

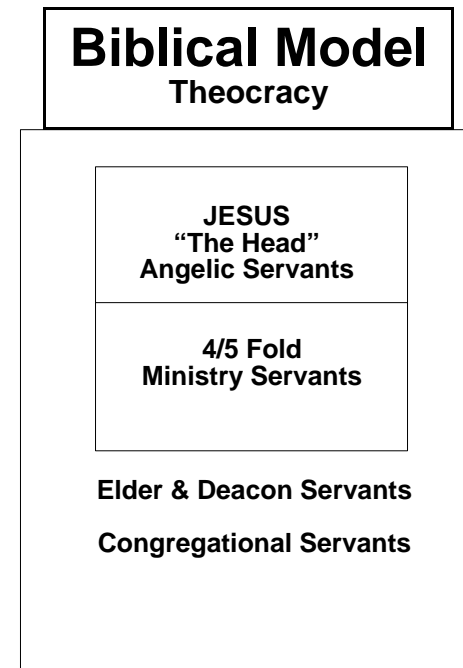
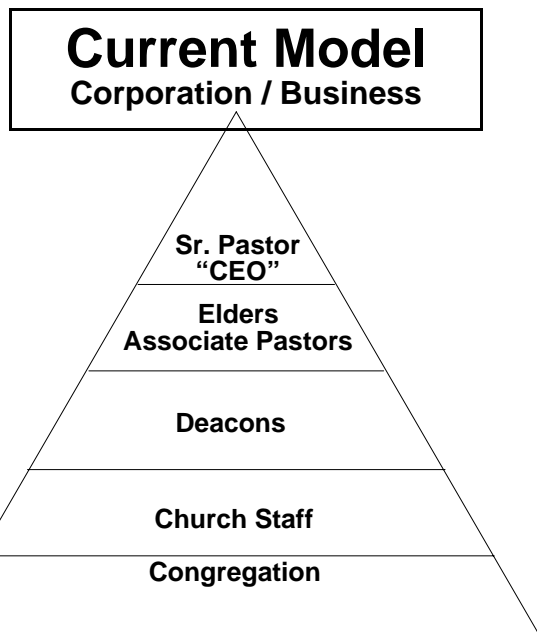


Part Eleven in the series: *"Towards a Christocentric Ecclesiology, or A Christ Centered Church"*

Church Models

The Current Model is based on the Catholic hierarchical system of government, that has been with the Church since approximately 135 AD in the Church of Rome. Shortly after 155 AD the Church of Constantinople picked it up and despite the Protestant Reformation hierarchical government has been with us ever since.

The Model the Apostles received from the Lord, by inspiration, was a non hierarchical model. The only hierarchy was the Lord Jesus Himself. Apparently He felt that since it was "His" Church He wouldn't have any trouble leading it if His Church would walk in the Spirit He put within them. It assumes spirituality, rather than assuming carnality. The hierarchical model is a Law model, as it assumes carnality and chooses men to control the carnality of their congregations.



As we begin this short study it needs to be clearly stated that our discussion of Church models and its leaders is not to be taken as a back handed attack of current Church leadership. Those who are leading our contemporary Churches are doing the best they know to do, given the mindset they have inherited. Our discussion here is not an attack on their integrity or character, only a challenge to the approach of gathering the saints.

Over the years I've watched Churches and ministers labor under the hierarchical system of Church government. It wears out both the leaders and those who try to follow them.

Then, because people get tired of being controlled and leaders grow weary of trying to control people who are tired of being controlled, they begin to look for an alternative. This is where a great controversy arises. As "Senior Pastors" they love to be "In Charge," in fact they've told themselves the Bible teaches that they're to be in charge, so letting go of this approach is a double bind. They don't truly see the role of Senior Pastor in the New Testament, but their natural mind can't imagine how things could get done in their Church without it. What to do?

Most pastors, who begin to see the Apostles taught non-hierarchical government, get very nervous. It goes something like this, "If I begin to implement a non-hierarchical form of government then who sets the policies, who determines salaries, who writes up job descriptions, who pays the bills, who hires and who fires? All good questions.

It all needs to unwind. No policies are needed if you don't have buildings and you don't hire staffs. The bible doesn't call for Church staffs, so let them go and let them discover what they are "really" called to do in the kingdom. Sell the building, and solve all the policy issues and bills. Once remove the building and you remove the corporation. Remove the corporation and there is no need for a CEO. Remove the CEO element of pastoring and you begin to stand to have a chance at having a biblically defined servant for a shepherd. A servant knows better than to act like a boss with those he serves. Thus, the leadership step down off their platforms and take their place alongside the rest of the body - living among them, instead of over them. Each member, fitly and compactly joined together causes the increase of the whole. With Jesus as the "Head" of His Church all others know their place.

About now I can hear, "Sure, right, and what about the people?" Well, where did we learn that we had to have buildings, hire staffs, and trade in our callings to become administrators? You see, we created all the headaches we are working with. Buildings, staffs, policies, agendas, job descriptions, vision statements, pews, pulpits, chairs in a row, etc., none of it is in the bible, none of it helps, and all of it creates a hassle out of the ministry. The early Church did just fine in folks living rooms. Are we so sure it can't work again? It's a pretty simple and stress reduced approach.

For those who are not so sure, give the following a try. Because you have what the world calls a "Corporation," try to divide the corporation issues on to one side of your ministry ledger, and the spiritual kingdom on to the other side. The corporation side contains all the things you, as senior pastor, must administrate; all the things mentioned above. They require a "Boss;" someone "In Charge." The other side of the ledger would be those things where you would step back and Jesus alone would administrate - you know - the things of the heart, spirituality, eternal things. Those areas where He is the Head and

not you.

Now comes the tough part. If the Bible says Jesus is the Head of His Church, but you have the functional role as head of the left side of the ledger, how sure are you that Jesus doesn't want to speak into those decisions too? And what if you thought you heard Him tell you one thing, but your staff member thought He heard Him tell them another? Now we have a major problem with a corporation modeled Church. Example, pastor Jim has a job description and a time commitment to the Church. He's the Church administrator, and as such you believe he needs to be there Monday through Friday from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM. What does pastor Jim do if He hears the Lord call him to remain home and pray from 9:00 AM to 11:00 AM, then to go and visit sister Agnes in the hospital, and share the gospel with the gas station attendant during his lunch break? What if this happens frequently? What happens to your job description, your time schedule, your staff meetings, and your salary requirements? It can become messy, and perhaps I would go so far as to say it should get messy, because what is to say that Jesus' time schedule for your Church employee will be the same as yours? How will you describe to your board of directors having an open ended job description and office time schedule?

You see, we, by following the corporation model, have created a monster for ourselves. It puts our staff in a bind, where they either follow the leading of the Spirit for their lives, or they ignore His leading and get to the office because that's where they get paid, and they have a commitment to being on time.

You say, this wouldn't happen. You believe if Jesus had you hire a staff member He would support your agenda for that staff member and wouldn't lead him to be other places, on a regular basis, than where you established for him to be? But, are you sure? How certain are you really, that Jesus' agenda and yours, for that staff member, are exactly the same, from day to day?

You fire back, then if the above is true then how would an individual handle a secular job? Would the Lord lead him to be late every day to work? He'd lose his job if He did. But let's look at this. This is secular work, as opposed to spiritual work. We do believe in the difference between the two don't we? One is directly serving the kingdom of God full time, and the other indirectly serves the kingdom by being a godly worker full time. But do we really want to combine the two in the work of the ministry? Do we want our associate pastor Church administrator to pass up ministry opportunities because of our bottom line, our job descriptions, and our agendas? The pure corporate leader would say - "Yes, absolutely," but would the Senior Pastor dare to say "Yes?" I doubt it. It just feels sacrilegious.

Even sorting out our feelings about sacred and secular are tough enough, much less trying to decide how to administrate that on a daily basis with Church staff. The secular boss can tell his employees that he couldn't care less what God wants them to do, they'd better be to work on time and stay on task or be fired. Can the Senior Pastor risk such an attitude? Is he really that staff person's ministry boss? Is the Church really "his" to administrate? If so, where would you turn in the New Testament to validate that ownership? Where would you go to define your role as Senior Pastor? And if you could find such a role where would you go to define it in such a way as to give you the right to set such policies and to control your staff that rigidly? Nope, the task is too daunting. It is just too beyond us as leaders to stand in for God, especially when God has asked for no stand-ins. It's His job to administrate His kingdom, not a Pastor's.

If we believe there is such a thing as a full time minister, and if we believe that He is first and foremost a minister “unto” God, then we must treat him differently than we treat the average corporation employee. The two realms are just too different to mix them together. The secular corporation CEO need not bother asking God what his employee should do from day to day? He doesn’t need to check in with God and ask him if Jim should come in and sell potatoes today, or stay home and pray. Jim comes in and sells potatoes or gets fired - period. The Senior Pastor CEO can not act so cavalierly as this. Jim can’t commit, as a full time minister to God, to do exactly as the Senior Pastor CEO wants him to. This is having two equal bosses who would likely have two different wills for Jim on a daily basis. If Jim takes seriously his “full time” call to ministry then it must first and foremost be “unto” God and not his CEO Senior Pastor. Jim, the secular employee, has no choice - be on time or get fired.

Where does all this leave us? In a real dilemma. We have our Church buildings to pay for, our agendas, our titles, our positions, our enjoyment of power over other people, our Church vision. All of it takes money and consistency of employment and employee commitment to keep it running. Running we are, and wearing out too. We either stop praying, lest as employees of our Churches we hear God call us to do something else than what our CEO Pastor has required of us, or we pray, follow His lead, and run the risk of being fired.

I think we’re better off to obey God. I think we’re better off to pray. I think we’re better off to sell our buildings, simplify our agendas, and do the real work of God. Pray, follow His leading, and do the work of the ministry. That’s pretty much how Jesus did it, the Apostles did it, the early Church leadership did, so it worked for them. Who is to say it won’t work again? I know many for whom it is. You might consider trying it yourself. Who knows you might actually start enjoying the ministry again. God is not a task master, He pays very well, His job description is simple “hear and obey.” In the end there is a great retirement plan with eternal benefits. Not bad, especially when compared to what you presently have.

And, let’s imagine for the moment that you can figure out how to manage the time schedules of your staff, through using a “flexible” schedule approach, but what about your policies? Those policies that you just “believe” the people must live under. Things like, Tithing, or Social Drinking, or how the Spirit is allowed to manifest in the lives of the people who gather in assembly, etc. What about these? How do you handle a staff member who doesn’t believe Tithing has a place in the New Covenant, while you very much do? Do you “allow” it? Do you have a biblical right to “allow” or disallow anything based on your title or position? Not biblically, but if you follow the Corporation model approach you will likely tell yourself you do, and you will likely tell your congregation you do. Or, Social Drinking? What do you do with that one? And of course the one that is currently such a curly issue - the manifestations of the Spirit in the congregation. What do we do about that? Some will want you to absolutely control those, while others will absolutely want you to leave it alone. Does proper “pastoring” of the renewal mandate that you control those things that offend some but blesses others? It certainly does if you don’t want people leaving your congregation. But, do leaders have a right to establish policies so as to govern whether some leave or some stay? Do they even have a right to establish what they believe is “right” whether people stay or leave? The answer is “no” to both scenarios. You see, it all comes down to this issue over and over again. The fact is biblically you don’t have a leg to stand on when it comes to deciding such issues for the whole congregation. If you were to take a careful look at every single word that Jesus, Paul and the other apostles use to define the role of leadership in the Church, you wouldn’t find a single definition that

supports an hierarchical corporation approach to leadership. You are certainly free to express your perspective, but to actually set policy that you will require folks to carry out, or deacons to enforce, has no biblical basis. The moment you accept the reality of this statement, in that exact moment integrity will demand that you begin to unravel the unbiblical approach you are using and begin to establish a biblical model.

“But,” you say, “Our Church is not led by just one man. Our Church is led by a team of leaders.” Where did you arrive at that approach? Not the Bible. Just because a Senior Pastor utilizes a team approach, shows great respect for his team, and makes no policies apart from his team, there is still no biblical support for a team of leaders determining the policies and forms a Church will take. It is still hierarchy, and hierarchy, no matter how you form it, has no biblical basis for existing.

Theocracy is the “Only” model that is prescribed. Jesus leading His body through His Spirit by means of gifts of His grace manifesting through each member, is the only approach Jesus and the apostles taught and lived. Anything else is man centered, supplants Jesus, makes Church more about man than about Jesus, and robs the people of a true experience of Church - Jesus style. This is true authority, powerful authority, ultimate control based on the ministry of the Spirit, and not based on title, position, coercion or intimidation. And if you want to know how Jesus styled control looks one needs only study the Gospels. He leads by wisdom, example, love, and servanthood. What a refreshing approach to leadership. May God help us to give it a try.

When we talk model, let’s be clear that we’re not saying model in the Platonic sense. What we are not interested in is yet another “Church” movement “thing,” in the sense of making a biblical Church some sort of ideal organization with it’s own goals and agendas. There is no such thing as a particular form of biblical Church. Those who see themselves as participants in the House Church movement need to take a very close look at this perspective, seeing the great Platonic danger inherent in such a movement. There is no such thing as “House Church,” as if it were yet another structure or construct of Church. Church is one thing and one thing only - Jesus in the midst of His people, with His agenda, working through His people who love and live in relationship with one another, and who are touching His world. Biblical Church exists in the world, not limited to some organization, building or even home. It is creational rather than organizational. It is organic rather than corporate. It is people interdependently related to one another as they relate to God and their world. We are not after yet another “approach” to doing Church. We are to be done with such thinking. Our goals are simple, love God and love people. Beyond that there is no organizational vision or agenda, other than that which is clearly defined in the New Testament. Individuals may be called to unique goals, but the “Church” as an organization with goals does not exist. It simply does not exist and should not exist. It never should have existed, and the problems it faces today are a result of Platonic group idealisms that will not and could not work. (See James Thwaites “Renegotiating the Church Contract,” for clarification on the issue of platonism and its adverse effect on the way we think of Church.)

While we favor smaller, simpler, and more relational environments, for gathering the Church, we are not interested in developing any particular form of gathering, nor being identified with any particular movement. The whole notion of movement manifests its ignorance of the problem. We don’t need a movement. We don’t need a whole new breed of organizational and visional gurus. We are not an organization that is “going anywhere.” We need apostles and teachers to help us understand what it is that Jesus was communicating through His apostles and to help us return to the simple approach they established in the Early Church.

If you decide to disagree with what is written here please know that I'm not surprised, nor is God. He's watched it since 135 AD. He's committed to working with the Current Model, and so am I. But make no mistake about it, many wonderful blessings are being missed, those in the pews are still going to find it hard to stay awake during your sermons, and money is always going to be a big challenge for you, as well as managing the administrative functions of your position. Jesus will never leave us or forsake us, unless we utterly leave and forsake Him. The Current Model devotees love Jesus and desire to honor Him, may they also become a bit more open to Him showing them a more excellent way.

For those who desire additional reading on this subject I strongly urge the reader to consider Robert Banks' "Paul's Idea of Community", and Frank Viola's "God's Ultimate Passion." Both of these brothers have presented a lifetime of research and experience in biblical Church, and will provide you with outstanding insights into the Church that is in the heart of Jesus.