

CHAPTER 1

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM? HOW ARE CHURCHES UNBIBLICAL AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

³ *Greet Prisca and Aq'uila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus,* ⁴ *who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I but also all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks;* ⁵ *greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epae'netus, who was the first convert in Asia for Christ.*

Romans 16:3-5 (RSV)

The title of this book is *Biblical and unbiblical churches*. The question therefore is what exactly do we mean by 'biblical' as opposed to 'unbiblical'? My argument is that what the Christians of the first century knew as church, i.e. the way it was organised, structured and led, as set out in the book of Acts and the New Testament letters, and also as historians describe it, was *the way God intended church to be*.

By stark contrast, what the vast majority of churches now do is pretty much the exact opposite in every respect of what the Early Church did. I shall seek to demonstrate and justify that claim below. In the table I will set out, on the left, what God intended. By that I mean what the apostles *taught* and what the first century Christians *did*.

Then, on the right, I will set out what the vast majority of churches today actually do, as per the traditions which virtually all the denominational churches follow. They inherited these methods and structures from the Roman Catholic church, not from the first century Church. However, very few of them know that, mainly because most people never give this issue a moment's thought.

	<u>The biblical model of church:</u>		<u>What most churches now do:</u>
a)	Small in size, i.e. perhaps 10 – 50 people		Large in size, i.e. 100 – 500 people or even thousands
b)	Meeting in people's homes or perhaps in barns or outbuildings		Meeting in large and elaborate buildings
c)	The people themselves are the church. There is no special church building which costs a lot of money to buy and then maintain and so all the church's financial giving can go to help its members or the poor or homeless and isn't needed to fund the building.		The building is the church and the people attend it. This creates a huge financial burden for the people in trying to buy and then maintain the building. That puts people under financial pressure to give more than they can afford and it diverts money away from the poor and needy. The special building also requires a lot of time and effort to maintain.

	<u>The biblical model of church:</u>	<u>What most churches now do:</u>
d)	<p>The leaders have ordinary jobs and support themselves from their own wages. They are not paid anything for their roles in the church, unless they are full time itinerant Bible teachers or are sent away as missionaries to other countries where they cannot initially get jobs.</p> <p>If so, the sending churches support them, not the people to whom they are sent. Even then, such missionaries or itinerant teachers would still try as far as possible to support themselves, as Paul did, by a part-time trade such as tent-making.</p> <p>Overall, therefore, having no special building and usually no paid staff, the congregation is free to direct all its financial giving towards supporting their own families and also the poor and needy, as the average house church has very few expenses to pay for, if any.</p>	<p>The leaders work full time within the church and are paid. Many have never worked in any ordinary job and have no trade, career or profession to which they can return. Even those who once had a job lose their skills and become unemployable in their previous job after a number of years, such that they cannot return to it anyway.</p> <p>Such men can often end up feeling trapped in ministry work. They have no alternative but to carry on, even if they have lost all their enthusiasm or have become burnt out. This affects many men in their forties and fifties, such that the final 20 or more years of their ministry are ineffectual and miserable for all concerned.</p> <p>The need to pay staff puts an intolerable burden upon the congregation and diverts money away from the support of their own families and the poor and needy. In most churches today, 90% or more of the church's annual budget is spent on salaries and the building, neither of which were an issue until the 4th century.</p>
e)	<p>Each local church is led by a number of mature men called elders or bishops, which are just alternative words to describe the same person. A key part of their role was to protect the church from false teaching and corrupt behaviour – and that included keeping an eye on each other and challenging any heresy or misconduct even if it came from a fellow elder.</p>	<p>Each church is led by one man called a pastor or minister. In larger churches he will be accompanied by 'assistant ministers' who are, likewise, full time and paid. Under this hierarchical set up, the "junior" leaders do not see it as their role to question or challenge the senior leader's teaching or conduct. If they did their 'career' in the church would immediately end, as would their salary. So, they don't challenge anything the senior leader does.</p>

	<u>The biblical model of church:</u>	<u>What most churches now do:</u>
f)	<p>All the tasks of the church, including teaching, preaching, music, evangelism, children's work, administration, pastoral work, etc is shared between all of the people, not just the elders, so that everybody is active and all participate in the ministries and roles for which they are best suited/gifted.</p>	<p>One man, or perhaps a few men, irrespective of their giftings or lack of giftings, do all the work on behalf of the people. Therefore that man, or small group of men, do many things for which they are not suited, even when there are several people in the congregation, sitting idly by, who would be far more capable of doing those tasks. If anything is ever done by people in the congregation it will only be menial work, behind the scenes. Any visible work which attracts public attention is reserved for the paid leader(s).</p>
g)	<p>The people sit in groups or a circle within a house/barn/outbuilding and they all participate in a two-way dialogue during or after times of teaching and preaching so that it is fully interactive. All can contribute to, comment on, question and even disagree with, whatever is being taught.</p> <p>None of the leaders are insecure so they don't object to being questioned or even contradicted and they reply without taking offence. Also, a variety of people take turns to lead/teach/preach, not necessarily a whole sermon, but a contribution of some kind, even if it is brief.</p> <p>This then gives every member of the church the chance to gain experience of some form of leadership or teaching and enables them to grow in maturity and confidence. It also makes it possible for future elders to be identified as their gifts and qualities are given the chance to be displayed. This format also gives women the chance to contribute without having to adopt a full teaching or preaching role.</p>	<p>The same man speaks every week or most weeks, irrespective of whether he has anything fresh or interesting to say, or about which he feels passionate. The people sit in rows, facing him and never interrupt or participate in any way while he speaks. Neither does anyone question or contradict him after the talk has ended. Indeed, it would be considered unthinkable for them to do so.</p> <p>They are essentially spectators and there is no scope for questions, comment or debate. It is just a one way process. Therefore, the people remain unskilled, immature and inexperienced and they never develop the confidence to begin to contribute and lead.</p> <p>That protects the leader from embarrassing questions and silences any potential rivals, which is a relief to him. But it denies the church the benefit of each of those people's gifts, qualities and areas of experience. It also denies them any scope to question or contradict him which is a vital part of the process of assessing (diakrino) what leaders teach, as we are all commanded to do.</p>

	<u>The biblical model of church:</u>	<u>What most churches now do:</u>
h)	The people eat a meal together each week, like a family, which often, but not always, includes bread and wine. It need not necessarily be a cooked dinner. It could just be a packed lunch. But the point is they sit and eat together. They do so to have fellowship with each other and also to commemorate Jesus' ministry, His death on our behalf and His future return. But it is very important because eating together creates a wholly different dynamic and encourages intimacy and sharing in a way that doesn't happen where people don't eat together.	There is no meal and very little meaningful fellowship or intimacy and the people just have bread and wine as a pure ritual with nothing else to accompany it. Therefore, the congregation rarely get to know each other properly or in any depth and it all remains superficial, such that you can attend a traditional church for 20 years and many of the members are still effectively strangers to you.
i)	The leaders serve the people.	The people serve the leaders.
j)	The members of the church make all major decisions collectively as a group. The leader(s) do not decide for them.	The leader (or small group of leaders) make all the decisions on behalf of the church.
k)	Nobody rules over the people of the church. The elders, although recognized as being more mature, are still just members of the church and their role is to protect, advise and serve, not to rule.	The leader rules over the people. He is higher than and different from the members and they serve him.
l)	Every member of the church submits to, honours, cooperates with, and defers to <i>every</i> other member equally. It is mutual submission and goes in all directions, vertically and horizontally. See chapter 10 below in which I look in closer detail at the whole issue of authority and "submission" and what it does, and doesn't, mean.	The direction of submission is entirely one way. The people all submit to the leader and he submits to nobody, other than the regional or national hierarchy of the denomination.

	<u>The biblical model of church:</u>	<u>What most churches now do:</u>
m)	Each church is free and independent and is led by its own elders/bishops, albeit that all important decisions are made by the membership of the church as a whole. So, one house church might have 1-4 bishops (which is just another word for an elder).	Most churches are part of a national or international denomination with very senior leaders who rule over all the churches in that area or country. The men known to us today in traditional churches as bishops have a regional or national role. They rule over many churches, rather than being <i>one of the leaders within a single local church</i> , as they were in the New Testament. So, one bishop might rule over 50-100 churches and there are no bishops within any church. In short, their definition is totally different from the biblical definition.
n)	A leader of a church is an ordinary man and is not seen as anything exalted or special. There is no distinction between any of the people and no such thing as 'clergy' or 'lay' members. Neither is there any such thing as 'priests'. All Christians are equal.	The leaders belong to a special group called 'clergy' which is separate from the people and seen as higher than them. They are 'ordained' because they are seen as having been called by God to an enhanced status, or even 'priesthood' which makes them quite unlike the ordinary people, who are referred to as 'lay' members.
o)	Meetings are likely to be different each week in their form, content and mood, depending on who is teaching or leading the worship that week and on what the others choose to contribute. It therefore varies according to what the rest of the people, led by the Holy Spirit, choose to say.	Meetings are exactly the same every week. They follow a rigid pattern and timetable known as 'liturgy'. This is done according to long-established traditions and customs. The Holy Spirit is not involved and would not be permitted to alter anything if it went against the church's traditions and timetable.

	<u>The biblical model of church:</u>	<u>What most churches now do:</u>
p)	<p>The vast majority of leaders are not paid and do not depend on the church for their livelihood. Therefore they are secure, relaxed and confident. They are not afraid of or beholden to anybody and can teach the Bible faithfully and without compromise, even if the truth is unpopular and causes some members to leave.</p>	<p>The leader(s) depend solely on the church for their salary, pension and the mortgage on their home. Unsurprisingly, they tend, therefore, to become very insecure and cautious. They will frequently compromise over doctrine or avoid teaching on controversial issues.</p> <p>They censor themselves to avoid upsetting anybody who might leave the church and/or stop giving financially and/or give less. As a result, in most traditional churches, 50-75 per cent of the Bible is never spoken about, given that the Bible is an inherently controversial book which is likely to upset people if it is taught fully and openly.</p>
q)	<p>Because the leaders are relaxed and secure, they do not feel threatened by each other, or by up and coming young men who have potential to become future leaders, or indeed by anybody else whose personal talents or spiritual gifts are different from, or greater than, their own.</p> <p>Therefore, each leader is happy to help to develop other Christians and to see them grow into mature disciples who can look after themselves and help others and are not dependent upon him. Indeed, even if a young man grows so well as a disciple that he becomes a better leader and preacher, the older man will be glad and will happily let that younger man become a fellow elder and even the senior elder.</p> <p>We see this exemplified in the Book of Acts which begins with Barnabas as the senior figure and Paul helping him, but then it is reversed and Barnabas recognises Paul as uniquely gifted and begins to serve him. So, at first they are referred to as Barnabas and Paul, but later Paul and Barnabas.</p>	<p>It is very common for paid leaders to be deeply insecure and even paranoid. They will then seek to protect themselves from real or imagined threats or from potential rivals who might preach better than them or have greater gifts. Any talented young man will be frozen out or driven away.</p> <p>At any rate, those young men will not be given opportunities to teach, preach or lead. The leader's fear is that they might do a better job than him and cause unflattering comparisons to be made. Therefore, such leaders don't develop gifted young men into mature disciples within the church. On the contrary, they hold them back or even drive them out.</p>

I could have made the above list a lot longer but you will see the general pattern and the consistent contrast, right across the board, between what churches are *meant to be* and what they have *actually become* for most of us. Within this book I shall address other areas of divergence as well, because the list above is far from comprehensive.

The question is *how* and *why* did all of this divergence happen? How did we stray so far away from the biblical model, as demonstrated for us in Acts and the New Testament letters, for how church should be? Did it happen by accident, or did some person or group deliberately cause the Church to go down this unbiblical route whereby we end up doing the exact opposite of what the Early Church did on just about every issue?

You will presumably agree that the misalignment is much too consistent for it to be a coincidence. For example, imagine you were to go to a car dealership and order a brand new car and you wrote out a long list of 30 or 40 different specifications. What would you think if you were then to find, when the car arrived some weeks later, that it was the *exact opposite in every respect* of what you had asked for?

Imagine you'd asked for a saloon but they sent an estate/station wagon. What if you'd asked for diesel and it was a petrol engine? What if you'd asked for it to be black, but it was white? In fact, what if all 30 or 40 items on your specification list were not only wrong, but the *direct opposite* of what you had specified?

You would surely conclude that somebody was altering things intentionally because if they were just entering the data into their computer randomly, then at least some of the options they selected would be correct. However, if every single factor was the reverse of your instructions you would feel sure it was either a practical joke or deliberate sabotage.

My suggestion to you, in the context of church, is that the specifications laid down by God have been reversed on purpose. I do not suggest that any single man, or even group of men, did this. That would be impossible, because the pattern is so consistent, right across the world.

It seems clear to me that this divergence has arisen as a result of Satanic/demonic influence throughout the centuries, in particular since the fourth century AD. That was when the Roman Emperor, Constantine, effectively took over the churches throughout the empire and created the corrupt hierarchical organization known to us as the Roman Catholic church. This then degenerated further into a toxic mixture of Christianity, paganism and man-made philosophy.

I shall return to that theme below as a separate issue, but see also Book Three in this series in which I go into some detail about the errors of Catholicism, including their authoritarian, top-down leadership model. But what may surprise you is that quite a lot of their approach to leadership and church structure has been retained by the Protestant churches, notwithstanding the Reformation.

The Devil was well aware of how important it was for each local church to operate in the ways that God ordained, with all the built-in safeguards, as per the way in which the apostles operated. Therefore the demons set about distorting and diverting every one of these specifications to prevent God's instructions being implemented. They wanted to remove all the safeguards and make churches less effective and less healthy than they were meant to be, and would have been, if we had kept the biblical model.

How then did I get interested in this subject, i.e. how did I notice the problem of unbiblical churches and work out what was going on? It began for me in the 1990s when I was becoming increasingly

frustrated at the way churches operated and how ineffectual they tended to be, especially their leaders. This was partly because the condition of the churches was getting worse all over the western world, but also partly because my eyes were starting to open and I began to see things which had been there all along but which I hadn't noticed.

Then, from about 1999 onwards, I found, time and time again, that certain church leaders I knew were behaving dishonestly, carnally and manipulatively. Moreover, most church leaders seemed to be second or third rate men, lacking the ability and confidence one sees in men in the secular workplace.

The churches seemed to be attracting weak, unimpressive men who would never reach senior positions in any trade, business or profession. Moreover, many of them were seeking to dominate and control their churches. This wasn't happening just once or twice, here and there. I noticed it again and again, all over the country. And I heard others reporting the same problems. Eventually I concluded that it was the norm rather than the exception.

I also found that an alarmingly high percentage of church leaders (*though by no means all*) are what the Bible calls '*hirelings*' rather than genuine *shepherds*. Hirelings are men who have no sense of vocation and view what they do as just a paid job rather than as a service to God or His people.

Hirelings are not necessarily seeking to cause any deliberate harm. It is just that they care more about themselves than about the people they lead. So, they are not willing to lay down their lives, or take risks, or even tolerate inconvenience, for the sake of the sheep. By contrast, a real shepherd willingly does all those things.

Even worse, I saw that a significant minority of leaders were *wolves*. That means men who see church leadership as a position which they can use and exploit, either to get money or power or to build an empire for themselves. They are often the third rate men who have not got enough talent or imagination to succeed in a secular career or profession.

They see the church as an easier route where untalented men can reach the top and where there is far less accountability. They will then intentionally deceive, control, manipulate and exploit people to whatever extent is necessary, either for personal gain or to protect their position or just to indulge their own egos.

This gradual series of discoveries about the real nature of many British churches was both bewildering and depressing. There were times when I also found it traumatic, because I was one of the very few people who actually tried to tackle such leaders face to face rather than complain behind their backs. I always challenged them directly and openly, never engaging in gossip.

But I found that when I did, they were always quick to close ranks and to band together with other leaders in their own church and in other churches to attack and undermine anybody who was challenging them, or whom they perceived as a threat. I found that such men are vastly more skilled at the art of self-preservation, and at protecting each other, than they are at teaching, preaching or caring for their people.

In this book, and also in Book 6, I describe how several leaders I have known have been willing to say and do whatever it takes to defend themselves, even to the extent of telling blatant lies. I also show how their hierarchical institutions joined with them to resist correction and to undermine anybody daring to expose or challenge them. I hope the details of those experiences may be of use to readers

who have faced, or are now facing, similar problems and are bewildered by the coordinated wall of hostility that they meet.

You might ask whether I am saying that if a church is not biblical in terms of its structure, organization and leadership then it isn't a church at all. Or, am I at least saying that it is not a *valid* church, such that God would not bless or use them? *No, I am not saying any of that.*

Many such unbiblical churches have been, and are still being, both blessed and used by God. That is so, even where one or more of the leaders are corrupt. In one sense, God has quite limited options available to Him because virtually all churches, especially denominational ones, are organised and led in an unbiblical, domineering and hierarchical way.

So, I am *not* saying that an unbiblical church is not a real church, or that God does not use or recognise such churches. On the contrary, I know He does use many of them, despite all their faults. What I am saying, however, is that if such churches were to alter their structure, approach and leadership style, so as to be biblical rather than unbiblical, then God would be able to bless and use them far *more* than He has been able to do hitherto.

So, the fact that some people get saved in unbiblical, domineering churches is not an argument for them continuing to be run in an unbiblical domineering way. Moreover, if we were to have a twenty first century reformation whereby we again learn how to do church in a biblical way, as in the Early Church, then a great many unnecessary and self-inflicted problems would be avoided.

Vast numbers of Christians today are obstructed, wounded and damaged by leaders and their talents are wasted. This is done to them within the very churches which God had intended to be a haven of protection, support and fellowship. He meant the local church to be a safe and healthy place where every one of us can grow, fulfil our potential and be active in *doing the work of the ministry*.

Instead, at present, countless millions of people are attending churches as mere spectators, where there is little for them to do other than watch the minister perform as a *one man band*. That state of affairs is especially frustrating for men, more so than women, because a man's very nature recoils from being passive. That is one reason why so many men abandon church. They see it as an essentially feminine institution, led by inadequate but manipulative weaklings, which provides nothing meaningful or constructive to do.

I would also add another point which was not the case even 30 years ago but is happening now. That is I believe we are living in the period of the time known as "the last days" or "the end times" which are the run up to the rise of the antichrist. The point is that we are already seeing a move towards a dictatorial one world government with oppressive laws and severe censorship. And it is happening at an astonishing speed.

That attack on our freedoms will gather pace and will be increasingly directed at churches. Therefore, it is going to be all the more essential for us to rediscover the biblical model of house churches, if only to enable us to evade Government surveillance and restrictions and "fly under the radar".

All the large denominational churches will be easy for a dictatorial government to regulate and most of them won't even object to doing whatever they are told, as we saw in the Covid hoax of 2020 when virtually all traditional church leaders caved in to government pressure and immediately closed their churches. The only churches that defied the oppressive covid rules were the house churches.

I believe that God greatly desires to change all of this and to see a return to biblical church, meeting in homes, and especially a return to biblical leadership. I would therefore urge you to consider whether what I am saying is true and, if so, how you could play a part in your local area in starting to effect that change.