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Preface

Like my previous work, *The Apostolic Life*, this book is a collection of articles. While the articles cover various subjects, the main theme is being an apostolic church, or a first-century church, in the twenty-first century.

Ecclesiology, the doctrine of the church, is an underdeveloped topic in the modern Pentecostal movement. Pentecostals stress the importance of upholding the message and experience of the New Testament church, but with regard to the operation of the church they tend to be pragmatic, focusing on what seems to work best from a pastoral perspective. The New Testament does not give us a specific blueprint for church government, but it does contain principles for us to follow. While biblical ecclesiology does not require a specific form of organization, it does require us to have some structure within and beyond the local church.

Some chapters in this book explore how we can implement these principles in the local church and in organized efforts beyond the local church. Other chapters discuss biblical principles of ministry and leadership in the contemporary context. Of course, many articles focus on pragmatic aspects of ministry and church life.

Most of the chapters in this book originally appeared as articles in the *Pentecostal Herald*, the official magazine of the United Pentecostal Church International (UPCI), or in the *Forward*, the UPCI periodical for ministers. Most were published after I became the general superintendent of the UPCI on January 1, 2010. If a chapter has been published before in some form, I have so noted at the end of the chapter. I have made some small editorial changes for this book. I have included some

material with dated references to illustrate how we can respond to various situations in church and society. Due to the nature of the book, some points are discussed in more than one chapter, but I trust the occasional repetition is not distracting.

My hope is that this book will provide inspiration and contribute to the conversation of how we can live as a New Testament body of believers in the twenty-first century.



The
CHURCH

CHAPTER 1

1 Thank God for the Church!

“Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:16-18).

The church is God’s idea. Jesus Christ established the New Testament church upon the rock of revelation of His identity as the Messiah, the Son of God. Jesus further proclaimed that the gates of Hell (*hades*, the place of the dead) would not prevail against the church. Although the church is composed of fallible, imperfect humans, by God’s grace it will be victorious over every foe, including death itself.

To fulfill God’s plan, everyone needs to belong to a local assembly of Apostolic believers and to be faithful to its meetings. “And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to

good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching” (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Every assembly needs a pastor (shepherd), also called an elder or bishop (overseer). (See Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5-9; I Peter 5:1-4.) All of us, including preachers and pastors, need to follow and submit to spiritual leaders. “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you” (Hebrews 13:17). These leaders are not to be dictators, but they lead by example, including their own example of submission (I Peter 5:3, 5).

Every local assembly needs to be connected and accountable to the larger body of Apostolic churches. For example, the general assembly of apostles and elders in Jerusalem made decisions and sent instructions for all the churches to follow (Acts 15:6, 22-29). Paul admonished all the churches to unite around basic teaching and practice. (See I Corinthians 7:17; 11:16.)

Why should every believer belong to a local church, and why should every local church belong to the general association of churches? The first reason is to glorify God by the means He has chosen. In addition, there are many benefits to us.

Teaching. The church enables us to continue steadfastly in the “apostles’ doctrine and fellowship” (Acts 2:42). We thereby become disciples and grow into spiritual maturity.

Fellowship. We are inherently social beings, and we need social and spiritual interaction with believers who share the same worldview and values.

Balance. Instruction and fellowship help us avoid extremism. We are rooted in a godly heritage without becoming isolated, narrow-minded, one-sided, inflexible, or stagnant.

Accountability. The church provides a structure of relationships that fulfills scriptural principles of spiritual authority and unity.

Inspiration. Other believers and churches inspire us with their faith, worship, commitment, encouragement, and godly example. We “provoke,” or stir up one another, to love and good works (Hebrews 10:24).

Support. The church provides emotional, spiritual, and practical support in time of need.

Opportunity. Our association opens doors of service, ministry, enrichment, and fulfillment.

Credibility. Because we are part of a local, national, and international body, our testimony is more credible and appealing.

Fulfilling the Great Commission. Our association enables us to promote the gospel around the world, which is both our responsibility and our privilege. By joining our diverse gifts, callings, talents, and resources, we have strength and ability to fulfill God’s plan.

The church is a saving station, a hospital, a greenhouse, a schoolhouse, a lighthouse, and a shelter in the time of storm. It is a temple, built with living stones, where the Spirit of God dwells (I Peter 2:5). The church is a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own special people (I Peter 2:9). It is the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:27), the bride of Christ (II Corinthians 11:2), and the family of God (Romans 8:14-16).

I am glad I belong to this family. Thank God for the church!

South Texas Vision, July-August 2008; *Pentecostal Herald*, May 2009