

How The NT church becomes OT church

First lets try to simply define what is "OT" (Old Testament/Old Covenant) church.

In the old testament, Israel operated in a certain way. They had to, according to their law, build and operate the temple. Why did they have to build the temple? The central purpose of the temple and all its functions was to make atonement for sin..

"For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul." (Leviticus 17:11)

God had given Israel laws, some of which were commandments. We ought to be familiar with these commandments since they are basically reiterated in the NT. The purpose of these commandment laws was to make Israel aware of ether sin. We know from the NT that...

"all have sinned and fall short of Gods' glory" (Romans 3:23)...

but the OT states....

"Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?" (Proverbs 20:9)

So God gave Israel a set of practices that they needed to accomplish in order to make payment (atonement) for their sin. Sin needs to be paid for, innocent blood needs to be shed in order for God to forgive. Of course this ought to sound familiar to the Christian--of course it is the offering of the blood of Christ that forgives us of sin--but let's remember--Israel in the times of the OT did not have Christ! They did not have the cross or the resurrection, they did not have the atoning blood of Jesus, so they had a set of practices which God temporarily accepted as an atonement (practices which were imperfect and needed to be done repetitively).

This area of the book of Hebrews explains this point very clearly...

"For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins. Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me: In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God. Above when he said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and offering for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein; which are offered by the law; Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." (Hebrews 10:1-10)

What were these sacrificial practices? Here is an overview.....

- 1.. Israel had to build and maintain a building, the temple, the house of God, the sanctuary.
- 2...When entering the house of God there was a gate of prize and a court of worship, so the format for meeting was first must come praise and worship.
- 3... In the sanctuary there was an altar, and on that altar were the ministers...
- 4... the Levitical priest or pastors of Israel. The delegated, designated, anointed, appointed, ordained ministry. In the OT ministry was a birthright of the Levites and in fact only the high priest could enter into the presence of God and even this only on certain occasions.
- 5...The priests had authority over the congregation of Israel.
- 6...The congregation was a reference to the other 11 tribes of Israel, the majority of the people who were not ministers, who had no authority in God, but whose job was to bring in the...
7. ...tithes and offerings. These were the crops and animals and goods which were offered to God (for sin). "Tithe" was

simply the amount of certain offerings "tithe (1/10th) of the corn or of the increase of the herd"--etc.

8. The priest/pastors lived off part of the tithe/offerings, some was placed in a storehouse so that the offerings could continue year round (being they were imperfect offerings and needed to be continually done).

Now lets stop a minute.

Do these things sound familiar? For anyone who has attended "church" in the western world (and much about anyplace!) these are absolutely a description of some of the practices and definitions that we might call "church". The Biblical source for many of the definitions and functions of ministry and authority among organized Christians.

Just a very quick reference, but it is absolutely true that these practices were introduced to Christianity in the Dark Ages perhaps even originating in the ancient Roman times, from the catholic church. They have been the prevailing set of practices for Christians for centuries. People rarely ever ask questions about these things, they are usually just accepted (more on that later).

One of the reasons that people accept these OT practices is that many of them have acquired NT names. Even I make make the mistake of calling these practices "church"--they are NOT! These are the OT sacrificial practices for Israel. This is the "stuff" that Israel had to do in order to have their sin forgiven--before Jesus came to save the world through His work on the cross, folks!

So, what is NT function?

The NT church is actually very very well hidden by these traditional OT practices. NT Christian practice is actually very, very open ended and free. Why? Because the basis for it is the direct instructions of Jesus Christ.

The first and foremost priority in the NT is to find the direct instructions of the Head--Christ.

The function then flows from His instructions. Christ is meant to have all authority.....

"But I would have you know, that the **head** of every man is **Christ**;" (1 Corinthians 11:3)

"**Christ** is the **head** of the church: and he is the saviour of the body." (Ephesians 5:23)

Therefore the simplest description of a NT Christian meeting is for believers to get together and pray and ask God what He wants them to do--and who should do it.

The priesthood is in all believers...

"Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy **priesthood**, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."

"But ye are a chosen generation, a royal **priesthood**, an holy nation," (1 Peter 2:5, 2:9)

The ministry gifts are for "all" (since God now dwells in all believers)....

"One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ." (Ephesians 4:6-7)

This is a very hard one for Christians to understand. We are very sure that a "minister" ought to have authority over us. (there are a handful of scriptural bits and pieces that have been hooked together for believers to verify this misconception of "ministerial authority"--I have spent a lot of time dealing with those in other places) So all I can say is just try to trust me--the NT says that everyone can serve God. Every believer can function by direct command and authority of Jesus Christ the Head of the church.

And it really just makes simple sense. True ministry is God acting through someone to serve others and serve the will of God. And now in the NT ALL believers can have the indwelling Holy Spirit, ALL believers have Christ within and have entered into the presence of God. We are ALL His sons and daughters and His "bondservants"...servants who are free.

Within a Christian meeting the NT clearly gives the right to speak, teach prophecy worship--(in other words--minister!) to everyone attending (1 Corinthians chapters 12-14). Therefore God has the right to speak through whomever He chooses. There is no designated speaker, no permanent leader (but there is a permanent leader--Jesus!).

Which leads us to the question of authority. Most Christians have no problem saying that Christ is the Head of the church--the Head of all things. That all power and authority belongs to Him. Then how is it that one believer has authority over another within the common Christian practice? Some Christian meetings are rather insistent upon this concept of pastoral

authority (remember those Levitical priests, in authority over the congregation--on an altar). Some others these days will underplay the authority of the pastor. They might say that He is the servant of the church, and the truth is that he is probably a really nice fellow and works very hard to help people.

Exercising authority over others is not, as it might sound to some, an evil, demanding, rulership. The authority in place is not something that the current pastor invented or fought for (more on this later), but something invented in ages past by some clearly not-so-nice people. What I am speaking of is a very large dysfunction among lots of really, really great believers. We are working very, very hard at something that we have not invented, nor studied, but simply accepted because we have seen other really nice people doing. We are following a set of rules and definitions that are obsolete, and these rules are displacing another way of doing things that would make perfect sense, if only we could come up out of our traditions and see them as God would like us to.

In my opinion the worse result of this traditional church system is that the focus of the time, effort and resources of believers becomes fixed on meeting and the meeting place itself. And there is very very little invested in the Gospel. As believers become entrenched in the old covenant practices, they loose by degrees, the functioning of the new covenant Gospel. We cannot serve 2 masters Jesus said and as much as we may believe in and desire the new covenant, if our practice speaks heavily of the old covenant we are walking further and further from God, and Christ as our Head.

I truly believe that every Christian has at times operated in correct NT practice. but it was not in "church". It was the time when you were in the parking lot of Walmart and God lead you to witness and pray for that homeless man. It was that moment of time when the anointing of God fell upon you and you prayed for healing and deliverance and God did it--He did the work, you simply served Him and did His will. It was in the moment when you spent that day working to build a house for those folks who had none. That is the true Church with Christ as it's Head. It is the picture of Christian believers, listening to God and doing what Jesus did.

We can very easily become people seeking after our own kingdom rather than God's kingdom. Jesus told us to seek first His kingdom (His right to rule, His instructions, His authority) and His righteousness (His righteous acts of ministry, of service). Traditional church makes us follow after a visible kingdom, to serve in a visible kingdom and be under human authority.

Amen authority.

Most of the authority in Christian practice is actually contained in the "amen". The idea that one person has such a perfect teaching for everyone that the only correct response is "yes". This type of authority goes even beyond the OT and is actually a type of human authority found in ancient Roman tradition.

These repetitive practices are the reason why it is so difficult for Christians to see or understand the command that Jesus gave that we should not exercise authority one over another among ourselves....

"But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you:..." (Mark 10:42-43)

He spoke this about 5 times in the Gospels and it is in fact the only direct bit of advice He gave for how things ought to be "among ourselves". Amazingly little studied or strived toward or practiced among believers but I believe it to be the key to having Christ truly be the Head.

As I said the function of a Christian meeting is meant to be very open ended. Why? Because the instructions God gives and the type of instructions we ought to be seeking, ought to be Gospel centered. Ministry is meant to be open toward anyone that God chooses, but there is a priority of service. The most important ministerial function among believers ought to be apostleship. What is this? Simple the sending of small groups of believers to carry out the instructions of God--to witness the Gospel, pray for the sick, pray for those who need deliverance, to feed to poor and hungry, help the homeless and visit those in prison. These are the highest goals of Christianity according to the NT. Therefore when believers pray they always ought to be seeking God's instructions for the "where, when, how, and who" of spreading the Gospel. And be very ready to follow these instructions.

Quite certainly these instructions from God will be different in different times and places for different people based on the gifts of the believers present and in fact primarily based on the needs of those to be ministered to. This is very important and so rarely gotten to among believers....a meeting to seek how to serve others who are unsaved, in need of healing, deliverance. A meeting to seek Gods will on how to help the poor and homeless. that is a description of a NT Christian meeting. Where is the Biblical basis for this type of ministry function? Simple: take a look at the ministry actions of Jesus Christ as described in the Bible!

So to summarize:

1. Christ is the Head, His instructions come first.

2. Ministry is for all believers, everyone may speak, teach pray prophecy.
3. We should not exercise authority one over another among ourselves
4. The purpose of the meeting ought to be the furthering of the Gospel. to reach the unsaved and to pray and help those who are in need.
5. The most common meeting is in small groups (it is completely immaterial where the meeting is held), and it ought to be expected that God will give instructions on how to send individuals or other small groups out to accomplish His will.

Just think about it for a minute. Which type of meeting would you rather attend? The temple meeting, based on the OT sacrificial laws, or the NT meeting, based on the sovereignty of Christ and the furthering of the Gospel?

A very important point I want to be clear about is that, in my experience, no Christian group is completely devoid of following NT practices to some degree. Every Christian group, to some degree will spend time on what they might call "outreach" (amazing how the OT has sort of "sucked up" all the NT words so that true church practice is left with the term outreach!). Every Christian group as well as individual, has experienced the true NT function at some point in time, by a witnessing program or a healing service, a visit to the homeless shelter, or a feeding collection for the poor in the community. Again I ask you to think on your own experience--which side of the coin felt right to you? Was it the time you collected food for the homeless, or the 400th time you attended Sunday church? Unfortunately the traditional system of function suggests to us that we ought to fulfill both covenants.

(Oh and by the way--some might be thing at this point that I am throwing out the OT..no not at all. I only suggest we re-examine our practices as believers and decide which we are favoring with our time, effort and resources--the OT or the NT? I would throw out only the OT practices of Israel that had to do with atonement--since we have another way to be forgiven--the atonement of Jesus Christ at the cross of Calvary!)

Degrees.

And these things are done by degrees. That is the key to understanding how Christian practice is shifted, over time, toward favoring the Old instead of the New.

I would like to look at a common path that believers are lead down, that brings them from the NT to the OT over time.

1. Lets' form a home church.

Home churches pop up literally on a daily basis today. I think this is a good thing in many ways. Just the fact that this is happening ought to show us that maybe, God is trying to lead His people away from old traditions.....However....forming a home church can also be the beginning point of the road to OT church. You see, the simple idea that meeting in a home automatically puts someone into the NT is not at all correct. One can see in newly formed home churches the seeds that very often lead to the OT practices. If we are not constantly striving to seek Gods' leading and do not insist that every believer has ministry to do for God and that we ought not exercise authority one over another--then the OT practices which speak against these concepts can slowly begin to enter into a home church.

a. A "Community" of Christians. Many home churches center on this idea and there is some truth in it. Yes the NT church was somewhat like a community and certainly we ought to pray for one another and help one another within the church. But this can easily become the leading to building ourselves a storehouse and a sanctuary for ourselves. We need to realize how drastically self-centered traditional church function is. In traditional church people are very used to giving--they are often pushed hard to "give"--but the giving is in reality, giving to oneself. The demands of traditional church for a physical building--the 'house of God **must** be built' (one can find these quotes in the OT quite easily--and reasonably so--if Israel did not build the temple they could not have their sin forgiven!). Home church seems to alleviate this problem. Now we are meeting in homes, hurrah, no more building to fund! But if the giving becomes self-centered, eventually a building fund might spring up. And even if we continue in homes, a large fund built up by believers can eventually become a point of authority--after all who has the right to control these funds? Home church can have authority in a different form and the real truth is that Jesus Christ is meant to have the authority over every penny that His children possess.

b...The purpose of meeting is...meeting.....A very hard concept for us to understand is that repetitive meeting (once a week--is a strict Christian law--yet not Biblical!) are NOT part of the picture of the NT church. In the OT the sabbath (sacrificial) laws demanded Israel to perform repetitive functions because the offerings they were making were imperfect, They offerings needed to be done over and over again. This huge tradition is in almost every home church I have ever

encountered. Its sort of the automatic "of course we will meet once a week". We need to look openly at the NT and realize that every meeting described in the NT is actually a one-time event. Look for yourself. In the meetings the NT describes, believers gathered together, they prayed, received the instructions from God, and then went out and carried on those instructions. You see the most important purpose is NOT meeting, it is the Gospel. In the Bible record, Jesus did not meet the same way twice. Why? Because He knew the perfect will of the Father which was to meet the needs of different people in the specific ways that the Father instructed.

Now I am certainly not suggesting that believers ought to wander the streets (unless God is calling them to do so specifically!) but what I am suggesting is that meeting is not nearly as important as we have been taught by tradition. Yes of course do not forsake it (you see some believers in Bible times were so on fire for spreading the Gospel that they needed to be reminded to meet with others occasionally). If a group of believers truly did meet, in order to receive Gods' instructions on how to further the Gospel, it might lead some of them to ministries that would take days or weeks or months to carry out. Certainly along the way they ought to consult with and meet with other believers, but as Jesus said.. "seek first the kingdom of God (the authority of God--His instructions) and all things will be added unto you".

c... That sneaky tithe thing..... Some home churches start paying tithes. This really does not make any sense at all. At least in traditional church the practices of the building fund and the professional pastor give the Biblical suggestion that tithe ought to be done. How does it fit in at all in home church? After all the person hosting the meetings is paying for the snacks (or maybe everyone chips in)--what else are the expenses? There certainly was no tithe in the NT church, but it often gets into home churches simply because some people start to do it as a carry over from what they had done in the traditional church they had previously attended. This usually happens in home churches where there is a strong leader or leaders--why?.....

d..the leaders--the Levites.....In most home churches people experience the idea that they can finally say something in a meeting! It's a wonderful revelation to them and they feel happy about it. But often people feel unsafe without a "real minister" who is in charge of them. Unless there is a strong teaching within the group that no one but Christ ought to lead, that we all ought to have the equal right to minister, and we should not exercise authority one over another among ourselves.....somebody will get elected the Levite.

Well I shouldn't say elected, because that is not the case. What we usually do is find the person who teaches the Bible the best and put them in that position. For centuries Christianity has had the ministry gifts in reverse. 1 Corinthians 12:27-28 tells us that "first" (of prime importance) ought to be apostles, second, prophets, and thirdly, teachers.

There is as I said earlier a priority for ministry. and teaching is supposed to be last. In fact teaching is the only NT Bible ministry that has warnings attached to it--("we should not all be teachers"--we should not heap up teachers to itching ears"). If apostleship is meant to be the most important function then release of ministry ought to be something we actively seek. Never heard of that? Jesus did it a lot (John ch 20 among others). He sent a lot of people (the greek word translated as sent is "apostello")--He did not hold them under a law of perpetual teaching. But this traditional law (based not he Levitical catholic priest concept) very readily sneaks into home churches.

You see we are so used to OT church that when believers actually do function in NT practices, they will often see it as a failure! Imagine holding a meeting of just a few believers. You get together and fast and pray and God tells you to send 2 of those people out to minister the Gospel--and you break up and don't see them again! What a failure! ...

¶ Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus. (Acts 13:1-4)

So how do these things progress? Well a group begins with some home meetings--but they decide to meet every Tuesday every week (forever). On one side this group is actively witnessing the Gospel, and inviting unsaved people into the meetings (one of the functions of meetings the Bible describes--a room for the unlearned). So the group grows over time. Some of the people in the group are also attending traditional church--and they might try to invite their pastor into the meeting. The pastor of course does not like it and tells "his people" not to attend....Or he likes it so much he starts attending regularly....oops, now we have a professional minister in the mix.....(sometimes this "pro" is home grown--simply the person who prays the loudest or teaches the Bible in the most accepted/popular manner)....One family is then "lead by God" to tithe to the pastor....hey we have so many people in the group why don't we rent out a building downtown--and become a "real church".....we will need offerings, and tithe if God leads you.....time and tithe.....and a next generation takes over these as the "correct traditions" of their church.

And many people believe this to be the correct progression of things.

2 points of view...

the average person....If you were or are an "average person" in a traditional church, chances are that you never ever ever ask any questions about ministry, authority or church function. why? Well because obviously you are NOT the person who gets those instructions from God. You are NOT the pastor! So the average person goes to a traditional church and absolutely trusts that the church leaders have studied ministry and know about authority and have a clear understanding from God about how the church ought to meet and what we ought to do. Why does the average person have this idea? I believe it is because of the repetitive format of the church service, in which we are (quite unknowingly in most cases) reenacting the temple/ sacrificial laws of the OT. We believe that this is a NT Christian meeting--and it is--since that is who the people attending are--but the actual practices are never put into question. In the format of the church service the average person (the sheep) is shown that when it comes to God they are not allowed to speak, teach, pray out loud (at least to be heard by anyone), and that there is one person who has a great deal of "Gods' authority" over them. This person has so much authority that you owe them money each week, and when the service is on you can only say amen to everything they say. There isn't any time or place to ask a question. In fact the idea of questioning the whole proceedings is considered to be rebellious.

The leader....this is the most interesting part, but most good folks who become pastors or such start out as average people (unless they are related to a church leader--that is one way to become the church leader--kind of like the birthright of the Levitical priests?). But over time they really wanted to teach the Bible. They also are usually people who are the most "in love with" the system that they see in front of them. They are usually really nice people who truly want to help others and they believe that the best way to do that is to get into ministry. Yes of course they have ministry (but it never comes up that everyone has ministry too!), usually a teaching gift. They go to ministry school where, contrary to the belief of the average person, no one teaches about ministry from the Bible. At ministry school they are taught how to write sermons and preach and manage money--the stuff that fits into the system. If they get good enough at those skills--the ones that fit into the system, they become a pastor. Usually they are sure that God has lead them there and that can be confusing to many people.

I am going to say something here that may not sound right to you but please listen. One of the signs that a group of believers is functioning in NT ways is that they fail sometimes. Everything does not go perfectly all the time. Why is that? Because it is clear, from the Bible (and if we are honest in our own experience as believers) that no one hears from God perfectly all the time. Part of the idea of trying to seek out God's will often, and being truly open to whatever He asks of us, is that we will not hear His voice correctly 100% of the time. All the churches in the Bible were making mistakes, in fact as hard as it is for us to believe, I think that mistakes are an earmark of correct Christian function. Maybe it's hard for us to believe because we have been raised on the church service, in which there never ever is any mistake and nothing ever goes wrong.

So is it a mistake for someone to hear from God that they ought to become a pastor? Even that may not be a mistake! Pastor is a NT ministry--but it is not at all what traditional has told us it is. If we used the NT to define pastor we would find that it is an anointing to release people to serve God. Interestingly, exactly the opposite of someone who holds people under their authority. A NT pastoral anointing would be to quietly guide another believer in some way, much more of a one on one ministry, to encourage and help other believers so that they can serve God. And maybe God actually is calling someone to do that--it's just that when some people hear the word pastor, their experience immediately kicks in--they have known and seen some wonderful people of God who are called pastors and they are amazed that God is calling them to preach sermons and collect tithe and "run the ship"!

This is usually all that most people who are in ministry know about ministry--what they have seen other people say and do. And the big "of course" is that the tradition of the church service is the right and correct way for Christians to function together. so they go ahead and work extremely hard to try their best to do a very difficult job--but perhaps a job that God never actually called anyone to do! Perhaps a job that He would like shared by many within the group and in fact a job that is actually less important than the Gospel ministry.

And when someone has accepted the job....it only will take a few tiny half-scriptures dropped in here and there to re-affirm the Biblical correctness of it all. So some pastors have heard the idea that the pastor is like a Levitical priest...but it's a vague thing that no one ever asks them about. Some of them are extremely aware of the scriptures on tithe, since some of them see their job of fund raising as the most important form of success they are meant to achieve. Success within the system means to bring more people in who pay more tithe so you can build a bigger building so that you can bring more people in who pay more tithe so you can build a bigger building....and so the home meeting has become the mega church.

It just seems very very difficult for us to understand that the Gospel is the most important thing.