

Radical Restoration Review

This work is review of the book "Radical Restoration, A Call To Pure And Simple Christianity" by F. LaGard Smith, copyright 2001. The intent is to examine only the teaching presented therein with comparison to what is revealed in scripture. Where the teaching is assessed to conform or not conform with scripture, it will be noted alike. This is not a rebuttal but a review. Moreover, no character assumptions or judgments of the motives of brother Smith are intended, but comments are offered in all respectfulness. From here on, the author is referred to simply as "Smith," not for disrespect but for brevity.

The Church Of Christ

A local church is not merely the collective group of Christians living in a city as Smith would denote (pg 24, P 4). Saul was a Christian living in Jerusalem but was not part of that body until he was accepted among them. In a reverse scenario, the fornicating Christian was put out from among the church at Corinth, though he was still a Christian living in Corinth. Churches are comprised also of elders and deacons. This leadership structure indicates that a local church is more than a mere collectivity of people.

Smith objects to the phrase "Jerusalem church of Christ" but accepts "the church of God at Corinth" (pg 24). The difference is mere semantics. There were no denominations in the first century from which a distinction needed to be made, however, the need for terms of distinction exist today. Though some who are weak in knowledge today may think of the church in a sectarian way, we simply need to teach about it. We don't need to radically alter anything in this matter.

In chapter two starting at page 29, Smith expertly draws our attention to corruption in the church: immorality, divorce, and materialism (pg 32). His call is to cut quickly and deeply at the root of the shallow spirituality problem. However, when he first touches on things that need to change, instead of targeting a lack of authority, evil speaking, or favoritism in the church, he suggests we "throw away the clock" (pg 37, P 1). His zeal is as misdirected as those against whom he argues. He is naive to think that disposing a "worship-begins-at-7:30-PM" mentality will actually draw people to greater moral devotion. His idea of spirituality is based not on instruction in the word (1 Cor 2:12-16) but on informality and spontaneity (pg 37, P 2).

At page 37, Smith's argumentation on the term "institution" is a play on semantics to make well-structured and orderly worship seem like an overbearing spouse. He describes it as "a body whose doctrinal and organizational superstructure has overshadowed the more sublime purposes for which it was established" (P 3). Apparently, he thinks that doctrine is not a keynote for the church's purpose, however, the scripture which best encapsulates the purpose of the church says it is the "pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim 3:15). "Truth" is that system of facts to be believed, orders to be obeyed, and promises to be enjoyed: rules and rituals, as he puts it. (Incidentally, baptism and the Lord's Supper are rituals by definition). That is doctrine. Doctrine is the thing which Smith commends Josiah, Ezra, and Nehemiah for defending (pg 31, P 3). We will see that Smith places doctrine at a lower priority in favor of spontaneity and emotionalism.

At page 37, Smith also disparages rules and rituals as if they are evil or worthless. He likens the healthy church to an "organism" not an "organization." Scripture is using this metaphor long before Smith. Paul calls the church a body, like our own, with eyes, ears, feet, and hands. All living organisms follow natural rules. For examples, fish must not breathe air; mammals must not breathe water. Attempting to violate these rules is fatal. Organisms are not free from rules, structure, and organization. Furthermore, rituals and routine are not necessarily bad, except when they become perfunctory. Daniel routinely prayed three times daily. Routines and rituals can help us put order and structure in our lives. Smith's descriptions are designed to encourage those in perfunctory activities to throw off doctrine, rules, and orderliness rather than to simply put meaning back into their actions.

Smith maintains that we should not think of the church as an "it" (a corporate, functioning, structured body) but a "we" (a collective group of sanctified people) (Pg 38, P 2-4). He declares that to refer to the church as "it is" instead of "we are" is perverted, institutional thinking. However, this is exactly the language of scripture. In Ephesians 1:22, 23, Paul says, "the church which is his body...," not "who are his body." In 1 Timothy 3:15, he says, "...the household of God, which is the church..." not, "who are the church." Of the church, Jesus said, "The gates of Hades will not overpower it" (not "them"); Paul said, "I... tried to destroy it" (not "them"), and "it may assist those who are widows indeed" (not "they may assist"). Yet, Smith would consider it a "great advance" to think of the church in ways other than the way Jesus and Paul express it.

Though some would claim that the church is not an organization, a corporation, an establishment, an institution, or an association, scripture most assuredly indicates that it is. An organization is simply a body organized. The church has a head: Jesus Christ (Eph 1:22); a local body is structured with elders, deacons, and teachers (Phil 1:1). A corporation is, by definition, a body legally formed to act as a single entity with various rights and duties (Eph 4:16). An establishment is a thing which has been established, as if by a ratified covenant (Heb 10:9). An institution is simply an established organization or corporation. An association is a society of persons having a common interest (Eph 3:9, 10). The church is indisputably all these things. Some ulterior motive must be involved to insist otherwise.

Smith makes issues from the comparative terminology of becoming a "church member" and becoming a "Christian" (pg 38, P 3). However, scripture will show that one is the same as the other. In Acts 12:1 Christians are referred to by Luke as "some who belonged to the church." If you are a Christian, God has added you to the church; if you are a member of the church, you are a Christian. Smith also scoffs at the notion of one identifying himself with a local body, but it is a completely scriptural concept (Rom 16:1).

Smith de-emphasizes our need to obey while focusing on Christ's atoning sanctification (pg 3, P 4). When we speak of someone as being baptized, it is by metonymy: a part-for-the-whole figure. We actually mean the whole submission-by-faith process. Smith declares we ought not be thinking of people as "baptized" or as "members" but as only "sanctified Christians." Smith again fails to consult scripture about this. Concerning Lydia, Luke describes her status as having been baptized, not "having become a sanctified Christian" (Acts 16:15). Also, Paul says we are members of his body, which is the church. Smith would have us think that Paul's and Luke's language betrays how denominational they had become.

Smith suggests that minimally devoted church-goers today are a product of the denominational thinking which he insists has pervaded the church (pg 38, P 4). To the contrary, it is Smith's own propositions that will lead to lukewarmness. When rules, regulations, and structure are portrayed as cumbersome and stifling, many Christians will seek to perform only the minimum requirement. For example, if not attending a midweek Bible study assembly is declared not to send a soul to hell, since it is only an artifact of the institutional structure, we should not be surprised when it is altogether canceled due to a lack of interest.

Perceptively, the issue here is mainly semantics. Smith is willing to think of the church as a collective body but not as a membership. He would call baptized believers "sanctified" but not call those sanctified "baptized believers." Now as Smith emphatically states that this is not semantics (pg 39, P 2), then it can only mean he has an agenda against sound doctrine and orderliness.

"Non-institutional" brethren have never objected to institutions, human or divine, but only that the divine institution has no authority to financially support a human institution (pg 38, P 3). But of course, it is the de-emphasizing of doctrine which Smith is promoting.

Smith makes very truthful observations on the spiritually sick and half-dead churches (pg 39, P 4). This writer has seen churches vibrant with group leaders, visitation programs, gospel meetings, vacation Bible school, and door-to-door campaigns, but where immorality, lying, false teaching, and favoritism lies beneath the surface.

Smith makes worthwhile remarks how those who grow up in the church might not be as keenly sensitive to ungodliness in their lives as one coming out of the world, participating in all manner of debauchery (pg 40). Though some adolescents may obey the gospel simply to imitate the outward action of their peers, some most certainly do so recognizing their sin, having perhaps lied to their parents or repeated a vulgar joke. Simply because some do not have the proper attitude does not mean churches per the norm have sliced Acts 2:38 in half. The idea of calling this verse "our corporate logo" and disparaging the "five steps" explanation of obedience has a condescending tone.

Again, the idea is set forth that the church is only a collection of sanctified believers, not a structured organization with elders, teachers, and members (pg 43, P 2). From here, Smith indicates how wrong it is to measure loyalty to God by loyalty to His church. He likewise fails to consult scripture for this statement. Scripture makes clear that loyalty to God is manifested by devotion to his church. Jesus instructs us to seek first the kingdom of God (Matt 6:33). Any son who honors his father will honor the things of his father. This writer has seen the fruit of this idea in the church. On this basis, one who persistently neglected assembling for worship to encourage his brethren was declared to be a very spiritually-minded person, and his absence was excused. There is no edification in this; this does not restore anything.

Lutheran Legacy

Beginning at page 45, Smith calls Christians today "heirs" of Martin Luther's religious revolution. After developing Luther's history and the emergence of Calvin and the Presbyterians, Smith declares, "We can hardly deny our religious roots or escape the family tree" (pg 54, P 2). Conservative Christians today will flatly deny Smith's teaching on this. True, the Roman Catholic Church had its conception in the one true church of Jesus Christ, but it stopped being that church when it stopped teaching and practicing the things ordained by Christ for that church. When local bodies fell into the apostasy which had been foretold and they refused to repent, Christ would have removed their candlestick (Rev 2:5). They then would have been no more His church than those in Judaism or paganism, no matter by what name they called themselves. They are not the heritage of Christians today. Even if at that time there was not a single sound church in existence, the church still existed in seed form in the word. Planting the word would produce simply Christians: members of Christ's church. This today is the true Christian's true heritage, not Martin Luther.

Smith warns against a bombastic style of debate marked by misquoting, deceit, sarcasm, and character attacks (pg 57, P 3). He readily puts Jesus in a different class. Though harsh, He was never untruthful, conniving, or deceitful. This writer will make certain that any criticism offered to Smith will come from pure motives, free from wrangling and with accurate quotations.

Smith's illustration of a patient screaming louder when the doctor touches more closely to the ailing body part is spot on (pg 58, P 2). This writer has witnessed gospel preachers who misconstrue, attack another's character, and spew biting sarcasm when faced with their own inability to defend their traditionalistic doctrines with scripture. These men apparently think that the need to change the heart applies to everyone except themselves.

Smith will now list examples of things he claims we inherit from our so-called Lutheran legacy. The first is a clergy-laity distinction (pg 60, P 2). Though every church will deny it exists, it often truly does. This becomes painfully clear when a "regular church member" charges a "regular gospel preacher" with false teaching. Unable to defend his doctrine with scripture, the heretic preacher will remind his opponent how many more years he has studied and how many other "regular gospel preachers" agree with him, as if that is how we establish authority. Additionally, others who also are convinced that his teaching is false will tolerate him, because of his position as "the regular preacher." Furthermore, if any "regular member" would be marked as a false teacher by the "regular preacher," the whole congregation will withdraw simply at the preacher's instruction, not even fully understanding why. This writer has seen all this kind of partiality play out in a so-called conservative church. This is not to say that having a regular preacher is a bad thing; he simply ought not be held above others. Perhaps this occurs from denominational influences, but it is not our heritage, and it will not be a part of any sound church. We will deal with more of what Smith has to say about local preachers later in our review.

Smith's second example is a claim that organizational and administrative features are inherited from our so-called legacy (pg 60, P 3). Again, in his attempt to disparage structure and orderliness, he emphasizes the role of the elders as shepherds, guarding and feeding a flock, while conveniently ignoring the scriptural terms suggesting elders are more than this alone. The original word sometimes translated "bishop" means "overseer." The idea is not passive observation but managing and presiding over a group. The terms "supervisor" and "president" are fitting in our vernacular. Scripture calls them "rulers" and requires that we submit to them. If it were not that elders make decisions on matters of judgment and that we comply, then they would have no rule. Elders do not get to make decisions on doctrinal matters. It is not because the elders say so that we baptize for the remission of sins. If they would claim otherwise, we must rebel. This is not rule. However, if the elders state that they want an assembly dismissed with prayer and not a scripture reading, it is within their right to demand such, and we should obey. Call it administration if you will, but it is a God-ordained role of elders. The truth to Smith's statement is that there are elders today who, incapable of defending truth with scripture, do nothing more than administer their rules. Though this may occur in fact by denominational influence, it is not our legacy, nor ought it be tolerated in any church today.

Smith's third example is the Lord's Supper, and his remarks are preposterous. We absolutely do not have Luther to thank for being able to partake of both the bread and the wine (pg 61, P 1). This is ridiculous. We have Jesus to thank for that: "Drink of it, all of you" (Mat 26:27). Again, disparaging anything resembling ritual, Smith uses the word "meal" to describe our communion without the first scriptural reference. We use the word "meal" to describe eating the quantity of food to satiate physical hunger. Nowhere does the Bible ever refer to the Lord's Supper as a "feast" or a "meal." The significance of the

Lord's Supper has nothing to do with physical hunger (1 Cor 11) or satisfying the flesh by the quantity eaten. If eating a small portion seems too ritualistic to us, our heart is in the wrong place. Incidentally, there is nothing in the context of Jude 12 to indicate that the "love feast" mentioned is the Lord's Supper. More about this will come later.

Smith's fourth example is another attack on anything resembling structure, format, observance, tradition, or management (pg 61, P 2). Contrary to Smith's suppositions, worship does not need to divest itself of these attributes to be "mutually participatory" (the scriptural term is "fellowship") or "intimate" (the scriptural concept is self-examination). Moreover, for his claim that first century worship was spontaneous, he offers no scriptural basis. Spontaneity carries the idea of doing whatever you want to do whenever you want to do it. However, scripture requires worship to be orderly (1 Cor 14:40). The original word is from TAXIS, which Thayer defines as, "1) an arranging, arrangement 2) order 2a) a fixed succession observing a fixed time 3) due or right order, orderly condition 4) the post, rank, or position which one holds in civic or other affairs 4a) since this position generally depends on one's talents, experience, resources 4a1) character, fashion, quality, style." The opposite of orderly (that is, disorderly), ATAKTOS, was used as a military term for a soldier "out of ranks," (Thayer). TAXIS is the doing of the proper thing at the appointed time. As a case in point, Paul even instructs one sitting by quietly who is given something to say by the Holy Spirit's direct operation to wait until the first one speaking becomes quiet, so that each may take his turn speaking one at a time (1 Cor 14:30, 31). He is not to spontaneously blurt out something and interrupt another but must keep his spirit under control (vs 32). Spontaneity is truly incompatible with scriptural worship. However, once we de-emphasize orderliness and structure and strip the elders of their rule, we can have people doing whatever they want whenever they want to do it. In fact, this writer has seen this influence toward spontaneity make a worship assembly look more like an open house with people coming and going at all times and doing or eating whatever they want whenever they want with the attitude that no elder has the right to ask them to try to get to church on time or please do not eat an apple during Bible class. Spontaneity is the seed of chaos (vs 33).

Smith is a master at spinning words and clever metaphors, but "let's be honest," just because there are similar or borrowed expediencies with denominationalism, it is no reason to claim that the church today is any kind of hybrid (pg 61, P3). God's word is the pure seed, and Smith is sowing none of it to make any of his claims.

Smith once again speaks disparagingly of doctrine in favor of spiritism. "It is we who continue to worry more about whether we are doctrinally restored than about whether we are spiritually restored" (pg 73, P 2). By "spiritually" he no doubt means emotionally charged spontaneity, and by "doctrinally" he no doubt means stifled in rote traditionalism, as is evident by his previous chapters. A proper understanding of doctrine and spirituality in scripture reveals that the two are on equal footing. "Worship Him in spirit and in truth" (Jn 4:24); "I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the understanding also" (1 Cor 14:15). In contrast, Smith's propositions emphasize the spirit over the doctrine, which is just as wrong as emphasizing the doctrine over the spirit.

A Model Of Perfection

In chapter five, Smith makes some excellent applications from the "model of perfection," giving scriptural support for all his statements (pg 97, P 3). However, the correct application of scripture ceases at age 97. In paragraph 2, he states that the early church practiced hospitality. Nowhere in scripture do we see the church as a body practicing hospitality. He makes the age-old mistake of confusing individual action and corporate action. In fact, Smith has laid much groundwork to disparage all aspects of corporate structure, organization, and orderliness. The church as a functioning, institutional body is odious to him. Consequently, he misapplies Acts 2:46. Eating meals together in our homes is not a church function; it is individual function. As a case in point, the social withdrawing Paul enjoins is to be executed on an individual basis, not a corporate basis (1 Cor 5:11). Also, eating together is not the only thing, but any socially "mixing it up" together: golfing, fishing, and all recreation and entertainment. All such activities are not church functions.

Now that Smith assumes socially eating together is a church function, his connecting it to the love feasts (Jude 12) and the Lord's Supper is his resultant misapplication of scripture. Jude's language is completely figurative. If "hidden reefs" and "clouds without water" are metaphors, so must be the love feast. It's what we call a mixed metaphor. Jude is not talking about a literal physical meal for satisfying fleshly hunger any more than he is talking about an actual sand bar beneath the water's surface. Instead, figuratively, it is a filling ourselves with the Spirit (Eph 5:18), with the "unleavened bread of sincerity and

truth" (1 Cor 5:8); it is gorging ourselves on the love of God (Eph 3:15). To claim that the love feast is a physical food fellowship meal or the Lord's Supper is to misunderstand. The kingdom of God is not about such carnal eating and drinking. The Lord's Supper is not connected to a common meal: "If anyone is hungry let him eat at home" (1 Cor 11:34). Consider this: if the Lord's Supper is connected to a common meal and we are not to eat such with a persistently disorderly, unrepented Christian, then if such a person gathers with us to worship, we must not permit him to partake of the Lord's Supper. If he reaches for the bread, we must pull it away. It will have to be somebody's task to make sure he is not served. This is absurd.

At page 97, paragraph 5 to the end of the chapter, Smith's discussion on relationships, persecution, the supernatural, and urgency are commendable. Here, Smith boldly presents truthful statements well established in correctly applied scripture. The Bible student is well rewarded to join this look back into the minds and attitudes of first century Christians. Notably, nothing here requires changes in worship or church orderliness as it appears today. It is a simple call to spirituality and away from carnality in the lives of Christians in everyday life.

The Work OF The Holy Spirit

Smith describes the Holy Spirit as "mystically" dwelling within us (pg 117, P 2). No scripture is offered for this statement. Mysticism carries the idea of things hidden. To the contrary, the apostles' work in the Spirit was all about revelation: removing the mysticism of Old Testament prophecy and symbolism (Col 1:26, 27). Incidentally, Paul's point in 1 Corinthians 3:16 is that we, individually, ("you, yourselves") are each a temple of God, as is the meaning in 6:19. The church as a collective body is truly a temple (Eph 2:21), but this verse is not teaching us that. We just need to be careful to get the messages from passages of scripture that are actually revealed and intended.

Smith discusses the first century miraculous works of the Holy Spirit (pg 118-120). In the end, he doubtfully concludes, admittedly by conjecture, that miraculous gifts have passed with the passing of the apostles. He calls it his "untidy conclusion." In this section, all of his reasoning from the scriptures ignores "...whether there be tongues, they shall cease...; when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away" (1 Cor 13:8-10). Smith faithfully acknowledges that no modern-day revelation could go beyond first century teachings, (and our measure on that matter is the scriptures themselves). Therefore, if we need nothing more than the scriptures, then they are perfect. However, first century Christians did not yet have all the New Testament scriptures. They had to rely in part on the gifts -- all given for confirming the new revelations. Since we now have the perfect, we know the partial has gone away. Nevertheless, Smith likes to paint this picture of mysticism -- that we can't know these matters with certainty. In so doing, he robs the scriptures of their glory and power.

Smith further proposes that the Holy Spirit works in our lives today in tangible ways outside the scriptures. He claims that, as we have swung the pendulum away from miraculous works through men today and modern-day revelations, we have unjustifiably banished the Holy Spirit to dwell only between the covers of the Bible, not actually within us (pg 121, P 2). Before we completely buy into this proposition, we should examine what the Holy Spirit actually has to say about the scriptures directly. They come from the very breath of God (2 Tim 3:16) and are alive, active, (Heb 4:12), powerful, and able to change the hearts and lives of men (Rom 1:16, 17). Smith's illustration is only reasonable if the covers of the book remain in the closed position. When we open the book and begin living it and teaching it, scripture becomes the Holy Spirit's direct medium. Paul rhetorically asks the Galatians, "...did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?" (Gal 3:2). Follow this logic: If Christ indwells us through faith (Eph 3:17) and faith comes by hearing the word of God (Rom 10:17), then Christ indwells us through His word. The same is true of the Father and the Holy Spirit. Scripture further reveals that not only does the Spirit abide with us, we also abide with Him (Rom 8:9). How does this happen? The same way: through the written word which we have heard (1 John 2:24-27), observing His commandments (1 John 3:24) and keeping His doctrine (2 John 9).

We do not have to cut Acts 2:38 out of our Bibles, as Smith proposes (pg 121, P 3), to accept that the Holy Spirit enters our heart through our ears by His word (Act 2:37, 40, 41). Smith continues, "If we've been immersed, we've been as filled on the inside as we've been washed on the outside." This statement indicates a misunderstanding. Baptism has absolutely nothing to do with an outward washing (1 Pet 3:21), so it's hard to derive something meaningful from the statement. It is only clever language designed to discount the idea that the Spirit indwells us through His word.

Smith goes yet further: "What good is it, then, for us to have the Holy Spirit dwelling within us if nothing actually happens as a result?" To the contrary, if life changing happenings are evidence of his indwelling,

then the word is truly the medium. Anyone who can hear the words, "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for the ungodly" and it actually have no effect on him is someone refusing to let the Holy Spirit in.

Notwithstanding, we cannot say the Holy Spirit in other ways no longer works for us today - definitely in our prayers (Rom 8:26) and perhaps providentially. These intangible truths may present an element of mystery, but there's nothing mysterious about His operation through the word. However, we downgrade the power of the scriptures if we suppose that the Holy Spirit today instills in us knowledge, wisdom, enlightenment, discernment, understanding, insight, faith, and love apart from his word (pg 122, P4 - pg 123, P3). One who would think otherwise should read Psalm 119 in its entirety.

In radically restoring us today, we must accept that we cannot go back to exactly as it was at the apostle's time. In fact, God would not want us too, even if we could, anymore than a parent wants his child to remain a baby forever. Paul calls the spiritual gifts child's play -- things for which a mature man has no use (1 Cor 13:9-12). A mature man uses the word; it is his guide. Churches today lose their spiritual power when they de-emphasize the word and emphasize emotionalism, mysticism, and spontaneity, supposing them to be evidences of the Holy Spirit's work (pg 124; P 2, 3).

The Lord's Supper

Smith tells a story of his visit with a church which held the tradition that the one presiding over the Lord's Supper must break the loaf into two pieces before serving it. His description is laced with irony, sarcasm, and rhetoric, designed to make that body of believers appear as unenlightened buffoons. If Smith tried to teach them that "break bread" is simply an idiom by metonymy for eating it and not an actual ritual element, it would be nice to think he did so with more gentleness and grace than his words here portray. The sister about whom he wrote disparagingly would no doubt feel embarrassed and insulted to read Smith's words here. The Holy Spirit through the writings of Paul teaches us that love ought not behave this way (Rom 14, 1 Cor 8; 13:1-7). Besides, such bread breaking is a matter of opinion. The sister did not sin when she broke the bread in the manner Smith describes.

Smith now begins to propose what is required to radically restore the Lord's Supper to primitive church practices. Having already rejected orderliness and structure in the local church, disregarded the distinction of the church universal and local, and blurred the distinction between individual and corporate activity, he surmises "from all appearances" that the Lord's Supper was observed in the church as a part of a "fellowship meal" -- a normal meal with food variety for satisfying physical hunger (pg 128, P 5).

To validate this, Smith asserts that the inaugural Lord's Supper was part of an ordinary meal "without question" (pg 129, P 2). In a study of authority, it is crucial to understand what elements in a recorded example are germane to the activity (and thus binding) and what elements are incidental. What part of that Passover scene was germane to the communion observance? Jesus took only the bread and the cup (the fruit of the vine or wine) and made it something special and unique. Nothing else. Paul said, "As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes." The meat was not part of this. The sop dish was not part of this. The Lord's Supper was not part of the meal nor vice versa any more than was eating it in an upper room (Mark 14:15) or in a room with many lights (Act 20:7, 8) or the foot washings (Jn 13). These are incidentals.

When Paul explains the Lord's Supper to the Corinthians, he says, "I delivered to you that which the Lord delivered to me," and he goes on talking only about the bread and the cup and the spiritual significance. This was not a carnal thing. This had nothing to do with renewing physical nutrition and strength, as Smith supposes. In fact, Paul charges them to eat those kinds of meals at home. Smith supposes here that Paul is only charging them not to over-eat (pg 131, P 4). If Paul had meant to tell them simply not to over-eat in what Smith proclaims is an ordinary fellowship meal, that's what he would have said. Instead, Paul said one's own house is the place to eat such. All such carnality is what Paul deems "not the Lord's Supper."

Smith also cites the love feast of Jude 12 as validation for his doctrine (pg 137, P 1). We have already briefly discussed this. Jude's language is intensely figurative. He begins in verse 4 metaphorically describing some false teachers as animals (vs 10), hidden reefs in their love feasts (vs 12), rainless clouds blown by the wind (vs 10), dead fruitless trees, ocean waves full of foam, and wandering stars (vs 13). They were not literally any of those things, but only figuratively. In the midst of this deep symbolism, Smith is ready boldly declare that the love feast here mentioned is not a figure of speech -- a spiritual feasting on God's word -- but a literal food meal. Smith's reasoning does not fit. Even if we concede that it was a literal food meal for the purpose of gaining physical nutrition, there is absolutely nothing in the

text that would necessitate it was the action of the assembled church as a body nor that it had anything to do with the Lord's Supper. Any such conclusion is derived from one's own imagination.

If we look to the totality of rightly applied scripture for anything that would support Smith's "fellowship meal" -- a common physical meal for the flesh taken as an observance in a worship assembly of the church as a body -- we find nothing. To the contrary, we see that Christians individually shared common meals in their homes and that the church is not carnal but spiritual. Men have for decades tried to find in Jude 12 and 1 Corinthians 11 justification for social church dinners, but it's just not there. All such carnal thinking is wrong-mindedness, and it is disgraceful to propose the same perversion of the Lord's Supper of which the Corinthians were guilty.

On this basis alone, Smith affirms that the Lord's Supper was a "memorial in a meal," a "combined table fellowship and memorial" (pg 128, P5), "an integral part of a *real meal*" (pg 129, P5). All such connections of the Lord's Supper to a common meal are scripturally unfounded.

Smith maintains that the supposed fellowship meal was a hearty meal of robust quantity (pg 281, P 4). He writes, "That ordinary table wine was being consumed in large quantities...underscores...that...gathering around the Lord's table was not the token ritual with which we are familiar but an actual food-and-drink meal" (pg 132, P 2) for the included "special purpose of strengthening...their physical bodies" (pg 128, P 5). Remarkably, Smith fails to notice that in the verses before and after 1 Corinthians 11:21 where their abundant drinking is mentioned, Paul is rebuking them for doing it. Authority in religion can come from examples for sure, but only those apostolically approved. This is not the pattern we should follow.

All such connection of the Lord's Supper to the physical quantity eaten and satisfying the needs of the flesh is wrong-mindedness. Consider the words of Jesus in John 6. (No connection of eating and drinking Christ's body and blood with the Lord's Supper is intended but only a distinction between carnal thinking and spiritual thinking). He says, "You seek me...because you ate the loaves and were filled" (vs 26). Jesus explains that he is true meat and true drink that gives life. The crowd did not understand because they were thinking carnally (vs 60), but, to his disciples, He explains, "It is the Spirit who gives life, the flesh profits nothing. The words I speak to you are spirit and they are life" (vs 63). The writer of Hebrews also weighs in on this: "Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings; for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, through which those who were so occupied were not benefited" (Heb 13:9). The Lord's Supper has nothing to do with the flesh. It is completely carnal mindedness to think that the significance of the Lord's Supper is found in the quantity eaten or in the amount of time it takes to do it.

Smith seems to get tangled in his own argument. To explain Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 11:22, Smith suggests Paul is saying that "if the reason you are participating in the fellowship meal is to feed your stomach, then you'd better stay home." However, satisfying the needs of the flesh is exactly what Smith sets forth for this "fellowship meal" elsewhere in his writing (pg 128 p 5).

The possible abuse that Smith recognizes in blurring the distinction between the auditorium and the fellowship hall betrays him (pg 135, P 2). Churches denouncing the "social gospel" doctrine (which came along with church-supported human institutions in the middle of the last century) have made the plea for decades to get common meals out of church functions. Smith's teaching on this is the very source of the problem.

Smith makes a fundamental error on the idea of fellowship, which the mainstream, liberal, institutional, social-gospel churches (all terms used accommodatively) have done for over half a century now. In Acts 2:42, the word "fellowship" (Gr. KOINONIA) is used in connection with teaching, prayer, and breaking bread. Teaching and prayer are both spiritual things, clearly. It stands to reason that this bread-breaking would also be spiritual (the Lord's Supper), not carnal (a common, social meal). This is further validated by the fact that the early Jerusalem Christians were using the temple for a gathering place, but not for common meals. This they did in their individual homes, specifically (Acts 2:46). Add to this that Paul tells us that Lord's Supper time is not common meal time -- eat the common meals at home (1 Cor 11:22, 34). Further noting that the kingdom is spiritual, not carnal, the evidence is overwhelming that Acts 2:42 does not refer to a common meal in a worship service of which the Lord's Supper is a part. Note particularly that Luke does not use the word "fellowship" to describe their meals at home. Throughout the New Testament scriptures, the word "fellowship" is never used of carnal things, such as pot-luck dinners and recreational activities -- always spiritual. Nevertheless, Smith has managed to coin the phrase "fellowship meal," though there is no scriptural validity for it. Liberal brethren immediately think of fellowship carnally; conservatives immediately think of the spiritual. If Smith would radically restore the church, he would stop thinking carnally and work to remove all social and recreational functions from mainstream

churches. His own language reveals his carnal mind set (pg 142, P 5): "The question...[is]...whether we should be meeting...for combined fellowship and worship as the early Christians did." He further states, "Look at our own balancing act between the auditorium and the fellowship hall" (pg 135, P 2). In rebuttal, to the conservative, spiritually-minded Christian, worship *is* our fellowship: singing, praying, communing, giving, and learning together; the auditorium *is* our "fellowship hall," where we share in all these things.

Smith writes, "The primitive church met in homes" (pg 143, P 1). That is true (Col 4:15), but that is not the only place they met. They also met in temple quarters (Acts 2:46) or in furnished upper-story rooms (20:8). Smith makes the mistake of failing to understand when New Testament examples are binding. The rule of uniformity indicates that meeting in homes is not binding. Moreover, we have the recorded, generic command to assemble (Heb 10:24), so any recorded example is merely exemplary, not a mandate. Any other meeting place is only an expediency. More will come later about churches meeting in homes.

Smith has already planted the false seed that all ritual is inherently evil. Therefore, his remedy for a lifeless, perfunctory Lord's Supper observance is to turn it into part of a carnal feast. You do not have to do that to add meaning to the action. He calls what we traditionally do "miniaturized" and "stylized" (pg 143, P 3). He needs to understand that the amount of food eaten or the amount of time doing it compared to other activities has nothing to do with its meaning. Calling the Lord's Supper "the centerpiece of New Testament Christian worship" is Smith's words (pg 143, P 4), not our Lord's. No such idea is presented in scripture. In Acts 20, it was the preaching that lasted until midnight, not the Lord's Supper.

In all references of churches meeting in homes (Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:9; Col 4:15; Phm 1:2), there is no indication that physical meals for the flesh were enjoined as part of worship when the saints gathered there. Smith has already gone to great lengths to remove order, structure, and purpose from occasions when the saints came together "as a church" (1 Cor 11:18). When saints come together for a common, social meal or for playing games, it is not "as a church." Scripture makes a clear distinction of when saints met together for secular purposes and when they met for worship. During a worship service in one of the saint's homes was not the time to bring out meat, potatoes, and gravy.

This is a similar kind of misunderstanding the Corinthians were having. They were carnal-minded (1 Cor 3:1-4). In what was supposed to have been the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:20), the brethren who got there first consumed all the bread and wine (vs 21) while others arriving later had nothing of which to partake (vs 33). It is not a stretch to suppose that, in being carnally minded, they could have thought that if eating a little honors Christ, eating more honors more, creating the want for the ones arriving later. Paul takes great care to explain that the meaning of the Lord's Supper resides in the heart (vs 23-30) and is spiritual. There may well be some speculation here, but it certainly fits. Most assuredly, we cannot derive from this anything about a so-called "fellowship meal."

Smith expounds on the amount of time typically devoted to the Lord's Supper: "When is the last time you heard comments being invited from among the brethren as the Lord's Supper was being observed?" (pg 153, P 2). "In terms sheerly of time, perhaps the only part of our worship receiving less attention than the Lord's Supper is prayer.... Even announcements can come close to edging out the scant few minutes devoted to the supper" (pg 141, P 2).

Some churches today, influenced by Smith's ideas, are trying to enlarge the Lord's Supper, that is, spend more of the assembly time doing it. First of all, we need to understand that the Lord's Supper is only the eating of the bread and the drinking of the cup discerningly with prayerful thanksgiving: nothing else (1 Cor 11). A song sung after or before is not part of the Lord's Supper; it is singing. An invited comment offered by a brother or a reading or an admonition "to prepare our minds," as we often say, is edifying, but it is not actually part of the Lord's Supper; it is time devoted to exhortation. Aside from a many-worded blessing (Matt 6:7), the only way to actually enlarge the Lord's Supper is to eat and drink larger portions. Some churches today have replaced the tiny traditional communion cups with "Dixie" cups, perhaps suitable for a small breakfast portion. They also provide more or larger loaves so that worshipers can break off a hefty helping, which may take them each several minutes to finish eating. Conversely, our tradition of taking a tiny pinch of bread and sip of juice more likely originates from recognizing that the significance of the memorial lies in the spirituality of the observance, not in the portions consumed or the time devoted to perform it. You may enlarge the portions if you wish, but do not deceive yourself into thinking this pretense elevates the experience to a higher spiritual plane. God, in His wisdom, uses the simple and meager things to put to shame the high-minded and worldly (1 Cor 1:25 - 2:5).

On a side note, Smith calls the Lord's Supper an "observance" (pg 153, P 2), but he criticizes calling our assemblies a "worship service" because of the implication of spectatorship (pg 154, P4, 5). However, nothing suggests spectatorship more than "observance," but we know that this is not what Smith intends to imply. Neither should he assume others mean spectatorship when they say "worship service." This is nothing but haggling over words, which Smith ought not be engaging.

Consistent with his doctrine of spontaneity, Smith writes, "There was no particular 'order of worship'" (pg 140, P 5). To the contrary, when Paul commands all things to be done decently and orderly, he is precisely talking about doing things in the appropriate way at their appointed time; it is the meaning of his words. When Smith expresses his concerns about the feasibility and propriety of the "fellowship meal," he says, "The good news... is that there could never again be a kind of 'three-songs-and-a-prayer' mentality" (pg 142, P 3). Know this: there is absolutely nothing wrong with having three songs and a prayer at every assembly. It is decent and orderly. If someone needs to have the order of services jumbled around at every gathering, he is thinking carnally -- needing to have his physical senses stimulated to be edified. Such a man needs to change his focus and begin thinking spiritually, and a "fellowship meal" with a "please-pass-the-gravy" mentality is exactly the opposite of what he needs to accomplish this.

Anything further Smith writes about the "memorial fellowship meal" is to be categorically rejected. His premise for it has no scriptural foundation.

House Churches

Presuming that the examples of churches meeting for worship and the assumed memorial meals in their homes indicates the specific pattern we are to emulate, Smith coins another new phrase unknown to scripture: "house churches" (pg 146, P 1). Building upon this, he postulates that the pattern would suggest "relatively small groups" (pg 146, P 3). He disregards the fact that the church in Jerusalem was originally in the thousands (Acts 2:41) and that the numbers of the Antioch church were said to be "many" (15:35). From here, Smith uses pure speculation and supposition. "I wonder," he says, proposing that Saul's house to house persecution "might have" been at house church assemblies. He makes the same argument about Paul teaching both publicly and house to house (Acts 20:20). Smith admits this could possibly infer "times of private study with individual families in their own homes" (pg 146, P 4). However, the sound Bible student will need to see that the inference is necessary in order to reach an unavoidable conclusion and establish authority for a binding pattern. Smith makes these conclusions from only possible inferences. All Smith's references to churches meeting in homes as revealed in scripture prove nothing. For every mention of a church meeting in a home there is another mention of a church meeting with the specific place not mentioned. We can just as easily speculate that the gatherings mentioned in Acts 11:26; 14:27; 15:25; 20:8; Hebrews 10:25; James 2:2; 1 Corinthians 5:4; 11:18; and 14:23 were not necessarily in a home but could have been in some public meeting hall or rented quarters. The fact that Paul tells the Corinthians to eat their carnal meals at their homes suggests that not all gatherings for worship was at their homes (1 Cor 11:34). There is nothing in scripture that requires us to conclude that the examples of churches meeting in homes is binding on churches today or that God's will is that all churches be "relatively small groups."

Smith notes that Paul's language in Romans 16 indicates that not all Christians in Rome worshiped together (pg 147, P 3). That still does not prove that they all met exclusively in small groups and in homes. Not all Christians in Atlanta, Georgia today worship together either, but that does not necessitate that they meet in small "house churches." Smith despises institutionalizing the church (pg 24, P 3), but the concept of a "house church" as much as anything directly relates the body to its gathering place, just as the denominations do.

Smith also notes that scripture states no example of a church building (pg 149, P 2). A study of authority will show that we do not need an example for everything we do. There is not the first example of churches using song books, but they are authorized as an expediency to carry out the generic command to sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. However, it is not mandatory that we sing with song books, either; we can sing with them or without them. The same holds true for our assemblies. We can worship in someone's home or someplace else as an expediency for gathering. Whatever the place, the proposed "table fellowship meal" has no scriptural support. Meet in homes if you will, but such carnality ought have no portion there.

Smith has no tangible evidence that forces his conclusion. He asks whether the house church "was a divinely intended arrangement or merely a historical happenstance owing to economic necessity" (pg 149, P 3). Rhetorically, he asks, "Is it possible that what God intended was a revolutionary kind of worship?" Though he argues in its favor from every possible angle, nothing but questionable possibilities are

presented. Here is his language: "It would not be surprising if..." (pg 148, P 1), "There seems to be..." (P 2), "Perhaps... perhaps... might have... might have..." (P 3).

Smith's reasoning makes sense only if we buy into the "table fellowship" doctrine. He writes, "even the first century synagogue was more focused on teaching and preaching than on... table fellowship practiced by early Christians" (pg 150, P 2). This writer begs to differ, if you please. To the spiritually minded -- those rejecting the "table fellowship" doctrine -- this statement is utter nonsense. Just like the assemblies of the Jewish synagogues, the churches met for exactly the same purpose -- not for filling their stomachs -- but for teaching and preaching (Acts 13:1; 15:12, 35; Rom 12:5-8; 1 Cor 4:17; 12:28; 14:19-26; Eph 4:11; 1 Tim 3:15).

Smith's final attempt to validate this is to suggest that in a home is a better setting for teaching rather than in a cold, impersonal church building. Personal evangelism in homes may well be more effective than evangelism done in large assemblies in auditoriums, but this does not mean that the latter is out of line to the divine pattern. Paul utilizes the auditorium teaching method with considerable success (Acts 13:14-49; 17:1-4, 34; 19:8-10). The point is this: small meetings in homes is a good way to teach, but it is not the only way -- it is not the "divinely intended arrangement." Sound, active churches will utilize all available teaching methods.

Spontaneous and Informal Worship

Smith has already laid his groundwork by earlier renouncing all indications from scripture and that the first century church was a structured organization. He has blurred the distinction between the church as a body and the individual Christian and has stripped the eldership of any kind of rule. With carnal mindedness, he has converted the Lord's Supper into a potluck dinner and banished congregations to the obscurity of scattered gatherings in small numbers. He has also categorically declared all ritual and routine to be evil (pg 151, P 4). Having done this, he turns again to the idea of spontaneity and informality in worship.

Smith writes, "The primitive church had an intimacy, informality, and degree of mutual participation largely foreign to our own experience" (pg 151, P 5). These are conclusions he derives solely from his house church and fellowship meal suppositions, which have no scriptural support -- no scripture is otherwise offered. We have already noted that spontaneity stands in direct opposition to decency and orderliness as prescribed in scripture.

With the assumed intimacy generated by what would necessarily be a relatively small gathering in someone's home for a common meal, Smith now further develops assumptions about mutual participation in worship. He describes typical assemblies today as "spectator oriented" with minimal participation in only singing and the Lord's Supper: "We are a *listening* audience... to announcements, prayers, sermons,... actively participating in thought, but mostly our role is passive. By contrast we hear, 'When you come together, every one has a hymn or a word...' (1 Cor 14:26)" (pg 152, P 3).

To put intimacy, spontaneity, and informality into practice, Smith suggests that someone might pray aloud the moment he feels moved to do so or that someone might begin to sing aloud at that moment (pg 153, P 2); "no official song leader is needed" (pg 160, P 2).

This writer has first-hand experience meeting with a small group of Christians largely influenced by this thinking. Worship services had frequent moments of awkward silence. At one such point, a brother spontaneously asked, "Does anyone have a song?" Though Smith maintains that no song leader is needed, this brother effectively became one out of the need of the moment. He was surely following Paul's cue in 1 Corinthians 14:26. Some of us were looking forward to singing, but when no one spoke up after more awkward silence, the brother finally said, "Okay, it appears no one wants to sing; we don't have to sing." Similar awkward moments came with prayer. As much attempt as there was among us to break traditions, we still liked to end our assemblies with prayer -- an act Smith would surely brand as "ritual, liturgy, and sacrosanct tradition" (pg 151, P 4). Nevertheless, there were frequently moments of awkward silence where we all wondered what was going to happen next and who was going to make it happen. A self-appointed "worship leader" would eventually pipe up and similarly ask, "Does anyone want to pray?"

Smith admits, "There's much to think about" (pg 153, P 3), but this writer knows from experience that there is absolutely no convenient way to put Smith's ideas into practice. Moreover, for someone to burst into spontaneous prayer or song is disorderly -- plain and simple. Imagine someone spontaneously starting to sing "How Great Thou Art" from memory -- no songbook used (pg 154, P 3) -- and expecting

the congregation to be fully mutually participatory. Now imagine that someone in the assembly does not know the tune or the words. Without a song leader asking him to open his song book to the page, this individual is forced to become a mere listener -- the very problem Smith thinks his ideas will eliminate.

In Smith's proposal, everyone present would have an opportunity to give instruction, not just the designated leader. He cites 1 Corinthians 14:26, "*Everyone* has a... word" (emphasis Smith's). He admits practical problems exist with member capabilities, which need to be resolved, but no solutions are suggested. A fundamental flaw here is the idea that anyone can be a public teacher. Though anyone can certainly share what he knows, there is a certain level of knowledge required to teach publicly, especially when challenging questions and open discussions are encouraged (pg 153, P 2). This writer has personally witnessed problems within the church previously mentioned. The practice there was that every male member was expected to take his turn leading worship and teaching. The distinction in scripture that some are qualified to be teachers and some are not was basically ignored (Acts 13:1; 1 Cor 12:28, 29; Eph 4:11; 1 Tim 1:7; 2:7; Heb 5:12; Jam 3:1). As a consequence, on occasions, men not grounded in doctrine spoke inappropriately. Moreover, having an attitude of informality and spontaneity, they were often admittedly ill-prepared and incapable of offering more than only a few minutes of disjointed ideas, which seldom challenged us to self-examination. These men needed to sit and listen to a qualified teacher so that they might grow in knowledge and faith and may one day be qualified to teach also.

Smith's message is well received that our worship must not follow an outward form without an inward substance. However, the informality in worship that Smith is prescribing is accurately termed also as casualness. Casualness will manifest itself in people taking little interest and showing little concern. With a nonchalant attitude, they will regularly arrive late for worship and be distracted with cell phones and snack food. For some people, it will appear that they can barely squeeze time for worship in between their morning exercise routine and breakfast. In contrast, when Paul declares that things are to be done with decency and orderliness, it means that we are setting the time for worship and keeping it, conducting ourselves with dignity and propriety in the way we act, dress, and talk. It is a solemn, sobering occasion, not a picnic, party, or an "open house." It seems we should all be capable of singularly focusing on spiritual things for just an hour or two. If not, we are too busy.

Smith declares that church-goers today are largely spectators. This is not the case with whom this writer currently attends, and we don't follow Smith's prescriptions. Prayers are participatory. Many people arriving search for the one preparing the prayer list for worship, and when prayer is offered, hearty "amens" fill the room. Some folks ask the song leader to lead certain songs with special meaning to them, and the building resounds. During the sermon, the sound of turning Bible pages persists until the final word is spoken. There is nothing passive about that. Smith's words are deriding, as he scorns the "five items of worship" as "orchestrated religious spectacle for which we have reserved seats" (pg 154, P1). His condescending description continues as "slickly crafted high tech worship-team services" (pg 154, P 3) with the audience "sitting in the pews following along in the set-piece ritual" (pg 155, P 1). He likens it to spectators cheering from the stands at a sports event. No scripture is offered to suggest a worship assembly should be compared to a football game. Notwithstanding, if anyone in the bleachers thought he was qualified to play, there's certainly tryouts available. Imagine the disaster that would result if a small-framed man spontaneously decided he was qualified to be more actively participatory and ran out on the field during a play. There is structure and protocol in football. Smith's analogy fails in so many ways, and his belittling words are disgraceful.

Smith maintains that scripture describes assembled worship as informal, spontaneously participatory, and dynamically interactive (pg 155, P 4). However, he arrives at this only by a series of possible inferences and conjecture. First, he erroneously includes the common meal at the Lord's last supper as an integral part of worship. From here, he concludes that their assemblies must have been in relatively small numbers, else there's no way to expedite the carnal meal. He further supposes that all worship assemblies were in their homes -- the logical place for small gatherings for a meal. Then, he concludes assemblies must have been characterized by informality and spontaneity, because that is the way people behave in their homes. All this is a product of assuming the Lord's Supper is part of a carnal meal. No scriptures are actually cited that portray anything like the informality and spontaneity Smith proposes.

Evangelism and Edification

With his typical condescending language, Smith next attacks the extending of a formal invitation for attendees to respond to the gospel, as is traditionally practiced in churches today, accompanied by a standing invitation song (pg 156, P 1). He is somehow completely certain that the Lord's day worship assemblies from house to house of the early church were not their venues for evangelism. However, he

speculates that their evangelistic efforts were conducted house to house (pg 156, P 2). This is confusing, because he has gone to great effort to claim that Lord's day edification was house to house. So edification is house to house, but conversely, evangelism is house to house. Very confusing. Now that he has fabricated from conjecture that worship assemblies were not their venues for the evangelism, it is easy for him to make the traditional stand-and-sing invitation look silly. However, remove his false suppositions, and the invitation looks like an efficient expediency. He offers no scripture for his supposition, but let's take a look.

The word "exhortation" in scripture reveals much about the work of Christians. In 1 Corinthians 14, the context involves the assembled church (vs 23). The word "exhortation" in verse 3 is from PARAKLESIS, which Thayer's definition includes a "summons... supplication, entreaty... persuasive discourse, stirring address." The traditional invitation is exactly nothing other than exhortation. The exercising of the spiritual gifts certainly edified the gathered church (vs 12), but Paul affirms that their primary purpose was for the unbelievers that would have been also in the assembly (vs 22-25). This is evangelism in a worship assembly of the church. Smith cries, "This weekly confusion between edification and evangelism has been a disaster" (pg 157, P 3). Smith actually writes, "There is nothing to indicate that the memorial meal on the Lord's day was ever intended as an evangelistic outreach" (pg 156, P 3). In all due respect, this is absolutely ridiculous. Paul clearly states that the Lord's Supper is a proclamation of the Lord's death: the crux of the gospel message to a lost and dying world (1 Cor 11:26). Smith is the one truly confused about why we gather together.

Smith continues to deride the traditional invitation, saying it is intended "for mythical people who aren't there" (pg 157, P 2). Again, this sounds reasonable only in Smith's distorted view of the church. Reduce the church to a small, reclusive, disorganized band, meeting spontaneously in homes of not pre-disclosed locations, with no visible identity, and you can be certain that a non-Christian seeking truth will never find his way there. In contrast, this writer currently meets with a church who owns a meeting house with a sign in front, prominently positioned on a major road in a large suburb. Though such a building is odious to Smith (pg 159, P 4), visitors from the community are a regular occurrence, and they are always exhorted by hearing, "Come unto me" (Matt 11:28), "Arise and be baptized" (Acts 22:16), "The spirit and the bride say come" (Rev 22:17). Either have the traditional invitation for expediency or don't, but there is no reason to suggest that those who do so are short-sighted ignoramuses.

Giving

Continuing with the presupposed notion that the early congregations were limited to small numbers meeting in homes for spontaneous informal worship, including meals, he now addresses the matter of giving. Speaking of 1 Corinthians 16:1-4, He says, "We hear those words badly paraphrased... 'We have been commanded to give of our means on the Lord's day as we have prospered'.... The truth is, there is simply no evidence that the early church ever made weekly contributions as part of an apostolically mandated worship ritual" (pg 164, P 2, 3).

Let's examine Smith's charge of the "badly paraphrased mantra." First, consider the word "commanded." Many reliable versions translate the word DIATASSO in verse 1 as "orders" or "directions." Thayer defines this word as, "to arrange, appoint, ordain, prescribe, give order." In the KJV, it is translated "command" seven of the sixteen times it appears. In Acts 18:2, it is used of an edict issued by the Roman emperor. Moreover, when Paul states this, he is actually speaking of the command he gave to several other churches throughout Galatia. What he taught in one church, he taught in all (1 Cor 4:17). Paul continues, saying, "So do you also" (NAS). The verb here is in the imperative mood: something every church "must" do (NKJ). There is absolutely nothing inaccurate about the phrase, "We have been commanded." Anyone who would declare this is not by commandment is only working to gender strife.

By "Lord's day" we simply mean the first day of the week. This phrase is also accurate. However, note that Paul is specific about this day. No other day is mentioned in scripture as a day for the church to take up a collection. A study of authority will show that when a recorded command is specific, it is limiting, restricting, ruling out all else. Smith suggests, "Maybe that happens even during the week" (pg 145, P 3). He offers no scripture to indicate a possible exception to Paul's specific command.

Is "give of our means" a bad paraphrase? The word translated "lay" or "put aside" is TITHEMI. This same word is used repeatedly in Acts 4:34-5:4, where the clear indication is the giving of one's own possession to become the property of another. That's giving of our means. This contribution is called a "gift" in verse 3 (NKJ); a gift is by definition the object one gives. With all due respect, this writer cannot accept that this is a bad paraphrase. Smith has pre-programmed his reader to be appalled at "ritual," but the apostle has most certainly ordained this activity for the church. Moreover, contrary to Smith's ideas (pg 164, P

2), as this action would ultimately result in thanksgiving and glory to God, it is rightly termed "worship" (2 Cor 9:10-15).

Smith maintains that Paul's instructions were merely a matter of implementation precipitated by a question that the church had previously asked (pg 164, P 3). This is not true. Paul's instruction was an ordination delivered to all the churches. Smith claims that if this were "a 'command' for us today, consistency demands that we hold our funds until Paul himself comes..." (pg 164, P 4). Smith again fails to understand how we establish when examples are binding. Applying the rule of uniformity, we see sometimes Paul delivers the gifts and sometimes others (2 Cor 11:9). Besides, Paul makes clear that the delivery method is a matter of expediency for them to decide (1 Cor 16:3, 4). No such options are offered in Paul's first day of the week collection instructions.

Smith is quick to point out that Paul says later that the giving is not by "commandment" but "advice" (2 Cor 8:8, 10) (pg 164, P1). Smith offers no explanation to the apparent contradiction that Paul states it is an imperative command in 1 Corinthians 16:1 but says "not by commandment" here. This demands an explanation. The answer is that, though it is a command, God doesn't want us to do it from the sense that it is a requirement bound upon us against our will but that we do it out of love simply because it is the right thing to do. Paul explains this clearly in 2 Corinthians 9:5-11. Paul utilizes the same appeal to Philemon in his letter to him (Phile 1:14). You don't "obey" advice (vs 21). The fact that we do it willingly does not negate the fact that it is a command.

Smith affirms that the collections were not regular activities but isolated, unique occurrences: "Special collections intended to meet particular needs..." (pg 164, P 3) "...as they would arise" (pg 245, P 2). Interestingly, the word translated "put aside" is in the present tense. According to Dana and Mantey, "The present tense is the idea of progress. It is the linear tense" (paragraph 172, emphasis D-M). "It signifies action in... state of persistence" (para 173(1)), "to denote that which habitually occurs" (para 173(2)), "...to describe that which recurs at successive intervals or... periods,... of repeated action" (para 173(3)). Moreover, the word prosper is from EUODOO and appears also, not only in the present tense, but in the passive voice and subjunctive mood. The significance of this is that as a regularly as prosperity might come our way, we ought to be regularly giving. If prospering is not a unique occurrence, neither should be our giving. They gave not according to what they had but according to how they prospered that week.

Smith teaches what has been termed by others as "needs-based giving" (pg 245, P 2, 3). This ought to become a moot point. There is always work that the church needs to be doing. For one, wages can be paid to preachers (2 Cor 11:8; 1 Cor 9:4-14) and to elders who labor hard at teaching (1 Tim 5:17, 18). Preaching and teaching often requires supplies: books, papers, or any other teaching expediencies (2 Tim 4:13). Many preachers are living in substandard conditions today because of lacking funds. For this reason, others cannot devote themselves full time to ministry (2 Cor 11:9; Acts 18:3-5). Moreover, we always have the poor saints needing benevolence (2 Cor 8:13-15). If a church would truly investigate her potential, there would be effectively no end to the work that could be done with whatever funds were gathered, thus, never a time when no collection is necessary (pg 245, P 3).

Smith devotes an entire chapter to considering how a church might put his teaching into practice. Having first-hand experience meeting with a church among whom many had been influenced by Smith's thinking, this writer knows that this teaching is completely impractical, even if it had scriptural validation. First, the approach is taken that the monetary value to be raised must be established before all else, then the members of the church begin to give to meet the commitment they have agreed upon (pg 245, P 3). There is no scriptural precedence for this. In scripture, the driving force behind the giving is the degree that we have prospered (1 Cor 16:2) and how we have purposed in our hearts (2 Cor 9:7). No scripture indicates that they gave in order to meet a pre-agreed-upon monetary value. They gave as they purposed and prospered and used whatever they thereby gathered. The gift was determined by what was collected, not the other way around.

The practical problem with this is that, if a church is not diligent to discuss the work it needs to be doing as a body and establish budgets and goals for each separate matter individually with weekly regularity, no one gives, as they see no need for it. As a result, little or nothing is laid up "in store." The original word for this is THESAURIZO, which was used of a monetary treasury of funds reserved for future use (Jam 5:3). Then, when a pressing need does arrive, no funds are available -- the very problem Paul sought to avoid (1 Cor 16:2).

Smith proposes, "When *every* collection is special to meet a *specific need* which has come to the attention of the congregation, it can be as simple as everyone's getting into their pockets and purses and coming up with the necessary money, which is immediately dispatched to those in need." Personal experience shows

that nothing close to this is actually what happens. In the aforementioned church with whom this writer formerly met, news came that a brother in a remote location, a gospel preacher, was in need of assistance with upcoming surgical expenses. If we would have had a reasonable treasury in store, at our Sunday morning worship assembly, we could have agreed upon an amount and had it sent right away. Instead, unable to do so, we decided we would discuss it at a certain time when we could all meet together for a consensus. As we were preparing to meet the next week to discuss the matter, we learned that the \$10,000 had been donated by other churches before we even had the chance to decide what was going to be our pre-determined monetary value for which we would make a special collection. This is so backwards from the biblical pattern. A church can't really know how much it can do until it first takes up and stores a collection. As a result, we were not able to experience the joy of that fellowship. The efficiency which Smith claims would characterize his special-collection needs-based giving will not be realized in actual practice.

The Eldership

Smith now discusses how he would radically restore church eldership. He begins by noting that their work is to be like shepherds tending sheep. Many other descriptions are noted in the Bible for the work of elders, but Smith does not bring them to light. Let's take a look. POIMEN is the word translated "pastor" in Ephesians 4:11 (KJV). J. H. Thayer describes this as one, figuratively speaking, who cares for and controls others in submission. When used metaphorically, as is the case with elders, Thayer includes, "The presiding officer, manager, director of any assembly,... of kings and princes." Though tending sheep is a vivid metaphor for their work, the word implies also official management by definition. Smith would limit this work to "provision and protection" (pg 170, P 2). Though he rejects the idea that the church is an organization, part of the elders' work is clearly to preside, manage, and direct: the work of leaders in organizations.

Another word is EPISKOPOS, translated "bishop" in Philippians 1:1 (KJV). Literally, "overseer." Thayer defines it as "a man charged with the duty of seeing that things to be done by others are done rightly, any curator, guardian, or superintendent." The word EPISKOPE in 1 Timothy 3:1 means "overseership" (W. E. Vine) and includes "investigation, inspection, visitation" to judge another's character (JHT).

Another word is HEGEOMAI, a verb translated "rule" in Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24 (KJV). Thayer defines this "to lead,... to rule, command, to have authority over; a prince, of regal power, governor, viceroy, chief,... commander."

These words reveal that the duties of elders are much more than merely pastoral. These matters will come to bear more in our review as we continue.

Eldership Jurisdiction

Smith's idea of the "memorial meal" has snow-balled into the further concept of scattered, small, house churches. Though the premise is faulty, he now proposes what elderships might have been like, asking, "Were there elders in each one of the house churches; or only one set of elders over all the house churches for the entire metropolitan area?" (pg 171, P 3; pg 172, P 3). To answer this, he notes how elders were appointed in "cities" not "churches" (Tit 1:5) (pg 170, P 4) and how elders are referenced by their city names (Acts 15:2, 4; 16:4; 20:17) (pg 172, P 3). He writes, "We've always assumed that 'the flock of God among you' must surely apply to each congregation. On the other hand, we've never really linked these intriguing passages to the existence of smaller house churches.... Did a number of different house churches ever collectively compromise a larger congregation?" (pg 173, P 1).

Smith's ideas here are pure speculation; no solid reasoning from scripture is applied for validation. He continues, "No single model of an eldership responsibility is conclusive.... Perhaps elder oversight may have been exercised throughout a group of house churches, which collectively compromised a larger, recognizable 'congregation....' Elders in individual house churches might also have come together as a group of city-wide elders to discuss matters...." (pg 178, P 2, 3).

Remove the false premise that churches in the first century were exclusively small house churches and Smith's suppositions unravel, not to mention there is no scriptural basis for anything he is saying here; it is all speculation. As much as he loathes organization and structure, he actually proposes a whole other level of management -- a whole other functioning body independent of the church -- the "group of city-wide elders." This depicts an ecclesiastical province: a term known only among denominations. This is fully consistent with the institutionalization of the church he so much detests. Such a body is entirely without scriptural authority.

Reconsider how faulty is the exclusive, small, house church proposition. Scripture indicates that some first century churches were indeed large, so much so that they would have met in furnished facilities or rented halls. Smith further supposes that a "congregation" is a collection of house churches (no scriptural validation offered), only because he pre-supposes all churches must have been small enough to accommodate carnal meals in their individual homes. Let's examine how the word "congregation" is used in scripture.

The English word "congregation" is translated from PLETHOS in the original Greek. Thayer defines it as, "1) a multitude 1a) a great number, of men or things 1b) the whole number, the whole multitude, the assemblage 1b1) the multitude of the people." With reference to the church, the word PLETHOS is translated as "congregation" in the NAS but as "multitude" in the ASV, KJV, and NKJ. Consistent with its definition, in each case that PLETHOS is used of the church, the context is of the church in its assembled state: a local gathering of Christians (Acts 4:32; 6:2, 5; 15:12, 30). Interestingly, the word commonly translated "church" is EKKLESIA, which the NAS translators interchangeably render as "church" (Matt 16:18) or "congregation" (Acts 7:38; Heb 2:12). In the church's local, assembled state, these words effectively indicate the same thing.

Smith is redefining the word "congregation." The definition of PLETHOS certainly includes a collection of "things," which could include anything, even "a multitude of churches." However, the keynote of PLETHOS is a local gathering. For the word "congregation" to be legitimately used in the way Smith is suggesting, it would have to indicate a local gathering together of numerous house churches. PLETHOS would then accurately describe such a congregation as a gathering of nothing more than people. However, this is not what Smith intends, because such a local gathering would not be practicable in someone's home. Some larger, rented or owned quarters would be necessary, which is completely contrary to his teaching. Smith intends that the individuals are gathering separately in their own house churches. However, separate gatherings in scattered places and at different times is not the meaning of PLETHOS. Clearly, New Testament usage of this word never involves an assemblage of assemblies.

Recognizing that the word "congregation" (PLETHOS) is simply the gathering of a local church, it is important to note that the definition would suggest a relatively large number of individuals. Acts 11:26 reads, "And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And for an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers...." From Luke's use of this word, it is fully worthy of acceptance that the local bodies at Jerusalem and Antioch were no doubt relatively large in number (Ref. Acts 15:35). If Smith would abandon his exclusively small house church doctrine, he would not need to torture word meanings to devise a way for the church to have a recognizable community presence (pg 178, P 2).

There is an apparent contradiction which Smith makes no effort to resolve: that elders were appointed in every city (Tit 1:5) and that they were appointed in every church (Acts 14:21-23). Which one was it? Assuming that all churches were obscure, small, house churches dispersed throughout a city, Smith proposes elders were over cities, which would have made them recognizable. However, this does nothing to explain the apparent contradiction. Instead, consider that one church could have embodied all the saints in a particular city and be identified and distinguished from others by that city's name. Metonymy is a figure of speech where a part is put for the whole. When Paul says "cross" in Ephesians 2:16, he means the whole death by crucifixion process Christ endured. Now consider that when Paul instructs Titus in Crete to ordain elders in every city, he means, by metonymy, in the churches of every Cretan city. It is therefore reasonable that "the elders at Jerusalem" (Acts 15:2) simply means "the elders of the church at Jerusalem" (vs 22). This explanation is acceptable, and no alternate word definitions or structuring of the eldership is required to make it fit. The inferences observed by Smith are not necessary, and his conclusions from them are not forced. Smith is not following sound hermeneutics.

Smith has no tangible, scriptural evidence of the small house churches scattered throughout a city as he proposes. He contrives this only through a series of false pre-suppositions originating from a carnal "fellowship meal." If such house churches existed with city-wide elderships, Luke had the perfect opportunity to reveal it to us when he penned Acts 15. Note carefully that Luke does not say in Acts 15:4 "They were received of all the house churches and the apostles and the city-wide elders." Moreover, in verse 22 he does not say, "Then it seemed good to the apostles and the city-wide elders, with the whole house churches...." Where God's word is silent, we ought not be speaking.

Smith claims that the scriptures are inconclusive regarding the jurisdiction of church elders (pg 178, P 2). Know this: we do not have to assume in 1 Peter 5:2 "that 'the flock of God among you' must surely apply to each congregation" (pg 173, P1). In Acts 20:17, Paul summons the elders of the church at Ephesus. "Church" is singular. In verse 28 he says, "Take heed... to all the flock among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers." "Flock" is singular. Moreover, "among" is translated from EN "denoting (fixed)

position (in place, time, or state)" per the Theological Dictionary Of The New Testament. Thus, elders never had jurisdiction over any other churches but the one which they were among. It serves no purpose but to generate strife to suggest anything else.

Elder Qualifications

After developing the analogy of elders as shepherds, Smith discusses elders as seen in the Old Testament writings, beginning at page 173. He notes that these former elders were not God-appointed and apparently met no list of qualifications; they were simply the older, wiser men of families, tribes, cities, or regions to whom the people naturally trusted for their guidance and judgment (pg 175, P 5). From the examples of Old Testament elders, Smith makes another strong pitch for his "city-wide elders" proposition saying, "It would not have been unthinkable for elders in the primitive church to have had a city-wide responsibility... despite a multiplicity of house churches" (pg 177, P3). Smith is again relying solely on speculation. There is no necessary inference forcing us to conclude that features of the Old Testament eldership apply to the church today.

Smith carries the Old Testament elder concept on to the matter of the qualifications of New Testament church elders. He proposes that what we call "elder 'qualifications,' which we tend to view so technically" in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 are better termed "qualities" that "merely exemplify the kind of Godly character which has always been expected of God's shepherds" (pg 180, P2). Smith further notes that the Jerusalem church elders predate the writing of the lists in 1 Timothy and Titus. He obviously fails to understand how the new dispensation was delivered. In the first century, God's will was partly by spoken word and partly by written word until the written word was complete (1 Cor 13:9-12). Moreover, that which was spoken was exactly the same as that which was written (1 John 1:3, 4). Titus knew what were the requirements of elders before Paul penned them in his epistle to him, because Paul had commissioned him by word of mouth to ordain them before his departure (Tit 1:5). The point is this: the Jerusalem elders would have had to meet the same requirements as the Cretan elders. The time of the writing of the lists is immaterial; God's law on the matter existed in spoken form before it came to be in written form.

Smith makes a fundamental hermeneutical mistake: substituting the generic for the specific. Paul specifically lists numerous attributes an individual *must* possess to be an elder. Smith proposes the list is merely a way of generically describing "the kind of qualities which are found so uniquely in older, wiser, godly men... of a type" (pg 180, P 4; pg 181, P 1). To debate over calling these attributes "qualities" rather than "qualifications" is nothing but word play; they must be met with either nomenclature. The inevitable result of Smith's reasoning will be unlawful elder appointments.

Smith further writes, "Nor would it seem that these specifically-listed qualities were ever intended to be exhaustive" (pg 180, P 2). He again offers no scriptural basis for such a bold statement beyond what is written (1 Cor 4:6). When something is specified, we have no right to add to it or subtract from it. The requirement to be "blameless" quite generically covers a broad range but nothing beyond its necessarily implied scope. On the other hand, no one has the right to add specifications on the grounds that the list is not exhaustive. Smith's proposition could enable people to enact and enforce exact age limits or perhaps a restriction on the distance an elder could live from the meeting place of the church. Such mandates might be heard in actual practice or where Smith abides, but they are unauthorized and abominable.

The Work of Elders

Smith's remarks about elders also serving as gatekeepers are spot-on (pg 182 - 183). He then moves to discuss their role as teachers. He makes a crucial observation about some elders today who, incapable as teachers themselves, hire preachers to do their teaching for them (pg 184, P 4; pg 185, P 1, 2). Sadly, this writer has seen this very thing play out in one church as a former member. In a doctrinal dispute with two elders (one of whom was essentially the hired preacher), the preacher did all the talking while the other elder sat silently, his purpose being only to observe and rebuke disorderliness if required. When this writer asked this elder to explain his beliefs in the matter, he simply replied, "I agree with him," pointing to the preacher. Incidentally, this elder always found a way to avoid private discussions by inviting the preacher to join. He was incapable of defending doctrine on his own. What a shame.

Smith affirms that the primary role of elders is "not as decision makers but as shepherds" (pg 187, P 3). Notwithstanding, we have already noted that elder responsibilities exceed teaching alone; they are also to be managers, directors, and rulers. In what realm would an elder rule? Smith assigns the limit of the elders' rule to the teaching of doctrine alone. Regarding Hebrews 13:17, he writes, "We see the precise source of that authority,... 'remember your leaders, *who spoke the word of God to you.*' ...When

shepherds are teaching God's word, they are also conveying God's authority, and therefore are to be obeyed. (It's not unlike the call for children to obey their parents *in the Lord*.)" This is true, but if that is the only way elders rule, they have no more rule than anyone else. Anyone can teach God's word, and all must submit to it (2 Tim 4:1-5). When they do so, they are obeying God, not the teacher. Likewise, if *anyone* sees his brother in sin, he has authority to privately admonish him in the word, take witnesses if necessary, and eventually take the matter to the church if the brother rejects them (Matt 18:15-18). Not just elders have this authority.

Look at Smith's example of a parent's rule over his child. A parent has authority over his child in matters other than doctrine. That's not what Paul meant by "in the Lord" (Eph 6:1). If a father stipulates to his daughter to be home by 11:30 PM, the obedient child will not demand he produce book, chapter, and verse for that order. A father has the right to make that judgment based on what he thinks is best. Smith's example does not support his doctrine. Elders' rule is likewise in the realm of judgment in the church, not doctrine, else they have no rule at all. Elders do not have the right to declare, "We have decided that baptism will be for the remission of sins." However, if the elders say, "Please use the microphone when leading prayer so all may hear," it is not our place to protest or rebel but to submit to their rule in the matter.

Smith's ideas will lead to anarchy in the church. If every judgment is made by each member thinking he has an equal voice, even to that of the elders, it will be nearly impossible to ever accomplish anything. Claiming to follow the approved example in Acts 15:22, some folks believe that every decision made in the church should be by unanimity, not just among the elders, but among all. This is completely impracticable. Suppose someone in the body has the idea for the church to post a sign by the street where they meet for worship. This is a judgment matter; posting the sign is not sin if you do or sin if you don't. Now if only half the members want it and the other half doesn't, the claim is that, without unanimity, they won't pass the decision to post the sign. However, notice that *without unanimity*, they indeed effectively passed the decision *not* to post the sign. A study of authority will show that the example of unanimity of judgment in Acts 15:22 is not binding. They could have chosen some other men to deliver the letter or decided upon some entirely different method of communicating the message. It is nice that they all agreed, but sometimes we might have to yield and forbear with one another (or especially with the elders) in matters of judgment and indifference (Col 3:12, 13). However, in matters of faith and doctrine, we must never yield (Gal 2:4, 5).

Elders certainly have the duty to teach, but others can teach also. There's nothing wrong with elders paying wages to a preacher (1 Cor 9:1-14) and asking others to share in the teaching also. However, as Smith well explains (pg 184, 185), if they are incapable of teaching, they ought not think they can fulfill this role vicariously.

Smith derives the familiar and important differentiation between elders' work and deacons' work from how the widow's needs were handled in Acts 6 (pg 186, P 3). Correspondingly, this writer has unfortunately seen a church where the elders reversed their roles with the deacons. A poor elderly couple needed help with a sanitation problem in their apartment. The elders stepped in and assisted on a hush-basis, thinking to spare them embarrassment or shame. That was deacon's work. On another occasion, the elders turned over all planning and management of a children's summer Bible teaching program to a deacon. Only when the elders learned of the plan to bring in small farm animals as a show-and-tell "teaching aid" did the elders step in. The elders should have been more involved in teaching in the first place. Smith writes, "Never underestimate the willingness of those in charge to abdicate their responsibility and put it on some else's shoulders.... Interminable 'elders meetings' to decide matters having little to do with the spiritual health of the flock are a mockery" (pg 189, P 2, 3). Amen to that.

Full-time Paid Evangelists

In chapter 10, Smith discusses characteristics of some full-time paid preachers today. He challenges the idea of "pulpit preachers." Agreeably, any full-time paid gospel preacher doing only two sermons, a public Bible class, and a bulletin per week along with visiting the sick and elderly of the congregation should not feel he is fulfilling the work of an evangelist. An evangelist, as the word would imply, is one who would also take the gospel out into a world of sinners. A balance of efforts inward and outward is required, as revealed in Paul's instructions to the evangelists Timothy and Titus. Smith touches on this: "No law says an evangelist has to constantly be on the move; just continually moving others to Christ. The question is not whether the evangelist is 'located,' but whether the one who is 'located' is an evangelist.... To be sure, Timothy was both an evangelist to the lost, and in some sense a 'minister' to the saved" (pg 204, P 2, 5).

While admitting that such balance should exist, Smith tips the scale in emphasis of the outward effort over the inward: "that converting people to Christ was the primary purpose..." (pg 197, P 3). Particularly when the direct instructions to Timothy and Titus are examined, we have no indication that one role is emphasized over the other; this is only Smith's opinion. He tips the scales so far that he seems to denounce the idea of a local evangelist altogether -- even one doing outreach. He writes, "the role of an evangelist is to be *sent*... to establish and to train and then to be sent out all over again" (pg 198, P 2). He contradictively says they do not have to be constantly moving, but they need to be constantly sent. To this, he further states, "So what is the role of an evangelist? Call it 'church planting'" (pg 207, P 2). He quotes the apostle Paul: "I planted, Apollos watered.... I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it" (1 Cor 3:5-10). Smith continues: "The role of an evangelist, then is planting and watering; and laying foundations for others to build on.... It's *breaking new ground*" (pg 207, P 3).

We should note here Smith's misapplication of the passage. Paul uses metaphors from farming and construction, but the point is exactly the same from both. One plants; another waters. One founds; another builds. In the analogies, Paul the evangelist is the one planting and founding; Apollos the evangelist is the one watering and building. However, Smith is not willing to recognize building as a role of the evangelist but of "others." The "others" implied by Smith would certainly be the elders (pg 198, P 2). Metaphorically speaking, "watering" and "feeding" are the same thing, however, Smith assigns the watering to the evangelist but the feeding to the elders. He is needlessly confusing things. Paul's language presents a clear balance between the in-reaching and the out-reaching roles of evangelists. Apollos building up the local body at Corinth, feeding and watering that flock, and refuting false teachers in public is a perfect biblical example of a full-time local preacher with a balance of efforts within and without (Acts 18:27, 28).

Smith invites us "to look *where* the first century evangelists did most of their preaching.... It was not in the pulpits of comfortable church buildings before familiar audiences. It was out and about among the people of misdirected faith" (pg 198, P 3). From the examples in Acts, he cites where they preached in Jewish synagogues, by a river with those meeting for prayer, on Mars' Hill among the philosophers, in private homes, in public places, on dusty roads, and in lecture halls. Smith's message is well taken that that evangelists today need to carry the gospel outside the church building. However, he does not take into account how different the world is today. For one, in the very early days, there were no local churches out there anywhere in the first place. Also, there was not the abundance of denominations already believing in Christ. (We don't really look that unique to them today). Furthermore, it is difficult to imagine any modern counterpart to the examples in scripture. If a gospel preacher today visited a Catholic mass, the priest would not likely give him the floor saying, "If you have any word of exhortation for the people, say on" (Acts 13:15). A treasurer for royalty would not likely pick up a hitch-hiking stranger in his limousine (Acts 8:27-31). No one causing a ruckus today would likely be offered a public lecture venue in a council hearing (Acts 17:18-20). People today do not open their homes to bed down travelling strangers (Acts 10:32; 16:15); we have cheap motels for that. With crime and annoyances so common today, wary people usually offer nothing more than a curt "hello" in a public place and not even answer the phone or their front door for a stranger.

In our culture today, the public meeting house for a church has proven to be an expedient place for evangelism. A stranger uncomfortable with you in his home or vice versa will not feel threatened there. Smith ought to be more willing to recognize the typical church building today as a viable, cultural expediency for gathering people together for evangelism. That's not to say we should not be exhausting every other option; however, such opportunities are much harder to come by these days. Conclusively, a church has scriptural authority by New Testament examples for paid, local, gospel preachers (1 Cor 9:4-14); they simply ought to be doing more than "keeping house." Moreover, any gospel preacher whose focus is to make a name for himself in the brotherhood by publishing books and holding lectures is misdirected.

Beginning at page 209, Smith discusses the need for every Christian to do evangelism and not just leave all the work to the paid professionals. Likewise, he notes that just because one is not appointed an official elder or deacon doesn't mean he has no responsibility to be watchful for others or be a servant. (pg 211, P 2). Without such individual vigilance, we could find ourselves following heretical elders into their sin and false doctrine. Smith's remarks have scriptural validation; however, his application of this in assembled worship does not. He writes, "Of course, it's what happens when we are assembled for the memorial meal,... and worship... which most naturally defines our mutual ministry.... The very concept of worship focused around a pulpit flies in the face of the dynamic, mutually participatory house churches in the apostolic age. Houses don't have pulpits!" (pg 211, P 4).

Smith's suppositions about "memorial meals" and small "house churches" throw him off track again. Amazingly, after all his good exhortations for all Christians to be involved in evangelism, he reiterates his error that the Lord's day worship assembly is not the place for it. In all this writer's years in the church, he has never seen one worship service "focused around a pulpit." Our worship is Christ-centered (Phil 3:3), but the mind of Christ is revealed only in His word (Eph 3:1-7). Therefore, Christ-centered worship is necessarily word-centered, and the pulpit is simply an expediency for its delivery. When New Testament examples of assembled worship are examined, we see exactly this propensity for the word (Acts 4:31; 6:2; 18:11; 20:7). However, no correctly applied scripture supports Smith's doctrine of the "memorial meal." Smith's proposition that the Lord's Supper is the centerpiece of a "memorial meal" (pg 131, P 3) creates not a pulpit-focused worship but a meal-table-focused worship, and such a focus is carnal-mindedness.

By the end of the chapter, Smith completely denounces the idea of balanced roles for preachers, calling for evangelists to be no longer seen in pulpits and for pulpits to be emptied of evangelists (pg 212, P 2). There is no scriptural reason for such an idea. This is a calling for change for the sake of change.

Youth Ministries

In chapter eleven, Smith addresses some problems in the church today where special interest programs run amok. One particular program involved is the typical "youth ministry," found especially in large churches supporting human institutions and sponsoring social and recreational activities. The Bible student is well rewarded to read Smith's insightful examination in this arena. He deals with the issue soundly, up to the point where application is made to house churches and meal-table fellowship.

Smith explains that the heart of the problem is a failure at the level of mature leadership. When mature leaders fail to lead with soundness, natural behavior dictates that the young and inexperienced will assume the leadership role, almost like a wolf pack, where the alpha male loses his influence. (Shakespeare's story of King Lear is Smith's illustration, pg 214 - 217). When the youth of a church begins to make demands for programs and activities specially tailored to their modern styles, weak elders who cater to them might not be aware of some dangers being introduced. Those who are young and lacking wisdom and experience are then the ones driving the church (pg 220 - 221). However, it is God's intended order that those older rule those younger. Some modernized churches today are turning this upside down.

Smith takes reference from two events in Israel's history to demonstrate this. His first is the demise of the Northern Kingdom. He writes, "The most fascinating thing about the punishment which God promised as a result of the elders' languid leadership is that, ... since the elders failed to lead from the top of the generational hierarchy, God said... 'I will make boys their officials; mere children will rule over them' (Isaiah 3:4)" (pg 221, P 3). The other event is when Rehoboam took the advice of the young, inexperienced counselors with horrific results (pg 222, P 4).

Smith notes that this is manifesting itself in some churches today in what he calls "the worship wars," which are centered mainly around the music in worship (pg 223). A kind of "campfire" style of contemporary music is introduced, and Smith explains, "Not unexpectedly, young people were instantly drawn to the easy tunes and simple lyrics with their distinctive emphasis on feelings" (pg 224, P 3). Smith further explains how we then begin to hear the faint call for adding instruments in worship, and a schism in the church begins to form over "contemporary" and "traditional" worship formats (pg 224, P 5).

Smith elaborates, "Without begrudging them their own space and opportunities for fellowship, the fact remains that there are consequences to dividing up the congregation for *any* purpose. For all their advantages, there are also inevitable down sides to carving up the family into 'singles ministries,' 'seniors ministries,' and 'the college group.' Once such categories are created, at some point the wholeness of the Lord's body begins to get lost in much the same way that focusing on minorities in society can actually produce more strife than unity" (pg 225, P 1, 2).

This is not to say that churches today might not need to designate certain people to be committed to executing particular tasks to see to the needs of a certain group. This is exactly what happened in Act 6 in the way the widows' needs were met. However, in that case, the apostles were not slack in their leadership nor did they allow the widows to take over the work. There are wise ways to handle the special needs groups without fragmenting the church or relinquishing the leadership of elders.

It is actually surprising and refreshing to this writer that Smith would here issue a cautionary note about non-traditional worship formats and programs with a focus on emotionalism and mutual participation for youth or any other special group in the church.

Applications

In chapter 12 Smith begins answering some anticipated questions that will doubtless arise regarding how his teachings could be put into practice. This review will not engage this arena. Before we discuss *how* we could do a certain thing, we should first establish *whether* we should be doing it in the first place, which Smith has not yet done.

In the remainder of his book, Smith summarizes his presentation and adds some clarification. He is to be commended for including the "dissenting remarks" from others; however, nothing presented there offers any explanation for the hermeneutical errors noted in this review.

Conclusion

We will end where Smith begins: with a view of Edwin Abbott's "Flatland." Smith implies that those not willing to consider a new point of view are stymied in traditions and oblivious to the reality of God's true revelation (pg 22 - 27). This is a completely scriptural principle. Peter warns concerning the inability to see anything except what is near (1 Pet 1:9). In Daniel's prophecies, he explains, "Many will be purged, purified and refined, but the wicked will act wickedly; and none of the wicked will understand, but those who have insight will understand" (Dan 12:10).

This review has been conducted with full open-mindedness. The fresh view-point has been given a fair shot. However, in the story of "Flatland," it is understood that the true reality exists in the three-dimensional world; those content to live in the two-dimensional world are living in ignorance. They are limiting and restricting where limits and restrictions are only fictitious. The story is only used as an illustration, and illustrations can be utilized to support anything: even heresy. With an open mind, please consider the result in the story if the true reality exists only in Flatland -- the two-dimensional world -- and that the three-dimensional world is actually fictitious. For this analogy, let the two-dimensional world represent the doctrine of Christ; anyone venturing into the third dimension is transgressing into error, devoid of truth (2 John 9).

In this review, Smith is seen making grievous hermeneutical errors. Words are wrangled and adjusted in meaning; generic and specific terminology is exchanged; possible, not necessary, inferences are offered in argumentation to arrive at conclusions not forced; apostolically disapproved examples are cited for authority; pure conjecture is put forward void of any scriptural support; self-contradictions are generated; the whole scriptural message is not presented; and carnal-mindedness is a keynote. In a similar but completely different analogy, Smith's view of religion and the church today is like trying to draw a map of the world on a flat piece of paper. The only way to do it is to distort the true image. By assumption, Smith pre-determines what he supposes to be true. As a result, sound doctrine on the organization, work, purpose, worship, and authority in the church is distorted to fit the premises.

Nevertheless, please note that not everything Smith presents is appraised as a departure from sound doctrine in this review. It is good that Smith challenges us to ask *why* we do what we do and to keep our fervent service from falling into perfunctory formalities. However, change for the sole sake of change where problems with lifeless, unspirited worship do not prevail is nothing more than a needless invitation for strife and suspicion among brethren. This writer has personally witnessed unnecessary friction hereby created in the church.

The reader is strongly urged to investigate open-mindedly on his own and determine for himself whether these teachings of F. LaGard Smith are consistent with sound doctrine as presented in scripture. Please consider this review a warning. Follow what you know is true; reject what is shown to be heresy.

This work is presented in all respectfulness and love. Joy is not taken in offering a reproof to a brother; joy is found in the word of the Lord (Psa 119:77). A search for truth and self-examination for every man must never end. Should any reader conclude that this review contains misapplication of scripture, this writer is humbly prepared to accept constructive criticism in the word.