



Recipe For Building a Better Church & How Can We Build a Better Church? by Gerald Cowan

*All Scriptures and comments are based on the **New King James Version**, unless otherwise noted.*

"Join the church of your choice." The determinative word there is not join or choice. It is your. Not something someone else chooses for you or imposes upon you (such as communism, which is not really "government of the people, by the people, and for the people" as in democracy). As Adolf Hitler mandated a Volkswagen (literally "people's car") so certain countries have mandated a "state religion" (such as Islamic, Christian, Catholic, Buddhist, etc) or a "national church" (such as Church of England, Church of Sweden, etc). There's a world-wide phenomenon in nominal Christianity: the creation and proliferation of churches to meet the requirements and desires of the people who will be members in the so-called "purpose-driven" churches where members determine what the church will be and do – these could be called "churches of the people, for the people, and by the people." What are the premises, purposes, and promises of such a "people's church?"

Some churches are formed to protest against some other church or religious group. They are commonly labeled as "Protestants," and they began as a protest against Catholicism, which they feel is not fully or properly Christian. Some are formed to be more exclusive; each one characteristically views itself as "the only true church." Others are formed to be more inclusive; they view themselves as ecumenical, promoting unity in diversity. Some are organized around a particular doctrinal viewpoint, such as Sabbath or Seventh-day, Presbyterian-ruled, emphasizing a certain Method of baptism, initiation, worship, or concept of God – variations and excuses for them seem endless and numberless. The concept of the "purpose driven" churches and members is still popular.

Shamefully some are constantly shifting the boundaries and the goal posts of the church to accommodate cultural and ethnic factors (not Biblical). As Neil Armstrong famously said in July 1969, as ostensibly the first human to step on the moon, "That's one small step for a man, a giant leap for mankind," when stepping on the moon, some insist now that every cultural shift – such as "gay liberation" and the embrace of gender variations – is a giant leap forward for mankind (in truth such things are a giant step backwards, a retreat into abysmal ignorance and darkness and a repudiation of truth). So, to appease our cultural and ethnic tension we are accosted by black church, white church, indigenous church, gay, transgender or non-binary church, messianic Jewish church, etc, etc – *ad infinitum ad nauseum*. Some want to provide a "one size fits all" church – a "Community Church" – where every person can feel he or she belongs and is welcomed into a loose coalition rather than strict doctrinal or creedal exclusivity. It is assumed that man himself determines and adjusts all things to suit himself and to judge whether anything meets his current desires and values. It is assumed that man himself is able to shape his own life and destiny, therefore religion must evolve to accommodate man's evolving nature and

evolving culture – man must build himself a church that “meets his needs.” Protagoras was a 5th Century BC pre-Socratic Greek philosopher. He created a major controversy during ancient times through his statement that, “Man is the measure of all things,” interpreted by Plato to mean there is no absolute objective truth. Whatever individuals deem to be the truth is true – man by man himself is judged, each person’s judgment of himself is the only valid one. This concept is popular today: whatever you believe is “your truth” and is valid for you – let your conscience be your guide and ignore those who disagree with you. The New Testament of the Bible, being about 2,000 years old, is not “new” enough – God and His Bible need an update. How arrogant is man! But.

. . . . Without a valid existing all-knowing God who presents and upholds absolute truth any church or any religion is invalid and irrelevant. Islam claims Allah is God – some nominal Christians foolishly believe and claim Allah and the God of the Bible are one and the same, that Allah is simply God by another name. But the Bible clearly states that is a lie. The first three of the ten commandments assert that there is but one God and His people must not countenance any others (**Exodus 20:1-7**). The Jews knew that the Lord our God is one, and there is no other – He alone is to be worshipped and served (**Deuteronomy 6:1-5**). The same is true for Christians – all supposed gods other than the God of the Bible are idols, no matter who believes in them and acknowledges them (**1 Corinthians 8:1-6**). Buddhism has no god(s) – Gautama Buddha himself was/is not a god. Some claim to honor all gods and are willing to accommodate any new deities that may be invented, as for example in Hinduism, the Masonic Lodge, etc. Catholicism and all of so-called Christendom claim to honor the God of the Judeo-Christian Bible. But that necessarily raises the question: Does God accept and approve all or any of them? Since they all differ in some ways they cannot all be valid, accepted and approved by God. Unless the Lord God builds the house those who build it labor in vain (**Psalms 127:1**). As co-workers with God we are to build up the house of God, the church of the Lord (**1 Timothy 3:15, 1 Corinthians 3:9-15, 2 Corinthians 6:1-3**).

HOW CAN WE BUILD UP THE BETTER CHURCH?

Obviously we cannot hope to build something better than what the Lord himself has built and established for us. Making up something more compatible with the personal preferences and desires of those who attend cannot please God if it differs from His will and plan and stipulation. I have noticed that most of us are concerned about any wolves that may be threatening the church, but we do not recognize all of them because they have learned they are easily detected when they come dressed as sheep. Currently many of the shepherds (pastors and overseers, leaders of the flock) are wolves – they are much more effective as shepherds than they could ever be as member sheep mingling with the true sheep of the true Shepherd.

The Lord has built and is building His house, the church. As noted, if He does not build it those who do try to build it or one to replace it are laboring in vain (**Psalms 127:1a**). Remember that it is intended to be the Lord’s church, not yours or mine or ours.

We must build upon the foundation of the Lord himself as laid by his chosen apostles (**Ephesians 3:20**), upon the words the Lord himself has delivered, not upon the words of men about His words and sometimes interpreting his words in such ways as to pervert His message (**Matthew 15:3 and 9, Galatians 1:6-9**). No self-proclaimed preacher, prophet, or pope can claim to know the mind of God better than the Holy Spirit-guided men chosen by the Lord to speak for Him. Silver and golden

tongued orators are no better than cardboard bells and dry clattering sticks pretending to be oracles of God (**1 Peter 4:11**) unless they faithfully present the Lord's words. You can't build up the Lord's house by hanging your own portrait in it.

Have we forgotten the motto about calling Bible things by Bible names and doing Bible things in Bible ways? Why hesitate to speak where the Bible speaks and keep silent where the Bible is silent?

Why are we so concerned with the looks and decor of the building in which we meet and so little concerned about what is said and done in the building? That's a bit like insisting on a genuine leather cover and gilded edges of the pages in the Bible but not knowing what is said in it. The container cannot be more important than the contents. We are not called upon to build a better building but rather to build up those who meet in it. The people, not the building, are the church. We are to build each other up in the most holy faith (**Jude 20**).

We build up the church by showing ourselves to be faithful members of it, sharing the Lord, sharing the word of the Lord, sharing fellowship in the Lord, sharing love in the Lord, and being holy people by the Lord's definition (**Galatians 5:22-26**, **2 Peter 1:2-12**). Be the people of God in deed and truth, not only in words – what you are usually speaks more forcefully than what you say.

To outsiders emphasize more what the Lord can and will do for them than what they can do for Him. To the insiders, the members, emphasize what they can do for each other but especially for the Lord and for His church.

<><>— — —<><> *Gerald Cowan*

Gerald Cowan's Personal Periodicals, Number 631, April 18, 2021