

# *THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST*

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

## **ANSWERING DENOMINATIONAL DOCTRINES “The Community Church Movement”**

### **Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:**

*THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST*. Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Ben Bailey.

The Scripture says, “But the truth and sell it not” (Prov. 23:23). There is a high premium placed on the truth of God in the Scriptures because of its power to make us free from sin (Jn. 8:32). No matter what the cost is to us, we must make sure that we have the truth, and that we are living by it. In this series of lessons we have been looking at various doctrines of men, and comparing those with the Word of God. Today we are going to look at the errors of the community church movement. Is this movement something that God has authorized? Is it something that glorifies God? What is the community church movement?

In a nutshell, the community church movement is not about bringing men up to God’s standards (“If you are raised in Christ, seek those things that are above”; Col. 3:1). Rather, the community church movement is about bringing God down to man’s standard. It is all about popularity, the desires of the populace, and how to make that happen. This movement began with Bill Hybels, who sent out a survey asking, “Why are people in our community not going to church? Why don’t you and your family go to church?” The top four responses he received were as follows:

- (1) People didn’t like being begged for money.
- (2) People found church to be boring, predictable, and routine.
- (3) People did not think that church was relevant to their lives.
- (4) People left church feeling guilty because the Christian message was too negative.

Hybels thought about these things, and then said to himself, “If I can get these things out, I can get people in church.” The problem with such an attitude is that some of the things that people did not like are things that God has put in the Bible because they are things that people need to hear. Some of the things that made people feel guilty may not have been what individuals wanted to hear, but they are what God wants us to hear. Many men have played a big role in the community church movement. Bill Hybels, Rick Warren, and Joel Osteen have seen super-fast growth in their movements. In fact, community churches seem to be popping up everywhere. But what does the community church movement teach? Are its teachings in line with the Bible? Are the teachings of the community church movement in line with Scripture? Let’s notice some errors that the community church error has within it, and then compare them with the Bible.

The community church movement has a flawed view of Bible authority. The following statement comes from the Willow Creek Website concerning Bible authority: “Willow Creek Community Church official statement is: The sole basis of our belief is the Bible, which is uniquely God inspired, without error, and the final authority on all matters on which it bears.” Much of this sounds good. “The Bible is inspired.” “The Bible is the final authority.” “It is from God.” What is the problem? It is the little part at the end—“on all matters on which it bears.” That opens up a floodgate to things that the Willow Creek Community Church thinks the

Bible does not address, and that men therefore are free to do. The Bible is the final authority not just “on all matters on which it bears,” but on **all matters**, period! Notice 2 Peter 1:3—“As His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue.” When it comes to living a good life and being the type of godly people we need to be, the Bible has authority not “on all things on which it bears,” but on “all things that pertain to life and godliness through knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue.” There are no “big open doors” through which we may walk in any way we desire. God has specified how we are to live our lives. He has specified how to be godly people. He has already settled such things in His Word. Psalm 119:89 tells us that God’s word has been forever “settled in heaven.” Jesus said in Matthew 28:18, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.” That leaves us with no authority since Jesus has already decided. Therefore, we must look for God’s authority in all matters. We are to “do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). The Bible tells us that we are to do everything “in the name of [by the authority of] Jesus Christ” (Col. 3:17). Revelation 22:18-19 tells us that we are not to add to or take away from the Word of God. How we need the mindset of John 2:5. Mary (Jesus’ mother) turned to the servants and said, “Whatever He says to you, do it.” Her point was that Jesus would tell them what was right, and they were to do it. The same is true for us. We are to speak “as the oracles of God” (1 Pet 4:11). We are not to add to God’s Word, “lest He rebuke us, and we be found a liar” (Prov. 30:6). How I wish that the people inside the community church movement could get a clear understanding of 1 Corinthians 4:6, which says, “Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other.” Paul’s point was, “Do not think beyond what is written!” How we need to realize that God has spoken! There may be some things in which we have expediency in matters of option and opinion. But that does not mean that doctrinal doors are left wide open so that we can do whatever we want. We are not to “go beyond that which is written” in the Scriptures. We must stay true to the Word of God. The community church movement has a flawed view of Bible authority. The Bible is not the standard just “on all matters on which it bears,” but on **all matters**, period.

The community church movement also has a flawed view of New Testament singing. In most places, community churches employ something like a ten-piece rock band that operates in a concert-type fashion. Smoke, fireworks, and psychedelic lights are part of the program so that it looks like a person has walked into a rock concert. Is that what the New Testament teaches concerning singing? Did God ask for the pizzazz and showiness associated with such things? No. God made it very simple when He said, “Speak to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Eph. 5:19). God did not ask for a ten-piece band. He did not ask for fireworks, sparks shooting out of the floor, or things of that nature. God said that we are to speak to one another by singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Furthermore, we are to “make melody in our hearts to the Lord.” Colossians 3:16 (the companion passage) tells us that we are to “teach and admonish one another.” Our purposes are to glorify God, to encourage one another, and to do so in the way that God has commanded. In 1 Corinthians 14:15 the Bible says, “I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding.” The community church movement is caught up in entertaining and making people have fun. People want to go and feel like they have been in a concert. They want to walk away with euphoria. The problem is, however, that God never asked for such things. The Bible is clear on its teaching. If God had wanted to do such things, He would have told us. We are not to “go beyond that which is written.”

The community church movement also has a flawed view of New Testament church organization. Here's how it usually goes inside the community church movement. There is a "senior pastor." There is an "executive pastor." And then there usually is a "pastor of administration." I would like to ask: Where are all of those things found in the Bible? If we are not to add to or take away from God's Word (Rev. 22:18-19), and if God tells us in His Word everything that we need "for life and godliness" (2 Pet. 1:3), and if the Scripture is complete (2 Tim. 3:16-17), where do we find things like a "senior pastor," an "executive pastor," or a "pastor of administration"? Here is the biblical pattern for church organization. Jesus is the Head of the church ("that in all things He might be head of the body, which is the church"; Eph. 1:22-23). Elders are placed as overseers (1 Pet. 5:1-3), as shepherds of the flock (Heb. 13:17), and as bishops (those who are over the flock and who try to help people get to Heaven; Acts 20:18ff.). Then there are deacons, who are servants inside the kingdom of God (1 Tim. 3:12). They are to serve well. Then there are the members, who stand on level ground at the foot of the cross. Paul wrote to "the bishops, deacons, and all the saints who are in Philippi" (Phil. 1:1). In the Bible we never find such things as "senior pastors," "executive pastors," or "pastors of administration." In fact, the word "pastor" is used in the Scripture (1 Pet. 5 and Acts 20) to represent the office of an elder (Acts 14:17). And in the Bible there was always a plurality of elders in congregations. What doesn't surprise me when it comes to an organization like the community church that embezzlement of funds is so common. I read a study recently that mentioned one of the quickest ways to get rich: start your own church! In the name of God and religion, you can get people to give money so that you have complete control of it. People donate, thinking that they are pleasing God. Yet many people have been hoodwinked. The community church movement has a flawed view of church organization.

The community church movement also has a flawed view of New Testament teaching on baptism. Here is a statement from the Saddleback Community Church on baptism: "Baptism doesn't make you a believer; it shows that you already believe. Baptism does not save you; only your faith in Christ does that. Baptism is like a wedding ring. It is an outward symbol of the commitment you make in your heart." The blatant teaching is, "Baptism does not save you." Let's compare that with 1 Peter 3:21. You've heard what the community church movement teaches. Now let's hear what God says. In 1 Peter 3:21 we read, "There is also an antitype **which now saves us—baptism** (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." Now it's "choosing time." The Saddleback Community Church says that baptism does not save us. But God said in the Bible that baptism does now also save us. So, it's "choosing time." Whom will you choose? Will you choose the community church movement, which is looking to make people happy? Or, are you going to choose the Bible, which is in direct opposition to the community church movement? It is not just in 1 Peter 3:21 where we read that baptism is essential for salvation. There are multiple places in God's Word which teach that baptism is essential for salvation. In Acts 22:16 Saul was told, "Why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." In the first Gospel sermon in Acts 2, Peter proclaimed, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (vs. 38). In Mark 16:16 Jesus made it so clear when He said, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved." Jesus said, "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (Jn. 3:5). All of us want God's blessings. We want every spiritual blessing that is in Christ, don't we? We want the salvation that is found in Christ (2 Tim. 2:10-12). If salvation and all spiritual blessings are found only in Christ, how do we get in Christ where those things are found? Galatians 3:27 states, "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ."

The community church movement's view of baptism is flawed, and is in direct opposition to the teaching of the New Testament.

The community church movement also has a flawed view of giving God our best. Here is an attitude about a person's dress that was expressed by one of the churches in the community church movement: "We are more concerned with meeting your real-life needs than with what you wear. So, dress casually, and you'll fit right in. After all, we have a pastor who wears Hawaiian shirts and no socks." That may not seem like much at first. But I want you to think about the significance of what that is actually saying. We are being told, "God doesn't care what you look like. Just come, and everyone will be happy. Our preacher wears Hawaiian shirts and no socks." What's the problem with all of that? It doesn't even get close to being reverent, or to doing what the Bible teaches regarding how we give God our best. Let me illustrate. Look in Exodus 3:5 and notice what the Scripture says. God speaks to Moses and says, "Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground." In Moses' day, sandals were considered dirty and unclean, so they were taken off. When Moses stood before God, it was to be in reverence and in the manner ordained by God. Proverbs 28:14 says, "Happy is the man who is always reverent." In Matthew 6:33 we are told to "seek first the kingdom of God." In Malachi 1 and 3 we are told not to rob God, but to give Him our best. We are to dress modestly and appropriately (1 Tim. 2:11-13; 1 Pet. 3:7). The whole idea that God does not care what you wear or how you dress, so you can come to worship "as you are," is not taught in the Scriptures. God expects our best. We are to give Him our best. We are to be reverent, and are to honor God in everything we do. The casual dress is just one more sign of the relaxed approach that those in the community church movement take. It clearly illustrates that these people are concerned about getting in line with society, not with God. Society is becoming more and more relaxed, less reverent, and more "laid back." Thus, it is on this that the community church movement concentrates. We need to give our best to God. We need to dress appropriately, and give the first fruits (the best) to God in order to honor Him in everything we say and do.

Another error taught by the community church movement concerns the Lord's Supper. In essence, those in the community church movement say that there is no set standard for the Lord's Supper. There is no standard time. There is no standard regarding how the Lord's Supper is to be observed. We may partake of the Lord's Supper whenever we feel like it because God left no teaching on the matter. This would be one area, according to those within the community church movement, on which the Bible "does not come to bear because God has not specified." But the Bible does teach us when and how to partake of the Lord's Supper. We are to follow the example of first-century Christians. In 1 Corinthians 11:1 Paul said, "Imitate me as I also imitate Christ." In Acts 2:42 we learn that the Christians "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers." We are to follow that pattern. There is an "oftenness" associated with the Lord's Supper: "As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (1 Cor. 11:26). How often did first-century Christians come together? We know that they came together on the first day of every week (1 Cor. 16:1-2). But did they come together to break bread? Notice the words of Acts 20:7, which says, "Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight." God established the order. And here we see the example based on the command for Christians to eat the bread and drink the cup in order to remember the Lord's death. In Acts 20:7 we learn by example that we are to partake of the Lord's Supper on the first day of every week. We are not to partake of the Lord's Supper on Christmas, as some people teach (a holiday, by the way, that is not even found in the Bible). We are not to do it on

Easter. Rather, we are to partake of the Lord's Supper on the first day of every week. This is the way we proclaim the Lord's death.

Another error that often is popular in the community church movement is the flawed view about preaching the Gospel. In essence the attitude is, "If you come, you're as likely to see a play as to hear a sermon." Is that what God has authorized? Remember that Paul lived in the Greek era, during which there was a large push toward acting and drama. In the midst of such an era, how did God choose to get His message across? Did He choose acting or plays? No, not at all. Notice what 1 Corinthians 1:21 says: "Since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe." It is the oral proclamation of the Gospel that God has authorized. "Preach the word" (2 Tim. 4:2). There is a big difference between preaching and acting. Acting is often about entertainment and/or emotionalism, whereas preaching is about the relaying of information that is essential to salvation. Plus, it is preaching that God has authorized. This is an area on which God has clearly specified what He wants. Colossians 3:17 teaches us that whatever we do in word or deed, we are to "do all in the name of [by the authority of] Jesus Christ." God has not authorized plays, skits, or drama. Rather, God has authorized the oral proclamation of the Gospel to save those who are lost.

One of the things that has become very popular in the community church movement, and that is a major flaw of that movement, is its view of sin. The community church movement focused on the fourth area in Hybel's survey. People said that they were tired of going to church and leaving feeling guilty. In other words, the Christian message "contained too much about sin." In fact, Joel Osteen (who has become one of the most popular speakers in the movement, and who draws crowds of between 15,000 and 20,000 on a weekly basis), has focused on the idea of **not** talking about sin. In an interview that Larry King had with Joel Osteen, King was trying to get Osteen to condemn sin (such as homosexuality and abortion, both of which the Bible clearly condemns). But Osteen would not do that. In fact, he would not even mention the word "sin." Here is the dialog that occurred during the interview.

King: "You don't call those people [homosexuals and abortionists] sinners?"

Osteen: "I don't."

King: "Is 'sin' a word you don't you?"

Osteen: "I don't use it. I never thought about it. But I probably don't."

Osteen thought about it. And he knew that people didn't want to hear about sin. This is where the community church movement is taking advantage of people. When confronted with the truth, Osteen wouldn't even admit that homosexuality and abortion are sins. His view was, "I don't even like to use the word 'sin.'" But sin is a reality. And when we ignore sin, we ignore its destructive ways, as well as its only cure—Jesus Christ. Sin is what separates us from God (Is. 59:1-2). The Bible says, "All have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). Romans 6:23 teaches that "the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Hebrews 9:22 teaches us that "without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sin." How can we ignore sin, while at the same time talking about Jesus? The two are directly connected! "This Man, Jesus, after He had offered one sacrifice for sin forever, sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 10:12). The community church movement is all about following what is popular. If it is popular, that is what will draw a crowd and bring in more money. Then it will appear as if people are trying to please God. But the popular way is the way that leads to destruction. In Matthew 7:13-14 Jesus said,

“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.”

Exodus 23:2 says, “Do not follow a multitude to do evil.” This leads us down the wrong path. If we get caught up in what is popular, what we like, or bringing God down to man’s level, then we will not be doing what God wants us to do, but instead will simply be trying to make people happy. Paul said in Galatians 1:10, “If I were still pleasing men, I would not be a servant of Christ.” We must realize that we must be in the church because God has told us to serve Him the correct way. It is not about you or me. Rather, it is about glorifying God. We need to stop being so self-centered, and realize that God created each one of us (Gen. 1:26). One day, we will give an account to God (2 Cor. 5:10), and the way we live our lives will determine (based on the Bible) where we will spend eternity. Wouldn’t it be a horrible thing to one day stand before God, having followed the multitude, having done what we viewed as fun, and then hear God say to us, “Depart from Me, you workers of iniquity; I never knew you”? How much fun or popular would it be then? We need to realize that God’s way is clear. Jesus built only one church (Eph. 1:22-23; Mt. 16:18). One day He will return for His kingdom (1 Cor. 15:24). One day we will all stand before God to give an account for the things we have done in this life (Rom. 14:10-12). Those who have done good will arise to the resurrection of life eternal (Jn. 5:28-29). Those who have done evil will be cast into the lake of fire which is the second death (Rev. 20:12-15).

Are you about doing what is popular? Or are you about doing what is right? Are you here to serve God and please Him? Or are you going to go along with what everyone else is doing? We need to realize that the community church movement is full of religious error. If you are involved in that, you need to know that it is not pleasing to God because it is in opposition to His will. To be right, a person must get out of the community church movement, repent, and give yourself fully to God and the Bible. The best advice anyone could give you would be to search the Scriptures for yourself to see if what you are doing is pleasing to God. If it is not, abandon it. My prayer and hope is that if you are caught up in the community church movement, you will strive every day to put God’s will before your own.

**Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:**

*THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST* is brought to you by loving, caring members of the church of Christ. The McLish Avenue church of Christ in Ardmore, Oklahoma, oversees this evangelistic effort. For a free CD or DVD of today’s broadcast, please write to:

***THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST***  
**607 McLish Ave.**  
**Ardmore, OK 73401**

You may call **580-223-3289**. Please visit us on the web at [www.thegospelofchrist.com](http://www.thegospelofchrist.com). We encourage you to attend the church of Christ, where “the Bible is loved and the Gospel is preached.”

## STUDY QUESTIONS FOR “THE COMMUNITY CHURCH MOVEMENT”

1. According to material contained in this lesson, who are three well-known leaders in the American community church movement?
2. According to a survey conducted by a leader in the American community church movement, what are four reasons that people said they do not like to “go to church”?
3. What can truth do for us (Jn. 8:32), and what should our attitude be toward truth (Prov. 23:23)?
4. According to 2 Peter 1:3, what has God given us in His Word?
5. Who, according to Matthew 28:18, has “all authority in heaven and on earth”?
6. What warning is contained in Prov. 30:6 and Revelation 22:18-19?
7. The community church movement frequently uses mechanical instruments of music in its worship of God. According to passages such as Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16, are such things authorized by God as being acceptable?
8. The community church movement often employs designations for some of its workers as “senior pastor,” “executive pastor,” or “pastor of administration.” Where in the New Testament are such designations or offices authorized?
9. The Saddleback Community Church’s teaching on baptism is as follows: “Baptism doesn’t make you a believer; it shows that you already believe. Baptism does not save you; only your faith in Christ does that.” Compared to passages such as Mark 16:16, Acts 2:38, Acts 22:16, and 1 Peter 3:21, is such teaching biblical?
10. Does the statement from one community church that “we are more concerned with meeting your real-life needs than with what you wear, so dress casually, and you’ll fit right in because, after all, we have a pastor who wears Hawaiian shirts and no socks,” express reverence toward God, in keeping with such passages as Proverbs 28:14?
11. The community church movement generally teaches that a person may partake of the Lord’s Supper on any day of the week at his/her convenience. Is that in keeping with passages such as Acts 2:42 and Acts 20:7?
12. According to 1 Corinthians 1:21 and 2 Timothy 4:2, what method did God authorize for the proclamation of the Gospel?
13. One prominent person in the community church movement, Joel Osteen, said in a television interview that in his preaching he does not use the word “sin.” In view of such passages as I Kings 8:46, Isaiah 59:1-2, Romans 3:23, and Romans 6:23, is that attitude biblical acceptable?
14. The community church movement is intent on “doing what is popular.” What does Exodus 23:2 have to say about that?