

# A Statement Concerning the City Church

by David Orton

<http://lifemessenger.org/statement-concerning-city-church/>

## **Preamble:**

This tentative statement is merely the expression of one ministry and viewpoint. It is presented as a resource paper for discussion trusting it may assist in the quest for the “city whose builder and maker is God”. It cannot pretend to be definitive, particularly in view of our own limitations, and the fact that the reformation, revival, and restoration of the church is still underway. “The path of the just is a shining light that shines more and more unto the perfect day” — there is more light to come. The first century church only provides in seed form what is yet to be revealed. And so, apart from union with Christ by the Spirit there are no models or patterns sufficient for what God is about to do. We therefore send this statement out warning against pursuing a slavish imitation of any particular first century model of the church, especially the city-church. Our model is the pattern Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and our principle, the “law of the spirit of life”. Giving heed to this we trust that our contribution will add in some small measure to the quest as we approach that perfect day.

## **Article I The Restoration of All Things**

*We affirm* the restoration of redeemed humanity to the image of Christ and of the whole of creation beyond its original glory. This includes the restoration of the church, the Body of Christ, not only from the effects of the historical fall, but also, from its Constantinian fall. From the Reformation, with each subsequent visitation of His Spirit, God has been restoring truth, gifts, and ministries to the church to the intent that she be ultimately brought to “the fullness of the stature of Christ”, and so fill the whole universe with His glory. Given that God’s ultimate purpose is cosmic, we also affirm the kingdom purpose of cities and the role of the church in their redemption. This entails the total reconstruction of life and culture, according to God’s design revealed in Scripture.

*We deny* the ultimate defeat of Christ, or His church, in a time-space world; or the ultimate destruction of the cosmos.

*We deny* the ultimate reconciliation of Satan, the fallen angels, and the unregenerate.

(Acts 1:6; 3:19-21; 15:15-18; Mtt 17:11; 28:18-20; Rom 5:12-21; 8:18-30; Eph 1:22-23; 3:10, 21; 4:1-16; 5:25-33; 1 Cor 15:25; Heb 11:10; 12:22-23; Rev 21:2-3; Joel 2:25-26; Isa 49:6; Jer 30:3, 17, 18; Amos 9:11-15; Ezk 33-48)

## **Article II Pre-eminence of Christ**

*We affirm* the pre-eminence of Christ as head over all things to the church. While not denying that God gives ministry gifts to the church, Christ alone is the head of every person in the New Covenant so that all may know him and be guided by him.

*We deny* the legitimacy of any ministry or priestly intermediary as a covering between Christ and his church.

(1 Cor 11:3; Eph 1:22; 4:15, 16; 5:23; Col 1:17, 18; 2:19; 1 Tim 2:5; Heb 8:10-12)

## **Article III Law of the Spirit of Life**

*We affirm* the ‘law of the Spirit of life’ as the operating principle in the emerging shape of the church. It is a law of freedom and a law of love. No man can control it. The new wine, the sovereign presiding presence of the Holy Spirit, will alone determine the shape of the wineskin. This is according to the law of life. A seed provides the biblical illustration. As the mature plant is as different to the seed so is the mature church as different to the first century church. But as they are dissimilar so are they similar. While the seed does not bear any visible resemblance to the mature plant it contains, in potentiality, the shape of the future, the life- principle and the coding to take it to maturity. And so, the divine intent for maturity is present, but not manifest, in the first century church. The seed principles are evident but the ultimate shape of the mature church is not fully revealed. Therefore, abiding in union with Christ in the Holy Spirit is the key to the emerging shape of the church. This principle is also one of life out of death, explaining the first century church’s demise and ultimate raising to life again and

restoration to full maturity in a new wineskin. And so, the glory of the latter house will be greater than the former.

*We deny* that a legalistic imitation of first century church formulas or patterns will bring the presence of God or the church to maturity.

(Rom 8:1, 2; 14:17; Gal 3:2; 5:1, 18; Jn 14:15-18; 15:5,6; 16:13-15; Zech 4:6-10; Rom 13:8, 10; Jn 13:34; Jas 1:25; Lk 5:37, 38; Jn 12:23-26; Hag 2:9)

#### **Article IV Geographical Basis of Unity**

*We affirm* that there is only one church in any given city. The only apostolical ground for the division of the church is the city. The civil jurisdictions and boundaries of cities (including sub-cities comprising larger metropolitan cities) are the exclusive ground for the differentiation of the one church that is in Christ.

*We affirm* that all those who have the Spirit of Christ comprise the church of that city.

*We deny* that God ever intended any distinction of the church other than by city boundaries. Scripture does not sanction or model any extra-local configuration of the church whether regional, national, or international. Neither does it sanction any division of the church according to a particular theology, experience, leader, race, class, age, or gender. We deny that the 'modality' of the local church excludes the freedom of 'sodality' for the trans-local work of apostles and their teams (ref. Article VII for the division of the 'church' & the 'work').

(One Church of the City - 2 Cor 1:1; 1 Thes 1:1; 2 Thes 1:1; Rev 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14; Rom 1:7; 16:1; Eph 1:1; Phil 1:1; Col 1:2; Acts 8:1; 11:25-26; Many churches of a region - 1 Cor. 16:19; Acts 15:41; Rom. 16:4; Gal. 1:2; One apostolic local & universal church – Jn 10:16; 17:20-23; Mtt 16:18; Acts 4:32; 20:29-31; Rom 12:5; 1 Cor 1:10-13; 3:16 (AMP); 10:16, 17; 12:12, 20, 27; Gal 3:28; Eph 2:14-16; 4:4, 16, 25; 3:6; 5:30; Phil 2:1-2; The 'church' & the 'work' – Acts 13:1-3)

#### **Article V Doctrinal Basis of Unity**

*We affirm* that our unity is in God revealed in Jesus Christ. This revelation comes by the Spirit and is grounded in the Holy Scriptures, which, in their entirety are the Word of God and wholly sufficient for our salvation. They are the ultimate source of authority for all doctrine and practice, providing the foundation for the church's historic faith as expressed in her creeds. The Apostles' Creed, in particular, provides the most basic and ancient expression of that faith.

*We affirm* "Unity in essential things, freedom in non-essential things, and charity in all things."

*We deny* that true unity can be found outside of God in Christ and the historic faith of the Christian church as revealed in Scripture. We also deny that agreement is necessary in the non-essentials (eg various aspects of ecclesiology & eschatology) for unity to exist.

(Mtt 28:19-20; Acts 2:42; Rom 15:4; 1 Cor 15:1-11; Eph 4:3, 13; 1 Tim 1:3, 4; 2:7; 4:6, 7, 13, 16; 6:20; 2 Tim 1:14; 3:14-16; 4:1-4; Jd 3; 1 Jn 1:5-7; 2:3-6, 20-27; 4:6; 2 Jn 9-11)

#### **Article VI Spiritual/Relational Basis of Unity**

*We affirm* that the unity of the Spirit already belongs to those who have received the Spirit of Christ. It is therefore a present spiritual reality, which can only be manifested and maintained through brotherly relationships of humility and love. The relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is the ground and demonstration of this.

*We deny* that biblical unity is organisational, institutional, or hierarchical. It does not occur through denominational unions or institutional alliances.

(Jn 13:34-35; 15:13, 17; 17:20-23; Rom 5:5; 12:10; Gal 5:13, 22; Eph 4:1-3, 15; Phil 2:2; Col 2:2; 1 Pet 1:22; 2:17; 3:8; 1 Jn 3:10-23; 4:7-21; Jd 21; Ps 133)

#### **Article VII The Cross – The Only Path to Unity**

*We affirm* that the Cross is the only solution to the scandal of division in the body of Christ. Division is rooted in unbroken self. Therefore, the call to unity is the call to deny self and take up our cross.

*We affirm* that God's ways are higher than man's ways. Therefore, God's route to unity is foolishness and weakness to the natural and religious mind. Consequently, the path to unity is not according to man's wisdom and strength.

*We deny* that unity without humility will work, nor will it bring glory to God. We deny that unity can be achieved organisationally or politically. We also deny that all division is bad. God may use division as an instrument of judgement to frustrate the pride of man, or to affirm what is right and true.

(Gen 11:4-9; Prov 15:33; Isa 53:6; 55:8-9; 56:11; Mtt 23:12; Mk 8:34-37; Rom 6:11-14; Eph 4:2; Col 3:1-17; 1 Cor 1:10-31; 11:19; Phil 2:1-11; 1 Pet 5:5; Jas 4:1-10; 1 Jn 2:19)

#### **Article VIII Architecture of Unity – Jerusalem, Antioch, & Ephesus**

*We affirm* that the New Testament provides sufficient modelling of the one city-church for its restoration. To understand a particular operation of the Spirit and its line of development into the present we may study its first occurrence. This is demonstrated through three model cities: Jerusalem, Antioch, and Ephesus. Together they provide the key ingredients for unity. From Jerusalem we learn of the restoration of David's tabernacle for the ingathering of the Gentiles and observe the first principles of the Christian life and community expressed in the rhythm of 'temple worship' and 'house fellowship'. In Antioch we observe the dynamic elements for the birth of apostolic ministry to the nations (including the division between the modality of the 'city-church' and the sodality of the 'apostolic work'). We see citywide plural collegiate leadership, fasting, prayer, ministry to the Lord, prophecy, and the laying on of hands. From Ephesus we learn of Christ as head of the church, the partnership between apostles and citywide plural eldership, and the strategy for multiplication and regional impact through the miraculous and apostolic bases of operation.

*We deny* that a return to apostolic foundations, to the seedbed of the first century church, necessarily inhibits the church's contemporary relevance, movement forward, or freedom to respond to the 'law of the Spirit of life'.

(Acts 2:38-47; 4:32-37; 5:12-16; Acts 13:1-3; 15:1-21; 19:1-41; 20:18-38; Heb 6:1-3)

#### **Article IX Foundation of Unity – Christ, Apostles, & Prophets**

*We affirm* that Christ is the foundation of the one true church. This is the case both historically through His incarnation, passion, resurrection and ascension; and experientially through the believers' revelation of, and relation to, His person.

*We affirm* that Christ appoints present-day apostles and prophets, as foundational ministries, who articulate and incarnate (through their teaching and person) His will and ways. To the degree they do this they have spiritual authority to serve the household of faith. Discharging their apostolic / prophetic commission they relate to the elders of the city through a filial and charismatic connection. Their ministry is to lay the foundation of Christ in the city-church.

*We deny* that the authority of apostles or prophets is based on a positional office, or that they are to function independently of the elders of a city and the other ascension-gift ministries.

(Mtt 16:18; 1 Cor 3:10-11; Mtt 23:33; Lk 11:49; Eph 2:20; 4:11; 1 Cor 12:28; 1 Tim 1:18; 4:14; 3:1-16; 4:16; 5:17; Filial connection of apostles [see Article X below] – 1 Cor 4:14-21; 9:1-19; 2 Cor 6:11-13; 7:2-16; 11:5-20; 12:11-21; Phil 2:19-22; 1 Tim 1:2, 18)

#### **Article X Elders of the City – Plural Servant Leadership**

*We affirm* the plurality of elders (as an identifiable functioning leadership team) for a city. With a diversity of ministries, graces, and measures (some fellow-elders being apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers) they serve co-equally in a collegiate style of leadership as shepherds and examples of the flock knowing they will give an account to the Chief-Shepherd on the Day of Christ. They are divinely called, biblically qualified (as to character and gift), and apostolically appointed. Their measure of grace for city eldership will have been proven through an evident commitment to the whole not

the part, to the larger body of Christ and His kingdom in that city. They will be free of denominational and sectarian loyalties. They will be appointed under the presidency of the Holy Spirit through prophecy and the laying on of hands on the basis of divine calling, character, and a process of relational-functional emergence in the citywide sphere. This will not necessarily occur through a democratic process or on a representational basis. The sole consideration apart from character is divine call and the consequent measure of grace for the citywide sphere. It is recognised that only a small minority of congregational and ministry leaders of a city will have this call. This is not an issue of 'lesser or greater', but of 'division of labour' according to the will of God.

*We affirm* the principle of 'first among equals'. According to spiritual seasons and specific needs at any given time we believe that God may raise up, under the presidency of the Spirit and the confirming counsel of the elders, a particular gifting and ministry to provide a facilitating lead role. There is no permanent office or title for this fluid role. Christ alone is the head of the church.

*We affirm* the division of larger metropolitan cities into zones or sub-cities according to civil boundaries and jurisdictions. The overseers of these zones will relate and function as described above, but as a part of the whole relating into the elders of the larger metropolitan city. Each zone may (or may not) have an elder/overseer sitting on the wider metropolitan eldership depending on divine call and gifting.

*We affirm* the distinction between organisational authority and spiritual authority. The former is positional and imposed from above based on power, the latter is relational and received from below based on love. The authority of citywide elders is purely spiritual.

*We affirm* the relationship between elders and apostles. While elders are free to accept or reject apostolic personnel or policy they will normally discharge their responsibilities in partnership with the fatherly support, counsel, and direction of apostles (whether local or from outside).

*We affirm* the relationship between elders and deacons. The city-church diaconate serves, in cooperation with the apostles and elders, primarily but not exclusively in the administration of the 'naturals'. This will be multi-faceted, including finance, care of the poor, networking, and communication. The elders, on the other hand, will steward the 'spirituals'. They serve as faithful shepherds feeding and overseeing the flock through their various spiritual giftings.

*We deny* any place for overbearing, coercive, abusive, or hierarchical authority; and the interposition of any mediatorial office or class of person between Christ and the congregation.

(Mtt 20:20-28; Lk 22:25, 26; Mtt 23:8-10; Acts 14:23; 20:17, 18; 1 Tim 5:1, 2, 17-19; Tit 1:5; Heb 13:7, 17; Jas 5:14; 1 Pet 5:1; Filial connection of apostles [see Article IX above] – 1 Cor 4:14-21; 9:1-19; 2 Cor 6:11-13; 7:2-16; 11:5-20; 12:11-21; Phil 2:19-22; 1 Tim 1:2, 18; Elders & apostles – Acts 15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23; 16:4; 21:18; Apostles, elders, & deacons – Acts 6)

#### **Article XI     Discipline**

*We affirm* the responsibility of elders to exercise discipline in a spirit of gentleness over the household of faith. This includes members and fellow elders. The Scriptures enumerate various sins and sinful lifestyles that require discipline. They generally come under two heads: moral/relational and doctrinal/intellectual. This includes all kinds of sexual immorality, covetousness, idolatry, drunkenness, extortion, disorderly conduct, division, sectarianism, evil speaking, false teaching, and heresy.

*We affirm* the process of discipline as outlined in Mtt 18:15-20: First step – Private Appeal (one-on-one); Second step – Peer Admonition (two or three); Third step – Public Admonition (the whole church); Final step – Excommunication (to be treated as an unbeliever).

*We affirm* the restorative purpose of discipline for the individual and its protective purpose for the church. Disciplinary rulings of the city-church, therefore, need to be binding and honoured from one congregation to another.

*We deny* the use of civil authority to enforce church discipline.

(Mtt 18:15-20; Gal 6:1; Doctrinal/Intellectual – Rom 1:18-22, 28; 16:17-18; Gal 1:7-10; 1 Tim 1:20; 4:1-3; 6:3-5; 2 Tim

2:17-26; Tit 3:9, 11; 1 Jn 4:1; 2 Pet 2:1-4; Jd 3-4, 19; Rev 2:12-17; Moral/Relational – Rom 1:24-31; 16:17-18; 1 Cor 1:10; 3:1-3; 5:1-2, 9-13; 11:18; 2 Cor 7:11, 12; Gal 5:20; Eph 4:31; 5:12; Col 3:8; 2 Thes 3:6-15; 1 Tim 6:4; Tit 3:10-11; 1 Pet 3:9; 2 Jn 9-10; Jd 3-4; Acts 5:1-11)

### Article XII Strategy & Timing of Unity – ‘Saul-David Transition’

The strategy and timing of city-church emergence can be illustrated by two analogies:

1. Saul and David, and
2. The remnant returning from Babylon.

They both represent the transition from an old order to the new – from human government to God’s. There has been a system of human government, rooted originally in Babel, but entering the church in the first and second centuries, mainstreamed through the Middle Ages, slipping through the Reformation, and inherited as normative by the contemporary church. However, with the work of restoration begun approximately 500 years ago human control over the church is being irrevocably shaken and dismantled. The Reformation is coming to its maturity and the church is coming out of its Babylonian captivity.

But how the transition occurred from the old to the new in the [‘Saul-David transition’](#) is instructive.

The Scriptures present four representative men to whom we relate: Adam (racially), Abraham (redemptively), Moses (relationally), and David (regally). If we are desirous of a greater understanding of the emerging kingdom David provides its typical representation with Christ, the son of David, as the anti-type.

David’s life, therefore, becomes a lesson for the increase of the kingdom.

Once anointed at Bethlehem David did not embark on a campaign for the Kingdom. He did not politically recruit or organise. Surely, we say, he should have ‘networked’ the important influencers – the courtiers and princes of Saul’s palace, and brought them into his confidence! Wouldn’t it be commonsense to form an ‘alliance’ of military commanders and young warriors! But God’s ways are not ours.

David is thrust into obscurity. Through his fugitive stronghold of Adullam God sovereignly gathers and prepares, in anonymity, a forerunner group who will establish the new kingdom order.

In the fullness of time he is directed by the Lord to go up to Hebron, is anointed the second time, leading Judah for 7 1/2 years. After which, he is anointed the third time with all Israel gathering to him. He then takes Jerusalem and receives the fullness of the kingdom.

And so, the kingdom did not come to David through any political initiative or skill, but through various anointings, each according to the Lord’s timing.

This is why Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world, or else my servants would fight.”

This is a work of God. He will not share his glory with another – and so, no man will be able to lay claim to it. No amount of ‘networking’ or ‘organisation’ will do it. Saul lost the kingdom because of unbroken self – self-will, self-seeking, and self-promotion. This explains David’s oft-perplexing circumstances – they were designed to break him and deal with his self-life. For the new order to work David had to be moved by a different spirit.

The Saul-nature will disqualify us for the increase of the kingdom. This may explain some of our own journey and the apparent self-selection of many leaders who begin with the city-church journey but do not continue.

Therefore, like Paul turning from the Jews to the Gentiles, we submit that the Lord is turning from the leadership of the current system to a new breed and a new generation. This is not to say that many will not still come from the system. Many of the priests still turned and believed despite Paul’s withdrawal. And despite Paul’s primary call outside of the established order, it did not preclude his involvement with it.

The Lord is creating a new wineskin. This is in preparation to receive the new wine of the next visitation of God's Spirit. He is the master strategist and the outpouring of the Spirit sent to usher in the fullness of the kingdom will not be wasted. There will be a forerunner people readied by God to receive it – a remnant that will prepare the way for the larger body of Christ. There will be a Joseph people sent ahead for their deliverance. (Note: Both David and Joseph were sent ahead through the betrayal of their brethren, and yet through this returned to them for their salvation). Jesus suffered outside the camp. So let us be ready to bear the reproach outside the city gates if necessary. This is the record of revival history. God seems to come at the most unusual time and through the least expected people. He doesn't need a majority ("He doesn't save by the many or by few"). God works initially with a forerunner-remnant group. And as no respecter of persons turns up and dwells where he is welcomed, regardless of religious or social standing.

### **But how will this dwelling of God in the Spirit grow across a whole city?**

We have written this Statement on the premise that the restoration of the city-church is on God's agenda. If this premise is true it follows that there is a specific timing and way forward to be revealed.

When the remnant returned from Babylon to rebuild the Temple there were two items on God's agenda: *first*, the rebuilding of the altar, and *second*, the relaying of the foundation. And so, in rebuilding the temple of the city-church, our Lord who said, "I will build my church", will restore the *altar* and the *foundation* – the altar of the cross and the foundation of Christ. Paul emphasised that, "No man can lay any other foundation than has already been layed which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 3:11). But it is not Christ alone – it includes "apostles and prophets, and himself as the chief-cornerstone" (Eph 2:20-22). As Paul explained, "God sets first apostles, second, prophets, and third teachers..." (1 Cor 12:28).

And so, intimacy with Christ and his cross goes hand-in-glove with the foundation of apostles and prophets, which brings us to Antioch.

To discover the line of development of a particular work of the Spirit we must go back to its first occurrence. The apostolic ministry to the nations was birthed from Antioch (ref Acts 13). And so, it is to there we must go. There were several elements to this:

1. Prophets,
2. Teachers,
3. Ministry to the Lord with fasting,
4. Prophetic utterance,
5. The Pauline revelation, and
6. The city-church wineskin.

God used a particular *man*, with a particular *message*, and a particular *method*. The Holy Spirit prophetically selects particular people in the context of relationship, worship (prayer), and fasting. Through the plurality of the team in Antioch the Holy Spirit separated Paul and Barnabas from the city-church to the larger apostolic work. Paul was an apostolic (sent) *man*. His apostolic *message* was that all things are now restored under one head in Christ, and that the church is his body. His apostolic *method* was to raise up this corporate Christ city-by-city. Paul as the prototype apostle illustrates that the apostolic will only be restored to its fullness in the context of a particular *message* and *method*—of the revelation of the one body of the city (see Eph 1-4). If this is true it will call into question [how many apostolic networks currently operate](#).

For the apostolic foundation to be laid in a city we are seeing that there will be a Holy Spirit initiated season of citywide:

1. Covenant relational links and team-building (underground networks akin to David's Adullam & Ziklag group),
2. Prophetic teaching (seminars defining the process & principles of the apostolic wineskin),
3. Continuous worship, prayer, & fasting,
4. Prophetic ministry & apostolic commissioning, and
5. Plural collegiate leadership (elders) over the city.

The city-church leadership will begin underground, embryonically, but with the DNA for citywide catholicity and multiplication. Through a growing citywide team and strategies the ministry will be given back to the saints, restoring the heartbeat of *koinonia* as the believers multiply, meeting 'house to house', and daily in the 'temple'.

In this whole process more prayer and deliberation will need to be put into the theological and practical objections/obstacles to the city-church, including:

- Basis of unity,
- Basis of authority,
- Local church autonomy,
- Denominational loyalties & structures,
- Biblical orthodoxy, and
- Failures of previous unity movements etc.

It is understood that this endeavour is impossible apart from the supernatural leading of the Holy Spirit. We are confronting 1,800 years of entrenched tradition, human fallenness, and demonic power. We therefore issue this Statement trembling before Almighty God assured that he is head over all things and that before the end comes he will display his multi-faceted wisdom to angels and men through the church.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Ephesians 3:20–21 NIV

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