

Operation Repent: Phase Two

When *Operation Repent* was launched in January 2021, two online checklists were provided so that people could assess the health of their church or Christian organisation:

1. *How Biblical is my Church?*
2. *How Welcoming is my Church?*

Since then the response to the website has been overwhelming. Indeed, I expected there would be little interest in either of the questionnaires. For having worked within the church, and having hit my head against a brick wall for so long, I did not expect to see so much interest in the website or what I was doing.

Now, of course, for many, that is probably as far as it will probably go. Some may know that something is wrong, but will not have the determination to do anything, and others will simply deny that there is a problem. And that's the way it's always been. But there will be some who can identify with the problem, and wish to do something about it.

As a consequence, I have brought forward the second phase in *Operation Repent*, by introducing two new elements to the website. One is a chart and the other a draft covenant for churches to use.

3. *What Gospel Does My Church Proclaim?* and
4. *Covenant for Reform*

Please feel free to use them to help restore your church to its biblical model.

But be warned: *operationrepent.com.au* provides questions and answers that many will find challenging to their beliefs, traditions, and practices.

What Gospel Does My Church Teach?

The chart *What Gospel Does My Church Teach?* recognises that the church today is very different to the church of the New Testament. And even if a pure unadulterated Gospel is preached, it is the practices of the church that teach where the church really stands.

As a consequence, the chart deals with a number of issues that are relevant to many (if not most) churches today. It is not intended to be comprehensive. But it is designed to show the gap between what is preached in the pulpit and what is being taught by practice.

Because even though the understanding of the church has developed over the centuries, so too has its practices. And many of the practices that have been adopted (i.e., its involvement in

weddings, funerals, social welfare, nursing homes, schools, hospitals, etc.), have more to do with its place in society, than its biblical origins.

As consequence, the chart spells out what gospel is actually being taught in our churches. And I have used the formula:

What is preached + what is practiced = what is actually taught

Now obviously, the table suggests that the church is sending out mixed messages. Because even if it is proclaiming the gospel from the pulpit, its words are not being matched by its actions. As a consequence, it illustrates quite clearly that the gospel is being lost.

Covenant For Reform

In regard to the Covenant, this is a practical step in the need for reform. Because identifying what needs to be done, and agreeing to put it into practice are two very different things. As a consequence, the Covenant is a tool that can be used to progress any reform forward. And there are at least three things that need to be considered:

1. There is a need to avoid endless delaying tactics. And setting up committees to discuss the issues and make a plan of attack is all very fine, but if those committees just drag on and on, and um and ah, and procrastinate about what to do, there needs to be a way forward. Because a lot of churches will be quite happy to undergo review after review, but provided they goes nowhere.
2. There can be inherent problems in the process itself. And rushing in to fix the matters, without thinking through the issues can be very damaging too. When a church strays it often does so over time. As a consequence, the people get used to the way the church operates, and come to accept the practices as part and parcel of the Christian faith. As result, those things have to be untaught, explanations given, and new and more biblical models need to be taught and adopted; and
3. There needs to be consideration that just because something isn't in the Bible, it does not necessarily make it invalid. Indeed, even in Luke's story of the church in Acts, we can see the church grow and develop. And there's no reason to think that it shouldn't be allowed to continue to grow and develop after biblical times. As a consequence, there may be things about the church today that are equally as valid as those practiced in the Bible.

As a consequence, the document would spell out the path that the particular church is taking, and would make that path clear. It would also combat the issue of people coming back later, saying, 'We didn't agree to that.'

As a clergyman, I found it very helpful to have a statement of agreement with a church—in writing—before commencing ministry. And in these circumstances, it would be doubly so. Furthermore, I would suggest that any church wishing to follow this path, should do so with the mutual support and oversight of another church which may, perhaps, be making a similar commitment.

Now there are a number of covenants detailed in the Bible. Most notably, God’s covenants with Adam (Genesis 1:26-30; 2:16-17), Noah (Genesis 9:11), Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3), Moses (Exodus 19-24; Deuteronomy 11), David (2 Samuel 7:8-16), and the new covenant described in Jeremiah (Jeremiah 31:31-34). As a consequence, a formal agreement between the creator and his people could be considered to be quite normal.

Furthermore, if the church has become so unbiblical, the idea of putting the plan for reform in writing makes sense. But it would not be a covenant to replace God’s covenant with us, but a covenant in which the church commits itself to God, in terms of restoring its teaching and practices to the principles set out in the pages of the Bible.

Now up to this point, those who are members of a denomination might be saying, ‘Yes, that’s alright for independent churches, but what about us? It’s a lot harder for us as part of a bigger denomination.’ And you would be right. But don’t think that being part of a larger church means that change is impossible. For there are still things that can be achieved at a local level. And when it comes to Synods and the like, motions can be brought to investigate and report on specific practices of the church, to get the ball rolling.

In summary, then, there is a way forward to institute change and reform in the church. But it does require a willingness to put the biblical faith into action, as well as a willingness to put aside those practices which conflict with the faith.

Any reform, however, will require the need to accept that a church has a problem, a willingness to do something about it, and a commitment to take a certain course of action. And the whole process needs to be wrapped in prayer—before, during, and after the appropriate action.

As to the wording of the covenant, that would need to be decided by each church, taking into account their circumstances, need, and pace of reform, etc. The draft includes both a statement of what the church believes, and a commitment (with time frames) to the process of reform. But it should be adapted to meet the needs and circumstances of each reforming church.

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