OurExtensionCords.com

Our Extension Cords

By Henry H. Mitchell, 2025

Full-scale Power

There are countless Christian church and benevolent organizations. Wherever we are, they compete with each other for our commitment and support. How do we answer?

I find it helpful to consider this comparison. God is the source of all love, all creativity, all spiritual power. So I take the thought of the infinite power source and compare it to a great electrical grid. The transmission lines of the grid can carry electricity at a strength of a million volts or more.

Pros and Cons of Downscaled Power

By the time it gets to our house, that power is transformed down to only 220 and 110 volts, because that's what our electrical appliances are designed for. Our family's present house was built in the 1950s, so its outlets and their locations are not ideal. Because of that, we use lots of extension cords for our convenience, of different designs depending on what we are plugging in to them. We have to keep in mind that they are not as safe (can be damaged, can be overloaded) as plugging in directly to the wall outlet. Though aware of their weaknesses, we find those extension cords make life better for us in many ways.

Churches and benevolent organizations are a lot like that. God's power is infinite. Humans and their organizations can have access to God's power, but they themselves are limited in the strength and variety of the power they can distribute. They can provide God's love and a helping hand, in limited ways, as they reach people where they are. And, sadly, they can sometimes actually become damaged or unplugged from the Source, still looking useful at first glance but actually providing none of God's power.

Cord Principles to Remember

Consider applying these cautionary extension cord principles to churches and benevolent organizations:

- Even though we can get power through the extension cord, the cord is not the source.
- Our responsibility is to the power company, not the extension cord. Our account is with the power company, not the extension cord.
- We can't tell how well an extension cord works by how pretty it is.
- Extension cords can lose their flexibility and crumble with the passage of time.
- An extension cord may work well for one purpose, but not so well for other purposes.
- For maximum safety in high-power applications, bypass the electrical cord and go straight to the outlet. Or, even better, hardwire directly with a permanent connection.
- If it isn't getting the job done, the first thing to check is whether it's plugged in.

Humans in organizations exhibit human frailties. When a weakness becomes evident within the organization, God is still and always our source of his power, his love, his comfort. The organization can never block our direct access to God and his constant presence (see *AConstantPresence.com*).

A Biblical Vacuum

Christian organizations, including churches, have a structural problem: the New Testament says almost nothing about organizations. It contains much regarding personal responsibility and maturity, and how to recognize and reward mature leaders when leadership is needed for a situation or task. But there are no requirements listed for academic qualification, buildings and other property ownership, retirement plans, liturgy, music types and instruments, or even membership rolls. The church of the earliest Jesus-followers seems to have been a rapidly-expanding free-form movement, growing by miracle rather than method. It certainly was not fragmented into a great number of rigidly-separated congregations in close proximity to each other, as is common today.

Human Experiences Produce Human Patterns

One pattern that developed and has persisted among Christians is an adoption of various Old Testament forms related to the tabernacle, temple, and synagogue experiences of the Old Covenant. (See the article "About Church.") Jesus replaced the Old Covenant with his very different New Covenant, and those former Judaic patterns make little sense in Christianity beyond reminding us of who Jesus is, and how Judaism prepared for Jesus's coming, birthed Jesus, and preserved the overwhelming proof of who he is. (See *EverythingHangsOnThis*.com.)

Another very evident pattern absorbed into Christianity arises from centuries of conflict, accommodation, and replacement ("Christianization") involving formerly pagan areas and their governments. In that process, with many variations worldwide, pagan properties and practices have been repurposed: buildings of worship, forms of worship, holiday celebrations, official actions performed on behalf of the government, and a priest/clergy official class through whom all things religious are incorrectly said to flow, even including personal salvation and the written Word itself. The most obvious example for most American, European, and related churches of all denominations is their historical connection and descent from the Roman church at some time during the past 1600 years.

Even groups who have broken from some of these older traditions have created new traditions of their own, usually based on commemorating past successes of their group, or preserving a particular cultural history.

None of these accumulated traditions come with New Testament authority. Although they may be familiar, comforting, uplifting, and even inspiring, they may not apply in another time, place, and/or culture. The bottom line is that we may find them helpful, or we may find them distracting, but whatever we experience of these traditions, they are not essential to a person's close and miraculous walk with God. (See *DivineOutline.com* and *AConstantPresence.com*.)

Cautions

Even though the New Testament does not say how Christians are to organize, it does tell us practices to avoid. Some of them are very difficult to avoid, once a manmade pattern is foundational to the organization. Here are a few zones of concern:

Traditions which take precedence over God's instructions.	*Mark* 7: 9-13	" . . . You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! . . . [discussing in this case failing to honor one's father and mother] . . . Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that."
Leaders who attract followers to themselves, rather than encouraging the maturing process through the constant presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit, as Paul did.	*Acts* 20: 29-31	"I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard!"
Promoting the immature to leadership.	*I Timothy* 3: 6	"[An overseer] must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil."
Preaching/teaching to please the listeners.	*II Timothy* 4: 3	"For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths."
Too many teachers, especially teachers who are not well-tested and mature, known to practice what they teach.	*James* 3:1	"Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly."
Excessive or faddish teaching. There is problem with teaching which is heard but not put into practice, and therefore learned-about but never really learned in a life-changing way. This can happen by rejection or by the teaching's not being the person's	*Ephesians* 4:14	"Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching . . . ."

immediately-needed focus. This problem can lead to hardening of the spiritual heart and spiritual paralysis. (So even weigh this series of notes with practical caution and the guidance of the Holy Spirit!)		
Power plays and manipulation. Humans are imperfect, even in Christian organizations.	*Ephesians* 4:14	"Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by . . . the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming."
Yoking with unbelievers. When properties, budgets, and related necessary legalities become involved, or a ministry aspect that requires high skill, often worldly-wise and -reputed people – or family and friends – are brought in for practical and personal reasons. It may take awhile, but intra-organizational warfare is inevitable. This is the main reason Christian organizations, like all bureaucracies, are likely to eventually become enemies of the cause for which they were founded. Note: It seems that the most sensitive and potentially explosive points within Christian ministries involve finances and music.	*II Corinthians* 6: 14-18	"Do not be yoked together with unbelievers . . . ."
Quenching the Holy Spirit. Through pre-planned and repetitive schedules and activities, time and resources can be squandered while individual and group instructions from the Holy Spirit go unheeded. These organized activities can also too easily be focused on promoting leaders rather than equipping the flock, external behaviors rather than internal changes, and in-gathering for ministry rather than out-going for ministry.	*I Thessalonians* 5: 19	"Do not quench the Spirit."
"Shearing the flock" for profit, rather than equipping the saints for ministry – in effect setting up a false tollgate for access to God, when that access is actually absolutely free to every individual through Jesus.	*Titus* 1: 10-11	"For there are many rebellious people, full of meaningless talk and deception . . . disrupting whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach —and that for the sake of dishonest gain."

Regarding The Tithe

A survival principle for many Christian church organizations is the Old Testament tithe. There are problems with modern insistence on this practice. Most obvious, it is an Old Testament rule, not a New Testament rule.

The tithe was a tax set at a tenth of the produce of the Promised Land that God had given to the nation of Israel. (*Leviticus* 27:30 and *Deuteronomy* 26:12) People of Israel were required to present that produce every year for the use of the priestly Levites (who did not have farmland). During the third year the tithe also went to "the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow" as a demonstration of God's benevolence. It was not to be used to maintain the temple and its activities. That support came from a separate temple tax on every male over twenty years old. (*Nehemiah* 10:32-34, *Matthe*w 17: 24-27)

We no longer live in the Promised Land of Israel. We no longer have a Levitical priesthood. We are all a royal priesthood. (*I Peter* 2: 4-9) The temple is now our own body. (*I Corinthians* 6:19) So it is not reasonable to assume that the tithe is required of Christians to support our clergy (actually, the New Testament does not even establish a clergy) and the functions of our church organizations (which are not New Testament – defined, either). We are supposed to honor those who labor among us (*I Thessalonians* 5:12, *I Timothy* 5: 17-18), but that is not a tithe requirement.

So we do not owe the Lord a tithe, a tenth. What we do owe him is everything. It is all his. And it is our responsibility to let his Holy Spirit teach us how to carry out his wishes with that everything (see *AConstantPresence.com).* For each of us, the answer will be different, depending on the assignments he gives us. "Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." (*II Corinthians* 9: 7)

By the Numbers

Many churches focus on their numbers in attendance and on the membership roll. This may not be good.

For background, *Psalm* 33:16 contains the wisdom, "No king is saved by the size of his army . . . ." In *II Samuel* 24 and *I Chronicles* 21 King David disobeyed God by taking a military census. It seems that numbering itself is not the problem, it is the motivation of the numbering. If we think our identity and strength are in the numbers of those who follow us, we are wrong. In the Jesus world, the numbered people are God's, not ours. And our own identity and strength as individuals come from God, not our followers.

Paul states in *Ephesians* 4: 11-13, "So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

And what is our overarching purpose in attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ? Jesus stated it in his Great Commission in *Matthew* 28: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations . . . ."

So if numbering is of any significance to a church, it is far more important how many are equipped and go than how many stay because they are happy to be there.

And the *Ephesians* 4 giftings of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers may not match our modern thought of "career." The giftings do not occur for the benefit or even the identity of those of us who act in those gifts, they occur for the equipping of God's people. So those giftings may be evident at a particular time and place, among certain believers who are being equipped, and then not at other times and places.

Back to Those Extension Cords

So, regarding our "extension cords," our Christian churches and benevolent organizations, I encourage you to let the Holy Spirit guide you in when, where, how, and with whom you participate. May you take great joy in that participation, and in the changes in participation which the Holy Spirit brings you!