



Shepherd's Global Classroom

Doctrine and Practice of the Church

By Dr. Stephen Gibson

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Doctrine and Practice of the Church

Course Contents

Course Description and Objectives	5
Directions for the Class Leader	7
Lessons	9
(1) One God and One Church	9
(2) Christian Unity	19
(3) The Local Church.....	29
(4) Church Associations.....	37
(5) Church Membership.....	45
(6) Sharing Life Together	57
(7) The Church in the World.....	67
(8) Local Church Support.....	77
(9) Tithe.....	87
(10) Baptism.....	95
(11) Communion	107
(12) Church Discipline.....	119
(13) The Character of a Christian Leader	131
(14) Spiritual Gifts.....	143
(15) Questions for Church Maturity	157
Form for Recording Assignments	167
Form for Requesting Certificate	169

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Doctrine and Practice of the Church

Course Description and Objectives

Course Description

This course presents the biblical concept of the church as central to God's work on the earth. The student will gain understanding of Christian unity, church membership, fellowship, financial support of ministry, tithe, baptism, communion, church discipline, and signs of church maturity. The course explains principles and applications for the life and work of the church.

Course Objectives

- (1) To understand the identity and biblical description of the church.
- (2) To see God's plan for the church, and the work of God in the church.
- (3) To learn the responsibilities of a member and leader in the church.
- (4) To apply principles for the support, administration, and development of the local church.
- (5) To be equipped with content and structure for teaching about the church.

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Directions for Class Leaders

The directions for each lesson are printed throughout the lesson in italics (*italics*).

The symbol  comes before a discussion question. The class leader should ask the question and give the students time to discuss the answer. If the same student usually answers first, or if some students do not speak up, the leader can direct the question to someone: "Pierre, how would you answer this question?"

Much scripture is used in the course. Whenever the class should read a passage together, the directions will say so. For example: *A student should read Romans 6 for the group.* At other times scripture references are given in parentheses in the text. For example: (1 Corinthians 12:15). Those references are support for the statements in the text. It is not necessary to always read the passages in the parentheses.

Several tests are assigned. Each test should be given at the beginning of the lesson time. The student will write from memory a list of statements that he memorized from the previous lesson. The class leader should make sure that students do not look at written notes or help each other on the test. If a student is not able to write the list, he can be scheduled to try again later.

Each lesson has assignments described at the end. Assignments should be completed and reported at the next lesson time. If a student does not complete a lesson, he can do it later, but the leader should encourage students to keep on schedule so that they learn more from the class.

One of the purposes of the course is to prepare students to become teachers. The class leader should give students opportunities to develop their teaching skills. For example, the class leader should occasionally let a student teach a short section of the lesson to the class.

The student is supposed to teach a section of material to people outside the class, three different times. It is not necessary for him to teach a whole lesson each time. This assignment is not scheduled; the student should create the opportunities and make sure he gets the assignment done.

Each lesson has at least two block quotes from some theologian in history. When the class comes to a block quote, the class leader could ask a student to read and explain the quote.

If the student wants to earn a certificate from Shepherd's Global Classroom, he should attend the class sessions and complete most of the assignments. To calculate whether a student has earned a certificate, the leader can use this system: there are 14 times that the student writes paragraphs about the "Seven Summary Statements," there are 13 other assignments and tests, there are 15 lesson times, and 3 outside teaching assignments. The total of items required is 45. The student should complete at least 37 of the items to earn a certificate.

*Block quotes
look like this.*

Lesson 1

One God and One Church

Whenever the symbol [?] occurs, the class leader should let students try to answer the question.

Introduction

[?] *Why do you go to church?*

When people talk about “going to church” they mean going to the church building for a scheduled worship service.

Many people say they go to church to learn about God. Sometimes people who feel far from God go to church hoping to feel the presence of God. People who know God go to church hoping to experience His presence in worship. The church is about God.

People should be able to experience the presence of God in the worship services of the church.

But the church is not a building, and it is not just the meetings for worship. The church is the group of believers who are committed together to be the church. So when we talk

“Wherever Jesus Christ is,
there is the Catholic
[universal] church”
(Ignatius, in a letter to
Smyrna).

about people seeing the church or coming into the church, we mean the group of believers. When we say the church is about God, we don’t mean only that the building and worship service are about God. The life that the group of committed believers has together is about God.

Origin of the Word

In the first century A.D., the Greek term *ekklesia* was commonly used. When an announcement was made in a city, calling together an assembly of people for a meeting, that group meeting was called an *ekklesia*.

Ekklesia is the word used for the church in the New Testament. The word was used 117 times in the New Testament, but not all of those occurrences refer to the church. Some refer to other kinds of meetings (Acts 19:32, 39, and 41).

The gospel is offered to the people of every race, social class, location, and occupation. Just as everyone in the city could hear the announcement for a meeting, no category of people is excluded from receiving the offer of the gospel.

The church is the group of people that chose to respond to the call of the gospel. They come from every category of people to form a special, diverse group of people who are committed to Christ and his church.

God the Father in the Church

The Persons of the Trinity – the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – relate to believers in special ways in the church.

God will be glorified for eternity for the works he does in the church. “Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.” (Ephesians 3:21).

Because the church exists for God’s glory, nothing should be done by the church that dishonors God, or gives people a misunderstanding about what God is like, or makes a person the focus instead of God.

The church is the family of God.

“As ye have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith” (Galatians 6:10).

“After this manner therefore pray ye, our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name” (Matthew 6:9).

Because the church is the family of God, it is not possible for a person to be truly in the church unless he believes in God and is in relationship with him. A person does not enter the church only by knowing the people of the church. He enters the church by coming into relationship with God, then by committing to a relationship with God's people.

🔍 *What does it mean to have God as your Father?*

Christ in the Church

Jesus is the one who built the church. Jesus promises the ultimate success of the church.

"And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18).

Jesus promised to be with the church.

". . . I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen." (Matthew 28:20).

"For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20).

Christ is the head of the church, and the church is his body in the world. The personal relationship that Christ has with the church is deeper than we can understand.

"And has put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that fills all in all" (Ephesians 1:22-23).

"For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones" (Ephesians 5:30).

"The personal phrase 'my church' indicates that Jesus, according to Matthew, deliberately intended to form a continuing community of prayer, preaching, and discipline. He called and trained his disciples and promised the coming of the Holy Spirit to guide them after his ascension" (Thomas Oden, *Life in the Spirit*).

Because a member of the church is a part of the body of Christ, it is not possible for a person to truly be part of the church unless he has personally put his faith in Christ as Savior and accepted his authority as Lord.

? *What kind of person can be called a member of the body of Christ?*

The Holy Spirit in the Church

The book of Acts shows that the early church was conscious of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gave inspiration and power for preaching (Acts 2:11). He called people to special ministry (Acts 13:2). He guided them to the right places for ministry (Acts 16:6-10). He settled doctrinal issues (Acts 15:28).

The Holy Spirit is the great director of the church in fulfilling its world-wide mission. No single human organization can expect to accomplish the whole task. God calls and sends missionaries, and he knows the needs of every geographical area.

Worship in the early church was guided by the Holy Spirit. He spoke through various members (Acts 14:30-31). The planned program of worship could be changed at any time by the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit gives spiritual gifts that members should use for serving one another (1 Corinthians 12:4-7).

The life of the church is life in the Spirit. Therefore, the church is different from every other kind of human organization. Members of the church are in fellowship with each other because they are in relationship with God and have spiritual life. A person who is not converted is not really in that fellowship even if he likes the church and is a friend to the people of the church.

A person enters the church by experiencing the miracle of regeneration by the Holy Spirit. Because regeneration is a supernatural experience, evangelism is supernaturally guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit. The results of evangelism cannot be explained by natural causes.

In the first days of the early church in Jerusalem, the commitment and unity of the members was so strong that it is hard for modern believers to imagine. People sold property and gave the money so that the members of the church could share life together. When Ananias and Saphira lied, they were killed because their sin disrespected the wonderful work the Holy Spirit was doing in the church (Acts 4:32-35, 5:1-4).

The unity of the church is accomplished by the life of the Spirit. The church (not the building, but the group of believers) is called the "temple of God" because the Spirit lives in the church in a special way (2 Corinthians 6:16). Serious judgment is pronounced on any person who harms the spiritual temple where Christian unity exists (1 Corinthians 3:16-17).

? *What would you say to a person who claims to be empowered by the Holy Spirit but attacks and divides the church?*

God Revealed by the Church

The church helps people to remember God, focus on God, and experience change by God.

The church is designed and created by God. More than anywhere else on earth, church is the place where the will of God is done purposely by people who love God. Therefore, the church shows the world what God is like.

? *What are some things people should see about God by seeing the church?*

By looking at the church, people should see that God is loving and merciful, cares about all people, forgives, supports truth, keeps commitments, and hates sin while loving sinners.

? *What errors should people avoid by remembering that the church is about God?*

Because the church exists for God, the worship of the church should be focused on God. When worship becomes focused on human leaders or performers, it becomes human-centered, which is idolatry. Wrong worship becomes fleshly, exalting certain people and appealing to natural desires. Wrong worship can even become demonic because worshippers are yielding themselves to feelings and spirits that are not from God.

The One Universal Church

A student should read Ephesians 4:1-6.

? *What is the main point this passage makes about the church?*

Paul called the believers to be in unity. The reason for unity is that there is only one church. All true Christians are in the same body, just as there is only one God and one gospel. There is one Christianity and one church because there is one God.

The fact that there is one universal church is emphasized in 1 Corinthians 12:13, where Paul said that the believing Gentiles all come into one body.



A creed is a statement of foundational Christian beliefs. An early Christian creed called the "Apostles' Creed" included the statement "I believe in the catholic church." The word *catholic* in the creed did not refer to the Roman Catholic Church. It meant "universal" or "complete." The creed was saying that there is one church that is represented by Christians everywhere.

A student should read Ephesians 2:20.

The church is built on one foundation: the ministry and truth revealed by the apostles and prophets; and, the ministry, message, atonement, and continuing life of Jesus Christ. There is one foundation and one church.

There is a religion in China called Eastern Lightning. They believe that the work of Jesus is over and that God has sent a new messiah for modern times. The new messiah is a Chinese woman who teaches new doctrines.

? *What answer would you give to someone from the Eastern Lightning religion?*

The unity of the universal church does not mean that one organization is the whole church. No single organization even comes close to fulfilling God's purpose for the church everywhere in the world. Jesus told his apostles not to expect all Christians to be in the same organization (Mark 9:38-39).

The Roman Catholic Church claims to be the whole church of God. The Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses claim the same.

? *What would you say to a person who claims that his organization is the whole church of God on earth?*

Local Church Accountability to the One Church

The local church should not feel free to develop doctrine independently. In one place, Paul gave directions, then said it was done that way “in all the churches of God” (1 Corinthians 11:16). He told a church that they should accept certain ministers because they represented the other churches (2 Corinthians 8:23-24). He was obviously implying that it would be wrong for a church to decide to hold doctrines different from all the other churches.

The Corinthian church was blessed with spiritual gifts; and they began to think of themselves as independent, not needing to listen to anyone else. Paul corrected their thinking and practices and reminded them that they were not the origin of the Word of God; it came to them from others, and did not come to them alone (1 Corinthians 14:36). He went on to say that those in their church who were spiritually perceptive would recognize Paul’s directions as inspired by God.

The local church should be self-governing and self-supporting; but it needs a relationship with the universal church for doctrinal stability, training resources, and world mission perspective.

Today there are many kinds of churches and a great variety of doctrine, even though they claim to follow the Bible. For a church to be accountable to the universal church does not mean that it should try to be like all of the other churches around it. It should hold the doctrines of Christianity that were essential at the beginning of the New Testament church. It should also be part of an association of churches that provides accountability for each other.

For doctrinal stability, a local church should have three things: (1) A conviction that the Bible is the absolute authority, (2) The essential doctrines of historic Christianity, and (3) Fellowship in an association of churches with good theology.

Right now we are talking about the second in the list. We will talk about church associations in another lesson.

A local church should not feel free to accept doctrines that are contrary to the essential Christian doctrines of the early church. Those doctrines are stated in certain early creeds. The Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Chalcedonian Creed state the doctrines that were essential to Christianity from the beginning. They include doctrines of the Trinity and doctrines of the deity of Christ and the Holy Spirit. If a church rejects the doctrines of those creeds, it should not call itself Christian, because it is a different religion.

The Nicene Creed

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God; begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of light, Very God of very God, begotten, not made; being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made; who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; he suffered and was buried; and the third day he arose again according to the scriptures; and ascended into heaven; and sits on the right hand of the Father; and he shall come again, with glory, to judge both the quick and the dead: whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and Son together is worshiped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets; and I believe in one Catholic and Apostolic Church; I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead; and the life of the world to come. Amen.

What if a person decides he doesn't agree with one of the statements of the Nicene Creed? Because these doctrines have been held by the church from the beginning, if he denies one, he is claiming to have an understanding of truth that the church did not have for 2,000 years. If a church or individual does not hold the doctrines of the Apostle's Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Chalcedonian Creed, his doctrine should not be trusted. Because the doctrines of the creed support the gospel, if a person denies a doctrine of the creed, he may be contradicting the gospel.

? *What would you say to a person who says he is a Christian but disagrees with a statement in the Nicene Creed?*

The seven statements below are the main points of this lesson. The purpose of the lesson is for the student to understand these points.

Seven Summary Statements

- (1) A local church is the group of believers who commit together to be the church in a specific place.
- (2) The church shows the nature of God to the world.
- (3) The life of the Spirit is the life and unity of the church.
- (4) Church membership is based on relationship with God and commitment to the group of believers.
- (5) There is one universal church following one Christianity because the church is about one God.
- (6) No human organization is the whole church of God on earth.
- (7) A local church must hold the essential, historical doctrines of the universal church.

Before the next class session, the student should write a paragraph about each of the "Seven Summary Statements" (a total of seven paragraphs). The paragraph should explain what the point means and why it is important. The student should write it the way he would explain it to someone who is not in the class. The writing should be turned in to the class leader.

At the beginning of the next class session, the class leader should ask several students to tell the group what they wrote for certain points.

Each of the other lessons (except the last one) will have an additional assignment besides the paragraphs about the "Seven Summary Statements." The assignment may be a test, an interview, study of a scripture passage, or writing.

During the course, the student should teach a lesson, or part of a lesson, to an individual or group that is not part of the class. The student can choose the

material to teach. This should be done three times, with different material. The student should report to the class leader each time he does a teaching session.

Lesson 2

Christian Unity

Students should give the class leader the paragraphs they wrote for the "Seven Summarizing Statements" in the previous lesson.

The class leader should ask various students to share with the class what they wrote on one of the "Seven Summarizing Statements."

Whenever the symbol  occurs, the class leader should let students try to answer the question.

A student could read the illustration in the block for the class.

A Fictional Illustration: There was once a city that was in danger of flooding from a river. People of the city organized into teams to fill sandbags and place them along the river. People worked with enthusiasm, and team spirit developed. The teams soon named themselves. There were the City Savers, the Sand Shovelers, and the River Blockers. Team identity became important. The members of each team wore matching shirts. They talked about how their team was the best. They criticized the work of the other teams.

When a River Blocker asked to borrow a wheelbarrow from the City Savers, they did not allow him to take it, because they thought they might need it later. When the Sand Shovelers ran out of bags, they had to wait for an hour for more bags to be brought, though the other teams still had extra bags. The teams had forgotten that they all had one mission. The success of the team seemed more important than the total success of the mission.

 *How do churches sometimes act like the teams in the story?*

The Bible strongly emphasizes the value of Christian unity. Paul reproved the schisms of the Corinthian church with the question, "Is Christ divided?" (1 Corinthians 1:13). He told the Ephesians to maintain the unity of the Spirit, pointing out that, "There is one body . . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Ephesians 4:4-5). Jesus prayed earnestly that the believers be one in order that the world would believe that he came from the Father (John 17:21).

From the beginning, the church considered itself to be one. The Apostles' Creed includes this statement: "I believe in . . . the Holy Catholic Church; the communion of the saints." The Nicene Creed includes this statement: "I believe in one Catholic and Apostolic Church." The term *catholic* means complete and universal. The term *apostolic* means that the church was established by the apostles and still follows the apostles' teaching.

Early creeds expressed the essential doctrines of Christianity. The church did not consider any person a Christian who did not accept these creeds, since the creeds were intended to define essential Christianity. Therefore, a person was a heretic if he thought that there were true churches that were not part of one universal church.

Denominations

The church on earth has not been organized into one institution for many centuries. Instead, there are many distinct groups of churches. A group of churches that forms one organization is called a denomination.

In A.D. 451 Oriental Orthodoxy separated from Roman Catholicism because of doctrinal disagreement. Today there are regional church organizations in Oriental Orthodoxy: Coptic, Ethiopian, Eritrean, Malankara Syrian, Syriac, and Armenian Apostolic.

In A.D. 1054, Eastern Orthodoxy separated from Roman Catholicism. Today there are fifteen regional church organizations in Eastern Orthodoxy, including the Russian Orthodox Church, the Serbian Orthodox Church, and the Church of Cyprus.

Besides those large divisions, other groups of churches separated from the Roman church during those centuries.

The Protestant Reformation occurred in the 1500's. Many churches separated from Roman Catholicism because they believed the church no longer preached the true gospel clearly. There were many other issues, including political ones, but doctrine was the most important.

Many denominations formed from the Reformation. The Church of England was composed of churches in the country of England. When they established churches in other countries, they were called the Episcopal Church.

Presbyterian churches came from the influence of the reformers: John Calvin in Switzerland, John Knox in Scotland, and others. There are several Presbyterian denominations today.

The Lutheran Church started in Germany from the ministry of Martin Luther. There are Lutheran churches in many other countries also.

The Anabaptists were people who believed that the Reformation had not completely restored the scriptural gospel. They believed that worship should be without unscriptural ceremonies and that baptism was only for converts and not for babies. From them have come many denominations of Baptists in many countries.

The Pentecostal churches started from a revival in Los Angeles in 1906. A great variety of Pentecostal and Charismatic denominations exist in many countries of the world. They have great variety of doctrines, and some deny the doctrine of the Trinity.

There are now thousands of denominations that claim to be Christian. There are thousands of independent churches that are part of no denomination.

Denominations often begin with a group of people who believe that an important truth is denied or neglected by the church they are in. They start a new denomination with the intention of being doctrinally correct. Over time, they continue to develop their doctrines, and become different from other denominations. They also develop different traditions about the proper form of worship and details of Christian living.

Sometimes denominations begin with evangelism. If there are many converts in a region and no denomination to take care of them, a new denomination

may form. A denomination may begin from the work of a mission organization in a particular country.

Most Christian denominations do not claim to be the only real Christians. If an organization claims to be the entire church of God on earth, it should not be trusted.

? How many different names of churches and denominations do you know?

Unbelievers object to Christianity because of its divisions and variety. Many unbelievers think that the various sects of Christianity all contradict one another. Many people of the world think there is no type of unity among Christians.



? What are some behaviors that seem to deny any unity among churches?

Churches tend to emphasize the things that make them different from other churches, even if those things are not foundational doctrines of the faith.

Sometimes people are too quick to accuse other churches of hypocrisy, compromise, or other sin, without really understanding.

Some churches say that other churches are not Christian, even though they believe in the foundational Christian doctrines.

Churches do not appear to be united in carrying out the Great Commission. Churches seem to compete like businesses compete. Many leaders consider labor and resources to be wasted if they help a ministry that does not have their organization's name.

Perhaps all Christians would agree that all Christians should be in unity, but many do not know what form that unity should take.

First, we will talk about the unity of the universal church; then, we will talk about the unity of the local church.

Universal Church Unity: Not Institutional Union

Some people think that all churches should unite into one organization. They think that the existence of many separate organizations means that the church is not in unity. They make no distinction between the essence of the church and the institutions of the church; therefore, unity for them means the uniting of institutions.

? *What would you say to a person who thinks that all Christian organizations and churches should unite in one organization?*

Institutions cannot connect without deciding that their doctrinal differences do not matter. To unite, they must agree on some foundational doctrines and decide that many of their other doctrines are not important enough to separate them from those who disagree.

The whole attempt is based on the idea that Christian unity is institutional unity.

Jesus Himself did not demand that all his followers be in the same organization during his earthly ministry, as shown by this incident:

"And John answered and said, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name; and we forbid him, because he follows not with us. And Jesus said unto him, forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us" (Luke 9:49-50).

Jesus' words show that a person can be "not with us" in the sense of being part of our organization, and yet be "for us." Obviously there is a Christian unity that does not consist of being in one institution.

Through the centuries since Jesus' earthly ministry there have been organizations that claimed to be the whole church, saying that all separate organizations were not Christian. Jesus did not claim that his group was the whole church even while he was physically present to lead it.

Sometimes people use the term *invisible church*. The term *invisible church* refers to the fact that there is not a visible organization with a membership list that contains all Christians. Also, Christian organizations have members

that are not truly Christians. Therefore, we cannot point to any particular organization and say that it is the universal church.

Even though the universal church is not a single, visible organization, the unity among all Christians is supposed to be visible. Jesus prayed that believers would be in unity, and said that a result would be that the world would believe on him (John 17:21). That means that Christian unity must be somehow visible to Christians and the world.

The Basis of Christian Unity

Groups of believers study the Bible and discuss what they believe, trying to make sure they are right. They realize that they do not agree with the doctrines of some other groups of Christians.

? *When you meet a person who says he is a Christian, what is necessary for you to be able to share Christian unity with him?*

The unity of the local church is based on biblical doctrine, the experience of grace, and the life of the Spirit. Unity of Christians beyond the local church has the same basis, though with less detail.

Another way to state the basis of unity is this: if a person testifies that he is saved, seems to have spiritual life, and seems to believe in basic Christian truth, then Christian fellowship is possible. Fellowship can continue as long as the person seems to live in relationship with God and in obedience to the Bible.

Christian unity does not depend on agreement on every detail of doctrine. It is not possible for the church in all places to agree on all details of doctrine. Even the apostles had disagreements (Galatians 2:11-14).

There are a few doctrines that are foundational, essential to the Christian faith. If a person does not believe those doctrines, he cannot understand and believe the gospel.

Then there is the longer list of doctrines that a particular church believes, but most churches understand that not all Christians everywhere agree on all doctrines. Even if a doctrine is implied in the Bible, not everyone will understand the Bible the same way.

? What are some examples of foundational doctrines? What are some other doctrines that are not foundational?

Some foundational doctrines are about the nature of God, the deity of Christ and the Holy Spirit, the atonement of Christ, and salvation by grace through faith.

Some doctrines that are not foundational are beliefs about forms of worship and details about the Christian life. It is important for us to try to be biblical in all that we do, but we must realize that not all true Christians will agree in these details.

"If your heart is right, as mine is with your heart, then love me with a very tender affection, as a friend that is closer than a brother; as a brother in Christ, a fellow citizen of the New Jerusalem, a fellow soldier engaged in the same warfare, under the same captain of our salvation. Love me as a companion in the kingdom and patience of Jesus, and a joint heir of his glory" (John Wesley, "The Spirit of Unity").

Signs of the True Church

An ancient concept of the signs of the true church was held by both the Roman Catholic Church and the reformers. Christians for centuries have believed that the four signs of the true church are unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity. Those terms have been defined different ways. Here are some simple definitions. *Unity* means that the church includes all true Christians, though not necessarily in a formal list. *Holiness* means that the church stands against sin and believes in salvation from sin. *Catholicity* means that the church can take a relevant form in any culture anywhere, while holding to essential truth. *Apostolicity* means that the church holds the original faith established by the apostles.

The Error of Church Competition

Sometimes the churches in an area are close enough together that people can choose which one they want to attend. The people of a church may try to show people of the community that their church is better than the other churches. They compete with the other churches, trying to make their own church more attractive. They think their church is successful if their number of people is increasing.

Competition between churches is based on a misunderstanding of what the church is. They seem to think that the church is like a business that should attract customers. Or, it is like a showplace that needs to attract an audience. These are wrong concepts of the church.

The church is a spiritual family. The members of a good family try to take care of each other. They work together to provide the needs of the family. They spend time together because of their relationship.

The church is a family of faith, based on their relationship with God and each other. They do want new members, but new people should be attracted by the gospel and the family life of the church. The church should focus on communicating the gospel and demonstrating the life of the church. Then they will attract the right people – the people who are interested in being part of the family.

? *If a church tries to compete with the other churches in the area, how will the competition change the church?*

Local Church Unity

? *Why does local church unity need agreement on more doctrines than universal Christian unity?*

A Christian may accept the testimony of other Christians who do not hold all of his doctrines, as long as they hold the foundational Christian doctrines and demonstrate a Christian life.

However, because a Christian must personally practice what he believes is right, he cannot partner in ministry with all Christians. For example, if a pastor

believes that the Bible tells him to baptize converts, he cannot pastor a group of people who teach that converts should not be baptized.

Another example: if a person believes that the gift of tongues is not evidence of being filled with the Spirit, it would be difficult for him to partner in ministry with people who believe that a person who does not speak in tongues does not have the Holy Spirit. There would be problems for their fellowship because they would not accept his testimony. There would be problems in ministry cooperation because they would try to lead new converts into the experience of speaking in tongues.

If a person does things he believes are biblically wrong, he violates his own conscience. He comes under condemnation from God because he chose to do something even though he believes the Bible forbids it.

A Christian may believe that people with various doctrines are real Christians, but he must fellowship and do ministry in a group of people who agree on most doctrines. That means that a local church must have a statement of doctrine that goes beyond the foundational doctrines of the universal church.

? *Why would it be a mistake for a person to try to agree with every church's doctrines?*

Conclusion

A Christian must keep a balance in his attitude toward others. He must not say that other Christians are not real Christians because they differ in doctrinal details that are not foundational. But, he must have a close fellowship with a local church that holds doctrines together that let them fellowship and do ministry together.

Seven Summary Statements

(1) The Bible emphasizes Christian unity.

(2) The early church believed in the unity of the church as an essential doctrine.

- (3) The church cannot accomplish unity by getting all Christians into one organization.
- (4) Christian unity is based on biblical doctrine, the experience of grace, and the life of the Spirit.
- (5) Christians everywhere agree on certain foundational doctrines of Christianity.
- (6) Christians in various churches will not agree on details of doctrines.
- (7) A local church must agree on a detailed statement of doctrines.

Before the next class session, the student should write a paragraph about each of the "Seven Summary Statements" (a total of seven paragraphs). The paragraph should explain what the point means and why it is important. The student should write it the way he would explain it to someone who is not in the class. The writing should be turned in to the class leader.

Interview Assignment: The student should talk to members of three different churches and ask them how they view other churches. What unity do they think exists among all Christians? Write a paragraph from each of the three conversations.

Reminder: the student should plan to teach something from the course to people not in the class, three different times.

Lesson 3

The Local Church

Students should give the class leader the paragraphs they wrote for the "Seven Summarizing Statements" in the previous lesson.

The class leader should ask various students to share with the class what they wrote on one of the "Seven Summarizing Statements."

Students should give the paragraphs reporting on the interview assignment from the previous lesson. The class could discuss some of their interviews.

Whenever the symbol [?] occurs, the class leader should let students try to answer the question.

[?] *What is the local church? How is it different from every other kind of group?*

A Definition of the Local Church

This definition of the local church can be divided into seven essential elements. These elements are further explained throughout this course.

The local church is a group of believers that functions as a spiritual family and community of faith; offering the gospel and the fellowship of the church to all who repent; practicing baptism and communion; cooperating in worship, fellowship, evangelism, and discipleship; accomplishing the work of the body of Christ by the gifts of the Holy Spirit; submitted to the Word of God; with unity based on biblical doctrine, the experience of grace, and the life of the Spirit.

"Believers are not called out separately to live out a merely individuated relation to God but are called together and bound together as a people" (Thomas Oden, *Life in the Spirit*).

Below the parts of the definition are repeated with explanations inserted in parentheses.

☐ *On any of the parts of the definition, the class leader could ask the question, "Why is this a necessary characteristic of the church? What would be some results if a church lacked this characteristic?"*

(a) The local church is a group of believers that functions as a spiritual family and community of faith (The church is a group formed by Christian faith. It has stronger relationships than any other group in the world.);

(b) . . . offering the gospel and the fellowship of the church to all who repent (A church cannot exclude ethnic groups or classes of people and still be faithful to the gospel. No commonality of ethnicity or social class is necessary. Also, a church cannot refuse to forgive certain sins if it is faithful to the gospel.);

(c) . . . practicing baptism and communion (Jesus gave directions to the church for these ceremonies. Baptism represents entering the church by conversion. Communion represents the grace that is revealed in the gospel.);

(d) . . . cooperating in worship, fellowship, evangelism, and discipleship (These are essential purposes of the church. Cooperation is necessary for the church to accomplish these important purposes.);

(e) . . . accomplishing the work of the body of Christ by the gifts of the Holy Spirit (The spiritual tasks of the church can never be accomplished only with human abilities.);

(f) . . . submitted to the Word of God (The church depends on the Bible for its gospel, doctrine, and authority. If a church chooses not to obey the Bible, the church loses its authority for teaching.);

“The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men in which the pure Word of God is preached and the sacraments duly administered according to Christ’s ordinance . . .”
(Articles of Religion of the Methodist Church).

(g) . . . with unity based on biblical doctrine, the experience of grace, and the life of the Spirit (The members of the church can commit to each other because they have these three things together. Without all three, true Christian fellowship does not exist.).

God’s Investment in the Church

A student should read Ephesians 3:1-10 for the group.

 *What are some things Paul said about his ministry?*

Paul said that an important part of his ministry was explaining the church, so we know that explaining the church should be an important part of ministry today. God planned that Gentile believers would be brought into the church, and that the church would demonstrate the wisdom of God in the world.

We need to remember that the church is not a building. Christians did not have any church buildings during the first several generations of the church. That means that when the New Testament talks about the church, it is talking about people.

Ephesians explains how important the church is to God's plan.

" . . . And has put all things under his feet, and given him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that fills all in all" (Ephesians 1:22-23).

This verse says that Jesus is the Head of the church, and that the church is his body. It says that the church has the fullness of God.

Imagine a river that provides all of the water for a great city. Millions of people use the water, yet the amount they take is less than the amount that flows on down the river. It's hard to imagine how much water that is. (For another illustration, see the footnote.¹)

But what about the fullness of God? If God were to make a container or channel for pouring out his blessings and grace and power for the world, what kind of container would hold the fullness of God? This verse says that the church is that container. The church contains God's blessings for the world.

And remember, the church that contains the blessings of God is not the building, but the group of people in Christian fellowship.

God's plan for the church existed at the beginning of the world. So what purpose did God have in mind for the church?

¹ There is a company called Carbonite that backs up personal computers. They can save everything that is on your computer in case something happens to it. Imagine the kind of storage they must have to contain the contents of thousands of computers!

Look again at Ephesians 3:10-11.

“To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known [revealed] by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord” (3:9-11).



Manifold means “all kinds of.” God has wisdom for every situation and every aspect of life. God’s wisdom is to be revealed to the universe, including the spiritual world, by what God does through the church. A person gets his understanding of God by what he sees in the church. For a person to see the church should prompt him to worship God. He should be moved to exclamation about the wisdom of God because of seeing the wisdom of God at work in the church. The world will not see all of this from the Sunday worship services. They see it by the action of the church every day and in every situation of life.

? *What are some examples of situations of life where God’s wisdom is important?*

Does God’s “manifold” wisdom include wisdom about family problems, poverty, unemployment, inadequate housing, poor education, juvenile delinquency, child neglect, medical needs, and other human problems? Of course it does. How is the world to see the wisdom of God? They are to see it demonstrated by the church, as the church demonstrates how God’s solutions are lived out in the community of faith.

A student should read Ephesians 3:20-21 for the group.

The purpose of everything God made is to glorify God. The church is where God is especially glorified, because it is where he demonstrates love and redemption, it is where creatures made in his image willingly worship and obey him, it is where a family of faith demonstrates a life that is blessed by God, and it is where redeemed people participate in the redemption of others by evangelism.

God will be universally, eternally glorified through what the church is doing

now. The work that your local church does will stand as an eternal monument to the glory of God.

The Sufficiency of the Local Church

The Bible talks about the one church, but it also talks about local churches. For example, the Apostle John wrote to the seven churches in Asia (Revelation 1:4). Paul mentioned "all the churches of God" (1 Corinthians 11:16).

A local congregation is part of the one church, yet is also called a church. Many of the epistles in the New Testament are addressed to churches in particular places.

? *Which can be called the temple of God, the one universal church or a local church?*

In Ephesians 2:20-21 Paul said that the one church, on the original foundation, is the temple of God. In verse 22 he also said that the Ephesian believers were a house of God. In another verse he also told the Corinthian believers that they were a temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16). Therefore, we see that the one universal church is a temple of God; yet the local church is also.

? *Which can be called the body of Christ, the one universal church or a local church?*

"All essential elements of the church are embryonically present in this early fourfold description of the church [Acts 2:42]: apostolic doctrine, community, sacrament, and common worship" (Thomas Oden, *Life in the Spirit*).

Paul spoke of the one church as the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:23). However, writing to the church at Corinth, Paul said, "You are the body of Christ" (1 Corinthians 12:27). He did not say that the Corinthian believers were only part of the body of Christ. They were the body of Christ for that place.

God intends for each congregation to function as a complete church, with everything they need to be the body of Christ for a place.

Paul compared the members of the local church to parts of the body, like the eye, foot, and hand. Obviously, the parts of the body have to be together in one place to function. He was not saying that they were part of the body and that the other parts of the body were scattered around the world. They were the complete body for that place.

Paul said to the Corinthians that certain things were to be done “when the whole church is together in one place.” He obviously was not speaking of the universal church, but the local church. The local congregation has special authority when it functions as a church.



God gives the gifts of the Spirit that are needed for the local church. The members work together with various gifts to meet the needs of the congregation.

Because the local congregation is the body of Christ, the temple of God, and the church, it is sufficient to be the church where it is.

The sufficiency of the local church means that the local body has the gifts and resources needed for ministry in its location. The local church can function as a church even if it has no help from somewhere else. The local leaders of the church help the congregation develop a vision and goals for local ministry. The congregation works together to financially support the ministry and take care of the members of the congregation.

The Necessity of the Church

It is difficult to preserve new converts unless they are brought into the life of the church. A believer cannot be discipled well without participating in the formation that happens in the local church. A person cannot be trained for ministry without experience in the church.

The gospel does not have visible form in a community until there is a church. The visible form is not the church building, but the functioning family of faith that demonstrates life in relationship with God. Until the church is there, the

world cannot see what it means to be a Christian. A community cannot be considered fully evangelized until a church is there.

Seven Summary Statements

- (1) A converted person should not be excluded from the church because of ethnicity, social level, or the sins of his past.
- (2) The tasks of the church can be accomplished only by the work of the Holy Spirit through the church.
- (3) The church's unity is based on biblical doctrine, the experience of grace, and the life of the Spirit.
- (4) God's wisdom is revealed to the world by what he does in the church.
- (5) The sufficiency of the local church means that the local body has the gifts and resources needed for ministry in its location.
- (6) The church is necessary for preserving converts, discipling believers, and training ministers.
- (7) A community is not fully evangelized until a church is there.

Before the next class session, the student should write a paragraph about each of the "Seven Summary Statements" (a total of seven paragraphs). The paragraph should explain what the point means and why it is important. The student should write it the way he would explain it to someone who is not in the class. The writing should be turned in to the class leader.

Writing Assignment: Study Ephesians 5:25-32. Write a few sentences about the relationship between Christ and the church.

Reminder: the student should plan to teach something from the course to people not in the class, three different times.

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Lesson 4

Church Associations

Material is needed in preparation for this lesson. This lesson discusses the relationship between churches and their association. If the students are from a church that is in an association, the class leader should get a copy of the requirements of the association for review in the class.

Students should give the class leader the paragraphs they wrote for the "Seven Summarizing Statements" in the previous lesson.

The class leader should ask various students to share with the class what they wrote on one of the "Seven Summarizing Statements."

Students should give the class leader their sentences from the passage assignment from the previous lesson.

Whenever the symbol  occurs, the class leader should let students try to answer the question.

 *What is the name of the church association or denomination you are in?*

Defining Church Associations

When a Christian meets Christians from different local churches, questions arise. They ask why his beliefs and practices are different from theirs. He notices that there are doctrinal differences between different kinds of churches. There are great differences in worship styles.

A church member may look for a religious identity that is broader than his local church. He wants to see that his church is part of a category of churches that believe the same doctrines and cooperate and fellowship together. He doesn't want to feel that his own congregation is the only church in the world that has its particular beliefs and practices.

 *One or two students could explain how they benefit from contact with other churches like their own.*

In another section, we studied the following statement: "For doctrinal stability, a local church should have three things: (1) A conviction that the Bible is the absolute authority, (2) The essential doctrines of historic Christianity, and (3) Fellowship in an association of churches with good theology."

In this lesson we are talking about the third in the list.

Definition: A church association is a group of churches that has central leadership, shares certain beliefs, commits to accomplish certain goals together, and has some form of fellowship together.

Weak and Strong Association Types

An association could be called "weak" or "strong" depending on the strength of the elements that hold the association together.

In weak associations, the central leadership has very little authority over the local church; the list of common beliefs may be very short and basic; the common goals may not require much participation from the congregations; and the fellowship may be rare meetings of representatives of the congregations. In those associations, each church property is owned by the local congregation; and a local church can choose to leave the association at any time. Some churches would quickly leave the association if they felt that it no longer met a need for them.

The churches and members of a weak association usually emphasize the autonomy of the local church. They do not want the association to govern the local church, so they carefully limit the authority of the association. Therefore, to call an association "weak" is not to say that it is failing in its purpose. The members of a weak association want the central authority to be weak. The authority is decentralized and held by the local churches.

? *What do you think is good about "weak" associations? What is not good about them?*

In strong associations, the central leadership has the authority to overrule local leaders; the list of common beliefs covers many issues; the congregations are expected to give for the common goals; and the

congregations have frequent contact with each other. The church properties may be owned by the association; and, if so, individual churches cannot choose to leave the association.

Members of strong associations tend to look to the central leadership for solutions to some kinds of problems. They emphasize commitment to the association along with commitment to the local church.

Various kinds of church associations exist. An association may not have all of the characteristics of a strong or weak association, but can be classified as weaker or stronger depending on which characteristics they have. Strong associations are often called "denominations."

? *What do you think is good about "strong" associations? What is not good about them?*

? *What church associations do you know about? How would you describe them?*

Responsibilities of a Denomination

A strong church association may be called a denomination. That does not mean that it has all of the characteristics of a strong association, but that it could be described as strong rather than weak.

A good denomination exists to serve the local churches. The denomination helps the churches to accomplish things together that most local churches cannot do well alone.

(1) It provides a sense of identity in distinction from other kinds of churches.

The members of a local church know that they are different from other churches in their area. They are encouraged to know that they are part of a group of churches that share their doctrines.

(2) It establishes doctrine.

A local church should not feel free to change and develop its doctrine without listening to anyone else. The denomination should hold the historic, essential doctrines of Christianity, but also have more detailed doctrines that they believe are Scriptural.

"The Church has power to decree rites or ceremonies, and authority in the controversies of faith, and yet it is not lawful for the Church to ordain anything that is contrary to God's Word written. . ." (Articles of Religion of the Church of England).

(3) It sets qualifications for pastors and church members.

The denomination should set standards so that the pastors and members of the churches set a consistent Christian example. Qualifications should be based on those provided in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, but need to be made clear for each modern culture.

(4) It provides a system of church administration.

The denomination should provide the local church with a system for appointing people to positions in the church and for maintaining accountability.

(5) It provides a means of training pastors.

Most churches do not have the resources and materials to train future pastors. The denomination should develop a training program that is accessible and practical.

(6) It guides the placement of pastors in churches.

Pastors without churches and churches without pastors can be helped by denominational leaders. Good denominational leaders will respect the faithful local leaders of the church in all decisions.

(7) It provides guidance when the local church has a crisis.

If the local church is divided on an issue or does not have trusted leadership, denominational leaders should help.

(8) It coordinates and supports mission and church planting efforts.

The group of churches should share a vision for mission work. They combine resources and support people to accomplish mission goals.

“The evangelization of the world is clearly the mission of Christianity. But the fulfillment of this mission requires the church, because the instrumental agencies for its accomplishment are not else possible” (John Miley, *Systematic Theology*).

(9) It provides fellowship on a larger scale than the local church.

Members are encouraged to share time with members of other churches from the denomination.

(10) It organizes events that bring the churches together.

The denomination should organize conventions and conferences that help the churches fellowship and set goals together.



(11) It sends leaders to the churches to give counsel and encouragement.

Someone from the association leadership should visit every church at least once per year, and more often would be better.

(12) It provides counsel for developing the financial sustainability of the local ministry.

The association should emphasize the potential of the local church and guide them to financial maturity.

If a denomination properly serves these purposes, it can be a valuable help for accomplishing the purposes of the church. It would be practically impossible for most local churches to fulfill all the above responsibilities alone. Denominational leaders must remember that the denomination exists to serve the local churches.

? *Now that we have seen what denominations can do for their churches, let's consider this question: What are some ways that a church association can have benefits that a weak association has while avoiding the problems that go with them?*

? *How can an association have the benefits that a strong association has while avoiding the problems that usually go with them?*

Local Church Commitment to the Denomination

This list will not be exactly the same for every denomination, but it is a general description of what denominations usually require of their churches.

The local church commits to do the following:

- (1) Accept the denomination's doctrinal statement, teach the doctrines, and not allow contrary doctrines to be taught in the church.
- (2) Teach and require members to live a consistent Christian life.
- (3) Participate in conventions and other events and support the cost as much as they are able.
- (4) Provide an accurate annual report of attendance, conversions, staff, and income.
- (5) Maintain unity with the denomination's other congregations and leaders and deal with conflicts in a biblical way.
- (6) Not participate with any other organization that requires a similar commitment.

If the students are from a church that is in an association, take a few minutes to look at the requirements of the association.

Was your church association started by an international mission organization? If so, describe the relationship between the churches and the mission organization.

The Relationship between a Mission and Its Church Association

Sometimes churches are in a relationship with an international mission organization. The mission may start churches, or existing churches may affiliate with the mission. The churches connected to a mission form an association.

At the beginning, foreign missionaries may live in the country and be the leaders of the association. Over time, association leadership develops from

the national pastors. A mission should have the goal of developing leaders so that foreign missionaries do not continue to lead the church association directly.

When national association leaders have been developed, there are three levels in the organization: mission leadership, association leadership, and local church pastors. The association leaders work directly with the pastors. The mission leaders work mostly with the association leaders.

Some missions provide strong central leadership that forms a strong association of churches. Other missions provide some kind of help to a weak association of churches and do not assert any authority over them.

If the relationships among the three levels are not clearly explained there are many assumptions and misunderstandings. Sometimes people from the churches contact mission leaders about their needs instead of the association leaders because they think the mission is more generous with resources. Mission leaders sometimes work directly with churches, bypassing association leadership. This confuses association leaders because it makes their role unclear.

In a previous section we listed the responsibilities of a denomination. In a church association started by a mission, the responsibilities are accomplished by the association leaders and the mission leaders working together. Over a period of time, the association leaders should gradually take more of the responsibility. The ideal condition of a mature association is that it could function well even if it did not have help from a mission.

Seven Summarizing Statements

- (1) An association of churches helps the stability of the local church.
- (2) Associations can be called "weak" or "strong" depending on how important the central leadership is.
- (3) Members of a "weak" association emphasize the autonomy of the local churches.
- (4) Members of a "strong" association emphasize commitment to the association along with commitment to the local church.

(5) A church cannot be in a denomination and also be in another association that requires a strong commitment.

(6) A denomination exists to help churches accomplish their purpose through cooperation.

(7) An international mission should gradually transfer responsibilities to the association leadership.

Before the next class session, the student should write a paragraph about each of the "Seven Summary Statements" (a total of seven paragraphs). The paragraph should explain what the point means and why it is important. The student should write it the way he would explain it to someone who is not in the class. The writing should be turned in to the class leader.

Test: At the beginning of the next class session, students will need to write from memory at least 10 of the responsibilities of a denomination and at least 5 of the commitments of a local church to its denomination.

Reminder: the student should plan to teach something from the course to people not in the class, three different times.

Lesson 5

Church Membership

Students should give the class leader the paragraphs they wrote for the "Seven Summarizing Statements" in the previous lesson.

The class leader should ask various students to share with the class what they wrote on one of the "Seven Summarizing Statements."

Test: Students should individually write from memory at least 10 of the responsibilities of a denomination and at least 5 of the commitments of a local church to its denomination.

Whenever the symbol  occurs, the class leader should let students try to answer the question.

 *Can a person be a Christian and live a Christian life without the church?*

There are many good reasons that people may have for coming to church. A person may come to church to learn something, to feel God's presence, to feel acceptance and friendship, to be encouraged to do right in the battles of life, to have attitudes and focus adjusted, to be changed, to worship God with others, to demonstrate commitment to God and his people, to assist in the ministry of the church, and to see and be in on what God will do.

*"Those first believers loved the church because they loved Jesus" (Larry Smith, in *I Believe: Fundamentals of the Christian Faith*).*

If a person is not coming to church, the things in the above list are not important enough for him to come for them. What kind of person would not care about any of those things enough to be motivated by them? Being present

doesn't prove that a person is a Christian, but if a person is not attending church, he probably is not a Christian.

? *Why does church membership matter? Isn't it enough just to go to church and be a Christian?*

Church Membership Is Commitment to God's Plan

In a previous lesson, we saw that a priority of Paul's ministry was to explain the church. Paul emphasized the church because the church is God's way of implementing the plan of salvation throughout the world.

The Apostle Paul was called "to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world has been hid in God . . . to the intent that . . . it be revealed by the church the manifold wisdom of God . . ." (Ephesians 3:9-10).

The "mystery" is the plan that God has to express his fullness and reveal his wisdom in the church. A good plan attracts people who commit to it. The group of committed people is a fellowship.

God's plan for the church calls for commitment from people. The church is the fellowship of people who have responded to God's plan and have committed themselves to it. If a person does not commit to the church, he is not committing to God's plan.

? *What are some reasons people have for refusing to commit to church membership?*

The Real House of God

God lives inside every believer, but he lives in the church (the group of committed believers) in a special way.

Look where these verses say that God lives: "In whom [Jesus Christ] all the building fitly framed together grows unto a holy temple in the Lord: in whom you also are built together for a habitation of God through the Spirit." (Ephesians 2:21-22).

God lives in the church. The church, the group of believers, is the house that

God lives in by the Spirit.² God's dwelling in the church is for purposes beyond what can be fulfilled by individuals. If a person refuses to commit to the church, he is refusing to be part of this plan of God.

The Family of God

A person finds his spiritual identity when he is convicted of sin, then experiences God's love, grace, and acceptance. When he repents and puts his faith in Christ, he becomes a child of God. This is the most important identity a person can have.

The believer also has a spiritual identity as a member of the family of God (Ephesians 2:19). All other believers are his spiritual brothers and sisters. He feels a kinship with any true Christian that he meets.

The church exists as the universal family of God and also as a local congregation that functions as the local family of God. If a brother or sister has a need, it is his local spiritual family that helps him. Just as a believer can expect his spiritual family to be ready to help him, he should be committed to the family and ready to help others. The help from the family would not exist if there were not believers who commit their time and resources to it.

Some people ask for help but are never available to help others. They don't understand what it means to be committed to the family.

Other people take care of themselves and expect everyone else to do the same. They do not understand their responsibility for the needs of others.

? *How would you explain to a person that he needs to be committed to the family of God?*

² In I Corinthians 6:19, the individual believer's body is called the temple of the Holy Spirit; so it is not wrong to think of individuals being the dwelling place of God. Elsewhere in the same epistle, the local body is referred to collectively as the temple of God (3:16-17).

The Error of Individualism

A person must individually believe God's truth and individually choose to obey God. A person's relationship with God begins when he repents and puts his faith in Christ. His relationship with God does not depend on anyone else. Every believer has the Holy Spirit to guide him in understanding God's Word.

However, many Christians have become too independent in their attitude. Their own perceptions become their final authority. They trust only their own interpretation of Scripture. They seek an individual purpose for their life that will honor their own gifts, rather than seeking fulfillment by the use of those gifts in the body. Their important decisions are based on their own opinions, their own feelings, and their own desires, and are not guided by the wisdom of the church.

Many people cannot explain the purpose of the church. They see it as valuable only to provide certain benefits to individuals. They do not commit to it like a family. They do not accept any spiritual authority. They are quick to leave a church and look for another if there is a problem.



This problem exists everywhere, but people of some cultures have more tendency to try to be spiritually independent because their culture emphasizes individual freedom.

Many churches have accepted the assumption that people are all spiritually independent. Sermons give instructions on how individuals can make personal decisions to get the best results. Many churches are led by a team of people who put on a program, and the congregation is a crowd of spectators. Another kind of church is a pastor's personal enterprise, and he tries to provide enough benefits to keep the people and collect their financial support.

The New Testament picture of the church is a local congregation that shares the responsibility of the church. It is impossible for a church to fulfill its responsibilities except as a congregation of committed, cooperating people. Most of the epistles of the New Testament are not addressed to individuals, but to churches, and should be interpreted and applied that way.

Some Purposes of the Local Church Found in the New Testament

For each item of the list, discuss how a congregation would be able to share this responsibility and do it better than an individual could.

- (1) Evangelize (Matthew 28:18-20).
- (2) Worship as a congregation (1 Corinthians 3:16).
- (3) Maintain doctrine (1 Timothy 3:15, Jude 3).
- (4) Support pastors financially (1 Timothy 5:17-18).
- (5) Send and support missionaries (Acts 13:2-4, Romans 15:24).
- (6) Help members in need (1 Timothy 5:3).
- (7) Discipline members who fall into sin (1 Corinthians 5:9-13).
- (8) Practice baptism and the Lord's Supper (Matthew 28:19, 1 Corinthians 11:23-26).
- (9) Disciple believers to maturity (Ephesians 4:12-13).

Most of these things cannot be done by one person acting independently. They depend on cooperation of the group of believers and a structure of leadership.

God calls every believer to commit to a local church and help that church fulfill its purpose in the world. Unless a member serves in the church, he is not fulfilling his purpose as a member of the body of Christ.

God has a plan of operations for a local body of believers. He gives what is needed and requires a commitment from us.

“It is the duty of every Christian, not only to openly profess his faith in Christ, but to enter into fellowship with the body of believers in his community, and to take upon himself the responsibilities of church membership” (Wiley & Culbertson, *Introduction to Christian Theology*)

The Metaphor of the Body

A student should read 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 for the group.

Paul said that the members of the church are supposed to work together like the parts of the physical body. A part is not supposed to try to be independent of the others. A part cannot accomplish much without the others.

A Christian should realize that his abilities find their value in the life of the church. Just as an eye or ear is useless except when it functions for the body, a person is not likely to find a significant purpose in the will of God unless he functions as a committed member of the church.

Membership Processes

A student should read Acts 2:46-47 for the group.

The Lord added to the church daily. Joining the church was not a complex thing in the early days of the church. A testimony of conversion and faith was the basis of membership. Even without a formal membership process or a list of membership rules, it was easy to see who was in the church.

Often a church begins without a formal membership. At first the church consists of the ministry team. Then, local people are added who respond to the ministry and became involved. The group meets frequently for discussions about practical matters, spiritual issues, vision for the future, and aspects of sharing life together. There is no membership list, but everyone knows who the committed people are.

As the church grows, questions arise. Many people visit the church, and many people participate in activities; but who are the people of the church? A church is supposed to be a witness, but how can it be a witness if the community doesn't know who the church people are? We teach the congregation to commit to helping others who are in the body, but how can they know who those are? If a person refuses to respond to correction and lives in open sin, how can he be distinguished from the core group of believers, to show the difference between those who commit to living faithfully and those who do not?

Many modern churches have extensive membership requirements. They have a statement of doctrine, rules for the member's lifestyle, and maybe a period of probation. It is not easy for a new convert to quickly become a member of those churches.

A new convert needs to be accepted into the fellowship of the church immediately. He needs to be part of the group of believers that are committed

to one another. He loses friends who are not Christians when he is converted, and he needs Christian fellowship.

The new convert also needs the discipleship that comes from close fellowship with other Christians. He will be shaped by the values of people who share their lives with him.

What if a convert cannot join the church because of high membership requirements that he cannot understand? If he is kept out of membership, he feels that he is not really accepted in the church. He needs some kind of membership immediately. The early church was able to get converts involved as members quickly.

If the church does well at making converts members quickly, the membership of the church will include people who are not mature Christians. New converts do not understand all of the important doctrines of the church. They also have not developed a mature Christian lifestyle. Therefore, they should not be responsible for making decisions for the church. Because the membership of the church includes people who are not mature Christians, the general membership of the church should not make decisions about the direction of the church.

Within the general membership should be members who form a governing body. The governing body of the church should be composed of mature Christians who understand the doctrines and lifestyle taught by the church. This is the group that makes decisions for the church. Membership in this group should have higher requirements than the general membership of the church. People from this group can serve as teachers and leaders in the church. The governing body makes sure that the church stays true to its doctrine and purpose.

The general membership accepts true converts who commit to the church. The requirements for general membership are the basics of Christianity and commitment to that particular church. A convert can be accepted quickly into general membership if he appears to be truly converted. Then a convert gets the fellowship and involvement in the church that he needs immediately. Some churches call general membership "the Fellowship."

? Why does a new convert need to be involved in the church quickly?

? In the system of membership described in this section, what is the Fellowship, and what kind of person is a member?

? In the system of membership described in this section, what is the Governing Body, and what kind of person is a member?

The Fellowship and Governing Body are a system of membership. In the block below, two other systems for membership are described.

Other Systems of Membership

Mature Christian Membership

One concept of membership is that the members are the group of Christians who are doctrinally sound and sufficiently mature that they can be trusted to vote on church decisions. This group elects people to positions of service, including the pastor. They either vote on business decisions or elect a group of representatives that makes those decisions. Because membership controls church government, a new convert may not quickly be welcomed into membership. The more conservative and cautious the church is, the longer the list of membership requirements and the longer the time period between conversion and membership. The church sets the membership requirements to include everything a mature Christian should be, rather than the basic description of a convert. A convert may participate in the life of the church for years without qualifying to be a member. Some converts leave because they cannot be members.

Congregational Membership

At some churches, those who normally attend worship are considered members. That group may vote on church business, or some other authority structure may be in place, but anyone who attends the church is a member. The church may claim that they have no list of members. However, even in a church that claims to have no list of members, there is an unwritten system of determining who is in and who is not; it is just less defined.

In a church with congregational membership, control of the church may be in the hands of a pastor who has served the church for many years. Or, the church may be controlled by the leaders of influential families, even if they are not in official positions.

If a young church has congregational membership and the general congregation is the final authority, there is no way to predict what it will be in a few years.

If an older church with congregational membership has stability, it probably has been controlled long-term either by a family group or by a strong, long-

term pastor. It would be difficult for them to explain the rules for the way things are done, but they trust the ones in control. Written policies may not exist or may be ignored. When the time comes that the pastor or other older leaders are replaced, the church may go through big changes.

? *What advantages and disadvantages do you see with the two membership systems described in the block above?*

Below (after the "Seven Summarizing Statements") is an example of the Fellowship and Governing Body membership, used by a church in Indianapolis, Indiana, in the United States. After that is an example of a church covenant used for membership in the Philippine Bible Methodist Church.

The class should look at the two examples provided. Discuss how these two descriptions compare to church membership in the churches you know.

After looking at the two examples of membership plans at the end of this lesson, come back to the "Seven Summarizing Statements" below.

Seven Summarizing Statements

- (1) God lives in the group of believers in a special way.
- (2) The church is the family of God, where believers commit to the family relationship.
- (3) Church membership is a way to commit to God's plan for the church.
- (4) A congregation must share the responsibilities of the church together.
- (5) An individual's abilities are most valuable when used in the life of the church.
- (6) A new convert needs to be involved in the church immediately.
- (7) Maturity should not be a requirement for church membership.

Before the next class session, the student should write a paragraph about each of the "Seven Summary Statements" (a total of seven paragraphs). The paragraph should explain what the point means and why it is important. The

student should write it the way he would explain it to someone who is not in the class. The writing should be turned in to the class leader.

Writing Assignment: Estimate the percentage of people who attend your church who are committed members. Describe how a person becomes a member in your church.

Reminder: the student should plan to teach something from the course to people not in the class, three different times.

EXAMPLE OF A CHURCH FELLOWSHIP PLAN

The Victory Chapel Fellowship

The public is invited to attend most activities of Victory Chapel, including worship services, home congregation meetings, and Bible studies. All may participate in worship, sharing of needs, prayer, congregational meals, orderly discussion, and informal fellowship. However, the New Testament indicates that the group of people who make up a local church should be identifiable. It should be publicly known what people are the church. Without such an identifiable group, it is impossible that the church have a clear testimony before the world, share true Christian fellowship that is based on Christian unity beyond friendship, exercise biblical church discipline, and bear together responsibility for the ministry of the church. Therefore, responsibility for the ministries of Victory Chapel rests on a group within the congregation called the "Fellowship."

Criteria Met by Those in Fellowship

We recognize that there are many other specifics that are marks of spiritual growth, but the following list provides the basics that seem necessary for unity and true Christian fellowship.

(1) Spiritual Life

Demonstrate evidence of conversion, spiritual desire, and commitment to walk in obedient relationship with God.

(2) Biblical Morality

Abstain from sexual immorality, illegal drug use, tobacco, and alcoholic beverages.

(3) Church Commitment

Attend all services of the church faithfully unless prevented by health, other ministry, or employment in a type of work that cannot be paused for Sunday.

Tithe into the offering of the church.

(4) Doctrinal Unity

Unity and understanding of the statement of faith of Victory Chapel is necessary. The pastor will share discussion and instruction time with each candidate.

(5) Practical Ethics

Maintain honesty in all relationships and faithfulness to commitments. Maintain behavior consistent with love and loyalty to those in the fellowship.

Policies

We realize that some new members will not continue, but we choose not to have a probation period, because new converts need immediate involvement in the church.

The governing body will evaluate a name proposed for the Fellowship after the candidate has been interviewed by the pastor.

A convert accepted into the Fellowship will be scheduled for baptism unless he has been baptized previously.

If a believer in the fellowship is found to be in violation of the requirements, the governing body may either drop the believer from fellowship or allow him to have a period of probation and accountability, after which his case will be reconsidered.

EXAMPLE OF A CHURCH MEMBERSHIP COVENANT

Philippine Bible Methodist Church

“Having received Jesus Christ as my Savior and Lord, believing in his death, the shedding of his blood and his resurrection as the complete work for my salvation, I now unite with the universal body of Christ. But as the body has many members, so is the body of Christ. Through sincere prayer, I feel led of the Holy Spirit to unite with the Philippine Bible Methodist Church family - to its fellowship, faith, and spiritual disciplines as God increasingly enables me. In doing so, I commit myself to God and to the other members to do the following:

First, to protect the unity of my church

- by acting in love toward other members - I Pet.1:22
- by refusing to gossip or backbite – Eph.4:29
- by following its appointed leaders – Heb.13:17
- by having compassion on brethren who have fallen out of the grace of God – Gal.6:1-2

Second, to share in the responsibility of my Church

- by praying for its growth – I Thess.1:1-2
- by inviting the unchurched to attend – Lk.14:23
- by warmly welcoming visitors – Rom.15:7
- by introducing people to Jesus Christ – Acts 8:33-35

Third, to serve the ministry of my Church

- by the discovery of spiritual gifts – I Pet.4:10
- by being equipped to serve with the pastors – Eph.4:11-12
- by developing a servant’s heart in ministering to the saints, and to the hungry, the naked, the sick, the widowed and orphaned, and the imprisoned – as means and opportunity is granted. – Matt.25:31-46; Phil.2:3-7

Fourth, by supporting the testimony of my Church

- by attending faithfully – Heb.10:25
- by humbly receiving the Word of God as preached, and walking in its light – I Jn.1:9-10
- by pursuing a holy life – Heb.12:14; Phil.1:27
- by confessing faults – James 5:16
- by partaking of the Lord’s Supper – I Cor.11:23-26
- by giving regularly – Lev.27:30; I Cor.16:2; 2 Cor.9:7”

Signed this _____ day of _____ Signature of Member _____

Approved by: _____ Local Church Pastor

Lesson 6

Sharing Life Together

Students should give the class leader the paragraphs they wrote for the "Seven Summarizing Statements" in the previous lesson.

The class leader should ask various students to share with the class what they wrote on one of the "Seven Summarizing Statements."

Students should turn in the writing assignment from the previous lesson.

Whenever the symbol  occurs, the class leader should let students try to answer the question.

The Church after Pentecost

A student should read Acts 2:42-47 for the class.

 *What details do you see about the fellowship of the church after Pentecost?*

In the book of Acts, soon after Pentecost, there is a description of the life of the church. "All that believed were together, and had all things common." Many people sold property to support the community life of the church. They were meeting frequently for worship at the temple and also meeting for fellowship in their houses.

At a time when the work of the Holy Spirit among them was at its highest, the community life of the church was at its deepest. For those early believers, being part of the church meant much more than attending services on Sunday. The believers shared life together daily.

"In both the Scriptures and the creeds Christian fellowship is represented as a means of grace" (Wiley & Culbertson, *Introduction to Christian Theology*).

Life in the Family

The church is called a family.³ Believers are called children of God,⁴ and call each other brother and sister.⁵

Let's imagine the family as it has been understood in most parts of the world until modern times. The network of relatives formed a clan, which was part of a tribe. The extended family provided protection, access to justice, land possession, employability, marriageability, education, old age support, orphan support, and widow support. Imagine a world where all of those things were hardly available outside of family connections.

In that kind of culture, everyone in the family followed the same religion. Religion was not considered an individual choice. Children were trained in the family's religious traditions.

Many converts to Christianity were rejected by their families. They lost everything that normally was provided by the family. The church became their new family. That's why they called each other brother and sister. The people of the church helped each other and depended on each other.

If the people of a church see each other only on Sunday, they begin to think that only the Sunday meeting is church. The New Testament churches met on Sunday, but the church was alive and active every day.

“For the church is God's family, where by birth and blood we also belong – a community of heritage and love which we enter by the new birth, saved by Jesus' blood” (Larry Smith, in *I Believe: Fundamentals of the Christian Faith*).

? *How would things be different for a church that shares life every day?*

Pastors should know that serving the congregation through the week is just as important as leading the worship service. All kinds of spiritual gifts and abilities are needed, not just the gifts used in church services. There is a

³ Galatians 6:10, Ephesians 3:15.

⁴ Galatians 3:26, 1 John 3:2.

⁵ James 2:15, 1 Corinthians 5:11.

way for every person to serve. People of the community will see what it really means to be part of the spiritual family.

As a family of faith, the church commits human resources and finds divine resources to meet needs of every kind for those in fellowship, demonstrating to the world God's wisdom in every aspect of life and inviting the unsaved to be converted and enter the family.

Aspects of Shared Life

If people are sharing life together, their time together will include the following aspects.

(1) Ministry is planned and accomplished together.

In many churches, a small team is responsible for all of the planning and work of the church. Everyone in the church should be able to participate in the work of the church, even new converts.

(2) Needs are met together.

If a person has a problem, he should be able to depend on friends in the church for help. That doesn't mean that a person should be allowed to be irresponsible, but if he is doing what he can, the church family should be ready to help.

(3) Work is accomplished together.

A strong relationship is developed when believers work together helping someone in the fellowship. They may also work together to support their own families.

(4) Leisure time is spent together.

People of the church should get together for times of enjoyment when they eat, visit, and do activities they enjoy.

(5) Special life moments are celebrated together.

Not all cultures celebrate the same special events of life. Some of the special times people celebrate are birth, reaching a certain age, beginning school, finishing school, being baptized, having birthdays, getting married, having children, having funerals, and other special times. People in other religions usually have special ceremonies and ways to celebrate these times. The church should also have a way to share the special times of life together.

It is interesting to see the purposes served by tithe in the Old Testament. Tithe was not just to support the temple and those who conducted its worship. Tithe was also for relieving the financial needs of widows, orphans, and foreign immigrants.⁶ It was also for having special parties.⁷ The uses of tithe show us that all aspects of life together are relevant to the church.

Fellowship and Economics

A student should read James 2:15-16 for the group.

? *What do these verses imply about Christian fellowship?*

Sometimes people live as though financial needs are unrelated to the fellowship of believers. But Scripture tells us that being part of the family of faith means that we should respond to needs.

Fellowship means sharing life, which includes sharing spiritual experience. The Greek word *Koinonia*, used in the New Testament, is often translated “fellowship” and the word is used for any kind of sharing. It is sometimes used for sharing of financial resources (2 Corinthians 9:13, 8:4; Romans 15:26).

The first-century Christian community in Jerusalem had nobody who was lacking what he needed (Acts 4:34-35), because people shared what they had.

In the first generation of the New Testament church, when there was discrimination in the church’s administration of financial assistance, though

⁶ Deuteronomy 26:12.

⁷ Deuteronomy 12:17-18.

unintentional, the ministry was in danger of being hindered. When the problem was corrected, the gospel continued to multiply converts (Acts 6:1, 7).

A Christian writer named Aristides wrote the following at about AD 125.

They walk in all humility and kindness, and falsehood is not found among them, and they love one another. They despise not the widow, and grieve not the orphan. He that has, distributes liberally to him that has not. If they see a stranger, they bring him under their roof and rejoice over him as it were their own brother: for they call themselves brethren, not after the flesh, but after the spirit and God; but when one of their poor passes away from the world, and any of them see him, then he provides for his burial according to his ability; and if they hear that any of their number is imprisoned or oppressed for the name of their Messiah, all of them provide for his needs; and if it is possible that he may be delivered, they deliver him. And if there is among them a man that is poor and needy, and they have not an abundance of necessities, they fast two or three days that they may supply the needy with their necessary food.

Julian the Apostate, the Roman emperor (A.D. 361-363) who persecuted the church, made this statement about Christians: "The godless Galileans feed not only their poor, but ours also."⁸

A church is only fulfilling half of its responsibility if it preaches repentance but does not invite the repenting person into a family of faith where he learns how to sustain his new life. For example, if the church tells a woman she cannot be supported by an immoral relationship, the church should also tell her how she will find support in the family of faith.

In some parts of the world we see congregations that demonstrate this kind of Christian community. This total fellowship results not only in care of the members in financial matters, but also a great empowerment for ministry.

These churches of the poor [in Bolivia] have what we could call a stewardship for survival. Popular churches planted among the poor cannot depend on a tradition, on the help of the state, on the

⁸ Christians were called "godless" or "atheists" because they believed in only one God, and that he was invisible, rather than believing in a multitude of visible idols.

endowment of rich benefactors, or on a body of professional ministers. They have to be fellowships where members join forces to make the community live, grow, propagate the faith, and survive. The stewardship of the totality of life is experienced as total missionary mobilization. What seems to be more difficult to obtain in the case of developed and established churches is lay mobilization – total participation in the holistic welfare of the Christian community. Among the churches of the poor, such mobilization is the normal lifestyle of the community. No other form of life and ministry is possible.⁹

The example set by these churches shows us something else, also. We might assume that a church must have a lot of money to take responsibility for its members. But, this kind of community is being demonstrated in churches of the poor.

The people of every society already share life financially through the public economy. We buy the things we need and work to earn money. There is another kind of economy that works in a family. The work that each member does for the family is not measured in dollar amounts. Each person is expected to help in the ways that he can, without a strict accounting being kept. Help is given in the context of the family relationship. It is not expected that every member will be able to do the same things or do work of equal value, but he should do what he can. If a member of the family is unwilling to do what he can, he will be confronted about it and may not get the help he wants from others.

“[Show desire to be a Christian] . . . by doing good especially to them that are of the household of faith . . . employing them instead of others, buying from one another, helping each other in business; and so much the more because the world will love its own, and them only” (John Wesley, “Rules for the Society of the People Called Methodists”).

The economy of a congregation should be more like the family economy than the public economy. For it to work, relationships in the congregation must go beyond surface friendliness. It means that questions will be asked when a

⁹ Samuel Escobar, in *The Urban Face of Mission*, by Harvie M. Conn and others, 105.

person asks for help after being irresponsible with his own resources or after being unwilling to help others.

A congregation learns ways to develop this relationship among their people. They have to be able to explain the church to people who never help anyone but ask for help. They have to teach people who cannot cooperate with others. They have to confront those who feel free to follow their own inclinations on ethical matters and do not respond to pastoral correction.



? *What are some examples of ways that members of the church can help each other? (gardening, child care, employment, crisis situations)*

Practical Directions

A student should read 1 Timothy 5:3-16 for the group.

This passage gives practical directions about how the church should support members who have needs. There is no question about whether the church should be concerned about the needs of its members. Verse 16 says that people should take care of their family members so that the church can take care of people who have nobody to help them. The apostle assumes that financial care of members is the church's responsibility.

Obviously, if every member became financially dependent on the church, the church could not help anyone. This passage gives practical directions so that the church can help the people who really need it.

This passage speaks specifically of widows, but the principles could be applied to other people also. We know that the church has responsibility for others: James 2:15-16 implies that we should respond to the need of a brother or sister; James 1:27 mentions both widows and orphans.

Three principles about the church's financial support of members:

(1) Family has the first responsibility.

Family members are responsible to help relatives in need so that the church does not have to support them (5:4, 16). If a person will not help his family, he is not a believer (5:8).

If a pastor sees that someone in the church has a need, he should find out what the person's relatives can do to help.

(2) A faithful member deserves help.

A widow deserves help if she has lived as a faithful Christian who has helped others (5:10). The same principle would apply to others besides widows, if they are in need and unable to provide for themselves.

(3) A member should do what he can for himself and others.

A Christian should do what he can to be a blessing to others (5:10). If he does not have employment, he can find other ways to help people.

A person who is not willing to work should not be supported by the church (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

A student should read 2 Thessalonians 3:6-12 for the group.

This passage tells us much about the life of the early church. Here Paul deals with a problem. There were people who were depending on the church for support so they would not have to work. They spent their time visiting people and spreading gossip.

What does this tell us about the church of that time? They were taking care of their members. The church had a sense of responsibility to make sure that nobody in the church was hungry. They were like a family.

Because they were like a family, it was possible for a person to be lazy and depend on others. Paul told them that they should require everyone to do what he could do. If a person is not willing to do what he can, he should not be allowed to eat the food provided by others.

It is wonderful when the church is like a family that meets all kinds of needs. For that to happen, the church must have principles to follow. The church must have requirements for those who depend on the church for support. Without requirements, the church will soon become too burdened with lazy people and will not be able to continue meeting needs.

Pastors and deacons must guide the church to function as a family. They must respond to needs with love. However, love means that they are willing to speak the truth. If a person is not taking responsibility, someone must be willing to talk to him about it. If a person does not help other people and do what he can to support himself, the church should not continue to support him.

It is right to ask questions when someone asks for help. Is he willing to help others? Does he work when he can? Does he use his money wisely? Does he take responsibility for his family?

Many people come to the church to ask for help. The church must have a way to show care for people the first time they come, even before the person shows responsibility. Then, there must be a way for the relationship to develop. The person should know what he should do to become part of the fellowship of the church.

Seven Summary Statements

(1) The work of the Holy Spirit in the church brings members into a close relationship of sharing life together.

(2) The church is a family that shares life every day and works together to meet every need.

(3) The church invites the repenting sinner into the family of faith where he learns to sustain his new life.

(4) When the church functions every day, there is a place of ministry for every believer.

(5) Church time spent together includes ministry, needs, work, leisure, and celebration times.

(6) Christian fellowship includes sharing of material resources.

(7) The church does not have to help people who do not do what they can to help themselves and others.

Before the next class session, the student should write a paragraph about each of the "Seven Summary Statements" (a total of seven paragraphs). The paragraph should explain what the point means and why it is important. The student should write it the way he would explain it to someone who is not in the class. The writing should be turned in to the class leader.

Writing Assignment: What are the various ways that the people of your church share life together beyond worship services?

Reminder: the student should plan to teach something from the course to people not in the class, three different times.

Lesson 7

The Church in the World

Students should give the class leader the paragraphs they wrote for the "Seven Summarizing Statements" in the previous lesson.

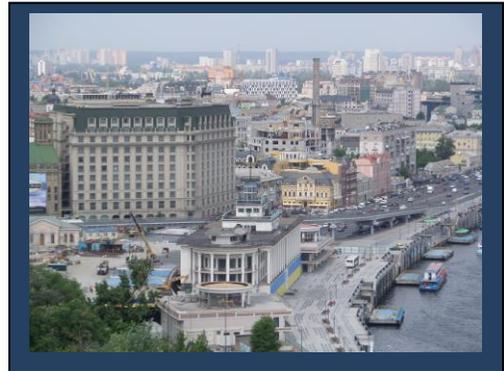
The class leader should ask various students to share with the class what they wrote on one of the "Seven Summarizing Statements."

Students should turn in the writing assignment from the previous lesson.

Whenever the symbol  occurs, the class leader should let students try to answer the question.

The Church in Society

Jeremiah wrote to Jews in captivity telling them what their relationship should be with the pagan society they were in. These Jews were there against their will; the religion of the society was pagan; the government was oppressive and had destroyed their nation; and, they were waiting for the day when they could leave. Maybe they thought they should not get involved in the problems of that society.



 *How should the church be involved in society?*

Listen to the message God gave the prophet for these people:

“Seek the peace [*shalom*] of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its peace you will find your peace” (Jeremiah 29:7).

Shalom, the word usually translated peace, refers not only to peace itself, but the blessings that accompany peace. It refers to the blessings of God. These worshippers of God in a pagan country would find God’s blessings as they tried to bring those blessings to the people of a heathen society!

The problems of the world come from the root problem of sin. Individuals and organized powers do not respect God’s Word. The church is uniquely qualified to speak to the world’s problems because the church can explain the Word of God and demonstrate the wisdom of God. The church should not only speak against the sins of society, but should explain and demonstrate what society should be like.

“The Christian church is the community through whom the Holy Spirit administers redemption and distributes gifts, the means in and by which God makes his reconciling work in Christ present to humanity. The church is called from the world to celebrate God’s own coming, and called to return to the world to proclaim the kingdom of God that is centered upon God’s own coming and expected return” (Thomas Oden, *Life in the Spirit*).

The Church and the Neighborhood

? *What are the signs of success for a church?*

With a worldly concept of success, a person might think a church is successful if it has a large attendance, a large budget, and a great building. As Christians, we know that those things do not really mean success in God’s eyes, but we still are impressed too much by those things. We usually think a pastor is successful if he has such a church.

A more important measurement would be the number of real conversions that happen because of the ministry of the church. The spiritual growth of the believers is also very important, but difficult to measure.

A very important demonstration of the church's success is the change it makes in its neighborhood.

Consider this statement.

"The success of a local church should be directly tied to the degree that it holistically transforms its immediate neighborhood. Any other success factor is secondary."¹⁰

? *What do you think of the preceding statement?*

The gospel makes an impact far beyond those who are converted. Every person who is converted and begins to live by Christian principles influences many others. Jesus said that his followers are the salt and light of the earth.

Christian principles are the foundations of freedom and justice, and are the basis of reforming society. If a church is influencing people to follow Christian principles, the society will be influenced to establish freedom and justice.

This applies to a local area. If people in the neighborhood are being saved, there should be changes in the neighborhood.

? *What changes would happen in your neighborhood if many of the people were influenced to follow Christian principles?*

What would it mean for the neighborhood to be influenced by the ministry of the church? There would be a reduction in crime, child abuse and neglect, immoral behavior, violence, racial discrimination, illegal businesses, exploitive businesses, and vandalism. Renters would be more faithful. More landlords would provide safe houses. More people would be able to own their homes. Businessmen would be more willing to develop employees. Employees would have better character for work.

The spiritual impact of the church is the first priority, but if the spiritual impact is real, it will be demonstrated in visible changes in the neighborhood.

¹⁰ John Perkins, quoted by Daniel Hill in "Church in Emerging Culture," in *A Heart for the Community*, 203.

Ministry to the Poor

? What did Jesus say is the second greatest commandment?

A student should read Matthew 22:37-39 for the class.

In the Gospel of Luke is recorded a time when someone asked Jesus how to have eternal life. Jesus asked him, "What does the law say?" Answering, the man combined the two greatest commandments. He said you should love God with all that you are and love your neighbor as yourself (Luke 10:27). Jesus said his answer was right, and said, "Do that, and you will live." A person who has that love has eternal life.

The man then asked the question, "Who is my neighbor?" He did not think that he had to love everyone. He wanted to find a narrow category of people that he was supposed to love, so he could feel that he was fulfilling the requirement.

Jesus answered that question with a story. The neighbor in the story was a stranger with a need.

? What story did Jesus tell as an example of loving your neighbor?

A student should read Luke 10:30-37 for the class.

Jesus told the story of the Samaritan as an example of what it means to love your neighbor as yourself. It is the example of someone responding to an urgent practical need. Our neighbor is any person we meet. Love motivates us to respond to needs.

Jesus stated his mission in Luke 4:18-19:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord."

This statement could be used to answer the question, "Why did Jesus come?": because Jesus said it is what he was anointed to do. It was the purpose predicted of him in the Old Testament.

Jesus' mission gives direction to the church, which is the "body of Christ" in the world. The first thing he said he was to do was preach the good news to the poor. The church is not fulfilling its mission if it neglects or excludes the poor.

Jesus' description of his ministry shows that he expected to change earthly conditions also.

A student should read Micah 6:6-8 for the class.

 *What question was the prophet asking?*

The prophet Micah considered the question of what God really wants from his worshippers. He wondered whether herds of cattle would be enough of a sacrifice, or even child sacrifice. He then explained that it's not a matter of finding a sacrifice that is great enough to be worthy of God. God has revealed his requirements.

We are responsible to do justice and try to help others receive justice.

Mercy does not refer only to the kind use of authority. "Mercy" refers to relief of needs. Jesus said that the Samaritan was an example of the love God commands because he "showed mercy."

Sometimes churches think they should focus only on spiritual needs. They think they are not responsible for issues of poverty. Churches should be models of love on the pattern of the Good Samaritan.

The Bible mentions the poor about 400 times. That shows that the problems of the poor are a concern to God.

Jesus said that the poor are blessed with the kingdom of heaven (Luke 6:20). The Apostle James said that God has chosen to make the poor rich in faith (James 2:5). God has chosen to show his power by using the poor and weak of the world (1 Corinthians 1:27-29). The church has many reasons for making special effort to evangelize the poor. One reason is that the gospel spreads more rapidly among the poor.

The city of Sodom is remembered for the sin of sexual perversion; but the wickedness of the city, as God described it, was not that alone.

A student should read Ezekiel 16:49-50 for the class.

? *What sin of Sodom do these verses mention?*

The people of Sodom used their prosperity to provide leisure for themselves and did not find a way to empower the poor (“strengthen the hand”) to change their situation.

The Parish Concept

When a church has responsibility for a certain neighborhood, that area is called the church’s parish. Historically, very large church organizations have expected each of their local churches to serve a specific geographical area. This is a custom of the Roman Catholic Church in many parts of the world, the Lutheran Church in Germany, and the Church of England in Great Britain. Most Protestant denominations do not have parishes in the same sense.

Let’s imagine what it would be like for a church to consider itself the church for its community. Everyone in the parish would know who the pastor was and that he was available to pray, encourage, and counsel, whether they attended his church or not. When he visited among the community, his primary goal would not be persuading them to attend church. Instead, he would be taking the ministry of the church to them.

The church would provide ministries that respond to the needs of the neighborhood, such as family counseling, youth mentoring, and character-based job training. These are not unrelated to the purpose of the church. They are areas where biblical answers are crucial, and the church should be sharing the wisdom of God’s Word in practical areas. It is easy to point out things that are wrong in society, but the church must describe what society should be.

? *What are needs in your neighborhood that could be changed by God’s Word?*

Old Testament prophets saw the land and people as belonging to God, and called everyone to keep God’s covenant. They preached about the blessings that came on the community when it followed God’s plan and about the curses that came from disobedience.

The pastor should view his community as his parish under God. God is the Landlord and Ruler who offers to bless people if they will live by his plan. The pastor should continually call the people of the community to live under God's direction. He should explain what it means to live with the blessings of God and encourage them to come into relationship with God.

The parish concept doesn't mean that everyone in the neighborhood is a member of the church. The church is those who are committed to living in relationship with God, but the community is influenced by the church.

The parish concept doesn't mean that the neighborhood controls the church and sets its values. The church is commissioned by God, follows his Word, and advocates the kingship of God to the neighborhood.

Because the church is called to be salt and light, the church is called to make a difference in its neighborhood.

"As Jesus' body, the church is the group in fellowship which exists to do his will and to represent the interests of His kingdom" (Larry Smith, in *I Believe: Fundamentals of the Christian Faith*).

Gospel Priority

Many ministries offer programs that respond to the material needs of people in the neighborhood. They serve the needs of the community, as far as their resources allow. They think that helping people in practical ways will make friends and get attention for the gospel. Their goal is to create opportunities to share the gospel. They want to show that they care.

Their formula is: Program, then Relationship, then Gospel. There are many ways for programs of help to go wrong. Help may not create any relationship except the giver/recipient relationship.

Sometimes the gospel seems separate from the things being given, and people can get help without being interested in the gospel. The people working in the program may become busy at providing the help and not share the gospel. Recipients take as much as they can for as long as they can, then go to look for help from others.



The formula should be turned around. The church should emphasize the gospel as its first contact with everyone.

? *What is the gospel?*

When a church presents the gospel to the world, they must be faithful to include a description of a new life in the church. Salvation is not a personal decision that leaves a person alone in a strange, new life. Sinners will not usually accept the gospel unless they are attracted to the community of faith that presents the gospel.

In the ministry of Jesus and the apostles, we see that the gospel is the “good news” of the kingdom of God. It is the message that the sinner can be forgiven and come into relationship with God. He is delivered from the power of sin and made into a new creature. He enters the family of faith, where his spiritual brothers and sisters encourage him and help him with his needs.

The church should see its primary mission to be communicating the gospel. The church should work at that constantly. Everyone should know that working for the salvation of souls is what the church is about. Then, the church attracts the right people. It attracts people who are interested in the gospel. These people come into relationship with the church, so the ministry of the gospel created a relationship.

Then the church helps people that are in relationship with the church. Maybe not all of those people are saved yet, but they are in relationship and are attracted by the gospel ministry of the church.

So the reversed formula is Gospel, then Relationship, then Help (not a program). The church should not be just an organization offering programs for help. Instead, the church is a group of people that help the people who are in relationship with them. If they start programs, people will come for the programs without the relationship.

Seven Summary Statements

- (1) An effective church causes changes in its neighborhood.
- (2) We must show our love for neighbors by responding to needs.
- (3) The church must minister to the poor to fulfill its mission.
- (4) The church should minister to the people in its geographical area.
- (5) The church should describe and demonstrate what society should be.
- (6) Gospel ministry is the first priority of the church.
- (7) The church should help people in the context of relationship with them.

Before the next class session, the student should write a paragraph about each of the "Seven Summary Statements" (a total of seven paragraphs). The paragraph should explain what the point means and why it is important. The student should write it the way he would explain it to someone who is not in the class. The writing should be turned in to the class leader.

Interview Assignment: Talk to several people who do not attend church. Ask them to describe the influence of the church in the neighborhood. Write a summary.

Reminder: the student should plan to teach something from the course to people not in the class, three different times.

This SGC course is licensed to Engelbrecht Riaan with email avishuaministries@gmail.com.

Lesson 8

Local Church Support

Students should give the class leader the paragraphs they wrote for the "Seven Summarizing Statements" in the previous lesson.

The class leader should ask various students to share with the class what they wrote on one of the "Seven Summarizing Statements."

Ask for the reports from the interview assignment from the previous lesson. Students could discuss what they learned from the interviews.

Whenever the symbol  occurs, the class leader should let students try to answer the question.

Jesus' Directions

A student should read Luke 10:1-9 for the group.

The disciples were sent to be the first ones to preach the gospel in many villages.

 *What is unusual about the instructions Jesus gave the disciples when he sent them out to do ministry?*

Jesus had all power and resources and could have given them anything. He could have given them enough money to buy everything they needed and to meet the needs of other people. He could have given them the power to multiply bread and fish for themselves and the people they preached to. They could have provided food in every village they visited.

Instead, he sent them with no money. He told them to depend on help from the people of the villages. The disciples went as Jesus directed, and their needs were provided.¹¹

¹¹ Luke 22:35.

? *Why did Jesus send them this way?*

Their ministry attracted the right people. Because they preached the gospel first, they attracted people who were interested in the gospel. Because they had needs, they attracted people who wanted to help. They had the best people for the beginning of a church.

What if they had gone into the villages with everything they needed and with things to give to the people? They would have attracted the wrong people. They would have gathered a group of people who came to get something. After that, the ministry could continue only by continuing to give things away. The ministry could not grow without having more things to give away. They would not have help unless they paid for it. They would not have the group of people that would make a good beginning for a church.

The method Jesus gave them started a group that could become a church. It was a group of people excited about the message of the gospel and desiring to help. It is important that churches begin the right way.

Reasons the ministry of a local church should be financially supported by the local congregation.

? *Why should a church be locally supported? Before looking at the list below, what reasons can you think of?*

Reason 1: Jesus showed us that ministry in a place should start the right way. He sent the disciples out with no money so that their ministry would attract a group of people who were interested in the gospel and wanted to help.

Reason 2: God gave directions for the New Testament churches to give. They were supposed to send support for the first church in Jerusalem (1 Corinthians 16:1-3; 2 Corinthians 8:1-7, 9:1-6). They were supposed to take care of widows and other needy people in the church (1 Timothy 5:16; James 1:27, 2:15-16). They were to support people in full-time ministry (Galatians 6:6).

Reason 3: God equips each church to be the body of Christ in its place (1 Corinthians 12:27). That means that a mature church can make decisions and develop vision for its own ministry. That does not happen as long as it is dependent on outside leaders for support and direction. Local financial support is necessary for church maturity.



Reason 4: God blesses the finances of people that tithe. A curse is on the finances of people who do not tithe (Malachi 3:8-10).

Reason 5: Dependence on outside support makes the local church vulnerable. National and international economies are uncertain. If distant donors stop giving, the churches that depend on them will suffer.

Reason 6: Pastors should be supported by the people they serve (Galatians 6:6). The local congregation knows if the pastor is faithful. They know if he spends time in his ministry. He should not be supported long-term by people far away.

What problems come from dependence on distant support?

Mission Financial Policies Based on Local Church Centrality

An international mission or denomination should follow certain principles in the ways they help the churches. The organization should be careful to help in a way that makes the churches stronger, rather than making them more dependent. Here are some examples of policies a mission or denomination may develop.

(1) Emphasize tithe as the foundation of Christian finances. If a congregation is not tithing, God will not bless the finances of the church. If they are not already doing what they can, they already have the wrong understanding of ministry finances. Help from the outside may make things worse instead of better.

(2) Rather than giving routine support, do projects that give something permanent. The organization should spend money for projects that will help

the church be stronger financially, rather than providing salaries that make the church dependent on distant support. Where monthly salaries from the organization already exist, the organization should make transition to help the church become self-supporting.

(3) Do not start ministries that can never become locally supported. Organizations should not start things that will be dependent upon outside support for as long as they operate. The goal is to establish ministries or enterprises that can belong to a local church and be locally maintained. For example, a school should be the ministry of a local church.

Any ministry effort that is unlikely to ever be locally financed should be something short-term that accomplishes a purpose quickly without creating dependence (examples: conventions and seminars).

(4) Empower local church leadership rather than bypassing it. When outsiders or higher ranking leaders give help directly to the needy, those in the local ministry look ineffective. Rather than giving directly to the people of a church, the organization should equip the church leadership to meet needs.

☐ What examples of the wrong kind of mission help can you think of? What are some examples of the right kind of help?

Avoiding the Aid Industry

A church must not be sidetracked from its priorities by the “aid industry.”

There are people and organizations that want to give resources to relieve poverty but do not have direct contact with people in need. Therefore, “relief organizations” have developed. These are organizations that collect resources from donors to give to people in need. Sometimes the administrators of the aid earn salaries from the resources they manage. Sometimes there is deception, and both the donors and the needy are defrauded. Even when aid goes to the right people, one problem is that the aid industry tends to do the things that will please the donor rather than trying to understand the real needs of the people.

The aid industry usually bypasses the local church. It gives in a way that ignores the church’s relationship with the people receiving. Giving has better effects when it is done through the church, by leaders who know the

circumstances of the people, and in a way that exalts the importance of the church.

If an organization meets the basic needs of the poor (like food) without changing their situation, it makes the poor more dependent. If they have enough resources, they may create communities of dependent people. If they continue long enough, they raise new generations of dependent people.



A mission should not become part of the aid industry and forget its priorities. To do so ultimately harms both the church and the people with needs.

? *What examples have you seen of the aid industry and its effects?*

God's Plan for Pastoral Support

A student should read Deuteronomy 18:1-5 for the group.

? *What does this passage tell us about financial support for ministry?*

Financial support of people in full-time ministry was God's plan from the time that he instituted a form of worship in the Old Testament. The priests were to be supported for their work in the temple. They did not receive a share of the land, because they were not to be busy with farming.

Sometimes when Israel declined in their faithfulness to worship, the support for the priests also declined. It was a sign of Israel's unfaithfulness when the temple workers had to leave the temple and find other ways to support themselves (Nehemiah 13:10).

A student should read 1 Corinthians 9:1-14 for the group.

? *What does this passage tell us about financial support for ministry?*

Paul's main point is in verse 14. He said that God's plan is for preachers of the gospel to be supported by their ministry. He said in verse 13 that it was similar to the Old Testament system.

In this passage of Scripture, Paul used several illustrations. A farmer is supported by the crops he produces. A shepherd is supported by the production of the flock. A soldier does not make war at his own expense.

The apostle is saying that ministry deserves the pastor's complete focus. The best situation is for him to be able to leave other employment (verse 6). The apostle says that a ministry should also be able to support the pastor's wife, which implies children also (verse 5).

A student should read 1 Timothy 5:17-18 for the group.

? *What does this passage tell us about financial support for ministry?*

The apostle says that elders who lead well deserve double honor. The honor is financial support, which is shown by verse 18.

A student should read Galatians 6:6 for the group.

The person benefiting from the ministry should help to support the ministry.

The Usual Beginning of a Church

From the first century of the church until now, most churches have started as small groups meeting in homes. Church buildings did not exist for the first two hundred years, yet Christianity spread rapidly. In some large cities, thousands of people were in the church fellowship, yet they met in groups in homes.

“Let us not praise those tramps who wander around and unite with no church, because they nowhere find their ideals realized, something always lacking”
(Melancthon, *Loci*).

As Paul traveled and evangelized, his priority was to establish a church in every place. That method included appointing pastors (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). The pastor in each place was a person who already lived there and was part of the fellowship.

A pastor usually starts his ministry without financial support. He helps the missionary or begins preaching the gospel without a missionary because he has a desire in his heart to help. He begins to show gifts and abilities for the ministry. He does it not for pay, but because of spiritual zeal.

As a group of believers is formed, the responsibilities of the pastor increase and take more time. The group should see that they need to help support the pastor so he can give his time to ministry. The support may not be complete at first, but can grow gradually.

? *What would you say to a person who says he wants to be a pastor but is waiting for financial support?*

Exceptions

Paul explained that God's plan in general is for the pastor to be supported. However, his own ministry was an exception sometimes. In several places he worked to support himself (1 Thessalonians 2:9; 2 Thessalonians 3:8).

When a new church is beginning, it may not be able to support a pastor completely. When a missionary goes to a new area to preach the gospel, there may not be much support for him. Therefore, a preacher must be a person who preaches because he desires to follow the call of God. He will do ministry because it is in his heart, even if he is not paid.

If a pastor is not willing to work to support himself and preach without pay when necessary, he does not have the love for God that he should have. Some people will do for money what they will not do for God. We should be willing to do anything for God. If a pastor thinks he is too important to work to support himself, he should remember the example of Paul. There has never been a greater missionary than Paul, but he was willing to do whatever was necessary to accomplish the ministry.

Paul said that he preached the gospel because of the call of God. He preached because otherwise he would not please God. The preacher has a special responsibility, and will be judged by God if he does not obey (1 Corinthians 9:16-17).

? *What should be a pastor's motivation for his ministry?*

Financial Accountability

It is important to have financial accountability in the local church. The Apostle Paul set an example for us. When he was collecting money from one church

to take to another, he had witnesses and made sure that nothing was done secretly (2 Corinthians 8:20-21).

People of the world distrust people who manage money. They assume that many people steal from the money they manage. They believe that many pastors serve only for money. It is important for the local church to have a system for financial accountability that proves that their pastor can be trusted.

? *What are some practices that help a church show that the offerings are being used honestly?*

For financial accountability, offerings should be collected and counted by several people, not just one. Someone besides the pastor should keep a record of how the money is spent.

Some pastors teach that all the tithe belongs to them. The Bible does not teach that all tithe should go to the pastor. Tithe was used for several purposes (Deuteronomy 26:12).

The pastor should help administrate the use of the tithes and offerings to take care of the ministry of the church. The congregation will be willing to give more if they see faithful use of the offerings.

The Character of the Pastor and Deacons

We are told in Scripture that those who are in ministry must be good examples of character. In this course there is a separate section about the character of pastors and deacons, but in this section we mention character in relation to money.

The Apostle Peter said that the elder is a shepherd who should care for the flock, with desire to feed and guard them. His motive should not be money (1 Peter 5:1-2).

Demas was a man who helped the Apostle Paul, but left him because of loving the things of the world (2 Timothy 4:10). Imagine what a privilege Demas had to work with Paul in the first generation of the church, yet he left the ministry because of materialism. Some pastors love the things of the world more than they love God. Some of them leave the ministry, but others use the ministry as a way to get the things of the world.

A characteristic of the teachers of false doctrine is that they do it for money (Titus 1:11; 2 Peter 2:3).

A student should read 2 Corinthians 12:17-18 for the group.

What do we learn about Paul and Titus from this passage?

A student should read Philippians 2:19-22 for the group.

What do we learn about Timothy from this passage?

Paul set an example of serving because of love for God. Timothy and Titus followed his example (Philippians 2:19-22; 2 Corinthians 12:17-18).

Seven Summary Statements

(1) Ministry in a new place should emphasize the gospel and attract the right people.

(2) A mature church is not dependent on outside support or leadership.

(3) Organizations should help churches in a way that does not weaken the local support.

(4) Organizations that give aid often hinder the ministry of the church and cause dependency.

(5) A church should support their pastor so that he can give his time to ministry.

(6) The church should have a system of accountability that proves their honesty.

(7) The pastor should be motivated by his love for God and desire to serve.

Before the next class session, the student should write a paragraph about each of the "Seven Summary Statements" (a total of seven paragraphs). The paragraph should explain what the point means and why it is important. The student should write it the way he would explain it to someone who is not in the class. The writing should be turned in to the class leader.

Test: the student should be prepared to write from memory at least five of the six reasons for local church support and the four mission financial policies.

Reminder: the student should plan to teach something from the course to people not in the class, three different times.

Lesson 9

Tithe

Students should give the class leader the paragraphs they wrote for the "Seven Summarizing Statements" in the previous lesson.

The class leader should ask various students to share with the class what they wrote on one of the "Seven Summarizing Statements."

Test: each student should write from memory five of the six reasons for local church support and the four mission financial polices from the previous lesson.

Whenever the symbol  occurs, the class leader should let students try to answer the question.

Introduction

Tithe is a controversial subject in some places. Some people think that the idea of tithe is not consistent with salvation by grace. They think it sounds like paying for salvation. Some people do not want to feel responsible to support the church. They give whatever they feel like giving at any time.

 *What have you heard people say as reasons against giving tithe?*

In this lesson we will look at the biblical basis and the practical purpose of tithe.

The Lord of All

A Christian understands that God is the owner of everything in the universe.

God owns us as our Creator. He made us, gave us abilities, and created all of the resources we use. Everything was made by him, continues to exist by his power, and exists for his glory (Colossians 1:16-17).

God also owns us by redemption. He paid the price for our salvation. He redeemed us from the judgment we deserved because of sin. We owe him our lives because Jesus died for us (2 Corinthians 5:14-15).



God also owns us by deliverance. As sinners we were under the power of Satan and sin. Salvation removes us from the control of evil (Acts 26:18).

Because we belong to God, everything we have belongs to God.

Give an example of how you manage your possessions for God.

God's Specific Directions

Sometimes God demonstrates his ownership of everything by giving specific directions for a part of what we have. The requirements show that he has the right to give directions for any part or for all of what we have. When we obey God's directions for that part, we demonstrate that we are willing to obey him on everything.

For example, when God put Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, he restricted them from eating from a certain tree. They also had general responsibilities, but the specific command provided a demonstration of obedience.

God's specific requirements give us a chance to demonstrate obedience. If a person is not obeying God's specific directions about certain parts of his life, his disobedience shows that he is not obeying God's general directions for the rest.

A woman complained to a pastor that she didn't understand why God was not blessing her. The pastor asked her if she were obeying God. She said, "Yes, I'm trying to do what is right. I don't know anything I should do differently." The pastor reminded her that she had not been attending church. He said, "You may not know what God wants you to do on some days, but you know what he wants you to do on Sunday. If you are not doing what you know is right on that day, you probably are not obeying God on the other days."

There are several biblical examples of times when God gave specific directions about an aspect of someone's life. God was serious in his command, and gave rewards for obedience and penalties for disobedience. The rewards and penalties did not affect just the part of their life that was under the requirement. Their choice affected every part of their life.

Examples of Specific Directions

(1) The forbidden tree in the Garden of Eden

God told Adam and Eve not to eat from a certain tree. That was not his only commandment to them; they were supposed to take care of the garden, also. Until their disobedience, they were blessed and lived in God's presence. When they violated the restriction of the one tree, they lost access to Eden, broke their relationship with God, and brought a curse on all mankind (Genesis 3:17-19).

(2) The 7th day

God gave restrictions of the Sabbath day, making it a special benefit for man. It was designed for man's benefit. A person who did not obey God's directions for that day showed that he was not obeying on the other days. Disobedience brought a curse from God that affected every part of life (Isaiah 58:13).

(3) Jericho

Jericho was the first city destroyed by Israel when they entered the Promised Land. God told them that everything taken from Jericho was to be devoted to God. Other cities did not have this requirement, but God gave special

directions for that time. Disobedience caused defeat in battle, the death of 36 men, and the death of a family (Joshua 7:5).

(4) Saul and the Amalekites

God told King Saul of Israel to destroy the nation of Amalek and to kill all the people and animals. Saul kept some alive. He claimed that he had obeyed God, even though he did not obey the specific command. God rejected Saul from being king (1 Samuel 15:3, 9, 20-23).

(5) Land Sabbaths

The land was supposed to rest the seventh year. The people disobeyed God and did not keep the Sabbaths for the land. If a farmer did not obey God the seventh year, he probably was not obeying God during the other years. When the people disobeyed, God allowed them to lose their land completely. The land Sabbaths were fulfilled by 70 years of captivity (2 Chronicles 36:21).



(6) First Fruits

Israelites were supposed to give God the first fruits of their field. If they obeyed, God blessed the production of the fields (Proverbs 3:9-10). The blessing was not just for the part they gave, it was for their whole crop. If they did not keep the requirement, their land was not blessed. If a person does not give the part that God requires, he is not obeying God with the other parts either.

(7) Tithe

God commands the tenth to be given. If a person does not give it, he shows that his money is not submitted to God. He is not using the other ninety percent for God's glory either. God will bless the possessions of the one who tithes (Malachi 3:10). If a person will not give to support ministry, all of his possessions are cursed (Haggai 1:6).

A store owner left for a trip. Before leaving, he told his employee, "Take care of the store and be sure to sweep the floor." When he returned, the floor had not been swept. The employee said, "I took care of the store for you." The owner said, "Because you did not do the one specific thing I ordered, I know that in all of your work you pleased yourself instead of me."

? *How does a person show that he is obeying God?*

The Original Purposes of Tithe

? *What was tithe used for?*

The Old Testament priesthood was supported by tithes (Numbers 18:20-21). The Levites, the tribe of the priests, were not given a share of the land (Deuteronomy 18:1-4). They were supposed to be financially supported for their ministry in the temple.

Tithe was used to support the temple worship and those responsible for it. God's plan was for the Levites to focus on ministry and not have to be involved in business. One sign of the decline of worship was when the Levites were not receiving offerings and had to leave their ministries to go work in the fields (Nehemiah 13:10).

Tithe was also used for feasts for the worship community, to which the poor were invited (Deuteronomy 12:17-18, 14:22-29).

Tithe was used to help the poor, the widows, and foreign immigrants (Deuteronomy 26:12).

? *What differences do you see in the use of tithe today?*

After they knew they had given their tithe faithfully, they could pray for God's blessings (Deuteronomy 26:12-15).

To keep the tithe is robbing God. Tithing into "God's storehouse" will bring an uncontainable blessing (Malachi 3:8-10).

? *What would you say to a person who says he is too poor to tithe?*

Modern Relevance of Tithe

Some people say that tithing was a system only for the Old Testament.

? *Are there reasons to believe that the system of tithing was not a temporary Old Testament requirement?*

(1) Abraham gave tithe to Melchisedek long before the law of Moses was given for Israel. This shows that it was a general principle before Moses. Tithing did not start with the Old Testament law, it was a principle from the beginning (Genesis 14:20; Hebrews 7:4).

(2) Jacob promised to tithe to God (Genesis 28:20-22), even though the law of Moses was not given yet. Jacob knew that it was already a principle of giving to God.

(3) Jesus affirmed tithing and did not say it was only for a past time (Matthew 23:23).

(4) Paul told church members to give "on the first day of the week" as they had prospered (1 Corinthians 16:2). Therefore, they were to give in proportion to what they received. The Old Testament guideline of ten percent shows us what God considers a reasonable proportion to be. There is no reason to think that God's opinion has changed.

(5) God still plans for those who are in full-time ministry to be supported financially by their ministry. "Those who preach the gospel should live of the gospel." He did not plan for pastors to work and support themselves and not have time to devote to their ministry. 1 Corinthians 9:11-14 says

that the person giving spiritual benefits should receive financial benefits from

"Now sometimes we hear someone say with surprise, 'That person gives tithe!' How great a disgrace is this, I ask, that what among the Jews was no matter of astonishment or celebrity has now become among Christian a matter for surprise? If it were a dangerous thing to fail to give tithe then, surely it is much more dangerous now" (John Chrysostom, in sermons on Ephesians, written before A.D. 400).

those he serves. 2 Corinthians 12:13 shows that churches usually supported Paul financially while he ministered to them.

Church Policies

Tithing should be expected of those who are committed members of the church. The church should not teach about tithing to people who are not saved.

A person who comes to the church for the first time should never feel that he is obligated to give money to the church.

A church should not try to collect tithes from people who are visiting the church and have not yet committed to the church.

The church should make sure that people do not think that paying tithe is part of salvation. Nobody should think that tithe will help a person get saved.

The church should minister to the congregation and the community without requiring payment.

All members should know how the money of the church is used. The church should follow careful procedures of managing the money so that everyone knows that it is done honestly.

“Tithing ought to be paid, whatever your occupation”
(Augustine).

Tithe does not belong to the pastor alone.

Tithe is supposed to support the ministry of the church. However, supporting the pastor should be a priority of the church.

Seven Summary Statements

(1) God is the owner of us and all that we have.

(2) Tithe is commitment both to the church and to God.

- (3) A person who is not willing to tithe is not obeying God with his finances in general.
- (4) Tithe does not pay for salvation.
- (5) Tithe is God's plan for supporting the ministry of the church.
- (6) God blesses tithing and sacrificial giving.
- (7) Tithe is our commitment to depend on God's provision.

Before the next class session, the student should write a paragraph about each of the "Seven Summary Statements" (a total of seven paragraphs). The paragraph should explain what the point means and why it is important. The student should write it the way he would explain it to someone who is not in the class. The writing should be turned in to the class leader.

Interview Assignment: Ask several members of your church if they tithe, and why they do or don't. Write a summary.

Reminder: the student should plan to teach something from the course to people not in the class, three different times.

Lesson 10

Baptism

Students should give the class leader the paragraphs they wrote for the "Seven Summarizing Statements" in the previous lesson.

The class leader should ask various students to share with the class what they wrote on one of the "Seven Summarizing Statements."

Students should turn in their writing for the interview assignment from the previous lesson. The class could discuss their interviews.

Whenever the symbol  occurs, the class leader should let students try to answer the question.

Origin of the Custom of Baptism

A student should read Matthew 3:1-12 for the group.

In the New Testament, we are introduced to the concept of baptism by the ministry of John the Baptist.

However, John did not invent the custom of baptism. The Pharisees baptized Gentiles who converted completely to Judaism. The Pharisees did not baptize Jews, because they assumed that all Jews were already the people of God. John practiced the custom differently because he baptized Jews.

 *Whom did John reject from baptism? Why? What does that tell us about the requirement for baptism?*

Some of the Pharisees came to be baptized by John, but he rejected them because they had not repented.

The Pharisees thought they didn't need to repent and be forgiven because they were Jews. John wanted them to understand that the real people of God are those who love and serve him. People who claim to be the people of God because of being born as Jews are like fruit trees that do not produce fruit. God rejects them.

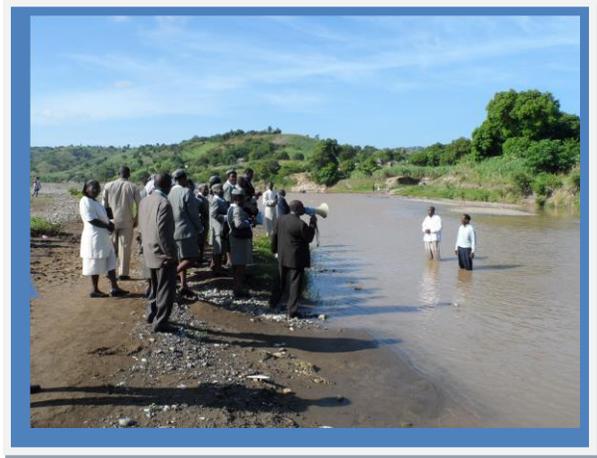
A student should read John 3:22-23 and 4:1-2 for the group.

Jesus apparently emphasized baptism in his ministry. Jesus did not do the baptisms himself, but gave that responsibility to his disciples. They baptized even more people than John.

A student should read Matthew 28:18-20 for the group.

At the end of Jesus' earthly ministry, he told the disciples to go everywhere in the world making disciples. He told them to baptize.

We know that this command was not just for the apostles, because the mission would take centuries to finish. Jesus gave the promise that he would be with them "until the end," which shows that the command and the promise are for the church in all generations.



We find from the New Testament epistles that the first century church obeyed this command literally (Acts 2:38, 8:38).

A student should read 1 Corinthians 1:12-17 for the group.

? *Why was Paul glad he had not personally baptized many people in Corinth?*

Baptism represented entrance into the church. The Corinthians had a problem with divisions. They were following various leaders. Paul reminds them that baptism does not mean that they become a certain person's follower; it means that they become a follower of Christ. He was glad he had not personally baptized many of them, so that nobody would think he wanted them to be his personal followers. He said that his priority was to preach the gospel.

? *What does the passage tell us about the normal practice of baptism in the early church?*

This passage tells us that the early church baptized believers everywhere. They were still following the command of Jesus. Baptism was not just for people in Israel. It was not a temporary custom. It was done everywhere that the gospel went.

Since the beginning, the church has practiced baptism as the public testimony that a sinner has repented and entered the fellowship of believers.

For most people, baptism is not the moment when they become Christians. A repenting sinner is saved the moment he puts his faith in Christ. After being saved, he should obey the command to be baptized as a demonstration of his new life of obedience to Jesus as Lord. There are some people who are exceptions, because it was at the time of baptism that they put their faith in Christ and experienced conversion. But, ordinarily, baptism is the testimony that salvation has already happened.

? *What would you say to a person who says that he became a Christian when he was baptized?*

“Christian baptism is a solemn sacrament signifying the acceptance of the benefits of the atonement of Jesus Christ, and it is a pledge with full purpose of obedience in holiness and righteousness” (Wiley & Culbertson, *Introduction to Christian Theology*).

An Error to Avoid: Thinking Baptism is Part of Conversion

Some people interpret certain verses of Scripture to mean that baptism is a part of salvation in the sense that a person is not really saved until he is baptized. One verse is Acts 22:16, where Ananias told Saul "rise and be baptized, washing away your sins." However, every Christian knows that our sins are washed away by the blood of Christ (1 John 1:7). The washing of the water can only represent a spiritual reality. Ananias was telling Saul that he should make the physical demonstration of the step of faith. Baptism was the testimony that his sins were washed away.

In Hebrews 10:22, we are told that believers should approach God "having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water." Maybe the water refers to baptism. That is not absolutely certain. However, even if it does refer to baptism, the verse does not say that baptism saves us. It simply says that we should do it, and we already know it is a command of God.

Jesus told Nicodemus that a person should be "born of water and of the Spirit" in John 3:5. This statement follows his statement that a person must be born again, which was confusing to Nicodemus. Nicodemus was thinking of physical birth. Jesus was saying that a person must be born not only physically, but spiritually, to enter the kingdom of heaven. To be "born of water" is the physical birth.

Baptism is not a work that a person does to qualify for salvation or earn salvation. Some people teach that because baptism is not a work that earns salvation, we should not practice it. They are concerned that people might put their faith in baptism instead depending on the grace provided in the atonement. However, any command of Christ should be obeyed, and we should not think that our obedience to any of God's commands earns our salvation.

Baptism can be called a means of receiving grace. That does not mean that it saves us, or that the action automatically gives grace. If a person did it without faith, it would not have value. It is a means of grace because it is an action that God designed for us; and when we do it in obedience and faith, the Spirit of God works in our hearts to establish us in the Christian life.

? Why should we be baptized?

Theological Symbolism

A student should read Romans 6:3-11 for the group.

? What does baptism symbolize, according to this passage of Scripture?

The Bible tells us that baptism symbolizes the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. When a believer is baptized he testifies that he is connecting with the atonement provided by Christ. The apostle even used the statement that we are “baptized into Christ Jesus.”

In salvation, we receive the benefits of Christ’s death; but, in a special sense, we also share in his death. Jesus died because of sin, not his own sin, but the sins of the world. Likewise, in salvation we die to sin, because we repent of it and leave it.

The subject of Romans 6 is victory over sin. It does not refer to forgiveness only. It is clear that the believer is supposed to be free from the control of sin (12-14) and not continue in sin (1).

In salvation we share in Jesus’ resurrection. Just as he rose from the dead, we begin a new life at the time when we die to sin. We begin a life of victory and freedom from sin.

“The grace we need is not in the water, but in the work of the Holy Spirit which its baptismal use represents; not in the bread and wine, but in the atonement which their sacramental use signifies” (John Miley, *Systematic Theology*).

The Issue of the Mode of Baptism

The question of mode is this: should a believer be baptized by immersion, pouring, or sprinkling?

The majority of Christians throughout the world who practice the baptism of believers practice baptism by immersion.

There are several reasons that many Christians believe that immersion is the right way to baptize.

(1) The word *baptize* comes from a Greek word that means to immerse or dip.

(2) Baptism symbolizes Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, which is best symbolized by immersion (Romans 6:3-5).

(3) In the Bible records of baptism, people went into the water to be baptized (Mark 1:10, Acts 8:38).

(4) The early church practiced immersion except when it was impossible because of bad health or a lack of water. The *Didache*, a summary of the apostles' teaching written at around A.D. 70, says that a believer can be baptized with poured water if not much water is available.

Because of these reasons, many Christians believe that immersion is the biblical and historical mode of baptism.

Some Christians believe that another mode of baptism is scriptural. The Old Testament described ceremonies of sprinkling that represented the atonement. The New Testament also refers to the sprinkling of blood. Because sprinkling of blood could symbolize the atonement, it is possible that baptism by sprinkling could also. (For biblical references to sprinkling see Exodus 24:8; Hebrews 9:19-20,10:22, 12:22-24; Numbers 8:6-7; Isaiah 52:15; Ezra 36:25; and 1 Peter 1:2.)

Because the Bible never makes a definite statement of what mode of baptism is required, we should be tolerant of Christians who have a different opinion on this issue.

The Issue of Delayed Baptism

Sometimes people who profess to be Christians want to delay their baptism. They say that they have believed the gospel and repented, but they do not want to be baptized yet. Sometimes they delay for years. Sometimes people wait until they are dying.

Usually, if a person is not willing to be baptized there is some commitment connected to baptism that he is not willing to make. Maybe he does not want

to be committed to the church. Maybe there is sin that he really has not stopped yet. Maybe he does not want to make a public testimony that he is a Christian.

A person is a Christian before being baptized if he is truly converted. He does not need baptism to make him a Christian. However, if he is not willing to completely repent of sin and testify for Christ, he is not a Christian yet.

? *What would you say to a person who says he is a Christian but does not want to get baptized?*

The Issue of Infant Baptism

The church is a community of faith living in a covenant with God. At the time when a sinner repents and enters the community of faith, baptism is the public testimony of his conversion.

But what about a baby who is born to Christian parents who are in the church? The child is part of the community of faith. A young child who is too young to experience conversion is accepted by God until he is mature enough to make a choice against God.

Some churches believe that a baby should be baptized as a sign that he is in the community of faith. If the child accepts the doctrines of the church when he gets older these churches have a ceremony called "confirmation." Some churches don't consider conversion necessary, because the child was born into the church and accepted what he was taught (Examples are the Roman Catholic Church, the Lutheran Church, and the Church of England). Other churches that practice infant baptism do believe that conversion is important. For example, the early Methodists led by John Wesley believed that conversion is necessary even for a person who was baptized as a baby.

Some believe that circumcision served a similar purpose in the Old Testament. A child was circumcised to symbolize that he was in the covenant. He did not have to wait until he was old enough to understand what the covenant meant.

The early church seems to have practiced infant baptism. Hippolytus wrote about apostolic tradition in A.D. 212 and said that children are to be baptized;

and, if they are too young to speak, their parents can speak for them. Origen wrote in A.D. 248 that the apostles practiced infant baptism. Augustine wrote in A.D. 400 that infant baptism had been practiced by the whole church since the time of the apostles and that he had never heard of any person who denied baptism of infants.

In the book of Acts, the apostles sometimes baptized whole families (11:14; 16:15, 33). We can assume that they baptized the children also.

Objections to Infant Baptism

(1) In the New Testament, believers were baptized after a testimony of faith. They were people who had repented and believed the gospel. There are no directions for baptizing babies.

(2) Infant baptism cannot fulfil the original purpose of testifying that the believer has died to sin and lives for God.

(3) The historical result of infant baptism in most places has been to create congregations of unconverted people who think they are Christians.

Instead of baptizing babies, some churches have a ceremony for babies called "Dedication." In that ceremony, the parents dedicate the child to God and promise to raise him with Christian training. In those churches, baptism does not occur until the child gets old enough to understand repentance and faith.

When preaching to people who have been baptized as babies, it is not necessary to discredit their baptism. Instead, preach that a person is not saved without repentance and saving faith. If a person is living in sin, his baptism is not a reason for thinking he is a Christian.

The Issue of Time

? *How long should the church wait to baptize a convert?*

In the New Testament, converts were baptized immediately. Baptism did not represent a level of maturity or knowledge.

Some churches require converts to go through a period of education and Christian growth before they can be baptized. They want to make sure the converts are good examples of Christians. They want to see them live a Christian life for some time first so that fewer of them will fall away after baptism.

Baptism is a testimony that the person is converted. It is not a statement of spiritual maturity or knowledge. Therefore, baptism should happen soon after conversion. To wait seems to imply that we don't know if a person is truly converted. It shows doubt in his testimony, which could cause him to become weak in his own faith.

Baptism is also a means of grace, because as a person obeys in faith and makes this public demonstration, God gives him establishing grace. If we make a convert wait to be baptized, we are keeping from him this help at the time when he needs it most.

If a person does not seem to understand the gospel and does not demonstrate a transformation by grace, he should not be baptized. If he does have those qualifications, he should be baptized soon as a means of strengthening his faith.

The Issue of the Name

? *What should a pastor say as he baptizes the convert?*

When Jesus gave the apostles the Great Commission, He told them to baptize "in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19).

To be baptized "in the name" of the Trinity meant to be baptized under their authority. Jesus used the term *name* similarly when he said he did not come in his own name (John 5:43).

Some churches believe that a pastor doing a baptism should say, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." Other churches believe that the proper way to baptize under the authority of all three Persons of the Trinity is to say, "I baptize you in Jesus' name."

In the ministry of the church recorded in the New Testament, we find several examples of directions for baptism, and the words are different from the words Jesus used when he gave the Great Commission. On the day of Pentecost, Peter told the converts, "Be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 2:38). Paul baptized the Ephesian believers in the name of Jesus (Acts 19:5). Peter told the believers at Cornelius' house to "be baptized in the name of the Lord" (Acts 10:48). Paul implied that the Corinthian believers were baptized in the name of Jesus (1 Corinthians 1:12-13).

In the book of Acts, baptism in Jesus' name distinguished it from the baptism of John (which is also mentioned in the book of Acts seven times) and the baptisms of other religions.

It seems that the way the church fulfilled Jesus' command was to emphasize the name of Jesus in baptism. It is likely that a pastor doing a baptism in the first century of the church said, "I baptize you in the name of Jesus." In the first years of the church, faith in Jesus was the main issue. If a person believed in Jesus, he was a Christian.

However, according to very early church history, the church did emphasize the Trinity at baptism. Within the first generation of the church, there were people who said they believed in Jesus, but did not really believe the right things about God. The *Didache*, a summary of the teachings of the apostles written at approximately A.D. 70, says that converts are to be immersed three times, with statements of belief in each member of the Trinity. Other writers, dating A.D. 248 or before, wrote that the normal practice of the church was to mention the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit at baptism (Hippolytus, Origen, Tertullian, and others).

The problem today is that some religious groups deny the Trinity. They say they believe in Jesus, but they do not believe that Jesus is a person distinct from the Father and the Holy Spirit. They baptize in the name of Jesus because they believe that Jesus is the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and that they are all one person. One example of a group that does this is the United Pentecostal Church.

Today most churches that believe in the Trinity baptize with the words, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit." This way they are affirming faith in Jesus and still affirming belief in the Trinity.

A Form for Baptism

The converts to be baptized should stand together to be shown to the people who are there to watch. As the crowd comes together, someone could lead them in singing for a few minutes.

Someone could read Matthew 28:18-20.

The pastor should speak to the crowd and say, "These to be baptized today have testified to repentance and faith in Christ. As baptism represents the death and resurrection of Jesus, these believers testify by baptism that they have died to sin and now live for God. They have begun a new life in obedience to God."

Then the pastor should lead the church in prayer for the converts. His prayer should include statements like these: "Lord, we thank you for your grace that brought these to salvation and spiritual life. We thank you that you deliver them from the power of sin. We pray for the power of the Holy Spirit to fill them and give them victory every day. Make them witnesses to their community and a blessing to the church."

The converts should individually go into the water to the pastor. Before baptizing each, he should say, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit."

After the baptism, the congregation could sing a hymn together. Someone could lead in another short prayer.

Seven Summary Statements

- (1) Jesus' disciples baptized during his ministry.
- (2) The early church baptized people everywhere that the gospel went.
- (3) Baptism symbolizes the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.
- (4) Baptism is a testimony of salvation and a new life in Christ.
- (5) A convert should be baptized soon after conversion.

(6) A person should not assume that he is a Christian because he was baptized.

(7) The church should affirm Trinitarian doctrine in baptism.

Before the next class session, the student should write a paragraph about each of the "Seven Summary Statements" (a total of seven paragraphs). The paragraph should explain what the point means and why it is important. The student should write it the way he would explain it to someone who is not in the class. The writing should be turned in to the class leader.

Interview Assignment: The student should talk to three different baptized believers and ask what their baptism meant to them. He should write a brief summary.

Reminder: the student should plan to teach something from the course to people not in the class, three different times.

Lesson 11

Communion

Students should give the class leader the paragraphs they wrote for the "Seven Summarizing Statements" in the previous lesson.

The class leader should ask various students to share with the class what they wrote on one of the "Seven Summarizing Statements."

Students should turn in the reports of their interviews from the last lesson.

Whenever the symbol  occurs, the class leader should let students try to answer the question.

Introduction

The class leader or selected students should briefly tell the story of Israel's deliverance from Egypt. Let various students contribute details. Exodus 11-12 tells about the first Passover.

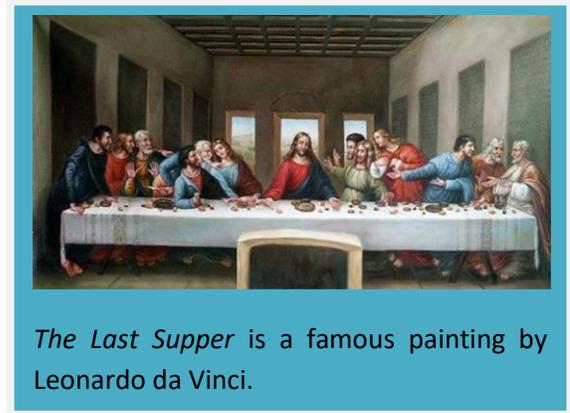
The Origin of the Practice of Communion

Passover was a Jewish feast that celebrated the night when the nation of Israel left Egypt. The celebration was not just about deliverance from Egypt; it was celebration of God's mercy to them when he killed Egyptians but passed over the houses of the Israelites (Exodus 12:27). Therefore, the event was a symbol of the mercy of God toward his people.

After the deliverance from Egypt, the Israelites had a Passover feast every year. God gave them ceremonies for that day which included special food and the ceremonial use of blood.

The event was a type of salvation. That does not mean that the people who were delivered that day were all forgiven of their sins and in right relationship with God. However, they were delivered from slavery, they received mercy from God, and blood was part of God's requirement. Those details make this event an illustration of the salvation provided by Christ. Most Israelites celebrated the Passover without realizing its full meaning.

At the last Passover that Jesus shared with his disciples, he explained the meaning of it. He instituted a ceremony for the church to practice when he said "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:15-20). Various churches call this ceremony "the Lord's supper," or "Communion," or the "Eucharist," or the "Mass."



Paul's statements show us that this custom is to be practiced regularly by the church until Jesus returns (1 Corinthians 11:24-26).

The church had other special times of feasting and fellowship that should not be confused with communion. For example, when the Bible says that the early believers were "breaking bread from house to house," we should remember that the term *breaking bread* simply referred to eating (Acts 2:46). They were fellowshiping every day by eating together in various homes. The church also had "love feasts" that were not the same as communion (Jude 12).

The Meaning of Communion

A student should read John 6:47-58 for the group.

Jesus shocked the crowds when he said that he was the bread from heaven, and that they needed to eat his flesh and drink his blood.

? *What did Jesus mean by those statements?*

In verse 51 Jesus said he was giving himself for the life of the world. He was talking about the sacrifice of himself to provide the atonement. He compared his sacrifice to food and drink. Just as a person needs food for physical life, he must accept the sacrifice of Christ for eternal life.

A student should read Luke 22:15-20 for the group.

At Jesus' last Passover meal with the disciples, he said that the bread was his body and the wine was his blood. He was speaking of the fact that he would give his life for their salvation.

Hebrews 10:1-10 tells us that the Old Testament sacrifices were symbols of the atonement that Jesus would provide.

"The body of Christ is given, taken, and eaten in the



The Bread and Wine

? *Why did Jesus use bread and wine for communion?*

There may be several reasons that Jesus used bread and wine for communion. Bread was the most basic food, as it has been in many parts of the world. Bread not only represents food in general, but also represents life because food is necessary for life. Wine was the most common drink at that time, other than water. Wine also represents celebration.

Some modern churches use wine for communion even if they do not drink wine at any other time. Other churches use grape juice because they do not want to encourage the drinking of anything alcoholic. Grape juice was called wine in the New Testament whether it was fresh or at any stage of fermentation.

Some churches have changed to completely different things to eat and drink for communion. We should be careful about ideas of using something different

for communion. The Mormons use bread and water, but they do not believe in the Christian doctrine of the atonement.

It is possible that in certain parts of the world other things are the basic food and drink, and bread and wine may not be common there. In that case, the church may prayerfully consider different options.

Not the Literal Body and Blood

The Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church believe that the bread and wine literally become the body and blood of Jesus. There are other churches that believe that his body and blood are somehow truly present in the bread and wine. Most Protestant churches believe that the bread and wine symbolize the body and blood of Christ without their physical presence.

When Jesus served the Passover to his disciples, he said, "This is my body . . . this is my blood." Jesus was still standing there, physically present with them. His body and blood had not yet been given in sacrifice. It seems clear that he meant that the bread and wine were symbolic of his body and blood, and not literally his body and blood. The bread and wine used in communion should be considered the same.

Salvation is through the one-time sacrifice of Jesus. His death does not occur repeatedly. Because communion is an act of worship and faith in the single event of Jesus' death, it is not necessary that the bread and wine be literally his body and blood.

Because the Roman Catholics believe that the church had control over giving out the literal body and blood of Christ, many of them believe the church controls who can be saved. They think that a person cannot be saved if the priest refuses him communion. Millions of people think that a person is saved by receiving communion.

The proper view of communion is that it is an act of worship symbolizing the death of Christ for us, during which God gives grace in response to the faith of the participant. It is for people who are saved, and their salvation does not depend on the availability of communion.

? *Why should we not think that Jesus meant that the bread and wine were literally his body and blood?*

? *Why is it not necessary for salvation that communion be literally the body and blood of Christ?*

A Means of Grace

Communion is often called a means of grace. God has designed it to be a means of grace when it is received with faith in the atonement of Christ. A Christian should obey God in following the scriptural commands. A Christian should not neglect this means of grace that God has provided.

“The means of grace are the divinely appointed channels through which the influences of the Holy Spirit are communicated to the souls of men” (Wiley & Culbertson, *Introduction to Christian Theology*).

If a person takes communion without faith in Christ, it does not automatically bring grace to him.

If a person takes it without reverence for its meaning, he brings condemnation upon himself (1 Corinthians 11:27-29).

Like baptism, communion is not essential to salvation the same way repentance and faith are essential. Communion is an act of obedience and expression of faith. A Christian would not cease to be a Christian if he did not have access to communion.

? *Is it necessary for a Christian to receive communion? Don't answer only "yes" or "no." Explain.*

The Proper Manner

The Apostle Paul corrected the Corinthians' wrong way of sharing communion. The directions he gave them are valuable for us.

A student should read 1 Corinthians 11:20-34 for the group.

? *What were the Corinthians doing wrong?*

They were bringing food and making a meal of the Lord's Supper. Each person ate his own food rather than sharing. They did not wait on each other and begin at the same time. Some people were eating too much, and others were still hungry. Some were drinking too much and getting drunk.

? *What specific directions did Paul give them?*

He told them to not make it a meal. The churches did have feasts and fellowship meals, but those were supposed to be at different times. He told them to wait for each other and start together.

Paul reviewed the manner that Jesus instituted the custom for the church. Jesus gave the bread, then the wine, explaining their meaning. It is important for the participant to take them reverently, remembering what communion means.

Paul said that a person should examine himself to make sure he does not take communion "unworthily." Some people interpret that to mean that a person should not take communion unless he is sure that his life pleases God in every detail. That is not what the verse is teaching. The apostle was talking about the manner of taking communion. A person is condemned if he takes it in an irreverent, careless manner.

It is good for the congregation to pray together during the communion. Different people could be arranged to lead in prayer at different parts of the service. The group could also sing together at any point. The service should be done in a quiet and orderly way. It is not a time for loud, spontaneous rejoicing. It is a time for meditating on the sacrifice of Jesus that was given for our salvation.

The Proper Recipients of Communion

? *Who should be allowed to receive communion?*

Jesus gave the practice to his disciples and told them to do it together, so we know it is for Christians. Communion should not be given to a person who is following another religion. A person who worships other gods is worshipping demons. He cannot also worship Christ (1 Corinthians 10:20-21).

If a person is living in open sin and has not repented, he should not be given communion. To take communion is to testify that we have identified with the death of Christ. A person who is willfully sinning does not have that testimony.

A person who is living in obvious sin such as fornication, idolatry, or drunkenness is not a Christian (1 Corinthians 6:9-10). The Bible tells us that we cannot fellowship with a person who commits these sins and still professes to be a Christian (1 Corinthians 5:11). Therefore, it would not be right to serve him communion.

If a member has sinned and has refused the correction of the church, he is to be considered unsaved (Matthew 18:17), and therefore should not be served communion.

Communion expresses the special unity that belongs to Christians. The term *communion* implies that meaning. The apostle said that in communion we demonstrate that we are one special body (1 Corinthians 10:16-17). Therefore, if a person is known to be a careless, unconcerned sinner, he cannot share in that unity.

A pastor is responsible to serve communion to Christians, but he is not responsible to investigate every detail of their lives. If a person professes to be a Christian and is not living in open sin, the pastor can accept his testimony.

Every person who is truly saved has received the atonement that the communion represents, whether or not he is a member of a particular local church. Therefore, local church membership should not be a requirement for communion.

A true convert qualifies for both communion and baptism. He should not have to wait until after baptism to receive communion, if he is willing to be baptized.

If a congregation is mixed with a variety of Christians and unsaved people, including people who are living in obvious sin, communion should not be served to the congregation in general. Communion could be scheduled at a different time for those who should receive it.

? *What are some reasons that an obvious sinner should not be served communion?*

The Frequency of Communion

? *How often should communion be served? Why?*

Some churches serve communion every week. Other churches serve it once every month. Some do it once per year. Some do it rarely, with no schedule.

The Bible does not tell us exactly how often to serve communion.

Some people before they were saved trusted in rituals for salvation. When they get saved and leave that form of religion, they may be uncomfortable with any religious ritual. They may think that communion should not be often.

Sometimes churches that have an informal style of worship do not understand the value of ritual.

Some people wrongly place their faith in the ritual. They want to have communion frequently because it helps them to feel that they are saved.

It is important for a pastor to occasionally take time to explain the meaning of communion. He should help his people understand how to use it as a blessing in their relationship with God without trusting in it the wrong way.

Proper Authority for Administration of Communion

? *Who has the right to serve communion?*

The Bible tells us that every believer is a priest (Revelation 1:6, 1 Peter 2:5, 9). That means that we can worship God directly and help others to worship him. No mediator on earth is necessary to bring us to God, because Jesus is our High Priest, and he has given us access (1 Timothy 2:5, Hebrews 4:14-16). By him we are to continually make sacrifices of praise (Hebrews 13:15).

Because every believer is a priest, we can reason that any believer could serve communion to other believers, especially in situations when a pastor is not available. However, there are reasons that communion should ordinarily be served under the direction of a pastor.

The Bible does not make a direct statement that communion should be served only by the pastor. However, Paul gave special directions for serving communion in an orderly and reverent way. The directions were for the group, and the leader was responsible to guide the group. The people of the church would naturally depend on the pastor to make sure communion was done properly, and the pastor should take that responsibility.

Look again at the warnings given in 1 Corinthians 11:27-34.

Paul said the directions were important because of reverence for the body and blood of Christ. If a person were careless, he would be guilty. Judgment of sickness and death had already come upon many of them. Paul said that if they would be careful to examine themselves, they would be spared the judgment of God. Paul said that he would have further directions for them later.

It is important to share communion properly, not only to avoid the harm that comes from misuse, but to gain the benefit that God has designed for us.

It is reasonable to think that the apostle expected the leaders of the church to make sure these directions were followed. The members of the church would want their pastors to help them share communion properly because of its importance.

The pastor also has special responsibility because communion should not be served to someone who is involved in another religion or in obvious sin.

Therefore, communion should be normally served by a pastor or someone under the pastor's direction. The pastor can ask others to help him in a

communion service. The pastor may also give approval for someone to serve communion to people where the pastor is not present.

A Form for Communion

Gathering: There should be a routine way of gathering the people who will share communion. If it is done in a public worship service, leaders must know how they will serve the right people.

Scripture: Before communion is served, Scripture should be read. A few statements could be said about the Scripture, but should be short. Examples of scripture passages that could be used include Matthew 26:26-30,; Mark 15:22-28,; Luke 22:14-20,; John 10:11-18,; John 19:1-6,; John 19:16-19,; John 20:26-29, 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, Hebrews 10:11-17, Hebrews 9:24-28, Hebrews 4:12-16, Revelation 1:12-18, Isaiah 53:1-5, or Isaiah 53:6-12.

Prayer: Someone should lead in prayer. The prayer should include statements like these: “Lord, we thank you for the salvation you provided by the sacrifice of Jesus. We thank you for the grace that you give us freely. As we share communion together we testify that we depend on you for spiritual life. We demonstrate the unity that we have as believers together. We pray for grace to live pleasing to you every day.”

Distribution of Bread: The bread may be distributed by the pastor or by people he appoints. He may say, “This bread represents the body of Christ, given for our salvation.” Everyone should be quiet and reverent throughout the communion time. In some churches, the pastor will ask the people to hold the bread until everyone has received it, then eat it together. In other churches, the custom is for each person to eat the bread when he receives it.

Prayer: The pastor or someone he chooses could lead a short prayer thanking God for his grace.

Distribution of Wine: The pastor may say, “This wine represents the blood of Jesus, given for our salvation.” Some churches distribute individual cups. Others pass one cup. At some churches, each person dips his piece of bread into the wine. The important thing is that it be done in an orderly, reverent manner.

Prayer: The pastor or someone he chooses could lead a prayer of worship.

Hymn: The group could sing a hymn together.

Seven Summary Statements

- (1) Communion comes from the Jewish celebration of Passover.
- (2) Passover illustrated the atonement provided by Christ.
- (3) The bread and wine are symbols of the body and blood of Jesus.
- (4) Communion does not automatically give salvation to the recipient.
- (5) Communion can give grace if a person receives it with faith in Christ's atonement.
- (6) Communion should not be served to obvious sinners or followers of another religion.
- (7) The pastor is responsible to make sure communion is practiced properly.

Before the next class session, the student should write a paragraph about each of the "Seven Summary Statements" (a total of seven paragraphs). The paragraph should explain what the point means and why it is important. The student should write it the way he would explain it to someone who is not in the class. The writing should be turned in to the class leader.

The student should interview three believers about what communion means to them and write a brief summary.

Reminder: the student should plan to teach something from the course to people not in the class, three different times.

Lesson 12

Church Discipline

Students should give the class leader the paragraphs they wrote for the "Seven Summarizing Statements" in the previous lesson.

The class leader should ask various students to share with the class what they wrote on one of the "Seven Summarizing Statements."

Students should turn in the reports of the interview assignment from the previous lesson.

*Whenever the symbol **?** occurs, the class leader should let students try to answer the question.*

A Definition of the Local Church

Before we talk about church discipline, let's repeat the definition of the local church that we had in an earlier lesson:

The local church is a group of believers that functions as a spiritual family and community of faith; offering the gospel and the fellowship of the church to all who repent; practicing baptism and communion; cooperating in worship, fellowship, evangelism, and discipleship; accomplishing the work of the body of Christ by the gifts of the Holy Spirit; submitted to the Word of God; with unity based on biblical doctrine, the experience of grace, and the life of the Spirit.

Now let's consider a definition of church discipline.

A Definition of Church Discipline

Church discipline is the church's united, purposeful response to the sin of a member with the fourfold purpose of protecting the unity of the church, standing for truth, protecting the congregation from wrong influence, and bringing the sinning member back to salvation and fellowship.

Further in this lesson, we will look at scriptural support for this definition.

? *Look at the definition of the church and the definition of church discipline. Considering what the church is, explain why church discipline is necessary.*

The Necessity of Church Discipline

What happens when a church member goes back into sin, but still participates in the church? What if a member does not really believe the foundational doctrines of the church and teaches wrong doctrines? What if a member has done wrong to someone else and will not admit it?

Certain churches were rebuked by Jesus because they failed to use church discipline. The church at Pergamos had teachers of false doctrine that should have been removed (Revelation 2:14-16). The church at Thyatira had a woman that Jesus called Jezebel, who led people to commit fornication and worship idols; therefore, the Lord rebuked the church (Revelation 2:20).

The Bible tells us that there can be no fellowship between light and darkness, between those who serve Christ and those who serve other gods (2 Corinthians 6:16-17).

Here we will look at for reasons that church discipline is necessary. Further in the lesson, we will look at scriptural support for these reasons, but we summarize them here to make them easier to learn.

Church discipline is necessary (1) because the church must have unity. The unity of the church is based on biblical doctrine and the life of the Spirit. The definition of the church shows how important it is for the members of the church to be in spiritual fellowship. That fellowship is based on their relationship with God and experience of grace. If a person has lost his spiritual

life, he cannot have Christian fellowship. If a member refuses to accept truth, repent of sin, or admit wrong, he no longer has unity with the church.

Church discipline is necessary (2) because the church must support truth. To allow a member to continue in sin is to fail to support truth. The church cannot stand for truth before the world if its members live in violation of truth.

Church discipline is necessary (3) to protect the people of the church from wrong influence. If a member of the church is in obvious sin yet continues to be respected as a Christian, other members will be tempted to do the same.

Church discipline is necessary (4) to restore the member who has sinned. If a member is living in sin and is not confronted, he is less likely to repent. If he is confronted he may be angry, but later he is more likely to repent.

Punishment is not a reason for church discipline. Punishment is not a responsibility of the church. Only God can punish for sin. The action of the church should be for the purpose of correction, not punishment.

“The government of the church of Christ is widely different from secular governments. It is founded in humility and brotherly love: it is derived from Christ, the great head of the church, and is ever conducted by his maxims and Spirit” (Adam Clarke, *Christian Theology*).

? *What would happen if a church failed to practice discipline of an openly sinning member?*

Directions from Jesus about Church Discipline

A student should read Matthew 18:15-20 for the group.

Jesus gave directions for dealing with conflicts between believers. If a believer thinks someone has done wrong to him, he should talk to that person individually. Most problems are resolved at this point. Most of the time there has been a misunderstanding; and if two believers are willing to be honest and humble, they solve the problem between them.

The relationship among believers is valuable. If a person believes someone else has wronged him, the relationship is damaged. He should go to the wrongdoer with humility and kindness and show that the relationship is important to him. He could say something like this: "Brother, I appreciate the blessing you are in the church. You are an important friend. But I am concerned because I feel that you did wrong to me. I am talking to you about it only because I want our relationship to be right." Explain the wrong, but be careful not to be harsh and accusing. Be ready to listen and understand. Be ready to forgive.

According to Jesus' directions, if someone really has done wrong and will not admit it, the other person should talk to him again with one or two respected believers. Again, emphasize to the wrongdoer that he is loved and that the relationship is important.

If the wrongdoer still refuses to admit wrong, he should be reported to the leaders of the church; and, they should talk to him. If he still refuses to listen, the church should agree together to consider him an unbeliever.



To consider a person an unbeliever does not mean to treat him rudely. It does mean that he is no longer a participating member of the church or leading any ministry of the church.

He cannot receive communion because he is to be considered a heathen (verse 17). The church lets him know that they do not consider him a believer and that they are praying for him to repent.

After these directions, Jesus gave a lesson on forgiveness (Matthew 18:21-35). If a person admits his wrong and repents of it, we must be ready to forgive.

? *How would you talk to a person who has wronged you when you try to restore the relationship?*

Directions from Paul about Church Discipline

A student should read 1 Corinthians 5 for the group.

? *What was the situation that Paul addressed in this chapter?*

The Apostle Paul gave directions for church discipline for a specific case in the Corinthian church. A member of the church was in an immoral relationship.

Paul told them that church discipline is not for people who are outside the church, but for members (11-12).

The church was supposed to take action in unity ("when you are gathered together"). They were to remove this person from their fellowship.

If a person is "called a brother" yet is committing sin like those listed in verse 11, the Christians are to refuse to fellowship with him at all. The purpose is to make sure the person realizes that he is not a Christian and for the world to know that this person is not still part of the church. This would include his removal from any position in the church. He cannot be served communion because that implies closer Christian fellowship than even eating a meal together.



Paul implied two goals of this action. One goal is that the church be kept pure (6-7). It is impossible for a church to be in unity if members are in sin.

A second goal is to bring the sinner back to salvation ("that the spirit may be saved"). If the church continues to accept him as a member while he continues to sin, he will think he is all right and is not likely to repent. He is more likely to repent if the church discipline happens.

The action is called "delivering him to Satan." There was another case where Paul delivered teachers of false doctrine to Satan (1 Timothy 1:20). The sinner needs to understand that he is not under the blessing and protection of God. As a sinner he is outside of the church and a servant of Satan. The life of sin will destroy him if he does not repent.

A student should read Titus 3:10-11 for the group.

If a person is teaching heretical doctrine, the church should try twice to correct him. After that, he should be rejected. The Bible tells us that this person has already violated his own conscience.

Heresies are not small variations of doctrine. A heresy is a false doctrine that contradicts the foundational doctrines of the gospel.

We should not be quick to accuse someone of heresy. A person may be wrong in some of his doctrines yet be a sincere follower of Christ.

Look at 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15. Explain the directions that are given in these verses.

The Discipline of a Pastor

Pastors often are criticized. Pastors are often in situations where they could be accused falsely. It is important for the pastor to build the trust of his people by always being a good example.

The Bible tells us that an accusation against a pastor should not be considered unless there are two or three witnesses (1 Timothy 5:19).

Leaders of a church association or denomination are responsible to keep pastors accountable and should be involved if a pastor is to be examined or removed. They can help to hold the church together at a time when the ministry of the church is questioned.

 *Why is the sin of a pastor serious?*

A Restoration Process

We should remember that one goal of church discipline is to restore the member to salvation and fellowship. The church does not need to make sure

the sinning member was sufficiently punished. When a member admits sin and repents of it, the church should have a procedure for restoration.

In the case of some sins, if the member immediately admits his wrong and corrects his behavior, he may be able to continue his participation in the church. More serious sins are listed in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, including sexual immorality, theft, and drunkenness. A member who commits one of these sins should be removed from membership participation and any leadership position.

The restoration process begins when the member repents of his sin. In the case of a more serious sin, he cannot be instantly restored to leadership or membership participation. Some time is necessary for full restoration.

The first step of restoration is confession. The member must admit his wrong to those who were harmed, those who participated in the wrong with him, and those in spiritual authority over him.

The second step is separation. Wrong relationships must be ended. Relationships that have a wrong influence should also be ended. Any things that are used only for sin should be discarded. Possibly things that have been misused for sin will also need to be discarded. The member should show that he is not trying to keep a bridge for the possibility of going into the sin again.

The third step is accountability. This is the one that takes time. The member should report regularly to his spiritual authority, which may be a pastor or board of deacons. He should be able to report victory over the temptation. He should show that he is being careful to protect himself from falling to temptation.

Accountability should be maintained with more frequent contact with a spiritual advisor approved by the spiritual authority. The advisor will talk with the member frequently, possibly even daily for a while. The advisor should be of the same gender as the person being advised.

The accountability period should last at least several months. In the case of a moral sin that involved others, and especially if the sin continued for some time, the accountability period must be much longer. During this period, the

member should not be allowed to lead or teach in any form. He should be allowed to take communion if his repentance appears to be real.

The reason for the time is not to imply that the member is not a Christian. If he has repented, he is forgiven and saved. The time period is so that he can recover from the effects of his sin, build strong spiritual disciplines, and demonstrate a consistent Christian life.

The Bible tells us that a person should not be a leader unless he has a good reputation with people outside the church (1 Timothy 3:7, 10). If a person is newly converted from a life of open sin, the world must see him live as a Christian for a while before he becomes a leader; otherwise, it seems that the church is appointing sinners to leadership. The same principle applies to a person who is being restored after a fall.

The fourth step is affirmation. This is full restoration. The member now has the confidence of the church and can participate fully as a member in whatever role the church gives him. More time may be necessary for high positions of leadership, especially for the role of pastor.

? Describe the accountability period. How does it work, and what is its purpose?

Church Membership Requirements

Most churches have a statement of doctrine that goes beyond the foundational doctrines of Christianity. These details of doctrine distinguish a church from other churches. Churches with distinctive doctrines are identified with names like Methodist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Baptist, or others. The differences between churches usually are not heresy, and a person should not be called a sinner because of those differences.

Agreement on details of doctrine is necessary for the members of a church to be able to worship together and cooperate in ministry. Therefore, the church may require its members to support its doctrinal statement. They must not say that a person must believe their doctrines in order to be a Christian, but in order to be in unity with that particular local church.

If a person does not believe the doctrines of a particular church, that church would be right to refuse him as a member. If a member teaches or argues for doctrines contrary to the doctrine of the church, he may be removed from membership.

If a member is removed because of doctrinal differences that are not essential to Christianity, this is not the same as church discipline because of heresy or obvious sin. The church should not say that the person is not a Christian just because he does not fulfil the requirements for membership.

If a church has membership requirements that include rules for dress, entertainment, or other behavior, a member may be removed for refusing to keep those requirements. This is not the same as church discipline for obvious sin. The church should not say that the person is not a Christian. Maybe the person is rejecting truth and is not a Christian, but he should not be considered an unbeliever only because he is unwilling to commit to the church's membership requirements.

“Holy Scripture contains all things necessary to salvation, so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man that it should be believed as an article of the Faith or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation”
(Articles of Religion of the Church of England).

? *What are some examples of membership requirements that are held by some churches and not others?*

Worship Leadership and Participation

The worship services of the congregation should usually be open to anyone. People should be invited to visit.

A church may not allow a person to enter who has disruptive behavior, such as a person who is intoxicated. A church may also not allow a person to enter who is dressed in an obviously disrespectful and indecent way. However, it is important that people not be excluded because of being poorly dressed or because they are not familiar with proper church behavior. It is a tragedy

when people feel that they cannot go to church because they do not have clothes that are good enough.

If a person is disruptive in his behavior in worship, the pastor or someone appointed by the pastor should talk to him. If he refuses to cooperate, he should not be allowed to be in the services.

Sometimes a church allows someone to play a musical instrument or lead singing even though his life is not a good example. Anyone who leads singing or plays a musical instrument at the front of the church represents the character of the church. If he is living in sin, people think that the church accepts him as a Christian, even though he is sinning.

? *What requirements should a church have for those who lead in worship?*

Errors to Avoid

There are three errors that people of the church must avoid in dealing with problems in the church.

(1) Inconsistency

Some sins seem more serious than others. The difference sometimes is because of cultural assumptions. A church may have the tendency to deal strictly with some sins but tolerate others. God calls the church to stand for scriptural truth and not just for the values of the culture.

There is also inconsistency in the way churches deal with the various people in the congregation. If a person is from an influential family, leaders may be much more careful in the way they treat him; but the Bible warns us to not favor people because of their status (James 2:1-9).

(2) Impatience

Sometimes people in the church think that a problem is not being solved quickly enough. They begin to talk about the problem to various people, even people outside of the church. They complain that leaders are not dealing with

the problem. This makes new problems for the church and hurts the church's influence.

(3) Lack of Love

Some people are happy to find faults in others. They are quick to believe reports of wrong doing. They judge others strictly, without trying to understand. They do not grieve for the sins of church members. They are glad to have bad news to tell. They are not sorry about the harm that is done to the testimony of the church.

Every pastor and teacher should speak against the sin of gossip. He should teach his people to hate gossip and refuse to listen to it.

If a person loves God, the church, and his brothers and sisters in Christ, he should see sin as a tragedy. He should hope that a report of sin is not true. If it is true, he should desire to see the sinner restored. He should help prevent harm to the church. He will not spread the news more than necessary.

Seven Summary Statements

(1) Church discipline has the fourfold purpose of protecting the unity of the church, standing for truth, protecting the congregation from wrong influence, and bringing the sinning member back to salvation and fellowship.

(2) A member who sins and does not repent must not be considered a believer by the church.

(3) The purpose of church discipline is not punishment, but correction and restoration.

(4) The church should not consider every person who disagrees with its distinctive doctrines and membership requirements to be a sinner.

(5) The steps of restoration are confession, separation, accountability, and affirmation.

(6) Restoration takes time because the member must recover from the effects of his sin, build strong spiritual disciplines, and demonstrate a consistent Christian life.

(7) The church must guard against inconsistency, impatience, and lack of love.

Before the next class session, the student should write a paragraph about each of the "Seven Summary Statements" (a total of seven paragraphs). The paragraph should explain what the point means and why it is important. The student should write it the way he would explain it to someone who is not in the class. The writing should be turned in to the class leader.

The scripture references below should be divided among the students. Each student should write a paragraph explaining what his verse tells us to do.

1 Timothy 5:13; Titus 2:3; Galatians 5:15, 26; Galatians 6:1; Colossians 3:8-9, 3:12-15; Philippians 4:8; and Ephesians 4:29-32

Reminder: the student should plan to teach something from the course to people not in the class, three different times.

Lesson 13

The Character of a Christian Leader

Students should give the class leader the paragraphs they wrote for the "Seven Summarizing Statements" in the previous lesson.

The class leader should ask various students to share with the class what they wrote on one of the "Seven Summarizing Statements."

Students should turn in their work from the verses assigned in the previous lesson.

Whenever the symbol  occurs, the class leader should let students try to answer the question.

The Challenge of Christian Leadership

The scripture we study in this lesson applies specifically to pastors and deacons, but others are also leaders in the church. Any person who teaches a class, leads a house church, or leads worship is also a leader. Those people are examples of the kind of person approved by the church. Therefore, it is important that they are good examples of Christian character.

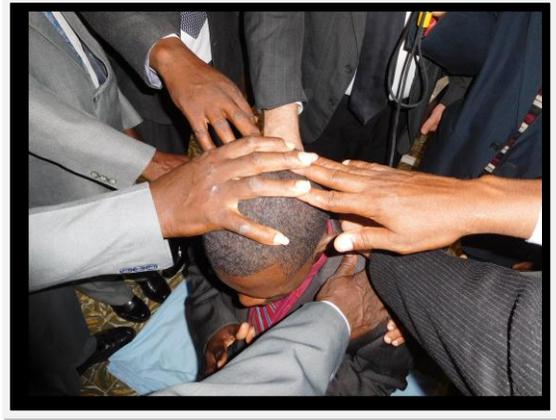
The personal character of a leader is more important than his natural abilities. God gives a Christian leader the abilities needed for his ministry.

A student should read 1 Timothy 3:1-7 for the group.

It is not wrong for a person to desire the position of pastor if he has the right motive. If he wants honor and authority or the opportunity to make financial profit, he does not have the heart of a pastor. He should desire the opportunity to serve.

We have two passages of Scripture about the qualifications of pastors and deacons. They were written by the Apostle Paul to Timothy and Titus. Timothy was over the churches of Ephesus; Titus was over the churches of Crete. They had the job of appointing pastors for each local congregation.

Imagine what it would be like for a man to become a pastor in the first generation of the church! He did not have academic training. There were no books about ministry for him to study. He did not have the opportunity to observe other pastors. He did not even have the opportunity to observe the life of the church for a long time because the church was new. Even most of the New Testament was not written yet.



Paul told Timothy how to gain the respect of his people. He told him to be an example in word, behavior, love, spirit, faith, and purity (1 Timothy 4:12). A pastor does not gain respect by demanding respect.

? *How does a pastor earn respect?*

The apostle told Timothy and Titus the qualifications for pastors. Most of the qualifications refer to Christian character and maturity rather than special ability. Therefore, every Christian should be encouraged to develop these qualities.

Qualifications of Pastors

(1) Blameless

The pastor is not to be guilty of wrongdoing. This is necessary for the church to be able to trust him and for the church to have a good testimony to the community. The pastor cannot lead others to do what is right if he is not doing right. The pastor must be a person who has shown a consistent Christian life over a period of time.

(2) Husband of One Wife

In many parts of the world, polygamy has been a normal custom. God's design is for a man to have one wife. This requirement was so that pastors would set the example.

(3) Vigilant

The pastor is the protector of his congregation. He should be on guard against false doctrines and wrong influences. He must teach his people so that they are secure in their doctrines. He must be ready to warn individuals of spiritual danger.

❓ *What happens if a pastor is not aware of the spiritual dangers that his people encounter?*

(4) Serious

The pastor must be serious about his ministry. He should not be an impulsive person who makes decisions too quickly. He must be able to think calmly about important issues. He must not allow his mind to be distracted from his ministry by personal concerns, entertainment, or temptations.

“The preaching of the Gospel, with the pastoral care which belongs to the office of the ministry, is the divinely instituted means for the conversion of sinners and the spiritual edification of believers. It is therefore most reasonable that God should select his own agents, and specially call them into his service” (John Miley, *Christian Theology*).

(5) Well-Behaved

The pastor should have orderly behavior. He should not behave in a way that is not appropriate. He should learn how to show respect and reverence with the customs of the place where he serves.

(6) Hospitable

The pastor must be a person who responds to the needs of others. He should be willing to share. He should be able to be friendly and helpful even to people he meets for the first time.

(7) Able to Teach

The pastor must be able to explain truth so that people can understand it. He must take responsibility to read and educate himself.

(8) Not Drunken

The pastor should not allow himself to be influenced by wine. He should never behave like a person affected by alcohol. This principle would apply to any other substance that would have a similar effect.

(9) Not Violent

The pastor should not be a person who tries to get his way by the threat of force. He should never act like a person who is ready to strike someone. A pastor should not be ready to hurt someone who offends him. See also 2 Timothy 2:24-25.

 *What are proper ways for a pastor to show the right kind of anger?*

(10) Not Greedy

People of the world change what they say for profit. People in certain occupations such as lawyers, salesmen, or politicians are tempted to change truth to please people. A pastor is also tempted, because the truth of God's Word does not please everyone. A pastor must be faithful to truth whether it benefits him financially or not.

A pastor must desire to see the ministry of the church supported financially, and not be a person who wants only to take. He must lead the church to function like a family caring for its members, rather than always thinking of what they should give him.

(11) Ruling His House Well

The pastor's leadership ability should be demonstrated at home. He should have his children under control. If he cannot direct his own home, he will not be able to direct the church. This does not include children who are adults and away from his authority because he is not still responsible for them.

(12) Not a New Convert

If a person is put into a position of authority too quickly, he will be tempted to pride. Pride is the same sin that caused the devil to fall. Promotion should come gradually along with experience.

? *What damage happens if a person is put into position quickly and does not do well?*

(13) Having a Good Reputation

Before a man is appointed to be a pastor, he must have a good reputation among people outside the church. They must know that he is honest and faithful in all that he does. If he had a bad reputation before he was converted, he needs time to establish a better reputation before he becomes a pastor.

A student should read Titus 1:5-11 for the group.

“Almighty God, our heavenly Father, who has given you a good will to do all these things, grant also unto you strength and power to perform the same; that, he accomplishing in you the good work which he has begun, you may be found perfect and irreprehensible at the latter day, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.” (“The Consecrating of Bishops,” *Book of Common Prayer*).

Most of the qualifications for a pastor listed in Titus are also listed in the passage from 1 Timothy.

? *What additional characteristics of a pastor are in the passage in Titus?*

The passage emphasizes the ability of a pastor to respond to false doctrine. The pastor must be well-trained in true doctrine and be able to explain persuasively. The purpose is to convert those who are in false doctrine, but even more importantly, to protect the families of the congregation from being led into error.

Qualifications of Deacons

A student should read Acts 6:1-6 for the group.

? *What problem is described in this passage?*

The first deacons were appointed soon after Pentecost. They were needed because of the numerous details of managing the church. The apostles needed to be able to focus on prayer and preaching. Seven men were appointed. Some of them had greater ministries later.

A deacon helps the pastor with the details of ministry. A deacon may be a preacher, but not necessarily.

? *What were the qualifications of the first deacons?*

The qualifications of the first deacons were that they have a reputation of honesty and be filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom. They would be managing money for the church, so a reputation for honesty was necessary. They would deal with many difficult situations, so wisdom was important. Their work would have spiritual effects in the church; so it was necessary that they be filled with the Holy Spirit, for his guidance, anointing, and purity.

The Apostle Paul listed some qualifications for deacons.

A student should read 1 Timothy 3:8-13 for the group.

(1) Respectable

The deacon must be a person who is respected in his relationships with family, friends, and community before he becomes a deacon.

(2) Sincere

The deacon must be a person who is reliable in all that he says. He will hear criticism about people in the church and will hear many opinions about problems in the church. He must be a person who is honest in what he says.

(3) Not Drunken

The deacon must not be a person who is affected by alcohol. His behavior must be respectable and consistent.

(4) Not Greedy

A deacon will be responsible to manage money for the church. He is also responsible to care for needs of people in the church. He must not be a person who tries to benefit himself from his ministry.

(5) Holding Good Doctrine with a Good Conscience

When a person falls into sin, he usually begins to believe wrong doctrine. If a person lives in spiritual victory, he will be more likely to hold true doctrine.

(6) Experienced

Before a person is given the position of deacon he should have the opportunity to help the ministry and show that he is wise and trustworthy. Wise leaders will give people opportunities to help before giving them positions of responsibility.

? What are some examples of ways a person can help the ministry of the church without being given a position of authority?

(7) With a Faithful Wife

The deacon's ministry is harmed if his wife gossips and is not a good example of a Christian.

(8) Ruling His House Well

Like the pastor, a deacon should be able to manage his home well.

The Priority of the Committed Group

The church is a group of believers who have made commitments to God and to one another, organizing for the purpose of fulfilling the mission of the local church. The work and the resources to make the ministry happen come from that group. Without that group, there is no church.

A stranger who walks into a place of business is important because he is a potential customer. Likewise, a visitor to the church is important because he is a potential member of the committed group. The most important person to

a business is the person who is a regular customer. The most important person in the church is the one who is committed to the church.

Therefore, staff positions in the church should serve the committed group. Every pastor and teacher should have the purpose of serving the members of the group and attracting more people to join the group. The group grows in number when people get saved and commit to the church, or when people who are already saved realize that they need to commit to the group. The staff of the church should study the needs of the group and provide discipleship, spiritual direction, ministry training, and forms for fellowship. They should guide the group to work together to meet all needs of those in the group.

As a family of faith, the church commits human resources and finds divine resources to meet needs of every kind for those in fellowship, demonstrating to the world God's wisdom in every aspect of life and inviting the unsaved to be converted and enter the family.

? *What would it look like for the leaders of the church to have the priority of developing the group of believers that are committed to one another?*

The Spiritual Priority of the Church

Though financial matters are necessary for the church (for pastoral support, congregational care, and other local ministries), the church should be focused primarily on the spiritual priorities of evangelism and discipleship. The pastor should be primarily a spiritual leader. That means that the pastor should not become excessively burdened with business management. The ideal is for members of the church to have employment or businesses from which they give tithe. For business conducted by the church, trusted deacons should carry much of the responsibility. The first deacons were appointed so that the apostles could be devoted to prayer and the ministry of the Word (Acts 6:2-4).

Traits of a Pastor Who Leads Well

The class should discuss the importance of each point, beginning with the question, "Why is this trait important?"

- (1) His loyalty is not divided among other organizations.
- (2) He is willing to build a ministry team and use the abilities of other people.
- (3) He leads his congregation to share life as a spiritual family, concerned about all needs.
- (4) He serves his church out of love for God and the people, rather than for personal profit.
- (5) Spiritual priorities like worship, evangelism, and spiritual growth are the focus of his ministry.
- (6) He has the trust and confidence of his people.
- (7) He is willing to build the church as a permanent institution that does not belong to him.
- (8) He leads the church to maturity, teaching tithing and fellowship that meets needs.
- (9) He is totally honest in all things, including the use of money.
- (10) He demonstrates ability to manage money and staff well.

Traits of a Ministry Project Leader

A person selected to lead a church-operated enterprise should have these qualities. The leaders of the church should constantly work to develop these qualities in members who can help with the responsibility of the church and be added to the leadership team.

The class should discuss the importance of each point, beginning with the question, "Why is this trait important?"

- (1) He is faithful to a local church in attendance, tithe, and participation and has a Christian testimony that is respected.
- (2) He is already investing his effort and passion into the local church.
- (3) He has the Christian qualities of complete honesty and a high sense of ethics.
- (4) He already shows initiative and motivation to do his best with what he has.
- (5) He is personally disciplined, self-motivated, and constantly improving.
- (6) He demonstrates ability to organize and lead others, not just ability to work when directed by someone else.
- (7) He has the competency that will be needed for his role in the project.

Seven Summary Statements

- (1) The personal character of a leader is more important than his natural abilities.
- (2) A person must show Christian qualities for a period of time before becoming a leader.
- (3) A person who has responsibility in the church is an example of the character of the church.
- (4) Financial management is necessary for the church for pastoral support, congregational care, and other local ministries.
- (5) The church should be focused primarily on the spiritual priorities of evangelism and discipleship.
- (6) Leaders in the church should focus on developing the group of people who are committed to the church.
- (7) The church must be established as a permanent institution that belongs to the congregation.

Before the next class session, the student should write a paragraph about each of the "Seven Summary Statements" (a total of seven paragraphs). The paragraph should explain what the point means and why it is important. The student should write it the way he would explain it to someone who is not in the class. The writing should be turned in to the class leader.

Each student should study Ezekiel 34:1-10 and write a few sentences that summarize the message of this passage. The writing should be given to the class leader.

Reminder: the student should plan to teach something from the course to people not in the class, three different times.

Lesson 14

Spiritual Gifts

Students should give the class leader the paragraphs they wrote for the "Seven Summarizing Statements" in the previous lesson.

The class leader should ask various students to share with the class what they wrote on one of the "Seven Summarizing Statements."

The class leader should ask for the students' writings on Ezekiel 34:1-10. He may select some of the good statements from the writings to share with the class.

Whenever the symbol  occurs, the class leader should let students try to answer the question.

Definition of Spiritual Gift

A spiritual gift is an ability given to a believer by the Holy Spirit for use in the ministry of the church. It is the work of the Spirit through the believer, yet the believer makes choices in how he uses his gift and may use it improperly. A spiritual gift is not the same as a natural ability, but gifts may accompany natural abilities and cannot easily be distinguished.

Listing Spiritual Gifts

Spiritual gifts and ministry roles are listed several places in the New Testament. The lists are similar but not identical. The Bible does not give us a list of all spiritual gifts.

A student should read Ephesians 4:7-12 for the group.

Verses 7-8 tell us that the grace of God is given to every person in the form of spiritual gifts. The apostle apparently is not talking about the grace of salvation, because in verse 11 he listed several ministry roles that God has given.

God calls people to special ministries and gives the spiritual gifts they need. Paul listed some ministries, rather than listing spiritual gifts like he did in 1 Corinthians.

The ministry roles listed are apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher. Obviously, this is not meant to be a complete list of all ministry roles.

Apostle. The apostles were specially chosen to extend the church after the earthly ministry of Jesus. They were known for miracles in their ministry (2 Corinthians 12:12). They all knew Jesus personally during his earthly ministry (1 Corinthians 9:1, Acts 1:21-22).

In the book of Revelation we read that the twelve foundations of the city represent the twelve apostles, which means that they were unique in the history of the church (Revelation 21:14). Other verses that imply that there are only twelve apostles are Matthew 10:2 and Acts 1:26. Jude 17 implies that apostles were in the past. There are not living apostles today.

Prophet. Some people assume that prophecy is prediction of future events, but the New Testament refers to preaching as prophecy. In the Old Testament, prophecy often included prediction, because that was one way that the prophet proved that his message was from God. In Old Testament times, much of the Bible had not been written.

A prophet is a person who receives a message from God, which might, or might not, include prediction. The authority of his message usually is the Bible.

Evangelist. The word *evangelist* comes from the word for *gospel*. An evangelist is a person who communicates the gospel, either to individuals or to congregations. Every Christian should share the gospel, but some are specially gifted for this work. A pastor should do evangelism as part of his ministry (2 Timothy 4:5).

Pastor. A pastor is not just a preacher, but a person who provides spiritual care for a specific group of people.

Teacher. In the church, a teacher is one who explains biblical and spiritual truth to others. Every pastor should be a teacher (1 Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:9), but others who are not pastors are also gifted to be teachers.

A student should read Romans 12:6-8 for the group.

Here the apostle says that a person should focus his efforts with the gift God has given him, rather than scattering his effort and time among many kinds of ministry.

Some special exhortations are given for certain ministry types. For example, the one who leads must be diligent, not leading only when he wants to, but making sure that responsibilities are fulfilled always. The one who gives should not do it in a way that gets attention for himself, but should give in a simple way. The person who "shows mercy," helping people with urgent needs, should do it cheerfully, not grudgingly.

A student should read 1 Corinthians 12:28 for the group.

Paul apparently did not intend to give a complete list of all gifts or ministry roles in this verse. For example, he did not mention pastors in this list, though he mentioned them in the list in Ephesians.

Apostles, prophets, and teachers have been discussed previously in this lesson.

Some people are called to ministries of miracles and healing. Every believer has the privilege of praying for miracles, and God will respond to faith; but some believers have a gift of discerning the will of God and exercising faith for miracles.

Some people have the gift of helps. They see needs more quickly than other people. They notice opportunities to help with individual needs or the work of the church. They have various practical abilities.

Some are given special abilities to lead and administrate. Many people think that the leaders are the most important people, but leadership would be worthless without the other gifts in the church.

The gift of languages is listed last. Maybe the apostle wanted to correct those who thought it was the most important gift.

Principles from Peter

The Apostle Peter stated briefly the most important principles about spiritual gifts.

A student should read 1 Peter 4:10-11 for the group.

We can see at least six important points about spiritual gifts in these verses.

- (1) Believers are entrusted with spiritual gifts given by God. Therefore, they are obligated to use them for God and not as personal owners. We are accountable to God for our use of spiritual gifts.
- (2) Gifts are to be used for others. They are not for personal promotion or profit.
- (3) The grace of God is diverse ("manifold"). There is a great variety of gifts.
- (4) A person's speaking should be consistent with the Bible.
- (5) A person should depend on power from God as he serves.
- (6) All ministry should have the goal of glorifying God.

Principles from Paul

The Corinthian church was blessed with many spiritual gifts. They had some misunderstandings, so the Apostle Paul gave them explanation about spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12-14.

The remainder of this lesson explains principles about spiritual gifts from 1 Corinthians 12-14.
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These chapters of Scripture teach us many principles about spiritual gifts. A few of the principles are written here for us to study.

A student should read 1 Corinthians 12:1-3 for the group.

(1) The Principle of the Doctrinal Test: Spiritual experiences should be evaluated by the truth that we know.

The Corinthian believers had been idol worshippers before. Idols do not speak, but spirits do. The followers of many heathen religions open themselves to the actions of spirits. They seem to think that any spiritual experience is good. Mindless trances or emotional frenzies are what they seek. They are glad to come under the control of a spirit, even if it makes them speak or act in ways that are crazy or obscene.

The apostle warned them that no person speaking by the Holy Spirit will say bad things about Jesus. If an evil spirit takes control of worship, it will cause people to dishonor God by the things they do and say. The Holy Spirit will not lead worship in a way that dishonors God.

We should not assume that spirit activity is a good thing just because it is supernatural. The test here is comparable to 1 John 4:1-3. If a spirit says something contrary to God's Word, it is not to be accepted.

? *What religions do you know that have worshippers that allow evil spirits to control them?*

A student should read 12:4-11 for the group.

(2) The Principle of the Diversity of Gifts: The Holy Spirit works in every believer, but in different ways.

These verses emphasize that one Holy Spirit works in many different ways. He chooses how to distribute spiritual gifts. Every believer has at least one spiritual gift. There is not one gift that everyone has.

“Yet not every one that speaks in the Spirit is a prophet, but only if he has the ways of the Lord. From his ways therefore shall the false prophet and the prophet be recognized”
(*Didache*, written in the first century of the church).

A member should use his gift to benefit the body. God did not give him a gift for his own benefit.

A student should read 12:12-26 for the group.

(3) The Principle of the Body: Each member is important, and each member needs the others.

The apostle compared the members of the church to members of a physical body. They have different abilities and purposes. No member of the body should think that he has to be like another member to be in the body. For example, the ear should not think that it should be an eye in order to be in the body. The point is that there is not a certain gift that a person must have to be in the body.

No member should think that because of his gifts he doesn't need the other members. The body cannot function well without all of the members.

Some gifts get more attention than others. People think certain gifts are signs of spiritual status. God decides how to give the gifts, and there is not inherent status because of a gift.

? *What would you say to someone who thinks that a person who preaches is always more spiritual than the person who cleans the church building?*

A student should read 12:27-31 for the group.

(4) The Principle of Ministry Roles: God gives each member what he needs to fulfil his particular ministry.

This section of Scripture summarizes chapter 12.

God calls people to fulfill various ministries. A ministry is not for a person to use for his own promotion, but to serve the church.

Tell the class that you are going to read the questions in 12:29-30, and as you read each question, they should answer. For example, when you read the question "Are all apostles?" the class should say "no."

Because ministries are different, gifts are different. Paul asked a series of

questions, each implying the answer "no." He is plainly saying that there is no gift that can be expected of every believer.

A student should read chapter 13 for the group.

(5) The Principle of Love: Love is the eternal priority, and spiritual gifts are not permanent.

The first three verses show that a lack of love cannot be compensated for by great natural talent, spiritual gifts, or personal sacrifice.

For personal examination, try putting your own name in place of love in verses 4-7 and consider how well it fits.

Verse 11 is not a call to maturity. The apostle compared our earthly life to childhood and compared life in heaven to adulthood. Someday we will not need the things we need now. Prophecy and gifts of knowledge are needed now because our understanding is incomplete. In eternity, those spiritual gifts will not be needed and will be put away like "childish things."

Even faith and hope will someday be unnecessary because everything will be fulfilled, but love will still be the supreme value.

Chapter 14 of 1 Corinthians emphasizes one principle especially: the principle of communication. Other truths are taught in the chapter also, but the apostle explained and illustrated this one many times.
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(6) The Principle of Communication: Ministry depends on communication of truth in an understandable way.

A student should read 14:1-5 for the group.

Preaching is more important than speaking in other languages.

To prophesy does not just mean to predict future events. Prophecy is preaching. In the Old Testament, prophecy often included prediction because that was one way that the prophet proved that his message was from God. In Old Testament times, much of the Bible had not been written.

Now a preacher can preach from the Bible and show that his message is from

God. There is still the supernatural aspect because God gives the preacher special understanding and applies truth to situations.

Speaking does not help unless people understand the language being spoken. If a man speaks in a language that others do not know, only God understands him.

Some people take the words "no man understands him" to mean that the speaker does not understand even himself, but that is not the natural meaning of the sentence. If a German testified in our church and we later said, "Nobody understood him," we would not mean that he also did not understand himself.

Unless the words are explained, the church is not edified.

? *What should a pastor do about a person who often speaks in the church in a language nobody understands and nobody translates?*

In verse 5, Paul said that it would be good if all of them had the gift of tongues; but see also 4:8 and 7:7. He said in 4:8 that it would be good if they reigned like kings, but he did not really expect them to because even the apostles were suffering. He said in 7:7 that it would be good if all of them were celibate like him; but he said that not all are called to that, and we know that marriage is God's design for most people. In 14:5, he simply affirms that it would be good for everyone to have the gift of tongues; he does not imply that everyone will. In 12:29-30, he clearly demonstrates that there is no certain gift that everyone should have.

A student should read 14:6-19 for the group.

Speech is worthless if it is not understood.

In verse 6, the apostle asked the question, "What good will it do?" Unless something is understood, it does no good. Even musical instruments must be played according to some pattern or tune or they have no meaning, only noise. Trumpets are used to signal to an army. If the trumpet makes noises that are not arranged signals, nobody will know whether to charge the enemy or to pack the tents. Communication is the emphasis of this whole chapter.

Words that are not understood just go “into the air” (9). This is saying strongly that such words are worthless.

He said that if people do not understand each other, they seem like uncivilized people to each other (11). If a person wants to keep speaking without being understood, he is not trying to build up the church but trying to accomplish some purpose of his own (12).

? *What reasons could a person have for speaking things that nobody understands?*

Paul said that if a person speaks in a language unknown to the other people, his own understanding does not bear fruit (14). Paul was not saying that the person could not understand himself, but that his own understanding would not do good for others.

He said the best way is to do ministry in the Spirit and with understanding at the same time (15). To be in the Spirit does not mean that a person cannot be understood.

He said that an uneducated person is most likely to not understand what is being said (16). This confirms that he is talking about real languages. He said we are not supposed to say “amen” to something we do not understand.

Paul said that he was glad he could speak in many languages. However, he said that five words that are understood are better than ten thousand that are not understood (18-19).

“It is a thing plainly repugnant to the Word of God and the custom of the primitive church to have public prayer in the church or to administer the sacraments in a tongue not understood by the people” (Articles of Religion of the Methodist Church).

A student should read 14:20-25 for the group.

Spirit-anointed words that are understood glorify God.

The purpose of the gift of tongues is communication of the gospel (see Mark 16:15-17).

Some people believe that the gift of tongues is a sign that the speaker has the Holy Spirit, but verse 22 says that the gift of tongues is not a sign to prove anything to believers. That means that the gift does not prove anything to the person who has it or to believers who see it. It is a sign to unbelievers only when it is used to communicate the gospel in an understandable way.

It is possible that a spiritual gift will continue to work for a person if he falls back into sin and breaks his relationship with God. Therefore, a spiritual gift does not prove that a person is doing right or even that he is saved.

If a visitor to the church hears them all speaking and not understanding, he will think they are crazy. But if an unbeliever hears truth that convicts his heart, he will realize that God is there.

A student should read 14:27-35 for the group.

(7) The Principle of Order: The church must keep order in worship.

The apostle asked the question, "Why does everyone think they need to do something in the service?" The Corinthian believers thought that a person was important if he spoke or led worship, so everyone wanted to do it.

He said that if a person is speaking in a language the others don't know, it should be translated. They should not take a lot of time during worship for things that have to be translated (27).

A person who speaks a language the others don't know should not speak if there is nobody to translate (28).

There should never be more than one person speaking at once (31). Apparently because everyone wanted to speak, several people were speaking at once. The worship was in chaos.

Some of them might have said that they could not be under rules because when the Spirit moved them they could not control themselves. Paul said that the prophet can control himself (32). He said that God will not cause chaos in the church (33). The Holy Spirit will not move a person to do something that is against the Bible's teaching.



? *What are some good procedures for keeping order in worship?*

Apparently, women in the Corinthian church were causing disorder. They may have been asking questions and arguing, because Paul said they should be under authority and should wait to ask their questions at home. Under better circumstances, women may be allowed to have ministries and participate in worship; but, they should be orderly.

A student should read 14:36-40 for the group.

? *What did Paul imply about their relationship to other churches?*

(8) The Principle of Apostolicity: Every church should submit to original doctrine of the apostles.

The Corinthian believers were blessed with spiritual gifts. Maybe they started thinking that they didn't need to listen to any other authority. Paul reminded them that the gospel came to them from others. They needed to be submitted to the doctrines of the whole church of God. If a person says that he knows better than the directions of the apostle, he is ignorant and should not be

considered wise or spiritual.

Paul told them not to forbid the use of various languages. The gift of tongues is important, especially in places where different languages are used; but, the gift must be used in the way that the Bible directs.

Church Competition with Spiritual Power

There are some churches that try to attract attention with demonstration of spiritual power. They believe that miracles and spiritual gifts identify the best church. They claim many miracles of healing. Some of the members claim to get frequent words of revelation from God. Their worship services focus on the demonstration of spiritual gifts more than on the Bible. They believe that every Christian should have the gift of tongues, and they want the gift to be demonstrated in their worship services. They encourage people to take initiative in worship services so much that their services can be chaotic. Their leaders try to become famous, bragging about their spiritual power and criticizing other churches.

Several problems exist in churches that compete with spiritual demonstration. Many of their members, and even worship leaders, live in open sin. They do not understand mature spirituality that is demonstrated by faith that endures the problems of life. Many of their leaders are young people who do not live in victory over sin and do not respect older, faithful believers. They have unscriptural practices of the gift of tongues. Most of their people have not actually experienced miracles, but are hoping to.

A church that is truly anointed with the Holy Spirit should demonstrate faith and spiritual gifts in scriptural practices. A church should lead their members to develop mature faith that endures hard times and provides victory over sin. Rather than demonstrating spiritual gifts like a performance, the church should use spiritual gifts to serve the needs of the family of faith.

? *What are some signs of a church that is trying to compete with other churches by demonstrating spiritual power?*

Seven Summary Statements

- (1) A spiritual gift is an ability given to a believer by the Holy Spirit for use in the ministry of the church.
- (2) Every believer receives spiritual gifts, but not every person can be expected to have one certain gift.
- (3) The various members of the church should function together as one body with every gift needed and important.
- (4) Spiritual gifts accompany ministry callings.
- (5) Spoken words have no value if they are not understood.
- (6) The believer must use his gift carefully to glorify God and edify the church.
- (7) Love for God and people is most important now and forever.

Before the next class session, the student should write a paragraph about each of the "Seven Summary Statements" (a total of seven paragraphs). The paragraph should explain what the point means and why it is important. The student should write it the way he would explain it to someone who is not in the class. The writing should be turned in to the class leader.

Test: the student should be prepared to write from memory at least seven of the eight principles from Paul about spiritual gifts.

Reminder: the student should plan to teach something from the course to people not in the class, three different times.

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Lesson 15

Questions for Church Maturity

Students should give the class leader the paragraphs they wrote for the "Seven Summarizing Statements" in the previous lesson.

The class leader should ask various students to share with the class what they wrote on one of the "Seven Summarizing Statements."

Test: each student should write from memory at least seven of the eight principles from Paul about spiritual gifts.

Introduction

This lesson gives characteristics of a mature church in the form of questions. A church should consider these questions to understand how they need to develop.

The group of students in this class may not all be from the same church and may not be the ones who can make decisions about changes in the church. They can use the questions for evaluating the maturity level of a church and setting goals for their own ministry.

For each question below, discuss the meaning of the question, using the explanations provided. Then, consider what a church could do to develop the characteristic it needs.

(1) Where are the small groups that give spiritual life to the church?

A healthy church usually has some kind of small groups where spiritual life is sustained. These groups may be house churches, Sunday school classes, or other kinds of groups. These may be organized, or they may be informal.

Spiritual revival usually starts in small groups. The spiritual life of the church is not sustained or revived only in worship services. Spiritual accountability and life change usually happen in small groups. The leaders of the church should make sure that small groups exist that are accomplishing these purposes. If the existing structures in the church are not enabling spiritual life, changes are needed.

(2) Who owns the church?

The church is not mature unless there is a group of committed members who take responsibility for the ministry and its financial support.

If the ministry is operated like a personal business for the pastor, the church will never mature. If the church building is rented, the church is not mature if an individual or outside organization pays the rent.

Ideally, the building and ministry should be owned by the group of church members. If the building is rented, the congregation should take responsibility together for paying the rent.

The local church ministry should be established to continue as an institution until the return of Christ.

(3) How is the local ministry financially supported?

The best financial situation for a church is to be supported by tithing members. If the church is supported by an outside organization it is not a mature church and is vulnerable. If it is supported by the pastor or by a few givers and not by the general congregation, the congregation has not developed into a mature family of faith.

Tithe is God's method for supporting the local church. The leaders of the church should teach tithing and gradually build local support for the ministry of the church. The church should not depend on outside support for its operations. Outside support should be used for projects that build the church's capacity.

(4) Does the church support a full-time pastor?

The biblical plan for a pastor is that he devote his time completely to his ministry. Sometimes that is not possible for a new church, but the church should have the goal of developing support that will allow the pastor to focus on ministry without being distracted by financial needs.

(5) What is the system for financial accountability?

Offerings should be collected and counted by more than one person. Several trusted people should be involved in setting the financial priorities and policies of the church. The members of the congregation should know how the financial system of the church works.

(6) What means are being used to get the gospel to people outside the church?

The first responsibility of the church is to take care of the committed members of the congregation. However, the church must always be reaching out to the people in the neighborhood. The church must have activities that make sure people outside the church are seeing the work of the church and hearing the gospel. Some of these activities may be happening spontaneously. Leaders will need to organize others, also. Members with abilities should be invited and trained for these activities.

“Among all the divinely instituted means for the accomplishment of the mission of Christianity the chief place is assigned to the preaching of the Gospel”
(John Miley, *Christian Theology*).

(7) How is the church responding to neighborhood needs?

The church should find ways to respond to needs in the neighborhood. The priority should always be to show the love of God and demonstrate biblical principles.

(8) Are there ethnic or economic categories of people that are excluded from the church's outreach?

Do poor people feel welcome to attend church in the clothes that they have? Are children of the community welcome to attend even if their parents do not? Is there an ethnic group of people who assume that the church is not for them?

(9) How are visitors greeted?

The church should train people to greet people who visit the church. The most important purpose of greeting visitors is to make the visitor feel welcome and comfortable. Several people should try to get acquainted with the visitor. He should not only be invited to attend another worship service. The visitor should be invited to attend a small group meeting or home meeting where he can learn and ask questions.

(10) What is the church's method to immediately disciple new converts?

When a person gets saved, either at the church or elsewhere, he should not be invited only to a worship service. He needs to be invited into a system of immediate discipleship. This may begin with personal visits with a pastor. He may be invited into a small group that meets weekly. The church needs to be prepared to minister to new converts.

(11) How does the church describe spiritual maturity?

What do spiritually mature people look like? The congregation should be taught the characteristics of spiritual maturity. These characteristics do not always accompany leadership ability or talents, but people with these characteristics should be respected as examples.

(12) What is the system for purposeful spiritual development?

An important task of the church is to help the spiritual development of its members (Ephesians 4:11-13). The leaders of the church cannot just hope that spiritual development is happening. They should not simply preach to the congregation and leave all spiritual development to individual initiative. Pastors should have a system for encouraging the people to use spiritual disciplines. They should provide accountability for all who accept it. This can be done through personal conversations, small groups, classes, and other ways.

(13) Is there a membership structure that provides people a way to commit to the church?

People who want to commit to the church need to know specifically what commitment means. Some churches claim to have no membership structure, but every church has some way of knowing who its people are. Everyone needs to know who the people are who form the church.

“Jesus founded the church by personally calling and gathering the apostolate around himself, training, disciplining, and commissioning them to the ministry of proclamation and sacrament, expressly stating his irreversible intention to upbuild an ongoing community that would be commissioned with power and authorized to baptize, preach, discipline, and celebrate the paschal meal with the risen Lord”
(Thomas Oden, *Life in the Spirit*).

(14) Are the membership requirements clear and known to everyone?

Everyone should know what commitments are necessary for membership. The requirements and a description of the process for becoming a member should be printed.

(15) Do the membership requirements allow a convert to get involved quickly?

A convert who is ready to commit to the church should be able to help the church immediately. That does not mean that he should be given a position or leadership responsibilities. It is important for him to know that he is part of the church.

(16) What is the group that is responsible for keeping the values and standards of the church?

There is a group of committed members within the congregation that determines the nature of the church. They may be a board of deacons or they may be a group of voting members that could be called the governing body. Leaders must give special attention to developing this group. Changes in that group will determine the future of the church. The pastor must be accountable to them and keep them informed. They and the leadership team must have the same priorities for the church.

(17) Does the church share commitment to a clear vision?

The pastor, leadership team, and group of committed members must spend much time discussing the purpose and goals of the church. They should develop a vision of the church that they can support. The congregation needs to be familiar with the church vision.

(18) Do the members know the doctrines of the church?

The church must do more than lead its people to worship and have spiritual experiences. When an outsider asks a member, "What does your church believe?" the member should have a good answer. Members should be able to explain the basic doctrines of Christianity and the special doctrines of their church.

(19) Do members understand the relationship between the church and its denomination?

The church should be fulfilling its commitment to its association. Fellowship in the association can help support the doctrine of the church. People of the church should be encouraged to participate in association events.

(20) How are worship services planned and evaluated?

Leaders should prayerfully plan the worship service. If the Holy Spirit leads the service in an unexpected direction, that is wonderful; but otherwise, the leaders should have a plan to follow. There should be meetings where several leaders work together on the details of the services.

If the church has good worship, the congregation is involved and interested. A church should try to use many different people in different parts of the service to help keep more people interested and committed.

(21) Are baptism and communion practiced scripturally and in a meaningful way?

Every genuine convert should be already baptized or in a schedule to be baptized soon. Communion should be served to those who have a testimony of grace. Communion should be practiced in a way that helps the participants worship.

(22) Does the church practice biblical church discipline?

The church should stand against sin. If a member of the church is guilty of sin, he must be confronted. The goal should be to bring him to repentance and restore him to spiritual victory.

(23) Is there a team that shares ministry responsibilities?

The ministry will not grow unless it builds a leadership team. Each person is limited in the number of people he can influence and the responsibilities he can carry. The ministry of the church should not be the ministry of one person.

(24) What is the system for selecting, training, and adding members to the ministry team?

The ministry cannot grow without developing new members for the leadership team. Members for the team should be selected very carefully, but the church must always be working to find and develop people who can take responsibility in the future. The growth of the ministry depends on development of more leaders.

(25) What is the system for responding to conflict and problems in the church?

Unresolved conflicts cripple the church. The congregation must be taught how to resolve personal conflicts with people. Leaders of the church must not ignore conflicts but be prepared to help bring reconciliation.

(26) Is the church supporting missions in a partnership with other churches?

If a church truly wants to advance the kingdom of God, it will not only work to expand its local influence. A church demonstrates that it is for God's glory when it gives for ministry that will not benefit itself.

“The same single body that struggles against the principalities and powers, and that expects even more severe difficulties in the future, is at the same time already victorious by virtue of its being presently united with its head in the heavenly city, anticipating that completed joy in the Lord wherein all the faithful shall praise God together at the end of days” (William Pope, *A Compendium of Christian Theology*).

(27) Is the church helping a new church get started?

A mature church should be helping a new church to start in a nearby area. The new church will reach people not being reached by the existing church.

(28) Does the ministry of the church serve all ages and categories of people in the congregation?

The needs of children, the elderly, young people, young families, men, unmarried people, and others should be important to the church. The church should also think of the needs of people from all levels of spiritual maturity.



(29) Do the people of the congregation work together to take care of the needs of members?

The church must care about the financial needs of people of the congregation. Most needs should be met by people helping each other without administration by the church leaders. If most of the members do not feel responsibility to help others, they have not formed a mature church yet.

(30) How does the church make sure the financial needs of people of the congregation are met?

The church should have deacons that make sure needs are noticed. The church in the book of Acts appointed the first deacons for this purpose.

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Doctrine and Practice of the Church

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