



**SCRIPTURE'S  
MISSION FOR THE  
CHURCH**

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## PREFACE

Several years ago, I began to get frustrated with the plethora of “how to” books being published on the church. As an educator, I felt obligated to stay abreast of the literature in my professional fields of pastoral studies, local church ministry and leadership development. Consequently, I read volume after volume about the church...how to plant and grow a healthy one; lead, change, or revitalize one; empower her to make disciples; etc., etc. There was no shortage on passion, creativity or opinions – just a shortage on Scripture.

In one of those contemplative moments, I sensed God’s conviction for not starting where I should have – The Bible. Ultimately, it doesn’t really matter what everyone else says or even what “is working” where or why. What does matter is what God has spoken and recorded as truth. Much of what is done today under guise of ministry violates or minimizes God’s principles. God’s gentle reminder sent me back to His Word, revisiting Scripture’s mission for the church. I re-read the New Testament with intensity to rediscover the truths about the church and those God has called to lead His bride.

The following pages represent the results of that comprehensive study. Any reader quickly notices the volume of printed passages under each point. If most readers are like me, they never take the time to look up the noted reference. I would much rather have you read God’s words than mine! I have simply taken the time to categorize His explanations and instructions.

My holy hunch is that you love the church as much as I do, otherwise you wouldn’t be interested in reading this e-book. I hope you find the study as insightful as I did. I welcome your feedback and evaluation because the only part that is inspired is quoted from The Bible.

- Dr. James R. Ayers

Note: All Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version.

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# REVISITING SCRIPTURE'S MISSION FOR THE CHURCH

## I. THE PROGRESS OF THE CHURCH

### A. WHEN THE CHURCH BEGAN

As with most births, a great deal of excitement accompanied the birth of the church on the Day of Pentecost. This birth captured the immediate attention of an unbelieving world and forever altered the eternal destiny of untold millions. From its inception, the church has faced skepticism, criticism and mockery. Nonetheless, she must continue "declaring the wonders of God."



*All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language (Acts 2:4-6)*

*... 'We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!' Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, 'What does this mean?' Some, however, made fun of them and said, 'They have had too much wine' (Acts 2:11-13).*

### B. WHERE THE CHURCH BEGAN

In our contemporary culture, the word "church" connotes a place, that is, a geographical location or a building designed for worship and instruction in the Scriptures. More accurately, the "church" (ekklesia) is a called out group of people, an assembly of Christians.

Those who accepted Peter's message on the Day of Pentecost numbered about 3,000. Initially, they met on the east side of the outer court of Herod's temple in the place called Solomon's Colonnade or Porch. This portico was inside the walls of the temple area and formed the outer perimeter of the Court of the Gentiles. Jesus often walked and talked here. It was also the place where scribes held their classes and debates. Merchants and money changers invaded this area to do business.

The church also met in houses. Small groups of believers enjoyed fellowship in their homes as they broke bread together and prayed. Churches were known to meet in the homes of several New Testament characters.



*Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts. . .(Acts 2:46).*

*The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade (Acts 5:12).*

*Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ (Acts 5:42).*

*But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison (Acts 8:3).*

*You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house (Acts 20:20).*

*Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. Greet also the church that meets at their house (Romans 16:3-5).*

*The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house (1 Corinthians 16:19).*

FOR FURTHER STUDY: Acts 3:11; Colossians 4:15; Philemon 1:2.

### **C. HOW THE CHURCH GREW**

In the last two decades, the "church growth" theme has become the hottest topic in Christian circles. The best book on the subject is the book of Acts. It recounts the history and principles of church growth from the first century.

Authentic church growth occurs only when people accept the message of the gospel and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Although the early church did grow numerically, it was not their focus or obsession. Much of today's "church growth" comes as people leave one church to attend another or return to a local church after a long hiatus. The priority of the

apostles was to faithfully share the gospel. God gave the increase and the church grew quite naturally as individuals embraced the Savior by faith and became fully devoted followers of Christ.

Notice how the concentric circles of influence broaden throughout the book of Acts as believers became *witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth* (Acts 1:8). When penetrating a new geographic territory, the apostles and evangelists often went to the synagogues first seeking those who had a genuine interest in spiritual things. Jews and Gentiles alike believed and were added to the church. The gospel was shared with individuals, households and groups. There does not seem to be a prescribed way which evangelism occurred. The message was constant but methods were flexible. As the church swelled, obedience to the Word of God and living in the fear of the Lord were important factors. With this growth came encouragement and strength to face opposition.



*Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day (Acts 2:41).*

*...praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved (Acts 2:47).*

*But many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand (Acts 4:4).*

*Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number (Acts 5:14).*

*So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith (Acts 6:7).*

*Then the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a time of peace. It was strengthened; and encouraged by the Holy Spirit, it grew in numbers, living in the fear of the Lord (Acts 9:31).*

*But the word of God continued to increase and spread (Acts 12:24).*

*When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed (Acts 13:48).*

*At Iconium Paul and Bamabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There they*

*spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed (Acts 14: 1).*

*They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch. . .(Acts 14:2).*

*So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers (Acts 16:5).*

*When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor. Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds. A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas. In this way the Word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power (Acts 19:17-20).*

FOR FURTHER STUDY: Acts 10:44-46; 11:21,24; 13:12; 16:14,25-34; 17:4,12,34;18:7-8; 28:24.

#### **D. WHY SIGNS AND WONDERS ACCOMPANIED CHURCH GROWTH**

The Book of Acts is scattered with narratives about miracles, exorcisms and signs performed by the apostles, Philip, Stephen and Paul. A clear pattern develops: Miracles, signs and wonders accompanied the message of the gospel and authenticated the messenger who preached it. As a result of witnessing the miraculous, many people believed in the Lord and turned to Him. This follows the precedent set by God through the ministry of Jesus: . . . *Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know (Acts 2:22).*

##### 1. The apostles

*Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles (Acts 2:43).*

*The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people (Acts 5:12).*

FOR FURTHER STUDY: Acts 3:1-16; 4:8-22, 30; 9:32-35, 36-43.

##### 2. Stephen

*Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, did great wonders and*



*miraculous signs among the people (Acts 6:8).*

### 3. Philip

*When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said. With shrieks, evil spirits came out of many, and many paralytics and cripples were healed (Acts 8:6-7).*

*Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw (Acts 8:13).*

### 4. Paul

*So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders (Acts 14:3).*

*God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them (Acts 19:11-12).*

FOR FURTHER STUDY: Acts 14:8-20; 20:9-10; 28:7-9.

## **E. WHAT OPPOSITION DID THE CHURCH FACE?**

Where God is at work, the devil is sure to make his unwanted presence felt. A good case in point is the church. Since its inception the church has faced ridicule, intimidation, threats and criticism. Opposition came swiftly because the preaching of the cross is offensive to those who proclaim another gospel.

Paul wrote, *For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God (I Corinthians 1:18)*. For this reason the church should expect to be criticized by an unbelieving world which does not understand us. Sadly, at some moments in history, the church did succumb to the voice of her critics and stray from her appointed path and purpose. Our response to criticism must be a confident reliance on God's absolute truth with a determined effort to choose obedience. Public opinion is not the basis for our decision making. Perseverance, spiritual stick-to-it-iveness, was to rule supreme when standing upon biblical principles.



*After further threats they (the Sanhedrin) let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened (Acts 4:21).*

*On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying (Acts 13:44-45).*

*At Iconium Paul and Bamabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed. But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers (Acts 14:1-2).*

*But when the Jews opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, 'Your blood be on your own heads! I am clear of my responsibility. From now on I will go to the Gentiles' (Acts 18:6).*

*Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God. But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus (Acts 19:8-9).*

*For you, brothers, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from the Jews, who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to all men in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. . . (1 Thessalonians 2:14-16).*

*You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised (Hebrews 10:36).*

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us (Hebrews 12:1).*

FOR FURTHER STUDY: Acts 2:12-13; 4:1-22; 11:1-3; 19:22-41; 21:27;  
2 Thessalonians 3:5; James 5:7-12; Revelation 2:2-3,19; 3:10.

## **F. WHO PERSECUTED THE CHURCH?**

The verbal abuse which began as ridicule and criticism soon digressed to physical abuse against the church. To confess Christ publicly meant sure persecution and suffering. Beatings, floggings, imprisonment and even death became commonplace in the first century church.

Most persecution came at the hands of jealous Jewish unbelievers who tried to maintain their power base in the name of religious purity. Sadly, they never knew the joy of a relationship with the living God. Those, like Saul of Tarsus, who did come to believe in the risen, living Christ bore the brunt of their vicious attacks.

It is interesting to note how most of the fledgling New Testament churches suffered trials and persecution. They anticipated persecution, yet welcomed God's message with joy, even rejoiced in their suffering.

An astute student of church history observes how persecution in American churches is absent today. Could it be that many western churches no longer pose a serious threat to our enemy's kingdom? While none enjoy suffering persecution, it is a litmus test of commitment.



*His (Gamaliel's) speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name (Acts 5:40-41).*

*And Saul was there, giving approval to his death. On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison (Acts 8:1-3).*

*Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem (Acts 9:1-2).*

*Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews (Acts 11:19).*

*The word of the Lord spread through the whole region. But the Jews incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Bamabas, and expelled them from their region. So they shook the dust from their feet in protest against them and went to Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:49-52).*

*For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for Him. . . (Philippians 1:29).*

*You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit (1 Thessalonians 1:6).*

*For you, brothers, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from the Jews, who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to all men in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last (I Thessalonians 2:14-16).*

*In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith-- of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire-- may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed (1 Peter 1:6-7).*

FOR FURTHER STUDY: Acts 5:18; 6:5 - 8:1; 9:13-14,23-25,29-30; 12:1-4; 14:5-7,19-20; 16:19-24; 17:5-9,13; 18:6,12-13; 21:27-36; 22:4-9,19-20,22-25; 23:12-22; 24:5; 25:1-3; 26:9-11,15; 28:17-31; Philippians 3:6; 2 Thessalonians 1:4-5; Hebrews 10:32-34; James 5:7-12; 1 Peter 4:12-19; Revelation 2:8-10.

## II. THE PRECEPTS OF THE CHURCH

### A. CHRIST IS BUILDING HIS CHURCH

Before the church was born, Jesus gave Peter a sneak preview of what was to come. Based upon the same confession of faith that Jesus was *the Christ, the Son of the living God*, (Matthew 16:16) a group of people would become living stones building a spiritual house...the church.

There are three significant points of theology which are quite reassuring: (1) Christ is the One who will build the church, (2) the church belongs to Christ, and (3) she shall not be defeated by her archenemy, the devil.



*And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it (Matthew 16:18).*

*Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience (Colossians 3:12).*

*But Christ is faithful as a son over God's house. And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast (Hebrews 3:6).*

*. . . to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven (Hebrews 12:23).*

*. . . you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (I Peter 2:5).*

*But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy (I Peter 2:9-10).*

### B. CHRIST IS THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH

There exists an intimate relationship between Christ and the church. As the church took on its identity, the New Testament writers wanted believers everywhere to understand the significance of their relationship with the One who redeemed them.



*And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way (Ephesians 1:22-23).*

*Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ (Ephesians 4:15).*

*For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior (Ephesians 5:23)*

*And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy (Colossians 1:18).*

### **C. CHRIST LOVES THE CHURCH**

The word love is often misconstrued. It is used typically to describe favorite foods, fanatic support of an athletic team, patriotism, material possessions, and special relationships. As the author of love, God gave the world a living, breathing object lesson to grasp the breadth and depth of genuine love. No love can supersede the love of Christ for us.



*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless (Ephesians 5:25-27).*

### **D. CHRIST DISCIPLINES THE CHURCH**

God's longsuffering should never be mistaken for a casual attitude toward sin. Biblical history repeatedly illustrates the truth: . . . *the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son* (Hebrews 12:6). The words of the Son of God to the churches in Thyatira and Laodicea rehearse the tragedy once more. These churches

and countless others through the epochs of time have sinned against a holy God. There have been sins of omission that is, we have failed to do what God has commanded. Conversely, sins of commission have dragged God's name through the proverbial mud. Perhaps most intoxicating are sins of our disposition with prevailing attitudes of apathy toward holy living. May God be merciful to us.



*To the angel of the church in Thyatira write: These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first. Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and hands, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds (Revelation 2:18-23).*

*To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm-- neither hot nor cold-- I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me (Revelation 3:14-20).*

## **E. CHRIST CARES FOR THE CHURCH**

With the birth of any child comes the responsibility of providing for that child. Not only do they need nourishment to sustain their physical growth but also need the security that comes from protection. Christ truly knows the needs of His people. He fosters loving care for His church because we are the sole object of His love.



*After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church. . . (Ephesians 5:29).*

## **F. THE CHURCH IS THE BODY OF CHRIST**

At the moment of salvation, all believers are baptized into the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 12:12-13). This universal church includes all believers for all time. There are no ethnic, racial, gender, age or economic distinctions. *Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all (Colossians 3:11).*

Just as a material body would cease to exist without a literal head, so it is with the church. Christ is much more than a figurehead for the church. As a living organism, the body of Christ is constantly changing and growing. The body is to receive her direction from her Head. It is a strange phenomenon in Christianity to observe how many members of this body ignore the headship of Christ.



*And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way (Ephesians 1:22-23).*

*There is one body and one Spirit-- just as you were called to one hope when you were called. . . (Ephesians 4:4).*

*Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work (Ephesians 4:15-16).*

*. . . for we are members of his body. 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' This is a profound mystery--but I am talking about Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:30-32).*

*And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy (Colossians 1:18).*

*Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church (Colossians 1:24).*



## **G. THE CHURCH IS THE BRIDE OF CHRIST**

In the Old Testament, God chastened the nation of Israel for her idolatry which was spiritual adultery. In the New Testament we see the church as the bride of Christ. This intimate relationship is clearly illustrated in the institution of marriage. A husband is to a wife what Christ is to the church. Not only should the church understand WHO we are but WHOSE we are.

*... for we are members of his body. For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. profound mystery-- but I am talking about Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:30-32).*

*Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: 'Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.' (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.) Then the angel said to me, 'Write: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!' And he added, 'These are the true words of God' (Revelation 19:6-9).*

FOR FURTHER STUDY: Revelation 19:14 prophecies how the bride, adorned in her fine white linen, will accompany Jesus when He returns to earth to judge sin and establish His millennial kingdom.

## **H. THE CHURCH IS TO BE HOLY**

I have never seen an ugly bride! As she strolls down the aisle on her wedding day she blushes and glows with the prospect of giving herself to the man she loves. Traditionally, she is adorned in a white gown, symbolizing her purity. Some have earned the right to wear it; others do so hypocritically.

Christ wants his bride to remain pure and faithful to Him alone. Spiritual adultery occurs when the church sins. Sadly, churches across our nation have become increasingly tolerant of sin in the body. There is reluctance to expose sin for what it is. Sins of the tongue breed ill feelings and disunity. Far too many casualties are attributed to friendly fire. Threats of legal ramifications have intimidated churches into letting church discipline slide. The church as a bride is not always pure, not always beautiful, but nonetheless always loved.

When a woman adorned in bridal array enters the room, all eyes are upon her. The world is watching the church. What they see should never be an embarrassment to the Bridegroom!



*But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving (Ephesians 5:3-4).*

*... and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless (Ephesians 5:27).*

*... so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ-- to the glory and praise of God (Philippians 1:10-11).*

*Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience (Colossians 3:12).*

*May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones (I Thessalonians 3:13).*

*Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14).*

*As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy' (I Peter 1: 14-16).*

*I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false (Revelation 2:2).*

FOR FURTHER STUDY: I Corinthians 5:1-13 is a strong case for the necessity of purity in the church. There should be no tolerance for those who habitually and blatantly sin. Such a one is to be expelled from the church. The list of sins in vs. 9-11 would seem to indicate this applies to much more than just sexual sin.

## **I. THE CHURCH IS TO FOLLOW SCRIPTURE'S GUIDELINES FOR CONDUCT**

Someone has said, "The Word of God is the will of God." A primary purpose of the Scriptures is to teach us how to live in the world without becoming worldly. It is God's will for believers to sanctify themselves and present a clear witness to the world of the difference Christ makes in our lives.

Paul's summary statement in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 reminds us how, *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.* In other words, the Bible tells us what is right (*teaching*), what is not right (*rebuking*), how to get right (*correcting*) and how to stay right (*training in righteousness*). These biblical principles are to be applied to every aspect of conduct in God's household, which is the church.



*Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth (I Timothy 3:14-15).*

FOR FURTHER STUDY: 1 Timothy 2:8-15 gives specific guidelines for conduct in the church on subjects of prayer and the role of women.

## **J. THE CHURCH IS THE PILLAR AND FOUNDATION OF THE TRUTH**

When Jesus proclaimed, *I am the way and the truth and the life* (John 14:6), He personified truth. A living object lesson about truth, He presented Himself in stark contrast to Satan, who is the father of lies (John 8:44). It follows then that Jesus would expect His church to traffic only in truth.

In some instances, ideas, traditions, and opinions of man have been erroneously elevated to the same status as truth, when in fact, they are not. No doubt, the devil is delighted when man's ideas replace God's. The church must be careful to hold man's ideas (form) in abeyance, preferring to test our ideas against God's truth (function). Truth influences not only what we *believe* in the church but also how we behave.



*. . . if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth (I Timothy 3:15).*

### III. THE PERILS OF THE CHURCH

#### A. THE CHURCH HAS ENEMIES

Like a successful athlete, the church must have both an offensive and defensive strategy. A defensive stance becomes necessary in light of the reality that the church has enemies. There are those in positions of political, moral and educational influence who are diametrically opposed to the message of the cross and God's purpose for the church. Scripture exhorts Christians to be self-controlled and alert because our archenemy, the devil, is prowling around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour (I Peter 5:8).

*... in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes (2 Corinthians 2:11).*

*For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things (Philippians 3:18-19)*

#### B. THE CHURCH FACES DANGERS

##### 1. The danger of division

Friendly fire - that's the term used by the military for a casualty caused accidentally by someone on their own side. The body of Christ is sometimes guilty of friendly fire--shooting their own soldiers. Most distressing is the reality that this is sometimes intentional.

Several of Paul's epistles warn of the divisive person who divides and destroys from within. These individuals are found in nearly every church. Seeking power and control, they undermine leadership with subversive agendas. It is "their way or the highway." Wealth, community prominence, longevity in the church, and sinful selfishness and pride are some of the tools of their trade.

Church splits have become far too commonplace. Rather than brothers and sisters working through their differences with respect for one another, it becomes easier to pack up and move out. Sadly, most of these splits are over methodology, not doctrine. What message are we sending to a skeptical world when Christians in the church cannot even get along with one another? If Satan can keep us fighting among ourselves, then he can be sure the church will never be about our Father's business.



*I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery, they deceive the minds of naive people (Romans 16:17-18).*

*In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval (1 Corinthians 2:17-19).*

*If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other (Galatians 5:15).*

*Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other (Galatians 5:26).*

FOR FURTHER STUDY: 1 Corinthians 1:10-15; 3:1-9.

## 2. The danger of false teaching

During His ministry on earth Jesus warned against false teachers--wolves in sheep's clothing who would propagate their gospel. Addressing this same problem, Paul warned of false apostles who masquerade as apostles of Christ. Even Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 2:13-15).

False teachers have only one fundamental purpose--to divert people away from the truth. They exploit and enslave people to belief systems which are heretical. Their gospel is one of works, not grace. Entrapment in religion without a genuine relationship with the living God is their goal.

Churches have been paralyzed by the deadly influence of false teachers for 20 centuries with no sign of relief. Belief in "another gospel" purports multiple ways to know God or multiple gods to know, when in fact, there is only one God and one way to enter into a relationship with Him. Several of the seven churches mentioned in Revelation felt their onslaught. Some exposed their error; others embraced their teaching to their own detriment. The twenty-first century church must learn from them.



*For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve. I repeat: Let no one take me for a fool. But if you do, then receive me just as you would a fool, so that I may do a little boasting. In this self-confident boasting I am not talking as the Lord would, but as a fool. Since many are boasting in the way the world does, I too will boast. You gladly put up with fools since you are so wise! In fact, you even put up with anyone who enslaves you or exploits you or takes advantage of you or pushes himself forward or slaps you in the face (2 Corinthians 11: 13-20).*

*I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel--which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned (Galatians 1:6-9)!*

*Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming (Ephesians 4:14).*

*I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary (Revelation 2:2-3).*

*I know your afflictions and your poverty--yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan (Revelation 2:9).*

FOR FURTHER STUDY: Acts 15; 19:13-16; Revelation 2:6, 20-25; 3:9.

### **C. THE CHURCH WAS REBUKED**

Revelation chapters 2-3 are a relevant treatise on the spiritual condition of local churches. Of the seven churches listed, all but two were criticized by Jesus for lack of spiritual focus. Churches in Smyrna and Philadelphia were commended for their faithfulness and encouraged to hold fast to their convictions.

Four of the churches under fire were facing direct influence by Satan. The most important insight to be gained from this passage is the concerted effort by the devil to divide and destroy the church from within. Those who were guilty of falling away received the same counsel... REPENT!



1. The church in Ephesus (Revelation 2:1-7) was rebuked for forsaking their first love.
2. The church in Pergamum (Revelation 2:12-17) was rebuked for holding to the teachings of Balaam and the Nicolaitians.
3. The church in Thyatira (Revelation 2:18-29) was rebuked for their toleration of Jezebel and acts of spiritual adultery with her.
4. The church in Sardis (Revelation 3:1-6) was rebuked for their apathy. They were described as "dead" with incomplete deeds in the sight of God.
5. The church in Laodicea (Revelation 3:14-22) was rebuked for their complacency. Their repulsive deeds were neither cold nor hot; they were lukewarm.

#### **IV. THE PURPOSES OF THE CHURCH**

For centuries, theologians have correctly expounded upon The Precepts of The Church outlined previously in this paper. While most agree on what the church IS, more controversy exists over discussing what the church should DO. Excelling in some points, we have also all but ignored others deemed unimportant. To be and do all that God intended for the church is "hard work" (Revelation 2:2) indeed. The following comprehensive list does not suggest an order of priority.

##### **A. TO ARBITRATE IN LAWSUITS AMONG BELIEVERS**

Some Corinthian believers were unable to settle disputes among themselves. To their shame, they appealed to the ungodly in a court of law to arbitrate in their differences. Paul's preference was to involve the church in swift resolution rather than broadcast to the unbelieving world that brothers cannot agree. In a day when lawsuits are the rule and no longer the exception, members of the body of Christ should appeal to the church, not the courts, when they have an irreconcilable disagreement.

*If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life! Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, appoint as judges even men of little account in the church! I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? But instead, one brother goes to law against another-- and this in front of unbelievers! The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers (1 Corinthians 6:1-8).*

## **B. TO EDIFY BELIEVERS**

A central purpose of the church is to produce fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ. In the maturation process, individual believers are built up in their faith and equipped for works of service. Church planters and spiritual leaders in the first century fully expected believers to progress from "milk" to "meat" as they were being built up in their faith.

As the saints are built up, families are also strengthened. Spiritual growth spills over into every facet of one's life.

A Christian's greatest strength and power comes from wearing the spiritual armor described in Ephesians 6:10-18. The reality of spiritual warfare may be one of the devil's best kept secrets. However, every Christian who takes his or her faith seriously will be the target of the devil's schemes.



*They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. 'We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,' they said (Acts 14:21-22).*

*Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification (Romans 14:19).*

*It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of*



*Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work (Ephesians 4:11-16).*

*Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen (Ephesians 4:29).*

*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore, put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints (Ephesians 6:10-18).*

*And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ--to the glory and praise of God (Philippians 1:9-11).*

*We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil (Hebrews 5:11-14).*

*But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit (Jude 20).*

FOR FURTHER STUDY: 1 Corinthians 14:4-5, 17; Ephesians 6:1-4.

### **C. TO ENCOURAGE BELIEVERS**

Everyone needs encouragement. What better place to give and receive it than the fellowship of believers in a local church? The eternal encouragement we receive through Jesus Christ provides the impetus to encourage one another to keep our focus on the author and perfecter of our faith. The need for encouragement will intensify as persecution increases and the epidemic of ungodliness intensifies before the return of Christ.



*When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. On arriving, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed (Acts 18:27).*

*The brothers there had heard that we were coming, and they traveled as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns to meet us. At the sight of these men Paul thanked God and was encouraged. When we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him (Acts 28:15-16).*

*May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word. . . (2 Thessalonians 2:16-17).*

*But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness (Hebrews 3:13).*

*Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching (Hebrews 10:25).*

### **D. TO PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL**

In this author's opinion, the proclamation of the Gospel is the most significant reason why Christ leaves the church on earth. Believers have been entrusted with the gospel and are charged with preaching the greatest story ever told to all who face a Christless eternity. Numerous biblical case studies point to the value and effectiveness of personal evangelism. Peter, John, Philip, Paul, Barnabas and others devoted themselves to telling the good news.

The church was born as a result of Peter's preaching the gospel and evangelism continues to be the sole method of church growth. Although some members of the body of Christ are spiritually gifted to do so, everyone who names Christ as Savior has a responsibility

to sow the seeds of the gospel. Regretfully, the greatest story ever told has become the greatest story *never* told!

*While effective methods of evangelism change with culture, the gospel has remained the same. According to the Scriptures, Christ died for our sins, was buried, yet was raised on the third day (1 Corinthians 15:3-8).*



*'Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.' After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly. All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all (Acts 4:29-33).*

*Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ (Acts 5:42).*

*We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf. Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:20-21).*

*. . . the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you. All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth (Colossians 1:5-6).*

*The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia-- your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God. . . (1 Thessalonians 1:8-9).*

*I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ (Philemon 1:6).*

*It still remains that some will enter that rest, and those who formerly had the gospel*

*preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience (Hebrews 4:6).*

*It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things (1 Peter 1:12).*

*. . . but the word of the Lord stands forever. And this is the word that was preached to you (1 Peter 1:25).*

*For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to men in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit (1 Peter 4:6).*

FOR FURTHER STUDY: Acts 2:22-41; 3:11- 4:4; 4:5-22; 8:5,12,25,34-35,40; 9:20-22,27; 10:36-43; 11:19-20; 13:13-46; 14:1-3,7-18,20-22,25; 17:1-4,18; 18:5; 28:31; Jude 23.

## **E. TO TEACH THE SCRIPTURES**

If Christians believe the Bible to be verbally inspired in its original autographs and completely trustworthy in all areas of faith and practice, then it is imperative that people know and understand what God has spoken. Since the first century church did not have the benefit of a written New Testament as we do today, believers depended upon verbal instruction via the apostles' teaching. Some teaching explained how the Law of Moses was fulfilled with the coming of Christ. Paul, Peter and others taught the church principles about living in this new dispensation of grace.

All exposition of Scripture should have as its ultimate goal a practical application for living the Christian life. For decades, there has been an overemphasis on doctrine, simultaneously underemphasizing a personal response to biblical truth. My conviction is that the average Christian does not need to KNOW more Bible, he or she needs to APPLY more of what is already known. The Apostle Paul warned us how knowledge alone puffs up (1 Corinthians 8:1). A similar caution is found in James 4:17, *Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.* Therefore, teaching the Scriptures demands a delicate balance between explanation and application.

Exposition without practical application is incomplete. In every context where the Bible is preached or taught, listeners must be stimulated to answer the, "So What?" question. Change is always the ultimate goal when one comes face to face with the God of the Scriptures.

As the fledgling church began to spread her wings, the mother church in Jerusalem carefully monitored how the Scriptures were taught and applied in other churches. For example, Acts 15:1-35 (c.f 21:25) documents how the apostles sent instructions to the Gentile believers in Antioch regarding certain practices to avoid. Issues of practical Christian living have always been a matter of great concern to church leaders.



*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer (Acts 2:42).*

*At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people. When the high priest and his associates arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin--the full assembly of the elders of Israel--and sent to the jail for the apostles. Then someone came and said, 'Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people' (Acts 5:21,25).*

*Having brought the apostles, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name," he said. "Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood" (Acts 5:27-28).*

*Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ (Acts 5:42).*

*When they had testified and proclaimed the word of the Lord, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages (Acts 8:25).*

*As soon as it was night, the brothers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men (Acts 17:10-12).*

*Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks (Acts 18:4).*

*They arrived at Ephesus, where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila. He himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews (Acts 18:19).*

*But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord (Acts 19:9-10).*

*His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms. . . (Ephesians 3:10).*

*Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God (Titus 2:3-5).*

FOR FURTHER STUDY: Acts 2:14-21; 8:4; 8:30-35; 11:22-26; 15:35; 17:16-34; 18:11, 24-26; 19:8, Hebrews 12:15-16; 13:4-5.

## **F. TO PROVIDE FELLOWSHIP**

From the onset of the church, fellowship was an important component of church life. The early church was devoted to fellowship. Their partnership in the Gospel motivated them to meet together regularly, share with others in need and stimulate one another to spiritual growth.

Fellowship may also be one of the most misunderstood concepts in the twentieth century church. In some cases, it is assumed to occur whenever a group of Christians are together in a room enjoying coffee and donuts. True biblical fellowship cannot occur unless individuals are sharing the victories and defeats of the Christian life with others in the body.



*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer (Acts 2:42).*

*Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved (Acts 2:46-47).*

*The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade (Acts 5:12).*

*On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight. Then he went upstairs again and broke bread and ate. After talking until daylight, he left (Acts 20:7,11).*

*Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching (Hebrews 10:25).*

*We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ (I John 1:3).*

## **G. TO FINANCIALLY SUPPORT THE WORK AND WORKERS OF THE MINISTRY**

A review of a person's checkbook will quickly reveal where that person's priorities are, *For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Matthew 6:21)*. Most studies indicate that the average believer gives between 2 - 4% of his income to the church. This "grace giving" falls short of the law's required tithe as outlined in the Old Testament.

The ramifications of this generation of non-givers is beginning to be felt. Missionaries who are willing to serve in the field cannot proceed because support cannot be raised. Many pastors have lived at the level of poverty because churches did not see them as worthy of their hire. All the while, materialism is a pervading problem among parishioners.

Paul's teaching about giving was very pointed. He wanted Christians to know the joy of sacrificial giving. He expected it to be an expression of thanks to God, showing commitment to the church's work of the ministry.



*Now about the collection for God's people: Do what I told the Galatian churches to do. On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made. Then, when I arrive, I will give letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gift to Jerusalem. If it seems advisable for me to go also, they will accompany me (1 Corinthians 16:1-4).*

*And here is my advice about what is best for you in this matter: Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have. Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality, as it is written: He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little (2 Corinthians 8:10-15).*

*This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God (2 Corinthians 9:12).*

*Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need. Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. I have received full payment and even more; I am aptly supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:14-19).*

FOR FURTHER STUDY: 2 Corinthians 8:1-7; 9:1-5.

## **H. TO GLORIFY CHRIST**

The Westminster Catechism calls this the chief end of man. The Apostle Paul stated the same conviction emphatically when writing to the Church in Corinth. *So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.* (I Corinthians 10:31).

Whether as individuals or as the collective body of Christ, the goal remains the same... to bring glory to God.

*We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thessalonians 1:12).*

## **I. TO MEET OTHERS' PHYSICAL NEEDS**

Long before our government invented the welfare system, the church was proactive in meeting the physical needs of one another in the family of God. In former years, the Law



required that widows, orphans, and the poor be cared for by the populous. However, the motivation of the early church seemed to be compassion, not compulsion. Possessions were sold, extra supplies were shared, food was distributed to the hungry, and love offerings were taken for other congregations in need.

This purpose of the church has largely fallen by the wayside in deference to government and community programs. Some churches do stock food pantries, operate food kitchens, distribute sandwiches to street people, and the like. However, these ministries are not usually a high priority in the church 19 centuries later. In fear of sharing a "social gospel," this purpose of the church is seldom part of its fiber and fabric.



*All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need (Acts 2:44-45).*

*All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had (Acts 4:32).*

*There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need. Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet (Acts 4:34-37).*

*The next day we landed at Sidon; and Julius, in kindness to Paul, allowed him to go to his friends so they might provide for his needs (Acts 27:3).*

*Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality (Romans 12:13).*

*Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality, as it is written: 'He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little' (2 Corinthians 8:13-15).*

*This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God (2 Corinthians 9:12).*

*He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need (Ephesians 4:28).*

*Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world (James 1:27).*

*If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth (1 John 3:17-18).*

FOR FURTHER STUDY: Acts 6:1-4; 10:2; 11:27-30.

## **J. TO MINISTER TO ONE ANOTHER**

Within the body of Christ, the law of love governs all relationships. Spiritual giftedness made each member of the church unique and necessary for the spiritual growth of others. Each person was charged with the responsibility of using the gift(s) entrusted to him or her for the mutual benefit of everyone in the church.

"One another" phrases are sprinkled throughout the New Testament reminding us of our responsibilities to other brothers and sisters. No one is exempt; no one is excused; everyone is expected to *do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers* (Galatians 6:10).

Ultimately, gifts were given for the strengthening of the church. As gifted believers minister to one another, God's people are prepared for works of service.

*Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves (Romans 12:10).*

*Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited (Romans 12:16).*

*. . . But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other (1 Corinthians 12:24-25).*

*You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love (Galatians 5:13).*



*Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ (Galatians 6:1-2).*

*Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ (Ephesians 5:21).*

*Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful (Colossians 3:12-15).*

*Therefore encourage each other with these words (1 Thessalonians 4:18).*

*Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing (1 Thessalonians 5:11).*

*Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other (1 Thessalonians 5:13).*

*Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else (1 Thessalonians 5:15).*

*And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:24).*

*And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased (Hebrews 13:16).*

*Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective (James 5:16).*

*Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen (1 Peter 4:9-11).*

FOR FUTHER STUDY: Romans 1:11-12; 12:3-9; 13:8-10; 1 Corinthians 12; 16:15-18; 2 Corinthians 1:3-4; Ephesians 4:11-16; Philemon 7; Hebrews 13:2-3; 2 Peter 1:7; 1 John 3:16.

## K. TO PRAY

There is nothing the church can do which has greater impact than prayer. From day one, the church was devoted to prayer. Without exception, it is the one thing which every member of the church can do. Who knows what God will do if His people become a people of prayer.

A healthy church is a praying church. Given the power of prayer, God's people can accomplish God's purposes only when using God's power. A detailed study of hundreds of biblical references to prayer reveals how God delights in the prayers of His people. More than a privilege, it is the responsibility of the church. Without prayer, she is powerless to wage war with a world system at odds with God. It was Paul's conviction that Christians should *pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints* (Ephesians 6:18).

Someone has said that prayer should be our first resource, not our last resort. For the believer, prayer should be a reflexive action, what we do first. Too often it is what we do when we have exhausted all other options and do not know where else to turn for help.

The Scriptures are not lacking in examples of the power of prayer. In most cases, prayer is underemphasized and certainly not utilized to its full advantage in believers' lives. Show me a church with power, and I will show you a praying church!



*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer (Acts 2:42).*

*He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly (Acts 10:2).*

*Cornelius answered: 'Four days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me. . .'* (Acts 10:30).

*So after they (the church at Antioch) had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off (Acts 13:3).*

*If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that he should pray about that. All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death (1 John 5:16-17).*

*But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit (Jude 20).*

FOR FURTHER STUDY: Acts 4:23-31; 12:5-17; 20:36; 21:4-6.

## **L. TO RESTORE THE FALLEN**

Even though Christians should sin less, they certainly are not sinless. However, *everything in the world--the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does--* (I John 2:16), tempt the spiritual man to yield to the desires of the flesh. Many godly men and women have fallen from fellowship with God because their choices have taken them down the pathway of sin.

It is the duty of those in the church who are spiritual to watch for those who travel the slippery slope of bad decisions. When someone in the body is caught in sin, every effort should be made by others who are walking with God to restore the one who has strayed from godly living.

Several observations must be noted. First, there must be clear indication that sin occurred. This is not a matter of differing opinions; be sure that a chapter and verse identifies one's words, thoughts, or deeds as sin. Second, confrontation is uncomfortable territory for many Christians. However, this does not excuse our responsibility. Finally, remember that the testimony of the church is also at stake. Failure to confront sin is to condone it by our silence.

*Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ (Galatians 6:1-2).*

## **M. TO BE A WITNESS TO THE WORLD**

The church is to be held high as a light shining in a world darkened by sin. She is to be the pillar of morality and the place where faith, hope and love are preached and practiced. When she fails to reflect the highest standards of integrity, a shadow of doubt is cast on her credibility. How can an unbelieving world believe her message when internal turmoil, strife, divisions and sin of all varieties have stained her testimony? No wonder the world scoffs and makes accusations of hypocritical conduct.

If a church is to earn respect and maintain a credible testimony in a community, there must be a concerted effort to stand for righteousness by living out biblical truth. In a

post-Christian era, we must show the world something dramatically different from what they have seen during the last few decades as we have all but ignored the world's marginalized.

*Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you* 2 Corinthians 9:13-14).

*For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: 'Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you' (Ephesians 5:8-14).*

*Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel. . . (Philippians 1:27).*

## **N. TO WORSHIP**

Some theologians identify the purpose of the church as a trilogy of the following categories: evangelism, exhortation and exaltation. Worship ascribes worth to our God and exalts His name. It is exciting to see churches revitalizing their "worship services."

A word of caution here is necessary: Worship should occur privately and publicly, personally and corporately. In other words, worship is not limited to a church service. God loves the praise of His people. Therefore, worship should be occurring on a daily basis as we spend time alone with Him.



*For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh. . . (Philippians 3:3).*

*Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe. . . (Hebrews 12:28).*

*Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise--the*

*fruit of lips that confess his name (Hebrews 13:15).*

*But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light (1 Peter 2:9).*

FOR FURTHER STUDY: Acts 13:2; 1 Corinthians 11:2-16; 14:33-35;  
2 Corinthians 9:12; Ephesians 3:20-21.

## **O. TO SHOW HOSPITALITY**

Travel during the first century was extremely dangerous. Inns and hotels were overrun by thieves, drunkards and prostitutes. Since Christians were neither welcome nor safe in these public facilities, the church offered housing to traveling teachers, preachers and evangelists. On many occasions, Paul and his companions stayed in believers' homes.

In the quest for privacy, many contemporary believers have not viewed their homes as a vital place for ministry. For those who will open their doors to missionaries, guest speakers and those in need, great blessings await.



*And when she (Lydia) was baptized, and her household, she besought [us], saying, if ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide [there]. And she constrained us (Acts 16:15).*

*... and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them (Aquila and Priscilla) (Acts 18:3).*

*Finding the disciples there (in Tyre), we stayed with them seven days. Through the Spirit they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem (Acts 21:4).*

*We continued our voyage from Tyre and landed at Ptolemais, where we greeted the brothers and stayed with them for a day. Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven (Acts 21:7-8).*

*There we found some brothers who invited us to spend a week with them. And so we came to Rome. The brothers there had heard that we were coming, and they traveled as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns to meet us. At the sight of these men Paul thanked God and was encouraged. When we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him (Acts 28:14-16).*

*We ought therefore to show hospitality to such men so that we may work together*

*for the truth (3 John 8).*

FOR FURTHER STUDY: Galatians 4:14-15.

## **V. THE PHILOSOPHY OF A HEALTHY CHURCH**

Scripture reveals no less than four marks of a healthy church. When any of these traits are lacking, a church will be distracted, finding it necessary to divert precious resources into unproductive activities. No doubt the devil is delighted when our attention remains on ourselves instead of a lost world facing eternity without the Savior.

### **A. UNITY**

People who epitomize good health consciously take care of their physical body. They are careful what they consume, get plenty of exercise, and give the body rest as necessary. Just as a physical body must be cared for to maintain good health, so it is with the spiritual body of Christ. Every member of Christ's body must be cognizant of the needs of other members and work together to keep the whole body healthy.

Unity among members in a local church is a telltale sign of good health. If everyone is focused on the same purposes and working toward the same goals, it is likely that unity will be enjoyed. When someone introduces a selfish agenda in conflict with the course charted by the spiritual leaders of the church, division is sure to follow. Every member of God's family is of equal importance.

The Bible has nothing good to say about divisive people who generate disharmony in the church. In fact, warnings are given repeatedly to watch out for these cancerous characters whose intent is to divide and destroy the body from within.



*All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had (Acts 4:32).*

*May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 15:5-6).*

*I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought (1 Corinthians 1:10).*



*...so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other (1 Corinthians 12:25).*

*Finally, brothers, good-bye. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you (2 Corinthians 13:11).*

*You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:26-28).*

*This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 3:6).*

*Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit--just as you were called to one hope when you were called--one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all (Ephesians 4:3-6).*

*Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body (Ephesians 4:25).*

*Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel. . . (Philippians 1:27).*

*If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose (Philippians 2:1-2).*

*My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ. . . (Colossians 2:2).*

*And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. . . (Colossians 3:14-15).*

*Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14).*

*What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God (James 4:1-2).*

*These are the men who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit (Jude 19).*

FOR FURTHER STUDY: Acts 10:27-28, 34-35; Romans 14; Ephesians 2:11-22.

## **B. FAITH**

God has always called upon His people to exercise faith. Scores of biblical characters had their faith tested. Some passed and some failed. Since we are saved by grace through faith, one should expect corporate faith of God's people to be a second benchmark of a healthy church.

A church with faltering faith doubts that God can keep His promises. They find it hard to step out in faith to do great things for God in their community, in world missions, or even in financial matters. When human reasoning takes precedence over faith, we put God in a box and determine what He is capable or incapable of doing. God delights in doing the impossible, but He will test our faith, just as He tested Abraham. Do we render lip service only? Or, are we *sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see?* (Hebrews 11:1).



*First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world (Romans 1:8).*

*For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how orderly you are and how firm your faith in Christ is (Colossians 2:5).*

*The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia-- your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it . . . (1 Thessalonians 1:8).*

*But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love. He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you. Therefore, brothers, in our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith*

(1 Thessalonians 3:6-7).

*For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:9).*

*We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing. Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring (2 Thessalonians 1:3-4).*

*. . . I hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints (Philemon 1:5).*

*I know where you (Pergamum) live--where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city--where Satan lives (Revelation 2:13).*

*I know your (Thyatira) deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first (Revelation 2:19).*

*I know your (Philadelphia) deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name (Revelation 3:8).*

## **C. HOPE**

Webster defines hope as "desire accompanied by expectation." What a fitting description of eternal hope! Our desire is to spend eternity with the One who freed us from the dungeon of darkness as slaves to sin. On the day Jesus ascended into heaven, two angelic beings reaffirmed what Jesus had been telling His disciples; they could expect Him to come again: *Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven (Acts 1:11).*

The Christian lives with the expectation that Jesus will come again. His own testimony in John 14:3 confirms this hope for us: *In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am (John 14:2-3).*

This hope provides comfort for the grieving, encouragement for the weary, and purpose for the hopeless. Hope carries us during the difficult days of the Christian journey. It is a

balm which brings healing when pain seems unbearable. We who name Christ as Savior can say with confidence, "My Hope is in the Lord!" The church which has lost hope has neglected one of the resurrection's greatest doctrinal applications: He is risen and coming again!



*Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).*

*But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet (1 Thessalonians 5:8).*

*With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith (2 Thessalonians 1: 11).*

*Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful (Hebrews 10:23).*

#### **D. LOVE**

One single word seems to overshadow all the other benchmarks of a healthy church... love. Love should be the watchword of the church, for no other word captures single handedly the very character of God and his desire for the church. It should motivate what we will do, test what we have done, and monitor the method and attitude in the process of all the church does.

After his famous treatise on the subject in the preceding chapter, Paul's exhortation in 1 Corinthians 14:1 was to *follow the way of love*. Again in 16:14, he summarized his counsel to the church saying, *Do everything in love*. Knowing Paul's purpose for this letter helps us realize that many of the problems in most churches can be quickly resolved if people will learn to love God with all of their heart, soul, mind and strength; then love

others as themselves. Admittedly, this is harder than it sounds, but nonetheless demands every ounce of the believer's effort.

*Therefore show these men the proof of your love and the reason for our pride in you, so that the churches can see it (2 Corinthians 8:24).*

*For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love (Galatians 5:6).*

*You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love (Galatians 5:13).*

*Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love (Ephesians 4:2).*

*Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work (Ephesians 4:15-16).*

*And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight. . . (Philippians 1:9).*

*. . . because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints--the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel. . . (Colossians 1:4-5).*

*My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ. . . (Colossians 2:2).*

*And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity (Colossians 3:14).*

*May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you (1 Thessalonians 3:12).*

*Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more (1 Thessalonians 4:9-10).*

*We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing. Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring (2 Thessalonians 1:3-4).*

*. . . I hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints (Philemon 1:5).*

*And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:24).*

*Keep on loving each other as brothers (Hebrews 13:1).*

*If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, 'Love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers (James 2:8-9).*

*Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy. . . (1 Peter 1:8).*

*Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart (1 Peter 1:22).*

*Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king (1 Peter 2:17).*

*Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8).*

*This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother. This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another (1 John 3:10-11).*

*Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth (1 John 3:18).*

*Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us (1 John 3:24).*

*This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands (1 John 5:2).*

*And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another. And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love (2 John 5-6).*

FOR FURTHER STUDY: 1 Corinthians 13; Philippians 2:2; Colossians 1:8; 1 Thessalonians 3:6; 5:8; 2 Thessalonians 3:5; 2 Peter 1:7; 1 John 2:9-11; 3:14; 4:7-21; 2 John 6; Revelation 2:19.

## **VI. THE PROCEDURES OF THE CHURCH**

### **A. BAPTIZING BELIEVERS**

Following the example of Jesus and John the Baptizer (Matthew 3), new believers were baptized by immersion in a nearby body of water almost immediately after their profession of faith. This public act was a declaration of their commitment and allegiance to a new Master. In every case scenario, a spiritual leader, an apostle, deacon or evangelist, was the one who did the baptizing.



*Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off--for all whom the Lord our God will call.' With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, 'Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.' Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day (Acts 2:38-41).*

*As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, 'Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?' And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing (Acts 8:36-39).*

*For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said, 'Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.' So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days (Acts 10:46-48).*

*At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then*

*immediately he and all his family were baptized (Acts 16:33).*

FOR FURTHER STUDY: Acts 16:15; 18:8; 1 Corinthians 1:13-17.

## **B. CHURCH DISCIPLINE**

In the discussion of The Precepts of the Church, it was noted how Christ disciplines the church and wants her to be holy. Since the believers' sanctification has not yet been perfected as it will be in eternity, the reality of sin still poses a perpetual threat to the testimony of the church.

God has gone to great length in giving us His written Word and living Spirit to guide us in all matters of truth. Even so, the flesh and spirit still battle for control. Sometimes the lure of sin is victorious. When God's child prefers a lifestyle of sin in disregard of God's truth, the church is charged with the responsibility of exercising discipline.

The purpose of church discipline is to restore the fallen brother, never to punish. The twentieth century church has been squeamish about this matter. To complicate matters more, threats of legal repercussion have intimidated many churches into retreat. A careful review of principles Matthew 18:15-20 outlines the church's responsibility.



*This will be my third visit to you. Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. I already gave you a warning when I was with you the second time. I now repeat it while absent: On my return I will not spare those who sinned earlier or any of the others, since you are demanding proof that Christ is speaking through me. He is not weak in dealing with you, but is powerful among you (2 Corinthians 13:1-3).*

*If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed. Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother (2 Thessalonians 3:14-15).*

*Timothy, my son, I give you this instruction in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight, holding on to faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith. Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme (1 Timothy 1:18-20).*



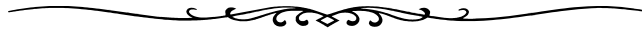
*Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him. You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned (Titus 3:10-11).*

FOR FURTHER STUDY: Acts 5:1-11; 1 Corinthians 2:5-11; 5:1-13.

### C. COMMUNION

During the Feast of the Unleavened Bread, Jesus celebrated the Passover supper with the twelve in an upper room in Jerusalem. During the meal, Jesus introduced the unleavened bread and the cup of wine as a lasting memorial of His body and blood which were to be given for them (Matthew 26:17-30).

Since that night, the Lord's Table has been observed by believers in remembrance of the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Whenever the church eats the bread and drinks the cup, they proclaim the Lord's death until He comes (1 Corinthians 11:26). Considered an ordinance of the church, it serves as a constant reminder of the price paid for our redemption.



*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer (Acts 2:42).*

*When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk. Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you for this? Certainly not!*

*For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*

*Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself that is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep.*

*But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.*

*So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for each other. If anyone is hungry, he should eat at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment. And when I come I will give further directions (1 Corinthians 11:20-34).*

#### **D. CONFLICT RESOLUTION**

It has already been established that unity is a benchmark of a healthy church. Given the fact that Christians are not perfect, it makes good common sense to assume that divisive issues, which arise between imperfect people in the church, need swift attention before they escalate.

When conflict arose in the first century church, attention was given to these brush fires before they became raging flames. Spiritual leaders snuffed out dangerous disagreements by confronting problems quickly. Practical solutions were sought which were agreeable to all parties involved.

On at least two occasions, the church at large was drawn into the process of resolution. The congregations in Jerusalem and Philippi were consulted and asked to participate in reconciling differences. If unity is to be restored, everyone must traffic only in truth.



*In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, 'It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.' This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Simon, Pannenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them (Acts 6:1-6).*

*Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body (Ephesians 4:25).*

*I plead with Euodias and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the*

*cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life (Philippians 4:2-3).*

FOR FURTHER STUDY: Acts 15:1-41; 21:20-26.

## **E. FASTING**

This spiritual discipline has all but disappeared from the church. In the Scriptures, it is always closely tied to prayer and worship. The purpose, it seems, was simply an effort to temporarily and voluntarily remove the earthy distraction of eating to facilitate greater concentration on spiritual things or contemplation of matters of great spiritual significance.

*While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off' (Acts 13:2-3).*

*Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust (Acts 14:23).*

## **F. CARING FOR WIDOWS**

The care of widows in the Jerusalem church was the first major issue confronting the apostles. The widows among the Grecian Jews were being slighted as food was distributed. A solution amenable to all was introduced.

The matter of caring for widows was clearly defined by Paul to Timothy. Some widows who fit clearly defined guidelines were the responsibility of the church. Sadly, this role has often been surrendered to the government with the church remaining woefully impotent and silent.



*Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world (James 1:27).*

FOR FURTHER STUDY: Acts 6:1-6; 1Timothy 5:3-17.

## **G. LEADERSHIP**

*Jesus spent nearly three years building a leadership team who would carry on the responsibility of establishing the church. In turn, the apostles would entrust the truth to reliable men who were qualified to teach others (2 Timothy 2:2).*

The twentieth century church is in desperate need of godly men who meet God's qualifications for elders and deacons as noted in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. A passion for godliness and commitment to Scripture's authority are not negotiable qualities for the leader in God's church. These spiritual leaders earned respect by honoring God's priorities regardless of the consequences. Such boldness is absent in so many church leaders today.

*Peter and the other apostles replied: 'We must obey God rather than men!' (Acts 5:29).*

*Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13).*

*The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, "Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain," and "The worker deserves his wages." Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses. Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning (1 Timothy 5:17-20).*

*Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you (Hebrews 13:17).*

FOR FURTHER STUDY: Acts 6:1-6; 1 Corinthians 10:23-33; Hebrews 13:7.

## **H. ORDERLINESS**

Chaos and carelessness characterize the way in which many church matters are handled. If we forget Whom we serve, our attitudes may be nonchalant and our actions haphazard. Certainly our Savior deserves excellence in organization and adequate preparation to ensure orderliness.



*But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way (1 Corinthians 14:40).*

*For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how orderly you are and how firm your faith in Christ is (Colossians 2:5).*