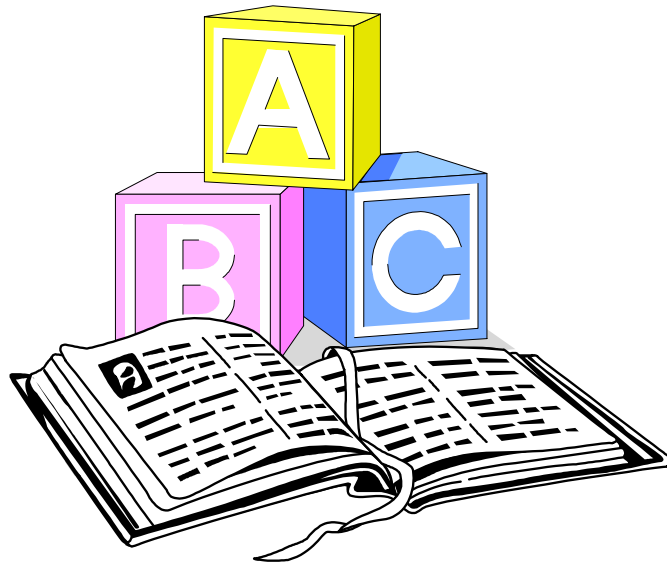


The First Principles



by

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The Organization of the Church (1)

April 2, 2000

Purpose: This lesson explains the organization of the Lord's church as outlined in the New Testament. The young Christian may need to correct misconceptions from previous church experiences where the authorized pattern was not followed. Further, all Christians need to have an understanding of how the church is to function and what their individual role is in the organizational structure. Particular attention will be placed upon elders, deacons, evangelists and teachers and the relation of Christians to each.

1. The Need for Organization

- A. More and more people see Christianity as only an individualized endeavor. Note the following observation from *Surveying the Religious Landscape* by George Gallup, Jr. and D. Michael Lindsay:

“Millions of people of all faiths are believers, many devout, but they do not always participate in the congregational lives of their denominations ... Americans tend to view faith as a matter between them and God, to be aided, but not necessarily influenced, by religious institutions.”

- B. But it is clear that the first converts to Christianity, under the inspired guidance of the apostles, associated in local groups for the purpose of mutual work and encouragement (e.g., Ac 2:44-47; 4:32-35; 5:11-12; 6:1; etc.). While some duties and responsibilities of the Christian are carried out on an individual basis, an inescapable element of the life of faith involves collective activities which cannot be shirked.
- C. All collective human endeavors from sports teams to businesses, from family to the military, need structure. Authority, discipline, cooperation and selflessness are all important ingredients of collective bodies. Otherwise, chaos reigns.

2. The Organization of the Universal Church

- A. The principle here is so obvious that many overlook it: *There is **no organizational structure*** of the universal church. By “universal” is simply meant all Christians from across the globe at any given time.
- B. The New Testament does not mention things like headquarters, conventions, councils, presidents, delegates, dioceses, parishes, denominations or other human terminology applied to the organizations of modern churches. Our vocabulary changes when we deviate from the teaching of the New Testament.
- C. The universal church has no organizational structure because it has been given *no collective duties or work*. It does not function as a unit but distributively – through each individual Christian doing his/her part.

3. Membership in the Local Church

- A. Converts to Christianity associated themselves together into local groups called “churches,” usually named by the city in which they were found:
1. The first disciples in Jerusalem were called “*the church which was at Jerusalem*” (Ac 8:1).
 2. After the scattering we find that “*the churches* (“church” in NAS) *throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified*” (Ac 9:31). Within this geographical area we find “*the saints who dwelt in Lydda*” (Ac 9:32), disciples in Sharon (9:35), Joppa (9:36-38, 42), etc.
 3. Eventually a Jewish/Gentile mix of disciples associated together in Syria: “*And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch*” (Ac 11:26).
- B. Nothing is said in the New Testament regarding the establishment of membership in a local church.
1. Fellowship among believers is established **only** by each believer’s own fellowship with God. That is, if it can be determined within the limits of human knowledge that a man has complied with God’s conditions of pardon, there is no cause to reject him from fellowship.
 2. How a church may go about establishing the faithfulness of a believer is a matter of judgment. Barnabas interceded for Paul among skeptical brethren when he came to Jerusalem (Ac 9:26-28); a letter of commendation was sent with Apollos as he journeyed to Corinth (Ac 18:27). On the other hand, flagrant immorality was cause for the Corinthians to reject a brother (1 Cor 5:4-5; 13).
 3. There is no basis for voting one into membership, official membership rolls (holding one’s letter), probationary status, blackballing or other illegitimate acts of judgment.
- C. Though a Christian is in the same spiritual family with all other Christians the world over, he sustains a peculiar relationship among those with whom he regularly associates.
1. It is incumbent upon the saint to let his intentions be known to a local church if he wishes to be considered as an active member.
 2. Again, how this is to be done is a matter left by God to the judgment of men.
 3. This issue is of greater import in our society where congregations abound in the same city. Brethren may “congregation hop” and never be accountable anywhere. This must be addressed at the local level.

Questions:

1. With whom did Paul and Barnabas assemble for a whole year (Ac 11:25-26)? What were they doing during this time (cf. Ac 13:1)?
2. What kind of activities did the earliest Christians participate in together (Ac 2:42, 44-46)? What does this say about their attitude toward each other?
3. Why were the Jerusalem brethren reluctant to recognize Paul?
4. What is meant by the term “universal church”? What is a “local church”? Examine the following texts and tell whether the term “church” is used in a local or universal sense:
 - a. Mt 16: 18 – *“I will build My church.”*
 - b. 1 Th 1:1 – *“To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”*
 - c. Mt 18:17 – *“And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church.”*
 - d. Eph 1:22-23 – *“And gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body.”*
 - e. Ac 20:28 – *“Shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”*
 - f. 1 Cor 11:18 – *“When you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you.”*
 - g. Philemon 2 – *“To the beloved Apphia, Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house.”*
5. What works and duties are given to the universal church to accomplish by cooperative efforts?
6. Why should we expect God to give a local church organizational structure? What does such structure enable the church to do?
7. Will a church always be able to correctly determine who should be in fellowship with it? Does being in a local church’s membership guarantee salvation?

The Organization of the Church (2)

April 5, 2000

1. The Structure of the Church

A. Jesus possesses all authority over the church – Eph 1:20-23.

1. When Jesus declared that He would build His church (Mt 16:18), His intent was to create a spiritual body of people who would resemble Him in character and would conform to His will.
2. He “purchased” these people with His blood which atones for their sins (Ac 20:28).
3. No one has the right to usurp Jesus’ authority or set aside His will. His people must act individually and collectively “in His name” (Col 3:17).

B. Jesus expressed His legislative power through a group of men called apostles. They were selected by Jesus; they accompanied Him in His travels; they heard His teaching firsthand. They were specially commissioned by Jesus to teach His doctrines to the world and make disciples (Mt 28:18-20).

1. They were given the “*keys to the kingdom of heaven*” and the authority to bind and loose heaven’s will (Mt 16:19; 18:18). These men did not speak by human wisdom or according to cultural peculiarities of their time. They spoke eternal truth by the authority of the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:16-18, 25-26; 16:12-15).
2. As Moses issued laws for God among the Jews, so the apostles were empowered to speak for Jesus. They were given special signs as credentials of heavenly authority (2 Cor 12:12; Heb 2:3-4).
3. While apostles do not continue to live upon the earth and their office or authority was not perpetuated among others, the apostles are still active through the teaching they left (Example: “*They have Moses and the prophets ...*” – Lk 16:29).

C. When local churches were first established, men who were knowledgeable and blessed with a degree of spiritual maturity were appointed to positions of oversight duties within each church (Ac 14:23; Tit 1:5).

1. Just as there is no organizational structure beyond the local church, so there are no positions of authority beyond these local leaders.
2. Leaders in local churches guide brethren in carrying out the will of God which has already been revealed. They do not legislate or make new laws for God. These men focus on the spiritual health and soundness of each member.

3. The New Testament gives qualifications which must be met by any man who is assigned a leadership role in a local church (1 Tim 3:1-7; Tit 1:6-9).
- D. Local churches are also served by specially appointed men who assist in various non-leadership roles. These men must meet certain qualifications as well which are not as stringent as those for the leaders and allow for younger men to serve (1 Tim 3:8-13).
- E. A crucial element of any congregation is spiritual growth. Such growth is based upon an understanding of God's word and the ability to retain and utilize its principles. Thus we find in first century churches those who taught others (Ac 13:1; 18:26; 2 Tim 2:2). No special qualifications are given for teachers to be appointed, but grave warnings are issued to those who undertake the responsibility (Jas 3:1).
- F. The local church is completed by the rest of the members who, though vital in their work and contributions, do not carry out any specified role or duty.

2. New Testament Terms Describing These Roles

- A. Jesus is called Christ, Lord, King and head, all emphasizing His authoritative role.
- B. Jesus' special representatives are called apostles (sent ones, Eph 4:11), ambassadors (2 Cor 5:20), ministers of the new covenant (2 Cor 3:6). Their credentials cannot be acquired by anyone living today (Ac 1:21-26).
- C. Leaders within the congregation are called:
 1. Elder (or presbyter): Referring to the relative age, wisdom and maturity of a man so appointed (1 Tim 3:1; 5:17, 19).
 2. Overseer (or bishop): Referring to the function of superintending or overseeing the local church (1 Tim 3:1; Ac 20:28).
 3. Pastor (or shepherd): Referring to the care and service of the "flock" or church, involving feeding, protection, guidance; i.e., what a shepherd provides for his sheep (Eph 4:11).
 4. Ruler: Referring to the authority of the position (Heb 13:17; 1 Tim 5:17).
 5. Example: Elders must model the Christian life before others (1 Pet 5:3). They are merely men and as such will make mistakes. But when errors occur, they are to be an example of penitence and correction.
 6. Steward: One who by a higher power is entrusted with a responsibility (Tit 1:7). Remember, it is the **Lord's** church, not the elders' church. They are watching over His flock on His behalf.

D. Servants within the congregation are called deacons (1 Tim 3:8).

E. Those who give instruction to others are teachers.

1. Teachers may be elders, who **must** be “*able to teach*” (1 Tim 3:2), for a vital part of their shepherding is to “*exhort and convict those who contradict*” (Tit 1:9).
2. Teachers may be evangelists, as Timothy served in Ephesus and elsewhere (2 Tim 4:5; 1 Tim 4:11-16). Evangelists, or preachers, serve a particular function in the Lord’s church (Eph 4:11; 1 Cor 9:14).
3. Teachers may be women who instruct younger women (Tit 2:4-5) or children.

F. All Christians, including those who serve in the above roles and those who do not, are called saints (set apart ones, Phil 1:1), disciples (learners, Ac 11:26), brethren (members of the same spiritual family, 1 Th 1:4; 2:1, 9, 14, 17, etc.).

3. Congregational Maturity – Like individual Christians, congregations may not mature at the same rate. A congregation may be incomplete but still a valid local group of saints. All congregations, however, should work toward the model of perfection.

Questions:

1. Elders watch out for the _____ of the saints (Heb 13:17).
2. What would you gather about the terms elder, overseer and shepherd as used in Ac 20:17, 28? To whom do these terms refer?
3. T/F The apostle Peter served as an elder later in life.
4. What should an elder be able to do by sound doctrine (Tit 1:9)?
5. What is the gist of the warning given to those who wish to teach?
6. T/F Timothy was a pastor. Give evidence for your answer.
7. What did Paul and Barnabas do on their return trip to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch?
8. In what way are the original apostles still working today?
9. Why can a man not be an apostle today?
10. What is the difference between a pastor and an evangelist?

The Organization of the Church (3)

April 9, 2000

1. The Scope of Elders' Rule

A. A study of the history of Christianity reveals that organizational corruption began very early. It is important to understand the scope of the rule of elders so that the Lord's church does not repeat the mistakes of history.

B. Limiting factors of rule:

1. Elders were appointed in "every church" (Ac 14:23). The church at Ephesus had elders (Ac 20:17); the church at Philippi had elders (Ph 1:1). Since a church is a local body of believers, there is no larger body over which anyone may rule.
2. Elders are restricted to ruling those "among them" (Ac 20:28; 1 Pet 5:2). The type of rule provided by elders – spiritual guiding, feeding and protecting – cannot be done from a distance. Elders cannot adequately oversee other churches of which they are not part.
3. The New Testament always indicates a plurality of shepherds over a congregational flock (Ac 14:23; Tit 1:5; Ac 20:17; Ph 1:1; etc.). There may be several reasons for this though none are expressly stated. One man serving as an overseer may fall victim to unchecked ambition, pride, imbalance of judgment, stress or other pitfalls.

C. The Lord's work becomes impaired when a local church has no elders.

1. In an immature congregation, decisions must still be made to allow the church to work and worship in a unified manner, but shepherding authority cannot be delegated to those who are not qualified to serve as elders. Problems arise in "business meeting" situations where a mixture of ages, temperaments, knowledge and opinion undermine productive reasoning and decision-making.
2. Often elderships are deliberately bypassed in favor of man's substitutions: deacon boards, one-man pastor systems, denominational control, majority rule, etc.

2. The Nature of Elders' Rule

A. Elders are not legislators; that is, they do not have authority to add to or alter God's revealed will. Revelation was the work of the Son, His apostles and inspired prophets. However, they do have "rule" and authority.

1. *"Recognize those who labor among you, and are **over you** in the Lord ..."* (1 Th 5:12).

2. “Let the elders who **rule well** ...” (1 Tim 5:12).

3. “Obey those who **rule over you**, and be submissive” (Heb 13:17).

B. The rule of elders is likened to and qualified by a man’s rule over his household:
“... *one who rules his own house well ... for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?*” (1 Tim 3:4-5).

1. Even as a father is empowered by God to make decisions in the family (and such doesn’t constitute heavenly legislation), so elders have authority over the local church.

2. Elders have authority to implement God’s laws in the most efficient and expedient way as they may determine. The decisions of elders should create a context in which both individuals and the congregation itself are edified and unified. Elders only exercise judgment; they do not make laws for God. However, their judgments are to be respected and submitted to.

3. Serving as an elder is not an honorary position. It is a work that involves guidance, warning and rebuking. If no authority is present to urge compliance to judgment, then the position is merely a figurehead.

C. Elders must not become “lords” over the church (1 Pet 5:3); that is, they must resist taking a superior air and commanding others at will. They must not serve by constraint nor for the sake of gain only lest they become corrupt and ineffective in their service (1 Pet 5:2).

3. Duties of the Church to the Elders

A. Respect them for their work – 1 Th 5:12-13. We may not agree with every decision the elders make, but we must not become murmurers and complainers. The Lord does not look favorably upon such.

B. Be subject to and obey them – Heb 13:17. Our society is increasingly belligerent toward authority, and it may be difficult to accept the leadership role of the elders.

C. Reject unsupported accusations – 1 Tim 5:19. The nature of the elders’ rule will inevitably place them at odds with some brethren who may attempt to retaliate by underhanded attempts to destroy influence.

D. Call them for assistance – Jas 5:14-16. No preacher or elder is a mind-reader; they may not know if a brother or sister is in need of their counsel or encouragement. We must be willing to reach out to them in our need; they should be available and willing to come when requested (if at all possible).

4. The Duty of Each Christian to the Local Church

- A. In a word: *contribute!* Each member is needed and is expected to do his/her share in the congregation. “... *from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what **every joint supplies**, according to the effective working by which **every part does its share**, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love*” (Eph 4:16).
- B. Elders, deacons and preachers are not the designated workers of the congregation. They merely provide assets, resources, guidance and other assistance to see that the body functions at its optimal level. As the physical body is a unit and dependent upon every organ contributing to the well-being of the whole, so it is in the local church.
- C. Unfortunately, apathy and laziness rides on the backs of those who are willing to bear the load. God doesn’t ask anyone to do what they can’t; He does ask all of us to serve Him with the talents He has given us.

Questions:

1. What things indicate that the position of an elder is not an honorary or figurehead title?
2. Why would it be unwise to have a single person serving in the role of elder over a local church?
3. T/F An elder may be paid for the work he does in the local church.
4. What is necessary for an accusation against an elder to be considered substantive?
5. Give a specific example of elders lording themselves over a congregation.
6. Describe what the elder’s attitude should be as he goes about his work.
7. What is wrong with one eldership overseeing the work of another church?
8. Explain the cooperative role of elders, evangelists and teachers from Eph 4:11-16. What should their work accomplish?
9. Upon what grounds should a man “desire the position of a bishop” (1 Tim 3:1)? Upon what grounds should one **not** desire the position?
10. Discuss the importance of good communication lines between elders and the congregation they oversee.

Attendance (1)

April 12, 2000

Purpose: This lesson emphasizes the importance of participating in the worship and edification gatherings of the local church. A lax attitude toward assemblies is a primary source of weakness wherein our faith can be undermined. It is important for new Christians must learn to appreciate the value and benefit of these gatherings.

1. Assemblies in the First Century

A. It is evident from studying the New Testament that early Christians spent a significant amount of time together in spiritual activities:

1. The very first converts *“continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers”* (Ac 2:42). This means that they diligently and regularly associated for these purposes.
2. Paul gives a variety of instructions to the Corinthians about their conduct when they *“come together as a church”* (1 Cor 11:18, 20, 33; 14:23-40).
3. On the occasion of Peter’s arrest and impending execution, *“constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church”* (Ac 12:5). Mary, John Mark’s mother, opened her home to the brethren for this purpose (Ac 12:12).

B. When should the church meet?

1. Some people confuse the Jewish sabbath day with the Christian day of worship. They may believe that Saturday is the specified day of worship or that the sabbath has been moved to Sunday, the “Christian sabbath” as it is often called.
2. However, the church is not limited in its meetings for edification by day or time except in regard to two specific responsibilities:
 - a. Paul instructed the Corinthian brethren: *“On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside ... that there be no collections when I come”* (1 Cor 16:2). This is the first mention of Sunday being a special day of worship upon which the Christians were to take up a collection.
 - b. Later we are told of the disciples in Troas who *“came together to break bread”* on Sunday (the first day of the week) (Ac 20:7).
 - c. The first day of the week is not modeled after the Jewish sabbath but receives its importance from the fact that Jesus was resurrected on this day. Thus it is called *“the Lord’s day”* (Rev 1:10).

3. Beyond these activities, God puts no restrictions on the time when Christians can worship and engage in activities that strengthen them spiritually.
- C. The only limiting factor to worship gatherings is practicality. Churches, either through elders or a consensus of members, are given the latitude by God to decide what is feasible for their own locale. Dire circumstances, like in the case of Peter's imprisonment, may call for frequent meetings. Mid-week gatherings for study may or may not be expedient. Some weeks may be devoted to nightly assemblies for an accent on preaching and evangelism. These are matters to be determined by human judgment.

2. What Happens in the Church's Assemblies?

- A. God is worshiped via various activities such as singing (Eph 5:19), praying (1 Tim 2:1-3) and observing the memorial supper of Jesus' death.
- B. Christians are edified by joint participation in these activities as well as teaching and preaching (Ac 20:7, 11; 1 Tim 4:13; 2 Tim 4:2-5; 1 Cor 14:19, 26). Just as the body receives strength from exercise and use, so the spirit is strengthened by spiritual activities.
- C. Provisions are made for the church's collective activities (1 Cor 16:1-2). Paul set aside a particular day and occasion for contributions which are peculiar to congregational obligations.
- D. Sometimes, unfortunately, disciplinary actions are taken during assemblies against unfaithful members who have forsaken the Lord: *"In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together ... deliver such a one to Satan ..."* (1 Cor 5:4). This does not have to be a Sunday morning worship, but a gathering of the church is the setting in which such discipline is to be administered.
- E. Sometimes during a church's assembly a person may choose to obey the gospel and become a Christian. Other times the occasion is used to make a public correction of a public wrongdoing.
- F. With the exception of the Lord's supper and taking the collection (which must be done on Sunday), the church may do any or all approved acts of worship and edification whenever it assembles. No passages dictate specific acts. A church may come together and just sing. It may just offer prayers. It may assemble for study and immediately disband thereafter. Our ritualism sometimes causes us to assume that certain activities are expected or even demanded when they are not. We must be careful not to bind things that God has not bound.

3. The Assembly of the Church Is Not ...

- A. ... primarily a social event. The purpose for a congregation's gathering is spiritual,

this must always be kept in view. However, these gatherings secondarily afford an opportunity for Christians to converse, become informed, express interest and concern for each other.

- B. ... merely an obligation to be discharged. Attending worship is not for the purpose of getting a “✓” so that one will not be marked absent. There must be a corresponding interest and enthusiasm in the nature of the occasion.
- C. ... empty ritual. God takes no pleasure in mindless, habitual rituals. Worship is to be participatory and deliberate. Our minds must be engaged in what we are offering to God, and He will know if they aren't.
- D. ... entertainment. Our society is steeped in amusement and the desire to be entertained. Unscrupulous religious people have seized upon this desire and turned worship into “amateur hour.” All forms of secular entertainment have been incorporated into worship thus corrupting the offering that God desires. Christians must be careful to maintain the honor and dignity of presenting gifts to God, for He has demonstrated in graphic ways how He feels about unauthorized offerings (cf. Nadab and Abihu, Lev 10:1-7).

Questions:

1. How might some overemphasize the social nature of worship gatherings?
2. What did God demand of those who came near Him (Lev 10:3)? Is this different today?
3. Paul spoke to the Corinthians about occasions on which they came together as a church. Can Christians “come together” without being a church? Explain.
4. T/F The Lord's day was not modeled after the Jewish sabbath.
5. How do we know that the first century church came together on Sunday to observe the Lord's supper?
6. How do we know that “gospel meetings” are authorized?
7. Can a church be faithful without mid-week congregational meetings? Discuss.
8. What church in the NT met “*not for the better but for the worse*”? How can worship make a church worse?
9. What are the conditions wherein disciplinary measures (withdrawal) are to be taken?
10. What should characterize *any* meeting of the church (1 Cor 14:33, 40)?

Attendance (2)

April 16, 2000

1. Do I Have to Attend Every Service?

A. Every congregation faces the problem of inconsistent attendance.

1. Almost uniformly churches will have the largest crowd on Sunday morning followed by a reduction on Sunday evening and a larger drop off mid-week.
2. It has been my personal experience that the above question is **never** posed by someone I would consider to be a mature, strong Christian. (How would you feel about an elder or preacher who just didn't show up?) Instead, the question arises in those who have competing interests to the worship of God. They ask it in light of another activity they would rather be doing (sleeping, watching TV, being with worldly friends, etc.).
3. The same people ask "Do I have to ..." questions. "Do I have to study?" "Do I have to talk to my neighbors?" "Do I have to say a prayer?" "Do I have to ..." only considers serving God from the standpoint of duty. This is insufficient.

B. What happens when people opt to absent themselves from assemblies?

1. Those who did make the effort to come are disappointed by the lack of commitment in others. Unexplained absences create concern.
2. Contributions to the collective worship will be missed (particularly singing).
3. Though teaching isn't a "numbers game," at the same time it is discouraging to the teacher to see his/her hard work go unappreciated by those who chose not to attend a class.
4. God is being worshiped by less than all His children in a given locale. Is God *less* disappointed by willful absences than men?
5. Like it or not, a facility that is not significantly full suggests negative things to non-Christian visitors. To have 150 people in a building that seats 300 looks like failure or disinterest or both. Sometimes this situation cannot be helped, but this is beside the point. Negative impressions may still be made, *but how much worse when the building is made more empty by voluntary absence.*

C. Good things result from spiritual participation. Nothing good comes when Christians choose not to worship or study with the rest of the congregation. "Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, **to him it is sin**" (Jas 4:17).

2. Motivations in Attending Worship

- A. The primary motivation in attending worship is a desire to commune with God at every opportunity available. Those who understand the joy and appreciation of fellowship with the Creator do not need to be convinced as to **why** they should attend every service.
- B. The command of God: *“And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, **not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some**, but exhorting one another ...”* (Heb 10:24-25).
 - 1. A Christian can forsake the assembly without completely abandoning the Lord. If complete abandonment is indicated in this passage, the person is guilty of much more than simply not coming to worship.
 - 2. As stated above, such forsaking comes from weak brethren, even as these Jewish Christians were vacillating and contemplating a return to Mosaic authority. A sign of that weakness is the excusing of oneself from the assembly.
 - 3. Part of our Christian obligation is to “stir up love and good works” in each other. How can this be done when I am physically removed from the assembly? And don’t be fooled: people who willfully absent themselves from the assembly are not the ones engaged in private exhortations of their brethren.
- C. Submission to the leadership of the elders: *“Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls ...”* (Heb 13:17). As noted previously, elders are entrusted with the feeding and oversight of the souls in their charge. They are given authority by God to implement meetings and activities which they deem to be edifying and beneficial. Christians are expected to submit to their rule, which includes appointed times to meet for edification and worship.
- D. The example of Jesus: *“And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day ...”* (Lk 4:16).
 - 1. This is interesting because Sabbath gatherings were not expressly commanded in the Law of Moses. They began during the exile when the fabric of Jewish culture had been shredded by deportation. Yet when the Jews gathered for spiritual activities, Jesus was in attendance.
 - 2. Jesus attended these gatherings for what He could give, not for what He would get. But many today complain that they don’t “get anything” from attending.
- E. There are other peripheral matters that touch on the subject of attendance: our desire to be with our spiritual family; the sense of enjoyment from worshipping and interacting with those with whom we have so much in common (assuming we do, of course); evangelistic opportunities, etc.

3. What If ...?

- A. "What if I am traveling?" The things that are commanded peculiar to the Lord's day are still applicable whether traveling or at home. Paul met with saints wherever possible when traveling (Ac 20:6-7). However, other gatherings which are matters of judgment among local churches (mid-week services, gospel meetings) would not be binding upon traveling Christians. This being said, the reasons for meeting with saints go far beyond "duty." Where possible and expedient, Christians will naturally desire to be with brethren who are engaged in worship.
- B. "What if I have to work?" There are circumstances which will occasionally hinder brethren from attending church gatherings. When this is unavoidable, one's absence is justified: caring for an ill family member, uncontrollable work schedules, traveling conflicts/detainment (as in the case of the apostle Paul); etc. Of course, we must be honest in assessing when a circumstance constitutes an mere inconvenience, a hardship or a reasonable hindrance. Some excuse ourselves from worship when they wouldn't miss work or recreation under the same circumstances. We should make such determinations remembering that the Lord is the judge of our actions, not man.
- C. "My husband forbids me to come?" This is an unfortunate situation not only in regard to attendance at worship but for the marriage in general. Such a husband may try to forbid other acts of worship and service as well. Jesus knew such strife would arise (Mt 10:35-36), but He also said, *"If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters ... cannot be My disciple"* (Lk 14:26). It is hard to formulate a "cookie cutter" answer for the myriad factors that may arise in such a situation, but my judgment in general would be that a woman must first be obedient to the Lord in the things He expressly commands (assembling for the stated Lord's day purposes). Beyond this, in matters pertaining to gatherings arising from human judgment, the wife should be in subjection to her husband while trying to build bridges of communication and trust which will result in greater freedom to be with God's people.

Questions:

1. What is suggested by any protest that begins "Do I have to ..."?
2. Is the willful absence from worship a sign of weakness or strength?
3. What effect does one's willful absence have upon other Christians?
4. If you have a Vine's Dictionary, give the definition of "forsake" (see Vol. 2, p. 126: ENKATALEIPO). Note the different word for becoming a complete apostate: APO-TASSO (verb); APOSTASIA (noun)(ibid).
5. When should the elders of a congregation take action regarding forsaken assemblies?

Purpose: God has always expected His people to give generously in whatever work He had for them to do. This is no different for present citizens of the kingdom. This lesson explores various aspects of giving incumbent upon the Christian today.

1. First Century Christians: A Charitable, Giving Community

- A. As money is a universal medium of exchange, we should not be surprised at certain financial activity among early Christians. We must learn from and respect the nature of this giving and spending.
- B. Because of certain peculiar conditions which then existed, Christians faced the need to financially assist each other regarding the necessities of life.
 - 1. The very first converts in Jerusalem *“had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need”* (Ac 2:45).
 - 2. Their attitude is described later: *“... neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common ... for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles’ feet ...”* (Ac 4:32-35).
 - 3. Several years afterward this generous church finds itself in need and receives from others (Rom 15:25-26; 2 Cor 8-9).
- C. This giving does not constitute communism but compassion. The giving was not so that everyone would be equally funded but in possession of the necessities of life:
 - 1. *“Nor was there anyone among them who **lacked**”* (Ac 4:34).
 - 2. *“For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened; but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may supply **their lack**, that their abundance also may supply **your lack** – that there may be equality”* (2 Cor 8:13-14). The equality is not possession for possession, dollar for dollar but equally in possession of life’s necessities.
 - 3. *“For the administration of this service not only supplies the **needs of the saints**, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God ...”* (2 Cor 9:12).

2. First Century Christians: A Preaching People

- A. In addition to caring for their needy, early Christians were diligent evangelizers

and supported those who devoted the majority of their time to this undertaking:

1. The principle for supporting a preacher is clearly stated in 1 Cor 9:9-14.
2. Paul was repeatedly supported by the Philippians (Ph 4:10-18). He *“robbed other churches, taking wages from them”* to serve the Corinthians (2 Cor 11:8).
3. Brethren assisted traveling evangelists and in so doing became *“fellow workers for the truth”* (3 Jn 8).

B. Funds for elders and teachers were also appropriate in certain situations – 1 Tim 5:17-18; Gal 6:6.

C. It costs money to broadcast the gospel and make it available to a lost world, whether by salaries for evangelists, materials, air time or other expenses. Christians are charged with supporting these efforts, and it takes generous funding to accomplish the greatest of all earthly endeavors – spreading the gospel.

3. Individual and Collective Funds

A. Christians sustain a peculiar relationship with their spiritual family – the local church. That group exists for purposes outlined in the NT. Funds are pooled and works accomplished which are uniquely charged to the group.

1. The brethren gave offerings of their abundance and *“laid them at the apostles’ feet”* (Ac 4:35). That is, they relinquished private control of their own money to the apostles for the accomplishment of collective goals (in this case, caring for the needy brethren).
2. When a notorious couple tried to gain glory for themselves through such offerings, Peter rebuked Ananias saying: *“While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control”* (Ac 5:4)?
3. Paul warns against turning private obligations into congregational burdens: *“If any believing man or woman has widows, let them relieve them, and do not let the church be burdened, that it may relieve those who are really widows”* (1 Tim 5:16).

B. Christians have wide latitude to use their personal funds for godly aims. However, the peculiar nature of the group and contributions made to it must be honored. The sense of this can be understood in any other endeavor (Rotary Club funds, athletic department funds, retirement funds, etc.), but when it comes to religion, people tend to ignore common sense.

C. Corruption comes swiftly when private funds/endeavors are mixed with congregational. The distinctive nature of the church is easily compromised.

Questions:

1. What trait was Barnabas first noted for in the NT (Ac 4:36-37)?
2. The Jerusalem contribution was to help the _____ in that city (Rom 15:26).
3. The Lord commanded “*that those who preach the gospel should live _____.*”
4. Who was primarily responsible for Paul’s support after he left Macedonia?
5. Explain the spiritual significance of a church supporting a preacher from Phil 4:17-18.
6. What circumstance prompted benevolent offerings to Judean brethren (Ac 11:27-30)?
7. Discuss the selflessness demonstrated by the brethren in Ac 2:45.
8. Ac 4:32-36 has been used to justify supporting non-Christians from congregational funds. Show how this passage does not support this principle.
9. What, in general, should the church not be burdened with (see 1 Tim 5:16)?
10. T/F God struck Ananias and Sapphira dead for not giving more than they did.

1. The Proper Attitude of Giving

- A. The example of Ananias and Sapphira provides a graphic warning against serving God with the wrong attitude. God does not take insincere offerings lightly.
 - 1. The Macedonian brethren *insisted* on helping the brethren in Jerusalem in spite of their own poverty: “*For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and **beyond their ability**, they were **freely willing**, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift ...*” (2 Cor 8:4).
 - 2. He further said, “*It **pleased** those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem*” (Rom 15:26).
 - 2. This accords with Paul’s exhortation to the Corinthians that they should give “***not grudgingly or of necessity**; for God loves a **cheerful** giver*” (2 Cor 9:7).
- B. Such liberality in giving of our possessions begins with first giving *ourselves* to the Lord (2 Cor 8:5). It is not until we recognize that our very souls belong to God, being purchased unto Him by the blood of Christ, that we will come to see ourselves as stewards.
- C. Further, God is the One who ultimately blesses us with what we have: “*And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work*” (2 Cor 9:8). This principle makes it easier for us to be generous.

2. The Proper Time of Giving

- A. It is not unusual to see religious groups taking up collections at assemblies through the week. The prevailing notion seems to be that a church can collect funds whenever it suits them.
- B. The only specific instruction given in the NT for collecting funds for congregational needs is 1 Cor 16:1-2. Consider the following:
 - 1. The uniformity of practice: “*As I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also.*”
 - 2. The instruction is in the form of a command: “*... given orders ... must do also.*”
 - 3. The day is specified: “*On the first day of the week.*”

C. While it is true that this instruction pertains to a special collection (the benevolent offering to the brethren in Jerusalem), and while it is true that funds had been generated among local churches for at least two decades prior to this, it seems that this present instruction formalizes the time and method of financial collections.

1. The NT does not state how contributions were formerly collected.
2. It is not unusual for God to allow a temporary arrangement only to establish a permanent order at a suitable time later.
3. **Example:** Paul did not “formalize” the qualifications of deacons until his instructions in 1 Tim 3. Yet men served in a quasi-deacon role as far back as Ac 6.

3. The Method of Giving

A. It is incorrect to differentiate what is given for collective purposes on the first day of the week as “the Lord’s money” (a phrase *not used* in the NT).

1. All of our possessions are the Lord’s, for He has given us all we have and we belong to Him. **All our money is the Lord’s money!**
2. Christians have individual responsibilities to meet with what they have prospered from the Lord: providing for families (1 Tim 5:8); paying taxes (Mt 22: 21); sharing with the needy (Eph 4:28). Great discretion may be exercised in disposing of these funds (recreation, investment, charity, medical needs, etc.), but a man is faithfully serving the Lord when he meets his individual obligations.
3. In addition to these individual responsibilities, Christians also have *collective responsibilities*. To meet these obligations special collections are taken. These collective funds (a “treasury,” if you will) are not “the Lord’s” as distinct from the funds in our personal accounts. *They are to be used for different purposes and in accord with different guidelines, but all the money is the Lord’s!* The Lord doesn’t own church buildings, preachers’ homes, song books or any other earthly items. These things are owned by people (the church) in discharging their collective responsibilities given by the Lord.

B. This distinction is important when it comes to the question of “how much” to give.

1. Brethren often appeal to the OT concept of tithing to establish a “base rate” of giving, even though we rebuke the denominations for their “tithing.” But tithing under the Law of Moses was given for a wholly different purpose than the collective contributions of the church (i.e., to support the tribe of Levi as they ministered in spiritual matters). Furthermore, tithing was not the whole of the Jews’ offerings: there were numerous free-will offerings of the people in addition to the tithe.

2. The only NT guidelines regarding amount are the following:
 - a. *“As he may prosper”* (1 Cor 16:2).
 - b. *“He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully”* (2 Cor 9:6).
 - c. *“So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity”* (2 Cor 9:7).
 - d. *“For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have”* (2 Cor 8:12).
 - e. *“Each according to his ability”* (Ac 11:29).
3. No percentages are given, no allusions to the 10% tithe, no instructions on before tax/after tax giving, etc. As the poor widow gave more in her two mites than the rich did with their gold and silver (Lk 21:1-4), God looks at the heart of the giver as he responds to his obligations. Each Christian must give conscientiously and in a spirit of generosity and gratitude to the needs at hand, whether due to circumstances beyond our control or works undertaken by consent.
- C. NT churches did not prosper from business enterprises, did not solicit unbelievers for funds (bake sales, rummage sales, car washes, etc.) or otherwise generate funds apart from free-will offerings of their own members. Thus such giving becomes an act of worship to God rather than coercion or extortion.

Questions:

1. From where does every good and perfect gift come (Jas 1:17)?
2. Describe the attitude of the Macedonians as they contributed to the poor brethren in Jerusalem.
3. What churches had been ordered to take up a Sunday collection before the Corinthians?
4. What things are *specifically* authorized concerning this collection? List some things about the collection that are matters of expediency.
5. What was the main purpose of tithing under the Law of Moses?
6. Why were the collections of 1 Cor 16:1-2 to be stored or saved?
7. What is the difference between an individual having a garage sale and giving the money to the church and the church having a bake sale to raise funds? Are they both ok?

The Lord's Supper (1)

April 30, 2000

Purpose: The only memorial Jesus instituted was that of commemorating His death through a common partaking of food. Like every other element of Christianity, this memorial has been corrupted by those who pay no heed to what the Scriptures say about it. This lesson explores that memorial meal and establishes its true significance.

1. Terms Describing the Lord's Supper

- A. The Lord's Supper – 1 Cor 11:20. This context is the negative; i.e., the Corinthians were observing the Supper in error and thus corrupting its purpose.
- B. The breaking of bread – Ac 2:42 (Ac 20:7). This is a common term denoting eating and is applied to common meals as well as the Lord's Supper. The individual context suggests the proper application.
- C. The Lord's table – 1 Cor 10:21. This is metonymy: the thing which holds the food (table) is substituted for the food itself (the Supper).
- D. Communion of the body/blood of Christ – 1 Cor 10:16. "Communion" means fellowship or sharing. All Christians share together in the observance of the Lord's Supper. They demonstrate their oneness by the elements which are representative of what they hold in common: redemption through the sacrifice of Jesus.
- E. The terms "sacrament," "mass," "Holy Eucharist" and other phrases related to the Lord's Supper are not found in the NT. The Lord's Supper is not "dispensed" by the local church; rather, it is simply a shared spiritual meal among believers.

2. The Purpose of the Lord's Supper

- A. A memorial – Jesus instituted this supper as a (the) memorial of His death.
 - 1. 1 Cor 11:23-26 – *"Do this in remembrance of Me ... This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."*
 - 2. To be valid, the physical act of eating and drinking must be accompanied by the mental act of memory and reflection.
 - 3. This memorial is unique in that it is a common *act* rather than a set-aside day, a monument of physical materials (statue, museum, medallion, etc.).
- B. A proclamation – The observance of the Lord's Supper is a constant proclamation to the world that Jesus has come and has died.

1. 1 Cor 11:26 – *“You proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes.”*
 2. This is proclaimed in other ways as well, but the Lord’s Supper is a regular group proclamation by act.
- C. A communion – Partaking of the Lord’s Supper is an act of worship in which Jesus shares with us.
1. 1 Cor 10:14-22 – Communion with Christ through His memorial meal constitutes fellowship with Him even as partaking of meals in an idol’s temple is communion with demons.
 2. Mt 26:29; Lk 22:18, 29-30 – Since the kingdom would not be a full reality until the day of Pentecost, when Peter extended citizenship via the forgiveness of sins, Jesus is speaking of a spiritual partaking with His saints.
 3. We must be conscious of this communion as we partake of the Supper lest we offend the Lord through thoughtlessness.

3. An Obligation and A Privilege

- A. Peter Wilson observes: “Every Christian, when ushered into God’s kingdom by baptism, makes an appointment to meet Christ around His table on the first day of every week. No appointment with earthly friends, family or for our personal pleasure ought to take precedence over this appointment.”
- B. It is so easy to allow very important things to sink to the level of habit or cumbersome duty. We must retain a sense of eagerness and privilege in partaking of this memorial.

Questions:

1. Describe the context of Ac 2:42.
2. What advantages are enjoyed by the type of memorial that Jesus selected?
3. How do we know that the Lord’s Supper was not a temporary memorial?
4. Would it be proper to take the Lord’s Supper to one who is sick and unable to attend worship? Give a Biblical reason for your answer.
5. What aspect of the Lord’s Supper is a memorial of Jesus’ resurrection?

The Lord's Supper (2)

May 3, 2000

1. Background and Elements of the Lord's Supper

- A. Jesus chose the night of His betrayal and arrest to institute His memorial supper. On this occasion, Jesus was observing the Passover feast with His disciples (Mt 26:17-19). This was a fitting occasion to inaugurate the memorial as Jesus would die the next day and shed His precious blood "*as of a lamb without blemish and without spot*" (1 Pet 1:19).
1. What was to be eaten on this occasion was lamb, bitter herbs, unleavened bread and grape juice or diluted wine.
 2. Jesus incorporated two of these elements into His memorial: unleavened bread and "fruit of the vine" (Mt 26:26-29). No other elements may be used, for to make substitutions would violate the actions and statements of the Lord.
 3. The elements were eaten by the disciples. That all Christians are to partake of the Lord's Supper is evident by Paul's comments in 1 Cor 11:17-34 and the practice in Troas, Ac 20:7.
- B. The significance of the elements:
1. Jesus distributed the bread by breaking or tearing off pieces and giving them to the disciples (Mt 26:26). The consistency of this bread was like pita bread. In so doing Jesus said, "*Take, eat; this is My body.*"
 2. After the meal (Lk 22:20) Jesus "*took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins'*" (Mt 26:27-28).
 3. The force of "is" ("*this is my body/blood*") is metaphorical. Jesus provided simple, globally available elements to represent the atoning sacrifice of His body.
- C. The memorial, then, is primarily a remembrance of Jesus' *death*. It is not uncommon to hear a prayer or comments to the effect that the Lord's Supper is a memorial of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. True, these other aspects are almost inseparable from redemption, but the specific thing memorialized in the Supper is the *death* which paid the debt of our sins.

2. The Method of Observance

- A. Time – The *only* passage to specify a time for the partaking is Ac 20:7 – "*Now on*

the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread ...". That this was the settled practice of the early church is without question. This observance does not make Sunday a holy day, but it is the authorized day of the week when Christians observe the memorial of Jesus' death.

- B. The occasion – The brethren assembled for this memorial; i.e., it is not a private act of worship but a corporate celebration and proclamation (Ac 20:7; 1 Cor 11:17-18, 20).
- C. The frame of mind – *"Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord ... For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body"* (1 Cor 11:27).
 - 1. To "discern the Lord's body" is to have a full appreciation of the purpose and value of Jesus' sacrifice as we partake of the memorial. The Corinthians had completely perverted the solemn occasion and turned it into an self-indulgent, common meal.
 - 2. We might make the same mistake by letting our mind wander or by harboring sinful attitudes while we partake of the elements which represent forgiveness.

Questions:

- 1. How can one avoid partaking the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner (1 Cor 11:28)?
- 2. How would you answer the argument that partaking of the Lord's Supper is just as meaningful on the first Sunday of the quarter as on every Sunday?
- 3. Is it sinful to offer the Lord's Supper only once on Sunday? Why do we offer it twice? Do we have authority to offer it twice? Discuss.
- 4. List three things in our observance of the Lord's Supper that are matters of expediency.
- 5. If Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper at Passover, why can we not serve lamb on the table?

The Lord's Supper (3)

May 7, 2000

1. Corruptions of the Lord's Supper

A. The Lord's Supper as a common meal – This was the mistake of the Corinthians.

1. The Corinthians indulged themselves rather than partaking for a memorial purpose. *"But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment"* (1 Cor 11:34).
2. They further practiced social divisions in their indulgence. *"For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? ... Therefore ... when you come together to eat, wait for one another"* (1 Cor 11:21-22, 33).
3. We must be careful to retain the solemnity and dignity of this occasion.

B. Trans-substantiation – The doctrine that the bread and juice *literally* become the flesh and blood of Jesus.

1. This is an ancient doctrine of Catholicism and is a wholly unnecessary assertion. Both Jesus and the inspired writers of the Bible commonly used metaphors for comparison and description.
2. When Jesus said, "This is My body/blood" He was not teaching cannibalism. He was obviously still living when He said this. And when He said, "This cup **is** the New Covenant in My blood" (Lk 22:20), He was not referring to the container or its contents. These things were merely representations or symbols.
3. A similar misunderstanding takes place in Jn 6 and leads to the multitude's abandonment of Jesus: *"I am the bread of life"* (6:35) ... *"unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you ... for My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed"* (6:53, 55). This is not in reference to the Lord's Supper but Jesus' character and teaching.

C. Emphasis on the container – Another misunderstanding over Jesus' language in instituting the Supper involves the container for the fruit of the vine. The singular "cup" is taken to mean that only a single vessel can be used to distribute the juice. The container, however, is of no significance in the memorial. The number of containers, the composition of the container, the manner of distribution (passing the container to the participant or the participants partaking at a central location) is incidental to the object: to drink the juice that is symbolic of Jesus' blood.

D. Closed communion – While it is true that the observance of the Lord's Supper is

only a communion between Jesus and His people, those people are ill-equipped to make accurate determinations of who is qualified to partake. We might as well ask non-Christians to leave while we pray; ask them not to sing; and refuse to take their money. Such a double-standard concerning the Lord's Supper is baseless. What such a practice amounts to is sectarianism.

E. Limited participation – Churches who see the Lord's Supper as a sacrament to be dispensed by the church have also limited the distribution of the juice to the clergy. The laity receives a wafer of bread while the clergy drinks of the juice. This reinforces hierarchical distinctions and helps maintain a submissive spirit among the common members.

F. Periodic partaking – Rare is the church that partakes of the Lord's Supper every Sunday. The reason usually used for infrequent observation is that less is better; i.e., to take it too much would decrease appreciation for the sacrifice.

1. While it is sometimes true that “familiarity breeds contempt,” this is a classic case of pitting our wisdom against God's. We should trust that if God said “first day of the week” (implied: every time a week has a first day), that is exactly what we need to keep our minds focused upon Christ.
2. Additionally, it is usually *frivolous* things that we soon grow tired of. Too much chocolate, too much TV, too much *Andy Griffith*. It is hard to imagine true faith becoming bored or nonchalant about the sacrifice that brings heaven near.
3. Actually, this sounds like an excuse to get out of a memorial that is truly meaningless to the participant. Compare the attitude of Israel in Am 8:5: “*When will the New Moon be past, that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, that we may trade our wheat?*”

2. Conclusion – The memorial feast of the Lord's death is of uttermost importance. It deserves our faithful observance and undivided attention.

Questions:

1. Where did Paul get his teaching on the Lord's Supper? Cite the verse.
2. Discuss your thoughts on 1 Cor 11:30.
3. Use Ac 20:6-7 to show that the Lord's Supper was not an annual event in the NT.
4. Some have argued that the bread must be broken first by the servers of the Lord's Supper because “*Jesus took bread, blessed it and broke it, and gave it to the disciples ...*” (Mt 26:26). How would you respond to this?

Personal Evangelism (1)

May 10, 2000

Purpose: God has chosen that the primary method of transmission of His word is by word of mouth – preaching and teaching. Early Christians eagerly shared the message of the gospel with their contemporaries, sometimes at risk of their own lives. We must develop this characteristic as we grow in our faith.

1. Evangelism: A Prime Objective of the Church

- A. What is evangelism? It is from the Gk. *euangelizo* which means “to bring or announce glad tidings” (Vine, Vol. 2, p. 168). It refers to the simple process of speaking the gospel, regardless of who is doing the speaking.
- B. If Jesus gave His life to provide forgiveness of sin and citizenship in His heavenly kingdom, it should not surprise us that a main focus of that kingdom would be to propagate that message of salvation.
 - 1. A charge to both the apostles and the churches they would establish and guide: *“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you ...”* (Mt 28:19).
 - 2. Paul gave instructions to Timothy *“that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth”* (1 Tim 3:15).
 - 3. An example of this would be the young Thessalonian church which Paul commended thusly: *“For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything”* (1 Th 1:8).
- C. The kingdom of Christ is never large enough. As long as time flows, and many of those carried along the stream of time are lost, the Lord’s church and each individual Christian must focus their efforts on reaching and persuading all who can be moved by the gospel.

2. Evangelism: A Cooperative Effort

- A. The NT reveals that saving souls was a cooperative effort. At the very bottom are individual men, the ones who actually teach someone else the truth.
 - 1. Apostles: These men were specially commissioned by Jesus to concentrate their lives upon traveling throughout the Roman world and planting and nurturing churches. Examples of these men’s work are found throughout the book of Acts,

but note especially these passages concerning apostleship: Gal 1:11-12, 15-16; 2:7-9; Rom 15:18-21; 1 Cor 4:9-13.

2. Evangelists: These men were not necessarily inspired or endowed with the gifts of the Spirit (though many were), but they concentrated their efforts upon teaching and preaching. Examples: Philip (Ac 8:5-13 [cf. Ac 21:8]); Apollos (Ac 18:24-28; 1 Cor 1:12; 3:5-9; 16:12); Timothy (2 Tim 4:1-5).
3. Individual saints: It becomes obvious in reading through the history of the early church that *all* Christians had a part in spreading the gospel. There are too many lost people and too limited contacts to leave evangelism only in the hands of a few. Note that it is individual members who are scattered from Jerusalem and who “*went everywhere preaching the word*” (Ac 8:1, 4). Later, when the gospel is first preached to a significant degree among the Gentiles it is again by those who were scattered from Jerusalem (Ac 11:19-20). No apostle was initially involved in this effort in Antioch.

B. Local churches also made collective efforts to support and encourage evangelism:

1. “*I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to minister to you*” (2 Cor 11:8).
2. “*You have done well that you shared in my distress. Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities*” (Ph 4:14-16).
3. Such a focused laborer in the gospel is worthy of his wages: 1 Cor 9:7-14.

C. Whether congregational or individual, whether local or distant, whether written or oral, whether through partial or total financial support, God’s people must be working according to their ability and opportunity to spread the gospel of Christ.

Questions:

1. What did the Thessalonians do with their newfound faith?
2. T/F All apostles were evangelists, but not all evangelists were apostles.
3. Explain what Paul means when he asks, “*Is it oxen God is concerned about?*”
4. Discuss the advantages/potential disadvantages of having a fully-employed evangelist.
5. What does Paul call Aquila and Priscilla in Rom 16:3-4?
6. How would you respond if you heard someone say, “I don’t have to teach anyone the gospel; that’s what we pay the preacher for.”?

1. Seeking the Lost

- A. It is a challenge to find good people who may be open to gospel teaching.
 - 1. Paul's evangelistic habit was to first go to the Jewish synagogue when entering a city (if there was one): Ac 13:5, 14-15, 42-46; 14:1; 17:2. Paul also found some godly women praying by a river (Ac 16:13-15). He took a public stage in Athens where philosophies were openly discussed (Ac 17:16-21). Granted, we are not all apostles, but we must all like Paul look for opportunities to speak about Jesus.
 - 2. Not all societies are equally open to the gospel, and not all times in a given society are equally fertile. Evangelism will not produce equal results.
 - 3. It is also helpful to realize that evangelism and converting people are not the same thing. We have the obligation to sow the seed and nurture and cultivate, but it is God who gives the increase (1 Cor 3:7). Even Jesus could not convince all who heard Him, so we should not expect to do what He could not do.
- B. The most important element in reaching the lost with whom we daily associate is our example.
 - 1. *"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven"* (Mt 5:16).
 - 2. Our society is filled with religious skepticism because of the practices of unscrupulous preachers who *"suppose that godliness is a means of gain"* (1 Tim 6:5). So much corruption has been prevalent in the Christian community that unbelievers are wary of those trying to convert them.
 - 3. We must demonstrate genuineness, sincerity, honesty, consistency and lack of hypocrisy to unbelievers so that we can gain whatever confidence we can. This can take a long time and can be forfeited in an instant by foolish behavior.
- C. We must learn to "think evangelism." That is, we must prioritize searching for lost people in our conscious thought, take deliberate steps to cultivate prospects for teaching.

2. Some Practical Suggestions

- A. Pray for opportunities to be useful to the Lord. How many great endeavors of God's people began with prayer?! We need courage, wisdom, patience and other qualities of godliness in order to effectively influence the lost.

- B. Keep a running list of family, friends, co-workers and others with whom you might have an open door to teach.
- C. Do your part in welcoming visitors at worship, especially “regular visitors” who are friends and family of members.
- D. Show hospitality – Open your home to people who are “outside your circle” of acquaintances. If we stay huddled in cliques, we will not have opportunities to influence others who need us, particularly the lost.
- E. Read your Bible in public – On work breaks, in doctor’s offices (plenty of waiting there!), etc.
- F. Speak openly of God to others – Express thankfulness for some blessing of God, mention a sermon topic recently addressed, etc. Strike up a conversation with the repairman in your home, mail/package delivery employees, etc. You never know what may come from such “cold” contacts.
- G. Keep tracts, business cards and other advertising media on hand. Leave them in restaurants, mail them with bill payments, distribute them in other creative ways.

3. More Contacts, Not More Teachers

- A. What is needed to increase our potential in teaching the lost is not more teachers, for there are many at Hueytown who are capable of studying with a non-Christian.
- B. What is needed is more contacts. If you are a young Christian or uncertain of your abilities, you can arrange studies that can be taught by others.
- C. **In fact**, new Christians are often more successful at producing contacts than older Christians. Your earliest days of faith may present opportunities to reach family and friends which may never come again.

Questions:

1. Discuss some practical suggestions of how we can let our light shine before others.
2. Why did Paul go to synagogues first to preach the gospel?
3. T/F The gospel should be equally fruitful in all societies at all times.
4. Share with the class an unusual story of how someone you know or heard of became a Christian.
5. How might a Christian wife most effectively teach her husband (1 Pet 3:1-2)?

1. Resistance to Personal Evangelism

- A. One thing that is very frustrating to Christians, but especially to new Christians, is why others don't appreciate the gospel as we do. Sometimes it is because they are deceived: *"But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ ... should shine on them"* (2 Cor 4:3-4).
- B. Others simply have their hearts set on darkness, and they will not change no matter how badly others wish they would: *"And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed"* (Jn 3:19-20).
- C. The apostles and others were threatened (Ac 4:18-21), beaten (Ac 5:40-41; 16:22-23; 2 Cor 11:24-25) and killed in their efforts to teach others. Why then would they keep on preaching what was bringing them such grief? They had a genuine love for people's souls and a sense of what lostness truly meant. Though they mistreated him, Paul loved the Jews to the point that he would have forfeited his own salvation for them (Rom 9:1-3). We must be resilient and persevere in our efforts to offer salvation to the lost.

2. Hindrances in Reaching Out to the Lost

- A. When Jesus saw the multitudes of hurting, distressed people huddled around Him, *"He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, **like sheep having no shepherd**. Then He said to His disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, **but the laborers are few**. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest'"* (Mt 9:36-38).
- B. With so much at stake, with so many people around us with spiritual need, why are so many reluctant to be laborers?
 - 1. Apathy – We can so easily become apathetic to the plight of others by saying things such as, "They got themselves into their mess; they can get themselves out" or "The gospel is preached here every Sunday and the doors are open. They can come hear it if they want to." We must not forget that we are Christians by virtue of the efforts of others who were interested in us: a parent, a spouse, a friend, a mentor, etc. *Somebody has to care!*
 - 2. Shyness – Some people genuinely find it difficult to open up and speak to strangers or to get involved in a controversial discussion (which can happen when we

venture to speak with people about their spiritual welfare). But this trait should not be allowed to become an excuse and rule our actions. Some have a natural trait of anger, but it must be fought and controlled. So it is with inhibition.

3. Status quo – The lack of grounding of new converts can be unsettling. They often have erroneous hangovers from their former religious experiences; their lack of wisdom and experience in the faith may lead to erroneous conclusions or suggestions. They may not dress the way we think is appropriate, handle their children as we think they should. Their fledgling faith may be weak in some areas, and as a result they may do some questionable things. These are all growing pains that must be worked through. But some Christians are reluctant to take on this challenge, and their solution, whether consciously understood or not, is to protect the status quo by not diligently evangelizing.
4. A “formal religion” mentality – What we mean by this is that some Christians reduce faithfulness to the building and worship setting. They come to see the whole or the majority of their obligation discharged by their “attendance.” They come to see the building as central to the practice of faith: the building is where we worship, preach, study, and it is the place where the lost can come get the truth if they want it. This formalized view of Christianity completely fails to see the need to go to where the lost are and initiate efforts to save them.

C. Not everyone will have equal abilities to teach, but we must do our best with what we have.

3. The Example of Jesus

- A. *“For the Son of Man has come to seek and save that which was lost”* (Lk 19:10). Jesus was a seeker. He traveled throughout Galilee on several journeys seeking the lost (Mt 4:23; 9:35; 11:1).
- B. Jesus exposed Himself to the elements, to enemies, to exhaustion and to other discomforts in order to give men opportunity to be saved. He saw the lost as spiritually sick and in need of a physician (Mt 9:12). He had what they needed, though many of them did not realize it. Still, He did what He could to save them.

Questions:

1. Who is the “god of this age” and what does he do to hinder evangelism?
2. Describe Paul’s evangelistic spirit from 1 Cor 9:19-23.
3. Discuss how Christians can be preparing themselves to teach others more effectively.
4. What is the ultimate reward for evangelizing (see Jn 4:35-36; 1 Th 2:19)?

Relations With Brethren (1)

May 21, 2000

Purpose: This lesson lays a foundation for getting along with others. The Lord's church is a family, and the health and effectiveness of this spiritual family depends upon the ability of Christians to get along with one another.

1. The Importance of Good Relations with Others

- A. **Most** of the NT deals with interpersonal relations – how to get along with others.
- B. A lack of unity can destroy any organization that depends upon mutual good will and harmony: *“Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and a house divided against a house falls”* (Lk 11:17). Jesus further ties the unity of His church to evidence that encourages belief (Jn 17:20-23). On the contrary, when such unity is absent a hurdle is placed in the way of the unsaved.
- C. A local church is comprised of people with a common faith but differences in many other areas: gender, personality, education, family structure, employment, hobbies, opinions, etc. It is imperative that these differences be overcome by the overriding commonality of brethren.

2. The Local Church: A Mutually Dependent Association of Believers

- A. Family ties – Some new converts to Christ are not used to being in a spiritual family with its attendant duties, scrutiny and accountability. It may take a while to adjust to such a setting. Family love must be cultivated (1 Jn 4:7-11, 20-21; 5:1-2; 1 Th 4:9-10).
- B. Bodily interdependence – Christians are described by Paul as a body wherein each member contributes to its overall health and functioning (1 Cor 12:14-31; Rom 12:5; Eph 4:25). Paul's description of the body in 1 Cor 12 is two-fold:
 - 1. 12:14-19 addresses the discouraged brother who feels unappreciated because he might not be so spiritually endowed as others. Individual concerns must be made subordinate to the welfare of the group. And we must trust that *“God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased”* (12:18).
 - 2. 12:20-26 tempers the arrogance of the brother who has been given abundant capability in the kingdom. He is reminded that *“those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary”* (12:22), and *“those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor”* (12:23).
 - 3. The ultimate goal: *“That there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another”* (12:25).

- C. A spiritual temple – Another “group” illustration of the church is that of a spiritual temple of living stones: 1 Cor 3:16-17; 1 Pet 2:5; Eph 2:19-22. Note the severe penalty against anyone who would defile the temple.

3. Current Threats to Cohesiveness of the Church

- A. Individualist society – We are transforming into a self-centered, individualist society. We are withdrawing into ourselves, pursuing our own goals, desires and ambitions. This is contrary to the care we are to have for others as members of the body of Christ (Ph 2:4).
- B. The desire for privacy – The explosion of communication and web technology has produced a detrimental fallout. It seems that everyone has access to us – our hobbies, our finances, our health – and they want to sell us what we don’t want or need. This intrusiveness has caused us to recoil, and we are drawing ever more in to our homes and personal lives. We screen calls and take messages for fear it might be another salesman.
- C. Over-commitment – We are also so busy and harried that we have little “free time” for the spontaneous visit or study with brethren. How many of us plan for spiritual events and incorporate them into our schedules? The things we are busy doing are not ungodly things, but they simply crowd out the higher priority things of spiritual value.
- D. We must be aware of our culture and the threats it poses to our spiritual well-being. What can we do to retain control of our lives and schedules so that we are better able to serve our brethren?

Questions:

1. List some differences that exist between members within a local church and how they can lead to division.
2. Explain how the Lord expects us to serve Him from Mt 25:34-46. What are the consequences of failure?
3. What is necessary for the body to be edified in love (Eph 4:16)?
4. He who loves God must love _____ (1 Jn 5:21).
5. What did Paul desire to hear about the Philippian brethren (Ph 1:27)?

Relations With Brethren (2)

May 24, 2000

1. Principles/Actions Which Promote Unity

- A. Active good will – *“Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets”* (Mt 7:12).
- B. Love – *“Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law ... Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law”* (Rom 13:8-10).
- C. Impartiality – *“My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ ... with partiality ...”* (Jas 2:1-4); *“I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality”* (1 Tim 5:21).
- D. Humility – *“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself”* (Ph 2:3); *“Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another”* (Rom 12:10).
- E. Submission – *“... submitting to one another in the fear of God”* (Eph 5:21); *“Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble”* (1 Pet 5:5).
- F. Service – *“If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you”* (Jn 13:13-17); *“But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant”* (Mt 23:11).
- G. Bearing burdens –
 - 1. *“Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep”* (Rom 12:15).
 - 2. *“Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ”* (Gal 6:2).
 - 3. *“Comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak”* (1 Th 5:14).
 - 4. *“Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of Lord”* (Jas 5:14).
- H. Hospitality – *“... given to hospitality”* (Rom 12:13).
- I. Financial assistance – *“Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor,*

working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need” (Eph 4:28).

2. Principles/Actions Which Damage Spiritual Relations

A. Basically, we could simply say that the antithesis of the above list produces division, which is true. But we may suggest some specifics:

1. Sins of the tongue: Gossip, which not only publicizes what should have remained private but often distorts and exaggerates reality (Pr 16:28; 17:9; 2 Th 3:11), anger/slander (Eph 4:26, 31; Jas 1:19-20), murmuring/disputing (Ph 2:14; 1 Cor 10:10), wrangling/argumentation (1 Tim 6:4-5).
2. Sexual defrauding – *“Each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter”* (1 Th 4:4-6). Such behavior is the ultimate insult and injury that one Christian could inflict upon another.
3. Spiritual abandonment – *“Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world ...At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me”* (2 Tim 4:10, 16); *“not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another ...”* (Heb 10:25).

B. The easy solution to maintaining peace and harmony: ***Don’t do these hurtful things and do the helpful ones listed above.*** But alas, life seems to be a bit more complicated than this, doesn’t it?

C. We each have a huge responsibility to uphold and strengthen the body of Christ and to keep from harming it and its influence.

Questions:

1. What is true of the one who shows partiality (Jas 2:8-9)? Give a modern example.
2. What advantage comes in giving preference to others and esteeming them better than ourselves? Why should we look at other people this way?
3. What does weeping with those who weep demonstrate?
4. What effects does murmuring and complaining have upon others?
5. Do you think others know when we offer our service with feigned interest or concern?

1. When Relations Become Strained

- A. Even godly, well-intentioned people will have disagreements from time to time. Paul and Barnabas did (Ac 15:36-40). When such occurs, Paul suggests that an arbitrator from among the brethren be chosen to make a fair judgment (1 Cor 6:5).
- B. Brethren are warned in a couple of passages not to push issues that will cause a brother to violate his conscience and stumble in his faith (Rom 14:13, 21; 15:1-3; 1 Cor 8:9-13).
- C. We must be willing to yield wherein we feel that doing so would not jeopardize or compromise a greater good.
 - 1. In the case of Paul and Barnabas and the disagreement over John Mark, Paul evidently felt that the gospel work would be jeopardized by Mark's questionable reliability. He and Barnabas parted ways but not with bitterness or rancor. Paul later made favorable references to both Barnabas and Mark.
 - 2. We **must** refrain from exercising our liberties when doing so becomes the cause of another's sin, even if that sin is violation of conscience rather than material violation of God's precept.

2. When Sin Occurs

- A. It will happen from time to time that our brethren will become overtaken in a fault. Efforts must be made to restore brethren caught up in such circumstances:
 - 1. *"Brethren, if a man is overtaken in a trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted"* (Gal 6:1).
 - 2. *"Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins"* (Jas 5:19-20).
 - 3. *"And on some have compassion, making a distinction; but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh"* (Jude 22-23).
- B. When a brother recognizes his error and repents, he should be restored to his place in the family. Grudges should not be harbored; his wrong should not be constantly publicized. Care must be taken that the process of restoration is just that: to

restore someone's spiritual health which has been lost. This process can take time and requires patience by all parties (2 Cor 2:6-8).

3. When Sin Occurs Against Us

A. Occasionally we will find ourselves victimized by someone's sinful behavior. Such events can be hurtful, but we are counseled to seek the sinner's repentance. If one is truly the target of sin, then Jesus sets forth a procedure to follow (Mt 18:15-17):

1. Go privately and *"tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother"* (18:15).
2. *"But if he will not hear you, take with you one or two more, that by the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word may be established"* (18:16).
3. *"And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector"* (18:17).

B. Such reconciliation is to be sought by the wronged party; they are to actively seek the confession and repentance of the offender. There is no justification for brewing, stewing, gossiping and assassinating the character of the one who wronged us as a substitute for going and trying to straighten out the problem.

C. A forgiving spirit:

1. We must have a forgiving spirit toward those who have wronged us. Jesus says there is no limit on forgiveness among men, just as there is no limit to our forgiveness by God. Peter inquired about this (Mt 18:21ff).
2. Jesus further made God's forgiveness of our sins contingent upon our willingness to forgive others: *"For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses"* (Mt 6:14-15).

Questions:

1. What did Paul say the Corinthians should demonstrate toward the brother who had been disciplined?
2. How might one go about persuading a brother to repent of his sins?
3. What does Jesus say should come before offering a gift at the altar (Mt 5:23-24)?
4. Where must true forgiveness come from (Mt 18:35)?
5. What must we remember when restoring others from their sins (Gal 6:2)?

Purpose: This lesson stresses the fundamental importance in coming to a personal knowledge of the Scriptures. Familiarity with the word of God is crucial for our continued spiritual development and securing our hold on eternal life.

1. The Christian/The Student

A. When one becomes a Christian, he/she must understand up front they are taking on a life of continuing education.

1. Jesus was first and foremost a *teacher*. When multitudes gathered to Him for the miraculous blessings He bestowed, He took advantage of their presence and taught them.
2. The term “disciple” (*mathetes*) means “a learner (from *manthano*, to learn ... indicating thought accompanied by endeavor) ... The disciple was not only a pupil, but an adherent; hence they are spoken of as imitators of their teacher” (Vine, Vol. 1, p. 316).
3. Jesus paradoxically offers rest to all who come to Him, but He demands that they take His yoke and *learn* from Him (Mt 11:28-29).

B. The role of learning:

1. One is able to obey the gospel through learning: Rom 1:16; 6:17; 10:17.
It is possible for a man to learn by his own study of the Scriptures or to learn from one already knowledgeable, but in either case a man comes to understand the will of God by mental industry.
2. Once converted, the new Christian should “*desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby*” (1 Pet 2:2).
3. The rest of one’s life is a pursuit of deeper knowledge of God’s word so that one’s faith attains the most mature status possible and his usefulness to God is most effective: “*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth*” (2 Tim 2:15). This natural growth is what the Hebrew brethren failed to do and were thus in danger of losing their souls (Heb 5:12-6:3).

C. The attitude toward learning: If we have a full appreciation of who God is and the value of His word in our lives, we should have a natural hunger and thirst for knowledge (Ac 17:11).

2. The Value of the Scriptures

- A. The Scriptures are not merely the words of men but the words of God *through* men (1 Cor 2:10-13; 1 Th 4:8; 2:13). God has always made it His habit to speak to the majority through a selected and approved minority.
- B. The Scriptures, especially the NT, are God's final words to mankind. Nothing more will be directly revealed until Jesus returns. Therefore, if we want to know what God thinks or expects, we will learn it from our study of the Scriptures. See Eph 3:3-5; Heb 1:1-2; 2:3-4.
- C. The Scriptures reveal our inward thoughts and motives, enabling us to make corrections where needed (Heb 4:12).
- D. The Scriptures contain stories of God's interaction with mankind over the past millennia. Though all the various laws imposed at different times do not necessarily apply today, we can learn much through God's dealings with people in ancient times (Rom 15:4; 1 Cor 10:6, 11).

3. The Priority of the Scriptures Over the Words of Man

- A. Though men are indispensable in God's scheme of converting sinners and edifying the saved, we must always keep in mind the fallibility of man and place our confidence squarely upon what is revealed. *"If the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch"* (Mt 15:14).
- B. The NT warns repeatedly of false teachers, those who are unscrupulous and sly in their use of the word of God to take advantage of others (1 Tim 6:3-5; 2 Tim 3:6-9; 2 Pet 2:1-3, 18-19).
- C. We dare not shirk our personal responsibility to learn the word of God and trust in a preacher, a brotherhood publication, a religious tradition, the view of a school or any other entity. The responsibility for what we know and how it affects our lives lies squarely on our shoulders.

Questions:

1. What is the basic meaning of "disciple"?
2. "No one knows the things of God except _____."
3. In what way is the word of God like a sword (Heb 4:12)?
4. Why was Paul not ashamed of the gospel?
5. How can one always be learning but never come to a knowledge of the truth?

1. The Process of Learning

- A. Learning is a graduated process. From the time of infancy the human being gradually acquires knowledge. Whenever he/she masters one concept, it is natural to move to the next step. However, when it comes to the Scriptures, some tend to stop learning after the basics are grasped. This results in a retardation of spiritual growth and makes a situation ripe for error or ungodly, destructive behavior.
- B. Many stop learning the Scriptures because study is an inherently arduous and uncomfortable process. Learning is *work*. We have to focus our concentration, consider concepts and their logical outcomes, look for inconsistencies, blend what we have already learned with a new concept, etc. This takes time. Studying the Bible unto spiritual benefit is much more than a 20-minute lesson and filling in blanks.
- C. Parents often approach the Bible with double standards. They recognize the time, effort and discipline that it takes for their child to learn math, science and language but fuss and complain about a short Bible lesson. We should instill in our children good study habits so that they will be responsible students of the Scriptures into adulthood.

2. Resources for Bible Study

- A. Obviously, our study begins with the Bible itself. It has top priority and we should devote ourselves to becoming as familiar with it as we can. Our Bibles should not be clean and white with the pages still stuck together (unless it's new); rather, they should be dog-eared, stained with oil from our hands, marked in with pens and highlighters. They should be *used*. A daily Bible reading program is a ***must***.
- B. The Bible does not counsel rejecting all works of man in our quest to learn. We **do** have to be careful to avoid being influenced by false teaching, but that is not to say that everything produced by human authors is worthless. Men have written some works that are insightful, well-researched and inspiring and which certainly reflect a depth of understanding surpassing our own in some areas. Fortunately, we now have some very good resources available to all in the library. If they sit unused, this may expose some weaknesses in our attitudes about growing in knowledge.
- C. Private studies – Some of the most productive studies I have ever had with people have been one-on-one discussions in an informal setting. Jesus taught multitudes, but He also had personal conversations with many (the woman at the well – Jn 4: 7:4-26, the scribe – Mk 12:28-34; Peter – Mt 17:25-27). We benefit greatly by having studies and discussions with each other about the word of God.

- D. Group classes – The elders of this church have implemented a number of learning opportunities for the overall edification of the body (Eph 4:11-16). From Wednesday morning studies in the fall/winter to regular Sunday/Wednesday Bible classes, from periodic gospel meetings to weekly sermons, these gatherings are designed to give us opportunities to study together and “*stir up love and good works*” among us (Heb 10:24).
- E. It would be hard to overstate the importance of constant connection with and meditation upon the word of God. We need this focus in order to keep Satan at bay and keep focused on whatever is noble, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous and praiseworthy (Ph 4:8).

3. A Priority on Study

- A. A genuine and thorough knowledge of the Bible requires investment and priority.
1. It will take time. We may have to slow down or completely rearrange our schedules. If Bible study is an afterthought, then we should not be surprised or disappointed that we know as little as we do.
 2. It will take money. We buy magazines, newspapers, novels, school texts and other reading materials without flinching. But how much have **you** personally invested in Bible study materials? Are our computers only for game-playing? Or might it not be worthwhile to invest in a good Bible software program?
 3. It will take interest. Those not truly interested in learning and growing can find some pretty creative excuses for not participating in Bible studies. It’s funny, when we *really enjoy* something the heat, cold, gnats, mosquitoes, rain, early rising, physical discomfort, hunger and other inconveniences don’t seem to bother us nearly so much. Excuse-making tells more about us than we care to admit.
- B. Let’s decide to put Bible study, once and for all, where it belongs: at the **top** of our priority list.

Questions:

1. Apply Gal 6:7 to studying the Bible.
2. Describe what you think it would have been like to be a member of the church in Antioch from Acts 11:26; 13:1; 15:32-35.
3. How would you respond to someone who says, “I just think you people in the church of Christ spend too much time studying the Bible.”?
4. Where do you have a problem applying Ph 4:8 in your life?

1. Seeing the Big Picture

It is not until one sees the “connectedness” of the Biblical books that specific passages and concepts will make sense. Until then, one’s knowledge will be a hodgepodge of unrelated facts laced with myths and misconceptions. When we learn to see the big picture several things will happen automatically: 1) formerly obscure passages will begin to make sense, 2) we will be able to find things in the Bible more quickly, 3) we will be better equipped to defend the truth, and 4) our memory of Bible data will increase. *There are no shortcuts in this process. Time must be spent learning about each individual book.*

2. Bringing Order to Chaos

The books of the Bible are “chaos” in the sense that they are not chronologically arranged in either testament. One cannot read straight through the Scriptures and get an orderly flow of events.

Note the grouping of OT books by literary category:

Books of Law (Penteteuch)

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus
Numbers, Deuteronomy

Books of History

Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2
Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2
Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah,
Esther

Books of Poetry

Job, Psalms, Proverbs,
Ecclesiastes, Song of
Solomon

Major Prophets

Isaiah, Jeremiah (Lamentations),
Ezekiel, Daniel

Minor Prophets

Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum,
Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

Note the similar grouping of NT books:

Gospels (Biographies)

Matthew, Mark, Luke, John

History

Acts

Epistles (Personal Letters)

Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians,
Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Phile-
mon, Hebrews, James, 1 & 2 Peter, 1, 2 & 3 John, Jude

Prophecy

Revelation

These categorizations are of some value, but they aren’t very helpful if you are trying to locate a specific event, verse or personal anecdote. For this the student of the Bible must become familiar with the major theme and time frame of each book. Refer to the OT chart on page 49. This is a brief overview of OT events, but note in the right hand column that the books are placed in their chronological sequence.

When we were little we started out memorizing the books in order. Most children with a little practice can carry out this task - even the OT - at two or three years. As our Bible knowledge progresses we should begin to recognize a progressive order of events. When

we associate the books of the Bible with these events, our ability to handle the Scriptures accurately will increase.

Example: Suppose you are having a discussion with someone and you wish to refer to the contest on Mt. Carmel between the prophet Elijah and the prophets of Baal. You don't have a concordance with you, so where do you start? From a background study of the OT, you remember that Elijah was a faithful prophet in the days of extremely wicked kings over Israel. That should eliminate all the books of the OT except those dealing with the Divided Kingdom: 1 & 2 Kings; 2 Chronicles. At least you have this much of a head start, having eliminated right off the bat 36 of the 39 OT books. Through other studies you may have come to realize that Elijah's work is covered mostly in 1 Kings, for he ascends into heaven at the beginning of 2 Kings. At this point you may be able to quickly scan through 1 Kings and find the reference (especially when you see the highlighted texts you had earlier marked), or you may look at the opening page of 1 Kings and look at the chapter/subject chart you hand wrote for such times as this. In either case, diligent study, organization of books/events and effective note-taking has prepared you to find a reference rather quickly without outside aids.

3. A Practical Assignment - Commit the following simple outline of Acts to memory:

1. The growth of the Jerusalem church – Acts 1-7
2. The scattering of the Jerusalem church – Acts 8-12
3. Paul's preaching among the Gentiles – Acts 13-20
4. Paul's imprisonment in Caesarea – Acts 21-26
5. Paul's journey to Rome – Acts 27-28

As time goes on, you can add to this outline and make it more detailed, eventually being able to tell the main theme(s) of any chapter you may be asked about. This may seem an insurmountable challenge to the new Christian, but just think about all the football teams (or basketball, or whatever) you can name, the players who fill certain key positions, their numbers, scores of certain games played, etc. *We're back to attitude and interest – we learn and remember the things we have a genuine interest in.*

Questions:

1. T/F Most books of the Bible are chronologically arranged.
2. Where in the above outline of Acts do you think Paul's defense before King Agrippa is found?
3. What books are the biographies of the NT? What are the OT poetical books?

Prayer (1)

June 14, 2000

Purpose: One of the most blessed privileges of the child of God is the ability to pray directly to God through Jesus and be heard. There is a tremendous amount of spiritual strength that comes from this interaction with God. Yet, it is a benefit that is sometimes neglected. When we come to truly understand prayer and our relationship with God, we will seek to develop this aspect of interaction with God.

1. What Is Prayer?

Man's sense of what it takes to make prayer acceptable to the God of heaven is often quite different from Jesus' teaching. Rather than a pompous show, mindless repetition or some formal "prayer lingo," genuine prayer is *conversation with God*. God is not more apt to hear cliches than common speech; His attention is not gained by handling beads or trinkets. Prayer is the humble expression of need and the simple giving of thanks.

2. Our Motives in Prayer

Jesus drew several negative lessons on prayer from the Pharisees. One had to do with their turning what should have been a private petition into a public show (Mt 6:5-6; 23:14). We must keep the main thrust of Jesus' observation in view lest we misapply His point. He does not condemn praying in public *per se*, for He, Himself, does it (Jn 11:41-43; Mt 26:26-27), early Christians did it (Ac 4:24ff) and Paul directed it (1 Cor 14:15-17). What Jesus faults is an inner desire to impress others with piousness, to display one's prayers for the praise and adulation of others. What a travesty of heavenly privilege! God does not appreciate so being used.

3. Jesus' Sample Prayer

Jesus drew a lesson from the "hypocrite"; He now draws from the heathen (Mt 6:7-8). Again, while repetition *per se* is not wrong, we must not think that prayer can be reduced to perfunctory phrases repeated over and over by a benumbed mind. God lacks no awareness of anything; He is not like a distracted parent who must be hounded, tugged on and irritated before taking notice. Jesus then gives a prayer which was simply intended to be a sample of appropriate (though not comprehensive) content coupled with simplicity of expression (Mt 6:9-13). This was never intended to be what it has become: a group recitation at formal or ceremonial gatherings.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name – God must be given due honor and respect in view of all He is and has done. What a shame that God's name is more often found in the company of profanity than praise.

Your kingdom come – As Jesus gives this sample prayer the kingdom as prophesied in

Daniel has not yet fully come. Thus some object to this phrase on that basis. However, the term “kingdom” has application to the final manifestation of the Lord at His second coming and the saints eternal heavenly home (2 Tim 4:1, 18). There is, therefore, a legitimate sense in which the kingdom has not yet come.

Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven – This is both acknowledgment of and submission to the omnipotent power of God. As we shall see in this study, bending to the will of God is vital to acceptable prayer and to the strength of our faith.

Give us this day our daily bread – The first three phrases addressed God: His name, kingdom and will. The prayer now turns to human needs, the first being daily sustenance. God has made our bodies dependent upon constant fuel, and it is He who provides the rain and seasons to produce food (Ac 14:17; Mt 5:45). Thus the constant need to eat is designed to keep us aware of and dependent upon the Feeder.

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors – Sin is here pictured as spiritual indebtedness to God (see Mt 18:21ff). Man’s only hope for fellowship with God is His willingness and provision for forgiveness. But this is conditional upon several things, one of which mentioned here is our own willingness to forgive those indebted to us via their wrongdoing.

And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one – As God does not tempt us to sin (Jas 1:13), the thought here is that God not *allow* us to be “drawn away by (our) own desires and enticed” (Jas 1:14). Or, the reference could be to trials of various sorts which God certainly employs to build our faith (Heb 11:17). The prayer presents a positive desire: to be delivered from *the* evil one (Satan) or *any* evil one who may seek to do us harm.

For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever, Amen – This doxology appears to have been added by men later as it is not in the oldest and most reliable manuscripts. Also, various versions of it exist in the later manuscripts. If considered original, the prayer ends with acknowledgment that God is transcendent, a powerful and glorious Being with eternal existence. All must humble themselves at His feet in prayer and personal will to be accepted of Him. To do otherwise is spiritually suicidal.

Questions:

1. What reward do men have who pray publicly for human acclaim?
2. God sees _____ (Mt 6:6). How does He reward genuine prayer?
3. What must we do even as we “stand praying” (Mk 11:25-26)?
4. T/F This prayer covers everything that ever needs to be prayed.

1. Persistence in Prayer

Jesus tells two short parables to illustrate that “*men always ought to pray and not lose heart*” (Lk 11:5-8; 18:1-8). But if God doesn’t need to be cajoled or pestered into hearing our prayers, why is persistence in prayer needed? Mainly, because prayers may not be answered exactly when and how we think they should be. We must always defer to the divine judgment of God. Sometimes a good thing becomes bad if administered at the wrong time. Further, other people’s needs must be considered along with our own. (This becomes sadly comical when two sports teams are both praying for victory when only one of them can win. And the winners say, “God was looking out for us and gave us the victory today.” Does that mean the *morally* superior team won?!) We must not conclude that God doesn’t hear or care if what we ask for is not granted immediately.

2. Humility in Prayer

Jesus tells another parable in Lk 18:9-14 which contrasts with the simple prayer of Mt 6:9-13. “*Two men went to the temple to pray ...*”. Again, public prayer *per se* is not forbidden, and Jesus quotes Isaiah’s reference to the temple as a “house of prayer” (Mk 11:17). *Attitude* is the key. One man was overwhelmed with a sense of his own righteousness; the other was overwhelmed with a sense of guilt and shame for his sins. One of these prayers will be rewarded; the other will not.

3. God Hears His Children

1 Jn 5:14 – “*Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.*”

Jas 1:5-8 – “*If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; for he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.*”

Mt 7:11 – “*If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!*”

As we are encouraged by God to seek Him and cast all our cares upon Him, “*for He cares for you*” (1 Pet 5:7), we are naturally drawn to the question of the **effectiveness** of prayer. What, exactly, does prayer *do*? This question will be explored more fully in our next lesson, but we cannot adequately consider it until first looking at the frame of mind of the petitioner.

As the Christian matures prayer progresses from an occasional cry for help to an ongoing dialog. Our awareness of dependence upon God becomes *daily* rather than only during a crisis. All our thoughts are examined in light of God's oversight; blessings are received and enjoyed in the acknowledgment that God is responsible for them; our weakness to temptation and faltering in sin is more immediately apparent rather than swept under the rug of obliviousness.

As our faith grows, so does our confidence that God is active in our lives; no, not *miraculously* active, but active nonetheless. Prayer is based upon confidence in that activity. God is not merely a divine "shrink" or sounding board who dispassionately listens to our troubles. Through the ages He has responded to not only the *needs* of His children but their *expressions* of need – and desire. Even the psalmist long ago wrote: "*But certainly God has heard me; He has attended to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God, who has not turned away my prayer, nor His mercy from me!*" (Ps 66:19-20). We express our needs, and God responds not vocally but actively. We "hear" and "see" answers to our prayers. There is great blessing alone in being *heard* (1 Jn 5:14). Just knowing that God is *aware* of our situation (though He is aware even *without* prayer) provides great strength and comfort. But it is our faith in God that gives us confidence to make requests with the assurance that they will be granted.

Note the following from James 1:5-8:

1) God gives "liberally and without reproach." God is not stingy, reluctant or resentful in His giving. Note that the object requested – wisdom – is something that God desires for all men to possess. Thus "*it will be given to him.*"

2) The petitioner must "ask in faith, with no doubting." This man is not seeking blessings which arise from a constant relationship with God but is moved by fleeting urges and occasional perceived needs. God is merely a momentary tool to be used and set aside until needed again. Such a man is "*double-minded ... and unstable in **all** his ways,*" not just prayer.

3) Such people are not promised God's help in response to prayer as are His dedicated, faithful people (v 7).

Questions:

1. Why might some people not ask God for wisdom?
2. How can a man who prays for wisdom help himself attain it?
3. Jesus wonders if He will find _____ on the earth when He comes.
4. Where was the tax-collector standing when he prayed?
5. T/F The Pharisee was not heard because didn't do any religious things.

1. The Sovereignty of God's Will

One principle we must always keep in mind, especially when considering the subject of answered prayer, is that one's belief in and relationship with God does not obligate God to the believer's will. On the contrary, the believer is **always** subordinate to the will of God. God's promise to answer prayer must be balanced with the sovereignty of His will. We must learn to make our plans for the future and base our intentions upon the over-arching will of God. God's purposes are supreme and we must seek to match our lives with that purpose as best as we can determine. Note the emphasis on God's will:

Jas 4:15: *"Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.'"*

1 Cor 4:19: *"But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord wills ..."*. (See also Ac 18:21; Heb 6:3; Rom 1:10; 15:32; 1 Th 3:11; etc.)

1 Pet 3:17; 4:19: God's will may even allow some circumstances of suffering.

Heb 10:7, 9: Prophetic purpose: *"Then I said, 'Behold, I have come – in the volume of the book it is written of Me – to do Your will, O God ...'"*.

2. Some Conditions Placed Upon Prayer

- A. God's will: *"... if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us"* (1 Jn 5:14). Jesus recognized and respected this: *"O My Father, if it is possible ... nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will"* (Mt 26:39, 42, 44). The will of God often has set limits, and we cannot effectively pray in violation of those limits. For example, we are not to pray for God to save people who remain rebellious to Him (1 Jn 5:16). Further, our desire and God's will may not mesh, and in such cases we must be content and confident in His judgment.
- B. Obedience: *"And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight"* (1 Jn 3:22). "Keep His commands" equates with "walk in the light" (1:7) and "abides in the light" (2:10). This is called "knowing God" (2:3). John here states our previous observation: those in a covenant relationship with God have the assurance of answered prayer.
- C. Proper motives: *"Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures"* (Jas 4:2b-3). Here we have people who are so consumed with sating their desires that they forfeit prayer in favor of their own ambition, ingenuity and shrewdness. The "do not

ask.” Others asked, but did so for selfish indulgence. Such attitudes make one an enemy of God, a spiritual adulteress (Jas 4:4).

D. What is beneficial: The NT emphasizes God giving “good gifts” (Jas 1:17; Mt 7:11). It may very well be that what *we* determine to be beneficial *God* sees as disastrous. As a human father may withhold something dangerous from his child, so God governs what He allows us to have. We must defer to God’s judgment in this matter.

Not all these conditions are stated with every promise of answered prayer, but they are always operative as we make our requests to God.

3. Promises of Answered Prayer

It is in the above light that the following verses must be understood. To make them unqualified, open-ended promises wherein the will of God is made subject to our will is erroneous. Prayer is not some heavenly credit card for an earthly shopping spree.

Mt 7:7 – *“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.”* Remember that this was spoken to demoralized, disillusioned people (Jews, mainly) who had long been misguided by the scribes and their traditions. Jesus is trying to instill new hope and confidence in God, and He does so by reintroducing God to them as a caring, loving Father (comp. Mt 6:25-34).

Mk 11:23-24 – *“For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will come to pass, he will have whatever he says. Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.”* After all Peter had seen Jesus do, he marveled at the withering of the fig tree which Jesus had cursed the day before (Mk 11:20-21). Jesus speaks this to His disciples who are still uncertain in faith; hence, *“So Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Have faith in God’”* (Mk 11:22). Jesus will shortly be asking His disciples to do the “impossible”: preach His kingdom into existence among the cities of the Roman Empire. They will not be able to do this by their own resources, but by tapping into the will of God by faith and prayer they will be successful. They must yet come to greater faith. [Faith as a mustard seed and moving mountains seem to be proverbial expressions, see Mt 17:20]

4. Conclusion

God answers prayers! If we think carefully, I believe we will find that the vast majority of our prayers have been answered in the affirmative. Even when answered in the negative, our prayers have been to our benefit. Let us not allow the major hurt or disappointment set aside the greater truth: God has given us everything we need and so much more!

First Principles Evaluation

Multiple Choice:

1. Which term does **not** describe one with oversight authority in a local church?
 - a. Pastor
 - b. Elder
 - c. Evangelist
 - d. Bishop
2. Which part of worship is not expressly commanded in the NT?
 - a. Observing the Lord's Supper
 - b. Singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs
 - c. Engaging in prayer
 - d. Offering an invitation at the end of a sermon
3. Gatherings of the church are not necessary for which of the following (circle all that apply, if any):
 - a. Disciplinary action (withdrawing fellowship)
 - b. Partaking of the Lord's Supper
 - c. Baptism
 - d. Taking up the collection
4. Of whom is this said: "Neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common"?
 - a. The church at Corinth
 - b. The Jerusalem church
 - c. The churches of Macedonia and Achaia
 - d. The Philippian brethren
5. Which of the following is **not** a purpose of the Lord's Supper:
 - a. Reenactment
 - b. Memorial
 - c. Communion
 - d. Proclamation
6. Which term best describes these three men: Philip, Timothy and Apollos?
 - a. Fishermen
 - b. Deacons
 - c. Converts of Paul
 - d. Evangelists

7. 1 Cor 12:25 says “that there should be no schism in the body.” What does “schism” mean?
- a. Disease
 - b. Discouragement
 - c. Division
 - d. Disagreement
8. Who should help restore a brother overtaken in a trespass (Gal 6:1)?
- a. His peers
 - b. Those who are spiritual
 - c. The preacher
 - d. Those who have sinned in a similar manner
9. What is the first thing one should do when sinned against?
- a. Go to the sinner and tell him
 - b. Seek the advice of the elders
 - c. Nothing; wait for him to realize his mistake
 - d. Call Jim and have it put in the bulletin
10. The basic definition of “disciple” is:
- a. A learner
 - b. A believer
 - c. A saint
 - d. A Jewish convert
11. Which of the following is **not** a minor prophet?
- a. Amos
 - b. Micah
 - c. Ezra
 - d. Joel
12. Who “searched the Scriptures daily” to verify Paul’s teaching?
- a. The Philippians
 - b. The Bereans
 - c. The Athenians
 - d. The Ephesians

True/False

- 1. T/F The universal church has no organizational structure.
- 2. T/F Sunday worship is modeled after the Jewish Sabbath observance.

3. T/F The church at Corinth was given the same instructions concerning giving as the churches in Galatia.
4. T/F The term “break bread” can refer to a common meal as well as the Lord’s Supper.
5. T/F Offering a gift at the altar takes precedence over being reconciled with a brother.
6. T/F The following books of the OT are in chronological order: Judges/Isaiah/ Esther.
7. T/F Jesus never prayed publicly.
8. T/F Our requests of God must always be subject to His will.
9. T/F The universal church is comprised of all true saints worldwide.
10. T/F Antioch was unique because it was the first place that the term “Christian” was applied to believers.

Finish the Verse:

1. “not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but _____...” (Heb 10:25)
2. “For by one Spirit we were all baptized _____...” (1 Cor 12:13)
3. “And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is _____, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.” (Eph 1:22-23)

Four Point Bonus:

Of whom is it said, “but first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God” (2 Cor 8:5)?

Answer Key:

Multiple Choice:

1. C
2. D
3. C, D
4. B – Ac 4:32
5. A

6. D
7. C
8. B
9. A – Mt 18:15
10. A
11. C
12. B – Ac 17:11

True/False:

1. T
2. F
3. T – 1 Cor 16:1
4. T
5. F – Mt 5:23-24
6. T
7. F – Jn 11:41-43
8. T
9. T
10. T – Ac 11:26

Finish the Verse:

1. “exhorting one another”
2. “into one body”
3. “His body”

Bonus:

The churches of Macedonia