

Omega Course:

Practical Church Planter Training

By

The Alliance for Saturation Church Planting

In cooperation with

Peter Deyneka Russian Ministries



The CCP Pastoral Training Course



The CCP (Community Church Planting) Pastoral Training Course Book 4

Reaching all the Nations for Jesus Christ

Bereik al die Nasies vir Jesus Christus

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LEADERSHIP

LEADERSHIP

2

LESSON

Profile of a Leader

☞ Lesson Purpose

The purpose of this lesson is to help the trainee to understand his role as a leader in the specific context of church planting.

☞ Main Points

- There are eight characteristics of a Christian leader.
- 'Natural leaders' and 'non-leaders' can improve their leadership skills.

☞ Desired Outcomes

When the content of this lesson has been mastered, each participant should:

- Know the role of the leader in the church planting process.
- Know his/her personal strengths as a leader.
- Be committed to work on two specific areas where he/she intends to grow in leadership ability.

☞ Appendix

2A "The Leader"

☞ Suggestions to Trainers

Keep in mind that almost all of these concepts are expanded on in greater detail in later lessons.

INTRODUCTION

There are different styles of leaders. However, no matter what style is most natural for the church planter, he should always be a facilitator. A facilitator is someone who enables others to use their gifts and abilities more effectively. Church leaders are responsible to *prepare God's people for works of service* (Eph 4:12), rather than do most of the ministry themselves. Although a church planter must be a "doer," it is even more important that he "causes things to be done."

Below is a list of several personal characteristics and skills that enable a church plant leader to see a church planted under his ministry.

I. MAINTAIN CHRIST-LIKE CHARACTER

The church planter, first of all, must possess Christ-like character. Ministry flows from character. Consider the maxim: "private victory precedes public victory." Unless Christ has claim on your heart so that Christ-likeness is evident, how can you expect to see Christ work through you in your nation? If the church planter is not being changed by Christ, it is doubtful that others will be changed through him.

Christ-likeness springs from understanding God's love for us, and from our own need for him to work in our lives. Ministry must be a result of God's grace at work in our lives; no other motivation will be honored by God or will sustain commitment when times are tough. Awareness of God's grace in our lives is gained and sustained by meditating upon God's Word, believing his promises, prayer, and worship.

Through daily fellowship with Christ, focus on God's promises, and on the vision that He has given for your ministry. Acknowledge your dependency upon Him to accomplish His purpose in your life and ministry. Worship God for what he has done in your life already.

II. WORK WELL WITH A TEAM

Many church-planting projects start out with a leadership team in place. Other times, a church planter starts out alone and must develop others who join his team as the project develops. Whatever your situation, always work toward developing teams, both leadership teams and ministry teams. Make it a normal pattern for your ministry and for the church in its development.

Teamwork was the normal pattern for ministry in the New Testament.

Effective church planters do not work alone. On the contrary, they stand with others, or others stand with them in the work that God has called them to do. Often working with others as a team can be just the crucible in which our true character is seen and developed. Beware of the leader who is not surrounded by a team. If one cannot work with a team, how can one lead a church? Teamwork is the normal pattern for ministry in the New Testament. The Holy Spirit set apart Paul and Barnabas as a missionary team (Ac 13:2). Although Paul and Barnabas went their separate ways later in ministry, they both formed new teams with whom they ministered (Ac 15:36-41). Teamwork was so important to Paul that even when he had an open door for ministry, he held off because he was alone (2Co 2:12-13).

A "team" may be defined as a **group of people who have banded together to work toward a common objective**. A good team has common values and philosophy of ministry. The giftedness of the various team members ought to be diverse while mutual respect, affirmation and loyalty should be evident through open and constructive communication on the team. It is the job of the leader to work with the team not as a boss or chief, but as a facilitator. His teammates are not his personal staff, but his co-workers. Building and working with a team can be extremely difficult and time intensive process, but you can be certain that its dividends are great.

III. DEVELOP THE GIFTEDNESS AND ABILITIES OF OTHERS

The leader of a church plant multiplies himself through the identification and development of other workers. Many leaders try to build their ministries around themselves and their own accomplishments. But God calls us to disciple and train others (2Ti 2:2). It is always better to put 10 people to work than to do the work of 10 people.

It is always better to put 10 people to work than to do the work of 10 people.

One of the main tasks of the leader of a church plant must be to enable others to identify their spiritual gifts and to become effective in ministry. This involves training mature church workers as well as new converts to do the tasks of the ministry, and matching people with appropriate gifts to the ministry opportunities as they arise. This also means the leader is, first of all, a *trainer*. Even if he does not spend a lot of time training in the technical sense, his life models how to do ministry. People develop their gifts and abilities by just being around this person.

Part of the discipleship process of new believers is to help them identify and use their gifts. Involving them in ministry is a great way to do this. Consider taking a disciple on a visit to a sick person, or on an evangelistic opportunity. This is an effective way to train him or her for ministry.

IV. KNOW HOW TO DELEGATE RESPONSIBILITY

A wise leader is happy to delegate when it is appropriate (Exodus 18). Delegation accomplishes more than working alone, by involving others in the ministry.

There are several reasons for delegation. The church planter may delegate responsibilities in areas of ministry where he is weak and others are gifted. In other situations, he may delegate so that others will feel a sense of ownership for the ministry. People tend to be more committed to things they themselves participate in.

While a church planter always looks for ways to delegate, he does so without demanding more from others than he himself is willing to give. He avoids overworking others. When assigning people to ministry responsibilities, he also makes sure that they have the necessary resources to complete the task. When appropriate, the wise leader models ministry before expecting it from others.

V. SET GOALS, PLANS AND OBJECTIVES AND WORK TOWARD THEM

Setting goals and planning is a normal practice approved in Scripture. In Proverbs, we learn that we should "Make plans by seeking advice, if you wage war, obtain guidance" (Pr 20:18). Jesus used the illustrations of a builder who did not plan before building a tower and of a king who did not prepare properly for a battle as examples of people poorly committed to their tasks (Lk 14:28-33). If we are truly committed to our ministry, then setting clear goals and plans is proper for us as well.

A church planter prayerfully establishes goals, objectives and strategies in consultation with his team. His plans are realistic. He avoids unrealistic goals that cannot be achieved. His plans are flexible, so that he can cope effectively with ambiguity and change. He is able to adapt strategies and plans to specific situations. When necessary, he adjusts his priorities and emphasis according to the various phases of church birth and growth.

Figure 2.1 Characteristics of a Christian Leader



VI. ARTICULATE VISION IN SUCH A WAY THAT IT INSPIRES OTHERS

The leader is a person of vision. That is, he sees not only the present, but can also imagine what the future could be like. For the church planter, this means communing with God through the Word and prayer, with the result that he has a clear sense of what God wants to do through him in the future. He also recognizes the importance of persuasively communicating this vision to the church or to the other believers who will help him plant a new church. He may develop a theme/slogan that highlights the vision and philosophy of the ministry. A visionary church planter is able to keep the vision central to everything that is done in the establishment of the new church. Through his efforts, those involved in the church plant remain committed to the vision, and feel responsible for the growth and success of the ministry.

VII. BE PERSISTENT AND OVERCOME SETBACKS

A Christian leader must be persistent. Satan will resist any attempt to build the Church of Jesus Christ. Problems *will* arise. He must be willing to work hard and long and not give up. He takes initiative and is aggressive in getting things done, without being bossy or unpleasant. He is a self-starter like the ant in Proverbs 6:7 who works because of his own initiative, without waiting to be directed. He approaches challenges as "opportunities" rather than as "problems." He believes that God will do great things for His Own glory.

A leader approaches challenges as "opportunities" rather than as "problems."

Most people are reactive; meaning their activity is controlled by events as they happen to them. A reactive person is always responding to what is going on around him, and ends up being the victim of circumstances. A Christian leader or church planter should be pro-active. He needs to think *ahead* and prepare himself and those to whom he ministers so that they can victoriously work through problems when they happen. For example, a Christian leader teaches truth *before* the cults steal his sheep, and deals with problems while they are still small and manageable. Inevitably, there will be times when the best leader must react to a problem. But a good leader will lay a good foundation in advance, so that problems are easier to solve. Even in difficult times, he will remain a *leader*, rather than a *victim*.

Table 2.2 Victim or Leader?

Victim	Leader
Says: "There is nothing we can do"	Says: "Let's look at the alternatives"
Focuses on the problems	Focuses on the possibilities
Lives in the past	Lives for the future
Pessimistic	Optimistic
Waits for others to move	Takes initiative

VIII. LEAD IN EVANGELISM

It is impossible to plant a church without evangelism. Because evangelism is such an important part of church planting, it must be clear that it is a priority of the leader. Many in the church planting project will have the same attitude as the leader when it comes to evangelism. If the leader is not involved, they will not be. If the leader only talks about evangelism, and never does it, neither will they. If the leader is passionately active as an evangelist, they will be too.

Evangelism is a fundamental task commanded repeatedly in the New Testament (Mt 28:19-20). Jesus trained 12 men to take His place. Training them was His main focus - but He never lost sight of the reason He was training them. He made it obvious by His teaching and His example that His concern was for the masses who needed salvation. His disciples caught that same concern through Jesus' example as well as His explicit teaching. Paul also told Timothy to do the work of an evangelist (2Ti 4:5). Evangelism may not have been his gift, but Paul felt that Timothy had to make it a priority.

Evangelism and ministry training are both crucial activities of church planters. One may ask how the church plant leader can concentrate on each of these activities at the same time. This is a good question. One way to answer it is to involve the leaders you are training in evangelism. Always work with a partner and he will always be learning.

CONCLUSION

The above personal characteristics and skills better enable a church plant leader to successfully see a church planted under his or her ministry. A church planter will be wise to develop these skills and characteristics. Yet it should be kept in mind that church planters are not all alike. Personalities and styles differ as with any other ministry gift. In which of the above ways are you gifted as a church planter? In which ways are you limited, in your opinion?

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION, REVIEW AND APPLICATION

- Why should a leader delegate?
- What particular task are you doing that you should delegate to another?
- What is a facilitator?
- In what ways is a church planter like a farmer?
- How can a leader get others involved in setting goals?
- Which is more important, the training of leaders or active evangelism?
- What does it mean to be pro-active and why should a church planter have this characteristic?
- Do you have a team to work with? Why or why not?
- Do you or your team have goals for your ministry?

ACTION PLAN

See Appendix 2A: "The Leader." What characteristics of Christian leadership do you see in this account of the life of Christ? List them for yourself on a sheet of paper, and then compare them to the characteristics discussed in this lesson. Do they agree? How important do you think they are? How does your life and leadership compare?

LEADERSHIP
APPENDIX
2A

The Leader

The leader had quite a job to do. His mission was to transform the world. The transformation this leader sought was not merely cosmetic, or temporary. It involved a whole new philosophy of life resulting in a new culture reaching every tribe and nation. To say the least, the leader had a most difficult task before him. Other great leaders had attempted less grand things and failed. Humanly speaking, this leader was completely alone in this mission. No one else was committed to it, nor did anyone else even understand it. How would he ever accomplish his task? How would he get his message out? How would he inspire others to live according to it?

An examination of the leader's method contains many surprises. The leader did not do many of the things that we might expect. He did not seek public office or gather an army. He didn't open an institute, or hold formal seminars to train others in his new philosophy; he did not pull his followers away for a period of secluded intellectualism. He did not submit writings to a printing press to produce books and newsletters pitching his plan. Instead, the leader started by gathering a small group of followers to himself (Mt 10:2-4). Rather than concentrate on the multitudes, he spent three years specifically training these men in his transforming way of life in hopes that they would then help him in the transformation of the multitudes.

The leader did not do many of the things that we might expect.

With only 12 men, this seemed like a hopelessly small start. Nevertheless, he lived his beliefs and deeply loved these 12 as if they were his own family. They lived together, eating, resting, working and relaxing without any constraints or barriers. In all this, the leader put his ideas into action by living them out with his followers. They traveled together from village to village where he interacted with others, meeting all kinds of needs. The leader commonly preached to enormous crowds (Mk 4:1). His sermons weren't elaborate; he used many illustrations from life as it was lived in that land at that time. He would often retreat with his followers alone to the countryside where he made his sermons especially meaningful through in-depth follow-up discussions (Mk 4:34).

The followers were committed and seemed eager to learn, but they showed little promise. Several were backward villagers, barely literate; one had been a tax collector, a profession despised by the general population; a few were in the fishing business. At best they were ordinary men, not the 'cut above' kind from whom one would expect great things. None of them possessed the statesman-like charisma desired for leaders of a great movement. And although the leader carried a spiritual message, none of the men he picked were religious leaders. In spite of all these disqualifiers, these unlikely followers were the ones that he personally picked to stand alone as the front-runners of a great movement. The leader thought that the qualifications of these men would be that they had been with him.

The followers he picked were at best, ordinary men.

The leader had an unusual humility. He paid no attention to sarcastic remarks about his hometown. He was content to be known as a small-town boy and the son of a carpenter. He did not seek attention or self-gain, but sought to empower others and to stay out of the limelight himself. Some thought that he could have had a greater impact if his leadership would have been more formal, if he had worked in the existing system. But the leader rejected formal status. He rejected the direct control of the kingdoms of the world even when it was offered to him (Mt 4:8-10). Instead of working toward reformation of the current system, the leader endeavored to ignite a whole new movement.

In retrospect, we might wonder about the leader's competency. He befriended sinners (Mk 2:15-17). His sermons and his teaching stepped on the toes of many who were in positions to help the cause. With few exceptions, this leader showed no confidence in the religious leaders of his day. His standards were high—he demanded all or nothing from would-be followers and many could not make the commitment (Mt 10:37-39).

The leader evaluated customs and routines according to their resulting function. For example, to the leader, "busy work" could be a trap that kept people from really important things (Lk 10:41-42). Concerning the religious law, the leader was always respectful while also being practical, not getting hung up on the letter of law. He vented the full extent of his anger when he observed the Temple not being used for its intended function. The leader scorned traditions and rituals that weighed people down instead of providing inner freedom. He was much more concerned with inner transformation according to the 'spirit of the law' than with outward conformity to rules and regulations (Mt. 15:7-9).

The leader loved people deeply; his mission involved servant-like ministry to other people. Perhaps this is why many people do not remember him first and foremost as a 'leader.' Misconceptions of leadership as 'rank,' 'position,' or 'status' keep many from thinking of this person as a leader. Rather, he is remembered as a servant, a teacher, a healer, a counselor, or any such designation that makes clear that this man assisted and guided people. His personal routine was often influenced by the needs of others. He always took time to talk to common people, to meet their needs by healing them or guiding them toward inner freedom. When large crowds came to him, he responded to their interests and needs with little regard to formal schedules or his own needs. He did not mind the interruptions of children (Mt 19:13-15). He dealt graciously with all sorts of unruly interruptions, even when the ceiling was torn away over his head. He did not get caught up in petty divisions of people. So important were people to him that he summarized the law relationally.

The leader loved people deeply; his mission involved servant-like ministry to other people.

He was not impressed as much by knowledge, riches, or rigid obedience to the law, as he was by faith. In fact, if you wanted to impress the leader, mustering up faith seemed like the best way to go about it. Faith was perhaps his only measurement for others. He constantly urged others to believe and was prone to almost embarrassing outburst of excitement when he found people of faith. When an outcast of society demonstrated faith in him, even in a disruptive way, the leader accepted him (Lk 7:36-38). Though he personally possessed supernatural ability, at several points he stated that he was actually limited by the lack of faith of others.

Near the end of his work with his followers, it seemed that there were many failures. His followers often could not understand what he taught. The general population was confused about who he was. His followers were committed to him when he was popular but they did not stand by him when he needed them most. Even one of his closest followers denied even knowing the leader at a crucial moment (Mt 26:69-74). Another follower betrayed him in favor of the first solid cash to come along, but then soon committed suicide. Eventually the establishment turned on the leader. He was arrested, tried, convicted and put to death as an enemy of the people. So much for transforming the world.

His followers were no doubt surprised and disheartened by the leader's strange and sudden departure. They did not feel ready for him to leave. It seemed that he had just begun. He had had an amazing impact, but the world, having just rejected the leader, was far from transformed. Because the work was not complete, the leader, in his leaving, gave his followers the mandate to lead on as he had done (Mt 28:18-20). He had sufficiently prepared them so that if they applied what they had learned from him, they would have a similar (even greater) impact.

And lead on these followers did. They emerged as people of great faith and vision for the transformation the leader had sought. With tremendous zeal and enthusiasm they carried on the mission. As they did so they made one thing very clear—the leader had never really left. It only seemed that way for a moment. In fact, his spiritual presence was key to the very transformation he sought. He, the leader, was with them as they set out to spread his message to every tribe and nation. His presence was their message and their inspiration!

These followers, showing themselves to be good followers after all, did not depart significantly from the pattern that the leader had established. They carried on influential discussions with common people in the market places, as well as the established temples and synagogues (though their own worship centers were apparently in homes). They lived their message boldly and loved others deeply, while gathering still other followers to do the same. As people accepted the message, local fellowships celebrating the leader's presence were established. Like the leader, these followers and their local fellowships had such an impact that the formal establishments of government and religion were seriously threatened—to the point of retaliation.

His followers lived their message boldly and loved others deeply.

Not many generations later, followers developed more 'sophisticated' methods of following the leader. Sometimes with more regard for "doing as the Romans do" than for doing as the leader had done, they made use of the dominant modes of worldly operations. The informal spontaneous movement that emphasized the leader's presence gave way to formal institutions and rigid programs. Impressive organizations, large buildings, and 'cutting-edge' programs replaced the simple celebrations and heartfelt proclamation which allegiance to the leader had inspired. This trend provided a certain security and control, but the leader's presence was overshadowed and much of what the leader stood for was denied. By establishing and honoring forms at the expense of functions, the real impact of his mission was lost.

Formal institutions and rigid programs overshadowed the leader's presence.

The leader's influence continues. Those who follow the leader are commanded to work as he did. As elaborate schemes for transforming the world through programs and institutions show less promise than ever, his followers should again be reminded of the unique approach of the leader. The basic idea is strangely simple: a leader, who lives what he believes, deeply loves his followers with whom he shares a way of life—this is leadership at its best. This is The Great Leader who touches lives and transforms the world.

SOURCES

Adapted from *The Teacher*, an unpublished manuscript by Ted Ward and Lois McKinney.

THE CHURCH

THE CHURCH

2

LESSON

The Purpose of the Church

WHY DOES THE CHURCH EXIST?

☞ Lesson Purpose

The purpose of this lesson is to describe how the Church is intended to be a force for the propagation of the Gospel in the world.

☞ Main Points

- The Church has three purposes—ultimate, outward, and inward.
- The Church is the agent for mobilization rather than the object of ministry.

☞ Desired Outcomes

When the content of this lesson has been mastered, each participant should . . .

- Be aware of the biblical purposes for the Church.
- Recognize that the Church's purpose as an agent for reaching the world requires church planting and ministry.

☞ Appendix

2A Great Commission Worksheet

☞ Suggestions to Trainers

Be sure that participants can clearly articulate the inward and outward purposes of the church. It would be good if you can use big visuals to impress upon trainees the various paradigms of church purpose. You could make drawings on poster paper. Or, in your context, perhaps a chalkboard or an overhead projector might be more appropriate.

INTRODUCTION

'Purpose' might be described as *'the end to which our efforts take us.'* Any organization has a purpose. A business exists to make money through the sale of goods or services rendered. The government of a country exists to protect its citizens and rule its people.

The Lord Jesus serves as a great model in the area of purpose. He knew why He came to earth and where He was going. He had a great purpose. 'The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor' (Lk 4:18-19).

For churches to be truly effective in today's world, they must have a clear sense of purpose. Without it, church leaders and workers can waste energy and resources doing things they have not been called to do. Every church planter should understand the biblical purpose for the Church and think through this purpose in the light of his own church planting work and mission.

A clear understanding of biblical purpose can make a church:

- purposeful and expectant.
- faithful and flexible, innovative yet true to Scripture.
- gracious and relational, emphasizing God's love and forgiveness.
- joyful and celebrative (people are looking for this).

- vital and dynamic, equipping people for real life ministry.
- growing and reproducing, planting new churches.

I. THE PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH

Jesus has established His Church with a purpose in mind. It is a wonderful purpose, fixed in eternity past, destined for a glorious future. We could summarize the purpose of the church by saying *the Church exists to glorify God through edifying the believers and evangelizing the lost*. Figure 2.1 shows this three-fold purpose of the Church.

Table 2.1 The Three-fold Purpose of the Church

ULTIMATE PURPOSE	OUTWARD PURPOSE	INWARD PURPOSE
Exalt the Lord	Evangelize the lost	Edify the laborers
The Church exists for the Lord	The Church exists for the World	The Church exists for itself

A. Exalt the Lord

The Bible teaches that there is an ultimate purpose to which all creation moves; it is God’s own glory. God’s glory represents all that is true of Himself: His nature, attributes, character and actions. God’s own glory is His chief aim for eternity and man’s chief purpose for existence. He is working out His eternal purposes toward this end. God’s own glory is the final purpose of the Church (Ro 15:6,9; Eph 1:5ff; 2Th 1:12; 1Pe 4:11).

God is glorified (revealed, made known) when we worship Him (Jn 4:23), offer prayer and praise to Him (Ps 50:23) and live a godly life (Jn 15:8). ‘Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God’ (1Co 10:31). This is true for individual Christians and for His Church.

- What does it mean for you to glorify God?
- How does the Church glorify God?
- How is God glorified in our midst?

B. Evangelize the Lost

The Bible clearly teaches that there is an outward purpose for the Church, to be accomplished in this age. It is a purpose that places the Church’s focus and efforts outside itself. It is the reason Jesus came to reach a lost and dying world (Lk 19:10). Jesus said, ‘As the Father has sent Me, so I now send you’ (Jn 20:21). This outward purpose of the Church is outreach to the lost—evangelism and mission.

Perhaps no portion of Scripture better states the outward purpose of the Church than the ‘Great Commission’ passage of Matthew 28:18-20 (See Appendix 2A, "Great Commission Worksheet").

C. Edify the Laborers

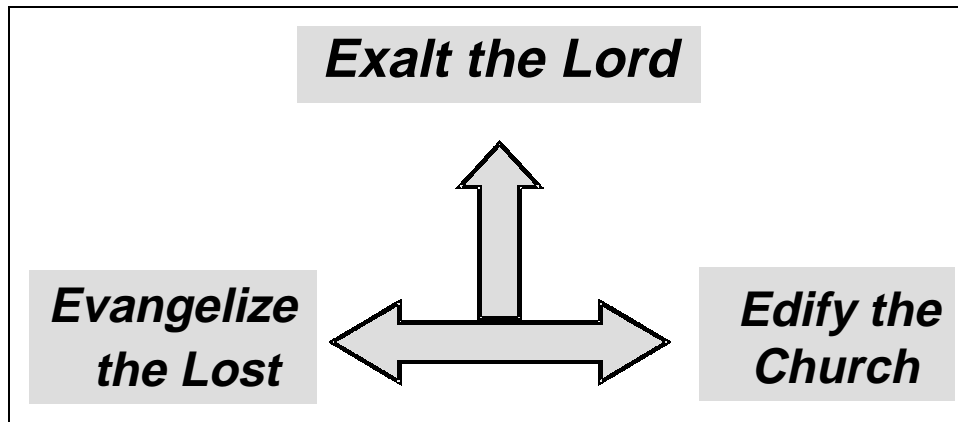
The Bible teaches that the Church also has an inward purpose. It is the edification or building up of its members. The bulk of the New Testament epistles were written to believers to strengthen them in their Christian life and ministry so that they could accomplish the outward purpose of reaching a lost and dying world.

Ephesians 4:11-16 best explains the inward purpose for the Church. The church exists to edify the believers. The training and equipping of God’s people as a gathered community (in worship, teaching, fellowship and nurturing functions) leads to the accomplishment of the outward purpose, making disciples.

- Leadership is given (v. 11) to equip the saints for ministry (v. 12), not just to do the work of ministry themselves. What are the implications of this vital truth for your church planting work? How will this affect how you do what you do?
- What observations do you make from this passage about planting a church? Write them now.

The purposes of the church can be simply stated as exaltation, edification and evangelism. The people of God gather for worship and edification, in order to scatter to do the work of evangelism. These are interrelated purposes. None of them should exist apart from the others. The inward purpose (edification) serves the outer purpose (evangelism) and both purposes serve to glorify God (worship). As followers of Jesus gather for the inward purpose of edifying one another (Eph 4:11-16), loving one another (Jn 13:34-35), and practicing the functions of the New Testament church (Ac 2:42-43), they are better equipped for the outward task of outreach and ministry to the lost world.

Figure 2.2 Three-fold Purpose of the Church



II. PARADIGMS FOR UNDERSTANDING THE PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH

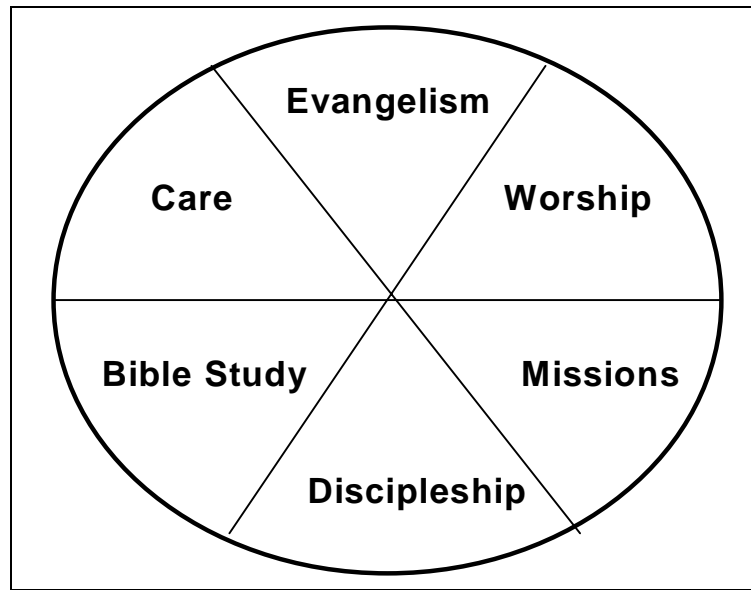
A paradigm is simply a way of looking at something. A paradigm provides rationale and explanation for how a particular system, process or object is and ought to be. The following sets of contrasting paradigms are ways of looking at the church in light of its nature and purpose.

A. The Program-Centered Church Compared To The Great Commission Church

1. *Program-Centered Church*

Churches often struggle in practicing their multifaceted purpose. Failing to integrate all that God has called us to do can lead to a program orientation consisting of various components, each component competing for resources and participants (See Figure 2.3). In this program-centered view, the church may resemble a secular training institution or small business in its structure and organization. Over time, the church becomes more concerned about itself and less concerned about the lost, becoming irrelevant to the society in which it exists.

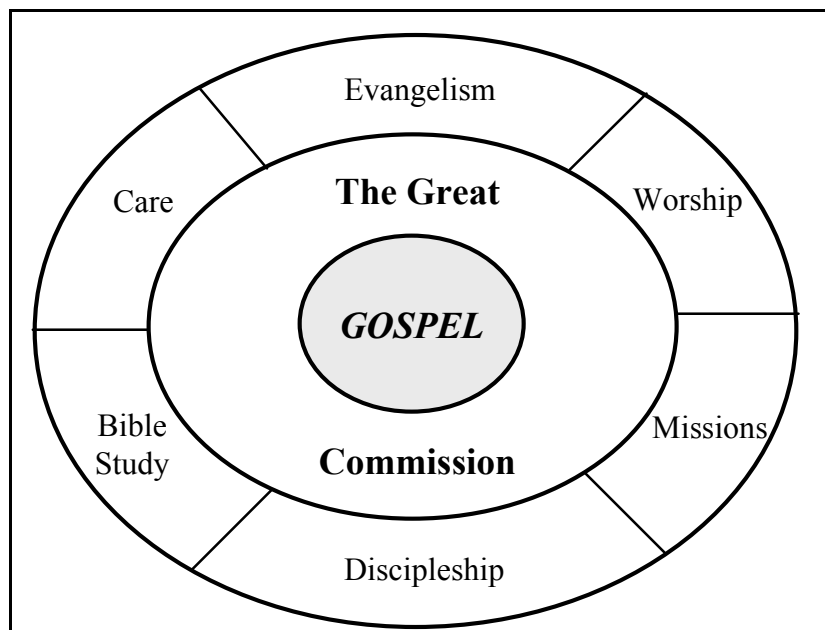
Figure 2.3 The Program-Centered Church



2. *The Great Commission Church*

The biblical view of the Church, shown in Figure 2.4, places the Great Commission at the heart of the Church's purpose, and from it proceed programs and equipping ministries. In this model the elements and programs of the gathered church community serve to prepare the believer for the outward task or purpose—evangelism and Great Commission work. The needs of the believers are still taken care of but in their proper perspective in light of God's purpose to bring the lost to Himself.

Figure 2.4 The Great Commission Church



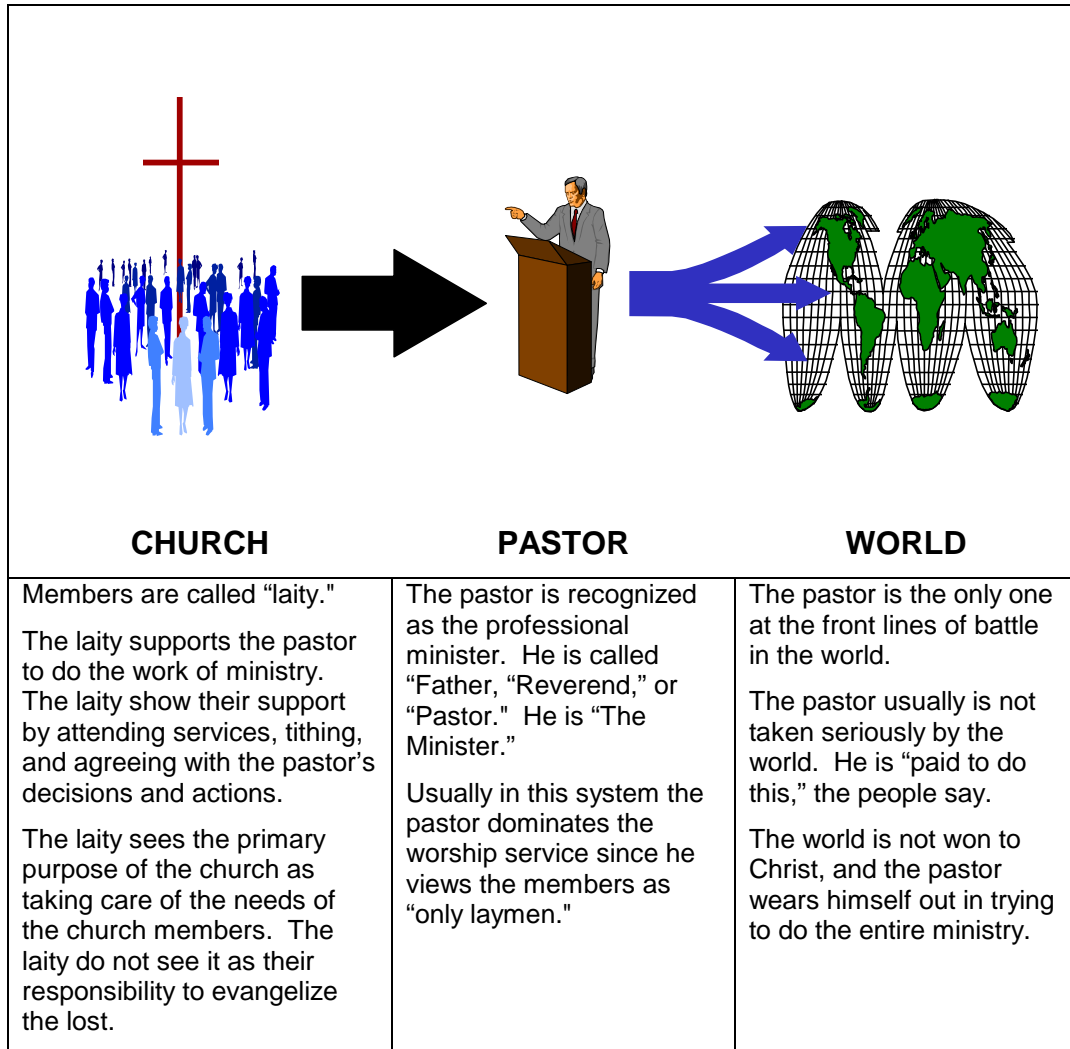
- What are the ramifications for these two approaches to church structures? The mobilization of church members for 'church work?' Leadership development?
- What happens to a church when it recognizes that its 'reason for being' is to spread the Gospel?

B. The Church as an 'Object of Ministry' Compared to the Church as an 'Agent for Mobilization'

1. *The Church as an Object of Ministry*

Some believers think of the church as a gathering place to be with other believers and to be ministered to by the pastor (see figure 2.5). This is perhaps the most common paradigm for viewing the church. This paradigm is partly true. Church is indeed a gathering where we enjoy fellowship as well as receive spiritual nourishment from spiritual leaders. However, this paradigm fails to put the outward purpose of the church in proper perspective and supposes a non-biblical clergy / laity distinction.

Figure 2.5. The Church as an Object of Ministry

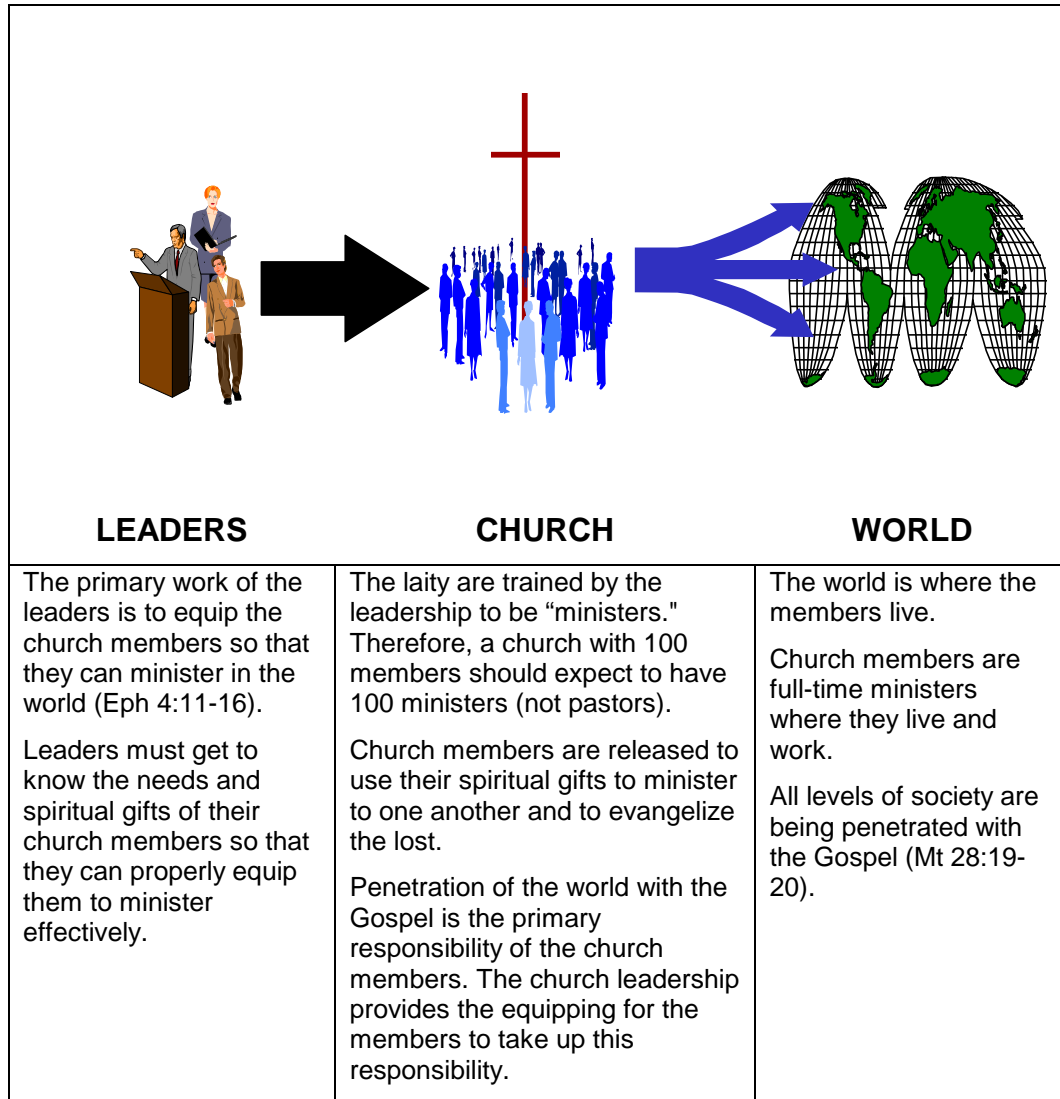


adapted from Brock p. 66,67

2. *The Church As An Agent For Mobilization*

The church is not an object of ministry, but rather an agent of mobilization for the Gospel into the world. As shown in the figure 2.6, the role of leadership in the church is to equip (to train and to empower) church members for service in the world. This is the edification purpose of the church. Believers gather together to worship the Lord, to grow in their faith, to learn God's Word, to encourage, pray for, and practically help one another. These church members develop the spiritual character and servant skills needed to evangelize the lost (the outward purpose of the church). Fulfilling the Great Commission is not just the pastor's job, or the job of a few individuals in the church, but it is the function of the entire body of Christ (the church).

Figure 2.6. The Church as an Agent for Mobilization



adapted from Brock p66,67

CONCLUSION

A clear sense of purpose helps the church to be effective. Without understanding its purpose, church leaders and workers can waste energy and resources doing things they have not been called to do. Every church planter should understand the biblical purpose for the Church and think through this purpose in the light of his own church planting work and mission.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION, REVIEW AND APPLICATION

- Why is it important that the church understand its purpose? What happens when churches do not understand their purpose?
- How would you summarize the purpose of the church?
- Why should the church reach out to the lost? Who is responsible to evangelize?
- How does the Great Commission relate to the purpose of the church? What other passages in the Bible help us understand the purpose of the church?
- Why should the church be a force and not just a field?

- Do the churches in your region have a clear understanding of why they exist as a church?
- What is the role of leadership in a purpose-driven church?

ACTION PLAN

Reflect on the purpose of the Church by doing the worksheet contained in Appendix 2A, "Great Commission Worksheet."

SOURCES

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The CCP Pastoral Training Course



Ecclesiology

~ Eileen Reid



Ecclesiology The Study of the Church

This course is designed to introduce the student to the theology of the church. Ecclesiology should help us to understand the role of the church and our roles in the church. Each believer has a function and role within the body of Christ which is the church. Areas such as baptism and communion are discussed. How church leaders are chosen and what they are to do are explained. In the church the believer worships God and becomes a disciple, a fully committed follower of Christ. From the church the nonbelievers receive ministry and evangelism so that they too might become followers of Christ.

- Lesson 1 will focus on the definition of ecclesiology and its use, especially in the New Testament.
- Lesson 2 will focus on the marks of the church and the imagery used to describe its nature.
- Lesson 3 will focus on the purpose of the church and include a discussion of the sacraments of communion and baptism.
- Lesson 4 will focus on the polity or governance of the church.
- Lesson 5 will focus on the discipline of the church, its relationship with Israel, and a summary.

Each lesson will include at least one major passage for inductive study and conclude with study questions.

All scripture will be quoted from the New American Standard Version unless otherwise noted.



1

Definition of Ecclesiology

Definition

The word *ecclesiology* comes from the Greek, *ekklesia* meaning assembly or literally the called out ones (the preposition *ek* = out from and the verb *kaleo* = to call with *logos* = study of). *Thayer's Greek Lexicon* defines it as "a gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place." *Ekklesia* is used to translate the Hebrew word *qahal* in the Greek translation of the Old Testament called the Septuagint. *Qahal* meant a congregation, assembly, company or other organized body. (Deut. 31:30, Lev. 19:2, Micah 2:5) These Old Testament references using the Greek word *ekklesia* are not referring to the New Testament church. In fact, most translations of the Old Testament do not use the word *church* at all. The English word *church* comes from a Greek word (*kuriakon*) used first of the house of the Lord and then to describe his people.¹ (Eph. 2:19, I Tim. 3:15)

Although the Greek word *ekklesia* soon became a distinctively Christian word, it has its own pre-Christian history. Thus to those, whether Jews or Greeks, who first heard it applied to the Christian society it would come with suggestions of familiar things. Throughout the Greek world and right down to New Testament times (compare Acts 19:39), *ekklesia* was the designation of the regular assembly of the whole body of citizens in a free city-state, "called out" (*ek*, "out," and *kalein*, "to call") by the herald for the discussion and decision of public business. As noted earlier, the Septuagint translators used the word to render the Hebrew *qahal*, which in the Old Testament denotes the "congregation" or community of Israel, especially in its religious aspect as the people of God. In this Old Testament sense we find *ekklesia* employed by Stephen in the Book of Acts, where he describes Moses as "he that was in the church (the Revised Version, margin "congregation") in the wilderness" (Acts 7:38). Consequently, the word came into Christian history with associations alike for the Greek and the Jew. To the Greek it would suggest a self-governing democratic society; to the Jew a theocratic society whose members were the subjects of the Heavenly King. The pre-Christian history of the word had a direct bearing upon its Christian meaning, for the Greek: *ekklesia* of the New Testament is a "theocratic democracy"², a society of those who are free, but are always conscious that their freedom springs from obedience to their King.

Ekklesia in the Gospels

Ekklesia is only occurs in the Gospel of Matthew where Jesus uses the word twice. The first use is in Matthew 16:18 following Peter's great confession. Let's look at the whole passage.

¹ Robert G. Clouse, "Doctrine of the Church," *The Portable Seminary: A Master's Level Overview in One Volume*, ed. by David Horton 182.

² "The Church" *Nave's Topical Bible*, Electronic Version 12671-2095-03.

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He began asking His disciples, saying, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"

And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; some Elijah; and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

And Simon Peter answered and said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

And Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.

"And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it.

"I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you shall bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven." Matthew 16:13-19, NASB

Note Jesus uses questions to engage his disciples to identify who He is. Simon Peter's confession (verse 16) brings a pronouncement of special blessing on Simon (verse 17). Then Jesus calls Simon Peter (Greek *petros* – rock) upon whom He will build His church. Note the possessive adjective, *his*. The question can arise, is Jesus building His church on a man? The answer is no! He is building His church on the confession of the man which was revealed to Simon by Jesus' Father in heaven. So in essence Jesus builds His church on the Father's revealing Himself to those who believe in Jesus. (See 1Thess. 2:14) Jesus then describes the church as having such power and authority that the gates (symbol of power and authority) of Hades will not stand against it. Hallelujah! The church's authority is also illustrated in verse 19 by the keys to bind and loose. (See Isaiah 22:22) In doing so Jesus identifies the church with the kingdom of heaven. To bind is to shut up and to loose is to open up or make plain.

The terms "the kingdom of God" and "the church" are distinguished in Scripture. The kingdom appears to be a reign rather than a realm, which the church is. These two ideas, however, are complementary, the one employing the other. Sometimes it is hardly possible to distinguish between them. It may be true that by the words "the kingdom of God," our Lord means not so much His disciples, whether individually or as a collective body, but something which they receive or a state upon which they enter. At the same time, the whole history of the growth of the idea of the kingdom led, naturally, to the belief that the kingdom of God about which Christ taught would be expressed and realized in a society. His kingdom is visibly represented in His church, and the church is the kingdom of heaven insofar as it has already come, and it prepares for the kingdom as it is to come in glory.³

Jesus also uses *ekklesia* in Matthew 18:17. (This whole passage will be examined more closely in the discussion in Lesson 5 on church discipline.) Note the parallel in Matt. 18:18 on bind and loose with Matt. 16:19. Then in 18:20 we have the wonderful promise that where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. This clearly identifies Christ's called out ones as those who gather in His name. *In His name* signifies under and with His authority. They submit themselves to Him as His followers. As a whole Matthew 18 shows that Christ believed the church as a society possesses powers of self-government (see Lesson 5) in which questions of discipline were to be decided by the collective judgment of the members.

³ Robertson's Word Pictures of the New Testament, Electronic Version, IV.

Even with a cursory look at these two passages, there is “evidently some form of ongoing and organized congregation of believers is in mind. In 16:18 Jesus commits the privilege of interpreting his teaching authoritatively to his disciples and assures them that the church will never be defeated by any natural or supernatural, earthly or cosmic, opposition. In 18:15 the theme is the life of the local congregation. It is to be a community in which broken relationships are restored, and only after several attempts at reconciliation have failed is it to become a community which enforces discipline and draws clear boundaries.”⁴

Ekklesia in the book of Acts

In Acts the Greek: *ekklesia* has come to be the regular designation for the society of Christian believers, but is employed in two distinct senses. First in a local sense, to denote the body of Christians in a particular place or district, as in Jerusalem (5:11; 8:1, in Antioch (13:1; 15:22), in Caesarea (18:22)—a usage which reappears in the Apocalypse in the letters to the Seven Churches. Then in a wider and what may be called a universal sense, to denote the sum total of existing local churches (9:31 the Revised Version (British and American)), which are thus regarded as forming one body.⁵

Ekklesia in the Writings of Paul

Introduction

There can be no doubting the centrality of the church in the writings of Paul. According to Ephesians 5:25-27, “... Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy ...” It is through the church, of which Christ is the head (Eph. 1:22; 5:23; Col. 1:18), that God’s wisdom is “made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms” (Eph. 3:10). Paul’s own ministry concentrated on the planting of Christian communities among the Gentiles and then, by visit, letter and intermediary, on instructing them more perfectly in their faith. Even when relationships were strained, as with the Corinthian church, Paul never reduced his commitment to the churches he had founded and to others, like Colossae and Rome, which he had never visited, he demonstrated deep investment.⁶

When talking to the church he combined imagery such as being a nursing mother (1 Thessalonians 2:7), profound theological treatise as in Romans or the Christology in Colossians 1, practical advice for Christian living as in Ephesians 4-6 and pastoral help and counsel as in the pastoral letters. All of this reflects Paul’s deep love for the local churches. However he also was mindful of the relationship between the church universal and Christ. One illustration is His clear teaching that marriage, the union of husband and wife, modeled the relationship between Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:21ff). Paul was always concerned for the church to be composed of people above reproach, who loved each other and lived in the Spirit. (e.g. Galatians) They were to be true followers of Christ who obeyed His teachings. A quick overview of the way Paul used *ekklesia* will illustrate the major points already made.

4 K. N. Giles, Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Development (DLNTID), Electronic Version, ed. by R.P. Martin and P.H. Davids, (Downers Grove, IVP 1997).

5 D. J. Tidball, “Synoptics and the Church,” New Dictionary of Biblical Theology (NDBT), 3rd Edition, Electronic Edition, ed. by T. Demond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IVP 2001).

6 J. C. Lambert, “Church,” International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (ISBE), Electronic Version, ed. by James Orr 12678; 2095.10.

The meaning of ekklesia

Of the 114 references to *ekklesia* in the NT, sixty-two are to be found in Paul. In his earlier writings he uses *ekklesia* mostly with reference to the gathering of the local congregation (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 2:1; Philem. 2), which usually meets in someone's home. When he wants to describe more than one local congregation he uses the plural (1 Cor. 16:1, 19; Gal. 1:2; 1 Thess. 2:14). When he uses the term "the church" generically, as he does in 1 Corinthians 10:32; 15:9; Galatians 1:13, he is referring to all the Christians on earth, to the entire Christian community which finds expression in many varied local congregations. In Colossians and Ephesians his concept of church applies to something wider than the local congregation. The distinctive element in these letters (Eph. 1:22; 2:6; 3:10; 5:23-27, 29, 32; Col. 1:18; 3:1-2) is the connection between the church on earth and the heavenly realm, which should determine the nature of the church in the present age.

Traditionally it has been argued that in Paul the church was local and universal and that there was little room for anything in between. More recently it has been recognized that various NT churches formed special associations (Rom. 16:4, 16; Gal. 1:22; 1 Thess. 2:14). These affiliations probably arose from Paul's calling as a missionary to the Gentiles (Gal. 2:8). The need for any such group to submit to the wider church, and not to work in arrogant isolation, is underlined by Acts 15.⁷

As already mentioned Paul uses vivid imagery for the church in his letters to the churches and pastoral leaders. While more discussion on imagery will follow in lesson 2, a brief summary of major illustrations will serve to show Paul's grasp of the church.

The church is the temple of the living God and so should be neither destroyed nor defiled (1 Cor. 3:11-17; 2 Cor. 6:16-18; Eph. 2:21). It is a new humanity, taking its origin from the second Adam rather than the first (Rom. 5:12-17; Eph. 2:15). It is a body where each member is significant and which must keep closely in touch with its head (Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:12-31; Col. 1:18). As a body it can grow and mature (Col. 2:19; Eph. 4:16). It is the household of God (1 Tim. 3:15) where certain rules of conduct apply. Further images speak of the church as God's field (1 Cor. 3:9), the bride of Christ (2 Cor. 11:2), an army of the Spirit (Gal. 5:25-6:5), the pillar and foundation of truth (1 Tim. 3:15).⁸ The vivid imagery used might cause us to ask two questions. What kind of worship took place in the early church and what was its form of governance?

The life and worship of the early church is portrayed in Acts and, in Paul, especially in 1 Corinthians 11-14 and Colossians 3:16. Paul is concerned more with the quality of relationships within the church than with its programme. It must be characterized by mutual love and upbuilding as well as by holy living and practical concern for the poor (2 Cor. 8-9; Eph. 4:17-6:9; Phil. 2:1-18; Col. 3:5-4:1; 1 Tess. 4:1-12). No blueprint is given for the leadership structure of the Pauline churches, which seems to have been flexible (within certain spiritual guidelines), involving both apostles, prophets, teachers and evangelists, and elders or overseers and deacons (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11-13; Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:1-16; Titus 1:5-9). Whilst some development in organization is evident between the early years of the Gentile mission and its later more settled period, earlier charismatic ministries (see Spiritual gifts, Languages) should not be seen in opposition to later structured offices. Both charisma and structure are apparent and essential throughout.⁹

⁷ Tidball, (NDBT) "Writings of Paul."

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

More discussion will follow on governance and polity in Lesson 4.

In summary *ekklesia* is found most often in the writings of Paul. We have seen “the term usually has reference to a group of believers in a specific city. Thus we find Paul’s letters addressed the ‘the church of God in Corinth’ (1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1), ‘the churches in Galatia’ (Gal. 1:2), ‘the church of the Thessalonians’ (1 Thess. 1:1).” However, the NT picture of the church is also universal. That is, there is one body (Eph. 4:4) and there are times when *church* is used to speak of the *entire* church (cf. 1 Cor. 10:32, 11:22, 12:28; Eph. 5:23; Col. 1:18, 24). Thus, the church is “the whole body of those who through Christ’s death have been savingly reconciled to God and have received new life... while universal in nature, it finds expressions in local groupings of believers that display the same qualities as does the body of Christ as a whole.”¹⁰

Ekklesia in Later NT Writings

Hebrews views the church through the lens of the OT cult and offers a distinctive understanding of it as the worshipping community of the New Covenant brought into being through the sufficient sacrifice of Jesus as the great High Priest. Stressing the importance of meeting together (10:25), it contrasts the worship of the new community with that of the old and relates it to heavenly worship (12:18-29). Leaders are mentioned in passing at 13:7 and 17.

James speaks of the church as the scattered twelve tribes (1:1) and wants it to be an egalitarian community (2:1-13) which values the poor as much as the rich, and a healing community which experiences the restorative power of prayer (5:13-16).

1 Peter does not use the word “church,” but the writer sees the Christian community as composed of “elect strangers” (1:1) who are constituted as the new Israel (2:9-10) through the liberating work of the suffering Christ. Instructions are given to elders and to other sections of the church community (5:1-9).

John’s letters stress the need to distinguish the genuine from the false church. In 3 John there is a repeated emphasis on faithfully walking in truth (1, 3, 4, 8, 12). 1 John spells out the essentials of the truth about Jesus.

Revelation is addressed to the seven churches of Asia (1:1-3:22); the writer designates the church a kingdom and a priesthood (1:6; 5:10). The role of prophet is especially significant (10:7; 16:6; 18:24; 22:6, 9) as the church is undergoing severe persecution. The writer presents the true destiny of the church, unseen in this world, as a reason for hope and perseverance (19:9-10; 21:1-22:21). He envisages the church composed of people from every people and nation (5:9), and the creation fully restored to its creator (21:1-22:21).¹¹

Conclusion

Recent discussions of the church have revolved around two major issues.. First has been a desire by some to see that the church has its origin and basis in the creative and interactive Trinitarian nature of God. As God is diversity in unity as Jesus reflects in the 17th chapter of John’s Gospel so the church is many faceted but united in Jesus. This is to help explain the many faces of the church currently seen in the world. Second

¹⁰ Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 6th ed., ed. by Baker, (1998) 1044.

¹¹ Tidball, (NDBT), “Later Writings.

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is the desire to see the current church as an institution not worthy of reflecting the active loving creative intention of Jesus when He founded the church nor of the church described in the New Testament. In this view the church needs major reformation and must recover its heritage as the true bride of Christ. This reflects the post modern culture general view that institutionalization and bureaucracy and hierarchy are anathema to the desires of Christ. As in most cases there is truth in both claims and the author challenges the reader to see how both desires can be met in Christ. In any case these desires have generated a much deeper study and discussion of biblical ecclesiology.

So how is the church to be defined? One definition for the local church being used by OMS' Every Community for Christ is:

"A local church is a group of people who, by the grace of God the Father, are committed to Christ the Son and to one another; led by the Holy Spirit, they seek to obey all that Jesus Commanded. Healthy local churches, directed by recognized leaders, are living organisms which worship God and grow by making disciples and planting daughter churches."

"Healthy local churches, regardless of the model or structure, worship God, practice the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper (also known as sacraments); experience fellowship, teach and obey the Word of God, evangelize, make disciples, and serve the community."

From this brief review of the way *ekklesia* is used in the NT one can easily see the church is not a building but people and their activity, so what is the nature or marks of the church? That is the subject of Lesson 2.

Discussion Questions

1. What does it mean to you to be a called out one?
2. Who do you say Jesus really is?
3. Do you believe the church can defeat the gates of Hades? How?
4. Matthew 18: 19-20, 2 or 3; How many people does it take to make a church?
5. What do you feel when you realize you are part of the church universal? What does this mean when you gather together in your local church?
6. What do you think of the definition of the local church used by OMS' ECC?



2

The Nature of the Church and Imagery Used to Describe it

The Nature of the Church and Imagery Used to Describe it

What does Jesus see as the marks of the church? That is what should characterize the believers who compose the church so that the world may know we are his disciples; that the world may believe the Father sent Jesus. Jesus makes the answers clear in John's Gospel.

The Mark of Love John 13:34-35

In context this is Jesus' celebration of His last meal with the disciples prior to his crucifixion. Before the meal He washed each of His disciples' feet including Judas'. He demonstrated both servant leadership and unconditional love. Even though Jesus knows He will be betrayed and crucified, He has assurance that God His Father will be glorified. Now he gives a new commandment.

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another. (Jn. 13:34-35)

The fact that Jesus calls it a new commandment should catch our attention even without the dramatic context. Jesus knows that in the hours and days which will follow, it would be easy for the disciples to practice blame shifting, accusations, fault finding etc. with one another. How important then that they recognize that they are to love each other. When you consider who composed the group of disciples, a zealot, four Galilean fishermen, a tax collector, etc., Jesus' death and absence could make for a very difficult time. In verse 35, love is the mark by which all people will know that they are disciples of Jesus. This love is self sacrificing and serving. Jesus himself has modeled this for them and now models it for them as he goes to Gethsemane and eventually Golgotha. That servant love for each other is based firmly on Christ's love for us. The servant love of the church contains many aspects (see I Corinthians 13) but there are two which are most striking, thankfulness and forgiveness. Not only is the church composed of those who have been forgiven but it is God's chosen vessel for the sharing of the good news of God's forgiveness and reconciliation with the Father through Christ. This is the Good News, the gospel of Jesus Christ. As a church we must ask ourselves how we are doing in showing love for one another as believers in Christ. Why do we wonder at nonbelievers' lack of interest in the church when they see us treat each other with hostility and lack of forgiveness? Little wonder when people say they like Jesus but they do not like the church.

Thankfulness for each other is robbed when we fail to forgive each other. In fact our relationship with God is called into question as Jesus says directly in Matthew 6:14-15. Lack of forgiveness holds us captive. Believers in the early church practiced a ritual of sharing bread with a person whom they needed to forgive or whom they needed to seek forgiveness from. Here are some questions for us as church leaders to use to examine ourselves in light of our Lord's command in John 13:34-35.

1. How can God use me and bless me if I am holding offenses or carrying grudges which really translate into an unwillingness to forgive?
2. What does God want me to do? Read Matthew 5:23-24, 6:14-15, Ephesians 4:32 and Colossians 3:13.
3. Is my past clear? If I cannot celebrate my past it may be because I have not forgiven or sought forgiveness.
4. Where am I right now concerning clearness? If I experience any uneasiness when I ask that question, I probably need to take care of some present situation.
5. Am I able to thank God for these hurts I have experienced? If not then perhaps I have anger and forgiveness issues with God for which I must care. See I Thessalonians 5:18.

The Mark of Unity

In the 17th Chapter of his gospel, John, alone of the other gospel writers, records Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane immediately prior to His arrest. This is often called the High Priestly Prayer because Jesus is not only praying on behalf of Himself and His disciples but also for future believers. (John 17:20) Then in the midst of His prayer, Jesus gives the second mark of the church.

I do not ask in behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us; that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me. And the glory which Thou hast given Me I have given to them; that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, that the world may know that Thou didst send Me, and didst love them, even as Thou didst love Me. Father, I desire that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am, in order that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me; for Thou didst love Me before the foundation of the world. (John 17:20-24)

Jesus twice, 21 and 23, states the importance of unity for the world believing that God sent Him and God loves the world. This is a unity based on believing in Jesus. This unity mirrors the Trinity which is one and yet with distinctive diversity as three persons, Father Son and Holy Spirit. In verse 22 Jesus links this with the glory of God the Father which He has given to His disciples. A glory which was not self-serving but freely given by the Father to His Son, Jesus even as the Father's love has been given to Jesus. This glory and love seek the welfare of others while affirming their worth and value (see Psalm 8). Paul, in Colossians 3:14, reminds us that love is the perfect bond of unity. This unity derives from God's love and is not based on sameness in appearance but rather on the transforming love of God which has been perfected in us and is perfecting us. (This reflects the perfect tense which John uses in 17: 23 and conveys the sense of both completed and continuing action.) The idea of perfect is another New Testament way of talking about the nature of Christ being formed in us. Often we refer to this as Holiness in the full sense which includes both a crisis (decision) and a process as we are transformed through the working of the Holy Spirit (Romans 6 and 8 describe this well). Jesus knows this unity is a process which only can be perfected as the believers are in

Christ and the Father is in Christ. So this is not uniformity or a losing of one's personality but conformity to Christ where individual personalities/ identities are focused on Jesus and controlled by His love. So the Triune God does their part and the church is called on to do their part.

So let us explore two questions:

1. Does the world perceive our servant love for each other? How? Have you experienced (know and feel) this love personally and corporately? How would you describe it?
2. Does the world see our unity with each other? How? Have you experienced (know and feel) this love personally and corporately? How would you describe it?

Unless the church demonstrates servant love for one another and exhibits the unity/harmony of being one in Christ, we will dishonor the name of Jesus by being disobedient. Jesus gave only these two marks as the ones by which the world would know that we are His disciples, that Jesus was sent by God and that God loves the world. Let us not fail to achieve the high marks for which Jesus has called His church!

The early church understood and practiced this servant love as we have seen in Acts 2:42 and following. They spread the good news of Jesus while caring for each other and their communities. In 2 Corinthians, we find predominantly Gentile believers taking an offering for a predominantly Jewish church in Jerusalem. In James 1:27, we read that "...pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress and to keep ourselves unstained by the world." This concern for widows was manifested early in the church's life as recorded in Acts 6. The care of widows is even discussed at length by Paul when he is writing to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4. James also reminds us not to play favorites especially to those who appear wealthy in James 2. The faithfulness to Christ and His command to love and be one in Him caused the early church to be known as Christians in Antioch (Acts 11:26) and as followers of the Way (Acts 9:2, 22:4). Like Jesus they laid hands on people for healing and for service. James describes the fellowship as being a place of prayer and of healing in James 5. They reached out beyond their cultural biases as Peter, a Jewish Christian, went to Cornelius' house, who was a Roman centurion and a Gentile (Acts 10). They understood Jesus' teaching in Luke 10 about the Good Samaritan. They were out to prove themselves to be good neighbors. They were to pray for those in authority over them (1 Timothy 2:1-2). Their lifestyle was to be one of submission to authority and to do what was right (Romans 13:1-7 and 1 Peter 2:13-17). Both Peter and Paul affirm that in doing so the church, which is composed of the followers of Christ, is fulfilling God's will.

Three major illustrations develop this theme as being under God's will or authority. The first is that of the building. 1 Peter 2:5 describes "... the believers as living stones being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." We can easily see the necessity of unity and submission to the Master Builder. The purpose is not to serve ourselves but we are to be a place in which we serve God and others. The spiritual sacrifices are the commitment to faithfully fulfill our Lord's will in thought, talk and walk. This also brings to mind the sacrifice of Jesus who gave Himself up for the church. The church was bought with His blood (Acts 20:28). Paralleling Peter, Paul says we are "... being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit."

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow-citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, growing into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:19-22)

In this passage, Paul reminds the church that they are now part of God's family not outsiders. This introduces the second major illustration which is that of the family. Here God is the father and we are his children, brothers and sisters. Recognizing the importance of citizenship in the Roman world, Paul reminds them that they are now "fellow citizens with the saints," not aliens. Hallelujah!! Then Paul quickly moves to the building metaphor and says the foundation is the apostles and prophets (connecting the Old and New Testaments together) with Christ as the cornerstone. (See also 1 Peter 2: 6-7.) What a foundation for the church!! Believers are being fitted together and it is growing into a holy temple in the Lord. The comparison with the actual temple in Jerusalem or even temples in Gentile lands is obvious. However this temple is alive and composed of individuals who are followers of Christ.

This image of life, "living stones" in Peter, and "growing" in Paul introduces the most developed metaphor for the church in the New Testament. The church is the body of Christ, with Christ being the head. The major target text for our study is I Corinthians 12:12-27.

For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. And if they were all one member, where would the body be? But now there are many members, but one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you;" or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; and those members of the body, which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our unseemly members come to have more abundant seemliness, whereas our seemly members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, that there should be no division in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it. (1 Corinthians 12:12-27)

Doing our inductive study we note that the context immediately preceding our target text is stressing that the Spirit is involved in giving a variety of gifts but all from the same Spirit. In the midst of diversity there is unity because all have received from the same Spirit as the spirit desired. Hence no complaining about your gifts or jealousy or arrogantly comparing gifts but rather rejoicing that the Spirit is at work in all the gifts and in all the people. The context which follows lists the various gifts and the more excellent way/gift – LOVE. This reminds us that we do not all manifest the same gifts but we are part of one body, Christ's, and we should actively love each other. Once again it is unity in diversity.

This is the major theme of Paul in the target text. Regardless of our ethnicity or our social standing (v.13), we are all baptized into one body. As the body has many members and yet is one, so is Christ's body. How foolish for us to deny our part in the body or assume we are the whole body. We are not to squabble about our position in Christ's body but we are placed where we are by God's sovereignty, (v 18). We are to recognize how much we really need each other and care for one another (v 24). Note this is simply another way of stating Jesus' command to love one another. Sadly, the church has not done this well and division has often characterized the church not serving loving unity. Then in a true picture of loving unity, Paul reminds us that just as one part of our body aches and the whole body aches with it, so when one member suffers, we should suffer with them. In other words we should feel their pain. When one member is honored, we all rejoice. This is the church, a living organism, active and alive; serving and loving the triune God and each other as we reach out to the world for God's glory.

No study of the nature of the church is complete without at least a brief look at the book of Revelation. In this book we find the further portrayal of the church as the bride of Christ, and that great marriage feast in 19:6-10. "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and his bride has made herself ready." Then in a description reminiscent of Ephesians 5:26-27, the church is presented "... as clothed in fine linen, bright and clean, for the linen is the righteous acts of the saints." Then a blessing is pronounced on all who are invited to the marriage supper. This part of the mission of the church to be discussed in the next lesson, which is making sure people have the invitation. The bride is also linked with the new Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2; Heb. 12:22-24).

Within Revelation we also discover what Jesus actually thinks of some of the early churches.¹² In chapters 2 and 3, we see what Jesus, as the head of the church, has to say to seven of the early churches in Asia Minor. In the context immediately preceding chapter 2 we meet Jesus described in very dramatic language of power and splendor. As reigning Lord of the church, He is seen in the middle of His churches, portrayed as seven lamp stands and each church having its own angel portrayed as stars. In an oral or literary formula, each church is addressed by Christ, who is described in a manner which is appropriate for that particular church. Christ then states what he knows about that church, positively and negatively, with Jesus' prescription for correction. However with the churches in Smyrna and Philadelphia there are no negatives. If the churches refuse Christ's action plan, there is punishment promised. If the churches obey their Lord and follow His action plan they will overcome and receive a reward which is distinctively appropriate for each church. As noted, five of the seven churches have deficiencies. Ephesus has left their first love, Pergamum has allowed false teachings and immorality even as Thyatira has. Sardis has been deficient in completing their actions in service of God. Laodicea is apathetic, arrogant, deceived and undisciplined. In these five churches there is a lack of discernment and an allowance for false prophets, immorality and pride. Two of the churches, Thyatira and Sardis, have division. On the other hand the two churches positively commended, Smyrna and Philadelphia, are noteworthy for their lack of material wealth and their perseverance for their true Lord even though it results in suffering for a season. So what do we learn from this look at Revelation 2-3?

¹² John R. W. Stott, *What Christ Thinks of the Church: An Exposition of Revelation 1-3*. (IVP 2003).

1. The Lord of the church is Christ.
2. Churches are important to Christ.
3. Christ desires for churches to be overcomers.
4. Even the early church had to contend with sin and was tempted to compromise the true Way.
5. Overcoming churches keep their desire, first love for Christ. They persevere in suffering; they do not measure their riches in material things but in their relationship with their Lord and with each other. They reject false prophets and immorality. They recognize who the lord of the church is and they are humble before Him.
6. Every church has an angel.
7. Every church, the living body of Christ, can either receive a blessing or judgment based on how they handle sin and their love for their Lord and each other.

May the church, the living body of Christ, bring glory and honor to its Lord always.

As the early church grew and developed, it experienced changes of course. One of those was moving from worship on the Sabbath (Friday sundown to Saturday sundown) to worship on Sunday. As was to be expected, the early Christians since they were ethnically Jews, observed the Sabbath. However as persecution arose from the Jews, the believers in Christ were forced out of the synagogues. While preserving some of the organizational structure and worship of the synagogue (Lesson 4), the early church moved worship to Sunday. This was natural progression since Jesus arose on the first day of the week, Sunday, and Pentecost (the day after the seventh Sabbath Leviticus 23:16) occurred on the first day of the week, Sunday. (Author's note: Most calendars reflect this Christian heritage of beginning the week with Sunday.)

Further growth of the church resulted in numerous councils and additional marks of the church.

The Nicene Creed confesses "one holy catholic and apostolic church." The apostolicity of the church refers to its foundation on apostolic teaching. The church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:20), as recipients of revelation (Eph. 3:4, 5). Since the apostles were eye-witnesses of the resurrection (Acts 1:22) as well as communicators of the word of Christ (Jn. 14:26; 15:26; 16:13), their foundational office cannot be continued (1 Cor. 15:8), although their missionary task remains. The holiness of the church fulfills the OT symbolism of ceremonial cleanness by a moral purity wrought of the Spirit (1 Cor. 6:14-7:10). Separation from unbelief and sin, together with dedication to the service of God in all of life, must mark the corporate life of the church. Love in the Spirit binds the saints to God and each other.

The NT church is catholic or universal: it is not limited geographically as Israel was, and it joins in one fellowship people of every sort. The church cannot exclude from its membership any who credibly confess Christ. Sectarianism that limits church membership to any race, caste, or social class denies catholicity.

The church is the one family of God the Father (Eph. 4:6), it is one in the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:14, 16; 1 Cor. 10:17; Gal. 3:27; Jn. 17:20-26), and is one fellowship in the Spirit (Eph. 4:3; Acts 4:32). When denominational division threatened the Corinthian church, Paul cried, "Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you?" (1 Cor.

1:13). The one body of Christ's sacrifice provides salvation in one fellowship (Eph. 4:3). Saints are joined by the unifying graces of the Spirit (Eph. 4:15, 31, 32; Col. 3:14). When the church is divided, it is injured and weakened, but not necessarily destroyed. The task of recovering scriptural unity requires a return to the apostolic foundation with zealous love.¹³

Then the Reformers introduced their understanding of the crucial marks of the church: the preaching and teaching of the word of God, the celebration of the sacraments and the exercise of the spiritual disciplines to make sure the body of Christ was pure and holy. They of course omitted the outward unity with the papal see and its claim of apostolic succession as one of the marks of the church. The reformers returned to the close study of the scripture and the early church. They concluded that church should be a place where the word, the scriptures, are taught and proclaimed, not the dogma of the Roman Catholic Church or the Orthodox Church. They saw the early church as a community of faith, the gathering of the saints, that experienced unity of the Spirit as they enjoyed fellowship, celebrated the sacraments, and exercised power and authority under the Lordship of Christ.

Primarily the church is a society not of thinkers or workers or even of worshippers, but of believers. Hence, we find that "believers" or "they that believed" is constantly used as a synonym for the members of the Christian society (e.g. Acts 2:44; 4:32; 5:14; 1 Tim. 4:12). Hence, too, the rite of baptism, which from the first was the condition of entrance into the apostolic church and the seal of membership in it, was recognized as preeminently the sacrament of faith and of confession (Acts 2:41; 8:12, 36; Rom. 6:4; 1 Cor. 12:13). This church-founding and church-building faith, of which baptism was the seal, was much more than an act of intellectual assent. It was a personal laying hold of the personal Savior, the bond of a vital union between Christ and the believer which resulted in nothing less than a new creation (Rom 6:4; 8:1, 2; 2 Cor. 5:17). If faith in Christ is the fundamental note of the Christian society, the next is fellowship among the members. This follows from the very nature of faith as just described; for if each believer is vitally joined to Christ, all believers must stand in a living relation to one another. In Paul's favorite figure, Christians are members one of another because they are members in particular of the body of Christ (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:27). That the Christian society was recognized from the first as a fellowship appears from the name "the brethren," which is so commonly applied to those who belong to it. In Acts the name is of very frequent occurrence (9:30, etc.), and it is employed by Paul in the epistles of every period of his career (1 Thess. 4:10, etc.). Similar testimony lies in the fact that "the koinonia" (English Versions "fellowship") takes its place in the earliest meetings of the church side by side with the apostles' teaching and the breaking of bread and prayers (Acts 2:42). The koinonia at first carried with it a community of goods (Acts 2:44; 4:32), but afterward found expression in the fellowship of ministration (2 Cor. 8:4) and in such acts of Christian charity as are inspired by Christian faith (Heb. 13:16). In the Lord's Supper, the other sacrament of the primitive church, the fellowship of Christians received its most striking and most sacred expression. For if baptism was especially the sacrament of faith, the Supper was distinctively the sacrament of love and fellowship—a communion or common participation in Christ's death and its fruits which carried with it a communion of hearts and spirits between the participants themselves. Another dominant note of the New Testament church lay in the consecration of its members. "Saints" is one of the most frequently recurring designations for them that we find. As thus employed, the word has in the first place an objective meaning; the sainthood of the Christian society consisted in its separation from the world by God's electing grace; in this respect it has succeeded to the prerogatives of Israel under the old covenant. The members of the church, as Peter said, are "an elect

¹³ Edward P. Clowney, "Church," *New Dictionary of Theology* (NDT), Electronic Version. ed. by Sinclair B. Ferguson and J. I. Packer, (Downers Grove, IVP, 2000).

race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession" (1 Pet. 2:9). But side by side with this sense of an outward and priestly consecration, the flame "saints" carried within it the thought of an ethical holiness—a holiness consisting, not merely in a status determined by relation to Christ, but in an actual and practical saintliness, a consecration to God that finds expression in character and conduct. No doubt the members of the church are called saints even when the living evidences of sainthood are sadly lacking. Writing to the Corinthian church in which he found so much to blame, Paul addresses its members by this title (1 Cor. 1:2; compare 6:11). But he does so for other than formal reasons—not only because consecration to God is their outward calling and status as believers; but also because he is assured that a work of real sanctification is going on, and must continue to go on, in their bodies and their spirits which are His. For those who are in Christ are a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17), and those to whom has come the separating and consecrating call (2 Cor. 6:17) must cleanse themselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God (2 Cor. 7:1). Paul looks upon the members of the church, just as he looks upon the church itself, with a prophetic eye; he sees them not as they are, but as they are to be. And in his view it is "by the washing of water with the word," in other words, by the progressive sanctification of its members, that the church itself is to be sanctified and cleansed, until Christ can present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing (Eph. 5:26, 27).¹⁴

This lesson has presented the marks, nature of the church with a primary focus on the New Testament marks and metaphors of the church. In the next lesson we will turn our attention to the purpose of the church.

Discussion Questions

1. God has called you to be His own. What does that mean to You?
2. Which of the biblical illustrations for the church is most meaningful to you and why?
3. How does the Spirit function in your life and that of your local church?
4. How do you apply the insights from the study of the seven churches in Revelation?
5. Define each of these terms used by the Nicene Creed to describe the church in your own words.
 - a. One
 - b. Holy
 - c. Catholic
 - d. Apostolic
6. Define in your own words the concepts the reformers used of the preaching and teaching of the word of God, the celebration of the sacrament and the exercise of the spiritual disciplines to make sure the body of Christ was pure and holy for the marks of the church.
7. What do you understand by being called a saint?

¹⁴ J. C. Lambert, "Church," (ISBE), Electronic Version, 12684-12692; 2095.16-2095.24.



3

The Purpose/ Mission of the Church

Lesson Objectives

- To understand the major mission of the church
- To understand the major commandment for the church
- To discuss the ways the mission and commandment interface
- To identify the sacraments of the church and the ways they are practiced

Since the major image used to describe the church is that of the body with Christ as the head, we, as members of the body, look to the head, that is, Christ, to understand our mission or purpose. The mission is clearly presented in Matthew 28:18-20, commonly called the Great Commission.

And Jesus came up and spoke to them saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you, and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

In context, this is addressed specifically to the disciples. By inference and by the way the apostles and early church understood it, this commission/mandate is for all Christ's followers.

There are several key observations to make prior to understanding Christ's mission for the church. First, note the use of all or always: *all authority/power* (v. 18), *all the nations* (v. 19), *all things* (v. 20), and *always* (v. 20). The first *all* reminds us that Jesus has been given all authority on heaven and earth. Who has given Jesus this authority? By implication, He has received this from the Father (see John 5:19-30 and Phil. 2:9-12).

In addition His followers are reminded in the last part of vs. 20 that Jesus is with them always in this mission. He will not desert or abandon them. Thus empowered with Christ's authority and accompanied by His presence, the Jesus follower can go forward with boldness and confidence to make disciples. Surrounded by Christ *all-ness*, the follower is to be inclusive in reaching all nations and teaching them to observe all things which Jesus commanded. The follower is to be exclusive in the focus on making disciples. In fact, the main verb is *make disciples*, not *go*, even though it often is the lead verb. Thus, the sense of verse 19 could better be expressed as, "Make disciples of all nations, going, baptizing, and teaching." Now, we can see the other three verbs, *going*, *baptizing*, and *teaching*, are all present participles expressing how we make disciples of all nations. As present continuous action verbs they remind us that these activities are ongoing in achieving our purpose to make a disciple. Before we discuss each of these activities further, let us note that we are to make disciples of Jesus, not of ourselves. These disciples are to come from all the nations, literally the gentile or pagan nations. The Greek word gives us the word *ethnic*. This must have been difficult for the Jewish disciples to hear, but it is in keeping with Acts 1:8.

But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.

The making of disciples according to Jesus first requires that we go – get outside our comfort zone. Jesus desires disciples from all nations and the early church understood this and practiced it. By the fourth century, if not before, the whole world was receiving the good news of Jesus. This is the glorious picture given of the church in Revelation 7:9

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands.

Go may be as simple as saying something to a family member or going across the street, or to the next village, or to the big city or to another country. Regardless of the destination of the going, one must be willing to move beyond themselves. This requires effort and may involve inconvenience, discomfort and even risk. However, this is why we are surrounded by Jesus' all-ness.

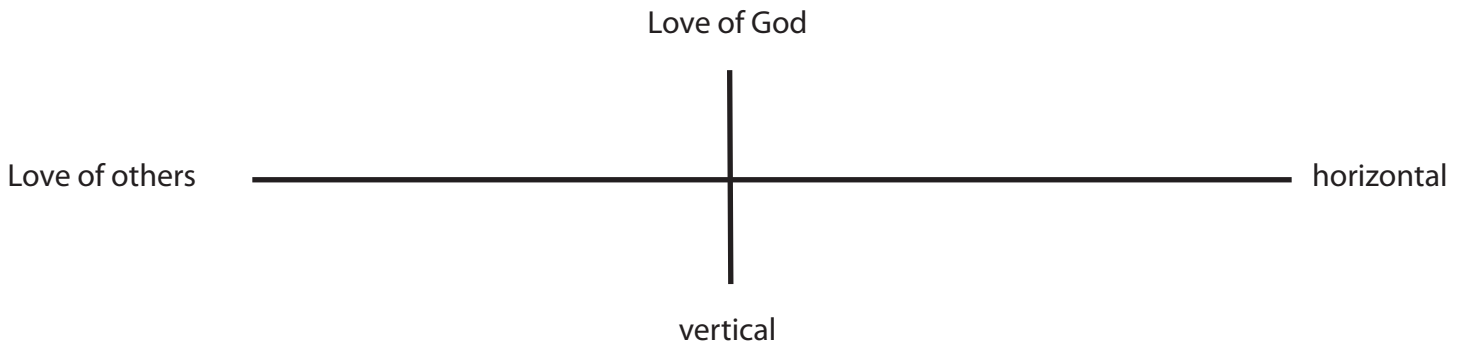
The second activity of disciple making that Jesus declares is baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Why baptism? From early on, even in Jesus' ministry, baptism was an outward sign, a public display, of a person's inward commitment or decision to follow God. This might involve repentance such as the way John the Baptist proclaimed of as in Jesus' case since He was sinless, was an act of obedience as He moved into His public ministry. Here in the great commission, baptism is used as the way for the disciple to indicate publically his willingness to be a Jesus follower and is part of his community, the church. Note the baptism is done using the names for the Triune God. The definite article *the* is used in front of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, affirming that these are exclusive, the one and only Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In addition the Greek makes it very clear that you are baptized into the names for God. In other words, you become part of God's family (John 1:12). The preposition *into* indicates movement from one condition or situation into another. Hallelujah, that is good news and is why baptism is so important for the follower of Jesus. More discussion will occur on baptism in the section in this lesson on the sacraments.

The third activity of discipleship making is teaching them to observe/keep/obey all things whatsoever I have commanded you. This means presenting all the teachings of Jesus. Since Jesus used and taught out of the Old Testament, that should also be taught. Since the apostles and other New Testament writers commented on Jesus' teaching, they also should be taught. So what should be taught? The whole Bible which is the word of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17; Heb. 1:1-2). Note that the verb *to keep, observe, obey* is continuous in nature. So this is not teaching for the sake of presenting information but teaching designed to be understood and followed. So the church has its marching orders from its Head.

Now, how do we fulfill this mandate? First is an overarching attitude which reflects the very nature of the triune God, love (1 Jn. 4:16). In Matthew 22:37-40, Jesus Himself presents what has been called the great commandments. Jesus is answering a test question placed to him by a lawyer (scribe) who wanted to know which commandment of the law was the greatest.

And He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the great and foremost commandment. And a second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."

Note, the ways we are to love the Lord our God. With all our heart – emotion/passion, with all our soul – energy/will, with all our mind – intellect. Mark added with all our strength, to include the physical sphere, Mk. 12:29-31.) Love to and for our God is to be our heartbeat, our motivation. However, this love is incomplete without the second command. Note the love of our neighbors (see Lk. 10:29-37 for Jesus' explanation of a neighbor) is not given the same descriptive phrases as love of God. Rather, it is modified by the way you love yourselves. So the way I love others should reflect the way I love myself. Moreover, Jesus has succinctly summarized the secret of relationships. Within the church my relationship with God, a vertical axis, affects/influences my relationship with myself and others, horizontal axis.



Note Jesus' summary statement in vs. 40 is that on these two commandments depend the whole Law and Prophets. This is a Jewish shorthand way of saying the whole Old Testament. In fact Jesus succinctly summarizes the two major groupings of the ten commandments, love of God (1-4) and love of the neighbor (5-10). The very foundation of God's message in the OT rests on love of God and others as yourself. I believe John 3:16 and 1 John 4:16 provide a continuation of this same foundation in the New Testament.

So now as the church, we have the heartbeat of how we fulfill our mandate – we make disciples out of love of God and others as ourselves. The church must maintain its focus on its mission and not get caught up in a defensive posture, or otherwise it will never be able to storm the gates of hell. How did this work out in the early church? Let us examine the response to Peter's message in Acts 2.

Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" And Peter said to them, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself." And with many other words he solemnly testified and kept on exhorting them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation!" So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. And everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together, and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions, and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. And day by day continuing with one mind in the

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temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:37-47)

Note Peter's answer in vs. 38 to the people's question whose hearts (Hebrew world view heart = mind, will, emotion) consciences had been pierced on what should they do. They are to repent, be baptized for Jesus' name for the forgiveness of sins and they will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Peter reminds them this is a promise for them and their children whom the Lord our Lord is calling to Himself. (While baptism is done in Jesus name, the other members of the trinity are mentioned. In no way should be construed to mean baptism only in Jesus' name takes precedence here. Mt. 28:19.) Following the tremendous response, 3,000 became believers. They practiced (vs. 42), in fact, put their hearts into, four disciplines as they became followers of Christ.

1. The apostles teaching which was the good news about Jesus and His teachings (Mt. 28:20)
2. Fellowship – *koinonia* – coming together for the purpose of encouraging and building each other up.
3. The breaking of bread – a common meal which probably included celebrating communion, or the Lord's Supper, or the Eucharist, together (see 1 Cor. 11:17-34)
4. Prayer – practicing talking with God and listening to God

These four disciplines are supplemented/expanded in the following verses (43-47).

1. The people were open to a sense of wonder and belief about who God was and how He worked through the apostles.
2. They were together in caring for each other and meeting each other's needs.
3. They spent time in public worship in a large setting (the Temple) and in smaller settings (the house).
4. Meeting together involved food which was a common element of Middle East culture. Food tends to relax people and in the Middle East provides the protection of the host.
5. They practiced all with abundant joy (see Jn. 15:11) and humility from their hearts, praising God (Ps. 34:1-3). Then in 47b they enjoyed favor with all the people and the Lord was adding to their number daily.

One can easily see that the early church understood Jesus' command and did so with love. They gave themselves wholeheartedly to His teaching, being baptized, loving on each other, prayer, and celebrating communion. The early church was not perfect and had to be challenged to go to all the nations (Acts 8:4; 10:1-48; 15:13-21). Wherever the early church went they practiced baptism and communion. These are crucial rites or ceremonies of the church which are known as sacraments or ordinances and are essential expressions of its purpose.

The Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, and some other churches recognize seven sacraments: baptism, the Eucharist (Communion), confirmation, marriage, holy order, penance, and extreme unction. Most Protestants recognize only baptism and Communion, holding that these two alone were specifically instituted by Christ. Those who view these rites as *sacraments* see them as a "means of grace," that is, grace is

conveyed to the believer through participation. Those who use the term *ordinance* tend to see these rites as outward or visible symbols of an inward or spiritual reality.¹⁵

- Baptism is an essential part of the great commission and was routinely practiced in the early church as was already studied (Acts 2:41-10:48).
- Baptism is the Christian rite of initiation that symbolizes identification with and commitment to Christ, spiritual rebirth (or regeneration), and purification.
- In some churches (e.g., Roman Catholic, Orthodox), baptism is believed to have salvific benefits and is therefore administered to children as well as converts of any age.
- Some (e.g., Reformed/Presbyterian) believe baptism signifies the covenantal relationship between God and his people (as in the Old Testament rite of circumcision), and thus it is offered to children of believing parents as well as adult converts. In this view baptism is not considered salvific.
- Some, like Baptists and others, reserve baptism (sometimes called believer's baptism) for those having professed faith in Christ.
- Modes of baptism, which differ among churches, include immersion, effusion (pouring), and aspersion (sprinkling).¹⁶

Regardless of the mode, Christian Baptism is a step of obedience in the believer's continuing growth in his/her relationship with Christ. It is a public proclamation of one's faith in Christ alone for salvation. It serves as evidence that salvation is a reality in the believer's life. Thus has come the phrase "an outward sign or witness of an inward belief." Baptism is also a way to testify that life is new in Christ. This is clearly seen as Paul comments on baptism in Romans 6:3-7. He reminds us that baptism means we have died to sin and are raised to walk in newness of life. Comparing baptism with Christ's death and resurrection, Paul teaches that we have been buried with Him through baptism into death so that we might be raised from the dead to the glory of the Father, freed from sin. Paul sees baptism as symbol and act of sanctification. This parallels Peter's teaching in 1 Peter 3:18-22 where baptism is more than the removal of dirt from the flesh but an appeal to God for a good conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ... (verse 21). This newness linked with light is reflected in what most believe to be an early baptismal hymn of the church?

Communion, the celebration of Fellowship with the Triune God, is also called the Lord's Supper or the Lord's Table. These other names serve as a good reminder that the Lord Himself instituted it, and commanded us to observe/keep it (Mt. 26:26-29; Mk. 14:22-25; Lk. 22:17-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-25; 1 Cor. 10:16). It is His supper, not the church supper. This was instituted by Jesus as He celebrated his last meal with His disciples prior to His Crucifixion and hence what we often call the Last Supper. We find its story in each of the Gospels. Communion is also called the *Eucharist*, from the Greek word for being thankful or grateful, which is a believer's experience as He remembers Christ's death on his behalf. Communion became for the church what Passover was for the Israelites. Each time it was and is celebrated, the church remembered and we remember what Jesus did for us. Consequently...

Communion is a reenactment of the Last Supper of our Lord with his disciples before he was crucified. Bread and wine (or juice) represent the body and blood of Christ. There are four main views of Communion, though in practice each has variations.

¹⁵ Robert G. Clouse, "Doctrine of the Church," Portable Seminary, 187.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 188.

The Roman Catholic View

The Roman doctrine is known as transubstantiation, in which the “substance” of the bread and wine (when properly consecrated) is said to actually, *physically* change into Christ’s body and blood, even though the physical appearance remains unchanged.

The Lutheran View. Called consubstantiation, this approach holds that Christ’s body and blood are *substantially present* with the consecrated bread and wine, even though these elements do not physically change.

The Memorial/Commemorative View

Here the partaking of the bread and wine is a memorial – “in remembrance” of Christ’s atoning sacrifice. The elements are understood to be representative symbols of Christ’s body and blood; his presence is not believed to be physically or substantially present in them.

The Calvinist/Reformed View

This stresses the mystical, spiritual communion between the believer and Christ through the Holy Spirit. The body and blood of Christ are held to be truly (but only spiritually) present in the elements.¹⁷

In summary, while views may differ, the form may vary as long as it does not alter the designated reality. Believers may use unleavened or leavened bread and may drink grape juice or wine from one common vessel or from separate glasses. More important than such details of form is the purpose that believers eat and drink in remembrance of the One who died that they might live.

The Lord’s Table is repeated to signify the participant’s continued repentance from sin and faith in Christ. Repeatedly, Jesus said, “Do this in remembrance of me” (1 Cor. 11:24-25). The bread and the wine or juice refresh our memories concerning the Messiah’s sinless life and atoning sacrifice in our stead. They vividly recall the unjust accusations and personal suffering he bore to deliver us from the power of evil. They recollect something of the agony of the Father’s wrath Jesus felt to effect our pardon. They recollect the precious blood he shed that we might be reconciled to God. For all who remember the greatest act of love in history, the Lord’s Table does not become an empty ritual. Those who doubt the truth of the Gospel may have little to remember, but those who believe the Bible are overwhelmed with memories of the greatest act of love ever offered.

Do believing participants in the Lord’s Table experience Christ’s “real presence”? Christians remain ever conscious of the Lord’s redemptive presence with them until the end of the age (Matt. 28:20). Also they are cognizant of his presence in the church whenever members gather in his name. In both these cases his presence is real. As participants examine themselves (1 Cor. 11:28) and intentionally partake (10:16), they become more consciously aware of their needs and of the presence of the Savior who sacrificed himself for them.

¹⁷ Ibid. 187-188.

The broken bread and poured-out wine/juice has a vast array of significant applications each time the event is celebrated. (1) the Holy Spirit faithfully strengthens the participant's capacities to know and serve the values of Christ's kingdom. (2) participation in the Table declares one's continuing assent to the Gospel's objective truth and its subjective application for one's life. (3) responsible participation in the Supper manifests a person's continued commitment to Christ as Lord in all relationships. (4) the bread and cup express one's renewed desire to love the Savior with one's whole heart. (5) partaking exhibits one's continual dismissal of other masters and the giving of ultimate allegiance to Christ above all else. (6) at the Lord's Table a person gives visible testimony to abiding fellowship with the crucified and exalted Christ and to the members of the institution he heads. So this observance may appropriately be called "communion." "Is not the cup of thanksgiving... a participation [*koinonia*] in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation [*koinonia*] in the body of Christ?" (1 Cor. 10:16). At the Lord's Table people of faith experience relational communion (v. 17). Furthermore, believers together present a public *proclamation* of Christ's death until his return (1 Cor. 11:26).

The observance is administered responsibly by the church, but it is not the church's supper; it is the *Lord's* Supper. It was ordained by our Lord for all his followers, not for one particular church or denomination. Hence a church invites to participate all who owe their spiritual life to the crucified and risen Lord. And participants are to examine themselves, rather than be examined by the officers of the church (v. 28).¹⁸

So as the Church administers both baptism and communion, it fulfills its Lord's commands and His stated mission. As such it serves as a reminder that all ministries of the church from that time until now should ultimately focus on fulfilling the great commission (Mt. 28:18-20). To do this more effectively, the church experienced needs for organization and a form of governance. This is what we shall examine in Lesson 4.

LESSON 3 Discussion Questions

1. How are you actively engaged in fulfilling the great commission?
2. What is your attitude in filling the great commission?
3. What should be the end goal of all church programs and ministries?
4. When you read Acts 2:42-27, what are you practicing, putting your heart into it, to be a follower of Christ? How does your local church compare with the early church?
5. What form of communion do you enjoy most and why?
6. Have you been baptized? If so, how, why, and what did you experience? If not, why not?

18 Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology: Three Volumes in One* (Zondervan, 1996) 290-292.



4

The Governance and Polity of the Church

Lesson Objectives

The student will learn

- The church's head is Christ.
- Leaders in the church are first to serve and are to be good shepherds.
- No one form of church government is advocated in the scriptures.
- Leaders have various spiritual gifts which they are to exercise *for the equipping of the saints for the work of service to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of all knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.* (Eph. 4:12-13)
- The qualifications for an elder/overseer/bishop and for a deacon

The Governance and Polity of the Church

For God is not a God of confusion but of peace as in all the churches of the saints.
But let all things be done properly and in an orderly manner. (1 Cor. 14:33, 40)

How is this to take place? We are to remember that Christ is the *head over all things to the church which is His body* (Eph. 1:22). Christ then called his disciples as servant leaders to guide his called out ones, the church.

But Jesus called them to Himself, and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." (Mt. 20:25-28)

As believers we submit to Christ and serve Him. To serve means we humble ourselves and seek the welfare of others before our own (Philippians 2:3). We do it out of our love for and obedience to our Lord and because we love others. Note how this fulfills the great commandment in Mathew 22:37-40. We simply cannot be leaders until we have learned to serve. Unfortunately as we move into leadership we must constantly remind ourselves and be reminded that our mission is to serve Christ and others.

The other major image used to describe the leaders in the church is that of shepherd. This is the image which Christ uses to describe Himself as the good shepherd in John 10. He knows his flock by name; he cares for them and protects them. He is willing to give his life for the flock. This is also the imagery used by the writer of Hebrews to describe Christ.

Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen. (Hebrews 13:20-21)

In this powerful benediction, the writer of Hebrews asks the God of peace (Father God) working through Jesus (the Great Shepherd of the sheep, God's son) to equip us to do His will. Note how the concepts of shepherd and servant are used. If we do the Father's will we are servants. But we can only do the Father's will as we are allowing the Great Shepherd to work in and through us. May we as leaders be so blessed! Besides the writer of Hebrews, Luke in quoting Paul's farewell message to the Ephesians church leadership uses shepherd as well as Peter the fisherman in his first letter to the churches which are scattered.

Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. (Acts 20:28-31)

In what Luke described as a very spiritually and emotionally charged meeting between Paul and the leaders, elders, of the Ephesus church (verses 36-38), the elders are reminded to guard themselves and their flock. Paul knows that there will be men who are compared with wolves who will try to harm the flock. Unfortunately these will not only come from outside but from within. Hence it is so important for the elders to be on their guard. Moreover Paul makes abundantly clear that they have become leaders through the Holy Spirit to shepherd the flock which has been purchased by God's very blood. What a solemn responsibility the elders have.

Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. (1 Pet. 5:1-4)

Peter as a fisherman might appear to be unlikely to use the shepherd illustration. However let us recall the scene between Jesus and Peter in John 21. In that very emotive scene, Jesus asks Peter three times, "Do you love me?" Peter painfully answers "You know I love you!" The three times of course parallels the three denials by Peter of Jesus. After each assertion of Peter's that he loves Jesus, Jesus uses shepherd language to tell Peter what he should do; tend then my lambs, shepherd my sheep and tend my sheep. Little wonder then that Peter uses shepherd imagery. He quickly identifies crucial elements of being a shepherd leader. First he is to shepherd the flock. This means the leader protects cares and provides for them. How does the leader do this? The shepherd leaders do so voluntarily in accordance with God's will, not for what they can get out of the flock or from their position but eagerly with a whole heart. They do not lord it over the flock that is abuse their authority position. But rather they are an example, which brings to mind the idea of Jesus as the shepherd and servant leader. Then they receive that great promise that if they do so, they will get

their reward, an unfading crown of glory from the Chief Shepherd Himself. Hallelujah!!

How were Jewish worship centers and communities organized? What were their probable influences on the organization structure of the early church?

The starting point must be the NT understood in the context of its first-century social and historical context. As the Christian church began as a Jewish renewal movement, what is said in the NT, often in passing, about Christian leadership should be read in the light of what we know about the ordering of Jewish communal life in the first century. It may be presupposed that at first the early believers took over Jewish forms, modifying them only as the need arose and as the Holy Spirit bestowed new life and vitality. Beginning with this assumption we may take it that the earliest Christian congregations were the counterparts of Jewish synagogues, albeit of a more charismatic nature, the first Christian leaders had Jewish antecedents and the linkages that developed between Christians in a given area or in different locations followed patterns the Jews had developed.

Jewish Communal Government

Self-governing Jewish communities usually had a ruling council, the *gerousia*, to direct their affairs. The *gerousia* was made up of respected older men who were generally called *presbyteroi* (elders). One elder was usually recognized as the presiding elder, sometimes called a *gerousiarches* (ruling council member) and sometimes an *archon* (ruler), but some texts and inscriptions mention three ruling *archontes*. The oft-mentioned *archisynagogos* (ruler of the synagogue) was also a significant communal figure, but his special domain was the Sabbath assemblies where he presided. He was assisted by a one or more officers who were designated individually *hazzan* (Heb.), *hyperetes* (Gk.) and in English translation, servant. (author's note you can see the influence here on the early church in Acts 6 where deacons were selected and deacon of course literally translates servant or the one who waits on tables.)

Sabbath Assemblies.

Meeting together for Scripture reading, exposition, prayer and common meals was very much part of localized Jewish communal life in the first century. Although special buildings were known, the most common venue was a home setting. In any location where there was a Jewish community of some size there were usually several meeting places. One tradition has it that there were 394 synagogues in Jerusalem when the city was destroyed by Titus in A.D. 70; another tradition has it that there were 480. It may be conjectured that the owner of the home, as the host of those meeting in his house, usually assumed the office of *archisynagogos*. Philo and Josephus usually called these buildings *proseuchai* (a house of prayer). Once Josephus calls them *sabbateion* (Sabbath meeting place). Later Jewish texts also use the title "house of prayer" as well as "house of study" and "house of assembly." It was only late in the Second Temple era and first in Palestine that the name for the local community of Jews in their complete number, *synagogos*, became the name for a specific meeting place, a usage often seen in the NT.¹⁹

So the structure of the Jewish community and synagogues seem to have exercised influence on the early church meeting in homes and organizing. However, the instructions of Jesus regarding servant leadership and His investment of authority in the apostles and their subsequent influence must not be discounted.

¹⁹ K. N. Giles, "Church Order, Government," (NLNTID), Electronic Version 1.3; 2.2-3.

It seems evident from the New Testament that Jesus gave His disciples no formal prescriptions for the organization of the church. In the first days after Pentecost they had no thought of separating themselves from the religious life of Israel, and would not realize the need of any distinct organization of their own. The temple-worship was still adhered to (Acts 2:46; 3:1), though it was supplemented by apostolic teaching, by prayer and fellowship, and by the breaking of bread (Acts 2:42, 46). Organization was a thing of gradual growth suggested by emerging needs, and the differentiation of function among those who were drawn into the service of the church was due to the difference in the gifts bestowed by God upon the church members (1 Cor. 12:28). At first the Twelve themselves, as the immediate companions of Jesus throughout His ministry and the prime witnesses of the Christian facts and especially of the resurrection (compare Acts 1:21, 22), were the natural leaders and teachers of the community. Apart from this, the earliest evidence of anything like organization is found in the distinction drawn by the Twelve themselves between the ministry of the word and the ministry of tables (Acts 6:2, 4)—a distinction which was fully recognized by Paul (Rom. 12:6, 8; 1 Cor. 1:17; 9:14; 12:28), though he enlarged the latter type of ministry so as to include much more than the care of the poor. The two kinds of ministry, as they meet us at the first, may broadly be distinguished as the general and prophetic on the one hand, the local and practical on the other.²⁰ Later, elders (variously designated *presbyteroi*, *episkopoi*, *proistameno*i and *hegoumenoi*) were appointed (Acts 14:23; 20:17; 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9; Heb. 13:7; 1 Pet. 5:1). These functioned alongside apostles and prophets and more nebulous functionaries such as evangelists (Acts 21:8; Eph. 4:11; 2 Tim. 4:5) and deaconesses (Rom. 16:1).

It is perilous to try to work out a consistent polity on the basis of nomenclature alone. The terms are too imprecise and too fluid. For example, an apostle could describe himself as an elder (1 Pet. 5:1) and one of the Seven could be called an evangelist (Acts 21:8). Some elders preached, but not all did so (1 Tim. 5:17); and some (like Apollos) preached who were not elders at all (Acts 18:24-26).

What emerges from the NT is not a graduated list of office-bearers with precise designations and clearly defined functions, but clear evidence of three forms of ministry: a ministry of tables (performed by apostles, deacons and some women), a ministry of oversight and pastoral care (performed by apostles, elders, bishops and pastors); and a ministry of the word (performed by apostles, prophets, evangelists, elders, deacons—and by some with no designation at all).²¹

(The author notes that women in leadership are presented in the scriptures see Romans 16 as illustrative. However, because of a strongly worded prohibition in 1 Timothy 2:12 by Paul which does not permit women to teach or to have authority over men, there are questions raised about women in pastoral leadership (1 Tim. 2:12-15). It is important and interesting to observe that Paul's prohibition about women teaching is only mentioned here in a letter addressed to a community, Ephesus, which had a strong goddess worship, a corruption of Diana to a fertility goddess (Acts 19). There is no other mention like this elsewhere in scripture. We must be careful not to build our doctrine on one verse. The only other strongly worded reference of a prohibition nature regarding women in the church is in Corinthians 14:34-36. Once again this a city where there is a strong fertility goddess worship. To the author it appears clear that since both these references are contextually similar and there is a clear and profound absence of similar prohibitions in the majority of Paul's writings and those of the other NT writers, these prohibitions are culturally based and not for universal

²⁰ E. J. Forrester, (ISBE) 12694; 2015.26.

²¹ D. Macleod, "Church Government," (NDT).

application.)

General principles

Five general principles can be deduced from the NT teaching as a whole: (a) all authority is derived from Christ and exercised in his name and Spirit; (b) Christ's humility provides the pattern for Christian service (Mt. 20:26-28); (c) government is collegiate rather than hierarchical (Mt. 18:19; 23:8; Acts 15:28); (d) teaching and ruling are closely associated functions (1 Thes. 5:12); (e) administrative assistants may be required to help the preachers of the word (Acts 6:2-3).²²

From this rather quick survey of the Jewish background as well as New Testament references, we can see that it is difficult to support any one form of church government. Unfortunately:

Many Christians still believe that the NT exclusively supports their ecclesiology. All too many Baptists and those of the Anabaptist (believer baptism only) persuasion (congregational but independent and perhaps local elders in form), Presbyterians (elder form), Roman Catholics & Anglicans (Hierarchical or Episcopal in form) and Pentecostals (congregational, independent and charismatic), find their church order and no other endorsed by the NT. Aspects of each ecclesiology are present in the Scriptures but not as one given pattern and not in any set form. The NT exhibits diversity and development in church order and in patterns of leadership.²³

The extended family, the village, the state and the religious community are the primary categories for consideration in examining any form of church government. It is doubtful that the early believers envisioned any of the structures which we view as normative with denominations. However that should not be viewed as supporting independent congregational forms of church government. Belonging to the one worldwide Christian community brought into existence by Christ was always the primary reality as far as the earliest believers were concerned.

But regardless of the form of church government, the crucial issue is the character of the leader. We will close this lesson with an inductive study of 1 Tim. 3:1-13.

22 G. S. M. Walker, "Church," *New Bible Dictionary*, Electronic Version, Section 3, ed. by I. Howard Marshall, A.R. Millard, J.I. Packer and D.J. Wiseman, (Downers Grove IVP).

23 K. N. Giles, "Church Order, Government," (*DLNTID*), Electronic Version, 1.22.

Inductive Study – 1 Timothy 3:1-13

It is a trustworthy statement; if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, uncontentious, free from the love of money. He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?); and not a new convert, lest he become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he may not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach. Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things. Let deacons be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households. For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus. (1 Timothy 3:1-13)

Some observations:

1. A person is commended for desiring the office of elder/overseer/bishop (Gk. *Episcopos*). [v. 1-13]
2. Both overseer and deacon must be beyond reproach. [v. 2, 10]
3. They both must be not addicted to wine. [v. 3, 8]
4. They both must be free from the love of money. [v. 3, 8]
5. They both must be tested, not new converts. [v. 6, 10]
6. They both must be the husband of one wife. [v. 2, 12]
7. They both must manage their households well. [v. 4-5, 12]
8. They both must be men of dignity and integrity. Deacons are also commended if they serve well. [v. 2, 4, 8, 13]
9. Elders are to be hospitable and able to teach, not argumentative and with a good reputation with those outside the church. [v. 2, 3, 7]
10. The mention of women in verse 11 coupled with the reference in Rom. 16:1 seems to indicate there were women deaconesses. These women also must meet high criteria.

(Author's note: If the reference in verse 11 is to deacon's wives, as some assert, it is remarkable that Paul made no comment about elder's wives.)

Based on these observations one can easily see that to be involved in either role called for a person of character. As servant leaders of the household of God they were to be exemplary in their walk with Christ. After all they were responsible for the church of the living God – the pillar and support of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15). As such they were called on to provide leadership in the administration of church discipline which is the topic of our next lesson.

Discussion Questions

1. If Christ is the head of the church, what is your role? How are you doing?
2. What are some of the characteristics of a servant leader? Do you have any of them? What would others say?
3. What are some of the characteristics of the shepherd leader? Do you have any of them? What would others say?
4. To you, what are the most important qualifications for an elder? For a deacon?
5. There are three primary lists of spiritual gifts. They are sometimes distinguished as:

Rom. 12:3-13	motivational gifts	the heart
Eph. 4:11	ministry gifts	the role
1 Cor. 12:27; 14:1	manifestation gifts	the hand

What do you see as your primary motivational gift? What role is that exercised in? How is it manifested?

Author's note: This is one interpretation. No dogmatic position should be taken on the gifts which are freely and graciously bestowed by the Father through the Holy Spirit.



5

Discipline in the Church

Rationale.

Since the church is called to be the pure bride of Christ, it is essential for holiness of thought and behavior to characterize its members. Since its members are on the journey of maturity in Christ, they are susceptible to temptations and discipline is required. One must always remember that the goal of church discipline is restoration to full fellowship with God and other believers.

Discipline in the church seeks the glory of God (2 Cor. 6:14-7:1), the purity of the church (1 Cor. 5:6, 11:27), and the reclaiming of the offender (1 Tim. 1:20; 2 Thes. 3:14; 1 Cor. 5:5). Faithful discipline will deter others from sin (1 Tim. 5:20) and avoid Christ's judgments (Rev. 2:14-25). Administrative discipline seeks to maintain good order in the church; judicial discipline is concerned with individual offences, whether private or public. Degrees of censure serve to rebuke and restore the guilty: admonition (Mt. 18:15-18; 1 Tim. 5:20), suspension from the Lord's table (1 Cor. 11:27; 2 Thes. 3:6-15), and excommunication (Mt. 18:17; Tit. 3:10, 1 Cor. 5:5, 11; Gal. 1:9). Loving fellowship provides the context for discipline that is more preventive than corrective.

Footnote

Lesson Objectives

- Understand the Biblical guidelines for administering discipline
- Examine a past or current experience to use as a case study of how to apply these principles

But in case I am delayed, I write so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth. (1 Tim. 3:15)

The subject of discipline in the church is one that has been open to much abuse because Biblical guidelines have not been practiced consistently. Failure to administer church discipline is a sin. Some will say discipline produces conflict and thus in the name of peace and harmony will overlook sin. Nowhere is this the attitude or overlooking sin commended in the scripture.

The book of Acts which chronicles the work of the Holy Spirit through the apostles and the early church, illustrates graphically the need for church discipline through a vivid case study. In Acts 4:32-35 there is an examination of the way believers are caring for one another through selling their goods and bringing the proceeds to the apostles for distribution (v. 35). Then there is a graphic contrast presented between the action of Barnabas (Acts 4:36-37) and Ananias and Sapphira. Barnabas sells the land and brings the property to the apostles (v. 37). Ananias and Sapphira also sell property but deceitfully kept some of the proceeds back (Acts 5:2, 8). In rendering discipline, Peter reminds Ananias that the issue is not whether he sold the property or not, or even how much money he received for the sale, but the fact that he attempted to lie to the Holy Spirit and God. The result was both Ananias and Sapphira died. Now this may seem like

extreme discipline to us and caused great fear in the early church (v. 5), but please note that Peter nor any other member of the church killed Ananias and Sapphira. Their death was supernatural and a result of them willfully trying to deceive God. Ultimately then, church discipline is to come from God and be in keeping with His desire to have a holy people called by His name. In the very next chapter of Acts a conflict arose because Hellenistic (Greek culture and speaking) Jews complained their widows were not being treated as well as widows of the Hebrew Jews. We gain insight into handling church conflict and the resulting discipline by seeing how the apostles handled this. They first recognized their mission, “the word of God” and did not want to be distracted from it (Acts 6:2). They then provided criteria for the selection of seven men who should be put in charge of the task of serving tables (literally deacons) (Acts 6:3). Then once again the apostles reaffirm they will devote themselves to prayer and the ministering/service of the word (Acts 6:4). This decision was affirmed by the whole congregation and they choose seven men who interestingly all have Greek names. Before these seven began their responsibilities, they were brought to the apostles who prayed over them and laid hands on them. Move the parentheses to the nature of the church Chapter 2 (In the NT laying on of hands was observed in healing (Lk. 13:13; Acts 28:8), blessing (Mk. 10:16), ordaining or commissioning (Acts 6:6, 13:3, 1 Tim. 5:22) and imparting spiritual gifts (Acts 8:17, 19:6; 1 Tim. 4:4; 2 Tim. 1:6). Note that in settling conflict and administering discipline the apostles listened and responded prayerfully and maturely. They did not act rashly or defensively.

This is seen over and over again in conflict situations in the book of Acts. Whether with Cornelius in Acts 10 where God teaches Peter to call nothing He has created “unclean” (Acts 10:15, 28), or James in the council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) where the early church affirms that Gentiles can be followers of Jesus without following the rituals of Judaism or becoming Jewish proselytes, the goal is glorify God. This is accomplished through a study of the scriptures, prayer, and seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit. These are certainly worthwhile guidelines for us as we deal with conflict and must administer discipline. Also note this is never done for self promotion or self vindication but for God’s exaltation. They are not afraid to take their decisions to the congregation. Those administering discipline know whose they are and their security and significance is not based on popularity but on God. The focus of church discipline is always internal and on members. This is clearly seen in Paul’s dealings with the *saints* at Corinth.

In 1 Corinthians 5:1-5, Paul directly confronts a problem of immorality which does not even exist among Gentiles, but which exists within the congregation (5:1a). He says the person should be removed from their midst (5:2). He commands then in the name of Jesus, that when they assemble that “one should be delivered to Satan for the destruction of his flesh so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.” (1 Cor. 5:5)

This is family language; by using the word brother, Jesus is talking about your spiritual brother. In this process Paul also disciplines the church who has been arrogant and not repentant in their handling of this sin. The church must remember its Lord has called it to be holy.

Once again the action may appear harsh but note the purpose is ultimately restoration of the sinner and the purity/holiness of the church. In Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians, he has to admonish them to receive the brother back into fellowship (2 Cor. 2:5-11). Paul first reminds them that to speak so boldly as he did in his first letter is really a sign of his love for them (see Prov. 3:11-12). Now that the person has repented, he should be forgiven and love for him reaffirmed (v. 8, 10). He later says that he rejoices that they were made sorrowful to the point of repentance – a turning away from their sinful actions (2 Cor. 7:5-12). He reminds

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us that “the sorrow which is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation but the sorrow of the world produces death (v. 10).” So even though godly discipline can produce sorrow, its intention is for the sorrow to lead to repentance. Thus repentance without sorrow will not produce the turning away from sin and the embracing of God and all that He desires.

Where did the apostles learn the importance of church discipline and basic principles to follow? From Jesus, of course! In Matthew 18:15-20 Jesus presents crucial teaching for us on church discipline.

And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you a Gentile and a tax-gatherer. Truly I say to you, whatever you shall bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst. (Mt. 18:15-20)

1. This is family language; by using the word *brother*, Jesus is talking about your spiritual brother rather than biological brother.
2. This is a brother who has sinned.
3. You are direct – *reprove* means literally to bring to the light, expose it, show why it is wrong.
4. Such action is described as winning your brother if he listens. Note that this is in keeping with the Old Testament concept that when you hear truth you will respond in obedience which leads to restoration of relationship.

Summary of verse 15: A relationship is assumed in which sin has been directly observed by you and is corrected in a private manner. As a member of the family of God you reprove or confront the sin. The person responds positively. This is described as a win.

But what happens if your brother does not respond well? Jesus goes on in verse 16 to suggest that you then are to take one or two witnesses with you which confirms the Old Testament scripture (Deut. 19:15). Sin is not a personal bias but a direct willful violation of the known will of God (James 4:17) Note that these witnesses should not be biased for you or for the other person.

But what happens still if the brother does not respond well? Then you are to tell it to the church. If he is not humbled by this, then you are to treat him as a Gentile and tax gatherer. For the body of Christ such harsh language is to remind us of the seriousness of sin when there is not repentance. Note: This of course builds on our earlier discussion on the polity of the church. Taking it to the church could be the whole church in a congregational system or it could be the elders of the church or it could be the pastoral leadership team. Then in a very somber comment Jesus says in verse 18 that whatever we bind here on earth is bound in heaven, whatever is loosed on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. This parallels Jesus’ statement about the authority of the church in Matthew 16:19. This appears to be the authority to announce guilt (shut up/ bound) or innocence (open/loose_ not to determine it. (See Peter’s action with Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5.)

So if there is sin in the church it is to be corrected directly, privately, quickly and if need be, publically for the welfare of the body. The first step in restoration is to confront or reprove. This is further confirmed by Paul's comments in Galatians 6:1:

Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, looking to yourselves, lest you too be tempted.

Note again the family language – *brother*, and the fact that you have knowledge of the sin. The new elements which are made explicit by Paul were implied by Jesus. But now there is increased emphasis on the spiritual condition of the one doing the confrontation. Are you spiritual? That is in the context of Galatians and I believe the whole tenor of the scripture; are you filled with the Spirit, manifesting the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) and walking by the Spirit (v. 25). If so, then you can keep reading. Because we find that the confronter must also have the goal clearly in mind, restoration, and be willing to do so gently and humbly knowing we too face temptations. Restoration (literally translated *mending nets* in Mk. 1:19) requires patience and diligence. Thus confrontation must always be done after you have examined yourself to make sure you are spiritually fit. Then you do so humbly, not arrogantly, with great gentleness and patience. You focus on the action, not the person.

Having done the confrontation, what is the next step in restoration? The second step is forgiveness. It is no surprise that after teaching about church discipline in Matthew 18:15-20, Jesus goes on to talk about the importance of forgiveness. This also parallels the prayer Jesus taught His disciples where we are to pray for God to forgive us our trespasses/sins (same word used in Gal. 6:1) as we forgive those who trespass or sin against us (Mt. 6:12). In fact, Jesus continues in v. 14-15 to say that if we do not forgive, God cannot forgive us. Jesus states (Mt. 18:35) a similar thought but stresses forgiveness must be from our heart. In Hebraic understanding this means forgiveness as willful, emotive action and thought on our part. Being imperfect, the church sometimes has difficulty doing this as we saw with the Corinthian church in 2 Cor. 2 and 3. However, unless we do forgive, then we face the truth that God is unable (Mt. 18:35 suggests unwilling to forgive us. Let us also remember that when we fail to forgive, that person or incident holds us hostage. So as we forgive let us do so promptly, graciously and lovingly, even as God in Christ has forgiven us (Eph. 4:32).

Having confronted and forgiven, we are well on the way to helping restore our brother or sister. However, there is still a third step and that is love. We have already studied that God is love (1 Jn. 4:16) and that Jesus' great commandment is to love God and to love others as we love ourselves (Mt. 22:37-40). Paul admonishes the Corinthian church to love the one who had sinned (2 Cor. 2; 1 Cor. 13, especially v. 1-7 provides active illustration and description of love).

If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing. Love is patient, love is kind, and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (1 Cor. 13:1-7)

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Verses 1-3 use conditional statement, "if, then" to show us a truth that is contrary to what would naturally be expected. In doing so we are vividly reminded that love is the more excellent way (12:3). Regardless of our particular spiritual gift, without love we and it are nothing. No wonder the first verse of 14 stresses that we are to continually pursue love. Verses 4-7 use both positive and negatives to give us a breathtaking view of love. The essence and foundation of all meaningful action is love. This should not surprise us for the very essence and foundation of our lives and the life of the church is God and God is love.

Thus the church engages darkness within by exposure, speaking the truth in love (Eph. 4:15) with the goal of restoration through exercising confrontation, forgiveness and love. In doing so the church is reminded of the importance of listening before speaking and being very slow to anger (James 1:19). Confrontation done in anger generally only causes the person to respond defensively and hinders the godly sorrow that moves them to repentance. This serves as a sober reminder for the church since restoration involves not only the action of the church, but the willful response of the sinner. If the sinner does not recognize their sin, take responsibility for it, and sincerely repent, then they cannot be restored. On the other hand, the church must be quick to restore when repentance has occurred. James makes clear that intervention leads to repentance, creates ripples of blessing (James 5:19-20).

The church is also charged to engage darkness without and the gates of Hell will not withstand it (Mt. 16:18). This form of church discipline is that of an army mobilized to fight for its Lord. The armor we are to wear in this conflict clearly identified in Ephesians 6:10-18 as well as the need for prayer cover so that we will stand and not fall. We see a picture of a search and rescue option in Jude 20-23:

But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith; praying in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life. And have mercy on some, who are doubting; save others, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh.

The church is to be characterized by not only a sure foundation but growth (see 1 Pet. 2:5; Eph. 2:19-21). This growth is based on prayer, love and expectation of Christ's return. However Jude makes clear that this growth is not for ourselves, it is so we can rescue others. Hallelujah! The rescue directive comes after Jude has already provided guidelines for being alert to and administering church discipline within. So Jude in addressing both aspects of discipline concludes with a powerful prayer of benediction. May this be true of God's people called the church and may the church always give such praise to its founder.

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. (Jude 24-25)

Discussion Questions

1. What is the relationship between sorrow and repentance?
2. Do you believe sin must be confronted/reproved?
3. List the steps for restoration in church discipline.
4. List six of the Biblical principles for church discipline.
5. Examine the following Biblical case studies regarding "church discipline" using the following template.
Exodus 32, Acts 6, Acts 15
 What is (are) the conflict(s)?
 Who is involved?
 How is restoration accomplished?
6. From your own experience share a case study involving church discipline.
7. Can a pastor be restored to ministry who has repented of sin such as lying, cheating, and immorality?



Appendix 1

Relationship with Israel

Christ, Church and Israel Today:

The abiding truth in the church's claim to be the true Israel is that there exists an inalienable connection between the historic people of God, the Jews, and the new entity, the Christian church. The church's Lord must necessarily be identified as the Messiah of Israel as promised in their Scriptures. Gentiles who trust in Christ are therefore not trusting in an isolated individual whom God has apparently arbitrarily chosen. They are linked through Christ, as part of the faithful remnant, to the people of Israel from whom he came by human descent. If Jesus as a human being, as part of the faithful remnant of believing Israelites, is ignored or forgotten, he becomes unreal, because his family upbringing and personal devotion are disregarded as if it would not have mattered what kind of community he had been born into. But the Gospels, especially Luke, witness otherwise. Jesus was nurtured among faithful believers who were longing and hoping for Israel's restoration.

Christ cannot therefore be decontextualized to become the exclusive property of the Christian church; otherwise he becomes ... a theological abstraction. He is the Lord of the church and the Messiah of Israel. This leads us to a further Christological assertion. Although we do acknowledge Jesus as the true Israelite, the ideal servant of God, we must not totally identify him with Israel. We cannot claim that Christ is Israel. While Christian doctrine affirms that Christ is the only mediator between God and humanity, this confession does not negate the fact that historically the righteous remnant of Israel was an essential vehicle in the extension of the covenant faith to Gentiles (not everyone could expect a personal appearance of Christ as in the case of Paul).

Nor is it legitimate to claim that Christ displaces or becomes Israel. In such a theology, the humanity of Christ is obliterated with Israel,.... In order to avoid such an outcome, some recognition has to be given to the fact that the church is called to share in the salvation promised to Israel, as Paul describes in the analogy of the olive tree in Romans 11:13-14. In other words, it must be recognized, as we have already asserted, that there exists an inalienable connection between the church and Israel, one that cannot be subsumed under the notion of believers having a connection with Christ, as if he were an isolated individual and as if Israel could be ignored.

Although the NT writers and their immediate successors did not all equally emphasize the aspect of the church as people of God, it is a useful and a valuable title. It stresses the continuity in God's purposes for humanity. It draws attention to the faithfulness of God throughout history, despite the faithlessness of humans. It reminds us of the oneness of God and of the corporate nature of the people of faith. As such it is a healthy deterrent against all forms of extreme individualism. But above all, it reveals to us something of the sovereignty of God in salvation, since it is God who alone determines the membership of his people.²⁴

²⁴ W. S. Campbell, "Church as Israel, People of God," ([DLNTID](#)).



Appendix 2

Summary of all lessons

This course has attempted to answer the following questions.

1. Who is the church? The church is both a visible local body of believers as well as the invisible universal church consisting of all Christ followers regardless of their denominational differences. As such the universal church consists of living Christians and departed Christians (the cloud of witnesses in Hebrews 12:1). The church as a visible local body may have formal membership with certain criteria such as a public testimony of faith in Christ and baptism.
2. What is the authority of the church? The authority of the church derives from its head, Christ Himself. Thus the church's authority is dependent on following Christ's teaching. As such the Bible is the revelation of the triune God and the church is to be defined as a group of people who claim adherence to it. Thus a body not following/obeying Jesus' teaching is not the church.
3. What are the marks of the church? The church is the body of Christ, the holy Jerusalem, the holy bride of Christ. As such the church is marked by early creed as being unity (one), holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity. By later Protestants the marks were preaching of the word (scripture), administering the sacraments, and practicing a disciplined Christian life.
4. What is the purpose of the church? The pillar of truth, the church is to fulfill the great commission (Mt. 22:37-40) as they read and study the Bible (the teaching), fellowship (worship and giving), pray and share the Good News. In this role the church proclaims and celebrates the sacraments of communion and baptism.
5. How is the church governed? All things are to be done properly and in order (1 Cor. 14:33-34). The early church took its governance from the synagogue where there was a president (ruler) and a group of elders. In Acts 6 this group of general and prophetic leaders (elders/bishops), were supplemented by local and practical leaders (deacons) who literally served/waited on tables. At issue is not the type of church government; congregation, presbytery or Episcopal, but rather the type of leader. Is the leader a Christ follower who seeks first to serve and models shepherd leadership (1 Pet. 5:2-4)?
6. How is the church to exercise discipline as the holy people of God? The purpose of church discipline is always restoration. This requires that truth be spoken in love following guidelines in Matthew 18:15-20, Galatians 6:1. It also requires that the person being corrected recognizes their fault, take the responsibility for it, and sincerely repents – turns from their previous actions.

THE CHURCH

11

LESSON

Social Dynamics of the Church

HOW OUR CULTURE AFFECTS OUR CHURCH

☞ Lesson Purpose

The purpose of this lesson is to explain how culture—both religious and social—has influenced the church throughout its history. It will also draw parallels between the church today in Central/Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union and the early apostolic church.

☞ Main Points

- Churches will be influenced by culture but must not cross the line into sin.
- Culture can be a positive, negative, or neutral influence in the church.
- The church must adapt its forms to the changing culture in order to be relevant.

☞ Desired Outcomes

When the content of this lesson has been mastered, each participant should...

- Be aware of the great influence of culture on the church in the past.
- Be convinced that church forms must change as culture and needs change.
- Evaluate his own church to see if it is adapting to win the lost or expecting the lost to change to match the church.

☞ Suggestions to Trainers

- In preparing to teach this lesson, briefly review the major points of your country's religious history. Consider preparing a short bibliography of your context.
- Consider making a transparency of Figure 11.1, or draw it on a board. Discuss whether the three cultures shown have the right to be different from each other—or should they always be the same if they are biblical.

INTRODUCTION

Culture always plays an important role in determining how we think and act. We are formed by our culture, surrounded by it, and influenced by it. This often happens without our notice. Even when we meet someone from another culture that is very different from ours, we may decide that *he or she* is unusual, and we are “normal.”

Culture surrounds and influences the church.

Culture also influences the church. Churches in every country are different. Some differences result from doctrinal beliefs, but most differences result from culture. For instance, the church buildings in Africa would be very different from ones in Russia. The climate is different, and so is the culture. Music in a South American church would be very different from music in a Korean one. These differences arise from the culture and not from doctrine.

Furthermore, no country is a homogeneous cultural group. Every country includes people from various countries and cultural backgrounds. Culture may vary greatly even among native groups within a country. Differences in economic status, educational level, and age may cause radically different worldviews. Even the cultural differences between rural and urban areas can be significant.

Some of these cultural influences on the church are positive. They help the church relate to and win their countrymen. An example of this kind of influence might be the use of poetry. If this is an art form that is greatly appreciated in the culture it may be used effectively for expressing spiritual truths. Other cultural influences are neutral and not very significant; they simply reflect the way a particular church chooses to do something. An example of a neutral influence is the collection of the offering: should it be taken during the service itself, at the beginning, middle, or end or should a box be left at the back of the room in which people can put their offerings? Unfortunately, there are also negative cultural influences that may impact church life. These might include racism or syncretism that spills over into the church from the culture.

Cultural differences can be positive, negative or neutral.

I. BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES

A. Keeping the Balance

Adapting to the culture without conforming to sin in the culture can be difficult. This is an important issue for the church planter. As he works to organize a new church, he needs to make decisions about which forms and structures to use. There are two very significant passages about this issue in the New Testament.

1. *Acts 14:11-18*

In this passage, Paul had just healed a crippled man in the city of Lystra. When the people saw the miracle, they proceeded to offer sacrifices to Paul and Silas. Their intentions were good, but Paul recognized that this would be idolatry and struggled to prevent this evil. Paul refused to participate in a cultural practice that was clearly contrary to Scripture.

2. *1 Corinthians. 9:19-23*

Paul clearly states that he is willing to become like a Jew, a Gentile, or anyone else in order to win them to Christ. He considered the salvation of the lost far more important than his own cultural preferences. However, he also states that there is a limit to the degree to which he can become like another culture. Paul is always under Christ's law (v. 21). He cannot accept sin, but he will yield the rest of his culture for the sake of the lost.

B. Form and Function

The concept of form and function has already been discussed in previous lessons. They are the keys to finding balance in the church's approach to culture. It is important to remember the meaning of these terms.

1. *Function – What We Must Do*

The things which the church is commanded to do are the *functions*. The main functions include teaching, preaching, evangelizing, baptizing, worshipping, praying and observing the Lord's Table. There are many other functions, such as encouraging one another, loving one another, singing hymns and spiritual songs, and giving to the Lord and to the needy. The church must do these things.

2. *Form – How We Choose to Do the Functions*

The *forms* of the church are the *ways* in which the church carries out its *functions*. The church has great liberty in this area as long as they do not choose a form that is prohibited by Scripture. For example, the church is commanded to pray. How, where, when and how often the church prays is not stated. The position one assumes (standing, kneeling, sitting, etc.) differs from culture to culture. There is liberty in these decisions. If, however, the church decided to pray to Buddha, that would be a sin. We do not have *that* much freedom.

We have freedom to choose how we worship and minister, as long as we do not cross the line into sin which is expressly forbidden in the Bible.

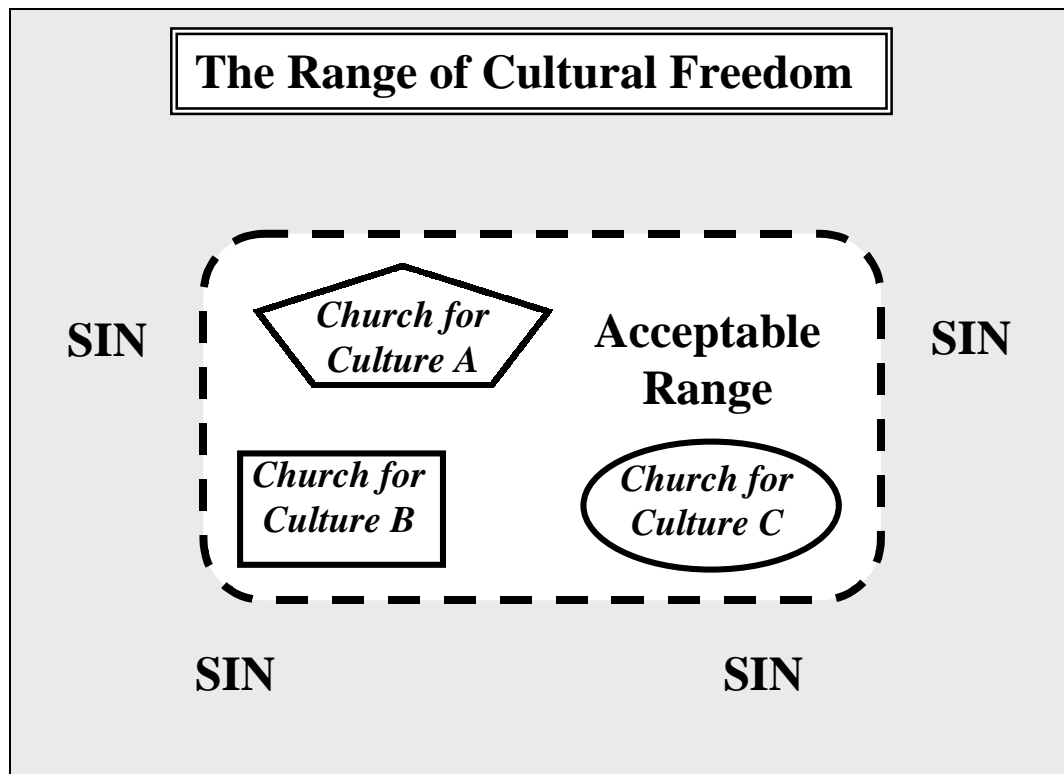
Distinguishing form and function is the first step in developing a church that is appropriate for each cultural group. We must understand that we have freedom to choose how we worship and minister

as long as we do not cross the line into sin, which is expressly forbidden in the Bible. The forms can and will be different for each culture. This is good and normal as long as sin is avoided.

Figure 11.1 helps explain how our range of freedom allows diversity in our worship and Christian life.

Note in the figure that the three different shapes in the center represent church forms appropriate for diverse cultures. Any point within the white center is acceptable to the Lord. However, different cultures prefer different forms within this acceptable area. Cultures A, B and C may each choose a different way of doing their biblical functions. This is good and normal. The gray area represents sin. Each cultural form is equally valid, as long as it does not cross the dashed line into the area of sin that the Bible forbids.

Figure 11.1 Range of Freedom for Church Culture and the Christian Life



II. THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH AND CULTURE

The influence of culture is clearly seen in the story of the New Testament church. It began as a basically Jewish group and then quickly spread to the Gentiles. Eventually, the church in the Gentile regions far surpassed the church in Jerusalem in size and importance. And in AD 70, the Roman destruction of the city of Jerusalem decisively ended the importance of that church.

As we read through the book of Acts and the epistles, we see that forms of worship, church structures and organization developed *as they were needed*, and often in response to cultural issues. This was a continuing process as new challenges and new cultures confronted the growing church.

Forms of worship, church structures and organization developed *as they were needed*—often in response to cultural issues.

A. The Jerusalem Church

The Jerusalem church was a tremendous example of a thriving local church. It still serves as a model for a loving, caring, sharing body. It had one major weakness. The congregation only

fulfilled the first part of Christ's command to be witnesses in "Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." We must imitate the love of these believers for one another, but not their lack of concern for the rest of the world.

The early church in Jerusalem was essentially composed of Jews who were greatly influenced by their Jewish culture. The apostles constantly had to decide how to mesh their Jewish traditions and forms of worship with their new Christian faith.

1. *Prayer in the Temple*

The disciples continued to meet, pray and worship in the Jewish temple even after their conversion (Ac 2:46; 3:1). They were already used to this style of worship, and it was comfortable for them to continue it. As the number of believers grew into the thousands, there was no other place large enough to meet. There was no thought of building a "church" building. The believers *were* the church. This part of their Jewish religious culture was acceptable. However, they no longer participated in the sacrifices. They understood that Christ, the Lamb of God, had already fulfilled the sacrificial function (Heb 7:27). They rightly rejected that custom, despite its deep roots in their culture.

2. *The House Churches*

In addition to the temple meetings, the believers met together from house to house (Ac 2:46). This pattern began even before Pentecost. The disciples were constantly together as they waited for the Holy Spirit (Ac 1:12-14), and for three years previously they had been together daily with Jesus. This custom therefore arose not from their Jewish culture, but from their experience with Christ.

3. *Evangelism*

The culture of the Jews had a negative effect on evangelism. They had trouble believing that God would save the Gentile "dogs" despite Christ's acceptance of all people (Jn 4). The Lord corrected this weakness by sending persecution to drive them out of Jerusalem to witness to the world. He also spoke to both Peter and Paul through dramatic visions in order to persuade them to go to the Gentiles (Ac 9,10).

The Jewish cultural view of the Gentiles had a negative affect on the evangelism of the world.
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4. *Development of Deacons*

The foundational church offices were the apostles and the prophets (Eph 2:20). The next office appears to be that of deacon, although it is not specifically called such in Acts 6:1-7. The occasion for the development of this office was a cultural problem. It appeared that the church took better care of the "real" Jewish widows who spoke Hebrew than they did of the ones who spoke Greek.

This decision of the apostles was to have the congregation select seven men to care for this task. Since all have Greek names, it appears that the church made their decision based on culture. They decided that the Greek-speaking widows were as important as the Hebrew-speaking ones. They also decided that Greek-speaking men could best minister to their own cultural group. But they appointed them in a public fashion that demonstrated they were not a "second-class" culture within the church.

B. The Church Among the Gentiles

With the persecution of Acts 8:1-3, the disciples finally spread the gospel to Samaria and the "uttermost part of the earth." Many of the Gentiles readily believed the message, especially when they saw the miracles performed by the apostles. God also chose the Apostle Paul to specifically minister to this group (Ac 9:15). As a result of his ministry, the church exploded in growth despite severe opposition.

Even the churches in the Gentile areas of Asia Minor included a significant number of Jews. Paul's normal method of winning a new city was to go to the Jews first and to the Gentiles only when the Jews rejected the message of the Gospel. Paul knew that the Jews were God's chosen people and

that they already had a basic knowledge of God and of the Old Testament. Sometimes he found devout Jewish men or women who enabled him to quickly form the nucleus of a new church. But they also brought with them both secular and religious cultural traits that often hindered outreach to the Gentiles.

A common theme in the New Testament is how to integrate these Jewish believers into the body of Christ. Christ has broken down the division and formed one new body—the church—from both the Gentiles and the Jews (Eph 2:14-16). However, they did not always get along. Usually conflict arose when the Jewish Christians insisted on passing their religious culture on to the Gentile Christians. The epistles consistently rebuke such an attitude.

Conflict often arose in the early church when the Jewish Christians insisted on passing their religious culture on to the Gentile Christians.

1. *The Jerusalem Council*

Acts 15:1-21 records the landmark decision concerning how much Jewish religious culture should be brought into the church. The Jewish believers insisted that circumcision was necessary for salvation. There were two major decisions made by the council.

A. Circumcision

Circumcision was one of the most sacred rites of Judaism. However, the council rejected it. They were not willing to place any extra burden on those being saved (Ac 15:10-11,19). Salvation by grace through faith eliminated the need to perform any religious work. The book of Galatians is essentially written to address this same issue. The movement to force new believers to submit to Jewish traditions and religious culture was decisively rejected.

B. Eating of Meat

While specifically rejecting circumcision, the council did make another concession (Ac 15:19-21). They asked the Gentile believers to refrain from the following:

- Food polluted by idols
- Sexual immorality
- Meat of strangled animals and blood

Verse 21 gives the reason for this. There were unbelieving Jews in every city, whom the church desired to win to the Lord. Sexual immorality, meat offered to idols and meat with blood in it was so culturally offensive to them that it would hinder reaching them for Christ.

Sexual immorality is specifically prohibited in the Bible as sin. Its prohibition is understandable. But what about the eating of bloody or sacrificed meat? Paul later added an important discussion on this subject. In 1 Corinthians 8 he relates the following principles:

- Idols are nothing
- The food we eat does not affect our relationship to God

He also condemns abstaining from foods in 1 Timothy 4:3-5. Clearly, eating food is not a sin. And yet he decides not to eat meat that has been sacrificed to idols in order to avoid offending the “weaker brother.” Paul is referring to young Christians who are still weak in their faith and do not yet understand their new freedom in Christ. Paul gives up such meat in order not to be an offense to the weak believer. This closely matches the situation in Acts 15. We therefore see that the disciples were to make cultural concessions to two groups:

Believers must adjust their religious forms to be less offensive to the culture of unbelievers and “weak” Christians.

- The unsaved Jews
- The “weak” Christians

The important teaching is that *believers must adjust their religious forms to be less offensive to the culture of unbelievers and "weak" Christians.* This then becomes the context for Paul's statement about becoming "all things to all men" in order to win them (1Co 9:19-23).

2. *Missions in Antioch*

God mightily used the Antioch church as a base from which to send out Paul and Barnabas, and later Silas, to evangelize the Gentile world. We know little of the internal life of that church as compared to the Jerusalem church, about which much is written. The new component that the Lord shows us through Antioch is the necessity of taking the Gospel to all peoples. The religious culture of the Jewish believers prevented them from accomplishing this task. They could not, and would not, make the changes necessary in their forms of worship that were necessary to reach the Gentile nations. God set them aside and used the Antioch church instead. It is a heart-breaking end to the wonderful beginning of the Jerusalem church in Acts 2.

The structure of the church changed, grew, and was refined as needed.

3. *Development of Church Offices*

As the church spread throughout Asia, and the Mediterranean area, new offices were added to the church structure. We see elders added in 1 Timothy 3:1-11 and Titus 1:5. Deacons continue, but their requirements, like those of the elders, are given in greater detail in 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:5-9. In these books we also see possible reference to deaconesses and a reference to a specific support list for church widows, complete with a list of requirements for them. It is clear that the structure of the church changed, grew, and was refined as needed in the changing times and needs. And church ministry was adjusted according to the specific cultural needs and traits of each group (Tit 1:12-14).

Church ministry was adjusted according to the specific cultural needs and traits of each group

4. *The Roman Persecution*

Beginning in Acts 8, the early church was severely persecuted by the Romans. The suffering and death of the Christians during this period is well known, as is their faith and love. Most of the New Testament was written during this time, and calls to remain faithful are common. In general, believers did remain true to the faith and serve as a great example to us. Forbidden to meet publicly, they met in homes, forests, and caves. But pressing on in faithfulness was difficult. They continued to struggle with leaving their cultural forms and customs. As the persecution became more severe, it was a strong temptation for Jewish believers to return to Judaism and the safety of its official status. The fact that they could not make a clean break with the past and their old forms of worship later served as a snare for them. The book of Hebrews is written to this group to demonstrate the foolishness of exchanging the power for Christ for these old forms.

III. FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT UNTIL NOW

Much time has passed from the New Testament days until our modern era, and the Christian Church has also changed. Some of this change has been positive and some has been negative. Much of it has been influenced by culture rather than by doctrine.

A. The Development of the State Church

The devotion of the saints was eventually victorious—even the Emperor Constantine believed, and Christianity was named the state religion. That act changed the religious picture of the world. Instead of a small group of serious believers meeting in homes at great risk, huge state church buildings appeared with the prestige that attracted even unbelievers to their power, beauty and wealth. There were always true believers—a "remnant." But as the political power and visibility of the

As the political power and visibility of the church increased, forms of worship became increasingly more important than their functions.

church increased, its spirituality declined. Forms of worship became increasingly more important than their functions.

B. The East-West Split

Eventually the Catholic and Orthodox Churches split. The issue was partly doctrinal (the “filioque” clause), but also was largely influenced by cultural differences between the East and the West, and by a struggle for power among the leaders of the two groups. Both the eastern and western churches relied heavily on forms rather than functions. *How* they went through the motions of worship meant more to them than *what* they believed. There emerged two very different forms of Christian worship—one in the East and one in the West. Notice this appreciation of form when emissaries reported in 987 AD to Vladimir, Grand Duke of Kiev, on the Orthodox faith in Constantinople:

The Protestant Church slowly adopted many of the same forms that the Orthodox and Catholics used.

“The Greeks led us to the edifices where they worship their God, and we know not whether we were in heaven or on earth. For on earth there is no such splendor or such beauty, and we are at a loss how to describe it. We only know that God dwells there among men, and their service is fairer than the ceremonies of other nations. For we cannot forget that beauty. Every man, after tasting something sweet, is afterward unwilling to accept that which is bitter, and therefore we cannot dwell longer here.”
The Primary Chronicle

C. The Protestant Reformation

The root of the Protestant Reformation was the desire of the reformers to correct this unwarranted emphasis on forms. They desired to return to the true functions of the church. The reformers preached that salvation was through faith in Christ—and faith alone. The forms of church were not as important as the functions. **What we believe** is far more important than **how we worship**. Both the Orthodox and Catholic Churches rejected this argument. Wars were fought over the issue. Countries were invaded. Infidels were slaughtered. Christian state churches persecuted the other Christian churches. Explorers raced to claim newly discovered continents for the “true” religion. There were abuses on all sides. In an extreme case in Russia, Orthodox fought Orthodox in the Old Believers Schism over the issue of how many fingers to use when one crossed oneself. They died for this form even though both sides agreed on the doctrine of the Trinity—the function! Amid this animosity, the Protestant Church nevertheless slowly adopted many of the same forms—large ornate buildings, professional priesthood and rigid forms of service—that the Orthodox and Catholics used.

The degree to which churches have been affected by their culture and past depends in large part on the choices church leaders have made concerning form and function.

IV. CONTEMPORARY CULTURE AND THE CHURCH

The churches in Central/Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union today struggle with the results of cultural, political and religious history. Each local church has its unique congregation and setting. It is impossible to paint a general picture that applies to all. The degree to which each church has been affected depends in large part on the choices church leaders have made concerning form and function. These choices may have been made consciously or unconsciously, but they were certainly made. Some of them are positive. Others may hinder the contemporary church from reaching the lost.

Two clear principles arose from the study of the New Testament church:

- 1. The forms of the church must change according to need or cultural change.**
- 2. The church must be willing to change its forms so as not to hinder unbelievers or weak Christians—although avoiding sin.**

Unfortunately, these principles are often completely reversed. Rather than follow the clear example of the Bible, we take one or both of the following actions:

A. We Refuse to Change

Many churches *refuse* to change. They may be totally unaware of the amount of “cultural baggage” they have collected over 2000 years of church history. If aware, they justify it as an ancient tradition. Forms have supplanted function. They follow the course of the Jewish Christians and cling to their traditions. As a result, they are unable to reach and relate to their culture.

B. We Expect the Unbelievers to Conform to Our Church Culture

This is so common as to be accepted without question. However, it is clearly opposed to Scripture. In the Bible the *believer* is supposed to become all things to all men. We are to live lives that identify with the unbelievers and make it easy for them to relate to us and listen to our message. We are to attract them to the Savior. Some things in a culture are sin. They must be rejected. But often they simply conflict with the church’s culture. When this is the case, the church must change. Even Christ totally changed his culture and became a man in order to reach sinners—yet without sin (Php 2:7; Heb 4:15).

In the same way churches often expect “weak” believers to quickly give up things for which they are not ready. But the scriptural pattern is for the strong believers to sacrifice their rights in order to keep from placing too difficult a burden on the weak believers. How often have church members acted as the “weak” brother and demanded that the new Christians give up their culture?

It is true that the stronger brother should teach the weaker one. But this is to take place over time. The first stage is for the stronger brother to yield his rights and suffer the shortcomings of the weaker brother until he grows and matures.

V. SUMMARY

The challenge for the church today is to know when to confront sin in the culture around it and when to change and adapt to the culture in order to win the lost. These must always be kept in balance. This is a difficult issue for the church in Central/Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union. There are centuries of tradition and history weighing on them. In many ways the issue resembles the problem of the Jewish Christians in the early church. They were devoted to the Lord. They prayed fervently. They loved one another. But they had a difficult time setting aside their 2000-year Jewish history in order to fulfill the Great Commission. Let us change before another persecution would scatter the brethren.

The challenge for the church today is to know when to confront sin in the culture around it and when to change and adapt to the culture in order to win the lost.

Some churches today will choose to change and win the lost, but many will not. For this reason, the planting of new churches is even more important, and the task of the church planter is an urgent one. The cultural dynamics of new churches are much more like the Antioch church. New believers come without the religious cultural “baggage” of older Christians. They can relate to their world and their culture easily. Their potential is unlimited. Without concrete forms they are free to adapt their worship and life in order to reach the lost.

The danger is that new believers also know little of holiness or doctrine. The Antioch church overcame that shortcoming with good teachers (Ac 13:1). As they taught the people about both grace and holiness, God used them to reach the known world of that day. May we be as faithful today.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION, REVIEW AND APPLICATION

- What are some of the major cultural traits of your country or area? Where did they come from? Are they from history, religion, politics, climate, lifestyle or something else?
- How can a believer distinguish between something that is sin and something which contradicts his religious culture?

ACTION PLAN

- Review the lessons on form and function in light of this lesson. List the forms and the functions of your church.
- Evaluate your list above in light of what you now know about the historical cultural influences on the Christian Church.
- List the traits of the other historical branch(es) of Christianity in your country, such as Orthodoxy, Catholicism or Lutheranism. Critically and prayerfully evaluate which of these traits have been assimilated by your church. Categorize them as positive or negative.

SOURCES

Russian Primary Chronicle: Laurentian Text, Samuel H. Cross. N.p., n.d.