

Church Membership

**“Let your light
so shine
before men,
that they may
see your good
works,
and glorify
your Father
which is in heaven.”
Matthew 5:16**

Burley W. Moore

Church Membership

**“Let your light so shine before men, that
they may see your good works, and glorify
your Father which is in heaven.”**

Matthew 5:16

All scripture references are taken from the KJV
Copyright © 2021
Burley W. Moore
All Rights Reserved

The author acknowledges with grateful appreciation all
materials from other individuals and sources.

FOR INFORMATION CONTACT

**Burley W. Moore
2704 Fairway Drive
Greensboro, NC 27408
burleymoore@att.net
336-292-2408**

**Please Visit Our Web Site At
www.covenantofgraceministries.com**

**Cover Design © Morris Publishing
Printed in the United States by Morris Publishing ®
3212 East Highway 30
Kearney, NE 68847
800-650-7888**

Table of Contents

Preface 4

**Chapter 1
Establishment of the Church 6**

**Chapter 2
Entrance into the Church 20**

**Chapter 3
What to Look for in a Good Church 33**

**Chapter 4
Commitment to Membership in a Church 44**

**Chapter 5
Importance of Belonging to a Local Church 52**

**Chapter 6
Using Your Spiritual Gift in the Church 58**

**Chapter 7
Two Offices in the Church 67**

**Chapter 8
Response to Leadership in the Church 73**

**Chapter 9
Ordinances in the Church 79**

**Chapter 10
Financial Giving in the Church 85**

Preface

The simple title of this book is ***Church Membership***, which is made possible only by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit in the soul of a sinner. Afterwards, it's the responsibility of the individual to find a local church where they can be "**rooted and built up**" in Christ (**Col. 2:7**) through the Word of God.

For that reason, it's vital to find a local church where one can grow and mature in the Christian life. As you read this book on ***Church Membership***, it's mainly referring to seeking God's leading following the new birth in finding a Bible-believing local church.

Most local churches have specifics listed in their constitution and by-laws as to who and how church membership is to be handled. It's generally agreed that the early church had some type of membership system in order for them to deal with matters, such as the selection of what we believe to be the prototype of the first deacons (**Acts 6:2-8**) and church discipline (**Matt. 18:15-17, I Cor. 5:1-13**). Then again, when it comes to "**elders**," church membership is implied in other passages (**Acts 14:23, I Tim. 5:17, Titus 1:5, I Pet. 5:1-14**).

Although, church membership is accepted to be a good and reasonable thing, we can all agree that no detail is given in Scripture as to how it must look in every congregation. No doubt, that's because every congregation is different and the details may vary from local church to local church. However, there must be some essential matters that will be applicable in every Bible-Believing assembly. With that being said, this book will take you into God's Word and cover subjects that can very easily help you see the importance of being an active and faithful member of a New Testament church.

This book can be used in different ways. Some will read it simply as "reading material" on the subject for their

personal spiritual enrichment. Others may read it because they are considering becoming a member of a local church and are looking for biblical “pointers” to direct them in the right direction in their search. This group could possibly consist of individuals or families who are searching for a church family for the first time or others who are trying to relocate to another local church for one reason or another. It could be that some in this particular group have become disillusioned about church membership because of the liberal trends they are seeing in their current situation. For that reason, you are reading this book in hopes of finding spiritual direction that will help in your search. May God be pleased to use this little book to help in that endeavor.

Another possible way this book can be used is by pastors who conduct some sort of new member’s class or new member’s orientation for those considering becoming members of the congregation they pastor. With that being the case, the pastor is welcome to use this in any way he sees best. My suggestion is to possibly give each family a copy to read as a requirement for membership. Allow a month for them to read and mull over it. Afterward, meet with them individually or as a group and discuss the book, asking for any questions they might have that you will need to address more fully. Whatever else your source of material may be for a new member’s class; you can combine it with this book followed by having them to give a personal testimony of coming to saving faith in Jesus Christ. This can be done in whatever way one desires, possibly by writing out their testimony on paper and giving it to the pastor, or having them share it from their heart without notes. These are mere suggestions that might be considered if the book is used in such a setting. Regardless, it’s my prayer that God will use this material to help us better understand the importance of church membership.

Chapter 1

Establishment of the Church

“When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say *that thou art* John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed *it* unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”
(Matt. 16:13-18)

When most people think of a Christian **“church,”** usually their first thoughts are those of a structure made from wood, brick, and mortar with perhaps a steeple on top. However, we know from the Scriptures that the true **“church,”** the **“bride”** (**Rev. 21:9**) of our Lord Jesus Christ, is not made from such material. It is comprised of people who have been **“born again”** (**Jh. 3:3**) by the transforming regenerating power of the **“Holy Spirit”** (**Jh. 3:8**).

At the very moment of conversion, a person is made a member of the **“body of Christ”** (**I Cor. 12:27**), thus the **“bride”** of Christ (**Rev. 21:9**), and should seek out a local assembly from which he/she should **“not forsake”** (**Heb. 10:25**) the assembling. The visible New Testament **“church”** is simply a congregation of professing believers who ban together in the **“fellowship”** of **“the gospel”** and in the practice of their **“faith”** (**Acts 2:41-47**). A local

“**church**” is supposed to be a group of believers who publicly profess to their community that they truly know who “**Jesus**” is.

The greatest knowledge in life is to know who “**Jesus**” is and the mission of the “**church**” is to testify of “**Christ**” (v.13-17). I want us to notice the question that “**Jesus ... asked his disciples ... whom do men say that I the Son of man am?**” That’s a good question and is still being asked of men, women, boys, and girls today. In order to exercise saving “**faith**” (Eph. 2:8) in the Lord Jesus Christ, one must know who “**Jesus**” really is.

“**Jesus Christ**” is no doubt the most controversial Person who has ever stepped onto the scene of human history. During His day, “**some**” thought Him to be “**John the Baptist ... Elijah ...or Jeremiah**” reincarnated. Even today, many consider Him only to be some great historic personality, teacher, or mere founder of Christianity. From “**his disciples.....Jesus**” called for a confession as to Who they thought He was. It was “**Simon Peter,**” the apparent leader and spokesman for the group, who declared Him to be “**the Christ, the Son of the living God.**”

“**Jesus**” is no other than “**the Christ, the Son of the living God**” Who came to earth as the God-Man to be the sinner’s Redeemer. “**Jesus**” was the earthly name of God’s “**Son,**” identifying Him as our Savior from sin (Matt. 1:21). “**Christ**” is a title that means ANOINTED ONE and distinguishes Him as the Messiah Who fulfilled all the Old Testament promises of prophecy. It’s all important that men have a correct understanding of Who “**Jesus**” really is.

The only way to know “**Jesus**” the way “**Simon Peter**” knew “**Jesus**” is by the supernatural revelation of God. Knowing ABOUT “**Jesus**” is not the same thing as personally knowing Him in a soul saving encounter. Scripture even declares that the demons know about Him, but not in saving faith (Jam. 2:19). Being “**born again**”

(Jh. 3:3) is not a work of **“flesh and blood,”** but a divine revelation of the **“Father”** made possible by the convicting and converting power of the **“Holy Spirit” (Matt. 11:27)**. Therefore, the only way into the true **“church”** of Jesus Christ is to be **“born”** into it through the new birth **(I Jh. 5:4-5)**.

The Foundation of the Church v.18a **“upon this rock”**

This may be hard to believe, but this verse is one of the most disputed, debated, and controversial in the New Testament regarding ecclesiology, which is the doctrine of the **“church.”** Due to that fact and without spending too much time on the subject, I want to cut to the chase and give my condensed view of this debate because I personally see it as a very simple verse to understand. For those who disagree with me, I only ask that you do so in grace and realize that we’re all still seeing **“through a glass darkly” (I Cor. 13:12)**. My utmost desire is to remain true to the exegesis of the text and **“rightly”** divide **“the word of truth” (II Tim. 2:15)**, believing that the Bible never contradicts itself.

However, there are different interpretations by great theologians when it comes to this verse, especially the first part of it dealing with the **“rock.”** For instance, the Roman Catholic Church believes that **“Peter”** is the **“rock”** in this passage and that he was their first pope who began the role of apostolic secession. Among Protestants, there are those who also believe this **“rock”** is referring to **“Peter”** who was the first apostle to take the Gospel to the Gentiles **(Acts 10)**. Others, believe that the **“rock”** was Peter’s confession along with all believers who confess the same. Personally, I believe that the **“rock”** was He IN WHOM the confession was made, **“the Christ, the Son of the living God.”**

Believing that Scripture is the best commentary on Scripture, we find the answer in the various metaphors that are used to help explain the doctrine of the **“church.”** In the Bible, a metaphor is a comparison made between two or more things using figurative or descriptive language to teach Biblical truth. For illustration, I call your attention to the **10th Chapter of John’s Gospel** where it speaks of the **“sheepfold”** representing the collective church assembly, the **“sheep”** being the individual Christians who comprise the **“church,”** and the ultimate **“shepherd”** Who is **“Christ”** Himself.

Other metaphors are used to help describe God’s strength as well as the security and stability of our God and His **“church”** such as the words or phrases, **“the Lord is my Rock” (II Sam. 22:2, Ps. 18:2).** A major verse from Isaiah that points us to our text says, **“Therefore thus saith the Lord, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation” (Isa. 28:16).** Other verses written by Peter in his first epistle uses the same terminology by referring to the **“living stone” (I Pet. 2:4),** which is Christ, and the **“living (lively in KJV) stones” (I Pet. 2:5),** which are Christian believers, and the **“chief corner stone” (I Pet. 2:6),** which is Christ.

When I was in the pastorate, I remember singing
with the children:

“the wise man built his house upon the rock,
the rains came down and the floods came up,
and the house on the rock stood firm.
The foolish man built his house upon the sand,
the rains came down and the floods came up,
and the house on the sand went splash”

I call this to your attention, because I don’t think we ought never lose the simplicity of Biblical Truth. There is a

passage of Scripture in the Gospel of Matthew that teaches the doctrinal truth of that little song.

“Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it. And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: For he taught them as *one* having authority, and not as the scribes.”
(Matt. 7:24-29)

The establishment of the New Testament “**church**” is based upon no other than “**Jesus Christ**” Himself. Great skyscrapers are able to withstand the gales and storms because of the stability of their foundations. As we all know, dwellings that are more securely built will come nearer withstanding hurricane force winds. Such as, beach dwellings built upon deep piling depth at the coast when strong hurricanes hit the shoreline are more secure. The reason why the “**church**” has been able to stand against the onslaught of Hell itself is because of her “**foundation.**”

“For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”
(I Cor. 3:11)

There has been much debate by biblical scholars as to what the **“rock”** was to which **“Jesus”** referred in our text. However, the debate is needless, simply because if **“Christ”** is NOT the eternal **“foundation”** of the **“church,”** then the **“church”** has NO permanent basis. The **“church”** certainly wasn’t built upon the apostle **“Peter,”** but it was built upon **“Christ,”** the Eternal **“Rock”** of Ages as described in the Old Testament and fulfilled in the New. A beautiful picture of **“Christ”** was portrayed in TYPE from the account of Moses drawing water from the **“Rock.”**

“Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.”
(I Cor. 10:1-4)

“Christ” is not only the Architect and Founder of the **“church,”** but also the **“foundation ... rock”** and the **“living stone”** to which **“Peter”** referred in his **First Epistle (I Pet. 2:4)**. Christ is the **“foundation”** as well as the **“head” (Eph. 5:23, Col. 1:18)** of His **“body,”** or in other words, from head to toe and all the **“living stones”** in-between comprises His **“church”** (His **“body”**). These are beautiful metaphors that teach us about the **“preeminence”** of Christ in giving His **“church”** stability and permanence.

The way I personally see this verse is that the **“rock”** is the **“foundation”** and the **“foundation”** is the **“rock.”** It’s the same as saying that if you live in a cement slab home, then the foundation is the slab and the slab is the foundation. Today, the most common material for a home

foundation is concrete, but otherwise the foundation usually consists of such material as stone, brick, concrete block or poured concrete.

Several beautiful TYPES IN THE STUDY OF TYPOLOGY (**I Cor. 10:10-11**), are used as pictures or examples of **“Christ.”** During their 40 years of wandering, God took care of the Israelites by miraculously providing **“manna” (Ex. 16)** from heaven and **“water”** from the **“rock.”** Moses, on two separate occasions, drew **“water”** from a **“rock.”** The first time (**Ex. 17:5-6**), he struck it once, but the second time God told him to **“speak”** to it. Instead of speaking to it, he struck it twice (**Num. 20:10-11**) costing him entrance into the Promised Land. On both occasions, in grace, God gave **“water”** to his thirsty people which a good illustration of how God, even **“in wrath”** can **“remember mercy” (Hab. 3:2).**

That **“Rock”** which Moses struck was a picture of **“Christ”** Who was only crucified once (**I Cor. 10:4**). **“Christ”** is the **“Rock”** that composes the **“foundation”** of His **“church.”** He is also described as the **“chief corner stone”** of the **“church”** which is a major support of a building and in this case, the One Who holds the **“church”** together. The **“household of God” (Eph. 2:19)** is the same as **“the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10)**, with both terms referring to the **“church.”** The building material laid upon this **“foundation”** consists of **“living stones” (I Pet. 2:5)** who are souls redeemed by the **“blood of the Lamb” (Rev. 12:11).**

“Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded

together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.”
(Eph. 2:19-22)

Some believe “**the apostles and prophets**” were the “**foundation**” of the “**church**,” but I see them as the first “**living stones ... built**” upon the “**foundation rock**” which can only be Christ Himself. We generally have no trouble understanding who the “**apostles**” were, but some believe these “**prophets**” were the early New Testament “**prophets**” while others believe it spoke of the Old Testament “**prophets.**” Personally, I believe it speaks of both the Old and New Testament “**prophets**” (**Eph. 4:11, Heb. 1:1**) who ministered to God’s people.

God has always had a people on both sides of the cross. In the Old Testament they were referred to as the “**Israel of God**” (**Rom. 9:6, Gal. 6:16**) differentiating them from the nation of Israel. They were true believers who were saved by grace through faith just like all New Testament believers. In the New Testament, believers are referred to as “**Christians**” (**Acts 11:26**) and the collective body is called the “**church.**” In the book of Acts, believers are referred to in the Old Testament as the “**church in the wilderness**” (**Acts 7:38**). Believers in the Old Testament are called God’s “**wife**” and believers in the New Testament as the “**bride**” of Christ with both being in Heaven after death. When looking at this, we need to keep in mind that a man’s “**wife**” is his “**bride**”. There is a clear teaching in Scripture that both Old and New Testament believers will enjoy the eternal state together forevermore.

The Builder of the Church v.18b **“I will build”**

Although, “**Christ**” did not build the “**church**” upon “**Peter**,” He did promise to take men like “**Peter**” who are as “**weak**” as sand and unstable as water and build His

“**church**” from such material (**I Cor. 1:27, Eph. 2:20**). Someone has said, “I MAY TREMBLE ON THE ROCK, BUT THE ROCK WILL NOT TREMBLE BENEATH ME.” We can make such a statement because the “**Rock**” is “**Christ**” and not mere mortal man. We’re all as “**weak**” as “**Peter**,” but if we’re on the “**Rock**,” we’ll discover the spiritual strength and power that is required to live the victorious Christian life (**I Jh. 5:4**).

It was “**Peter**” who “**denied**” (**Jh. 18:27**) His Lord three times before the “**cock**” crowed, but yet it was out of this type of humanness that the New Testament “**church**” is built. Every believer can identify with “**Peter**,” because we all have at some time or another in our Christian walk miserably failed our Lord. The truth of the matter is that “**Peter**” sinned just as grievously as did “**Judas**,” but “**Peter**” repented and “**wept bitterly**” (**Matt. 26:75**) in great remorse. “**Peter**” was not a perfect man nor was he some super spiritual saint, but merely a piece of stone built upon the massive “**Rock**” of “**Christ**.”

The very name “**Peter**” is most significant because it was the new name that “**Jesus**” gave to “**Simon Barjona**” (son of Jona) when they first met (**Jh. 1:42**). Actually, “**Cephas**” and “**Peter**” are different forms of the same name with both meaning a little piece of rock, stone, or pebble. He was a man with two names, “**Cephas**” was his Aramaic name and “**Peter**” was his Greek name. Looking at the literal Greek, helps us better understand the truth of this verse. It reads, “**thou are Petros {pet-ros meaning pebble} and upon this Petra {pet-ra meaning Rock} I will build my church.**” “**Petros**” {petros} refers to a fragment of stone, referring to “**Peter**” as one of the “**living (lively) stones**” (**I Pet. 2:5**) built upon the “**Petra**” {petra}, the massive “**Rock**” of “**Christ**” alone.

“**Christ**” (**Petra**), not “**Peter**” (**Petros**), is the “**foundation ... Rock**” on which the New Testament “**church**” is constructed. “**Peter**” was merely a piece of stone, just like all true believers are “**lively stones**,” built

upon the massive **“Rock”** of the New Testament **“church”** (**I Pet. 2:4-9**). Jesus did NOT say **“thou art Petros, and upon this Petros I will build my church”** but He said, **“upon this Petra I will build my church.”** Some pastors imagine that Jesus pointed to Himself when He said that. Scripture doesn’t verify this, but it could have happened that way.

We must never forget that the **“church”** is no mere human organization, but a supernatural living breathing ORGANISM that Almighty God is responsible for building. The empowering life of the **“church”** comes from no other than the Holy Spirit. From the very beginning of her New Testament establishment, it’s recorded that **“the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved”** (**Acts 2:47**). Unless **“Christ”** does the building of His **“church,”** then all other building is in **“vain”** (**Ps. 127:1**). Building a large structure is a slow, but progressive work. Just like a house being built, it takes time and little by little God’s **“church”** (**Eph. 2:20**) will be brought to completion. Scripture teaches that the **“apostles and the prophets”** (**Eph. 2:20**) were some of the first **“living stones”** added to the **“foundation”** and ever since, **“living stones”** will be added until Christ comes again.

If **“Jesus Christ”** is NOT the spiritual Contractor of a local **“church,”** then all we’re building is an empire for the glory of ourselves. The commission of the **“church”** has been to plant, water, and nurture the **“seed”** (**Matt. 13**), trusting God to bring forth the **“increase”** (**I Cor. 3:7**). From **“every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation”** (**Rev. 5:9**), God is calling out His **“church”** from around the world. Our responsibility is to evangelize the lost (**Matt. 29:19-20**), it’s God’s responsibility to call out His **“church.”**

The Owner of the Church v.18c “my church”

There is only One Person Who has the right to call **“the bride, the Lamb’s wife” (Rev. 21:9)**, **“my church”** and that is Jesus Christ. It’s like a husband, having a lawfully wedded wife, is the only one who has the right to call her, **“my wife.”** I cannot call your wife, my wife, and vice versa. Only the husband has that right and privilege. Down through the years, both as a pastor and church member, I’ve become particular in trying to form the habit of never referring to the Lord’s **“church”** as my church or our church. I’ve referred to it as our church home or the pastorate that God has entrusted to me. It’s a reminder to me that the **“church”** doesn’t belong to me, but I’m a mere part of the **“body of Christ”** that He purchased with His own **“blood” (I Cor. 10:16)**.

Local churches have their local leaders and workers who will serve God as **“faithful ... stewards” (I Cor. 4:2, I Tim. 3)** and **“members of the body” (I Cor. 12:22-23)**. But, let us keep in mind that a **“steward”** is only a manager and is always fully accountable to the owner. In essence, the New Testament **“church”** does not belong to the pastor, no other elder, deacon, nor even to the local members. She belongs exclusively to **“Christ”** because He **“loved the church”** so much that He **“gave Himself for her” (Eph. 5:25)**.

Paul reminded the Corinthians that the **“church”** is a purchased possession of Jesus Christ by saying that she is **“bought with a price” (I Cor. 6:20)**. I refer to the **“church”** in the feminine gender because she is the **“bride of Christ.”** The **“church”** has been bought and paid for by the precious atoning blood of Calvary’s Lamb which makes Him our **“Kinsman”** Redeemer like **“Boaz”** was to **“Ruth” (Ruth 3-4)**. The same **“blood”** that purchased the **“church”** has spiritually cleansed her thus

enabling her to become the very **“body”** of **“Christ”** with Him being the **“head”** (**Eph. 5:23**).

At this point, let me remind you that the **“mind”** is a major part of man’s **“spirit”** (**I Thess 5:23**) and as the **“body of Christ”** (**I Cor. 12:27**) we’re admonished to **“let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus”** (**Phil. 2:5**). Just as God is a trinity, He made man a trinity with a **“spirit and soul and body”** (**I Thess. 5:23.**) When a person is regenerated by the Holy Spirit, then the Holy Spirit takes up residence in our **“spirit”** and **“The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.”** (**Rom. 8:16**). This means that our view of the **“church”** should be the same as Christ’s. We need to hate the things that God hates, and love the things that God loves.

The Eternality of the Church v.18d **“gates of hell shall not prevail against it”**

“Jesus” didn’t say that the **“church”** would NOT suffer attack nor have any adversaries. But He did say that the **“gates of hell shall not prevail against”** the **“church of the living God”** (**I Tim. 3:15**). In other words, the true **“church”** is as indestructible and eternal as **“Christ”** Himself. Regardless of how great the Satanic assaults, the **“church”** will always be eternally triumphant.

Now, listen very carefully to what I’m about to say, because I don’t want anyone to misunderstand me. I believe that the Bible very clearly teaches that there is a literal place called Hell and it’s a place of eternal torment for unregenerate souls. However, the **“gates of hell”** in this verse as translated in the KJV is a reference to DEATH and is speaking of HADES, the unseen world of death. The Greek word Ghenna speaks of **“hell”** (**Mk. 9:43-47**) and describes its eternal state of torment (**Lk. 16:19-31**). It’s also called the **“lake of fire”** (**Rev. 20:14-15**) where the

lost will spend eternity forever and ever. The word HADES is also translated in the Greek to be “**hell**,” but it’s used in reference to death. In the Old Testament, HADES only bore the meaning of death or the grave.

Although, it’s true that the devil and all the host of “**hell**” opposes the “**church**,” this verse is teaching that not even death shall prevail against her. In other words, the “**church**” cannot be permanently destroyed. The devil can frustrate us, persecute us, and kill us, but he cannot destroy us, like the old song says “cast down, but not destroyed.” Christian martyrs can be put to death, but that will not destroy nor extinguish the “**church**,” the “**bride**” (**Rev. 21:2**) of “**Jesus Christ**.” On the third day after His crucifixion, “**Christ**” arose victoriously in order for “**death**” to have no power over His “**church**” (**I Cor. 15:55-57**). When our Lord returns, “**the dead in Christ shall rise first, then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up**” (**I Thess. 4:16-17**).

Closing Thoughts

Some have gone so far as to ask if the “**church**” of Jesus Christ will survive and on the authority of God’s Word I answer with an emphatic “YES”, she will survive. I’m afraid that down through the years, local churches that were once known for their zest and zeal for the Lord became corrupt and God removed their “**candlestick**” (**Rev. 2:5**). In other words, these local assemblies failed to exist due to the fact they failed to remember Who Jesus really is. But God has always had His remnant and He always will have His remnant until the end of time. He has never left Himself without a witness and when the final curtain comes down on this world’s scene, the “**church**” will fulfill God’s divinely designed mission for her. We may feel as “**weak**” (**Matt. 26:41**) as “**Peter**” and perhaps have failed the Lord just as grievously, but it’s comforting to

know that we have a powerful **“Christ”** who remains Sovereign over the affairs of men.

As **“weak”** as we often appear, it’s refreshing to know that **“Christ”** will never give up on His **“church,”** the truly redeemed people of God. Local churches may come and go, but the true **“body of Christ”** has an eternal purpose. Down through the centuries, the **“church”** has thrived even in the midst of persecution and difficulty. If she were only a mere human organization, she would have long been gone. But, the eternal purpose of the **“church”** is yet to be realized in all of her splendor and glory as the **“bride”** of Christ.

The only way a sinner can become a member of **“the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10)** is through a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit in his or her life. If you are a member of the **“body of Christ ... the church,”** then only through the supernatural empowerment of the Holy Spirit can you effectively serve the Savior and **“glorify”** Him in both **“body ... and spirit” (I Cor. 6:20)**. So much of what is being done in local churches today is being done in the energy of the flesh **(I Cor. 3:13-15)** instead of the power of the Holy Spirit. We need to remember that **“the church”** is not about us, but it’s about **“Christ”** because He is the Foundation, Builder, Owner, and Eternal Securer of His **“church.”**

As the song writer penned the words: “The Church’s one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord; She is His new creation by Spirit and the Word: From Heaven He came and sought her to be His Holy Bride; With His own blood He bought her, and for her life He died.” What a blessing for God to bestow His **“grace”** upon unworthy sinners, convicting us of sin, granting **“faith” (Eph 2:8-9)** to believe, and making us part of His **“body”** of believers, **“the church”** of Jesus Christ.

Chapter 2

Entrance into the Church

“There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.”
(Jh. 3:1-8)

To further explain how one finds entrance into **“the church of the living God” (I Tim. 3:15)**, I want to take you to the **third chapter of John’s Gospel** and see what Jesus had to say about entering **“the Kingdom of God.”** For a person to enter this world, they must be born into it physically. Likewise, for a person to enter the **“the kingdom of God,”** one must be spiritually born into it. At this point, we need to equate the likeness of **“the kingdom of God”** to the **“church of the living God.”** There’s only one way to be part of His **“church”** and that is to be

spiritually **“born”** into it which is what Jesus taught **“Nicodemus.”**

This text is one of the most important in all of John’s Gospel because it concerns the subject of the new birth. There is nothing of greater value to the human soul than the new birth. Religion has much confused this subject causing many church members and religious leaders to have no idea what it means to be **“born again.”** I want to begin this chapter by telling you what the new birth is NOT. It’s NOT simply a change of heart, a religious decision, a spiritual experience, Bible reading, Bible study, saying prayers, walking down a church aisle, or joining a local church. Neither is it being baptized, getting confirmed, religious reformation, philosophical renewal, nor the power of positive thinking. With all that being said, let’s hear what the Word of God teaches regarding the new birth.

The New Birth was Taught by Jesus Himself v.1-2

“Nicodemus” was a good, moral, and religious man who was also a chief teacher of the Jews in the day of Christ. He was a **“Pharisee,”** being part of the most religious group in Jerusalem. Being **“a ruler of the Jews,”** he most likely was a member of the Sanhedrin, a ruling body of the Jews. However, he didn’t understand the **“truth” (Jh. 8:32)** of the new birth. Multitudes of church members and seminary graduates with degrees in theology are in the same boat with **“Nicodemus.”**

His coming to Jesus **“by night”** was no doubt because he didn’t want to be seen in public with Christ. However, this is actually a good picture of the carnal man, lost in his trespasses and sins who is in the dark spiritually when he is outside the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Everyone who is **“born again”** comes to Christ the same way, in the darkness of his sin. Being merely religious, good, or moral

will never fit a person for heaven. “**Nicodemus**” needed more than “**a teacher,**” he needed a Savior from sin and only Jesus fit that description.

He recognized the “**miracles**” that Jesus performed, but are “**miracles**” the only sure proof that a person is of God? Let’s not forget that the magicians of Egypt were able to duplicate the “**miracles**” (**Ex. 7-8**) of Moses up to a point, but God always proved Himself Superior. Satan is a supernatural being thus enabling people to do supernatural things up to a point (**II Cor. 11:13-14, I Jh. 4:1**). People should not be tested by the mere ability to work miracles, but by the Word of God (**Isa. 8:20**). The works that Jesus did and the words that Jesus spoke proved Him to be the Son of God. Jesus did perform “**miracles,**” but His life was also in complete agreement with the Old Testament Scriptures. His enemies even admitted that “**never man spake like this man**” (**Jh. 7:46**). He Who spoke nothing but heavenly wisdom proclaimed “**ye must be born again.**”

God gave “**miracles**” to authenticate His Word. People have basically always been the same since the day sin entered the human race through Adam and Eve. Shortly after Jesus performed His first miracle at the marriage feast in Cana of Galilee, it’s said that many believed in His “**miracles,**” but didn’t apparently believe Him to be the Son of God (**Jh. 2:23-25**). Jesus knew that their acknowledgment of His Messiahship was not genuine. Therefore, we see that it’s possible to believe Jesus to be a miracle worker without trusting Him as Lord and Savior. Herein, we discover even in the church, that there are people who don’t have a correct understanding of Who Jesus really is. He is the only Savior of sinners and we all must see ourselves as sinners in need of being saved from sin’s penalty (**Rom. 3:23, 6:23, Rom. 10:9-11**). The greatest miracle ever is the glorious resurrection of Christ from the grave which guarantees the believer our future glorification.

The New Birth is a Necessity to Enter the Kingdom of God v.3

The most important thing that a sinner needs is a Savior and for that reason, Jesus got immediately to the point regarding being **“born again.”** It’s a mere fact that no person can live until they have been born. Likewise, no one can live for God until they have been **“born again.”** Notice that word **“again.”** In the Greek it means **“from above.”** The physical birth alone makes us unfit for the **“kingdom of God.”** Ever since Adam, man has been outside of the realm of Paradise and has needed to be **“born again.”**

You may be asking, like **“Nicodemus,”** just what is this new birth that Jesus is talking about? The first birth gives us the nature of our earthly parents, but the second birth gives us the nature of Christ. It’s a birth that doesn’t make a Christian any better than anyone else, but it makes him/her a person with two natures (**Gal. 5:17**).

By physical birth we have a nature that is born spiritually blind, separated from God, and totally depraved. Therefore, such a person cannot **“see”** (understand) the spiritual things of God. Once again, in the Greek, this means **“to know”** the things of God. The reason so many cannot **“see”** anything wrong with sin is because they have never been **“born again.”** Satan has so blinded the mind of the natural man that it’s impossible for him to intellectually approach God. **“Nicodemus”** thought that being born a Jew would satisfy God, but such was not the case. Likewise, simply being a Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, or a mere church member will not get us to heaven. A sinner is a spiritual corpse who needs to be brought to life in Christ and unless he receives spiritual life from God, he will not go to heaven upon death.

Jesus spoke of **“the kingdom of God,”** but just what does this mean? It’s simply God’s rule over His people as it refers to everlasting life and the things of God. It’s NOT an

earthly kingdom as Christ attested to (**Jh. 18:36**). The “**kingdom of God**” (**Rom. 14:17, I Cor. 15:40**) is basically the same thing as the “**kingdom of heaven**” (**Matt. 3:2, 7:21**) which is a study unto itself. To simplify this, all I will say is that God’s “**kingdom**” is populated with a new creation after Christ’s own likeness (**II Cor. 5:17**). When a person is “**born again**,” he/she immediately enters God’s spiritual “**kingdom**” and someday it’s eternal splendor in glory. This “**kingdom**” does not consist of carnal pleasures known to the body of flesh. It consists of things which are from above (**Rom. 14:17**). The only way to enter into the possessions of those things which are from above is to be “**born again**.”

The New Birth is a Mystery to the Natural Man v.4

As a natural man, “**Nicodemus**” was unable to receive this great spiritual Truth (**I Cor. 2:14**). The only way to understand spiritual Truth is by the “**Holy Spirit**” (**Jh. 16:13**). “**Nicodemus**” was an earnest seeker after “**truth**” (**Jh 14:6**) having been given this hunger by the “**Holy Spirit**,” although he first confused the physical and spiritual birth. He only thought in terms of the physical while Christ was speaking in terms of the spiritual. His question was basically, “can a man go through the whole process of nature again?” It wouldn’t make any difference if he could because man wouldn’t be any better off the next time around. All men are born sinners, alienated from God.

All men are physically born wrong, spiritually speaking. The first birth makes us children of Adam, wrath, and disobedience. No amount of education nor religion is going to change the old nature with which we are all born. Unless we receive God’s new nature, we’ll not spend eternity with Him. For illustration, just look at a fish out of water and you’ll see what it looks like to be out of harmony with one’s

environment. Such would be the case with an unregenerate soul in heaven. There is no way that one can reason out the mysteries of the new birth. However, that does not make it any less real or needful. God doesn't require us to explain the new birth, but acknowledge our need of it by personal faith and repentance.

The New Birth is a Work of the Holy Spirit v.5-8

It's impossible to produce a spiritual birth by a physical means. "**Born of water**" is not a reference to water baptism, but is a figurative expression referring to the Word of God as the instrument used in regeneration (**Eph. 5:26**). A person is "**born again**" when the "**Spirit of God**" uses the "**Word of God**" to produce faith and impart the new nature (**Rom. 10:17**). The "**Spirit**" often uses a believer to give (share) the "**Word**," but only the "**Spirit**" can impart spiritual life and do the birthing. "**The Word of God**" is the "**seed**" (**Lk. 8:11**) while the "**Holy Spirit**" is the Begetter (**I Jh. 3:9**) Who alone can produce the positive results. Only God's grace can subdue the old nature within us and only God's Word can feed the new nature and equip us for "**kingdom**" living. For illustration, let me say that musicians and artists are born, not manufactured. A person must have a musical nature if he is to enter the kingdom of music and a person must have an artistic nature if he is to enter the kingdom of art. Likewise, a person must have the spiritual nature of Christ if he/she is to enter "**the kingdom of God.**"

The second birth is like the second Adam (**I Cor. 15:45-49**) in the fact it is from above and is conceived in the heart by the "**Holy Spirit.**" We need to note at this point that Christ is often referred to by man as the second Adam, but Scripture refers to Him as the "**last Adam.**" The first Adam got us in a whole peck of trouble in the Garden of Eden

when he doomed and damned the human race under the curse of sin, but the **“last Adam”** came to get us out from under that curse. There are only two Adam’s in those regards and for that reason, man often refers to them accordingly. But to be biblically correct, we need to see them as the **“first Adam”** and the **“last Adam” (I Cor. 15:45)**.

In the work of regeneration, the **“flesh”** is of no profit because it is of the old nature and therefore condemned (**Jh 6:63**). Regardless of what you do with the **“flesh,”** it remains **“flesh.”** You can dress it up, baptize it, and even make it religious but it will remain the same ole corruptible sinful **“flesh.”** That’s why Jesus said, **“ye must be born again.”**

The word **“wind”** in our text is the same Greek word for **“Spirit.”** The Spirit of God is Sovereign as He moves and works as He wills. Just as the **“wind”** is beyond man’s control, so is the Holy Spirit. I cannot control the **“Holy Spirit” (I Thess. 4:8)** and neither can you. It is the **“Holy Spirit” (Eph. 1:13, 4:30)** Who is to control us through His mighty power within the believer. **“Wind”** cannot be seen nor explained, but only heard and observed. It blows when and where it pleases. It can come gently as a breeze or loudly as a storm. It cannot be contained, but it’s effect and power can be recognized.

No man has power over the **“wind”** nor can he control where it will blow. Likewise, the Holy Spirit’s work of regeneration is above comprehension and is His sole prerogative. It’s impossible to actually see the **“wind;”** all we can see are the effects of it. The results of the new birth will be observable and unmistakable for all to see in bearing the **“fruit of the spirit” (Gal. 5:22-26)**. Regeneration is not a natural self-determined intellectual process, but a divine work of God's Sovereign grace (**Jh. 1:12-13**). Because man is in **“the flesh,”** he is at **“enmity against God” (Rom. 8:7)** and is incapable of pleasing God. No amount of human effort can ever appease God’s

requirements for righteousness. Only the imparting of spiritual life from the Holy Spirit can give one the capacity to know and love God.

Just because we cannot explain everything about the new birth doesn't make it unreal. There is much about the "**Spirit of God**" (**Rom. 8:9,14**) that we don't understand, but one thing is for certain and that is to hear His voice and obey His will is to pass from death into life. Upon hearing and receiving the Word of God by faith, the Holy Spirit takes up His eternal abode within our souls. By the will of the "**Spirit**" we are born into the family of God (**Jam. 1:18**). This indwelling "**Spirit**" creates an eternal union between the believer and the "**Son of God**" (**Jh. 20:31**).

Summary & Closing

Many things are mysterious, but still very much real. In fact, even physical birth has been referred to as the "miracle of birth" in the sense that God is the Creator of it. Our Creator God is the only One Who can birth a sinner into the "**kingdom of God.**" The new birth is not a theory, but a reality. Everyone who has ever been physical born is a product of a physical birth ordained by God with the beginning of the first couple, Adam and Eve (**Gen. 1:26-28**). While every person is a product of physical birth, not all are a product of spiritual birth. When a man's sperm fertilizes a woman's egg, a human being is generated in the woman's womb. Along with that generation comes degeneration. Because all humanity has inherited the depravity of Adam and Eve (**Ps. 51:5**), we are all born fallen sinful creatures in need of regeneration (the new birth).

The doctrine of "**REGENERATION**" (**Titus 3:5**) is the same thing as what we commonly call being "**born again**" (**I Pet. 1:23**) or THE NEW BIRTH. In the word, "**re-generation,**" we discover a description of a second birth

denoting a new beginning of life. It is a spiritual quickening and imparting of divine life (**Eph. 2:1**). By nature, man is **“dead in trespasses and sins;”** therefore, must be reborn in order to pass from spiritual **“death unto life”** (**Jh. 5:24**). For sinful man to experience salvation, he **“must be born again,”** or in other words, regenerated by the power of the Holy Spirit. Those who are spiritually regenerated are **“born”** into the **“household of faith”** (**Gal.6:10**) and will manifest a changed life and a new nature (**Eph. 4:22-24**).

Within the ranks of the institutionalized church, there is some confusion as to what a Christian really is. A Christian is not merely one who has joined a local assembly, tithes his/her income, or gives money to charity. He's not merely one who reforms his life by stopping bad things and starting good things. The only kind of true Christian is a **“born again”** believer who has had a life changing, soul saving encounter of transformation in Jesus Christ by the power of God's **“grace”** (**Eph. 2:8**). **“Regeneration”** is a creative act on the part of God and not a reforming process on the part of man. Failure to be **“born again”** means to remain **“lost”** (**II Cor. 4:3**) in one's sins, blind to the gospel, and outside the **“kingdom of God.”**

When **“Nicodemus”** heard Jesus speak of being **“born again,”** he too was somewhat confused about the new birth. By human standards, he was a good religious Jew, but he was **“lost”** (**Matt. 18:11**) in his sins. He needed something more than wealth, education, and religion to get him to heaven. Like **“Nicodemus,”** we're all in the same sin boat together and **“must be born again”** if we want an eternal hope beyond the grave.

“Regeneration” is the change brought about through the Holy Spirit by the use of divine truth in which the moral disposition of one's soul is renewed in the **“image”** (**Rom. 8:29**) of Christ. It is a transforming revolution that takes place within the heart of man. **“Nicodemus”** is a classic example of the **“natural man”** (**I Cor. 2:14**) who is unfit for the **“kingdom of God.”** A supernatural new birth from

“**above**” is necessary in order for a man to know God and enter into His “**kingdom.**” The physical birth allows us to enter the sphere of men, but only the spiritual birth from “**above**” permits us to enter into the sphere of union and “**fellowship**” (I Jh. 1:3) with God. To be “**born again**” means that we become “**partakers of the divine nature**” (II Pet. 1:4). Receiving this “**divine nature**” doesn’t mean that the “**old man**” (Rom. 6:6, Eph. 4:22), the Adamic nature with which we were physically born, is eradicated nor will it be until death. But it does mean that we have a “**new ... nature**” that is subject to knowing and doing the will of God (Gal. 5:16-18). Man could not and did not create himself and neither is he capable of re-creating himself (Jer. 18:3-4). “**Regeneration**” is necessary if man is to have fellowship with His Creator because his Maker is “**holy**” (I Pet. 1:15), but the fallen creature is unholy. With the inherited nature of Adam, we are all “**born**” physically with vile and sinful tendencies. Therefore, the only way to receive a new nature that is directed to God is by means of a new spiritual birth.

“**Regeneration**” is indeed a spiritual mystery to man because it is a work of the Holy Spirit. He does the work of “**regeneration**” through the conviction of “**sin**” (Jh. 16:7-8) and gives “**faith**” (Rom. 10:17, Gal. 5:22) to believe and “**repentance**” (Acts 5:31, 11:18, II Tim. 2:25) to turn from sin to the Savior. The Holy Spirit works quietly, silently, powerfully, and mysteriously behind the scenes of spiritual conversion.

The Holy Spirit is the divine agent in this work of “**regeneration**” and uses certain influences to accomplish it. He uses the “**Word of God**” in the conviction of our sin and the revealing of truth (Jam. 1:18, I Pet. 1:22-25). The word “**water**” in our text is a reference to the Word of God and not to baptism (Eph. 5:26). God’s “**word**” is the cleansing tool used by the Holy Spirit to purge us from the filth of the world (Jh. 15:3). The figurative expression,

“washing of regeneration” (Titus 3:5) indicates the power of God’s **“word”** to cleanse us.

Not only does the Holy Spirit use the **“Word of God,”** but He also uses human instrumentality to proclaim it **(Rom. 10:14-17)**. The preaching of the gospel has not been commissioned to angels, but to men **(Acts 10:1-6)**. The Great Commission has been given to the church **(Matt. 28:19-20)** and believers are empowered to exercise their gifts for the good of both those inside and outside the church **(Eph. 4:11-12)**.

Since the term **“born again”** means the same as spiritual **“regeneration,”** it’s also inclusive of the concept of conversion. **“Regeneration”** and **“conversion” (Acts 15:3)** are so closely connected that where one is, the other is also. **“Regeneration”** is the work of God, changing the heart of man by His Sovereign will. **“Conversion”** is the work of God in turning man away from his sin to God and is the result of **“regeneration.”** Neither **“regeneration”** nor **“conversion”** actually originates with the **“Word of God” (Eph. 6:17)** or the **“preacher” (Rom. 10:14)**, but with the Sovereign decree of God **(Jh. 15:16, Eph. 1:4-14)**.

The Holy Spirit uses people and tools through which to accomplish His purpose in declaring the **“Word of God”** and the **“preacher”** (witness) who does the sharing. Not until the Holy Spirit overpowers man’s depraved will, man won’t **“hunger and thirst after righteousness” (Matt. 5:6)**. God must supernaturally open our hearts to the gospel; just as He did that of **Lydia’s (Acts 16:14)**. Unless God initiates our salvation and gives us **“faith” Eph. 2:8-9)** to believe and repentance to turn, we can never become one of His **“children” (Gal. 3:26)**. The truth of the matter is that **“regeneration”** must precede **“faith”** because a spiritually **“dead”** person will want nothing to do with God. When God regenerates a soul, He gives the sinner a repentant heart and faith to believe with a hunger in his heart for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Salvation is “free,” but that doesn’t mean the “price” to obtain it was cheap. (Rom. 5:15-19). Jesus paid the “price” of man’s redemption by shedding His blood on the cross in order for us to be “bought” off Satan’s slave market of sin (I Cor. 6:19-20). This “price” was not paid to Satan who will never willingly release one of his captives. This ransom “price” was paid to God the Father that satisfied His required payment for our sins. Since we could never pay such a price, God came in human flesh, taking on the body of Jesus Christ (Jh. 1:1-4,14), Who paid the atonement price for us. When Jesus declared, “it is finished” (Jh. 19:30), He meant that God’s redemptive work of salvation was paid in full. God’s provision of salvation is a free “gift” (Rom. 6:23) to those whom God calls to receive it by “faith” (Rom. 4:16).

“Regeneration” is only possible through the “finished” work of Calvary’s “Lamb” (Jh.1:29). Human “works” can never earn, achieve, nor merit eternal life (Eph. 2:8-10). Once we’re “saved” (Rom. 10:9) from the penalty of our sin in hell, then “regeneration” will manifest itself in “good works” (Jam. 2:17-18). Blood bought salvation frees us from the curse of the law and brings us under the liberty of grace (Rom. 8:1-6).

New life in Christ will evidence itself in the bearing of spiritual “fruit” (Gal. 5:22-25) and in faithfulness unto God. For a Christian, the things that he once loved, he will begin to hate, and the things that he once hated, he will begin to love. This is the result of being “born again” and becoming a “new creature ... in Christ” (II Cor. 5:17). The regenerate man possesses the same absolute liberty, as did Adam before the fall and sinners after the fall. The difference between an unregenerate man and a regenerate man is one of ability, not liberty. Both are free to do good, but only one is able to do good. Man was created with a will to choose and when given a choice, he chose to do evil. After choosing to sin, man lost his ability of will to do anything good to accomplish his salvation (Gen. 6:5).

Therefore, he is unable to convert himself and save himself from sin. But when God converts a sinner, he/she is freed from his/her natural bondage under sin and by **“grace,”** enabled to trust Christ. Technically speaking, it is **“regeneration”** that breathes spiritual life into a **“dead”** soul and causes him/her to be spiritually resurrected. It is the exercise of faith and repentance in the heart of a sinner, both of which are accomplished by the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit. Only God can make a new creature out of an old man. Practically speaking, we have no more to do with our second birth than we had to do with our first birth. The Holy Spirit is the Divine Agent in regeneration and for that reason, all glory and praise for our salvation belongs to God.

Unless a sinner comes to Christ in faith and repentance, they will not discover the reality of this spiritual birth. Man does have a free-will and if you want to know what it's like, look at what Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden. When exercised they chose to eat the forbidden fruit, disobey God, sin in disobedience, and brought the curse of depravity upon all his posterity. The only way our sinful free-will can be overcome is by the Holy Spirit Who grants faith and repentance. Unless that happens, a person will never show evidence of being **“born again.”**

As far as **“Nicodemus”** is concerned, we believe that he bore evidence of being **“born again”** by trusting Christ as his Lord and Savior (**Jh. 7:50-51, 19:39-42**). Regardless of what **“Nicodemus”** did with Christ, the question is one that every individual must answer for himself. Have you ever been **“born again?”** The new birth, being **“born again,”** is the beautiful doctrine of **“regeneration.”** Those whom the **“Holy Spirit”** births into **“the kingdom of God,”** into the **“household of faith”** (**Gal. 6:10**), are admonished to find a local church assembly where they can serve the Lord Jesus, be nourished from the Holy Scriptures, grow spiritually, and find fellowship with other believers (**Heb. 10:25**).

Chapter 3

What to Look for in a Good Church

“And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all *men*, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.”
(Acts 2:42-47)

The average person of today who expresses interest in joining a church will give several different explanations as to what they're looking for. Some will tell you they want a place to socialize with their buddies, fellowship with their families, and find new friends. Others may tell you they want a church that offers various activities from which they can chose involvement. For those with youngsters in the home, they will most likely tell you they want a selection of programs for their children and youth. There are yet others who want a “**church**” that offers a style of worship and music that entertains them and satisfies their emotions.

In the city, church buildings are found in the abundance and in rural areas they seem to be scattered throughout the countryside. When it comes time for a Christian to find a church home, what should influence him to join a particular congregation? It's generally agreed that most church growth today is, what we call, “TRANSFER

GROWTH” and not “NEW CONVERT GROWTH.” If a Christian is a member of a spiritually dead assembly, then he ought to find one where Christ is pre-eminent (**Col. 1:18**). If a Christian makes a move from one town to another, then he needs to find a local “**church**” that will meet his spiritual needs and recognizes Christ as “**head**” of the “**body**” (**Col. 1:18**).

From a survey, that was authorized many years ago by what is now the North American Mission Board of the SBC, statistics reveal some reasons why people say they join a particular church. Personally, I doubt if these figures have changed much if at all. The survey revealed where 52.7% said that it was because the congregation was warm and friendly, 44.5% said that it was because of the influence of their family and friends, 39.9% said that it was because of the influence of the pastor, 11.8% said that it was because of the location of the church, and only 9% said that it was for spiritual reasons.

With all that being said, herein we discover the NUMBER ONE prerequisite for church membership. What might that be? We saw from the previous chapter, the answer to that question! A person must show evidence of the new birth. That is what the Bible calls being “**born again**” (**Jh. 3:3**). In other words, the starting place for church membership is to be “**born**” into the “**household of faith**” (**Gal. 6:10**) by the power of the Holy Spirit. No Christian ever reaches the state of perfection on this side of heaven, but one who is “**born again**” (**Jh. 3:1-13**) will show evidence of being a “**new creature**” (**II Cor. 5:17**) with a new nature that bears “**the fruit of the spirit**” (**Gal. 5:22-26**). Therefore, such a person will have a testimony of having being changed by the miracle working power of the Holy Spirit in “**regeneration**” and transformation (**Rom. 12:2**). They will have an appetite (desire) for the things of God and as one of God’s “**sheep**” (**Jh. 10**), goat food will not satisfy the longing of their soul. People who do not meet these criteria are not qualified for membership in a

local assembly representing the “**bride**” (Rev. 21:9) of Christ on earth.

Before becoming a church member, a person must first realize themselves a sinner in need of salvation. A description of what it means being a Christian is found in what is often called God’s plan of salvation. Many different verses can be used to describe this, but for the sake of illustration, I will use the following with a brief explanation.

“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”

(Romans 3:23)

Every person has displeased God, no matter the bigness or littleness of the sin. Adam only ate a forbidden piece of fruit while King David committed adultery and murder. Both found forgiveness along with the dying thief on the cross beside Jesus. The first step is confessing that you are a sinner, that your sin has separated you from Holy God, and that you need God’s forgiveness.

“The wages of sin is death: but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

(Romans 6:23)

Just as a person receives wages from his employer, you will someday receive wages from your Creator as to how you responded to Christ. Those who reject Him will discover an eternity of suffering the consequences. We are all going to physically die because of the curse of sin upon the human race, but the Christian will know God’s gift of eternal life and the joy of a home in heaven with our Lord.

“If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the

mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.”

(Romans 10:9-11)

“**Saved**” is a perfectly good biblical word. It’s talking about being saved from God’s wrath against sin. You cannot save yourself from it. I cannot save you from it. Only God can save you from such wrath. He came to earth to do for you what no mortal man can do for you. You’re not saved by praying prayers, doing good works, giving money, walking a church aisle, or by joining a local church. However, every Christian needs to be part of a local assembly that teaches the Word of God whereby they can mature in the faith (**Heb. 10:25**). There is no such thing as secret discipleship. Your commitment to Christ will be obvious. Genuine conversion will be evident. Heart belief is a surrender that produces a noticeable difference. To be truly saved is to be “**born again**” which will make one unashamed.

When one is birthed into the family of God by the power of the Holy Spirit, he/she becomes a member of the “**body of Christ**” (**I Cor. 12:27, Eph 4:12**), the church, which is the “**bride**” of Christ. Yes, this is speaking of the universal “**church**” of all believers from all over the world. But it also means that we are to find a local church with whom to identify that we can call our church home and not forsake the “**assembling of ourselves together**” (**Heb. 10:25**).

When it comes time for a “**born again**” (**Jh. 3:3**) believer to find a church home, he/she needs to turn to the Word of God and discover the qualities that make up a good church. What I mean by a good church is one that’s not a mere organization, but a spiritually living breathing organism supernaturally empowered by the Holy Spirit.

I’m talking about a local church that is composed of “**born again**” believers thus being the “**bride**” of Christ.

This is a true genuine church in the sight of God and not a mere institutionalized entity. The early church was truly a success and bore traits that we need to pattern ourselves after today. If we want to have a good local church, then we too need to follow the example of the early believers. This is not to say that every local church is to do things the same way in every area; however, there must be a basic emphases and philosophy of ministry that is prevalent in a good New Testament church. Therefore, the success or effectiveness of a local church should not be measured by the number of people who attend, but by their commitment to Jesus Christ and faithfulness to the Word of God.

The Early Church was Devoted to the Apostles’ Doctrine (Acts 2:42)

The Greek word for “**doctrine**” is *didache* (did-akh-ay), meaning teaching or instruction. Before the completion of the New Testament Scriptures, the “apostles” were energized by the “**Holy Spirit**” (Jh. 14:26) to speak authoritatively for God. Their teaching carried the same weight of authority as the recorded Scriptures carry for us today. Eventually, God’s revealed “**truth**” (Jh. 14:6) that was received by the “**apostles**” was written into what we treasure as the Word of God. To have a devotion to the “**apostles’ doctrine**” is the same as saying that they were devoted to the Word of God.

Therefore, we learn that the most foundational trait for a local church must be their dedication to God’s Word. “**Continued stedfastly**” can be translated from the Greek to mean being devoted or to be strong towards. In other words, they were committed not only to the proclamation of “**Scripture**” (I Tim. 3:16), but to the practical application of it in their lives.

This Greek word for “**doctrine**,” *didache* (did-akh-ay), encompasses both the CONTENT and the MANNER of the

“apostles’ teaching.” Concerning content, we may ask, “exactly what did the apostles teach?” Throughout the Book of Acts as well as the New Testament, we discover the answer to that question. **“The apostles’ doctrine”** is everything in the Word of God, including the Old Testament Scriptures from which they no doubt studied. It was not picking and choosing parts that were liked and disliked, understood or not understood, but accepting the entire **“council of God” (Acts 20:27)** without question.

The primary function of a local church is to proclaim God’s Word without compromise and without apology. There can never be too much preaching and teaching in the church simply because it’s impossible to ever learn all there is to know from God’s Word. Unless we know what the Word of God says about something, then we’ll not know how to act and react biblically to given situations. A good test to determine the sincerity of a particular church is to examine its position on Holy Scripture **(II Tim. 3:16)**.

Concerning the manner of the **“apostles’ teaching,”** we ask, “how did they do it?” From Peter’s sermon, as recorded in this second chapter of Acts, we discover something about the proclamation of his message. It was relevant **(Acts 2:14-15)**, biblical, and expository **(Acts 2:16-21, 25-28, 34-35)**. It was Christ-centered, specific, personal, authoritative **(Acts 2:22-23)**, and purposeful **(Acts 2:37)**. The early church did not gather together to be entertained, to discuss their feelings, or to collect everyone’s opinion (to pool their ignorance) on a given subject. They congregated with the primary purpose of learning the **“apostles’ doctrine”** and to test everything based on the standard of God’s Word **(I Jh. 4:1-6)**.

There are no more **“apostles and prophets” (Eph. 3:5)** today, but the **“foundation”** of their **“doctrine”** has been laid with **“Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone” (Eph. 2:20)**. Our task is to make sure that what we build conforms to the **“foundation”** of what has been laid by them. We shouldn’t appeal to what people

want, but to what people need and be faithful to that which God has entrusted to us (**II Tim. 4:1-4**). A good church is one where the people desire and respond to biblical teaching and preaching and where the leaders are committed to providing that on a regular basis. It's unfortunate in our day that many churches claim to believe the Bible, but when it comes to applying it, the Bible is not their final authority.

The Early Church Had a God-Centered Focus **(Acts 2:43)**

The powerful preaching of the “**apostles**” as well as the “**many wonders and signs**” affected their attitude toward God. The Bible says that “**fear came upon every soul,**” meaning that they recognized the presence of a holy and loving God in their lives and gave Him reverence. This Greek word for “**fear**” is *phobos* (fob-os), expressing a reverential awe of God. Just because we recognize God as our Heavenly “**Father**” (**Matt. 6:9**) doesn't mean that we overlook the fact that He “**judgeth according to every man's work**” (**I Pet. 1:17**). We're no longer living in the apostolic age and experiencing these supernatural “**wonders and signs,**” but our attitude toward God should still be the same. Without a proper respect and “**fear**” of the Almighty that is due the Great Sovereign Ruler of this Universe, we can become flippant toward God.

A local church must always remember that it doesn't exist for the mere benefit of man, but for the glory of God. Once again, how sad it is that the focus of many churches today is to solve people's problems and meet people's needs rather than to bring glory to God. The church is not about us, but about God. A man-centered church will promote traditions to make people comfortable, whereas a God-centered church will not waver from the “**simplicity that is in Christ**” (**II Cor. 11:3**).

A man-centered church will avoid anything that might be offensive, whereas a God-centered church will boldly and faithfully **“preach the Word” (II Tim. 4:2)** without compromise. A man-centered church will choose worship styles based on the preference of the people, whereas a God-centered church will endeavor to pattern themselves after a biblical model regardless of the **“itching ears” (II Tim. 4:3-5)** of the people. A man-centered church will encourage people to get council from ungodly experts, whereas a God-centered church will point them to **“the law of the Lord” (Ps. 1:1)**. A man-centered church will not practice discipline towards sinning members, whereas a God-centered church will lovingly confront them in obedience to Christ **(Matt. 18:15-17, II Thess. 3:6-15)**. A man-centered church will have little emphasis on prayer and the Word of God, whereas a God-centered church will make it their primary focus **(Acts 2:42)**.

In today’s terminology, you will most often find one of two kinds of churches prevalent in our modern society with the Christ-centered church becoming harder to find. The USER-FRIENDLY church begins with what people want and provide it, whereas the CHRIST-CENTERED church begins with Who God is and celebrates His Sovereignty. The USER-FRIENDLY church perceives people as users to be sold, whereas the CHRIST-CENTERED church perceives people as sinners who need to be saved and then disciplined. The USER-FRIENDLY church focuses on externals, whereas the CHRIST-CENTERED church focuses on internals. The USER-FRIENDLY church relies on glitzy, high-tech, multi-media to work on the audience from outside in, whereas the CHRIST-CENTERED church relies on the presence of God through the Holy Spirit to influence from inside out. The USER-FRIENDLY church places an emphasis on entertainment with a focus on their worship leaders, whereas the CHRIST-CENTERED church places an emphasis on an encounter with Christ and focuses on the One Who should be worshipped. The

USER-FRIENDLY church downsizes the pulpit and highlights the messenger, whereas the CHRIST-CENTERED church upgrades the pulpit and highlights the message. The USER-FRIENDLY church peddles a cheap grace as it seeks to contrive, whereas the CHRIST-CENTERED church proclaims a costly redemption and confronts the sinner in love.

The Early Church Ministered to the Needs of Others (Acts 2:44-47)

They ministered to one another within the “**body**” (Eph. 4:12) of Christ. From Acts 2:42 we have already seen that “**they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread.**” The word “**fellowship**” is *koinonia* (koy-nohn-oo-ah) which means communion, joint participation, or a sharing together. Their coming together for the purpose of hearing the “**apostles’ doctrine**” was a common experience. They all hungered to hear from God and to be taught what “**thus saith the Lord**” (Zec. 11:4). There is so much discouragement facing us in the world, that we need to congregate together to encourage one another in the Lord. Why should anyone want to attend a “church” only to hear negative conversation, carnal gossip, and religious politicking.

Acts 2:44 tells us they “**had all things common**” and verse 46 says they were in “**one accord.**” As you very well know, that’s not referring to an automobile. These early believers were bonded together in the Lord and not only shared the Lord’s supper together, but shared their meals together as they broke “**bread from house to house.**” Their “**love**” (I Jh. 4:20) for one another was so great that they sacrificially gave of their means to meet the needs of other believers. The selling of their “**possessions and goods**” that we read about in our text was not a command from God, but it was a demonstration of their

“love” (I Jh. 4:21) one for another. No God-fearing active member with a legitimate need should be blindly ignored by their brothers and sisters in the **“household of faith” (Gal. 6:10)**. Neither should the church be ripped off by abusers; therefore, wisdom and discernment should be exercised by the leadership when it comes time to assist the needy **(Acts 6:1, I Tim. 5:8-10)**. A good church is one that will wisely investigate the situation, use biblical judgment, and try to help those with honest needs.

The early church also ministered to those outside the **“body”** of Christ. In the opening verses of chapter two in the Book of Acts, we see just how they ministered to the needs of unregenerates **(2:6-11)**. They proclaimed to the multitude gathered in **“Jerusalem”** the **“wonderful works of God.”** Then, **“Peter”** confronted the mob and preached that **“Jesus”** had been **“slain”** by **“wicked hands” (2:22-23)** only to be **“raised up” (2:24)** after He had been **“crucified” (2:36)**. Peter’s message was for the sinner to **“repent”** and turn to **“Christ for the remission of sins” (2:38)**. The word **“remission”** means forgiveness or release from bondage or imprisonment. We do those outside the **“body”** of Christ no favors by soft-sudsing their lostness or making them feel comfortable in their sin. Our job is to love the sinner enough to show them the error of their ways, evangelize the lost by proclaiming that the message of forgiveness is only found in **“Jesus Christ”** by **“grace through faith” (Eph. 2:8)**. It always has been and always will be God’s Sovereign right to add **“to the church daily such as should be saved.”** A good church will faithfully and lovingly proclaim to the world that **“JESUS SAVES” (Matt. 28:19-20)** and leave the results to the **“Holy Spirit” (Jh. 3:6-8)**.

From the pen of George Mueller, came some very thought-provoking statements and it would do us well to ponder them, as he made these following remarks. “Live churches move out on Faith; dead churches by Sight. Live churches support foreign as well as home missions; dead

churches have no world vision. Live churches don't have CAN'T in their dictionary; dead churches major on CAN'T. Live churches focus on the Present; dead churches on the Past. Live churches Evangelize; dead churches Fossilize. Live churches stand on the Word of God; dead churches on Tradition and Liturgy."

As never before, we need to realize that there must be a definite line drawn between the world and the New Testament church. We're living in a day when so much of the world is in the church that you can hardly tell that the church is still in the world. We must never forget the admonition of our Lord to the Corinthians when He said, **"come out from among them, and be ye separate" (II Cor. 6:17)**. Although local churches will have different personalities just like people, yet a good church should bear a likeness of Godliness and exhibit these same qualities that were found in the early church. If you were to list the qualities of a good church, would your list be in agreement with the Word of God or would it be more pragmatic? In other words, are you viewing the church through the lens of the world, removing its gospel focus, thus its importance as **"ambassadors for Christ" (II Cor.5:20)** to our lost world? Such a church does not bear evidence of being **"the bride of Christ."**

Chapter 4

Commitment to Membership in a Church

**“Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ,
so *let* the wives *be* to their own husbands in every
thing.”**
(Eph. 5:24)

The statistics on disintegrating marriages today is a sad and unfortunate picture of the modern-day state of the church. We're told that one out of two marriages end in divorce which in essence tells us that one or both of the spouses are not committed to the relationship. Likewise, the average institutionalized church fails to realize commitment to **“Christ”** on the part of the membership.

In our text, Paul likens Christ's relationship to His **“church”** to that of a husband and wife. He makes it emphatically clear that the **“church”** is to be **“subject unto Christ.”** This Greek word for **“subject”** is *hupotasso* (hoop-ot-as-so) which means to put under, submit, to be in subjection, to be subordinate, to obey, or to yield to one's admonition. When this word is used in reference to the military, it speaks of arranging under the command of a leader. In non-military usage, this word speaks of a voluntary commitment and cooperation.

Every local **“church”** needs a membership system and every Christian ought to be committed to his or her local **“church”** family. Churches lose members from active service every year with reports of one out of every two persons on church roles being lost to kingdom service. This means that one out of every two church members bears a negative witness to the world as to the relevance of a vital church relationship. It's so very sad that the average church cannot report more than 50% of their membership as being only moderately active. Even sadder is it that this 50% makes no positive difference on the

morals of their community. How sad that church membership has become a social status rather than an indication of one's personal committed relationship to God.

As we think about the unfaithfulness of so many church members, it causes us to ask, "why are there so many inactive people?" No doubt, there are several reasons for this, but first and foremost it's probably because many church members have never been "**born again**" (Jh. 3:3). There are also people who have been "**saved**" (Acts 16:31), but fail to grow from spiritual infancy into spiritual maturity (I Cor. 3:1-3) through a "**study**" and application of God's "**Word**" (I Tim. 2:15) and as a result they never come to understand the meaning of discipleship.

There are three basic reasons why church membership is essential for a genuine blood-bought believer. God's "**Word**" commands the Christian to be committed to a local "**church**" (Heb. 10:24-25). God's "**Word**" teaches our obligation of obedience to the leaders of a local "**church**" (I Thess. 5:12-13, Heb. 13:7). God's "**Word**" shows us the privileges of being in partnership with a local "**church**" (I Cor. 12:12-27), which we'll study in more detail in chapter six.

The Command for Commitment

**"And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some *is*; but exhorting *one another*: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."
(Heb. 10:24-25)**

Scripture clearly commands for believers not to forsake "**the assembling of ourselves together.**" This means that we are not only to attend church services regularly, but we are also to be stimulating one another "**unto love and**

to good works.” Our **“assembling ... together”** should be a spiritual encouragement to one another or else we meet in disobedience to the Lord. The commitment called for in this passage is in reference to a local **“body” (I Cor. 12:12)** of believers which therefore teaches commitment to one’s local church family. It’s not enough to merely be a part of the universal church, but we need to commit ourselves to a local **“body”** of believers. A local church is simply a visible manifestation of the **“body”** of Christ on earth; therefore, every **“saved”** person ought to be a part of that representation **(Acts 2:47)**.

It’s possible to be **“saved,”** but not unite in fellowship with a local **“church”** because **“church”** membership does not save one from sin. However, to be an obedient believer, one WILL make a commitment to **“church”** membership. Charles Spurgeon asked the question, “You can be as GOOD a Christian by disobedience to your Lord’s commands as by being obedient?” Then he answered by saying, “There is a brick. What is it made for? To help build a house. It is of no use for the brick to tell you that it is just as GOOD a brick while it is kicking about on the ground as it would be in the house. It is a good-for-nothing brick. So, you rolling-stone Christians, I do not believe that you are answering your purpose. You are living contrary to the life which Christ would have you live, and you are much to blame for the injury you do.”

It appears that the majority of people who attend churches today have no biblical commitment to the assembly. To commit yourself to **“church”** membership is to commit yourself to faithfulness in a local assembly and to the cause of **“Christ” (Eph. 5:25)**. It would be helpful if every local **“church”** had a membership list of believers who seriously committed themselves to be faithful, **“not forsaking the assembling of”** themselves **“together” (Heb. 10:25)**.

The Obligation of Obedience and Privileges of Partnership

“And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. *And* be at peace among yourselves.”

(I Thess. 5:12-13)

“Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that *is* unprofitable for you.”

(Heb. 13:17)

Submission to authority has been a problem with mankind since the beginning of creation. When it comes to the local **“church,”** God has placed chosen vessels in charge of caring for the spiritual life of its members. Scripture makes it very clear, that members of a local **“church”** are to **“obey”** and **“submit”** to the unadulterated **“Word of God”** (**Deut. 11:26-28, II Thess. 3:14**) taught by their God ordained pastors. Of course, this goes without saying they must be careful to select leaders upon whom the Hand of God is evident and those leaders must take seriously their accountability first and foremost to God for what they preach and how they lead.

A congregation is not only to listen to her leaders when they are teaching the Truth of Holy Scripture, but to make the job of their leaders enjoyable. **“Church”** membership makes it easier for the leaders to shepherd the flock because it distinguishes those who profess to believe from those who don't. There is no doubt that many **“church”** members are **“lost”** while some non-church members are **“saved”** (**Matt. 7:21-23, 13:36-43**). **“Church”** membership

does not save from sin, but it is important to be part of a local **“church”** once you get **“saved”** and to come under the authority of God’s **“Word”** which holds us accountable. We’re living in a world having problems with authority issues, even in the church. Pastors must always remember they are forbidden in Scripture to be dictators over **“the flock of God,”** but serve as shepherds who lead (**I Pet. 5:3**).

If an elder or any other professing believer falls into sin, then he is to be dealt with in loving discipline (**Matt. 18:15-17, I Cor. 5:1-13, I Tim. 5:19**). If an unbeliever commits sin, then he has nothing from which to be excommunicated, but needs to be evangelized and encouraged. For the sake of Christian testimony before the eyes of the world, a local **“church”** should look as much as possible like the spiritual **“body”** of Christ. A **“church”** that is in fellowship with Christ is in UNITY with Him (**Jh. 17:22-23**) and demonstrates SUBMISSION to Him (**Eph. 5:22**). That means no one should join a local **“church”** or be allowed to remain a member who has not made a credible profession of being **“born again”** (**Jh. 3:3**).

God has invested His manifold **“grace”** (**I Cor. 1:3**) in the souls of His redeemed people and He expects an orderly administration of His **“church”** (**I Cor. 14:40**). Therefore, the **“church”** is expected by God to be a faithful steward of those treasures that He has committed to her (**I Thess. 2:4**). God has given structure and **“order”** to His **“church”** and to try and function outside of God’s plan is to make a local assembly no more than a religious lodge, country club, community center, or civic organization. The **“church”** is not supposed to be a loose collection of individuals who do their own thing, but a closely knit structure like unto the human **“body”** (**Eph. 4:16**) with a **“mind”** (**Phil. 2:5**) governing its actions and functions.

In order for a **“body”** to function properly as it should, the **“members”** of the **“body”** must receive their orders

from the same source. That common ground must be the faithful proclamation of God's Word. Then, in cooperation with one another, they function in **"unity"** (**Eph. 4:3**) and harmony (**Acts 2:44**) for the **"common"** good of the **"body."** Therefore, both the privilege of belonging to the **"body"** and the responsibility of fulfilling our intended purpose is clearly illustrated in Paul's writings to the Corinthians as we'll study in more detail in chapter six. If everyone is doing their own thing, going in different directions, and receiving instructions from various sources, there will be nothing but chaos and confusion.

Commitment to a local **"church"** and submission to Godly leadership is necessary to one's spiritual growth. The **"pastor"** has been divinely appointed by God to lead the local **"church"** on the human level and is accountable to God for the way he does it. However, his leadership can only be as good as the people who are willing to follow (**Heb. 13:17**). Therefore, a congregation should strive to make the pastor's job a **"joy"** and not a burdensome **"grief."** Faithfulness to the local **"church"** will not only help one to **"grow in grace"** (**II Pet. 3:18**), but the fellowship ought to encourage us to live **"holy"** (**Rom. 12:1**) in an unholy world. So many times, people want to think about the privileges of **"church"** membership without realizing the responsibilities that go along with it. If one joins a **"church"** for the sake of popularity or to get attention, then he has joined for the wrong reason. **"Church"** members should come to the services expecting to be spiritually fed (**I Pet. 5:1-2**) and taught the **"Word"** (**Acts 6:2,4**) of God by the **"pastors"** (**Eph. 4:11**) getting something that will benefit and enhance their spiritual lives. Upon departure, God expects believers to put His Word into action through daily living bringing **"light"** into a dark world of sin (**Matt. 5:16**).

"Church" membership is a two-sided coin with both privileges of partnership on one side, but responsibility and commitment on the other. To be a member of a local

“church” is to commit yourself to living a Christian life and strive NOT to bring reproach on the cause of **“Christ.”** As a believer, we are accountable to God for our conduct, and through the local **“church”** that accountability is to be exercised according to the process of **“church”** discipline. When a believer strays from the flock and turns to a life of sin, then confrontation is an act of love that can benefit him greatly if his profession is genuine. Even the harshest discipline enacted by the **“church”** is always for the good of the offender and the testimony of the congregation.

A believer’s relationship to **“Christ”** is sometimes described in Scripture through the analogy of a father and child (**I Thess. 2:11**) or a husband and wife (**Eph. 5:21-33**) relationship. Just as a loving **“father”** chastens his wayward child, God corrects his disobedient children (**Heb. 12:5-11**). Furthermore, churches who do not practice discipline and maintain a pure membership roll, find themselves spiritually shaken up with people who refuse the responsibility of commitment. People in the community have a right to know who belongs to whom in the marriage relationship and it’s no different when it comes to the **“body”** of Christ.

Closing Thoughts

Most people of today appear to hold membership in a local **“church”** without realizing their privileges and responsibilities therein. The **“head”** of the **“church”** is **“Christ”** (**Eph. 5:23, Col. 1:18**) and He has promised that not even the **“gates of hell (death)”** would prevail against the **“church”** (**Matt. 16:18**). Neither martyrdom nor natural death can destroy or put an end to **“the church of the Living God”** (**I Tim. 3:15**).

It was for the **“church”** that Christ went to the cross and died. It was for the **“church”** that Christ arose from the dead. It was to the **“church”** that Christ gave the great

commission and the ordinances (**Matt. 28:19-20, I Cor. 11:23-26, Eph. 5:25**). God's design for the "**church**" is for her to be His representatives on earth (**Eph. 3:21, 5:25-27**). The New Testament "**church**" had a glorious beginning and it has had a blood-written history, but it has a bright future because of Christ's "**victory**" over the power of "**death**" (**I Cor. 15:55-57**). As a blood-bought member in the "**body**" of Christ, we are obligated to God in the use of our time, talents, and finances.

Local churches will never be stronger than the families that comprise their fellowship. A membership of worldly, careless, negligent, and immature people will prevent a local "**church**" from accomplishing much spiritually for the Lord. Unfortunately, the local "**church**" means so very little to so many of its members who have not learned to support the local "**church**" with neither their presence nor their financial or material means. As a result, they become only a liability and not an asset to their congregation. Instead of addressing the problem, churches have allowed their membership rolls to become flooded with this kind of dead weight which in turn has caused membership to lose its meaning.

Charles Spurgeon said, "Perhaps you say that you are not a church member; if so, I reply that, if you are a Christian, you ought to be a member of Christ's visible church on earth; for, if you have the right NOT to be one, and so have all the people of God; and so, the Church of God, as an organization in the world, would cease to exist. Who is to maintain the ministry of the Word? Who is to keep up the ordinances of God's house if all his people break up into separate grains of sand instead of being living stones built into his spiritual temple?"

If you're a Christian, then you ought to be a member of a local "**church**" that holds you accountable for your conduct, and you need to assume both the privileges and responsibilities in order to maintain that membership.

Chapter 5

Importance of Belonging to a Local Church

“But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.” (I Tim. 3:15)

In our day when corporate worship has come under great Satanic attack, it would do us well to remember that Christ has joined the believer not only unto Himself, but to His **“church.”** Every redeemed soul has been placed in the **“body of Christ” (I Cor. 12:27)** and has been commanded to **“provoke (stimulate) ... one another ... unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together” (Heb. 10:25).** **“The church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28)** needs to learn how to conduct and express herself locally where God has placed her. Remember, the word **“church”** is translated from the Greek word *ekklesia* (ek-klay-see-ah), meaning a called-out group or an assembly of people.

In the New Testament, the word *ekklesia* (ek-klay-see-ah) appears some 111 times and 73 of those times it's specifically referring to the gathering of people. It's very clear from scripture that the **“church”** is to be a community of genuine believers and not just a collection of people who profess to believe (**Jam. 2:19**). The New Testament **“church”** according to Scripture is not a building, a denomination, or a program, but a called-out group of people (universal and local) who profess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. A **“church”** is not brick and mortar, but people who have been saved by God's grace and who

assemble together to worship. Therefore, the quality of a “**church**” should not be measured by the condition of its buildings or even in the appeal of its services, but by the spiritual state of the people themselves. The “**church**” is people and a New Testament “**church**” is only as good as the people therein.

Unfortunately, many modern churches have adopted the secular marketing techniques of the world and diluted the message of the gospel. As a result, most of those who affiliate with a church fall far short of being committed Christians. It’s impossible to grow closer to Christ and further from His “**church**” because His “**church**” is the primary means through which God accomplishes His work in the world. In our text, Paul wrote to Timothy as he pastored in Ephesus and used four descriptive terms to emphasize the importance of the local “**church.**” An understanding of these terms ought to give us a greater love and appreciation for the “**church**” as a holy institution.

The New Testament Church is Called **“the house of God”**

The “**church**” is a dwelling place for God. The word “**house**” comes from the Greek *oikos* (*oy’kos*) which can mean an inhabited dwelling place or a household of persons forming a family. This word “**house**” is NOT talking about a building, but to a group of people through whom God has chosen to work (**Eph. 2:19-22**). In the Old Testament, God met with His people in the temporary Tabernacle and later in the more permanent Temple, but now He indwells believers thus making us His “**temple**” (**I Cor. 3:16-17, 6:19-20, II Cor. 6:14-18**).

When believers congregate together, they become a “**spiritual house**” (**I Pet. 2:5**) that is “**built**” by the very hands of God Himself. Therefore, if one is a part of God’s

“household” (Heb. 3:6, I Pet. 4:17), then he should live and act accordingly. If one is **“in Christ” (II Cor. 5:17)**, then he’s a part of the universal body and should be a committed member of a local **“church.”**

The **“church”** as a whole is the **“bride of Christ” (Eph. 5, Rev.21:9)** which in and off itself is a family term and every local **“church”** ought to be a picture of the family of God. The only way to know God as our heavenly **“Father” (Rom. 8:15-17)** and to become a member of God’s family is through the **“power”** of the Holy Spirit (**Jh. 1:12-13, 3:3**). Upon being **“born again,”** the believer becomes a member of the **“household of faith” (Gal. 6:10)**. Actually, there are only two ways to legally become a child of a parent thus making one a member of the **“household.”** A person is either **“born”** into the family or else he can go through the legal **“adoption”** process. Scripture uses both expressions to describe a believer’s relationship to God’s family (**Rom. 8:15, Eph. 1:5, I Jh. 3:9,4:7, 5:1,4**).

We’re all born into sin and unless one experiences the **“adoption”** of Christ into His family, then he will remain forever a child of **“the devil” (Jh. 8:44)**. Likewise, we are all born into a spiritual family whose **“father”** is a **“liar”** and **“except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (Jh. 3:3)**. The **“household of faith”** is the family of God, all of whom have been given the **“gift” (Eph. 2:8)** of **“faith”** and **“repentance” (Acts 11:18)** by the Holy Spirit (**Gal. 5:22**).

The New Testament Church is Called **“the church of the living God”**

In contrast to the pagan temples of dead idols, Paul emphasizes that **“the church”** is of **“the living God.”** The **“church”** came from God and belongs to God, simply because He is the Originator and Owner of it (**Eph. 1:14**).

She is His possession and not that of mortal man; therefore, we need to recognize Him as the Controller of it and not bow to the opinions of man (**Acts 20:28**). Scripture makes it perfectly clear that all **“three”** (**I Jh. 5:7**) Persons of the God-Head are deeply involved in the origin and operation of **“the church”** (**I Pet. 1:2-3**).

“God the Father” revealed His love for **“the church”** by His Sovereign election before the **“foundation of the world”** (**Eph. 1:4-7, Rev. 13:8**). **“Jesus Christ”**, the Son, loved **“the church”** so much that He **“gave Himself for it”** (**Eph. 5:25**) and **“purchased with His own blood”** (**Acts 20:28**). Christ is pictured as **“the good shepherd”** Who gave **“his life for the sheep”** (**Jh. 10:11-16**). As a result of God’s divine decree, **“Christ is the head of the church: and saviour of the body”** (**Eph.1:22-23,5:23**).

God the Holy **“Spirit”** authenticated **“the church”** at **“Pentecost”** through signs and wonders (**Acts 2:1-4**). It’s the job of the **“Holy Spirit”** to bring members into the **“body”** (**I Cor. 12:13**) of Christ through the convicting of **“sin”** (**Jh. 16:7-14**) and the miracle of regeneration (**Jh. 3:6-8**). The **“Holy Spirit”** is our guarantee to eventual glorification (**Eph. 1:13-14**) and our source of **“power”** (**Acts 1:8**) to live the Christian life and to understand the Word of God (**Jh. 14:26**). Furthermore, it is the **“Holy Spirit”** Who promotes **“unity in the bond of peace”** (**Eph. 4:3**) and equips believers with **“spiritual gifts”** to serve the Lord (**I Cor. 12:1-11**).

The New Testament Church is Called **“the pillar ... of truth”**

The Greek word for **“pillar”** is *stulos* (*stoo-los*), which means to prop or support which speaks to us of that which holds up the **“truth.”** If the **“pillar”** of a building is inferior or removed, then the structure will topple and endanger people nearby. This is exactly what happened in Samson’s

last act against the Philistines as recorded in the Old Testament (**Judges 16:29-30**). If the New Testament **“church”** does not stand and uphold the **“truth”** of God’s **“Word”** (**I Thess. 2:13**) in our society, then there is no one else left to do so.

The **“church”** is the instrument God has chosen to proclaim **“truth”** to the world; therefore, it is our sacred duty to do it. Even though much **“gospel”** (**Mk. 16:15**) proclamation should take place outside the assembly, it is still the **“church”** that initiates it within and sanctions evangelism without. We must never forget that the means God uses to impart **“faith”** to men is the **“Word of God”** (**Rom. 10:17**). Not only is the **“Word of God”** our message in evangelism, but it is also the instrument God uses to disciple His **“church”** (**Eph. 4:11-12**). Through the local **“church”** believers are to study God’s **“Word”** (**II Tim. 2:15**) and be taught God’s **“Word”** by the pastor/teacher so they might move from sinfulness to holiness. Trying to grow spiritually outside the **“church”** is like learning how to swim without ever getting wet.

The New Testament Church is Called “the ... ground of the truth”

The concept of the **“church”** being both **“the pillar and ground of the truth”** translates into two slightly different meanings. The word **“ground”** comes from the Greek *hedraioma* (*hed-rah-yo-mah*) which carries the idea of stability or permanence. Local churches may come and go, but the true **“body”** of Christ is eternal. Regardless of the many assaults against the **“church,”** it will stand the test of time (**Matt. 16:18**). **“Hell,”** in **Matt. 16**, is better translated to be Hades, meaning that not even **“death”** (**I Cor. 15:55-57, Heb. 2:14-15**) itself has power to stop the **“church.”** The blood of church martyrs has not decreased, but only increased the strength of the **“church.”**

Just because we're living in a post-Christian and anti-Christian culture, doesn't mean that the **"church"** is in danger of extinction. God's remnant may be getting smaller and our society may be less tolerant to Christianity, but **"unto Him be glory in all the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end"** (Eph. 3:21). God's glorious plan of building His **"church"** shall continue, regardless of how man views it and tries to pass laws in opposition to it.

God's **"Word"** (Eph. 6:17, Heb. 4:12) makes it perfectly clear how important the **"church"** is to Almighty God. We need to ask ourselves if the **"church"** is as important to us as it is to the Lord. If it means anything at all to us, then we ought to make sure that **"Jesus Christ"** has His rightful place in our lives and that we have found our place in His **"church."** As Christ was sent by the Father, so has the **"church"** been sent out into the world with a message of reconciliation and hope (Jh. 20:21).

We need to see ourselves as **"ambassadors for Christ"** (II Cor. 5:20) through the ranks of the local **"church."** It's impossible for a follower of Jesus Christ to profess allegiance to Him and deny the importance of His **"church."** Members in a local **"church"** should not be seen as mere consumers, but as servants in the **"body"** of Christ. **"Church"** membership is not optional for a child of God simply because Christians need God and they need one another. To be a truly **"saved"** (Rom. 10:9) person, but not an active member of a local **"church"** is to be a disobedient Christian. To be out of **"fellowship"** with God's people means that one is out of **"fellowship"** with God (I Jh. 1:3, 3:14, 4:6-11).

Chapter 6

Using Your Spiritual Gift in the Church

“For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also *is* Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether *we be* Jews or Gentiles, whether *we be* bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body *were* an eye, where *were* the hearing? If the whole *were* hearing, where *were* the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where *were* the body? But now *are they* many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: And those *members* of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely *parts* have more abundant comeliness. For our comely *parts* have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that *part* which lacked: That there should be no schism in the body; but *that* the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the

members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret? But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way”
(I Cor. 12:12-31)

In this above passage, we’re going to take a brief look at how the apostle Paul used the human “**body**” to illustrate the use of “**spiritual gifts**” within the New Testament “**church.**” Before we begin, I want to remind you that although God chose human instrumentality through which to write His Word, that’s all they were, no more than tools in God’s Hand. These sixty-six books that we have in our canon of Holy Scriptures are all the authoritative Word of the Living God. These men wrote under divine inspiration as the Holy Spirit moved upon them to write (II Tim. 3:16).

In this passage, it would do us well in our study of church membership, to see how Paul shows us the interdependence of each “**member**” and the integral “**part**” that each person plays. With all it’s multiplied “**parts,**” God designed a person’s “**body**” to operate as a total human being. Without any “**part**” of one’s “**body,**” it’s impossible to operate as well as was intended. So it is, with the “**body of Christ,**” which is referring to either a local “**church**” individually or the universal “**church**” as a whole. EVERY “**member**” is important to one’s human “**body**” and so is EVERY “**member**” important to the local “**church**” of Jesus Christ.

The Indivisibility of Members in the Body v.12-20

It's important to notice that Paul doesn't liken the "**church**" to an organization, but to a living breathing organism. Like the human "**body**," the "**church**" reflects both unity and diversity (**Rom. 12:4-5, Ep. 4:16**). Just as the human "**body**" has only one "**head**," so it is with the "**body**" of a local "**church**" whose "**head**" is "**Christ**" (**Eph. 1:22-23**). Although, the "**church**" is referred to in a singular sense as "**one body**," she is actually made up of "**many members**." Likewise, the human "**body**" is comprised of "**many members**," it also is considered only "**one**" entity. There is a oneness to the "**body**" despite the differences among its numerous "**members**." Within this complicated physical "**body**," there are over 200 bones, plus nerves, blood vessels, muscles, tendons, glands, and other organs Yet, all the "**members**" of the "**body**" are so closely related that it's able to function as a single unit (**Rom. 12:5**).

One cannot become a "**member**" of the "**body of Christ**" by water baptism, but by **being "baptized ... by one Spirit ... into one body"** which is "**the body of Christ ... the church**." This is true baptism of the Holy Spirit which differs from unbiblical views. There's much confusion in the ranks of religion as to what this actually means; therefore, let me remind you that "**God is not the author of confusion**" (**I Cor. 14:33**) and if He's "**not**," just who do you think it could be other than Satan himself, the instigator of "**every evil work**" (**Jam. 3:16**). Scripturally, being baptized with the "**Holy Spirit**" has nothing to do with speaking in tongues, but being immersed by the "**Holy Spirit**" into the family of God at the very moment of regeneration. This is what makes a person a "**member**" of the "**body of Christ**," the "**church**."

The **“Holy Spirit”** is the very Source of a believer’s new birth. He is the One Who convicts us of sin (**Jh. 16:8-11**), converts us to a saving knowledge of Christ (**Jh. 3:3,5**), gives us faith to believe (**Gal. 5:22**), and places us in the family of God (**Rom. 8:11, Eph. 1:13-14**). Water baptism (immersion) is the act of publicly identifying with Christ, giving outward testimony of the inward change that resulted from being **“baptized into”** the **“body of Christ.”**

The **“Spirit”** baptism to which Paul referred is a fulfillment of what was promised by John the Baptist (**Matt. 3:11**). Baptism of the **“Spirit”** is the placing of a new **“member”** into the **“body of Christ”** at the moment of conversion. Evidence of possessing the **“Holy Spirit”** is not speaking in ecstatic utterances, but in demonstrating the **“fruit of the Spirit”** (**Gal. 5:22-23**) whereby the **“Holy Spirit”** actually possess us. It’s not a second work of grace that we are to go looking for after salvation. There is only one baptism **“into”** the **“Holy Spirit,”** but many fillings afterwards (**Eph. 5:19**).

The theme of unity and diversity is further developed by emphasizing the placement of the different **“members”** in one’s **“body.”** It’s a simple fact that for a **“body”** to be a **“body,”** it requires diverse **“members.”** This is trying to teach us theologically how each **“member”** of the **“church”** has a unique function in the **“body”** of believers. Less gifted believers are not to be seen as those of little value. Both the **“hand”** and **“foot”** have unique functions that the other cannot fulfill. The **“ear”** and the **“eye”** are extremely vital **“members”** of the **“body”** as well as the nose for **“smelling.”** However, if the **“whole body”** consisted of only one **“member,”** then it would be a monstrosity. Placement in the **“body”** is a Sovereign act of God. It’s unreasonable to expect everyone to have the same identical **“gift.”** Based upon God’s Sovereignty, He has **“set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.”** God has a plan and purpose in

all that He does and it's for us to seek His will and fulfill the position in which He has divinely placed us.

It's a sin to literally covet another person's **"gift"** and to criticize a person for not having a **"gift"** that God hasn't chosen to give them. Many people criticize a pastor for not doing this or that and never stop to realize that perhaps God has not gifted him in that capacity. In order to be a pastor, a man must have the **"gift"** of teaching God's Word, but no one man will be able to live up to everyone's expectations. That's why God gives various **"gifts"** to the **"members"** in a local **"church"** so different needs can be met by different people. Instead of being critical of what other people are doing or not doing, we need to examine our own hearts to discover our **"gifts"** and put them to use for our Lord.

The Interdependence of Members **in the Body v.21-26**

The **"many members"** in the **"one"** spiritual **"body of Christ"** are as interdependent upon each other as the **"members"** of every individual human **"body."** You'll never find anyone wanting to part with any **"member"** of his **"body"** without a medical reason by simply declaring, **"I have no need of you."** That's because every **"member"** of the **"body"** is important regardless of how minute we may think it is. There are some **"members"** of the physical **"body"** that we take for granted until something hurtful happens that calls our attention to its importance.

Every part of the **"body"** has a purpose and no part can take leave of the other without being missed. Not only is the **"foot"** dependent upon the **"head,"** but so is the **"head"** dependent upon the **"foot."** No bodily **"member"** is without significance, meaning, and purpose. That's the way it is also in a local **"church."**

Although, it's true that some **"members"** of the **"body"** are more **"feeble" (weaker)** than others, meaning that some are more vital to sustain life, all are still **"necessary."** There are some **"body parts"** that you can live without and some you can't. Some **"parts"** of the **"body"** receive more attention than others and are referred to as more **"honorable"** and **"comely" (presentable)**. However, that doesn't mean the other **"members"** are useless. When God looks at the **"body,"** He sees it as **"tempered (arranged) together"** as a whole entity with each **"member"** contributing to the other. It's possible to live without some of the more visible **"members"** of the **"body,"** such as a **"hand"** or **"foot,"** but impossible to live without some of the hidden **"members"** like the heart and lungs. In reality, the **"feeble (weaker) members"** are the ones that most often assist the more prominent **"members"** and enables them to carry out their tasks.

God made the **"body"** so each **"member"** would complement each other and work in harmony. The word **"schism"** means division and tells how God's design for the **"body"** is for it to coordinate together. When **"members"** of a human **"body"** are not cooperating together, you will see erratic behavior. There is no place for our feelings or opinions to cause **"schism"** (division) in the **"body of Christ."** There is no room for jealousy or a sense of superiority in the church. Caring for others and seeking the best interest of others is evidence of spiritual maturity **(Rom. 12:10)**. Just as it is with the human **"body,"** so it is with the **"church."** When **"one member"** suffers, then we all **"suffer"** and when **"one member"** is honored, we should **"all rejoice."**

The Induction of Members into the Body v.27-31

In saying that **“ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular,”** Paul is declaring both unity and diversity within the **“church.”** Regardless of our differences, a local church should consist of **“born again”** believers making us all members in the same family with Christ as our common **“head.”** At this point, Paul adds to the list of **“spiritual gifts”** that he previously began earlier in this chapter (**v.8-10**). He continues this list of **“gifts”** that were found in the church at Corinth (**v.28-30**), but I want to emphasize that these were particular ones recognized in that specific church. None of these mentioned comprises an exhaustive list of all that can be found in local churches throughout history. More **“gifts”** are mentioned in **Romans 12:6-8**. Some will be similar and can still be found in the church today, such as those mentioned in the church at Ephesus (**Eph. 4:11-12**), **“evangelists ... pastors ... teachers.”** Some **“gifts”** were unique for the day and age in which they were given, others were unique due to the circumstances of the church, while others may be common in all local churches. That which I want to emphasize in keeping with this text is that every **“member”** in the **“church”** has a contribution to make for the good of the **“body”** if they will find and use their **“gift”** to the glory of God.

Once again, the emphasis is on God’s Sovereign control as to who gets what **“gift.”** Just as the human **“body”** possesses numerous and varied **“members,”** so does the **“church”** possess a complexity of **“gifts.”** The Bible mentions many **“gifts,”** but doesn’t name every **“gift”** given to the **“body of Christ.”**

Application

In the 12th chapter of First Corinthians, we learn something about the “**spiritual gifts**” that God gives to individual believers in the “**church.**” What mere human organization alone cannot do in a “**church,**” God’s “**Spirit**” can and will do through the supernatural enablement of His people. It appears from Scripture that every believer will be equipped with some “**gift**” as God sees fit to give. Some will have at least one and some may have several. At this point, we must understand when we talk about “**spiritual gifts**” (I Cor. 12:1), we’re not talking about talents. A talent is something that is inherited genetically at birth and manifest itself as one matures. It’s a natural born ability or aptitude to do something.

A “**spiritual gift**” is something entirely different because it’s an ability to do something that we’re not born with the natural ability to do, nor can it be learned from a textbook. An example of such a “**gift**” can be seen in the early disciples who preached the Gospel in foreign languages which they had never learned nor studied (Acts 2:1-13). By no amount of education can a “**spiritual gift**” be acquired.

It’s also been referred to as a “**grace gift**” because it’s obtained by nothing other than God’s “**grace**” just like our salvation. Scripture clearly teaches about the “**gifts**” given by God for spiritual service (I Cor. 12:4, Eph. 4:7-8, I Pet. 4:10-11). I’ve refrained from trying to mention all the “**gifts**” named in Scripture because the context often refers to those that were necessary and evident in particular congregations. However, there are some “**gifts**” that have been evident since the beginning of the New Testament “**church.**” Those “**gifts**” that I’ve previously mentioned are “**evangelists ... teachers ... pastors.**”

For those within any given congregation, the “**gifts**” could be as varied as needed. The bottom line is, God

alone gives a Christian the supernatural ability with which he/she was not born in order to perform a task in the **“church.”** This was the case with **“tongues”** in the early church, to which I just alluded, when God gave individuals the ability to speak the gospel in a foreign language that had never been studied nor mastered to the point of declaring an intelligible conversation.

There must be many different **“spiritual gifts”** that God has bestowed down through history just as there are many different **“members”** in a local **“church.”** Every **“member of the body”** is important, both in the human body and the **“body of Christ.”** Regardless of what your **“gift”** may be, we must use it in humility and love. This is something the Corinthian **“church”** had to learn to do, just like we do today. Both our natural born talents and spiritual **“gifts,”** all we are and hope to be, should be dedicated and used for the glory of God.

Chapter 7

Two Offices in the Church

I Tim. 3:1-13

“This *is* a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

Likewise *must* the deacons *be* grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre; Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience. And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being *found* blameless. Even so *must* *their* wives *be* grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things. Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.”
(I Tim. 3:1-13)

This text introduces us to the two offices that God has ordained in the New Testament “**church.**” We discover

them to be the “**office of a bishop**” and the “**office of a deacon.**” Instead of looking at the qualifications of those who hold these offices, we are going to look at the actual role that one is to fill as they hold their specific “**office**” (position). The character traits listed in our text are important and should be seriously considered when the “**church**” is looking for men to hold these offices. However, our subject under study will concentrate more on the position of the “**office**” and God’s expectations of their role in the local “**church.**” Many churches today have a hierarchy system of government which is NOT found in the Word of God.

The most important “**office**” in the New Testament “**church**” is that of “**bishop**” because it’s a position that offers the most necessary spiritual leadership to the congregation. To begin with, we need to understand there are three terms used in the New Testament that refer to the position of “**pastor**” (**Eph. 4:11**). The words, “**elder ... bishop**” and “**overseer**” are all titles referring to the one “**office**” (same position). There is nothing wrong with having more than one pastor, in fact, a plurality of elders is very biblical. However, it only stands to reason that if there is more than one pastor, there needs to be some system of leadership for the sake of order. For instance, in a plurality of elders, someone needs to be designated as the lead-elder with specified duties, but never lording over the other elders nor the congregation. An example of oneness in unity, but yet diversity in duty can be seen in the God-Head Himself (**I Jh. 5:7-10**). God the “**Father,**” God the “**Son,**” and God the “**Holy Spirit**” are all Three Persons, yet One in equal essence with “**God**” the “**Father**” being called the “**head**” (**I Cor. 11:3**). This indeed is a great mystery to which we’ll never fully comprehend on this side of Heaven, but simply believe by faith.

The First and Primary Office in the New Testament Church is that of Pastor v.1-7

To begin with, let's examine the different titles found in the New Testament that refer to this one **"office"** (**Acts 20:17,28**). As Paul spoke his parting words to the leaders of the **"church"** at **"Ephesus,"** he sheds some light on the **"office"** of **"pastor"** (**Eph. 4:11**). We need to pay close attention to the closing two words in that verse (**Eph. 4:11**), **"pastors and teachers."** These two words are actually linked together to form a single pair describing their shepherding work to be the teaching (feeding) of God's Word to God's **"sheep"** (**Jh. 10:16-17**).

The English translation of **"pastor"** actually appears only this one time (**Eph. 4:11**) in the New Testament. It comes from the Greek word *poimen* (poy-mane) meaning shepherd or herdsman. There are two pastoral terms found in the epistle of **First Peter (I Pet. 5:1-5)** that refers to the function of a **"pastor."** The Greek words for **"flock"** is *poimnion* (poym-nee-on) and **"feed"** is *poimaino* (poy-mah-ee-no). It's very easy to see how the words **"pastor ... flock"** and **"feed"** are so very closely related. Anytime the words **"flock"** or **"feed"** are used in the context of a **"church,"** it's referring to the function of a **"pastor."**

The **"elders"** mentioned in **Acts 20:17** are also the **"pastors"** who are admonished to **"take heed ... to all the flock"** and **"to feed the church of God"** in **Acts 20:28**. The Greek word **"elders"** is *presbuteros* (pres-boo-ter-os) and it speaks of either an older man or a man of rank in office. When the context is referring to a **"pastor,"** then the word speaks of his **"office"** in the New Testament **"church."**

In writing his first epistle, Peter called himself an **"elder"** and addressed the group as **"elders"** (**I Pet. 5:1-5**). In this passage, Peter instructed the **"elders"** to **"feed the flock of God which is among you"** and to take the

“oversight,” *episkopeo* (ep-ee-skop-eh-o), meaning to oversee. The “elder” is forbidden from being a dictator, but is to lead the “flock” by example, always recognizing that he is only an under-shepherd with Christ being the “chief Shepherd.”

The Greek word “overseers” (**Acts 20:28**) is *episkopos* (ep-is-koop-os) referring to a man in charge and comes from the same Greek word as “bishop,” (**I Tim. 3:3:1**) *episkope* (ep-is-kop-ay), meaning to take oversight or to be the overseer. This is the same word that is used by Paul in his letter to “Timothy” and to “Titus” in listing the qualifications for the “office of a bishop” (**Titus 1:4-9**). Therefore, the words “overseer ... bishop” and “pastor” are referring to the same person and can be correctly used interchangeable. The only way that one can become a biblical “overseer” in the “church” is to be called of God and for the “Holy Spirit” to make you one.

When a man gives evidence of being called by God, it’s customary for the “church” to set him aside for that purpose by the laying on of “hands” (**I Tim. 5:22**). This was a custom practiced by the early “church” (**Acts 8:17-18, 9:17**) that was probably a carry-over from the Old Testament practice of identifying with a sacrificial animal (**Ex. 29:10,15,19, Lev. 4:15**). Today, we generally follow that same custom as we identify with those whom we believe to be called into the Gospel ministry.

After looking at the three titles that are used for the “office of a bishop” (“elder” or “pastor”), we can only conclude that each word tells something about his position. The word “pastor” refers to his major role of feeding and watering God’s “sheep” (**Jh. 10:27**) with the “Word of God” (**Acts 6:2**). The word “elder” speaks of his spiritual maturity and wisdom for the “office.” The word “bishop” refers to his administrative role of leadership in the “church.”

The Second Office in the New Testament Church is that of Deacon v.8-13

There is no way that a “**pastor**” can do all that needs tending to in a local “**church**,” therefore, “**deacons**” are to be selected to help him carry out his ministry. The word “**deacon**” means “**servant**” and that’s exactly what they are to do, assist the “**pastor**” in ministry. They are not called nor set apart to be managers or bosses, but lowly servants who will do whatever needs to be done for the Lord’s work. They are not to RUN the church nor see themselves as lording over the pastor. A common conception in many churches is that of a board of deacons which is totally contrary to Scripture. They should never see themselves as a board of directors, controllers, or managers, but simple servants in service to the Lord of Glory.

Scripture has little to say as to exactly what “**deacons**” are to do and that’s because the job description can vary from church to church. The bottom line is that they are to help the pastor in his ministry to the congregation. We believe the origin of the “**office of deacon**” is probably found in the appointment of men to service in helping the early apostles as recorded in the **6th chapter of Acts (Acts 6:1-7)**.

Sometimes, even Bible-Believing churches are divided over what to call women who are set aside by the congregation in service to our Lord. We know there were women in the New Testament who are called servants, such as “**Phebe**” (**Rom. 16:1**). In this passage she is referred to as a “**servant**” with the Greek word being diakonos (dee-ak-on-os). Men servants are called deacons and female servants are referred to as deaconesses. Some churches refuse to recognize women servants as deaconesses, but’s that’s what they are except the fact that most churches don’t hold them up to the same standards

as the male “**deacons.**” The truth of the matter is that’s exactly what ought to be done. It’s not uncommon for churches to elect a nominating committee to “fill various positions” in a local church, but never require anything more from them but to breathe air. Most churches select women to serve in some capacity, but will lambast those who call their women workers deaconesses.

The Greek word for “**deacon**” finds its meaning in three different words, all of which have the same root. The first being diakoneo (dee-ak-on-eh-o) meaning to serve or to minister. The second being diakonia (dee-ak-on-ee-ah) meaning service or ministry. The third being diakonos (dee-ak-on-os) meaning servant or minister. The word “**ministration**” in the **Acts 6:1-7** passage comes from the Greek word from which we get the words service and deacon.

Regardless of gender, all believers are saved to serve the Lord Jesus Christ and those whom the church sets aside for specific ministry are to meet the requirements found in our text. There is no doubt, men and women alike played a very important role in the ministry of Christ. Regardless of who does what in the church it ought to be done for the Glory of Christ alone. All believers should see themselves as lowly servants of their Blessed Redeemer in humble submission unto Him. Those whom the “**church**” sets aside for a leading role ought to meet the same qualifications.

Chapter 8

Response to Leadership in the Church

**“Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that *is* unprofitable for you.”
(Heb. 13:17)**

Throughout the Old Testament, God provided leaders for His people and the welfare of Israel was largely dependent on the effectiveness of those leaders. That is why God declared to the pagan nations surrounding Israel, **“touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm” (I Chron. 16:22)**. Unfortunately, Israel often turned against their leaders which brought God’s wrath upon them **(Neh. 9:26-27)**.

Not only did God have positions of spiritual leadership in the Old Testament, but He also instituted positions of leadership in the New Testament **“church.”** Therefore, it’s important that members of a local **“church”** understand and apply the biblical principles pertaining to their relationship with their leaders. We need to recognize the two extremes when it comes to **“church”** leadership. One extreme is an outright denial of any authority structure in the **“church”** and everybody does his own thing. The other extreme is an enslaving authoritarianism that cripples the body and places it in spiritual bondage. The good middle road of balance when it comes to leadership is for the under-shepherd of God’s flock to lovingly and authoritatively proclaim God’s Word and not be afraid to practice discipline within the body when necessary. Our scripture text very clearly summarizes the responsibilities of **“church”** members to their leaders.

Members Need to Recognize the Scriptural Authority Their Leaders Proclaim v.17a

God's Word expects those within the "**church**" to show respect to the pastoral leadership who are seeking to direct the congregation God-ward. God's "**sheep**" are expected to follow the shepherd and not the shepherd to follow the sheep (**Jh. 10:27**). The Greek word "**obey**," *peitho* (pi-tho), means to be continually persuaded. Therefore, this passage is saying that the teaching and counsel of our spiritual leaders from the Word of God ought to be very persuasive in our hearts and lives. This word, "**obey**," not only commands the receiving of biblical instruction, but carries the connotation of compliance to leadership that's teaching it. In the Greek, the word "**rule**" is *hegeomai* (hayg-eh-om-ahee) which means leader or refers to one who has authority over another.

This command to "**obey**" church leaders is an unmistakable emphasis on the authority of their biblical instruction. God doesn't want anyone obeying "**church**" leaders when they tell a congregation to do evil or anything contrary to Scripture. However, they are expected to "**obey**" when the "**Word of Truth**" is "**rightly**" divided (**I Tim. 2:15**). When it comes to the Word of God, there should be NO compromise from neither the pastor nor congregation. There will be times when a congregation may not agree with a personal decision made by the leadership. It's, at such a time as this, we shouldn't let our emotions outweigh our respect for our church leaders.

As in any other type of organized body, there must be leaders who make decisions for the good of the "**body**" (**I Cor. 12:12**). Even in the "**church**," we may have different opinions on various subjects, but in order for the "**church**" to run smoothly, a course of action must be taken for the welfare of the assembly. For instance, musical styles in the "**church**" services are a matter of preference on which it's

impossible for everyone to agree. Therefore, the leadership of the “**church**” must take the initiative and make a decision as to the direction in which the “**church**” should move for the good of the “**body**.” This could sometimes require compromise of opinions without sacrificing biblical precedent. If everyone tried to dictate policy, there would be nothing but massive chaos in the assembly. God has ordained the “**office**” (I Tim. 3:1-7) of pastor as the under-shepherd of God’s “**sheep**” (Jh. 10:27). “**Church**” members need to recognize that it’s a position set apart by God Himself and for that reason alone, respect that which has been divinely instituted. Scripture does not demand that we agree with all the personal suggestions offered by our leaders, but a “**church**” does need to recognize the “**gifts**” that God gives to leaders which enables them to provide spiritual insight. Pastors are no more perfect than anyone else; therefore, we must regularly pray for God’s leading in the lives of those who have been divinely chosen to shepherd the sheepfold

Therefore, God’s Word also commands members to “**submit**” to their leadership. Herein lies the element of trust that we must have in our leadership. Not only does the Word of God say for “**church**” members to “**obey**” their church “**rulers**” when they are following the Lord, but to “**submit**” to them. In the Greek, “**submit yourselves**” is *hupēiko* (hoop-I-ko), meaning to yield to authority or to place yourself under one’s admonition. The very structure of these words in the Greek teaches us to diligently and continually devote ourselves to the process of placing ourselves under the care of our leaders. A good picture of this type of submission is given to us from Paul’s writings to the Thessalonians, “**Know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you**” (I Thess. 5:12-13).

This simply means to appreciate and acknowledge the position of your “**church**” leaders. “**To esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake**” tells the “**church**”

to respect their **“office”** and treat them with dignity and respect. Even when our leaders make mistakes, and they will because they are human, or when we disagree with them, our **“love”** for the Lord and desire to obey God’s Word should be our motivation. We are not to be guided by personal feelings, but by the plain teaching of Scripture and the realization of their God ordained **“office.”** When there are differences, and there will be, we must learn to disagree agreeably as brothers and sister in the family of God (**Rom. 12:10**).

“Love” (Jh. 13:34-35) should be our motivating factor in what we do for the Lord and in our treatment of each other in the **“church.”** Effective leadership in the **“church”** requires an effective following of those within the congregation. The final admonition in this text is to **“be at peace among yourselves.”** **“Peace”** is the absence of conflict and both leaders and members must work hard to maintain **“peace”** if the **“church”** is to glorify God. Malice toward one another has no place within the **“church.”** As long as you have two people you will have differences of opinion and we must learn how to disagree without creating conflict. Anytime we disagree with our leadership, it must NOT be done in a rebellious and cantankerous spirit, but in gentleness and humility without creating division and disruption in the **“church.”** How sad it is that some people are more interested in proving that they are right than in promoting **“unity” (Eph. 4:3)** in the **“body”** of Christ.

Members Need to Recognize the Importance of Leadership v.17b

“Church” leadership is important because God has appointed the pastor to **“watch”** over the **“souls”** of the saints. This cannot help but remind us of when God called the prophet Ezekiel to be **“a watchman unto the house of**

Israel” (Ezek. 3:16-21). The responsibility of Ezekiel was to speak the Word of the Lord and if he failed, then he would be punished. The responsibility of the pastor is to **“preach the Word” (II Tim. 4:2)** and if the people fail to respond then he has still been faithful to his call. If a pastor wonders from doing God’s bidding, then God will deal with him accordingly and Scripture gives instructions to the church on how to deal with him **(I Tim. 5:19-20).**

Scripture also reminds the spiritual leaders of the **“church”** that they **“must give account”** of their leadership. This drives home very clearly the grave responsibility that God has entrusted to **“church”** leadership. God’s people need pastors to warn them of worldly enemies that would wage war against their **“souls”** and rob them of their testimonies as well as of their spiritual joy.

A congregation should make the pastors job a **“joy”** to serve them and not a burdensome **“grief.”** A church’s relationship with its leadership should enable them to truly enjoy their role in the **“body”** of Christ. Congregating together should be a delightful experience and not something that we dread to do. A congregation of people who are truly saved, prayerful, trying to walk in obedience to Christ, hungry for the Word of God, growing in grace, sowing seeds of unity, demonstrating their love for one another, submitting to biblical authority, and being willing workers is truly a **“joy”** to any pastor.

On the other hand, a people who brings **“grief”** to a pastor’s heart makes it **“unprofitable”** for the entire congregation. This Greek word for **“grief”** is *stenazo* (sten-ad-zo) which means to groan. A congregation has the ability to either make their leader’s job difficult or enjoyable. To cause them to groan in disappointment is not good for the spiritual health of the assembly. Pastors are grieved when a congregation doesn’t care about the salvation of lost sinners, sees nothing wrong with sin, fails to spiritually mature, sows seeds of discord, shows no love for the

brethren, seeks counsel from the ungodly world, bickers, gossips, nit-picks, unjustly criticizes, and is content with merely being pew potatoes.

The Old Testament is filled with stories of how Israel grieved her leaders. For example, time and again **“Moses”** was disappointed by the stubbornness of the Israelites and by their gripping and grumbling (**Ex. 15:24, 16:2, 17:3, Num. 14:2, 16:41**). **“Jeremiah”** has become known to us as the weeping prophet because of how the spiritual state of his people had broken his heart (**Jer. 4:19, 8:18, 21, 9:1, Lam. 3:48-51**). Scripture makes it perfectly clear that it’s **“unprofitable”** for a **“church”** to bring sorrow to the hearts of her leaders. A congregation should cause their pastor to look forward every Sunday in preaching to them and for it not to be a burdensome task. Pray for him, not only on Sunday, but for him and his family throughout the week. Pray for God to put a hedge of protection around him from the enemy of our souls. Pray for him as he spends time alone with God in preparation of sermons.

The Greek word for **“unprofitable”** is *alusiteles* (al-oo-sit-el-ace) meaning hurtful. Failure to follow biblical instruction and do things God’s way is neither good for the leaders nor for the congregation, nobody benefits. A congregation needs to see themselves as people who help their pastor to **“run”** (**I Cor. 9:26-27**) well in his race of service (**I Pet. 5:1-5**). Pastors are to lead by example, not as dictators, and are to be the under-shepherds of God’s people in the absence of the **“chief Shepherd.”**

Unto the faithful pastor is promised **“a crown of glory that fadeth not away.”** The God-called pastor must always see himself as being employed only by Almighty God, and ultimately accountable to Him. Humble submission to God and to the authority of His Word is required if one is to live an obedient Christian life and be an asset to the cause of Christ. This applies to both pastor and people within a local **“church.”**

Chapter 9

Ordinances in the Church

There are some religious groups and denominations who refer to what I'm about to say, as a sacrament. Some go so far as to believe these sacraments contain an element of something sacred, even saving grace. Most Protestant denominations recognize only two ordinances that Jesus left for the church to observe. Scripture clearly teaches that a sinner is **“saved by grace through faith” (Eph. 2:8)**. No act of man whatsoever, including these ordinances have anything to do with salvation; however, it does have something to do with obedience and testimony.

Everything I've just said doesn't mean that both of these ordinances are not sacred acts, but they contain no element of salvation. For illustration, marriage is sacred, but there is no salvation in the marriage vows. Because of the confusion over the word sacrament, I find the word ordinance more fitting. Therefore, with that being said, we turn our attention to these two ordinances that Jesus told us to **“observe”** in the church. The word ordinance can be an authoritative command or a decree that was given to the church by Christ. Such a decree ought to require our submission to His authority (**Rom. 13:2**). Actually, in the passage known as the Great Commission (**Matt. 28:19-20**), we discover a direct command to the church when He said, **“teaching them to observe ALL things.”** This refers to every aspect of God's Word, including the ordinances.

These ordinances are outward signs or visible acts of worship whereby we can identify with what Jesus Christ has done for His redeemed people. A New Testament ordinance is a symbolic representation of the central truths found in the Christian Faith. To help us better understand the purposes of the New Testament ordinances, we can

somewhat compare them to Old Testament typology. Typology reminded the Old Testament saints of what Christ would do in the future. Ordinances remind the New Testament saints of what Christ has already done in the past.

Christ gave the New Testament church two ordinances that we are to **“observe” (Matt. 28:19-20)** like picture language or visual aids to enhance our worship. In NO WAY WHATSOEVER are these ordinances required for salvation, but rather as a means of reminding believers something about obedience, fellowship, and the cost of our redemption. Both the observances of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, should be a very important part in the life of every believer.

Baptism by Immersion

“Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer *it to be so now*: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”
(Matt. 3:13-17)

Baptism was the first ordinance instituted by the divine example of Christ Himself when He first entered His public ministry. A common question that is frequently asked is, “why was the sinless Son of God Who had no need of repentance, baptized?” The answer to that question is twofold. First, in being baptized, Christ set for us an

example to follow. Secondly, it was time for Him to launch His public earthly ministry and identify Himself with sinful man as God's promised Messiah. Just as Jesus began His earthly ministry with baptism, so is the new convert to begin his walk with Christ by publicly testifying in the baptismal waters. The concept of baptizing has its roots in the Old Testament as it carried the idea of cleansing. Our ordinance of baptism today comes from the ritual performed by John the Baptist when God sent him to baptize as a sign of repentance in preparation for the coming Messiah.

By the mere fact that Jesus **“went up straightway out of the water”** indicates that His example of baptism was immersion. Besides, the Greek word for baptize consisted of immersion, submersion, and emergence. Immersion was the only mode of baptism practiced in the early New Testament church. It's rather clear to see that the **“Eunuch”** was immersed and not sprinkled by the way he came **“up out of the water” (Acts 8:38-40)**.

There are some who may take the position that the mode of baptism doesn't matter and shouldn't even be an issue. We must realize that baptism has nothing to do with one's salvation, but it is a matter of obedience to the command of Christ. Christians need to see how close they can come to living up to God's commands rather than how far they can drift and get by. It's good for converts to be baptized as soon as possible, depending upon the age and circumstances involved, in order to learn how to practice obedience to the command of Christ.

Baptism by immersion is a picture of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (**Rom. 6:3-5**). It was designed for those who have been saved to give unashamedly a testimony of identification with Jesus Christ (**Acts 10:47-48, Col 2:12**). Unless a person is truly saved, then the act of baptism is useless and meaningless. There are some Protestant denominations that practice infant baptism as well as adult sprinkling. Some of these, link the Old

Testament covenant of circumcision with the rite of New Testament baptism. Those who practice infant baptism most often don't believe that it saves an infant from sin, but if he/she gets saved later in life, they see no need of another outward baptism because of the prior experience. For those of us who don't hold this view, infant baptism is meaningless to the child who has no idea of what's happening. Scripture teaches what is called Believer's Baptism and unless one is truly converted and realizes what he's doing, then baptism serves no purpose. However, if Christians differ as to their belief in the mode of baptism, let's treat one another in grace and not allow our differences to cause us break fellowship with one another. The dying thief (**Lk. 23:43**) on the cross next to Jesus didn't get baptized. Believer's baptism by immersion is a beautiful act of obedience, but it's not a cardinal doctrine of the Christian Faith.

The Lord's Supper

“And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed *it*, and brake *it*, and gave *it* to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave *it* to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.”
(Matt. 26:26-29)

The Lord's Supper was the second ordinance instituted by Christ on the eve of His crucifixion. When it comes to this observance, once again there are some differing views in various religious circles. The Roman Catholic Church believes in what is called transubstantiation, which means

they believe the elements literally and miraculously changes to the body and blood of Christ. Another view that is found in some well-known Protestant churches is called consubstantiation, meaning they believe in the substantial (actual or physical) presence of Christ at the Lord's Supper. Others believe in what is called substance or real divine presence of Christ at the observance, but the presence is not tied to the elements themselves. The view that I feel best describes the significance of the Lord's Supper is where the elements remain mere signs and symbols.

In the Lord's Supper, Christians not only look back at the cross, but also forward to Christ's future return. The New Testament church is to partake of the elements and **"show the Lord's death till he come."** It's to be a constant reminder of Christ's love on the cross and His future return in the resurrection of the dead. The **"bread"** is symbolic of His body that hung on the cross and was broken (human body and spirit separated) through the pain of death on Calvary. The **"cup"** is symbolic of His shed blood on the cross in payment for our sins.

The purpose of this ordinance is **"in remembrance"** of Christ and how He came to **"save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21)**. We should never forget that in a matter of speaking, our sin is what caused Christ to be nailed to the old rugged cross. We should never forget that God hates sin and sin separated man from Holy God as well as robbing us of spiritual joy. We should never forget that we need to humble and **"examine"** ourselves before God as we confess any known sin to Him, asking God to reveal our sin to us that we may draw closer to Him in confession and repentance.

The Lord's Supper is a blessing if it's observed properly, but a danger if it's made a mockery (**I Cor. 11:23-32**). God judged **"many"** in the Corinthian church with sickness and death who had hypocritically partook of this ordinance. Our attitude in coming to the Lord's Supper table should be one

of reverence or else we could be signing our very own death warrant (so to speak). It's a reminder to believers that we need to take living the Christian life seriously. Christians who think they can get by with spiritual carelessness in the church are greatly deceived. Before a Christian partakes of the Lord's Supper, he is required to **"examine himself."** This self-examination is for the purpose of asking God to reveal any sin that's crept into our lives, confessing and repenting of that sin to God, asking Him to fill us with His forgiveness, being willing to forsake self, and follow God's Word. God promises that when we sin if we do not **"judge ourselves,"** then we will be **"chastened of the Lord."** Scripture teaches that God will deal with wayward disobedient believers in either chastisement or possible death (**Heb. 12:5-11, I Jh. 5:16**). All a believer must do to escape God's **"chastisement"** is to honestly **"confess"** his **"sin"** unto the Lord (**I Jh. 1:9**). Sin in a believer's life doesn't sever our union with Christ, but it does hinder our fellowship with Him. The observance of the Lord's Supper is a constant reminder of this.

Therefore, we could say that the Lord's Supper is a time for us to take a look in three directions. We need to take an INWARD look and confess any known sin to God. We need to take a BACKWARD look and remember our sin debt that Christ paid for us with His shed blood on the cross. We need to also take a FORWARD look and eagerly watch and wait for the glorious return of Jesus Christ in His second coming.

Chapter 10

Financial Giving in the Church

**“Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.”
(I Cor. 16:1-2)**

Everything cost and that includes doing Christian ministry. It cost for the local “**church**” to operate and do the Lord’s work. How then does God expect the “**church**” to fulfill the Great Commission without funds? He doesn’t! God’s method of receiving money and carrying out the gospel ministry differs greatly from the method of the world. At least, it’s supposed to because God doesn’t expect the church to function like the world. Dating back all the way to the Old Testament and until today, God has ordained that His work be carried out and supported by the giving of His redeemed people.

As we begin thinking about giving of our financial resources as it’s taught in the New Testament, we need to take a moment and see the foundation laid in the Old Testament. Giving is a delicate subject because when one starts talking about money, people become sensitive. The Old Testament Hebrew word “**tithe**” (**Lev. 27:30**) is translated from both Hebrew and Greek to mean a tenth part or 10%. Tithing was part of the Mosaic Law and is often looked upon as a tax placed upon Israel. Simply put, it was considered to be 10% of one’s income that was to support the work of the original portable tabernacle and later, the permanent temple. There is some difference in belief as to how many tithes were imposed upon Israel.

However, it was more like a tax than it was a donation or free will gift.

Actually, there appears to be three different **“tithes”** that were given over a period of three consecutive years which amounted to 23 and 1/3% of one’s annual income. The first **“tithe”** was a Workers **“tithe”** to fund the national religious life of Israel in support of the priests and Levites (**Lev. 27:30-33, Num. 18:21-32**). The second **“tithe”** was a Worship **“tithe”** used to fund the temple events, such as the various feasts that were observed throughout the year (**Deut. 14:22-26**). Then, every third year, a Welfare **“tithe”** was received in support of the poor and needy (**Deut. 14:28-29**).

As we see from the **“tithe”** requirement, it amounted to more of a taxation which was referred to by the prophet Malachi. Pay close attention to the words in this stern rebuke. **“Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that *there shall not be room enough to receive it*”** (**Mal. 3:7-10**). We must note from what Malachi said, that God expected the Israelites to pay their **“tithes”** (which is plural), but also give their FREE WILL **“offerings.”** Tithing is a FIXED amount, whereas FREE WILL giving is a FLEXIBLE amount. We see an example of Israel’s free-will giving in the building of the tabernacle when they brought so much that they were told to stop because they had more than enough (**Ex. 36:5**).

Before going any further and proceeding into our text, let’s back up before the time of the Mosaic Law and discover something about when tithing was first mentioned

in the Bible. With all that I've just said, it's not uncommon for believers to question tithing today since we are no longer under the Mosaic Law. The paying of a **"tithe"** to God existed 400 years before the Mosaic Law was ever instituted (**Gen. 14:20**). From the time **"Abraham"** paid **"tithes"** to **"Melchizedek,"** tithing has been considered a holy act of worship unto God.

After the Mosaic Law, the **"tithe"** was given to the Levites for spiritual service (**Num. 18:21**) and failure to **"tithe"** was strongly condemned, as we just read, by the Old Testament prophet, **"Malachi"** (**Mal. 3:6-12**). The directness and forthrightness with which **"Malachi"** (**Mal. 1:1**) spoke, lets us know that God takes the giving of our finances very seriously. The **"curse"** spoken of in Malachi was most likely the withholding of God's **"blessing"** because God does not bless disobedience. The giving of one's monetary gifts to God carries a special **"blessing"** and failure to give as we ought, forfeits that **"blessing."** There is no doubt that not all Israelites tithed or else Malachi would not have said what he did. Nothing is recorded in Scripture as to the penalty for not tithing except that which we find in the Book of Malachi.

God's plan for the financial support of God's work has been the giving of God's people and not receiving it from a heathen world. The reference to **"Gentiles"** in **Third John, verse 7**, is reference to non-believers in Christ or simply heathens. Herein is a good reason why churches don't pass offering plates in a church service so as not to collect funds from those outside of faith in Christ. As we move into the New Testament, we learn that Jesus taught His disciples to both pay their taxes and support God's work by tithing. He said, **"Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's"** (**Mk. 12:17**).

Before the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, He did not attack tithing, but the legalism involved in giving. He

said, **“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier *matters* of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone” (Mat. 23:23).** We must remember that when Jesus spoke these words, He spoke them while the Mosaic Law was still in effect and while the temple was still standing with sacrifices still being offered. Those who **“tithe”** their income today should not do it from a sense of obligation, but love for their Lord. The question for our consideration is, “How can we do less under GRACE than the Jew did under LAW?” God doesn’t want just our **“tithe,”** but He wants our all on the altar of **“sacrifice” (Rom. 12:1)** and when He has our all, He will have our finances which includes our **“tithes and offerings.”** The New Testament teaches generous sacrificial grace-giving which overall involves far more than just 10% of our income (carefully read and study **Second Corinthians, chapters 8-9**).

Christian ministry depends upon Christian giving and we can learn from early historical records that the Christian community practiced at least a **“tithe”** if not more. Therefore, it’s considered by many believers that the **“tithe”** is a good starting place for Christians to practice grace-giving. We call it grace-giving, because we give out of God’s grace to us and not out of legalistic compulsion. If you want to know where your love, affection, and priorities lie then all you have to do is look at how you spend your money.

Since the New Covenant gives a greater blessing than the Old Covenant, then how can we do less in the New Testament than they did in the Old Testament? The local church, as well as all other Christian ministries in general, can only do what they have finances to do with. That is a simple law of economics that unfortunately some people never learn. To be a good steward means to live within

your means and that also applies to a church and any other Christian ministry. Believers ought to have a good testimony in how they pay their bills, spend, and manage their money. Just as it cost individuals to live, having to pay for food, clothing, shelter, etc., it cost to carry out the Great Commission (**Matt. 28:19-20**) of the church and adequately compensate those whom God has called out to serve in full time capacity (**I Tim. 5:18**). God's plan to do this is the giving of **"his people"** (**Matt. 1:21**) whom He has purchased with the shed blood of Christ. Our act of grace-giving is not only an act of worship, but recognition of God's ownership of all that we possess. If we follow tithing (10%) as our minimum standard of giving, then we ought to learn from the Old Testament that God wants our **"firstfruits"** (**Ex. 23, 34**). It's not deducting all our bills and giving God the leftovers, it's not merely making some kind of financial contribution to the church, it's not giving when we take a notion, feel like it, have an excess of funds, or when we think that we can afford it. I mention this simply to demonstrate the biblical principle of **"firstfruits"** giving, which is giving the best we have. Rather than giving God our leftovers and seeing how little we can give in the support of the Lord's work; we need to see how much we can give. We need to see grace-giving as simply making a deposit in our heavenly bank account. I like what Jesus said, **"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also"** (**Matt. 6:19-21**).

Someone may ask, "If we use the tithe as a minimum standard of giving, could there ever be a time when a person may not be able to give at least 10% of their

income?" I would answer in all honesty "YES" under destitute situations it's conceivable, because God doesn't expect us to give what we don't have. But, even at that, something can be given if it's only a meager amount. In the case of the "**widow**" who went to the "**temple**" and gave all she had, it's merely showing that God sees the heart and knows why we give what we do (**Mk. 12:41-44**). I say this because we are not a bunch of legalists living under a system of bondage. The matter of grace-giving is between the individual believer and God and failure to give as God has commanded is to rob ourselves of His special "**blessing**." I've never found a person who regrets giving of their financial resources to God.

As "**Paul**" (**I Cor. 1:1**) concludes his closing remarks in his letter to the Corinthian Christians, he reminds us in **chapter 16** that stewardship is a vital part of worship. Many believers in "**Jerusalem**" were suffering from poverty, so "Paul" sought to collect money from the surrounding churches to help meet their need. We have nothing worthy to give God that can ever merit our salvation, but upon receiving Christ, we need to realize that everything we have belongs to Him and acknowledge His Lordship over us. One way we have of doing that is giving back to Him a monetary portion of what He has blessed us with. The Christian needs to recognize himself as a steward, carefully managing that which God permits him to possess. Through the inspired hand of "**Paul**," God had "**given order**" to the New Testament "churches of Galatia" regarding the giving of money and the financing of God's Work. "**Given order**" means charged, directed, or commanded. Under divine inspiration, he was passing the same message on to the believers of Corinth as well and to us today (**I Cor. 16:1**).

The simple fact from Scripture is that God's Word commands believers to give in the support of Christian ministry. It's a sad thing for "**churches**" to reject the Bible

method of financing God's work and partake in such things as food sales, car washes, yard sales, raffles, pledges, and the like. All such practices are spiritually illicit and disgrace the gospel of Jesus Christ. I find myself in the minority who hold to such a belief. However, I remember when I was a young pastor attending one of our State Evangelism Conferences, hearing a well-known preacher of that day. He told of how God dealt with his heart while pastoring a rather large church in the Southern Baptist Convention. While driving into the church parking lot on one particular occasion, he was confronted with signs held by youth in the congregation directing those driving on the busy freeway to come into the church and buy a plate of spaghetti. He cried out to God, asking what he had done to see the church that he pastored turned into a spaghetti restaurant. The youth were trying to raise money for a "mission trip," but that was a turning point in the life of that pastor. From that time on, he no longer allowed such sells to take place under his pastorate and said that if God wanted them to go on a mission's trip, that He would provide the way. In other words, he was convicted that God's "house" is not to be turned into a retail business. My take on such a scenario, is why don't the young people get a job and earn enough money to pay for their mission trip instead of begging from others? If God doesn't provide from their own giving or that of other believers, then God simply may not want them to go on such a trip.

From my own personal experience, I've had to deal with similar situations in at least two churches of which I became pastor. It was one of those unwanted things that I inherited from previous pastors. In one of those churches, it was a matter of yard sales along with hot dogs. It was something that the WMU had been instigating. When I became pastor, my wife voiced her opinion in one of their meetings which is the same as my belief in such matters.

At first, it didn't go over well, but eventually the ladies decided to stop such practices. I never attacked them from the pulpit, but simply preached the Word of God and let God do the speaking. In the other church, it was a matter of an annual Bar-B-Que sale in which they raised up to \$5,000.00. I knew they were doing this when I took the pastorate, but once again, I just preached the Word and never attacked anyone. In a matter of time, the man who started this fund raising came under such conviction that he led the movement to stop it. Needless to say, it thrilled my soul. I'm sure that you can tell from the length of time that I've spent talking about it, that free-will giving is a strong conviction of my heart. Jesus Himself had something to say about the spiritual sales mentality. Although, when He addressed the subject, it was in regards to the Old Testament **"temple,"** but it still has something to say to us today, including the use of finances in the Lord's work.

The Jews had abused the **"temple"** and I'm afraid that many believers are abusing not only their own bodies and personal finances, but the things of God. Much can be said about this passage because it speaks volumes to us today in the church. **"After this he (Jesus) went down to Capernaum, he, and his mother, and his brethren, and his disciples: and they continued there not many days. And the Jews' passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise. And his**

disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up” (Jh. 2:12-17).

That which has been consecrated to God is holy unto Him. This includes such things as a believer’s body which is today the **“temple of the Holy Spirit” (I Cor. 6:19)**. It should also include the collective body of believers comprising **“the church of the living God” (I Tim. 3:15)**. A CHURCH BUILDING is simply an empty building until the collective **“BODY OF CHRIST” (I Cor. 12:27)** gathers to meet therein. What I’m about to say in this next sentence will no doubt make a lot of people angry. I personally believe that when a local church charges people to enter their doors to attend an event or activity, then it becomes a business establishment. It’s not my intention to anger anyone, but to get people to think biblically. There is nothing wrong with receiving free-will offerings from people who attend such an activity, but whatever happened to the church living in the realm of **“faith” (Rom. 14:23)**? I remind you that God’s work is to be supported by the gifts of God’s people and not from the unregenerate world. I base that statement on a verse found in the **Epistle of Third John verse seven, “Because that for his name’s sake they went forth taking nothing of the Gentiles” (III Jh. 7)**. Reference to **“Gentiles”** was speaking of heathens of whom the early church did not depend for their finances. Failure to give the way God has commanded us to give is disobedience and disobedience is sin and God doesn’t bless sin.

Scripture teaches how our offerings are to be given unto the Lord under the New Covenant **(I Cor. 16:2)**. Our text is telling us about Paul collecting a special offering for needy believers in **“Jerusalem.”** Along with this special **“collection”** are found biblical principles of Grace-Giving in general that can be applied today.

Biblical Principle #1
New Testament Giving is to be Christ Centered
“upon the first day of the week”

We need to keep in mind that after Christ's resurrection, the New Testament believers assembled on the **“first day of the week” (Acts 20:7)**. Every Lord's day is a reminder to the believer of our victory over sin, death, hell, and the grave because of the finished work of Christ on the cross and His glorious resurrection on the third day afterwards. Christ came out of the tomb to come into our hearts and make new creatures out of sinful men (**II Cor. 5:17**). Every Lord's day we gather in remembrance that God's love was not just wordy, but demonstrative. God left the portals of glory in a place of perfect paradise to come and live among sinful men, be crucified, and give Himself to satisfy the wrath of God against sinners.

The very mention of the **“first day of the week,”** reminds us that Christians gather on Sunday to celebrate our risen Lord in worship which, according to our text, includes financially supporting the Lord's work. Worship means to reverence, honor, praise, and glorify the One and Only God of our salvation Who **“gave His only begotten son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (Jh. 3:16)**. Because God **“gave”** the very best that Heaven had to offer, we ought to give of our best to Him.

There are many worthy Christian ministries that deserve our support. However, a Bible-believing church should never suffer as a result of its members sending their money elsewhere to the point of not supporting their local assembly. There are many radio and TV preachers and para-church organizations who are doing a good work, but will they be available to minister to you when you need a pastor? People ought to give to the place from which they receive their blessing and to the ministry that is doing

God's work God's way. This may very well include a par-a-church ministry, but by no means exclude the local church. Some interpret Malachi's passage to mean that the "**storehouse**" is the local church, but the local church did not exist in the time of Malachi. In those Old Testament days, the Jews had their temple in Jerusalem and their synagogues in the various communities. I personally understand the "**storehouse**" to mean God's work which today most definitely begins in a local New Testament church, but is not limited to it. If a person cannot support the local church they're attending, then they ought to find one they can support. Therefore, local churches ought to be mindful in how they spend God's money. It ought to be to the glory of God and not to the glory of ourselves or our own selfish agendas.

Biblical Principle #2
New Testament Giving is to be Regular
"first ... of the week"

Although, it's true that it has been customary for believers to assemble on Sunday, the thought behind this verse goes further. Our giving doesn't have to be given on the first day of the week, but in Paul's case it was a most opportune time to take this "**collection**" since believers would congregate together on that day. Not only should the local church be supported by our financial giving, it ought to be periodic, systematic, and consecutive, not occasional, spasmodic, emotional, or haphazard. In other words, it should be on a regular systematic basis depending on how a person receives his income, it could be every other week, monthly, or whatever the case may be. For the believers in Paul's day, "**the first day of the week**" was the best time for them to receive this "**collection**" and do their giving. The simple principle

taught here is that our giving is to be given regularly from a heart of love and not compulsion. We learn from **Second Cor. 9:6-7**, **“But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.”** The believer is to give unto the Lord, not expecting anything in return, but His favor. God knows our hearts and the reason with which we give and why we do what we do.

This passage in our text is teaching that God’s **“tithes and offerings”** are not to be accumulated for ourselves or spent on our own selfish pleasures. When one fails to give as normal, then they ought to make it up as soon as possible. That’s what I believe **“Paul”** meant when he said, **“that there be no gatherings when I come.”** A good biblical principle to follow is to **“first”** give unto the Lord His rightful portion soon after receiving one’s income. Failure to stay up to date with God, often allows room for temptation to set in and our giving to become less than regular and systematic in so much that one never catches up.

Biblical Principle #3
New Testament Giving is for Everyone
“every one of you lay by him in store”

No believer, regardless of age, status, or wealth has been left out of the responsibility in giving. The rich, poor, young, and old alike are to share in God’s work by making a financial contribution. Children, who receive an allowance, ought to be taught by their parents the principle of giving out of what they have received or earned. I do believe that children ought to be given a task around the house to earn what they receive and taught a good work

ethic. The truth about the matter is that giving not only becomes an act of worship unto God, but it reveals our gratitude and love for Him. Jesus did not give just 10%, but His life in sacrifice for our sins on the cross. God gave the very best that Heaven had to offer, God in human flesh in Substitutionary Atonement for our sins.

Parents should **“teach”** their **“children”** from the youngest age the truths of God which includes the responsibility of financially supporting God’s work (**Deut. 6:4-7, Eph. 6:1-4**). This means that if a child receives an allowance, he should be taught about the Old Testament **“tithe”** and the principles of New Testament Grace-Giving. If a child has no money of their own, then parents ought to give them money to contribute regularly in order to teach the principle of financial worship unto the Lord. Furthermore, if parents are to teach their children the importance of worship, so should the church be taught.

Biblical Principle #4
New Testament Giving is to be Proportionate
“as God hath prospered”

Herein, we are reminded of the New Testament principle of grace-giving and not holding legalistically to the **“tithe.”** There is no substitute for the giving of our financial and material substance to God. We must never forget that God is the One Who allows us to prosper in the first place. Everything good that we possess is a gift of God’s grace. Our text shows us that New Testament grace-giving is on a basis that is equal and fair for all. Even the Old Testament **“tithe”** was a fair way to give because it robbed no man. It permitted all believers, regardless of wealth or poverty to receive God’s blessings from giving. Like the person tithing in the Old Testament, who gave 10% of a large income, was not blessed more than the person tithing off a small income. New Testament giving does not call for a mere

portion, but for a proportion of our income. When I use the word, proportion, I'm simply referring to a part of the whole.

The question that is often asked today is, "What proportion should be given since tithing is not actually mentioned in this passage?" First of all, we should never try to excuse ourselves from giving, by saying that **"tithing"** is Old Testament and we're not under Law. Since **"tithing"** was the minimum standard for Old Testament giving, it most certainly becomes a good general minimum standard under New Testament Grace. Besides, many of the early Christians did far more than **"tithing"** as they **"sold"** their possessions and gave to the needy (**Acts 4:34-35**). Scripture has not commanded believers to give all their finances to the Lord's work, but to give **"as God hath prospered."**

As a young person growing up, I heard of a very wealthy Christian businessman who lived off of 10% of his income and gave 90% to the Lord. That man was R.J. LeTourneau, an inventor of earth moving machinery who became widely known as the man who moved men and mountains. I mention him merely to illustrate how God admonishes believers today to give as **"God hath prospered."** Very few people can do what this man did, but we can give as **"God hath prospered"** us.

The Old Testament **"tithing"** consisted of the **"firstfruits of the land"** (**Deut. 26:10**) and the **"firstlings"** of their **"herds"** and **"flocks (Deut. 12:6)**. The offering of **"firstfruits"** by the Israelites was an acknowledgment that the produce of the land and increase of their animals came from God. It was an offering unto God of the fruits that ripened first and firstborn animals which taught that God ought to be FIRST in every aspect of our lives, including our money. These **"firstfruits"** in the Old Testament went for the support of the priesthood, just as our giving today finances God's work. We learn from the **"firstfruits"** offering that God deserves our best and not the leftovers. We're not to give God the least we can, but the most;

therefore, deducting our bills to determine how much we have left to give shows something about our priorities. That which we should give in today's economy is to be determined from what we financially gain.

If we're not careful, we can become very legalistic about what we give or how we determine a **"tithe"** as a minimum standard. Therefore, we must remember that giving is an act of **"worship"** and true **"worship"** originates within the **"heart"** of man and if a man's **"heart"** is not right with God, then neither will be his giving (**Jh. 4:24, Mk. 12:30**). One who is in love with God will not see how little he can give, but surrender his all unto the Lord, thus trying to be a good steward in every aspect of their finances. The giving of one's monetary gifts to God carries a special blessing and failure to give as God prospers forfeits that particular blessing.

Closing Thoughts

Giving is scriptural and tithing is normally a good starting place in determining how much we need to financially give to the Lord's work. The Christian is not forced by law to **"tithe,"** but he is compelled by love to obey the teachings of his Lord. We're not to give out of fear, personal recognition, or for the mere purpose of a tax benefit, but out of loyalty, obedience, and love (**II Cor. 9:6-7**). Don't ever try to figure out how you can give, just discover God's miraculous multiplication system through faithful obedience to God's Word. By faith, give your rightful proportion back to God and trust Him to supply your every need and in so doing, you'll discover that it's impossible to out-give God.

New Testament giving is an acknowledgment before Holy God of our appreciation for His saving and keeping grace as well as all His other bountiful blessings upon us. The Christian should give because he has personally

experienced how God “**gave His only begotten Son**” (Jh. 3:16). Not only does God want our mere “**tithes,**” but our all on the altar as a “**living sacrifice**” (Rom. 12:1). When God has our ALL, He will not just have 10% of our income, but everything that we possess.

A Final Few Words From the Author

If you have been reading this book from chapter one through chapter ten, I'm sure you've discovered that I have used a lot of repetition in words, phrases, and comments. This was done deliberately in hopes of driving home some major doctrinal truth pertaining to the subject of this book. I've used this same type of repetitive style in some of my previous books. When you stop to think about it, the Bible has a lot of repetitive doctrine found from Genesis to Revelation. It's God's way of instilling within us the mighty Truths of His Holy Word.

I trust that this book as been a blessing in pointing out the importance and seriousness of church membership. I've tried to make it clear that the “**church**” belongs to “**Christ**” and the “**born again**” believers are the “**living stones**” who comprise it. Searching for a “**church**” home today is not an easy undertaking. In fact, it's probably never been harder in church history or at least in my lifetime. There will never be a perfect “**church**” on this side of Heaven, but we do need one that will “**Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away *their* ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. (II Tim. 4:2-4)**