

Outline

Preface	2
Introduction	4
Chapter 1 – Kingdom of God/Heaven	6
Chapter 2 – The Old and New Testaments and Christ’s <i>Ekklesia</i>	12
A. Replacement Theology	13
B. “Church Age” Theology	16
Chapter 3 – How Should We Then Live?.....	21
Chapter 4 – The <i>Ekklesia</i> – a Building	22
A. Christ, the Pattern	22
B. Christ, Drawing All Together	23
Chapter 5 – The <i>Ekklesia</i> – the Body	26
A. Gifts Given	27
B. Purpose of Gifts	34
Chapter 6 – The <i>Ekklesia</i> and Marriage.....	43
Chapter 7 – The <i>Ekklesia</i> – Christ’s Purpose	48
A. The Great Commission	51
B. Growth	55
C. Church Membership	58
Chapter 8 – Government	73
A. Elders or Bishops	73
B. Deacons	86
C. An Example	89
D. Democracy/Congregational Government	94
Chapter 9 – The <i>Ekklesia</i> – Ordinances	97
A. Baptism	99
1. Reformed Tradition	100
2. Baptist Tradition	105
B. Lord’s Supper	115
Chapter 10 – Summary	120

Preface

Many of us have grown up with some concept of *church*. However, within our modern context, that can mean almost anything: from receiving a pep-talk once a week to make us feel good about ourselves as we face the trials of life, to a fire-and-brimstone declaration of our lot as sinners (although this has virtually disappeared), or simply the outside observation of something in which others have been involved. What we think of *church* will be shaped by our experience, and whether we have attended it regularly, sporadically, rarely, or not at all.

It was during one of our weekly gatherings (we meet in our home) that I was challenged to do a study of the church, with the suggestion that I base my study on the book, *New Testament Church Principles* by Arthur G. Clarke. However, as I began to read the book, I saw that to base a study on this book would be simply to build on another man's research and opinions, and really only produce an in-depth book review. With that settled, I determined to do a Book review of how we are to understand the *church*, and to begin by examining what Jesus meant when He said: "I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18). What exactly is it that Jesus is building?

Church has come to mean different things to different people – each denomination has their own expression of how they meet together, and the great disparity that is evident is affirmation that we must have lost our way from what Jesus intended for us. Therefore, as I began the study, it was with the determination to be carefully Biblical and not to lean upon the opinions of others. When was the last time that anyone considered, in the light of Scripture, what he is doing in church? Have we become like the proverbial hamster on a wheel, expending a lot of energy but seeing no spiritual results? Are we so involved in the programs and practices of our particular church that we no longer stop to think about what we are doing, or why we are doing it? Do we find ourselves saying: "Since the pastor says (or does) this, then it must be okay"? Do we ever question what we hear, read or see, and take the time to evaluate it according to the Bible?

Someone recently said that he finds that he is a fixer-upper of Biblical teaching – he will take what someone whom he might hold in high esteem has said or written, and he will tweak it just a little bit to make it better fit his understanding of the Scriptures (yes, he is a *pastor*). This is a very appropriate description of much of what takes place within our churches today – the foundation for activities and preaching is no longer the Word of God but our traditions and someone else's teachings; the instruction of Scripture is continually being tweaked to fit our changing tolerance of what is acceptable. Our minds have been shifted into neutral, the Bible has been shelved, and we go on our way confident that those who have gone before us have done their homework. Guess what! That is an ill-founded confidence. What Christians desperately need today is a fresh dose of love for God's truth (for without that we cannot be saved – 2 Thessalonians 2:10); it must be there if the Spirit of God is truly abiding within, but our sanctified carnality excludes the Holy Spirit (for to be carnally minded is *enmity against God* – Romans 8:7) and, like Samson, we don't even realize it (Judges 16:20) – the programs will continue without the Spirit of God. "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how

that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates [not standing the test, not approved]?” (2 Corinthians 13:5).¹

Since we are commanded to continually examine and test ourselves to ensure that we are in the faith of Jesus Christ (both *examine* and *prove* are in the present tense and imperative mood), should it not also be important to carefully scrutinize what we are doing to ensure that it is in keeping with Christ’s commands? What follows is a brief examination of what our Lord called His *ekklesia* (which the translators have dubbed the “church”). Are you prepared to test the *church* of western thinking against the *ekklesia* that Jesus said that He would build?

¹ Strong’s Concordance, Online Bible Edition.

Introduction

Today we hear the word *church* used in many different ways. Many will say that on Sundays they “go to church,” that is, they go to a building to sing songs, perhaps to tithe, to be led in prayer, and to hear a sermon (or sometimes, they simply call all of this *worship*). Other times we might hear of the “church universal,” signifying that the church is really larger than our local gathering, that it is, in fact, made up of all believers in Christ. Then, too, we may hear of the present time in which we’re living referred to as being “the Church Age”; this comes from a *dispensational* view of the Scriptures, which is founded upon the assumption that God has dealt with people through the ages in different ways based on His revelation to them – and, no, I do not believe that that is a Biblically accurate identification of our present day.

Consider a dictionary definition of the word *church*:

1. a building for public worship, especially in the Christian religion,
2. all the followers of a religion, especially the Christian religion, considered collectively,
3. a religious service that takes place in a church,
4. the clergy as distinct from lay people,
5. religious authority as opposed to the authority of the state, and
6. a denomination or branch of the Christian religion.²

So we see that when someone goes “to church,” they can be going both to the building and to the service that will take place. However, what we also see within this definition is structure (item #4) and authority (item #5). The definition presented would probably be accepted by most churchgoers today – in essence, it fits with our traditional view of what *church* is.

Clearly, it is important that we understand what we mean when we use the word *church*, for it serves many purposes today; however, we must be careful to define our terms so that we are properly understood. The word *church* appears many times within our King James Bible (KJV), and so we must determine what is meant when it is used. Does it agree with our modern understanding of the term? In other words, do the words that God used in His Word that are translated as *church* harmonize with what *church* is today?

The word translated as *church* in our KJV is the Greek word *ekklesia* (*ek-klay-see’-ah*), which is a compound word: *ek*, meaning *out of*, and *klēsis*, a *calling* – or, more simply, *called-out ones*.³ The word is not exclusively religious in nature, and so it does not specifically apply to a gathering of those with faith in Christ, but rather to a gathering of people out of the general masses. For example, the same Greek word is used of the mob that gathered in Ephesus when the silversmiths thought that they were losing their trade because of Paul’s teaching; here the translators saw fit to render it as *assembly* (Acts 19:32, 39, 41).

² Encarta Dictionary, “church.”

³ Vine’s Expository Dictionary, “assembly.”

On the other hand, if you consider the history of our word *church* (its etymology), you find that it comes from the Greek word *kyrios*, which means *ruler* or *lord*; and it was since AD 300 that the word *kyriakon* (*of the Lord*) began to be applied to the places where Christians worshipped.⁴ Interestingly, it was shortly after this that Constantine, the Roman Emperor, led a softening of the state's attitude toward Christians, and, as Emperor, went on to introduce many changes into the *church* of that day. We find the Greek word *kuriakos*, meaning "belonging to the Lord," used twice in the Scriptures: in 1 Corinthians 11:20 we see the "Lord's supper" (*kuriakon deipnon*) and in Revelation 1:10 John writes of the "Lord's day" (*kuriakh hmera*).⁵ What is evident is that the word *church* has a fundamentally different historical meaning from the Greek word *ekklesia* that has been translated as *church* within most modern Bibles.⁶

At this point we might be tempted to say: "So what?" What difference does all of this make? It sounds so much like semantics and seeking to split the proverbial hair – the discussion is about shades of meaning, but, in reality, does it make any difference? Perhaps there is an element of truth to that query, but, unfortunately, the semantics in this case have made it much easier for our adversary to hoodwink us into believing a skewed version of the truth. The voice of most theologians can be heard loudly proclaiming the traditions to which we have all become accustomed; nevertheless, it is important to hear the Word of God on these matters. We must be Bereans and hold the Scriptures as our Standard so that we may know the Truth.

⁴ <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?l=c&p=13>, "church."

⁵ For a study of the Sabbath and the Lord's Day, see *What of the Sabbath?*; <https://www.thenarrowtruth.com/what-of-the-sabbath.html>

⁶ A check of 28 English Bibles, showed *ekklesia* translated as *assembly* five times, *community* once, and the other 22 occasions as *church*.

Chapter 1 – Kingdom of God/Heaven

Jesus said, “I will build my *ekklesia*” (Matthew 16:18); before we go further, it is necessary that we provide a context for this *ekklesia*. We read much of the kingdom of God and kingdom of heaven in the Gospels; the phrase *kingdom of heaven* is only used in Matthew’s writing (32 times), and *kingdom of God* is mentioned 54 times in the Gospels (five times in Matthew, 15 in Mark, 32 in Luke and twice in John), and 69 times in the post-Messianic writings. John the Baptist heralded the kingdom as he prepared the way for Jesus the Messiah (Matthew 3:2), and Jesus, when He began His teaching ministry, spoke much about this kingdom (Matthew 4:17). If we are to understand God’s intention for the *ekklesia*, then we must have an appreciation for the greater context within which we gather in His name.

The terms *kingdom of God* and *kingdom of heaven* are often used interchangeably. Jesus said that it is very difficult for a rich man to enter into the *kingdom of heaven*, and then went on to say that it would be easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the *kingdom of God* (Matthew 19:23-24) – clearly, they are the same. What is important for our consideration is that we understand that there is only one kingdom.

Kingdom comes from a Greek word (*basileia*) that primarily means *sovereignty* or *royal power*.⁷ Rather than the physical realm of a sovereign, it refers to the right of a sovereign to rule. There are times when the word is used to represent an actual physical kingdom, and these are generally evident from the context. For our purposes, the *kingdom of God* refers to where God is presently sovereign; at this time, the kingdom of God is *not of this world* (John 18:36), however its physical fulfillment will take place when Jesus returns and sets up His kingdom on earth. We acknowledge that God is ultimately sovereign (Psalm 103:19), yet we must also recognize that, within His sovereignty, He has permitted Satan to rebel and man to sin. So even while we are aware of the overall authority of God over the affairs of the earth, we must also realize that Satan is the ruler of this world at this time and is called the “prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:2; cf. Luke 4:6-8). When the Pharisees demanded of Jesus to know when the kingdom of God would come (their intent was to determine when Rome would be overthrown), Jesus said that it would not come “with observation,” as in *lo here* it is, but the “kingdom of God is within [in the midst of] you” (Luke 17:20-21) – Jesus was that all-encompassing kingdom Who was walking among them.⁸ He identified Himself with the kingdom of God: if we are *in Christ*, then we are a part of His kingdom (Romans 8:1), and He is the *Head* of it (Colossians 1:18). When Jesus met with Nicodemus, He openly declared: “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). This is exactly the same truth that was spoken to the Pharisees in Luke 17: the kingdom of God is identified with the Lord – unless you are reborn through the washing of the Word of God and the indwelling Spirit of God, you cannot enter into the kingdom of God, nor can you experience an abiding relationship with Jesus Christ. From this we learn that the kingdom of God in the world today is existent in the hearts and lives of those

⁷ Vine’s “kingdom.”

⁸ Friberg Lexicon, *Bibleworks* 8.

who, by faith, have the Spirit of God abiding within – those who abide *in* Christ, believe His Word, and live in obedience to it. There will come a day, when the Lord Jesus returns, that He will establish His kingdom-rule on this earth, and then His kingdom will take on a physical dimension.

Although we do not find the phrase “kingdom of heaven” or “kingdom of God” in the pre-Messianic Scriptures, the kingdom was already there and it is referred to as the “kingdom of the Lord” or Jehovah. David explains that Solomon was chosen by Jehovah to “sit upon the throne of the kingdom of the LORD over Israel” (1 Chronicles 28:5); David drew a distinction between the *kingdom of Jehovah* and the nation of *Israel* – he saw Solomon as being the king of the Lord’s kingdom first, and thereby ruling over Israel. Clearly, David saw the kingdom of the Lord as being *over* Israel, and if Solomon would be obedient to the Lord, then his kingdom would never cease (1 Chronicles 28:7). When the Lord brought Israel out of Egypt, His desire was for them to become a “kingdom of priests” who would point the nations to the God of all creation (Exodus 19:6), because the promise to Abraham was that through his descendants all of the nations of the earth would be blessed – not only was this a promise of the Messiah to come, but it also indicated the responsibility of the children of promise. Those who are *in Christ* by faith are no different, for Peter calls us “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people” (1 Peter 2:9; cp. Deuteronomy 14:2).

Lest we miss the broad scope of this spiritual kingdom, the Apostle Peter wrote,

⁴Whereby [through Jesus Christ] are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature [the Holy Spirit abiding within – Romans 8:9], having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. ⁵And beside this, giving all diligence, **add to your faith** virtue [uprightness]; and to virtue knowledge [understanding, insight]; ⁶And to knowledge temperance [self-control]; and to temperance patience [perseverance]; and to patience godliness [reverence]; ⁷And to godliness brotherly kindness [*philadelphia* – brotherly love]; and to brotherly kindness charity [*agape* – love as an act of the will]. ⁸For if these things be in you, and abound, they make *you that ye shall* neither *be* barren [inactive] nor unfruitful in the [full] knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ ... ¹⁰Wherefore the rather, brethren, **give diligence** [make every effort] to make your calling and election sure: for **if ye do these things**, ye shall never fall [the Greek negatives *ou* and *me* along with a subjunctive verb makes this the strongest negative possible: *absolutely never*]: ¹¹For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the **everlasting** [eternal] **kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ**. (2 Peter 1:4-11).⁹

God has provided us with everything necessary to live godly lives; the fruit of the Spirit will reveal itself through the *new man* whom we are to put on – created by God in all *righteousness and true holiness* (Galatians 5:22-23; Ephesians 4:24). We are admonished by Peter to grow in our walk with the Lord (it is a command: “add to your faith...” – 2 Peter 1:5); we are to walk worthy of our holy calling (Ephesians 4:1; 2 Timothy 1:9). We are also commanded to make our *calling sure* (2 Peter 1:10), for in so doing we will establish our steadfastness in Christ and, through this, we will be provided an entrance into the “everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:11). Notice that this is an *everlasting kingdom*, an eternal kingdom because it is of the Lord Jesus Who is God eternal;¹⁰ notice as well that access into it will not be attained by coasting! We

⁹ Friberg Lexicon; Strong’s Online; https://www.ntgreek.org/learn_nt_greek/subj-negation.htm.

¹⁰ Friberg Lexicon.

are called to expend energy (*give diligence*), not only physically, but we are to labor spiritually to ensure that we will find that entrance into Christ's kingdom that will be richly provided for us. Jesus said: "Enter ye in [imperative mood, a command!] at the strait gate ... Because strait *is* the gate, and narrow *is* the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matthew 7:13-14)¹¹ – He commanded us to enter through the Narrow Gate (the Lord, Himself – John 14:6), but warned that there would only be a *few* who would find Him. We are called to be steadfast in the faith (1 Corinthians 16:13), vigilant (1 Peter 5:8), sober (1 Thessalonians 5:6, 8; 1 Peter 1:13; 4:7; 5:8), diligent (2 Peter 3:14), wary (Philippians 3:2; Colossians 2:8; 2 Peter 3:17), and we are commanded to be imitators of God (Ephesians 5:1). Our task is great: we must labor, not through the efforts of the flesh that will only bring condemnation, but through the inner working of the abiding Spirit of God. "*There is* therefore now no condemnation to them which are **in Christ Jesus**, who walk not after the flesh, but after [are living according to] the Spirit" (Romans 8:1).¹²

When God created man, He gave him a task to do: "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish [fill] the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth" (Genesis 1:28).¹³ God gave to man authority over the earth, to bring it into subjection, and also to have dominion, or rule, over all of the other living creatures on the earth (the Kingdom of God on earth – something that will be realized again in fullness with the new heaven and new earth of Revelation 21). Yet man turned his back on this privilege, and, through his rebellion, turned the dominion of God's creation over to Satan (Luke 4:6-8). It is clear from 2 Peter 1 that the kingdom of our Lord Jesus is without beginning or ending, and therefore, God's plan is to have as part of that kingdom, those who are willing to be redeemed. Adam's sin did not thwart God's plan to build His kingdom, for, from Adam until today, God has always extended His grace to those who are willing to be saved through faith in the redemption that only He could provide. We are spiritually born into this vast multitude (this great cloud of witnesses, Hebrews 12:1) when we look back to the redemption that was transacted by Christ, and accept His cleansing by faith.

Jeremiah spoke of this day:

³¹Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: ³²Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: ³³But this *shall be* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

Jeremiah was told of a day when the Law of God (*my law*), the Ten Commandments written by the finger of God upon tables of stone, would be placed within us – a day when the Spirit of God, as promised by the Lord Jesus, would come to reside within all those who believed and accepted

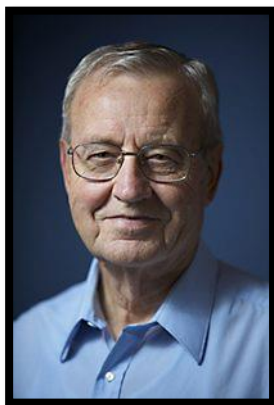
¹¹ Strong's Online.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

God's salvation by faith so that they would know Him. When Jesus said: "This is my blood of the new testament [Covenant], which is shed for many for the remission [forgiveness] of sins" (Matthew 26:28),¹⁴ He was implementing the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy. The disciples, to whom He spoke these words, were all descendants of Israel, and indeed, Jesus' entire ministry on earth was directed to the *lost sheep of the house of Israel* (Matthew 15:24). Romans 11:17-18 makes it clear that by faith the Gentiles are grafted into the same **spiritual Olive Tree** as Israel – the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul explains that not everyone who is of Jewish descent is considered to be of true Israel (Romans 9:3-9); Hosea recognized that God would include for Himself a people outside of Israel: "...I will say to *them which were* not my people, Thou *art* my people; and they shall say, *Thou art* my God" (Hosea 2:23; Romans 9:25; 1 Peter 2:10). Jesus stated plainly that He had those who were not of the fold of Israel who would hear His voice and He would lead them as a part of the one flock that is His (John 10:16). Romans 8:2-4 makes it abundantly clear that the righteousness of the Law of God is fulfilled in us through the working of the indwelling Spirit of God; as we walk according to the leading of the Spirit, we are called the "sons of God" (Romans 8:14). This is the *kingdom of God* within us: being born again by faith in the Word of God (the Lord Jesus Christ – Revelation 19:13) and the abiding Spirit of God (John 3:5).

There are those who claim that the kingdom of God "resides in the small, despised apostolic churches" of today;¹⁵ yet it cannot be disputed that these small, non-mainstream churches also include unbelievers in their fold. So we are forced to return to the prophecy of Jeremiah that foretold a time when God would put His Laws into our inward parts by His Spirit, as confirmed by Romans 8. We like to consider the kingdom of God to at least be an identifiable group of people – this best fits with our cultural expectations. However, Peter identified those whom he calls "strangers" (as in, those dwelling in a foreign land; i.e., Christians living in the world) as a "royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people," even while he acknowledged that they were *scattered* throughout the land (1 Peter 1:1, 2:9). God's calling is always to the individual; Elijah learned this when he despaired of Israel's apostasy and thought that he was the only one who still sought after God. The Lord told him that there were still 7,000 who had not bowed to Baal (1 Kings 19:18; Romans 11:2-5); these were righteous individuals, known to God, among the multitudes of the nation of Israel who had either fallen away or remained in paganism.



Dallas Willard

It is interesting to realize that, along with today's onslaught of the contemplative prayer (spiritual formation, centering prayer, etc.) movement, which focuses so heavily upon a return to the mystical teachings of the early church fathers (in reality the founders of the Roman Catholic Church), there is also a departure from the accountability of the individual. Dallas Willard, in his book *Renovation of the Heart*, comments in this manner on the admonition in Ephesians 4:24 to put on the new man: "the individual or **group** more and more effectively acts for the good things they intend; and the will itself evermore broadens and

¹⁴ Strong's Online.

¹⁵ David Cloud, "The Kingdom of God," <http://www.wayoflife.org/database/kingdomofgod.html>

deepens its devotion to good and the God of the good” (emphasis added).¹⁶ Notice that the group is viewed in the same way as the individual – yet, within Scripture, there is no such thing as group salvation; each individual must believe (Acts 16:31 is directed to an individual: *thou*). “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever [singular] believeth [*is believing* (present tense; singular)] in him should not perish [singular], but have [*should be having* (present tense; subjunctive mood [a possibility but not a certainty], singular)] everlasting life” (John 3:16).¹⁷

This Biblically foreign concept of group salvation is equally evident in the dominionist teachings of popular men like Rick Warren. Dominionism teaches that through accepting Christ, the believer now has authority, or *dominion*, over every area of life; therefore, it is only fitting that believers endeavor to exercise that control within our culture. You often hear today, even among Evangelicals, of “saving the culture” – this is dominion theology. The focus is on establishing Christ’s kingdom on earth in preparation for Him to return to then assume its leadership. Nowhere in Scripture are we told to work toward the salvation of our culture; our culture is under the control of Satan, and will be **until Christ returns** to establish His kingdom on earth – yes, it is Christ Who will come to rule with a rod of iron (Revelation 19:15), and it is certain that we cannot build His kingdom on earth when He specifically stated that at this time, His kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36). “This new gospel of dominionism has been teaching, at least since the mid 1970s, the principle of group conversion. According to this theology, small groups can agree by consensus to become ‘saved.’”¹⁸ Consider that Rick Warren’s declared means for the resolution of social difficulties is a trilateral partnership: “The third partnership involves a relationship between faith communities, the government and the business sector.”¹⁹ In Warren’s words: “The government has the administrative power to form agendas and set goals, the business sector can provide the expertise, the capital and the managerial skills, and the church can provide the distributive network and the local credibility.”²⁰ Notice Warren’s rather nebulous reference to “faith communities” – there is nothing within his teachings that would characterize them as being narrowly defined, yet Jesus openly declared that the way to life is narrow and that there are few who will find it (Matthew 7:13-14). Jesus assured Pilate that His kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36), and Luke 4:6-8 confirms that they remain securely under Satan’s control; clearly Rick Warren and Jesus are on different pages! By downgrading the concept of salvation, room has been made for the dominionist’s agenda: get group assent to a faith concept, and you have achieved the salvation of the culture – in reality, there is nothing Biblical about such an approach, and certainly nothing *saving* in such a concept of *salvation*. Warren, and all those promoting this kingdom-now theology, have overrun



Rick Warren

¹⁶ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, p. 253.

¹⁷ Stephanus 1550 NT, *Bibleworks* 8.

¹⁸ “Christian Imperialism,” <http://herescope.blogspot.com/2006/01/christian-imperialism-update-5-group.html>

¹⁹ “Pastor Argues Faith is the Missing Link,” *The Hoya*, February 5, 2008, <http://www.thehoya.com/node/15251>

²⁰ Ibid.

their headlights and are speeding on in utter darkness; we are called to be aware of such, to be discerning, and to weigh their teachings carefully (1 John 4:1).

As we look about us today, we easily recognize that Christ's kingdom has not been physically established on this earth yet, despite the best efforts of men like Warren and his fellow dominion-now advocates. The evidence of Satan's activities is prolific; he is the destroyer, and you do not have to look far to recognize that his handiwork is everywhere (1 Peter 5:8, the word *devour* means to *destroy*²¹). Yet in the midst of this, Christ is still building His assembly of redeemed ones – not a physical kingdom, as it will be when He returns to earth someday, but a spiritual kingdom of saints who have been redeemed from sin – those *called-out* ones who have been made a part of His kingdom through faith in His finished work of redemption.

²¹ Strong's Online.

Chapter 2 – The Old and New Testaments and Christ's Ekklesia

Today our Scriptures are divided into “Old Testament” (OT) and “New Testament” (NT), and it is often carefully explained that *testament* means covenant.²² It is further clarified that the OT carries the Old Covenant that has now been replaced by the New Covenant that is contained in the NT. To a degree that is correct, for the NT contains the account of Jesus' ministry on earth during which He kept the Law of God and fulfilled the ordinances of the Mosaic Law so that He qualified as that perfect sacrifice for the sins of mankind – He was eternal God come in the flesh. It is also clear that at His last meal with His disciples, Jesus spoke of the contents of the cup representing the *new testament*, or New Covenant, in His blood (Luke 22:20); this is the fulfillment of the words of Jehovah spoken to the prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

However, what too often takes place in our minds is the formation of a great gap between the OT and the NT. We fail to recognize that the NT is built upon the OT, and that God has given both to us as His Word. Under the New Covenant we “are built upon the **foundation** of the apostles [NT] and prophets [OT], Jesus Christ himself being the chief **corner stone**” (Ephesians 2:20). Isaiah wrote of this: “Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious **corner stone**, a sure **foundation**: he that believeth shall not make haste [yield or hurry away]” (Isaiah 28:16).²³ The prevailing thought among believers today is that the “church” is God's present avenue of work in this world (we are in the “Church Age”); it began when Jesus declared that He would build His *church* (*ekklesia*), someday He will finish it, and then He will go back to working with Israel. In essence, what is being said is that the NT speaks to the “church” that Jesus is building today, and the OT outlines God's dealings with Israel that will continue at a future date after the “church” is completed.

If we would permit the Scriptures to speak for themselves, and set aside our manmade theologies, however well systematized they might be, we would discover that God's Word to us is **one** revelation. Within the Greek Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, the word *ekklesia* appears over 41 times, and the corresponding Hebrew word has been translated as *assembly* or *congregation* in the KJV. They are all used of the children of Israel or Judah, and in each case it refers to a special gathering of the people. God's *called-out ones* have always been there; the prophets of Israel spoke much of the remnant that the Lord would restore, even as they spoke against the apostasy of their day – really their message is very appropriate for our day of spiritual carnage.

Two primary errors have flowed out of an incorrect consideration of the OT Scriptures from our post-Messianic perspective, and both of these are prevalent today. It is important that we understand these so that we can recognize them when we hear them, and so that we can read the Scriptures with a proper understanding of the work that God is doing today against the background of what He began with Adam.

²² Strong's Online.

²³ Holladay Lexicon, *Bibleworks* 8.

A. Replacement Theology

The first of these errors says that the “Church” has replaced Israel in God’s economy, and so all of the promises that God made to Israel are for us today. Today this is commonly known as *replacement theology* (an older term is *supersessionism*, where the church is said to *supersede* Israel²⁴); it says that God has finished with Israel because they rejected Jesus as their Messiah, and God has set them aside forever. Those who hold to this position use Matthew 21:43 as a basis for their understanding: “Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.” To whom was this addressed? Jesus was speaking to the chief priests and elders of the people of Israel, and the thrust is that because they refused to recognize Jesus for Who He is, the kingdom of God would be given to a *people* (singular; a specific people but not a *nation* as we think of it today) who would bring forth the fruits in keeping with God’s kingdom. These Jewish leaders recognized that Jesus spoke these things against them (Matthew 21:45), yet they were afraid of taking action against Him because the people considered Jesus to be a prophet. Even though Jesus’ words were directed specifically to the Jewish leaders who were spiritual failures, it is clear from Israel’s history that they, as a people, were not strong in their commitment to the Lord. Isaiah wrote that though Israel should become as the sand of the sea, only a *remnant* would *repent* (Isaiah 10:22);²⁵ God has always worked with the faithful few. Jesus’ ministry on earth was to the *lost sheep of the house of Israel* (Matthew 15:24); He taught the people of Israel, confronted their spiritual leaders, gained great followings, and we are told that *many believed in His name* because of the miracles that they had witnessed, yet Jesus would not commit Himself to them (John 2:23-24). At the time of His crucifixion, the *many* were gone, and after Jesus’ ascension, the disciples who gathered to await the coming of the Comforter were 120 (Acts 1:15) – a small remnant of the crowds that had followed the Lord and were beneficiaries of His miracles.

Therefore, when Jesus said to the Jewish leaders: “The kingdom of God shall be taken from you” and will be given to a people who will live in accordance with God’s kingdom, what did He mean? As Jesus met with His disciples on the evening before His crucifixion, He took the cup and declared that this drink symbolized the New Covenant in His blood that was about to be shed (Luke 22:20). Along with this *New Covenant* came a fulfillment and completion of the Mosaic Law, particularly as it pertained to the priesthood, the sacrifices and the temple (Ephesians 2:13-16) – the *new* replaced the *old* (Hebrews 8:13). With the implementation of the New Covenant, the kingdom of God came in a whole new way and with a new power (Revelation 12:10): God’s Law (the Ten Commandments) are now written upon our minds and placed within our hearts (Hebrews 10:15-17), and the Spirit of God (the Comforter) was dispatched to dwell within everyone who places his faith in the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 8:9). “For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink [physical things as the Jews had come to understand it]; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” (Romans 14:17). Jesus told Pilate: “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36), and the New Covenant follows this truth. In essence, Jesus alerted the Jewish religious leaders that God’s kingdom would no longer be theirs: their Mosaic Law was about to be fulfilled and replaced (*abolished* in Ephesians 2:15) by the New

²⁴ <http://www.shema.com/Combating%20Replacement%20Theology/crt-004.php>

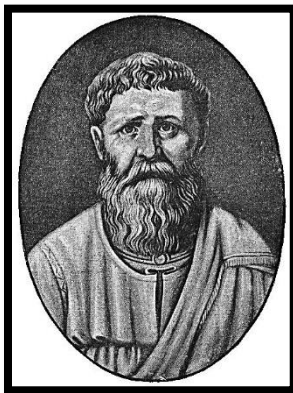
²⁵ Brown, Driver, Briggs Lexicon, *Bibleworks* 8.

Covenant. As a nation they had fulfilled God's mandate for them – to bring the Prophet into the world (Deuteronomy 18:15) Who was the promised Blessing to *all families of the earth* (Genesis 12:3).²⁶

A careful examination of the Scriptures reveals that changes did take place for Israel. As Jesus died, the veil of the temple was torn from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51), this was a sure sign to the religious leadership of Israel that the temple rituals had been ended by God, for only He could tear it from the top down. As Jesus died for the sins of the world, the temple, its priesthood and the sacrifices were rendered obsolete; referring to Jehovah's words to Jeremiah, the writer of Hebrews declared: "In that he [Jehovah] saith, A new *covenant*, he hath made the first old [declared to be obsolete]. Now that which decayeth [is being made old] and waxeth old [is becoming obsolete] *is* ready to vanish away [is close to disappearing]" (Hebrews 8:13a).²⁷ It was only a few years after these words were written that the temple and all of Jerusalem were completely destroyed by the Romans; all of what Jesus had fulfilled was now removed: the temple and Jerusalem were completely gone (even as Jesus had predicted, there was not one stone that was left in place – Luke 19:41-44), and the Jews of Jerusalem were either killed or taken captive – the exercise of the Law of Moses came to a halt (the central aspects of the priesthood and the temple were wiped out – it was like they had *vanished*).²⁸

Replacement theology says that God has turned away from Israel, and that the "Church" has become His new Israel and assumes all of the promises, both nationally and spiritually, that were made to Israel. This is where the advocates of this theology err; they endeavor to establish the "Church" as a replacement Israel – when it is not! Earlier we referred to Paul's teachings in

Romans 11; let's return to that and have a closer look so that we can better understand exactly what is laid out for Israel and for us, His *ekklesia*.



Augustine

Paul begins by laying down a principle in Romans 11:16 – "For if the firstfruit *be* holy, the lump *is* also *holy*: and if the root *be* holy, so *are* the branches." He uses two illustrations to establish a single truth. The first (*firstfruit* and *lump*) would be very familiar to a Jewish audience; before the Jews could partake of a new harvest, they had to bring a sheaf of barley (*omer*, can refer to the sheaf or to a dry measure; barley was the first grain to ripen) to the temple.²⁹ The priest would *wave* this before the Lord (the *Wave Offering*) as the expression of Israel's acknowledgment of God as being their Provider and their readiness to give to Him the first of their harvest, before they used any of it for themselves (Leviticus 23:11, 14). *Lump* (*phurama*) speaks of that which has been mixed and kneaded – hence the bread that would be made from the harvested grain.³⁰ In essence, Paul is saying that if the harvest has been

²⁶ For more on this see: <https://www.thenarrowtruth.com/the-role-of-israel-today.html>

²⁷ Friberg Lexicon.

²⁸ Ernest L. Martin, *The Temples that Jerusalem Forgot*, p. 18.

²⁹ Strong's Online.

³⁰ Ibid.

consecrated to the Lord (made *holy*), then that which is made from the sanctified harvest is also holy.

The *root* and the *branches* are more closely related to the parable that Jesus taught in John 15. *Root* (*rhiza*) identifies the cause or reason for something, and for a plant that is its root.³¹ Within His parable, Jesus spoke of the Vine and the branches – the *Vine* being identified with the *root* as Paul uses it here. Jesus said: “I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every *branch* that beareth fruit, he purgeth [prunes] it, that it may bring forth more fruit ... Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it [should] abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.” (John 15:1-4).³² Since the *Vine* is holy, then it should be anticipated that its branches will reflect the holiness of the Vine – if the *root* is *holy*, then the *branches* that are abiding in the *Root* will also be holy.

We must understand that both the *firstfruit* and the *root* are the Lord Jesus Christ: “now is Christ risen from the dead, *and* become the firstfruits [singular] of them that slept” (1 Corinthians 15:20) – Christ is the first Who was risen who would never die; as John wrote the Revelation, he identified Jesus this way: “behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David” (Revelation 5:5) – Jesus, born about a thousand years after David, is called his *Root*. The One Who declared: “Before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58) is the *Root of David*, and the One in Whom we must faithfully abide if we would bear fruit for Him. Therefore, everything that is tied to the Lord (whether the meal for baking or the branch) is holy – the key being the connection to Him!

Returning to Paul's illustration in Romans 11, he goes on to say that some of the branches have been broken off because of unbelief, and that some wild branches have been grafted into the Tree (the Lord Jesus) by faith (Romans 11:17-20). This is an illustration of the Jews and Gentiles being made one in the Lord Jesus (Ephesians 2:14-16); the natural branches (Jews) of the Olive Tree were broken off because of unbelief and the unnatural branches of the wild olive tree (Gentiles) were grafted in through faith. Jesus spoke of this: “And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold [*aule* – speaking of Israel]: them also I must bring [lead], and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold [*poimne* – **flock**], *and* one shepherd” (John 10:16).³³ There is only one flock, kingdom of God, *ekklesia* and *one shepherd*. After recounting some of the faithful of the OT, the writer of Hebrews concludes with this: “And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect [complete]” (Hebrews 11:39-40)³⁴ – the OT saints (even from before Abraham) await the redeemed who will come to faith in Christ before they, with us, will be *complete*. As Paul began his letter to the Roman Christians, he carefully explained that a Jew is someone who through faith has circumcised his heart and is right before God (Romans 2:29), even as Abraham was declared to be righteous because of his faith in the Lord before circumcision was instituted as a sign of God's promise (Romans 4:3, 11). Faith in the Lord and faithfulness to the Lord is what makes us a child of God and of Abraham (Romans 4:16). As John describes the New Jerusalem for us, we are told that the gates bear the names of the twelve tribes of Israel and that

³¹ Strong's Online; Friberg Lexicon.

³² Friberg Lexicon; Stephanus 1550 NT.

³³ Strong's Online.

³⁴ Ibid.

the foundation of the City carries the names of the twelve Apostles (Revelation 21:12, 14). It is through the faith of Abraham that entrance is gained to that City, but the foundation of all saving faith (OT and NT) is the Lord Jesus Christ, the Chief Corner Who brought in the New Covenant forever (the Message of the Apostles).

The formulation of replacement theology seems to have begun with Augustine (although its roots go back to the second century AD),³⁵ and it is prevalent today among those whose doctrines have been strongly influenced by his teachings – the Roman Catholics, and many who adhere to Reformed theology, hold Augustine and his teachings in high regard. From the second century forward, this replacement theology grew out of a desire to eradicate everything Jewish from Christianity; very early anti-Semitism gained traction among the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church, and the Reformers didn't shake this sentiment.

Consider an example from Augustine's writings. Ezekiel wrote that the Lord would "take you [Israel] from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land" (Ezekiel 36:24); this was to be done because of the Lord's holy name and so the heathen would know that He is God (Ezekiel 36:22-23). Augustine took this seemingly straightforward passage and said: "And therefore we ought to take this saying ... not literally, as if they referred to Israel after the flesh, but spiritually, as referring to the spiritual Israel. For the Church, without spot or wrinkle, gathered out of all nations, and destined to reign for ever with Christ, is itself the land of the blessed, the land of the living ..."³⁶ By spiritualizing the promises made to Israel regarding the physical land of promise, Augustine was able to reject Israel outright and turn his attention to "the Church" as the replacement for Israel within God's economy. Such spiritualization of God's Word served to heighten an already growing attitude of anti-Semitism within the rapidly-forming, apostate Roman Catholic Church. What is fascinating is that this attitude was not lost during the reformation: Martin Luther considered the destruction of Jerusalem and concluded that "the Jews, surely rejected by God, are no longer his people, and neither is he any longer their God;"³⁷ John Calvin is quoted: "Their [the Jews] rotten and unbending stiffneckedness deserves that they be oppressed unendingly and without measure or end and that they die in their misery without the pity of anyone."³⁸ Such thinking only served to foment the anti-Jewishness that had characterized the Roman Catholic Church from its earliest beginnings, and provided a rationalized justification for "the Church" replacing Israel entirely.

B. "Church Age" Theology

The second error that has flowed out of the separation of the OT and NT is that the "church" is something that God has inserted into the passage of time and it has nothing to do with Israel. This theological position is a product of a dispensational approach to Bible interpretation, which "is essentially the belief or teaching that God has worked with mankind according to different

³⁵ <http://www.shema.com/Combating%20Replacement%20Theology/crt-004.php>

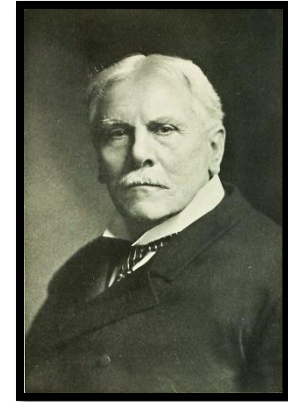
³⁶ Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, Book III, Chapter 34, paragraph 49.

³⁷ Martin Luther, "On the Jews and their Lies," <http://www.humanitas-international.org/showcase/chronography/documents/luther-jews.htm>

³⁸ https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/John_Calvin

methods in different time periods.”³⁹ Probably the most well-known proponent of this teaching was C.I. Scofield, who developed a study Bible around seven dispensations of Biblical interpretation (he saw seven), and placed his dispensational notes on virtually every page.

David Cloud, a Fundamental Baptist and avid dispensationalist, has admitted that there are no specific indications within Scripture as to how many dispensations there are, and says: “The exact number of dispensations or ages is not what is important ... The important point is that there HAVE been various periods during which God has worked out His purposes, and during these periods God has related to men in different ways and has required different things of them. To understand and interpret the Bible properly, one must understand this” (emphasis his).⁴⁰ However, having underscored the importance of dispensational interpretation, he then makes this statement: “I am convinced that the way of salvation was the same in principle in the Old Testament as it is today, and that was by faith through God’s grace based on the shed blood of Christ (Romans 4). Further, it appears to me that Ephesians 2:18-22 tells us that the household of God, that great temple that God is building, ultimately includes both Israel and church age saints”; he then goes on to conclude “that no one system of dispensational theology can satisfy everything the Bible teaches about Israel, the church, and future events.”⁴¹ From this one must conclude that the dispensational grid for Biblical interpretation is not as critical as Cloud claims (he virtually contradicts himself on this whole subject) because: 1) it doesn’t really matter how many dispensations you hold, 2) the thread of salvation from Adam to the end of time is the same, and 3) no one system of dispensationalism will work all of the time. So, my question to Cloud would be: “Why are you so adamant that you must have a dispensational model in order to interpret the Bible correctly?” I would concur that we need to be ever conscious of the context of a passage that we might be reading, but I do not think that it is essential to hold to a complex, dispensational understanding of man’s history in order to properly understand God’s Word to us. Why do we need a manmade grid through which to view the Scriptures, when God has promised that His Spirit will provide us with the discernment needed to understand His Word (John 16:13; 1 Corinthians 2:14)? Once again, man has created a system of theology that may appear to fit together so neatly, yet even Cloud admits that it leaves gaps in a proper understanding of Scripture. Why not simply set man’s created systematic theologies aside, and permit the Spirit of God to speak to us through the words that God has preserved for us? Unfortunately, there are few of us today who do not carry about an excessive amount of theological baggage that hinders our understanding of the Bible.



C.I. Scofield

Even though David Cloud has admitted that any dispensational model will not work all of the time, he still insists upon using dispensationalism to interpret the Scriptures; consequently, he refers to the present *dispensation* as the “Church Age” – one of the nine dispensations that he

³⁹ Matt Costella, “The Historical Development of Dispensational Theology Within Biblical Fundamentalism,” *Foundation Magazine*, Jan-Feb 2002.

⁴⁰ David Cloud, “Study the Bible Dispensationally.”

⁴¹ Ibid.

uses.⁴² Matt Costella, in his article “The Historical Development of Dispensational Theology Within Biblical Fundamentalism,” has listed several characteristics of dispensational theology:

- a rigidly applied literalism in the interpretation of Scripture
- **a dichotomy between Israel and the church**
- **a restricted view of the church**
- a Jewish concept of the kingdom
- a postponement of the kingdom
- **a distinction between law and grace that creates a multiple basis for God's dealing with man**
- **a compartmentalization of Scripture**
- **a pre-tribulation rapture**
- its view of the purpose of the great tribulation
- its view of the millennial reign of Christ
- its view of the eternal state
- its view of the apostate nature of Christendom (emphasis added)⁴³



Matt Costella

Of these, you will note that several create all kinds of difficulties with many passages of Scripture; nevertheless, these support the modern Evangelical understanding of the “Church Age.” Cloud declares: “Dispensational Theology helps us study the Bible within its proper context.”⁴⁴ However, again I ask: rather than submit the text of God’s Word to the arbitrary divisions (dispensations) of man’s making, why not simply study the Scriptures always being aware of its context?

The *Church Age* is held to be a “parenthetical time frame in which God no longer dealt specifically with the Jews but with the church, which is comprised of all who believe on Him, whether Jew or Gentile.”⁴⁵ Even though Cloud understands that men from all “dispensations” are saved in the same way, he still speaks of the Church Age as a separate and distinct dispensation. There is a sense in which he holds the “church” in isolation, and yet seems to understand a great coming together in the future. However, as we have already seen, there are glimpses in the OT of the New Covenant that God would make with Israel, and through which He would draw people of all nations together (Psalm 22:27; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hosea 2:23). Yes, it was a mystery; in Colossians 1:25-27, Paul confirms that this was a mystery in the OT. Yet a mystery is NOT something that is unknown, just something that is difficult to fully understand or explain. So when we read “Christ in you, the hope of glory” spoken of as being a mystery in times past – it is not something that was unknown, just something that was not clearly understood from the OT perspective (Colossians 1:27).

Too many Evangelicals view the “Church” as an afterthought on the part of God; when Israel’s religious leaders rejected Jesus as their Messiah, God came up with a Plan B that saw the Gospel extended to the Gentiles. Their view is that Jesus came to earth to establish His earthly kingdom,

⁴² The *father of dispensationalism* (John Nelson Darby) proposed six, Scofield had seven; proposals have varied from as few as three to as many as 18, with many in between;

<https://theologue.files.wordpress.com/2014/08/howmanydispensations-edsanders.pdf>

⁴³ Costella, “Historical.”

⁴⁴ Cloud, “Study.”

⁴⁵ Ibid.

but when the Jews rejected Him as their Messiah, God then had to come up with an alternate plan for mankind. Nothing could be further from the evidence of Scripture. God was not caught off guard by the Jewish leaders, and Jesus' crucifixion was not a "Plan B" in God's dealings with mankind. Passages like 1 Peter 1:19-20 and Revelation 13:8 eliminate any conjecture that God had to implement a secondary plan in order to save the day. Daniel 9:24-27 speaks of the Messiah



Greg Boyd

coming and being "cut off, but not for himself"; truly, Jesus was "cut off," and it was not for Himself but for the sins of the world (1 John 2:2). This kind of "alternate plan" speculation stems from what is called Open Theism, which says that God does not know what has not yet happened, and that He is ever learning from, and responding to, events as they unfold. The late Clark Pinnock of Regent College and McMaster's University, and Greg Boyd of Bethel College & Seminary and Woodland Hills Church (St. Paul, MN), are two who have actively promoted this heresy. Those who would reject this extreme position, still attribute unique characteristics to this present time that do not find support in Scripture. Probably the most pronounced of these would be the separation between Israel and the *ekklesia* (one of the fundamental pillars of dispensationalism). Passages like Romans 11:16-27 (that we looked at earlier) should remove any thought of such a dichotomy existing between the two, for Paul carefully explains that we are grafted into the Olive Tree alongside of faithful Israel – we are one in Christ. In Ephesians 2:11-18 it is clarified that, through Christ's sacrifice on the cross, God has made the Jew and the Gentile one in Christ (this is something *new* under the New Covenant that was implemented through the shed blood of Christ) – that which separated us has been removed (the Law of Moses with its many ordinances). However, what is often clear from the Scriptures does not fit well with "Church Age" theology, and consequently, we will hear much about the theology while the eternal truths of God's Word are virtually ignored or spiritualized away. Cloud says that the "New Covenant ... is God's promise to convert Israel and forgive her sin and give her a new heart of obedience";⁴⁶ he also says: "Christ is our new husband and Lord, and He rules our lives through the New Covenant."⁴⁷ Despite Cloud's desire to appear to have his theology well defined and Biblically accurate, there are just too many times when he appears to trip over his own untied theological laces. My personal experience is that if we will hold a love for the truth of the Word of God (2 Thessalonians 2:10), and expend time and effort into studying it (2 Timothy 2:15), then we will discover that God has not left us to our own devices or the devices of other, but His Spirit will guide us to understand His Word (John 16:13) – not that we suddenly have all of the answers, but rather through our love for His Truth, the Spirit will grow our understanding of His Word to us (2 Peter 3:18).

It should be evident, even from such a cursory look at how the *ekklesia* fits into God's working from the beginning of time, that it is not an afterthought; it is not a parenthetical interruption of God's dealings with Israel (the *Church Age*), but rather an integral part of God's plan that was established before the foundation of the world. Nor do we see that the *ekklesia* has replaced Israel and assumed all of God's promises to it. We must guard against placing the *ekklesia* in isolation; Hebrews 11 should make it abundantly clear that we are part of the body of believers of all the

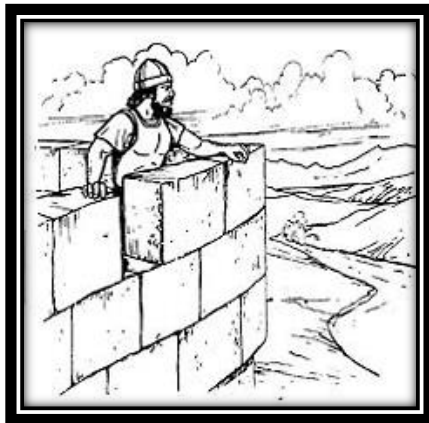
⁴⁶ https://www.wayoflife.org/reports/a_refutation_of_replacement_theology.php

⁴⁷ <https://www.wayoflife.org/reports/the-law-and-the-new-testament-christian.php>

ages. The New Covenant of fulfillment in Christ includes everyone in the whole world and has replaced the old Mosaic Covenant of promise; we are participants in the kingdom of God (with the OT saints, NT saints and Millennium saints) that will find its final expression in the eternal new heaven and new earth.

Chapter 3 – How Should We Then Live?

This was the question that the Lord said that Israel was asking, and the response that the Lord gave them was: “I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?” (Ezekiel 33:11). This is another one of many passages that strikes a blow against Calvinism that claims that God has already determined whom He has destined for glory and who is condemned to eternal damnation; yet if this were so, then why does the Lord command them (*turn ye* is in the imperative mood) to turn away from their evil ways?⁴⁸ God called Ezekiel to be a watchman to the



children of Israel (Ezekiel 3:17; 33:7); a watchman is someone who is to be alert to the approach of the enemy, and who will sound a warning at the sight of a wolf, or a wolf dressed in sheep's clothing (Matthew 7:15). Yet even as God appointed Ezekiel as a watchman, He also told him that Israel would not listen to him (Ezekiel 3:4-11); the Lord declared to Isaiah: “though thy people Israel be as the sand of the sea, yet a remnant of them shall return [repent]” (Isaiah 10:22a).⁴⁹ From this we realize that the work of a watchman is not measured by how many heed his warning, but by his obedience in sounding the warning that God has given to him. Today's

Evangelical has lost his fear of the enemy of his soul; too many of their watchmen have fallen asleep, worldliness has blinded their eyes so that they cannot see, or pragmatism has silenced their voice: like dumb dogs, they can no longer raise the alarm at the approach of the enemy (Isaiah 56:10). Today the watchmen who call out a warning are considered to be narrow-minded legalists who don't understand the liberty that we have in Christ. What Evangelicals are no longer willing to accept is that our liberty in Christ has freed us from the bondage of sin (Galatians 5:1) so that we are now free to serve our Master, the Lord Jesus Christ, and others (not ourselves, Galatians 5:13). We have been called to be holy as God is holy (1 Peter 1:15-16); that is our calling, and we are charged to walk worthy of it (Ephesians 4:1).

The question that Israel posed is one which we, too, would do well to consider. Now that Christ has redeemed us from sin, “how should we then live?”

There are several metaphors used in the Word of God to help us to understand what the *ekklesia* really is; Jesus openly declared that He is building the *ekklesia*, but what is it like? In determining how this *ekklesia* is to function (the “how should we then live” question), we will consider three metaphors used within Scripture to illustrate what it is that Jesus is building. As we begin to understand more fully what Jesus said that He would build, to that same extent we will be able to grasp our holy calling in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 1:9).

⁴⁸ Strong's Online.

⁴⁹ BDB.

Chapter 4 – The Ekklesia – a Building

In the Scriptures, God has used several word-pictures to help us to understand the work that He is doing to bring together those who have been chosen *in Christ* to be His people. One of those metaphors is that of a building. In Ephesians 2 we read:

¹⁹Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; ²⁰And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner *stone*; ²¹In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: ²²In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:19-22).

This passage follows on the heels of Paul’s explanation that in Christ the separation of Jews and Gentiles has been removed (it was the Law of Moses that separated the Jews) – they are no more two, for He has made them one (Ephesians 2:15). We read in the passage quoted that we are “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets” – not the men themselves but rather the Message that they brought. Peter confessed: “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,” and Jesus confirmed that “upon this rock [*petra* – a significant, fixed rock] I will build my *ekklesia* ...” (Matthew 16:16, 18).⁵⁰ Our quoted passage then goes on to identify Jesus Christ is the “chief corner” of this solid foundation (Ephesians 2:20). “The cornerstone concept is derived from the first stone set in the construction of a masonry foundation, important since all other stones will be set in reference to this stone, thus determining the position of the entire structure.”⁵¹ The chief cornerstone was “laid so as to give strength to the two walls with which [it] was connected.”⁵² So we see here that Christ is the Chief Corner, the first Stone laid as a reference for all other stones used in constructing the building, and it is through Christ that the two walls (the Jews and Gentiles, Ephesians 2:11-13) are drawn together and strengthened into one (Ephesians 2:19). There are two things that we need to learn from the cornerstone metaphor: 1) Christ was first laid down as the pattern, and 2) there is only one building – Christ is drawing all together. Let’s consider these more closely.

A. Christ, the Pattern

As the Chief Corner, Christ was laid down in order to provide a point of reference for the construction of the rest of the building. We read in Ephesians 2 that He is the Corner that secures the *foundation* of the *apostles* and *prophets* together upon which are laid all of those who are found to be in Christ so as to form a “habitation of God through the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:22; cp. Revelation 21:1-3). Earlier Paul wrote that God has “chosen us in him [Christ] before the foundation of the world” (Ephesians 1:4); it is *in Christ* that we are to put on the “new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Ephesians 4:24) – we have been remade

⁵⁰ Strong’s Online; Liddell-Scott Lexicon, *Bibleworks* 8.

⁵¹ <https://educalingo.com/en/dic-en/cornerstone>

⁵² Vine’s, “cornerstone.”

by God to conform to the pattern laid down by the Chief Corner, Christ. Peter declares that we have not been redeemed (brought into Christ) by corruptible things, but “with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world ...” (1 Peter 1:19-20); Christ, the Lamb of God, Who was “slain from the foundation of the world” is the only Redeemer of mankind, whether OT, NT or Millennium (Revelation 13:8). Jesus Christ, the eternal *Logos*, is that Chief Corner Whom God determined would be the Sacrifice for the sins of mankind before the man was created – the only Way of salvation was in place before creation. There is only one way to the Father, and that is through

The Law of Moses did not bring salvation.

faith in the Provision that He has made for our salvation (John 14:6); it was so for Adam, Abel, Noah, Abraham, David, Paul, Apollos, Timothy, and it is so for us today. The difference is one of perspective: prior to the *Logos* taking on a body of flesh to fulfill the requirements of the Law, believers looked forward to His coming according to the promises of God; after the redemption of mankind that was completed by Christ on the cross, we now look back in faith to the Provision that God made for sin. The salvation that we enjoy is the same (regardless of era): it is by God’s rich grace through faith in Him. Christ came to fulfill the Law of Moses, to *fill it up*, to *complete it* (Matthew 5:17);⁵³ never, from the fall of Adam to Christ, had anyone kept the Law with perfection (hence the need for continual sacrifices), yet Christ came to fulfill the Law so that He would qualify as the spotless Lamb of God order to pay the price for our redemption (Matthew 5:17-20). For God “hath made him [i.e., Christ] *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin [He was the perfect, sinless Lamb of God]; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him [the new man of Ephesians 4:24]” (2 Corinthians 5:21). There is only one entrance into the “everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:11), and He, the Chief Corner, was laid down before the foundation of the world – it is unchangeable! The Law of Moses did not bring salvation but rather a heightened awareness of sin in order to bring the individual to repentance and faith in God’s promised Redeemer (Romans 3:20-23; Galatians 2:15-16; 3:24). The Chief Corner was established before the world was created; God, in His perfect holiness and justice, through His equally perfect mercy and grace, had the Provision for our salvation in place before creation. The Pattern was established in eternity past; Peter declared of Jesus: “¹¹This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. ¹²Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:11-12).

B. Christ, Drawing All Together

There is only one foundation, and Christ, as the Redeemer for all mankind and the Chief Corner, holds together and establishes the pattern to which we must conform. “*There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*” (1 Timothy 2:5). This is the One, of Whom it was foretold in Genesis 3:15, Who would come to crush the head of the serpent; this is the Prophet prophesied through Moses: “I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him” (Deuteronomy 18:18). Jesus declared, “...as my Father hath taught me, I

⁵³ Strong’s Online.

speak these things” (John 8:28) – a clear fulfillment of the prophecy that had been given through Moses. Ephesians 2:11-17 speaks of the Gentiles being aliens from Israel, but Christ came to bring them near and to make of both, i.e., the Jew and the Gentile, one, having broken down the wall that separated them (Ephesians 2:14). The very next verse identifies that wall of separation as “the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances”; these were the ordinances (Greek, *dogma*) or judgments that made up the Law of Moses, which flowed out of God’s Ten Laws written in stone; it was these Mosaic Laws that separated the children of Israel from all other nations – those unique celebrations and sacrifices that foreshadowed the coming Messiah, and found their fulfillment in Christ. God’s desire was to make Israel into a kingdom of priests (Exodus 19:6) to bring His Law to the world (there is no evidence they ever became that kingdom of priests); nevertheless, Christ came, fulfilled and replaced (*abolished*) the Mosaic Law with the New Covenant, and became the great High Priest for all of mankind (Hebrews 4:14) – a Priest forever after the order of Melchisedec and not after the order of Aaron (Hebrews 6:20).

Paul admonished the Galatians against returning to the “weak and beggarly elements” of Jewish ceremonial practices, to the point that he feared he might have labored among them in vain (Galatians 4:9-11); it is a serious thing to try to return to what God has *abolished* (Ephesians 2:15)! To the Colossians, Paul explained that the ceremonial practices of the Jews were a “shadow of things to come” (Colossians 2:17), and therefore, they were no longer subject to such *shadows*, inasmuch as Christ (the Light Who cast those *shadows*) had fulfilled and replaced them. What is unmistakable is that the Jewish ordinances are no longer in force; for indeed, Christ made of “twain [the Jew and the Gentile] **one new man**, so making peace; and that he might reconcile both unto God in **one body** by the cross ...” (Ephesians 2:15-16). Hebrews 11 outlines for us some of those who have been approved by God through faith, men like Abel, Enoch, Noah – all who lived long before God spoke to Abraham, and began to more specifically make known His plan for the redemption of mankind; as the writer concludes the accounting of the OT faithful, he declares this: “And these all [OT saints], having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided [having planned beforehand] some better thing for us, that they without [apart from] us should not be made perfect [complete]” (Hebrews 11:39-40)⁵⁴ – the OT saints will not be complete without us! Then we come to Hebrews 12:1-2: “¹Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses [all those named and unnamed in chapter 11], let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset *us*, and let us run with patience [*hupomone* – with faithful endurance] the race that is set before us, ²Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of *our* faith” Notice, it is Jesus Who is the Author and FINISHER of faith – from Adam, all the way through to the end of time, Jesus is the Author of saving faith; He completed the hope of faith through the cross and is now sitting at the right hand of the throne of God preparing for our final redemption from the presence of sin (John 14:2), and meanwhile He is interceding for us (Romans 8:34).

When Jesus was met by the centurion who sought healing for his servant, He declared that this man exemplified a greater faith than He had seen among the Jews, yet the man was clearly a foreigner serving in the legions of the Roman army (Matthew 8:5-10). Then Jesus went on to say: “... many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and

⁵⁴ Friberg Lexicon.

Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 8:11). Jesus declares that the forefathers of the children of Israel will sit down with foreigners in the kingdom of heaven, whereas the children of the kingdom, namely their physical descendants, the Jews, will be “cast out into outer darkness” (Matthew 8:12). The kingdom of heaven is not a kingdom of Jews, nor is it a kingdom made up of only believers since Jesus’ resurrection – the Word of God makes no such distinctions. From before the foundation of the world, Christ was in place as the Chief Corner and the final Sacrifice for sin; everyone who comes to God in faith must conform to the Corner Who is already in place, and has been from before the *foundation of the world* (1 Peter 1:19-20). It is clear from the very beginning that this was understood; Cain and Abel exemplified the difference that obedience and rebellion can make, and it is equally evident that Cain understood his failure (Genesis 4:1-7).

What we must not miss from this metaphor (Christ as the *Chief Corner*) is that there is only one Building. This understanding alone may well stand in contradiction to some well-honed theologies, yet we must not hesitate to examine all theologies in the light of Scripture, for they are only man’s understanding of God’s Word (1 John 4:1). If we permit the Scriptures to speak for themselves, then we will quickly recognize that many of the things that we have received from the teachings within the Evangelical movement (whether Baptist, Pentecostal, Evangelical Free, Alliance, or whatever stripe one bears) have been put through the filter of some form of systematic theology – an impressive way of saying that man has established a grid, or overlying template, that impacts the Bible’s message. Unfortunately, what too frequently happens is that the understanding of the Bible becomes tainted by the systematic theologies, rather than the theologies being measured and weighted against the standard of the Word of God. Where the two do not line up, the tendency is to side with the theology and simply ignore the Scriptures. We often forget that God’s ways and thoughts are so much higher than ours (Isaiah 55:9). We would all do well to follow the example of the Berean believers, who were applauded for searching the Scriptures daily in order to determine if what they were hearing from the Apostle Paul was right according to God’s Word (Acts 17:11). We must not forget that theologies (unlike God’s Word) are not infallible and simply reflect someone’s attempt to understand God.

Chapter 5 – The *Ekklesia* – the Body

There are numerous passages that use the metaphor of the body; we will look at two that provide more details about the Body of Christ. The first of these is in 1 Corinthians:

⁴Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵And there are differences of administrations [or, service], but the same Lord. ⁶And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. ⁷But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal [or, for the common good]. ⁸For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; ⁹To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing [plural *healings* in Greek⁵⁵] by the same Spirit; ¹⁰To another the [power for] working of miracles; to another prophecy [speaking forth the mind of God]; to another discerning of spirits; to another *divers* kinds of tongues [languages, not gibberish]; to another the interpretation of tongues: ¹¹But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing [distributing] to every man severally [to each one his own] as he will.

¹² 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. ¹³For 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. ¹⁴For the body is not one member, but many. ... ¹⁸But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. ... God hath tempered the body together ... ²⁵That there should be no schism in the body; but *that* the members should have the same care one for another. ²⁶And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.

²⁷ Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular [individually members]. ²⁸And 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. ²⁹*Are* all apostles? *are* all prophets? *are* all teachers? *are* all workers of miracles? ³⁰Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret? (1 Corinthians 12:4-30).⁵⁶

The emphasis in this passage is on the unity of the Body (put together by the Spirit of God), and how that Body functions as a unit. It is important to note that there is only ONE Body; if we get nothing else from the reading of v. 12, it should be abundantly clear that there are many members, but only one Body. Does this mean that the Corinthian assembly was that one Body, complete in themselves? 1 Corinthians 1:2 makes it evident that the letter was not only written to those saints who met at Corinth, but to “all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord”; that would make it a general letter, meant for all of the redeemed. There is a universal element to this Body of Christ, as we also noted from the metaphor of the building; Christ draws together the saints from all ages into one. All who are “sanctified in Christ Jesus, called ... saints” (1 Corinthians 1:2) are part of this Body; they are all included within the one building of which Christ is the Chief Corner (Ephesians 2:19-22). Many who hold to “Church Age” thinking stumble

⁵⁵ Stephanus 1550 NT.

⁵⁶ Strong's Online; Friberg Lexicon.

into the error of seeing the believers in Christ since the day of Pentecost as being the Body of Christ. However, Jesus very clearly stated: “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6), and the Scriptures make it very clear that it was determined before the foundation of the world that Jesus, as the Lamb of God, would die for man’s sins (Revelation 13:8). The saving faith of the OT saints was in the promised, foreshadowed Christ; there is only one Body made up of all who are sanctified in Christ Jesus (1 Corinthians 12:12-13). Are we, who come after the redemption accomplished by Christ on the cross, the only ones sanctified in Christ? I would vehemently say, “No!” From the very beginning, Jesus Christ, the Redeemer for all of mankind, is the only One in Whom there is salvation (John 14:6; Ephesians 1:4; Revelation 13:8).

1. Gifts Given

What is very evident from this explanation of the Body is that it has pleased God to provide a variety of gifts to the various members within the Body of Christ. We are not all gifted in the same way; there are diversities of gifts – they are not intended to cause division but rather interdependence (the lesson that the Apostle Paul was trying to strike home to the Corinthians who had separated from one another according to their favorite teachers – 1 Corinthians 1:12). The gifting that we have all received is from the one Spirit, and we have all received at least one gift from the Lord (1 Corinthians 12:11), and His gifting may vary depending upon circumstances – that is, not all gifts are given permanently. This is a Spirit-instilled gift, not a natural ability; it may involve the use of our natural talents, but we must not limit the spiritual gifting to our natural abilities. Those in the world can demonstrate many amazing natural talents, and we might even say that they are gifted, but those are not gifts imparted by the Spirit of God, as you will find within the Body of Christ.

It is interesting to ponder the fact that it is the function of the various parts of the Body that is underscored as being important (1 Corinthians 12:17); it is as each member of the Body is operating within the parameters of its particular design that the Body is healthy. In verses 8 through 10 we read of various ways by which the Spirit makes His presence known for the express purpose of drawing everyone together within the Body (v.7). Then in verse 28 we read of various functions that God has set within the *ekklesia*; notice that these are functions, **not** positions or offices. Note too, that we have already seen the first two as we looked at the metaphor of the building: the apostles and prophets, whose Message forms the foundation of the Building of God. An *apostle* is a messenger, or someone who is sent with orders,⁵⁷ and a cursory look at the OT shows us that there were many apostles during those days: Moses (Exodus 3:10), Samuel (1 Samuel 16:1), Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:7), and Ezekiel (Ezekiel 2:3), to name just a few. Do we have apostles today? It depends on how narrowly you define the term; if you refer to those who saw our Lord and were directly commissioned by Him, then, no, there are no apostles today and far fewer in the OT Scriptures. However, within the definition of “one sent with orders,” it can be easily seen that there will be apostles today (those who have been sent forth with a Message of hope). A similar situation exists with the prophets. We readily recognize Elijah, Isaiah and Jeremiah as prophets in the days

⁵⁷ Strong’s Online.

before Messiah (prophets can also be apostles), and we also recognize that they foretold events that would take place in the future; however, a prophet is more than someone who predicts future events. A prophet is also someone who expounds hidden truths, and, within our context, one who more specifically explains the truths of God for us; so, within this framework of understanding, we could have those today who expound the Word of God whom we could consider to be prophets: those who explain the mind of God as expressed through His Word to us (the Bible). However, they will **not** proclaim new revelations from God – God’s revelation to man is complete: our Bible.

What the passage in 1 Corinthians makes so very clear is the interconnectedness of the Body, and also the unique functioning of its various parts. The metaphor of the physical body with its eyes, hands, feet, etc., is used to emphasize that we are not all the same (vs. 15-17), and this is not only okay, but specifically designed as such by God (v. 18). As a result, some might say that we need to gather in sufficient numbers so that all the various parts of the Body are present in order to permit a balanced functioning. This could be construed to present a case for numerical growth as being essential for an adequate functioning of the local assembly. However, we must not forget the words of the Lord Jesus: “...where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20). What becomes evident from this promise is that even if only two or three saints are come together in the name of the Lord, Jesus will presence Himself in their midst – and how could there be anything lacking where the presence of the Lord is? The strong emphasis concerning the teaching on the Body within 1 Corinthians is the variety of functions, but the one Body; the lesson this gathering needed to learn was that they were not to pander after the messengers of God, but rather be drawn together even as a body, with its many functioning parts, works together as a unit.

Let us move on to look at a second passage that uses this metaphor of the Body. Whereas the passage from 1 Corinthians emphasizes the uniqueness of each one within the Body and the importance of expressing the gifting given by the Spirit of God to thereby function as a unit, the following passage underscores the unity that we have in Christ and the purpose for which God has provided the gifting. The Corinthians needed to learn that we are all uniquely gifted by the Spirit of God for the purpose of drawing us together, for God has called us to fulfill differing roles within the Body of Christ – therefore, “who then is Paul, and who *is* Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?” (1 Corinthians 3:5). The focus of the letter to the Ephesians is who we are IN CHRIST, and therefore, it only follows that the purpose of our gifting *in Christ* would receive a greater emphasis.

⁴There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; ⁵One Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶One God and Father of all, who *is* above all, and through all, and in you all. ⁷But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. ⁸Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. ⁹(Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) ¹¹And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; ¹²For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: ¹³Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: ¹⁴That we *henceforth* be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with

every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, *and* cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; ¹⁵But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, *even* Christ: ¹⁶From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love. Ephesians 4:4-16.

What we have in Ephesians is a short list of gifts that have been given to the *ekklesia* for our edification and spiritual growth. We have *apostles* and *prophets* mentioned first (Ephesians 4:11), in similar fashion to the listing in 1 Corinthians, and we readily recognize that it was through the apostles and prophets that we have received God's Word. Many of them penned the Scriptures that God has given, and what He has supernaturally preserved to guide us in our walk with Him. From that perspective, the Spirit of God specifically filled and gifted these men to write His Word so that there might be a perpetual witness to the reality of His truth. It is the preservation of the Scriptures that has, in turn, preserved a people, a remnant, who have been faithful to God's calling all down through the centuries; even today, it is only a remnant who remain faithful to the Lord.

Paul goes on to specifically mention *evangelists*, *pastors* and *teachers* (v.11). we must keep in mind that these are not positions or offices, but gifts bestowed by the Spirit of God upon some within the *ekklesia*. You will note in Ephesians 4:8 that God "gave" these; in 1 Corinthians 12:28 we read that God "set" these gifts within the *ekklesia* (perhaps a little more forceful term, which emphasizes God's part in placing the gifts) – either way, man can take no credit for them. Today it is customary to go to seminary for a few years, and then feel qualified to be a "pastor," or a Bible "teacher." We may well take schooling to polish our natural abilities, but that does not qualify us to exercise the spiritual gift of teaching or shepherding. There are many "teachers" through our lifetimes whom we would have to say, did not have the gift of teaching; they may have had all of the worldly "qualifications" and all of the "education," but they still were not teachers. Again, we must remind ourselves that these are not positions within the *ekklesia* for which we can be trained; these are spiritual gifts bestowed by the Spirit of God upon whomever He will. However, 1 Corinthians 12:31 says: "But covet earnestly [literally, to "burn with zeal"] the best [or, more useful] gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way."⁵⁸ The first phrase is a command; so we are to desire earnestly, or be zealous for, the gifts that are the most useful to the Body, and this is explained further in chapter 14 where it is clear that the Corinthians were, instead, pursuing the showy gifts – like speaking in unknown languages (1 Corinthians 14:4). This admonition begins, "Follow after [again a command, to "seek after earnestly"] charity, and desire [another command, and the same Greek word translated as *earnestly* in 12:31 – "burn with zeal"] spiritual *gifts* [the word *gifts* is supplied; the intent here is that we would desire to be spiritually minded (Romans 8:2-10)], but rather [to a greater degree] that ye may prophesy" (1 Corinthians 14:1).⁵⁹ Paul's desire is that we are to diligently seek to be *spiritually minded* to the enlightenment of the entire assembly, rather than our own edification (1 Corinthians 14:2-4). Even though we are to be zealous for the more excellent spiritual gifts, we must recognize that it is the Spirit of God Who bestows these gifts; in essence, we are commanded to be zealous in our spiritual growth and in our walk with the Spirit of God. As we grow in the Spirit, we will discover that we are prepared by the Spirit for the

⁵⁸ Strong's Online.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

endowment of the gift (or gifts) that He desires us to exercise for the benefit of the Body of Christ; such gifting may only come when the Spirit has led us into a place where it is needed. Education may do many things, but for it to be useful, it must remain subservient to the Spirit and the spiritual gift that God desires for us. “For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God” (1 Corinthians 3:19a), and unfortunately, most seminaries today are filled to the brim with the world’s wisdom and methodologies.

All of the gifts outlined in Ephesians 4 (*apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers*) are bestowed specifically for the building up (*edifying*) of the *ekklesia*. God has gifted individuals to function within the Body according to their given gift, and for very specific purposes. Because our study is particularly focused on what the *ekklesia* should be today, and these gifts given by God are particularly focused on bringing that *ekklesia*, the Body of Christ, to perfection, let’s consider each of these gifts more thoroughly:

Apostle – as we’ve already seen, the word means “one sent forth.”⁶⁰ We typically think first of the Lord’s twelve disciples as the Apostles, and, indeed, when Jesus chose the twelve, that is what they were called (Luke 6:13). If we use this as the criteria for determining apostleship, then to date there have been only twelve. There are others who are referred to as apostles in Scripture, but they were not individually called by the Lord. The eleven sought the Lord’s guidance in naming a replacement for Judas (who had lost his position), but the contention would be whether this was really God’s choice or simply another case of Peter’s impetuosity (Acts 1:15-26). Barnabas is referred to as an apostle (Acts 14:14), but his commissioning was through the believers at Antioch, not a direct call from Jesus; depending on how you interpret 1 Thessalonians 2:6 (in light of 1 Thessalonians 1:1), Silas and Timothy could be included as apostles, but again, they were commissioned by others, not directly by the Lord. The names of the twelve apostles will be inscribed in the twelve foundations of the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:14), thereby limiting the apostleship (of those directly called by the Lord Jesus) to twelve. However, that does not mean that others might not attempt to take on the mantle of such an Apostle (not recognizing that it is a gift from God). Indeed the Catholics today contend that their pope fills the position as a successor to the Apostle Peter. There is evidence, even before the canon of Scripture was closed, that there were those who sought to assume this role, and were properly judged as frauds. In the note to the messenger of the Ephesian believers, the Apostle John wrote: “I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars” (Revelation 2:2). The designation of Apostle carried great weight among the early believers, and it seems evident that there were those who sought that influence. Are there apostles today? Clearly there are those who may be “sent forth” by a group of believers, but this is not the same as those who were chosen by the Lord – this is a gift that has ended.

Prophet – “one who speaks forth ..., a proclaimer of a divine message.”⁶¹ Couched within this is the concept of proclaiming the hidden truths of God, an element of inspiration that produces revelation. It is clear from 1 Corinthians 13:8 that there will come a time when prophecies will

⁶⁰ Vine’s “apostle.”

⁶¹ Vine’s “prophet.”

cease (the word *fail* is *katargeo* – future tense, passive mood: cause to cease⁶²); an indication that when the canon of Scripture was complete, special revelation would also come to an end. Second Peter 2:1 declares: “But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you ...,” which indicates a transition from a time of *false prophets* to one of *false teachers*; from a time when some would portray themselves as divinely inspired when they were not, to those who would endeavor to make the Scriptures say that which God never intended. Are there prophets today? Not in the full sense of the word; we will have those who will speak forth the truth, but they will never claim to be speaking a new revelation from God, if they do, then they will **not** be speaking forth truth from God. Yes, there are many today who claim to receive special revelations from God (this is particularly common among the Charismatics), yet what is equally clear from Scripture is that they are the false teachers about whom we have been warned, those who proclaim false doctrine and who are often among us. Much error has been brought into the flock by those who purport to have a revelation from God; many of the cults that call themselves “Christian,” have come about through just this means. Even among Evangelicals we will hear, “the Lord told me” to do such and such, or “the Lord gave me this”; by this they mean that you are not permitted to question them on what they’ve done, for their orders have come from a higher authority. Yet too often, when their actions are examined in the light of Scripture, it becomes appallingly evident that the Lord told them no such thing. As far as the proclamation of a new divine message, this, too, is a gifting that has ended.

Evangelist – this is a “bringer of good tidings.”⁶³ It would seem that this was someone who was gifted to declare the Gospel, but who would not necessarily hold responsibilities of leadership within a local body of believers. This could very possibly be someone who traveled about proclaiming the Gospel, a preacher of the Word of God, but not an overseer of the flock.

Pastor – this word is “shepherd, one who tends herds or flocks (not merely one who feeds them).”⁶⁴ The responsibilities of a shepherd are 1) to watch for enemies trying to attack the sheep, 2) to defend the sheep from attackers, 3) to heal the wounded and sick sheep, 4) to find and save lost or trapped sheep, and 5) to love the sheep, sharing his life with them and so earning their trust.⁶⁵ It doesn’t take much contemplation to realize that most who call themselves “pastors” today fall short of the work of a shepherd (perhaps because they fill a “position” in a man-made organization, rather than being so gifted by the Spirit of God). The modern approach to Christianity has virtually eliminated the need for being gifted as a shepherd. Today we have redefined the enemies of our souls as friends of the faith, so that there is now no need to be on the alert for those who were once considered to be our enemies, and, in reality, they are still our enemies. Healing is left to the professionals, whether medical or psychological, thereby freeing the shepherd from any responsibilities in this areas. We have resurveyed the boundaries of the sheepfold to include the wild and rugged terrain where the sheep may become lost or trapped, so there is no need to seek those who are in trouble, for the widened sheepfold already includes them. We are all far too busy to have time to share our lives with anyone, and so the “shepherd” expects the sheep to follow him because he bears the title “pastor,” and not because he has invested his life into their lives and has

⁶² Friberg Lexicon.

⁶³ Strong’s Online.

⁶⁴ Vine’s “pastor.”

⁶⁵ Strong’s Online.

earned their trust. The shepherding responsibilities of today's pastor have either been sublet to professionals or rendered obsolete due to changing times and circumstances. Now their primary responsibility is to lull the sheep into a state of glassy-eyed complacency as they get to know their new "fellow sheep" – you know, the ones with the growly voices and ill-fitting, sheepskin cloaks (Matthew 7:15).

Most churches today have well-defined position descriptions for their staff, and the primary position is that of "pastor." Many of today's pastors misuse (or abuse) Hebrews 13:17 which says: "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves"; this becomes a stick in their hands to keep their sheep in line. Although the word *obey* is a command, it does not call for blind obedience but rather a submission that is based upon an earned trust (something that a leader who has been gifted by the Spirit of God as a *shepherd*, would understand); "the obedience suggested is not by submission to authority, but resulting from persuasion."⁶⁶ *Pastor* is not an office or a position that includes authority to which we are to submit; rather, it is the gifting of an individual by the Spirit to fulfill the responsibilities of a shepherd – none of which automatically gives him any authority. A shepherd of sheep would not take over a new flock and expect the sheep to



automatically trust him; this is something that would take time, and must be earned by the shepherd. Yet, despite this clarity from Scripture, we still find the following indicative of most assemblies today: "Do pastors have divine authority? Yes, clearly they do. Believers, then, must yield to their pastors, follow their admonition, obey their commands, and submit to their authority."⁶⁷ There is a thirst for power within those who fill the pulpits today, which is not unlike that sanctioned by the Roman Catholic Church – even independent Baptists, who pride themselves on not having come out of the Roman Catholic Church (unlike the Protestant denominations), should recognize this stamp of Romanism, if they would take the time to contemplate what they see in the mirror. Of even greater concern is their ability to ignore Jesus' words: "Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall [absolutely] not be so among you ..." (Matthew 20:25-26a).⁶⁸

Teacher – This word is a clear translation from the Greek into English. In 1 Corinthians 12:28 it is the third gift itemized, possibly emphasized because the Corinthians were divided by the various teachers whom they'd had within their assembly. We must be aware that this gifting also comes with a warning: "My brethren, be not many masters [*teachers*; the same Greek word translated as *teachers* in Ephesians 4:11], knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation [or judgment]" (James 3:1).⁶⁹ Perhaps this gifting is easily counterfeited, or we are warned not take on the task of teaching just because we have a natural ability to talk. We are cautioned to be diligent, to be on the alert for false teachers (2 Peter 2:1) who are clearly not a gift to the Body of Christ. These would be Satan's counterfeits, those who will proclaim things that we may well like

⁶⁶ Vine's "obey."

⁶⁷ Bud Talbert, "The Pastor and His People," Part 1, *The Whetstone*, May-June 2003.

⁶⁸ Strong's Online.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

to hear (2 Timothy 4:3), perhaps even demonstrating a form of godliness (2 Timothy 3:2-5), but we are to be spiritually discerning and turn away from such as these. They may be well-educated and eloquent speakers, yet they are “never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Timothy 3:7). Today, there are many highly educated men and women on radio, TV, and in print who may demonstrate a form of godliness, but they are tangled in the web of their own philosophies and are unable to understand the simple truths of Scripture. Take note of their associations, for that will often betray their true position, and pay close attention to their attitude to the Word of God: “by their fruits ye shall know them” (Matthew 7:20). We must be alert, for there may be much truth in their message, but we must turn away from them for the error that laces their teaching. We would quickly reject a mixture of 99% water and 1% arsenic as not being pure water and, therefore, a danger, but we seem to have a much greater accommodation for those whose teaching is not pure according to the standard of the Scriptures. We seem hesitant to question the musings of theologians (past or present) – we would rather sift through the garbage dump of man’s thinking looking for a fleck of gold, than to turn to the Treasure from God, His Word.



Arnold Cook

Take, for example, the book *Historical Drift* by Arnold Cook, former Canadian president of the Christian & Missionary Alliance Church and a graduate of Fuller Seminary. In it he makes the statement: “Doctrinally sound and morally pure – that’s what Christ was and is looking for.”⁷⁰ That is a good statement and one with which we could heartily agree. He also makes the observation that “standing for doctrinal truth will place us in situations where we will be perceived as breaking Christian unity,”⁷¹ and, once again, we would have to say, as we ponder the thrust of this comment, that this is clearly accurate. Yet, in the midst of these good statements, he also says: “Every Christian organization **must balance** its unswerving alignment with **God’s revelation** with its commitment to communication through **relevance**” (emphasis added).⁷² In other words, we must hold our commitment to the Word of God in balance with what we understand as being a relevant means of communicating God’s Word; he advocates giving the objective truth of the Word of God equal weight (*balance*) with a subjective determination as to that which is deemed relevant today. Additionally, he has no hesitation in using the sciences of sociology and psychology: he declares, “Mankind is born flawed.”⁷³ It would seem clear that he does not hold to the depravity of man; “flawed” and a “sinner by nature” are not synonymous! Perhaps it is here that he reveals his hand, for if there are redemptive qualities in sinful man, then the sociologies and psychologies may, in fact, hold some merit. It is this strange mixture of truth and error that is so characteristic of Evangelical teachers today, even to the point where they will hold conflicting “truths” at the same time, yet not recognize the absurdity of doing so. We must be on guard at all times, and be prepared to turn aside from those who may say many very good things, but who will include that which is contrary to sound doctrine: “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine” (2 Timothy 4:3). We are told to “mark them which cause

⁷⁰ Arnold Cook, *Historical Drift*, p. 138.

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 198.

⁷² Ibid, p. 180-181.

⁷³ Ibid, p. 56.

divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them” (Romans 16:17).

2. Purpose of Gifts – There are those today who look at Ephesians 4:11 and say that the gifts delineated here are the men in whom these gifts appear. When speaking of the “pastor” in relation to the congregation, one pastor declared: “...He [the pastor] is God's man for us, because God has gifted him and appointed him to be His spokesman to our souls. God could have appointed someone else, but He gave us this man. To refuse his leadership is to refuse God's will.”⁷⁴ Again we must be cognizant of what precedes Ephesians 4:11, and verse seven declares: “... unto every [or each] one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.” We have all received a gift from Christ, given with grace according to the measure of where Christ has set us within His Body (there is nothing within Scripture that would indicate that we have been given an exhaustive listing of the gifts of the Spirit). Recognizing that these gifts set down in Ephesians 4:11 are in fact bestowed by the Spirit of God upon believers, we come to understand something of the reasons for their impartation from Ephesians 4:12:

1. “For the perfecting of the saints” – this means the complete equipping of the saints.⁷⁵ It is not that we are brought into a state of sinlessness in this life (as some would have us believe), but rather that we should be completely equipped to live as those who are saints, and holy before God. This would involve living according to the high calling of God on our lives (Ephesians 4:1; 2 Timothy 1:9).

2. “For the work of the ministry” – the gifts are given for the work of service; they are given so as to enhance our benefit to one another within the Body. We hear much today of “ministry,” which can mean almost anything; it has come to be viewed as something lofty that only those who are in “full-time” work for the Lord can truly claim. We may speak of our “ministry” with high sounding words and in soft tones in order to emphasize our great spirituality, but our calling is “... in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves” (Philippians 2:3). The word *ministry* comes from the same Greek root from which we get *deacon*; the thrust is that we are to serve one another (Galatians 5:13) – this is not a self-aggrandizing work, but simply helping one another. Too often there is such pride in the “ministry” that we have, which means that the Lord may not be present in the work that we are doing, or that He is working despite us, rather than because of us. If we are doing anything for Him, then it is because of Him and the gifting that He has given us, and not because of anything that we might bring to the work: all of our righteousnesses are as filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6). How much “ministry” being done today is devoid of the blessing of the Lord because it is being done through personal effort and bears no mark of the presence of the Spirit of God? Evangelicals today are busily carrying out their programs “for the Lord,” yet like Samson of old, they “wist not that the LORD was departed from” them (Judges 16:20). Jesus confirmed this: “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never

⁷⁴ Bud Talbert, “The Pastor and His People,” Part 2, *The Whetstone*, July-August 2003.

⁷⁵ Strong's Online.

knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Matthew 7:21-23) – works done in His name, Jesus calls *iniquity*.

3. “For the edifying of the body of Christ” – the gifts are given for the building up (*edifying*) of the Body of Christ – that’s you and me! Paul’s admonition to the Corinthians was that “forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual *gifts* [or to be spiritual], seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church” (1 Corinthians 14:12). In our zeal for spirituality, we must ensure that it results in the building up of the Body of Christ, and not ourselves. We even hear much about spirituality within the world today, but it is a spirituality that has its roots in the devil, and is fleshly. The exercising of our God-given gifts is for the express purpose of enriching our fellow believers; if we seek to draw acclaim to ourselves, then we have failed to exercise a spiritual gift, and have fallen to working in the flesh and have permitted the stench of death to enter our lives (Romans 8:5-6).

These three reasons for the gifting that we have considered, are not without their greater purposes. The gifts imparted by the Spirit of God seek to propel us toward achieving three goals as noted in Ephesians 4:13:

1. “Till we all come in the unity of the faith” – this is an interesting phrase, particularly in our day of Ecumenism. The Chuck Colsons of this world would take this as all the more reason to continue their work of uniting “Christians” of every stripe and persuasion. They take passages such as this and place their emphasis on the *unity*, rather than on the *faith* out of which the true unity of the Spirit flows. They destroy the faith (by compromise) in order to generate a unity, but this is not the unity spoken of in the Word of God; rather, it finds its source in compromising the truth and accommodating error – in essence, a destruction of the faith that was once delivered unto the saints, a faith that we are supposed to defend (Jude 3). We must keep in mind that the overriding theme of Ephesians centers on being *in Christ*. This unity (being *in Christ*) comes from abiding in the Vine (John 15), and we are charged to work at guarding the unity of the Spirit (Ephesians 4:3). What is missed in our English translation of verse 13 is that the verb *come* is in the subjunctive mood; i.e., this is a possibility but not necessarily a certainty. The reality is that everyone who begins *in Christ* will not arrive at that *unity of the faith*; the Scriptures warn us against becoming apostate (Hebrews 3:12). Beyond that, we will not see the perfect unity of the faith in our earthly lives, for we are all striving against our fallen natures (Romans 7); this simply means that the gifts given by the Spirit will continue to draw us toward the perfecting, working, and edifying of the Body of Christ **until** we all should (not *will*) come to the unity of the faith. However, we are not to give up, for we are commanded to “stand fast” (1 Corinthians 16:13; Galatians 5:1; Philippians 4:1; 2 Thessalonians 2:15 – in each one of these it is a command!).

2. “[Till we all come to] the knowledge of the Son of God” – this speaks of a full or a “precise and correct knowledge” of the Son of God.⁷⁶ This is much more than simply knowing about Jesus Christ; it is an intimate and full understanding of Who He is and what He has done. This, too, carries the thought of possibility but not certainty (the active verb *come* bears the subjunctive mood), and speaks not only to our limited understanding while in the flesh, but the real threat of being deceived and falling away (Ephesians 5:6). However, there will come a day when I shall

⁷⁶ Strong’s Online; Friberg Lexicon.

know “even as also I am known” (1 Corinthians 13:12). It is in the area of a *precise and correct knowledge* of the Son of God that Evangelicals are failing miserably today. They know many things about the Son of God, but they have neglected the Word of God for so long that they no longer know Him and are so easily duped into believing a lie; we live in a day of Christian paganism (the generation of apostates is dying – those who believed and turned away from their faith), when those who profess faith do not understand the essentials of God’s Message to mankind. We bear a responsibility to study to know the Lord Jesus Christ more completely; how can we “stand fast” if we do not know wherein we stand?

3. “[Till we all come] unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” – this is the third purpose for the gifting that God has given. *Perfect* is defined as “wanting nothing necessary to completeness,”⁷⁷ and clearly lines up with the first reason for the Spirit’s gifts: “the perfecting of the saints.” However, the process of working this completeness into our lives can be painful: “⁵... My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: ⁶For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. ⁷If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?” (Hebrews 12:5-7). Hebrews 12:11 clarifies the reason for the chastening: “Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are [vigorously] exercised thereby.” Another way of describing this *perfect man* is to say that we will be like Christ (the phrase “unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” speaks to that). “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). Will we become perfect in this life? Experience and the Scriptures both tell us, “No.” However, we have a hope that we will one day be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is – if we persevere in Him!

The gifts are given for the purpose of perfecting, serving and edifying the Body of Christ, with a view to the attainment of the goals of unity in the faith, a full knowledge of the Son of God, and that we might become like Christ (with the understanding that we will be growing in accomplishing these goals, but will never truly achieve them until we are with Christ). And all of this is so that we will become stable in our understanding (Ephesians 4:14); we will not be easily taken in by the latest teaching to hit the market.

The overarching purpose of spiritual gifts is for us to become more like the Savior.

That we ... be no more children – *be* is in the subjunctive mood, and like the goals just considered, that makes this a possibility but not a certainty.⁷⁸ If what preceded this verse is active and working in our lives, then we will be moving away from being children, and moving toward maturity and stability in our walk with Christ. However, there is always the possibility that we will not permit the working of these gifts in our lives; “¹²For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which *be* the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. ¹³For every one that useth milk *is* unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. ¹⁴But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, *even* those who by reason of use have their

⁷⁷ Strong’s Online.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Hebrews 5:12-14). We are not to remain as children (*babes*) but are to study the Word so that we become stable and mature. The phrase *tossed to and fro* (Ephesians 4:14) is actually one word in Greek, and means to be *tossed by the waves*.⁷⁹ When something is tossed by the waves it is moving up and down, backwards and forwards, and side-to-side; there is total instability and maximum shifting in every direction – we are not to be like that. We are to be firmly planted: “...be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:58). This is followed by a reiteration of the ultimate goal of our stability and growth: that we “may grow up in him in all things, which is the head, *even Christ*” (Ephesians 4:15). The overarching purpose of the gifts being given to the *ekklesia* is for our growth, that we may become more like our Savior; here is where the metaphor of the body enters.

“From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (Ephesians 4:16). This sentence begins (in verse 11) with the gifts given by the Spirit, and ends with this involved metaphor of the body.

From whom ties what follows in this verse to Christ, as mentioned in the previous verse; again, we can see the theme of Ephesians coming through: *in Christ*. As Head of the Body of Believers, Christ exercises control over the Body and provides what is needed for it to function as it ought. This Body is *fitly joined together* – the same Greek word as used in Ephesians 2:21 where it speaks of the building growing into a holy temple in the Lord, and carries the thought of being joined closely together.⁸⁰ The Master Builder is at work, and He will not build anything that is not perfect. Hence, if we are not growing in Him, what basis do we have to include ourselves in the construction project on which He is working? Will He be pleased to use the teachings of godless philosophers in His building program? We must give Paul’s admonition to Timothy careful consideration: “Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee” (1 Timothy 4:16). We must be discerning as to the doctrine that we will heed; there are many Evangelical voices today that would seek to lead us into error and compromise (Rick Warren, James Dobson, Chuck Swindoll, Joel Osteen, et al.).

And compacted by that which every joint supplieth. The Greek word for *compacted* carries the thought of being united or joined together,⁸¹ and serves to reinforce the *fitly joined together* just mentioned. The Greek word translated as *joint*, does not mean a flexing joint (such as the knee or elbow), but rather a ligature that acts as a connection, or a means of joining together.⁸² The thrust here has nothing to do with flexibility and everything to do with connectedness. Again, we must not lose the context for this, namely, the source is Christ. In this Body, we are all inextricably joined to Christ, and He is the One Who draws us together. Here is another clear confirmation that our unity comes from being in Christ, not from joining hands with infidels who call themselves Christians. Our life and unity flow only from being connected to the Head (Christ), from abiding in the Vine (John 15:4).

⁷⁹ Strong’s Online.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Vine’s “joint.”

I have read that the brain is more than a storage place for memories and a processor of sensory perceptions and thoughts. Scientists are discovering that the brain is the great control center of the body, and seeks to keep all body operations in balance, calling for compensating functions when something goes wrong.⁸³ In essence, the brain is connected to every part and function of the body, and seeks to coordinate and control everything. This would be the analogy that Scripture would have us understand when it refers to Christ as the *Head* of the Body of His redeemed ones. As we



Charles Colson

exercise every effort, with the guidance of the Spirit of Truth, to walk worthy of His calling, we strengthen our connection with our Savior, and our union with Him will grow. The essence of this phrase, *compacted by that which every joint supplieth*, is that we are united by that which comes through every *joint* or connection that we have with Christ, and through the edification that we receive from fellow believers and their *joint* or connection with Christ. There is no room for Chuck Colson's *Evangelicals and Catholics Together*: setting aside the teachings of the Lord for the sake of walking hand-in-hand with those who proclaim a different gospel. Our being united comes only through our union with Christ; He must be the focus in order for there to be a unity that bears His blessing. All of our efforts at unity

are as straw that will not survive the test of fire, and will only lead to compromise and the Lord's displeasure. When Colson says: "we must strive for unity because it is the essence of the church,"⁸⁴ it is very clear that he has misunderstood the truth of our verse. It is evident from this verse that the compacting, or the close unity of the Body, does not come through our efforts to make it happen, but from that which flows from Christ, our Head, through our connectedness to Him (Ephesians 4:15-16). It is all of Him, and nothing of us.

Our verse goes on: *according to the effectual working in the measure of every part*. The Greek word that is translated as *effectual working* (*energia*) is used in the NT only in regard to superhuman power.⁸⁵ Within this context, that can only refer to the working of Christ; this is not each one of us doing our part, but rather it is the work of God that comes through our connectedness to Christ as the Head of the Body. The Body is united or joined together, not through the efforts that we might expend, but through the working of Christ and by our being joined to Him. We must be the work *of* Christ before we can do a work *for* Christ; "for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of *his* good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13). Jesus stated: "I am the vine, ye *are* the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5). This last phrase, *without me ye can do nothing*, is the culmination of what Jesus is saying here. In the Greek, this is a very emphatic statement making use of a double negative to underscore the message: separate, or apart, from Me you have no ability to do not even one thing (*nothing* is a word which comes from a compound of *not even* and *one*).⁸⁶ We are totally dependent upon Him to fulfill our function within the Body; we do not receive a gift from the Spirit, and then go out in our own efforts to exercise that gift. We must not forget Jesus' words

⁸³ <http://42explore.com/brain.htm>

⁸⁴ Charles Colson, *The Body*, p. 102.

⁸⁵ Strong's Online.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

from Matthew 7:21-23: “²¹Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. ²²Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? ²³And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.” It is plainly evident from this passage that there will be those who will do many wonderful things in the name of Jesus (undoubtedly they will think that they are exercising their spiritual gifts under the power of the Spirit of God), yet they will receive His condemnation. Although they may do great exploits, their works will not be recognized by the Lord. Jesus said that without Him we can do not even one thing; evidently all these great works (prophesying and casting out devils – interestingly, these are two things that the Charismatics love to do) were done without the Lord. They did many impressive things, but the Lord was not in them energizing the work: “they that are in the flesh cannot please God” (Romans 8:8). “Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it” (Psalm 127:1a); unless the Lord is building the Body of Christ, we labor in vain to build it on our own. Even though we may do seemingly great things, and even do them in the name of the Lord, unless we permit the Spirit of God to work in us to accomplish these things, they are done in vain – they hold no eternal value. An unknown poet sought to capture this concept (I’ve edited one word to make the thought line-up more completely with Scripture):

Only One Life

Two little lines I heard one day,
Traveling along life's busy way;
Bringing conviction to my heart,
And from my mind would not depart;
Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done ~~for~~ through Christ will last.

Only one life, yes only one,
Soon will its fleeting hours be done;
Then, in 'that day' my Lord to meet,
And stand before His Judgement [sic] seat;
Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done ~~for~~ through Christ will last.

Only one life, the still small voice,
Gently pleads for a better choice
Bidding me selfish aims to leave,
And to God's holy will to cleave;
Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done ~~for~~ through Christ will last.

Only one life, a few brief years,
Each with its burdens, hopes, and fears;
Each with its clays I must fulfill,
Living for self or in His will;
Only one life, 'twill soon be past,

When this bright world would tempt me sore,
When Satan would a victory score;
When self would seek to have its way,
Then help me Lord with joy to say;
Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done ~~for~~ through Christ will last.

Give me Father, a purpose deep,
In joy or sorrow Thy word to keep;
Faithful and true what e'er the strife,
Pleasing Thee in my daily life;
Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done ~~for~~ through Christ will last.

Oh let my love with fervor burn,
And from the world now let me turn;
Living for Thee, and Thee alone,
Bringing Thee pleasure on Thy throne;
Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done ~~for~~ through Christ will last.

Only one life, yes only one,
Now let me say, "Thy will be done";
And when at last I'll hear the call,
I know I'll say "twas worth it all";
Only one life, 'twill soon be past,

Only what's done ~~for~~ through Christ will last.

Only what's done ~~for~~ through Christ will last.

We have referred to Matthew 7:21-23 where Jesus warned that not everyone who did marvelous things in His name would be accepted by Him. Before we leave this, consider the context of this warning: it follows on the heels of His admonition to “¹⁵beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. ¹⁶Ye shall know them by their fruits” (Matthew 7:15-16a). After declaring that we would be able to recognize the wolves by their fruits, even when they appeared to be sheep, He goes on to state that there will be those who will do great things in His name but they will be condemned because He does not know



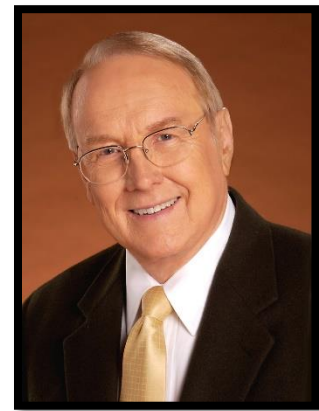
them. So how can we recognize the wolves when they are disguised as sheep and their works may be done in the name of Jesus? Jesus declares that the one who will enter heaven is the one who does the will of God (Matthew 7:21); we must walk in obedience to the commands of God. John wrote: “³And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. ⁴He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 John

2:3-4). Ponder this! John asserts, by the Spirit of God, that there will be those who say: “I know God,” yet they do not keep His commandments; it is affirmed that they are without the truth, not simply that they haven’t yet come to a full understanding of the truth, but the truth is not there – they are living a lie! The lie is this: they profess to know God, yet do not obey His commands; therefore, to know God is to walk in obedience to His commandments. Consider Paul’s words to the Thessalonians: “they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved” (2 Thessalonians 2:10); he is speaking of those in the end times who will be deceived by the working of Satan that will be done with “all power and signs and lying wonders,” and their deception will come as a result of their disregard of the truth. Jesus declared the words of God to be truth (John 17:17) and identified Himself as being Truth (John 14:6); therefore, it seems obvious that unless we are prepared to live in accordance with the Scriptures and pattern our lives after the example of the Lord, then we will be pronounced a liar and will be fair game for the deception that will take place during the last days. I fear this will be the end for many within New Evangelicalism;⁸⁷ there is an ever growing number who advocate that they “know God” but their lives clearly indicate that they are not walking in obedience to His commandments. We are to be very careful that we do not join ourselves to them or walk with them, lest we be overcome by their message of positivism and succumb to the deception of Satan.

“¹Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. ²But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night” (Psalm 1:1-2). The ungodly are not just those who frequent the red-light districts of our cities or who fill our prisons, but they are also those who week-by-week fill the pews of today’s modern churches; Evangelicals who advocate a positive message of

⁸⁷ New Evangelicalism, when it began, advocated a repudiation of separation, an emphasis on social involvement, a commitment to revisit some fundamental doctrines (particularly relating to the first eleven chapters of Genesis), and to engage the liberals (the faithless) in dialogue; an appealing stance that masks some blatant violations of the Scriptures.

God's love for everyone are included in the ungodly – we are not to walk in their ways. Their positive message is a different gospel that permits them to stand with sinners – Colson is a classic example of that, for he stood shoulder-to-shoulder with the Catholics and was one with them. Lastly, there is a growing scorn among Evangelicals for those who advocate adhering to the teachings of Scripture and will not join with them in their Ecumenical acceptance of anyone who calls himself a Christian; we are considered to be too narrow and always so negative. There is a progression in Psalm 1:1 that we must not miss: first there is **walking** with the ungodly (after all, they're not bad people and say that they love God), then there is a stopping to **stand** with them (they're working for a good cause and why shouldn't we support them in it – this is James Dobson's line for joining with the Catholics), and then, the final capitulation – **sitting** with them and criticizing those who walk a more narrow way. It all began with walking with them, doing things with them, attending their meetings, listening to or reading their teachings, etc. By contrast, Psalm 1:2 calls on us to delight in the law or commandments of the Lord and to seek our direction there. If we see ourselves drawn to walking in the way of the Evangelicals, whether frequently or on occasion (for that will be the greatest temptation that we face today), we must stop immediately and return to the Word of God. We must be alert, for the temptation is subtle.



James Dobson

Returning to our passage (Ephesians 4:16), the *effectual working* is not our working, but the working of Christ, as Head of the Body, in the *measure of every part*. This latter phrase is difficult to understand so let's approach it carefully, keeping in mind the context in which we find it. The word *measure* here is the Greek word *metro*, and means a determined extent, or limit.⁸⁸ The Greek words translated as *every part* also include the word for *one*, adding an element of singular precision to this – every part is included, in this case, no one is left out. As we bring these together, what we find is a declaration that is in keeping with the metaphor of the body that began this verse. Christ is working according to the extent, or limit, of each individual part of the Body. Two things bear consideration here: 1) this is Christ working, as we have already seen, and 2) we are all different. Christ is working according to the determined limit of each one of us within the Body; we are not all the same, and Christ is working in accordance with our differences. Psalm 103:14: "For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust." Once again, there is no place for our fleshly efforts in what we perceive to be the Body of Christ – that will only lead to personal disaster; we must permit Christ, as our Head, to work in and through us.

The last phrase is this: *maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love*. Here is the culmination of this verse, toward which everything outlined so far pushes – the growth of the Body of Christ that results in the enrichment of itself in love. As we maintain our relationship with Christ, our Head, we will grow and mature, and become a source of edification to those around us. We must not misconstrue this to be numerical growth; yet this is so often what happens. We mustn't compare ourselves with anyone else, for we all fill a unique function within the Body; we

⁸⁸ Strong's Online.

need only be encouraged and challenged in our personal walk with the Lord to remain faithful to Him in all that He has called us to do.

All of this comes through God having gifted apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers for the Body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11). Again, these are not positions within the Body to which we can aspire, but they are functions that have been given to some within the Body for the benefit of the whole Body. As these gifts, and others not mentioned here, are exercised under the guidance of the Spirit, there will come spiritual maturity to those within the Body; there will be a oneness of faith, a stability in our walk, and an intimate connectedness to Christ as our Head.

Yet, as we look out at the Evangelical landscape today, we see the opposite: we see immaturity, instability, and fleshly indulgence. There can be little doubt that the wolves are counterfeiting the gifts of the Spirit, speaking enticing words of comfort for the itching ears of listeners who demand to be consoled and assured that they are okay (2 Timothy 4:3-4). A spiritual blindness has settled over the average, so-called Christian; they have turned away from the truth and have embraced a falsehood that assures them that they have a place in heaven without repentance, without walking in obedience to God's commandments, and without separating from the world. We must recognize that God has made provision for our growth in Christ and for our functioning within the Body to its edification. We are not called to defeat but to victory, if we will but return to the Scriptures and walk in obedience to the many, many commands that God has given us, for thereby we do show that we love Him (1 John 5:3).

We have looked briefly at two passages that use the metaphor of the body to describe the *ekklesia*, the assembly of those called-out ones. In the first (1 Corinthians 12) we saw the emphasis upon the different functions of the various parts of the body for the overall wellbeing of the body as a whole; we are all gifted by the Spirit of God to perform a particular function within the Body. In the second (Ephesians 4), emphasis was given to the connectedness that we, as members of the Body, have to the Head, Who is Christ; through the gifts bestowed by Christ, we are provided with all that is necessary for our growth. As members of the Body, we are to be alive and growing into the image of Christ our Savior, for He is providing us with all that we need for such growth.

Chapter 6 – The Ekklesia and Marriage

The metaphor of the husband and wife relationship is also applied to the *ekklesia* in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. This is not an entirely new concept, for Isaiah spoke of the Lord being the husband of the redeemed: "For thy Maker *is* thine husband; the LORD of hosts *is* his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall he be called" (Isaiah 54:5). However, Paul goes into some specific details in Ephesians 5:22-27:

²²Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. ²³For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. ²⁴Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so *let* the wives *be* to their own husbands in every thing. ²⁵Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; ²⁶ That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, ²⁷That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

Submit, in this case (v.22), comes from the same Greek word as used in the previous verse when speaking of submitting to one another; this is particularly significant when we realize that Paul is beginning to draw the parallel between Christ's relationship with His called-out ones and that between a husband and wife. In the previous verse (v. 21) we are told that we are to submit to one another in the fear of God: we are not to lord it over one another, and we are all on level ground before the Lord. Jesus said: "²⁵Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. ²⁶But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; ²⁷And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: ²⁸Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:25-28). Jesus very clearly declared that there is to be no positional authority ascribed to a "pastor" (unlike what is so prevalent today); we are to practice a mutual submission "in the fear of God" (Ephesians 5:21), which excludes the unquestioning obedience that many "pastors" demand.

Even though the word *submit*, in verse 22, is the same as that used in the previous verse, there is one significant difference: it is now a command. Here we are told that the wife is to be under submission to her husband, not anyone else's husband, and this is to be like unto her submission to the Lord: the two qualifiers to her submission. In the context of the previous verse, one man cannot tell another man's wife how she is to conduct herself as a wife (he can tell her, but her obligation is to her own husband, not to another man). Ultimately, her submission is not to go beyond what would be required of her by the Lord; the guiding rule, even with her own husband, is that her submission to him must be as unto the Lord. Anything that her husband might ask of her cannot be outside of the guidelines of what the Lord would require. In this there is safety for the wife, and a responsibility on the part of the husband to know what the Lord wants. Once again, we see the consistency of God: in Genesis 3:16 God told Eve, "...thy desire *shall be* to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee," and this is God's instruction to wives after the Lord was ascended to

heaven: “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.” This has nothing to do with equality or value, but everything to do with the role that God has prescribed.

Lest we should miss the importance of the roles that God has ordained, the very next statement provides us with the initial context for this submission: “For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church” (Ephesians 5:23). In the Greek, verses 22 and 23 are more closely linked, and the latter provides us with the reason for the wife’s required submission to her husband; the first word of verse 23 is really *because*, and it draws the two thoughts together: the wife is to submit because the husband is the head.⁸⁹

We have just looked at the metaphor of the Body, where it is clearly stated that Christ is the Head (Ephesians 4:15; Colossians 1:18). We might readily recognize that a physical body separated from its head is no longer alive and is a corpse; however, do we so readily recognize that the same is true for the Body of Christ? If a member of the Body of Christ severs himself from the Head, how long will that member continue to function in his designed capacity? It is vitally important that we maintain a personal, living relationship with Christ; unless we continue to abide in the Vine, we will be removed, we will dry up, and be cast into the fire (John 15:6). Yet, here we are called on to carry that thought one step further: in the same way that Christ is the Head of the *ekklesia*, so the husband is the head of the wife within the marriage relationship. This is God’s pattern for the wife’s submission to the husband – the husband is her head.

The feminist movement shudders at these concepts, and even among Evangelicals there is a “Christianized” version of this movement that advocates “Christ’s liberation from human limitations imposed by gender, ethnicity or class.”⁹⁰ In other words, there are to be no restrictions based upon the roles that God has called men and women to fill; they would be quick to quote Galatians 3:28 – “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is **neither male nor female**: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.” Paul’s message to the Galatians was that through faith in Christ we all become children of God – there is no difference based upon who we might be; however, this cannot be misconstrued to mean that there are no longer gender roles within God’s *ekklesia*. The organization, Christians for Biblical Equality, claims that if the Bible is “properly interpreted” it will yield the fruit of Christian feminism, and they promote themselves as being a Christian, Evangelical organization.⁹¹ Perhaps if women understood more clearly that the husband is to be their head, even as Christ is the Head of the *ekklesia*, they would object less to the special role to which God has called them. Nevertheless, if they are unwilling to submit to Christ as Lord (and feminism stands contrary to such), then it only follows that they would find it equally difficult to be called by God to submit to their husbands.

However, there is more to verse 23: “... and he [i.e., Christ] is the saviour of the body.” The word *saviour* means “a savior, deliverer, preserver,”⁹² and is a reminder to the husbands of Christ’s

⁸⁹ Strong’s Online.

⁹⁰ http://www.cbeinternational.org/new/membership/ind_family.shtml

⁹¹ The CBE is endorsed by Tony Campolo (Evangelical heretic at large), Gordon Fee (Regent College, Vancouver), Richard Foster (Renovaré – spiritual formation guru), as well as professors at Fuller Theological Seminary, Gordon-Conwell Seminary (Walter Kaiser), and those with the Salvation Army, YWAM, and Inter-Varsity.

⁹² Vine’s “Savior.”

role in relationship to the Body. Therefore, for the husband to fulfill his role as *head* in the marriage relationship, he must be willing to sacrifice of himself for the preservation and well-being of his wife. Look at God’s pronouncement of punishment on Adam:

¹⁷And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed *is* the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; ¹⁸Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; ¹⁹In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou *art*, and unto dust shalt thou return (Genesis 3:17-19).

You’ll notice that there is no mention of the man’s rule over his wife (as compared to the punishment meted out to the woman in Genesis 3:16); the man would now have to labor in order to provide for his helpmeet. Contrary to modern thinking, God’s order for marriage is for the man to be the provider. In the sin that took place in the Garden of Eden, Adam submitted to Eve – he took the forbidden fruit that Eve offered to him. However, in the curse that God placed upon mankind, He clearly re-delineated the roles for the man and woman (Genesis 2:18): the man is to work in order to provide for his wife, and the wife is to be ruled by her husband. Today the husband-wife functions have become blended to such an extent that families are in a terrible mess – small wonder when we have carelessly set aside the God-designed roles for the marriage relationship.

We often acknowledge that repetition within Scripture is an indication of the importance of something, an axiom that we would do well to keep in mind. We now come to Ephesians 5:24 which states: “Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so *let* the wives *be* to their own husbands in every thing.” In case we didn’t catch it the first time, the Spirit of God repeats in clear,

Satan loves to undermine the authority of Scripture.

unmistakable language what was just said, so that we cannot miss it; in other words, pay attention because this is important! This is a plain, straight-forward declaration of what God wants in a marriage, and the Greek text supports the translation as found in the KJV. However, we must realize that this is contrary to modern thinking, even among Evangelicals. If we consider for a moment how several modern texts handle this verse, we will realize afresh the attack of Satan against the Word of God:

New International Version: “Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.”

New Century Version: “As the church yields to Christ, so you wives should yield to your husbands in everything.”

The Message: “So just as the church submits to Christ as he exercises such leadership, wives should likewise submit to their husbands.”

New American Standard Bible: “But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything.”

Contemporary English Version: “Wives should always put their husbands first, as the church puts Christ first.”

There is a common theme of variance throughout these translations that are quite prevalent among Evangelicals today: the introduction of the word *should*, or the phrase *ought to*, takes the sting out of this plain declaration by the Spirit of God, and makes it more palatable for our modern tastes – and more optional for Evangelicals. This is a very simple and small demonstration of Satan’s effectiveness at undermining the authority of Scripture; despite God’s warnings against adding to or taking away from His Word (Deuteronomy 4:2), these translations continue to enjoy great popularity. Evangelicals may claim the Bible to be their final authority for faith and life, but when they rely upon a modern translation that no longer carries the untainted words of God, their claim holds little merit and we must be cautious!

As we move forward to Ephesians 5:25, we see that the focus shifts from the responsibility of the wife to the responsibility of the husband, and this provides a necessary context for the wife’s submission. It says: “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it....” This carries the imperative mood; i.e., it is a direct command from God. God understands our hearts: in Genesis 3 after telling Eve, as the wife, that she would be ruled by her husband, we would expect God to then tell Adam about ruling his wife – but God didn’t do that. We’ve just read, and seen emphasized, the responsibility of the wife to submit to her husband, and might expect God to tell the husband how he is to rule over his wife – but, once again, that is not what we see. After reading of the wife’s need to submit to her husband, and seeing it emphasized, the husband is now commanded to love his wife in the same way that Christ loves the *ekklesia*. Wow! Notice the parallel here: the wife is to submit to her husband as unto the Lord (Ephesians 5:22); the husband is to love his wife as the Lord loves His redeemed ones. In both cases, the requirement that is to be fulfilled is patterned after the Lord. The incredible thing is that if the husband fulfills his responsibility to love his wife as Christ loves the *ekklesia*, then as the wife submits to her husband, it will be the same as submitting to the Lord. Once again the husband is reminded that his love is to be a sacrificial love.

The passage in Ephesians goes on to describe what Christ will accomplish in His *ekklesia* because He has given Himself for her: she will be holy and without blemish (v. 27) before Him in His purity and holiness. What assurance we have, even as we struggle today to live a godly life, that there will come a day when we will stand before the One Who is truly pure and holy and we will be without blemish – an incredible thought! However, our look at this metaphor would not be complete without this additional thought: “⁶... from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. ⁷For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; ⁸And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. ⁹What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder” (Mark 10:6-9). By using the metaphor of the marriage relationship to portray Christ’s relationship with the *ekklesia*, His called-out ones, God has underscored the unity that is to be found in Christ. As we remain *in Christ*, we will experience a growing unity of the Body and an increasing unity with the Lord Jesus. The mystery of becoming one flesh in marriage is a picture of what takes place spiritually with Christ and the *ekklesia* (Ephesians 5:31-32). This is not a unity that comes through our efforts to join with those who purport to hold to a similar faith, but only through having been

Only in Christ do we
have true unity.

grafted into the Olive Tree, the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 11:16-22). Isaiah saw Messiah coming and spoke of Him as a “root out of dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, *there is* no beauty that we should desire him” (Isaiah 53:2). It is only *in Christ*, the Messiah, “the anointed One,” that we have true unity (John 15:6) – a truth that is so needful to keep firmly in mind in this day when unity through our own efforts has become so common.

The question asked earlier was: “How should we then live?” As we have worked our way through the metaphors of the body and the marriage relationship, what has become evident is that we are inextricably tied to Christ for everything. In ourselves we are dead in our sins, without hope in a world that does not know Christ.

¹¹...if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you. ¹²Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. ¹³For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. ¹⁴For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God” (Romans 8:11-14).

The answer to our question is: we are to live by the Spirit of God; the Lord has given us His Word to be our guide, a Word that is filled with commands to which we are to give heed.

Chapter 7 – The Ekklesia – Christ’s Purpose

So far we have considered a proper definition of the word translated as “church” in our KJV Bibles, the *ekklesia* within the broader context of the Kingdom of God, we have reminded ourselves of the errors that can occur if we draw an artificial line of separation between the Old and New Testaments, and we have looked into several metaphors used in Scripture to help us understand this *ekklesia* into which we have been born by the Spirit of God. You might say that we have beaten all around the bush, and now it is time to contemplate the “bush” itself.

From Scripture, what is the *ekklesia*? As we have considered our metaphors of the building, the body and the marriage relationship, we would have to conclude that the called-out ones are people who have been bought out of sin through the blood of the Lamb of God. Therefore, the local gathering that we commonly refer to as a “church,” is really not the *ekklesia* of Scripture, for it may well include both the lost and the redeemed, and it is only the redeemed who are a part of Christ’s *ekklesia*. The *ekklesia* is not a building or an organization, yet our word *church* works for both of these; the *ekklesia* is an organism, a Body whose Head is the Lord Jesus Christ. As a Body, the structure, health, and life of the *ekklesia* are controlled by the individual connections to the life-giving Head, Jesus. Therefore, when we use the word “church” today, we must understand that we are using a term that has accumulated millennia of baggage from an apostate organization and bears no resemblance to the term *ekklesia* in Scripture, which has, unfortunately, been translated as “church.”

Ekklesia, within the context of our study, refers to a gathering of redeemed individuals who have been called by the Lord to a life of holiness and purity, as opposed to a group who meet together regularly and abide by a particular creed or constitution. Jesus said: “I will build my *ekklesia*” (Matthew 16:18); it is His work, not ours. Ephesians 4:8 says that when Christ “ascended up on high, he led captivity captive ...”; this means that when Christ ascended to the Father He took with Him, into the very presence of God, the saints from the “bosom of Abraham” who had died in the faith (Luke 16:19-31) and were raised to new life in Him when He rose from the dead (Matthew 27:52-53), so that now to be “absent from the body is to be present with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8). Nevertheless, the building of the Body of Christ is a work that Christ has claimed for Himself, and He began with the saints who had died prior to His incarnation (Hebrews 11), and He continues today with all who repent and place their enduring faith in His redemption – those who will persevere in their journey through life: “we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end” (Hebrews 3:14). This is very different from drafting a constitution or creed, and then living accordingly; this calls for us to live in harmony with the Word of God, not man’s understanding of it. This is a very significant difference: the former calls on us to place our faith in the men who drafted the creed or constitution; the latter requires us to study and learn God’s Word for ourselves so that we might examine all that we hear, see and read in its pure light. The former will provide a false sense of security and lead to a neglect of the Word of God; the latter will make God’s Word central to our spiritual well-being, and magnify the Lord in all things. “And hereby we do know that we know him [God], if we keep his commandments” (1John 2:3); where are His commandments? – in His Word!

As we examine the *ekklesia*, the gathering of the called-out ones of Christ, let us consider, first of all, the purpose for the gathering – not what we think it is from what we have observed through the years, but what is our purpose according to the Scriptures? A verse that we have all heard, and one that has been used against many of us from time-to-time, is Hebrews 10:25 – “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.” The first part of this verse has become a favorite of “pastors” who want to lay guilt on someone who no longer attends their church, or who only attends sporadically.

Let me say at this juncture that I have no problem calling the gatherings of the Evangelicals and Liberals “church”; but the more I have studied this subject, the less inclined I am to use the same term to describe a Biblical gathering of God’s called-out ones, His saints. The Biblical term is far more exclusive, and I believe we will see that it is designed by God to fulfill a far different function than the modern churches at large that have become little more than religious social groups.

As we look further at Hebrews 10:25, let’s consider the context of this verse, beginning with verse 19 (which some show as a new paragraph). Having just explained to us the once-for-all-time sacrifice of Jesus, our Great High Priest, the writer of Hebrews goes on with this passage:

¹⁹Having therefore, brethren, boldness [confidence] to enter into the holiest [the way was opened when Jesus died (Matthew 27:50-51)] by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated [opened] for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; ²¹And *having* an high priest over the house of God; ²²Let us draw near [*may we draw near*; this is a subjunctive clause, indicating possibility but not certainty] with a true heart in full assurance [complete confidence] of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³Let us [*may we*; subjunctive mood] hold fast the profession of *our* faith [*hope*] without wavering; (for he *is* faithful that promised;) ²⁴And let us consider [*may we consider attentively*; again subjunctive mood] one another to provoke [incite] unto love and to good works: ²⁵Not forsaking [stopping] the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some *is*; but exhorting [urging, encouraging] *one another*: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.”⁹³

The writer makes an allusion to the Jewish temple and the fulfillment of the temple system through our Lord Jesus Christ, which is a common theme in Hebrews. “⁵⁰Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. ⁵¹And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom ...” (Matthew 27:50-51). With the death of Jesus came access into the Holy of Holies, that inner sanctuary of the temple into which the high priest would enter only once each year on the Day of Atonement; it is significant that the veil was opened by God, for only He could have torn it from top to bottom – it was probably about 80 feet tall.⁹⁴ Jesus opened access to God the Father, symbolically, by tearing the veil, which the writer identifies as His flesh that was torn upon the cross. As our great High Priest, Jesus ascended to the true Holy of Holies once-for-

⁹³ Strong’s Online; Friberg Lexicon.

⁹⁴ Josephus, *War of the Jews*, 5.5.4; <http://www.ccel.org/j/josephus/works/war-5.htm>

all-time, and opened the way for us to come with confidence through His shed blood into the presence of God – the ultimate fulfillment of the temple sacrificial system. This is an access that is based entirely upon the work of Christ, and so we cannot come without first being cleansed: "... having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water" (Hebrews 10:22). The Mosaic Law had strict requirements for the cleansing of the high priest before he was permitted to enter into the Holy of Holies (Leviticus 16:3-4); we receive the cleansing from the shed blood of Christ that opens our access to the Father in the heavenly Holy of Holies. Having been cleansed and having come into this holy sanctuary through Christ, we are urged to remain firm in the faith (Galatians 5:1), and to give careful attention as to how we can encourage love and good deeds in those about us through exhortation. In the midst of this, almost as a parenthetical comment, we read that we are not to abandon coming together as evidently some were in the custom of doing. Consider the time that this was written (approximately AD 67⁹⁵): Christians were facing persecution from both the Jews and the Romans, and it is conceivable that some were hesitating to congregate for fear of oppression; yet Jesus promised to be present where two or three came together in His name (Matthew 18:20). Out of this marvelous passage that challenges us to stimulate one another to love (*agape* – an act of the will) and God-approved works because Christ has opened a way for us into the very presence of God, into the Holy of Holies in heaven itself – what gets the emphasis today? Don't forget to assemble together! Probably the least important thought within the whole sentence and today it receives banner significance; not attending church for a year is placed alongside of adultery and homosexuality by some when dealing with church discipline.⁹⁶ There is urgency among Evangelicals and independent Baptists to protect their churches (their kingdoms), for it is only through maintaining a sufficiently large group that the pastors (using the term in the Evangelical sense) can justify their own existence within the group, and the success of their programs and projects is dependent upon adequate numbers. Clearly, they are not above taking such a profound passage from the Word of God and using one phrase of it to support their church programs and staffing, even while they neglect the ministry of exhortation.

The focus of Hebrews 10:25 is the need to encourage and exhort our fellow saints to hold fast their commitment to the faith of our Lord Jesus, and to live a life of love, righteousness and holiness (the *good works* of the *new man* – Ephesians 4:24). The urgency of such an exhortation is twofold: 1) the need to be continually conscious of the work that Jesus has done on the cross in order to open our access into the very presence of God, that heavenly Holy of Holies, and 2) the warning that follows in Hebrews 10:26. One of the ways that the former can be accomplished is through coming together from time-to-time to be exhorted through the teaching of the Word of God; however, the gathering together cannot be construed to be the emphasis of this passage. As a matter of fact, many times Evangelical pastors, who use this verse to place guilt on anyone who may not be faithful in attending all of the services at their church, do not accurately teach the Scriptures so as to fulfill the balance of the verse that speaks of the need for exhortation. Many times they are too busy teaching those things that the people want to hear, in order to enhance their

⁹⁵ <https://www.biblestudytools.com/resources/guide-to-bible-study/order-books-new-testament.html>

⁹⁶ James W. Crumpton, *New Testament Church Discipline*, p. 67 (pdf version).

own security within the church (2 Timothy 4:2-4). They chastise people for their poor church attendance, even while they fail in the far more serious matter of teaching the truth of God’s Word. The warning that follows provides a significant reason for exhortation – “For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins” (Hebrews 10:26). Unfortunately, it seems that most professors of faith in Christ today never bother to read that far – it is far easier to neglect God’s Word here and there than to be forced to change our theology because it does not agree with the Scriptures.

As we consider the purpose of the *ekklesia*, we must keep in mind the preeminence of the Word of God over what we too often hear within churches today. Jesus is not building His *ekklesia* to support the man-made programs that are central to the typical modern church. Once we begin to realize that man has developed his own church-building project (quite apart from what the Lord is doing), then we can open our thinking to what the Scriptures really tell us about the plan of God for us, His redeemed ones – His *ekklesia*. If you are attentive to how often we hear “the church” being personified, i.e., it is given traits that are normally only applied to individuals, it is a beginning to understanding some of the misconceptions that are being taught and readily accepted today. In days gone by, we’ve heard much of *the church* fulfilling the Great Commission, but was it given to “the church?”

A. The “Great Commission” – What of the “great commission?” To whom was this commission given by Jesus? It used to be a popular subject for many missions’ conferences, but its emphasis seems to have declined in recent years. Perhaps as the theology of John Calvin has been gaining popularity within modern Evangelical communities, the work of missions is losing some of its appeal. Nevertheless, it is still a part of God’s Word to us and very relevant to our subject. Let us look at the five instances where the commission is repeated.

1. Matthew 28: “¹⁶Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. ¹⁷And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted. ¹⁸And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. ¹⁹Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: ²⁰Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen.”

The first thing to be noted is that the commission, as recorded here, was given to the eleven disciples; even though they all worshipped Him, some still doubted as to what this was all about. The Greek word translated as *go* is commonly used to signify the end of a conversation, and simply means “to go on one’s way,”⁹⁷ or to “continue on one’s journey.”⁹⁸ What we cannot miss is that this is not a command (as we have so often heard it thundered from pulpits), but would more accurately give the thought that: as you are going on your way, here is something that I command you to do along the way – teach. The core of the commission is to teach, or to instruct, *all the*

⁹⁷ Vine’s “go.”

⁹⁸ Strong’s Online.

peoples (*ta ethnos*, often translated as *Gentiles* [as non-Jews], identifying those who are outside of the faith), and to live in obedience to (*observe*) all of the commands that Jesus has given.⁹⁹ The fulfillment of this command to *teach* is not confined to a formal classroom setting, but is to be an integral part of our journey through life. What many of those energetic conference speakers missed, as they pounded the word *go*, was that the command was for everyone to *teach* careful obedience to the Lord's commands. It is important to keep in mind that Jesus is the eternal *Logos*, and the commands that He has given were not just to those throughout His earthly ministry, but are all of the commands within the written Word of God (which all harken back to the Law of God, the Ten Commandments¹⁰⁰). Baptizing is secondary to or a product of the teaching; the injunction is capped with the promise that Jesus will be with the eleven all the days (*alway*) as they go on their way teaching others to walk in obedience to God's Law.

2. Mark 16: "14Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen. 15And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature."

It is the eleven who are spoken to, and here, too, Jesus is dealing with some who doubted. The same Greek word for *go* is used here (as in Matthew), and it signals the end of Jesus' time with them; with the conclusion of His conversation, they are to enter the whole world and herald the Good News to everyone.

3. Luke 24: "45Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, 46And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: 47And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48And ye are witnesses of these things."

From the context, we understand this to be addressed to the core group of disciples, and the central message of repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be taken to all peoples (*ta ethnos*, those who do not believe) in the name of Jesus. They were to go out as witnesses of Jesus' suffering and resurrection from the dead, which form the heart of the Message of redemption and new life in Christ.

4. John 20: "19Then the same day at evening [the same day that Jesus rose from the dead], being the first *day* of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace *be* unto you. 20And when he had so said, he shewed unto them *his* hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord. 21Then said Jesus to them again, Peace *be* unto you: as *my* Father hath sent me, even so send I you."

⁹⁹ Friberg Lexicon.

¹⁰⁰ When Jesus responded to the lawyer in Matthew 22:37-40, He identified His declared two commandments as the summarizing support for the Law of God (the Ten Commandments), the Law of Moses and the words of the prophets.

Jesus said: “As my Father has sent me [*apostello* – to send forth with a commission], likewise I am sending you [*pempo* – to send, in a more general sense].”¹⁰¹ Jesus’ incarnation involved a very specific commission from God the Father, namely, the fulfillment of the Scriptures in accomplishing the redemption of mankind. Jesus’ sending of the disciples is more general in nature. There are no specifics given here as to what the “sending” would involve.

5. Acts 1: “⁶When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? ⁷And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. ⁸But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”

Once again, the core group of disciples received these words, and they were to be witnesses of what Jesus had declared and accomplished in ever widening circles from where they were.

What we see in each of these is that Jesus commissioned individuals to take His message of Good News to all peoples – it is individuals reaching individuals within the whole world. Unlike some who proclaim the heresy of spiritual formation theology today, Scripture does not support the idea that a group can experience salvation, but individuals within a group can certainly be saved by **personal** faith in Christ. However, there is a sense today where “the church” has been elevated to take on the characteristics of an individual. For example, David Cloud says: “A church that doesn’t have time for fruitful evangelism is sinning against the Lord of the Harvest and will doubtless give account at the Judgment Seat of Christ for becoming sidetracked.”¹⁰² There are several things in this simple statement to which we need to give our attention, because they reflect a commonly held attitude about the “church,” but one that is not in accordance with Scripture. Most obviously, a church cannot sin – people sin; yet we hear this kind of rhetoric all of the time. The local church is personified; it is said to act and react as only a person can. Cloud’s further comments provide some enlightenment as to what he means: “I recall a kind and godly pastor who had allowed **his** church’s visitation program to die.”¹⁰³ So when Cloud speaks of a church making time for “fruitful evangelism,” he is really speaking of a church having a program of some sort that will be their means of “fulfilling the great commission.” However, the “great commission” was given to the disciples of Jesus who were to function as individuals, not as a group – they were to teach as they went on their ways; it was definitely not given to a group with a mixture of saved and unsaved individuals pledging allegiance to a creed or constitution (like today’s churches). So a group of saved and unsaved who make up a “church,” can, within Cloud’s thinking, sin against the Lord and that group will be held accountable at the “Judgment Seat of Christ.” Second Corinthians 5:10 – “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that **every one** [singular] may receive the things *done* in *his* body, according to that he hath done, whether *it be*

¹⁰¹ Vine’s “send.”

¹⁰² David Cloud, “Reviving a Church that is Lukewarm Toward Evangelism,”
<http://www.wayoflife.org/fbns/reviving-a-church-lukewarm.html>

¹⁰³ Ibid.

good or bad.”¹⁰⁴ Yes, the redeemed will all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, but we will not be judged as a group; it is an individual accountability that we have to our Lord; this is in keeping with the individual connection that we have with the Lord (Ephesians 4:15-16). On the other hand, the unsaved will be raised to stand before God at the great white throne for their final judgment; they will not even appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so it is incorrect to say that “the church” (as Cloud uses the term) will be called to give an account before Christ. It is also clear from Cloud’s words that the church belongs to the pastor, the church has programs through which it endeavors to fulfill its obligations, and so the church takes on human characteristics. Jesus said, “I will build my *ekklesia*” (Matthew 16:18; cp Jeremiah 31:4a); Jesus is doing the building, it is His *ekklesia*, and it is an *ekklesia*, not a *church*. This may appear to some as knit-picking, but if we are not careful in the use of words, we will tend to communicate something that is not true; we can see this exemplified in the churches today, even those considered to be Fundamental. They are organized around a constitution or creed (which will often identify them as Baptist, Alliance, Evangelical Free, Pentecostal, or whatever); if there is a dispute within the group, they appeal to the constitution. The constitution empowers the clergy to exercise authority, and encourages the laity to submit to them (contrary to Ephesians 5:21); the people become members by pledging allegiance to the constitution, and their spiritual assurance too often comes through being a member in good standing. All of this is extra-Biblical – it stands outside of the Scriptures. We might religiously proclaim *sola scriptura* (Scripture alone), but our activities will either confirm or deny the reality of this in our hearts.

We are individually
gifted after we have been
individually redeemed.

As we looked at the *ekklesia* being likened to the body, we saw that Christ is joined to each individual who has repented of his sinful ways and has placed his faith in the finished work of Christ, Who alone provides redemption (Ephesians 4:16). We have individually been gifted for service within the Body, and Christ has strategically placed us so that our gifts will be of maximum benefit to its wellbeing. All of this is clearly personal: we are redeemed individually, we are individually gifted by the Spirit of God, we have been placed individually by Christ within the Body where He desires us to be, and we have individually been commissioned to speak forth the reality of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection and the need for obedience to His commands. We cannot shift any of this to the “church”; we cannot hide behind anyone else (whether pastor, priest, or pope), we cannot hide within a program, we cannot depend upon our church membership, nor hang our spiritual hat upon a creed or constitution – “If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast *them* into the fire, and they are [literally – *it is* (singular)] burned” (John 15:6).¹⁰⁵ Failure to accept individual responsibility has permitted

Jesus said, “**I** will build
my *ekklesia*.”

many to hide within the programs of a church and feel good about what they are doing, when, in reality, they are simply tossing a few coins into the church treasury while they do nothing. A church cannot sin, but people, those for whom Christ died, certainly have that propensity; Jesus

¹⁰⁴ Stephanus 1550 NT.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

did not die to save “the church”; He died to provide salvation for men, women, boys and girls by whom He is building His *ekklesia* – it is His project, not ours.

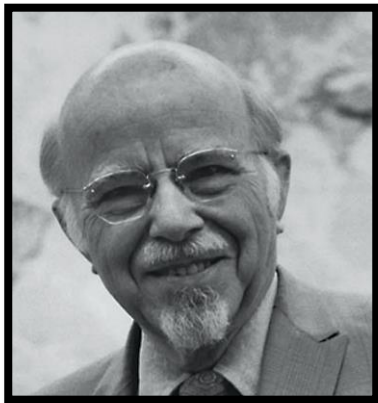
Herein are some of the fundamental differences between a church and the *ekklesia*: the *ekklesia* has no creed but the Word of God (1 Timothy 4:16; 2 Timothy 3:16-17), there is neither clergy nor laity, for we are all one in Christ (Romans 12:5; Ephesians 2:14-18; Ephesians 4:4-6), there is a clear understanding of our individual accountability to God, and our mutual submission to one another in the Lord (Ephesians 5:21). A church, on the other hand, is formed around a creed, constitution or statement of faith (the product of man), which provides structure and authority for the clergy, and ensures that the laity understand their responsibility. The two are not the same, nor can they ever be, for the latter is the invention of man, while the former is the project of the Lord Jesus Christ. When the *ekklesia* comes together, it is around the Word of God, and they exhort and comfort one another through God’s Word; when the church comes together, it is around programs and functions that are a product of their constitutions and creeds. The *ekklesia* is the Body of Christ; it is an exclusive group that includes absolutely no unbelievers and no apostates. Yet what is becoming increasingly prevalent is that the church is a social means of dealing with what we call the *great commission*; it is a setting for the implementation of programs and projects that give the impression of accomplishing Christ’s purposes. Jesus said: “I will build my *ekklesia*,” and we would do well to permit Him to do just that; ours is to obey His commands (1 John 2:3), hold fast to the teachings of the Scriptures (1 Timothy 4:16), and have a word for those who ask the reason of the hope that lies within us (1 Peter 3:15). The commission that Jesus gave was to individuals (not to an organized institution called the “church”), and we see in Scripture that its fulfillment began on an individual basis just like Jesus planned: the scattering of the believers by persecution would have deterred any early attempts to become organized (Acts 8:1, 4); Philip worked alone (Acts 8:5ff, 26ff), and Ananias (someone not heard of before, nor again) is specifically called by God to prepare Paul (or, Saul, as he was at the time) for ministry to the Gentiles (Acts 9:10ff). Ananias did not receive his commission from a church, a pastor, or a missions committee, nor did he consult with a consistory or church board before venturing forth – he was called and commissioned by God alone to do the work alone.

Why would the Lord save, indwell and gift us individually only to commission an organization to take His Message to the world? Quite simply – He wouldn’t and didn’t. As much as we might like to justify the finely organized institutions that we call “churches,” this is not what Jesus had in mind. We cannot deflect our personal responsibilities onto an organization – yet as we observe Evangelicals and Baptists of all stripes and flavors today, this is exactly what they have done, and continue to do. May the Lord grant us the vision to look beyond the traditions with which we have become comfortable, to see what His Word really says on this subject.

B. Growth - Whole organizations have sprung up to promote the latest philosophies of how to grow your church (numerically, not spiritually). A search on a popular “Christian” book distributor’s website yielded 4,025 books, ebooks and audiobooks on the subject; a general

“Google” search yielded 302,000,000 hits for “church growth.”¹⁰⁶ Although the Emergent Church paradigm has made great strides in recent years, where spiritual vitality is completely subjective and we learn how to draw from all faiths in order to experience “God,” the church growth phenomena is certainly not finished yet. Bill Hybels and Rick Warren are notorious poster-pastors for demonstrating the effectiveness of applying the carefully crafted principles of church growth, which they learned from the late Robert Schuller.¹⁰⁷ Donald McGavran, a missionary to India for many years, is credited with providing the initial spark that ignited the phenomena of the mega-church in our western world, and the church-growth movement worldwide.

Before we go further in our look at this philosophy, which has spread like wild-fire across the Evangelical community globally, it is important to understand its basic premise, that root from which it springs. As McGavran developed and spread his philosophy of church growth, he based it very firmly upon an Ecumenical understanding of the church. His foundational premise is that “church growth is basically a theological stance. God requires it.”¹⁰⁸ Once again, the subtlety lies in the use of terms and how they have been redefined (his statement “God requires it” serves to place whatever he says beyond question for everyone who will not check his teaching against Scripture). Within McGavran’s economy, “church” is a very broad term that includes Adventists, Roman Catholics, Pentecostals, the Orthodox and so on;¹⁰⁹ each in their own right is but another branch of the church, and each, in turn, would flesh out the principles that he put forward within the context of their own traditions, creed, constitution, and/or statement of faith. Therefore, it is not surprising that advocates of this teaching will proudly declare that “tremendous growth is going on in the Christian Church today.”¹¹⁰ If you define your terms



Donald McGavran

just right, you can demonstrate the tremendous growth that is taking place within the church around the world; however, we must bring Biblical discernment to bear on the statistics that are so freely tossed about and realize that they have redefined what it means to be one of God’s saints.

From the beginning of McGavran’s philosophy, which laid down the principles for realizing “church growth,” there has been an emphasis on numbers; simply put, church growth is seen only as an increase in the number of people attending services. They will acknowledge the need for at least a nodding assent to some of the generally accepted themes of Christianity that qualifies anyone, in their eyes, as being a disciple of Jesus; however, “the fruit that the Church Growth Movement has selected as the validating criterion for discipleship is responsible church membership.”¹¹¹ Although they express a desire to reach the world for Jesus in fulfillment of the *great commission*, in reality, they are there to see the growth and multiplication of the “church”

¹⁰⁶ <https://www.christianbook.com>; both checked in 2021.

¹⁰⁷ <http://www.deceptioninthechurch.com/orrel20.html>

¹⁰⁸ Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, 1980, p. 7.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 101, 116.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, p. 3.

¹¹¹ C. Peter Wagner, *Leading Your Church to Growth*, 1984, p. 21.

movement (by the way, this is NOT the *ekklesia* that Jesus said that He would build). They can disguise this well, at times, but when they declare that “the great obstacles of conversion are social, not theological,”¹¹² their deviation from Scripture becomes all too clear.

The New Evangelical message of the gospel has become a social message calling people to a common venue. Just by way of a reminder, New Evangelicalism sprang up in the late 1940s through a repudiation of Biblical separation,¹¹³ a desire to dialogue with the liberals, a felt need to focus on the social needs of the world, and a willingness to reevaluate some “theological problems,” like the history of man, God’s method of creation, the universality of the flood, etc.¹¹⁴ The greatest obstacle to conversion today is the twisted theology that modern Evangelicals hold dear (a product of New Evangelicalism that has infiltrated every Evangelical denomination to some degree); they have redefined the Biblical terms to remove the sting of the Gospel message so that it is increasingly difficult for anyone to be truly saved through their teachings. They are not unlike the Pharisees of Jesus’ day, against whom Jesus declared: “...woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in *yourselves*, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in” (Matthew 23:13); “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves” (Matthew 23:15). Today, men like Rick Warren have great, world-wide projects seeking to establish Christ’s kingdom on this earth, yet the message that they proclaim will not bring anyone into the kingdom of God, for they have skewed the message and broadened the application to the point that they no longer present the purity and truth of God’s Word. Warren’s P.E.A.C.E. program¹¹⁵ endeavors to create a three-pronged approach to resolve all of today’s social ills by drawing together government, business and churches – an unholy alliance where the latter is defined as broadly as possible so as to exclude no one. We are deluded if we think that we can possibly be building Christ’s kingdom while compromising His Word!

In October of 2007, representative Muslims generated a 29-page letter in which they “petitioned their Christian counterparts to help find steps to be taken toward erasing the misunderstandings about each other that often lead to violence.”¹¹⁶ The letter was initially signed by 138 Muslim clerics from numerous branches of Islam and presented at a conference in Jordan; the fundamental basis for the letter was: love of God and love of neighbor.¹¹⁷ The letter was addressed specifically to Pope Benedict XVI and 26 other named religious leaders, and more



Pope Benedict XVI

¹¹² McGavran, p. 215.

¹¹³ See the separate study, *Biblical Separation*; <https://www.thenarrowtruth.com/biblical-separation.html>

¹¹⁴ David Cloud, “New Evangelicalism – Its History,” <http://www.wayoflife.org/fbns/fundamen1.htm>

¹¹⁵ Promote reconciliation, Equip servant leaders, Assist the poor, Care for the sick, Educate the next generation. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/P.E.A.C.E._Plan

¹¹⁶ <http://www.spiegel.de/international/0,1518,511167,00.html>

¹¹⁷ <http://acommonword.com/>

generally to leaders of Christian churches everywhere.¹¹⁸ Within a month, four professors from Yale University had drafted a response that was endorsed by some 300 “Christian” leaders, including Leith Anderson (president of National Association of Evangelicals), David Yonggi Cho (leader of the world’s largest Evangelical church in Seoul), Robert E. Cooley (Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary), Lynn Green (chairman, YWAM), Bill Hybels, Stanton L. Jones (Wheaton College), Tony Jones (Emergent Village), Greg Livingstone (Frontiers), Rick Love (Frontiers), Brian D. McLaren (Emergent Church), Judith M. Rood (Biola), Richard Mouw (Fuller), Greg H. Parson (US Center for World Mission), Robert Schuller, John G. Stackhouse, Jr. (Regent College), George Verwer (founder of OM), and Rick Warren.¹¹⁹ Supporters of this one response (and there were other responses as well) come from well-known seminaries, missions, churches and individuals, and are intermingled with those of liberal schools and churches – this is ecumenicity at work. They choose to believe the lie of these Muslim clerics that Islam is a religion of peace and tolerance, and, by doing so, they are playing into the hands of the Muslim leadership. What runs contrary to all that we in the West have ever learned is that within the Islamic faith “lying is not only permitted, but actually fostered, and even, at times, commanded.”¹²⁰ Blindness has settled over Evangelicals, even those who at one time seemed to stand solidly for truth and demonstrated a commitment to the Word of God.

The obstacle to conversion remains spiritual, for man is spiritually dead to God, but alive unto the prince of this world (Ephesians 2:1-2); Evangelicals today have “a form of godliness, but [deny] the power thereof ... [they are] ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge [a precise and correct knowledge¹²¹] of the truth” (2 Timothy 3:5, 7). Ecumenical activity is a very strong evidence that Evangelicals today neither understand nor have a love for God’s unalterable truth.

C. Church Membership – If church membership has become the measure of a successful church today, as the church growth promoters would lead us to believe, it is little wonder that the bar of entry has been lowered so as to permit many more to gain access. Nevertheless, what these men, on a mission to Christianize the whole world, seem to have lost sight of is that God has not changed. Jesus declared that the entrance to the way that leads to life is narrow, and there will be few who find it (Matthew 7:14); that plain statement of truth has not changed. Despite the best and most eloquent arguments by church growth men like Donald McGavran, C. Peter Wagner, Robert Schuller, Rick Warren and Bill Hybels, the truth of Matthew 7:14 is alive and well today. These men have achieved a degree of success in making church membership the measure of the success for a church (or its pastor); yet we wonder at the failure of the church within society today.

¹¹⁸ http://rissc.jo/docs/Common_word.pdf ; specifically included were Rowan Williams (Archbishop of Canterbury), Mark Hanson (bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America), David Coffey (president of the Baptist World Alliance), and Samuel Kobia (president of the World Council of Churches).

¹¹⁹ <http://acommonword.com/lib/downloads/fullpageadbold18.pdf>

¹²⁰ Joel Richardson, *The Islamic AntiChrist*, p. 151.

¹²¹ Strong’s Online.

Church membership has become essential within modern churches, and even within Fundamental churches it has become a focus. Although Fundamentalists might not use the length of one’s church membership list as an evidence of blessing, it has become a vital and carefully guarded part of their organized church, and they look diligently to Scripture to find support for it. David Cloud, a popular Fundamentalist and founder of the Way of Life website, has written an article called “Church Membership” in which he outlines four reasons for having church membership, and endeavors to support these with Scripture. Since our subject is the *ekklesia*, and since membership has become very important to the churches at large, and even to those who declare themselves to be Fundamentalists, let’s take a moment to consider the basis for it as given by someone of Cloud’s stature within the Fundamentalist movement. If church membership is Biblical, then we would expect to find the best Biblical support for it from someone like Cloud.



David Cloud

In his preamble to listing four reasons for church membership, Cloud provides a couple of background points to lay the foundation for his arguments. First of all, he says that membership is entirely a matter of practicality, because it provides the church with a means of knowing who is in and who is out.¹²² That’s not a good start to demonstrating the Biblical basis for membership. The church clearly is no longer the Body of believers that Christ said that He would build (Matthew 16:18). Jesus openly declared that He knows His sheep (John 10:14), so if we were speaking of the *ekklesia* that Jesus said that He would build, clearly there is no need for a membership roll. However, we have bought into the lie that bigger is better, and so we must own property, hire staff, implement programs, and develop a budget; church has become comparable to business where the prescribed shareholders must vote on whom they should hire as a manager, into which product lines they should venture, what property to acquire, and how big a budget to approve that will guide their operations going forward. A business typically functions on the majority vote of the shareholders and, without a second thought, most churches have adopted this practice. However, the Biblical mandate is that the teachings of Scripture are to be paramount and are to be protected at all cost; Timothy was warned: “take heed unto [give attention to] thyself, and unto the doctrine ...” (1 Timothy 4:16). We are to be cautious in how we use the teachings of the Word of God; we cannot use them to accomplish our own ends. How do we see the democratic vote of the majority displayed within Scripture? The people came together as one to build a tower that would reach unto heaven (Genesis 11:1-8), a project that did not meet with God’s approval; the majority chose to ignore Noah’s preaching and perished from the face of the earth (1 Peter 3:20). The voice of the majority was heard when the elders of Israel demanded a king and the Lord granted them their desire, not because it was best for them, but because they insisted upon it (1 Samuel 8: 4-7). We see the will of the people, influenced by certain leaders, crying out to have Jesus crucified (Matthew 27:20-23). Democracy is founded upon the will of the people, but often “the people” are easily persuaded by a few, and too often they do not know, or lose sight of, what is right and best.

¹²² David Cloud, “Church Membership,” <http://www.wayoflife.org/fbns/church-membership.html>

What place does such have within the *ekklesia* of Jesus? It has no place at all! The practicality of church membership within today’s churches is founded upon a general departure from the Word of God.

Cloud then goes on to refer to Acts 2:41 – “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added *unto them* about three thousand souls,” and then he declares that those “who were saved and baptized were added to the church. That is church membership.”¹²³ If that were true, then you would not have Fundamentalists limiting participation in the activities of their churches to those who have their names on the membership roll. You can be saved and baptized, but you may still be banned from singing in the choir, teaching, or sitting on any of their governing boards if your name is not on their membership list. In reality, this is a bit of a red herring, because what is described in Acts 2:41 is not what church membership is at all, even within Cloud’s world. With this “firm foundation,” David Cloud launches into his four points of support for church membership:¹²⁴

1. “We need church membership because each church is a body and family.”

By way of explanation, Cloud declares that all of the NT believers “are a part of Christ and the family of God but each church is independent and has its own business.”¹²⁵ In support of this statement, he refers to Acts 14:21-23:

“²¹And when they had preached the gospel to that city [Derbe], and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, ²²Confirming the souls of the disciples, *and* exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. ²³And when they had ordained them elders in every church [*ekklesia*], and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.”

Paul and Barnabas travelled back through the country through which they had just come, and established the disciples, exhorted them, warned them of tribulation to come, and appointed elders in each *ekklesia*. The independence of each *ekklesia* I would allow, since each one received its own elders, but to say that each *ekklesia* had its own “business” is to read a modern church context into the Scriptures. The oversight of the local assembly was placed into the hands of appointed elders (1 Peter 5:1-3) to ensure their adherence to the teachings of Scripture. There was no “business” to attend to, for most of these early gatherings were in homes (Acts 2:2; 5:42; 8:3; 9:11, 17; 12:12; 16:32; 17:5; 20:20; Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15; Philemon 2). It is noteworthy that those within the *ekklesia* in each of these towns did not vote on their elders; the elders were appointed by Paul and Barnabas. Democracy had no finger in who would be responsible for attending to the spiritual oversight of these assemblies; the elders were appointed by someone of spiritual maturity. Today, church leadership is largely determined by a majority vote of the members – something that is clearly not demonstrated within Scripture.

¹²³ Cloud, “Membership.”

¹²⁴ Each is quoted from Cloud’s article, “Church Membership.”

¹²⁵ Cloud, “Membership.”

Cloud goes on: “We see the same thing in Revelation 1:4 [carrying forward the thought of independence], where each church was addressed individually.”¹²⁶ Actually Revelation 1:4 is addressed to the “seven churches [plural form of *ekklesia*] which are in Asia,” clearly a general greeting to all of them; the names of the seven individual groups are not mentioned until verse 11 of chapter 1. However, what follows in chapters 2 and 3 is addressed to the *angel* or *messenger* (singular; elder¹²⁷) of each *assembly* within the locations mentioned. We must be careful in our handling of the Word of God.

Cloud continues: “In Revelation 1:12-13 Jesus is standing in the midst of the churches, which are signified by the golden candlesticks. In the Old Testament there was one candlestick in the tabernacle, but in the New Testament dispensation there are many candlesticks, as each church is a light.”¹²⁸ *Candle* is a mistranslation of a Greek word that means lamp, and this understanding serves to clarify the word picture used by Jesus in Revelation. It is very evident that the lampstand (*luchnia*) is not the light, but a holder for the lamp or lamps that will give forth the light (Revelation 1:12); so the *ekklesia* is not the light (in contradiction to Cloud’s statement), but it is the context from which the lights of individuals will show forth the Spirit of God, Who is the Light. As we saw earlier in Hebrews 10, the *ekklesia* is the place where individuals are exhorted and challenged to remain firm in the faith so that their light might shine forth. Cloud’s contention that the current *dispensation* has “many candlesticks, as each church is a light,” and that this stands in contrast to the OT dispensation, is misleading, and another example of 1) misinterpretation due to a dispensational view of Scripture, and 2) holding the translators’ choice of words for the KJV as the most accurate, without any consideration for the original languages.¹²⁹ If we follow the illustration that John gives us in Revelation 1, we understand that each *ekklesia* is **not** a light (as Cloud contends), but rather that the seven lampstands ARE the seven assemblies just named, just like Jesus said (Revelation 1:20). The OT menorah was a lampstand, used in the tabernacle and temple of Israel, which held seven lamps (Exodus 25:31-37). Each *ekklesia* is a lampstand from which the lamps will shine forth; Jesus said: “¹⁴Ye are the light of the world ... ¹⁵Neither do men light a [*luchnos* – lamp], and put it under a bushel, but on a [*luchnia* – lampstand]; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house” (Matthew 5:14-15).¹³⁰

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ The Greek word *angelos* is most often translated as *angel*, but is also used to describe John the Baptist (Matthew 11:10), the disciples of John the Baptist who went to inquire of Jesus whether He was the One (Luke 7:24), the thorn in the flesh of Paul (2 Corinthians 12:7), and the spies sent to Jericho (James 2:25); so the concept of “one who is sent” comes through. Jesus addressed a particular *messenger* in each of the assemblies, undoubtedly an elder who bore spiritual responsibility within the assembly.

¹²⁸ Cloud, “Membership.”

¹²⁹ Cloud does not hold to the KJV being an inspired translation, but “an accurate, lovely, and God-superintended translation of the divinely-inspired Scripture,” which clearly means that he will not check the original Greek or Hebrew to affirm their choice of words. From my studies, I believe that is an oversight that leads to many erroneous conclusions, as we see here. I, too, believe that the KJV is the superior translation today, but that is not because the translators were so wonderful, but because their translation work was not influenced by the higher critics that came later. I fear that the guidelines that King James I gave to the translators impacted their work more than men like Cloud acknowledge; hence, they turn a blind eye to the translational errors within the KJV to the detriment of their followers.

¹³⁰ Strong’s Online; Stephanus 1550 NT; the translators have really confused the matter by using the word *candle*.

Quoting from Cloud: “See 1 Timothy 3:15, which says the church is ‘the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.’ In the context this refers to the church that has pastors and deacons (1 Tim. 3:1-14).”¹³¹ Cloud refers to 1 Timothy 3:1-14 as the context of a church that has “pastors and deacons,” culminating in being called the “house of God.” First of all, the passage referred to makes no mention of *pastors*. The Greek word *episcopus*, translated as *office of a bishop* in 1 Timothy 3:1, means “investigation, inspection, visitation.”¹³² In 1 Timothy 3:2 the Greek word translated as *bishop* is *episkopos*, which means overseer.¹³³ From Titus 1:5-7 we learn that the *episkopos* (bishop) and the *presbuteros* (elder) are used synonymously; however, as careful students of the Scriptures, we must note that nowhere, in the passage referred to, do we find the word *poimen* (shepherd – translated as *pastor* in Ephesians 4:11). The ultimate context of 1 Timothy 3:1-14 is, therefore, to provide Timothy with some guidelines as to the functioning of the *ekklesia* should Paul be tarried in coming to him (v. 14). What is clearly evident is that there are some very specific qualifications for those who would take on either elder or deacon roles within a local *ekklesia*.

Here is a definition of a pastor that might be worthy of consideration within today’s churches and, perhaps, even within the Fundamental Baptist movement: “Pastors ... must preach and take care of the religious instruction of the faithful, especially of the young, supply their spiritual needs ..., administer diligently the property entrusted to their care, watch over the moral conduct of their parishioners, and remove, as far as possible, all hindrances to their salvation.”¹³⁴ Although this might well define what is expected of a “pastor” in today’s Evangelical churches, this definition comes straight from the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, and serves to illustrate how well we have learned from the influence of Roman Catholic traditions.

The phrase “house of God” (1 Timothy 3:15) was used extensively in the OT to refer to both the original tabernacle and to the temples that were later built and rebuilt; Paul provides here a new understanding of what this house of God is. It is no longer the temple (the building), but it is the “church [*ekklesia*] of the living God” upon which the truth rests. Again, we see the importance of being firmly established in the doctrine that has come to us through the written Word of God. The *house of God* is no longer a building, a temple, or a tabernacle, but it is the metaphorical *building* that God is constructing, of which Jesus is the Chief Corner (Ephesians 2:19-22); what we must also understand is that the *house of God* has never been a local gathering of saints and sinners around a particular creed or statement of faith. Those who are redeemed by the blood of Christ and are faithfully abiding in the Vine (John 15:4), are a part of the *house of God* (Hebrews 3:6). We (like Timothy) are commanded to “take heed ... unto the doctrine” (1 Timothy 4:16) so that we might remain in the Vine and, in fact, be a support of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15).

Cloud continues: “In the New Testament each separate church is a spiritual body and has its own members. ‘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

¹³¹ Cloud, “Membership.”

¹³² Strong’s Online.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ The Catholic Encyclopedia, “Pastor,” <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11537b.htm>

particular’ (1 Cor. 12:26-27).”¹³⁵ We’ve already looked at this passage in 1 Corinthians 12 as it relates to the metaphor of the body that is used by God to illustrate the gifting of the members within the *ekklesia*. It would seem evident that Cloud has succumbed to straining at a gnat in order to defend his position. I would concur that each *ekklesia* is a spiritual entity – the reason that we gather is for our spiritual edification and strengthening. However, to say that each separate *ekklesia* is a spiritual body and has its own members after the fashion of 1 Corinthians 12, demonstrates a serious lack of contextual consideration. 1 Corinthians 12:12-13 clarifies for us: “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**” It seems quite indisputable that there is one Body, and we are ALL baptized by the Spirit into that one Body. Not every *ekklesia* will boast of having all of the gifts of the Spirit being exercised within it, but the promise of Jesus is sure that where two or three come together in His name He will be in their midst (Matthew 18:20). It is inappropriate to take a passage of Scripture that deals with the Body of Christ and apply it in this manner to a local church that is made up of believers and unbelievers gathered around a constitution, statement of faith, or creed. Jesus said: “I will build my *ekklesia*,” and it is that Body (the *ekklesia*, the kingdom of God) into which we are born; in its truest sense, a local gathering of the children of God is but a small expression of the *ekklesia* that Jesus is building.

As we have considered the first point in Cloud’s *Biblical* defense of church membership, the *church is a body and family*, it seems that the evidence has crumbled under a more careful examination. To use 1 Corinthians 12 as the basis for calling a local church a Body is to skew the intent of the Corinthian passage and create the impression that each church must be the Body of Christ; this would mean that Christ has many Bodies throughout the world when it is clear that there is only ONE Body. Let us move on to consider Cloud’s second reason for church membership:

2. “We need church membership for unity.”

Unity is a subject that is very popular today, especially within the Christian community at large; it actually surprised me to see that Cloud would use this as one of his arguments for church membership. To begin his defense of this point, he appeals to Scripture:

“The Bible requires that the believers have one mind in doctrine and practice. ‘Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment’ (1 Cor. 1:10). ‘Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel’ (Phil. 1:27). For

¹³⁵ Cloud, “Membership.”

this reason our church has a lengthy statement of faith and we require every member to agree with it, whether he is joining by statement of faith and baptism or from another church.”¹³⁶

Let’s carefully consider the passages referred to here. In 1 Corinthians 1:10 Paul was addressing the divisions that had become evident among the Corinthians due to some preferring one servant of Christ over another, and still others, perhaps wanting to appear to be particularly spiritual, declaring themselves to be “of Christ” (1 Corinthians 1:12). Cloud says that this is the reason (to prevent such divisions) that his church has a “lengthy statement of faith,” and why they require every member to agree with it. Based on this, what you would expect to find in Paul’s exhortation to the Corinthians would be his instructions on how they should draw up a statement of faith and have everyone support it. However, Paul leads the Corinthians to this: “²¹Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours; ²²Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; ²³And ye are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s” (1 Corinthians 3:21-23). In other words, don’t glory in men but rather in the unity that is yours through Christ! Nevertheless, Cloud would use this same Corinthian problem to provide a “Biblical” basis for drafting a statement of faith, and using that as a means for unity. What is a statement of faith? It is nothing more than a document that man puts together outlining, in summary format, what they believe to be the important themes of Scripture. I have seen too many statements of faith that either leave out significant teachings or provide a skewed interpretation of teachings from the Scriptures, for me to find Cloud’s comments on this matter acceptable. Nowhere in Scripture do we find encouragement to paraphrase the Word of God, and then use that to determine who is in or out of a gathering. Is that not the very thing that Paul was trying to lead the Corinthians away from – glorying in man? Whoever drafts the statement of faith will hold a sense of ownership of that document, and any questioning of it will lead to strife and the same failure that the Corinthians experienced; if it is prepared by a committee, then you can rest assured that it is the product of compromise as they haggled over the nitty-gritty of the statement’s content. Even beyond that, the final product is a man-made document that is used as the measure of who is to be accepted into membership; that would be a different measure than what God uses to determine who is accepted into His glory, and perhaps more or less restrictive. If the solution to the Corinthian divisions was simply a statement of faith and a membership roll, I think Paul would have explained that, for it would have been a far more simple way to control the whole problem than appealing to them to turn their eyes away from men and focus them on Christ, Who is their Savior and their Life.

Scripture provides us with the example of the Bereans (Acts 17:10-11) who received the words of Paul with gladness, and searched the Scriptures daily to ensure that what they heard was in keeping with the Word of God. They did not refer to a statement of faith, a constitution, or a creed, but shone the light of the Word of God upon what they were hearing from Paul; the Scriptures were their guide, not a paraphrased, summarized document. Is there a fear to use the Word of God alone lest we find some of our pet doctrines unsustainable? That’s all the more reason that we should commit to using only the Scriptures.

¹³⁶ Cloud, “Membership.”

David Cloud then appeals to Philippians 1:27 – “Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel” Paul’s desire for the Philippian believers was that they would “stand fast in one spirit” (the Spirit of the Lord), and that they would strive together in this unity of the Spirit against the opposition that they were facing (verse 28 – “in nothing terrified by your adversaries”). However, if you look further into Paul’s letter, you read: “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus ...” (Philippians 2:5). Now we have the whole picture! This is a call to stand fast in the unity that we have in Christ; we must permit His Spirit and His mind to be our guide and strength. What a high calling is ours, to live humbly before God in the mind of Christ and to stand securely in the Spirit of God; this is very much like 1 Peter 1:15-16 – “¹⁵But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; ¹⁶Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.”

There is nothing within the passages, from which Cloud quotes, to inspire a “lengthy statement of faith,” and then require everyone to agree with it. As a matter of fact, his position sounds very much like a unity that is the product of man’s designs. With such an approach to church unity, it would be very difficult to be critical of the late Chuck Colson who labored tirelessly to draw the Evangelicals and Catholics together, and achieved a modicum of success with the document, *Evangelicals and Catholics Together*. Colson’s approach was to arrive at a statement of faith that was broad enough so as to include Catholics, thereby drawing as many together as possible for the purpose of unity. Cloud says that you need a lengthy statement of faith (Colson’s was about 10 pages), and then everyone must agree with it in order to be included in the membership (if you don’t agree with Colson’s document, you would not be included in their unity). The parallels are uncanny. Granted, Colson’s and Cloud’s documents would say very different things, but the essence of the process is identical. Nowhere in Scripture do you find such action either suggested or called for. The difficulty that the Corinthians faced would have been an ideal situation for Paul to tell them to simply draw up a statement of faith to which everyone agrees – but he didn’t. Paul’s final instruction to them, in his letter of reprimand, is this: “Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong” (1 Corinthians 16:13). We are to learn to walk in the Spirit of God so “that the righteousness of the law [of God] might be fulfilled in us” (Romans 8:4); such a walk will never be achieved through giving our assent to a statement of faith and having our names added to the membership roll of a church – even a Fundamental one. Our unity is only found in Christ (Ephesians 4:1-6), the eternal Logos (John 1:1), not by submitting to a constitution, creed, or statement of faith.

Cloud’s appeal to these Scriptures provides absolutely no basis for church membership. The unity that we have is found in Christ; as we abide in Him, and He abides in us, we have unity with Him and, by this means, unity within the Body (the *ekklesia*). It is nothing that we are called upon to generate through drafting a statement of faith; it is a reality that we have in Christ alone. In John 17:20-23 Jesus said:

²⁰Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; ²¹That they all may be one; as thou, Father, *art* in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us [John 15:10]: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. ²²And the glory which

thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: ²³I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.

Our unity is IN CHRIST; anything else is of the flesh.

3. “We need church membership for discipline.”

Cloud begins this section by quoting from 1 Corinthians 5:11-13:

¹¹But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. ¹²For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? ¹³But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.

He then goes on to offer this explanation:

“This passage deals with church discipline, and in verse 12 we see that there are those who are in the church and those who are without. How can a congregation know who is in and who is out, who is under discipline and who is not, unless it has some form of church membership? As we have stated, it is a matter of practicality. Parents can't discipline other people's children, and churches can't discipline those who are not a part of its own family. Also verse 11 says those under discipline cannot eat, which refers both to personal fellowship and to the Lord's Supper. The church has the obligation before God to exercise discipline over its members and those who are under discipline cannot partake of Communion. Thus there must be a way for the church to know who is a part of the family and who is outside.”¹³⁷

The context, for the Scripture passage quoted, is Paul addressing the Corinthian error of having someone in their midst who professed to be a believer yet continued to live in sexual sin, and they were proud of their liberty in Christ and thought more highly of themselves than they should have (1 Corinthians 4:18). The pride of those in the *assembly* in Corinth had served to dull their spiritual discernment to the point that they tolerated gross sin in their midst, and refused to deal with it.

There is nothing in the passage quoted that demands a membership list, or even indicates that a membership list would make the discipline easier to administer. Clearly, there are those who are outside of the assembly of believers, and those who are within; but Paul's admonition in this case is to “put away from among yourselves that wicked person” (5:13), that one who is living in sin while trying to appear to be righteous. It is clear that until there is repentance from this evil, they are to exclude this individual from their fellowship; he is not to be in their assembly (verses 2, 5, 7, 9 and 11 would further support this position). By contrast, the *ekklesia* that Jesus is building is a pure gathering; it is not a mixture of believers and unbelievers, nor do those who live in continual sin remain within the fold of fellowship, as we learn from this passage. Paul warns them that “a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump”; in other words, tolerating sin is inviting destruction into

¹³⁷ Cloud, “Membership.”

your midst, for it will permeate the whole assembly if it is not dealt with. The identification of this man within the Corinthian context would not have been difficult for the elders of the assembly; they would have known who it was without having to have a name to cross reference with their church membership roll to see if discipline could be applied or not. If a gathering is too big to know what is taking place within its assembly, then perhaps it is just too big. The crux of the instruction is this: if there is known sin, it must be repented of, or the individual or persons involved are to be excluded from fellowship. This is not difficult to understand, although it may be painful to enforce.

Cloud’s statement: “parents can’t discipline other people’s children” is weak and really does not apply in this matter but it does appeal to our sense of logic, and might win some people over. The elders appointed to oversee the *ekklesia* are responsible for those who participate in the assembly; they have been appointed to their role by the leading of the Spirit of God, and continue there through their exemplary life. Anyone who attends such an assembly places himself under the authority of the presiding elders; therefore, everyone who attends is subject to Biblical discipline, not just those who have their names recorded on a membership roll. If the elders are truly men of God, and the attendees are truly born of God, then the application of discipline will not be grievous, but part of our exhortation – the reason that we are to assemble in the first place (Hebrews 10:25). This is not a matter of a parent disciplining someone else’s children, for the *ekklesia* is comprised only of the children of God; we are born of God, and are to be subject one to another and clothed with humility (Ephesians 5:21; 1 Peter 5:5). Just because someone’s name is not on a membership roll, that does not exclude him from Biblical discipline. Isn’t there something wrong if two people attending the same independent Baptist church commit the same grievous sin, and only the member is disciplined? It would seem that an artificial distinction has been created that will not lead to a proper application of Biblical discipline.

Cloud’s defense, in this case, springs from an improper understanding of what the *ekklesia* really is. It is not a group made up of the leavened and unleavened (1 Corinthians 5:6-8); it is a pure gathering, and the elders bear the responsibility to ensure that it remains pure. When the gatherings have become like our modern churches (Evangelical, Fundamental, Liberal, or whatever), then membership becomes a means of control – but that is **not** the *ekklesia* that Jesus said He is building; that is man’s building project and a serious departure from the Word of God. If we return to what the Scriptures say that the *ekklesia* is, then we will leave behind many of the procedures, trappings, and traditions that have become the essence of today’s church.

4. “We need church membership for authority.”

Cloud begins by quoting from Hebrews those verses that “pastors,” who are endeavoring to either establish or retain their authority, love so much.

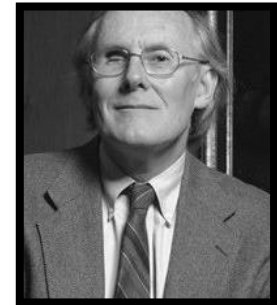
Hebrews 13:7 and 17 say, ‘Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation. ... Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they

that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.”¹³⁸

He then goes on to explain the importance of these verses:

“According to these passages each believer is to be under the authority of church rulers, and we know from other New Testament Scriptures that these rulers are pastors and elders. How can the church leaders know whom they are ruling if there is no membership? Do pastors have the rule over anyone who visits the church? Of course not, so there must be some sort of membership, which involves a standard by which the church accepts members and a commitment on the part of those seeking membership.”¹³⁹

What we need to always be on guard against is the argument that seems to make perfect sense, a reasoning that appeals to our love of logic, but which may, in fact, involve a departure from the truth of God’s Word. At the point where the Lord opened my eyes to the error that pervades Evangelicalism, it was the logic of liberal arguments that was drawing me in. The course at Briercrest Biblical Seminary was *Contemporary Theologians*, and the study was of the late Clark Pinnock, a Baptist heretic, and the subject was his promotion of the doctrine of open theism – God cannot know what has not yet happened, because God cannot know the expression of man’s free will until it has happened.¹⁴⁰ There is a subtle logic in the whole error of open theism that is quite attractive to the natural mind, but the essence of the argument is that, like us, God is limited by time. What these heretics forget is that God is the Alpha and Omega – the beginning and the ending (Revelation 1:8); God knows all of the events of all of time, and He knew them before He created this world. Can we comprehend God’s omniscience? No, and therein is the appeal of such doctrines as open theism – it reduces God sufficiently for us to be able to wrap our minds around some of His greatness. We must be careful that we do not fall for the same subtlety as we look at Cloud’s arguments for membership. His whole premise is based on the assumption that the way we do “church” today is Biblical; my argument is that we have lost sight of what the Scriptures tell us about the *ekklesia* – we have fallen for the example of the apostate Roman Catholic Church.



Clark Pinnock

Before we look at Cloud’s position in his final argument, we need to consider who the elders are and how they are brought into leadership. “The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: ²Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight *thereof*, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; ³Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock” (1 Peter 5:1-3). It is clear from this passage, and from others, that the elders of an assembly have been given the authority and responsibility of spiritual leadership. Perhaps the difficulty today is not that we need membership to firmly establish

¹³⁸ Cloud, “Membership.”

¹³⁹ Cloud, “Membership.”

¹⁴⁰ <https://carm.org/open-theism/what-is-open-theism/>

authority, but rather that we have lost sight of who the elders are to be. The typical church today will peruse 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 when it is time to look at their leadership (if they actually make it that far), and they (as an assembly) then democratically elect “elders” to a three-year term to have oversight of the church activities; or, they review the passages noted, and vote to call a “pastor” to be their chief leader. In either case, we have missed the established Biblical example. The elders in Scripture were evidently appointed for life (only personal failure, incapacity, or death would see them removed from this appointment, which is why “elders” [plural] were appointed). This is an assumption based upon two things: first of all, they were appointed, not elected, and, secondly, if they were to only hold their appointment for a short period of time, then Scripture would have provided us with the details as to how the transition was to be accomplished. The elders were appointed by men of spiritual stature and maturity, i.e., other proven elders (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5); therefore, the perpetuation of the elders would be through further appointments, not elections. Elders were not put into place through a popularity contest (unlike most elections in churches today), nor were they in for a few years and then released from their responsibilities. These men were responsible for the oversight of the local *ekklesia*, to ensure that the teaching was according to the Scriptures, and that the gatherings were orderly (1 Corinthians 14:33; 1 Timothy 4:16; 2 Timothy 1:13; Titus 1:5).

The passages that Cloud cites from Hebrews 13 are commonly used to establish the “pastor” as the authority over the congregation, or the laity. However, these are perhaps the most abused passages of Scripture, particularly by pastors who endeavor to establish their authority over the people, even if, as a last resort, through no other means than intimidation. The Greek word translated as “rule” in verses 7 and 17 means to go before or to lead.¹⁴¹ This qualifies the *rule* as leading by example, rather than being autocratic, and, thereby, it removes the hierarchical thinking that we too often associate with authority. What we must not miss is that this leadership does not apply to a “pastor,” but would have been understood to refer to the elders; as we have already noted, “pastor” and “elder” are not the same and cannot be used synonymously. Hebrews 13:17 says: “obey them that have the rule over you,” and pastors have used this to intimidate people into submission. However, *obey*, as it is used here, includes the concept of being persuaded (from the Greek); so rather than obedience to someone in a position of authority, it calls for the people to be fully persuaded of the Biblical integrity of the elder, and then to be obedient.¹⁴² This is vastly different from how we see this passage being used today: “Believers ... must yield to their pastors, follow their admonition, obey their commands, and submit to their authority.”¹⁴³ Once again, we are called upon to be Bereans: testing what we see and hear according to the Scriptures, and then, being fully persuaded, we are to be obedient. Anything less than this would be following a man, and falling into the same error as the Corinthians; we are to turn our eyes away from man and focus on the Lord. Rather than blind obedience to someone who holds a certain *position*, this is a command to go to the Word of God and evaluate that elder, and then, if he proves to be harmonious with Scripture, follow him. However, even then there is to be a continuous examination against

¹⁴¹ Liddell-Scott Lexicon.

¹⁴² Strong’s Online.

¹⁴³ Bud Talbert, “The Pastor and His People,” Part 1, *The Whetstone*, May-June 2003.

the standard of the Word of God, so that if the elders should fail in some area, then everyone would not blindly follow them into error.

In the message of Jesus to the messenger of Ephesus, He said: “But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate” (Revelation 2:6); to the messenger of Pergamos, He said: “But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there ... them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate” (Revelation 2:14-15). In both of these passages, mention is made of the Nicolaitanes, and it is clear that this group was to be avoided. Names are always of interest in the Word of God – “Nicolaitanes”: what does this mean? There are some who claim that these were followers of Nicolas, one of the seven who were appointed to oversee the needs of the believers gathered in Jerusalem (Acts 6:5), although this is very commonly disputed. It is often argued that these were lovers of pleasure, and were indifferent to immorality and things sacrificed to idols.¹⁴⁴ However, if you read Revelation 2:14-15 carefully, it is clear that those who held to the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes were in addition to those who ate things sacrificed to idols and who committed fornication. So we come back to the meaning of the name: it is made up of two words in Greek: *nikos*, which means “victory,” or “to utterly vanquish,” and *laos*, which means “people.”¹⁴⁵ Therefore, when these are brought together, the Nicolaitanes were those who suppressed, or lorded it over, the common people. Jesus said unto His disciples: “²⁵... Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. ²⁶But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; ²⁷And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: ²⁸Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:25-28). The doctrine of the Nicolaitanes is in direct contravention of both the words and example of our Lord. Yet what do we find today in most churches? We have the *clergy* and the *laity*, the professional religious leaders and the average person who is taught to look to the clergy for direction and spiritual instruction. We live in a day when the sin of the Nicolaitanes is rampant throughout Evangelicalism, and perhaps even more so among the independent Fundamental Baptists – an inheritance from the Roman Catholic Church that has perfected the clergy-laity separation through their layers of hierarchy from their pastors (or parish priests) all the way to the pope. In Jesus’ words: “... it shall [absolutely¹⁴⁶] not be so among you”; yet it is so among us!

Scripture teaches us that the authorities within the assembly are the elders (or bishops); it speaks of elders being appointed within assemblies, but never pastors. It may be a matter of semantics to some, but there can be no equating *pastor* and *elder* with Biblical support. I would advocate that the elders are responsible for the spiritual wellbeing of the *ekklesia*, and if someone comes into the assembly, then they are automatically under the authority of the elders. Part of that responsibility is to protect the group from anything that would draw them away from the clear teachings of Scripture (1 Peter 5:2); it matters not whether that detracting influence comes from someone who is a long time participant in the assembly, or someone newly arrived. To limit the

¹⁴⁴ These were put forward by Irenæus in his “Against Heresies,” Chapter 26.

¹⁴⁵ Strong’s Online; <http://www.biblestudy.org/basicart/nicoltn.html>

¹⁴⁶ Strong’s Online.

authority of the elders to only those whose names are on a *membership list* is to bind their hands to adequately protect the flock. Cloud has created a false premise by insisting that the elders do not exercise authority over everyone who attends their gathering. By entering the assembly, one is automatically placed under the authority of those responsible (the elders) – a membership list is irrelevant. Once again, we must face the question of size – if the group is so large that the elders cannot know the people, then perhaps it is too large. Jesus said: “I am the good shepherd, and know my *sheep* ...” (John 10:14); if Jesus declared that He knows those who are His, then it should be incumbent upon the elders, who bear the responsibility of ensuring obedience to His Word, to know those who are within their gathering – something for which the Spirit of God would provide assistance. If we would only follow the Biblical mandate, and not our traditions, we would have more gatherings with greater accountability; we would own less property, require fewer programs, spend fewer dollars on real estate, and discover the blessing of the Lord for the few who gather in His name.

Based on these four reasons, Cloud contends that he has proven from Scripture that “a church needs to maintain [a] membership”¹⁴⁷ Yet, as he concludes his article, he insists that membership is really a matter of *liberty*, and every church must determine what works for them because “the Bible does not spell out the issue of church membership.”¹⁴⁸ I would agree with the latter position, and clearly state that Cloud did not make a case at all for church membership based on the Scriptures that he used. As a matter of fact, more than anything else, he has demonstrated that membership is another of the trappings of modern churches that finds no basis within Scripture. It is a matter of practicality, but that practicality has been necessitated by creating a monster that requires careful handling in order to keep it under control. This is not the *ekklesia* that Jesus said He would build (Matthew 16:18); this is a man-made organization that is gobbling up men who could have done great things if they weren’t consumed with trying to manage a church; it is consuming untold resources, whether people’s time, money, or their spiritual gifts, with virtually no return. How could this happen? The Corinthians were not so unlike us: they turned their eyes away from the Lord and looked at the men who worked in their midst; over the centuries, we have lost sight of the Lord and His Word, and have been taken in by the impressive cathedrals and exploits of heretics.

This has been a lengthy sidetrack. However, it is important that we understand that the primary basis for how modern churches carry on their business is not supported by the Bible. We have fallen for the lie that bigger is better (a marketing ploy of the Church Growth Movement), and to our own spiritual detriment, we have accepted that success in the Lord’s work can be measured in greater numbers. As we have looked at the concept of church membership and considered the evidence, we must admit that there is no Biblical support for it – it is merely a practical method for controlling the empires that we tend to build. We may admit to the error of the mega-church philosophy, but are we prepared to acknowledge that the churches of today (even those of a Fundamental persuasion) have succumbed to the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing we are to hate (Revelation 2:6)? If we would establish elders (plural) according to the standards of

¹⁴⁷ Cloud, “Membership.”

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

Scripture, God would honor this and ensure that their authority was effective, but **never** autocratic (1 Peter 5:1-5). Unless God’s Word is used to evaluate our “church” situation, we may be guilty of identifying the small dry stalk in the eye of a perceived offender, even while we overlook the log (large enough to support the roof of a building) that is in our own eye (Matthew 7:3-5).¹⁴⁹

Our focus today on numerical growth and membership, stems from building kingdoms that consume modern church leaders, and that require a minimum number of people to sustain them. It is no longer a matter of searching the Scriptures and being obedient to the commands of the Lord; we have programs to support, staff to pay, and property to maintain. This cannot be done through the “two or three gathered” in the name of Jesus; this requires a sizeable, committed group who are prepared to invest their time and money in order to maintain the empire that has been constructed. However, Acts 2:47 says: “And the Lord added to the church (*ekklesia*) daily such as should be saved.” It is the Lord Who is building His *ekklesia* – we must not lose sight of this foundational principle.

“As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby ...” (1 Peter 2:2). There, in a nutshell, is the formula for spiritual success. The difficulty today is that there is so little longing for the Word of God; we live in a generation that lusts after the pleasures of life with all of their being, and the average, modern churchgoer is no different. It is a rare occasion, indeed, to find anyone who has a passion for the pure teachings of God’s Word, and who is willing to follow the dictates of the Scriptures. Is it any wonder that there is so little spiritual maturity within the Evangelical community? Yes, we are to grow – but it is to be a spiritual growth in the Lord, not an obsession with bodies in a building, or names on a list. As we considered the metaphor of the Body, we saw that we are to “grow up into [Christ] in all things” (Ephesians 4:15); spiritual maturity and increased holiness must be our desire.

This provides a good basis for our next area of study: the government of the *ekklesia*.

¹⁴⁹ Vine’s “mote.”

Chapter 8 – Government

We have looked briefly at the purpose of the *ekklesia*, focusing specifically on its commission and its growth. From the latter, we were led into an examination of the tradition of membership, which, for many, has become their measure of success and means of control. As we move into the area of government for the local assembly of believers, it is with some idea already that what the Word of God has to tell us may well differ from what is common practice today. We will begin by looking at the only two areas of responsibility within a local gathering that the Scriptures give us, namely that of elders (or bishops) and deacons. Perhaps we need to remind ourselves at this juncture, of God’s warning in His Word: “Every word of God *is* pure: he *is* a shield unto them that put their trust in him. Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar” (Proverbs 30:5-6). As modern Evangelicals and Fundamentalists alike develop their structures of authority that, for the most part, go well beyond the Biblical simplicity of elders and deacons, they are guilty of adding to what God has given to us for the *ekklesia*. Is it any wonder that Evangelicals are rapidly sliding into apostasy or deeper into paganism? They have accommodated the doctrines of heretics, they have compromised the Word of God through their multiplied translations, they have turned their backs on the Lord’s instructions and joined themselves unto the gods of this world, and they have ignored God’s design for the local assembly. They are being taken captive by the world; however, unlike the Israelites of old, they are going into captivity voluntarily, and arrogantly looking with disdain on anyone who seeks to uphold the teachings of Scripture. Paul’s description of the world in the last days is an apt picture of today’s churches: they are “lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters [imposters], proud [above others], blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent [without self-control], fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady [reckless], highminded [wrapped in a mist], lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof” (2 Timothy 3:2-5).¹⁵⁰ What is the admonition that the Lord places alongside of this list of grievous traits? – “From such turn away” (2 Timothy 3:5).

Now let us consider the two areas of responsibility that the Lord has prescribed for the local assembly of His children, those who are a part of His *ekklesia*.

A. Elders or Bishops – We bring these two terms together, for, as we have seen, Titus 1:5 and 7 show that they are used synonymously. The Greek word for *elder* is *presbuteros*, and means elderly or old.¹⁵¹ The term was used extensively within the Jewish tradition for the leaders of the tribes and families, and it spoke of those who were older, more mature, and therefore, possessed greater wisdom in dealing with the problems of life. On the other hand, the Greek word for *bishop* is *episkopos*, which means overseer.¹⁵² The elders appointed by Paul and Barnabas (Acts 14:23 –

¹⁵⁰ Strong’s Online.

¹⁵¹ Vine’s “elder.”

¹⁵² Vine’s “bishop.”

the word *ordained* literally means to stretch out the hand,¹⁵³ and indicates choosing; cp. Acts 10:41) would have been men of maturity. Although they would have been relatively new in the faith, they would have exemplified the qualities necessary for Paul and Barnabas to appoint them as elders within the local assembly.

There are two passages that outline the qualifications of an elder: 1 Timothy 3:2-7 and Titus 1:6-9. There is considerable overlap between the two, so let's look at these passages together, using 1 Timothy 3 as the template:

²*A bishop then must be blameless*, – This quality is reiterated in Titus 1:6 in our English translation; however, two different words are used in the Greek. In Timothy the Greek word is *anepileptos* (*an-ep-eel'-ape-tos*), which means “that cannot be laid hold of, hence, not open to censure, irreproachable.”¹⁵⁴ In Titus the word is *anenkleto*s (*an-eng'-klay-tos*), which means “that which cannot be called to account,”¹⁵⁵ or nothing can be laid to their charge, their reputation is spotless. In the former, it is that he cannot be held accountable for any wrong; in the latter, it is that there is no accuser. Although the difference is subtle and largely one of perspective, what is evident from both is that the elder must live an impeccable life.

the husband of one wife, – This is an important quality, for it, too, is reiterated in Titus. As you consider the metaphor of the relationship between the husband and wife in marriage illustrating Christ's relationship with His *ekklesia* (Ephesians 5:22-33), the importance of this singular unity comes to the fore. This immediately eliminates polygamy, but I believe, based on the marriage metaphor, that this also eliminates anyone who is divorced or even separated. It also places anyone who is unmarried outside of the qualifications for elder, and excludes women from taking this responsibility. The latter has become an increasingly acceptable practice today, and the pressure to accept women into this role is growing, as is the capitulation to do so – undoubtedly another product of feminism.

vigilant, – This word means to be *sober* or *temperate*, as in abstaining from wine.¹⁵⁶

sober, – This word means to be of sound mind and, hence, to be self-controlled and prudent.¹⁵⁷

of good behaviour, – This means to be *orderly* or *modest*, discreet and *well-ordered*, not given to chaos or extravagance.¹⁵⁸

given to hospitality, – This calls for one who is hospitable; the Greek word comes from two roots, which, when brought together, literally mean, “love of strangers.”¹⁵⁹

apt to teach; – Literally, *skilled in teaching*.¹⁶⁰ This would not be by the credentials of man, but rather being effective and able in handling the Word of God; someone who rightly divides the

¹⁵³ Vine's “ordain.”

¹⁵⁴ Vine's “blameless.”

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Strong's Online.

¹⁵⁷ Vine's “sober”; Gingrich Lexicon.

¹⁵⁸ Vine's “behavior”; Liddell-Scott Lexicon.

¹⁵⁹ Vine's “hospitality.”

¹⁶⁰ Vine's “teach.”

word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15). It is noteworthy, that this is also identified as a gift of the Spirit (Ephesians 4:11); if there was ever a place for the exercising of this gift, it would be among those who are appointed as elders within the *ekklesia*.

³*Not given to wine*, – This is reiterated in Titus, giving emphasis to this quality. The Greek word for *given to wine* means “tarrying at wine,” hence the elder is not someone who lingers at wine or is a drunkard. Considering the quality of *vigilant* above, it would seem that, among the elders or bishops, the only use of wine would be as a medicine (1 Timothy 5:23).

no striker, – Someone who does not strike out, literally, the Greek word means a “bruiser, ready for a blow.”¹⁶¹ This quality would describe someone who is not prone to physical violence; this is also repeated in Titus.

not greedy of filthy lucre; – This is someone who is not desirous of base or shameful gains or money.¹⁶² This is commonly seen as an excusable characteristic today; there is a strong desire among many Evangelicals for wealth, and eyes are averted when it comes to how this wealth is acquired. I am reminded of Rick Warren who is the “pastor” of Rupert Murdoch who chairs a company called News Corporation that is increasing its profits through its expansion of TV pornography channels. Nevertheless, Warren’s comment is: “I don’t have to agree with 100 percent of what another person does in order to work with them on the 20 percent that we do agree on.”¹⁶³ This cavalier attitude has proven lucrative (there’s that word *lucre*) for Warren, as Murdoch was the first to donate to Warren’s P.E.A.C.E. program to the tune of two million dollars.¹⁶⁴ “For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from [stray away from] the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1 Timothy 6:10).¹⁶⁵ This quality is reiterated in Titus.



Rupert Murdoch

but patient, – Literally it means *seemly*, and probably best understood as *gentle*.¹⁶⁶ This is one of the attributes of the wisdom that comes from above, translated as *gentle* in James 3:17.

not a brawler, – Literally, *not fighting*.¹⁶⁷ Similar to *no striker*, but opens the door to any kind of fighting; someone who is not contentious and does not enjoy arguing.

not covetous; – Literally, *not loving money*.¹⁶⁸ Similar to *not greedy of filthy lucre*, but, perhaps, a little broader in its application.

¹⁶¹ Strong’s Online.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ken Silva, “Purpose-Driven Pornography,” http://www.apprising.org/archives/2007/05/purpose_driven.html

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Strong’s Online.

¹⁶⁶ Vine’s “patient.”

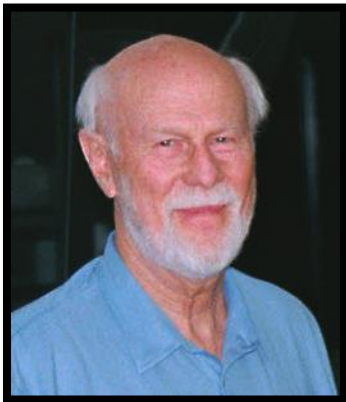
¹⁶⁷ Vine’s “brawler.”

¹⁶⁸ Strong’s Online.

⁴*One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity;* – The word *ruleth*, within our understanding would give rise to an autocratic concept, perhaps an attitude of “I’m in charge and everyone will do as I say.” However, the word is not that, but, along with the word *well*, actually means to place before excellently, to be a guardian, to give attention to.¹⁶⁹ This is more about being an example, of demonstrating the walk with our Lord as much as or more than simply demanding action or dictating commands. The children are to be in *subjection*, they are to be obedient; Ephesians 6:1 confirms this: “Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right.” However, notice in 1 Timothy that the children’s submission is qualified: it is to be *with all gravity*. *Gravity* is a very interesting word and means “the characteristic of a thing or person which entitles to reverence and respect, dignity, majesty, sanctity.”¹⁷⁰ The bishop, or elder, is to be someone who stands before his children in a manner that will engender their respect.

⁵*(For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)* – This is a parenthetical comment that underscores the absurdity of having an elder in charge of overseeing the local *assembly* when his own family is in shambles.

⁶*Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil.* – The Greek word for *novice* speaks of someone *newly planted*, a *neophyte*, a *new convert*.¹⁷¹ The phrase *lifted up with pride* is from one Greek word that means *to raise a smoke, to wrap in a mist*.¹⁷² This provides a word picture of the effect of pride; there is a clouding of judgment, a blindness through



Dave Hunt

thinking too highly of oneself. The word *fall* bears the subjunctive mood, which means that it is a possibility but not necessarily a certainty.¹⁷³ Pride was the undoing of Satan, and the warning here is that by succumbing to pride, a new convert, if given the responsibility of being an elder, could receive the same condemnation as the devil. Jesus made it clear that everlasting fire was prepared for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41); this is a very serious warning. Many seek to downplay or trivialize the fire of hell. Even the late Dave Hunt succumbed to downplaying the everlasting fire of hell by saying: “the flame of His [God’s] justice burns the conscience with supernatural conviction.”¹⁷⁴ He supposes that the “fire” that tries our works (1 Corinthians 3:13) isn’t physical

fire, therefore the Lake of Fire that was made for the devil and his angels (spirit beings) can’t be real fire either (Matthew 25:41). We cannot begin to fathom how God is going to measure our merit or try our works – it could very well be with real fire. This world is reserved for fire (2 Peter 3:7, 10-12); could this be the judgment of our works? If we have built with wood, hay or stubble, then it will be burned up.

¹⁶⁹ Strong’s Online.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Dave Hunt, “Justice, Forgiveness and Transformation,” *The Berean Call*, Vol. XXIII, No. 4, April ’08, p. 4.

⁷Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. – Good speaks of that which is excellent, or surpassing;¹⁷⁵ there is nothing mediocre here. Report comes from the Greek word for witness, and here speaks of testifying.¹⁷⁶ Notice that this testimony comes from those who are *without*, those who are not a part of the *ekklesia*; the elder is to be favorably spoken of by those who are not part of the Body of Christ. This is particularly applicable to the elders, or bishops, but it is also applicable to all of us: “¹¹Dearly beloved, I beseech *you* as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; ¹²Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles [or, heathen]: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by *your* good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation” (1 Peter 2:11-12). The reason for the need of this exemplary report from those outside is given: first of all, personally: lest he fall into defamation [*reproach*] by holding the responsibility of ensuring the integrity of the children of God, yet being found of less than good report among others; as it relates to the Body: lest he fall into the snare of the devil. Second Corinthians 6:3 says: “Giving no offence [no occasion for stumbling] in any thing, that the ministry [or service] be not blamed” How many times in recent years has the devil been able to use the moral failure of high-profile “Christians” to tarnish the perceived work of Christ? The warning is given here that the bishop, or elder, must be attentive to his life lest the devil have the means for tripping him up.

This completes the standard for elders laid out in Paul’s exhortation to Timothy, and several which were reiterated to Titus. Now let us consider Paul’s unique instructions regarding the *elder* to Titus. From Titus 1 we read:

⁶... *having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly*. – His children are to be trustworthy, or *faithful*, and they cannot be charged with living like the prodigal son or not being submissive (Luke 15:13).¹⁷⁷ The Greek word used for *children* is *teknon*, and draws emphasis to the physical or outward responsibility of parenting,¹⁷⁸ so the consideration is that the children behave appropriately and faithfully, as opposed to those who are only inwardly pious (same word as in 1 Timothy 3:4). The parents bear the responsibility for training their children Biblically, but that does not determine the heart attitude of the children as they grow into adulthood. We are called on to submit to one another (Ephesians 5:21), wives are to submit to their husbands (Ephesians 5:22), and we are to submit to God (James 4:7); the Greek root of *unruly* comes from the word for *submit* along with a negative: rebellious, disobedient, and undisciplined.¹⁷⁹

⁷*For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God*; – *Blameless*, here, indicates that there is no accuser; no one can hold anything against them. However, this is in relation to being a *steward of God*. A *steward* is someone who has been placed in charge, or made the manager, of something, and here it is clear that the placement has been made by God; the elder, or bishop, is God’s steward. The elder is to have no accusers in the discharge of his responsibilities within the assembly (1 Peter

¹⁷⁵ Strong’s Online.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Strong’s Online; Friberg Lexicon; Stephanus 1550 NT.

5:1-5). In his instructions to Timothy, Paul made it clear that an accusation against an elder was not to be considered unless there were two or three witnesses (1 Timothy 5:19). An accuser might well come forward when the elder is required to administer discipline, but the protection here is in the plurality of elders and the required plurality of accusers (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5; 1 Timothy 5:19).

not selfwilled, – Not self-pleasing or arrogant.¹⁸⁰ First Peter 5:5 speaks to the humility that is to adorn the elder.

not soon angry, – Not prone to anger; that short-fuse syndrome is not to be present.

⁸... *a lover of good men*, – Literally, *a friend of goodness*, or *loving goodness* (the Greek does not include *men*).¹⁸¹ This would assume a proper definition of what is good; not the perverted definition that characterizes our day: “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter” (Isaiah 5:20).

... *just*, – This signifies being righteous: “keeping the commands of God.”¹⁸² Although this is to characterize all of God’s children (1 John 2:3), it is specifically underscored here for the elder. Keeping in mind the exhortation for the elders to be an ensample (1 Peter 5:3), this would be critical. We will consider this (*ensample*) more completely a little later.

holy, – This is not the same Greek word as used in 1 Peter 1:15-16 to describe God and how we are to live: *hagios* speaks of purity, but through a separation from everything that is not pure.¹⁸³ The Greek word used here (*hosios*) speaks of purity as being undefiled by sin or free from wickedness.¹⁸⁴ The correlation between the two is clear, but there is a subtle difference of focus between the words; the call here is for a life free of anything that would be unrighteous.

temperate; – This word has the same Greek root as the fruit of the Spirit, *temperance* (Galatians 5:23), and means to be self-controlled, along with the thought of strength¹⁸⁵ – a radical contrast to the self-indulgent society that we live in today.

⁹*Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers*. – Here again is the exhortation that we see so often throughout Scripture: *holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught*. *Holding fast* means to hold to firmly or to cleave to,¹⁸⁶ but there is an interesting nuance to this word. The Greek word is *antechomai* (an-tekh'-om-ahee), and brings in the concept of against (*ante*).¹⁸⁷ Perhaps we see a warning here that there will be those who would seek to dilute the *faithful word*, or to change it ever so slightly, but we are called to cleave to the Word of God against all who, through whatever

¹⁸⁰ Strong’s Online.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Vine’s “holy.”

¹⁸⁴ Strong’s Online.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

means, would seek to alter or destroy His revelation to us. Two areas that are very prevalent today and serve to test our commitment to God's Word are: the proliferation of translations and the prominence of the clergy. The former has compromised God's message to us through a foundation of tainted manuscripts, which has resulted in translations that lead us to question God's message. This has been compounded by the modern translating technique called dynamic equivalence, which simply means that words are no longer translated, but rather the thoughts or ideas – thereby producing, not a proper translation, but a paraphrase at best or a commentary at worst. We are called to hold fast the Word of truth against this attack. Then we have the prominence and dominance of the clergy, resulting in the average pew-warmer rarely opening the Scriptures, and certainly deferring any opinions on its content to those more learned. The Dark Ages were dark for many reasons, but one of them was that the Scriptures were only in the hands of the clergy, and the common man was not permitted to read them for fear of reaching an errant interpretation – I would adjure that we are rapidly heading back into the Dark Ages, spiritually speaking. We are to cleave to God's Word against all temptations to defer to the highly educated experts.

The challenge here that is placed before the elder, or bishop, is that they will hold to the doctrines of the Bible and not be swayed by the fashionable theologies of men (no matter how reasonable they may sound), nor be influenced by those who should know the Scriptures (but may not). Several of the epistles that form a part of our Bible today, speak of the error and compromise that was already finding its way into the local assemblies before the Apostles even left the scene. A great challenge faces those who are given the oversight of a local assembly: to adhere to the Scriptures, to teach plainly from them, and not be intimidated by those who have departed from the truth.

There is a reason for this strong adherence to the Word of God and the need to stand against all temptations to compromise. The reason is focused on *gainsayers* (*antilego*), those who speak against or contradict.¹⁸⁸ If you cling to the Word of God, and walk through life carefully, there will be those who will ridicule you for being legalistic, far too narrow-minded, and perhaps even Pharisaical. Here we see the importance of adhering to the Scriptures, for unless we have learned to walk using the Bible as our Standard, against which all things must be measured, we will cave before the criticism. We are to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, soul and mind (Matthew 22:37), which speaks of a steadfastness and a single-mindedness that will not sway when the winds of new doctrine blow (Ephesians 4:14). We are to cleave to the Word of God so that we might, through pure teaching, instruct (*exhort*) and refute (*convince*) those who would contradict us (*gainsayers*). The reason that we can do this is not because of who we are, but because of the Truth to which we cling. The fallacy into which modern Evangelicals have fallen is this: well educated theologians will always have the best Biblical answer to any question. That could be true if the theologians would cling to the Word of Truth, but they don't; they leave it far behind in their pursuit of more education, a good rapport with other compromisers and for the preservation of their favored theology.

¹⁸⁸ Strong's Online.

When the Lord began to open my eyes to new truths from His Word, my first reaction was, “This can’t be right; otherwise, surely these men who have spent years studying the Word of God would have come to this reality long ago.” Yet, what I have had to realize, and it has taken some time (and I may not be fully there yet), is that because these men read Scripture through a grid of their own denominational thinking, their own traditional understanding, or their own theological bias, they overlook some of the simple truths of Scripture that can be life-changing. They may spend years studying, but they are always looking to support their traditions, their doctrines, their thinking – all of which are more firmly entrenched in their minds than is the Word of God. So what bends? The Scriptures must bend, of course. Their theologies are inflexible and so carefully constructed; it is the Bible that must be molded and twisted in order to “support” their theology (2 Peter 3:16).

We have here the qualities of an elder, or bishop, and as we have looked at them more carefully, we can see that this task is not to be undertaken lightly. The standard is high for those who would accept this responsibility.

First Timothy 3:1 says: “... if a man desire the office of a bishop [*episkope* – investigation, visitation, oversight], he desireth a good work.” The Greek word translated as *desire* means “to stretch one’s self out in order to ... grasp something.”¹⁸⁹ Clearly, it is not wrong for a man to aspire to be an elder, or bishop (to have the responsibility of oversight within the *ekklesia* of the Lord), but, just as evidently, the desire spoken of here is more than simply wanting something. This word calls for a personal effort, which means that he will take particular care to ensure that his life is aligned with the Word of God so that the qualifications outlined are a normal part of living. However, what should be equally evident is that the qualities of an elder should be abiding in each one of us; we should not look at this as just the Lord’s calling for elders – each one of us is called to a life of holiness (1 Peter 1:15-16; 2:9). We are called *saints*, a word translated from the Greek *hagios*, meaning *holy*;¹⁹⁰ it is incumbent upon all of us to live in keeping with this holy calling by God (Ephesians 4:1).

What we must also note from 1 Timothy 3:1 is that *episkope* is the Greek word that the KJV translators have shown as *office of a bishop*. There is no *office*; this is simply the responsibility to ensure that doctrinal integrity and order is maintained among an assembly of *called-out ones*. Perhaps the translators were unduly influenced by the ecclesiastical structure of their day and the Bishop’s Bible:¹⁹¹ the Bishop’s Bible shows *office of a bishop*, and it was carried right into the KJV.¹⁹² It is very evident from today’s churches that the “pastor” fills an *office* within their carefully designed organizational structures – there is nothing like that within Scripture. This

¹⁸⁹ Strong’s Online.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ The first of fifteen criteria that the translators of the KJV were given by King James was: “The ordinary Bible, read in the church, commonly called the Bishop’s Bible, to be followed, and as little altered as the original will permit” (http://www.kjvonly.org/other/kj_instructs.htm). It was important for King James (as the head of the Church of England) to preserve his position and the structure of the churches that gave him control.

¹⁹² Bishop’s Bible, *ESword*.

should not be surprising since Jesus very carefully explained that there was to be no hierarchy among His followers (Matthew 20:25-28), and we are to submit to one another (Ephesians 5:21).

First Peter 5:1-5 provides us with a glimpse into the responsibilities of an elder, and how the elder is to fulfill those responsibilities within the Body.

¹The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: ²Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight *thereof*, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; ³Neither as being lords over *God's* heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. ⁴And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away. ⁵Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all *of you* be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.

The first responsibility named here is to *feed the flock of God* (v. 2). *Feed* is an accurate translation of the Greek, and more interestingly, it is also closely related to the word *poimen* (shepherd). A shepherd is one who tends a flock of sheep or goats. He ensures that they have adequate pasture (feed), but his responsibilities go well beyond that to include watching out for enemies, protecting the sheep from those enemies, tending to the wounded or sick, looking for those that have wandered away, and, generally, sharing his life with the sheep so that they will learn to trust him.¹⁹³ Consider these three words in Greek: *shepherd* (*poimen* – *poy-mane'*), *feed* (*poimaino* – *poy-mah'-ee-no*), and *flock* (*poimnion* – *poym'-nee-on*).¹⁹⁴ The similarity of these words is striking. Yet it is somewhat noticeable that the Spirit of God, through Peter, addresses this command (*feed the flock*) to the elders and not to *shepherds* (or, as it is frequently translated, *pastors*). You may recall that the word *poimen* in Ephesians 4:11 is translated as *pastors* in the KJV, and this has been used to elevate the *office* of “pastors” in churches, something that is an inheritance from, or has been patterned after, the Roman Catholic Church.

Let's consider this more closely. The prophets of the OT spoke of the *shepherds* of Israel, those who were in a place of responsibility to the people, who, in Jesus' day, were called the Sanhedrin. Jeremiah, a prophet of God who witnessed the removal of Judah from the Promised Land, recorded these words of the Lord:

¹Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! saith the LORD. ²Therefore thus saith the LORD God of Israel against the pastors that feed my people; Ye have **scattered** my flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them: behold, I will visit upon you the evil of your doings, saith the LORD. ³And I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all countries whither I have driven them, and will bring them again to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase. ⁴And I will set up shepherds over them which shall feed them: and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall they be lacking, saith the LORD. ⁵Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. ⁶In his days Judah shall be saved,

¹⁹³ Strong's Online.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

and Israel shall dwell safely: and this *is* his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS (Jeremiah 23:1-6).

This is a passage that speaks to the situation that Jeremiah faced with the people of Judah, but it is also a prophetic passage in that it speaks to a day that had not yet come – the coming Branch (the Lord Jesus Christ) and when He will reign as King over the earth (the Millennium). When Jesus began His ministry on earth, He went about through the cities and villages of Israel and observed the people: “But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were **scattered** abroad, as sheep having **no shepherd**” (Matthew 9:36). The Pharisees of Jesus’ day were the latest in a long line of “shepherds” who scattered the people – yes, Israel was again gathered into their own land, but their *spiritual leaders* exulted in their lofty positions and worked to keep the people suppressed; they sat in the seat of Moses, yet in their self-righteousness and arrogance, they oppressed the people whom they were supposed to serve (Matthew 23:1-4).

The Lord, through Ezekiel (a prophet of God to captive Israel), pronounced judgment upon those who were filling the role of shepherds to the people of Israel but who were self-indulgent (not unlike the Pharisees of Jesus’ day), and then declared: “²³I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, *even* my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. ²⁴And I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them; I the LORD have spoken *it*. ²⁵And I will make with them a covenant of peace ...” (Ezekiel 34:23-25; see also Ezekiel 37:24). At this time, David had been dead for some 400 years, but he was always upheld as the shepherd/king of Israel, a forerunner of the Messiah. David openly declared: “The Lord is my Shepherd ...” (Psalm 23:1), thereby acknowledging only one Shepherd. Jesus was born of the seed of David to serve and to redeem a people unto Himself. The words of Ezekiel are a Messianic prophecy and spoke of a day when there would be one Shepherd over the Lord’s people; no more will there be a multitude of shepherds who will scatter the people.

In Ephesians 4:11, we have several gifts given by the Spirit of God to those within the *ekklesia* for the perfecting of the saints; these are gifts that will ensure the growth and maturity of the children of God. Included within this short listing is the word *poimen* or *shepherd*. The use of the word *poimen* is quite limited within the NT Scriptures. It is used to refer to those whose occupation was tending sheep (as in Luke 2), it is used more generally to speak of the one who has care of the sheep (Matthew 9:36), and then there are several passages that refer to the Lord Jesus Christ (John 10:1-18; Hebrews 13:20; 1 Peter 2:25). This term is **NEVER** applied to a **man** in regard to the *ekklesia*. Consider very carefully Jesus’ words in John 10:16 – “... other sheep I have, which are not of this fold [*aule* – an enclosure used to protect the flock at night; a reference to Israel]: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be **one fold** [*poimne* – **flock**], and **one shepherd**.”¹⁹⁵ Ephesians 2:16 speaks of the cross of



Pope Gregory I

¹⁹⁵ Strong’s Online.

Christ bringing together the Jew and the Gentile into one Body, of which Christ is the Head (Ephesians 4:15). This agrees completely with Jesus' words in John 10:16 – there is only one Body or flock, and there is only one Head or Shepherd, and that is Jesus Christ. According to Ephesians 4, the Lord has gifted some as a *shepherd* for the purpose of bringing the saints of God (His children) unto completion or maturity; the Lord will give some the heart of a shepherd to assist in bringing His Body to the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-13). However, nowhere do we find anyone within the *ekklesia* (the Flock) carrying the title of *shepherd*, except the *one Shepherd*, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Our word *pastor* comes from the Latin word for shepherd, *pastorem*.¹⁹⁶ About AD 590, Gregory the Great wrote a book that came to be of some importance within the Catholic Church; it is known by several titles, but the crux of its contents is summarized by two words contained in its title: “pastoralis curae,” or pastoral care.¹⁹⁷ In this document, Pope Gregory I speaks of the shepherd, or pastor, as one who knows “by the use and trial of prayer that he can obtain what he has requested from the LORD,” and the pastor fills “the post of intercession with GOD for the people.”¹⁹⁸ He also declares: “The conduct of a prelate [within the context, this is referring to those who are called *pastor*] ought so far to transcend the conduct of the people as **the life of a shepherd is wont to exalt him above the flock**” (emphasis added).¹⁹⁹ Clearly, Gregory had already departed from the Biblical mandate on several fronts, and the direction that the Roman Catholic Church was to take in these matters is already clearly evident. He determined that the pastor (someone who is filling a specific position within the church) must need to know how to obtain his requests of the Lord; “No one presumes to teach an art till he has first, with intent meditation, learnt it. What rashness is it, then, for the unskilful to assume pastoral authority, since the government of souls is the art of arts!”²⁰⁰ What a departure from the Scriptures! There is no “pastoral authority” ascribed to men, and the rule of the souls of men is an *art*? Within the mind of Gregory, the pastor was the interceder with God for the people, indication that there was a significant concentration of power into the office of pastor by this time (by contrast Romans 8:26 and 34 make it clear that we have the Spirit of God and the Lord Jesus Christ interceding for us); the common people were there to be ruled over and told how they were to approach God – namely, through the pastor or bishop of their souls (by contrast see 1 Peter 2:25, where this is exclusively ascribed to the Lord Jesus Christ).



John MacArthur

Within this framework, the pastor was given the title of *shepherd* and was exalted over the flock, something Scripture attributes only to the Lord – Jesus is the ONE Shepherd (John 10:16). I am told that at the Master's Seminary (John MacArthur's school) they emphasize that the pastor is the “under-shepherd”; why not just call them *elders* gifted with a shepherd's heart as the Scriptures do? Very simply, to do so

¹⁹⁶ <http://www.etymonline.com/>, “pastor.”

¹⁹⁷ <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06780a.htm>; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pastoral_Care

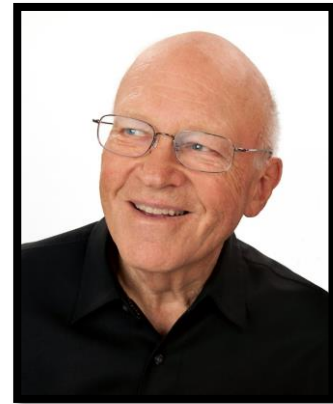
¹⁹⁸ Gregory the Great, *The Book of Pastoral Rule*, translated by James Barmby, Part I, Chapter 10.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, Part II, Chapter 1.

²⁰⁰ Ibid, Part I, Chapter 1.

would undermine the elevated role of the *pastor* within the mind of the average pew-warmer. Today it takes several years to train men to be pastors, yet a bulk of this training is in theology (indoctrination) and professional skill development (how to run a church, develop programs, and learn counseling techniques). By contrast, God's purpose for the *ekklesia* is that we ALL might come to a full "knowledge of the Son of God," so that we will be not "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine" (Ephesians 4:13-14). Seminaries endeavor to perpetuate their leaders' interpretation of the Scriptures; whereas the *ekklesia* is there to exhort and challenge all individuals to grow in their understanding of the Word of God and to learn to "rightly divide the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).

Peter exhorts the elders to *feed the flock of God*, to provide the redeemed ones with fodder for growth; if they are not fed, they will seek out the seemingly luxurious pastures of the enemy, or they will waste away and die of starvation. We see this very thing within the modern churches that have not only permitted the enemy into their camps, but have often openly invited them to participate. I am reminded of Rick Warren who has invited Ken Blanchard, a purveyor of New Age philosophy and one who acclaims Buddhism, to participate in his "Christian" programs. What folly! What does the devil, who now works in the children of disobedience (Ephesians 2:2), have of eternal value that he can offer to the Christian? Nothing! Evangelicals today have not only compromised their stand against the world's values, but they have also forsaken the Message of life; they offer their people the world's fare even while they deprive them of the truth.



Ken Blanchard

Peter goes on to exhort the elders to willingly take the oversight of the flock of God. *Taking the oversight* is the verb form of the Greek word translated as *office of a bishop* in 1 Timothy 3:1, and it means to oversee.²⁰¹ They are not to do this under duress or by force, but to voluntarily, or willingly, take on this responsibility, and not for shameful gain (i.e., for wealth, power, or prestige). The elders were appointed under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, so the exhortation here is that they willingly take up their allotted responsibility to oversee the *ekklesia*, not because of feeling forced to do it, nor yet for personal benefit. Feeling inadequate for the responsibility could lead someone to feel constrained to do the work of an elder; yet if the Lord has brought that individual into the place of such responsibility, then He will provide what is needed to accomplish such a godly oversight. Within the modern church context, the tendency would be to take on the responsibility for personal prestige or wealth (since the Spirit of God has little to do with the placement of "pastors" and elders today).

Peter's final exhortation to the elders is that they are to be *ensamples* to the flock and not lord it over them (1 Peter 5:3). We have already dealt extensively with the error of the Nicolaitanes (Revelation 2:6, 15) as brought forward by Jesus through the Apostle John; we have seen the error of the Corinthians, and Paul's admonition that we are all laborers together (1 Corinthians 3:9); we

²⁰¹ Strong's Online.

have considered Jesus' charge to the disciples that lording it over one another was not to have any place among us (Matthew 20:25-28). This should be an easily recognized doctrine of Scripture since it is not spoken of in isolation, yet it is one by which most churches today have failed to abide (it matters little whether they are Liberal, Evangelical or Fundamental). As long as we speak of the *clergy*, we are identifying a group that has been elevated to a position for which the average Christian is not qualified. This has led to the ignorance of the average pew-warmer as to what God's Word has to say to them – unless their *clergy* tells them what it means, they will die in their ignorance. Even those who regularly read the Scriptures will only read deeply enough to recognize what they have been told – there is never a thought to test what they have heard (1 John 4:1); what neglect of the commands of the Spirit of God that tell us to hold fast the teachings of Scripture!

The Greek word translated as *heritage* is very interesting (1 Peter 5:3); it means to choose by lot, or to assign a portion.²⁰² This speaks of the elders not placing those in subjection who have been assigned to them by the Lord. The elder is to accept the oversight of those who are a part of the *ekklesia*, knowing that the Lord knows those who are His and those who are part of the local assembly. Ephesians 1:11 says, "... in whom [i.e., in Christ] also we have obtained an inheritance ..." according to the predetermination of God. This word *inheritance* comes from the same Greek root word (as *heritage*), meaning that we have been assigned a portion in Christ, and that this portion has been assigned according to God's foreknowledge. If we look further to Ephesians 4:16 we read: "...From whom [i.e., Christ] the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the **effectual working in the measure of every part**, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." As we bring these two passages together, we see that the foreknowledge of God has placed us within the Body of Christ where we are individually connected with Christ, our Head, so as to effectively use our individual gifting in order to bring growth to the Body. Those who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ are all members of His Body (His flock, His *ekklesia*, His kingdom); we will have differing roles within that Body (1 Corinthians 12) but we are all members of that one flock that Jesus said that He would build (Matthew 16:18), and (don't miss it!) we are all vitally connected with our one Shepherd, our Head, the Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 4:16; John 10:16). Therefore, we are to submit to one another in the fear of God (Ephesians 5:21); within the context of the Body of Christ, there is no room for a hierarchical authority structure; a clergy-laity distinction has absolutely no place within the *ekklesia*.

Rather than being lords over the flock, the elders are to be *ensamples*. This is not a word that we use much today, and we typically read it as the word *example*. However, the Greek word *tupos* means the mark of a blow,²⁰³ and speaks of an imprint that is made, much like a seal will leave an exact impression of its form. By contrast, the words most often translated as *example*, speak of a specimen or a sample; the former is much more precise in its demands. Pause to consider the qualifications of an elder as outlined in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1: this is the exact imprint that is to be before us; here is the life-pattern that those within the local assembly are to see in their elders. This is a life that could only be lived through the presence of the abiding Holy Spirit; yet, as Peter

²⁰² Vine's "heritage."

²⁰³ Strong's Online.

declared, the calling that we have all received from God, is that we are to live in holiness (1 Peter 1:15-16). Yes, the elders are to be a true pattern to the sheep of whom they have oversight, but we are all to live in a manner worthy of the calling that we have of God (Ephesians 4:1).

The elders or bishops of the *ekklesia* bear a significant responsibility. Their lives are to be above reproach to their own families, to those within the *ekklesia*, and even to those who are outside of the *ekklesia*. I am reminded of the many times I have heard it said that Christians make the worst employees and are the worst with whom to do business. How contrary this is to the Word of God! Jesus said: “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). The structure of churches today does not encourage accountability: *pastors* are often not accountable to anyone (or to a board whom they control, often through the abuse of Hebrews 13:17), and they refuse to hold anyone else accountable to God’s call on their lives (lest they be accused of meddling), and the mutual accountability of Ephesians 5:21 has been lost through the general Biblical ignorance of the average pew-warmer. The elders have not been permitted to exercise their God-given responsibilities to the redeemed and their Redeemer; in fact, the understanding of the proper role of the elder within the *ekklesia* has been virtually lost within our modern context. We can rest assured that Jesus is building His *ekklesia* today, but we can be equally assured that men are busily building their own churches without the Lord, and remain totally oblivious to the fact that the Spirit of God is not with them.

B. Deacons – The second area of responsibility within the *ekklesia* that is named in Scripture is that of *deacon*. The word in Greek is *diakonos* (*dee-ak'-on-os*) and means “one who executes the commands of another, a servant, attendant or minister.”²⁰⁴ In reality we are all to be the deacons of Christ, for we are to be walking in obedience to His commandments. However, within the *ekklesia*, these men would work alongside of the elders, or bishops, and attend to the needs of the assembly. The first time that we see this word in the NT is in Jesus’ words against anyone who might be tempted to feel superior to others within the Body: “...it [lording it over one another] shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister [*diakonos*] ...” (Matthew 20:26). This is the application of the term in the broad sense – we are all to be deacons, to serving one another as the servants of the Lord. We often think of the seven men who were chosen to meet the daily ministrations in the early gathering in Jerusalem as being deacons, yet the term is not used regarding them (Acts 6:1-6), even though their work was one of ministering to needs.

Let’s consider carefully the qualifications for a deacon within the *ekklesia*, as they are outlined in 1 Timothy 3:8-13:

⁸*Likewise must the deacons be grave*, – Notice that the outline of qualifications for a deacon begins with the word *likewise*, or *in the same way*.²⁰⁵ Clearly, there is little difference between the

²⁰⁴ Strong’s Online.

²⁰⁵ Friberg Lexicon.

qualifications for an elder, or bishop (as delineated in the preceding verses), and what is required of a deacon. Within the modern church context, the deacon is generally considered to be of far less importance than the elder (evidence of hierarchical thinking), and so the standards are often lower; yet, what we see here is that the qualifications that follow are like to those for the elder.

The first noted quality for deacons is that they are to be *grave*; the Greek word is *semnos*, and the primary meaning is to be *worthy of respect, dignified, revered*.²⁰⁶ This identifies a life that is above reproach, and someone who takes life seriously.

not doubletongued, – The Greek word is *dilogos*, two or twice worded, and means to have one word for one person and a different word for someone else, either to gain or maintain favor or to pacify.²⁰⁷ The result is hypocrisy, lying and confusion. James speaks of a double-minded man as being unstable in all his ways (James 1:8); so a double-tongued man would be someone whom you could not trust, for they would say whatever the situation would seem to demand, rather than the truth. The deacon is to be someone who speaks the truth without variation.

not given to much wine, – This is an accurate translation of the Greek phrase, and appears to be a variation of the virtual total abstinence that is imposed upon the elder (verses 2 and 3).

not greedy of filthy lucre; – This is exactly the same Greek word as used in verse 3 for the elder, and means not eager for shameful gain or greedy for money.²⁰⁸

⁹*Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience*. – This is admittedly a very difficult phrase. The mystery of faith, from Colossians 1:27, would be “Christ in you.” Ephesians 2 speaks of Christ bringing together both Jews and Gentiles into one Building, and of making one Body out of what had formerly been two very separated groups. Acts 6:1 gives indication that early on there remained a Jew-Gentile tension, even within the assembly of believers. A cursory look at church history will tell you that this tension led to many excesses and errors, many of which are still being perpetuated today. Those who minister within the *ekklesia* are to do so without regard as to who anyone is; their conscience is to be clear of any guilt and undefiled.”²⁰⁹ Perhaps the ultimate example of this would be when the Lord Jesus took upon Himself the task of a servant and washed the disciples’ feet – including the feet of Judas, who was about to betray Him (John 13:2-17; verse 26 confirms that Judas was among the number). The deacons are to minister without partiality.

¹⁰*And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless*. – The deacons are to be examined, or tested, before they are to fill this role; *also* tells us that this is after the same manner as for the *elders*, or *bishops*. After examination (the understanding being that they are approved), they are then to minister; both the examination (*proved*) and the ministry (*use*) are commands, and are essential to the welfare of those within the assembly. What has been translated as “use the office of a deacon” in our KJV, is the same Greek word as used in Matthew 4:11 – when the “angels came and ministered unto” Jesus. It would appear that the translators were unduly influenced by their own experience within the churches of

²⁰⁶ Friberg Lexicon; Gingrich Lexicon, *Bibleworks* 8; Liddell-Scott Lexicon.

²⁰⁷ Strong’s Online.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Friberg Lexicon; Liddell-Scott Lexicon.

the day, and so they created an “office” for the deacon – this time the Bishop’s Bible cannot be blamed, for it does not include anything beyond the word *minister*.²¹⁰

¹¹*Even so must their wives be grave*, – Here we have an admonition to women. Within the Greek, there is only one word that is translated as wife (wives) or woman (women) based on context. In the Greek, this phrase literally says: “Women, in the same way, be worthy of respect.”²¹¹ Context might be taken to limit this verse to the wives of the deacons; there is really nothing within the Greek to provide this slant to the admonition that is given here. It’s clear from the words supplied in our KJV that the translators thought that this applied to the wives of the deacons. Within the spirit of this passage, I would say that it applies to the wives of both the elders and deacons, and, in reality, applies to all women who have been reborn into the *ekklesia* of Christ.

not slanderers, – The Greek word for *slanderer*, *diabolos*, is most often translated as *devil*, and so this could be a charge to not play the role of the devil (the father of lies – John 8:44). The women are not to lie; they are not to make false accusations.²¹²

sober, – This word means *temperate* or self-controlled. This is not the same Greek word translated as *sober* in verse two, but is the same as the Greek word translated as *vigilant*.

faithful in all things. – This is a true translation of the Greek phrase; the women are to be faithful or trustworthy in all that they do.

¹²*Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife*, – Returning to the qualifications of a deacon, the charge is that they are to have one wife. This is a reiteration of the charge to the elders.

ruling their children and their own houses well. – *Ruling* comes from the same Greek word as used in verse four; they are to *stand before* their children and their households with excellence. Included, as well, is the thought of being a guardian to their children and to all within their household.

¹³*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*. – The first phrase is: *for they who minister well, acquire for themselves a good standing*.²¹³ Once again, there is no *office* as we might understand it. The Greek word for *purchase* is the same as that used in Acts 20:28 where Paul charged the elders of Ephesus “to feed the church [*ekklesia*] of God, which he hath **purchased** [acquired] with his own blood.”²¹⁴ Jesus is the ultimate example of the work of a deacon – through His ministry on the cross, He has purchased salvation for mankind, and through personal faith in Him we join His *ekklesia*. Through an excellent ministry to the children of God comes a confident faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

We can see that the Lord has not carelessly tossed together the qualifications for those who would have the oversight within the *ekklesia*, and those who would minister to it. However, even

²¹⁰ Bishop’s Bible.

²¹¹ Stephanus 1550 NT; Friberg Lexicon.

²¹² Strong’s Online.

²¹³ Stephanus 1550 NT; Vine’s “degree.”

²¹⁴ Friberg Lexicon.

as we have seen the high standards laid down for these men, we have also reminded ourselves along the way that, really, these standards are those to which we should all aspire. We are called to live a life of holiness in the Lord; such a life will demonstrate these characteristics. The caution that we face, while considering these qualifications for the roles indicated, is that our lives before coming to the Lord may actually prevent us from assuming these responsibilities, and we must be willing to accept his limitation. Elders and deacons must first be examined to ensure that they qualify for the work of serving the *ekklesia*, and then they must be appointed by seasoned elders under the guidance of the Spirit of God.

C. An Example – Now that we have looked carefully at the Biblical basis for how the *ekklesia* is to be kept, it might be of value to look at the leadership section of the constitution of a Fundamental Baptist church (I choose such a church because they frequently claim to be a *New Testament Church*, whereas most Evangelical churches would not make such a claim). Therefore, this is not a liberal church, not even a modern Evangelical church, but a conservative group of believers who would say, with all sincerity, that they are conducting themselves according to the Scriptures. Our traditions have encroached upon the truths of God’s Word with great subtlety; even those who seem determined to abide by the Scriptures, incredibly, step-by-compromising-step, often come to the same end as those who simply turn away from the Word of God – hence the need for the vigilance to which we are so often called in the Scriptures. Baptists have long boasted that they were not part of the Reformation departure from the Roman Catholic Church (never having been part of the Church), yet, somewhere along the line they have absorbed many of the trappings and traditions of the Catholics. Clearly, the Roman Catholic Church cannot be blamed for everything, and Baptists stand as proof of that. Now that we have seen the Biblical mandate for those who bear responsibility within the *ekklesia*, let us take a brief, eye-opening look at the leadership portion (Article V) of the constitution of Foundation Baptist Church in Calgary.²¹⁵

Quoted Constitution	Comments
Section 1: Classification:	
The leadership of Foundation Baptist Church shall be composed of the following and shall be selected as the need may arise and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit:	
Administration - Pastor (s) and Elder(s).	Here is an error already, and evidence of accepting Roman Catholic tradition as their own. They have adopted the Catholic term “pastor,” and have equated it with elder – something that is not found in the Bible.

²¹⁵ <http://www.foundationbaptistchurch.com/about-us/what-we-believe/constitution.html>

<p>Service - Deacon(s), Clerk, Treasurer, Financial Secretary, Sunday School Superintendent, Teachers, Musicians, Ushers, and other ministers as the need may arise.</p>	<p>Evidently Paul's instructions to Timothy were woefully incomplete! Actually, all of the other additions to the Bible's instructions are due to the practice of following after the heathen (the Roman Catholics). They have been deluded into thinking that they need large groups, buildings, programs, etc. – when the <i>ekklesia</i> is simply to gather for mutual exhortation and encouragement in the Lord.</p>
<p>Section 2: Qualifications:</p>	
<p>The leadership shall be elected from among the active members (Article IV Section 4) who give evidence of the qualifications laid down in the Word of God.</p>	<p>The Article referred to defines active membership as: "One who attends regularly the meetings of this church, and who contributes to and participates in the work of this church according to the New Testament." This definition sounds spiritual, but is really quite nebulous. The leadership is elected under the sacred Western rite of democracy, certainly not a Biblical practice (as we will see).</p>
<p>Personal endowments (Romans 12:1-8; I Corinthians 12-14; Ephesians 4:1-16; I Peter 4:10-11)</p>	<p>These passages do not refer to "personal endowments," which by definition is a natural ability or quality.²¹⁶ Rather, these are speaking of the particular gifting that has been given by the Spirit of God. The emphasis in several of these passages is on the ONE Body, and that we are many members but only ONE Body. It is the Spirit Who has gifted us and placed us specifically according to His pleasure for the benefit, development and growth of the whole Body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-16). My natural ability may or may not be of value to the Lord; I believe our God-given gifting can change from time-to-time as the need will demand.</p>
<p>Moral and spiritual standards (Acts 6:1-4; I Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-11): All leadership shall strive to be separated from practices which discredit our Christian testimony and</p>	<p>The high standard of Scripture for those who would oversee and serve the <i>ekklesia</i> is very clear, and it is good to place the spotlight on these. The real difficulty with the last</p>

²¹⁶ Encarta Dictionary, "endowment."

cause others to stumble. (Romans 14:21; I Corinthians 8) Therefore, any individual in leadership who is no longer willing to maintain moral and spiritual standards or is unwilling to fulfill his duties shall resign. If voluntary resignation is not forthcoming, the matter shall be referred to the Pastor and Elders to take the necessary action.	statement made becomes all too apparent when you consider the indicated process in light of the Pastor's responsibilities (below) if he should be the problem.
Section 3: Responsibilities:	
The responsibilities of those in leadership shall commensurate with their titles and according to the teaching of the Word of God.	This sounds good, but the problems begin immediately: there is no Biblical responsibility attached to "pastor," other than attending to sheep and goats.
Pastor (s)	
The Pastor shall be the executive head of the church and the president of the corporation. He shall have the general oversight of the entire church and shall perform all necessary duties relating to such oversight. (I Thessalonians 5:12-13; I Timothy 2:7; 5:17 ; Titus 1:7 ; Hebrews 13:7,17; I Peter 5:2-4) He shall be moderator at all meetings except when matters concerning him are under consideration.	Herein is the profound problem with this particular Baptist structure: the pastor is made like unto the pope of Rome: he is the undisputed head over all things. If he fails in his responsibilities, he is beyond the reach of accountability within this structure. None of the passages referenced deal with "pastors," and the highlighted references specifically mention elders, or bishops. Underlying this glaring oversight is a tremendous assumption that the modern day "Pastor" is equivalent to the Biblical elder, and that the church of today is the same as the <i>ekklesia</i> of God's Word. Unfortunately for all of those caught in the modern church movement, there is no sound basis for making this leap.
Elder(s)	
As the need arises, Elders shall be nominated by the Pastor and the Board of Elders and voted upon by the church. Each man shall be considered individually. Any Elder may be removed from office if he becomes physically incapacitated, spiritually unqualified, or his inability to serve is established in the minds of the Pastor and the Board of Elders.	The Biblical qualifications for the elders are strangely missing. They only appear under the position for "pastor," which would seem to indicate that the qualifications for this position are somewhat lower. Paul's charge to Titus was to "ordain [or appoint] elders in every city" (Titus 1:5). According to this, Paul had it wrong. We have already considered the will of

	<p>the people as exemplified within Scripture (and it was never good), yet today we do nothing without the consent of the majority. This is NOT Biblical! God has always worked with the remnant; modern churches always work with the majority. It is somewhat commendable that the Board is self-perpetuating and self-monitoring; however, this is subject to the approval of the majority. It is clear that there is no place for “submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God” (Ephesians 5:21) within this structure; this is top-down control with no variance. It might appear to be congregational rule, but the only ones who will stay in this type of arrangement are those who approve of the “Pastor”; everyone else will leave, thereby confirming the “Pastor’s” firm control.</p>
1. Elders shall meet monthly with the Pastor and shall select their own chairman and secretary at their first meeting after the annual meeting. They are to assist the Pastor in the spiritual oversight of the church and are responsible to him at all times.	<p>The elders are responsible to the pastor; according to Scripture they are to be appointed under the guidance of the Spirit, and, therefore, are responsible to God and accountable to the assembly that they oversee. In this example, they are not overseers (as they should be), but puppets under the control of the pastor.</p>
2. The Elders are to authorize the preparation and distribution of the elements of the Lord’s Supper.	<p>What is there to authorize; from 1 Corinthians 11 it would seem that the celebration of the Lord’s supper has already been authorized by the Lord Jesus for our remembrance of Him. Preparing the elements and serving them doesn’t require authorization; this looks like a crumb tossed out to justify having elders.</p>
3. The Elders shall act in advisory capacity concerning all matters of church business and in the employing and dismissing of other positions of leadership.	<p>Again, <i>advisory</i> to the pastor – there is strong central control here!</p>
4. When a vacancy occurs in the pastorate, the Elders of Foundation Baptist Church shall seek for a suitable Pastor. When they deem wise, they shall present to the church	<p>Based on the structure outlined, a vacancy would only occur when the pastor decided to move on; there is virtually no other way to get him out. When a vacancy occurs, these elders,</p>

at a specially called business meeting the name of one of the candidates and conduct the voting on the same. It shall continue this procedure until a Pastor is chosen. Any candidate recommended to the church must be voted upon by a three-fourths vote of the active members present and voting to be accepted as Pastor. The voting shall be by ballot, public notice of such action having been given from the pulpit two Sundays immediately preceding the date of the meeting.	who have functioned under the domination of the former pastor, are suddenly thrust into the full responsibility of finding a replacement. Yet again, the majority voice rules.
5. The Elders of Foundation Baptist Church shall serve as its Nominating Committee, the responsibility of which is to present annually to the church a slate of nominees for its various departments. (Secretary(ies), Clerk, Treasurer, Financial Assistant, Sunday School Superintendent, Teachers, Ushers, etc.)	The elders, who Biblically are charged with the oversight of the local assembly, get to present names to the church of those who are willing to fill the lower roles. What a sad departure from what God intended for the elders of His local assembly.
Deacon(s)	
The nomination and selection of deacons shall be done in the same manner as Elders.	Again, no qualifications are indicated; they are simply perpetuated via the elders.
1. The Deacons shall care for the physical needs of the church. (Acts 6:1-6) The Deacons shall meet monthly to discuss the business of the church, and shall elect their own chairman and secretary at their first meeting after the annual meeting.	Strong organization to support the central focus – the pastor.
2. The Deacons shall act in harmony and cooperation with the Board of Elders, and shall assist the Elders in dispensing the benevolence of the church.	The seven of Acts 6 were chosen so that the apostles wouldn't have to bother with the responsibility of meeting the needs of the huge gathering, unlike these deacons who are under the direct supervision of the elders. When the structure is not driven by God's standard, there is no room for trust, even in the small things.
Other ministers shall be appointed as the need arises and the Holy Spirit directs.	An ending that sounds spiritual to an otherwise flagrant departure from the Word of God.

The Constitution of Foundation Baptist Church goes on to say that their government “shall be congregational.”²¹⁷ In other words, the church will be congregationally directed – the members will vote on all matters of business including the placement of pastors, elders, and deacons. However, with such a strong central control, it is clear that the government is congregational only to the extent to which the “pastor” permits it to be. It is always interesting to note, in a constitution such as this, where the supporting Scripture references are missing; there is an unacknowledged realization that much of what they are implementing finds absolutely no basis in the Word of God.

D. Democracy/Congregational Government – As we have looked at an excerpt from the Constitution of Foundation Baptist Church, and as we consider the churches within our own experience, we would very likely agree that the will of the majority always plays a part in the larger decisions of the church. How the government structure is composed will determine, to a large extent, just how much impact the will of the majority will have on the final outcome. The selection of those who are accepted as pastors or approved as elders always flows out of the expressed will of the people. From where does this come?

This could very well have come as a reaction to the rigidly hierarchical organization of the Roman Catholic Church. It is said that when the pendulum swings, it generally swings from one extreme to another – it would seem that this would be no exception. In his article, “Why I am a Baptist,” Rod Benson includes this revealing statement: “if one stresses congregational government as a Baptist distinctive, one must also acknowledge that it has no overt scriptural basis.”²¹⁸ However, it is very evident that the lack of a Biblical foundation has not hindered this distinctive from being very popular, particularly within Evangelical and Baptist communities.

The first place where we find the will of the people being carried out is in Genesis 11:1-9. It seems that they came together to build a tower to exalt themselves; they came together as one – Nimrod (*rebellion*) is generally held responsible for leading these people in rebellion against the Lord (they were to replenish the earth [Genesis 9:1], but they did not want to be *scattered*).²¹⁹ This undertaking was massive, but they worked as one to accomplish their task. As we considered this earlier, we recognized that despite the expressed will of the people being undertaken, their single-mindedness did not receive God’s approval, and He confounded their language thereby forcing them to abandon their project. Through the introduction of new languages, God caused them to scatter and fulfill His command to replenish the earth (Genesis 9:1). Although the will of the majority was to build, it was contrary to God’s desire for mankind. The lesson that twentieth-century Christians need to understand, is that a course of action approved by the majority, does not make it right, best or Biblical.

Throughout history, conquering civilizations would typically bring with them the dominance of one language that would commonly be used throughout their empire. Since World War II,

²¹⁷ Article VI of the Constitution of Foundation Baptist Church, Calgary
<http://www.foundationbaptistchurch.com/about-us/what-we-believe/constitution.html> .

²¹⁸ <http://jmm.aaa.net.au/articles/9014.htm>

²¹⁹ Strong’s Online.

English has become the primary working language of the world, not so much through a conquering leader as through the infiltration of English into the worlds of art, technology, and commerce. The world-wide reach of the British Commonwealth in the latter 19th and early 20th centuries set the stage for the technological influence of English through the American domination of this market. The United Nations presently recognizes two working languages, English and French, but the practical working language is English, since the location of the UN headquarters is in the U.S.²²⁰ In a broad sense, the world today is returning to a time similar to that of Babel, partially through the unifying influence of English as a world-wide language, which is a significant step toward a one-world government.

When God created man, He made a unique being within His creation (Genesis 1:26-28); man was created in the image of God. God personally formed him from the dust of the ground and breathed into him the “breath of life; and man became a living soul” (Genesis 2:7). He gave man dominion over all of the earth and all of the creatures in the earth (Genesis 1:28), and God spoke with man, providing him with instructions on how to live (Genesis 2:16-17) – man was in direct communication with his Creator. However, Satan entered the scene and this changed; man relinquished his dominion over the earth to Satan and lost his close relationship with God. With the entrance of sin, God set His plan in motion for man’s redemption (Genesis 3:15).



UN Headquarters, New York

God’s intent was that man should live under His direct authority and in communion with Him. Years later, God implemented a theocracy with Israel where all authority and guidance flowed from Him. Moses was God’s spokesman to the people, and, through him, God made provision for the Aaronic priesthood and the tribe of Levi to perpetuate His instructions and lead the people of Israel. This continued to the time of Samuel when the elders of the people of Israel came to him with their request: “... Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations” (1 Samuel 8:5).

It is interesting to realize, at this point, that Israel’s call for a king was foretold by God: “When thou art come unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein, and shalt say, I will set a king over me, like as all the nations that *are* about me; Thou shalt in any wise set *him* king over thee, whom the LORD thy God shall choose: *one* from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee: thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which *is* not thy brother” (Deuteronomy 17:14-15). Even though this prophecy was recorded, God still viewed the people’s call for a king as a rejection of their direct submission to His leading (1 Samuel 8:7). Going forward, Israel clearly forgot the admonitions of the Lord regarding this king, whom they were to have over them, for it seems that, after David, there was no time spent in seeking the one of God’s choosing. Theocracy had been replaced with monarchy, by the will of the people. Through the will of the people, we see the kingdom of Israel divided (1 Kings 12:20), with ten tribes making Jeroboam king, and, quickly thereafter, following him into idolatry. Despite the error

²²⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Common_%28language%29, “lingua franca.”

and failure that came through the kings, it is clear from Scripture that there will come a day when Messiah shall sit upon the throne of David (Luke 1:32), and, one day, God will once again be with man (Revelation 21:3).

Within the *ekklesia*, we see this position of rule reserved for our Head, the one Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet what we too often find, as the constitution of Foundation Baptist Church illustrated, is that the pastor is given a unique position of headship, far beyond anything that Scripture would support. Jesus made it abundantly clear, for all who have eyes to see, that we are to minister together (Matthew 20:25-28; 1 Corinthians 12); we are all members of the ONE Body. We often refer to churches as belonging to the pastor, and that is an accurate reflection of what is often reality – they do belong to the pastor; he is their head, rather than the Lord Jesus.

Democracy (from the Greek *demos* – common people, and *kratos* – rule, strength²²¹) began with the ancient Greek city-states, not in the mind of God. There is nothing sacred about democratic rule; the will of the people is too often contrary to what is right and good (the tower of Babel is one example). If we are a part of the *ekklesia* that Jesus said He would build, then Christ is our Head, our Shepherd, our High Priest and King; our allegiance is to Him, not to man. It is only as we look to Jesus, the Author and Finisher of faith (Hebrews 12:2), that we will be able to hold fast to the Word of God without regard for man (2 Timothy 1:13; 1 Corinthians 3:21). Even the elders who are charged with oversight within the local assembly, are “among” us (1 Peter 5:1); they are not over us in a hierarchical sense, but are one of us. This fundamental principle is too often scorned by those who profess to follow the Scriptures with diligence; when it comes to the crunch, they will opt for their denominational theology rather than weigh their traditions against such unmistakable teachings from Scripture. May we permit the Lord to strengthen us to walk in a manner that is worthy of our calling in Christ Jesus, especially when that means leaving our traditions behind. “And Jesus said ... No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:62). If our commitment is to the Lord Jesus, the eternal Word, then we must not look back to our traditions, no matter how good they might appear, but rather cleave to the eternal Word of God.

²²¹ <http://www.etymonline.com/> “democracy.”

Chapter 9 – The Ekklesia – Ordinances

Within our tradition, we recognize two ordinances: Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Other traditions incorporate sacraments, rather than ordinances, and it is important to understand the terms in use. An ordinance is "something regularly done because it is formally prescribed, especially a religious ceremony such as Communion."²²² On the other hand, a sacrament is so much more: it is "a rite that is considered to have been established by Jesus Christ **to bring grace** to those participating in or receiving it" (emphasis added).²²³ It is important to understand the difference between these two as we proceed to look at Baptism and the Lord's Supper; the classification assigned (as ordinance or sacrament) will give indication of the views attached to it. Even though we might be somewhat insulated from other views on this subject, we would be remiss not to pause to consider some of these differing positions, if for no other reason than to be more firmly convinced of our own.

Within the Roman Catholic tradition, there are seven *sacraments* of which most are considered necessary for salvation²²⁴ (note the term used – these are **not** ordinances):

1. **Baptism** "is the door of the spiritual life; for by it we are made members of Christ and incorporated with the Church."²²⁵ This is called baptismal regeneration (born again by baptism), and within the Catholic tradition it is applied to infants; this is considered the important first step toward heaven. Interestingly, faith is strangely absent.

2. **Confirmation** – in "which the Holy Ghost is given to those already baptized in order to make them strong and perfect Christians and soldiers of Jesus Christ."²²⁶ This completes the cycle of preparation for heaven. The only faith at work here is a misplaced faith in the Roman Catholic Church that they have their doctrine right.

3. **Holy Eucharist**, the celebration of mass where the "Body and Blood of Christ are truly present" in the bread and wine.²²⁷ The full extent of this sacramental sacrilege is seen when the wafer, consecrated by the priest, is placed into a monstrance for all to see and worship as being Jesus, the Son of God. For the Catholics, the bread and/or wine are not symbolic (in most cases the bread/wafer fills the role of both the bread and wine), but become the actual body and blood of the Lord through the Eucharistic mass; the reality is that Christ is sacrificed



Monstrance

²²² *Encarta Dictionary*, "ordinance."

²²³ *Ibid*, "sacrament."

²²⁴ The Council of Trent, Canons and Decrees, Seventh Session, Canon IV: "If any one saith, that the sacraments of the New Law are not necessary unto salvation, but superfluous; and that, without them, or without the desire thereof, men obtain of God, through faith alone, the grace of justification; though all (the sacraments) are not indeed necessary for every individual; let him be anathema." Despite the best efforts of Ecumenists today, the Council of Trent is alive and well within the Catholic economy, and it is clear that any unity that involves the Roman Catholic Church will require compromise on the part of the other faith.

²²⁵ <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02258b.htm>, "Baptism."

²²⁶ <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04215b.htm>, "Confirmation."

²²⁷ <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05584a.htm>, "Holy Eucharist."

in an unbloody manner during each mass.²²⁸ Anyone disputing this, according to the Council of Trent, is anathema (accursed).²²⁹

4. **Penance** – “forgiveness of sins committed after baptism is granted through the priest's absolution [forgiveness of sins] to those who with true sorrow confess their sins and promise to satisfy for the same.”²³⁰ This is in keeping with the pastor, or priest, being the intercessor for the people, and, considering that baptism is applied to infants, clearly the priest will be in high demand for the parishioner's whole life.

5. **Extreme Unction** (an anointing) means “to give spiritual aid and comfort and perfect spiritual health, including, if need be, the remission of sins, and also, conditionally, to restore bodily health, to Christians who are seriously ill.”²³¹ Traditionally the “extreme unction” is applied to those who are on the verge of dying, as being part of the “last rites” administered. This would be the Catholic's way to ensure that the soul is ready for eternity – a final anointing, possibly for the remission of sins, so that the soul is clean for passing through death. It is amazing to see that the eternal condition of the soul rests in the hands of a fallible clergy, supported by the errant doctrines of a church that has long since departed from the truth.

6. **Order**, as a sacrament, “was applied to clergy and laity ... later to the hierarchy as a whole or to the various ranks of the clergy.”²³² The Catholics have not only created a complex hierarchical system of control, but they have made it one of their sacraments so that it is firmly established. It's interesting to note that they've made this a sacrament (something supposed to have been established by Jesus Christ), when it is perfectly clear that Jesus was opposed to this very thing (Matthew 20:25-28).

7. **Matrimony** “a figure of the union of Christ, and the Church.”²³³ Interestingly, even though this is a sacrament, it is one in which the priests are forbidden to participate (hence the Council of Trent says that not all sacraments are essential for everyone's salvation); their marriage is to the Church of Rome, and in that they are to be satisfied.

The Eastern Orthodox Church does not recognize a fixed number of Sacred Mysteries (as they call the sacraments), but they do include the seven of the Roman Catholic Church as basic; they may be termed somewhat differently, but they are essentially the same. Even though someone of the Eastern Orthodox faith could participate in a Roman Catholic mass, the Orthodox tradition includes a much more strict form of closed communion that would not permit a Catholic to participate in their service. In many ways, these two groups are a reminder of the Pharisees and Sadducees of Jesus' day – both hold the Truth in their hands, yet neither can see beyond their own rules and regulations to the Life that is right under their noses. However, we must all examine our hearts to ensure that we are not guilty of the same error. So many Evangelicals hold the truth of

²²⁸ <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05584a.htm>, “Holy Eucharist.”

²²⁹ The Council of Trent, Canons and Decrees, Thirteenth Session, Canon VI.

²³⁰ <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11618c.htm>, “Penance.”

²³¹ <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05716a.htm>, “Extreme Unction.”

²³² <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11279a.htm>, “Holy Orders.”

²³³ <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09707a.htm>, “Marriage.”

God's Message, yet fail to incorporate His truths because of their blindness due to denominationalism, theology, ignorance, worldliness, and/or complacency.

Let us consider the two ordinances common to the Evangelical and Baptist traditions: Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

A. Baptism – The Greek word translated as baptism (the noun) means, “consisting of the processes of immersion, submersion and emergence.”²³⁴ This definition indicates an entrance into the water (immersion), being completely covered by the water (submersion), and coming up out of the water (emergence). Strong's defines the Greek verb form, *baptizo*, as “to dip repeatedly [as in dying cloth], to immerse, to submerge.”²³⁵ One would think that that should make an end of any discussion on how baptism is to be carried out, but, alas, nothing is quite so simple.

Within the Protestant Evangelical community (and I would include Baptists in this group) there are a couple of concepts of baptism to be considered. When we think of baptism, we typically think first of John the Baptist:

¹In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, ²And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. ³For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. ⁴And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey. ⁵Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, ⁶And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins” (Matthew 3:1-6).

Indeed, this is the first mention of the ritual of baptism in the Scriptures.

It is interesting to see that the Jewish leaders were not taken aback at John's work of baptizing in the Jordan River, but their great curiosity was “Who art thou?” (John 1:19). The ritual of baptism was not unfamiliar to the Jews of this time, but how John was using baptism was a variation to the norm of their day – he was baptizing Jews. Within rabbinical traditions, baptism was an essential part of their process of initiating a proselyte, along with circumcision and the presentation of a sacrifice.²³⁶ John came on the scene baptizing Jews upon their repentance from sin, and the Jewish leaders needed to find out who this man was who was baptizing in this unusual manner (John 1:19-27). When these leaders asked John their question, his response was that he was not the Christ – he was not the Messiah for Whom the Jews were waiting. John wanted it clearly understood by these men that he was not the promised Messiah. The leaders then asked him if he was Elijah, or the prophet who was promised by Moses – which he also clearly denied. When pressured as to who he was, John quoted from Isaiah 40:3 (cp. Isaiah 40:3-5 with John 1:23). John's message was one of preparation for the Messiah, the Lord Jesus; his baptism of repentance was in anticipation of the coming ministry of Jesus. The Jewish leaders rejected John's baptism, even as they would

²³⁴ Vine's “baptism.”

²³⁵ Strong's Online.

²³⁶ Jewish Encyclopedia, “Baptism.”

reject the coming Son of God, the One to Whom John pointed as being “the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Their rejection of John’s baptism came to the fore when Jesus asked them pointedly whether the baptism of John was of heaven or of men, and they refused to answer (Matthew 21:23-27).

As we consider baptism today, it isn’t long before we realize that there are various views held, and most seek to pull their support from the Scriptures. Evangelical positions are often vague, although most will practice emersion. The Evangelical Free Church (EFC) pioneers, however, believed that “if Scripture alone is the rule, and Scripture is open to various interpretations, and believers are free in conscience to interpret it as they feel ‘led’ by the Holy Spirit, it follows that they may be led to different views.”²³⁷ With this heritage, you would expect the Free Church to have a decidedly open position regarding baptism, and you wouldn’t be disappointed. Contrary to the EFC pioneers, I believe that the Holy Spirit will lead to only the one true interpretation, but readily acknowledge that man has a great tendency to impose a multiplicity of views on God’s Word. We cannot ascribe the spiritual confusion that is out there today, to the Holy Spirit – it is man who is responsible for the myriad interpretations of (and deviations from) God’s Word.

As we consider the doctrine of baptism, it is with a full awareness that there are various understandings of the significance of baptism, and differing views as to modes.

1. Reformed Tradition

The Reformed concept of baptism harkens back to the Roman Catholic tradition, and was carried with them in their separation from Rome. Their view is that baptism is a sacrament rather than an ordinance, as it is within Evangelical traditions. Sacraments, within this context, are defined as “holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace, immediately instituted by God, to represent Christ and His benefits; and to confirm our interest in Him: as also, to put a visible difference between those that belong unto the Church and the rest of the world”²³⁸ Within Reformed tradition, they contend that their manner of baptism was implemented directly by God, and, therefore, it is a sacrament. Consider what the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) has to say about baptism:

I. Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:19), not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible Church (1 Corinthians 12:13); but also to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace (Romans 4:11; Colossians 2:11-12), of his ingrafting into Christ (Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:5), of regeneration (Titus 3:5), of remission of sins (Mark 1:4), and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in the newness of life (Romans 6:3-4). Which sacrament is, by Christ's own appointment, to be continued in His Church until the end of the world (Matthew 28:19).

²³⁷ David V. Martin, *Trinity International University 1897-1997*, p. 19.

²³⁸ http://www.reformed.org/documents/wcf_with_proofs/index.html Chapter XXVII.

II. The outward element to be used in this sacrament is water, wherewith the party is to be baptized, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, by a minister of the Gospel, lawfully called thereunto (Matthew 3:11; John 1:33; Matthew 28:19-20).

III. Dipping of the person into the water is not necessary; but Baptism is rightly administered by pouring, or sprinkling water upon the person (Hebrews 9:10, 19-22; Acts 2:41, 16:33; Mark 7:4).

IV. Not only those that do actually profess faith in and obedience unto Christ (Mark 16:15-16; Acts 8:37-38), but also the infants of one, or both, believing parents, are to be baptized (Genesis 17:7, 9; Galatians 3:9, 14; Colossians 2:11-12; Acts 2:38-39; Romans 4:11-12; 1 Corinthians 7:14; Matthew 28:19; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15).

V. Although it is a great sin to contemn or neglect this ordinance (Luke 7:30; Exodus 4:24-26), yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it, as that no person can be regenerated, or saved, without it (Romans 4:11; Acts 10:2, 4, 22, 31, 45, 47): or, that all that are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated (Acts 8:13, 23).

VI. The efficacy of Baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered (John 3:5, 8); yet, notwithstanding, by the right use of this ordinance, the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited, and conferred, by the Holy Ghost, to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongs unto, according to the counsel of God's own will, in His appointed time (Galatians 3:27; Titus 3:5; Ephesians 5:25-26; Acts 2:38, 41).

VII. The sacrament of Baptism is but once to be administered unto any person (Titus 3:5).²³⁹

This is the basis for Reformed thinking as it pertains to baptism. What is immediately apparent is that there are two churches in view here: a visible one, and an invisible one. The emphasis is clearly placed upon the visible church, and the obvious reason for this is that those who subscribe to the WCF also hold tenaciously to a rigid doctrine of election, i.e., “This effectual call [of those predestined unto life] is of God’s free and special grace alone, not from anything at all foreseen in man, who is altogether passive therein”²⁴⁰ Therefore, within the minds of the framers of the WCF, no one can know who is a part of the invisible church, because it is all of God and we have no part in determining whom He selects. Those within the Reformed tradition have no assurance of salvation, other than a subjective evaluation of their own lives, with the hope that they are not deceiving themselves through righteous works.

You will note in the portion of the WCF quoted, that only one Scripture reference is used to support baptism as an admission of the individual into the visible church: “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” (1 Corinthians 12:13). Paul’s letter was written to the redeemed, not to the heathen of Corinth; therefore, when it is declared, “ye are the body of Christ”

²³⁹ http://www.reformed.org/documents/wcf_with_proofs/, Chapter XXVIII.

²⁴⁰ http://www.reformed.org/documents/wcf_with_proofs/index.html Chapter X.

(verse 27) this is the Body of the Redeemed, those who by faith have laid hold of the eternal life that is found only in Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 6:11-12). The primary focus of the epistles within our NT Scriptures is not on the “visible Church,” but on living a godly life in keeping with the calling to holiness that we have received of God (Ephesians 4:1; 2 Timothy 1:9; 1 Peter 1:15-16). Our redemption is sure as we walk in faithful obedience to the commands of God’s Word, and the visible aspects of our lives will be conformed to our inward commitment. The Pharisees were very committed to the visible “church” of their day, yet Jesus spoke words of condemnation to them: “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead *men*’s bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity” (Matthew 23:27-28). This is the philosophy that the WCF would seek to perpetuate, but unfortunately, those who hold to this view often do not even attempt to maintain an external righteousness – after all, nothing we can do in this life can impact what God has already predetermined as our eternal destination.

As such then, baptism, within the Reformed tradition, is not a symbol of a spiritual decision made, but a sacrament by which they hope that spiritual grace will be imparted, thereby welcoming the individual into the covenant of grace (a “sign and seal”). The WCF uses Romans 4:11 as support for this teaching: “And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which *he had yet* being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also.” This speaks of Abraham receiving the sign of circumcision as a confirmation of the covenant that the Lord had made with him – a perpetual sign that was to be carried forward to all generations. This is where the Reformed thinkers relate baptism to circumcision; circumcision was administered on the eighth day of life (Leviticus 12:3), and so baptism must also be administered early in life. They have grasped onto the sign of Abraham’s covenant with the Lord, but missed much weightier matters. If they would simply read Romans 4:11 in the context of what follows, they would surely realize that it was the **faith** of Abraham that led to his righteousness, and that he is “the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps” of his faith (verse 12) – a faith that he had even before he was circumcised. The promise of blessing that God made to Abraham, came well before the sign of circumcision (Genesis 12 – the promise, Genesis 17 – the sign); therefore, all who exercise faith in the redemption of Christ (in fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham) are considered to be the spiritual children of Abraham (Romans 4:16). However, the WCF seeks to perpetuate a physical sign for a spiritual benefit, even while they admit in their Article V that it is of no real value (nevertheless, they still insist that it is a “sin” to fail to administer baptism after their manner). All through this, the WCF only offers a frayed thread of hope, for the grace of the Spirit of God will only be effectual if the person baptized is one who has been predestined by God to grace for eternal life. The WCF openly confesses that baptism has no bearing on an individual’s salvation, for you can be saved without it, and by the same token, you can be damned even if you have received it. What a hopeless situation; in many respects, this sounds very much like Orwellian doublespeak, seeking to cover every option available. Baptism’s value is clearly limited to being a sign of joining their visible church; there is obviously no value to it being a sign of the covenant of grace (a sacrament). Their form of baptism

is simply a sign of accepting the WCF as holding the correct interpretation of Scripture, very much like circumcision was simply a sign of being a descendent of Abraham.

Inasmuch as they view baptism as a means of possibly infusing the grace of the Spirit of God into the individual's life (should they be among *the elect*), it is administered as quickly as possible to the children of those who ascribe to the WCF (as closely as possible to the eighth day is preferred). I recall hearing that there was concern expressed by some that I was almost three weeks old before I was baptized. There seems to be a dichotomy within the minds of those who hold to the WCF position, for, on the one hand, they are in a rush to have the baptism administered, and, on the other hand, they declare: "Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated, and saved by Christ ...,"²⁴¹ the obvious implication being that infants who are not *elect* will not be saved. So, what's the rush? Why bother with baptism at all, since it is clearly not necessary for salvation – what difference will one more "sin" make in the broad scheme of such a confining view of predestination?

Since baptism within the WCF holds no truly symbolic significance, it follows that the mode of baptism will be somewhat nebulous as well. As they declare: "Dipping of the person into the water is not necessary,"²⁴² pouring or sprinkling is just fine; when you consider that they hold to paedobaptism (child/infant baptism), it is very understandable that immersion would be avoided. However, the question arises, how do they justify this within the definition of the word *baptism*? Let's take a moment to consider the passages of Scripture that they use to support their position (Article III). Their first text is from Hebrews 9:10 – "*Which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation,*" and 19-22:

¹⁹For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and **sprinkled** both the book, and all the people, ²⁰Saying, This *is* the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined unto you. ²¹Moreover he **sprinkled** with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry. ²²And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission.

There are two words here that speak to the matter of cleansing: *washings* and *sprinkled*. In the former case, the Greek word is *baptismos*, which means "a washing, purification effected by means of water,"²⁴³ and the passage quoted refers to the ritual washing required under the Mosaic Law. Within the Hebrew, these words also mean "to wash, wash off, wash away, bathe" (Exodus 29:4; 30:19), and do not carry the concept of immersion. This ritual was used for the sanctification of Aaron and his sons into the priesthood (Exodus 29:4), and the routine cleansing that was required before they ministered in the tabernacle (Exodus 30:19); both speak of the holiness of God and the need that man has to be cleansed in order to minister before Him. *Sprinkled* comes from the Greek word that means just that, and the Hebrew used in Exodus 24:8 is also a word that means to

²⁴¹ http://www.reformed.org/documents/wcf_with_proofs/index.html Chapter X, Article III.

²⁴² http://www.reformed.org/documents/wcf_with_proofs/index.html Chapter XXVIII, Article III.

²⁴³ Strong's Online.

sprinkle, scatter, or toss.²⁴⁴ Although this might, at first, appear to support the WCF concept of baptism, it is necessary to keep in mind that these are applied to ritual cleansings that underscored the holiness of God, and have absolutely no bearing on circumcision, which the WCF seeks to link to baptism. In other words, these are some of the ritualistic cleansing routines that were part of the Mosaic ceremonial laws, all of which were fulfilled and ended with the death, burial and resurrection of Messiah Jesus (Ephesians 2:14-17). None of these OT ceremonies have any correlation whatsoever with baptism.

The WCF then appeals to Acts 2:41 – “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added *unto them* about three thousand souls.” Alas, there is no support here for their mode of baptism (or any mode, really); what does come through is that those who were baptized had received the word that Peter preached, which means that they all understood what was spoken (an immediate elimination of anyone who could not understand – namely, infants). This actually speaks against what the WCF advocates.

Next, the WCF uses Acts 16:33 – “And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed *their* stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway.” However, just two verses earlier, Paul and Silas expounded, for the Philippian jailor, the terms of salvation: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.” Once again, there is nothing here to support or dispute any mode of baptism. However, the prerequisite to baptism, being an active belief in the Lord Jesus Christ, is very clearly evident; something that infants cannot do. Even though there is nothing here that would dispute the WCF’s mode of baptism, there is evidence that would call their infant-baptism teachings into question. The thread to which they cling is that it would not have been convenient to have used immersion.

Finally, they use Mark 7:4 – “And *when they come* from the market, except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, *as* the washing of cups, and pots, brasen vessels, and of tables.” Here, the Greek word for *wash* is *baptizo*, which means to immerse, or submerge. The Reformed would say that this cannot refer to a full submerging of the body under water, for they would not be able to accomplish this “baptism” every time that they returned from the market. However, once again, context is very important. Just before this we read: “¹Then came together unto him [Jesus] the Pharisees, and certain of the scribes, which came from Jerusalem. ²And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled [*aniptos*: *a* – not, *nipptos* – to cleanse], that is to say, with unwashen, hands, they found fault. ³For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash *their* hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders” (Mark 7:1-3). Within the context of this passage, it is clear that in verse four the reference is to washing (*baptizing*) the hands, not the whole body. Simply sprinkling one’s hands will not clean them; it would only dampen them sufficiently to make the defilement more evident. Here, again, we fail to find support for pouring or sprinkling to be applied to the Greek word *baptizo*. There is nothing to suggest that this word means anything other than a full immersion.

Within the WCF tradition, baptism is applied to herald the bringing of the recipient into the particular church that is conducting the *sacrament*. This is not to be construed as salvation,

²⁴⁴ Strong’s Online.

although, they insist, it can be a grace used to instill salvation, should the recipient be one of the elect. However, if the individual is not one of *the elect*, then it holds no value whatsoever. Baptism, within this tradition, is likened to Jewish circumcision which was a rite of entry into the Jewish nation. Inasmuch as they practice infant baptism, their mode of baptism follows the Catholic tradition of sprinkling or pouring. This is one area where the Reformed thinkers did not depart far from the Roman Catholic Church, and there are those within the broad fold of Reformed theology who would admit this to have been one of the errors of the Reformers. The practice of infant baptism came into being early in the second century through the teaching of baptismal regeneration.²⁴⁵ We have the roots of this Roman Catholic tradition going back to within a few years of the death of the last Apostle of Jesus; the corrupting work of Satan is evident very early on.

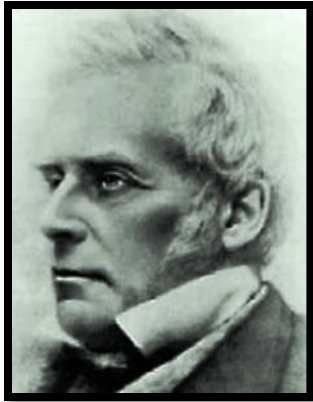
2. Baptist Tradition

What we have within Baptist teaching on the matter of baptism is, in essence, a position that is at the opposite end of the spectrum from the Reformed tradition. Theologians love labels, and, for example, when I sought to discuss the lack of a Biblical basis for church membership with a Baptist leader, I was labeled Brethren (which I'm not) and he is a Baptist – end of discussion. I fear we are prone to miss much of what God would have for us in His Word because we are quick to attach a label and look no further. When I began this study, my anticipation was that the Baptist position on baptism would present my own personal views, but now that I have entered the study of this subject, I will have to qualify that thought. We must learn to study the Scriptures without the bias that can come through adherence to a particular denominational position (or at least have our minds open to the Scriptures and the Spirit of God – not closed by man-made blinders). “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). Any denominational statement of faith, creed, or doctrinal statement is an interpretive presentation of what some men think that the Word of God says on a subject or subjects; it is not God's, for He explains His Word by His Word. The creeds are statements drawn together by men, perhaps very godly men but, nevertheless, still men. We are commanded to “try the spirits,” which simply means to hold what is presented against all of the Word of God. Evangelicals and Baptists have forgotten how to do this; the Bereans were commended for taking the Apostle Paul's words and testing them against the Scriptures (Acts 17:10-11), yet, in our fast-paced world, most Christians will barely crack their Bibles, let alone study them. So, far be it from me to accept a Baptist or any other denominational position on any doctrine as the final word, and it matters little to me who holds it – the question must be: “What does the Scripture say?”

I mentioned that the Baptist position on baptism is, to some extent, poles apart from the Reformed tradition. I say this based on two areas of thought related to baptism: the first is how the

²⁴⁵ E.H. Broadbent, *The Pilgrim Church*, p. 32.

progression from the times of the OT prophets to today is viewed, and the second deals with the meaning of the ritual of baptism.



John Nelson Darby

Within Baptist theological thinking, there is a strong leaning toward a dispensational view of Scripture (probably more so today than historically), even though the way it is expressed may vary considerably from group to group. Nevertheless, there is generally an acceptance of the concept of dividing all of time into chunks based upon how they see God working with man (yes, this is a very subjective exercise). C.I. Scofield, perhaps the most notorious promoter of dispensational thinking, defined a dispensation as “a period of time during which man is tested in respect of obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God.”²⁴⁶ As we noted earlier, Scofield recognized seven dispensations, David Cloud (a Fundamental Baptist and strong dispensationalist) thinks that there are nine, John Darby (considered by some to be the 19th century father of dispensationalism) held to six, James Gray (one of the editors of the Scofield Bible) thought there were eight, and Robert Thieme (an independent Fundamentalist from Texas) considers only four. The contention is made that the number of dispensations is not as important as using a dispensational grid for studying the Scriptures, yet even having said that, Cloud confesses that there are principles that will apply to all dispensations.²⁴⁷ In essence, dispensationalism is a theologian’s attempt to divide up the Word of God and, thereby, to varying degrees, isolate certain parts from one another – a primary target of this isolationist tactic is Israel and the “church,” something that all dispensationalists seem to hold in common.

Covenantalism (the primary focus of Reformed thinking), on the other hand, draws the Scriptures together into one or more covenants made between God and mankind; rather than periods of time, they consider the scope of the covenants made. For example, the WCF identifies two covenants, the covenant of works, which applied to Adam before the fall, and the covenant of grace applied to Adam and all of mankind after him; however, even within the covenant of grace, they refer to two dispensations: one of law and the other of the Gospel. Within covenantal thinking, there is an attempt to draw all times together and emphasize the sameness of God’s dealings with man throughout time. Even though there are those who draw from both fields (covenantal and dispensational), their view of history will, for the most part, follow either the covenantal or dispensational line of thinking (if you need a label). So when you hear of Reformed Baptists, they would be those who hold to a covenantal view of history, but do not hold to all of the doctrines of the WCF. Typically, they will hold to credobaptism (believer’s baptism) rather than a paedobaptism (infant baptism).

Unfortunately, what tends to take place is a focus on the theology, working all the bits and pieces together to make a cohesive whole, and then using that as a grid for the interpretation of

²⁴⁶ http://www.carm.org/dictionary/dic_c-d.htm#_1_48, “Dispensationalism.”

²⁴⁷ Cloud, “Study.”

Scripture. I've had a strongly Calvinistic individual (a covenantal position) question my intelligence because I could not understand and accept his theological position; in his words, "it all fit together so perfectly" how could I not understand it. Yet anytime I would bring to his attention those Scriptures that clearly declared a truth contrary to his Calvinistic position (to show that it did not all fit together so perfectly), it was generally deflected by him saying that it referred only to *the elect*, not to all of mankind. For example, 1 Timothy 2:1-4 reads: "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, *and* giving of thanks, be made for all men; ²For kings, and *for* all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. ³For this *is* good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; ⁴Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth"; within his Calvinistic mindset, the "all men" refers only to the elect who are determined to be saved in the foreknowledge of God before the foundation of the world. Those who strongly adhere to a specific theology tend to not have eyes to see what the Scriptures say, or ears to hear any explanation other than what their theology supports. I was told by a Baptist pastor: "I am a Baptist by conviction. I believe our faith and practice is absolutely in line with what the Word of God teaches ... We will have to agree to disagree"²⁴⁸ Notice his first alignment was with the Baptist position, not the Word of God, and therein rests the hurdle over which we will never be able to drag these men. Unless God opens their eyes, they will continue to proclaim, "We see!!" – even while they remain trapped in their own theological maze.

Those of the Baptist persuasion will typically hold to a dispensational view of Scripture that sets a gulf between Israel and the "church." Within this framework, the "church" is something new that God implemented when Israel rejected Jesus as their Messiah, and it will continue until it is raptured out of the world, at which time God will turn His attention to Israel once again. Since they perceive there to be a gulf fixed between Israel and the "church," they reject anything carried forward from OT times into today; there is an undue emphasis on the NT as being for today, while the OT merely tells us how we got to where we are. Whereas the covenantal position tends to meld the two together and erroneously, in our case, sees baptism as an extension of circumcision, the dispensational view permits no such thought. Although I do not agree with the dispensational view of Scripture, as it erects false barriers within the flow of God's Word, it has landed its adherents on the right side of the baptism issue. I have provided this explanation to illustrate that our overall view of Scripture will impact specific doctrines.

The second area of difference between Reformed and Baptist baptism traditions deals with its meaning. We've already noted that, within the covenantal position, it serves as a door into the visible "church," a means to receive the grace of God, which could lead to the salvation of the recipient if they happen to be among the elect (after all, it is a sacrament). It would seem that this understanding comes at the expense of many Scriptures that clearly contravene this view, and would, in fact, support the Baptist position. Since this is probably the area where the most significant differences rest, let's take some time to review the Scriptures that speak of baptism

²⁴⁸ Personal correspondence from Wilbert Unger, Bethel Baptist Church, London, ON.

within the context of the activities of the *ekklesia* in Acts, and within the instructions given in the epistles.

Acts 2:37-39 – ³⁷Now when they heard *this*, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men *and* brethren, what shall we do? ³⁸Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. ³⁹For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, *even* as many as the Lord our God shall call.

The middle verse (38) is typically the only one quoted in reference to baptism, but it is important to provide some context lest we misread the passage. Verse 37 provides us with a clear understanding of those whom Peter told to repent and be baptized – it was the people who had been *pricked* in their hearts. This indicates that they were at least old enough to understand the message that Peter had just delivered, and they were under conviction by the Spirit of God. Lest the infant-baptizers latch onto verse thirty-nine and say that Peter included the people's little children, we must again permit context to provide a true understanding of what is being said. Peter is declaring that repentance, baptism and the Holy Ghost are not only for the present audience, but also a promise of God for their children (to those who will come after them) and to those who were "afar off." This last phrase (actually a single word in Greek, *makran*) is used by Paul in Ephesians 2:13 to speak of the Gentiles, those not of the commonwealth of Israel, who have been brought together with spiritual Israel into one – Jesus having broken down the middle wall that separated the Jew from the Gentile. Peter, through the inspiration of the Spirit of God, used a term that would come to be applied to the nations of the world – and, indeed, the promise of the Spirit of God is to everyone who believes.

Acts 8:36-39 – ³⁶And as they went on *their* way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, *here is* water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? ³⁷And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. ³⁸And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. ³⁹And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.

The word used here is *baptizo*, and what is very evident is that Philip ensured that the Ethiopian understood Who Jesus Christ was and that he believed (was persuaded) before consenting to baptize him – the qualification for baptism was belief in the Lord Jesus Christ. The mode of baptism is equally clear – *baptizo* means to immerse, or submerge;²⁴⁹ therefore, the Ethiopian went down into the water, went under the water, and then came up out of the water.

Acts 10:44-48 – ⁴⁴While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. ⁴⁵And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. ⁴⁶For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, ⁴⁷Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? ⁴⁸And

²⁴⁹ Strong's Online.

he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days....

There are those of the infant-baptism persuasion who use Acts 10:24 as justification to say that small children were in the audience, and, therefore, included in the baptism rite: “And Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends.” However, it is important to read the whole story, for verse thirty-three provides some further clarification on this matter – Cornelius declares: “Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear [includes understanding] all things that are commanded thee of God.”²⁵⁰ They were there for the express purpose of being taught what God had prepared for them through Peter; this would exclude those who could not understand, i.e., infants.

This is a fascinating passage that relates the lesson given by God to Peter, and those with him, that this work was God’s work, and it was bigger than just the Jewish community. On Pentecost, it was Peter, and the other disciples, who spoke in tongues to convince the observing people that the words that they heard were of God, for the crowd declared: “we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God” (Acts 2:11). This time it was the Gentile outcasts who spoke in tongues by the Spirit of God so that Peter, and those with him, might learn something. In his discourse to these people, Peter got as far as “whosoever believeth in him [Jesus] shall receive remission of sins” (Acts 10:43). At this point, while Peter was speaking these words, the Spirit of God fell on those gathered – they believed, even as Peter spoke, and received the cleansing from on high. After they believed, they were baptized (*baptizo*); again proof that all those who were baptized were believers, and those incapable of believing (infants) were not included.

Acts 16:14-15 – ¹⁴And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard *us*: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. ¹⁵And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought *us*, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide *there*. And she constrained us.

Even though there is nothing within this passage to indicate who all would have been included in Lydia’s *household*, based on the wealth of passages that make it clear that belief precedes baptism, we cannot support creating a doctrine of infant baptism from this text.

Acts 16:30-33 – ³⁰And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? ³¹And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. ³²And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. ³³And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed *their* stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway.

Paul’s instructions to the Philippian jailor do not mean that the jailor’s household was automatically saved if he believed; the thrust is that believing results in salvation for anyone. The very next verse says that the jailer and all who were in his house received instruction from Paul that very hour. Since the passage indicates that all within his household were baptized (*baptizo*),

²⁵⁰ Friberg Lexicon.

it only follows that everyone was able to believe and understand Paul's teaching; there were no infants in this household.

Romans 6:3-6 – ³Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? ⁴Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. ⁵For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also *in the likeness of his* resurrection: ⁶Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with *him*, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.

Here we have the explanation of the symbolism of baptism, which in the Greek means immersion, or submersion²⁵¹ – imagery that would fall apart if submersion were not used. Baptism symbolizes Christ's death, burial and resurrection, and testifies that these have been applied, by faith, to the life of the recipient. Paul offers this illustration of the new life that we have in Christ to provide an image of why we are to "yield [ourselves] unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and [our] members *as* instruments of righteousness unto God" (Romans 6:13). The argument that Paul uses is: how can something that is dead still live? (Romans 6:2). If we have been brought by faith into a new life in Christ, how can we remain active in a life of sin? The thrust of this passage makes it clear that we cannot. "For when ye were the servants [slaves] of sin, ye were free from righteousness ... But now being made free from sin, and become servants [become enslaved] to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life" (Romans 6:20, 22).²⁵²

As we accept Christ's redemption by faith, we identify with Him in His death. Our old man, our sinful nature, is crucified with Christ – it has died with Him (Romans 6:6; Galatians 2:20, 5:24). We are to *reckon* or account ourselves to be dead to sin (Romans 6:11); this is a term of logic that speaks of this reckoning being based on facts, not supposition, conjecture, or thin hope.²⁵³ The fact in this is that Christ died bearing the sins of the world (John 1:29), and that includes the sin that we, by faith, acknowledge as being crucified with Him (1 Peter 2:24). As we enter into the water in baptism, we are signifying the death of our old sin nature – it is our identification with Christ in His death; we are testifying that we are considering our old man to be dead, as well as the life of sin that it exemplifies. Through a living faith in Christ, we are made free from sin; not that we are made sinless, but we are able to deem the bondage or power of sin to be broken within us.²⁵⁴ We are commanded to "let not sin therefore reign [to be king, to exercise kingly power] in your mortal body" (Romans 6:12);²⁵⁵ this is a **command** that we are called to obey; it is **not** a stated reality. "...²²That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; ²³And be renewed [*being renewed*; present tense, passive voice (it is God Who does the *renewing*)] in the spirit of your mind; ²⁴And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Ephesians

²⁵¹ Strong's Online.

²⁵² Friberg Lexicon.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ This is the real bondage breaker, not Neil Anderson's ritual prayers endeavoring to cast off the forces of evil.

²⁵⁵ Strong's Online.

4:22-24).²⁵⁶ The “putting off” and the “putting on” are activities in which we are to be involved; the middle voice means that we are doing this and we are the beneficiaries as well.²⁵⁷ The grace of God that is imputed to us through faith in Jesus Christ, our Sacrifice, is not a grace that does everything for us. Even as Adam, the first man, was provided with a choice, so we, too, are called upon to exercise our wills in choosing to follow after God’s righteousness, and He has not left us without resources. Jesus said that He must leave this world so that He could send the Comforter, the Spirit of God, so that He might abide with us forever (John 14:16); this same Spirit from God intercedes for us with God (Romans 8:26).

As the waters of baptism close over us, we are identifying with Christ in His burial. The significance of His burial is that it confirms His death. The theories still circulate that Christ did not die but merely swooned and appeared to be as dead. However, the fact that he remained in the tomb for three full days and nights, confirms that He died. Within early Jewish custom, the tomb was not “immediately closed over the dead. During the first three days it was customary for the relatives to visit the grave to see whether the dead had come to life again.”²⁵⁸ We can readily see that Jesus’ burial (with the sealed tomb) was a departure from Jewish tradition, and His three-day burial is confirmation that He was dead.

“Now upon the first *day* of the week [this would have been the beginning of the fourth day after Jesus’ death], very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain *others* with them” (Luke 24:1). This indicates two things: 1) there was no doubt in the minds of these women that Jesus had died, for they brought the traditional spices for burial, which they had prepared beforehand, and 2) the time within which the Jews would watch for a return to life was past – Jesus was dead. This is even more striking at the death of Lazarus: “Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been *dead* four days” (John 11:39); Jesus delayed His coming to the family so that everyone would know beyond a shadow of a doubt that Lazarus was dead. The two witnesses of Revelation are left in the streets of Jerusalem for three and a half days – again, confirmation that they were really dead (Revelation 11:9). When the waters of baptism close over our heads, we are affirming our identification with Christ’s burial; it demonstrates our will to put off the old man – he is dead.

However, the ordinance of baptism is not complete without coming up out of the water, and, thereby, identifying with Christ in His resurrection. We are brought up out of the water, “like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4). This is the capstone of our Christian faith: “if Christ be not risen, then *is* our preaching vain, and your faith *is* also vain” (1 Corinthians 15:14). Having been raised with Christ through faith in Him, we are called to live our lives in the *new man*, whom we are to put on (Ephesians 4:24), as the slaves of righteousness (Romans 6:18). Even though there are many

²⁵⁶ Stephanus 1550 NT.

²⁵⁷ https://www.ntgreek.org/learn_nt_greek/verbs1.htm

²⁵⁸ Jewish Encyclopedia, “burial.”

commands in the Scriptures that tell us how we are to live our lives, we are not left to work out this life of righteousness on our own – the guidance of the Spirit of God is ours (Romans 8:1-14).

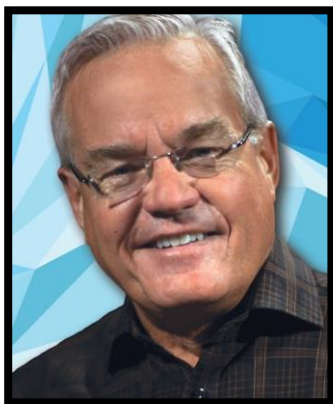
As we consider the ordinance of baptism in light of the Scriptures that we have looked at so far, we can readily see that it is a picture of the process of acquiring new life in Christ; we identify with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection. What is equally evident is that baptism alone holds no merit and, without new life through faith in Christ, it is reduced to an empty ritual. The order of belief and then baptism makes perfect sense, for baptism is a physical testimony of the reality of what has already taken place spiritually. It makes no sense to put baptism ahead of new birth, for then it could not testify to the reality of the spiritual condition of the recipient.

Colossians 2:12 – ... Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with *him* through the faith of the operation [working] of God, who hath raised him from the dead.

This is another passage that ties baptism to the work of the Lord that was accomplished through His death, burial and resurrection. This likeness is drawn after the declaration of the spiritual condition of the recipients of this letter: “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, *so* walk ye in him ...” (Colossians 2:6). The saving work of the Lord must precede baptism, else it cannot be a picture of something that has taken place.

What the covenantal, infant-baptism sacrament cannot illustrate is the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Despite the clear explanation from passages like that in Romans 6, for many people the traditions of men still hold greater weight than the Word of God. When all of the pieces of their theology fit together so neatly, they are very hesitant to entertain any evidence that would cause damage to their tight, little package.

Within the Biblical *ekklesia*, it would seem evident that baptism is an ordinance that is used to testify of a change that has already taken place within the spiritual life of the recipient. It is a picture that serves to remind us of the reality of what the Lord went through to purchase our redemption. We have died to the *old man* (he has been *put off* [Ephesians 4:22], and he is crucified [Galatians 2:20]), and, inasmuch as he is dead, we are to live a life of holiness (1 Peter 1:15-16) and righteousness (Romans 6:13, 18) through the power and guidance of the indwelling Spirit of God (Romans 8:10-11).



Bill Hybels

It is interesting to look at what some very prominent Evangelicals say about baptism. Bill Hybels, on his Willow Creek Community Church website, declares: “While recognizing the right for other churches to practice infant Baptism if it conforms to their theologies, the congregation of Willow Creek Community Church understands Scripture to teach that only professing believers qualify for Baptism. ... If you were baptized as a child, it was the intent of your parents that you would one day be a follower of Christ. Your Baptism as an adult can be viewed as the fulfillment of your parents’ wishes. **It in no way repudiates the Baptism you**

received as a child” (emphasis added).²⁵⁹ There is a definite effort made to not offend anyone who holds to infant baptism, despite it having no basis in Scripture; even though they will not practice it themselves, they steer well clear of using righteous judgment (the Word of God) to state that infant baptism is unbiblical. Joel Osteen (Lakewood Church) is even more vague: “We believe...water baptism is a symbol of the cleansing power of the blood of Christ and a testimony to our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.”²⁶⁰ Although he says that baptism is to be a *testimony*, and therefore, it must follow our faith, he is very short on details. The comments made by the leaders of the Evangelical Free Church are supremely anemic: “The Lord Jesus mandated two ordinances, baptism and the Lord’s Supper, which visibly and tangibly express the gospel. Though they are not the means of salvation, when celebrated by the church in genuine faith, these ordinances confirm and **nourish** the believer” (emphasis added).²⁶¹ As clear as the Scriptures are regarding the symbolism of baptism, there is a hesitation on the part of Evangelicals to take a Biblical stand on this doctrine – even to the point of making an ambiguous attempt to attach some sacramental value to it (*nourish*).

As we have looked at the passages in Acts that deal with baptism, it is evident that believer’s baptism was practiced by the early Christians. Jesus’ final instructions to His disciples included the concept of baptism (Matthew 28:19), and it is apparent that the early disciples followed through on that instruction. It is equally clear from Scripture that baptism is not essential to holding saving faith, for it is only an outward expression of an inward change. Baptism will not make you live a better Christian life; it will not save you, nor will it bestow some mysterious grace into your life. Unless you have by faith appropriated the redemption that Christ won at Calvary, and unless you have made a commitment to walk worthy of the calling that Christ has placed upon you, baptism will be nothing more than another religious ritual. Too often it is the thing to do; you’re not opposed to that for which it stands and all your friends are doing it, so it becomes another step along the road of participating in a Christian culture. The meaning and reality of rebirth into life in Christ has become clouded, and baptism becomes an empty ritual (we may understand all the theory behind it, but our lives do not exemplify its spiritual truth).

As an aside, why did Jesus insist that John the Baptist baptize Him?

¹³Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. ¹⁴But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? ¹⁵And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer *it to be so* now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him. ¹⁶And 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: ¹⁷And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased (Matthew 3:13-17).

John recognized the anomaly of baptizing Jesus, the Lamb of God, Who came to take away the sin of the world (John 1:29). Then there was the matter of John’s baptism being one of

²⁵⁹ <http://www.willowcreek.org/attachments/Baptism.pdf>

²⁶⁰ <http://www.lakewood.cc/AboutUs/OurBeliefs/Pages/LCBeliefs.aspx>

²⁶¹ http://www.efccm.ca/wordpress/?page_id=274

repentance – and Jesus, as the sinless Son of God, had no need for repentance. However, there are a couple of things I would suggest that may not completely answer the probing question, but, perhaps, will serve to provide a fuller appreciation for all that took place on this occasion.

First of all, Jesus' baptism took place in the midst of John's ministry; it was a public baptism that occurred in the sight of all those who were present that day. By doing this, Jesus made it abundantly clear that the ministry of John the Baptist had His endorsement; it was God's work and served a prophetically fulfilling purpose. We've already seen that the scribes and Pharisees rejected John's baptism – this is another instance where Jesus stood in opposition to the religious authorities of His day.

Secondly, it served as a fulfillment of the cleansing required by the Law before a priest could assume his duties. "And Aaron and his sons thou shalt bring unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and shalt wash them with water" (Exodus 29:4, also 40:12; Leviticus 8:6); this was one part of a complex process of preparing these men for their priestly duties. Even though Jesus is a High Priest after the order of Melchisedec (Hebrews 5:1-10), and not through the lineage of Aaron, He accepted John's baptism as a symbolic cleansing before He began His earthly, high-priestly ministry, in fulfillment of the Law that required the high priest to be cleansed. Leviticus 21:10 tells us that the high priest was also anointed with oil: "And *he that is* the high priest among his brethren, upon whose head the anointing oil was poured" As Jesus came out of the water, we are told that heaven opened and John saw "the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him" (John 1:32). "... the anointing oil, which was prepared according to divine instructions, was therefore a symbol of the Spirit of God, as the principle of spiritual life which proceeds from God"²⁶² As Jesus emerged from the water, the Spirit of God, the third member of the Godhead, descended upon Him. The high priest, within the ceremonial practices of the Mosaic Law, was to be cleansed and anointed before he was ready to carry out his responsibilities. Jesus openly declared that He came not "to destroy the law, or the prophets ... but to fulfil" (Matthew 5:17). Throughout His life and ministry, He kept the Law perfectly (not necessarily the traditions of the Pharisees, but the Law of God and the Law of Moses). As He prepared to begin the ministry that He had come to earth to perform, He fulfilled the ceremonial requirements of a high priest, and He ultimately became our High Priest. "Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus ... a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end" (Hebrews 3:1, 6). Jesus is our High Priest as long as we hold fast, or retain, the hope that we have in Him. This promise is followed by a clear warning, "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God" (Hebrews 3:12).

First Peter 2:4-10 – ⁴To whom coming, *as unto* a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, *and* precious, ⁵Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. ⁶Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that

²⁶² Keil & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament, Leviticus 8:10-13, *ESword*.

believeth on him shall not be confounded. ⁷Unto you therefore which believe *he* is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, ⁸And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, *even to them* which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed. ⁹But ye *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: ¹⁰Which in time past *were* not a people, but *are* now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

The mercy of God is obtained by identifying with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ – all that Jesus went through to purchase our pardon. In practical terms, the Lord Jesus set the example for us. He, the sinless Son of God, entered the waters of baptism, and submitted to the ritual cleansing prescribed for a priest so that there might be no question as to His ministry for sinners. We have been declared to be a *royal priesthood*, and the ordinance of baptism provides both a public testimony and a living illustration of our commitment to walk in the steps of our Savior.

B. Lord's Supper – This ordinance might seem to be far less controversial than baptism, yet there are extreme variances in understanding within the Protestant community and, in reality, this served as the focus of the contention between the Reformers and the Catholic Church. We noted earlier that within the Roman Catholic Church this is a sacrament referred to as the Holy Eucharist, in which they believe the wine and bread (or, more commonly, just the bread or wafer) literally becomes the blood and body of the Lord Jesus Christ through the words of the priest in their ceremonial mass – to the point that parishioners are encouraged to worship the wafer as they would the Lord. Interestingly, this Catholic tradition began to take form early in the third century AD, and served to solidify the clergy-laity separation, for only the clergy could perform the ritual that would transform the bread and wine into the body and blood of the Lord.²⁶³ Within Protestantism, we have a full range of understandings of the Lord's Supper, from a memorial ordinance to a sacrament that is almost, but not quite, the same as the Catholic tradition.

Within Anglicanism, we have the closest understanding to that of the Catholic practice, but there is also a wide variation of beliefs. The High Anglicans tend to practice what is known as *consubstantiation*, which simply means that the elements of the Eucharist (they use the Catholic term), even though they do not change from being bread and wine, take on the *nature* of the body and blood of the Lord alongside of their physical substance. So physically, the elements remain bread and wine, but sacramentally they become the body and blood of the Lord; they view the change as one of transformation, but not substitution. Therefore, for the purposes of their Eucharist, they are partaking of the body and blood of the Lord (in similar fashion to the Catholics). The Low Anglicans tend to hold beliefs that vary from the sacramental union tradition of the

²⁶³ Broadbent, pp. 52-53.

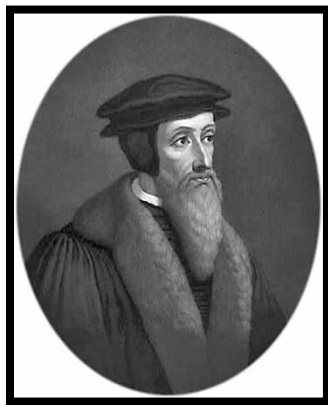
Lutherans, to spiritual presence and dynamic memorialism – each one a step further away from the Catholic tradition of transubstantiation.

The Lutherans practice what they call *sacramental union*, which goes back to Martin Luther. The understanding is that the body of Christ is united with the Eucharistic bread (they, too, use the term *Eucharist*), and the blood of Christ is united with the wine of the sacrament, in much the same way that we as humans are body and soul. Therefore they, too, believe that anyone participating in the Eucharist is actually eating the body of Christ and drinking His blood. The fine line of difference between this and the Catholic tradition is that the bread and wine remain present, although mystically united with Christ's body and blood, whereas the Catholics see the bread and wine transformed into the actual body and blood of Christ. As I said, the difference is a very fine line.



Martin Luther

The Reformed and Presbyterian traditions (both finding their roots in the theology of John Calvin) hold to a *spiritual presence* in the elements of communion. The essence of this is that the physical characteristics of the bread and wine do not change; however, spiritually, the elements, through the faith of the participant, become the body and blood of the Lord – another tiny step away from Catholic transubstantiation, but the line of change remains very small.



John Calvin

Within each tradition considered so far, the participant is eating the body and drinking the blood of Christ, whether this is considered a literal reality (as with the Catholics), a mystical union of some sort (as for the Anglicans and Lutherans), or only spiritually speaking (as with the Reformed). What is very evident is that none of these views has departed very far from the Catholic traditions surrounding the Eucharist. Today, as we see many of these faiths once again joining hands with the Roman Catholic Church, it is evident that the practices surrounding this sacrament (and they all call it a sacrament) will not stand in the way of such a reunion. Despite the fact that the Reformers went to their deaths disputing the Catholic traditions in this matter, you can see that, in their separation, they did not go very

far. With the passage of time, that fine line of demarcation has become blurred, and generations later it is no longer seen as a dividing principle upon which they are prepared to stand.

The final position regarding the Lord's Supper is that it is a *memorial* of the death of our Lord, and the elements are symbolic of His body and blood. Considering the practices that we've looked at so far, this is clearly a great departure from them. Our ordinance (it is not considered a sacrament) is based on the last meal that Jesus had with His disciples before His crucifixion, and on a passage from Paul's letter to the Corinthians.

Matthew 26:26-29 – ²⁶And 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. ²⁷And he took the cup, and gave

thanks, and gave *it* to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; ²⁸For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. ²⁹But 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.

When Jesus said to His disciples: “this is my body,” and “this is my blood,” what should be very apparent is that the disciples would have understood this to be figurative language. Jesus did not turn the elements into his flesh and blood, for He goes on to refer to the contents of the cup as being the “fruit of the vine.” No transubstantiation had taken place, not even consubstantiation or mystical union; the bread and the fruit of the vine were still, in substance, just that. Clearly the content of the cup was of less importance than the symbolism that Jesus sought to instill in His disciples at this time. Luke adds the thought that this was to be done in remembrance of the Lord (Luke 22:19).

We find no evidence of any mystical transformation of the elements at the first Lord's Supper, but what we do find is a fulfillment of the prophecy of Jeremiah.

³¹Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: ³²Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: ³³But this *shall be* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people (Jeremiah 31:31-33).

As Jesus broke the bread and distributed the produce of the vine to His disciples, He specifically stated: “This cup *is* the new testament [covenant] in my blood, which is shed for you” (Luke 22:20).²⁶⁴ He used the very words that God gave to Jeremiah so many years before, and He made that covenant with those who were sons of Israel. There was no mystical transubstantiation at that gathering, but something far greater took place – the implementation of the promised New Covenant! The writer of the book of Hebrews recognized this amazing truth, and declared, “⁶[Jesus] obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises. ⁷For if that first *covenant* had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. ⁸For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah ...” (Hebrews 8:6-8; the writer then begins to quote from Jeremiah 31).

Paul, in his letter of instruction to the Corinthians, provides them with instruction in how they were to celebrate that which has become known as the Lord's Supper. Evidently, their way of keeping the commemorative meal had fallen into disarray, and Paul clarified for them (and for us) the proper order:

²³For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the *same* night in which he was betrayed took bread: ²⁴And when he had given thanks, he brake *it*,

²⁶⁴ Strong's Online.

and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. ²⁵After the same manner also *he took* the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink *it*, in remembrance of me. ²⁶For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew [announce or declare] the Lord's death till he come. ²⁷Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink *this* cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of *that* bread, and drink of *that* cup. ²⁹For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. ³⁰For this cause many *are* weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. ³¹For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. ³²But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world. ³³Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another. ³⁴And if any man hunger, let him eat at home; that ye come not together unto condemnation. And the rest will I set in order when I come. 1 Corinthians 11:23-34.²⁶⁵

This is a reiteration of the account from Matthew, with the addition of the purpose of this celebration being a remembrance of the Lord: His birth, ministry and what He accomplished through the giving of His body on the cross and the shedding of His blood, and we are to do so until He comes again. What is significant in Paul's instructions to the Corinthians is the warning that comes along with keeping this ordinance of remembrance. It seems that the Corinthians had failed to comprehend the purpose for looking back to the death of the Lord Jesus as the price paid for our redemption. It seems that some were coming to their assembly hungry, and looking to fill up during the ordinance (verse 21), and others started their celebration before they came together, and were imbibing too freely of the cup. Then there was the problem of divisions (again) between the rich and the poor, with the former despising the latter (verse 22). This was an *assembly* that was fraught with divisions even at the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Some of the Corinthians considered the celebration to be just another meal, not laying hold of the solemn symbolism of this time; this is not a common meal, for there are only two elements, and each is to bring to the remembrance of the participant the sacrifice that the Lord made for them. This is not a time to eat to fill the stomach or drink to quench the thirst; those activities are to be taken care of in the home before coming together (verse 22). The warning is to those who would partake without recalling the sacrifice that the Lord made for them or the New Covenant that He had implemented – those who would eat and drink *unworthily*. It is stated that they will be “guilty of the body and blood of the Lord” (verse 27); they will be under judgment for not discerning the significance of the elements representing the body and blood of the Lord (verse 29), and, thereby, eating and drinking carelessly. The word *unworthily* (used in verses 27 and 29) means *irreverently*;²⁶⁶ these do not discern the significance of the event that is being called to mind through partaking of these elements. Essentially, this would be someone who is flippant with the commemoration of the Lord's death, and the elements are but bread and wine (a time to eat and drink); by contrast, the Catholics make the elements the very body and blood of the Lord, thereby crucifying Him all over

²⁶⁵ Strong's Online.

²⁶⁶ Strong's Dictionary, *ESword*.

again, and, thereby, making the celebration to be that which our Lord never intended. Both are a desecration of what the Lord desired.

The significance of approaching the elements of communion irreverently are clearly described by Paul: because of their actions, many were “weak and sickly” (physically) among them and “many sleep” (1 Corinthians 11:30). This same word is used to describe the “sleep” that Lazarus had for four days before Jesus arrived to call him forth from the grave (John 11:11-14); it is the sleep of death. There can be no question that this is a solemn occasion; there can be no doubt that the Lord took the desecration of this celebration very seriously. This is to be a time of reflection on the sacrifice that the Lord made on our behalf by coming to earth for the express purpose of securing our redemption at Calvary; we are to partake of the elements in remembrance of Him – anything beyond that, or less than that, is not following the Lord’s instructions.

Chapter 10 – Summary

matthew 16:15-18 – ¹⁵[Jesus] saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? ¹⁶And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. ¹⁷And 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. ¹⁸And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter [a piece of rock²⁶⁷], and upon this rock [a mass of rock²⁶⁸] I will build [future tense] my church [*ekklesia* – called-out ones]; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against [overcome] it.²⁶⁹

What is plainly evident here is that it is Jesus Who is building the *ekklesia*. Those of dominionist and reconstructionist persuasion today (a very large segment of the Pentecostals and Charismatics, and a growing segment of the general Evangelical community) see themselves as building the church so that, when they have finished their work, the Lord can return to receive it. How presumptuous to take on a task that Jesus said that He would do.

Acts 14:21-23 – ²¹And when they had preached the gospel to that city [Derbe], and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, ²²Confirming the souls of the disciples, *and* exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. ²³And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.

The spiritual oversight of the local *assembly* of called-out ones was placed in the hands of a plurality of elders, those who were mature in their understanding of the doctrines of God. There is no indication of terms of office, no indication that their appointment came through the democratic voting of the people, and no indication of a hierarchy of authority.

First Peter 5:1-4 – ¹The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: ²Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight *thereof*, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; ³Neither as being lords over *God's* heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. ⁴And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

The elders are to lead by example, not from any kind of positional authority. Jesus condemned positional authority in Matthew 20:25-28 and Revelation 2:6 and 15. This places much of the structure of modern Evangelical and Fundamental churches under the Lord's condemnation.

Ephesians 5:25-27 – ²⁵Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; ²⁶That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, ²⁷That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish."

²⁶⁷ Strong's Dictionary.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Strong's Online.

It is clear that the *ekklesia* that Jesus is building, will be sinless, totally set apart unto Him through Whom we are redeemed. Herein is perhaps the greatest disparity between the *ekklesia* of the Scriptures and the churches of today; the former is holy and pure, made up of those who have been redeemed by the Lord, the latter is a conglomeration of saved and unsaved who have given their approval to a constitution or creed of man's design.

Psalm 5:4 – “For thou *art* not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with thee.

We, who will dwell with God for all of eternity, will be sinless, for nothing less can abide with God.

The contrast between the Lord's *ekklesia* and today's churches, whether Liberal, Evangelical or Fundamental, is sharp. There has even been a general failure on the part of those who would adhere to the text of Scripture to discern the instructions and example regarding the assembling of God's called-out ones. For the most part, today's churches are fashioned according to tradition, with either no regard for the instructions of the Word of God, or a fear to consider what the instructions of Scripture would do to their programs and property. Pastors will avoid examining the Bible in this matter for fear of becoming unemployed; pew-warmers today don't examine the Scriptures regarding anything – they simply accept, without question, what they are told. Churches today are caught between those who are willfully ignorant (some pastors and leaders) and those who have been lulled into a false sense of security (many pastors and leaders, and everyone else). Neither is where the Shepherd of the sheep would have us to be; we are to be vigilant, ever alert to the dangers that will come (1 Peter 5:8), and we are to be students of the Word, permitting the Spirit of truth to guide us into His truth (John 16:13; 2 Timothy 2:15).

If this study has done nothing other than cause you to return to the Word of God and search out whether these things are so, then I will consider this time well spent. It is our God-given responsibility to be discerning and vigilant to the dangers that will approach us, and the evil that often lurks among us.