

Following Jesus

A Study of the Fundamentals of Discipleship

by David E. Pratte



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Following Jesus: A Study of the Fundamentals of Discipleship

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**“He who glories, let him glory in the Lord”
– 1 Corinthians 1:31**

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Introduction

This booklet is designed to be used for any of the following purposes:

- * **Bible classes for teen or adult students**
- * **New member studies**
- * **Family Bible studies**
- * **Personal study**

The material is divided into ten lessons, however each lesson will take several study sessions to complete, depending on the background and experience of the students. Furthermore, each lesson is intended to contain an abundance of material, especially Scripture references, on each point. Some study groups may decide to omit even some of the main study Scriptures. Additional Scriptures are also given on many points so that the students can do supplementary study where needed.

We urge all classes and students to emphasize the Scriptures in these studies. Teachers are encouraged to have students read the Scriptures and answer the questions as “homework” assignments. Then the Scriptures should be read again and discussed in the class or recitation period. The emphasis throughout should be on God’s word, not on the author’s comments.

One helpful use for this material is to study it with all new members in the congregation. The material may be taught by different families who are already members of the congregation. The first lesson may be taught by one family in their home, the second by a different family, etc., so that by the time new members finish the material they also have gotten to know several members of the congregation.

Note: When I quote a Scripture, I generally quote the New King James Version, unless otherwise indicated. Often – especially when I do not use quotations marks – I am not quoting any translation but simply paraphrasing the passage in my own words.

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How to Change Yourself

Have you ever had difficulty trying to change a habit? Humans are creatures of habit. We tend to continue acting as we have in the past. Like a river flowing through a canyon, the longer a habit continues, the more deeply it becomes ingrained, and the harder it is to change. This is true of all habits, good or bad.

The importance of a habit depends on its consequences. Heroin use, for example, has far more serious consequences than biting fingernails. The most significant habits are those that have eternal consequences.

Ephesians 4:22-24 shows that major changes must occur when we are converted. Old practices and attitudes must be replaced by new ones. We must learn good habits like Bible study, prayer, attending church meetings, giving, teaching others, etc. We must also eliminate bad habits like foul language, uncontrolled temper, gambling, drugs, drinking, gossip, lying, pornography, sexual promiscuity, etc.

We need to know, not just *what* changes to make, but *how* to make them. Change does not come easily. Since the Scriptures provide us to all good works (2 Timothy 3:16,17), they give all the guidance we need. Let us study 12 specific, practical steps the Bible gives to show us how to change to become what God wants.

Please look up each Scripture in **bold underline** below and answer the questions that follow.

Step 1: Change Your Purpose in Life.

Why is motivation important? Is a sound sleeper more likely to get up in the middle of the night if the house is on fire or if he remembers he did not brush his teeth? Christians have some of the strongest possible motives for changing. Consider some:

Love and dedication to God

1 John 5:3; 4:19,9 — Why should we obey God? Why should we love Him? How did He show His love?

2 Corinthians 8:5 — Describe how the Macedonians gave. Why were they so generous?

Think: Why is it hard to change a specific action if we are not totally dedicated to God's service?

If you are having difficulty changing yourself, learn to appreciate God's blessings and mercy. (See also Rom. 12:1,2; Ecc. 12:13; Matt. 6:33; 16:24; 1 John 2:15-17; Matt. 10:34-37; 22:37-40; John 14:15.)

Imitation of Christ

Name some examples from life in which people are motivated by the desire to be like someone else.

Luke 6:40 — What is the goal of a disciple?

The life most worth imitating is that of Jesus (1 Peter 2:21,22). As we face each decision in life, we should ask, "What would Jesus do?" (See also Gal. 2:20; Matt. 16:24; Col. 3:10.)

Desire for eternal life, not eternal punishment

1 Corinthians 9:25 — What sacrifices do athletes make, and what motivates them? What goal does a Christian seek? (See also James 1:12; Rev. 2:10; Col. 3:1-10; 2 Peter 1:10,11; 2 Thess. 1:8-10.)

Think: Why would a lack of motivation keep people from changing to please God? What are some mistaken motives that sometimes keep people from serving God as they should?

When we lack motivation to change, let us think about God's love for us, think about the importance of being like Christ, and think about our eternal destiny.

Step 2: Believe You Can Change with God's Help.

Proverbs 4:23 — Why is the condition of your heart important? What should you do about it?

Think: What ultimately determines the way you act? (Cf. Matt. 15:18,19; 12:34-37.)

1 Corinthians 10:13 — Describe the promise in this verse. Will you ever face a temptation so great you have no choice but to sin? How can you avoid sinning?

Think: Explain the phrase “God is faithful.” Can people and circumstances force you to do evil? Is there ever a valid excuse for sin?

Philippians 4:13 — What does this verse promise? Whose strength must we rely on?

Think: Does God promise that our own strength alone can keep us faithful? What may happen if we trust our own power instead of Christ’s?

Psalm 37:5 — What will God accomplish for you? What must you do first?

Think: How should we respond to people who say, “I just can’t change. It’s too late. Besides, I’m only human.” If a person thinks this way, will they be likely to succeed in serving God? Explain your answer.

No matter how strong a temptation you face, no matter how long you have practiced a sin, if God says to change, you can change. (See also Eph. 6:10-18; 3:20,21; 2 Cor. 9:8; Josh. 1:5-9.)

Step 3: Study the Bible About Your Habit.

Joshua 1:8 — To succeed in God’s work, what did Joshua need to do? (Cf. Psalm 1:2; 119:11.)

Think: What application should we make?

Deuteronomy 6:6-9 — When and how often should God’s word be considered?

Think: Where might you write passages about changes you need to make, so they will remind you?

Matthew 4:1-11 — How did Jesus handle temptation? What did this require Him to know?

Practical application: List verses about your habits, then memorize them so they will strengthen you when you are tempted. Quote them to yourself and to those who tempt you. (See also Prov. 3:5,6; 2 Tim. 3:16,17; Eph. 6:17; Rom. 1:16; Heb. 4:12.)

Step 4: Repent Of Sin.

Acts 8:22 — What should we do when we sin?

Think: What is repentance? (See Matt. 21:28,29; Acts 17:30; 11:23.)

Proverbs 28:13 — Should we cover up sin, excuse it, blame someone else? What should we do?

Think: Is it enough just to be sorry for our sins? What else is needed? (See 2 Cor. 7:10.)

Most achievements in life require about 10% ability and 90% just plain determination and hard work. In spiritual matters, God has granted every accountable person the ability to please Him; so we are completely able to change. God has provided everything we need. The decision is ours.

We will never change until we make up our minds to pursue the means God provides until we succeed. The decision to do this is repentance, and no one will change to please God without it.

Step 5: Develop a Plan of Action.

Proverbs 14:22 — What should we devise?

Think: Name some works God has made plans for (see Rom. 8:28; Eph. 1:7-9; 3:10,11; Heb. 8:5; Gen. 12:1-7). Likewise, God’s servants need to have a plan to succeed in His service (Luke 14:26-33; Dan. 1:8; Psalm 17:3; Acts 11:23; 2 Cor. 9:7).

Think: Name some other important endeavors that require planning in order to succeed.

Practical application: To change your life, you need a specific, practical checklist of steps you will take to change. Analyze the circumstances or causes that lead you to fail to do right, then plan how to avoid those causes. It may help to write your plan down and modify it as needed.

Many people fail to change to please God because they never planned to succeed. They did not plan to fail; they just failed to plan!

Step 6: Pray Regularly.

Prayer is essential in two ways.

A child of God should pray for forgiveness.

A person who is not yet a child of God needs to believe in Jesus, repent of sins, confess Christ, and be baptized to be forgiven (Mark 16:16; Rom. 10:9,10; Acts 2:38; 22:16). If he sins afterward, he needs to repent and pray for forgiveness (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:8-10; Prov. 28:13; Matt. 6:12).

Then pray for God’s help to change.

Matthew 6:13 — What should we ask God to do? (Cf. Matt. 26:41.)

Practical application: Tell God exactly what your problem is. Pray often and regularly (1 Thess. 5:17; Col. 4:2). Pray especially at the moment when you face temptation (Matt. 26:36-46). God has promised that, if you ask His help, He will hear and answer (1 Peter 5:7; Phil. 4:6,7; Eph. 6:11,13,18).

Step 7: Seek Help from Other Christians.

James 5:16 — What should Christians do for one another? (Cf. Gal. 6:2.) What should we do if our sins have harmed specific individuals (Matt. 5:23,24)?

Think: Name some ways mature Christians can help us when we are fighting a difficult habit.

Note: Public church meetings are especially designed to give encouragement (Heb. 10:24,25; 3:12,13; Eph. 4:15,16). We need to attend regularly for many reasons, but especially we need encouragement as we try to become what God wants us to be.

Step 8: Diligently Practice What Is Right.

We have discussed several steps to prepare us for change, but none of them can substitute for hard work. All the good attitudes in the world will not get the job done until we follow through with action.

1 Corinthians 15:58 — Describe specifically what kind of workers we should be.

James 1:22-25 — What must we do with God's word?

Think: How are habits formed (for example, riding a bicycle or driving a car)? Do new practices always feel natural and comfortable at first?

We change only when we compel ourselves to do what we know is right, then repeat it until it becomes "second nature." God does not promise that change will be easy, but He promises that it is possible if we work diligently according to His word. (See Rom. 6:1-23; Matt. 7:21; Luke 6:46.)

Step 9: Substitute Good Habits for Bad Ones.

Ephesians 4:22-32 — List several specific practices we must put **off**. For each one, name what we must put **on** in its place. (Note v25,28,29,31,32.)

Matthew 12:43-45 — What happened to the demon in this story? What lesson does this teach?

Think: Name some other examples of bad habits we should eliminate to be Christians. Then name good habits we can replace them with.

"Nature hates a vacuum." Remove the air from a bottle, and it will try to get back in. Fill the bottle with something solid, and the air stays out. So your life cannot stay a spiritual void. It will fill with good or evil. Replace bad habits with good, and the bad is less likely to return.

Step 10: Avoid Temptation.

Matthew 6:13 — If we pray as Jesus taught us to, how should we act toward people, places, and situations that tempt us? (Cf. Rom. 13:14.)

1 Corinthians 15:33 — What is the effect of keeping evil company?

Note: "Do not be deceived." How are people often deceived regarding companionships?

Think: Name some habits that are often begun and continued because of "peer pressure." Breaking such habits by themselves is hard enough, but it is far more difficult when "friends" urge us to continue them. (See 1 Peter 4:3,4; Prov. 13:20; Ex. 23:2.)

Psalms 26:5 — What should we hate?

Think: What is the application to people who say, "I won't drink (or dance or gamble, etc.). I'll just go to the tavern (or dance hall or casino) to be with my friends"? (Cf. 2 Cor. 6:14-18; Eph. 5:11.)

You cannot change a bad habit while continuing to run with the "crowd" that caused the habit. Changing the habit will require changing your friends because the "friends" are part of the habit!

Step 11: Face One Day at a Time.

Often people quit trying to serve God because they are overwhelmed by the sacrifices required to live the rest of their lives for God. Consider:

Matthew 6:33,34 — What should be our attitude toward the temptations of tomorrow?

Practical application: Ask yourself this: "Can I practice what is right today — just today?" Of course you can. So when you get up each morning,

How to Change

promise yourself and God, “I will live today for God.” Don’t worry about handling tomorrow. If it comes, you can handle it the same way you will handle today.

Two men were climbing a steep path up a tall mountain. One looked to the top and asked, “How will we ever make it?” The other replied, “One step at a time.” And that is the only way for you to change yourself.

Step 12: Be Patient.

Romans 2:7 — How do we receive eternal life?

Galatians 6:9 — What must we do to reap eternal life?

2 Peter 3:18 — In what should we grow?

Note the emphasis on growth and patience. You are born again as a baby and gradually grow up in Christ. You may look at mature Christians and think, “Why can’t I be like them?” But they

probably took years to mature. Developing good habits takes time. Do not be impatient with yourself. (Cf. 1 Cor. 15:58.)

Sin should never be excused. But some habits and desires are deeply ingrained. If you fall, you should repent, and ask God’s forgiveness. But get up and go on. Do not give up. (See 1 John 1:8-2:2.)

Children may not notice much change as they grow from day to day, but photographs from years ago will show amazing differences. So you may get discouraged with your service to God today compared to yesterday. But if you diligently apply the steps taught in God’s word, after 5, 10, or 20 years you will see significant changes compared to where you began.

Conclusion

By using the means God provides, you can change to be what He wants. He gives motivation, guidance, and encouragement. All that is left is for you to determine to follow His will and then diligently act on that decision. He provides the tools. You must use them. What choice will you make?

How to Study the Bible

Introduction:

After baptism, people should be taught to observe all Jesus' commands (Matthew 28:18-20). Learning God's will is as essential after baptism as before. Conversion should be the beginning of a lifetime of study.

However, in order to benefit from Bible study, we must know how to study properly. The purpose of this lesson is to present basic Bible principles about proper study. Please look up each Scripture **typed in bold underline** below and answer the questions.

Part I: Proper Attitudes in Study

Ezra "prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord" (Ezra 7:10). Right methods of study must begin with right attitudes.

A. Appreciate the Importance of Study

Diligent study requires motivation. Christians have all the reasons they could possibly need to study the Bible. Consider a few. As you do, note the emphasis on regular, frequent study.

#1: Study so you can obey God and grow in His service.

Joshua 1:8 — What was Joshua to do so he could succeed? How often was he to meditate?

1 Peter 2:2 — What do babies need in order to grow? What do Christians need to grow spiritually?

Think: Do we long for the word like a baby longs for milk if we neglect to study? (See also 2 Tim. 2:15; Rom. 10:17; Matt. 4:4; John 6:44,45; 2 Peter 1:12-15.)

#2: Study so you can avoid error.

Hosea 4:6 — Why were God's people destroyed? Is this a danger today? How can we avoid it?

Acts 17:11 — How did the Bereans distinguish truth from error? How often did they study?

(See also 1 John 4:1,6; Gal. 1:8,9; Matt. 22:29.)

#3: Study so you can teach others.

Hebrews 5:12 — What should Christians become? Why had these people failed?

Think: Why should teachers study? Why should people who are not teachers study? Is there an excuse for us if we do not study? (See also Deut. 6:6-9; 2 Tim. 2:2; 1 Tim. 1:7; 1 Peter 3:15; Col. 3:16; Rom. 15:14.)

#4: Study because you love God and His word.

Psalm 1:2; 119:47,48,97-99 — What will we do if we delight in God's word? How often will we do it?

Think: If people truly love God, will they complain about "having" to study or prepare for classes?

Think: Suppose a young lady is separated from her boyfriend, who writes to her every day. She displays his letters on the coffee table, but they sit there for days before she opens and reads them. Does she really love him? What application can be made to Bible study? (See Psalm 19:7-11; John 14:15; 1 John 5:3.)

Do people usually learn about subjects that really interest them (sports, hobbies, etc.)? What does our Bible study indicate about our interest in God's word?

B. Study with an Open Mind and a Love for Truth.

Acts 17:11 — What attitudes helped the Bereans accept truth?

Matthew 13:14,15 — Why did some misunderstand truth? What kinds of motives might cause these attitudes?

If we do not have a burning desire for truth, God will not force us to accept it. He will let us be lost.

(Cf. Matt. 5:6; 2 Thess. 2:10-12; 2 Tim. 4:2-4; John 3:19-21; 2 Cor. 13:5; 1 Thess. 5:21,22.)

C. Respect the Bible as Being Infallibly Inspired.

If a person doubts that the Bible is God's infallible word, he is much more likely to disagree with it.

The Bible is from God.

1 Thessalonians 2:13 — Is the Bible from God or men?

1 Corinthians 14:37 — Whose commands did Paul write?

Think: If we reject a Bible command, whom have we rejected? (See also 2 Tim. 3:16,17; Gal. 1:11,12; Eph. 3:3-5; Luke 10:16; 2 Peter 1:20,21; Matt. 10:19f; 2 Sam. 23:1,2; Ex. 24:3,4,7; Isa. 51:16; Jer. 1:5-9.)

The Bible is infallible.

Infallible means the message of the inspired writers cannot possibly be wrong.

Psalm 119:128 — How is God's word described?

Titus 1:2 — What can God not do?

Think: Read Matthew 22:31,32. Note that the Bible is so accurate that we can rely even on the tense of the verbs. What does this show about infallibility?

How will it affect our Bible study if we are not convinced that every word is true?

(Cf. John 17:17; Psalm 33:4; 19:8; 147:4,5; Rom. 3:4; Job 37:16; Num. 23:19; Heb. 6:18.)

D. Believe that the Bible Can Be Understood.

Some believe that the Bible can be understood only by specially trained clergymen, not by the average person. As a result, they approach the Bible convinced they will never understand it.

Mark 7:14 — Whom did Jesus address? Did He expect them to understand His message?

2 Timothy 3:16,17 — For what are the Scriptures profitable? What profit would they be if we could not understand them?

Acts 17:11 — Instead of just accepting what preachers said, what did the Bereans do? Could they understand the Scriptures?

Think: If a person is convinced he cannot understand the Bible, what will most likely happen if he tries to study it?

(See also Eph. 5:17; 1 Cor. 14:33; Eph. 3:3-5; Isa. 55:11; 35:8; John 20:30,31; 8:32; Prov. 2:1-12.)

Part II: Principles of Bible Authority

Luke 8:18 warns us to take heed how we hear. Likewise, we must take heed how we study the Bible. To know how to study, we must understand the principles God uses to teach us. (2 Tim. 2:15)

A. God's Commands for Us Today Are Revealed in the New Testament

Old Testament laws are not binding today.

The fact that a practice was acceptable under the Old Testament does not prove it is acceptable today.

Hebrews 10:9,10 — What did Jesus do to the first will and to the second? Why (v3,4)?

Colossians 2:14,16 — What did Jesus do to the old law? What is the consequence regarding unclean meats, feast days, and the Sabbath?

Galatians 5:1-4 — What is our condition if we try to be justified by the law today?

Think: What consequence follows for Old Testament practices like the following: animal sacrifices, Levitical priesthood, tithing, seventh-day Sabbath, circumcision, instrumental music, feast days, etc.?

(See also Gal. 3:24,25; Rom. 7:1-7; Eph. 2:11-18; Heb. 8:6-13; 9:15-20; 7:11-25; Jer. 31:31-34.)

Although the Old Testament is not binding as law, we should still study it.

Old Testament Scriptures were written for our learning (Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:6,11).

History — What events are referred to in Genesis 1, Acts 7, and Hebrews 11? Would we understand these events without the Old Testament?

Evidence — God’s existence, the Bible’s inspiration, and Jesus’ Deity are confirmed by the accuracy of the Bible in history, geography, and science, by fulfilled prophecy (John 5:39; Acts 3:24), and by the unity of the Bible. How does the Old Testament contribute to these evidences?

Unchanging Principles — Although God’s laws have changed, many facts about the universe, the nature of man, and the nature of God do not change (Heb. 13:8). What principles can we learn from the Old Testament according to Rom. 3:9-23 and 1 Cor. 10:1-12?

Appreciation and Understanding of the New Testament — How can differences and similarities between the old and new laws help us understand and appreciate the new? Consider, for example, Heb. 11; 10:3,4; Rom. 3:20.

Think: Should we neglect to study the Old Testament just because it is no longer binding as law?

B. In the Bible, God Uses Three Basic Methods to Reveal His Will.

We often use various methods to communicate with others. Likewise God uses these general methods:

1. Commands and direct statements

1 Corinthians 14:37 — Whose commands did Paul record?

Think: List some commands recorded for us in the New Testament. Consider Acts 10:48; Matt. 22:37-40; 1 Cor. 11:23-25; 16:1,2.

(John 14:15,21-24; 15:14; 1 John 5:3; 2:3,4.)

2. Examples and illustrations

Instead of directly commanding us to do something, God sometimes instructs us by giving an instance in which Christians acted by His guidance. We are expected to imitate these examples.

1 Peter 2:21,22 — Who left us an example? What should we do with it?

Philippians 3:17; 4:9 — How should we use Paul’s example?

Think: Specifically, what can we learn from the following Bible examples? Heb. 11; James 5:10,11; Acts 8:35-39; 20:7; 14:23.

(Cf. Acts 15:5-11; Phil. 2:5; Matt. 10:24,25; 16:24; 1 John 2:6; 1 Cor. 11:1; 10:1-12; 4:16; 1 Tim. 1:16.)

3. Logical necessary conclusions (“necessary inferences” or “Scriptural reasoning”)

Some truths are not directly or expressly stated, yet they necessarily follow as a logical consequence of what is stated. It’s like determining someone’s age if they tell you exactly when they were born.

Acts 17:1-3 — What did Paul customarily do? Do Old Testament prophecies directly state that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ?

(Acts 2:22-36; 18:4,19; 19:8,9; 28:23; Isa. 1:18)

Matthew 19:3-9 — What conclusion did Jesus reach from God’s marriage plan in Gen. 2? Was this conclusion directly stated there?

(For other examples see Heb. 7:11-18; Acts 11:1-18; 15:6-21; Gal. 3:10-12; 1 Cor. 15:12-19; Matt. 22:23-32; 21:28-46; 22:41-46.)

Think: How would you use John 6:44,45; Mark 16:15,16; and Acts 2:38 to prove babies should not be baptized? Eph. 1:22,23 with Heb. 8:1 to prove the church has no earthly headquarters? Heb. 10:25 to prove the church may provide a place to assemble? Are these conclusions directly stated in the passages?

Mature Christians must use wisdom to apply the principles of God’s word to specific situations (Heb. 5:14). As in a math problem, we “add up” the information given to reach a conclusion.

C. God’s Word Completely Reveals His Will for Us.

Some people think that the Bible does not necessarily teach us everything we may do to please God. So they think they can learn how to please God by going to other authorities, such as tradition, church councils, denominational creeds, modern revelations, etc.

John 16:13 — How much truth did the Holy Spirit reveal to the apostles? What does this prove

about doctrines people claim are from God but are not found in the Scriptures?

2 Peter 1:3 — What has God's power granted?

2 Timothy 3:16,17 — How many good works are provided in the Scriptures? Can people today invent or reveal new truths or new ways to please God that are not found in the Scriptures?

Scripture may not answer every speculative question men may have (Deut. 29:29), but they tell us all we need to do to please God. (Cf. Acts 20:20,27.)

D. Only Divine Authority, not Human Authority, Is Acceptable in Religion.

When a practice is not included in what God has authorized, should we participate in it or not? Remember that the Scriptures provide us to every good work. What about works it does not provide?

Consider the Bible teaching about wisdom

Isaiah 55:8,9 — How do God's thoughts and ways differ from ours? Can we know what He wants without revelation?

Jeremiah 10:23 — Is man wise enough to direct his own life?

Proverbs 14:12 — What happens if we follow religious practices that seem right to us, but are not revealed from God?

Proverbs 3:5,6 — How do we show trust in God?

Think: If we practice things not found in the Bible whose wisdom do we trust? Do not add to nor take from God's word (Rev. 22:18,19). (1 Cor. 1:21-24; 2:5; Deut. 4:2; 12:32; Prov. 30:6; Luke 16:15)

Consider the Bible teaching about worship

John 4:23,24 — How should we worship God?

Matthew 15:9,13 — What kind of worship is based on human doctrines? What does this tell us about practices not revealed by God?

Think: Who is honored when we follow human doctrines? When people defend their practices by saying "I think it's beautiful," or "We're satisfied with it," whom are they seeking to please?

Note the example in Lev. 10:1-3.

Consider the source of proper authority.

2 John 9 — What must we do to have God? Where do we find all Jesus' teachings? What if we practice things not found in Scripture?

Galatians 1:8,9 — What is the condition of any man who preaches a gospel that differs from what inspired men taught?

Think: Did God intend for His word to itemize everything we should not practice? Should we ask, "Where does God forbid this act?" or "Where does God tell us to do this act?" If an act is not included in what He said to do, what should we do about it?

(Col. 3:17; 2:8; 1 Peter 4:11; 1 Cor. 4:6; 2 Cor. 10:18; Rom. 10:1-3)

E. God May Teach in General or Specific Terms.

Our practices must fit the meaning of the instructions God has given. However, people sometimes misunderstand Scripture because they fail to distinguish specific language from general language.

A statement of the principle

Specific authority: God has told us not to practice things that do not fit the meaning of His instructions. So when He wants us to do a thing in a particular way, He instructs us by choosing words that are specific or narrow (limited, restricted, exclusive) in their meaning. If we then do things differently, outside the limits of the meaning of the terms He uses, we displease Him.

General authority: When God wants to leave men free to choose from several alternative ways of doing a thing, He instructs us with words that are more general or broad (inclusive, comprehensive, all-encompassing) in their meaning. We still must do only what fits the instruction, but we are free to choose any of the various alterna-

tives that fit. Any such choice would be acceptable because we would still be doing what God said.

Applications of the principle

Noah and the ark — Gen. 6:14 — What material was Noah told to use to make the ark? Could he have used metal, pine, walnut, etc.? Did God expressly say not to use them?

Think: Suppose Noah had used an ax or saw to cut the gopher wood to “make” the ark. Would he still have been doing what God said?

Going to preach the gospel — Mark 16:15 — What did God say to do here? Do we obey the command if we preach man-made doctrines in addition to the gospel?

Think: Name some methods of transportation a person might use to “go” into all the world? Are these things specifically mentioned in the verse? If we use them, would they fit God’s command to “go”?

Think: Could a man “preach the gospel” to people by writing them a letter, dividing them up into classes and teaching them, speaking over radio or TV, writing on a blackboard, or using an overhead projector? Do these fit the meaning of what God said to do?

Conclusion: Many things are wrong in religion, though nowhere specifically forbidden, because they do not fit what God specifically said to do. Other things are acceptable, though nowhere specifically mentioned, because they do fit general instructions in God’s word. Study the examples in the chart below.

General & Specific Authority

INSTRUCTION	UNAUTHORIZED	AUTHORIZED
Make ark of Gopher wood (Gen. 6:14)	Metal pine, walnut	Hammer & saw Pegs & glue
Go Preach the gospel (Mark 16:15)	Human doctrine	Walk, ride Speak, write, TV
Believe, repent Buried in baptism (Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38; Rom. 6:4)	Sprinkle, pour Baby, animal	River, lake Baptistery
Collection on first day (1 Cor. 16:1,2)	Rummage, business Week day	Container Time of day
Bread & fruit of the vine First day (Matt. 26:26-29; Acts 20:7)	Hamburger, Coke Week day	Containers Time of day
Sing (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16)	Piano, organ	Songbook, parts

Part III. Other Rules for Bible Study

A. Consider Other Passages on the Same Subject.

Truth on a subject is determined by “adding up” all pertinent passages.

Acts 3:22,23 — How much of Jesus’ teaching must we heed?

Matthew 4:4 — How many of God’s words must we live by?

Think: Should we “interpret” a passage in a way that contradicts other passages? How can other passages help us in our study?

(1 Cor. 14:33; Rev. 22:18,19; Acts 20:20,27; Matt. 28:20; 12:25,26; James 2:10; 2 Tim. 3:16,17.)

Some applications

Think: Is the pattern of worship entirely revealed in one passage? What about the steps to salvation?

What application can be made to people who take passages that teach we are saved by faith, ignore passages about baptism, and conclude we are saved by “faith only” without baptism?

What about members of the Lord’s church who emphasize the command to be baptized, then fail to attend, live a faithful life, etc.?

B. Consider Context and Background.

“Context” means the verses surrounding the one being studied, especially verses on the same subject. By “background” we mean who is speaking, to whom they speak, etc. Note some specific benefits of studying context and background:

Word meanings: Words are sometimes used today in ways that completely differ from the meaning in the Bible. Furthermore, words may have different meanings in different contexts. We learn the correct meaning by how the word is used.

Romans 6:3,4 — The word “baptism” is defined today as sprinkling, pouring, or immersion, but what does it mean in the Bible according to context?

Acts 20:17,28 — Compare “elders” (v17) to “bishops” or “overseers” (v28). Are “elders” and “overseers” the same work or different?

Further explanation: When a verse confuses us, other statements nearby may clarify the meaning.

Acts 16:31-34 — Some people claim v31 means we are saved by “faith only,” so baptism is not needed. But had the whole gospel been taught yet (v32)? When all was taught, how urgent was baptism to the jailer? (cf. Acts 2:38; 22:16; Mark 16:16; etc.).

The speaker: The Bible is infallible, but sometimes it infallibly records the errors of fallible people.

Psalms 14:1 quotes “There is no God.” But who says this?

Job 2:9 says “Curse God and die.” But who says this? How did Job respond to her (v10)?

To understand the Bible we must realize that sometimes it accurately records the fact that fallible people do or say sinful things.

The people addressed, when and where: Not all instructions spoken by God in the Bible are intended for us to obey.

Genesis 6:13,14 — What did God tell Noah to do? Must we do this?

Genesis 22:1,2 — What was Abraham told to do? Must we do it?

Luke 23:39-43 — What promise did Jesus make to the thief? Was this before Jesus died or after? What law was then in effect (Heb. 9:16,17; Col. 2:14)? Does this prove we can be saved without baptism?

Part IV: Tools & Suggested Procedures for Bible Study

Having considered the requirements for proper Bible study, we will now offer some helps and suggested methods of applying these principles. These ideas harmonize with the principles we have learned, but other approaches may fit them too.

A. Helpful Tools for Study

Translations: The Bible was written in Hebrew and Greek, so we need translations into our language. Since the Bible words are inspired, translations ought to give the exact meaning of the original words.

Unfortunately some modern “translations” emphasize beauty or simplicity of expression instead of original meaning. Other translations come from one man or one denomination, so their views may influence their work. Seek a translation made by many men from different groups, who believe in verbal inspiration, and who emphasize the meaning of the original words (the introduction of the translation usually describes the translators’ philosophy).

For a primary study Bible, we suggest the King James Version, New King James Version, American Standard Version, or New American Standard Version. Others may be useful for comparison. Comparing several translations may help clarify the text.

Cross references: Some Bibles have footnotes on each verse that refer to other similar verses. From those verses you might find still others, etc. This is useful for “studying other verses on the subject.”

Concordance: A concordance lists words in the Bible alphabetically and gives passages where each word is used. Some concordances are brief, others are more complete.

Uses of a concordance include: (1) finding many passages about a subject; (2) finding a particular verse if you know one or two words in it;

(3) determining the meaning of a word by studying verses where it is used.

Other helps: The following helps may be useful, but remember they are written by fallible humans who can be wrong.

(1) Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias are descriptions, listed alphabetically, of Bible people, places, things, and events. Emphasis is on history and geography. Do *not* expect detailed definitions or discussions of doctrinal matters.

(2) Word study helps include “expository dictionaries” and lexicons. These actually define Bible words, but you must know the Greek or Hebrew alphabet to use a lexicon. Be careful with these books if you have no training in the original languages.

(3) Commentaries are verse-by-verse explanations of the Bible text. Be especially careful, because the authors’ beliefs may contradict Scripture. If you use commentaries, study several to get alternative views, consider the *reasons* the author gives for his view, and always let the Bible be your final authority.

B. Suggested Procedures for Bible Study

Too many people do not study the Bible in an organized way, and too many depend on others to study for them. It may not be wrong to use someone else’s material to guide us in a study, yet some members need to also learn to study for themselves.

The following suggestions are designed to help you study a Bible passage or subject for yourself using just a few basic Bible study tools. These are general guidelines that may be helpful, but may be abbreviated or modified in some cases.

Suggested procedure for studying a Bible passage

Suppose you have a particular section of Scripture you want to study: a verse, chapter, section, or even a whole book. The following procedure will help you use the principles we have learned.

1. *Read the passage in context.* You may need to read the whole book. Understand the theme of the book, and list the main subjects discussed.

2. *Study the general background of the book of the Bible.* Who wrote it? What do you know about the author? To whom was it written, and what do you know about these people? When was it written and under what circumstances? You

may learn this information from reading the book itself (see previous step) or by using cross-references, concordances, etc.

3. *Study the particular passage section by section.* Examine each paragraph, each verse, each phrase, and even each word. Define key words using context, parallel passages, other translations, and dictionaries. Study other passages on the subject (use cross references and concordance).

Ask yourself questions about what the passage does and does not mean, and consider alternative views. Search for evidence till you can answer your questions, prove what view is correct, and explain the meaning in your own words. Think of examples or illustrations to help explain the passage. Make specific applications to your own life and the lives of others.

Write careful notes throughout your study, and save your notes for future reference.

Suggested procedure for studying a Bible subject

1. *Select and define the topic.* Write it as precisely as you can in a few statements or questions. Revise, if necessary, as you proceed.

2. *Jot down everything you think you know about the topic:* passages, main points, illustrations, applications, etc.

3. *List the important words related to the topic.* You will use these to find pertinent passages in the concordance. Be sure to define them as you proceed.

4. *List the important passages.* Use memory, concordance, cross references, etc.

5. *Study each passage using the methods previously described for passages.* Ask questions, draw conclusions, make applications, think of illustrations.

6. *Organize the material.* Divide your topic logically into its major divisions and sub-divisions. Classify each item of information under the appropriate sub-division.

Again, make careful notes at each step. You may want to write a final outline or summary of the material, especially if you intend to teach it to others. Save your notes for future study.

Conclusion

God’s word not only teaches why we should study, it teaches us how to study. We have no good excuse for not learning God’s word. Our eternal destiny depends on the outcome.

“Teach Us to Pray”

Introduction:

In Luke 11:1 Jesus’ disciples asked, “Lord, teach us to pray.” The purpose of this study is to help Christians improve their praying.

Everyone needs to learn more about prayer. People who are new in the faith may have never studied about how to pray. Some members do not pray properly, so their prayers are not even answered. Even faithful Christians can improve.

What is prayer? Note Acts 4:24,31. Prayer is simply man talking to God (Rom. 10:1; Matt. 6:9ff). It is a form of communication similar in many ways to simply talking to our earthly father, except we must remember we are addressing God and must meet conditions of acceptable prayer.

For each of the passages below that are **typed in bold underline**, read the passage in your Bible and answer the questions.

I. What Should We Pray About?

What should we include in prayer? Some cannot think of much to say. Others say things that are inappropriate or even unscriptural. Some just repeat memorized phrases they have heard from others.

Let us compare Bible examples of prayer to our own prayers and see if we can improve.

A. We Should Praise God’s Character and Work.

Bible prayers commonly included many descriptions of the glory and greatness of God. Jesus began the model prayer by praising God’s name (Matt. 6:9). Many psalms are filled with praise.

For each of the passages below, list the particular qualities or works of God that were praised.

Psalm 86:5-12 —

1 Chronicles 29:10-13 —

Jeremiah 32:16-23 —

We could never list all the great qualities and works for which God deserves our praise. Instead of just thinking of more things for God to give us, do we need greater emphasis on describing His greatness?

(See also Psalm 90:1-4; Neh. 9:4-8; Gen. 18:25; 1 Sam. 2:1-10; 2 Sam. 7:22,23; 1 Kings 8:23-30; 2 Kings 19:15; Ezra 9:8,9; Neh. 1:5; Job 42:1,2; Psalm 143:1-12; 17:7; 90:7-11; 102:1,12,24-27; Matt. 6:13; Luke 2:37,38; Acts 4:24; Eph. 1:16-19; Col. 1:12-14; Rev 11:17.)

B. We Should Pray on Behalf of Others.

Bible prayers are filled with requests and thanksgiving for people other than the one offering the prayer. How often do we think to pray for others, whether or not they request our prayers?

For each passage listed below, identify the kind of people for whom we should pray:

1 Timothy 2:1,2 (Ezra 6:10; 1 Chron. 29:19)

1 Chronicles 29:19 (Matthew 19:13-15; Gen. 25:21,22; 24:12-14; 18:23-33; 1 Sam. 1:10-12)

Romans 10:1-3 (Matt. 9:36-38; Luke 23:34)

Luke 6:27,28 (Acts 7:60; Luke 23:34) —

Ephesians 6:18-20 (Col. 4:3,4; Acts 4:25-29; 6:6; 14:23; 1 Thess. 5:25; Matt. 9:36-38) —

Colossians 1:3,9-14 —

(Cf. Luke 22:31,32; John 17:9-22; Acts 8:24; Rom. 1:9-12; Eph. 1:15-19; Phil. 1:3-11; 1 Thess. 1:2; 2 Thess. 1:11,12; 2:13; 2 Tim. 1:3; Num. 11:2; 21:7; 14:13-20; Deut. 9:18-20,25-29; Ex. 32:9-14,31,32; 1 Sam. 7:5-11)

Note that many examples involve prayer for specific individuals or congregations. Do we show this personal concern for others in our prayers? Note also that Paul openly told people he was praying for them. This practice would motivate us to be more diligent to pray for others and would give Christians a greater sense of love and appreciation for one another.

C. We Should Make Requests and Give Thanks.

We should pray for what we truly need, but remember to thank God for what we have received.

For each passage below, list the expressions that show we can ask God to meet our needs or should thank Him for what He has given.

Philippians 4:6,7 —

Note: A “supplication” is a request for needs to be “supplied.”

Matthew 7:7-11 —

1 Peter 5:7 —

Ephesians 5:20 —

Bible prayers include thanksgiving right alongside requests. God invites us to ask for what we need, but He is displeased when we are so ungrateful as to offer no thanks when the request is granted

(Cf. 1 John 5:14,15; 3:21,22; 1 Timothy 2:1; John 14:13,14; 15:7,16; 16:23,24,26; Luke 17:12-17; 1 Thess. 5:18; Col. 4:2; 2:7; 3:17.)

D. Some Specific Things We Should Pray about

No one prayer could mention everything there is to pray about, but Bible prayers teach us many specific things to mention. We may pray about these things for ourselves or for others. We may make requests and then give thanks when we receive them. For each passage below, list the specific things mentioned.

Matthew 6:9-13 —

3 John 2 (2 Kings 20:1-7) —

Acts 12:1,5,12 —

Acts 21:5 —

1 Timothy 2:1,2 —

Psalms 141:1-3 —

Matthew 9:36-38 —

Luke 3:21 —

John 17:20-26 —

Ephesians 6:18-20 —

Colossians 1:9-11 —

Colossians 4:3 —

Note how Bible prayers often concerned spiritual needs and blessings. Some people seem to pray as if they are sending a “Christmas list” to Santa for all the physical things they want. Biblical prayers may concern physical needs, but very often they emphasized man’s spiritual needs.

How do our prayers compare to Bible prayers? Are there areas where we need to improve?

(Psalm 119:169-172; 1 Kings 8:33-53; Neh. 1:8-11; Matt. 15:36; 26:26-29; 26:36-46; John 17:9-12,17; Acts 4:23-31; 8:22,24; 14:23; 20:36-38; 27:35; 28:15; Eph. 3:14-19; 2 Cor. 1:8-11; 4:15; 12:7-10; 13:7; Phil. 1:3-6,9-11; 4:6,7; 2 Thess. 3:1,2; James 1:5,6; 5:16)

II. When, Where, How Long, and How Often Should We Pray?

Should we pray publicly, privately, in church meetings, as daily routine, or spontaneously? What posture must we use?

A. General Admonitions about Frequency & Place

What do the following passages say about where and how often we should pray:

Acts 2:42 —

1 Timothy 2:8 —

1 Thessalonians 5:17,18 —

Think: Do these verses mean we should pray 24 hours a day, seven days a week? If so, when would we do other good works God has commanded? (Luke 11:1)

Prayer should be a regular, frequent part of our daily lives, and we should never quit or cease the practice of prayer. Further, we should never participate in any practice such that we would be ashamed to pray to God in the midst of that activity.

(Eph. 1:16; 5:20; 6:18; Col. 1:3,9; 2:7; 3:17; 4:2,12; Luke 18:1-7; Rom. 12:12; Acts 6:4; 1:14; Phil. 1:4; 4:6; 1 Cor. 1:4; 2 Thess. 1:3,11; 2:13)

B. Specific Examples of Time, Place, etc.

To gain a fuller understanding, tell what these examples say about when and where people prayed:

1 Corinthians 14:15 (see the context) —

Matthew 6:6 —

Mark 1:35 —

Acts 4:23ff —

Acts 27:35 —

Psalm 55:16,17 —

Daniel 6:10,11 —

We should pray in private but also in public worship assemblies. We should not pray to make a show before others, but we should not be ashamed to pray when others are present (cf. Acts 27:35). We should pray habitually throughout the day but also at special times when needs arise.

Do we pray like faithful people in the Bible?

(Matt. 14:23; Deut. 9:18,25,26; 1 Kings 8:22; 2 Kings 20:1-3; Ezra 9:4,5ff; Neh. 9:1-5; Psalm 5:3; 88:1,13; Dan. 6:10,11; Matt. 15:36; 14:19; 26:36-46; Mark 1:35; Luke 6:12; 9:18; 24:30; Acts 10:9; 12:5,12; 20:36; 1 Thess. 3:9,10; 1 Tim. 5:5)

C. Posture and Physical Conduct During Prayer

May we stand for prayer or only kneel or sit? Must we speak out loud for God to hear us? Must we fold our hands, bow our heads, and close our eyes? What do these Bible examples say about position?

Nehemiah 1:4 —

Luke 22:41 —

Mark 11:25; Luke 18:13,14 —

1 Chronicles 29:20

John 17:1—

1 Sam. 1:12,13 —

Think: What can we learn from the variety in these examples? Does the position we are in determine whether or not God hears us?

(Gen. 24:12,13,27,48; Ex. 4:31; 12:27; 34:8,9; 1 Sam. 1:26; 2 Sam. 7:18; 1 Kings 19:4; Neh. 8:6; 9:4,5ff; Matt. 14:19; 26:39; John 11:41; Acts 9:40; 20:36; 21:5)

III. Can Prayer Really Change the Future?

Does God really answer prayer, or are the benefits of prayer just psychological? Because we have prayed, does God so intervene in the course of history that events occur differently than they would have?

A. Promises that God Will Answer

What do these passages say about God's response to prayer?

1 John 5:14,15 —

1 John 3:22 —

James 5:16 —

There are conditions we must meet; but if we do so, God has promised to answer our prayers

according to what is good for us in harmony with His will.

(Matt. 7:7-11; Mark 11:24; John 14:13,14; 15:7,16; 16:23,24,26; James 1:5,6; Luke 18:1-8; 1 Peter 3:12; 5:7; Matt. 6:6,8; Psalm 55:22; 86:7; 28:6; 31:22; 118:5)

B. Bible Examples of Answered Prayers

Many Bible examples show God's response to prayers of His people. God does not do miracles today (1 Cor. 13:8-10), but He is able to control events according to natural law so as to answer prayer without miracles. We will focus on cases of this nature.

Tell what prayer was answered in these examples:

1 Samuel 1:10-20,26-28 —

2 Chronicles 7:11-14 —

2 King 20:1-7 —

(Cf. Ex. 32:9-14; 1 Sam.; 7:5-11; 2 Kings 19:15-37; 2 Chron. 33:10-13; Neh. 1:4-2:8; Psalm 32:5-7.)

C. Some Conclusions about Answers to Prayers

God does act in response to prayer.

Some people claim that, if God does not do miracles, then He must not answer prayer. Others see only psychological benefits in prayer. Even though we pray Scripturally, they claim God does not actually intervene in the course of earthly events to bring about what we requested. What can we learn from the above examples in response to these views?

Matthew 18:19 — Does God act when we make requests? What kind of requests does this refer to?

Think: If the only benefits of prayer are psychological, couldn't the same effect be produced if a person prayed with sincere faith to an idol? Note James 5:16; 1 John 3:22; Prov. 15:8,29. (Cf. John 14:13,14; 15:7.)

The Bible promises that God Himself acts in response to our prayers, acting by means of natural law.

However, we must also work, to the extent of our ability, to achieve what we requested.

God does act in response to Scriptural prayers, but He will not act if we are not willing to do our part. Study the Scriptures listed in each example below and explain what we should pray for and also what work we must do to achieve what we requested:

Matthew 6:11; 2 Thessalonians 3:10 —

James 1:5; 2 Timothy 3:15-17 (Acts 17:11)

Matthew 9:36-38; 2 Timothy 2:2 —

If we pray for needs to be met, we must do what we can to bring about what we requested. God may then bless our work and use it to accomplish good that may not have been accomplished had we not prayed.

God gives, not necessarily what we want, but what is best for everyone involved.

Tell what was prayed for in the following examples. Did the person receive exactly what he wanted?

Matthew 26:36-46; cf. Luke 22:43 —

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 —

Matthew 7:7-11 — What kinds of gifts does a father give?

(Psalm 34:10; Rom. 8:28; James 1:17; Matt. 6:8)

If we do not receive exactly what we asked for, this does not mean God refused to answer. God is infinite, where our knowledge is limited. We may not know what is best, but God does. This is why we ought to pray for God's will to be done. He can then give us what we asked, something greater, or something different, according to what He knows to be best.

We further may not understand **how** God can control the universe without miracles, yet the Bible affirms that He does. Those who believe in God must believe in His power to answer prayer, even though we cannot explain how He does it.

IV. What Conditions Must Prayer Meet?

God has promised to answer prayer, yet sometimes our prayers are not answered because we have not prayed properly. There are conditions we must meet in order for God to answer our prayers, just as there are conditions we must meet in order for God to forgive our sins. What are these conditions?

A. We Must Pray in Jesus' Name (by His Mediation).

Consider these verses:

John 14:13,14 — In whose name should we pray? (Cf. John 15:16; 16:23,24,26; Eph. 5:20)

Romans 1:8 — Through whom did Paul thank God? (Col. 3:17)

1 Timothy 2:5 — How many mediators are there between God and man? Who is that mediator?

Note: The immediate context here refers to salvation, but the broader context refers to prayer (see v1,2,8). Jesus mediates in prayer because He mediates in salvation. He is our High Priest (Heb. 4:14-16).

Think: What application should be made to praying through Mary or a dead "saint"? Did they redeem us by their death? Can they mediate prayer?

What does it mean to pray "in Jesus' name"?

Think: Why do you sign your name to a check or other legal document? What is meant when a police officer says, "Halt in the name of the law"?

A person's name stands for the person and all that He is. God's name is "hallowed" because God Himself is hallowed (Matt. 6:9). More specifically, a person's name represents his will and authority.

We pray "through Jesus" because His authority enables us to be heard. Because of sin, we could never approach God without Jesus. We need a "go-between" to reconcile us to God so we can communicate with Him. Because Jesus died as our sacrifice, He is the only one who can authorize us to approach God in prayer.

To pray in Jesus' name means we are appealing to His authority as the one mediator between

God and us. We are trusting His power to make it possible for God to hear our prayer.

B. We Must Pray According to God's Will.

1 John 5:14,15; Matthew 26:39 — Whose will should be done as result of prayer? (Cf. Matt. 6:10)

Consider what this means.

In things essential to salvation, God's will is revealed in the Scriptures.

We must never pray for things that do not harmonize with God's revealed will.

James 4:3 — Why did God not answer these people's requests?

Acts 2:38 (Mark 16:16) — Would it be proper for us to pray for God to save people without repentance or baptism? Should unbaptized sinners try to be saved by "praying through" or "praying the sinners prayer" as some denominations teach? Explain.

Since the gospel came into effect, no passage ever tells an unbaptized person to pray for forgiveness of sins. Such a prayer would not be answered because it is not according to God's will.

Think: What are some other examples of prayers that would not harmonize with God's revealed will?

In things not essential to salvation, God's will may not be expressly revealed.

Many events of everyday life may not be matters of right or wrong, so we may not know God's expressed will. For example, we know God allows suffering and death, so in a particular instance of illness we may not know whether God would be willing for the person to get better or not (2 Cor. 12:7-10).

In these cases we may pray for what we believe to be best, then ask God to do what He knows to be best. Then by faith we accept the outcome.

C. We Must Pray with Understanding, Sincerity, and Humility.

1 Corinthians 14:15,16 — How does this verse say we should pray? What do these terms mean?

Think: What can you do to help make sure you understand and mean what you pray? What can men do when leading public prayer to help people understand so they can say “amen” (cf. vv 19,26,40)?

Matthew 6:5,7,9 — What wrong motive do some folks have? What are “vain repetitions”? How did Jesus show respect in the model prayer?

Think of some examples of vain repetition. Does this prove it is wrong to repeat a request? (Study Matt. 26:36-46; 2 Cor. 12:7-10; Luke 18:1-7.)

Jeremiah 29:12,13 — What words here show that prayer should be sincere and earnest?

Prayer must never become a mere formality or outward ritual that we go through without meaning what we do or simply to impress other people. We must pray fervently from the heart.

(1 Sam. 1:10,15; Luke 22:44; Mark 12:40; 1 Cor. 14:15; Psalm 17:1; 145:18; James 5:16,17)

Luke 18:9-14 — How does this story contrast humble prayer with self-righteous prayer?

God should not be approached casually (“Hi, Pop!”), nor as a servant at our beck and call. Our attitudes and speech should exalt His greatness while recognizing our weaknesses, sins, and human frailty. (2 Chron. 7:14; 33:10-13; Gen. 18:27)

D. We Must Pray in Faith.

James 1:5-8 — What conditions must a prayer for wisdom meet? What happens if we have doubts?

As previously discussed, God has expressly revealed that He is willing to give some things, such as forgiveness to a penitent child of God. Faith requires us to believe He will give what He has promised. For other things He has not necessarily revealed what He will give (such as good health), so we pray “Thy will be done.” Then we must believe He will do what is best.

Praying in faith also requires us to accept what God sends. Too often, when we do not receive exactly what we asked for, we complain or think God broke His promise. Faith requires us to believe He will give the best thing at the best time,

and then believe that the result is what is best. (Mark 11:24)

E. We Must Pray with Repentance for Sin.

According to these passages, besides praying, what must children of God do to receive forgiveness?

Acts 8:21-23 —

Luke 18:13,14 —

Forgiveness is not granted to those who persist in sin, excuse it, rationalize it, overlook it, or hide it. To receive forgiveness when we pray, we must be truly sorry for sin and determine to overcome it.

(2 Chron. 7:14; Psalm 32:5-7; Dan. 9:3-12; James 5:16; 1 Kings 8:33-36,46-53)

F. We Must Pray with Forgiveness for Others.

Matthew 6:12,14,15 — What else must we be willing to do in order for God to forgive our sins?

To have a right relationship with God we must pursue right relationships with people (Matt. 5:23,24). Have others apologized to you requesting your forgiveness, yet you continue to hold a grudge? Do you seek revenge, wishing harm to come to those who have wronged you, unwilling to pursue peace and harmony? (Mark 11:25; Matt. 18:21-35)

To receive God’s forgiveness when we pray, we must have the same attitude toward others that we expect Him to have toward us!

G. We Must Pray While Living a Faithful Life.

According to these passages how does our manner of life relate to God’s answer to prayer?

James 5:16 —

1 John 3:21,22 —

Proverbs 28:9—

Isaiah 59:1,2 —

God heard the prayer of Cornelius before he was baptized (Acts 10:4,31), but what did Cornelius receive as a result? God gave him an opportunity to learn the truth. Beyond that, there is nothing God has promised to give alien sinners in answer to prayer.

But God likewise rejects the prayer of the impenitent child of God. Too many people want to live their lives for themselves, then go running to God in time of need. They expect Him to serve them despite the fact they refuse to serve Him! God says it will not work. If you want God to hear your prayers, first repent of your sins and live in obedience to Him.

(Psalm 66:18; 34:15-19; 109:7; Prov. 15:8,29; 1:24-29; 21:13; Isaiah 1:15-17; 1 Peter 3:12; John 9:31; 15:5; Lam 3:1,8; 1 Peter 3:7; 1 Tim. 2:8; 2 Chron. 7:14)

Conclusion

God will answer prayer for you. He desires to meet your needs and offer you everything He has promised to His faithful children. But first you must become a faithful child of His by obedience to His gospel (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Rom. 10:9,10; 6:3,4; etc.). Then you must meet the conditions of prayer.

Attending Church Meetings

Introduction:

The purpose of this study is to consider Bible teaching regarding the Christian's responsibility to attend gatherings of the local church.

New Testament churches arranged meetings so members could study God's word and worship. Some meetings were on the first day of the week, others were not. Churches today also conduct various church meetings. Some are on Sunday, others are not. How important it is for members to attend these meetings?

Everyone has times when they may be sick or have other genuine reasons for missing (2 Cor. 8:12), but how important is it to arrange our schedules to come? Should we habitually come every time the church meets, or may we habitually miss? Should we let minor excuses keep us away, or should we sacrifice to overcome those excuses? How important is it to arrive early and stay till the meeting is dismissed?

Let us consider the application of some Bible principles. Please look up each Scripture **typed in bold underline** below and answer the questions.

I. Teaching and Learning

Teaching and study of God's word are primary purposes of church meetings, so consider what the Bible says about them.

A. Jesus Set the Example of Attending Teaching Meetings.

Though He lived under the Old Testament, Jesus gave an example of how we should think and act (1 Peter 2:21,22; Phil. 2:3-5; 1 John 2:6). What was His practice regarding meetings for teaching and worship?

Luke 4:16 — What was Jesus' practice regarding weekly synagogue meetings?

Think: If there was a total of 3-4 hours of meetings in the synagogue, would Jesus have customarily attended just part of this, or would He attend as much teaching and study as He could? (Matt. 9:35; 13:54; Mark 1:21; 6:2; Luke 13:10; John 18:20)

Matthew 15:32; Mark 10:1 — What practice of Jesus is described here? Did He attend one study or more than one per week? (Matt. 13:1-3; Mark 2:13)

Think: Some say Jesus authorized the church to have only one meeting a week. Does this agree with His own practice? If Jesus were a member of a local church today that had several meetings each week, would He try to attend them all or just one a week?

B. Christians Should Desire to Study and Learn.

Psalm 1:1,2 — How does the godly man view God's law? How often does he meditate on it?

Proverbs 2:1-12 — How should one search for true wisdom?

Matthew 5:6 — Who will be filled with righteousness?

Think: The word should also be studied privately, but much study is done in church meetings. If someone hungers and thirsts, diligently seeking knowledge, would he appreciate the value of attending study opportunities the church has arranged?

(Acts 17:11; Psalm 119:10-16,33-35,47,48,97-105; 1 Peter 2:2; 2 Peter 1:5-11; Phil. 4:8; Josh. 1:8; Col. 1:9,10,28; Deut. 6:6-9; Hosea 4:6)

C. Christians Should Desire to Edify and Be Edified.

Romans 14:19; 15:14 — What should we pursue? How much knowledge should we seek? What should Christians be able to do for one another?

1 Corinthians 14:26 — When should edification occur? (Cf. v19)

Think: Edification is not limited to a specific day or number of meetings per week. If we appreciate the value of teaching, why would we not want to attend every opportunity the church gives us?

(Acts 11:26; Eph. 4:11-16,29; 5:19; Rom. 12:5-8; Heb. 3:12-14; 10:24,25; 1 Thess. 4:18; 5:11,14; Col. 3:16; 1 Tim. 3:15)

D. To Be Able to Teach Others, We Must Be Taught.

Hebrews 5:12-14 — What “ought” Christians to learn to do? Why were some unable to teach?

2 Timothy 2:2 — What should faithful men learn to do? What do they need in order to do this?

Think: How involved are you in teaching? What should you be doing so you can be a good teacher?

Church meetings enable us to learn and to teach others (1 Tim. 3:15; Eph. 4:11-16). We should teach and study outside the assemblies as well as in them. But how many people do you know who regularly miss church meetings, yet are diligently studying the Bible and teaching others?

II. Praise to God

A. Some Acts of Praise Are Limited to the First Day. Others Are Not.

Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:1,2 — When should the church have the Lord’s Supper and the collection?

1 Corinthians 14:15 — What acts of praise are done in church assemblies? (Cf. v19; Heb. 2:12)

Colossians 3:16; Ephesians 5:19 — What day of the week is specified for teaching in song?

Acts 4:23,24,31 — What day is specified for the church to assemble for prayer? (1 Thess. 5:17; Col. 4:2)

Think: We also may study God’s word in church meetings. What passage limits singing, prayer, or teaching to one assembly per week or one day of the week? When may the church meet for these acts?

B. Christians Should Desire and Appreciate Opportunities to Praise God.

After studying each passage below, ask yourself the following “Thought question”: *If a person has the godly attitude this passage is encouraging, and if the church provides opportunities for praising God, would such a person habitually attend or would he habitually miss when he could come?*

John 4:23,24 — What kind of worship does God seek? If God seeks this worship, what should we seek to give? (Thought question: If one has the “spirit” God seeks, would he want to attend or do other things when the church meets?)

Luke 24:52,53; Acts 2:42 — What words in these passages describe how regularly the early disciples participated in worship? (Thought question.)

Hebrews 13:15 — Jesus gave His life as a sacrifice for us. What sacrifice does He ask us to offer? If we appreciate His sacrifice, how consistently should we attend? (Thought question.) (1 Peter 2:5,9,10)

Psalm 95:1-3; 122:1 — If one appreciates the greatness of God what will he do? Does one truly appreciate God if he does not want to do this? (Thought question.) (Cf. Psalm 100:4; 148:1-13)

Revelation 19:1,4-6 — What do God’s servants do in heaven? Who should participate (v5)? If people don’t want to worship God on earth, would they enjoy heaven? (Thought question.) (7:9-15; 15:2-4)

Romans 1:21 — The context describes those who gradually fall away from God (v22-25,28-32). What is one of the first evidences of this departure (v21)? (Thought question.)

Think: These general verses do not limit praise to any particular day or number of meet-

ings per week. When the church arranges such meetings, why would any faithful Christian not want to come?

(1 Chron. 29:10-13; 1 Sam. 12:24; 1 Cor. 6:19,20)

III. Unity

Biblical unity requires, not just doctrinal agreement, but also oneness of spirit, attitude, goal, and purpose. Unity (or division) in a congregation often expresses itself in the worship assemblies.

A. Passages that Urge Oneness

John 17:20-22 — What kind of unity did Jesus pray for us to have? Would Jesus neglect opportunities to worship His Father?

Acts 1:14; 4:24,32; 5:11,12 — Describe the unity of the first church. In what were they steadfast?

Note that unity showed in their worship. (Acts 2:1,46; 15:22,25)

Philippians 1:27; 2:1-4 — How is unity described in these verses?

Romans 15:5,6 — What do like-minded brethren do?

Think: If we have the unity and like-mindedness described here, and if the church plans times for us to worship and study together, will we strive to be with our brethren or not? (1 Peter 3:8; Eph. 4:2,3; Phil. 3:15,16; 2 Cor. 13:11; 4:13; Rom. 14:19; 12:16)

B. Passages that Rebuke Division

Mark 3:24,25 — What happens to a divided kingdom or house?

1 Corinthians 1:10; 12:25 — What conditions should and should not exist in a church?

Think: As in Corinth (chap. 11 & 14), the assemblies of a local church typically reflect whether or not there is unity. When some members assemble diligently but others make little effort, is that unity and like-mindedness? Are you “of one

heart and one mind” with your brethren in attendance?

IV. Cooperation and Fellowship in Works of Service

The spirit of unity in a church should manifest itself in members *working* together, *sharing* the workload, *and serving* one another.

A. Members Should Desire to Share in the Work

Early Christians continued steadfastly in worship, which included “fellowship” (Acts 2:42). Fellowship means sharing, joint participation, communion. Congregations need members who join together or cooperate in the work. This includes church meetings.

Acts 4:23 — With whom did the apostles meet? What work did they accomplish (vv 24,31,32)?

Note that they recognized the group as “their own.” This sense of belonging expressed itself in meeting and working together.

Acts 9:26-29 — What did Saul do when he moved to Jerusalem? After the church had received him, what did he do? (18:27,28)

Note the pattern: Christians need to *join* the disciples (v26), be *with* the disciples (v28), then *work* with the disciples (v29).

Ephesians 4:16 — What should the parts of the body be doing? How many parts of the body should participate? (Rom. 12:4-8)

Each Christian should be “part” of the body, then they should “work,” doing their “share” (fellowship) so the body can grow. When some parts do not do their share, the whole body suffers.

B. Members Should Desire to Serve One Another.

Galatians 5:13; 6:2 — What should we do for one another?

1 Corinthians 10:24 — Whose well-being should concern you?

1 Peter 4:10 — What is a steward? What does stewardship require us to do with the blessings we received from God?

Ephesians 4:12 — What works should the church accomplish?

Summary: The church exists so members can serve one another and build up the body. Members should want to actively serve in this work. Note that nothing we have discussed here is limited to any particular day of the week or number of assemblies.

C. Applications to Attendance

Assemblies are among the main opportunities the church provides for members to share (participate) in the work.

* What works have we already studied that members can participate in when they attend?

* How do the announcements “equip us for service”? List some ways they help us know the needs of members and know about church activities so we can be involved.

Think: If members want to share in the work, should they neglect the assemblies or should they attend regularly? True, there is work to do outside the assemblies, but how many people who habitually neglect coming and yet are still deeply involved in the work?

People who are negligent in attendance often “do not feel part of the group.”

Even in a friendly and caring congregation, some members say, “We just don’t feel part of things. We don’t feel included.” Yet usually these people have not been regularly attending the services, and when invited to participate in the work, they often decline.

Review Acts 9:26-29. What did Saul do to be “part of the group”?

Think: If an employee at work or student at school attends only 1/2 to 1/4 of the scheduled meetings, will he feel part of the group? If a child participates in only 1/3 or 1/4 of family activities, will he/she feel part of the group?

If people “do not feel part of the group,” what can do to help solve that problem?

V. Leadership

A proper view of attendance requires understanding Bible authority and church leadership.

A. The Principle of General and Specific Authority

Anything the church practices must be authorized in the gospel (Matt. 15:9,13; Gal. 1:8,9; 2 John 9-11; Jer. 10:23; Prov. 14:12; 3:5,6; Rev. 22:18,19). But what about acts that are not expressly or specifically mentioned one way or the other?

Statement of the principle

When God wants man to do a thing in a particular way, He instructs us with words that are specific or narrow in meaning. We must not practice things that do not fit His meaning. So, when He wants a thing done in a particular way, He words His instructions so as to leave us no choice (“specific authority”).

*When God wants to leave men free to choose from several alternative ways of doing a thing, He uses words that are more general or broad in meaning. We must still do only what fits His meaning, but there may be various ways of doing what fits. We must then **make decisions** to choose a course that fits what God said to do (“general authority”). Any such choice would be acceptable.*

Applications of the Principles

Genesis 6:14 — *Noah and the ark.* What material did God say to use for the ark? Would metal or walnut have been acceptable?

Is a hammer or saw specifically mentioned? If Noah used them, would he be disobedient? Were there decisions Noah had to make?

Mark 16:15 — *Going to preach the gospel.* What must we preach? May we preach man-made doctrines?

May we “go” in a car or plane? Are these specifically mentioned? May humans make decisions in carrying out these commands?

Conclusion: Many similar applications can be made regarding baptism, singing, the Lord’s supper, etc. All activity must be **authorized** by God,

but it need not be *specifically mentioned*. We need only be doing what fits the meaning of God's word.

In matters of "general authority," there are **decisions that humans must make**. Doing this is not violating God's will but just carrying out His commands. In particular, there are many decisions that must be made regarding church assemblies. Who should make these decisions?

B. The Principle of Leadership

For a group to work with unity and cooperation, there must be leadership to make decisions. Therefore, in every institution that God has ordained, He has also ordained a plan for leaders.

Ephesians 5:22-25; 6:1,4 — Who leads in the home? If the wife (or children) refuses to follow the husband's (or parents') decisions, are they disobeying just other people or are they disobeying God too?

1 Peter 2:13,14 — Who makes decisions in a nation? If citizens refuse to follow, are they disobeying just the rulers? (Rom. 13:1-5)

Conclusion: God has work for His institutions to do. Decisions must be made in order for that work to be done, so God has ordained leaders to make the decisions. Others in the group must follow the decisions. When people refuse to cooperate, they are not just rejecting *human* authority. They are hindering *God's* work. These principles also apply in the church.

C. Leadership in the Church

God ordained elders to lead local churches.

Acts 14:23 — To what position were men appointed? How many churches should have these leaders? (Note that the men appointed must first have certain qualifications — 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9.)

1 Peter 5:1,2 — What work do elders do?

Hebrews 13:17 — What is the responsibility of members toward those who rule over them?

Conclusion: Elders should "rule," and other members should follow. We may disobey only if they lead the church to practice sin (Acts 5:29). This is God's ordained way for churches to make decisions and obtain cooperation. (Acts 20:28; 1 Tim. 5:17; Heb. 13:7)

God has given men authority in the church.

1 Corinthians 14:34; 1 Timothy 2:11,12

— What position do women have compared to men in the church? May women exercise authority over men in church meetings or Bible studies?

Men should lead women in the church. Men should be subject to the elders; but if there are no elders, the men still must make decisions.

Think: When the leaders make a decision, how many members of the group must follow the decision in order to have unity and cooperation?

Ephesians 5:21; 1 Peter 5:5 — How should members treat one another? What attitude should we show toward one another?

Think: Suppose a congregation has elders and they make a decision, but one of the elders prefers a different decision. Must he abide by the elders' decision? What is required for unity and cooperation?

Suppose a church has no elders. When the men make decisions, must a man submit even if he prefers different decisions? What is required for unity and cooperation?

Conclusion: When general teaching of Scripture authorizes a work, and when the leaders in the church (elders or men) make a decision, then all the members, including the leaders, must follow the decision for the sake of unity and cooperation. Anyone who insists on his own way is not submissive and humble.

Members should also imitate the good example of the leaders.

For each passage listed below, tell whose example we should imitate:

1 Peter 5:3 —

Hebrews 6:11,12; 13:7 —

Leaders in the church are decision-makers and example setters. Members should follow both their decisions and their example.

D. Applications to Attendance

In summary, the church has *general* authority to meet more than once a week and on days other than the first day of the week. God has ordained leaders in the church to decide the number and times of meetings that they believe **would best meet the needs of the members**. All members should then follow those decisions in order to participate in the work God has commanded.

Consider some specific decisions that must be made regarding church assemblies.

For each case listed below, ask these questions: (1) Is this person being submissive to the leaders? (2) Is he following the example of Jesus and of godly elders? (3) Is he being cooperative and like-minded? If this were an organization such as a business or school, would such conduct be considered cooperative? (4) Does he act as though he really wants to study, teach, and praise God?

* Suppose a church (led by elders or men) chooses Sunday at 10:30 AM to meet for the Lord's Supper, but someone says the time is a human decision that he does not have to follow. So instead he comes at 2:30 PM. Is he being submissive, etc.?

* The church (led by elders or men) chooses to rent or buy a building to meet in, but a member of that church says that's a human decision, so he goes instead to some other place he chooses.

* The church appoints certain men to lead singing, prayers, preaching, etc., but a member says these choices are human decisions, so he appoints other men to suit himself.

* The leaders establish guidelines for the length of meetings (time limit on classes, number of different activities in the assembly, etc.). But a member says this is a human decision, so he consistently comes late or leaves early. Is he being submissive, etc.? Would this be acceptable on the job or at school?

* Now consider the **number** of assemblies each week for edification or praise. The elders or men appoint a certain number of assemblies each week. But a member says those are human decisions and he will come whenever he chooses. Is he being submissive, cooperative, etc.? Would this be acceptable on the job or at school?

In each of the above situations, what should a cooperative, willing worker do to follow the leaders?

E. A Summary Passage — Eph. 4:11-16

V11 — What leaders did God place in the church?

V12 — What work do these men lead the church in doing?

Vv 13-15 — What purposes or goals should be accomplished by the work the church does?

Conclusion: God ordained leaders to supervise the work to build up the members to achieve maturity and unity. But much of this work is done in assemblies. It follows that *the leaders should provide as many assemblies as they believe are needed so the church can grow and mature.*

V16 — How many members must do their share so the body can grow and build itself up?

The work is effective when every member willingly cooperates, following the leaders. A member who will not carry out the decisions of the leaders is not being cooperative, not working for unity, not building up the body, and not following the leaders.

Since much of this work is done in assemblies, it follows that **every part** of the body should arrange his schedule to be present as much as he possibly can.

VI. Proper Example and Influence

Christians should teach and edify others, but we teach by what we do as well as by what we say.

A. Passages about Influence

Matthew 5:13-16 — Explain what these illustrations teach. What should our conduct lead others to do?

Think: Since glorifying God is a major purpose of our assemblies, do we lead people to glorify God when we attend or when we do not?

1 Timothy 4:12 — In what ways should we be an example? Would this include setting a good example regarding attendance?

Matthew 18:6,7 — What is our condition if we cause one who believes in Jesus to sin?

Think: Suppose our example leads people to conclude that attendance is not very important, so they are lost for lack of instruction. What is our condition before God? (Titus 2:7,8; 1 Peter 2:11,12; 3:15,16; Phil. 2:15,16)

B. People Who May Be Influenced by Our Example

Consider some specific people who may be affected by our example. All these are people who need to attend church meetings. Does our example encourage them to attend or discourage them?

People who are not members

Think: Shouldn't we teach people in the world to live for God? Suppose a friend of yours comes to a Sunday night or mid-week meeting, and you habitually are not there. Will your example help or hinder efforts to convert them? (2 Cor. 6:3)

New converts

Think: Do new converts need frequent instruction and encouragement? Would you advise them to come regularly or not? What does your example say?

Children

Ephesians 6:4 — What responsibility do parents have in training their children? Are children influenced just by our instruction or also by our conduct? (2 Tim. 1:5; Ezek. 16:44; Neh. 13:23,24).

Many parents neglect attendance when their children are young, so their children grow to be unfaithful. Later the parents repent and come regularly, but it is too late to save their children. How sad!

Think: Christians should live so other people can imitate us and have the hope of eternal life. Suppose everyone in the church were to imitate your example. What would happen to our Bible classes on Sunday or Wednesday? What would happen to Sunday evening meetings or Gospel meetings? Would everyone be there, or would no one be there?

VII. Commitment And Sacrifice

Christians should desire to learn and teach God's word, praise God, and cooperate in submission to the leaders. But some want to do as little as possible. Others let frivolous and minor excuses hinder them. How great a priority should attendance be?

A. Serving God Should Be a Commitment of Highest Priority.

Passages to consider

For each passage below, ask: If a person has this commitment, will he attend regularly or will he let minor matters hinder him?

Matthew 22:36-38; John 14:15 — What is the greatest command? What will love motivate us to do? Are we serving God with all our heart, etc., when we try to get by with minimal service?

1 Corinthians 15:58 — What should characterize our work for the Lord? How will "abundant, steadfast" work affect our attendance?

Revelation 3:15,16,19 — What will God do with one who is lukewarm? Is a person lukewarm if he serves a little, but not much?

Consider: The wrong body temperature is a symptom of disease. Likewise negligent attendance is a symptom of spiritual disease. If one has little zeal for studying, teaching, or praying, will he have much interest in attending? A person who is lukewarm in attendance is almost always lukewarm in other ways.

Matthew 6:33 — What should be our top priority? If righteousness and the work of the kingdom are our top priorities, how will that affect attendance?

2 Corinthians 8:5,12 — Why did the Macedonians give generously? Who finds it easier to spend a few hours a week in church meetings: the person who gives His life to God, or the person who wants to keep his life for himself?

Note v12: Does God require acts that are beyond our ability? If we cannot do them, what attitude does He still require?

Consider an illustration.

Most people consider job attendance to be a high priority. If God's work is our top priority, if a

circumstance would not hinder us from job attendance, why should that same circumstance hinder us from worship assemblies? This can become a test to help us determine what constitutes a valid reason for not coming. (2 Cor. 8:12)

Consider each of the following examples. Ask first if the circumstance would keep you from going to work. Then ask if it should keep you from attending church meetings under the same circumstances?

* Serious illness

* A sick child (Would you stay home too if your spouse was home to care for them?)

* Company comes to visit or you are invited to someone's house

* You have work to do on your house

* You don't have transportation

If, in a certain set of circumstances, a person would go to work, and if serving the Lord is his highest priority in life, then surely in the very same circumstances he should attend the church meetings.

(Col. 3:1,2; 2 Peter 3:11,14,17,18; 1 Tim. 4:15; John 2:17; 1 Cor. 6:19,20; Titus 2:11-14)

B. We Should Sacrifice to Serve God.

Some people think that everything about church meetings should be pleasant and without hardship. Some expect a continual emotional high. Otherwise they see no point in coming.

Consider the Bible teaching about sacrifices. A sacrifice involves giving up something of great value in order to achieve something of greater value. A sacrifice is often unpleasant, but we do it because of the higher end that is achieved.

Ephesians 5:2; Hebrews 12:2 — What sacrifice is described here? Was Jesus' death pleasant and emotionally uplifting? Why did He endure it?

Think: Jesus' sacrifice required Him to give His life so we would be saved. If we appreciate what He did, what sacrifices should we make to worship Him?

Matthew 16:24,25; Romans 12:1,2 — What sacrifice does Jesus require of us? Is this always pleasant? What will we receive if we make the sacrifice? What if we refuse? Would Jesus be regular in attending all church meetings? (1 Peter 2:21; Phil. 2:5; 1 John 2:6)

1 Peter 2:5; Hebrews 13:15 — What sacrifices are offered by those in God's spiritual house? How does worship fit the idea of a sacrifice?

Consider: Many things about worship should be very pleasant to a Christian, but we must be willing to come even when it is unpleasant and upsetting. Christians have been persecuted for worshipping. Some worshipped in catacombs. Wives have been beaten by their husbands for coming. If we are not willing to sacrifice, will God be pleased with our worship?

Malachi 1:6-8,13,14 — What kind of sacrifices did the law require? In what ways were these people refusing to sacrifice? What did God say about it?

Think: Are we willing to make the relatively small sacrifices that are required of us? Will we lose an hour's sleep to get up earlier for Bible class on Sunday morning? Arrange our schedules to come back Sunday night or Wednesday? Give up visiting with friends, watching TV, going to a ball game, etc.? Are we like Israel, wanting *cheap* sacrifices?

Conclusion: We "want" to worship God and are glad to do it, not because it is always easy and painless, but because the end result is worth it. If we are having difficulty making sacrifices to attend church meetings, we should be like Jesus. Stop focusing on what we are giving up and start focusing on the end result. (Gal. 2:20; Phil. 3:6-15; John 16:21)

VIII. Strength, Growth, And Faithfulness

Christians should study and pray at home. Why do we also need to *meet*? When we understand why God developed the concept of the church and meeting together, then we will understand why we should be there for every opportunity the church gives us.

A. Attendance Promotes Strength and Faith.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 — What are the advantages of two being together? Note that these advantages increase with greater numbers.

Romans 1:12; Psalm 119:63 — How could Paul and the Romans help one another? With whom will a godly person seek companionship? If godly people are my companions, wouldn't I want to be with them in church meetings?

Consider: We are daily saddened and discouraged by the spiritual indifference, immorality, and error of people around us. Being with Christians strengthens us and gives courage to face the world.

1 Thessalonians 4:18; 5:11 — What should we do for one another? Do we do this in our assemblies?

Consider: Studying God's word together gives strength. Alone we may fail to see our weaknesses, or we may lack strength to stand for truth, but other Christians help us do better. This is the advantage of a "one another" relationship. (Col. 2:19; Eph. 4:12,16)

James 5:16 — How can we help one another with our sins? Do we do this in our assemblies?

We are stronger when we work together, not alone. That is why the Lord established the church and ordained church meetings. We strengthen one another and help one another face the hardships of life and remain faithful. (Rom. 1:21)

B. Attendance Promotes Growth

2 Peter 3:18 — In what ways should Christians grow? How can attending church meetings help this?

1 Peter 2:2 — Why do babies need milk? Will a baby grow if it frequently misses feeding times?

Ephesians 4:11-16 — What expressions in these verses pertain to growing? How does the church help in this? How many parts of the body should be involved in this work (v16)?

Too many Christians are trying to "go it alone" spiritually. God knows that strength and

growth come by being with other Christians, so He ordained group responsibilities, including attending assemblies.

C. A Summary Passage — Hebrews

Hebrews was written to strengthen Hebrew Christians who were in danger of falling away.

Hebrews 2:1-3 — What danger are we warned about? Does this usually happen suddenly?

3:7-11 — What happened to Israel and what did God do about it?

3:12-14 — What can help us avoid falling? Instead of falling, what should we do? How often?

Think: We should exhort one another privately, but the assemblies are appointed for this very purpose. Is the church authorized to schedule more than one meeting a week to meet this need? If members value exhortation, will they make a diligent effort to be there?

Psalm 95:1-11 — This passage (v7-11) is quoted in Heb. 3:7-11. What is the point in the context of the original passage? What should God's people do to avoid falling? List the expressions in the context that relate to worship.

Conclusion: People who neglect worship meetings are depriving themselves of one of God's weapons to help them avoid falling.

Hebrews 4:9-11 — What should we be diligent to do?

Think: Attendance is a fundamental part of God's plan to keep us faithful. What conclusion should we reach about attendance?

Hebrews 10:23-25 — We now have the background to apply this verse. What does v23 admonish us to do? How do we avoid wavering (v24,25)? When and where do we stir one another up?

Note: the subject is still the problem of drifting away (as in chap. 2-4). The reason we should

not forsake church meetings, as some folks do, is that we need them so others and we can stay strong. When we neglect them we leave ourselves defenseless, and we are in the process of falling.

But how often do we need to attend? Does this apply just to one assembly per week? The **principle** taught in the context is: We need to be exhorted regularly and frequently (not just once a week), and the assemblies are one of the major opportunities to do this. Those who want to be strong and growing will want to be there whenever the church provides the opportunity.

Conclusion

Galatians 6:10 — How often should we do good? The church has given us the opportunity to attend meetings to worship God, study His word, and edify one another several times a week. Is this “good” to do? Are you using the opportunity?

Ephesians 5:16 — We should be “Making the most of your time” (NASB). The church provides several opportunities weekly for you to worship God and study His word. Are you making the most of those opportunities?

Giving to Finance Church Work

Introduction:

God has assigned work for local churches of Christ to do. Like other organizations, churches need financial income to accomplish their work. Knowing this, God has authorized churches to obtain funds by taking up collections from the members (1 Cor. 16:1,2; 2 Cor. 8 & 9; Acts 4:32-5:11; 11:27-30; 2:44,45).

Christians should practice many different kinds of giving, but the purpose of this study is to focus on the Christian's responsibility to support the work of the local church financially. Please consider several Bible principles. Read the passages in **bold underline** and answer the questions regarding them.

I. Prosperity & Ability

A. The Old Law Taught Tithing.

Leviticus 27:30-33 — How much did Israel give? Define "tithe." (Genesis 14:20; 28:20-22)

Old Testament tithes supported the Levites (Num. 18:21-32; Mal. 3:7-10). Israelites also gave free-will offerings, taxes, and other gifts to support the religious service and civil government (Ex. 35:29; 1 Chron. 29:1-19; Deut. 12:5-19; 14:22-29).

Hebrews 10:9,10 — Is the old law still binding? Should churches today require Christians to tithe? (See also Rom. 7:1-7; Col. 2:14,16; Gal. 3:24,25.)

Think: The Old Testament nevertheless teaches us useful lessons (1 Cor. 10:6,11; Rom. 15:4). If most people under the law were able to give at least 1/10 of their income to support religious work, why wouldn't the same be true today? Remember this as we study.

B. The New Law Teaches Giving according to Prosperity and Ability.

1 Corinthians 16:1,2 — How should the church obtain funds? How much should members give?

Think: Should the Lord's church raise money by bingo, bake sales, rummages, raffles, etc.?

Think: What does it mean to give as "prospered"? What does "prospering" include: "take-home" pay? "gross pay"? "fringe benefits"? income from investments? income from family-operated business?

Acts 11:29 — How did each person determine how much to give?

Think: If folks have an increase in income, should they continue to give the same amount? Explain. (See also 2 Cor. 8:12; Mark 12:41-44; Matt. 25:14-30.)

Think: Bible principles of giving apply to Christians around the world and in every century. Compared to people in other societies, is the average American relatively poor or relatively wealthy? How should this affect our giving? [Luke 12:48]

II. Stewardship & Sharing

A. We Are Responsible to Share in Church Work.

We should want to give so we can support the work the church does.

Philippians 4:14-18 — What did the church at Philippi use money for? In what sense was this "fellowship" (sharing)?

Note: Local churches today likewise need money so the gospel can be taught in our assemblies and classes, gospel meetings, radio and TV, literature, etc. (See also 1 Tim. 3:15; Acts 11:22-26; 1 Cor. 14; 1 Thess. 1:8; 1 Cor. 9:6-14; 2 Cor. 11:8,9.)

Acts 4:32-35 — What did this local church use money for? (See 11:27-30; 1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8,9.)

To the extent we are able, we should share in the church's work. Remember that the more we can give, the more the church can accomplish. Are you fulfilling your responsibility to share in the church's work?

B. We Are Stewards of God's Possessions.

A steward is a person responsible to use someone else's property to accomplish work for the owner.

Psalms 24:1,2; Haggai 2:8 — Who owns all things? Who gave us “our possessions”?

We “possess” or “own” things only as relates to other people. We have the power to decide how “our possessions” will be used, but other people have that right only for their possessions, not for ours. But in relation to God, He is the real owner, not us. He has the right to control, for He is the Maker.

(Cf. Psalm 50:10,12; 1 Chron. 29:11-14; Deut. 8:11,17,18; 10:14; James 1:17; Job 1:21; Gen. 14:22.)

Think: The Christians in Acts 4:32-35 gave generously because they realized their possessions really belonged to God. How would this same understanding help us to give more generously?

Note: We sometimes think of the church treasury as “the Lord’s money,” but the money in our pocket is also “the Lord’s money.” Giving it to the church just transfers it from one of God’s stewards to another of His stewards. To give it, then, does not do God a favor. It just fulfills our duty as stewards to use God’s possessions for His purposes.

Are you a careful steward of the Lord’s money?

C. This Stewardship Is a Duty of All Christians.

For each passage below, tell who gave money:

Acts 2:44,45 —

Acts 11:29 —

1 Corinthians 16:1,2 —

Note: In most congregations a few members give most of the money, even though others could give more. If you are truly able to give only a small amount, then God is pleased. But if you could give more, yet you just choose to leave the giving up to others, are you a faithful steward?

Could the church accomplish more if you were a better steward?

D. We Will Be Judged for Our Giving.

A property owner has the right to hold a steward accountable for how he uses the property (Luke 16:1,2; 12:42-46; 1 Cor. 4:2).

2 Corinthians 5:10 — When will we be judged for our stewardship in giving?

Are you truly a faithful steward who will be rewarded at that judgment? (Acts 17:31; Rom. 14:12; Matt. 25:31-46).

III. Regularity

A. Give Each First Day of the Week.

1 Corinthians 16:2 — When should we give?

Think: Under the Law of Moses, the Sabbath was remembered on the seventh day of the week (Ex. 20:8-10), so how often was it celebrated?

Think: If your employer said, “You will be paid on the last day of the week,” how often would you expect to be paid?

Think: The New Testament says to have the Lord’s Supper and giving on the “first day of the week” (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2). How often then should we give?

Note: the New American Standard and other translations say “every” first day of every week.

Denominations err when they have the Lord’s Supper once a month or once a year, and they likewise err when they take up collections on weekdays. But what should we conclude about a Christian who could give on a first day of the week, yet he fails to do so?

B. Attendance and Giving

Think: Suppose you prosper such that you ought to give \$50 per week. If you miss a Sunday and just keep the \$50 you should have given, have you obeyed God’s command to give as prospered? Isn’t this like the Israelites who stole from God (cf. Mal. 3:8-10)?

Many members fail to give as prospered because they miss meetings, then do not “make up” later for what they should have given. This is just one of many problems involved in missing church meetings.

Do you give to the church regularly?

IV. Purpose

2 Corinthians 9:7 — How should we give according to this verse?

Think: Should we wait till the plate is passed, then just drop in part of whatever we happen to have with us? Explain your answer.

Acts 11:29 — Who decided how much these people would give?

Think: May the preacher or the elders decide what you should give?

Some people think more carefully about buying a new pair of shoes than they do about giving to the church! Remember, the church has many important works it needs money to accomplish, and your eternal destiny is involved. Study your Bible, meditate on the principles we are studying, analyze your prosperity and ability, then decide how much to give.

At the bottom of this page is a chart to help you plan your giving. It compares dollar income to percentage given. There are other factors to consider, so this may be an oversimplification, but it may still be helpful.

Are you able to give more than most people in other countries can? Are you able to give as much the Old Testament Israelites did? What percentage of your income do you give now? Can you improve?

V. Love, Liberality & Cheerfulness

A. Giving Lovingly.

John 3:16; Galatians 2:20 — How did Jesus and His Father express their love for us?

Scriptural love is an unselfish concern for the well-being of others. It motivates people to give what others need but are unable to do for themselves. (See also John 15:13; 1 Cor. 13:4-7; 1 John 4:9; Eph. 5:2,25.)

2 Corinthians 8:8,24 — What is the connection between our giving and love?

Consider these specific questions:

(1) If you were lost, but the church could teach you if it had the money, how generously would you want the church members to give? “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:39).

(2) If you were a preacher who needed additional income in order to adequately care for your family, how generously would you want members to give? “Do unto others...” (Matt. 7:12)

(3) Do you love brethren who have genuine material needs? “Let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:16-18).

Every good thing you have, physically or spiritually, came from God. Now God asks you to show your love by supporting the church. If you really love God, will you give as little as you can, or will you give as generously as you can?

B. Give Liberally.

James 1:5,17 — How is God’s giving described here? If we appreciate what He has done, how should we respond?

2 Corinthians 8:1,2 — How was the Macedonians’ giving described? (Cf. Rom. 12:8.)

2 Corinthians 9:6 — What must we do to reap bountifully? Explain the illustration.

Contribution as Percent of Weekly Income										
% of Income	Amount of Weekly Income									
	\$100	\$200	\$300	\$400	\$500	\$600	\$700	\$800	\$900	\$1000
3%	\$3	6	9	12	15	18	21	24	27	30
5%	5	10	15	20	25	30	35	40	45	50
7%	7	14	21	28	35	42	49	56	63	70
10%	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
- 1	12	24	36	48	60	72	84	96	108	120
15%	15	30	45	60	75	90	105	120	135	150
17%	17	34	51	68	85	102	119	136	153	170
20%	20	40	60	80	100	120	140	160	180	200
25%	25	50	75	100	125	150	175	200	225	250

Think: What do we want to reap (Gal. 6:8)? Do we want a bountiful harvest, or a sparing one? Can we reap that harvest by being stingy in our giving? Are you sowing sparingly or bountifully?

C. Give Cheerfully.

2 Corinthians 8:12, 9:7 — How do these verses describe our giving?

Think: Should we grieve over what we have given, feeling sorry for ourselves, regretting all the things we could have done with that money? Should we give because someone pressured or embarrassed us, or because we consider it a privilege to give?

Acts 20:35 — Who is blessed the most when we give?

Think: Why did God plan His work so that we must give in order to accomplish that work? Couldn't He have done it without our gifts?

Surely God does not need our gifts. Giving is for our good! We get out of something only according to what we put into it. The reason many people get so little out of their religion is that they put so little into it. To really be blessed in God's service, we must give of ourselves.

(See also Phil. 4:14–18; Mark 10:29,30; Luke 6:38; Prov. 11:24,25; Mal. 3:10.)

VI. Sacrifice

A. God Sacrificed Much for Us.

John 3:16 — What sacrifice did the Father make for us?

John 15:13 — What sacrifice did Jesus make?

God did not keep His best possessions for Himself, giving us leftovers that had little value to Him. He gave the best He had, though it cost Him great pain and sacrifice.

(See also Phil. 2:5-8; Rom. 6:23; 8:32 1 Tim. 2:6; Gal. 1:4; 2:20; Titus 2:14.)

B. We Should also Sacrifice.

2 Corinthians 8:9 — Whose giving is an example to us?

2 Corinthians 8:1-4 — In what way are the Macedonians an example to us?

Mark 12:41-44 — Why was this widow commended?

Think: Is God impressed by the size of our gift or by the degree of our sacrifice?

The gospel does not require us to give all we have (cf. Acts 5:4), but it does require sacrifice. We should give enough that we feel the effect because we are sacrificing things of real value to us.

Are there things that you really would like to have, and you could afford them were it not for the fact that you gave to the church? Does our giving to God show sacrifice for Him as He sacrificed for us?

(See also Mal. 1:13,14; Phil. 4:18; Rom. 12:1; Gen. 4:4; 2 Sam. 24:24; Phil. 2:5-8.)

VII. Priorities & Total Commitment

A. Serving God Must Be Our Highest Priority in Life.

Matthew 6:19-24,33 — Where should we lay up treasure? Will God take second place in our lives? What should be our greatest priority in life?

Think: The Bible often warns that material things can be a very corrupting influence (1 Tim. 6:6-10,17-19; Luke 12:15-21; Deut. 8:11-18; Matt. 19:23,24; 1 John 2:15ff). What is our condition if the way we live is determined more by our desire for material things than by our desire to please God?

Matthew 16:24-27 — What should we deny, and what should we be willing to give up in order to follow Jesus?

Think: Are we, like typical Americans, so concerned about material things that our desires keep us from giving as we should?

2 Corinthians 8:5 — Why did the Macedonians give generously? What does this tell us if we are not willing to give generously? (cf. Rom. 12:1; Gal. 2:20)

Think: Are people usually willing to sacrifice for things that are really important to them? If we give our lives to God so that serving Him becomes

the most important thing in our lives, how will that affect our giving?

B. Consider Your Priorities.

Each of us should study our finances in light of our priorities. If serving God is your highest priority, then it should show in the way you spend your money. Budgeting involves studying what we spend in order to make sure we spend wisely for that which is most important. It is helpful even to write down what we typically spend money for, like this:

- \$ _____ — Church contribution
- \$ _____ — Housing (mortgage or rent, utilities, etc.)
- \$ _____ — Clothing
- \$ _____ — Taxes
- \$ _____ — Food
- \$ _____ — Transportation
- \$ _____ — Recreation, entertainment (sports, TV, vacation, movies, etc.)
- \$ _____ — Other expenses

Fill in the blanks above with the amounts that you typically spend weekly or monthly. Remember that providing necessities is part of our duty to God (2 Thess. 3:10; 1 Tim. 5:8; 6:8; Gen. 3:17-19). Luxuries, however, are items that may not be sinful of themselves, but we buy them to please ourselves and others, not to please God.

Some say, "I'd give more, but I can't because I have so many bills to pay." But what are your bills for? Often we buy to please ourselves because we want the things other people have, then we do not give as we prospered because we "have so many bills to pay"!

If you considered your priorities more carefully, would you be paying less for personal desires and giving to the church more generously? Is God really first in your life if you are spending more on recreation and entertainment than you are giving to the church (cf. 2 Tim. 3:4)?

Studying your finances can help you evaluate your income (prosperity) and expenses in light of

your priorities. This will help you purpose what to give. Does your giving reflect proper priorities and commitment in your life?

Conclusion

There are many ways to give of ourselves in God's service besides just giving money to support the church. Nevertheless, giving to the church is a fundamental duty of all Christians.

We will conclude by listing some questions Christians should consider to help them determine whether their giving is pleasing to God.

1. How much am I sacrificing to support God's work? How much am I really giving up in comparison to what I have left?

2. Am I carrying my fair share of the responsibility to support the work of the church, or am I leaving this up to others when I really could be giving more?

3. Am I seeking to give as much as I can, or do I try to "get by" with giving just a little to the Lord and spending the rest to please my family and myself?

4. How does my church contribution compare to other items in my budget? Does my giving indicate that the church and service to God are really the most important things in life to me?

5. Do I give the way I would want other people to give if they were giving to meet my need — if I were the lost person who needed to hear the gospel, or if I were the preacher or the Christian in need?

6. Do I give as much as Jesus would give if He were in my place? If He had my income and my family obligations, would He give more? (1 Pet. 2:21)

7. How much would I give each Sunday if I had to personally put the gift into the nail-pierced hand of Jesus Himself? Would I give more than I do now? Would I feel ashamed of what I give now? Remember, whatever I am giving now, He does know, and He will judge me for it.

Is God pleased with your giving?

Human Relationships

Introduction:

Each person has relationships that originate, not because he is a Christian, but simply because he is a human being. Examples include the family, civil government, business relationships, etc. In our society these relationships are frequently troubled, so we should appreciate any means for improving them.

The purpose of this lesson is to examine the Bible teaching regarding human relationships. God ordained most of these relationships; and since He is all-wise, His word provides our best source of guidance regarding them.

The basic Bible principle regulating all human relationships is **love**.

Matthew 22:39 — The second-greatest command is to love your neighbor as yourself.

Matthew 7:12 — Do to others as you would have them do to you.

1 John 3:16-18 — Love requires that we **do** what is best for others (cf. 1 Cor. 13:4-7).

Romans 13:8-10 — Never do harm to others.

When we possess Biblical love, we will obey all God's commands with a sincere concern for what is best for God and man (John 14:15; 1 John 5:2,3; 2:3-6). Love means, not just that we do what we think is best, but that we let God's word tell us what is best.

As you study the following material, please look up all **passages typed in bold underline** and answer the questions.

I. The Family Relationship

Many families today are clearly troubled. Alienation often exists between husband and wife, between parents and children, or among brothers and sisters. Bitterness, quarreling, violence, or divorce may result. What is God's plan for proper family relationships?

A. The Husband's Responsibilities to His Wife

The husband should be committed to the marriage for life.

Multitudes of marriages in our society end in divorce. Consider the Bible teaching.

Romans 7:2,3 — How long are husband and wife bound? When may one remarry? What is the condition of one who remarries while his or her spouse is still living?

Matthew 19:3-9 — What grounds are permitted for divorce? What is one's condition if he divorces for another reason then remarries?

Think: Define "adultery"? Why is an unscriptural remarriage called "adultery"?

Man should enter marriage fully realizing that it is a lifetime commitment. Divorce without Scriptural grounds should never be considered nor discussed as an option. If one is involved in an unscriptural remarriage, he must leave it to cease adultery and be forgiven (cf. 1 Cor. 7:10,11). (Note Mal. 2:14-16; Matt. 5:31,32.)

The husband should love his wife.

Some men act selfishly or abuse their wives, but consider what the Bible teaches.

Ephesians 5:25-31,33 — A man's love for the wife is compared to what?

Think: What lessons should husbands learn from Jesus' love for the church? Was Jesus' love an emotional, romantic mood He "fell into" because people were so attractive to Him, or was it a commitment He made by His own good will toward us?

A husband should be committed to doing good for his wife, even if she is not acting lovingly toward him nor attracting him romantically. He must do good even at the cost of serious personal sacrifice.

1 Peter 3:7 — How should a man treat his wife? Explain each of the concepts described in this verse.

Think: How does a man dwell with his wife according to knowledge? Give specific applications.

1 Corinthians 7:3-5 — What aspect of love is described here?

Jesus expressed love for the church both by words and by deeds. If a husband properly loves his wife, he will tell her so, but he will also show it by his actions. (Col. 3:19)

The husband should provide for the family's physical needs.

Many families go without necessities because men quit their jobs for frivolous reasons or waste their income selfishly.

Genesis 3:17-19 — What work requirements were given to the man? (Cf. 2 Thess. 3:10.)

1 Timothy 5:8 — For whom is the man obligated to provide? What is his condition if He will not?

Think: Name some Bible examples of occupations or businesses men had outside the home. (See also Eph. 5:28,29).

God gave man the duty to provide for the family. Nowhere does the Bible give such a command to the wife. Man should not neglect his other responsibilities by over-emphasizing work. Yet one who neglects to work, but expects his wife or someone else to provide income for his family, is worse than an infidel.

The husband should be the head of the family.

Some claim that a man should not have authority over his wife or his authority should be limited to certain areas. In practice, wives often take the lead in making family decisions. But note:

Ephesians 5:22-24 — How is the husband like Christ?

Think: Should the wife, her parents, or the man's parents be the head of the family? Cf. Gen. 2:24.

Love will lead a husband to consider the needs and desires of the wife and children. He will make decisions for the good of the whole group, not just to please himself. This requires discussion at times to understand the views of others. However, the husband does have final authority. (Note verses below).

Often this responsibility is not a privilege but a burden. Some men are not willing to make tough decisions and stand up for what they are convinced is best, knowing the wife or children disagree. Yet men must remember they will give account to God for the leadership they exercise in the family.

If the wife fails to fulfill her duties, this does not justify the husband in failing to fulfill his duties (Romans 12:17-21; Luke 6:27-35).

B. The Wife's Responsibilities to Her Husband

The wife too should have a lifetime commitment to the marriage.

Neither the man nor the woman has the right to end the marriage while their spouse is alive, except for the cause of fornication. (See passages listed above.)

The wife should love her husband.

Modern feminists say a woman does not need a man but should find fulfillment outside marriage. Consider what the Bible says.

Genesis 2:18-24 — Why was woman created?

A woman is not required to marry (see 1 Cor. 7), but by nature she finds her greatest fulfillment in life by loving and caring for a family. (See also Mal. 2:14.)

Titus 2:4 — What should young women be taught to do?

Note that a woman can learn to show love. Again, this is a matter of choice and commitment, not primarily a romantic mood.

The wife should also show affection and fulfill her husband's sexual needs (1 Corinthians 7:3-5).

The wife should submit to the headship of the husband.

We have learned that God teaches husbands to use their authority in love. Though our society may protest and rebel, He also tells wives to submit to their husbands.

Ephesians 5:22-24,33 — What illustrates the wife's subjection? Should the church be rebellious or respectful to Christ? How many of her husband's decisions must a wife abide by?

The wife may disobey her husband only if he commands her to violate God's law (Acts 5:29).

Titus 2:5 — What should young women be taught?

This does not mean woman has less ability or less value than man (cf. 1 Peter 3:7; Matt. 20:25-28; Gal. 3:28). But someone must be in charge to make decisions in the home. God has determined that this responsibility belongs to the man. (See also Gen. 3:16; Col. 3:18; 1 Peter 3:1-6; 1 Cor. 11:3)

The wife should work at home caring for her family.

Our society places little value on the work of homemakers. Instead it encourages women to neglect their family responsibilities to do things God never required them to do.

Titus 2:4,5; 1 Timothy 5:14 — Where should mothers work, and what work should they do?

Note that this work is a blessing and should be valued and appreciated (cf. Psalm 113:9).

Think: Consider the responsibilities of a mother in the family, the church, Bible study, teaching others, benevolence, hospitality, etc. Is it not true that outside jobs and similar activities often hinder wives and mothers from fulfilling duties that God requires of them? Specifically, where is the authority for a family to enroll their children in day-care so the wife can make money?

We learned that providing family income is a responsibility God gave the husband. There may be emergency exceptions (as when the husband has died or is disabled), but generally a mother should not neglect her God-given duties nor give them to other people so she can fulfill roles God never gave her.

It follows that the husband and wife have distinct roles. God gave them separate duties and gave each a nature best suited to those duties. To blur these distinctions or to deny they exist is to disobey God. For both the husband and the wife, the greatest satisfaction in marriage comes when they follow God's plan.

Again, the husband's failure to properly fulfill his duties does not justify the wife in failing to fulfill her duties (Rom. 12:17-21; 1 Peter 3:1,2; Luke 6:27-35).

C. The Parents' Responsibilities to Their Children

Society continually undermines the right of parents to train and supervise their children. Entertainment, government agencies, peers, and schools may lead children to think they can "do their own thing." Yet when the children do wrong, these same groups immediately blame parents!

Parents should love their children.

Society tells parents to let other people train their children and even to kill "unwanted" babies before they are born. As a result, children are often neglected, abused, or abandoned.

Titus 2:4 — Whom should young women learn to love?

Children are a blessing from God, not an unwanted burden (Psalm 127:3-5; 128:1-4). Parents who love their children will do what is best for them. This requires taking quality and quantity time with children. Abusing and neglecting children is not love.

Parents should train children to know and obey God's will.

Few children are truly taught to love God. Even in the Lord's church, the majority of children do not become faithful Christians.

Ephesians 6:4 — What duty do fathers have?

This duty includes bringing the children to all meetings of the church, and also teaching them God's word at home (Deut. 6:6-9). Training children is primarily the work of parents, rather than the church. When children grow up without a knowledge of God and His will, the parents will give account. (See also Prov. 22:6; Gen. 18:19; Deut. 4:9,10; 1 Sam. 2:22-25; 3:13; 2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15.)

Parents should punish and reward children as needed to motivate them to do good.

Spanking and all forms of punishment are despised by our society. Yet God has spoken:

Hebrews 12:5-11 — When fathers chastise children, whose example are they following? Why should children be chastised? Will this help or hinder the children's respect for authority?

Proverbs 13:24; 23:13,14 — Is spanking contrary to love? What good can it produce for the child?

Think: Should parents spank because they have lost their temper or to satisfy a lust for power? How important are consistency and fairness to children?

Inconsistency provokes the child to anger (Eph. 6:4). The father and mother should work in harmony (Matt. 12:25). Children must be treated without favoritism (James 2:8,9). Parents should

keep their promises, including the promise to punish (James 5:12).

God will hold accountable parents who do not discipline their children (1 Sam. 3:13). Instead of following society's ungodly philosophies about child rearing, Christians need to fight those concepts with every upright weapon at our disposal. Families that follow God's word will truly be blessed.

(Col. 3:21; Matt. 23:23; Prov. 22:15; 19:18.)

D. The Children's Responsibilities to Their Parents

Children should listen to parents' instruction.

Society encourages children to disregard their parents' teachings and make their own choices. Young people often think their parents are unreasonable or do not understand.

Proverbs 6:20-23 — How should children treat parental instruction?

Parents are older and more experienced. They may not be perfect, yet they are wiser, so God put them in charge. (See also Prov. 1:8; 15:5; 23:22.)

Children should respect their parents.

Many young people mock, ridicule, and flaunt their parents. Such conduct is encouraged by many aspects of society and is ignored by many parents.

Ephesians 6:2,3 — How should children view parents?

Generally parents deserve respect because they have done much good for the children. In any case, God deserves respect, and He tells children to honor their parents. This requires respectful speech and attitudes. (Cf. Matt. 15:4; Prov. 6:20-23; 15:5; 23:22.)

Children should obey their parents.

Rebellion is admired and encouraged by many. Acts that parents have disapproved are yet practiced, because "everybody's doing it," etc. Some folks accept such conduct as inevitable. What does God say?

Ephesians 6:1 — What should children do for parents? Why?

Luke 2:51 — What example did Jesus set?

Romans 1:30,32 — What is the condition of those who disobey parents or who encourage such?

Children should obey all parental instructions unless they are told to do something sinful (Acts 5:29).

If parents have made mistakes or sinned, that does not justify disobedience by the children (Rom. 12:17-21; Luke 6:27-35; Deut. 21:18-21; Col. 3:20).

Children should care for elderly parents.

Elderly people today are often neglected or placed in nursing homes, not because this is really needed for the proper care of the parent, but because the children do not want to be bothered.

1 Timothy 5:4,8,16 — What should children do for elderly parents? What is their condition if they neglect this work?

(Cf. Matt. 15:4-6; Ruth 4:13-15; John 19:25-27.)

Making happy homes is not easy, especially in a corrupt society. But God's plan is always best, and the homes that learn and do His will are the ones that accomplish the most good.

II. Civil Government

Civil government faces major turmoil. Often innocent people are penalized or treated unfairly while criminals escape punishment. How should a Christian act toward government in times like this?

A. Christians Should Obey the Laws.

Some people believe they are justified in disobeying government because laws are unfair and officials are corrupt. They justify "civil disobedience" to any law they consider to be unjust.

Romans 13:1-5 — How should we act toward governing authorities? Why? What are the consequences if we disobey?

Think: Explain "for conscience' sake" (v5)?

1 Peter 2:13,14 — Why do governments exist? What is our duty toward them? What if we disobey? How many laws must we obey?

Think: Does this apply to income tax laws? Traffic laws? Other laws we consider to be unreasonable?

Acts 5:29 — In what circumstances may we disobey civil law?

Note: First-century rulers, both Roman and Jewish, were corrupt and unjust. Often Christians were mistreated and persecuted, but this did not justify disobedience. Laws could be disobeyed only when necessary in order obey God.

(See also Titus 3:1; Dan. 3:1-29; 6:1-24.)

B. Christians Should Pay Their Taxes.

Matthew 22:17-21 — What question was Jesus asked, and how did He respond?

Some people cheat on taxes or even refuse to pay. They may justify themselves on grounds that the government is corrupt. But the Roman government was corrupt and hated by Jews, yet Jesus still taught His disciples to pay their taxes. Again, we must return good for evil, not evil for evil (Rom. 12:17-21). (See also Rom. 13:6,7; Matt. 17:24-27.)

C. Christians May Rebuke Sinful Rulers or Appeal to Higher Authorities.

Obedience to law does not mean Christians never tell rulers when they are wrong and passively accept mistreatment without recourse.

Examples in which God's people rebuked rulers for sin.

When preachers and churches rebuke evil laws or sinful rulers, some people say we "should not be involved in politics." Yet the Scriptures teach Christians to rebuke sin wherever it occurs (Rev. 3:19; Eph. 5:11; 2 Tim. 4:2-4). This includes rebuking sinful rulers.

In each of the following examples, describe what wrong the ruler did and tell who rebuked him.

Matthew 14:1-4 —

Acts 24:25 —

2 Samuel 12:1-15 —

Christians today ought to speak out when government permits or promotes immoral con-

duct such as abortion, homosexuality, pornography, divorce, and gambling. (Cf. 1 Kings 13:1-5; Dan. 4:1-37.)

This does not mean churches, as such, should endorse candidates or support political campaigns. Nor should individual Christians take the law into their own hands. Although people of God in the Bible protested immoral laws and evil conduct by rulers, yet they did not participate in revolutions nor practice violence against the rulers. They obeyed the laws except when the laws required them to disobey God, yet they told the rulers when they were wrong.

Examples in which God's people used their rights for protection from mistreatment.

Esther 7:1-6 — What plot was made against the Jews? What did Esther do about it?

Acts 22:24-29; Acts 23:12-33 — How was Paul about to be treated in these cases? What did he do about it? (Cf. 16:35-40.)

Acts 25:10-12 — To whom did Paul appeal for justice? Why?

While Christians must obey law, they should tell rulers when they are wrong, and they may use their rights as citizens to seek protection by the government or to appeal decisions to higher authorities. This may include voting and writing letters to officials.

D. Christians Should Pray for Rulers.

1 Timothy 2:1,2 — For whom should we pray? Why?

Prayer is one of the strongest forces a Christian has for the good of his country. We should pray that government will not hinder our service to God but that we may serve God in peace.

(Esth. 4:15-17; Neh. 1:11-2:5; 1 Chron. 29:19)

III. Business Relationships

Serious problems exist in business. Employees are sometimes paid inadequately or treated unfairly. Yet employees themselves are often lazy or even steal from the company. Some companies are dishonest, misrepresenting their product or charging for work not done.

How should Christians act in business?

A. Christians Should Work Diligently and Obey Their Supervisors.

Ephesians 6:5-8 — How should servants work?

Think: If our employer treats us poorly, are we justified in being lazy or rebellious (1 Peter 2:18)?

Employees should work as diligently when not being watched as they do when being watched. They are really working for God, and He always watches. Your employer may reward you, but even if not, you will be rewarded by God.

Titus 2:9,10 — In how many things should workers obey? May we disregard “unreasonable” rules or speak disrespectfully to supervisors? May we steal or take property without permission?

2 Thessalonians 3:10 — What should happen to one who will not work?

Lazy workers should not be paid by businesses, should not be defended by unions, nor should they be cared for by relatives or charitable organizations.

Matthew 20:1-16 — If we are paid the wage we agreed upon, do we have a right to complain?

Do you work diligently as though working for the Lord? (Ephesians 4:28; Colossians 3:22-4:1; 1 Thessalonians 4:11,12; 1 Timothy 6:1,2; 5:8; Luke 3:12-14)

B. Christians should treat their employees fairly.

Some companies are so determined to make a profit that they are unkind or unfair to their employees. Or if they learn that certain workers have cheated them, they retaliate by cheating the employees or becoming unreasonable toward them all.

Colossians 4:1 — How should masters act? Why?

James 5:1,4 — What evils did these people commit?

(Jer. 22:13; Eph. 6:9)

C. Christians Should Pay Their Debts.

People often borrow property or buy a product on payments, but then they refuse to return the item or to repay the loan. They say, “This is just a loan, I will pay you back,” but they never do.

Psalms 37:21 — Who is called “wicked” here?

Romans 13:6-8 — What should we give others?

James 5:12 — What principle is taught here? How would this apply to paying our debts?

Are you paying your debts to those whom you owe? (Romans 1:31,32)

D. Christians Should Deal Honestly in All Financial Matters.

2 Corinthians 8:20,21 — In whose eyes should we be honest?

Deuteronomy 25:13-16 — How does God view unjust dealings? What examples are given?

Often people use unfair measures or keep inaccurate records so as to cheat others. Some deceive customers about the quality of their product or what it will do. All such dishonesty violates God’s word.

(Rom. 12:17; 1 Peter 3:15,16; Luke 3:12-14; Prov. 11:1; 19:22)

The rule in all business dealing is to treat others as you yourself would want to be treated (Matt. 7:12).

IV. Relationships to Other Races and Nationalities

Racial conflicts are another concern in society. Alienation between people of different races and nationalities has existed throughout history, including in Bible times. What does God’s word teach?

A. People of All Races Should Be One in Christ.

Under the Old Testament, Jews were God’s special nation. They separated themselves religiously and socially from Gentiles. Some Jewish Christians would not preach the gospel to Gentiles and would not associate with them.

Revelation 5:9 — Whom does Jesus redeem?

Acts 10:28,34,35; 11:17,18 — What did God teach Peter? Who can have eternal life? What if someone objects to this teaching?

Romans 10:12,13 — Does God recognize distinctions between Jew and Gentile? Whom does Jesus rule, and whom will He save?

Mark 16:15,16 — To whom should we preach?

Think: If Jesus will save all these people, will they all be in heaven? If we are going to live forever with them in heaven, why should we refuse to worship with them on earth?

Galatians 3:28 — Who should be one in Christ?

People of all races and nations need the gospel. It is our duty to take it to them. When they are converted, we are all one in Christ and ought to work together in unity in the local church even as first-century Jews and Gentiles were taught to do. To refuse or to object is to oppose the plan of God.

(Matt. 28:18,19; Eph. 2:11-18; 1 Tim. 2:4; Tit. 2:11; 2 Peter 3:9; Rom. 1:16; 2:6-11; Acts 15:9,11)

B. Christians Should Be Hospitable and Helpful to People of All Races.

Some passages

Genesis 1:26,27 — In whose image was man created?

Think: Regardless of race or nationality, all men are descendants of Adam, so all are in God's image. We can all be His spiritual children. By what right may we refuse to treat one another with decency and respect?

Luke 10:25-37 — Who helped the needy Jew? What principle did this illustrate?

Note that Samaritans and Jews were generally enemies, but Jesus showed that everyone is your neighbor, regardless of race or nation. We ought to be kind and helpful to all needy people.

Galatians 2:11-14 — How did Peter act in Antioch? What did Paul say about this conduct?

When we refuse to be hospitable or show common courtesy to people because of race or nationality, we are "not straightforward about the truth of the gospel" and are "to be blamed."

(John 4:9; Acts 6:1-6; 1 Tim. 5:20,21; Gal. 2:5,6; James 2:1-13)

Some conclusions

Biblical love is violated whenever we treat anyone with cruelty, unkindness, or mockery because of their race or nationality. Instead we should show care and kindness to all people.

Think: Is it right to mistreat someone because he does **not** belong to a minority group? Should minority groups be favored to the harm of majority groups? Is respect of persons justified in either direction?

Note: The New Testament church lived in an age of alienation between races as great as any that exists today, yet Christians never rioted, looted, stole, destroyed the property of others, or disobeyed civil law in the name of civil rights. Even if they felt they had been mistreated, they were taught not to return evil for evil. Two wrongs do not make a right (Rom. 12:17-21).

So Christians today should want people of all nations to be saved. Therefore, we should teach them, be kind to them, and be willing to work and worship side by side with them in Jesus' church. We should preach the gospel and change the hearts of men so they will want to treat others right.

Conclusion

Being a Christian is not just a matter of acting right toward God. Yes, Christians should worship God, study His word, teach the gospel, and avoid immorality. But that is just part of the Christians' life. No person can be right with God unless he is also treating other people right. As a result, faithful Christians will be the very best of family members, citizens, employees or employers, and members of society.

Responsibilities in the Local Church

Introduction:

“...the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love” — Eph. 4:16.

The purpose of this study is to examine the responsibilities each member has in the local church. What kind of people should we be in order to contribute effectively to the work of the local church? In what specific activities should we be involved?

Each Christian should commit himself to work with some particular local church.

When they move into an area, Christians should become recognized as part of a faithful local church and should labor to help accomplish its work.

Acts 9:26-29 — When Paul went to Jerusalem, he sought to join the disciples there. After it was clear that he was a Christian, he labored among them preaching God’s word. Note that Christians must express their intent to be recognized as part of a local congregation.

Acts 18:27,28 — When Apollos went to Achaia, the church in Ephesus sent a letter to the brethren there to receive him. He then worked diligently among them.

Hebrews 13:17; Acts 20:28-30 — Members need elders watching for their souls in the local church. But the oversight of elders extends only to the local church where they have been appointed (1 Peter 5:1-3). Elders must know which sheep are their responsibility and which are not. Therefore, members must clearly indicate that they seek to be part of a local church.

There is no such thing in the Bible as “floating membership,” where Christians visit around but never commit themselves to any local church. Nor did Christians have their membership “back home,” while residing so far away they could not actively participate in the work there. Each person should be recognized as part of a particular local church, so he can participate in its work. (Romans 16:1,2; 2 Cor. 3:1)

We have responsibilities to the local church, not because the church so decided, but because God so decided. This study will show that our duty

toward God gives us duties toward the local church.

Look up each **passage in bold underline** below and answer the questions that follow it. Ask yourself, “Do I do my share to make this congregation what it ought to be?”

I. Attitudes Needed in the Local Church

We must start by establishing proper attitudes. Some people think that obedience to God does not matter as long as one has a sweet disposition. Others seem to think that attitudes do not matter as long as one is doctrinally correct. Actually, proper attitudes and proper conduct are both essential.

Here are some attitudes Christians need in order to maintain proper relationships in the local church.

A. A Local Church Needs Members Who Love God and One Another.

All Christians must love God and one another.

Matthew 22:37-40 — What are the two greatest commands?

John 13:34,35 — How can we learn to love one another? What does our love show to others?

1 John 4:19-21 — Why should we love God? How should this affect our attitude toward our brethren?

Our love for our brethren should increase and abound more and more (1 Cor. 13:1-3; 1 Thess. 3:12; 4:9,10).

Love requires us to obey God and work for the good of others.

Love requires action. Those who do not obey God or serve others, do not have a Biblical love.

John 14:15,21-24 — To truly love Jesus, what must one do?

1 John 2:3-6; 3:16-18; 5:2,3 — How did Jesus show His love for us? How do we show love for God and for others? What if we say we know Him but do not obey Him?

Think: Do we please God by a sweet disposition without obedience? Do we please Him by outward conduct without proper motives?

Too many congregations are filled with people who lack a sincere love for one another or who fail to show their love by their conduct. Furthermore, love is the basis of obedience to all God's commands. The other attitudes and practices we will study must grow out of love. (John 15:12-17; Eph. 5:2; Phil. 2:2,3; Heb. 13:1; 1 Peter 1:22; 2:17; 3:8,9; 4:8; Gal. 5:6; 2 John 4-6)

Please consider these questions to help you evaluate your love.

* Do you sincerely love all your brethren or just some of them?

* Do you have true sympathy and compassion for your brethren, trying to put yourself in their place?

* Does love show in both your deeds and your words?

* Do you willingly sacrifice for the good of others, or do you insist on pleasing yourself first?

* If every Christian showed love as you do, would observers conclude that we are Jesus' disciples?

* Do you love as Jesus loved?

B. A Local Church Needs Members Who are Committed to Truth.

Too many churches suffer because members fail to pursue truth.

The Bible teaches we must love the truth.

1 Corinthians 13:6 — In what does love rejoice or not rejoice?

Proverbs 23:23 — How committed should we be to truth?

2 Thessalonians 2:10-12 — What may happen to those who do not love truth?

Repeatedly we hear about members or churches who leave the truth. This is not because truth is unattainable, but because people do not

love it enough to learn it and stand for it. No matter how often you hear the truth preached, if you do not love it enough, sooner or later you will believe error and be lost.

(1 Peter 1:22,23; John 8:31-34; James 1:18; Psalm 19:7-11; 119:47,48,97,140-143,151; John 8:40,44-47; 3:19-21; Rom. 1:18-25; Phil. 1:9-11; 1 Tim. 1:3-7; 2:3,4)

Our love for truth must lead us to learn and believe it.

Truth is found in God's word (John 17:17), but that does us no good unless we learn and accept it.

John 8:32 — What must we do so truth can free us from sin?

2 Timothy 2:15 — What must we do to be approved of God?

Psalm 19:7-11; 25:4,5 — How valuable are God's ordinances?

Think: If we really value truth like we value treasure, would we think about it only one hour a week? Does a person love truth when he has no desire to study it every day? Shouldn't we want to attend every opportunity the church provides for us to learn?

Local churches are successful in their work only when the members are truly committed to studying and accepting God's instructions. (Prov. 2:1-6; 8:7-11,17; Acts 17:11; Psal. 86:11; 1 Tim. 2:3,4; Eph. 1:13; Phil. 4:8; Hos. 4:6; John 8:43-47; 2 Tim. 2:25,26)

Commitment to truth must lead us to obey it.

1 Peter 1:22,23; John 8:31 — What must we do to purify our souls and be true disciples?

Romans 2:6-11 — On what basis will God judge men?

The Bible nowhere promises the benefits of truth to those who do not obey it. Too many congregations have members who continue to disobey truth, yet they expect to be treated as if they are faithful. These folks need to learn the importance of commitment to truth.

Churches need members who love the truth enough to obey it. (Psalm 19:11; 2 John 4; 3 John 3,4; Gal. 5:7; Psa. 26:3; 86:11; John 4:24; 3:19-21; James 5:19,20; 1:18-25; Matt. 7:21-27; Heb. 10:26-31)

Commitment to truth must lead us to oppose error.

Most members of the church have difficulty speaking out against sin. Some people say it is “unloving” to do so. Yet truth and error are opposites. You cannot love one without hating the other.

Hebrews 1:9 — How did Jesus view right and wrong?

Psalms 119:104,127,128; Romans 12:9 — How should we view truth and error?

Think: Is it possible to really love truth without hating error?

Revelation 3:19 — What does Jesus do for those He loves?

Think: How can rebuking sin be an act of love? Should we rebuke people who have not really sinned?

We should not rebuke people from a spirit of pride, vengeance, envy, or self-will. But if people are truly in sin and we love them, we will rebuke them. Otherwise we are not really committed to truth.

Too many congregations have been overrun by error because members did not oppose it. The only congregation that will remain faithful before God is one where the members will speak out for what is true and oppose error with sincere love for the souls of all.

(Eph. 4:15 Amos 5:15; 1 Tim. 1:3-7; 1 John 4:1-6; Heb. 12:5-11; Lev. 19:17,18; 2 Tim. 2:24-26; James 5:19f; Gal. 6:1,2; 1 Thess. 5:14; Eph. 5:11; 2 Tim. 4:2-4)

Please evaluate your commitment to truth.

* Is spiritual truth more valuable to you than all the material possessions you have or want to have?

* Do you attend every church meeting in order to learn truth?

* Do you also study diligently at home and teach God’s word to your children?

* Are you willing to examine even your most cherished practices and possessions to see whether they harmonize with truth?

* Are you willing to change your conduct to live according to truth no matter how great the sacrifice that is required?

* When people try to show you that your practice does not harmonize with God’s word, do you listen with an open mind?

* When you believe others have sinned, do you love their souls enough to kindly discuss God’s word with them?

C. A Local Church Needs Members Who Are Committed to Work.

Too often people believe that, even if they do not work, they should still be treated as faithful members. Some churches, for the sake of numbers and financial income, say or do little about such members. As a result, many congregations are hindered by uncommitted members. Instead of “every part doing its share,” just a few members do most of the work.

The Bible teaches us to work for the Lord and serve others.

Many verses already studied show that love for God and truth should lead us to serve God and obey truth. Consider other verses.

1 Corinthians 15:58 — How does this describe our work?

Think: Is God satisfied when folks do not work? do a little work? even work hard but only occasionally?

Galatians 5:6,13,14 — What avails those in Christ?

Titus 2:11-14 — For what purpose did Jesus redeem us?

If we appreciate the importance of loving God and others, if we are committed to the truth, and if we want to be saved eternally, then we must appreciate the value of working for the Lord.

(Gal. 6:2; Luke 10:25-37; Acts 10:35; Matthew 20:26-28; Neh. 4:6; Ecc. 9:10; James 2:14-26; 2 Thess 1:8,9; Rom. 2:6-10; 6:17,18; Matt. 7:21; Phil. 2:12)

Please evaluate your work for the Lord.

* Would Jesus say that you always abound steadfastly in His work, or are you on again, off again?

* Do you seek ways to be more involved in the work of the church, or do you seek to avoid work?

* When you see a member suffering problems, do you step in to try to help the way you would like to have others do for you?

* If every member were just as active and involved in the work of the church as you are, how much work would be accomplished?

* Do you work in the church like Jesus would?

D. A Local Church Needs Members who are Patient and Forbearing.

Many members can act properly when they have no problems, but they fail to act properly when things do not go their way, or when they are not treated well. Other people are good at starting projects but not so good at finishing what they start.

Patience and forbearance are what we need.

The Bible teaches patience and forbearance.

Patience is endurance, persistence, perseverance, long-suffering, steadfastness. It is the quality of a person who, having begun in the right direction, continues on in spite of all difficulties.

Forbearance is the quality by which a person endures mistreatment without himself doing wrong.

1 Corinthians 13:4,7 — What will love lead us to do?

Galatians 5:22; 2 Peter 1:6 — How important is patience?

Romans 2:7 — Who will receive eternal life?

The church needs people who do right no matter what happens and who continue working till the work is done. Consider specific circumstances where we need patience and forbearance.

We need patience and forbearance when we face hardships.

Luke 8:11-15 — How did the good soil differ from other soils?

Hebrews 10:32-38; 12:1-4 — What do we need when we are suffering? Have we suffered as much as people in these examples? (1 Peter 2:19-23)

Too many members blow hot and cold. They begin good works, but they become discouraged and stop. Local churches need members who keep working no matter how difficult the challenge. (James 5:7,8; 1:12)

We need patience and forbearance when teaching sinners.

2 Timothy 4:2-4; 2:24-26 — When do we need to be long-suffering? Why do we need it then? What is the goal of our teaching?

1 Thessalonians 5:14 — With what people should we be patient?

Some people would teach if other people would be receptive, but they become discouraged when they don't see results, when people criticize, or when their converts go back to the world. God has forewarned us to keep teaching despite these problems.

Some teachers pressure, push, or constantly badger people, insisting they immediately admit they are wrong. Yet people in error sometimes take years to change. Local churches need members who patiently lead sinners to the truth.

We need patience and forbearance when brethren have sinned.

Galatians 6:1 — What should we do for brethren who sin?

Matthew 18:15-17; 5:23,24 — Describe God's plan for reconciling alienated brethren, step by step. (Luke 17:3,4)

Note that the one who believes he has been wronged and the one who is accused of doing wrong are both obligated to talk. When sufficient rebukes have occurred, then the church must

withdraw from those in sin (1 Corinthians 5; 2 Thessalonians 3:6,14,15; Titus 3:10,11; Romans 16:17,18).

Ephesians 4:32 — What must we do when people repent? Describe how Jesus forgives us. (Matthew 18:34,35)

Following the Divine pattern for reconciliation requires patience and forbearance. The local church needs members who patiently resolve their difference according to God's plan.

Please evaluate your patience and forbearance.

* Do you serve God as faithfully when facing hardships as you do when things are going your way?

* Do you blow hot and cold in your service to God, or do you see tasks through to the end?

* Do you give people time to accept the truth and change their habits?

* Do you seek to be reconciled to people in the church from whom you have become alienated? Do you honor the Bible plan for church discipline? Do you truly forgive those who repent?

* If everyone in this congregation worked for the Lord in times of difficulty like you do, how much work would be completed?

* Do you bear up under temptation and hardship like Jesus did?

E. A Local Church Needs Members Who Practice Unity and Peace.

Throughout the world local churches have been destroyed by division and strife. Brethren who once worked side-by-side can no longer even worship together. This is tragic.

The Bible requires peace and unity.

John 17:20,21 — For what did Jesus pray?

Acts 5:12 — Describe the unity of the Christians at Jerusalem.

Romans 15:5,6; 1 Peter 3:8 — How united should we be? (1 Cor. 1:10-13,31)

Think: How many people does it take to destroy the unity and peace of the local church? How many people must work for unity?

Peace and unity will result when we practice all the other attitudes we have studied. (Mark 9:50)

Love promotes peace and unity, because it leads us to treat our brethren properly.

Philippians 2:2-5 — How does love produce unity?

Think: Can unity exist where members always want their own way and pursue their own interests?

Few things destroy unity in a local church faster than selfishness. Local churches need members who will seek the well-being of other members, sacrificing their own desires to help others.

Truth (not human doctrine) is the proper basis of peace and unity.

Ephesians 4:2-6 — List seven things necessary to unity.

Think: Does unity exist when some depart from the "one faith" and persist in unscriptural practices?

God's plan for unity is not a plan for doctrinal compromise. We should compromise our personal preferences and opinions, for the good of the group. But when people leave the truth to practice sin, they must be taught to repent (Rom. 16:17,18; Titus 3:10,11).

Wisdom from above is "first pure, then peaceable" (James 3:17). Local churches need members who seek unity based on truth.

Service and work promote peace and unity because they teach us all to do our share.

1 Corinthians 12:14-25 — What illustration shows how members should treat one another? How can this lead to unity?

Think: How is division promoted by members who do not work?

The local church needs members who work diligently to please the Lord. If all will cooperate and work together, then we also have the unity God wants.

Patience and forbearance promote peace and unity, because they lead us to overcome problems and resolve differences.

Ephesians 4:2,3 — What qualities are needed along with unity?

Think: How should we deal with personality conflicts in which people are not guilty of sin, but they just irritate us or have different opinions about the work?

Romans 15:1,2 — Who should help others? How does this relate to chapter 14 (cf. 14:19)?

Think: How should we act if we have doubts about a certain act, perhaps cannot conclusively prove the act is sinful, but there is an alternative course for which we have no doubts (14:23)? Should we condemn others if they believe this course is unnecessary? How should we treat others when they have such doubts? (See also 1 Cor. 8 & 10).

With these attitudes, brethren can have peace and unity even when they disagree in personal conscience.

Please evaluate your efforts toward unity and peace.

* Do you rely on God's word as the standard of unity, or do you follow human doctrines or even doctrinal compromise?

* Do you appreciate all members for the work they do when they work according to their ability?

* Are you willing to sacrifice your personal desires and preferences in order to maintain unity?

* Do you seek peace in matters of personal conscience, not forcing your conscience on others?

* If all members of the congregation worked for unity and peace as you do, would this congregation have the influence for good that Jesus prayed for?

II. Specific Works Needed in a Local Church

Members who have the proper attitudes will be active in the work of the local church. Notice some specific works all members should participate in:

Following Jesus

A. Worship

Christians should praise God privately, but worship is also a group activity that all members should participate in. They should be as active as possible in the work. Consider specific forms of worship we should be involved in:

Prayer

Ephesians 6:18 — What are we here taught about prayer?

Acts 2:41,42 — Describe the worship of these converts.

God wants all His children to pray in the assemblies of the church (1 Cor. 14:15) as well as in private (Matt. 6:6). Diligent prayer should include praying for the work of the church in all its aspects.

Singing

Colossians 3:16; Ephesians 5:19 — How should we sing? Who should participate? What purposes does singing accomplish?

Think: Should Christians in our assemblies neglect to sing or sing halfheartedly? Must one be an accomplished musician to teach and praise in song?

The emphasis in singing is on the **message** in the words, not on the artistic ability of the singers, nor on the catchy melodies.

Again, we should sing when we gather with the saints (1 Cor. 14:15; Heb. 2:12), but we should also remember to sing in private or with our families (Jas. 5:13). Those who believe in the value of worship, will sing out as enthusiastically and zealously as they can.

Giving

1 Corinthians 16:1,2 — When should churches take up the collection? Who should give? How much should each one give? For what was the money here used? (Acts 2:44; 11:29; 2 Cor. 9:7)

Philippians 4:14-18 — For what did the church at Philippi use money it had collected (cf. 2 Cor. 11:8,9)?

Local churches collect funds so they can accomplish their authorized work, but most congregations are hindered in their work because some members do not give as they should. Those who really want to serve in the local church will determine to be truly generous in their giving.

The Lord's Supper

As with giving, all Christians should partake of the Lord's Supper each first day of the week (Acts 20:7).

Matthew 26:26-28 — Explain the purpose of the elements of the Lord's Supper.

1 Corinthians 10:16,17; Acts 2:38f,41f — How many members should commune? How diligent should we be about it?

All who love the Lord should willingly meet with the saints each week to remember Jesus' death. (See also 1 Corinthians 11:23-26,29.)

Other acts of worship include teaching the lost and edifying the members, but we will consider those as separate points below.

Please evaluate your worship:

* Do you regularly attend all the meetings of the local church?

* Do you pay attention so that you mean the words of the songs and can say "amen" to the prayers?

* Do you appreciate the meaning of the Lord's Supper, including the time while others are physically eating and drinking?

* Do you pray diligently for the church's work?

* Do you give cheerfully and generously, seeking first the kingdom of God (Matt. 6:33)?

* Do you live a life that harmonizes with the words you sing and pray in the assemblies?

* If all members worshipped as you do, how pleased would the Lord be?

* Would Jesus worship as you do?

B. Edification of Members

All members should edify one another.

All members should admonish, build up, and even rebuke other members. This duty does not belong just to elders or public preachers.

Ephesians 4:15,16; Hebrews 3:12,13 — What should the members of the body do? How many members should participate?

Too often members seek their own spiritual well-being but do not try to help others when they have spiritual needs. (1 Thess. 5:11,14; Rom. 15:14)

Consider some specific ways members can edify one another.

We edify one another in church meetings.

Hebrews 10:24,25 — What should we do for one another? What application does this have to church meetings?

* Name some ways we can exhort one another in our assemblies.

* How can we exhort one another in our classes?

We should edify members privately.

If we care about others in the local church, we will make opportunities to help them anytime we can. Sometimes the best opportunities occur away from church meetings. Consider some specific ideas:

* How can you edify others in your family?

* Suggest some ideas for helpful private Bible studies.

* List some specific groups of members you could exhort.

* Why is a good example important (1 Tim. 4:12; Titus 2:7; Matt. 5:13-16; 18:6,7)?

Edifying others is one of the best ways to help the local church.

C. Teaching the Lost

Every member should learn to teach the lost.

Acts 8:4 — What did these Christians do?

Note that this was not discussing the apostles (v1). Converting the lost is a duty of all members.

2 Timothy 2:2,24-26 — What should faithful men be able to do?

Hebrews 5:12 — What should we learn to do?

Think: If we are not able now to teach, what should we be doing?

People have different abilities in teaching, but all have some ability, all must use their ability, and all can increase their ability.

(Prov. 11:30; Phil. 2:15,16; 1 Peter 3:15; Dan. 12:3; Jude 1,3; 1 Thess. 1:8; John 4:35,36)

Think of people you may teach.

John 4:35 — Explain Jesus' illustration.

Everyone you meet is a possible contact to teach about Jesus. Here are some groups you could talk to. **Add to this list.**

* Friends and relatives (John 1:40-49; Acts 10:24,33).

* Neighbors (John 4:39-42).

* People you work with.

Think: Did you learn the truth by yourself, or did someone help you? If someone helped you, did they do a good work for you? If you care for the souls of others, shouldn't you be finding people to teach?

There are various kinds of teaching methods you can use.

Several methods are available. Different methods might be best for different people. Here are a few suggestions. **Add to this list.**

* Invite people to church meetings & Bible classes.

* Pass out tracts or other printed literature.

* Start them on a correspondence course.

* Your ultimate goal should be **to set up private Bible studies** in which people take out their Bibles and study God's word. You may teach or invite someone else from the congregation to teach. Use filmstrips, printed study guides, or any approach you prefer, but **set up a study.**

Note: If you are inexperienced, volunteer to go with others who are more experienced. As you become experienced, then invite others to go with you so they can learn.

There is simply no greater service that any individual can do for another than to show him how his soul can be saved. If you believe in serving others, then be a soul-winner!

D. Helping The Physically Needy

Matthew 25:34-40 — What good works are described here? Who should do these good works?

Note: Most of the work of caring for the needy is individual responsibility. We should help our family, relatives, or people we personally know. However, some needy people are the responsibility of the church. Here are some of the needy people we can help.

The sick, hospitalized, disabled, sorrowing, lonely, imprisoned

Luke 10:30-37 — What story did Jesus tell, and what did the story teach?

Here are some specific things we can do for needy folks. **Add to this list.**

- * Visit or call them to express concern.
- * Provide assistance: food, baby-sitting, help around the house, transportation, financial aid.
- * Pray for them.

The poor, needy, or destitute

1 John 3:17 — What should we do about a brother in need? (James 2:15,16)

Here are some things we can do for these folks. **Add to the list.**

- * Provide them with food, clothes, place to live, transportation.
- * Help them find a job.

Note: Often these folks are in trouble because of their own indifference, foolishness, or laziness. What should we do in such cases (2 Thess. 3:10; Luke 15:16,17; 1 Tim. 5:8)?

Widows, orphans, or strangers

James 1:27 — What does pure religion involve? (1 Tim. 5:4,8,16).

Here are some things we can do for these folks. **Add to the list.**

- * Take them into your home.
- * Provide food, clothing, transportation if needed.
- * Show personal interest by visiting them.

There is no lack of ways to be helpful to people around us. Whether you are a man or woman, young or old, rich or poor, there are things you can do.

E. Leadership and Other Areas of Service

Several works in the church involve leadership or other ongoing responsibilities related to the works we have already listed. Those who truly want to serve in the local church should consider what assistance they can give in these works.

Elders, deacons, & their wives

Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5 — What leaders does God want each church to have?

Note: A church must have a plurality of elders. If it has no such men, it is in an immature state— there is something missing that needs to be accomplished.

1 Timothy 3:1 — How is the work of elders described here?

Think: Who can deny that elders, deacons, and their wives do a good work? Christians should be “zealous of good works” (Titus 2:11-14). If being an elder is a “good work,” what can we conclude?

Many churches are without elders because few men and their wives desire to qualify for the work. If all members were zealous of good works, more churches would have qualified leaders. If you desire to be of service, why not make it your goal to become qualified? (Note the qualifications in 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9.)

Other works of service in the church

Men can attend men’s meetings.

If there are no qualified elders, the only authority position left in the church is the men who have authority over the women (1 Cor. 14:34ff). Hence, the men must make the decisions to carry out the work. Even when there are elders, the elders should discuss the work with the men from time to time.

Many of the most important matters affecting the local church are discussed in these meetings. Men who attend can be informed about what is happening and why. You can be of service by helping make these decisions and/or by volunteering for work.

All members can volunteer for work assignments.

We have already discussed jobs such as preaching, teaching classes, and personal visitation. In order for these works to be done other

day-to-day duties are needed. This includes the following. **Add to this list.**

- * Cleaning and maintenance of the building.
- * Cleaning and preparing the communion set.
- * Correspondence, printing, and secretarial work.

The way to become a part of things in a local church is to get involved in the work! If you want to serve, talk to the people who are in charge of various works. Let them know what you would like to do. **Volunteer to serve!**

Conclusion

A dangerous trend in the church is the “what’s-in-it-for-me?” attitude. “What am I going

to get out of this?” If we think we will not personally benefit from some church activity, we just do not participate.

Remember the example of Jesus. He did not come to earth to be served but to serve others (Matt. 20:28). Instead of expecting other people to serve you, start serving other people! Instead of focusing on what you can get out of an activity, start thinking of ways you can help others. When you do, you will find that you yourself will benefit and grow in many ways.

Galatians 6:7-9 — We reap according to what we sow. We get out of any activity according to what we put into it. If we sow sparingly, we reap sparingly; if we sow bountifully, we reap bountifully (2 Cor. 9:6).

Purity in Everyday Life

Introduction:

If there was ever an age that needed to learn moral purity, it is the age we live in.

The Bible describes 3 aspects of life in which we need to keep pure.

* **Pure deeds** — 1 John 5:3; James 1:21-25

* **Pure words** — Matthew 12:34-37; James 3:2-8

* **Pure thoughts** — Matthew 5:8; Prov. 4:23

Many believe it does not matter what they think as long as they do not actually practice evil deeds. But pure thoughts are essential to a pure life because our thoughts determine what we say and do. Pure thoughts lead to pure words and pure deeds.

The purpose of this lesson is to consider various “moral” issues to determine what is and is not pure.

To be pure we must examine every aspect of life (2 Cor. 13:5; 1 Thess. 5:21,22). Serving God will affect our lives, not just 1 or 2 hours a week, but 24 hours a day.

Please look up the Scriptures **typed in bold underline** in this booklet and answer the questions.

I. Principles for Examining Our Conduct

2 Timothy 3:16,17 — The Scriptures instruct us in righteousness, providing us to every good work. Yet we must study diligently, pray for wisdom, and apply the word properly (2 Timothy 2:15; James 1:5-7). We must learn to discern good and evil (Hebrews 5:14).

Here are some Bible principles to help you consider whether specific acts are pure or impure.

A. Does the Bible Directly Prohibit This Conduct?

The Bible contains many lists of sins to be avoided — Mark 7:20-23; Romans 1:26-32; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 4:17-5:21; Col. 3:5-11; 2 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 3:3; James 3:13-4:10; 1 Peter 4:1-4; Revelation 21:8; 22:15. Other passages discuss individual sins. These prohibitions should be studied and obeyed.

Remember that the Bible teaches in both general and specific terms. Sometimes it describes in detail that a specific act is sinful. Other times it presents **general principles** that may include many specific sins. We must study to determine

whether a specific act fits the definition of something God has forbidden.

Surely we should avoid what God’s word specifically prohibits, but we must also apply general principles to determine right from wrong.

B. Will I Be a Good Steward?

1 Peter 4:10,11 — What is a steward? What has God given us that we should use and care for?

(Luke 12:42-46; 1 Cor. 4:1,2; Matt. 25:14-30)

Consider some specific blessings we should use for God:

1. Ability and effort

Our stewardship requires us to use our abilities in diligent work for the Lord (1 Peter 4:10,11).

Titus 2:14 — For what purpose did the Lord purify us?

(Rom. 12:11; 1 Cor. 15:58; 12:12-27; 2 Cor. 8:5; Ecc. 9:10; Prov. 6:9,10; Heb. 6:12)

2. Time and opportunities

Life is made of time. God gave you your life to serve Him. You must use it for what is most important.

Galatians 6:10 — What opportunities must we be sure to use?

John 9:4 — Explain Jesus’ illustration.

Think: How is using our time similar to budgeting money? (Eph. 5:15,16; Matt. 25:14-30; Ecc. 12:13; 1 Kings 20:40; 1 Peter 4:2,3)

3. Possessions

Psalm 24:1,2 — Who really owns everything?

1 Timothy 6:9,10,17-19 — What are the dangers of loving money? How should we use our possessions?

(Haggai 2:8; 1 Chron. 29:11-14; Matt. 6:19-34; Acts 4:32-35; 2 Cor. 8:1-5; 9:6-10; 1 John 2:15-17)

4. Health and life

1 Corinthians 6:19,20; Romans 12:1,2 — To whom do our bodies belong? How should we use them?

Think: May we destroy or abuse God's gifts to please ourselves? Are we "pure" if we neglect God's work to please ourselves? (3 John 2; Rom. 6:12ff)

C. Will I Set a Good Example?

1 Timothy 4:12; Matthew 5:13-16 — How should our lives affect others?

Matthew 18:6,7 — What happens to us if we lead others to sin?

2 Corinthians 6:3 — What should we seek to avoid? How might we be guilty of this?

Think: Should we do what we want as long it is not inherently sinful, or should we sacrifice our liberties to help others be saved (1 Cor. 9:19-23; 10:24,31-33)?

I should ask: If others see me do this, will they be helped or hindered in their service to God? What about children? Would I advise new converts to practice this? Will this conduct help or hinder efforts to save the lost?

(1 Cor. 8; Rom. 14; 1:32; Titus 2:7,8; 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1; Eph. 5:11; 1 Peter 2:11,12; 3:15,16)

D. Will I Be Tempted to Sin or Be Hindered in Serving God?

Consider the influence an act may have, not just on others, but also on you yourself.

Matthew 6:13 — What should we pray for? Should we knowingly enter tempting situations simply to indulge our own desires?

Proverbs 22:3 — How does a prudent man differ from a fool?

Think: If you know a course of action is likely to lead to sin, should you even start down that path?

1 Corinthians 15:33; Proverbs 13:20 — What danger should we watch for? How will wise men act to avoid the danger?

Ask yourself, "Will this act encourage or hinder my service to God? Will it strengthen or dull my interest in spiritual things?"

(Rom. 13:14; Prov. 4:23; 6:27; 24:1,2; 5:8; 1 Cor. 5:6,7; Matt. 18:6-9; 26:41; James 4:4; Gen. 39:7-12; Heb. 12:15; Gal. 5:7-9; Eph. 4:27; 5:11; 2 Cor. 6:14-18)

E. Will I Obey Legitimate Authority?

God has ordained that certain people have authority over us. To obey God, we must obey these authorities unless they command us to sin (Acts 5:29). For each passage below, tell whom we must submit to.

Romans 13:1-7 (1 Peter 2:13,14; Titus 3:1) —

Ephesians 6:1 (Luke 2:51; Rom. 1:30,32) —

Ephesians 5:22-24,33 (Titus 2:5) —

Ephesians 6:5-8 (Col. 3:22,23; Titus 2:9,10) —

1 Peter 5:1-5 (Acts 20:28; Heb. 13:17) —

Some acts are impure for us simply because those in authority over us have forbidden them.

F. Will I Be Consistent with My Standards and What I Expect of Others?

All of us have standards we profess to follow or we apply to others. To encourage an honest evaluation of an act, try imagining someone else in the situation, or think of what you profess in other situations.

Matthew 23:3,4 — How did these people act? Should we expect others to follow rules we do not follow?

Think: Would you want your children to grow up participating in the act you are considering? Would you participate in this act around church members? (Rom. 2:1,21,22; Matt. 6:1; 7:1-5; Acts 10:34,35)

Hebrews 6:12; 13:7 — Whom should we imitate?

Think: If you would be disappointed to see elders or preachers participate in an act, then should you do it? (1 Peter 5:2,3; 1 Cor. 11:1; Phil. 3:17; 4:9)

Matthew 15:7,8 — What error did these people commit?

Think: Would you feel pure before God if you stopped in the midst of the act and prayed for His blessings on it or sang songs of praise to Him?

Romans 14:20-23 — Should you participate in an act that violates your conscience?

Think: Sometimes you face two courses, one of which is clearly acceptable but the other is doubtful. What should you choose (at least for your own conduct)? Yet take care before you condemn others in the matter — v1-12. (See also 1 Cor. 8:4-12; 10:23-33.)

Is your life consistent with your own standards, your own conscience, and your expectations of others?

G. Will I Practice Proper Priorities?

Matthew 6:19-21,24,33 — How many spiritual masters can we have? What should be our highest priority in life?

John 6:27,63 — What should we emphasize?

Many acts may not be inherently sinful but must not become so important to us that they hinder our service to God. Are you putting God first in your life?

(Matt. 16:24-27; 10:34-39; 1 Cor. 6:19,20; 15:58; 2 Cor. 8:5; 5:14,15; 4:16-18; Gal. 2:20; Rom. 8:5-8; 12:1,2; Luke 12:15-21; 14:25-33; Col. 3:1,2; 1 Tim. 4:8)

H. Will I Show Love for God and Man?

Matthew 22:37-40 — What are the greatest two commands?

Matthew 7:12; Romans 13:8-10 — How will I treat others if I love them?

If you did the act in question, would you be sincerely acting for the well-being of others, or would you be pursuing your own interests regardless of the will of God or the needs of others?

(1 John 5:3; 3:16-18; John 14:15; Luke 6:27,28,31-33; 10:25-37; 1 Cor. 13:1-8,13; Phil. 2:1-5)

I. Would Jesus Do This? Would I Want to Be Doing It When He Returns?

We sometimes fool ourselves about the nature of an act, but questions like these should help us evaluate things honestly.

1 Thessalonians 5:1-5 — When is Jesus coming? What lesson should we learn?

James 4:13,14 — What else is uncertain?

Think: Would you want to face Jesus in judgment knowing you had done this act and not repented? (2 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:10-12; Rev. 20:12; Gal. 6:7-9)

Luke 6:40 — Describe the goal of a disciple.

Every act should be examined by asking, “What would Jesus do?” If He were here now, would He practice this activity, use this language, go to this place, wear these clothes, etc.? (1 Peter 2:21,22; Matt. 16:24; 1 Cor. 11:1; Eph. 5:1,2; Phil. 2:5; Gal. 2:20)

The Bible is the complete and absolute standard of right and wrong. However, it does not directly describe every act we should avoid. It also teaches principles we must apply. Let us now apply these principles to acts people commonly practice.

II. The Principles Applied

A. Pure Attitudes toward Others

We have learned we must love others, avoiding anything that constitutes hatred or lack of love. Consider some specific applications.

Vengeance, grudges, uncontrolled anger

The entertainment industry glorifies vengeance. When others mistreat us, we may feel justified in seeking vengeance or losing our temper.

Luke 6:27,28,31-33; Romans 12:17-21 — How should we treat enemies and those who hate us?

Ephesians 4:26,31 — Is anger always sinful? Why is it dangerous?

Luke 17:3,4; Matthew 5:23,24 — How should we treat people who wrong us? What if they believe we have wronged them?

Vengeance and uncontrolled anger escalate alienation. The Bible provides a plan for reconciliation.

(Matt. 5:21,22,38ff; 18:15-17,21-35; 6:12,14,15; Lev. 19:17,18; 1 Peter 2:21-23; 3:8,9; Luke 23:34; Acts 7:60; James 1:19,20; 5:16; Prov. 24:29; 14:17; 29:11,20)

Envy and jealousy

When others receive something good, an envious person feels displeased or wishes he received the good instead. Some justify and exploit class envy. Yet is it consistent with love?

Romans 1:29,32 — Those guilty of envy are worthy of what?

Matthew 27:18 — What motivated the Jews to kill Jesus?

(1 Peter 2:1; Titus 3:3; James 3:14-17; 1 Tim. 6:4; 1 Cor. 13:4; Gal. 5:19-26; Rom. 13:13)

Pride

Pride means exalting oneself as more important than others, instead of being meek and humble. A proud person overlooks his failures and exalts his abilities. He may disregard others, insisting his desires be met. Society overlooks pride and justifies special favors for actors, sports heroes, politicians, the rich, etc.

Romans 12:3-5 — How should we think of self and of others?

Proverbs 6:16-19 — How does God view a proud look?

Philippians 2:2-5 — Describe the attitudes we should have.

(Prov. 16:5,18; 13:10; 1 John 2:15-17; Rom. 1:30,32; James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5; 1 Cor. 13:5; 2 Tim. 3:2; Luke 14:7-11; Gal. 6:1; Col. 3:12,13)

Following Jesus

B. Respect for the Rights of Others

Surely people today need to learn respect for life and property.

Respect for human life

Violence runs rampant in our nation: murder, beatings, muggings, shootings, stabbings. Entertainment serves a steady diet of it. Kids carry lethal weapons to school. Society even justifies abortion, suicide, mercy-killing, and violence by the “oppressed.”

Romans 13:8-10 — Why should we not murder or hurt others?

Proverbs 6:16-19 — How does God view hands that shed innocent blood?

Abortion is murder, because the unborn baby is a “child, baby, son, infant.” To deliberately kill it is as wrong as deliberately killing one who has been born (Gen. 25:21,22; Job 3:3,16; Hos. 12:3; Luke 1:36,41,44).

(Gen. 9:2-6; Matt. 15:19,20; Rev. 21:8; 22:15; Ex. 23:7; 20:13; Deut. 27:25)

Respect for others' property

Stealing of all forms is epidemic. Nearly every citizen knows a loved one victimized by it. Some justify rioting and looting by the “oppressed.”

Romans 13:8-10; 1 Corinthians 6:9,10 — Why should we not steal?

Ephesians 4:28 — Instead of stealing, what should we do?

Think: List some specific forms of stealing.

(Ex. 20:15; Isa. 61:8; 1 Peter 4:15,16; Titus 2:9,10; Matt. 15:19,20; Psalm 37:21; Ezek. 33:15)

C. Pure Relationships between Men and Women

Society generally accepts immoral conduct between men and women. Entertainment justifies it, sex education condones it, and many churches accept it.

Fornication and adultery

Many unmarried couples have sexual relations or live together. Many married people have affairs. Movie and sport stars who do it are hailed as heroes, and politicians who do it are elected anyway!

1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Revelation 21:8; 22:14,15 — What is the destiny of fornicators and adulterers?

Hebrews 13:4 — In what case is the sexual union upright? What about the union in other cases? (Note 1 Cor. 7:2-4,9; Rom. 7:2,3.)

(1 Cor. 6:18; Ex. 20:14; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 5:1-11; 1 Thess. 4:3-8; Prov. 5:1-23; 6:23-7:27; Mark 7:20-23)

Homosexuality

Homosexuals and lesbians have “come out of the closet,” militantly demanding acceptance by society.

Leviticus 18:22,23 — Summarize these verses.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 — How does God view homosexuals?

Romans 1:26-28,32 — What conduct is discussed here? How is it described?

(Gen. 19:1-11; 2 Peter 2:6-8; Lev. 20:13,15,16)

Divorce & remarriage

Judges grant divorces for essentially any reason. Nearly half of all marriages end in divorce, and most divorcees then remarry. Nearly everyone knows close loved ones that are affected.

Romans 7:2,3 — How long are man and wife bound? When may one remarry? What if one remarries while his/her spouse lives?

Note: Adultery is a sexual union with one person while married to another. Remarriage is adultery because God still binds one to his/her first spouse.

Matthew 19:3-9 — Summarize Jesus’ teaching about divorce.

1 Corinthians 7:10,11 — If one has remarried (unscripturally) and wants to be right with God, what choices does he/she have?

Think: Explain why the unscriptural remarriage cannot continue. (Matt. 5:31f; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18; Mal. 2:14-16; Gen. 2:24)

Suggestive clothing and conduct

Many people justify pornography and sexually suggestive clothing, jokes, recreation, and entertainment. We have learned that we must have pure thoughts and avoid activity that encourages, tempts, or leads toward sinful acts.

Mark 7:20-23 — What is the source and consequence of evil thoughts and licentiousness?

Define licentiousness (or lasciviousness) from a dictionary.

Note this definition: “wanton (acts or) manners, as filthy words, indecent bodily movements, unchaste handling of males and females” (Thayer). (Rom. 13:13,14; Gal. 5:19-21; 1 Peter 4:1-4)

Matthew 5:28; Proverbs 6:25 — What errors are described in these verses? Must one physically commit adultery to sin?

(Proverbs 5:18-20 ; Philippians 4:8)

1 Timothy 2:9,10; Titus 2:5 — How should godly women dress?

(2 Cor. 11:2; Gen. 3:7-11,21; Prov. 7:10; Lev. 20:17; 2 Sam. 11:2ff)

Remember that Christians must not tempt others to sin and must not subject themselves to temptation to satisfy personal desires (see Matthew 18:6,7; Genesis 39:7-10 and similar passages above).

Think: How do these principles apply to these practices: pornography; suggestive movies, music, TV shows, and jokes; dancing; mixed swimming in modern swimsuits; petting; revealing clothing such as halters, low-cut or tight dresses, short skirts, shorts? Would Jesus participate in these activities?

In an age of “free love” and moral looseness, Christians must “be not conformed to the world,” but “shine as lights” in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation (Romans 12:2; Philippians 2:15).

D. Pure Speech

Remember we will be judged for our speech as well as for our deeds.

Lying and deceit

Lying involves speech intended to lead others to believe what is not true. It is practiced by children, businessmen, and politicians. Entertainment, “situation ethics,” and even some religions accept it.

John 8:44 — What is Satan’s relationship to lying?

Proverbs 6:16-19 — How does God view lying?

Revelation 21:8; 22:14,15 — What will be the destiny of liars?

(Eph. 4:25; 1 Peter 2:1,22; 3:10; Matt. 15:18-20; Col. 3:9; Prov. 19:22; Psalm 24:3-5; 40:4; Ex. 20:16)

Slander and tale bearing

Slander is saying about other people things that are untrue (see previous point) or that are maliciously motivated. Whole magazines, tabloid papers, and printed columns get rich off the practice. “News” reporters, politicians, employees, neighbors, church members, and preachers often participate.

Psalm 101:5; 1 Corinthians 6:9,10 — What will happen to slanderers or revilers?

Proverbs 16:28 — What problems do tale-bearers cause?

(1 Cor. 5:11; Prov. 26:20; 11:9; Rom. 1:30,32; Titus 3:2; 2:3; 1 Peter 2:1,23; 3:9; 2 Tim. 3:3; Ex. 23:1; Psalm 41:5-7; 3 John 9,10; 1 Tim. 6:3,4; 5:13; 2 Thess. 3:11)

Cursing, profanity, and obscenity

“Four-letter words” are often standard communication on the job, in entertainment, at school, in government, and in most homes. For many it is funny, impressive, entertaining, or just a habit.

Note these definitions: “Cursing” is saying we want someone to be harmed. “Profanity” is conduct that fails to show proper respect for spiritual

things, such as the name of God, heaven, hell, etc. “Obscenity” is similar to “lasciviousness” (sexual suggestiveness).

James 3:9-12 — What does God say about cursing? (Luke 6:27,28; Romans 12:14,17-21)

Exodus 20:7 — What should we not do with God’s name? (Psalm 111:9; Matthew 6:9)

1 Timothy 1:9-11 — How does God view those who are “profane” and “unholy”?

Ephesians 4:29; 5:4 — What kinds of speech should be avoided?

Note: “Filthiness” (“obscenity” — NIV) means “lasciviousness” (sexually suggestive speech — see above on Mark 7:20-23).

Furthermore, words that mean the same and sound similar to curses or profanities should also be avoided because of their harmful influence.

(James 3:2-8; Colossians 4:6; Psalm 141:3)

E. Personal Habits

Use of intoxicating drinks and drugs

Drug or alcohol use usually begins among those who are young, influenced by friends, music, rebellion, desire to escape, or desire for a thrill.

As with “baptism,” “saint,” “bishop,” “Christian,” etc., the modern usage of the word “wine” differs from the Bible. Bible “wines” might be fermented or unfermented, like our word “cider.” When described favorably, Bible “wines” were not fermented: Isaiah 16:10; 65:8; Jeremiah 48:33; Revelation 19:15.

Modern wines are generally more alcoholic than fermented Bible wines. A can of modern beer contains as much total alcohol as a glass of wine or a shot of whiskey. Should a Christian drink a shot of whiskey?

Galatians 5:19-21 — What does God say about drunkenness?

(Eph. 5:18; 1 Cor. 5:11; 6:9,10; Rom. 13:12-14)

Note: Intoxication means that brain function is impaired so one does not think as clearly as normally. Studies prove that just one or two beers or glasses of modern wine have this effect. Even before speech or motor skills are noticeably im-

paired, moral judgment and self-control are diminished. Drinking and drugs are condemned because their very first effect is to weaken inhibitions.

1 Peter 5:8 — Why should we be sober?

Think: Explain the contrast between drinking and sobriety. (1 Pet. 1:13; 1 Cor. 9:25-27; 1 Thess. 5:6-8)

1 Peter 4:3 — What is taught here about alcoholic drinks?

Note: “Banqueting” (KJV), is also translated “drinking parties” (NKJV, NASB), or “tippling” (NEB). It is drinking which is less excessive than “drunkenness” or “revelries.” “Not of necessity excessive,” but giving opportunity for excess (Trench).

Here are some other problems with drinking and drugs. What have we already learned about them?

(1) They are harmful to health.

(2) They are progressive. One who participates is tempted to go deeper into error — Proverbs 23:20,21,29-33; 20:1; Hosea 4:11.

(3) They are a bad example. Most people begin drinking and drugs because of friends, etc.

(4) In many cases they are forbidden by parents or by civil government, including alcohol for minors.

“Wine is a mocker” (Proverbs 20:1). Should faithful, mature Christians use the intoxicating beverages and drugs of our society?

Use of tobacco

Like drinking and drugs, the smoking habit usually begins early in life.

Nicotine is a known poison used in many insecticides. Every cigarette package clearly states that smoking is dangerous to health. Virtually all major health organizations, from the Surgeon General to the American Heart Association and American Cancer Society, have declared smoking harmful.

On the average, a two-pack-a-day smoker will cut 8 or 9 years off his life by his habit. The Surgeon General has declared that smoking is “the largest preventable cause of illness and premature death in the United States” (“Smoking, Tobacco, and Health,” p. 7).

Recent studies indicate that second-hand smoke is harmful to the families of smokers. Yet the habit is productive of no good whatever.

Romans 12:1 — What should we do with our bodies?

1 Corinthians 6:19,20 — To whom does the body belong and how should it be used?

Think: Can we use our bodies for these purposes after we have destroyed our health and life by smoking? Consider again our study of stewardship.

3 John 2 — For what did John pray?

Think: Is it right to pray for health then knowingly destroy our health for a selfish habit that produces nothing of value to anyone?

Think: Remember the Bible teaching about example (Matthew 5:13-16; 1 Timothy 4:12; etc.). Young people who smoke usually start because of the influence of their parents or friends. If your influence encourages others to start, what is your responsibility?

Should preachers or elders smoke? Remember, you should live by the standard you expect of them. Would Jesus smoke?

Gambling

Gambling is a major business. Governments now promote it, instead of opposing it. Promotional advertising surrounds us. Many gamblers are emotionally addicted. Many lose their savings, homes, and families.

Gambling involves a wager, risking loss of possessions in exchange for the opportunity to win someone else’s possessions, depending on the outcome of a game of chance, without compensation to the loser.

For each passage below, list an authorized way to obtain a possession from someone else:

1 Timothy 5:18 (Matt. 20:1-15; 2 Thess. 3:10-12) —

Genesis 23:1-18 (Matt. 13:45,46; John 4:8)

—

Acts 20:35 (1 John 3:17,18; Eph. 4:28) —

Think: People can obtain a possession from others by working for it, purchasing it, or receiving it.

ing it as a gift given as a willing expression of good will. Does gambling fit any of these alternatives?

Acts 20:33-35 — Instead of coveting, how did Paul obtain income? Do gamblers believe it is more blessed to give than to receive?

Think: Covetousness is a desire to obtain someone else's possessions against their will or without giving proper payment. It is the desire to get something for nothing. Does this describe gambling? (Eph. 5:5-7)

Matthew 22:39; 7:12 — Does the gambler love his neighbor as himself? Does he do to others as he wants them to do to him? (1 Cor. 13:5; Phil. 2:4)

Again, gambling subjects one to many evil influences that Christians should avoid. And people begin because of the influence of others, but a Christian's influence should be for good, not harm. Do you want your children and new Christians to begin gambling? Should elders and preachers do it? Would Jesus do it?

Conclusion

Christians should shine as lights in the world (Philippians 2:15,16). We must live upright lives that influence others for good. Does your own life harmonize with Biblical purity?

Church Organization and Work

Introduction:

The purpose of this study is to examine the New Testament pattern for the organization and work of the church. This pattern is as much a part of God's word as is the teaching about worship or salvation from sin.

Acts 20:28-31 — Paul warned that from among the elders would come men who would teach error and draw away disciples. The history of the Lord's church shows repeated examples of departure from God's pattern for church organization and work.

Psalms 119:128 — "...all Your precepts concerning all things I consider to be right; I hate every false way." This states a basic Bible truth: if we truly believe one thing, we must oppose its opposite. The more we support a belief, the stronger we must deny its opposite.

In this study we will affirm the Bible pattern for the organization and work of the church, then we will oppose human changes in this pattern.

Please look up the passages below in **bold underline**, then answer the questions following them.

I. We Need Bible Authority for Every Religious Practice.

This material summarizes the lesson on How to Study the Bible. You may want to review that lesson as you answer the following questions.

A. God Reveals His Will Three Ways.

1. Commands and direct statements

Sometimes God states directly what He wants us to do or believe (1 Cor. 14:37; John 14:15; Matt. 28:20).

Name some examples of Divine commands we must obey:

2. Examples and illustrations

Sometimes God teaches us what to do, not by expressly telling us how to act, but by giving instances of Christians acting with His approval.

1 Peter 2:21 — What did Jesus leave us? What should we do about it?

1 Corinthians 11:1; Philipians 3:17; 4:9 — Whose example are we here told to imitate?

List some lessons we learn this way:

(Matt. 16:24; 10:25; 1 John 2:6; 1 Cor. 4:16,17)

3. Logical conclusions or necessary inferences ("Scriptural Reasoning")

Sometimes truth is not directly stated but necessarily follows from what is stated. Note some examples:

Matthew 19:3-9 — What Old Testament passage did Jesus quote? What did He use it to prove? Was His conclusion directly stated in the Old Testament?

List some other lessons we learn this way:

(See also Matt. 22:23-32; Acts 17:2,3; 10:1-11:18; 15:6-21; 1 Cor. 15:12-19.)

When we study a subject, we must consider lessons taught by any of these teaching methods.

B. All Spiritual Service Must Be Authorized by God.

Matthew 15:9 — What kind of worship is based on human law?

Colossians 3:17 — In whose name should we act? What does this mean?

Galatians 1:6-9; 2 John 9 — What consequence comes on those who teach a different doctrine?

God has told us in the gospel everything we should do to please Him (2 Tim. 3:16,17; 2 Peter 1:3; John 16:13). Human wisdom cannot discover what pleases God (Jer. 10:23; Isa. 55:8,9; Prov. 14:12; 3:5,6). Therefore, if we practice anything not taught in the gospel, we displease God. (Rev. 22:18,19; 1 Pet. 4:11)

C. God's Teaching May Be Specific or General.

Everything we do must fit the definition or fall within the meaning of God's instructions. **When God wants man to do a thing in a**

particular way, He chooses terms that are specific or narrow in meaning. We displease Him if we do anything not included in the meaning of these specific terms.

On the other hand, *God sometimes decides to leave man free to choose from alternative ways of doing a thing, so He instructs us in words that are more general or inclusive in meaning.* We are then free to choose any alternative that fits the definition of God's instruction. Consider some examples:

Genesis 6:14 — What material was Noah told to use for the ark?

Think: Could Noah have built the ark of metal? But could he have used a hammer or saw to "make" the ark?

Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 — What elements did God specify for the Lord's Supper? On what day should it be done?

Think: May we use hamburger and Coke, or commune on Wednesday? But would God care what time we had the communion on the first day of the week?

Ephesians 5:19 — What kind of music did God specify for worship?

Think: May we play musical instruments to praise God? But would singing parts (soprano, bass, etc.) fit the meaning of "sing."

If we believe in having Bible authority for all we do, then we must oppose all unauthorized practices.

II. The Church's Work Is Primarily Spiritual in Nature.

A "local church" has *all* the characteristics listed in the chart below. Above the chart is a list of passages. Place the passages in the appropriate spaces following the characteristics. The first two are done for you. Some verses may be used more than once.

**Matthew 18:15-17; Acts 4:32-5:11; 9:26-28; 14:23; 1 Corinthians 1:2; chap. 5; 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 11:8,9; Galatians 1:2; Philip-
pians 4:14-18; 1 Peter 5:1-3.**

CHARACTERISTICS OF LOCAL CHURCHES	PASSAGES
(1) A group of Christians from a certain area or locality	1 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:2
(2) A set of rules, the gospel, which guides the body	1 Cor. 16:1
(3) A work or function to be accomplished by the group	
(4) A system for overseeing the work (elders)	
(5) Funds belonging to the group to carry out its work	
(6) An identifiable membership *	
(7) Mutual agreement and understanding that they are a local church	

* This means there are Biblical guidelines for determining who is or is not a member of the local church.

A. The Church Is Primarily Spiritual.

The gospel teaches that *spiritual needs are more important than physical needs* — Matt. 16:26,27; John 6:63,27. Meeting physical needs has only temporary benefits; meeting spiritual needs has eternal benefits. (Cf. Col. 3:1,2; Luke 12:15-21; Matt. 4:4; 10:28.) Note how this spiritual emphasis applies to the church.

The church has a spiritual Founder, Owner, and Head.

Matthew 16:18; Acts 20:28 — Who built the church? Whose church is it? How did He make it His?

Ephesians 1:22,23; 5:23-25 — Who is head of the church? For whom is He the Savior?

Think: Why did Jesus shed His blood (Eph. 1:7; Luke 19:10; 5:32; Matt. 20:28; 26:28)? If that blood purchased the church and Jesus is now the head of it, then is the church physical or spiritual in nature?

People enter the church for spiritual purposes.

Acts 2:47 — Who is added to the church?

Colossians 1:12-14 — Who is translated into Jesus' kingdom?

Think: Does this imply that the church is physical or spiritual in nature? (Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:23,25)

The church is entered by a spiritual birth.

John 3:3,5 — How does one enter the kingdom? Is this birth physical or spiritual?

Think: How is baptism connected to salvation (Rom. 6:3,4; Acts 2:38,47; 22:16; Mark 16:16)? If one enters the church at baptism (1 Cor. 12:13), then is the church physical or spiritual?

The primary work of the highest leaders in the church is spiritual.

Acts 6:2-4 — Why did the apostles not want to become deeply involved in "serving tables"?

Acts 20:28; Heb. 13:17 — What work should elders emphasize?

Think: What does this show about the nature of the church?

The church is a spiritual house, a kingdom not of this world.

1 Peter 2:5 — How is the church described here? What kind of sacrifices do we offer?

John 18:36 — Why did Jesus' disciples not fight?

The church is fundamentally spiritual, created to help men be saved and have eternal life. This work is far more important than physical matters — Matthew 6:33. (Cf. Rom. 14:17; 2 Cor. 10:3-5.)

B. Local Churches Are Primarily Spiritual in Work.

As we study the work the church is told to do, note how it reflects the spiritual nature of the church.

Local churches should teach the lost.

1 Thessalonians 1:8 — What work did this church accomplish?

Acts 11:22-26 — What did this church do to spread the gospel?

Philippians 4:14-18 — How did the Philippian church help Paul?

The church is the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15). (Cf. 2 Cor. 11:8,9; 1 Cor. 9:1-18)

Local churches should edify Christians.

1 Corinthians 14:19,23-26 — What was accomplished in church assemblies? (cf. Heb. 10:24,25)

Ephesians 4:16 — What should the body accomplish?

Edification also includes church discipline (1 Corinthians 5; Matt. 18:15-17; 2 Thess. 3:6-15).

Local churches should provide opportunities to praise God.

Previous lessons have discussed the various forms of praise in church assemblies. These acts include:

Studying God's word (see above)

Prayer (1 Cor. 14:15; Acts 2:42)

The Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:17-34; Acts 20:7)

Singing (1 Cor. 14:15; Heb. 2:12; Eph. 5:19)

The Collection (1 Cor. 16:1f; 2 Cor. 8&9).

Local churches should care for certain destitute members.

Acts 4:32-35 — How were needy saints here cared for? (Cf. Acts 2:44f; 6:1-6; 11:27-30)

1 Corinthians 16:1-4 — What was this money used for? (Cf. 2 Cor. 8 & 9.)

Think: Look back over what we have learned about the nature and work of the church. What emphasis do you see in the work of the church? How does this harmonize with its basic nature?

The church is the unique institution God established to meet the spiritual needs of mankind. Everything we can now do to help people physically, we could have done had Jesus never died and established the church. But no man's spiritual need could be met without Jesus' death and without the church. It is a serious error to lead the church away from its spiritual work and focus instead on unauthorized material works.

III. Churches Should Use the Gospel to Attract The Lost

Here is an important application of the spiritual nature and work of the church. Souls are saved and edified by gospel preaching, not by carnal promotions.

A. God Has Specified the Power We Should Use to Attract People.

Romans 1:16 — What is God's power to save men? (2 Thess. 2:14; Rom. 10:17)

John 12:32 — How did Jesus motivate people to come to Him? (Matt. 11:28-30)

Acts 17:2,17; 18:4,11,19; 19:8,9; 24:24,25 — What means did faithful Christians use to attract people to Jesus and His church? (Acts 5:42; 8:4,5,25,35; 13:5,16; 14:1,7,21; 16:13; etc.)

Think: Did the apostles ever offer people carnal promotions to get them to accept Jesus?

The greatest motivating power we have is the story of God's love, Jesus' death, and the hope of eternal life (1 John 4:19; 5:3; Acts 20:32; 1 Cor. 1:18-24; Heb. 4:12,13; Jas. 1:21; Rom. 10:14-17).

B. Churches Should Not Appeal to Man's Carnal, Physical Desires.

Many churches offer fun, food, entertainment, parties, sports, and recreation to attract people. This is without Divine authority and contradicts the spiritual nature of the church.

2 Corinthians 10:3-5; Ephesians 6:10-18 — Are our enemies fleshly or spiritual? What

weapons do we use against them? Are these weapons sufficient to meet our needs?

1 Corinthians 1:18-25; 2:1-5 — Whom should men trust? How do we produce faith? What happens if we exalt human ability and wisdom?

John 6:26,27,44,45,63,68 — When people followed Jesus for physical reasons, what did He do? What does He offer that can give us eternal life?

Think: What is the difference in principle between offering people fun, food, recreation, etc., to get them to come and just offering them \$10 to come?

Clearly God's people refused to use physical appeals such as many people use today. The Bible rejects the concept that "the end justifies the means" (2 Sam. 6:3-7; 1 Sam. 8 & 15; Lev. 10:1-3; Matt. 7:21-23).

God is spirit (John 4:24). His kingdom is spiritual. Man's greatest need is spiritual. Our enemy is spiritual. Our eternal reward is spiritual. Therefore, God gave us spiritual drawing power: the gospel.

The church should refuse to use carnal appeals because we believe in the power of the gospel. Carnal attractions are unauthorized because they are different drawing power from what God specified. They pervert the spiritual nature of Jesus' church. (Rom. 14:17)

IV. Individuals and Churches Have Different Responsibilities.

A. Local Church Work Is Not Always the Same as that of Individuals.

Some people say that whatever individual Christians must do, the church may do likewise. But note the following passages. ***In each case ask whether the church and the individual are taught to do the same things or different things.***

Matthew 18:15-17 — Who acts in the first step described here? Who acts in the second step? When does the church become involved?

Ephesians 4:28; 1 Corinthians 16:1,2 — How do individuals obtain funds (cf. 2 Thess. 3:10)? How does the church obtain funds?

2 Corinthians 9:6,7; Acts 5:4 — Who decides how much an individual should give to the church? Who controls the individual's money until he gives it?

1 Timothy 5:4,8,16 — For whom should individuals provide? If individuals fulfill their duty, will the church care for the same people or different people?

Think: Consider some other examples:

* Individuals marry and raise children. Do local churches? Heb. 13:4; Gen. 1:28; Eph.6:4

* Individuals may wear the names of men, such as Paul, James, David, Alexander Campbell, etc. May local churches (1 Cor. 1:10-13)?

* Individuals may sing secular songs accompanied by instruments (Luke 15:25; 1 Cor. 14:7; Matt. 11:17). May churches do so?

* Individuals may wash in water for purposes other than remission of sins (Acts 9:37; Luke 7:38). May local churches, as such, do these things?

The church is not just one member, but an organization of many members functioning as a unit (1 Cor. 12:14). A business corporation does not necessarily do all the things done by the individual employees of that company. So also the Bible distinguishes the church as a unit from the individual members.

Sometimes the work of the church is similar to that of members; but just because a passage authorizes or requires individuals to do a thing, that does not prove the church is authorized to do the same.

B. Individual Responsibilities Should Not Be Shifted to the Church.

The "Social Gospel" involves the church in material pursuits that God gave to individuals, not to the church. Consider some examples:

Businesses, hospitals, secular education, & politics

May individuals participate in these for their own good and that of their families (Eph. 4:28; 2 Thess. 3:7ff; Acts 18:2f; 1 Tim. 5:8; Matt. 22:21)?

But what passage authorizes local churches to own, operate, or sponsor businesses, hospitals,

colleges, schools, day-care centers, or political campaigns?

Recreation, entertainment, social activities

Again, may individuals be involved in these for themselves and their families (1 Tim. 4:8; 5:8; Mark 6:31; 1 Cor. 11:22,34)?

But what passage authorizes local churches to organize or sponsor ball teams, gymnasiums, boy scouts, camps, parties, carnivals, stage productions, concerts, kitchens, and dining facilities?

The church is a spiritual body to worship God, preach the gospel, and care for certain destitute members. Individuals have additional duties that God never gave to the local church.

The church should not be diverted to pursue "Social Gospel" interests. To do so is to practice unauthorized church activities. It perverts the spiritual emphasis of the church, and allows individuals to shift their own responsibilities to the church.

V. The Church Is Limited in Caring for Destitute Members.

Local churches do have a responsibility in benevolence, but the Bible places limits on that responsibility.

A. Men Should Work to Provide for Their Needs.

Ephesians 4:28 — How should individuals meet their needs? (1 Thess. 4:11,12)

2 Thessalonians 3:10 — What should happen to one who can work but refuses?

Think: Should local churches care for able-bodied people who could care for themselves?

B. Individuals Should Care for Needy Relatives.

1 Timothy 5:4,8,16 — Who should provide for needy people who have relatives?

Think: If needy people are related to Christians who could care for them, should the church help the needy people or should it first teach the Christians their duty and discipline them if they refuse to do it?

(Cf. Gen. 3:17-19; Matt. 15:4-6; Esth. 2:7)

C. Individuals Have a Duty to Any Truly Destitute People.

Luke 10:25-37; Matthew 25:31-46 — Whom should individuals care for? (Eph. 4:28; Acts 9:36-39; 20:34,35; etc.)

James 1:27 — Who should be cared for according to this passage?

For each verse listed below please cite the words or expressions that show whether this passage addresses individuals or churches.

v19 —

v23 —

v24 —

v25 —

v26 —

v27 —

Think: Is it proper to use James 1:27 to authorize church activity?

Galatians 6:10 — To whom should we do good?

Again, for each verse listed below please cite the words or expressions that show whether individuals or churches are being addressed.

v3 —

v4 —

v5 —

v6 —

vv 7-9 —

Think: Vv 7-9 are discussing our eternal destinies. Will this matter be determined individually or congregationally?

Gal. 6:10 does not define the “good” we are to do, but the context discusses helping people serve God (v1-9). To know what other works are “good,” we must study other Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16,17).

These verses discuss individual work. Individuals, as they are able, should care for all people who have need, especially their own relatives. To learn what the local church is to do, we must examine verses discussing church work.

D. Local Churches Care for Destitute Members.

Some people believe the church should help people in general, whether or not they are Christians.

Every passage about church benevolence specifies that members should be helped.

Carefully read the following passages about churches helping needy people. In each context, find a word or expression that shows whether these people were Christians (“saints,” “believers,” etc.) or not:

Acts 2:44,45; 4:32-35; 6:1-6 —

Acts 11:27-30 —

Romans 15:25-27 —

1 Corinthians 16:1-4 —

2 Corinthians 8:4; 9:1,12 —

(Cf. 1 Tim. 5:3-16)

Think: Consider the following parallels:

* All passages about music in worship specify “singing.” Why shouldn’t we use instruments?

* Baptism is specifically for those who believe and repent. Why shouldn’t babies be baptized?

* Likewise God told local churches to care for needy members, but He never said they should care for non-members. What conclusion should we reach?

But some say “all men” in 2 Cor. 9:13 means non-members.

“All” means the whole group discussed **in context** (“men” is italicized — added by KJV translators). It means all humans everywhere only if the context so indicates (cf. Heb. 8:11f; Gal. 2:14; 1 Tim. 5:20).

“Unto them and unto all” shows “all” contrasts to “them.” “Them” here is a particular group of needy **saints** — the ones at Jerusalem (1 Cor. 16:3; Rom. 15:25; 2 Cor. 8:4; 9:1). “All” means the whole group of which the “them” were a part — hence, all **saints.** This harmonizes with the context and with the other passages on church benevolence we have studied.

Individuals should fulfill their duties, not shift them to the local church. This keeps the church from being involved in unauthorized works, and frees the church to do the work God gave it: helping people be saved, while maintain-

ing a limited role in helping certain needy members.

VI. Local Churches Should Function Independently.

A. Christ Is the Head of the Church.

Ephesians 1:22,23 — Who is head of the church?

Hebrews 8:1 — Where is Jesus now? (cf. Acts 1:9-11; 2:33)

Think: Where then is the headquarters of Jesus' church?

Jesus' church has no earthly head, headquarters, centralized governing bodies, or universal officers. (See also Eph. 5:22-25; Col. 1:18.)

B. Each Local Church Should Function Independently from Other Churches.

Acts 14:23 — How many churches, as they mature, are expected to appoint elders? Are the elders in each church singular or plural?

Acts 20:17,28; 1 Peter 5:1-3 — What work do elders do? What flock would any particular eldership oversee?

Note that the above verses use the terms "elders," "bishops," and "pastors" (shepherds) interchangeably. Men must meet Divine qualifications in order to be appointed. (Cf. 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9.)

Think: Since each church should have its own elders, and since those elders oversee the flock "among them," would any men have the right to oversee or to make decisions for more than one local church?

We conclude that God wants each congregation to function independently, guided by its own local officers. God's plan is perverted when the work and funds of many churches are centralized to be supervised by one man or body of men.

C. Central Organizations Are Unauthorized.

The introduction stated that prophecy and history both reveal that many perversions have occurred in the organization of the church. Consider some examples.

Catholic and Protestant central organizations

The pope is earthly head of the Roman church. Under him, cardinals, bishops, etc. supervise the work of many local churches. Protestant denominations have centralized headquarters, councils, societies, and officers that supervise the work of the local churches.

Think: What Bible principles that we have studied are violated by these arrangements?

Missionary societies

A century ago, Jesus' church divided when men introduced missionary societies under a board of directors. The board received funds from churches, then it decided what preachers would be supported, when, where, how much, etc.

Think: What Bible principles are violated by this arrangement?

Benevolent societies

More recently, Jesus' church has again divided because men have formed institutions such as orphan homes, widows' homes, etc., having boards of directors. Churches donate funds to the board, which in turn decides who to help, when, where, etc.

Think: Are these arrangements different in principle from the missionary societies? What Bible principles do they violate?

Note: In principle, such boards are the first step toward a denominational government. If some work of some churches can be centralized under a board, why cannot ALL the work of ALL the churches be centralized? Is there a consistent stopping place?

If we support Bible teaching about local church supervision and independence, then we must oppose centralized organizations. No New Testament church ever donated funds to any man-made institution.

VII. Church Cooperation Should Maintain Independence.

A. Local Churches May Cooperate Scripturally.

The pattern for church support of preachers

Acts 11:22-24 — What did Jerusalem do for the Antioch church? (cf. 13:1-3)

Philippians 4:14-18 — What did Philippi do for Paul?

2 Corinthians 11:8,9 — What work did several churches do?

Note that each church decided for itself whom it would send, whom it would support, when, where, how much, etc. In evangelism, churches did not donate funds to other churches; funds were sent to preachers through messengers (Phil. 4:18; 2:25; 2 Cor. 11:8,9).

The pattern for church-to-church donations

There are, however, a few examples in which churches did send donations to other churches. Let us consider them.

Acts 11:27-30 — Who sent a gift to whom? For what purpose? What people received the funds?

1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8:4,12-15; 9:1,12; Romans 15:25-27 — Who sent gifts to whom? For what purpose?

Below is a chart that summarizes the principles involved in church-to-church donations. We have listed the principles. From the passages listed above, you fill in the Scriptures that teach each principle.

CHURCH DONATIONS TO OTHER CHURCHES	SCRIPTURES
The receiving church needed help to care for its own destitute members	
The purpose of the gift was to relieve needy members	
Churches with abundance sent to relieve those in need	
The contributing was temporary, lasting only till the emergency was relieved *	

* Note “now at this time” and “their abundance may also be a supply for your want” (2 Cor. 8:14).

The purpose of church-to-church donations is as clear and binding as the purpose for baptism, communion, etc. The receiving church had an emergency need and intended to overcome its problem and become financially independent again, but needed temporary help due to an emergency.

In this way, **local church independence and equality were maintained** (2 Cor. 8:13-15). Each church was free from destitution, but no eldership controlled the affairs of any other church. Each eldership maintained its authority to oversee the affairs of the local church, as taught in 1 Pet. 5:1-3 and other passages already studied.

B. Centralized Cooperation Is Unscriptural.

If we support scriptural cooperation, we must oppose cooperation that centralizes the work, funds, or oversight of local churches. Missionary and benevolent societies, as already studied, violate this pattern of cooperation.

Consider “sponsoring elderships.”

This is an arrangement for supervising a work that is the responsibility of many churches, but one eldership “assumes the oversight” of the work. However, they know the church where they serve cannot finance the work, so they ask for funds from other churches.

Works done in this way include radio and TV programs, orphan homes, campaigns for Christ, area-wide workshops, support of preachers in a foreign field, national literature distribution, etc.

Sponsoring elderships are unscriptural.

Consider the principles of church cooperation as applied to this case:

* Is the receiving church **incapable of meeting the needs of its own members?** Modern “sponsoring churches” often send donations to other churches!

* Is the **purpose of the gifts to relieve destitute members** in the receiving church? The purpose is usually some form of evangelism.

* Are **churches with abundance sending to relieve a needy church?** Often the receiving churches are wealthy, and contributing churches are relatively poor.

* Is the arrangement **intended to be temporary?** The elders assume the work knowing they cannot afford it and never intending that they will afford it.

The result of modern “sponsoring eldership” cooperation is ***inter-dependence, centralization, and inequality***. The sponsoring elders oversee more than the work of one local church. They oversee the centralized funds of many churches to do a centralized work (not a local need), which is just as much the responsibility of the sending churches. Each church no longer oversees its own work independently from other churches.

An on-going relationship is established in which the sending churches depend on the sponsoring church for oversight, and the sponsoring church depends on the sending churches for money.

This too is a first step toward centralized church government. If one church can oversee some of the funds from some churches to do some of their work, why cannot one church oversee ***all*** the money to do ***all*** the work for ***all*** the church-

es? Where do you draw the line Scripturally? Remember that the Catholic hierarchy began with elders assuming more than local authority: the Pope is the bishop of one church who oversees the work of all the other churches.

If we believe churches should work independently yet cooperate Scripturally, then we must oppose “sponsoring eldership” cooperation.

Conclusion

People who favor Scriptural church work and organization, must oppose all unauthorized changes in these areas. Years ago, nearly all non-instrumental churches of Christ would have practiced as we have learned in this study, but in recent years many have drifted.

Fortunately, many local churches have stood for the truth. We need to teach the truth so future generations will not repeat the errors of the past.

Church Discipline

Introduction:

Ideally, we would wish for every child of God to remain faithful. We do not wish for any to be lost, and there is much we should do to help Christians grow. Despite our best efforts, however, some members will still become involved in sin. It happened in the first century, and it will happen today. What do we do then?

The purpose of this study is to examine the obligations local churches have toward members who are known to be guilty of sin. What does the Bible say?

Please look up the passages in **bold underline** below, and answer the questions that follow them.

I. God's Attitude Toward Discipline/Chastisement

A. God Sets an Example of Using Discipline.

Some say that punishment is contrary to God's loving nature. True, God is loving, but God is also just and righteous. His love leads Him to offer forgiveness and His patience leads Him to delay punishment, but His justice leads him to eventually punish sinners who do not repent. (Psalms 89:14; 2 Peter 3:9)

Statements that God believes in discipline

Hebrews 12:5-11 — How is God compared to earthly fathers? What are the purposes of chastening? Does chastening strengthen or weaken our respect for authority?

Revelation 3:19 — What does Jesus do for those He loves? What purpose should this accomplish?

Think: Is punishment contradictory to love? (Prov. 3:11,12; Rom. 11:22; Deut. 8:5; 28:15-68)

Examples of God's chastisement of His people

In each of the following examples, name the people God punished and describe their punishment.

PASSAGE	PEOPLE	PUNISHMENT
Genesis 3:16-19		
2 Samuel 6:3-7		
Acts 5:1-11		
Matthew 25:41,45		

(Gen. 19:17,26; Num. 16:1-35; Lev. 10:1-3.)

B. God Ordained Chastisement in Israel.

We do not live under the Old Testament today, yet 1 Corinthians 10:1-12 states that God chastised His people under the Old Testament as an example to **us**.

Examples of discipline in Israel

Note examples where God instructed His people to inflict chastisement. For each passage below, describe the sin and the punishment.

PASSAGE	SIN	PUNISHMENT
Exodus 32:25-28		
Numbers 15:32-36		
Joshua 7:10-13,24-26		

Many other examples can be given. (See Ex. 21:12-25; 22:16-20; Lev. 20:1-27; 24:10-23; Num. chap. 25; 35:30-34; Deut. 19:11-21; 13:1-18; 21:18-21; 22:13-27.)

The purposes for discipline in Israel

But **why** did God want Israel to practice discipline. What purposes did it accomplish? For each passage listed below, describe the purpose or effect that chastening would accomplish.

PASSAGE	PURPOSE OF DISCIPLINE
Deut. 8:5,6	
Deut. 13:5,10,11	
Deut. 13:12-18	
2 Samuel 12:14	

We summarize these purposes as follows:

1. Discipline motivated sinners to repent. Deut. 8:5,6. (Lev. 26:18,40,41; Num. 12:1,10,11)

2. Discipline motivated other people to avoid sin. Deut. 13:5,10,11 (17:7,12,13; 19:19,20; 21:21; 22:21,22,24; 24:7; Lev. 20:14)

Even when there was little or no hope that the sinner himself would repent, yet he was punished so that other people would realize that such conduct was unacceptable. Removal of the sinner from among the people also eliminated a harmful influence that might lead others to commit the same sin. (Note especially such expressions as “put away evil from your midst.”)

3. Discipline upheld the reputation of God’s people and the integrity of God. 2 Sam. 12:14. (Ex. 32:25; Neh. 5:9; Ezek. 36:20-23; Dan. 9:16; Rom. 2:17-24)

4. Discipline obeyed God’s command. Deut. 13:6-11; 13:12-18. (Deut. 19:11-13; 21:18-21; Josh. 7:10-13; Ex. 32:25-29; Num. 35:30-34)

Note that Israelites who opposed the discipline of the wicked were themselves disobeying God and were subject to discipline (Deut. 17:9-13; Num. 16:41-50).

The church does not use physical violence against sinners today; however, these examples prove God believes in discipline. We will see that discipline today is done for the same reasons that it was done in Israel.

C. God Ordains Chastisement in His Institutions.

God has instituted three special institutions. In all of them He has commanded some form of chastisement. God believes in discipline.

Civil government

1 Peter 2:13,14 — What work did God appoint rulers to do.

Think: What purposes do this chastisement accomplish? (Rom. 13:1-6; Proverbs 14:34)

The home

Proverbs 13:24 — What will a parent do if he loves his child? (See also 19:18; 22:15; 23:13,14; 29:15)

Think: What purposes are accomplished by this discipline? (Heb. 12:5-11; 1 Tim. 3:4,12; 1 Sam. 3:10-14)

Discipline in the nation and the home should be practiced for the same reasons it was in Israel.

The church

We will study church discipline in detail in the following sections. We will see that God still believes in discipline. He has authorized and commanded the church to discipline erring members. We will see further that discipline in the church is done for the same reasons that it is in these other areas we have studied.

II. An Examination of Passages about Church Discipline

Matthew 18:15-17

The reason for discipline: a sin against a brother

Read v15 — What kind of conduct is a brother accused of committing? What is sin (1 John 3:4)?

Think: Is Jesus referring specifically to a private sin of one brother against another, or is He referring to publicly known sins? (Note that, at the outset, it is possible for the matter to be resolved between just two brethren. Would this be the case if the sin were publicly known? Cf. Galatians 2:1-14; 1 Timothy 5:20)

Think: Should the church discipline people for an act that someone simply thinks might be wrong, or that violates some member’s personal conscience (cf. Romans 14)?

Think: Name some specific examples of the kinds of sins that might fit this verse.

The first step: a private meeting

Read v15 again — To resolve the alleged sin, what must the accuser do? What is the purpose of the meeting? At what point in the matter considered resolved?

Think: Should the brother who believes he has been wronged gossip to other people while refusing to talk to the accused brother? May he just ignore the fact his brother sinned? Should he talk to the brother for the purpose of vengeance or gloating over him?

Luke 17:3,4 — If the accused party did sin, what must he do? If he repents, what should happen?

Think: If the offender truly repents, but the offended brother refuses to forgive, what then?

Matthew 5:23,24 — What is our duty if we know that another brother believes we have sinned?

The goal of Jesus' teaching is to produce reconciliation. Forgiveness then must end the matter, so it is not spread among the congregation.

The second step: one or two other brothers are included

Read v16 — If the accused brother will not correct his sin, what is the next step?

Think: What purpose do the witnesses serve? (Cf. Deut. 19:15; John 8:17; 2 Cor. 13:1; 1 Tim. 5:19.)

Note that the procedure moves on to the next step only when it is clear the accused brother will not "hear" us at the current step — i.e., either he refuses to discuss, or it is clear the present approach will not lead him to repent. This may take one or more attempts.

The third step: the church becomes involved

Read v17 — If the accused person still refuses to repent, what step is taken next?

Think: What is the value of the whole church becoming involved?

The last step: treat the sinner as a heathen and a publican

Read v17 again — If the man still refuses to repent, what is the final step?

Think: How did Jews treat Gentiles or publicans? (Cf. Acts 10:28; 11:3; Matt. 9:9-13; Luke 19:1-10; Gal. 2:12; John 4:9.) Later passages will help explain this.

Far too often, small problems become major problems because this passage is neglected. Though an honest meeting could resolve a problem, Jesus' teaching is ignored, wounded feelings fester, and bitterness develops. Other misunderstandings follow, and the problem magnifies till it "blows up."

Romans 16:17

Kinds of sin chastised: divisions and offenses

Romans 16:17 — What kinds of sin is Paul discussing?

Think: What are "divisions" ("dissensions" — NASB)? Name some kinds of conduct that can cause division. (See Gal. 5:20; Acts 20:29,30; 1 Cor. 1:10-13.)

Think: What are "offenses" ("occasions of stumbling" — ASV)? Name some kinds of conduct that can cause occasions of stumbling (cf. Matt. 18:6-9; 16:23; Luke 17:1,2; Rev. 2:14-16; 1 Cor. 8 & 10; Rom. 14).

Think: Note that Paul refers to divisions and offenses that are "contrary to the doctrine" (cf. Gal. 1:8,9; 2 John 9; Matt. 15:9; etc.). Have we sinned if we "speak the truth in love," yet people are offended? (See Matt. 10:34-37; 15:12ff; Eph. 4:15.)

The discipline administered: note and avoid

Read Romans 16:17 again — What should be done to the sinners described here?

Think: What does it mean to "note" ("mark" — ASV) them? What is the purpose of it?

Think: What does it mean to "avoid" them or "turn away from them" (ASV). (Note Thayer's definition: "...keep aloof from one's society; to shun one".)

This is not a haughty self-righteousness, but a refusal to socialize. In order for the brethren to do this, the sinner must first be "marked" or identified so they know who sinned and what they did.

1 Corinthians chapter 5;

2 Corinthians 2:5-11; 7:8-12

Read 1 Corinthians 5 carefully. Then consider the following points:

The kind of conduct to be disciplined

This case involved fornication between a man and his father's wife (5:1). To show Corinth how to deal with this case, Paul taught general principles about chastising sinners.

For each verse listed below, list the general description of the sins Paul is discussing:

V8 —

V13 –

Note the similarity between “put away the wicked man” in this passage and the command in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 13:5; 17:7,12; 19:19; 21:21; 22:21,24; 24:7; etc.)? This expression also shows that Paul is discussing a broad principle of discipline. His teaching is not limited to just the specific sin(s) being considered in context.

V11 – Note the list of specific sins. Define each (consider other passages where the words are used).

SIN	DEFINITION
Fornicators	
Covetous	
Idolaters	
Railers	
Drunkards	
Extortioners	

Think: Does this list specifically name every kind of sin that should be disciplined? If so, where are murderers, pornographers, drug dealers, liars, kidnappers, nudists, people who curse and use profanity, etc.?

Note also that the church chastens one who is a “brother” – “within” (the church), in contrast to those who are “without” in the “world” (v9-12).

The disciplinary action to be taken

Note that the church must make a “judgment” in the case (v12). It must examine the evidence and determine whether or not the person is guilty of sin. List the expressions in each of the following verses showing how the person should then be treated. Study other translations to help you understand them.

V2 –

V7 –

Vv 9-11 –

V13 –

Note that to “put away” a person from “among yourselves” means to “purge out” the leaven of his influence, and to not “keep company” with him. Until the church takes action that re-

quires the members to cease associating with a sinner so that he cannot influence them, then the man is still “among” them in the sense this passage forbids.

Think: What is meant by “deliver such a one to Satan” (v5)? Does this mean that the church puts the person into a lost condition, or does the church just openly declare what the man’s condition already is?

By disassociating themselves from the man, the church makes clear that his conduct is evil and that his conduct put him under Satan’s control (cf. 2 Timothy 2:24-26; Romans. 6:16ff; John 8:34).

Think: Note v4. How is the church notified of the circumstances: privately or in a meeting of the church?

The whole church must be informed of the circumstances of the individual and of the action to be taken. The members must then follow through by privately avoiding social association with him. This should be done, not in self-righteous pride, but in “mourning” for the man’s lost condition (v2).

The purpose for the discipline

V5 – What is our ultimate goal for the sinner?

Note: “Destruction of the flesh” may mean he will suffer humiliation because of his sin, or it may mean his desire to live in sins of the flesh will be destroyed (cf. Galatians 5:24). Either view harmonizes with Scripture. But clearly it is hoped that the church’s action will lead him to repent and be saved spiritually.

Vv 6-8 – What comparison illustrates our purpose in discipline?

Think: What effect does leaven have in a lump of dough? How is purging out leaven similar to refusing to keep company with sinners?

Think: Name other illustrations from life in which something bad is isolated in order to help others avoid harm. How is this similar to Old Testament discipline? Note that we take this action for the purity of the church regardless of whether or not the sinner repents.

Think: Some people say that the only purpose for withdrawing is to get a sinner to repent. So, if they think a certain brother will not repent, they conclude the church should not withdraw from him. Is there only one reason for church disci-

pline? Should we judge the results before we have obeyed God?

V13 — Is this a suggestion or a Divine command (cf. 14:37)? If we refuse to obey, is God pleased?

Additional information from 2 Corinthians 2:5-11; 7:8-12

As a result of Paul's first epistle, the church apparently withdrew from the sinner, and he repented. In the second epistle, Paul gives more information.

2:9 — Why had Paul written them this command? Was the discipline optional or required?

7:11 — What had Corinth accomplished by disciplining the sinner?

Think: When a church does nothing about known sins, what does this do to the reputation and influence of the church in the community? How does this compare to Old Testament discipline? (Cf. Acts 5:5,11,13.)

2:6-10 — What should we do when a sinner repents? Why?

Think: Why is it important for the church to forgive when a sinner repents?

2 Thessalonians 3:6-15

Read 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 carefully, then consider the following points.

The kind of actions to be disciplined

As elsewhere, this passage discusses *general principles* then applies them to a *specific case*.

Note first the general descriptions.

For each verse below, tell who should be disciplined. Check other translations and define the terms.

V6 —

V14 —

V15 —

Think: Why is the person called a "brother" (cf. 1 Cor. 5). How many brothers should be disciplined?

Note: Thayer defines "disorderly" as: "...to be disorderly; a. prop. of soldiers marching out of order or quitting the ranks ... Hence, b. to be neglectful of duty, to be lawless ... c. to lead a disorderly life..."

Think: What "order" or rule did the "disorderly" man violate (see v6,14)? Cf. 1 Thess. 5:14; 2 Thess. 2:15.

Now note the case at Thessalonica.

Vv 7-13 — What specific kind of disorderliness is described?

Note that the word "disorderly" is applied both to a sin of omission (not working) and to a sin of commission (busybody). "Disorderly" is not a specific term for just one kind of act, but is a general term which here is applied to a specific instance of sin.

The disciplinary action taken

For the following verses, describe the action taken. (Study other translations to help you understand.)

V6 —

V14 —

V15 —

Think: Does the church's action break the sinner's relationship with God? What is it that we "withdraw"?

Think: Is the person still a "brother" after we withdraw? How should this affect how we treat him?

Think: Does "withdraw" mean we have no contact with the brother at all? What should be the purpose of any contact with him? Should he be allowed to attend church meetings? Does "withdraw" equal "stop attending"? If a brother stops attending, has the church "withdrawn" from him or should it still do so?

Purposes for the action

For each verse below, list the reason why the church should act as described toward the sinner.

V6 —

Vv 14,15 –

Think: Is this command an option that the church can just take or leave?

Think: What would you think of a preacher who says, “I don’t think people will obey, so let’s not bother to teach them”? What then should we think of a brother who says regarding an erring member, “I don’t think withdrawing will bring him back, so forget it”?

If a brother is walking disorderly, then the church must obey God’s command. Withdrawing ourselves will tend to make him ashamed and will serve other purposes noted elsewhere. Whether or not he repents is then between him and God, but the church must exercise the discipline God commanded.

Titus 3:10,11

Read Titus 3:10,11 and consider the following points.

What kind of conduct is supposed to be disciplined? **Study other translations and definitions.**

Note: Vine defines “heresy” (KJV) as “...an opinion, especially a self-willed opinion, which is substituted for submission to the power of truth, and leads to division and the formation of sects...” (See other examples in 2 Peter 2:1; Gal. 5:20; 1 Cor. 11:19).

Note that “heretics” (“divisive” people — NKJV) often leave a congregation because of their views. Paul still commands us to discipline them as described here.

Describe the disciplinary action to be taken. Study other translations and definitions.

Think: What is the significance of a “first and second admonition.” (Cf. Matthew 18:15-17.)

Think: What is meant by “rejecting” a brother?

Final discipline is taken only when it is clear that the previous steps will not solve the problem. The church disassociates only from sinners who stubbornly persist in refusing to repent.

Note: In 1 Timothy 1:18-20,3-11 certain men were “delivered to Satan” (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:5). So 1 Corinthians 5 teaches the church to deliver to Satan those who are “wicked,” and 1 Timothy 1 describes some people who ought to be delivered to Satan. Hence, the church today should deliver to

Satan the kind of people described in 1 Timothy 1. Study the passage further to understand the kind of people described.

(Other passages to consider are: 1 Cor. 16:22; 1 Tim. 6:3-5, KJV; 2 John 9-11; 1 Cor. 15:33; Heb. 12:15)

III. Summary and Conclusions

Let us summarize what we have learned.

A. The Actions Involved in Church Discipline

Admonition and judgment

For each passage below, summarize what is taught about rebuking a sinner (we have listed additional verses besides those already studied):

PASSAGE	INSTRUCTION REGARDING REBUKING SIN
Matthew 18:15-17	
Titus 3:10	
Luke 17:3,4	
Galatians 6:1,2	
1 Timothy 5:20	

(Cf. 2 Thess. 3:15; 1 Thess. 5:14; James 5:19f; Gal. 2:11; Titus 1:9,10; 2:15; 2 Tim. 4:2-4.)

Remember that the church must also make a judgment about whether or not the sinner is guilty: 1 Corinthians 5:12; Matthew 18:17.

Marking and withdrawing

Remember that the church must “mark” or take “note” of the sinner: Romans 16:17; 2 Thess. 3:14. This “marking” is necessary in order for the members to know they should refuse to associate with the brother.

For each passage below list the expression that describes the withdrawal or refusal to keep company.

PASSAGE	EXPRESSION
Matthew 18:17	
Romans 16:17	
1 Cor. 5:2-7,11,13	
2 Thess. 3:14,15	
Titus 3:10	

These verses require a deliberate choice by each member of the church to refuse to have social companionship with the sinner. We do not even eat common meals with them.

If we will not keep social companionship with the sinner, surely we should not do anything that would lead him to think we believe he is right spiritually (cf. Matt. 18:17; 2 John 9-11; 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1; Eph. 5:11).

Forgiveness for those who repent

Remember also the following verses that teach us to forgive the sinner who repents: Matthew 18:21-35; 6:12,14,15; Luke 17:3,4; 2 Corinthians 2:6-11; Ephesians 4:32.

B. Purposes of Chastisement

The purposes of church discipline are the same as in government, the home, and the nation of Israel.

To encourage the sinner to repent

For each verse below, state the purpose.

PASSAGE	PURPOSE OF DISCIPLINE
Matthew 18:15	
1 Cor. 5:5	
2 Thess. 3:14	

To warn the members and to overcome bad influences

1 Corinthians 5:2,6-8,11,13 — What purposes does discipline accomplish here?

Consider also the following verses about influence or about lessons learned when a sinner is punished: 1 Corinthians 15:33; 1 Timothy 5:20; 2 John 9-11; Hebrews 12:15. (See also Acts 5:11; Gal. 6:1; Prov. 24:1,2; 13:20; Rev. 2:20-23; 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1)

To protect the influence of the church and to defend the reputation and honor of God

2 Corinthians 7:11 — What was accomplished when Corinth disciplined the fornicator?

Consider also the following passages about our reputation and how it reflects on God: Acts 5:11; 1 Peter 3:16; Romans 2:17-24; 1 Peter 2:11,12; 2 Cor. 6:3.

A church that tolerates sin among its members will never be effective like it ought to be in saving souls. Instead, it brings reproach upon

God. (See also Proverbs 22:1; 14:34; Matthew 5:16; Philippians 2:15,16; 2 Peter 2:2; Titus 2:5,7,8; 1 Timothy 3:7; 6:1; 5:14.)

To obey God's commands

Nearly every passage we studied contained direct statements commanding the church to discipline erring members (Matthew 18:15-17; Romans 16:17; Titus 3:10; etc.). What do these verses especially say about this?

2 Corinthians 2:9 —

2 Thessalonians 3:6 —

God has directly rebuked congregations for failing to discipline erring members (1 Cor. 5; Rev. 2:20-23).

C. Kinds of Sin that Require Discipline

Several passages referred to broad or general categories of sin that need discipline. Sometimes these general principles were then applied to specific cases.

General descriptions of sins to be disciplined

For each verse below, list the broad terms used to describe sin:

PASSAGE	GENERAL TERMS FOR SIN
1 Cor. 5:6	
1 Cor. 5:13	
2 Thess. 3:6	
2 Thess. 3:14	

Terms that are not as broad as the above

What terms are used in these verses:

PASSAGE	TERMS FOR SIN
Matthew 18:15	
Romans 16:17	
Titus 3:10	

Some specific kinds of sin to be disciplined

List the specific kinds of sin to be chastised according to these verses: (Note also 1 Timothy 1:8-11,20.)

1 Corinthians 5:11 —

2 Thessalonians 3:11 —

These passages are just specific applications of the general principles of discipline. The intent is not to itemize every specific sin that can be disciplined.

Conclusion

As it was in Old Testament Israel, so it is in God's spiritual Israel today. When members go in-

to sin, God calls upon the rest of us to demonstrate whose side we are on: the sinner's side or God's side.

By exercising discipline, the church obeys God's command to motivate the sinner to repent and it removes evil influence, thereby maintaining the reputation of the church and the honor of God.

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