

The Story of the Church in the Bible

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Preface

The story of the church is a wonderful story. It ought to be told in story form. It took the planning of God, the work of the prophets, the agency of angels and the death of Jesus to bring it about. It did not happen by accident. God used many godly men to bring it about.

Men like John the Baptist, the apostles Peter and Paul gave their best efforts to make the church a reality. It came about over a period of hundreds of years. The story begins in the Old Testament and is continued in the New Testament.

I have spent the better part of my life as a member of the church, and it has taken me nearly two years to tell the story. It had been the desire of my wife that I write something about the church and I have used the time since her death to do so.

Richard E. Walker

Abbreviations

Gen	Genesis	Ecc	Ecclesiastes
Exo	Exodus	Song	Song of Solomon
Lev	Leviticus	Isa	Isaiah
Num	Numbers	Jer	Jeremiah
Deu	Deuteronomy	Lam	Lamentations
Josh	Joshua	Eze	Ezekiel
Judg	Judges	Dan	Daniel
Ruth	Ruth	Hos	Hosea
1 Sam	1 Samuel	Joel	Joel
2 Sam	2 Samuel	Amos	Amos
1 Ki	1 Kings	Oba	Obadiah
2 Ki	2 Kings	Jon	Jonah
1 Chr	1 Chronicles	Mic	Micah
2 Chr	2 Chronicles	Nah	Nahum
Ezra	Ezra	Hab	Habakkuk
Neh	Nehemiah	Zep	Zephaniah
Est	Esther	Hag	Haggai
Job	Job	Zec	Zechariah
Psa	Psalms	Mal	Malachi
Pro	Proverbs		

Matt	Matthew	1 Tim	1 Timothy
Mark	Mark	2 Tim	2 Timothy
Luke	Luke	Titus	Titus
John	John	Phm	Philemon
Acts	Acts	Heb	Hebrews
Rom	Romans	Jam	James
1 Cor	1 Corinthians	1 Pet	1 Peter
2 Cor	2 Corinthians	2 Pet	2 Peter
Gal	Galatians	1 John	1 John
Eph	Ephesians	2 John	2 John
Phi	Philippians	3 John	3 John
Col	Colossians	Jude	Jude
1 Th	1 Thessalonians	Rev	Revelation
2 Th	2 Thessalonians		

NIV	New International Version
NKJV	New King James Version
RSV	Revised Standard Version

1

God Planned the Church

After God created the plants and animals, He said,

Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and
let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds
of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth,
and over all the creatures that move along the
ground.

Gen 1:26

FREEDOM TO CHOOSE

The fact that God made men and women in His own image means, among other things, that He gave them the ability to think. They can distinguish the difference between right and wrong. What is more, God has allowed them to choose whether to do good or to do evil.

God knew that men and women would not always choose to do what is right and God knew that if they chose to do wrong, they would have to die. That is why God said to Adam,

You are free to eat from any tree in the garden;
but you must not eat from the tree of the

knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.

Gen 2:16-17

GOD IS A GRACIOUS GOD

God decided to save as many humans as He could. The apostle Peter wrote,

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

2 Pet 3:9 (NKJV)

God knew that in order to save as many humans as He could, He would have to provide a remedy for sin. He decided from the very beginning to send His own Son into the world to save the men and women, who would allow themselves to be saved.

This is something that God decided to do before beginning of time. The apostle Paul said,

This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

2 Timothy 1:9b-10

THE ENORMITY OF THE PRICE

The apostle Peter described the enormity of the price that God was willing to pay for man's salvation. Peter wrote,

For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.

1 Pet 1:18-20

One of the reasons why Jesus was willing to die for people is because He knew that it was God's will for Him to do so, and He wanted to please His Father. In His last hours on earth, Jesus prayed,

Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.

Luke 22:42

JESUS LOVED THE CHURCH

The Apostle Paul wrote,

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without

stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

Eph 5:25-27

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CHURCH

Even before God made man, He planned for there to be a body of people that would love the things that He loves and live by the rules that He lives by. In other words, God planned for there to be a church.

The fact that God planned the church before He made man points to the importance of the church.

THE CHURCH DOES NOT SAVE PEOPLE

The church does not itself save people. God's Son Jesus Christ saves people. The church is helpful, nonetheless, in saving those that God puts into it (Acts 2:46-47). One of the functions of the church is to help keep the saved people safe.

GOD'S SECRET IS KNOWN

The secret that Gentiles would become members of Abraham's family is now widely known because Paul was privileged to proclaim it (Col 1:24-27).

After the church came into existence, it became easier for people on earth and for the angels in heaven to see the wisdom that God demonstrated in planning the church. The apostle Paul wrote,

Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Eph 3:8-12

The apostle Paul was grateful for the trust that God had placed in him. He was privileged to reveal God's secret concerning the church (Col 1:24).

THE CHURCH IS IMPORTANT

The church is not more important than Jesus, but a part of the good that Jesus has done for the world was done through the church. Therefore, let no one look down on the church. Instead, let everyone rejoice over the wisdom that God displayed in planning the church.

2

Old Testament Prophets Foretold the Church

God was looking for a man that would

direct his children and his household after him to
keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right
and just.

Gen 18:19

At last, God found such a man. It was Abram, who came to be known as “Abraham” (meaning “the father of nations”). God chose Abraham because God knew that Abraham would teach his family to stay faithful to God.

GOD’S PROMISE TO ABRAHAM FORESHADOWED THE CHURCH

God said to Abram,

I will make you into a great nation and I will bless
you; I will make your name great, and you will be
a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and

whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

Gen 12:2-3

With these words God promised to multiply Abraham's descendants until they became as numerous as the stars of the sky and the sand on the seashore (Gen 22:17). God also promised that Abraham's descendants would be a blessing for all people. Not only were Abraham's physical children meant to be a blessing for all nations but his spiritual children as well.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

God spoke to Moses and gave him Ten Commandments and many additional laws based on the Ten Commandments. God did not give these commandments and laws to Abraham's spiritual children. He gave them only to the children of Israel (Col 2:14).

WHAT GOD FORETOLD MOSES

God said to Moses,

I will raise up for them [the children of Israel] a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him.

Deu 18:18

Some people think that God was talking about Joshua, who succeeded Moses as the leader of Israel, but Joshua was a military leader, not a prophet-lawgiver as Moses was. Therefore,

we must look for someone else to be the prophet of whom Moses spoke.

WHAT KING DAVID SAID

God gave King David more information about the One who through whom God was planning to bless the world. David wrote,

The LORD says to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand
until I make your enemies a footstool for your
feet.”

Psalm 110:1

David did not expect that he (David) would be the one to sit at God’s right hand in heaven. That honor would belong to someone else. It would belong to the one whom David called “*my Lord*.” David wrote,

The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind:
“You are a priest forever, in the order of
Melchizedek.”

Psalm 110:4

The man of whom David spoke would be both priest and king like Melchizedek. He would be not only prophet and lawgiver as Moses was but also a priest and king as Melchizedek was.

This indicates that the kingdom over which David’s Lord would reign would not only be an earthly kingdom but also a spiritual kingdom as well.

***MANY PEOPLES LEARN
TO WALK IN GOD'S WAYS***

Many years after King David's death, the prophet Isaiah foretold,

Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

Isa 2:3

Isaiah was speaking of someone that would bring God's ways to the peoples of the world. About that person Isaiah said,

In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious.

Isa 11:10

Jesse was the father of King David. The "*Root of Jesse*" refers to someone from Jesse's family. King David had been dead for many years when Isaiah wrote the above. It was not King David but someone yet to come.

The prophet Isaiah foretold that the future priest/king would spring up at a time when many were not expecting Him. Isaiah wrote,

He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or

majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

Isa 53:2

Isaiah also foretold that the future king would experience many sad things. Isaiah said,

He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Isa 53:3

Now, can you think of any king that was “*despised*” and “*rejected*?” If you can, your answer will tell you of whom Isaiah was speaking.

Again Isaiah said,

Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted.

Isa 53:4

Whom do we know that carried our sorrows and was stricken by God for our sins? Was it the Jews as a nation? No, they have suffered for their own sins (Lev 26:18 and many other passages). It was Jesus Christ, our Lord!

Let us sum up, then. We have seen that nations would be blessed through the descendants of Abraham (Gen 12:3) and that the blessing would come through someone that would be both prophet and lawgiver like Moses (Deu 18:18) and priest and king like Melchizedek. We also know that this One would be punished for the sins of others (Isa 53:4). Whom do we

know that fits these prophecies? Only one person: Jesus Christ our Lord.

THE NEW LAW

About a hundred years after Isaiah lived and prophesied, the prophet Jeremiah pointed out that God intended to give a new law (covenant) to the Children of Israel. Jeremiah said,

“The time is coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD.

Jer 31:31-32

This “*new covenant*” (or law) would be different from the law that God gave to Moses. It would not be written on stones, as were the Ten Commandments. It would be written on people’s hearts (2 Cor 3:12-18). God said through Jeremiah,

“This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.”

Jer 31:33

From these words we see that God’s children would have a new law (covenant) (Jer 31:31). They would be redeemed, as we saw, by the suffering of someone (Isa 53:4) from the family

of Jesse. They would also be blessed by being taught the way of the Lord (Isa 2:3).

In these prophecies we see the outlines of the church that would emerge. There would have to be someone with whom God could make a covenant. Now we find ourselves speaking about the church.

3

Angels Announced the Coming of Christ and the Church

The earliest event that is narrated in the New Testament is the appearance of the angel Gabriel to Zechariah the priest. The angel appeared as Zechariah was performing his priestly duties in the holy part of the temple at Jerusalem. The angel said,

Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John....And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah...

Luke 1:13-17 (NKJV)

With these words Gabriel foretold that John, Zechariah's son, would "*turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God*" (Luke 1:16 NKJV). If, indeed, John would be able to turn many of the children of Israel to their Lord, it would be a great accomplishment. (The prophets had been trying to do that for centuries.)

Please, notice that the angel did not say that John would turn ALL of the children of Israel to their Lord. He said that John would turn "*many of the children of Israel to their Lord.*"

If John were able to turn “*many*” of the children of Israel to their Lord, but not all of them, two groups would emerge among the Israelites.

TWO GROUPS IN ISRAEL

One group would consist of the Israelites that turned to God. (This group would be the church.) The other group would consist of Israelites that refused to turn to the Lord.

Each of these two groups would have a new relationship with the Lord God. No longer would a person’s birth qualify that person for membership in God’s spiritual Israel. Only those that turned to the Lord and changed their ways would qualify as God’s spiritual Israel. Consequently, being God’s spiritual people became a matter of choice, not of birth.

A “PEOPLE” FOR THE LORD

Additional information was given to John the Baptist’s father about how John would prepare a people for the Lord. Gabriel said,

He [John] will also go before Him [Christ] in the spirit and power of Elijah, ‘to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,’ and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

Luke 1:17 (NKJV)

John did, in truth, turn the minds of many of the Children of Israel to wisdom and righteousness. This greatly facilitated

their being able to believe in Jesus when He arrived. Thus John got a “*people*” ready for the coming of the Lord (Luke 1:17).

We know, of course, that John himself was not in the church. We know this because John was beheaded before the church was founded. He trained many disciples, however, to be ready to embrace the church when it arrived.

ZECHARIAH WAS DELIGHTED

Zechariah, being a priest and having considerable knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures, understood that Gabriel was announcing the coming of the Christ. Zechariah also understood that his son John would play a significant role in getting people ready for the Christ. This excited Zechariah so much that he could hardly believe what the angel told him. Because Zechariah was so slow to believe, God took away his ability to speak until after John was born.

THE OUTLINES OF THE CHURCH

The identity of the people that were about to split off from the Children of Israel were becoming clear. They would be people prepared to serve the Messiah. Over the rest of the Jews, Jesus would not reign. The Messiah would reign only over that part of the house of Israel that would recognize Him as their Messiah.

A SAVIOR

After Gabriel appeared to Zechariah, he appeared to Mary, a young woman at Nazareth in Galilee. To her, he said,

“Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you” (Luke 1:28).

This frightened Mary and Gabriel said to her, *“Do not be afraid...You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus”* (Luke 1:30-31).

Gabriel informed Mary that her son Jesus would be *“great”* and that He would be called *“Son of the Highest”* (Luke 1:32). That is the same as saying that He would be called the Son of God (Luke 1:35).

Gabriel also told Mary that God would give to her son *“the throne of his father David”* and that He (Jesus) would *“reign over the house of Jacob forever”* (Luke 1:33).

JOHN THE BAPTIST’S WORK

Gabriel’s words to Zechariah indicated that John would prepare a *“people”* for the Messiah. John would *“turn”* people from their evil ways. Therefore, the Messiah’s people would be unlike any other people. They would not be once-born like everyone else was. They would be twice-born children of God (John 3:3-5).

A SAVIOR

An angel came also to Joseph, Mary’s future husband and said to him in a dream,

Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary
home as your wife, because what is conceived in
her is from the Holy Spirit.

Matt 1:20

God appointed Joseph to be a parent and a guardian to young Jesus.

SPIRITUAL DELIVERANCE

After Zechariah regained his ability to speak, he praised God that God was about to fulfill the terms of the covenant He had made with the fathers of Israel. Zechariah's words are recorded in Luke 1:67-75.

As we begin to read Zechariah's praise for God, we get the impression that Zechariah may have been thinking about the Children of Israel being delivered from Roman oppression. Yet, as we get further into what he said, we get the impression that his words refer to a salvation of a different sort.

Zechariah said that God was intervening in the affairs of the people of Israel so they could serve God in holiness and righteousness all the days of their lives (Luke 1:74-75).

Zechariah also said that John would make "*the knowledge of salvation*" available to the people of Israel. This salvation would be known to them through "*the forgiveness of their sins*" (Luke 1:77).

With these words, Zechariah downplayed the expectation of a political and national deliverance from the Romans. He highlighted a spiritual deliverance from sin. This points toward the church, for when God delivers people from their sins He puts them into His church (Acts 2:47).

4

God Sent the Savior

When the time came for the Savior to be born, there were shepherds in a field at night tending their sheep near Bethlehem. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and a glorious light shone round about them. The angel said,

Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.

Luke 2:10-12

Please take note of the words the angel spoke. He said that a child that was born that day in Bethlehem. He also said that the child would be a “*Savior*” and a “*great joy*” for “*all people*.”

A LIGHT TO THE NATIONS

After baby Jesus was circumcised on the 8th day (Luke 2:21), Joseph gave Him the name “*Jesus*” (Savior). At the appropriate time, Joseph and Mary took baby Jesus to the

temple in Jerusalem and offered the sacrifice prescribed by the Law of Moses.

While they were at the temple, an elderly man named Simeon took up baby Jesus up in his arms and praised God that he had lived to see the salvation that God had provided (Luke 2:29-30).

Simeon said that Jesus would be a “*light*” for Gentiles and the glory of Israel (Luke 2:32).

To Mary, Simeon said, “*This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel*” (Luke 2:34). That is to say, many reputable people among the Children of Israel would be brought low and many lowly people would be elevated.

THE KING OF THE JEWS

After Jesus was born, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is he who was born to be King of the Jews?” They explained, “We saw his star in the East and have come to worship him” (Matt 2:2).

The people of Jerusalem were shocked to hear that a new king had been born. They knew that Herod would not like that. There was no telling what Herod might do. Some were wondering whether or not this contender might be the Christ (Messiah).

As for King Herod, he was fearful, too. He called for the priests and scribes and demanded that they tell him where the Scriptures say the Christ (Messiah) would be born. They replied, “*In Bethlehem in Judea.*” Then they quoted Micah the prophet, who said,

But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of

you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of
my people Israel.

Matt 2:6

Observe that Micah predicted that the Christ (Messiah) would be a “*ruler*.” Observe also that the Christ would “*shepherd*” to (take care of) the “*people of Israel*,” as kings were supposed to do.

ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH PARTED WAYS

The church and Israel parted ways over the question of whether or not Jesus was the messianic king. They parted ways, not because the church left Israel, but because the Jews did not accept Jesus. They were, thereby, broken out of Abraham’s family tree (Rom 11:17-21). Gentiles that responded to the gospel of Jesus were grafted into Abraham’s family tree. They are children of Abraham by faith in Jesus Christ (Gal 3:29).

INDIVIDUALS WHO “TURN” TO THE LORD

Summing up, we learn that Christ’s people would be composed of individuals who “*turn*” from disobedience and who start living under the guidance of King Jesus.

5

John the Baptist Prepared the Way

From an early age, both Jesus and John knew what their respective roles in life would be. Jesus knew that His name meant “*savior*” and John was told, no doubt, by Zechariah, that he was to prepare the way for the Messiah.

JOHN THE BAPTIST

The predictions concerning John began to be fulfilled when he went to a wilderness area around the Jordan River (Luke 3:3) and began preaching to the people that came out to him. He preached that everyone would have a chance to “*see the salvation of the Lord*” (Luke 3:6), and he called upon the people of Israel to repent, saying, “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*” (Matt 3:2 NKJV).

John also preached a “*baptism of repentance for the remission of sins*” (Luke 3:3). He explained why he was out in the wilderness preaching. He said, “*I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance*” (Matt 3:11 NKJV). His motive for being in the wilderness baptizing people was to get them to repent. He was successful in this. As a result of his work, many Israelites were baptized, confessing their sins (Matt 3:6).

Notice that John the Baptist linked forgiveness of sins with repentance and baptism. This linkage remained in force all during the days that Jesus was on earth. It remains in force today, with the added feature that a person must believe that Jesus is the Christ (Mark 16:16 and Acts 2:38).

HOW REPENTANCE MANIFESTS ITSELF

When scribes and Pharisees went out to the wilderness to hear John the Baptist preach, he challenged them, saying, “*bear fruits worthy of repentance*” (Luke 3:8 NKJV).

John warned Jews not to rely on their national heritage to save them. He said,

And do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.

Matt 3:9

Being fleshly descendants of Abraham did not automatically qualify them to be a part of God’s spiritual family. Much more was required of them than that.

Various individuals came to John and asked him how repentance should modify their lives. John told them,

The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same.

Luke 3:11

This foreshadowed the generosity of Jesus’ followers later in the church (Rom 12:8).

Tax collectors asked John what they should do; and he told them, *“Don’t collect any more than you are required to”* (Luke 3:13). This foreshadowed the financial integrity of Jesus’ future followers in the church (Rom 13:8).

To the soldiers that came asking what they should do, John said, *“Don’t extort money and don’t accuse people falsely--be content with your pay”* (Luke 3:14). This foreshadowed that Jesus’ future followers would be incorruptible and content (1Timothy 6:6).

The preaching of John the Baptist showed clear outlines of the coming church; for in order to be in the church, those who believe must repent of their sins and turn from evil. They must also submit to baptism for the remission of their sins.

Thus we get a picture of the kingdom/church, which was about to come into existence. The Messiah would reign over that part of the house of Israel that would believe on Jesus, repent of their sins and receive baptism. The Messiah would also reign over Gentiles, who did the same (Gal 3:26-29).

JESUS WAS BAPTIZED

Jesus went to the place where John was baptizing in the Jordan River. He asked John to baptize Him but John declined to do so. John did not consider himself worthy to baptize Jesus. He knew that Jesus was a godly man. John acknowledged his own sinfulness by saying to Jesus, *“I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?”* (Matt 3:14)?

So Jesus replied, *“Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness”* (Matt 3:15).

John became fully convinced that Jesus was the Messiah after he had baptized Him and saw the Spirit of God

descending upon Jesus (John 1:32-33). If Jesus had not been baptized, some people would say, “Jesus was not baptized, so I don’t need to be baptized, either.”

A DIFFERENT KIND OF KINGDOM

If God had intended that Jesus’ kingdom be like other kingdoms of the world, composed of both good and bad people, then repentance and baptism would not have been required. As it is, however, God intended for the kingdom to consist of people who turn from bad ways and who are washed in water (baptized) for the forgiveness of their sins.

All of these considerations reinforce the idea that the church differs from all earthly kingdoms. We should not pattern it after any earthly kingdom. It is not like the Roman Empire nor is it like the Roman Catholic Church.

NOT ALL JEWS ACCEPTED JESUS

Sadly, not all of the people of Israel recognized that Jesus was the Christ (Messiah). The apostle John later wrote of Jesus, “*He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him*” (John 1:11 NKJV). The apostle John also wrote,

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.

John 1:12 (NKJV)

This shows that it is possible for people to belong to the fleshly house of Israel and yet not be counted as “sons of God.”

It is also possible for Gentile people, who are not Jews, to be counted as members of God's family through Jesus Christ (Gal 3:26-29).

6

Jesus Began Gathering People

John the Baptist referred to Jesus as “*the Lamb of God*” (John 1:36), and two of John’s disciples heard him say that. This aroused their interest in Jesus and they began to follow Him. John (the apostle) records the conversation that followed:

Then Jesus turned, and seeing them following, said to them, “What do you seek?” They said to Him, “Rabbi” (which is to say, when translated, Teacher), “where are You staying?” He said to them, “Come and see.”

John 1:38-39a (NKJV)

They went with Him and saw where He was staying and spent the rest of the day with Him.

One of the two men was Andrew, a fisherman from Bethsaida, a town by the Sea of Galilee. The first thing Andrew did, after finding Jesus, was to go and get his brother Simon. Andrew said to Simon, “*We have found the Messiah*” (John 1:41 NKJV).

When Jesus saw Simon approaching, He said to him, “*You are Simon the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas*” (John 1:42). (The word “*Cephas*” means ‘a stone.’)

Even though Jesus recognized Simon’s abilities, He did not make Simon the head of the church. That would be too much

for any human being to bear. Only Jesus is strong enough to be the “*rock*” on which Jesus’ spiritual kingdom is built (See 1 Cor 3:11).

JESUS FOUND PHILIP

The following day Jesus found a man named Philip, who was also from Bethsaida. To him Jesus issued His second invitation. He said, “*Follow me*” (John 1:43).

PHILIP FOUND NATHANAEL

Then Philip went away and found Nathanael. Philip said to Nathanael,

We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law [Deu 18:18], and about whom the prophets also wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.

John 1:45 NIV

In this way, the number of the people associated with Jesus began to grow. It grew as one person told another about Him. What a beautiful way for the kingdom to grow! No pressure was involved.

JESUS IN JERUSALEM

Soon after these things happened, Jesus walked from Galilee south to Jerusalem. The Passover feast was coming up and Jesus wanted to be there.

Jesus entered the temple area at Jerusalem and found people selling animals for sacrifice. So He made a small whip

of cords and drove the people away. He also overturned the tables of the moneychangers and caused their coins to spill. To those that sold doves, He said, *“Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father’s house into a market”* (John 2:16)!

Jesus felt that the temple of God was no place to attempt to make money. If Jesus had such zeal for God’s physical temple, how much more for God’s spiritual temple, the church (2 Cor 6:16)!

Some people think Jesus’ actions at the temple justify their use of physical force; but His little whip of cords was never a danger to anyone. There is no indication that He hit any person with it.

JESUS’ CONVERSATION WITH NICODEMUS

While Jesus was at Jerusalem, a Pharisee named Nicodemus, who was one of the rulers of the Jews, came to Jesus by night and said, *“Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God.”*

Nicodemus said further, *“For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him”* (John 3:2).

To that Jesus replied,

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew,
he cannot see the kingdom of God.

John 3:3 (RSV)

Nicodemus had difficulty understanding what Jesus meant. He asked Jesus,

How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?

John 3:4 (RSV)

Jesus answered,

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

John 3:5 (RSV)

These words were prophetic. They showed that people that come to believe in Jesus are born a second time. Such people are born of water and spirit.

JESUS BEGAN TO REACH OUT IN JUDEA

In many respects the message that Jesus began to preach was similar to what John was preaching. Both men were announcing that the kingdom of God was drawing near. Jesus said, "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*" (Matt 4:17 NKJV). If the kingdom was "*at hand*" in Jesus' day, but not in hand, that means that the kingdom had not yet fully arrived.

WHAT KIND OF A KINGDOM?

The kingdom which John and Jesus were announcing was to be a "heavenly" kingdom. The Gospel of Matthew calls it "*the kingdom of heaven.*" The other three gospels (Mark, Luke

and John) call it “*the kingdom of God.*” Both expressions mean the same.

A SPIRITUAL KINGDOM

Although Jesus’ kingdom (the church) is a heavenly kingdom, it exists on earth. It has existed on earth ever since Jesus “*built*” (established) it (Matt 16:18). Its headquarters (mother church) are not on this earth, however. They are neither in Jerusalem nor in Rome. Its headquarters are also not in Boston, Brooklyn or Salt Lake City. Rather, its headquarters are in heaven (Gal 4:26), where Jesus sits at the right hand of God (Col 3:1-2).

JESUS’ METHOD OF EVANGELISM

Although Jesus taught a message similar to the message of John the Baptist, Jesus’ method of evangelism was somewhat different from John’s. John stayed away from populated areas and preached in the wilderness. Jesus, on the other hand, went into the villages, towns and cities, where the people were, for He was seeking people.

When Jesus became aware that the leading Jews had found out that He was making more disciples than John the Baptist, He (Jesus) left Judea and started back to His home in Galilee (John 4:1-3).

Perhaps the reason why Jesus left Judea at that time was to prevent the scribes and Pharisees in Jerusalem from putting Him to death before He had completed His work.

JESUS IN SAMARIA

As Jesus and His disciples passed through Samaria on their way back to Galilee, they stopped at a well, where Jesus asked for a drink of water. He asked it from a Samaritan woman that was at the well.

In the course of their conversation, the woman said,

Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you
Jews claim that the place where we must worship
is in Jerusalem.

John 4:20

Jesus replied to her,

But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true
worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and
truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship
Him.

John 4:23 (NKJV)

Jesus' reply to the woman showed that worship in the kingdom of God would be different from the ceremonies carried out at Samaria and Jerusalem. No longer would animals be sacrificed as a part of worship. Candles and incense would be eliminated, as would also be the beating of drums and the blowing of trumpets. The nature of worship would be changed.

It is a mistake for Jesus' followers to drag the trappings of Old Testament worship into their assemblies. When they do that, they disregard the teaching of Jesus when He said,

God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must
worship in spirit and truth.

John 4:24 (NKJV)

Please, notice Jesus used the word “*must*.” He said that “*those who worship Him (God) must worship in spirit and truth*.” The word “*must*” implies a necessity. Of a necessity, true and valid worship must be of a certain kind. It must worship that is sincere and according to truth.

WHERE TO WORSHIP

Jesus also said to the Samaritan woman,

Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you
will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem,
worship the Father.

John 4:21

Although Jerusalem is as good a place as any to worship God, it is not the only place to worship God. Prayers offered from a private home or from under a tree reach to heaven just as quickly as do those spoken at Jerusalem or in a cathedral.

7

Jesus Started Training Workers

When Jesus' disciples returned from the Samaritan village, to which they had gone to buy food, they said to Jesus, "*Rabbi, eat something*" (John 4:31).

Jesus replied, "*I have food to eat that you know nothing about*" (John 4:32). It seems that Jesus had enjoyed teaching the Samaritan so much that it was like food for Him.

THE URGENCY OF JESUS' MESSAGE

Concerning the urgency of His message, Jesus said,

Do you not say, 'There are still four months and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. For in this the saying is true: 'One sows and another reaps.'

John 4:35-37 (NKJV)

Following that, Jesus said,

I sent you to reap what you have not worked for.
Others have done the hard work, and you have
reaped the benefits of their labor.

John 4:38

Jesus was not the first to teach about God. Indeed, Moses, Samuel, David, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and all the teachers of Israel were still influencing people that read the Old Testament.

A broad foundation of knowledge has been stored up to help people understand what Jesus was talking about. This broad foundation of knowledge is still available for people today in the Old Testament.

Therefore, it is good for the followers of Jesus to be familiar with the Old Testament. Some faithful Christians read the whole Bible through every year. That is a good habit to develop.

JESUS CALLED PETER AND ANDREW

When Jesus arrived back in Galilee after His trip to Jerusalem, He began enrolling certain followers as full-time student-apprentices.

He walked along the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee and saw the two fishermen from Bethsaida, Simon and Andrew, whom He had met previously. They were casting a net into the sea.

Jesus invited Peter and Andrew to join Him. He said,

Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.

Matt 4:19 (NKJV)

This was language that fishermen understood. They knew that it takes work to catch fish. They also knew that fish have to be drug ashore, cleaned and preserved in some way. Yet when they do manage to catch fish, what joy it gives them! The anticipation of that joy sends fishermen out onto the water day after day.

Jesus' message was not entirely new to Peter and Andrew, for both of them had been followers of John the Baptist. They were with John when John pointed to Jesus as the Messiah and they had recently spent some time with Jesus. They were overjoyed that Jesus invited them to join His group. So they immediately left their nets and began following Him full time.

JESUS CALLED JAMES AND JOHN

As Jesus continued to stroll along the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee, He came upon two other fishermen, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother. They were in a boat with their father mending their nets. Jesus invited them to follow Him and they also left their boat and their father and began following Jesus (Matt 4:22). They, too, were full of joy, for there is no work that gives more joy than helping men and women find Jesus.

THE NEED TO EVANGELIZE

The word "evangelize" often has an unpleasant ring to it, but it need not be so. It is a good word. It means to tell someone good news. What's wrong with that?

AT SIMON PETER'S HOUSE AT CAPERNAUM

After Jesus had cast a demon out of a man in the synagogue at Capernaum, Jesus went into the house of Peter and Andrew. He took James and John with Him.

They found Peter's mother-in-law in bed with a fever. So Jesus took her by the hand, rebuked the fever and she got up. Then she started waiting on them.

One of the enlightening things about this story is that it shows that Peter had a mother-in-law. That means that he was a married man. The man that is reputed by some to be the first Pope continued to be accompanied by his wife even after he began his ministry (1 Cor 9:5).

That same afternoon, the whole town gathered outside Peter's door. They were looking for Jesus. They had brought their sick for Jesus to heal them. Jesus laid His hands on them and healed them all (Luke 4:40).

This shows that Jesus' ministry was not only a ministry of teaching but also a ministry of healing. That is why Jesus' followers have become nurses and doctors. They have also established nursing homes and hospitals.

SOLITARY PRAYER

Early the next morning, Jesus left Peter's house and went away to a solitary place to pray. Thus He demonstrated how important private prayer is.

JESUS SET A PATTERN FOR EVANGELISM

Jesus had no intention of remaining at Capernaum even though it had been His home ever since He and His family had moved there from Nazareth. To His disciples He said,

Let us go somewhere else-to the nearby villages-so
I can preach there also. That is why I have come.

Mark 1:38

Jesus went everywhere in Galilee, teaching in the synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness among the people. His message was,

The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God
is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.

Mark 1:15 (NKJV)

Jesus wanted everyone to hear the good news. Therefore, He went personally to the people and told them the good news face to face. He set the pattern for His disciples to follow. The Apostle Paul took up Jesus' method of evangelism, too, and passed it on to Timothy. Paul told Timothy,

And the things you have heard me say in the
presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable
men who will also be qualified to teach others.

2 Timothy 2:2

Jesus' pattern for evangelism should still guide the actions of His followers today.

JESUS TAUGHT SIMON PETER A LESSON

After Jesus' first preaching tour in Galilee was over, He returned to His home at Capernaum for a few days of rest. The fishermen among His disciples decided to do a little fishing during their vacation from Jesus' school.

They did not, however, have a very long vacation. Soon, as Jesus walked along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, people were crowding around Him to hear the word of God from Him (Luke 5:1). As He walked by, He saw the boats of His disciples sitting on the shore. They were washing their nets in the sea.

Jesus got in Peter's boat and asked Peter to pull out from land a little way so that He (Jesus) could speak to the crowd from it. Peter did as Jesus requested and Jesus sat in the boat and taught the crowd (Luke 5:3).

When Jesus finished teaching the crowd, He had a lesson for Peter. He said to Peter,

Put out into deep water,
and let down the nets for a catch.

Luke 5:4

Now, Peter was an expert fisherman and he did not think that Jesus' suggestion was a good one. He said, "*Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything.*" Yet Peter added, "*But because you say so, I will let down the net*" (Luke 5:5).

When Peter let down the nets he caught so many fish that the nets began to break. Peter signaled to James and John in another boat to come and help them. They filled both boats so full of fish that the boats began to sink.

Peter was astounded at the catch. So he came and fell at Jesus knees and said, “*Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man*” (Luke 5:8)!

Jesus said to him, “*Don’t be afraid; from now on you will catch men*” (Luke 5:10). At that, the fishermen hauled up their boats on the land and left everything and resumed following Jesus.

Peter learned that when Jesus said, “*Let down the nets*”, Jesus had a reason for saying it. This was a valuable lesson for Peter. It is also a valuable lesson for Jesus’ followers today. If Jesus says for His people to do something, they should do it and trust that good results will follow.

8

Jesus Brought a New Way of Looking at Things

Shortly after Jesus had selected Peter, Andrew, James and John, His disciples and others came to Him on the hillside in Galilee. He taught them a new way of looking at things.

PEOPLE WHO ARE POOR IN SPIRIT ARE BLESSED

Self-assured people and self-confident are usually considered to be blessed, but Jesus had a different idea. He said,

Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matt 5:3

How can it be? How are people blessed that are poor in spirit? They are blessed because they are more likely to have hearts that are open to news about the kingdom of heaven.

MOURNERS ARE BLESSED

Jesus thought that sadness be a blessing. They usually recognize that they are in need of comfort. They are, therefore, much more likely to respond to Jesus' message than. If they respond to Jesus' message, they will be comforted by their Father in heaven. Jesus said,

Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.

Matt 5:4

THE MEEK ARE BLESSED

God designed His kingdom for meek people. Proud people do not belong in it. Jesus said,

Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.

Matt 5:5

Jesus' words concerning the meek remind us of Psalm 37:11, which says, "*But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace.*" David in the Psalm was thinking of humble Jews inheriting land in Canaan, but Jesus was thinking about His followers inheriting a place in the world to come (1 Pet 21:7). Jesus was looking at things from heaven's point of view.

LOVERS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS ARE BLESSED

Jesus knew that only people that love fairness and lawful-dealing would be God's kingdom. He said,

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for
righteousness, for they will be filled.

Matt 5:6

In Jesus' kingdom there will be only people that deal justly with others and who long to have others treat them justly as well.

MERCIFUL PEOPLE ARE BLESSED

There is no place for brutal and harsh people in Jesus' kingdom. The citizens of His kingdom feel compassion for their fellowman and help him. Jesus said,

Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.

Matt 5:7

James advanced Jesus' thought by saying, "*Mercy triumphs over judgment*" (Jam 2:13 NKJV). That means they will be judged fairly.

Let us pause for a moment to reflect on how important mercy is. Before Jesus' message had been proclaimed by the church and had penetrated society, wounded soldiers were usually left on the battlefield to die. Unwanted babies were set out to starve or to be eaten by wild animals. Elderly people were sometimes abandoned.

Jesus' followers have led the way in attempting to do away with these evils. In Jesus' kingdom, wounded people are cared for, babies are cherished and elderly people are honored.

THE PURE IN HEART ARE BLESSED

Jesus saw a special blessing for Jesus' followers that get rid of lewd and wicked thoughts. Only in the case that one's thoughts have been purified can anyone hope to see God. Jesus said,

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Matt 5:8

The privilege of seeing God in heaven will more than compensate for the pleasure of watching every impure TV show or movie that one has missed on earth.

PEACEMAKERS ARE BLESSED

Contentious people, who alienate brother from brother, are not suitable candidates for the kingdom of God. Jesus said,

Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called sons of God.

Matt 5:9

The Apostle Paul echoed Jesus' words:

If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath.

Rom 12:18-19

It is significant that many of the people today that are trying to get Muslims and Jews to get along peaceably are people that have been influenced by Jesus.

***PEOPLE PERSECUTED FOR
JESUS' SAKE ARE BLESSED***

From the beginning of His ministry, Jesus wanted His people to know they would suffer persecution. He said,

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of
righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matt 5:10

He also said,

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute
you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you
because of me.

Matt 5:11

Great blessing await those who are persecuted for Jesus' sake. The blessings are in heaven. Persons that have been persecuted on earth because of their faith in Jesus will be rewarded in heaven for all the abuse that they have suffered. Jesus said,

Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in
heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the
prophets who were before you.

Matt 5:12

The value of their heavenly reward will far outweigh the suffering (see 2 Cor 4:17).

JESUS' VIEW OF LIFE

Jesus' view of life is opposed to the way worldly people think. It is diametrically opposed. He looked at life from the point of view of eternity.

Therefore, Jesus turns people's thinking upside down. Or, perhaps, better to say that He turns people's thinking right side up.

Human thinking often leaves heaven's point of view out of consideration, but Jesus did not leave it out. Jesus brought heaven's way of thinking down to earth. He pointed out how people in the kingdom of heaven (the church) ought to think and act.

9

Jesus Updated the Law and the Prophets

The Law of Moses was given to the children of Israel before they entered the Land of Canaan (Exo 19:3-6). It was a part of the covenant that God made with the children of Israel at Mt. Sinai. Since God made the covenant with them only, the Law also was given to them only.

The Law became outdated when the Messiah appeared. It was unsuitable for all people everywhere.

JESUS DID NOT COME TO DESTROY THE LAW

There was a danger that people might think that Jesus came to destroy the Law (and the Prophets), but that was not the case. Even though the Law was outdated and needed revising, Jesus did not want to “destroy” it. Rather, He wanted to update it about the events that the prophets foretold. Jesus said,

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or
the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but
to fulfill them.

Matt 5:17

HOW JESUS UPGRADED THE LAW

The Law, for example, showed that murder was wrong. Jesus agreed with that, for He said,

You have heard that it was said to the people
long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who
murders will be subject to judgment.’

Matt 5:21

Jesus demanded that His followers not only refrain from murder, but that they show great kindness to all. He said,

But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his
brother will be subject to judgment. Again,
anyone who says to his brother, ‘Raca,’ is
answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who
says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of
hell.

Matt 5:22

Now, “*Raca*” was an abusive term. The highest religious court in Jesus’ day had the right to question a person for saying “*Raca*” to anyone. Jesus, however, prevented His people from calling anyone even a “*fool*,” which was, presumably, a milder form of abuse. Jesus considered even a mild form of abuse to be inappropriate (1 Pet 3:9).

Thus we see that Jesus “*fulfilled*” the Law of Moses by revising and elevating it, and thereby making Christian fellowship possible.

BE RECONCILED QUICKLY

Jesus taught that no person's offering to God would be acceptable to Him, unless that person resolved any conflicts that he may have had with anyone. Jesus said,

Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

Matt 5:23-24

Jesus did not want His people to sue each other at court. He said,

Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.

Matt 5:25-26

As a result of such teaching, the members of Jesus' church are not supposed to take each other to court. See 1 Cor 6:1-6.

SEXUAL PURITY

The relationship between men and women in the church should be loving and pure. It should be as pure as the relationship between brothers and sisters in an earthly family.

Jesus said,

You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Matt 5:27-28

Jesus would later say,

For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.

Matt 15:19

It comes as a relief to people as they enter the community of believers in the church to find that adultery and fornication are not the rule among them. The Apostle Paul would write,

But fornication and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is fitting among saints.

Eph 5:3 (RSV)

Sexual purity is a matter of life or death. Jesus felt that a person should take every precaution to avoid sexual sins. He said,

If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

Matt 5:29

In the same vein He said,

And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

Matt 5:30

If, for example, a follower of Jesus has acquaintances that tempt him to sin, he should make new acquaintances. If a workplace leads a follower of Jesus to sin, he (she) should get a new workplace. No friend (or job) is more important than avoiding sexual sins. Nothing can tear a congregation of the Lord's church apart as quickly as sexual sins.

DON'T COMMIT ADULTERY

It was common in Jesus' day for a man to divorce his wife. Jesus said,

Furthermore it has been said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.

Matt 5:31 (NKJV)

Jesus had a different teaching. He said,

But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.

Matt 5:32 (NKJV)

People need to understand what Jesus was talking about when He spoke of *fornication* and *adultery*. A married person that engages in sexual intercourse with someone, other than the person to whom he or she is married, commits “*adultery*.”

If an unmarried person engages in sexual intercourse with someone that is married, both persons commit the sin of “*adultery*.”

FORNICATION

“*Fornication*,” on the other hand, is sexual intercourse between unmarried people. The word “*fornication*” is a translation from the Greek word “*porneia*,” which is associated with the Greek word “*pornee*,” a prostitute.

According to Jesus, a man may divorce his wife because she had sexual intercourse with a man other than himself. In divorcing her, he does not cause her to “*commit adultery*,” due to the fact that she is already an adulteress.

If a man divorces his wife, however, for some reason other than because she has committed adultery, he runs the risk of causing her to become an adulteress by marrying someone else. The man that marries her also commits adultery by marrying her.

All of this may appear restrictive to people that are not used to hearing straight talk in this matter; but it is essential that people know what Jesus was talking about.

Jesus was not trying to restrict people’s freedom. He was trying to protect people. He had everyone’s best interests at heart. Presumably, what He said about men divorcing their wives applies equally to women who divorce their husbands.

A STABLE SOCIETY

Jesus wants His followers to lead holy lives. He wants them to have stable marriages. Stable marriages make for stable homes. Stable homes make for stable children; stable children make for a stable church; and stable churches make for a stable society.

10

Jesus Continued Updating the Law

The Old Testament said,

If you make a vow to the LORD your God,
do not be slow to pay it, for the LORD your God
will certainly demand it of you and you will be
guilty of sin.

Deu 23:21

Jesus did not permit His followers to make vows or take oaths. Jesus knew that it was dangerous for His followers to do that. If a person fails to perform his vows or oaths that he makes before God, he brings sin upon himself. Jesus said,

Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.’ Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God’s throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black.

Matt 5:33-36

SPEAK THE TRUTH

Jesus envisioned that His people would always speak the truth. If it is our custom to speak the truth, we do not need to make vows or to take oaths to confirm our word. Jesus said,

Simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’
‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil
one.

Matt 5:37

Question: Should Christian people follow this rule? Yes, of course, they should. James wrote,

Above all, my brothers, do not swear-not by heaven
or by earth or by anything else. Let your ‘Yes’ be
yes, and your ‘No,’ no, or you will be condemned.

Jam 5:12

Think how much more pleasant life would be if we could trust what other people say! Think how much more smoothly business would flow at home and around the world!

We can’t expect worldly people to be completely honest; but we do expect the followers of Jesus to be honest. Even if Christ’s church were to accomplish little else in this world other than to promote telling the truth, the church would be a blessing to mankind.

DON’T REPAY EVIL FOR EVIL

As we read through the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus’ precepts become progressively more controversial. He said,

You have heard that it was said,
'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.'

Matt 5:38

"Eye for an eye, and tooth for tooth" was the rule that the world lived by before Jesus came into the world. Some people live by that rule today, but Jesus advised a different way of living. He said,

But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If
someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to
him the other also.

Matt 5:39

It might appear too risky for us to apply this teaching literally, but the opposite course is even more risky. The results of resisting evil can be seen in the Middle East today. For example, in response to some injustice (perceived or actual), the Arabs commit an atrocity to protest what the Jews did (or were thought to have done) to them.

Then the Jews, in response to the Arab's atrocity, punish the Arabs to pay them back and teach them a lesson.

After Israel pays them back, the Arabs feel obligated to avenge what Israel did. As a result, hatred grows on both sides and the situation gets worse.

The path of retribution and vengeance is the old way. It goes back as far as Lamech, who said he killed a man for wounding him. Lamech added, "*If Cain is avenged seven times, then Lamech seventy-seven times*" (Gen 4:24). People with that way of thinking cause killing and maiming to continue.

What Jesus said next may also sound risky.

DON'T RESIST A LAWSUIT

Jesus said,

And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.

Matt 5:40

Did Jesus intend for His people to take these words seriously and to put them into practice? Yes, of course He did. It is the way people in His spiritual kingdom (church) should act.

Someone may respond, "But a person is entitled to defend his property before the law, is he not?"

Yes, a person is generally entitled by the law of the land to defend his or her property before the law. Although a follower of Jesus is *entitled* to defend his property before the law, but he is not *obligated* to defend it.

It was painful for the Jews of Jesus' day when a Roman soldier compelled them to carry his gear a mile. Yet Jesus taught His followers not only to carry the gear for one mile but to carry it farther than was required. Jesus said,

If someone forces you to go one mile,
go with him two miles.

Matt 5:41

DON'T REFUSE TO LEND

Jesus also said,

Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away
from the one who wants to borrow from you.

Matt 5:42

Did Jesus really intend for His followers to lend to those who try to borrow from them? Of course He did.

Someone may sputter, “But that is not rational! If Christians were to do that, it would impoverish them.” Maybe it would impoverish them, and maybe it wouldn’t. God is able to replenish whatever loss might occur to a person for doing what Jesus said. Where is our trust in God? Are we too fearful to do what Jesus said?

Jesus, however, would want us to use discretion in lending. He would not want us to lend money to an alcoholic, or a sharp sword to a child or a shotgun to a proven criminal. There may be some better way of helping a person than by lending to him things that would harmful.

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

Now we come to the most difficult part of all. Jesus said,

You have heard that it was said,
‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’

Matt 5:43

Many people around the world love their neighbors and hate their enemies, but Jesus said,

But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for
those who persecute you, that you may be sons of
your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise

on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

Matt 5:44-45

Jesus practiced what He taught. While He was hanging on the cross, He prayed, “*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing*” (Luke 23:34).

Jesus explained why it is important for His followers to love their persecutors and pray for them. He said,

If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?

Matt 5:46

It is commonplace for people to love those that love them, but Jesus expects His people to live by a higher rule. He said,

And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?

Matt 5:47

PERFECTION

After Jesus had described various stages along the road toward perfection, He summed up His teaching about moral perfection by saying,

Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Matt 5:48

Jesus wants His followers to aim high. The Greek word “teleios,” which is translated “perfect,” implies a goal that has been set.

Ideally, the members of Jesus’ church are on the road toward moral perfection. The apostle Paul said,

And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle,
encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient
with everyone. Make sure that nobody pays back
wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to
each other and to everyone else.

1 Th 5:14-15

11

Jesus Taught Us Proper Motives

Jesus saw that people often did their good with the wrong motives. He said,

Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.

Matt 6:1-2

Furthermore, Jesus taught His people to keep quiet about the good they do. He explained to what extremes they ought to go to keep their good deeds quiet. He said,

But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Matt 6:3-4

The good deeds that Jesus' people do should be done solely with God in mind. They should ask themselves, "What did God say?" or "What pleases God?" If they read the New Testament and do what God says in it, this shows that God rules in their hearts.

PRAY IN SECRET

Jesus lived at a place where it was socially acceptable to be seen praying in public. This led people to make a show of their piety; but Jesus said,

And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites,
for they love to pray standing in the synagogues
and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell
you the truth, they have received their reward in
full.

Matt 6:5

Other people saw them praying, but that is the only reward that they got. God does not respond to prayers that are prayed to impress people. Prayer should be a sincere transaction between God and man. Jesus said,

But when you pray, go into your room, close the
door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then
your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will
reward you.

Matt 6:6

DON'T BABBLE IN PRAYER

Some people mistakenly assume that using many words in prayer makes their praying more acceptable to God, but that is not true. Not the mouthing of words appeals to God, but a heart devoted to Him appeals to Him. Jesus said,

And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

Matt 6:7

JESUS' SAMPLE PRAYER

After Jesus said these things, He demonstrated what an acceptable prayer could be like. It is sometimes called “the Lord’s prayer.” Jesus said,

This, then, is how you should pray: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.’

Matt 6:9-13

This is a fine prayer, but it is not be appropriate for every occasion. For example, there is nothing in the prayer about such ceremonial occasions as weddings and funerals. It is a

sample prayer. It shows us some of the things that might be included in our private prayers. There is no indication that the apostles and earliest Christians spoke this prayer. All too often, however, the Lord's Prayer is the only prayer some people know.

FORGIVENESS

Jesus emphasized that a person who asks for forgiveness must be willing to forgive. Jesus said,

For if you forgive men when they sin against you,
your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if
you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will
not forgive your sins.

Matt 6:14-15

FASTING

Every religious activity, including fasting, should be done sincerely and from the heart. Jesus said,

When you fast, do not look somber as the
hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to
show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth,
they have received their reward in full.

Matt 6:16

The only reward that people get who make a show of their fasting is that others take notice that they fasted. Jesus said,

But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash
your face, so that it will not be obvious to men

that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Matt 6:17-18

LOOKING AT MONEY FROM HEAVEN'S POINT OF VIEW

There are many reasons why it is unwise for us to store up wealth on earth. One of them is that our wealth is not safe. Jesus said,

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.

Matt 6:19-20

Jesus added another reason why we should not store up wealth on earth. He said,

For where your treasure is,
there your heart will be also.

Matt 6:21

Jesus warned,

No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted

to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.

Matt 6:24

For the person who takes Jesus' words seriously, all kind of questions arise. For instance, how much wealth should we keep? How much should we give away? Should I be invested in stocks and bonds? Should a congregation of the Lord's church hoard wealth?

Although Jesus did not give specific answers to such questions, He expects us to look at life from God's point of view.

12

Jesus Taught Us to Trust God

Many of our worries concerning money arise from our lack of faith in God's providence. Jesus said,

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life,
what you will eat or drink; or about your body,
what you will wear. Is not life more important
than food, and the body more important than
clothes?"

Matt 6:25

The believer who worries about whether or not he will have enough money for food and clothing is not trusting in God. Jesus said,

Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or
reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly
Father feeds them. Are you not much more
valuable than they?

Matt 6:26

No one can foresee every eventuality. Who knows whether or not banks will fail? Who knows whether or not stock markets will crash, or governments will fall? Who can prepare himself for every disaster?

WHO KNOWS HOW LONG HE WILL LIVE?

Jesus wants us to trust God regarding the future. He asked,

Who of you by worrying can add
a single hour to his life?

Matt 6:27

GOD WILL CLOTHE YOU

Concerning the wonderful way in which God dresses the flowers, Jesus asked,

And why do you worry about clothes? See how the
lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin.
Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his
splendor was dressed like one of these.

Matt 6:28-29

Then Jesus asked,

If that is how God clothes the grass of the field,
which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into
the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you
of little faith?

Matt 6:30

Therefore, Jesus exhorted,

So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or
'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'

Matt 6:31

It is the people of the world, who do not believe in God, who worry about such things. Jesus said,

For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

Matt 6:32

Our trusting in God does not mean that we should be idle or lazy. Not at all! We must work to provide for our families and ourselves. We should work with all our might and pray as much as we can.

WHERE TO PLACE THE EMPHASIS?

Jesus taught us where to place the emphasis. He said,

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness,
and all these things will be given to you as well.
Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for
tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has
enough trouble of its own.

Matt 6:33-34

These words have encouraged the followers of Jesus for hundreds of years. His promises have proven themselves to be reliable over and over again.

JUDGING

Jesus warned us not to judge others. He said,

Do not judge, or you too will be judged.
For in the same way you judge others, you will be

judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

Matt 7:1-2

Jesus gave a comic illustration of what He meant. He asked,

Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye?

Matt 7:3-4

Jesus continued by adding,

You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

Matt 7:5

PRAY!

Turning again to teaching about prayer, Jesus emphasized that His followers have the privilege of asking. He said,

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.

Matt 7:7

Jesus assured us that God would be responsive to our prayers. He said,

For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

Matt 7:8

Jesus pointed out that God is kind and generous. Jesus asked,

Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

Matt 7:9-11

THE GOLDEN RULE

People will be more likely to live in peace and harmony if they practice what is sometimes called, “The Golden Rule.” Jesus said,

So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

Matt 7:12

The sayings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount describe a distinctive way of living. Not everyone in the world, however, wants to live by His rules. He encouraged those who do, by saying,

Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

Matt 7:13-14

***FOR WHOM WERE THESE
INSTRUCTION INTENDED?***

After a person reads (or hears) the Sermon on the Mount, he can judge for himself whether Jesus intended His teaching to be only for people living during His lifetime or not. I think He was also thinking about people in generations to come. He was thinking about the church.

The things that Jesus taught on the side of a mountain that day in Galilee amazed the people that heard Him. It had the ring of truth to it, and He spoke with authority – not as the scribes and Pharisees (Matt 7:28-29).

Jesus announced that day many of the basic principles of His upcoming spiritual kingdom (the church).

13

Jesus Promised to Build His Church

After Jesus finished teaching His Sermon on the Mount, He resumed His evangelistic activities in the towns and villages around the Sea of Galilee.

He taught in the synagogues. He preached the good news of the kingdom. He also healed every one that came to Him to be healed (Matt 9:35).

Jesus took with Him the men that would become His apostles. They saw how He healed a leper (Matt 8:1-4), how He calmed the storm on the Sea of Galilee (Matt 8:23-27). They saw Him cure the Gadarene demoniac (Matt 8:28-34) and they were aware that He raised Jairus' daughter from the dead (Matt 9:18-26).

JESUS SENT OUT HIS APOSTLES ON A SHORT MISSION

The time had come for Jesus' apostles to try evangelizing on their own. He gave them the power (authority) to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease (Matt 10:1). Then He sent them out two by two. On this first mission they were to preach only to Jewish people.

He told them to say, “*The kingdom of heaven is near*” (Matt 10:5). He instructed them to heal the sick, raise the dead and cure the lepers, and to drive out demons (Matt 10:8).

He warned them not to carry money with them or to charge any money for their services.

THE TWELVE RETURNED

When the twelve returned to Jesus from their limited mission, they gave Him a glowing report of all that God had done with them. Following that they continued to be with Jesus, watching Him and learning from Him. He was prepared them for their future work.

WHO IS “THE SON OF MAN?”

Toward the close of Jesus’ ministry in Galilee, the following exchange between Jesus and his apostles took place:

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Matt 16:13-16

Peter’s answer is what is called the good confession (1 Tim 6:12). It is the same confession that Jesus Himself would later make before Pilate (1 Tim 6:13). It is also the confession that

prospective Christians make before they are baptized. The church is founded on the conviction that Jesus is the Christ (1 Cor 3:10-11).

After Peter made the good confession, Jesus said to him,

Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah,
for this was not revealed to you by man,
but by my Father in heaven.

Matt 16:17

Then Jesus added,

And I tell you that you are Peter,
and on this rock I will build my church,
and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

Matt 16:18

THE WORD “CHURCH”

This is the first time we find Jesus using the word “church.” With this word He portrayed that His people would be called out of the sinful world and into an assembly that would take place in His name.

Up until this time, as far as we know, Jesus had only spoken about “*the kingdom of God*” or “*the kingdom of Heaven*.” The expressions “*kingdom of God*” or “*kingdom of heaven*” and the word “*church*” all refer to the same body of people.

“I WILL BUILD”

Notice that the founding of the church lay still in the future when Jesus spoke these words. He still had much work to do before His church became a reality. The hardest part of His work would be to suffer death on the cross.

“ON THIS ROCK”

Jesus had given Simon son of Jonah, a new name (John 1:42). He called him “Peter,” which in Greek means a little rock.

Jesus did not intend, however, to build His church on the man Peter. When Jesus said that He would build His church “*on this rock*” (petra), He was thinking of something far more substantial than a mere human being. He was thinking of the great truth that Jesus Himself is the Christ. This was the truth that Peter had confessed.

It is true that Simon Peter was to be in the foundation of the church, as were other apostles. They were the nucleus around which Jesus would build His church (Eph 2:20).

“MY CHURCH”

Jesus spoke of the church as being “*my church*.” He was emphasizing the fact that the church would belong to Him. It would bear the stamp of His teaching and personality and He would be the one to die for it (Acts 20:28). He would be the bridegroom and the church would be His bride (John 3:29).

Jesus was aware that some men would establish churches in their own name. Since that can happen, we should be careful to search out and to find Jesus' church.

“THE GATES OF HADES WILL NOT OVERCOME IT”

Jesus said that the gates of Hades would not overcome the church (Matt 16:18). He was describing the church as an advancing, militant army. He did not mean, of course, that the church would be militant in any physical way. The church would attack the portals of death and would thereby snatch people out of the death's grasp, using the word of God, which is the sword of the Spirit (Heb 4:12).

THE KEYS OF THE KINGDOM

Continuing to speak to Peter, who had made the “*good confession*,” Jesus said,

I will give you the keys of the kingdom of
heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound
in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will
be loosed in heaven.

Matt 16:19

Peter was not the only one of the apostles, however, to whom Jesus gave the authority to bind and loose on earth. All of the apostles had the same authority. See Matt 18:18. They would open the gate to heaven for many. They would do this by teaching and preaching the gospel of Jesus, which is the power of God to save (Rom 1:17).

HOW TO MAINTAIN HARMONY IN THE CHURCH

Jesus knew that His church would face many challenges. One of the most severe challenges would be how its members would get along with each other. He said,

If your brother sins against you, go and show
him his fault, just between the two of you. If he
listens to you, you have won your brother over.

Matt 18:15

Notice that Jesus said that the offended brother should go to the offending brother and speak to him privately. Jesus did not say that the offended brother should speak harshly to the offender. Rather, he should counsel the offending brother as a loving brother.

There is the possibility, of course, that the offending brother will not listen to his brother's counsel. If that should happen, Jesus told him what to do. He said,

But if he will not listen, take one or two others
along, so that 'every matter may be established by
the testimony of two or three witnesses.'

Matt 18:16

If the offending brother will not listen to the chastening of two or three of his brethren, then let the whole church bring pressure upon him. Jesus said,

If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church;
and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat

him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

Matt 18:17

Jesus' advice for resolving conflict in a congregation of the Lord's church is very important; for if wrongs and misunderstandings are allowed to continue to fester, they will cause great damage to the loving fellowship of the congregation.

JESUS WAS THINKING ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THE CHURCH

Jesus' teaching regarding reconciliation is important to us in additional way. It shows that Jesus was thinking about the future of the church. It shows that He knew that His church/kingdom would have a future. It also shows that Jesus planned and designed the church. It did not come about by accident after Jesus was gone.

14

Jesus Predicted His Death

Some of the Pharisees and scribe in Galilee asked Jesus to give them a sign (a miracle). He knew that they were taunting Him. He told them that no sign would be given them except “*the sign of Jonah.*” He said,

For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

Matt 12:40

It is likely that neither Jesus’ disciples nor the Pharisees understood at that time what Jesus meant. His disciples, however, later remembered these words and came to understand that Jesus was saying that He would spend time in the tomb and then come to life again.

JESUS SPOKE OF HIS DEATH

Toward the end of His ministry in Galilee, Jesus began to speak with His apostles more openly about His death.

Following Peter’s confession that Jesus was the Christ (Messiah), Jesus explained to them that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the authorities.

He also predicted that He would be put to death and rise on the third day (Matt 16:21).

This upset Peter so much that he took Jesus aside and said to Him, *“Never, Lord!’ This shall never happen to you!”* (Matt 16:22). Then Jesus turned to Peter and said to him,

Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block
to me; you do not have in mind the things of God,
but the things of men.

Matt 16:23

Jesus went on to say that He was not the only one that would to be called upon to suffer. He said,

If anyone would come after me, he must deny
himself and take up his cross and follow me. For
whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but
whoever loses his life for me will find it.

Matt 16:24-25

The prospect of having to suffer should not hold Jesus’ followers back from following Him. He said,

What good will it be for a man if he gains the
whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a
man give in exchange for his soul?

Matt 16:26

Jesus also spoke of the reward that awaits His faithful followers. He said,

For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s
glory with his angels, and then he will reward

each person according to what he has done.

Matt 16:27

Jesus knew that worldly people would try to intimidate His followers, so He warned,

If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.

Mark 8:38

THE DISCUSSION ON THE MOUNT OF TRANSFIGURATION

Not long after this conversation, Jesus took with Him Peter, James and John up on one of the mountains in Galilee, where Jesus' appearance changed before them. "*His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light* (Matt 17:2). Then there appeared with Him Moses and Elijah, who had been long dead. They discussed with Jesus the suffering and death that awaited Him in Jerusalem (Luke 9:30).

Jesus did not want His followers to tell others yet about His upcoming death, burial and resurrection. They were to keep it a secret for the time being (Matt 17:9). He assured them, however, that His death would result in the kingdom of God being openly established on earth (Luke 9:27) and that it would happen during the lifetime of some of those listening to Him.

Jesus continued speaking of His upcoming death to His apostles. He did this to prepare them for what was going to happen. He said to them,

The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised to life.

Matt 17:22-23

JESUS HEALED A CONVULSIVE BOY

Also on the occasion of His having healed a convulsive boy in Galilee He mentioned His impending death. He said to His disciples,

Listen carefully to what I am about to tell you:
The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men.

Luke 9:44

Jesus' disciples were sad, of course, yet they were hesitant to ask Him anything about what He had said (Mark 9:32).

In spite of all of these forewarning, Jesus' disciples did not seem fully to understand what He was telling them (Luke 9:45).

JESUS WENT UP TO JERUSALEM

When Jesus saw that the time was approaching for Him to be taken up to heaven, He started walking in a roundabout way toward Jerusalem (Luke 9:51). He spent a few weeks going through villages in Judea on both sides of the Jordan River.

Finally, He led His disciples up the steep road that led from the Jordan River to Jerusalem. His apostles were aware of the dangers that awaited them in Jerusalem, and they were astonished that He approached the city in such a public way.

So Jesus took the Twelve to one side and told them exactly what was going to happen. He said,

We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise.

Mark 10:33-34

After they reached Jerusalem, Jesus explained the necessity of His death by saying,

The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.

John 12:23-24

So you see, Jesus knew He had to die so that His work could bear fruit. Jesus death and the existence of the church are inextricably intertwined. He said,

But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.

John 12:32

Jesus said this to show what kind of a death He was going to die (John 12:32-33). He implied that He would be lifted up on a cross.

Jesus spent His last week teaching in the temple and disputing with the scribes, the Pharisees and the religious

authorities. When He had finished teaching and witnessing to them, He said to His disciples,

As you know, the Passover is two days away –
and the Son of Man will be handed over to be
crucified.

Matt 26:2

All of these pronouncements indicate that Jesus' mind was set on the cross and on what would happen thereafter. He knew that His death would light a fire that would continue to burn in the hearts of men and women.

He had done His best to prepare for the future. He had selected His apostles and had trained them well. He had apprenticed them in the type of work they would be doing. They were to be busy ushering people into God's kingdom and thereby starting local congregations of the church.

AN INESCAPABLE CONCLUSION

The conclusion is inescapable that Jesus intended for His followers to plant congregations and that the people in those congregations should live as Jesus had taught.

WHAT JESUS SAID TO THE APOSTLES AFTER HIS RESURRECTION

When Jesus appeared to His disciples after His resurrection, He explained that what had happened to Him was in fulfillment of the Law of Moses. It was also fulfilled the Prophets and the Psalms (Luke 24:44). He said,

This is what is written: The Christ will suffer
and rise from the dead on the third day,
and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be
preached in his name to all nations, beginning at
Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.

Luke 24:46-48

Jesus also gave instructions as to what His apostles should
do. He said,

I am going to send you what my Father has
promised; but stay in the city until you have been
clothed with power from on high.

Luke 24:49

He told them to stay in Jerusalem and wait there until God
would “*clothe them with power from on high.*”

In compliance with Jesus’ instructions, they stayed in
Jerusalem. They waited with great anticipation to see what
would happen next.

15

The Holy Spirit Fell on the Apostles

There were forty days between Jesus' resurrection and His ascent to heaven. During those forty days Jesus appeared to His apostles several times and told them many things (Acts 1:1-3). One of the things He told them was that they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4). He said,

For John baptized with water, but in a few days
you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.

Acts 1:4

The apostles interrupted Jesus to ask Him, "*Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel*" (Acts 1:6). Their question indicated they did not have a clear idea of what the kingdom would be like. They seemed to think that Jesus would be an earthly kingdom like King David. They also seemed hope that Jesus would set up that kind of a kingdom.

Jesus did not pause to explain at that time that His kingdom would be a spiritual kingdom, not an earthly kingdom. They would understand that in due time. He only said to them,

It is not for you to know the times or dates the
Father has set by his own authority.

Acts 1:7

Then He continued giving instructions to His apostles,
saying to them,

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit
comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in
Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to
the ends of the earth.

Acts 1:8

Jesus explained what the Holy Spirit would do for the
apostles. Jesus said,

But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father
will send in my name, will teach you all things
and will remind you of everything I have said to
you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you.
I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let
your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”

John 14:26-27

When the Holy Spirit came to the apostles, He (the Holy Spirit) empowered them to be Jesus’ witnesses. He taught them everything they needed to know and recalled to their minds all that Jesus had said when He was with them (John 14:26-27). In addition, the Holy Spirit would give them power to do miracles (Heb 2:4). Being thus equipped, they were able to give believable testimony concerning Jesus.

Jesus also instructed them to bear witness first in the city of Jerusalem and then in Samaria. After having born witness in

Jerusalem and Samaria, they should bear witness to ends of the world (Acts 1:8).

JESUS ASCENDED TO HEAVEN

On the 40th day after His resurrection, Jesus was taken up in a cloud while the apostles and other disciples stood watching. They watched until the cloud hid Jesus from their sight.

While they were still looking up toward the sky, two men clothed in white appeared beside them and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).

Then the apostles and the others returned to Jerusalem. They went to the upstairs room in where they had been staying. About 120 of them were in the group (Acts 1:15). Among them were Mary the mother of Jesus and Jesus’ brothers (Acts 1:14).

A REPLACEMENT WAS FOUND FOR JUDAS

During the next ten days the apostles and their associates spent much time in prayer. At some point Peter stood up and spoke to the group concerning Judas Iscariot (Acts 1:15). Peter told them they must choose someone from among their number to replace Judas. He said should they choose someone that had been with Jesus all the time from John’s baptism onward and had had seen Jesus after His resurrection (Acts 1:21-22).

Two of their number filled these qualifications. They were Joseph called Barsabbas and Matthias. So the apostles prayed

and cast lots to determine which of these two men they should choose. The lot fell on Matthias, and he was added to the Eleven.

THE HOLY SPIRIT FELL ON THE APOSTLES

The apostles were all in one place in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, which was fifty days after the Passover.

Suddenly, a sound was heard from heaven. It was like the sound of a mighty, rushing wind. The sound filled the whole house where they were sitting (Acts 2:1-2). It could be heard outside the house as well.

The apostles saw forked tongues of fire coming down and resting on each of them. And they (the apostles) were *“filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them”* (Acts 2:4).

When the noise was heard, a crowd of people rushed together and the apostles began explaining to the crowd what had happened. They spoke to the crowd in the languages of the various places from which the people had come (Acts 2:5-6).

So the people asked, *“Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language”* (Acts 2:7-12). Notice that the apostles were not jabbering senselessly. They were speaking in recognized and intelligible languages.

All of this so amazed the crowd that they asked, *“What does this mean?”* Some of them said, *“They have had too much wine”* (from Acts 2:12-13).

PETER AROSE TO SPEAK

At that, Peter stood up with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd. (Notice that it was only Peter and the eleven (Acts 2:14) that stood up and spoke. It was not the entire 120.)

Peter explained that the apostles were not drunk, as some of the people in the crowd had supposed. Peter explained that this was happening in fulfillment of a prophecy of Joel, who had said,

In the last days, God says, 'I will pour out my
Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will
prophesy, your young men will see visions, your
old men will dream dreams.'

Acts 2:17

Then Peter began speaking about Jesus. Peter said,

Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was
a man accredited by God to you by miracles,
wonders and signs, which God did among you
through him, as you yourselves know.

Acts 2:22

This was not the first time that most of these people had heard about Jesus. Many may have seen Him and heard Him teach. Many more had heard about His miracles. Some of them may have may have heard the rumor that His tomb had been found empty. If any of people in Jerusalem had not heard about Jesus before they came to the city, they would certainly have heard about Him after they got there; for the city was abuzz about Him.

Peter said of Jesus,

This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.

Acts 2:23-24

KING DAVID

Peter reminded the crowd that King David had spoken of a resurrection from the dead. David spoke of it as if it were his son's body that would not see corruption (Acts 2:26-28; Psalm 16:9-11).

Peter assured the people, however, that David was a prophet and that he (David) knew that it would be one of his descendants, that would sit on his (David's) throne (Acts 2:30; 2 Sam 7:11-16).

Therefore, Peter concluded that when David spoke of the resurrection from the dead, he was not speaking of himself but of the Christ (Messiah). Peter concluded that David had prophesied that Christ's (Messiah's) body would not be left to decay (Acts 2:31).

PETER BORE WITNESS

Peter, then, began to bear witness to what he and the other apostles had seen. He said that God raised Jesus from the dead and that they were all witnesses to this fact (Acts 2:32). Peter

said that God had also raised Jesus to His (God's) right hand, from where had poured out all that these people were seeing and hearing (Acts 2:33).

Peter reminded them that David himself had not ascended to heaven, but had said,

The Lord (God) said to my Lord (Jesus): 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.'

Acts 2:34-35; Psalm 110:1

Perhaps it should be explained that David used two different Hebrew words for "*Lord*" in this 110th Psalm. He said that "*the Lord*" (Jehovah, God) spoke to "*my Lord*" (Adonai, Lord). This shows that David knew that he (David) had a Lord. His Lord is the Christ (Messiah). So God (Jehovah) said to David's Lord (the Christ), "*Sit at my right hand.*" This means that the Messiah was the one to sit at God's right hand, not David. The Christ was to sit at God's right hand until all of His (Christ's) enemies would be brought low.

Peter concluded his speech with this affirmation:

Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.

Acts 2:36

THREE THOUSAND PEOPLE OBEYED THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

Peter's message on that day confirmed in the minds of many people that Jesus was the Christ (Messiah).

Peter's accusation that they had put their Christ (Messiah) to death pierced their hearts like a dagger. So they cried out in desperation, "*Brothers, what shall we do?*"

In reply Peter told them,

Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in
the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of
your sins. And you will receive the gift of the
Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your
children and for all who are far off—for all whom
the Lord our God will call.

Acts 2:38-39

In the following chapter we shall see what happened next in Jerusalem.

16

A Congregation of the Lord's Church Was Established in Jerusalem

Peter preached a gospel sermon on the Day of Pentecost in Jerusalem and many people came to believe that Jesus is the Christ (Acts 2:41).

The new believers asked Peter what they should do to make up for having put their Messiah to death. Peter told them to repent and to be immersed (baptized) for the forgiveness of their sins (Acts 2:38).

Notice that Peter required the people first to repent and then to be baptized. Repentance comes before baptism, for without repentance baptism is meaningless. That is one reason why we should not baptize babies. Even if babies had faith, they could not repent.

Peter also told the people that if they would do as he prescribed they would receive a great gift. The gift would be the Holy Spirit, whom God had promised to all whom He would call by the gospel (Acts 2:38-39).

Peter warned his listeners and pleaded, saying, “*Save yourselves from this corrupt generation*” (Acts 2:40). His message did not fall on deaf ears. About 3,000 of his listeners were immersed (baptized) on that day. As each was baptized

he (or she) was added to the company of the apostles and their companions (Acts 2:41). Who was it that added them? The Lord added them (Acts 2:47), because each of them believed the truth about Jesus and had repented of their sins and been immersed for the forgiveness of their sins.

THE FIRST CHURCH

When this first congregation of the Lord's church came into existence, the kingdom of heaven was no longer only "near" or "close at hand." It was a present reality. That first congregation was composed of the apostles, their companions and the newly baptized believers.

WHAT WAS IT LIKE?

Most of the members of the church came from a Jewish background and were more or less familiar with the contents of the Old Testament. There was much, however, that they still needed to learn about Jesus. They were blessed by the fact that Jesus' apostles were present among them and that they could go to them with questions (Acts 2:42).

FELLOWSHIP IN THE EARLY CHURCH

The members the Jerusalem congregation had sweet fellowship with each other. It was a happy time! In the evenings they gathered in homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts (Acts 2:46).

They were also “*breaking bread*” and partaking of “*the fruit of the vine*” on the first day of each week in memory of the resurrected Jesus (Matt 26:26-30 & Luke 22:15-20).

THEY ALSO ENGAGED IN PRAYER

In the midst of all this activity, they did not forget to pray. How could they? There was so much for them to be thankful for. God had brought them out of ignorance. He had forgiven them their sins and placed His Holy Spirit in their hearts.

It is amazing how much joy the faith of Jesus Christ can produce in the hearts of people. Outsiders saw this and were greatly intrigued by what they saw. They looked favorably on the believers (Acts 2:47). They were filled with awe (Acts 2:43) over the miraculous things that the apostles did.

Their group kept growing, for “*The Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved*” (Acts 2:47).

THEY SHARED THEIR GOODS

Although they were not required to share their goods with each other (Acts 5:4), they did it anyway (Acts 2:44). They shared because of the love that they had for each other. They were like one big, happy family.

THEY CONGREGATED IN THE COURTYARD OF THE TEMPLE

Many of them gathered daily in the temple, where they encouraged each other and shared their faith with as many as would listen.

PETER HEALED A CRIPPLE MAN

One day, as Peter and John were entering the temple, a cripple man saw them and begged for money. Peter said him, *“Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk”* (Acts 3:6).

Then Peter took him by the hand and helped him stand up. The man stood up and was so overjoyed that he walked and jumped about, praising God.

When the people saw what had happened to the beggar, they were filled with wonder and amazement (Acts 3:10). A crowd gathered and Peter preached to them. Peter told them that the cripple man had been healed through the faith that comes by Jesus (Acts 3:16). Then Peter urged the people to repent and be converted (Acts 3:17-20).

PETER AND JOHN WERE SEIZED

The religious authorities in Jerusalem finally decided to clamp down on the preaching of the gospel on the temple grounds. While Peter and John were speaking to the people, temple guards and Sadducees came up and seized them and put them in jail until the next day.

In spite of the fact that Peter and John were arrested, many people had heard their message and believed.

The next day Peter and John were brought before the religious authorities in Jerusalem. The authorities wanted to know how they had been able to heal the cripple man at the temple.

Peter said to them,

It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom
you crucified but whom God raised from the dead,
that this man stands before you healed.

Acts 4:10

After that the authorities commanded Peter and John not to speak or teach any more in the name of Jesus. They threatened them with punishment if they did. Then they let them go.

When Peter and John got back to their people they reported all that the priests and elders had said to them. The brethren praised God in prayer for all the miracles and signs that the apostle had been able to do (Acts 4:23-30). Soon the number of the members of the church grew to 5,000 (Acts 4:4).

PERSECUTION

The brethren continued to congregate daily at the temple and were highly regarded by the people, but the people began to shy away from associating with them because the authorities had warned them against the brethren.

All the while, however, crowds continued to come from the surrounding towns and countryside to be healed by the apostles (Acts 5:12-16).

Again, some of the apostles were taken into custody and were put in jail by the authorities. Never-the-less the apostles were freed in a miraculous way (Acts 5:17-20) and the authorities found them at the temple teaching the people as usual (Acts 5:25).

The apostles were arrested and warned again (Acts 5:26-32). Peter spoke up and made a defense. His defense so angered the assembled dignitaries of the Sanhedrin that they wanted to kill them.

However, a wise Pharisee named Gamaliel spoke out on the apostles' behalf. As result of which the apostles were flogged and set free (Acts 5:34-39). The apostles left the Sanhedrin and rejoiced that they had been "*counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name*" of Jesus (Acts 5:41).

Arrests, threats and beatings did not stop apostles from teaching and preaching that Jesus is the Christ. They were doing this in the temple courts and from house to house (Acts 5:42).

THE FIRST DEACONS

Some of Greek-speaking widows in the congregation were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. So the apostles called all the disciples together and said,

It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry
of the word of God in order to wait on tables.

Acts 6:2b

What the apostles recommended was that seven men from the congregation be chosen to oversee the daily distribution of food to the Grecian widows. The apostles said regarding the seven men,

We will turn this responsibility over to them and
will give our attention to prayer and the ministry
of the word.

Acts 6:3-4

This sheds light on the internal workings of the Jerusalem congregation. The apostles had the oversight of the flock of the

Christians. Yet, their main job was to teach and to pray. Later, elderly men in the congregation served alongside the apostles as leaders of the Jerusalem congregation (Acts 15:2).

The word of the God continued to spread among the people and the number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly. Even some of the Jewish priests became obedient to the faith (Acts 6:7).

THE JERUSALEM CHURCH WAS SCATTERED

Now Stephen, one of the seven men that had been chosen to serve as servants (deacons) of the Jerusalem congregation, was *“a man full of God’s grace and power”* (Acts 6:8). In his zeal, Stephen stirred up antagonism among the Jews. They came to hate him so much that they made up false accusations against him, brought him to trial and stoned him to death (Acts 6:13; 7:57-60).

The stoning of Stephen set off a wave of persecution (Acts 8:1), which became so intense that the church, except for the apostles, was scattered. Even though the scattering of the church was tragic for the congregation in Jerusalem, but it proved to be beneficial to the spread of the cause of Christ to other places.

WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM THE JERUSALEM CHURCH

We note that no one was saved that was not added to the church and that there was no one that was added to the church that was not saved. Therefore, being saved and being added to the church are one and the same.

We note also that the new members did not “join the church,” as one might join a club or a human organization. They were “*added*” to the church by the Lord Himself. When the Lord added new people to the church, they had as much right to be in the church as anyone else did.

Furthermore, people that became members of the church were not required to pay a tax or a fee for the privilege. They were neither told to subscribe to a particular set of doctrines, nor were they required to take an oath of allegiance to the congregation or to the elders.

In addition, the Lord’s church in Jerusalem was remarkable in several ways. Its members had great love for each other. They shared their goods with each other. They told everyone about Jesus. Even though evangelism got them into trouble with the religious authorities, they were not intimidated. They trusted in God and kept on telling people about Jesus.

We also learn that the spiritual leaders of the congregation need to devote themselves to teaching and praying. Therefore, they cannot personally take care of everything that needs to be done in a congregation. They needed to appoint others to help them.

Also note also that the Jerusalem congregation was making sure that the widows in the church had daily food. It was the duty of the congregation to provide food for widows, however, only if there were no relatives in the widows’ families to help them (1 Timothy 5:4).

17

Philip Planted the Gospel in Samaria

With the stoning of Stephen, a wave of persecution broke over the church in Jerusalem. Among the persecutors was a man named Saul. He went from house to house dragging off men and women and put them in jail (Acts 8:2-3). He later became known as the apostle Paul.

Due to the persecution many Christian brothers and sisters fled Jerusalem. Some of them fled to the surrounding areas of Judea and some went north to Samaria. However the apostles stayed bravely at Jerusalem.

The brothers and sisters that were scattered spoke about Jesus everywhere they went. They were helping the apostles carry out the command of Jesus:

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations,
baptizing them in the name of the Father and of
the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them
to obey everything I have commanded you.

Matt 28:19-20

PHILIP IN SAMARIA

Philip was one of those that left Jerusalem (Acts 8:5). Prior to his departure, he had served as one of the seven men chosen to see that the Grecian widows were not neglected in the daily distribution of food (Acts 6:3-5).

The city of Samaria was about 40 miles north of Jerusalem. Philip proclaimed Jesus to be the Christ. Many Samaritans believed and were baptized (immersed) (Acts 8:12).

The apostles had placed their hands on Philip, while he was still in Jerusalem, to give him the power (authority) to perform miracles. Philip drove evil spirits out of people and many paralyzed people and crippled were healed. This brought great joy to the people of the city of Samaria (Acts 8:6-8).

Although Philip could perform miracles, he could not pass this ability on to others. That had been reserved for the apostles.

SIMON THE SORCERER

Now there was in Samaria a sorcerer named “Simon,” who had amazed the people for a long time with his sorcery. He boasted that he was someone great. All the people, both high and low, paid attention to him. They exclaimed, “*This man is the divine power known as the Great Power*” (Acts 8:10).

When Simon the sorcerer heard Philip’s preaching, he believed and was baptized (Acts 8:13). After his baptism Simon followed Philip about and was astonished at the great signs and miracles that Philip did.

THE CHURCH IN JERUSALEM HEARD WHAT HAPPENED IN SAMARIA

Before people in Samaria began obeying the gospel, it was unusual for non-Jews to become Christians. So when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that some Samaritans, who were at best half-Jews, accepted the word of God, they were curious. They sent Peter and John to investigate.

Upon arriving Peter and John prayed for their new brethren in Samaria. They prayed that the Holy Spirit would come upon them; for,

...the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.

Acts 8:16

I understand this verse to mean that although God's Spirit had come into the Samaritan's hearts as a result of their having obeyed the gospel (Acts 5:32), none of them had received power to do miracles.

So Peter and John placed their hands on certain ones of the Samaritan brethren and gave them the power of the Holy Spirit to do miracles (Acts 8:17). There is no mention in the Bible of anyone other than the apostles ever being able to pass on to others the ability to do miracles.

SIMON THE SORCERER'S TEMPTATION

When Simon, the (erstwhile) sorcerer, saw that the Spirit was given by the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying,

Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom
I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.

Acts 8:19

Simon not only wanted to perform miracles but also to be able to pass miraculous ability on to others. This would make him more powerful than Philip. It would make him equal to the apostles. Peter was horrified at Simon's offer. Peter answered him:

May your money perish with you, because you
thought you could buy the gift of God with
money! You have no part or share in this ministry,
because your heart is not right before God.
"Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord.
Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a
thought in your heart. For I see that you are full of
bitterness and captive to sin.

Acts 8:20-23

The attempt to purchase preferential treatment in the church has become known as "simony." It is a grave sin. History records that many bishops and cardinals over the years have attempted to purchase preferential treatment for themselves with money.

When Simon heard Peter's rebuke, he became afraid. He pleaded with Peter, saying, "*Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me*" (Acts 8:24).

Notice that Peter did not answer, "I remit your sin." Instead, Peter told Simon to ask God for forgiveness.

THE CHURCH IN SAMARIA

Peter and John soon returned to Jerusalem. On their way back they took time to proclaim the gospel in various Samaritan villages as they passed through. Many little congregations, presumably, sprang up among the Samaritans as a result of the efforts of the two apostles.

Notice that Peter and John did not appoint Philip or anyone else to be a “cardinal,” a “priest,” or any such thing for the Samaritan congregation. They did not even appoint elders and deacons to serve in their congregation. This shows that a congregation of the Lord’s church can exist and grow, until men can be found in the congregation to serve as elders and deacons.

After Peter and John left Samaria the congregation was on its own. It was subject only to God the Father, the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit. It existed as an independent congregation alongside of the much larger and more influential congregation in Jerusalem.

Although the Samaritan congregation was independent and had its own identity, it was not a national Samaritan church. It was a part of the same spiritual body as the congregation in Jerusalem.

THE CONVERSION OF AN ETHIOPIAN

Not long after the events described above, an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, telling him to go to the desert road that connected Jerusalem to Gaza (Acts 8:26). As Philip was walking on the road to Gaza, along came a man riding in a chariot. The man was an official of Queen Candace of the

Ethiopians, in charge of all her treasury. He had been to Jerusalem to worship God and was returning home to Ethiopia. As the man was riding along, he was reading in the Old Testament book Isaiah.

The Spirit of the Lord said to Philip, *“Go to that chariot and stay near it”* (Acts 8:29).

So Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading from Isaiah the prophet. Philip asked him, *“Do you understand what you are reading?”* (Act 8:30)

The man replied, *“How can I unless someone explains it to me”* (Acts 8:31). Then the man invited Philip to come up and sit with him in the chariot.

The passage which the man was reading was,

He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as
a lamb before the shearer is silent, so he did not
open his mouth. In his humiliation he was
deprived of justice. Who can speak of his
descendants? For his life was taken from the
earth.

Isa 53:7-8

Acts 8:32-33

The Ethiopian requested of Philip, *“Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else”* (Acts 8:34)?

Beginning with that passage, Philip, no doubt, told the man about Jesus, how He had fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah. He also told the Ethiopian what Jesus had taught. Philip may have also described for him the church in Jerusalem, and told him that there should be congregations like this in every place.

We know that Philip explained that the man should confess the name of Jesus and be immersed for the forgiveness of sins (the same as in Acts 2:38). We know this because, when they came upon a body of water beside the road, the man said, *“Look, here is water. Why shouldn’t I be baptized”* (Acts 8:36)?

The Ethiopian then gave orders to stop the chariot and both he and Philip went down into the water, where Philip immersed him (Acts 8:38).

It would not have been necessary for them to go down into the water, if baptism had consisted only of a little water being sprinkled over the man’s head. The fact that both of them went down into the water suggests that the baptizing was done by immersion. The expression “to baptize” means to dip something or someone in water.

When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord took Philip away. The Ethiopian did not see Philip again, but the Ethiopian went on his way rejoicing.

We do not know for sure that the Ethiopian continued to be a faithful Christian after he returned to his home in Ethiopia, but the Ethiopian people have a tradition that this man was the first to introduce Christianity to them.

After that, Philip continued his work as an evangelist. He became known as “Philip the evangelist” (Acts 21:8). He showed up at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea on the Mediterranean coast (Acts 8:40) and there he settled down.

WHAT WE LEARN FROM THE SAMARITAN CONGREGATION

The Samaritan church was under a threat, as many congregations are. The threat to the Samaritan congregation came from a powerful man who wanted preferential treatment. Many congregations have come under this threat. It was a blessing that the apostle Peter was there to ward off this threat.

We do not have Peter on the earth today, but we have two letters that he wrote. In addition, we have the writings of the apostle Paul and others. If we follow the New Testament, we will be able to ward off many threats.

We learn from the Samaritan church that a congregation can be independent, subject to no man.

18

Peter Worked in Judea and Caesarea

When persecution finally died down, the churches in Judea, Galilee and Samaria grew in number and the Holy Spirit encouraged and strengthened their hearts (Acts 9:31). About this time the apostle Peter began to visit some of the congregations in the countryside around Jerusalem.

AT LYDDA

At Lydda, west of Jerusalem, Peter encountered a man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden for eight years. Peter said to him, “*Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and take care of your mat*” (Acts 9:34). Aeneas got up and walked and the news of this caused many people to turn to the Lord.

AT JOPPA

At Joppa, near the Mediterranean coast, a Christian lady named Tabitha, died and her body was placed in an upstairs room. When the disciples at Joppa learned that Peter was at Lydda, they sent two men and urged him to come at once.

Peter went to Joppa. When he got there, he was escorted to

the upstairs room where Dorcas' body lay. Many women stood around crying. They showed him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made them.

Then Peter sent everyone out of the room, knelt down and prayed. After praying, he told the dead woman to get up. She opened her eyes and sat up (Acts 9:40).

Taking her by the hand, Peter helped her to her feet and called for the people to come back into the room. As a result of this miracle, many people in Joppa became believers.

We see from these events that the kingdom was growing and that God was using the apostles' miracles to confirm the truthfulness of their testimony (compare Heb 2:2-4).

Peter stayed at Joppa for a while in the home of a tanner named Simon.

CORNELIUS' VISION

Meanwhile, at Caesarea, on the Mediterranean coast, There was a Roman army officer named Cornelius. Although Cornelius was not a Jew, he and his family respected God and gave generously to Jews that were in need. He also prayed regularly to God.

One day, at about three in the afternoon, Cornelius had a vision in which an angel of God spoke to him by name. Cornelius was frightened, but he replied anyway. Then the angel said,

Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as
a memorial offering before God. Now send men
to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is

called Peter. He is staying with Simon the tanner,
whose house is by the sea.

Acts 10:4-6

When the angel departed, Cornelius sent two of his household servants along with a devout soldier to Joppa.

THE APOSTLE PETER'S VISION

About noon the next day, the apostle Peter went up on the flat roof of the tanner's house to pray. While he was praying he saw a vision. In the vision he saw a large sheet let down to earth by its four corners. In the sheet were all kinds of four-footed animals, reptiles and birds.

A voice said to Peter "*Get up, Peter. Kill and eat*" (Acts 10:13). Peter knew that it would be contrary to the Law of Moses for him to eat some of those creatures. Many of them were unclean (see Leviticus 11).

So Peter replied, "*Surely not, Lord! I have never eaten anything impure or unclean*" (Acts 10:15).

Again, the voice spoke, "*Do not call anything impure that God has made clean*" (Acts 10:15).

Peter saw the same vision three times.

PETER RECEIVED AN INVITATION

While Peter was wondering what his vision meant, Cornelius' men arrived at the door of the tanner's house. The men called out and asked if Simon Peter were there.

While Peter was still thinking about the vision that he had just seen, the Spirit said to him,

Simon, three men are looking for you. So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them.

Acts 10:19b-20

Normally Peter would not have had anything to do with Gentiles, yet he went down from the roof and presented himself to the men. The men replied,

We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people. A holy angel told him to have you come to his house so that he could hear what you have to say.

Acts 10:22

Peter then invited the men into the tanner's house.

PETER SPOKE AT CORNELIUS' HOUSE

The next day Peter went with the men and arrived at Cornelius' house. Cornelius had invited his relatives and close friends to come and hear what Peter might have to say.

As Peter entered the house, Cornelius fell at his feet; but Peter said to him, "*Stand up, I am only a man myself*" (Acts 10:26).

Peter said to the people gathered at Cornelius' house,

You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came

without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?

Acts 10:28-29

Cornelius replied,

Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us.

Acts 10:33

At that, Peter began to speak to the people. He said,

You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached-how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

Acts 10:37-38

Peter went on to mention that the Jews had killed Jesus by hanging him on a tree. He also asserted that on the third day God had raised Jesus from the dead (Acts 10:39-40). Then Peter testified that he and his fellow apostles had seen Jesus after Jesus' resurrection. Peter also affirmed that God would judge the living and dead through Jesus (Acts 10:41-42).

To which Peter added,

All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins

through his name.

Acts 10:43

THE HOLY SPIRIT FELL

While Peter was speaking, a most remarkable thing happened. The Holy Spirit fell on all the Gentiles that heard the message and they began to speak in foreign languages and praise God.

The Jewish believers that accompanied Peter could hardly believe their eyes and ears. They were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on Gentiles. How could it be possible that God's Holy Spirit came into the hearts of Gentile people, who were thought to be unclean? It was an anomaly.

To Peter, however, it did not seem strange at all, because God had shown him that he (Peter) should no longer call any man unclean (Acts 10:28).

GENTILES WERE BAPTIZED

Peter understood the full significance of the unusual things that had happened. He asked,

Can anyone keep these people from being baptized
with water? They have received the Holy Spirit
just as we have.

(Acts 10:47)

So Peter ordered that the new Gentile believers should be baptized in the name of Jesus.

Up until that time, only Jews and Samaritans had been taught and baptized. With this the kingdom of God was set free from the confines of Jewish rules and traditions. Believers began speaking to the Gentiles as well as Jews about the gospel.

THE REACTION OF THE CONGREGATION IN JERUSALEM

When Peter got back to Jerusalem the news of what happened at Cornelius' house caused a stir among Jewish brethren. They asked him why he met and ate with Gentiles.

Peter then told them the whole story. He said, "*As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning*" (Acts 11:15).

Peter remembered, they had started preaching the gospel to Jews when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the apostles on the day of Pentecost at Jerusalem. In like fashion when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Gentiles at Cornelius' house, it caused him to start preaching the gospel to Gentiles.

Peter continued explaining to the brethren in Jerusalem, saying, "*So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God*" (Acts 11:17)?

That settled the matter for the brethren. They had no further objections to what Peter had done. Instead, they praised God, saying, "*So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life*" (Acts 11:18).

LESSONS WE CAN LEARN

What took place at Caesarea was a forerunner of what was beginning to happen in other towns as well. The gospel was beginning to be taught to non-Jews as well as to Jews so that people from every ethnic background could become members of Christ's church.

Even though the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Gentiles at Caesarea, those people still needed to be baptized (immersed) for the forgiveness of their sins. This shows that even if people today have a religious experience, they still need to obey the Lord in baptism.

This story also shows that people should be taught before they are baptized. Peter, or some other preacher, had to come and tell the gospel story. The Holy Spirit did not go directly to Cornelius without some human being going to preach the gospel to him.

19

Saul Was Baptized at Damascus

Many of the believers who fled persecution in Jerusalem came to Damascus. Damascus is the chief city of Syria. It lies about 150 miles northeast of Jerusalem. It had quite a large Jewish community. Many followers of Jesus were there who had fled persecution in Jerusalem.

Saul persuaded the high priest in Jerusalem to give him letters to take to the synagogues in Damascus. The letters requested that Saul be permitted to bind followers of Jesus and to bring them to Jerusalem for punishment.

SAUL SAW THE LORD

As Saul was on his way to Damascus, a bright light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say, “*Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me*” (Acts 9:4)?

Saul replied, “*Who are you, Lord?*”

The Lord answered, “*I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do*” (Acts 9:5-6).

When Saul got up from the ground he was blind. So the men with him led him to Damascus. For three days and nights he neither ate nor drank anything, for he realized that he was the worst of sinners.

Paul's seeing Jesus did not automatically qualify Paul to be a Christian. No. He was still outside of the spiritual kingdom of God. He was still guilty of his sins.

ANANIAS

Now, there was a disciple named Ananias at Damascus, to whom the Lord spoke in a vision, saying, "*Ananias!*"

Ananias answered, "*Yes, Lord.*"

The Lord said,

Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight.

Acts 9:11-12

Ananias answered,

I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name.

Acts 9:13-14

The Lord told Ananias,

Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.

Acts 9:15-16

Ananias went to Saul. Upon entering the house Ananias placed his hands on Saul and said,

Brother Saul, the Lord-Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here-has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” Immediately, Saul regained his sight.

Acts 9:17-18

Then Ananias said to him, *“And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name”* (Acts 22:16).

Saul was then immersed (baptized) in water, after which he received the Holy Spirit, as everyone does who obeys Jesus (Acts 5:32). Then Saul began to preach Jesus in the synagogues of Damascus. He preached that Jesus is the Son of God. Every one that heard him was astonished and asked,

Isn’t he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn’t he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests.

Acts 9:21

Saul continued to speak about Jesus and grew steadily stronger in his ability to witness for Him. He became so strong that the Jews couldn’t withstand him and conspired to kill him. They watched the city gates to prevent his slipping out of the city and escaping their grasp. But Saul’s Christian brethren came to the rescue. They let Saul down secretly in a basket through an opening in the city wall, and he escaped.

LUKE'S ACCOUNT IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

We are greatly interested in Luke's account of the conversion of Saul. It describes the process of conversion. It shows that conversion begins with hearing (or learning) the truth. Saul learned that Jesus was the Christ (Messiah) when he saw the resurrected Jesus (Rom 10:14-17).

Few people today get their information about Jesus by reading the Bible. Most of them get their information from a preacher, a parent, a teacher, a relative or a friend.

Some people think that little babies have faith in Jesus, but that is wrong. Little babies have no information about Jesus. Therefore, it is a mistake to baptize them. People do not need to fear that little babies will be lost eternally if they die before they are baptized. Babies have done nothing that would prevent God from taking them to be with Him in heaven.

There is another reason, too, why little babies should not be baptized. Baptizing them often gives false comfort to their parents, which may cause them to neglect their children and fail to train them properly in the Bible. Let parents teach the Bible to their children, starting at an early age. If children receive proper training, they will usually make the right choice. It is then--after they have made their choice--that children should be baptized.

REPENTANCE IS NECESSARY

As soon as Saul realized that Jesus is the Christ, he knew that he (Saul) was in the wrong. He was not only sorry for his sins, but he was resolved to change his ways. When a person

makes a resolve to change, as Saul did, and does change his (or her) ways, it is known as “repentance.”

Some people assume, on the basis of a religious experience that they have had, that they have already been forgiven. They have not been forgiven, however, until they have repented and changed their ways. Even though Saul had the experience of seeing the resurrected Jesus, it did not exempt him from having to repent in order to be saved. Saul’s “religious experience” (as some would call it) was only the beginning of the process of his becoming a Christian, not the conclusion of it. His religious experience was no evidence that he was saved.

It is hard for us to overly emphasize the importance of repentance, for without repentance there is no forgiveness. Jesus said, *“But unless you repent, you too will all perish”* (Luke 13:3, 5).

THE IMPORTANCE OF BAPTISM

As we saw, Ananias said to Saul,

And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be
baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his
name.

Acts 22:16

Until Saul was baptized, he was still guilty of his sins.

No one has so much faith that he or she does not need to be baptized. Yet baptism does not, of itself, save a person; but in baptism a person comes into contact with the blood of Christ, which saves.

AN APPEAL FOR A GOOD CONSCIENCE

Furthermore, baptism is the proper way to appeal to God for the forgiveness of sins. The apostle Peter wrote that baptism

...now saves you also – not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ...”

1 Pet 3:21

WHAT WE CAN LEARN

We can learn many things from Saul’s experiences at Damascus. We learn that a great emotional experience, like the one that Saul had, does not put one into the kingdom of God (the church), nor does it assure one of salvation. In spite of Saul’s wonderful experience, he was still guilty of his old sins. Even after his wonderful experience, he still had to go to Damascus to learn how to complete the process of his conversion.

From the narrative of Saul’s conversion we learn that God does not forgive people before they have changed their ways.

We also learn from Saul’s example that a newly converted person should immediately begin to share his (or her) faith, which Saul did.

Furthermore, we read that Christian brothers in Damascus helped Saul escape from those that wanted to do him harm.

History tells us that the gospel of Jesus spread from Damascus to other cities in Syria and then on further to the East.

20

Antioch in Syria Became a Center for Christianity

Antioch was the capital of the Roman province of Syria. It was the third largest city in the Roman Empire. A considerable number of the Jewish believers in Christ had come to Antioch. They began to speak to Gentiles. As a result, many of the Gentiles believed and turned to the Lord (Acts 11:21).

When the news of the conversion of Gentiles in Antioch reached the ears of the brethren at Jerusalem, they sent Barnabas to investigate. Barnabas was full of the Holy Spirit and faith. He was one of the reliable men that had helped distribute food to the poor widows of the congregation at Jerusalem.

WHAT BARNABAS FOUND AT ANTIOCH

When Barnabas arrived at Antioch, he found that God had, in truth, allowed many Gentiles to hear the gospel and obey it. This made Barnabas very glad and he stayed in Antioch for a while.

During the time Barnabas was there, he encouraged the brethren and led a great number of people to the Lord (Acts 11:24).

In the midst of these activities, Barnabas remembered that Jesus had commissioned Saul of Tarsus to be a preacher to Gentiles (Acts 9:15). So he decided to go to the city of Tarsus, Saul's hometown, in search of him.

BARNABAS BROUGHT SAUL TO ANTIOCH

After Barnabas found Saul, he brought him to Antioch. Together they worked for a whole year for the Lord and taught many people. Although Barnabas and Saul were Jews, they attended the assemblies of the church along with Gentile brothers and sisters.

It was at Antioch that the disciples were first called "*Christians*" (Acts 11:26). Whether their friends called them that or whether it was their foes, we do not know. We do know, however, that the apostle Peter sanctioned the use of the name "*Christian*." Peter wrote,

...if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed,
but praise God that you bear that name.

1 Pet 4:16

Indeed, to be called "Christian" is far better than to be called Presbyterian, Anglican, Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Methodist, Baptist, Pentecostal, or whatever. Those names are all divisive in nature and sectarian in spirit.

THE GENEROSITY OF THE CHRISTIANS IN ANTIOCH

About this time certain prophets came to Antioch from Jerusalem. One of them, a brother named Agabus, stood up and

foretold by the Spirit that a severe famine was coming over the whole land.

Therefore, the Christians at Antioch decided to send financial aid to their brothers and sisters in Judea, who were struggling financially. Each of the church members at Antioch gave according to his or her ability, and Barnabas and Saul took their gift to the elders of the church in Jerusalem for distribution.

They were following Jesus' teaching that it "... *is more blessed to give than to receive*" (Acts 20:35 NKJV).

BARNABAS AND SAUL WERE CALLED TO EVANGELIZE ASIA MINOR

After Barnabas and Saul had taken the money to Jerusalem, they returned to Antioch. They were present among the brethren in Antioch, who were fasting and worshipping, when the Holy Spirit said to them, "*Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them*" (Acts 13:2).

Would Barnabas and Saul accept the challenge or would they shy away from it? God be praised! No one needed to persuade them.

After the brethren at Antioch had placed their hands on Barnabas and Saul and prayed for them, they sent them off on their journey.

SAUL'S FIRST MISSION JOURNEY

Barnabas and Saul sailed first to the Island of Cyprus, where they taught a few people. It was on Cyprus that Saul

developed into their lead spokesman. It was also at Cyprus that Saul began to be called “Paul.”

Upon leaving Cyprus, Paul and Barnabas caught a boat sailing to the mainland of Asia Minor (today Turkey). They worked as evangelists for the Lord in some of the major towns in the interior of Asia Minor, which we will look at in the next chapter.

BACK IN ANTIOCH

After about three years on the mission field, Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch. Upon their return they called the church together and reported all that God had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch with the disciples for a good number of days (Acts 14:27-28) and then made another trip to Jerusalem.

CIRCUMCISION

While Paul and Barnabas were in Antioch, some people from Jerusalem made their way to Antioch. These people maintained,

Unless you are circumcised, according to the
custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.

Acts 15:1

Paul and Barnabas knew that this was wrong. They knew that circumcision was for Jews only and had nothing to do with Gentiles. Circumcision was a part of the covenant that God made with Abraham and Abraham’s descendants (Gen 17:11).

If Gentile Christians had to be circumcised, it would mean that Gentiles would have to convert to Judaism before they could be Christians. That would turn Christianity into a Jewish sect. So Paul and Barnabas came into sharp debate with the Jews from Jerusalem.

In order to resolve this question, the brethren at Antioch appointed Paul and Barnabas, along with other brothers, to go to Jerusalem to see what the apostles and elders had to say about this matter.

On the way south to Jerusalem Paul and Barnabas reported to all the churches of Phoenicia and Samaria. They reported that Gentiles had been converted. This made the brethren very glad.

CIRCUMCISION IS NOT MANDATORY

When Paul and Barnabas got to Jerusalem, the whole church welcomed them. Paul and Barnabas told the church everything that God had done on their mission trip to Asia Minor.

Then the brethren in Jerusalem met together and decided to write a letter to the church in Antioch. The letter that they wrote read in part,

It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things.

Acts 15:28-29

There were only four things that the apostles and elders in Jerusalem felt that Gentiles should observe from the Old Testament. Circumcision is not one of them.

Then the men from Antioch returned to Antioch with the letter. Two brothers from the Jerusalem congregation went with them. They were Judas and Silas.

When the letter from Jerusalem was read to the Antioch church, the members were encouraged and rejoiced. Following that, Paul and Barnabas remained a while longer in Antioch.

So the question of whether or not Gentile brothers should be circumcised had been resolved. It was resolved at the meeting of the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. Gentile brothers did not need to be circumcised, but then another question arose.

SHOULD JEWISH BRETHREN EAT WITH GENTILE BRETHREN?

Not long after Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch from Jerusalem, the apostle Peter came to Antioch. He ate meals with his Gentile brethren, as Paul and Barnabas had been doing.

As more of the Jewish brethren came from Jerusalem, however, some of them criticized Peter and other Jewish Christians for having table fellowship with Gentile Christians.

So Peter and other Jewish Christians stopped eating with Gentiles, in order not to offend the Jewish brethren from Jerusalem. Even Barnabas, who had helped Paul evangelize Gentiles in Asia Minor, stopped eating with Gentiles. This meant that they would not even be able to eat the Lord's Supper with their Gentile brethren.

When Paul saw that Peter, Barnabas and others were not acting rightly, Paul said to Peter,

You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?

Gal 2:14

He also said to Peter,

We who are Jews by birth and not ‘Gentile sinners’ know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ.

Gal 2:15-16

Paul then added,

If I rebuild what I destroyed, I prove that I am a lawbreaker. For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Gal 2:18-20

Peter and Barnabas and others acknowledged the truthfulness of what Paul had said. People have a new relationship with each other after becoming Christians.

***WHAT ELSE CAN WE LEARN
FROM THE CHURCH AT ANTIOCH?***

The church at Antioch served as a launching pad for Christian missions to the Roman world. Every congregation today should be a launching pad.

The church in Antioch was a very loving and generous congregation, showing us the way in such matters. They were interested in the welfare of brethren in other places, as we should be.

Just as the brethren in Antioch were willing to learn from the apostles, so should we be willing to learn from the apostles as well. We can by reading their words in the New Testament.

Although the congregation in Antioch had its own ethnic flavor, and spoke a language different from the churches in Judea and Jerusalem, it had the same Head, the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph 1:22).

The fact that the gospel spread west from Antioch did not make the congregation at Antioch a ruler over other congregations.

21

The Churches of Galatia

The Holy Spirit instructed the brethren at Antioch in Syria to send Barnabas and Saul on a mission to the Gentiles (Acts 13:1-2). In response Barnabas and Saul hailed a boat and sailed west to the island of Cyprus.

From Cyprus they sailed north to the coast of Asia Minor (today Turkey). From there they went overland to the central part of Asia Minor. They came to the cities of Antioch (in Pisidia), Iconium, Lystra and Derbe.

AT ANTIOCH IN PISIDIA

Antioch in Pisidia is different from Antioch in Syria. On the Sabbath Paul and Barnabas went in the synagogue at Antioch and sat down. After the Law and the Prophets had been read, the rulers of the synagogue sent word to Paul and Barnabas, inviting them to speak a message of encouragement to the people.

Paul accepted the invitation, stood up, and gave a short review of the history of Israel. Then Paul proclaimed that God had raised up from David's line, as promised, the Savior Jesus (Acts 13:23).

Many of Paul's listeners at the Synagogue were impressed with what Paul said and they urged Paul and Barnabas to speak again on the next Sabbath.

On the next Sabbath many people came to the Synagogue to hear Paul and Barnabas speak about Jesus. However, many of the Jews were jealous and spoke against Paul and Barnabas. Then Paul and Barnabas said,

We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since
you reject it and do not consider yourselves
worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the
Gentiles.

Acts 13:46

Gentiles at the synagogue were glad and many of them believed. As a result, a congregation of the Lord's church was established in Antioch. From Antioch the word of the Lord spread throughout the whole region.

The Jews, however, continued to stir up trouble for Paul and Barnabas and caused the leaders of the city to ban Paul and Barnabas from that region.

AT ICONIUM

Paul and Barnabas went on to Iconium, which was not far from Antioch. In Iconium they went to the Jewish Synagogue on Saturday. There they spoke effectively and a great number of both Jews and Gentiles believed. Unbelieving Jews in Iconium turned the minds of many Gentiles against the brothers.

Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time in the city of Iconium speaking and confirming their word with miracles.

Yet the citizens of Iconium were divided. Some of them sided with the Jews, others with the apostles. Certain unbelieving Jews and Gentiles formed a plot to stone Paul and Barnabas, but the apostles heard of it and fled from Iconium (Acts 14:1-6).

WHAT HAPPENED AT LYSTRA

After Paul and Barnabas left Iconium, they came to Lystra and the surrounding Lycaonian territory. In Lystra Paul and Barnabas found a lame man that was crippled from his birth. The man listened as Paul spoke. So Paul looked at the man and commanded him to stand up. At that, the man jumped up and began to walk.

When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, "*The gods have come down to us in human form!*" (Acts 14:11). The priest of Zeus even brought bulls and wreaths to the gates of the city to offer them as sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas. When the apostles saw what the priests were doing, they tore at their clothes. They rushed into the crowd and shouted,

Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men,
human like you. We are bringing you good news,
telling you to turn from these worthless things to
the living God, who made heaven and earth and
sea and everything in them.

Acts 14:15

Paul and Barnabas went on to explain,

In the past, he (God) let all nations go their own way. Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy.

Acts 14:16-17

They had difficulty stopping the people from sacrificing to them.

When unbelieving Jews in Antioch and Iconium heard about the reception that Paul and Barnabas found at Lystra, they came to Lystra and spoke against Paul and Barnabas. They succeeded in turning many of the people against Paul and Barnabas. Then the people caught Paul and dragged him outside the city and stoned him and left him for dead.

The next day some of the disciples gathered around Paul and he was able to get up and go back into the city. On the following day he and Barnabas left for Derbe.

PAUL AND BARNABAS PREACHED IN DERBE

After Paul and Barnabas had preached the good news in Derbe and had won many new disciples, they retraced their steps to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch (in Pisidia) to strengthen and encourage the disciples. They said to the disciples, “*We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God*” (Acts 14:22b).

ELDERS

When Paul and Barnabas retraced their steps, they appointed elders for each church and installed them with prayer and fasting. They then turned the future welfare of the brethren over to the Lord.

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE GALATIANS

After Paul and Barnabas left the churches in Central Asia Minor, the Jews in those areas continued to cause trouble for the congregations. In addition certain Jew came up from Jerusalem and brought false accusations against Paul and Barnabas.

These newcomers from Jerusalem, however, did not have a correct view of the church. They did not know what Christ's church was not a Jewish sect. They tried to extend Jewish sway over the new Christians by telling the Gentile Christians that it was necessary for all their men folk to be circumcised.

When Paul heard that the Galatian churches were being disturbed, he wrote a circular letter to them. In the letter he said, "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned" (Gal 1:8)!

Paul wrote that Christians are justified by faith and not by the works of the law of the Old Testament. He said that Jews had been held prisoners by the law of the Old Testament before faith in Jesus had come to them (Gal 3:23). He added, "*Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law*" (Gal 3:25). (Gentile people were, of course, never under the supervision of the law of the Old Testament.)

CHILDREN OF ABRAHAM BY FAITH

Obedient believers in Christ are no longer Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, male or female. Paul wrote,

...you are all one in Christ Jesus.

If you belong to Christ,
then you are Abraham's seed,
and heirs according to the promise.

Gal 3:28b-29

SONS OF GOD

Something glorious takes place in the lives of the baptized believers, God sends His Holy Spirit into their hearts. Paul wrote,

Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son
into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba,
Father.' So you are no longer a slave, but a son;
and since you are a son, God has made you also
an heir.

Gal 4:6-7

Notice that Paul did not say that God sends His Holy Spirit into people's hearts in order to make them His sons. He said God sends His Spirit into the hearts of His people because they are already His sons.

Believers must be cleansed by the blood of Christ by repentance and immersion. If they are not cleansed, God would have to withdraw His Holy Spirit from their unclean hearts.

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Toward the end of Paul's letter to the Galatians he began to discuss how Christians should live. In essence they should live as Jesus lived.

THE DEEDS OF THE FLESH

Paul taught that man's fleshly body and the Spirit of God are in competition with each other. He urged the brethren to live by the Spirit and, thereby, not gratify the evil desires of the body (Gal 5:16).

Paul named some of the evil deeds that the body sometimes desires. Paul mentioned sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and such like (Gal 5:19-21). Then Paul warned that those who do these things will not inherit the kingdom of God (i.e. not get to heaven).

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

The Spirit that was in Jesus Christ lives in the hearts of men and women and bears the same spiritual fruit in their lives that He bore in Jesus' life. Regarding these spiritual fruits, the apostle Paul said,

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace,
patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,
gentleness and self-control.

Gal 5:22-23

Dear reader, if these are the attributes that you seek, then let me tell you where you can find them: You will find them in Christ's church. In Christ's church, God produces some of the finest of men and women on earth.

WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM THE CHURCHES IN GALATIA

We can learn that members of the church should not follow the customs of the Old Testament. Instead, we should follow the New Testament. We should look to Jesus as the “*author and finisher of our faith*” (Heb 12:2 NKJV) and live like He taught.

We can also learn that we should lead lives that bear spiritual fruit. If we do this, we will be a blessing to all that know us.

22

The Church in Philippi

On Paul's second missionary journey, he took Silas along with him. He and Silas traveled by land across Asia Minor (present day Turkey), visiting the churches of Galatia as they went.

At Lystra they met a young disciple named Timothy, about whom the brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well. Paul and Silas asked Timothy to go with them, and he was permitted to go.

Then Paul and his company traveled east across Asia Minor and came to Troas, on the coast. At Troas, Paul saw a vision of a man of Macedonia, pleading with them to come and help the Macedonians. (Acts 16:9). Paul took that as a sign that he and his companions should go to Macedonia to preach the gospel.

So they sailed across the Aegean Sea and landed at Neapolis on the coast of Greece. From Neapolis they went inland to Philippi, which was a Roman colony.

LYDIA

On the Sabbath day Paul and his company went outside the city of Philippi to a place by the river where women met to

pray to God. Paul and his companions sat down with the women and began to talk with them.

One of the women was Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira. She was a Gentile lady but the Lord opened her heart and she and her household responded to Paul's message.

After Lydia and her household were baptized, she said to Paul and his company, *"If you consider me a believer in the Lord, come and stay at my house"* (Acts 16:15). Therefore, Paul, Silas, Luke and Timothy lodged with her.

A SLAVE GIRL

As Paul and Silas were on their way to the place of prayer, they came across a slave girl possessed by an evil spirit. The girl followed Paul and the others shouting, *"These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved"* (Acts 16:17).

She kept doing this for many days. Finally, Paul got tired of her doing it, so *"he turned around and said to the spirit, 'In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!' At that moment the evil spirit left her"* (Acts 16:18).

When the owners of the slave girl saw that their hope of making money of her was gone, they took hold of Paul and Silas and dragged them before the magistrates. They said,

These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into
an uproar by advocating customs unlawful for us
Romans to accept or practice.

Acts 16:20-21

THE PHILIPPIAN JAILER

A crowd of people joined the girl's owners in bringing charges against Paul and Silas. The military magistrates ordered Paul and Silas to be stripped and beaten.

After that they were severely flogged and thrown into jail. The jailer was told to guard them carefully, so he put them in an inner cell and locked their feet in stocks.

At midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God and the other prisoners were listening. Suddenly there was a violent earthquake and the foundations of the jail were shaken. All the prison doors flew open and everyone's chains came loose.

The jailer woke up and saw the prison doors open. He thought his prisoners had escaped, so he drew his sword and was about to kill himself.

But Paul shouted, "*Don't harm yourself! We are all here!*" (Acts 16:28).

At that the jailer called for lights. He rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them out and asked them, "*Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*" (Acts 16:30).

Paul and Silas told him, "*Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved — you and your household*" (Acts 16:31). Paul and Silas explained more about the word of the Lord to the jailer and to all the members of his family.

The fact that all the members of the jailer's family listened to Paul and Silas' in the middle of the night, makes us think that no small children were in the jailers' family.

At that very hour, the jailer took Paul and Silas and washed their wounds and he and his family were baptized. Then the jailer brought Paul and Silas into his own house and set food

before them. The jailer was filled with joy that he and his family had come to believe in God.

After Paul and Silas left the jailer's house they returned to Lydia's house. At Lydia's house they met with the brothers and sisters of the church and encouraged them. Then they left Philippi.

PAUL'S GREAT AFFECTION FOR THE PHILIPPIAN BRETHREN

Years later, when Paul was in prison, he wrote a letter to the Philippian congregation, saying,

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

Phi 1:3-5

He wrote, "*God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus*" (Phi 1:8).

STAND FIRM

Paul wanted the brethren to "*stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith*" (Phi 1:27). The best way to do that would be for them to follow what they had received from him (Paul) and had seen in him (Phi 4:9). Paul admonished them not to be frightened by those that opposed them.

PRAY

Paul knew that praying helps a person in many ways. It is, for example, very useful in overcoming anxiety. Paul said,

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

Phi 4:6

Praying can bring one the peace of God, which guards the heart and mind.

HEALTHY THINKING

Paul desired that the brothers and sisters think in a positive way. He said,

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.

Phi 4:8

Paul knew that if the brethren could think rightly, they would also be able to act rightly.

JOY

We don't think of Jesus as being a joyous person, but He often was. He told His disciples, "*These things I have spoken*

to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full” (John 15:11 NKJV).

In a similar way, we don’t often think of the apostle Paul as being joyous when he was in prison, but he, too, often was. One of the things Paul liked to do when he was in prison was to pray for the people whom he knew and loved. It gave him joy to think of them when he prayed (Phi 1:4). The simple act of praying for others whom we love can give us joy. Paul also rejoiced over the progress of the gospel among the Philippians (Phi 1:18).

Paul wrote that the Philippians could make his joy full by having a mind like Christ’s. Having such a mind would involve having the same love that Christ had (Phi 2:2-5).

SUPPLIES FOR PAUL

It gave Paul joy to have received a gift from the Philippians when he was in prison. He was not only glad to get the supplies, but his knowing that the Philippians still cared for him also gave him joy (Phi 4:10).

A FUTURE VISIT

Paul felt that he would get out of prison and would be permitted to visit the Philippians again. He was also confident that the Philippians would be glad to see him (Phi 1:25-26). The Philippian church was in many ways an ideal congregation.

OVERSEERS AND DEACONS

The Philippian congregation was organized as Paul prescribed for every congregation of the Lord's church to be (Titus 1:5). The congregation was led by two or more "elders." These were the men that the Bible also describes "bishops" (overseers) or "pastors" (shepherds).

The Philippian congregation was also served by a number of "deacons" (servants) (Phi 1:1). (One wonders whether or not the Philippian the jailer, whom Paul and Silas had baptized, had become one of the leaders of the Philippian congregation.)

The congregation did not seem to be troubled with any major problems. The orderliness of the leadership of the Philippian congregation led to harmony among the members.

There was one situation, however, that needed to be attended to. Two of the sisters could not get along with each other. Paul wrote to them, "*I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord*" (Phi 4:2).

WE CAN LEARN FROM THE PHILIPPIAN LETTER

All congregations in every city were different from each other. Some had a more rapid spiritual growth than others. The same is true of congregations today. Some have progressed nicely; while others still have a long way to go.

23

The Church in Thessalonica

Paul and Silas left Philippi and traveled west to Thessalonica. Thessalonica was a Greek commercial center and had a civilian government.

Paul and Silas went to the Synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. Paul showed them from the Scriptures that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and rise from the dead. Then he said, *“This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ”* (Acts 17:3).

Paul’s words on that occasion convinced some of the Jews that Jesus is the Christ and they began associating with Paul and Silas. In addition, a large number of God-fearing Greeks, including some of the prominent women of the city, were persuaded to follow Jesus.

A MOB AND A RIOT

The Jews were so furious that Paul and his friends had taken away some of the people from the Synagogue that they formed a mob and started a riot. The mob rushed to Jason’s house, where Paul and Silas lodged, intending to drag them out; but Paul and Silas were not there. So the mob dragged out Jason and others and took them to the city officials, shouting:

These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus.

Acts 17:6-7

The city officials decided, however, to make Jason post bond and let him and the others go. That night the believers in Thessalonica expressed their concern for the safety of Paul and his companions and encouraged them to leave the city.

PAUL'S TRAVELING COMPANIONS CAME TO CORINTH

The Greek brethren sent Paul by boat to Athens but his travelling companions stayed for a while in Thessalonica. Paul did not find many Athenians who believed what he preached, so he moved over to Corinth, just a few miles away. Paul was greatly encouraged when his companions joined him at Corinth. It was there that he wrote the first of his two letters to the Thessalonians.

THE FIRST THESSALONIAN LETTER

In the first letter Paul reminded to the Thessalonians that he had not used flattery to win them for the Lord. Nor had he or any of his companions tried to get any of their possessions.

They worked with their hands to support themselves. The tender way that the apostles treated the Thessalonians reflected Jesus' instructions to His apostles. Jesus said to them,

I am sending you out like sheep among wolves.
Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent
as doves.

Matt 10:16

SEXUAL MORALITY

Paul felt it was very necessary to warn the members of the Thessalonian church not to fall into sexual immorality. Members of the Lord's church have received God's Holy Spirit and they are expected to live holy lives (1 Th 4:7-8). You will recall that Jesus said,

But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman
lustfully has already committed adultery with her
in his heart.

Matt 5:28

PAUL REASSURED THEM REGARDING THE DEAD

Paul urged the brothers and sisters not to grieve over the Christians that have died (1 Th 4:13-15). He said that when Jesus returns Jesus would bring with Him those of His people that have died. Paul wrote,

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven,
with a loud command, with the voice of the arch
angel and with the trumpet call of God, and the
dead in Christ will rise first.

1 Th 4:16

Only after Jesus has returned, will He take the rest of us to meet Him in the air (1 Th 4:17). We should, therefore, comfort each other with these words.

AS A THIEF IN THE NIGHT

Paul taught, as Jesus did, that the Son Man would return as a thief in the night (1 Th 5:1-3). That does not mean that Jesus will return unnoticed; for, as a matter of fact, *“Every eye will see Him”* (Rev 1:7).

PAUL’S SECOND LETTER TO THE THESSALONIANS

In Paul’s second letter to the Thessalonians he mentioned some of things that will take place before the Lord returns. There will be a rebellion on earth and a lawless man will be revealed. That lawless man will exalt himself over everything that is called God or that is worshiped. He will set himself up in God’s temple, announcing that he is God (2 Th 2:3-12). Paul said that the secret power of lawlessness was already at work (2 Th 2:7).

When the lawless one will be revealed, the Lord Jesus will come and overthrow him with the breath of His mouth (2 Th 2:8).

Before the “lawless one” is overthrown, however, he will use the power of Satan to do all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders to deceive those that are going to perish (2 Th 2:9-10). They are going to perish because they do not love truth. God will send them a powerful delusion so that they will

believe lies (2 Th 2:10). All who do not believe the truth, but take delight in wickedness, will be condemned (2 Th 2:12).

DON'T STOP WORKING

Some of the Thessalonian Christians thought that the Lord was coming very soon and they had stopped working to support themselves. Paul reminded them that when he was present with them, he had instructed them to lead a quiet life, to mind their own business and to work with their hands (1 Th 4:11). If they did this, Paul said, they would gain the respect of outsiders and not be dependent on anyone (1 Th 4:12). He cited his own conduct and the conduct of companions as examples. He and they had worked night and day to support themselves while they were in Thessalonica. Paul later wrote, *“If a man will not work, he shall not eat”* (2 Th 3:10). Therefore, a congregation is under no obligation to feed those that are able to work but choose not to do so.

MANY ADMONITIONS

In Paul's letters he wrote many admonitions. It was needful for him to do so because the New Testament had not yet been completely written. Paul admonished the Thessalonians: *“Live in peace with each other”* (1 Th 5:13). This parallels Jesus' admonition. He said, *“Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other”* (Mark 9:50).

Paul also admonished the Thessalonians: *“Be joyful always”* (1 Th 5:16). Jesus had said,

Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Matt 5:12

Many parallels could be cited between Paul's teaching and Jesus' teaching. It is not necessary to cite them all here; for you can read the New Testament for yourself. What Paul and Peter and others taught will help you show forth the spirit and teaching of Jesus in your life.

WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM THE THESSALONIAN LETTERS

We can learn many practical things. We can learn, for example, how missionaries, preachers and teachers ought to treat the people whom they teach. They should treat them as tenderly as beloved brethren and not as masters.

Missionaries and preachers should also try to avoid being a financial burden to their brothers and sisters. Missionaries and preachers should earn their own daily bread, when possible.

We can learn to comfort each other.

We can learn to love and to live at peace with each other.

We can learn that members of the Lord's church should not engage in sexual immorality.

24

The Church in Corinth

Paul left Thessalonica and he was sent by the brethren to Athens. While Paul was in Athens, he spoke to Jews and Gentiles in the Synagogue. Also, a group of curious Athenian philosophers invited him to Mars' Hill to speak to them. However, not many Athenians responded positively to his message.

AT CORINTH

So Paul decided to cross over the Isthmus of Corinth and come to the city of Corinth. Corinth was a rich, commercial city, to which people had come from many places. There, Paul became acquainted with Aquila and Priscilla. They were Jews that had come from Rome and were tent-makers by trade, as was Paul. So Paul lodged with them and worked at his trade at their side. Each Sabbath Paul went into the Synagogue and attempted to persuade both Jews and Greeks (Acts 18:4).

SILAS AND TIMOTHY ARRIVED IN CORINTH

When Silas and Timothy finally joined Paul at Corinth, Paul's spirit soared. He began to testify more vigorously than

before that Jesus is the Christ. Yet most of the Jews in Corinth resisted his teaching and blasphemed.

To them Paul said, *“Your blood be on your own heads! I am clear of my responsibility. From now on I will go to the Gentiles”* (Acts 18:6).

Paul then took up lodging at the house of a certain Gentile named Justus, who had been worshiping at the Synagogue, and whose house was next door to the Synagogue.

Crispus, the ruler of the Synagogue also left the Synagogue and joined Paul. Crispus believed in the Lord with his whole household. Other Corinthians also believed and were baptized. In this way a congregation of the Lord’s church came together in Corinth.

One night the Lord said to Paul in a vision,

Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent.

For I am with you, and no one is going to attack
and harm you, because I have many people in this
city.

Acts 18:9-10

AN UPROAR AGAINST PAUL

After a while the Jews in Corinth rose up against Paul and brought him before Gallio, the proconsul of Achaia. They complained that Paul was persuading people to worship contrary to the law (Acts 18:13).

Paul was about to answer this charge when Gallio said to the Jews,

If you Jews were making a complaint about some
misdemeanor or serious crime, it would be

reasonable for me to listen to you. But since it involves questions about words and names and your own law --settle the matter yourselves. I will not be a judge of such things.

Acts 18:14-15

Gallio then drove the Jews from the judgment seat and some of the people took Sosthenes, who was the current ruler of the Synagogue, and beat him; but Gallio paid no attention to this.

THE FIRST CORINTHIAN LETTER

After Paul left Corinth, he kept in touch with them. Word was sent him that the brothers in Corinth were not united. Some of them were saying, "*I follow Paul.*" Others, "*I follow Apollos,*" others, "*I follow Cephas (Peter),*" and still others, "*I follow Christ*" (1 Cor 1:12).

PAUL WAS A SERVANT

Paul considered himself to be only a servant (1 Cor 4:1). He had planted the seed of the gospel in Corinth and Apollos had watered, but God had given the increase (1 Cor 3:6). Therefore, the Corinthian church, like all other churches, was God's field and God's building (1 Cor 3:10) of which Christ is the foundation. The people in the church are God's temple and God's Spirit lives in them (1 Cor 3:16-17).

A CASE OF SEXUAL IMMORALITY

There came about in the Corinthian church a case of sexual immorality. One of the men in the church had his father's wife to be his own. Not even non-Christians would put up with such a thing (1 Cor 5:1), but the church was tolerating it.

Paul's solution to the problem was for the church to turn the man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh. This should be done publicly and in the church assembly. The purpose of the action was not to consign the man to hell but to cause him to repent and change (1 Cor 5:4-5). If the man would do that, his soul could be saved on the Day of Judgment.

Furthermore, the members of the church should not associate with any members of the church that were sexually immoral, or who were greedy, idolaters, slanderers, drunkards or swindlers. With such people they should not even eat (1 Cor 5:11).

TAKING A BROTHER TO COURT

Some of the members of the church were bringing suit against other members before worldly judges (1 Cor 6:1). Paul thought that there would be wise person in the congregation who could settle disputes among the brethren (1 Cor 6:5).

QUESTIONS ABOUT MARRIAGE

Some people think that the Apostle Paul hated women, but that is not true. Paul instructed the people that were already married to stay together (1 Cor 7:10-11). He also told them not

to deprive their partners in marriage of their conjugal rights (1 Cor 7:4-6).

THE LORD'S SUPPER

The division within the Corinthian church became all the more apparent when they came together on the first day of the week to celebrate the Lord's Supper. Some of them ate the Lord's Supper by themselves without waiting for others to eat (1 Cor 11:20-22). But eating and drinking are not the purpose of the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is designed to proclaim the Lord's death until He comes again (1 Cor 11:26). The bread calls to mind the body of the Lord, and the cup signifies the new covenant in His blood (1 Cor 11:24-25).

The Lord's Supper is a memorial. Jesus said, "*Do this in remembrance of me,*" (1 Cor 11:24).

Anyone in the assembly that eats the bread and drinks the fruit of the vine in an unworthy manner commits a sin against the body and blood of the Lord (1 Cor 11:27).

A DIVERSE GROUP

The members of the Corinthian church were a diverse group. Some of them were Jews with a background of good personal morals. Others had been among the vilest sinners in the Roman Empire (1 Cor 6:9-11). Many had worshipped idols. In the process of becoming Christians, however, they were washed and sanctified (1 Cor 6:11). Therefore, God looked upon them as though they had not sinned.

VARIOUS GIFTS

The Holy Spirit gave to these imperfect Christians some the most precious gifts that were ever given to man. To some of the men He gave the ability to present helpful messages to the assembled church (1 Cor 12:8). Others received extra strong faith. Others could heal the sick (1 Cor 12:9). Some could distinguish between true messages from the Holy Spirit and false ones. Some could tell the gospel story in foreign languages by the power of the Holy Spirit and others could interpret foreign languages (1 Cor 12:10).

The Holy Spirit distributed these gifts to various individuals among the brethren as He (Holy Spirit) saw fit (1 Cor 12:11).

Apostles laid their hands on people's head (or shoulders) to bestow these gifts. Since Paul was the first of the apostle on the scene in Corinth, it is reasonable to suppose that he was the one who imparted miraculous spiritual gifts to the Corinthians. The purpose of these gifts was to benefit the body (the church).

Some of the Corinthians were so immature, however, that they disputed among themselves who had the greatest gift. That prompted Paul to show which gift is the greatest one.

THE GREATEST GIFT

Paul said, *"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal"* (1 Cor 13:1). He said that to love is greater than the ability to prophesy. It is greater than to understand mysteries. It is also greater than the ability to move mountains by faith. A person who does not love is worth nothing.

THE REMARKABLE ATTRIBUTES OF LOVE

Love does not envy what another person has or what another person does. Love does not boast. It is not proud (1 Cor 13:4) or rude or self-seeking. The person that loves is not easily angered and keeps no record of the wrong (1 Cor 13:5). He does not delight in evil but in the truth (1 Cor 13:6). Love always trusts, hopes and seeks to protect the person that is loved.

MIRACULOUS SPIRITUAL GIFTS PASS AWAY

Paul foretold, however, that miraculous, spiritual gifts would pass away (1 Cor 13:8). He said that faith, hope and love would endure. Of these three, love will last the longest; for after faith has turned to sight and hope has turned to reality in heaven, love will continue.

RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING THE ASSEMBLIES

Paul instructed the Corinthians about how to conduct themselves in an assembly of the church. He said that the ability to speak in tongues (foreign languages) was given as a sign to convince unbelievers of the truth of the gospel (1 Cor 14:22). Therefore, speaking in tongues (foreign languages) has no place in an assembly of the church, unless there are people present who understand those languages and can interpret them for others. Teaching, on the other hand, was given to edify the church.

Paul instructed the women of the congregation to refrain from speaking publicly to the assemblies. This is the same as what Paul taught in all the churches (1 Cor 14:33-34).

THE COLLECTION OF MONEY

Paul advised the brethren in Corinth to collect money on the first day of the week when they came together to observe the Lord's Supper. He told them to save up money up so it would be ready when he (Paul) came to take it to the poor saints in Jerusalem.

Paul also showed us on which day of week we should meet. The early Christians met on the first day of the week. They came together to observe the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:20).

A USEFUL STUDY

It is very useful for us to study the Corinthian letters. They tell us much about how a congregation of the Lord's church should function. We can even learn from the faults and mistakes of the Corinthian brethren.

It is important for Christians in every century to abide by what the apostles wrote concerning the assemblies, for the advice he gave helps them avoid doing wrong.

THE SECOND CORINTHIAN LETTER

The Corinthian brethren must have implemented what Paul had recommendations, for he had almost no criticism of them in his second letter.

25

The Church in Ephesus

After Paul had spent a year and a half at Corinth, he took Aquila and Priscilla and sailed to Ephesus. He did not stay at Ephesus, however, but went on to Jerusalem, leaving Aquila and Priscilla in Ephesus.

EPHESUS

Ephesus was in those days the center of the worship of the goddess Diana. It had a magnificent temple dedicated to Diana. Its temple was called “the eighth wonder of the world.”

APOLLOS

While Aquila and Priscilla were at Ephesus, they met a Jew named Apollos, who had recently come from Alexandria, Egypt. Apollos knew the Hebrew Scriptures and believed in Jesus. He spoke boldly about Jesus in the Synagogue. He knew, however, only the baptism of John the Baptist. So Aquila and Priscilla invited him into their home and explained to him the way of the Lord more perfectly (Acts 18:26). After Apollos had been taught, he went to Corinth and helped stabilize the church in Corinth.

PAUL'S RETURN TO EPHESUS

After Paul had visited Jerusalem, he returned to Ephesus and found that a dozen believers had come up from Alexandria. Their views were similar to those that Apollos had held before Aquila and Priscilla taught him.

When Paul met the twelve men, he asked them whether they had received the Holy Spirit or not. They replied that they had not, nor did they even know of the existence of a Holy Spirit. Their answer aroused Paul's suspicion about the validity of their baptism and prompted this exchange:

So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?" "John's baptism," they replied. Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." On hearing this, they were baptized into {5 Or in} the name of the Lord Jesus.

Acts 19:3-5

Upon hearing this, the twelve men accepted baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus. After they were baptized Paul placed his hands on them and the Holy Spirit came on them and they spoke in tongues (languages) and prophesied (Acts 19:6).

PAUL LEFT THE SYNAGOGUE OF EPHESUS

Paul spoke boldly for about three months at the Synagogue in Ephesus. Yet some of the people at the Synagogue refused to believe and said bad things about Jesus, so Paul stopped visiting the Synagogue.

When Paul left the Synagogue, he took with him those that believed and met with them daily in a lecture hall. He taught in the lecture hall for two years, and all the Jews and Greeks in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord (Acts 19:10). Many of them came to love the Lord and openly confessed their evil deeds (Acts 19:18). Some of them had practiced sorcery and they brought their valuable scrolls about sorcery and burned them publicly.

A GREAT DISTURBANCE IN EPHESUS

A silversmith named Demetrius had made his living from little statues of Diana. He accused Paul and his associates of discrediting the goddess. This brought the whole city into uproar and many of them rushed into the amphitheater. Paul viewed the large crowd as an excellent opportunity to preach the gospel. He wanted to go in and address them; but the disciples, fearing for Paul's life, would not let him go in. Finally the crowd dispersed peacefully.

THE EPHESIAN ELDERS

Paul decided to make a quick tour of the churches in Greece before he went to Jerusalem again. After Paul completed his quick tour of Greece, he stopped at Miletus, which was on the coast, not far from Ephesus. From there he sent for the elders (Acts 20:17) of the Ephesian congregation and they came to him. Paul told them,

Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of
which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.

Be shepherds of the church of God, which he
bought with his own blood.

Acts 20:28

Note that these men, in addition to being “overseers” (bishops) and “shepherds” were also elders of the Ephesian church (Acts 20:28).

THE GLORY OF THE CHURCH

Paul’s letter to the Ephesian church shows how highly he valued the church. He wrote that the church is Christ’s body and that Christ is its head (Eph 1:22-23).

Just as there is one God, one Lord, one Spirit and one faith (Eph 4:6), there is also only one body of Christ, the church. Yet in this one body there are many members, which have various functions.

FUNCTIONS OF THE BODY

Some of the early Christians were apostles and some were prophets. Some members of the church served as evangelists; some as pastors (elders) and some as teachers (Eph 4:11-12). God designed these various functions in the church in order to build up each member of the church (Eph 4:12-13) to the point that each member will become strong enough to help others. When this happens, the members of the church learn, for example, not lie, not to steal nor to use filthy language. They learn, instead, to be kind, tenderhearted and forgiving (Eph 4:22-32).

SINGING

Singing has always played a big role in Christianity. Christians sing because they are happy and grateful. They sing because they know that they have a wonderful future. They “*sing and make music in your heart to the Lord*” (Eph 5:19). They teach and encourage each other in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Notice that Paul is speaking of making music with the voice.

JESUS LOVES THE CHURCH

The price that Jesus paid for the church shows how deeply Jesus cared for the church. It cost Him His life. Paul wrote,

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word.

Christ did this

...to present her to himself as a radiant church,
without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but
holy and blameless.

Eph 5:25-27

Therefore, Jesus is our role model and teacher. Since He loves the church, we should love it, too. Even if some of the individuals in church do not act as they should, we have no excuse to look down on the church.

Christ’s love for the church sets the standard by which a man can measure his love for his wife. Paul wrote,

After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church --for we are members of his body.

Eph 5:29

SUBMISSION

Wives are to be in submission to their husbands, and both husbands and wives are to be in submission to the Lord (Eph 5:22). A husband should be submissive to his wife in some ways. Paul wrote, “*Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ*” (Eph 5:21).

LEAVING THE FIRST LOVE

From the Ephesian letter we get a favorable impression of the Ephesian church at the time Paul wrote his letter to them. Some 40 or 50 years later, however, when Jesus dictated a letter to the Apostle John, Jesus accused the Ephesians of having lost their first love (Rev 2:4).

Jesus cautioned them,

Remember the height from which you have fallen!
Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.

Rev 2:5

***WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM
THE EPHESIAN CHURCH***

We can learn that congregations around the world should all believe and teach the same thing because there is only one faith (Eph 4:5).

We learn that congregations everywhere are to follow the same rules.

In addition, we learn that there is only one baptism (Eph 4:1) and that all the Christians in all the congregations are supposed to have been baptized by that baptism. Baptism has certain definable characteristics. It is done by immersion in water (Acts 8:36, 38-39); it follows a confession of faith in Jesus as the Messiah (Christ) (Rom 10:9-11); and it is done for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38).

26

The Church in Colossae

Paul's letter to the Colossians is very similar to his letter to the Ephesians. They may have been written at the same time. Paul was in prison when he wrote both letters.

THE TOWN OF COLOSSAE

Colossae was a small Phrygian town in Asia Minor. It was on the east-west trade route, which ran across what is now Turkey. It was located near Laodicea and was about 100 miles from Ephesus.

Paul learned of the church in Colossae from a fellow prisoner, named Epaphras (Phm 23). Epaphras had been a member of the church at Colossae (Col 4:12) and was probably the one who taught the gospel to the Colossians.

PAUL'S DESIRES FOR THE COLOSSIANS

Paul was concerned about the Colossians church for he knew that they had not received much teaching, so he began praying for them. He prayed that God would give them spiritual wisdom and understanding and be filled with knowledge of the will of God (Col 1:9-10).

Paul wanted the Colossians to know that he had struggled in prayer for them and also for the brethren at Laodicea. He prayed that their hearts would be encouraged and that they would be united in love. This would open up for them the riches that are in Christ Jesus, in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden (Col 2:2-4).

Paul also prayed that the Colossians would lead lives worthy of the Lord and be pleasing to Him in every good work (Col 1:10). Paul prayed, in addition, that the Lord would strengthen their endurance and patience.

Paul wanted them to give thanks to the Father, who had qualified them to share in the kingdom of light (Col 1:11-12). He reminded them that God had rescued them from the dominion of darkness and brought them into the church. He also wanted them to remember that Christ had bought them out of slavery (Col 1:12-13).

A QUICK SUMMARY

Since the Colossians hadn't received much teaching, Paul gave them a quick summary of basic truths. He said that Jesus is the very image of God, God's Son and the creator of everything. Jesus is the one that holds all things together (Col 1:15-17). He is also the head of the church (Col 1:18).

THE COLOSSIANS WERE ORDERLY

Paul's concern for the Colossians did not imply that he thought they were a disorderly church. To the contrary, he said, *"For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with*

you in spirit and delight to see how orderly you are and how firm your faith in Christ is” (Col 2:5).

PAUL’S PERSISTENT EVANGELISM

Everywhere Paul went he proclaimed Christ. He taught and admonished everyone. He did it with wisdom so that he might present everyone perfect before Christ (Col 1:28-29).

DANGERS

Paul was aware that all of the churches in Asia Minor were under attack from Jewish teachers, who were trying to get Gentile Christian men circumcised. Physical circumcision, however, is not necessary for Christian men. They have a spiritual circumcision, which is baptism (Col 2:10-12).

Paul was also concerned lest anyone deceive the Colossians with fine-sounding arguments (Col 2:4) and they be taken captive by hollow and deceitful philosophy (Col 2:8).

CHRISTIANS DO NOT NEED TO KEEP OLD TESTAMENT LAWS

The Jewish troublemakers were telling the Colossians that they should not eat or drink certain foods. They were also telling them that they should observe New Moons and Sabbath days. Paul taught that those things were only shadows of the things that were to come (Col 2:16-17).

Paul observed that the people that dealt in dietary laws and festivals had a kind of false humility. They boasted about their

visions and religious experiences; but they had lost their connection with Christ (Col 2:18-19).

It is only by clinging to Christ and following His instructions that the church can avoid submitting to human commands, which have the appearance of wisdom but no real value (Col 2:20-23).

ELEVATE YOUR SIGHTS

Paul urged the brethren to set their minds on things above, where Christ sits at the right hand of God (Col 3:1-4). Elevating their minds helps them avoid “*anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language*” (Col 3:8).

Christians should start living the new life. They should put on love as a garment and clothe themselves with “*compassion, kind-ness, humility, gentleness and patience*” (Col 3:12). They should also forgive each other (Col 3:13).

SUBMISSION

An attitude of submission is one of the hallmarks of Christian character.

Wives should submit to their own husband in the Lord. A husband should love his wife and seeks her best interest. He submits to her needs and usually to her requests.

Children should obey their parents; fathers should treat their children kindly; slaves should be good servants; masters should treat their slaves fairly (Col 3:18-4:1).

THE DEVOTIONAL LIFE

Paul felt that prayer is important both at home and in the assembly. He wrote, “*Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful*” (Col 4:2). Christians should be reading the Bible and thinking about what it says. They should also be singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs at home and in the assembly (Col 3:16).

SUNDRY ADMONITIONS

Paul advised Christians to be wise in how they treat outsiders. Christians should make the most of every opportunity to influence outsiders for good. (Col 4:5-6).

Christians should also let “*the peace of Christ*” rule in their hearts because they were called to peace. They should also be thankful (Col 3:15).

Whatever they do, in word or deed, Christians should do all in the name of the Lord Jesus so as to give honor to Him (Col 3:17).

FELLOWSHIP BETWEEN CONGREGATIONS

Relatively good Roman roads in central Asia in those days made it easier for the Colossians to travel to other places. As a result, many members of Colossian church were acquainted with members of congregations in nearby places.

Paul desired that his letters get wide circulation among the churches. The Colossians should read his letter to them in their assembly. Also the Laodiceans should read his Colossian letter (Col 4:16).

***WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM
THE COLOSSIAN LETTER***

The Colossian letter is full of good, practical advice. From it we can learn much about how we should think and live.

What is more, we can learn what the relationship between congregations ought to be. Congregations should treat each other brotherly but no congregation should be set over other congregations.

27

The Churches on the Island of Crete

Crete is a Greek island in the Mediterranean Sea. It has many mountains and is about 156 miles long. It varies in width from 7 to 35 miles. When Paul and Titus finished establishing churches on the island of Crete, Paul left Titus on the Island to “*straighten out what was left unfinished*” (Titus 1:5).

THE CRETANS

Paul did not have a very high opinion of the Greek people on Crete. He quoted one of their poets as saying, “*Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons*” (Titus 1:12). Paul agreed with this assessment and told Titus,

Therefore, rebuke them sharply, so that they will be
sound in the faith and will pay no attention to
Jewish myths or to the commands of those who
reject the truth.

Titus 1:13-14

LEADERSHIP

The churches on Crete needed godly leadership. Paul instructed Titus to seek out good men in every congregation and appoint them to serve as elders (Titus 1:5). Titus should choose men for this work with a good reputation. They should be husbands of one wife and have raised children. Their children must be believers and not be wild or disobedient (Titus 1:6).

An elder must also possess certain personal qualities. He must not be overbearing or quick-tempered. He must not get drunk, or be a violent man or be dishonest in business. Moreover, He must be hospitable, self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined (Titus 1:7-8). In addition to these qualities, an elder (overseer) must hold to the reliable message as taught by Paul (Titus 1:9-11).

Finding such men for the eldership is not an easy job. There are not many men that have not soiled their lives by unrighteous living and lost either their marriage or their children. Elders should begin early to teach young men to qualify themselves to serve as elders (overseers). Among other things, a prospective elder should marry a godly wife, one who can help him in raising obedient children.

TEACH, ENCOURAGE, AND REBUKE

Paul told Titus not to be shy about his being young (Titus 2:15). He should encourage the church members of all ages and rebuke them with all authority.

ADVICE FOR OLDER MEN

Titus should teach older men “*to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance*” (Titus 2:2).

ADVICE FOR OLDER WOMEN

Titus should teach the older women to “*be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or be addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good*” (Titus 2:3). In addition, older women of a congregation should train the young women in the congregation to love their husbands and their children, to be self-controlled, pure, to be busy at home, kind and in subjection to their husbands. Young women should be this way so that no one can malign the word of God (Titus 2:4-5).

ADVICE FOR YOUNG MEN

In line with this, Titus should encourage young men to be self-controlled (Titus 1:6). Titus should set an example by doing what is good. He should show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned. He should do this so that those who oppose him might be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about him (Titus 2:7-8).

SLAVES AND MASTERS

Paul told Titus to teach Christian slaves to be subject to their masters in everything. That sounds strange to our ears, of course, because we know that slavery is wrong. Paul, too,

knew that slavery is wrong. Until the teaching of Jesus had done away with slavery, Christian slaves should try to please their masters. They should neither talk back to them nor steal from them. They should demonstrate to their masters that they can be fully trusted. The reason that Paul gave for such advice was, “*so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive*” (Titus 2:9-10).

ATTITUDE TOWARD THE GOVERNMENT

Paul told Titus to remind the members of the church to be “*subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good.*” Paul also taught them not to slander anyone but “*to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men*” (Titus 3:1-2).

CHRISTIANS ARE UNIQUE

Christians should say “No” to ungodliness and to worldly passions because they belong to Christ and are anxious to do what is good in His sight. The earth is not their home. They are just waiting here on earth until Christ takes them home (Titus 2:11-14).

THINGS TO AVOID

Brethren ought to avoid foolish “*controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless*” (Titus 3:9).

A DIVISIVE PERSON

Paul told Titus to “*Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him*” (Titus 3:10). Paul also made the comment that a divisive person is warped, sinful and self-condemned (Titus 3:11).

THE PLAN OF SALVATION

Paul wrote that God had saved him and others with “*the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit*” (Titus 3:5). The washing of which Paul wrote occurs in the water of baptism. It brings about a new birth and God sends His Holy Spirit into the heart of the person that has been born anew.

WE CAN LEARN MUCH FROM PAUL’S LETTER TO TITUS

We can learn the importance of there being godly men to lead a congregation.

We can find specific advice for older men, older women, young men and slaves.

Furthermore, we can learn what we should do with a divisive person.

28

The Roman Church

Paul wrote his Roman letter while he was taking the money to Jerusalem, which the Greek churches had given for the poor (Rom 15:25-26). His letter to the Romans informed them that after he had delivered the funds, he intended to visit them on his way to Spain (Rom 15:23-24).

THE SITUATION IN ROME

The church in Rome was founded by brethren that had come from other places. Some of them were ethnic Jews and some were Gentiles. Although Paul had not been to Rome, he knew a lot of the members. He greeted several family groups in his letter. Among them were Aquila and Priscilla, who had gathered a group of believers (Rom 16:5-15).

ALL HAVE SINNED

Paul reminded the Jewish brethren that before they became Christians, they had all sinned, thereby falling “*short of the glory of God*” (Rom 3:23 NKJV). None of them had been truly righteous, because true righteousness is not found by keeping the Law of Moses. Keeping the Law of Moses produced only

the know-ledge of sin. Righteousness in the eyes of God comes only through faith in Jesus Christ.

Paul reminded them that it was by faith that Abraham came to be considered a righteous man. The Bible says, “*Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness*” (Gen 15:6, Rom 4:3). God considered Abraham to be righteous because Abraham did not “*waver through unbelief*” (Rom 4:20-22). For that reason God made him the “*father of many nations.*” Both Gentiles and Jewish people that believe in Christ are Abraham’s spiritual children.

BAPTISM

Paul described the process by which God makes people righteous. It begins when they come to believe that Jesus is the Christ. In addition to people having faith, people must seek to stop sinning. Paul asked,

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so
that grace may increase? We died to sin; how can
we live in it any longer?

Rom 6:1-2

NOT SUBJECT TO THE LAW OF MOSES

Jewish Christians are no longer subject to the Law of Moses. They are like a widow, whose husband has died. She is free to marry again (Rom 7:1-6). Similarly, Jews that be-come Christians are free from the Law of Moses. In the words of Paul, “*the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death*” (Rom 8:2).

THE HOLY SPIRIT

God sends His Holy Spirit into the hearts of people that believe in Jesus and turn from sins and are immersed into Christ (Act 2:38-39). Once God has sent His Holy Spirit into a person's heart, that person is better able to control his bodily desires (Rom 8:9-10).

EVERY MEMBER HAS A FUNCTION

Paul envisioned every member of the Lord's church as having some specific function. If a man's talent is speaking messages in the assembly, he should speak. If a person's talent is for serving others, that person should serve. However, not every talent that is mentioned in Romans chapter 12 is a miraculous, spiritual gift. Most of the talents mentioned there are talents many people have normally.

HOW PEOPLE GET ALONG WITH EACH OTHER

Paul addressed the differences between weak brethren and strong brethren in the church. For example, a brother with a Jewish background should not look down on a brother that eats only things a Jew considers to be unclean (Rom 14:3). Judging is not for man to do; it is for God to do (Rom 14:4). Paul asked,

You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why
do you look down on your brother? For we will

all stand before God's judgment seat.

Rom 14:10

PERSECUTION

Paul likely wrote his letter to the Roman church between 56 and 58 AD. That was only a few years before Roman Emperor Nero set fire to the city of Rome and blamed the Christians for it. Paul makes no mention in his letter that persecution had begun, so Paul must have written his letter before the persecution had begun. After the persecution began, the church in Rome and churches in various parts of the Roman Empire continued to exist. Many of them paid for their faithfulness with their lives.

WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM ROMANS

We learn that God considers believing in Jesus and being obedient to Him as righteousness.

We learn that we are free from the Law of Moses and not obligated to follow what it says.

We learn not to judge each other.

We learn the importance of our treating each other kindly.

We learn that individual members of the Lord's church can start a congregation and they should start one, if there is no congregation where they live.

We learn to stand firm in the face of persecution.

29

The Book of Hebrews

The Book of Hebrews starts out like a religious treatise and ends like a letter. Sometimes it is called the “Letter to the Hebrews.” The book (or letter) was likely written to the church in Jerusalem, which by this time had been in existence over 30 years. If the Book of Hebrews was written to the Jerusalem church, it must have been written before AD 70, because in that year the Romans destroyed the temple and the city of Jerusalem.

We do not know who wrote Hebrews. The message of the book agrees with Paul’s message, and some people think Paul wrote it. Others think Apollos or Luke wrote it.

JESUS’ HIGH STATION

The Book of Hebrews says that Jesus is the Son of God and that He is the agent through whom God created all things (Heb 2:1-3). Jesus’ is, therefore, far above the angels, who are themselves created beings (Heb 1:4-14). Moreover, Jesus is worthy of more honor than Moses. More attention should be paid to what Jesus said than to what Moses said (Heb 3:3).

This implies that the laws of the Old Testament are not binding upon Christians today, including the law concerning

the keeping of the Sabbath. Christians do not have a special day on which they are not permitted to work. Their Sabbath rest is in heaven (Heb 4:9-10).

GREAT HIGH PRIEST

Jesus is our great High Priest (Heb 4:14). We can approach Him directly (in prayer) and do not need an earthy priest to intercede for us.

Furthermore, Jesus is a priest like Melchizedek (Gen 14:18-20), who was greater than Abraham (Heb 7:1-7). Jesus is, therefore, greater than the priests among Abraham's descendants, who were performing their religious duties at the temple in Jerusalem at the time the Book of Hebrews was written.

Jewish members of the Lord's church in Jerusalem would have been well aware of these things. Don't forget that many of the members of the Jerusalem church were formerly Jewish priests (Acts 6:7).

MORE PRESSING SPIRITUAL NEEDS

Once the writer of Hebrews had mentioned the above things, he was ready to move on to some of the more pressing spiritual needs of the Jerusalem church.

Christians must be careful not to fall away. If they fall away after they have been enlightened and have tasted the good things that Christ has to offer (Heb 6:4-5) it may be impossible to renew them again to repentance (Heb 6:6).

The author of the Hebrew letter had confidence, however, that the Jerusalem brethren would be victorious in living as Christians (Heb 6:9-12).

JESUS IS IN HEAVEN

The writer of Hebrews pointed out that Jesus sits in heaven (Heb 8:1-2), and that He will not come back to earth again except to take His people home with Him. If He were to come back to earth, stay on earth for a 1,000 years, He would not be able to serve as priest; for He is of the tribe of Judah, not of Levi. The writer of Hebrews wrote, *“If he were on earth, he would not be a priest, for there are already men who offer the gifts prescribed by the law”* (Heb 8:3).

Jesus will not return to earth to set up a 1,000-year kingdom, as some people believe. Hence, there is no need for people to think about rebuilding the temple that once stood in Jerusalem.

A NEW COVENANT

The covenant that God made with the children of Israel at Mt. Sinai is no longer in force (Heb 8:7). God said, *“The time is coming...when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah”* (Jer 32:31; Heb 8:8).

When God promised a new covenant, it showed that the covenant that He made with the Children of Israel at Mt Sinai was getting old and was going to pass away (Heb 8:13).

DON'T LOSE HOPE

Christians should, therefore, draw near to God with full of confidence (Heb 8:22). They can draw near because their hearts have been sprinkled with the blood of Jesus and are thereby purified.

ASSEMBLIES

When Christians gather, they should encourage each other to love and to good deeds. The writer of the Book of Hebrews wrote, “Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another-and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Heb 10:25).

THE FAITH CHAPTER

The eleventh chapter of Hebrews tells how Noah saved his family by acting upon His faith in building the ark. It tells how Abraham lived in the land of promise and how Sarah bore Abraham a son in her old age.

The faith chapter also mentions how God kept Israel and his family alive by sending them to Egypt in a time of famine. It also tells how Moses was permitted to lead the Children of Israel from Egypt to the Promised Land.

HEBREWS CHAPTER TWELVE

Hebrews chapter twelve is full of encouragement. It encourages Christians not to grow weary in times of suffering but to follow Jesus' example (Heb 12:1-4).

The things that God has promised faithful Christians have already begun to come about. We have already drawn near to the city of the living God, which is called “*Mount Zion*” and “*the heavenly Jerusalem*” (Heb 12:22). We do not yet live physically in heaven, but we possess the right to live there someday.

Christians are already associating with the joyful assembly of angels, even though their human ears do not yet hear the singing of the angles (Heb 12:22).

Christians have come to the church of the first born Sons of God and their names are recorded in heaven (Heb 12:23).

They have also drawn near to “*the spirits of righteous men made perfect*” (Heb 12:23) and to God, who is the Judge of all men.

In addition, they have drawn near to Jesus, who has given them a new covenant (Heb 12:24).

Since Christians receive a kingdom that cannot be shaken, they should be thankful and worship God with reverence and awe.

30

Epilogue

What the story of the church in the bible shows is that the church is important. It is important to God. That is the reason that God planned it.

It is important to Jesus because it is *His* Church. The Church of Christ belongs to Jesus. I'm not using the term "Church of Christ" in any denominational way. People are so accustomed to churches belonging to denominations that it is difficult for them to think of the church in an undenominational way. The church, however, belongs to Christ in a unique way due to the fact that He came to establish it. He established it by dying to save lost people. When He saved a person, He added that person to His church.

The story of the church in the Bible shows what happens when the gospel of Christ is preached. Churches come together. Each of the churches told about in the Bible has a message for today. The church in Jerusalem, for example, shows how churches should react to persecution. The churches in Samaria show that people from ethnic minorities can be members of Christ's church. The church in Syrian Antioch shows that a church should be evangelistic. The churches of Galatia show that some people will try to pervert the gospel. The church in Philippi shows what an ideal church is like. The

church in Corinth shows that the members of the congregation should lead holy lives.

Jesus told a parable about the kingdom of God in which a man, having found a treasure in a field, went and sold all that he had in order to buy that field. Christ's church is precious. Just as the man in the parable traded everything he had in order to buy the field, we are called to commit the fullness of our lives to Christ's church.

