

Life in the Father's House



A Member's Guide to the Local Church

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This series of lessons is based on the book
Life in the Father's House: A Member's Guide to the Local Church
by Wayne A. Mack and David Swavely (P&R, 1996),
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This is the teacher's edition of this material, which includes filled-in blanks and additional explanatory notes (bold font in brackets).

A Fun Little Evaluative Exercise

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|---|---|-----|---|
| T | F | 1. | Spiritual growth is directly linked with fellowship with a local church. |
| T | F | 2. | The early church did not have business meetings. |
| T | F | 3. | There are no biblical examples of infants being baptized. |
| T | F | 4. | Believers who are not members of a church should be considered to be disobedient and/or out of order. |
| T | F | 5. | The number one consideration when choosing a church ought to be the pastor's personality. |
| T | F | 6. | Biblically, membership in a local church is optional. |
| T | F | 7. | The pastor has no more authority than anyone else in the church. |
| T | F | 8. | Paul forbade women to pastor because he didn't understand the equality of men and women. |
| T | F | 9. | Biblically, the word "church" may refer to a building. |
| T | F | 10. | Worship occurs only on Sundays. |
| T | F | 11. | A spiritual gift may be a natural ability. |
| T | F | 12. | One believer has no right to confront another believer about his or her sin. |
| T | F | 13. | It is a sin not to pray for your fellow church members. |

Introduction to Life in the Father's House

What is the Church?



Much confusion exists as to what the church is and what it is supposed to be doing. Some see the church as a social club, others as a welfare agency. Churches are involved in politics, feeding the hungry, homeless shelters, and even banks. What does the Bible say about the church?

I. What is the church?

A. The word “church”

The Greek noun translated “church” in the New Testament is *ekklesia*, from the preposition *ek*, meaning “out,” and the verb *kaleo*, meaning “to call.” The church is made up of those who have been “called out.” The idea of assembly is also inherent in the word; an *ekklesia* assembles. The word could be translated *assembly* or *congregation*. The English word “church” may have come from the Greek word *kuriakon*, meaning, “the Lord’s.” The Dutch *kerke* and the German *Kirche* are similar.

The word *ekklesia* was used to describe a “called out assembly” of any sort, whether for sacred or secular (as in Acts 19:32, 39, 41) purposes. Of the 114 times *ekklesia* is used in the New Testament, the overwhelming majority (about 100) refer to a local church. **[E.g., the church at Galatia, Corinth, Rome, etc.]** It is from *ekklesia* that we get our English word *ecclesiology*, meaning the doctrine of the church.

B. The concept

Theologically speaking, there are two usages for “church” in the New Testament. They are as follows:

1. The universal or invisible church

The universal or invisible church (or body of Christ) is composed of all believers during the Church Age (the time from Pentecost to the Rapture) whether dead, alive, or yet to be conceived.

And he is the head of the body, the church. Col 1:18

For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. 1 Cor 12:13

2. The visible or local church

The visible or local church is the visible expression of the body of Christ at any one particular place at any one particular time.

And to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellowsoldier, and to the church in thy house: Philemon 1:2

Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth. 1 Corinthians 1:1-2

[Note the controversy over local only: some deny the existence of the universal church. But there are several passages that pretty clearly teach that all believers are part of the body of Christ, the church.]

II. What makes a church a church?¹

A local church is . . .

- A. A group of baptized believers (Acts 2:41)
- B. Organized with the offices of pastor and deacon (Phil 1:1, 1 Tim 3:1-13)
- C. Sharing a common faith or body of truth (Acts 2:42, Jude 3)
- D. Observing the ordinances of baptism (Matt 28:19) and the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:42)
- E. Carrying out the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20)
- F. Meeting regularly (Heb 10:25, Acts 20:7)

If a group of people doesn't meet the above criteria, it cannot be called a church. Thus, many so-called churches today are not really churches, or at least are out of order.

Note: Biblically speaking, the church is composed of the people; it is not the building. The building is where the church meets.

Further Discussion:

1. Is a local church primarily a place for believers or unbelievers? **[believers]**
2. Is it wrong to call a building a church? **[It's not wrong, just inaccurate.]**

¹ From Rolland McCune, DBTS

3. What are some things typically associated with churches that the above definition (points A thru F) leaves out? [**a building, music, Sunday school, deacons, etc.**]

Resources:

Several books and articles are helpful for the study of the church. The teacher highly recommends the textbook for this series, *Life in the Father's House* by Mack and Swavely.

While these are profitable reading, one cannot give a blanket endorsement to any of them.

"Be ye Holy": The Call to Christian Separation by Fred Moritz

"Femme Fatale: The Feminist Seduction of the Evangelical Church" by Susan Olasky in the March 29, 1997 issue of *World* magazine, pp. 12-15.

"How May We Serve You?" by John H. Armstrong in the September 1995 issue of *Tabletalk*, pp. 8-9, 52.

"The Fallacy of 'Getting Something Out of Worship'" by Ralph Wood in the March/April 1997 issue of *The Christian Ministry*, pp. 16-18.

Biblical Foundations for Living, Lesson 26.

Christianity & Liberalism by J. Gresham Machen

Competent to Counsel by Jay Adams.

Different by Design by John MacArthur.

Disciplines of a Godly Man by R. Kent Hughes

I Believe in the Church by David Watson.

Made in America by Michael Scott Horton

Members of One Another by Eric Lane.

Philosophy of Church Ministry, David Doran, DBTS class notes, Spring 1993

Reclaiming Authentic Fundamentalism by Doug McLachlan

Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism, edited by John Piper & Wayne Grudem.

Spiritual Gifts by John MacArthur.

The Church in God's Program by Robert Saucy.

The Glorious Body of Christ by R.B. Kuiper.

The Place of Women in the Church by Charles Ryrie.

The Tragedy of Compromise: The Origin and Impact of the New Evangelicalism by Ernest Pickering

The Ultimate Priority by John MacArthur.

Understanding Spiritual Gifts by Robert Thomas.



Lesson 1: Realizing the Importance of the Local Church

The local church has fallen on hard times in recent decades. There are several reasons why this is so, a few of which we will examine below. None of the reasons, however, have biblical legitimacy, for the Scriptures affirm the *primacy* of the local church.

I. The primacy of the local church

The primacy of the local church means that the local church has primary importance in the world today. The church is the *primary* means through which God is accomplishing his purposes currently. The church is God's program through which He saves the lost, edifies believers, and glorifies Himself. It's the center of God's plan for the world. Consequently, it should be a *top priority* in the life of every believer.

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

Note from this text that:

- A. The church is God's household, His dwelling place, and His family. C.f. also 1 Cor 3:16-17 and Eph 2:19-22. If we want to be where God is, we'll be at church. The way we relate to Him is largely based on how we relate to His church.
- B. The church proceeded from God and belongs to Him. He is personally involved in its operation and activities. The Father loves the church (Eph 1:4-5), Christ died for the church (Acts 20:28), and the Holy Spirit initiated the church (Acts 2:1-4). Needless to say, the church is near and dear to the heart of God. It is primary.
- C. The church is the institution upholding and supporting the truth. If we want access to the truth, the church must be part of our lives. Those not part of the church are on a shaky, unstable foundation.

The church is the one institution God has promised to build and bless. We should direct our energies and efforts to support our church.

II. Why people reject the primacy of the local church

As mentioned above, there are several reasons why the emphasis on the local church has decreased in recent years. Below are a few of them:

A. An overemphasis on the universal church

Some think that because they are part of the universal church, they have no need of a local church. Others claim that their ministry is to the Body of Christ in general instead of to a certain church. But the Bible clearly teaches that a believer should attend, support, and minister within the context of a certain congregation.

B. The rise of the “parachurch”

Another recent phenomenon has been the rise of the “parachurch.” The prefix “para” means beside or alongside. Parachurch organizations are designed to assist the local church in accomplishing its objectives. Any agency that is trying to do Christian ministry, but is not directly tied to a local church, is parachurch. [E.g., college ministry, jail min, youth min, etc.] The past few decades have seen an unprecedented increase in the number of these ministries. Parachurch organizations often do a good work, focussing on evangelism, discipleship, and social welfare. In fact, parachurch groups have become popular because they are successfully accomplishing what the church is not.

The main problem with parachurch ministries is that they can become a substitute for church. People often commit their time, financial resources, and talents to the parachurch organization rather than to a church. Parachurch organizations may also intrude into areas that are the express domain of the church, such as the administration of the ordinances. But parachurch is not church. It has no right to encroach upon the church’s “turf.” The Bible’s emphasis is on the church, not the parachurch.

For Discussion

Name some parachurch organizations. [**Campus Crusade for Christ, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, SonLife, Youth Specialties. Also most mission agencies and colleges.**] Are all parachurch organizations necessarily bad? [**No, but they can function in bad ways.**] What makes one parachurch organization legitimate and another not? [**Its interaction/ connection with the church**] Which should receive more of your time, talents, and treasures: your local church or a parachurch organization? [**your church**]

C. Individualism

The American independent spirit has led many to forsake the local church altogether, replacing it with a personal, individualized faith. Some think they can worship God by themselves, perhaps out in the wilderness, on the golf course, or in front of their TV at home. Contrary to the individualistic spirit of our culture, the Bible emphasizes corporate worship rather than personal worship. People can and should worship God on an individual basis. But that is no excuse for forsaking the assembly of believers (Heb 10:25). **["My Bible is all I need" mentality. But it's only been in the last 3-400 or so years that personal Bible study was possible, because most people prior to that did not own a copy of the Sc.]**

D. Family

In this day of family instability and break up, families need as much time together as they can get. But people often use their family obligations and activities as a way to get out of church responsibilities. Sporting events, travelling, family reunions and the like are more fun than church, and they strengthen the family, so why not skip church for family time?

Family, for most folks, is more important than the church. That is, the ties and responsibilities of members of a family to that family are stronger than ties a church member has to his church. **[For example, would you be more willing to sacrifice (or even die) for your family, or for your church? Should parents ever miss church to care for sick children? If your church shuts down, you can always find another church to attend and support.]** This fact, however, does not give the believer the right to neglect his church just because of a family outing. One challenge of the Christian life is to balance both family and church life. Both are important; neither can be neglected.

[This is not to say that family is more important than one's personal relationship with God. Jesus said that faith in him would often lead to family break up (Mt 10:35 "For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law-- a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.")). History is filled with examples of those who suffered and died for their faith, often leaving family and loved ones behind. They could have renounced their faith and stayed with their families. But obedience to God is more important than one's family.]

One fact that some overlook is that church is a family event, something family members can participate in and support together, something that will strengthen and help the family. Church is a family outing. So when a family neglects the church, it is really harming itself.

[Church and family are the two most important elements in the Christian life. Anything that keeps a family from being together at church has to take a back seat (sports, outings, etc). What could be more important than that? Obviously, there will be emergencies and non-typical things that occur, but the norm should be for the family to be together at church.]

E. Disillusionment/disappointment with the church

Many people have simply given up on church. They are sick of the politics, gossip, discord, and pettiness that are often part and parcel of church life. Such believers may retreat to a personal, individualistic faith that is not dependent upon a church, or they may gravitate toward parachurch organizations. Such disillusionment is understandable, especially given the spiritual condition of many churches, but it is not defensible biblically. **[also boredom, church is irrelevant, apathy, can't find a church that perfectly suits them.**

From Nate Krupp, "House-church" proponent: [W]e are seeing God do incredible things: people are leaving the institutional church by the thousands; they are tired of being an audience, instead of a body; they question increasingly all of the money that goes into buildings; they are tired of being controlled and manipulated; they long to use their giftings to serve God and to see "the priesthood of all believers" instead of "the clergy," and they long to see the Holy Spirit allowed to freely move instead of everything being controlled.

... In place of "church" as we have traditionally known it, with the building, the minister, the Sunday morning service, and all of the programs, God is sovereignly, in these days, raising up a massive, growing movement of people who are desiring to function like the early Christians in the Book of Acts. Believers are turning their backs on all of the programs and returning to their first love, Jesus.

They long for Him to be the Head of His Church. They are gathering in their homes for simple times of worship, sharing their lives with each other, studying the Bible together, praying for one another, having the Lord's Supper together - being a family, rather than an organization. They have an understanding that everyone can minister (1 Corinthians 14:26). ... They meet the needs of children in various ways, but generally agree that the training of children in the ways of God is a responsibility of the parents not the Sunday School, junior church, or kids clubs.]²

² Nate Krupp, "A Growing House-Church Movement in North America and Around the World," <http://www.radchr.net/ghem.htm>

- III. Church leaders support the primacy of the local church.
- A. Augustine: “He cannot have God for his father who does not have the church for his mother.”
 - B. John Calvin: “The Church is the common mother of all the godly, which bears, nourishes, and governs in the Lord both kings and commoners; and this is done by the ministry. Those who neglect or despise this order want to be wiser than Christ. Woe to their pride!”
 - C. Michael Scott Horton: “The term *unchurched Christian* is an oxymoron.”
 - D. Wayne Mack & David Swavely: “[The] contemporary indifference toward the church represents a gargantuan shift from long-standing values held by those throughout history who have called themselves the people of God.”

“Attempting to grow in Christ outside of the church is like trying to learn to swim without ever getting into the pool!”
 - E. Alva J. McClain: “The necessity of membership in the local church is never questioned in the New Testament. It is taken for granted. Had we asked the believers of the Apostolic period whether it was essential to join a church, they would not have known what we were talking about. Every believer became a member of a church.”

For Discussion

Does belief in the primacy of the local church invariably lead to the neglect of the home, work, school, etc? Can it? Should it?

Review:

1. The local church has primacy. It demands our commitment and allegiance.
2. Parachurch ministries do not share the primacy of the church, and should not infringe on church responsibilities.
3. There are many reasons one might manufacture to explain why he cannot be a participating member of a church. None of them is legitimate.

4. The overwhelming opinion of Christian leaders throughout the ages is that all believers ought to be members of local churches.

For Further Discussion:

1. Considering what we've learned about the importance of participation in your church, how do you decide when it's appropriate to miss church for a special event?

[It would have to be a pretty big event or a major emergency to prevent church attendance. It should be a rare occurrence.]

2. Is going to a spiritual non-church event (e.g., a concert, a seminar) equivalent to attending your own church? **[No, there are no organic ties at such an event.]**
3. Parents often let their kids skip church for various fun events. If this is a regular pattern, what message do you suppose the children pick up? What effect, if any, will it have on the future lives of those kids?

[Boils down to the idea the church is not a high priority. That church takes a back seat to fun activities. It's OK to miss church. In the future, those kids will probably see church as a very low priority, perhaps not even attending.]

4. Some refuse to join a church unless they find one they find one that's "just right." Is this biblical?

[No. You should join the church near you that is the most biblical. No church is perfect. As long as there are no serious theological errors in the church, you should join it. It's better to be a member of an imperfect church than not to be a member of any church. E.g., the church at Corinth—would you not join if you lived there?]

5. What's the difference between attending a church and joining it?

[If you don't join, there is no real bond or commitment there. You're not part of the organism. In many churches, if you don't join, you can't serve. A Christian with no place of service is an aberration.]



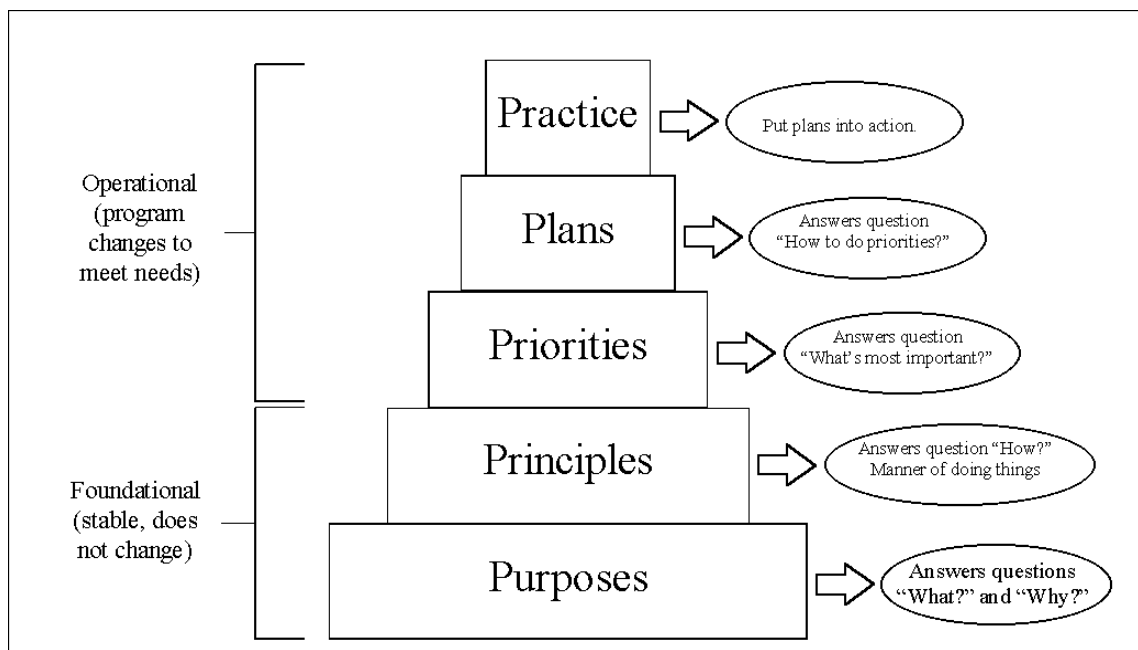
Lesson #2: Philosophy of Church Ministry, Part I

Said Alice to the Cheshire cat, "Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go?" Said the cat, "That depends a good deal on where you want to get to." "I don't much care where," said Alice. "Then," said the cat, "it doesn't matter which way you go."

Many churches are in the same predicament as was Alice in Wonderland – they are unsure of where they want to go. Few church members know exactly what their church is trying to do, how it should do it, or why it should do it. They simply do what they've always done, but with no particular purpose or reason in mind. They lack a clear philosophy of ministry.

A philosophy of ministry tells you where you want to go as a church. Without a philosophy, a church will lack a sense of purpose. **[Actually, every church has a philosophy whether it is stated or not.]** A philosophy provides direction. It answers the questions, "Who are we?" and "What are we supposed to do?" To be successful, a church needs to know its mission, its reason for existence, and how it plans to carry out that mission. A church should develop strategies (means) based on its philosophy (purpose). Philosophy also gives the church a means of evaluation. If a church doesn't know what it is supposed to be doing, it can't evaluate how well it's doing it. A philosophy gives a ministry its priorities and generates commitment within the membership. Having a clear philosophy of ministry is a good thing.

Philosophy of Ministry Visualized



A philosophy of ministry is how a church views and does its work. It states the purpose for which a church exists and the principles by which it functions. These determine the priorities which it values. Once a church determines why it exists, how it is going to do things, and what is most important, it can then make plans and carry them out. The church pursues only those programs that directly support the philosophy of ministry. Any program or activity not directly in keeping with the philosophy of ministry is dropped.

Where do we start with a philosophy of ministry? The Word of God. A church must find the biblical purposes for the church and the principles by which a church should function. This is the beginning point.

A philosophy currently popular in Evangelicalism is to start with people's needs. A "needs-centered" church focuses on meeting the needs (physical, spiritual, emotional, etc.) of its members. It asks the question, "What do people want the church to be?" This is how many of the "mega-churches" got so big. What are some weaknesses of such an approach?

[1. Biblical ministry is concerned with pleasing God, not with placating people. "Needs" is the wrong place to start; 2. Needs are constantly changing, thus, such a ministry tends to be faddish. 3. "Needs" often are desires or personal preference. You soon run the church by popular opinion rather than biblical principle.]

How would you end this sentence: "Our church exists to" How you fill in the blank states your philosophy of ministry.

What then is the biblical purpose for a church?

I. **The Aim or Purpose of the Church: to Glorify God**

A. Texts

1 Cor 10:31 *Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.*

Eph 1:12 *That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.*

Eph 3:21 *Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.*

B. Explanation

The purpose of the church is doxological. The Greek word *doxa* means "glory," and refers to the radiant splendor or glory of God. To glorify God means to display His character. The ultimate goal of all things in the universe is to glorify God. The Westminster Confession of Faith states that the ultimate purpose for man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. Thus the church exists primarily to honor and glorify God. This central

purpose both drives and limits all the church's activities. All things must be done in a manner that conforms to the character of God.

The purpose of the church is also theocentric, that is God-centered. The object of honor and the One the church is trying to please is God, not man. This is an important distinction to maintain today, because many churches are fashioning themselves into organizations that appeal to people at the expense of pleasing God. Our concern is not "What do people want?" but "What does God want?"

II. The Action of the church

How does a church glorify God? The Great Commission gives us a good starting place.

Matt 28:18-20 And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

The main clause in this passage is "teach all nations." One could translate it "make disciples of all nations." The primary purpose of the church is to make disciples. Note that there is no biblical distinction between a regular believer and a disciple. All believers should display the characteristics of a true disciple. Note also that making disciples is a process. It's not simply making converts. Baptism and teaching follow conversion in the disciple-making process.

In order to make a disciple (the goal), we have to have an image in mind of what a disciple is. What does a disciple look like? A disciple is a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ. A disciple is saved and baptized, regular and active in worship, being edified and edifying others, practicing biblical stewardship, and engaged in evangelism. This is the goal or outcome that the church is aiming for in the life of every person it comes in contact with.

How does a church make disciples?

- A. Evangelism of the lost
- B. Edification of the saints
- C. Worship
- D. Fellowship
- E. Service

We'll look at these five actions in Part II of this lesson.

Conclusion: A philosophy of ministry is a statement that tells you where you want to go as a church. It provides direction, gives the church a means of evaluation, gives a ministry its priorities and generates commitment within the membership. A philosophy

of ministry should be doxological and theocentric. The primary aim or purpose of the church is to make disciples.

For Further Discussion:

1. What is the philosophy of ministry of Liberty Baptist Church? Finish the sentence: LBC exists to” **[to glorify God through making disciples]**
2. Describe the character of a church that puts the desires of people first. **[Capitulating to whatever fad or fashion that comes down the pike. Embracing pop culture. Popularity is the most important thing in the church.]**
3. What sorts of activities would a biblical philosophy of ministry (doxological and theocentric) rule out? **[Anything not a part of the four objectives. E.g., banks, soup kitchens, grocery stores, hotels, etc.]**



Lesson #3: Philosophy of Church Ministry, Part II

In the last lesson we discussed the importance of developing a philosophy of church ministry. We found that a philosophy of ministry tells you where you want to go as a church. It provides direction, gives the church a means of evaluation, gives a ministry its priorities and generates commitment within the membership. A philosophy of ministry should be doxological and theocentric. The primary aim or purpose of the church is to glorify God by making disciples.

How does a church go about the task of making disciples? Note Acts 2:41-42, 47.

Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. . . . Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

Based on this and other texts, notice four primary activities in the process of making disciples.

- I. **Evangelism** “*they that gladly received his word . . .*” and “*the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved*”

A primary emphasis of a church should be on spreading the Gospel and attempting to convert people to Christ. Why is evangelism an important focus of the local church?

- A. The local church is the source of evangelism. The goal of the church is to reproduce congregations.

1. The local church has been given the authority to evangelize.

Just prior to His Ascension, Christ indicated that the authority to evangelize would be given when the baptism of the Holy Spirit took place.

Acts 1:8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

This occurred on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), the day upon which the church was established.

2. The local church provides the evangelists.

The local church is the training ground for evangelism (Acts 2:46-47). Those who are saved join a local church, where they learn to become effective witnesses. Churches then send out missionaries to start more churches.

- B. The local church is the means of evangelism, both personal and corporate.

Evangelism is enhanced by the preparation and support provided by the local church.

1. The local church provides specialized training.

Witnessing is a learned activity. It is the educational ministry of the local church which prepares believers to witness more effectively.

Ephesians 4:11-12 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.

2. The local church provides encouragement.

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

Church members should encourage one another to tell others about Christ.

3. The local church provides strength through prayer.

2 Thessalonians 3:1 Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you:

Colossians 4:2-4 Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving; Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds: That I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak.

Church members should pray that the church would have an effective outreach and that each member would have opportunities to witness personally.

- C. The local church is the end of evangelism.

Evangelism which produces only professions of faith is incomplete. The Great Commission calls for evangelism which not only produces converts, but which also sees them baptized and united in membership with a local church.

Acts 2:41 Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.

Evangelism does not end when a person makes a profession of faith. Evangelism is a process whose goal is to see converts become mature in the faith.

II. Edification “they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine”

- A. Definition: edification means “to build up.” A primary goal of the church is to build up believers, that is, help them to become fully devoted and mature followers of Jesus Christ.

- B. Texts:

1. Ephesians 4:12-13 *For the **perfecting** of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the **edifying** of the body of Christ: 13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.*
2. 1 Cor. 14:3 *But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to **edification**, and exhortation, and comfort.*

- C. How is one edified?

1. Through biblical and theological education.

The ministry of the Word ought to enjoy a central place in the life of a church. The church is responsible to teach the Bible and biblical theology to its people. Such instruction may be formal, as when the pastor or a teacher lectures, or informal, when church members interact with each other at other times.

The pastor ought to spend his time exegeting and preaching the Word. Sunday school teachers are not babysitters. Their task is to teach the Bible.

Acts 20:27 For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 *All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*

2. Through the use of spiritual gifts

As we use the gifts God has given us, we edify one another.

1 Cor. 14:12 *Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church.*

3. Through following qualified leaders

2 Cor. 10:8 *For though I should boast somewhat more of our authority, which the Lord hath given us for edification, and not for your destruction, I should not be ashamed:*

Note that each of the above means of edification is carried out within the context of the local church. Without a commitment to a certain church, the believer does not have access to these things.

III. Fellowship “*And they continued steadfastly in . . . fellowship*”

Fellowship is participation or communion of believers with each other based on their union with Christ. Unity among the members of a church is one of the distinguishing marks of genuine believers.

1 John 1:7 *But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.*

The Bible places great emphasis on this unity. It is described by a word that is translated “one another” or “each other.” This word appears over 100 times in the New Testament. Since unity is so important, believers should encourage and support it.

Romans 14:19 *Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.*

1 Peter 4:10 *As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.*

IV. Worship “*And they continued steadfastly in . . . breaking of bread, and in prayers, praising God*”

Worship is any activity that displays the worth or value of God. Participation in the worship service of one’s church is a primary means of worship. Listening to the Word as it’s preached, praying, singing, and confession of sin are elements of worship.

Colossians 3:16-17 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord

Conclusion: How does the church go about fulfilling its primary objective of making disciples? It engages in evangelism, edification, worship and fellowship. Remember the word WIFE (Worship, Instruction (edification), Fellowship, and Evangelism) It is by means of these steps that lost folk are saved, baptized, added to the church, and taught. These objectives must be the central focus of the church.

For Further Discussion:

1. Categorize the following programs under one (or more) of the four objectives of the church. Place a check mark in the category(s) where the program belongs.

Program	W	I	F	E
Senior Saints				
Teen meetings				
Nursery				
Sunday school				
Work days				
Sunday evening service				
Kids4Truth				

2. How does a clear philosophy of ministry prevent a church from implementing some programs? **[The church avoids or stops any program that does not “plug into” the philosophy.]**
3. How does a clear philosophy of ministry help a church make decisions? **[The church will consider how and if the thing in question fits with its philosophy.]**
4. What comes first, edification or evangelism? **[Edification, because believers have to be taught to evangelize—not only techniques/methods, but also the content of the gospel. Jesus made disciples before he commissioned them to reach the world. We should follow the same pattern.]**
5. How good of a job is LBC doing at making disciples? **[Remember that making disciples is a process. How good of a job are we doing at reaching people, seeing them converted to Christ, seeing them baptized, and seeing them move on to maturity?]**

6. Can you think of any other philosophical issues a church must grapple with? [**1. Type of service and music (contemp. or traditional?); 2. Emphasis on excellence/ professionalism (pubs, building, etc) or on mission (i.e., don't spend \$ on building but on people and programs.); 3. Size (keep growing or spin off new cong.?).**



Lesson #4: Committing Ourselves to Church Membership

Once a person is saved, he *automatically* becomes a member of the body of Christ (the “universal” or “invisible” church). The body of Christ is composed of all those saved during the church age (from the Day of Pentecost until the Rapture). For obvious reasons, it is impossible for the universal church to assemble regularly in order to carry out the objectives of the church (for the objectives of the church, see the Introductory Lesson). Therefore, the local church becomes the means whereby God accomplishes His purposes in this age. The local church is the visible expression of the universal church. Commitment to a local church is the assumed responsibility of everyone claiming to be a part of the universal church. The local church should be a top priority in the life of every believer, as we learned in the first lesson.

Unlike the universal church, membership in a local church is voluntary. One must *choose* to become a member of a particular local church. Unfortunately, some Christians choose not to.

For Discussion

Why do some Christians refuse to join a local church? **[They are disobedient; they see it as optional; they don't agree with some aspect of the church.]**
What about people who attend a church but refuse to formally join it? **[Same as above. They want the benefits of a church without the commitments involved.]**
Do you have to wait to find the perfect church, or can you join one that is slightly flawed? **[If you find the perfect church, don't join it; you'd wreck it. Obviously, no church is perfect, and you won't agree on some points. But as long as the church is doctrinally and philosophically sound, there's no reason not to join.]**

The fact that some Christians refrain from uniting in membership with a local church is unfortunate, for church membership is a good thing.

I. The Reasons for Membership

Though it is true that church membership is not *explicitly* taught in Scripture, the concept is found throughout its pages. Consider the following:

A. Biblical precedent

1. Believers were added to the church in Jerusalem (Acts 2:47).
2. Records of membership were kept (1 Tim 5:9).

3. Members could be removed from the local church (1 Cor 5:12-13). One obviously cannot be removed from something he is not a part of.
4. Members could transfer from one church to another (Rom 16:1).

B. Biblical principles

1. The principle of accountability

The local church is the context in which one makes himself accountable to other believers. Members of a church are responsible to exhort, encourage, warn, and disciple one another. We should welcome and seek such accountability. Unwillingness to join a church implies an unwillingness to be held accountable. Also, pastors have the responsibility to feed, lead and guard those who are part of the flock. It is not possible for a shepherd to serve faithfully if he does not know who his sheep are. Pastors are responsible to serve those who are members. His ministry may extend to non-members as well, but his main concern is members. Those who desire pastoral care should seek membership.

For Discussion

To whom in the local church is the believer accountable? See Matthew 18:15-20 & Hebrews 13:17. **[To one another and to the church leadership]**

How does church membership make accountability possible? **[If one is not a member of the church, no church discipline can take place. You can't throw someone out of an organization he is not a part of. The church has no influence over those not in its membership.]**

2. The principle of commitment

The members of the early church had a sincere commitment to one another (see Acts 2:41-47). The author of Hebrews exhorts his readers not to forsake the assembly of believers (Heb 10:25). Members of a church ought to be firmly committed to one another and to the ministry of their church. Those who are not members have little or no ownership of the ministry. No matter how faithfully they attend, they are not really committed to the assembly.

Most churches have a formal covenant that members agree to when they join. A covenant is an agreement or contract which lists the obligations members voluntarily take upon themselves. Such a

document is helpful in that it spells out very clearly the commitments people are making when they join the church.

[Pass out copy of church covenant and read thru it.]

3. The principle of orderliness

In the local church, all things are to be done in an orderly manner (1 Corinthians 14:40). Church membership facilitates orderliness by *clearly* identifying who is part of a local church and who is not. If one is part of a church, the church members have the right and responsibility to help that person live an orderly life. If a non-member is living a disorderly life, the church has no right or obligation to confront the person about it. Non-members are not under the authority of any church.

II. The Requirements for Membership

A. The initial requirements

1. Salvation (Acts 2:41,47)

A dearly held principle of Baptist polity [**explain polity**] is regenerate church membership. That is, only those who can give a reasonable testimony of salvation are considered for membership. This obviously prohibits infants from membership, as well as anyone else who does not have a testimony of salvation.

2. Baptism (Acts 2:41)

Just as salvation and Spirit baptism are prerequisites to membership in the invisible church, so salvation and water baptism are prerequisites to membership in the visible church.

Normally, when one gets saved, he is shortly thereafter baptized. This is the clear NT pattern. The church then votes to accept the person into membership. If a baptized believer moves to a new community, his membership is transferred from his old church to his new one; he is not re-baptized. If a person has a legitimate testimony of salvation, has been baptized, and has evidence of an orderly way of life, he may expect to be welcomed into the membership of a church.

- B. The continuing requirement: an orderly walk

In order to remain a member in good standing, the church member must live a consistently righteous, although not perfect, lifestyle (2 Thes 3:1). Those who persist in sin are to be warned, rebuked, and, if they fail to respond, excommunicated from the assembly (see 1 Corinthians 5). In Lesson 8 we'll discuss the basis on which an excommunication could take place.

III. The Responsibilities of Membership

“Membership has its privileges” was a catchy advertising slogan several years ago. As far as the local church is concerned, this saying might be modified to read: Membership has its responsibilities. What are some of the responsibilities of a local church member?

- A. Attendance (Acts 20:7, Hebrews 10:24-25)

This is not sporadic, hit-and-miss attendance, but faithful participation. A church member should strive to support all the services and activities of his church that pertain to him. If one does not attend, he can't be an active participant. A non-attending member is a drag on the whole operation.

- B. Giving (1 Corinthians 16:2)

The sacrificial giving of the members of a church finances the ministry of that church. The local church is both the collection and distribution point for the money Christians give. Members should seek to give a portion of their income to sustain and expand the ministry of their church. Those who don't give are not only disobedient, they are not pulling their weight.

- C. Fellowship (Acts 2:42)

Fellowship is more than just social interaction. The fellowship that church members have with each other is based not only on their common bond of faith, but also on their common commitment to one another as members of the same church. Thus, if one is not a member of a church, the degree of fellowship that he can experience with other believers is greatly diminished. Members of a church have made a pledge and a commitment to one another. They can count on each other. Non-members have not so committed themselves, and thus are outside the fellowship.

[Attenders and non-members may enjoy a degree of fellowship, but they can't expect the same treatment as members can.]

D. Ministry

Note all the ways in which church members are to minister to each other.

1. Pray for one another (2 Thes 3:1; see also Lesson Ten)
2. Do good to one another (Gal 6:10)
3. Serve one another (Gal 5:13)
4. Forgive one another (Col 3:13)
5. Edify one another (1 Thes 5:11)
6. Admonish one another (Rom 15:14)
7. Bear one another's burdens (Gal 6:2)
8. Teach one another (Col 3:16)
9. Comfort one another (1 Thes 5:11)
10. Exhort one another (Heb 3:13)
11. Encourage one another (Heb 3:13 and 10:25)

Members fulfill these ministries (and more) primarily within the context of their church. If one is not a part of a church, he can't fully participate in either the giving or the receiving aspects of these ministries. He really has no outlet for ministry within the church because he's not part of it. He may have a personal ministry of outreach and discipleship, but this would be separate from church ministry.

Further, leadership is only for members. If one wants to be a pastor, deacon, usher, or Sunday school teacher, he normally has to be a member. In fact, if one desires to fulfill nearly any responsibility in the church, he has to be a member. Thus, membership is required to obey the above commands.

[Admittedly, some churches are very loose when it comes to whom they allow to minister within the church. Some churches allow non-members to be involved in ministry. We don't.]

IV. Membership privileges

The saying "membership has its privileges" is true. There are things church members can participate in that non-members cannot.

A. The ordinances

The Lord's Supper is for church members. This ordinance is strictly for those who have been baptized and are part of a church. The other ordinance, baptism, is directly linked to membership. That is, those who are baptized are normally added to the church.

[Some churches have closed communion, others close, and others open. We practice close communion—one has to be a member of either our church or a church of like faith and practice. This is based on the order in the Great Commission: make disciples by going, baptizing, and teaching. Observing the Lord’s Supper is what baptized believers do.]

B. Ministry

As noted above, ministry is a responsibility, but it’s also a privilege. Knowing that the other members of the church have obligated themselves to minister to one another is a very comforting and strengthening thought. There are times when we need to be ministered to, and members should be able to count on other members to do so. Knowing that one has a definite place of ministry is also helpful. Ministering among a group of people who have committed themselves to each other is a real joy.

C. Fellowship

Like ministry, fellowship is both a responsibility and a privilege. The members of a church have committed themselves to each other, and thus have a unique bond of fellowship. Non-members have no such privilege.

Review:

1. There are several reasons why believers should be members of a church. The Bible demands it, there is no accountability without it, and orderliness is impossible without it.
2. There are several requirements for membership. One must have a valid testimony of salvation, must have been baptized, and must walk in an orderly manner.
3. The responsibilities of membership include participation, financial support, ministry and fellowship.
4. The privileges of membership include participation in the Lord’s Supper, ministry, and fellowship.

For Further Discussion:

1. Can you think of any scenarios in which church membership is not required for the believer? **[Perhaps when a saved person moves to a place where there is no Christian church, or where all the churches are bad. Then he should start a church.]**
2. Should a church ever baptize someone who does not intend to join the church? **[No, not normally. Certain circumstances may allow it, but not normally.]**
3. Should we have a negative, arrogant attitude toward those who attend but refuse membership? **[No. If we are charitable, we'll see them as disorderly brethren. However, note this warning from Jay Adams: "People who are not members of a church should be treated as unbelievers, because they are treating themselves as unbelievers" (*LITFH*, 18). Believers unite with churches; unbelievers don't.]**
4. What problems do churches that don't have formal membership face? **[1. It's unbiblical; 2. They have no basis for discipline; 3. There is no basis for control or limitation; 4. Little or no commitment from attenders, especially when times are tough—people will be prone to cut and run easily.]**



Lesson 5: Choosing a Good Church

If you were to ask one hundred different people what a good church is like, you'd probably get at least one hundred different answers. To some people, the facilities are the most important – they want a nice building, stained glass, comfortable seating, a pleasant nursery, etc. Others are more interested in how dynamic the pastor is, or what programs the church provides. What exactly makes a church “good”? Which factors are more important? Which are less important? Which are unimportant?

As you might guess, there are many factors which make a church good. These factors can be categorized into five general areas. These are the things you ought to evaluate as you look for a church to attend.

I. A Good Church has the right Position.

The *first* factor to consider when choosing a church is its doctrinal and philosophical position. That is, churches are distinct from each other based on the way they handle Scripture and on their philosophy of ministry. Generally speaking, there are three options here:³

A. Liberal

A liberal church is one which denies part or all of the cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith by adding to or subtracting from them.⁴ Many of the mainline denominations [**Church of Christ, some Lutherans, some Presbyterians, Congregationalists, United Methodists, most Episcopal, some Baptist**] are liberal, as are many theological seminaries, and they have been for many decades.

[Years ago, schools like Yale, Princeton, and Harvard were strong theological schools. Now they are thoroughly liberal.]

Protestant liberalism developed in Germany and Britain and crept in to the U.S. around the turn of the century. Liberals denied traditional creeds of Christianity and created modern, naturalistic statements of the doctrines. Liberalism teaches that the Bible is not supernatural, infallible, or authoritative, but is the work of limited writers whose message must be updated for the modern audience. All belief must pass the test of reason, experience and

³ From Elwell's *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*.

⁴ For one author's delineation of the fundamentals of the faith, see chapter 4 (“What are the Fundamentals of Christianity?”) in *Reckless Faith* by John MacArthur.

critical examination. Sin and evil is seen as imperfection, ignorance or immaturity. Salvation is achieved by reversing the effects of sin, mainly through education and good works. Liberal churches preach primarily good works and social action.

Note: It's important that we reserve the word "liberal" to refer to unbelief and apostasy, not to looser standards of behavior. Someone is not "liberal" just because he listens to popular music, wears the latest fashions, or goes to the movies.

B. New Evangelical

A new evangelical church is one which holds to the cardinal doctrines of the faith, but refuses to separate from or criticize those who do not. New Evangelicals desire to interact with liberal scholarship, which often leads to theological liberalism. **[Good example is "Openness of God" idea espoused by Clark Pinnock, who used to be Evangelical, but now is closer to liberal.]** New Evangelicalism arose in the 1940's as a reaction to what some saw as negative aspects of fundamentalism (narrow-mindedness, lacking scholarship, harsh, divisive, contentious, not addressing social problems). New evangelicalism stresses the opposite of those things (being open-minded, well educated, gracious, non-judgmental and socially/politically active). This movement is quick to adopt and employ elements of modern cultural, such as popular music, mass media, and marketing. Evangelicals strive to be highly cooperative and inclusive, often working together with any group who professes Christianity. Most non-liberal Protestant churches in the West fall into this category. Usually this group is known simply as "evangelical."

C. Fundamental

A fundamental church is one which upholds the cardinal (or fundamental) doctrines of the faith, such as belief in miracles, the virgin birth, the substitutionary atonement of Christ, His resurrection, and the inspiration of the Bible. Fundamentalism arose in the early 1900's in a reaction to theological liberalism coming from Europe that was influencing the mainline denominations in the U.S. The name "Fundamental" probably came from a series of books, called The Fundamentals, which both defended orthodox Protestantism and attacked liberalism, Roman Catholicism, evolution and other enemies of the faith.

What are the primary characteristics of Fundamentalism?

1. Commitment to the fundamental doctrines of orthodox Christianity, like inspiration of the Bible, the resurrection of

Christ and salvation by grace through faith. Fundamentalists believe the Bible is literally true and accurate.

2. Separation from sin and false doctrine. Fundamentalists emphasize separation from the world and holiness of lifestyle. They also insist on separation from wrong doctrine and from those who teach it. They refuse to cooperate with those who deny important biblical doctrines. A primary emphasis of fundamentalists is their desire to expose error and separate from it. This is the key, essential distinction of Fundamentalism.
3. Militancy or zeal. Fundamentalists tend to be very blunt in criticizing those who have departed from the faith. They are aggressive and assertive in their defense of the truth and their exposure of error.

Currents within Fundamentalism Today:

- Confessionalism – doctrinal essentials, as typically explained in a confession of faith or doctrinal statement, define the parameters of fellowship and/or separation. Doctrine and philosophy are most important to this group, rather than impressive statistics or charismatic personalities. This branch values formal education yet still emphasizes personal holiness and evangelism. It also seeks to distance itself from some of the extreme positions within other branches of fundamentalism. *One would hope that more within the movement follow this track. E.g., DBTS, CBTS, NTA, GARBC. “Mainstream” fundamentalism? Probably not, or not yet.*
- Imperialism – the movement rises and falls with a particular popular leader, an “empire builder,” the local “Doc.” Certain fundamental leaders have arisen to build impressive churches, schools or other ministries, and some see these men as representatives of the entire movement. Such leaders often pass the baton to their children or comrades, who step into leadership and continue building the “empire.” *E.g., Bob Jones, Hyles, Clearwaters, Cedarholm*
- New Image or Neo-Fundamentalism – broader appeal to the evangelical community; less emphasis on personal standards of holiness. Neo-fundamentalists typically grew up within Fundamentalism, are committed to the core beliefs, but are less militant, less separatist, and more open to evangelical influences. Neo-fundamentalists tend to be younger people who did not participate in the past battles with the liberals, and/or who are fed up with Fundamentalism’s tendency toward externalism, conformity and isolation. *E.g., Falwell, Van Impe, Cedarville University, Cornerstone (Grand Rapids). Is GARBC moving this direction?*

- Hyper-fundamentalism – elevation of programs, personalities, and personal opinion to the level of cardinal doctrines. Hyper-fundamentalists often rally around certain issues that most consider to be non-essential (e.g., Bible versions, dress standards, musical forms, hair length, personal recreation choices) and powerful, dynamic leaders who demand loyalty from their followers. Hyper-fundamentalism is often highly exclusive, charging dissenters with heresy and/or apostasy. This branch of the movement tends to be pragmatic, holding that impressive statistics are an indication of God's blessing. Leaders in this category often downplay education and emphasize personal piety and service. *E.g., Hyles, BBF, Fairhaven College, etc. Such people would strongly assert that this branch is true Fundamentalism.*

These categories are obviously not airtight because some within the movement do not fit so neatly into any of them and because people and groups move from one category into another. Fundamentalism is not a monolithic, centralized movement, so it reflects a broad range of sensibilities.

Fundamental churches tend to be independent, socially and politically conservative, actively involved in evangelism and missions, and often stand aggressively against social and religious movements they see as being in error.

How would you categorize our church? Liberal, evangelical or fundamental? **[Fundamental.]**

Can you tell anything about the position of a church from its name? **[Generally, the name has some meaning. E.g., if the church is called Pentecostal or Roman Catholic, you can usually assume some things to be true of that church. But don't judge a church by its name alone. If you are committed to Baptist distinctives, then you'll probably look for a Baptist church. Some good churches don't have "Baptist" in the name. Bible or community churches may be good.]**

II. A Good Church has the right Philosophy of Ministry.

Philosophy includes *what* you do (priorities), *why* you do it (purpose), and *how* you do it (programs). Every church has a philosophy of ministry, whether articulated or not. The key to a good philosophy is *emphasis* and *implementation*. In other words, does the church's ministry emphasize what the Scriptures emphasize? Does it major on the "majors" and minor on the "minors"? Furthermore, does the church consistently implement its philosophy? In other words, does it do what it claims is important to do?

In our study of philosophy of church ministry (Lessons 2-3), we determined that a church exists primarily to glorify God. It accomplishes this through edifying believers and evangelizing unbelievers. The four primary responsibilities of a church are worship, instruction, fellowship and evangelism (WIFE).

- A. The philosophy is doxological, that is, putting the glory of God uppermost. A doxological purpose limits the activities of the church to only those things that please and honor God. Thus we will not participate in those activities that we see as worldly or inappropriate. Activities that don't honor God are eliminated.
- B. The philosophy is theocentric, that is, focussing on the person of God rather than on the needs or desires of man. Many modern churches base their entire ministry on doing what people want or expect. They meet people's "felt needs." Instead, we ought to find out what God wants and do that, regardless of whether or not it's popular.
- C. The philosophy is Word-based, that is, accepting the Word of God as the only rule of faith and practice. The church should strive to preach the Word systematically, exegetically, and practically.

III. A Good Church has the right People.

A. Good leadership

A good church is one whose pastor(s) have *character* (see 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1) and are *competent* (this includes education and experience). The quality of pastoral leadership is a primary consideration when evaluating a church. Unfortunately, people often are attracted by a pastor's personality rather than his character, qualifications and skills.

Deacons generally are influential in churches. Deacons must be of godly character and be able to take care of the physical needs of the church. The relationship between the pastor(s) and deacons is critical to the success and health of the church.

It's also critical that the men of the church exercise leadership. Church leadership is male.

B. Good laymen

A good church is one whose people are *committed* to the ministry of their church and to the direction set by its leadership. They are participants, not merely spectators.

Most visitors look for a church that is friendly, warm and welcoming. Love and close fellowship among the people of the church should be evident.

IV. A Good Church has the right Programs.

Churches typically have many programs in place to meet their goals. What are some of these programs? [**Sunday school classes, small group studies, youth groups, senior citizens groups, VBS, nursery, children's church and visitation**]

In our consumer-oriented culture, many people make the mistake of choosing a church based solely upon the programs it has to offer. A program is simply a means to an end and should not be the basis on which one chooses a church. A good program is one that glorifies God in its entirety and accomplishes a biblical end. Most programs are *extrabiblical* (not *unbiblical*) and are thus dispensable. One should be committed to the program only to the extent that it's fulfilling the goal. Programs and methods change; goals don't.

What kind of programs should a church have in place?

- A. Programs to edify believers: a church ought to have strategies for helping believers grow in their faith. Sunday school classes, regular worship services, Bible studies, and special meetings are designed to accomplish this goal.
- B. Programs to reach the lost: a church ought to have strategies to preach the gospel to the unsaved, baptize converts, and add them to the church. Normal church services, special evangelistic events, missions support, and the personal witness of church members should accomplish this goal.
- C. Programs that enhance worship: worship services, singing, prayer, giving. Having a nursery and children's church fits under this category.
- D. Programs that enhance fellowship: small groups, formal and informal meetings, discussion, etc.

- E. Programs that are biblical: a church may be tempted to branch off into areas not strictly within the domain of the church. For example, churches are often involved in political action, feeding the hungry, or working for racial equality. While in and of themselves such programs are good, they are not specifically the responsibility of the local church.

V. A Good Church has the right Polity

Polity describes the way the church conducts its affairs – what the pastor does, what the deacons do, how it administers baptisms and communion, how it conducts worship, who it allows into membership, who has the authority in the church, etc. Polity is the method of government.

Most Baptist churches are congregational (ruled by the congregation) rather than presbyterian (ruled by a small group) or episcopal (ruled by a bishop). Further, most Baptist churches uphold the following distinctives: the Bible as the sole authority for faith and practice (2 Tim 3:16-17), the autonomy of the local church (1 Cor 5:4-5, 12-13, 6:1-5), the priesthood of the believer (Heb 4:16; 1 Pet 2:9; Rev 1:6), two ordinances: water baptism and the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:41-42), soul liberty (Rom 14:5, 12; 1 John 2:27), regenerate church membership (Acts 2:41, 47), two offices: pastor and deacon (Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:1-13), and separation of church and state (Matt 22:21).

If you are committed to the above distinctions, you will most likely feel most comfortable in a Baptist or baptistic church. It may be tempting to join a church that is solid in many ways but has the wrong polity. Polity may not be the *primary* consideration when looking for a church, but it is an important one.

Review:

1. A good church has the right *position*. There are several different theological positions a church may adopt: liberal, evangelical, or fundamental.
2. A good church has the right *philosophy of ministry*. This philosophy should be doxological, theocentric and Word-based.
3. A good church has the right *people*: qualified leaders and committed members.
4. A good church has the right *programs*. It provides biblical programs that edify believers and evangelize the lost.
5. A good church has the right *polity*. It upholds traditional Baptist distinctives.

For Further Discussion:

1. How long do you think it would take one to decide if a church is a good one or not? **[Probably at least a few visits. One should attend every service for a couple of months before deciding.]**
2. How important is polity? Is it a non-negotiable? **[It's pretty important. Baptist polity follows the Bible pretty closely, so I don't see much room for fudging.]**
3. Who is responsible for making a church a "good" church? **[everyone in the church, both leadership and laymen]**
4. What are your options if you can't find a "good" church? **[join the best one and try to make it better; start a church; don't attend church—not a good option.]**
5. On a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being high), rate how well LBC is doing in the five areas discussed in this lesson.

Position (liberal, evangelical, fundamental)	
Philosophy (doxological, theocentric, Word-based)	
People (qualified leaders, committed members)	
Programs (implementing WIFES)	
Polity (congregational government, Baptist distinctives)	



Lesson 6: Relating to Church Leadership

We live in an age when pastoral authority is commonly either downplayed or pushed too far. Many pastors are far too passive, while others act like little dictators, ruling over their “kingdoms” with an iron fist. What does the Bible teach about pastoral authority? We’ll seek to answer that question in this lesson.

[Not trying to advance any agenda or set thing right. This is just an area in which we need to understand what the Bible says.]

Pastoral authority can be a touchy subject. Before we start, note the following:

- ◆ Most pastors have spent a considerable amount of time as regular members in a local church. During that time, they had to learn how to properly relate to their leaders. Being found faithful followers, they have been elevated by God to the positions of leadership they currently hold. This is consistent with the biblical principle, “He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much” (Luke 16:10; see also Matthew 25:21). So pastors know what it’s like to be a regular member.
- ◆ Pastors are under authority, too. They are “undershepherds” to the “Chief Shepherd” (1 Peter 5:4) and are accountable to Him (Hebrews 13:17). Ultimate authority lies with Christ, the Head of the church.
- ◆ A pastor and his people are equal in *essence*, yet unequal in *function*. In other words, a pastor is not inherently superior to those under his authority; however, he has been given a superior role or office in the local church. The honor a pastor deserves is due to his role or position, not to his age, education, skill or size.

With these things in mind, let’s see what the Bible says about the authority of a pastor.

I. Pastoral Titles Signify Authority. Acts 20:17, 28 [read]

- A. *presbuteros*, the elder: The literal or basic meaning of this term signifies a person of extended age, that is, “older,” perhaps in contrast to younger people. This title emphasizes the maturity and wisdom associated with age. The chief idea of *elder* both in the Hebrew and Christian sense is that of presiding or ruling; he is the president of the assembly.

[John refers to himself in 2, 3 John as “the elder.” This was clearly a term of respect and authority.]

- B. *episkopos*, the overseer or bishop: An episkopos is a man charged with the duty of seeing that the things done by others are done right. The terms “superintendent” and “guardian” are further legitimate meanings for the term.

[The verb form mean “to take care of, to oversee, to care for.”]

- C. *poimen*, the shepherd or pastor: Shepherds feed and lead. They lead in such a way that no individual member of the flock is able to disregard the shepherd. An important aspect of the shepherding role is to protect. False doctrine and false teachers abound. The pastor has to protect his people from their influence. This requires a delicate balance between kindness and patience on one hand, and authority on the other. The word “shepherd” most accurately describes the pastor’s role: a strong leader who cares strongly for his sheep

Note: These three words are synonymous. See Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Pet 5:1-2; Ephesians 4:11; Titus 1:5 and 7. Pastor, elder, and bishop signify the same office.

[One scholar said that each term is descriptive of an aspect of the pastoral office: *elder* speaks of the dignity of the office, *overseer* refers to the duties of the office, and *shepherd* relates to the ministry of feeding and protecting.]

II. Pastoral Responsibilities Signify Authority.

- A. Leading/Ruling the Flock: 1 Tim 5:17 says “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.” The word for “rule” here means “be at the head (of), rule, direct” or “manage, conduct.” See also 1 Thes 5:12 and Heb 13:7. “Double honor” very likely refers to financial support.
- B. Stewardship/Management: Titus 1:7 states that the “overseer must be above reproach as God’s steward.” A steward is one who manages his master’s property. Implicit in the concept of stewardship is control. Further, the overseer is “*God’s* steward.” God has entrusted the pastor with authority to manage his “goods.” One cannot manage something without controlling it. The pastor, as steward, must exercise control or management of the church. This responsibility requires authority.
- C. Oversight: Peter writes that an elder is to “shepherd the flock of God, exercising oversight” (1 Pet 5:2). The main verb here, “shepherd,” is modified by “overseeing,” a participle describing the means or manner in which one is to shepherd. Thus, one functions as shepherd by means of exercising oversight.

Note: Before taking issue with a decision made by a pastor (or by anyone in authority for that matter), the key word to remember is *perspective*. As overseer of the congregation, the pastor has a much broader perspective than others do, and is thus the person most qualified to make a decision

that is in the best interests of the congregation as a whole, even though such a decision may adversely affect part of the congregation.

- D. Preaching and Teaching: Paul instructs Timothy, “Preach the word.” Three strong imperatives accompany the preaching function: “reprove, rebuke, exhort.” Implicit in each of them is authority. Paul repeats the command in Titus 2:15: “These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority.” The pastor must be an authoritative messenger of God. One theologian has said that church leaders gain absolute authority because of the absolute character of what they stand for. In preaching and teaching, because of the nature of the message, pastoral authority is necessary.

III. Responsibilities of Church Members to the Pastor(s) Signify Authority.

- A. Obey: Heb 13:17: “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves.” This passage is especially strong because of the combination of the two imperatives “obey” and “be submissive.”

Kent suggests that obedience “denotes assenting to another’s direction,” and that submission “involves yielding one’s contrary opinions in favor of someone else’s.” There are times when we simply have to submit to pastoral authority.

- B. Esteem/Honor: 1 Thes 5:12-13: “And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake.”

To “know” means to recognize or acknowledge something, in this case, the authority of the pastor(s). To “esteem them very highly” could be translated “abundantly out of all bounds, beyond all measure.” It is a compound word that piles up three prepositions for the sake of emphasis. It is also likely that this command includes the idea of an outward show of respect. If we want to submit actively to the leaders of our church, we should relate to them as we would to any other highly respected or honored person.

IV. Ordination and Calling Extend Authority.

Congregations call and/or ordain their pastors. This is a formal recognition of one’s gifts and an extension of authority to the person to exercise them. Hence, in ordination and/or calling, the church gives the man authority to be pastor. In other words, when a church calls or ordains a pastor, they are signifying that they will allow the man to act as their pastor, with all the associated authority involved in that position. If the church is unwilling to let the pastor shepherd the flock, it should not call the man the pastor (shepherd).

[A pastor that doesn’t rule/govern is unbiblical. Explain the ordination process.]

V. **Biblical Limitations On Authority**

The authority of the pastor is not unlimited. Strong and commanding leadership does not require dictatorial or oppressive rule. The pastor must be characterized by:

- A. Humble service: Mt 20:25-28. Rather than lording over their followers and seeking to be served, Christian leaders should follow the example of Christ in serving and in giving of themselves for others. Jesus came “to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” Christian leaders should display the same spirit of Christ-like humility, service and sacrifice.
- B. Not Lording Over the Flock: 1 Pet 5:2-3. Pastors should “shepherd the flock of God, exercising oversight not under compulsion, . . . not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.” The idea of “lording over” implies a stern, domineering rule over one who is weak. Pastoral authority is strong, but not oppressive.
- C. Subject to Church discipline: The writers of the New Testament clearly point out the steps to take if a member or leader of a church sins. If a pastor is teaching false doctrine, causing divisions, or participating in any number of sins that disqualify him for leadership (1 Tim 3), then the members of the church have the right to ask the pastor to resign.

Review:

What about when we disagree?

We can disagree with church leaders on various issues without creating conflict, as long as we hold our opinions with godly humility and graciousness. We may even be able to disobey without creating conflict. There is often room for interpretation on some issues of the church, and if we explain that we cannot go along with something because of the dictates of our conscience, the leader(s) may allow an exception. Whenever a disagreement occurs, a member must be careful about the manner in which he differs. He may not do so in a rebellious or independent spirit. Church members should handle all disagreements in a spirit of mutual humility with a willingness to work toward biblical agreement.

[E.g., music disagreements]

1. The pastor’s titles signify authority. Overseer, elder, and shepherd/pastor imply authority.
2. Pastoral responsibilities demand authority. The pastor is responsible to preach the word, exhort, encourage and reprove. In order to do so, he must have authority.
3. Responsibilities of members to the pastor imply authority. Members are to obey and honor their leaders.
4. Ordination and calling extend authority to a man to pastor the flock.
5. Pastoral authority is limited. The pastor is to humbly serve his flock, and the congregation may remove him if he disqualifies himself.

For Further Discussion:

1. What should one do if he thinks the pastor is not leading the church in the right way? **[First, you must insure that it is a biblical/ethical issue. One's style of ministry, personal habits, etc. are no basis of asking for one's resignation. If it is a valid issue, take the proper biblical steps: confront him about the sin/problem personally, verify with 2-3 others, bring it before the church if he refuses to change/repent.]**
2. How much weight should a member put on what the pastor says? **[If it's a biblical command, submit. If anti-biblical, do not submit. If extra-biblical: if affairs of the church, submit generally; if not affairs of the church, consider carefully.]**
3. Would you rather attend a church where the pastoral leadership is strong or weak? **[Strong leadership may have its problems, but it's better than no leadership.]**
4. Aside from biblical considerations, why is strong pastoral leadership so important? **[Because every organization needs a leader of some sort. Everything rises and/or falls with leadership. A solid organization always has strong leaders.]**
5. Would it be better to call a pastor from within the church or from outside of it? **[Ideally, pastors would be raised from within the church. Paul and Timothy appointed pastors who were already part of the churches they worked with (2 Tim 2:2). But usually that's not how it works. A congregation often wants an outsider to come and fix its problems. Outsiders sometimes have a better perspective on things.]**
6. How important is the ordination process? **[Very important. Ordination is an examination of the candidate regarding his faith and conduct. It's a way of insuring that only qualified men get into leadership positions.]**

Lesson 7: Church Finances



A common and all-too-true criticism of many churches is that money (or lack of it) seems to be all they are concerned about. For many churches, financial matters are a major burden on the congregation. Just paying the bills from week to week may be difficult. Churches often incur large debts to build buildings or enlarge their ministries. Financial mismanagement, fraud, waste and abuse is unfortunately widespread in churches. Some ministries finance their work through bazaars, bake sales, bingo and even casino nights. Others insist that the church members must give of their financial resources to support the work. What does the Bible say about this important aspect of local church life?

I. Governing texts:

Mark 12:41-44 *And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.*

Luke 6:38 *Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.*

Acts 2:44-45 *And all that believed were together; and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.*

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

2 Cor 9:6-8 *He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.*

Phil 4:18 *But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odor of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God.*

II. Governing principles:

- A. Give. The Bible commands believers to give of their resources to support the ministries of the church.
- B. Give generously. The Bible repeatedly *commends* generous giving and *condemns* misers.
- C. Give rationally. We should give according to a deliberate, carefully considered plan.⁵ Many folks don't plan their giving. They just open their wallet or checkbooks and see what's available that day. Our giving should be planned with careful forethought, not erratic and haphazard.
- D. Give individually. Paul addressed his comments to "every man," that is, each person. It's the responsibility of every individual believer to support his/her church financially. Anyone who receives income, even housewives and children with no regular income, can participate in this aspect of worship.
- E. Give the firstfruits. Giving to God should come off the top, not after all the other expenses have been paid. Pay God first, then everyone else, even Uncle Sam. See Prov 3:9.

The OT Law required that the Jews give the first-born male to the Lord's service, the first-born animal as a sacrifice, and the first-fruits of the crops as an offering to the Lord. This practice acknowledges that everything came from God and belonged to Him.

- F. Give proportionally. Give a percentage of your income, according to how God prospers you (1 Cor 16:2). If you have little, you give a little. If you have much, you give much. Some Jews were so scrupulous in this matter that they even gave a portion of what grew in their herb gardens, a practice Jesus seems to be in favor of (Mt 23:23).
- G. Give sacrificially. Giving to the Lord means not being able to buy something for ourselves. Giving should not be a token, trivial amount. It should cost us something. God is pleased with such sacrifice. Jesus found the widow's mite (Mark 12:41f) more praiseworthy than the large gifts of rich people. See also 2 Cor 8:2-3.
- H. Give regularly. Paul told the Corinthians to prepare their offering to be collected on the first day of the week, Sunday. That's when you should bring your offerings. Giving should be a normal, regular part of your worship experience on Sundays.
- I. Give cheerfully. God loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor 9:7). Supporting the cause of Christ should be a source of great joy for believers.
- J. Give quietly. Don't broadcast your giving. You don't need to announce how much you give or show off as you put your offering in the plate. Be

⁵ Paul's word for "purposed" in his heart means "to set aside beforehand."

- careful not to do your works of service in order to show off to others. See Mt 6:1.
- K. Giving is an aspect of worship. We worship the Lord through giving of our finances to support the ministry. Paul says that the giving of the church in Philippi was “an odor of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God” (Phil 4:18).
 - L. One should support the ministry of his home church first and other ministries after that. One’s own church should be the focal point of all ministry and service. Thus, one should give to support his own church and its ministries first. Offerings to other organizations are proper and commendable, but not if they are at the expense of funds that should be directed to one’s own local church.
 - M. The faithful giving of the church members, not garage sales and bazaars, supports the work of the church. If members refuse to give, the church will have no ministry.
 - N. Failure to support the work of the ministry financially is a spiritual problem, not a financial one. Those who refuse to prioritize their income and expenses according to the Bible prove their spiritual immaturity. Believers should count it a privilege to give of their financial resources to support the ministry of the church. Those who fail to do so are out of order and are missing a blessing.

How Much Should I Give?

Some people are confused about how much money the Christian should give to support the work of the ministry. Some say that one need not give at all if he is poor or if the bills are due. Others assert that God demands the tithe (10%), and lack of tithing amounts to robbing God (Mal 3:8-11). Some teach that the tithe is a good starting place, but one should give more than that if possible. Some suggest that one should keep only what he absolutely needs and give away all the rest.

The NT teaches that one should give cheerfully, not as though paying a bill, but as he purposes in his heart (2 Cor 9:8). You decide on how much to give through a thoughtful, prayerful analysis of your income, expenses, and the needs before you. Supporting the work of the ministry should always be a high priority when you consider if and how to spend your money.

? What about the tithe? Consider the following:

- ✓ Tithing is the practice of giving a tenth (10%) of one’s income or property as an offering to God.
- ✓ The underlying principle of the tithe precedes the OT Law. Abraham gave tithes to Melchizedek (Gen 14:20) although there was no law compelling him to do so.

Abraham the “father of the faithful,” sets a good example for us here. Jacob also gave tithes to God (Gen 28:22).

- ✓ Most of the biblical teaching on the tithe comes from the OT Law, not from the NT. The tithe was a clear requirement of OT living. But if we followed the OT practice, we’d give much more than ten percent.

OT tithes were not primarily *gifts* to God, but taxes for funding the national budget in Israel. The Levitical priests had both civil and religious functions. The Levite’s tithe (Lev 27:30-33) was a predecessor to today’s income tax, as was a second annual tithe required by God to fund a national festival (Deut 14:22-29). Smaller taxes were also imposed on the people by the law (Lev 19:9-10; Ex 23:10-11). So the total giving required of the Israelites was not just 10 percent, but well over 20 percent. All that money was used to operate the nation. All giving beyond that required to run the government was purely voluntary (cf. Ex 25:2; 1 Chr 29:9). Each person gave whatever was in his heart to give; no percentage or amount was specified.⁶

- ✓ Jesus made only a few passing references to tithing (e.g., Matt. 23:23). Remember that Jesus lived while the Law was still in force. He presents no detailed teaching on the subject.
- ✓ Paul never mentions tithing clearly or explicitly. Even in 1 Cor 9, where he’s talking about the financial support of the ministry, he does not mention the necessity of tithing. He does, however, refer indirectly to the OT tithe to teach that the congregation should meet their pastor’s financial needs (1 Cor 9:13-14). But he never commands Christians to tithe.
- ✓ Given all the biblical data, it’s best to conclude that tithing is no longer legally necessary, but it continues as a godly principle of conduct. We have the example of Abraham and Jacob, as well as Jesus’ and Paul’s approval of the OT practice of tithing. The biblical pattern seems to be that godly, committed believers give at least a tithe of their income to support the ministry.
- ✓ Tithing is something we can commend but not something we can command. The Christian who does not tithe is not in the same position as the OT Jew who did not tithe (guilty of sin, transgressing the law). Therefore we cannot simply say to a non-tithing Christian: “You are robbing God” (Malachi 3:8). He should not be made to feel guilty, but he should be challenged to follow examples such as Abraham and Jacob.

Should Christians tithe? Yes, they should make that their minimum goal because it is a principle endorsed by Scripture, honoring to God and essentially Christian in character. Such an offering is but a token of the fact that God has provided, and is the ultimate owner, of everything which we possess. Tithing honors the Lord as our Creator and as our Redeemer, testifying that we gratefully belong to Him. Discipleship is costly. Our Lord expects us to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him. Sacrificial giving is part of our commitment to Christ.

⁶ John MacArthur

Must Christians tithe? The answer is no. They are under no legal or moral necessity. There are no clear NT commands that one must give a specific percent of his or her income to the Lord's work. Giving is a matter of grace, not law. However, the general testimony of Scripture is that believers *should* give at least a tithe.

Those who could tithe but do not are less generous than the OT saints who received less but gave more. How can we who enjoy so many more spiritual blessings give less? Such people have little appreciation of how much Christ has done for them.⁷

Other Aspects of Church Finances:

- \$ The method used to collect the funds is not important. Some churches pass a plate and other have a box where people deposit their gifts. No method is given in the Bible.
- \$ An accountability program is an important aspect of church finances. The church should take steps to guarantee that money is not mishandled or misused. Further, the church should regularly produce an accounting of income and expenses so the members know how their offerings are being used. A budget, which categorizes income and expenses, is a highly recommended means of planning spending.
- \$ The deacons, rather than the pastor, ought to administrate the church finances. They must insure that the bills are paid and that the accounts are properly managed. They can delegate this responsibility to anyone they choose, but they are still responsible to oversee this matter (under the general oversight of the pastor).

Conclusion: The NT church depends upon the generous, sacrificial giving of its members to support the work of the ministry. Everyone in the church should carefully prepare a plan for regular financial giving of a portion of their income. Believers should aim to give at least a tithe (10%) of their income to the Lord's work at their local church.

Discussion Questions:

1. T E OT believers were required to give exactly 10% of their income to the priests. *Closer to 20% when all was added up*
2. T E The NT clearly teaches that Christians must tithe.
3. Since there's no NT command to tithe, how much should a Christian give? *Following biblical examples, he should still at least give a tithe* .
4. What do biblical examples teach us about tithing? *Godly believers of history tithed, so we should follow their example.*
5. How do you decide how much to give? *2 Cor 9.6-8 He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.*

⁷ Peter Bloomfield, "Should Christians Tithe?"

Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.

You purpose in your heart, i.e., evaluate your situation and give what you determine is best. I think you ought to start with the tithe and try to go up from there. But some may not be able to tithe until they get their financial house in order.



Lesson 8: Fulfilling Our Roles

One of the most significant battles being fought in evangelical circles today concerns the role of men and women in the church. An unprecedented number of women are assuming positions of leadership in churches around the world. Several mainline denominations have recently opened the way for women to be pastors and other groups are seriously considering it. Respected leaders who advocate female leadership have authored many books and magazine articles supporting it. Yet others are standing against the idea. At the heart of the controversy is the issue of authority and submission: are men and women totally equal in every respect, or are there roles of leadership and submission that apply to the church?

As we've seen previously, the fact that someone is a leader or a follower doesn't suggest that he or she is any better or worse *as a person* than anyone else is. Subordination in function does not imply inferiority of essence. God made both man and woman in His image (Gen 1:26-27); thus, they are of equal value in God's sight. Paul clearly asserts this truth when he says, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). Further, gender and role distinction is not a result of sin. Before sin ever entered the world God ordained and fitted Adam to be a loving, caring, strong leader for his wife Eve. God ordained and fitted Eve to be a partner who supports and honors that leadership and helps carry it through. Both were made in the image of God and were equal in their God-like personhood. But they were also different in their manhood and womanhood.⁸ Different roles demand different responsibilities, but not different degrees of worth. God has given men and women distinct roles to fulfill both in the home and in the church. If we want to please God with our full potential, particularly in the arena of the local church, we must understand the unique functions for which we have been designed.

It's ironic that, as much as modern feminists hate Christianity, the Christian faith is largely responsible for raising the living standards for women. Prior to NT times, women were regarded as little more than slaves or cattle. Even the Jews didn't put much value on the life of a woman. A common prayer was: "God, I thank you that I was not born a Gentile, a slave, or a woman." NT teaching did much to elevate women to equal status with men before God. And the original leaders of the women's movement were Christians. So it's illogical to criticize Christianity for its supposed ill treatment of women.

Today, we will focus on the roles of men and women in the church.

I. The Role of Men in the Church

A. Leading

⁸ John Piper, from a sermon *Manhood, Womanhood and the Freedom to Minister*, June 18, 1989.

1 Tim 3:1-2 *If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife...*

Throughout the Bible, God, for his own purposes, entrusted leadership to men. Some men were good leaders, others were not. There are a few examples in the Bible of women leaders (Deborah, a judge; Athaliah, a queen), but they seem to be the exception rather than the rule.

Pastoral leadership is clearly male. Pastors and deacons must be “the husband of one wife” (1 Tim 3:2, 12, literally “a one-woman man”), not “the wife of one husband.” Throughout the history of Israel and the NT church, men filled all ongoing leadership positions. The 12 disciples were men, the leaders of the early church were men, and for hundreds of years church leaders have been men. It’s been only in the last several decades that women have aspired to pastoral leadership within evangelicalism.

It’s unfortunate that many men have abandoned their responsibility to lead. Perhaps it’s because of poor or non-existent male leadership that women want to step into that role. All godly men ought to develop their leadership skills in the hope that God could use them for His glory in a church setting. Church leadership is crucial, and without strong male leadership, the church will flounder.

Some equate leadership with tyranny. They think that in order to lead, one must be a dictator, telling everyone what to do all the time. But that’s not the idea Jesus taught, nor is that the kind of leadership we see exemplified in the Bible. Jesus demanded that leaders be servants (Matt 20:25-28). One of the key terms for “pastor” is “shepherd.” Just as a shepherd tenderly leads and feeds his flock, so the pastor must be a loving shepherd to his flock. At times, this requires firm resolve (toughness; see Jude 23); at other times, gracious toleration (tenderness; see Jude 22); at all times, selflessness (see Luke 22:25-27).

B. Teaching/preaching

The official teaching voice of the church must be male. Teaching in the context of a church is an authoritative function. That is, the teacher is communicating an authoritative message, and this must be done in an authoritative way.

However, teaching is not the exclusive domain of pastors. One need not have graduated from seminary to teach (although formal education is beneficial). It’s impossible for a single pastor, or even a pastoral staff, to carry out all the teaching of the church. Other men in the church must be

partners in the ministry of the Word. Every man is a potential teacher, and should develop his teaching skills for the church and the home.

C. Minister

Ministry is a very broad word, implying service in the most general sense. First Peter 4:10 says that all spiritual gifts are to be used to minister to one another in the church. And Paul says, “There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord” (1 Cor 12:5). Anything a Christian does to help the work of his church is a ministry. Many valuable ministries are neither public nor official. All men ought to seek to be involved in some aspect of ministry in his church.

II. The Role of Women in the Church

1 Timothy 2:11-12 *Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.*

Titus 2:3-5: *[Teach] the aged women likewise, that they be in behavior as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.*

A. What women can do:

1. Teach

1 Cor 11:5 *But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven.*

Paul affirms that women can prophesy (i.e., teach, speak), but even in the process of prophesying they are to do so in a manner and with a demeanor that will not violate male headship. Paul does not place the same limits on men, and thus upholds and preserves the notion that male leadership is God’s ordained pattern in the church. Paul affirms that women have prophetic gifts, and he wants them to exercise those gifts in church, but he does not want them to overturn male leadership.

2 Tim 1:5: *When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also.* Also see Titus 2:3-5.

Paul instructed women to teach their children and to teach young women to be good wives and mothers. Timothy learned the Scriptures from his mother and grandmother. There are countless examples of children who have been converted to Christ and disciplined both by their own mothers and by other women of the church. Further, many women teach Sunday school, children's clubs, and women's classes. If a woman wants an outlet for her teaching and leadership abilities, there are plenty of opportunities available at most churches.

Note the Quote: "The hand that rocks the cradle is the hand that rules the world" (W. S. Ross). In other words, women often have a great deal of influence over the children they raise, who in turn influence world events. To suggest that women have no leadership responsibilities ignores this important role.

2. Minister

Women are capable and suitable for many ministries within a church. The Bible mentions several: hospitality, mercy, helping, discipleship, and serving. For example, Martha was distracted because of her service or ministry, and the service being described is preparation of a meal (Luke 10:40). In Luke 22:27, one who serves is contrasted to one who reclines during the meal. The ministry in view is simply serving tables. Luke 8:1-3 tells of a number of women who were ministering to Jesus and the apostles. The specific ministry they engaged in was not preaching the gospel but providing financial resources so that Jesus could carry on His ministry. Women have engaged in significant ministries, even if those ministries were unofficial.⁹

Some churches recognize the office of deaconess. This is based on a statement Paul made, referring to a woman named Phoebe who was moving to Rome: *But I commend our sister Phoebe to you, being a servant of the church in Cenchrea* (Rom 16:1). The word "servant" is the word *deakonon*, which is the same word for "deacon." It's not clear that Paul meant that Phoebe fulfilled the office of a deacon (he may have just meant "servant"); however, that is what he might have meant. In 1 Timothy 3:8-10 and 12, the qualifications are given for men who are to serve as deacons. In 3:11, Paul says, "Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers,

⁹ Thomas R. Schreiner, "The Valuable Ministries Of Women In The Context Of Male Leadership: A Survey Of Old And New Testament Examples And Teaching" in *Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*.

sober, faithful in all things.” Paul introduces the women¹⁰ mentioned here in the same fashion he introduced the men in 1 Timothy 3:8, i.e., he uses the word “likewise.” The “likewise” in 3:11 suggests that the qualifications for men who are deacons also apply to women deacons.¹¹

Thus, women do and always have played an important role in the ministry of the church. The fact that women are limited in their role doesn’t mean they have no place of service. No woman could possibly say that since there are some restrictions on women in ministry, then there is nothing valuable for her to do.

From the Danvers Statement:¹² With half the world’s population outside the reach of indigenous evangelism; with countless other lost people in those societies that have never heard the gospel; with the stresses of misery and sickness, malnutrition, homelessness, illiteracy, ignorance, aging, addiction, crime, incarceration, neuroses, and loneliness, no man or woman who feels a passion from God to make His grace known in word and deed need ever live without a fulfilling ministry for the glory of Christ and the good of this fallen world.

3. Learn

1 Tim 2:11 *A woman should learn in quietness ...*

The fact that Paul wants Christian women to learn is an important point, for very few encouraged such a practice at that time. Both men and women should learn all they can, not only for their own benefit, but also for the potential benefit of others with whom they come in contact.

4. Submit

Women, just like all the members of a church, are to submit to church leadership. In our society, submission has become a negative concept. But the Scriptures never treat it that way. Submission is the appropriate response of Christians to those who are in authority over them.

¹⁰ The word “wives” is literally “women.” The word doesn’t necessarily signify wives. The text literally says “Women likewise [must be] grave...” Further, the word “their” in the KJV has been inserted by the translators but is not reflected in the Greek.

¹¹ Schreiner

¹² The Danvers Statement summarizes the core beliefs of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW). The statement was prepared by several evangelical leaders at a CBMW meeting in Danvers, Massachusetts, in December of 1987.

The woman's submission to the man both in the home and in the church is a beautiful picture of the submission of the church to her head, Christ (see Eph 5:22-24).

B. What women can't do:¹³

1 Cor 14:33-36 *For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints. Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.*

1 Tim 2:11-14: *Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I [allow] not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.*

Paul prohibits women from pastoring a church. He did not permit any woman to hold a church-recognized teaching authority over men. Let's look at 1 Tim 2:11-14 more closely.

- ♦ “A woman should learn in silence”: The word *silence* here is used earlier in verse 2 of this chapter: “[Pray] that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.” Here it refers to a life untroubled, serene and content, which all godly people should lead. So the silence doesn't seem to be total, unlike the Greek public meetings in which women could not speak at all. Clearly, Paul is concerned that the women accept the teaching of the church peaceably—without criticism and without dispute. This quietness is the opposite of exercising authority over men. “Don't exercise authority over men, instead be silent.” The point is not whether a woman says nothing, but whether she is submissive and whether she supports the authority of the leaders God has called to oversee the church. Quietness means not speaking in a way that compromises that authority.
- ♦ “I do not permit a woman to teach”: The word “teach” and its related nouns “teaching” and “teacher” are used in the NT mainly to denote the careful transmission of the tradition concerning Jesus Christ and the authoritative proclamation of God's will to believers in light of that tradition (see esp. 1 Tim 4:11: “Command and teach these things”).¹⁴ “Teach” and “exercise authority” go together. So Paul forbids women teaching when it is part of the exercise of authority over men.

¹³ Most of the material in this section taken from John Piper.

¹⁴ Moo.

In light of these considerations, the teaching prohibited to women here includes what we would call preaching and the teaching of Bible and doctrine in the church, and also likely in colleges, and in seminaries. Other activities, such as leading Bible studies, evangelistic witnessing, counseling, teaching subjects other than Bible or doctrine, are probably not teaching in the sense Paul intends here.¹⁵ In other words, women are prohibited from the official, authoritative teaching function of the church. Other teaching situations are allowed.

- ◆ “. . . or to have authority over a man”: He is saying in essence, “I do not permit women to fill the office of pastor in the church.” The pastor is charged with the leadership and instruction of the church; that’s a summary of his job. So when Paul puts those two things together and says, “I do not permit a woman to teach or exercise authority,” the most natural sense is, “I do not permit a woman to assume the office of pastor in the church.” On the other hand, Paul’s prohibition should not restrict women from voting in a congregational meeting or keep them from most church administrative activities.

The New Testament makes it plain that Christian women, like men, have been given spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12:7-11). Women, like men, are to use these gifts to minister to the body of Christ (1 Pet 4:10); their ministries are indispensable to the life and growth of the church (1 Cor 12:12-26). There are many examples in the New Testament of just such ministries on the part of gifted Christian women.¹⁶ Too often, Christian women focus on biblical restrictions rather than on their biblical commission. This is unfortunate, for God has uniquely endowed women with the ability to perform many important tasks in the church.

III. The Role of Roles

One of the most common allegations against the traditional role of women in the church is that such roles are sexist or demeaning to women. But gender roles rooted in biblical teaching are God’s ordained order for church life. The Bible teaches that women are not inferior to men, just different. Men and women perform different functions in the church.

Some assert that any distinction in roles or responsibilities was a purely cultural circumstance that has no bearing on modern Christianity. That is, while it is true that men were in charge in Israel and in the early church, that condition was just a reflection of their male-dominated culture. Some even suggest that Paul was simply wrong in his “bigoted” approach to female roles. He subscribed to an old-fashioned, wrong-headed idea that needs to be updated. However, a simple reading of the Pastoral Epistles (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus) very clearly demonstrates that Paul’s insistence on male leadership was not just a cultural or primitive idea. Paul bases his statements on the original creation and the fall: “Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it

¹⁵ Moo.

¹⁶ Moo.

was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner” (1 Tim 2:13-14). The New Testament roles for man and woman in marriage and in the church are rooted not in sinful pride, nor in cultural expectations, but in God’s original design for creation. Thus we expect this original design to continue in the life of the church.

God intends for the entire church, men and women, to be mobilized in ministry. Nobody is to be at home watching soaps and reruns while the world burns. And God intends to equip and mobilize the saints through a company of spiritual men who take primary responsibility for leadership and teaching in the church.¹⁷

Review:

Men and women, though equal before God, have differing roles in the church.

1. Men are responsible to lead, teach and preach.
2. Women are responsible to teach, learn, minister and submit.
3. Women are not responsible to fulfill the role of pastor or to exercise authority over men in the context of a church.
4. Roles based on gender are God-given and biblically based. They do not imply essential superiority or inferiority.

For Further Discussion:

1. What about verses like Galatians 3:28: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Doesn’t this text prove that men and women can share equally in any church responsibility?

[1. The operative phrase is “in Christ Jesus.” In this context, Paul is not speaking of relationships in the family and church, but of standing before God in righteousness by faith. 2. The existence of elders in the church, appointed by the Holy Spirit to rule in the body, does not destroy our equality in Christ. There is no reason to claim that Galatians 3:28 supports an egalitarianism of function in the church.¹⁸ 3. Such texts actually raised the status of women by asserting their essential equality with men.]

2. What about examples like Philip’s daughters (Acts 21:8-9: “[Philip] had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.”), which seems to allow for women to prophesy?

[The text doesn’t say that Philip’s daughters were pastors. “To prophesy” means “to proclaim.” These women apparently proclaimed the gospel. There’s no indication or evidence that they pastored the church or authoritatively taught men.]

¹⁷ Piper.

¹⁸ S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., from “Role Distinctions in the Church” in *Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*

3. What about women teaching or having authority over men in other activities in society generally (for example, in government, business, or education)?

[Paul's concern in 1 Timothy 2:11-15 is specifically the role of men and women in activities within the Christian community. This text cannot be applied outside that framework.]

4. What about the idea that Paul's commands are a reflection of his primitive culture, and thus not applicable to the modern church?

[With such a methodology, any teaching in Scripture could be dismissed. Further, the text doesn't even hint that such is the case. The activities involved in 1 Timothy 2:12 are transcultural in the sense that they are permanent ministries of the Christian church and the prohibitions of 1 Timothy 2:12 are grounded in theology. When we add to these factors the fact that the New Testament teaching on these matters is consistent, we are justified in requiring very good reasons from the text itself to limit the application of this text in any way. We find no such reasons. Therefore, we must conclude that the restrictions imposed by Paul in 1 Timothy 2:12 are valid for Christians in all places and all times.¹⁹]

¹⁹ Moo.



Chapter 9: Participating in Worship

*Some go to church to take a walk; some go there to laugh and talk.
Some go there to meet a friend; some go there their time to spend.
Some go there to meet a lover; some go there a fault to cover.
Some go there for speculation; some go there for observation.
Some go there to doze and nod; the wise go there to worship God.*

- Charles Haddon Spurgeon

Although the Bible is clear about who and how and when to worship, worship seems to be a lost art in Christianity today. In fact, worship is one of the most misunderstood doctrines in all the Scriptures, and that is spiritually debilitating, because an understanding of worship is vital to any full application of Scripture.²⁰ As more and more churches become man-centered in their theology and methodology, the God-centered activity of worship becomes the exception rather than the norm. How sad! What exactly is worship? How is worship expressed in the context of the local church? How can we become better worshipers? Let's find out.

I. Worship Explained

The English word “worship” was once spelled “worthship.” As you might guess, worship is the act of displaying the worth or value of someone or something. It is ascribing to God His worth, or stating and affirming His supreme value. Theologically speaking, worship is any activity whereby believers display the worth or value of God. It is the believer's response of all that he is to all that God is.

A simple definition: worship is honor and adoration directed toward God. The biblical words for worship literally mean, “to kiss toward,” “to kiss the hand,” and “to bow down,” thus signifying humble adoration. Worship is the “boiling over” of a heart filled with praise and adoration for who God is and what he has done. By its very definition, worship is God-centered. That is, it has God as its focus. Worship is about God and for God.

Psalm 29:2 Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.

An important truth to note is that worship is something we give to God; we render honor, homage and adoration to God. Most people focus on getting something out of the worship service. Instead, we should come with the intention of giving our worship to God.

²⁰ Much of the material in this lesson from John MacArthur, *The Ultimate Priority* (Chicago: Moody, 1983).

Worship should focus on God, not man. Man-centered worship is a contradiction in terms. Unfortunately, in many churches today, worship is designed to produce a personal experience, a religious feeling, a sense of God's presence that gives the worshipper a warm, fuzzy feeling inside. That should not be our focus. Worship is not something we feel but something we do. God is the recipient. He's the one we are trying to please, not ourselves. In worship we are seeking God's happiness, not our own. We should leave the worship service with a sense of God's greatness and goodness. Correct worship may actually leave us with a sense of our own sinfulness and failure. In fact, we may feel pretty bad about ourselves after worship.

Proper worship will often produce meaningful emotions and experiences. We should find worship fulfilling and we may find it highly emotional. You may indeed sense the presence of God or feel profoundly affected by the worship experience. However, such a response is a byproduct, not the goal, of worship.

II. Worship Expressed

Worship is one of the main objectives of the church. For most churches, the Sunday services (especially the morning service) are their primary corporate worship opportunities. **[By "corporate" I mean as a church. We do worship God independently/personally, but our topic is worship as a church.]**

Generally speaking, there are five ways in which a church expresses its worship to God:

A. Preaching

Ac 5:42 And daily in the temple, and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and proclaiming the gospel of Jesus the Christ.

Ac 10:42 And He commanded us to proclaim to the people, and to testify solemnly that He is the One having been appointed by God to be Judge of the living and the dead.

1Co 1:17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ should be deprived of its power.

2Ti 4:2 preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all patience and teaching.

1. The responsibility of the speaker: preach the Word accurately (2 Timothy 2:15), thoroughly (Acts 20:27) and convincingly (Titus 2:15). He is to bring out the sense of the text (exegesis) and explain how it applies to modern life (application).

Nehemiah 8:8 *So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.*

2. The responsibility of the listener:
 - a. Actively listen with the intent of understanding and obeying (James 1:22-25).
 - b. Evaluate what the preacher says in the light of the Bible (Acts 17:11). This is not a critique of the preacher's performance or style, but of the truthfulness of his message.
 - c. Obey the biblical commands.

Preaching should be the focal point of every worship service, for it is the medium which God has ordained to save the lost (1 Cor 1:21) and sanctify the saved (1 Cor 2:12-14).

Note the Quote: "Word and worship belong indissolubly to each other. All worship is an intelligent and loving response to the revelation of God, because it is the adoration of his Name. Therefore acceptable worship is impossible without preaching. For preaching is making known the Name of the Lord, and worship is praising the Name of the Lord made known. ... Our worship is poor because our knowledge of God is poor, and our knowledge of God is poor because our preaching is poor. But when the Word of God is expounded in its fullness, and the congregation begins to glimpse the glory of the living God, they bow down in solemn awe and joyful wonder before His throne. It is preaching which accomplishes this, the proclamation of the Word of God in the power of the Spirit of God. That is why preaching is unique and irreplaceable."²¹

B. Singing

Singing is an excellent vehicle for expressing one's adoration for God. The Book of Psalms, the hymnal for Israel, is full of praise and worship directed toward God. The NT also affirms the importance of music in worship (Col 3:16-17). In most church services, music plays a prominent role. We must insist, however, that both the music and the musicians be pleasing to God.

One of the most heated and divisive debates raging in Christianity today concerns music. Traditionalists insist that music should be conservative, reverent and doctrinal, relying mostly on hymns. Advocates of contemporary music suggest that church music should mirror popular music. Many churches have disposed of the hymnal and replaced it with catchy choruses and emotional songs based on personal experience.

²¹ John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), pp. 82-83.

However, because music is an integral part of the worship of God, the music used should be consistent with the character of God. Church music should be reverent and distinctively Christian, not a cheap imitation of the world's popular music.

[As you might guess, we take a pretty dim view of CCM. We take the conservative/traditional route.]

C. Giving

We don't often think of giving as an aspect of worship, but it is. Both the OT and the NT command sacrificial giving to the Lord's work. The Levitical system was centered on worshipping the Lord through offerings. In the burnt offering, for example, the worshipper offers a sacrifice that is wholly burnt up—offered totally to God. This was one of the ways God prescribed to worship Him. In the NT, we no longer worship the Lord with animal sacrifices; we worship through financial giving.

Philippians 4:18 But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odor of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God.

D. Praying

Yet another way in which we can express our adoration for God is through prayer. Even though someone else may be leading in prayer, you can and should silently pray along with him or her. Prayer is a necessary and important aspect of church life that all believers should participate in.

1 Chron 29:10-11 David said, Blessed be thou, LORD God of Israel our father, for ever and ever. Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all.

E. Serving

A final expression of corporate worship is service. God is pleased when His children use the abilities He has given them in the corporate worship of their local church, provided He gets the glory.

It's interesting to note that one of the NT words for service also suggests paying homage or rendering honor.

Romans 12:1 *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.*

These elements in combination constitute worship. As we listen to the preaching, sing, pray and give, we are participating in worship. Every worship service should contain these elements.

Question: What should be the character of our worship? Put a check mark by the words that describe what a Sunday worship service should be like.

Serious	Informal
Orderly	Silly
Celebratory	Humble
Glitzy	Casual
Formal	Reverent
Funny	Chaotic
Boring	Meaningful
Short	Entertaining

Obviously, we want to approach God with a sense of awe and humble reverence. This explains why our services are more serious than glitzy. Some see worship as a kind of celebration, so their services are very upbeat and joyful. There's room for celebration within a service, but the attitudes of humility and sorrow for sin must also be present.

III. Worship defiled

Is the form of worship really all that important? As long as one is sincere in his desire to worship God, any form of worship is acceptable, right? *Wrong!* In fact, God repeatedly judged those who failed to worship Him properly.

- A. False worship: worshipping the wrong god.
- B. Independent worship: not following the prescribed forms.

Nadab and Abihu were high priests who offered “strange fire” before the Lord (Lev 10). They acted independently of the direct revelation of God, and God killed them on the spot. King Saul did a similar thing, usurping the role of the priest by preparing the burnt offering (1 Sam 13:8-14). Such disobedience cost him the throne. In another example, Aaron made a golden calf for the people to worship, reducing the true God to an image (Ex 32). The prophet Malachi tells the Israelites that God would not accept their offerings of lame, blind, and sick animals. In each case,

people were attempting to carry out a responsibility before God in a way that did not fit the revelation He had given.

C. hypocritical worship: worshipping with the right form but with wrong attitude

The Lord does not accept worship from arrogant, self-righteous people, even if they offer their sacrifices using the right forms. Amos 5:1 “I hate, I reject your festivals, nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer up to me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them.” See also Isaiah 1:11-15.

Note the Quote: “God is a living, eternal, glorious, merciful, holy being. [We] must come in the contrition and humility and brokenness of sinners who see ourselves against the backdrop of that holiness. And that should put such thanksgiving and joy in our hearts for the gift of His forgiveness that our worship is all it should be. We are to live lives of confession, repentance and turning from our sin so that our worship is that which fully pleases God. We dare not go rushing into His presence in unholiness. We cannot worship God acceptably except with reverence and godly fear We must return to the biblical teaching of God’s utter and awesome holiness in order to be filled with the gratitude and humility that characterizes true worship.” John MacArthur, p. 86.

It should be clear that God does indeed care about how we worship Him. Some forms of worship are unacceptable to God. We have to follow the prescribed forms and have the right heart attitude. The NT tells us how to worship God, and we shouldn’t attempt to worship God independent of that plan. Neither should we think that God is pleased when we attempt to worship Him if we are guilty of sinful attitudes. We can do everything right and still be wrong. The form of worship and the attitude of the worshipper are equally important.

From the Westminster Confession of Faith: *[T]he acceptable way of worshiping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshiped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture.*

Even among those who attempt to worship God according to his word and with the right attitude, a debate rages about the appropriateness of some forms of worship. Does God delight in traditional hymns or in contemporary rock music, or in both (or perhaps neither)? Does God want a long, serious sermon or a short, uplifting one? Is it OK to read prayers? Is drama or comedy acceptable? Can we use pop and potato chips for

communion? Can we dance in the aisles if we feel like it? These are the issues the modern church is struggling with.

IV. Worship Enhanced

All of us have likely attended worship services that were boring, uninspiring, chaotic, and/or confusing. Some of the blame no doubt rests with the worship leader when that happens, but those in the audience may also share the blame. What can you do to make the worship service more acceptable to God as well as more personally meaningful?

A. Prepare yourself for the service.

1. During the week: The more we personally worship the Lord during the week (in Bible study, prayer, song, righteous living, etc.), the more prepared we will be to corporately worship Him come Sunday.
2. Saturday night: Don't stay out so late on Saturday night that you can't function on Sunday morning. Get to bed early enough to get a good night's sleep. Have Sunday morning planned out beforehand (clothing, breakfast, travel plans, etc.).

Here's an Idea: Plan a special "Lord's Day Eve" meal and family time Saturday night to prepare for Sunday. Include Scripture reading and prayer after the meal with a focus on teaching the children different aspects of church life. Take time to get everything ready to go for Sunday morning.

3. Sunday morning:
 - a. Prior to arrival: Spend time in personal worship (Bible reading and prayer) before leaving for church. Allow plenty of time to get ready and get to church early.
 - b. Prior to the service:
 - ☐ Greet others warmly.
 - ☐ Look over the bulletin. Read through the Scripture text and/or outline if given.
 - ☐ Think about the purpose of the service—to bring honor and glory to God, and to encourage, challenge and exhort those who attend.

- ☐ Think about God's perfect character and attributes – wisdom, power, glory, grace, mercy, etc.
- ☐ Spend time in silent contemplation. Prepare your heart for the service to follow. Save fellowship for after the service.
- ☐ Sit up front in order to eliminate distractions.
- ☐ Humble yourself before the Lord (1 Pet 5:6) by confessing sin. Thank God for his mercy toward you and his invitation for you to come boldly before the throne of grace.
- ☐ Think about how God might use you to encourage or challenge someone else.

B. Participate in the service.

- ☐ Sing with enthusiasm and joy. Think about the words as you sing them.
- ☐ Listen carefully.
 - ☺ Maintain eye contact with the speaker.
 - ☺ Turn to the proper passages in the Bible. Read along silently or responsively as appropriate.
 - ☺ Respond positively – smile, laugh, nod head, take notes, say “Amen.”
 - ☺ Think about how to respond personally to the message. What sins must I confess and forsake? What duties must I fulfill? What comforts and promises can I count on? How does this message encourage or challenge me? How should I respond?

From the Westminster Confession:

It is required of these that hear the Word preached that they attend upon it with diligence, preparation and prayer; examine what they hear by the Scriptures; receive the truth with faith, love, meekness and readiness of mind; meditate upon it; hide it in their hearts; and bring forth the fruit of it in their lives.

C. Review after the service.

- ☐ Talk to the speaker about your impression of the sermon.
- ☐ Quiz family members or friends about the main points of the sermon.

- Discuss the purpose of the sermon and how one should respond to it.
- Discuss anything about the sermon that was confusing or hard to understand.
- Discuss the other parts of the service—music, prayer, etc.
- Avoid being overly critical of the “performance” of the preacher. Focus instead on the content of the message.

Conclusion: The value of the worship service depends in large degree on how much you personally invest in it. If you come to church prepared and with the right attitude, expecting to give worship to God, you’ll find your experience of worship meaningful and satisfying. On the other hand, if you rush into the service at the last minute (or late) with little forethought and with other things on your mind, it’s unlikely your worship will be satisfactory either to yourself or to God.

Review:

1. Worship is any activity whereby believers display the worth or value of God.
2. Worship includes the following activities: preaching, praying, singing, giving, and serving.
3. Worshipping God with the wrong forms or with wrong attitudes is unacceptable.
4. We can enhance our worship experience by preparing for it ahead of time and by enthusiastic participation in the worship services.

For Further Discussion:

Many churches either have or are considering moving to a “contemporary” worship format. That is, instead of a piano and/or organ, they use a worship band. Instead of traditional hymns, they use short, catchy choruses. Instead of a 30-minute sermon, they use drama or multi-media productions. Instead of dressing up for church, they dress casually. Instead of a serious, reverent atmosphere, a celebratory, joyful attitude prevails. A couple of questions:

1. How culture-bound is worship? That is, should worship reflect the modern culture, or should it be somehow different? Is a “traditional” worship style merely a reflection of the culture of the 1950’s?
[Worship is by necessity somewhat culture-bound. It uses the language and abilities of the people. The problem with worship reflecting modern culture is that modern/pop culture is morally bankrupt. If we import that into the church, we’ve got trouble. Traditional worship does seem stuck in that era, mostly because the culture of that day was far less secular, less immoral.]
2. Is there anything wrong with substituting drama or video for the sermon?

[Yes, the fact that preaching is the means God designed to communicate the gospel. We can learn from drama and video, but we can't neglect or forsake preaching as the primary method of communication during a service.]

3. What's the difference between choruses and hymns? [**Choruses tend to be quite self-centered, focussing on what God has done for the individual. They also can be trite and repetitive. Choruses appeal to/play upon the emotions more than do hymns. Hymns, on the other hand, tend to be more doctrinally centered, focussing on the person of God, the atonement, sin, and other great themes. Hymns more directly ascribe honor and glory to God. They're more rational than emotional.**]
4. Whose desires are to be satisfied in a worship service, God's or man's? Is human fulfillment the goal or byproduct of worship? [**The primary objective is honoring God, not the audience. Worship is to be theocentric. Human fulfillment (a good feeling) is a result, not a goal, of worship. In fact, worship may make us feel pretty bad about ourselves.**]
5. Many contemporary services are designed to be "seeker-sensitive." That is, they appeal to the ordinary unsaved person. Is there anything wrong with designing your service to appeal to the unsaved? [**Services should be designed to honor God, not unsaved people. The worship service is primarily for the saints, not for the unsaved. The unsaved cannot worship God, so they should be uncomfortable in that kind of setting.**]



Lesson 10: Using Our Spiritual Gifts

In 1 Corinthians 12:1, Paul states: “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant.” He then dispels such ignorance in chapters 12-14. In spite of Paul’s instruction, there remains much ignorance among Christians concerning spiritual gifts. The well-known excesses of the charismatic movement is testimony to this fact. As bad as *ignorance* concerning spiritual gifts is, what’s worse is *inactivity*, or the failure of some believers to exercise their spiritual gift(s). In this lesson, we will discuss what spiritual gifts are, identify which gifts are in use today, and challenge one another to exercise our spiritual gifts in the ministry of our local church.

I. What are Spiritual Gifts?

1 Corinthians 12:7-11 *But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.*

Definition: The Greek word Paul uses for “spiritual gifts” (1 Cor 12:1) is *pneumatikon* which literally means “spirituals.” The Greek word normally translated “spiritual gifts” is *charismata* (the singular is *charisma*). The root word, *charis* is the Greek word for “grace.” Thus, “spiritual gifts” are “grace-gifts” or “grace-endowments.” A spiritual gift is a Holy Spirit-energized ability graciously given by God to each and every believer at the moment of salvation for the edification of one’s local church and the glory of God. Let’s expand this definition.

A. Spiritual gifts are energized by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:7-11).

Spiritual gifts are called “spiritual” because the Holy Spirit is the One who makes them effectual. The Holy Spirit transforms our natural talents or developed skills into spiritual gifts so that we might use them for spiritual ends.

What’s the connection between a natural talent or ability and a spiritual gift? Based on passages such as Psalm 139:13-16, it is clear that God has had a hand in shaping and molding our lives in keeping with His sovereign will and purpose. Natural talents and abilities are *God-given*, yet not *God-devoted* until conversion occurs and one receives the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. At this significant turning point in one’s life, natural

talents and abilities are dedicated to God and used to build up the Body of Christ.²²

- B. Spiritual gifts are graciously given by God (1 Cor 12:11; Heb 2:4).

Spiritual gifts are called “gifts” because God gives them without regard to the one upon whom He bestows them. Thus, one should not make his or her spiritual gift(s) an occasion for pride.

- C. Spiritual gifts are given to every believer (1 Cor 12:7, 11; 1 Pet 4:10). Every Christian has at least one spiritual gift. No one can say he has no ability or no place of service.

Believers ought to concentrate their efforts to minister in those areas in which they are gifted. Doing so leads to increased effectiveness and a deeper sense of personal satisfaction. A spiritual gift calls forth a sense of mission, enthusiasm and vision. Too often, sincere and faithful Christians have carried heavy loads of guilt because they were expected to perform tasks for which they had little or no ability. The happiest and most effective Christian servants are those who are functioning in ministries where they can clearly recognize some sense of calling, some degree of skill, some level of enthusiasm and vision, and feel competent to serve.²³

- D. Spiritual gifts are given at the moment of salvation.

Spiritual gifts are possessed only by believers by virtue of the fact that only believers have the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:9). The believer will probably not receive a new ability or skill he did not have prior to conversion; however, he does receive the empowerment to use his skills and abilities for the glory of God and for the benefit of the church in a way that he could not do before conversion.

[That is, if a person had no musical skills prior to conversion, he likely won't all of a sudden be able to play an instrument and sing when he gets saved.]

The New Testament clearly indicates that in certain situations God bestowed “grace-gifts” immediately in ways that were miraculous and visible (Acts 2, 10). At other times, gifts were imparted through others, such as those occasions when the Apostles or elders would lay their hands on certain individuals as a means of imparting special gifts and abilities (I Tim 1:18, 4:14; II Tim 1:6).

²² Lindsey Garmon.

²³ Gamon.

The particular gifts that God is imparting to the church today are not identical to the gifts that were given to the first century church. The needs are different; therefore, some of the gifts are different. Even the manner in which gifts are imparted is not the same as in the first century. Since we have no living Apostles among us, gifts cannot be imparted through the laying on of hands. Instead of using miraculous and spectacular means for imparting spiritual gifts today, God disperses His gifts through means that are quiet and non-spectacular.²⁴

- E. Spiritual gifts are intended to edify one's local church and to glorify God (1 Cor 12:7; Eph 4:11-12; 1 Pet 4:10-11).

Why has God given spiritual gifts? According to the above references, there are two purposes for spiritual gifts: edification of one's local church²⁵ and glorification of God. Notice that neither of these involves self-glorification.

Why is it so important to emphasize the local church as the place in which one employs his or her spiritual gifts? **[The Bible emphasizes ministry within and to the church to which one belongs, not to the church in general. Some people have the mistaken impression that their ministry is to the universal church/Body of Christ. That is, they are trying to minister without any connection to a specific church, a practice that is out of order.]**

II. How Many Spiritual Gifts Are There?

The Scriptures specifically mention eighteen (see Rom 12:6-8; 1 Cor 12:8-10, 28-30; and Eph 4:11). These are: apostleship, prophecy, teaching, exhortation, evangelism, pastoring, ministry, giving, mercy, leadership, faith, miracles, healing, tongues, interpretation of tongues, distinguishing of spirits, wisdom, and knowledge. Are there more gifts than these? It's unlikely. **[Some say that there are more, but I am hesitant to say so.]**

Several of these gifts were miraculous in nature, and are sometimes called "sign gifts." These were temporary and no longer exist because they were associated with the founding of the church (2 Cor 12:12), a period sometimes called the Apostolic Age. Since genuine apostles no longer exist, the sign gifts associated with apostleship no longer exist. Further, church history shows that the gifts naturally died out with the death of the apostles. Neither the church fathers nor the reformers saw these sign-gifts as applicable to themselves. Until recently, the only groups to suggest that sign gifts were still in operation were heretical sects.

²⁴ Gamon.

²⁵ "A spiritual gift is to be exercised within the ministry and outreach of the local church. Since the only legitimate, visible, and organized expression of the Body Church is in local churches, the function and exercise of the spiritual gifts is in that sphere" (Dr. Rolland McCune, DBTS class notes).

The modern Charismatic movement (which is a relatively recent phenomena, beginning in the early 1900s) insists that these gifts are still (or once again) available to believers. Such a conclusion is highly suspect.²⁶

Many spiritual gifts are permanent²⁷ and are still in operation today.

III. How Does One Exercise His/Her Spiritual Gifts?

A. Discover your spiritual gift(s).

Though much has been made of doing so, nowhere does the Bible command us to pinpoint which gift(s) we have. **[Contra the popular practice of “gift spotting” – people in the church who are trained to help people find their spiritual gifts]** Rather, we are commanded to get involved in ministry (1 Pet 4:10). Doing so will usually reveal which gift(s) we possess or do not possess.

B. Look for opportunities to exercise your spiritual gift(s).

As mentioned previously, every believer should exercise his spiritual gift(s) to enhance the ministry of his local church. Get involved! Don't be a “pew potato.” Spiritual gifts, when faithfully exercised, contribute to the overall health and growth of the church. Failure to exercise one's spiritual gift(s) hurts both the individual and his church. Since there is no such thing as a giftless Christian, there should be no such thing as a Christian who is not employing his gift in some area of service within his church.

Below are some of the ministry opportunities currently available at Liberty Baptist Church:

Sunday School	Youth Ministry	Songleading
Prayer Chain	Special Music	Nursery
Music Groups	Deacon	Women's Ministries
Visitation Program	Offertories	Cleaning
Instrumentalist	Grounds	Usher

Every church member should be involved in at least one of these areas.

Review:

²⁶ A study of the Charismatic movement is beyond the scope of this lesson. For more information, read John MacArthur's fine book *Charismatic Chaos*.

²⁷ I.e., existing throughout the entirety of the church age. The church age will come to an end when the remnant of the body of Christ is taken out of the world at the Rapture, at which time all spiritual gifts will cease.

1. A spiritual gift is a Holy Spirit-energized ability graciously given by God to every believer at the moment of salvation for the edification of his local church and for the glory of God.
2. There are many different gifts listed in the Bible, some of which were temporary and some of which were permanent.
3. The believer finds and exercises his gift(s) within the context of his church.

For Further Discussion:

1. Why doesn't our church practice the miraculous gifts (healing and tongues)? **[The sign gifts were temporary and apostolic in nature.]**
2. If every Christian has a spiritual gift, and if the gifts are to be used in service in your church, why don't all church members serve? **[disobedience, ignorance, laziness, "retirement"]**
3. How can one find his spiritual gift(s)? **[Try out various ministries. Commit to those that suit you.]**



Lesson 11: Confronting One Another in Love

In our hyper-sensitive and non-judgmental culture, most people avoid confrontation. Confrontation is a cold, harsh, unloving idea. According to the Scriptures, however, confronting a fellow believer about his or her sin is one of the most loving and appropriate things a Christian can do.

The practice of confronting someone about his sin is called church discipline. It's very important for a church to deal with sin among its members before it weakens or destroys the church. A church must protect its members from false prophets ("wolves" Acts 20:29) and from false doctrines ("damnable heresies" 2 Pet 2:1). To do so, it must confront people about their sin. It's not an easy or enjoyable thing to do, but it is necessary to preserve the purity and the testimony of the church.

Note several things the Bible teaches about confrontation.

I. Confrontation is in the best interests of the offender.

Simply put, love is doing what is best for another. The consequences of sin can be devastating to an individual and to those around him. Ignoring the problem is an unloving thing to do. Turning a deaf ear and a blind eye to a Christian brother who's in sin indicates a lack of concern.

Psalm 141:5 Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness: and let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head: for yet my prayer also shall be in their calamities.

Proverbs 3:11-12 My son, despise not the chastening of the LORD; neither be weary of his correction: For whom the LORD loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth.

Proverbs 27:5-6 Open rebuke is better than secret love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.

Other texts that command us to confront erring brethren: Matt 18:15-17; 1 Thes 5:14; 2 Thes 3:15. See also 2 Sam 12:1-14; Rom 15:14; Gal 2:11, 6:1-2; James 5:19-20.

II. Confrontation is in the best interests of the church.

1 Timothy 5:20 Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear.

The Bible is clear in its command to confront the sin in the lives of church members. Failure to do so is simple disobedience.

III. What is confrontation?

In Romans 15:14, Paul states: “And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.” The Greek verb translated “admonish” is *noutheteo*. It could also be translated warn or counsel. Note that such admonition is the responsibility of church members to “one another.” From this verse, Christian counselor Jay Adams has popularized the idea of “nouthetic” counseling. Nouthetic counseling is simply a technical term for the concept of confrontational counseling. In his book, *Competent to Counsel*, Adams gives three characteristics of nouthetic confrontation:

- A. There is a problem to be solved. In this case, the problem is sin. Nouthetic counselors assert that most problems are rooted in sin. Even depression, anxiety, paranoia, and other mental disorders are often the result of unconfessed sin and the guilt associated with it.

- B. Words are an integral part of the solution.

Noutheteo carries the idea of rebuking, warning, or admonishing. Someone must verbally rebuke or warn the offender about his or her sin. The confrontation must revolve around how the person has violated God’s Word, and what the Bible says must be done about it.

- C. The solution to the problem is the restoration of the individual.

The goal is for the offender to be reconciled to God through confessing and forsaking the sin (Prov 28:13) and to be reconciled to those whom have been adversely affected by the sin (see Matt 5:23-24). This is the only means of true forgiveness, cleansing, and clearing of the conscience. Biblical changes in attitude and behavior often solve the problem(s).

Thus, biblical confrontation occurs when a believer recognizes a sin problem in another believer’s life, confronts that person about his sin, and encourages him to repent and be restored. The context of this confrontation is the church, i.e., church members confront other members, not just believers in general. This is a church-centered activity.

Such confrontation is in stark contrast to how the world handles problems. Most psychologists suggest denying one’s guilt and/or blaming others for his problems. The modern way of handling problems is to make oneself the victim rather than the cause of sin.

To Integrate or Not To Integrate?

Is the Bible the only resource necessary for counseling, or do we need to borrow from secular psychology? *Integrationists* (e.g., Dobson, Narramore, Crabb) assert that the findings of psychological "science" should be used along side biblical principles. To integrationists, the Bible simply does not have all the answers to man's problems. Psychology must fill in what the Bible lacks. **[Thus the addition of self-esteem and Maslow's Hierarchy into Christianity]** *Non-integrationists* (Adams), on the other hand, claim that the Bible does have all the answers to man's problems. There is no need to resort to psychology to direct people to the solution of their problems. To say that God's Word is insufficient to meet man's needs implies that God is unable to care for His children, that He needs man's help to do so, that God's wisdom is lacking, or that He has left us in the dark regarding certain essentials of life. Obviously, such is not the case. God has given us "all things pertaining to life and godliness" (2 Pet 1:3). ~~Thus, the theologian is better able to address man's problems than is the secular~~ psychologist. **[This does not mean that the Bible handles medical issues.]**

IV. How should one confront?

The key to effective confrontation is the manner in which it is done. Below are some pointers in this regard:

A. Confront promptly.

Don't let the problem fester. Deal with it immediately (Matt 5:23-24). Don't pretend as if the sin does not exist. Procrastination usually makes the matter worse.

B. Confront privately.

Matthew 18:15 commands the confronter to "go and tell [the offender] his fault between you and him alone." This is the first step. If this does not result in reconciliation, other individuals are to get involved (Matt 18:16-17). If the offense is public in nature, one may have to deal with it publicly.

C. Confront reluctantly.

No one should relish the role of confronter. Go with a broken-hearted attitude over the sin of your brother (2 Cor 2:4a).

D. Confront humbly.

Realize that "but for the grace of God, so go I" (1 Cor 15:10).

E. Confront gently.

The purpose of confrontation is not to "let someone have it." An overly harsh approach may drive the individual even further away from reconciliation (Gal 6:1).

F. Confront lovingly.

Make it clear that the purpose for your confrontation is the offender's well-being (2 Cor 2:4b). You're there to help the person, not to punish him.

V. What should one confront about?

Many sins do not demand personal confrontation. Be sure that the matter you are considering confronting someone about is clearly a matter of sin and not one of personal preference. There are some sins that are better left "covered" (see Prov

17:9, 19:11; and 1 Pet 4:8). Admittedly, we need much wisdom to discern which sins should be covered and which should be confronted.

A. Specific sins that demand confrontation:

1. Doctrinal deviation: believing and/or teaching the wrong doctrine

Rom 16:17 I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them.

Discernment is necessary here because a believer may be ignorant or in error in many areas, yet not be guilty of doctrinal deviation. If the person is teachable and humble, church discipline may not be necessary. Also, some doctrines are more important than others. But when a church member who should know better subscribes to and/or teaches false doctrine in essential matters of faith and practice, and refuses to submit to the direction of legitimate church leaders, the church must act.

2. Divisive spirit: causing division and discord within the church; spreading rumors, gossip, lies, etc.

Titus 3:10 Warn a divisive person [KJV “heretic”] once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him.

This may be one of the most common and most overlooked offenses that happens within a church. The Bible is quite severe on those who cause division. They are to be put out of the church.

3. Disorderly conduct: participating in behavior that is inappropriate for Christians

2 Thes 3:6 In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us.

Again, discernment is necessary when determining what kind of behavior demands church discipline. A church must insure that discipline begins for biblically valid offenses, not for mere preference issues. But when a member is violating clear behavioral commands from Scripture, the church must impose discipline.

B. Questions to ask to determine the seriousness of the sin

How do you know when to confront a brother/sister in Christ regarding his/her sin? Ask yourself the following questions:

1. What impact is the sin having upon your relationship with the offender?

If the sin has caused a break (or even a strain) in your relationship, then you owe it to one another to deal with the issue in order to reconcile your relationship.

2. What impact is the sin having upon the offender himself?

If the offender is unaware of the sin or is underestimating its severity or is not taking steps to deal with it, then confrontation is in order.

3. What impact is the sin having or could have upon others?

If the sin is adversely affecting the offender's family, his local church or his testimony before the unsaved (or has the potential for doing so), then confrontation is in the best interests of everyone involved.

VI. Results of the confrontation

As previously stated, the desired outcome of church discipline is the confession, repentance, and restoration of the offending brother. If he does repent, things go back to normal (unless the nature of the sin prevents this). If he refuses to repent, the matter is taken before the whole church. If after the church warns him he still refuses to repent, he is excommunicated from the church and is considered to be an apostate. Believers are to avoid those who have been excommunicated.

Note: Bystanders and even members may accuse a church of lacking love or being overly severe on those whom it disciplines and/or excommunicates. It seems to them that Christian love and patience would dictate that the church not discipline anyone. However, we've seen that discipline is an expression of love, is clearly biblical, and is in the best interests of the church and the individual. We must submit our notions of fairness and love to biblical principles that direct church life.

Further, family ties and relationships must not hinder church leaders from imposing discipline on anyone. Biblical principles must over-rule family affections.

Conclusion: Although the whole matter of confrontation and church discipline is a difficult one, it is necessary and beneficial that we study it. Church discipline is like

surgery—painful, inconvenient, and often costly, but necessary for the survival of the church. A church cannot afford to be apathetic about sin “in the camp.”

Review:

1. Confronting a fellow believer about his sin is a loving and biblical thing to do.
2. Confrontation is talking to someone about his sinful condition with the goal of getting him to repent and be reconciled.
3. The manner of the confrontation is important. Confrontations should be done promptly, privately, reluctantly, humbly, gently, and lovingly.
4. One should confront another about sins such as doctrinal deviation, divisiveness, and disorderly living.
5. If the one confronted is unwilling to repent of his sin, the proper response is to excommunicate the person and consider him to be an apostate.

For Further Discussion:

1. Who makes the better counselor, a psychologist or a theologian? Why? **[the theologian, because he knows the Bible and knows when, why, and how to confront and restore. Be careful about “Christian” psychologists—they may know more about Freud than about Christ. Further, your pastor probably makes the best counselor, not some professional counselor who is a stranger.]**
2. Which is more important, one’s relationship with God or one’s relationship with another human being? **[with God]** Apply this principle in the realm of confrontation. **[We are sometimes hesitant to confront someone because we are friends. But obedience to God and care for the church are more important than individual friendships. You must confront someone even if it strains or breaks friendships.]**
3. If a person is excommunicated from one church, should the church down the road accept him into its membership? **[no]**

Why is it so dangerous and counter-productive for churches not to enforce each other’s discipline? **[Discipline is ineffective if other churches don’t recognize it. The problem is never fixed; restoration never occurs because the person is not forced to deal with it.]**

How could churches prevent this type of “church hopping”? **[Make sure that new people are not under church discipline from their previous church. Talk to their previous pastor.]**

4. Should we have any fellowship at all with someone who has been excommunicated from a church of like faith and practice? **[The Bible says to avoid such people and consider them to be unbelievers or apostates.]**
5. What would be the dangers of associating with an excommunicated church member? **[1. You're disobedient—you're supposed to avoid the person; 2. It doesn't help the person under discipline. The discipline is supposed to lead to his repentance; 3. The apostate may continue to have influence over church members and thus spread the problem.]**



Chapter 12: Preserving Unity in the Body

A local church is an organization that is most effective when all its members are working together in harmony. One of the most effective “devices” (2 Corinthians 2:11) Satan uses against a local church is disunity. Few problems will hurt a church’s testimony more than division. On the other hand, few things are more important for the growth and stability of a church than unity (see John 17:20-23). “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity” (Psalm 133:1)! Thus, it’s beneficial for us to understand the causes of disunity and the methods for maintaining unity.

Conflict and contention can develop between any two or more Christians, even if they have been committed to Christ and serving His church from many years. For example, Paul wrote, “I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord” (Phil 4:2). The conflict between these women was significant enough that news of it had reached Paul in Rome, where he penned this letter. The fact that Paul takes time to address the problems shows how important the resolution of conflicts is.

I. Causes of Disunity

A. Sinful Speech

Perhaps the biggest contributor to disunity in the local church is the misuse of the tongue. Gossip, criticism, and corrupt speech create an environment that is ripe for division. Improper use of the tongue can split a church.

Proverbs 16:28 A perverse man sows strife, And a whisperer separates the best of friends.

Proverbs 17:9 He who covers a transgression seeks love, But he who repeats a matter separates friends.

B. Pride

Proverbs 13:10 states, “Only by pride comes contention.” Self-will always leads to division. Pride influences one to push for his own position over the desires of others. Pride prevents people from cooperating as a team. Pride hinders people from admitting their own shortcomings and failures, and gives people a false sense of importance. It should be fairly obvious how destructive pride can be. Humility, on the other hand, fosters unity.

C. An individualistic spirit

Whereas our society places the emphasis on the *personal* (the individual), the Scriptures place the emphasis on the *corporate* (the group). When “every man does that which is right in his own eyes,” disunity is the inevitable result.

D. Sowing discord

Consider the words of Proverbs 6:16-19:

*These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.*²⁸

The person who plants seeds of disunity in the hearts of fellow church members (usually through sinful speech) is inviting God’s severest chastisement.

*1 Cor 3:16-17: Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.*²⁹

You may remember from the last lesson that causing division and discord within the church is a legitimate cause for church discipline, even excommunication. Creating division and dissention is a serious sin.

Titus 3:10-11 Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person has been perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned.

E. Retaliation

Romans 12:17-19: Recompense to no man evil for evil. . . . If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

²⁸The “six, yea seven” formula is a Hebraic literary device, the purpose of which is to draw attention to or emphasize the final item in the list (see also Proverbs 30).

²⁹The “temple” being spoken of in these verses could apply to believers individually or corporately.

While retaliation is a common reaction when others sin against us, the Bible strictly forbids such a response. Retaliation is not only sinful, but it also makes matters worse. Believers must trust that the Lord will work all things out in a just and fair way.

F. Failure to resolve interpersonal conflicts biblically

If conflicts are allowed to fester and grow, unity within the church is impossible. Inaction is the only response worse than conflict itself. Trying hard to “turn the other cheek,” church members often ignore an offense because confronting it would be inconvenient and awkward. But the Scripture commands that both the offender and the offended are responsible to seek a resolution to any conflict (Matt 5:23-24 c.f. 18:15).

II. Keys to Unity

A. A common set of beliefs

Amos 3:3 asks: “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” The answer to this rhetorical question is a resounding “No!” The small book of Jude tells believers to “contend for the faith once delivered unto the saints.” This faith is the common set of core beliefs that all saints assent to. It is crucial that a local church agrees upon a set of beliefs around which its members can unite. The role of the pastor is key in this regard. Ephesians chapter four tells us that God has given pastors to the local church for (among other things) the “unity of the faith” (verse 14). As pastors teach and church members heed the truths of Scripture, unity will result.

Note that unity is not built on a common set of experiences. Experience is not a solid base for unity; doctrine is. Some propose that Christian love or common goals or even tradition are bases of unity. However, only similar theological beliefs and values can generate true unity. Without this common ground, there can be little agreement. Thus it is important that the church educate its members regarding the content of “the faith.”

[The mantra of evangelicalism is “let’s all just love Jesus and focus on what unites us.” But once you start defining terms, you find that you really have nothing to base that unity on. Thus experience (e.g., speaking in tongues) becomes a basis of unity. I’m not uniting in any substantial way with anyone who does not agree with me doctrinally.]

Also note 1 Cor 1:12-17: focus on the message rather than the messenger. Loyalty to persons ought not hinder our loyalty to the Word.]

B. Humility

The Church at Philippi was experiencing a lack of unity (Phil 1:27, 2:2, 14, and 4:2).³⁰ The remedy for this malady was very simple: humility (Phil 2:3-8). A humble person does not create strife or discord within a church because he is going to put the needs of others before his own.

C. Deference

A significant aspect of humility is deference. Deference is willingly giving up your own interests, desires and needs in favor of another's interests, desires and needs. Not everyone can have his own way all the time. Be willing to sacrifice your personal desires for the greater good. This is especially important in non-theological areas, such as choosing the color of church furnishings or deciding how to spend money. Don't make a big fuss over minor issues.

Deference to legitimate authority figures within the church is also very important. Church members are to obey and honor their pastor(s). When everyone recognizes and defers to the authority of the leaders, the church functions smoothly.

D. Strong Leadership

You are perhaps familiar with an organization that has "too many chiefs and not enough Indians." Most successful organizations employ a single strong leader who directs the group toward certain goals. The Bible teaches that pastors are to be strong leaders who carefully guide and guard the flock. A church without leadership is like sheep without a shepherd.

E. Biblical confrontation

In our last lesson we saw the importance of lovingly confronting a church member living in sin. Not only is this important for the individual offender, but also for the body as a whole. This is especially true in the case of one who is sowing discord. Such an individual must be confronted about his sin. If he refuses to stop,

³⁰ Many commentators suggest that the theme of the book of Philippians is joy, but a closer look reveals that Paul's primary consideration in the book is unity.

he must be removed from the body (see Rom 16:17 and Titus 3:10). Retaining a member who sows discord and division will destroy a church.

You might think that confrontation would undermine unity. How could believers who confront each other over their sin promote the unity of the church?

[It works because no one likes to live with unresolved conflict. Resolution of problems is beneficial. Not dealing with sin is far more destructive to a church than confrontation is.]

F. Quickly resolving interpersonal conflicts

Because churches are full of sinners, it is inevitable that interpersonal conflicts will occur from time to time. Church members sometimes just don't get along well together. Someone makes an off-hand comment, someone's feelings get hurt, and pretty soon there's a problem. When conflicts do occur, they must be dealt with quickly and biblically. Sinful attitudes and actions often develop if a conflict of personalities festers. Biblically resolving personality conflicts enhances the unity of the church.

[By personality conflicts, I mean when 2 or more people just don't get along. Personalities often clash, with the result of creating tension between the members. This is not a matter of church discipline, unless sinful attitudes or actions result from the problem.]

Note that Paul named both Euodias and Syntyche as participants in the conflict. He considers them both responsible for the unreconciled situation between them. In most conflicts, it's unlikely that the blame rests solely with one person.

G. Like-mindedness

Philippians 2:2 *Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.*

The key to conflict resolution, and to all godly conduct, is right thinking. We are to have the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:16; Phil 2:5). Unity is the natural result of church members seeking the same goals. All members of the church should strive toward consensus when it comes to important decisions. If the majority of church members do not agree regarding a certain issue, it is unwise to pursue that course of action.

Review:

1. The ungodly speech, pride, an individualistic, divisive spirit, retaliation, and failure to handle conflict biblically cause disunity.
2. Having a common set of beliefs, humility, deference, strong leadership, biblical confrontation, a quick resolution to interpersonal conflicts, and like-mindedness all aid in establishing and protecting unity.

For Further Discussion:

1. Would you say that your conduct in the church is promoting or weakening church unity?
2. Gossip is a common cause of disunity within a church. Why do you think this is the case? **[The temptation to gossip seems universal within humanity; may seem to be normal and insignificant; creates discord; often not addressed as serious sin.]**
3. How has the individualism of our age negatively impacted the local church? **[Everyone has his own agenda, ideas, and he thinks his ideas are just as good as anyone else's. People have a low level of commitment to a church.]**
4. If you disagree about a church matter (e.g., color of the carpet, a building program), should you try to promote your position, defer to others, or leave the church? **[Depends on the matter at issue. For most minor things, it's best to defer to leadership. For biblical issues, you must stand for your convictions.]**
5. What would happen if each member always insisted on getting his own way? **[Chaos, disunity, bad reputation in the community, no ministry]**



Lesson 13: Praying for One Another

In the past twelve lessons, we have discussed various matters of importance in the local church. Perhaps none is more important than the one that we will discuss today. It is only fitting, therefore, that we conclude our study of “Life in the Father’s House” by looking at the subject of prayer.

Prayer is an important part of the life of a church. The early church devoted itself to the apostles’ doctrine and to prayer (Acts 2:42). The apostles saw prayer as a high priority—they refused to deal with matters that would take them away from the ministry of the Word and prayer (Acts 6:4). Paul spent much time praying for the churches he started (Col 1:9), and he often asked for prayer in return (Eph 6:19; 1 Thes 1:25; 2 Thes 3:1).

Note some important points about prayer as it should be practiced in the local church:

- I. Prayer is a means of worship. It’s one of ways we honor and glorify God.

Acts 2:42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

Jude 1:20 But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost.

Colossians 4:2 Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving.

Since prayer is worship, it should have a prominent place in the worship service. Corporate prayer is prayer as a church family for the needs of the church. It is biblical to encompass in prayer all the members of a particular group by praying for that group as a whole. This is because God works with groups as much as He works with individuals. Corporate prayer ought to be a significant aspect of church life. When we are thinking of the church as a unit, we will learn to think in ways that promote unity.

Prayer for the church ought also be a part of your personal, private prayer life.

- II. Pray for your local church.

- A. For its members and friends

1. Pray that each person would have a teachable spirit and a commitment to the success of the church. Pray for those who have drifted away from the church, or are very sporadic in attendance.

Use the church directory as a guide to pray systematically for each family.

2. In looking at the examples of prayer we find in the NT, most of them are concerned with spiritual issues rather than earthly or physical ones. Not that it's unbiblical to pray for physical needs. However, the *primary* focus of our prayers for the body should be the spiritual needs of its members and their effectiveness in ministry. Remember that the foundational issues in people's lives are spiritual, so we should concentrate on them.
3. Once again we see the importance of membership. Those who are members have committed themselves to praying for one another. Non-members have not done so and thus cannot count on the same prayerful concern as members can. (Those who attend but are not members will also likely receive the benefits of prayer.)

B. For its ministries

Pray that each ministry would be enhanced (increase in quality) and expanded (increase in quantity). "Lengthen thy cords and strengthen thy stakes" (Isaiah 54:2). Pray for the local, area, and world-wide aspects of ministry, both in edifying the saved and in evangelizing the lost.

LBC ministries to pray for:

Worship services
Sunday school
Teen group
Missionaries
Deacons
Women's Ministries
Pastor
Visitation/outreach

C. For its leadership

Pray for your pastors and for laymen in positions of responsibility (deacons, teachers, etc.). Pray for wisdom and strength to guide and guard the church. Pray that leaders would be committed to the accurate and systematic teaching of the Bible. Pray that the leaders would be committed to the care and feeding of the "flock."

D. For its purity, testimony, and strength

In this day of compromise and temptation, it's common for churches to move from where they once stood. Accounts of immorality, church splits, and theological error abound. Pray that the church will remain committed to the fundamental aspects of faith and practice. Pray that the church will have a positive, honorable reputation in the community. Pray for unity and commitment to the good of the church. Also pray that God would prevent error, disunity and conflict.

E. For its organization and order

Paul tells us that everything in the church ought to be done “decently and in order” (1 Cor 14:40). What does this imply?

“Decently” means honestly, in an appropriate manner, fitting, or proper. The word suggests a well-formed plan. Note that “all things” are to be done decently and in order. Every aspect of the church should be well-planned and orderly. “In order” means arranged in an orderly condition; in due or right ranking or position. Literally, the words are “according to (an) order or arrangement.” This teaches us that the church must be orderly, not haphazard, casual, or careless. Thus, we ought to pray that things in the church are done in an excellent, orderly way and according to a well-formed plan.

III. Pray for other local churches.

Pray for churches of like faith and practice in your area and for churches you have previously been a part of. The same types of things you pray for regarding your own church would be proper to pray for regarding other churches.

Conclusion: Prayer is a central part of the life of a local church. Seek opportunities to join in corporate prayer and remember the church in your private prayer.