

GETTING TO KNOW YOUR BIBLE PRESENTS:

SEEKING GOD AFTER THE DUE ORDER



LEARNING TO NAVIGATE TOUGH TOPICS,
ESTABLISH BIBLICAL AUTHORITY &
STAY GROUNDED IN TRUTH

BILLY LAMBERT

Getting To Know Your Bible

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SEEKING GOD AFTER THE DUE ORDER

Lesson #1

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CHURCH

Lesson Text - Matthew 16:13-18

INTRODUCTION

The New Testament church had its inception into the world as a result of the long-range plan and purpose of God. When Jesus died on the cross, thus purchasing the church (Acts 20:28), it was not accidental. His death was according to God's determinate counsel and foreknowledge (Acts 2:23).

"I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH"

When Jesus came into the coast of Caesarea Philippi, he inquired of his disciples as to the public opinion of his identity. They replied by saying that some thought he was John the Baptist, others that he was Elias, others Jeremias, and others announced that he was, at least, one of the prophets. It was then that Jesus asked, "But whom say ye that I am?"

With boldness, Peter answered Jesus by saying, "Thou art the Christ, the son of the living God." Jesus then said to Peter, "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my father which is in heaven."

Then Jesus declared, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church." This is the first place that the word "church" is to be found in all of God's revealed word. Notice that Jesus said, "I will build." Christ is the builder of the church. If an organization was built by any other, at any other time or place, it is not the church Christ built.

Further observe that Christ declared, "I will build my church." This is why we can speak of it as the church of Christ (Romans 16:16). If one takes money for which he has worked and buys a watch with that money, he can say, "It is my watch." Jesus paid the purchase price for the church (Acts 20:28), hence He has the right to call it "my church".

Jesus stated, "I will build my church." He said church as of one, not churches as of many. (Romans 12:5; 1 Corinthians 12:12-13)

THEORIES OF THE CHURCH'S ESTABLISHMENT

There is a theory advanced that the church had its beginning in the early morning of time, at which time God determined those who would be members of the church and those who would not. Growing out of that theory come the popular doctrine known as "Calvinism", or the false doctrine of election and reprobation.

Yet another theory regarding the church's establishment has its beginning in the days of Abraham.

Perhaps the most popular theory is that which asserts that the church began during the lifetime and ministry of John the Baptist. If the church was existent during John's lifetime it could not properly be called a New Testament church.

The Hebrew writer plainly declares that a testament is not of force until after the death of the testator. (Hebrews 9:15-17) It is a contradiction of terms to talk about the church of the New Testament having been in existence prior to the effectiveness of the

New Testament. Still another consideration which logically excludes the church from John the Baptist's lifetime and ministry is the fact that Jesus is the supreme head of the church and that He was not exalted to the headship of the church until after His resurrection. (Ephesians 1:19-23) This was long after John's death. If the church existed in John's lifetime, it was a church without a head. It also was a body without any blood, since Jesus shed His blood at Calvary (after John's death) to purchase the church. There was no Gospel until Jesus died on the cross and was raised from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:1-4), hence a church that existed in John's day would have been a church without a gospel to preach.

PENTECOST – BIRTHDAY OF THE CHURCH

Someone may ask, "What difference does it make when the church had its beginning, just so I know I am a member of it?" How can you know you are a member, except you know what people did under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to become members of the "one body?"

We read about the New Testament church in prophecy. About 600 years B.C. Nebuchadnezzar dreamed a dream. He could not remember his dream, and this troubled him greatly. Daniel, a young Jewish captive, recalled the king's dream and gave its interpretation. The dream is recorded in Daniel 2:31-35 and the interpretation is in Daniel 2:36-45.

A great image stood before King Nebuchadnezzar. "The image's head was of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass. His legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay."

Daniel, in his interpretation tells the king, “Thou art this head of gold.” Daniel then explains that after Nebuchadnezzar would arise three other kingdoms. In Daniel 2:44 he said, “And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break into pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.”

At the time of this prophecy, Nebuchadnezzar was king of Babylon. In 536 B.C. Babylon fell, never to rise again.

Cyrus, a Persian, and Darius, a Mede, combined their forces against Babylon and sealed the doom forever. The new empire was called the Medo-Persian, which represented the breast and arms of the image. This empire lasted until about the year 333 B.C.

Then at this time Alexander the Great began his conquest of the world. His empire is represented by the belly of brass. He reigned for only about seven years, and died a shameful, drunken death after which time his government was for a time divided into four parts. These soon blended into two, the South and the North, known in history and the Longidae and the Salvidae.

Around 63 B.C. the Roman government made its rise over that part of the world. This was the fourth world empire represented in Daniel’s interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. It was “in the days of these kings” that the kingdom of God would be established.

In about 34 B.C. while the Caesars were reigning in Rome, Herod the Great was king over Palestine. The New Testament now begins its story.

In Matthew chapter one we read of the birth of Christ. In chapter two of Matthew we read about the decree that went forth from Herod the king, that all children under two years old in the city of Bethlehem were to be put to death.

In the opening of the third chapter of Matthew we read, "In those days came John the Baptist." In what days? In the days of the Herods, in the days of the Caesars, John the Baptist broke the silence of the wilderness by calling out, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." The expression "at hand" implies that it is nearby or was approaching.

After John was put into prison, Jesus began to preach "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." (Matthew 4:17) The twelve said the kingdom was "at hand" and the seventy explained that this meant "nigh unto you." (Luke 10:9) These declarations announced the coming of the kingdom, or of that church promised by Christ when He said, "Upon this rock I will build my church." (Matthew 16:18)

In Mark 9:1 Jesus said, "Verily I say unto you, that there be some of them that stand here who shall not taste of death until they have seen the kingdom of God come with power." There were some who would not die until they had seen the kingdom, or church, "come with power."

By reading the New Testament we can learn when the power came. In Luke 24:49, Christ said, "Tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem until ye be endued with power from on high." Then again, in Acts 1:8 we read, "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you."

Here is what we have learned: (1) The kingdom is to come with power. (2) The power is to come in the city of Jerusalem. (3) The power is to come with the spirit. Question: When did the Holy Spirit come? If we may determine that, we can logically know when the church began.

The Bible says that the Spirit came on Pentecost. "And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire,

and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” (Acts 2:1-4) If the kingdom or church was to come with the Spirit, and if the Spirit came on Pentecost, it follows then that the church began on Pentecost in about A.D. 33.

Peter then began to preach the first gospel sermon ever preached in the name of the risen Christ. (Acts 2:14-40) There were about three thousand who were baptized for the remission of their sins and the second chapter of Acts closes by saying: “And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.” (Acts 2:47)

THE CHURCH AFTER PENTECOST

In 96 A.D. John, while in exile, wrote, “I, John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ.” (Revelation 1:9) Thus, we can see that John was in the kingdom.

In 64 A.D. the apostle Paul wrote, “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 the ground of the truth.” (1 Timothy 3:15)

In 55 A.D. Paul wrote, “Unto the church of God which is at Corinth.” (1 Corinthians 1:2)

Luke the historian, in 45 A.D., made mention of “the church that was at Antioch.” (Acts 13:1)

In 34 A.D. we read in Acts 8:1 that “There was a great persecution against the church.” We read in Acts 5:11, A.D. 33, “great fear came upon all the church.”

Also, in Acts 2:47 in the year 33 A.D. we are told the “Lord added to the church daily.”

This brings us back to Acts chapter two. Everything said concerning the church before Acts chapter two points toward it and everything said concerning the church after Acts chapter two points back to it. This is the fountain head. The church of the New Testament had its beginning on the first Pentecost after Jesus’ resurrection.

SEEKING GOD AFTER THE DUE ORDER

Lesson #2

SOME SHALL DEPART FROM THE FAITH

Lesson Text – 1 Timothy 4:1-3

INTRODUCTION

The New Testament sets forth the fact that the church of Christ was established on the first Pentecost after His resurrection from the dead. The Bible also gives a description of the church.

The church was built by Christ (Matthew 16:18) and was purchased with His blood. (Acts 20:28)

The church was established in Jerusalem in fulfillment of prophecy. “And it shall come to pass in the latter days, that the mountain of Jehovah’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of Jehovah, to the house of the God of Jacob: and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths; for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of Jehovah from Jerusalem.” (Isaiah 2:2-3)

There were certain divinely appointed names by which the church and its members were known: “All the churches of Christ salute you” (Romans 16:16): “Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes

our brother, to the church of God which is at Corinth, even them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, their Lord and ours.” (1 Corinthians 1:1-2)

Other names by which the church is known are “church of the first born” (Hebrews 12:23); “the church” (Acts 11:26); individual members are called Christians (Acts 11:26).

The New Testament church was governed by the authority of Christ. (Ephesians 1:22-23) “And hath put all things under his feet and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of his that filleth all in all.”

There was a specific form of government for the New Testament church. Each congregation had its own elders, who had the oversight of the church. (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-3) Each congregation was autonomous or self-governing.

Another characteristic of the New Testament church was its worship. They worshipped God by singing. (Ephesians 5:18-19); praying (1 Corinthians 14:15); eating the Lord’s supper (Acts 20:7); giving (1 Corinthians 16:1-2); and teaching God’s Word (Acts 2:42).

For some years the church remained true to Christ, but the scriptures foretold of a great falling away. Over a period of several hundred years there were major departures from the faith.

APOSTACY FORETOLD

Jesus gave a warning to His disciples about false teachers. “Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves. (Matthew 7:15)

The apostle Paul warned that there would be a departure from truth among the elders of the church. "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." (Acts 20:28-30) Note that Paul said, "of your own selves shall men arise," meaning from among the eldership; hence, there would be a major departure from the faith beginning with the government of the church.

Again, Paul wrote, "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth." (1 Timothy 4:1-3)

MAJOR DEPARTURES

During the first fifty years after the death of the last apostle, the church continued to struggle to maintain its purity. There were, however, some conflicts over their relationship to Judaism. Judaizing teachers were constantly trying to corrupt pure Christianity.

There were problems that soon arose because men began to change the organization of the church. Any change in doctrine or organization from that found in the New testament is a departure from the faith once delivered.

One of the most striking departures from the apostolic pattern was the rise of the monarchical episcopate. This refers to congregational rule by one man. Ignatius of Antioch was primarily the person who led in this departure. According to the New

Testament, each local congregation is to have a plurality of elders with no distinctions being made in authority among them.

However, the elders of any particular congregation would select one of their number to preside at their meetings. In the course of time the one selected became known as “The Bishop.” A distinction was made between the terms “elder” and “bishop.” These terms are used interchangeably in the New Testament.

Gradually “The Bishop” came to feel his importance. By the close of the third century each congregation of any size had a bishop as its head with a group of elders under him.

As Rome was the chief city of the world at this time, the bishops from cities of lesser importance came to regard it an honor to concede to the Bishop of Rome, until almost the whole world bowed before him. Finally, he came to be known as “Lord God, the Pope” and “Vicar of Christ.”

From this change in church government other departures would follow. By 150 A.D. there came to be a distinction between those who served as ministers and the rest of the congregation. As this grew the “clergy” patterned itself after the Priesthood of the Old Testament. “Without reference to the causes which occasioned the distinction between the clergy and their laity, this is worthy of notice as another important change in the constitution of the church, which gradually arose in connection with the rise of episcopal power.” – Lyman Coleman. The distinction between the so-called clergy and laity is forthrightly condemned in the New Testament. (Matthew 23:8-10; 1 Peter 2:5,9)

A false doctrine that appeared in the church early in the second century was a sort of millenarianism, which seems to have been a carry-over from Judaism. Many of the Jews had expected a temporal Messiah and some of the Christians carried this materialistic hope of the Jews to the second coming of Christ.

Cerinthus claimed to have special revelations from angels to the effect, that after the resurrection, the kingdom would be established on earth. Various forms and shades of this false doctrine are still taught vigorously by men.

Another departure was the doctrine of original sin that teaches that children are born with guilt of sin and through inheritance are depraved in nature. "Prominent among the early departure from the divine order was the substitution of infant baptism for that of believers. This practice originated in the third century and grew out of the doctrine of original sin. It was contended that baptism was regeneration in the sense of washing away original sin; that infants were depraved by original sin and could not be saved without this washing away of that sin, and therefore they baptized infants that they might be saved." – (J.W. Shepherd). Infant baptism rested upon two speculative and totally unscriptural doctrines: (1) Hereditary, total depravity, or that an infant is born in sin, and is a sinner through and through, depraved in nature; and (2) baptismal regeneration or that baptism will take away our sin, even though there is no faith.

Still other innovations that constituted departure were (1) the substitution of sprinkling and pouring for immersion. (The first case of a man having water poured on him was Novatian in A.D. 251); (2) the introduction of human creeds. In A.D. 325 Constantine called a church council at Nice, in Bithynia. From this council emerged the Nicene Creed, which was destined to become the basis of all creeds of the so-called Christian world; (3) there was the addition of instrumental music in worship. Its first appearance in church history was about the sixth century, A.D.

ATTEMPTS AT REFORMATION

From the first major departure from the faith, there emerged a blending of the powers of church and state. The Pope of the Roman Catholic church, which had come out of the great apostacy, became the highest authority on the earth.

During the next twelve hundred years there was what is known in history as the “Dark Ages.” This lasted until the beginning of the sixteenth century. At this time people began to open their eyes and cast aside delusions under which they had been and to exercise more freedom of thought.

This marks the beginning of that period of history known as the Reformation. Martin Luther is recognized as the leader of the Reformation of the sixteenth century. He became a monk when he was about nineteen years old. He found an old Bible in an Augustine convent and through study became convinced that the religion of this day was foreign to that taught in the word of God. With great courage, Martin Luther undertook to reform the Roman church. Luther began to teach justification by faith in contrast to the cold and ritualistic theory of Rome. It was Luther who unchained the Bible and gave it back to the people. He did not have in mind the starting of another church, but merely the reformation of the apostate church. He encouraged men not to call themselves Lutherans, but Christians only.

Following the work of Luther, John Calvin of France came on the religious scene. He advocated: Predestination, irresistible Grace, Original sin, particular Redemption, and the Perseverance of the Saints. This is still known as “Calvinism.” By his great influence his name has been perpetuated as a great reformer.

Others such as Henry VIII and John Wesley were advocates of the Reformation Movement. Many people now call themselves Protestants. Why are they so called? If they are Protestants, they must be protesting something. That which was originally protested in the Protestant Reformation was the error of the church of Rome.

We are indebted to these men for their causing men to investigate and search the Bible. However, as a result of their efforts, there was begun many different churches with different names, teaching different doctrines. This is commonly known as the denominational world. With the rise of all these different churches, fuel was added to the

fire of division. It is not what the Bible teaches that has caused the religious division that exists today; this is what the Bible does not teach – the creeds and doctrines of men.

A FINAL EXHORTATION

At no time is the church more than one generation away from apostasy. In Hebrews 2:1 we read, “Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.” We must constantly give heed to the truth as it is revealed in God’s Word or departure from the truth is the result.

SEEKING GOD AFTER THE DUE ORDER

Lesson #3

SEEKING AFTER GOD FIRST

Lesson Text – 1 Chronicles 13:1-14

INTRODUCTION

In 1 Chronicles 15:13, we find these words, “For because ye did it not at the first, the Lord our God made a breach upon us, for that we sought him not after the due order.” These words were spoken by David regarding a certain thing he had tried to do. In this verse there is a lesson for all who would seek after God. A knowledge of the circumstances under which they were spoken will help us to understand.

Among the many pieces of furniture which God commanded Moses to make for the Tabernacle was the ark, which was called “the ark of God”, “the ark of the testimony”, and “the ark of the covenant.” The ark was built somewhat like a box, being two and half cubits long, one and a half cubits wide, and the same in depth. It was overlaid with gold within and without. Attached to either side by rings of gold were staves which extended at the ends. These were also overlaid with gold. When Israel moved, making it necessary to move the ark, it was the work of the sons of Kohath, of the tribe of Levi, to take the ark up by the staves and carry it on their shoulders. It should be remembered that this was God’s instruction concerning how to move this important piece of furniture.

There came a time when God permitted Israel to be captured by an idolatrous people called the Philistines. They also took the ark away with them. Because the presence of the ark caused them so much trouble, they finally decided to send it back. They fastened it on a new cart, hitched up a yoke of milk cows, and turned them loose. The cows went straight to the country of Israel. The ark was received and finally placed in the house of a man named Abinadab. It stayed there for twenty years. (1 Samuel 7:2)

After David became king, he decided to bring the ark home to Jerusalem, the capital city. David was unaware of God's instruction concerning the moving of it. He went down and set it on a new cart, to which he had had hitched a yoke of oxen. When he came to the threshing floor of Nachon, the old oxen stumbled and were about to fall, Uzzah, one of the drivers, took hold of it to keep it from falling off. But when he did, he dropped dead.

Understanding that a law of God was being violated, David said, "None ought to carry the ark of God but the Levites: for them that hath the Lord chosen to carry the ark of God, and to minister unto him forever." (1 Chronicles 15:2) He then called in men who were descendants of the tribe of Levi and told them to make ready to go down and bring up the ark.

David had determined to bring the ark back to the place it should be. However, he was trying to do the right thing in the wrong way. He simply ignored God's way. He was using a way of his own. When later he looked back upon the tragic outcome, he said it was because they did not seek God "after the due order."

GOD'S "DUE ORDER" MUST BE RESPECTED

It was because he did not respect the "due order" that Cain's sacrifice was objected. (Genesis 4:5; Hebrews 11:4)

Because he did not seek God after “the due order” in bringing water out of the rock, Moses was compelled to relinquish his leadership of Israel and was denied the privilege of entering Canaan. The “due order” was for him to “speak ye unto the rock.” (Numbers 20:8) Instead, he smote the rock. (Numbers 20:11)

Saul was rejected by the Lord as the king of Israel because he did not seek God “after the due order” in the destruction of the Amalekites. (1 Samuel 15:22-23) The “due order” was to utterly destroy them, but he spared Agag the king and the best of the sheep and of the oxen.

GOD’S AUTHORITY IS SUPREME

Authority is the great regulator of our lives. People cannot survive without some “due order” to guide them. Without some standard of authority, chaos will result.

We are to practice in Christian work and worship only that which is authorized by the word of God:

“To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.” (Isaiah 8:20)

“If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God.” (1 Peter 4:11)

“And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another.” (1 Corinthians 4:6)

From these passages three things are clearly taught: (1) a failure to speak according to divine truth plunges one into moral and spiritual darkness; (2) when we speak of things eternal we should rely upon what God says about the matter; (3) we cannot go beyond the bounds of inspired revelation.

Frequently, men use other things other than God's Word as a standard of authority, thus they seek not God "after the due order."

The religion of one's father is often used as the sole basis of religious activity. If such had been acceptable, Paul would have been justified in his past actions. "And profited in the Jews religion above wrong my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers." (Galatians 1:14) He followed the religion of his ancestors, but he was wrong.

Conscience is used as the final authority with some. However, Paul lived in all good conscience (Acts 23:1) only to learn he was in error. Conscience can only be a safe guide if set by the proper regulator, which is God's word. (1 John 3:20-21)

The decisions of the majority do not determine the "due order" of things divine. The majority have ever been in the wrong. (Matthew 7:13-14)

Church councils, synods, and conferences are not our authority. Men often contradict themselves.

The Bible and the Bible only is our authority. It is a divinely given book. "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. (2 Peter 1:21) "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 Timothy 3:16-17)

In Revelation 22:18-19 the Lord said: "For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book." Obviously, God's condemnation rests upon any who would go beyond, fall short of, seek to alter, disregard or attempt to make substitution to His Word.

TWO KINDS OF AUTHORITY

In Matthew 21:23 Jesus was asked, "By what authority doest thou these things? And who gave thee this authority?" Jesus then said He would answer the question if they would answer His. "The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, if we shall say, from heaven; he will say unto us, why did ye not then believe him? But if we shall say, of men; we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet." (Matthew 21:25-26) Because of their dilemma the people decided to say nothing. "From heaven, or of men?" is the question that still must be answered. There are only two basic kinds of authority which are suggested by this question: (1) human; (2) divine.

The only way we can be subject to divine authority (God's due order) is to follow the New Testament as our pattern. God gave Noah a pattern for building the ark in Genesis. Noah followed that pattern. "Thus did Noah according to all that God commanded him, so did he." (Genesis 6:22)

God gave Moses a pattern for the building of the tabernacle. Moses was told, "And look that thou make them after their pattern, which was showed thee on the mount." (Exodus 25:40)

Likewise, God has given the pattern for building Christian character and the pattern for the church.

The fact that the New Testament is to be our pattern (our due order) is declared in numerous passages. Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not God: he that abideth in the teaching, the same hath both the Father and the Son.” (2 John 9) “I marvel that ye are so quickly removing from him that called you in the grace of Christ unto a different gospel; which is not another *gospel*: only there are some that trouble you and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach unto you any gospel other than that which we preached unto you, let him be anathema.” (Galatians 1:6-8)

It is God’s plan that we walk according to the divine pattern given in His Word. Apostasy comes when men no longer respect the will of God. For the time will come when they will not endure the sound doctrine; but, having itching ears, will heap to themselves teachers after their own lusts; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and turn aside unto fables.” (2 Timothy 4:3-4)

In view of the sobering fact that we shall be judged by heaven’s standard (John 12:48) ought we not “seek God after the due order”?

SEEKING GOD AFTER THE DUE ORDER

Lesson #4

THE RESTORATION OF NEW TESTAMENT CHRISTIANITY

Lesson text - Hebrews 8:5

INTRODUCTION

When Moses was given the details for the construction of the tabernacle, he was told to build it according to the pattern that had been given unto him on the mount. (Exodus 25:1-9) There is a pattern in the New Testament for the church. Only by following this pattern can we have first century Christianity in the twenty first century. It was because of the eager desire and sincere aim of good men to follow the pattern of the New testament that the Restoration movement of the nineteenth century became reality.

Efforts at Restoration must not be confused with the Reformation movement. The leaders of the Protestant Reformation had as their aim the reformation of the Roman Catholic Church, while those who took lead in the Restoration movement were motivated to restore the Testament church, not reform an apostasy.

This effort at restoration is well illustrated by an accident that happened in the gold rush days in California. A group of men became separated from their party and they thought they would die because of the lack of water. Suddenly they came upon a stream of sparkling water.

When they began to drink from it, they found it bitter to the taste. To say the least, they were disappointed. One man went up stream and found the fountain from which the stream was flowing. When he drank of the water it was sweet and good to the taste.

He couldn't understand how something so good and sweet at the fountain could be so bitter on down the stream. He soon discovered side streams that poured into the main stream that brought the bitter water and corrupted the stream. He took the party back to the beginning of the stream and there their thirst was quenched.

In the twenty first century, the religious world is woefully divided into several hundred different bodies, or churches, and many people wonder, "What is Christianity?" Millions of us believe in Christ; yet the power of Christianity is nullified by the divisions that exist. We must achieve the unity with which the church began. We must return to the fountain head of truth which is the Word of God and restore the church as it was before the waters were made bitter by human doctrines and creeds.

THE NEED FOR RESTORATION

The departure from the faith predicted by Christ and the apostles was characterized by six major departures.

- (1) A change in church government.
- (2) A change in the designation and descriptors of the church.
- (3) A change in the subject of baptism. Infants as well as believers were baptized.
- (4) A change in the form of baptism. Sprinkling was substituted for immersion.
- (5) A change in the creed of the church. Human creeds were introduced.
- (6) A change in the form of worship. Instrumental music was added to worship.

It must be pointed out that the leaders of the Reformation in Europe had no intention of forming denominational churches. Luther told his followers to call themselves Christians, not Lutherans. Unfortunately, the followers of these men did not respect their sentiments and they formed fellowships centered around the teachings of Luther, Wesley, Calvin, etc. This was the beginning of denominationalism. Rather than answer Jesus' prayer for unity (John 17:20-21), this only added fuel to the fires of division. There were several men who were not content with this and advocated a return to the ancient order. The close of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century were characterized by a number of simultaneous movements, which had as their aim the restoration of the New Testament church. Often these men worked independently of and unaware of the other's activity.

EARLY BEGINNINGS OF THE RESTORATION MOVEMENT

While for the most part of our study of the Restoration movement will be confined to activity in America, it should be noted that there were some important roots in the Old World. There were churches of Christ in the following places:

- (1) Morrison's Court, Glasgow, Scotland, in 1778.
- (2) Leith Walk, Edinburg, Scotland, in 1798.
- (3) Criccieth, North Wales (the home of David Lloyd George), in 1779.
- (4) Tubemore, Ireland, in 1807.
- (5) Manchester, England, in 1810.
- (6) Dublin, Ireland, in 1810.

There arose in America about the same time leaders who advocated a return to the New Testament pattern. Among the first in America to see the need for restoration of the New Testament church was James O'Kelley. He began preaching in 1775, as a lay preacher in the Episcopal church. His interest in religion was prompted by the

writings of John Wesley. Wesley advocated that the Bible was God's authoritative Word and was all sufficient for faith and practice.

These concepts appealed to O'Kelley, and he soon began to work as a traveling minister. In the year 1793, he went to the Baltimore conference of his church and declared that he could no longer hold to some of the things he had pledged himself to preach, because he could not find them in the Bible.

The history of that period records the fact that five thousand people went with him, endeavoring to take the Bible as their only guide. One of these men, Rice Haggard, stood up at the meeting in 1794 and pleaded that the Bible itself be accepted as their only creed. He also moved that they be known as Christians only. (1) Christ is the only head of the church, (2) The name Christian is the only acceptable name, (3) The Bible is the only rule of faith, (4) Christian character is the only test of church fellowship and (5) the right of private judgment is the privilege of all.

While O'Kelley was making headway in Virginia, Abner Jones, a Baptist, was reaching similar conclusions in New England. Jones became convinced that "sectarian names and human creeds should be abandoned." Soon Elias Smith joins Jones and as they worked together other preachers gave up denominationalism to have part in the undenominational undertaking.

In the year 1804, a man by the name Barton W. Stone and a half dozen other preachers felt the same way. They said, "Why can't all of us who believe in Christ be united?" They wondered why they couldn't take the Bible as their only guide. Stone's work was largely in Kentucky. A revival was conducted at Cane Ridge 1801. Over thirty thousand attended. This meeting marked the beginning of a movement to restore the New Testament church. As a result of Stone's work, many churches seeking to restore the ancient order were started in Ohio, Kentucky, and Tennessee.

Thomas Campbell, a member of the Seceder Presbyterian church, moved his family to America on May 13, 1807. Campbell advocated the principle: "Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent." In 1809, Thomas Campbell delivered what became known as the "Declaration and Address." In this address the Restoration plea was comprehensively proclaimed.

While Thomas Campbell was working on the principle of the Declaration and Address, his son, Alexander, in Glasgow, Scotland, was feeling a growing dissatisfaction with the Seceder church. Soon Alexander joined his father in the work. He also advocated the acceptance of the Bible as man's only rule of faith.

Walter Scott came to America in 1818 and soon came to realize that human standards in religion were wrong. He announced his intention of rejecting all authority but that of Christ. He became convinced that the gospel contained facts to be believed, commands to be obeyed, and promises to be enjoyed. He resolved to preach it that way. He began to preach: (1) faith to change the heart; (2) repentance to change the life; (3) baptism to change the state; (4) remission of sins to cleanse from guilt.

From studying the history of these men several conclusions begin to emerge. (1) They were contending for the all-sufficiency of the Word of God. (2) They were contending that Christian baptism is an immersion in water in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. (3) They were contending that believers were subjects of baptism. (4) They were contending that baptism was for the remission of past sin. (5) They were contending that in conversion the Holy Spirit operates through the Word and never without the Word of Truth. (6) They were contending that the organization of the church must be in accordance with the pattern found in the New Testament. (7) They were contending for the proper observance of the Lord's supper.

Many years ago, a farmer was plowing in his field when the plow became lodged on an object in the ground. Thinking that the plow had become entangled with a root, the farmer tried to remove the obstacle only to learn that it was a more difficult undertaking. It was not a root in the ground, but something like a stake that the plow had hit. He tried to remove the object but soon discovered that it went deep into the earth. There seemed to be some large structure buried there. Archaeologists were called in and they began to excavate the site of this structure. To their amazement, there was a building buried beneath the earth. It had been covered over some years before by a natural disaster. Frantically they removed the dirt and rubble that had hidden this building for perhaps hundreds of years. The building had once been some kind of temple or house of worship. An effort was made to remove all of the debris and restore the building to its original condition.

In a similar way, what men like O'Kelley, Jones, Stone, Campbell, and others attempted to do was unearth the New Testament church. They sought to remove all human creeds, human names and religious divisions that had obscured the church for many years and restore it to its original order.

Churches of Christ throughout the world are seeking to follow the pattern laid out in the New Testament. By speaking where the Bible speaks, by being silent where the Bible is silent, we can restore first century Christianity in the twenty first century.

SEEKING GOD AFTER THE DUE ORDER

Lesson #5

OUR PLEA AND HOW IT SHOULD AFFECT US

Lesson Text – 1 Peter 3:15

INTRODUCTION

The distinctive feature of the church of Christ is its endeavor to restore New Testament Christianity. Its plea is to restore the church of the New Testament. Churches of Christ throughout the world are calling upon honest, truth-seeking men and women to return to the Bible. We must “Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls” (Jeremiah 6:16). A failure to walk according to divine truth is to plunge into moral and spiritual darkness. “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isaiah 8:20). The apostle Peter wrote, “If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God.” (1 Peter 4:11) We must speak where the Bible speaks. We must be silent where the Bible is silent.

Churches of Christ have made the plea to restore the New Testament plan of salvation. The New Testament teaches that upon hearing the gospel one must believe in Christ. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:12-13). The scriptures further are found to teach that one must repent of his sins. “I tell you nay, but except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3).

One must also confess Christ before men. (Matthew 10:32-33) An example of this is to be found in Acts chapter eight where the man from Ethiopia said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (Acts 8:37). If the New Testament plan of salvation is restored, then baptism for the remission of sins must be taught and practiced. On the day of Pentecost Peter told those who inquired, "What shall we do?" to "repent and be baptized.... for the remission of sins." (Acts 2:38)

The work of the church must also be restored. Its work is threefold: (1) evangelism (Matthew 28:18-20); benevolence (Galatians 6:10); (3) edification (Acts 20:32).

Also, in restoring New Testament Christianity, Bible things must be called by Bible names. Individually, God's people are called Christians. (Acts 11:26; Acts 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16) Collectively, they are called "churches of Christ" (Romans 16:16), "church of God" (Acts 20:28), "house of God" (1 Timothy 3:15), and "church of the first born" (Hebrews 12:23).

We have not outgrown the plea to restore the New Testament church. We should endeavor to restore the church of the Bible in every generation. Inasmuch as we are never more than one generation away from apostasy, we must continue to call men back to the Bible. What effect should the plea to restore the church of the Bible have upon the church?

MOST STUDIOUS

If we are to speak where the Bible speaks then we must study the Bible. How can we "give an answer to every man" for our faith without study? (1 Peter 3:15) How can we "speak as the oracles of God" if we don't know what the oracles of God are? (1 Peter 4:11)

A little boy listened intently as his Sunday school teacher talked about Sodom and Gomorrah. He asked, "Did you say that Sodom and Gomorrah were cities? I thought they were husband and wife like Dan and Beersheba."

The only way to overcome a lack of knowledge of the Word is through study. "Study to show thyself approved unto God." (2 Timothy 2:15). "Search the scriptures." (John 5:29). On one occasion Jesus said, "Ye do err not knowing the scriptures nor the power of God." (Matthew 22:29).

Ignorance can destroy. God said, "My people are destroyed for a lack of knowledge." (Hosea 4:6). These people were Old Testament dropouts. Similarly, a lack of knowledge can bring destruction to God's people today.

Through rightly dividing the Word, we can learn that there are two main divisions of the Bible: (1) the Old Testament consisting of 39 books and (2) the New Testament consisting of 27 books. The Old Testament is divided into four main divisions: (1) law, (2) history (3) poetry, and (4) prophecy.

The New Testament is likewise divided into four selections: (1) biography or life of Christ, (2) history, (3) letters, and (4) prophecy. The Old Testament was abrogated when Christ died upon the cross. Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross." (Colossians 2:14). All of the blessings of salvation that men receive today are upon the terms of Christ's last will and testament. "And for this cause He is the mediator of the New Testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.

For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth.” (Hebrews 9:15-17). This explains why the thief on the cross was not told to be baptized. He lived and died before the will of Christ was effective.

We must understand that there are three ages of Bible history if we are to be effective students of the Word. The first age of Bible history is called the Patriarchal age. It lasted for some 2500 years, beginning with the creation and ending with the giving of the law at Mount Sinai. The second age, known as the Mosaical age, began with the giving of the Law of Moses and lasted up to the death of Christ on the cross. The third and final age, known as the Christian age, began with the death of Christ and will last until He comes again.

If, as members of the church of Christ, we are to present the restoration plea, we must have a good, working knowledge of the Bible.

BENEVOLENT MINDED

In seeing to restore the New Testament church, one is made keenly aware of the attitude of charity that existed among early disciples of the Lord. “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.” (Acts 2:44-45) We will never truly restore the church until we have restored the spirit of love and benevolence that characterized the Christians of the first century.

We are taught in the scriptures to help all men. “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.” (Galatians 6:10) It has been maintained by some that the only ones that can be assisted out of the church treasury are saints. This hardly could be the nature of the case. A collection was taken to carry to the poor saints in Judea (Acts 11:27-30). It was

distributed by the elders of the church, not only to the saints, but unto all men. “Whiles by the experiment of this ministration they glorify God for your professed subjection unto the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal distribution unto them, and unto all men.” (2 Corinthians 9:13)

God has always had a special concern for the poor and unfortunate. “He that despiseth his neighbor sins: but he that hath mercy on the poor: happy is he.” (Proverbs 14:21) Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble.” (Psalms 41:1) He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given will he pay him again.” (Proverbs 19:17)

We may restore the plan of salvation, worship, and other vital items of the New Testament church. But, unless we restore the attitude of benevolence and love that existed in the first century church, we have fallen short. A failure in this regard will result in our eternal ruin. “Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.” (Matthew 25:41-43)

FAITHFUL IN WORSHIP

In making the plea to restore the New Testament order of things, emphasis is placed upon weekly observance of the Lord’s Supper. This is based upon Christ’s command (Luke 22:19) and on apostolic example (Acts 20:7). It I also contended that one should engage in all other acts of worship such as singing, praying, teaching, and giving. (Ephesians 5:19; 1 Timothy 2:8; Acts 2:42; 1 Corinthians 15:1-2)

Of all people, Christians should have respect for the Lord's Day. (Revelation 1:10) There may be, at times, reason why one cannot attend a worship assembly such as sickness, work, etc. It should be understood that it is not a sin to miss a worship service, but it is a sin to neglect a worship period. "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." (Hebrews 10:25)

To neglect the worship of the Lord is sinful. If one person can willfully neglect the worship services, why can't all do so? Those who have been negligent should comply with the Lord's second law of pardon, namely repentance, confession and prayer. (Acts 8:13-24; James 5:16; 1 John 1:9)

A FINAL THOUGHT

There is a need to continue to make the plea, "Back to the Bible." it is good to speak where the Bible speaks. But we also need to do where the Bible says do.

SEEKING GOD AFTER THE DUE ORDER

Lesson #6

CHURCH LEADERSHIP

Lesson Text – 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13

INTRODUCTION

There is a great need for dynamic leadership in the twenty-first century. A growing world compels it. It is estimated that the world's population is in excess of seven billion souls. Also, the increase in crime and immorality demands good leadership. We live in the "do your own thing" age. This is the age of the new morality. We are plagued with many problems in America, but doubtless our greatest one is a moral problem. Furthermore, a decline in religious fervor necessitates good leadership. It was waning religious commitment that was a contributing factor in the fall of ancient Rome and those forces are at work in our own country today.

Every institution and organization is but the lengthened shadow of its leadership, and in no area is effective leadership needed more than in the church of our Lord. Poor leadership can have disastrous consequences. Isaiah wrote, "For the leaders of this people cause them err; and they that are led of them are destroyed." (Isaiah 9:16) Poor leadership can lead to digression. Paul warned the elders of Ephesus of this danger. "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." (Acts 20:28-30) In addition, it should be observed that poor leadership can lead the church to a dead end.

Jesus declared, "Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind, and if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch." (Matthew 15:14) The work of Christ's church has been hindered in many places because of ineffective leadership. It should also be pointed out that poor leadership can lead to hell and destruction. In his scathing rebuke of the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus pointed out the danger of poor leadership. "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves." (Matthew 23:15)

One concept of eldering is that elders are a ruling class in the church, much like a policeman, mayor, or governor. Another concept that is gaining in popularity is that elders have no authority – not even delegated authority. "Some teach that bishops actually possess no authority, that they do render a service to the church, but that they lead only by influence and example." (Virgil Poe, ANCHOR, 34).

A third concept is that elders are those God-appointed leaders who are charged to oversee the flock and must answer to God for their discharge of this duty.

In the New Testament, the men who are called elders are also referred to under different titles. They are called elders (Acts 20:17). They are called presbyters (1 Timothy 4:14). They are called overseers (Acts 20:28). They are called pastors (Ephesians 4:11). Incidentally, the preacher of a local congregation should not be called pastor unless he serves as one of the pastors or elders overseeing the flock. The elders are also called bishops (1 Timothy 3:1). They are referred to as shepherds (Acts 20:28).

The word "feed" in this passage means to shepherd. These six terms may be grouped into three pairs: (1) Elders and presbyters denoting experience. (2) Bishops and overseers denoting position. (3) Pastors and shepherds denoting the work to be done.

The work to be done by these men can be listed under three general headings.

(1) They are to exercise the oversight of the church (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2). This duty cannot be delegated to others with divine approval. The central idea in overseership is that of directing or ruling; and it is therefore the duty of the elders to rule over the congregation (1 Timothy 5:17). (2) They are to be shepherds to the flock. This is one of the tenderest, most beautiful and most intimate relationships which exists between the leaders and the congregation. "A good shepherd calleth his own sheep by name." (John 10:3) Eastern shepherds have phenomenal memories. In a flock of hundreds, they can call each sheep by name. One famous Bible scholar noted this practice: "Thousands of sheep and goats were grouped in dense, confused masses. The shepherd spaced in several directions. They called their sheep in shrill, peculiar calls. The sheep listened, recognized their master, and flowed as a stream towards their own shepherd." Also, a good shepherd "goeth before them." (John 10:4) A shepherd does not drive the sheep – he leads them. In going before the sheep, the shepherd is the first to meet the vicious beast and to discover and to point out the dangers to be avoided.

The test of a good sheep is to listen to its master's call and to learn his will. Jesus said, "They know his voice." (John 10:4) The sheep does not see the green pastures or still waters, but it knows they are there. A man once changed garments with a Jerusalem shepherd thinking he would deceive the sheep. But the sheep followed the shepherd's voice, and not his garments. "A stranger will they not follow." (John 10:5) The duties of those who serve as the under-shepherds of the Christ are to "feed" and "tend" the flock. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, (Vol. I, pages 562, 665) points out that the word *Poimaino*, translated "feed" and "tend" embraces more than feeding. It includes all that is involved in the office or work of a shepherd, such as guiding, guarding, folding, and feeding.

(3) A third phase of the work of elders is that of teaching those under their care. (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:9) If good leadership is important, so is good fellowship. This is the emphasis of 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13.

KNOW THEM

In this part of the text, Paul is suggesting that we take knowledge of, recognize and appreciate our elders. But what is there we should “know” about them? We should know the responsibility of their office. The sacred penman wrote, “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give an account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.” (Hebrews 13:17) From this passage we see that elders “watch for your souls.” Like a shepherd watches over his sheep and becomes alarmed when one wanders from the fold, elders watch over the flock of God and become concerned when one of the flock strays away. Good elders heed Solomon’s advice. “Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks, and look well to thy herds.” (Proverbs 27:23) We further learn from the passage in Hebrews that elders “must give account.” They will be held accountable for the work they do in tending and overseeing the church.

Another thing that we should “know” about elders is their authority. Paul put it this way: “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.” (Acts 20:28) Elders do not exercise authority in matters of doctrine. Matters of doctrine have already been settled in heaven and no man has the authority to tamper, alter, pervert, or change that which God has spoken. (Revelation 22:18-19)

What have elders been authorized to do? (1) They are authorized to feed the flock. (Acts 20:28) (2) They are authorized to watch. (Hebrews 13:17) (3) They are authorized to oversee. (Acts 20:28) (4) They are authorized to admonish. (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13) (5) By example, we know elders are authorized to use collected funds. (Acts 11:30) This shows that churches can cooperate or work together.

WHICH LABOR AMONG YOU

Elders do not serve as a board of directors, but theirs is a work to perform. In citing the qualifications of elders, the apostle wrote, “If a man desires the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.” It is a “good work.” More young men need to prepare themselves for this “good work.” More young women need to prepare themselves so as to qualify their husbands for the eldership.

AND ARE OVER YOU

Elders are “over” us and not “under” us. This fact is pointed out three times in the New Testament. First, in Acts 20:28, Paul, in speaking of the elders said, “...over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers...” Then, in the 1 Thessalonian letter, he shows elders are “over” us. The third place this is pointed out is in Hebrews 13:17. “...obey them that have the rule over you...” The word “obey” in this passage means “be persuaded by your leaders.”

Men should be led to obey elders through persuasion and compulsion – not mere demand of the law. So it is clear. Elders are “over” us, not “under” us. Yet, some would seek to dictate to the elders and tell the elders what to do. It is a weak eldership that is swayed by a pressure group. The shepherd is over the flock, not the flock over the shepherd.

However, elders are not “over” us as lords or dictators. The apostle Peter strikes a deathblow to such an idea. “The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock.” (1 Peter 5:1-3). No, elders are not to lord over the church. The shepherd does not drive the sheep, but they

follow him. Elders, not only through the decisions that they make, but by the life they live, point the way. They are out front in their example (1 Peter 5:3), in their Bible knowledge (Titus 1:9), and in their faithfulness and dedication. (Matthew 6:33)

The sphere of their leadership is “in the Lord” or in the church. Elders can exercise the oversight only of the affairs of their local congregation. Peter wrote, “Feed the flock of God, which is among you...” Hence, this would prohibit the elders of one congregation taking the oversight of and making decisions affecting the affairs of another congregation.

ESTEEM THEM

When Paul wrote in the Thessalonian epistle that we should “esteem” elders, he meant that we should respect them. Unfortunately, all church members and even some preachers do not “esteem” or respect elders. There are perhaps some plausible reasons that some men are not respected as elders. One possible reason being that a man may not be worthy of respect. If a man does not live a Christ-like life, he is not worthy of being “esteemed” as an elder. Jesus said, “Let your light so shine as before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father, which is in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16) If an elder’s Christian light has gone out, he will not be respected. Furthermore, if a man does not have control of his domestic affairs, he will have great difficulty in being respected by the church.

In giving the qualifications of elders, Paul wrote, “One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; For if a man knows not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?” (1 Timothy 3:4-5)

But another reason that some church members do not respect elders is that they refuse to submit to the authority of the elders. It is a serious thing to reject the authority of elders. The Hebrew epistle is as clear as the noonday sun: “Obey them that have rule over you, and submit yourselves.” (Hebrews 13:17)

When we reject the leadership God has provided, we reject the leadership and authority of God! In the Old Testament, as is recorded in Numbers 16, Korah, Dathan and Abiram, with two hundred and fifty princes who were men of renown, “gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron.” They accused Moses of being a dictator and lord over them. They said, “Ye take too much upon you...wherefore then, lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the Lord?” (Numbers 16:3) What were they doing? They were rejecting the leadership of Moses, God’s appointed leader over the people. Moses challenged these men to come the next day with their censors before the Lord and let the Lord settle the matter. Because of the attitude of Korah and his cohorts, the Lord said, “Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment.” (Numbers 16:21) Moses and Aaron said, “Shall one man sin, and wilt thou be wroth with all the congregation?” (Number 16:22) The Lord then instructed all the people to separate themselves from “these wicked men and touch nothing of theirs, lest ye be consumed in all their sins.” (Numbers 16:26) Moses then challenged Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. “Hereby ye shall know that the Lord hath sent me to do all these works; for I have not done them of mine own mind. If these men die the common death of all men...then the Lord hath not sent me.” (Numbers 16:28-29)

Moses was simply saying this is the way to prove whether I am God’s appointed leader. On the other hand, Moses said, “If the Lord make a new thing, and the earth open her mouth and swallow them up... then ye shall understand that these men have provoked the Lord.” (Numbers 16:30) After Moses ended speaking, the “earth opened her mouth and swallowed them up and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods. They, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit and the earth closed upon them. And they perished from among the congregation.” (Numbers 16:32-33) The principle is clearly understood – WHEN WE REBEL AGAINST THE LEADERSHIP GOD HAS PLACED OVER US, WE REBEL AGAINST GOD.

Also, you will recall when ancient Israel came to Samuel, their judge, and said, “Give us a king to judge us,” that the thing displeased Samuel. (1 Samuel 8:6) Samuel felt a personal rejection, but God assured him by saying, “They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me that I should not reign over them.” (1 Samuel 8:7) In rejecting the leadership God had provided for them, they had rejected God!

On one occasion David had the opportunity to take the life of Saul, king of Israel. Saul had on numerous occasions attempted to take the life of young David, but had failed. Saul learned that David, his rival, was in the wilderness of Engedi and when Saul came to the sheepcotes, there was a cave and he stopped to rest. David and his men were nearby and while Saul slept, David had his chance to put an end to the rivalry between Saul and him. David was able to get so close to Saul that he “cut off the skirt of Saul’s robe privily.” (1 Samuel 24:4) But why did David not kill him? Here is what David said: “The Lord forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the Lord’s anointed, to stretch forth mine hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the Lord.” (1 Samuel 24:6) David refused to harm Saul, his most avowed enemy, because Saul was the leader that God had anointed over Israel.

Again, it is good to be reminded that when we do not respect the authority of elders and rebel against their decisions, we are rebelling against God. Sometimes there are those who pit their judgment against that of the eldership and create strife and division within the local congregation simply because they do not respect the authority of elders.

Paul tells us not only to esteem our elders, but to “esteem them HIGHLY. But not only “highly,” but “VERY HIGHLY.” And the reason for this esteem is for their “work’s sake.” It is sad that some children hear their parents criticize the elders, but never esteem them.

We are further admonished to “esteem them very highly in LOVE.” We should love all Godly elders as well as all Christians.” (Hebrews 13:1)

BE AT PEACE

In this part of the text under consideration, Paul suggests that we “be at peace among ourselves.” When all of the elders are over all of the work of all the church, all of the time, there will be peace. A united eldership is essential for a united church. Some elderships are divided and consequently, the church is divided. How it must grieve the God of heaven to see the body of his Son torn by strife and division. God expects his people to be at peace. (Psalms 133:1; Ephesians 4:3) But it takes big men to “keep” unity in the church.

Every member of the church must be a promoter of peace and harmony. Paul wrote to the Roman brethren, “If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.” (Romans 12:18) Again he wrote, “Follow after the things which make for peace....” (Romans 14:19) But what are the things that “make for peace?” First of all, a recognition of the authority of God and elders would make for peace. In the second place, the possession of an unselfish spirit would make for peace in the church. (Philippians 2:4). Third, the practice of the golden rule would make for peace in the kingdom of God (Matthew 7:12) In the fourth place, returning good for evil will promote peace in the church. (Romans 12:20) Finally, the possession of a forgiving spirit will make for peace among the people of God.

SEEKING GOD AFTER THE DUE ORDER

Lesson #7

THE MISSION OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

Lesson Text: Matthew 28:18-20

INTRODUCTION

A certain preacher had a habit of always beginning his sermon by asking, “Why are we here, Why are we here?” Once, he was invited to speak at an insane asylum. As he stood before the audience, he forgot where he was and began his speech in his customary way. “Why are we here, why are we here?” he asked. One old man in the back stood up and replied, “We don’t know why you are here, preacher, but we’re here because we aren’t all there.” We need to ask ourselves in a serious vain, “Why am I here?” What is our real mission in life? What is the mission of the Lord’s church?

WHAT THE MISSION IS NOT

Negatively speaking, the mission of the church is not to enhance social prestige. While it is true that the church should be well spoken of in the community (Acts 2:47), it should never be our aim to compromise the truth in order to be socially accepted. Neither is it the mission of the church to entertain. Many denominational churches have become commercialized and entertainment conscious. For example, one church advertised “Karate For Christ” as a special gimmick to draw a crowd. The mission of the church is not to preach a social gospel. While we are concerned about the material needs of the world, it is not the mission of the church to campaign for civil rights or to engage in political issues.

WHAT THE MISSION IS

It was Paul Harvey who commented that Jesus did not come into the world to get people out of the slums, but he came to get the slums out of the people. Jesus came into the world to save the lost. Prior to his birth, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph and said, “And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for He shall save His people from their sins.” In Luke 19:10 we are told, “For the Son of man is come to seek and save that which was lost.” No man will ever be like Jesus Christ unless we follow His example. (1 Peter 2:21) Therefore, as members of his body, we must “seek” and “save” those who are lost. This is our mission.

We need to recapture the zeal that characterized the early church in soul winning. From a study of the book of Acts, we learn that the early church was a growing church. For instance, look at the continual, daily progress the church made.

“And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:47).

“Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand” (Acts 4:4).

“And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women” (Acts 5:14).

“And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly...” (Acts 6:7).

Have you ever wondered why the church in Jerusalem grew so rapidly? It wasn't because they had a beautiful, air-conditioned building in which to meet. Nor was it because they had hired a good preacher to work with them. The key to the success of the early church is summed up in Acts 5:42. “And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.” They were working every day to convert men to Christ, the hope of the world. (John 14:6)

There are only two kinds of evangelism in the Bible. Both are mentioned in Acts 5:42. (1) Mass evangelism. ("Daily in the temple") This corresponds to pulpit preaching. (2) Personal evangelism ("in every house"). Personal Evangelism is one person talking to another person about his need for Christ, with the view of bringing him to a decision. To be truly evangelistic, we must be for both, for mass evangelism and personal evangelism.

After his triumphant resurrection, Jesus gave the worldwide commission to His disciples. He said, "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." (Matthew 28:18-20) This has been called the Great Commission. It is truly a Great Commission because its scope includes the whole world. It is great because of the planning behind it. It was in God's eternal purpose. (Ephesians 3:8-11) This commission is great because of the message it heralds. In obeying this commission, we must preach Christ and Him crucified. (1 Corinthians 5:1-4) Yes, this is a "Great Commission." This commission, according to Mark's gospel is, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." (Mark 16:15-16) We are very strong on verse 16, which teaches the necessity of baptism. But what about verse 15? This verse teaches the necessity of teaching and preaching the gospel to others.

The early church carried out the Great Commission in less than thirty years. Jesus gave the marching order to "go teach all nations" in A.D. 33. Paul wrote in A.D. 62 that the gospel "was preached to every creature, which is under heaven." (Colossians 1:23)

WHY WE SHOULD BE SOUL WINNERS

Inasmuch as the Great Commission is binding upon all Christians, it behooves us to do all within our power to convert men to Jesus Christ because he is the only Savior men have. He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me." (John 14:6)

John Newton is reported to have said, "I am an old man and I don't remember many things. But I remember two things: I am a great sinner and Christ is a great Savior." Have we been convinced that men will be lost eternally without Christ?

Furthermore, a deep conviction of the value of man's soul will cause us to carry out the Great Commission. How valuable is a soul? Usually we quote Matthew 16:26 where Jesus said, "For what is a man profited, if he should gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" "Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" Of course this does show the value of a man's soul. It is worth more than all of the world. But if you want to really measure its worth in God's eyes, read about the death of Christ upon the cross. The cross was the cruelest form of death known to man. The cross was the gallows of Jesus' day; the electric chair of His age. Men were known to have lasted hours on the cross until they died of the scorching heat or heartbreaking suffering. Yet, Jesus suffered the agony of the cross because of the value God placed upon the soul of man. Every stripe Jesus received, every thorn pressed into His precious brow, every nail driven into His body was an expression of God's evaluation of the soul's value.

On one occasion Peter asked Christ, "Behold, we have forsaken all and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?" Peter wanted to know what reward he would receive for his service. Jesus answered by promising blessings in this life and in the life to come. (Matthew 19:29) It is not an inferior motive to serve God for reward. If we do all we can to carry out the Great Commission "What shall we have therefore?" Soul winning does not pay much in material benefits or reward. If it did more people would be involved in this work. Suppose you were paid one thousand dollars for each person you

converted. Would that change your attitude? Now don't get excited. No one will pay you one thousand dollars for each convert, but God on high will give you far more. "And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever." (Daniel 12:3)

Another incentive for carrying out the Great Commission would be the horrors of a devil's hell. The fact that hell is real is the most horrible and concrete fact in all of the world. The rich man in Luke 16 cried and said, "I am tormented in this flame" (Luke 16:24). He learned the hard way that hell is real. If God's people really were convinced that there is a hell to shun, they would be far more active in His service, trying to deter those who are headed that way.

Two men met on the street. They had been classmates in high school. One was an avowed atheist and the other a preacher. They talked for a while about old times and then the atheist asked the preacher, "Do you believe in God?" the preacher replied, "Yes." He then asked, "Do you believe the Bible is the word of God and that all who do not obey it will go to hell?" The preacher again replied by saying, "Yes, I do." then I must call you a liar," said the atheist. "For if you really believed in God and really believed that I would go to hell if I didn't obey His word, you would be talking to me about my soul."

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE PRACTICE OF PERSONAL EVANGELISM?

In the second century the church became embroiled in a theological controversy. The third century saw a strong growth of apostasy. Then ensued what is known as the Dark Ages. This period of darkness separates us from any direct contact with New Testament Christianity. It is our strong belief that the pure gospel was still taught and believed, even during the period of darkness. We are not interested in tracing the church back through the centuries; we are only interested in restoring the New Testament church.

The reformation of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was limited in its scope. It was primarily a theological reformation. A return to the study of God's word was advocated. Mass evangelism and personal evangelism were not stressed. A little over two hundred years ago, John Wesley revived the concept of mass evangelism. It has come from protracted meetings and brush arbors to modern day revivals and gospel meetings. Personal evangelism has not fully made its re-entry into Christianity. When we restore personal evangelism, we will have uncovered the life-giving element of the church of the first century.

HOW TO HAVE AN EVANGELISTIC CHURCH

Since it is the mission of the church to execute the Great Commission, we should be vitally concerned about how we can become and remain a soul-winning congregation. How can we restore evangelism to the church?

We can become soul-winners when we get our priorities right. We must learn to put first things first. Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, taught, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." (Matthew 6:33) This clearly shows that Christ and His church must be first in our lives. We will never become the evangelistic church Christ died for as long as we allow other things of less importance to deter us from the greatest business in the world. We must be about our Father's business.

We can become soul winners when we have our hearts right with God. David is described in the Bible as a man after God's own heart, but David sinned. He committed murder and adultery. He was, however, penitent for his sins.

In his penitential Psalm in chapter fifty-one he said, "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin." David realized he had sinned and wanted God's forgiveness. He continued, "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a

right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.” (Psalms 51:10-12) David is asking God to cleanse his heart and to restore the “joy of thy salvation.” David had lost the joy of his salvation.

You cannot lose the joy of your salvation without losing your salvation. David then made a promise to God. “Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee.” (Psalms 51:13) Until men get their hearts right with God, they are not spiritually fit to teach and convert others.

Then again, we can have soul-winning churches when leaders lead the way. It has been said that every institution is but the lengthened shadow of its leadership. This being true, no church will ever be any more concerned about the lost than is its leadership. Preachers, elders, and deacons should lead the way. The good example of a faithful leadership can inspire other to enter the harvest field. May God help us to win the world to Christ in our generation.

On one occasion, an artist was employed to paint a picture of a dead church. Some thought he would paint a picture of a run-down building, much in need of repair, with broken windows and an unkept yard. However, when the picture was finished and unveiled, to the astonishment of all, he had painted the picture of a stately building with a large steeple looming high overhead. It was a magnificent building. Upon closer examination of the picture, you can see that the front door of the building is open. In the foyer of the building is a small table. Across the front of the box are the words Mission Work. Across the slot on top of the box where you drop the money in is a cobweb. Any church that has lost sight of its mission is a dead church. May each one of us pledge himself to do his part in carrying out the great work God has placed in our hands.

SEEKING GOD AFTER THE DUE ORDER

Lesson #8

MUSIC IN WORSHIP

Lesson Text – Ephesians 5:19

INTRODUCTION

One of the first things one notices when visiting a worship service of the Lord's church is the absence of mechanical instruments of music. And the question is often asked, "Why don't you use instruments of music in your worship?" Let it be noted that the absence of a mechanical instrument is not just an effort to be odd or peculiar. Neither is their lack of use in Christian worship from a lack of funds to purchase them. Churches of Christ do not refrain from the use of mechanical instruments in worship because others use it. The scope of this lesson will be to show from a scriptural standpoint why we do not use the instrument in our worship.

THE SCRIPTURES SPEAK

Every New Testament reference to music designates singing.

"And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the Mount of Olives." Matthew 26:30

"And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the Mount of Olives." Mark 14:26

“And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them.” Acts 16:25

“And that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy; as it is written, for this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles and sing unto thy name.” Romans 15:9

“What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.” 1 Corinthians 14:15

“Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.” Ephesians 5:19

“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.” Colossians 3:16

“I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee.” Hebrews 2:12

“Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray. Is any merry? Let him sing psalms.” James 5:13

We would have to go beyond the bound of inspired revelation in order to introduce a mechanical instrument into worship. We do well to remember that, “Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God.” (2 John 9) Paul exhorted the brethren of Corinth not to go beyond that which is written.” (1 Corinthians 4:6)

WALKING BY FAITH

It is impossible to walk by faith, and at the same time, use mechanical music in worship. Man's relationship to God involves the issues of faith. "But without faith, it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." (Hebrews 11:6) In matters of religion, man must walk by faith. "For we walk by faith, not by sight". (2 Corinthians 5:7) Man walks by faith when, and only when, he does that which God has authorized in His word. "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." (Romans 10:17)

Inasmuch as there is not a single passage of scripture authorizing the use of mechanical instruments in our worship, it cannot be done out of faith.

BIBLICAL AUTHORITY

The Bible teaches or authorizes in four ways: (1) Statement of fact. Genesis 1:1 is an example of this type of authorization. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." (2) Direct command. Mark 16:15 is an example of a direct command. "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." A direct command may be generic or specific in nature. A generic command is a command where the Lord has told us to do a thing, but has not specified any particular way of doing it. In Mark 16:15, "go" is generic since we are not told how to go. We can walk, ride, or fly and still be going. A specific command is a command where the Lord has told us to do a certain thing in a specific way.

In Exodus 25:31 Moses commanded the people to make a "candlestick of gold." The word "gold" is specific as to the metal to be used. Brass or silver would not do. A command may be both generic and specific. For example, "go" is specific in Mark 16:15 as to what is to be done, but is generic as to how the going is to be done. (3) Approved

apostolic example. For an example to be binding, there must be a background command behind the example. Acts 20:7 is an approved example for observing the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week. Luke 22:19 is the command that enforces the example. (4) Necessary inferences. There are inescapable deductions from statements in the Bible that are not commanded. For example, water is never commanded for baptism, yet we conclude that it is implied that water is the element to be used. (Acts 10:47-48; John 3:5; Ephesians 5:26)

There is not a direct statement of fact, direct command either generic or specific, approved example or inference from scripture that authorizes the use of a mechanical instrument in worship.

We must speak where the Bible speaks, and we must remain silent where the Bible is silent. (1 Peter 4:11; Galatians 1:6-9) We must exclude those things not taught in the scriptures.

When God commanded Noah to build the ark of gopher wood, that specific command excluded all other kinds of wood. (Genesis 6:14) Pine or oak would not do. Noah used what God specified. In Genesis 6:22 we read "Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he."

The command to make golden candlesticks excludes any other kind of metal. (Exodus 25:31) If God has said to make candlesticks of metal, any metal would have been acceptable.

If God had commanded His people to make music, that would have been a generic command and all kinds of music, both vocal and mechanical, would have been acceptable. But God used the specific word "sing" which would exclude playing a mechanical instrument.

TESTIMONY OF SCHOLARSHIP

Some often boast that they are not concerned with what the scholars say; but we are indebted to scholars for the English translation of the Bible. How can we say we don't care about scholarship?

There is unity among scholars that the early Christians did not use mechanical instruments of music. Dr. Curt Sachs of Columbia University, an eminent musicologist has said, "All ancient Christian music was vocal."

Lyman Coleman, an outstanding Presbyterian scholar wrote, "...it is generally admitted that the primitive Christians employed no instrumental music in their religious worship" (The Primitive Church, page 370-371). Emil Nauman said, "There can be no doubt that originally the music of the divine service was everywhere entirely of a vocal nature" (This History of Music, Vol. 1, page 177). Joseph Bingham, of the Church of England, in his book, Antiquities of The Church says, "Music in the church is as ancient as the apostles, but instrumental music is not."

Dr. Frederick Louis Ritter said, "We have no real knowledge of the exact character of the music which formed a part of the religious devotion of the first Christian congregations. It was, however, purely vocal" (The History of Music From The Christian Era To The Present, page 28). John Calvin, in his commentary on the 23rd Psalm said, "Musical instruments in celebrating the praises of God would be no more suitable than the burning of incense, the lighting of lamps, and the restoration of the other shadows of the law." Adam Clarke, noted Methodist preacher, puts it in these words, "Music, as a science, I esteem and admire. But instruments of music in the house of God, I abominate and abhor" (Clarke's Commentary, Vol. 1, page 686).

OBJECTIONS CONSIDERED

In support of the use of instrumental music some say, "It was used in the Old Testament." In answer to this objection, it should be pointed out that men are no longer amenable to the Old Testament. Paul wrote, "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross" (Colossians 2:14). If men were still subject to the Old Testament, they would be under obligation to obey "the whole law." (Galatians 5:3) Hence, there would be the duty to offer such things as burnt offerings (Psalms 66:13), which involved the offering of animals. (Psalms 66:15) Many things were practiced under the Old Testament law, which were never commanded or endorsed in the New Testament.

When Christ died upon the cross, He abrogated the Old Testament law and gave His last will and testament. (Matthew 26:28; Hebrews 9:15-17) The authority for that which is to be practiced in work and worship in the Christian age is found in the New Testament and it is silent as to the authorization of instruments of music.

A frequent argument made in favor of the instrument is this: "The Bible does not say you cannot use it." We are not told not to put milk and cornbread on the Lord's table, but they are excluded because the elements to be used are specified. We are not told that it is wrong to count beads as a religious service, but this practice is excluded because Christ is our mediator.

There is not a passage in the Bible that says a man could not be the head of the church. But since Ephesians 1:22-23 teaches that Christ is the head of the church, that would exclude anyone else. There is not a verse that says, "Thou shalt not use mechanical instruments." But by the fact that singing is specified (Ephesians 5:19), playing an instrument is excluded.

Someone may say, "There will be instruments in heaven, so why not have them in the church?" First of all, Paul taught in 1 Corinthians 15:50 that "flesh and blood

cannot inherit the kingdom of God.” And as there will be no literal bodies in heaven, why should we think there will be literal instruments of music there? This particular argument is based on Revelation 14:2-3. “And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and the voice which I heard was as the voice of harpers harping with their harps: and they sing as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four living creatures and the elders: and no man could learn the song save the hundred and forty and four thousand, even they that had been purchased out of the earth.”(ASV) Was it thunder, which was heard? No. It was a voice “as” thunder. This signified volume. Was it many waters, which was heard? No. It was a voice “as” many waters. This signified rhythm. Was it harpers, which was heard? No. It was a voice as harpers harping with their harps. This signified melody. That which John heard was “a voice” and that voice was “singing a new song.”

Still another defense that is made is that “it is just an aid to worship like a songbook, tuning fork, lights, or a meetinghouse.” When a songbook is used, you are still only singing. When a tuning fork is used to pitch a song, you are still only singing. The command to assemble necessitates a place to assemble. And thus, if a building is bought or rented for the purpose of worship, you are only obeying the command to worship. When a mechanical instrument is used you have added an element to the worship. Playing has been added. A mechanical instrument constitutes an addition rather than an aid.

But we are told, “The word psallo in Ephesians 5:19 means to pluck the strings of an instrument.” One hundred forty-eight of the world’s finest scholars in translating the Greek into our English New testament rendered the word “sing.” The word psallo means to pluck, to touch, to cause to vibrate, but Paul says to “psallo with the heart.” There the instrument is named – the heart. If psallo means to play a mechanical instrument, then we must all equip ourselves with some instrument or else be in disobedience to God.

Man must be content to worship God in song. God has spoken. Man must obey.

SEEKING GOD AFTER THE DUE ORDER

Lesson #9

WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES ON GIVING

Lesson Text – 1 Peter 4:10

INTRODUCTION

Our lesson text is perhaps one of the greatest verses in the Bible on the subject of stewardship. This one verse presents to us in vivid detail the four pillars in the temple of Christian stewardship. First of all, it teaches that the obligation of stewardship belongs to and devolves upon “everyone.” This verse further shows that the ministry of stewardship must be according to the gifts received. In addition, we learn that the scope of leadership takes in all the “manifold grace of God.” Finally, we are called upon and challenged by this verse to be good stewards.

There is an Old Testament passage, which teaches the principles of Christian stewardship. In the Song of Solomon, we read in chapter eight, verse 11, “Solomon had a vineyard at Baalhamon.” He let out the vineyard unto keepers. Everyone for the fruit thereof was to bring a thousand pieces of silver.” The language of this verse is oriental, yet the lesson is cosmopolitan. In every nation there must be some system of economics. For a prosperous condition there must be a division of labor. The land must be cultivated. The people must have food. So a wise ruler farms out his land to husbandmen, who are obligated to return a fair portion of the produce.

This is what Solomon had done with his vineyard. All of this had its counterpart in the church. Every man is a steward entrusted with God’s property. A little boy hit the nail on the head when he said, “Stewardship means that life is like a great ship loaded

with rich cargo to be delivered to many places. God is the owner of the ship and its cargo and I am the captain.”

A steward is defined in Webster’s New World Dictionary as “one who acts as a supervisor or administrator, as of finances and property, for another or others.” The word steward as it is used in the New Testament is “one to whom a thing is committed.” In the Pulpit Commentary we read, “A steward is not an owner of the property. He is the responsible administrator of a trust” (Vol. 22, page 188).

It should be of vital interest to every Christian as to how we can be good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

THE RIGHT ATTITUDE TOWARD STEWARDSHIP

Success or failure in any field of endeavor depends largely upon one’s attitude. It was Solomon who wrote, “As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7). Someone has said, “Our attitude determines our altitude.” I believe that is so true. We will never exceed our attitudes. It is attitude that keeps many people from having a clear understanding of stewardship. Brother N.B. Hardeman reportedly said, “The reception of any truth depends upon the attitude one has toward it.”

This may account for the many ugly remarks we hear about such a subject as this. When the preacher teaches a lesson on giving, some covetous brothers will be heard to say, “All they ever talk about is money,” or “All the preacher ever preaches on is giving.

One man was heard to say, “I don’t care what they say, I’m not giving anymore.” I have never known of a person who had the right attitude toward stewardship who objected to sermons on the subject.

We are critical of our religious friends because of the attitude they have toward the truth on the church or baptism or the Lord's Supper. We need to stop and take a long hard look at our attitude toward the subject of stewardship. When we do, I believe we will understand why we are not growing as we should. I also believe we will understand why we are not preaching the gospel to the whole world. We will never be right with God until we get our attitude right toward stewardship. E.A. Hungerford said, "It is not altogether unlikely that a wrong attitude toward money stands between more people and their right relationship to God than any one thing" (Rust As A Witness, by V.P. Black, page 75).

This leads us to ask the question, "What should my attitude be toward stewardship?" First of all, if my attitude is right, I will recognize that God is the great proprietor of all. Everything belongs to God by right of creation. Notice these verses and observe what belongs to God.

The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein" (Psalms 24:1).

"Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezekiel 18:4).

"For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field are mine" (Psalm 50:10-11).

The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts" (Haggai 2:8).

There is nothing that man can give to God that He did not already own. Everything that man has in his possession is a gift from the benevolent hand of Jehovah.

The Bible teaches, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." (James 1:17) I once heard a story that illustrates the attitude that so many people have toward their possessions.

A certain preacher noticed a little girl in a department store with her nose pressed up against the glass at a candy counter. The child was in rags and dirty. It was obvious that she longed for some of the chocolate candy that her eyes were fixed upon. The preacher gave the salesclerk a quarter and instructed the clerk to give the little girl some of the candy. When the girl received the bag of candy, at once she began to stuff her mouth full.

Oh, how she was enjoying it. Then the preacher asked if he might have a piece of the candy. Immediately the little girl clutched the bag and ran out of the store shouting, "It's mine, it's mine!" You may say the girl is an ingrate, but let us put the spotlight where it belongs. We talk about "our" money, "our" house, "our" car, "our" farm, etc. and fail to realize that it all belongs to God.

Also, if my attitude is right toward stewardship, I will cultivate a hatred for covetousness. Jesus warned of this terrible sin. "Take heed and beware of covetousness." (Luke 12:15) One reason that covetousness is such a dangerous sin is that it is so deceitful. A person can be eaten up with it and not be aware of it. Covetousness is to the soul what cancer is to the body. A covetousness man was overheard to say in a doctor's office, "I made \$55,000 last year and I give \$8.00 or \$10.00 every time I go to church." This man doubtless believed that he was making a great contribution. How many are there in the Lord's church who are not giving as they ought because of the sin of covetousness?

Furthermore, if my attitude is right toward stewardship, I will give God my best. God has never been satisfied with less than man's best in any age of the world. In the Old Testament God was repulsed by the lame, sickly offerings of the Jews. "Behold, what a weariness is it! And ye have snuffed at it, saith the Lord of hosts; and ye brought that which was torn, and the lame, and the sick; thus ye brought an offering: should I accept this of your hand? saith the Lord." (Malachi 1:13) God refused to accept the offerings of the Jews when they failed to give their best and He will not accept our offerings today unless we are giving Him our best. Many members of the church spend all their money for self and give the Lord some of the scraps that are left over. We need to realize that God will not accept our scraps. He wants and deserves our best.

THE NEED FOR FAITHFUL STEWARDSHIP

Someone may wonder, "Why should I be a good steward?" One reason for being a faithful steward is because it is commanded. In 1 Corinthians 4:2 Paul wrote, "Moreover it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful." If there were no other reason for me to be a faithful steward, this one reason should be sufficient. However, another reason to be a good steward is in order to prove our love for the Lord. One may give and not love, but you cannot love and not give.

When we give to the Lord, we prove the sincerity of our love. (2 Corinthian 8:8) A man once bought himself a new suit and a new pair of shoes. He began to think how much he had spent on himself and decided he ought not to go home without buying his wife something. He stopped at a dry goods store and bought her a dress for \$1.98. He carried it home and said, "Here honey, this is how much I love you." How true to life. This is the way we often treat the Lord. We spend what we want on self and give the Lord a tip and say, "Here Lord, this is how much I love you."

We also are to be good stewards because this is the way to lay up treasure in heaven. In Matthew 6:19-21 Jesus said, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon

earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” Since there are no pockets in a shroud, we cannot carry our money with us when we die. But we can send it on ahead by laying our treasures up in heaven.

It is imperative that we be good stewards because this is the only way to provide funds for the work of the church. It is the work of the church to preach the gospel to the lost world. (Mark 16:15) It takes preaching to convert the lost world. (Romans 10:13-17; 1 Corinthians 1:21) And since it takes preaching to preach the gospel to the lost world, preachers have a right to be supported to do the work of preaching. Notice these verses.

“Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel” (1 Corinthians 9:14).

“I robbed other churches, taking wages of them, to do you service” (1 Corinthians 11:8).

“Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things” (Galatians 6:6).

With less than one tenth of one percent of the world’s population, members of the New Testament church, how could anyone object to supporting adequately those who preach the gospel? It is also the work of the church to help the needy. (Galatians 6:10; James 1:27)

If we are interested in the church and its program of work, we will willingly invest our time, talent, and money in it and its work. The church that no longer is in need of money is a church that is dead. As long as we are an active, alive, and awake church, it will take faithfulness in stewardship to carry on its work.

HOW TO GIVE

No man is giving scripturally until he is giving liberally. In Romans 12:8 Paul wrote, "He that giveth, let him do it with liberality." Someone may ask, "But how much is liberal?" That is a good question and it deserves an honest answer. Liberality depends upon a number of factors.

Our ability determines our liberality. Some have a greater ability to give than do others. For example, here is a man who earns \$100.00 per week and he gives \$15.00 to the Lord. Here is another man who earns \$500.00 per week and \$15.00 to the Lord. It doesn't take a person with a high IQ to know that one of these men gave liberally and the other did not. Liberality also is determined by present needs in the kingdom. The time may come as it did in New Testament days, that we will need to sell all we have to help one another.

Scriptural giving is also purposed or planned giving. Listen to the apostle Paul. "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver." (2 Corinthians 9:7) "These people had promised a year in advanced to help the people of Judea" (2 Corinthians 9:1-5). If it was scriptural to plan what one was to give to the Lord, then it is scriptural now. Yet, how many will plan or purpose what they give to the Lord?

It is important that our giving be regular if it is to be pleasing to the Lord. The Bible teaches that we are to give "upon the first day of the week." (1 Corinthians 16:1-2) I am convinced that the Christian should give to God upon that given day. Furthermore, I am persuaded that we have a special obligation to the congregation where we worship. When we are on vacation, we should make it a point to leave our contribution before we leave town.

We should be careful that we give as not to rob God. A serious indictment was brought against the Jews of old. "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye\

say, wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation” (Malachi 3:8-9). No one would dare consider taking anything out of the collection plate. But on the other hand, when we fail to put into the collection plate what belongs to God, we are just as guilty of stealing from the Lord as the man who takes it out. Now which is worse? To take it out or to refuse to put it in?

We must also give to the Lord sacrificially. There are many sacrifices being made for the here and now, but not many are made for the after-a-while. I often ask myself, “What real sacrifices have I ever made for the cause of Christ?” So many people are looking for an easy, cheap religion. How unlike David of old when he said, “Neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing” (2 Samuel 24:24). David was not looking for a cheap way out. He refused to have a religion that did not involve a cost to him. If you really want to know if you are giving scripturally, ask yourself, “Am I giving sacrificially?”

WE MUST BE WILLING TO PROVE GOD

Listen to what the Bible says, “Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.” (Malachi 3:10)

Notice that to the Jews that had been robbing him, God said, “prove me.” This is another way of saying put me to the test. See if I will keep my word. The Lord then promised to open up the windows of heaven and shower so many blessings on them they would not be able to receive them all. Now let me ask you a question. “Are you willing to prove God? Will you put Him to the test?” Over and over again in the Bible we have the promise from God that if we would be liberal, He would bless us.

“Honor the Lord with thy substance, and with the first fruits of all thine increase: So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.” (Proverbs 3:9-10)

“The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself.” (Proverbs 11:25)

“Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days” (Ecclesiastes 11:1).

“But this I say, He which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully; and he which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly.” (2 Corinthians 9:6)

“Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom.” (Luke 6:38)

Do you believe God will keep his word? The man who has never been liberal in his giving cannot say that it does not pay to give. But there are thousands of faithful stewards who will say that the more they give the more God blesses them.

One day the thunderous voice of God will echo from the regions of heaven and say, “Give an account of thy stewardship.” Will you have been a good steward of the manifold grace of God?

SEEKING GOD AFTER THE DUE ORDER

Lesson #10

THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT

Lesson Text – Ephesians 4:1-6

INTRODUCTION

We live in a period of history that is woefully marked with division and strife. It goes without saying that the religious world is sadly divided. Should we be alarmed over this? Is God? Unity must have been of great concern to our Lord, for during the closing hours of His life on earth, He earnestly beseeched the Father on behalf of unity of believers. “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me” (John 17:20-21). From this prayer, we learn that we are to be one as Christ and God are one. Can you imagine God teaching one thing and Christ another?

THE IMPORTANCE OF UNITY

The entirety of God’s word extols His desire for unity of believers. Note the emphasis of the scripture on this theme.

“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” (Psalms 133:1)

“Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” (Amos 3:3)

“Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”
(Ephesians 4:3)

Fulfill ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.” (Philippians 2:2)

From these passages, several conclusions emerge. First, it is good and pleasant for brethren to be united. There is nothing so bad or unpleasant as discord among brethren. Second, we can never walk together without unity. Third, we must work at maintaining unity. Fourth, as Christians we are to be of “one mind.”

THE POWER OF UNITY

Unity is a powerful thing. You may recall the story in Genesis 11 when men determined to build a tower whose top would reach heaven. We are told “the people are one.” They were united in purpose. Then the record says, “nothing will be restrained from them...” Here is an example of the power of unity, even in that which was contrary to the will of God.

The power of unity is further illustrated in the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. According to the book of Nehemiah, this task was completed in 52 days. How could this be? It was because the people were united. They said, “Let us rise up and build.” Think of the power God’s people can have today when they rise up in unity.

Another example of the power of unity is in the church in Jerusalem. They were of “one accord.” (Acts 2:46) They “were of one heart and of one soul.” (Acts 4:32) It was the Jerusalem church that was spread throughout the world by persecution, but they maintained the spirit of unity and preached the gospel to the whole world. (Colossians 1:23)

UNITED WE STAND – DIVIDED WE FALL

Jesus said, “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand.” (Matthew 12:25) The apostle Paul in writing to the Corinthians said, “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the same of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” (1 Corinthians 1:10)

There must unity in matters of faith. We must “speak the same thing.” Matters of faith have already been settled in heaven. No one has the right to alter, tamper with or otherwise change the scriptures. The excuse is often made, “God did not intend for us to see things alike?” Can we see things alike? We see things alike in mathematics. Two plus two equals four everywhere in the world. We see alike in science. The formula for water is H₂O. It is the same all over the world. We can see things alike in religion when we go by the scriptures. Several years ago, while looking for a place to put a tent for a gospel meeting, I came upon a very interesting thing. On a dead-end road there were two church buildings opposite sides of the road. They taught different doctrines and wore different names. However, it was obvious that they that they used the same blueprint in building their meeting houses, for they were identical almost to the smallest detail. How could they do that? They went by the plan. When we go by the God’s blueprint for the church, we will have the exact same thing today, as existed in the first century. Yes, there must be unity in matters of faith.

There must also be unity in matters of judgment. Even in matters of judgment or opinion, we must be “perfectly joined together.” There will be differing opinions about things where God has not legislated, but even there, unity must prevail.

THE EVILS OF DIVISION

Division thwarts God's plan and purpose for the church. Under the figure of a body, the unity of the church is set forth. "So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and everyone members one of another." (Romans 12:5) For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ." (1 Corinthians 12:12) A body divided cannot accomplish its purpose and goals. We, as a body of people, will never evangelize the world for Christ without unity of purpose. The church moves like a train with the brakes on when there is division and strife.

Division is a discouragement to the novice. Here is a fine couple that learns the truth and obeys the gospel. They come into the church and they are on fire for the Lord. Division and strife in the church would soon put the fire out. Those who cause division will answer in the judgment for the innocent souls who became discouraged and quit.

Division also is a great cause of infidelity. Jesus prayed that his followers be one "that the world might believe." (John 17:21) Division produces atheism and infidelity. Not only are people confused in other lands, but often children of homes where there is religious division are led into irreligion. The confusion that exists in the world is not of God. "For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints." (1 Corinthians 14:3)

Division breeds luke-warmness. This is the tepid waters in which the sin of luke-warmness thrives.

THE KEY TO UNITY

The key to unity is found in Jesus' prayer in John 17. He prayed that His followers be one, as he and the Father were one. How were God and Christ one? Was

it not through Christ's submission to the will of God? He submitted to the will or authority of God. He prayed in Gethsemane, "Not my will, but thine be done." That is true submission.

Submission to authority unites. When two contractors become submissive to one architect's drawing, they have two buildings alike. When millions of people submit to communism, unity results. When men become submissive to the gospel, without addition or subtraction, unity is the result.

You will have division when you do not go by the Bible. It is not what the Bible teaches that divides people. It is what the Bible does not teach. Men's creeds and doctrines divide us.

WE NEED TO GET TOGETHER

There is one fold and one shepherd. (John 10:16) The only way that unity can ever be accomplished is for all believers in Christ to submit to Him their lives, putting off all man-made doctrines, becoming and remaining plain New Testament Christians. The church is called a flock – Jesus is the shepherd. Unity among a flock of sheep is not obtained by a conference of rams, but by submission of each sheep of the fold to the leadership of the shepherd. The road to unity can be successfully traveled by lifting up our eyes to Christ and following Him in all matters of faith.

HOW TO MAINTAIN UNITY

To keep the unity of the Spirit we must practice the golden rule. "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets." (Matthew 7:12) We must also maintain a forgiving attitude. "Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man has a quarrel against

any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.” (Colossians 3:13) It is by having a mind to work, (Nehemiah 4:6), that unity can be kept among God’s people. It has been said that a kicking mule can’t pull while kicking, and a pulling mule can’t kick while pulling. As long as we are pulling and working together, there will be unity.

A CLOSING THOUGHT

Jesus died to unite men in one body. (Ephesians 2:14-16). May we ever conduct ourselves so as to be worthy of so great a price.

SEEKING GOD AFTER THE DUE ORDER

Lesson #11

WALKING IN THE OLD PATHS

Lesson Text – Jeremiah 6:16

INTRODUCTION

Change is inevitable. Things change in the medical field. Advances in medicine have contributed to man's longevity. Things change in the educational world. Man now has access to more knowledge than any previous generation. Things change in scientific technology. Transportation and communication have changed significantly in the last few years.

In many instances, we must be willing to give way to change. It is foolish for a man to reject modern means of transportation and insist on walking. It is folly to reject modern advances in medicine and insist on some antiquated remedy. However, when it comes to the salvation of the soul, we need to stand in the old paths. The winds of change are now blowing. Dangerous trends are adrift. It is time to sound the alarm lest we be engulfed in the boisterous waves of modernism and liberalism.

WE NEED TO WALK IN THE OLD PATHS WHEN IT COMES TO PREACHING

It is time to get alarmed when preachers stop preaching the Bible. Brother Gus Nichols used to tell preachers, "We need to let God do most of the talking in our sermons." We need real Bible preaching today. The world doesn't need pretty platitudes nor soft, soothing sermons. It needs the gospel of Christ.

Preaching the gospel is a sacred trust. “I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and doctrine.” (2 Timothy 4:1-2) “A charge to keep have I. A God to glorify. A never dying soul to save and fit it for the sky.”

“Give us positive preaching,” cries some cheerleader from the sideline. What is “positive preaching”? If you mean the “don’t criticize, condemn, and complain” philosophy, then it appears that the duty of the preacher has been overlooked. There is a place for building positive attitudes. The world is too negative already. But a positive attitude cannot be built until the soul has been purged of sin. A surgeon must cut before he can heal. So it is with preaching. The crying need of the Lord’s church is for preachers who will “preach the word.”

WE NEED TO WALK IN THE OLD PATHS CONCERNING CHURCH WORK

There is much misunderstanding about the nature of the work of the New Testament church. It is not the work of the church to provide entertainment. It is not the work of the church to engage in social or political issues. These are things that one may do on his own, but they are not the work of the church.

The work of the Lord’s church consists primarily of three areas of activity. (1) Benevolence. “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.” (Galatians 6:10) “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.” (James 1:27) “Only they would that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do.” (Galatians 2:10)

Several fallacies have been taught in the past years about helping the needy. Some have taught that congregations cannot cooperate or work together in assisting the needy. The example found in Acts 11:27-30 shows this to be in error. This is a clear-cut example of congregations working together to help the poor saints in Judea. Another error taught is that the only ones who may be helped with the church's treasury are saints. This is found to be false from reading 2 Corinthians 9:13. "While by the experiment of this ministration they glorify God for your professed subjection unto the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal distribution unto them, and unto all men." The collection that was taken (Acts 11:27-30) was used not only for the saints, but for "all men."

(2) Evangelism. Preaching the gospel to every creature is the primary task of the new testament church. "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." (Mark 16:15)

(3) Edification. It is not enough to teach and to baptize, but we must continue to "teach all things." (Matthew 28:19-20) This is the method whereby the church is edified or built up. (See Acts 20:32; Ephesians 4:16) The reason for Bible Study Sunday morning and Wednesday night is to edify the church. One purpose of Gospel Meetings is to build up the church – to keep the saved, saved.

To restore New testament Christianity, we must put strong emphasis on the work of the church.

WE NEED TO WALK IN THE OLD PATHS RESPECTING CHURCH AUTONOMY

Every local church of Christ is independent in government. This is implied in the division of the "one body" into separate and distinct local congregations. This is implied in the appointment of elders "in every church." (Acts 14:23) This is implied in Paul's instruction to the elders from Ephesus.

“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.” (Acts 20:28) This is implied in Peter’s exhortation to elders. “Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind.” (1 Peter 5:2) The New Testament is silent as to any other arrangement for local church government.

Someone has given this definition of autonomy in the local church. (1) Control its own resources. (2) Exercise oversight of its own work. (3) Manage its own affairs. (4) Discipline its own disorderly members. (5) Provide for its own worthy indigent to the limit of its ability. (6) Govern itself in all matters of judgment and expediency.

WE NEED TO WALK IN THE OLD PATHS REGARDING WOMEN’S ROLE

More and more we hear of women assuming positions of leadership in the religious world. There is a place for women in the work of the church, but they cannot usurp authority over a man. “But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.” (1 Timothy 2:12) This passage eliminates women preaching publicly when men are present. This eliminates women serving as elders and deacons. This passage forbids women praying in the presence of men.

There is work women can do for the Lord. (Mark 14:8) Some of the Lord’s most faithful companions were women. However, we must respect the limitations placed upon them in the church.

WE NEED TO WALK IN THE OLD PATHS WHEN IT COMES TO MARRIAGE

Marriage is as old as man, having been ordained of God in the beginning. The marriage union is patriarchal in government. “For the husband is the head of the wife,

even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the savior of the body.” (Ephesians 5:23) The husband and father is head of the family. The home is monogamous in form. One man for one woman. (1 Corinthians 7:2) Marriage is to be indissoluble in nature. It is “till death do us part.” (Romans 7:1-4) “For the woman, which hath an husband, is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth. But if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband.”

No man has the right to separate those things God has joined together. “Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.” (Matthew 19:6) The rule is that a man and woman live together till death. (Romans 7:2) The exception is for the cause of fornication. “And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.” (Matthew 19:9)

Some are teaching that those who have divorced and remarried without scriptural justification, before they learned and obeyed the gospel, are not answerable to the Lord’s teaching in Matthew 19:9 on the assumption that such people are not under the law of Christ and are responsible to civil law only.

The theory assumes that moral law is applicable only to those in the church, and that people who have not obeyed the gospel are incapable of committing adultery or of violating other specific moral laws. The theory implies that civil law is the sole standard of moral conduct for people in the world. This is a false teaching which jeopardizes both the doctrinal and moral purity of the church.

All men are amenable to the law of Christ on marriage and divorce. Some try to nullify the force of Matthew 19:9 by questioning who is involved in the “whosoever” specified by Jesus. Some identify this as a “covenant passage” for “disciples only.” The “whosoever” in Matthew 19:9 is “whosoever puts away his wife.” This gets everyone so doing. “Whosoever” means any person at all. To suggest that those outside the church

are not subject to God's law of marriage and are free to marry, divorce, and remarry as they please, and then have that marriage sanctified in baptism, is to make a farce out of passages like Malachi 2:16, which states that God hates divorce.

A CLOSING THOUGHT

Whether or not New Testament Christianity is reproduced in this century depends entirely upon men and women walking in the old paths. When we become like the Athenians, who were ever craving something new, we will have left behind this divine injunction: "Ask for the old oaths... walk therein." In Jeremiah's day, the people became rebellious and said, "We will not walk therein." One has but to study the history of this people's woes to learn of the disastrous consequences of rejecting the old paths.

SEEKING GOD AFTER THE DUE ORDER

Lesson #12

WOMEN IN LOCAL CHURCH DEVELOPMENT

Lesson Text – Titus 2:1-3:8

INTRODUCTION

It is the purpose of this lecture to pinpoint the role of women in the overall development of the church in the first century. Special attention will be directed to their place in the growth of the church as seen through the pen of Luke, the author of the Acts of the Apostles.

Luke not only wrote the book of Acts, he also wrote the Gospel of Luke. In Luke's writing in the gospel there is demonstrated the change that Jesus wrought in the status of women. During Jesus' ministry there were many women who followed Him. Brother Mac Layton wrote, "The Book of Luke has been called 'The Gospel of Women' because he calls so many to mind. They ministered with their hands to the needs of Jesus; their feet followed him where he went. Out of the gate and up the hill to Golgotha they bewailed His coming death. The women were the last at the cross and the first at the tomb. The ears of a woman were the first to hear the sweetest message of the ages: "He is not here; He is risen" (How To Build A Great Church 184)!

One truth is magnified when you study the development of the church of the first century. Women are extremely valuable and important to the growth of the church. Granted, there are restrictions placed on women by divine instruction. Their prohibition by no means relegates Christian women to a second-last role in the church. "The ground is level at the foot of the cross. All are one" (Malachi 3:28). However, there is a

difference in their function in the church. The Lord has given to each their role or function. Be it noted that in spite of the limitations placed on women, God's Will wrought liberation to women! While she is not permitted to preach, serve as an elder or usurp authority over the man, she nevertheless has opportunities for service that cannot be found elsewhere (1 Timothy 2:12; 1 Corinthians 14:35).

A godly woman recently remarked, "Women in the church want to know that they can make a difference." No book in the Bible describes what women can do for the Lord more than the book of Acts.

WOMEN WHO MADE A DIFFERENCE

After Jesus' ascension into heaven (Acts 1:9-11), the disciples returned to Jerusalem (Acts 1:12) and entered an upper room (Acts 1:13). This was a place of residence and not the temple as is indicated in Luke 22:11 and Luke 24:53.

The eleven were in this room waiting for the promised of the Father. Boles mentions four classes of persons gathered there. (1) "The eleven apostles." (2) "Certain devout women, including Mary the Mother of Jesus." (3) "The brethren of Jesus: James, Joses (Joseph), Simon, and Judah (Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3)." (4) "The other disciples of Jesus" (Boles 26). They were of "one accord" (Acts 1:14). There was a oneness of mind and of spirit. They had been told to wait for the promise of the Father, so they spent their time in prayer. What better thing could they have done?

This is the last mention we have of Mary, the mother of Jesus. The New Testament leaves her on her knees in prayer. There was a prayer meeting of men and "women" before the New Testament church was established (Acts 1:14).

Prayer continued to play a role in the development of the church throughout the book of Acts. There is a reference to prayer in almost every chapter of Acts. (Acts 1:15; 4:31-32; 2:42; 3:1; 6:4; 7:55-60; 8:24; 9:36-43; 12:1-11; 13:1-3; 14:23; 16:13; 16:25; 20:36; 21:5; 27:35; 28:8.) Here is a great lesson for the church today. We will never accomplish much without prayer. Most failures in life are prayer failures (James 4:2; Matthew 7:7-11).

Never underestimate the strength of Christian women on their knees. What preacher hasn't had some godly woman tell him she prays for him every day? "The effectual, fervent prayer" (James 5:16) of a godly woman can penetrate the vault of heaven and shake the gates of hell. While her role is restricted in an assembly of the church (1 Timothy 2:12), there is no limit to the number of prayers a good sister might pray privately.

Hannah was a woman of prayer (1 Samuel 1:10). She was without child, but her prayers entered heaven and God blessed her with Samuel (1 Samuel 1:11-20). Samuel became a great man of God (1 Samuel 9:6). If there were more women like Hannah, there might be more men like Samuel. With such a shortage of gospel preachers, may God give us godly women who will pray for sons that will become preachers of the Word (2 Timothy 4:2).

A Woman of Good Works

All Christians, both men and women, are to maintain good works (Titus 3:8). We are to be zealous of good works (Titus 2:14). We are to be ready to every good work (Titus 3:1). We are to provoke one another to love and good works (Hebrews 10:24).

We read of such a woman in Acts 9:36-42. "Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and alms deeds, which she did. And it came to pass in those days, that she

was sick, and died: whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber. And forasmuch as Lydia was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them. Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and showing the coats and garments, which Dorcas made, while she was with them. But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up. And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive. And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord.”

This text reminds me of the brevity of life. Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth” (Proverbs 27:1). “Go to now, ye that say, today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away” (James 4:13-14). “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment” (Hebrews 9:27). A woman by the name of Dorcas died. Her illness was fatal (Lockyer 47).

Dorcas lived at Joppa (Acts 9:36). Joppa was on the Mediterranean Coast, some ten miles from Lydda (Acts 9:38). “Dorcas implies ‘the female of a roebuck, a gazelle’; an emblem of beauty. Dorcas is the first Greek name of a female in the New Testament, its Hebrew equivalent being Tabitha” (Lockyer 46).

She is called a “certain disciple” (Acts 9:36). Is it not the case then that she was a Christian, inasmuch that the “disciples were called Christians first at Antioch” (Acts 11:26). She also would have been observant of the Lord’s Supper since “the disciples came together to break bread” each Lord’s Day (Acts 28:7). Also, Dorcas was one faithful to the word. Jesus said, “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed (John 8:31). She was a fruitful disciple. “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples indeed” (John 15:8). Without question she

had counted the cost of being a disciple. “So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:33).

Luke records that this “certain disciple” was “full of good works and alms deeds which she did” (Acts 9:36) (Lockyer 47). Her good work was done with a sewing pedal (Acts 9:39) (Lockyer 47). After her death, Peter came to the upper room where she lay. Widows surrounded her lifeless form, showing the garments and coats Dorcas made while she was alive.

If there is a message from Dorcas to her sisters in the twenty-first century it is this: There is work for all women in the church today. A woman can do anything a man can do in the work and worship of the Lord except one thing. She cannot usurp authority over the man (1 Timothy 2:12). Dorcas practiced “pure and undefiled religion” (James 1:27). She had compassion for the poor and needy (Psalms 41:1-3). Some of the hardest workers in the church have been and continue to be women (Philemon 4:3).

There is so much women have to offer today. Mac Layton, in his book “How To Build A Great Church,” has listed several things Christian women can do effectively. They are: (1) Christian women can lead in magnificent work of keeping unity in the church. (2) Christian women can do a great work in teaching the children. (3) They can lead in hospital visitation. (4) Christian women lead in the teaching of Christian women (Titus 2:3-5). (5) Christian women can lead the way in visitation and soul winning (Acts 18:2,18, 26). (6) Christian women can lead in hospitality (Hebrews 13:2). (7) Christian women can lead the way in greeting at the church building. (8) Christian women can lead in encouragement. Thank God for Christian women like Dorcas who work for the Lord.

Dorcas left a monument of her life. When she died the widows showed the “coats and garments” she made for them (Acts 9:39). Hers was a monument of good works. How shall we be remembered? For our good works? For doing our best (Mark 14:8)? For our compassion and concern? For our meek and quiet spirit (1 Peter 3:4)?

A WOMAN OF FAITH

The mother of Timothy is mentioned one time in the book of Acts. “Then came he to Derbe and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek” (Acts 16:1). The name of Timothy’s mother is not given in this verse, but we learn of it from Paul’s letter to Timothy. “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” (2 Timothy 1:5). At first one might think this single reference to his mother is insignificant. It is a very important passage. Luke records that she “believed” (Acts 16:1). She did not keep her faith to herself, but passed it on to her son.

Timothy had a strong faith, and as a companion of Paul made tremendous impact for good in the church. Timothy worked with Paul, (Romans 16:21) and was his messenger to the Corinthian church (1 Corinthians 4:17) and to the church at Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 3:2-6). He was at Rome with Paul (Philippians 1:1; 2:16; Colossians 1:1; Philemon 1). Timothy suffered much for the truth with Paul (Hebrews 13:23) (Boles 251).

None of this would have been possible without the “certain woman” of Acts 16:1. Timothy was taught at an early age. “But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:14-15). His was an “unfeigned faith.” “Unfeigned faith means unhyprocritical, sincere, and unpretentious. Timothy had a pure faith. Both Timothy’s mother and his grandmother had this pure faith also” (Sheerer 942-943). Timothy was a third generation Christian, but his was not a second hand faith.

There is no indication that Timothy's father was a Christian. Some think he may have been dead. If that is the case Eunice was a single mother. Whatever the situation may have been, Eunice, that "certain woman" (Acts 16:1), raised a gospel preacher. Timothy was a man of god (1 Timothy 6:11). He had been taught godly qualities like holy living (1 Timothy 6:11-12). He was taught to endure hardness and difficulty (2 Timothy 2:3). He had been reared to be a man of faith (2 Timothy 1:6). Mothers today can rear young men like Timothy. It may be thought to be an impossible undertaking in light of the present assault of Satan on our children (1 Peter 5:8). Eunice shows it can be done.

There are things that a Christian mother can do to instill "unfeigned faith" in her children. (1) She can teach them about God (Deuteronomy 6:4). (2) She can teach them that the Bible is the inspired word of God (2 Timothy 3:16-17). (3) She can teach her children to trust God (Proverbs 3:5-7). (4) She can teach her children to pray (1 Thessalonians 5:17). (5) She can teach her children the love of sowing and reaping (Galatians 6:7-8). (6) She can teach her children that the most potent force in their life is Jesus Christ (Philippians 4:13).

What a great example the mother of Timothy is for women today. Consider how the life of her son influenced so many during the infancy of the church. This was all because she was a "certain woman, which was a Jewess and believed (Acts 16:1). Her faith reaches beyond the first century into our modern world. When we read the books of First and Second Timothy, we are reminded how enriched we are because of this woman's influence on the one to whom those books were written.

A WOMAN OF HOSPITALITY

The account of the conversion of Lydia and her household is confined to three short verses. "And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she

attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, if ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.

And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying" (Acts 16:14-16). After Paul heard the Macedonian call (Acts 16:9) he and his companions went to Philippi, "which is a city of Macedonia" (Acts 16:12). On the Sabbath day they went down to the riverside. The America Standard Version says they "supposed" there would be a prayer meeting there. There was no synagogue in Philippi. Boles said, "The rule is the Rabbi required ten men to constitute a synagogue, but here had gathered only a group of women" (Boles 256).

One of those women was Lydia. She was a successful businesswoman, "a seller of purple" (Acts 16:14). She was from Thyatira, a city well known for its purple dye. God was worshipped by Lydia (Acts 16:14). Boles explained, "She was either a Jewess or a proselyte to the Jewish religion" (Boles 257). She was a woman of deep religious character.

Her heart was open to the gospel (Acts 16:14). Some suppose this opening of her heart was a direct operation of the Holy Spirit. The notion that the Holy Spirit operates directly on a sinner's heart eliminates the inspired word of God (1 Peter 1:23; 1 Corinthians 4:1; James 1:18, 21; John 15:3; Romans 1:16). Lydia's heart was opened by the preaching of the gospel (Romans 10:17; John 6:44-45). "She attended unto the things, which were spoken of Paul" (Acts 16:14).

Lydia and her household were baptized (Acts 16:15). Then, she constrained Paul and his company to accept an invitation to be entertained in her home. She said, "Come into my house and abide there" (Acts 18:15). "Peter's reception at the house of Simon, the tanner, and the entertainment of Lydia are instances of the hospitality which was characteristic of early Christians" (Boles 258). (All Women 85).

Christian hospitality, as practiced by Lydia, is almost a lost art in our day. What older preacher among us, who in his early preaching days, was not a welcome guest in the homes of the brethren? Being a guest in a spare room was just a normal thing. The children in that home had the delightful opportunity of spending the week with the visiting preacher. Now he is put in a motel without much contact with the brethren. Times have changed since Lydia's day.

Lydia practiced the hospitality as taught in the bible. "Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Hebrews 13-1-2). "And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins. Use hospitality one to another without grudging" 1 Peter 4:8-9). There is an example of hospitality in the Old Testament that can serve as an example for us today. It is the story of the Shunammite woman (2 Kings 4:8-26). She is called a "great woman" (2 Kings 4:8). There are three reasons she is called "great".

First, she was perceptive. She told her husband, "I perceive that this is an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually (2 Kings 4:9). She recognized that Elisha was a godly man. Second, she was humble. When she was asked what could be done for her she replied, "I dwell among my own people" (2 Kings 4:13). She wanted nothing in return for helping the prophet. Third, she was hospitable. Since Elisha came to their home "continually" (2 Kings 4:9) she told her husband, "Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick: and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither" (2 Kings 4:10). They built a spare room to entertain the prophet when he came to their home.

A godly, Christian couple in Linden, Alabama, Mr. and Mrs. Conway, did something quite similar. Since there was no suitable place for visiting preachers to stay, they built a special room onto their house. They called it the Elisha Room. This writer has had the privilege of enjoying their hospitality by staying in that room.

What blessings are being missed by failing to imitate Lydia and the woman from Shunem in this regard. No excuses were offered. They just opened their homes to others. When you think about it, Lydia had two open things: An open mind to the gospel and an open home to strangers.

One does not have to have all the finery of the latest fashions before one can practice hospitality. One does not have to have the most expensive of foods to set before one's guests. The late Gus Nichols was invited into the home of a poor woman. All that was on the table was cornbread and peas. She asked brother Nichols to offer thanks. She said, "If you are a Christian, it's good enough for you. If you are not a Christian, it's too good for you."

THE WOMAN WHO WAS "ONE" WITH HER HUSBAND

One of the more prominent women in the book of Acts is Priscilla. Her name is mentioned three times in Acts. "And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them" (Acts 18:2). "And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila; having shorn his head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow" (Acts 18:18). "And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly" (Acts 18:26). Further mention is made in the New Testament (Romans 16:3; 1 Corinthians 16:19; 2 Timothy 4:19).

Priscilla's name, according to Cruden's concordance, means "ancient, old-fashioned simplicity." Little is known of Priscilla's background. She was born in Pontus. Like her husband, Aquila, she was a Jew of Asia-Minor. Both of them were friends of Paul.

Aquila and Priscilla were a team. They were harmoniously together in the Lord's service. They are never mentioned apart. Lockyer in, "All the women of the Bible", mentions several ways in which the couple was "one". (1) They were one in marital bliss. (2) They were one in the Lord (Acts 18:2). (3) They were one in secular occupation (Acts 18:3). (4) They were one in their friendship for Paul. (5) They were one in their profound knowledge of scripture (Acts 18:25-28). (6) They were one in their service of the church (Romans 16:3) (Lockyer 122-125).

One thing is striking, not only about Priscilla, but about other women of whom we read in the Acts of the Apostles: God uses simple, humble servants to do His bidding. Some of the greatest servants in the kingdom are not those with the eloquence of Apollos, but with the humble servant and hearted spirit of a Dorcas or Priscilla.

What a contrast with many women of the twenty-first century. Rather than being found on their knees in prayer like Mary, being filled with good works like Dorcas, and working side-by-side with their husbands in the service of the king, many modern mothers and women are found looking for the latest scoop on Facebook; enjoying a martini at the bridge party. They are seen running fervently all over town from one children's sporting event to another; going to the mall to find something to wear others haven't seen. (We must have something new, of course.) They spend precious little time with the Word, if at all, and prayer is said now and then if the family ever sits down for a meal together.

May God help us all go back to the great examples found in the Bible and emulate the God fearing men and women found there. We have godly women in the church today. Praying women, working women, women that are one with their mates. May their numbers increase.

SEEKING GOD AFTER THE DUE ORDER

Lesson #13

PREACH JESUS & HIM CRUCIFIED

Lesson Text – Colossians 1:24-29

INTRODUCTION

Paul said, “I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body which is the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you the hope of glory. Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.” Col. 1:24-29.

The value of this little paragraph (Col. 1:24-29) is in providing gospel preachers insight as to the work they are to perform. It also points out the sacrifices that must be made for one to be a faithful proclaimer of the Word. Paul rejoiced in his sufferings for the church (v. 24). He was entrusted with the gospel (v. 25). He was a steward of the gospel (1 Th. 2:4; Gal. 1:6-12). He preached all of the gospel, “fully carrying out preaching of the word of God” (v. 25 NASV). Paul preached the “mystery hidden from ages and from generations” (v. 26). This mystery was “Christ in you the hope of glory” (v. 27). It was the aim of the apostle Paul to “present every man perfect in Christ Jesus” (v. 28). There was a two-fold emphasis in Paul’s preaching: (a) “warning every man”; (b) “teaching every man” (v. 28).

PAUL'S MOTIVATION TO PREACH

Some powerful words are used by Paul in verse twenty-four: “sufferings”, “afflictions”, “rejoice”. Keep in mind Paul was a Roman prisoner when he penned these words. Try to catch the image of a man in chains (Acts 21:17-28:31). This fact alone would have caused his enemies great delight. However, he “rejoiced” that he was “counted worthy to suffer shame for his name” (Acts 5:41). He had fellowship in the sufferings of Christ (Phi. 3:10). Not only did he suffer, he endured “afflictions”. This has reference to the pressures and persecutions of life (2 Co. 4:8-10).

How could he “rejoice” in the midst of all this suffering and ill treatment? One answer is in the fact that he had his eyes on the prize (Phi. 3:12-14; 2 Co. 4:16-18). He was looking beyond his present circumstances to a superior reward (Rom. 8:18). He rejoiced because of his love for the Gentiles (Phi. 1:7-8). The brethren in Christ were in his heart and he was willing to suffer for them (Phi. 2:17-18). He became what Peter described as a “partaker of Christ’s sufferings” (1 Pe. 4:12). It is the case that every faithful Christian will endure some degree of suffering (Mat. 5:10-12; 2 Ti. 3:12).

Paul rejoiced in his sufferings for the sake of the church. He had been told he could suffer (Acts 9:16). To the Colossians he wrote, “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake” (Col. 1:24). The “now” looks back over the past of the Lord’s dealings with him. His sufferings were manifold and were more than that of imprisonment. While they were endured for Christ’s sake, they were for the benefit of the Colossian believers, who would not have received spiritual help had it not been for what he suffered and was suffering. (WEV 347)

All of the apostles suffered greatly. They were “as men doomed to death”; they were “made a spectacle unto the world” (1 Co. 4:9). Paul was no exception. He outlined his sufferings to the Corinthian brethren (2 Co. 11:24-27).

What is meant when the apostle wrote that he suffered “to fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ” (Col. 1:24)? It is not being suggested that there was anything lacking in the value of Jesus’ death. He died as a sacrifice for all men and in so doing appeased the wrath of God (John 1:29; Heb. 2:9; 1 Pe. 2:24; Isa. 53:1-12; Rom. 5:6-9). Hendrickson notes: “We should bear in mind that although Christ by means of the afflictions which he endured rendered complete satisfaction to God, so that Paul is able to glory in nothing but the cross (Gal. 6:14), the enemies of Christ were not satisfied! They hated Jesus with insatiable hatred, and wanted to add to his afflictions. But since he is no longer physically present on earth, their arrows, which are meant especially for him, strike his followers. It is in that sense that all true believers are in his stead supplying what, as the enemies see it, is lacking in the afflictions which Jesus endured. Christ’s afflictions overflow toward us.” (Hendrickson 87) “Paul’s motivation for enduring suffering was to benefit and build Christ’s church.” (MacArthur 2600)

PAUL’S MESSAGE TO THE CHURCH

He became a minister (v. 25). The word “minister” (diakonos) means “primarily denotes a servant, whether doing servile work, or as an attendant rendering free service” (WEV 272). Paul viewed himself as a minister or servant of Christ (Rom. 1:1; 1 Co. 3:4-7).

He was a steward of the gospel. The word “stewardship” (oikonomia) means “primarily denoted the manager of a household or estate” (WEV 74). He was “allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel” (1 Th. 2:4). We must be found faithful as stewards of the gospel (1 Pet. 4:10).

Paul preached to benefit others. His ministry was “for the sake of His body” (Col. 1:24 b). The stewardship of the gospel was given to Paul for the brethren (Col. 1:25 b).

He preached the mystery. This mystery is now revealed (Col. 1:26; Eph. 3:2-11; Rom. 16:25-26; Eph. 1:9). The mystery is “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27).

He presented a full gospel. His passion was “to fulfill the word of God” (Col. 1:25 a). “Every minister is bound” “to fulfill the word of God” “in his ministry” (Pulpit 39). This is done by proclaiming the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). One must also rightly divide the word of truth (2 Ti. 2:15). The promises of the word must be applied correctly (Luke 4:21).

Paul’s mission was to the Gentiles. “To them God willed to make known... this mystery among the Gentiles” (Col. 1:27). He had been “separated from his mother’s womb” to preach “Him among the Gentiles” (Gal. 1:15-16). As Paul stood before King Agrippa, he rehearsed his encounter with Jesus on the Damascus highway. When he asked, “Who are you Lord?”, Jesus replied, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand up on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, in order, to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they have received forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among these who are sanctified by faith in me.” (Acts 26:15-18)

Up to this point Paul’s thrust is on the supremacy of Jesus Christ. Now as he lifts his pen to explain the mystery, once again he puts the focus on Christ. What is the mystery? “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27). Jesus lives in us (Gal. 2:20). “The heart is Christ’s chamber of presence: shall we not, therefore keep it with all diligence” (Pulpit 3a). Jesus is “the hope of glory” because as our forerunner, he has carried the anchor of our hope within the veil (Heb. 6:19-20). Without that hope we would of all men be most miserable (1 Co. 15:19). We search the scriptures for through them we “might have hope” (Rom. 15:4; 1 Pe. 3:15). In connecting the dots between

suffering and hope, Paul wrote the Roman brethren, “And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance and perseverance character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Rom. 15:3-5).

PAUL'S GOAL: MATURITY OF THE BELIEVERS

When God selected a method or a strategic plan to utilize in propagating His message to the world, He chose preaching (1 Co. 1:21). In every age of Bible history preaching was a key element in getting God's message to men. Noah was a “preacher of righteousness” (2 Pe. 2:5) in the Patriarchal Dispensation. John the Baptist lived and died during the Mosaic Dispensation and his preaching blazed the way for our Lord (Mat. 3:1-2, 11-12). God had only one Son and He was a preacher (Mat. 4:17).

Paul exalted Jesus in the Colossian letter. He presented Jesus as unique and unsurpassed. The theme of the letter is JESUS. “Christ is all and in all” (Col. 3:11). Jesus has the preeminence over all (Col. 1:18 NASV). As the late Wendell Winkler stated, “With Christ, it is first place of no place” (WW). He is preeminent in the creative process (Col. 1:16; John 1:1-3; Heb. 1:1-2). He is preeminent in the church (Col. 1:18; Eph. 1:22-23). He is preeminent in the redemptive process (Col. 1:13-14). He is preeminent over the grave (Col. 1:18). The day Jesus arose from the dead is the day that death died.

Hence, it just seems logical that Paul would select Jesus as the theme of his preaching. “Whom we proclaim, admonishing every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ” (Col. 1:28). “Him we preach” NKJV “We proclaim him” NASV “Whom we proclaim” KJV “Whom we proclaim” ASV There is no room in the preaching of a faithful gospel preacher for any other message (Acts 8:4-5, 12; 5:42; 1 Co. 2:2; 2 Co. 4:5).

Men and women have a right to hear the gospel at least once before they die. Preach Christ, not philosophy, science, theory, a feel-good doctrine or a hobby, Preach Christ!

The late Frank L. Cox visited the campus of Alabama Christian College (Faulkner University) in the late 60's to lecture and meet with young ministerial students. The preacher students asked a number of questions to which Bro. Cox gave one answer to each question. He said to the querist, "Just preach the word son."

Preaching Christ was the heart of Paul's preaching (1 Co. 2:2). It was the message of Philip in Acts chapter eight. When the church was scattered by persecution, one of those who left Jerusalem was Philip. He went to Samaria and preached Christ (Acts 8:4-5,12).

The message Paul preached was Christ crucified (1 Co. 2:2). He preached Christ as the only Savior (Acts 4:12). The Christ Paul presented to man was a sufficient Savior (Heb. 7:25). He is mighty to save "to the uttermost".

Paul's message was not limited. Three times in one passage he uses the phrase "every man" (Col. 1:28). Vincent, in commenting on this phrase, states: "Thrice repeated, in order to emphasize the universality of the Gospel against the intellectual exclusiveness encouraged by false teachers." (Vincent Vol 3 480)

The blessed, glorious Gospel is for all (Rom. 1:16). When Paul repeated those for whom his preaching was intended, he used the Greek term 'anthropos' from which we get mankind inclusive of men and women.

The apostle saw the need to develop men and women, who behaved and obeyed the gospel, into mature Christians. The maturation process of these Christians involved two aspects of the apostle's preaching. It involved "admonishing". This "included in admonishing is the idea of warning people and pointing out the

consequences of immorality, unspiritual living, and following erroneous teaching. It includes both a positive and a negative approach to teaching because Christians must do what is right as well as eliminate from their lives what is wrong. While the emphasis must be on righteous living, the importance of avoiding evil must not be overlooked.” (TFT 170)

Paul was both positive and negative in his preaching Christ (2 Ti. 4:1-2). Even our Lord knew when to admonish (Mat. 5:34; 6:2-3,5,16,19,25,31). The basis of the apostle’s preaching was upon the wisdom of God. “Paul presented God’s wisdom (1 Co. 1:24, 30; 2:7) instead of the wisdom of the world (1 Co. 2:13). He did not seek to persuade through appealing speech techniques or human wisdom; he simply presented God’s message (1 Co. 2:1-5). (TFT 171)

There was an objective or goal in Paul’s preaching: “to present every man complete in Christ” (Col. 1:28). The preacher’s work is two-fold. First, to persuade men to enter Jesus and secondly, to develop the baptized believer toward completeness or maturity (Heb. 5:12-6:1; Mat. 28:19-20; Eph. 4:11-16). It is a huge disservice to teach and baptize a believer and not teach “all things” (Mat. 28:19-20) that are involved in living the Christian life. The word “perfect” (teleios) means “signifies having reached its end, finished, complete, perfect, full-grown, a full age” (Vine 174).

We should seek perfection or completeness “(1) in teaching or doctrine (Heb. 6:1); (2) in faith (Jas. 2:22); (3) in hope (1 Pe. 1:13); (4) in love (1 Jn. 4:18); (5) in understanding (1 Co. 14:20)” (Pulpit Com Vo. 20 40). “Perfect” is elsewhere translated “mature”, “complete” (Mat. 19:21). Vincent suggests that “perfect” (telios) means to be “fully initiated” (Vincent Word Studies Vol. III 481).

Paul is not suggesting that we can reach a state of sinlessness (1 Jn. 1:8-10). He is saying we can reach a stage of greater maturity than when we first obeyed the gospel (Heb. 5:12-16; 1 Co. 3:1-3). Here he presents a contrast of the complete and the incomplete. The mature and the immature. The strong and the weak.

MacArthur correctly states, “The goal of the ministry is the maturity of the saints” (Eph. 4:11-13) (J Mcol. 80). To be mature is to be like our Lord. We have not yet reached the top rung in the ladder of Christian maturity (Phi. 3:12). The day is coming when this will be realized (1 Jn. 3:2). Feeding on God’s word helps to nourish us and aid in our spiritual growth process (1 Pe. 2:2; Mat. 4:4).

If Christ-likeness is essential to our growth and spiritual development, then it is equally as important to be a “partaker of the divine nature” (2 Pe. 1:2-4). There are five powerful words Paul uses about his ministry (v. 26): Purpose = His purpose was to convert people and bring them to maturity in Christ. Labor = (kopiao) means to work to the point of exhaustion (POSB 374). Striving = (agonizomenos) This suggests agonizing effort. Mightily = Paul was empowered, as were the other apostles, to perform miracles (2 Co. 12:12). Power = (energia) Paul’s power was from Christ. This was not physical power but spiritual power (Eph. 3:16).

The late J.W. Shepherd helps put all Paul said into a clear perspective: “A small dynamo can retain its energy if continually replenished. Christians themselves are spiritual dynamos, but they must be in constant union with Christ the source of life and energy. The constant inflow of power from Christ enabled Paul to be a continuous supply of energy for others.” (JWS 272)

WHAT IS THE APPLICATION?

The apostle styles himself as having endured “sufferings” (v. 24). He suffered with stonings, beatings, shipwreck, being cold and hungry, being rejected by his own countrymen (2 Co. 11:24-27). We must be willing to suffer for the sake of Christ (1 Pe. 4:16). In a world that is self-seeking, a true servant is an oddity. Rather than “What can the church do for me?”, our attitude should be “What can I do for the church?” This requires humility. Christ emptied Himself as a servant and became man’s savior (Phi. 2:6-8). Being a Christian is a life of service.

One word that describes the apostle Paul is “servant” or “bondservant” (Rom. 1:1; Phi. 1:1). If we imitate Paul (1 Cor. 11:1) we will follow his example (Phi. 4:9) and become willing, energetic servants in the church. This will make us like our Lord who came into the world “to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mat. 20:28). There was a dispute among the Lord’s disciples over greatness in the kingdom. There was a clamoring to be the number one man in the kingdom. Jesus put that to rest by stating, “Whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave” (Mat. 20:27). The scribes and Pharisees loved to sit in Moses’ seat and tell men what to do. They relished titles and adoration, not unlike men today. They were told, “But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant” (Mat. 23:11).

Jesus’ servant-hood is highlighted by His girding Himself with a towel and stooping to wash the feet of His disciples (John 13:1-13). He said, “If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet” (John 13:14). Being a minister or servant is not optional for a Christian. It is a way of life. Paul poured out his life like a drink offering (2 Ti. 4:6; Phi. 2:17) for the sake of others. We can do no less. Where would the church be without servants? Where would a hospital be without doctors and nurses? Where would an army be without soldiers? Where would a ball team be without players? Even so, the church cannot function without those with the heart of a servant.

Paul saw himself as a steward of the gospel (v. 25). As such he was to be faithful in proclaiming the gospel (2 Ti. 4:7; 2 Th. 2:4). We, like Paul, have been entrusted with the gospel (Mark 16:15). Never has the world needed the gospel more than in our lifetime. The world is on fire with sin. There is one answer to the world’s predicament – Jesus! **PREACH HIM!**

Evangelism can never take a backseat in the Lord’s scheme of things (1 Co. 9:16). For the world to hear, we must go (Rom. 10:13-17). We cannot afford to shirk our duty as stewards of the gospel (1 Pe. 4:10-11).

Paul's intent was to encourage others to be complete in Christ (v. 28). To accomplish this in our lives we must rid ourselves of hindrances (Heb. 12:1). We are not to stay in a state of spiritual infancy, but we are to grow in "grace and knowledge" (2 Pe. 3:18). To be complete or perfect in Christ we must develop the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) to make our call and election sure (2 Pe. 1:5-11).

There was a balance in Paul's message (v.28). It was both positive and negative. He was "warning" and "teaching" (v. 28). When he charged Timothy to "preach the word" (2 Ti.4:2), he encouraged a balance in his preaching. He was to "convince" and "rebuke" and also to "exhort". "Convince" means, "to convict, confute, refute, usually with the suggestion of putting the convicted person to shame" (WEV 239). "Rebuke" means "to put honor upon, then to adjudge" (WEV 253). To "exhort" means to "urge one to pursue some course of conduct", hence, to encourage (WEV 60).

For a preacher to be effective he must strive for balance in his preaching. It cannot all be negative nor can it all be positive. This is where prayer for wise sermon preparation becomes valuable. The material covered in this book may not be easy to preach, but it must be a focal point if the church is to survive.

In the Philippian letter Paul wrote that Christians "work out" their salvation while God "works in you" (Phi. 2:12-13). God was working through Paul (v. 29). If God did all the work, human agency would not be needed. God, however has placed the glorious gospel in the hands of Christians (2 Co. 4:7). We are the tools through which He ministers and spreads His word to others (1 Co. 3:5-9) (TFT 177).

God works "mightily" in His servants (Col. 1:29). He gives us the strength to persevere, even in difficult circumstances (2 Co. 12:1-9; Phi. 4:13). When the world seems to be against you, "do not lose heart" (2 Co. 4:16). When you become discouraged, "do not grow weary while doing good" (Gal. 6:9).

There is a world waiting for the gospel message (Acts 16:9). We can be renewed in spirit by our knowledge that God “works in” us “mightily” (v. 29). Please do not let the words of this book fall on deaf ears. Read. Study. Obey. Teach. The next generation of the church depends on us seeking God after the due order!



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

BILLY LAMBERT



As the standing speaker for the nationwide Getting To Know Your Bible TV program on DIRECTV, Billy Lambert has a gift for spreading God’s word. He received his Bachelor of Arts and Legum Doctor Degrees from Faulkner University before he began preaching in 1962. He has preached in cities across Alabama from Evergreen, Mobile, Bay Minette, to Summerdale (where he currently serves). He also completed campaign work in Trinidad and Guyana in South America. He has weekly podcasts (Getting To Know Your Bible), blogs, and has mentored many ministers over the years.

Lambert has done radio work for more than three decades has held meetings in several states. His lectureships include Faulkner University, Freed Hardeman University summer lectures, World Mission Workshop in Atlanta, Georgia, Jamaican lectures, Southeastern Bible Lectureship, and Spiritual Growth Workshop in Orlando, Florida.

Lambert’s powerful writings include the Articles for Gospel Advocate written workbooks, “Following After Jesus,” “God’s Formula for Blessing,” “You Can’t Out Give God,” “Harvest Of An Evangelistic Church,” “Seeking God After The Due Order,” and “Hebrews.” His sermon booklets are titled “Power in the Blood” and “Philippians.”

He has been honored as Alumnus of the Year at Faulkner in 1978, Honoree at the Appreciation Banquet for his Southeastern lectures in 1999, and Honoree at the Appreciation Banquet for his Faulkner lectures in 2002. Billy Lambert is married to Louise Lambert, and they have three children — Todd, Melanie, and Allison — and five grandchildren —Caleb, Callie, Jackson, Caryn, and Josie.