

The Church Jesus Built



Studies On The Church We Read About In The Bible

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To God Be The Glory!

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The Church Jesus Built

Why Study The Church?

INTRODUCTION

1. In **Mt 16:18**, we read where Jesus spoke of His church...
 - a. In which He promises **“I will build my church”**
 - b. In which not even the “gates of Hades” (i.e., death) shall prevail against it, either by trying to:
 - 1) Prevent its establishment (death did not prevent Jesus from building His church)
 - 2) Destroy the church (killing Christians does not destroy the church)
2. It is not uncommon today to hear people disparage the church...
 - a. I have heard people say in effect, **“Christ, yes; the church, no”**
 - b. Professing they love Jesus, desiring even to follow Him, they have little use for “the church”
3. This low estimation of the church may be due to several reasons, including...
 - a. A lack of understanding of what the church truly is, as taught in the Bible
 - b. A misconception of the church, fostered by erroneous views of the church
4. With this lesson, I wish to begin a study of **“The Church Jesus Built”**, in which I hope...
 - a. To increase our understanding and appreciation of the Lord’s church
 - b. To make sure that our concept of the church is in harmony with the Bible
 - c. To note some of the challenges facing the Lord’s church today

[In this lesson, I would like to emphasize **the importance of studying the church**. Many reasons can be given, but I will focus on two, the first of which is the high...]

I. ESTIMATION OF THE CHURCH IN THE BIBLE

A. ESPECIALLY IN THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS...

1. **Christ is “head over all things to the church” - Ep 1:22**
 - a. That Christ is head over all things is clear enough, but what is meant by the phrase **“to the church”**?
 - b. Perhaps that Christ exercises His authority over all things “in the interest” of the church (**Hendriksen**); i.e., the rule of Christ is for the benefit of His church!
 - c. Does this not say something about the Lord’s estimation of His church?
2. **The church “is His body” - Ep 1:23**
 - a. The body of Christ!
 - b. It is His spiritual body, of which He is the head!
3. **The church is “the fullness of Him who fills all in all” - Ep 1:23**
 - a. Christ fills all in all; what fills Him?
 - b. The church constitutes His fullness!
 - c. If one is to be in Christ, by implication he or she must be in the church!
4. **The church is part of God’s “eternal purpose” - Ep 3:10-11**
 - a. The manifold wisdom of God is made known through the church
 - b. In keeping with God’s eternal purpose; i.e., His plan which He had from eternity!
5. **To God be “glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages” - Ep 3:21**

- a. Certainly God is worthy of all glory
- b. In the church and by Jesus Christ, God will be glorified forever!
- 6. **“Christ is the head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body” - Ep 5:23**
 - a. His authority over the church is again emphasized; also that it is His body
 - b. But here we note that Christ is the Savior, not of all men, but of His body, the church!
 - c. Again the implication is clear; to be saved, we must be in His body, the church!
- 7. **Christ “loved the church and gave Himself for it” - Ep 5:25**
 - a. Jesus loves His church, even as husband is to love his wife
 - b. His death on the cross had His church in view; He was dying for the church!
- 8. **Jesus’ design is to present it as “a glorious church” - Ep 5:26-27**
 - a. He seeks to “sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word”
 - b. He desires for it to not have spot or wrinkle, but to “be holy and without blemish”!
- 9. **Jesus nourishes and cherishes the church - Ep 5:29-30**
 - a. Even as you care for your own body
 - b. So Jesus has the same concern for His body, the church!
 - c. All because “we are members of His body”!

B. OTHER PLACES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT ALSO...

- 1. The church was purchased with the blood of Christ - **Ac 20:28**
- 2. The church is His body - **Co 1:18,24**
- 3. The church is the family of God, the pillar and ground of the truth - **1 Ti 3:15**

[Whatever the Lord’s church is, I want to a part of it, don’t you? If you love Jesus, and the church is His church, His body, how can you not love the church? How can you not desire to learn more about the church, its nature, its purpose, its design?

Unfortunately, misdirected if not careless men have sought to change the church from what we see it in the Bible. Such efforts should not go on unnoticed or unanswered. This leads me to my second reason why we need to study the church...]

II. EFFORTS TO CHANGE THE CHURCH IN THE BIBLE

A. AS REPRESENTED BY “THE DENOMINATIONAL VIEW”...

- 1. In seeking to describe the Lord’s church today, some suggest that it is **made up of all the different denominations**
 - a. Despite their doctrinal differences, their creedal affirmations
 - b. Despite their competing ecclesiastical authorities, all claiming to be led by the Spirit of God today
- 2. But is this the “glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle”?
 - a. A church with hundreds of differing creeds, names, and doctrines?
 - b. Teaching a multitude of contradictory doctrines, adding a plethora of man-made traditions?
 - c. Presenting a divided picture to the world, one that breeds doubt and skepticism in those that see it?
- 3. Such confusion comes not from God! - **1 Co 14:33**
 - a. God is the source of peace in His churches
 - b. Where confusion dwells, Satan is the author! - cf. **Mt 13:24-30; 36-43**
- 4. When people no longer abide in the doctrine of Christ, they have not God! - **2 Jn 9**
 - a. When they stop abiding in Christ Himself, they are cut off - **Jn 15:2,6; cf. Ro 11:22**

- b. They may believe they are still His disciples, doing things for Him; but unless they continue to do the Father's will, they are sadly mistaken! - cf. **Mt 7:21-23**
- **This view of the Lord's church is too "broad"!**

B. AS REPRESENTED BY "THE SECTARIAN VIEW"...

1. Some understand the Lord's church as **made up of a particular group of churches**
 - a. All wearing just one "official" name
 - b. All listed in some church directory
 2. This view fails to take into consideration some important principles
 - a. There is no one "official" name for the Lord's church
 - b. The Lord's church is a body made of individual members, not individual congregations
 - c. One might be a member of the Lord's body, but not yet associated with a local congregation (e.g., the Ethiopian eunuch)
- **I will have more to say on this, but this view of the Lord's church is too "narrow"!**

CONCLUSION

1. Again, we are talking about "**The Church Jesus Built**"...
 - a. One that is highly esteemed in the Scriptures
 - b. One that should be highly esteemed in our own hearts!
2. It is easy to be influenced by erroneous views which permeate the religious world...
 - a. Perhaps your view of the church has been a **denominational** one
 - b. Perhaps your view of the church has been a **sectarian** one
3. I hope that in this lesson I have...
 - a. Reminded you of the great estimation the Lord has placed on His church
 - b. Stimulated you to consider whether your understanding of the church may need some major overhauling or fine-tuning!

In any case, "**The Church Jesus Built**" is always worthy of our prayerful consideration...!

The Church Jesus Built

What Is The Church?

INTRODUCTION

1. In our first lesson, we began looking at “**The Church Jesus Built**” - cf. **Mt 16:18**
2. We surveyed why the church is a subject worthy of careful study...
 - a. Because of the high estimation of it in the Scriptures; e.g.:
 - 1) The church is the body of Christ - **Ep 1:23**
 - 2) The church is “the fullness of Him who fills all in all” - **Ep 1:23**
 - 3) The church is part of God’s “eternal purpose” - **Ep 3:10-11**
 - 4) Christ “loved the church and gave Himself for it” - **Ep 5:25**
 - 5) Jesus’ design is to present it as “a glorious church” - **Ep 5:26-27**
 - 6) He nourishes and cherishes the church - **Ep 5:29-30**
 - b. Because of efforts by men to redefine the church in the Bible; e.g.:
 - 1) As represented by the **denominational** view
 - 2) As represented by the **sectarian** view
3. But what exactly is the church...?
 - a. What is this “church” Jesus said He would build?
 - b. What is this “church” that Jesus loves, nourishes, and cherishes?
 - c. What is this “church” that some have sought to redefine?

-- **For if we desire to be in “The Church Jesus Built”, we should know exactly what it is, shouldn’t we?**

[Perhaps a good place to start is by defining the word “**church**” itself...]

I. THE CHURCH DEFINED

A. THE GREEK WORD IS “EKKLESIA”...

1. Many have noted that this word is a combination of two words: **ek** (out of) and **kaleo** (to call)
 - a. Concluding that the primary idea is that of being “called out”
 - b. That Christians were called the “ekklesia” because they were “called out”
 - 1) Now it is true that Christians have been called out - cf. **1 Pe 2:9**
 - 2) But the use of “ekklesia” in the New Testament does not stress the “called out” nature of the church!
 - c. This is a common mistake of defining a word by its etymology rather than by its actual usage in its historical context
2. The word “church” as defined by **Easton’s Bible Dictionary**: “In the New Testament it is the translation of the Greek word ‘ecclesia’, which is synonymous with the Hebrew ‘kahal’ of the Old Testament, both words meaning simply an assembly.”
3. Notice **Thayer’s** definition: “a gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place, an assembly”
 - a. “an assembly of the people convened at the public place of the council for the purpose of deliberating” - cf. **Ac 19:39**

- b. “the assembly of the Israelites” - cf. **Ac 7:38**
- c. “any gathering or throng of men assembled by chance, tumultuously” - cf. **Ac 19:40-41**
- **The usage of “ekklesia” therefore emphasizes the “assembled” nature of the church; i.e., it simply refers to a gathering, an assembly of people**

B. “EKKLESIA” AS USED IN THE CHRISTIAN SENSE...

1. **Thayer’s** definition offers the following uses of “ekklesia” in a Christian sense:
 - a. “an assembly of Christians gathered for worship in a religious meeting” - cf. **1 Co 14:19,35**
 - b. “a company of Christians, or of those who, hoping for eternal salvation through Jesus Christ, observe their own religious rites, hold their own religious meetings, and manage their own affairs, according to regulations prescribed for the body for order’s sake” - cf. **1 Th 1:1**
 - c. “those who anywhere, in a city, village, constitute such a company and are united into one body” - cf. **1 Co 1:2**
 - d. “the whole body of Christians scattered throughout the earth” - cf. **Ep 1:22-23**
 - e. “the assembly of faithful Christians already dead and received into heaven” - cf. **He 12:22-23**
2. Putting it most simply, we can think of the church in two primary senses:
 - a. **The church universal** - the whole assembly of people who are saved, both living and dead
 - b. **The church local** - a company of saved people in a geographical area who work and worship together as a local congregation

-- **The difference between the “universal” and “local” church will be examined in another lesson**

[What is the church, then, especially in the **universal** sense? It is that grand assembly or company of people who are saved by Christ (cf. **Ep 5:23,25-27**).

But the term “assembly” alone does not do it justice, which is why we find other terms in the Scriptures used to describe the company of God’s people...]

II. THE CHURCH DESCRIBED

A. THE CHURCH IS “THE BODY OF CHRIST”...

1. So described in **Ep 1:22-23**
2. This metaphor depicts the relationship we enjoy with Christ and each other
 - a. Christ is our Head, from which we as the body receive nourishment - **Co 2:19**
 - b. We are members of the body, and of one another - **1 Co 12:27; Ro 12:5**

B. THE CHURCH IS “THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD”...

1. I.e., the family of God - **1 Ti 3:15**
2. This emphasizes the familial relationship we enjoy in Christ
 - a. We are in Jesus’ “family” - **Mt 12:48-50**
 - b. We have many brothers and sisters - **Mk 10:28-30**
 - c. We are to treat each other accordingly - **1 Ti 5:1-2**

C. THE CHURCH IS “THE TEMPLE OF GOD”...

1. I.e., a holy habitation or dwelling of God - **Ep 2:19-22; 1 Pe 2:5**

2. As such, we have a responsibility to maintain purity - **1 Co 3:16-17; 2 Co 6:16-7:1**

D. THE CHURCH IS “THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST”...

1. As Paul wrote to the Colossians, they had been “translated into the kingdom of the Son of His love” - **Co 1:13**; cf. also **Re 1:9**
2. This emphasizes the authority-making power in the church; Christ is King, He has all authority! - cf. **Mt 28:18,20**
 - a. The church is not a democracy, nor a republic
 - b. The citizens do not make the laws, they are made by the King!

E. THE CHURCH IS “THE BRIDE OF CHRIST”...

1. We are betrothed to Christ - cf. **2 Co 11:2**
2. This figure portends of an even greater relationship with Christ in the future! - cf. **Re 19:6-9; 21:2**

CONCLUSION

1. What is the church? As used in its **universal** sense, the church is...
 - a. A great assembly, a great company of people
 - b. Made up of all those redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, both living and dead
2. To illustrate the blessings and privileges of this great company, the church is also called...
 - a. The body of Christ
 - b. The household of God
 - c. The temple of God
 - d. The kingdom of Christ
 - e. The bride of Christ-- **This is “The Church Jesus Built”, of which Jesus spoke when He said “I will build my church...” (Mt 16:18)**

We will have more to say about the church as revealed in the Bible in our next lesson, as we begin to contrast the difference between the church **universal** and the church **local**...

The Church Jesus Built

The Nature Of The Church (Universal)

INTRODUCTION

1. Understanding the nature of “**The Church Jesus Built**” begins with the word **church** itself...
 - a. From the Greek word **ekklesia**, it means “**an assembly**”
 - b. Which is used most frequently in the New Testament in two senses:
 - 1) **The church universal** - that company of souls redeemed by the blood of Christ
 - 2) **The church local** - Christians in a geographical area that work and worship together as a congregation of God’s people
2. Our understanding of the nature of the church can also be enhanced by...
 - a. Contrasting the church **universal** with the church **local**
 - b. Noting how the New Testament carefully delineates between the two
3. Failure to observe the distinction between the church **universal** and church **local**...
 - a. Leaves one open to erroneous concepts of the church
 - b. Leads one to present a confusing picture of the church in their evangelistic efforts

[In this lesson and the one to follow, I would like to notice ways in which the church **universal** is different from the church **local**. Let’s begin by looking at...]

I. THE CHURCH ‘UNIVERSAL’

A. COMPOSED OF ALL CHRISTIANS...

1. This is the church to which Jesus referred in **Mt 16:18**
2. It is made up of all the saved, both living and dead - cf. **He 12:22-24**

B. THERE IS ONLY ‘ONE’ CHURCH...

1. Remember, the universal church is called the **body** of Christ - **Ep 1:22-23**
2. There is only **one body** (**Ep 4:4**); therefore, only **one church**!

C. BEGAN ON THE DAY OF PENTECOST...

1. In Jerusalem, following the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ - **Ac 2:1-47**
2. As Peter later referred to this day, it was **the beginning** - cf. **Ac 11:15**

D. ENTER ONLY BE BEING ‘ADDED’ BY THE LORD...

1. One cannot **join** the church by their own volition
2. Rather, they are **added** by the Lord Himself when saved - **Ac 2:41,47**

E. THE LORD KEEPS THE BOOKS OF MEMBERSHIP...

1. There is no agency on earth that keeps the registry of true members
2. Enrollment is in heaven; only the Lord knows those truly His - **He 12:23; 2 Ti 2:19**

F. CONSISTS OF ALL THE SAVED...

1. The Lord is presenting to Himself a church holy and without blemish - cf. **Ep 5:25-27**
2. Those in the church who are sinning and refuse to repent are **cut off, cast out, spewed out**

- cf. **Jn 15:2,6; Ro 11:19-22; Re 3:16**

G. MUST BE IN THIS CHURCH TO BE SAVED...

1. For the Lord is the **Savior of the body** (which is His church) - **Ep 5:23**
2. Since the Lord adds one to His church when they are saved, one cannot be saved and not be in the church **universal!**

H. HAS NO 'EARTHLY' ORGANIZATION...

1. The church **universal** has organization - cf. **Ep 2:19-22; 1 Pe 2:5**
 - a. What organization exists is spiritual in nature
 - b. Christ is the cornerstone, together with His apostles and prophets as the foundation, and all Christians are 'living stones'
2. There is **no earthly headquarters** for the church
 - a. E.g., no telephone number to call to speak with the head of the church
 - b. For He is in heaven!

I. CANNOT BE DIVIDED...

1. For there is no **earthly** organization to divide!
 2. If division appears to exist...
 - a. Some unscriptural organization of churches must have been created
 - b. Such an organization can have division, but the Lord's church **universal** cannot!
 3. Those who would seek to divide the church through doctrine, conduct, etc., are simply cut off by the Lord Himself!
- **There is and always will be, 'one body' - Ep 4:4 (we need to make sure we are remaining faithful to be in it!)**

J. DEATH DOESN'T AFFECT MEMBERSHIP...

1. The church **universal** is made up of the saved, both living and dead - **He 12:22-23**
2. When one dies, they are still with Christ! - **Ph 1:21-23; 1 Th 5:10**

CONCLUSION

1. We have seen there are at least ten things true of the church **universal**...

a. Composed of all Christians	f. Consists of all the saved
b. There is just one	g. Must be in this to be saved
c. Began on the Day of Pentecost	h. Has no earthly organization
d. Enter only by being added by the Lord	i. Can't be divided
e. The Lord keeps the books of membership	j. Death doesn't affect membership
2. Our next study shall examine what is true of the church **local**...

In light of what we have seen thus far, we do well to ask ourselves: Have we been added by the Lord to His church **universal**...? - cf. **Ac 2:36-41,47**

The Church Jesus Built

The Nature Of The Church (Local)

INTRODUCTION

1. In our previous study, we began to examine more closely the nature of the Lord's church
2. In doing so, we made the following observations about the church **universal**...
 - a. Composed of all Christians
 - b. There is just one
 - c. Began on the Day of Pentecost
 - d. Enter only by being added by the Lord
 - e. The Lord keeps the books of membership
 - f. Consists of all the saved
 - g. Must be in this to be saved
 - h. Has no earthly organization
 - i. Can't be divided
 - j. Death doesn't affect membership

[Let's now compare that with what is revealed about the church **local**...]

I. THE CHURCH 'LOCAL'

A. COMPOSED OF CHRISTIANS IN ONE LOCATION...

1. A local church is made up of Christians in one geographical area
 2. E.g., the church at Corinth, the church of the Thessalonians - **1 Co 1:2; 1 Th 1:1**
- **In contrast, the church universal is made up of Christians everywhere!**

B. THERE ARE 'MANY' CHURCHES...

1. Paul had reference to local churches when he wrote **Ro 16:16**
 2. And again when he wrote **Ga 1:2**
- **When it comes to the church universal, though, there is just ONE!**

C. BEGINS WHENEVER PEOPLE JOIN THEMSELVES TOGETHER...

1. As the gospel spreads and people respond to it, those in a particular area start a local church when they agree to work together as one
 2. Just as the church in Antioch began later than the church in Jerusalem - **Ac 11:19-26**
- **Whereas the church universal began in Jerusalem on Pentecost, local churches have begun at different places and different times!**

D. ENTER BY 'JOINING' THE CHURCH...

1. When one wishes to become an accepted member of the local church, they must "join themselves" to that church
 2. Such as Paul sought to do when he came to the church in Jerusalem - **Ac 9:26-28**
- **Whereas one is 'added' by the Lord Himself to the universal church, we can seek to 'join' a local congregation (if its members are willing to accept us)**

E. ENROLLED THROUGH HUMAN JUDGMENT...

1. Whether we are accepted into a local church is a decision made by the leaders or members of that church
 2. Sometimes people are rejected when they should be received - **3 Jn 5-9**
- **Evil men may succeed in kicking one out of a local church, but only the Lord**

determines who stays in the universal church!

F. CONSISTS OF BOTH SAVED AND LOST...

1. Since enrollment occurs through human judgment, fallible decisions can be made
2. A local church may therefore have some who are nominal Christians - cf. **Re 3:1-4**
-- Hypocrites may become members of a local church; but they don't sneak by the Lord to become members of the universal church!

G. DO NOT HAVE TO BE IN THIS CHURCH TO BE SAVED...

1. One can be saved, and not belong to any local church
2. Such was the case of the Eunuch immediately following his conversion, and of Paul when he was in transit between Antioch and Jerusalem - cf. **Ac 8:39; 9:26**
-- Of course, this should be temporary; in the universal church, it is impossible!

H. HAS 'EARTHLY' ORGANIZATION...

1. A local church when scripturally organized will have bishops and deacons - **Ph 1:1**
2. These bishops were also called 'elders' and 'pastors', whose role was to oversee and feed the local congregation - **Ac 14:23; 20:17,28**
-- The only role or position ever given men over the universal church on earth was the apostles, and they were not replaced when they died - e.g., James in Ac 12:2

I. CAN BE DIVIDED...

1. Local churches can easily be divided over doctrine or personalities
2. Such was the case with the church at Corinth - **1 Co 1:10-13; 3:3,4**
-- While we can't divide the universal church, we can be responsible for dividing local churches!

J. DEATH AFFECTS MEMBERSHIP...

1. When we die, our membership in a local congregation ends
2. Just as when Stephen died, he was no longer a member of the Jerusalem church - **Ac 8:1-2**
-- But our membership in the church universal continues on after death!

CONCLUSION

1. To illustrate the differences between the church **universal** and **local**, consider this table...

The Church "Universal"	The Church "Local"
Composed of all Christians	Composed of Christians in one location
There is just one	There are many
Began on the Day of Pentecost	Begins when people join together
Enter only by being added by the Lord	Enter by joining ourselves
The Lord keeps the books of membership	Enrolled by human judgment
Consists of all the saved	Consists of both saved and lost
Must be in this to be saved	Do not have to be in this to be saved
Has no earthly organization	Has earthly organization
Can't be divided	Can be divided
Death doesn't affect membership	Death does affect membership

2. Noticeably absent in the Scriptures is any **denominational** concept of the church...
 - a. "A large group of religious congregations united under a common faith and name and organized

under a single administrative and legal hierarchy.” - **The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language**

- b. “A religious organization uniting in a single legal and administrative body a number of local congregations.” - **Webster**
 - c. I.e., any group of congregations that are joined together under some governing body
 - 1) The number of congregations can be as few as two or more
 - 2) But by their tie to a governing body above the local congregation, by definition they are ‘denominated’ from all congregations that do not submit to the same authority
- **Such as found in both Catholic and Protestant churches today**

- 3. Why note these differences between the church **universal** and the church **local**...?
 - a. To better understand how the word ‘church’ is used in the New Testament
 - b. To avoid confusion in our thinking when we use the word ‘church’
- **When we are aware of the differences, we are also better able to identify the New Testament church today!**
- 3. One could say that a key difference between the two is this...
 - a. The church **universal** in essence concerns our relationship **with Christ**
 - b. The church **local** basically concerns our relationship **with one another**
- **Of course, our service in the latter can certainly affect our standing in the former!**

Is our relationship with Christ and each other what it should be...?

The Church Jesus Built

The Authority Of The Church

INTRODUCTION

1. In examining the nature of the Lord's church as revealed in the Bible...
 - a. We find a distinction between the church **universal** and the church **local**
 - b. We do not find the **denominational** concept of the church so prevalent today
2. What has contributed to the development and proliferation of denominations today...?
 - a. It really comes down to **the issue of authority**
 - b. For what distinguishes one denomination from another is their authority
3. **Authority in religion** is a very important issue for those interested in the Lord's church...
 - a. It is impossible to maintain unity unless we agree upon the **same standard** of authority
 - 1) The unity for which Christ prayed - **Jn 17:20-21**
 - 2) To avoid the division of which Paul condemned - **1 Co 1:10-13**
 - b. This is true in all areas of life
 - 1) Imagine the confusion if we did not have a standard relating to weights and measures
 - 2) We could not even agree on the length of a line, the volume of a tank of gasoline, etc.
 - 3) Confusion would reign supreme in the market place if we did not all agree on one standard of authority in regards to weights and measures
 - c. This is especially true in matters of religion...
 - 1) If people can agree on the standard of authority in religious matters, unity is possible when we submit to that same standard
 - 2) There are other elements necessary to have unity (which I will discuss later), but without a standard of authority upon which we all agree, unity is impossible!

[What should be the standard of authority for Christ's church? Let's begin with a point with which I am sure all those professing to be Christians can agree...]

I. JESUS CHRIST HAS BEEN GIVEN ALL AUTHORITY

A. SO HE CLAIMED...

1. He claimed all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Him - **Mt 28:18**
2. He therefore expects us to observe all things He has commanded - **Mt 28:19-20**

B. SO HIS APOSTLES TAUGHT...

1. He is the **head** of the **body** (the church) - **Ep 1:22-23**
2. As such, we are to submit to Him in everything - **Ep 5:23-24**

[If Jesus were on earth today, we could solve all religious questions by simply asking Him. But since He is not on earth, what then? This leads to our next point...]

II. JESUS HAS DELEGATED AUTHORITY TO HIS APOSTLES

A. TO RECEIVE CHRIST, WE MUST RECEIVE HIS APOSTLES...

1. As Jesus taught in **Jn 13:20**
 - a. Note that the word ‘apostle’ means ‘one sent’
 - b. So as Jesus speaks of ‘whomever I send’, He has particular reference to His apostles
2. The apostles were sent as ‘ambassadors’ for Christ - cf. **2 Co 5:20**
3. Therefore the early church “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine” - **Ac 2:42**

B. TO ENSURE RELIABILITY, JESUS PROMISED THE HOLY SPIRIT...

1. Who would teach the apostles all things, reminding them of what Jesus said - **Jn 14:26**
2. The Spirit would guide the apostles into **all** truth - **Jn 16:12-13**

C. THE HOLY SPIRIT GUIDED THEM INTO ‘ALL’ THE TRUTH...

1. Paul said he taught “the **whole** counsel of God” - cf. **Ac 20:27**
2. Peter wrote God “has given to us **all things** that pertain to life and godliness” - **2 Pe 1:3**

[So the apostles were given **all** the truth God (and Christ) wanted us to know. If the apostles were on earth today, we could simply ask them to settle religious differences. But again, they are not on earth. What then...?]

III. THE APOSTLES HAVE WRITTEN WHAT CHRIST WANTS US TO KNOW!

A. IN THE N.T., WE HAVE WHAT THE APOSTLES WERE GIVEN BY THE SPIRIT...

1. As Paul explained in **Ep 3:1-5**
2. He wrote, so that when we read his writings we can have his same understanding
3. Peter wrote his epistles that we might always be reminded - **2 Pe 1:12-15; 3:1-2**

B. IN THE N.T., WE HAVE THE COMMANDMENTS OF THE LORD HIMSELF...

1. As Paul made clear in **1 Co 14:37**
2. As Peter confirmed, such writings as Paul's were considered Scripture - **2 Pe 3:15-16**
3. Therefore, when we have questions about what the Lord would have us to do...
 - a. We don't have to ascend to heaven for an answer
 - b. We don't have to ask Jesus personally, nor His apostles
 - c. We simply need to turn to the apostles' writing (i.e., the New Testament)!

[In the **New Testament**, the repository of the “apostles’ doctrine”, we can turn to learn the will of Jesus, given through His inspired ambassadors, the apostles. But this raises another question: Is the New Testament a complete guide for us today; i.e., is it sufficient...?]

IV. THE NEW TESTAMENT IS A COMPLETE, ALL-SUFFICIENT GUIDE

A. IT MUST BE COMPLETE, FOR “THE FAITH” HAS BEEN REVEALED “ONCE FOR ALL”...

1. Consider carefully the words of Jude - **Ju 3**
2. “Once for all” literally means “one time for all time”
3. We cannot expect further revelation in the future
4. The writings of the apostles as collected in the New Testament are all we have
5. Our task, is not to look for further revelation, but to "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints"!

B. ACCORDING TO THE APOSTLES, THESE WRITINGS (SCRIPTURES) ARE

INDEED SUFFICIENT...

1. Sufficient to make one complete, furnished unto every good work - **2 Ti 3:16-17**
2. They provide all we need to enjoy life and godliness - **2 Pe 1:3**
3. By heeding the writings of the apostles...
 - a. We will have the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ - cf. **2 Pe 1:8-9**
 - b. An abundant entrance will be supplied into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ - cf. **2 Pe 1:10-11**

C. WE ARE LEFT WITH GOD'S PROVIDENCE AND HIS WORD...

1. As Paul prepared the elders of the church at Ephesus for his departure, he commended them to God and the word of His grace - **Ac 20:32**
 - a. He did not instruct them to appoint apostles to take his place
 - b. He did not instruct them to seek further revelation (for Paul had already proclaimed "the whole counsel of God" to them - **Ac 20:27**)
2. He simply directed them to two things:
 - a. To God Himself (i.e., His Divine Providence)
 - b. The word of His grace (that word which had been revealed by Paul himself)
3. These two blessings, Paul was confident, were able to do two things:
 - a. Build them up
 - b. Give them an inheritance among all those who are sanctified

CONCLUSION

1. **The New Testament**, then, is how...
 - a. Christ speaks to us today
 - b. He leads us to life everlasting!
2. It is through the writing of the apostles, **the apostles' doctrine**, that the Lord speaks and directs His Church...!
 - a. It is the apostles' doctrine that is the standard of authority in matters of religion
 - b. It is the apostles' doctrine in which we must 'continue steadfastly'! - cf. **Ac 2:42**
3. There is more to be said about **authority in religion**, which we will cover in the next lesson

But I hope that our attitude is such that what was said about the Thessalonians can also be said of us (cf. **1 Th 2:13**). Is that our attitude toward "the apostles' doctrine"...?

The Church Jesus Built

Other Standards Of Authority

INTRODUCTION

1. In our previous study, I endeavored to show...
 - a. That it is through **the apostles' doctrine**, that the Lord speaks to and directs His Church
 - b. That the **New Testament** is how Christ speaks to us today and leads us to life everlasting
 - c. That it is the apostles' doctrine which ought to be **our standard of authority** in matters of religion - cf. **Ac 2:42**
2. Many say that they accept the apostles' doctrine as their authority in religion...
 - a. But when faced with an issue in which a cherished position or view is being challenged...
 - b. ...they often appeal to a source for their authority that is quite different
3. Perhaps the best way to avoid this is to be aware of other sources of authority in religion...
 - a. Some sources are **objective** - where we look outside of ourselves for authority
 - b. Other sources are **subjective** - where we look within ourselves for authority

[This study shall briefly touch upon **standards** that people commonly turn to when faced with questions about what they believe and why they practice the things they do in religion. Let's start with...]

I. OBJECTIVE STANDARDS OF AUTHORITY

A. THE OLD TESTAMENT...

1. It is common for people to resort to the O.T. to provide authority for some practice
 - a. When they can't find authority for it in the teachings of Christ and/or His apostles
 - b. For example, a clergy-laity system, burning of incense or use of instrumental music in worship, keeping the Sabbath, etc.
2. But the O.T. was designed to be temporary, to fulfill a specific purpose and as a covenant has been replaced by the New Covenant (i.e., the New Testament)
 - a. It was given because of transgressions, till Christ should come - **Ga 3:19**
 - b. For those under the Law (Israel), it was a tutor
 - 1) A tutor designed to lead them to Christ - **Ga 3:24**
 - 2) A tutor that has been taken away - **Ga 3:25**
 - c. When those who were under the Law came to Christ...
 - 1) They became dead to the Law - **Ro 7:4**
 - 2) They were delivered from the Law - **Ro 7:6**
 - d. As prophesied by Jeremiah, God has made a "new covenant" to replace the "first covenant" which is now obsolete - **He 8:7-13**
3. In the issue of circumcision, the apostles demonstrated that one cannot use the O.T. to teach something which the apostles themselves did not command
 - a. Some sought to enforce circumcision and the Law upon Gentile believers - **Ac 15:1,6**
 - b. But the apostles, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, were able to defuse the problem by simply stating they "gave no such commandment" - **Ac 15:22-29**
4. This is not to say the O.T. is not of value to Christians...
 - a. It was written for our learning, to provide patience, comfort, and hope - **Ro 15:4**

- b. It was written for our admonition, that we not make similar mistakes - **1 Co 10:6,11**
- 5. We just can't use it to enjoin religious practices upon others which the apostles themselves did not teach!

B. MAJORITY RULE...

- 1. Many people accept whatever the majority thinks about something
- 2. But consider the words of Jesus, in describing the end of the majority - **Mt 7:13-14**
- 3. If you followed the majority...
 - a. In Noah's day, you would have perished in the flood
 - b. In Joshua's day, you would have perished in the wilderness
- 4. Rather than simply follow the majority, let our attitude be like that of Joshua: "as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." - cf. **Josh 24:14-15**

C. PARENTS...

- 1. Some think "If it was good enough for Mom and Dad, it is good enough for me."
- 2. As much as we may love and respect our parents, Christ must come first - **Mt 10:37**
- 3. If every generation had simply followed their parents, then we who are Gentiles would still be idol-worshippers and polytheistic!

D. PREACHERS...

- 1. It is common for people to place their trust in their preacher, priest, or pastor
- 2. They reason that surely these 'men of God' could not be wrong or lead them astray
 - a. Yet Paul warned of how we can easily be misled - cf. **2 Co 11:13-15**
 - b. And Jesus warned about the 'blind leading the blind' - **Mt 15:12-14**
- 3. Our attitude needs to be like that of the Bereans, who carefully examined Paul's teachings in light of the Scriptures - **Ac 17:11**

E. CREEDS AND TRADITIONS OF MEN...

- 1. This is where the denominations really get most of their authority
- 2. Indeed, adherence to the creeds of men is what produces denominations
 - a. Accept the Bible only, and you become a Christian only
 - b. Accept the Bible along with some Creed, and you become something else!
 - 1) Accept the Bible and the Book of Mormon, and you become a Mormon
 - 2) Accept the Bible and papal authority, and you become a Roman Catholic
 - 3) Accept the Bible and the Lutheran Catechism, and you become a Lutheran
- 3. Creeds are really not even necessary...
 - a. If they say more than what the Bible says, they say too much
 - b. If they say less than what the Bible says, they say too little
 - c. If they say exactly what the Bible says, then why not let the Bible be our creed book?
- 4. The fact is, creeds are filled with the traditions and commands of men, many which conflict with and displace the commands of God! - cf. **Mk 7:6-9**

[Creeds of men, preachers, parents, majority rule, even the Old Testament, are **objective** standards that many turn to rather than the authority of the Lord's apostles. Some turn to...]

II. SUBJECTIVE STANDARDS OF AUTHORITY

A. CONSCIENCE...

- 1. "Let your conscience be your guide" is the motto of many

2. But our conscience cannot always be reliable
 - a. Paul had served God with a good conscience throughout his life - **Ac 23:1**
 - b. Even at a time when he was persecuting Christians! - cf. **Ac 26:9-11**
3. Our conscience is **like a clock**, which works properly only if set properly
4. Once our conscience has been **set** by the apostles' doctrine, then it can be a good guide

B. HUMAN WISDOM...

1. Many feel that through their own wisdom they can determine right and wrong
2. But God's thoughts and ways are not always our own - cf. **Isa 55:8-9**
3. In fact, God has chosen to save man in a manner specifically designed to confound those who depend solely upon human wisdom - cf. **1 Co 1:18-29**
4. For us to know God's will, it was necessary for Him to reveal it to us - **1 Co 2:9-12**
 - a. This He has done through His Spirit-inspired apostles
 - b. Who in turn shared it with us through their writings - **Ep 3:1-5**

C. FEELINGS...

1. This is often the standard of authority for many people
 - a. Who go by whatever 'feels right'
 - b. Who place stock in a religion 'better felt than told'
2. Yet the Bible declares the danger of trusting in feelings
 - a. "There is a way which seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death." - **Pro 14:12**
 - b. "He who trusts in his own heart is a fool..." - **Pro 28:26**
 - c. "O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps." - **Jer 10:23**

CONCLUSION

1. Because the way we should live is 'not in man'...
 - a. We need an **objective** standard for our authority in religion
 - b. We can't depend upon **subjective** standards like conscience, human wisdom, or feelings
2. But which objective standard...?
 - a. Not creeds of men, preachers, parents, majority rule, or even the Old Testament
 - b. Only the apostles' doctrine, i.e., the New Testament...
 - 1) For the apostles were personally selected to be Christ's ambassadors
 - 2) For the apostles were inspired by the Holy Spirit, to be guided into all the truth
 - 3) And they were inspired to write all that Christ would have us to know and do

What is our standard of authority? Our answer will determine whether we are the church Jesus built...

The Church Jesus Built

How To Establish Authority

INTRODUCTION

1. In the past two lessons in this series, I have stressed that for us to be “**The Church Jesus Built**” we must have the proper standard of authority...
 - a. That standard is the Will of Christ...
 - 1) As revealed in the apostles’ doctrine, that is, the teaching of Christ’s apostles
 - 2) As inspired by the Holy Spirit, and preserved for us in the pages of the New Testament
 - b. Other standards are not suitable guides to lead us in the way of salvation
 - 1) Not the Old Testament, majority rule, parents, preachers, creeds and traditions of men
 - 2) Nor our conscience, human wisdom, or feelings
2. Before we leave the subject of authority, there are questions worthy of our consideration...
 - a. What is our obligation regarding authority?
 - b. Exactly how does one use the New Testament to establish authority?
 - c. Are there limitations placed upon how far we may go in matters of religion?
 - d. Will having the same standard of authority guarantee unity among followers of Christ?

[In this lesson and the next, I wish to share some thoughts along these lines, beginning with...]

I. OUR OBLIGATION REGARDING AUTHORITY

A. EVERYONE HAS AN OBLIGATION...

1. Jesus did not speak without having authority - **Jn 12:49-50**
2. Even the Spirit did not speak on His own authority - **Jn 16:13**
3. Those who despise authority are ill-spoken of in the Scriptures - **2 Pe 2:10; Ju 1:8**

B. WHAT IS OUR OBLIGATION...

1. To do all things in the name (by the authority) of Jesus Christ - **Co 3:17**
 - a. To provide authority for all that we believe and do in religion
 - b. A duty enjoyed upon all who presume to speak for God - cf. **1 Pe 4:10**
2. **Note well:** the burden of proof is on the affirmative, not the negative
 - a. We do not have to prove some practice is wrong (e.g., instrumental music)
 - b. Those who affirm some practice scriptural have the burden to provide authority for it
3. Our duty then would be to examine the evidence to see if it supports what is affirmed
 - a. Does the evidence adequately not support what is affirmed?
 - b. If not, the practice is without authority and thereby unscriptural!

[The burden to provide authority is upon any and all who wish to engage in some religious practice or preach some religious doctrine. How does one provide such authority? Here are some basic principles to remember...]

II. HOW AUTHORITY IS ESTABLISHED

A. AUTHORITY CAN BE ESTABLISHED IN THREE WAYS...

1. **Direct command or precept** - a direct statement of something that can or cannot be done
 - a. E.g., “repent and be baptized” - **Ac 2:38**
 - b. E.g., “love one another” - **Jn 13:34**
 - c. E.g., “abstain from sexual immorality” - **1 Th 4:3**
2. **Approved example** - an illustration that shows a practice was done with the approval of the Lord’s apostles
 - a. As an apostle, Paul taught by both precept and example
 - 1) He encouraged others to imitate him, and sent Timothy to remind people of “his ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church” - **1 Co 4:16-17**
 - 2) The God of peace will be with those who do the sort of things both heard (precept) and seen (example) in an apostle like Paul - cf. **Ph 4:9**
 - b. So when we have an example that meets with apostolic approval, we know there is authority for the practice
 - 1) E.g., having a plurality of elders in one church - **Ac 14:23; 20:28; Ph 1:1**
 - 2) E.g., meeting on the first day of the week for the purpose of breaking bread (i.e., the Lord's supper, cf. **1 Co 10:16-17**) - **Ac 20:7**
3. **Necessary implication, or ‘forced conclusion’** - something neither expressly stated nor specifically exemplified, yet it is necessarily implied by the clear import and meaning of the language used so that one can only draw a particular conclusion
 - a. Jesus appealed to necessary implication when He reasoned that there must be a resurrection of the dead based upon the implication of God's statement to Moses - cf. **Mt 22:29-33**
 - b. Peter and the brethren in Judea understood the necessary implication of the Gentiles receiving the Holy Spirit, that it meant Gentiles were permitted to be baptized and enjoy the repentance that leads to life - cf. **Ac 10:44-48; 11:15-18**
 - c. Therefore, if the evidence of the Scriptures warrant it, we may draw certain conclusions through necessary implication
 - 1) E.g., the issue of baptizing infants
 - a) The prerequisites for baptism include faith and repentance - **Mk 16:16; Ac 2:38; 8:37**
 - b) Infants are incapable of faith and repentance
 - c) The necessary implication (or forced conclusion) is that baptism is not required of infants
 - 2) E.g., the matter of using unleavened bread in partaking the Lord’s Supper
 - a) There is nothing expressly stated nor specifically exemplified in reference to using unleavened bread as we observe the Lord's Supper
 - b) But when Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper at the Last Passover, we know He was using unleavened bread - cf. **Lk 22:7-19**
 - c) The necessary implication is that we should use unleavened bread as we keep His command to observe the Lord’s Supper

B. THERE IS BOTH GENERAL AND SPECIFIC AUTHORITY...

1. Using a direct command as an example, sometimes it is **general** in its authority
 - a. That is, “not limited in scope, area, or application” (American Heritage Dictionary)
 - b. The command ‘go’ in **Mt 28:19** is generic and authorizes all methods of transportation
2. Sometimes a direct command is **specific** in its authority
 - a. That is, “explicitly set forth; definite” (American Heritage Dictionary)
 - b. When God commanded Noah to build the ark with gopher wood (**Gen 6:14**), the specific nature of the command ruled out using any other kind of wood

3. A **specific** command may itself have a degree of **general** authority
 - a. E.g., the command to **sing** specifically authorizes acapella music
 - b. It is not generic enough to authorize instrumental music, a totally different class (or kind) of music
 - c. But it is generic enough to authorize different aids or expedients (see below), such as song books, to carry out the command to sing

C. EXPEDIENTS MAY BE USED TO CARRY OUT AUTHORIZED PRACTICES...

1. **Expedient** means “appropriate to a purpose” (American Heritage Dictionary)
2. Thus an "expedient" is an aid that is suitable for carrying out that which is authorized
3. Sample expedients based upon what is authorized in the Scriptures...
 - a. Assembling is authorized, so the meeting house is an expedient to carry out the command to assemble
 - b. Teaching is authorized, so arrangement in classes is an expedient to carry out the command to instruct
 - c. Giving is authorized, so baskets are an expedient for gathering the contribution
 - d. Baptism is authorized, so the baptistery is an expedient to provide a place for immersion
 - e. Singing is authorized, so hymn books are expedient to helping us sing

CONCLUSION

1. These principles on how to establish authority from the Scriptures may seem prosaic, but they are very useful in applying the apostles’ doctrine (i.e., the Word of God)
2. When understood properly and applied correctly, they can be useful to maintain the unity and peace of a local congregation

Our next study will examine what limitations are placed upon how far we may go in matters of religion, and whether having the same standard of authority guarantees unity among followers of Christ...

The Church Jesus Built

Other Thoughts Related To Authority

INTRODUCTION

1. We saw in our previous lesson...
 - a. What is our obligation regarding authority
 - b. How one can use the New Testament to establish authority
2. Two more questions remain in our consideration matters related to authority...
 - a. Are there limitations placed upon how far we may go in matters of religion?
 - b. Will having the same standard of authority guarantee unity among followers of Christ?

[To help answer these questions, first consider these...]

I. WARNINGS FOUND IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

A. WE MUST NOT CHANGE ITS MESSAGE...!

1. This is especially true in regards to the gospel of Christ! - **Ga 1:8-9**
2. Even if authorized by an angelic messenger, we would be accursed!
3. Therefore, the gospel of salvation in Christ must be preserved in every respect!

B. WE MUST NOT ADD TO OR TAKE AWAY FROM IT...!

1. We find such a warning at the conclusion of the last book of the Bible - **Re 22:18-19**
2. Though primarily applicable to the book of Revelation, this warning is consistent with others pertaining to the revelation of God's will to man - **Deu 4:2; Pro 30:5-6**

C. WE MUST ABIDE IN THE DOCTRINE OF CHRIST...!

1. Otherwise, we will not have fellowship with the Father and the Son - **2 Jn 9**
2. Is this passage referring to the doctrine about Christ, or the doctrine taught by Christ (along with His apostles)?
 - a. As pointed out in the Expositor's Bible Commentary, the question is of little importance for John holds equally to both positions
 - 1) It is fundamental to the faith to hold to the proper views about Christ - **2 Jn 7**
 - 2) It is fundamental to the faith to obey the commandments of Christ - **1 Jn 3:24**
 - b. Thus what John says here applies in either case

D. WE MUST NOT ALLOW TRADITIONS OF MEN TO MAKE THE COMMANDS OF GOD OF NO EFFECT...!

1. Jesus charged the Pharisees with 'vain worship' for doing this - **Mk 7:5-13**
2. In view of this warning, we should evaluate our religious practices:
 - a. Are they based upon traditions of men, or the commandments of God?
 - b. If traditions of men, does our keeping them render the commands of God of no effect?
 - c. E.g., by keeping the man-made tradition of sprinkling for baptism, we render the command of God for immersion (Grk. **baptizo**) of no effect

E. WE MUST NOT ABUSE OUR LIBERTY IN CHRIST...!

1. In Christ we enjoy freedom, but we must be careful in our use of it - **Ga 5:1,13**
2. We must be considerate of our brothers' consciences - **Ro 14:14-15:3**
3. We should be willing to forego our liberty rather than let it destroy a brother - **1 Co 8:9-13**
4. We should not only ask "Is it lawful?", but also "Does it edify?" - **1 Co 10:23-24,31-33**

[With such **warnings** weighing upon our hearts, we are more likely to approach the Word of God with the humility it deserves as we seek to establish the authority for our service to God.

Now for our last question related to having the same standard of authority: Will it **guarantee** unity among the followers of Christ...?]

II. HAVING THE SAME STANDARD DOES NOT GUARANTEE UNITY

A. THERE ARE STILL CHALLENGES TO FACE...

1. **Which commands are binding today?**
 - a. Some commands must be understood to be limited in application
 - b. Effort must be made to determine whether a command was intended to be limited or universal in application
 2. **Which approved examples are to be considered normative for the church today?**
 - a. Much of what we learn about the church pertaining to its work and organization is by example, not precept
 - b. Effort must be made to determine whether an example should be understood as teaching a binding principle for the church to observe universally
 3. **When are necessary implications really necessary implications?**
 - a. People often infer things from the Bible and call their conclusion a necessary implication
 - b. But it may only be a possible implication, not one necessarily inferred
- **These are questions or challenges faced by every congregation of Christians**

B. WE NEED THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST...

1. Barton W. Stone, a promoter of Christian unity in the early 1800's, had these insightful words in an article entitled "Christian Union" published in The Christian Messenger (1828):

"On no other foundation can the parties ever meet, than on the Bible alone, without note or comment; and in no other name will they ever unite, but in that given to the disciples at Antioch--CHRISTIAN. But should all the professors of Christianity reject all their various creeds and names, and agree to receive the Bible alone, and be called by no other name than Christian, will this unite them? No, we are fully convinced that unless they all possess the spirit of that book and name they are far, very far, from Christian union." (As quoted by **J. M. Powell, The Cause We Plead: A Story Of The Restoration Movement**, 20th Century Christian, 1987, p. 56)
2. In addition to agreeing on the same standard of authority (i.e., the Word of God), we need the proper spirit to "rightly divide the word of truth" - cf. **2 Ti 2:14-16**
3. As Paul told Timothy, the servant of the Lord must carefully apply the Word when seeking to teach others - **2 Ti 2:23-25**
4. We need to have the proper attitudes to maintain the unity of the Spirit - **Ep 4:1-3**
5. We need to have the mind of Christ to be of one accord, of one mind - **Ph 2:1-5**

CONCLUSION

1. The Bible teaches us, not only by way of direct commands, but through approved examples and necessary implications
2. It is helpful to understand the principles of general and specific authority, and when something may be expedient to fulfill things that are authorized
3. Warnings throughout the scriptures should serve to keep us on “the straight and narrow”
4. But as valuable and needful the same standard of authority may be, simple agreement on what the standard is will not guarantee unity - we need to apply the proper spirit of love, patience and humility as we grow together towards unity in Christ
5. What is our attitude toward the authority of God’s Word? Are we willing...
 - a. To accept **the authority of Jesus Christ**, as delegated to His apostles?
 - b. To adopt **the mind of Christ**, as illustrated in His sacrificial life and death?

Again, our answer will determine whether we are “**The Church Jesus Built**”... - cf. **Mt 28:18-20**

The Church Jesus Built

The Organization Of The Church

INTRODUCTION

1. In studying what should be the **authority** of the church...
 - a. We noted that it should be “**the apostles’ doctrine**”
 - b. As contained in the pages of **the New Testament**
2. The New Testament provides a **pattern** that was followed by the early church...
 - a. The church at Jerusalem “**continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine**” - **Ac 2:42**
 - b. The apostles taught their doctrine “**in every church**” - **1 Co 4:17**
3. The pattern that we find for **local** churches includes such elements as...
 - a. The **organization** of the church
 - b. The **worship** of the church
 - c. The **work** of the church

[In this lesson and the next, we will examine what pattern emerges from the New Testament regarding the **organization** of the Lord’s church in the local sense. But one might ask...]

I. WHY BE CONCERNED ABOUT CHURCH ORGANIZATION?

A. ORGANIZATION REVEALS PURPOSE...

1. When God creates something...
 - a. He has a purpose in mind
 - b. He designs His creation with the organization to accomplish His purpose
2. This is true in the physical realm
 - a. Certain animals were created as beasts of prey
 - b. Simply by looking at the animal’s features (i.e., its organization), we can glean what its purpose is
3. This is true with the **local** church as well...
 - a. Seeing its organization will help us learn of the Lord’s purpose for the church
 - b. This will be especially helpful later, when we examine the **work** of the church

B. APOSTASY OFTEN BEGINS WITH CHANGES IN ORGANIZATION...

1. One of the earliest departures from the New Testament was in church organization
2. Modern-day apostasies often start this way as well
3. Especially when people seek to change the purpose or work of the church!

[The **organization** of the church as revealed in the New Testament should not be taken lightly. The Lord had a purpose in mind, and organized the church to meet that purpose. With that said, let’s now consider...]

II. CHURCH ORGANIZATION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

A. ELDERS TO OVERSEE THE LOCAL CONGREGATION...

1. A congregation, once fully developed, would have elders - cf. **Ac 14:23; Ti 1:5**
2. These elders were also called bishops and pastors
 - a. **Elders** (Grk., “presbuteros”, presbyter) for they were older men
 - b. **Bishops** (Grk. “episkopos”, overseer) for their task was to oversee the congregation - cf. **Ac 20:17,28; 1 Pe 5:1-2**
 - c. **Pastors** (Grk. “poimen”, shepherd) for their task was to shepherd and feed the flock of God - cf. **Ac 20:17,28; 1 Pe 5:1-2**

-- **Not three distinct offices, but different ways to describe the men and their work (cf. Easton’s Bible Dictionary, Moody Handbook of Theology)**
3. Elders were appointed only after meeting **stringent qualifications**
 - a. The qualifications are listed in **1 Ti 3:1-7; Ti 1:5-9**
 - b. Note that they “**must be...**” (no exceptions), e.g....
 - 1) Husband of one wife
 - 2) With faithful children

-- **Such qualifications prepared them for their role - cf. 1 Ti 3:5**
4. In every congregation with elders, there was always a **plurality**, never just one
 - a. There were “elders” in every church - **Ac 14:23**
 - b. The church in Jerusalem had “elders” - **Ac 15:2,4,6,22-23; 16:4; 21:18**
 - c. The church at Ephesus had “elders” - **Ac 20:17; 1 Ti 5:17**
 - d. There were to be “elders” in every city - **Ti 1:5**
 - e. When one was sick and wanted prayer, they were to call for the “elders” - **Ja 5:14**
 - f. Younger people were to submit to the “elders” - **1 Pe 5:5**

-- **We never read of just one elder or bishop over one church or group of churches**
5. The authority of the elders to oversee was limited...
 - a. They were to take heed to the flock of God “**among which** the Holy Spirit has made you overseers” - **Ac 20:28**
 - b. They were to “shepherd the flock of God **which is among you**” - **1 Pe 5:2**

-- **No elder (bishop, pastor) or group of elders had any authority beyond their local congregation!**

B. DEACONS TO SERVE THE ELDERS AND THE CONGREGATION...

1. These were **servants** (Grk., “diakonos”, servant, minister) who assisted the elders in the work of the church
2. Their qualifications are found in **1 Ti 3:8-13**
3. The work they do is a very noble one - **1 Ti 3:13**
4. While not identified as deacons per se, the seven men appointed to serve tables may have been prototypes of the service rendered - **Ac 6:1-6**
5. If so, then deacons are certainly “**ministers of mercy**”

C. THE MEMBERS OF THE CONGREGATION ITSELF...

1. Commonly called **saints** (Grk., “hagios”, holy one) in the New Testament - cf. **1 Co 1:2; Ph 1:1**
2. Also called **disciples, Christians, believers**, etc.
3. Among such members there may have been **evangelists** and **teachers** - **Ep 4:11**
 - a. **Evangelists** took the gospel to the lost
 - b. **Teachers** instructed and edified the members
 - c. **Note:** Those commonly referred to as **preachers** or **ministers...**
 - 1) May do the work of both evangelist and teacher - e.g., **2 Ti 4:5; 2:2**
 - 2) But whether they serve as evangelist, teacher, preacher, or minister, within the local

- church they likewise submit to the oversight of the elders
- 3) I.e., there is no indication they had “evangelistic oversight” or authority akin to that given to the bishops (elders, pastors)
 - 4) They were to “take heed to the word”, whereas elders were to “take heed to the flock” - cf. **1 Ti 4:16; Ac 20:28**

CONCLUSION

1. In **Ph 1:1**, we find the organization of the local church alluded to in Paul’s address:

“To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons”

2. Other than the members (“saints”), what organization existed in the local church was a **two-tier** system...
 - a. **Bishops** (also known as elders, pastors), of which there always more than just one
 - b. **Deacons**, who ministered to the congregation under the oversight of the bishops
3. The organization of the local church also suggests a **threefold** mission...
 - a. Bishops reflect the work of **edification**
 - b. Deacons reflect the work of **benevolence**
 - c. Teachers and evangelists, the work of **evangelism**

But it wasn’t long before changes in the organization of the local church occurred. In our next study we shall note what happened then, and what changes often occur in the present...

The Church Jesus Built

Changes In Church Organization

INTRODUCTION

1. In our previous study we saw that churches in the New Testament when completely and scripturally organized had a **two-tier** system... - cf. **Ph 1:1**
 - a. **Bishops** (also known as elders, pastors), of which there always more than just one, who oversaw the local congregation
 - b. **Deacons** ministered to the congregation under the oversight of the bishops
2. The authority of the bishops (elders, pastors) was limited...
 - a. To the flock of God among them, i.e., the local congregation - cf. **Ac 20:28; 1 Pe 5:2**
 - b. Thus each congregation was independent and autonomous, while submitting to the apostles' doctrine - cf. **Ac 2:42; 1 Co 4:17; 14:37**
3. Over the years, many have not been content with the New Testament pattern...
 - a. Soon after the apostles died, changes in the organization of the local church occurred
 - b. Despite later efforts to reform or restore the church, similar changes continued to occur

[In this study we shall review these **changes** and to suggest their **significance**...]

I. CHANGES IN THE ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH

A. ANCIENT CHANGES...

1. In the New Testament, churches that had elders (bishops) never had just one...
 - a. There was always a plurality - cf. **Ph 1:1; Ac 20:17**
 - b. This certainly prevented a one-man rule over a church
2. But things soon changed; as noted by the **Holman Bible Dictionary**...
 - a. During the second century A.D. churches came to have a single bishop, and then that bishop came to exercise oversight over nearby rural churches as well as the city church so that his ecclesiastical territory became known as a "diocese" or "see" ("eparchy" in the East).
 - b. Bishops of churches that had been founded by apostles were said to be in succession to the apostles, and hence their teaching was held to be authentic and their authority collegial.
 - c. By 400 A.D. in the West, the bishop of Rome began to assume extraordinary authority above other bishops.
3. According to **A. T. Robinson's Word Pictures**: "Ignatius shows that in the early second century the office of bishop over the elders had developed, but Lightfoot has shown that it was not so in the first century."

B. MODERN CHANGES...

1. **Many denominations** have simply adopted the later changes in church organization
 - a. Some go back to 400 A.D., and emulate an organization similar to Roman Catholicism
 - b. Others go back to the second century A.D...
 - 1) And have a **three tier system** of bishop, elders, deacons within a congregation

- 2) Or where a bishop or group of bishops (presbyters) oversee a number of churches
2. Some who sought to restore New Testament Christianity later adopted changes that are not much different than what occurred in the past
 - a. **The International Church of Christ** developed a hierarchy of control over churches that emulates the structure found in Catholicism and other churches
 - b. **The sponsoring-church concept** adopted by many churches of Christ has the same effect as changes which occurred in the second century (elders in one area overseeing other churches or areas)

[One might wonder whether such changes have any importance. My response is yes, for several reasons...]

II. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SUCH CHANGES

A. THEY REFLECT AN ATTITUDE...

1. It reflects an attitude toward the Scriptures and the Lord
 - a. That we are free to change whatever we desire
 - b. That we can come up with a more efficient plan of church organization and church cooperation than the Lord
2. The same attitude that allows changes in organization leads to changes in the work, worship, and doctrines of the church

B. THEY CHANGE THE PURPOSE...

1. Remember, organization (design) reflects purpose
2. Change the organization and you change the purpose
3. E.g., in the NT organization of the local church, the purpose of the elders is to watch and feed the flock over which the Spirit has appointed them
4. When elders become overseers of other churches or works in other areas...
 - a. They are no longer shepherds, but administrators
 - b. They presume authority in areas they have not been given
 - c. They take on works they really can't oversee (at least, effectively)
 - d. Their purpose as God's shepherds has changed!

C. THEY UPSET THE BALANCE OF POWER...

1. Changes in organization upset the "balance of power"
2. Other than the authority given the inspired apostles, no man or group of men were given more authority than the elders of a church - cf. **He 13:17**
 - a. Their authority was limited to the church (flock) "among them" - **Ac 20:28; 1 Pe 5:2**
 - b. A plurality of elders in one congregation also kept them in check
3. But when changes in church organization occurred...
 - a. It became possible for one man to control one or more churches
 - b. It became possible for a group of men to control a group of churches
4. Thus authority over churches which ought to rest in Christ and His apostles now becomes vested in uninspired men!

D. THEY INCREASE THE SPREAD OF ERROR...

1. Finally, the Divine wisdom to slow the development of error is hindered
2. Some changes in church organization were an attempt to restrain error
3. But whenever you have an organizational structure above the local church, the potential for

error's spread multiplies!

- a. If error creeps into a local church, it is less likely to spread if each congregation remains independent and autonomous
- b. But if error creeps into a hierarchy like those developed in the second century and later, it can quickly spread to churches expected to submit to the hierarchy

CONCLUSION

1. Church history illustrates **the danger of making changes** in the organization of the church...
 - a. Changes in organization leads to changes in work and worship
 - b. Lack of respect of authority regarding organization is usually accompanied by lack of respect for other doctrinal matters
2. When Jesus said, **“I will build My church”**, He knew the best way to do it...!
 - a. The New Testament reveals how He did it through His apostles
 - b. A clear **pattern** concerning the **organization** of churches in the New Testament reveals its simplicity and evidence of Divine Wisdom

If we are content to **“continue steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine...”** (Ac 2:42), then we will make sure that we follow their ways in Christ pertaining to the **organization** of the local church!

The Church Jesus Built

The Nature Of Worship In The Church

INTRODUCTION

1. Our previous lessons examined the **organization** of the church, in which...
 - a. A clear **pattern** emerges that illustrates its simplicity and Divine Wisdom
 - b. A congregation, when completely organized, consisted of:
 - 1) **Bishops** to oversee the local congregation (also called elders, pastors)
 - 2) **Deacons** to serve the congregation in its work
 - 3) **Saints**, i.e., the members of the congregation
 -- As indicated in Paul's address to the church at Philippi - **Ph 1:1**
 - c. **Authority** was carefully **limited**
 - 1) A plurality of bishops in each church prevented one-man rule
 - 2) Charged to shepherd the flock of God among them, bishops were prevented from exercising authority over more than one congregation
 -- Thus the potential spread of error was severely hindered

2. In this lesson and the one to follow, we shall examine the **worship** of the church...
 - a. For this too can help us identify "**The Church Jesus Built**"
 - b. For certainly those who "**continue steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine**" today will worship in the same manner as did the early Christians under the instruction of Christ and His apostles

3. Now, it is important to appreciate that not all worship is acceptable to God...
 - a. There is **vain worship** - **Mt 15:7-9**
 - b. There is **ignorant worship** - **Ac 17:22-23**
 - c. There is **will (self-imposed) worship** - **Co 2:20-23**
 - d. We should seek to offer what Jesus described as **true worship** (see below)

[What can we learn about the worship of the church? Consider some thoughts regarding **the nature of worship** in the church...]

I. THEIR WORSHIP WAS IN SPIRIT AND IN TRUTH

A. THE TIME HAD COME FOR A NEW KIND OF WORSHIP...

1. As Jesus explained to the Samaritan woman at the well - **Jn 4:23-24**
2. In which people are to worship the Father "**in spirit and truth**"
3. In which those who seek to worship Him "**must worship in spirit and truth**"

B. WORSHIPPING GOD 'IN SPIRIT'...

1. Some understand this to mean "**to do so with sincerity, from the heart**"
 - a. But this does not fit in with the idea that Jesus is making a contrast between OT and NT worship - cf. **Jn 4:19-24**
 - b. And sincerity was required under the OT - **Deu 6:4-7; Isa 1:10-18**
2. I suggest that to worship in spirit means to offer '**spiritual worship**'
 - a. I.e., in contrast to worship that is physical or fleshly
 - b. This contrast is in harmony with the context

- 1) Jesus began by saying **“God is Spirit”**
 - 2) Therefore the worship of Him is to be ‘spiritual’, that is, in keeping with His nature
 - c. This interpretation is in harmony with what we learn elsewhere about the contrast between OT and NT worship
 - 1) **He 9:1-10** teaches that OT worship consisted of **fleshly** ordinances; e.g.:
 - a) A physical structure (tabernacle)
 - b) Special clothing for priests
 - c) Lampstands
 - d) Burning of incense
 - e) Instruments of music
 - f) Animal sacrifices
 -- All of which appealed to the **physical** senses
 - 2) But NT worship is focused toward the **spiritual** side of man:
 - a) God’s temple is spiritual, made up of Christians - **1 Co 3:16; Ep 2:19-22**
 - b) All Christians are priests, offering up spiritual sacrifices - **1 Pe 2:5,9; Ro 12:1; He 13:15**
 - c) Our prayers are as sweet incense - **Re 5:8**
 - d) Our music is making melody with the **heart** - **Ep 5:19**
 - 3) Physical ordinances of the OT were to last until a “time of reformation” - **He 9:9-10**
- **To “worship in spirit”, then, is to offer up ‘spiritual’ worship as taught in the NT and not the ‘physical’ worship as found in the OT**

C. WORSHIPPING GOD ‘IN TRUTH’...

1. Some understand this to worship **according to the commands of God**
 - a. Certainly we should do this
 - b. But again, this is no contrast to what God expected in the OT - cf. **Deu 5:32-33**
 - c. Jesus admitted that the Jews had been right in their worship - **Jn 4:22**
 -- So the contrast is **not** between **true** and **false** worship
 2. The contrast is between that which is **true** (or **real**), and that which had been a **shadow** (or **type**) pointing toward the true!
 - a. Many elements of OT worship were simply a ‘shadow’ of what was to come
 - 1) The Tabernacle was a symbol or type - **He 9:8-9**
 - 2) The Law with its worship was only a ‘shadow’ of that which was to come - **He 10:1**
 - b. Christ is now in the **true** tabernacle (heaven)- **He 9:11-12,24**
 - 1) Therefore we should expect the worship of the **true** to be different from that of the **shadow**
 - 2) And we have already seen that to be the case:
 - a) The OT worship, which was but a **shadow**, was **physical** in nature
 - b) But NT worship, which God now expects of “**true worshipers**”, is according to the **true** realities (God is Spirit, Christ in heaven) and is therefore **spiritual** in nature
- **To “worship in truth”, then, is to offer up the ‘true’, ‘spiritual’ worship as taught in the NT, and not the ‘physical’ worship in the OT which was but a ‘shadow’**

[When we consider **the elements of worship** in our next lesson, I trust we shall see that the worship in the early church was indeed spiritual in its focus. But before we conclude this study, two more things can be said about **the nature of worship** in the church...]

II. THEIR WORSHIP WAS FOR EDIFICATION

A. WORSHIP WAS CERTAINLY DIRECTED TO GOD...

1. As we will see later, they sang ‘hymns’ - cf. **Ep 5:19**
2. The definition of ‘hymn’ is a song of praise to God
- **As God’s creatures, especially those created in His image and redeemed by His Son, the Creator is the primary focus of any worship service - e.g., Re 4:9-11**

B. WORSHIP WAS ALSO TO BUILD UP EACH OTHER...

1. As Paul instructed the church in Corinth - **1 Co 14:26**
 - a. All things were to be done “for edification”
 - b. That is, for the purpose of “building up”
2. Note that in regards to singing...
 - a. They were **“speaking to one another...”** as well as to the Lord - **Ep 5:19**
 - b. They were **“teaching and admonishing one another”** - **Co 3:16**
3. Note the true source of their edification...
 - a. Not the music or melody of the songs themselves
 - b. But the words of the songs which taught and admonished them
 - c. For **spiritual worship** is designed to impact the spiritual side of man, not his fleshly side
- **Worship in the church should therefore edify or build up those engaged in it, not by what may sound good to the ears (the flesh), but by words that impact the heart of man (the spirit)**

[Sadly, it is easy for us to be more interested in the melody and beat of a song, than the actual words! But those seeking true edification will be careful to note the difference. Finally...]

III. THEIR WORSHIP WAS DONE DECENTLY AND IN ORDER

A. THE CHURCH IN CORINTH HAD A PROBLEM...

1. At a time in which Christians enjoyed the gifts of tongues (speaking in a foreign language), those in Corinth were misusing them
 - a. Tongues were designed to be a sign for unbelievers - **1 Co 14:22**
 - b. They were speaking without interpreters, and all at once - **1 Co 14:23**
2. Therefore Paul commanded them to do things decently and in order...
 - a. They were to speak one at a time, and no more than three - **1 Co 14:27**
 - b. If there were no interpreter, they were to remain silent - **1 Co 14:28**
- **Thus they were to do things “decently and in order” - 1 Co 14:40**

B. WORSHIPPING DECENTLY AND IN ORDER...

1. Worship that is **‘decent’** is that which...
 - a. Is done “in a seemly manner”; i.e., fitting for the occasion
 - b. Glorifies God by offering up “spiritual worship” (worship in keeping with His nature; not necessarily what we want) - cf. **Jn 4:23-24**
 - c. Edifies the brethren by teaching and admonishing them - cf. **1 Co 14:26**
2. Worship that is **‘in order’** is that which...
 - a. Follows “a fixed arrangement”; i.e., not totally spontaneous - e.g., **1 Co 14:27**
 - b. Contributes to peace, not confusion - cf. **1 Co 14:33**

CONCLUSION

1. When we consider **the elements of worship** in our next lesson...
 - a. We will see how they are consistent with **the nature of worship**
 - b. That what the worship of the early church was indeed done:
 - 1) **In spirit and truth**
 - 2) **For the purpose of edification**
 - 3) **Decently and in order**

2. Remember, not all worship is acceptable to God. Worship based upon...
 - a. The doctrines of men is **vain worship** - **Mt 15:7-9**
 - b. A lack of understanding of God's nature is **ignorant worship** - **Ac 17:22-23**
 - c. What we think is best is **will worship** (self-imposed religion), and of no true value in overcoming the flesh - **Co 2:20-23**

Let those who seek to be a part of **“The Church Jesus Built”** listen closely to the Master...

“But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”
(Jn 4:23-24)

Are we **“true worshipers”** of the Father?

The Church Jesus Built

The Elements Of Worship In The Church

INTRODUCTION

1. In seeking to better understand “**The Church Jesus Built**”, we are looking at the **worship** of the church as revealed in the New Testament
2. The preceding lesson made the following observations about **the nature of worship** in the early church...
 - a. Their worship was **in spirit and truth** - **Jn 4:23-24**
 - b. Their worship was **for edification** - **1 Co 14:26**
 - c. Their worship was to be done **decently and in order** - **1 Co 14:40**
3. In determining what was meant to **worship God in spirit and truth**, I suggested that...
 - a. It involved worship in keeping with God’s nature (God is Spirit, our worship is to be spiritual)
 - b. It would be different from the “fleshly ordinances” of the Old Testament which were a shadow of that which is true (or real)
4. This lesson will identify **the elements of worship** as described in the NT...
 - a. I.e., the **activities** in which the early church engaged in their worship
 - b. With some observations about their **spiritual** nature in contrast to OT worship

[Let’s begin by noticing...]

I. ACTIVITIES IN THE WORSHIP OF THE CHURCH

A. THEY OBSERVED THE LORD’S SUPPER...

1. As commanded by the Lord and His apostles
 - a. A memorial feast instituted by Jesus Himself - **Lk 22:14-20**
 - b. Taught to the churches by the apostles - **1 Co 11:23-29**
 - c. In this memorial they remembered:
 - 1) The sinless body offered on the cross
 - 2) The blood shed to provide forgiveness for their sins
 - d. In this memorial they proclaimed their faith in the efficacy of the Lord’s death
2. On the first day of the week
 - a. As described in **Ac 20:7**
 - b. One can infer from this passage that they were doing this every week
 - c. Other passages certainly indicate they were assembling regularly on the first day of the week - e.g., **1 Co 16:1-2**

B. THEY GAVE TO MEET CERTAIN NEEDS...

1. The church was noted for its love for one another
 - a. As exemplified in the church at Jerusalem - cf. **Ac 2:44,45; 4:32-35**
 - b. Such love went beyond those in the local congregation - **Ac 11:27-30**
2. A weekly collection was instituted
 - a. To provide for the needs of the saints - **1 Co 16:1-2**

- b. Principles were taught to determine how much one should give
 - 1) “As he may prosper” - **1 Co 16:2**
 - 2) Whatever is given with “a willing mind” - **2 Co 8:12**
 - 3) “According to what one has” - **2 Co 8:12-13**
 - 4) “As he purposes (plans) in his heart” - **2 Co 9:7**
 - 5) Whatever one can give “cheerfully”, not “grudgingly” or “of necessity” - **2 Co 9:7**
 - 6) Keeping in mind the principle of “sowing and reaping” - **2 Co 9:6,8**
- 3. Funds so collected were used to help needy Christians, including those who devoted their lives to preaching the gospel - cf. **2 Co 11:8,9; Ph 4:10-18**

C. THEY LISTENED TO THE WORD...

- 1. They were noted for their attention to the Word
 - a. The church in Jerusalem “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine...” - **Ac 2:42**
 - b. As ambassadors of Christ, the apostles’ words were taken very seriously - cf. **1 Co 14:37; 1 Th 2:13**
- 2. They therefore used their assemblies to hear God’s Word
 - a. As when Paul spoke at Troas - **Ac 20:7**
 - b. Or when letters from the apostles had been received - cf. **Co 4:16**

D. THEY OFFERED PRAYERS AND SONGS...

- 1. Prayers were offered in their assemblies
 - a. As indicated in **1 Co 14:15-17**
 - b. Especially in times of trouble - cf. **Ac 12:5,12**
- 2. Songs were sung when they were together
 - a. Using psalms, hymns and spiritual songs to speak to one another - **Ep 5:19**
 - b. Using the same to teach and admonish one another - **Co 3:16**

[Such were the **activities** in which the Christians engaged in the worship of the early church. But in what way was their worship any more **spiritual** than that seen in the Old Testament? Let me suggest a few observations regarding...]

II. THE SPIRITUAL NATURE OF THEIR WORSHIP

A. CONTRAST THE LORD’S SUPPER WITH O.T. SACRIFICES...

- 1. The OT required elaborate ritual in offering various sacrifices, which certainly involved the physical senses (sight, sound, smell, touch)
- 2. The Supper, a memorial of Christ’s sacrifice, involves the mind more than the senses
 - a. Requiring meditation rather than much in the way of physical action
 - b. Involving a time for reflection, self-examination

B. CONTRAST THEIR GIVING WITH O.T. TITHING...

- 1. The OT required a specific amount (a tithe, or ten percent), which could easily be given in a perfunctory manner
- 2. Giving in the NT was based upon principles requiring careful thought and proper attitudes
 - a. As one prospered and purposed in their heart
 - b. Cheerfully, without grudging obligation

C. CONTRAST THEIR SINGING WITH O.T. MUSIC...

- 1. Mechanical instruments were used in the OT to accompany praise to God

2. In NT worship, the instrument they used was the “heart”, not the “harp”
 - a. Upon which they were to “make melody” - cf. **Ep 5:19**
 - b. In which they were to sing “with grace” - cf. **Co 3:16**

D. CONTRAST OTHER ELEMENTS OF WORSHIP...

1. The OT required:
 - a. A physical tabernacle (temple)
 - b. Separate priesthood
 - c. Special garments
 - d. Burning of incense
 - e. Elaborate ceremonies, special feast days
2. In NT worship:
 - a. The temple is the people of God - **1 Co 3:16-17; Ep 2:20-22**
 - b. All Christians are priests - **1 Pe 2:5,9**
 - c. They adorned themselves with Christ - **Ga 3:27; Co 3:5-14**
 - d. Their prayers were as incense - **Re 5:8**
 - e. Observance of feast days was a cause of concern - **Ga 4:10,11; Co 2:16,17**

CONCLUSION

1. The worship in the early church was **simple**, and it was **spiritual**...
 - a. Certainly simple in contrast with the worship of the Old Covenant
 - b. Designed to encourage the worship of God with the inner man, not to make an impression on the outer man

-- **Not to say that the outer man was not affected, but the priority was on the spiritual**
2. This was especially true in regards to the use of mechanical instruments of music...
 - a. “... the first Christians were of too spiritual a fiber to substitute lifeless instruments for or to use them to accompany the human voice.” - **Catholic Encyclopedia**
 - b. “The execution of Byzantine church music by instruments, or even the accompaniment of sacred chanting by instruments was ruled out by the Eastern Fathers as being incompatible with the pure, solemn, spiritual character of the religion of Christ.” - **Constantine Cavarnos, Byzantine Sacred Music**
 - c. “Musical instruments in celebrating the praises of God would be no more suitable than the burning of incense, the lighting up of lamps, the restoration of the other shadows of the law. The Papists, therefore, have foolishly borrowed this, as well as many other things, from the Jews. Men who are fond of outward pomp may delight in that noise; but the simplicity which God recommends to us by the apostle is far more pleasing to Him.” - **John Calvin, Commentary on the Book of Psalms, Vol. I, p. 539**
3. Sadly, many today think that to become more “spiritual” requires innovation (change)...
 - a. Such as mechanical instruments, clapping, burning of incense, theatrical productions
 - b. But such things appeal to the fleshly side of man, rather than to his spiritual side!

-- **When one looks to the OT for the kind of worship they offer, they are taking a step backward, not forward to true spirituality!**
4. Some complain that simple singing and worship is outdated and boring...
 - a. But the “fleshly ordinances” of the OT are older than the “spiritual worship” of the NT!
 - b. If we find the spiritual worship of the NT boring, is that not a sad commentary on our own

spiritual condition?

1) The melody of a song may only be a simple chant...

2) But if the words of the song present spiritual truths, how can that be boring?

-- **Is it really outdated, or simply challenging to those seeking to entertain themselves?**

In **“The Church Jesus Built”**, the worship will seek to worship God the way Jesus instructs, again noting His words:

“But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

(Jn 4:23-24)

Is our worship “in spirit and truth”?

The Church Jesus Built

The Work Of The Church

INTRODUCTION

1. Having considered the organization and worship of “**The Church Jesus Built**”, what about the **work** of the church...?
 - a. What does the Lord intend for His church to do in this world?
 - b. Are we free to involve the church in whatever work we deem suitable?

2. In asking such questions, we should continue to note the distinction between the church **universal** and the church **local**...
 - a. The church **universal** has no earthly organization in which to do its work; what work it does is done as individuals who live and work in the world
 - b. The church **local** has organization as we have seen, and as such is capable of some sort of corporate (as opposed to individual) work

-- **It is the work of the church local that I am addressing in this study**

3. The work of the church can be gleaned in some respects from what is revealed about the **organization** and **worship** of the church...
 - a. For the Lord organized His church to effectively carry out its work
 - b. And the worship ordained would certainly complement the church in its work

-- **Look at the organization and worship of the church, and that begins to tell one what the work of the church is!**

[With that in mind, and turning now to the Scriptures, let me first stress that the work of the church includes...]

I. EDIFICATION (PREPARING THE SAINTS FOR SERVICE)

A. IMPLIED BY ITS ORGANIZATION AND WORSHIP...

1. The local church when completely organized will have bishops (elders, pastors)
 - a. Their function is to feed and oversee the flock - **Ac 20:28; 1 Pe 5:1-2**
 - b. As they carry out their responsibilities, the church will be built up (edified)
2. The activities of their worship are designed to edify
 - a. E.g., singing designed to exhort and admonish, as well as praise God - **Ep 5:19; Co 3:16**
 - b. E.g., preaching and teaching which certainly edifies the church

B. EXPLICITLY STATED IN THE SCRIPTURES...

1. Speaking of the gifts which Christ gave His church - **Ep 4:11**
2. Such gifts (including that of evangelists, pastors and teachers) are designed:
 - a. For the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry
 - b. For the edifying of the body of Christ - **Ep 4:12**
3. As each person in the church does their part, the end result will be the “growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love” - **Ep 4:15-16**

[When one looks at how the local church is organized, what it is called to do in worship, and the purpose of the gifts that Christ gave His church, I believe it is fair to say that the primary work of the local church is **edification**, i.e., the spiritual development of its members! But clearly there is more. The work of the local church certainly includes...]

II. BENEVOLENCE (PROVIDING FOR NEEDY SAINTS)

A. THE EARLY CHURCH CARED FOR ITS MEMBERS...

1. We see it in the church at Jerusalem for its own - **Ac 4:32-37**
2. We see it in the church at Antioch for their brethren in Judea - **Ac 11:27-30**
3. We see in the churches of Macedonia and Achaia for their brethren in Jerusalem - **Ro 15:25-26**

B. ITS ORGANIZATION AND WORSHIP ACCOMMODATED SUCH WORK...

1. Deacons were appointed - cf. **Ph 1:1; 1 Tim 3:8-13**
 - a. They served the congregation
 - b. If the seven selected in **Acts 6** were prototypes of the work of deacons, they would certainly serve in providing assistance for widows and other needy members - **Ac 6:1-6**
2. The collection for needy saints was made a part of the weekly assembly - **1 Co 16:1-2**

C. THERE WERE LIMITATIONS TO ITS BENEVOLENCE...

1. In Paul's instructions to Timothy - **1 Ti 5:9-16**
 - a. Widows with believing family members were not to be supported
 - b. Their own families should support them, that *"the church not be burdened"*
 2. Examples of church benevolence are limited to needy saints
 - a. In every case of church benevolence, i.e., where money was taken from the church treasury, the recipients were believers in need - cf. **Ro 15:25-26; 1 Co 16:1-2; 2 Co 8:1-4; 9:1**
 - b. Of course, individually Christians are expected to be "good Samaritans" and help those in the world as they have opportunity and ability
- **This implies that the local church was not intended to be a social agency to cure all the social ills in the world. It has neither the organization nor resources to do so!**

[The work of **benevolence**, while important, appears to take a back seat to the primary work of the church, which was **edification**. But there is another work of the church, which is a natural outgrowth of equipping the saints for ministry...]

III. EVANGELISM (PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL)

A. THE EARLY CHURCHES WERE INVOLVED IN EVANGELISM...

1. They sent out preachers to spread the word in new places - cf. **Ac 13:1-3**
2. They provided support for such preachers - e.g., **2 Co 11:8,9**

B. THIS IS CONSISTENT WITH WHAT THE LORD EXPECTS...

1. For His disciples were to make more disciples - **Mt 28:19-20**
2. For His people are to proclaim the praises of God - **1 Pe 2:9-10**
3. And among the gifts He gave to His church was the function of "evangelists" - **Ep 4:11**

CONCLUSION

1. The work of the church can be summarized as:
 - a. **Edification** (preparing the saints for service)
 - b. **Benevolence** (providing for the needy saints)
 - c. **Evangelism** (proclaiming the gospel)
2. For such work the Lord designed His church, especially in the **local** sense...
 - a. As reflected in its **organization**
 - b. As reflected in its **worship**
3. When we let the **local** church do its proper work, it will...
 - a. “equip saints for the work of the ministry”
 - b. “edify the body of Christ”
 - c. “grow up in all things into Him who is the head, Christ”
4. If we are to truly be “**The Church Jesus Built**”...
 - a. Let’s be sure to understand what the work of the church is
 - b. Let’s make sure that we carry out that work in the local church as taught in the New Testament

May we today let the church be “**The Church Jesus Built**”, in its nature, its organization, its worship, and its work! In this way we can do our part to fulfill the prayer of Paul:

*“to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever.
Amen.” (Ep 3:21)*

The Church Jesus Built

Innovations In The Work Of The Church

INTRODUCTION

1. In our previous study, we summarized the work of the church as...
 - a. **Edification** (preparing the saints for service)
 - b. **Benevolence** (providing for the needy saints)
 - c. **Evangelism** (proclaiming the gospel)

2. When we let the **local** church do its proper work, it will...
 - a. “equip saints for the work of the ministry”
 - b. “edify the body of Christ”
 - c. “grow up in all things into Him who is the head, Christ”

3. Yet it is not uncommon for the **local** church to be used in ways God did not intend, such as for political or social activism...
 - a. Not that such causes are without merit
 - 1) As individuals, Christians can certainly participate in such matters
 - 2) Using other organizations such as family, community, or governmental agencies
 - b. But the local church is **limited** in its resources
 - 1) It can easily become “burdened” (cf. **1 Ti 5:16**)
 - 2) It can be hindered or distracted from fulfilling its true purpose

[Among many churches, innovations have been introduced into the work of the church. Though well intentioned, they tend to **denominationalize** and/or **secularize** the church. One such innovation is...]

I. INSTITUTIONALISM

A. INSTITUTIONALISM DEFINED...

1. The support of human institutions from the treasury of local churches
 - a. “...the doctrine or practice of a church sending money to an institution of some kind in order to carry out some work that the church has deemed worthy of support.”
- <http://www.goodfight.com/notes/Institutionalism.html>
 - b. “... this may include supporting missionary organizations, orphan's homes, nursing homes, schools, other churches, even political organizations.” - **ibid.**
2. Such institutions are often called ‘**parachurch organizations**’
 - a. “The parachurch is effectively a new form of religious organization that dates from the early 19th century.”
 - b. “In the first quarter of the 19th century, parachurch organizations were abundant in many forms -- Bible tract societies, independent educational organizations, independent missionary groups, and moral reform organizations.”
 - c. “The defining characteristic of a parachurch is that it stands outside of the organizational structure of well-established religious bodies.”
 - d. “Parachurches are often the creation of an entrepreneur or a small cadre of people who seek to achieve specific goals.”
-- <http://religiousbroadcasting.lib.virginia.edu/parachurch.html>

3. The goal of such institutions are certainly noble: evangelism, benevolence, edification, etc.
 - a. The issue in this study is not whether such institutions have a right to exist
 - b. The issue is whether local churches should support them out of their treasury

B. PROBLEMS WITH INSTITUTIONALISM...

1. **There is no scriptural support for churches to support human institutions**
 - a. There is no example of NT churches sending money to human institutions as a way of carrying out their work of evangelism, edification, or benevolence
 - b. The practice began in the 19th century (see above)
 - c. In the NT, churches sent money directly to other churches or individuals
2. **It gives oversight of the local church's work to those not its elders**
 - a. Human institutions are governed by board members, CEOs, or other individuals
 - b. Churches 'out source' their work and their oversight by giving to such organizations
3. **It turns the local church into a collection agency for man-made organizations**
 - a. Institutions appeal for churches to support their organizations
 - b. The local church thus becomes a mini 'United Way' for human institutions
4. **It tends to denominationalize the church**
 - a. Institutions usually identify their association with a particular group of churches
 - b. E.g., a 'Church of Christ school', or 'Church of Christ benevolent home', etc.
 - c. The use of 'Church of Christ' in such a way contributes to a denominational mindset
5. Additional insights regarding the problems with institutionalism come from an article on **Parachurch Organizations** by **William McDonald**:
 - a. "One result is that capable teachers and preachers have been called away from their primary ministries in order to become administrators. If all mission board administrators were serving on the mission field, it would greatly reduce the need for personnel there."
 - b. "Another result of the proliferation of organizations is that vast sums of money are needed for overhead, and thus diverted from direct gospel outreach. The greater part of every dollar given to many Christian organizations is devoted to the expense of maintaining the organization rather than to the primary purpose for which it was founded."
 - c. "Organizations often hinder the fulfillment of the Great Commission. Jesus told His disciples to teach all the things He had commanded. Many who work for Christian organizations find they are not permitted to teach all the truth of God. They must not teach certain controversial matters for fear they will alienate the constituency to whom they look for financial support."
 - d. "The multiplication of Christian institutions has too often resulted in factions, jealousy, and rivalry that have done great harm to the testimony of Christ. 'Consider the overlapping multiplicity of Christian organizations at work, at home, and abroad. Each competes for limited personnel and for shrinking financial resources. And consider how many of these organizations really owe their origin to purely human rivalry, though public statements usually refer to God's will (Daily Notes of the Scripture Union).'"

-- <http://web.singnet.com.sg/~syec/literature/parachurch.html>

[Whether **individual Christians** should support such human institutions is another issue. There is no authority for **local churches** to do so, and it is fraught with problems. The same is true regarding...]

II. SPONSORING CHURCHES

A. SPONSORING CHURCH CONCEPT DEFINED...

1. Where one congregation oversees a work in another area, or the combined efforts of two or more churches
 - a. “One congregation that especially oversees a project such as a mission society, in which other congregations have an interest and to which they voluntarily contribute regularly. The fact that other churches contribute to a project this is overseen by the elders of one church is the central idea.” - **J. D. Thomas**, *We Be Brethren*, p. 355
 - b. “A sponsoring church is a congregation which assumes the oversight and control of some activity in the general field of evangelism, edification, or benevolence.” - **Kevin Kay**, *Institutionalism: Sponsoring Church*
2. Some examples of sponsoring church arrangements
 - a. A church sponsors a foreign work, with its elders overseeing the evangelist(s) and the congregation(s) in a particular area
 - b. A church sponsors a work beyond its own ability to finance (e.g., TV, radio), and asks other churches to financially support its efforts
 - c. A church sponsors an evangelist, with other churches channeling their support of said evangelist through the auspices and control of the sponsoring church
3. The sponsoring church concept was developed as an alternative to parachurch organizations
 - a. Many opposed human institutions like missionary societies
 - b. This alternative sought to do the same work through churches rather than societies

B. PROBLEMS WITH THE SPONSORING CHURCH ARRANGEMENT...

1. **There is no clear scriptural support for the sponsoring-church concept**
 - a. Some point to Jerusalem as a ‘sponsoring church’ - cf. **Ac 11:29-30; 12:25**
 - 1) Where supposedly the elders of the Jerusalem oversaw the work
 - 2) But the ‘elders’ in **Ac 11:30** are just as likely those of the churches in Judea
 - b. Some believe Philippi ‘sponsored’ Paul’s support - cf. **2 Co 11:8; Ph 4:15-16**
 - 1) Where supposedly support from other churches were funneled through Philippi
 - 2) But Paul’s remarks in **Ph 4:15** refer to the beginning of the work in Macedonia, and **2 Co 11:8** can easily include support received directly from other churches later
2. **It gives too much oversight to the elders of a local church**
 - a. Elders were to oversee the flock of God ‘among you’ - cf. **Ac 20:28; 1 Pe 5:1-2**
 - b. Elders of a sponsoring church have oversight beyond the local congregation
 - c. They oversee works in other places, even churches in other countries
 - d. Who gave the elders the right to assume such authority?
3. **It violates the NT pattern for local church autonomy**
 - a. In the NT, congregations were independent, autonomous
 - b. Other than the Lord and His apostles, a congregation was answerable only to its elders - cf. **1 Pe 5:5; He 13:7,17**
 - c. Elders of the sponsoring church expects churches and individuals they ‘sponsor’ to be answerable to them
 - d. Sponsoring churches have sought to control the actions and even the property of churches or works they ‘sponsor’ (especially in foreign countries)
4. **It reverses the goal of scriptural cooperation between churches**
 - a. In the NT, support always worked toward the direction of equality - cf. **2 Co 8:13-14**
 - b. In the sponsoring church concept, smaller churches send money to bigger churches
 - c. Instead of equality, big churches become bigger at the expense of smaller churches
5. **It seeks to activate the universal church**
 - a. The sponsoring church concept was originally developed in opposition to church supported missionary societies (e.g., the American Christian Missionary Society)

- b. The missionary society concept was designed to activate the universal church
- c. Thus the sponsoring church seeks to accomplish the same as the missionary society
- d. Yet such efforts lead to the next problem...
- 6. **It leads to denominationalizing the church**
 - a. Attempts to activate the universal church lead to denominationalism
 - b. Invariably, such efforts separate those who support such efforts from those who do not
 - c. Before long, groups of churches are identified by whether or not they support such efforts (e.g., institutional vs. non-institutional churches)
 - d. People begin asking “Are you with us, or them?”, sounding like those in Corinth - cf. **1 Co 1:11-12**

[Both **institutionalism** and the **sponsoring church** concept have done much to **denominationalize** churches of Christ. Another innovation has done much to **secularize** churches of Christ...

III. SOCIAL PROGRAMS

A. SOCIAL PROGRAMS DEFINED...

- 1. Where churches use their funds to offer social programs
 - a. Either for their own members
 - b. Or for those in their community and beyond
- 2. Social programs such as:
 - a. Day care centers, schools, counseling services
 - b. Orphan homes, disaster relief, medical missions
 - c. Family life centers, gymnasiums, racket ball courts
- 3. Through such efforts, using the local church to:
 - a. Solve social ills in our society
 - b. Provide entertainment for young people to keep them interested and out of trouble

B. PROBLEMS WITH SOCIAL PROGRAMS...

- 1. **There is no scriptural support for the church to support social programs**
 - a. The church certainly provided benevolence for Christians - cf. **1 Co 16:1-2; Ro 15:26**
 - b. As individuals we are certainly to be “good Samaritans” - cf. **Ga 6:10; Ja 1:27**
 - c. But there is no indication that the local church became a business that offered such a wide range of services
- 2. **It burdens the local church with activities for which it was not designed**
 - a. Notice Paul’s concern that the church not be ‘burdened’ - cf. **1 Ti 5:16**
 - b. Christians were expected to fulfill their familial duties - cf. **1 Ti 5:8**
 - c. Thus limitations were placed on who the church could support - cf. **1 Ti 5:9-13**
 - d. The church has its own work to fulfill (e.g., evangelism, edification), while the Lord expects individuals, families, governments, and society at large to fulfill their duties - cf. **1 Ti 5:4,14** (family); **Ro 13:3-4** (government)
- 3. **It has the long term effect of secularizing the church**
 - a. **Secularize** - To draw away from religious orientation; make worldly - **American Heritage Dictionary**
 - b. The effects of secularization on the church through social programs are evident:
 - 1) Elders (shepherds, pastors) become board members, directors, managers
 - 2) Evangelists (preachers, ministers) become staff managers, personal counselors
 - 3) Churches have youth directors, education superintendents, family counselors, secretaries, janitors, etc.

- c. Losing its spiritual focus, a congregation becomes:
 - 1) A **business** instead of a **body**
 - 2) A **foundation** instead of a **family**
 - 3) A **corporation** instead of a **church**

CONCLUSION

1. Again, it is **not** that there are social causes that do not need to be addressed...
 - a. As individuals, Christians can and should make an impact
 - b. They can use other organizations such as family, community, or governmental agencies
 - c. Like leaven, their influence may not be as noticeable, but nonetheless real - cf. **Mt 13:33**
2. But do not forget that the **local** church is **limited** in its resources...
 - a. It can easily become “burdened” (cf. **1 Ti 5:16**)
 - b. It can be hindered or distracted from fulfilling its true purpose intended by God
3. History has shown the impact of institutionalism, the sponsoring church concept, and church involvement in social programs: **denominationalism** and **secularization**

Being ‘**in**’ the world, there is the danger of becoming ‘**of**’ the world (cf. **Jn 17:14-15**). Should we not be content to “let the church be the church”, especially in regards to its work...?

The Church Jesus Built

Identifying The Lord’s Church Today

INTRODUCTION

1. In this series we have sought to examine “**The Church Jesus Built**” by studying...
 - a. The **nature** of the church
 - b. The **authority** of the church
 - c. The **organization** of the church
 - d. The **worship** of the church
 - e. The **work** of the church

2. We noted some of the distinctions between the church **universal** and the church **local**...

The Church “Universal”	The Church “Local”
Composed of all Christians	Composed of Christians in one location
There is just one	There are many
Began on the Day of Pentecost	Begins when people join together
Enter only by being added by the Lord	Enter by joining ourselves
The Lord keeps the books of membership	Enrolled by human judgment
Consists of all the saved	Consists of both saved and lost
Must be in this to be saved	Do not have to be in this to be saved
Has no earthly organization	Has earthly organization
Can’t be divided	Can be divided
Death doesn’t affect membership	Death does affect membership

3. When we are aware of the difference between the church **universal** and **local** churches, we are better equipped to identify “**The Church Jesus Built**” today...
 - a. In view of the high estimation placed upon the church as described in the New Testament, I would like to be able to identify it today, wouldn’t you?
 - b. But is our task one of being able to identify the church **universal**, or **local** churches?

[It is the latter question that I wish to address in this study. Let me begin by asking...]

I. CAN WE IDENTIFY THE CHURCH “UNIVERSAL”?

A. ONE POPULAR APPROACH IN EVANGELISM IS AS FOLLOWS...

1. Jesus said He would build **His** church, and we read about it in the Bible
2. If today you could find that church we read about in the Bible, wouldn't you want to be a member of it?
3. Well, here is a chart which shows the **pattern** of the New Testament church...
 - a. A chart is then used which describes the beginning of the church (its founder, place and time of origin, and its head)
 - b. The chart also lists verses describing the organization, name, worship, etc., of the church
4. If you can find the church that is like this in all respects, then it is the New Testament church today!

B. THE PROBLEM WITH THIS APPROACH...

1. Are we not trying to identify the one and true church, i.e., the church “universal”?
2. But charts like the one described above often make no distinction between the church **universal** and the church **local**
 - a. E.g., its founder, time and place of origin, head, etc., refers to the **universal** church
 - b. Yet passages describing organization, name, worship, etc., refer to the **local** church!
3. This can easily lead to confusion...
 - a. Concerning the church **universal**
 - 1) That **it** may have earthly organization
 - 2) That **it** is overseen by elders and served by deacons
 - b. Concerning the church **local**
 - 1) That **they** all started in Jerusalem
 - 2) That **they** all started in 30 A.D.
4. It is virtually impossible to identify the church **universal** in this way
 - a. It has no earthly organization that can be visibly seen
 - b. Only the Lord knows...
 - 1) Those who are truly saved
 - 2) Those who thereby make up His body, the one true church!
5. At best, we can only identify **local** churches today

C. A MORE SCRIPTURAL WAY TO DISCUSS THE CHURCH...

1. Regarding the church **universal**
 - a. Emphasize that the Lord is in the process of building His one true church
 - b. Which consists of all the saved, for the Lord adds those being saved to it
 - c. Here is how you can be saved and thereby become a member of the Lord’s church...
2. Regarding the church **local**
 - a. Once saved, and a member of the body of Christ, the NT teaches you should “join yourself” with a local congregation
 - b. But which one? How can you identify which of the myriad congregations are considered by the Lord as His faithful churches in the local sense?
 - c. Now let’s examine what the NT reveals about the local church...

[This approach is not only scriptural, it also has less potential for confusing the **universal** church with the **local** church. With this in mind, here are a few thoughts on...]

II. HOW TO IDENTIFY THE CHURCH “LOCAL”

A. THE “NAME” IS A GOOD PLACE TO BEGIN...

1. The name of a local congregation reveals much
 - a. Whether the church is concerned about promoting unity in the body of Christ
 - b. If the name is a denominational name, religious division must not be a major concern of those in the congregation
2. The “name” should therefore be a scriptural name
 - a. **There is no one scriptural name** for the Lord's church in the New Testament
 - 1) The expressions “church of God” (**1 Co 1:2**), “churches of God” (**1 Th 2:14**), and “churches of Christ” (**Ro 16:16**) are commonly used
 - 2) Other terms are used also, and all reflecting an association with God and Christ (body of Christ, kingdom of God, bride of Christ, temple of God, etc.)
 - b. But **the use of scriptural names** instead of a humanly-conceived name...
 - 1) Reflects a desire to follow the Scriptures, and not human tradition

- 2) Certainly conveys a desire to honor God and Christ, and not some man, creed or particular doctrine
 3. However, the “name” alone is not a sure guide
 - a. Just as the name “Mrs. Copeland” alone is not a sure guide if you were seeking to find my wife
 - 1) For there are a lot of women who go by the name, “Mrs. Copeland”
 - 2) But only one who bears the name is properly my wife!
 - b. So there may be many congregations that bear the name of Christ or God that may not be truly honoring them!
 - 1) For example, there are over 200 separate denominations that use the name “Church of God”
 - 2) Likewise, there may be “Churches of Christ” that are no less a congregation of the Lord than any with a denominational name!
- **Yet I would still recommend that one begin with the name, and in particular those congregations that use the expression “church of Christ”**

B. EXAMINE THE “GOSPEL” BEING PREACHED...

1. Remember how Christ is adding people to His church **universal**
 - a. Through the gospel, He calls us - **2 Th 2:14**
 - b. As we heed the gospel call, the Lord adds us to His body, the church - **Ac 2:41,47**
 - c. That is why it is so important that the gospel not be perverted in any way - **Ga 1:6-9**
2. If the gospel proclaimed by those in a **local** church is different...
 - a. By changing either the facts or commands of the gospel...
 - b. ...then people are not being saved, and the Lord is not adding them to His church!
3. A church with a perverted gospel...
 - a. May have the nicest people, but they are still unregenerate people!
 - b. May wear the name of Christ, both as individuals and as a church, but are not truly the people of God, nor a part of **“The Church Jesus Built”!**

C. COMPARE THE “PRACTICE” WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT PATTERN...

1. In the New Testament, we find a **pattern** regarding local churches
 - a. The NT describes the early church during its first 60 years
 - b. A careful study of Acts and the epistles reveal a picture of the church
 - c. From this picture, a pattern emerges in reference to:
 - 1) The worship of local churches
 - 2) The work of local churches
 - 3) The organization of the churches
 - d. This pattern emerges as we see the early Christians...
 - 1) Continuing steadfastly in the “apostles’ doctrine” - **Ac 2:42**
 - 2) Being taught the same things in every church - cf. **1 Co 4:17; 16:1-2**
2. Faithful churches abiding in the “apostles’ doctrine” will reflect this **pattern** today
 - a. Their **worship** will be like that described in the New Testament
 - b. Their **work** as a congregation will be similar to that found in the New Testament
 - c. Their **organization** as a congregation will seek to be like that described in the New Testament
3. **At the very least**, does the local congregation allow you...
 - a. To fulfill your obligations related to other Christians?
 - 1) E.g., gathering on the first day of the week to break bread? - **Ac 20:7**
 - 2) E.g., laying by in store as God has prospered you? - **1 Co 16:1-2**

- b. To fulfill your obligations without violating your conscience?
 - 1) E.g., praising God in song without mechanical instruments of music?
 - 2) E.g., using the Lord's treasury for what is the proper work of the church?
- 4. Bear in mind, **no congregation is perfect** - cf. **Re 2:1-7; 3:1-6**
 - a. Christians are not perfect, though they are to strive toward perfection
 - b. Churches may lack the spiritual fervor we might desire to see in them
 - c. But if a church at least provides the basics for your spiritual growth and service, then perhaps you can encourage the other members to grow and serve with you!

CONCLUSION

1. If we wish to identify "**The Church Jesus Built**" today...
 - a. We cannot point to one group of churches and say "There is The One True Church!"
 - b. For "**The One True Church**" that Jesus built...
 - 1) Is a spiritual entity, a body made up of saved individuals throughout the world
 - 2) With no earthly headquarters nor earthly organization
2. But there are countless individuals who have joined themselves together as **local churches**...
 - a. Following the apostles' doctrine as revealed in the New Testament
 - b. Imitating the pattern seen in the New Testament regarding the work, worship and organization of the local church
 - c. And such churches can be so identified today!
 - d. **Feel free to contact me if you would like for me to see if I can find a church in your area**
3. A person's first concern should be to look to the Lord through His Word to save him, thereby adding him to His church **universal**
4. Having done that, he or she should then examine the New Testament to learn what to look for as one seeks to locate and worship with one of His **local** churches

But suppose one is unable to find an established congregation in their area that is following the New Testament pattern, what then? The answer will be offered in our next and final lesson in this series...

The Church Jesus Built

Starting The Lord's Church In Your Home

INTRODUCTION

1. In our previous study, I offered suggestions on identifying the Lord's church today...
 - a. The **name** of a congregation is a good place to begin
 - b. Examine the **gospel** being preached
 - c. Compare the **practice** with the New Testament pattern
2. Whenever possible, we should seek to join ourselves with an established congregation...
 - a. There are benefits the Lord designed for us from such fellowship
 - b. Especially when a congregation is completely and scripturally organized
3. But it is not always possible to find a congregation of the Lord...
 - a. Where the authority of the apostles' doctrine is respected
 - b. Where the worship is in Spirit and truth
 - c. Where the church is engaged in the work the Lord intended
4. In such cases, it is possible to start the Lord's church in one's own home...
 - a. Priscilla and Aquila had churches meet in their home - **Ro 16:3-5; 1 Co 16:19**
 - b. As well as other Christians in the first century - cf. **Co 4:15; Phe 1:2**
 - c. My family met in their home for two years when we lived in Taiwan
 - d. Indeed, many established churches today began with Christians meeting in a home

[If you deem it necessary to start a church in your home, perhaps these suggestions may be helpful...]

I. GIVE PRAYERFUL CONSIDERATION

A. TO THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST...

1. Remember, this is how Christ adds people to His church **universal**
 - a. Through the gospel, He calls us - **2 Th 2:14**
 - b. As we heed the gospel call, the Lord adds us to His body, the church - **Ac 2:41,47**
 - c. That is why it is so important that the gospel not be perverted in any way - **Ga 1:6-9**
 2. If the gospel we have obeyed is different from that revealed in the Scriptures...
 - a. By changing either the facts or commands of the gospel...
 - b. ...then we have not been saved, and the Lord has not added us to His church!
 3. If the church in your home holds to a perverted gospel...
 - a. You may be the nicest people, but you are still unregenerate people!
 - b. You may profess the name of Christ, both as individuals and as a church, but you are not truly the people of God, nor a part of "**The Church Jesus Built**"!
 4. As you give consideration to the gospel, these studies may prove helpful...
 - a. **Conversions In The Book Of Acts**
 - b. **Baptism - A Special Study**
- These and others studies can be found online at <http://ExecutableOutlines.com>

B. TO YOUR INTENTION...

1. Why are you wanting to start a church in your home?
 - a. Is it because you can't get along with people in another congregation?
 - b. Is it because you have problems submitting to authority (e.g., elders)?
 2. The Lord knows your heart, and will bless your efforts only if properly motivated
 - a. To serve the Lord faithfully according to His will
 - b. To worship Him in Spirit and truth
 - c. To be simply Christians, members of His body, the church
 - d. To one day becoming scripturally organized as a church (with elders and deacons)
- **Remember that unless the Lord builds the house, labor will be in vain - Psa 127:1**

[Having **obeyed the gospel of Christ** in its purity and simplicity, **armed with the proper intention** to serve the Lord in all things, you are ready to begin. As you meet in your home, be sure to...]

II. FOLLOW THE NEW TESTAMENT PATTERN

A. WORSHIP ON THE LORD'S DAY...

1. The first day of the week, when the disciples came together - **Ac 20:7**
 2. The first day of the week, when the disciple laid by in store - **1 Co 16:1-2**
- **One may worship other times, but the Lord's day is essential!**

B. WORSHIP IN SPIRIT AND TRUTH...

1. Engage in **prayer**
 - a. We have several examples of group prayer in the early church - **Ac 4:23-24; 12:5,12**
 - b. Paul called for prayers to be offered in every place - **1 Ti 2:1,8; 3:15**
 2. Engage in **song**
 - a. Commands to sing can be found in **Ep 5:19; Co 3:16; He 13:15**
 - b. Singing hymns praises God and edifies the brethren
 3. Engage in **the Word**
 - a. Teaching or preaching was part of public worship in the early church - **Ac 20:7**
 - b. If preachers or teachers are not present, then just read the Scriptures
 - c. One might also listen to recorded sermons, or read Bible studies from the Internet or other sources
 4. Engage in **the Lord's Supper**
 - a. Also called the "breaking of bread" and "communion" - **Ac 2:42; 20:7; 1 Co 10:16**
 - b. A memorial feast instituted by Jesus Himself - **1 Co 11:23-26**
 - c. The fruit of the vine can be simple grape juice (like Welch's)
 - d. The bread should be unleavened (like Matzo)
 5. Engage in **laying by in store**
 - a. Also called the "collection" and "contribution" - **1 Co 16:1-2; Ro 15:26**
 - b. To provide for the needs of Christians, and to do the work of the church
- **For more information, see earlier lessons related to the worship of the church**

[Remember that Jesus promised to be wherever even just two or three are gathered in His name (**Mt 18:20**). When offered in Spirit and truth, worship can be just as meaningful in a home as in large building. Finally, one more thought or two...]

III. AS YOU CONTINUE

A. REACH OUT TO YOUR BRETHREN...

1. Make contact with Christians in other places
 2. Even though they may be too far away to assemble on a regular basis
 3. Communicate with them via the Internet or by other means
 4. Perhaps they can provide additional materials for your study and worship
- **It is edifying to know you are not alone in serving Jesus simply as a Christian**

B. REACH OUT TO THE LOST...

1. Seek to share the gospel of Christ with family, friends and neighbors
 2. Offer to have Bible studies with them in your home or theirs
 3. Invite them to your worship on the Lord's Day in your home
- **Don't forget that we have a Great Commission given by our Lord - Mt 28:18-20**

C. REACH OUT TO THE COMMUNITY...

1. As you grow, consider renting or building a meeting place other than your home
 2. Many people are hesitant to worship in a home; as you rent, then build, it develops credibility as a congregation in the eyes of the community
 3. Some communities have strict zoning laws regarding the use of a home for worship; as you grow, the need to rent or buy a central meeting place will become necessary
- **Consider what will be expedient in your community in reaching out to the lost - cf. 1 Pe 2:12**

CONCLUSION

1. There are certainly benefits to starting a church in a home...
 - a. It provides an opportunity for the Lord to bless those in the neighborhood and community through your presence
 - b. It is easier to create a sense of family and closeness among the members
 - c. The commute to services is nice if the church is meeting in your house <grin>
2. But again, whenever possible we should seek to join ourselves with an established congregation...
 - a. There are benefits and opportunities to be found in a larger group
 - b. Especially when a congregation is completely and scripturally organized
3. What is important is that we are only seeking to be **"The Church Jesus Built"**...
 - a. Not some man-made church or denomination
 - b. Simply Christians, members of the body of Christ, His church

My prayer is that in some way this series may encourage others who love Jesus to serve Him as His Word directs, to be nothing more than **"The Church Jesus Built"**...