
Christ's Distinctive
Church

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*Christ's Distinctive
Church*

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Lesson #1

The Origin and Authority of the Church

Christ's Distinctive Church

In a society in which men create churches every day, it sounds surprising to some to talk about the origin of the Lord's church. Many books have been written by men that tell of the history and origins of denominations and community churches. Men believe anyone has the authority to start a church and create its doctrine. What is the truth? The Lord established only one church (Matt. 16:18) and we must look to Scripture to understand its origin and authority. The Bible must be our only standard of truth.

The prophets were "seeking to know what person or time the spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow" (1 Pet. 1:11). They longed to understand who the Messiah would be and how His coming to mankind would change things. They knew the Old Law would be changed and a new covenant would be established (Jer. 31:31-33). The last prophet to speak about the coming Kingdom was John the Baptist. He taught the Kingdom was "at hand" (Matt. 3:1-2), yet John himself was not in the Kingdom (Matt. 11:11).

1. When and where was the church to begin?

A. Isaiah 2:2-3

B. Daniel 2:31-35

Some people are surprised to learn that the Kingdom was not established during the life of Jesus. Further surprise comes when people realize He lived a sinless life, not violating the Old Law. Jesus also taught the Kingdom of heaven was "at hand" (Mark 1:15; Matt. 10:7; Luke 10:9). The Jewish people at the time of Christ were certainly anticipating the Kingdom and the Anointed One of God. Everything they read pointed to their time, and the current prophet said it was about to happen. We are made to wonder why some believe the Kingdom has not yet come, and that it will not be established until the second coming of Christ. They have no understanding of the prophecies, teaching and history recorded in Scripture.

2. What is relayed about the Kingdom?

A. Matthew 6:9-10

B. Matthew 16:18

C. Mark 9:1

D. Mark 15:43

E. Acts 1:6

3. What event in Scripture is said to have been the "beginning" of the church? (Acts 11:15; 2:1-4; Luke 24:47; Heb. 9:15-17)?

4. How did the Kingdom come "with power" (Mark 9:1)?

5. Isaiah 2:3 says "the law will go forth from Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." What law went forth?

6. How do these Scriptures refer to the Kingdom: something in the future, something in the past, or something now in existence? (Acts 5:11; 8:1; 13:1; Col. 1:13; Rev. 1:9)

The Kingdom that Christ spoke about is the Church. The Church was divinely prophesied to be a kingdom that would endure forever (Dan. 2:44). It was established by the authority of Jesus Christ who is the Son of God. He claimed to possess all authority (Matt. 28:18) and Scripture affirms He has all authority (Eph. 1:22; Col. 2:10; Phil. 2:9). Jesus selected a small group of men to serve as His ambassadors (2 Cor. 5:20) who were called the apostles. As His representatives, they were given authority in His name to teach and preach. Their mission was made clear to them by the action of the Holy Spirit in their lives, and made clear to men by the miracles which they performed. The miracles proved God was with them, so men should listen to the message. The miracles, then, were a stamp of authority.

7. How do these passages further demonstrate the apostles role as ambassadors for Christ, as well as their authority?

- A. Matthew 16:17-19
- B. Matthew 28:18-20
- C. John 20:22-23
- D. Acts 5:12-16
- E. Acts 19:11-20
- F. 2 Thessalonians 3:14
- G. 1 John 4:6

8. How was the Holy Spirit involved in the lives of the apostles? (Luke 24:49; John 14:26; 16:13)

By the inspiration of God, the new law of salvation in Jesus Christ has been fully revealed, having been once and for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3). This covenant was a fulfillment of prophecies and became the covenant which men are now to obey, the old covenant having been nailed to the cross (Col. 2:14). The One who died to establish the church is the only one who has the authority to establish its doctrine. If we create or change the doctrine of the church as revealed in the Bible, we usurp the authority that belongs to Christ who is the head of the church (Eph. 1:22).

9. What source of authority are we to follow?

- A. John 1:17
- B. Mark 9:7
- C. Acts 3:19-23
- D. Hebrews 1:1-2
- E. Galatians 3:23-29

Many today teach that the Bible has become a corrupt document and is not the pure word of God as first revealed. They insist that a latter day revelation from God is necessary to correct our understanding. This is one of the justifications given for the Book of Mormon, but is also the thinking of those who believe in modern so-called "prophecy" that contradicts Scripture. It is contended that these new messages from God have more authority than the written Word. It is in this way, in the minds of some, a book of creeds bears as much and in most cases more authority than the Holy Bible.

10. Is the Bible the complete will of God?

- A. Romans 1:16-17
- B. 2 Timothy 3:16-17
- C. 2 Peter 1:2-3
- D. Revelation 22:18-19

Lesson #2

The Organization of the Church

Christ's Distinctive Church

Where men have created churches, they have arranged a leadership organization that is best described as a pyramid. One person or a small group maintains authoritative control at the top of the pyramid. Various levels of authority descend through the organization and expand in number until the bottom of the pyramid is reached, which is essentially the members of the church. The Catholic model of organization exhibits this with the Pope as the pinnacle of the pyramid and the parish priest as the bottom level of authority. It can also be seen in the Mormon church with its council of apostles as the authoritative leaders and the members at the bottom of the pyramid. To men, an organization like this seems good. Most businesses follow a similar model. It was not the wisdom of men that authorized the organization of the church, but God.

1. Discuss the two ways in which the word “church” is used in Scripture. (Matt. 16:18; Eph. 1:22-23; Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 1:2)

2. Was there a pattern of organization in the first century church? (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5)

As discussed in lesson one, Jesus is the head of the church and has all authority (Eph. 1:22-23; Matt. 28:18). This means Jesus is the one and only law maker. Anyone who holds a role of authority within the church must submit to the Law of Christ. A distinctive feature of the Lord's Church is the independent, self-governing nature of each congregation. Congregations are always spoken of as separate entities such as the “churches of Galatia” (Gal. 1:2) and the “churches of Judea” (Gal. 1:22).

Within a local congregation, a role of leadership is to exist. This role is limited to men who are the “husband of one wife” who also meet the character qualifications which are given in 1 Timothy 3:2-7 and Titus 1:6-9. Always, it is a plurality of men within the congregation. God does not approve of one individual leading a congregation. These are not lawmakers, but are given to ensure the way of God is followed by those who make up the congregation.

3. What names/titles are given in Scripture for this role of leadership? Include any indications of the function of this role.

A. Acts 20:17, 28

B. Ephesians 4:11

C. 1 Timothy 5:17; Titus 1:5

D. 1 Timothy 4:14

E. Philippians 1:1

4. What is the responsibility and work of an elder?

- A. Acts 20:28-31
- B. Romans 12:8; 1 Timothy 5:17; 1 Peter 5:3
- C. 1 Peter 5:2
- D. Hebrews 13:17

In addition to elders within a local congregation, the role of deacon is plainly given (Phil. 1:1). We find qualifications for deacons in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. This role is also limited to men who are the “husband of one wife.” The word “deacon” is derived from a Greek word meaning run or hasten. It indicates active service. “A special servant” is a good working definition of the word.

5. Discuss the differences in the roles of “elders” and “deacons.”

Another role God has given in the church is that of an evangelist (Eph. 4:11). This is one who is a proclaimer of good news. We see two strong examples of this role in Philip (Acts 21:8) and Timothy (2 Tim. 4:5). Like all Christians, the evangelist is to be an example (1 Tim. 4:12) and one who is to keep himself pure (1 Tim. 5:22). He is to have an appropriate gentleness in his teaching (2 Tim. 2:22-26), yet stand firm against those teaching error (2 Tim. 4:1-5).

6. Discuss the differences in the roles of “elders” and “evangelists.”

7. While not an exhaustive list, who do these passages reveal is the work of an “evangelist?”

- A. 2 Timothy 4:1-2
- B. Titus 1:13; 2:1
- C. 1 Timothy 6:20-21
- D. 2 Timothy 2:15
- E. Acts 8:12, 38
- F. Titus 1:5

A local congregation is primarily made up of believers who have no special role. These are referred to as “members” of the body of Christ (Rom. 12:4). They are also called “saints” (Rom. 16:2; Phil. 1:1) meaning they are those who have been sanctified being set apart from the world by the blood of Jesus Christ. They are individually members of the body (1 Cor. 12:27). No one will be saved because of an association with a certain congregation. However, if we are to obey and respect those in authority (Heb. 13:17) who are our elders, and elders are to watch for the souls of those who are a part of the congregation, it is only logical that we let the elders of a local church know that we desire to be a part of the congregation. We are telling the elders we desire to submit to their oversight, we ask that they watch for our soul, and let them know of our willingness to join in the work that congregation is doing. God’s organization of the Church is distinctive when compared to man’s choices of organization, yet God’s will is that this would benefit the members of the body.

Lesson #3

Scriptural Name and Teaching of the Church

Christ's Distinctive Church

With the decline of denominationalism in the last two decades, we have seen many groups change their name. Many have rejected the denominational name for something more generic. "Fellowship" or "Harvest" as part of the name seems to be a trend in recent years. Even "Community" is common in church names. Something like "The New Caney Community Fellowship Church" would fit in with modern names, but it is not a Scriptural name.

The problem with most names of churches is that they do not identify anything about the church. "Lakewood Church" is a prime example of this. You have no idea what they believe or practice. Just being named after a denomination also tells you little since so many splinters have occurred in most denominations so that we see various beliefs and doctrines within those organizations. Sadly, this is even true of those who have "Church of Christ" on the sign. A person must investigate to determine if the truth is being taught in that location.

1. What is wrong with names given by men? (John 17:20-21; 1 Cor. 1:10-15)

2. What is the name found in Scripture for believers?

A. Is. 62:2; Acts 11:26; Acts 26:26-28; 1 Peter 4:14-16

B. Philippians 4:21

C. Acts 16:1; 20:7

D. Colossians 1:2

3. What is the name found in Scripture for the church?

A. 1 Corinthians 1:2

B. Romans 16:16

C. Matthew 13:24, 31, 33, 44, 45

D. Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18

E. 1 Timothy 3:15-16

There is something to a name. It does matter what the church is called. Whatever we do must be done in the name of Jesus Christ (Col. 3:17). His name is the only name through which unity in religion will ever exist. His name is "above every name" (Phil. 2:9) and every tongue should confess His name (Phil. 2:11). "There is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Why then would we not desire to name ourselves after Christ: Christ-ians (for individuals), Church of Christ (for the congregation)?

4. What does the name "Church of Christ" identify about a congregation?

The name distinctly identifies the Lord's Church, but there are many other marks of distinction. In the 1950's and 1960's those who were members of a Church of Christ generally had a reputation for being people who knew their Bible. It is an appropriate reputation, for the Lord's church only looks to Scripture for its doctrine and beliefs. We strongly recognize the authority of the word of God and believe we must adhere to it strictly.

We are not at liberty to change the teaching of Christ in any way. We are to abide in the doctrine of Christ (2 John 9). Jesus only taught the words "received from the Father" (John 8:28, 38; 17:8). Do we think we have more authority than Christ and can teach things that did not come from the Father? The apostles limited their teaching to what had been revealed to them (2 Pet. 1:16-21; Gal. 1:6-12). Do we think we have more authority than the apostles and can teach things that are not contained in God's revealed word? We MUST see we are limited in our teaching to those things revealed through Jesus Christ, the apostles and other inspired men which are contained in the Bible.

5. Using Scripture, demonstrate the Bible is all sufficient and must be our only doctrine.

Human creeds abound in our society. Men have created them and they are full of errors and false teaching. They are not a reliable document because those who wrote were fallible, not having been inspired of God. They are unable to meet the needs of men in providing salvation from our sin. Over and over, the creeds of men are revised and updated, in some cases every year or two. It is not a lasting document, like the Bible. The creeds of men are all contrary to each other. They do not agree on the supposedly same revealed truth, so they cannot all be true. They all disagree with the Bible, therefore none of them can be true. It is not God that confuses, but men.

6. How does the teaching in the Lord's church about salvation make it distinct from churches created by men?

7. Jesus taught with authority which came from God, yet He still justified many of His teachings by looking to the Scriptures. Give two examples of Jesus teaching truth from Scripture.

8. Give two examples of the apostle Paul teaching from Scripture.

9. How can the identity of the church (as seen in the name) be destroyed in the teaching within the church?

10. What does God reveal about those who go beyond the limits of authority in their teaching? (2 John 9; Rev. 22:18-19; 2 Thess. 3:14; 2 Peter 2:1ff; Gal. 5:1-10)

Lesson #4

Purity and Discipline of the Church

Christ's Distinctive Church

Some who have come to learn the gospel of Jesus Christ, who formerly worshipped in the religions created by men, will find parts of this lesson different from what men teach. Many who have been Christians for years continue to struggle with some of the concepts found in this lesson. I encourage each of you to study the passages.

Since the beginning, the Lord's Church has been composed of individuals who have been forgiven of sin. None of us are sinless, and all of us have rebelled against God at one point in our life. Jesus died that we might have the hope of forgiveness and "might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless" (Ephesians 5:27). The Church is made up of individuals who have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ (1 John 1:7). The Greek for "cleansed" indicating an on-going cleansing. It is by the blood of Christ that we continue to be recipients of God's forgiveness when we repent (Acts 8:22).

1. **What did Jesus do for the church (Eph. 5:25-26)? Why?**
2. **How is it any of us came to be pure in God's sight (1 Cor. 6:9-11; 1 Pet. 1:22-23)?**

We are baptized "into Christ" (Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3), meaning baptism is the pivot point through which we enter a relationship with God. God has given deep and specific instructions to those "in Christ" about how to live in purity and holiness before Him.

3. **For each of the following references, list the phrase or phrases about how a Christian is to live.**
 - A. 2 Corinthians 6:14; 7:1
 - B. Romans 12:1-2
 - C. Romans 6:12-14
 - D. Colossians 3:1-14
 - E. 2 Timothy 2:19-22
 - F. Ephesians 5:7-13
 - G. 1 John 1:7
 - H. 1 Timothy 5:22

God knew that some would depart from the faith, and would in fact not keep themselves pure and holy after having obeyed the gospel. These are called "accursed children" who have "forsaken the right way" (2 Peter 2:14-15). They are unrepentant and unwilling to separate themselves from the world. Their love for the world has made them the enemy of God (James 4:4). Instruction is given in Scripture about how the church is to respond toward a member

who is no longer walking in righteousness. There is a need for an intervention and attempt to correct such a one. We are to withdraw from those who walk disorderly (2 Thess. 3:6). This is not just a good idea, it is the command of God.

- 4. Review the example in 1 Corinthians 5:1-13. State what actions the congregation in Corinth were commanded to take.**

- 5. What additional instructions are found in Titus 3:10-11?**

- 6. Does Romans 16:17 teach the same principle? Why or why not?**

- 7. What is to be the attitude of Christians toward the one in error (Gal. 6:1-2; 2 Thess. 3:14-15)?**

- 8. What would be the result if a congregation were to allow sin to go uncorrected (refer again to 1 Cor. 5 and Rev. 1:20, 2:5)?**

- 9. What is the purpose of church discipline (1 Cor. 5:5; 2 Cor. 2:6-8)?**

- 10. Upon whom is discipline to be exercised (2 Thess. 3:6, 11-15; 1 Cor. 5:11-13; Rom. 16:17; Titus 3:10-11)?**

The Scriptural course we are to follow is very clear. (1) Pray for the one in error (1 John 5:16) (2) Attempt to convert them (James 5:19-20) (3) Restore them if possible (Gal. 6:1) (4) Admonish them (1 Thess. 5:14) (5) If they will not repent, as a last resort, withdraw from them (1 Thess. 3:6; 1 Cor. 5:4-5, 13). This is a difficult and unpleasant task of confronting sin, yet God expects it of the faithful. Many who think they are faithful to God never follow the instructions in this lesson. Most religions of men choose to ignore these principles. Some call these things “unloving”, “unproductive,” and “useless.” Those who think this way are disagreeing with God. He sees there is value to this, and it is a great expression of love to go find the last sheep that went astray.

Several specifics about accomplishing this command are not given in Scripture. A decision must then be reached about how to fulfill the commands. This is a responsibility that must fall to the elders who are given the oversight (1 Pet. 5:2) and who watch for souls (Heb. 13:17). Sadly, some take the view that the elders withdraw from an individual and the congregation is just informed. This mindset fails to see the instruction in Scripture for a congregation to withdraw and “remove the wicked man from among yourselves” (1 Cor. 5:13). Each person will be held accountable by God for their obedience to these instructions. We are to submit to the oversight of the elders (Heb. 13:7). To reject their oversight (even in this matter) will result in anarchy, strife and fission in a congregation. It behooves elders then to keep a congregation informed of efforts being made toward an individual, as well as seeking help from the congregation in reaching out to an individual.

Lesson #5

The Worship of the Church

Christ's Distinctive Church

Since the beginning of the church, man has worked to introduce his own ideas about worshipping God. The modern world is no exception. We are surrounded by every conceivable creation of man that is touted as worship. Some believe we can worship God any way we want, only be sincere in what you do. Many contend that entertaining others or being entertained is worship to God (puppet “ministries,” juggling “ministries,” music “ministries,” etc). Some fail to see a division of the covenants and so bring Old Testament concepts and practices into their man-made religion. Understanding that the Bible is our authority for all that we believe and practice (lesson #1), we must worship God in the way He has revealed.

1. List examples of worship that was not acceptable to God.

A. Genesis 4:5

B. Leviticus 10:1-3

C. Mark 7:7-8

2. Why is worship not about my choices or my conscience (John 4:23-24)?

3. We are to worship on the first day of the week. Why is this day significant? (Include in your answer concepts from Acts 2, Rev. 1:10, and Acts 20:7.)

There are five components to Biblical worship which we need to examine. For each component, there are abuses in the religions of men. We must examine each component separately to understand God's will for each of us. Our personal failure to worship in Spirit and in Truth is what we will be judged on, not the congregation; however, since we must at times worship corporately, most often these abuses are identified on a congregational basis. We must be careful to see their application to the congregation as well as the individual.

The Lord's Supper

Acts 2:42 indicates the Christians on the day of Pentecost were continually devoting themselves to “the breaking of bread” (among other things). This phrase is sometimes used of a common meal (as in Acts 2:46), but in this verse is a reference to the Lord's Supper. It is the supper which Jesus initiated (Matt. 26:26-29).

4. What was the purpose of the Lord's Day assembly (Acts 20:7)?

5. How often is this observance to be kept (Acts 20:7; 2:42)

6. What is the purpose of partaking (1 Cor. 11:24-26; 10:17; Matt. 26:26-29)?

7. What are Christians to be doing while they partake (1 Cor. 11:27-29)?

8. How does this observance help the Christian (1 Cor. 11:30-32)?

Singing

More than any other act of worship, music has been accepted as an area in which men can make choices that alter God's teaching. Singing is an action which unifies a group of people. Just as in the Lord's Supper, we see abuses by congregations and individuals. We must be careful to follow God's will in this matter.

9. What is the dual purpose of singing in the worship assembly?

A. Hebrews 13:15; Acts 16:25; Romans 15:9; James 5:13

B. Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16

10. Sing is a "specific" command. Why is this important to our understanding?

11. What should be the individual's thinking while singing?

A. 1 Corinthians 14:15

B. Ephesians 5:10; Colossians 3:16

12. To what songs are we limited? (Ephesians 5:10; Colossians 3:16)

13. What might make our singing "vain worship" to the Lord?

Praying

Singing and prayer are two acts of worship which we should be engaged in privately. They are not limited to the assembly. Some do not pray or sing away from the assemblies, and these miss great opportunities for personal growth and encouragement. Nowhere in Scripture does God command a length to any prayer. We see examples of Christ praying all night, and the apostles wishing to devote themselves to prayer (Acts 6), but there is no specific length commanded. Understanding the need to pray, even as a corporate act of worship, is important.

14. Provide at least one passage for each description of prayer from the New Testament.

A. Prayer

B. Supplication

C. Intercession

D. Giving of Thanks

E. Petition

F. Ask

G. Request

15. For what should we pray? (Provide a Biblical verse teaching this principle.)

16. Why should we end prayers with a phrase like "in Jesus' name" (Col. 3:17)?

Teaching

In Acts 2:42, we see (among other things) that the disciples were continuing in the apostles doctrine. Each individual will be held accountable for continuing in this doctrine, but Acts 2:42 has them doing this congregationally. For our complete understanding of how to worship God, we must understand exactly what this means.

17. Where did the apostle's doctrine come from (John 17:8; 16:7-12; Matt. 10:19; Gal. 1:10-12; 1 Cor. 2:9-12)?

18. How do we learn this doctrine now (2 Thess. 2:15; 1 Cor. 14:37; 1 Cor. 4:6)?

19. Why should we listen to this doctrine (Matt. 16:19; 1 Tim. 6:3-5; Matt. 28:18-20)?

20. What does it mean to “continue” in this doctrine (1 Tim. 4:16; Gal. 1:6-12; 2 John 9-11)?

It is the Elders charge to “feed the flock of God among you” (1 Pet. 5:2; Acts 20:28), teaching the apostles doctrine in the congregation. They must be able “both to exhort in sound doctrine and refute those who contradict” (Titus 1:9). Their oversight and feeding is accomplished by having a man preach the word of God. The preaching must be sound doctrine, meaning it is in accordance with the teaching of Christ and the apostles (1 Tim 1:10; 2 Tim. 4:3; Titus 2:1). Part of our worship at the public assembly is to continue in the apostles doctrine.

Giving

1 Corinthians 16:1-2 gives the command to lay by in store on the first day of the week when we come together. This is a personal, individual command that is accomplished at the assemblies of the saints. For some religious groups founded by men, this seems to have become the focus of worship so that men see church leaders as those who merely want to line their pockets. The reality in Scripture is that the collection was merely one aspect of corporate worship.

21. Does God command tithing today (1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 9:7)?

22. What should be our attitude while giving (2 Cor. 9:7)?

23. What does God say about the amount we give?

A. 1 Corinthians 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 8:12

B. 2 Corinthians 9:6

C. Acts 2:45

Let's be certain that we worship God in the way He has commanded. It is only then that we will be able to worship Him in truth. Let's also be certain to worship Him with the right understanding and mind set. It is only then that we will be able to worship Him with a correct spirit.

Responsibilities of Membership

Christ's Distinctive Church

Many in a congregation which calls itself a "Church of Christ" have an understanding of the church that is colored with the thinking of men. This is easily seen when people say, "I don't need to be a part of the church in order to be saved."

1. While it is true that "the church" does not do the saving (God does), what does Scripture reveal about being a part of the church (Ephesians 2:16-22; Hebrews 12:22-23)?
2. How is a person saved from sin (Gal. 3:26-27)?
3. How is one added to the church (Acts 2:41)? What does this indicate about joining a church by some other process?
4. How are those who are members of the Lord's Church expected to live (1 Cor. 6:11; 1:2; Eph. 4:1; 2 Tim. 2:19)?

We must remember that the word "church" can refer to a local congregation or be used in a "universal" sense describing all those who have been saved. Being a part of the "universal" church is a necessity, for God adds us when we obey the gospel. Some do not think they need to be a part of a local congregation in order to be saved, yet this demonstrates a lack of understanding of God's word. He has commanded our assembling together (Heb. 10:24), and working together.

5. List some of the things Scripture says we are to do together with "local" saints. Provide references.

In addition to the work we are to accomplish, there are many passages that speak of responsibilities to fellow saints. For each of the following passages, name what responsibility God has given us.

6. 1 Corinthians 12:24-25

7. Romans 12:9-13

8. Ephesians 4:13

9. Philippians 2:1-4

10. 1 Thessalonians 5:14-15

11. 1 Peter 4:7-11

One of the areas of great responsibilities for members is in their individual relationship with the elders. God has included instructions about our attitudes and actions toward elders which must be obeyed if we want to please God. These are as binding as any other command of God, yet brethren at times seem more willing to violate these commands. Let us be certain to understand our obligations to God by examining the following references.

12. 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13

13. Hebrews 13:17

14. 1 Timothy 5:17-21

There are many blessings that come to us as a result of being saved. We are added to the body of individuals who have been called out of the world (called out of sin) to serve God. Jesus is the head of this body, which is the church (Eph. 1:21-23). God blesses us in many ways as His children. He watches over us (1 Cor. 10:13) and provides for our needs (Matt. 6:33). He corrects us as a Father (Heb. 12:5-11) and we can appeal to Him as our Father (1 Pet. 3:12; Matt. 6:9). We are promised the eternal home if we are faithful (1 Pet. 1:3-5), yet He blesses us in the local congregation even now.

15. What are the benefits of fellowship?

A. Acts 2:42-46; 4:34-35

B. Galatians 2:9

C. Romans 12:15

D. 1 Corinthians 3:9

E. Hebrews 10:24-25; Colossians 3:16; Ephesians 5:19

Lesson #7

God's Plan for Unity

Christ's Distinctive Church

Jesus' prayer in John 17 clearly indicates how important unity was to Him. He prayed for "those who believe in Me through their word," speaking of the apostles preaching (v.20). He was thinking of all the believers when He said, "that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us" (v.21). He goes on to indicate the effect of our unity by saying, "so that the world may believe that You sent Me." The religious climate in which we live is not united. The effect is easily seen in the masses of people who do not believe in God and who hold religious groups as nothing more than a money-making scheme. Nevertheless, unity among believers in a congregation is the command of God.

- 1. Describe the issues about unity which existed in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:10-13). How are they told to correct their problems? How are they to become united?**
- 2. What arguments are used by the apostle Paul to demonstrate their error of divisions?**
 - A. 1 Corinthians 1:16
 - B. 1 Corinthians 3:1-3
 - C. 1 Corinthians 3:16-17
- 3. Define "denomination" and compare it with the church described in Scripture. (See Matt. 16:18; 3:2; Eph. 1:22-23)**
- 4. Examine the following passages to determine God's attitude about divisions.**
 - A. Galatians 5:19-20
 - B. Romans 2:8
 - C. James 3:13, 18
 - D. 2 Peter 2:1-2
 - E. 1 Corinthians 11:17-18
- 5. What attitude are Christians to have about those who cause divisions? (Rom. 16:17-18; 2 John 9-11; Titus 3:10-11)**

Denominationalism corrupts God's plan for unity. It makes a mockery of God's plan. Some have tried to argue in favor of denominationalism from John 15 (the vine and the branches) indicating the church is comprised of all the denominations. They argue this is how we are united. To believe this is to grossly misunderstand Scripture.

6. From Ephesians 4:4-6, describe how these seven points enable us to be united.

Unity is an individual responsibility. A congregation will only be as united as the individual members are united. Out diligence individually will accomplish a corporate goal of unity. Ephesians 4:3 says we are to be "diligent to preserve the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace."

7. How are unity and peace intertwined? (see also Matt. 10:34)

8. What promotes unity?

A. Philippians 2:3-5; Romans 12:3-5

B. 1 Corinthians 1:10; Titus 2:7; Titus 1:9

C. Romans 12:18-21

D. 1 Peter 4:7-11

9. For each point below, describe how unity is destroyed. Try to provide an example of each from your own experiences. Try to include the observed consequences from your experiences.

A. Selfishness (Phil. 2:35)

B. Speculative and hobbyistic teaching (Titus 2:7; 3:9-11; 2 Tim. 2:14; 2 Peter 1:16-2:2)

C. Uncontrolled tongues (James 3:5-12)

D. One who is easily provoked (1 Cor. 13:5)

Lesson #8

The Mission of the Church

Christ's Distinctive Church

Over the last 150 years, with the rise of the social gospel, many groups that claim to be following Christ have changed the mission of the church. Even some who call themselves a Church of Christ. Men have strayed from the Biblical pattern which we are to follow (Heb. 8:5). Most people today do not have a good understanding of the Biblical mission of the church and are surprised to learn there are limitations in the mission. There are no limits in religious groups today. They do whatever they think is right or beneficial. We must be those who continually look to the book for our authority, even in regards to the mission of the church. God's Word gives a three-fold divine mission to the church.

MISSION: EVANGELISM

This is the primary mission of the church. The church is to "evangelize" the world. The Greek is derived from a word that means "good news." The "evangelist" is one who proclaims good news. The gospel is the good news. We can all be saved from our sin through the blood of Jesus Christ. The gospel is the "power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16). While there are many Biblical references demanding personal evangelism, our scope in this lesson is about the mission of the church.

1. **Explain the role of the church from 1 Timothy 3:14-15 and Ephesians 3:10.**
2. **What was God's plan for spreading the gospel in the New Testament era? (Acts 1:8; Romans 1:16) How was this carried out?**
3. **How do we fulfill the mission of evangelism in the church today? (Are missionary societies the means of fulfillment?)**

MISSION: EDIFICATION

A secondary mission of the church is to edify the saints. Again, there are many passages that demand this of the individual Christian, and to the extent the individuals do this, the church is able to accomplish its mission. However, there are a few passages that speak to the edification derived from the congregation which is where we now focus our attention.

4. **How do the elders edify us? (Acts 20:28-31; Heb. 13:7-17)**
5. **How do the corporate assemblies edify us? (Heb. 10:25; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:15-16)**
6. **"Feed the Church of God" is the instruction to the elders (Acts 20:28). Discuss whether a program of teaching and classes fulfill this aspect of the elders work, and discuss whether public classes edify us.**

MISSION: BENEVOLENCE TO THE SAINTS

Our society has embraced the social gospel to the extent most who claim to be a Christian believe a mission of the church (if not the primary mission) is to provide for the needs of the society. For this reason we see religious groups today operating food banks, shelters for the homeless, orphan homes, assisted living centers, counseling classes on every imaginable subject, emergency relief organizations, hospitals, and much more. There is no question that much good is done through these works, but the over-riding concern must be: is it authorized in Scripture?

We must understand a fundamental point: the church cannot do everything the individual can do. The mission of the church is restricted where the individual is not. For example, if Scripture indicates the church cannot support from the treasury a medical relief group to a natural disaster, that does not mean the individual cannot support it. In fact, many of the instructions in Scripture demand more of the individual than from the church (treasury). To think the authority for the individual authorizes the actions of the church is to ignore Scripture and operate on assumptions and feelings.

In the Bible we never see one example of how benevolence was used as a means to introduce the gospel (giving a bowl of soup with the agreement they will listen to the sermon). Benevolence is not the means of propagating the gospel, it is the fruit of the gospel!

7. What are some of the ways the individual is taught to practice benevolence? (just a sampling of passages)

A. Luke 10:25-37

B. Acts 9:36-43

C. Matthew 25:31-46

D. Galatians 6:10

E. 1 Timothy 5:8

8. Does James 1:26-27 authorize the individual or the congregation in these specific acts of benevolence? How is this misapplied today?

9. Did God ever intend for the church to provide for the needs of everyone? (see 1 Tim. 5:16)

10. Who does God intend to take care of all the needy? (Luke 20:25)

11. Who received aid from the New Testament church?

A. Romans 15:25-26; 1 Corinthians 16:1-3; 2 Corinthians 8:4

B. Acts 4:43-45

C. Acts 11:27-30 (how was aid distributed?)

D. 1 Timothy 5:1-16

Lesson #9

Church Finances

To carry out the threefold mission of the church will take money, therefore the proper use of the treasury is an important concern. Many religious groups today operate as if they are a business. Financial decisions are based on good business practices rather than on the word of God. Many decisions are based on "I think" rather than on "is it authorized." As individuals, we need to be certain the congregation where we worship is utilizing the treasury in an authorized way for we all seek to please God.

THE INDIVIDUAL IN GOD'S PLAN

Every Christian is to be a participant in giving into a collection for 1 Corinthians 16:1 says "let each one of you." There is no authority for fund-raisers, investment schemes or business enterprises to grow the treasury. Many groups are involved in all of the afore-mentioned methods, but we must adhere to the pattern of Scripture which God has given. The only way money came into the treasury was through the giving of individuals. It was done on the "first day of the week" and the amount was "as he may prosper" (1 Cor. 16:1-2).

1. For each of the following passages, describe the motive or attitude we should have in giving.

A. Luke 6:38

B. 1 Timothy 6:17-19

C. Acts 20:35

D. 2 Corinthians 9:7

2. Define "stewardship" (1 Peter 4:10).

3. Is tithing an individual obligation in the church today?

THE USE OF THE TREASURY

4. Who may be supported annually from the Lord's treasury?

A. 1 Timothy 5:3, 9, 16

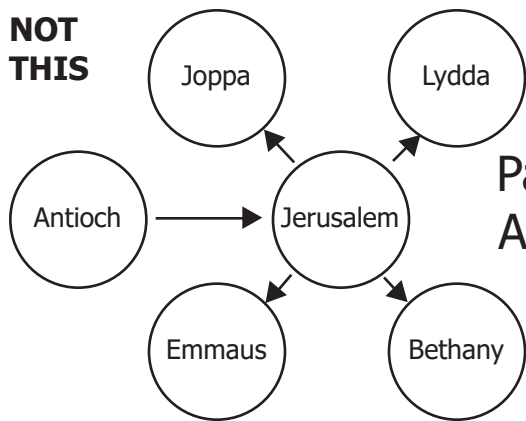
B. 1 Timothy 5:17-18

C. 1 Corinthians 9:14

5. As we support from our treasury a preacher in another location, how is the money authorized to move from our treasury? (see Philippians 4:15-16) How can this be violated?

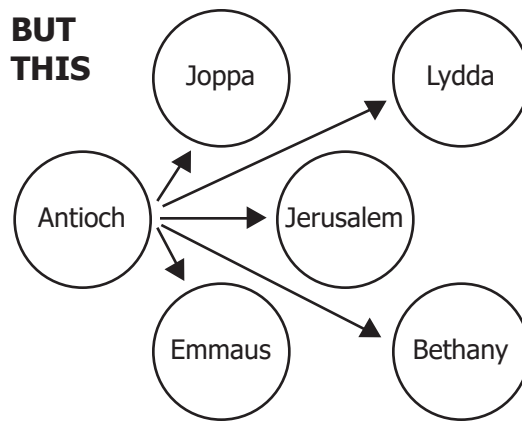
Acts 11:27-30 is an example of one congregation sending financial relief to saints in another location. It is easily seen that in fact many congregations were sending funds to help the saints in Jerusalem. There are some important facts to notice about this effort: (1) It was not a permanent arrangement. It was a one-time gift because of a need. (2) The funds (in Acts 11:30) were sent by the hands of Paul and Barnabus to the elders of the church in Judea (presumably several congregations had need). Those who had the oversight would more readily know where the need was greatest within their congregation. A pattern is thus established from these events. The chart below helps illustrate how some have chosen to operate today through a single agency that oversees distribution. This is not the pattern from Acts 11.

**NOT
THIS**



**Pattern of Delivering
Aid in Acts 11:27-30**

**BUT
THIS**



We also see a pattern in Scripture where congregations worked concurrently (cooperated) in meeting the needs of the church in Jerusalem (Rom. 15:25-28; 1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8-9). The area of Judea was very poor, and evidently the church in Jerusalem suffered from an immediate need which it could not meet (perhaps as a result of the famine mentioned in Acts 11). Each individual gave into the congregational collection on the first day of the week to help with this need (1 Cor. 16). Each congregation acted independently, even in choosing who would carry the contribution to the area of need (1 Cor. 16:3). No congregation sent its contribution through another church or other agency.

6. Describe a sponsoring church arrangement. Is this unscriptural? Why or why not.

7. Similar to a sponsoring church arrangement is the use of a human organization (apart from the church) that is charged with doing the work of the church. For example: an orphan home supported from multiple church treasuries and overseen by a board of directors. Is this unscriptural? Why or why not?

For the Lord's church to build and operate organizations to do the work of the church violates the principle of walking by faith. "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). "We walk by faith and not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7). "Whatever is not from faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23). We must have authority for all that we say and do, and that authority must be from the Scriptures.

Finances are one area in which many congregations are failing to pay attention to God's pattern. The only logical result is that the church will not be what God desires and will not please God. Our greatest desire should be to please God!

Lesson #10

Images of the Church: The Called Out Body

Christ's Distinctive Church

The next three lessons will examine several Scriptural images of the church. They collectively convey a great deal about the nature of the church and our individual part within the church. The word “church” is translated from the Greek word Ekklesia which means “to call out.” It originally referred to any group of called out people, such as a political committee meeting, or a city assembly. Its use in Scripture refers to the called out body of people who are in Christ.

1 Corinthians 1:2 states we are “saints by calling.” The word “saint” is the same root from which we get “sanctified.” Verse 2 also says we have been “sanctified in Christ Jesus.” God has called us in sanctification (1 Thess.4:7). So we are called to be sanctified in Christ Jesus. This is God’s calling, but we must receive or answer this call. In similar concepts Paul quotes Hosea saying we will “be called sons of the Living God.”

1. How are we called of God to come out of the world?

A. 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14

B. How do men claim we are called of God?

2. To what is God calling us?

A. 1 Peter 2:9

B. 1 Peter 2:21

C. Colossians 3:15

D. 1 Corinthians 1:9

2 Timothy 1:9 says God has called us with a “holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity.” The calling of God is directly related to being in a relationship “in Christ” where all spiritual blessings are found (Eph. 1:3). The “holy calling” comes from the “Holy One” (1 Peter 1:15) and we are therefore to be holy.

3. What is the hope of this calling?

A. 1 Peter 1:3-4

B. Ephesians 4:1-3; 2 Thessalonians 1:11

C. 2 Peter 10-11

While we are a part of the called out, Scripture places an emphasis on the image of the church as a comparison to a physical body. The church is His body (Ephesians 1:23) and the body is the Church (Colossians 1:18, 24). As we studied in a previous lesson, Christ is head of the body (Colossians 1:18)

and head over all things to the church (Ephesians 1:2). Just as the physical body is governed by the authority of the head, so Christ has that authority from God to govern the church.

4. What is the proper understanding for the church in its relationship with Christ?

A. Ephesians 5:23-24, 28-32

B. Ephesians 4:14-15

5. What is the proper understanding of our individual roles in the body?

A. Ephesians 4:16

B. 1 Corinthians 12:14-27

6. How do we come to be a part of the body (1 Corinthians 12:12-13)?

7. Who can be a part of the body (Ephesians 2:16)?

8. Some want to say they can be a Christian without needing to be a part of “any church” (whether they mean a religious organization or an individual congregation). Based on our study in this lesson, how would you respond to such a statement?

One of the beautiful things about the image of the church as the body of Christ is that all the members are included. No one can “join a congregation” and then not participate with the congregation. Every part of the body has a purpose and is needed to complete the body. Those who desire to sit on the pew and not be actively involved in every way possible fail to understand the principles in this lesson. When separated from the body, a member of the physical body dies very quickly and cannot be restored to health. The spiritual lessons are almost the same. Some will absent themselves from the body, forsaking the assembling of the saints (Heb. 10:25), or absenting themselves from everything except the Sunday morning assembly, and this results in their continued weakness. Rather than growing stronger in the body, through the sustenance and strength gained from other believers, some maintain a very weak spiritual state where they never grow. It is almost like a weak limb on the physical body that refuses to heal or withers to the point of being almost of no use. These fail to see how they are not growing, for their weakened state is all they are accustomed to. It then becomes the responsibility of the body to actively encourage and strengthen the weak (1 Thessalonians 5:14). Plainly, if we are going to be part of Christ’s body (the church), we must give ourselves completely to Him. Anything less simply disagrees with the image of a body.

Lesson #11

Images of the Church: Household and Kingdom

Christ's Distinctive Church

THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD

The Church is a family. We are part of the house of God (Hebrews 3:6; Ephesians 2:19). As far as a Scriptural image of the church that explains the nature of the church, the image of the household is perhaps the most understood and most applied by Christians. God is the father (Ephesians 3:14; 1 Corinthians 8:6) and Jesus is a Son over His house (Hebrews 3:6). We become the child of God through faithful obedience to God's word: "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ" (Galatians 3:26-27).

1. What principles are revealed about God's Children?

A. Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 4:6-7

B. Matthew 6:6-9

C. Matthew 6:33-34; 7:7-12; James 1:17

D. Hebrews 12:4-11

E. 1 Corinthians 10:13

F. 1 John 3:1-3

2. What does this relationship demand of us?

A. 2 Corinthians 6:17-7:1

B. 1 John 3:9-10; 1 Peter 1:14

C. 1 Peter 4:15-16

D. Colossians 3:17

E. 1 John 4:20-21

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Many are teaching today that the Kingdom of God is yet to come. They claim the kingdom will be established when Christ returns a second time. These fail to understand how the Church is the Kingdom, and are unwilling to believe the truth of Scripture. With the coming of John the Baptist, men were told to repent for the kingdom of heaven was at hand (Matthew 3:2; Mark 1:14-15). Several times in Matthew 13 Jesus (in parables) speaks of the "kingdom of heaven" relating truths about the church. And Jesus tells some of those present with Him they "will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:27). So to contend the kingdom has not yet come is to deny scripture.

One of the main reasons people get this fact wrong is because they are

looking for the establishment of a physical kingdom. Jesus said “My kingdom is not of this world...not of this realm” (John 18:36). 1 Corinthians 4:20 agrees saying, “the kingdom of God does not consist in words but in power.” In fact, Jesus said, “the kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or, ‘There it is!’ For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst” (Luke 17:20-21). His is a spiritual Kingdom, not a physical.

After the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) with the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles, the kingdom is ALWAYS spoken of as in existence (Acts 8:12; 20:25; 28:23; Col. 1:13; 1 Thess. 2:12). The inescapable conclusion is that the Kingdom was established on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. That the church is in fact the Kingdom.

3. What can we learn about the Kingdom from Hebrews 12:22-29?

Jesus admits to Herod He is a king (John 18:37). There is no point in being a king if there is no kingdom. The Kingdom exists today and is the church.

4. What did Jesus conquer in bringing His kingdom into existence?

A. Hebrews 2:14-15

B. 1 John 3:8

C. Revelation 1:18

D. Matthew 28:18-20

In agreement with the other images of the church, entrance into this Kingdom is only possible if one is born again “of water and of the spirit” (John 3:5). Some who teach that baptism is not essential for salvation fail to understand how the kingdom exists, that we must be a part of it, and entrance into the Kingdom is only according to God’s conditions. Jesus says we must each receive the Kingdom “like a child” (Mark 10:15), speaking of our humility and submissiveness to His will.

5. As citizen’s of this spiritual Kingdom, what are some of our responsibilities?

A. Matthew 7:21

B. Colossians 3:1-4

C. Matthew 20:20-28

D. Mark 10:23-31

6. What will happen at the end of the Kingdom?

A. Matthew 13:36-43

B. Matthew 25:31-46

C. 1 Corinthians 15:24-26

Lesson #12

Images of the Church: Temple and Vineyard

Christ's Distinctive Church

THE TEMPLE

The image of the church as the temple of God is drawn from an understanding of the Old Law. God commanded the creation of the Tabernacle as a dwelling place among the Israelites (Ex. 25; Lev. 26; Deut. 12 and 16). In the Holy of Holies they were commanded to create and place the Ark of the Covenant which had the mercy seat where God sat. Only the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies once a year. Many years later Solomon built the Temple in Jerusalem as a permanent dwelling place of God (2 Chron. 7). It was modeled after the Tabernacle and had the approval of God. In the New Covenant, the Church is now said to be the temple of God.

1. **Where is God's Temple today? Where does He dwell? (1 Corinthians 3:9, 16-17)**
2. **What is the foundation of the temple (church)?**
 - A. 1 Corinthians 3:11
 - B. Ephesians 2:20
3. **What is meant by Christ being the "corner stone" (Ephesians 2:20; Isaiah 28:16)?**
4. **Who is building this Temple? (Ephesians 2:19-22)?**
5. **How does 1 Peter 2:5-6 extend the image of the church as a Temple to God?**

The church is only as strong as the individual stones and their joining together. Just as stones in a wall are placed in mortar so as to be permanently fixed and unmoving, so we as spiritual stones are joined together in love and are diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:2-3). God is the one who enables to be a "living stone" (through salvation in Christ Jesus), but we are responsible for our growth.

6. **Explain the individual's part in the maintenance and growth of the church as seen in the image of a Temple (Ephesians 2:21-22; 4:16).**

THE VINEYARD

There are several passages that explain the character of the Church, the gospel and believers in the imagery of horticulture. Most notably we find Jesus speaking of the gospel as a seed that is sown (Matthew 13:1-23; Luke 8:11). The seed is spread through the preaching of the word (1 Corinthians 1:21). The Church plays a part in as a sowing agency by supporting those who are preaching (Philippians 1:4-5; 2:15-16; 1 Thessalonians 1:8).

7. In the following three parables, what does Jesus reveal about the laborers in the vineyard?

A. Matthew 21:29-31

B. Matthew 21:33-46

C. Matthew 10:1-16

8. What is the fruit that is to be produced in God's vineyard?

A. John 15:8; Romans 7:4

B. Galatians 5:22-23

C. Romans 15:26-28

D. Colossians 1:10

E. John 4:35-38

The imagery of a vineyard is completed with paying the laborers and them receiving their reward (Matthew 20:8). Of all the images of the church, this one emphasizes the individual work of those who are laboring in the vineyard. Every Christian is to bear fruit for God, and every man is accepted by God who is willing to agree to His conditions for salvation. If we do not view ourselves as laborers and servants of God, we have a very poor understanding of what Scripture reveals about the church. It is distinctive and different from any group created by man, for it was created by God, is made possible by Christ's sacrifice, held together by our obedience to God's teaching on unity, and is constantly growing to bring glory to God.