

Characteristics of a Healthy Biblical Church

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Matthew 16:13-18 (ESV)

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up. Ephesians 4:11-12 (NIV)

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Acts 2:42 (NASB)

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Matthew 28:18-20 (NIV)

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About Phil Benedict

I (Phil Benedict) grew up in a godly Christian home and was saved as a young child. I was active in our church youth group in Boise, Idaho, where I met my wife, Linda. We married when we were young and God has blessed our marriage. We have now been married for over fifty-four years (as of January 2021). We have four children, all of whom are actively serving the Lord. We both graduated from Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, Illinois, and from Boise State University in Boise, Idaho. I have also taken classes in secondary school administration at the College of Idaho in Caldwell, Idaho, as well as classes in Cherokee heritage from Northeastern State University in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, and classes in drug and alcohol counseling at Bacone College in Muskogee, Oklahoma. We have served as “full time” Christian workers for over thirty-five years. We have been members of UIM International (United Indian Missions) for over twenty-five years.

Thanks to My Wife

God has given me an exceptional wife. We met when we were kids in our church youth group. We married young and God has blessed our marriage. Linda has been a huge blessing in my life. She has been my co-worker and partner throughout life and in the writing of Bible study guides. She has spent many, many hours editing, checking for mistakes, making suggestions, printing, and binding these study guides. She has been a genuine ministry partner. Without her, these study guides would not exist.

My Prayer

“Father, I pray that Your name will be glorified and revered through this Biblical study of Your church. I pray that Your Spirit will use this study to strengthen individuals and churches. I am asking that You work to bring them to a greater maturity and productivity in their walk with You. You deserve the honor, the glory, and the praise for who You are and for what You are doing in Your church.”

The Purpose of This study Is To Help Us To Understand the Characteristics of a Healthy Biblical Church

God did not design His children to be spiritual hermits. He instructed them to meet together to be taught the Word of God, to be encouraged and to encourage others, to be built up and to build up others, and to serve the Lord by serving fellow believers. God expects believers to function together as a unified group, or “body”. He called that body of saved people the “church”.

Most Christians would agree that a “good Christian” ought to “go to church”. Many do have a sincere desire to do what our Lord expects them to do and so they do faithfully attend their church. However, God’s purpose and plan for the church goes far deeper than simply fulfilling an obligation to “go to church.” Simply “attending church” does not fulfill God’s purpose for the church or for the saved individuals who form the church.

The Word of God gives us instruction relating to the preaching and teaching of His Word, how we are to interact with each other and help each other to be faithful, and how to grow in our walk with Him. This is extremely important to the growth of individual believers and to the development of a healthy Biblical church.

As I have taught in churches where we lived and served, I have observed a lack of understanding of God’s plan and purpose(s) for the church. When I have taught about the church and its role in God’s plan for believers, some have expressed their appreciation for the teaching. I began putting together a group of lessons about the church that I would teach in various places. Then I decided to put these studies together in a more organized manner. This Bible study guide on a healthy Biblical church is the result of that commitment.

This study is written in simple and easy to understand language. This is not written for scholars and theologians, but instead for ordinary laymen who want to understand what the Word of God teaches and to put it into practice.

This study is not a book. It is simply a collection of Bible study guides on key Biblical teaching relating to the church. I have not attempted to make it all flow smoothly with a lot of introductions, transitions, conclusions, or lengthy explanations.

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Acts 2:42 (NIV)

How to Get the Most from This Study Guide

This study guide is designed to help you to learn, to understand, and to live what God teaches us in His Word, the Bible. God gave us the Bible to teach us how to know and to walk with Him.

While the subject matter in this study deals with fundamental Biblical truths relating to the church, these are not light studies. Take your time as you go through these studies. If you go over the material too quickly without much thought, it will have little or no lasting impact on your life.

It is important that one take time to read, to digest, and to absorb the Scriptures in this study guide. Take time to carefully read and think about them. Meditate on them and the truths they teach. Regularly ask God for a right understanding of Scriptural truths and then make them part of you. Learn to love God and His Word. Commit yourself to making Biblical truths the foundation of your life and to putting them into practice every day of your life.

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NIV)

Bible Translations Used in These Studies

There are five different translations used throughout these studies. The translations used are the King James Version (KJV), the New King James Version (NKJV), the New American Standard Bible (NASB), the New International Version (NIV), and the English Standard Version (ESV).

The purpose of these studies is to help ordinary people understand fundamental Biblical truth. When quoting Scripture, I have tried to use the translation which most clearly states the Biblical truth being covered in that part of the study. No particular translation has been favored in these study guides. After each verse that is quoted, the translation is identified by giving the initials of the translation.

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Chapter One

Key Scriptures Relating to the Church

In this opening study of a healthy Biblical church we will simply look at some key Scriptures relating to the church and make a few brief comments on each passage. Obviously, there are many other Scriptures relating to the church; however, to have a basic understanding of God's plan and purpose for the church, these are verses that need to be digested.

Carefully read and think about each of these verses in order to get a basic understanding of what is being taught in each of them.

1. Matthew 16:18-28

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Matthew 16:13-18 (ESV)

This is the first mention of the church in the Word of God. Notice that Jesus says that *"I will build my church"*. It is Jesus and Jesus only who builds the church. It is not the pastor who builds the church; it is not programs that build the church; and it is not strategies that build the church. It is Jesus and Jesus only who builds the church.

Of course, Jesus works through people to accomplish His will and purpose. Our role as pastors, teachers, and laymen is to correctly understand God's purpose for the church and then, led and empowered by the Spirit of God, we implement His plan in the location where He places us. We must continually focus on the Lord and His instructions rather than letting our own agenda become our focus for the church.

When we come into line with the instructions of our Lord Jesus Christ who is the founder and builder of the church, Satan and all his forces will not be able to "prevail against it". What a statement!!! We may get discouraged at times, but as long as we follow our leader, we are on the winning side. When we are on His side, we will be victorious!!!

2. Matthew 28:18-25

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Matthew 28:18-20 (NIV)

In this passage we are given the overall purpose of the church. In these final instructions given to His disciples, Jesus commands us to go and make disciples in all nations. *We make disciples by baptizing*

new believers, and teaching them “all that I have commanded you”. These are the marching orders for the church. If we want to be in line with His program, we must give priority to these instructions given by Jesus for the church.

We make disciples by leading people to the Lord and then teaching them the Word of God. Jesus, as God, is the author of the entire Bible. We are to teach “*all that I have commanded you*” which is the entire word of God. That is a lifelong responsibility. The great commission is never finished. When an individual is led to the Lord, it is only the first step in a lifelong teaching responsibility.

3. *Acts 2:42-47*

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Acts 2:42 (NASB)

This verse tells us what the priorities of first New Testament church were. They continually gave themselves to teaching, fellowship, communion, and prayer. This is clearly still a pattern for us today. If we expect to be a “New Testament church”, these must still be the priorities of the church today.

4. *Ephesians 4:16-21*

This passage is perhaps the most complete description in the entire Bible of God's plan for the church. All who wish to understand God's purpose for the church need to understand what is being taught in these verses.

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. Ephesians 4:11-16 (NIV)

Notice what is said about this church.

- ...They had leaders equipped by God.
- ...Laymen were being equipped to serve.
- ...The church was mature in their faith.
- ...They were unified.
- ...They were attaining the full measure of the fullness of God.
- ...They understood right doctrine and were not deceived by wrong teaching.
- ...They spoke the truth in love.
- ...The Lord Jesus Christ was the Head of the church.
- ...They were growing and being built up in love and in knowledge of the Son of God.
- ...Each member did his part.

This is a description of an amazing church. Jesus was the Head and they were mature; yet still growing and being built up in their faith and knowledge. I and many others would like to be part of a church like this.

The role of God-given leaders-- evangelists, pastors, and teachers -- is to prepare God's people to serve the Lord and to be mature disciples of our Lord. In a mature church, every Christian has a role to play. Each member of this church was being "*prepared to serve*", and each person was "*doing his part*". In other words, each person, being led and empowered by the Spirit of God, was using the abilities God had given him to serve in the church.

A major priority of the church must be to teach the Word of God, and in so doing we equip laymen to serve in the capacity to which God calls them. If this is not being done, the church will always be a weak church, no matter how big and well organized it is.

5. 2 Timothy 3:15-4:4

...and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:15-17 (NIV)

These verses give us the fundamental purposes of the Word of God. These purposes are:

- ...teaching the Word
- ...rebuking sin
- ...correcting wrong behavior
- ...training in right living

When the Word of God is doing its work in us, we are being equipped to do the work of God. It is the Word of God that equips us to do the work of God. We can go to college and seminary, attend training or leadership seminars, learn to develop programs and strategies, but if we do not have the Word of God doing its work in us, we are not genuinely equipped to do the work of God and there will be little genuine spiritual fruit in our life.

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. 2 Timothy 4:1-4 (NIV)

Here are the same verses in the NASB.

I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come

when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. 2 Timothy 4:1-4 (NASB)

In these verses is one of the strongest commands in the entire Bible. The apostle Paul states, *“I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: **preach the word**”*.

Paul is saying that both God and the Lord Jesus are there with Him in giving this command. It is as if both God and Jesus are right there charging or commanding us to *“preach the Word”*. It can’t get any more authoritative than that.

We are to *preach the Word!!!* We do not just preach about the Word or preach in spiritual generalities - we preach the Word itself. We stay with the Scripture and preach and teach it. The Word of God is powerful and effective. God promises to use and bless the preaching and teaching of the Word of God. He does not promise to bless our own knowledge and wisdom or our gift of gab.

6. *Hebrews 10:22-25*

...let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:22-25 (NIV)

In a healthy Biblical church, a mature body of people faithfully meet together and genuinely love, encourage, and build each other up. This is the heart of genuine Biblical fellowship. A church where this is not taking place will always be an immature church.

In the church, the Word of God is to be preached and taught, and individuals are to actively seek to love, build up, and encourage each other, and even to “spur one another on”. In a mature church, the leaders must fulfill their God-given responsibilities and the individual laymen must do their part. Without both of these, the church will not be a healthy Biblical church.

7. *John 4:23-24 and Hebrews 12:28-29*

Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.” John 4:23-24 (NIV)

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our "God is a consuming fire." Hebrews 12:28-29 (NIV)

These verses teach sobering truths. A primary purpose for individual Christians and for the church as

a body is to worship God. Our worship must be in a right spirit and it must be done in accordance with genuine Biblical truth. If our heart is not right and if we worship “in our own way”, it is not genuine worship. And our worship must be done in accordance with Biblical truth. For worship to be genuine, it must be with an attitude of reverence and awe of God.

Genuine worship is focused only on glorifying and exalting God. So called worship that is designed to entertain, to draw people into the church, to impress people, or to appeal to the young people is not genuine worship, and it does not glorify God. Genuine worship focuses only on glorifying and exalting God – nothing else.

Chapter Two

The Church -- It's God's Program for Believers

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:23-25 (NIV)

God did not design His children to be spiritual hermits. He instructed them to meet together to be taught the Word of God and to teach others, to be encouraged and to encourage others, to be built up and to build up others, and to serve the Lord by serving fellow believers. God expects believers to function together as a unified group, or "body". He called that body of saved people the "church".

When we think about a church, we normally think of a church building where people "attend church". However, to correctly understand Biblical teaching about the church, we need to understand that *the church is not a building; it is saved people*. In the New Testament, the Greek word most frequently translated "church" means "*called out ones*". All people, worldwide, who are genuinely saved, are the church.

Only genuinely saved people are part of the church. Others may attend meetings and even "join a church", but joining a church does not make one part of the body of Christ, or part of the true Biblical church. Only genuine believers are part of the church.

There is a major difference between "attending" church and serving in the church as God designed and instructed us to do. You can attend church and still be an unsaved person. You can attend church and never grow in your walk with God. Millions "attend" church but never actively serve the Lord Jesus Christ as God expects. Simply "attending church" does not fulfill God's purpose for the church or for the saved individuals who form the church.

A primary purpose for the church to meet together is to be taught and to grow in our understanding of the Word of God. In the following Scripture verse, we see that the New Testament church continually devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching.

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Acts 2:42 (NASB)

In the following Scripture we are instructed to meet together and to encourage and build up each another. We need each other's help.

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:23-25 (NIV)

God planned for us to function together as a unified body of believers. To illustrate His plan, He used the human body. (Romans 12 and I Corinthians 12) Each part of our body (hands, feet, ears, nose, eyes, etc.) has a role to play in the overall functioning of the body. Each part needs other parts of the

body to function normally. When one part is not fulfilling its role, the whole body suffers.

For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many... ..so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it. From 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 (NASB)

God gives each person certain abilities and talents (spiritual gifts). When a believer uses those abilities to serve fellow believers, those believers will be encouraged, strengthened, taught, admonished or helped in some way. The church will become more mature and unified. Christians will grow in their walk with God and through it all the Lord Jesus Christ is honored and glorified.

Throughout this study, the church is sometimes identified as the “body of Christ”, or simply as the “body”.

One should never allow himself/herself to become a source of trouble or disunity in the church, or to be a discouragement or stumbling block to other believers. One sin that is a stench to God is being a source of disunity or sowing discord among Christian people.

Believers come together to learn, to worship, to fellowship, to grow, to encourage, and to build each other up in the faith. It is an enjoyable time of learning, inspiration, and fellowship. Often our closest friends are believers who regularly meet together as part of a local church.

The word “church” is used of all believers, throughout the world. When the word “church” is used to refer to a group of believers who live fairly close to each other and regularly meet together, we sometimes refer to them as a “local” church. Most of the references to the church in Scripture refer to a local group of believers.

In the rest of this study when the word “church” is used, it will refer to the local group of believers who make up a “local church”.

There have been hundreds (thousands?) of books written about the church. Many are good, but many are not so good. Many are based on distorted or flat-out wrong teaching. Many advocate a program designed to appeal to man rather than being solidly founded on the Word of God. One good book that I would personally recommend is John MacArthur’s book, The Master’s Plan for the Church.

The Importance of the Church

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. Ephesians 5:25-27 (NKJV)

The Lord Jesus Christ loved us, his church, so much to that He died (*gave Himself for her*) for us so

that we can be clean and holy, radiant, without spot, wrinkle, blemish, or any other blame. If Jesus loved the church (us) enough to die for us, then we who are His church have great value to Him.

The church is identified as Christ's own body. This is indicative of a very close personal relationship between Christ and the church.

And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. Ephesians 1:22-23 (NASB)

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. 1 Corinthians 12:27 (NIV)

...because we are members of His body. Ephesians 5:30 (NASB)

Since Jesus identifies us as His own body, it is essentially impossible for us to understand or to describe how close we are to the heart of God. We are part of Him and in John seventeen He prays that we would be one with Him. That is an amazing truth. We, who are sinful people, can be cleansed and given His righteousness and even participate in His divine nature. (2 Peter 1:4) We will never totally understand how much God values us, His church. While we will never totally understand it, we can be thankful and we can worship Him in spirit and in truth with an attitude of reverence and awe.

Jesus loved us, His church, so much that He even identified us as His own future bride.

Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready." It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Revelation 19:7-8 (NASB)

As we have seen, the church has tremendous value to God. If we, His people, are going to walk with Him, we need to understand how important the church is to God. And we need to do our part in helping the church function as God designed it to function.

The word "church" is used some 115 times in the Bible. Much of the New Testament is made up of letters which are written to local churches. Again, this is one more indication of how important the church is in God's plan for believers.

Reasons for Meeting Together As a Church

1. The Word of God instructs us to meet together.

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:23-25 (NIV)

Here we are clearly instructed to meet together to encourage one another and to "*spur one another on to good deeds*". This cannot be done in isolation. We must meet together. Listening to radio programs, watching television preachers, tweeting each other, or connecting by means of other social

networking sites, the internet, or “worshipping God in nature” does not override or take the place of God’s command to meet together.

2. The God-given Biblical pattern was to meet together as a church.

So then, those who had received His word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Acts 2:41-42 (NASB)

The first church, led by the Spirit of God, continually met together for teaching, for fellowship, for prayer, and to celebrate communion. This was the pattern of Biblical churches throughout the New Testament. This is the pattern that God established. God, who is our creator, our father, our Lord, our teacher, our source of strength, our helper, and our comforter, loves us and knows us better than we know ourselves, and He knows what we need in order to faithfully walk with Him. Regularly meeting with fellow believers is a major part of His plan for us.

3. To be taught -- To grow in our understanding and application of the Word of God

The early church “*continually devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching*”. This is God’s plan. A major reason for this is given in the following verse:

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NASB)

It is the Word of God doing its work in us that equips us to do the work of God. If we are not regularly being taught and regularly absorbing and putting into practice the Word of God, then we are not equipped to do the work of God or to fulfill the purpose for which He created us.

It is the Word of God that enables us to faithfully serve Him in our day-to-day life. There will also be difficult times or times of trial in the Christian’s life. It is the regular absorption of the Word of God that equips us to be faithful in these hard times.

We cannot encourage and build each other up if we ourselves are not growing in our own understanding of the Word of God and growing in our walk with Him.

4. To be encouraged and to be built up in our walk with God, and to encourage and build up others

Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 (ESV)

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the

more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:23-25 (NIV)

But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. Hebrews 3:13 (NIV)

Therefore encourage one another with these words. 1 Thessalonians 4:18 (ESV)

In the Word of God, Christians are repeatedly instructed to encourage and build up one another. We ourselves need to be encouraged and built up, and our fellow believers also need to be encouraged and built up. This is a ministry of giving. We give of ourselves to build up fellow believers. It is shallow and selfish to put our own desires ahead of ministering to fellow believers as God instructed us. If we desire to draw near to God, we will have to draw near to His people and minister to them as He instructed us to do. This cannot be done without being obedient to God's instructions to regularly meet together.

5. To use our God-given abilities (spiritual gifts) to serve God and our fellow Christians

As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. 1 Peter 4:10 (NASB)

Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: Romans 12:6 (NASB)

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.
1 Corinthians 12:7 (NIV)

God has given every genuine believer a special ability (spiritual gift) to serve fellow believers. Not only are we to encourage and build up fellow believers, we are to use whatever gift God has given us to serve our fellow believers.

When a believer uses those abilities to serve fellow believers, those fellow believers will be encouraged, strengthened, taught, admonished or helped in some way. The church will become more mature and unified. Christians will grow in their walk with God and through it all the Lord Jesus Christ is honored and glorified.

6. To join in public prayer

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Acts 2:42 (NASB)

So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church.
Acts 12:5 (ESV)

When he (Peter) realized this, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying. Acts 12:12 (ESV)

On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God... Acts 4:23-24b (NIV)

When Christians pray together it can be a blessed time of fellowship and our Lord Jesus Christ is honored. By praying together we demonstrate faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and we encourage and build up our fellow believers.

7. To join with fellow believers in worship and praise to God

Praise the Lord! Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise in the assembly of the godly!
Psalm 149:1 (ESV)

I will tell of Your name to my brethren; In the midst of the assembly I will praise You.
Psalm 22:22 (NASB)

I will give you thanks in the great assembly; among throngs of people I will praise you.
Psalm 35:18 (NIV)

Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.
Acts 2:46-47 (NIV)

In the Word of God, people got together to sing, to praise and to worship the Lord. They met together with glad and sincere hearts. It is a rich and rewarding experience to get together with other sincere Christians to sing, praise and worship our Lord Jesus Christ.

One result of being filled with the Spirit and letting the Word of God dwell in us richly is to sing and make melody in our hearts to the Lord.

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.
Ephesians 5:18-21 (NASB)

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.
Colossians 3:16 (ESV)

The following verses are an Old Testament example of corporate worship that pleased God so much that His glory filled the house of God:

...and all the Levitical singers, Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun, and their sons and kinsmen, clothed in fine linen, with cymbals, harps and lyres, standing east of the altar, and with them one hundred and twenty priests blowing trumpets in unison when the trumpeters and the singers were to

make themselves heard with one voice to praise and to glorify the LORD, and when they lifted up their voice accompanied by trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and when they praised the LORD saying, " He indeed is good for His lovingkindness is everlasting," then the house, the house of the LORD, was filled with a cloud, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of God.

2 Chronicles 5:12-14 (NASB)

8. To observe the Lord's Supper with fellow believers

And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood". Luke 22:19-20 (NASB)

This observance, which we identify as "communion", or the "Lord's table", or the "Lord's supper", was instituted by Jesus as a memorial of His death and shed blood. We are to "*do this in remembrance of Me*". We, as Christians, so easily become casual or half-hearted in our appreciation of what Jesus has done for us. We seem to forget so quickly. When we participate in this ordinance, it is a time to examine ourselves and our attitudes and to commit ourselves to serving Him with all our heart.

As Christians, we are blessed beyond our understanding because He died so that we can have eternal life. Communion is a picture and a celebration of this profound truth.

Breaking bread and communion were a regular part of the worship of the early church.

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Acts 2:42 (NASB)

When we take communion, we are fellowshiping (sharing) with our Lord.

Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a *sharing* in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a *sharing* in the body of Christ? Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all *partake* of the one bread. 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 (NIV)

9. To be a part of the church's ministry of world evangelism

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Matthew 28:19-20 (NASB)

God has given us the responsibility to take the message of salvation to all the peoples of the earth. As individuals we cannot possibly fulfill this responsibility, but as a church we can be a significant part of world evangelistic outreaches. This is important to God and it should be important to us. One way we demonstrate our love for Him is by being part of world evangelism.

10. To develop Christian friends for ourselves and our children

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up!
Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 (ESV)

Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.
Proverbs 13:20 (ESV)

Oil and perfume make the heart glad, so a man's counsel is sweet to his friend.
Proverbs 27:9 (NASB)

As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another. Proverbs 27:17 (NIV)

Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered, or you may learn his ways and get yourself ensnared. Proverbs 22:24-25 (NIV)

We are influenced by our close friends. We enjoy being with them and sharing in their lives and activities. On a spiritual level, our friends can either build us up or they can tear us down. Friends who walk with the Lord can be a big encouragement to our spiritual growth. Friends who do not share our spiritual values can tear us down. While we cannot and should not isolate ourselves from the world, our best friends need to be ones who walk with the Lord.

While this is important for adults, it may be even more important for our youth. We all know how strong peer pressure is in the life of our young people. If you have children and youth, it is extremely important that you find a church where they can have friends that will be a positive influence in their lives.

This last verse teaches the same truth, only from a negative viewpoint. To be friends with the world is to be an enemy of God.

You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.
James 4:4 (ESV)

11. To assist us in teaching our children to know and to walk with God

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Ephesians 6:4 (NASB)

Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it.
Proverbs 22:6 (NASB)

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.
2 Timothy 3:14-15 (NIV)

We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done. Psalm 78:4 (NIV)

And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. Deuteronomy 6:6-7 (NKJV)

God clearly instructs parents to teach and to train their children to know God and how to live godly lives. Parents will pay a high price for their neglect of the spiritual training of their children. Teaching and training children is not easy. It needs to be started when children are very young, even in infancy. While the church cannot replace the parents in giving spiritual instruction and training, the church can assist the parents.

Just like adults, children need teaching, encouragement, and building up. Churches must help in providing this. Too many churches simply entertain children so that they will not be a disturbance in the “adult services”. This is a horrible, irresponsible, ungodly attitude. What are they thinking? Is God not concerned with the training and instruction of children? Churches *must* do all they can to assist parents in teaching and training their children.

12. To be held accountable, both to the church leaders and to other members

Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another... Colossians 3:16a (NASB)

We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone. 1 Thessalonians 5:14 (NASB)

Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. Galatians 6:1-2 (NIV)

Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. Luke 17:3 (NASB)

Part of our responsibility to one another is to admonish one another and even to rebuke one another when it is appropriate. In a Biblical church, members are held accountable for the way they live. This accountability is a big motivation to be faithful in our service to the Lord. Without this accountability, many Christians will not be consistent in their spiritual growth and in their walk with God.

Rebelling Against God's Plan

As we have seen, the church is very important in God's plan for His people; however, many professing Christians, in ignorance or in rebellion, do not put much value in it. They may ask, “Why can't I live a good life and be a good person without going to church?” Others will make statements like “I can worship God at home.” Or “I feel closer to God in nature than I do at church.” The questions people

raise about church and the excuses given for not participating are many. “Do I really need to sit through long dull sermons?” “I’m really tired on Sundays, it’s my only day off.” “Sunday is the only day I have to go to the lake.” “I have to work on Sunday.” “I think the kids ought to go to Sunday School, but I need to stay home and clean the garage.” “There are too many hypocrites in church.” “All they want is money.” “I don’t have anything to wear.” And the list of excuses goes on and on and on and on...

All of these questions or statements, in one way or another, imply that church is not needed. The truth is – yes, on a human level you can be a good moral person without going to church, but you can’t please God or be obedient to Him. God instructs us to regularly meet together with other Christians. The church is important to God, and it should be important to us. To choose to live apart from Christ’s body (the church) is to rebel against God. Essentially, an individual who does that is saying that he knows better than God. This sin of rebellion gives Satan a foothold in our lives and leads to unproductivity and defeat in our walk with God.

Many so-called Christians simply value other things more highly than the church or obedience to the Lord. They show this by their sporadic attendance and participation. Many attend only the more entertaining activities. They may not come out and say the church is unimportant, but their actions show how they think.

For a person to say or think that he can do God’s will or purpose without being involved with the rest of God’s body is like a human hand saying, “I don’t need the rest of this body. Why do I need the heart or the legs? I think I will leave this body. I can do just as well or better on my own.” We all know that if you separate a hand from the rest of the body, it is helpless and it quickly dies. And so it is with the church. God designed us to be part of his body (the church) and we are to work together to accomplish his will and purpose. He did not design us to be spiritual hermits.

We all recognize that there are some who, because of physical sickness or handicap, cannot regularly get out to meet together with other Christians. These individuals may not be able to enjoy all the blessings of meeting together but they can still grow in their walk with the Lord and draw near to Him. Christians who are not physically restricted should make a special effort to minister to these individuals.

I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go into the house of the LORD. Psalm 122:1 (NKJV)

Chapter Three

A Healthy Biblical Church Has Biblical Leadership

The Word of God is absolutely clear that the Lord Jesus Christ is the founder and the head of the church. God does call and equip men to be human leaders, but it is of the utmost importance that those individuals recognize that they are followers and servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. They must follow the instructions given in His Word – the Bible. If their ministry is to bear genuine spiritual fruit, they must follow His plan and purpose for the church. Failure to understand and practice this fundamental truth could very well lead to disastrous eternal consequences.

The Lord Jesus Christ Is the Head of the Church

And he (Jesus) is the head of the body, the church: ... Colossians 1:18a (KJV)

Here it states in clear and unmistakable language that the Lord Jesus Christ is the head of the church.

And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

Ephesians 1:22-23 (NIV)

In this passage, the church is identified as Christ's own body. This is a very personal relationship. We are the body of Christ!!! A good church leader does not develop his own body of believers. He develops the body of Christ.

For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the savior of the body. Ephesians 5:23 (KJV)

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. Ephesians 4:15 (NIV)

Not only is Jesus identified as the head of the church, He is also identified as the foundation, the chief cornerstone, and the chief shepherd of the church. Building on any foundation other than solidly building on the instructions of Jesus Christ is bound to ineffective and unproductive.

For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 3:11 (NASB)

...built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. Ephesians 2:20 (NIV)

When the church was young, God used men--apostles, prophets and evangelists--and he still uses men--evangelists, pastors and teachers--to build the church. Yet, all of these build on the chief cornerstone--Jesus Christ. The cornerstone was the first and most important stone in a rock foundation as was used in Biblical times. The strength of the building rested on the cornerstone. So it is in the church. The church is built on the foundation of which Jesus is the chief cornerstone. Without the strength of the cornerstone -- our Lord Jesus Christ -- the church will crumble and fall.

...and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away. 1 Peter 5:4 (NKJV)

God calls and equips pastors to be shepherds of his flock (the church). They are called to be the human leaders of the church. Pastors must always remember that they are not the Chief Shepherd. The Chief Shepherd is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Churches may have large crowds and big impressive buildings, but unless they are built on the right foundation and follow the right shepherd, it will bear little genuine spiritual fruit.

The Head of the church has given us a book of instructions in how to lead His church. That book of instructions is the Word of God -- the Bible. Leaders of the church must be students of the Word of God and must accurately understand and follow its instructions. They must learn to read, to study and absorb it for themselves. They cannot simply follow the teaching and examples of others and repeat what they have heard other pastors say.

The human heart can be full of pride. Even those of us who know the Lord can be troubled with pride if we do not allow the Spirit of God to control our lives. When leaders of a local church allow such things as pride, envy, and jealousy to influence them, they will attempt to promote their own desires in the church rather than submitting to the lordship of Jesus, who is the founder, the head, the foundation, the chief cornerstone, and the chief shepherd of the church. When this happens, the Spirit of God and the will of God are hindered and the church does not fulfill the plan and purpose of God.

The Biblical head of the church is not:

- ...the pastor
- ...the elders
- ...the deacons
- ...the founder of a local church
- ...relatives or descendants of the founder of the church
- ...those who gave the land where the church meets
- ...those who have or give a lot of money
- ...good businessmen or lawyers
- ...someone who wants to be the center of attention
- ...someone who likes to exercise control
- ...someone who keeps the church in turmoil

No human, the pastor or any other person, should ever try to be the head of the church. If we do, we become a hindrance to the work of God and will cause others to stumble in their walk with God, and may even cause some to reject our Lord Jesus Christ.

Called and Equipped To Be a Pastor

Our Lord, who is head of the church, calls and equips certain men to pastor or shepherd His people -- the church. These pastors or "under shepherds" play a very important role in the life of a church. There may be occasional exceptions, but few churches will rise above the spiritual level of those who are pastors and leaders of the church.

Being in the ministry and serving as a pastor is a good thing. It is a tremendous privilege to teach and preach the Word of God. It is one of the highest privileges in all the world. What a joy to be called by God to be a shepherd of His people and to be able to teach, to lead, and to encourage God's people to grow in their knowledge of God and in their walk with God.

Yet, along with this privilege come many responsibilities and demands. The pastor's way of life will be closely watched by others, both saved and unsaved. He is to set an example for others. No one should desire to be a pastor unless he clearly senses that God is leading him in that direction, and he is willing to face demands and pressures that the average Christian does not normally face.

A pastor must be mature in the Christian faith. He must keep learning and growing in his own walk with God, setting an example for others to follow. Satan will oppose him every step of the way. If the pastor gives Satan a foothold in his life, Satan will hinder, or even stop, his effectiveness as a pastor.

How Pastors Are Identified in the Bible

The pastor of a church is identified by several different titles in the Bible. Often different translations will use different words to identify the pastor. Following are some of these words or titles. After each word, the translations that use that word for pastor are given.

1. *Pastor* Ephesians 4:11 (KJV, NKJV, NASB, NIV)

2. *Shepherd* Acts 20:28, 1 Peter 5:2 (NASB, NIV)

The words "pastor" and "shepherd" are exactly the same. They are same Greek word. A pastor is a shepherd of the flock that God has placed under his care.

3. *Bishop* 1 Timothy 3:1-2, Titus 1:7, Philippians 1:1 (KJV, NKJV)

4. *Overseers* Acts 20:28, 1 Peter 5:2 (KJV, NKJV)

5. *Overseers* 1 Timothy 3:1-2, Titus 1:7, Acts 20:28, Philippians 1:1 (NASB, NIV)

Again, the words "bishop" and "overseer" are the same Greek word. In Protestant circles most of us shy away from using the word "bishop" because of its association with the Catholic church. In the Catholic church, the office of a bishop is not the same as the Biblical office of a bishop.

The meaning of the word "bishop" or "overseer" is simply one who has been given the care or oversight of a local church. A bishop or overseer is a watchman or guardian of the church. It is interesting to note that in 1 Peter 2:25, Jesus is identified not only as the shepherd but also the "overseer" of our souls.

For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. 1 Peter 2:25 (ESV)

6. *Elders* Acts 14:23, 1 Timothy 5:17, Titus 1:5-6, 1 Peter 5:1 (KJV, NKJV, NASB, NIV)

In the New Testament, the pastors are identified as elders. In a general sense, the word “elder” refers to older or more mature individuals. However, when used in reference to the church, it is always a reference to someone with authority in the church rather than simply an older person. In several passages, the elders are directly identified as shepherds and overseers of the church.

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ’s sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers... 1 Peter 5:1-2a (NIV)

However, there apparently were some elders who had authority in the church, but they were not the pastor or one of the pastors. Every pastor was an elder, but not every elder was a pastor.

The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. 1 Timothy 5:17 (NASB)

Using the term elder in reference to a pastor indicates that a pastor is to be a mature Christian. A pastor must not be a young immature Christian. One of the qualifications of a pastor as stated in 1 Timothy 3:6 is that he must not be a recent convert or a novice.

He (the overseer) must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. 1 Timothy 3:6 (NIV)

It appears that in some New Testament churches there was more than one elder or pastor in a church. This was not necessarily true of every church. Today individual churches can vary. Some will have one pastor or elder and others may have several. It is certainly a wise pastor who has a group of mature Christian men in the church to whom he goes for counsel as he oversees the church.

The Responsibilities of a Pastor

1. The pastor is to “Preach the Word”.

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. 2 Timothy 3:16-4:2 (NIV)

This passage is one of the most important in all of the Bible in describing the pastor’s responsibility to “preach the Word”. Every pastor should carefully study and digest these verses. Here, Paul, the older veteran pastor, is instructing the younger pastor, Timothy. Paul tells Timothy to “Preach the Word”. As he “preached the word”, Timothy was to correct, rebuke, and encourage, with great patience and careful instruction (NIV). According to this passage, this is what equips people to do the work of God.

These instructions are extremely important to a pastor. If he follows these instructions, his preaching

will be in tune with God's purpose in preaching and teaching. If he does not follow these instructions, his preaching will be unproductive and unfruitful.

Our preaching and teaching must not come from our own selves.

For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. 1 Corinthians 1:17 (NIV)

I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.

1 Corinthians 2:3-5 (NASB)

Notice the phrases "*lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power*" and "*so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on the power of God*". These phrases help us understand the negative results of preaching that is not solidly in tune with the Word of God.

2. *The pastor is to be a teacher.*

Preaching and teaching certainly overlap each other and a pastor is to do both. He is to preach the Word and he is to be a capable teacher of the Word.

One of the qualifications of a pastor is that he be "able to teach" or, as one Bible scholar describes it-- a pastor is to be "skilled at teaching". (Spiros Zodhiates in the Complete Word Study Dictionary, page 447)

Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, 1 Timothy 3:2 (NIV)

The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. 1 Timothy 5:17 (NASB)

These things command and teach. 1 Timothy 4:11 (KJV)

I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. 2 Timothy 4:2 (NIV)

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, Ephesians 4:11 (NASB)

Each of these verses in one way or another indicates that the pastor is to be a teacher. He is to give *careful instruction*. Most Bible scholars believe that in Ephesians 4:11 the words "pastors" and "teachers" refer to the same person. Apparently in the Greek it is equivalent to a hyphenated word. The pastor is a pastor-teacher.

3. *The pastor is to lead the church.*

Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.ⁱ Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. Acts 20:28 (NIV)

The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. 1 Timothy 5:17 (NIV)

These two passages both indicate that the pastor is to be the primary church leader. He is to “keep watch” over himself and the flock. He is described as an “overseer”. He is instructed to be a “shepherd”, and he is described as one who “directs the affairs of the church”.

Biblical principles of church leadership transcend time and culture. These principles apply to churches that were started in Biblical times; they apply to churches that exist now; and they will apply to churches that will be started in the future. These principles apply to churches of all cultures. They apply to churches all around the world whether they exist in “primitive” cultures or whether they exist in very technologically “advanced” cultures. Details of how a church functions vary greatly, but these principles of leadership are the same.

4. *The pastor is to prepare God's people to serve the Lord.*

From the following passage we find that the pastor is to prepare God's people to serve the Lord. When this takes place, the church will be a unified mature pure church that is growing in their relationship to Jesus Christ.

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be *pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.* Ephesians 4:11-16 (NIV)

Notice what takes place when pastors and teachers function as God planned.

- ...They have leaders equipped by God.
- ...Laymen were being equipped to serve.
- ...The church was mature in their faith.
- ...They were unified.
- ...They were attaining the full measure of the fullness of God.
- ...They understood right doctrine and were not deceived by wrong teaching.
- ...They spoke the truth in love.
- ...The Lord Jesus Christ was the Head of the church.
- ...They were growing and being built up in love and in knowledge of the Son of God.
- ...Each member did his part.

Wow!!! What a church. I would love to have a part in this kind of a church.

This is a very important passage of Scripture in understanding the relationship of the Head of the Church and those He calls to be pastors. Evangelists, pastors, and teachers all work to teach God's people to serve Him. As God's people serve Him, the church becomes mature and unified. Each person does his/her part as they grow in love and in their relationship with the Head of the church, the Lord Jesus Christ.

5. Pastors are to be an example of godliness.

Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers--not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. 1 Peter 5:2-3 (NIV)

Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity. 1 Timothy 4:12 (NKJV)

If a pastor is not setting an example, he will be ineffective and he will be a poor leader of God's church. One qualification for being a pastor is to be "blameless" in the way he lives. (1 Timothy 3:2)

6. The pastor is responsible to keep false doctrine or teaching out of the church.

As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. 1 Timothy 1:3-4a (NIV)

The pastor is to keep false teaching out of the church and, if necessary, command individuals not to teach false doctrine.

7. A pastor is to pray for his people.

Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, James 5:14a (ESV)

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. Ephesians 6:18 (NIV)

The pastors and elders of the church, along with everyone else in the church, are to "always keep on praying for all the saints".

Pastors Are Accountable to God

God has given pastors authority in the church and they are accountable to Him for how they serve as a pastor.

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Hebrews 13:17a (NASB)

Here it lets us know that leaders will have to give an account to God for how they have led. This is a sobering truth. We should not become church leaders unless we are clearly called of God and we are willing to take this responsibility very seriously.

Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we shall incur a stricter judgment. James 3:1 (NASB)

Here we are warned not to be quick to get into a position where we teach others. This applies to pastors, evangelists, teachers, and anyone else who is in a position to teach. In this Scripture we are warned that teachers will be judged more strictly than others. Again, it is a tremendous blessing and privilege to teach others; however, we must take that responsibility very seriously. We will be held accountable for the way in which we teach.

Right Attitudes for Pastors

1. The pastor must have the attitude of a servant.

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. 1 Peter 5:1-4 (NIV)

Notice the phrase “*eager to serve*”. An elder or pastor must not dislike being a servant but instead he must be eager to serve. If a pastor does not have the heart of a servant, he will not be a good pastor.

Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. 1 Peter 4:10 (NIV)

All Christians, including pastors, are to be servants. Jesus set the example for all of us to follow.

For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. Mark 10:45 (ESV)

But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: Philippians 2:7 (KJV)

The apostles also identified themselves as servants.

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, Romans 1:1 (KJV)

Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, 2 Peter 1:1a (KJV)

2. A pastor must not “lord it over the church”.

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ’s sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. 1 Peter 5:1-4 (NIV)

God has given a pastor the responsibility and the authority to oversee the church. However, the pastor must not “lord it over the church” or be offensive in his exercise of authority. It is a wise pastor who can balance his authority with the attitude of a servant and who does not “lord it over the church”.

A Word to Pastors

Pastors, we have an enormous privilege and responsibility. Be men who are led and strengthened by the Spirit of God. Be men of prayer. Love God, love your family, and love the people God has given you. Have faith in God, not in yourself. Be humble, with the heart of a servant. Set a good example of godly living. Look forward to His return. Love the Word of God. Learn to accurately study and teach the Word. Don’t get up to preach or teach without preparing. Don’t just repeat what you have heard others say. Enjoy your ministry. To honor the Lord Jesus Christ, be a good pastor.

If you are like the rest of us, you probably get discouraged at times, and maybe even get down on yourself. However, remember that it is the Spirit of God that convicts of sin, and produces the fruit of the Spirit in the lives of people. We cannot do that. We are simply instruments in His hand. Our job is to seek to be a godly man – loving, obedient, and faithful. That is all we can do. He is the one who produces fruit, not us. When we have done all, we reasonably can and we still don’t see the result we hope and pray for, don’t get down on yourself. It is in His hands. Recognizing this can take a lot of pressure off of us, and we can relax and enjoy our ministry. ☺

A Word to Churches

Churches, love your pastors. Daily and fervently pray for them. Don’t unjustly criticize and tear them down. When they set good examples, follow them. Apply what is correctly taught to your everyday life. Pay your pastors well. Don’t be an agitator or a source of disunity. (God hates dissension.).

The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. 1 Timothy 5:17 (NIV)

Qualifications of Pastors

1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9, 1 Peter 5:1-3

God gave us qualifications for pastors and deacons. These are high standards. The pastor and other church leaders as well, must be examples of godly or holy living. If they do not live up to this high standard there will be problems in the church. Yet, these qualifications are often ignored and not even considered when ordaining a pastor or choosing a pastor for a church. To ignore these qualifications is absolute foolishness for a church.

Some will object to what was just stated in the previous paragraph and say that if God calls a man to preach, then who are we to question that call. However, it is God Himself who gave us these qualifications and He expects us to follow them. God will never lead contrary to His own Word. If an unqualified man claims to be called of God to preach, we need to be able to recognize it.

In the ministry which God has given to me personally, more than once I have seen men clearly not qualified to be a pastor announce that they have been called to preach. They were ordained and they then began to pastor a church. I have seen churches hurt, and the families of these men have suffered. Churches, individuals, and families will avoid a lot of hurt and pain if they will listen to these God-given instructions and put them into practice when ordaining or selecting a pastor.

Every individual who feels called to be a pastor needs to honestly and carefully evaluate himself in the light of these qualifications. If there is repeated failure or sin in any one given area, then that individual should not become a pastor until he has broken the control of that sin, gained victory, and has had time to demonstrate that he has gotten victory over that sin. If an individual's life is questionable in several areas, he probably should not be a pastor.

When someone who is clearly not qualified feels God is calling him to preach, he desperately needs to re-examine his call. Again, the Spirit of God will never lead contrary to the Word of God. God cannot bless someone who becomes a pastor without being led by God, and who is not Biblically qualified to be a pastor. That individual will save himself, his family, and the church a lot of pain and hurt if he will back off and reconsider.

We recognize that no person, including pastors or future pastors, is perfect. No human will be in one hundred percent compliance with every qualification. We are all human and all of us still sin. This study is not meant to discourage men whom God has genuinely called to be pastors. However, it is meant to challenge a God-called man to examine himself and then seriously commit himself to actively growing toward maturity in any of these areas where he may be weak.

This study *is* meant to discourage unqualified men from seeking the office of a pastor.

The Biblical qualifications for a pastor are given in 1 Timothy 3, Titus 1, and 1 Peter 5:1-3. Again, every individual who feels he is called to the ministry should thoroughly examine himself in the light of these Biblical qualifications before committing himself to the ministry.

Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that

his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.

1 Timothy 3:1-7 (NIV)

The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you. An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless -- not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it. Titus 1:5-9 (NIV)

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers -- not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. 1 Peter 5:1-4 (NV)

These qualifications are outlined below. Following each qualification there is a very brief explanation of that qualification.

A. An individual called to be a pastor should desire to be a pastor (bishop -- overseer -- elder -- shepherd -- minister -- servant). (1 Peter 5:2, 1 Timothy 3:1) An individual must be led by God and should eagerly want to be a pastor. He should not be pushed into the ministry by other people.

B. Above reproach, blameless. (1 Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:6-7) On-going mature Christian living which gives no opportunity for accusation.

C. The husband of one wife. (1 Timothy 3:2, 12, Titus 1:6) Must have only one wife and she must be his legally married wife. He must be a “*one-womaned man*”, not given to lust or desiring other women.

Note: See the section at the end of this lesson for a more detailed look at this qualification.

D. Temperate, Self-Disciplined (Sober, vigilant--KJV) (1 Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:8) Self-controlled. Able to control one's passions and desires. Sober, clear minded, alert, steady. Able to make good decisions. Has good judgment. Mentally and psychologically well balanced. One who is not intoxicated. One who is able to control his fleshly and sensual desires.

E. Not given to drunkenness. (1 Timothy 3:3, Titus 1:7) One who does not have a reputation of being a drinker. Not controlled or impaired by wine, other alcoholic drinks, or drugs.

F. Not violent, not quick tempered, not prone to fighting. (No striker, brawler, --KJV) (1 Timothy 3:3, Titus 1:7) Not quick-tempered, or vengeful, and does not physically, verbally, or

mentally abuse others. Able to control his anger. Does not get into fights. Does not always have to have his own way.

G. Not self-willed or overbearing. (Titus 1:7) Not one who demands his own way without regard for others. He does not offend others by his self-centered attitude. (Notice that this qualification says “not self-willed”. It does not say “not strong-willed”.)

H. Gentle, patient. (1 Timothy 3:3) One who is patient, loving, considerate, gracious, forgiving, and kind.

I. A lover of what is good, just, holy. (Titus 1:8) A man who loves what God loves. A man who highly values being conformed to the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. He works at being conformed to His image.

J. Not greedy for money or position, not covetous. (filthy lucre KJV) (1 Timothy 3:3, Titus 1:7, 1 Peter 5:2-3) One who does not love money, prestige, or power. Has a Biblical attitude about things that appeal to man’s flesh.

K. Hospitable. (1 Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:8) One who uses his home as a place of ministry. One who enjoys serving other people.

L. Able to teach. (1 Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:9) A skilled teacher. Able to teach and equip others for productive service. Able to teach the Word and lead others to use their talents and gifts to serve the Lord. He regularly reads and studies the Word and understands and teaches it correctly.

M. Able to answer false teachers from the Word of God. (Titus 1:9) He is knowledgeable in the Word of God, and he is able to recognize and refute wrong teaching.

N. Must be a good leader and manager of his own home. Children who believe and are obedient (1 Timothy 3:4-5, Titus 1:6) Children who live at home must be believers, obedient, and respectful. A pastor must be a good husband and father. He must not neglect his own home or leave the managing of his home to others.

O. Not a new or immature Christian. (1 Timothy 3:6) An individual must be a mature Christian who has proven himself to be a godly leader. He must not have a problem with pride.

P. Not lording it over the church, but being an example to the flock. (1 Peter 5:3)

“The Husband of One Wife”

In both 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:6 the qualification, “the husband of one wife”, is stated.

Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife,
1 Timothy 3:2 (NIV)

An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, Titus 1:6 (NIV)

Today, and down through the years, there have been several different views taught as the correct way to understand this qualification. Following are five different ways that have been taught as the correct way to understand what is meant by “the husband of one wife”:

1. That a pastor cannot ever marry a second time
2. That a pastor cannot ever have been divorced
3. That a pastor cannot be single
4. That a pastor cannot be a polygamist (currently married to more than one wife)
5. That a pastor must control his passions and be mentally and physically faithful and devoted to his one legally married wife. He must be physically and mentally sexually pure.

Each of these interpretations have been promoted as the right one. After doing a considerable amount of studying and reading, it is my strong conviction that a combination of numbers 4 and 5 above is what this passage is intended to teach.

Note: Two books, *Church Leadership* by John MacArthur and *The Measure of a Man* by Gene Getz, were frequently consulted in putting together this material on the qualifications of a pastor. Other Bible study aids, including *The Complete Word Study New Testament* by Spiros Zodhiates, were also extensively used.

Dedicated Servants of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Church

The Role of Deacons in the Church

In order for a church to function well, there must be dependable individuals who are committed to serving the Lord Jesus Christ by giving unselfish service to the church. They do many of the things that are necessary for the church to function well and to do the ministries that God calls the church to do. They are willing and dependable. No church can function well without these dependable lay people who are willing to regularly serve in so many different ways.

What Is A Deacon?

The role of the deacon is determined from the meaning of the word “deacon” itself. The English word “deacon” comes from a Greek word meaning “to serve” or “servant”. Thus, the role of a deacon is to be a faithful dependable dedicated servant.

In Acts 6 we may have a hint of the kind of service a deacon gives. In the Jerusalem church a problem arose over equality in the distribution of food to widows. In order to make this right, they chose seven men to oversee this process of distributing food to the needy widows. In this passage the words “wait on tables” or “serve tables” has the same root word as the word “deacon”. Instead of the apostles taking time to serve tables, they chose seven dependable Spirit-filled men to serve in this capacity. While this does not actually teach what the duties of a deacon are, it is a good example from the Bible as to the kinds of service that a deacon can do.

The Bible does not give us a deacon’s job description. They are simply identified as servants. Churches vary greatly from culture to culture, from community to community, and even from church

to church. The role of the deacon or servant will also vary greatly in these various churches.

In the Bible, the pastor and other elders of the church are identified as those who are responsible for the spiritual health and well-being of the church. In many churches the deacon or deacons are responsible for the physical well-being of the church. The pastor simply cannot look after every aspect of running and maintaining a church. Deacons can support the pastor by serving in many ways, including looking after the physical plant. This leaves the pastor more free to concentrate on the spiritual well-being of the church. This is a very important function. Without good deacons or servants, a church suffers.

The Office of Deacon

Many churches have a deacon board and men hold the office of a deacon. Their duties vary in different churches. In many churches they are the governing board of the church, while in other churches they are primarily responsible for the building and property of the church. Again, there is a lot a variety in what the board's responsibilities are and in what is expected of a member of a deacon board.

When there is a deacon board which plays a role in the administration of a church, the men on that board need to meet the qualifications for a deacon given in the Word of God. As part of the church administration, they have an important role in the life of the church. In the Word of God there are high qualifications given for men who serve in this capacity. Individuals who desire to hold this office should carefully read and study this passage of Scripture. As with a pastor, only those who qualify to be a deacon should hold the office of deacon.

There are some individuals, either men or women, who do not hold the office of deacon and are not members of a board, but because of their character and faithful service, they become role models and good examples to others. I believe that these individuals, even though they are not official "deacons", should also seriously look at these qualifications and seek to be the kind of person described by these qualifications.

Qualifications of a Deacon

Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons. In the same way, their wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything. A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well. Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus. 1 Timothy 3:8-13 (NIV)

From this passage of Scripture, the qualifications of a deacon are:

A. "worthy of respect". (Verse 8) Deacons are to live in such a way that they are worthy of respect. Serious. Dignified.

B. “sincere”. (Verse 8) He is not a gossip. He tells the truth. He is not two-faced. He is not deceitful in what he says or how he lives. He does not say one thing about a matter to some and then say something entirely different to others. He is genuinely truthful and sincere.

C. One who is not a “problem drinker”. (Verse 8) He does not have a reputation of being a drinker. Not controlled or impaired by wine, other alcoholic drinks, or drugs.

D. “not pursuing dishonest gain”. (Verse 8) A person who is not greedy for money or other material possessions. He earns his money in honest and reputable ways. He can be trusted with handling money.

E. “They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience”. (Verse 9) A deacon must understand the deeper truths of the faith. He regularly reads and studies the Word. He accepts all that the Bible teaches and he does not rebel against any part of Scripture. He has a clear conscience because he consistently lives what is taught in the Bible. He is committed to godly living. He quickly confesses any known sin.

F. “They must first be tested”. (Verse 10) A deacon needs to be a mature Christian who has proven himself to be a faithful disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. A person who has undergone some testing and has remained true to the faith. His faith has been strengthened by trials.

G. “Nothing against them”. (Verse 10) On-going mature Christian living which gives no opportunity for accusation.

H. “their wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything”. (Verse 11) The wife of a deacon must also have a high moral character. She must be respected by others. She must not be given to gossip or other malicious talk. Not double-tongued. She must not be a drinker. Not controlled by anything other than the Lord Jesus Christ. She must be self-controlled. She must be dependable and trustworthy.

I. “the husband of but one wife”. (Verse 12) A deacon must have only one wife and she must be his legally married wife. He must be a “*one-womaned man*”, not given to lust or desiring other women.

J. “must manage his children and his household well”. (Verse 12) Children who live at home must be believers, obedient, and respectful. A deacon must be a good husband and father. He must not neglect his own home or leave the managing of his home to others.

Pastors and deacons must serve together as a team. There have been many problems in churches when one or the other oversteps his God-given role and causes dissension. Both pastors and deacons must be godly servants of the Lord Jesus Christ, seeking to glorify Him, not themselves.

Chapter Four

A Healthy Biblical Church Accurately Teaches and Preaches the Word of God

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NKJV)

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.

Colossians 2:6-8 (NIV)

Correctly understanding the Word of God and putting it into practice will result in rich blessing.

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. Psalm 1:1-3 (ESV)

Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. "And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. "Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. "The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall."

Matthew 7:24-27 (NASB)

The Word of God is God's revelation of truth to man. Only in the Word of God are there the correct God-given instructions on how to be saved from the penalty of sin and how to live a godly life. The Spirit of God, through the Word of God, gives direction and strength to live in submission to Him and to be productive in our walk with Him. A person who is not regularly, in one way or another, absorbing genuine truth from the Word of God will not be a fruitful productive Christian and he will not grow much, if he grows at all. Untruth, half-truth, or distorted truth, or watered-down truth simply does not lead to knowing God or to growing in our walk with Him.

Yet, in spite of how important solid teaching is, it sometimes seems as if solid Bible teaching is almost a rarity. Everywhere you turn there is distorted Bible truth, half-truths, watered down truths, and outright false teaching being taught. Many religious leaders put "success" and popularity over being Biblically accurate and sound. At the same time, many laymen prefer "feel good teaching" and entertainment over solid Biblical teaching. Very often there is enough truth mixed in with distorted truth or outright false teaching that people believe and accept it without questioning.

Even conservative theologians and Bible teachers can add to the confusion by often disagreeing over

fundamental Biblical teaching.

All of this can result in a shallow Christian belief system and a shallow commitment to putting genuine Biblical truth into practice.

The purpose of this chapter is to challenge pastors and teachers to accurately understand and teach the Word of God. They must be very careful and discerning in what they teach. The spiritual health of those we teach are often impacted by our teaching. This is serious. It has eternal ramifications. And God holds us accountable for what we teach.

I would also like to challenge laymen to be very careful and discerning in what they accept as Biblical truth.

If anyone speaks (preaches or teaches), **he should do it as one speaking the very words of God.**
1 Peter 4:11a (NIV)

The Fruit of Correctly Understanding and Applying the Word of God

Right understanding and application leads to genuinely knowing God.

Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. 2 John 1:9 (ESV)

Once we know God, correctly understanding and putting genuine Biblical truth into practice leads to many blessings, great rewards, and productivity in our walk with God.

The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. Psalm 19:7-11 (ESV)

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. Psalm 1:1-3 (ESV)

Correctly understanding and applying Biblical truth leads to godly living.

...the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness, Titus 1:1c (NIV)

How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Your word. With all my heart I have sought You; Do not let me wander from Your commandments. Your word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against You. Psalm 119:9-11 (NASB)

Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples

indeed. "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." John 8:31-32 (NKJV)

The Word of God frees us from the control of sin and from many harmful things such as anger, fear, guilt and pride (see Study Guide Eighteen). Abiding in the Word leads to answered prayer.

If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. John 15:7 (NKJV)

Putting the Word of God into practice strengthens us and enables us to stand strong in the difficult times or the “storms” of life.

Therefore, everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall. Matthew 7:24-27 (NASB)

Sound doctrine encourages.

He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it. Titus 1:9 (NIV)

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NKJV)

The Word of God teaches us right doctrine and it gives instruction in right living (righteousness). It reproves and corrects wrong behavior. *This process equips us to do the work of God.* Bible schools, seminaries, and training seminars all have their place; however, all the training in the world will not equip us to do God’s work if the Word of God is not doing its work in us. God does His work through people who absorb the Word of God and who put it into practice.

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. Ephesians 4:11-16 (NASB)

God gave the church pastors and teachers. When the Word of God is correctly taught, those who hear are being equipped for works of service. Again, it is the teaching of the Word of God that equips us to do the work of God. When this process is taking place, the church is built up and there is unity,

maturity, stability, love, and on-going spiritual growth in the church. People attain to the “whole measure of the fullness of Christ”.

The Fruit of Incorrect Understanding and Application of the Word of God

For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. Romans 10:2-3 (ESV)

Paul’s prayer for his own people was that they would be saved. He states that they had a zeal for God but their zeal was not based on a correct understanding of the Word. As a consequence, they were not even saved. They had a zeal for God, but they were not saved. This is the most serious result of wrong teaching. Many will believe they are saved when they are not. Many are committed and sincere and have gifts, but when they are judged by God, He will say to them, “*I never knew you*”.

Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" Matthew 7:21-23 (NKJV)

Incorrect understanding and application of the Word can lead to empty worship. Matthew 15:8-9 are sobering verses. Many false teachers claim to love God, but their worship and their teachings are empty and worthless. The tragedy is that they lead many others down the same path that they are taking.

These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men. Matthew 15:8-9 (NIV)

Human wisdom and teaching empties the gospel of its power.

For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. 1 Corinthians 1:17 (NIV)

False teaching perverts the gospel and gives license to sin.

They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord. Jude 1:4b (NIV)

In their greed, false teachers ruin families.

They must be silenced, because they are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach--and that for the sake of dishonest gain. Titus 1:11 (NIV)

False teaching invites God’s wrath.

Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Ephesians 5:6 (NIV)

The Word of Truth and the Spirit of Truth

Jesus identifies the Word of God as the Word of Truth.

Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. John 17:17 (NKJV)

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth. 2 Timothy 2:15 (NASB)

He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, James 1:18a (NIV)

The entirety of Your word is truth, and every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever. Psalm 119:160 (NKJV)

Jesus also identifies the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Truth.

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever...the Spirit of truth. John 14:16-17a (NIV)

However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; John 16:13a (NKJV)

Jesus identifies His Word as the Word of Truth and He identifies His Spirit as the Spirit of Truth. The Spirit of Truth (the Holy Spirit) enables us to understand the Word of Truth (the Bible).

In order to correctly understand the Word of Truth we need to be filled -- controlled and led -- by the Spirit of Truth. Study of the Word that is done without the illumination of the Spirit of God will very likely result in misunderstanding and confusion.

The Spirit of Truth will not and cannot ever lead contrary to the Word of Truth – the Bible. The Spirit does not use untruth to convict people of sin and He does not use untruth to direct us in our walk with God. Incorrect Biblical knowledge or understanding of the Word of God is not a result of the leading or filling of the Spirit of God.

And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. 1 Corinthians 2:4-5 (KJV)

Being Diligent in Our Pursuit of Correctly Understanding Biblical Truth

As we have seen, the Spirit of God enables us to understand spiritual truth. However, that does not mean that we can sit back and do nothing, expecting the Spirit of God to illuminate and enlighten us.

In fact, we are told to study diligently and to make the search for understanding and insight a very high priority.

Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. 2 Timothy 2:15 (KJV)

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth. 2 Timothy 2:15 (NASB)

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. 2 Timothy 2:15 (NIV)

Notice the wording of the various translations of 2 Timothy 2:15. We are to “study”, to “be diligent”, and to “do our best” to correctly understand the Word of Truth. In other words, we are to work hard to correctly understand the Word. A follower of the Lord Jesus Christ is to give a high priority to correctly understanding the Word of God – the Bible. It is the foundation of all our knowledge, all our understanding, insight, our wisdom, our attitudes and our actions.

Our reading and absorbing the Word needs to be an on-going practice. Many have a poor understanding of the Word and they do not grow much simply because their reading and study of the Word of God is so sporadic. We are busy people; however, one of the fundamental disciplines of the Christian life is to establish correct priorities. Absorbing the Word of God must be a top priority.

My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God.

Proverbs 2:1-5 (ESV)

Absorbing the Word of God and developing maturity in our walk with Him is a growth process. It doesn't come easily or quickly. It takes commitment and discipline. Spiritual understanding, growth, and maturity come as we discipline ourselves to absorb His Word and put it into practice over extended periods of time.

Many times, in my teaching I have suggested the formula – RRTP (Read, re-read, think, and pray for understanding.). Read a passage from the Word of God, then re-read it several times, take time to think (meditate) about it, and ask God for a correct understanding of that passage.

It is a good idea to read through a paragraph, a chapter, or an entire book several times in order to develop a better understanding of that passage of Scripture. If the passage you choose can be read in one day, then read through it several times. Sometimes you may need to read that same Scripture for several days in a row. If the passage is too long to read in one day, divide it up into sections that can be read in one day. Then read and re-read it, one section at a time. This process may take several days, a week, a month, or even longer. As you read and absorb the Word, don't be in a hurry. Absorbing the Word is not a quick process. It takes time, but in the end, it is worth it many times over. It pays rich rewards.

The reason for using this pattern of repetitive reading is simple. We simply do not remember or

understand everything we read the first time through. This is especially true of the Bible. It is rich in depth. The more we read and think about a passage in the Word of God, the more we understand it and can put it into practice.

As you read, take time to think (meditate) about what you read. Regularly ask God for a correct understanding of what you are reading.

Absorbing the Word is not quick or easy, but it is one of the most enjoyable and rewarding things you will ever do. It is exciting when, from time to time, you sense the Spirit of God opening up your understanding of a particular passage of Scripture and you begin to understand its application and significance in your life and in the lives of your fellow believers.

As you read, there will be parts you don't understand. That is okay. Nobody understands all the Bible. You will understand more as you grow in your walk with God. There are some things that we will never totally understand while we are here on earth. Even good Bible scholars regularly debate many things they simply do not understand.

There are times when basic Bible study aids can help us to understand a passage of Scripture. On pages 128-129 of this study, some basic Bible study aids are suggested.

At the end of this study, there is a form entitled "paragraph study". The purpose of this form is to guide one through the study of a paragraph or short passage of Scripture. One thing that using this form does is to make one think about what he/she has read. This form may be helpful for anyone who wants to absorb and digest the Word of God, and it is also a very good tool to use in preparing to teach a passage of Scripture.

And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.

Jeremiah 29:13 (NKJV)

Biblical Warnings Against False Teaching

In the Word of God there are many passages that warn us about false teaching and false teachers. Due to the sheer number of warnings given, this is apparently something that God wants us to very clearly understand. Here are just a few of these warnings.

For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. 2 Timothy 4:3-4 (ESV)

Some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.

1 Timothy 4:1 (NIV)

Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. Hebrews 13:9a (NKJV)

...but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.

Galatians 1:7b (ESV)

Let no one deceive you with empty words, ... Ephesians 5:6a (NKJV)

I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves' men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. "Therefore be on the alert, ... Acts 20:29-31a (NASB)

Her prophets have smeared whitewash for them, seeing false visions and divining lies for them, saying, 'Thus says the Lord GOD,' when the LORD has not spoken. Ezekiel 22:28 (NASB)

Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. 2 John 1:7a (NIV)

Keep on, then, with your magic spells and with your many sorceries, which you have labored at since childhood. Perhaps you will succeed, perhaps you will cause terror. All the counsel you have received has only worn you out! Let your astrologers come forward, those stargazers who make predictions month by month, let them save you from what is coming upon you. Surely they are like stubble; the fire will burn them up. They cannot even save themselves from the power of the flame... ...Each of them goes on in his error; there is not one that can save you. Isaiah 47:12-15 (NIV)

Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. Colossians 2:6-8 (ESV)

At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Matthew 24:10-11 (NIV)

Recognizing False Teaching and False Teachers

The kinds of false teaching are endless. There are world religions such as Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and many more that are false to the core. There are many cults such as Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Scientology, and many others that claim to believe the Bible, but again, they too, are false to the core. Roman Catholicism is a false system that has enough truth that it deceives many honest seekers. There are many "Christian" denominations that claim to teach and follow the Bible but they do not teach that it is absolute truth or that it is the inerrant Word of God. As a result, they may teach a social and political gospel that seems to have little resemblance to Biblical truth.

Often those who teach false doctrine are very familiar with the Bible. Even Muslims quote the Bible in order to "prove" their teaching and win converts to Islam. Satan himself knows the Word of God and will deceitfully use it to accomplish his own purpose. Satan used Scripture to tempt Jesus. Following his lead, false teachers do the same thing. They use Scripture for their own purpose and cause many to believe untruth. When people hear the Bible quoted, many automatically assume that the teaching is right since it is the Bible being quoted. However, when false teachers use the Bible, they teach distorted truth or they often teach a mixture of truth and error. This is, in many ways, the most dangerous of all because it can sound so right, but, in reality, it distorts the truth and leads many away from the truth.

Many claim to believe the Bible but only preach the “positive” parts of Scripture. They completely deny or ignore things such as sin, judgment, hell, and the shed blood of Christ. This does not lead to salvation or to a godly productive life.

False teachers deny or distort fundamental teachings of Scripture such as:

- A. the inspiration and inerrancy of the Word of God
- B. who the Lord Jesus Christ is
- C. the trinity
- D. the way of salvation
- E. the miracles of Christ, such as the virgin birth and the resurrection of Christ
- F. the accuracy of the Biblical record of creation and the flood as recorded in Genesis 1-11

There are more subtle forms of false teaching as well. There are some who basically have the fundamentals of Scripture right, but they are close to teaching false doctrine simply because they handle Scripture in such a careless or sloppy manner that they distort its teaching. Sometimes out of carelessness or ignorance they make untrue statements about what the Bible teaches.

If anyone speaks (preaches or teaches), he should do it as one speaking the very words of God.

1 Peter 4:11a (NIV)

Preachers and teachers need to be very careful how they handle the Word of God. *It is God's Word.* When we preach or teach, we should do it as one who is speaking the “*very words of God*”. This is serious. We dare not teach the Word of God in a casual or careless manner. We dare not distort what God teaches in His Word.

Biblical Descriptions of Those Who Do Not Teach Sound Doctrine

They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm. 1 Timothy 1:7 (NIV)

There are many descriptions of false teachers in the Word of God. Some of them seem harsh but the descriptive language is consistent with the seriousness of their wrong teaching.

These men are blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm -- shepherds who feed only themselves. They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted -- twice dead. They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever.

Jude 1:12-13 (NIV)

These are springs without water and mists driven by a storm, for whom the black darkness has been reserved. 2 Peter 2:17 (NASB)

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?

Matthew 7:15-16 (KJV)

For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ. Jude 1:4 (ESV)

They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work. Titus 1:16 (NKJV)

With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed--an accursed brood! 2 Peter 2:14 (NIV)

Methods Used By False Teachers

False teachers can come from both inside and outside the church.

I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert, ... Acts 20:29-31a (ESV)

For certain men have crept in unnoticed, Jude 1:4a (NKJV)

Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. Acts 20:30 (NIV)

..shepherds (pastors) who feed only themselves. Jude 1:12 (NIV)

In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. 2 Peter 2:3 (NIV)

These are grumblers, complainers, walking according to their own lusts; and they mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage. Jude 1:16 (NKJV)

They are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over weak-willed women, ... 2 Timothy 3:6a (NIV)

As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; Ephesians 4:14 (NASB)

They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. 2 Peter 2:14a (ESV)

...promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; 2 Peter 2:19b (NASB)

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, 2 Peter 2:1 (NASB)

Basic Principles of Bible Interpretation

When we talk about “interpreting” a passage in the Bible, we are simply talking about correctly understanding what that passage is teaching.

In the greatest majority of Scripture, the meaning is clear. It simply means what it says.

There certainly is a place for scholars, but one does not have to be a Bible scholar to correctly understand most of the Bible. It is much more important to be a godly, Spirit-filled individual than it is to be a Biblical scholar.

The uneducated lay person can know and correctly understand from the Word of God all that is needed to be a godly individual who glorifies God, who is led by the Spirit of God, who walks close to God, who is a faithful productive servant of God, and who fulfills the will and purpose of God in his/her life.

This does not mean that we do not need to use good principles of interpretation as we read and study the Bible. Every Christian who takes the Word of God seriously needs to apply some fundamental principles of interpretation, or of correctly understanding the Word of God. Following are some basic guidelines that need to be used in correctly understanding or “interpreting” the Bible.

Even after applying all these principles of interpretation, there will still be times that you just don’t understand a passage. That is okay. Nobody understands all the Bible. At some point in the future you may understand it better; however, there are some things that we will never totally understand while we are here on earth.

1. Make sure that you are “right” with God.

This is the most fundamental of all rules when it comes to correctly understanding the Word. If one is harboring even a little rebellion or unwillingness to submit, it hinders the Spirit of God from working in his life. A person who is not letting the Spirit of God lead him will never be able to grasp the riches of the Word of God.

2. Be committed to understanding what God intended Scripture to teach, rather than what you want or expect it to teach.

We must be honest with the Word of God. Sometimes it is a temptation to misrepresent or misinterpret what a passage of Scripture is teaching in order to make it say what we would like it to say. However, we must be willing to accept what the Bible teaches, not what we would like it to teach, or what we think it should teach.

3. Interpret the Bible literally.

The following two sentences are not from the Bible, but they illustrate the literal and figurative use of a word. In the first sentence the word “plowed” is used literally, and in the second sentence it is used figuratively.

*The farmer plowed his field after it had dried out from the heavy spring rains.
After returning from his vacation, John plowed through the paperwork on his desk.*

Obviously, John did not get a tractor and a plow on the top of his desk to go through his paperwork. The figurative use of the word “plowed” simply conveys that John had a lot of paperwork to do when he got back from his vacation.

A Biblical example of this is in the following verse:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation.

Matthew 23:14 (NKJV)

Jesus said to the Pharisees “*you devour widows' houses*”. We would all agree that lumber, nails and rocks do not make very good eating. Obviously here Jesus is using figurative language. He is condemning the Pharisees for their hypocrisy. They tried to appear to be very spiritual; however, in their unrestrained greed they took advantage of widows for their own personal gain. They even took their homes away from them.

When we study the Bible, we should understand it to mean just what it says unless the passage itself indicates otherwise. The Bible does use teaching tools such as word pictures, illustrations, parables, and figurative language. *The context will determine if the passage is to be understood in a literal or figurative sense.* A fundamental rule for understanding the Bible is to accept its teaching literally unless the context tells us otherwise.

Someone has said that “when the literal sense makes good sense, don’t look for any other sense, or you will wind up with nonsense”.

4. Accept what a passage is teaching without “spiritualizing” that passage.

Part of understanding the Scriptures literally is to avoid spiritualizing a text. Spiritualizing Scripture is to assign “spiritual” meanings that are not called for by the text. Or one can make spiritual applications that have no foundation in the text. The Bible is full of genuine spiritual teaching and there is no need to make up spiritual teaching or application that is not actually taught in a passage of Scripture.

Following is a far-out example of “spiritualizing” a text.

There is a true story about a married couple who came into a church for counseling. Apparently they had originally decided not get married; however, they heard a sermon based on the Israelites walking around Jericho seven times and the walls collapsing. The preacher said that if a prospective husband would walk around his prospective bride seven times, any future problems in their marriage would collapse like the walls of Jericho. Based on that, the future husband walked around his future bride seven times and then married her. He soon discovered that all the problems had not collapsed and, after years in a difficult marriage, they came to the church for counseling.

This sounds a little humorous and far-fetched; yet the story is true and it is an example of what can

result from “spiritualizing” a passage of the Word of God.

Just for the irony of it, let’s see what kind of “Biblical” teaching we can get out of the nursery rhyme “Little Bo Peep” by spiritualizing it.

Little Bo Peep has lost her sheep and doesn’t know where to find them.

Leave them alone, and they’ll come home, wagging their tails behind them.

By spiritualizing this nursery rhyme, we could teach that many of God’s people who were His sheep are now lost. They are lost and even God can’t find them to bring them back. But if we will be patient, they will all eventually get saved again and return to the fold. When they return, they will all be happy again just like Little Bo Peep’s happy sheep who all came home wagging their tails behind them.

Obviously, this is nonsense and seems to sound far out and even a little offensive, but it is not such a far-out illustration of what people can do by spiritualizing Scripture. Most anything imaginable can be incorrectly taught by spiritualizing Scripture.

Some will even go so far as to teach that most of the stories of the Bible did not really happen but they were put in the Bible so that we could learn “spiritual” lessons from them. This, of course, is a rejection of the truthfulness of the Word of God, even though they claim that it teaches “spiritual” lessons.

Below, Isaiah 11:6-9 is quoted. The comments following these verses are from Richard W. De Haan’s book, You Can Understand the Bible, pages 61 and 62, as he talks about Isaiah 11:6-9.

The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder’s den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. Isaiah 11:6-9 (ESV)

“The context will immediately indicate that this refers to the time when Jesus will reign upon the earth and set up His kingdom. Those who are given to spiritualizing Scripture will make the wolf represent one thing, the lamb another, and the lion something else. Some will even tell us this passage means that the day is coming when the world, representing one sect or denomination of Christianity, will make peace with and unite with some other religious sect or denomination. But when we begin to interpret in this manner, one guess is as good or as bad as another. If I were to use this method, I could claim that the wolf is the United States, the lion is Britain, the bear is Russia, and conclude that this passage teaches these three will ultimately make peace. Such are the vagaries of spiritualizing the Scriptures. How much easier it is to believe literally that when Jesus comes and the Kingdom is set up, even the animals will be at peace with one another, become docile, lose their carnivorous nature, and dwell together in safety.”

5. Understand how individual verses fit into the overall teaching of that section of Scripture.

A fundamental rule of Bible study and interpretation is to understand the context of a passage. One needs to read and understand the entire passage rather than isolating a phrase or verse from its context. Without understanding the context, we may easily misunderstand what a verse or individual phrase is teaching.

For example, consider the following sentence. “John and Jill played a game of basketball and John beat Jill”. If I repeated just the last part of this sentence and told someone that “John beat Jill”, I would be taking that part of the sentence out of context, and could totally mislead people.

Many people take Scripture passages out of context. They either do not know the context or they deliberately choose to misrepresent the verse. By doing this, you can make the Bible seem to teach many kinds of things that it really does not teach at all.

6. Interpret individual passages in the light of parallel or related passages.

When a passage is not real clear, we should read other related passages to understand the Bible’s overall teaching on a given topic. The Bible never contradicts itself. We should understand what the Bible teaches on a particular topic before we try to understand the meaning of an individual passage. We need to interpret more hard-to-understand passages in the light of other passages that are more clear in their teaching.

For example, in 1 Corinthians 15:29 it talks about being “baptized for the dead”. Commentators are divided as to what this means and no one seems to know for sure. While we may not know exactly what it does mean, we do know that it is not teaching that we can be baptized for the unsaved dead and they will be saved. We do not accept that interpretation because it clearly contradicts many other clear passages of Scripture.

7. Look up the meaning of key individual words that are used in the Bible.

There are times when we can misunderstand the meaning of a particular word used in Scripture. The New Testament was originally written in Greek, not English. Looking a word up in an English dictionary (Webster’s) sometimes helps a little, but often it will not give a very good explanation of its Biblical meaning or usage. It is often more helpful to understand how it is used or what it means in the Greek language. The Biblical meaning of words such as grace, love, faith, and hope are not at all the same as we use them in modern English.

Often a Bible dictionary such as the Wycliffe’s Bible Dictionary can be quite helpful. For a more precise definition there are several expository dictionaries giving the Greek meaning of New Testament words. Vines Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words is a good one. Both of these books are well worth having as you seek to correctly understand the Word of God.

8. *When studying the Bible, it is a good idea to recognize the style of writing that you are reading.*

In the Bible there are many different kinds of writing, or “genre”, as it is often called. In the Bible there is narrative, history, law, discourses, sermons, poetry, parables, proverbs, and prophetic or apocalyptic writings.

It is not the purpose of this lesson to analyze each kind of writing and how to study and understand it. That would be a major undertaking. However, following is a very brief discussion of some of them and a few basic guidelines for understanding them.

Narrative tells what happened. Most of the historical parts of the Bible are narrative. If the Bible says it happened, we simply accept it as truth and believe it.

A *discourse* is a sermon or teaching. Much of the four gospels and Paul’s letters are primarily teaching and doctrine. Sometimes these may be heavy, but they need to be studied. These passages teach important fundamental truths of our faith.

There is *poetic writing* throughout the Bible. Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Solomon, and Ecclesiastics are all poetic books. Poetry often stirs our souls and they express much of what we ourselves often feel. These parts of Scripture often inspire us and lift our hearts in praise to God.

There is much that can be learned from poetic passages of Scripture; however, heavy doctrine is best learned from the doctrinal parts of Scripture. A *proverb* is short saying that expresses a general truth. It is not an absolute law in which there will never be an exception.

A *parable* can be described as a story with a spiritual meaning. Jesus told many parables. It is important to remember that parables normally have one primary teaching. Do not make the mistake of trying to find a spiritual lesson in every detail of the story. Instead, look for the central message and stay with that primary teaching.

Sometimes the hardest of all Scripture to accurately understand are the *prophetic* parts of Scripture. At times good reliable commentaries can be a big help. However, even if a passage is difficult to understand, we can still read it and be greatly blessed. We may not understand all the details but we can get a general flow of what will happen and live in the light of Biblical prophecy. We know for sure that our Lord Jesus Christ is coming back and we will be with Him forever.

9. *Do not allow the world’s way of thinking to influence your understanding of Biblical truth.*

The world’s way of thinking and the Word of God have little in common. Yet many, perhaps most, Christians are deeply influenced by the world’s way of thinking. This is so common that many do not even recognize or know it. Many are so immature in their spiritual growth that they hardly know the difference. However, for those who correctly understand and apply solid Biblical teaching, there is great reward.

We must guard against interpreting the Bible in such a way as to make it compatible with man’s ways of thinking. Let God be God. He is the revealer of genuine truth. We must never subjugate God to man by manipulating His truth to make it conform to man’s way of thinking.

Being Wary of Theologians

I have personally learned much from good Bible teachers. I have been encouraged many times and I have grown in my walk with the Lord as I have listened to their teaching and read their writings. However, I have also learned that I need to be very discerning as I listen to the teaching or read the writing of even those who are generally accepted as good solid conservative Bible teachers and theologians. I would personally strongly advise others to also be carefully discerning as they hear the Word of God taught, or read what others have written about the Word of God.

It would be nice if conservative Biblical theologians and teachers who believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, all agreed with each other and taught only clear Biblical truth which God reveals in His Word. However, many theologians do not seem to be satisfied with simply teaching plain Bible truth. They feel compelled to go beyond fundamental Bible teaching and to add and staunchly defend their own particular understanding which is derived from their own reasoning and logic rather than being a clear Bible teaching. As a result, even conservative theologians teach many different and conflicting things. Many seem unable to simply let Scripture speak for itself and they feel that they must develop and defend their own deeper “understanding” of what the Bible teaches.

There are many Bible truths that are basic and are easily understood by most of those who love the Lord and His Word. You do not need to be a Bible college or seminary graduate to understand them. However, these same fundamental Biblical truths can be sources of disagreement and deep division among theologians who write many long books defending their understanding of that simple truth.

Christians need to ask the Spirit of God for understanding, then read the Word of God and accept and put into practice its fundamental teachings. We will not understand everything. Nobody does. And that includes theologians, even those who write many long volumes to explain their views or understanding of what the Bible teaches.

I could get myself into some trouble for saying this, but it is my advice that you do not try to fit the Scripture into any theological framework such as Calvinism, Arminianism, covenant theology, reformed theology, or even dispensationalism. Again, just simply read the Word and believe what it teaches. You do not have to go beyond what the Word teaches and try to understand what God does not clearly reveal in His Word.

Again, I have personally learned much from good Bible teachers. Good Bible reference materials can be very helpful. However, we must always remember that Bible study aids and reference materials are all written by people. Theologians, scholars, teachers, and writers are all imperfect people and subject to making mistakes. All people, including myself, are fallible. Their writings and their teaching can and do contain error. Go ahead and use good Bible reference materials and learn from good Bible teachers, but you must always be very careful and discerning in what you accept as genuine Biblical truth.

Protecting Ourselves from Biblical Untruth

To protect ourselves from being misled or deceived by wrong teaching, we have at least four lines of defense.

1. Walk close to God and be led by His Spirit.

Listen to the Spirit of God. He is the Spirit of Truth and He will lead you to truth. If you are regularly absorbing the Word of God and committed to walking near to Him, you will sense when a teaching is not right. When you sense something is not right, listen and be discerning!!! If you sense something is not right, there is probably something that is not right!

But when He, the Spirit of Truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth. John 16:13a (NASB)

2. Develop systematic Bible reading and study habits so that you will be knowledgeable enough to recognize half-truths, distorted truth, and outright false teaching.

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth. 2 Timothy 2:15 (NASB)

There is no substitute for our own personal reading and studying of the Word of God. Without this, we are susceptible to being mistaught. When we “let the Word of God dwell in *us* richly”, we will recognize or sense when a teaching is not right.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another... Colossians 3:16a (KJV)

3. You must be very careful to be taught only by teachers and pastors who are committed to correctly teaching the Word of God.

God gives us gifted pastors and teachers to help us grow in our understanding and application of the Word of God. However, today it seems as though pastors and teachers who distort the truth outnumber those who teach it straight.

Carefully listen to what is being taught. Is it genuine Bible truth or does something just not seem right? Think about what is taught. Learn who you can trust to teach the Word right. It is a good idea to have a healthy skepticism when you hear someone teach that you do not know or know about. Good teachers can be a huge blessing, but ones who do not teach it right can hinder or even stop our spiritual growth if we absorb their teaching.

Be extremely cautious about television and radio preachers. Many, probably most, of them are in it for the wrong reasons and there is about every kind of false or distorted teaching imaginable being taught. This may sound a little harsh, but if you are in a church that is not careful to correctly teach the Word of God, then you need to get out and find one that does, even if you have to move or drive a long distance. If you have a family that is being incorrectly taught, it is serious. It has eternal consequences!!!

He (pastors and teachers) must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it. Titus 1:9 (NIV)

4. Seek the advice and counsel of mature godly Christians.

When you are unsure if something is Biblically correct, discuss it with someone who is knowledgeable, and who can be trusted to discern the truth.

Where there is no counsel, the people fall; But in the multitude of counselors there is safety.

Proverbs 11:14 (NKJV)

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NKJV)

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ. Colossians 2:6-8 (NIV)

Chapter Five

A Healthy Biblical Church Is Devoted to Prayer

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. Ephesians 6:18 (NIV)

No church will ever be stronger than their pattern of absorbing and applying sound Biblical truth, and no church will ever be stronger than their prayer life. These are measures of our walk with God. We can be a “good” person, regularly participate in all the meetings at church, teach Sunday School, and we can even be a well-known teacher or preacher, but if we are not regularly absorbing the Word of God and if we have not developed Biblical patterns of prayer, there will be little or no genuine spiritual growth and there will be little of the fruit of the Spirit in our life.

Prayer and Spiritual Productivity

God instructs us to pray. *To move the hand of God through prayer is a high calling. We dare not take that calling lightly.*

The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. James 5:16b (NIV)

Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not. Jeremiah 33:3 (KJV)

For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer,... 1 Peter 3:12a (NIV)

And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear. Isaiah 65:24 (KJV)

You hear, O LORD, the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry, Psalm 10:17 (NIV)

But know that the LORD hath set apart him that is godly for himself: the LORD will hear when I call unto him. Psalm 4:3 (KJV)

Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. Hebrews 4:16 (KJV)

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, Ephesians 3:20 (NKJV)

You do not have because you do not ask. James 4:2b (NASB)

...do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses

all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:6-7 (ESV)

If God's people do not pray, family members may not be as fully blessed. If we fail to pray, pastors, teachers, evangelists, missionaries, and other leaders may not see as much spiritual fruit in their ministries. Your fellow Christians may not be as fully blessed and you yourself will not be as fully blessed if you fail to pray.

If you sincerely desire to walk close to God and to live a spiritually productive life, then commit yourself to a lifetime of developing healthy Biblical patterns of prayer. It will not be easy. It is not easy for individuals and it is not easy for churches. If it were easy, more would do it.

If you make a commitment to prayer, there will most likely be times when you will falter and there may be times when you will get discouraged. Don't lose heart. Get back on track. Absorb the Word. He knows that we are dust and He is delighted when we get back to our commitment to prayer.

It is God's will for us to regularly (continually) pray.

Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving;
Colossians 4:2 (NASB)

Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (KJV)

Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart, Luke 18:1 (NASB)

...rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; Romans 12:12 (NKJV)

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. Ephesians 6:18 (NIV)

Churches and Prayer

Churches, as well as individual Christians, need to develop healthy patterns of prayer. *Churches who devote little time to prayer will always be weak churches.* It makes no difference whether that church is large or small. Churches may appear to be healthy; but if there is little prayer, it is, in reality, a castle being built by man, not by God.

I have personally taught in a number of churches in Oklahoma and elsewhere. From what I have observed, most of these churches spend less than five minutes a week in prayer together as a church. In most of these churches essentially all the prayer requests given are for physical health. Yet, in the Word of God, out of well over 1000 references and teaching on prayer, very few of them relate to physical health. Praying for physical health is needed; however, it should not be the major focus of our prayers.

Many Christians often complain about today's sad state of the American church or Christianity in

general, but only a few earnestly regularly pray for the church or for fellow believers. There are numerous Bible conferences that focus on topics such as prophecy or creation. There are conferences and seminars that teach methods, techniques, and strategies for starting and strengthening churches and families. However, there are few conferences or seminars that teach us to pray and there are few conferences or seminars where prayer is much more than a routine way to open or close a meeting. In many “prayer meetings”, prayer is almost non-existent. There is certainly a connection between the scarcity of prayer for the spiritual health of fellow believers and the scarcity of spiritual power and fruit in many Christians and in Christian churches and in families.

Most churches and individuals simply have not been taught to pray. One of the greatest weaknesses and dangers facing the church in America is that few of our leaders seem to be given to consistent earnest Biblical prayer. Many are gifted speakers, many are excellent organizers, many are good promoters, many are good at developing strategies, many have written books, and many claim to be filled with the Spirit, but few seem to be given to consistent earnest Biblical prayer.

Both large and small churches can be God-blessed churches. In many small churches people feel like they are second rate. There just doesn’t seem to be much happening like there is in the “big” churches. That attitude will change if that small church will devote itself to prayer. A church that prays as God instructs us to pray will be a blessed productive church. Over time they will see God work in thrilling ways. This does not mean that a “small” church will grow to be a “big” church. Being big is not necessarily evidence that God is at work. God can use small churches and He can use big churches. Through prayer, God will work, whether the church is large or small.

Many churches and individuals desperately need to devote more time to prayer, and they desperately need to change what they pray for. Changes are not always easy, but this change is needed. I have suggested to some churches that meet on Sunday mornings, Sunday evenings, and Wednesday evenings that they might want to consider devoting the Sunday evening service entirely to prayer. Sunday morning and Wednesday evening could be given to the preaching and teaching of the Word, and Sunday evening given entirely to prayer.

In the following verse of Scripture we are instructed to *“always keep on praying for all the saints”*.

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. Ephesians 6:18 (NIV)

Many of the prayers by believers for fellow Christians are shallow and sporadic. In the Word of God there are numerous examples of prayers for fellow Christians. Following is one of them:

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. Ephesians 3:14-19 (NASB)

Take a good look at the content of this prayer. How do our prayers compare with it???

Following is a list of Biblical prayer requests and commitments that could revolutionize our prayer for ourselves and for fellow believers.

Biblical Prayer Requests and Commitments

These are Biblical prayer requests that you can pray for yourself, for your family, your church family, and for others.

A. Relating to Our Walk with God -- Teach me your way, O Lord, and I will walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name. Psalm 86:11 (NIV)

1. You will hallow (or reverence) God's name. The Lord's Prayer, Matthew 6
2. God will reign in your life. The Lord's Prayer (Thy kingdom come), Matthew 6
3. You will know and do the will of God. The Lord's Prayer, Colossians 1:9
4. The Word of God will dwell in you richly. Colossians 3:16
5. The Spirit of God will enable you to correctly understand Biblical truth. 1 Corinthians 2:6-13
6. You will be continually filled with the Spirit of God. Ephesians 5:18
7. You will be filled with the fruit of the Spirit. (love, joy, peace, self-control, etc.) Galatians 5:22-23
8. You will be strengthened with power through the Spirit of God in your inner being. Ephesians 3:16
9. You will be conformed to the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 8:29
10. You will earnestly seek God with all your heart. Psalm 63:1, Jeremiah 29:13
11. You will draw near to God. James 4:8
12. You will live and walk by faith. Hebrews 11:5, Jude 1:20
13. You will know God's love that surpasses knowledge. Ephesians 3:19, 1 John 3:1
14. You will love God with all of your heart, soul, mind and strength. Deuteronomy 6:5, Mark 12:28-31
15. You will put Biblical love into practice. 1 Corinthians 13:1-8, 13
16. You will be devoted to praying as the Word teaches us to pray. Matthew 6:9-15, Colossians 4:2
17. You will be faithful in prayer and will not give up. Luke 18:1, Ephesians 6:18
18. Your motives for praying will be right. James 4:3
19. You will have wisdom. Ephesians 1:17, James 1:5
20. You will not believe or accept ungodly counsel or distorted Biblical teaching. Acts 20:30,
21. You will be delivered from Satan and all his deceitfulness. Matthew 6:13, John 17:15, Ephesians 6:10-18
22. You will continually grow in your walk with God. 2 Peter 3:18
23. You will look forward to all that God has ahead for us. Hebrews 6:17-20, Revelation 21:1-4
24. Your whole being -- spirit, soul and body -- will be blameless at His coming. 1 Thessalonians 5:23
25. You will remain faithful until death. 2 Timothy 4:6-8

B. Praise and Thanksgiving -- In everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 (NASB)

1. Thank and praise God for His death on the cross and for your salvation. 2 Corinthians 9:15
2. Thank and praise Him for your many spiritual blessings. Ephesians 1:1-14
3. Thank and praise Him for your family.
4. Thank and praise Him for daily physical blessings and for your health.
5. Thank and praise Him for the difficult times in life that strengthen your faith. James 1:2
6. Thank Him for ____ (You fill in the blank.)

C. Relating to Our Way of Life -- But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy." 1 Peter 1:15-16 (NIV)

1. You will actively seek to live a holy life. 1 Peter 1:15-16
2. You will consider yourself dead to sin and selfish desires. Romans 6
3. You will avoid every form of evil. 1 Thessalonians 5:22
4. God will search your heart and reveal any sinful way in you. Psalm 139:23-24
5. You will present yourself to God as an instrument of righteousness. Romans 6
6. You will be filled with the fruit of righteousness. Philippians 1:11
7. You will not become weary in doing good or lose heart. Galatians 6:9, Hebrews 12:3
8. You will not be angry but forgiving as God has forgiven you. The Lord's Prayer, Colossians 3:13
9. You will be a good steward of all that God has given you. Matthew 25:14-30, 1 Corinthians 4:2
10. You will not love money and will be content with what you have. Philippians 4:11-12, 1 Timothy 6:6-10
11. All your attitudes and your actions will please and glorify God. 1 Corinthians 10:31, Psalm 19:14

D. Relating to Evangelism -- Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." Matthew 9:37-38 (ESV)

1. You will be an active witness for the Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:20
2. God will open the door for you to present the gospel. Colossians 4:3
3. You will declare the gospel clearly and fearlessly. Ephesians 6:20, Colossians 4:4
4. Pray for individual family members, friends, and others who are lost. Romans 10:1
5. God will send workers with the gospel to the lost all around the world. Luke 10:2, Acts 1:8
6. The gospel message will spread rapidly and be honored. 2 Thessalonians 3:1
7. God will protect His messengers by the power of His name. 2 Thessalonians 3:2, John 17:11
8. Pray for individual missionaries that you know (or know about). Ephesians 6:19-20

E. Relating to Fellow Believers and Our Families -- Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 1 John 4:11 (NIV)

1. Your love will increase and overflow for fellow believers. 1 Thessalonians 3:12, 1 Corinthians 13
2. You will faithfully pray for fellow believers. Ephesians 6:18, James 5:16
3. You will encourage, build up, and serve fellow believers. Hebrews 10:23-25
4. You will control how you talk about others. Ephesians 4:29
5. God will protect believers worldwide who suffer persecution because of their faith. 1 Corinthians 12:26
6. Your marriage will be strong and that you will love and respect your wife/husband. Ephesians 5:22-23
7. You will actively teach your children (grandchildren) to walk with God. Deuteronomy 11:19-20
8. Your children (grandchildren) will be obedient and respectful. Ephesians 6:1-3

F. Relating to Our Daily Needs -- Give us today our daily bread. Matthew 6:11 (NIV)

1. God will supply your daily needs. The Lord's Prayer, Matthew 6
2. You will have good health. 3 John 2a

G. Relating to Those Who Are in Positions of Authority -- Pray... ...for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.

1 Timothy 2:2 (NIV)

Prayer and the Sovereignty of God

God is sovereign. He is in total control of all that happens or ever will happen. He knows the future as well as He knows the past. According to the Word of God, He has planned the future and He works out everything according to His own will and purpose.

In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, Ephesians 1:11 (ESV)

In God's own sovereignty and wisdom, He has determined that He will respond to the prayers of His people. We, as people, will never fully understand the mind of God or how God works. We will never fully understand how a sovereign God who has everything planned out and is in total control, responds to the prayers of His people.

However, one thing is very clear from the Word of God. God instructs us to pray and He promises positive answers to our prayers. *God instructed us to continually pray and He has instructed us on how to pray. We must not take this awesome responsibility lightly. If we expect to see our sovereign God at work, we must pray. There are no shortcuts or alternatives.*

Pray without ceasing. 1 Thessalonians 5:17 (KJV)

Devote yourselves to prayer, Colossians 4:2a (NASB)

Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart, Luke 18:1 (NASB)

Chapter Six

A Healthy Biblical Church Understands and Practices Discipleship

A fundamental purpose of the church is to make disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ. The last command that Jesus gave His disciples was to make disciples -- followers of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In order to make disciples we need to understand what a disciple is and what the Word of God teaches about being a disciple of our Lord Jesus Christ. The purpose of this Study Guide Six is to help us understand what the Word of God teaches about being a disciple. We will then conclude with a section on Biblical guidelines for making disciples.

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Matthew 28:18-20 (NIV)

A disciple can be defined as one who becomes like our Lord. Before creation, God planned for us to be like Him. This is a major theme throughout the New Testament.

For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Romans 8:29 (NKJV)

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Philippians 2:5-8 (NASB)

For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. 1 Peter 2:21 (ESV)

A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher. Luke 6:40 (ESV)

Reading and studying the Word of God, learning Biblical patterns of prayer, and fellowshiping with fellow Christians are all hollow activities if we do not have the gut level commitment to be like our Lord Jesus Christ.

What Is A Disciple?

To begin this study, we must understand what a genuine disciple is. Following are definitions given by several Biblical scholars:

- A. *“Imitators of their teacher”*. An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, Vine, page 316
- B. *“Willing to be trained, a learner”*. Making Disciples, John MacArthur, page 11
- C. *“A follower”*. Theological Wordbook, Charles Swindoll, General Editor, pages 94-95
- D. *“...not only to learn, but to become attached to one’s teacher and to become his follower in doctrine and in conduct of life”*. The Complete Wordstudy Dictionary–New Testament, Zodhiates, page 936

When Jesus was on earth, a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ was one who followed Him, who loved Him, who believed His claims to be the Son of God, who believed what He taught, and who put those teachings into practice. Today it is not much different. *A disciple is one who loves our Lord, who absorbs His Word, and who actively commits himself to being like Him and putting His Word into practice in his day-to-day life.*

Being a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ is not a casual commitment. It is completely giving up our own will and giving ourselves completely to knowing and doing His will. We die to our own desires and live to glorify Him.

Jesus Teaches About Discipleship

Matthew 10:24-42

In the first part of this chapter (Matthew 10), Jesus is preparing His twelve disciples for their first preaching assignment. As the chapter progresses, His teaching broadens to include all future disciples, and He even goes on into the tribulation period. This part of the chapter that we are looking at (Matthew 10:24-42) applies to all disciples now – in the church age. Pastors and other church leaders need to give careful attention to these verses since they were given to prepare His disciples for their ministry of preaching the gospel.

This passage of Scripture is not for wimps or pansies. It calls for total commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. As His followers, and especially those who are church leaders, we must not expect popularity, but rather expect rejection. We cannot fear dying for our faith, and our love for the Lord must come before love for even our own human families. (This is not an excuse for neglecting our families.) In fact, we die to all our own selfish desires and commit ourselves completely and totally to following and being like our Lord. If this is too high a price to pay for being a pastor or other church leader, then don’t be one because you will hinder the Holy Spirit from working, and you will not be able to lead others to be good disciples of our Lord.

The purpose of this section is to take a good look at this passage of Scripture (Matthew 10:24-42) and to be challenged to deepen our commitment to seeking Him with all our hearts, to drawing near to Him, and to being profitable servants of our Lord Jesus Christ.

A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. "It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher, and the slave like his master. Matthew 10:24 (NIV)

A committed disciple is to be like his teacher.

"A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher.
Luke 6:40 (NASB)

For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; Romans 8:29 (NASB)

For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. 1 Peter 2:21 (ESV)

If they have called the head of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign the members of his household! Matthew 10:25 (NASB)

A disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ must expect rejection. Jesus was rejected by the big majority of people. He was accused of casting out demons by the power of Satan. If they called Him “Beelzebul” or Satan, then we, too, must not expect popularity or widespread acceptance as a follower of Christ.

But the Pharisees said, "He casts out demons by the ruler of the demons." Matthew 9:34 (NKJV)

Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also. John 15:20 (NASB)

I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. Matthew 10:16 (NIV)

Therefore do not fear them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. Matthew 10:26 (NASB)

A disciple must not be afraid of preaching and teaching. Three times in these verses in Matthew 10, Jesus tells us not to be afraid. The first reason that we are not to be afraid is that God will, at some point, reveal the truth about us and about all those who oppose us. If we are good servants and innocent of wrong doing, it will be known by all. Those who are guilty of rejecting the message and of persecuting His followers will be openly exposed and will publicly face the consequences of their rejection and attitudes.

For nothing is hidden that will not become evident, nor anything secret that will not be known and come to light. Luke 8:17 (NASB)

But there is nothing covered up that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known.
Luke 12:2 (NASB)

Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God. 1 Corinthians 4:5 (ESV)

Notice the last phrase of this verse. Each person will receive their just recognition from God. Disciples who are rejected on earth will be openly commended and rewarded by God.

What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light; and what you hear whispered in your ear, proclaim upon the housetops. Matthew 10:27 (NASB)

Jesus privately taught His disciples many things. Now they were to publicly teach and preach what they had learned. Today, a disciple is to publicly tell what he has learned. God has given to us the ministry of reconciliation. We are to tell the world about Jesus.

All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 2 Corinthians 5:18-20 (ESV)

...but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth. Acts 1:8 (NASB)

Obviously, pastors and preachers are to preach and teach the Word of God. However, even laymen must teach what they have learned. Parents and grandparents must teach their children and grandchildren. All Christians are to teach and admonish one another.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom,... Colossians 3:16 (NIV)

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, Ephesians 4:29 (NIV)

Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, ... 1 Thessalonians 5:11a (ESV)

Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. Galatians 6:1-2 (NIV)

And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another. Romans 15:14 (NASB)

Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Matthew 10:28 (NASB)

A disciple must not be afraid to die, if necessary. We are not to fear those who can kill our bodies. We do not fear Satan and all those who are intentionally or unintentionally doing his bidding. All they can do is kill us and that will never happen unless it is God's will and purpose. When we die, we will be with the Lord forever. That is nothing to fear. Rather than fearing for ourselves or our lives, we fear for those whom God will judge by sending their body and soul into an eternal hell.

Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. "But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. "So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows. Matthew 10:29-30 (NIV)

A disciple does not fear lack of provision or protection. Since God is totally aware of what individual sparrows are doing, He is much more aware of our needs and He will provide for us. He is totally aware of everything about us, even numbering the hairs on our head. If He knows that much about us, He is certainly aware of all our needs.

Therefore, I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

Matthew 6:25-30 (ESV)

Therefore, whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven. Matthew 10:32-33 (NKJV)

Genuine disciples publicly confess their belief in the Lord Jesus Christ. We are saved by faith in the death of Jesus Christ as the payment for our sin, and turning away from that lifestyle of sin. People who are genuinely saved make it known to other people.

...because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart, one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. Romans 10:9-10 (ESV)

Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Matthew 10:34-37 (ESV)

A genuine disciple loves God more than his own human family members. Worldwide and even here in America, many, many times when one commits to being a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ, he/she faces the opposition and sometimes even the total rejection of his own family. If we are unwilling to accept this, then don't pretend to be a disciple of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it. Matthew 10:38-39 (NKJV)

The cross is a symbol of death. A genuine disciple is willing to die to every other desire and be totally committed to being a follower of our Lord. We die to self.

Those who focus on the pleasures and desires of life now will, in eternity, lose everything. Their life separated from God in an eternal hell is described as death. Those who lose their life now for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ will enjoy an abundant life with Him forever.

He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me. He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward. And he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward.
Matthew 10:40-41 (NKJV)

Not everyone will reject the message given by the disciples of Christ. Some will receive the message and the messenger. Those who receive and help provide for the prophet or messenger will share in the messenger's reward. Those who receive and provide for a fellow Christian layman who is not a prophet, will also share in his reward.

Those who receive our message become our brothers and sisters in the Lord and they become disciples together with us. There is little in life that compares with the joy of being used by God to lead someone to become a fellow disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward." Matthew 10:42 (NASB)

Most of the commentators agree that the little ones spoken of here are not children, but rather one who is simply a follower or disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. Even a cup of cold water given to a disciple who is thirsty will result in an eternal reward.

Review – What are the characteristics of a disciple from Matthew 10:24-42?

1. A disciple is to be like his teacher.
2. A disciple must expect rejection.
3. A disciple is to publicly tell what he has learned.
4. A disciple must not be afraid of those who reject Christ.
5. A disciple must not fear dying because of his faith.
6. A disciple does not fear lack of provision or protection.
7. A genuine disciple is to publicly confess his belief in the Lord Jesus Christ.
8. A genuine disciple is to love God more than his own human family members.
9. A genuine disciple is willing to die to every other human desire and be totally committed to being a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ.

More Biblical Teaching on Discipleship

1. There are false disciples. Not everyone who claims to be a follower of Christ is a genuine disciple.

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" Matthew 7:21-23 (NKJV)

This is a frightening truth. Many who think they are saved and who even call Jesus “Lord” are not genuinely saved. Jesus will tell them, *“I never knew you, Away from Me you evildoers.”*

Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, observing His signs which He was doing. But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men, and because He did not need anyone to testify concerning man, for He Himself knew what was in man. John 2:23-25 (NASB)

Here there were many who believed in Jesus’ name, but Jesus would not “*entrust Himself to them*” because He knew their hearts. Their belief was shallow and did not result in genuine salvation.

These people honor me (Jesus) with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men. Matthew 15:8-9 (NIV)

...having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.
2 Timothy 3:5 (NIV)

After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. John 6:66 (ESV)

Carefully read John 6:60-71. In this passage there are disciples who are genuine disciples, and there are “disciples” who followed Jesus for a while but deserted Him when they did not like what Jesus taught. There was even one individual who was identified as a disciple but who later betrayed Jesus.

Again, this is a frightening truth. There are apparently many who believe they are genuine followers of the Lord Jesus Christ; yet they have never known Him. It would be well for each of us to examine our own heart to be sure that we are a genuine disciple of the Lord.

Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves... 2 Corinthians 13:5 (NIV)

2. A genuine disciple continually grows in his knowledge and practice of the Word of God.

Jesus therefore was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, “If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine. John 8:31 (NASB)

This verse clearly indicates that a true disciple is one who abides in the Word. To abide in the Word is to continually be in the Word. Abiding is to consistently read, to study, to absorb, and to practice the Word of God. Abiding is an on-going continual process, not an occasional activity.

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.
1 Timothy 3:16-17 (NIV)

To be equipped to do the work of God one must be continually learning the Word, letting the Word rebuke and correct wrong sinful behavior, and letting the Word train him in the right way to live.

How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Your word.

Psalm 119:9 (NASB)

Your word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against You. Psalm 119:11 (NASB)

Any individual who does not regularly read, study, absorb, and live the Word of God cannot claim to be a genuine disciple. This is true if the individual is a pastor, elder, deacon, teacher, or lay person. Nobody can separate discipleship from abiding in the Word of God.

3. There is intensity in a Biblical commitment to discipleship.

The following Scripture passages describe an intense search for God and for spiritual understanding and wisdom. There is an intensity to discipleship. It requires work and self-discipline. Overall, most Christians are passive in their commitment to being a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is not what God asks. He expects us to have a zeal and to be diligent in our commitment to being His disciple.

My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, ...then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding. He holds victory in store for the upright, he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless, for he guards the course of the just and protects the way of his faithful ones.

...then you will understand what is right and just and fair--every good path. For wisdom will enter your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul. Discretion will protect you, and understanding will guard you. Proverbs 2:1-11 (NIV)

Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Peter 1:5-8 (NASB)

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth. 2 Timothy 2:15 (NASB)

Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress.

1 Timothy 4:15 (ESV)

O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. Psalm 63:1 (ESV)

And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.

Jeremiah 29:13 (NKJV)

4. *There are costs involved in discipleship.*

There are blessings waiting for those who commit to walking close to our Lord. However, from a human viewpoint, there are also costs and sacrifices involved in total commitment. In Luke 9:23, we are told to *"take up our cross daily"*. The cross is a symbol of death. In Romans 12:1, we are told to offer our bodies as living sacrifices.

Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. Matthew 16:24 (KJV)

And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. Matthew 10:38 (NKJV)

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. Romans 12:1-2 (ESV)

More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, Philippians 3:8 (NASB)

Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him, "Lord, I will follow You wherever You go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." Then He said to another, "Follow Me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God." And another also said, "Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house." But Jesus said to him, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." Luke 9:57-62 (NKJV)

He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Matthew 10:37 (KJV)

In comparison to our commitment to Christ, even our human families take second place.

In the Bible, the word "hate" is sometimes used in a comparative sense. In the following verses (Luke 14:25-27) we are not being taught that all disciples are to have animosity or "hatred" for our families, but rather we are being taught that we are to have a much greater love for our Lord than for our families. In other passages of Scripture it is clear that we are to *"love one another deeply from the heart"*. If we obey God, we will have a deep love and respect for our families, even though they are second place to our commitment to our Lord.

Christians are told in Scripture to hate what is evil. We hate the evil in ourselves and the evil in our families. Genuine disciples hate evil.

Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own

life also, he cannot be My disciple. "And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. Luke 14:25-27 (NKJV)

So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple. Luke 14:33 (NKJV)

An individual who commits to being a disciple must be willing to pay the cost. Again, a cross is a symbol of death. A genuine disciple must be willing to die to all his selfish desires in order to focus on his commitment to following the Lord Jesus Christ.

In many, many Christian churches today there is an attempt to make Christianity appealing to the world. In doing so, the truth is watered down. The costs of following the Lord Jesus Christ are seldom, if ever, mentioned. This is a dangerous trend and can result in many people thinking that they are saved and heaven bound when, in fact, they never had a genuine salvation experience.

Many Christians consider the price and the demands of commitment to be too high. They appreciate being saved and having the hope of eternal life with God, but the cost of total commitment here on earth is more than they are willing to pay. People with this kind of an attitude need to get their focus off of themselves and on the Lord Jesus Christ. When we consider how much He suffered so that we can have eternal life, it makes our trials and our so-called sacrifices seem awfully small.

At the end of this chapter there is an e-mail that we received from friends – Bob and Carol Janecke – who were serving as missionaries in India. The Janeckes paid a high price for following the Lord Jesus Christ. Their nine-year-old son died as a direct result of their following God's leading to India. In this e-mail you will find out if they considered the cost to be too high.

5. Love and unity characterize a disciple of our Lord Jesus Christ.

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." John 13:34-35 (NIV)

May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, Romans 15:5 (ESV)

Genuine disciples love each other and are unified in their overall goal of following and honoring the Lord Jesus Christ. When there are fights or quarrels and disunity among followers of the Lord, something is drastically wrong. Pride and selfishness have become more important than being a disciple of Jesus. The Spirit of God is hindered and the world is repulsed by our actions. Unity is more than just the absence of hostility. Unity is when we are one in our desire to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what God desires and what He can bless.

6. There are consequences to a lack of commitment.

Carefully read the following verses several times. In this passage there are serious warnings against ignoring our pursuit of spiritual wisdom and understanding.

Wisdom calls aloud in the street, she raises her voice in the public squares; at the head of the noisy streets she cries out, in the gateways of the city she makes her speech: "How long will you simple ones love your simple ways? How long will mockers delight in mockery and fools hate knowledge? If you had responded to my rebuke, I would have poured out my heart to you and made my thoughts known to you.

...But since you rejected me when I called and no one gave heed when I stretched out my hand, since you ignored all my advice and would not accept my rebuke, I in turn will laugh at your disaster; I will mock when calamity overtakes you-- when calamity overtakes you like a storm, when disaster sweeps over you like a whirlwind, when distress and trouble overwhelm you.

...Then they will call to me but I will not answer; they will look for me but will not find me. Since they hated knowledge and did not choose to fear the LORD, since they would not accept my advice and spurned my rebuke, they will eat the fruit of their ways and be filled with the fruit of their schemes. For the waywardness of the simple will kill them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them; but whoever listens to me will live in safety and be at ease, without fear of harm." Proverbs 1:20-33 (NIV)

From this passage, notice the consequences of ignoring godly wisdom, which is essentially the same as ignoring God Himself. These consequences are serious. Carefully read and think about them.

Consequence one... *then they will call to me but I will not answer;*

Consequence two... *they will look for me but will not find me.*

Consequence three... *they will eat the fruit of their ways and be filled with the fruit of their schemes.*

Consequence four... *the waywardness of the simple will kill them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them;*

Now carefully read each of the following Scriptures:

Blessed is the man who always fears the LORD, but he who hardens his heart falls into trouble. Proverbs 28:14 (NIV)

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. Galatians 6:7-8 (NASB)

I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. "So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Revelation 3:15-16 (NKJV)

Christians who do not choose to grow in their walk with God bring on themselves multitudes of problems and troubles. Walking with the Lord helps us avoid many of the heartaches and pain that carnal Christians bring on themselves. This writer has been amazed at the amount of trouble and pain Christians can bring on themselves as a direct result of their disobedience. It is also amazing that those same Christians just do not seem to get it. Serving our Lord will save us from multitudes of trouble, pain, and hurt.

Superficial Discipleship -- from John Chapter Six

Before one can appreciate this section, you need to read through John chapter six at least a couple of times. Think about what you read. It is a long chapter, seventy-one verses, but you will enjoy absorbing the Word of God.

This chapter begins with a huge crowd of people following Jesus. Jesus fed a crowd of about five thousand men. When you add women and children, it is likely that there was a crowd of about fifteen to twenty thousand people.

And a great multitude followed him, because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased. John 6:2 (KJV)

And Jesus said, Make the men sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. John 6:10 (KJV)

Jesus created food for this entire crowd of people. The crowd loved it and they even tried by force to make Jesus their king. The next morning the crowd again came to Jesus, expecting more food and expecting Him to heal their sick.

At the beginning of the day Jesus was very popular. However, by the end of the day the crowd had become disillusioned, and apparently only a handful of them continued to follow Him.

From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? John 6:66-67 (KJV)

Why did most of this crowd, who were identified as His disciples, turn away from Him?

We find in this chapter that Jesus clearly states that He is from God and that He is the only source of eternal life. In this chapter there is also a call to a deep level of commitment to Him.

Since Jesus had just fed them bread the day before, He uses bread as an illustration to teach about Himself. As bread (food) is necessary for physical life, so He, Jesus, is the bread of life, the source of eternal spiritual life.

Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal. John 6:27 (NASB)

And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst. John 6:35 (KJV)

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." John 6:51 (NIV)
Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me. John 14:6 (NASB)

At this point Jesus calls them to a much deeper level of dependency, commitment, and closeness to Himself.

Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. John 6:53-57 (NKJV)

Jesus is the only source of eternal life. In a spiritual sense we are to eat His flesh and drink His blood. It is because of His death and shed blood that we can know and walk with God. This call to spiritually eat His flesh and drink His blood is a call to complete and total dependence on Him. It is a call to a deep level of commitment to following His teachings and putting them into practice.

After hearing this from Jesus, the crowd had had all they could take. Most of them left and no longer walked with Him. Their actions showed that they were not genuine disciples of Jesus.

The Jews then complained about Him, because He said, "I am the bread which came down from heaven". John 6:41 (NKJV)

On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" John 6:60 (NIV)

From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. John 6:66 (KJV)

Later the Apostle John gave the reason that many people stop following the Lord.

They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us. 1 John 2:19 (NIV)

Jesus knows what a person's motivations are. He knew what was in their heart, or what they were thinking. He did not commit Himself to coming into the life of a shallow, less than genuine, believer.

Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men, and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man. John 2:23-25 (NKJV)

Characteristics of Shallow Discipleship

In this section we will look at some characteristics of the crowd that left Him, as recorded in John chapter six. In a more general sense, these are characteristics of many shallow or false disciples. These characteristics are still descriptive of many "disciples" today.

1. They followed the crowd.

People love a show. This large crowd of less than genuine disciples followed Jesus to watch Him do

miracles. They were not interested in His message; instead, they came to be entertained or to be fed. Today it is not so different. People still go along with the crowd. Many false teachers put on a good show and crowds come. Many will also come to see a legitimate ministry if there is a crowd. However, being part of a crowd does not make one a genuine follower of the Lord Jesus Christ.

2. They were fascinated by the supernatural.

A large crowd followed Him, because they saw the signs which He was performing on those who were sick. John 6:2 (NASB)

Still today, people are attracted to what at least appears to be supernatural. In the tribulation period the anti-Christ will deceive many by doing miracles. Today, we need to be very discerning. Even Satan can do “miracles”.

Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’ Matthew 7:21-23 (ESV)

3. They wanted Jesus to provide physical blessings. They were not interested in His teaching.

The crowd wanted Jesus to make their life easier for them. They wanted deliverance from Rome. They wanted more food. They wanted Jesus to heal their sick. They wanted Jesus to put on a show and to entertain them. But they were not listening to what He taught. There is no indication that they accepted, believed, or wanted to put His teaching into practice. Instead of submitting to the will of God, they wanted Jesus to fulfill their self-centered desires.

Then they said to Him, "Lord, always give us this bread." Therefore the Jews were grumbling about Him, because He said, "I am the bread that came down out of heaven." John 6:41 (NASB)

Still today many want and expect Jesus to do their own will. The Bible clearly teaches that God will care for His people, but God does not promise that He will give every Christian a life of ease or wealth if they just have enough faith, give enough money, or speak the right words. In some circles it is taught that if you give enough money, God will make you rich. God will give you everything you want--large elaborate homes, expensive luxury cars, the most elaborate showy wardrobes, and so on.

This “prosperity doctrine” is the idea that God's favor is expressed mainly through physical health and material prosperity, and that these blessings are available for the claiming by anyone who has sufficient faith. In this teaching, discipleship, repentance, and living a godly obedient life is not important. Faith and giving money alone are all that is required to be rich beyond anything we can imagine.

This doctrine is known by several different titles -- the Prosperity Doctrine, the Word of Faith Movement, the Faith Formula, Positive Confession, or Name It and Claim It. They all essentially teach that “faith” can be used to influence God for their own selfish gain whenever and for whatever

they want. This doctrine is totally false.

The heart of genuine discipleship is to commit to doing His will and to following His example. We submit to His teaching and follow Him rather than demanding that God submit to our will.

Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name. 'Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Matthew 6:9-10 (NASB)

4. They were religious, but they had no hunger for genuine Biblical truth. Instead, they clearly rejected it.

This crowd in John chapter six was a crowd of religious people. They were committed to following the Old Testament law and the traditions of their elders; however, it was a ritualistic obedience rather than an expression of faith in God who gave the law.

It is likely that this crowd was on its way to observe the Passover feast, since in the fourth verse of this chapter it states:

Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was near. John 6:4 (NASB)

It is ironic that a religious crowd of people, who are on their way to observe the God-given Passover feast, hear the truth being taught from the Passover Lamb of God Himself; yet they reject it in stubbornness and unbelief. They murmured, grumbled and even mocked what Jesus taught.

At this the Jews began to grumble about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." John 6:41 (NIV)

On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" John 6:60 (NIV)

Then the Jews began to argue with one another, saying, "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?" John 6:52 (NASB)

Today there are still millions of religious people, even so-called Christians, who have no interest in hearing or in believing what the Word of God teaches. A genuine disciple loves the Word of God and the God-given truths it contains. He studies and seeks to genuinely understand and apply its teaching. A false disciple will distort and twist the truths of the Bible. He will teach what he wants to teach and what people want to hear. There is no genuine desire to know, to teach, or to apply the truths taught in the Word of God.

These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men. Mark 7:6-7 (NIV)

5. Even though they "followed" Jesus, they did not put their faith in Him.

I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live

forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world." The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?" John 6:51-52 (NKJV)

Jesus taught that they should eat His flesh and drink His blood. Those hearing Him knew that Jesus was speaking in a spiritual sense. They understood His claims and what He was teaching. Yet, even after seeing evidence that He was the Son of God, instead of putting their faith in Jesus and receiving eternal life, they rejected Him. Today many call Jesus a good man, a prophet, or a good moral teacher, but they reject Him as the Son of God and the only source of eternal life.

These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men. Mark 7:6-7 (NIV)

6. They justified, rationalized, and defended their unbelief.

Those who rejected Jesus ignored the evidence. Jesus often claimed to be the Son of God, equal with the Father. He backed up His claims with many miracles that they all had seen. John the Baptist had identified Him as the "Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world". When Jesus was baptized, God Himself publicly announced that Jesus was His own Son. However, they ignored the abundant evidence and rationalized their unbelief.

They were saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does He now say, 'I have come down out of heaven'?" John 6:42 (NASB)

It is no different today. Men still refuse to believe the evidence such as creation itself and the resurrection of Jesus. The whole theory of evolution is an attempt to rationalize and justify their rejection of God.

7. There was no evidence of repentance of sin.

Throughout this whole chapter (John 6) there is not the slightest evidence or hint of any conviction of sin or of a desire to turn from sin. They loved their sin and rejected the Savior.

8. There was no desire for true worship.

This people honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. Matthew 15:8-9 (ESV)

One Example of Being a Disciple

To conclude this section on Biblical discipleship, here is a copy of an e-mail that was received by Phil and Linda Benedict from friends, Bob and Carol Janecke, who were missionaries in India. This e-mail was sent on April 30, 2004.

From the Janeckes:

It is difficult to know how to write about Luke. He was with us on Sunday. Monday, he woke up itching. Toward evening he had a fear of drinking. We took him to the hospital Tuesday morning. By Wednesday evening he was gone. It happened so quickly, yet went on too long. It's hard to watch your son die.

Luke loved to play on our wooded mountain slopes. He had names for all the stray dogs and wandering cows. One of his dog friends must have gotten rabies. Luke never got bit. Most likely a lick on the face.

Our neighbor drove us to Delhi on Tuesday, looking for hope. It's a difficult, hot, 6-hour trip on dangerous roads. A/C cooling, or open windows, made Luke panic. He talked the whole way there. His personality had started to change. He was sure that he just had sunstroke. Before we found the recommended hospital, I had to hold him down physically. They wouldn't take him. We had to find the Infectious Disease Hospital in evening Delhi traffic. It was near 9 when we finally got there. They were afraid of him. Their option was to put him in a dark room with an iron bar door, and lock it. We could watch him die from outside. "He will die soon. Decide quickly if you want the room because it's time for us to go home." We started on the long trip back home.

They gave Luke a shot to help calm him down. It didn't seem to do much. He was still talking continuously. Now in more random sentences. Usually he spoke about family members, or the neighbor's dog. Sometimes in Hindi. I had to hold him down the whole way. I knew it could be the last time that I got to hold my son. He was already leaving.

We got back to our small Christian hospital at 4 a.m. Everything was quiet. By the time I carried him up to a room, our doctor was there. Nurses got an I.V. drip going. Luke was soon resting calmly. Our doctor, and the whole staff, had been praying all day long for Luke. They all showed such love and compassion as they took care of him that day. He consciously rested, without pain. We could still talk to him.

Our neighbor brought Sam, Rebekah, and Hannah to the hospital at 7. Soon others started to arrive to visit and pray. All day long people kept coming with food, prayers, love. One lady sat outside his room all day praying. All over town people were praying. Others sent messages to prayer groups around India and the world. So much prayer. The hospital gave us an adjoining room for food and guests. Most were staying, filling the hall, waiting with us. We could still be alone with Luke when we wanted to be. I had that chance before he died...to talk, cry, pray. Finally, exhausted, at 6 p.m., I laid down to sleep. The doctors came back shortly after. Luke had gone.

Luke is with Jesus. He took him home. I had a chance to talk with him alone before we left for Delhi. He had made Jesus his Savior sometime earlier in his young life. On our trip home from Delhi I talked with him about going to heaven. What would it be like? Luke only knew that Jesus would be there. It would be a good place.

We had his funeral the following morning (yesterday). Swami arranged to have a casket built for Luke that night. Three of the older boys from Lancer Lodge orphanage dug his grave in the Christian cemetery...a beautiful quiet spot on a wooded mountain ridge close to our house. We all helped to cover the hole...put flowers and candles on top, and sang.

Thank you for your love and prayers. I'm sorry that we couldn't let you know about Luke earlier. It all happened too quickly. Luke was only 9 years old. None of us has the promise of life tomorrow, but we all have God's offer of life eternal. *He had to watch His Son die to give us this gift.* Luke had taken it. He was ready to go.

Bob, for the Janecke Family

(Note: This e-mail used with the permission of the Janeckes.)

Today the Janeckes are still actively following the Lord Jesus Christ. Following Him cost them the life of their son, Luke; yet in my conversations with them I did not detect any bitterness or anger. I will always remember the second to the last sentence in this e-mail, *"He had to watch His Son die to give us this gift."* God gave the life of His Son so that we can have eternal life. I, for one, make the commitment to be a genuine follower of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Biblical Fundamentals of Making Disciples

So far, we have looked at what a Biblical disciple is. Now let's take a brief look at how to make disciples. The fundamentals of making disciples are not hard to understand. They come directly out of the Word of God.

First let's look at Matthew 28:18-20 again.

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Matthew 28:18-20 (NIV)

Making Disciples – Step One – Salvation

Before anyone can be a disciple, he must be a saved person. No unsaved person will ever be a genuine disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, the first step in making disciples must be to give them the gospel. Those who respond by genuinely believing in Him are now ready to be "discipled".

Making Disciples – Step Two – Baptism

According to Matthew 28:18-20, believers are to be baptized. Baptism is a public statement of identification with our Lord. It is a first step of obedience in the life of a disciple or follower of Jesus Christ. Something is wrong when a believer does not want to take this step of obedience. Baptism is not a part of salvation, but it is doubtful if a believer will grow much in his walk with the Lord if he ignores or refuses this step of obedience to our Lord.

Making Disciples – Step Three – “teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you”

Teaching is a fundamental necessity in the process of making disciples. In fact, we are to teach disciples to “*obey everything I have commanded you*”. For a disciple to be obedient to all that Jesus commanded, he must know and practice what the Word of God teaches. Teaching to obey “*all that I have commanded you*” is a huge job. In fact, it is a lifelong process. All believers need to keep on learning the Word of God, and we should never stop growing in our obedience to the Word.

Jesus, as God, is the author of the entire Bible; therefore, in order to teach disciples to “*obey everything I have commanded you*”, we need to teach them the whole Bible and teach them to obey all the instructions that God gives to us in His Word.

Both “step three” and “step four” are lifelong commitments. Neither of these steps is ever completed. These two steps are distinct; yet they go together. Neither can be done well without the other.

Making Disciples – Step Four – “putting the one-anothers into practice”

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom,... Colossians 3:16a (NIV)

Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.
1 Thessalonians 5:11 (ESV)

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another-- and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:24-25 (NIV)

The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. 2 Timothy 2:2 (NASB)

God clearly expects us to grow and mature in our walk with Him. This is true of all Christians, both those who have been saved for a short time as well as those who have known Him for many years. All of us need to keep on learning and keep on being built up by fellow believers.

God did not expect us to be alone in our growth process. We need each other. He put us in a family of believers, the church, and gave us the instructions to love, to teach, to encourage, to build up, and even to spur one another on. Without this kind of encouragement, spiritual growth will be slower or even at a standstill. There are about thirty “one another” commands in the Word of God. They all have a purpose and they all play a part in our growth. All of us are to put these commands into practice. And all Christians, young and old, are to encourage growth and to build up fellow believers.

When ten, fifty, or a hundred fellow believers seek to teach, to encourage, to build up, and to hold each other accountable, it is a powerful motivation and incentive to remain faithful and to grow in our walk with the Lord. This, I believe, is the heart of genuine discipleship.

I have put together a Bible study on fellowship in which there are two chapters dealing with the one-

another. I would highly recommend getting this study to help understand their value in the whole process of making disciples.

Making Disciples – Step Five – “holding each other accountable”

It would be great if there were continual growth and progress in the process of discipling and building up a new brother in the Lord. We enjoy it immensely when everything goes smoothly. However, there are often setbacks and times of discouragement and even disappointment. It is especially disappointing when sin in the life of one being discipled disrupts the discipleship process. When this happens, we can just ignore the sin, or we can abandon the discipleship process, or we can follow Biblical instructions and deal with it as instructed in the Word of God.

Carefully read each of the following Scriptures:

Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.

Galatians 6:1 (NASB)

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom,... Colossians 3:16a (NIV)

If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, Luke 17:3b (ESV)

When there is on-going sin in the life of a brother, we are to seek to restore that brother. The two words admonish and rebuke are related, but not the same. To rebuke or to reprove is definitely more intense than admonish. Admonish is more gentle. When someone is admonished to correct a wrong behavior but does not respond, the next step may be a rebuke.

The whole purpose of an admonition or rebuke is to bring about the restoration of the sinning brother. If he repents, forgive him. With the repentance comes forgiveness and restoration. There must be no desire on our part to humiliate or put down the sinning brother. Let God do the judging; we are to focus on restoration.

We are instructed to deal with the offending brother gently. It is to be done in love, not anger. It would be best not to do it at all than to deal with the sinning brother in anger. Actions taken in anger seldom have beneficial results.

Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.

Galatians 6:1 (NASB)

Read the verse above carefully again. The rebuke is to be done by someone who is “spiritual”. The rebuking must be done by someone who is walking with the Lord and who has the right motives for the rebuking or admonishing.

In the following verses we are told to get the plank out of our own eye before removing the sawdust

from someone else's eye. Notice that it does not say to forget the whole process if you have a plank in your eye. We are told to get the plank out of our own eye and then go to the brother with the sawdust in his eye. In other words, the plank is not an excuse for inaction. Rather it is cause for us to deal with both our own sin and the sin of a brother.

Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye. Matthew 7:3-5 (ESV)

Carefully read and think about each of the following Scripture verses. They all help us to understand and put into practice the Biblical responsibility of restoring a sinning brother or sister.

If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. Matthew 18:15 (NASB)

These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you. Titus 2:15 (NIV)

We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone. 1 Thessalonians 5:14 (NASB)

We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies. Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat. 2 Thessalonians 3:11-12 (NIV)

Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him. Titus 3:10 (NIV)

Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning. 1 Timothy 5:20 (NASB)

Without doubt, this is the hardest part of discipleship. We do not want to offend a brother. Or we may be afraid that the other person will be angry and will reject what we have to say. It is much easier to simply ignore the whole thing.

Yet, according to the Word of God, it is our responsibility. When a brother sins, we are to admonish and/or rebuke him.

One-to-one Discipling

For many new believers, it can be very helpful to regularly meet individually with a more mature believer to be taught and encouraged. Very often new believers will face difficult situations that they are not yet ready to face alone. Without someone beside them, many will become disillusioned and fall back into their old way of life. One-to-one discipling will not guarantee that the new believer will remain faithful, but it often can be a big help. This, combined with the church's obedience to the one-another commands, makes a strong support network for new believers.

The individual doing the one-to-one discipling needs to understand the five steps given above very well. He needs to be capable of correctly teaching the Word of God, and he needs to understand the necessity of encouraging, building up, and even spurring one another on.

One-to-one discipling does not take the place of the whole church body's responsibility in the discipling process. From the very beginning the entire church has a responsibility to teach, encourage, and build up new believers. In one-to-one discipling, an individual or a mentor can begin and strengthen the teaching, encouraging, and building up process. However, a single individual will not be able to do all that is involved in discipling a believer.

Remember, discipling is a lifelong process and it needs to be the biggest part of a church's ministry. Ongoing discipleship is a ministry of the church. If a church does not understand this, it will always be an immature church and people will not grow and mature as God intended them to grow.

For some, the process of discipleship is to give a new believer a little booklet with a few Bible verses and a few simple questions about those verses. After the new believer has completed one or more of these booklets, he/she has been "discipled". While this may have some value, overall, this process is very shallow and ineffective. It does not begin to teach them to obey "*all that I have commanded you*", and it hardly begins to give them the lifelong encouragement they need to be faithful and grow in their walk with the Lord.

No two situations are exactly alike. Mature believers need to use wisdom in the process of teaching and encouraging new believers. However, the fundamental Biblical instructions relating to discipleship remain constant, and we must put them into practice if we expect to have a healthy Biblical church.

Again, "discipling" is a lifelong process. Pastors, teachers, and laymen all need to teach all the Word of God, and they need to continually build up and encourage fellow believers. This is the heart of genuine Biblical discipleship.

You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. 2 Timothy 2:1-2 (NKJV)

Chapter Seven

A Healthy Biblical Church Actively Promotes Evangelism

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Matthew 28:18-20 (NIV)

As we saw in the last study guide, after Jesus was resurrected and just before He ascended back into heaven, Jesus instructed His followers to “*go and make disciples of all nations*”.

A disciple is a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. Spiros Zodhiates defines a disciple in the following way. Being a disciple is “...*not only to learn, but to become attached to one's teacher and to become his follower in doctrine and in conduct of life*”. The Complete Wordstudy Dictionary–New Testament, Zodhiates, page 936

Before a person can be a disciple, he must first make the choice to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. No unsaved person can ever be a disciple of our Lord. Therefore, the first step of discipleship is to take the gospel to unsaved people.

This is a fundamental purpose of a church. Unsaved people are lost and bound for an eternal hell. Jesus died so that we can know and walk with Him. This is what the Bible is all about. God has given us the responsibility of taking this good news to unsaved people throughout the world. A healthy Biblical church takes this responsibility seriously. A church that has no outreach to unsaved people is not a healthy Biblical church.

That is what this Study Guide Seven focuses on -- taking the gospel to unsaved people and leading them to put their faith in, or to believe in, the Lord Jesus Christ.

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

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 2 Corinthians 5:17-20 (ESV)

We are the representatives of Jesus Christ here on earth. This is an awesome privilege and an awesome responsibility. As His representatives, we have the responsibility to tell unsaved people that they can be reconciled to God. To be reconciled with God is to make peace with God. God created man perfect, and man had perfect fellowship and peace with God. However, when man sinned, he became an enemy of God. When we confess our sins and put our faith in Him, we are reconciled to God and we have peace with God. We are no longer an enemy of God.

God expects each individual Christian to tell the good news of salvation to those around him/her. The

church, working together, also has the responsibility to take the good news of salvation to the whole earth. We send out ambassadors (missionaries) to other parts of the earth. God will bless churches and individuals who pray and who generously give to make this possible. The church cannot neglect this responsibility and still be a healthy church.

What is the message that we are to give?

It is sin that separates us from God. An individual must deal with his sin problem before he can be saved. Our job is to let people know what the Bible teaches about how to be saved from the penalty for sin and to encourage them to believe what God has revealed in His Word, the Bible. Our message is that Jesus died to pay the penalty for our sin and that He resurrected from the dead, proving beyond question that He is the Son of God.

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 (NIV)

Biblical Examples of Witnessing

The Bible does not give us a “right way” to witness. Within the Bible itself there are examples of various approaches to witnessing. Jesus Himself was the master at witnessing and used different approaches with different people.

....When Jesus talked to the woman at the well, He, in love, confronted her with her sin and offered her “living water” that would bring eternal life.

....When speaking to the woman caught in adultery, He granted forgiveness and admonished her to “go and sin no more”.

....When He spoke with Nicodemus, who was an intelligent man, He challenged Nicodemus on an intellectual level.

....When He called Peter, a fisherman, He invited Peter to become a “fisher of men”.

....When a large crowd was hungry, Jesus fed them first and then challenged them to believe in Him, the “bread of life”.

....After the Jewish religious leaders repeatedly confronted and opposed Jesus, He severely rebuked them for their hard hearts and hypocrisy.

The followers of Jesus were very different from each other. Their differences show up in how they witnessed to others.

....The blind man who was healed did not know all the right theology, but he gave clear testimony of what Jesus had done for him.

....Matthew invited his unbelieving friends over to his house to meet Jesus.

....Paul, who was an intelligent man, often reasoned with people.

....Peter, who was not an intellectual, spoke very bluntly to his listeners.

....Stephen used history to show the sinfulness of those who were listening.

....Dorcus served those who were in need.

....Barnabas was known as an encourager.

....In the Old Testament, prophets often warned of coming judgment by God.

Some Ideas for Witnessing

Witnessing can vary tremendously from individual to individual. God has given each of us different abilities and personalities. Scripture does not give detailed instructions; however, we must all make witnessing a priority in life. Be prepared to stretch your comfort zone. Ask God to open the door, and then look for opportunities to witness.

1. *As God gives you the opportunity, spontaneously witness to individuals that God brings into your life or across your path.*
2. *Start a program of friendship or lifestyle evangelism.* See Paul Little's suggestions in the following section of this chapter.
3. *Teach an evangelistic Bible study.* Ask someone to study the Bible with you on a regular basis. The books of Mark or John are often good books to use.
4. *Pass out gospel tracts.*
5. *Participate in an organized evangelistic outreach.* Sometimes churches have an organized program for evangelistic outreach. Evangelistic meetings, literature distribution, video distribution, and service projects are a few ways.
6. *Use your imagination.* People have been saved through individuals putting Scriptures or messages in newspapers, and even through writing Scripture on a scrap of paper and throwing it out a window. Think and pray for ideas on how you can reach unsaved people for the Lord.
7. *Financially support and pray for a missionary family.*

As you make witnessing a priority, pray, pray, pray. God is anxious to bless those who obey and those who pray.

Friendship Evangelism

The following suggestions are based on guidelines given in a book entitled, How To Give Away Your Faith, by Paul Little. This approach to evangelism is sometimes called “lifestyle” or “friendship” evangelism.

1. *Get to know unsaved people.* Our best friends should be fellow Christians; however, we will not lead unsaved people to the Lord if we don’t know any unsaved people.
2. *Find a common interest.* Find a clean common interest that you can enjoy doing with other people.
3. *As the opportunity comes, talk about spiritual matters.*
4. *Don’t get ahead of the Holy Spirit.* Don’t try to push an individual to make a profession of faith if you do not sense the Holy Spirit working in the individual. Forcing or pushing for an insincere decision does not result in salvation.
5. *Don’t condemn a person.* When Jesus talked to individuals, He did not condemn them. We, too, should “speak the truth in love”.
6. *Stick with the main issue.* Once a serious conversation about salvation has started, don’t confuse things by bringing up issues that are not pertinent to salvation.
7. *Bring the individual to a point of decision.* Use the Word of God, show him the plan of salvation and, in love, bring him to the point of accepting or rejecting it.

Principles Relating to Witnessing

1. Take the responsibility to witness seriously.
2. Be ready to give a “short version” of your testimony. Many witnessing opportunities are limited to a few minutes.
3. Make sure that you accurately understand the plan of salvation. This is critically important. You cannot explain it to others if you do not correctly understand it yourself.
4. Regularly pray and ask God to give you opportunities to tell the “good news”.
5. Look for opportunities to witness.
6. Be willing to stretch yourself and step out of your comfort zone.
7. When you sense the Holy Spirit prompting you to witness to someone, be obedient. You may not get another chance to talk to him.
8. Practice how to tell someone the plan of salvation.

9. Become very familiar with or even memorize a few key Scriptures. (Romans 3:23, Romans 6:23, Romans 5:8, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Romans 10:9-10)

Be ready to lead an individual in a prayer of confession and repentance.

There is no magic prayer to pray that results in salvation. In fact, it is not the prayer that saves us. The moment an individual makes the choice to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, or to acknowledge Jesus as his Lord, he is saved. To reinforce that choice, we encourage an individual to pray, confessing his sin and committing himself to turn away from his lifestyle of sin.

When an individual is ready to accept the Lord, be ready to go over the basics of salvation and to lead him in prayer. Don't wait for Sunday to take him to church or to see the preacher. If you wait, he may change his mind or, for whatever the reason, he may never make it to church. You lead him to the Lord. After he/she has made the choice to believe, then encourage him to come to church and make a public profession of faith and be baptized.

If a person has honest questions and doubts that you cannot answer, it may be helpful to ask a more knowledgeable Christian for help; but, as a normal rule, you don't have to have all the answers to lead a person to the Lord. Don't try to give phony answers to questions to which you don't really know the answer. People will respect an "I don't know" answer, but they quickly see through a made-up answer.

Once a person is saved, the process of disciple-making has just begun.

After an individual has made a profession of faith, he is a "baby" in the Lord. Just as a newborn infant needs to be cared for and loved, someone needs to take a baby Christian by the hand and walk with him/her through those first months or year after he/she is saved. Without individual encouragement and teaching, he/she may get discouraged or even give up on his faith. If he is genuinely saved, he cannot lose his salvation, but without individual encouragement he may become confused and discouraged.

Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good. 1 Peter 2:2-3 (NIV)

A more mature believer needs to regularly meet with and walk beside a newborn Christian for a period of time (several months -- a year) in order to encourage, to build up, to admonish, and to pray with the new believer.

We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, Romans 15:1 (ESV)

Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 (NASB)

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another -- and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:24-25 (NIV)

What Salvation Is Not

When you witness to someone, they may tell you why they are already a good person. They may tell you of some action that they have already taken which, in their mind, makes things okay. Following is a list of things that people have claimed when asked if they are saved. They believe that these things will somehow gain them merit with God. Some of these are good things but they will not save us. The truth is that a person could do or experience all of these things and still not be genuinely saved.

In the past I (phil Benedict) lived in the “Bible belt” where being religious is common, even normal. I have heard every one of these things given as an evidence of someone being saved.

- It is not being baptized.
- It is not “going forward” in church.
- It is not “attending church”.
- It is not joining a church.
- It is not “making a decision”.
- It is not having a “relationship with Jesus”.
- It is not “connecting” with Jesus.
- It is not thinking about spiritual things or meditating on the Bible.
- It is not knowing what is in the Bible.
- It is not reading the Bible all the way through.
- It is not reading the Bible every day.
- It is not praying every day.
- It is not being “religious”.
- It is not being “sincere” or being a “good” person.
- It is not doing the best you can.
- It is not turning over a new leaf.
- It is not when your good deeds outweigh your bad deeds.
- It is not having a “spiritual experience” or a “spiritual awakening”.
- It is not giving all your problems to Jesus.
- It is not “speaking in tongues”.
- It is not being part of the worship team of your church.
- It is not taking communion or the sacraments.
- It is not keeping the “golden rule”.
- It is not being born into a Christian family or in a Christian country.
- It is not keeping the ten commandments or following any other set of rules.
- It is not tithing or giving money to worthwhile causes.
- It is not having an uncle who is a Baptist preacher.
- It is not having a grandmother who donated the land on which the church was built.

Absolutely none of these things will by themselves result in our being saved. The only way to be saved is to put one’s faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and accept His free gift of salvation and turn from a lifestyle of sin.

**My mouth will tell of your righteousness,
of your salvation all day long,
though I know not its measure.
I will come and proclaim your mighty acts, O Sovereign LORD;
I will proclaim your righteousness, yours alone.**

Psalm 71:15-16 (NIV)

Chapter Eight

A Healthy Biblical Church puts the “One Anothers” of Scripture into Practice

In this study guide we are going to look at the “one anothers” of Scripture. These instruct us in how God expects believers to interact with each other. There are about thirty separate “one-another” commands in the New Testament. Some of these are repeated numerous times. These commands are a key part of God’s design for the church. The heart of these one-another commands is to love, to encourage, to build each other up and even to spur one another on to good deeds.

When ten, fifty, or a hundred fellow believers love us enough to seek to teach, to encourage, to build up, and to hold us accountable, it is a powerful motivation and incentive to remain faithful and to grow in our walk with the Lord. God did not design us to function alone in our spiritual walk. He planned for us to walk in harmony with a group of believers (the church) who are also seeking to grow and mature in their walk with the Lord.

In spite of their importance in God’s design for the church, these one-another commands are basically ignored by many churches. From my own observations, these commands are among the most ignored instructions God has given to the church. The gospel is preached, and we make a stab at praying, but very often there is essentially no interaction among believers in which they encourage and build each other up. We need to give heed to these teachings. They are God’s instructions.

These commands are a fundamental part of our spiritual growth. They are the heart of how we are to interact and fellowship with fellow believers. Putting these one-anothers into practice is necessary if we, as individuals and as a church, are to grow in our walk with Him as He intends for us to grow. If a church fails to teach and to practice these God given-instructions, it will always be a weak, immature, lukewarm church.

Putting these teachings into practice is not optional – it is absolutely necessary.

The “One Another” Commands of Scripture

To help us understand and digest the one another commands, I have divided them into three groups.

- A. In Group A are one another commands which all closely relate to loving one-another.
- B. In Group B are one another commands which all closely relate to building up one-another.
- C. In Group C are one another commands which all closely relate to living in harmony (unity) with one-another.

There is a considerable amount of overlap between these groups. In reality, all the “one-anothers” relate and interact with each other. Each one is distinct; yet they all work together. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to put any one of them into practice without putting many of the others into practice as well.

Group A – Love One Another

As was pointed out in the fellowship study, loving each other and being one are the foundation of fellowship and our interaction with each other. *If the command to love one another is not being practiced, it will be useless to try to put the rest of the “one-anothers” into practice.*

1. This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. John 15:12 (KJV)

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Romans 12:10 (NASB)

Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. 1 John 4:11 (KJV)

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor;
Romans 12:10 (NASB)

Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart. 1 Peter 1:22 (NIV)

Many of us have heard these instructions all of our life, but like so many, we never stop to give it much thought. Many of us need to take a good hard look at ourselves and determine how we can begin to seriously put them into practice. When we do start loving each other, there is a deep satisfaction and joy as we interact with our fellow believers.

In a local church there may be a tremendous variety of individuals who attend. There may be individuals from different races, different “social classes”, some who are financially well off, and some who have very little. People have different personalities, different levels of growth in their Christian life, and a multitude of other differences; yet we are all to “*love each other deeply from the heart*” and we are to be “*devoted to one another in brotherly love*”. This is a beautiful thing and, again, this is the heart of Biblical fellowship.

In order to understand what it means to love one another, we need to understand the Biblical definitions or concepts of love. In the New Testament there are two key words for love. They are the Greek words “agape” and “phileo”. Agape is by far the most common word. In order to better understand these two words, following are definitions or descriptions for each of them which are given in several different Bible expository word dictionaries.

Agape love (Strong’s numbers 25 and 26)

1. *To see or discern what someone’s need is and to meet that need.*
2. *Unselfish affection or tenderness for another without expecting anything in return.*
3. *Seeking another person’s highest good on the basis of a decision of the will.*
4. *A deliberate choice or act of the will as a matter of principle or duty.*
5. *An unselfish and self-sacrificing love that is ready to serve. Seeks the welfare of others.*
6. *To esteem or to regard with favor. The objects of love may not be “worthy” of that love.*

Putting all this together, we can describe or define agape love as follows:

In obedience to Biblical teaching, to see or discern what someone's need is and, without expecting anything in return, choose to meet that need.

Agape love may or may not involve feelings of attachment to the person being shown love.

In the exercise of agape love, it will likely, in one way or another, involve a sacrificial giving of yourself. The ultimate example of this kind of giving is found in the death of our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. John 3:16 (KJV)

Phileo love (Strong's numbers 5368, 5360, and 5361)

1. *Shared interest or commitment to a common cause or cherished ideals.*
2. *Loving one's brother, tender affection, fondness, friendship, liking a person.*
3. *Favorable interest or approval, showing hospitality.*
4. *May be inside or outside one's family.*

Putting all this together, we can describe or define phileo love as follows:

Having an affection for, serving, and building up our brothers and sisters in the Lord.

Phileo love is used in reference to God's love for His Son, for God's love for us, and for our love for each other.

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; Romans 12:10a (NASB)

Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. 1 Peter 3:8 (NIV)

In the Word of God we are never commanded to love our enemies or the people of the world (neighbors) with *phileo* (affection) love. When we are instructed to love our enemies and our neighbors, it is with *agape* (making a choice) love.

It is interesting to note that we are not commanded to love God with *phileo* love, but we are commanded to love Him with *agape* love. While at times we may feel a deep appreciation and worship of God, we most likely will not continually feel a warm fuzzy affection for Him. However, even when we don't feel that affection, we love Him by our obedience and service. This is the heart of genuine love for God.

For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome. 1 John 5:3 (NKJV)

This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. 2 John 1:6a (NKJV)

In a very general sense, *agape* emphasizes choosing with your will to meet the needs of another

person, while *phileo* involves an attachment to the ones we love. However, we need to be careful about drawing conclusions about a passage of Scripture based solely on the use of these words. Often the words can overlap and be essentially the same in their usage. Often *agape* love does involve an emotional attachment to the one we choose to love. While *phileo* love emphasizes loving those with whom we have a common bond in the Lord, *agape* love also often involves meeting the needs of our brothers and sisters in the Lord. However, *agape* love also reaches those with whom we have no common bond, or to those we may not “like”. The best way to determine their “meaning” is simply to understand them according to how they are used in the text.

Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love (*phileo*) for your brothers, love (*agape*) one another deeply, from the heart. 1 Peter 1:22 (NIV)

The one-another commands of Scripture are rooted in both *agape* and *phileo* love. It is not hard to love those we have an affection for (*phileo*); however, we are also expected to love those who are not so easy to love (*agape*).

In the rest of this study guide, there will not normally be a distinction made between the two kinds of love. The overwhelming number of times when the word love is used, it is *agape* love.

There are quite a number of other one-another commands that go hand and glove with the command to love one-another.

2. Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us... Romans 15:7a (NASB)

With all of our differences, we accept each other as brothers and sisters in the Lord. It is natural to be drawn to some people more than to others. This is as true with Christians as it is with others. However, as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, we deliberately determine that we will accept into our fellowship all other genuine believers, even those we have trouble “liking”.

3. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Ephesians 4:32 (NIV)

Being kind is not hard to understand. It simply means to be kind. Kindness and gentleness are an evidence of the Spirit of God at work in and through us. This may seem so basic that it hardly needs to be said; yet, most of us do not really stop to think of how we can be kind to each other.

Our fellow believers probably include members of our own human families, such as our husband or wife, our children, and our parents. We are not only to be kind to fellow believers in the church, we are also to be kind to members of our own families – even when they irritate us at times.

Closely tied to the instructions to be kind, is the command to be compassionate to one another. Compassion takes kindness to a deeper level. We care about each other and when they hurt, we hurt. When they have needs, we follow Biblical principles and seek to meet those needs.

We are also told to be tender-hearted. Being kind to one another is an action, while being tender-hearted is an emotion. This may be more difficult for some of us. If so, we need to recognize our

responsibility and commit ourselves to obedience and ask God for the capacity to be tender-hearted loving people.

If we harbor on-going resentment or dislike of a fellow believer, it is sin and must be recognized as such and confessed. We must also forgive each other – which will be dealt with later in this study guide.

4. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” 1 Peter 5:5 (ESV)

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; Philippians 2:3 (NASB)

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; Romans 12:10 (NASB)

In the Christian life there is no room for feeling superior or better than any other member of the body of Christ. In fact, we are to consider others better than ourselves (Philippians 2:1-11), and we should care for the needs of others in the same way we care for our own needs. We are to give preference to one another.

Look at these verses again. “*God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.*” Pride in ourselves, in who we are or what we have done, has no place in the life of a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. Anyone who is committed to being a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ must actively seek to be a humble person. Proud believers must confess their pride as a sin, and recognize that they are simply a sinner saved by grace. Any gifts or abilities or possessions we have are given to us by God.

Being humble is a fundamental principle in following God-given instructions for Biblical fellowship. A proud Christian will find it hard, if not impossible, to live in harmony with fellow believers and will certainly be unable follow instructions such as, “*give preference to one another in honor*”, or “*submit to one another*”, or to “*wash one another’s feet*”. We must not let pride interfere with our being a productive member of the fellowship of believers. All of us need to bury our pride and commit ourselves to serving the Lord Jesus Christ and His followers – our brothers and sisters in the Lord.

In John 13, while the disciples were arguing about who would be the greatest in the kingdom of God, Jesus wrapped a towel around Himself, took a basin of water and began washing the disciple’s feet. Washing someone’s feet was a humble thing to do. Yet, the sovereign God, the creator of the universe, washed the disciple’s feet and set an example for us to follow.

5. ...that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. 1 Corinthians 12:25-26 (ESV)

Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. Galatians 6:2 (NIV)

The body of Christ is one body and we who are all genuine believers are members of that body. When

one member hurts, the whole body feels his/her pain and they intercede before the Lord on behalf of the one suffering. They readily and cheerfully do all they can to alleviate the suffering.

On the other side, we rejoice when a member is honored or blessed. This must be genuine rejoicing. *There is no room for pride in the person who has been honored and there is no room for jealousy or envy in other members of the body.*

This kind of sharing is an expression of love that comes from a group of people who are committed to serving and honoring the Lord Jesus Christ and are committed to loving and serving each other.

6. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Ephesians 5:21 (NIV)

Within the body of Christ there is a mutual submissiveness. To submit to a fellow believer means that we are willing to serve, to respect, and to honor fellow Christians, putting their interests above our own. We are willing to be taught by them and we are open to their admonition and to their counsel. Even the most educated and “mature” Christian must be willing to serve and to learn from those less advanced in their faith. All members must be willing to serve and learn from all the other members of the body, even those we may not personally “like”.

If we submit to one another, we do not become angry and defensive when someone disagrees with us. Instead, we seek to find what the Word of God teaches about a certain issue. What a joy this kind of harmony can be, when we all choose to be obedient to God and we serve and learn from each other.

7. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Colossians 3:13 (NIV)

Christians are far from perfect. Sometimes we get on each other’s nerves. At times we simply have to “bear with each other”, or put up with each other. There may be times we need to peacefully discuss problems we have with each other. Through it all, we still commit ourselves to living in harmony with each other. In the end, God is honored and the world notices the testimony of God’s people. We also live with a clear conscience about how we treat and talk about fellow believers.

8. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. 1 Peter 4:9 (ESV)

Not only are we to “*bear with each other*” and to “*live in harmony with one another*”, we are to show hospitality to each other. We are to be kind and to share our time, our homes, our possessions, and our lives with our fellow believers. What’s more, we are to do it without grumbling. In other words, we are to show practical love to our fellow believers with cheerful attitudes.

9. Greet one another with a holy kiss. Romans 16:16, 1 Corinthians 16:20, 1 Peter 5:14, 2 Corinthians 13:12, 1 Thessalonians 5:26

The instruction to “*Greet one another with a holy kiss*” is repeated five times in Scripture. Apparently, it must be important. The emphasis is on greeting one another, not on the kissing. Obviously, cultures

vary in the way they greet each other. In our culture these instructions might read “greet each other with a warm hearty handshake”. From time to time our greeting may also include a warm hug. This is certainly within the scope of a Biblical greeting.

When we take time to greet our brothers and sisters in the Lord, we are letting them know that we value their presence. A warm greeting communicates acceptance and appreciation. A Biblical greeting carries with it the idea of welcoming those we are greeting. We are glad to be with them. In our society where few have the time to meaningfully interact with other people, a warm greeting can be very meaningful and, at times, even healing.

Notice it is to be a “holy” greeting. Holy means that it is pure and clean. A holy greeting does not hide disdain or deceit. It is a genuine expression of welcome and gladness to be with them. If we cannot genuinely welcome another believer, we need to examine ourselves to see where the problem is and then take steps to correct the situation. When we greet one another, it must be sincere. Even if the person we are greeting is not a good friend, we can still be sincere in our greeting. If we are at odds with someone, then get it straightened out to the point where we can sincerely greet them.

It seems unnecessary to say, but a holy greeting certainly rules out any greeting or hugs with an ulterior motive. Hugging anyone for impure reasons is certainly out of place among Christians at church or, for that matter, anywhere else.

Churches clearly have different personalities. In recent years, my wife and I have visited in two churches where people seemed to go out of their way to *avoid* any kind of a greeting. They appeared to be cold and indifferent. When my wife, Linda, and I left, neither of us had any desire to attend either of those churches again. If we want to attract others to the Lord Jesus Christ, or to our church, we must go out of our way to warmly and sincerely greet them. If we want to communicate Christian love, the least we can do is give a warm greeting.

10. When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, “Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. John 13:12-15 (ESV)

Jesus set an example of humble love and service when He washed the feet of the proud disciples. Jesus instructs us to follow His example and to wash one another’s feet. Washing feet was the job of a servant. We, too, must have the heart of a servant and humbly serve our fellow members of the body of Christ.

Group B -- Building Up Fellow Believers

Another foundation in God’s plan for the church is that we are to actively seek to build up our fellow believers. Spiritual growth takes determination and discipline. All of us find ourselves slipping from time to time and falling short of the walk with God that we desire. One of God’s remedies for this is that we are to seek to build up and encourage each other. We are to “*spur one another on*”. We need each other. We need to seek to build each other up.

This, I believe, is one of the most neglected ministries of the church. We expect the pastor to teach and encourage believers, but it seems as if only occasionally do laymen seek to build up fellow believers. This is simply not being taught in many churches.

The following verses are not speaking just to pastors; they are instructions given to every Christian.

1. So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.

Romans 14:19 (NASB)

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, Ephesians 4:29 (NIV)

Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 (ESV)

We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. Romans 15:1-2 (ESV)

Every one of us has the responsibility to help build up fellow Christians. We are even to build up those fellow believers that we have trouble liking.

We must not take these instructions lightly. Often, we hear Scripture but give very little thought as to how we should put it into practice. Building up fellow believers is fundamental to God's program for the church; yet, many of us hardly give a second thought as to how we can put it into practice.

There are several "one another" commands that fit together under the general heading of building up one another.

2. But encourage one another day after day, Hebrews 3:13 (NASB)

But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. Hebrews 3:13 (NIV)

Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 (ESV)

Therefore encourage one another with these words. 1 Thessalonians 4:18 (ESV)

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another -- and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:24-25 (NIV)

We all need to be encouraged -- day after day.

Jesus knew we needed encouragement and before He died, He promised His disciples to send another Helper after Jesus returned to heaven.

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. John 14:16-17 (ESV)

God gives us His own Spirit to help us to be what He wants us to be and to do what He wants us to do. In this passage and also in John 16, the Spirit is identified as our Helper, or one who is called along beside us to help us. The Spirit is also in us. He is both beside us and He is in us, enabling us to live as God wants us to live.

In this passage the Spirit of God is identified as a helper. The Greek word used in these passages for the Spirit or helper is “paraklete”, or one called alongside to help. It is interesting to note that in the verses that instruct us to encourage each other, the word “encourage” has the same Greek root as the word “helper” or “paraklete” which describes the Holy Spirit. *When a brother or sister needs help, we, along with the Holy Spirit, come along side that person to give help and encouragement.*

We, as Christians, know that we have the presence of the Spirit in our lives; yet, we also need each other to help and encourage us. *We, as Christians, are to come along beside our fellow Christians and help and encourage them, just as the Holy Spirit comes along beside us and helps us.*

It is good to have the Spirit of God as our Helper and enabler. Yet, God also knew that we needed other *people* to come along beside us and to encourage us. What a blessing when we know that our fellow believers care enough to give encouragement when it is needed.

3. Serve one another in love. Galatians 5:13b (NIV)

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace:
1 Peter 4:10 (ESV)

Believers are to be willing to serve each other. This can be done in many different ways. We need to learn to look for ways to serve our brothers and sisters in the Lord.

A more specific way of serving is to use our spiritual gift to serve each other. Every genuine believer has been given a spiritual gift for the “common good” of the church. This is important. The last chapter of the fellowship study guides cover this important teaching in more detail.

4. Teach one another.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom,... Colossians 3:16a (NIV)

I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another. Romans 15:14 (ESV)

All Christians, whether we are “teachers” or not, are to be involved in teaching each other. God certainly calls and gifts some to be teachers of His Word. That is one of the spiritual gifts. Teachers are extremely important in the church. However, that is *not* what these verses are referring to. All

believers, no matter what their spiritual gift is, are to teach fellow believers.

For these instructions to teach each other to be a reality, we need to get away from the idea of a classroom teaching situation for a moment and think of how individual Christians can teach each other. We can teach by the way we live. We can teach by being in tune with each other and knowing the problems each other faces and, when appropriate, we give advice and counsel. We remind each other of Biblical truths that relate to situations we face in life. If we ask for direction from the Spirit and then look for ways to build up and teach each other, He will open the right doors for us to teach fellow believers.

Teaching one another comes as we *“let the word of Christ dwell in you richly”*. Those who are not regularly absorbing the Word of God are in no position to teach others. This is another motivation to regularly read and study the Word.

5. Admonish one another.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another... Colossians 3:16a (KJV)

Admonish is a somewhat stronger word than teach. To admonish is to warn about wrong in the life of a fellow believer. If we love one another and seek to build each other up, we will care enough to warn about the wrong in their life.

And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another. Romans 15:14 (NASB)

Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Galatians 6:1 (NIV)

Again, admonishing comes from the heart of one in whom *“the Word of God dwells richly”*. If one’s own heart is not in tune with the Lord’s heart, then we have no business trying to correct someone else’s wrong.

We must be absolutely certain that we ourselves are absorbing and practicing the Word, and we must be certain that what we are admonishing in the life of a brother is wrong by Biblical standards. Admonishing is to be done with wisdom. When the Word dwells in us richly, we will have the Biblical understanding and wisdom to do it right.

We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, 1 Thessalonians 5:12 (ESV)

We are not to be angry or resent someone who admonishes us. Even if a part of us gets a little angry or resentful, we still listen in love and genuinely evaluate and apply what is said.

6. Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. Luke 17:3 (NASB)

Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning. 1 Timothy 5:20 (NASB)

The two words admonish and rebuke are related, but not the same. To rebuke or to reprove definitely is more intense than admonish. Admonish is more gentle. When someone is admonished to correct a wrong behavior but does not respond, the next step may be a rebuke.

Without doubt, the hardest “one-another” to carry out is to rebuke a brother or sister in the Lord because of sin in his/her life. This is seldom done, because, most simply, we do not want to be that involved in someone else’s life. We are afraid that the other person will be angry and will reject what we have to say. It is much easier to simply ignore the sin in the life of a fellow believer. It is none of our business.

Yet, according to God, it is our business. In spite of our reluctance, God’s instructions have not changed. When a brother sins, we are to admonish and/or rebuke him.

Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.

Galatians 6:1 (NASB)

The whole purpose of a rebuke or admonition is to bring about the restoration of the sinning brother. If he repents, forgive him. With the repentance comes forgiveness and restoration. There must be no desire on our part to humiliate or put down the sinning brother. Let God do the judging; we are to focus on restoration.

Read the verse above carefully. The rebuke is to be done by someone who is “spiritual”. The rebuking must be done by someone who is walking with the Lord and who has the right motives for the rebuking or admonishing. However, this must not be used as a cop out. We cannot say, “I am not spiritual enough, so let the preacher or someone else do it”.

We are instructed to deal with the offending brother gently. It is to be done in love, not anger. It would be best not to do it at all than to deal with the sinning brother in anger. Actions taken in anger seldom have beneficial results.

In the following verses we are told to get the plank out of our own eye before removing the sawdust from someone else’s eye. Notice that it does not say to forget the whole process if you have a plank in your eye. We are told to get the plank out of our own eye and then go to the brother with the sawdust in his eye. In other words, the plank is not an excuse for inaction. Rather it is cause for us to deal with both our own sin and the sin of a brother.

Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye. Matthew 7:3-5 (ESV)

7. Spur one another on.

Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

Hebrews 10:24 (NIV)

Here we are instructed to “*spur one another on to love good deeds*”. Part of the fellowship among believers is to do all we can to help them grow and develop, even to the point of “spurring them on”. I suspect that this could be done in many different ways; however, any action taken must be done in gentleness, love, and concern for the brothers and sisters involved.

8. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. James 5:16 (NIV)

When there is a sin in one’s life that he/she is having a difficult time getting victory over, then one more step that they can take is for the individual to admit that sin, first to God, and then to a fellow Christian or a group of Christians. The believers to whom one confesses need to be spiritually mature individuals who can be trusted not to gossip or to break confidences.

When this step is taken, those to whom the sin is confessed should immediately pray. Then there must be on-going prayer for the individual over the next days, weeks, months, and even years. Again remember, “*The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective*”.

9. Pray for one another. James 5:16 (NASB)

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. Ephesians 6:18 (NIV)

Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me, Romans 15:30 (NASB)

In the Word of God there are many passages that, in one way or another, teach us to pray for one another. Prayer is a powerful tool to use in our battle against sin. We need to regularly pray for ourselves and we need to regularly ask others to pray for us. Let fellow Christians share in your struggle against sin by praying with you. Remember, “*the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective*”.

It would be well for all of us to take a look at the apostle Paul’s prayers for fellow believers, and then begin incorporating those prayers into our own prayers for our fellow believers. This would ensure that we are praying in the will of God, and then we can expect positive answers to our prayers for each other.

A while back I asked a Bible study group for practical suggestions for building up fellow believers. Here are some of their suggestions:

- ...Spend time in prayer with fellow believers.
- ...Share things you have learned from the Word of God.

...Go visit in the homes of fellow believers.
 ...Help each other in times of trouble.
 ...Say something pleasant to a fellow believer.
 ...Send an encouraging card to fellow believers.
 ...Remember important days in the lives of fellow believers.
 ...Smile!!!

Now you think of ways that you can build up, encourage, or teach fellow Christians.

Group C – Living in Harmony (Unity) with One Another

1. Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. 1 Peter 3:8 (NIV)

...be at peace with one another. Mark 9:50b (ESV)

As we saw in the Fellowship Study Guide Two, unity is at the very heart of Biblical fellowship. If the church is not one in Christ, there will be no genuine fellowship with God or fellowship with each other.

Like all the members of a musical symphony harmonize and produce beautiful music together, so it is with God's people. When we are in harmony together, we exalt our Lord Jesus Christ; we fellowship with God; we fellowship with each other; and the world is drawn to the Lord as a result of the testimony of the church. Remember, the unity of the church is the foundation of evangelism. (John 17:20-26)

Unity is not just a nice concept, but rather an active pursuit and commitment for every Christian who wants to exalt and please our Lord Jesus Christ. When God's people are not one, the heart of God is grieved and the world is not drawn to our Lord.

2. ...forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. Colossians 3:13b (NIV)

Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Ephesians 4:31-32 (NIV)

Every genuine Christian has been forgiven by God of a lifetime of sin. Without God's forgiveness we would be condemned by God to an everlasting separation from God in an eternal hell. Yet God, in His love, His grace, and His mercy has forgiven us. We stand before God justified and righteous. That is a precious truth.

In the same way God forgave us, we are instructed to forgive each other. There are times when wounds inflicted by fellow Christians can hurt deeply. Even though this is true, none of us has come close to suffering like our Lord suffered on the cross. Yet, the first words He spoke on the cross were

"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing". (Luke 23:34) This is the example we are to follow.

We must forgive each other. To refuse to forgive is disobedience and rebellion.

Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.... ...For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. Matthew 6:12,13-15 (NIV)

Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. Luke 11:4 (NIV)

When Jesus taught His followers to pray (Matthew 6), He instructed them to ask God for forgiveness based on the fact that we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. This is not talking about salvation, but rather it is speaking of God's on-going forgiveness of His children that maintains our fellowship and walk with Him. If we do not forgive those who sin against us, we cannot expect parental forgiveness from God and we cannot expect to enjoy fellowship with Him.

A practical definition of forgiving is -- *getting rid of our anger and making the choice not to hold on to a grudge or to seek revenge.*

The only real motive for not forgiving and holding on to anger is wanting revenge or wanting to get even. There is no other reason for not forgiving and for holding on to anger.

The Bible states that revenge belongs to God.

Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay, says the Lord.' Romans 12:19 (NIV)

Cease from anger, and forsake wrath: fret not thyself in any wise to do evil. For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth. Psalm 37:8-9 (KJV)

Forgiving is not hard if you will make the decision to let God handle the revenge. Tell God that you are putting the whole thing in His hands and you are going to back off and let Him handle it. God is a just God and He will avenge wrong. His judgment is always right. You need to put your trust in God and leave it there.

Forgiveness begins with a mental choice. We may not feel like forgiving, but we choose to forgive anyway because we choose to obey God. Not forgiving and holding on to anger will only lead to more spiritual defeat. Be obedient to God and choose to forgive, even if you don't really feel like it.

After you choose to forgive a person, reaffirm that decision over the next few days, weeks, months, or even years if necessary. At first you may not feel any different; however, once you make the mental choice to forgive, your feelings will eventually come into line with the mental choice you have made. If you never begin by making the mental choice to forgive, you will never be at peace with God or with yourself and you will continue in your anger and spiritual defeat.

Not forgiving or holding on to anger can also lead to all kinds of problems such as depression, stress, bitterness, strained relationships, physical problems, etc., etc., etc. Forgiving is a big step toward

spiritual growth, personal freedom, peace, good mental health and even good physical health.

Forgiving someone does not necessarily mean that you will like or respect the person you are forgiving. And contrary to the popular expression “forgive and forget”, you will probably not forget what happened. However, while you will probably not totally forget about it, after you have made the choice to forgive, you do not have to keep on thinking about it all the time.

3. So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God. Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, ... Romans 14:12-13a (NASB)

Do not complain, brethren, against one another, so that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door. James 5:9 (NASB)

Christians are not to judge each other with the intent of tearing them down. When we do that, we are inviting the judgment of God against ourselves. All Christians will give an account of themselves to God. If someone has sinned against you, they will have to give an account to God for it. God will judge and avenge the sin. That is not our job. In obedience to God, we let Him do the judging. If we try to take God’s place and judge a person ourselves, we will do nothing but grieve God and hurt people, and we also invite God’s judgment on ourselves.

4. Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. James 4:11 (ESV)

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, Ephesians 4:29 (NIV)

The Word of God is crystal clear. We are to control our tongues. Many Scriptures teach this. We must not speak evil against a fellow believer, but rather say only what will build him up. We must forgive and move on. God will handle the sin in the life of whoever sinned against you.

Here again, we are instructed to control our tongues. Christians are not to run each other down. If we say something about someone, it must be for the purpose of building them up. We must not say things that will discredit or tear them down – even if we believe it is entirely true.

If we know there is sin in another person’s life, then there is a Biblical pattern for dealing with it. Talking negatively about them to other members of the body of Christ is not part of that God-given pattern.

5. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, Colossians 3:9 (NKJV)

Christians must not lie to each other. This seems obvious. Lying is a direct violation of one of the ten commandments. However, many Christians seem to feel it is not very wrong to tell a “little white lie”. For some, lying seems to be a way of life. They say whatever seems beneficial to them at the moment, whether it is fully true or not. Habitual lying or occasionally telling a “little white lie” is sin and it needs to be repented of. Lying is always wrong and will always have negative consequences. We

cannot lie and expect good to come from it. If we claim to fellowship with God, we cannot lie to His people or to anyone else.

6. If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other. Galatians 5:15 (NIV)

“Biting and devouring each other” is very serious. When members of the body of Christ tear each other down and even “destroy” each other, it will severely damage the testimony of the church and may cause others to stumble in their walk with the Lord. When we engage in this kind of behavior, we invite the discipline and judgment of God. We also lose eternal rewards, which will affect us for an eternity.

If *“biting and devouring each other”* is taking place in a church and those responsible refuse to stop, according to the Word of God, they should be expelled from the church and fellowship with them withdrawn.

I am personally very familiar with a church that had a “church fight” that split the church. Over thirty-five years later, the church and individuals in the church have still not fully recovered.

7. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other. Galatians 5:25-26 (NIV)

As we have already seen, all Christians have the Spirit of God in them and beside them. The Spirit of God, through the Word of God, instructs us to be at peace with one another. If we engage in disputes, seeking to promote our own interests, irritating and being jealous of each other, we are not being led by the Spirit of God, no matter how pious we may appear. Spirit-filled Christians are at peace with each other.

8. ...be at peace with one another.” Mark 9:50b (ESV)

Closely tied to the command to be in harmony with one another is this command to be at peace with one-another. This verse is not hard to understand. It simply means what it says -- be at peace with one another.

This sounds simple and it is; yet it is profound. If the will and purposes of God are to be done, we must be at peace with each other. Infighting and divisions hinder the work of the church. Instead, we must love and build one another up, not tear each other down.

Chapter Nine

A Healthy Biblical Church Actively Teaches and Promotes Godly Living

In the Word of God we are repeatedly instructed to live godly lives. We are to be holy. Our fundamental purpose as a disciple or follower of our Lord Jesus Christ is to glorify Him. We do this by our attitudes and by the way we live. The Christian life can be broken down in many different ways; however, ultimately, genuine disciples make holiness and godly living the highest priority in their life. This is what brings glory to our Lord Jesus Christ.

Churches must teach godly living if they are to be in tune with God's plan for the church. Remember, Jesus instructed us to teach disciples to "*be obedient to all that I have commanded you*" (Matthew 28:19-20). The greater our obedience, the more godly and holy our lives will be.

Teaching godly and holy living is not an emphasis in many churches. However, if a church misses this and does not actively teach and pursue godly living they miss the most fundamental reason we exist, and they will never fulfill God's purpose for the church, and they will never produce much genuine spiritual fruit. Churches do not have the right to alter, to distort, or to water down, our God-given instructions for living.

The Word of God clearly instructs us to live holy and godly lives.

According to the following verses, Jesus died so that we could be holy and blameless, without spot or wrinkle. Notice the last phrase. We (the church) are presented to Christ "holy and blameless".

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He 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 5:25-27 (NASB)

Once we are saved, we are credited with His righteousness and our legal standing with God is one of absolute holiness. We have been washed clean by the blood of the Lamb!!!

Now that we are saved and have been credited with righteousness, we are clearly instructed to "*be holy in all that we do*". Our way of life is to clearly reflect our righteous standing before God. We are to follow the example of Jesus in holy living.

But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy." 1 Peter 1:15-16 (NIV)

Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God. 2 Corinthians 7:1 (NIV)

Notice, we are to purify ourselves from anything that contaminates our spirit or our body. If we have any respect or reverence for God, we will strive to live a holy life. We are to run from anything that might contaminate us and actively pursue godliness.

But flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness. 1 Timothy 6:11 (NASB)

So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace,...

2 Timothy 2:22a (ESV)

Fleeing and pursuing are not passive activities. They are active, on-going, continual, non-stop commitments. We continually pursue righteousness and godly living.

In the following Scripture we learn that before the beginning of time God planned for us to be conformed to the image of the Jesus. That is a high standard. Jesus was sinless, pure -- perfect. And we are to be conformed to His image!!!

For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Romans 8:29 (NKJV)

If we purify ourselves (2 Corinthians 7:1) and live godly lives, we will reject the attractions of the world.

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age,... Titus 2:11-12 (NIV)

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world.

1 John 2:15-16 (ESV)

Genuine believers are to separate themselves from the world and from the love of worldly things. We are not to accept the world's way of thinking. We are not to love the world's entertainment, the world's music, or anything else that has its origins in the world's way of thinking or living. Anything that appeals to our old nature must be rejected and replaced with a commitment to what is holy and godly.

Notice that *"if anyone loves the world the love of the father is not in him"*. This is serious. There are great numbers of people who claim to be followers of the Lord, but they have a love for much of the world's pleasure and the world's ways of thinking and living. You cannot have both. You cannot love both the world and God at the same time.

Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. 2 Corinthians 6:17 (NIV)

Teaching separation from the world is not popular in churches today. If we teach godly living and warn that certain kinds of activities are not healthy for believers and that it is not a good idea to participate in certain activities, we are accused of being "legalistic" and not understanding our "freedom" in Christ. This understanding of freedom is so far off from Biblical teaching that it is

pathetic. Freedom in Christ frees us from the bondage and the control of sin. It does not give us license to keep toying with sin.

A few years back I sat in a Bible study where they concluded that to teach total abstinence from alcoholic beverages was legalistic and that our freedom in Christ allows us to drink in moderation. There were two brothers in that class and both brothers began to drink in “moderation”. With time, they both became alcoholics, they were both divorced by their wives, they both lost their families, and they both spent many years in wasted carnal living. You don’t need to remind me that in many cultures moderate drinking by Christians is accepted. I personally do not want to stand before God and give account of my teaching that we can dabble around the fringes of sinful activities and not be hurt by it. We are to purify ourselves and “*touch no unclean thing*”.

A follower of the Lord Jesus Christ is to have a totally transformed mind or way of thinking.

And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. Romans 12:2 (KJV)

Only those with a transformed mind are equipped to understand and do the will of God. A transformed mind becomes more and more in tune with God’s way of thinking and less and less in tune with the world’s way of thinking.

But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. Ephesians 4:20-24 (NASB)

Notice that we are to lay aside our old corrupted way of life, our old way of thinking, and to put on the new self. This is done by being renewed in our mind. To put off the sinful way of life we totally change the way we think.

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. Colossians 3:1-2 (NKJV)

The following verse is a powerful passage of Scripture. It tells us what kinds of things we are to put into our minds. Every professing believer needs to take a good hard look at this passage and evaluate his mind. What do I think about? Is what I watch on television or the movie I watch true, pure, lovely, admirable, morally excellent, and praiseworthy? Can I praise God for the privilege of watching this show or movie? Does the music I listen to, or what I read, or the pictures I look at all meet this same standard?

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things. Philippians 4:8 (NIV)

Teaching godly holy living goes hand-in-hand with the command of Jesus to teach followers of the Lord Jesus Christ “*to obey everything I have commanded you*”. This is the instruction given to the

church by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. We dare not take this lightly.

Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. Matthew 28:19-20 (NIV)

What does it mean to be godly or to be holy?

Being godly is not following a set of rules; it is much deeper. None of us will ever reach a state of perfection; however, every one of us should continually seek to be a more godly person. When we become satisfied with our walk with Him, it is indicative of a lack of depth in our spiritual life.

Living a holy life can be described in many different ways. Without any attempt to elaborate, following are some Biblical descriptions of what godliness and holiness is all about.

1. Being godly is to be transformed in both our attitudes and in our actions. We have a transformed mind and we seek to be holy in all that we do. Romans 12:2, 1 Peter 1:15-16
2. Being godly is be obedient to *“all that I (Jesus) have commanded you”*. Matthew 28:19-20 (NASB)
3. Being godly is to abide in the Word of God and to let it dwell in you richly. John 15:1-11, Colossians 3:16
4. Being godly is to be conformed to the image of our Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 8:29
5. Being godly is to understand that we are in Christ and that He is in us. We are to be one with Him. 1 John 4:13, John 17
6. Being godly is to fellowship or to *“participate in His divine nature and escape the corruption of the world caused by evil desires”*. 2 Peter 1:4 (NIV)
7. Being godly is to be continually sensitive and responsive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 5:18
8. Being godly is to walk by faith, step by step. 2 Corinthians 5:7
9. Being godly is to love and to serve fellow believers. 2 John 1:6, 1 Peter 1:22
10. Being godly is love what God loves and to hate what God hates. Titus 2:11-12, 1 John 2:15-16
11. Being godly is to worship God in spirit and in truth with an attitude of reverence and awe. John 4:23-24, Hebrews 12:28-29

Believers are to teach, to encourage, to build up, and to admonish one another to be godly.

The instructions in the Word of God to be holy are a high standard to follow. To help us follow this high standard He put us in a body of believers (the church) who can encourage us, and spur us on to live in accord with this standard of godliness and holiness.

We already covered this topic in Study Guide Six, which is on discipleship, so this will be just a quick reminder of these Biblical instructions.

Again, God did not expect us to be alone in our growth process. We need each other. He put us in a family of believers, the church, and gave us the instructions to love, to teach, to encourage, to build up, and even to spur one another on. Without this kind of encouragement, spiritual growth will be slower or even at a standstill. There are about thirty “one another” commands in the Word of God. They all have a purpose and they all play a part in our growth. All of us are to put these commands into practice. And all Christians, young and old, are to encourage growth and to build up fellow believers.

When ten, fifty, or a hundred fellow believers seek to teach, to encourage, to build up, and to hold us accountable, it is a powerful motivation and incentive to remain faithful and to grow in our walk with the Lord.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom,... Colossians 3:16a (NIV)

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another -- and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:24-25 (NIV)

God clearly expects us to grow and mature in our walk with Him. This is true of all Christians, both those who have been saved for a short time as well as those who have known Him for many years. All of us need to keep on learning and keep on being built up by fellow believers.

Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.

Galatians 6:1 (NASB)

If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, Luke 17:3b (ESV)

When there is ongoing sin in the life of a brother, we are to seek to restore that brother. The two words admonish and rebuke are related, but not the same. To rebuke or to reprove is definitely more intense than admonish. Admonish is more gentle. When someone is admonished to correct a wrong behavior but does not respond, the next step may be a rebuke.

The whole purpose of an admonition or rebuke is to bring about the restoration of the sinning brother. If he repents, forgive him. With the repentance comes forgiveness and restoration. There must be no desire on our part to humiliate or put down the sinning brother. Let God do the judging; we are to focus on restoration.

In the following verses we are told to get the plank out of our own eye before removing the sawdust from someone else's eye. Notice that it does not say to forget the whole process if you have a plank in your eye. We are told to get the plank out of our own eye and then go to the brother with the sawdust in his eye. In other words, the plank is not an excuse for inaction. Rather it is cause for us to deal with both our own sin and the sin of a brother.

Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye. Matthew 7:3-5 (ESV)

Church Discipline – Dealing with an Erring Unrepentant Brother

In this section of this study guide we will deal with God-given instructions in how a church is to deal with an individual whose life becomes a reproach to the Lord, or with someone who begins to teach wrong doctrine. Christians can reject or neglect Biblical instructions to be holy and fall back into a sinful life. When those who are in a position of leadership in the church determine that a member of the church or a professing Christian who regularly attends or fellowships with the church has engaged in conduct that clearly violates Scripture, or who has seriously erred in doctrine, then that individual should be subject to church discipline, including dismissal from the church if the wrong is not corrected in a reasonable amount of time.

Most churches totally ignore Biblical instructions related to this whole area of church discipline. Most do not feel it accomplishes anything and will, in fact, hurt the church. However, it is interesting to note that Christ's very first instructions to the church dealt with how the church was to deal with an erring brother.

If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. Matthew 18:15-17 (NIV)

There are at least four Biblical reasons for church discipline.

The reason for church discipline is not for us to punish someone for their sin. That is God's responsibility. Rather, church discipline is God's way of reclaiming an erring believer and maintaining the purity of the church. There are at least four specific Biblical reasons for church discipline.

1. The first reason is simply to be obedient to instructions given in the Word of God – the Bible.
2. A second reason for church discipline is to promote the spiritual welfare of the offending believer by calling him or her to return to a Biblical standard of doctrine and conduct.

Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. Galatians 6:1 (NIV)

And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will. 2 Timothy 2:24-26 (ESV)

Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith; Titus 1:13 (KJV)

3. A third reason for church discipline is to strengthen other believers by deterring sin.

Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning. 1 Timothy 5:20 (NASB)

4. The fourth reason is to maintain the purity in the church.

Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? 1 Corinthians 5:6b (NASB)

Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals." 1 Corinthians 15:33 (NASB)

An example of how important the purity of the church is to God is given in Acts 5. God literally took the life of both Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, for being deceitful and not telling the truth.

Some Biblical examples of cases requiring church discipline are:

1. Overt Sin

But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; ... Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person. From 1 Corinthians 5:11-13 (KJV)

Here we are told to “*put away from among yourselves that wicked person.*” In other words, the following kinds of people are not to be part of the church:

a fornicator – This includes anyone guilty of sexual sin, including marital unfaithfulness.

covetous – This is a greedy person.

an idolater – This is one who worships something or someone other than God.

a railer -- This is one who slanders someone else.

a drunkard – This is someone who regularly gets drunk.

an extortioner – This is one who steals or swindles money.

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife. And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this?

1 Corinthians 5:1-2 (NIV)

What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside?

God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked man from among you."

1 Corinthians 5:12-13 (NIV)

The kinds of sin leading to church discipline is not limited to those mentioned above in 1 Corinthians 5:11-13. The following Scripture gives more kinds of people we are to avoid:

But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people. 2 Timothy 3:1-5 (ESV)

2. Private Offenses Whereby an Innocent Brother or Sister Is Injured

Moreover, if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. Matthew 18:15-17 (NKJV)

3. Being Divisive or for Repeated Trouble-making

Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him. You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned. Titus 3:10-11 (NIV)

I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. Romans 16:17 (ESV)

There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies, and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers. Proverbs 6:16-19 (NIV)

A person who is an on-going source of trouble-making and division is not to continue being a part of the church. We are to have *"nothing to do with him"*.

4. Serious Doctrinal Error

There are literally hundreds of passages in the Bible warning of false teaching, false teachers, and false shepherds (pastors). These must not be tolerated. They destroy the foundations of the church and keep the church from accomplishing its God-given mission.

Notice in the following verses Timothy was to *"command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer"*:

As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. These promote controversies rather than God's work--which is by faith. The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Some have wandered away from these and turned to meaningless talk. They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm. 1 Timothy 1:3-7 (NIV)

Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. Romans 16:17 (NASB)

I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Acts 20:29-30 (ESV)

...shepherds (pastors) who feed only themselves... These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts;... From Jude 1:12 and Jude 1:16 (NIV)

I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive. Romans 16:17-18 (ESV)

Two of the seven churches in Revelation 2-3 were given severe warnings by the Lord Jesus Christ for tolerating false teaching and/or false shepherds.

The clear implication of these Scriptures and many others that deal with false teaching and false shepherds is that they cannot be tolerated and they must be removed from the church.

5. Refusal to Support Oneself and One's Family

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us... For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat."... We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies. Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat... If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed. From 2 Thessalonians 3:6-14 (NIV)

But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. 1 Timothy 5:8 (NASB)

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

Again, the Biblical action to be taken is to not associate with this kind of a person.

6. Private Offenses by an Individual in the Church Whereby an Innocent Member Is Injured

If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. Matthew 18:15-17 (NIV)

When church discipline is exercised, there is a Biblical pattern to follow.

By putting together, the instructions given in several of these Scriptures that relate to church discipline, we can determine a Biblical pattern to follow when exercising church discipline.

When there is overt sin, or someone is being divisive or spreading wrong doctrine, the following is a Biblical procedure to follow:

Step One. The church leadership should assign two or more spiritually mature men the responsibility of confronting the individual concerning his sin or his wrong teaching. When this takes place, if the offending party evidences genuine repentance, and, when appropriate, he makes restitution, he shall be forgiven and restored.

Step Two. If the individual does not respond to this reproof, the leadership should warn him that if he/she does not repent, the congregation must be told of the matter. If the individual still does not repent, the congregation shall then be informed of the identity of the erring member and the nature of the sin or wrong teaching. Again, the purpose of this action is to encourage the erring individual to repent and be restored.

Step Three. If the public rebuke does not produce repentance and resolution within a reasonable time, he/she should be removed from church membership.

If at any point the individual being disciplined gives evidence of genuine repentance, and if, when appropriate, he makes restitution, he shall be forgiven and restored to fellowship.

If an unrepentant offending party is removed from the church membership, the remaining members will be encouraged to restrict all contact with him (except family members) from that point forward. The purpose of this action is to encourage that individual to repent and return to his commitment to serving the Lord Jesus Christ and to fellowship with the church.

When one individual in the church is injured by the sinful actions of another individual in the church, the following steps are a Biblical pattern to follow.

Step One. The individual who has been offended is to honestly examine his/her own heart and motives, pray for God's direction, and then go to the offending individual seeking that individual's repentance, reconciliation, and restoration of fellowship.

Step Two. If the erring individual who caused the offence refuses to repent, the offended person shall again go to the erring individual accompanied by one or two other individuals who shall confirm that

the sin has occurred or is continuing to occur. On this second visit, the offender should be warned that the church leaders will be informed if there is no genuine repentance.

Step Three. If the erring individual still refuses to heed this warning, then the church leadership should be informed of what has taken place.

Step Four. If, after investigating the matter, the church leadership determines that there is Biblical cause to continue, they shall warn the offending person that if he/she does not repent then the matter will have to be taken to the church body. If the offending party evidences genuine repentance, he shall be forgiven and restored. If not, the leaders shall inform the church congregation. This is done so that the church may call the erring individual to repentance. If, in a reasonable length of time, the erring individual does not repent in response to the church's collective call to repentance, then he should be removed from membership.

Biblical Attitudes Relating to Discipline

Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. Galatians 6:1-2 (NIV)

And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, 2 Timothy 2:24-25 (ESV)

We are instructed to deal with the offending brother gently. It is to be done in love, not anger. It would be better not to do it at all than to deal with the sinning brother in anger. Actions taken in anger seldom have beneficial results.

There can be severe consequences when a church does not deal with sin or seek to be a godly church.

The following warnings were all given to churches who no longer sought to be godly. Notice the severity of these warnings. One has to wonder how many of our churches today have the same standing before God.

'But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. 'Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent. Revelation 2:4-5 (NASB)

'Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth. Revelation 2:16 (NKJV)

Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your works complete in the sight of my God. Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you. Revelation 3:2-3 (ESV)

The following verses are sobering. Jesus is standing on the outside of the church knocking. He is waiting to be asked to come in. Jesus wants to fellowship with the church. He is knocking at the door. Will we let Him come in???

Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. Revelation 3:19-20 (NIV)

Some Basic Biblical Teaching About Forgiveness

A major purpose for church discipline is to bring an individual to repentance of the sin and restoration of fellowship. We need to be quick to forgive. To finish this chapter on the church and godly living, we will look at three basic Biblical truths relating to forgiveness.

1. God forgives us when we confess our sin.

When we are saved, we are forgiven of all sin. One of the most fundamental Biblical truths is that when God forgives a person, He forgives totally and completely. All sin--past, present, and future--is completely and totally forgiven.

He forgave us all our sins, Colossians 2:13 (NIV)

I will cleanse them from all the guilt of their sin against me, and I will forgive all the guilt of their sin and rebellion against me. Jeremiah 33:8 (ESV)

"I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more. Isaiah 43:25 (NIV)

For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." Hebrews 8:12 (NIV)

...the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. 1 John 1:7 (NIV)

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9 (NKJV)

...though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. Isaiah 1:18b (KJV)

There is no reason for a genuine Christian to feel on-going guilt about sin that has been confessed. We may sense a certain amount of remorse or regret about past sin, but there is no reason for on-going feelings of guilt.

In secular settings there is a lot of emphasis on forgiving oneself. The Bible says nothing about forgiving yourself. When we accept God's total and complete forgiveness, there is no need to be concerned about forgiving yourself. We need to stop beating ourselves up for what God has already completely forgiven, and move on. In reality, self-condemnation for what God has already

forgiven shows a lack of faith in God and in the truthfulness of the Word of God.

In the Word of God there are two basic kinds of forgiveness. The terms “judicial forgiveness” and “parental forgiveness” are not Biblical terms, but they do describe these two kinds of Biblical forgiveness.

A. Judicial Forgiveness

When an unsaved person genuinely repents of his sin and puts his faith in the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ to pay the penalty for his sin, then that person’s sin is forgiven. All his sin – past, present, and future -- is forgiven. When his sin is forgiven, he is justified, and righteousness is credited to his account. He becomes a child of God, and he will spend eternity with God forever.

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace. Ephesians 1:7 (NKJV)

When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, Colossians 2:13 (NIV)

B. Parental Forgiveness

When a person who is already genuinely saved chooses to sin, his fellowship with God and his joy are interrupted. He will bear little or no genuine spiritual fruit. In parental forgiveness, when we, as Christians, confess our sin to God, our Father forgives us and our fellowship and walk with God is restored.

When one of God’s children chooses to sin, there are many consequences. These many consequences include the fact that we have smeared and dishonored the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and we are no longer fruitful productive servants. We may face the discipline or chastisement of God. When there is unconfessed sin in the life of the Christian, we are no longer walking in fellowship with Him and the joy of our salvation is gone.

The book of 1 John was written primarily to Christians. One of the reasons this book was written was to teach Christians how they could have fellowship with the Father, with fellow Christians, and how their joy could be full. In the first chapter, John writes,

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 1:8-9 (KJV)

Christians must regularly confess their sin to God to have on-going fellowship with God and with other Christians, so that their joy will be complete, and so that they can be productive servants of our Lord Jesus Christ.

One excellent example of parental forgiveness is in the life of King David. David was a child of God; yet he sinned grievously. When David was confronted with his sin, he admitted his sin and repented.

Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD" – and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Psalm 32:5 (NIV)

David confessed his sin and then prayed for renewed joy. David still suffered many consequences of his sin, but the joy of walking with God was restored when he confessed his sin.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.
Psalm 51:12 (NIV)

...if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land. 2 Chronicles 7:14 (ESV)

When a Christian confesses his sin, there is a restoration of the joy and fellowship in our walk with God. We can again be fruitful and productive and grow in our walk with our Lord.

One thing that we need to understand is that confessing sin to God does not necessarily remove the natural consequences of sin. For example, if a person's sin leads to a divorce, confessing the sin does not necessarily mean that the marriage will be restored. If a prisoner confesses His sin, he will be forgiven by God but that does not mean that he will get out of jail. Sin will always have negative consequences. We cannot ever sin and expect good as a result.

2. As we have been forgiven, we are to freely forgive a brother who sins against us.

...forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. Colossians 3:13b (NIV)

Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Ephesians 4:31-32 (NIV)

Every genuine Christian has been forgiven by God of a lifetime of sin. Without God's forgiveness we would be condemned by God to an everlasting separation from God in an eternal hell. Yet, God in His love, His grace, and His mercy has forgiven us. We stand before God justified and righteous. That is a precious truth.

In the same way God forgave us, we are instructed to forgive each other. There are times when wounds inflicted by fellow Christians can hurt deeply. Even though this is true, none of us has come close to suffering like our Lord suffered on the cross. Yet, the first words He spoke on the cross were "*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing*". (Luke 23:34 NASB) This is the example we are to follow.

We must forgive each other. To refuse to forgive is disobedience and rebellion.

Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.... ...For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. Matthew 6:12,13-15 (NIV)

Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. Luke 11:4 (NIV)

When Jesus taught His followers to pray (Matthew 6), He instructed them to ask God for forgiveness based on the fact that they had forgiven those who had sinned against them. This is not talking about salvation, but rather it is speaking of God's on-going forgiveness of His children that maintains our fellowship and walk with Him. If we do not forgive those who sin against us, we cannot expect parental forgiveness from God and we cannot expect to enjoy fellowship with Him.

A practical definition of forgiving is -- *getting rid of our anger and making the choice not to hold on to a grudge or to seek revenge.*

The only real motive for not forgiving and holding on to anger is wanting revenge or wanting to get even. There is no other reason for not forgiving and for holding on to anger.

The Bible states that revenge belongs to God.

Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay, says the Lord.' Romans 12:19 (NIV)

Cease from anger, and forsake wrath: fret not thyself in any wise to do evil. For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth. Psalm 37:8-9 (KJV)

Forgiving is not hard if you will make the decision to let God handle the revenge. Tell God that you are putting the whole thing in His hands and you are going to back off and let Him handle it. God is a just God and He will avenge wrong. His judgment is always right. You need to put your trust in God and leave it there.

Forgiveness begins with a mental choice. We may not feel like forgiving, but we choose to forgive anyway because we choose to obey God. Not forgiving and holding on to anger will only lead to more spiritual defeat. Be obedient to God and choose to forgive, even if you don't really feel like it.

After you choose to forgive a person, reaffirm that decision over the next few days, weeks, months, or even years, if necessary. At first you may not feel any different; however, once you make the mental choice to forgive, your feelings will eventually come into line with the mental choice you have made. If you never begin by making the mental choice to forgive, you will never be at peace with God or with yourself and you will continue in your anger and spiritual defeat.

Not forgiving or holding on to anger can also lead to all kinds of problems such as depression, stress, bitterness, strained relationships, physical problems, etc., etc., etc. Forgiving is a big step toward spiritual growth, personal freedom, peace, good mental health and even good physical health.

Forgiving someone does not necessarily mean that you will like or respect the person you are forgiving. And contrary to the popular expression "forgive and forget", you will probably not forget what happened. However, while you will probably not totally forget about it, after you have made the choice to forgive, you do not have to keep on thinking about it all the time.

3. Individual Christians are to personally forgive each other, even when the offending brother does not repent, make restitution, or ask for forgiveness.

Choosing to forgive allows a person to be at peace with himself and with God.

So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. Colossians 3:12-14 (NASB)

And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. Mark 11:25 (NKJV)

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Ephesians 4:32 (NIV)

Forgiving an unrepentant brother does not free that brother from his Biblical responsibility to repent or to make restitution for his wrong.

Forgiving an unrepentant brother does not mean that your fellowship with him will automatically be restored. However, you have done what God asks you to do and you can have peace with God and grow in your walk with Him.

Chapter Ten

A Healthy Biblical Church Understands and Practices Genuine Worship

A church that actively teaches and promotes godly holy living will also worship Him as He teaches us to worship.

O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker. For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. Psalm 95:6-7 (KJV)

That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:10-11 (KJV)

But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth. John 4:23-24 (ESV)

...let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire. Hebrews 12:28b-29 (ESV)

These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain;... Matthew 15:8-9a (NIV)

Worshiping God exalts, reveres, glorifies, and pleases God. God seeks worshipers. We who are sinful people have been saved from everlasting judgment and we have been given eternal life. Our Lord Jesus Christ is holy; yet He suffered and died to pay the price for our sin. The holy God became sin so that we can escape eternal judgment, be adopted into His family, and live and reign with Him forever in eternal joy, peace, and satisfaction. Because of who He is and what He has done for us, He is worthy of our worship.

It is so easy for us to lose our focus and appreciation of these truths and become casual in our walk with the Lord. We must not let that happen. Instead, we must regularly remember who He is and what He has done for us. As an expression of our love and appreciation we joyfully worship our Lord and our Savior. We have been blessed beyond measure and from the bottom of our hearts we revere and worship our Lord, and we worship only Him and Him alone.

A right understanding of worship is needed by both the church as a whole and by individual believers who make up the church. Worship is a way of life, not just a Sunday morning church activity. Individual believers must be taught and understand genuine worship. When individuals genuinely worship God, then there can be glorious worship together as a church body. However, if individual members of the church do not individually live a life of worship, there will be little or no genuine worship when they get together for corporate worship.

The most basic meaning of the word “worship” is to bow down, to prostrate oneself, to fall down, and to give reverence.

Worship is a call to a deeper walk with God. It is a call to be in reverence and awe of our holy God. It is a call to love and obey Him.

Each of the following phrases are used in various expository word studies or Bible dictionaries to define or to describe worship. Each of these descriptions helps us to understand the depth of Biblical teachings that relate to worshiping God.

...to bow down, ...to kneel down, ...to prostrate oneself, ...to revere, ...to serve, ...to glorify, ...to honor, ...to have awe, ...to adore, ...to respect, ...to love, ...to give devotion

Putting all this together in simpler terms, worship can be defined as *“bowing down before God in our spirit, in reverence and in awe, with love, devotion, and submission”*.

Following is an extraordinary example of pure worship. Here, a “sinful” woman bows in repentance at Jesus’ feet. With deep appreciation, love, and devotion for our Lord Jesus Christ she anoints His feet with oil and her tears, and washes them with her hair.

Then one of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with him. And He went to the Pharisee's house, and sat down to eat. And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, and stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil.

Luke 7:36-38 (NKJV)

What an example of worship! This “sinful” woman left forgiven. However, there is no indication that the proud Pharisee ever humbled himself to worship Jesus. God grant us the desire to love and worship Him with the same spirit as this “sinful” woman.

Bowing is a sign of submission, respect, or reverence. In the Old Testament they often knelt or bowed in worship. When the Lord Jesus Christ was present on earth, many times an individual would bow or kneel before Him. In the book of Revelation, we are given glimpses of life in heaven, and in heaven they physically bow before our God in worship, praise, and adoration.

That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:10-11 (KJV)

O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker. For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. Psalm 95:6-7 (KJV)

Then Ezra blessed the LORD the great God. And all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands; then they bowed low and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. Nehemiah 8:6 (NASB)

After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Matthew 2:11 (NASB)

Then the man bowed low and worshiped the LORD. Genesis 24:26 (NASB)

...the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, Revelation 4:10a (NKJV)

It would be a high privilege to bow down before the physical presence of our Lord Jesus Christ in reverence, awe, and submission, giving Him our love and devotion. However, Jesus does not have to be physically present for us to bow in worship. In the Old Testament they often bowed when, of course, Jesus was not physically present. Today there would be nothing wrong with physically bowing in submission and reverence for God. *However, more important than the physical posture is the attitude of the heart.*

...let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our "God is a consuming fire." Hebrews 12:28b-29 (NIV)

But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth. John 4:23-24 (ESV)

The rest of this study guide on worship will cover fundamental Biblical truths relating to worship. I pray that it will help some to experience the joy of genuinely serving and worshipping God.

Biblical Teaching Relating to Worship

1. John 4:23-24

But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth. John 4:23-24 (ESV)

This is an important key Scripture relating to worship. This describes how we are to worship Him today. There are at least three key truths given in these verses.

A. God seeks worshipers.

Notice the phrase, *"for the Father is seeking such people to worship him"*. God wants us to worship Him, but there are limits to the kind of worship He accepts. We must worship Him in "spirit and in truth". If we want to give acceptable worship, we must do it with a right spirit, and our worship must be grounded in genuine Biblical truth. If we have a genuine desire to draw near to Him and to grow in our walk with Him, we will seek to give Him the kind of worship that He seeks. Much too often we design our worship to please or exalt ourselves or to please other people rather than seeking to exalt only Him in our worship.

B. We worship God in our spirit.

Here we are instructed to worship God "in spirit". When we worship Him, we bow down to Him in

our spirit. We bow before Him in our spirit with the same attitudes of devotion, reverence, awe, and submission that we would be demonstrating if we were bowing before Him in His physical presence. However, if our spirit is not right, our worship will not be genuine. If our spirit is not in tune with solid Biblical truth and if we are not being led by or filled with the Spirit of God, then our worship will not be genuine. When our spirit is right, we can be immeasurably blessed as we bow before Him in our spirit in genuine praise and worship.

C. We worship God in truth.

Our worship of God must be based in truth. False understandings of God and His Word do not lead to genuine worship. It is certainly true that one does not have to be a theologian to bring God acceptable worship and even baby Christians can worship and please God and bring joy to His heart. However, when we base our worship on a shallow or incorrect understanding of God and His Word, our worship will not be genuine. This is true whether we have been saved for a very short time or for a long period of time.

2. Worship and the Holiness of God

Over and over in Scripture, God is defined as holy. When God describes Himself in Scripture, He uses the word “holy” more than any other characteristic. To have even a basic understanding of God, and if we are going to know and walk with Him, and if we are going to genuinely worship God, we must understand and be in awe of His holiness.

When we think of God, we often think of His great love for us. It is right for us to think of Him in this way. His love is a big motivation for us to worship and to praise Him. However, in Scripture, an even more fundamental characteristic of God is His holiness.

The basic meaning of “holy” in the Word of God is to be “separate” or “set apart”. When used in reference to God, it means that God is completely and totally separated from all that is sinful or evil. God is absolutely clean and pure, separated from even the slightest tint of evil.

As people, it is hard for us to understand holiness since we are so sinful. However, for us to give Him genuine worship we must have a fundamental understanding and appreciation for God’s holiness. Carefully read and think about the following Scriptures. Let them sink deep into your mind and soul.

Who among the gods is like you, O LORD? Who is like you -- majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders? Exodus 15:11 (NIV)

But the Lord of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. Isaiah 8:13 (ESV)

There is no one holy like the LORD, Indeed, there is no one besides You, Nor is there any rock like our God. 1 Samuel 2:2 (NASB)
...holy and reverend is his name. Psalm 111:9b (KJV)

Holy and awesome is His name. Psalm 111:9b (NKJV)

..."Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."

Isaiah 6:3 (NIV)

And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!" Revelation 4:8 (ESV)

Understanding the holiness of God has a huge impact on our worship. Many times in the Word of God, He is worshiped because of His holiness. We are given instructions to worship Him in the *"splendor of His holiness"*.

...ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name. Bring an offering and come before him; worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness. Tremble before him, all the earth!

1 Chronicles 16:29-30a (NIV)

Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness.

Psalms 29:2 (NIV)

Let them praise Your great and awesome name; He is holy. Psalm 99:3 (NKJV)

Exalt the LORD our God, And worship at His footstool--He is holy. Psalm 99:5 (NKJV)

Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous, and give thanks to his holy name! Psalm 97:12 (ESV)

And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, "Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed."

Revelation 15:3-4 (ESV)

As we understand more about the holiness of God, the more we must seek to live a holy life.

As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy." 1 Peter 1:14-16 (NIV)

Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.

2 Corinthians 7:1 (NIV)

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age,... Titus 2:11-12 (NIV)

We are told to get rid of all that contaminates our body and spirit. In so doing we develop holiness in our life. Living a holy life is the heart of revering and worshiping God. The greater our personal holiness, the deeper and more acceptable is our worship to God. One cannot separate worship from holiness. *We worship God because of His holiness and we worship God by living a holy life.*

3. *Right Attitudes of Worship*

...let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our "God is a consuming fire." Hebrews 12:28b-29 (NIV)

In this verse we are given two attitudes that are the heart of acceptable worship. Those two attitudes are "reverence" and "awe".

The Greek word for "reverence" that is used in this verse speaks of a "moral repugnance" of evil. We hold on to what is genuinely good and are repulsed by what is evil. This parallels the teaching that we worship God because He is holy. *Genuine worship adopts as its own the abhorrence and hatred of evil that is the very heart of our holy God. We cannot genuinely worship a holy God unless we, too, have a repugnance of evil.*

Many Christians do not seem to hate evil. It is not an emphasis in many Christian homes or churches today. *Yet, if we are not in sync with God's hatred of sin and evil, we can hardly bring Him anything more than shallow or superficial worship.*

The second word used to describe acceptable worship is "awe". The root meaning of the word translated "awe" that is used in this verse speaks of an attitude of "reverent submission" to God or a godly "fear" of God. In this usage, to "fear" God is to have a deep respect or reverence for God and to be devoted to Him. In our worship, we revere God and we submit to Him in every part of our life.

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. Ecclesiastes 12:13 (KJV)

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction. Proverbs 1:7 (NASB)

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. Proverbs 9:10 (NASB)

In the following verses there are warnings about not having a fear or reverent submission to our Lord:

Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD: They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. Proverbs 1:28-31 (KJV)

...let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our "God is a consuming fire." Hebrews 12:28b-29 (NIV)

The last phrase of Hebrews 12:28b-29 is "*for our God is a consuming fire*". Within the context, this is referring to the time when God spoke to the people of Israel from Mt. Sinai. God showed Himself in thunder, lightning, dark clouds, fire, and an earthquake. (Exodus 19) The sight was so terrifying that even Moses trembled with fear. (Hebrews 12:21)

It would be well for each of us to go back and read and digest Exodus 19 to get a deeper sense of

reverence and awe of God. Our attitude toward God cannot be light and casual if we are to bring Him acceptable worship. Every fiber of our being recognizes who He is and gives Him loving devotion and total and complete control of our life. Shallow and casual attitudes about God result in shallow frivolous worship. A lasting revival of godly living will come in our own life and in the life of our churches when we choose to bring Him the kind of worship He seeks.

4. *Worshiping in Truth*

But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth. John 4:23-24 (ESV)

Notice here that worship must be done “in truth”. *Genuine worship can only be given by one who is committed to correctly understanding and putting into practice the truths taught in God’s Word -- the Bible.*

This has very important implications for pastors and teachers. If we do not consistently and regularly teach the Word, we lead our people on a path of insincere worship as well as spiritual frustration and fruitlessness.

It needs to be emphasized that one does not need to be a Bible scholar to worship God. In fact, many an unlearned person has shown a deep devotion to God and has given Him very genuine worship.

However, we must not use this as an excuse for not seeking to mature in our walk with the Lord. If we are not growing, we will be ineffective, unproductive and defeated in our spiritual life and we will certainly not be able to give Him the worship He seeks.

Many Christians, probably most of us, associate worship with having good feelings about God. However, worship is not based on feelings; it is having the right attitudes about God and putting the truth of God into practice. *Genuine worship is not based on feelings; it is based on truth.* We can thank God that He gave us emotions and feelings and that we are not unfeeling robots; however, truth, not feelings, is the heart of genuine worship. Feeling all “warm and fuzzy inside”, getting “spiritual goose bumps”, or “having a good time” may all be good things, but they do not mean that we are genuinely worshiping God.

Notice the order in the following verse. They spent several hours reading the Word of God and then they spent several hours confessing their sin and worshiping. Again, genuine worship comes from a heart that is right with God. Here we see that the Word of God brought conviction of sin; then the people confessed their sin and worshiped.

While they stood in their place, they read from the book of the law of the LORD their God for a fourth of the day; and for another fourth they confessed and worshiped the LORD their God. Nehemiah 9:3 (NASB)

5. *Genuine worship brings glory to God and only to God.*

I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another,... Isaiah 42:8a (NASB)

Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.

1 Corinthians 10:31 (KJV)

These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men. Matthew 15:8-9 (NIV)

Genuine worship never draws attention to our self or to another a person. It always focuses on God and God alone.

There are many “worship” leaders who profess a desire to glorify God but, in reality, they seek to draw attention to themselves and to their own talents and abilities. There are many singers and music groups who seek to draw attention to themselves. In reality, they seek to glorify themselves rather than to glorify God. This is serious. No person should ever lead or participate in any worship activity unless he first empties himself of all pride and desire to glorify self and seeks only to uplift and glorify God.

If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen. 1 Peter 4:11 (NIV)

It is very important for all who have a part in public worship to understand that their goal is to focus attention on the Lord Jesus Christ. They must not seek to draw attention to themselves. This is true of anyone who has a part in any kind of a public ministry. When we seek to draw attention to ourselves, we are attempting to steal the glory that belongs to God and God alone. God will not share His glory with anyone else in this manner.

Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.

Colossians 3:23-24 (ESV)

6. *Fundamentally, worship is a way of life.*

...I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way,... Acts 24:14a (NIV)

Paul states that he worshiped as a follower of the “Way”. The “Way” is a reference to belief or faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and all that goes with that faith. All that goes with being a disciple or follower of Jesus is described as worship. *Our worship, bowing before Him in our spirit, is not an occasional experience but an on-going, continuous, non-stop way of life.* This attitude of worship and submission controls every part of our life. If we hold back in any area, our worship is hindered and may, in fact, be empty or vain worship.

Worship is much more than participating in our church’s “worship service”. This may well be a legitimate part of our worship, but worship is much more than this. *Genuine Biblical worship extends*

to every part of our lives, not just our church's worship or music program.

I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is your spiritual service of worship*. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. Romans 12:1-2 (NASB)

These verses are clearly talking about an on-going attitude and way of life. This on-going way of life is our spiritual worship. Here we are told to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice. Offering our bodies as a living sacrifice is complete and total surrender of ourselves to God. We are to be holy. Our way of thinking is to be transformed. Being a living sacrifice is death to self and total submission to our Lord Jesus Christ. The Greek word that is translated worship in these verses can also be translated service. Thus, the phrase, “*spiritual service of worship*”. Our worship is closely tied to our service. Serving or worshiping God is continual, not just an occasional or Sunday morning experience.

She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day. Luke 2:36b-37 (ESV)

This widow, Anna, spent most of her life, night and day, worshipping. Wow, what an example of a lifestyle of worship.

Worship and our way of living cannot be separated. None of us are perfect, but if we are not growing in our walk with God, we cannot expect to give God the worship He seeks.

7. When we live a lifestyle of worship, there will be specific times in which we experience genuine heart-felt worship.

In our society, it seems as if everybody is busy. This is just as true of Christians as it is of everyone else. In addition to our jobs, we have responsibilities at home, to our families, and to our church. And from time to time, we do need to take a little time to relax. Even when we are committed to living a lifestyle of worship, most of us do not continually feel a spiritual high. Sometimes we feel just plain tired and worn out.

In spite of all this, when we are genuinely committed to serving the Lord, there will be times when we will experience genuine deep-down heart-felt worship and appreciation of who God is and what He has done for us.

There are times when we read and meditate on the Word of God that the Spirit of God opens up our understanding, and we respond in our hearts with thanksgiving and worship. There are times when we sing a solid old hymn or gospel song that our spirits are lifted in praise and worship. When we see our children serving the Lord, we joyfully worship and thank Him. When He provides for us and when He comforts us, we thank and we worship Him. When we fellowship with our brothers and sisters in the Lord, we can thank and worship Him. Other times we look at the stars, the trees, the mountains, or at a beautiful flower, or we see the squirrels in the trees, or the deer in the woods, or stand beside the ocean, and in our hearts, we give Him praise and worship because of who He is and what He has created. There are times when I have taught a class and could sense the Spirit of God at work, and, in

my heart, even though I was tired, I have thanked and praised God who gives me the privilege of teaching His Word.

There are endless reasons for us lift our hearts in worship to our God, who is our Creator, our loving Father, and our Savior. These times of heart-felt praise and worship enrich our lives and they strengthen and sustain us, and they please our Lord.

By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshiped, leaning upon the top of his staff. Hebrews 11:21 (KJV)

Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care. Psalm 95:6-7 (NIV)

And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. Nehemiah 8:6 (KJV)

The man bowed his head and worshiped the Lord and said, “Blessed be the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken his steadfast love and his faithfulness toward my master. Genesis 24:26-27a (ESV)

Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground, and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell down before the LORD, worshiping the LORD. 2 Chronicles 20:18 (NASB)

8. *Music and Worship*

Many Christians associate worship with a meaningful time of singing and music at church. However, worship is much broader than our music programs. God loves music and it should be an important part of our lives and our worship; however, it simply is not Biblically correct to think of worship primarily as a meaningful time of music and singing. Worship involves all of our life, not just our music.

Hebrew and Greek words for worship are used about seventy times in the Bible. In only a couple of these Biblical references do music and worship occur at the same time. Again, worship involves all of our life, not just our music.

This section is not meant to downplay the role of music. Not at all. I personally have limited musical ability, but I love to sing hymns and gospel songs that uplift and praise our Lord. We worship the Lord as we praise Him in song.

Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing. Psalm 100:2 (KJV)

The Levites stood with the instruments of David, and the priests with the trumpets. Then Hezekiah commanded that the burnt offering be offered on the altar. And when the burnt offering began, the song to the Lord began also, and the trumpets, accompanied by the instruments of David, king of Israel. The whole assembly worshiped, and the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded. All this continued until the burnt offering was finished. When the

offering was finished, the king and all who were present with him bowed themselves and worshiped. 2 Chronicles 29:26-29 (ESV)

Notice that in these verses the music occurred as burnt offerings were made to God and as the people bowed in worship to God. When we use music as an expression of worship, it should encourage people to bow before God in their spirit in reverence, in awe, and in submission to Him.

9. Praise and Worship

Praise is exalting our God. It is words spoken or sung or the thoughts and attitudes of our heart which exalt God.

The following phrases or words are all used in various Biblical word studies or Biblical dictionaries to describe praise:

*...exalting the wonderful characteristics and the acts of God,
 ...to speak well of,
 ...to give thanks,
 ...expressing genuine appreciation,
 ...to approve of, to honor, to glorify,
 ...expressing joy and adoration to God,
 ...to shout for joy, to be jubilant, and to sing.*

Putting this all together, we can define Biblical praise as: *to speak, or to sing, or to think thoughts that exalt the characteristics and the acts of God.*

Biblical praise has at least three basic elements:

1. *Exalting God because of His attributes (characteristics).*
2. *Exalting God because of what He does or has done.*
3. *Giving thanks for who He is and what He has done.*

God instructs His followers to praise Him.

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

1 Peter 2:9 (NIV)

Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised... Psalm 48:1 (KJV)

Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Psalm 103:1 (NIV)

Often praise and music go together.

Sing praises to God, sing praises: sing praises unto our King, sing praises. Psalm 47:6 (KJV)

O come, let us sing unto the LORD: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation. Let

us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms. For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods. Psalm 95:1-3 (KJV)

Praise the Lord! For it is good to sing praises to our God; for it is pleasant, and a song of praise is fitting. Psalm 147:1 (ESV)

Shout with joy to God, all the earth! Sing the glory of his name; make his praise glorious! Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds!" Psalm 66:1-3a (NIV)

Sing to him; sing praises to him; tell of all his wondrous works! 1 Chronicles 16:9 (ESV)

In the mind of many, praise and worship are essentially the same thing; however, while both are fundamental to our walk with God, they are not the same. Worship involves every part of our life. It is living a life that continually glorifies Him. Praise is more specific. Praise is to speak, or to sing, or to think words or thoughts that exalt the wonderful characteristics and the acts of God. If we are not regularly giving God praise, it is doubtful that we are genuinely living a lifestyle of worship. While praise is a very important part of worship, worship is much broader than praise.

10. Unacceptable Worship

These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, Matthew 15:8-9a (NKJV)

A very serious warning is given in these verses in Matthew. Not all that is identified as worship is acceptable to God. Here some worship is identified as “vain”. The Greek word translated “vain” is defined in expository Greek word studies as meaning “at fault”, “a folly”, “having no purpose”, “groundless”, “invalid”, “useless”, and “futile”.

For our worship to be accepted by God, it must be given by one who is committed to serving and obeying God. It would be a good idea for each of us to examine ourselves and our worship. Is our worship “at fault”? Does God consider it to be folly, groundless, invalid, useless and futile? Worship that is given for any reason other than to bring glory and reverence to God is not genuine worship.

Carefully consider each of the following verses:

Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Jesus with her sons, bowing down and making a request of Him. Matthew 20:20 (NASB)

The mother of James and John came and bowed down before Jesus. However, her purpose was to ask that Her sons be exalted in the kingdom of God. She did not bow to exalt the Lord; she bowed for selfish reasons. This is not genuine worship.

They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator who is forever praised. Romans 1:25 (NIV)

Here it speaks of those who worship what has been created rather than worshiping the Creator. This kind of worship leads to judgment, not blessing.

Most of us fail to realize just how detestable empty or false worship is to God.

Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations -- I cannot bear your evil assemblies. Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Isaiah 1:13-15 (NIV)

Notice how strong God's language is here -- "*my soul hates*". The heart of God is repulsed by our insincere worship and He will not hear the prayers of those who worship in such a manner. A similar passage is given in Amos. Notice the phrase "*take away from me the noise of your songs*". Again, the heart of God is repulsed by insincere worship.

I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them. Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. Amos 5:21-24 (ESV)

Look carefully at the third commandment.

You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain. Exodus 20:7 (NASB)

To take the Lord's name in vain is to use it in an empty, or shallow, or frivolous, or unthinking, or false, or deceptive manner. (*Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Harris, Archer, Jr., and Waltke, page 908, and *The Complete Word Study Dictionary -- Old Testament*, Baker and Carpenter, page 1107.)

When we think of "taking the Lord's name in vain", we normally think of using one of God's names as a curse word. Using God's name in cursing certainly is taking His name in vain; however, taking God's name in vain is much broader than that. Any use of God's name in a light, frivolous, or incorrect manner is taking His name in vain and that is a violation of the third commandment. Worship that is shallow or frivolous and is not genuine is, in fact, taking God's name in vain. This is serious and it displeases God.

In many churches our "worship" is designed to please people. We want them to have a good time or to be entertained by the services. Music is often designed to appeal to the young people so that they will come to church. Often the kind of music used is simply based on the preference of the "worship leader". Biblical instructions such as worshiping in "spirit and in truth", and with reverence and a repugnance of evil, and exalting our holy God seem to play little or no part in the service. This should not be. It takes God's name in vain.

11. Preparing Ourselves for Worship

...let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts

sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

Hebrews 10:22 (NIV)

Hebrews 10:12 is a tremendous verse that we can use to prepare ourselves for worship. While the words “worship” or “praise” are not in this verse, it is certainly the heart of these verses.

“...let us draw near to God...”

This is a call to worship. Let us draw near to God. Confessing any known sin, and committing ourselves to serving, to loving, and to walking with Him and drawing near to Him, are all the very heart of worship.

“...with a sincere heart...”

Without a sincere heart there is no genuine worship. Without sincerity, it is only acting or pretending. It is hypocritical. We do not have to be perfect to worship God but we do have to be sincere. We sincerely want to exalt the Lord Jesus Christ rather than exalting ourselves. We cannot do both.

“...in full assurance of faith...”

In coming before God, we are confident that He exists and that He can be trusted to keep His word. As a result, we put our faith into practice by loving and being obedient to Him. Without faith in Him there is no genuine worship.

“...having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience...”

In Scripture, “heart” is a broad word which refers to our entire inner being, our mind, our attitudes, our emotions, our feelings, and our desires. It is who we are. A clean heart or a pure heart is one that has been made clean by the blood of Jesus. That person has learned, with the strength of the Spirit of God, to control his mind, passions, and desires. Now instead of desiring evil, he desires to worship and to praise our God and Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He comes to God with a clean conscience.

“...having our bodies washed with pure water.”

When we bring our thoughts and our feelings under control, we will also bring our physical bodies under control. Many sins are committed through our bodies. When we control our heart and our body and bring them under the control of the Spirit of God, then we are ready to bring God genuine praise and worship.

A verse similar to Hebrews 10:22 is found in James 4:8. This verse contains the promise that when we draw near to God, then He will draw near to us. Wow!!! What a blessing and a privilege. We can be near to the God of the universe and He is seeking our praise and our worship.

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. James 4:8 (NKJV)

As was stated at the beginning of this study, *the call to worship is a call to a deeper walk with God. It is a call to be in reverence and awe of God and to serve Him accordingly.*

Letters to the Seven Churches

To finish this study of a healthy Biblical church we will briefly look at the letters sent by our Lord, through the apostle John, to seven different local churches. These letters are recorded for us in the Word of God in the book of Revelation, chapters two and three. From these letters we can see and understand what pleased and what displeased our Lord about these churches. Although these churches existed about two thousand years ago, the message of all these letters is still critically important and applicable today.

To begin this important study, carefully read Revelation 1:9-20 several times. This is an awesome passage. The apostle John sees an amazing vision of our Lord Jesus Christ. This vision cannot be adequately described; it can only be read and marveled at. Here Jesus is presented in all His glory, in all His majesty, and in all His authority.

We may wonder why God gave John such a vision just before giving him the messages to the seven churches. While Scripture does not specifically say, it is a safe conclusion to say that Jesus wanted us to have a glimpse of His own glory, power, majesty, and authority before He gave these messages to the churches. These messages are not something to causally and lightly skim over. They are from the majestic, the glorious, and the powerful God -- the creator of the universe and of all life, including man himself. God is saying that this is important -- They are from Me, listen to what I have to say!!!

We need to carefully examine each message. He gives us these evaluations of seven different churches so that we can examine our own churches and determine how healthy we are as a church today.

Following are outlines of the message given to each church. I have personally found these outlines to be very enlightening as I put them together; however, they do not replace your own careful reading of the Word of God. To get the full value from these messages, you need to carefully read, think about, and absorb these messages out of the Bible itself.

Revelation 2:1-7 * Message to the Church at Ephesus

A. Positives about this church

- ...They worked hard.
- ...They persevered.
- ...They did not tolerate wicked men.
- ...They tested those who claimed to be apostles.
- ...They endured hardship.
- ...They hated the practices of the Nicolaitans. (The Nicolaitans denied the fundamentals of Scripture and they practiced a loose immoral lifestyle.)

B. Negatives about this church

- ...They had lost their first love.

- C. God's instructions to them
 - ...Remember from where you have fallen.
 - ...Repent.
 - ...Do the things you did at first.
- D. Warning to the church
 - ...Failure to repent will result in the church going out of existence.

Revelation 2:8-11 * Message to the Church at Smyrna

- A. Positives about this church
 - ...They suffered afflictions and poverty; yet they were rich.
 - ...They had been slandered.
 - ...They would suffer continued persecution, prison, and even death.
- B. Negatives about this church—**None**
- C. God's instructions to them
 - ...Be faithful, even to the point of death.
- D. Warning to the church—**None**

Revelation 2:12-17 * Message to the Church at Pergamum

- A. Positives about this church
 - ...They remained true to God's name.
 - ...They did not renounce their faith even when one of them (Antipas) was put to death.
- B. Negatives about this church
 - ...They tolerated the teachings of Balaam (free living and immorality).
 - ...They tolerated the teaching of the Nicolaitans. (The Nicolaitans denied the fundamentals of Scripture and they practiced a loose immoral lifestyle.)
- C. God's instructions to them
 - ...Repent.
- D. Warning to the church
 - ...If you do not repent, I will come and fight against you with the sword out of my mouth.

Revelation 2:18-28 * Message to the Church at Thyatira

- A. Positives about this church
 - ...They practiced right deeds.
 - ...They had love and faith.
 - ...They served and they persevered.

...They were doing more than they did at first.

B. Negatives about this church

...They tolerated a false teacher (the false prophetess, Jezebel).

...They tolerated immorality.

...They tolerated eating of food offered to idols.

C. God's instructions to them

...To those who tolerate Jezebel----repent.

...To those who do not tolerate Jezebel—hold on to what you have until I come.

D. Warning to the church

...I will cast Jezebel on a bed of suffering.

...I will make those who commit adultery with her to suffer intensely.

...I will strike her children dead.

Revelation 3:1-6 * Message to the Church at Sardis

A. Positives about this church

...They had a few people who had not soiled their clothes (by sin).

B. Negatives about this church

...They had a reputation for being alive, but they were dead.

C. God's instructions to them

...Wake up.

...Strengthen what remains, what is about to die.

...Remember what you received.

...Obey.

...Repent.

D. Warning to the church

...I (Jesus) will come against you like a thief (when you do not expect it).

Revelation 3:7-13 * Message to the Church at Philadelphia

A. Positives about this church

...God had given them an open door that no one could shut.

...They had a little strength.

...They had kept God's Word.

...They had not denied the name of God.

...They had kept God's command to patiently endure.

B. Negatives about this church---**None**

- C. God's instructions to them
...Hold on to what you have.
- D. Warning to the church---**None**

Revelation 3:14-22 * Message to the Church at Laodicea

- A. Positives about this church---**None**
 - B. Negatives about this church
 - ...They were neither hot nor cold.
 - ...They were lukewarm.
 - ...They thought themselves rich and had acquired wealth, but they were wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked.
 - C. God's instructions to them
 - ...Buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.
 - ...Be earnest and repent.
 - ...Invite Him to come in and eat with you.
 - D. Warning to the church---
 - ...I am about to spit you out of my mouth...
-