

# *Life in the Father's House*

Pastor Scott Estell

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This study is based on the book, *Life in the Father's House: A Member's Guide to the Local Church* by Wayne Mack and Dave Swavely

## Topics

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# *Introduction*

“Here’s the church and here’s the steeple. Open the doors and see all the people.” When most people think of church, they think of a place (such as a building with a steeple) or an activity (going to church). However, the church is a group of people.

“...[Y]ou do not ‘go to church’ or ‘sit in church’—you are a part of the church ....”  
(Mack & Swavely, p. 12).

The English word, “church” comes from the Greek word, *kuriakos*, which means “belonging to the Lord” (which itself comes from the Greek word, *kurios*, meaning “lord”). This word is found in 1 Corinthians 11:20 (the Lord’s supper) and Revelation 1:10 (the Lord’s day). This is a reminder that the church belongs to God (cf. Matthew 16:18’s “I will build my church”; Acts 20:28’s, 1 Corinthians 1:2’s, and 2 Corinthians 1:1’s “the church of God”; and 1 Timothy 3:15’s “the house of God” and “church of the living God”).

The Greek word for church is *ekklesia* (from which we get such English words as “ecclesiology” and “ecclesiastical”). The word literally means “to call out” (the Greek preposition, *ek*, “out” + the Greek verb, *kaleo*, “to call”). In this respect, the church is a group of people called out by God from the world (1 Peter 2:9). In Acts 19, we see the word, *ekklesia* being used of an “assembly” (verses 32, 39, and 41), a reminder that the church is a group of people who assemble or congregate (see Acts 2:44’s “together,” Acts 20:7’s “came together,” Hebrews 10:25’s “not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together,” and James 2:2’s “assembly”). A Christian is not to be unchurched or de-churched. Michael Scott Horton (*Made in America*, p. 187) has called the term, “unchurched Christian” an oxymoron. R. Kent Hughes (*Disciplines of a Godly Man*, p. 152) has written: “So today, at the end of the twentieth century, we have a phenomenon unthinkable in any other century: churchless Christians.”

The word, *ekklesia* is used of the church over 100 times in the New Testament. It is occasionally used to describe the “universal” or “invisible” church, or the “body of Christ” (see Ephesians 1:22-23, 5:29-30, and Colossians 1:18), those saved during the church age, from the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2) to the Rapture. The overwhelming majority (approximately 90%) of the uses of the word, however, are in reference to the local church, a reminder that the body of Christ has a visible manifestation, that the church is ultimately a group of people who regularly assemble in a particular place.

## *Realizing the Importance of the Local Church*

As pointed out in the introduction to this study, inherent in the New Testament word for church (*ekklesia*) is assembly. If you are saved during the church age (from the Day of Pentecost to the Rapture), you are part of the body of Christ and are expected to be part of the visible manifestation of His body by being a part of a local assembly of believers, the local church. Furthermore, the local church of which you are to be a part is to have a place of priority, primacy, or preeminence in your life, because the local church is the primary means by which God is accomplishing His purposes in this, the church age.

The primacy of the local church is seen by the fact that the overwhelming majority (over 90%) of the references to the church in the New Testament are to the local church. Accordingly, the New Testament is dominated by books written to local churches and about the local church. Acts narrates the establishment and expansion of the local church. Paul's Epistles are written to local churches in Rome, Corinth (see 1 Corinthians 1:2's and 2 Corinthians 1:1's "unto the church of God which is at Corinth"), Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi (see Philippians 1:1's "bishops and deacons"), Colossae, and Thessalonica, as well as to individuals connected to local churches: Timothy in Ephesus (see the qualifications for bishops and deacons in 1 Timothy 3), Titus in Crete (see the qualifications for elders/bishops in Titus 1:5-9), and Philemon in Colossae (see Philemon 2's "church in thy house"). The author of Hebrews exhorts his readers not to forsake the assembling of themselves together (Hebrews 10:25). James writes his letter to those who assemble (see James 2:2) and speaks of the elders of the church (James 5:14). In Peter's first epistle, he speaks of elders and their flocks (see 1 Peter 5:1-4). John's Epistles were most likely written to a church or churches in the area of Ephesus (see 3 John 6, 9, and 10). And the book of Revelation was written primarily to seven local churches in the Roman province of Asia (see Revelation 1:4, 11, and chapters 2 and 3).

The primacy of the local church is also seen in specific texts of Scripture, including:

*1 Corinthians 3:16-17*

*Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.*

According to this text, the local church at Corinth (the pronouns used in this verse are plurals) is the holy of holies (the particular Greek word Paul uses is the one for this particular part of the temple) of God, the place where God dwells (cf. 2 Corinthians 6:16). Because the local church is so sacred in God's sight, He will destroy anyone who dares to defile it.

*1 Timothy 3:15*

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

Based on the preceding context (which gives qualifications for the local church offices of pastor and deacon), Paul is clearly speaking of the local church in this verse, which is the “pillar and ground of the truth.” In other words, the local church is the means by which God upholds the truth of His Word. Were it not for the local church, the Truth would collapse. The local church upholds the Truth by declaring It and by defending It (by disciplining those who are doctrinally deviant, Romans 16:17, 1 Timothy 1:19-20, 6:3-5, Titus 3:9-10, and 2 John 9-11; cf. Revelation 2:14-16 and 20). “Our own relationship to God and His truth is in mortal danger if church does not occupy its intended place in our lives” (Mack & Swavely, p. 27).

*Hebrews 10:23-25*

*Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.*

In a book that often warns its readers about the danger of apostatizing, the author of Hebrews implies that one of the means of persevering in the faith/belief and in faithfulness/behavior is the local church. Accordingly, John, in 1 John 2:19, says that those who left the local church showed that they were not part of the body of Christ/saved in the first place.

*“The Lord esteems the communion of his church so highly that he counts as a traitor and apostate from Christianity anyone who arrogantly leaves any Christian society, provided it cherishes the true ministry of Word and sacraments” (John Calvin, cited in Mack & Swavely, p. 20)*

The primacy of the local church is not as prominent today as it has historically been. Several reasons for this can be suggested:

- An increasingly anti-institutional mindset in American culture
- An increasingly individualistic mindset in American culture. Some see themselves as “Christian Lone Rangers who demonstrate their authenticity by riding not to church, but out to the badlands, reference Bible in hand, to do battle singlehandedly with the outlaw world” (R. Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man*, p. 152).
- The prevalence of the “parachurch.” The prefix, “para” means beside or alongside. A parachurch organization is, by definition, designed to come alongside the local church, to supplement it while being subservient to it. However, in many cases, the parachurch has superseded the local church, even

supplanting it and becoming a substitute for it. “The ‘Jesus Movement’ of the sixties and seventies had spawned hundreds of parachurch organizations devoted to proclaiming the Gospel and teaching the Bible, and in most cases those organizations redirected the focus of believers away from the local church. A generation of leaders was exercising their spiritual gifts in other contexts besides the assemblies they attended on Sunday. This parachurch ‘theft’ ....” (Mack & Swavely, p. 15). Rather than the parachurch, the Scriptures see the local church as central to missions (see Acts 13:1-3 and 14:27) and ministry<sup>1</sup> (see 1 Peter 4:10). “*The local church is God’s agency in the world transacting God’s business.*” Today’s extra-church organizations *must* find the goal and consummation of their earthly efforts in the local church. For them to do otherwise is to be out of harmony with the designs of Christ” (from the back cover of Earl Radmacher’s *The Nature of the Church*; emphasis publisher’s). “The Lord has given us the apostolic *message* we are to preach. He has also given the apostolic *method* which we are to follow. His method involves the establishment of local churches and the implementation of His work through the church ... [S]ome who preach the gospel have ... forsaken His method. Declaring that ‘the church has failed,’ they set up other organizations and methods that compete with the churches, and often criticize and oppose them. Money and people are diverted from the churches. Such programs cannot be justified Biblically” (Paul Jackson, *The Doctrine and Administration of the Church*, pp. 27-28; emphasis his).

*“The Church is the common mother of all the godly, which bears, nourishes, and governs in the Lord both kings and commoners; and this is done by the ministry. Those who neglect or despise this order want to be wiser than Christ. Woe to their pride!” (John Calvin, cited in R. Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man*, p. 153)*

*“If the church is central to God’s purpose ..., it must surely also be central to our lives. How can we take lightly what God takes so seriously? How dare we push to the circumference what God has placed at the center?” (John Stott, cited in Joshua Harris, *Stop Dating the Church*, pp. 64-65)*

*The local church is to be given “a sacred pre-eminence over all institutions of human origin” (from the words of many church covenants)*

*“Am I building my life around the church, or the church around my life?” (Ken Brown, “The Centrality of the Church: Part 3 of 3,” *Sola!*, June 2000, p. 3)*

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<sup>1</sup> “A spiritual gift is to be exercised within the ministry and outreach of the local church. Since the only legitimate, visible, and organized expression of the Body Church is in local churches, the function and exercise of the spiritual gifts is in that sphere. While the larger body may benefit from the gifts, i.e., more than the members of the local church of which the believer is a member, the exercise of spiritual gifts, as in all spiritual endeavors in this dispensation, is to be under the aegis of the local church” (Rolland McCune, “Systematic Theology 3” class notes, p. 214).

*“... [T]he Church must be at the very center of your life” (R. Kent Hughes, Disciplines of a Godly Man, p. 176)*

*“...[T]he church is the primary means through which God accomplishes His plan in the world. It is His ordained instrument for calling the lost to Himself and the context in which He sanctifies those who are born into His family. Therefore God expects (and even demands) a commitment to the church from everyone who claims to know Him”  
(Mack & Swavely, p. 21)*

## *Committing Ourselves to Church Membership*

Once a person is saved, he or she automatically becomes a member of the body of Christ (or what some have called the “universal” or “invisible” church), those saved during the church age, from the Day of Pentecost to the Rapture. Unlike membership in this group, however, membership in its visible expression, the local church is not automatic. One must choose to become a member of a local church. Is such a choice optional or obligatory? To a seemingly increasing number of professing believers in America, membership in a local church is not necessary. A headline from the June 2011 issue of Life Action Ministries’ *Revive* magazine read: “20 million Americans say they are Christians but they simply don’t want to be part of the church.” Many claim to be believers, but do not want to be belongers (Joshua Harris, *Stop Dating the Church*, p. 16).

Why is this so? Several reasons may be suggested:

- A lack of explicit mention of church membership in Scripture. Taking an encyclopedic view of the Bible, some think that the absence of a chapter and verse on church membership settles the issue. However, it must be remembered that the books of the New Testament were occasional, meaning that the writing of each was occasioned by a particular set of historical circumstances relating to the writer and especially to the recipients. The reason the New Testament does not directly address the issue of church membership is because it was not an issue. Alva McClain (cited in Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity*, 3:225) once said: “The necessity of membership in the local church is never questioned in the New Testament. It is taken for granted. Had we asked the believers of the Apostolic period whether it was essential to join a church, they would not have known what we were talking about. Every believer became a member of a church. It was involved in the very profession he made in Christ.” Several other writers concur:

*“In the New Testament there is no such person as a Christian who is not a church member” (Douglas Millar, quoted in Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines Within the Church*, p. 49).*

*“The concept of a believer who was not a member of a local church is completely foreign to Acts and the Epistles” (Paul Downey, *More Than Spectators: Fulfilling Your Role in the Local Church*, p. 32) and “...Acts and the Epistles assume that every believer would join the membership of a local church” (Downey, p. 33; emphasis his).*

*“The New Testament knows of no Christians who are not accountable members of local churches ...” (John Piper, July 2008, source unknown).*

*“In the early church, when a person responded to the gospel of Jesus Christ, he was added to the church. There was no question whether he ought to join the local assembly; this was taken for granted” (Henry Thiessen, Lectures in Systematic Theology, p. 317).*

*“The New Testament knows of no believer who does not submit himself for baptism and join the local church” (Earl Radmacher, The Nature of the Church, p. 190) and “... [T]he New Testament knows ... of no regenerate person who is not a member of a local church” (Radmacher, p. 342).*

*“It is assumed in the NT that a member of the body of Christ is also a member of a local church. An unbaptized, unaffiliated Christian is not allowed for in the NT” (Rolland McCune, “Systematic Theology 3” class notes, p. 76).*

*“... Christians who disdain membership, are aberrations in the history of the Christian Church and are in grievous error” (R. Kent Hughes, Disciplines of a Godly Man, p. 153).*

*“People who are not members of a church should be treated like unbelievers, because they are treating themselves as unbelievers” (Jay Adams, quoted in Mack & Swavely, p. 37).*

*“...[W]hile membership in the church is not a prerequisite of salvation, it is a necessary consequence of salvation” (R.B. Kuiper, quoted in Mack & Swavely, p. 40)*

Is the Scripture silent regarding the matter of church membership? Consider the following:

- The practice of churches keeping a roll is not without precedent. According to 1 Timothy 5:9, there was a roll of widows eligible for benevolence.<sup>2</sup>
- Those who were saved on the Day of Pentecost were “added” to the local church in Jerusalem (Acts 2:41 and 47).

*R. B. Kuiper (cited in Mack & Swavely, pp. 39-40, emphasis Kuiper’s) says in regards to Acts 2:47: “Not only does the Lord Christ require of those who are saved that they unite with the church; He Himself joins them to the church. And the reference is unmistakably to the visible church.”*

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<sup>2</sup> The KJV speaks of these widows as being “taken into the number.” The NASB and NIV speaks of them as being “put on the list.” The ESV speaks of them as being “enrolled.”

- Not only do we see the adding of individuals to the local church in the New Testament, but also the subtraction, through church discipline. In a context of church discipline in 1 Corinthians 5, there is a clear demarcation made between “them also that are without” (verse 12) / “them that are without” (verse 13) and “them that are within” (verse 12; cf. verse 13’s “put away from among yourselves”), indicating that there was a clear understanding of who was part of the local church at Corinth (and, therefore, responsible to exercise church discipline) and who was not. Furthermore, how could the local church at Corinth effectually excommunicate the man in question if he was not already a member of their church? As Mack & Swavely (p. 45; emphasis theirs) write: “... [H]ow can we officially put the offending party *out* of the church if he or she has never officially entered into it?”
- Following the deaths of Ananias & Sapphira in Acts 5, we read that “of the rest [dared] no man join himself to them [the local church in Jerusalem]” (Acts 5:13). The Greek verb translated “join” in this verse has the idea of “to glue or cement together, to unite, to join firmly” (Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines Within the Church*, p. 46), to “associate with on intimate terms” (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, p. 441). Such terminology strongly suggests a formal membership commitment.
- God is a God of order (1 Corinthians 14:33) and, therefore, orders that His church function orderly (1 Corinthians 14:40). The practice of formal membership is an application of this principle of orderliness.
- Unconcern about commitment. American culture is increasingly becoming non-committal. Just as there are those who want the benefits of cohabitation without the accompanying responsibilities of marriage, so there are those who want the benefits of the local church without the accompanying responsibilities of membership. “Eric Lane says that the believer’s relationship to the church is analogous to a marriage. He likens Christians who refuse church membership to a man and woman who merely declare themselves married and move in together without ever submitting to a legal marriage ceremony” (Mack & Swavely, p. 51).
- An aversion to accountability. Just as our culture is becoming increasingly unconcerned about commitment, so it is becoming increasingly against accountability. Both of these are areas in which Christians need to be counter-cultural, rather than conforming to the culture (Romans 12:1). By becoming a member of a local church, one places himself under the accountability of that church and subjects himself to its discipline, if and as needed (Matthew 18:15-17).

*“... [A]n unwillingness to join a local church is tantamount to saying we are not interested in divine accountability in our lives” (Mack & Swavely, p. 51)*

- A bad experience at a past church. Remember, however, the wrong of another does not release us from the responsibility to do right.

By committing oneself to church membership, one is committing to various responsibilities, such as:

- Assembling (Hebrews 10:25)/congregating/gathering (Acts 14:27)/coming together (Acts 2:44 and 20:7)
- Giving monetarily (1 Corinthians 16:1-2)
- Serving (Galatians 5:13 and 1 Peter 4:10). No “pew potatoes.”
- Fellowshiping (Acts 2:42), reflected in the many “one another” commands in the New Testament, such as:
  - Admonish one another (Romans 15:14; cf. Hebrews 3:13 and 10:25)
  - Love one another (John 13:34-35 and 1 Thessalonians 4:9)
  - Forbear and forgive one another (Colossians 3:13; cf. Ephesians 4:32)
  - Confess to and pray for one another (James 5:16)
  - Bear one another’s burdens (Galatians 6:2)
  - Be hospitable one to another (1 Peter 4:9)
  - Edify and encourage one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

Fellow believers are members one of another (Romans 12:5). By committing ourselves to membership in a body of believers, we are able to effectively give expression to and evidence of this reality.

# *Choosing a Good Church*

Having had the importance of the local church impressed upon us and having considered the case for committing in membership to one, the question then becomes, To what kind of local church should one commit? The short answer is: A good one. This begs the question, What makes a church a good church?

In order for a church to be a good church, it must first truly be a church. According to the Reformers, a true church was characterized by the proper preaching of the Word, the proper observance of the ordinances, and the practice of church discipline. In regards to the first (the proper preaching of the Word), Mack & Swavely (pp. 257-258) write: “In our consideration of churches, we must therefore eliminate many of the denominations and movements that call themselves ‘Christian,’ because they simply do not conform to the apostles’ teaching. They either have subtracted from it by embracing liberal theology (as in the case of most mainline Protestant denominations), or they have contradicted it by adding tradition or further ‘revelation’ (which is true of the cults and Roman Catholicism). Such churches are not true churches at all, and Bible-believing Christians should not be a part of them.” Paul Jackson (*The Doctrine and Administration of the Church*, p. 26) concurs: “... ‘[C]hurches’ that are in any of the various cults or modernism or other serious error are not true churches.” In regards to the third (the practice of church discipline), Mack & Swavely (pp. 69-70), referencing Jay Adams, speak of a “no church,” in other words, a church that is not truly a church, because of its refusal to practice church discipline, adding (p. 70): “‘No church’ is a strong term, but it is an appropriate one, because no matter how often a group of people call themselves a church, it means nothing if they are not functioning as a church, according to God’s instructions.” They also say (p. 258): “Because church discipline is so clearly commanded in Scripture and yet so infrequently practiced, it serves as an especially good test of the quality of any particular church (see 2 Cor. 2:9). Simply asking the church leaders if they practice church discipline will often reveal whether that church is worthy of further consideration.”

According to Rolland McCune (*A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity*, 3:219-220), the local church of the New Testament is composed of those who are: 1) true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 2:41, 47); 2) baptized (immersed) in water as a public testimony (Matthew 28:19, Acts 2:41); 3) organized with the biblical officers of pastor and deacons (Philippians 1:1, 1 Timothy 3:1-13); 4) sharing a common faith or body of biblical truth (Acts 2:42, Jude 3); 5) observing the ordinances of baptism and communion (Matthew 26:26-30, 28:19, Acts 2:41-42); 6) carrying out the great commission (Matthew 28:18-20); and 7) meeting at regular and stated times (John 20:19, 26, Acts 20:7, 1 Corinthians 16:2, Hebrews 10:25).

The previous two paragraphs are designed to help us think through, historically and, more importantly, biblically, what makes a church a church. In order to be a good church, a church must first actually be a church.

So, what makes a church a good church? It may be said that a good church has:

- A proper position

This should be the primary consideration when choosing a church. A good church has beliefs that are based on the Bible alone. As mentioned previously, a “church” whose beliefs are based on sources other than the Bible or in addition to the Bible is not a true church and, therefore, not a good church. Furthermore, as also mentioned previously, a “church” whose beliefs are biblically bogus is also not a true church and, therefore, not a good church. Such “churches” include those that are theologically liberal or modernist, which deny such fundamental doctrines as the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture and the deity of Christ.

A good church also has:

- Proper practice

Biblical beliefs are to beget biblical behaviors. In a good church, the Bible has true authority, not just titular authority, as explained by Mack & Swavely (pp. 60-61; emphasis theirs): “Unfortunately, our churches today often give the Bible *titular authority* rather than *functional authority*. Many of them relegate the Word of God to a role not unlike that of the Queen of England. She has the title of a ruler but participates very little in the actual governing decisions of the country. The real power and influence reside in the Prime Minister and in Parliament. Similarly, many churches today prominently display the Bible and claim to believe it, but when it comes to the everyday functions of the church, the Bible is not their final authority.”

Such proper practices include, as previously mentioned, church discipline, which helps a church protect its proper position and practices on an intra-church level. On an inter-church level, such protection is practiced by ecclesiastical separation, both on a first degree/primary level (separation from unbelieving churchmen who deny the fundamentals of the faith) and on a second degree/secondary level (separation from believing churchmen who disobediently do not practice first degree/primary separation or who engage in improper practices, such as speaking in tongues).

A good church also has:

- Proper polity

Because we are a Baptist church, we believe in (and seek to consistently practice) Baptist polity. Such polity flows out of and is found in what are called the Baptist distinctives, the beliefs that, collectively, distinguish Baptists from other groups, which include:

**B**—Bible as our only authority for belief and behavior. The Bible is the Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16) and is sufficient (2 Timothy 3:17).

**A**—Autonomy of the local church. Each church is autonomous, or self-governing.

**P**—Priesthood of the believer. Every believer has direct access to God (Hebrews 4:16). No human mediator, such as a priest, is needed for the confession of sin, interpretation of Scripture, etc.

**T**—Two ordinances: water baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Baptism is for believers only and is by immersion only. The Lord’s Supper is a memorial of the death of Christ.

**I**—Individual soul liberty. Belief and behavior is the prerogative of the individual (see, for example, Romans 14:5 and 12) and, therefore, cannot be coerced by the state.

**S**—Saved church membership. The visible church is to be comprised only of those who have personally professed faith in Christ (see Acts 2:41 and 47).

**T**—Two offices: pastor and deacon (Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3:1-13)

**S**—Separation of church and state. No state church. The church and state (Romans 13:1-7) have separate realms of God-given responsibility (see Matthew 22:21//Mark 12:17//Luke 20:25).

A good church also has:

- A proper purpose

Mack & Swavely (p. 64) rightly remind us that “the church ... was created predominately for His honor and not for our happiness (Eph. 3:21).” See also Colossians 1:18, 1 Peter 2:9, and 4:10-11). Man-centered churches (such as those that are “market-driven”—in their music, etc.) are missing the mark.

A good church also has:

- Proper pursuits

What is a church collectively called to accomplish? What is its mission? According to Scripture, the church is to pursue:

- The exaltation of God/worship

*And they continued steadfastly<sup>3</sup> in ... [the] breaking of bread, and in [the] prayers. And fear came upon every soul ... (Acts 2:42-43; cf. Acts 2:47's "praising God")*

The worship of the church is to include:

- Singing (Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16; cf. Psalm 100:2b)
  - Reading of Scripture (1 Timothy 4:13; cf. Colossians 4:16 and 1 Thessalonians 5:27)
  - Praying (Acts 2:42; cf. Acts 4:23-31, 12:5, and 12)
  - Giving offerings (1 Corinthians 16:2)
  - Preaching the Word (Acts 20:7; cf. 1 Timothy 4:13's "exhortation")
  - Observing the ordinances: baptism (Acts 2:41; cf. Matthew 28:19) and the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:42; cf. 1 Corinthians 11:17-34)
  - Exercising spiritual gifts (Romans 12:1; cf. Romans 12:6-8)
- The edification of the saved/instruction and fellowship

*"And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine"*  
*(Acts 2:42)*

Instruction is an integral part of the Great Commission (see Matthew 28:20's "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you"). Mack & Swavely (p. 57) write: "A good test of the soundness of a particular church is whether it could be open to that kind of criticism (that there is 'too much teaching')."

*"And they continued steadfastly in ... [the] fellowship"*  
*(Acts 2:42; cf. Acts 2:44-46)*

Fellowship in the church includes:

- Praying together (Acts 4:24)
- Serving together in a particular ministry or on a particular ministry project (see the entire book of Philippians, especially 1:5)
- Helping a fellow member in financial difficulty (Acts 2:45 and 4:34-35; cf. Acts 11:27-30)
- Bearing one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2; cf. 1 Corinthians 12:26 and 1 Thessalonians 5:11)

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<sup>3</sup> Mack & Swavely (p. 55) say that the verb translated "continued steadfastly" in Acts 2:42 literally means "to be strong towards."

- The evangelization of the unsaved/evangelism

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

This is also an integral part of the Great Commission (see Matthew 28:19’s “teach [or “make disciples of,” ESV] all nations”; cf. Luke 24:47 and Acts 1:8)

Mack & Swavely (in chapter 3) describe these pursuits as a devotion to the apostles’ teaching, a God-centered focus, and a loving concern for the needs of people, both for others in the body of Christ and for those outside the body of Christ. The proper pursuits of the local church do not include political activism and social benevolence (though benevolence is to be practiced within the congregation). Believers may, however, individually pursue political activism, as well as social benevolence beyond the congregation.

A good church also has:

- Proper people (as the church is the people)

This includes pastors who are qualified (see 1 Timothy 3:1-7, 2 Timothy 2:24, and Titus 1:5-9, which includes primarily character qualifications, but also competency qualifications—1 Timothy 3:2’s, 2 Timothy 2:24’s, and Titus 1:9’s ability to teach and 1 Timothy 3:4-5’s and Titus 1:6’s ability to effectively shepherd his home and, therefore, the church). It also includes deacons who are qualified (see 1 Timothy 3:8-13) and members who are committed (attending, giving, serving, etc.).

A good church also has:

- Proper programs

While this is relatively the least important<sup>4</sup> of the aforementioned qualities of a good church, programs do help the church “put shoe leather” to its pursuits. A good church seeks to consistently and effectively implement its pursuits by its programs. A church that elevates programs (or personalities or preferences) to the place of preeminence is not a good church.

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<sup>4</sup> The position and pursuits of the church are primary, foundational, and non-negotiable (an inflexibility of foundation), while its programs, policies, and procedures are secondary and somewhat (within biblical parameters) flexible (a flexibility of function), based upon a particular church’s era, area, congregation, etc.

## *Relating to Church Leadership*

In Philippians 1:1, the apostle Paul identifies three groups of people in a local church: “all the saints ... with the bishops [or pastors] and deacons.” In so doing, he both implies that the officers of the church (the pastors and deacons) are part of the church and set apart within the church. In other words, they are both laity and leaders.<sup>5</sup> That God has called some of the laity of the church to be leaders is also seen in several spiritual gift passages. For example, in Romans 12:4-8, Paul speaks of the equality of the members of the local church (vs. 4a and 5), while at the same time speaking of the differing functions of its members (vs. 4b and 6a), with such functions including the function of leadership (v. 8’s “he that ruleth”). Paul does the same in 1 Corinthians 12:12-30: equality of all (vs. 12-13, 20b, and 25-26), yet differing functions (vs. 14f), including leadership (v. 28’s “governments”). This is a reminder that leaders in the church are ultimately laity; pastors are parishioners. What sets pastors apart is the responsibility to rule that is required of their role. Being parishioners, they are inherently of no more worth than any other member of the body. Being pastors, they have a different work. They are different in position, not in person.<sup>6</sup>

That the work of the pastor includes leadership is seen by the various titles for the office. The word, “pastor” means shepherd. As such, a pastor leads a flock (see 1 Peter 5:1-4, including v. 2’s “oversight”; cf. Acts 20:28’s “overseers”), as a shepherd leads a flock of sheep (see John 10:3-4; cf. Psalm 23:2b and 3b). A pastor is also a “bishop” (Philippians 1:1, 1 Timothy 3:1-2, and Titus 1:7), which means overseer<sup>7</sup> (see Acts 20:28 and 1 Peter 5:2; cf. Hebrews 13:17’s “watch”) or superintendent (cf. 1 Timothy 3:4-5’s emphasis on ruling). A pastor is also an “elder” (Acts 14:23, 20:17, 1 Timothy 5:17, 19, Titus 1:5, James 5:14, and 1 Peter 5:1), which means president (cf. 1 Timothy 5:17’s “elders that rule well”). The pastor’s responsibility to lead/rule (and the corresponding responsibility of his parishioners to follow/obey/submit) is explicitly expressed in such passages as 1

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<sup>5</sup> Bear in mind that, consistent with Matthew 25:21, Luke 16:10, and 1 Timothy 3:6, before becoming a leader in the church, a pastor was only part of the laity, having had to learn to himself be a follower of his pastor’s leadership.

<sup>6</sup> This same dynamic (equality of worth/person, inequality of work/position) is found in the Trinity and in the home (see 1 Corinthians 11:3). Rolland McCune (*A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity*, 3:230; emphasis his) makes such a distinction: “A pastor ... has more *ministerial* authority, or leadership authority, by virtue of his office. However, as a *member* of the body, he has no more authority than another. He has only one vote like everyone else.”

<sup>7</sup> That a pastor is an overseer is a reminder that his perspective is broader than others in the congregation, a factor that should be taken into account when one considers calling a decision he makes into question. All things being equal, by virtue of his position, he is the most qualified person in the congregation to make a decision that is in the best interest of the body as a whole.

Thessalonians 5:12, 1 Timothy 3:4-5, 5:17, and Hebrews 13:17 (cf. Hebrews 13:7 and 24).<sup>8</sup>

Pastoral authority is not absolute, as a pastor is accountable to the congregation of which he is a member, subject to its rebuke<sup>9</sup> (1 Timothy 5:20) and to removal by it if he is unrighteous and remains unrepentant. More ultimately, he is accountable to the Chief Shepherd, of Whom he is an undershepherd (1 Peter 5:3-4; cf. Titus 1:7's "as the steward of God," Hebrews 13:17, and James 3:1). Pastoral authority is also restricted, pertaining to "the affairs of the church" (1 Timothy 5:17, NIV). Mack & Swavely (p. 256; emphasis theirs) flesh this out: "Some may claim that the elders of a church only have authority in matters specifically commanded in Scripture, but it seems quite unnecessary to have commands to submit to *them* [such as in Hebrews 13:17] if they are only enforcing what Scripture has already said. The fact is, for the church to function properly, leaders need to make many decisions about matters not addressed directly in Scripture (such as worship times, funds distribution, and musical styles)." If a pastor gives a directive pertaining to the affairs of the church, a parishioner must submit to it, but if he gives a directive not pertaining to the affairs of the church, a parishioner is not subject to it.<sup>10</sup>

The manner in which a pastor is to exercise leadership is to be authoritative, but not authoritarian. He is to direct without being domineering or a dictator. He is to lead, not lord over (1 Peter 5:3). He is not to be a Diotrefes (see 3 John 9-10). His leadership is to be strong, not stifling. While leading, he is to be serving (see Matthew 20:20-28//Mark 10:35-45, Luke 22:24-27, and John 13:1-17). Pastors are ministers.

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<sup>8</sup> The Greek word translated "rule" in Hebrews 13:7, 17, and 24 is used in Acts 7:10 to describe Joseph's position as governor/prime minister in Egypt. It was also used in the Greek literature of the day to describe a man in any leadership position, such as a military commander. According to Mack & Swavely (p. 76), the word is used 24 times in the New Testament to refer to secular authorities and is usually translated "governor."

<sup>9</sup> The public rebuke of a pastor, as with the public rebuke of any parishioner (Matthew 18:16), is restricted to matters that can be independently corroborated by at least two witnesses (1 Timothy 5:19).

<sup>10</sup> Of course, if a pastor, like anyone else, gives a directive that is an explicitly biblical one, whether pertaining to the affairs of the church or not, a parishioner is to submit to it, while if he, like anyone else, gives a directive that is explicitly an unbiblical one, whether pertaining to the affairs of the church or not, a parishioner is not to submit to it (see Acts 5:29). While a pastor is not to command when it comes to matters not pertaining to the affairs of the church, he certainly can still counsel. As Mark Snoeberger ("Doctrine 5: Ecclesiology and Angelology" class notes, p. 30) writes: "...[A] pastor has no right to order individuals in his congregation to buy Chevrolet model cars and not Ford or Toyota products. However, he may rightly advise a man not to purchase an extravagant car that will strap him financially and limit his giving or attendance (because he has to moonlight every Sunday to pay for the car)."

Relating properly to a pastor as a parishioner includes following his leadership as he follows the Lord (1 Corinthians 11:1)/deferring to his directives and decisions. Since he primarily leads as he feeds (1 Thessalonians 5:12, 1 Timothy 5:17, and Hebrews 13:7), this would include a consistent and conscientious effort to hear and heed his teaching and preaching. This is a blessing to the pastor and is best for the parishioner, a win-win (Hebrews 13:17).

Relating properly to a pastor as a parishioner also includes respecting and remunerating/paying proper respect to and appropriately paying those pastors who do not shirk their work, primarily the work of the Word (see 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 and 1 Timothy 5:17-18).

Relating properly to a pastor as a parishioner also includes praying for your pastor. From the life of Paul, we see the principle of leaders praying for their followers (see Romans 1:9, Ephesians 1:16, Philippians 1:4, Colossians 1:3 and 9, 1 Thessalonians 1:2, and 2 Thessalonians 1:11), as well as followers praying for their leaders (see Romans 15:30, 2 Corinthians 1:11, Ephesians 6:19, Philippians 1:19, Colossians 4:3, 1 Thessalonians 5:25, and 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2). Pray for your pastor's perseverance (Luke 22:31-32, John 17:11, and 1 Thessalonians 5:23-25); for his purity (Philippians 1:10-11 and Colossians 1:10): doctrinally, philosophically, practically, and morally; for his protection: from the evil one (John 17:15) and from evil men (Romans 15:30-31 and 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2); and for his proclamation, that it would be: correct (2 Timothy 2:15), complete (Acts 20:27), clear (Colossians 4:3-4), courageous (Acts 4:29 and Ephesians 6:19-20), convincing (Titus 1:9), and without constraint (2 Thessalonians 3:1)

One final note: Relating properly to a pastor as a parishioner does not require absolute agreement on the interpretation of every text in Scripture or on respective positions on matters of personal preference. Pastors and parishioners do not need to see eye-to-eye in the dotting of every "i," nor do they always have to agree in the crossing of every "t" (Romans 14:5).

## *Fulfilling Our Roles as Men and Women*

In the previous study in this series (“Relating to Church Leadership”), the point was made that all members of a local church are equal in terms of their worth, though God may call and equip them to do different work (such as the work of pastor); that they are equal in person, though they may be different in position, with a priority in position not equaling a superiority of person. This distinction, rooted in the Trinity<sup>11</sup>, not only holds true in relation to pastors and other parishioners, but also in relation to men and women in the church. While there is an equality of essence between the two (see Genesis 1:26-27, Galatians 3:28, and 1 Peter 3:7), there is a difference in duty.<sup>12</sup> This also holds true in the home (see Ephesians 5:22-24 and 33b, Colossians 3:18, Titus 2:5, and 1 Peter 3:1-6).

In relation to one another in the church<sup>13</sup>, men are to lovingly lead, while women are to sweetly submit to their leadership (see 1 Corinthians 11:3 in its context). Accordingly, the official leadership positions in the church, pastor and deacon, are to be male only. In regards to the first, the qualification lists for the office of pastor in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 consistently use Greek words that are masculine in gender. Our reliable English translations, such as the NASB, clearly bring this out: “man” (1 Timothy 3:1); “he” (1 Timothy 3:1); “He” (1 Timothy 3:4); “his” (twice in 1 Timothy 3:4); “man” (1 Timothy 3:5); “his” (1 Timothy 3:5); “he” (1 Timothy 3:5); “he” (1 Timothy 3:6); “he” (twice in 1 Timothy 3:7); “man” (Titus 1:6); and “he” (Titus 1:9). Especially decisive in this regard is “husband of one wife” (as opposed to “wife of one husband”) in 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:6. The same phenomenon occurs in regards to the qualification lists for the office of deacon in Acts 6:1f and 1 Timothy 3:8-10 and 12-13: “men<sup>14</sup>” (Acts 6:3), “men” (1 Timothy 3:8); “men” (1 Timothy 3:10); and “husbands of only one wife” (1 Timothy 3:12).

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<sup>11</sup> The members of the Trinity are equal in essence/worth/being/person, but unequal in function/work/behavior/position and performance. The first has been referred to as the “ontological trinity” (see, for example, John 10:30), while the second has been referred to as the “economic trinity” (see, for example, John 14:28 and 1 Corinthians 11:3).

<sup>12</sup> Those who hold to this distinction have been called “complementarians,” while those who hold to the position that there is to be an equality of both essence and function have been called “egalitarians.”

<sup>13</sup> Mention has already been made regarding the Scripture’s explicit teaching on male headship in the home. While Scripture does not explicitly teach male headship in human government, Mack & Swavely (p. 98) point out that “in the two-thousand-year history of Israel recorded in the Old Testament, all ongoing leadership positions (like priests, kings, and the prophets who wrote Scripture) were filled by men.” Times when women assumed leadership of the theocracy (such as in the days of the judges) were exceptional and less than ideal (see Isaiah 3:12).

<sup>14</sup> The Greek word is the gender-specific Greek word for male.

Consistent with male headship in the church and the fact that the teaching of God's Word is an inherently authoritative function (see Matthew 7:29, 1 Timothy 4:11, and Titus 2:15), teaching of men in the church is to be done by men only (see 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-14<sup>15</sup>). This is not to say that women cannot do any teaching. Based on the example of Aquila & Priscilla in relation to Apollos in Acts 18:24-26, it appears that women can be involved in instructing men in such a private, two-on-one type of setting. Women teaching/mentoring other women is prescribed by Titus 2:3-5. Women certainly can and should teach their own children (as Proverbs 1:8 suggests and as Timothy's mother and grandmother evidently did, 2 Timothy 1:5 and 3:14), as well as the children of others.<sup>16</sup> The issue in regards to women teaching men is not one of competence, as if women are constitutionally incapable of doing so. Rather, the issue is one of God's command and the woman's contentment with the role that God has reserved especially for her.

Since the role of men in the church is leading and since leading can be done through teaching (see 1 Thessalonians 5:12, 1 Timothy 5:17, and Hebrews 13:7), men in the church ought to be seeking to be teachers/mentors<sup>17</sup> (Hebrews 5:12; cf. Acts 13:1, Romans 12:7, 1 Corinthians 12:28, and Ephesians 4:11), including teaching by example (John 13:14, Philippians 3:17, 1 Thessalonians 1:7, 2 Thessalonians 3:7-9, 1 Timothy 4:12, 2 Timothy 3:10, Titus 2:7, Hebrews 13:7, and 1 Peter 5:3; cf. the many character

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<sup>15</sup> There are some who suggest that Paul was accommodating himself to the male-dominated culture of his day and that, therefore, the commands of 1 Timothy 2:11-12 are culturally conditioned. However, notice that Paul roots his requirement in creation (verses 13-14), which was prior to the creation of culture. Paul's point in this passage is that women are not to be leaders in worship, but learners. By saying they are to do so "in silence" does not mean that they are not to say a word or be heard in worship, but that there is a certain way they are to worship, namely, with a quiet, rather than contentious, spirit (the same Greek word translated "silence" in verse 11 is translated "peaceable" earlier in the chapter, in verse 2). Just as they are to have such a demeanor when it comes to their appearance in worship (verses 9-10), so also they are to have such a demeanor when it comes to their position in worship, properly placing themselves under the headship of those divinely directed to lead in worship. The roles are not to be reversed. God's order is not to be overturned. Women are not to exceed their role, while men are not to recede from theirs. When this first happened, the result was regrettable (verse 14; cf. Genesis 3:16b).

<sup>16</sup> Mack & Swavely (p. 113) rightly remind that "women can make a tremendous contribution to the church and the world from the bottom up instead of from the top down." As an 1865 poem by William Ross Wallace read: "The hand that rocks the cradle is the hand that rules the world."

<sup>17</sup> Mack & Swavely (p. 100) ask: "Christian man, .... Are you developing your leadership skills in your personal life and in your home with the hope that God could use them for His glory in a local body of believers?" and write (p. 101): "Every man in the church should be intentionally developing and practicing his teaching skills ..."

qualifications in the pastor and deacon qualification lists in the New Testament, which are qualities that ought to characterize any and every Christian man).

Since leading includes leading by following, that is, showing others how to be followers, men in the church ought to follow their leaders. Pastors show how to follow by following Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1). Deacons show how to follow by being willing to serve as deacons and follow the lead of their pastors. The men of the church show the rest of the congregation how to follow by following the leadership of their pastors and deacons.

While the restriction of women being unable to teach men in the church might cause women in the church to view their role as a restrictive one, Mack & Swavely (p. 114) rightly remind that “women can never legitimately say that they have nothing to do for Christ until they have taught every needy child and every needy woman in the church and in their community everything they know about the Word of God.”

A final note: While most take 1 Timothy 3:11 as referring to the wives of deacons, there are some who see it as referring to a church office of deaconess<sup>18</sup> (cf. Romans 16:1). If so, this would be an additional potential role for women in the church.

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<sup>18</sup> So Rolland McCune (*A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity*, 3:267), Homer Kent (*The Pastoral Epistles*, revised edition, pp. 135-136), and Robert Saucy (*The Church in God's Program*, pp. 159-161).

# *Participating in Worship Services*

The nineteenth century British “prince of preachers,” Charles Spurgeon once wrote:

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

One of the pursuits of the church (these pursuits were pointed out in a previous lesson in this study, “Choosing a Good Church”) is the exaltation of God, or worship, as seen by the example of the first church, the church of Jerusalem, at its birth.

*And they continued steadfastly<sup>19</sup> in ...[the] breaking of bread, and in [the] prayers. And fear came upon every soul ... (Acts 2:42-43; cf. Acts 2:47’s “praising God”)*

If we are to properly participate in this pursuit, we need to know what it is, what it is to include, and how to improve our participation in it.

- An Explanation of Worship

The English word, worship was once spelled “worthship.” This helps us understand what worship is. Worship is any attitude, affection, or action that expresses the worth or value of who or what is worshipped. The only worthy object of worship is God (Revelation 4:11 and 5:12; cf. Romans 1:25). Worship is the response of all that we are to all that God is. It is giving God His due (1 Chronicles 16:29, Psalm 29:2, 90:11, 96:8, Jeremiah 10:7, and Malachi 1:6). It is giving Him glory and honor.

Worship is about and for God, not us. In recent decades, some churches have become man-centered/anthropocentric (rather than God-centered/theocentric), adopting a “market driven” philosophy of ministry and designing their worship services to be “seeker sensitive.” However, as Romans 3:11 clearly teaches, there are no such “seekers.” It is not man who seeks after God; rather, it is God who seeks after man (Luke 19:10 and John 4:23). David Platt writes (*Radical Together*, p. 108): “...[T]he Bible makes clear: ‘There is ... no one who seeks God.’ So if the church is sensitive to seekers, and if no one is seeking God, then that means the church is sensitive to no one” and (p. 109) “So let’s be radically seeker sensitive in our churches. But let’s make sure we are being sensitive to the right Seeker.”

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<sup>19</sup> Mack & Swavely (p. 55) say that the verb translated “continued steadfastly” in Acts 2:42 literally means “to be strong towards.”

- The Expression and Elements of Worship

Worship is an expression of exaltation, exalting God for His excellence. It is a response of reverence to the revelation and recognition of His reality. The expression or response may be private/personal/individual or public/collective, with the second taking place through the worship services of a local church.

According to Scripture<sup>20</sup>, the elements of such worship services should include:

- Singing (Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16; cf. Psalm 100:2b)
- Reading of Scripture (1 Timothy 4:13; cf. Colossians 4:16 and 1 Thessalonians 5:27)
- Praying (Acts 2:42; cf. Acts 4:23-31, 12:5, and 12)
- Giving offerings (1 Corinthians 16:2)
- Preaching the Word (Acts 20:7; cf. 1 Timothy 4:13's "exhortation")
- Observing the ordinances: baptism (Acts 2:41; cf. Matthew 28:19) and the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:42; cf. 1 Corinthians 11:17-34)
- Exercising spiritual gifts (Romans 12:1; cf. Romans 12:6-8)

The particular topic under study, "Participating in Worship Services" is a reminder that we are not merely to be present at worship services, but are to participate in them once we are present at them. And such participation is to be passionate, not passive.

- Enhancing Our Worship

Here are some pointers for improving our participation in worship services:

- Prepare

Preparation for each worship service begins at the conclusion of the previous one. By participating in private/personal worship throughout the week, one is preparing himself or herself for public worship at the start of the new one. Prepare by spending time in prayer for the services, both well before them and just before they begin (the prayer of Psalm 119:18 is a good one to pray). Prepare the soil of your heart for the seed you will

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<sup>20</sup> According to the "regulative principle" of worship, the elements of worship are regulated by Scripture, including only those elements that Scripture prescribes and/or describes. Those who do not hold to the regulative principle allow for any elements not specifically proscribed/prohibited in Scripture. The regulative principle of worship is articulated by the Westminster Confession of Faith: "The acceptable way of worshiping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshiped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture."

hear preached.<sup>21</sup> Eliminate or limit distractions, especially on Saturday night<sup>22</sup>, Sunday morning, and Sunday afternoon. Preparation includes purity (Psalm 15, 24:3-4, Isaiah 1:11-17, Matthew 5:23-24, and Hebrews 10:22). For example, purity is a prerequisite to being prepared for the preaching of God's Word (see Psalm 1:1-2, James 1:21, and 1 Peter 2:1-2). In the words of Amos 4:12, "prepare to meet thy God."

- Be present

One cannot participate in a worship service unless he or she is present at it. Unless you are truly providentially hindered from attending, be present at the place of worship. And, once there, be all there.

- Participate

Don't be a "pew potato." Participate passionately, as well as properly; in spirit, as well as in truth (John 4:23-24). Work at your worship.<sup>23</sup>

- Give musical offerings (Hebrews 13:15). Sing with gratitude (Colossians 3:16's "singing with grace"), gusto (Colossians 3:16's "singing with grace **in your hearts**"; cf. Ephesians 5:19's "singing

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<sup>21</sup> Charles Spurgeon (cited in Mack & Swavely, p. 129) once said: "We are told men ought not to preach without preparation. Granted, but we add, men ought not to *hear* without preparation. Which, do you think, needs the most preparation, the sower or the ground? I would have the sower come with clean hands, but I would have the ground well-plowed and harrowed, well-turned over, and the clods broken before the seed comes in. It seems to me that there is more preparation needed by the ground than by the sower, more by the hearer than by the preacher." In like manner, the 17<sup>th</sup> century Puritan, Richard Baxter (cited in R. Kent Hughes, *Spiritual Disciplines of a Godly Man*, p. 114) once wrote: "Make it your work with diligence to apply the word as you are hearing it .... Cast not all upon the minister, as those that will go no further than they are carried as by force .... You have work to do as well as the preacher, and should all the time be as busy as he ... therefore be all the while at work, and abhor an idle heart in hearing, as well as an idle minister."

<sup>22</sup> The 17<sup>th</sup> century Puritan, George Swinnock (cited in R. Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man*, p. 109) once wrote: "Prepare to meet thy God, O Christian! Betake thyself to thy chamber on the Saturday night .... The oven of thine heart thus baked, as it were, overnight, would be easily heated the next morning; the fire so well raked up when thou wentest to bed, would be the sooner kindled when thou shouldst rise. If thou wouldst thus leave thy heart with God on the Saturday night, thou shouldst find it with him in the Lord's Day morning."

<sup>23</sup> Mack & Swavely (p. 119) cite the following from Donald Whitney: "Modern man worships his work, works at his play, and plays at his worship."

and making melody **in your heart**”), and gladness (Psalm 100:2; cf. Psalm 95:1-2). Sing with your heart and with your head (1 Corinthians 14:15b). Participate by playing an instrument (Psalm 92:1-3, 98:5-6, and 150:3-6; cf. 1 Chronicles 15:16).

- Privately pray along with public prayers (Acts 1:14 and 4:24). Be praying during the preaching. Pray for God to be preeminent (Matthew 6:9).
- Give monetary offerings (see 1 Corinthians 16:2’s “every one of you”; cf. 1 Chronicles 16:29, Psalm 96:8, and Philippians 4:18). Give yourself first (Romans 12:1 and 2 Corinthians 8:5).
- Hear (Matthew 11:15//13:9//Mark 4:9//23, Mark 4:24//Luke 8:18, and Revelation 2:7//11//17//29//3:6//13//22; cf. Proverbs 23:12; contra Jeremiah 25:4) and heed (Matthew 7:24-27 and James 1:22-15) what is heralded. See yourself as an actor, not as an audience member.<sup>24</sup>
- Be present when the ordinances are being observed and participate in their observance (see 1 Corinthians 11:24’s “this do” and 25’s “this do ye”).
- Be serving in the worship services (1 Peter 4:10-11).

While worship is not about what I can get out of it, but about what I can give to God in it<sup>25</sup>, while giving to God in it we find ourselves getting much out of it. As with virtually anything in life, so with worship: you get out of it what you put into it. While personal benefit/blessing is not the purpose for which we worship (the primary purpose is to be a blessing to God—see, for example, Colossians 3:16’s “to the Lord” and 1 Peter

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<sup>24</sup> Soren Kierkegaard, a 19<sup>th</sup> century philosopher, once said something to the effect that when the average person hears a sermon, he views the preacher as the actor and himself as a member of the audience, silently critiquing the performance of the preacher, when in reality God is the audience, he is one of the actors, and the preacher is a prompter, reminding him of his lost lines.

<sup>25</sup> R. Kent Hughes (*Disciplines of a Godly Man*, p. 106) writes: “The telltale sign of this kind of thinking [a man-centered perspective of worship] is the common post-worship question, What did you think of the service today? The real questions ought to be, What did God think of it and of those who worshiped? And What did I give to God?” The 17<sup>th</sup> century Puritan, Stephen Charnock, likewise has said: “To pretend homage to God and intend only the advantage of self is rather to mock him than worship him. When we believe that we ought to be ... satisfied rather than God glorified ... we set God below ourselves. Imagine that He should submit His honor to our advantage! We make ourselves more glorious than God!”

4:11's "that God in all things may be glorified"; the secondary purpose is to be a blessing to others—see, for example, Colossians 3:16's "one another" and 1 Peter 4:10's "one to another"), we benefit/are blessed as a byproduct.

Prepare more purposefully. Be present more frequently. Participate more passionately. He is worthy.

## *Using our Spiritual Gifts*

In writing to the local church at Corinth in 1 Corinthians 12:1, the apostle Paul said: “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant.” He then takes three chapters to inform them about this issue. Some two thousand years later, ignorance remains. Explanation is still essential. While some are uninformed, others, though informed, are inactive, making exhortation to exercise one’s gifts equally essential.

- Explaining Spiritual Gifts

There are several spiritual gift lists in the New Testament, found in Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, 28-31, Ephesians 4:7-11, and 1 Peter 4:10-11. These lists, collectively, identify eighteen different gifts, nine temporary<sup>26</sup>, nine permanent. The nine permanent gifts are: teaching (Romans 12:7, 1 Corinthians 12:28-29, and Ephesians 4:11; cf. Acts 13:1 and 1 Peter 4:11), exhortation (Romans 12:8; cf. 1 Peter 4:11), evangelism (Ephesians 4:11), pastoring (Ephesians 4:11), ministry (Romans 12:7 and 1 Corinthians 12:28’s “helps”; cf. 1 Peter 4:11), giving (Romans 12:8), mercy (Romans 12:8), leadership (Romans 12:8’s “ruling” and 1 Corinthians 12:28’s “governments”), and faith (1 Corinthians 12:9). If these lists are not necessarily exhaustive, then there may be others. If so, such others would perhaps be subsets of these (for example, though one may not have the spiritual gift of pastoring, he or she may have the spiritual gift of shepherding and can, therefore, effectively shepherd a Sunday School class, etc.; the spiritual gift of ministry may be particularly multifaceted). Also,

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<sup>26</sup> The nine temporary gifts were apostleship, prophecy, miracles, healing, tongues, interpretation of tongues, distinguishing of spirits, wisdom, and knowledge. Because these were either revelatory gifts (apostleship, prophecy, tongues and interpretation of tongues, distinguishing of spirits, wisdom, and knowledge) or gifts that corroborated such revelation (miracles and healing; see Acts 14:3, 2 Corinthians 12:12 and Hebrews 2:3-4; cf. 1 Kings 17:24 and Acts 2:22), they ceased with the deaths of the apostles and the corresponding completion of the New Testament canon (see 1 Corinthians 13:8-10). In this regard, B.B. Warfield (*Counterfeit Miracles*, pp. 25-27) has written: “Miracles do not appear on the pages of Scripture vagrantly, here, there, and elsewhere indifferently, without assignable reason. They belong to revelation periods, and appear only when God is speaking to His people through accredited messengers, declaring His gracious purposes. Their abundant display in the Apostolic Church is the mark of the richness of the Apostolic age in revelation; and when this revelation period closed, the period of miracle-working had passed by also, as a mere matter of course . . . . Therefore it is that the miraculous working which is but the sign of God’s revealing power, cannot be expected to continue, and in point of fact does not continue, after the revelation of which it is the accompaniment has been completed.” Those who believe that all of the spiritual gifts are still operable today are called “continuationists,” while those who believe that some have ceased are called “cessationists.” This is one of the major differences between charismatics/Pentecostals and other groups, such as Baptists.

while some believers are especially equipped to excel in one or more of these areas, all believers are expected to engage in them. All believers should teach (at least privately and informally; Matthew 28:20 and Colossians 3:16), exhort (Romans 15:14, Colossians 3:16, 1 Thessalonians 5:11, and Hebrews 3:13), evangelize (Matthew 28:18-20, Luke 24:47, and Acts 1:8; cf. 2 Timothy 4:5), shepherd (Philippians 2:4<sup>27</sup>), minister (Galatians 5:13), give (1 Corinthians 16:2), be merciful (Luke 6:36), etc.

A spiritual gift may be defined as a Spirit-energized endowment graciously given by God (specifically, God the Son, Ephesians 4:7-11) to each and every believer at the moment of salvation for the glory of God and the good of others.<sup>28</sup> Let's develop the details of this definition:

- Spiritual gifts are energized by the Holy Spirit.

It is for this reason they are called “spiritual” gifts (1 Corinthians 12:1 and 14:1; cf. 1 Corinthians 12:7-11). The Holy Spirit activates the natural and nurtured abilities of a believer, whether previously dormant or active, and uses them for spiritual/supernatural ends. What God has already given now becomes God-driven.

- Spiritual gifts are endowments.

It is for this reason that they are called “gifts” (Romans 12:6, 1 Corinthians 1:7, 12:1, 4, 31, Ephesians 4:7-8, and 1 Peter 4:10). Literally, they are “grace gifts” (one of the Greek words used to describe them is *charismata*, used in Romans 12:6, 1 Corinthians 1:7, 12:4, 31, and 1 Peter 4:10, the root of which is the Greek word for grace, *charis*; cf. Romans 12:6, Ephesians 4:7, and 1 Peter 4:10). They are given (1 Corinthians 12:7-11, Ephesians 4:7, and 11), not gotten. They are received (1 Peter 4:10), not achieved. The ability (1 Peter 4:10) and the ability to use the ability (1 Peter 4:11) are given by God (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:28). Therefore, there is no basis for boasting about our abilities (see 1 Corinthians 4:7).

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<sup>27</sup> In Philippians 2:4, Paul commands the Philippian believers to look on the things of others. The Greek verb is *skopeo*, which means to look at attentively, fix one's attention on something with deep interest in it (Peter O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, p. 185). One of the New Testament words for a pastor is *episkopos* (“overseer”), from the verb *episkopeo* (*epi*, “over” + *skopeo*). Based on this verse, it is the responsibility of every church member (not just the pastoral staff) to look out for others in the congregation.

<sup>28</sup> Mack & Swavelly (p. 146) define spiritual gifts as “abilities that God has granted to Christians for the edification of others in the body and the evangelization of those outside the body.”

- Each and every believer has been enabled.

Each Christian has at least one spiritual gift (1 Corinthians 12:7, 11, Ephesians 4:7, and 1 Peter 4:10). No Christian can use inability as an excuse for inactivity.

- Spiritual gifts are for the ends of the glory of God and the good of others.

More specifically, these ends are: the exaltation of the Lord, the edification of one's local church, and the evangelization of the lost.

Since God is the giver of the gifts, He gets the glory for them (1 Peter 4:11). They are to be exercised so He will be exalted. Ministry is meant to magnify the Master.

While the primary purpose of spiritual gifts is vertical, secondary purposes are horizontal. Besides the evangelization of the lost (particularly in relation to the gift of evangelism), the horizontal purposes include the edification of the local church (1 Corinthians 12:7 and Ephesians 4:12-16).

- Exercising Spiritual Gifts

Believers' abilities are to be put into action (1 Peter 4:10; cf. Romans 12:7's "let us," Romans 12:8's "let him do it," 1 Corinthians 12:5's "administrations," 1 Corinthians 12:6's "operations," 1 Corinthians 12:7's "manifestation," Ephesians 4:12's "work," Ephesians 4:16's "working," 1 Timothy 4:14's "neglect not," and 2 Timothy 1:6's "stir up"). No pew potatoes! As stewards of our spiritual gifts (1 Peter 4:10), we will one day be held accountable for any failure to activate them. As Mack & Swavely (p. 155) mention, one church's Sunday bulletin reads:

"Staff—[The names of the pastoral staff]  
Ministers—Every Member"

They go on to add: "... [L]ife in the Father's house is not a spectator sport" (p. 162) and "...[E]very member should be a 'full-time minister' in the work of the local church" (p. 163).

Rolland McCune ("Systematic Theology 2" class notes, p. 214) reminds us that the local church is indeed the arena in and through which our abilities are to be activated: "A spiritual gift is to be exercised within the ministry and outreach of the local church. Since the only legitimate, visible, and organized expression of the Body Church is in local churches, the function and exercise of the spiritual gifts is in that sphere. While the larger Body may benefit from the gifts, i.e., more than the members of the local church of which the believer is a member, the

exercise of spiritual gifts, as in all spiritual endeavors in this dispensation, is to be under the aegis of the local church”

How does one discern what spiritual gift or gifts he or she may have? While there may be some value in filling out a formal “spiritual gift inventory” in order to discover what one’s gift or gifts may be, a simpler approach would be to ask oneself such questions as: What do I enjoy doing? What am I good at? and What have others asked me to do? Perhaps the best way to discern and discover one’s spiritual gift or gifts is simply to get involved in ministry wherever needed. Such involvement will quickly clarify where one’s capabilities lie.

If you would like a list of ministry opportunities available in our church, please see the pastor.

# *Confronting One Another in Love*

Confrontation. It's a concept that our individualistic, anti-invasive culture certainly does not invite. And it's one that causes even Christians to be uncomfortable. Yet, it's correct. It's caring. And it needs to be conducted correctly and with care.

- Confrontation is correct.
  - Confrontation is carried out throughout the canon of Scripture.

Confrontation was part of the fabric of biblical history from the very beginning, as God confronted Adam and Eve over their sin (Genesis 3:8f), then their son, Cain, over his sin (Genesis 4:6 and 9-12). As the Old Testament further unfolded, men of God confronted their fellow men over their sin, as Joshua did with Achan (Joshua 7:19f), as Samuel did with Saul (1 Samuel 13:11-14 and 15:13f), as Nathan did with David (2 Samuel 12:1-14), and as the priests, led by Azariah, did with Uzziah (2 Chronicles 26:17-21). In the New Testament, we see Christ confronting Peter (Matthew 16:21-23//Mark 8:31-33), Peter confronting Ananias & Sapphira (Acts 5:1-10), Paul confronting Peter (Galatians 2:11-14), and Paul calling out Euodias and Syntyche (Philippians 4:2-3).

- Christians are called to confront.

Not only are we given many examples in Scripture of those who confronted, including God the Father and God the Son, but also many exhortations to confront, both implicit and explicit.

*Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness: and let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head ... (Psalm 141:5)*

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

*Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY WORD MAY BE ESTABLISHED. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican (Matthew 18:15-17)*

*And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another (Romans 15:14)*

*Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly ... (1 Thessalonians 5:14)*

*And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother (2 Thessalonians 3:14-15)*

*A man that is [divisive] after the first and second admonition reject (Titus 3:10)*

- Christians are competent to confront.

Not only have Christians been called/commanded to confront, but they also have been equipped to do so. In Romans 15:14, Paul reminds the Roman believers (whom he calls “my brethren”) that they had both the moral maturity (“full of goodness”) and the mental maturity (“filled with all knowledge”—that is, the knowledge of God’s Word) to admonish one another. Each Christian ought to be becoming increasingly competent to credibly correct (through his or her moral maturity; see Galatians 6:1’s “ye which are spiritual”) and correctly correct (through his or her mental maturity; see 2 Timothy 3:16’s “for reproof, for correction”) a fellow Christian in need of correction. As with spiritual gifts (see the previous lesson in this study), so with this: inability is no excuse for inactivity. The question is not: Are we called/commanded to confront (we are). Nor is the question: Are we capable of confronting/competent to confront (we are). The question ultimately is: Do we care enough to confront?

- Confrontation is caring.

As has already been pointed out, confronting is godly (God did it); it is Christian/Christ-like (Christ did it). Why does God confront His children when they are in need of correction? It is because they are His children and, thus, He cares for them (Proverbs 3:11-12, Hebrews 12:5-6, and Revelation 3:19a). Confronting and caring are complementary concepts, not contradictory ones. Paul confronted the Corinthians because of his care for them (see 2 Corinthians 2:4).

Confronting is caring because its concern is correcting, and correcting keeps one from being condemned by his or her corruption (see James 5:19-20; cf. 1 Corinthians 5:5 and 11:32).

- Confrontation is to be carried out correctly and with care.

If confrontation is carried out incorrectly and/or uncaringly, it can cause more harm than good. Scripture gives us several principles for practicing it properly.

- Cover instead of confront, if and when you can (Proverbs 10:12, 17:9, 19:11, and 1 Peter 4:8).

Our first response when wronged ought to be to absolve the one who did the wrong by absorbing the wrong.

While some sins can be covered, others cannot.<sup>29</sup> Which sins cannot/should not be covered?<sup>30</sup>

- Sins that produce problems between people because one or more of the people find passing over the problem impossible (Matthew 5:23-24 and 18:15<sup>31</sup>)
- Sins that are public (1 Timothy 5:20)

A wrong ought to be rebuked (if not repented of) or rebuked and made right (if repented of) within the realm it was committed and/or comprehended. Such was the case when Paul confronted Peter's sin in Galatians 2:11-14, as Paul rebuked Peter "before them all" (Galatians 2:14).

- Sins that are adversely impacting or have the potential to adversely impact the perpetrator and/or those whose lives are impacted by the perpetrator (1 Corinthians 5:6-7).

A biblical example is Peter's sin in Galatians 2:11-14, which was adversely impacting others (Galatians 2:13).

- Sins that are a pattern/perpetual

In such cases, not only is confrontation called for, but also accountability, to keep such sins from continuing to be committed.

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<sup>29</sup> "Love covers a multitude of sins, but sometimes sin throws the covers off" (Mack & Swavely, p. 173).

<sup>30</sup> Mack & Swavely (p. 174) give this rubric for discerning whether or not a certain sin should be confronted: "A question you could ask yourself when you think about confronting someone is this: In light of the next step in Matthew 18:16, would one or two more people of sound judgment consider this issue significant enough to go along with me?"

<sup>31</sup> Often, when a personal offense takes place, the offender is oblivious to it. In such a case, "the one with the sore toes goes because he's the one who always knows" (Jay Adams, *From Forgiven to Forgiving*, p. 18).

- Confront only when convinced that a clear command of Scripture has been clearly violated.

If in doubt, give the benefit of the doubt to the other person, either forgoing a confrontation or going to discern if there is legitimate cause for your concern.

- Confront with a meek mindset (Galatians 6:1; cf. 2 Timothy 2:25).

Remember, “So go I, but for the grace of God.”

- Make sure your conduct is correct when you confront (Romans 15:14 and Galatians 6:1).

You cannot credibly correct the incorrect conduct of others if your conduct is incorrect. Before seeking to take the toothpicks out of the eyes of others, make sure there aren't any two—by fours in yours (Matthew 7:3-5).

- Make correction your concern when confronting.

When someone is wrong, resolve to restore them to right. Make it your aim to gain your brother (Matthew 18:15). In Galatians 6:1, the Greek verb translated “restore” was used of mending a net (Matthew 4:21) and setting a broken bone.

- Keep the confrontation as concentrated as possible.

As mentioned previously, there are occasions when public confrontation is prescribed. However, in most cases, private confrontation is our first responsibility, with public confrontation as a last resort (Matthew 18:15-17). Commenting on this text, Mack & Swavely (p. 166) write that confrontation is to increase to whatever level is necessary to bring about change.

A final note: If we find ourselves on the receiving end of confrontation, let us receive it correctly (Psalm 141:5 and Proverbs 9:8b).

## *Preserving Unity in the Body*

The 133<sup>rd</sup> Psalm reads: “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.” Unity among brethren is indeed a pleasant thing (conversely, there are few things more unpleasant than disunity among brethren). Because unity among brethren, including among a body of believing brethren, is so pleasant, our natural impulse ought to be to not only practice it, but also preserve it. According to Scripture, it is imperative that we do so.

“Preserving Unity in the Body” implies that such unity is already present, a point that the apostle Paul makes in several places.

- Unity is our position.

In the midst of urging the church at Ephesus to be unified in Ephesians chapter 4, Paul reminded them that they already were. He says in verses 4-6: “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” Christians are characterized by several common denominators:

- One body. All believers are part of one body, the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13). Therefore, the members of each local manifestation of this one body, the local church, are members one of another (Romans 12:5b; cf. Romans 12:4a’s “one body,” Romans 12:5a’s “one body,” 1 Corinthians 12:12’s “the body is one,” “one body,” and “one body,” 1 Corinthians 12:13’s “one body,” and 1 Corinthians 12:20’s “one body”). As the hymn, “Onward, Christians Soldiers,” says: “We are not divided; All one body we.”
- One Spirit. All believers are indwelt (1 Corinthians 6:19) and endowed (see “the same Spirit” in 1 Corinthians 12:4, 8, and 9 and “that one and the selfsame Spirit” in 1 Corinthians 12:11) by one Spirit, the Holy Spirit. There is a “unity of the Spirit” (Ephesians 4:3), a “fellowship of the Spirit” (Philippians 2:1) among the saved.

- One hope. All believers have the same expectation of being exalted (Colossians 1:27's "the hope of glory").
- One Lord. All believers have a common connection to Christ, being in Him (Galatians 3:28). "Is Christ divided?" (1 Corinthians 1:13).
- One faith. All who believe believe in a common creed, consisting of the core beliefs that constitute Christianity (Acts 2:42's "the apostles' doctrine," 2 Thessalonians 3:6's "the tradition," and Jude 3's "the faith which was once delivered unto the saints").<sup>32</sup>
- One baptism. While this may be a reference to water baptism, it is more likely a reference to Spirit baptism, the judicial placement of the New Testament, church age believer into the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit at the moment of conversion (1 Corinthians 12:13).
- One God and Father (notice all the "all's in verse 6). Believers are brethren, brothers and sisters, spiritual siblings, part of the same family, children of the same Father (John 1:12).

Our positional unity must be practiced. This indicative of the Christian life must become an imperative of Christian living.

- Unity is prescribed.

Just prior to pointing out the positional unity of the Ephesian believers in Ephesians 4:4-6, Paul commands the Ephesians to practically keep it in verse 3: "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Paul does the same in Philippians 2:1-2, commanding the Philippians to be practically unified (verse 2's "be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind") because positionally they already were (verse 1's "if any fellowship of the Spirit," i.e., since there is fellowship of the Spirit).

The verbal translated "endeavouring" in Ephesians 4:3 means to exert extensive effort, to bend over backwards, to take pains. The ESV translates it "eager," the NIV "make every effort," and the NASB "being diligent" (cf. the noun form, translated "diligence" by the KJV in 2 Peter 1:5). See 1 Thessalonians 2:17's "endeavoured" (same word) and 2 Timothy 1:17's "diligently" (same word) to get the flavor of it. The reason why we must exert every effort to ensure unity is because we have an enemy (1 Peter 5:8; his very name, Satan, means adversary or opponent), who has many devices (2 Corinthians 2:11). One of his devices is to

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<sup>32</sup> Be reminded that doctrine is not inherently divisive. Division over doctrine is due to doctrinal deviancy (see 1 Timothy 6:3-5 and 2 John 9-10).

“divide and conquer” (he also knows that a kingdom or house divided against itself cannot stand, Matthew 12:25-26//Mark 3:24-26//Luke 11:17-18). This he will try to do by sowing seeds of discord (Proverbs 6:19b), perhaps even using our natural differences to do so (whether gender or generational, economic or ethnic, personality or personal preference<sup>33</sup>, etc.).

- Disunity can be present.

In the New Testament, there are several instances of disunity in churches, reminding us that our positional unity does not make us automatically immune to practical disunity.

It has already been pointed out that Paul exhorted the church at Ephesus to endeavor to be unified (in Ephesians 4:3), possibly implying that disunity was a problem in the church there.

The church at Philippi clearly had a disunity problem. Paul implies it in several ways: 1) By what he says in Philippians 1:27, 2:2, and 14; 2) by the seemingly superfluous use of the word, “all” in 1:1, 4, 7 (2x), 8, 25, 2:17, 26, 4:22, and 23 (and “every” in 4:21); and 3) by the use of such terminology as “fellowship” in 1:5, “partakers” in 1:7, “fellowship” in 2:1, “likeminded” in 2:20, “companion” and “fellow soldier” in 2:25, “yokefellow” and “fellow labourers” in 4:3, and “communicate” in 4:14. The disunity problem in Philippi is made explicit in 4:2.

The New Testament church most known for its disunity was the church at Corinth. See especially 1 Corinthians 1:10f and 3:3f. The problem in Corinth was a party spirit, with parishioners attaching themselves to a particular person, whether Paul, Apollos, Peter, or Christ.

- Unity can be preserved by disunifying deeds being prevented.

Based on what was pointed out previously about our positional unity, unity among Christians ultimately does not need to be created, as it was created at conversion. Rather than being created, it simply needs to be carried out and kept; rather than being produced, it needs to be practiced and preserved; rather than making it, we need to make it happen and maintain it. The second half of this equation, keeping/preserving/maintaining unity, occurs when, among other things, we:

- Have a divine disposition towards divisiveness

Proverbs 6:16-19 says: “These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that

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<sup>33</sup> Bear in mind that unity does not necessarily mean unanimity. A body of believers can be unified, while holding differing opinions when it comes to personal preferences.

shed innocent blood, An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.” The primary point of this proverb is that God particularly hates one who sows discord among brethren. The “six, yea seven” formula is a Hebraic literary device, the purpose of which is to draw or attention to or emphasize the final item in the list (cf. Proverbs 30:15-16, 18-19, 21-23, and 29-31).

- Disallow divisive deeds by disciplining those who do them

Divisiveness is a work of the flesh (Galatians 5:20’s “seditions”) and is one of the grounds for church discipline (see Romans 16:17 and Titus 3:10).

- Unity can be preserved by unifying deeds being practiced.

If we are to preserve unity in the body, we must not only prevent disunifying deeds, but we must also practice unifying ones. Such deeds include:

- Properly proclaiming God’s Word

According to Ephesians 4, Christ gave pastors and teachers to the church (v. 11b) so that, as they speak the truth in love (v. 15), a church might, among other things, become unified in the faith (v. 13; cf. v. 5’s “one faith”). According to Paul in the book of Philippians (see 1:5, 7, and 27), it is the gospel that glues us together.

- Praying

Perhaps the most unified church in the New Testament was the first church, the church at Jerusalem, whose unity was seen from the time it was born (see Acts 2:44; cf. 4:32). Several times in the book of Acts, we read of these believers being of “one accord” (1:14, 2:1, 46, 4:24, and 5:12). Part of their one accord was their one accord in prayer (see 1:14 and 4:24; cf. 12:12). It has been said that “the church that prays together stays together.”

- Responding properly to problems by pursuing peace

The previous lesson in this study spoke of the need for confronting a fellow Christian in order to correct incorrect conduct, keeping the

confrontation as concentrated as possible.<sup>34</sup> One of the purposes for such concentrated confrontation is to keep problems that should be confronted and corrected privately from becoming public and, therefore, particularly problematic (see, for example, Proverbs 17:9). When such problems pop up, our perspective, purpose, and approach should be the pursuit of peace (Romans 12:18, 14:19, and Hebrews 12:14). See especially Ephesians 4:3 and Colossians 3:14-15.

- Putting ourselves in our proper place

Humility is the key to unity (see Ephesians 4:2-3 and the entirety of Philippians chapter 2; conversely, see Proverbs 13:10a). When we are humble in heart (Romans 12:16), as was Christ (Matthew 11:29 and Philippians 2:5-8), deferring to the desires of others (Philippians 2:3-4; see the example of Abraham in Genesis 13:5-9), disunity will disappear. Putting people in their proper place was Paul's prescription for the party spirit in Corinth (see 1 Corinthians 1:13 and 3:5-7).

As Abraham said to Lot in Genesis 13:8: "Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee ... for we be brethren." Rather, let there be unity. Once again, as David said in Psalm 133:1: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!"

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<sup>34</sup> The concentration should only include those who have a right to know, meaning those who are part of the problem or have been given the responsibility to be part of the solution.

## *Praying for One Another*

According to Romans 12:5 and Ephesians 4:25, members of a local church are “members one of another.” As such, they have been given various responsibilities in relation to one another, such as: love one another (John 13:34-35, 15:12, 17, Romans 13:8, 1 Thessalonians 4:9, 1 Peter 1:22, 1 John 3:11, 23, 4:7, and 2 John 5); be kindly affectionate one to another (Romans 12:10); prefer one another (Romans 12:10); be of the same mind one toward another (Romans 12:16); edify one another (Romans 14:19 and 1 Thessalonians 5:11); receive one another (Romans 15:7); admonish one another (Romans 15:14); greet one another (Romans 16:16, 1 Corinthians 16:20, 2 Corinthians 13:12, and 1 Peter 5:14); care for one another (1 Corinthians 12:25); serve one another (Galatians 5:13 and 1 Peter 4:10); bear one another’s burdens (Galatians 6:2); be kind one to another (Ephesians 4:32); forgive one another (Ephesians 4:32 and Colossians 3:13); forbear one another (Ephesians 4:2 and Colossians 3:13); comfort one another (1 Thessalonians 4:18); encourage one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11, Hebrews 3:13, and 10:25); consider one another (Hebrews 10:24); speak not evil one of another (James 4:11); confess your sins one to another (James 5:16); and be hospitable one to another (1 Peter 4:9). Perhaps the most important of these responsibilities is the responsibility to pray for one another (James 5:16). So, it is fitting that our study of “Life in the Father’s House” concludes with this topic.

- Why we should pray for one another
  - It is mandated.

Besides the command of James 5:16 to pray for one another, we have Paul’s words in Ephesians 6:18: “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints” (note that no fellow church member is to be excluded: “all saints”<sup>35</sup>; cf. Philippians 1:4). In like manner, Samuel, in 1 Samuel 12:23, surmised that it would be sinful to cease praying for his fellow Israelites.

- It is modeled.

In the New Testament, we see many examples of believers praying for one another:

- The church in Jerusalem. Acts 2:42 tells us that the first church devoted themselves to, among other things, prayers (literally, “the

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<sup>35</sup> Mack & Swavely (p. 217) rightly remind us to pray for all believers, including those who are prospering spiritually, writing: “... [A] study of [Paul’s] other prayers recorded in the New Testament reveals that he actually seems to have prayed more often for Christians who were succeeding spiritually.”

prayers”). Part of their corporate praying included praying for one another (see, for example, Acts 4:23-31 and 12:5 and 12).

- Paul

In most of his letters, Paul includes a “prayer report,” in which he tells his readers that he is praying for them and what he is praying for them (see Romans 1:8f, 1 Corinthians 1:4f, Ephesians 1:15f, 3:14f, Philippians 1:4f, Colossians 1:3f, 1 Thessalonians 1:2f, 2 Thessalonians 1:3f, and 2 Timothy 1:3f; cf. 2 Corinthians 13:7 and 2 Thessalonians 5:23). Paul also would ask his readers to pray for him (see Romans 15:30-32, Ephesians 6:19-20, Colossians 4:3-4, 1 Thessalonians 5:25, and 2 Thessalonians 3:1-2).

- Epaphras

Paul commends Epaphras for his prayers for the Colossians in Colossians 4:12-13.

The ultimate example of praying for believers is the example of Christ, who did so on several occasions: praying for Peter in Luke 22:31-32 and praying for His current and future followers in John 17.

- It is a means.

Prayer is a means by which God accomplishes His will on earth, as it is accomplished in heaven (Matthew 6:10). For example, it was God’s will to deliver Jacob from Esau, to which Jacob alluded (in verses 9 and 12) in his prayer for protection from Esau in Genesis 32:9-12. God answered (Genesis 33). As another example, it was God’s will to send a drought upon Israel in Ahab’ day (1 Kings 17:1), then to send rain (1 Kings 18:1), for which Elijah prayed (1 Kings 18:42 and James 5:17-18). God answered (1 Kings 18:45 and James 5:17-18). God’s will that people be saved (1 Timothy 2:4 and 2 Peter 3:9) is accomplished through prayer (Romans 10:1). God’s will that believers be kept (2 Thessalonians 3:3 and 1 John 5:18) is accomplished through prayer (John 17:15).

- What we should pray for one another

- Praise God for other believers.

In his prayers, Paul often thanked God for fellow believers (Romans 1:8, 1 Corinthians 1:4, Ephesians 1:16, Colossians 1:3, 1 Thessalonians 1:2, 2 Thessalonians 1:3, 2:13, 2 Timothy 1:3, and Philemon 4). After praising God for other believers in prayer, like Paul, let them know that you have done so.

- Pray for the perseverance and purity of other believers.

This is what Paul prayed for the Thessalonians in 2 Thessalonians 5:23: “And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” An examination of Paul’s prayers recorded in his letters reveals that his prayers for other believers were primarily for their sanctification (see especially 2 Corinthians 13:7, Philippians 1:11, Colossians 1:10, 1 Thessalonians 3:13, and 2 Thessalonians 2:17).<sup>36</sup> This is how Epaphras prayed for the Colossians (see Colossians 4:12<sup>37</sup>).

Praying for the perseverance and purity of believers is what Jesus did (see Luke 22:31-32 and John 17:11, 15, and 17).

- Pray for the proclamation of other believers.

Paul asked the Ephesians in Ephesians 6:19-20 to pray that he would proclaim God’s Word boldly (cf. the prayer of the Jerusalem church in Acts 4:29). He asked the Colossians in Colossians 4:3-4 that he would proclaim God’s word clearly. He asked the Thessalonians in 2 Thessalonians 3:1 to pray that his ministry of the Word might “have free course” (literally: “run”). “The spiritual battles for the souls of men, women, and children are not won when the preacher comes into the pulpit or the evangelist hits the street. They are won before the preaching or evangelism even starts, by the people who come before the throne of God in prayer” (Mack & Swavely, p. 231).

- Pray for the protection of other believers.

Paul, on several occasions, asked fellow believers to pray for his physical protection (see Romans 15:30-31, 2 Corinthians 1:8-11, and 2 Thessalonians 3:2). We should also pray for the spiritual protection of other believers (see John 17:15).

- Ways we can pray for one another

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<sup>36</sup> Mack & Swavely (p. 225) point out that Paul, in his praying for other believers, “concerned himself almost exclusively with spiritual issues, rather than earthly or physical ones.”

<sup>37</sup> J. Oswald Sanders once said: “It was Epaphras’ kneeling that kept the Colossians standing.”

- Personally and privately

When in your “prayer closet” (Matthew 6:6), pray for your fellow parishioners. Use your church directory or the like as a guide.

- Interpersonally and publicly

Like the church at Jerusalem (see above), be committed to corporate prayer. Such times not only foster fellowship, but also help us to know how to pray more specifically for one another in private. Not only are we to pray *for* one another, but also *with* one another.

- Passionately

Passion is a principle of prayer (see Luke 22:44, Romans 15:30, Colossians 4:12, and James 5:17).

- Perseveringly

Perseverance is another principle of prayer (Luke 11:5-10, 18:1-8, Colossians 4:2, and 1 Thessalonians 5:17). Ephesians 6:18 calls us to pray this way for other believers (“praying always” and “with all perseverance”). Paul prayed for other believers without ceasing (Romans 1:9, Ephesians 1:16, Colossians 1:9, and 2 Timothy 1:3)/always (1 Corinthians 1:4, Colossians 1:3, and 1 Thessalonians 1:2)/night and day (2 Timothy 1:3). Epaphras also prayed this way (Colossians 4:12).

As members one of another, let us remember to pray one for another.