A scenic view of a mountain range with snow-capped peaks and a valley with a church and houses. The mountains are rugged and rocky, with patches of snow. The valley is lush green with a winding road and several buildings, including a church with a tall steeple. The sky is a soft, hazy blue.

Church Administration *THAT PROMOTES* Brotherhood

*Finding the Blessing
of Brotherhood in New
Testament Church Life*

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Promotes Brotherhood**

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in New Testament Church Life

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Introduction

Look at the picture on this cover. It is taken in the Swiss/Austrian Alps, the area where the forefathers of the Anabaptist churches lived. This picture tells a story if we take the time to stop and listen. Think of what the early Anabaptist grew up with. But first let's start with church services today.

Today many of us from Anabaptist backgrounds enjoy church life marked by orderly, predictable church services. Our services are made up of congregational singing, of lay brothers leading out in devotional thoughts and topics and of then having a lay minister (one who never received professional training) share a sermon with us. These predictable church services spill over into predictable interpersonal church relationships. Ordained leaders from the brotherhood are given responsibilities in spiritual and material care. Most of our families live within a half hour travel distance and frequently are invited for meals or go to visit each other. Our meeting houses are mostly of simple construction, built to last without showiness or luxurious furnishings.

Our forefathers did not always find it so. Yes, it is some 500 years ago, but our Anabaptist forefathers originated from a setting where the village church was the most ornate building in the town. Church districts had a cathedral, the bishop's chair, which surpassed the architecture and construction of all other buildings. Specially trained choirs sang accompanied by pipe organs. In some, gold adorned the higher levels of the walls which towered twenty or thirty feet into the air. Beautiful paintings and sculptures were placed throughout the building with the intention of stimulating worship.

The local priests who led out in services were backed by a hierarchy of leaders. On the lowest level were priests. Above them were bishops, then archbishops, then cardinals, and finally at the top, the Pope. The Pope supposedly carried on in the lineage and authority of Saint Peter. There were confessionals in most churches where pious members went to confess their sins and to receive penance, direction how they could pay for their sins. Clearing of sin could only be accomplished through the church. This church life is still carried out in the Roman Catholic church, and in a similar manner in most of the churches of the Reformation.

When Johann Gutenberg invented the printing press and Bibles were printed, common people learned to read and began to understand the Bible. This produced a drastic change in people's understanding. While history tends to focus mainly on the change of believer's baptism, practical church life also took a radical change as well. What were some of these changes?

Church changed to services held in houses, attics, barns and even caves. Services were conducted by lay brothers who were ordained to preach the Word and lead the church. Singing went to a capella songs- most of them homemade lyrics put to common tunes. Many other changes took place because church was no longer something one merely attended. Rather it became a brotherhood, with each member being an integral part of it. Strangely, in many ways it became patterned more like Jewish synagogues than their former "Christian" churches.

Not everyone who left the Roman Catholic denomination became Anabaptist. Other Protestant denominations rejected the pope and the control of the Roman church but retained much the same style of church life with clergy, liturgy, and ornate church buildings. Why was there a difference between the Anabaptists and the other churches? Because the vision was different.

Through the years the Anabaptist descendants have received many Protestant influences. We have learned their songs and read their writings. The first influences of Sunday School and Protracted meetings received mixed acceptance. Some plain churches have accepted these practices when they felt it contributed to an atmosphere of brotherhood.

Today there are many more influences such as megachurches where influencers produce videos of sermons to be shown to thousands of listeners each week. Some stay at home to listen to televangelists preach. There are professional choirs and bands that provide praise and worship services as contemporary services, and perhaps at another time have traditional services. Since Covid-19 there has been a widespread acceptance of virtual services.

On the other hand, and perhaps in overreaction to hierarchy, some groups have gravitated to "house

churches.” This seems to be somewhat in reaction to the pressure of professional worship, but many of these slip into a casual atmosphere where people come as they are and live as they please.

Does it matter how we do church? May disgruntled souls or young people leave our traditions and still be in the will of our Lord Jesus and be saved? With so many options, is it important to retain the practice in church services and structure that our fathers gave us?

In this course you will find that the standard and important test for all of church life is “Is it Scriptural?” and “Does it produce true brotherhood?”

We do not choose church life and structure because it is “what works,” nor because it is the latest fad on the contemporary scene. We go to Bible direction for our answers. Come along as we do this search.

The author’s recent experience included a Sunday visiting a congregation labeled as “Mennonite Brethren.” The explanation for their label was that their heritage was two Anabaptist brotherhoods that came out of the Protestant Reformation. Any expectations that the church services might have reflected their heritage as Mennonite or Brethren quickly disappeared. Here are a few of the comparisons observed:

The Heritage That They Left	What Exists Today
Literal obedience to Bible commands even those socially despised	No evident effort to obey many of the distinctive Bible commands
Bible studies focus on Scripture text and questions designed for discussion	Sunday School began with open Bibles but quickly went to watching a video
A team of lay leaders who make many sacrifices to understand and teach the Bible	A trained pastor who led the entire service and appeared to be a one-man team
Congregational singing from books with a song leader to lead out	Pianist and special singers leading the music from overhead projection
Possibly 1/3 of the congregation attendance made up of children	Very few children with 65 years being the approximate median age
Offering collected in quiet inconspicuous ways	Offering collected by conspicuously filing to the front of the church
Simple clothing that was modest, clean, and respectable	Gender neutral and stylish casual clothing with deliberate tears and discoloration

This comparison is not intended to cast reflection on others. The style of worship chosen by the congregation we visited is very likely the product of a variety of influences, and not the fault of any one person or group. This is also true for many of our conservative Mennonite churches. We did not choose our background nor invent brotherhood. Rather it was given to us by the choices of others.

Which direction will we choose to go? What can we do to retain our heritage of Bible obedience? What will we use as our guide? The Bible that guided the Anabaptist forefathers is the only safe guide.

H. Stephen Ebersole

Honour all men.
 Love the Brotherhood.
 Fear God.
 Honour the king.
 1 Peter 2:17

Lesson 1– Church Administration and Brotherhood Can Church Administration Support/Undermine Brotherhood?

Carl sat across the room from Samuel with a puzzled look on his face. "So, tell me again how you think this works? You think that a church with a certain class that rules over the rest of the church and tells other people what to do is to somehow create a sense of belonging between church members?"

Carl had once belonged to a conservative Anabaptist church with a culture that rewarded loyalty to church prescribed functions and practice. The culture "protected" the loyal and "rejected" the disloyal in an effort to "maintain" values deemed necessary for organizational sustainability. This unhealthy "system" worked for sustainability function but seriously lacked in using New Testament church life as a pattern for healthy church life. If someone went beyond the standards in appearance and always seemed to agree with the leaders, then that member achieved a status of influence in the congregation. In that position you could be on the slate for Sunday School superintendent or even qualify to be ordained. Too many people chose to stay "on the line." That is, they were safe from public rebuke, but not signed up enough to get more responsibility. Carl had felt the tension that brought pause to conversation with his friends when the preacher came around.

This cultural value system was in place whether the member was acting upon conviction or if he was acting upon hypocritical values.

This all had led Carl to leave the church of his childhood and join a "brotherhood." He had gone to visit Samuel, a childhood friend, because he was beginning to doubt his sanity with the endless debates between brothers over what was okay and what wasn't. Recently a brother had led the assembly wearing cutoffs.

"And I am not ready for that!" Carl declared through clenched teeth. "I can't stand bossy leaders, and neither can I stand people who just do whatever they please."

"Yes, there is a different way," Samuel assured him. "It isn't easy because human nature is involved. But there is a way the Bible outlines, and you want to be a part of that."

The Foundation for all Brotherhood

Any discussion of belonging to the Body of Christ needs to begin with the introduction to the Gospel that John the Baptist and Jesus brought to Kingdom seekers. The kingdom of heaven may be found only by those who are willing to see their sinfulness and brokenness outside of Christ's redeeming power. John 3:16 holds forth God's wonderful love in sending Christ to die for us. Sadly, verses 19-21 describe the reason why so many religious people missed salvation and brotherhood. Pride in their religious practices kept them from acknowledging the sin they had hidden in their lives. They would not come to the light because their deeds were evil and they did not want anyone else to know.

Any discussion about brotherhood must begin with a repentance foundation. Christ's salvation can transform and redeem anyone, no matter how sinful, except those who see religion as a competitive performance. Many churches that advertise brotherhood miss this essential component. Unless there is brokenness that comes through repentance and confession, there will be no brotherhood.

Administration That Restored True Brotherhood

Gospel salvation does not automatically cure all our ills. But brotherhood is designed to grow us. In this lesson we would like to begin by examining the example of the Apostle Paul's administration as he labored to bring a congregation from selfish individualism to brotherhood. The methods that Paul used with the Corinthian church are a worthy example to follow.

In Paul's first letter to the Corinthian church, we find the church at Corinth was in a "mess." This is the normal course for human nature. Even though the gospel had been preached and leaders had been established, human nature took relationships into chaos.

Why? Since we are humans, our flesh is not converted; therefore, we will always need to be dealt with it. This means "church life" will always be a challenge. Christianity is a calling to a high standard of holy living. This can be achieved only by allowing Jesus' methods of transforming lives to work in our midst to achieve the necessary change.

We can only imagine how Paul felt when he heard the reports of church life that came from the fledgling congregation. There was bitter fighting among the members about which leader was better. Gross immorality was being ignored by church leaders and members. In essence, the things that should not have mattered were big issues and the things that should not have existed were bringing public reproach on the church.

There was the problem of selfishness. Some members were taking other members to court in lawsuits. They were raising questions about broken home relationships. They were feuding over how to relate to Gentile issues of meats offered to idols. They were even contending over the communion meal. Not having the full written gospel, they were embroiled in disputes over spiritual gifts of tongues and healings etc. Then finally, there was the false doctrine being promoted that there was no life after death.

We can only imagine how Paul might have felt with his Pharisee background. Did he think of how Jews with their prim and proper synagogues would look "over the fence" and see this messy congregation? The Corinthian church was supposed to be a Messianic assembly. But it was anything but functional. Did Paul struggle with the feeling of needing to look better than Jews?

How did Paul handle this floundering church situation? Paul's letters to the Corinthians reveal his response:

- After commending their virtues (1Cor 1:4-9), Paul confronted each issue head on (1Cor 1:10-13; 3:1-3; 5:1-2; 6:1-2). He did not beat around the bush and attempt to act like everything was okay. But neither did he go into reaction mode and write them off.
- He rebuked the party spirit that was enveloping them (1Cor 1:10 ff). He would have no parts with groups feeding a "better-than-thou" spirit, and in his second letter soundly repudiated the practice of comparing and measuring each other by themselves (2Cor 10:12-17).
- He gave a clear path of disciplinary action for sins unto death to maintain a pure communion and to redeem the sinner (1Cor 5:1-13).
- When it came to interpersonal relationship conflicts going on in the church, he held up the virtue of charity (1Cor 13). He also highlighted the day when perfect revelation would do away with personal gifts that could be used for selfish promotion (1Cor 13:8-10).
- He opened eyes to the reality of future life beyond the grave (1Cor 15). In Paul's second letter to the Corinthian church there is more corrective communication but the tone shifts.
- He urged the church to restore the penitent brother (2Cor 2:6-10).
- He explained that the gospel is what brings change...not the Law (2Cor 3:6-11). He reminded them to look up into heaven to see the glory of our Lord Jesus which brings a profound change in who we are and consequently our personal behavior (2Cor 3:18).
- He renounced dishonest and manipulative administrative practices (2Cor 4:2). He held forth the person of the Lord Jesus who will change us from within (2Cor 4:5).
- He advised them to rise up to help those who were impacted by persecution and famine (2Cor 8:10-15; 9:5-15).

- Finally, he used personal suffering and weakness to highlight what it is like to endure suffering for this present time. He personally illustrated what it is like to possess the reality of present spiritual resources and the glory of future life ahead (2Cor 12:1-18).

Administration that Undermined Brotherhood

The Bible also gives us an example of administration that undermined brotherhood concepts. We do not know the entire story, but enough is given that we can see some of the tension it was building into the church family. See if you can picture what Bishop Diotrephes' administration was doing to this church.

“Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers; Which have borne witness of thy charity before the church: whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well: Because that for his name's sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles. We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellowhelpers to the truth. I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church. Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God.” 3 John 1:5-11

What do we know?

- The local church brotherhood was being visited by traveling evangelists who John called "fellow helpers of the truth." These evangelists were "paying their own way" while among the Gentiles but were open to receiving help from Diotrephes' church members (3Jo 1:5-8).
- Diotrephes refused to help people who were not a part of his program and also put rules in place forbidding his church members from helping these evangelists (3Jo 1:9-10). [Apparently Diotrephes believed he was part of the one true visible church and others who were not a part of his group were inferior.]
- Church members who dared to disobey Diotrephes rules on this issue were excommunicated (3Jo 1:10).
- Diotrephes realized there were other faithful church leaders who disagreed with his position and he put out negative reports about them (3Jo 1:9-10).
- John assessed the situation and discerned that Diotrephes' real problem was that he loved to have the preeminence (3Jo 1:9).

One of the key components of dysfunctional church life is to draw fellowship lines which conflict with or confuse Bible commandments or principles. The next step is to use church discipline to coerce members into cooperation with the leader's expectations.

The membership feels torn, because they want to obey and respect their leaders, but their own conscience and understanding of the Scriptures tells them their leader(s) are wrong. But they do not have the authority to stand up to their church leader(s). So, what shall they do?

This is an abuse of church discipline. It is right for leaders to make applications to Bible principles and create church rules¹ and church fellowship lines. Paul gave Timothy direction on this in 2 Timothy 3:5. “Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.” But it is not right for

¹I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind (declare to be improper and unlawful) on earth must be what is already bound in heaven; and whatever you loose (declare lawful) on earth must be what is already loosed in heaven. Matthew 16:19 AMP

leaders to require members to go against conscience grounded in the Word of God. (See Lesson 4 for more teaching on the mandate given to church leaders relating to standards.)

Functional or Dysfunctional?

So, what did Paul's methods produce compared to Diotrephes' methods?

Sociologists, people who study human nature, agree that functional societies have at least four distinct characteristics. This applies to all societies whether the home, school, or the government. Let's consider these rules in the context of church life.

1. Communication is easy – it is a simple matter for people to share their hearts, and there is no need to read hidden meaning into what is said.
2. Trust is evident – it is safe to give and to receive admonition and/or admit failure.
3. Mistakes are allowable – if someone makes a mistake, or even commits a sin, he is free to make corrections and is forgiven.
4. Emotions are real, and it's okay to express them – we are created in the image of God and have emotions. If we are happy or are sorrowful, there is no advantage in remaining stoic. When we share our emotions, we make connections with each other; and bonds are created.

Paul's administration produced a totally different emotional environment than Diotrephes'. A dysfunctional society also has rules.

1. Don't talk.
2. Don't trust.
3. Don't make a mistake – that could always be held against you.
4. Don't show any emotions.

Think about how Paul's personal testimony would have encouraged them to be open in their relationships.

"But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." 2 Corinthians 4:2.

And think about the impact that this simple statement left in their lives.

"For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise." 2 Corinthians 10:12

Paul's life and ministry did not reflect nor reproduce the Pharisaic hypocrisy under which he was raised. By being personally instructed on church life by the Lord, his ministry demonstrates a fresh vision of true brotherhood. But human nature took Diotrephes back into what the Pharisees produced. "I'm better than you because I _____. Moreover, if you don't listen on me, then I will excommunicate you." Oh the tension in this type of church atmosphere!

Understanding the Terms

"Church Administration" and "Brotherhood" in modern Christianity often seem or are sometimes argued to be contradictory in nature. The argument is that a church or congregation cannot enjoy both; either one or the other will prevail.

It is true that depending on how each is carried out, the two can conflict or even cancel each other. When leaders rule with a selfish heavy hand or in an intimidating/manipulative manner, brotherhood suffers. When church structure allows all members equal voice in final decision making, then church

administration is relegated to the sidelines. As we have witnessed in the example of the Apostle Paul, it is essential for the Christian church to create brotherhood.

Brotherhood carries at least two definitions. One is "a group of persons formally joined together for a common interest". But the other definition may be equally important. It is "the feeling of closeness and friendship that exists between companions." In some cases, church brotherhood may surpass the brotherhood that exists in families. In family brotherhood, we often have shared memories along with shared genetics. In church brotherhood we have shared spiritual memories, experiences, and expectations of future relationships forward into eternity.

Administration means the "performance of executive duties," or "management." This word carries the idea of orderly process. The Bible advocates the importance of order in the context of church life. Leaders must keenly sense their accountability to the Lord of the Church to guide His flock as He has outlined.

Which Model Will We Follow?

The purpose of this study is to help leaders and church members understand the framework Jesus and the Apostles established for the church to function in the first century AD. It is our goal today, nearly two thousand years later, to mimic that pattern. When the church as an organism patterns after that framework and everyone finds his place, fills his place, and stays in his place, then church can function well in rewarding brotherhood relationships. This is a success based on far more than human resources alone. The Holy Spirit energizes church fellowships where God's Word is honored, and His place is recognized.

In this study our standard of comparison will be the tests the apostles gave the early church. What did the apostles expect the early church life to look like? Do our church services reflect New Testament values? Or have we as conservative Mennonites morphed into something different than Christ intended? This study is not a determined effort to defend all the practices of the Mennonite church. Without doubt, there exists some variation between church groups with an Anabaptist heritage and all may reflect New Testament values. However, there are also examples of faulty church administration and faulty brotherhood practices under the "Mennonite" umbrella. When church life deteriorates into competition and faultfinding or into every man living as he pleases then we have strayed from our calling in Christ Jesus.

This study is to search out the often-hidden connections between New Testament doctrine and church life today. Church life today is not merely some discovery of "what works" or "what we need to do to keep a conservative church." Church life is to be an extension of the heart and will of Christ as His Spirit revealed truth to the early church.

This study will rely on what the Holy Spirit revealed for the church as written in the Holy Scriptures. We will not be turning to the history of the church, even the early post-apostolic era for our pattern. Both the atmosphere of martyrdom and persecution and times of peace and affluence greatly impact practices in the assembly. It is our goal to discover the principles that should direct us not only in our Western culture but in all cultures of the world.

What about Culture?

"Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen." Acts 6:9

Let us acknowledge right away that there will be surface differences in spiritual expression from one ethnic culture to another. In this verse describing a synagogue in the apostle's era, we find a group of people unique in several ways. They were freed slaves. They were mostly proselytes. They came from all over the world. And they were zealous to protect the values of the Law!

Some of our Mennonite practices are cultural or perhaps come from the predominate German/Swiss personality of our church group. This is especially true in the stoic atmosphere of the Sunday morning worship service. Other cultures may express their worship in more emotional expressions. It is not in our place to criticize when churches and congregations have expressions within Biblical boundaries that reflect their cultural makeup.

However, the New Testament outlines essential elements for church life that must be honored for the church to be Jesus' bride.

In our conferences and fellowships, each church will form its own personality. It is not our goal to use a cookie cutter and expect each congregation to be identical. Again, we rely on the Bible structure and God to set the members every one of them in the body as it pleases Him.

In Conclusion

We do not have to reinvent the church. We should treasure our heritage and tradition, but not allow these to overrun Bible direction. Let's discover the gift of the church - the gift that Jesus, the Holy Spirit and the Apostolic group has given us - and be intentional in our pursuit of brotherhood in our day!

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. In the references below from 1 Corinthians, describe problems that were undermining brotherhood.

1:11-12 & 4:6 _____

5:1-2 _____

6:6 _____

8:2-3 _____

11:21 _____

14:23 _____

2. What leads us to believe that Paul understood that administration carried out in a proper way could help to resolve these problems?

3. What thought processes gave Diotrephes "right" to control his church members beyond Bible direction?

4. What was at the root of Diotrephes' desire to control his members in this way?

5. Why might leaders be tempted to cover up serious sins in their church membership? How would covering serious sins undermine brotherhood?

6. In 2 Corinthians 4:2 Paul renounced all dishonesty, both personal and administrative. How does this affect the relationships between members in the church?

7. How can parents create a feeling of closeness in family life even though they are given the responsibility to lead? How does this parallel the responsibility of church leaders?

8. All around us we have many different styles of church life and administration. How will we know which style to adopt for our church life?

9. What are some strengths of the "Swiss/German" culture of our heritage? What might be some of the weaknesses?

10. How do the Bible and the Holy Spirit give stability and security to church life throughout varied cultures and eras of time?

Lesson 2 – Church Membership Do I Have to Be a Church Member to Be Saved?

I rounded the corner in the church hallway to be met by both walls lined with youth sisters. "Tell us why a person has to become a church member to be baptized?" they queried. I knew the reason for the question. They had become emotionally connected with a young mother without any church background who wanted to be baptized. She had not committed herself to discipleship or church membership, but she wanted to be baptized because of the Bible commandment. I appreciated the sisters' concern. They wanted their new friend to be in complete obedience to all the requirements for salvation.

This kind of question can be normal. For those raised in conservative Christian settings it is not often under question. However, when people come from an unchurched background, the commitment to separation and a lifestyle of holiness looks huge. Let's summarize the questions as follows:

- Where do we get the idea that church membership needs to be connected with baptism?
- Why can't people simply be a part of the invisible body of Christ without having to be a part of a congregation and submit to the rules of a church?

Sometimes as youth grow older, they feel church membership to be restrictive, so they go on to a related question.

- I don't feel like I quite fit in with any church, so what is wrong with me just choosing to live my Christian life between me and my God?

Born Into or Initiated Into?

In the Old Testament, people were born into the family of God by being born and raised Israelites. Later, in Nehemiah's day, individuals could make the choice to enter covenant to be a part of the "separated ones." But still all were Jews, or God's people, and a part of His program. In many religious cultures today, such as colonies or communes, the same automatic entrance into the church seems to take place. In Catholic and Orthodox churches as well as many Protestant churches, babies are baptized and become a part of the church without any decision of their own.

Any study of the New Testament makes it clear that when a person wanted to become a disciple of Christ, he needed to make a personal choice to do so. No one was made a part of the church against his will, nor by the decision of someone else. We understand the New Testament highlights the need for baptism. What is not as quickly associated is the fact that baptism in the New Testament Church initiated that person into a visible body of believers.

So, what did people need to do to receive baptism?

First, they owned their sin and their sinful tendencies. This brought about the essential "new spiritual birth" that takes place at this same time. This is sometimes called a "conversion." Jesus insisted that we become as "little children." Upon repentance, confession of their sin, and any necessary restitution, they would come forward requesting baptism.

However, in our selfish, sinful state it is possible that conversion unto the likeness of Christ never really happens. Rather, a person merely determines to join the church, and self-life continues. A person may modify his behavior slightly so that reputation is retained, but the bottom line of selfish life and pursuit remains.

In true conversion the old life must be denied so that a new life under the Lordship of Christ can replace it. Brotherhood can never develop among those who are determined to prove they are better than others.

From the example of the Ethiopian eunuch, we learn that sound beliefs are a necessary requirement before baptism takes place. *"And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."* Acts 8:37 This may have been a very short "instruction class," but the Ethiopian as Jewish proselyte had prior knowledge of the promised Jewish Messiah, and now he confessed his belief in this Christ.

Furthermore, from the example of John's disciples in Acts 19:1-7, we learn that those who had been baptized due to their repentance also needed to confess Christ and be re-baptized before they could receive the Holy Spirit.

Some feel that churches have now added an additional, unnecessary step. An applicant must be willing to take up the position of being a part of a local, visible body before he can be baptized. This membership includes accountability, identity, and connectedness with a visible, local brotherhood.

Is this a scriptural requirement?

Yes! There are several reasons for this belief.

In the New Testament, Baptism Was Connected to Membership

"Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers... And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."
Acts 2:41-47

It is clear when a New Testament believer chose Christian baptism, he was initiated into a local, visible, accountable church body. Baptism and body membership were considered a synonymous step in the process of following Christ. A person was either a part of those who rejected Jesus as the Messiah, or part of those who believed Jesus was the Christ.

Identity with the group of Christians might cost a new believer his family connections. It cost some of them their accumulated wealth. It is easy to accept that in those beginning days of church life there may not have been a membership role or list. However, the Bible records are clear that people knew which group they were a part of. Baptism made them a part of the "Jesus" group.

Church Life is Called Membership in the Body

"For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith;" Romans 12:4-6

By using one simple comparison, Paul shows that by being a member of a local church body of Christ, we are greatly humiliated but also greatly enriched. Our humiliation is that we are only a part of a larger body. There is no reason for us to glory in ourselves. But the opposite is also true. In being part of a body, we are connected to unbelievable resources, the gifts He distributes in the body. Anyone who has been a part of "brotherhood" understands something of the costs. Anyone who has been a part of "brotherhood" has tasted something of the benefits. Someone has said that three human emotional needs are security, worth and acceptance. In true brotherhood, all these needs are met. In pretend brotherhood, the stress of competition drains members of emotional resources and often produces mental problems.

This is another reason why we need to get church life right.

The New Testament knows no other model for the Christian than this. The local assembly is always compared to a human body and individuals are called members one of another. The more we can be interconnected with each other, the more we fulfill Christ's plan. (Ephesians 1:22-23; 1Corinthians 12)

One member of a loosely joined fellowship described his congregation as a "pile of body parts." He perceived that each one was doing his own thing, and no one was caring about the rest. Perhaps the closest example of "body parts" in the New Testament was the church at Corinth. They were called "carnal" in their individualistic and competitive view of church life.

In 1 Corinthians 3, the Apostle Paul uses the example of laborers working on a building. Some laid the foundation, some built thereon, but all were working on the same project. In this the congregation is soundly exhorted, or perhaps even scolded that they must come together. The leaders they were lining up behind were supposedly pulling in different directions. That was not true, and the members also needed to pull together.

Holy Communion is Preserved by Membership Lines

"It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed, In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person." 1 Cor 5:1-13

In this setting at Corinth, there was a man who had taken his father's wife (likely his stepmother) and was living with her in a state of fornication. The bottom-line remedy was that he needed to be placed outside church membership and not be given communion.

Churches that do not practice close communion based on church membership have a problem. That is illustrated by the following conversation.

"Sam! We have a problem in our church. Our pastor's brother who is a deacon came to church intoxicated!" Willie said, "Now, what do we do? Some think he should not be allowed to come to church, and others say he should come to church because that is what he needs! This is making division in our church!"

"Go home and study 1 Corinthians 5." Sam said. "The Bible gives us the direction we need for church issues today. If we don't follow the Bible, then we really aren't the church that Jesus established."

The next day Willie came back to Sam.

"Now I know what we should do! We should only give communion to our church members, and if they fall into sin, then we need to put them out of church membership!"

And that is the solution. The concept of close communion is not only an Anabaptist tradition, but it is what the Bible teaches. As the last verses of 1 Corinthians 5 teach, the church does not judge and draw lines

for those "without." We do not tell the world what to do. The Biblical church does judge those who are "within." That "within" is the invisible but very real line of membership.

Most Ordinances are Obeyed Within the Context of a Local Body

Not only is communion kept holy by practical lines of membership, but many of the other commandments given to disciples in the New Testament also require connections with each other. We are to wash each other's feet, and to greet one another with a holy kiss. We are to ordain leaders from among the brotherhood. The sick person is to call for their elders for anointing. Anyone who refuses to connect with a larger body will not be able to keep these commands. The path of aloneness is a lonely path, and not what Christ has planned for His people. It is not a safe path – we will end up a casualty of the Kingdom of Christ.

Answering Objections:

There are several examples in the New Testament of people being baptized when they could not have been a member of an existing church. Philip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch "And he went on his way rejoicing..." Acts 8:39. Paul baptized the Philippian jailor when there was no locally established congregation.

It is still true there are places in the world where the gospel is being introduced and there are no established congregations for people to join. Presently, this is the situation of conversions in some Muslim geographical areas. We believe these are places where the example of Philip and Paul should be followed.

Nevertheless, God does not intend that Christians stand aloof from the church. Where there are brotherhoods available, even brotherhoods as flawed as the Corinthian church, then believers should relate to the body. The New Testament offers no other legitimate long-term model.

It is true that some hypocrites may be able to hide within the body with sins unto death concealed in their lives. Church membership will not save a person who does not have a living relationship with Christ. It is not a magic answer. Not all true Christians can have membership, and not all members are truly converted. But church membership is still God's plan for the Church on earth.

In Conclusion

Without church membership there can be no baptism into a body, no body connection in church life, and no way to keep the church pure and holy. While the Bible does not say in one sentence, "Thou shalt have a members list in your church," there is no other way to maintain the Bible model without doing just that.

Questions for Thought and Discussion.

1. Why did the Anabaptists reject the practice of baptizing babies?

2. What effect does personal conversion and believer's baptism have on interpersonal relationships?

3. Give three reasons why we consider church membership (when possible) as an essential element of a person's salvation? (Main headings of this lesson).
 - A.
 - B.
 - C.

4. Explain why baptism without church membership is so appealing to many today.

5. Explain why becoming baptized in order to have the privileges of church membership is a deceptive concept.

6. When would you think a person who was not a church member and now lies in a coffin
 - A. Is still a saved person?

 - B. Is now lost forever?

7. When is a church member in good standing with the church still lost before God?

8. Describe the human tendency described in 1 Cor 12:15. Why do we need to resist this tendency?

9. Describe the human tendency described in 1 Cor 12:21. Why do we need to resist this fault?

10. Study Romans 16. Give three church members' names and share how they functioned as members of their local church body.

11. Under what circumstances would it be right for a person to be baptized without becoming an accountable member in a visible body of Christ?

Lesson 3 – Discipline for the Unruly Is It Proper for the Church to Discipline Members Who Stray?

"But didn't he come and confess his weekend of drunkenness? Why do the church leaders think they need to discipline someone who is already penitent for his sins?" Andrew asked.

Julius had come confessing that he had committed several sins unto death. He explained how he had been with cousins who were not a part of a separated church. They had used Scriptures to prove to Julius that it was right to drink a little wine for his health. What had begun as moderate drinking had escalated, and soon one drink led to the next. Inebriated, he was led down the road of drunkenness and fornication. Julius was horrified when he awakened the next morning to a splitting headache and horrifying memories. As he thought of what he had said and done while he was drinking, his overburdened conscience motivated him to go to his minister to confess his sin.

The minister was grateful his congregation understood the Bible pattern for relating to such failures. He knew the power of Biblical discipline to forgive and free the fallen sinner.

One of the most glaring inconsistencies of Evangelical Christianity today compared with New Testament teaching is the lack of discipline for the unruly. While some aspects of church discipline were taught in Lesson 2 in defense of the invisible but very real line of church membership, in this lesson we will look more closely at the reasons why and how church discipline was carried out in the New Testament church. We will begin with the example of the synagogue, go to illustrations of consistent church discipline in the New Testament, and finally study some ways in which church discipline was administered inappropriately. The issue of a written church standard will be looked at in the next lesson.

The Pattern of the Synagogue

In John 9 we have the account given of the man Jesus healed who had been born blind. Near the end of the story in verse 34 and 35 we have the phrase "cast him out." This is an illustration of the kind of excommunication that took place in Jesus' day. Apparently, the man who could now see his way to his home synagogue, was no longer allowed to go there for fellowship. Imagine the incongruity of such religiously sanctioned actions.

This was a much milder discipline than the death penalty that was carried out on those who broke the law in earlier days. You may recall the man who picked up sticks on the Sabbath (Numbers 15:32-36), and also Achan (Joshua 7).

Excommunication from the synagogue was a distinctive punitive action of the Separated Ones, (Pharisees) that organized in Nehemiah 8-10. These visionaries of Nehemiah's day understood it was disobedience to the commandments of God that was the cause for Israel to be led into captivity in the first place. These men of faith believed if they returned to their former disobedience, they would bring God's wrath upon them again. So after a reading of the Law and a clear explanation of it, a voluntary group made "ordinances" for themselves and committed to a uniform practice of the commandments they understood were being jeopardized.

By Jesus' day, however, they felt obligated to "cast out" a person who gave homage to Christ. They also felt obligated to seek the death penalty for the One who claimed to be the Messiah.

Despite religious authority being abused to the extent that Jesus was executed by Jewish leaders, when Christ established His Church, He used the same pattern and terminology as the Pharisees in binding and in loosing and in regarding transgressors as "a heathen and a publican" (Matthew 18:17).

Jesus' Teaching on Church Discipline.

Two distinct passages teach the authority of the church in relating to disciplinary issues. In each of these, Jesus used the same terminology as the Pharisees to describe the action the Church was to take. The first one of these refers to Church standards.

"And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Matthew 16:18-19

This passage relates to judging issues. From the Amplified Bible Version verse 19 says, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind (declare to be improper and unlawful) on earth must be what is already bound in heaven; and whatever you loose (declare lawful) on earth must be what is already loosed in heaven.

This passage plainly states the Church is to speak to issues and to declare some things lawful and other things unlawful. These declarations of the Church are to be in harmony with what Heaven declares on issues.

Discipline When a Brother Refuses to Repent of His Offense

The second passage of church discipline is when a brother refuses to repent of his offence or trespass against his brother. This will be referred to in this study as a "brother sin." It may be a small offence, but if the brother refuses to see that it is wrong, it is to be treated as a serious trespass. When after proper steps are taken a brother refuses to accept correction, he is to come under church discipline and may even be excommunicated.

"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. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Matthew 18:15-18

We learn essential information for church life in this teaching. First, a brother sin can become a "sin unto death." As was mentioned, what might have been a little issue and could have been resolved, may become so big the brother loses his relationship with the church. Brothers in the church are required to accept counsel and concerns from each other. Secondly, heathen men and publicans are to be treated differently than persons in the church. They are not given privileges that church members are given. Thirdly, the brothers as a group are given responsibility to hear and judge the attitudes and actions of each other.

Church Discipline for Committing Sins unto Death.

In Lesson 2 we reviewed the sin of fornication that Paul addressed in 1 Corinthians 5. In this context, Paul goes on to mention other sins (1 Cor 5:10-11) that are in the same class as fornication and need to be treated with discipline. Since the person committing the sin loses his salvation, it is called a sin unto death.

"If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it. All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death." 1 John 5:16-17

John here specifically writes concerning serious sins which immediately separate a person from God and exclude one from salvation. A person who is hiding this kind of sin in his life cannot establish a

relationship with God without acknowledging what he has done. Other Scriptures also witness to this truth. (These verses are found in Appendix A in the back of this booklet.) This "difference" in sins in no way allows for committing sins of any kind because "all unrighteousness is sin" 1 John 5:17.

Therefore it is plain that there is a difference in sins. Some sins may be cleared up between a sinner and his God. Some can be cleared up between a sinner and his brother. Others are of the magnitude they need to be taken to the church to be cleared up. Jesus gave the church the power to forgive sins (John 20:23). The beauty of this is the freedom a sinner has in knowing his sin has been sent beforehand to judgment².

The purpose of a church hearing and forgiving sins is not to shame and blame, but to help a brother make his way in victory over sin in his way toward heaven. "Such were some of you..." is true for most of us. We have a history of brokenness. But through owning our sins we find freedom.

It is difficult to imagine sins unto death that have not yet been named. However, knowing the perversity of the human heart, and the intrigue of the Devil, we know that the church will have to deal with sins that were not specifically mentioned in the Bible. Sadly, this has been the case in increasing instances since the industrial revolution and technology has been used to expand frontiers into iniquity.

Excommunication for Not Conforming to Church Tradition.

In 2 Thessalonians 2 the Apostle Paul enjoins the church to keep the "traditions" they had been given. This word tradition is the same word that Jesus had chided the Pharisees for abusing. Again, we see the link between the legitimate Pharisee practice and what the church was assigned to do. The church is to establish traditions that address specific cultural problems that surface in various geographical and cultural settings. We also learn from the way the Pharisees abused traditions, that sadly, church groups may do the same to their own condemnation.

As an example, in the next chapter (2 Thessalonians 3), the specific problems that plagued the church at Thessalonica begin to surface. Apparently there was a problem of people not taking specific responsibility for their material support. They avoided working. One would suppose this would be a problem where socialism has had its effect.

"Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us... For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread." 2 Thessalonians 3:6,10-12

From Bible record, we do not know that Jesus nor the apostles had ever addressed the problem of not working. Being negligent and lazy was a Grecian problem. Jesus repeatedly warned the Jews about the problem of too active pursuit of wealth and riches. This is the other side of the problem of material possessions. Paul gives very clear direction to it and a pattern for us to follow in cultures where it is a problem today.

Church leaders today are to look for the cultural snares of their day and address them from a Biblical perspective. When the church has spoken, leaders will need to be willing to exercise church discipline on violations when they arise, even though they may not find direct Bible teaching to address that issue. Sadly,

²Unlike Catholicism, we do not believe the Bible teaches that the church can forgive sins without true repentance on the part of the sinner, and without the sinner first receiving forgiveness from Christ. Eph 1:7; Col 1:14; 2:13

it appears that even as in Jesus' day, there will always be some who trust in keeping the traditions as a means to save them instead of following Christ commands to "deny self, take up (his) cross and follow him (Jesus).

Delivered unto Satan for Teaching False Doctrine.

In Paul's writing to Timothy, we are given another insight into church discipline. Let's combine the references to this since one of the names connects the two passages.

"Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck: Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme."
1 Timothy 1:19-20

"But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness. And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some. Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." 2 Timothy 2:16-19 (See also 1 Timothy 6:3-5)

Now we do not know for certain that the blasphemy that Hymenaeus and Alexander were excommunicated for was related to eschatology. But Paul does say Hymenaeus theology was overthrowing faith. There are a few conclusions that we can safely reach.

- The church did excommunicate over the matter of false doctrine, especially when it led the listeners into iniquity.
- Regarding eschatology, no one who is righteous will be missed in the gathering together of the saints. Jesus knows everyone who is His.
- There is never any excuse for the disciple of Christ to justify living in iniquity. We could wish for more details regarding the views on eschatology but will need to let this as is.

Another closely connected part of this is the direction to discipline those who dwell on the controversial and in doing so, erect walls between brethren.

"But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain. A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject; Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself." Titus 3:9-11

The "heretick" in focus here is a person who is schismatic, one who is divisive in the congregation. There are two ditches to avoid. One ditch is to overlook sin. The other ditch is to become divided over matters that amount to personal opinion.

Discipline for a Church Leader for Inappropriate Church Discipline (already referred to on page 6)

We have a very sad (but enlightening) account on the issue of drawing fellowship lines. There are verses which instruct us to draw fellowship lines based on doctrine and practice. Here is a sample of these:

"If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds." 2 John 1:10-11

"Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away." 2 Timothy 3:5

"And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them." Ephesians 5:11

However, the matter of being overly exclusive is also addressed. The Apostle John as a church leader needed to correct this matter. Apparently, there were itinerant missionaries who passed through Bishop Diotrephes' area but because they did not belong to the local church fellowship, he apparently felt threatened by them and was excommunicating church members who received them. This exclusive administrative attitude even led Diotrephes to speak reproachfully about the Apostle John

" I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church. Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God." 3 John 1:9-11

We are not given the privilege to witness the meeting between John and Diotrephes. Were they able to resolve this peaceably? Did John need to silence and excommunicate Diotrephes? Was there a church division over this? We have seen all these scenarios play out in our day, but the sacred record does not give us the conclusion of the matter. We only know it was right for a leader to call another leader into account. There is a proper time to draw fellowship lines, and there are times when it is not appropriate.

Discipline As a Time to Discern Godly Sorrow and to Build Trust

In 2 Corinthians 2, Paul addresses the restoration of the man who was disciplined because of the teaching given in 1 Corinthians 5. In this passage Paul explains two important concepts which help us understand why penitent confessing sinners still need church discipline.

One is in his use of the word "punishment."

"Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many." 2 Corinthians 2:6 There are consequences for sin, and some of the work the church does when discipline is applied is punitive.

But the other phrase that gives us enlightenment is found in chapter seven.

"For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death." 2 Corinthians 7:10

Paul explains there are two kinds of sorrow. When we sin, we always feel bad for our sin. One kind of sorrow thinks, "How can I look good to man; how can I restore my honor?" This is the sorrow of the world. The genuine godly sorrow says, "How can I restore my honor to God?" This is the sorrow for which the church is to look. Restoring a man to his place in the brotherhood when he has the sorrow of the world alone will not be true restoration. Often a disciplined sinner needs time to move in his journey from the sorrow of the world to godly sorrow. This requires a change of heart condition. The church also needs the time to rebuild the trust that has been broken. This will require some time of proving.

This is what the minister at the beginning of this lesson explained to Andrew. "We want Julius to make it to heaven. We understand it is more than feeling sorry for what he did. He needs to be meditating on the question, 'How can I be righteous before my Lord?'"

In Conclusion

This lesson has focused on Bible illustrations of the church practicing church discipline. The Church of Jesus Christ is to be a pure body, separated from the world. This can only be accomplished by Biblical church discipline. The illustrations in this lesson are a safe guide to follow. We do not need to imagine or invent a new path. Furthermore, if we do not practice Bible discipline, then we are not the Church of Jesus Christ. We may be a worldly organization and consider ourselves successful, but we are only Christ's church when we follow Christ's way.

Questions For Thought and Discussion

1. What kind of discipline for the disobedient was commanded in the Old Testament?
2. What discipline did the blind man who was healed receive from his synagogue? What was his offence?
3. What boundaries did Jesus put on the rules that a New Testament church may make?
4. Describe how something so simple as a brother cheating his brother in a small way may become so large that he would need to be excommunicated?
5. List some of the sins that are sins unto death, so serious they will bring automatic excommunication from the church?
6. Give an example of a sin that Jesus never addressed as far as we know and yet the early church excommunicated when this sin was a way of life.
7. What are some views of eschatology that should not be permitted in our fellowships?
8. What do you think motivated Bishop Diotrephes' faulty practice of church discipline?
9. Explain why a person who has committed a sin unto death and expressed sorrow for it may still need to be excommunicated from the church.

Lesson 4 – Church Standards Did Jesus Intend for the Church to Have Written Standards?

Pastor Dave shook his head. "But I'm not sure your church is on the right foundation," he said. "You Mennonites are forever making rules, even on things the Bible does not mention. We Brethren only discipline on what the Bible directly teaches."

Shawn pondered that statement for a bit, and then he asked, "Are you saying something has to be specifically mentioned in the Bible before you will take a position on it?"

"Yes, if it isn't specifically mentioned, then we don't forbid it."

Shawn's mind went to many different matters he believed the Bible forbade in principle form. "So," he asked, "What about smoking? What about using drugs? What about watching movies and television? Those things are not mentioned in the Bible."

"That's right; we have no position on those matters," replied Pastor Dave.

The Historical Basis for Binding and Loosing

One of the intriguing facts that Christians discover when looking for the roots of Church authority in written standards is the Old Testament connection. Jewish authorities reach out to Jesus' declaration to His disciples and place it in context with what the Pharisee movement had been doing for centuries. Following is a quote from the Jewish encyclopedia under the section of "Binding and Loosing" ...

"The power of binding and loosing was always claimed by the Pharisees. Under Queen Alexandra, the Pharisees, says Josephus ("B J." i, 5, § 2), 'became the administrators of all public affairs so as to be empowered to banish and readmit whom they pleased, as well as to loose and to bind.'" This does not mean that, as the learned men, they merely decided what, according to the Law, was forbidden or allowed, but that they possessed and exercised the power of tying or untying a thing by the spell of their divine authority, just as they could, by the power vested in them, pronounce and revoke an anathema upon a person...."

In the New Testament.

"In this sense Jesus, when appointing his disciples to be his successors, used the familiar formula (Matthew 16:19; 18:18). By these words he virtually invested them with the same authority as that which he found belonging to the scribes and Pharisees who 'bind heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders, but will not move them with one of their fingers'; that is, 'loose them,' as they have the power to do (Matthew 23:2-4)..."

Or under the section of "Authority" in the same Jewish encyclopedia we find the following::

"Far more significant and expressive of the idea of Rabbinical Authority are the words used by Jesus when ordaining Peter as chief apostle, or his disciples as his successors, and undoubtedly taken from pharisaic usage: 'I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven' (Matthew 16:19; 18:18). This corresponds exactly with what Josephus, or rather his source, tells of the Pharisees in the time of Queen Alexandra: 'They were the real administrators of the public affairs; they removed and readmitted whom they pleased; they bound and loosed [things] at their pleasure.'"

Historians both Jewish and Christian find the practice of "binding and loosing" first implemented because of the captivity and the return in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah. The transition from only having gatherings for temple worship in the feast days to weekly local Sabbath gatherings in the synagogue made

a profound difference in Jewish life. Jews in captivity understood Ezekiel's prophecy³ to teach them to preserve their faith by gathering in small groups to study the law. The effect of this was the establishment of regular accountability in every Jewish community.

In addition, the Pharisee movement was born in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah as recorded in Nehemiah 8-10. After a public reading of the law, faithful Jews assessed the areas where their current culture ran counter and led into disobedience to God's law. They responded with a voluntary alliance and agreement to enter into a uniform practice of ordinances that would help them remain faithful to a practice of the law. Their uniform practice then created distinct groups of the faithful.

It is interesting that while Jesus gave strong admonition against the excesses of the Pharisees, He nowhere did away with the basic system they followed. In fact, in using the common terms for their written edicts and synagogue excommunication, He established the Pharisee structure of synagogue gathering and discipline to be the norm for the Church. While this in practical life may become marked by human inconsistency, groups that have no binding and loosing end up far short of the Church that Jesus came to establish. This discipline is to operate alongside the invisible but very real work of the Holy Spirit to give direction in the assemblies of Jesus' disciples.

Church Leaders Made Decrees

In Acts 15:1-31 and Acts 16:4-5, the church carried out the mandate that Jesus had given them. It is of great importance that we follow the direction that Jesus gave and the pattern the Apostles initiated. We will primarily focus on two aspects of this formation of church decrees. The first aspect is the matter of *who* formulated the Decrees. The second aspect is the *nature* of their decrees.

"And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them. But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses. And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter." Acts 15:4-6

Who Established These Decrees of the Early Church?

1. It was not Peter alone. Many people use Jesus' declaration to Peter in Matthew 16 to say he was the head of the church. But look again at Acts 15 to see who spoke out at this conference.

- v7a The entire group did a good bit of disputing.
- v7b Peter shared that God had made it clear that Gentiles could be saved as well as Jews.
- v12 Barnabas and Paul gave a missionary report on the miracles and wonders God was doing among the Gentiles.
- v13 James summarized the discussion up to that point and made the proposal to which the entire group agreed.

2. It was the apostles and elders who led the decision "with the whole church."

- v2 Paul and Barnabas came to where the apostles and elders were.
- v6 The apostles and elders came together to consider this matter.
- v22 The apostles and elders "with the whole church" were pleased to come to agreement. v23 The letter that was sent began with "The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia..." Acts 15:23

³Therefore say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Although I have cast them far off among the heathen, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come. Ezekiel 11:16

Sometimes people wrongly expect Peter or his appointed successor to make the decrees for the church. Such has become the tradition of the Roman Catholic church which makes the pope infallible when he speaks *ex cathedra*.

At other times people wrongly bring Matthew 18 into this setting and believe every church member needs to be involved in forming and enforcing church decisions. That is clearly not the pattern followed. Matthew 18 relates to individuals settling personal offences and the church becoming involved when necessary. It is valuable for a brother to speak with an offender if he witnesses a violation of an agreed upon standard. However, the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 5 did not chastise the first observers of the immoral brother. He assigned the correction of the matter to the ordained leaders of the church based on what was commonly reported.

As the example illustrates, the matter of binding and loosing is a church leadership issue that should then be taken up with the entire brotherhood. Ideally new positions will please the "whole church."

What May Be Observed About the Decrees?

"But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood." Acts 15:20

"That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well." Acts 15:29

There is a wide variation of opinion on these decrees. Even brief research reveals Jewish rabbis and Catholic and Protestant scholars have interest in understanding what the apostles agreed to.

First, we know there were prohibitions in the law that were not carried over into the church. In this immediate setting we learn circumcision was not required. The New Testament canon goes on to explain that all efforts to call some meat "unclean" were abolished. (Acts 10-11) In fact, the entire commandments of the law, even those written and engraved in stone are done away with (2 Cor 3:7 & 11) and the handwriting of ordinances is nailed to His cross (Eph 2:15).

We also know there are many more things that Jesus prohibited during His ministry and that the Apostles addressed in the Epistles beyond these few church rules. For example, the New Testament prohibits stealing, lying, adultery, murder and slander. So, we know these decrees did not address a complete standard of morality issues.

What then are these decrees addressing? Apparently, these were cultural issues where the Christian church was confronting a pagan culture. These decrees make much more sense when read in a pagan culture today-- for example, in the Hindu culture in India. Christians there are easily convinced it is immoral to eat food that has been offered to their idols.

In our Western culture, these standards hardly make sense. We do not think of having our beef processed by a rabbi to make sure there is no blood in it. We don't find foods offered to idols for sale at a reduced price. We don't even think of eating an animal that was strangled. This is not from a moral viewpoint. It simply isn't appetizing. But we do have many cultural challenges the church in their day had never even faced.

But you might say, "What about the issue of fornication?" Some scholars believe this decree may relate to cultural applications of "fornication." One was the matter of Jews who had strong teaching about marrying Gentiles. This prohibition could well have been against intermarriage between believers with Jewish and Gentile heritage (Ezra 9-10). Or the problem of close incestuous marriages may have been in focus. The Jews had laws against close family intimacy (Lev 18:6-18) of which Gentiles did not have inhibitions.

One of the interesting conflicts that arises out of this is the strong position that the Apostle Paul took that meats offered to idols was not a moral issue. (See 1 Cor 8:1-13) Consider the following truths.

"But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse." 1 Cor 8:8

But in Revelation, this very issue is highlighted as being of great importance.

"Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols." Rev 2:20

What shall we conclude? One thing for certain is that if a church properly and scripturally forbids a cultural issue, even one that may have debatable basis, this decree should not be lightly regarded.

Let Us Walk By the Same Rule

There is another interesting term used in the New Testament. In some passages it endorses the concept of a church standard, and in others it seems to set boundaries on what those standards may be. It is the word "kanon," which is translated "rule" or "measure" in our King James Version. Strongs gives the definition as: kanon; from kane (a straight reed, i.e., rod); a rule ("canon,") i.e. (figuratively) a standard (of faith and practice); by implication, a boundary, i.e. (figuratively) a sphere (of activity): — line, rule. (Bold and underlined text done by the author.)

Following are the passages where this word is found.

"But we will not boast of things without our measure, but according to the measure of the rule which God hath distributed to us, a measure to reach even unto you. For we stretch not ourselves beyond our measure, as though we reached not unto you: for we are come as far as to you also in preaching the gospel of Christ: Not boasting of things without our measure, that is, of other men's labours; but having hope, when your faith is increased, that we shall be enlarged by you according to our rule abundantly, To preach the gospel in the regions beyond you, and not to boast in another man's line of things made ready to our hand." 2 Cor 10:13-16

"And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God." Gal 6:16
"Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing." Php 3:16

This word became our word "canon" defined as "a regulation or dogma decreed by a church council." In the Corinthian passage, Paul is referring to this line or meter as being the geographical boundaries where he shared the gospel message. In the last passage quoted, Paul is seeking to achieve perfection, and he is saying that one level of perfection to measure up to is the agreed upon church standard.

Are There Rules the Church May Not Make?

The question that may naturally arise is "If the church may rule on cultural issues, then do they have the liberty to rule on all issues? Or are there limitations?"

One of the verses to answer this question is found in the Apostles letter to the churches. "For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things;" Acts 15:28. The church needs to refrain from unnecessary burdens that do not illustrate Bible truths.

We also receive some direction on this as we ponder the warning of the Apostle Paul. He tells us that in the latter times, some action will be taken to make prohibitions which he says are not permitted.

"Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth." 1 Tim 4:3

What is the principle here? We already know the church cannot take authority over the New Testament. For example, the church cannot decide divorce and remarriage is now permitted, or that we no

longer need to wash each other's feet. It is the church's responsibility to establish practices on how to apply New Testament commands, not to figure out ways to violate them.

But forbidding marriage or commanding to abstain from meats is not a New Testament command. So how do we know the church can overturn what the Old Testament law directs, but not make these commands?

The institutions of marriage and of eating foods comes from Creation and God's declaration of morality after the Flood. These are Genesis principles that will carry for all generations. Matters such as gender distinction, procreation, eating meats, one day in seven being for rest, and what defines modesty are established by our Creator and may not be tampered with, even by church leaders under the authority of Christ.

In Conclusion

All churches that desire to be a part of the New Testament church that Jesus established will "bind on earth what has been bound in heaven and will loose on earth what has been loosed in heaven." If a church does not rise to the challenge for any reason, or if they take authority that goes beyond their Biblical authority, they forfeit their place within the kingdom of Heaven.

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. Where is the first record of God's people establishing rules for those who wished to enter into a voluntary agreement to a standard of holiness?
2. How do we know Jesus intended for His Church to operate on a premise of binding and loosing issues in a manner similar to the Pharisees?
3. What illustration from the early church in the book of Acts pictures the church leaders carrying out Jesus' direction to make rules on cultural issues?
4. What are some of the tendencies of a rule-bound group about which Jesus warned His followers? (See Matthew 23:1-33 and Mark 7:1-23).
5. When the early church wrote their decrees, why did they not make mention of forbidden sins unto death such as adultery or drunkenness?
6. What does it tell us when they refused to bring any of the Law given to Moses into the New Testament church?
7. What do you observe in the fact that Jews who quote Jesus in His comments about Pharisees making binding laws, but also reject Him as their Messiah?
8. Can you draw any significance from the fact that the word "Kanon" means both geographical boundary and a statement of faith and practice?
9. Why is it good for church leaders to realize they may only make rulings that are bound in heaven? How will they discover where that line is?

Lesson 5 – Choosing Leaders for the Church How Is the Church to Select and Relate to Her Leaders?

"Do you think that Frank is a member of the fellowship where he attends?" Stan asked his friend Alex. They were discussing whether or not they should include Frank, a mutual childhood friend of theirs, in a business opportunity they were considering.

"Well, he must be. I heard that he preached there last Sunday," Alex answered.

"Preached?" Stan asked. "Is he a preacher?"

"Oh no, he is not a preacher per se," Alex answered. "But their fellowship doesn't believe in preachers. They believe they are all preachers. In fact, they are raising questions about whether or not they should even have membership."

Leaders Were Never Self-Appointed

One of the practices of modern Evangelical Christianity is that most ministers sense a personal call and make the decision to pursue preaching as a life occupation. Their sense of calling leads them to seek education and training in some institution of higher education. Right along with the investment of the training is the expectation that this calling will provide a salary for them to support their living. When the time comes that they have received sufficient training, then they are in some manner chosen and hired by men who are authorized to hire the preacher. But is this the pattern of the early church?

It is no question that education and training may influence the performance of educated ministers. Is this what God wants? Or is this an example of the hireling referred to by Jesus in John 10:12?

The book of Hebrews highlights how Jesus exemplified an Old Testament principle of leadership by not appointing Himself. *And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron. So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee.* Hebrews 5:4-5

The New Testament clearly presents the model of leaders being *ordained* to lead in the Church. In this lesson we would like to discover the New Testament pattern for calling leaders, the service of leaders, and the role of leaders in church life.

Leaders Are Chosen From the Brotherhood.

We are given several examples of how New Testament leaders were called. In fact, the New Testament documents up to two or three generations of leaders as they were called to serve the church. This example is repeated enough to leave us a clear pattern, and we will make observations from the illustrations given us.

Who was ordained	Who did the ordaining
The early disciples who became the apostles	Jesus--Luke 6
The deacons	The apostles--Acts 6
The missionaries who were sent	The church--Acts 13
The first elders established in new churches	The missionary apostles -- Acts 14:23
The elders appointed by apostles to set things in order and to ordain other elders	Titus and Timothy

Jesus made His selection for the first leaders of the Christian church among ordinary men who were busy trying to support themselves in ordinary occupations. Some were fishermen, another was a tax collector. These were not men who felt called, but when they knew they were called, they took up their calling with a ready mind.

After Pentecost and the rapid growth of the church, the apostles saw the need for someone to serve the material needs of their fledgling group. They clearly defined the role and gave qualities of the office God was leading them to accept. Then they asked the brotherhood to give suggestions. This seems to establish the pattern for subsequent ordinations. After a time of examination, the apostles ordained all seven of the nominees.

The church at Antioch prayed and sent Paul and Barnabas out as missionaries. Later Paul selected Silas upon the recommendation of the brothers. When Paul and his associates visited churches the second time, they ordained elders at each city church congregation. When they perceived the churches were in disarray, they would ordain a delegate leader to stay to take the leadership and set things in order.

It is clear that leadership is always authorized by earthly authority, not upon a personal call alone. It is only given to those who meet spiritual and character qualifications.

A Leader Is Nominated By the Brotherhood

The New Testament does give a few norms for establishing leadership but not one set plan that fits all. It is also clear from the very first apostle ordination replacing Judas and with the first deacon ordination that the brotherhood has a responsibility in making nominations.

It may be frequently observed that the leadership of a congregation will see potential candidates differently than the membership does. It is possible the leadership may be subtly influenced by the Sunday impressions a person leaves, or by the loyal support of what the leaders have as their goals. Others who know the potential candidates best will know the actual character on an everyday level.

For these reasons, the brotherhood must be invited to give their nominations. Furthermore, the leadership should respect the viewpoint of the brotherhood. In some cases Mennonite church leaders have maintained they have the right to challenge nominations; to not accept those with whom they did not care to work alongside. This sends signals to the brotherhood that the membership is on a lower level than the ministry and undermines brotherhood. While the ministry may disqualify those who prove unqualified after they have examined them, they absolutely should not still the voice of a brotherhood when they submit nominations of brethren they trust and believe are qualified.

Another principle is the qualification, "at the mouth of two or three witnesses." When only one person believes he sees qualifications, his viewpoint may be affected by his personal bias. The scripture confirms the practice of requiring two or preferably three nominations for a person to be considered a candidate.

Leaders Serve in an Office Among Other Ordained Leaders

This brings the three-office ministry into focus. In the first generation of Christian leaders, it was Apostles, elders, and deacons. After the first generation of leaders passed off, it was elders given responsibility to ordain and to set things in order (bishops), elders (ministers), and deacons.

God has always worked with a three-office ministry. In Eternity, it is Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. In the Old Testament, it was Prophet, Priest, and King. In the New Testament church era it is Bishop, Minister, and Deacon, or something of its equivalent. This three-office ministry provides a beautiful system of checks and balances and creates team leadership.

When a person is called into an office, that office identifies his primary focus. He may also fit into other responsibilities, but no other temporary work may detract him from his first calling. In a later lesson we will discuss how each office can contribute to the atmosphere of brotherhood.

Questions Appropriate for Candidates to Answer

"Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them." Acts 6:6

When a deacon received nomination for his office in Acts, he was first set before apostles to be examined and instructed in preparation for his service. The entire list of qualifications given in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 2 is provided to test each nominee to ascertain his seriousness in maintaining his Christian life.

Questions should focus on an individual's personal character. This should include his personal devotional life and the quality of devotional life that is maintained in his family. He should be examined to see if he is free from sins unto death or other addictions that would hinder him from serving the church.

The counsel of his family, the community, as well as the members of the church should be given consideration.

A leader's vision for the church should also be discovered. Church life is a preparation for eternity, not just for maintaining group traditions or order here in time. Certainly, leadership in Jesus' Church is not intended to give someone an ego boost. (A list of questions given to ministers is included in Appendix C in the back of this study.)

The Authority of the New Leader

When a new leader is ordained, he must be respected by all. Of course, a new leader will lack experience and must be humble about his calling, but something happens when a man is ordained by God.

First, he is given a gift for his work. Paul reminded Timothy of this as he encouraged Timothy to make his calling the chief focus in his life.

"Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery." 1 Tim 4:14

The word "gift" used here comes from a Greek word from which we get the word "charisma" from. The definition of this word that best suits its usage is "grace or gifts denoting extraordinary powers, distinguishing certain Christians and enabling them to serve the church of Christ, the reception of which is due to the power of divine grace operating on their souls by the Holy Spirit" (Olive Tree Enhanced Strong's Dictionary)

A bishop needs to respect the calling of the deacon as much as the deacon respects the calling of the minister. Respecting a person means we give careful attention to their decisions and leadership. It might be observed that if church members and leaders spent as much energy to work with and encourage leaders they tend to be critical of, as they do to tear them down, much good would be accomplished.

Leaders Owe Respect to Each Other.

There is so much gained in church life if we "find our place, fill our place, and then stay in our place." While there is a place to respectfully share disagreements or corrections, it must be done considering eternity and the God who gives gifts to the church.

How Is the Congregation to Relate to Their Leaders?

"And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves." 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13

"Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation." Hebrews 13:7

"Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you." Hebrews 13:17

Leaders and church members will each give answer one day to the Lord of the Church for how they related to problems. Leaders are given special responsibility and accountability for the counsel and discipline they give their members.

In the direction "*to know them*" and "*esteem them highly*" we have a caution established against choosing to relate to special speakers and ministers as if they would be superior to one's own local leaders. In earlier days some were tempted to follow radio preachers because they liked their speeches. Today the temptation to follow podcast speakers is replacing the earlier temptation. Podcast speakers can never take the place of the local leaders who have been given their responsibility by God. Jesus said it this way, "*A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house.*" Matthew 13:57

When a Leader Leaves His Assignment

It is right for the congregation to view the calling of an ordained brother to be for a lifetime, unless the Lord would make it clear there is another place for him to fill. In the same way, when a brother is called by the Lord, he should devote all his energies into making the arrangement work. As humans, we will always see the needs in each other and may feel disillusioned with our flock. We do not have the liberty to use a critical spirit as reason to walk away from a calling given us by the Lord.

In the comparison of the Good Shepherd Jesus compared a true shepherd with a hireling. One will flee, the other will lay down his life for his sheep. We know which one of these our Good Shepherd calls His under-shepherds to be.

In Conclusion

There are more popular offices and ones that receive more financial remuneration, but there is no office or work more important than the work of caring for souls. The ordained leader has much influence on the atmosphere of the church. Through their leadership, brotherhood is either encouraged or is replaced with carnal relationships. We want to follow Christ's example and leadership.

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. How does the present trend of churches making everyone a minister with no one being officially called to an office in the church compare with the New Testament practice?
2. How does an individual (even women) become a minister and receive a charge in most modern evangelical settings?
3. What should a brother do if he feels he is called to be a preacher?
4. What are some advantages of a church leader being called from among the membership of a congregation?
5. What are some issues that could arise when members make nominations for new leaders?
6. How shall the leadership relate to a situation in which they believe a very popular church member does not qualify for church leadership?
7. Why should a church require a potential candidate for church leadership to receive at least two or more votes?
8. Give some reasons for a three-office ministry in church leadership.
9. Why is it important that nominees be thoroughly vetted (examined) before they are placed in the class to share the lot?
10. What did Jesus call the shepherd who was paid for keeping sheep but did not feel a personal attachment to them?

Lesson 6 – A Church Leader’s Vision of His Calling Does Jesus Install Lords or Servants?

"Whew!" Jed sighed. "I wish I didn't feel so trapped in our church... I thought brotherhood is supposed to be a place of encouragement and growth. Why do I feel like our leadership is more about trying to make me measure up to some impossible standard?"

"What are the areas where the ministry finds fault with your life?" Silas asked. "Are there restrictions they want you to honor that you are not cooperating with? Or are there things that you should be doing as a Christian brother that you are not doing?"

Jed didn't know what to say. "I have evidence they are spreading rumors about me behind my back. When I point out the things they say about me that are not true, they just get quiet. When I showed them their request that I disobey my dad in a non-moral issue (asking me to wear a plain hat instead of the company logo cap of my father's company as my father requires) was a violation of Bible commandment, they said I am bitter. In fact, because they so often attack me, in a recent meeting I told them I just don't trust them anymore. I feel like they don't even like me, much less love me the way the Bible teaches. I get the feeling they specialize in 'blame and shame,' rather than being guardians over my Christian life."

A Servant, Not a Lord

It is incredible that God trusts the leadership of His people to mortals. We all struggle with seeing ourselves, disciplining our own impulses, and controlling our own emotions. With human nature being what it is, there will be times when we are vexed or disappointed, or unrealistically impressed with ourselves. These feelings are experienced by human leaders.

And yet God is the One who assigns men to lead other men.

Among Biblically directed churches, a second element enters this amazing construct; God often chooses men who have had little training or professional schooling in leadership and asks them to lead.

In this lesson we set out to define one element of Scriptural leadership—what it means to be a servant of the people one is called to lead, versus how things go when one sees himself as a lord. The Bible gives us many examples of servanthood. Our chief example is Jesus Himself. He gave authoritative teaching, but not once did He ostracize His detractors nor set Himself as One who should materially benefit from His followers. He served them day and night, and finally offered Himself on the cross of Calvary to redeem the souls of those who receive and follow Him.

One of the chief differences in Jesus' leadership is that He was willing to be our example. He never sent men to go where He was unwilling to go. In fact, He was willing to go where He hardly ever sends any of us, to a literal cross. However, His words are clear, "Follow Me."

Another Bible example is the contrast between King Saul and King David. Saul wished to coerce the people to serve and protect him. David chose to trust God's hand in the leadership of the kingdom. David was far from perfect, but his example in leadership is one to follow. He kept his eyes on the One who had called him and was known as a man after God's own heart. He sought to use his leadership position as a means of solving problems, not protecting his selfish ambitions.

It is impossible for a leader to choose the "good life" of wealth, fashion, pleasure, or ease and expect his followers to deny self. The chief way to lead a group of followers in self-denial is to set an example by practicing the things he teaches.

His example does not replace the need for Biblical church discipline. It is right for the church to discipline the erring. (1 Cor 5; 2 Cor 2). It is right for the church to establish guidelines and to "bind" and

"loose" in practical areas where the lifestyle of a people violates Bible teaching. But the true leader will not require of the people what he himself is not willing to do first.

"But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." (Mark 10:42-45)

Contrasts Between a Lord and a Servant

Sometimes we can most clearly understand a role by making a contrast. The following chart is an effort to do this. This comparison is especially designed for church leaders. It could be modified to describe a business executive, or some other leader. In all of life Christians are called to be servants.

A Lord:	A Servant:
Desires to have as many people under him as he possibly can.	Desires to serve only as many souls as he can truly help.
Wants those under him to give him honor and praise through compliments and/or monetary contributions.	He wants to know his people's problems so he can help them find solutions and be successful.
Works to control the lives and decisions of his subjects. Any hint of independence is quickly punished.	He wants to give his people resources so they can bless a greater cause and accomplish work for their Master.
When someone shows some ability, he feels like they are a threat to him and works to undermine other's confidence in that person.	When someone shows ability, he praises them and encourages them to serve the Lord with the talents God has given them.
If someone leaves to serve God in another way, he must make them look rebellious and stir up the group to punish them.	If someone leaves and is true to the faith, he blesses them. If untrue to the faith, he applies scriptural discipline so as to help them find faith.
Seeks to create absolute loyalty, suspicious others of stealing hearts.	Exposes his people to faithful leaders, even those more popular than himself, knowing each personality and friendship stabilizes character.
When he senses discontentment, he accuses the group of disloyalty and of turning against him. (Saul in 1 Sam 6-8.)	When he hears a criticism, he chooses to see it as being from the Lord as something from which God wants him to benefit. (David 2 Sam 16:9-13)
Builds higher, stronger fences.	Works to create better pastures, a better sheepfold.
Takes any criticism as rebellion and forces his subjects into submission.	Welcomes loyal criticism and even opposition because he is looking for ways to strengthen his service.
Attacks the person.	Attacks the problem.

Despises those who criticize or would correct his errors.	Sincerely listens to rebuke or counsel and loves the one giving admonition.
Creates a fear-based structure.	Creates love-based relationships.
Wants to win every case as proof that he was right.	Wants to win the eternal cause for soul's sake.
Desires the acceptance and favor of other leaders, so he joins them in manipulation and intimidation.	Desires acceptance from God, so he will not violate his conscience regardless of any group pressure against him.
Does not hesitate to destroy the reputation of opposing groups or leaders that he sees as competition. The truth is sacrificed for his power.	Is very careful to maintain Christian relationship rules, honoring the truth, seeking to preserve peace between himself and other shepherds.
Chooses intimidation and manipulation to maintain control.	Is mostly afraid of his own anger and tendency to control. Deliberately reaches out to God to bring vengeance on unfair situations.
Takes the "priest" role in making transgressors accountable to him or one of the team.	Sees himself as one of the brothers and helps transgressors be accountable to other brothers.
Overlooks major failures in those who are perceived as loyal to him, but attacks perceived symbols of disloyalty.	Calls sin, "sin" and metes out just judgment regardless of the perceived support of one who is found in iniquity.
Directs people to himself – authoritarian leadership	Directs people to consciousness of a divine authority over all of us – authoritative leadership.

May God help us as leaders to find His methods of caring for His sheep. It should be our constant goal to hear ". . . Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord." (Matthew 25:23)

Greater Loyalty to the Lord of the Church

One of the snares of leadership in conservative church circles is the competition that can spring up between leaders of separate congregations or church groups. Competition is native to human nature. We all want to somehow prove that we are better than others. Church leaders can give expression of this carnality by making subtle or even overt comparisons between their church members and those from other groups. We can easily fall prey to the snare of superior attitudes that our congregation is much more "liberal" or "conservative" than others. The impression may be given that their church leader has contributed to this bent and stigma is attached to that leader.

When a leader wants to make his charge appear superior to others, he can be tempted to reward those who appear to be in line and withhold approval from those who do not measure up to his expectations. Some people will be conservative or loyal enough to be used in the church, and placed on the slate for potential election to hold a church office, while others are held back from the possibility of holding office within the church.

When a brother of "good esteem" is discovered to be with sin (in some cases even a sin unto death,) but the sin has been kept secret, he may be treated casually. At the same time a brother who is a "border liner" may find himself under censure or put out of public limelight because he expresses some concern about an administrative judgment (not a sin) to church leadership.

A congregation will be keenly aware of this type of treatment. Some will rebel against this leadership injustice, while others sense what it takes to meet the leadership's approval and conform outwardly.

The greater snare of this administration is the hypocrisy it tends to produce in congregational life. Weaker members tend to conclude, "If church life is all about looking good, then I must conceal my sin. If it is about looking good, then I must make gradual and subtle changes to become the most conservative in my setting."

Sin that is concealed grows. Addictions become stronger. Competition between brothers grows. True brotherhood suffers.

This is the struggle that tends to form in any group that believes in obedience to traditional expressions to achieve spiritual advantage. Jews, Muslims, and works-based Christian denominations all struggle with the temptation to succumb to intense competition. The entire system becomes very dark.

So how is the Christian church supposed to operate without something of a "brownie point" reward system? If each church member is treated without partiality, how can the entire group be led in whole-hearted obedience to New Testament values. We know each new generation will tend to challenge the old standards. How can they be led if there are no special rewards for those who go beyond the minimum standard?

The New Testament holds up obedience to God's Word as an expression of living faith. When our people understand that the various expressions of our standards are an effort to obey New Testament commandments, then there will be a stronger will to whole-hearted endorsement. When the items that are focused on are merely expressions of conservative Mennonitism, then competition naturally results.

Jesus criticized the Pharisees for making a great deal over things that were not important in God's eyes. That's where the phrase "strain at a gnat and swallow a camel" comes in. They also highlighted their symbols of obedience but bypassed the real commands of God.

While the New Testament does highlight modesty, morality, and headship, it also places great emphasis on soul-winning, on embracing true riches and of showing love and compassion to the suffering. It highlights transparency, forgiveness, and accepting our brother and helping to bear his burdens.

So many of these heart issues cannot be measured by a visible standard yet they are the essence of the relationship we are to maintain with our Lord.

Authoritative, Authoritarian, Indulgent, or Neglectful Church Life?

On the next page, you will find a chart that compares methods of church leadership. These quadrants are not intended to be exhaustive, but they do warrant discussion. While the chart originally was worded to describe types of leadership in homes, it also may apply to the church.

This chart endeavors to show how leadership can effectively enhance trust and communication among the brotherhood. Conversely, it also shows how brotherhood can be destroyed by inconsistent or unscriptural attitudes and actions of church leadership.

The goal is for leadership to be Authoritative, strong in love, and strong in discipline. Being strong in love means they care deeply for every member. They serve as guardians to the flock, not lords. They look for gifts being exercised and give compliments and encouragement where appropriate. If someone errs, they patiently come alongside to correct the course before there is disaster.

Another key point in authoritative leadership is the strong sense of accountability the leadership team has to each other and to their Heavenly Master. Is this church rule scriptural, or does it militate against what heaven has decreed as eternal morality? Church members need to sense that their leaders are accountable to each other and to the morality of heaven, regardless of how they have been schooled.

In the Authoritarian type of church government, there is over-emphasis on the leaders' authority and the need for the members to submit to the church. This type of leadership can lead a group to unhealthy uniformity in practice. It is true that uniformity does have value. In fact, church groups do well to be recognized by their "brand" as members choose consistent applications. However, any "brand" identity must be a result of Biblical practice, not an unscriptural emphasis on church authority.

Leadership Patterns and Church Atmosphere

<p style="text-align: center;">High in Love/High in Discipline Authoritative</p> <p>Mentality: There is a higher law to which we all must answer to. To present every man perfect in Christ.</p> <p>Structure: Obvious headship and leadership. Schedule and order.</p> <p>Rules: Logical and based on principle.</p> <p>Punishments: Firm, consistent & predictable.</p> <p>Affection: Visible tenderness, comfort in distress, expressions of encouragement and love.</p> <p>Outcome: Strong interpersonal relationships, well-adjusted, stable church life.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Low in Love/High in Discipline Authoritarian</p> <p>Mentality: Domineering leaders, "We are the law of this church." Our work is to maintain conservatism.</p> <p>Structure: Patriarchal control. Over emphasis on minute details.</p> <p>Rules: Strict rules, little mercy.</p> <p>Punishments: Harsh with few explanations. Inconsistent.</p> <p>Affection: Seldom displayed. Affection or tender emotions are weakness. Criticisms are common.</p> <p>Outcome: Temporary good impressions. Tense personalities with hidden deviancies. Obvious competition between members.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">High in Love/Low in Discipline Indulgent</p> <p>Mentality: Your will is our wish. Christ's salvation accepts all.</p> <p>Structure: Chaotic and unpredictable, the members' whims control the church.</p> <p>Rules: Basically non-existent, openly violated.</p> <p>Punishments: Sporadic, partiality is evident.</p> <p>Affection: Effusive pampering and catering to wishes of the influential.</p> <p>Outcome: Members who expect that others will serve their interests. Easily offended by others.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Low in Love/Low in Discipline Neglectful</p> <p>Mentality: Other programs or problems take priority.</p> <p>Structure: Each must fend for himself. Very little communication or sharing.</p> <p>Rules: Unspoken Rule-Stay out of the way and hoe your own row.</p> <p>Punishments: Very few. Perhaps a harsh reaction if anyone interferes with the leader.</p> <p>Affection: In theory but is not felt.</p> <p>Outcome: Character is not developed; thus, passions are not mastered.</p>

When church leadership feel their work may be measured by outward appearance and they want their group to reflect good leadership style, then the uniformity emphasis is promoted at the expense of inward well-being.

Indulgent leaders wish to be liked so they bring very little accountability or confrontation into the lives of their membership. They may pride themselves in the thought that they have no "Phariseism" in their group. Today, it seems the predominate thinking in evangelical circles is the Free Grace Theology. This belief centers around the choice to believe and minimizes the Biblical doctrine of discipleship. Free Grace asserts that belief brings salvation and any effort to obey for salvation shows a person is not saved. "God forgives, so why not let Him?" may be their motto. Apostasy or at least stair-step apostasy and a generation gap is noticeable in these churches. Church discipline is sadly neglected, even for sins unto death.

Neglectful leaders are just too busy with other pursuits to notice where their people are going. Many of these churches have no expectation of holiness unless it is what the people personally choose on their own. Leaders have very little connection with their members.

In Conclusion

God has designed that church leaders are first of all servants and guardians of the welfare of their people. Their calling is to care about the needs of their people and serve them in every need in life with a Biblical solution. They are to know the state of their flocks and be involved enough in their lives to actively care for their members. This care may be divided among the ministry, but church members have a right to know they are loved.

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. When a lay brother is ordained, what two hindrances may he face in taking the initiative to lead out?
2. What are the outstanding features of Jesus' leadership?
3. In what ways was David's leadership superior to Saul's?
4. Explain why servant leadership will still need to bring pain into the life of the erring.
5. How does a servant leader respond to criticisms or corrections from a church member?
6. Why does a leader need to give authoritative directives instead of just making suggestions?
7. If a church leader is determined to make his congregation look more conservative than a sister congregation in a similar fellowship, what is the root of the problem?
8. If a church leader chooses to overlook disobedience or sin in his congregation instead of confronting it what is the root of the problem?
9. What is essential for a leadership team to keep a strong and balanced emphasis on love and discipline?
10. Describe the present-day "free grace theology" in your own words and how that theology militates against order in the Christian brotherhood.

Lesson 7 – Just in Judgment What Are Biblical Principles and Practices for Judging Cases?

Stanley was stunned. He had accompanied his boss Everett to see the bishop after he had learned through bookwork that Everett had embezzled large sums of money and cheated on his taxes. Even though Everett had protested, Stanley had insisted that if Everett was not man enough to come along and make full confession, that he felt constrained to tell the church leader and the government all that he had discovered. The bishop, Brother Ivan was known to be a very conservative leader. Stanley felt it necessary to get this load into the hands of proper authorities and off his chest.

So they had gone to Bishop Ivan, and Everett had carefully shared his story. It was his conclusion that surprised Stanley.

"I know it was worse than it should have been, but it was not as bad as it could have been. I had opportunity to take much more from this situation, but I did not do so because it felt like that would have been wrong" Everett shared.

That shocked Stanley! "Was Everett really penitent?" he wondered. But Brother Ivan's response shocked him even worse.

"Well Everett, I am really disappointed to hear about this," Ivan responded. "I do appreciate that you followed your conscience and that you were willing to come confess your situation to me. I also know you have been a good supporter of church standards, and I know you had given large sums to the church when we needed it for our schools. I guess I am minded that this does not need to be made a public issue."

In a later conversation Stanley spoke privately with his bishop. "Do you know that Everett embezzled more than \$200,000? And do you realize that his tax avoidance could put him in jail?"

"You need to be careful," Bro Ivan warned Stanley. "This is how we have handled situations like this. Maybe I should have learned more about the amount involved, but the main thing is his penitence. I am not inclined to change what I have decided."

Stanley had never had one ounce of mistrust for his church leaders. Now he suddenly wondered if this was an isolated situation, or if it was normal to favor those who supported the church. "But this is not just! I wonder how often it happens like this?"

Throughout Time, God Has Always Insisted on Just Leaders

The Spirit of the LORD spake by me, and his word was in my tongue. The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me, He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God. And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain... But the sons of Belial shall be all of them as thorns thrust away, because they cannot be taken with hands: But the man that shall touch them must be fenced with iron and the staff of a spear; and they shall be utterly burned with fire in the same place. 2 Samuel 23:2-7 (See also Titus 1:8)

Throughout the Scriptures God's standard is the same. Leaders must be just in their judgment. Under no condition could a judge, prophet, priest, or church look at a situation with a political agenda in mind or a personal bias. The saying "The end dare not justify the means" comes to mind. Even if a man is "conservative," or has a denominational reputation, or is a relative, this may not temper the judgment of a situation. A judge was to thoroughly acquaint himself with the incident and look for principles to guide him to a decision.

In creating us in His image, God has given each person a sense of right and wrong and we must honor that innate sense. Leaders are not allowed to overlook wrong or to judge harshly because of personal bias.

These same principles should guide leaders today. We will enumerate the principles the Bible highlights.

The Accused Is Counted Innocent Until Proven Guilty

While the Bible does not directly state this principle, it is obvious from the direction given for making judgments. Consider this verse given for New Testament leaders. "Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses." 1 Timothy 5:19 If something began to be rumored about, it was not to be accepted. If one person came forward with an accusation it was not to be accepted. Only if two persons came with the same or similar charge that they themselves witnessed could the accusation be accepted. Clear material evidence could also be accepted as in our day of photos and recordings. These need to be thoroughly examined and proven valid.

And note, the accusers needed to be witnesses. They needed to have seen an action or material evidence with their own eyes. They could not come with hearsay.

This principle gives stability to judgment. In close communities such as we enjoy in church life, rumors can seem to ignite upon their own. If these are quickly taken as facts, they can potentially destroy the entire community. It is important to maintain this principle in receiving charges today.

One of the main factors included in this principle is that the leader must be willing to listen and to hear. He needs to give undivided attention to the case, and keep his eye directed to those who are presenting the case. It is good if he sums up what he has learned and repeats it to those sharing. If the case goes for or against what the party wants, it will go better if the leader does not begin to argue or set himself against the one presenting the case.

If the Conflict Is Interpersonal Related, Then a Time of Prior Sharing Is Essential

In Matthew 18 Jesus lays out the steps of reconciliation for breaches in interpersonal relationships. He shows the path of how a "brother sin" can go all the way to a "sin unto death." But the first step is not to run off to tell the minister what the problem is all about. The first step is to go face the brother and share what happened from one's personal perspective. After the brother has carefully listened, he may correct or explain the situation, allowing true restoration to take place. Leaders should not listen or become involved until personal efforts have been pursued and exhausted. If all other efforts fail, the church needs to resolve the issue. It is not right for fragmented relationships to exist outside of the attention of the brotherhood.

The Accusation Must Not Be Biased by Bribes or Respect of Persons

"And his sons walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment." 1 Samuel 8:3

There was great disrespect among the Israelites when Samuel's sons turned out to be partial. It led them to call for a king. Of course, a king could fall into the same error. Taking bribes or operating from respect of persons was something that God condemned, and for which the people lost respect. It must never be among the leadership of God's people.

It is easy for money or influence to give a bias to condemn or to justify. Sometimes we know family traits and are tempted to believe the worst about someone or favor their side. We need to remember there is an authority above all earthly authority, and this authority bows to no human preference.

The Crime or Offense Must Be Considered in Context

In Deuteronomy 22:22-27, God gives instructions to judges regarding the judgment of a young woman involved in immorality. If the incident happened in the field where no one could have heard her cries, it was

considered a case of rape and she was to be assumed innocent. But if it happened in the city and no one heard cries for help, then she was considered complicit with the crime.

This is an illustration of a larger principle. There will often be extenuating or intensifying circumstances in the context of a crime. The church leader should not judge hastily but should be careful to listen to the witnesses or the person in focus as he explains the situation in which he found himself.

The Accused Must Be Allowed to Face His Accuser

To whom I answered, It is not the manner of the Romans to deliver any man to die, before that he which is accused have the accusers face to face, and have licence to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him. Acts 25:16

This principle applies in several situations. Sometimes a person comes pointing a finger at another party, sure that they have been wronged. If possible, the leader should have both parties bring a witness along and hear the story from the beginning to the end. Both sides should be given opportunity to speak, to explain what has happened.

In another scenario, perhaps one person comes to confess a wrong he has committed against another person. Even in this situation it is best to bring both parties together. This is not always possible as the offender may wish to protect the identity of his friend.

Stories will often be altered in minor but significant ways when the person doing the telling knows the listener knows the situation in full detail. Often the listener can supply minor details that alter or bring out a more complete understanding of what has happened. It is wrong to hear only one side of a story and make a judgment. It is best for the leader to hear the story explained in detail with the other party listening in.

The Sentence Must Be Reasonable and Just

And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more. Luke 12:47-48

Need we say more? It is impossible to give all judgment equally, or even what men feel is fair. Human emotions are so easily affected by the person's connections with the one being judged, and the leader is the one needing to make the decision. That brings us to the next principle.

The Judgment Must Be Tempered with Mercy

So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty. For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment. James 2:12-13

A leader who needs to assign a punishment will almost always be considered unfeeling. A person being dealt with will almost always feel he should be treated with leniency. But mercy and leniency are not synonymous. Mercy is kind, gentle, or compassionate treatment especially towards someone who is undeserving of it. Leniency carries the idea of having a casual attitude toward sin and its consequences. Mercy comes because of divine influence in the life. Leniency comes from human ulterior motive. If possible, the wrongdoer should be led to the greater Judge of all the earth, and the judgment seat of the righteous and the wicked. If possible, he should understand the heart of mercy the leader has and this sentence is not done in anger, but in love and mercy. He must not be allowed to begin to question the seriousness of his sin if he indeed has committed a heinous offense. It is always merciful if a sin can be faced in time and sent on beforehand to judgment.

How can a leader demonstrate mercy?

- By patiently taking time to listen.
- By giving sympathetic body language.
- Maybe by sharing the process used to arrive at a just sentence.
- By using Bible examples that show leaders are accountable to the Judge over them, and responsible to purge out the old leaven are all part of the process.
- But most of all, deep in his heart, the leader needs to know that he truly loves his brother, even if he has transgressed and brought shame to the house of God.

An Accuser Found to Be False Shall Reap the Judgment He Sought for the Innocent

And the judges shall make diligent inquisition: and, behold, if the witness be a false witness, and hath testified falsely against his brother; Then shall ye do unto him, as he had thought to have done unto his brother: so shalt thou put the evil away from among you. And those which remain shall hear, and fear, and shall henceforth commit no more any such evil among you. Deuteronomy 19:18-20

Even though this passage does not seem to have a New Testament parallel, it is a valid principle to follow. There are motives behind a false accusation. The accuser should have made sure he was working with facts. He should have gone to the one assumed guilty to talk things out. This is such an important part in keeping peace in a church. And remember,

For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace. James 3:16-18

Or as another rendering of the verse puts it, "Those who sow peace raise a harvest of righteousness."

In Conclusion

Our God is a God of justice. He can only bless administrations and brotherhoods that are committed to transparency, justice, and confidentiality. We are limited in our knowledge and in our judgments, but we are not alone in our work when we are committed to God's principles. Then His Holy Spirit is the Behind-the-Scenes-Operator of the Church, and He will work His will when we work in conformity to His direction.

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. What essential element for relationships will disappear if church members get the feeling that their leaders might be partial in the way they treat people?
2. What is the ability that God gives mankind to sense if a matter is handled fairly and without partiality?
3. What should a leader do with a report if only one person "has the truth?"
4. What are some ways a leader can communicate that he is hearing a report even if he does not want to believe it?
5. Why is it essential that leaders do not become too involved in interpersonal conflicts too quickly but insist that brothers work things out if possible?
6. Why should your church leaders not accept large gifts from you knowing you are the source? How can this problem be remedied?
7. What are the advantages of having both sides of an immoral involvement give explanation of what happened in each other's presence?
8. Explain in your words the difference between mercy and leniency.
9. Describe the atmosphere in church life that will exist when church members are confident their leaders will judge transgressions or disagreements with fairness.
10. What was the Old Testament solution for a man who brought a false accusation against his brother?

Lesson 8 – Leaders' Relationships What are Guidelines that will Help Church Leaders to Get Along?

"Yes," Bennie sadly replied to Vincent his counselor, "The way my ministry got along, or rather I should say, did not get along, did have a lot to do with why I left the conservative church... I regret it, I should have overlooked their spats."

"Why did their disagreements affect your choices?" Vincent queried.

"We young people knew they were hardly even on speaking terms. It came out in overtones in sermons, in the way they wouldn't talk after church, and even in the way they looked at each other. We talked about it, how if they didn't like each other, then how could they talk about us needing to love each other? That made it so much easier for us to break church rules and get into things we should not have."

"So, what do you mean they didn't like each other?" Vincent probed. "Did they hate each other?"

Bennie pondered this for a while. "We all supposedly love each other, that is on some sanctimonious, philosophical level. But we all have things we tend to dislike about each other, and that showed up very plainly."

"Such as?" Vincent prodded.

"Well David, the pastor, was a very wealthy man. He always ran a successful business, lived in a nice house and in our minds as youth, would use gifts to buy friendship. But he was not a scholar, and I'm not sure why he was ever nominated to be a preacher. One of the youth heard him tell someone that he tried to make sure he had his daily personal devotions, even if they were often only five minutes long."

"And our deacon, Leroy, could way out preach him. He was a natural born scholar, and on the few Sundays he was allowed to preach, we learned Bible facts and archaeological information that stirred our appreciation for learning."

"But their disagreements were the most disheartening. Leroy was conservative at heart. He enjoyed speaking about prophecy and was thoughtful in his disposition."

"And David was just the opposite. There was very little content in his preaching, he tended to be on the lenient side of church standards, and he was constantly talking, even exaggerating to people. He had no time for prophecy and did not like those views being brought into sermons."

"But the worst thing was the way they would talk about each other behind the other one's back. Well, I don't think Leroy did it as much as David, but it did happen sometimes..."

And so, Bennie went on unloading the memories that still shaped his thinking.

New Testament Leaders Were Human Too

The fact is, even in the New Testament example, church leaders saw each other's flaws, disagreed on important issues and did not always "get along." First, we'll observe what transpired when Paul observed an inconsistency in Peter's life.

But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? Galatians 2:11-14

Next, we'll review what took place in a disagreement between Paul and Barnabas regarding who should help them in their next missionary journey.

And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do. And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God. Acts 15:36-40

From other passages in the Bible, we know these differences did not separate these brothers in their hearts. Later, Peter says about Paul:

And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction. 2 Peter 3:15-16

Also, we know Paul did not keep his negative opinion about Mark when he writes:

Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry. 2 Timothy 4:11

So, while we don't want to excuse any carnality that may be expressed in our differing from each other, we can acknowledge that differences between brothers in the Lord will surface and must be reckoned with.

In fact, differences in opinions and personalities should not just be acknowledged but also appreciated. Differences may strengthen a leadership team because different perspectives give a more rounded, holistic approach to solving problems and meeting needs. We choose to treasure and utilize each gift.

A Sample of Guidelines for Leaders

For this lesson we will examine a written guideline that is used by some ministerial teams. This is being shared with the intention of stirring up discussion. The ministerial team should read through this regularly and especially each time a new leader is added to the team. If at any later time there is a breach in relationships this should be reviewed to see what was violated to cause the breakdown. If a team agrees, more commitments may be added as needed.

Guidelines for the Ordained

“For we are labourers together with God: ye are God’s husbandry, ye are God’s building.” (1Co 3:9)

- I. **Relationships:** Goal - in spite of our differing personalities and convictions, we purpose to function as a team. This requires love, humility and openness. We believe love and unity are an essential part of being Jesus’ disciples.
 - A. We operate from the understanding that each one of us is placed where we are by God. While the calling one has is different from God’s calling for another, we will each do what we can to enable every other team member to be effective and successful in the work God has called him to.
 - B. Needs:
 1. We will choose the attitude, “When you see a need in me, come and tell me.”
 2. We desire to have the commitment, “If I see a need in you, I will pray for you, then share it with you.”
 3. We will operate with loyalty to the absent party. “I will not discuss your needs or faults with anyone else unless I have first shared them with you, and we have an understanding that we would like the input of a third party. Likewise, I rest assured that you will not discuss my faults behind my back.”
 - C. Decisions and differences:
 1. When we need to decide a matter, we will air the issue in a meeting. Each member is free to speak what is on his heart in the meeting.

2. When an agreement is reached, it is understood we will each submit to the group decision. Submission means each will do their best to make the decision work. A majority vote settles the matter. It will be our goal to have unanimous decisions.
 3. When we bring a quote to the group, whether it is in favor of our viewpoint or against it, we will share who made the quote.
 4. We will each be careful not to air our differences with others, especially in any way that would indicate division between us.
 5. Brethren live by this motto: "I embrace you as my brother(s) and view myself unworthy of your friendship."
- D. Communicating a team spirit: I will think in my heart and communicate with my actions that I am a part of the team.
1. I will not take initiatives on my own as if I own the church.
 2. I will not withdraw from the team even when I feel my ideas are not appreciated or accepted.

II. **Wife's Responsibility**

- A. It is important for each of our wives to realize it is the husband who is ordained, and her responsibility is to her husband. This means she will not take the initiative to correct matters among the sisters. Neither are our wives to have extended discussions about needs in the congregation between themselves.
- B. We encourage each husband to share freely and seek the counsel of his wife, especially before important decisions are made.
- C. The wife's loyalty is to be toward the team. She should be careful to keep confidences and not undermine the work of the ministry.
- D. When a sister in the congregation wishes to share a complaint, tell the sister with the complaint to tell her husband, and have the husband share with the minister, rather than the wives discussing negative issues between themselves.
- E. The wife is to be warm and friendly in an impartial way toward all the sisters in the congregation. As with all affected by an ordination, we should avoid exclusive friendships in the congregation.

III. **Workload**

- A. According to our ordination charge and directives given in the discipline, each of us has a distinct sphere of labor. We will endeavor to respect each other's work, and yet be open to each other's counsel.
- B. The lead pastor is responsible to lead out in establishing a preaching schedule for the congregation. This is to share out the load and give each one responsibility.
- C. Each of us has the freedom to decide issues that come under our sphere of responsibility but will need to be ready to explain our decision. If an issue surfaces which seems difficult to decide, then we will involve the group for a decision. (Many of our congregations have weekly conference calls so we can stay together on issues.)

IV. **Keeping House:** each of us bears responsibility for the spiritual welfare of the members of our congregation.

- A. If any of us hears of or sees a standards violation or a digression from a Scriptural principle, our preference is that the person making the observation first go and personally speak to the individual involved and see (1) whether the facts are as they seem and (2) if the person is aware of being in violation. This is more of a heart-to-heart counsel type of communication.
- B. No official decision will be made without this personal contact first. If a personal contact does not resolve the issue, then the ministry will decide how to address the issue.
- C. When judgment must be called regarding some member in the church, the following principles will be applied.
- D. No church action will be taken against an offender until the ministry is in agreement.
- E. A matter will be accepted as factual only at the mouth of two or three witnesses.
- F. Material evidence will be accepted as confirmation of the truth.
- G. Someone accused has the right to face his accusers face to face and give answer for himself before being pronounced guilty.

- H. In cases involving immorality, efforts will be made to have the parties involved face to face in order to discover the full truth and to bring proper resolution to the offense.
- I. Confidentiality - care shall be taken to maintain confidentiality:
 - 1. On matters that are of a private nature.
 - 2. While issues are being worked on until they are made public by church announcement.
 - 3. With people who are not affected by the matter.
- J. When there is a need or area of concern with a sister, we will first approach the man responsible for her. If there is no man obviously responsible for her, we will work with her with our wives along.
- K. Care should be taken that at no time a brother would counsel a sister alone, either on the phone or in person. While our wives are not responsible for the administrative work of the congregation, we do not hesitate to have them help protect us as we fulfill our responsibilities.
- L. If a situation arises when a family member is involved, the team member who is related is free to share his evaluation and recommendation of the matter. He will however refrain from voting or carrying through with the action. There are times when the brother will excuse himself from the discussion so the ministry may work more objectively with the situation.
- M. We encourage Spirit - empowered preaching. This means the pulpit is not to be used to replace the Matthew 18 manner of addressing personal offences. Preaching is not intended to address specific needs of specific individuals or to vent personal frustration. Preaching should be of the caliber that the local membership can feel confident about bringing neighbors or the unsaved into the assembly at any time

In Conclusion

No set of rules or guidelines can force unconverted hearts to love and accept each other. Two people may be experiencing the new birth and yet instinctively break rules for getting along with each other. When the heart is converted and guidelines are followed, lasting relationships may be achieved.

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. What was Paul's concern about Peter's way of treating the Gentile disciples? Explain why it needed to be taken care of in front of the group. Are there situations that should be taken care of in private?
2. How was the work of the Lord enhanced by the differences between Paul and Barnabas? Are there times when personal or group differences may serve kingdom interests?
3. Who should a leader credit with placing him in his calling? Who should he credit with calling the other leaders in his team? How will this make a difference in their relationships?
4. What does it mean to "be loyal to the absent party?" Why is this essential for long term relationships?
5. Why is it important to resolve significant differences in a meeting with each other rather than trying to do this via text or voice messages? When might it be important to go as a team rather than alone?
6. Why should a church leader avoid having special friendships among the membership?
7. Why is it important that the leader (or church member) who observes a transgression in another member be the one to go and speak with the offender to discover what is really taking place?
8. Who should be the one to decide what happens to a leader's children when a concern comes to light about their behavior? Why?
9. What is the leader's wife to do with other sisters in the church? What are some areas she is she to stay out of?
10. What is the leader to do when he thinks he has observed a flaw in a church member's life?

Lesson 9 – Building Brotherhood How Can I Strengthen Our Congregation in Brotherhood?

The burden on Brother Seth's heart was growing heavier. He had been absent from the little congregation he was called to lead for a few years and when he returned, he became keenly aware of a feeling of disconnect among the membership. There were two young mothers who unloaded their criticisms of the congregation to his wife.

"The people in the community are friendly" they told his wife Sara, "But our older sisters are cold and distant. They are more about performance and judgmentalism than true love and fellowship."

Seth began to watch for this disconnect. Sure enough, he saw things that made him believe the older sisters lived just for their families and really didn't care about the needs that existed in the other families.

He brought this out in a message one day, that Christ calls us to love our fellow man and not just think of ourselves and our families.

Later he felt led to challenge the church to not be so judgmental of each other.

One Sunday he even expressed his doubt whether the congregation was showing the love they should between themselves.

As he went out of the church that Sunday, one of the older sisters stopped to unburden her heart to him. She nicely put her concern in the form of a question.

"Do you think it will create love between us if you tell us that we don't love each other? Or is there something to the idea that your evaluations of the congregation are self-fulfilling? If you tell us you appreciate the signs of love flowing from heart to heart, won't that do more than telling us we really do not love each other?"

The Spirit used this question to challenge Brother Seth in his ministry. No, he could not ignore needs in the people he served, but if he chose to humbly give of himself, if he looked for the good, and nurtured the good that he found, would this not do more for the church than continued criticisms. He pondered the old proverb, "It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness."

In the introduction we learned that one of the definitions of brotherhood is "the feeling of closeness and friendship that exists between companions." In this lesson we'd like to explore why too many church members find church-life to be a place of loneliness and even competition rather than a place where they find acceptance and trust.

How the Fall Destroyed Closeness in Relationships

We know that God created us in His image and God is a God of love. He has given us potential for fellowship with Him and close connections with each other. We were created to worship, to love and adore Him, to serve as helpmeets to each other, and to creatively relate to the rest of creation around us.

We also know when Adam first met Eve he was impressed with her perfection. The fellowship between God and man and between the human family was true, unflawed fellowship.

But the Bible explains what happened when Adam and Eve sinned. Closeness and fellowship were turned to estrangement and alienation. The love story was tested by evil.

When Satan came to Eve, he introduced two thoughts into her mind. First, he wanted her to question God's truth and goodness. In essence he asked, "Does God really have your best in mind?" And secondly, he injected, "If you do this little disobedience, it will bring greater fulfillment to you in your experience."

Those two thoughts took root in Eve's mind and caused her to become deceived. She believed she could improve her lot in life by stepping outside the boundaries her Creator had given her. Adam knew better,

but wanted to please his companion, so he chose to follow her lead. Scripture makes it sound like it was only after Adam made that decision to follow Eve's example that "The Fall" occurred.

The Fall has affected our earthly environment. However, the worst changes from The Fall are what has transpired within our very nature. The suggestions Satan made to Eve from the outside are now deeply ingrained in each one of us. Now it is our instinctive reaction and outlook toward life to believe that God's way is not necessarily the best way and that some suggested deviation from His will may improve my lot in life.

And when we allow sin into our lives there are many other destructive consequences that follow even as Adam's choices brought him consequences.

Adam and Eve were filled with an overwhelming sense of self-consciousness. Their fallen condition and feelings of shame became their focus.

They saw the nakedness of each other. Not only did they see faults in each other, but human sexuality also became a serious problem.

When God came to talk with them, they wanted to hide. They sought to cover up their shame.

It became human nature to defend failures, often becoming quite creative in excuses for the wrong that was committed.

They found it easy to resort to manipulation and intimidation rather than forthright communication and petition.

All these traits, from the suspicious attitude toward God to the selfishness and defensiveness of Adam and Eve, were passed down to each one of their children. Not one single person needs to be taught to be bad, we all inherit it from deep within. And when we choose to sin, we mirror the traits of our parents.

Cain's relationship with Abel describes in part the incredible complexity that came into human relationships. Man in himself simply does not have it in him to create brotherhood. On his own, the closest man can do this is for the strong to dominate and control the weak. It is for the rich to oppress the poor. It is for mankind to have a lifelong struggle of resisting others' intrusion into their affairs.

How The Fall Affects Church-Life

It is one thing for humans to have conflict in their homes and in their businesses. A more troubling scenario is for brothers in the Lord to bring conflict into church relationships.

Church-life is supposed to be fellowship around Christ's answers in healing relationships with God and with mankind. Church-life is to be the fellowship of redeemed individuals who are on a path of sanctification.

But James aptly describes church-life that is hopelessly spoiled.

From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. James 4:1-3

Sadly, that is the way we are naturally. We have hidden desires and longings. We envision solutions to fill empty spots within us so that we can achieve or receive what we are so passionately desiring. We hide those empty longings because to reveal them seems shameful. But in covering them these desires grow.

Unmet desires may wear many faces. We desire preeminence, so we enter into conflict with whoever gets in our way. We think our ideas are better, so subconsciously we try to get others on our side. We know how to talk about our opponents behind their backs.

Even our prayer life can be selfish. It's all about us attempting to get fulfillment for self. And we tend to feel that someone exists who would agree with us and meet our needs. Perhaps those far away would

understand us better than those who are close by. (And now with Social Media chats this promise comes through even stronger.) These thought patterns and attitudes will never produce brotherhood.

There is an old ditty from an unknown source that seems to sum up our dilemma.

To live above with saints we love, oh that will be glory.

To dwell below with saints we know, well, that's a different story.

If we would truly contribute to the brotherhood of our congregation, we will need to dig deeper. Let's go back to the beginning of our problem.

How the Gospel Restores Closeness

The prophet Malachi promised that the prophet Elijah and the Messiah would come before the dreaded day of the Lord (the day of God's wrath). The New Testament reveals that John the Baptist and Jesus were the messengers, and the gospel is that message of reconciliation that Malachi foretold.

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse. Malachi 4:5-6

Turning fathers' hearts to the children and children's hearts to their fathers is no small accomplishment. Fathers and children represent different generations that live together in close confines blending their interests into common goals and all the while holding affection for each other. Fathers and their children have higher expectations of each other; and when these expectations are unrealized, this often sparks deep resentment and even revenge.

How did the message that John the Baptist and Jesus brought accomplish this reconciliation and closeness?

The Gospel lays out a path of reconciliation with God for any person who is willing to follow it. John introduced the "Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world" to any who desired to accept the provision made for him. The Lamb of God can cleanse the sin and change the heart of any human being regardless of his past deeds.

The path begins with repentance and willingness to own one's own sinfulness and sinful deeds. Through our confession and change of focus to "behold the Lamb of God," not only are our sins taken away, but also a passion for righteousness takes their place. Likewise, the normal extreme passion of self to have preeminence is replaced with a passion that the will of the Creator be given top priority.

True Christianity does not major on shame. Of course, we all feel ashamed because of our humanity and sinful failures. But Christ highlighted and blessed the poor in spirit, those who mourn and those who bless each other in their trials. This makes church-life a safe place for people to confess their sins, find healing, and be restored in their journey through a world of hurt and heartache. We understand that in some way, we are all broken and need help. As we are open with this need, a foundational element of all relationships is brought into our midst. That is trust. Brotherhood must be a safe place for us to be honest with our needs, struggles and even our failures.

Reconnection of the creature with the Creator restores a dynamic which is impossible to copy or produce in any other manner. When we are sensitive to His voice, we understand our Creator's voice may be heard by listening to our brother. The new life He gives enables us to accept correction or direction as we understand the goal is to bring us into eternal fellowship with Him and each other.

Brotherhood Is Designed for Personal Growth

As one moves from the Old Testament to the New Covenant, there is a subtle but very real shift. Along with the call to a personal accountability and personal relationship with God are commands that we must individually and personally connect with each other. Jesus and the Apostles simply did not teach the "me and myself with Jesus alone" that is reflected so often in modern religious writings and songs. Consider what the Apostle Paul taught that brotherhood is to accomplish in us.

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love. Ephesians 4:11-16

God is the Author of many gifts planted within individuals to be given to the Church. As we receive these gifts in the form of people that are different than we are, we all become more like Christ's body, and grow into His fulness. As we listen to people that Christ places in our congregation, we grow stronger in our Christian lives and are not so easily influenced by false prophets who would trick us with clever lies. Jesus is working through each of us individually to make the entire body fit together perfectly. As each person exercises his God given work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.

One Anothering

In Appendix B in the back of this study, you will find New Testament verses that instruct us about interconnectedness with other saints in Jesus' kingdom.

Perhaps the greatest expression of this "One Anothering" in the New Testament is the direction in Matthew 18 for individuals to go to each other and talk out any questions/differences/offences or difficulties with each other before they make these differences known to others. We naturally find it easy to talk about someone behind their back rather than to face them with our view of their failures. We have already thought of "Loyalty to the absent party." That needs to exist among leaders. The trust this loyalty produces is also needed in brotherhood relationships. It creates relationships that endure for a lifetime and into eternity.

What Administration Can Do To Promote Brotherhood

Treat each of the brethren without partiality. There are many reasons why leaders may be tempted to favor one brother over another. Some have more wealth. Some have agreeable personalities. Some are more conservative and make the congregation "look better." Others are more gifted. Then there are cousins or other relations. The scripture is clear, there may be no partiality expressed in brotherhood.

Honor Matthew 18 when someone comes to discuss a brother's offense. Leaders may not listen to members run each other down. A simple question of whether the person has voiced his concerns to his brother before airing them to others should put things in perspective.

Use influence to create a haven for the broken instead of creating a spirit of competition between brothers. The Pharisee system eventually produced a path of proving, "I'm better than you." But in this system, people could not be honest with their sins. When Jesus came, He created a safe place for people to bring their sins, their brokenness. He said, "Neither do I condemn thee, go and sin no more."

1. What were the two doubts about God with which the Serpent tempted Eve?

2. What were two overwhelming thoughts that Adam and Eve experienced immediately after the fall? (One was about themselves, and the other was about the other person in their life.)

3. What does the Apostle James identify as our cause for contention?

4. Who does Malachi identify as bringing reconciliation to fathers and their sons? What is so significant about that?

5. Name some of the steps to reconciliation with each other that we have in the gospel.

6. From Paul's writing to the Ephesians, what will be gained in our relationship with the Head of the body as we properly connect with our brethren in the church?

7. Select one of the essentials given for how administration can promote brotherhood and explain what happens when leaders choose a course opposite from what is described.

8. Where does true brotherhood in the Body of Christ end?

Lesson 10 – Congregational Focus Is the Focus of Our Fellowship According to New Testament Principles??

"What?" Donald asked his high school friend, "You never speak in tongues in your church? Have you never read Jesus' words the way Mark records them, that His followers would have signs follow them? He plainly promised that His disciples would cast out devils, speak in tongues, and heal sick people."

"No, we don't," Sidney answered. "We have had people who tried to follow that course, but that is not the focus of our church-life. If anyone begins to pursue that course in our church, he soon finds he does not really fit in."

"Well then what is your church all about then?" Donald persisted, "If you don't do what Jesus promised, and if you don't really even want to do those signs, can you even call yourself Christians?"

"That is a really good question," Sidney mused. "I know why we don't pursue the signs Jesus promised to the Apostles. The signs were given to confirm the Word and the Word is confirmed. But what would we say our church- life is all about?"

And what would you say to that question?

"My story is a sad one." Julian began, "Even though I became a Christian when I was eleven, I was not baptized nor received into the church until I was 16."

"What was the reason for that?" Silas asked.

"I don't know," Julian continued. "I never was told." I finished instruction class but when the question of baptism came up, I kept being told that I was not ready -- that I was not mature enough. I finally told the leaders that I would do anything they said, and then I was baptized. But even then, it wasn't long until I was kept back from communion again."

"Were you given reasons?"

"Only that they were not convinced that I was conservative enough. There never were any questions about my moral involvements, nor about how I was doing with my Bible reading, or the relationships that were deteriorating between me and my brother. Those were the real issues in my life."

"Finally, I gave up and walked away..."

In Revelation 2 and 3 we have divine insight regarding Jesus' ongoing relationship with the churches on earth. As we ponder these verses there are several "Jesus Facts" that come to our attention.

1. Jesus continually walks in the midst of the churches. He has never abandoned His Bride, even while we may feel very much alone.

2. Jesus sees us as candlesticks, or lamp stands. The choice of this symbolism no doubt identifies that the church on earth is to be a light to the surrounding community and world around us.

3. Jesus specifically addresses "angels" as He shares His assessment of the churches. The word "angels" means messengers and may refer to angels or demons or to anyone entrusted with sharing a message. Angels are always referred to as doing God's will in a perfect way. Demons carry out the will of the Devil. Church leaders as men may be faithful or flawed, and therefore these "angels" are very likely human beings, the pastors of the churches. We can conclude Christ has special judgment for church leaders in their work.

4. Jesus evaluates churches as a group. He has an ideal for congregations in how they faithfully serve Him and minister to their members and the communities in which they live. Here are some things He said to the churches of Asia.

- "I have somewhat against thee . . ." 2:4
- "I have a few things against thee . . ." 2:14

- "I will . . . fight against them . . ." 2:16
- "I have a few things against thee . . ." 2:20

5. Jesus rewards those who are overcomers as members of these churches. Each church group has those who are said to be overcomers, and the overcomers are given a specific promise of reward.

From this we learn that individuals may be faithful to Christ and sincere in almost any church setting.

This study is not intended to criticize other church groups and lift ours up. It is intended to accomplish the goals as follows:

- Recognize that every church has a goal that either helps or hinders their members.
- Help us identify the goal we wish to pursue as a church body and pursue this with unity and purpose.
- Help us know how to witness and serve seekers in other churches.
- Remember that Jesus is walking in our midst, so we choose to partner with Him and allow Him to energize and guide our groups.
- Remind us that the test Jesus gave for His followers in each generation is demonstrated in our care for each other. "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." John 13:34-35.
- Help any who may be dissatisfied with their church group to evaluate whether their dissatisfaction is valid or whether they should adjust their expectations to be more in line with Jesus' ideals.
- Cause us to humbly appreciate the contribution of every generation of leaders that helped their church groups come more into alignment with the Biblical Standard.

Leader's Focus in Church-Life

Every church leadership team has a basic goal that drives their church. Perhaps there has not been a conscious evaluation or open discussion regarding the goal, but it does exist. Sometimes this goal is more obvious to others than to the leaders themselves. As generations come and go, younger ministers may become a part of the team without assessing the reason their church exists. Sadly, if members of the ministerial team have different goals, the church will become divided in its focus.

It is essential that the ministry of a church examine their focus, so they consistently fulfill the purpose for which Christ has established it. As Revelation 2-3 points out, Christ continues to walk among the churches. He is constantly evaluating whether or not we are serving His kingdom the way we ought.

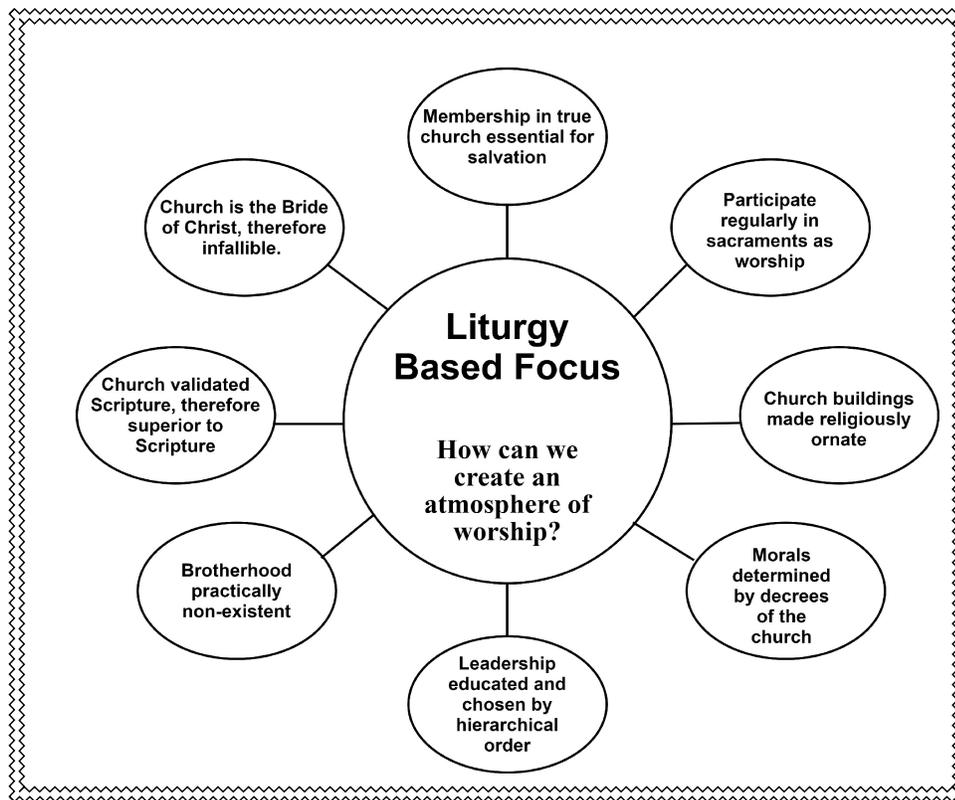
In this lesson we would like to examine what a worthy goal for the church would be. We will examine several inferior but possibly tempting goals. Then we would like to crystalize what our goal should be to be the Church of Jesus Christ. When we know what the goal is, we will be able to blend our varied gifts and our individual resources to truly support each other. The entire body of membership will benefit from a consistent and unified focus.

We will include a diagram with each church's goal to clarify the vision of the church and how that influences how the church functions.

Liturgy Centered Church-Life

The word "liturgy" signifies 'a rite or body of rites prescribed for public worship.' One main characteristic of liturgical worship is that it is not so easily affected by change. Practices that were established decades or even centuries ago continue without change.

This type of church-life goes back to basically two kinds of churches (Catholic and Eastern Orthodox). These groups trace their identity to the first generations after Jesus lived on the earth. In establishing some practices by which to carry out church-life, they created a static environment that was not affected by every



change that came along. These churches sorted through doctrines and practices that plagued the early church and established dogmas, or bodies of doctrines concerning faith and morals that in many ways remain unchanged even today. Through the years they also established rituals that are repeated over and over again as a part of a normal church service. Tragically, much of what corrupts their doctrine and practice is belief about the

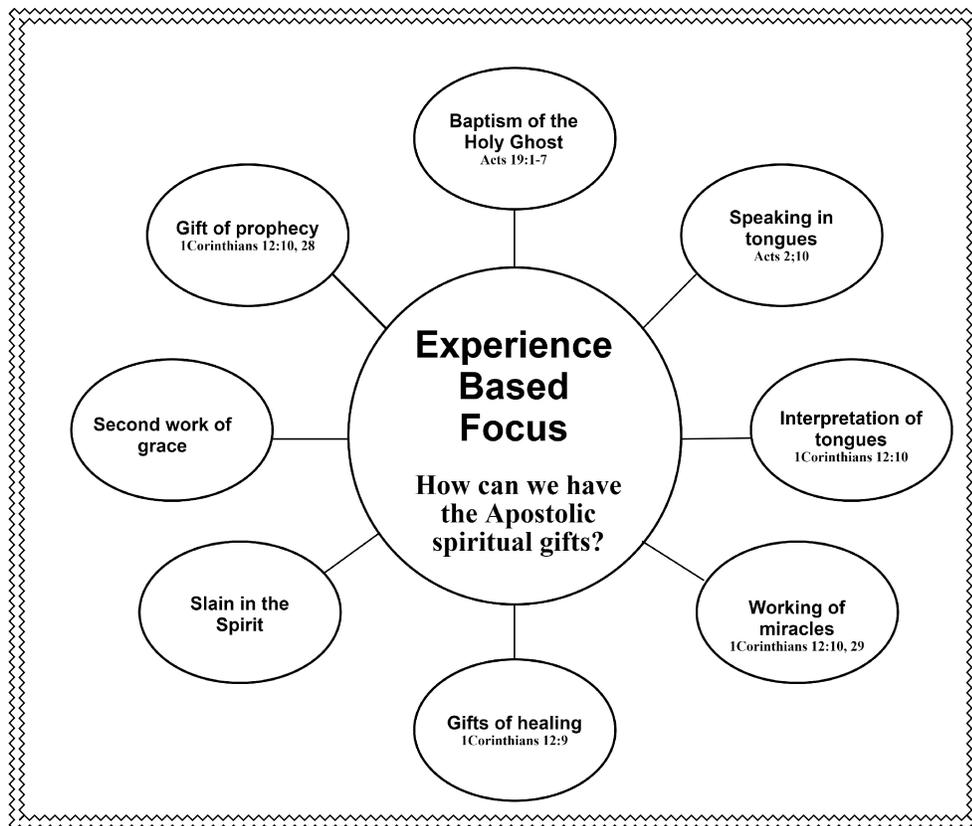
church authority and scripture. Since the early church divided between the sacred writings and the false writings (pseudographs), they hold the view that the church has more authority than Scripture. This supposedly gives the church the authority to selectively hold on to practices and traditions that are not taught in the Scriptures, and to disregard some things that are clearly taught.

Experience-Centered Church-Life

The second type of church-life we wish to examine also has a distinctive style of church service. We will call this experience centered because attending a church service is to give everyone an experience with the Holy Spirit which is measured in the atmosphere of the church service itself. Notice also a distinction from our first illustration. In this second illustration you will see that almost every label has a Bible reference. This type of church does not sense the difference between the transition stages of early Christianity and their long-term function. These churches are known as "Charismatic" or "Pentecostal."

Churches that have an experience-centered focus clearly seek to identify and recreate the signs God gave to the early church. They do not give attention to verses that explain why these signs were given to Jesus and the Apostles in the first century. They do not recognize verses that teach the signs would be done away with and replaced with the written Word. They do not see that eventually even the apostles themselves did not have the ability to perform signs. All of this creates a confusion between the church-life they pretend to achieve and the reality of what really happens in their midst.

Jesus did promise the disciples would be given signs to confirm that the message they were bringing was from God. The disciples were given this ability totally outside of their seeking any special manifestation of the Spirit. Even the Apostle Paul was given these signs, and he used this gift in his early church ministry



to plant churches. He also witnessed the sad effect on church-life that took place when believers made seeking these gifts the focus of their church-life.

Moreover, Paul also foretold a day when these signs would cease⁴. In the lifetime of the disciples, they witnessed the shift of focus toward the written word of God and away from special miracles. The legacy they give us is an ongoing ministry of charity and a study of the complete

canon of Scripture. By the time Paul wrote 2 Corinthians 12, he not only ceased performing miracles on others but even his own requests for miracles were denied. God taught Paul that living with God's grace being applied to problems was a better witness than having all one's problems miraculously solved.

In Experience Centered church-life, (supposed) supernatural expressions of the Holy Spirit are given priority. The Book of Acts is studied not so much as a historical record, but as a pattern of what the church is to look like today.

This type of church often ends up with the kind of problems that the early church in Corinth had. Since some apostles had gifts that appealed to some individuals more than others, a party spirit sprang up. The services that featured "speaking in tongues" were different than the ones described in Acts 2 and 10, in that those who heard the tongues had no idea what was being said. Instead of being impressed, unbelievers could well have gone home muttering about the "crazy people" who were under such strange influences. Paul asked that tongues events would include those who could interpret to the group what was being said; but of course no one really knew if the translation was correct or if someone else was rambling according to their own imagination.

Today many of the "commanded" healings never happen. At times the family of the afflicted may be accused of not having sufficient faith to carry out the miracle. In such a case, not only does the family have

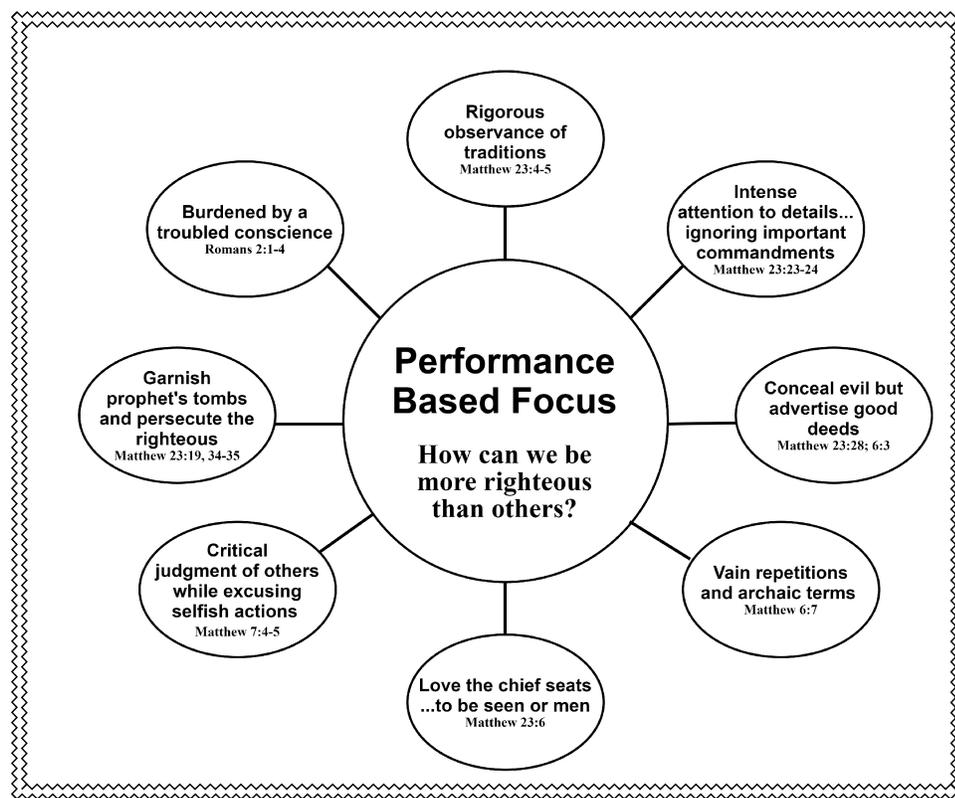
⁴Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. 1 Corinthians 13:8

the weight and burden of grieving, but they also are now somehow responsible for the ongoing suffering of their loved ones.

Fake healings and phony expressions of spiritual gifts often become a major temptation. Anyone who is honest can tell these are not real miracles. The temptation comes to doubt all miracle healings, even those that are recorded in the Bible. Not only do people lose confidence in these groups, but they also experience a loss of trust in the Biblical record. This unbelief spreads to everyday life. Bible commands are disbelieved and in being disbelieved, they are also disobeyed. Outright disobedience to the Scripture is the norm in many different areas of life.

Performance Centered Church-life

This kind of church-life is in some senses the extreme opposite of church life with a spiritual-gifts focus. Instead of spontaneous expressions of fervor, the public church service is marked by somber expressions of piety. The meetinghouse itself is marked by severe plainness. A close inspection of Jesus' challenges to



the Pharisees gives a pretty good idea of the competition and contentions that are the norm in a setting where one's value and worth is discerned by how strictly he practices specific traditions. This adherence to chosen traditions indicates one's loyalty to a movement. This competitive spirit spills over into natural life. Relationships are often driven by church members subconsciously seeking to prove they are better than each other even in

everyday life. This kind of church-life is in some senses the extreme opposite of church life with a spiritual-gifts focus. Instead of spontaneous expressions of fervor, the public church service is marked by somber expressions of piety. The meetinghouse itself is marked by severe plainness. A close inspection of Jesus' challenges to the Pharisees gives a pretty good idea of the competition and contentions that are the norm in a setting where one's value and worth is discerned by how strictly he practices specific traditions. This adherence to chosen traditions indicates one's loyalty to a movement. This competitive spirit spills over into natural life. Relationships are often driven by church members subconsciously seeking to prove they are better than each other even in everyday life.

Our illustration is based on the challenges that Christ gave the Pharisees. These challenges should not be handled lightly. When Jesus challenged performance religion, it cost Him His life. There have been many in successive years who have found that any uncovering of the shallowness of this legalism will demand a very high repayment price. Anyone who challenges long-established practices based on Scripture will find tradition holds more authority than the Bible.

Perhaps the most tragic snare of a Performance-centered focus is hypocrisy. Jesus said His disciples should do what the Pharisees commanded but should not follow their examples. When people are transparent but have a strong loyalty to outward forms of obedience, there is not a lot of damage. The damage comes when human nature does its worst in dragging a person into sin, but his performance focus drives him to keep it all secret.

It is true that when sin is confessed it shows up in all its ugliness. But it is in transparency that sin can be overcome and forsaken. Sin that is hidden away may not look that bad, but secret vices only increase in their power over the human will. It will consume more and more energy in seductive dreams and in painful regrets. It will grow until it possesses the soul in time and in eternity.

Performance-based church-life usually creates a "don't talk," "don't trust," and "don't make any mistakes" atmosphere. Much ado will be made over tiny issues, but there will be huge gaps in what can be openly talked about. Many questions will be answered with, "Just because we said so." Anyone who raises a question will be viewed with suspicion. But that is somewhat normal, because the entire relationship is suspicion-based. The identifying marks of good relationships are missing. Good relationships would give signs that communication is easy. It would not be difficult to talk about deep and heavy issues because the group is operating without politics and is operating with the light of the glorious gospel. But in performance-based church-life, there is strong control over who may be chosen to lead the church lest the control over the direction of the church somehow is jeopardized.

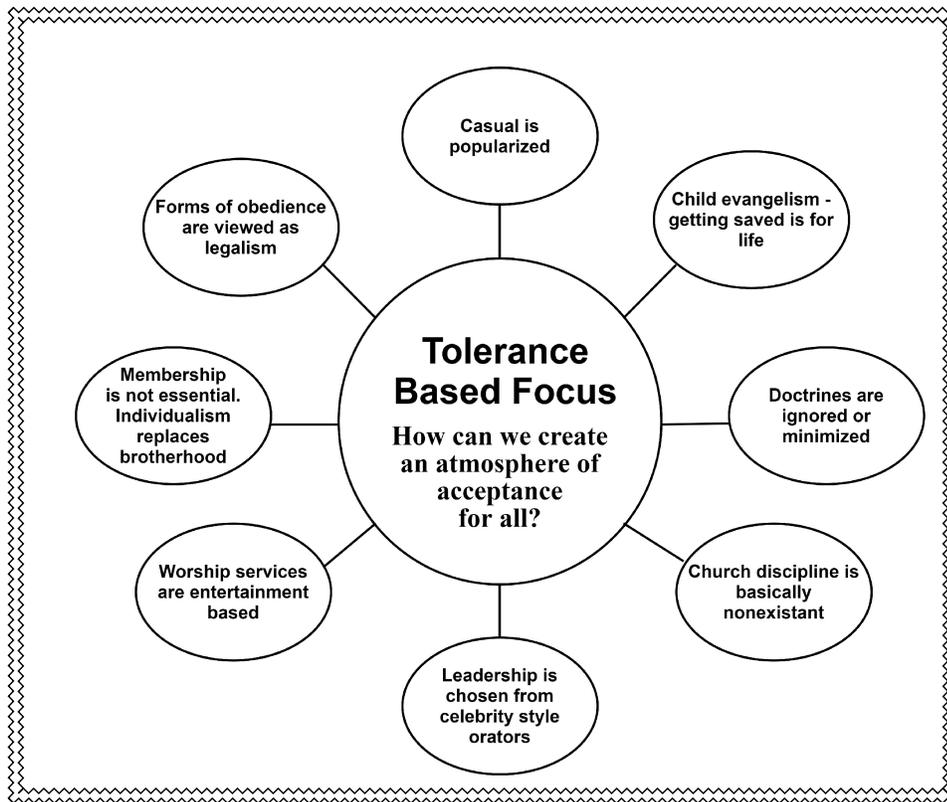
Good relationships are built on trust and proven by trust. In Christ's church, membership and ministry are open with each other. Church is a safe place to take your struggles and your sins. All of the membership realizes their sinful tendencies; so when confession of sin takes place, forgiveness is extended, accountability is established, and those who were bound in sin are set free.

Tolerance-Based Focus

As we look around us, the majority of our evangelical neighbors are greatly influenced by Free Grace Theology into what we will identify as a Tolerance-Based Focus. This version of Christianity highlights that God is a God of love and forgiveness and that anyone who has professed a faith in Jesus Christ is saved. This doctrine proposes that if people want more rewards in heaven, they may involve themselves in discipleship. It is asserted boldly that personal salvation has nothing to do with one's works or obedience.

This doctrine arose as a reaction to Augustinian Calvinism. Calvinism emphasized the sovereignty of a God who chose those who would be saved and those who would be eternally lost. The conclusion in this doctrine is that those who are elect by God's decree will persevere in their faith and will not fall away.

Free Grace Theology drew from the foundation that God is a God of love and that He would never decree from eternity past that some should be saved, and others should be lost. This led them to directly contradict their Calvinistic opponents. But along with free will and free grace, most of this theology adopted the platform that "whosoever believeth" on Christ shall forever be saved. The deception of this doctrine is found in the addition that those who are "once saved are always saved." Another common expression is, "once a son, always a son."



This type of emphasis creates a very casual attitude toward one's expression of faith, and therefore a casual attitude toward one's church-life. Even churches that have not officially adopted the Free Grace theology have embraced a similar expression of their faith. The only doctrine that is soundly embraced is the doctrine of tolerance toward all men.

It is true that we are to love all men, and God does not regard race, gender,

culture, language, nationality, or financial status as He judges men. But the Bible does make it clear that our life of works and obedience does fill a very large role in our relationship with Him.

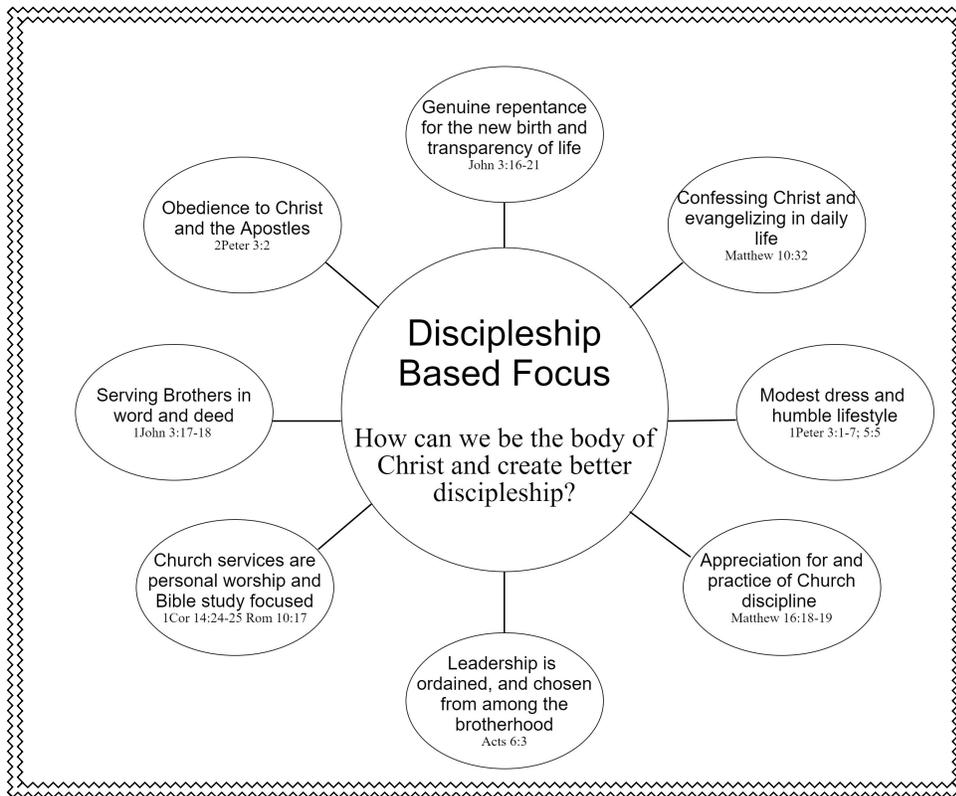
Jesus taught that those who say "Lord, Lord" but do not do the things He taught would be eternally rejected. John says, *"He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him. He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked. 1 John 2:4-6"*

Discipleship-Centered Focus

A church group that has its focus on helping each other be disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ will have some earmarks of all the other groups but be totally different. Like liturgy, some practices do not need to be reinvented. Baptism or wedding procedures may follow the same pattern year after year. Like experience centered church-life, everyone needs to experience a personal salvation in a relationship with their Lord Jesus. Like performance church-life, there are visible expectations for each Christian, even in clothing and in everyday behavior. And finally, like tolerance focused churches, there is an acceptance of other's gifts and calling. Not everyone is able to fit into the same mold.

But what is different than all the rest is the driving goal of the church that each member is to first and foremost strive to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus. Along with this is the goal in assisting each other to be a faithful disciple. It matters what shows up in church, but it also matters what is happening in the home and in the personal life of each individual.

As each member is called to serve his Lord, he also finds his calling to serve his brother. Brothers are able to admonish one another, not because they are trying to outdo each other, but because they wish to serve each other as brothers.



In this church there are signs of healthy relationships. Since each takes responsibility to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus, there is transparency in all dealings, producing trust. (See p7)

Trust, the foundation of all healthy relationships makes communication is easy. People take others for what they say, not assigning hidden motives or meanings. Relationships endure for many

years and even for many generations. People are predictable in actions and reactions.

When there are mistakes (and there will be because we are human) then the members will talk things out and forgive. When people are sad, or when they are happy, they are free to express those emotions because we are human, and humans have been given and even share God's own emotions.

In Conclusion

There is no such thing as a perfect brotherhood but there is a perfect Holy Spirit who guides us. We do not hesitate to put our trust in the Word He has given us and the counsel we receive from each other.

It is a healthy thing for brothers to discuss these concepts. Sadly, the very nature of the inferior goals of churches will forbid many from a discussion of whether they are on the path Jesus desires for His Bride. Then only eternity will reveal which groups assisted their members in being saints, and which were a stumbling block to their members.

May God enable us to honor His Name with administration that assists Christian Brotherhood.

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. What is the main purpose in assessing what our goal in church-life should be?
2. How might a liturgy focus in church-life produce a false sense of security?
3. What error of interpretation does experience centered church-life have for its basis?
4. What are some problems that arise in churches that attempt to relive the experiences that transpired in the book of Acts?
5. What fault of human nature is often activated in performance-based church-life?
6. How can a church that doesn't center on performance continue to maintain a conservative expression of obedience?
7. How did Free Grace Theology correct an error of Augustinian Calvinism?
8. What type of church-life does Free Grace theology tend to produce?
9. Why does Discipleship-based church-life tend toward Performance based church-life?
10. What action should church leaders take if they discover they or their members have chosen an inferior goal for their church-life?

Appendix A – Sins Unto Death

If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it. All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death. 1 John 5:16-17

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. Galatians 5:19- 21

For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them. Ephesians 5:5-7

Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them. Colossians 3:5-7

Appendix B -- "One Anothering"

1. Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his saltness, wherewith will ye season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another. Mark 9:50
2. A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. John 13:34
3. This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. John 15:12
4. These things I command you, that ye love one another. John 15:17
5. So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Romans 12:5
6. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another; Romans 12:10
7. Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits. Romans 12:16
8. Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. Romans 13:8
9. Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another. Romans 14:19
10. Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus: Romans 15:5
11. 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
12. Salute one another with an holy kiss. The churches of Christ salute you. Romans 16:16
13. And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another. 1 Corinthians 4:6
14. That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. 1 Corinthians 12:25
15. All the brethren greet you. Greet ye one another with an holy kiss. 1 Corinthians 16:20
16. Greet one another with an holy kiss. 2 Corinthians 13:12
17. For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. Galatians 5:13
18. With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Ephesians 4:2
19. Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another. Ephesians 4:25
20. And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. Ephesians 4:32
21. Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. Ephesians 5:21
22. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; Colossians 3:9
23. Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. Colossians 3:13
24. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. Colossians 3:16
25. And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: 1 Thessalonians 3:12
26. But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. 1 Thessalonians 4:9
27. Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do. 1 Thessalonians 5:11
28. I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality. 1 Timothy 5:21

29. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. Hebrews 3:13
30. And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Hebrews 10:24
31. Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. Hebrews 10:25
32. Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge. James 4:11
33. Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door. James 5:9
34. Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. James 5:16
35. Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: 1 Peter 1:22
36. Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: 1 Peter 3:8
37. Use hospitality one to another without grudging. 1 Peter 4:9
38. As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. 1 Peter 4:10
39. Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. 1 Peter 5:5
40. Greet ye one another with a kiss of charity. Peace be with you all that are in Christ Jesus. Amen. 1 Peter 5:14
41. For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. 1 John 3:11
42. And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment. 1 John 3:23
43. Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. 1 John 4:7
44. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. 1 John 4:11
45. And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another. 2 John 1:5

Appendix C -- Sample Questions for Candidates for Ordination

1. Give a brief account of your new birth experience and present Christian testimony.
2. Give a testimony of your Bible reading and prayer life habits and of your family worship practices.
3. Are there any areas of struggle or failure in your Christian life that you should share with us? Have there been any sins unto death as given in 1Cor 5:10-11; 6:9-10; Gal 5:19-21 and Eph 5:3-6 that you have not cleared with the church and yet remain in your past?
4. How would you envision your business involvements or obligations fitting in with this type of ministry? Are there any involvements that would hinder you in the work of this ministry?
5. What have you found helpful for living a victorious Christian life?
6. Give a word of testimony in relation to your marriage and home relationships.
7. Do you accept the Bible as the inspired Word of God and do you believe that the New Testament forms the basis for the doctrines and practices of the church today?
8. Explain your belief on church authority and the leader's role in church-life.
9. You are requested to read the 18 Articles of Faith, and the Church Standards in connection with this work. Do you have any question about the doctrines or standards of the conference? Can you give your support to them and seek to maintain them in the congregation?
10. You have been given a copy of the Orientation for the Newly Ordained. Can you support this view of team work and carrying out church standards?
11. What are your concerns for your local congregation? For our larger church fellowship?
12. Are you willing to support the activities of your own church fellowship rather than to give support to groups who do not uphold the doctrine of nonconformity, nonresistance, believer's baptism, and separation of church and state?
13. What are some of the sobering facts about the work of the ministry?
14. Do you share a compassion for lost and defeated souls? Can you share any ways you express this concern?
15. Can you understand that the Christian leader must endure hardships and misunderstandings. Will you commit to love those who oppose you and strive to maintain Christian composure in trying circumstances? What resources do you expect to use to do this?
16. Are you willing to share the lot with the other brethren and to accept this service as a lifetime calling?