

A person with curly hair, wearing a white t-shirt and blue jeans, is walking away from the viewer across a vast, sandy desert landscape. The ground is covered in small, dark rocks and sparse, dry vegetation. In the distance, there are low, rolling mountains under a warm, golden sky, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The overall mood is one of solitude and contemplation.

Your First
40 DAYS
In The Wilderness

FIRST PRINCIPLE LESSONS FOR NEW CHRISTIANS
Troy D. Spradlin

Your First 40 Days in the Wilderness

By Troy D. Spradlin

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DEDICATION

First and foremost, I thank God for His infinite love, grace, and mercy. I live to serve Him and His Son, Jesus Christ, in the kingdom of Heaven.

Secondly, I thank my beautiful, loving, and loyal wife, Andrea. I see Jesus Christ in her everyday life, which helps me learn and grow spiritually.

I want to thank the eldership and all the members at the Margaret Street church of Christ. Their love and support throughout the years are immeasurable. They helped make this effort possible.

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Welcome to God's family!

We are so glad that you have become a Christian! You have made the most important decision of your lifetime. It is the one that affects your eternal destiny. Becoming a Christian means you now belong to God. He is your Father, and you are His child. Being part of this family also means you should know a few things, such as what God expects of you as a member of His household and what you can expect from your Father. There are many other benefits that come with being a part of His family. So, just as any father would explain these things to a newly adopted child, God does that for us through His inspired Word, the Bible. This naturally implies that we must search and study the Bible. For a new Christian, that can be a daunting proposition!

This book is designed to help you with that endeavor. It is simply a study guide that will assist you in finding many of those important passages for your spiritual growth. It is presented in 40 devotional lessons, spread out over 40 days (one lesson per page, per day) that you can do by yourself or along with others. The end of each lesson also includes a few suggestions for your prayers that day, in order to help you develop a consistent prayer routine in your new spiritual walk. As you study through the lessons, if you can't get to all the verses that are cited, don't worry, you can always go back and study them at another time. Returning to the lessons even after you have finished the forty days will only help you in your spiritual growth. In fact, we sincerely hope this book will be a helpful study aid and reference for years to come.

The title, "Your First Forty Days in the Wilderness," is a reference to what happened to our Savior, Jesus Christ, after He was baptized. Mark's account of the Gospel says that "***Immediately the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness. And He was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan ...***" (Mark 1:12-13). Think about that, for a moment. If the devil attacked the Son of God shortly after His baptism, what do you think Satan will do to you?

That is why these first forty days after your baptism are crucial because Satan is now angry with you! In his mind, another precious soul has returned to God (he is angry because he already had you before you were baptized). Therefore, he is not going to make it easy for you now. In fact, the devil will ramp up his attacks on you, just as he did with Jesus. He will try everything in his power to drag you back into the darkness. However, there is hope! Notice what Jesus did to defend Himself against the attacks of Satan. On every occasion, Jesus responded with, "***It is written...***" (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10). In other words, He leaned on the Scriptures to protect Himself and to withstand the attacks. His example teaches us that we need to do exactly the same thing!

These 40 lessons are designed to help you resist those attacks by strengthening your knowledge of God's Word - that is the most important defense. The lessons are grouped into seven different principles:

- First, we will begin by explaining your responsibilities as a new Christian.
- Secondly, we will help you understand why the Bible is very important to your faith.
- Third, we'll study why the church is important to our Lord and should be to us.
- Fourth, we'll talk about the principle of the preeminence of Jesus Christ.
- The fifth principle will look at the necessity of worship.
- The sixth will review the sovereignty of God.
- And the seventh will provide direction on how to remain faithful throughout your life.

Once again, welcome to the family! I pray you will be greatly strengthened in your first forty days in the wilderness. If this little book can help you start on the right footing, then to God be the glory!

PRINCIPLE 1 - A CHRISTIAN'S RESPONSIBILITY

DAY 1: "What Must I Do After Baptism?"

The most important question one must ask themselves is, "What must I do to be saved?" Fortunately, the Bible gives us the answer to that question! We find it in the New Testament that teaches about "obeying the Gospel." This leads one to hear, believe, repent, confess, and be baptized. The Lord then adds them to the church. (See: Romans 10:17; John 3:16; Luke 13:3; Matthew 10:32; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:47). After all that is done, the second most important question one should ask themselves is, "What must I do AFTER obeying the Gospel?" The manner in which one lives their life after being saved is just as serious of a matter as obeying the Gospel. Fortunately, the Bible also gives us the answer to that second question.

God's plan to save man is not just about getting someone into the baptistery. In fact, notice that within the Great Commission itself, there is one distinct objective, which is completed in two phases. The first phase is, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." The second phase is seen in the words, "teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20). Both phases lead to the one main objective of "making disciples," which is the only true verb in the entire command. The words "go," "baptize," and "teaching" are all participles that point directly to the main verb of "making disciples."

Another way to look at this is by recognizing that God gives specific responsibilities to all believers. First, a believer must obey the Gospel to be saved. Secondly, a believer must learn and keep the commandments of God in order to remain saved. Essentially, to be a disciple means that one must be obedient throughout one's lifetime from the day one obeys the Gospel until the day one dies. This is precisely why Jesus said, "Remain faithful until death and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10).

Furthermore, note how the book of Hebrews presents this same thought, "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food," (5:12). This verse implies that a disciple's life is characterized by a process of continual growth. The passage is a clear indication something special exists within the Word of God that every believer must learn and apply. The writer of Hebrews illustrates it as a small child needing milk for growth before being capable of eating solid food. Likewise, new Christians will learn in increments during their spiritual growth.

Notice also that when someone becomes a Christian, they are described as "born again" (John 3:7; 1 Peter 1:23). According to 2 Corinthians 5:17 they become a "new creation," or "babes in Christ" in 1 Corinthians 3:1. So, just as a baby grows and matures by physical milk, so must a spiritual babe in Christ be nourished by the spiritual "milk" of the Word, (cf. 1 Peter 2:2; Colossians 1:10). Then, as one matures, they begin to consume "solid food" or, the "meat" of the Word. All of this is a poetic way of describing what the goal of every Christian should be, that only through the Word of God can one truly grow (Ephesians 4:15; 2 Timothy 2:15).

The simple truth is that it is not easy being a Christian! If it were, we wouldn't need all those letters in the New Testament about how to live a Christian life! (Romans through Jude) The fact that God provided those inspired letters for us teaches that we must work at it, and there is more to our salvation than just being baptized. This is why Peter warns: "Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things, you will never stumble;" (2 Peter 1:10). We must leave our old life behind and focus on our new one. We must "put off the old man," as Paul says in Colossians 3:9. We are no longer part of the world but now part of a new special family, a "chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people" belonging to God (1 Peter 2:9). So, the answer to the question of, "What must I do AFTER baptism?" is, we must work to grow spiritually mature (Philippians 2:12).

TODAY'S PRAYER: Pray that God will grant you the ability to study and understand His Word; that you may grow spiritually strong in the Scriptures and capable of withstanding Satan's attacks.

DAY 2: Every Christian Has a Responsibility

No one is, or should be, forcing you to be a Christian, nor can anyone coerce you to be a disciple of Jesus. In reality, someone cannot make you do the things necessary to be saved or even compel you against your will to obey God's commands. You must make that decision solely for yourself.

While it is true that the Bible teaches that those who do not obey the commandments of the Lord should be admonished (2 Thessalonians 3:14-15), God always gives us free will to decide whether to obey Him or not (cf. Proverbs 16:9; Joshua 24:15). You have a choice in the matter. Either submit to God or don't. This simple truth is one of the first things every Christian must come to realize, that every disciple has a personal responsibility toward God. Our first responsibility involves responding to the gift of salvation He offers. Nothing is more important than that. To make it to heaven, you must obey God's will. It is that simple. It means that you carry the exclusive responsibility for your own soul! It is your choice to obey God and yours alone.

Now, the word "responsibility" is a "big" word, not because of the number of letters, but because of what it implies. The Oxford Dictionary [1] defines the word as "The state or fact of being accountable... A moral obligation to behave correctly towards, or in respect of." Do you see a spiritual application there? Since God sent Jesus to die on the cross, paying for the debt of our sins (Romans 3:23-26, 5:8), we must be faithful to Him and serve Him. It implies that we are morally obligated to respond by behaving correctly regarding what He has done for us. In addition, it implies that we will be held accountable for our actions (Revelation 20:12).

Keep the above points in mind as you read Hebrews 5:12-14. This passage teaches a key aspect of that responsibility we have toward God - to grow into spiritual maturity! God desires specific characteristics to be developed and produced within our lives. In yesterday's lesson, we compared how an infant grows to that of how a Christian grows. The implication is, we cannot remain "babes in Christ" forever. In fact, no one should be baptized, added to the church (Acts 2:38, 40, 47), and then just remain stagnant in their faith. Instead, we must show love and gratitude toward God by making our best effort to grow into spiritually mature disciples.

Therefore, a Christian's responsibility extends beyond obedience to the Gospel call. One does not stop obeying God's commands once they have been saved because salvation is not fully complete until one gets to heaven (1 Corinthians 15:24). But again, it is something you must do for yourself! It is a personal duty, and it should be the most important goal of every Christian. Every Christian bears this responsibility for themselves.

Fortunately, spiritual growth can be attained and measured. The scriptures clearly outline what the characteristics of a mature Christian are. Possessing these various characteristics sets you apart, or sanctifies you, from the rest of the world and establishes you as a faithful disciple of Jesus. In John 13:15, Jesus said, "For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you." Considering the context of that passage, can you determine what the goal of every Christian should be? I'll give you a hint. Paul teaches the same principle in 1 Corinthians 11:1 and Philippians 3:17. Look up those passages and also consider 3 John 11. From those verses, can you identify what your responsibility is as a Christian?

New Christians (or even long-time Christians, for that matter) should also read 1 John 2:15-17. There, we learn that we are not to love the world or the things in the world. This indicates we should leave our former behaviors behind and focus more on spiritual and heavenly things. To reiterate, we cannot be baptized and then do absolutely nothing! If you do not continually put forth your best effort in trying to please God, then what does it really matter if you were baptized?

James 1:22 says, "Be doers of the word, and not hearers only." It means we have a responsibility to not only learn God's will but also fulfill His will. By doing so, we will develop into mature Christians. Accepting our responsibility toward God causes us to be that shining light and example to others that He desires us to be, which brings glory and honor to Him (Matthew 5:16). This is God's will for His creation and what pleases Him.

TODAY'S PRAYER: Let God know that you want to learn and understand your responsibilities as a Christian and commit to fulfilling them!

DAY 3: Characteristics of a Mature Christian (1)

A few years ago, a missionary in South America was studying the fundamentals of the faith with a new Christian. He explained to the young lady that, as a recent convert, she “must grow unto spiritual maturity.” At first, she became somewhat confused and then asked a pertinent question, “Well, what exactly does a mature Christian look like?” She had reasoned that if she could see what she needed to attain to with her own eyes, she could more easily arrive there. What a great attitude to have! With that in mind, let's take a look at how the Bible describes a mature Christian. In doing so, we can identify ten different attributes that are emphasized.

Love. First and foremost, a mature Christian is characterized by love. There is nothing more important in the life of a Christian than love! Jesus exemplified love for us in every aspect of His life. The Bible teaches that we are to love: God (Mark 12:30); Jesus (John 14:15, 23-24); one another (John 15:12); our mother and father (Matthew 19:19); and even our enemies (Matthew 5:44-48). This kind of love is not some “warm and fuzzy feeling.” It is an unselfish love that is exhibited in our actions. It is a love that comes from knowing God.

Think about how someone might identify you as a Christian. In John 13:35, Jesus explained how His disciples are to be identified, it is by “if you have love for one another.” Always remember that of all spiritual qualities mentioned in the Bible, it says, “The greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13:4-13).

Prayer. A mature Christian must also have a life of prayer. Without it, we simply can't be pleasing to God. The Creator wants to hear from His creation; therefore, we must pray. We should consider it a great privilege to communicate directly with Him. How wonderful it is to have access to God! (Hebrews 4:16) Think about this also: if Jesus Christ is our example (John 13:15) and He was a man of prayer (Mark 1:35; John 17:9), then we, too, must undoubtedly be frequently engaged in prayer. The Apostle Paul wrote that he desired “men to pray everywhere” (1 Timothy 2:8) and “without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). This is why we have included a “Today's Prayer” section at the end of every lesson. It is there to help you develop this extremely important practice in your life. After all, it is impossible to stumble when one is upon their knees in prayer!

Obedience. Here's a simple reality: One cannot be a true and faithful Christian without being obedient! A clear sign of spiritual maturity is demonstrated through obedience in every behavioral aspect of a disciple's life. In the Old Testament, in First Samuel 15:22, the prophet Samuel admonished Saul, saying, “Obedience is better than sacrifice.” Again, looking unto Jesus as our example, we see that He was obedient, even unto death on the cross (Philippians 2:8). Jesus also taught that if a disciple truly loves Him, they will keep His commandments (John 14:15). Only through obedience will God allow us to enter heaven (Matthew 7:21; Revelation 22:14).

Worship. How can one become a mature Christian if worship is not a high priority in their lives? Worship is important because it is what we were created to do. There are animals that were made to run, the sun was made to shine, and man was made to worship. According to Ecclesiastes 12:13 and Hebrews 10:25, we have a personal responsibility to worship God. Think about it in this manner: if you do not like going to the worship assembly to be with your brethren and glorify God, then what do you think you are going to do in heaven?

The Bible presents a specific manner in which we are to worship - “in spirit and truth” (John 4:24). We should never forget that God is to be the focus of our worship and not us. Worship is about giving glory, honor, praise, and gratitude to our Father in heaven. It is never to be converted into our own entertainment. Later in this study guide, we will present more lessons and details about the subject of worship.

Study. A mature Christian is also one who reads and studies their Bible (1 Timothy 4:13). Studying God's Word is the only effective way to develop true spiritual maturity. Jesus serves as our example since He was a man of the Book and often stated, “It is written” (Matthew 4:4, 12:3). He knew the Scriptures, and we need to know the Scriptures. You might consider how Paul encouraged Timothy to be diligent in his studies (2 Timothy 2:15) and what Peter instructs in 1 Peter 3:15. It is impossible to do what Peter says without studying the Bible. Lastly, remember this - the Word of God cannot get into you until you get into the Word of God!

TODAY'S PRAYER: Ask God to help you be able to discern and apply the characteristics of a mature Christian in your studies and to help you reach that objective.

DAY 4: Characteristics of a Mature Christian (2)

In yesterday's devotional, we began discussing several characteristics that can be identified in a mature Christian. The previous ones mentioned were love, prayer, obedience, worship, and study. Today, we will look at an additional five traits that are also emphasized in the Bible. They are: teaching, service, hope, suffering, and perseverance.

Evangelizing / Teaching. A mature Christian not only knows the Bible through personal study but is also capable of teaching it to others. Jesus taught that His disciples must plant the "seed" (that is, the Word of God) into the hearts of others, according to Matthew 13:1-23. To do that involves teaching new people the Gospel (evangelizing), and it also involves teaching other disciples.

Matthew 28:19-20 and Mark 16:16 are passages known as the "Great Commission." There, it is a command to take the Gospel (the "Good News") and proclaim it to others in order to save precious souls. In Ephesians 4:12, we find that teachers are to be involved in "equipping the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, ..." Consider also Acts 6:7, 8:4, and 1 Corinthians 9:16 about the importance of teaching.

Service. A mature Christian's true character or nature is seen in their service to others. Read John 13:3-15. Jesus told His disciples that He was leaving them an example to follow. According to the context, what was the example? (Hint: it involves a bowl, some water, and dirty feet). Jesus' example also includes what He said about His purpose for coming (Mark 10:45). A mature Christian must serve by following Jesus' example. According to 2 Corinthians 8:5, we should also give "first of ourselves" to the Lord. Today, add to your study these verses about service: Matthew 6:19-21; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Galatians 6:10; Colossians 3:17; and 1 Timothy 6:6-10.

Hope. A key element to spiritual maturity is hope. It's interesting that hope is not an easy word to define, yet, Paul certainly explains it well in Romans 8:24-25. Then, in Colossians 1:5, he states that our hope is laid up for us in heaven. It is why Peter also describes our hope as "a living hope" (1 Peter 1:3). Indeed, hope is so very important to understand! It provides much encouragement for our spiritual walk. Clearly, having hope is another essential characteristic that a mature Christian exhibits in their life.

Suffering. Most people don't want to accept this, but a mature Christian is going to suffer. Jesus taught that His disciples were going to suffer (John 15:20). This still applies to us today because, as a Christian, it is certain that suffering will come in one form or another (2 Timothy 3:12). Nobody really wants to suffer, but there are many good things that come from our suffering. For example, when we are faced with trials, non-Christians will be watching carefully to see how we will respond. How we handle adversity can be a testimony to our faith and a positive influence on others. Read Romans 5:3-4 to see how Paul describes the benefits of suffering.

Perseverance. A mature Christian is one who perseveres. Jesus said, "Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10). For the spiritually mature, those are very comforting and encouraging words! The apostle Peter also taught us to add perseverance to our faith (2 Peter 1:6). Hebrews 12:1 says, "... let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith ..." The word for endurance means "steadfastness, constancy, and patience." We must persevere! Consider adding these verses to your study: 1 Corinthians 9:24-27; Philippians 2:14-16; Colossians 1:23; and James 1:12.

In conclusion, all ten of these characteristics are to be done in faith. Developing these traits in your life will help you to grow spiritually mature. A wise preacher once said, "We have a faith, called 'The Faith' which produces faith." That is so true! When we put all these traits together by actively seeking to be obedient to God by worshipping and praying to Him, learning His will through His word, and serving in His kingdom by teaching others through love, while persevering due to the hope within us, despite persecution or suffering ... that is, indeed, the marks of true FAITH! They are characteristics found in a spiritually mature Christian.

TODAY'S PRAYER: Why not make a commitment today to put all these characteristics that we've studied into practice in your own life? Why not pray to God right now and ask Him to help you develop these things toward your own spiritual maturity?

DAY 5: A Christian Must Bear Fruit

In the last two lessons, we learned about spiritual maturity. We identified and discussed a few of the godly characteristics that are found in a spiritually mature Christian. Now, we need to ask ourselves: "How do we attain spiritual maturity in our own lives?" Perhaps, we could begin with what Paul wrote in Romans 12:2, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." According to the context, Paul was speaking to his fellow Christians. Pay close attention to the words Paul uses here. It seems rather obvious that we must make changes in our way of thinking. It also implies that we cannot continue "walking" (living our lives) according to worldly patterns, but rather, we should live our lives according to the Word of God. Thankfully, the Bible gives us everything we need to make such changes in our lives and grow as Christians (cf. 2 Peter 1:3). The reality is that we are all capable of changing and improving our lives so that we can be pleasing in the eyes of God.

Agricultural Metaphors and Growth Analogies

When we intently study the subject of spiritual growth in the Bible, we will find noticeable patterns. For example, Jesus and the inspired writers often compare the spiritual development of a disciple to that of a growing plant. We can also find this same metaphor used frequently in the Old Testament. The comparison is simple: just as a plant grows and produces fruit, every mature Christian must grow and produce fruit.

Read 1 Corinthians 3:1-9. Considering what Paul calls Christians in verse 1, what can we deduce from his analogy in verse 6? We should be able to see that just as a child grows by the nourishment of food (verse 2), a plant grows by the nourishment of water. In both cases, what is the source of the increase? It is God! He put this law into motion when He created the world, and all growth comes from His power, not our own.

Another powerful passage full of divine wisdom is John 15:1-8. Notice how God and Jesus are identified in verse 1. His disciples are called "branches" (15:5). The analogy is simple. The trunk supplies what is necessary for the branches to produce fruit; Jesus does the same for us. He says, "without Me you can do nothing."

In the original Greek language of the New Testament, there are several words for "branch." The term used here refers to a "tender offshoot or vine sprout." We might call it a twig. A twig or a vine sprout is rather insignificant compared to the branch of a large tree. A small twig carries no real strength and dries out faster than a tree branch. A good-sized branch is still useful as wood, even after it dies - one might make furniture, tools, or some other functional thing with it. But when a twig dies and dries out, it is not really useful for anything. Thus, it is gathered up and thrown into the fire.

How does this apply to the Christian?

1 Corinthians 3:1-9 implies that we have no other greater purpose in life than to bring glory and honor to God. Isn't that the point Jesus was making in John 15:5? We should also note that Jesus said, "A tree is known by its fruit" (Matthew 12:33). This means that we are known or can be identified by what we "produce," that is to say, our behavior. We know how to identify an apple tree by its fruit, an avocado tree by its fruit, and so forth. So, how can people identify us as Christians if we do not demonstrate it through our actions?

God desires action from us, and our actions are extremely important! That is what is meant by "bearing fruit." It means to take action, specifically actions that bring glory to God. We are to produce "fruit" that honors and exalts Him. This harmonizes perfectly with other passages, such as Ecclesiastes 12:13, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man's all."

So, now that we understand that a Christian is to bear fruit in order to be pleasing to God, you might be wondering, "What is this 'fruit' (or actions) that we must produce? What does that mean exactly?" In tomorrow's devotional, we will begin examining the specific traits of the fruit God desires in our lives.

TODAY'S PRAYER: Let God know that you want to make changes in your life and desire for your behavior to reflect that you belong to Him. Tell God you want to live to glorify Him.

DAY 6: Bearing the Fruit of the Spirit (1)

Yesterday, we mentioned that we must change our way of thinking (Romans 12:2). We also noted that we can do this by studying God's Word (2 Timothy 2:15) and imitating Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1). In doing so, it will result in us recognizing that we must stop doing those things that are contrary to God's will. It means we must no longer live according to the world's ways and, instead, should strive to live according to God's way - the manner He has revealed to us in the Bible. Living according to His way is also known as "bearing fruit."

A Christian must produce "fruit" in order to be pleasing to God, as Jesus taught in John 15:1-8. But what, exactly, is this "fruit" a Christian must produce? What does it look like? Fortunately, the Bible provides several passages that answer that question for us. Let's begin with the most obvious, Galatians 5:22-24. Here, we have a list of nine things or "fruit" that pleases God. We suggest that you underline each of these in your Bible, write them down somewhere so you can be reminded of them, or try to memorize each one.

Notice first that the collective group is called "the fruit of the Spirit" in a singular sense, but the inspired writer goes on to describe the fruit with a plurality of traits. Thus, compiling all of these components together makes up a singular "fruit." You might also observe that each of these traits only comes from having a right relationship with God. That is because God is the source of each trait. Therefore, we should strive to add this "fruit of the Spirit" to our daily lives in order to be godly disciples. Let's now look at each one individually.

Love. Study how the word is used in passages like 1 Corinthians 13:1-13; John 13:34, 35; 1 John 3:18, and 4:18. You will find that it is a special kind of love. It is a love without borders or limits, an unconditional love. It is the kind of love that you administer. Regardless of the actions of others, you have complete control of this kind of love. That being so, it makes it possible for you to "love your enemies," as Jesus said in Matthew 5:44.

It is rather interesting that there are four words for "love" in the original Bible language (Koine Greek). One was "eros," which is an intimate kind of love, such as found in marriage (this word is not found in the Bible). Another, "storge," is a paternal, familial kind of love, like between a mother and her child (also not found in the Bible, but the idea is seen in Mark 7:10). "Phileo," is the word for the type of love between friends, or brotherly kindness (cf. John 11:36). Then, there is "agape" love. This is true love. It is the kind of love that always looks out for the best interest of others (cf. Philippians 2:1-4). "Agape" is the word used here in Galatians 5:22.

Joy. Joy is not just "happiness," as some translations say. Rather, it is something deeper, more holy, and pure. Joy is different from happiness. Happiness depends on the circumstances of health, good friends, a pleasing environment, and/or security. Joy goes beyond all those things and draws its energy from one's relationship with God. One commentator said, "... the joy of the Lord is complete, and there is no human circumstance that can take it away, except when the Christian himself allows Satan in to steal it away." [2]

Look at how the word is used in John 15:11; Romans 14:17, 15:13; 1 Thessalonians 2:19; James 1:2; and 3 John 4. Have you ever considered that happiness and sadness cannot coexist simultaneously in the same moment? Yet, joy can coexist at the same time as sadness. This is because joy is more than an emotion, and it comes from a completely different source, God. Only God can provide this aspect of the fruit of the Spirit.

Peace. Read what Romans 5:1-2 and Philippians 4:7 say about peace. The peace mentioned in Galatians 5:22 is much deeper than any human peace. To help us understand better, some synonyms for this kind of peace might be: "serenity, satisfaction, stability, certainty, and security." But again, this is not some ordinary or common emotion. Godly peace is unique and precious. According to the apostle Peter, how might we obtain this peace from God (2 Peter 1:2)? Notice that he says, "in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord."

Therefore, for a Christian, peace is an inner tranquility that comes only through the hope and trust provided by receiving the forgiveness of one's sins through salvation (reconciliation with God).

TODAY'S PRAYER: Pray that God will grant you the complete understanding and blessings of love, joy, and peace in your Christian walk.

DAY 7: Bearing the Fruit of the Spirit (2)

Building upon our discussion from yesterday, the following characteristics of the fruit of the Spirit result from obtaining the previous virtues we examined: love, joy, and peace. It is not really possible to produce the next six virtues on the list without having the first three. We should also note that love, joy, and peace direct our attention toward God, while the next three direct our attention toward our neighbor.

Patience (the NIV says “forbearance,” and the KJV, NKJV, and ASV render it as “long-suffering”).

Could we not all use a little more patience? This is a word that means one is willing to accept and bear injury (cf. Matthew 18:21-35; Luke 17:3-5; Ephesians 4:32). Literally, it means “to be long-tempered” (the opposite of short-tempered)! Vine's Dictionary [3] states that “long-suffering is that quality of self-restraint in the face of provocation which does not hastily retaliate or promptly punish. It is the opposite of anger and is associated with mercy and is used of God.” That is a great explanation!

We must remember that God is, and has been, extremely patient toward us. Without His divine grace, we would not have salvation; it came through His patience! Study what 2 Peter 3:7-9, 15 says about the purpose of God's long-suffering toward us. Also, what does Apostle Paul say that patience will lead to in Romans 2:4?

Love and prayers are the best ways to develop the virtue of patience in your spiritual walk. But don't pray for patience if you are not ready! This is because the best way to “get” patience is to be put into those situations that require it. It is how you truly develop patience! Perhaps, first try serving more at your local congregation, in your community, and in any way you can find - which will always require patience.

Kindness (the KJV says “Gentleness”). This attribute implies that one is mild or pleasant. It also means being virtuous (having moral goodness) and benevolent. It is a key quality of a friendly person. It is a sweetness of attitude, as in someone who is easy to get along with and easy to please. This grace comes to one who is not constantly complaining but is kind and pleasant. Gentleness (which we will discuss later) is merely the attitude of kindness. Wouldn't it be nice if this personality trait were more prevalent in our society today?

1 Corinthians 13:4 speaks of a love that is “kind.” Jesus Himself is described as one who appeared to us because of God's kindness in Titus 3:4. Seriously, how hard is it to be kind and gentle to others? In order to develop kindness in your own spiritual walk, you must begin with prayer. Then, just determine within your heart to be kind to others (Ephesians 4:32)! Someone's kindness is easily noted in their speech and their mannerisms. So, remember, words can deeply affect and seriously hurt someone else (James 3:2-8). Being kind involves watching what we say and how we say it, as well as controlling our behavior toward others.

Goodness. This trait is closely connected with kindness. This word means “uprightness of heart and life.” The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament [4] says this word “indicates the quality which a man has who is ‘agathos’ [good] and therefore moral excellence, as well as goodness.” It is “the state or quality of being good; kindly feeling; kindness; generosity; excellence of quality; the best part of anything; essence; strength.” [5] Some like to think about goodness as the practical manifestation of kindness. It implies that one has the best interest of others within their heart and is willing to assist those in need. It is a trait exhibited in one's communication, generosity, and willingness to forgive offenses (Proverbs 15:1; Philippians 2:4; Matthew 7:12). Producing the fruit of goodness in your life means there is always a disposition to do good and help others as Paul encourages in Galatians 6:10. We might say that goodness is Christian love in action!

How might you develop goodness in your spiritual walk? Start with prayer (have you noticed that each of these starts with prayer?) This is because we must never forget that the “Fruit of the Spirit” is God's work! Follow up your prayer and study by seeking out ways to do something good for others. Talking about it is okay, but putting your knowledge into actual practice makes for true spiritual growth!

TODAY'S PRAYER: Ask God to continue to grant you the complete understanding and blessings of love, joy, and peace in your Christian walk. Ask Him to help you develop patience, kindness, and goodness also.

After baptism, what's next?

WE MUST BEAR FRUIT!

John 15:1-8; Matthew 12:33; 1 Corinthians 3:6; Romans 12:2

“THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT”

When the Bible says that a Christian must “bear fruit”, what does that mean?

We find an example of what type of fruit to bear in **Galatians 5:22-23**

1 Corinthians 13:1-13; 1 John 3:18

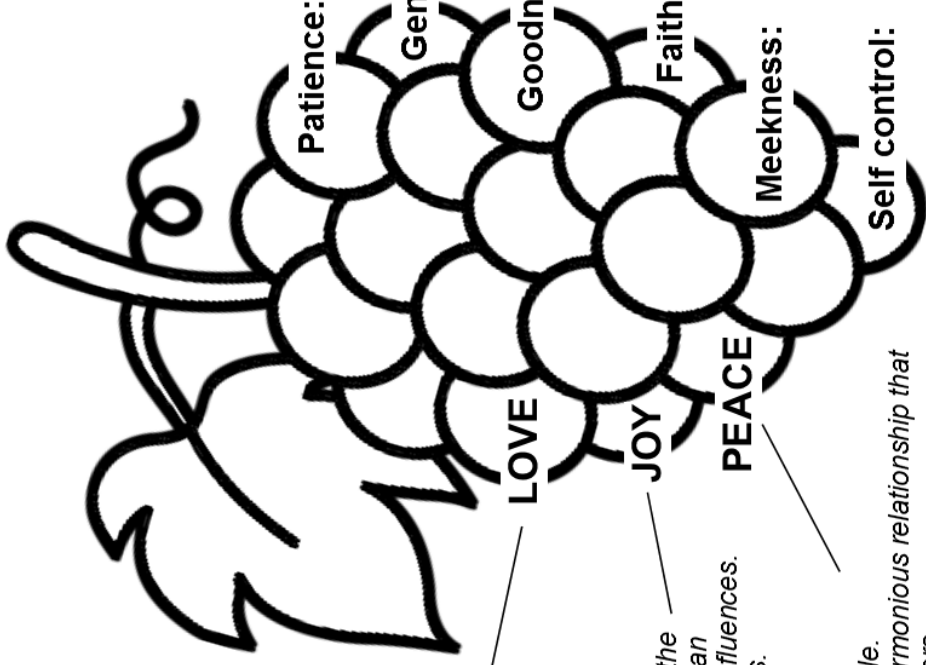
This is “agape,” which is a love without limits or boundaries. It is not an emotion, but rather a principle that is lived. No matter what the other person does, the Christian has control of this type of love.

John 15:10-12; Psalms 16:11

Difficult to define and is dependent upon the presence of love. It is a quality, deeper than happiness and independent of external influences. Joy can exist even when there is sadness.

Philippians 4:7; James 3:17, 18

Peace of mind even in the midst of trouble. This is the supreme good of man, the harmonious relationship that should exist between Christians and others.



Notice that at the Bible contrasts “the works of the flesh” (plural) in V19 with “fruit” (singular) in V22. It is a singular fruit with many different aspects, features, and nuances.

Colossians 3:12,13; Ephesians 4:2 - Often translated as *longsuffering; tolerance, support of others.*

Gentleness: 1 Corinthians 13:4; Romans 12:21 - to express kindness, as to what is right and just.

Goodness Matthew 5:20; 2 Thessalonians 1:11 - Denotes a moral quality; uprightness of heart and life; always wanting to do what is good and right.

Faithfulness: Hebrews 11:1,6 - Trust, a firm conviction, loyalty, constancy of affection.

Titus 3:2; Matthew 5:5 - Willing to learn, a desire to practice humility.

Matthew 21:22; 1 Corinthians 9:27 - The proper control of the will. Having control to not sin.

DAY 8: Bearing the Fruit of the Spirit (3)

Today, we will look at the remaining three graces of the “Fruit of the Spirit,” as outlined in Galatians 5:22-23. You might remember that the first three aspects of love, joy, and peace direct our attention toward God, while the next three, patience, kindness, and goodness, direct our attention toward our neighbor. These last three are directed toward the individual disciples as things we are to develop within our hearts and put into practice.

Faithfulness (written as “Faith” in the KJV). Jesus told His disciples to “Have faith in God” (Mark 11:22). It is a word that means “loyal in affection; constant; reliable, trusted, or believed.” Vine’s Dictionary states that it is “a firm persuasion, a conviction based upon hearing.” [6]

Read how the Bible describes faith in Hebrews 11:1. That same chapter in Hebrews also lists many wonderful examples of faithfulness (verses 7-40). Next, look at what is said about faith in the verse just before that passage in verse 6. How important is faith? The truth is, every child of God must be faithful to Him (1 Corinthians 4:2). You should be faithful because of your love for the Lord, not because the preacher says so or anyone else.

You can develop faithfulness in your spiritual walk by praying about it (there we go again). Ask God to help you increase your faith, just as the disciples did in Luke 17:5. Also, since the Bible says, “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” (Romans 10:17), then you should study and learn God’s Word daily in order to increase your faith. That’s the purpose of the New Testament according to what John says in John 20:30-31.

Gentleness (the KJV and the ASV render this word as “meekness”). Don’t confuse this word with how some Bible versions use “gentleness” in verse 22 for “kindness”! It is most often correctly translated as “meekness.” We might describe it as submissiveness, peacefulness, or tenderness. It is a trait of one who has a softness in their manners, a mild temper, or a quiet nature. Thayer says gentleness is a “mildness of disposition; a gentleness of spirit.”[7] It is something exercised “outward” as a result of the condition of one’s heart.

Read Titus 3:1-2 and James 3:13. How is a meek person described in those verses? The assumption the world often makes is that a gentle (that is, meek) person is defenseless or weak. However, meekness is not weakness! It is the fruit of having power. For example, Moses is described as “very meek” in Numbers 12:3, yet no one would consider him weak. The Lord was also gentle, but He certainly was not weak — as He had infinite, divine resources available to Him (Matthew 11:29). So, meekness equates to restraint. It is described as “power under control.” In other words, a meek Christian, who may wield great power, does not throw his/her weight around.

In order to develop meekness in your spiritual walk, start by praying. Read your Bible and study the examples of meekness. Samson lacked it, but Elijah, David, Jesus, and others are great examples of meekness.

Self-Control (the KJV uses the word “temperance”). This final grace of the Fruit of the Spirit is something that is exercised “inwardly.” It is the “virtue of one who masters his own desires and passions, especially his sensual appetites.” [8] Self-control involves restraining our actions, our temper, our tongue, outbursts of ill feelings, and our desire for money and power. In Galatians 5:19-21, notice that those worldly things are called “the works of the flesh.” In Acts 24:25, we have an example where Paul reasoned with the Roman governor, Felix, about those things. They can keep us from having access to eternal life and entering heaven. Yet, we have the power within us to refuse to participate in worldly affairs (1 Thessalonians 5:22). It is simply an attitude of submitting to the will of God, which is the opposite of how lost, worldly people live their lives. In Romans 12:1-2, a child of God is commanded to render his life as a living sacrifice. That requires self-control!

Developing self-control in your spiritual life, once again, begins with prayer. It is because each trait is part of the Fruit of the Spirit, not a product of our own willpower. Then, of course, this should be followed by reading your Bible. Combatting temptation like Jesus did with, “It is written” (Luke 4:4-12), requires knowing the Word of God well. Furthermore, you can develop the trait of self-control by avoiding temptation triggers and not putting yourself in situations that might lead to something sinful. Self-control means purposing to do right.

TODAY’S PRAYER: Ask God to help you develop these three final attributes of the fruit of the Spirit in your life, along with the previous.

DAY 9: You Must Add to Your Faith (1)

For the last several days, the primary question we have been dealing with is, “What does God expect of you after you have obeyed the Gospel?” To answer that question, we’ve talked about a Christian’s responsibility for personal growth, leading to spiritual maturity. We also discussed how part of that growth is to produce fruit in our lives. At this point, we might ask, “What happens if we sin after being baptized?” In response to that question, we must again turn to the Bible and identify the will of God concerning the subject.

We can start by reading Proverbs 6:16-19 and consider how much our sin truly hurts God. Secondly, we should consider the price God paid to save us from the consequences of our sins (Romans 6:23). Peter explains, “... you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ” (1 Peter 1:17-19). From these two passages, we can quickly conclude that sin is a serious problem - even for a born-again Christian! Yet, our great and almighty God knows that we will occasionally stumble because we are human. He knows this, for He created us and also knows that Satan will continue to attack us until Jesus returns for us.

But there is hope! Look at what 1 John 1:7-10 and 2:3-5 teach us. The implication is that even as Christians, we may sin, but if we do sin, we need to repent! Going back to our main question, “What does God expect?” The answer is, that He expects us to avoid all forms of evil (1 Thessalonians 5:22) and remain faithful until death (Revelation 2:10). So, how do we do that? How can we strengthen ourselves to withstand the attacks of the devil? How might we avoid falling into temptation? Fortunately, and once again, God has given us abundant answers in the Bible. Three things immediately come to the forefront: (1) we need to strengthen our faith, as is taught in 2 Peter 1:5-11; (2) we need to fortify our defenses against the devil just as Paul mentions in Ephesians 6:11; and (3) we need to lean on God to help us as Psalm 56:11 says!

Strengthening Our Faith

With those things in mind, let’s take a deeper look into what the Apostle Peter says about strengthening our faith in 2 Peter 1:5-11. Start by reading it carefully and identifying the seven attributes that Peter says we are to add to our faith. As you do, think about it in the manner of how one might bake a cake. They would need a recipe. If all the correct ingredients are mixed together and baked, the result is something appetizing. Or, we could think of it as a bricklayer. If one brick is added upon another, then something useful and solid, like a wall or foundation, can be built. Likewise, our faith functions in that manner. We have a “recipe” in the Bible with the basic components needed for spiritual maturity. These components help us to strengthen our faith in God. If we add these things to our faith, it helps us build a stronger foundation, which enables us to defend ourselves against temptations. So, what are these attributes? Let’s study each of them.

The first one is **Virtue**. This is a word that is sometimes translated as “moral excellence.” In this passage, it is used to imply “courage.” This suggests that we must be ready to confess our faith, not hide it, nor be ashamed of it! That’s what we find in Matthew 5:16, 10:32, and Romans 1:16-17. When faced with obstacles, as we strive to walk in the light, we need this attribute in order to fortify our faith. We must exercise courage!

The second element listed is **Knowledge**. What kind of knowledge are we talking about here? This is spiritual knowledge. This is the kind that only comes through studying God’s Word. It is truly the only way to know the will of God. Jesus affirmed this in John 8:31-32, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

Think about this, is it possible to obtain a true understanding of mathematics, science, or foreign languages without regular study? Absolutely not! The same principle applies to the Bible; we must study it if we want to grow spiritually. Knowledge is so very important! Consider also what the Bible says about knowledge in passages such as Proverbs 1:7 and 1 Timothy 2:4. The bottom line is, God wants you to know His Word.

TODAY’S PRAYER: Simple. Pray for courage and knowledge!

Here are a few practical points to help you in your own study of the Bible:

- Set a regular time everyday to sit down with God's Word.
- Pray before, during, and after studying the Bible. (Not a prayer to receive miraculous knowledge).
- Have the right attitude and humility in the study of the Bible.
- Memorize Scripture regularly (Psalm 119:11).
- Consider everything the Scriptures teach about any particular subject (Psalm 119:160).
- Let the Bible explain itself. It is its own best commentary!
- Use more than one English translation of the Bible (more than 50 different versions).
- Study the context of a passage, and never take it out of its context. The context includes: the verse itself, the verses before and after the passage, the book that contains the verse; and the rest of the Bible that deals with that particular subject in that verse.
- Ask yourself these questions when you read a book, passage, or verse: Who is talking? To whom was the writer talking? When was he talking to them? This will help understand more context.
- Recognize the different figures of speech. The whole Bible was not written to be interpreted literally. Some parts are poetry. Other parts are figurative or symbolic. (cf. Revelation 1:1, 19-20).

After baptism, what's next?

WE MUST CONTINUE TO GROW BY ADDING TO OUR FAITH!

2 Peter 1:5-11



LOVE: This is the Greek word "agape" (agape) which describes a type of unconditional and thoughtful love where one always has the welfare of the other person in mind. It refers to special love for God, love of God to man, and even a "self-sacrificing" love that every human being must feel toward others.

From Thayer's Greek Definitions:

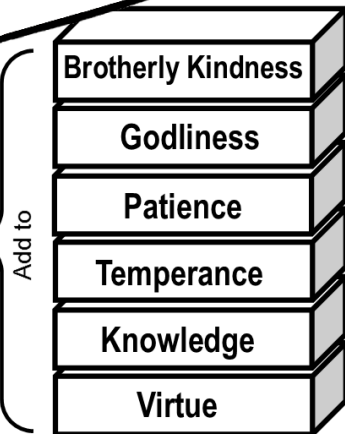
- "love of brothers or sisters, brotherly love; the love which Christians cherish for each other as brethren"
- "Reverence, respect; piety towards God, godliness"
- "steadfastness, constancy, endurance; in the NT the characteristic of a man who is not swerved from his deliberate purpose and his loyalty to faith and piety by even the greatest trials and suffering"
- "self-control (the virtue of one who masters his desires and passions, especially his sensual appetites)"
- "general knowledge of Christian religion, especially of things lawful and unlawful; moral wisdom"
- "moral goodness; any particular moral excellence, as modesty, purity"

We begin our Christian life with faith.
"Without faith it is impossible to please Him" (**Hebrews 11:6**).
Faith is complete trust and total conviction.

These are things that we need to add to
OUR FAITH:

"So then _____ comes by _____,
and _____ by the _____ of God."
(**Romanos 10:17**)

Faith is the foundation of the Christian life and is the basis of several steps to love.



DAY 10: You Must Add to Your Faith (2)

We are continuing our discussion and study regarding the question, “What does God expect of you after you have obeyed the Gospel?” We began by looking at some very specific and necessary life components, as presented in 2 Peter 1:5-11. These are necessary for building up one’s faith. We’ve previously discussed two of these attributes: virtue and knowledge. Let’s now continue with the next few items on Peter’s list.

Self-control. Interestingly, this quality is mentioned quite often in the Bible. It was one of the topics we considered earlier when looking at the Fruit of the Holy Spirit (Day 8). It is a word intended to promote moderation and sobriety. Self-control implies restraint of actions, controlling outbursts of emotions, constraining our temper, bridling the tongue, and curbing our desire for money and power.

Consider the order of the words presented here and how we must keep “adding” these qualities to our faith. From that perspective, this passage teaches us that knowledge is useless without linking it to or associating it with self-control. It is through knowledge that we learn how to control our character and resist temptation. Linking knowledge and self-control helps us quickly recognize that it is always right to do right, and it’s always wrong to do wrong. It is never right to do wrong, and it is never wrong to do right. You can learn more about self-control by reading Proverbs 29:11, 1 Corinthians 10:13, and 2 Timothy 1:7.

Peter continues by writing that we need to add **Perseverance** to our faith. (The KJV and ASV say “patience,” and the ESV has “steadfastness”). What is perseverance? It is “steadfastness, constancy, endurance.” Thayer’s Dictionary [9] says it “is the characteristic of a man who does not swerve from his deliberate purpose and his loyalty to faith and piety by even the greatest trials and sufferings.” This does not mean a passive resignation regarding current circumstances but an active resistance under the weight of affliction, sorrow, and grief. We must keep our focus on our service to God, despite the difficulties we might face. 2 Timothy 2:3 and James 1:2-3 teach us that perseverance is built through learning God’s Word and experience!

Godliness. This is a reverence, respect, and piety towards God. It is a religious fervor and compassion for things that are spiritual. In addition, it also means that we must take ourselves off the throne of our own heart and place the Lord upon it - making Him the center of our lives. We must submit to Him and His will. You are encouraged to read 1 Timothy 4:7-8 and discern what the Bible instructs about the importance of godliness.

Brotherly Kindness (love). The Anglicized transliteration of this word is "*philadelphia*" (just like the city of the same name). It is a compound word meaning “fraternal affection.” It has to do with a genuine concern for your brothers and sisters in Christ. It is not the strongest word in the Bible for “love,” but it is very close. Think about how we can demonstrate brotherly love in our lives. In fact, what does Romans 12:9-10 teach us in regard to this attribute? It teaches that we are to give preference to one another.

Love. This is the final “ingredient” in the list to add to our faith. The word “love” in this verse is the Greek word *agape*. It certainly differs from the brotherly love mentioned above because it is a stronger and deeper love! We have discussed this kind of love previously, which has more to do with our minds and our will, more so than our emotions (although our emotions are still involved). This love desires the best for others and is not obtained simply because someone has done something good for us or treated us with kindness. Have you noticed that the Bible speaks a lot about love? Even within this passage, notice that it begins with faith and ends with love! This teaches us that faith and love are connected, necessary, and essential to being a true disciple of Jesus.

In conclusion, we must consider why it is important to develop these virtues in our lives. Peter gives us the reason why in verses 10 and 11. It is “to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble.” According to the Bible, we will not be judged by how much money we have, by what college degree we’ve obtained, nor by any other measure of human success. God will judge us according to our obedience, love, and compassion toward others and if we have produced fruit of righteousness in our lives.

TODAY’S PRAYER: Since Scripture teaches that we must “add to our faith,” ask God to help you.

DAY 11: Learning to Function within the Body

We have mentioned several times now that every Christian is responsible for their own spiritual growth and maturing in the faith. A crucial step in that spiritual development is learning how to conduct oneself properly within the church. It is important to recognize that the Bible describes the church as a body. It is called the “body of Christ” in Ephesians 1:22-23 and Colossians 1:18. Also, according to 1 Corinthians 12:13, Christians have been baptized into that body. It is how we become members of the church (cf. Acts 2:47).

In his letter to the church in Corinth, Paul used an analogy of the human body to explain how unity among the brethren provides healthy functionality (12:12-31). It is not a difficult concept for us to understand. From our own experiences, we readily acknowledge that complex machines operate efficiently only when all their components are working in unison, performing their designated functions as intended. If a part fails to do its job, then the machine breaks down, which can cause severe damage or stop it from working altogether. Likewise, our human bodies function in much the same way. Every part has a specific purpose and contributes to the body's overall performance. This is what Paul emphasizes in his epistle.

Satan, on the other hand, wants to see the church fail. Because of him, division in the congregation is a constant threat among its members. Disunity and conflict can severely hamper or disable the church, and it can enter into a congregation through many avenues, such as abuse of power, erroneous doctrine, or improper conduct. A glaring example of this is found in the divisive nature of the members of the church there in ancient Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:10-13). It is why Paul used the analogy of the human body in chapter 12! Learning how to function properly within the church requires an attitude that constantly strives for unity.

To help us better understand the importance of unity, read Romans 12:3-8 then 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 and consider the specific details Paul accentuates. You should be able to deduce that the body does not exist only to serve the eyes, for example. But when the eye is hurt, different body parts will help it heal and become useful again. We also understand that the hand does not take from the body for its own purposes, nor does any other member demand something from the body for its personal benefit. Yet sadly, there are brethren in the church, within the body of Christ, who do not understand this simple concept. Their perception of the church is to take all that they can from the body or that the body exists only to serve them. All they do is take and take from the church; they never give back “of themselves” (as taught in 2 Corinthians 8:5). It is truly sad that some members of the Lord's church behave as if they are the only reason the body exists. What a shame!

There are three main points that Paul expresses in 1 Corinthians 12:1-27 we should take to heart. First, there is only one body, not multiple. Second, the body consists of many members, each with a special role within the body. Third, God united the human body, and He also united the church. With that in mind, read Ephesians 4:1-6 and see if you can determine how that passage parallels perfectly with 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 8.

As Paul described it so very well, each part of the body must do its own work to supplement the body, not strip from it! Just as the human body provides life to all its parts, so does the body of Christ. The disciple must submit himself to the authority of Christ and serve Him because of his love for Jesus. Therefore, we must never approach the Lord's body with the purpose of obtaining selfish gain. Instead, we should approach His body with a desire to give of ourselves first to His service. By doing so, we will receive a greater reward.

Remember what Jesus said to the rich young man? He told him, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me” (Matthew 19:21). Notice He did not say, “Take whatever you want and do whatever you want.” Sacrifice was the first thing He expected. In addition, our Lord also prayed for unity among His disciples and that there would be no division among them (John 17:21). Both passages teach us that we must learn how to function properly within the body.

TODAY'S PRAYER: Pray that there will be peace, harmony, and unity within the church where you are a member. Pray that you and every member will be a properly functioning part of the body of the Lord.

DAY 12: Where Is Jesus In This?

A really good maxim, or rule of life, is this, “It is always right to do right. It is always wrong to do wrong. It is never right to do wrong, and it is never wrong to do right.” That simple Biblical truth can help you navigate some of life's toughest moments. It will never fail you when you need to make a difficult decision. It is one of those precepts that has always proven to be reliable and true. Another very useful rule of life to use alongside that one is a simple question, “Where is Jesus Christ in this?” No matter the situation, no matter how difficult of a decision you may be facing, or how troublesome a scenario may appear to be, asking the question, “Where is Jesus in this?” can guide you in the right direction. This is because looking at a situation or challenge in the context of how Jesus handled it will provide the necessary light to help guide you down the right path.

WWJD or WDJD?

Years ago, a popular acronym was displayed on bumper stickers, billboards, T-shirts, and many other objects that stated, “WWJD?” You might remember that those letters stood for “What Would Jesus Do?” The idea was, if you get yourself into a jam, simply ask yourself, “What would Jesus do in that situation?” While the intention of that catchphrase was certainly good, it still misses the mark of being truly useful. This is because the word “would” leaves entirely too much room for speculation or personal interpretation of what Jesus “might” do. This can be extremely dangerous because our thoughts, imaginations, and intentions may not align with what Jesus did. It allows for someone to say, “Well, I think Jesus *would* do this in this situation,” or “He *would* do that if He were faced with the same problem,” when in reality, He might not. In fact, in most cases, Jesus never did what the people thought He *would* do. We must remember that people in His time thought He would free them from Roman rule because they believed the Messiah would be an earthly, military leader (cf. Matthew 22:42; Acts 1:6). In reality, what He actually did do was establish a spiritual kingdom (Matthew 16:18, 19; John 18:36).

Therefore, wouldn't it be better to simply imitate what Christ actually did instead of speculating about what He might do? Perhaps, a better acronym would be “WDJD - What Did Jesus Do?” If we simply study His actions and replicate them to the best of our ability, then we certainly cannot go wrong with that!

Application

Looking for Jesus in every situation will greatly bless your life! This truth can be applied to almost any scenario. For example, before you are about to confront someone or engage in a difficult conversation, ask yourself, “Where is Jesus in this?” Doing so will help you to have the right attitude before going into the discussion. If you become angry with someone, step back and look for Jesus in that situation. Again, it will help you deal with the other person in a more proper, Christian-like manner. Suppose you know of a couple of brethren who are at odds with each other. Ask them to think about “Where is Jesus in this?” It could possibly provide the right remedy so desperately needed to resolve their conflict.

There are going to be moments when we have to make difficult decisions. Sometimes, we are forced to decide something in a rush, which often results in making a poor decision. Asking, “Where is Jesus in this?” will always guide you in making the best decision. If we are honest with ourselves and genuinely look upon His example, we should always be able to find the right solution. However, for this to work as it should, you must first learn about Jesus. So, open up your Bible and get to know the Son of God. While you read those accounts of His life, observe His actions, take note of His mannerisms, and memorize His responses to the various situations He encountered. Let that be your guide. The more you know about Him, the easier it is to lean upon Him, which will help you to always do what is right.

Keep your eyes on Jesus! He will get you through!

TODAY'S PRAYER: Ask God to help you when difficult situations arise so that you might have the right mindset to deal with them by always remembering what Jesus did as your example.

DAY 13: Keeping Your Eyes on Jesus

When the automotive manufacturer Tesla introduced their autopilot feature in its electric cars, it created quite a sensation throughout the automobile industry. Shortly afterward, it sparked even more commotion in the media when people started crashing their cars while using the new feature. As it turned out, drivers were putting too much confidence in the autopilot and doing other things like napping or reading books instead of keeping their eyes on the road! Accordingly, Tesla responded by publicly stating, “Autopilot is an assist feature that requires you to keep your hands on the steering wheel at all times” and that “you need to maintain control and responsibility for your vehicle” while using it. [10] In other words, the feature was never intended to replace the driver; it was only implemented to assist the driver during his/her trip.

There is a spiritual lesson within the Tesla story that we can apply to Christianity. We find it in what the apostle John wrote, “But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). That word “if” is the key to the lesson! It implies that we can drift off the path or wander off course. It also implies that we can get back on track or correct our trajectory when we stray by returning to and walking in the light. So, just as Tesla's autopilot still requires the driver to be vigilant and make corrections whenever necessary, likewise, a Christian must do the same thing during their spiritual walk.

Just because we have been saved and are cleansed by the blood of Christ when we obeyed the Gospel does not mean we should take our eyes off Him! Think about how a sailor navigates a harbor or a farmer plows a field - they do it by pinpointing a landmark in the far distance to mark and maintain a straight line in their course. They keep their eyes on that point in order to steer straight toward their destination. Suppose they were to look back or divert their focus. In that case, they could drift away from their intended trajectory (cf. Luke 9:62). It is the same concept the apostle Paul used when he wrote, “Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth” (Colossians 3:2). This means we should pinpoint our trajectory (that is, heaven) and then maintain that bearing until we arrive at our destination. It is truly the key to a successful spiritual walk and reaching spiritual maturity! Thus, Christians must maintain their spiritual compass in good working order so that it will track straight and true. Good maintenance requires attentiveness. The Bible is full of these principles.

Throughout the Old Testament, God uses the phrases “If you obey” (Deuteronomy 11:27); “if you do this” (Exodus 18:23); “if you walk” (1 Kings 6:12); “if you heed, or if you keep my commandments” (2 Chronicles 7:17). Do you see a common thread in those passages? Those were all written to remind His people to stay on track and not drift off course. The word “if” implies that it is very possible to stray from obedient service to Him. Staying faithful is conditional. It all depends on whether you make the choice to submit to God or not.

In the New Testament, Jesus also teaches that we cannot serve two masters, so we should “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Matthew 6:24, 33). For a Christian, all of this has to do with keeping our eyes on Jesus. It is truly the only way we will make it to heaven. We must keep our focus solely on Him by learning God's will through the Scriptures and then remaining obedient to His commands (1 John 5:1-3). This harmonizes perfectly with Revelation 2:10, “Remain faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.” That certainly implies a true and straight trajectory maintained through vigilance.

Therefore, just as Tesla stated that a driver “needs to maintain control and responsibility for their vehicle,” a Christian must also maintain self-control and responsibility for their spiritual life and growth. A Tesla driver must keep their eyes on the road, and a Christian must always keep his/her eyes on Jesus. You can keep your eyes on Jesus Christ by observing and imitating His example (John 13:15; 1 Corinthians 11:1). Let us always be “looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God,” (Hebrews 12:2).

TODAY'S PRAYER: Pray that you may always maintain a true course to “walk in the light as He is in the light” by always focusing on spiritual, godly things.

PRINCIPLE 2 - THE BIBLE IS INFALLIBLE

DAY 14: The Importance of Authority

In our modern society, there is so much confusion about what is right and wrong that it can be hard to distinguish truth from fiction. Adding to an already perplexing scenario, some have proclaimed themselves to be the primary authority on some issues. But who or what made them the highest court of discernment? What are their credentials for assuming such a position? This same dilemma is also found in the religious world. A great deal of controversy exists concerning authority over spiritual matters because of many different viewpoints. A lot of it stems from worldly influences. So, how do we know what is correct? Who gets to determine what is right and wrong? In fact, does a supreme authority exist over spiritual things? If so, is it the church, a creed book, a chieftain, a central office, or a council of scholars? In other words, who makes the rules regarding matters of faith? And where should we go for answers? These are all important questions!

Learning how to discern authority in religious matters is a fundamental principle that everyone who calls themselves “Christian” should understand. Yet sadly, many wind up submitting to some “chieftain,” that is, some man posing as a supreme ruler over spiritual affairs, while others will consult creed books, confessions of faith, or church disciplines for guidance. Still, others submit to the decisions of councils, synods, or conventions for religious discussions. The trouble with all of these approaches is that they are based solely on human reasoning and emotion. If we compare each of these systems of authority with the other, we can easily identify glaring disagreements, discrepancies, and hypocrisies! It is the result of human wisdom, which is simply not capable of providing any harmonious or appropriate agreement in matters of faith (Jeremiah 10:23).

As is evidenced within the current religious environment, division and disunity prevail. The only thing that can provide true unity concerning all things religious is for there to be a singular, central, and divinely inspired authority that supersedes everything else. Such a foundational authority can be found in the Bible, the Word of God. Scripture is all that is necessary. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:13, then John 17:17 and Psalm 119:160. From where did the writings originate? They originated with the Creator, God (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The Bible should and must be at the center of all decisions concerning matters of faith and religion. Understanding the importance of the Bible serving as the central authority in religion is a critical concept to grasp!

Knowing the true standard of authority will influence one’s eternal destination. This is illustrated in the warning Jesus Christ gave to His followers, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven” will enter (Matthew 7:21). Therefore, it is our responsibility to seek out and discern what the will of God is. Can His will be found among a group of men or a creed book written by a man? One would think the answer should be obvious. But, as we have already illustrated, it is not. It is sad to see how many so flippantly dismiss authority in spiritual matters when we can so easily recognize it in our secular lives. For example, when a police officer commands us to stop, we must do so; otherwise, we know we will suffer consequences for our actions. It is not a difficult concept to comprehend! When it comes to religion, why does authority mean so little to some people? The Bible tells us why. Perhaps, the apostle Paul explains it best in 2 Timothy 4:3. He says it is because they have “itching ears.”

There are also some who simply don’t want to adhere to an established, prescribed set of rules, whether it is of divine origin or not. They want what they want, period. But contemplate the words of Jesus Christ in Matthew 28:18. Jesus received His authority from the Supreme Authority. It is God. He created the universe. It is His house. It belongs to Him, and He sets the rules. We do not have the right to change the rules regarding how to live in His house. He is the Owner, Builder, and Sustainer of this wonderful and marvelous creation (Psalm 95:3-5). Therefore, He has the authority to govern the affairs of man since He has all power.

TODAY’S PRAYER: Reaffirm your commitment to God that you fully submit to the authority of His Word, that He is sovereign, and that His Son sits at His right hand with all authority and power.

DAY 15: The Authority of the Bible

In our last study, we discussed the importance of authority. We established that it originates with God. He created the universe, and since all things of the universe belong to Him, He makes the rules (Revelation 4:11). We do not have the right to change the dictates of heaven regarding how to live in this world. Only God has the authority to govern the affairs of man, for He is all-powerful, and we, quite simply, are not.

A great example illustrating the significance of the word “authority” is found in Matthew 8:9. A Roman centurion came to Jesus and pleaded with Him to heal his servant. He recognized Jesus’ authority and stated, “I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes; and to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.” Notice here that authority involves the right to command others and also implies submission by the one receiving the command. Jesus certainly displayed that characteristic in His ministry (Matthew 7:29). The root of the word is “author,” which makes reference to a person who creates or gives existence to something. That is an appropriate description of God!

While Jesus Christ was on this earth, He taught that all must conform to God’s will (Matthew 7:21-23). He did it through the authority of His spoken word (John 12:48). He Himself proclaimed to have divine authority over all things, according to Matthew 28:18. Thus, He commanded that the people submit themselves to the sovereignty of heaven itself (Matthew 6:33) and what the Apostle Paul later calls, “the law of Christ,” (Galatians 6:2). All of this might cause us to reason and ask, “Since Jesus is no longer with us in bodily form, who or what is our authority now? Does He still exercise power today?” To answer that question, let’s read what His apostles said about the origin and authorship of their writings.

In Galatians 1:11-12, Paul says he neither received nor learned the Gospel through man. In Revelation 1:10-11, where the apostle John was instructed, “What you see, write in a book ...” means that he received visions directly from the Holy Spirit. The book did not originate with John. Simon Peter expressed rather clearly, “... that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit,” (2 Peter 1:20-21). Consider also what the writer of Hebrews says in Hebrews 1:1-2. We can conclude that today, God still speaks to us through His Son.

These verses, and many others like them, reveal to us that the things written in the Bible are not mere words of men, but rather, the words and will of the Father which the Holy Spirit revealed. So, the answer to the earlier question is “Yes! Jesus Christ is still exercising His authority today since He is part of the Godhead” (cf. 2 Corinthians 1:21-22). This unequivocally implies that the New Testament is the authoritative document that we must observe and follow. During His physical absence on the earth, the Lord has given us His written word to guide us. Therefore, the Bible governs our actions and guides our steps in all things spiritual.

From all that we have considered here, we may conclude that only one source of authority exists within the church. How can we make such a claim? Please read the following verses very carefully: Deuteronomy 4:2; Revelation 22:18-19; and 1 Peter 4:11. These verses help us understand that it is impossible for anyone or anything else to claim authority in religious matters. Therefore, any person, man-made document, governing body, or central organization claiming to have authority in religion cannot be substantiated by Scripture.

In addition, and according to John 16:13, Jesus Christ told the apostles that they would be guided into ALL truth. If the apostles were guided into all truth, must we wait to receive some additional revelation today? The answer is “no.” Peter confirms this by telling us, “His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue” (2 Peter 1:3). The word “all” in each of these verses is significant. We must never add to or take away from His inspired word.

This is the very reason we like to use the maxim, “We speak where the Bible speaks, and remain silent where the Bible is silent.” It is a good reminder that we must simply submit ourselves to God’s word, since God is the Creator and He gave all authority to Christ. His word is the final authority! There is no other!

TODAY’S PRAYER: Give thanks to God for loving us so much that He provided us with His Word!

How the Bible is Organized

Testament = "Covenant, Agreement"
"signifies a mutual undertaking between two parties or more, each binding themselves to fulfill obligations ..."

Old Testament

To whom was it given?
 Exodus 20,
 Deuteronomy 5:1-5

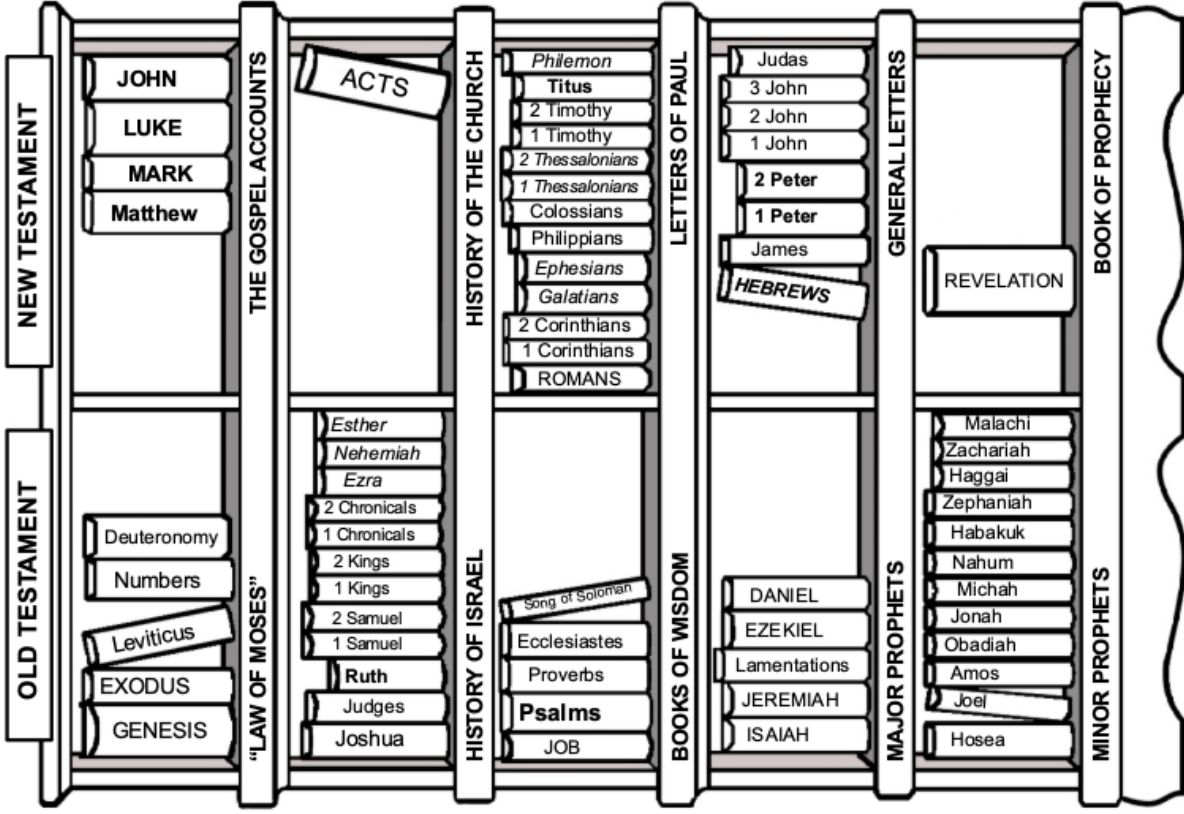
Why was it given?
 Galatians 3:19
 Romans 15:4

Its intended design
 Galatians 3:23

It was fulfilled in Christ!
 Matthew 5:17

It was nailed to the cross!
 Colossians 2:14

There is a new covenant!
 Luke 22:20
 1 Corinthians 11:25
 Hebrews 9:13-15



New Testament

It is for everyone
 Matthew 28:19
 Romans 3:20-26

Jesus has all authority
 Matthew 28:18
 Acts 3:22-26
 Hebrews 1:1-2

By the blood of Christ
 Revelation 1:5-6

It is a better covenant
 Hebrews 8:6-13

Fulfillment of the law
 Romans 8:2
 Galatians 6:2

There is a new covenant!
 Hebrews 10:1-4
 Galatians 3:13

The Bible is the History of Redemption

- We can find Jesus in every book and on every page.
- The message of the Bible, in short, is this: the Old Testament teaches "Christ is coming," the gospel accounts teach that "Christ has come," and the remaining NT books teach that "Christ is coming back again."
- Redemption is prophesied in Genesis 3:15 and fulfilled in John 3:16, (Galatians 4:4), and to the last verse of Revelation is all part of God's plan!

THE WONDERFUL BIBLE!

- It is a library consisting of 66 books, in 2 volumes, with 1,189 chapters, 31,000 verses, 750,000 words, and is divided by themes!
- It was written by 40 men over a period of 1,600 years. They wrote in 3 different languages and came from 3 different continents, with different cultures and backgrounds, and wrote with different moods and styles, yet they wrote the Bible in perfect harmony!

DAY 16: How We Got the Bible

There is no book that has had a greater impact on humanity than the Bible. It has become the most copied, printed, published, and translated book throughout history. In fact, as of this writing, the entire Bible has been translated into more than 600 languages, with the New Testament alone having been translated into more than 1500 languages! There are also translations of smaller portions of the Bible, which results in a sum of more than 3,000 languages having at least part of the Scriptures available to them. All these translations are necessary because the Bible was originally written in Greek and Hebrew.

So, what about our English Bible? How did we get all the various English versions that we have today? It is helpful for new Christians to understand this, so let's answer those questions with a brief look at history.

Did you know that about 450 English translations have been produced over the past few centuries? John Wycliffe (1320-1384) is credited with being the first to complete a translation of the Bible into English. It was a beautifully hand-written translation from Jerome's Latin Vulgate (c. 400 AD). His version eventually became outlawed, and 44 years after his death, Pope Martin V was still so infuriated, he ordered Wycliffe's body to be exhumed, burned, and his ashes scattered. Producing an English Bible back then was a dangerous business!

After the invention of the printing press in 1440, William Tyndale (1494-1536) produced the first Bible to be printed in English. He was an Oxford scholar (fluent in 8 languages) and a major leader of the Reformation. Since it was illegal for the common people to possess a Bible at that time, they were smuggled into England in bales of cotton and sacks of flour. Tyndale was later branded a heretic and eventually caught. He was chained to a pole with a rope placed around his neck. His last words were, "Lord, open the King of England's eyes!" He was then strangled and burned at the stake. Three years after Tyndale's death, King Henry VIII commissioned a new, authorized English translation. This version became known as the Great Bible (1539). Another period of persecution followed shortly afterward, so many Christian reformers fled to Geneva. It was there that another English Bible was produced. This one became known as the Geneva Bible (1560). It is the Bible that William Shakespeare quoted and the one that the Pilgrims brought with them to America.

Without question, the most widely known English translation is the King James Version, also known as the KJV. Forty-seven (47) scholars from Oxford, Cambridge, and Westminster produced it, each with various protestant backgrounds. They used many ancient Greek manuscripts and other Bible versions, such as Tyndale's translation, the Great Bible, and the Geneva Bible, to assist them in their work. Since its publication in 1611, it has become the most widely used English Bible and remains the oldest version still in use today.

Around the late 1600s and up to modern times, there have been many discoveries of additional ancient biblical manuscripts than what was available to the KJV translators. These new discoveries prompted a desire to update and replace the KJV with a more modern version. Publishers wanted to produce a Bible with an updated vernacular that could be commonly used among English speakers and would include the latest manuscript discoveries. A long succession of English translations has since followed. The first "American English" Bible produced was the American Standard Version of 1901. As popular as it became, it still never eclipsed the KJV. Some of the more popular versions since then have been the New American Standard Bible (1971), the New International Version (1978), the New King James Version (1982), and, most recently, the English Standard Version (2001) and Legacy Standard Bible (2021). This is a brief history of how we received so many versions.

God has always intended for His Word to be understood and known in every language. This is evidenced by the miracle of speaking in tongues (foreign languages) on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:7-11). While we no longer have miraculous gifts available to us as the first-century Christians did, God still desires that all of mankind understand His Word equally as well. We should be thankful for all those who were committed to and gave up their lives to carry out the daunting task of translating the Bible for us to have and know today.

TODAY'S PRAYER: Give thanks to God for all those who have diligently worked to make the Bible available to us in English and other languages. Because of them, we can have studies such as this one.

DAY 17: Rightly Dividing the Word

The Bible is not difficult to understand. Yet, many think it is! One reason some have difficulty understanding the Bible is that it is not written like a novel. The books are not a single narrative arranged in chronological order. If someone did not already know this, it could be confusing. Yet, another point seems to stand above others when it comes to misapprehension. It is the difference between the Old and New Testaments. Not only has the average person exhibited a deficiency in discerning the difference, but so have many Bible “scholars.” This lack of knowledge has led to numerous misguided practices and false doctrines. So, being able to distinguish between the Old and New Testaments is a foundational key to true Bible knowledge.

The apostle Paul wrote, “Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15 - KJV) “Rightly dividing” is a good description of how to deal with Scripture, meaning “to handle accurately or to teach the truth directly and correctly.” For example, a diligent student of God’s Word should know that the Bible can be “divided” according to different methods. First, it is a library of discrete writings, totaling 66 books in two volumes - 39 in the first and 27 in the second. It has 1,189 chapters and 31,000 verses! Secondly, it has thematic divisions, such as “books of law,” “history,” “poetry,” “prophecy,” and “letters.” Knowing such things helps one to handle the Scriptures more accurately by locating specific teachings and properly identifying the context of the various writings.

The most important division of Scripture is that of the two covenants or agreements (that’s what the word “testament” means). For example, Jesus Christ said, “For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matthew 26:28 - KJV). Here, Jesus is saying that He is instituting a “new agreement” between God and man (compare this verse in different versions such as the ESV, NKJV, and CEV to see the differences in words). It is because of this verse and others such as 2 Corinthians 3:6; Colossians 2:14; and Galatians 6:2 that we know the Bible is divided into two parts: the Old Testament, “old” because it is no longer in effect, and the New Testament, which is the current, binding agreement.

Agreements, or covenants, between God and His creation, can be seen throughout the Scriptures. For example, read Genesis 6:13-18. With whom did God establish a covenant? It was Noah. Later, in Genesis 15:18, we read that God made another covenant with someone else. What was his name? Abraham. With whom was a third covenant made in Exodus 34:27? Moses. Each of these agreements led up to and pointed toward the covenant that Jesus Christ would ultimately make at the Last Supper, the night before He was crucified.

We might explain the word testament as a “contract,” or much like a will that someone puts into effect. The best explanation of what Jesus did concerning this is found in Hebrews 9:14-20. Here we see what is involved in a testament - there’s a mediator and a testator. According to Thayer’s Dictionary, a mediator is “one who intervenes between two [parties], either in order to make or restore peace and friendship, form a compact, or ratify a covenant.” [11] A testator is a person who makes or initiates the will. He is the one who decides who the beneficiaries shall be. The Bible says Jesus is our Mediator (1 Timothy 2:5). Since He is the One who gave us the new covenant (1 Corinthians 11:25), and that also makes Him the Testator - nullifying the old covenant.

The conclusion can be summarized in the following manner: God made an agreement long ago with the Jews through the father of their nation, Abraham. The Jews ratified this agreement and lived under the Law of Moses (Exodus 19:8). When Christ came into the world, He established a new agreement. When He died, this new agreement, or testament, was put into effect. This prompted the cancellation or annulment of the first covenant. Since we are not those ancient Hebrews, we cannot (nor anyone else) use that old agreement as our law today! It is the old covenant; we now have a new one. This is why we use the name “New Testament Christians.” As Christians, we must learn and know the will of God - in the New Testament - if we want to be assured of eternal life. If we don’t know how to rightly handle the Word, then we put our souls in jeopardy!

TODAY’S PRAYER: Thank God for His divine wisdom revealed in His holy Word. Ask Him to give you the wisdom necessary for “rightly dividing the Word of truth.”

DAY 18: Why Do We Have the Old Testament?

Our previous devotional was about “Rightly Dividing the Word.” We discussed some of the differences between the Old and New Testaments. We outlined that the Old Testament is sometimes called the “Law of Moses,” or, just “the Law,” and that we Christians are no longer under that old law. This begs the question, “If we are now under the New Covenant of Jesus Christ (i.e. the New Testament), then why do we have, or even need, the Old Testament?” That’s an important question because some believe it isn’t necessary. There are many who have never read the Old Testament or see any value in it at all. Some brethren have even stated that they didn’t want to hear any preaching from the Old Testament, only from the New Testament. Still, others flat-out reject anything from the Old Testament. To be quite honest, that type of thinking makes absolutely no sense! Here is why, consider the following:

Look at what the apostle Paul wrote in Romans 15:4, “For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.” Before the New Testament was ever completed, here we have one of God’s divinely appointed, inspired writers explaining why we have the Scriptures (all of them). Shouldn’t that be enough to convince anyone of the importance of having and knowing ALL of God’s Word? If not, then don’t forget 2 Timothy 3:16-17. In that verse, Paul tells us that ALL Scripture is: (a) inspired by God, (b) it is useful, and (c) it will make a faithful believer “complete.” Again, notice the word “all.” These two verses are the best reasons why we need the Old Testament. Therefore, if we have established the necessity of Scripture, then what is it about the Old Testament that we Christians need today? We can answer that question with the following, easy-to-remember points.

Reference: While reading the New Testament, especially the Gospel accounts, there are many references to Old Testament personalities, events, and teachings. In fact, the Old Testament is quoted approximately 855 times in the New Testament! While opinions vary, it appears that all but 10 books of the Old Testament are quoted by the New Testament writers. With that many references, it certainly is necessary to be able to review where the quote is located, who said it, and why (this is known as “context”). We should also mention that the New Testament is full of words, concepts, and cultural references that can only be explained by reading about them in the “Old Law and the Prophets” (another name for the Old Testament).

Redemption: The reason for Jesus coming to earth, the need for salvation, and the purpose of heaven would be greatly obscured and confusing without the Old Testament writings! How would we know anything about the history of mankind, the formation of the universe, the advent of sin, man’s tendency to reject God, and the loving plan of redemption that our Father unfurled across the centuries if we didn’t have them written down somewhere to read and study? Clearly, the Old Testament proves its worth by providing answers to all these questions. The Bible is, essentially, a book about redemption history. It is the entire story of God's overall grand plan to redeem His creation back to Himself after mankind had disobeyed Him.

Reflection: Even though we are Christians under the law of Christ, reading the Old Testament will cause you to reflect upon your own life. The examples of God’s faithful servants, of those not so faithful, the rebellious, and even His enemies are there to help us reflect upon the nature of God, His love for His creation, and His sovereignty as Supreme Judge. Many times, just reading passages in the Old Testament, can cause one to easily identify how its principles still apply to us today. Our God that we have today is the same God of the Old Testament times. If He expected a certain level of obedience in His people back then, we can most definitely draw conclusions that He expects a certain level of obedience in all of us today!

TODAY’S PRAYER: Thank God for the entire Bible, as well as for revealing and preserving the whole story of the scheme of redemption in it so that we can see and learn about His true nature and love.

DAY 19: You Can Understand the Bible!

We live in an amazing, technologically advanced world that uses numbers to perform many different functions. For example, digital devices convert sound, images, and data into ones and zeros, then transmit them to another device somewhere else in the world, which converts those ones and zeros back into sound, images, and data. What incredible technology! The truth is that humanity has used numbers for thousands of years to accomplish many tasks. We fully understand the importance of adding numbers together in order to arrive at a specific answer - the sum of something. Well, there is a spiritual application here. It has to do with the question, "Why do people not understand the Bible correctly or think that it is too difficult to comprehend?" One of the main reasons is that many simply do not consider everything that the Bible says on a particular subject. Yet, this is such an important concept to understand when studying the Bible! The lack of understanding of this principle has caused so much confusion throughout the religious world, resulting in unbiblical doctrines, forms of organization, worship practices, and even differing plans of salvation. How is that possible? Well, it happens by picking and choosing verses, instead of considering all that the Bible has to say.

Read Psalm 119:160. Don't just read it in the version you always use, because not all versions render this verse in the same way. Read it in other versions - especially the American Standard (ASV), English Standard (ESV), and the New American Standard (NASB). Notice the word those versions use. They use the term "sum." The word that is translated from the Hebrew text has a few different meanings, yet is always dependent upon context. In the context of this passage, the word "sum" makes the most sense, and even the Literal Translations (Young's and LITV) render the word as "sum." It is a term that means "the total amount of something that exists." Considering that every word that proceeds from the mouth of God is true (Matthew 4:4; Titus 1:2), then we must diligently consider everything He says about any particular subject.

This is not a difficult concept to grasp! It is as simple as how we use numbers. For example, if we add 2 + 5, we know the sum of those numbers is not 25. The right answer is 7. Easy. Then why can we not do the same with the Bible? Why do we make it so difficult? If God says one thing in one passage and then adds something else in another passage, which pertains to the first, doesn't it stand to reason that we should add them together? We cannot approach the Bible haphazardly. Instead, we must consider everything the Bible says about a subject so that we can arrive at a proper understanding - it is what we mean by the sum of the Lord's Word on a topic.

Sadly, many do not "rightly divide the Word" (2 Timothy 2:15) because they take passages out of context and do not consider all that the Bible teaches about a subject. We must remember that the context of a passage is paramount. Determine the context by looking at the verses around it and identifying who is speaking, when he spoke, and to whom he was speaking. To establish the correct teaching, we must sometimes also examine their ancient customs and cultural situations. This will help us to understand how the Bible applies to us.

For example, consider the three passages about the Great Commission: Matthew 28:19-20, Mark 16:15-16, and Luke 24:46-48. Notice that Luke only mentions repentance as part of the preaching. This passage does not mention anything about confession or baptism. Mark mentions belief and baptism. Is repentance unnecessary since Mark does not mention it? Matthew does not mention belief or repentance, only baptism. The truth is that ALL of these passages speak about the same subject. Therefore, belief, repentance, and baptism are all necessary for salvation. To understand this truth well, you must consider the sum of all the passages.

Here is another example. Matthew 4:9 says: "All of these things I will give you if you will fall down and worship me." This verse seems to suggest that if we worship Jesus, He will give us everything we want. Is this a good interpretation of the Word of God? No, it is not! This text is not talking about worshipping Jesus. If you consider the context, you will notice that these are the words of Satan! He was tempting Jesus to sin.

The Bible is not hard to understand ... don't just look at some verses, instead, look at the "sum" of them.

TODAY'S PRAYER: Ask God to help you always consider everything He has to say about a subject in the Bible and never take things out of context.

DAY 20: How Do We Know What Applies to Us?

A child of God should always seek to fulfill His will. What pleases God most is for His creation to obey His commandments (1 John 3:22, 5:3). A true disciple who loves Jesus will obey His commands (John 14:15). But the Bible is so big, how are we supposed to know exactly which commands to obey? How do we discern what applies to us and what doesn't? After all, neither your name nor mine is written in the pages of the Scriptures. The answer is that we have to use our reasoning and logic in order to identify God's will for us (Matthew 7:21). This is not difficult to do or understand. We simply must acknowledge three things:

Direct Commands. "Do this or that!" or, "Stop in the name of the law!" are examples of direct commands. They are imperative statements, which mean something one must obey, be required to perform or be expected to execute. We can easily understand this concept because we frequently use imperative statements in our daily communication. The same applies to the Bible. There are direct commands we must obey.

For example, read Acts 17:30. Who does God require to repent? Even though this passage does not mention our names specifically, we are included in the word "all." This means that this passage is a direct command intended for us also. It applies to them, you, me, and everyone! Another example is in Matthew 5:44. Again, we read the words in the imperative, which means a command. Although Jesus Christ was speaking to a particular crowd when He said it, this is a universal command that applies to all disciples. This is for you and all believers.

New Testament Examples. What are we supposed to do if there is no direct command for something? If a direct command cannot be identified, then we must look for examples to guide us. The Bible has many for us to observe. For example, there is no commandment regarding the day we must meet to worship God, but we have examples. What day is mentioned in Acts 20:7 and 1 Corinthians 16:2? These passages tell us exactly what the first disciples did back in the first century. They met on the "first day of the week." Thus, we can deduce from what they did, which was right and pleasing to God, as an example for us to follow. We can be confident that it was an acceptable practice of God's will and that by doing what they did, we will also be pleasing to Him.

We have added the words "New Testament" to the example. This is because we are living under the New Testament law, that is, the law of Jesus Christ (Galatians 6:2). Those are the only examples that apply directly to Christians. While the examples we have in the Old Testament may be educational and informative, they are not binding on us today. Those were for the ancient Hebrews. So, we do not employ the practices they exhibited.

Necessary Inference. "Inference" means "a conclusion reached based on evidence and reasoning." [12] We do this often, even on a daily basis. Here is a basic illustration of inference: imagine your friend has a coin. The coin is in his hand. He puts his hand in his pocket. So, where is the coin now? What deduction can we make? Even though it is not stated directly, we can easily infer that the coin is in your friend's pocket because of other information given. The same principle can be applied to the Bible. For example, in Acts 8:35, we read, "Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him." Now, look at the very next verse. "As they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, 'See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?'" (vs. 36). What can we infer, that is, logically deduced from the information given in this passage? Through inference, we can conclude that baptism must have been a part of the preaching of Phillip. Thus, teaching about baptism is a necessary element that we must include in the preaching of the Gospel of Christ (cf. Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16; Romans 6:1-4).

These are all good reference points for discerning what applies to us and what doesn't. It is important because, according to 2 Peter 1:3, the Bible contains "all things that pertain to life and godliness." What Paul says about God in 1 Corinthians 14:33 could also be applied to His Word. Therefore, it is not difficult to understand what applies to us from the Bible! We must simply use it accurately, use our mental reasoning to draw sound conclusions and consider all that Scripture has to say about a subject.

TODAY'S PRAYER: Ask God to help you be able to discern clearly what applies to you and that you may arrive at sound, reasonable conclusions.

PRINCIPLE 3 - ONLY ONE TRUE CHURCH

DAY 21: Identifying the Lord's One, True Church

The fact that the church exists naturally implies that it had to have begun somewhere, at some time, in some place, and by someone having founded it. Yet, many religious groups claim to be the “one true church.” How can so many claim the same thing when each does something different than the other one just down the street? While everyone wants to belong to the right church, is it possible to identify the right one? Friend, it is not only possible to identify it, but there can be only one. We simply must ask questions like, “Who established the church? Where and when did it begin? How many were established?” and then look in the Bible for the answers. At that point, we can then compare our findings to what those many religions claim. This is such an important matter because, according to the Scriptures - like Matthew 7:21-23; 2 Timothy 2:10; and Ephesians 5:30 - identifying the Lord's true church is paramount to one's salvation.

Let's begin this study by looking at specific things Jesus said about the church. The first time we see the word “church” is in Matthew 16:18. Jesus said, “And I also tell you, that you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church; and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.” What should stand out in our minds is Jesus' use of the word “I” in reference to building the church. In simple terms, Jesus Himself would build the church. It would not be some man-made institution, a sect, a cult, nor a continuation of the current religious system of the time (Judaism), but rather, a divine creation of His own doing. Jesus also had no connection to the various religious sects of His day, nor did He establish any of them. This alone should tell us who the church belongs to; it belongs to Jesus (Ephesians 1:22, 23). It is the church of Christ, which is a description of what it is, not necessarily a formal title (Romans 16:16). No church, or any religious system, that cites someone else as its founder or head can claim to be the true church of the Bible. That distinction belongs solely to Jesus. Yet, sadly, many religious institutions today completely ignore this simple fact.

The second thing we should notice is that Jesus said He “will build” the church - future tense. This implies the church didn't exist at the time He spoke those words. We can also infer from this statement that His intentions did not include an extension of or supplementation to Judaism. It would be something different, (Luke 22:20; Colossians 2:14). But that brings up another question, “When did He establish the church?” The answer is, again, found in the Bible. Read the following verses, Luke 24:47-49; Acts 1:8; Acts 2:1-6, 37-41, 47; Acts 5:11, 8:1. Did you happen to notice the day mentioned and where it took place? It happened in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost. All of this took place shortly after the ascension of Jesus. So, did He build His church, or did someone else? Jesus did. He built it through His apostles by sending them the Holy Spirit (John 14:16,26, 15:26, 16:7) just as He said He would. Therefore, any religious body claiming to be the Lord's church that didn't start in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost by the apostles is making a false claim of being the Lord's church.

Thirdly, notice that the word “church” is singular. It is not plural. Jesus Christ did not say, “My churches.” Instead, he said, “my church” - singular. What does that teach us? It teaches the same thing Ephesians 4:4-6 teaches us, that there is only one! If the Bible says there is only one, yet multiple groups claim to be that one while each has its distinct differences existing between them, then how are we to determine which is the correct church? The answer is rather simple: measure it with the Bible! Truth and logic make it impossible for more than one to exist. Read and investigate what the church of the Bible looks like, what the members did, when and where they met, how they worshipped, what they called themselves, and how they became members. Compare those findings (the pattern, or model) with the various groups claiming to be the true church. If they don't match up with exactly what the Bible says, then how can they say they are the Lord's church? They cannot. If one takes the time to study the Bible about the church, then one can certainly identify the true church. If it can be identified, then one can be certain they are in the right church, the one of which God approves.

TODAY'S PRAYER: Thank God for the one true church that He clearly defines in Scripture.

How can we correctly identify the church?

“But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good.” (1 Thessalonians 5:21)

We should compare these questions with what the Bible has to say:

Who is its founder?

Matthew 16:18; Acts 20:28; Ephesians 2:20

When did it begin?

Acts 2:1; Marcos 9:1

Where was it established?

Acts 2:1-5; Luke 24:47

Isaiah 2:3

What name does it use?

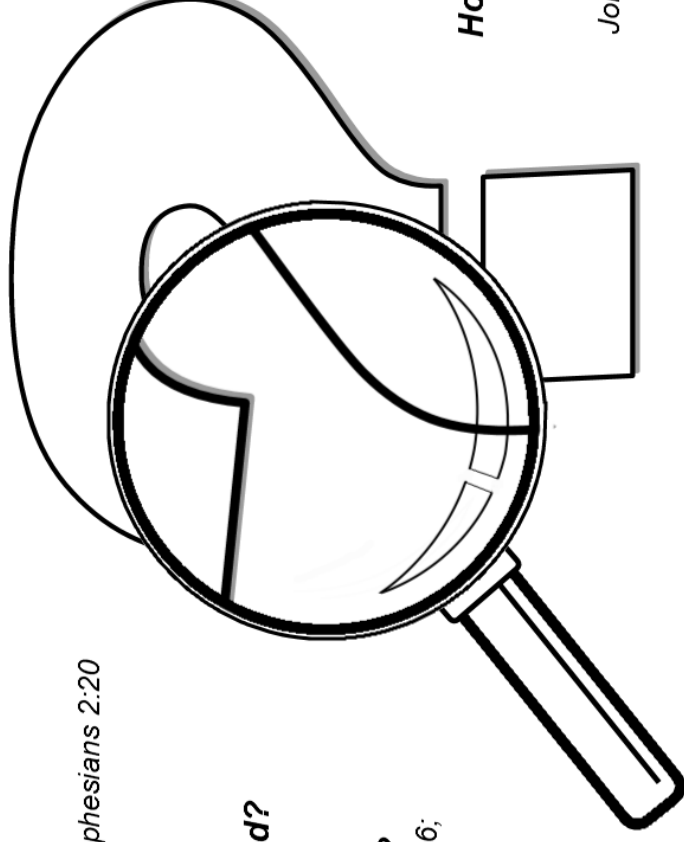
Matthew 16:18; Romans 16:16;

Acts 20:28; 1 Timothy 3:15

What is its mission?

John 6:45; Ephesians 3:9-12;

1 Timothy 4:16



Who is the head of the church?

Ephesians 1:22; Colossians 1:18

How is it organized?

1 Peter 5:1-3; Hebrews 13:17

Romans 12:4,5; 1 Timothy 3:1-13

Acts 2:41-47; Philipians 1:1

What is its rule of faith?

Romans 1:16; 2 Timothy 3:16-17;

1 Peter 4:11; 2 Peter 1:3

How does one become a member?

Acts 2:38-47; Romans 6:17-18

How does it worship?

John 4:24; Ephesians 5:19; Acts 2:42, 20:7

1 Corinthians 11:23-29, 14:15, 40

How might we identify the one and only true church? By examining the original!

If the church you are attending doesn't have these Biblical characteristics, it is not the Lord's church.

DAY 22: The Word "Church"

With so much religious confusion in the world, a disciple can easily become confused and disoriented. So, how does one determine if he/she is in the right church? How can we be sure that the church we attend is adhering to the right doctrine? Let's begin by looking at the word "church" itself. The word "church" is found more than 100 times in the New Testament. Obviously, it is a very important word if the inspired writers recorded it that often. But what does it mean exactly? Is that the actual word they used? If not, then when and where did our English word for "church" come from?

The first appearance of the word "church" in the New Testament is in Matthew 16:18 when Jesus Christ said, "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build My church," The word used here in our English Bibles was translated from the Greek word "ekklesia." Jesus Christ didn't actually say, "I will build my church." He said, "I will build my *ekklesia*." There's a bit of a difference between what He actually said and the word that many translators have decided to use in the many English versions that have been produced.

First, the Greek word *ekklesia* means "a gathering, assembly, congregation, or community." Many preachers like to point out that it is composed of two Greek words, "ek" meaning "out of" and "klesia [kaleo]" meaning "to call." Thus, they say, "Christians are the 'called out,' as in being called out of the world." While that may be an interesting and even applicable statement, the New Testament never really uses the word in that manner or context. Instead, it is always used in the sense of an assembly. Acts 19:32-41 is a great example of the word being used in its general sense, apart from the spiritual connotation. 1 Corinthians 14:23 also explains it well, "Therefore if the whole church [ekklesia] comes together in one place." Quite clearly, it is talking about an assembly. So, what Jesus said in Matthew 16 implies that He was going to build a gathering, an assembly, or a community. This is a better way of understanding what the word "church" truly means in the original language.

Secondly, our English Word, "church," came from a derivative of an Old English Word, "kirche," (from German influences). Sometimes it was spelled "kirikq, cirice, or chirche." [13] The word itself literally means "belonging to, or pertaining to God." So, in that sense of the word, it would be correct to say something like "the church building," for it is, indeed, a building pertaining to God. This form of the word was introduced into our Bibles when a man named John Wycliffe copied and published a translation of the Latin Vulgate (the Bible of the Catholic Church at the time) into the Middle English of his day (the language of Chaucer). In 1380, it became the very first Bible written in English. In it, he translated Matthew 16:18 in this way (in Old English style): "... Y schal bilde my chirche, ..." [14] He used the term *chirche* when translating *ekklesia*.

One hundred and forty-six years later, William Tyndale produced the first English translation to come directly from the Hebrew and Greek texts. His 1526 version was also the first English Bible mass-produced. In his translation of Matthew 16:18, it reads, "... I wyll bylde my congregacion ..." [I will build my congregation]. [15] After that, the Coverdale Bible of 1535, the Great Bible of 1539, and the Bishop's Bible of 1568 all followed suit and translated the word *ekklesia* as "congregation." It wasn't until the Geneva Bible was published in 1560 that the word "church" became a common term used among translators. The King James Version then solidified its use, which has lasted until today in all subsequent English versions of the Bible.

In summary, the word "church" is not really a reference to a building or a place you go. "Church," as the inspired New Testament writers used the word, means "the collection of disciples, or the assembly of the saints." The Apostle Peter described it this way, "You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood" (1 Peter 2:5). Therefore, it is the people that make up the church. The building is just where the church meets (where it assembles). Do you now see the difference in what Jesus Christ said? He certainly wasn't talking about building a big, elaborate brick-and-mortar structure. He was talking about spiritual things. He was talking about building a community of His people, His disciples, that is now known as "the church."

TODAY'S PRAYER: Thank God for His church. Praise Him for His infinite wisdom in setting up the church. Thank Him for allowing us to belong to it.

DAY 23: Why Are There So Many Churches? (Part 1)

Have you ever wondered why there are so many churches in the world today? It is an important topic that we all need to understand. Truly grasping the reason why requires a combined study of the Bible and secular history. In this lesson, we will start by briefly looking at the first 1700 years of church history. Then, we will look at what is called “Restoration History,” followed by a third lesson of modern church history. Sadly, there are many confusing accounts of the history of the Lord’s church. But the facts are not that difficult to find, and Jesus Christ is “the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8).

Beginning in the days of the apostles, we can easily identify autonomous congregations of the church of Christ being established (cf. Acts 8-28; Romans 16:16), which were each led by a plurality of elders (Acts 14:23; 1 Peter 5:1). But even then, some were already exiting the faith and starting their own “churches,” (cf. 3 John 9; Revelation 2:6; 1 Corinthians 1:10). This explains why, at the beginning of the second century, apologists such as Irenaeus and Origen wrote about a new practice that had emerged of a single elder beginning to exert more influence and control over other congregations, outside of his own. [16] Then, in 325 AD, Roman Emperor Constantine made it “official” by convening the Council of Nicea, which decreed that certain “bishops” were to be given control over multiple churches (even with elderships) within their respective regions. In that decree, the Roman Catholic Church was born. This one specific departure from the Scriptural model of church leadership can be pointed to as what would eventually result in an avalanche of denominationalism to come years later.

It was during a period known as The Dark Ages (about 500 to 1500 AD) that the last of the Roman Empire disintegrated, and the Holy Roman Empire emerged in power and importance. Pope Leo I became the first church leader to use the name *Pontifex Maximus*, the Latin phrase for “Supreme Priest.” However, several historians generally considered Gregory I to be the actual first pope because of a decree he wrote stating that Peter was the first “Pope” in Rome. According to him, all authority for the church must reside in Rome. [17] Using that ideology, Gregory’s successor, Boniface III, later appointed himself as the supreme leader of the church in 606 AD. This act essentially made him the first official pope of the Roman Catholic Church.

It was during this time that many false doctrines like Purgatory, Transubstantiation, and indulgences appeared, including unbiblical practices, such as adding musical instruments to worship. A major division also developed among the Catholic Church concerning whether its headquarters should reside in Rome or Constantinople. This same period also produced the first English translation of the Bible by John Wycliffe and saw the invention of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg. This made the Bible accessible to ordinary people for the first time in history. Such accessibility later prompted people like Martin Luther to nail his “95 Thesis” to the door of the Catholic Church in Wittenberg in 1517, igniting a movement that became known as The Reformation.

As more people began studying the Bible independently, like John Calvin, John Knox, Ulrich Zwingli, Jan Hus, Philip Melancthon, and Conrad Grebel, the number of leaders who rejected Catholic doctrine increased. The name “Protestant” appeared as people protested and resisted imperial edicts, which precipitated many to leave that church and start new ones. The Roman Catholic Church responded with the Council of Trent where they rejected the accusations against them. They affirmed their own doctrine through the Catholic Catechism of 1566. What followed was a bloody inquisition and religious wars, resulting in thousands losing their lives over the next several decades. The fighting finally subsided, with the “Peace of Westphalia” signed in 1648.

After so much conflict, many religious groups began seeking freedom to practice their faith, so they migrated to the New World. Sadly, among those groups who arrived in the American colonies, more division emerged as they attempted to follow their own interpretation of Scripture. Each developed its own creed, its own doctrine, and its own hierarchy of leadership. This practice has continued until the result is more than 40,000 different religious organizations today! In that context, America became fertile soil for the Restoration Movement, a crusade for returning to the Bible and rejecting man-made creeds and doctrines of those religious institutions.

TODAY’S PRAYER: Give thanks to God for the men and women who led the efforts of attempting to return to the Scriptural pattern for the church after it had diverged so much.

DAY 24: Why Are There So Many Churches? (Part 2)

Continuing our discussion concerning why there are so many churches in the world today, some might be prompted to ask a more specific question, “Isn’t the church of Christ just another denomination among all those others?” The simple answer is, “No, we are not.” Instead, we are striving to be the pre-denominational church that can be identified in the pages of the New Testament. Let’s look at how and why.

First, it is possible that a few aspects of our historical roots could have added to the confusion about why some think the church of Christ is just another denomination. It is because a few of our early leaders were men who had come out of denominational backgrounds. They were preachers such as James O’Kelley, Abner Jones, and Thomas Campbell, who had rejected the creeds and doctrines of those religious institutions to which they had belonged. Some have viewed this departure as constituting the creation of yet another denomination.

However, these men simply wanted to return to the Bible as the sole authority over the church, not start a new one. Their intent was to follow only the Scriptural examples of Jesus’ church in order to “restore” it in the same pattern. This ideology led to two simultaneous movements, one of Barton Stone and the other of Alexander Campbell. The two eventually merged and called themselves “Christians only.” Concerning religious authority, they determined to speak only where the Bible speaks and to be silent where the Bible is silent. With that understanding, the church of Christ has continued striving to replicate the original church in the Bible.

Secondly, we have often been called “Campbellites,” which implies we are a denomination because we follow Alexander Campbell’s doctrine, just as the “Lutherans” follow Martin Luther’s doctrine. However, Campbell and many other Restorationists, such as “Raccoon” John Smith, Walter Scott, Jacob Creath, Sr., J.W. McGarvey, Moses Lard, and David Lipscomb all rejected any man-made, denominational doctrine and simply held the belief that Christianity should be restored to that which was known and practiced in the early apostolic church.

While denominationalism is a distorted facsimile of the first-century church, Restorationists were searching for a purer and more ancient form of the religion - the one found only in the New Testament. With this as their theological foundation, the simple, true doctrine of the apostles became the pattern for the modern church.

Thirdly, we must remember that centuries of religious confusion had to be unraveled in order to get everyone back to the truth of the Bible. This took much time, effort, and teaching. So, just like the ancient Bereans of Acts 17:11, the Restorationists searched the Scriptures to discern all matters of religion. They concluded that the only creed found within the early church was Jesus Christ Himself. Thus, the quest for “restoration” has continued for almost 200 years now, with every aspect of doctrine being scrutinized and compared with the Bible to bring us back to the original. This is based on the principle of testing all things (1 Thessalonians 5:21) and adhering to 1 Peter 4:11, “If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God.”

It is why we use the name that we use - because it’s found in Romans 16:16.

It is why we have no headquarters anywhere on earth - because of what Jesus said in John 18:36.

It is why we don’t use musical instruments in worship - because of passages like Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 that speak only of singing (implying there is no authority to do otherwise).

It is why we have a plurality of elders as our leadership and not a singular “pastor” over the congregation - as we learn from the examples of Acts 20:28 and 1 Peter 5:1-3.

It is why we believe salvation comes *after* baptism and not before (Mark 16:16; Acts 22:16; and 2 Peter 3:21).

It is why we place Jesus as the only Head of the church - as it says in Ephesians 1:21-23 and Colossians 1:18.

Did you happen to notice that everything we listed here is supported and justified by Scripture? It is the simple principle that any religious element that is not supported by a “book, chapter, and verse” approach should be rejected. And that is why the church of Christ is not a denomination!

TODAY’S PRAYER: Pray that members of the Lord’s church today will always and only look to the Scriptures to discern how the church should be and what it should do.

DAY 25: Why Are There So Many Churches? (Part 3)

This is our third lesson concerning the question, “Why are there so many churches in the world today?” So far, we have approached the question by considering both history and the Bible. We began with observing the source of division that produced the various denominations of Christendom today (Part 1). Then, we discussed why the church of Christ is not one of those denominations (Part 2). There remains a third element to address. It is the question, “If the Church of Christ is not a denomination, then why are there different ‘types’ of churches of Christ?” Sadly, this is a question we often avoid or only speak about in private circles. But, brethren need to know the differences and the history behind them.

After the prominent men of the Restoration Movement successfully convinced so many hearts and minds of God-fearing people to return to the Bible in order to restore the Lord’s church to its original form, it was only a short period of time that departures happened once again. This time, the divergences came from within the church itself. As early as 1849, questions and opposing opinions had emerged concerning the inclusion of musical instruments in worship, congregational cooperation within the church’s missions efforts, and other methodological disputes. This led to differing practices among the various congregations around the country.

By 1906, the U.S. Census revealed just how far and wide the sectioning had reached. It exposed the fact that the Restoration church had been segmented into two distinct groups: the Christian Church (with Disciples of Christ) and the Church of Christ. At the time, the primary difference between the two was instrumental music. Only the Church of Christ maintained the practice of a cappella singing in worship. Sadly, it didn’t stop there. The sectioning continued among those two branches as multiple, differing factions emerged from the members over the next few years. It is sad to think about all the work that had been done to unify Christians in returning to the Scriptural model of the church had fragmented once again. Among the Churches of Christ, these differing factions grew in number in the early part of the twentieth century.

When independent congregations started “working out their salvation” (Philippians 2:12), strong opinions developed over various Scriptural interpretations, differing considerably at times. Essentially, what had happened among the seven churches of Asia (Revelation 2-3) and Corinth (1 Corinthians 4:6) was now happening in America. The various views that emerged among the differing groups within the churches of Christ led to special identities being assigned to themselves, such as “Mutual Edification, One-cup, Non-Institutional, and Non-Class.” As a result, congregations now range from extremely conservative to very liberal in their beliefs. Today, it is unfortunate that the sign on a building stating “Church of Christ” does not always guarantee that the practices of that group are the same as those of another church of Christ located nearby.

The most tragic result of this division is the lack of love and respect sometimes exhibited between the various factions when a number of the variances are simply a matter of differing opinions. Sadly, those opinions have been turned into “tests of fellowship,” where one group won’t have anything to do with another just because of those differences. In fact, some of these groups have been downright hateful toward each other, either directly or indirectly. While standing on Biblical truth and sound doctrine may be the intention, it should never be used as an excuse for treating someone with contempt and hatefulness. Jesus was firm and direct but never hateful.

So, what does this sad history teach us regarding “Why are there so many churches in the world?” It teaches us that although God has given the Bible to mankind, we still haven’t quite worked it all out perfectly. We are still learning! It also indicates Satan is still at work trying to destroy the church - we should never discount the weaknesses he exploits among church members. He is resourceful, and his evil devices are always at work. The best way to defend ourselves against Satan’s attacks is to study the Scriptures diligently (Acts 17:11). Jesus Christ clearly taught that only those who do God’s will shall enter into heaven (Matthew 7:21). So, we must find God’s will in His Word and obey it if we want to be acceptable to Him. It is as simple as that.

TODAY’S PRAYER: Ask God to help all those in His church diligently seek to do His will in all religious matters so that harmony and unity will prevail among the churches.

Are denominations part of ONE body?

HUMAN DOCTRINE

Teaches that:

- There are many that are part of the **BODY**.
- There are different functions of the **SPIRIT**.
- There are different types of **HOPE**.
- There are different characteristics and aspects of the **LORD**.
- There are different types of **FAITH**.
- There are different forms of **BAPTISM**.
- And, some even say that there exists more than just one **GOD**.

However, although they

EACH TEACH

DIFFERENT THINGS, THEY STILL SAY THEY ALL MAKE ONE BODY!

Which of these is the right answer? →

A head with a divided body?
..... Or,

A head with only ONE body?

BIBLICAL DOCTRINE

Ephesians 4.4-6:

- The Bible says "there is **ONE BODY**
- and **ONE SPIRIT**,
- just as you were called to **ONE HOPE**;
- **ONE LORD**,
- **ONE FAITH**,
- **ONE BAPTISM**;
- **ONE GOD** and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."

THEREFORE,

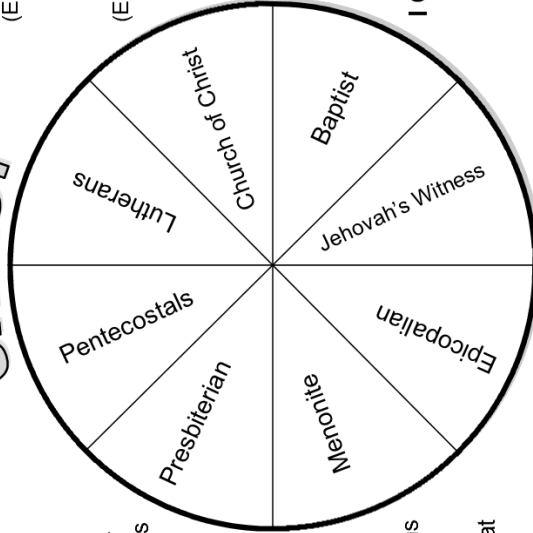
There is absolutely **NO** reason to say that there is "more" than any **ONE OF ANY OF THESE THINGS!**

CHRIST

THE HEAD
(Ephesians 5:23)

of the **BODY**
(Ephesians 5:30)

CHRIST



Romans 12:4,5

I Corinthians 12:22-27

the church that belongs to Christ is:

- ONE Family - Ephesians 3:15
- ONE Assembly - Hebrews 12:23
- ONE Vine - John 15:1
- ONE Home - John 14:2
- ONE Temple - 1 Corinthians 3:16

ONLY ONE BODY
Colossians 1:18

Furthermore, the Bible teaches there is only:

"ONE Kingdom" (Colossians 1:13) Is it common for a king to have more than one kingdom at the same time?
"ONE Flock" (John 10:16) Is it common for a shepherd to oversee more than one flock at a time?
"ONE Bride" (Ephesians 5:27) Is it common for a man to marry more than one bride?

Honestly, what makes more sense?

One head with many bodies or one head with one body?
One body with divisions as opposed to a united body?

Do not forget! Salvation is in Christ, that is, His body, (2 Timothy 2:10), so we must properly identify what is the true, correct body if we want to be saved!

DAY 26: The Kingdom Is Already Here!

Jesus often spoke about the “kingdom of God,” or the “kingdom of heaven.” What was He talking about? Many religious groups teach that the kingdom, which Christ is referring to, has yet to arrive - they say it is still coming sometime in the future. One such doctrine is known as “premillennialism.” It suggests that when Jesus returns, He will establish a kingdom on earth for a thousand years. This theory is derived from misconstruing several passages in the Bible. Sadly, it is a teaching that has greatly confused many people. So, what is the truth about God’s kingdom? Is it possible to accurately discern its existence? Indeed, it is possible. A few things about the kingdom can be a little difficult to understand, but it is not at all hard to determine the truth. We must simply look into the Bible to find the answers.

First, we can find where prophets like Daniel and Isaiah prophesied about a coming kingdom (Daniel 2:44; Isaiah 2:2; 9:7). It would be a special kingdom like no other before it. Daniel even specifies the timeframe of its establishment. He says, “In the days of these kings,” referring to a fourth kingdom that would come after the present one of his time. History, indeed, shows us that the Medo-Persians came after the Babylonian kingdom (the one Daniel was in), followed by the Greeks and then the Romans. According to these prophecies, we can deduce that God’s kingdom would be established during the reign of the Roman Empire.

Secondly, when Jesus Christ came to earth and preached, He stated that the kingdom “was at hand” (Matthew 4:17), and He also said, “The kingdom has come near you” (Luke 10:9). This indicates close proximity of time in its establishment. Jesus lived and said these things during the time of the Roman Empire. We should also consider what Galatians 4:4 teaches, “But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law.” Clearly, God’s timing was involved in all of this.

Thirdly, one must look for specific, identifying characteristics that indicate the presence of a kingdom. Every kingdom must have a king, subjects who are under the king, a territory, and a law. If it can be established that those four elements are present today, then we can conclude that the kingdom has been established and exists today. So, through diligent study of the passages presented below, you should find that not only does the kingdom of God already have all those characteristics present, but it is also already here and among us.

The first identifying mark is that a kingdom must have a king. If it does, is he reigning now? Look up these passages to determine the answer: John 18:33-36; 1 Corinthians 15:25-26; 1 Timothy 6:14-15; and Ephesians 1:20-22. According to these verses, Jesus Christ is the current reigning king. He is reigning from heaven. Secondly, “Does the kingdom have subjects?” Consider what John says about himself in Revelation 1:9. He says he is “in the kingdom.” Now, look in Colossians 1:2, 12-18 and Hebrews 12:28. What does this indicate about Christians? In addition, are not all disciples subject to the Lord according to Romans 6:17-22?

Thirdly, a kingdom must also have a territory. Notice that in Matthew 16:18-19, Jesus uses the terms “church” and “kingdom” interchangeably. Now, consider the words “church” and “body” as used interchangeably in Ephesians 1:22-23. In Acts 2:47 and Galatians 3:27, the Bible also teaches us that we are added into Christ (the church) upon our obedience to the Gospel (1 Corinthians 12:13). Then, notice that Jesus describes the kingdom as one that isn’t physically visible, but one that it is within us (Luke 17:20-21). Thus, we can conclude that the kingdom’s territory is found among and within the hearts of Jesus’ disciples (Romans 14:17). Lastly, a kingdom must have a law. If you compare Colossians 2:14 and Galatians 6:2 alongside what Jesus taught in Matthew 5:21-48, it should be obvious that all Christians live under a new law - the Law of Christ.

Therefore, according to what we have just observed and studied, we may conclude that the kingdom of God does, indeed, already have its king - Jesus Christ. It has subjects who are loyal to the king - His disciples. It has a territory - the hearts of those in His church. And, it has its own law - written in the New Testament. The verses categorically confirm that the kingdom of God has come, is here, and currently exists.

TODAY’S PRAYER: Give thanks to God for the kingdom of heaven, its King, Jesus Christ, and its glorious future that extends into heaven.

DAY 27: When and Where Did the Kingdom Come?

Previously, we presented the case, from Scripture, that the kingdom of God is already here. This usually provokes a few questions from more inquisitive students of the Bible, such as, “Can we identify with certainty when and where the kingdom began?” The answer is, “Yes! We can.” By studying the Scriptures, we can distinguish the precise time and location. This is yet more important information that every Christian should know and understand.

We’ll start with Mark 9:1. It reads, “Assuredly, I say to you that there are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power.” Pay close attention to all the words in that verse! This statement places a very specific time limit on the event. This is Jesus speaking to His disciples, to whom He says some will live to see that day, with their own eyes, when the kingdom shall come into existence. He also states that it will come “with power.” These same words are also found in Matthew’s account, right after He had told Peter that He would give him “the keys to the kingdom” (Matthew 16:19). Add to this, Jesus also uses the word “church” in verse 18 interchangeably with the word “kingdom.”

Now, in Acts 1:6, the disciples ask Jesus if He was going to “at this time restore the kingdom to Israel.” They had in mind a physical, earthly kingdom like the one from the days of David and Solomon. But, notice what Jesus says in verse 8, “you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you ...” Do you see the correlation to and consistency with Mark 9:1? Read the first few verses of the next chapter, Acts 2:1-4. What do we find? We see miraculous power come to (or rather, fall upon) the apostles in the form of the Holy Spirit! It happened exactly as Jesus had promised in John 16:7-13.

Thinking back now on the words of Mark 9:1, Jesus had said some would see the kingdom arrive. This implied that not all of them would, meaning some of them standing there wouldn’t be around when it arrived. So, were any of the apostles not there, or had someone died between the time Jesus had spoken those words and the day of Pentecost? Indeed, Judas was one of the men who had been with Jesus back then and had since passed on (Acts 1:16-18; Matthew 27:5). Again, isn’t that exactly what Jesus said would happen? His words came true! And, speaking of fulfilled prophecy, look at what Jesus said in Luke 24:46-48. He stated “that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things.” Where were the apostles when Peter preached that first Gospel message that we can find in Acts 2:14-36? Here’s a hint: Acts 1:12 says, “Jerusalem.”

The result of this study should help us with our question, “Can we identify with certainty when and where the kingdom began?” The answer is that the Kingdom of God began on the Day of Pentecost, some 2000 years ago. It began in Jerusalem and is still in existence today. It is not some future event, nor will it be some earthly, physical kingdom, as many erroneously teach today. The identifying marks of His present kingdom are easy to identify with Bible study, which refutes their claims.

In conclusion, the most important lesson we learn from the inception of God’s kingdom is what was actually said on that day. Peter stood up and began preaching. He preached about Jesus, the Christ. He preached the Gospel of Jesus’ crucifixion, death, burial, and resurrection. He preached that Jesus is the Messiah and is currently sitting at the right hand of God. What was the outcome of that sermon? The result was that many were convicted of their sins (Acts 2:37), and they responded to the invitation of Jesus by being baptized (Acts 2:38-41), which added them to the church (Acts 2:47). What just happened there? We see the fulfillment of yet another prophecy of Jesus. Peter used the “keys of the kingdom” to open up the “door” of salvation (cf. John 10:9), and the first New Testament converts were ushered in. That’s the main lesson for us! If we want to be saved, we must be in His kingdom - the church of Christ, the body of the Son of God (2 Timothy 2:10; Colossians 1:18; Galatians 3:27).

TODAY’S PRAYER: Give praise to God that you are part of His kingdom. Tell Him you are His faithful subject and you desire to serve Him and the kingdom.

PRINCIPLE 4 - ONLY ONE HEAD OF THE CHURCH

DAY 28: Who Is the Head of the Church?

Many, even in the body of Christ, do not understand the church's organization very well. While the apostles were the first leaders of the church (like we see in Acts 6:2-4), they have since passed on to their reward. This prompts questions like, “Who is the leader of the church now, or who directs its operations today? Is Jerusalem the headquarters? Or is there a specific manual that guides us today? Can we identify a leadership model within the church?” These are all very important questions that must be answered. Sadly, many have made serious mistakes in their attempts to fulfill these necessary roles in leadership. Our next few lessons will focus on the topic of church leadership from a Biblical point of view.

Knowing that Christ, and only Christ, is the head of the church should be the first, fundamental principle every Christian should understand about church leadership (Ephesians 1:20-23; Colossians 1:18). This is a key concept that directly addresses the organization of the church, how the church is governed, what method is used to govern it, and who is involved. It is important to distinguish Biblical truth from secular judgment because man has a natural tendency to place one person “in charge” or has the desire to seize the power of authority for himself (Judges 11:6; 1 Samuel 8:19, 20; 1 Kings 1:5). Just a cursory look at secular history reveals a long succession of kings, commanders, sultans, dictators, and presidents, proving man loves to seize power.

During the time of Jesus, there existed a government to which all were subjected, it was the Roman Empire. Thus, it shouldn't be surprising that around 313 AD, when the church came out of persecution, the leadership model of that era was eventually imposed upon the church. It was a framework the people were familiar with at that time. The hierarchy system of the Romans became the church's leadership model. But before we criticize those disciples, we should recognize that even today, modern leadership methods still creep into the church. For example, one can easily find an eldership operating in the same manner as a board of directors. This is because some elders are CEOs, presidents of businesses, etc - it is a leadership model with which they are familiar.

It is this mentality that has led many religious institutions that use the name “Christian” to establish various hierarchies within their organizations. They will install a system of ranking, which usually includes a top leader, several levels of sub-leaders, and assistants. There will often be a central office or headquarters with a primary document outlining every aspect of their institution's polity. Just do a search for “organization of the church” in your web browser, and you will be amazed at all the variations of church government! This begs the question, “Can all of this be what Jesus intended for His church?” Or does a singular, divinely inspired standard exist for how the church is governed? The answer is, “A divine standard exists.”

The Bible presents a very specific pattern for every congregation of the church of Christ. That pattern is *autonomy*, meaning governed by itself, not influenced by any outside authority. This alone implies that there can be no headquarters or a central office for the church, nor is any earthly organization authorized to govern it. There is not a single verse or example that approves of such an arrangement. There can also be no single human leader presiding over the entire church, but only Christ (Colossians 1:18). No Biblical example exists of a single individual governing or “overseeing” any one congregation. Instead, there is always a plurality of leaders, known as “elders” (Hebrews 13:17), seen among the autonomous congregations. Furthermore, there is no verse or example of a leader of one congregation having any authority over another congregation.

Jesus' kingdom (church) is not of this world (John 18:36), so its framework is not the same as the world's. This means that there is no other guide, creed, catechism, or manual outside of the Bible that is authorized by God containing instructions regarding the church. The Bible alone is completely sufficient to guide us in all things religious (2 Timothy 3:16, 17; 2 Peter 1: 3). Therefore, there is a divine leadership model for the church that exists! It's found in the Bible. The next few lessons will cover more of this topic in greater detail.

TODAY'S PRAYER: Thank God for His eternal wisdom in setting up the organization of the church!

How is the Church Organized?

LEADERSHIP

Elders and Deacons

*Acts 20:17,28; Titus 1:5-9
1 Tim 3:1-7; 1 Peter 5:1-4;
Hebrews 13:7,17*

Elders are the leaders of the church who shepherd the flock. Examining the Bible, observe that the word "elder" is always in the plural when referring to church leadership, it is never used in the singular, (as in "one elder / leader").

The deacons, evangelists, and teachers serve under the authority of the local elders.

THE HEAD

Jesus Christ

*Colossians 1:18,
Ephesians 1:22-23*

Jesus holds all authority (Matthew 28:18) and today He speaks through His apostles who wrote the New Testament (Hebrews 1:1,2 and 2 Peter 1:19-21). There is no other head, nor authority over the church, only Jesus.

THE LOST

Those in the world

*2 Timothy 2:10, Luke 19:10
Galatians 3:27, Hebrews 5:9*



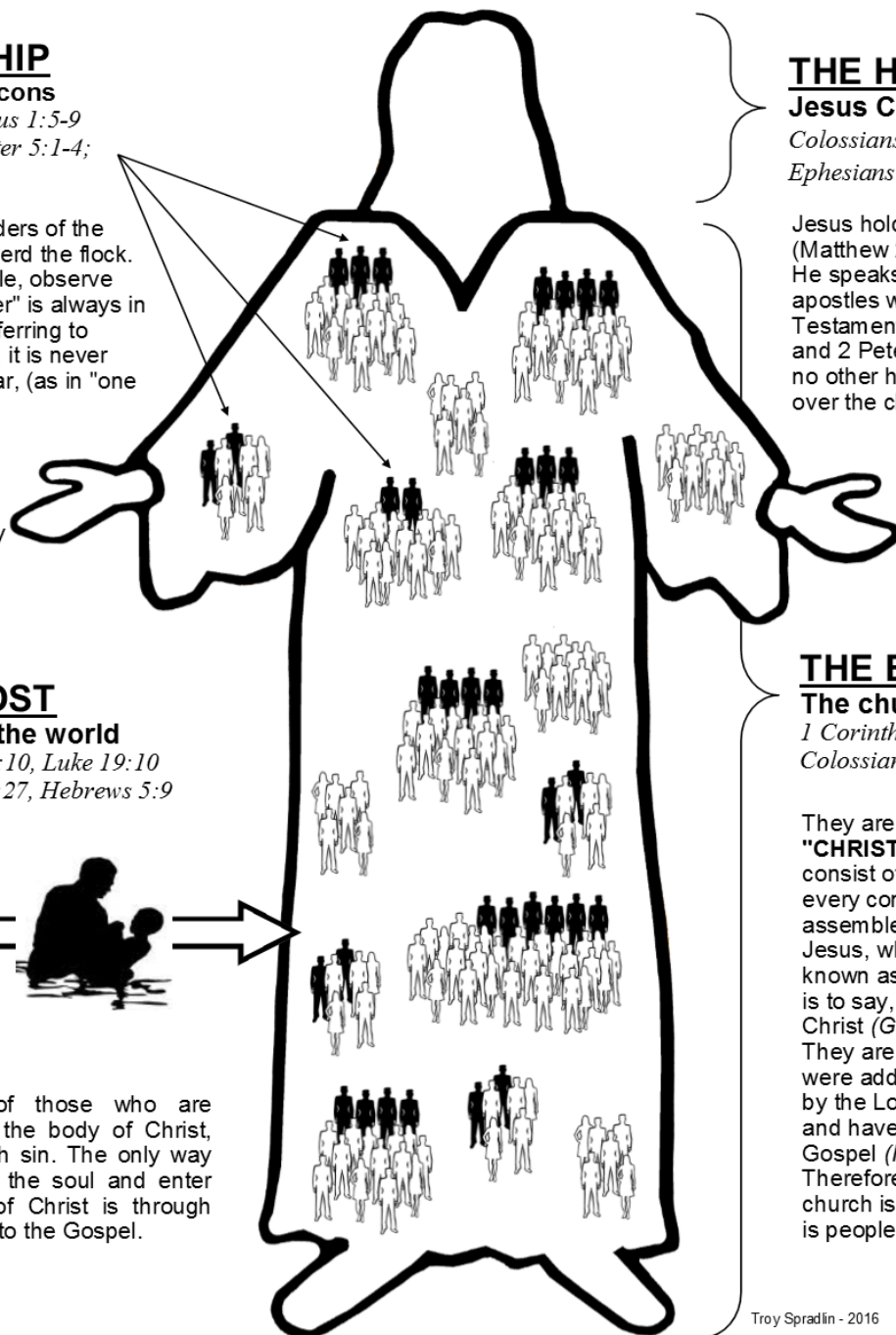
Consists of those who are outside of the body of Christ, stained with sin. The only way to cleanse the soul and enter the body of Christ is through obedience to the Gospel.

THE BODY

The church

*1 Corinthians 12:12-27,
Colossians 1:18*

They are known as "**CHRISTIANS**" and consist of the members of every congregation that assemble in the name of Jesus, who are also known as "the saints," that is to say, the saved in Christ (*Galatians 3:27*). They are also those who were added to the church by the Lord (*Acts 2:47*), and have obeyed the Gospel (*Romans 6:1-18*). Therefore, in reality, the church is not a building, it is people - a family.



Troy Spradlin - 2016

THE INDIVIDUAL CONGREGATIONS

Acts 11:23 (the local church), Ephesians 5:23 (the universal church)

Consist of the various assemblies (congregations) around the world of the saved who are in Christ. Each congregation may include evangelists, teachers, elders and/or deacons among its members. Not all may have elders, but each has always been autonomous. There is no example in the Bible of an individual, or a group of elders of one congregation having control or authority over another congregation. Nor is there a headquarters or central office that manages or makes demands upon the various congregations.

DAY 29: How Is the Church Organized?

The Scriptures are very clear; God has given us a divine leadership model for guiding the church. It is not of man's design, nor is it like any worldly format with which we may be familiar. In the previous lesson, we presented Jesus Christ as the only head of the church; no other stands above Him (Colossians 1:18). We touched on the fact that there is no Biblical authority for a singular individual to rise as the supreme leader over all of the church. In fact, the only people mentioned in leadership positions in the Bible are the apostles and elders (Acts 15:6; 16:4). In this devotional, we'll answer the question, "Exactly how is the church organized?" We'll find that Scripture mentions several types of members within the church. For example, 1 Corinthians 12:28, 29 and Ephesians 4:11 mention apostles, prophets, miracle workers, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. Philippians 1:1 also mentions deacons. Here are some important points about these offices or "positions."

Apostles refer to the twelve men Jesus called to work alongside Him (Mark 3:14-19). They were the main leaders of the church during its infancy (Acts 2:42). But not just anyone could/can be an apostle. According to Acts 1:21-22, there are very specific requirements to be an apostle, which means it is impossible for anyone today to truthfully call themselves one of Jesus' chosen apostles. Only two other men are mentioned in the Bible as having met those requirements. They were Matthias (Acts 1:26) and Paul (Galatians 1:1). Since we are now some two thousand years removed from that time, we no longer have apostles as leaders within the church.

Prophets and Miracle Workers. This refers to those early Christians, both men and women, who received miraculous, spiritual gifts from the apostles (Acts 8:14-17). They could speak in tongues, heal people, and had other supernatural abilities. This was necessary because the New Testament had yet to be written. These gifts were God's method for spreading and confirming His Word (Mark 16:20). But, once the Scriptures were complete, there was no longer a need for those gifts, so they ceased (1 Corinthians 13:10). In addition, all the apostles, who could impart such gifts, and those who received the gifts have all died, resulting in miraculous abilities having died with them. Furthermore, none of them were appointed as supreme leaders of the church.

Evangelists. This simply refers to a member who is capable of preaching the Gospel. Preachers are not the leaders of the church. They are just workers in the kingdom who teach and spread the Gospel to others.

Teachers. This refers to those brethren who can understand the Bible well and then communicate it to others in a way that can be understood. Some are capable of teaching before larger groups, while others are better suited for private settings. In either case, they are not designated as overseers of the church.

Deacons. These are men who have been placed in charge of a specific task within the church. The Biblical precedent is found in Acts 6:1-7. They also have specific qualifications required in order to assume the position (cf. 1 Timothy 3:8-13). While deacons may be considered a type of leader in the church, their real purpose and role is to serve, to be a servant - that's what the word "deacon" truly means (1 Timothy 3:10).

Pastors. The Bible also describes these men as "Overseers, Shepherds, Bishops, and Elders." Each is a synonym for the same person serving in that position. They are the only members of the church designated in the Bible as leaders. They are the only ones to whom other members are instructed to submit (Hebrews 13:7, 17). But their leadership has a specific purpose - to guard and watch over the souls of the flock (Acts 20:28; Hebrews 13:17). As a result, they must give an account to the Lord for their assigned duty. Thus, they are servant-leaders. Notice also that they are always referred to in the plural and never in the singular, which means no individual elder is superior to the others. They, too, are subjected to very specific qualifications (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). Being an elder is an enormous responsibility that deserves much respect from the brethren.

I would like to encourage you to take time to look up each of the Scriptures cited. Read the context and observe how each position functions within the body of Christ, especially in 1 Peter 5:1-5. The church's organization was put in place by God through His inspired writers. Let us never forget that God's way works!

TODAY'S PRAYER: Again, give thanks to God for how He set up the church and for each of those who have served or are serving in the different capacities within the body.

DAY 30: The Mission and Work of the Church

The Bible reveals man's purpose on this earth is to glorify God (Ecclesiastes 12:13; Revelation 4:11). But what does that mean exactly? In what way are we to glorify Him? Does the Bible give us answers? Indeed, it does! In fact, the Bible teaches we must "produce fruit" in order to bring glory to God (cf. John 15:8), which implies we must actively do something. It implies that we Christians, those of the church, must work!

Consider the example of the first Christians in Acts 2:42-45. It says, "They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and prayers. . . and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need." This passage implies that there are three different types of work of the church. They are: Evangelism - inferred from the words "the doctrine" (verses 42, 47); Edification - inferred from "fellowship, and prayers" (v42, 46); and Benevolence - inferred from the phrase "dividing their possessions" (v24, 44, 45). This teaches us that we can designate every work, or each ministry, into these three categories: evangelism, edification, and benevolence.

Evangelism. Jesus came to "seek and save the lost" (Luke 19:10), and then He commanded His disciples to do the same in what is known as The Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16: 15,16; Luke 24:47). He made it our responsibility, both individually and collectively as the church, to seek and save the lost, just as He had done while here. This simply refers to ordinary people going and telling other ordinary people the extraordinary good news of an extraordinary person, Jesus Christ. What an important responsibility!

Edification. This is a word that comes from the Greek, meaning "the act of building [up], or promoting spiritual growth." [19] When we participate in fellowship activities and encourage one another, we are building something. The words "building up" carry the idea of *reciprocity*. Read Romans 14:19 and 1 Thessalonians 5:11. There, you will see that the key idea is doing something mutual - doing something for someone else who simultaneously does something for you. Thus, each Christian strengthens their faith while helping one another.

Living for others is truly the greatest secret to happiness. Many live in difficulty because they only think of themselves. Selfishness does not edify anyone. Romans 14:7-8 says that we belong to the Lord. Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 talk about us being part of "the body" of Christ (refer back to the Day 11 lesson). The church is a spiritual family that unites and edifies all those who have been baptized in Christ.

Benevolence refers to covering or providing for the physical needs of others. Benevolence only requires need and opportunity. While the word "benevolence" is not found in the New Testament, we still find the idea or concept of benevolence within its pages. A related word in Biblical Greek is *eunoia*. In Ephesians 6:7-8, it is used in reference to the behavior and attitude we should have towards one another. The word "communion," in 1 Corinthians 10:16 (and as exhibited in Acts 2:42), means "fellowship, or joint participation," which also implies benevolence between each other. [20]

The principle of benevolence can also be found in the following passages: Galatians 6:9,10; James 1:27; Matthew 7:12; Matthew 25: 32-40; Philippians 2: 4. The church and every individual Christian should feel a responsibility towards those in need. Therefore, the focus must be on others, not on ourselves. Benevolence is an action in which God is glorified. Such service helps us stay pure since we are busy seeking the benefit of others instead of potentially being tempted or involved in sinful things.

Application: How do we glorify God? We do it through evangelism, edification, and benevolence, all of which produce fruit as the Lord commands. It is how we please Him. All three are extremely important! While these are easy things to say, they are not so easy to put into practice. Yet, we must! Every decision we make regarding church work must be based on these works. Each ministry, work, and focus can be divided into these three categories so the church can glorify God.

TODAY'S PRAYER: Pray that you and the church always bring glory to God through these three actions of evangelism, edification, and benevolence.

DAY 31: True Worship of the Church

Every Sunday, a large portion of the world's population passes through the doors of a building with a sign somewhere that says "church" on it. They go there to participate in a worship service or a religious ritual. However, with only a cursory glance, one can quickly discern that vast differences exist between the various religious services being conducted. In fact, many have replaced Sunday as the day of Christian worship by meeting on Saturday evening instead. This begs the following questions, "Does it really matter how one worships? Is there a specific pattern? Are there instructions for what, when, and how Christians must worship?" The answer is "Yes." A good understanding of this topic should be paramount for any true disciple of Christ.

Let's begin with the definition of the word "worship" itself. It comes from the Biblical Greek word, *proskunéo*, which literally means "to kiss the hand of (towards) one; a sign of reverence; kneeling, or prostration." [21] In addition, if we search for the word "worship" in our Bibles, we will find different kinds of worship mentioned. For example, Matthew 15:9 mentions a worship that is "vain." Acts 17:23 mentions worship to an unknown god. Colossians 2:23 talks about "self-imposed" worship. Mark 15:19-20 demonstrates a mocking worship, while John 4:24 talks about worship that is in "spirit and truth." From these verses, it should become apparent that there is a right way to worship, and there is also a wrong way.

The fact is, everyone worships something or someone. We see this throughout the history of mankind and even in society today. Humans are creatures of worship in one way or another. We will either worship a deity, money, sports, fame, some object, or someone. Yet, the Bible teaches that God is the creator of all mankind, and therefore, all of mankind should worship only Him. John 4:23 says, "But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him." God wants His creation to worship Him! So, what does it mean to worship in "spirit and in truth"? In simple terms, worshipping in "spirit" refers to the *attitude* one must have in worship. Worshipping in "truth" means that we practice the correct *doctrine* of worship as found in the Bible. Let's look at both a little closer.

Attitude has to do with the heart. Perhaps a good way to remember how important worship is might be to recognize that it involves the whole heart. Colossians 3:16 says we should have the "Word of Christ" dwelling within our hearts. Ephesians 5:19 says we are to make melody in our hearts. In contrast, one's heart can also be disengaged during worship, according to Matthew 15:8. This implies it is possible to be at worship physically but not to be there mentally (having the wrong attitude). If we are not paying close attention to what we are saying and doing, then we do not have our hearts actively involved in our worship to God.

Doctrine, or worshipping God "in truth," means we are to follow the teachings, patterns, and commands regarding worship as found in the New Testament. This is what is known as "doctrine." It doesn't take much to discern the specific commandments that we must obey or the examples we should follow. According to Biblical instructions, there are five components of worship:

1. Partaking in the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:23-26; Acts 20:7)
2. Singing songs of praise and worship (2 Colossians 3:16; Ephesians 5:19)
3. Prayer (Acts 2:42; 1 Timothy 2:1, 8)
4. An offering (1 Corinthians 16:1; 2 Corinthians 9:7)
5. Preaching the Word (Acts 20:7; 2 Timothy 4:2; Colossians 1:28)

Changing any part of worship results in the corruption of God's plan for worship, which leads to the destruction of the identity of the church. In the next few lessons, we will discuss the five components.

TODAY'S PRAYER: Pray that God will help you always to understand what it means to worship "in spirit and truth."

DAY 32: The Lord's Supper

In 1 Corinthians 11:24-25, Jesus mandated His disciples to remember one very specific thing, “Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” Then, it says, “In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.’” The words “do this” are imperative, meaning they are authoritative commands, meaning we must obey His instructions. Of all the things Jesus did during His ministry, He only asked His disciples to remember this special memorial feast and His Word (John 15:20). So, what is the Lord's Supper and its purpose? When should we partake of it? By reading passages like Matthew 26:26-29 and Luke 22:19-20, along with 1 Corinthians 11:23-29, we can identify three distinct elements as part of the supper: the bread, the cup, and the prayer. Let's take a closer look at each of these.

The Bread is not just any bread; it is something special. It is also nothing magical or unusual. It is simply the type of bread that was used during the Jewish Passover meal, which was an unleavened, flat bread. Jesus took it and used it as an instructive symbol for remembering His body, which was crucified upon the cross. When we eat the bread, we are to remember what He did for us. The symbolism is further explained in John 6:51, which records Jesus describing himself as “the bread of heaven.” In that discourse, Jesus reminded the Jews about the time God provided food from heaven for the Hebrews during their wandering in the wilderness (John 6:49). Just as that manna (bread) descended from heaven for them, Jesus also descended from heaven for us.

The Cup was also part of the traditional Passover dinner of the Hebrews. The “fruit of the vine” was served on four different occasions during the meal. On the fourth serving, Christ took that cup and used it to speak of his blood that would soon be shed during His crucifixion. The symbolism is better understood in light of Leviticus 17:11, which says that “the life of the flesh is in blood.” Why remember the blood? Because blood gives us all the elements necessary for life. Just as blood gives life to our physical body, Jesus' sacrifice gives life to the lost and spiritually dead sinner. When we drink from the cup, it is to remind us of what He did for us.

What was inside the cup Jesus used? He called it “the fruit of the vine” (Luke 22:18). There are many fruits, but very few grow on a vine. Grapes were the most common vine-grown fruit in that part of the world back then. The grapes' juice, or wine, was a very common drink at that time. While it was most likely only juice from the grapes, we also know from several historians that the wines produced in that era were often watered down significantly (possibly for preservation purposes and to produce a greater quantity).

Prayer is the third element of the Lord's supper. Matthew 26:26 says Jesus Christ “blessed” it, and Luke 22:19 says He “gave thanks.” As we participate in the supper, all three components of the memorial feast must be present, just as Jesus did and instructed. The purpose for doing all this is explained further by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:20-29. He states that it is not only a reminder of the great sacrifice Jesus made but also a mutual communion between the members of the body of Christ and a time of self-analysis and devotion (or re-dedication) to our Lord. We are to eliminate any outside thoughts from our minds and focus on remembering His love for us. This is why we pray individually after consuming each element. In doing so, Paul says that we “proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.”

Lastly, let's look at when we are to participate in what is now called the “Lord's Supper.” While the Passover was an annual feast for the Jews (according to the mandate in the Old Testament), the first Christians participated in the Lord's Supper after His ascension, when the church began, like we see in Acts 2:42. According to Acts 20:7, we also find the disciples participating in it on the “first day of the week.” Since they did it that way, then we can be confident that following that same divinely approved example is God's will. Therefore, since the first day of the week comes around every seven days, then Christians all around the world participate in this memorial of the death of our Savior on that day, which is every Sunday.

TODAY'S PRAYER: Pray that you always properly discern the importance of the Lord's Supper and partake in a pleasing and acceptable way in God's eyes.

The Lord's Supper

“do this in remembrance of Me” (Luke 22:19)

ANIMAL SACRIFICES	JESUS' SACRIFICE
Part of God's plan Genesis 4:3,5; Leviticus 1:1-9	Part of God's plan Matthew 16:21; 26:39
Without blemish Numbers 19:2, 28:3,9	Without blemish 1 Peter 2:21-24; Matt 27:24
Spilling of blood Leviticus 1:1-15, 16:14-16	Spilling of blood Mateo 26:28
Forgiveness of sin Hebrews 8:12, 10:17	Forgiveness of sin Matthew 9:22, 26:28
Cleaned of sin Leviticus 16:30	Cleaned of sin Acts 3:19; 1 Peter 3:18;
Offered once a year Hebrews 9:7, 25	Offered once and for all Hebrews 7:27, 10:12



It is a commandment
Observed as a memorial
Observed first day of the week
Represents His body and blood
To remember and proclaim
To be done with reverence

Mathew 26:26-29
 1 Corinthians 11:24
 Acts 20:7
 1 Corinthians 11:24-26
 1 Corinthians 11:26
 1 Corinthians 11:28-29

A HELPFUL METHOD FOR GOOD CONCENTRATION:

1. There is only **ONE** Lord (Ephesians 4:5).
2. There were **TWO** thieves crucified with Him, one on the left and one on the right (Matthew 27:38) ...
3. Placed upon **THREE** crosses (John 19:18).
4. The soldiers took His clothes and divided them into **FOUR** parts (John 19:23).
5. There were **FIVE** wounds (piercings of His body) – two in His hands, two in His feet, and one in His side .
6. He was on the cross for **SIX** hours, (Mark 15:25, 34).
7. There were **SEVEN** phrases uttered from the cross: **Luke 23:34, Luke 23:43, John 19:26, 27, Matthew 27:46, John 19:28, John 19:30, y Luke 23:46.**
8. There were **EIGHT** words on the sign above His head “This is Jesus, the King of the Jews” (Matthew 27:37).
9. Jesus gave up His spirit in the **NINTH** hour (Luke 23:44-46).
10. Name **TEN** events of His crucifixion. (Ten is just an easy number to remember. Choose ten things from His passion that mean the most to you). For example, Judas betrayed him (Matthew 26:48-49). There were two false witnesses against Jesus (Matthew 26:60). Peter denied Jesus three times (Matthew 26:75). Jesus was condemned by Pilate (John 18:13-38).
11. **ELEVEN** remained faithful to Him from among the ...
12. **TWELVE** disciples that He had chosen to follow Him.

DAY 33: Singing or Instruments in Worship?

The subject of incorporating musical instruments into worship is a topic that has been debated and contended by religious-minded people for more than 1,500 years! It is a frequent subject in Bible studies and religious conversations among many precious souls who are searching for truth. Yet, many are still confused about what is allowed in worship. Why is it so hard to understand? What is the truth? Let's talk about it.

The best way to approach this subject is by first establishing a mutually agreed-upon authority. Since we're talking about worship to God, wouldn't it make sense that God's Word should be the final deciding factor? Indeed, it should! Without it, it's really just one person's opinion over another. This is often revealed in what people say, such as, "I just like the way it sounds," or, "I prefer to go to a church that has a band." Those comments are nothing more than personal, subjective preferences - not something based on Scripturally supported conclusions. It is the main reason why people cannot agree on this topic. They are yielding to a personal preference instead of adhering to "Thus saith the Lord." There is a difference! The two approaches are completely incompatible. Do you see now why we must establish a principal authority? It all boils down to asking yourself, "What is more important: the will of God or my will?" (cf. Deuteronomy 5:29; John 14:15)

If we can all agree to submit to the Bible as the authority in all things religious, then what does it teach regarding worship? Let's start by being brutally honest. There is no verse that says, "Thou shall not use musical instruments in worship." However, before jumping to conclusions, please understand that there is also no verse that says, "Musical instruments are permitted in worship." So, how are we to know which is correct? We can draw a sound conclusion by considering two primary points of discernment: (a) comprehending the difference between the Old and New Testaments and (b) discerning what the will of God is in the matter.

Considering the first point, people often like to appeal to passages where instruments were used in the Temple in Jerusalem (the place of worship), such as Psalms 98, 144, and 149. However, if we are going to use those Old Testament verses as our authority for using musical instruments, then it would also imply we must keep the entire Old Testament law, not just one aspect of that law (James 2:10). Accordingly, we would also need to offer animal sacrifices, have special clothing for priests (which were only Levites - and how do we identify who a Levite is?) and use incense, as the Law of Moses commanded. In addition, ALL worshipers must play an instrument because only priests were allowed in the temple. Now, doesn't that seem absurd? The truth is, we cannot appeal to the Old Testament to justify using musical instruments in Christian worship, nor are we bound to it as obligatory for our worship today (Romans 7:1-14; Colossians 2:14; Hebrews 7:22, 8:6).

Secondly, concerning God's will and the argument of "no prohibitive verses against instruments," we could just as easily say that the Bible does not specifically prohibit the use of cake or milk in the Lord's Supper. Yet, how do we know that we can't change those elements? It's because we have commands and examples to teach us otherwise. Here's the point: if God tells us what He wants, then He doesn't need to list everything that He doesn't want. What the Bible does say and demonstrates is singing (cf. Matt 26:30; Acts 16:25; Eph 5:19; Col 3:16; 1 Cor 14:15). Not a single example exists in the New Testament of musical instruments being used in Christian worship. Every reference points to only one form of "music" - singing. According to historians and the early church fathers' writings, there is also no example of musical instruments being used during worship in the first few hundred years of Christianity. The first mention of them being used came in the seventh century!

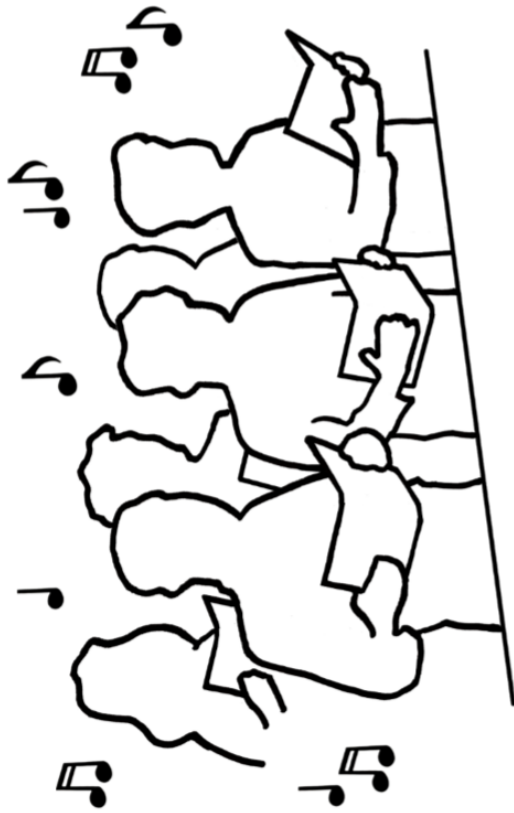
Lastly, incorporating musical instruments in worship is a more modern development and not part of the original pattern of worship within the church. Therefore, if we are truly concerned about worshipping God according to His will, then we must follow the examples and commandments for worship found only in the Bible. This means submitting to His authority. It is not a matter of preference, a question of ambiguity, nor some development in the name of progress. In addition, one cannot use "it is not a salvation issue" as an excuse because, in reality, how we worship is directly related to one's salvation (cf. Acts 2:41-47; Matthew 7:21)!

TODAY'S PRAYER: Pray we always make wise choices in worship to God and in ways He approved.

May we use instruments in worship?

“I will sing with the Spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding” (1 Corinthians 14:15)

THE WILL OF GOD - Matthew 7:21	THE ARC Genesis 6	PASSOVER Exodus 12	WORSHIP Leviticus 10	LORD-S SUPPER 1 Cor 11:23-26	MUSIC Ephesians 5:19
THE DIRECT COMMANDMENT	GOFER WOOD	LAMB	FIRE FROM THE ALTAR	FRUIT OF THE VINE BREAD	SING
Tools that are EXPEDIENTS for fulfilling the commandment, but do not change the command.	Hammers Saws	Fire Plates	Censers Wood	Cups Serving plates	Books Microphone
Things that ADULTERATE the commandment by making changes that are not approved by God.	Pine Walnut	Beef Fish	Strange fire Matches	Milk Cake	Instruments Drums



Commandments, Examples, and Requirements

- Matthew 26:30** “And when they had sung a hymn”
- Acts 16:25** “... praying and singing hymns”
- 1 Corinthians 14:15** “... singing with the spirit, understanding”
- Ephesians 5:19** “... singing and making melody in heart”
- Colossians 3:16** “... singing with grace in your hearts”
- Hebrews 2:12** “Sing (Greek: *humneo*) in the assembly”
- James 5:13** “Let him sing psalms” (Greek: *psallo*)

NOT ONE EXAMPLE OR COMMANDMENT CAN BE FOUND IN THE NEW TESTAMENT THAT ALLOWS **CHRISTIANS** TO USE INSTRUMENTS DURING OUR WORSHIP TO THE LORD!

DAY 34: Prayer

How is your prayer life? Do you pray as often as you should? Prayer is - and should be - an essential part of a Christian's life. Our Savior, Jesus Christ, was a man of prayer (cf. Matthew 14:23, 26:36-44; Mark 1:35; John 17:2-24). This implies that if prayer was so important to our Lord, why should it be any less important to us? We can certainly infer that every disciple should learn to pray correctly and often. In fact, Jesus' apostles asked Him to teach them how to pray (Luke 11:1). Isn't it interesting that the disciples never asked Him to teach them how to do anything else, like preach or sing? They wanted to learn how to pray.

What is prayer? The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia describes prayer as "a supplication; making a plea or request; to speak to a superior; to approach God." [22] We could say it is the heart's desire that expresses itself to God (Romans 10:1; 1 Timothy 2:1). The Bible uses the term prayer in its various Hebrew and Greek forms about 350 times. That means it is an important word and action to God!

Prayer is a great privilege for the Christian. It is something very powerful according to James 5:16-18, Hebrews 4:16, and Revelation 8:3-5. The enormous amount of power that prayer encompasses lies in the fact that it is the primary method for us to speak directly to God Himself, the Creator of the universe! Could you imagine having a direct line to the office of the President of the United States that you could use any time you desired to call him, ask anything from him, and he would always answer? That would be an incredible privilege and something truly powerful. Well, Christians have something even more powerful than that, we have prayer. Isn't it a marvelous blessing that our Almighty God desires to hear directly from His own creation?

Examples and commandments of prayer. Matthew 6:5-15 provides us with a divine model for prayer. It is the form that Jesus taught His disciples and we can still use that same prayer model today. In other verses, such as 1 Timothy 2:5, Hebrews 7:25, and Colossians 3:17, we also learn that we must pray through our Savior, Jesus. We must pray in His name, according to John 14:13-14. This means praying according to the authority of the Lord. This is significant because, according to the Hebrews, one's name represented everything a person was (Acts 4: 7-10). Since Jesus truly is the highest authority, using His name gives us access to God in prayer.

The purpose of prayer. Prayer serves many purposes for the Christian. It is a means to worship God, to glorify and praise Him, and to thank Him for what He has done for us. It is how we ask for forgiveness. It is also our given method for expressing our desire for Him to help others. Thus, prayer is a spiritual discipline which every Christian should strive to develop, maintain, and improve on a daily basis. Prayer is practically the "lifeblood" of a Christian's spirituality (1 Peter 5:7; Philippians 4:6, 7).

How often should we pray? James 1:5 says to pray when we lack wisdom (when we make decisions). James 5:13-18 teaches us to pray when one is sick. According to Acts 20:36-38, we should also pray at the time of separation from loved ones. We must pray for an increase in faith (1 Thessalonians 3:10) and to be continually giving thanks to God (Colossians 4:2). In 1 Thessalonians 5:17, it says we must pray "without ceasing," which means that we must seek every available opportunity to pray.

Some practical tips for praying. Pick specific times and places for praying each day (plan for multiple times). If possible, select a place where there is sufficient privacy and no distractions. Pray when first waking up. Pray before eating a meal. Pray in times of need or temptation or when you think of the many ways God has blessed you. Pray before making important decisions. Pray before, during, and after studying the Bible. Pray before going to sleep at night. Make a prayer list to help you remember those who need prayers (or take the church bulletin home with you). When you do pray in public, pray with sincerity of heart and without the intention to impress others. Pray with fervor (Colossians 4:12) and persevere in prayer (Matthew 26:44, 2 Corinthians 12:7-8)! Prayer is such a powerful and wonderful privilege every Christian should constantly practice in their spiritual walk. So, always remember, God wants to hear from you. Therefore, pray!

TODAY'S PRAYER: Ask God to hear your prayers and help you remember to always pray to Him in any situation. Thank Him for the privilege of prayer.

DAY 35: The Offering

Could we live in this world without money? It is possible, but it would certainly be difficult! We typically need money for food, shelter, clothing, and many other things. Money makes it possible to function in society. For some people, money can also be the cause of anxiety, stress, or other problems. Did you know that the Bible talks a lot about money? It talks about both the good and bad aspects of it, including how money is a part of worship. It is called, “the offering.” It also mentions tithing as an offering (meaning “a tenth”). To better understand the Biblical view of money and the principles of giving, we need to look at a few passages. If we understand the principles, applying them in our lives will be much easier. Here are four points to consider:

One: Give because you are a good "steward." Jesus considered all things to be the property of God and pointed out that we are simply *stewards*, meaning administrators for God. In Matthew 25:14-30, consider how Jesus explained the reward that the two men received who used their talents properly. You might also read Luke 16:10-13 which talks about being a faithful servant or an unjust servant. Peter also taught that we must be faithful stewards. “As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.” (1 Peter 4:10). In 1 Corinthians 4:1-2 and Ephesians 4:28, we learn that good stewardship must be part of our faith. The main point is that we must be good managers of all the blessings God has given us. It requires a lot of discipline and fidelity! Which, also means we must handle our money well.

Two: Give as you have prospered. This principle is found in 1 Corinthians 16:1-2. Everyone’s offering will be different according to what they have received. If God provided abundantly for you, then you must give back abundantly. God expects that you give diligently and generously! Remember that our ability to give is not limited to just money but can also include our skills and talents. We see this principle implied in 2 Corinthians 8:5, where Christians “first gave themselves to the Lord.” It appears they gave more than just their money.

So, what about tithing? Are Christians supposed to tithe, that is, give 10%? The New Testament gives no such commandment for giving a tenth of our income. Tithing was something God required from the Hebrews in the Old Testament. Even then, it had a primary and specific purpose: to provide sustenance for the Levite priests. Since we have no Levite priesthood today, then the tithing commandment does not apply to the church. However, just because we are no longer under the old law (Colossians 2:14), it does not mean we have no mandates concerning our giving, nor should we give much less than the Hebrews did in the Old Testament.

Three: Give with joy. The Bible says we should give “not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7). It’s a problem many have. We might give, but we don’t really like to give up our money. We must be very careful with that attitude! It’s called greed. The fact is, we will all have to give an account before God for our actions. Greed is a sin. A miser is as far away from Christ as any other sinner. According to 2 Corinthians 8:9, the miser has an attitude that is contrary to that of Christ.

If someone makes an offering but thinks, “I prefer to keep this,” then the offering is in vain since it is not done out of joy and generosity. Read and learn from what Jesus taught in Luke 12:13-21 about greed and the rich fool. Consider also what Christ teaches in Matthew 6:19-24. Where does joy come from? It comes from giving. Where does greed come from? It comes from selfishness. We must give selflessly from the heart.

Four: Give proportionately. No one should be overly burdened with their offering while another person shuns their responsibility. It is absolutely necessary that each member contributes financially to the church, in some amount or means (2 Corinthians 8:13). We must remember that God sees our offering, and He has promised to provide care for us (Matthew 10:29-30). Remember the widow of Mark 12:41-44? The Bible says that the poor widow “put in _____” (v44). Why? Because of her faith! Therefore, you should judge your offering by what is left over, not by the amount you put in the plate. Never forget how much God has provided for you when you are thinking about how much to give back to Him. Your offering is proof of your love!

TODAY’S PRAYER: Thank God for the many blessings He has bestowed upon you. Assure Him you will give back to Him, cheerfully, a portion of that which He has given you.

DAY 36: Why Preach?

Preaching is a prominent part of Christian worship, but it is not the most important part nor the central focus. That distinction is reserved for the Lord's Supper. Preaching is also a subject that evokes many interesting opinions. For example, some think preaching should be a motivational speech, while others think it is simply a time to rebuke the church. While preaching may certainly include some of those elements, that is not the true purpose of preaching, according to the Bible. It is these types of misconceptions that reveal why it is important to study the subject of preaching in order to understand its place and purpose in worship.

Why is preaching part of the worship service?

The simple answer is “because of commandments and examples in the Scriptures.” For instance, what did Jesus command His disciples to do in Mark 16:15? To preach the gospel. What mandate was given to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:2-4? To preach! What did Paul do in 1 Corinthians 15:1? He preached. There are numerous examples of preaching recorded in the New Testament (Acts 2:14-36, 3:12-26, 4:5-12, 7:2-53, 8:5, 10:28-47, 16:32, 17:22-31; and 20:7). It is because of these commands and examples that someone will usually stand up and preach as part of the worship service. This happens every first day of the week in congregations around the world. But, a sermon must have a purpose. The Bible teaches us that the purpose of preaching is:

- To reveal and explain the scriptures (Acts 7:1-53, 8:35; Nehemiah 8:8).
- To present Christ as our only hope (2 Corinthians 4:5; Acts 8:35).
- To promote Christian growth (Acts 2:42).
- To inform mankind about how to receive salvation (Acts 2:37, 38; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

Through the avenue of preaching, believers and non-believers learn more about Jesus and the will of God.

Who is the one that preaches?

Is it someone with a special gift? Must one have a license or special permission to preach? Although many of our religious friends want to elevate the preacher to some special office, such as “clergy, reverend, priest, or pastor,” those terms are not a Biblical description of a preacher. In fact, the word clergy is not even found in the Bible! A preacher is nothing more than a Christian who shares the Word of God with others. There is no verse that indicates a preacher is to be more important than anyone else, that he must have a special license or certain credentials to preach. The Bible teaches that all Christians are to preach in some form or another.

However, simply because everyone should/can preach doesn't mean that just anyone can step into the pulpit. This is because a preacher must have an exemplary life. His actions outside the pulpit are often more persuasive than any words he may speak in a sermon. In addition, a preacher must know how to “rightly divide the Word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). Therefore, the responsibility of preaching should never be taken lightly, be done for personal gain, nor espouse only one's opinions. Peter makes this abundantly clear with, “If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God.” (1 Peter 4:11) It has been said, “A preacher should hide behind the cross when preaching!” That is excellent advice for remembering the true purpose of preaching.

How is one to preach?

One of the kingdom's greatest preachers, Paul, explains, “Preach the Word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.” (2 Timothy 4:2) From this, we can deduce that: (a) we must preach from the Bible; (b) we must be prepared to preach at any given moment or circumstance; (c) we must persuade others by reasoning with the Scriptures; (d) we must point out flaws when compared to the Word; (e) we must build up and edify others; and (f) we must do it all with a method that exhibits much love and patience. Lastly, we should be reminded that preaching is God's chosen method for talking directly to us - through His Word (Hebrews 1:1, 2; Romans 10:14-17; 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

TODAY'S PRAYER: Give thanks to God for the avenue of preaching and thank Him for those who are capable of preaching.

DAY 37: Is Attending Worship Necessary?

It is early Sunday morning. You haven't slept all that well, and you are still rather tired from a long, hard week at work. It is raining and cold outside. Quite frankly, you just don't feel like getting up and going to worship this morning. Maybe you think to yourself, "I believe in God. I pray every day. I don't do anything bad or sinful. Do I really have to go to worship services all the time? Can't I just go occasionally?" Now, be honest with yourself. Have you ever felt this way? Surprisingly, it is not that uncommon. So, is our attendance absolutely necessary? In order to arrive at the correct answer, we should ask ourselves a few more questions first.

Is pleasing God the most important thing to me?

Remember, Jesus taught His disciples, "If you love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). He also said that only those who fulfill the will of God shall enter into heaven (Matthew 7:21). So, with that in mind, listen to what He told the woman at the well, "The hour is coming, and is now here, when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him," (John 4:23). The fact is, God desires His creation to worship Him. Therefore, if we truly want to please God, then we must worship Him, and we must do it in the way that He has prescribed in His Word.

Am I thankful for what God has done for me?

Understanding the "Scheme of Redemption" – the sacrifice that God and Jesus made on our behalf (John 3:16) - should be more than adequate to motivate us to worship Him. When the disciples came face to face with the reality of Jesus' power and deity by calming a storm, which saved their lives, they fell before Him and worshiped Him! (Matthew 14:30-33) Likewise, are you thankful for God's gift of salvation? Then, show your thankfulness to God by singing praises and worshipping Him in His assembly, His church (1 Peter 2:9).

Do I want the best for my family and myself?

Developing edification, knowledge, and brotherly love is more easily done within a corporate setting. Those things can't be truly learned or increased while in isolation. It is important to recognize that just being around your fellow Christians can have a major, positive impact on your life. With so many negative influences in the world, we certainly need more positive reinforcement. The church provides that! (John 13:35; Galatians 6:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:11) The church is an organism (more so than an organization); that is because it is a body, a family. It is one that mourns and rejoices together – you won't typically find that kind of support in a worldly setting (1 Corinthians 12:23-26). So, worship is yet another way we build each other up (Colossians 3:16).

Is the salvation of my soul important to me?

According to 2 Timothy 2:10, salvation is "in" Christ Jesus – that is, one must be in His body (which is the church, according to Col 1:18) in order to be saved. One cannot be saved outside of the church. Just being a member is not all that is required of a disciple. There is no such thing as "isolation salvation" presented in the Scriptures. So, active involvement in the church is essential, as seen by the examples of the first Christians (cf. Acts 2:44, 11:26, 14:27, 20:7; Romans 16:5, 16:16; 1 Corinthians 14:23). Worship is connected to our salvation.

Now, if you answered "No" to any of the questions above, then perhaps you should check your heart. God only wants those who will worship Him in spirit and truth. In the meantime, ponder this: if you don't like assembling with the saints to worship God, if you don't look forward to lifting up His name in praise with the church at every opportunity available because of the thankfulness in your heart, ... then what do you think you will be doing in heaven? Revelation 4-5 gives us a glimpse into heaven. The only thing revealed in that scene is a view of worship! Everyone there was worshipping God. So, if we truly want to be prepared for heaven, then let's worship our God by "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching," (Hebrews 10:25).

TODAY'S PRAYER: Give thanks to God for the honor and privilege of being able to worship Him. Pray that your heart will always be inclined to assemble with the saints in worship when there is an opportunity.

PRINCIPLE 6 - GOD IS SOVEREIGN

DAY 38: The Godhead

There are many things we simply do not know about God. Everything we do know comes directly from what He has chosen to reveal to us in His Holy Word. When Jesus came to earth, He brought light to many aspects of the nature of God, helping us to know and understand Him better. But even then, man is still perplexed about the true essence of Yahweh. One of the most difficult concepts to comprehend is that God is One being (Mark 12:29), while at the same time, He is three beings - the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 John 5:7; John 10:30). That's not easy to get our minds around! How are we to understand this?

The Bible's Depiction vs. Man's Theories

Let's start by first considering Genesis 1:26, "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.'" The "Us" and "Our image" are words that are suggestive of an intimate plurality of which God consists. It stands in perfect harmony with other Scripture, such as Matthew 3:16-17 where we see the three "Persons" presented together at Jesus' baptism. The Father is seen in the voice (v17), the Son had just risen from baptism, and the Spirit was "descending like a dove and alighting upon Jesus." Another revealing teaching came directly from Jesus when He stated, "I and My Father are one" (John 10:30). Again, this harmonizes perfectly with John 1:1, which reveals that the Word (Jesus Christ) was not only there with God at the creation, but that He is God. These, along with other verses such as John 15:26; Acts 10:38; 2 Corinthians 13:14; and 1 Peter 1:2, speak about the three persons separately while being one, which makes God unique.

Yet, over the centuries, man has conjured up various philosophies and theories in an effort to explain God's nature. These have taken on various names, such as Arianism and Modalism, with the most popular being Trinitarianism. This is where we get our word "trinity," which was formed by joining together the words "three" (tri) and "unity." The concept of the "trinity" is generally understood that God is three persons who all share one essence. But sadly, this theory has added only more confusion to the religious world and still doesn't fully explain the full nature of the Godhead.

For example, such a doctrine has led people to blend the three together so much so that they no longer mark a difference between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. As a result, many people now pray to the "trinity" instead of addressing the Father as the One to whom we should pray, with Jesus as our Mediator (John 15:16; 1 Timothy 2:5). It has also led to other extremes where people overemphasize the individuality of the three. To some, the doctrine of the trinity creates a sharp distinction between the three persons of the Godhead - essentially creating a form of polytheism consisting of three separate gods that function completely apart from the others. As a result, some are teaching that one should only be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ and not in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit, as is commanded in Matthew 28:18-19. There are also some who believe we should pray directly to Jesus, although He never taught His disciples to do so and even stated that, "in that day, you will ask me nothing" (John 16:23-26). All of these examples emphasize the fact that we must be very careful with theories that are propagated by men. It is better to simply allow the Bible to depict God's nature and the Godhead than trying to add to or take away from what it says.

The bottom line is this: we simply do not know everything there is to know about God and probably never will. What we do know is found in the Bible, so we should be careful how we describe Him. Scripture reveals distinct and subtle nuances between the "one" and the "three" characteristics of His nature. May we never deny the three distinct beings who make up the Godhead as seen throughout the Scriptures. Let us also never deny that the Lord our God is one, and we are called to love and obey Him. He is sovereign.

TODAY'S PRAYER: Thank God for His sovereignty - that there is no other God besides Him. Thank Him for His Son, the Christ, and the Holy Spirit. They are all blessings He has bestowed upon us.

DAY 39: The Scheme of Redemption

The entire Bible revolves around one specific subject – man’s relationship with God. The entire Bible is about God’s special plan for redeeming His creation (mankind) back to Himself. It is sometimes called “The Scheme of Redemption.” Here’s a simple way of looking at it: (a) God made a creation for Himself, and the creation lived in harmony with Him in the Garden; (b) the creation broke its purpose, which was to always obey and glorify God and thus, (c) had to be expelled from His presence; so, (d) God provided a means for His creation to be restored back to Him, and to live in His presence once again. The Scriptures are about the history of that plan of salvation (Acts 2:23; Ephesians 1:4). It is what makes every single person, place, and event inextricably linked together in an unmatched harmony carried throughout every page of God’s Holy Word.

The apostle Paul calls this overall theme of Scripture the “eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Ephesians 3:11). In his other epistles, he sometimes calls it “the mystery” (Romans 16:25; Ephesians 1:9; 3:3-9; Colossians 1:26; 1 Timothy 3:16). Because of Paul's education in the Scriptures and his upbringing among Jewish rabbis (Acts 22:3), he certainly understood all the connections and nuances of this singular, topical thread. It is also evidenced in his explanations of how all Scripture is related to Christianity. In Romans 5:14 and Colossians 2:17, Paul uses two special terms to describe the connecting points for the development and realization of redemption. He calls them a “type” and also a “shadow of things to come.”

The word “type” here means “an impression, figure, or example.” “Shadow” means “something representing another, an image cast.” [23] The concept of “shadow and reality,” or “type and anti-type,” is a Biblical method used to explain the links between something in the Old Testament (often identified as the Patriarchal and Mosaic ages) to something in the New Testament (identified as the Christian age). To understand better, think of how shadows work - they look like the object they depict and exhibit the same form, but they are not the actual object itself. Thus, a fingerprint is a “type,” while the actual finger that produced the print is the “anti-type.” One is the object in reality, while the other is just an image, or a “shadow,” of the object. Understanding this concept is absolutely crucial for identifying the Scheme of Redemption throughout the Bible.

Some examples of type and anti-type in the Bible include things such as:

- The Passover lamb, which was a “shadow of that which was to come” (the type), is Christ in reality (the anti-type). The lamb and its blood, which was sacrificed to save the Hebrews (Exodus 12:22-23), was a representation of what Christ did for all of humanity (John 1:29; Romans 5:8-9).
- The connections between the worship at the Tabernacle of the Old Testament and Christian worship, including prayer, the purpose of atonement, and the church or assembly, are a type and anti-type.

In fact, if you sit down with your Bible and study it with the overall Scheme of Redemption in mind, then everything that the Bible contains will start to make more sense! The study of any topic, such as grace, the problem of sin, the covenants, atonement, the resurrection, or the person of Jesus Christ, will all take on a deeper, richer, and more meaningful understanding with the perspective of redemption history in mind.

Studying, identifying, and then understanding the Scheme of Redemption reveals the historical connections between Abraham and the Jewish nation to the Lord's church today. It provides clarity as to why God gave the Law of Moses and instituted a sacrificial system. This kind of study will clarify subjects like Messianic prophecy, the incarnation of Jesus the Christ, and his death, burial, and resurrection. To understand the concept is to understand the true role of the kingdom (the church). It better prepares you for the second coming of Christ, the final judgment, and the eternal realm of heaven. If you truly want to grow and mature spiritually, then read and study your Bible through the lens of the Scheme of Redemption. Your life will be greatly blessed!

TODAY’S PRAYER: Thank God for His grand plan to save man. Thank Him for executing that plan and having it recorded in the Bible.

PRINCIPLE 7 - REMAIN FAITHFUL UNTIL DEATH!

DAY 40: Much More to Learn!

You have made it to day 40! Congratulations!

Here's something interesting to think about: on the fortieth day, the final day of Jesus' time in the wilderness, He was about as weak as He could possibly be from a physical standpoint due to having fasted all that time. On the other hand, He was also about as strong as He could be spiritually (in a human sense) because He had also been praying and focusing all His energy on the Scriptures. When Satan finally came to tempt Jesus, notice how He confronted the temptations. In every case, He responded with, "It is written," when Satan presented some physical enticement. Jesus recognized the temptation and immediately responded by citing Scripture to defend Himself. Basically, He used the Word of God to overcome Satan and his devices.

Jesus' example is a great lesson for us! He understands what it means to be tempted by Satan. It is why the writer of Hebrews said, "For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). So when temptation comes our way, we can do the exact same thing that He did to confront it. The Apostle Paul described it in this manner, "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:11-12). He goes on to describe the Word of God as the "Sword of the Spirit" (v17). In other words, Paul is saying that we are not helpless or defenseless against Satan. We have a powerful weapon we can use to fight back - the Bible!

As we mentioned in the first few lessons of this book, temptation will not cease to plague you simply because you were baptized or even for having made it this far! In fact, the attacks will probably increase in frequency and intensity. You see, the stronger you become spiritually, the more potent a weapon Satan must use to try and pierce your armor! But, your weapon will always be greater than his if you remain faithful to the Lord (Revelation 2:10). This means you must continue to make an effort to grow in your spirituality. You must continue to study the Scriptures all of your life ... and there is so much more to learn! It might encourage you to know that even the apostles never stopped growing or striving to do God's will.

The great Bible translator, Jerome, once said, "The Scriptures are shallow enough for a babe to come and drink without fear of drowning and deep enough for theologians to swim in without ever touching the bottom." [24] The Bible is, indeed, a most wonderful, incredible book. The lessons we have presented in this study guide are just a fraction of what remains to be read and studied within the Holy Word of God. We pray that you will continue your study of the Bible and increase in spiritual maturity. Perhaps you might even return to previous lessons here and look up all the verses that were cited throughout this study guide.

May God bless you richly for your dedication to Him up to this point. We pray you will continue to be just as faithful and dedicated your entire life. Ultimately, we pray that we will all see each other in heaven on that final Judgement Day. Blessings!

TODAY'S PRAYER: Give thanks to God for all that you have learned. Ask Him for protection and guidance in your future spiritual growth. Reaffirm your loyalty and faithfulness to Him.

Extra: Can We Fall from Grace? (Part 1)

There is a rather common saying among preachers, “It’s much easier to get them in the front door than it is to keep them from going out the back door!” What is meant by this is that evangelizing and converting someone is not as difficult as trying to keep them in the church and help them remain faithful! Essentially, this becomes a major goal for anyone who serves in ministry - trying to strengthen the souls of the brethren so that they don’t fall away. To make things difficult and confusing, there are countless religious teachers who say it is impossible to fall away. Could that be true? Can we fall from God's grace? How can we know for sure? The only way to answer these questions is with an open Bible.

God’s Word is very clear about this subject. If anyone desires to know the truth, then it first requires an honest heart and a humble approach to Bible study. In other words, we should never open the Bible with the purpose of forcing it to confirm something we may already believe. Instead, we must allow God’s Word to reveal knowledge to us. This simply means reading the Words that are written, understanding what they say (along with all that it says about a subject), and then just accepting it. Simple, right? First Peter 4:11 says we must speak according to Scripture, which implies not adding to it, changing it, or negating what it says.

One time, during a Bible study, a student was asked to read a particular verse aloud. The student began reading the verse from the Bible while changing the words as they spoke them – what came out of their mouth were not the same words that were written on the page! When asked to please re-read the verse, the student repeated the behavior of changing the words! The reason why this happened was because the student had been taught by someone else “what that verse is supposed to mean,” or “what the writer really meant to say,” instead of just reading the words literally and directly from the ink on the paper. That was a strange experience, but it illustrates to what extent people can be confused about certain Bible doctrines.

With that in mind, let's look objectively at what the Bible says in Galatians 5:4, “You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.” Here, we can see that one who was in a previously saved state of being can wind up in a separated state of being or an alienated position from God’s saving grace (the context also supports this deduction). In other words, you can go from being saved to being unsaved (no longer saved). Now consider this: how often does God have to say something for it to be true? Only once, right?! Indeed. Yet, this isn’t the only place the Bible speaks so directly or implicitly about how one can walk away from the faith, even after having been saved by obeying the Gospel.

People leave the faith for many reasons, but every reason can be boiled down to having a heart problem. One’s heart simply isn’t right with God. The parable of the soils is a helpful illustration regarding this principle (Matthew 13:1-23). It describes how people can come right up to the foot of the cross, even become a disciple (implied), but then leave the faith. It teaches us how God’s Word affects the heart in four different ways. Every human heart falls into one of those four categories: the pathway, rocky ground, among thorns, or good soil.

This same principle is seen once again in the actions of Simon the sorcerer (Acts 8:9-25). The apostle Peter said to him, “You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you.” (8:21, 22 - ESV). His heart was not right, and he needed to repent. Those are clear indicators that Simon was no longer in a saved state of being. Just reading what the Word says and not adding to or taking away from it through any personal bias, notice the sequence of events: Simon was saved (8:13), he sinned (8:18-19), was told he was in danger and would perish (8:20-23), all of which Simon recognized and acknowledged (8:24). Simon had fallen from God's grace! His soul was in danger of missing out on heaven.

The lesson for us is straightforward. A Christian, a saved member of the body of Christ, may choose to leave the church and decide to no longer be a faithful disciple. Doing so removes the gift of salvation and any hope of eternal life in heaven. How very sad! To teach otherwise is contrary to what the Bible teaches. We hope this lesson helped you to clearly see that both coming to Christ and leaving Christ are done by choice.

Extra: Can We Fall from Grace? (Part 2)

In our previous lesson, we discussed points regarding why people leave the church. In this lesson, we will address the fallacies involved in teaching that it is impossible to fall away, or losing one's salvation. Such a position evokes many questions and produces conflicts within Scripture. Think about the following questions. **If someone cannot fall from grace or lose their entrance to heaven (as many teach), then...**

1. Why did Jesus warn the church at Ephesus, saying, "I will remove your lampstand" (Revelation 2:5)? That clearly indicates that one's position of salvation can be expunged. The only reason Jesus would do that is because a Christian had sinned and would not repent.
2. Why did Jesus teach that we should "produce fruit" or otherwise be discarded as dry branches (John 15:6)? Do not forget that Jesus was addressing His disciples (cf. John 14). We glorify God when we produce fruit! If we cannot fall, then why should we be bothered to produce fruit for God?
3. Why did Jesus Christ say: "Not everyone who says to me: Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 7:21)? These people were obviously followers of Christ; they were disciples. They weren't non-believers! It is clear that they had received and obeyed the Gospel, since they were doing good works as a result of their obedience — but, they were not doing the "will of the Father."
4. Why does the Bible clearly use the word "fall" and other phrases that clearly state or imply such a possibility (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:12; 1 Timothy 3:7; Hebrews 6:6)?
5. Why did Simon the magician have to repent and ask for forgiveness after being baptized (Acts 8: 20-24)? It is clear that Simon obeyed the Gospel and was saved (vs. 13). If one can't fall from grace, what is that all about?
6. Why did the Apostles write so much about false teachers? Why are there warnings if there is no danger of falling (Colossians 2: 8; Galatians 1; 2 Peter; 1 John)? What difference does it make if there are false teachers?
7. Why do we need to confess our sins to be cleansed again by the blood of Christ if we cannot fall from grace (1 John 1:9)? The warning is to people who had already been baptized (they had already received salvation). John wrote "we," which included himself, an Apostle. So, doesn't that show how even one of Jesus' own righteous Apostles also needed to be cleansed again for forgiveness if they sinned? Implying falling?
8. Why did Jesus pray for Peter "so that [his] faith would not be lacking" (Luke 22: 31-32)? This implies the possibility of it happening.
9. Why does Peter say that we must stand firm in the faith if there is no possibility of falling (2 Peter 1:10)? For clarity, note 2 Peter 2:20: "... having escaped the defilements of the world." This is a reference to salvation. "As a dog returns to his vomit," means that these people had become entangled in sin once again.
10. 2 Peter 3:17: "Beware, lest you be dragged by the error of the wicked, fall from your steadfastness."
11. Don't forget that the people chosen by God in the Old Testament (Israel) were a rebellious people. An entire generation lost their right (inheritance) to enter the Promised Land (Numbers 32:13-15)! Has anything changed with God during this Christian dispensation? Is God more compassionate today with sinners than he was before? Of course not! Sin is sin — from the Old Testament time to today.

In reality, the questions don't stop here! If someone can't fall from grace, then ... "Why should we meet together with the church?" (1 Cor 11:18) "Why should we study the Word?" (2 Tim 2:15) "Why must we walk in the light?" (1 John 1:7) "Why should we do more than just be baptized?" (Heb 5:12) Yet, according to this erroneous doctrine - that one cannot fall away (also known as "once saved, always saved"), one can easily arrive at the conclusion that once you have salvation, then you are free to do whatever you desire!

We need to consider that when a doctrine such as this produces so many questions that it conflicts with Scripture, there must be something wrong! The Bible is simple and easy to understand. It is not necessary to do "acrobatics" to reach a correct conclusion. Instead, be honest with yourself. Let the Bible speak to your heart.

Finally, think about this: Suppose you are standing before the throne of God on the Day of Judgment; what would have been the safest doctrine to believe? Which one puts your soul in danger?

1. To believe in the possibility of falling, so you live obediently as a Christian until death to get to heaven?
2. Or, believe you can't fall, so you give no importance to the Christian walk or daily obedience, since "in the end, no one can fall from grace"?

One of these thoughts is very dangerous; the other is in harmony with the Bible. Which one will you choose?

ENDNOTES

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Welcome to God's family!

You have made the most important decision of your lifetime! It is one that affects your eternal destiny. Becoming a Christian means you now belong to God. He is your Father and you are His child. Being added to this new family also means there are a few things you should know, such as what God expects of you as a member of His family, what you can expect from Him, and many other benefits of being part of His household. Just as any father would explain these things to a newly adopted child, God does that for us through His inspired Word, the New Testament. This implies we must find and study these things for ourselves, since He has delivered His Word to us once and for all (Jude 3).

This book is designed to help you with that endeavor. It is simply a study guide that will assist you in finding many of those important passages in the Bible for your spiritual growth. It is presented in 40 lessons spread out over 40 days that you can do by yourself, or along with others.

The lessons are grouped into seven different principles.

First, we will begin by explaining what responsibilities you have as a new Christian.

Secondly, we will help you see why the Bible is so very important to our faith.

Third, we'll study about why the church is also just as important.

Fourth, we'll talk about the principle of the preeminence of Christ.

The fifth principle will look at the necessity of worship.

The sixth will review the sovereignty of God.

The seventh will provide direction on how to remain faithful throughout your life.

The title, "Your First Forty Days in the Wilderness" is a reference to what happened to our Savior after He was baptized. Mark's account of the Gospel says that, "Immediately the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness. And He was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan ..." (Mark 1:12-13).

If the Son of God was attacked by Satan after His baptism, what do you think Satan will do to you?