

Topical Sermons



Miscellaneous Sermon Outlines

This material is from **ExecutableOutlines.com**, a web site containing sermon outlines and Bible studies by Mark A. Copeland. Visit the web site to browse or download additional material for church or personal use.

The outlines were developed in the course of my ministry as a preacher of the gospel. Feel free to use them as they are, or adapt them to suit your own personal style.

To God Be The Glory!

Executable Outlines, Copyright © Mark A. Copeland, 2010

Topical Sermons

Table Of Contents

5BX Spiritual Fitness Plan	5
After Baptism, What Then?	8
The Anatomy Of A Backslider	10
Angry Words! O Let Them Never	13
The Apostasy And Restoration	16
Apostolic Succession	19
Are You Drifting?	23
Are You 'High Maintenance'?	27
Are You Ready For Your Journey Into Eternity?	30
Are You The Pastor?	33
Attitudes Needed In Congregational Work	36
Back To The Basics!	40
The Benefits Of A Small Church	44
Biblical Illiteracy	47
Blest Be The Tie	50
Capital Punishment	53
Cease From Anger, And Forsake Wrath	57
The Celebration Of Christmas	62
The Celebration Of Easter	66
Challenges For A Growing Congregation	71
Church Membership	74
The Clarion Voices Of God	76
Cohabitation Before Marriage	79
Commanded To Love	81
Congregational Evangelism	83
Congregational Singing	85
The Conversion Of Saul	87
Cremation Or Burial?	90
Daily Bible Reading (I)	93
Daily Bible Reading (II)	96
Dear Reverend	99
Dig Your Well Before You're Thirsty	101
Disappointments New Christians Face	104
Divine Signposts	107
Emotion Vs. Emotionalism	110
Evangelism Made Easy	114
Evangelism Made Personal	116
Examples Worth Following	121
Faith In The Community	124
Faith In The Family	126
Faith In The Workplace	129
Follow-up: Definition & Importance	131
Follow-up: Factors Affecting Follow-up	133
Getting Ready To Grow	137
God Hates Divorce!	140
God Loves Families!	143
God's Great Book	145

The Gospel According To Isaiah	148
Gospel Meetings - Keys To A Successful Meeting	151
Gospel Meetings - Why Should We Attend Them?	154
Gospel Meetings - Why Some Succeed, Others Fail	156
Gospel Meetings - Now Our Meeting Is Over	159
The Gospel Of Christ	162
The Gospel Of The Grace Of God	165
Grace And The Christian	168
The Great Commission According To Matthew	171
The Great Commission According To Mark	173
The Great Commission According To Luke	176
The Greatest Need	178
Growing Old Gracefully	182
Heaven Will Surely Be Worth It All	187
The High Cost Of A Free Gift	189
How Much Should I Give?	192
How Well Do You Listen?	196
I Am Coming, Lord!	200
Into All The World	202
Is Your Baptism Scriptural?	206
Jesus, My Lord	210
Jesus Our Shepherd	213
The Laying On Of Hands	215
Laying Up Treasure In Heaven	218
Let's Make A Deal!	221
The Lord's Supper	224
The Lostness Of The Lost	228
Love Your Enemies	230
Making Wise Choices	232
The Measure Of A Strong Christian	235
The Measure Of A Strong Church	238
Music In New Testament Worship (I)	241
Music In New Testament Worship (II)	244
The Nature Of Faith	248
The Need For Vision	251
A New Creation	254
The Old Testament And The Christian	257
The Parable Of The Lifesaving Station	262
The Passion Of The Christ	264
The Path To Salvation	267
Perspectives For Success In Evangelism	270
The Perverted Gospel - Its Message	276
The Perverted Gospel - Its Witness	279
The Power Of An Invitation	282
Prescription For Spiritual Health	284
Principles Of Church Growth	287
Private Devotions	290
The Problem Of Anxiety	292
The Problem Of Religious Division	295
The Providence Of God	298
A Reason For Our Hope	301
Reflections On The Loss Of A Loved One	305
Resolutions For A New Millennium	308

Resolutions For The New Year	310
Responding To Materialism	313
The Sabbath Day	316
Same-Sex Marriage	321
Secrets Of The Abundant Life	324
Shall We Dance?	328
The Significance Of The Birth Of Jesus	332
The Significance Of The Resurrection Of Christ	334
The Single Christian	337
The Sovereign Rule Of God	340
Spirituality In Youth	343
Studying With JWs	345
Support Your Local Church!	351
Take Time To Be Holy	354
To Seek Or To Serve?	357
The Three Loves Of A Disciple	360
The Uniqueness Of The Bible	362
The Value Of Secret Prayer	367
The Virtue Of Punctuality	370
We Should Remember The Poor	373
What Can Kill A Church	376
What God Has Joined	379
What Is Evangelism?	382
What Is The Church Of Christ?	384
What It Takes To Be Interested In The Lord's Work	380
What Shall I Wear?	392
What To Look For In A Church	395
What Visitors Have A Right To Expect	398
When Disasters Strike	402
When The Election Is Over	405
Who Killed Jesus?	408
Why Are You Waiting?	410
Why Attend Every Service?	414
Why Did Jesus Die On The Cross?	418
Why Did Jesus Suffer?	420
A Woman's Contribution To The Local Congregation	424
Would We Have Believed Them?	427
WWJD - What Would Jesus Desire?	430

5BX Spiritual Fitness Plan

INTRODUCTION

1. In the late 1950s, there was an exercise program called **5BX (Five Basic Exercises)**...
 - a. Developed for the Royal Canadian Air Force
 - b. Published as a booklet with 23 million copies sold in Canada
 - c. Consisted of five exercises to be done daily in 11 minutes
2. In this lesson, I would like to suggest a similar 5BX plan...
 - a. Designed for Christians, to aid their spiritual growth and development
 - b. Consisting of **five spiritual exercises** to be done daily (though not in 11 minutes!)

[I call it the **5BX Spiritual Fitness Plan**. In the original 5BX plan, the first exercise involved **stretching**. Our spiritual 5BX plan begins with a daily regimen that will **stretch** our souls...]

I. READ THE WORD OF GOD

A. THE WORD OF GOD...

1. The means by which we grow spiritually - **1Pe 2:2**
 2. Read the Psalmist's valuation of the Word - **Psa 19:7-10**
 3. It was by the Word of God that Jesus resisted the devil - **Mt 4:4,7,10**
 4. It is by God's Word in our hearts that we can resist sin - **Psa 119:11**
- **The Word of God is therefore foundational to our spiritual fitness**

B. READING THE WORD...

1. Develop the habit of reading the Word daily
 2. Start slow; perhaps with the NT, a chapter a day
 3. Progress to reading the Bible through each year
 4. Read devotionally, meditating on what you read
- **The Word of God will help you to grow in grace and knowledge**

[In the original 5BX plan, the second exercise involved **sit-ups** to strengthen the midsection. Our spiritual 5BX plan involves a spiritual exercise that will **empower** our souls...]

II. SPEND TIME IN PRAYER

A. THE POWER OF PRAYER...

1. There is forgiveness from God - **Ac 8:22; 1Jn 1:7-10**
 2. There is peace from God - **Php 4:6-7**
 3. There is strength from God - **Ep 3:14-16,20**
 4. There is opportunity from God - **Col 4:3**
 5. There is boldness from God - **Ep 6:19-20**
 6. There is wisdom from God - **Jm 1:5-8**
 7. There is healing from God - **Jm 5:14-16**
 8. There is tranquility from God - **1Ti 2:1-4**
- **Together with the Word, prayer is foundational to spiritual fitness**

B. PRAYING FERVENTLY...

1. As you read the Word of God, pray for wisdom
 2. Pray daily for forgiveness, strength, opportunity, boldness
 3. As needed, pray for peace, healing, tranquility
 4. Continue earnestly in prayer, vigilant in with thanksgiving - **Col 4:2**
- **Consistent, fervent prayer will strengthen your relationship with God**

[In the original 5BX plan, the third exercise involved **back extension** that increased flexibility. Our spiritual 5BX plan involves a spiritual exercise that will **enrich** our souls...]

III. SING PRAISES

A. THE ROLE OF SINGING...

1. One purpose of singing is to praise God - **Ac 16:25**
 2. It is a type of spiritual sacrifice that we offer to God - **He 13:15**
 3. A way to be filled with grace and melody in our hearts - **Col 3:16; Ep 5:19**
 4. A way to respond to the goodness of God - **Jm 5:13**
- **Singing praises is foundational to our spiritual well-being**

B. SINGING PRAISES...

1. Make praising God in song a part of your daily devotional
 2. Either by listening to hymns or singing them yourself
 3. Sing while you drive, while you work, either quietly or aloud
 4. Make melody in your heart, sing with grace in your heart
- **Singing enriches our souls and fortifies our relationship with God**

[The fourth exercise in the original 5BX plan was **pushups** to strengthen the upper body. Our spiritual 5BX plan involves a spiritual activity that **strengthens** our relationship with God and other Christians...]

IV. FELLOWSHIP WITH BRETHREN

A. THE IMPORTANCE OF FELLOWSHIP...

1. The church is the body of Christ which is built up when each part does its share - **Ep 4:15-16**
 2. Our assembling is designed to stir one another to love and good works - **He 10:24-25**
 3. Our fellowship is a source of comfort and edification - **1Th 5:11**
 4. A way to avoid becoming hardened by the deceitfulness of sin - **He 3:12-14**
- **Frequent fellowship is crucial to remaining faithful and steadfast**

B. EXPERIENCING FELLOWSHIP...

1. Assemble together with Christians every opportunity you can
 2. Take advantage of the assemblies offered by the local congregation
 3. Not just one time on Sunday, but every time the door is open
 4. Look for ways to be with Christians daily - by phone, Bible studies, social activities
- **Fellowship with other Christians strengthens one's faith in God and Christ**

[The fifth and final exercise in the original 5BX was **running in place** or **walking** to increase endurance. Our spiritual 5BX plan includes spiritual activity that produces **endurance** as well...]

V. DO GOOD WORKS

A. THE ROLE OF GOOD WORKS...

1. We are not saved by good works - **Ep 2:8-9; Tit 3:4-5**
 2. But we are created in Christ for good works, to glorify God - **Ep 2:10; Mt 5:16**
 3. Thus we are to be fruitful in every good work - **Col 1:10**
 4. We are not to grow weary in doing good - **1Co 15:58; Ga 6:9-10**
- **Good works are essential if we are going reap spiritual benefits**

B. DOING GOOD WORKS...

1. Share the gospel with the lost
 2. Minister to brethren and to the lost in need, whether physical or spiritual
 3. Utilize your resources (time, money, talents) to help the poor or sick
 4. Each day try to do something that blesses another person
- **Good works, done systematically, builds spiritual endurance**

CONCLUSION

1. We have seen that the **5BX Spiritual Fitness Plan** contains these five elements...
 - a. Read The Word Of God
 - b. Spend Time In Prayer
 - c. Sing Praises
 - d. Fellowship With Brethren
 - e. Do Good Works
2. Engaged in daily, I believe they go a long way to developing strong Christians...
 - a. But please note that these are “basic” exercises
 - b. I am not suggesting they are everything a Christian needs to do
 - c. However, they will establish a good foundation of spiritual fitness

Perhaps you might find this “plan” helpful as you seek to carry out the admonition given by Paul to the young man Timothy...

“...exercise yourself toward godliness. For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.” - 1Ti 4:7-8

After Baptism, What Then?

INTRODUCTION

1. Wonderful blessings come to those who respond to the gospel of Christ in **baptism**...
 - a. They receive remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit - **Ac 2:38-39**
 - b. They experience a washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit - **Ti 3:5-7**
2. Indeed, by God's grace **they are "saved"**...
 - a. Saved from their past sins - cf. **Mk 16:16**
 - b. With sins washed away by the blood of Jesus - **Ac 22:16; Ep 1:7**
 - c. Becoming heirs according to hope of eternal life - **Ti 3:7**
3. Yet in another sense, **they are still to be "saved"**...
 - a. They must make their call and election sure - **2 Pe 1:10**
 - b. They must be careful to save themselves - cf. **1 Ti 4:16**
 - c. They must remain faithful to receive the crown of life - **Re 2:10**

[What is one to do **after baptism** that will ensure remaining faithful to the Lord? There are some...]

I. THINGS TO REMEMBER

A. YOU ARE A NEW CREATURE...

1. By virtue of being in Christ - **2 Co 5:17**
2. Having been raised with Christ to walk in newness of life - **Ro 6:3-4**
- **God has given you new potential for living!**

B. YOU ARE A BABE IN CHRIST...

1. We begin our new life as "babes in Christ" - **1 Co 3:1**
2. We start with spiritual "milk" - **1 Co 3:2**
- **God allows you time to grow! - cf. He 5:12-14**

C. YOU ARE IN A CRITICAL PERIOD...

1. As a babe, you can be easily "tossed about" - cf. **Ep 4:14**
2. Satan often strikes hardest at the beginning of our service - e.g., **Mt 4:1-11**
- **Satan would love to see you fail! - cf. 1 Pe 5:8**

D. YOU FACE THE POSSIBILITY OF FALLING...

1. If you allow yourself to be hardened by the deceit of sin - **He 3:12-14**
2. Especially when you think you are strong - **1 Co 10:12**
- **God can be trusted to help us through temptations - cf. 1 Co 10:13; 1 Jn 2:1-2**

E. YOU ARE TO BE A GOOD EXAMPLE...

1. An example of those who believe - **1 Ti 4:12**
2. An example in both deed and word - **Ti 2:7**
- **Others should be able to look to you as to how to live for Christ - cf. Ph 3:17**

[Remembering such things will certainly help keep one strong in the faith. Also helpful are...]

II. THINGS TO DO

A. PUT GOD FIRST...

1. Love Him with all your being - **Mt 22:37**
2. Seek first His kingdom and righteousness - **Mt 6:33**
- **This will ensure that you do all that is necessary to remain faithful!**

B. STUDY THE WORD OF GOD...

1. Long for the Word, like an infant longs for milk - **1 Pe 2:2**
2. Emulate the Bereans in their attitude - **Ac 17:11**
- **Receive the Word with meekness, and it will save you! - cf. Ja 1:21**

C. BE FERVENT IN PRAYER...

1. Jesus has made it possible to approach God's throne - **He 4:14-16**
2. Wonderful blessings come through prayer - **Ph 4:6-7**
- **Be devoted to prayer, with an attitude of thanksgiving - cf. Co 4:2**

D. BE DILIGENT IN ASSEMBLING...

1. We are not to forsake our assembling together - **He 10:24-25**
2. It is a time for fellowship, prayer, and on the first day of the week, the Lord's Supper - **Ac 2:42; 20:7; 1 Co 11:23-26**
- **Neglecting the assemblies is a symptom of spiritual stagnation!**

E. HELP SAVE OTHERS...

1. The Lord wants His disciples to make more disciples - **Mt 28:19-20**
2. Those diligent in saving others are more likely to save themselves - cf. **1 Co 9:19-27**
- **Lose your enthusiasm for saving souls, and you may lose your own!**

CONCLUSION

1. While not meant to be exhaustive, these are just a few...
 - a. Things to remember
 - b. Things to do
 - **That may be helpful for someone recently baptized**
2. But not just for new Christians; for any Christian...
 - a. Who has left their "first love" - **Re 2:4**
 - b. For they should "repent and do the first works" - **Re 2:5**
 - **These are some of the "first works" that one needs to do**

Are you in need of doing the "first works"...? Perhaps you even need to obey the "first steps" of the gospel of Christ... - cf. **Mk 16:16; Ac 2:38; 22:16**

The Anatomy Of A Backslider

INTRODUCTION

1. In **2 Pe 2:20-22**, we read of the real possibility and serious consequences of backsliding
2. It is interesting that we find this passage coming from the inspired pen of Peter...
 - a. For if anyone knew “firsthand” the reality and dangers of backsliding, it was Peter!
 - b. As he discovered the night he denied Jesus!
3. The process of backsliding is a gradual one, often overtaking a person by surprise; and lest we fall from our own steadfastness...
 - a. We shall carefully examine the process that led to Peter’s denial of Christ
 - b. Followed by noticing how Peter’s own words in his epistles are designed to prevent the same from happening to us!

I. THE ANATOMY OF A BACKSLIDER

A. PRIDE - Mk 14:27-31

1. In a boastful manner, Peter claims he will not fall away or deny Christ!
2. In doing so, Peter takes the first step in backsliding: “pride”! - cf. **Pro 16:18**
3. Why is this the “first” step?
 - a. Because the first step in entering the kingdom is humility - **Mt 18:3-4**
 - b. So if we lose “humility”, we take that first step backward
4. Paul’s advice to the Corinthians is very apropos in this regard - cf. **1 Co 10:11**

B. LAZINESS - Mk 14:32-42

1. Told to keep watch, Peter kept falling asleep
2. It was therefore lack of diligent preparation which caused him to be caught off guard for what was to follow
3. The same thing can happen to us!
 - a. Without diligence, we too can be found unprepared - cf. **Lk 21:34-36**
 - b. More often than not, it is a “gradual drifting” that catches us off guard - cf. **He 2:1-3**
 - c. But when proud of ourselves, we become lazy, and that easily leads to the next step...

C. COWARDICE - Mk 14:54

1. Note that it says “...Peter followed Him at a distance”
2. Now that Jesus had become unpopular...
 - a. Peter stays far enough away so as not to be identified with Him
 - b. Peter was unprepared for the challenge of facing ridicule and persecution
3. Without diligent preparation, we too can become guilty of cowardice!
 - a. Ashamed to be seen carrying a Bible
 - b. Ashamed to be seen giving thanks
 - c. Ashamed to be seen with other Christians
 - d. Perhaps even ashamed to let others know that we are Christians!
4. And yet, Jesus has made it clear what He thinks of “cowardice” - cf. **Mk 8:38; Re 21:8**
5. When we are ashamed of Christ, it is natural for to fall into the next step of backsliding...

D. WORLDLINESS - Mk 14:54

1. We now find Peter sitting with the servants of the High Priest and warming himself by the fire
2. Ashamed to be seen with Christ, it becomes easy to mingle with those of the world and enjoy their comforts
3. But one cannot be “comforted by the fire” of the world, and not be “burned”!
 - a. Close contact with that which can harm has its effects! - cf. **Pr 6:27-29**
 - b. So it is we cannot “flirt with the world” and walk away untouched! - **1 Co 15:33**
4. By the time we become “friends with the world”, it is only a short time before we take the next and final step of backsliding...

E. DENIAL - Mk 14:66-71

1. Away from Christ, at comfort with those in the world, Peter finds himself denying His Lord and Savior!
2. In so doing, he has put himself in grave danger - cf. **Mt 10:32-33**
3. Though we may never actually deny Jesus in “words”, we can easily backslide to the point of denying Him in “action”...
 - a. We are called to worship Him . . . but make excuses why we cannot
 - b. We are called to serve Him . . . but render little or no service
 - c. We are called to stand by His side and suffer for His name...but stand afar off in the safety of the world’s comfort

[When we deny the Lord, our backsliding is complete; unless we repent, the only thing left is to one day face the Lord, where we will fully realize the error of our ways! For Peter, he fully realized his sin when the Lord turned and looked at him there in the courtyard (cf. **Lk 22:60-62**). Imagine the feeling in Peter’s heart as those eyes of His Savior pierced his soul! Like Judas, Peter wept bitterly over his sin. Unlike Judas, Peter had “godly sorrow” that results in true repentance (cf. **2 Co 7:10-11**). And years later, we find Peter writing the sort of things that would prevent us from making the same mistake he did...]

II. ADVICE FROM ONE WHO LEARNED THE HARD WAY**A. TO GUARD AGAINST “PRIDE”...**

1. Peter enjoins “**humility**” - **1 Pe 5:5-6**
2. Indeed, “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble”

B. TO WARD AGAINST “LAZINESS”...

1. Peter commands “**diligence**” - **1 Pe 5:8-9**
2. Note especially his words in his second epistle - **2 Pe 1:5,10; 3:14**

C. INSTEAD OF “COWARDICE”...

1. Peter charges us to “**glorify God**” - **1 Pe 4:16**
2. Think not of what it means to you, but what it means to God!

D. INSTEAD OF “WORLDLINESS”...

1. Peter tells us to “**abstain**” - **1 Pe 2:11-12**
2. Remember that we are “sojourners and pilgrims”, destined for a better place than the things of this world have to offer!

E. INSTEAD OF “DENIAL”...

1. Peter exhorts us to ever be ready to “**give a defense**” - **1 Pe 3:15**
2. By careful preparation, we will “defend” Christ, and not “deny” Christ!

CONCLUSION

1. From one who learned by the hard road of experience, let’s heed his advice lest we one day backslide ourselves, and in so doing deny the Lord! - cf. **2 Pe 3:17-18**
2. Remember too that when Peter saw the eyes of his Lord, he realized the error of his way...
 - a. Fortunately for him, there was still time to repent
 - b. But for us, when we see Jesus “face to face”, the time to repent will be gone...it will be the time for judgment!
3. If we realize that we are guilty of backsliding...
 - a. Repent now, do not wait until you stand before Jesus
 - b. Do it now, so that your “face to face” encounter with Jesus will be terrific, not terrifying!

Angry Words! O Let Them Never

INTRODUCTION

1. Many of the songs we sing are designed to teach and admonish - cf. **Co 3:16**
2. One such song is “**Angry Words! O Let Them Never**”...
 - a. Words written by D. K. P.
 - b. Melody arranged by H.R. Palmer, Will W. Slater
 - **In “Hymns For Worship”, it is song #394, entitled “Love One Another”**
3. A favorite of many, it is a song...
 - a. With valuable advice in our dealings with one another as members of God’s family
 - b. Warning against disrupting friendship and love through unthoughtful use of the tongue

[In both verse **one** and **three**, the focus is on...]

I. THE NEED TO BRIDLE THE TONGUE

A. THE TONGUE IS POWERFUL...

1. It is difficult to control
 - a. It has the power to control the whole body - **Ja 3:2-5**
 - b. For it reflects the true expression of the inward man - cf. **Mt 12:34-35**
2. It has power to do good and evil
 - a. To turn away wrath, or stir up anger - **Pro 15:1**
 - b. To use knowledge wisely, or pour forth foolishness - **Pro 15:2**
 - c. To be a tree of life, or a breaker of spirits - **Pro 15:4**
- **“Angry words! O let them never from the tongue unbridled slip; May the heart’s best impulse ever check them ere they soil the lip.”**

B. THE ADVANTAGES OF RESTRAINT...

1. Avoids sin - **Pro 10:19**
2. Keeps one out of trouble - **Pro 21:23**
3. Makes one to appear wise - **Pro 17:27-28**
4. Uncontrolled tongues can destroy friendships
 - a. Poorly chosen words, unthoughtful and rashly spoken words
 - b. Can make even the closest friends become enemies - e.g., **Psa 55:12-14**
- **“Angry words are lightly spoken, bitterest thoughts are rashly stirred, brightest links of life are broken, by a single angry word.”**

C. HOW THEN SHALL WE USE THE TONGUE...?

1. If for good, our words can be:
 - a. Sweet to the soul - **Pro 16:24**
 - b. A thing of beauty, like apples of gold in settings of silver - **Pro 25:11**
2. But if for evil, then beware:
 - a. We will be judged by our words - **Mt 12:36-37**
 - b. We will defile our bodies (and our friendships!) - **Ja 3:6**

[To encourage the proper use of the tongue, the song in verse **two** and the **chorus** reminds us of...]

II. THE IMPORTANCE OF FRIENDSHIP AND LOVE

A. THE BLESSINGS OF FRIENDSHIP...

1. Some of the most beautiful passages in the Bible were expressions between friends
 - a. Ruth's love for her mother-in-law, Naomi - **Rut 1:16-17**
 - b. Jonathan's devotion to his friend, David - **1 Sam 18:1**
 - c. Jesus' love for His disciple, John - **Jn 19:25-27**
 - d. Paul's love for his coworker, Timothy - **2 Ti 1:1-4**
 2. Good friends provide wonderful benefits
 - a. A true friend is "a man for all seasons" - **Pro 17:17**
 - b. A true friend can be closer than blood relatives - **Pro 18:24**
 - c. The rebuke of a true friend is of more value than the praise of an enemy - **Pro 27:6**
 - d. The advice of a true friend can be precious - **Pro 27:9**
 - e. Seek to hang on to good friends - **Pro 27:10a**
- **"Love is much too pure and holy, friendship is too sacred far, for a moment's reckless folly thus to desolate and mar."**

B. THE NEED TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER...

1. Our Savior teaches us to do so
 - a. A new commandment, to love as He loved us - **Jn 13:34-35**
 - b. Stressed again and again - **Jn 15:12,17**
 2. It is a "blest" command
 - a. Love will avoid offending another with loose words - **1 Co 13:4-5a**
 - 1) Love suffers long (patient)
 - 2) Love is kind
 - 3) Love does not envy (not jealous of others' good fortune)
 - 4) Love does not parade itself (does not brag about itself)
 - 5) Love is not puffed up (not arrogant)
 - 6) Love does not behave rudely (not inconsiderate of others' feelings)
 - b. Love will not allow loose words offend it - **1 Co 13:5b-8a**
 - 1) Love does not seek its own (not defensive)
 - 2) Love is not provoked (not sensitive)
 - 3) Love thinks no evil (assumes the best intention)
 - 4) Love does not rejoice in iniquity, but in truth (concerned more about truth than winning)
 - 5) Love bears all things (puts up with snide remarks, slights)
 - 6) Love believes all things (gives others the benefit of the doubt)
 - 7) Love hopes all things (looks for the best in others)
 - 8) Love endures all things (including hurt feelings by unkind or unthoughtful words)
 - 9) Love never fails (to show patience, compassion, forgiveness)
- **"Love one another", thus says the Savior; Children, obey His blest command."**

CONCLUSION

1. Friendship is too holy to let loose words in reckless moments destroy it...
 - a. Especially between brethren in Christ
 - b. Whose love is to be a mark of true discipleship - **Jn 13:35**

2. True love values friendship so highly, that it will resolve...
 - a. To say nothing that unnecessarily endangers our friendship
 - b. To let nothing that is said, no matter how hurtful, to destroy our friendship

May this song, “**Angry Words! O Let Them Never**” serve to remind us of the blessing and duty we have regarding our love and friendship as disciples of Christ!

Have you become a disciple of Jesus Christ...? - cf. **Mt 28:19-20**

The Apostasy And Restoration

INTRODUCTION

1. The New Testament reveals the establishment and early growth of the church...
 - a. The church Jesus said He would build - **Mt 16:18**
 - b. The church Paul wrote that Jesus loved - **Ep 5:25-27**
2. The Lord's will is that there be one church...
 - a. He prayed for the unity of His followers - **Jn 17:20-23**
 - b. Paul later wrote that there is one body (i.e., church) - **Ep 4:4-6; cf. 1:22-23**
3. Yet we see around us so much religious confusion, so many different churches...
 - a. How did it happen?
 - b. What can disciples of Christ today do about it?

[In the first place, we really should not be surprised by the plethora of different churches. For in the Bible itself we read that there would be an "apostasy" (falling away)...]

I. THE APOSTASY FORETOLD

A. BY THE APOSTLE PAUL...

1. In warning the Ephesian elders - **Ac 20:27-31**
 - a. Of "wolves" coming in from outside the flock
 - b. Of men "from among yourselves" drawing disciples away
2. In warning the church at Thessalonica - **2 Th 2:1-3**
 - a. Of a great "falling away" that must come
 - b. Revealing "the man of sin", "the son of perdition"
3. In warning the evangelist Timothy - **1 Ti 4:1-3; 2 Ti 4:1-4**
 - a. Describing how some will "depart from the faith"
 - 1) Giving heed to "deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons"
 - 2) Forbidding to marry, commanding to abstain from meats
 - b. Describing how some will "not endure sound doctrine"
 - 1) Getting teachers who will tell them what they want to hear
 - 2) Turning from the truth, turning aside to fables

B. BY PETER, JUDE, AND JOHN...

1. Peter warned of false teachers to come - **2 Pe 2:1-2**
 - a. Who will bring in destructive heresies
 - b. Whom many will follow
2. Jude warned of false teachers who were present - **Ju 3-4**
 - a. Who had crept in unnoticed
 - b. Who were turning the grace of God into lewdness
 - c. Who were denying the Lord God and the Lord Jesus Christ
3. John warned of "antichrists" who had come - **1 Jn 2:18-19**
 - a. Many, in fact, had come!
 - b. Indicative of living in the "last hour"

[As Jesus had warned, there would be false prophets (**Mt 7:15**). Before the canon of the New Testament was completed, the apostasy was already underway. As one examines early church history, there are further indications of...]

II. THE APOSTASY FULFILLED

A. A GRADUAL PROCESS...

1. In many cases, innocent at first
 - a. Attempting to deal with errors in and out of the church
 - b. Leading to a change in the organization of the church
 - 1) From autonomous and independent congregations overseen by a plurality of elders (also known as bishops and pastors) - cf. **Ac 14:23; 20:17,28; 1 Pe 5:1-2**
 - 2) To a collectivity of churches under one bishop - e.g., Ignatius
 - c. Resulting in centralization of power and influence among key individuals
 2. This subtle change made it much easier for error to spread
 - a. When those in power began teaching false doctrine
 - b. Before long, the very errors foretold by Paul were being taught - cf. **1 Ti 4:1-3**
 3. Through slow but gradual changes, the seeds of modern churches were sown
 - a. Producing what later became known as the Roman Catholic Church
 - b. But also many other “orthodox” churches (Greek, Egyptian, Russian, Armenian, etc.)
- **Just as foretold, many departed from the simplicity of the Lord’s church**

B. WHAT OF THE LORD’S CHURCH...?

1. I believe the Lord’s church continued on
 - a. For not even the gates of Hades could prevail against it - **Mt 16:18**
 - b. It is a kingdom that cannot be destroyed - cf. **Dan 2:44; Lk 1:32-33**
 - c. Wherever there are faithful disciples, though few and unknown, the church exists - cf. **Ac 2:47**
 2. Faithful disciples would have undoubtedly been treated as heretics
 - a. For refusing to follow those in “power”
 - b. By those presuming to have “authority” over the Lord’s flock
- **History may not record (or may misrepresent) the existence of those who remained faithful, but the Lord knows His own!**

[Throughout the history of the apostasy, many have come to realize what has happened, and efforts made to rectify the problem...]

III. REACTIONS TO THE APOSTASY

A. EFFORTS OF REFORMATION...

1. Attempts by those within to reform what they saw as the “apostate” church
 2. Some reformers were persecuted, either executed or expelled (e.g., Luther)
 3. Followers of such reformers often started new churches (e.g., Lutheran)
- **The end result was denominationalism**

B. APPEALS TO REVELATION...

1. Some claimed modern day revelation as a solution (e.g., Joseph Smith, Ellen G. White)
2. Believing the Lord was using them to lead people out of religious confusion
3. Followers of these “prophets” started many more churches (e.g., Mormon)

-- **The end result was even more denominationalism**

C. CALLS FOR RESTORATION...

1. There have been many calls for “restoration”
 - a. Some seeking to restore the Lord’s church (as though it had been lost)
 - b. Others seeking to restore people back to the Lord’s church (which has always existed)
2. In both cases, efforts usually centered around restoring the New Testament pattern for the local church (organization, worship, work, etc.)
3. In many cases, the efforts appear to have been short-lived
 - a. One generation may have truly been restored to the Lord’s way
 - b. Yet some in that generation and others to follow simply repeated the process of apostasy (e.g., the International Church of Christ)

-- **The end result often being even more denominationalism!**

CONCLUSION

1. Of the three (reformation, revelation, restoration), I believe the Biblical response is **restoration...**
 - a. As illustrated by the restoration of the Jews after Babylonian captivity
 - b. As illustrated by the restorative work of John the Baptist - cf. **Lk 1:16-17**-- **We must be restored back to the church of the New Testament**
2. Yet the principle of restoration works provided we...
 - a. Allow the Word of God to be our only guide and authority - cf. **Ac 20:32; 2 Ti 3:16-17**
 - b. Do not allow traditions of men to replace the commands of God - cf. **Mt 15:3-9**-- **Otherwise we plant the seeds of apostasy and denominationalism all over again!**
3. As followers of Jesus, we do well to imitate His service to God while on earth...
 - a. Living under the Law of Moses which was in force at that time, He was simply a Jew (not a Pharisee, Sadducee, etc.)
 - b. Living under the law of Christ (**1 Co 9:21**) today, we should simply be Christians, not members of some denominational party - cf. **1 Co 1:10-13**

What are you religiously? Involved with the descendants of the apostasy foretold in the Scriptures?
One of those whose response to the falling away has resulted in only another denomination?

Why not simply be a Christian, by letting the Word of God restore you back to the church of our Lord as revealed in the New Testament...? - cf. **Ac 2:36-42,47**

Apostolic Succession

INTRODUCTION

1. In **Mt 16:18** Jesus promised to build His church...
 - a. A church built on a solid foundation
 - b. A church that would never be destroyed
2. Where is His church today...?
 - a. There are many churches claiming to be “the one true church”
 - b. Is it possible to know which church is the “true church”?

[Many people believe that the answer is to be found in...]

I. THE DOCTRINE OF APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION

A. THE DOCTRINE DEFINED...

1. Apostolic succession is the line of bishops stretching back to the apostles. - **Catholic Answers, Apostolic Succession (San Diego: Catholic Answers, 2001)**
 2. All over the world, all Catholic bishops can have their lineage of predecessors traced back to the time of the apostles, something that is impossible in Protestant denominations (most of which do not even claim to have bishops). - **ibid.**
 3. The Church Fathers, who were links in that chain of succession, regularly appealed to apostolic succession as a test for whether Catholics or heretics had correct doctrine. - **ibid.**
- **Such is the view as defined by Roman Catholic sources**

B. THE DOCTRINE DELINEATED...

1. The **Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Nestorian and Anglican Churches** hold that apostolic succession is maintained through the ordination of bishops in unbroken personal succession back to the apostles but do not necessarily interpret this ‘succession’ identically. - **Wikipedia**
2. **Roman Catholics** recognize the validity of the apostolic successions of the **Eastern Orthodox** and **Oriental Orthodox** churches (such recognition is not reciprocated by the **Eastern Orthodox...**) - **ibid.**
3. The **Roman Catholic** church believes that the **Anglican Church’s** ordinations are invalid because of changes made to the rite of ordination under Edward VI, thus denying that Anglicans participate in the apostolic succession. - **ibid.**
4. The **Armenian Apostolic Church**, which is one of the Oriental Orthodox churches, recognizes **Roman Catholic** episcopal consecrations without qualification (and that recognition is reciprocated). - **ibid.**
5. Some Protestant churches, especially **Anglicans** (including those known in the USA as **Episcopalians**), and also **Moravians** and **some Lutherans**, do have Apostolic Succession (also known as the "historic episcopate"). - **ibid.**
6. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (**LDS**) has a similar, but unique position.
 - a. The LDS claims that apostolic succession was broken during the Great Apostasy, or falling away from the teachings of Jesus Christ, and later restored in America. - **ibid.**
 - b. The LDS Church maintains that God the Father and His son, Jesus Christ, appeared to Joseph Smith, Jr. near Palmyra, New York in 1820 and called Joseph as a prophet to

restore Christ's church and correct doctrines and practices to the earth. - **ibid.**

-- **Thus the view is held with some variation by different churches**

C. THE DOCTRINE DEFENDED...

1. Based on **Scripture**

- a. **Mt 16:18** - the assumption is made that apostolic succession is necessary for Jesus' promise concerning the church to be fulfilled
- b. **Ac 20:17,28** - from this passage some assume authority to govern the church universal
- c. **2 Ti 2:2** - this passage is offered as proof of apostolic succession

2. Based on **tradition**

- a. The Church Fathers, who were links in that chain of succession, regularly appealed to apostolic succession as a test for whether Catholics or heretics had correct doctrine.

- **Catholic Answers**

- b. Those who argued for the doctrine apostolic succession include:

- 1) Irenaeus (A.D. 189)
- 2) Tertullian (A.D. 200)
- 3) Cyprian of Carthage (A.D. 253)
- 4) Jerome (A.D. 396)
- 5) Augustine (A.D. 397)

-- See http://www.catholic.com/library/Apostolic_Succession.asp for quotes

[The doctrine of apostolic succession certainly has its advocates. But it is a doctrine with problems upon close examination...]

II. THE PROBLEM WITH APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION

A. THE DOCTRINE DEVALUED...

1. Based on **Scripture**

- a. **Mt 16:18** - if the church universal is the mystical body of Christ, its continuation is not dependent upon a physical succession of church leaders; it requires only the Head (Christ) and members (Christians)
- b. **Ac 20:17,28** - this passage only authorizes the authority of elders (bishops) over a local congregation; no authority is given over the church universal
- c. **2 Ti 2:2** - a succession of teachers was the goal; nothing in this passage supports an unbreakable succession of leaders whose authority was to be unquestioned
- d. **Ac 12:1-2** - when the apostle James was beheaded, no successor was appointed to replace him

2. Based on **history**

- a. The appeal to apostolic succession did not appear before A.D. 170-200 - **Elwell Evangelical Dictionary**
- b. All early succession lists were compiled late in the second century - **ibid.**
- c. It was developed as a means to counter Gnostic and other heresies
- d. It became a convenient way to assert validity and authority, taking precedent over appealing to the Word of God

-- **Today, different churches use their "succession lists" to prove their claim to be the true church; which one are we to believe?**

B. THE DOCTRINE DESTROYED...

1. An apostasy was foretold by the apostles - **1 Ti 4:1-3; 2 Th 2:1-3; 2 Pe 2:1-3**

2. Even some appointed by the apostles would fall away - **Ac 20:29-30**
 3. Those who taught differently from the apostles were to be rejected - cf. **Ga 1:6-9**
 4. Those who first claimed apostolic succession were already teaching things different from what the apostles' taught
 - a. E.g., they taught a distinction between bishops and elders (contra Paul and Peter)
 - b. Those who first claimed apostolic succession were heretics themselves!
 5. Those who claim apostolic succession today teach many things in addition and contrary to the teachings of Christ and His inspired apostles
 - a. The concept of apostolic succession therefore did not prevent apostasy
 - b. Claiming a historical connection does not prove faithfulness; apostates in the line of succession would render such claims untrustworthy
- **Claims of apostolic succession were first made by early apostates; the doctrine of those claiming apostolic succession today is far removed from apostolic teaching**

[Yes, churches claiming apostolic succession today differ quite a bit from the church as revealed in the New Testament. If apostolic succession does not prevent apostasy, what will...?]

III. THE ANSWER TO APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION

A. THE INDESTRUCTIBLE WORD OF GOD...

1. The Word of God is like seed
 - a. It is the seed of the kingdom - **Lk 8:11**; cf. **Mt 13:19**
 - b. It has the power to produce fruit in the hearts of those who receive it - **Mt 13:23**
 2. The Word of God is an incorruptible seed
 - a. An incorruptible seed by which we can be born again - **1 Pe 1:22-23a**; **Ja 1:18**
 - b. It lives and abides forever; it endures forever - **1 Pe 2:23b-25a**
 - c. It is contained in the gospel of Christ - **1 Pe 1:25b**
 3. The Word of God is sufficient for salvation and godliness
 - a. Able to save our souls - **Ja 1:21**
 - b. Profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness - **2 Ti 3:16**
 - c. Making one complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work - **2 Ti 3:17**
 - d. Providing all things pertaining to life and godliness - **2 Pe 1:3**
 4. The Word of God is the antidote to apostasy
 - a. The Faith (i.e., the Word of God) has been revealed once for all - **Ju 3**
 - b. Paul directed elders to the Word of God, not some doctrine of apostolic succession, as the protection against apostasy - cf. **Ac 20:32**
- **We need to appreciate the value of the Word of God to save and secure His people from the dangers of apostasy!**

B. THE SPIRITUAL NATURE OF THE CHURCH...

1. Many have an incorrect view of the universal church (i.e., the kingdom) - **Mt 16:18-19**
 - a. That the church is a physical institution, with a hierarchical organization
 - b. That the organization contains several levels of authority above the local church
 - c. That the church cannot exist without a physical continuation of the hierarchy
 - d. That membership requires approval of the hierarchy
2. Yet contrast that with what is revealed by Christ and His apostles
 - a. The church (or kingdom) is a spiritual institution
 - 1) The kingdom is within you - **Lk 17:20-21**
 - 2) The kingdom is not of this world - **Jn 18:36**

- 3) The kingdom is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit - **Ro 14:17**
 - b. The organization of the church universal is spiritual
 - 1) Christ is the cornerstone, His apostles and prophets are the foundation, and all other Christians are 'living stones' - cf. **Ep 2:19-22; 1 Pe 2:5**
 - 2) Christ is the Head, Christians are members of His body - **1 Co 12:27; Co 1:18**
 - 3) As long as Christ is the Head, His church will exist! - cf. **He 12:22-24,28**
 - c. Earthly organization was limited to the local church
 - 1) A local church when scripturally organized had bishops and deacons - **Ph 1:1**
 - 2) These bishops were also called "elders" or "pastors", whose role was to oversee and feed the local congregation - **Ac 14:23; 20:17,28; 1 Pe 5:1-2**
 - 3) The only authority over the universal church on earth were the apostles, and they were not replaced when they died - e.g., James in **Ac 12:2**
 - d. Membership in the church universal is determined by the Lord
 - 1) He is the one who adds people to His body, when they are saved - **Ac 2:41,47**
 - 2) He knows those who are His - **2 Ti 2:19**
 - 3) He only has the right to blot out our names from the book of Life - **Re 3:5**
- **We need to understand the spiritual nature of the church, to see why there is no need for 'apostolic succession' to preserve the Lord's church today!**

CONCLUSION

1. The doctrine of apostolic succession...
 - a. Is without true scriptural basis
 - b. Was devised by false teachers, in an attempt to counter other false teachers
 - c. Has been used by many different churches, each asserting their own validity and authority
 - d. Yet has not prevented wholesale apostasy from God and His Word
2. The Lord's church mentioned in **Mt 16:18**...
 - a. Is built on the foundation of Christ and His apostles - **Ep 2:19-22**
 - b. Grows whenever people respond to the gospel as proclaimed by the apostles - **Ac 2:38-41,47**
 - c. Is manifested wherever people continue in apostolic doctrine, not traditions of men - **Ac 2:42**
 - d. Is preserved by the power of God and the all-sufficient, once for all revealed, Word of God - **Ac 20:32; 2 Ti 3:16-17; Ju 3**

By remaining faithful to the incorruptible seed, the Word of God, and by His grace, we will receive that "inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (**Ac 20:32**)...

Are You Drifting?

INTRODUCTION

1. Billy Norris writes of a tragic event that resulted from “drifting”:

“Two young men were fishing above a low dam on a river near their hometown. As they were concentrating on catching fish, they were unaware that they had drifted until they were not far from the water flowing over the dam. When they realized their situation, the current near the dam had become too powerful for them to keep their boat from going over. Below the dam the water was dashing with strong force over great boulders and through crevices in the rocks. Caught by the swirling waters under the rocks, they never came to the surface. After days of relentless searching, the divers finally found one body, and then, two or three days later, the other.” (**Gospel Guide**)

2. The danger of drifting is not limited to the physical realm...
 - a. In **He 2:1**, we find a warning against drifting
 - b. Sadly, it is not uncommon for Christians to drift toward destruction!

[Brethren, “**Are You Drifting?**” Would you know it if you were? With this lesson I hope to stimulate careful introspection regarding the danger of drifting away from the Lord. Consider...]

I. THINGS WE SHOULD KNOW ABOUT DRIFTING

A. DRIFTING REQUIRES NO EFFORT...

1. Just stop oaring or tacking against the wind, and a boater will begin to drift
2. The same is true for the Christian, which is why we are told: “*We must give the more earnest heed...*” - **He 2:1**

B. IT IS AN UNCONSCIOUS PROCESS...

1. It is possible to drift unaware
 - a. In a boat, or undercurrents are often unnoticeable from the surface
 - b. In a plane, the wind or gravitational forces move the plane without you realizing it
2. The same is true in the spiritual realm
 - a. Many individual Christians have slowly drifted away
 - b. Many churches have gradually drifted into error

-- Only one day to find themselves far removed from the Scriptures

C. WE NEVER DRIFT UPSTREAM OR AGAINST THE TIDE...

1. Faithfulness to the Lord is like oaring upstream
2. You must constantly be “adding to your faith...” - **2 Pe 1:5**
3. You must continue to grow - **2 Pe 3:18**

-- The moment you stop growing, you start going backwards or downwards

D. THE SPEED DOWNSTREAM INCREASES...

1. The dangers increase with the speed of the drift
 - a. When we can hear the noise of the waterfall, it is already too late
 - b. When we lose sight of land, it is less possible to discover that we are drifting

2. As we move farther and farther from the Lord, we care less and less about what we do

E. IT IS DANGEROUS TO OTHERS...

1. A ship, just drifting, is a hazard to all other vessels at sea
2. Parents who are just drifting, will soon lose golden opportunities to teach their children
- **Ep 6:4**
3. Many are tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of doctrine - **Ep 4:14**

F. IT ENDS IN SHIPWRECK...

1. A boat adrift will crash on the rocks or go over the falls
2. For those who drift spiritually through their own neglect, there shall be no escape from a just punishment - **He 2:1-3**

[The danger of drifting is real, or there would be no need to warn against it. So again I ask, “**Are You Drifting?**” To help answer the question, here are some...]

II. COMMON SIGNS OF DRIFTING

A. DIMINISHING DESIRE TO STUDY GOD’S WORD AND PRAY...

1. The Bible is a unique book - a source of information not found anywhere else
 - a. Without God’s revelation, how could we truly know our origin, purpose, destiny?
 - b. It tells us of sin’s dreadful consequences, and how God saves us from sin
 - c. It provides direction for living happy, useful lives - cf. **Psa 1:1-3**-- **When one loses their desire to study God’s word, they are drifting!**
2. Prayer is a wonderful blessing - an avenue to communicate with God!
 - a. Jesus, who loved His Father, often prayed - **Mk 1:35; 6:46**
 - b. He expressed concern that His disciples not grow weary to pray - **Lk 18:1**-- **When the Christian prays less and less, he is drifting more and more!**

B. DIMINISHING DESIRE TO BE WITH GOD’S PEOPLE...

1. This includes **attending services** to worship God
 - a. One should always have the attitude of the Psalmist - **Psa 122:1**
 - b. If we no longer rejoice in the worship of God in the presence of brethren, we are drifting!
2. Fellowship with God’s people extends **beyond the services** of the church
 - a. We are to be concerned with edifying one another - **Ro 14:19**
 - b. Such edification should occur even daily - **He 3:13**
 - c. For the right kind of friendship strengthens us, while the wrong kind leads us to sin
- cf. **Ecc 4:9-12; 1 Co 15:33**-- **When a Christian prefers the companionship of people of the world, rather than fellow Christians, he is drifting toward the rocks of spiritual destruction!**

C. DIMINISHING DESIRE TO SHARE THE GOSPEL...

1. When one obeys the gospel, he knows God has blotted out his sins, made him a new creature in Christ, and he wants to tell the world about Jesus - cf. **Ac 8:4; 1 Th 1:8**
2. When a Christian no longer has the desire to take the message of salvation to others, he is drifting!

D. INCREASING THRILL OVER THINGS OF THE WORLD...

1. Such as greater thrill over **worldly honors**; for example:
 - a. Parents of one young man were excited beyond measure over a worldly honor he had received
 - b. They had never demonstrated such emotion over spiritual matters
 - c. Within the passing time, the entire family had drifted beyond the point of no return
-- **The apostle John warns us against the love of the world and the things in the world - 1 Jn 2:15-17**
2. Such as increasing enjoyment in **worldly pleasures**
 - a. Paul described some who were “lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God” - **2 Ti 3:4**
 - b. If we reach the point when we find more pleasure in some worldly activity than meeting with others to worship God, we definitely are spiritually adrift!

[Such are some of the signs of drifting away from God. If we are to remain close to God, it will not be easy. Here are...]

III. REMEDIES AGAINST DRIFTING

A. KEEP ROWING...

1. Spiritually speaking, this involves diligence - cf. **2 Pe 1:5,10**
2. It also means to keep abounding in our Christian graces - cf. **2 Pe 1:5-8**
3. There is no place for “retirement” in living the life of a Christian! - cf. **Ph 3:12-15; 2 Co 4:16**

B. WATCH OUT FOR UNDERCURRENTS...

1. We must always be on guard for undercurrent of temptation
2. For we have a fleshly nature which wages war against the soul - **1 Pe 2:11; Ga 5:16-18**

C. EXPECT TO GO AGAINST THE TIDE...

1. There are many tides to sweep us away
 - a. **Popularity, peer pressure, the praise of others**
 - b. **Modernism, skepticism, humanism**
 - c. **Denominationalism** - false doctrines of all kinds
 - d. **Liberalism and worldliness in the church** - probably the greatest enemies of the church in our lifetime
 - e. Neglect -- **indifference, apathy, lack of interest and concern**
2. If one drifts along with the majority, he certainty will be lost - **Mt 7:13-14**

D. WE MUST HAVE STRONG ANCHORAGE...

1. Rooted and grounded in Christ - **Co 2:6-7**
2. Minds must be anchored to the truth - **Ep 4:14-15**
3. Possessing an unshakable hope - cf. **He 6:18-19**
4. Rooted and grounded in the love of Christ - **Ep 3:16-18**

CONCLUSION

1. Brethren, **are we drifting?**
 - a. The danger is real, we would be foolish to say otherwise
 - b. Many have drifted away from the Lord, we would be arrogant to say it could not happen

to us!

2. **Are there signs of drifting in your life?** Honestly ask yourself:
 - a. Is my desire to study God's word and pray diminishing?
 - b. Is my desire to be with God's people not what it has been in the past?
 - c. Have I lost my desire to save those who are lost?
 - d. Am I too much enamored by the things of the world?

If in any way we must confess that we are drifting, then may we encourage one another to give earnest heed as warned by the writer to the Hebrews:

“Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him...” (He 2:1-3)

Brethren, our salvation in Christ is simply too great for us to neglect!

Note: The main idea and many thoughts from this lesson were taken from a lesson by David Riggs.

Are You ‘High Maintenance’?

INTRODUCTION

1. A blessing enjoyed in Christ is support from brethren in times of spiritual crisis...
 - a. Those who are strong are to support the weak - **Ro 15:1**
 - b. Those who are spiritual are to help those overcome in a fault - **Ga 6:1**
 - It is part of the “law of Christ” to thus bear one another’s burdens - **Ga 6:2**

2. At the same time, we have a responsibility to become strong...
 - a. Each Christian has a responsibility to “bear his own load” - **Ga 6:4-5**
 - b. We will be held accountable for our own actions - **Ro 14:12**
 - It is thus our responsibility to pick ourselves up as well - **He 12:12-13**

3. Some Christians never seem to progress from being supported to supporting themselves...
 - a. They remain very dependent upon their brethren
 - b. Unless constantly nurtured by brethren, they fall away or become apathetic
 - Such brethren are what might be described in the vernacular as “high maintenance”

[Are you “high maintenance”? When is it okay to be “high maintenance”? What is “high maintenance”...?]

I. THE DEFINITION OF “HIGH MAINTENANCE”

A. AS USED IN EVERYDAY SPEECH...

1. It refers to the need for a lot of attention
 - a. Required to maintain something in good order
 - b. Requiring a lot of time, energy, or money
2. Any person or thing that requires a lot of attention
 - a. **Cars** that require a lot of work to keep running
 - b. **Employees** that require close supervision to do their jobs right
 - c. **Significant others** that require a lot of gifts or dates or they lose interest

B. AS APPLIED TO CHRISTIANS...

1. Christians are “high maintenance”
 - a. If they require a lot of attention in order to remain faithful
 - b. If they require a lot of coddling or pampering to be active
2. Christians that are “high maintenance”...
 - a. **Babes in Christ** just starting their new spiritual life
 - b. **Slothful Christians** who attend and work only when constantly prodded
3. Even **churches** can be “high maintenance” (or not)
 - a. The church in Corinth certainly was - cf. **1 Co 3:1-4; 2 Co 12:20-21**
 - b. The church in Philippi was not - cf. **Ph 1:3-7**

[Some “high maintenance” is good and necessary in the work of the local church. But when it exists where it should not, then there can be some problems...]

II. THE DIFFICULTY OF “HIGH MAINTENANCE”

A. WHERE IT CAN HELP...

1. “High maintenance” is crucial for **the newborn Christian**
 - a. Just as it is for a physical baby
 - b. Weak in faith, weak in knowledge, they are very susceptible
 - c. Without the proper attention, they may soon be overcome
 2. “High maintenance” is essential for **the hurting Christian**
 - a. Just as it is for someone who is sick or injured
 - b. Overtaken in a fault, suffering physical illness or persecution, they are weak
 - c. Without they proper attention, they may soon be overwhelmed
- **In such cases, “high maintenance” is certainly called for - cf. 1 Th 5:14**

B. WHERE IT CAN HURT...

1. When it **hinders the growth** of the church
 - a. Which grows through evangelism, edification, benevolence
 - b. Which may not if undue effort is spent on a select few
2. When it **holds back the efforts** of workers
 - a. Paul desired to preach where Christ was not named - **Ro 15:20**
 - b. Yet churches like the one at Corinth held him back - **2 Co 2:12-13**
3. When **more serious needs go unmet**
 - a. E.g., babes in Christ not being helped, because others expect coddling
 - b. E.g., the sick and dying being neglected, because others require attention

[There are times in our spiritual lives when we all require some “high maintenance”. But to avoid keeping it from those who really need it, we should give serious thought and effort toward...]

III. THE DEFEAT OF “HIGH MAINTENANCE”

A. THROUGH INDIVIDUAL GROWTH...

1. We need “high maintenance” when we are babes in Christ
 2. But we should reach a point where we do not need it
 3. Where we can become the providers, not just the recipients
- **Consider the unfortunate case of the Hebrew Christians - He 5:12-14**

B. THROUGH INDIVIDUAL STRENGTH...

1. Strength from brethren is certainly helpful when we need it
 2. But we should also reach a point where our strength comes from God
 3. Where we can become the producers, not just the consumers
- **Consider the remarkable example of the apostle Paul - Ph 4:11-13; 2 Co 1:3-6**

CONCLUSION

1. My purpose **has not been to discourage** “high maintenance” when it is rightly needed...
 - a. For we are to bear one another’s burden - **Ga 6:2**
 - b. And the strong are to bear with the infirmities of the weak - **Ro 15:1**
2. My desire **has been to challenge** you in thinking about your service to Christ...
 - a. To reflect about your work in the kingdom - **Ga 6:4**
 - b. Are you bearing your own load? - **Ga 6:5**

When a burden becomes unbearable, that is when we need “high maintenance” from our brethren. When failure to bear our own load requires “high maintenance”, that is when we hinder the cause of Christ...!

***“He who is slothful in his work is a brother to him who is a great destroyer.”
(Pro 18:9)***

Are You Ready For Your Journey Into Eternity?

INTRODUCTION

1. If you were to die today, **would you know for certain that you would be with God eternally?**
2. The Bible tells us we can know for sure - **1 Jn 5:13**
 - a. If it is possible to know, I'd want to know, wouldn't you?
 - b. May I take a few moments of your time to share what the Bible says about receiving eternal life?
3. Before I do, let me ask you another question...
 - a. Suppose you come before Jesus and He asks, **"Why should I let you into heaven?"**
 - b. How would you answer Him?
4. Some might answer...
 - a. "I kept the Ten Commandments"
 - b. "I attended church regularly"
 - c. "I was a good moral person"
 - d. "I was a good neighbor"

-- **These and similar answers imply an understanding that salvation is earned**
5. Yet the good news (gospel) of the Bible is that **eternal life is a gift...**
 - a. "...the gift of God is eternal life..." - cf. **Ro 6:23**
 - b. As a gift, it is not something we earn or deserve!

[Why is eternal life a gift? The answer lies in understanding man's problem with sin...]

I. THE NEED OF GRACE

A. THE BIBLE TEACHES ALL HAVE SINNED...

1. Sin is violating the law of God - **1 Jn 3:4**
 2. Sin is failing to do what is right - **Ja 4:17**
- **Everyone has sinned in some way - Ro 3:23**

B. THE BIBLE DESCRIBES THE CONSEQUENCES OF SIN...

1. The wages of sin is death! - **Ro 6:23**
 2. What kind of death? Everlasting separation from God! - cf. **Re 21:8**
 - a. Have you done any of these?
 - b. Just a few?
- **Even if just one sin, we are still guilty! - Ja 2:10-11**

[While everyone is guilty of sin and deserving of death, there is hope in ...]

II. THE SOLUTION OF GRACE

A. GOD OFFERS THE GIFT OF LIFE...

1. In mercy God offers the gift of eternal life - **Ro 6:23**
 2. He does this through the death of His Son - **Ro 5:8**
 3. Out of love, God sent Jesus to be a sacrifice for our sins - **1 Jn 4:9-10**
 - a. On the cross, Jesus paid the price for our sins!
 - b. Through His death, Jesus made eternal life possible!
- **What wonderful love, what a wonderful gift! Yet sadly...**

B. FEW RECEIVE THE GIFT OF LIFE...

1. Because many will not look for it - cf. **Mt 7:13-14**
 2. Because many will not have done the Father's will - cf. **Mt 7:21-23**
 - a. Though they may do many things in the name of Jesus
 - b. Remember, doing good things does not merit eternal life
- **Only those who do the Father's will have eternal life! - cf. 1 Jn 2:15-17**

[What is the Father's will that we might receive the gift of eternal life...?]

III. THE RECEPTION OF GRACE

A. BELIEVE IN JESUS...

1. We must believe in Him whom God has sent - cf. **Jn 6:28-29,40**
 2. Believing in Christ involves more than mental consent - e.g., **Jn 12:42,43**
 3. A faith which does not express itself in action is a death faith - cf. **Ja 2:26**
- **How are we to express our faith in Christ?**

B. REPENT OF SINS...

1. Jesus requires repentance - cf. **Lk 13:3; 24:46-47**
 2. True repentance is:
 - a. A change of heart which will result in a change of life
 - b. A change brought about by sorrow for our sins - cf. **2 Co 7:9-11**
- **In repenting, we decide to turn from sin and turn to God!**

C. CONFESS FAITH IN JESUS...

1. Together with faith, confessing Jesus leads to salvation - **Ro 10:9-10**
 2. Confessing Jesus means to acknowledge Him as the Son of God - cf. **Ac 8:37**
- **Confess Jesus before others, and He will confess us before God! - Mt 10:32-33**

D. RECEIVE CHRIST IN BAPTISM...

1. Note first these spiritual truths:
 - a. All spiritual blessings are in Christ - **Ep 1:3**
 - b. Salvation is in Christ - **2 Ti 2:10**
 - c. There is no condemnation in Christ - **Ro 8:1**
 - d. Eternal life is in Christ - **1 Jn 5:11**
2. All these blessings are in Christ
 - a. It is one thing to believe in Jesus, quite another to get into Jesus
 - b. How does one get into Jesus? The same way you get into a coat (you put it on)
3. We get into Jesus by putting Him on in baptism - cf. **Ga 3:26-27**
 - a. As many as are baptized into Christ, have put on Christ
 - b. Those not yet baptized into Christ, have not yet put on Christ
 - c. If we have not put on Christ, we are not yet in Christ

4. What is baptism?
 - a. An immersion (burial) of the believer in water - **Ac 8:35-38**
 - b. Administered to the penitent for the remission of sins - **Ac 2:38**
 - c. In which we are:
 - 1) Baptized into the death of Jesus - **Ro 6:3**
 - 2) Buried with Him into His death - **Ro 6:4a**
 - 3) Raised with Him that we might walk in newness of life - **Ro 6:4b**
 - d. A working of God in cooperation with our faith - **Co 2:11-13**
 - 1) In which our sins are cut away (circumcised)
 - 2) In which we are made alive, forgiven of all sins
- **Not a work of righteousness done to earn salvation, but an act of faith submitted to in order to receive God's grace and mercy - cf. Ti 3:5-7**

E. REMAIN FAITHFUL TO JESUS...

1. Jesus expected us to learn and follow Him after baptism - **Mt 28:19-20**
2. Jesus promises the crown of life to those who remain faithful - **Re 2:10**

CONCLUSION

1. Though deserving of death because of sin...
 - a. We can receive God's gift of eternal life!
 - b. By expressing our faith in Christ through repentance, confession, and baptism!
2. **Two examples** confirm this is how God's gift of grace is extended...
 - a. Peter on the day of Pentecost - **Ac 2:36-42,47**
 - b. Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch - **Ac 8:35-39**
 - **Note what people were told to receive forgiveness of sins (the gift of eternal life)**
3. Does this make sense...?
 - a. Is there anything I have said you do not understand?
 - b. Have I taught you anything other than what the Bible teaches?

If you are willing to place your faith in Jesus, repent of your sins, confess your faith before others, then let these words move you to respond in the proper way...

“And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” (Ac 22:16)

Yes, why wait, when you can put on Christ in baptism and prepare yourself for your “journey into eternity”?

Are You The Pastor?

INTRODUCTION

1. “**Are you the pastor?**” is a question that I am frequently asked...
 - a. When people visit our services
 - b. When someone calls the church building

-- **A similar question when people learn that I preach: “What church do you pastor?”**
2. The questions are well intentioned, but misinformed...
 - a. Most people are not aware of the Biblical use of the word “pastor”
 - b. Indeed, most “pastors” today are not even qualified to be a pastor in the Biblical sense

[If we desire to use Bible words in Bible ways, then we do well to consider the proper meaning and use of the word “pastor”...]

I. “PASTOR” IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

A. THE WORD DEFINED...

1. The English word “pastor” is found only one time in the NT!
 - a. Listed along with apostles, prophets, evangelists and teachers - **Ep 4:11**
 - b. Interesting how a word found only once has become almost the universal term for addressing ministers of any sort!
2. The Greek word is **poimen**, and means “a shepherd (literally or figuratively): - shepherd, pastor” - **Strong**
 - a. The English word “shepherd” is found seventeen (17) times in the NT
 - b. Literally, in such passages as **Lk 2:8,15,18,20**
 - c. Figuratively, in such passages as **Jn 10:11,14; He 13:20; 1 Pe 2:25**

-- **So in Ep 4:11, it means “shepherds” metaphorically; but who were they?**

B. THE POSITION DESCRIBED...

1. The pastors or shepherds in the NT church were the “elders” of the congregation
 - a. “Compare **Ac 20:28**, which, with **Ac 20:17**, indicates that this was the service committed to elders (overseers or bishops); so also in **1 Pe 5:1-2**” - **Vine**
 - b. I.e., it was the elders who had the duty to be overseers (bishops) and to shepherd (pastor) and feed the flock of God
2. What the NT reveals is not three distinct offices, but different ways to describe the spiritual leaders of a congregation and their work:
 - a. Elders (Grk., **presbuteros**, presbyter) for they were older men - **Ac 14:23; 20:17**
 - b. Bishops (Grk. **episkopos**, overseer) for their task was to oversee the congregation - cf. **Ac 20:28; 1 Pe 5:1-2**
 - c. Pastors (Grk. **poimen**, shepherd) for their task was to shepherd and feed the flock of God - cf. **Ac 20:28; 1 Pe 5:1-2**
3. The NT also reveals that there was always a **plurality** of elders (pastors) in a congregation
 - a. Never just one, but at least two
 - b. Which served to prevent one-man rule over a congregation

-- **So the pastors were elders (presbyters), also known as a bishops (overseers); but what were their qualifications?**

C. THE QUALIFICATIONS DELINEATED...

1. The qualifications for elder-bishop-pastor are found in two places
 - a. In Paul's instructions to Timothy - **1 Ti 3:1-7**
 - b. In Paul's charge to Titus - **Ti 1:5-9**
 2. Note that these passages describe what an elder-bishop-pastor "**must be**", including:
 - a. The husband of one wife (i.e., a married man)
 - b. With believing children (i.e., children who are faithful)
 3. Such qualifications rule out:
 - a. Single "pastors"
 - b. Childless "pastors"
 - c. Female "pastors"
- **In light of what pastors "must be", many who claim to be pastors really aren't pastors in the Biblical sense**

[At this point, one may wonder: "Well, if you are not a pastor, then what are you and what role do you serve in the church?" It may therefore help to consider...]

II. "PASTOR" COMPARED WITH OTHER TERMS

A. EVANGELIST...

1. This word is found three times in the NT
 - a. The same place where the word "pastor" is found once - **Ep 4:11**
 - b. Philip, one of the original seven appointed to help needy widows, was later described as "the evangelist" - **Ac 21:8**; cf. **8:4-5,40**
 - c. Timothy was charged to do "the work of an evangelist" - **2 Ti 4:5**
 2. "The term **euaggelistes** describes a proclaimer of good news (gospel, **euangelion**)."
- **Ferrell Jenkins, The Early Church**
 - a. "It is popular in modern times to think of an evangelist as one who travels from place to place." - **ibid.**
 - b. "The idea of travel is not inherent in the word evangelist" - **ibid.**
 - c. Philip evidently spent twenty years in Caesarea (**Ac 8:40; 21:8**); Timothy was charged to remain in Ephesus (**1 Ti 1:3**)
 3. The work of an evangelist in relation to a congregation - **ibid.**
 - a. Preach the word - **2 Ti 4:1-5**
 - b. Put the brethren in mind of truth - **1 Ti 4:6**
 - c. Reprove sinners, including elders if necessary - **1 Ti 5:19-21**
 - d. Set in order, lead in appointing elders, teach qualifications - **Ti 1:5**
 - e. Teaching and training of teachers - **2 Ti 2:2**
 - f. Teach against false doctrine and silence false teachers - **1 Ti 1:3-4; Ti 1:11,13**
 - g. Set an example for the brethren - **1 Ti 4:12; Ti 2:7**
 - h. Give attention to reading, exhortation, teaching - **1 Ti 4:13; 2 Ti 2:15**
 4. The work between that of pastors and evangelists contrasted:
 - a. An elder (pastor) is to take heed to self and to the **flock** - **Ac 20:28**
 - b. An evangelist is to take heed to self and to his **teaching** - **1 Ti 4:16**
- **An evangelist is not a pastor (unless qualified and appointed to serve in a dual role, along with other pastors in the congregation), but a minister of the Word of God**

B. PREACHER...

1. This word, or related words (preach, preaching) is found many times in the Scriptures
 - a. It describes the ministry of John the Baptist - **Mt 3:1**
 - b. It describes the ministry of Jesus - **Mt 4:17,23; 9:35**
 - c. It describes what Philip and Paul did with the gospel - **Ac 8:5; 9:20**
 - d. It's role in saving souls is emphasized - **Ro 10:14-15**
 - e. Timothy was charge to preach the word - **2 Ti 4:2**
2. "The term **kerux** is used of a herald, messenger, or proclaimer" - **Jenkins**
- **A preacher, then, would likely be an evangelist, proclaiming the gospel of Christ to lost souls; once saved, pastors (elders) were to watch over those souls**

C. MINISTER...

1. "This term (Greek, **diakonos**) describes a servant (**1 Ti 4:6**)." - **Jenkins**
 - a. "The term is not limited to the preacher; it is used of deacons and other servants (**1 Ti 3:8,12**)." - **ibid.**
 - b. "The preacher is not to be **the** (only) minister of a church." - **ibid.**
2. Indeed, all those who serve in some capacity can rightly be called ministers
 - a. Deacons, of course, because that is what their very name means - **1 Ti 3:8**
 - b. Evangelists or preachers, for they are ministers:
 - 1) Used by God to reach out to the lost - **1 Co 3:5**
 - 2) Of the new covenant - **2 Co 3:6**
 - 3) Of God - **2 Co 6:4; 1 Th 3:2**
 - 4) Of Christ - **2 Co 11:23; 1 Ti 4:6**
 - c. Those who serve a congregation in some way - **Ro 16:1; Co 1:7**
- **Even pastors can rightly be called "ministers", in the sense that they serve God and His flock by watching over the flock; but a minister is not necessarily a pastor!**

CONCLUSION

1. Who can rightly be called a "pastor" according to the Bible...?
 - a. Those elders-bishops, who are charged to shepherd (pastor) the flock of God
 - b. Those who meet all the qualifications as listed by Paul in **1 Ti 3:1-7; Ti 1:5-9**
 - c. Who watch over a congregation not alone, but with a least another pastor duly qualified
2. Those often referred to as "pastor" might more properly be thought of as...
 - a. Preachers, evangelists
 - b. Teachers, ministers

Such is certainly true in my case, as I serve the Lord as a minister of the Word and of the gospel of Christ. Speaking of which, have you heard the wonderful gospel of Jesus Christ...? - **Ro 10:14-15**

Attitudes Needed In Congregational Work

INTRODUCTION

1. As Christians work together in a local congregation, the right attitudes are necessary...
 - a. All the talent in the world cannot make up for the wrong attitudes
 - b. With the right attitudes, our efforts in service to the Lord are enhanced and live up to their full potential
2. In what areas should we be concerned about our attitudes?
 - a. Our attitude toward God
 - b. Our attitude toward ourselves as individuals
 - c. Our attitude toward our brethren
 - d. Our attitude toward the work we do together as a church

-- **In a least these four areas, we must be sure to maintain the proper attitudes**

[And what are the proper attitudes? Let's begin with our...]

I. ATTITUDES TOWARD GOD

A. LOVE...

1. We must have the right kind of love toward God
 2. Jesus defined that kind of love in **Mt 22:37**
- **Do we love the Lord with all our heart, soul, and mind?**

B. FAITH AND TRUST...

1. Faith is a strong conviction and trust in things one does not see - **He 11:1**
 2. Without faith, it is impossible to please God - **He 11:6**
- **Do we have the kind of faith which pleases God? If not, cf. Ro 10:17**

C. THANKFULNESS...

1. Every Christian should have "the attitude of gratitude" - cf. **Co 3:17; Ep 5:20**
 2. God's righteous indignation is toward those who have become unthankful - cf. **Ro 1:18-21**
- **An attitude of thankfulness for the blessings we have will help allay the bitterness that often destroys the spirit in any congregation**

[If our relationship with God is right, it increases the likelihood that our relationship with others will be smooth as well (cf. **Pro 16:7**). What also helps are the proper...]

II. ATTITUDES TOWARD OUR SELVES

A. HUMILITY...

1. A humble estimation of one's self is very important - **Ro 12:3,16**
 2. Humility includes a willingness to serve, even to do "menial" tasks - **Jn 13:6-17**
 3. "Show me a man who cannot bother to do little things and I'll show you a man who cannot be trusted to do big things" (**Lawrence D. Bell**) - cf. **Mt 25:21**
- **Are we humble enough to serve your fellow brother?**

B. TEACHABILITY...

1. To be teachable is to be wise - **Pro 15:31,32**
 2. Teachability includes:
 - a. An eagerness to learn and grow
 - b. The ability to learn from correction, to profit from advice and criticism
 3. The old as well as the young need a teachable attitude: “Education is too good to limit to the young” (**Elton Trueblood**)
- **How teachable are we, when it comes to opportunities to study God’s word?**

C. HONESTY TOWARD OUR MISTAKES...

1. This includes a willingness to admit our mistakes - cf. **Ja 5:16**
 2. And a willingness to correct them
- **Everyone makes a mistakes; a congregation that functions well and grows is one filled with people who learn from their mistakes!**

[The attitudes of humility, teachability, and honesty will certainly prepare us to be useful to the Lord. They will also have a bearing on our relationship with others in the congregation. Let’s now focus our attention on...]

III. ATTITUDES TOWARD OUR BRETHREN

A. LOVE...

1. Jesus taught us the necessity of loving our brethren - **Jn 13:34-35**
 2. We have been born again that we might love one another fervently - **1 Pe 1:22-23**
- **If we truly love one another, how can we not work together?**

B. COOPERATION...

1. This involves a willingness to work together, as God intended - **1 Co 12:21**
 2. We need to be able not only to work, but to work together!
 3. “It marks a big step in a man’s development when he comes to realize that other men can be called on to help him do a better job than he can do alone.” (**Andrew Carnegie**)
- **Where there is cooperation, a good way of doing things will be more productive than a better way of doing thing where cooperation does not exist!**

C. APPRECIATION FOR OTHERS AND THEIR WORK...

1. We need to appreciate what others are doing - e.g., **1 Co 1:14; 1 Th 5:12,13**
 2. True appreciation for others will eliminate destructive criticism, gossip, divisiveness
- **Expressing appreciation is like grease on the gears of a machine...it makes others do their work much better!**

D. SUBMISSIVENESS...

1. We are to submit to one another - **Ep 5:21**
 2. And we are to submit to those in positions of leadership (e.g., elders) - **He 13:17**
- **Too many chiefs, not enough Indians...that is a common problem in many**

E. PEACEABLENESS...

1. Peace among brethren is something that we should pursue - **Ro 14:19**
 2. It is part of walking worthy of our calling - **Ep 4:1-3**
- **The true children of God are those who are peacemakers, and sow their deeds of**

F. HOSPITALITY...

1. Christians are to be hospitable - **Ro 12:13**
2. This includes both hospitality to strangers and to brethren - cf. **He 13:2; 1 Pe 4:9**
- **A factor in the rapid spread of the church in the first century was the hospitality**

extend

G. WARMTH, FRIENDLINESS, OPENNESS...

1. We see this expressed by those in the church at Jerusalem - **Ac 2:44-47**
2. It continued with the saints in Antioch - **Ac 11:27-30**

H. GENTLENESS, MEEKNESS...

1. Especially necessary in dealing with the spiritual weak - **Ga 6:1**
2. But also in dealing with those who oppose us - **2 Ti 2:24-26**

I. FORGIVENESS, FORBEARANCE, PATIENCE, LONGSUFFERING...

1. All of these attitudes overlap, and are very important - **Ep 4:2,32**
2. They help smooth out the bumps and obstacles that Satan will put in our way in his effort to destroy the local church

[Finally, let's survey some of the necessary...]

IV. ATTITUDES TOWARD OUR WORK

A. GRATITUDE FOR THE PRIVILEGE OF OUR WORK...

1. Paul certainly possessed this attitude - **1 Ti 1:12; 1 Co 15:9,10**
2. Do we appreciate what an honor it is to offer service in kingdom of our Lord?

B. ENTHUSIASM, EAGERNESS...

1. Remember, God loves a cheerful giver - **2 Co 9:7**
2. Nothing is so easy but that it becomes difficult if done with reluctance
3. Nothing is so hard that it cannot be made easier with enthusiasm

C. INDUSTRIOUSNESS, DILIGENCE, ENERGY...

1. Like those in Nehemiah's day, we need a "mind to work" - **Neh 4:6**
2. If we are to serve men "heartily", how much more the Lord - **Co 3:23**
3. Some people are like blisters...they never show up until the work is almost done
4. The slothful person is just as harmful as the destructive person - **Pro 18:9**

D. INITIATIVE...

1. Initiative has been defined as willingness to do what is right without having to be prodded
2. We should not have to be reminded constantly of our responsibilities - cf. **1 Ti 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6**
3. When you see something that needs to be done, don't criticize, energize! (i.e., do it yourself!)

E. POSITIVENESS...

1. We are to do things without murmuring and grumbling - **Ph 2:14**
2. The chronic complainer and the negative thinker are obstructions to the work of a congregation

F. PERSISTENCE...

1. We must have the attitude of Christ, not just to do, but to finish the work of God - **Jn 4:34**
2. We need “finishative” as well as “initiative” - cf. **He 6:12**
3. Then we can say with Paul: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” - **2 Ti 4:7**

CONCLUSION

1. Ideal attitudes make for ideal working conditions among the members of a local church...
 - a. Attitude improvement can be compared to the woodcutter sharpening his ax - **Ecc 10:10**
 - b. If we want the work of the congregation to go smooth, hone our attitudes!
2. Certainly the attitudes described this lesson will help the cause of Christ in any congregation...
 - a. They will improve our relation with God, ourselves, our brethren, and our work
 - b. They will make us “useful to the Master, prepared for every good work” - **2 Ti 2:21**

Are we developing the right kind of attitudes that prepare us for the work of the Lord?

Note: The main idea and several thoughts from this lesson were taken from a lesson by Gary Henry. The URL for his web site containing many excellent articles and sermon outlines is:
<http://www.brasstacks.org>

Back To The Basics!

INTRODUCTION

1. A disturbing trend seen too often in many churches is the apparent apathy of many Christians
 - a. They may attend services, but it appears that they are only “going through the motions”
 - b. Their singing, their praying, their Bible Study, their zeal, seems listless
 - c. To rephrase Thoreau: “The mass of [Christians] lead lives of quiet desperation.”-- **Certainly God desires more for His children! - cf. Ro 15:13**
2. I suspect the problem is one akin to an athlete or a sport team which is “**in a slump**”...
 - a. Such a person or team "goes through the motions", but they are not performing up to their true potential
 - b. The solution in sports: **Work on the fundamentals!**
3. The same is true with Christians; when we find ourselves in a slump...
 - a. We need to stress the fundamentals - cf. **Re 2:4-5**
 - b. We need to get “**Back To The Basics!**”

[In this lesson I would like to stress some of the fundamentals or “basics” that we need to get back to whenever our lives are in a spiritual slump. I.e., my first suggestion would be to...]

I. ENERGIZE YOUR FAITH

A. DEFINING FAITH...

1. A Scriptural definition of faith is found in **He 11:1**
2. The NIV is helpful: “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”
3. Vine's describes faith as **a firm conviction**
4. I like to think of faith as **confident trust**

B. IMPORTANCE OF FAITH...

1. Faith in God is essential to pleasing Him - **He 11:6**
2. Faith in Jesus is essential to finding forgiveness and eternal life - **Jn 8:24; 20:30-31**
3. Without faith, the only alternative is doubt accompanied with fear - cf. **Mt 14:30-31**

C. ENERGIZING YOUR FAITH...

1. The Word of God is designed to produce faith - cf. **Ro 10:17; Jn 20:30-31**
2. Through diligent reading of the Bible, we can energize our faith!

[So when you find yourself in a spiritual slump, pick up your Bible and allow it to rebuild that **confident trust** you once had! It will also help you to...]

II. FORTIFY YOUR HOPE

A. DEFINING HOPE...

1. It is not wishful thinking, or an insecure “I hope so”
2. Vine's describes it as **a confident expectation**

3. A common definition of hope is **desire plus expectation**

B. IMPORTANCE OF HOPE...

1. Hope is necessary to persevere - **Ro 8:25; 1 Th 1:3**
2. Hope is necessary for our motivation to become pure - **1 Jn 3:2-3**
3. Hope is necessary to increase opportunities to evangelize - **1 Pe 3:15**
- Without hope, we not only lose our souls, we won't be any good for saving others!

C. FORTIFYING YOUR HOPE...

1. The Word of God was written to produce hope - **Ro 15:4**
 - a. Through its revelation of God's dealings with man in the past, we know God keeps His promises
 - b. This encourages us to expect Him to deliver on His promises for the future
2. Peter encourages us to "rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" - **1 Pe 1:13**
 - a. Where do read of the grace that is to come when Christ is revealed?
 - b. In the Scriptures, of course!
 - c. Nothing fortifies our hope better than those wonderful passages that reveal the eternal destiny of the saints!

[When an athlete gets discouraged, he or she is often told to "**keep your eye on the prize!**" So the Christian must do, and it is with the aid of God's Word that we can keep our focus where it ought to be. Getting "**Back To The Basics**" will also include an effort to...]

III. ACTIVATE YOUR LOVE

A. DEFINING LOVE...

1. Paul gives the best definition of love - **1 Co 13:4-8a**
2. A simple definition that is easy to remember: **active goodwill**

B. IMPORTANCE OF LOVE...

1. Expressing love gives us assurance of our salvation - cf. **1 Jn 3:14,18-19**
2. Expressing love assures us that God will answer our prayers - **1 Jn 3:22-23**
3. Expressing love reassures us that we abide in God, and He in us - **1 Jn 4:7-8,12,16**

C. ACTIVATING YOUR LOVE...

1. Like the Thessalonians, we can be taught by God how to love - cf. **1 Th 4:9**
 - a. Jesus taught us how to love by His sacrificial life - **1 Jn 3:16**
 - b. God taught us how to love by giving His Son as a propitiation for sins - **1 Jn 4:9-11**
2. Through careful meditation upon what the Bible reveals about God's love for us, we can activate our love for others!

[As we continue to list what is involved in getting "**Back To The Basics**", I also encourage you to...]

IV. ENHANCE YOUR JOY

A. DEFINING JOY...

1. The Greek word is **chara**, and is closely related to the word **charis**
 - a. **charis** (grace) is **undeserved favor** which in turn gives joy, pleasure, delight

- b. **chara** (joy), then, is the response we have to undeserved favor
- 2. I like to think of joy as the **delightful response** to the grace we receive from God

B. IMPORTANCE OF JOY...

- 1. Joy is an essential element of what constitutes the Kingdom of God - **Ro 14:17**
- 2. Joy lightens the burden of trials in this life - **1 Pe 1:6-9; He 10:32-34**
- 3. It is often the loss of this virtue that is most evident in the lives of many Christians!

C. ENHANCING YOUR JOY...

- 1. Both Jesus and His apostles gave us words whereby our joy might be full - **Jn 15:11; 1 Jn 1:4**
 - a. Once again we see the value of **daily Bible study**
 - b. Just as the Bible can...
 - 1) Energize your faith
 - 2) Fortify your hope
 - 3) Activate your love...so it can Enhance your joy!
- 2. Jesus also stressed the importance of **prayer** in regards to joy - **Jn 16:24**
 - a. Answered prayer certainly excites the Christian, and increases joy!
 - b. So to the practice of daily Bible study, a key to getting “**Back To The Basics!**” is the habit of regular prayer

[There is one more **basic** I would like to point out before we conclude this study. You should also...]

V. ENJOY YOUR PEACE

A. DEFINING PEACE...

- 1. Vine's describes peace as **harmonious relations**
- 2. It is used to describe such harmony between...
 - a. Men
 - b. Nations
 - c. God and man
 - d. One's own self
- 3. A lack of peace often contributes to the “spiritual doldrums” that afflict many Christians

B. IMPORTANCE OF PEACE...

- 1. Another crucial element constituting the Kingdom of God - **Ro 14:17-19**
- 2. Peace with brethren contributes to receiving peace from God - **2 Co 13:11**
- 3. And having peace with God has a positive effect in our peace with our enemies - **Pro 16:7**

C. ENJOYING YOUR PEACE...

- 1. Peace with God begins with justification found only in Christ - **Ro 5:1**
- 2. It continues in response to **fervent prayer** - cf. **Ph 4:6-7**
 - a. Just as prayer can “enhance our joy”
 - b. So can prayer help us to “enjoy our peace” that surpasses all understanding!

CONCLUSION

- 1. **Faith, hope, love, joy, peace...**

- a. Simple words, aren't they?
 - b. Yet so essential to the "abundant life" Jesus has to offer those who come to Him!
2. Why are they often in short supply in the lives of many Christians?
 - a. Because they **neglect** two fundamental tools God provides for them
 - b. These tools? **The Word of God** and **prayer!**
 3. Brethren, whenever you find yourself in a spiritual "slump", let these two avenues of communication with God be the key to...
 - a. **Energize your faith!**
 - b. **Fortify your hope!**
 - c. **Activate your love!**
 - d. **Enhance your joy!**
 - e. **Enjoy your peace!**
 4. Restoring the basic elements of the abundant life found only in Christ is not a mystery...
 - a. Receive the implanted Word of God! - **Ja 1:21**
 - b. Continue earnestly in prayer! - **Co 4:2**

It's just that simple!

The Benefits Of A Small Church

INTRODUCTION

1. Churches come in all sizes...
 - a. Some are large, numbering in the thousands, even tens of thousands
 - b. Some are small, with as few as two or more people meeting in a home
2. The definition of church sizes is rather arbitrary, but here is one...
 - a. A **small** church is **less than 200** members (80% of churches)
 - b. A **medium** church has **201-400** members (10% of churches)
 - c. A **large** church as **401+** members (10% of churches)
 - For some, even 200 members constitute a large church
3. Each size has its advantages...
 - a. There are things a larger church can do with its increased resources
 - b. But there are benefits of small churches often lost in larger churches

[My purpose is not to encourage stagnation in church growth, but to remind us of the benefits (and obligations) of a small church lest we become discouraged...]

I. BENEFITS OF A SMALL CHURCH

A. STRONGER SENSE OF FAMILY...

1. A small church is one where almost **everyone knows each another**
 - a. Face-to-face interaction is much easier
 - b. Even when we don't remember their names, we remember their "face"
2. A small church is one where it is **easier to develop familial relationships**
 - a. A sense of "family", which is proper - cf. **1 Ti 5:1-2**
 - b. An opportunity to cross generational lines
 - 1) Where children learn to relate to others besides their peers
 - 2) Where young and old benefit from each other's strengths
- **The family of God is a wonderful blessing (Mk 10:28-30); a blessing most often experienced in small churches**

B. GREATER OPPORTUNITIES TO GROW...

1. More likely that **we are needed**
 - a. The roles to fulfill are not that much different between large and small churches
 - 1) Roles such as serving in public worship, Bible classes, etc.
 - 2) Whether large or small, the number of teachers, preachers, song leaders, etc., that are needed is about the same
 - b. The ratio of roles to members is usually much greater in small churches
 - 1) Simply because we do not have a large pool of members to choose from
 - 2) Therefore there is often a greater need in small churches
2. More likely that **we are used**
 - a. Larger churches often require a large rotation in its use of members
 - 1) Opportunities to preach, teach classes, serve in the public worship may be rare
 - 2) One may have the opportunity to be used only once in a long while

- b. Smaller churches use those willing to serve much more frequently
 - 1) Out of necessity at times, but can also be by design
 - 2) Small churches are often the training ground where leaders for large churches developed their skills
 - 3. More likely that **we are missed**
 - a. One's absence is more keenly felt in a small church
 - 1) Especially when needed to fulfill a certain role (e.g., Bible class teacher)
 - 2) One's absence can be overlooked for several weeks in a larger church
 - b. For those needing encouragement, this is important
 - 1) It is too easy to get lost in a crowd
 - 2) We need brethren who will take notice when we begin to show signs of weakness
- cf. **Ga 6:1-2**
- Proportionally speaking, more preachers, teachers, elders, and average members have been developed by small churches than large churches**

[Of course, there are many things a large church can do that a small church cannot. But small churches have their benefits that we need to appreciate. They also have their obligations...]

II. THE OBLIGATIONS OF A SMALL CHURCH

A. NURTURE SENSE OF FAMILY...

- 1. Congregationally, by providing opportunities for spiritual fellowship
 - a. E.g., Bible classes, gospel meetings, etc.
 - b. E.g., visitation programs, to encourage the weak, minister to the sick
 - 2. Individually, by providing opportunities for hospitality
 - a. E.g., inviting others into our homes, going out together
 - b. E.g., getting together for social occasions, such as potlucks
- As we seek to nurture our sense of family, we must be careful not to just limit our efforts to those in our physical families!**

B. PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH...

- 1. Training those willing to learn and serve
 - a. E.g., men's classes on serving in public worship, preaching, teaching
 - b. E.g., ladies' classes on teaching ladies, children
 - 2. Utilizing those willing to develop their abilities and talents
 - a. E.g., providing opportunities for men willing to preach, lead singing, etc.
 - b. E.g., likewise for women willing to teach children, other women, etc.
- We should not feel that a preacher is shirking his duties when he opens his pulpit or Bible classes so others can grow through such experiences - cf. 2 Ti 2:2**

C. WATCH FOR STAGNATION...

- 1. It is tempting to want to remain small
 - a. Because of the advantages of a small congregation
 - b. Its warmth, friendliness, etc.
 - 2. The Lord expects us to grow - cf. **Mt 13:31-32; Jn 15:1-2**
 - a. We should not be content to remain small
 - b. We should be seeking to grow both as individuals and as a congregation
- If we are not on an upward spiral of growth, we are likely heading downward**

CONCLUSION

1. Again, there are advantages to different sizes in congregations...
 - a. My point has not been to suggest one size is superior to another
 - b. My purpose has been to ensure we do not let smallness become a hindrance

2. As a small congregation...
 - a. We need to focus on our strengths, which should lead to growth
 - b. If we do not, we will likely stagnate, if not die altogether

Focus on our strengths as a small congregation, and it is more likely we will remain healthy when we become a larger congregation!

Biblical Illiteracy

INTRODUCTION

1. A growing problem is one of **“Biblical Illiteracy”**...
 - a. Not just by those in the world
 - b. Also in the church
 - **“Americans revere the Bible - but, by and large, they don't read it. And because they don't read it, they have become a nation of biblical illiterates.” - George Gallup and Jim Castelli**

2. How bad is it? Consider these results from various surveys...
 - a. Fewer than half of all adults can name the four gospels
 - b. Many professing Christians cannot identify more than two or three of the disciples
 - c. 60 percent of Americans can't name even five of the Ten Commandments
 - d. 82 percent of Americans believe “God helps those who help themselves” is a Bible verse
 - e. 12 percent of adults believe that Joan of Arc was Noah's wife
 - f. A survey of graduating high school seniors revealed that over 50 percent thought that Sodom and Gomorrah were husband and wife
 - g. A considerable number of respondents to one poll indicated that the Sermon on the Mount was preached by Billy Graham
 - **“Increasingly, America is biblically illiterate.” - George Barna**

[**“Biblical Illiteracy”** is like a poison, wreaking havoc in the lives of individuals, in our churches, and in our communities. To understand how, consider...]

I. THE POISON OF BIBLICAL ILLITERACY

A. ITS EFFECT ON INDIVIDUALS...

1. God's people have always been destroyed by lack of knowledge - **Hos 4:1,6**
2. Where there is lack of God's Word, the people faint - cf. **Amo 8:11-13**
 - a. In ignorance they make the wrong choices
 - b. When they stumble, they do not know where to turn
3. Without a knowledge of God's Word, a person has...
 - a. No real direction or guidance in life - **Psa 119:105**
 - b. No true joy or peace in life - **Psa 119:111,165**
- **How many lives are being destroyed, how many people are stumbling through life, because they do not have the light of God's Word guiding them...?**

B. ITS EFFECT ON CHURCHES...

1. Churches languish for lack of teachers; teachers are few for lack of knowledge - **He 5:12**
2. Churches are led astray by false teachers and false doctrine, for how can the ignorant know what is false? - cf. **2 Pe 2:1-3**
- **How many churches are “dying on the vine”, or into wholesale apostasy because their members cannot discern between truth and error...?**

C. ITS EFFECT ON COMMUNITIES...

1. Our standards of morality are skewed, where good is evil and evil is good - cf. **Isa 5:20**

- a. We slaughter the innocent (abortion), sparing the guilty (no capital punishment)
 - b. We reward the wicked (movie stars, entertainers), depriving the good (teachers, etc.)
 - c. Divorce is made easy, adultery looked upon lightly, fornication “an affair, a relationship”, homosexuality an alternative lifestyle
2. The effect of such things destroy our families and communities
 - a. Evil (pornography, promiscuity) is allowed to spread in the name of “freedom”, ripping families apart
 - b. Children are deprived the kind of parenting that is their God-given right
 - c. Leading to juvenile delinquency and greater evils
- **Consider how the moral fabric of our nation and others in the world are becoming unraveled when “everyone does what is right in his own eyes” - cf. Jud 21:25**

[The poison of “Biblical Illiteracy” has infected and sickened our people, our churches, and our communities. Is there an antidote to this poison? Indeed there is, but it requires **individual** effort...]

II. THE ANTIDOTE TO BIBLICAL ILLITERACY

A. DAILY DEVOTIONAL BIBLE READING IN PRIVATE...

1. The truly blessed person feeds upon the Word of God daily - **Psa 1:1-3; 119:97-98**
 2. A systematic practice of prayerful Bible reading as part of a daily devotional...
 - a. Will bring a person closer to God
 - b. Will gradually increase one’s understanding of the Word of God
 - c. Will offer strength, comfort and hope that only the Scriptures provide
- **Are you willing to do your part, everyday, in stamping out “Biblical Illiteracy”...?**

B. FREQUENT IN-DEPTH BIBLE STUDY WITH OTHERS...

1. The faithful Christian realizes the value of mutual edification - **He 3:12-14; 10:24-25**
 2. Churches often provide the opportunity for Christians to study together
 - a. In their Bible classes on the Lord’s day, during the week, and in their homes
 - b. Where they can benefit from the knowledge of other Bible students
- **Are you willing to participate in such activities to stamp out “Biblical Illiteracy”...?**

C. PARENTS ACCEPTING THEIR GOD-GIVEN RESPONSIBILITY...

1. God gave the responsibility of spiritual training to the parents - cf. **Deu 6:6-7; Ep 6:4**
 2. Church may provide assistance with their children’s classes, and yet...
 - a. Parents should not abdicate their responsibility to the church
 - b. Parents should be very much involved in the teaching programs of any church
- **Are you willing to accept your parental duties to stamp out “Biblical Illiteracy”...?**

D. PREACHERS FULFILLING THEIR DUTY TO THE WORD...

1. Preachers are to give heed to the Word, and to preach the Word - **1 Ti 4:16; 2 Ti 4:1-5**
 2. We should expect preachers to be “men of the Book”
 - a. Preaching and teaching the Word of God, providing exposition of the Scriptures
 - b. Not entertaining us with “pop theology” and “pop psychology”
- **Are you willing to require that preachers proclaim the Word to stamp out “Biblical Illiteracy”...?**

CONCLUSION

1. I was encouraged to prepare this study reading an article by **Albert Mohler (The Scandal of Biblical Illiteracy: It's Our Problem)**
2. I thought his concluding paragraphs to be especially on the mark...
 - a. “Churches must recover the centrality and urgency of biblical teaching and preaching, and refuse to sideline the teaching ministry of the preacher. Pastors and churches too busy--or too distracted--to make biblical knowledge a central aim of ministry will produce believers who simply do not know enough to be faithful disciples.”
 - b. “We will not believe more than we know, and we will not live higher than our beliefs. The many fronts of Christian compromise in this generation can be directly traced to biblical illiteracy in the pews and the absence of biblical preaching and teaching in our homes and churches.”
 - c. “This generation must get deadly serious about the problem of biblical illiteracy, or a frighteningly large number of Americans--Christians included--will go on thinking that Sodom and Gomorrah lived happily ever after.”

Are we willing to get “deadly serious about the problem of biblical illiteracy”? If so...

“Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.” - Ja 1:21

Blest Be The Tie

INTRODUCTION

1. A wonderful blessing we enjoy in Christ is fellowship with other Christians...
 - a. We are members of one another - **Ro 12:5**
 - b. Thus we have a special bond or tie that binds us together
2. A simple yet beautiful song that describes this bond is **“Blest Be The Tie”**...
 - a. Words written by John Fawcett in 1782
 - b. Melody by Johann Georg Nageli, arranged by Lowell Mason in 1845
 - **In “Hymns For Worship”, it is song #302**

[From the words of this song, let’s take this opportunity to reflect upon the special bond we enjoy as Christians...]

I. FIRST VERSE

A. “BLEST BE THE TIE THAT BINDS OUR HEARTS IN CHRISTIAN LOVE”...

1. Consider first what the tie that binds **is not**
 - a. It is not an earthly tie, such as:
 - 1) Friendship
 - 2) Marriage
 - 3) Family
 -- All of which are either social or physical ties
 - b. It is not broken like earthly ties, such as through:
 - 1) Separation
 - 2) Incompatibility (e.g., the apostles were a diverse group)
 - 3) Death
2. Consider then what the tie that binds **is**
 - a. Love, not easily broken - cf. **Co 3:14**
 - b. Love, that comes from the God of love - **1 Jn 4:7-11**
 - c. Love, learned from the example of Christ - **1 Jn 3:16**
 - d. Love, serving as a mark of true discipleship - **Jn 13:34-35**
 -- **The tie involves love that is uniquely Christian; patterned after Christ’s love**

B. “THE FELLOWSHIP OF KINDRED MINDS IS LIKE TO THAT ABOVE”...

1. This tie involves a unity for which Jesus prayed - **Jn 17:20-23**
2. It involves a unity of mind for which Paul prayed - **Ph 2:2**
3. Therefore any threat to this unity is strongly condemned - e.g., **1 Co 1:10**
- **The tie seeks to emulate the unity between the Father and the Son**

[The tie that binds is based upon the love and unity which Christ makes possible; how it is manifested is illustrated in the remaining verses of the song...]

II. SECOND VERSE

A. “BEFORE OUR FATHER’S THRONE WE POUR OUR ARDENT PRAYERS”...

1. We are blessed to be able to approach God in prayer
 - a. A privilege enjoyed in Christ - **He 4:14-16a**
 - b. A privilege with great blessings - **He 4:16b; Ph 4:6-7**
 2. This song depicts frequent and fervent prayer
 - a. Praying for one another - e.g., **Ja 5:16; Ac 12:5**
 - b. Praying with another - e.g., **Ac 1:14; 2:42; 12:12; 21:5**
- **Such prayer is a benefit of the tie that binds, and also strengthens that tie**

B. “OUR FEARS, OUR HOPES, OUR AIMS ARE ONE, OUR COMFORTS AND OUR CARES”...

1. We have similar concerns and desires
 - a. Some because we are simply fellow humans in this world
 - 1) We desire to be healthy, we fear sickness and dying
 - 2) We enjoy comforts of life, we fear joblessness and poverty
 - b. Others because we are fellow citizens of the kingdom
 - 1) We share the hope of the resurrection and eternal life - cf. **1 Pe 1:3**
 - 2) We share in the struggles against temptation and persecution - **1 Pe 5:8-9**
 2. As Christians, therefore, we can have more in common
 - a. Not just because of our human nature
 - b. But also because we are partakers of divine nature
 - 1) Grace and peace are multiplied - cf. **2 Pe 1:2-3**
 - 2) We have exceedingly great and precious promises - cf. **2 Pe 1:4**
- **Our shared experiences, enhanced by our spiritual blessings, strengthen our tie**

[The next verse focuses on mutual problems we sometimes face...]

III. THIRD VERSE

A. “WE SHARE OUR MUTUAL WOES, OUR MUTUAL BURDENS BEAR”...

1. As Christians, we are to bear one another’s burdens - **Ga 6:1-2**
 2. In times of spiritual weakness, we are to pray for one another - **Ja 5:16**
 3. In times of persecution, we are to remember one another - **He 13:3**
 4. In times of physical need, we are to provide for one another - **Ja 1:27**
- **Manifested in such ways, the tie we have in Christ is truly a blessing**

B. “AND OFTEN FOR EACH OTHER FLOWS THE SYMPATHIZING TEAR”...

1. Because that is how God composed the body of Christ! - **1 Co 12:24b-26**
 2. That we might weep with those who weep - **Ro 12:15**
- **An emotional but effective demonstration of the bond we share**

[The final verse describes the impact of the tie that binds, when it comes time to separate, even temporarily...]

IV. FOURTH VERSE

A. “WHEN WE ASUNDER PART, IT GIVE US INWARD PAIN”...

1. The tie is such that departure can be painful
 2. Note the example of Paul and the Ephesian elders - **Ac 20:36-38**
- **Never experience such pain? Perhaps one might need to examine their tie**

B. “BUT WE SHALL BE JOINED IN HEART, AND HOPE TO MEET AGAIN”...

1. We might be separated in the flesh, but can remain together in spirit - **Co 2:5**
 2. We are comforted by a wonderful hope
 - a. The hope of the resurrection - **1 Th 4:13-18**
 - b. Made possible by the resurrection of Christ, and our faith in Him - **1 Pe 1:3-5**
- **It is this hope which keeps our hearts joined together, when all other bonds fail**

CONCLUSION

1. “**Blest Be The Tie**” is a beautiful song...
 - a. That describes the blessings of our oneness in Christ
 - b. That expresses how many Christians truly feel for one another
2. But it describes blessings known only by those...
 - a. Who have been added by Christ to His church - cf. **Ac 2:41,47**
 - b. Who are diligent in preserving the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace - cf. **Ep 4:1-3**

Have you been added to the Lord’s church through obedience to the gospel (cf. **Ac 2:38**)? Are you doing your part to strengthen the tie that binds those in Christ?

*“Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.”
(Co 3:14, NASB)*

Capital Punishment

INTRODUCTION

1. Whenever an execution is imminent, questions are often raised...
 - a. Should capital punishment be acceptable in a civilized society?
 - b. Is it morally right for a government to administer capital punishment?
 - c. What is the purpose behind capital punishment, and is it accomplished?
2. How do we find the answers to such questions?
 - a. We could turn to various sources, and receive conflicting answers
 - b. For Christians who believe the Word of God to be complete and all-sufficient (**2 Ti 3:16-17; 2 Pe 1:3**), we must look to it for the answers

[In this study, we shall endeavor to glean from the Bible what it has to say on the subject. Turning to the book of Genesis, the book of beginnings, we read of...]

I. THE BEGINNING OF CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

A. BEFORE THE FLOOD...

1. Cain received protection from God against capital punishment - **Gen 4:13-15**
2. Lamech, descendant of Cain, presumed even more protection against capital punishment after killing a young man - **Gen 4:23-24**
3. By the time of Noah, mention is made of the corruption and violence which had filled the earth - **Gen 6:11-12** (might this be the consequence of a society without capital punishment?)
4. God's solution for the wholesale corruption and violence: capital punishment on a mass scale! (i.e., the flood) - **Gen 6:13**

B. AFTER THE FLOOD...

1. Man is immediately given an awesome responsibility - **Gen 9:5-6**
 - a. God now requires a reckoning from those who kill
 - b. He now requires a killer to be killed by his fellow man
2. The reason God requires this of man: "For in the image of God He made man"
 - a. To kill one created in God's image is a serious offense worthy of death!
 - b. Because man is created in God's image:
 - 1) He possesses the ability to exercise justice and righteousness
 - 2) He is capable of being a worthy administrator of capital punishment

[While the evidence is scarce, it appears that **before the flood** people took God's word to Cain as a license to kill without consequence. **With the flood**, God Himself administered a form of capital punishment upon the violent and corrupt. **After the flood**, He charged man with the responsibility to take the life of those who shed blood. Now let's take a look at...]

II. CAPITAL PUNISHMENT UNDER THE OLD COVENANT

A. GOD GAVE THE LAW TO GOVERN THE NATION OF ISRAEL...

1. The Law was both a civil and religious law, and has served as the basis for criminal justice

- in many other civilizations since first given to God
2. In it, we find that capital punishment was proscribed for the following crimes:
 - a. Premeditated murder - **Exo 21:12-14**
 - b. Parental abuse - **Exo 21:15**
 - c. Kidnapping - **Exo 21:16**
 - d. Cursing parents - **Exo 21:17**
 - e. Striking an expecting mother which causes the child to born prematurely and dies - **Exo 21:22-25**
 - f. Failure to keep a killer animal from killing - **Exo 21:28-29**
 - g. Killing a thief in revenge - **Exo 22:2,3**
 - h. Sorcery - **Exo 22:18**
 - i. Bestiality - **Exo 22:19**
 - j. Adultery - **Lev 20:10**
 - k. Incest - **Lev 20:11-12**
 - l. Homosexuality - **Lev 20:13**
 - m. Marrying both mother and daughter - **Lev 20:14**
 - n. Being a medium or spiritist - **Lev 20:27**
 - o. Breaking the Sabbath - **Num 15:32-26**

B. WAS THE LAW A GOOD LAW...?

1. Paul said that it was “holy and just and good” - **Ro 7:12**
2. While the religious aspects of the Law was temporary (cf. **Ga 3:23-25**), the civil law served its purpose well: to govern and preserve a nation
3. Who would presume to say they could improve upon such a civil code of ethics?
 - a. Many have arrogantly presumed they could do better
 - b. And countries have gotten worse, not better!

[Certainly under the Old Covenant capital punishment was ordained of God. But we live under the New Testament, not the Old; what does the New Testament say?]

III. CAPITAL PUNISHMENT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

A. THE PURPOSE OF THE NEW COVENANT...

1. Unlike the Old Covenant, the New Covenant is not designed to govern or regulate civil governments
 - a. It is designed for those in Christ’s kingdom, which is spiritual in nature - **Jn 18:36**
 - b. Its purpose is to help man achieving and maintaining a right relationship with God
 - c. So for the most part, it does not concern itself with telling men of the world how to regulate their civil affairs
2. But in defining our relationship to civil authorities while subject to a Higher Law, there are references which reveal God’s attitude toward capital punishment

B. REFERENCES TO CAPITAL PUNISHMENT...

1. Take a look at **Ro 13:1-7**
 - a. Governmental authorities are established by God
 - b. They serve as ministers of God, as “an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil”
 - c. When a government fulfills its responsibility upon those who are evil...
 - 1) It “does not bear the sword in vain”

- 2) This is a clear allusion to the administration of capital punishment!
- Thus the NT supports the government's right to exercise the death penalty!
- 2. Consider what Paul said in **Ac 25:11**
 - a. He was willing to die if he "committed anything worthy of death"
 - b. A clear implication that in Paul's mind were some crimes worthy of death!

[While the New Testament is focused upon the responsibilities of disciples of Jesus in His spiritual kingdom, there is certainly no indication that it is wrong for government to administer capital punishment when necessary. The principle established in **Gen 9:5-6**, given to all of mankind before the Old Covenant, remains a responsibility placed upon the governments of men! But what of those objections that are commonly raised whenever the issue is discussed?]

IV. COMMON OBJECTIONS TO CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

A. THE BIBLE SAYS "THOU SHALT NOT KILL"...!

- 1. The word "kill" is best translated "**murder**"
 - a. Cf. **Exo 20:13** (NKJV, NASV, NIV)
 - b. This command forbids killing with malice and premeditation
- 2. In the next two chapters, God prescribes the death penalty for nine different crimes! - e.g., **Exo 21:12-17**
- **The command not to murder is directed toward individuals; one must ignore the**

B. THE BIBLE SAYS GOD HAS NO PLEASURE IN THE DEATH OF THE WICKED...!

- 1. It is true that God says He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked - **Ezek 18:32**
- 2. But consider the context of this statement:
 - a. The soul that sins shall die; one shall not bear the iniquity of another - **Ezek 18:4**
 - b. Certain sins makes one worthy of death - **Ezek 18:10-13**
 - c. God encourages the wicked to repent and do what is right - **Ezek 18:21-23**
 - d. But even the righteous person who begins to do wickedness shall die if they do not repent! - **Ezek 18:24**
- **The whole thrust of the passage is this: repent before it is too late; God may have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that doesn't prevent Him from carrying it out! (cf. God's death penalty on 24,000 in the plains of Moab - Num 25:1-13)**

C. CAPITAL PUNISHMENT DOESN'T WORK, IT DOESN'T DETER CRIME...!

- 1. This is true to a certain extent, when it is not carried out quickly - cf. **Ecc 8:11**
 - a. But it does prevent the person executed from ever killing again!
 - b. Its ineffectiveness in preventing crime by others is an argument against our system of administering capital punishment, not the idea of the death penalty itself
- 2. "Determent" is not the only purpose, there is also the issue of "justice"
 - a. Justice demands that the punishment fits the crime
 - b. As God explained when He proscribed the need for capital punishment: "For in the image of God He made man" - **Gen 9:6**
 - c. Some crimes are so heinous, any punishment less than death is not justice!

D. INNOCENT PEOPLE ARE SOMETIMES PUT TO DEATH...!

- 1. This can happen...

- a. But again this an argument that pertains to a system in which capital punishment is administered
- b. It not an argument against the idea of capital punishment itself
2. In the Old Testament...
 - a. Capital punishment could not be applied unless the crime was seen by two or more witnesses - cf. **Deu 17:6**
 - b. If a single witness made an accusation that proved false, it could fall back on him! - cf. **Deu 19:15-21**
3. Personally, I prefer to seeing the death penalty limited to certain cases...
 - a. In which there are two or more eyewitnesses, and there is no doubt
 - b. Where the conviction is not dependent upon laboratory evidence
 - Where there are no eyewitnesses, then perhaps the maximum penalty should be life in prison (in case the laboratory evidence is later proved faulty)

CONCLUSION

1. Does God approve of capital punishment? We have seen...
 - a. That God gave mankind the responsibility of carrying it out after the flood
 - b. God's own illustration of justice in the government He gave to Israel
 - c. How Christians today are to acknowledge the right and responsibility given by God to governments to be His ministers in avenging wrath on the evildoers
2. Certainly any civilized nation abhors violence and bloodshed; but civilization cannot exist...
 - a. With violence and corruption running rampant
 - b. When government fails to administer justice with punishment that fits the crime
3. How does God view governments that fail to carry out their responsibility to execute wrath to the evildoer...?
 - a. As with any government that takes away justice: woe! - **Isa 5:20-23**
 - b. As with anyone who fails to fulfill their responsibility: cursed! - **Jer 48:10**

Many may refuse to accept what the Bible has to say about capital punishment. But let those who profess to be Christians and accept the Bible as inspired acknowledge that capital punishment is ordained of God!

Cease From Anger, And Forsake Wrath

Managing Anger

INTRODUCTION

1. An article in Newsweek (“**Better Temper That Temper!**”, 1/3/83) raised the question...
 - a. Is it best to let off steam? (reduces blood pressure, but produces hostility in others)
 - b. Is it best to suppress one’s anger? (raises blood pressure, but prevents hostility)
2. This prompted me to study the subject of anger from a Biblical perspective...
 - a. Which for the Christian provides the final word
 - b. For all things, including human behavior

[What follows is the results of my study. I began by taking...]

I. AN OVERALL LOOK AT ANGER

A. IN THE OLD TESTAMENT...

1. The OT books, especially Proverbs and Ecclesiastes have a lot to say about anger
2. Two passages provide this warning:
 - a. **Pro 14:17** - “He who is quick-tempered acts foolishly...”
 - b. **Ecc 7:9** - “Do not hasten in your spirit to be angry, for anger rests in the bosom of fools”
3. The following pretty well sums it up: “Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; Do not fret -- it only causes harm.” - **Psa 37:8**

B. IN THE NEW TESTAMENT...

1. It appears anger is not compatible with the Christian disposition
 - a. Anger and wrath are to be replaced by kindness and forgiveness - **Ep 4:31-32**
 - b. We are told we “must also put off all these: anger, wrath, malice...” - **Co 3:8**
 - c. James tells us to be “...slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.” - **Ja 1:19-20**
2. Yet we also note there appears to be a place for a certain kind of anger
 - a. Note Paul’s comments in **Ep 4:26** (see more below)
 - b. Jesus expressed anger on several occasions
 - 1) Toward the money changers in the temple - **Jn 2:13-17**
 - 2) Toward the hypocritical Pharisees - **Mt 23:13ff**
 - c. God is a God of anger as well as a God of love - cf. **Ro 1:18; 2:5; Ep 5:6**

[How do we reconcile those passages which demand anger be put off with those which speak of anger on the part of God, Christ, and the Christian? Let’s take...]

II. A CLOSER LOOK AT ANGER

A. CONCERNING THE ANGER OF GOD...

1. God’s anger is always a just reaction to evil - cf. **Ro 1:18; 2:5-9**
2. His wrath is never misguided; He is therefore capable of properly manifesting anger

3. Man, with his imperfections, is not so capable
 - a. His anger is often misguided and misdirected
 - b. Because of ignorance, false presumptions, misunderstanding, etc.

B. CONCERNING THE ANGER OF CHRIST...

1. In the examples of His anger...
 - a. There is nothing of self-interest
 - b. Only holy anger against unrighteousness which is abhorrent to God
2. He could be angry, but only for God's honor
 - a. When personally abused, He said nothing - cf. **1 Pe 2:21-23**
 - b. But when it was against God, He displayed righteous anger (as in the temple)
3. Man, with his imperfections, does not always properly use anger
 - a. E.g., we remain silent when sin is exalted and God is dishonored
 - b. Then get angry when someone offends us personally!

C. CONCERNING "BE ANGRY, AND DO NOT SIN..."

1. Don't ignore the context of **Ep 4:26-27** (cf. **Ep 4:31**)
2. Paul is telling us that if anger comes to the heart...
 - a. It must be **controlled** ("do not sin...nor give place to the devil")
 - b. It must be **dispelled** before nightfall ("do not let the sun go down on your wrath")
3. Compare this with the meaning of the Greek words often translated "anger" and "wrath"
 - a. **Thumos** (most often translated "wrath")
 - 1) "the sudden outburst of passionate anger" - **ZPEB**
 - 2) "the blaze of temper which flares into violent words and deeds, and just as quickly dies" - **Barclay**
 - b. **Orge** (often translated "wrath", but also "anger")
 - 1) "indignation which has arisen gradually and become more settled" - **Thayer**
 - 2) "suggests a more settled or abiding condition of mind" - **Vine**
4. The effects of Paul's remarks in **Ep 4:26-27** is in harmony with **Ep 4:31**
 - a. "**do not sin**" - i.e., don't let anger become wrath (outburst of anger), which is sin
 - b. "**do not let the sun go down on your wrath**" - i.e., don't let anger remain and become settled, for that is also a sin
5. The point is simply this:
 - a. It is wrong to "**blow off steam**"
 - 1) Which is the idea involved in the word thumos
 - 2) Sometimes translated "outbursts of anger"
 - b. It is wrong to "**have a lasting, suppressed anger**"
 - 1) Which is the idea involved in the word orge
 - 2) Sometimes translated "anger"

[But if it is wrong to be angry or to display wrath, is it humanly possible to remove these emotional reactions to trying and difficult situations? Yes! But only as we undergo a "transformation"...]

III. PUTTING AWAY ANGER & WRATH

A. TRANSFORMATION IN THE LIFE OF THE CHRISTIAN...

1. When a person becomes a Christian, a change is now possible - **2 Co 5:17**
 - a. This change involves many things, one of which is our relation to sin
 - 1) Before, we were "slaves of sin" - **Ro 6:17**

- 2) Now, we can be “free from sin” - **Ro 6:18**
- b. This does not mean that we cannot or do not sin
 - 1) Only that we do not “have to sin” - cf. **Ro 7:14-24**
 - 2) We are now free to present ourselves to God, to serve as instruments of righteousness - cf. **Ro 6:11-14,19**
2. When a Christian willingly presents himself to God, transformation is possible!
 - a. Made possible by “renewing your mind” - **Ro 12:1-2**
 - b. This renewing of your mind occurs as we:
 - 1) Set our minds on things above, especially on God and Christ - **Co 3:1-2**
 - 2) Behold (contemplate) the glory of the Lord - cf. **2 Co 3:18**
 - c. With a mind being renewed in this way, it becomes possible...
 - 1) To put off things like anger, wrath - **Co 3:8-11**
 - 2) To put on things like kindness, love, the peace of God - **Co 3:12-15**
 - a) Things which in themselves prevent anger and wrath from becoming a part of our lives
 - b) Especially the “peace of God”, which if allowed to rule in our hearts will give us the inner calm and harmony we need in trying times!
 - c) Crucial to putting on such things as “peace” is the Word of God and prayer! - cf. **Jn 14:27; 16:33; Ph 4:6-7**
3. Transformation leads to reacting differently...
 - a. Even as Christians, before we are transformed we will react according to the works of the flesh (with anger and wrath) - **Ga 5:19-21**
 - b. But the more we are transformed into the image of Christ, the more we will react according to the fruit of the Spirit (kindness, gentleness, self-control) - **Ga 5:22-23**

[During the process of transformation through the Word of God and prayer, it does not hurt to benefit from suggestions which complement what the Bible teaches. Along this line, perhaps it will be helpful to include some thoughts regarding...]

B. ANGER MANAGEMENT...

1. **Seneca**, a Roman philosopher-educator (4-65 A.D.), offered the following Self-control techniques in his book “**Of Anger**”...
 - a. Avoid frustrating situations by noting where you got angry in the past
 - b. Reduce your anger by taking time, focusing on other emotions (pleasure, shame, or fear), avoiding weapons of aggression, and attending to other matters
 - c. Respond calmly to an aggressor with empathy or mild, unprovocative comments or with no response at all
 - d. If angry, concentrate on the undesirable consequences of becoming aggressive
 - 1) Tell yourself: “Why give them the satisfaction of knowing you are upset?”
 - 2) Or “It isn’t worth being mad over.”
 - e. Reconsider the circumstances and try to understand the motives or viewpoint of the other person
 - f. Train yourself to be empathic with others
 - 1) Be tolerant of human weakness
 - 2) Be forgiving (ask yourself if you haven’t done something as bad)
 - 3) Follow the “great lesson of mankind: to do as we would be done by.”
2. **MyMindField.com** (http://topcondition.com/images/mymindfield/anger_management.htm) has these suggestions for controlling anger through behavior modification
 - a. **Reduce your frustrations**

- 1) Find the source of your frustration, whether they be people or subjects or situations
- 2) Attempt to reduce or eliminate your exposure to these negative stimuli
- b. **Reduce violent stimuli in your life**
 - 1) Choosing to avoid violent movies, violent and aggressive friends is part of this approach
 - 2) Be very selective with your friends so that they do not goad you into anger and rage
 - 3) Eliminate drugs and alcohol as stimulants of anger.
- c. **Reveal Yourself and Understand Others**
 - 1) Announce you may be having a bad day to others
 - 2) Attempt to indicate to others they are having a bad day and offer to listen or let them vent
- d. **Stop hostile fantasies**
 - 1) Cease dwelling on issues or people which aggravate
 - 2) Think smooth. Think cool.
- e. **Do not escalate the violence** - Aggressive action on your part may cause an equally aggressive response which starts a vicious cycle
- f. **Suppress or convert your violent reaction**
 - 1) Count to ten, take a deep breath, or go work out are variations on this theme
 - 2) Think of the source of the aggravation and whether a violent reaction will accomplish any purpose other than remorse, which is not a goal
- g. **Cease using temper to get your way** - While successful in the short term, using anger to win points is a losing strategy in the long run
- h. **Use stress inoculation** - This approach involves awareness of our own irrational fantasies, learning better understanding of why others are weak when they show rage, and rehearsing how to be calm in the face of angering stimulation
- i. **Disconnect anger from frustrating people or issues or desensitization**
- j. **Consider meditation and mild exercise to relax**
3. Some other useful sources for “Anger Management” on the Internet:
 - a. **Psychology In Daily Life - Controlling Anger--Before It Controls You**
<http://helping.apa.org/daily/anger.html>
 - b. **Mental Health Net - Anger And Aggression**
<http://mentalhelp.net/psyhelp/chap7/>

CONCLUSION

1. Instead of trying to determine whether we should react to difficult situations...
 - a. By letting off steam
 - b. By suppressing one’s anger...the goal of the Christian should be that of changing the inner person - the more we are transformed, the more likely we will react with love, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control
2. Following the example of Christ, there may be a place for anger, but only in things pertaining to the honor and will of God; in all other things, we do well to remember:
 - a. The example of Jesus - **1 Pe 2:23**
 - b. The words of David - **Psa 37:8**

Let us “cease from anger, and forsake wrath” by presenting ourselves to God, allowing our minds to be renewed as we behold His glory revealed in the Bible. Do you wish to be a “new creation”? You must be “in Christ” (**2 Co 5:17**), and that begins by being baptized “into Christ” (**Ga 3:27**)...

The Celebration Of Christmas

Should It Be The Work Of The Church?

INTRODUCTION

1. “Christmas” is an annual holiday celebrated by many...
 - a. Millions commemorate the birth of Jesus on this day
 - b. Many consider it as one of “the most holy” of religious holidays
 - c. For some, it marks one of the few times they attend church services (along with Easter and Mother’s Day)
2. But were you aware that...?
 - a. Christians in the NT did not celebrate the birth of Jesus as an annual observance?
 - b. Most Protestant churches did not begin celebrating Christmas until the 19th century?
 - c. Most churches of Christ still do not have annual observances of Christ’s birth
3. This may prompt questions in the minds of some...
 - a. How did the **yearly** observance of Jesus’ birth get started?
 - b. Should not the Lord’s church involve herself in such a holiday?
 - c. How about observing certain elements of it as individuals?

[Focusing on the observance of Christmas in connection with the birth of Christ, let’s start with...]

I. THE BIRTH OF JESUS

A. IN THE BIBLE...

1. “The New Testament provides no clues in this regard.” - **Encyclopedia Britannica**
2. The NT simply states that it happened in the days of Caesar Augustus and while Quirinius was governing Syria - **Lk 2:1-2**
3. Most scholars place the year of Jesus’ birth between 4-6 B.C.
-- **The actual year is uncertain, let alone the month and day**

B. IN HISTORY...

1. Sextus Julius Africanus popularized the idea that Jesus was born on December 25 in his *Chronographiai*, a reference book...written in 221 AD. - **Wikipedia, “Christmas”**
 - a. Based on the assumption that Jesus died on March 25
 - b. Based on a Jewish belief that prophets died on the same date as their conception
 - c. Thus if Jesus was conceived on March 25, then He was born nine months later (assuming a gestation period lasting exactly nine months)
2. However, Orthodox churches celebrate the birth of Jesus on Jan 6th or 7th
-- **The fact is that no really knows what day, month, or year Jesus was born**

[If we don’t know exactly when Jesus was born, then how did the annual celebration of His birth begin? For that, let’s review the history of...]

II. THE CELEBRATION OF CHRISTMAS

A. IN THE BIBLE...

1. There is no reference to Christians celebrating the birth of Jesus as an annual observance
 2. The only event of Jesus' life that was celebrated regularly was His death, done weekly in the observance of the Lord's Supper - cf. **Ac 20:7; 1 Co 11:20-34**
 3. Paul expressed concern about observing days, months, and years - **Ga 4:9-10**
- **The Bible does not support the idea of an annual celebration of the birth of Jesus**

B. IN HISTORY...

1. The identification of the birth date of Jesus did not at first inspire feasting or celebration - **Wikipedia, "Christmas"**
 - a. Tertullian does not mention it as a major feast day
 - b. In 245 A.D, Origen denounced the idea of celebrating Jesus' birthday
 - c. The earliest reference to Christmas is in a calendar in 354 A.D.
 - d. Soon after it was introduced to Constantinople (379), Antioch (380), Alexandria (430)
 2. Among Protestant churches, especially in the US - **ibid.**
 - a. During the Reformation, Protestants condemned Christmas as "trappings of popery" (Christmas literally means "the Mass of Christ", or "mass on Christ's day")
 - b. England's Puritan rulers banned it in 1647, it was reinstated in 1660
 - c. Puritans of New England disapproved of Christmas, it was outlawed from 1659 to 1681
 - d. Christmas fell out of favor in the US after the American Revolution, as it was considered an English custom
 - e. Interest in Christmas in America was revived through novels by Washington Irving and by immigrants from Europe bringing their customs
 - f. Christmas was declared a U.S. federal holiday in 1870
- **The annual observance of the birth of Christ has been adopted only after great controversy among both Catholic and Protestant churches**

[So we don't know when Jesus was born, and we do know that an annual observance of His birth did not begin for hundreds of years after the church began, what about today...?]

III. SHOULD CHRISTMAS BE A WORK OF THE CHURCH?

A. PAUL GAVE WARNINGS REGARDING FEAST DAYS...

1. He expressed his concern for the churches in Galatia - **Ga 4:8-11**
 - a. Not that their practice was wrong per se, only but he was concerned
 - b. From the context, his concern pertained to "why" they were doing these things
 - 1) If they believed it was necessary to be saved, then Paul's labor among them was in danger of being in vain
 - 2) For seeking justification through the Law, religious feast days, etc., causes one to fall from grace and become estranged from Christ! - cf. **Ga 5:4**
2. Paul admonished the Colossians not to let anyone "judge" them - **Co 2:16-17**
 - a. Some were seeking to bind the Law upon the Gentile believers - e.g., **Ac 15:1,5**
 - b. Gentile Christians were told not to let any one judge (condemn) them, for salvation is in Christ, not in the keeping of the religious feast days of the Law
3. Yet Paul himself was not averse to observing certain feast days apart from the church
 - a. He did not hesitate to keep Jewish customs when expedient - **1 Co 9:19-20**
 - 1) He had Timothy circumcised - **Ac 16:1-3**
 - 2) He took a vow - **Ac 18:18**
 - 3) He sought to keep a Jewish feast in Jerusalem - **Ac 18:19-21**

- 4) He participated in purification ceremonies, which included animal sacrifices - **Ac 21:17-26**; cf. **Num 6:13-20**
- b. However, his teaching made clear:
 - 1) It should be kept on an individual basis - cf. **Ro 14:5-6**
 - 2) It should not be bound on others - cf. **Ga 2:3-5**
 - 3) It had nothing to do with our justification in Christ - cf. **Ga 5:4-6**
- **Where Paul drew the line was in making such matters church doctrine or practice, in which people would be compelled to participate in them**

B. JESUS WARNED OF THE DANGER OF HUMAN TRADITIONS...

- 1. He rebuked the scribes Pharisees for their use of traditions - **Mk 7:1-13**
 - a. They made their traditions necessary for all to observe - **Mk 7:7**
 - b. In keeping their traditions, they laid aside the commands of God - **Mk 7:8-9**
- 2. Traditions of men are wrong when they:
 - a. Become matters of doctrine or required practice, bound upon all
 - b. Displace the commands of God by the very keeping of the traditions
- **Feast days are therefore like traditions; in certain situations they can be matters of expediency, but they can become a stumbling block to others!**

C. MAKING APPLICATION IN REGARDS TO CHRISTMAS...

- 1. **The Bible is silent regarding any observance of Christ's birth**
 - a. God and Jesus evidently did not deem it necessary for the church
 - b. Any observance is based upon human tradition, not God's Word
- 2. **As a human tradition, we must be very careful** - cf. **Mk 7:7-9**
 - a. It cannot become a matter of doctrine, which is bound upon others
 - b. It cannot displace the keeping of God's commandments (do those who come only on Easter believe that it renders the command in **He 10:25** of none effect?)
- 3. **An annual observance by the church is certainly unwise, if not wrong**
 - a. It intertwines human traditions with God's commands for His church
 - b. It forces people to observe what is a human tradition
- 4. **On an individual basis, if one wishes to esteem one day above another:**
 - a. It is between him and the Lord - **Ro 14:5-6**
 - b. Be careful not to condemn those who differ - **Ro 14:4,10-12**
 - c. Be sensitive to the convictions of others - **Ro 14:13-19**
- 5. **As for pagan elements that have become intertwined with the Christmas holiday...**
 - a. Perhaps this is best left on an individual basis
 - b. My own understanding is that we are free in Christ to change what may have been a religious practice at one time for personal use as an expediency
 - 1) E.g., using circumcision for hygienic purposes
 - 2) E.g., exchanging gifts among friends and family

CONCLUSION

- 1. My view of **Christmas** is similar to how I view **Thanksgiving**...
 - a. I know the idea of an annual observance is foreign to the Scriptures
 - b. As Christians we should give thanks and celebrate Christ's birth year around
- 2. But seeking to "continue steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine" (**Ac 2:42**)...
 - a. The Lord's church should refrain from adding human traditions to its work and worship

- b. Even so, I am grateful that at least once a year people think about Jesus' birth
3. My prayer is that people will do more than think about His birth once a year...
- a. That we be thankful for His coming to this earth every day
 - b. That we will submit to His rule and be citizens of His kingdom foretold long ago:

For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Of the increase of His government and peace There will be no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.

- Isa 9:6-7

Unless we submit to the authority of Jesus Christ, His birth means nothing to us. Have you been born again of water and Spirit that you might enter that wonderful kingdom of God? - cf. **Jn 3:3-5**

The Celebration Of Easter

A Historical And Biblical Perspective

INTRODUCTION

1. **“Easter Sunday”** is an annual holiday celebrated by many...
 - a. Millions of people commemorate the resurrection of Jesus on this day
 - b. Many consider it as “the most holy” of religious holidays
 - c. For some, it marks the only time they attend church services (although Christmas runs a close second)

2. But were you aware...
 - a. **That the church in the NT did not observe a YEARLY observance of the Lord’s resurrection?**
 - 1) The word “Easter” is found only once in the KJV Bible - cf. **Ac 12:4**
 - 2) The word in the Greek is actually “Passover”, and so translated elsewhere in the KJV
 - 3) “It is reasonably certain that the NT contains no reference to a YEARLY celebration of the resurrection of Christ” (**ISBE**)
 - b. **That the word “Easter” actually comes from “EASTRE”, the Anglo-Saxon name of a Teutonic goddess of spring and fertility?**
 - 1) To her was dedicated a month corresponding to our April
 - 2) Her festival was celebrated on the day of vernal equinox
 - c. **That many of the customs associated with Easter illustrate this and other pagan connections?**
 - 1) “The rabbit was sacred to the Germanic goddess ‘Eastre’, the goddess of fertility and springtime... And if you stop to think about it, rabbits are an extremely appropriate symbol for springtime, because of what they are famous for--having more rabbits.” (**William Heim**, associate dean of the College of Arts and Letters at USF, Orlando Sentinel, 4/15/87)
 - 2) “It appears there was a custom among ancient Egyptians and Romans to give eggs as presents at this time of year. That was intended to insure that the recipient would have a very fertile or productive year.” (**ibid.**)
 - 3) **Helms** went on to say that hunting for Easter eggs may have begun as the search for gifts from the sacred animal, the rabbit, on the morning of the festival.

3. This ought to prompt some questions in the minds of Christians...
 - a. How did the **yearly** observance of Jesus’ resurrection get started?
 - b. How did pagan names and traditions become associated with a “Christian” holiday (esp. one considered “the most holy”)?
 - c. What bearing should all this have on Christians today?
 - 1) Should the Lord’s church involve herself in such a holiday?
 - 2) How about observing certain elements of it as individuals?

[Here are the results of my own study on these things. Beginning with...]

I. LOOKING AT EASTER FROM A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

A. THE YEARLY OBSERVANCE OF CHRIST’S RESURRECTION

1. **The practice began early, in the form of a “Christian” Passover...**
 - a. The Passover was already an important feast to the Jews
 - 1) Instituted by Moses, commemorating their deliverance from Egypt
 - 2) It was during this feast that Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper
 - b. Many Jews continued to keep their Jewish customs and religious festivals after their conversion to Christ
 - 1) Paul was not averse to observing such Jewish customs - **Ac 18:18-21; 21:17-26**
 - 2) John and Philip were said to observe the Passover every year (cf. Eusebius)
 - But the Passover (and other Jewish festivals) was never bound upon the Gentiles (more on this later)
 - c. Shortly after the death of the apostles, some of the “Jewish” festivals began to be observed as “Christian” festivals
 - 1) I.e., the Passover was now observed in memory of Christ’s death
 - a) Who died during Passover week
 - b) Who was offered as our Passover lamb for our sins - cf. **1 Co 5:7-8**
 - 2) Thus began a **yearly** observance...
 - a) Even though Christ instituted the Lord’s Supper as the proper memorial to commemorate His death - cf. **Lk 22:14-20; 1 Co 11:23-26**
 - b) Both biblical and historical evidence indicate that this was a **weekly** observance - cf. **Ac 20:7; 1 Co 11:20-22; 10:16-17**
2. **The yearly “Christian Passover” soon included other observances as well...**
 - a. **Palm Sunday**, the day Jesus made His triumphant entry into Jerusalem prior to His death
 - b. **Good Friday**, the day He was crucified
 - c. **Resurrection Sunday**, the day He arose and which came to be known as “Easter”
3. **Celebrating these days was not without controversy...**
 - a. In the 2nd and 3rd century there was much dispute over the proper date
 - 1) The churches in Asia Minor followed Jewish chronology
 - a) So they celebrated the Passover when the Jews did, on the 14th of Nisan
 - b) The Jewish calendar is a lunar calendar, which meant the day of the week would vary from year to year
 - c) Thus the day of Passover would vary, and with it the day of celebrating Jesus’ resurrection
 - 2) Others observed the events on the day of the week in which they occurred
 - a) So that the “Christian Passover” always fell on a Thursday
 - b) The commemoration of Jesus’ death would be on a Friday
 - c) The celebration of the resurrection on a Sunday
 - b. This created quite a stir...
 - 1) While some were sorrowfully commemorating the death of Jesus, others were joyously celebrating His resurrection
 - 2) Churches threatened to “excommunicate” one another
 - c. Even after the Jewish calendar was dropped, and it was agreed to celebrate these holidays on the same days of the week, there was still a problem...
 - 1) There was no agreement on which calendar to use (Gregorian or Julian)
 - 2) Which explains the difference between the observances by the Roman and Greek orthodox churches today

-- **So the yearly observance of the resurrection originated from human tradition, not the Bible itself, and proved to be a source of turmoil among the churches**

B. THE INTRODUCTION OF PAGAN CUSTOMS...

1. Assimilation of pagan ritual into “Christian” observances was a common practice
 - a. When people took the gospel into a pagan area...
 - 1) Many would not discourage the local residents to discard their pagan rituals
 - 2) Instead, they would attempt to give such customs a “Christian” flavor
 - b. As **Helms**, quoted earlier, went on to say:
 - 1) “With the advent of Christianity, the egg, still taken as a symbol of life, was simply borrowed to be a symbol of the Christian holiday.”
 - 2) “The earliest Easter eggs were dyed red to represent the blood shed by Christ.”
 - 3) “Many cultures celebrated the advent of spring down through history. When Christianity came along about 2,000 years ago, there was already a number of pagan celebrations in place.”
 - 4) “People rarely discard a holiday. When a new system of beliefs comes along, you simply come up with a new mythic structure to explain why you were celebrating that holiday in the first place.”
2. The effect of such assimilation...
 - a. It eventually “neutralized” the pagan rituals
 - 1) Who would have ever thought of “Easter” as the name of a goddess?
 - 2) Without the help of historical research, we would have forgotten the pagan origins
 - b. But it also leaves many people with erroneous conceptions
 - 1) E.g., having people believe that Christians have always observed a yearly regarding the death and resurrection of Jesus
 - 2) E.g., in the case of Christmas, leading people to believe that Jesus was actually born on December 25th, not knowing that it was originally a Roman feast day

[But this has been looking at Easter from **a historical perspective**. As disciples of Christ, our primary concern should be **the biblical perspective...**]

III. LOOKING AT EASTER FROM A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

A. PAUL GAVE WARNINGS REGARDING FEAST DAYS...

1. Paul expressed his concern for the churches in Galatia - **Ga 4:8-11**
 - a. He does not say that their practice was wrong per se, only that he is concerned
 - b. From the context, his concern pertained to “why” they were doing these things
 - 1) If they believed it was necessary to be saved, then Paul’s labor among them was in danger of being in vain
 - 2) For seeking justification through the Law, religious feast days, etc., causes one to fall from grace and become estranged from Christ! - cf. **Ga 5:4**
2. Paul admonished the Colossians not to let anyone “judge” them - **Co 2:16-17**
 - a. Some were seeking to bind the Law upon the Gentile believers - e.g., **Ac 15:1,5**
 - b. Gentile Christians were told not to let any one judge (condemn) them, for salvation is in Christ, not in the keeping of the religious feast days of the Law
3. But as we noted before, Paul was not averse to observing certain feast days himself
 - a. He did not hesitate to keep Jewish customs when expedient - **1 Co 9:19-20**
 - 1) He had Timothy circumcised - **Ac 16:1-3**
 - 2) He took a vow - **Ac 18:18**
 - 3) He sought to keep a Jewish feast in Jerusalem - **Ac 18:19-21**
 - 4) He participated in purification ceremonies, which included animal sacrifices - **Ac 21:17-26**; cf. **Num 6:13-20**

- b. However, in his teaching it was made clear:
 - 1) It should be kept on an individual basis - cf. **Ro 14:5-6**
 - 2) It should not be bound on others - cf. **Ga 2:3-5**
 - 3) It had nothing to do with our justification in Christ - cf. **Ga 5:4-6**
- **Where Paul drew the line was in making such matters church doctrine or practice, where people were compelled to do them**

B. JESUS WARNED OF THE DANGER OF HUMAN TRADITIONS...

- 1. He rebuked the scribes Pharisees for their use of traditions - **Mk 7:1-13**
 - a. They made their traditions necessary for all to observe - **Mk 7:7**
 - b. In keeping their traditions, they laid aside the commands of God - **Mk 7:8-9**
- 2. Traditions of men are wrong, then, when they:
 - a. Become matters of doctrine or required practice, bound upon all
 - b. Displace the commands of God by the very keeping of the traditions
- **Traditions are therefore like the feast days; in certain situations they can be matters of expediency, but if we are not careful they can become a stumbling block to us!**

C. MAKING APPLICATION IN REGARDS TO EASTER...

- 1. **The Bible is silent regarding any YEARLY observance of Christ's resurrection**
 - a. God and Jesus evidently did not deem it necessary for the church
 - b. Any yearly observance is based upon human tradition, not God's Word
- 2. **As a human tradition, we must be very careful** - cf. **Mk 7:7-9**
 - a. It cannot become a matter of doctrine, which is bound upon others
 - b. It cannot displace the keeping of God's commandments (do those who come only on Easter believe that it renders the command in **He 10:25** of none effect?)
- 3. **An annual observance by the church is unwise, if not wrong**
 - a. It intertwines human traditions with God's commands for His church
 - b. It forces people to observe what is a human tradition
- 4. **On an individual basis, however, if one wishes to esteem one day above another:**
 - a. It is between him and the Lord - **Ro 14:5-6**
 - b. Be careful not to condemn those who differ - **Ro 14:4,10-12**
 - c. Be sensitive to the convictions of others - **Ro 14:13-19**
- 5. **As for the pagan elements...**
 - a. Again, perhaps this is best left on an individual basis
 - b. My own understanding is that we are free in Christ to change what may have been a religious practice at one time for personal use as an expediency
 - 1) E.g., using circumcision for personal hygiene
 - 2) E.g., using colored eggs and hiding them for family entertainment

CONCLUSION

- 1. My view of **Easter** is similar to how I view **Thanksgiving**...
 - a. I know that the idea of an annual observance is foreign to the Scriptures
 - b. As Christians we should give thanks and celebrate Christ's resurrection year around
 - c. But seeking to "continue steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine" (**Ac 2:42**), the Lord's church should refrain from adding human traditions to its work and worship
 - d. Yet I am grateful that I live in a country where at least once a year people think about God's blessings, especially in the gift of His Dear Son

2. My prayer is that people will do more than think about God's Son once a year...
 - a. That we be thankful in every thing and on every day
 - b. That we live in the power of the resurrected Life which is in Christ Jesus our Lord
 - 1) Which comes by being in Christ
 - 2) Which comes by living daily in service to Him who died for us, and rose again!

“For though He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, but we shall live with Him by the power of God toward you.” - 2 Co 13:4

“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” - Gal 2:20

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” - Phil 4:13

Are you living daily for Christ, serving Him by the power of His resurrected life?

Challenges For A Growing Congregation

INTRODUCTION

1. As a congregation grows, it is likely to face various challenges...
 - a. The devil would certainly love to hinder us in our work - e.g., **1 Th 2:18**
 - b. How he does this may not always be evident, as he is a great deceiver - **2 Co 11:3**
-- Through simple and seemingly harmless diversions, the devil can lead us astray
2. We must therefore take up the admonition to “**Hold fast...**” - **Re 3:11**
 - a. Accepting any challenges the devil might throw our way
 - b. Knowing that our efforts to be “steadfast” are not for naught - **1 Co 15:58**

[In this study we will look at some challenges that any congregation must meet to serve the Lord faithfully, but especially a growing congregation...]

I. WE MUST REMEMBER WHAT OUR WORK IS

A. TO EQUIP THE SAINTS FOR MINISTRY (EDIFICATION)...

1. We are to provide for the spiritual growth of each member - **Ep 4:11-12**
2. This is how the body continues to grow - **Ep 4:15-16**
3. Thus we are to provoke one another to love and good works, the very reason we are to assemble together - **He 10:24-25**
-- **Is each one of us doing what we can to help other Christians to grow?**

B. TO SOUND FORTH THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST (EVANGELISM)...

1. Like the church at Thessalonica - **1 Th 1:8**
2. Through individual and collective efforts, we must “sow the seed”
3. As our building fills, it becomes tempting to slack off, but we must either expand or swarm (have some leave to start another congregation)
-- **Is each one of us doing what we can to spread the gospel?**

C. TO PROVIDE FOR NEEDY SAINTS (BENEVOLENCE)...

1. The original purpose behind the weekly collection - **1 Co 16:1-2**
2. Even if there is no need locally, there may be needy saints in other places
-- **Is each one of us doing what we can to see that needs are being met?**

[The work of the local church goes far beyond providing a place where people can simply worship from week to week. We should be preparing ourselves to work! Will we meet the challenge? Another challenge we must face...]

II. WE MUST LIVE ABOVE PETTINESS

A. EVEN GOOD CHURCHES CAN BE HINDERED BY PETTINESS...

1. Notice Paul’s concern for the church at Philippi - **Ph 4:2-3**
2. When churches lose sight of their primary purpose, they are ripe for being torn apart by selfishness, gossip, and factionalism

B. WE MUST KEEP A PROPER SENSE OF PROPORTION...

1. It is disastrous if we begin to “major in minors”, to blow problems all out of proportion
2. We must see the largeness and importance of our work in comparison to our own personal problems
 - a. Every church has its problems, for we are imperfect people
 - b. Remembering Paul’s exhortations in **Ph 2:1-5** will certainly help

[What a sad thing it would be to have a congregation hindered by pettiness. Yet so many congregations do allow it to keep them from growing. Will we accept the challenge never to allow pettiness to so affect us? It will be easy to meet that challenge, if at the same time we meet another one...]

III. WE MUST MAINTAIN GRATITUDE FOR OUR BLESSINGS

A. WE HAVE MUCH FOR WHICH TO BE THANKFUL...

1. As individuals:
 - a. We have many physical blessings
 - 1) Our families, friends, homes, health
 - 2) Our freedoms, jobs
 - b. We have many spiritual blessings
 - 1) Salvation in Christ, the forgiveness of sins, the peace of mind
 - 2) The love of God, the strength of the Holy Spirit, the hope of heaven
2. As a congregation:
 - a. Free from turmoil, free to worship
 - b. Filled with love and unity
 - c. Blessed with good facilities, signs of numerical and spiritual growth
 - d. Great potential for both individual and congregational growth

B. WE SHOULD BE NOTED FOR OUR “ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE “...

1. Note how often Paul exhorted the Colossians to be thankful
 - a. Giving thanks to the Father - **Co 1:12**
 - b. Abounding with thanksgiving - **Co 2:7**
 - c. As the peace of God rules in your heart, be thankful - **Co 3:15**
 - d. Giving thanks to God - **Co 3:17**
 - e. Be vigilant in prayer with thanksgiving - **Co 4:2**
2. As individuals, and as a congregation, let us never become “unthankful”
 - a. It is a step toward depravity - **Ro 1:21**
 - b. It is a sign of perilous times - **2 Ti 3:1-5**

CONCLUSION

1. There are many other challenges that congregations may face...
 - a. Such as persecution for the cause of Christ
 - b. Or natural calamities that may devastate our community
2. But in most cases, even those challenges can be met and overcome if we...
 - a. Remember what our work is
 - b. Live above pettiness
 - c. Maintain gratitude for our blessings

With a will to do what the Lord desires of us, and with the “attitude of gratitude” lifting us above any sense of pettiness that might drag us down, let us do our part to answer the prayer of Paul:

“...to Him (God) be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.” (Ep 3:21)

Note: The main idea and several thoughts from this lesson were taken from a lesson by Gary Henry. The URL for his web site containing many excellent articles and sermon outlines is:
<http://www.brasstacks.org>

Church Membership

INTRODUCTION

1. Soon after conversion, or when moving to a new area, people often seek church membership...
 - a. They desire to become members of a local congregation
 - b. Which is a good thing, for both them and the church

2. Often there are questions regarding church membership...
 - a. What is church membership?
 - b. Is church membership really necessary?
 - c. What benefits are there to church membership?
 - d. What obligations are there to church membership?
 - e. How does one become a member of the church?

[This study will seek to answer such questions. Because the Bible speaks of the church in two primary senses (**universal** and **local**), let's first consider **membership...**]

I. IN THE CHURCH UNIVERSAL

A. DEFINITION...

1. The church **universal** is that church Jesus promised to build - **Mt 16:18**
2. It is referred to as the body of Christ - **Ep 1:22-23**
3. There is only one body, or church - **Ep 4:4**
4. This one body is made up of individual members - **Ro 12:4-5; 1 Co 12:27**
- **The church universal consists of all Christians, with Christ as the head**

B. PRIVILEGES...

1. Those in this church are saved, as Christ is the Savior of the body - **Ep 5:23**
2. They enjoy all spiritual blessings, which are found only in Christ - **Ep 1:3**
3. Such blessings include forgiveness of sins - **Ep 1:7**
4. Such blessings include the privilege of prayer - **He 4:14-16**
- **Those in the church universal enjoy blessings now and in the future**

C. OBLIGATIONS...

1. To remain connected to the Head, the Branch (Christ) - cf. **Jn 15:1-8**
2. To do their part in the body - **Ep 4:15-16**
3. To fulfill whatever function they can - **Ro 12:4-8**
4. To love the brotherhood (all Christians) - **1 Pe 2:17; cf. 1:22; 3:8**
- **Membership has its privileges, but it also has its obligations**

D. BECOMING A MEMBER...

1. Those who were baptized were "added" - **Ac 2:41**
2. Those being saved were added by the Lord to His church - cf. **Ac 2:47**
3. By one Spirit they were baptized into one body (the church) - **1 Co 12:13; cf. Ti 3:5**
- **One becomes a member of the church universal when they are saved**

[If one wishes to be a member of the church universal, they need to obey the gospel of Christ in faith,

repentance, and baptism (cf. **Mk 16:15-16; Ac 2:38-41**). Then they are ready to become **members...**]

II. IN THE CHURCH LOCAL

A. DEFINITION...

1. The church **local** is a group of Christians who meet and work together - e.g., **1 Th 1:1**
2. There are many such churches, not just one - **Ro 16:16; Ga 1:2; Ac 9:31**
3. Some form of membership in such churches is indicated - e.g., **Ro 16:1,5; Co 4:9**
- **The church local is made up of Christians in one location who agree to work together**

B. PRIVILEGES...

1. A spiritual family - **Mk 10:28-30; 1 Ti 5:1-2**
2. Strength from older Christians - **Ro 15:1; Ga 6:1**
3. Mutual comfort in addition to that received from God - cf. **2 Co 1:3-5**
4. The prayers of brethren - **Ja 5:14-16**
- **Those in local churches enjoy blessings not experienced by “floaters”**

C. OBLIGATIONS...

1. To bear one another's burdens - **Ga 6:2**
2. To exhort one another - **He 3:12-14**
3. To assemble together - **He 10:24-25**; e.g., **Ac 20:7**
4. To serve one another with whatever abilities we have - **1 Pe 4:10-11**
5. To care for one another, and to seek peace - **1 Th 5:11-15**
6. To withdraw from brethren walking disorderly - **2 Th 3:6-15**
- **Membership has its privileges, but it also has its obligations**

D. BECOMING A MEMBER...

1. Membership in a local congregation is not automatic (e.g., the eunuch) - **Ac 8:39**
2. It must be sought out by an individual (e.g., Saul) - **Ac 9:26a**
3. The congregation must be willing to extend fellowship (e.g., Jerusalem) - cf. **Ac 9:26b**
4. A recommendation can help expedite the process (e.g., Barnabas) - cf. **Ac 9:27-28**
5. The actual vetting process may vary from congregation to congregation
- **A person becomes a member of a church local when they are accepted as such**

CONCLUSION

1. Church membership is a worthy aspiration...
 - a. Membership in the church **universal** is necessary for salvation
 - b. Membership in the church **local** is needed for spiritual growth and service
2. Church membership in both aspects is attained...
 - a. **First** when we are added to church universal by the Lord when we are saved
 - b. **Then** when we join ourselves to a local church through mutual consent to work together

Have you become a member of the **church universal** through obeying the gospel of Christ? Have you become a member of a **local church** so you can fulfill your duties to Christ and His brethren...?

The Clarion Voices Of God

INTRODUCTION

1. Sometimes people may wonder: if there is God...
 - a. Why hasn't He made Himself more clearly known?
 - b. Why has He spoken only through what many view as an antiquated book (the Bible)?
2. I would contend that God has made Himself known...
 - a. He has spoken **in various ways** (in addition to a book that is far from antiquated)
 - b. He has spoken **quite loudly** (for those willing to listen)

[In what I like to call “**The Clarion Voices Of God**”, note that...]

I. GOD SPEAKS LOUDLY THROUGH HIS CREATION

A. GOD'S VOICE IN HIS CREATION...

1. Reveals His glory and His handiwork - **Psa 19:1-4**
2. Reveals His eternal power and divine nature - **Ro 1:19-20**
- **Through the intelligent design of the universe God says, “I exist!”**

B. HOW WELL DO WE LISTEN...?

1. Do we take the time to consider the wonders of the creation?
2. The Psalmist took time to contemplate them - **Psa 8:3; 104:24-25; 139:14**
3. It prompted Einstein to believe in “an Intelligence that produced the integrative complexity of creation.”
4. The intelligent design of the universe prompted even a prominent atheist to become a deist (Anthony Flew)
- **If we open our eyes to the world around us, we will say “I believe!”**

[Through His creation we can know that **God exists**. But what does this Supreme Being desire of us? What does He want us to know or do? For that...]

II. GOD SPEAKS LOUDLY THROUGH HIS WORD

A. GOD'S VOICE IN HIS WORD...

1. Is designed to produce faith (trust, conviction) - **Ro 10:17**
2. **Fulfilled prophecy** is designed to produce faith in God - **Isa 42:8-9; 44:6-8; 45:18-21; 46:9-11**
3. **Eyewitness testimony** offers evidence to believe in Jesus - **Ac 10:39-42; 1 Jn 1:1-4; 2 Pe 1:15-16**
4. Through **His Providence**, God's Word has spread to every nation and translated into virtually every language - cf. **Ro 10:17-18**
5. The **manuscript evidence** which attests to its authenticity as a historical document far surpasses any other ancient document (such as those by Socrates, Plato, Homer, etc.)
- **Through His Word God says of Jesus, “This is My Beloved Son, Hear Him!”**

B. HOW WELL DO WE LISTEN...?

1. It was written to produce faith in Jesus - **Jn 20:30-31**
2. Do we take the time to read the Word of God? The Bereans did! - **Ac 17:11**
3. David also, and praised it highly - **Psa 19:7-11; 119:97-105**
4. We have so much more of God's Word than did David, shall we not read it?
-- **If we open our ears to the Word of God, we will say "I believe in Jesus!"**

[Note that God not only revealed **His Word**, but sent **Jesus** to this world. In this way...]

III. GOD SPEAKS LOUDLY THROUGH HIS SON

A. GOD'S VOICE IN HIS SON...

1. God now speaks through His Son Jesus - **He 1:1-2**
2. Through Jesus God has manifested Himself most fully - cf. **He 1:3; Jn 1:14-18**
3. The life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus have changed history
4. Countless lives and entire nations have been affected by the sending of His Son
-- **Through His Son, God says "This is who I Am, this is what I desire of you"**

B. HOW WELL DO WE LISTEN...?

1. Do we listen to what Jesus reveals about God? - **Jn 14:6-9**
2. Do we heed His warnings regarding eternal life? - **Mt 7:13-14,21-23**
3. As Jesus said so often, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" - **Mk 4:9**
-- **If we will but listen to Jesus, we will say "You have the words of eternal life!"**

[God not only sent **Jesus** into the world, but has sent **His disciples** throughout the world...]

IV. GOD SPEAKS LOUDLY THROUGH HIS PEOPLE

A. GOD'S VOICE IN HIS PEOPLE...

1. The disciples of Jesus were given a great commission - cf. **Mt 28:19; Mk 16:15-16**
2. Their duty as the people of God is to proclaim His praises - cf. **1 Pe 2:9-10**
3. They are to proclaim His message in word and deed, proving what is the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God - cf. **Ro 12:1-2**
4. Their love and unity are to speak powerful messages to the world
 - a. Through love for one another, that they are Christ's disciples - **Jn 13:34-35**
 - b. Through unity, that God loves us and sent His Son into the world - **Jn 17:20-23**-- **Through His people, God says "I love you, and sent My Son to save you!"**

B. HOW WELL DO WE LISTEN...?

1. Their message has gone out into the world, today everyone has the opportunity to hear God through the lives and words of His people - cf. **Ro 10:18; Co 1:23**
2. Do we notice the transformation in the lives of true disciples? - cf. **1 Pe 2:12**
3. Are we willing to listen to the good news they are willing to share? - cf. **Ac 17:11**
-- **If we will but give them our attention, we will say "What shall we do?"**

CONCLUSION

1. **N.T. Wright** in his book, **Simple Christianity**, mentions universal traits found in mankind...
 - a. The search for justice
 - b. The quest for spirituality

- c. The longing for relationship
 - d. The yearning for beauty
 - **Which he suggests are echoes of a voice, calling us toward God**
2. I agree, though I would add that we have more than echoes; God has spoken...
- a. Through His **Creation**
 - b. Through His **Word**
 - c. Through His **Son**
 - d. Through His **People**
 - **Through such 'voices' God has spoken loud and clear!**
3. Who are they that fail to hear **"The Clarion Voices Of God"**? Only those...
- a. Who have shut their **eyes**
 - b. Who have closed their **ears**
 - c. Who have hardened their **hearts**
 - **Sadly, many have refused to hear the voices of God (Mt 13:15)**

As the Psalmist wrote, fools say there is no God (**Psa 14:1**), and it is the wicked who do not seek Him (**Psa 10:4**). Yet the prophet Isaiah calls upon all mankind to:

***"Seek the Lord while He may be found, Call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the Lord, And He will have mercy on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon."** - Isa 55:6-7*

Are you willing to seek Him, and to heed **"The Clarion Voices Of God"...**?

Cohabitation Before Marriage

INTRODUCTION

1. A practice acceptable to many people today is that of cohabitation before marriage...
 - a. Where a couple who intend to get married decide to live together first
 - b. In a poll on religion and the family conducted for Religion & Ethics Newsweekly, **49%** of Americans said that cohabitation was acceptable
2. Yet in the August 2005 issue of **Psychology Today**, there was an interesting article...
 - a. “The Cohabitation Trap: When ‘Just Living Together’ Sabotages Love” by **Nancy Wartik**
 - b. A blurb advertising the article: “Living together before marriage seems like a smart way to road test the relationship. But cohabitation may lead you to wed for all the wrong reasons--or turn into a one-way trip to splitsville.”
3. The article first described the general reasoning behind cohabitation...
 - a. That many see cohabitation as sort of future laboratory for marriage
 - b. That living together will help them make informed decisions regarding marriage

[Yet the research suggests something different. There is a very real danger in cohabitation before marriage. Before we consider that danger, let’s first make clear what the Bible teaches about...]

I. THE SIN OF COHABITATION

A. MARRIAGE IS HONORABLE...

1. The Bible speaks of the honor of marriage - **He 13:4**
2. Of course, marriage was first instituted by God - cf. **Mt 19:4-6**
3. It symbolizes the relationship between Christ and His church - cf. **Ep 5:22-33**
4. It also serves as a deterrent to fornication (sexual immorality) - cf. **1 Co 7:2,8-9**

B. COHABITATION IS FORNICATION...

1. Fornication is sex outside of the marriage bond
2. The Greek word **porneia** includes “adultery, fornication, homosexuality, lesbianism, intercourse with animals etc.” - **Thayer**
3. Thus cohabitation falls under the condemnation described earlier - cf. **He 13:4**
4. It can keep one out of the kingdom of God - **1 Co 6:9-10; Ga 5:19-21**

[For those who respect the authority of the Scriptures, cohabitation before marriage is rejected on moral grounds. But as illustrated in the above referenced article, there other reasons to reject it...]

II. THE FOLLY OF COHABITATION

A. COHABITATION UNDERMINES COMMITMENT...

1. **Wartik’s** summary of the research:
 - a. “Couples who move in together before marriage have up to two times the odds of divorce, as compared with couples who marry before living together.”
 - b. “Moreover, married couples who have lived together before exchanging vows tend to have poorer-quality marriages than couples who moved in after the wedding.”

2. One theory why this happens - **the inertia hypothesis**
 - a. Many cohabitating couples get married, but without an explicit decision to commit
 - b. The marriage is seen simply as the next step in a relationship, not much different than the decision to live together
3. Men who cohabit are especially less likely to commit in a marriage relationship
 - a. The hesitancy to commit led them to choose cohabitation in the first place
 - b. The uncertainty about the relationship often continues after marriage
 - c. Wartik referenced a 2004 study by psychologist Scott Stanley that found “that men who had lived with their spouse premaritally were on average less committed to their marriages than those who hadn’t.”

B. COHABITATION WEAKENS THE MARITAL BOND...

1. The experience of cohabitation itself is detrimental to the marriage bond
2. “A couple of studies show that when couples cohabit, they tend to adopt less conventional beliefs about marriage and divorce, and it tends to make them less religious.” - **Paul Amato**, professor at Penn State University
3. Those who cohabit do not have the same moral imperative to remain faithful after marriage
 - a. If we are willing to sin **with each other** before we marry...
 - b. How do we know we won’t **sin against each other** after we marry?
4. A successful marriage is one built on trust; such trust is stronger among those who fear the Lord more than they fear their spouse!

C. COHABITATION INJURIOUS TO CHILDREN...

1. To children whose parents remain in cohabitation
 - a. “...cohabitation is not an ideal living arrangement for children.” - **Wartik**
 - b. “Emotionally or academically, the children of cohabiters just don’t do as well, on average, as those with two married parents...” - **ibid.**
2. To children whose parents cohabit and then marry
 - a. If born out of wedlock, the stigma of illegitimacy looms
 - b. Even if born after the marriage, the parents’ example of cohabitation will likely encourage the children to follow in their steps

CONCLUSION

1. Cohabitation is certainly no indication that one is serious about getting married...
 - a. Many persons “...have different standards for living partners than for life partners.” - **Wartik**
 - b. “People are much fussier about whom they marry than whom they cohabit with.” - **Amato**
2. The Biblical concept of marriage is that life partners and living partners are to be the same...
 - a. That people do not live together until they are willing to commit their lives to one another
 - b. Such commitment strengthens the marriage bond and provides security for the children

If you desire the best for yourself and your children, then follow the Biblical concept of marriage...!

Commanded To Love

INTRODUCTION

1. In the minds of many, love is simply an emotion...
 - a. A feeling that cannot be forced
 - b. An emotion that can come and go (e.g., “I don’t love you anymore...”)
2. Yet we are commanded to love...
 - a. And not just in the sense of active good will
 - b. But also in the sense of affection, friendship
3. It is common to distinguish between two different Greek words for love...
 - a. **Agape** (active good will), as that which is commanded
 - b. **Phileo** (fondness, friendship), as that which cannot be forced
4. Yet the distinction between the two is not always clear cut...
 - a. **Agape** can also be defined as “brotherly love, affection” - **Thayer, Strong**
 - b. **Phileo** is often commanded in the Scriptures

[Perhaps a review of how we are commanded to love is in order. Also, how we can be taught to develop an emotional love towards another person. Beginning first with the command to love...]

I. WE ARE COMMANDED TO LOVE

A. GOD AND JESUS...

1. We are commanded to love (**agape**) God with our heart - **Mk 12:30**
2. We are commanded to love (**phileo**) Jesus, more than family - **1 Co 16:22; Mt 10:37**

B. THOSE IN OUR COMMUNITY...

1. We are commanded to love (**agape**) our neighbor - **Mk 12:31**
2. We are commanded to love (**agape**) our enemies - **Mt 5:44**

C. THOSE IN OUR FAMILIES...

1. Husbands are to love (**agape**) their wives (which includes to cherish) - **Ep 5:25,28-29**
2. Wives are to love their husbands (**philandros**, to love as a friend) - **Ti 2:4**
3. Mothers are to love their children (**philoteknos**, to be fond of one’s children) - **Ti 2:4**

D. THOSE IN THE CHURCH...

1. We are to love (**agape**) one another as Christ loved us - **Jn 13:34**
2. We are to be kindly affectionate (**philostorgos**, love of family) to one another with brotherly love (**philadelphia**, fraternal affection) - **Ro 12:10**

[It should be evident that the command to love often requires displaying a **true, heartfelt, affection** towards another (e.g., Jesus, spouses, children, brethren in Christ). If **commanded**, then it must be something we can **develop** where lacking. By the grace of God, we can be **taught** how to love...]

II. WE ARE TAUGHT HOW TO LOVE

A. WE CAN BE TAUGHT BY...

1. **God**
 - a. Concerning brotherly love (**philadelphia**) to love one another (**agape**) - **1 Th 4:9**
 - b. How He sent His Son - **1 Jn 4:9-10**
2. **Jesus**
 - a. How He was willing to die for us - **1 Jn 3:16**
 - b. How He loved (**agape** and **phileo**) His disciples - **Jn 11:3,5** (Lazarus, Mary, Martha); **Jn 13:1,34** (the disciples); **Jn 13:23; 20:2** (John)
3. **Paul**
 - a. Who taught Christians how to walk in love - **Ep 5:1-2**
 - b. Who taught husbands how to love their wives - **Ep 5:25-33**
 - c. Who practiced brotherly love (**agapetos**, beloved, dear) - cf. **Ph 4:1**
4. **Peter**
 - a. Who taught us to love one another (**phileo** and **agape**) fervently - **1 Pe 1:22; 4:8**
 - b. Who taught us to love (**agape**) the brotherhood, as brethren (**philadelphos**) - **1 Pe 2:17; 3:8**
 - c. Who practiced brotherly love (**agapetos**, beloved, dear) - cf. **2 Pe 3:15**
5. **Other Christians**
 - a. Older women should be capable of teaching the younger women - **Ti 2:3-4**
 - b. Even young Christians can set an example of how to love - **1 Ti 4:12; 2 Th 1:3**

B. WE CAN DEVELOP HEARTFELT AFFECTION...

1. **Phileo** love can be enhanced by adding **agape** love to it - cf. **2 Pe 1:7**
2. Display active good will (**agape**), and heartfelt affection (**phileo**) will follow - cf. **1 Th 4:9**

CONCLUSION

1. We cannot excuse the lack of heartfelt love toward Jesus, our brethren, or our families...
 - a. By making a distinction between **agape** and **phileo**
 - b. For both kinds of love are commanded, and the two often overlap
2. Where we lack a heartfelt love toward Jesus, our brethren, our family members...
 - a. We need to acknowledge the deficiency (as a sign of spiritual immaturity)
 - b. We need to be willing to relearn love (whether it be **agape** or **phileo**)
3. When we need to learn love others with a heartfelt love...
 - a. Look to the examples of the Father, Jesus, the apostles, and other Christians
 - b. Take the initiative to practice **agape** love, and **phileo** love will develop naturally

We have been purified to have unfeigned, affectionate love for one another (**philadelphia**); do we love one another (**agape**) fervently as we should...? - cf. **1 Pe 1:22**

Congregational Evangelism

INTRODUCTION

1. Evangelism is to be a central feature of the Lord's church...
 - a. To make disciples of all the nations - cf. **Mt 28:19-20**
 - b. To preach the gospel to every person - cf. **Mk 16:15-16**
2. There are many good ways to evangelize...
 - a. Public preaching and teaching, private studies and conversations, TV, radio, the Internet
 - b. What works well often depends on the circumstances, the culture, etc.
3. What works well in many places can be described as "**Congregational Evangelism**"...
 - a. Assuming there is **a congregation that already exists** in a community
 - b. Assuming its **members are willing to do their part** to make it work

[The term "**Congregational Evangelism**" could be used to describe many different efforts by local churches. In this study, I will use it to describe one particular approach...]

I. WHAT IS CONGREGATIONAL EVANGELISM?

A. UTILIZING A CONGREGATION'S MEMBERS...

1. Making use of **the members' contacts**
 - a. Each member has a network of potential contacts
 - b. These contacts may be family, friends, neighbors, coworkers
 2. Making use of **the members' abilities**
 - a. Each member has some ability to offer
 - b. These abilities may vary; i.e., hospitality, teaching
- **With any congregation of Christians, there is the potential for evangelism**

B. UTILIZING A CONGREGATION'S ASSEMBLIES...

1. Making use of **the congregation's assemblies**
 - a. Christians assemble regularly for worship and Bible study
 - b. These assemblies involve praise to God and interaction with those present
 2. What happens can have an impact on those who visit
 - a. Consider Paul's comments in **1 Co 14:23-25**
 - b. Note that the impact can be either negative or positive
- **When assemblies are utilized positively, you have "Congregational Evangelism"!**

["**Congregational Evangelism**" occurs when the members' utilize their contacts and abilities in conjunction with their assemblies to produce a positive effect among those who visit. Now consider...]

II. HOW CONGREGATIONAL EVANGELISM WORKS

A. BY ACTIVATING THE CONGREGATION'S MEMBERS...

1. The members must commit themselves to evangelism - cf. **1 Pe 2:9,10**
2. The members must invite people to services (via cards, phone, letters) - cf. **Jn 1:46**
3. The members must extend kindness to those who visit - cf. **He 13:2**

4. The members must display a positive picture for visitors - cf. **1 Co 14:23-25**
 5. The members must create opportunities for teaching - e.g., **Ac 10:24**
 - a. One does not even need to know what to teach
 - b. They can connect the visitor or prospect with a teacher
- **Everyone must be committed and do that which provides opportunities for those willing and able to teach**

B. BY ACTIVATING THE CONGREGATION'S SERVICES...

1. The members must **arrive early**
 - a. Visitors usually arrive early and leave early
 - b. The best opportunity to visit is before services
 2. The members must **greet the visitors**
 - a. Greet them in the parking lot
 - b. Greet them before services begin
 - c. Members sitting on the back rows are the "welcoming committee"
 3. The members must **offer worship that edifies** - cf. **1 Co 14:23-25,26b**
 - a. **By those who lead**, setting the example (e.g., enthusiastic)
 - 1) Starting with those who make the announcements
 - 2) Continuing with those who lead in song and prayer
 - 3) And of course, the preacher!
 - b. **By every member** also setting an example
 - 1) By how they sing (or do not sing) - cf. **1 Co 14:15**
 - 2) By how they pray (do I hear an "Amen"?) - cf. **1 Co 14:15-16**
 - 3) By how they listen (with readiness, or apparent boredom?) - cf. **Ac 17:11**
 4. The members must **visit with the visitors**
 - a. After services, if not before
 - b. Visitors must be given priority over other members
 - 1) You can always visit with the members
 - 2) This may be your only opportunity with the visitors
- **When a visitor leaves our services, what will they think? Will they want to return?**

CONCLUSION

1. Hopefully, their experience will encourage them to return again and again...
 - a. Where there will be opportunity to learn more
 - b. Where opportunities for personal study will be more likely
 - c. Where eventually the gospel is shared and gratefully received!
2. **"Congregational Evangelism"** as defined in this study, is nothing more than...
 - a. The members of a congregation utilizing their individual contacts, inviting people to services
 - b. Making sure that those who visit are encouraged by what they see to return

When this happens, the opportunity to sow the seed will be greatly enhanced...!

Congregational Singing

INTRODUCTION

1. In his web log, Ray Pritchard asked: **“Whatever happened to congregational singing?”**...
 - a. In visiting many (denominational) churches, he often found the practice lacking altogether
 - b. In some churches that had it, he found the singing lackluster

2. He offered some reasons why such may be the case...
 - a. Song leader chooses songs no one knows
 - b. Style issues confuses people (Fanny Crosby vs. Hillsong)
 - c. Architecture not always conducive to singing
 - d. Not enough people (e.g., 70 in a building that seats 500)
 - e. Too many new songs presented too fast
 - f. Wooden worship leader
 - g. Musical instruments so loud that singing is overpowered
 - h. Songs with little sense of order or progression or theme
 - i. Some congregations seem to not expect members to sing
 - j. Choirs and orchestras to do their singing for them
 - k. Lack of spiritual zeal
 - l. Preachers and other leaders don't sing
 - m. Entertainment culture leads us to expect to be entertained
 - n. We have lost the theological truth that God is to be praised in the singing of His people

3. In churches of Christ, congregational singing has been held as a matter of principle...
 - a. In opposition to instrumental music and choirs
 - b. Yet some churches today are getting away from congregation singing
 - c. In many churches that have it, the singing seems half-hearted at best

[**“Whatever happened to congregational singing?”** is a question some may do well to ask themselves. In seeking to ensure congregational singing its proper place in our worship, we first review...]

I. THE BASIS FOR CONGREGATIONAL SINGING

A. THERE IS BIBLICAL PRECEPT...

1. The Messianic age to be a time of singing praise - **Isa 12:1-6**
2. Christians were commanded to sing to one another - **Ep 5:19; Co 3:16**
- **Prophet and apostle make it clear that we are to sing praises**

B. THERE IS BIBLICAL PRACTICE...

1. Jesus and His apostles sang a hymn following the Last Supper - **Mt 26:30**
2. Heavenly beings and the sainted dead fill heaven with their praise - **Re 5:9-14; 7:9-12**
- **If such deemed it proper to join together in the praise of God, shouldn't we?**

C. THERE IS BIBLICAL PRINCIPLE...

1. One purpose of singing is to praise the Lord (inherent in the meaning of “hymn”)
2. Another is to teach and admonish one another - **Co 3:16**
3. A third is to be enriched by the Word and filled with the Spirit - **Co 3:16; Ep 5:18-19**

-- **Congregational singing reaches upward, outward, and inward!**

[But not all congregational singing praises God, teaches one another, and uplifts ourselves. To help reach that goal, here are some suggestions related to...]

II. THE PRACTICE OF CONGREGATIONAL SINGING

A. WHAT SONG LEADERS CAN DO...

1. Lead with **enthusiasm**
 - a. The song leader generally sets the tone
 - b. His influence goes beyond announcing the number and starting the song
 - c. The song leader's demeanor should reflect the nature of the songs he leads
 2. Lead with **familiarity**
 - a. People respond to songs they know and love
 - b. Few people are able to catch on and sing songs that are new to them
 - c. Too many new songs, and people get out of the habit of singing with fervor
 - d. There is a time and place to learn new songs; not every service is the time or place
- **Song leaders need not be accomplished, but they should be thoughtful of their function**

B. WHAT THE CONGREGATION CAN DO...

1. Sing with their **understanding** - **1 Co 14:15**
 - a. It is the words of the songs that express praise and provide edification
 - b. Melody is enhanced when we pay careful attention to the words
 2. Sing with their **heart** - **Ep 5:19; Co 3:16**
 - a. We are to make melody with our hearts, sing with grace in our hearts
 - b. Thus we should let the words of the song influence our emotions
 3. Sing with their **voice** - **Psa 51:14-15; Co 3:16**
 - a. The Psalmist wrote of praising God aloud with his lips, tongue and mouth
 - b. We are to teach and admonish one another; how can we if we do not hear one another?
 4. Sing with their **presence** - **Psa 122:1**
 - a. Practice makes perfect; sing with others whenever there is opportunity
 - b. Sit close to those who like to sing; you are more likely to sing louder
- **Praising God and edifying others should engage our whole being!**

CONCLUSION

1. Congregational singing is a spiritual activity with great potential...
 - a. Offering hymns of praise to God constitute spiritual sacrifices - **He 13:15**
 - b. Teaching and admonishing one another in song is one way we exhort one another - **He 10:24-25**
2. Whether congregation singing fulfills its potential depends on us...
 - a. Whether we appreciate the precept, practice, and principle behind it
 - b. Whether we sing as God intended: with our whole being (mind, heart, and voice)

May we as a congregation of God's people always have the attitude of David when it comes to singing...

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, O my soul! While I live I will praise the Lord; I will sing praises to my God while I have my being. - Psa 146:1-2

The Conversion Of Saul

INTRODUCTION

1. Fundamental to the Christian faith is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...
 - a. If Christ was not raised, our faith is in vain - cf. **1 Co 15:14,17**
 - b. If Christ was not raised, the apostles were liars - cf. **1 Co 15:15**

2. One evidence for the resurrection is the transformation that took place in the lives of those who knew Jesus...
 - a. Even a Orthodox Jewish scholar admitted as much
 - b. "If the disciples were totally disappointed and on the verge of desperate flight because of the very real reason of the crucifixion, it took another very real reason in order to transform them from a band of disheartened and dejected Jews into the most self-confident missionary society in world history." - **Pinchas Lapid**, former Chairman of the Applied Linguistics Department at Israel's Bar-Ilan University (TIME, May 7, 1979)
 - c. He concluded that a bodily resurrection could possibly have been that reason!

3. An amazing transformation that took place was that in the conversion of Saul of Tarsus...
 - a. A devout Pharisee, persecutor of Christians
 - b. Who became Paul the apostle, persecuted by his Jewish brethren

[In this lesson we shall consider why Saul's conversion serves as strong evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. Let's begin by reading **Ga 1:13-14**, and noticing...]

I. SAUL'S FORMER MANNER OF LIFE

A. HE PERSECUTED THE CHURCH...

1. In Jerusalem - **Ac 8:1-3**
2. And beyond - **Ac 9:1-2**
- **Something he believed he ought to do - Ac 26:9-11**

B. HE WAS ADVANCING IN JUDAISM...

1. As a scholar, trained at the feet of Gamaliel - **Ac 22:3**; cf. **5:34**
2. In social standing, advancing beyond many of his contemporaries
 - a. Holding positions of religious power - cf. **Ac 26:12**
 - b. Which likely included access to financial power
- **On the "fast tract" of success among his peers!**

C. HE WAS ZEALOUS FOR HIS TRADITIONS...

1. Proud to be a Hebrew - **Ph 3:4-5**
2. Proud to be a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee - cf. **Ac 23:6**
 - a. A conservative sect of the Jews
 - b. Noted for their opposition to Jesus during His ministry - e.g., **Mt 12:14**
- **With such a religious background, he was naturally prejudiced - Ac 26:9**

[Yet this prejudiced, prominent Pharisee, fierce in his opposition to Jesus and His church, became one of the most influential Christians of all time. How did this happen? Let's examine several...]

II. EXPLANATIONS FOR SAUL'S CONVERSION

A. PERHAPS THERE WAS AN ULTERIOR MOTIVE...

1. Could it have been wealth?
 - a. He had that with the Jews
 - b. He left it for the poverty of following Christ - cf. **1 Co 4:11-12; Ac 20:33-34**
 2. Could it have been fame?
 - a. He had that with the Jews
 - b. Consider what he experienced as a Christian - cf. **1 Co 4:10,13**
 - 1) Regarded as foolish and weak, even by other Christians
 - 2) Viewed as the filth of the world by those in the world
 3. Could it have been power?
 - a. He had this with the Jews
 - b. Compare this with what he suffered as a Christian - cf. **2 Co 11:24-28**
- **Indeed, no ulterior motive can be found to explain Saul's conversion**

B. PERHAPS HE WAS DECEIVED...

1. Then who deceived him?
 - a. Friends would not, for he was their champion against the Christians
 - b. Christians could not, because of his persecution against them
 - 1) Putting them into prison, chasing them into other towns - **Ac 8:3; 9:1-2**
 - 2) Even after his conversion, many feared him - cf. **Ac 9:26**
 2. His testimony does not allow for the possibility of deception
 - a. He claimed to receive his gospel from Jesus, not man - **Ga 1:11-12**
 - b. He claimed to see Jesus raised from the dead - **1 Co 15:8**
- **The empirical nature of his testimony precludes the possibility of deception**

C. PERHAPS HE WAS MAD...

1. Such was the conclusion of Festus, the governor - **Ac 26:24**
 2. Others have tried to explain his conversion in psychological terms
 - a. That his intense persecution of Christians gave him a guilt-ridden conscience
 - b. That combined with the heat on the road to Damascus, he became delirious and only thought he saw Jesus!
 3. Yet consider the testimony of Saul (Paul)
 - a. He had a clear conscience regarding persecuting the Christians - **Ac 23:1**
 - 1) It was something he thought he should do - **Ac 26:9**
 - 2) He did it out of ignorance, for which he knew he received mercy - **1 Ti 1:13**
 - b. He said he saw Jesus more than once
 - 1) Not just on the road to Damascus
 - 2) But on other occasions as well - **Ac 18:9-10; 22:17-21; 23:11; 2 Co 12:8-9**
- **Read his epistles, do they seem like letters written by a mad man?**

D. THE ONLY PLAUSIBLE EXPLANATION: HE SAW JESUS...!

1. This is the explanation given by Paul (Saul) himself
 - a. Before the Jerusalem mob - **Ac 22:1-16**
 - b. Before King Agrippa and Festus the governor - cf. **Ac 26:12-23**
2. It is the only explanation that explains his conversion
 - a. Why he was willing to forego wealth, fame, and power

- b. Why he was willing to suffer poverty, shame, and persecution
- **As he said “I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision...” - Ac 26:19**

CONCLUSION

1. The conversion of Saul is best explained by...
 - a. His testimony that it was the resurrected Jesus who appeared to him
 - b. Not once, but continuously throughout the rest of his life-- **Serving as one of the greatest evidences for the resurrection of Jesus!**

2. What is the significance of the resurrection of Jesus?
 - a. For the **unbeliever**, it verifies...
 - 1) The fact of His deity - cf. **Ro 1:4**
 - 2) The fact of final judgment - cf. **Ac 17:30-31**
 - b. For the **believer**, it verifies...
 - 1) The adequacy of our justification (Jesus' blood does cover our sins) - cf. **Ro 4:25**
 - 2) The hope for our own resurrection - cf. **1 Co 15:20-22**

Through such evidence as the conversion of Saul, God has born witness to the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Have you responded to this evidence with the obedience of faith?

Cremation Or Burial?

INTRODUCTION

1. A practice increasing in popularity is that of cremation as opposed to burial...
 - a. Cremation is certainly much cheaper
 - b. Popularized in modern culture (e.g., the cremation scene at the end of **Star Wars I**)
2. But concerned Christians often ask...
 - a. Is cremation scriptural?
 - b. Is cremation sinful?
 - c. What about loved ones who have been cremated?

[For answers to such questions, it may help to do a Biblical and historical survey concerning the practices of cremation and burial. So let's begin with..]

I. THE PRACTICE OF CREMATION

A. IN THE BIBLE...

1. The bodies of Saul and his sons were burned, but the bones were buried (twice!) - **1 Sam 31:12-13**; cf. **2 Sam 21:12-14**
2. Bodies were sometimes burned during times of pestilence - **Amo 6:10**
3. Bodies were burned as a form of condemnation - **Josh 7:15,25**; **2 Kin 23:19-20**
4. Moab was judged for burning the bones of the king of Edom - **Amo 2:1**
5. Paul writes of giving his body to be burned, but he was speaking of martyrdom - **1 Co 13:3**
- **Nowhere in the Scriptures is cremation spoken of with approval**

B. IN HISTORY...

1. "Cremation was the normal practice of Greeks and Romans. Many of them believed in the immortality of the soul and saw no reason to give special attention to the body." - **Timothy George, Cremation Confusion**
2. "Hindus, with their doctrine of reincarnation, still practice cremation." - **ibid.**
3. "Among the early Hebrews cremation was the exception." - **ISBE** (revised)
4. "Some rabbis considered the burning of the corpse consistent only with idolatry (Abodah Zarah i.3)." - **ISBE** (revised)
5. "The first cremation in America took place in 1876, accompanied by readings from Charles Darwin and the Hindu scriptures." - **George, ibid.**
6. "For many years, relatively few persons (mostly liberals and freethinkers) chose cremation. But that has changed dramatically. Only 5 percent of Americans were cremated in 1962; by 2000 it was 25.5 percent." - **George, ibid.**
- **The practice of cremation is clearly of heathen origin**

[Now let's consider...]

II. THE CUSTOM OF BURIAL

A. IN THE BIBLE...

1. Burial was clearly the custom among the patriarchs

- a. Sarah was buried by Abraham - **Gen 23:3-4,17-20**
 - b. Abraham was buried by his sons, Isaac and Ishmael - **Gen 25:8-9**
 - c. Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, was buried near Bethel - **Gen 35:8**
 - d. Rachel was buried near Bethlehem by Jacob - **Gen 35:19-20**
 - e. Isaac was buried by his sons, Jacob and Esau - **Gen 35:29**
 - g. Jacob buried Leah in the family tomb - **Gen 49:31**
 - g. Jacob made Joseph swear to bury him in the same place - **Gen 47:29-31; 50:2,13**
 - h. Joseph was embalmed in Egypt, later buried at Shechem - **Gen 50:26; Josh 24:32**
 2. Burial was the custom during the Mosaic dispensation
 - a. Miriam, sister of Moses, was buried in Kadesh - **Num 20:1**
 - b. Moses was buried by God Himself in the land of Moab - **Deu 34:5-6**
 - c. Joshua was buried in his inheritance at Timnath-Serah - **Josh 24:30**
 - d. Samuel was honored with a national burial - **1 Sam 25:1**
 - e. David, Solomon, Hezekiah, and many other kings were buried in the City of David - **1 Kin 2:10; 11:43; 15:8; 2 Kin 15:38; 2 Chr 32:33**
 3. Burial continued to be the custom for Jesus and His followers
 - a. Jesus was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea - **Mt 27:57-60**
 - b. Stephen was buried after his martyrdom - **Ac 8:2**
- **The overwhelming evidence in the Bible reveals burial as the preferred custom**

B. IN HISTORY...

1. "The main reasons for the Jewish preference for burial appear to be their belief that God intended for the soul and body to be compatible and their belief (especially in later Judaism) in the resurrection of the body." - **ISBE** (revised)
 2. "... clearly the early Christians followed the Jewish practice of burying the dead (see Tert., Apol., xlii; Minuc. Felix, Octav., xxxix; Aug., De civ. Dei, i.12, 13)." - **ISBE** (old)
 3. "As the catacombs in Rome attest, the early Christians insisted on burying their dead. Christian grave sites were called *coemeteria* (cemeteries), which literally means 'sleeping places,' reflecting belief in a future resurrection. - **Timothy George, ibid.**
 4. "Of course, many martyrs were burned to death, but Christians believed God would bring them forth unimpaired at the resurrection. 'We do not fear any loss from any mode of sepulture,' declared Minucius Felix, 'but we adhere to the old and better custom of burial.' - **ibid.**
- **Not until recent times did Christians even consider cremation as an alternative**

[Having surveyed the Biblical and historical evidence, here are some...]

III. REASONS TO PREFER BURIAL OVER CREMATION

A. CREMATION IS OF HEATHEN ORIGIN...

1. There is no Biblical support for cremation
 2. History reveals that cremation is of heathen origin
- **Why choose a practice with such pagan origins?**

B. GOD'S PEOPLE ALWAYS PRACTICED BURIAL...

1. That is, as revealed in the pages of the Bible
 2. Throughout Patriarchal and Mosaic dispensations, and into the Christian age
- **Why not rather emulate the practice of faithful saints in the Bible?**

C. BURIAL REFLECTS RESPECT FOR THE BODY...

1. "Unlike the Greeks, who regarded the body as a prison of the soul, both Hebrews and Christians saw it as the integration of human personality." - **ISBE** (revised)
 2. "Furthermore, the Christian emphasis upon the body of the temple of the Holy Spirit increased their disinclination toward cremation" - **ibid.**
 - a. Our bodies have served as a temple of the Spirit - **1 Co 6:19**
 - b. We honor places where George Washington slept; why not more those bodies where the Holy Spirit dwelt?
 3. Indeed, our bodies do not belong to us, but to the Lord!
 - a. The body is for the Lord - **1 Co 6:13**
 - b. The body is not our own, but bought at a price - **1 Co 6:19**
 - c. With which we are to glorify God - **1 Co 6:20**
- **Which practice, burial or cremation, shows a higher value for the body?**

D. BURIAL REFLECTS OUR HOPE IN THE RESURRECTION...

1. We believe in the resurrection of the dead - **Jn 5:28-29; Ac 24:15**
 2. We therefore eagerly await the redemption of our bodies - **Ro 8:23-25**
 3. We believe that what is sown in corruption will be raised in incorruption - **1 Co 15:42-54**
- **Which practice better pictures the hope that we have of the resurrection?**

CONCLUSION

1. We return to our original question: Is cremation unscriptural...?
 - a. It certainly is without scriptural support
 - b. Burial is certainly a scriptural practice
2. But is cremation sinful...?
 - a. If one has any doubt as to its approval by God, then it is! - cf. **Ro 14:23**
 - b. How much better to have a clear conscience supported by the revelation of God's Word
3. What of those who have been cremated...?
 - a. I am content to let the Lord be the Judge
 - b. We know that the Lord has the power to raise all the dead, no matter what has happened to their bodies - **Re 20:13**

Yet the Biblical support is clearly on the side of burial as opposed to cremation. Burial certainly reflects a higher regard for the body, which is also reflected in this prayer of Paul...

"Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." - 1 Th 5:23

Daily Bible Reading - Part One

Why We Need To Make It A Habit

INTRODUCTION

1. **John Quincy Adams**, the sixth president of our country, once stated...

“So great is my veneration for the Bible that the earlier my children begin to read it the more confident will be my hope that they will prove useful citizens of their country and respectable members of society. I have for many years made it a practice to read through the Bible once every year.”

2. **George Muller**, who established many orphanages throughout England, said...

“I believe that the one chief reason that I have been kept in happy useful service is that I have been a lover of Holy Scripture. It has been my habit to read the Bible through four times a year; in a prayerful spirit, to apply it to my heart, and practice what I find there. I have been for sixty-nine years a happy man; happy, happy, happy.”

3. Both of these men spoke of the habit of Bible reading...
 - a. This is a habit which many great people in the past engaged in regularly
 - b. Many people still do so today
 - c. But I fear that if the truth were known, fewer and fewer people have developed the habit of daily reading the Bible
 - 1) Many have probably never read the New Testament from beginning to end
 - 2) Even fewer have never read the entire Old Testament

4. And yet, I agree with...
 - a. **Patrick Henry**, who said: “The Bible is worth more than all other books which have ever been printed.”
 - b. **Charles Dickens**, who wrote: “The New Testament is the very best book that ever was or will be known in the world.”

5. For this reason, I have one objective in this lesson and the one to follow: **to encourage every person to develop the habit of daily Bible reading!**

[To help motivate us all in this regard, I wish to point out **why** it is so important to develop the habit of daily Bible reading...]

I. BECAUSE OF THE POWER OF GOD’S WORD TO SAVE - Ja 1:21

A. GOD’S WORD SAVES US BY PRODUCING FAITH... - Ro 10:17

1. Without faith it is impossible to please God - **He 11:6**
2. Without faith in Jesus we cannot be saved - **Jn 8:24**
3. The Word Of God was written to produce such saving faith - **Jn 20:30-31**

B. GOD’S WORD SAVES US BY CAUSING US TO BE BORN AGAIN... - 1 Pe 1:22-23

1. Jesus stressed the necessity of being born again - **Jn 3:3-5**
2. The rebirth involving water and Spirit comes when one has received the “incorruptible seed” of God’s Word; in particular, the gospel - **1 Pe 1:23-25; Ja 1:18**

C. GOD’S WORD SAVES US BY KEEPING US SAVED... - Ac 20:29-32

1. Paul frequently spoke of this value of God’s Word (especially of the Old Testament)
 - a. To the Corinthians - **1 Co 10:11-12**
 - b. To Timothy - **2 Ti 3:14-17**
2. It is the lack of God’s Word which has always destroyed the people of God - **Hos 4:6**

II. BECAUSE OF THE POWER OF GOD’S WORD TO COMFORT - Ro 15:4

A. GOD’S WORD COMFORTS THROUGH THE HOPE IT GIVES... - Ro 15:4

1. Paul speaks in this context of the Old Testament
2. Even it provides assurance of hope because it tells how God always keeps His promises

**B. GOD’S WORD COMFORTS THROUGH THE “HAPPINESS” IT GIVES...
- Psa 1:1-3**

1. Happiness through the stability and nourishment it provides
2. Note that this happiness comes to the one engaged in daily Bible reading! (“day and night”)

C. GOD’S WORD COMFORTS THROUGH THE PEACE IT GIVES... - Psa 119:165

1. With such inner peace, nothing causes them to stumble - **Psa 119:92-93**
2. As **Robert E. Lee** has said: “In all my perplexities and distresses, the Bible has never failed to give me light and strength.”

[Much more could be said about the value of God’s Word, but I want to stress another reason why everyone should develop the habit of daily Bible reading...]

III. BECAUSE WE ARE CREATURES OF HABIT AND TIME

A. AS CREATURES OF HABIT...

1. We either have good habits or bad habits
2. If we have not developed the **good** habit of daily Bible reading...
3. Then we have developed the **bad** habit of NOT reading the Bible daily!

B. AS CREATURES OF TIME...

1. We are subject to the limitations time places on us
2. As illustrated by James, our time on earth is brief - **Ja 4:14**

C. AS CREATURES OF BOTH...

1. If we have not developed the **good** habit of daily Bible reading...
2. Our time on this earth will one day catch up with us
 - a. We will have spent our lives on this earth without utilizing the benefits provided by daily reading of God’s Word
 - b. Many will have to face God having never read through His Word **once!**

CONCLUSION

1. This lesson is being presented to you at the end of another year...
 - a. Did you develop the habit this year?
 - b. If not, see how time has once again passed you by, and you have yet to read the Word of God upon which your soul's salvation depends!

2. As another year is about to begin, and many resolutions are being made, I want to encourage you to make **Daily Bible Reading** one of the top resolutions on your list, so at the end of the next year things will be different

In the next lesson, I will offer suggestions as to **how** to make Daily Bible Reading a habit...

Daily Bible Reading - Part Two

How To Make It A Habit

INTRODUCTION

1. In the previous lesson, I sought to encourage everyone to make daily Bible reading a habit...
 - a. By emphasizing the value of the Word of God to:
 - 1) Save us
 - 2) Comfort us
 - b. By stressing we are creatures of habit and time
 - 1) We either have a habit of reading or not reading
 - 2) If we have gotten in the habit of not reading, our time on earth will end without our ever having read God's Word

2. In this lesson, I want to offer suggestions for making daily Bible reading a habit in our lives

[To be successful in forming any good habit...]

I. WE NEED TO CREATE A "POSITIVE ADDICTION" TO DAILY BIBLE READING

A. WHAT IS A "POSITIVE ADDICTION"...

1. Usually when we hear the word addiction, we think of **negative addictions**
 - a. Which is simply another word for **bad habits**
 - b. Such as smoking, swearing, drinking, gambling
 - c. When something bad for us:
 - 1) Becomes "second nature"
 - 2) We do it without much effort or thought
 - d. We become dependent on it, either emotionally or physically
 - e. When we try to do without it, we experience various degrees of discomfort
2. **Positive addiction** is when you become dependent upon a **good habit**
 - a. For example, exercise can become a positive addiction
 - 1) Those who have made exercise a pleasurable and frequent experience soon become "addicted" to it
 - 2) So that if they go a few days without exercise, they feel uneasy, depressed, irritable
 - 3) Of course, if they go without exercise long enough, the discomfort will eventually pass
 - b. So a positive addiction is a habit which is:
 - 1) Good for you, either physically, mentally, or spiritually
 - 2) A source of pleasure and satisfaction
 - 3) One that should you neglect it, begins to give you "withdrawal pains"

B. WHY IS A POSITIVE ADDICTION TO DAILY BIBLE READING NECESSARY...?

1. It will help you maintain the practice of reading the Bible
2. Should a few days go by without reading the Bible, the "discomfort" experienced will help motivate you to get "back on track"
3. Most people who have tried to read the Bible daily and did not keep it up...
 - a. Are people who have never experienced a positive addiction to reading God's Word

- b. Rather than a pleasurable experience, it was a chore
- c. So when they fell behind in their goals, there was little motivation to catch up

[Having explained what I mean by “positive addiction”, here are some thoughts on...]

II. HOW TO CREATE A POSITIVE ADDICTION FOR DAILY BIBLE READING

A. THE PRINCIPLES ARE THE SAME FOR CREATING ANY POSITIVE ADDICTION...

1. You must make the experience a pleasurable one
 - a. This is where many people fail when it comes to “exercise”
 - b. Going about it the wrong way, the daily workouts are painful and miserable
 - c. Therefore any excuse not to exercise prevents them from keeping it up
2. The same applies to reading the Bible
 - a. To many, they try to do too much too soon
 - b. The experience soon becomes little more than “marking a checklist”

B. SOME SUGGESTIONS...

1. **Start slow, with small goals**
 - a. Many try to start by reading through the Bible in one year
 - 1) An admirable goal, but most never make it past Exodus or Leviticus
 - 2) Before Bible reading has become a positive addiction, they run into difficult passages of Scripture
 - 3) They are like beginning joggers who try to run a mile the first time out
 - b. I would recommend starting with making the New Testament a yearly goal
 - 1) This requires no more than a chapter a day
 - 2) The material is easier, more edifying at the outset
 - c. Once you have read the New Testament in a year a couple of times
 - 1) You might read through the Old Testament one year
 - 2) Then begin reading through the entire Bible each year
2. **Begin each session with prayer**
 - a. Like that found in **Psa 119:18**: “Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your Law.”
 - b. This puts us in the most receptive frame of mind - cf. **Ja 1:21**
3. **Read slowly, carefully**
 - a. This helps to prevent reading without comprehending what you read - cf. **Psa 1:1-2; 119:15-16**
 - b. Reading out loud at times, as though you were reading to someone else, can help to read this way
4. **Make use of Bible study aids**
 - a. Especially a Bible dictionary, and Bible maps
 - b. Don’t observe the “pass over”, passing over...
 - 1) Words you don’t understand
 - 2) Names you don’t know
 - 3) Places unfamiliar to you
 - c. Every time you do, there is that much more of the Bible you don’t understand, don’t get anything out of it
 - d. Take a moment to look them up in the references
5. **Discuss what you read with others**

- a. Encourage others to follow the same program of reading
- b. Share your discoveries, the passages that encourage you
- 6. **Read with the intention to do what it says**
 - a. Otherwise, you are wasting your time! - **Ja 1:22-24**
 - b. The true joy comes in the application of God's Word (another "positive addiction" to develop) - **Ja 1:25**
- 7. **End each session with prayer**
 - a. Like that expressed in **Psa 119:5-6**
 - b. Or the one found in **Psa 119:10-11**

CONCLUSION

1. I have found that following these suggestions the practice of reading the Bible becomes one of great joy: "I rejoice at Your word as one who finds great treasure." - **Psa 119:162**
2. Done on a regular basis, a "positive addiction" for daily Bible reading quickly develops which helps one to keep up this wonderful habit
3. I hope that in some way I have encouraged everyone...
 - a. To begin if they have never done so
 - b. To continue if they are doing so
 - c. To try again if they tried in the past and failed

For there is so much to gain, and there is so much to lose!

Dear Reverend

INTRODUCTION

1. I occasionally receive letters or e-mail with the salutation “**Dear Reverend...**”
 - a. From people who are well-intentioned and seek only to show respect
 - b. For this is considered common courtesy and proper etiquette in addressing ministers

2. Regarding the word “**reverend**” as used in the Bible...
 - a. It is used only of God in our English Bible (KJV, ASV) - **Psa 111:9**
 - b. Other translations use these words:
 - 1) “awesome” (NKJV, NASB, NIV, NRSV)
 - 2) “fearsome” (CEV)
 - 3) “awe-inspiring” (CSB)
 - 4) “terrifying” (GW)
 - c. The Hebrew word (**yare**) is applied to men several times
 - 1) Parents - **Lev 19:3**
 - 2) Moses and Joshua - **Josh 4:14**
 - 3) David - **1 Sam 18:29**

3. Yet the term “**Reverend**” has become one of many titles worn by various religious leaders...
 - a. In Orthodox churches, the following are used depending upon one’s position:
 - 1) His All Holiness, His Beatitude, His Eminence, His Excellency
 - 2) The Right Reverend, The Very Right Reverend
 - 3) The Very Reverend Father, Reverend Father, Mother Superior
 - b. Among Protestant churches, it is not uncommon to find these titles:
 - 1) Father, Doctor
 - 2) Apostle, Bishop, Pastor, Elder, Deacon
 - 3) Evangelist, Preacher, Minister, Teacher

[Is the use of such titles appropriate? How about when describing what one does in the service of the Lord? To answer these questions, consider first...]

I. THE USE OF TITLES

A. CONDEMNED BY JESUS...

1. The scribes and Pharisees loved to be called by men, ‘Rabbi, Rabbi’ - **Mt 23:7**
2. Jesus forbid His disciples from being called:
 - a. Rabbi - **Mt 23:8**
 - b. Father - **Mt 23:9**
 - c. Teacher - **Mt 23:10**

B. FOR EXALTING MEN...

1. Jesus condemns the use of titles and salutations that exalt men above another
2. This is evident from the context
 - a. The scribes and Pharisees loved being exalted by men - **Mt 23:6-7**
 - b. But this is contrary to the principle of servitude and humility - **Mt 23:11-12**
 - c. We are to view ourselves equally as brethren - **Mt 23:8**

[It is the use of religious titles that exalt men over others that Jesus condemns. Yet some of the same terms might rightly be used to describe what one does in the service of the Lord...]

II. THE USE OF DESCRIPTIONS

A. APPROVED BY THE APOSTLES...

1. Paul and Peter frequently used descriptive terms
 - a. Such as apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, teacher - **Ep 4:11**
 - b. Such as elder, bishop, deacon - **1 Pe 5:1-2; Ph 1:1**
2. Paul even used the term “father” in reference to himself
 - a. In his epistle to the Corinthians - **1 Co 4:15**
 - b. In a similar vein, he thought of Timothy as his son - **1 Co 4:17**

B. FOR DESCRIBING WHAT ONE DOES...

1. Such terms were used to describe:
 - a. What individuals did in the service to the Lord
 - b. What their function was in the body of Christ - cf. **Ro 12:3-8**
 - c. How they ministered to their brethren and to the Lord
2. The terms were not used as official titles
 - a. Such as “Apostle so-and-so”, “Father ...”
 - b. Or even “Elder ...”, “Pastor ...”, “Deacon ...”, “Evangelist ...”
 - c. Paul, Peter, etc., were never called “Apostle Paul”, “Apostle Peter”, etc., though the term was often used to describe their service to the Lord - e.g., **Ro 1:1; 1 Co 1:1**

CONCLUSION

1. The difference may seem insignificant, but there is a distinction between using terms...
 - a. As **titles** by which to address someone - e.g., “Evangelist Mark Copeland”
 - b. As **descriptions** of the service one provides - e.g., “Mark Copeland, Evangelist”
2. The difference is between...
 - a. Obeying the teaching of Christ, our Lord and Teacher - **Mt 23:8-10**
 - b. Understanding the proper use of descriptions by the apostles of our Lord - **Ep 4:11**
3. Those who have humbled themselves will have no problem with the Lord’s admonition...
 - a. They will not be offended if people do not use titles to address them
 - b. If it was good enough for Paul or Peter to be called by their first names, it is good enough for Mark, Joe, Sam, etc.

The use of titles is loved by those who desire to be exalted in the eyes of their associates; how much better to be exalted in the eyes of the Lord! - cf. **1 Pe 5:5**

Dig Your Well Before You're Thirsty

INTRODUCTION

1. Our title comes from a book with the same title by Harvey Mackay...
 - a. Extolling the value of networking for success in life and business
 - b. Illustrating the importance of preparation to succeed and survive
2. The title illustrates a simple yet important fact of life...
 - a. You cannot wait until you are thirsty to begin digging a well
 - b. If you do, you will likely die of thirst before you get the water you need
 - c. You must prepare ahead of time, before the need arises
3. As I read the book, parallels to the Christian life were clearly evident...
 - a. There are times of spiritual "thirst"
 - b. If we wait until such times to "dig our wells", we may be too late
 - c. We need to be "digging our wells" now!

[Are you digging your well before you're thirsty? Maybe it would help to be reminded of ...]

I. THE NEED FOR WELLS

A. THE DAY OF JUDGMENT...

1. There is a day of judgment coming
 - a. In which the world will be judged - **Ac 17:30-31**
 - b. In which we will all stand before Christ - **Ro 14:10-12; 2 Co 5:10**
 2. A day of salvation for some, condemnation for others
 - a. Some will hear good news - **Mt 26:34**
 - b. Others will hear terrible words - **Mt 26:41**
- **It will be too late to begin "digging wells" if we are spiritually "thirsty" on that day!**

B. THE TIMES OF TEMPTATION...

1. The Christian life is fraught with temptation
 - a. Because of our adversary, the devil - **1 Pe 5:8**
 - b. Because of our own fleshly desires - **Ja 1:14; Mk 7:21-23**
 2. Temptations should not be taken lightly
 - a. We can become hardened by the deceitfulness of sin - **He 3:12-13**
 - b. We might fall away during the time of temptation - **Lk 8:13**
- **Do we have "wells" to quench our spiritual thirst when we are tempted?**

C. THE PERIODS OF TRIBULATION...

1. The Christian life is not always easy
 - a. As Jesus warned the apostles - **Jn 16:33**
 - b. As Paul warned the disciples - **Ac 14:21-22**
2. The trials or tribulations we may face can be quite diverse
 - a. Some because we are Christians - **2 Ti 3:12**
 - b. Others because we share in the frailties of life: sickness, pain, death; economic recession, loss of jobs; terrorism, war, natural calamities

-- We better have our “wells” dug in advance if we are survive such “droughts”!

[In the face of such “droughts”, what can we do? Dig your “wells” before you’re thirsty...!]

II. DIGGING OUR WELLS

A. PREPARING FOR JUDGMENT...

1. Remember what God has provided
 - a. **His Son** as an atonement for sin - **1 Jn 4:9-10**
 - b. **The good news** of salvation to the whole world - **Mk 16:15; Co 1:23**
 2. Realize what we must do
 - a. **Respond** to the gospel of His grace - **Ac 2:36-39**
 - b. **Remain faithful** in our devotion and service - **Re 2:10**
- **Have you begun digging your wells by obeying the gospel of Christ?**

B. PREPARING FOR TEMPTATION...

1. Remember what God has provided
 - a. **His Providence** in time of temptation
 - 1) He will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able - **1 Co 10:13**
 - 2) Who is able to work all things for our good - **Ro 8:28,31-39**
 - b. **His Spirit** to help us overcome
 - 1) To strengthen the inner man - **Ep 3:16; Ro 8:12-14**
 - 2) To develop the character necessary - **Ga 5:22-23**
 - c. **His family** to support in our efforts
 - 1) Himself as our Father - **1 Jn 3:1**
 - 2) His children as our brothers and sisters - **1 Ti 5:1-2**
 - d. **His Son** as our Advocate and propitiation
 - 1) Who stands ready to assist us when we have sinned - **1 Jn 2:1-2**
 - 2) Whose blood will cleanse from all sin as we confess - **1 Jn 1:7-9**
 2. Realize what we must do
 - a. **Pray** that you enter not into temptation
 - 1) As Jesus taught on the Sermon on the Mount - **Mt 6:13**
 - 2) As He told His disciples in Gethsemane - **Mt 26:41**
 - b. **Be filled with His Spirit** by imbibing the Word
 - 1) Singing praises and making melody in our hearts to the Lord - **Ep 5:18-19**
 - 2) Teaching one another in song, letting the Word dwell in us richly - **Co 3:16**
 - c. **Develop and strength our relationships** with the members of our Family
 - 1) Communing with God in prayer - **He 4:14-16**
 - 2) Exhorting one another - **He 3:12-14**
 - d. **Repent and confess** when we sin
 - 1) To God - **1 Jn 1:9**
 - 1) To one another - **Ja 5:16**
- **Are you digging your wells by continuing steadfastly in prayer, in the Word and in fellowship with the family of God?**

C. PREPARING FOR TRIBULATION...

1. Remember what God has provided
 - a. **Hope** to help us endure
 - 1) A joyful hope that we might be patient in tribulations - **Ro 12:12; 1 Pe 1:3-6**

- 2) An abounding hope empowered by the Spirit of God - **Ro 15:13**
- b. **Peace** that only Christ can offer
 - 1) A peace the world cannot provide - **Jn 14:27**
 - 2) One that can guard our hearts and minds - **Ph 4:6-7**
- c. **Strength** found only in Christ
 - 1) That provides us with patience, longsuffering, joy - **Co 1:11**
 - 2) By which we can do all things in a spirit of contentment - **Ph 4:10-13**
- d. Given us **brethren** to comfort us in our trials
 - 1) Who comfort us with the comfort they receive from God - **2 Co 1:3-5**
 - 2) Who comfort us with words of hope and encouragement - **1 Th 4:18; 5:11,14**
- 2. Realize what we must do
 - a. **Focus our hope**
 - 1) Setting our minds on the grace to be revealed - **1 Pe 1:13**
 - 2) Benefiting from the patience and comfort of the Scriptures - **Ro 15:4**
 - b. **Nurture our peace**
 - 1) Through fervent prayer - **Ph 4:6-7; cf. Ro 15:13**
 - 2) Through following Paul's admonition and example - **Ph 4:8-9; cf. 2 Co 13:11**
 - c. **Develop our strength**
 - 1) Through asking for it, as Paul did for the Ephesians - **Ep 3:16**
 - 2) By putting on the armor of God - **Ep 6:10-18**
 - d. **Build our network of brethren**
 - 1) Ministering to one another - **He 6:10-12**
 - 2) Assembling together, exhorting one another, loving one other - **He 10:24-25; 13:1**
- **In what condition are your wells pertaining to your hope, your peace, your strength, and your brethren?**

CONCLUSION

- 1. If you paid close attention, you will have noticed the wells have already been dug...
 - a. The wells of salvation provided by God - **Isa 12:1-3**
 - b. Offering the water of life - e.g., **Jn 4:13-14; 7:37-39; Re 22:16-17**
 - **God offers the wells necessary to quench our thirst in times of spiritual drought!**
- 2. Our task, then, may be similar to that of Isaac's...
 - a. The wells of his father Abraham had been stopped up by the Philistines - **Gen 26:15**
 - b. He had to re-dig the wells for them to be of any use - **Gen 26:28**
 - **Do we need to "re-dig the wells" of our Heavenly Father?**

Have we let the "wells of salvation" God graciously provides to become stopped up through our own spiritual neglect? If so, then be sure to **"Dig Your Well Before You're Thirsty"...**!

Disappointments New Christians Face

INTRODUCTION

1. There is great joy in seeing new Christians grow in the faith - **2 Jn 4; 3 Jn 3-4**
2. Unfortunately not all new Christians grow as they should - cf. **Lk 8:13-14**
3. Problems and disappointments often overwhelm them, and some even fall away
4. This ought to concern older Christians, for we have a responsibility to those who are young in the faith - **Ga 6:1-2; Ro 15:1-2**

[This lesson is designed to help us understand and deal with some of the disappointments new Christians face. For example, a problem that is troubling to some is...]

I. SAME WEAKNESSES AS BEFORE (Disappointed with themselves)

A. MANY BECOME CHRISTIANS WITH JOYFUL ANTICIPATION...

1. Excited about forgiveness of sins - cf. **Ac 8:39**
2. “ “ the chance to start over
3. “ “ the help God is going to give them to change

B. BUT WHEN THEY SOON DISCOVER...

1. That the temptations are just as strong as before (sometimes even stronger!)
2. They can easily be discouraged and overcome - cf. **Lk 8:13**

C. HOW CAN WE HELP...?

1. By teaching them that “transformation” is an ongoing process - **Ro 12:1-2; Co 3:5-11**
2. By reminding them of God’s willingness to forgive and provide strength - **1 Jn 1:9; 2:1; Ph 2:12-13**

[A stumbling block to many new Christians is...]

II. IMPERFECT CHRISTIANS (Disappointed by their brethren)

A. THEY WITNESS INCONSISTENCY IN THE LIVES OF OTHERS...

1. They see those who do not practice what they preach
2. It really hurts when seen in those they had looked up to
3. But this problem is not a new one - **Ga 2:11-14**

B. ILL TREATMENT BY CHRISTIANS...

1. May occur in Bible classes, business meetings, at work, at play
2. Where harsh words can be devastating to those new in the faith

C. WHAT CAN WE DO...?

1. First, set better examples! - cf. **1 Ti 4:12**
2. Confess wrong when it occurs

3. Help the new Christian realize that older Christians are **also** going through the process of “transformation” - cf. **Ph 3:12-14**

[Then there is the problem of...]

III. TRIALS AND TEMPTATIONS (Disappointed by the world)

A. SUCH AS PLEASURES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE WORLD...

1. Often drawing the new Christian away (e.g., job, family, hobbies)
2. Choking them to the point of unfruitfulness - **Lk 8:14**

B. AND DISCOURAGEMENT BY UNCONVERTED FRIENDS...

1. Who want them to come back to the things of the world
2. As Paul warned in **1 Co 15:33-34**

C. WHAT CAN WE DO...?

1. Demonstrate what it means to “seek first the kingdom of God” - **Mt 6:33**
2. Make it clear by our own example who it is we love the most (i.e., not our jobs, hobbies) - **1 Jn 2:15-17**
3. Develop close friendships with new Christians **in the Lord**
 - a. Friendships centered around Christ and His work
 - b. Not just social interests

[Due to much misinformation about the Christian life, a problem some new Christians have is...]

IV. FALSE CONCEPTIONS ABOUT PROSPERITY (Disappointed by lack of success)

A. THINKING THAT NOW ALL OUR PROBLEMS WILL GO AWAY...

1. An idea propagated by the “gospel of health and wealth” teachers
2. But such is not always the case, even as it was in the days of the first century - **1 Pe 1:6-9; Ja 1:2-4**

B. WE NEED TO PREPARE NEW CHRISTIANS FOR POSSIBLE ADVERSITY...

1. Even as Paul did - **Ac 14:21-22; 2 Ti 3:12**
2. This need is especially great because Satan often strikes hardest when one is new in the faith

[Finally, there is often the problem of...]

V. TOO MUCH NEGATIVE TEACHING (Disappointed by their preachers)

A. SUCH AS CONSTANTLY EXPOSING DENOMINATIONAL ERRORS...

1. Certainly there is a place for learning about those in error - **2 Ti 4:1-2; Ac 20:27**
2. But there can be dangers involved in doing so...
 - a. If it is done in an arrogant, self-righteous spirit
 - b. If it is done to make us feel good or superior
 - c. If it is done to the exclusion of learning what **we** need to do
3. If we are not careful, it can create carnal Christians, given to strife and envy

B. WHEN NEGATIVE TEACHING IS CALLED FOR...

1. It should be done:
 - a. For the purpose of trying to understand and teach those in error
 - b. Out of love for those in error
2. It should be done as Paul did it...
 - a. With prayer for their souls - **Ro 10:1**
 - b. With recognition for their accomplishments - **Ro 10:2-3**
3. It should be done with the qualities mentioned in **2 Ti 2:24-26**

CONCLUSION

1. There may be other disappointments new Christians face, but I have found these to be quite common
2. Finally, it may help to quickly point that Christians generally go through four stages of spiritual growth...
 - a. The **ball of fire** stage, following their conversion to Christ
 - b. The **reality** stage, when the disappointments start to come in
 - c. The **up and down** stage...
 - 1) Here, people either grow through it to the next stage...
 - 2) Or they fall away, or become apathetic (i.e., “pew-warmers”)
 - d. Finally, those who persevere reach the stage of **steady as she goes**, where growth is progressive and steady:

***“But the path of the just is like the shining sun,
That shines ever brighter unto the perfect day.” - Pro 4:18***

3. To reach that stage where we will grow steadily...
 - a. We need to have **realistic expectations** of problems to come
 - b. We need to be sure we are **converted to Christ**, not the church, teacher, or friend

Have **you** been converted to Jesus Christ...?

Divine Signposts

INTRODUCTION

1. In our efforts to lead people to Christ...
 - a. We understand the importance of the Word of God - **Ro 10:17**
 - b. The gospel is the power of God to salvation - **Ro 1:16**
2. Yet it helps to complement the Word with a demonstration of certain qualities whereby...
 - a. People can see the truth of the gospel in action
 - b. People are more likely to believe in Jesus Christ
3. When demonstrated by Christians in a local church, these 'signposts' can serve to...
 - a. Let the nonbeliever know:
 - 1) There is a God Who loves him or her
 - 2) Who has sent Jesus as a manifestation of that love
 - b. Let the true searcher know:
 - 1) Those who are disciples of Christ
 - 2) Who can thus lead him or her to Christ

[There are at least four such “**Divine Signposts**”, one being...]

I. THE SIGNPOST OF UNITY

A. THE VALUE OF UNITY OF BELIEVERS...

1. It shows that God has sent Christ - **Jn 17:21,23**
2. It shows that God has loved the world - **Jn 17:23**

B. SO UNITY IS A SIGNPOST TO THE WORLD...

1. That God loves the world - cf. **Jn 3:16**
2. That God sent Christ who produces the unity witnessed by the world - cf. **Ep 2:13-16**

C. THUS THE IMPORTANCE OF UNITY...

1. Led Paul to condemn division and those who cause it - **1 Co 1:10; Ro 16:17-18**
2. Led Paul to teach attitudes essential to preserving unity - **Ep 4:1-3; Ph 2:2-4**

[Let's be sure that we do nothing to destroy the 'signpost' of **unity**; rather, let's work toward enhancing its effectiveness. Another 'signpost' that points one in the right direction is...]

II. THE SIGNPOST OF LOVE

A. THE VALUE OF LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER...

1. It shows that we have been loved by Christ, whose love we seek to emulate - **Jn 13:34**
2. It shows that we are truly His disciples - **Jn 13:35**

B. SO LOVE IS A SIGNPOST TO THE WORLD...

1. That Christ has loved His disciples - cf. **Jn 15:12-13**
2. That those who emulate His love are His true disciples - cf. **Ep 5:1-2**

C. THUS THE IMPORTANCE OF LOVE...

1. Led Paul to encourage churches to increase in love - **1 Th 4:9-10**
2. Led Paul to consider love as the “bond of perfection” - **Co 3:14**
 - a. Here we see that love and unity go together
 - b. By our love for one another, we are more likely to preserve our unity in Christ

[**Unity** and **love** also go hand in hand as “**Divine Signposts**”. The first lets people know God loves them, and the second shows people who are the followers of Christ. Now for a third ‘signpost’ ...]

III. THE SIGNPOST OF HOPE

A. THE VALUE OF HOPE...

1. It can prompt people to ask us questions - **1 Pe 3:15**
2. It can provide us opportunity to share the reason for our hope - **1 Pe 3:15**

B. SO HOPE IS A SIGNPOST TO THE WORLD...

1. Presuming that our hope is something:
 - a. Noticeable, prompting people to ask “Why?”
 - b. Based upon reason, i.e., evidences for our faith
2. Especially when our hope is:
 - a. Accompanied by peace and joy - **Ro 5:1-2**
 - b. Steadfast even in tribulation - **Ro 5:3-4**
 - c. Based upon the love of God - **Ro 5:5**
 - d. Made sure by the resurrection of Jesus - **1 Pe 1:3-4**

C. THUS THE IMPORTANCE OF HOPE...

1. Led Peter to command Christians to set their hope fully on the grace to come - **1 Pe 1:13**
2. Led Peter to command Christians to always be ready to explain their hope - **1 Pe 3:15**

[To **unity**, **love**, and **hope** as “**Divine Signposts**”, let’s now consider a final ‘signpost’ ...]

IV. THE SIGNPOST OF GOOD WORKS

A. THE VALUE OF GOOD WORKS...

1. They can lead men to glorify our Father in heaven - **Mt 5:16**
2. They can lead men to glorify God in the day of visitation - **1 Pe 2:12**

B. SO GOOD WORKS IS A SIGNPOST TO THE WORLD...

1. Directing people to consider the motivation behind such works
2. Opening people up to the gospel message which inspires such works - cf. **1 Pe 3:1-2**

C. THUS THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD WORKS...

1. Led Paul to command that we be ready for every good work - **Ti 3:1**
2. Led Paul to command that we be careful to maintain good works - **Ti 3:8,14**

CONCLUSION

1. With such “**Divine Signposts**”, we can see how people can be led to Christ...

- a. Our **unity** can convince people of God's love for them in sending Christ
 - b. Our **love** can direct them to true disciples of Christ
 - c. Our **hope** can prompt them to ask questions as to the reason for our faith
 - d. Our **good works** can encourage them to glory God by their own obedience to the gospel
2. This is no way takes away from the power of the gospel to save souls...
- a. But the Lord intended for His church to be a city set on a hill
 - b. Which by demonstrating certain qualities as a group would draw people to Him

Without these “**Divine Signposts**”, we make it a lot harder for souls who are searching to find their Savior and His gospel! Are we doing our part in the local congregation to display unity, love, hope and good works...?

Emotion Vs. Emotionalism

INTRODUCTION

1. To emote or not to emote, that is the question...
 - a. Many decry the lack of emotion in the worship and lives of others
 - b. Others warn against emotionalism as they look down on any display of emotion
2. Can we have emotion without succumbing to emotionalism? I believe we must!
 - a. Emotions have a scriptural role in the life of the Christian
 - b. Yet when emotions become emotionalism, there is a grave danger

[How can we have emotion without emotionalism? Let's first consider that there are...]

I. TWO EXTREMES TO AVOID

A. EMOTIONALISM...

1. That "better felt than told" sort of religion
 - a. Where people depend more on what they feel in their heart
 - b. Rather than on what they read in their Bible
2. Where worship is characterized by unrestrained outbreaks of emotion
 - a. E.g., rolling in the aisles
 - b. E.g., bursting out in unintelligible words
3. Such emotionalism...
 - a. Disobeys the scriptural admonition for worship in a decent and orderly fashion - cf. **1 Co 14:40**
 - b. Overlooks the warning: "He who trusts in his own heart is a fool..." - **Pro 28:26**

B. FORMALISM...

1. In which there is a complete lack of emotion in worship and service
 - a. Perhaps in reacting against emotionalism
 - b. Resulting in a "dead pan" attitude
 - c. Where songs are sung and sermons preached with little reaction by those engaged
2. Such lack of "heartfelt" religion is contrary to what Jesus taught
 - a. Condemning a religion in which one's heart is far removed from Him - **Mt 15:7-8**
 - b. Commending a love for God that involves the whole heart - **Mt 22:37-38**

[The tendency is to go from one extreme to another. Formalism can be avoided by remembering...]

II. EMOTION HAS A PROPER PLACE

A. EMOTION IS NECESSARY...

1. There is to be the emotion of love - **1 Pe 4:8; 1 Co 16:22**
2. There is to be the emotion of hope - **Ro 12:12**
3. There is to be the emotion of joy - **Ph 4:4**
4. There is to be the emotion of sorrow - **2 Co 7:10**
5. There is to be the emotion of hate - **Pro 8:13**
6. There is to be the emotion of fear - **Mt 10:28**

-- **There is a place for emotion in the life of the Christian!**

B. EMOTION MUST BE ROOTED IN THE WORD...

1. Scriptural emotions must be rooted in faith
 - a. Such faith comes by hearing the Word of God
 - b. This requires the use of our intellectual faculties
2. Notice how the Word of God is designed to stimulate emotion:
 - a. Reading of God's love, we should be moved to love - **1 Jn 4:9-11**
 - b. Told of promises awaiting us, we are motivated to hope - **1 Pe 1:3-4,13**
 - c. Informed of Jesus' reconciling work, we are moved to rejoice - **Ro 5:10-11**
 - d. Rebuked by the Word, it produces sorrow - **2 Co 7:8**
 - e. Filled with knowledge, we come to hate certain things - **Pro 1:7; 8:13**
 - f. Reading of the warnings in Scriptures, we are moved to fear - **He 10:25-27**

-- **Scriptural emotions are based upon the Word of God**

C. EMOTION MUST PRODUCE THE PROPER FRUIT...

1. Scriptural emotions must bear fruit
 - a. The emotions evoked by Scripture are there for a purpose
 - b. Unless the proper fruit is borne, it is simply emotionalism
2. Notice the kind of fruit borne by scriptural emotions:
 - a. The emotion of love bears fruit in obedience - **Jn 14:15; 1 Jn 5:3**
 - b. The emotion of hope bears fruit in patience - **Ro 8:24-25**
 - c. The emotion of joy bears fruit in sacrifice - **2 Co 8:2-5**
 - d. The emotion of sorrow bears fruit in repentance - **2 Co 7:10**
 - e. The emotion of hate bears fruit in rejecting error - **Psa 119:127-128**
 - f. The emotion of fear bears fruit in departing from evil - **Pro 16:6**

-- **Scriptural emotions will produce fruit in the life of the Christian!**

[While formalism can be avoided by understanding the necessary and proper for emotion in the life of the Christian, how does one avoid emotionalism? One way is to remember...]

III. WHEN EMOTION BECOMES EMOTIONALISM

A. WHEN EMOTION BECOMES AN END TO ITSELF...

1. When people stress emotion for emotion's sake
 2. When people forget that emotions are a means to an end
 - a. To motivate one to produce the proper fruit
 - b. The goal is not the emotions, but the fruit they are intended to produce
- **If all we display is emotion, not bearing the proper fruit, we are guilty of emotionalism!**

B. WHEN EMOTION IS NOT BASED ON GOD'S WORD...

1. When one is led by the thoughts and intents of one's heart
 - a. Remember the warning of **Pro 28:26**
 - b. Consider also these warnings - **Jer 17:9; Mk 7:21-23**
 2. Our emotions must be rooted in God's Word - cf. **Pro 3:5**
- **If our emotions are based upon anything other than the Word of God, we are guilty of emotionalism!**

C. WHEN EMOTION IS THE BASIS FOR YOUR FAITH...

1. When we allow feelings to dictate what we believe
 2. Such as when a person...
 - a. Refuses to obey what we read in the Scriptures, because he “feels” it should be different
 - b. Tries to change the meaning of a passage to support what he “feels” is right
- **If our faith is based upon emotions, we are guilty of emotionalism!**

CONCLUSION

1. The capacity to feel and express emotions is a wonderful gift from God...
 - a. It allows us to respond to the wonderful truths found in God’s Word
 - b. It motivates to higher levels of service in response to God’s Will
- **But like all good things, the capacity of emotion must be properly used**
2. To avoid both extremes of emotionalism and formalism...
 - a. Let our hearts be deeply moved by the Word of God
 - b. Let such emotion provoke us to bear the proper fruit God desires

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” - Ro 15:13

Evangelism Made Easy

INTRODUCTION

1. With the **Great Commission** Christians are given a great task...
 - a. To make disciples of all the nations - **Mt 28:19**
 - b. To go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature - **Mk 16:15**
2. It was a task accepted by the early disciples...
 - a. They went everywhere, preaching the Word - cf. **Ac 8:4; 1 Th 1:8**
 - b. The gospel was proclaimed to everyone - cf. **Co 1:23; Ro 10:17-18**
3. But how about today...?
 - a. Is the gospel being shared by most Christians?
 - b. **“Are you sowing the seed of the kingdom, brother?”**

[It does not require great knowledge or expertise to share the gospel with others. It can be done quite easily and often very effectively...]

I. USE CORRESPONDENCE COURSES

A. CHALLENGES INVOLVING EVANGELISM...

1. Finding prospects for study
 2. Setting up the study
 3. Teaching the material
 4. Answering questions
 5. Asking for a decision
- **Such challenges have hindered many from getting involved in evangelism**

B. CORRESPONDENCE COURSES ELIMINATE THESE CHALLENGES...

1. Through various methods of advertising, or a simple offer to a friend or acquaintance...
 - a. You find people who want to study the Bible
 - b. The study is automatically set up by those who respond to the offer
 2. Through the use of a Bible correspondence course...
 - a. The students teach themselves!
 - b. If questions are raised, you can study and answer them at your leisure
 - c. People are given the opportunity to make a decision
- **It becomes quite easy to share the gospel, even if one is a babe in Christ!**

[While there are many ways to advertise a correspondence course, I highly recommend direct mail...]

II. USE DIRECT MAIL

A. THERE ARE DIFFERENT WAYS TO ADVERTISE...

1. In the paper, on the radio or TV
 2. Using the Internet via a web site
 3. Direct mail, through mass or targeted mailings
- **For reaching people in a local community, direct mail has its advantages**

B. ADVANTAGES OF USING DIRECT MAIL...

1. You can target a specific audience
 - a. E.g., a mass mail out to a particular zip code
 - b. E.g., a targeted mailing to neighbors and friends
 2. Everyone glances at their mail
 - a. As opposed to the TV, radio, newspaper
 - b. Even it is junk mail
 3. It is non-intrusive and non-confrontational
 - a. You never interrupt their dinner, sleep, or favorite TV program
 - b. You can reach people who otherwise might not open doors or give the time of day
- **Direct mail almost guarantees that contact can be made with any person**

[Not all correspondence courses are designed with the direct mail approach in mind. There is one that I highly recommend...]

III. USE “JESUS, THE WAY”

A. ABOUT “JESUS, THE WAY”...

1. Authored by Sewell Hall, developed while preaching in England
 2. Contains seven lessons presenting Jesus as the way to many blessings
 3. Perhaps the least expensive course available
- **Simple, easy to complete, yet adequate in presenting the gospel**

B. ADVANTAGES OF “JESUS, THE WAY”...

1. The first lesson is designed for being sent via direct mail
 2. The first lesson presents gospel fundamentals, unlike courses which do it in later lessons
 3. Attention is focused on Jesus and His will for us
- **Even if the first lesson is not returned, the gospel has been shared!**

[Whether it be “Jesus, The Way” or some other course designed for direct mail, let me now offer...]

IV. USE A PLAN OF ACTION

A. PERSONAL PLANS...

1. Mail the first lesson to 50 homes in your neighborhood
 2. Give or mail the first lesson to your friends and family
 3. Every person who receives the first lesson has been exposed to the gospel
- **If you can slap on an address label, you can evangelize!**

B. CONGREGATIONAL PLANS...

1. Mail the first lesson to every home in the community, or to select postal codes
 2. Advertise the course in local papers, or even print the entire first lesson in the paper
 3. Offer the course to the world via a web site on the Internet
- **The opportunities are endless, provided sowers are willing to sow the seed!**

CONCLUSION

1. If you are willing to sow the seed, evangelism can be easy...

- a. You don't have to wait for a congregational effort
 - b. Just start mailing or giving the first lesson to everyone you know, or to every person you would like to provide an opportunity to learn about Jesus
2. For everyone who receives the first lesson...
- a. The responsibility now rests on their shoulders
 - b. They will not be able to say **“You never mentioned Him to me.”**

Whether they complete the course and obey Christ, or reject the first lesson with not even a casual glance, we have fulfilled our responsibility. That is **“Evangelism Made Easy”** ...!

Evangelism Made Personal

INTRODUCTION

1. The importance of sharing the gospel with others cannot be overemphasized...
 - a. Jesus wants everyone to hear the good news of salvation - **Mk 16:15-16**
 - b. He has provided the gospel as God's power to save all who believe - **Ro 1:16-17**

2. But what is the most effective way to reach people today? The Institute For American Church Growth asked over 10,000 people this question: **“What was responsible for your coming to Christ and this church?”** Their replies were:
 - a. I had a special need - 3%
 - b. I just walked in - 3%
 - c. I liked the minister - 6%
 - d. I visited there - 1%
 - e. I liked the Bible classes - 5%
 - f. I attended a gospel meeting - 0.5%
 - g. I liked the programs - 3%
 - h. **A friend or relative invited me - 79%**

3. What can we learn from a survey like this...?
 - a. It confirms that gospel meetings as traditionally held have lost much of their effectiveness
 - b. It justifies churches' concern to pick their preachers carefully and to give special regard to the quality of their Bible classes

4. The obvious point of the survey is this: **If churches are to grow, it will be through the efforts of individual members!**
 - a. Preachers, programs, classes may help, but in most cases they will only maintain the size of the congregation
 - b. Such congregational efforts are worthwhile, however, for they can reach people with whom we might otherwise never come in contact
 - But the fact remains: **The greatest potential lies with people who have some contact with members of the local congregation**

5. Two things are needed to utilize contacts made through members of the congregation...
 - a. **Concern** for the lost by those members - cf. **Mt 9:36-38; Ro 9:1-3; 10:1**
 - b. **Knowledge** of how to increase opportunities to share the gospel

[Assuming the concern is there, this lesson contains **three simple steps** to increase opportunities for sharing the gospel with relatives, friends, neighbors, and others. These steps are **based on observations** of what has consistently proven fruitful in other places and are confirmed by the results of the aforementioned survey. The first step is to...]

I. CREATE A LOVING, EDIFYING CHURCH

A. WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT...

1. **To confirm our claim** to be disciples of Christ
 - a. Correct doctrine, organization, worship, etc., are certainly important

- b. Yet it is our love for one another that the Lord intended to convince the world that we are truly His disciples! - cf. **Jn 13:35**
 - 2. **Our love makes us useful** to the Lord
 - a. From **Re 3:7-8** we learn that the Lord knows the true condition of His churches, and that He will “open doors” for those that can be useful to Him.
 - b. I am persuaded that if we are a church that can be used by Him to...
 - 1) Reach others with the gospel
 - 2) Assimilate them into the family of God
 - 3) Nurture them in their spiritual growth
 ...then He will "open doors" for us as well!
 - c. Suppose we are not a place where new Christians can grow spiritually in an atmosphere of love?
 - 1) Do we seriously think that the Lord will use His providence to lead us to souls who are seeking for the truth?
 - 2) Even if we did reach souls for Christ, would they receive the spiritual nourishment necessary to remain faithful and strong in the Lord's service?
 - 3. **Hospitality towards Christians prepares us** for the kind of personal work that is the most effective in leading others to Christ
 - a. I am referring to **friendship** evangelism, also known as **relationship or lifestyle** evangelism
 - b. Which requires a willingness to be hospitable toward those we are trying to reach
 - c. If we are unable (or unwilling) to practice hospitality towards our brethren, what makes us think we will practice it towards the lost?
- **If we are going to be fruitful in the long run, we must make sure that we provide the right kind of loving and caring spiritual environment in the local church**

B. SOME ACTION STEPS TO TAKE...

- 1. **Get to know ALL the members and regular visitors by name**
 - a. Get a church directory and begin to place names with faces
 - b. Try to learn someone new at each service until you know them all
- 2. **Practice hospitality towards the members and regular visitors - 1 Pe 4:8-9**
 - a. Invite them into your home, or out to eat (try one new family or member per month)
 - b. Visit other Christians each week (esp. the sick, shut-ins, new members, those absent)
- 3. **Contribute your time, service, and resources to the church**
 - a. Offer to help in whatever way you can (teach, give, serve)
 - b. Do not make others beg for help in providing a caring, spiritual environment
 - c. Make an effort to be at every service, on time

[When a congregation is filled with loving members who care for and edify its own, then I believe it is ready to be used by the Lord to reach out and care for others! Where does one begin in trying to reach the lost? May I suggest that you...]

II. UTILIZE A PRAYER LIST

A. WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT...

- 1. It is a technique used by successful people in all walks of life (having a “things to do” list)
- 2. It helps focus our attention upon those we hope to reach, and not neglect them

B. IN MAKING THE LIST...

1. **Start with those who are close** to you and work outwardly:
 - a. Family, friends
 - b. Neighbors, coworkers
 - c. Relatives of fellow church members
 - d. Regular visitors to the services of the church
 - e. Casual acquaintances (mailman, store clerk, etc.)
2. **Limit this list to five or eight** (too many and you will be unable to focus your efforts)
3. **Give priority to those who are the “unchurched”**
 - a. I.e., who are not active members of any denomination or particular religion
 - b. Active members of a denomination or religion are often very satisfied with their human traditions and are not as receptive to the pure and simple gospel of Christ
4. **Husbands and wives should probably have one list** (as the suggestions to follow will require their joint cooperation)
5. **Keep this list where you will see it daily**

C. PRAY FOR THOSE ON YOUR LIST DAILY...

1. The **importance** of such prayers
 - a. It is God who gives the increase when it comes to evangelism - **1 Co 3:6-7**
 - b. We are but servants whom God can use in His providential workings - **1 Co 3:5**
 - c. So though we may work as though it all depends upon us, let us pray as though it all depends upon God!
2. What you should pray for:
 - a. **That God will work together with you:**
 - 1) To give you **opportunities** to do good for them - **Co 4:3**
 - 2) To give you the **wisdom** to make the most of those opportunities - **Co 4:4-6**
 - 3) To give you **boldness** to say what needs to be said - **Ep 6:18-20**
 - b. **That those on your list will have:**
 - 1) Have the **opportunity** to hear the truth
 - 2) Have **honest hearts** to be open and receptive to the truth

[The third step is...]

III. INVITE THEM TO SERVICES

A. WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT...

1. In the past, I might not have thought this to be important, but I now think differently
2. Reasons for wanting people to attend church services:
 - a. They will (should) have **an opportunity to see a caring congregation** in action
 - 1) Combined with your own demonstration of love as an individual...
 - 2) ...the demonstration of love by others should make a lasting impression!
 - b. They will more likely have **an opportunity to be presented with the gospel** (more on this, shortly)
 - c. If they are attending regularly before conversion to Christ, **they will more likely continue to attend after conversion**

B. IN INVITING PEOPLE TO SERVICES...

1. **First spend time in prayer:**
 - a. Asking for **wisdom** to invite them in the best manner
 - b. Asking for **boldness** to offer the invitation to attend

2. **People will more likely accept your invitations:**
 - a. If they are among the **unchurched**
 - b. If they are **dissatisfied** with where they are attending and are willing to investigate a different church
 - c. If you have already been **hospitable** to them in various ways
3. **Be persistent:**
 - a. Invite time and again
 - b. Your perseverance will more likely be rewarded

C. BE HOSPITABLE TO VISITORS...

1. **Why this is important:**
 - a. By their presence, people are expressing an interest and/or willingness to learn
 - b. By your love and acceptance, you are preparing the soil of their hearts for the seed of the gospel
 - c. The Lord has provided “an open door”; dare we not take it?
2. **How to show hospitality toward visitors:**
 - a. Be friendly to all, whether invited by you, someone else, or are simply walk-ins
 - b. Arrive early for services
 - 1) Visitors are more likely to arrive early, and leave early
 - 2) If you come in late, you may not have an opportunity to visit
 - c. Give priority to visiting with guests over visiting with brethren
 - 1) You can always visit with brethren later
 - 2) This may be the only opportunity to make an impact with the visitors
 - d. In extending hospitality, do what is within your ability:
 - 1) Greet them, letting them know they are welcome
 - 2) Invite them home or out for a dinner or snack
 - 3) Call, write, or visit them after they have attended the services

D. MAKE SURE THEY ARE EXPOSED TO THE GOSPEL...

1. **Why this is important:**
 - a. Only the Gospel is God's power to save - **Ro 1:16**
 - b. While love and hospitality may help prepare the **soil**, the **seed** must still be sown
2. **Presenting the gospel of Christ:**
 - a. Ideally, this will come **after** witnessing a demonstration of the gospel in our lives
 - 1) By our love, hospitality, etc.
 - 2) Both as individuals and as a congregation
 - b. If you feel confident in discussing it with them, then approach them yourself and suggest some sort of Bible study. I have found either of the two suggestions effective:
 - 1) A Bible study with them in their home (using aids like video tapes, charts, or simply an open Bible)
 - 2) That they study on their own:
 - a) With the aid of a Bible correspondence course
 - b) By viewing a video Bible study series
 - c. If you do not feel you are yet confident in approaching them concerning a study, or in conducting it your self, there is still much good that you can do:
 - 1) Bring it to the attention of members who are able and willing to teach
 - 2) Provide opportunities for teacher and prospect to become better acquainted, and the teacher can take it from there

CONCLUSION

1. These suggestions are offered...
 - a. With **a firm conviction** that if they will be carried out, opportunities to share the gospel and save souls will be greatly increased!
 - b. With **the hope** that you will accept the challenge to implement these suggestions

2. This approach is **not only the most successful** in saving and keeping souls, it is also **one of the most natural and easiest ways** to reach the lost for Christ...
 - a. Remember the survey by The Institute For American Church Growth?
 - b. One does not even have to be able to teach to be effective in leading others to Christ!
 - c. One simply has to be a **friend** to Christians and to the lost!

3. **Even if we do not convert a single soul...**
 - a. We will have fulfilled our obligation to share Christ with others
 - b. We will have done it in such a way as to become:
 - 1) Better Christians, a better congregation
 - 2) Better friends, better neighbors, better coworkers!

Are you doing what you can to reach out to the lost...?

Examples Worth Following

INTRODUCTION

1. The Bible speaks of examples...
 - a. Imitating those who are good examples - cf. **1 Co 11:1; Ph 3:17; He 13:7**
 - b. Being a good example to others - cf. **1 Ti 4:12**
2. Such scriptures should cause one to wonder...
 - a. Who is my example, my role model as a Christian?
 - b. Whose example am I as a Christian?
 - c. What kind of example do I set as a Christian?

[In this study, “**Examples Worth Following**”, let’s consider these questions more carefully...]

I. WHO IS YOUR EXAMPLE?

A. IS IT THE LORD JESUS CHRIST...?

1. He was for the apostle Paul - **1 Co 11:1**
 2. He should be our example as well
 - a. On how to please one another - **Ro 15:1-3**
 - b. On how to love one another - **Ep 5:1-2**
 - c. On how to look out for one another - **Ph 2:4-5**
 - d. On how to suffer patiently when mistreated - **1 Pe 2:20-23**
- **Jesus certainly serves as our prime example**

B. IS IT THE APOSTLE PAUL...?

1. As he urged the Corinthians - **1 Co 4:6; 11:1**
 - a. To give no offense - **1 Co 10:32**
 - b. To seek the benefit of others - **1 Co 10:33**
 2. As he urged the Philippians - **Ph 3:17**
 - a. To not consider themselves as having attained perfection - **Ph 3:12a**
 - b. To press on to maturity - **Ph 3:12b-15**
 - c. To live according to the level they have learned - **Ph 3:16**
 - d. To enjoy a close relationship with the God of peace - **Ph 4:9**
 3. As he praised and encouraged the Thessalonians
 - a. For receiving the Word despite affliction - **1 Th 1:6**
 - b. To avoid being a burden to others - **2 Th 3:7-10**
- **Paul and other New Testament Christians provide wonderful examples**

C. IS IT OTHER FAITHFUL CHRISTIANS...?

1. As Paul exhorted the Philippians - **Ph 3:17**
 - a. To note those walking like Paul
 - b. To consider them a pattern to follow
 2. As exhorted by the writer to the Hebrews
 - a. To imitate the faith and patience of those who inherit the promises - **He 6:12**
 - b. To follow the faith of those who rule over us - **He 13:7**
- **Many Christians today provide examples worthy of emulation**

[Whose example are you following? You are imitating either Christ or some other Christian (either living or dead). Does your life suggest that the example you are following is less than exemplary (e.g., the Laodiceans - **Re 3:14-16**)? Closely related to this is another question...]

II. WHOSE EXAMPLE ARE YOU?

A. IS IT NOT OTHER CHRISTIANS...?

1. Your brothers and sisters in the Lord?
 2. Especially those who are babes in Christ?
 3. But even older Christians?
- **Christians should be mindful of their example on one another - cf. 1 Th 1:7; 1 Ti 4:12; Ti 2:7**

B. IS IT NOT YOUNG CHILDREN...?

1. Who naturally look up to their parents?
 2. Who are also influenced by others?
 - a. Adults like their parents
 - b. Older children as well
- **Christians should be mindful of their example upon the young - cf. Mt 18:6**

C. IS IT NOT UNBELIEVERS...?

1. Who see if we “walk the talk”?
 2. Who often gauge the value of following Christ by our example?
 3. Who judge the church by its members?
- **Christians should be mindful of their example seen by the world - cf. 1 Pe 2:12**

[Whether we want to be or not, we are examples to others, especially the young in years and young in faith. So let me ask...]

III. WHAT KIND OF EXAMPLE ARE YOU?

A. IS IT INDICATIVE OF A FAITHFUL CHRISTIAN...?

1. Showing the world what it means to be a Christian?
 2. Showing babes in Christ what maturity means as a disciple?
- **Is your example helping or hindering discipleship in others?**

B. IS IT CONDUCIVE TO CHURCH GROWTH...?

1. Offering a noble pattern of faithful church attendance?
 2. Setting a good example of developing one's abilities for Christ?
 3. Providing a worthy model of involvement in service to the Lord and His Church?
- **Is your example helping or hindering the progress of the church?**

C. IS IT WORTHY OF EMULATION...?

1. Would you want a child or new Christian to follow your example?
2. If every member provided the same example as you...
 - a. Would the church be strong?
 - b. Would the church be growing?
 - c. Would the church have service on Sunday and Wednesday nights?

- d. Would the church even exist?
- **Is your example helping or hindering the cause of Christ?**

CONCLUSION

1. I hope this questions have prompted serious introspection on your part...
 - a. As to who is your example or role model as a Christian
 - b. As to the sort of example or role model you are setting for others
2. Though written to a young preacher, I encourage you to apply Paul's words to yourself...
 - a. Be an example to the believers - **1 Ti 4:12a**
 - b. Be an example in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity - **1 Ti 4:12b**

You cannot escape being an example to others. Your only choice is what kind of example you will be. Will you be one of the many **“Examples Worth Following”**...?

Faith In The Community

INTRODUCTION

1. As Christians, we are but pilgrims and sojourners in this world...
 - a. We have duties regarding our spiritual growth and development - **1 Pe 2:11**
 - b. Yet we also have a duty toward those who are still of this world - **1 Pe 2:12**
2. One arena where we fulfill our duty to those in the world is “the community”...
 - a. The cities and neighborhoods in which we live
 - b. Relationships we maintain with our neighbors and fellow citizens
3. What impact should our faith have as members of the community...?
 - a. What effect should it have on us as neighbors and citizens?
 - b. How can our communities become a place to evangelize the lost?
4. In **1 Th 4:11-12**, Paul gave general instructions concerning Christians living in this world...
 - a. To lead a quiet life
 - b. To mind our own business
 - c. To work with our own hands
 - d. To walk properly toward those who are outside

[What this entails may be gleaned further as we consider passages which speak of Christians as neighbors and citizens. So let us start by looking at...]

I. THE CHRISTIAN AS NEIGHBOR

A. TO ASSOCIATE WITH OTHERS...

1. True, we are to be separate - cf. **2 Co 6:14-18**
2. But we must not confuse separation with isolation - cf. **1 Co 5:9-13**
3. Jesus provides the example - cf. **Mk 2:14-17**

B. TO LIVE IN PEACE...

1. As much as it depends on us - cf. **Ro 12:17-21**
2. Careful to give no offense if possible - cf. **1 Co 10:32-33**

C. TO WALK IN LOVE AND WISDOM...

1. We owe it to our neighbors to love them - cf. **Ro 13:8-10**
2. Showing kindness through hospitality (love of strangers) - cf. **Ro 12:13; 1 Ti 3:2; 5:10**
3. Making good use of our time - cf. **Co 4:5**
4. Speaking with truth and grace - cf. **Co 4:6; Ep 4:25,29**

D. TO DO GOOD...

1. Diligent in doing good works - cf. **Mt 5:16; Lk 6:35; Ga 6:10; 1 Th 5:15; 1 Ti 6:17-18; Ti 3:8 1 Pe 2:12**
2. Displaying honorable conduct - cf. **1 Pe 2:12; 2 Co 8:21**
3. Earning a good testimony from those outside - cf. **1 Ti 3:7; Ac 22:12**

[In **Ti 3:1-2**, Paul sums up what is our duty as neighbors. He also touches on what is our duty as citizens, upon which we will now elaborate...]

II. THE CHRISTIAN AS CITIZEN

A. OBEY THOSE IN AUTHORITY...

1. To be subject to rulers authorities - cf. **Ti 3:1; Ro 13:1-5**
2. To obey their laws, unless they conflict with God's law - cf. **1 Pe 2:13-16; Ac 5:27-29**

B. GIVE HONOR AND PAY TAXES...

1. Honor all, including those in government - cf. **1 Pe 2:17**
2. Pay taxes and customs, rendering fear (respect) and honor - cf. **Ro 13:6-7**

C. PRAY FOR THOSE IN AUTHORITY...

1. For kings and all who are in authority - cf. **1 Ti 2:1-2**
2. That we might lead quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and reverence - cf. **1 Ti 2:2-3**

[Christians are a valuable asset for any country in which they live. Not only by their lawful obedience and prayers for those in authority, but by sharing the good news of God's love (cf. **1 Ti 2:4-6**)...]

III. THE CHRISTIAN AS EVANGELIST

A. HOLDING FAST THE WORD OF LIFE...

1. We are to shine as lights in the world - cf. **Ph 2:14-15**
2. Holding fast the Word of life - cf. **Ph 2:16**
 - a. Some translations say "holding forth" (KJV, ASV) or "hold out" (NIV)
 - b. Certainly a duty expressed elsewhere - cf. **Mk 16:15; 1 Pe 2:9**
3. In our communities, we have a duty to spread the Word!

B. INFLUENCING PEOPLE BY EXAMPLE...

1. Sometimes people won't listen to our message
2. But we can still influence them for good by our example - e.g., **1 Pe 3:1-2**
3. In our communities, we have a duty to confirm the Word by our lives!

CONCLUSION

1. Living in our community is a wonderful opportunity...
 - a. To be a positive influence on our friends and neighbors
 - b. To be a blessing for whatever country in which we find ourselves
2. Let your faith in the community be an opportunity...
 - a. To demonstrate the value of a vibrant faith in Christ!
 - b. To reach others for Jesus Christ through the gospel!

What kind of neighbors and citizens are we? Do we encourage others to glorify God...?

Faith In The Family

INTRODUCTION

1. As Christians, we are privileged to be members of God's family...
 - a. With God as our Father in heaven
 - b. With Christ as our Elder Brother
 - c. With many fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters - cf. **Mk 10:29-30**
2. Even so, we also have duties as members of our human families...
 - a. As husbands and wives
 - b. As parents and children
 - c. As married and single

[What impact should our faith as Christians have on our physical families? What are our responsibilities as Christians who are blessed with familial relationships? Consider first...]

I. THE CHRISTIAN AS HUSBAND AND FATHER

A. DUTIES OF THE HUSBAND...

1. Husbands are to love their wives - **Ep 5:25-29**
 - a. As Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her
 - b. As their own bodies, nourishing and cherishing them
2. Husbands are to leave mother and father - **Ep 5:31**
 - a. Leaving parents to be joined to one's wife
 - b. The husband therefore gives his wife priority over his parents
3. Husbands are not to be bitter toward their wives - **Co 3:19**
 - a. "do not be harsh with them" (ESV)
 - b. "never treat them harshly" (NRSV)
4. Husbands are to be understanding and give honor to their wives - **1 Pe 3:7**
 - a. Understanding their delicate nature
 - b. Honoring them as heirs together of the grace of life

B. DUTIES OF THE FATHER...

1. To provide the necessities of life - **2 Co 12:14; 1 Ti 5:8**
 - a. Parents ought to provide for their children
 - b. A man who fails to do so is worse than an infidel
2. Not to provoke the children to wrath - **Ep 6:4; Co 3:21**
 - a. That is, by unreasonable commands; by needless severity; by the manifestation of anger - **Barnes**
 - b. Lest, by your continually finding fault with them, they should lose all courage, and despair of ever pleasing you - **ibid.**
3. To provide for spiritual training of the children - **Ep 6:4**
 - a. Bringing them up in the training (discipline, ESV) of the Lord
 - b. Bringing them up in the admonition (instruction, ESV) of the Lord
4. To provide loving discipline as necessary - **He 12:6-11; Pro 13:24**
 - a. Even as our Heavenly Father disciplines His children
 - b. Though it may be unpleasant at the moment

[Such are familial responsibilities of Christian men as husbands and fathers. Now let's consider...]

II. THE CHRISTIAN AS WIFE AND MOTHER

A. DUTIES OF THE WIFE...

1. Wives are to submit to their husbands - **Ep 5:22-24; Co 3:18; 1 Pe 3:1-2**
 - a. As to the Lord, as is fitting in the Lord
 - b. In everything, as the church is subject to Christ
2. Wives are to respect and love their husbands - **Ep 5:33; Ti 2:4**
 - a. Not just to submit, but to do so with respect and love for their husbands
 - b. Which older women should teach the younger women

B. DUTIES OF THE MOTHER...

1. To love their children - **Ti 2:4**
 - a. Which ought to be natural
 - b. Yet sin can lead to a lack of proper affection - cf. **Ro 1:31**
2. To manage the household - **Ti 2:5; 1 Ti 5:14**
 - a. The primary responsibility of the wife and mother
 - b. Though a woman may also engage in activities outside the home - cf. **Pro 31:10-31**
3. To provide spiritual training when male leadership is lacking - **2 Ti 1:5; cf. Ac 16:1**
 - a. Timothy's mother and grandmother were believers
 - b. Evidently his father was not, which is too often the case today

[Such are the duties of Christian women as wives and mothers. Next let's take a look at...]

III. THE CHRISTIAN AS CHILD AND SINGLE

A. DUTIES OF CHILDREN...

1. To obey their parents - **Ep 6:1; Co 3:20**
 - a. In the Lord, for this is right
 - b. In all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord
2. To honor their parents - **Ep 6:2-3**
 - a. The first commandment with promise - cf. **Exo 20:12**
 - b. By providing for their welfare in later years - cf. **1 Ti 5:4,8,16**

B. DUTIES OF THE SINGLE CHRISTIAN...

1. To utilize the advantage of being single - **1 Co 7:32-35**
 - a. Use your freedom to increase your service to God
 - b. Don't be selfish with the extra time and freedom you have
 - c. Don't begrudge others who may not do as much as you because of their other responsibilities (e.g., children, spouse)
2. To watch out for the dangers of being single - cf. **Ecc 4:9-11**
 - a. Temptation - make an effort to develop a close relationship with the Lord
 - b. Loneliness - accept invitations to be with others, initiate opportunities to be with others
 - c. Self-centeredness - offer yourself in service to others; be flexible
3. To remember that you are in the family of God - **Mk 10:29-30**
 - a. You have many mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, children
 - b. Make the effort to develop and utilize these relationships

[Finally, some remarks regarding discipleship as it relates to our familial relationships...]

IV. THE CHRISTIAN AS DISCIPLE

A. PUTTING THE LORD BEFORE THE FAMILY...

1. Of course, we are to love our parents, spouses and children
2. Yet our love for the Lord must come first - **Mt 10:34-37; 12:46-50**
 - a. Otherwise we are not worthy to be called His disciple
 - b. Only then will Jesus view us as members of His family
3. By putting God and His kingdom first, our families will benefit more - cf. **Mt 6:33**
 - a. God's providence will help provide for our families' needs
 - b. We will also be better parents, spouses and children by following Jesus

B. PRESENTING THE LORD TO THE FAMILY...

1. By way of example - cf. **1 Pe 3:1-2**
 - a. So wives were to influence their unbelieving husbands
 - b. So we can influence other unbelieving members of the family
2. By way of instruction - cf. **Ep 6:4**
 - a. So fathers were to instruct their children
 - b. So we can teach other members of the family

CONCLUSION

1. The nuclear family is a wonderful blessing, intended by God to consist of...
 - a. Husbands and wives who love and respect one another
 - b. Parents who love and discipline their children
 - c. Children who honor and obey their parents
2. As Christians, our familial duties are clear...
 - a. Whether as husbands or wives
 - b. Whether as parents or children
 - c. Whether as married or single

May our faith in Christ lead us to be the best spouses and parents, the best children and singles, we can possibly be...

Faith In The Workplace

INTRODUCTION

1. As Christians, we are but pilgrims and sojourners in this world...
 - a. We have duties regarding our spiritual growth and development - **1 Pe 2:11**
 - b. Yet we also have a duty toward those who are still of this world - **1 Pe 2:12**
2. One arena where we fulfill our duty to those in the world is “the workplace”...
 - a. Places of employment where we work
 - b. Relationships we maintain with those with whom we work
3. What impact should our faith have as members of the workforce...?
 - a. What effect should it have on us as laborers or managers?
 - b. Should the workplace become a place to evangelize the lost?
4. In **1 Th 4:11-12**, Paul gave general instructions concerning Christians living in this world...
 - a. To lead a quiet life
 - b. To mind our own business
 - c. To work with our own hands
 - d. To walk properly toward those who are outside

[What this entails may be gleaned further as we consider passages which speak of Christians as laborers and managers. So let us start by looking at...]

I. THE CHRISTIAN AS LABORER

A. SCRIPTURAL PASSAGES FOR LABORERS...

1. From the epistles of Paul - **Ep 6:5-8; Co 3:22-25; 1 Ti 6:1-3; Ti 2:9-10**
2. From the epistle of Peter - **1 Pe 2:18-20**
- **Instructions to servants can be easily applied by Christian laborers today**

B. SCRIPTURAL GUIDELINES FOR LABORERS....

1. Obey those who are over you (unless they ask you to do that which is unethical or illegal)
2. Work with proper respect and good will toward your boss
3. Labor sincerely and heartily, as to the Lord and not to men
4. Do not work only when the boss is watching, or just to please those over you
5. Demonstrate that you can be trusted with responsibility
6. Offer such service, not just to good employers, but even to those who are unfair
- **In so doing, you are adorning the doctrine of God our Savior!**

[Additional counsel for laborers can be found from the wisdom of Solomon (e.g., **Pro 12:24; 22:29**). Those who follow such guidelines will not only please the Lord, but likely be very successful in their work! Now let's consider...]

II. THE CHRISTIAN AS MANAGER

A. SCRIPTURAL PASSAGES FOR MANAGERS...

1. From the epistles of Paul - **Ep 6:9; Co 4:1**
2. From the Old Testament - **Deu 24:14-15; Pro 22:16; Jer 22:13-17; Mal 3:5**
- **From both Testaments there are principles to guide the Christian manager**

B. SCRIPTURAL GUIDELINES FOR MANAGERS....

1. Remember that you have a Boss in heaven!
2. Treat employees with justice and fairness
3. Do not oppress or exploit those who are under you
4. Don't resort to threatening (seek positive motivation instead)
- **Applying the golden rule (Mt 7:12) will go a long way to managing properly**

[Managers who so govern will likely be highly esteemed, both by those they manage and those under whom they serve. Yet as Christians, our goal is not just to provide honorable service, but to encourage people to glorify God (cf. **1 Pe 2:12**). This raises the issue of evangelism in the workplace...]

III. THE CHRISTIAN AS EVANGELIST

A. CONCERNS TO CONSIDER...

1. As Christians, we are to seek and save the lost - **Mk 16:15-16**
2. As workers, honorable service demands a proper day's work for a day's wage
3. Adorning the doctrine of Christ requires that we not pilfer (including time) - **Ti 2:10**
- **The challenge is to properly balance our efforts to save and our duty to work**

B. GUIDELINES TO GOVERN...

1. Don't forget the power of a good example - **1 Pe 2:12; 3:1-2**
2. Don't let your speech betray your profession as a Christian - cf. **Ep 4:29; 5:4; Co 4:6**
3. Wisely consider the best use of one's time on the job - cf. **Co 4:5**
 - a. Circumstances at work are rarely conducive to substantive spiritual discussions
 - b. Seek to turn casual conversations related to spiritual subjects into opportunities for home Bible studies
- **Spiritual zeal is no excuse for cheating those who have hired us**

CONCLUSION

1. Involvement in the workplace is a wonderful opportunity...
 - a. To be able to provide for one's self and family
 - b. To be able to serve the Lord through making a positive impact on others
2. Let your faith in the workplace be an opportunity...
 - a. To demonstrate the value of a vibrant faith in Christ!
 - b. To reach others for Jesus Christ!

What kind of laborers and managers are we? Do we encourage others to glorify God...?

Follow-up: Definition & Importance

INTRODUCTION

1. In the Great Commission, Jesus did not simply tell His apostles to baptize... - cf. **Mt 28:19-20**
 - a. He said “teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you”
 - b. He wanted them to **‘follow-up’** those who were baptized
2. Too often, once people are baptized they are left to simply drift...
 - a. In many cases, drifting back into the world
 - b. Or they drift into a state of apathy regarding their devotion and service to the Lord
3. This greatly hinders the growth of the Lord’s church...
 - a. Not only are the souls who drift or become apathetic in danger of falling away
 - b. Think of the potential souls they could have brought to the Lord if they had been faithful!

[Proper **‘follow-up’** should be of primary importance to any congregation. But exactly what is meant by this meant by the term **‘follow-up’**...?]

I. DEFINITION OF FOLLOW-UP

A. THE WORK OF GROUNDING A NEW BELIEVER...

1. Such was the goal of Paul’s labors - **Co 1:28-29**
2. Therefore it was an important part of his ministry - **Ac 14:21-22**

B. INVOLVING SEVERAL AREAS OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH...

1. Having the assurance of salvation and acceptance with God - **1 Jn 5:13; 2:3**
2. Developing a consistent devotional life - **1 Pe 2:2; Co 4:2**
3. Understanding the basics of abundant Christian living - **Co 3:12-17; 2 Pe 1:5-11**
4. Integrating into the family life of the local church - **He 10:24-25**
5. Grounded in the basics of Bible doctrine - **He 5:12; 6:1-3**
6. Involved in sharing the gospel with others - **1 Pe 2:9-10**

C. UTILIZING A THREEFOLD APPROACH...

1. **Group follow-up:** nurturing the believer through the local church - **He 10:25**
2. **Personal study:** activities in which the new Christian engages on his own - **1 Ti 4:13-16**
3. **Personal follow-up:** one-to-one relationship with a mature believer to aid and inspire the new Christian’s growth - e.g., **Barnabas and Mark, Paul and Timothy**
 - a. This work is best done by members serving as mentors and role models
 - b. It should also be done with discretion (e.g., women following up with women)

[With this understanding of **‘follow-up’**, consider some reasons regarding the...]

II. IMPORTANCE OF FOLLOW-UP

A. VULNERABILITY OF A NEW CHRISTIAN...

1. Satan seeks to destroy those in the faith - **1 Pe 5:8-9**
2. A Christian is most vulnerable when they are not grounded in the faith - **Lk 8:13**

-- **Weak Christians need to be assisted by older, mature Christians - Ga 6:1-2**

B. POTENTIAL FOR CHANGE IN A NEW CHRISTIAN...

1. A new convert has just expressed godly sorrow and repentance - **2 Co 7:10**
2. The desire to change and do what is right is at a peak - e.g., **Ac 16:15**
3. Given proper direction at this time, much progress can be accomplished - **2 Co 7:11**
4. Yet if the desire to change is not cultivated, discouragement and apathy can develop

-- **Thus the need to encourage the transformation process for the new Christian**

C. EFFECTIVE IN PRODUCING SPIRITUAL MULTIPLICATION...

1. Growth in the early church was described as multiplying - **Ac 6:7; 9:31; 12:24**
2. Contrast 'spiritual multiplication' with 'spiritual addition'
 - a. **Spiritual addition** - involves leading people to Christ, but that is all
 - b. **Spiritual multiplication** - involves leading people to Christ, then developing them until they are leading others to Christ
3. 'Spiritual multiplication' involves four stages:
 - a. **Evangelizing** - teaching others the gospel of Christ - **Mt 28:19**
 - b. **Follow-up** - teaching them to observe all that Christ commanded - **Mt 28:20**
 - c. **Reproducing** - when they in turn begin to teach others - cf. **2 Ti 2:2**
 - d. **Multiplying** - what finally occurs when those taught in turn follow-up and make disciples who then teach others

-- **Without 'follow-up', spiritual multiplication does not happen!**

D. SEEN WHEN ONE GRASPS 'THE VISION OF MULTIPLICATION'....

1. Suppose you develop just one truly 'multiplying Christian' each year...
 - a. Not an unreasonable goal
 - b. For some that may not seem like much
 2. If each year those 'multiplying Christian' developed one more 'multiplying Christian'...
 - a. In **two years** there would be **4**
 - b. In **five years** there would be **32**
 - c. In **ten years** there would be **1,024**
 - d. In **twenty years** there would be **1,048,576**
 - e. In **thirty-three years** there would be **8,589,934,592**
 3. If you simply baptized 1,000 a year, in thirty-three years there only would be 33,000
- **Not all become 'multiplying Christians'; the reason many don't is lack of follow-up!**

CONCLUSION

1. If we want the Lord's church to grow, then we need to provide follow-up for new Christians
2. Proper follow-up involves both a **congregational** and **individual** effort (especially the latter)

Please give prayerful consideration as to what you can do to provide 'follow-up' for new Christians...

Follow-up: Factors Affecting Follow-up

INTRODUCTION

1. In a study on “**Follow-up: Definition & Importance**”, **personal follow-up** was part of an overall effort to ground new believers in Christ...
 - b. Seeking to encourage engagement in this area of service in the Lord’s work
 - a. For there is great joy when we engage in such work - **3 Jn 4**
2. There are several factors that will affect any effort in **personal follow-up**...
 - a. Understanding these factors will help one know more about what is involved in such efforts
 - b. It may also help us understand why so few people ever engage in it

[For example, one factor affecting personal follow-up is...]

I. OUR OWN RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LORD

A. FOLLOW-UP INVOLVES THE IDEA OF “LIFE TRANSFERENCE”...

1. **Life transference** - the transferring of things in your life to the life of the new Christian
2. In other words, the sharing of a lifestyle with the new believer
3. Such as Paul did with the Thessalonians - **1 Th 2:8**

B. OUR WALK WITH THE LORD MUST BE WORTHY OF IMITATION...

1. Otherwise, the new believer is not likely to take us seriously
2. Consider the example of Paul
 - a. In his conduct with the Thessalonians - **1 Th 2:10**
 - b. So he write as he did to the Philippians - **Ph 4:9**
3. We should not view Paul as an exception; all mature Christians are to worthy of imitation - cf. **Ph 3:17**

C. THIS MAY EXPLAIN WHY MANY ARE NOT INVOLVED IN FOLLOW-UP...

1. Perhaps knowing they are not good role models or mentors for “life transference”
2. If such is the case with us...
 - a. Then we better get busy growing spiritually
 - b. If we are not able to help save others, we will unlikely save ourselves! - cf. **1 Ti 4:16**

[Another factor affecting personal follow-up is...]

II. OUR WILLINGNESS TO MAKE A COMMITMENT

A. PERSONAL FOLLOW-UP IS TIME-CONSUMING...

1. The needs of a new believer are often similar to that of a baby (feeding, bonding, protecting)
2. When life’s busy schedule presses down, **priorities** will have to be made
3. Only the truly committed person will spend the time necessary to follow-up
4. Paul illustrates the kind of commitment needed - **Ac 20:20,31; 1 Th 2:9-12**

B. THIS MAY EXPLAIN WHY SO FEW ENGAGE IN FOLLOW-UP...

1. **Commitment** is a difficult concept for many people

2. Lack of commitment is seen in many areas: work, marriage, family, church
3. Many lack commitment to save themselves, let alone being of much use to save others!

C. ARE WE ABLE TO MAKE THE COMMITMENT...?

1. Do we believe in the importance of personal follow-up?
2. Are we willing to devote the time necessary to encourage new disciples?
3. Can we rethink our present activities and discontinue those which interfere?

[Even when we are convinced of the need, and are willing to make the commitment, we must be aware of other factors affecting personal follow-up, such as...]

III. OUR WILLINGNESS TO CONCENTRATE OUR EFFORTS

A. IT IS TEMPTING TO WORK WITH TOO MANY AT ONE TIME...

1. Because of what others may expect of us (“You should not be working with just a select few.”)
2. Because of what may be our own vain glory (“Numbers impress brethren more than quality, so I better work with many.”)

B. GOOD FOLLOW-UP REQUIRES CONCENTRATED FOCUS...

1. That can be obtained only by working with a few at a time
2. While multitudes followed Him, Jesus focused on his select disciples during His ministry
3. Paul told Timothy to work with ‘faithful’ men - **2 Ti 2:2**
4. “A decision that our ministry will be **intensive**, rather than extensive, will change our whole life. **Quality** begets quantity. It takes vision to train one man to reach the mass.” - **Waylon Moore**

C. DO WE HAVE THE VISION TO FOCUS OUR EFFORTS...?

1. Certainly we should be open to encouraging all our brethren
2. But prime time and peak energy should be directed toward a select few until they are able to follow-up on others as well

[Also important as a factor affecting personal follow-up is...]

IV. OUR WILLINGNESS TO GO THE DURATION

A. DEVELOPING DISCIPLES CAN BE A LENGTHY PROCESS...

1. The illustration of ‘**spiritual multiplication**’ in our previous study revealed that it takes nearly six years for noticeable growth to occur
2. Even Jesus spent three years in developing His disciples
3. Paul was in relative obscurity for ten years before he began his missionary journeys

B. WILLINGNESS TO GO THE DURATION REQUIRES...

1. **Vision** - the same vision Jesus had - **Mt 13:31-32**; cf. **Isa 60:22**
2. **Patience** - willing to allow time for spiritual growth, and for spiritual multiplication to occur

C. COULD THIS EXPLAIN WHY SOME DO NOT PERSIST IN THIS WORK...?

1. We are a society motivated by “get rich quick” schemes, fed by “fast food” restaurants
2. We want salvation in four or five easy steps and at little cost

3. We must be willing to endure like Jeremiah, who labored for fifty years with little to show for his labors

[Indeed, the fruit of our labors in follow-up may sometimes not show up until after we are gone! But with faith and vision, we will not grow weary (**Ga 6:9**). A fifth factor affecting follow-up is...]

V. OUR WILLINGNESS TO TEACH AND TRAIN

A. TEACHING OF GOD’S WORD IS REQUIRED...

1. As Paul instructed Timothy - **2 Ti 2:2**
2. Accompanied by our example (which we saw earlier in ‘life transference’)
3. Yet it is the Word which ultimately produces spiritual growth and change - **1 Pe 1:23; 2:2**

B. THIS REQUIRES BEING A FAITHFUL STUDENT AS WELL..

1. As Paul instructed Timothy - **1 Ti 4:15-16**
2. Not only for our own spiritual growth, but to set the example for others - **1 Ti 4:12**

C. COULD THIS EXPLAIN THE LACK OF GROWTH IN SOME CONVERTS...?

1. What kind of students of God’s Word do they see in us?
2. Is our attendance in Bible study erratic? Do we come unprepared to share?
3. Are we willing to take the time to study with them in person?

[Finally, another factor affecting follow-up pertains to...]

VI. OUR SPIRITUAL ENVIRONMENT

A. THE ROLE OF A SPIRITUAL ENVIRONMENT FOR A NEW CHRISTIAN...

1. It plays a large part in his or her spiritual growth
2. A lukewarm or cold church environment can be devastating to the growth of a new believer
3. It can hinder or hurt the efforts of the faithful few trying to nurture new Christians

B. EFFECTIVE FOLLOW-UP MAY FIRST REQUIRE CLEANUP...

1. Working first with those who poor examples will only undermine future efforts
2. Spending time and effort to ensure the local congregation will be a safe haven for new Christians

C. COULD THIS EXPLAIN THE LACK OF GROWTH IN SOME CONVERTS...?

1. A faithful few may be trying to follow-up with new Christians or new members
- b. But are their efforts impacted negatively by the poor examples being set by others?

CONCLUSION

1. The work of personal follow-up is no easy task...
 - a. Which may explain it is so greatly neglected
 - b. Which is why Christians are so desperately need to accept the challenge
2. For those willing to accept the task of personal follow-up...
 - a. They will help the church ‘multiply’ - **Ac 9:31**
 - b. They will experience ‘no greater joy’ - **3 Jn 4**

And they will become imitators of the household of Stephanas: **“they have devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints” (1 Co 16:15)**. What a wonderful compliment...!

Getting Ready To Grow

INTRODUCTION

1. **Not all churches are prepared** to grow in number and in spirit...
 - a. Consider the church at Laodicea - **Re 3:15-19**
 - b. Even if a successful evangelist had come and converted many, how many would have remained faithful in a spiritual environment such as that?
2. For churches to grow, they must **look beyond their evangelistic efforts...**
 - a. For the mortality rate of new converts is often high
 - b. Unless a congregation is prepared to assimilate and nurture new converts, any success in evangelism may be short-lived
3. To have real, enduring growth, **we must get ready** to grow...!
 - a. Preparing ourselves as a congregation
 - b. Preparing ourselves as individual members of a congregation

[What is necessary in “**Getting Ready To Grow**”? First, allow me to suggest...]

I. WHAT WE MUST DO AS A CONGREGATION

A. OFFER ASSEMBLIES THAT EDIFY...

1. The **first exposure** many have to the gospel is by visiting a local congregation
 - a. What do they see and hear? Do they see love? - cf. **Jn 13:34-35**
 - b. Does it draw them closer to God? - cf. **1 Co 14:25b**
 - c. Do our visitors experience courtesy, warmth, and interest in spiritual matters?
 - Not all churches provide the right environment conducive for worship and spiritual growth - e.g., **1 Co 11:17; 14:26b**
2. **New converts** often depend heavily upon the spiritual nourishment provided by the assemblies, and rightly so - cf. **He 10:24-25**
 - a. Excited by their newfound faith, anxious to grow quickly, they attend all the services of the church
 - b. What do they find? Halfhearted services? Sparsely attended by older members?
3. If we are serious about growing...
 - a. **Those who lead** us in our assemblies will take their tasks seriously
 - 1) Coming prepared to serve their role
 - 2) Doing so gladly and with enthusiasm
 - b. **Every member** will do what they can to make our assemblies edifying to all
 - 1) Arriving early to welcome and visit with visitors, other members
 - 2) Participating wholeheartedly in the singing, prayers, etc.
 - 3) Staying around and visiting afterward

B. ASSIMILATE AND NURTURE NEW MEMBERS...

1. As valuable as our assemblies may be, they are not always adequate by themselves
 - a. **New members** may **remain on the fringe**
 - 1) Left out of the **family life** of the congregation (activities members do together)
 - 2) Remain on the fringe for long, and they may begin looking elsewhere

- b. **Babes in Christ** often **require special attention** and nurturing
 - 1) New converts often bring with them many personal problems
 - 2) They need the concern and care of interested, mature Christians - **Ro 15:1-3**
 - 3) Otherwise they may soon **wither away**

[What does it take for a congregation to provide such things? It begins with what we are willing to do individually, for a congregation is no stronger or ready to grow than its members are willing to be. Let me therefore suggest...]

II. WHAT WE MUST DO AS INDIVIDUALS

A. STRENGTHEN OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD...

1. Why is this so important?
 - a. Others **must see in us** the blessings of walking with God - not simply the pride of knowing about the Lord!
 - b. We cannot share what we do not have!
2. No matter how strong our relationship with God, **we can always improve**
 - a. Paul recognized this in his own life - **Ph 3:12-15**
 - b. Peter wrote that our spiritual growth must always be increasing - **2 Pe 1:5-8**
3. Therefore we must continue to add to our faith virtue, to virtue knowledge...
 - a. Much of this is accomplished through **personal and daily devotions** - **Psa 1:1-3**
 - b. But personal efforts must be accompanied by **frequent assembling** - **He 10:24-25**

B. STRENGTHEN OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH ONE ANOTHER...

1. Why is this important?
 - a. Our love and unity is **a powerful witness** for Christ - **Jn 13:34-35; 17:20-21**
 - b. A strong network of Christians is **essential to assimilate and nurture** new Christians
2. No matter how strong our relationship with one another, we can always improve
 - a. As Paul exhorted the Thessalonians - **1 Th 4:9-10**
 - b. As Peter wrote to Christians in general - **1 Pe 1:22**
3. Therefore we must seek out opportunities to strengthen our bond in Christ...
 - a. Regular **attendance** is certainly a great help - **He 10:24-25**
 - b. And so is **simple hospitality** (both offered, and accepted) - **1 Pe 4:8-9**

C. DEVELOP RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE LOST...

1. Why is this important?
 - a. **Light must shine** in darkness to be of much value - **Mt 5:14-16**
 - b. If people are sick, those with the cure must be willing to be among them - cf. **Mt 9:10-13**
 - c. The right **example** can prepare people to receive the Word - cf. **1 Pe 3:1-2**
 - d. Relationships with the lost can serve as **the basis for continued relationships** with them after they are saved
2. Developing relationships with the lost is **an ongoing process**
 - a. If an effort to share the gospel is not well-received, we may need to move on - **Mt 7:6**
 - b. Just as Jesus could not stay in one place, we cannot limit our outreach to just a few friends, relatives, and neighbors - cf. **Lk 4:42-44**
3. Therefore we must always be on the lookout for new relationships with the lost...
 - a. **Simple hospitality** will go a long way (both offered and accepted) - cf. **Mt 9:9-13**
 - 1) Matthew extended hospitality to his friends soon after Jesus called him

- 2) Jesus accepted the opportunity to eat and be with the lost
- b. **Inviting** the lost to our assemblies can be very profitable
 - 1) Giving them an opportunity to meet other Christians
 - 2) With whom they may also develop relationships

CONCLUSION

1. To be useful to the Master, an individual must prepare himself - **2 Ti 2:21-22**
2. The same is true regarding churches...
 - a. A congregation that has prepared itself will be used by the Lord
 - b. Just as the Lord was willing to provide an open door for the church in Philadelphia - **Re 3:8**
3. As we have seen, we must prepare ourselves both as a congregation, and as individuals...
 - a. But the onus rests mostly upon us as individuals
 - b. For a chain is no stronger than its weakest link
 - c. If we as individuals fail to do our part, any effort by the congregation as a whole is greatly weakened, if not mortally wounded!
3. Do we really want to grow? As with the physical body, the only alternative to growth is gradual decay and death

Shall we be like the church at Laodicea, or the church at Philadelphia? The answer may very well be found on whether we are **“Getting Ready To Grow”!**

Note: The main idea and several thoughts from this lesson were taken from a lesson by Gary Henry. The URL for his web site containing many excellent articles and sermon outlines is:
<http://www.brasstacks.org>

God Hates Divorce!

INTRODUCTION

1. A troubling trend was revealed by a recent survey from **The Barna Group**...
 - a. Born again Christians are just as likely to divorce as are non-Christians.
 - b. Among married born again Christians, 35% have experienced a divorce. That figure is identical to the outcome among married adults who are not born again: 35%.
 - c. Barna's figures show that nearly one-quarter of the married born agains (23%) get divorced two or more times.

-- **cf. The Barna Group (<http://www.barna.org>)**
2. The apparent reason? Evidently many do not believe divorce can be sinful...
 - a. Although Bible scholars and teachers point out that Jesus taught that divorce was a sin unless adultery was involved, few Americans buy that notion.
 - b. Only one out of every seven adults (15%) strongly agreed with the statement "when a couple gets divorced without one of them having committed adultery, they are committing a sin."
 - c. A majority of both Protestants (58%) and Catholics (69%) disagreed that divorce without adultery involved the commission of sin.

-- **ibid.**

[A survey like this reveals the need for constant reminder of what God has spoken concerning divorce. God hates divorce, and the reasons why He has made that clear....]

I. AS REVEALED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

A. IMPLIED BY MOSES...

1. Note carefully **Deu 24:1-4**
2. Moses forbid the first husband taking his wife back after she had remarried (even if her second husband died)
3. The reason: despite the bill of divorce from the first husband, marriage to the second husband had 'defiled' her! - **Deu 24:4**
4. Notice these comments by **Keil & Delitzsch**..
 - a. **"The second marriage of a woman who had been divorced is designated by Moses a defilement of the woman...a moral defilement, i.e., blemishing, desecration of the sexual communion which was sanctified by marriage, in the same sense in which adultery is called a defilement in Lev 18:20 and Num 5:13,14..."**
 - b. **"Thus the second marriage of a divorced woman was placed implicit upon a par with adultery, and some approach was made towards the teaching of Christ concerning marriage (Mt 5:32)..."**

-- **In the words of Moses, we begin to see why God hates divorce: it can lead to moral defilement akin to adultery!**

B. DECLARED THROUGH MALACHI...

1. Note carefully **Mal 2:13-16**
2. God did not receive the sacrifices of the priests because they had divorced their wives
3. God makes it clear that He hates divorce, and gives the reason why - **Mal 2:16**
4. God hates divorce because:

- a. It covers one's garment with violence
- b. It treats one's spouse with treachery
- **In the words of God Himself, divorce is a violent and treacherous act; to which many innocent spouses and the children of divorce can testify!**

[Christians do well to seriously consider these words in the OT (cf. **Ro 15:4; 2 Ti 3:16-17**). Even more so, they should pay careful heed to what God has said about divorce...]

II. AS REVEALED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

A. IN THE TEACHINGS OF CHRIST...

1. Note carefully **Mt 5:31-32**
 - a. Many scribes and Pharisees taught that divorce was permissible for any reason, as long as a certificate of divorce was granted
 - b. Jesus taught that divorce led to adultery, unless fornication was the cause of divorce
 2. Note carefully **Mt 19:3-9** (cf. **Mk 10:11-12; Lk 16:18**)
 - a. The Pharisees thought that divorce was permissible, as long as a certificate of divorce was granted
 - b. Jesus first explained that Moses' permitted divorce because of the hardness of their hearts, but it was not God's will from the beginning (of creation)
 - c. Jesus then provides the only ground for divorce without it leading to adultery: if the innocent spouse puts away his or her spouse for fornication - **Mt 19:9**
- **Jesus allows only one reason for divorce: when a spouse is guilty of fornication!**

B. IN THE EPISTLES OF PAUL...

1. Note carefully **Ro 7:1-4**
 - a. Here Paul is using what the Law taught on marriage for the purpose of illustration
 - b. Even the Law taught that a woman was bound to her husband for life
 - c. Even if she legally divorced her husband, she became an adulteress when she remarried
 2. Note carefully **1 Co 7:10-16**
 - a. Paul reminds them of what the Lord Himself taught - **1 Co 7:10-11**
 - 1) A wife is not to depart her husband; a husband is not to divorce his wife
 - 2) If a wife leaves her husband, she must remain unmarried or be reconciled
 - b. Paul reveals more concerning marriages with unbelievers - **1 Co 7:12-16**
 - 1) Believers are not to divorce unbelieving spouses if they are willing to live with them
 - 2) If unbelieving spouses depart, believers are not in bondage (to fulfill their marital obligations, in my opinion)
- **Paul reinforced Jesus' teaching on divorce, and permitted separation only when initiated by an unbeliever!**

CONCLUSION

1. From what we have briefly considered, the following can be gleaned...
 - a. God intends for marriage to be for life
 - b. God hates divorce, for it is a violent and treacherous act
 - c. He does not release the married from their marriage simply because they get a divorce
 - d. Unless divorce is for the grounds of fornication, any remarriage results in adultery!
- **And we do well to remember what is said about fornicators and adulterers - He 13:4**

2. What can be done to stem the tide of divorce? It requires commitment to...
 - a. Obeying God's Word concerning marriage and divorce - **Mt 7:21; Lk 6:46**
 - b. Loving the spouses of your youth - **Ecc 9:9; Pro 5:18**
 - c. Applying commands concerning husbands and wives - **Ep 5:22-33; Co 3:18-19; Ti 2:4**
- **Otherwise, it will be fruitless to claim to be followers of God - cf. Psa 50:15-23**

If we are guilty of causing adultery by divorcing, or are in an adulterous marriage, there is forgiveness for those who repent... - **1 Co 6:9-11** (though it may require celibacy, cf. **Mt 19:10-12**)

God Loves Families!

INTRODUCTION

1. In another study we noted that God hates divorce (cf. “God Hates Divorce!”)...
 - a. For it covers one’s garment with violence - **Mal 2:16a**
 - b. For it treats one’s spouse with treachery - **Mal 2:16b**
2. How does God feel about families...?
 - a. Does He love families as strong as He hates divorce?
 - b. What ideal family is one that He loves to see?

[We can confidently affirm that God loves families! How do we know this...?]

I. HOW WE KNOW GOD LOVES FAMILIES

A. GOD CREATED THE PHYSICAL FAMILY...

1. He instituted marriage between man and woman - **Mt 19:4-6; Ro 7:2-3; Mt 19:9**
 - a. Designing it to be for life
 - b. Allowing divorce only for the cause of fornication
2. He thus provided the ideal arrangement for children
 - a. In which they are to be born (from the union of two sexes who have become one)
 - b. In which they are to grow (benefiting from what both sexes have to offer)
3. His love for family extends to when families are broken
 - a. He is a father of the fatherless, a defender of widows - **Psa 68:5**
 - b. He relieves the fatherless and widow - **Psa 146:9**
 - c. He charges that families provide for their widows - **1 Ti 5:4**
 - d. He describes such care as pure and undefiled religion - **Ja 1:27**

B. GOD CREATED A SPIRITUAL FAMILY...

1. He offers Himself as a loving Father - **1 Jn 3:1-2**
2. He provides a wonderful Elder Brother for our salvation - **He 2:9-13**
3. He sent His Spirit so we could be born into this family - **Ti 3:4-7; Ro 8:15-17**
4. He revealed His Word so we can be born again - **Ja 1:18; 1 Pe 1:22-25**
5. He designed the church to be an extended family with many mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters - **Mk 10:29-30; 1 Ti 3:15**

[Indeed, God loves families! The concept of family is important in both the physical and spiritual realm. Focusing our attention on the **physical** family, let’s review...]

II. THE IDEAL FAMILY THAT GOD LOVES

A. WHERE HUSBANDS TREAT THEIR WIVES...

1. With love and without bitterness, as Christ loved the church - **Co 3:19; Ep 5:25-29**
2. With understanding, honor, tenderness, and as fellow heirs - **1 Pe 3:7**

B. WHERE WIVES RESPOND TO THEIR HUSBANDS...

1. With love and obedience - **Ti 2:4-5**

2. With submission, as the church is to submit to Christ - **Co 3:18; Ep 5:22-24**

C. WHERE FATHERS RAISE THEIR CHILDREN...

1. Without provoking them to wrath - **Co 3:21; Ep 6:4a**
2. In the nurture and admonition of the Lord - **Ep 6:4b**
3. With proper discipline when needed - **Pro 13:24; 19:18; 29:17; He 12:7-10**

D. WHERE MOTHERS RAISE THEIR CHILDREN...

1. With love - **Ti 2:4**
2. As homemakers, managers of the home - **Ti 2:4; 1 Ti 5:14; cf. Pro 31:10-31**

E. WHERE CHILDREN REACT TO THEIR PARENTS...

1. With obedience - **Co 3:20; Ep 6:1**
2. With honor - **Ep 6:2-3; cf. Pro 31:28**

F. WHERE ALL ARE DEDICATED TO SERVING HIM...

1. Having a genuine faith from one generation to another - cf. **2 Ti 1:5**
2. With devotion to the Lord that surpasses even devotion to one another - **Mt 10:37**

CONCLUSION

1. No family is perfect, but God's ideal for the physical family is worth striving for...
 - a. It is the best hope for strong marriages, for healthy and happy families, that last a lifetime
 - b. God-ordained marriages, and certainly children, deserve the very best we can give
2. If we find ourselves in a family broken beyond repair...
 - a. By death, divorce, or dysfunction beyond our control
 - b. Do not forget that God has a spiritual family designed for eternity

The best hope for strong, physical families is for everyone to become a child of God in His spiritual family. Have you become a child of God by being born again of water and the Spirit...? - **Jn 3:3-5; Mk 16:16**

God's Great Book

INTRODUCTION

1. When we contemplate the beauty and order of the creation...
 - a. We see the glory of God through His handiwork - **Psa 19:1**
 - b. We see evidence of His power and deity - **Ro 1:20**
 - **Perhaps we are moved to agree with the song, "How Great Thou Art!"**
2. While the creation reveals much about God, it tells us nothing about...
 - a. God's great gift of love and mercy
 - b. God's great people that He wants us to become
 - **To learn of such things, we must look elsewhere**
3. God has chosen to reveal this through His book, the Bible...
 - a. Is this book equal to the task?
 - b. You would expect a great God to give us a great book; has He?
 - **Indeed He has! By His Spirit, He inspired a book capable of accomplishing great things!**

[For example, let's just start with one portion of the Bible...]

I. HOW GREAT IS THE OLD TESTAMENT!

A. IN THE DAYS OF DAVID...

1. A guide for true happiness - **Psa 1:1-3**
2. The **virtues** of God's word praised
 - a. It converts the soul - **Psa 19:7a**
 - b. It makes wise the simple - **Psa 19:7b**
 - c. It rejoices the heart - **Psa 19:8a**
 - d. It enlightens the eyes - **Psa 19:8b**
 - e. It endures forever - **Psa 19:9a**
 - f. It is true and righteous altogether - **Psa 19:9b**
 - g. Making it more desirable than gold, sweeter than honey - **Psa 19:10-11**
3. The **value** of God's word contemplated
 - a. Helps the young man cleanse his way - **Psa 119:9**
 - b. Guards the heart against sin - **Psa 119:11**
 - c. Makes one wiser than his enemies - **Psa 119:97-98**
 - d. Gives one more understanding than his teachers and the ancients - **Psa 119:99-100**
 - e. A lamp and a light to guide one's way - **Psa 119:105**
 - e. Provides great peace to those who love it - **Psa 119:165**
- **This is the value of just a small portion of God's Word, available during the days of David (perhaps the books of Genesis to Ruth)**

B. IN THE DAYS OF PAUL...

1. A source of patience and comfort, imparting hope to the Christian - **Ro 15:4**
2. Serving as examples, written for our admonition - **1 Co 10:11**
3. As with all Scripture inspired of God, profitable in many ways - **2 Ti 3:14-17**

- a. Making one wise regarding salvation by faith in Christ
 - b. Useful for doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness
 - c. Helping the man of God to become complete, equipped for every good work
- **Christians may not be under the Old Covenant, but it remains an importance source for truth and happiness**

[If such is true regarding the **Old Testament**, how much more so when we have the complete and final revelation from God! In other words...]

II. HOW GREAT IS THE NEW TESTAMENT!

A. IT IS A LIVING WORD...

1. The Word of God is living and powerful - **He 4:12a**
 2. The Word of God is piercing, discerning - **He 4:12b**
- **This is because it is the sword of the Spirit, the instrument by which He convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment! - cf. Jn 16:7-8; Ep 6:17**

B. IT IS A LIFE-GIVING WORD...

1. The Word of God can save our souls - **Ja 1:21**
 2. The Word of God can produce rebirth and spiritual growth - **1 Pe 1:23-2:3**
- **This is because of the power contained in the gospel of Christ - cf. Ro 1:16-17**

C. IT IS A LIFE-GUIDING WORD...

1. Producing the faith necessary for our walk in life - **2 Co 5:7; Ro 10:17**
 2. Equipping the saint for every good work - **2 Ti 3:16-17**
- **As Jesus quoted in response to Satan's temptation: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." - Mt 4:4**

[There should be no question that God's book is great! It fulfills our greatest need, and gives us our greatest hope. But let us consider...]

III. HOW GREAT IS OUR RESPONSE?

A. IS OUR RESPONSE WORTHY...?

1. Many people (including Christians) are "Biblically illiterate"!
 2. Like Israel of old, we suffer from a "famine for the Word" - cf. **Amo 8:11-14**
 - a. Israel's famine was imposed by God by their exile
 - b. Our famine is self-imposed by our own neglect!
 - c. The effect is still the same!
 - 1) Our young people faint from thirst!
 - 2) They fall, and do not rise again!
 3. For many, they feed upon an "unbalanced diet"!
 - a. E.g., reading only select passages, often ignoring the Old Testament
 - b. E.g., reading only to prove themselves right and others wrong
- **Is "God's Great Book" worthy of such a tepid response? No!**

B. WHAT IS A WORTHY RESPONSE...?

1. We must properly value God's Word
 - a. More valuable than gold and silver - **Psa 119:72**

- b. As precious as great treasure - **Psa 119:162**
- **Do we consider God's Word of greater value than money?**
- 2. We must diligently read God's Word
 - a. With an attitude of longing - **Psa 119:131; 1 Pe 2:2**
 - b. With an intention to obey - **Ja 1:21-22**
 - c. With a prayer on our lips and in our hearts - **Psa 119:18,133**
 - **A consistent program of daily Bible reading in this spirit is a worthy response to God's great book!**

CONCLUSION

1. Contemplating **God's creation** produces the response: **How Great Thou Art!**
 - a. God is a Being of great power
 - b. God is a Being of great intelligence
2. Contemplating **God's book** produces a similar response: **How Great Thou Art!**
 - a. God is a Being of great wisdom and understanding
 - b. God is a Being of great love and compassion
 - c. God is a Being of great justice and righteousness
3. I pray that our study has done at least two things...
 - a. Increased your appreciation for **"God's Great Book"**
 - b. Stimulated your desire to be more diligent in your response to it
 - 1) More diligent in your reading of it
 - 2) More diligent in your obedience to it

"So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified." (Ac 20:32)

Let **"God's Great Book"** build you up, that you may receive that wonderful "inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you." (**1 Pe 1:4**)!

The Gospel According To Isaiah

INTRODUCTION

1. Undoubtedly you have heard of the four gospels...
 - a. The gospel according to Matthew
 - b. The gospel according to Mark
 - c. The gospel according to Luke
 - d. The gospel according to John
 - **But have you heard of the gospel according to Isaiah?**
2. Preaching the gospel of Christ, it was not uncommon for the apostles and others in the first century to refer to the Old Testament...
 - a. It was Paul's custom - **Ac 17:2-3**
 - b. Apollos did the same at Corinth - **Ac 18:27-28**
3. That was because elements of the gospel were foretold by Old Testament prophets...
 - a. Concerning **the coming of the Messiah** (Heb., Anointed One; Grk., Christ)
 - b. Concerning **the establishment of His kingdom**
4. One such prophet was **Isaiah**...
 - a. Who lived 750 years before Christ
 - b. Who was sent to prophesy to Judah and Jerusalem - **Isa 1:1**
5. Isaiah's book contains so many prophecies regarding the Messiah and His kingdom...
 - a. He is often called "**the Messianic prophet**"
 - b. We could call his book "**The Gospel According To Isaiah**"

[To illustrate my point, let's review some of the prophecies found in the book of Isaiah...]

I. THE GOSPEL OF THE MESSIAH

A. GOOD NEWS ABOUT THE MAN...

1. **He will be born of a virgin**
 - a. Whose name will be Immanuel ("God with us") - **Isa 7:14**
 - b. Fulfilled with the birth of Jesus by Mary - cf. **Mt 1:18-23**
2. **He will be a wonderful Child**
 - a. With an amazing name(s), destined to reign - **Isa 9:6-7**
 - b. Announced by the angels at Jesus' birth - cf. **Lk 2:11**
3. **He will be of the family of David (Jesse)**
 - a. Descending from the "stem of Jesse" (David's father) - **Isa 11:1**
 - b. Jesus' lineage shown in **Mt 1** (via Joseph) and **Lk 3** (via Mary)
4. **The Spirit of the Lord will rest upon Him**
 - a. With wisdom and understanding, counsel and might, knowledge and fear of the Lord - **Isa 11:2**
 - b. Visibly manifested at His baptism by John - cf. **Mt 3:16**

B. GOOD NEWS ABOUT HIS MINISTRY...

1. **He will be proceeded by a forerunner**
 - a. One sent to prepare the way - **Isa 40:3-5**
 - b. Fulfilled with the ministry of John the Baptist - cf. **Mt 3:1-3**
2. **He will be anointed to preach good tidings**
 - a. To the poor, proclaiming the acceptable year of the Lord - **Isa 61:1-3**
 - b. Fulfilled by His preaching in Nazareth - **Lk 4:16-21**
3. **He will bring light to those living in Galilee**
 - a. In the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali - **Isa 9:1-2**
 - b. Fulfilled by His living and preaching in Capernaum - cf. **Mt 4:12-16**
4. **He will not advertise Himself**
 - a. By quarreling or crying out in the streets - **Isa 42:1-3**
 - b. Fulfilled in Jesus' response to threats on His life - cf. **Mt 12:14-21**
5. **He will suffer in our behalf**
 - a. Despised and rejected by men - **Isa 53:1-3**; cf. **Jn 1:12**
 - b. His suffering and death for our sins - **Isa 53:4-6,8**; cf. **Mt 8:17**; **1 Pe 2:24**
 - c. Silent before His accusers - **Isa 53:7**; cf. **Mt 27:12-14**
 - d. His grave with the wicked and the rich - **Isa 53:9**; cf. **Mt 27:38,57-60**
 - e. All according to God's will, for our sins - **Isa 53:10-12**; cf. **Ac 2:23**; **1 Ti 2:5-6**

[Through such vivid prophecies, Isaiah foretold the gospel of the Messiah. Note how Philip was able to make good use of Isaiah's "gospel" in preaching Christ (cf. **Ac 8:30-38**).

But Isaiah's prophecies were not limited to the Messiah Himself. Just as Jesus proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom (cf. **Mk 1:14-15**), so did Isaiah through his prophecies...]

II. THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM

A. GOOD NEWS ABOUT ITS ORIGIN...

1. **It shall come to pass in the "latter days"**
 - a. The mountain of the Lord's house will be established - **Isa 2:1-2**
 - b. The time was fulfilled when Jesus began preaching - cf. **Mk 1:14-15**
2. **It shall proceed from Jerusalem**
 - a. As the Word is spread - **Isa 2:3**
 - b. So Jesus explained, the Word must proceed from Jerusalem - cf. **Lk 24:44-47**

B. GOOD NEWS ABOUT ITS NATURE...

1. **It shall be a kingdom of peace**
 - a. People will not learn war; its king will be the Prince of Peace - **Isa 2:4**; **9:6-7**
 - b. Thus the kingdom of God is one of peace - cf. **Ro 14:17**
2. **It shall include the Gentiles**
 - a. The Gentiles shall seek Him, in Whom they shall find justice - **Isa 11:10**; **42:1,6**
 - b. Thus Jesus has united both Jew and Gentile - cf. **Ep 2:11-18**

C. GOOD NEWS ABOUT ITS FUTURE...

1. **It shall last forever**
 - a. Of His kingdom there shall be no end - **Isa 9:7**
 - b. Even as the angel Gabriel pronounced to Mary - cf. **Lk 1:31-33**
2. **It shall usher in a new heavens and new earth**
 - a. Promised by God in terms to which Israel could relate - **Isa 65:17-25**; **66:22-23**

- b. A promised fully realized with the coming of Christ - cf. **2 Pe 3:10-14; Re 21:1-4**

CONCLUSION

1. Perhaps we can see why the apostles and others used the Old Testament...
 - a. To convince many that Jesus was the Messiah
 - b. To proclaim the prophecies concerning Him and His kingdom were being fulfilled
2. What is your reaction to the gospel...?
 - a. Foretold by the prophets centuries before Christ came?
 - b. Proclaimed by the apostles and preachers in the first century, A.D.?
3. My prayer and hope is that it is...
 - a. Similar to that of the Samaritans - cf. **Ac 8:12**
 - b. Akin to that of the Ethiopian Eunuch - cf. **Ac 8:30-38**
 - Not like some of those in Rome, who had hardened their hearts! - cf. **Ac 28:23-31**

Have your hearts grown dull, and ears hard of hearing, that the good news of the kingdom and the Lord Jesus Christ do not prompt the proper response? I hope not, and that we are all moved to proper action by these words of Jesus spoken at the beginning and end of His ministry:

“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.” - Mk 1:15

And He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned”. (Mk 16:15-16)

Gospel Meetings

Keys To A Successful Meeting

INTRODUCTION

1. The time for our gospel meeting is near!
 - a. In view of the Lord's money and the time we will spend...
 - b. ...we ought to be vitally interested in its success
2. For it to be a success, we must realize our responsibility and accept it!
 - a. The effort of the one(s) who will preach is important
 - b. Yet such effort can be greatly hindered if we fail to do our part

[What is required for a successful gospel meeting? Several keys are necessary, beginning with purpose: Why have a gospel meeting...?]

I. PURPOSE

A. ONE PURPOSE IS TO EVANGELIZE...

1. To seek and save the lost through proclaiming the gospel - cf. **Ro 1:14-17**
2. To provide opportunity for friends and neighbors to hear the gospel - cf. **Ro 10:17**

B. ANOTHER PURPOSE IS TO EDIFY...

1. To exhort one another to love and good works - cf. **He 10:24-25**
2. To revive our first love - cf. **Re 2:4-5**
3. To remove any lukewarmness that may have crept in - cf. **Re 3:15-19**

[Some meetings may be designed for one purpose or another, perhaps both. Once we have established our **purpose**, another key to a successful meeting is...]

II. PREPARATION

A. LACK OF PREPARATION CAN KILL A MEETING...

1. What would you think of a preacher who came unprepared?
2. Yet many members are often unprepared for a meeting...
 - a. Unprepared to attend each and every service if possible
 - b. Unprepared to encourage other members to attend
 - c. Unprepared to exhort the members at the services
 - d. Unprepared to invite those for whom the meeting is intended
 - e. Unprepared to visit and welcome those who come

B. PREPARATION INVOLVES EFFORT BY ALL...

1. Resolving to attend every service
2. Resolving to invite others to come
3. Resolving to be friendly to all who come

[Successful preparation means **working** as though it depends upon us, while **praying** as though it

depends upon God (more on prayer later). Another key to a successful meeting are...]

III. PROSPECTS

A. WHO ARE THE PROSPECTS...?

1. For a meeting designed to **evangelize**, the prospects are **the unsaved**
 - a. Including friends, relatives, neighbors
 - b. Anyone who has yet to come to the Lord
2. For a meeting designed to **edify**, the prospects are **ourselves!**
 - a. Every member of this congregation is a prospect
 - b. Every member needs to be encouraged, uplifted

B. WHAT SHOULD BE DONE FOR THE PROSPECTS...?

1. They should be invited (before and during the meeting)
2. Transportation should be offered if needed
3. One might invite them to dinner, and then attend the meeting together

[There are plenty of **prospects** (cf. **Jn 4:35**). With **preparation** the **purpose** of the meeting will likely be fulfilled. But there are three more keys to a successful meeting, one being...]

IV. PRESENCE

A. PRESENCE MAKES OR BREAKS A MEETING...

1. Your presence is edifying, while your absence is demoralizing!
 - a. Just as the absence of Titus depressed Paul - cf. **2 Co 2:12-13**
 - b. Just as the absence of two and a half tribes would have discouraged the rest of the tribes of Israel - cf. **Num 32:6-7**
2. We might think our absence is not important, but it is
 - a. Empty seats have an affect on those who are present
 - b. Affecting the morale of the members, and the impact of the meeting upon visitors

B. MEMBERS CAN MAKE THE DIFFERENCE...

1. Most meetings enjoy the presence of visitors, yet the overall attendance is often below the normal attendance on Sunday mornings
2. Why? Because the meeting is poorly attended by the own members of the congregation!
3. If all the members would just attend, most buildings would be filled!
4. Sadly, sometimes there are more visitors than members!

C. EXCUSES, EXCUSES...

1. Invariably, members will offer excuses to explain their absence
 - a. Like those in the parable of the great supper - cf. **Lk 14:15-24**
 - b. Unless it is sickness or unavoidable work, I have little sympathy
2. Don't tell me your excuses...
 - a. Tell it to your brethren who are discouraged by your absence
 - b. Tell it to the visitors who wonder why the members don't support their own meeting
 - c. Tell it to the lost who wonder if the gospel or Christ's church is worth it
 - d. Tell it to those who have the same reasons not to attend, but come anyway!
 - e. Tell it to the Lord, who came to this earth and died for you!

[A fifth key to a successful meeting is...]

V. PARTICIPATION

A. PARTICIPATE BEFORE AND AFTER THE SERVICE...

1. Arrive early to greet and welcome visitors
2. Sit up front, leaving the back for visitors who come late
3. Stick around afterward, greet the visitors, invite them back
4. Extend hospitality by inviting them home or to a restaurant for a snack - cf. **1 Pe 4:9**

B. PARTICIPATE DURING THE SERVICE...

1. Sing in a spirited manner, with grace in your hearts
2. Give a hearty amen to the prayers offered
3. Those who lead in prayer and song, do so audibly and with enthusiasm!
4. Give close attention to the sermon - cf. **Ac 17:11**

[Finally, but perhaps most important...]

VI. PRAYER

A. ESSENTIAL TO ANY EVANGELISTIC EFFORT...

1. Jesus called on His disciples to pray for the Lord to send forth laborers - **Mt 9:35-38**
2. Paul asked others to pray for his efforts to spread the Word - **Col 4:3-4; 2Th 3:1**

B. SO LET US PRAY...

1. For the preacher - cf. **Ep 6:19**
2. For the visitors - cf. **Ro 10:1**
3. For ourselves - cf. **Col 1:9**

CONCLUSION

1. If we approach our gospel meeting with the right measure of...
 - a. Purpose
 - b. Preparation
 - c. Prospects
 - d. Presence
 - e. Participation
 - f. Prayer-- **We will have an excellent and successful meeting!**
2. With the help of God, our meetings will accomplish the purpose for which they are intended...
 - a. Saving souls
 - b. Edifying the saved-- **And most of all, glorifying God and His Son Jesus Christ!**

Gospel Meetings

Why Should We Attend Them?

INTRODUCTION

1. The time for our gospel meeting is near; what is your reaction...?
 - a. Delight? Dismay?
 - b. Disinterest? Disgust?
2. What exactly is a gospel meeting...?
 - a. Usually a multi-day event hosted by a congregation, open to the public
 - b. Where a guest speaker (preacher, evangelist) presents a series of lessons
3. I have often observed the following...
 - a. Some look forward to gospel meetings, and attend every service possible
 - b. They even visit gospel meetings conducted by other churches in the area
 - c. Others appear not to care, and make little effort to attend at all

[Perhaps the difference is due to a failure to appreciate **why it is good to attend** gospel meetings, and especially **why we should try to attend every service** during our own gospel meeting. Allow me to suggest several reasons why I believe it is important. First, we should attend gospel meetings...]

I. TO SUPPORT A GREAT MESSAGE

A. GOSPEL MEETINGS PROCLAIM THE WORD OF GOD...

1. Which is living and powerful - **He 4:12**
2. Which is able to produce faith - **Ro 10:17**
- **Isn't God's Word worthy of our support?**

B. GOSPEL MEETINGS PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST...

1. The power of God unto salvation - **Ro 1:16**
2. The message Jesus wants everyone to hear - **Mk 16:15-16**
- **Isn't the gospel of Christ worthy of our support?**

[Our **presence** shows our support for the great message Christ has to offer the world. What does our **absence** show? Secondly, we should attend gospel meetings...]

II. TO RECEIVE A GREAT MESSAGE

A. GOSPEL MEETINGS HAVE A TWO-FOLD PURPOSE...

1. One purpose is to **evangelize**
 - a. To seek and save the lost by proclaiming the gospel
 - b. To provide opportunity for friends, neighbors, and strangers to hear the gospel
2. Another purpose is to **edify**
 - a. To exhort one another to love and good works - **He 10:24-25**
 - b. To revive those who have lost their first love - **Re 2:4-5**
- **Gospel meetings are designed to meet everyone's need**

B. GOSPEL MEETINGS OFFER SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE...

1. **For sinners**
 - a. The gospel of Christ which tells of God's love for them - **Jn 3:16; 1Jn 4:10**
 - b. The plan of salvation which tells how to respond to God's love - **Mk 16:16; Ac 2:37-38**
 2. **For the saved**
 - a. Apostolic doctrine to grow in grace - **Ac 2:42; 2Pe 3:18**
 - b. Apostles' teaching to prepare for the grace to come - **1Pe 1:13; 2Pe 1:10-11**
- **Gospel meetings are designed for sinner and saved alike**

[Our **presence** shows that we desire to receive the great message Jesus has to offer. What does our **absence** show? Finally, we should attend gospel meetings...]

III. TO SEND A GREAT MESSAGE

A. GOSPEL MEETINGS ALLOW YOU TO DEMONSTRATE...

1. Your priorities in life (the kingdom of God comes first) - **Mt 6:33**
 2. Your attitude toward the gospel (you are not ashamed of it) - **Ro 1:16**
 3. Your concern for the lost (you have compassion for them) - **Mt 9:35-38**
 4. Your support for your brethren (you want to encourage them) - **Ro 15:1-2**
- **Gospel meetings reveal a lot about ourselves**

B. GOSPEL MEETINGS ALLOW YOU TO INFLUENCE...

1. Your family, friends, neighbors, and brethren
 2. **For good**, by the example of your presence
 3. **For ill**, by the example of your absence
- **Gospel meetings impact a lot of people in various ways**

CONCLUSION

1. In review, we should attend gospel meetings...
 - a. To **support** a great message
 - b. To **receive** a great message
 - c. To **send** a great message
2. My purpose is not to put a guilt trip on anyone, but to...
 - a. **Enlighten** you as to the value of gospel meetings
 - b. **Encourage** you to utilize the opportunity of gospel meetings

And so I leave you these words of the apostle Paul...

“Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things.”
- 2Ti 2:7

Gospel Meetings

Why Some Succeed And Others Fail

INTRODUCTION

1. Gospel meetings can be a useful tool in the work of the local church...
 - a. A special series of services, lasting a few days, a week, or even longer
 - b. In which sermons or lessons are presented by guest preachers or teachers
 - c. Accompanied by congregational singing and prayer

2. The purpose of gospel meetings can be twofold...
 - a. **Evangelism** - providing opportunity to invite others to hear the gospel
 - b. **Edification** - building up the members through teaching of God's word
 - Some gospel meetings focus on one purpose or the other

3. Not all gospel meetings appear to have the same effect...
 - a. **Some are successful** in sowing the seed, and building up the members
 - b. **Others are failures**, discouraging those who attend rather than uplifting them

[Why the difference? Who do some succeed and others fail? I believe **the difference can be found in the attitudes of the members** of the congregation hosting the meeting...]

I. ENTHUSIASM LEADS TO SUCCESS

A. ENTHUSIASTIC PREACHING...

1. Presented by the guest preacher(s)
 - a. Lessons designed to stir the heart
 - b. Sermons presented by a preacher on fire for the Lord - cf. **Jer 15:16; 20:9**
2. Listened to by a receptive audience
 - a. Who receive the Word with all readiness - cf. **Ac 17:11**
 - b. Whose attentiveness inspires the preacher in his efforts
- **Rarely is there a problem with the preacher being on fire; yet the audience can have an impact on the preacher's zeal!**

B. ENTHUSIASTIC WORSHIP...

1. Congregational singing that uplifts and inspires - cf. **Co 3:16**
 - a. Led by enthusiastic and talented song leaders
 - b. Joined in by joyful congregants
2. Prayers offered that bless those who hear - cf. **He 4:14-16**
 - a. Often expressed by visiting preachers or elders
 - b. Drawing us near to God and preparing us to receive the Word
- **Enthusiasm in worship further blesses the audience by firing up the preacher!**

C. ENTHUSIASTIC ATTENDANCE...

1. Attendance by the regular members - cf. **He 10:24-25**
 - a. Coming to every service of the meeting as possible
 - b. Arriving early, glad to be present

2. Attendance by the visitors
 - a. Brethren from congregations in the area
 - 1) Who support our efforts by their presence
 - 2) Who contribute to the occasion by their singing and prayer
 - b. Visitors from the community
 - 1) Who have accepted the invitation to come
 - 2) Whose presence indicates spiritual interest
- **It is not uncommon for visitors to outnumber members; if all the local members are present, the building will likely be full!**

D. ENTHUSIASTIC WELCOME...

1. Extended before the service begins - cf. **Ro 16:16; 3 Jn 1:14**
 - a. By members who arrive early, ready to greet and welcome the visitors
 - b. By members who leave premium seating for the visitors
 2. Extended after the service is over
 - a. By members who stay around, talking to the visitors
 - b. By members who may show hospitality by inviting visitors into their homes or to a restaurant for a snack
- **Added to the efforts of the guest preacher(s), such interaction between members and visitors enhances the edification of the gospel meeting!**

[Even if a single soul does not respond to the gospel invitation, a gospel meeting is a success when the Word of God has been proclaimed and saints have been edified.]

Yet sometimes, a gospel meeting fails to rise to the occasion despite the faithful efforts of a fervent preacher. A major reason for failure can be summarized in one word: Apathy...]

II. APATHY LEADS TO FAILURE

A. APATHY TOWARD THE WORD...

1. Manifested by indifference toward the gospel meeting
 2. Observable by poor attendance by the members of the congregation
 3. Noticed by visitors from other congregations and the community
- **Does our absence not say something about our reverence for the Word of God?**

B. APATHY TOWARD PRAISING GOD...

1. Evident in late arrival that disrupts the service in progress
 2. Expressed in song and prayer that lacks zeal and fervor of spirit
- **Does not the praise of God deserve the same common courtesy we show other appointments we keep?**

C. APATHY TOWARD BRETHREN...

1. Visible by our absence and empty seats
 2. Apparently our concern for one another is not sufficient to make the effort necessary to attend
- **Does not our absence suggest indifference about the growth and well-being of the church?**

D. APATHY TOWARD VISITORS...

1. Shown by failing to welcome them
2. Conveyed by our quick departure after the services
- **Can we expect visitors to take our message seriously, when we fail to take their presence seriously?**

CONCLUSION

1. As with any service rendered to God or man, success or failure is affected by attitude...
 - a. Enthusiasm increases the likelihood of success
 - b. Apathy guarantees the likelihood of failure
2. In the service of God, attitude is important...
 - a. Diligence and fever are essential in our service to the Lord - **Ro 12:11**
 - b. Lukewarmness in our service is abominable to the Lord - **Re 3:15-16**

As we plan our involvement gospel meetings, what will our attitude be? The success or failure of gospel meetings rests heavily upon our attitude. And so does our eternal well-being!

Gospel Meetings

Now Our Meeting Is Over

INTRODUCTION

1. Our gospel meeting is now over...
 - a. Our special services to edify and evangelize have come to an end
 - b. The preacher has returned home, and our routine is returning to normal-- **What now?**
2. When Paul and Barnabas completed their missionary journey...
 - a. They returned to the church at Antioch - **Ac 14:26**; cf. **Ac 13:1-3**
 - b. They reported what God had done with them - **Ac 14:27**
3. In similar fashion, now that our gospel meeting is over...
 - a. I think it appropriate to review what happened
 - b. Also, to consider the question **“What next?”**

[If I may, then, let me review...]

I. WHAT I SAW

A. I SAW GOD AT WORK IN YOU...

1. Note that Paul recorded what God had done during his journey - **Ac 14:27**
 2. When a person is doing the will of God, God is at work in them - cf. **Ph 2:12-13**
-
- Thus I witnessed this past week the work of God in your lives in various ways!**

B. I SAW GOD AT WORK IN VARIOUS WAYS...

1. **Hospitality**
 - a. Many opened their hearts and homes to the preacher(s) and their families
 - b. My family and I likewise were beneficiaries
 - c. Others show kindness to visitors and other members
 - 1) Welcoming them to services
 - 2) Providing transportation to those in need
 - d. Did you know that God was at work in you while doing this?
 - 1) The ability to show hospitality is a gift from God - cf. **1 Pe 4:9-10**
 - 2) As you minister such a gift, it is with ability God supplies - cf. **1 Pe 4:11**
2. **Edification**
 - a. Hearts were touched by the gospel sermons and sincere prayers
 - b. Hearts were uplifted by the joyful singing
 - c. If you were so touched, God was at work in you - cf. **Ac 16:14** (hoping that you might act upon it)
3. **Sacrifice**
 - a. Many people made sacrifices to make this effort successful
 - 1) Those with large families, to come every night!
 - a) Despite the challenge to get the little ones ready
 - b) Despite having to work around the homework the older children had

- 2) Those who worked hard and long, yet made the effort to attend
 - a) Some worked long hours, coming straight from work
 - b) Some had additional responsibilities, requiring missing sleep
- 3) Several drove many miles to come
 - a) Yet came every night
 - b) Some driving out of their way to provide transportation
- 4) Mothers with families whose husbands had to work came anyway
- 5) Others whose spouses would not come, came anyway, proving themselves worthy of Christ - cf. **Lk 14:26**
- 6) Some endured great pain, but made the effort to be present!
- 7) Others cleaned the building every night after each service!
- b. Such sacrifice was a victory over Satan
 - 1) Who wants us to serve God out of convenience, not conviction
 - 2) Who uses such difficulties to make it inconvenient to serve God - cf. **1 Pe 5:8-9**
- c. Such sacrifice is further demonstration of God's working in you! - cf. **1 Pe 5:10**
4. **Influence for good**
 - a. Souls outside of Christ heard the gospel
 - 1) It may be a while for fruit to show - cf. **Jn 4:37**
 - 2) But when it does, God will have been at work! - cf. **1 Co 3:6-7**
 - b. Souls in Christ heard edifying sermons
 - 1) Challenging our commitment and service to God
 - 2) Exhorting us to faith and love to Christ

C. I ALSO SAW THE DEVIL AT WORK...

1. Satan is known for trying to undo the work of God - cf. **Mt 13:24-26,36-39**
2. Satan may have succeeded in the lives of some
 - a. By raising stumbling blocks in their way
 - b. By providing excuses for those who chose not to attend
 - c. By discouraging those who attended through the absence of others

[But now that the meeting is over, we cannot focus our attention on the past (cf. **Ph 3:13**). So I ask...]

II. WHAT NEXT?

A. REST IS APPROPRIATE...

1. Paul spent some time in between his journeys - cf. **Ac 14:28**
 2. Jesus told His disciples to take a rest - cf. **Mk 6:30-31**
- **So taking a "breather" (a short respite) is understandable**

B. RETIREMENT IS NOT...

1. Our retirement is "out of this world", for which we must maintain diligence - cf. **He 4:1-2, 9-11**
2. Yes, we need to persevere - cf. **He 10:32-39**
3. There is need to be careful, and not become like the church...
 - a. At Ephesus (forgetful) - **Re 2:2-5**
 - b. At Sardis (incomplete) - **Re 3:2-3**
 - c. At Laodicea (lukewarm) - **Re 3:15-16**

C. WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE...

1. By those who are faithful Christians
 - a. We have heard lessons to stimulate us to greater service
 - b. We need to apply what we learned - cf. **Ja 1:22-25**
2. For those who visited the services
 - a. The seed has been sown!
 - 1) Non-Christians have heard lessons on Jesus and the judgment
 - 2) Erring Christians have heard lessons on the need for faithfulness
 - b. Now comes the time to water what was planted! - **1 Co 3:6**
 - 1) Follow up with those willing to study further
 - 2) Pray for them, that their hearts will be receptive
3. For those who neglected the services
 - a. Patience, humility, gentleness and prayer in trying to reach them - cf. **2 Ti 2:24-26**
 - b. Hopefully, like the prodigal son they will eventually “come to themselves” - **Lk 15:17**

CONCLUSION

1. Now that the meeting is over, on the surface it appears to have been a good one...
 - a. Attendance was good (though it could have been much better)
 - b. Those who attended were edified

-- **But only time will tell of the real effect of this effort**
2. Follow-up is now important...
 - a. Paul described the need for follow-up in regards to his journeys - **Ac 15:36**
 - b. Our follow-up will include the regular edification provided by our life together as a church
 - c. But it can also include making plans for future meetings

-- **The lessons learned in this meeting can help us to prepare to the next meeting!**

What lessons have you learned from this meeting...?

The Gospel Of Christ

INTRODUCTION

1. In **Mk 16:15-16**, Jesus makes reference to “the gospel”...
 - a. Commanding His disciples to preach it to every creature
 - b. Offering salvation to all who believe and are baptized
2. In **Ro 1:16-17**, Paul makes reference to “the gospel”...
 - a. How he was not ashamed of it
 - b. How it is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe
3. What is this “gospel”...?
 - a. That Jesus wanted everyone to hear?
 - b. That is God’s power to save mankind?
4. The word “gospel” (Gr., euaggelion) means “**good news**”...
 - a. It pertains to the good news of salvation through Christ
 - b. It involves the proclamation of God’s grace offered through Jesus
 - c. It requires a response involving obedience - cf. **1 Pe 4:17; 2 Th 1:7-8**
5. A simple way to summarize the content of the “gospel” is that it contains...
 - a. **Facts** to believe
 - b. **Commands** to obey
 - c. **Promises** to receive

[Let’s take a closer look at “**The Gospel Of Christ**”, starting with...]

I. FACTS TO BELIEVE

A. CHRIST WAS CRUCIFIED FOR OUR SINS...

1. Fundamental to the gospel Paul preached - **1 Co 15:1-3**
 2. As foretold by the Old Testament scriptures - **Isa 53:4-6**
 3. Why did Jesus die for our sins?
 - a. Because we are all sinners! - **Ro 3:23**
 - b. Because the wages of sin is death! - **Ro 6:23**
- **In love God offers His Son as a “propitiation” (sacrifice) for our sins! - 1 Jn 4:9-10**

B. CHRIST WAS RAISED FROM THE DEAD...

1. Also fundamental to the gospel Paul preached - **1 Co 15:4**
 2. As proclaimed by Peter in the first gospel sermon - **Ac 2:22-32**
 3. As seen by many eyewitnesses - **1 Co 15:5-8**
- **Raising Jesus verifies the justification offered on the cross! - Ro 4:25**

C. CHRIST IS EXALTED AS KING AND SAVIOR...

1. He is now both Lord and Christ - **Ac 2:33-36**
2. He is head over all things - **Ep 1:20-23**
3. All authorities and powers are now subject to Him - **1 Pe 3:22**

-- **God has made Jesus ruler over the kings of the earth! - Re 1:5**

D. CHRIST IS COMING AGAIN...

1. As promised when He ascended to heaven - **Ac 1:9-11**
 2. Coming to offer both rest and tribulation - **2 Th 1:7-10**
 - a. Rest to those who responded to the call of the gospel - **2 Th 2:13-14**
 - b. Tribulation to those who obeyed not the gospel - **2 Th 1:8-9**
- **His coming will cause many to mourn, while others rejoice - Re 1:7; 22:20**

[Whether we are prepared for His coming depends upon our obedience to the gospel (cf. **2 Th 1:8**). This implies that **“The Gospel Of Christ”** also contains...]

II. COMMANDS TO OBEY

A. BELIEVE THE GOSPEL CONCERNING JESUS CHRIST...

1. We must believe the gospel, or we are lost! - **Mk 16:16**
 2. The gospel is God’s power for salvation to those who believe - **Ro 1:16**
 3. E.g., we must believe that God raised Him from the dead - **Ro 10:9-10**
- **For those willing to believe, eternal life can be theirs! - Jn 3:16; 20:30-31**

B. CONFESS YOUR FAITH IN JESUS...

1. Confessing with our mouth the Lord Jesus leads to salvation - **Ro 10:9-10**
 2. The Ethiopian eunuch provides an example of such a confession - **Ac 8:37**
- **Jesus will confess us before God if we confess Him before others! - Mt 10:32-33**

C. REPENT OF YOUR SINS...

1. Jesus wanted repentance preached in His name to all nations - **Lk 24:46-47**
 2. Peter therefore preached the need to repent to the Jews - **Ac 2:37-38; 3:19**
 3. Paul likewise preached the need to repent to the Gentiles - **Ac 17:30-31**
- **Unless we repent, we will perish in our sins! - Lk 13:3**

D. BE BAPTIZED FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS...

1. Jesus expected people to be baptized in response to His gospel - **Mk 16:15-16**
 2. Peter proclaimed baptism for the remission of sins to those who believed - **Ac 2:37-38**
 3. Paul related the place baptism had in his salvation from sin - **Ac 22:16**
- **When we submit to baptism, God does His work in saving us! - Co 2:11-13**

E. BE FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH...

1. Faithfulness is necessary if we desire to receive the crown of life - **Re 2:10**
 2. There is a real danger in losing our faith - **He 3:12-14**
- **Rest assured, our faithful labors will not be in vain! - 1 Co 15:58**

[When one obeys the commands of the gospel, they receive wonderful blessings. These blessings are offered in the gospel as...]

III. PROMISES TO RECEIVE

A. THE REMISSION OF SINS...

1. We are promised the remission of sins! - **Ac 2:38**

2. Our sins are “blotted out”, “washed away” - **Ac 3:19; 22:16**
3. Made possible by the precious blood of Christ - **Ep 1:7**
- **An ongoing blessing whenever we confess our sins! - 1 Jn 1:9**

B. THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT...

1. Spoken of by Christ during His ministry - **Jn 7:37-39**
2. Promised to those who repent and are baptized - **Ac 2:38-39; 5:32**
3. One aspect of this gift relates to His indwelling
 - a. The Spirit indwells the Christ - **1 Co 6:19; Ro 8:9-11**
 - b. The Spirit enables us to mortify the flesh - **Ro 8:12-13**
 - c. The Spirit is God’s instrumental agent to strengthen the Christ - **Ep 3:16**
 - d. The Spirit can produce wonderful fruit in our life - **Ga 5:22-23**
- **Because we are His children, God has given us this wonderful Gift! - Ga 4:6**

C. THE GIFT OF ETERNAL LIFE...

1. In the sense of our eternal reward
 - a. Received at the end of a life bearing the fruit of holiness - **Ro 6:22-23**
 - b. Received in the age to come - **Mk 10:29-30**
 - c. Received at the time of judgment - **Mt 25:46**
2. In the sense of our abundant life now
 - a. Offered by Jesus - **Jn 10:10**
 - b. A quality of life made possible by our relationship with God - **Jn 17:2-3**
 - c. A life in Christ enjoyed even now - **1 Jn 5:11-13**
- **Thus godly living has promise both in this life, and that which is come! - 1 Ti 4:8**

CONCLUSION

1. Can we understand why “**The Gospel Of Christ**” is “good news”...?
 - a. The “facts to believe” contains the message of God’s love and grace
 - b. The “commands to obey” are not difficult works, done to earn salvation, but simple acts of faith whereby we receive God’s grace - cf. **1 Jn 5:3**
 - c. The “promises to receive” help us deal with the real problem of sin in our lives
2. What have you done with “**The Gospel of Christ**”...?
 - a. You have now heard it, if not before
 - b. You know as much as those who heard it on the day of Pentecost, if not even more

Together with the apostle Peter, we implore you: “Be saved from this perverse generation.” (**Ac 2:40**) Respond as they did (in faith and baptism, **Ac 2:41**), and rest assured that Jesus will save you and add you to His church! - cf. **Ac 2:41,47**

The Gospel Of The Grace Of God

INTRODUCTION

1. In **Ac 20:24**, Paul speaks of the ministry he had received from the Lord Jesus:

“to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.”

2. The word **gospel** means “good news”, and **grace** means “unmerited favor”; so Paul was given the ministry to proclaim the good news...
 - a. That **God** has provided a way of salvation for sinners
 - b. And that **He** had done this without requiring merit on the part of sinners!
3. In this lesson we shall summarize the “**The Gospel Of The Grace Of God**” under three headings:
 - a. The **need** for grace
 - b. The **provision** of grace
 - c. The **reception** of grace

[Before we can begin to appreciate why the grace of God is good news, we must understand...]

I. THE NEED FOR GRACE

A. THE BIBLE DESCRIBES MAN’S TRUE CONDITION...

1. “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” - **Ro 3:23**
2. “For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.”
- **Ja 2:10**
3. “For the wages of sin is death...” - **Ro 6:23**
4. “But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.” - **Isa 59:2**
5. “But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags;” - **Isa 64:6**

B. WHAT THESE PASSAGES REALLY MEAN TO US...

1. **We must all plead guilty!**
 - a. Every accountable person has sinned
 - b. We can never demand entrance into heaven because we are somehow good enough
 - c. Even the very best of us is without merit in God’s sight!
2. **Our sins have alienated us from God!**
 - a. By our transgressions, we lose that precious relationship with God
 - b. We experience “spiritual” death, or separation from God; which if left unchecked, will result in eternal separation from God (i.e., hell)
 - c. While in this state of “spiritual” death, we are dead to God; our prayers are not heard
- cf. **1 Pe 3:12**
3. **As sinners, we cannot accomplish the removal of our guilt on our own!**
 - a. We cannot run away from this guilt
 - b. We cannot work our way out of this guilt

[So don't be self-deceived by notions of our own goodness. We are sinners in need of salvation! It is fair to say, then, that the **first** requirement of salvation is recognition of our true guilt. Once we acknowledge our sinfulness, we are in a position to appreciate...]

II. THE PROVISION OF GRACE

A. OUT OF LOVE, GOD HAS PROVIDED HIS SON...

1. Because God loved us, He sent His Son to die that we might have eternal life - **Jn 3:16; 1 Jn 4:9**
2. Because God loved us, He made His Son a **propitiation** for our sins - **1 Jn 4:10**
 - a. A "propitiation" is a sacrifice designed to appease
 - b. Therefore God has offered His Son as a sacrifice designed to appease Himself, which leads to a related point...

B. OUT OF JUSTICE, GOD HAS PROVIDED HIS SON...

1. To satisfy His justice, God provided redemption through the blood of His Son - **Ro 3:24-26**
2. God's grace therefore functions in this way:
 - a. God's justice requires an appropriate sacrifice for sin
 - b. Because He loves us, He provided His Son as a sacrifice for sin
 - c. God recognizes the death of Jesus on the cross as a suitable ransom for our sins, paid in full!

[So to satisfy both His justice and His love, God has graciously provided salvation through His Son, Jesus Christ. What we cannot earn, God has provided! But the provision of grace is not unconditional (otherwise all would be saved). Therefore we need to consider...]

III. THE RECEPTION OF GRACE

A. RECEIVING GOD'S SAVING GRACE REQUIRES OBEDIENCE...

1. For Jesus is "the author (or source) of eternal salvation to all who obey Him," - **He 5:9**
2. Freedom from sin comes when one is willing to obey from the heart - **Ro 6:17-18**
3. Such obedience involves:
 - a. Trusting in Jesus as the Son of God who died for your sins - **Jn 3:16**
 - b. Confessing your faith before men - **Ro 10:9-10**
 - c. Repenting of your sins - **Ac 17:30**
 - d. Culminating with being buried with Christ in baptism for the remission of your sins - **Mk 16:15-16; Ac 2:38; 22:16**

B. HOWEVER, SUCH OBEDIENCE HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH EARNING OR MERITING SALVATION...!

1. Salvation is by grace, and "not by works of righteousness which we have done" - **Ti 3:4-5a**
2. But by God's mercy, He saves us "through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit" - **Ti 3:5b**
 - a. When a penitent sinner, who trusts in Jesus, is baptized into Christ...
 - 1) He or she is united with Christ by baptism into His death, and therefore rises to walk in newness of life - cf. **Ro 6:3-8**
 - 2) He or she is "clothed" with Christ, able to enjoy all the blessings made possible by Jesus' death and resurrected life! - cf. **Ga 3:26-27; He 7:24-25**

- b. Through such a “washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit”, one is truly “born again of the water and the Spirit”! - cf. **Jn 3:5**

CONCLUSION

1. God has ordained...
 - a. ...that through **faith** and **repentance**
 - b. ...culminating with **baptism** into Christ...we might receive the wonderful **grace** of God!

2. Why don't more people respond to God's saving grace?
 - a. **It may be some do not understand the NEED for grace**
 - 1) They consider themselves good, moral people
 - 2) Yet, in nearly every example of salvation in the book of Acts, those being saved were deeply religious and very moral already!
 - 3) And as Isaiah said, *“all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags”!*
 - b. **It may be some are not aware of the PROVISION of grace**
 - 1) They may think that they are too sinful to receive God's grace
 - 2) Yet God desires all to be saved, and has provided Jesus *“a ransom for all”* - cf. **1 Ti 2: 3-6**
 - c. **It may be that some have not been taught the proper RECEPTION of grace**
 - 1) Many are told to “Say the sinner's prayer”, but are not told what Jesus and His apostles commanded people to do to receive God's saving grace
 - 2) People need to listen to Christ and His apostles, not modern preachers! - cf. **Mk 16: 15-16; Ac 2:36-38; 22:16**

3. We saw at the beginning of our study that Paul's ministry was...

“to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.” (Ac 20:24)

4. So we have sought to do in this study; and in closing, we add the words of Peter...

“testifying that this is the true grace of God in which you stand.” (1 Pe 5:12)

Dear friends, what is your relationship to the grace of God? Have you received the gospel of the grace of God? Are you standing in the true grace of God?

Grace And The Christian

INTRODUCTION

1. There is a word that conveys wonderful hope and comfort to the Christian...
 - a. The word is “grace”
 - b. It is a word that Paul loved to use
 - 1) Every epistle that he wrote (with the possible exception of Hebrews), begins and ends with mention of this word
 - 2) E.g., **1 Th 1:1; 5:28**
2. What does this word actually mean...?
 - a. How is it used in the N. T. scriptures?
 - b. What important things should we keep in mind concerning “grace”?

[In this study, we shall spend a few moments focusing our attention on this wonderful word, and its relationship to the Christian. Let’s begin by noticing..]

I. THE DEFINITION OF GRACE

A. THAT WHICH GIVES JOY, PLEASURE, DELIGHT...

1. This is the original idea of the word “**charis**”
2. It is used in the N.T. in this way in reference to speech...
 - a. The words of Jesus were spoken with grace - **Lk 4:22**
 - b. The words of the Christian are to impart grace to the hearers - **Ep 4:29; Co 4:6**

B. GOODWILL, LOVINGKINDNESS, FAVOR...

1. In this way, it is used ...
 - a. Of the kindness of a master towards his inferiors or servants
 - b. And especially of God towards men
2. **Thayer** points out that:
 - a. “**Charis** contains the idea of kindness which bestows upon one what he has not deserved.”
 - b. “The NT writers use **charis** preeminently of that kindness by which God bestows favors even upon the ill-deserving, and grants to sinners the pardon of their offenses, and bids them accept of eternal salvation through Christ.” - e.g., **Ep 2:5**
3. It is this particular definition of grace that prompts us to think of it most often as “**unmerited favor**”

C. A SPIRITUAL STATE OR CONDITION IN WHICH ONE ENJOYS GOD’S GOOD FAVOR...

1. When one accepts God’s grace, they are in a “state of grace”
2. Cf. **Ro 5:1-2; 1 Pe 5:12**

D. AN EXPRESSION OF GRATITUDE FOR FAVOR BESTOWED...

1. E.g., **1 Ti 1:12** where the English word is “thank” (“I thank Jesus Christ...”)
2. This is what is meant when people ask someone to “say grace” before eating a meal

[Such are the main ways the word **grace** is used in the NT. In connection with this word, there are some things that Christians should always keep in mind ...]

II. GRACE AND THE CHRISTIAN

A. WE ARE SAVED BY GRACE...!

1. Salvation is first, foremost, and always a matter of grace! - **Ep 2:5-8**
 - a. God doesn't owe us anything
 - b. What we deserve is eternal damnation, because all are sinners - **Ro 3:23; 6:23a**
 - c. Salvation is a gift, which God in lovingkindness offers to man - **Ro 6:23b; Ti 3:3-7**
2. No matter what God may call upon us to do in order to receive His grace, when we do those things (cf. believe, repent, confess Jesus, be baptized)...
 - a. In no way can we ever say that we earned or merited salvation
 - b. We are still "unworthy servants" - cf. **Lk 17:10**
3. We must forever remember that only by God's grace is salvation possible!

B. GOD'S GRACE REQUIRES HOLY LIVING...!

1. Some people reason that since we are saved by grace, we are free to do whatever we wish
2. Yet Paul wrote that the "grace of God...teaches us" to:
 - a. Deny ungodliness and worldly lusts
 - b. Live soberly, righteously and godly
 - c. Look for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of Jesus Christ - cf. **Ti 2:11-13**
3. As he continues, Paul explain why Jesus in grace gave Himself for us...
 - a. That He might redeem us from every lawless deed
 - b. That He might purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works - cf. **Ti 2:14**
4. The unmerited favor of God is no excuse to go on sinning!

C. HOLY LIVING REQUIRES GOD'S GRACE...!

1. To live "soberly, righteously and godly" requires the grace of God
2. We cannot do it on our own, but with God's help we can!
 - a. He works in us to do His good will - **Ph 2:12-13**
 - b. By His strength we can do all the things He desires of us - **Ph 4:13**

D. WE MUST GROW IN GRACE...!

1. This is especially true if we are going to live holy lives
2. Peter commands us to grow in grace - cf. **2 Pe 3:18**
3. Dear brother or sister, it is not enough just to experience God's grace in forgiving our sins
 - a. God has so much more to share with us, both in this life and the life to come - **Ep 2:7**
 - b. This explains Paul's salutations and benedictions - cf. **1 Th 1:1; 5:28**
4. We can grow in grace through:
 - a. Heeding the Word of God - **Ac 20:32**
 - b. Drawing near to God in prayer - **He 4:16**

E. WE CAN RECEIVE GOD'S GRACE IN VAIN...!

1. Paul begged the Corinthians that they might not receive God's grace in vain - **2 Co 6:1**
2. Having received God's grace, it is possible for it to have been in vain!
 - a. By seeking justification for sin elsewhere - **Ga 5:4**
 - 1) In the immediate context, Paul has reference to the Law of Moses

- 2) But if we seek to be justified by any system of salvation by works alone, we will fall from grace!
- b. By using God's grace as an excuse for licentiousness - **Ju 4**
 - 1) Some were using grace as an excuse for shameless behavior
 - 2) And yet we have seen that God's grace requires holy living - **2 Ti 2:11-14**
- c. By willful and impenitent sinning, thereby despising the Spirit of grace - cf. **He 10:26-31**
 - 1) For such a person there no longer remains a sacrifice of sin!
 - 2) Only a fearful expectation of judgment
 - 3) Why? Because through such willful and impenitent sin...
 - a) Trampled the Son of God underfoot
 - b) Counted the blood of the covenant (i.e., Jesus' blood) by which he was sanctified (i.e., saved) a common thing
 - c) Insulted the Spirit of grace

CONCLUSION

1. What a terrible thing it would be, to have received God's grace in vain...!
 - a. To have received God's grace at one point
 - b. But then to make it all vain (useless)
2. But it is just as terrible...
 - a. Not to receive it all!
 - b. Or having received it, not to grow in it!
3. So I encourage you all, in the words of the writer of Hebrews:

“look(ing) diligently lest anyone fall short of the grace of God.” - He 12:15

“let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.” - He 12:28

“For it is good that the heart be established by grace...” - He 13:9

“Grace be with you all. Amen” - He 13:25

Have you received the wonderful grace of God in your life?

The Great Commission

According To Matthew

INTRODUCTION

1. In Matthew's account of "The Great Commission," notice the main thought of Jesus' command...
 - a. "Go therefore and **make disciples** of all the nations" - **Mt 28:18-20**
 - b. Jesus wanted His apostles to make disciples
2. Are you a disciple of Jesus...?
 - a. More than likely you believe in Jesus
 - b. You might even be one to attend church services regularly

[But is that what it means to be His disciple? Let's take a close look at...]

I. THE MEANING OF A DISCIPLE

A. THE DEFINITION OF A DISCIPLE...

1. The word "disciple" literally means a learner
 - a. It denotes "one who follows another's teaching" - **Vine**
 - b. A disciple was not only a learner, he was also an adherent
 - c. For this reason disciples were spoken of as imitators of their teachers
 2. The goal in being a disciple
 - a. As stated by Jesus: to be like the teacher - **Lk 6:40**
 - b. To be His disciple, then, is to strive to be like Him!
 3. According to Paul, this coincides with God's goal in the redemption of mankind, that they be conformed to the image of His Son - **Ro 8:29**
- **Do you have a strong desire to follow Jesus and become like Him? Unless you do, it cannot be said that you are truly His disciple!**

B. THE MARKS OF A DISCIPLE...

1. One who abides in the words of Jesus - **Jn 8:31**
 - a. This would imply being a diligent student of the teachings of Christ
 - b. It also requires one to be a **doer** of the Word - **Mt 7:21-27; Ja 1:21-25**
 2. One who loves the brethren - **Jn 13:34-35**
 - a. With a love patterned after the love of Jesus ("as I have loved you")
 - b. With a love that is visible to the world ("by this all will know")
 - c. Made possible when we have been born again - **1 Pe 1:22-23**
 3. One who bears much fruit - **Jn 15:8**
 - a. Notice the word "much" (also found in verse 5)
 - b. Jesus is not talking about an occasional good deed
 - c. But a lifestyle which prompts people to glorify God! - **Mt 5:16**
- **To be a disciple of Jesus means more than just a casual church member; it requires commitment to the teachings of Christ, the love of brethren, and bearing fruit**

[Now that we understand the nature of discipleship how does one begin? For the answer we return to our beginning text (**Mt 28:19-20**)...]

II. THE MAKING OF A DISCIPLE

A. IT INVOLVES BAPTISM...

1. **Why baptism?**
 - a. Remember the goal of discipleship: to be like Jesus
 - b. He was holy and sinless, yet we are to be like Him
 - c. Fortunately, baptism is described as an act of faith which puts us in contact with the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ so we can be forgiven - **Ac 2:38; 22:16; Ro 6:3-4**
 - d. It is also the means by which one “puts on Christ” - **Ga 3:27**
 - e. So baptism is the logical starting place for true discipleship!
 2. **What is baptism?**
 - a. It is an act of submission which must be preceded by faith in Jesus and repentance for our sins - **Ac 2:36-38; 8:36-37**
 - b. It is also an act of submission which involves a burial in water, in which one then rises to walk in newness of life through the power of God - **Ac 8:38; Ro 6:3-4; Co 2:12**
 3. When done according to the Word of God, baptism then becomes an act of faith on our part which results in a wonderful working of God in our lives!
 - a. Our sins are washed away by the blood of Jesus - **Ac 22:16; Ep 5:25-27**
 - b. We are regenerated and renewed by the Spirit of God- **Ti 3:5-6**
- **When done in faith and repentance, baptism is truly a rebirth involving both water and the Spirit! - Jn 3:5**

B. IT INCLUDES TEACHING AND OBEDIENCE...

1. This brings us back to the very definition of discipleship
 2. For Jesus clearly states:
 - a. We are to be **taught** (that is, to be **learners**)
 - b. We are to **observe** (that is, to be adherents or **doers**)
 3. In this way we embark on a life devoted to learning and doing all that Jesus commanded
 - a. We are to continue steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine - **Ac 2:42**
 - b. We are to imitate them, even as they imitated Christ - **1 Co 11:1**
- **Thus baptism is the beginning of a life of learning and obeying the words of Jesus Christ - Lk 6:46**

CONCLUSION

1. Only those scripturally baptized, observing all Jesus commanded, can truly be called His disciples!
2. Only they can take consolation in the promise of Jesus: **“and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” - Mt 28:20**

Do you desire this wonderful promise? You must be willing to accept the authority and lordship of Jesus Christ in your life (cf. **Mt 28:18**). Are you willing to be a disciple of Jesus Christ...?

The Great Commission

According To Mark

INTRODUCTION

1. In Mark's account of "The Great Commission," notice the main thought of Jesus' command...
 - a. "Go into all the world and **preach the gospel** to every creature" - **Mk 16:15-16**
 - b. Jesus wanted every person in the world to hear the gospel (good news)
2. Have you heard the gospel of Jesus Christ...?
 - a. You have likely hear some part of the gospel
 - b. You might even have responded in some fashion to it

[But exactly what is the gospel of Christ, and how should one respond to it? With Mark's account of the Great Commission as our starting point, note that the gospel of Christ contains...]

I. FACTS TO BELIEVE

A. CHRIST WAS CRUCIFIED FOR OUR SINS...

1. This is likely the main point Jesus had in mind when He said "Preach the gospel..."
2. It was fundamental to the gospel Paul preached - **1 Co 15:1-3**
3. Why did Jesus die for our sins?
 - a. Because we are all sinners! - **Ro 3:23**
 - b. Because the wages of sin is death! - **Ro 6:23**
- **In love God offers His Son as a "propitiation" (sacrifice) for our sins! - 1 Jn 4:9-10**

B. OTHER FACTS OF THE GOSPEL TO BELIEVE...

1. Christ was raised from the dead
 - a. Also fundamental to the gospel Paul preached - **1 Co 15:4**
 - b. As proclaimed by Peter in the first gospel sermon - **Ac 2:22-32**
2. Chris is exalted as King and Savior
 - a. He is now both Lord and Christ - **Ac 2:33-36**
 - b. He is head over all things - **Ep 1:20-23**
3. Christ is coming again
 - a. As promised when He ascended to heaven - **Ac 1:9-11**
 - b. Coming to offer both rest and tribulation - **2 Th 1:7-10**
- **He who died for us arose and ascended to reign and will return in judgment!**

[Whether we are prepared for His coming depends upon our obedience to the gospel (cf. **2 Th 1:8**). In "The Great Commission According To Mark", it is clear the gospel of Christ contains...]

II. COMMANDS TO OBEY

A. BELIEVE THE GOSPEL CONCERNING JESUS CHRIST...

1. We must believe the gospel, or we are lost! - **Mk 16:16**
2. The gospel is God's power for salvation to those who believe - **Ro 1:16**
3. E.g., we must believe that God raised Him from the dead - **Ro 10:9-10**

-- **For those willing to believe, eternal life can be theirs! - Jn 3:16; 20:30-31**

B. BE BAPTIZED FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS...

1. Jesus expected people to be baptized in response to His gospel - **Mk 16:15-16**
 2. Peter proclaimed baptism for the remission of sins to those who believed - **Ac 2:37-38**
 3. Paul related the place baptism had in his salvation from sin - **Ac 22:16**
- **When we submit to baptism, God does His work in saving us! - Co 2:11-13**

C. OTHER COMMANDS OF THE GOSPEL TO OBEY...

1. Confess your faith in Jesus
 - a. Confessing with our mouth the Lord Jesus leads to salvation - **Ro 10:9-10**
 - b. Jesus will confess us before God if we confess Him before others! - **Mt 10:32-33**
 2. Repent of your sins
 - a. Jesus wanted repentance preached in His name to all nations - **Lk 24:46-47**
 - b. The apostles therefore preached the need to repent - **Ac 2:37-38; 3:19; 17:30-31**
 3. Be faithful unto death
 - a. Faithfulness is necessary if we desire to receive the crown of life - **Re 2:10**
 - b. There is a real danger in losing our faith - **He 3:12-14**
- **Though not included in Mark's account of the Great Commission, these commands are clearly taught elsewhere in the Scriptures!**

[When one obeys the commands of the gospel, they receive wonderful blessings. In "The Great Commission According To Mark", it is clear the gospel of Christ contains...]

III. PROMISES TO RECEIVE

A. THE PROMISE OF SALVATION...

1. Clearly stated in Mark's account of the Great Commission - **Mk 16:16**
 2. This involves salvation from sin - **Mt 1:21**
 - a. We are promised the remission of sins! - **Ac 2:38**
 - b. Our sins are "blotted out", "washed away" - **Ac 3:19; 22:16**
 - c. Made possible by the precious blood of Christ - **Ep 1:7**
 - d. An ongoing blessing whenever we confess our sins - **1 Jn 1:9**
 3. It also includes salvation from the wrath to come - **Ro 5:9**
 - a. When Jesus comes in flaming fire - **2 Th 1:7-10**
 - b. A day of wrath and indignation, tribulation and anguish - **Ro 2:4-11**
- **Such is the salvation that Jesus promises to those who obey the gospel!**

B. OTHER PROMISES OF THE GOSPEL TO RECEIVE...

1. The gift of the Holy Spirit
 - a. Spoken of by Christ during His ministry - **Jn 7:37-39**
 - b. Promised to those who repent and are baptized - **Ac 2:38-39; 5:32**
 - c. Given by God to those who become His children - **Ga 4:6; cf. 3:26-27**
2. The gift of eternal life
 - a. In the sense of our eternal reward...
 - 1) Received at the end of a life bearing the fruit of holiness - **Ro 6:22-23**
 - 2) Received in the age to come - **Mk 10:29-30**
 - b. In the sense of abundant life now...
 - 1) As offered by Jesus - **Jn 10:10**

- 2) A quality of life made possible by our relationship with God - **Jn 17:2-3**
 - 3) A life in Christ enjoyed even now - **1 Jn 5:11-13**
- **Thus the gospel has promise both in this life, and that which is come! - 1 Ti 4:8**

CONCLUSION

1. The gospel Jesus wanted preached to every creature is certain “good news”...
 - a. The **facts to believe** contains the message of God’s love and grace
 - b. The **commands to obey** are not difficult works done to earn salvation, but simple acts of faith whereby we receive God’s grace
 - c. The **promises to receive** help us deal with the real problem of sin in our lives, and prepare for the blessings of eternity!
2. What have you done with the gospel of Christ...?
 - a. Jesus wanted you to know about it
 - b. You have now heard it, if not before

Jesus made clear what He wanted people to do (**believe and be baptized**). He also made clear what would happen if we did not: **“He who does not believe will be condemned.”**

Are you willing to believe the **facts** of the gospel and obey its **commands**? If so, then its wonderful **promises** are there for you to receive...!

The Great Commission

According To Luke

INTRODUCTION

1. In Luke's account of "The Great Commission" (Lk 24:44-47), we find that Jesus wanted two things to be preached in His name to all nations...
 - a. Repentance
 - b. Remission of sins
2. In Acts, we learn that the apostles did indeed preach repentance and remission of sins...
 - a. The preaching of Peter - Ac 2:38; 3:19; 5:31
 - b. The preaching of Paul - Ac 13:38; 17:30

[Do we understand what it means to repent? Do we appreciate what it means to have our sins remitted? To be sure that we do, let's examine both concepts, starting with...]

I. REPENTANCE

A. REPENTANCE PROPERLY DEFINED...

1. Some misconceptions of repentance
 - a. That repentance is simply being sorry
 - b. That repentance is a changed life
 2. A proper concept of repentance
 - a. "change of mind; involves both a turning from sin and a turning to God" - Vine
 - b. I.e., a change of mind in which we **decide** to turn from sin and turn to God
- **Repentance is a decision, preceded by sorrow and followed by a changed life**

B. REPENTANCE PROPERLY PRODUCED...

1. Repentance is produced by sorrow - 2 Co 7:9a
 - a. Sorrow leads to repentance
 - b. Sorrow itself is not repentance
 2. Repentance is produced by godly sorrow - 2 Co 7:9b-10
 - a. Godly sorrow leads one to repentance, not worldly sorrow
 - b. Godly sorrow is that directed toward God, sorrow because one has sinned against a holy, loving God, not because one got 'caught' (cf. David's attitude) - Psalms 51:4
- **The right kind of sorrow produces the proper change of mind, leading to salvation**

C. REPENTANCE PROPERLY MANIFESTED...

1. True repentance will manifest itself in a changed life - 2 Co 7:11
 - a. Such as diligence, clearing of one's self, indignation, fear
 - b. Such as vehement desire, zeal, vindication
 2. True repentance will produce works befitting repentance - Ac 26:20
 - a. Such as confessing Jesus, and being baptized into Christ - Ac 8:36-38
 - b. Such as walking in works that God has ordained for those in Christ - Ep 2:10
- **Apathy, halfhearted service, is not indicative of true repentance!**

[Often, those who repented when they first came to Christ need to repent again (e.g., **Re 2:4-5**).
Wherever there is true repentance, remission of sins follows...]

II. REMISSION OF SINS

A. REMISSION OF SINS PROPERLY UNDERSTOOD...

1. The word remission means “to remit”, and involves a dismissal, release
 2. A key synonym often used in some translations is the word “forgiveness”
 3. Other terms and metaphors are used in the Bible to describe the “remission” of sins:
 - a. Sins are “taken away” - **Jn 1:29; Ro 11:27**
 - b. Sins are “blotted out” - **Ac 3:19**
 - c. Sins are “washed away” - **Ac 22:16**
 - d. Sins are “covered” - **Ro 4:7**
 - e. Sins are “not imputed” - **Ro 4:8**
 - f. Sins are “purged” - **He 1:3; 2 Pe 1:9**
 - g. Sins are “remembered no more” - **He 8:12**
 4. All signifying the removal of the **guilt** of sin from the sinner!
 - a. A sinner whose sins have been so forgiven is “justified” - **1 Co 6:11**
 - b. A legal term which means “not guilty”
- **The remission of sins is made possible through the blood of Christ! - Mt 26:28**

B. REMISSION OF SINS PROPERLY RECEIVED...

1. **By the alien sinner** (one who is not yet a Christian)
 - a. By believing (trusting) in Jesus - **Ac 10:42-43**
 - b. By repenting and being baptized - cf. **Ac 2:38**
 2. **By the erring Christian** (who sins after they have been baptized)
 - a. By repenting and praying - **Ac 8:22**
 - b. By confessing one’s sins to God - **1 Jn 1:9**
- **Note that in both cases remission of sins is tied to repentance!**

CONCLUSION

1. Do we want the blessing of having our sins remitted...?
 - a. It is possible only through the blood of Jesus!
 - b. It requires repentance brought about godly sorrow for our sins
2. Are you willing to do “works befitting repentance”...?
 - a. Not works done to earn or merit remission of sins
 - b. But acts of faith done to receive God’s grace and mercy through the blood of Christ

If you are a **sinner still outside of Christ**, then believe in Jesus, repent of sins, confess Jesus, and be baptized for the remission of yours. If you are an **erring Christian**, then repent of your sins and pray, knowing that God will cleanse you of all unrighteousness...!

The Greatest Need

INTRODUCTION

1. Many are the needs of our day...
 - a. The need for peace in war-torn areas around the world
 - b. The need for food and clothing in poverty stricken countries
 - c. The need for loving families, civil rights, good paying jobs, etc.-- **These needs are certainly noble and very important**

2. Yet I suggest that the greatest need for our world is **evangelism**...
 - a. Sharing the gospel with every person - **Mk 16:15**
 - b. Preaching the word everywhere - **Ac 8:5**-- **A need that was met aggressively in the first century AD - Co 1:23**

[Why evangelism is “**The Greatest Need**” may not be apparent to some, so a reminder of...]

I. WHY THE NEED IS SO GREAT

A. THE CONDITION OF THE WORLD...

1. Billions are dying, lost in sin!
 - a. For all have sinned - **Ro 3:23**
 - b. Without Jesus, they will die in their sins - **Jn 8:24**
2. What this means close to home
 - a. Relatives, friends and neighbors will be lost
 - b. For many Christians are doing little if anything to teach them
3. What this means in nations far way
 - a. Precious souls will die outside of Christ
 - b. Because many Christians are unwilling to either go or send - cf. **Ro 10:14-15**-- **Unless we do something to meet this need, souls will be lost!**

B. THE CONDITION OF THE CHURCH...

1. Many congregations have lost their focus
 - a. They have become little more than a social club
 - b. Meeting only the social and emotional needs of its members
 - c. They have become burdened by that which is the responsibility of others - **1 Ti 5:16**
2. Many congregations are declining in number
 - a. As Christians die or fall away, little is being done to convert others
 - b. Where numerical growth occurs, it is often by Christians moving in to the area-- **Unless we do something to meet this need, many churches will cease to exist!**

[So the need is great, for to save others and to save ourselves we need to evangelize! Yet consider...]

II. WHY THE NEED IS NOT BEING MET

A. FOR SOME, IT IS A LACK OF CONCERN...

1. Not concerned for the Lord's cause, who came to seek and save - **Lk 19:10**
2. Not concerned for those lost and dying in sin, unlike Paul - cf. **Ro 10:1**

3. Not concerned for their own welfare, endangered by failing to bear fruit - **Jn 15:1-2**
- **Have we become so hardened, that we no longer care?**

B. FOR SOME, IT IS A LACK OF KNOWLEDGE...

1. Lacking knowledge of God's Word
 - a. Perhaps unaware that Jesus calls us to this mission - **Mt 28:19; Mk 16:15; 1 Pe 2:9**
 - b. Perhaps needing to be taught again so we may teach others - **He 5:12**
 2. Lacking knowledge of what to do, what to say
 - a. When it can often be as simple as saying, "Come and see" - **Jn 1:45-46**
 - b. When it simply involves sharing with others what you have believed and done
- **Are we willing to make the effort to learn, that others might be saved?**

C. FOR SOME, IT IS A LACK OF COURAGE...

1. There is a fear of being:
 - a. Rejected by loved ones
 - b. Ridiculed by friends and strangers
 - c. Reviled by enemies of Christ
 2. Yet there is no need to fear such things
 - a. People are not rejecting us, but Christ
 - b. If reviled for the name of Christ, we are blessed - **Mt 5:11-12; 1 Pe 4:14-16**
 - c. If we are servants of Christ, we seek to please God, not men - **Ga 1:10**
- **Are we willing to overcome our fears, to save those who are lost?**

D. FOR SOME, IT IS A LACK OF FAITH...

1. Who don't believe that God's Word is true
 - a. When it describes the sinful condition of the world - **Ro 3:23**
 - b. When it describes the terrible consequences of sin - **Ro 6:23; Re 21:8**
 2. Who don't believe in the ability of God Himself
 - a. To give them the strength to do God's will - **Ph 4:13**
 - b. To give them the wisdom to teach His Word - **Ja 1:5**
 - c. To give them the courage to share His Will - **2 Ti 1:7-8**
- **Are we willing to have the faith to trust in God, that others might be saved?**

E. FOR SOME, IT IS A LACK OF FOCUS...

1. Distracted by things of the world
 - a. Stifling our efforts to bear fruit - cf. **Lk 8:14**
 - c. Making one unprepared for the day of the Lord - **Lk 21:34**
 2. Trying to do the impossible
 - a. Such as serving two masters - **Lk 16:13**
 - b. Such as loving both the Father and the world - **1 Jn 2:15-17**
 3. I suspect this is the major reason why people don't evangelize today
- **Are we willing to seek first the kingdom of God, making its growth our priority?**

[Whatever the reason for "The Greatest Need" not being met, there is no excuse. To encourage us to meet this need, consider some reasons...]

III. WHY WE ALL NEED TO BE PERSONAL WORKERS

A. TO FULFILL THE COMMAND OF CHRIST...

1. Jesus commanded that disciples be made - **Mt 28:19**
 2. Disciples who be taught to observe what He commanded - **Mt 28:20**
 3. He just gave the command to make disciples - **Mk 28:19**
- **The Great Commission is not fulfilled until we are making disciples!**

B. TO SHOW OUR LOVE FOR OTHERS...

1. Love for others was the second greatest commandment of the OT - **Mt 22:39**
 2. Love for one another is debt that can never be fully paid - **Ro 13:8**
 3. We are to love even our enemies - **Mt 5:44-45**
- **What greater love can we show, than to offer others the way of salvation?**

C. TO BE LIKE THE EARLY CHURCH...

1. To be the Lord's church, we must follow the pattern of congregational:
 - a. Organization
 - b. Worship and work
 2. To be the Lord's church, we must also demonstrate the same:
 - a. Zeal for the Lord's cause
 - b. Love for the lost
- **Unless we restore the spirit and soul of NT Christianity, we are only a skeleton!**

D. BECAUSE OF THE TERROR OF THE LORD...

1. This served to motivate the apostle Paul - **2 Co 5:10-11**
 2. Jesus spoke much about souls being lost - cf. **Mt 7:13-14,21-23; Mk 16:16**
- **The reality of the Judgment Day and souls lost should move us to action!**

E. BECAUSE OF THE JOY IN SAVING OTHERS...

1. There is the joy you can cause in heaven - **Lk 15:7,10**
 2. There is the joy you will personally experience
 - a. Paul refereed to his converts as his 'glory and joy' - **1 Th 2:19-20**
 - b. John had 'no greater joy' than to see his children walk in truth - **3 Jn 4**
- **The joy is magnified knowing that what you do will last for eternity!**

CONCLUSION

1. My purpose in this lesson has been twofold; to stress that...
 - a. The greatest need of **the church** is to get back to is original mission
 - b. The greatest need of **Christians** is to be personal workers in the vineyard of the Lord
2. The current apathy and rate of decline in many churches reveals...
 - a. There has been **a lack of concern, knowledge, courage, faith and focus**
 - b. That this lack has **hindered** the most important work of the church
3. What can we do...?
 - a. To ask the question indicates **concern**. Good!
 - b. To that one needs to add **knowledge**. Learn!
 - c. To knowledge one needs to add **courage**. Pray!

Then with **faith** and **focus** we can work together to fulfill "The Greatest Need". Do we have **faith**? Do we have the right **focus**? Do we even care...?

Growing Old Gracefully

INTRODUCTION

1. In speaking about “**Growing Old Gracefully**”, I feel much like **N. B. Hardeman** who when asked to speak on a similar topic...
 - a. Stated, “I am too young to speak as one should on this subject.”
 - b. Even though he was in his eighties or nineties at the time!
2. Most young people do not think about “growing old”, which is understandable...
 - a. For they have yet to experience the reality of “growing old” in the sense of declining in one’s physical strength and mental capabilities
 - b. For them getting older has always meant getting better as they draw closer to the peak of their physical maturity
3. If they talk about “growing old”, it is often with disdain for the way many people spend their golden years...
 - a. Discontented with life
 - b. Set in their ways
 - c. Bitter towards many people

-- **There is often truth in what the young say about the old: “Some old women and men grow bitter with age. The more their teeth drop out the more biting they get.” - George Dennison**
4. This has prompted many young people to say: “I will never be like that when I get old!”
 - a. But growing old gracefully does not happen by accident
 - b. Unless one understands and applies certain principles while young, the chances are great that he or she will become like the elderly they are quick to despise

-- **Think carefully about this statement: “Most men spend the first half of their lives making the second half miserable.” - La Bruyere**

[How are you spending the first half of your life? Will you grow old gracefully? Before we consider certain principles conducive to graceful aging, a reminder of...]

I. THE POSSIBILITY OF GROWING OLD GRACEFULLY

A. ILLUSTRATED BY BIBLICAL EXAMPLES...

1. **Moses**, at the age of 120 (note the vigor of the speeches in Deuteronomy) - **Deu 34:7**
2. **Joshua**, as he addressed the elders of Israel (note his conviction) - **Josh 24:15**
3. **Barzillai**, the Gileadite (note his gracious hospitality at age eighty) - **2 Sam 19:31-38**
4. **Dorcas**, who helped the poor and widows - **Ac 9:36-39**
5. The graceful manner in which **Paul** faced death - **2 Ti 4:6-8, 16-18**
6. **Peter** aged gracefully...
 - a. Becoming an elder - **1 Pe 5:1-2**
 - b. Remaining diligent as death approached - **2 Pe 1:13-15**
 - c. Forgiving toward those who rightly rebuked him - **2 Pe 3:15; cf. Ga 2:11**

B. ILLUSTRATED BY PERSONAL EXAMPLES...

1. One does not need to go to the Bible to find the only examples of people growing old

- gracefully
2. I am sure that we have all known such people
 3. I have been blessed to know a number of such people in my life
- **Yes, growing old gracefully is possible! When it occurs, it is beautiful to behold: “When grace is joined with wrinkles, it is adorable. There is an unspeakable dawn in happy old age.” - Victor Hugo**

[Unfortunately, too often wrinkles are joined with grace. How can we who are young live today so as to grow old gracefully, and not pathetically? There are several principles that when applied can ensure that growing old will be a graceful experience...]

II. THE PRINCIPLES OF GROWING OLD GRACEFULLY

A. “WHATEVER A MAN SOWS, THAT HE WILL ALSO REAP...”

1. Stated more fully in **Ga 6:7-8**, this is true in all areas of life
 - a. For example, in the physical realm
 - 1) Sow corn, you reap corn
 - 2) Take good care of your body, and you enjoy good health
 - 3) Disregard healthy habits, and the body will suffer for it
 - b. This is especially so in the spiritual realm
 - 1) “Even as I have seen, Those who plow iniquity And sow trouble reap the same.”
- **Job 4:8** (Eliphaz)
 - 2) Much of the bitterness, discontent, and anger which characterizes many older people is the result of “sowing to the flesh”
 - a) Note the works of the flesh (the result of sowing to the flesh) - **Ga 5:19-21**
 - b) Contrast the fruit of those who sow to the Spirit - **Ga 5:22-23**
 - 3) How much better to do as Hosea says: “Sow with a view to righteousness, Reap in accordance with kindness;” (NASB) - **Hos 10:12**
2. Yet the young often say: **“I want to sow my wild oats while I am still young”**
 - a. Then what? Hope for a crop failure? (Don’t count on it)
 - b. They fail to realize the harvest of trouble they will reap later in life
 - 1) Abuse their body with sex and drugs, their health will be ruined
 - 2) Engage in sexual immorality...they will ruin their reputation, and make it difficult to have a normal family life and the joy it ought to bring
 - c. Consider the sad irony of it all...
 - 1) Most young people do not realize that the popular lifestyle of “doing your own thing” and “sowing your wild oats” is the very thing that produces the pathetic mental and physical condition found in many older people!
 - 2) So while they condemn the old for the way they wasted their lives and the way they turned out, they are headed down the same path of corruption!

-- **“He that would pass the latter part of life with honor and decency must, when he is young, consider that he shall one day be old...” - Samuel Johnson**

B. “MAN SHALL NOT LIVE BY BREAD ALONE...”

1. Quoted by Jesus in **Mt 4:4**, let’s focus our attention on two words:
 - a. **Bread** - involves more than just dough; includes all things of a material nature
 - b. **Live** - involves more than simple existence; includes living life in its fullest sense, i.e., an abundant life

-- We must realize one does not find the good life in seeking and acquiring material things

- cf. **Lk 12:15**

2. If we don't learn this while young, we will waste much of our life pursuing the wrong things, and hate ourselves for it when we face death's door
 - a. Solomon came to this realization - **Ecc 2:17-23**
 - b. **Rosseau**, the French philosopher, saw the ungraceful way many old people live out their later years as the result of learning this truth too late: "Old men grasp more at life than babies, and leave it with a much worse grace than young people. It is because all their labors having been for this life, they perceive at last their trouble lost."
3. There is more to life than material things; to grow old gracefully we must realize this and find that which makes life full and abundant!
 - a. Fortunately, Jesus came to help us - **Jn 10:10**
 - b. He is the true and living Way! - **Jn 14:6**
 - c. And it is the Word of God that shows us the way to Christ - **Jn 5:39**
 - 1) This illustrates the truth of **Mt 4:4**
 - 2) The Word of God reveals Christ to us, who in turn shows us how to really live, for He is the Life!
4. What a shame to go through life, only to find at last our labors were of no lasting value - cf. **Lk 9:25; 12:15-21**

C. "BLESSED IS THE MAN WHO FINDS WISDOM..."

1. The word blessed means "happy, rich"
2. Wisdom is insight, understanding, which enables one to make the best use of his or her talents and circumstances, avoiding the mistakes and pitfalls of life
3. The value of wisdom is:
 - a. Beautifully proclaimed in **Pro 3:13-18**
 - b. Illustrated in **Ep 5:15-16**
 - 1) The days are evil (the time is short) - cf. **Ja 4:13-14**
 - 2) Wisdom helps one to utilize to the fullest what little time we have, instead of wasting our precious time
4. Wisdom can be acquired in two ways:
 - a. Personal experience
 - 1) Which can be very wasteful and time-consuming
 - 2) You can spend much of your life in trial and error, repeating the same mistakes made by others
 - 3) While you may finally gain wisdom...
 - a) You have not only wasted much time in the trials
 - b) You have to bear the consequence of your errors (you reap what you sow)
 - b. God and His Word - **Pro 2:6**
 - 1) What better source, than from He who by wisdom created the universe - **Pro 3:19-20**
 - 2) With such wisdom, especially at an early age...
 - a) Our journey through life will more pleasant and graceful - **Pro 3:21-26**
 - b) We can get a head start and soon pass those who learn only through trial and error - cf. **Psa 119:97-100**

[With the wisdom found in God's Word, it is possible to grow old gracefully. For in it we learn:

- ◆ How to avoid the needless suffering experienced by those reaping the results of learning by trial and error
- ◆ The true purpose of life is not found in the material things of life, but in that which Jesus Christ has to offer!

To help us apply these principles, here are some practical steps based upon Paul's exhortations to the young preacher Timothy...]

III. THE PRACTICE OF GROWING OLD GRACEFULLY

A. BE AN EXAMPLE TO OTHERS...

1. "...be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity."
- **1 Ti 4:12**
2. There is no way you can avoid being an example to others
 - a. You will be either be a good example
 - b. Or you will be an example of what not to be
3. Determine to be an example of those who believe, and this will set you on the right track of one who grow old gracefully!

B. COMMIT YOURSELF TO THE WORD OF GOD...

1. "Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine." - **1 Ti 4:13**
2. Commit yourself to studying and teaching the Word of God to others
3. This will assure that you have an open line to God's wisdom
4. So study the Bible daily, and share what you learn with others!

C. CULTIVATE YOUR TALENTS...

1. "Do not neglect the gift that is in you..." - **1 Ti 4:14**
2. The degree to which you reap will be based upon the ability with which you can sow
3. If you want to reap a large harvest of good in this life, develop your talents!

D. APPLY DILIGENCE TO YOUR EFFORTS...

1. "Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all. Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you." - **1 Ti 4:15-16**
2. Growing old gracefully, like many good things, does not happen by accident
3. It takes concentrated effort, so be diligent and persevere!

CONCLUSION

1. "To keep the heart unwrinkled, to be hopeful, kindly, cheerful, reverent--that is to triumph over old age." - **Thomas Bailey Aldrich**
2. Is it possible to triumph over old age, to grow old gracefully? Yes, for I have seen it happen time and again!
3. But those of us who are young must realize the experience is reserved for those who...
 - a. Follow the wisdom of God
 - b. Understand the abundant life is not found in worldly things
 - c. Sow in such a way as to bear fruit and reap a harvest leading to eternal life

4. Such a person will be like those described in **Psa 92:12-15**...

*“The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree,
He shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon.
Those who are planted in the house of the LORD
Shall flourish in the courts of our God.
They shall still bear fruit in old age;
They shall be fresh and flourishing,
To declare that the LORD is upright;
He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.”*

Don't you wish to be like that? By the grace of God you can! In Christ Jesus you can become a new creature (**2 Co 5:17**), made possible by the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit (**Ti 3:5**). The sooner you begin this new life, the less “baggage” of the old life you will have to contend with, and the more you can do for the Lord...

Heaven Will Surely Be Worth It All

INTRODUCTION

1. There is a song entitled “**Heaven Will Surely Be Worth It All**”...
 - a. Words written by W. Oliver Cooper
 - b. Melody arranged by Minzo C. Jones
 - **In “Hymns For Worship”, it is song #253**
2. As I sing this song, two main thoughts come to mind...
 - a. The many sacrifices faithful Christians must often make
 - b. The glories of heaven and what is to come for those who remain faithful
3. The song proclaims that the rewards will surely be worth whatever the cost...
 - a. As did Paul, in writing to the Romans - **Ro 8:18**
 - b. And again, in writing to the Corinthians - **2 Co 4:17**

[Will heaven be worth it all? Yes! But it never hurts to be reminded of both the cost and rewards of discipleship...]

I. THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP

A. JESUS MUST COME FIRST...

1. Before one’s own self - **Lk 9:23-24**
2. Before anyone else, including family - **Lk 14:26; Mt 10:34-37**
3. Before anything the world has to offer - **Lk 9:25; Lk 14:33**

B. WE MUST BE WILLING TO SUFFER FOR CHRIST...

1. We must be willing to bear our own cross - **Lk 14:27**
2. Living in an ungodly world, we may find that following Christ sometimes involves ridicule and persecution - **2 Ti 3:12**
 - a. The persecution may be physical - **1 Pe 4:12-13**
 - b. The persecution may be verbal - **Lk 6:27-28**
3. Other things we must endure for Christ’s sake:
 - a. Personal weaknesses in our struggle against sin - **1 Co 9:27**
 - b. Disappointments brought on by failing brethren - **2 Co 11:29**
 - 1) E.g., whose apathy and neglect produce slothful service
 - 2) E.g., whose irregular attendance makes it difficult to depend on them
 - 3) E.g., whose unwillingness to serve creates extra burdens on those who do serve
 - 4) E.g., whose murmuring hinders the efforts of those who try to do something
4. Even if blessed to escape such things, we must still be willing to expend time and effort in promoting the cause of Christ in positive ways
 - a. Sometimes alone, or with few to help
 - b. Sometimes in difficult places, where few appreciate your efforts

[Yes, discipleship can be costly. As the song suggests, we are often “hindered”, “burdened”, with “trials, toils and tears” and “many a heartache”. But the Lord tells us through His Word that “**Heaven Will Surely Be Worth It All**”...]

II. THE REWARDS OF DISCIPLESHIP

A. FROM THE PEN OF PAUL...

1. A man who endured much hardship - cf. **2 Co 11:23-25**
2. Yet looked forward to:
 - a. A house not made with hands - **2 Co 5:1**
 - b. The riches of God's grace - **Ep 2:7**
 - c. A glorious transformation - **Ph 3:20-21**
 - d. A crown of righteousness - **2 Ti 4:8**
 - e. A heavenly kingdom - **2 Ti 4:18**

B. FROM THE PEN OF PETER...

1. A man who likewise suffered hardship - cf. **1 Co 4:9-13**
2. Yet looked forward to:
 - a. An inheritance imperishable, undefiled, reserved in heaven - **1 Pe 1:4**
 - b. A new heavens and new earth, in which righteousness dwells - **2 Pe 3:13-14**

C. FROM THE PEN OF JOHN...

1. A man who suffered tribulation and exile - cf. **Re 1:9**
2. Yet was blessed to be shown:
 - a. The bliss of those who were triumphant over tribulation - **Re 7:9-10,13-17**
 - b. The destiny of the redeemed, forever with God - **Re 21:1-7,10-11; 21:22-22:5**

CONCLUSION

1. Can there be any comparison...?
 - a. Between a few years of service, even with hardship?
 - b. And an eternity of bliss in the presence of God?-- **“Heaven Will Surely Be Worth It All”!**
2. We have read the words of those like Paul, Peter, and John...
 - a. What if they could return and speak to us today?
 - b. What if our loved ones who died in Christ could return and speak to us today?-- **Would they not tell us, “Heaven Will Surely Be Worth It All”?**

Whatever the cost of following Jesus in this life, may the words of this song and the promises of Holy Scripture remind and comfort us to be faithful and persevere...

“Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise:” (He 10:35-36)

The High Cost Of A Free Gift

INTRODUCTION

1. Perhaps you have heard it said: **“The best things in life are free!”**
2. This is especially true when you consider that the “best” thing in life is a gift...
 - a. I am speaking of that which God offers to all who will accept it: “eternal life”
 - b. It is truly a “gift from God”! - cf. **Ro 6:23**
3. And yet, though eternal life is a gift...
 - a. A high cost was paid to offer the gift
 - b. And a high cost must be paid to receive it!
4. A high cost for a free gift? How can that be?
 - a. This “paradox” can sometimes be difficult to comprehend
 - b. However, teachings of Jesus are often found in the form of a “paradox” (e.g., the Beatitudes - **Mt 5:3-6**)
 - c. Upon closer examination, such “paradoxes” are not really contradictions, but expressions of very important spiritual truths!

[In this lesson, we shall consider how it is that a gift which is free can be so costly; beginning with...]

I. THE FREE GIFT OF SALVATION

A. MANY HAVE A WRONG CONCEPT ABOUT HOW SALVATION IS OBTAINED...

1. They think that salvation is earned by the “good works” they do
2. Consider this statement by a devout Muslim: “All my life I have obeyed the Koran and worshipped Allah faithfully. If, after death, I find that there is no paradise and there is no houris with which a man may be comforted, as the Koran promises, I shall feel that I have been miserably cheated.”
3. Many professing Christians have a similar concept of attaining heaven, that their reward is received because of...
 - a. Their good life
 - b. Their generous giving of their money
 - c. Their faithful attendance at church

B. BUT SALVATION IS GOD’S GIFT TO UNDESERVING MEN...

1. Offered while we were still sinners, ungodly, and enemies - **Ro 5:6-8**
2. Not because we love God, but because He loved us! - **1 Jn 4:9-10**
3. And it is offered to all who will receive it! - cf. **Re 21:6; 22:17**

[Salvation, then, is offered “freely”. But does that mean it costs nothing? Not at all! Indeed, we shall see that nothing in all the universe has cost so much...]

II. THE HIGH COST OF PROVIDING THE GIFT

A. WHAT IT COST THE FATHER... - Jn 3:16; Ro 8:32

1. It cost Him the sacrifice of His only begotten Son!
2. He did not spare His Son in an effort to save us from our sins!

B. WHAT IT COST THE SON... - Ph 2:5-8

1. It cost Him the renunciation of glory and majesty, which He had with the Father before coming to this world
2. It cost Him the humiliation of servitude, even to the point suffering and finally dying by crucifixion for our sins

C. WHAT IT COST THE HOLY SPIRIT... - 2 Th 2:13-14; Ep 4:30

1. A ministry through the ages of patiently wooing the stubborn hearts of sinful men through the call of the gospel
2. Suffering long with men who treat Him ill, being grieved with they resist Him

[Each Person of the triune Godhead has paid dearly to make the gift of salvation possible. So certainly from the viewpoint of its “provision”, we can see the “high cost of a free gift”. But the “acceptance” of this free gift is also costly...]

III. THE HIGH COST OF ACCEPTING THE GIFT

A. IT COSTS THE DENIAL OF SELF, AND THE RENUNCIATION OF MUCH THAT MEN HOLD DEAR...

1. Paul, who gladly paid the cost, expressed it vividly in several passages - **Gal 2:20; Ph 3:7-8**
2. One cannot accept Christ and His salvation on lesser terms than the complete surrender of self to Him!

B. THIS IS WHAT MAKES THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST “A HARD GOSPEL” FOR MANY TO ACCEPT...

1. They want to accept Jesus as Savior, but not as Lord of their lives
 - a. Some even suggest that accepting Jesus as Savior and as Lord as two entirely separate acts
 - b. But the two are inseparable - cf. **Lk 2:11; Ac 2:36; 10:36**
 - c. Even religious leaders who have led people to think otherwise are beginning to see the error of their ways: “The church today is paralyzed at the moment of its supreme opportunity because we have committed the blasphemy of insisting that what is so costly for God shall come easy to us. We haven’t dared face our congregations with a hard gospel.” - **Dr. Paul Calvin Payne**, General Secretary, the Board of Christian Education, Presbyterian Church
2. None can accept Jesus as “Savior of his soul” without accepting Him as “Lord of his life”!
 - a. Jesus Himself made this clear when He warned His hearers that the cost of discipleship is high - **Lk 14:25-33**
 - b. The lordship of Jesus over self, life, and possessions must be acknowledged if we are to know Him as Savior!
3. People must realize that Jesus commissioned His disciples to preach “repentance and remission of sins in His name” - **Lk 24:47**
 - a. There is no remission apart from repentance!
 - b. And repentance involves the whole life! - cf. **2 Co 7:10-11**

- 1) Not only sorrow for the past, that leads to repentance
- 2) But zeal and fervor for the future, that affects how we will live
- c. Repentance is therefore the abandoning of our own selfish way, to go God's way in obedience and fellowship with Him

C. "JUST ACCEPT CHRIST AND BE SAVED" IS THE APPEAL OF MANY...

1. And many people assume that it is a matter of "just accepting" Him, "with no strings attached"
2. However, consider the words of Jesus Himself - cf. **Jn 14:21,23**
3. To "receive Jesus", then, requires a full surrender to the lordship of Christ, a sincere acceptance of His commandments - cf. **Jn 15:10**

CONCLUSION

1. That is why the "gift" of salvation, while offered freely, still comes with high cost...
 - a. Salvation cannot be earned, nor merited, by any amount of good deeds
 - b. For even after a lifetime of diligent obedience we are still "unworthy servants" - cf. **Lk 17:10**
 - c. But the Lordship of Jesus rightly demands a full surrender to His authority - cf. **Mt 28:18-20**
2. Yes, the gift of salvation is costly...
 - a. It cost God more than heaven can declare
 - b. It cost Jesus the agony and shame of the cross
 - c. Even today it costs the Holy Spirit who seeks to woo you through the gospel
 - d. And it costs everyone who truly receives it the total submission of self to the rightful claims of Jesus on the lives and souls of all who would be His for time and eternity!

Jesus has paid the high cost to offer you the gift of salvation...have you paid the high cost of accepting it? - cf. **Ac 2:36-39**

How Much Should I Give?

INTRODUCTION

1. During His earthly ministry, Jesus challenged His disciples to give...
 - a. As recorded by Luke - **Lk 6:38**; cf. **12:13-34**
 - b. As stated by Paul - **Ac 20:33-35**
2. In his epistles, Paul commanded Christians to give...
 - a. To lay by in store weekly, for the needs of the saints - **1 Co 16:1-2**
 - b. To work, so that we might give to those in need - **Ep 4:28**
 - c. To be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share - **1 Ti 6:17-19**
 - d. To do good and share - **He 13:16**
3. A question that often comes up is “**How Much Should I Give?**”...
 - a. The Law of Moses was very explicit (tithing commanded of Israel)
 - b. The New Covenant is not as explicit (there is no command for Christians to tithe)

[Yet Christians are not left without assistance regarding giving. Consider first that we have...]

I. EXAMPLES TO INSPIRE US

A. FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT...

1. Abraham gave a tithe (ten percent) to Melchizedek - **Gen 14:20**
2. Jacob promised to give a tenth to God on his safe return - **Gen 28:20-22**
3. Israel’s freewill offerings for the tabernacle - **Exo 35:4-5,21,29; 36:5-7**
4. David and Israel’s freewill offerings for the temple - **1 Chr 29:3,9-15**
5. Israel’s tithing to God
 - a. One tenth to the Levites (who in turn gave a tenth to the priests) - **Num 18:21-28**
 - b. One tenth for the festive celebration - **Deu 12:5-18**
 - c. One tenth every third year for the poor - **Deu 14:28-29**
6. Israel’s guidelines for the land
 - a. Leave that which grows of itself in the seventh year to the poor - **Exo 23:10-11**
 - b. Allow people to satisfy their hunger - **Deu 23:24-25**; cf. **Lk 6:1**
 - c. Leave the corners and gleanings for the poor - **Lev 19:9-10; Deu 24:19-22**
7. The Lord’s release: debt release for the poor every seventh year - **Deu 15:1-4**
- **The Old Testament provided Israel with a rich history of giving, though some did not give as they should - cf. Mal 3:8-10**

B. FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT...

1. Zacchaeus, who gave half to the poor - **Lk 19:8**
2. The widow and her two mites - **Lk 21:1-4**
3. The meticulous tithing of the Pharisees - cf. **Mt 23:23**
4. The Christians in Jerusalem - **Ac 2:44-45; 4:34-35**
5. Barnabas, who sold land - **Ac 4:36-37**
6. The disciples in Antioch - **Ac 11:27-30**
7. The churches in Macedonia and Achaia - **Ro 15:25-26; 2 Co 8:1-5**
8. The brethren in Philippi, who helped Paul once and again - **Ph 1:3-5; 4:14-18**

- **The New Testament provides us with a rich history of giving, the greatest example being the gift of Jesus Christ - cf. Jn 3:16; 2 Co 8:9**

[With such examples to inspire to us, we should want to give! But again we ask, “**How Much Should I Give?**” Instead of any set percentage (e.g., ten percent), in the New Testament we have...]

II. PRINCIPLES TO GUIDE US

A. AS WE PROSPER...

1. Paul charged Christians to give as they prosper - **1 Co 16:1-2**
 2. He instructed them to give according to what they have - **2 Co 8:12-13**
- **Our giving should be in keeping with the level of our prosperity**

B. SEEK TO EXCEL...

1. Paul called for Christians to abound (excel, ESV) in the grace of giving - **2 Co 8:7**
 2. With God’s aid, we can abound in every good work - **2 Co 9:8-10**
 3. Jesus tells us to surpass the righteousness of the Pharisees (remember their meticulous tithing?) - **Mt 5:20; cf. Mt 23:23**
- **If the Pharisees gave tithes (actually 20-30%), do we surpass them by giving any less?**

C. DO SO WILLINGLY...

1. There must be a willing mind prompting our giving - **2 Co 8:12**
 2. We cannot give with a grudging obligation or of necessity - **2 Co 9:5,7**
- **We must give because we want to, not because we have to**

D. AIM FOR EQUALITY...

1. Paul did not expect others to be eased at our expense - **2 Co 8:13**
 2. Rather, that our abundance supply others’ lack - **2 Co 8:14**
 3. Moving in the direction of more equality between brethren - **2 Co 8:14-15**
- **Giving should be in the direction of the greater to the lesser (both as individuals and as congregations)**

E. SOW BOUNTIFULLY...

1. Again, our giving should seek to excel (abound) - **2 Co 8:7**
 2. If you sow bountifully, you will reap bountifully - **2 Co 9:6**
 3. Not for personal gain, but to abound for even more good works - **2 Co 9:8-10**
- **Seek to give bountifully, that you might give even more!**

F. GIVE PURPOSELY...

1. Each one is to give as they purpose in their heart - **2 Co 9:7**
 2. That is, with careful planning and intention, not as an afterthought
- **Budget beforehand to give purposely and willingly (see below)**

G. WITH CHEERFULNESS...

1. God loves a cheerful giver - **2 Co 9:7**
 2. Giving cannot be with a begrudging spirit, or sense of obligation
- **If we cannot give cheerfully, then our giving is not acceptable to God!**

[These principles are the guidelines that are given the Christian to govern his or her giving. They are more than adequate to guide us to give as we should. But in the spirit of **He 10:24**, here are some...]

III. SUGGESTIONS TO STIMULATE US

A. MANY SUGGEST AT LEAST TEN PERCENT...

1. This is often suggested as a bare minimum
 - a. Yet even the Pharisees gave **20-30 percent** to the Lord and to the poor!
 - b. Paul appealed to the example of sacrificial giving (Macedonians and the Lord) when he sought to motivate the Corinthians to give - **2 Co 8:1-9**
 2. Consider these statistics (taken from **GenerousGiving.org**)...
 - a. The average donation by adults who attend U.S. Protestant churches is about \$17/wk
 - b. Among church members of 11 primary Protestant denominations (or their historical antecedents) in the United States and Canada, per-member giving as a percentage of income was lower in 2000 than in either 1921 or 1933
 - 1) In **1921**, per-member giving as a percentage of income was **2.9 percent**
 - 2) In **1933**, at the depth of the Great Depression, per-member giving grew to **3.3 percent**
 - 3) By **2000**, after a half-century of unprecedented prosperity, giving had fallen to **2.6 percent**
 - c. Overall, only **3 to 5 percent** of Americans who donate money to a church **tithe** (give a tenth of) their incomes though many more claim to do so
- **We have so much for which to be thankful; should we give any less than what God's people gave in the past?**

B. BUDGET OUR GIVING...

1. We must give as we have purposed in our hearts - **2 Co 9:7**
 2. As we prosper, plan our budgets accordingly
 - a. Include a special place in our budgets for our planned giving
 - b. To follow the principle of giving God the first fruits, calculate our giving on **pretax** amounts, not on what is left after the government takes its share - **Pro 3:9**
 3. Budget not just what we give to the church, but to others as well - cf. **Ga 6:10**
 - a. E.g., **8 percent** for the church
 - b. E.g., **2 percent** for other charitable giving
- **Cheerful giving is easy when we have already set aside what we planned to give**

C. SEEK TO EXCEL IN THE GRACE OF GIVING...

1. Certainly when we sow bountifully, we reap bountifully - **2 Co 9:6**
 2. God is willing to multiply the seed we have sown and increase the fruits of our righteousness, that we might have an abundance for every good work - **2 Co 9:8-10**
 3. As income increases, why not **increase the percentage of giving** on additional income?
 - a. E.g., 10% on the first 30K, 15% on the next 10K, 20% on the next 10K, etc.
 - b. Or increase the overall percentage of your giving by 1% more each year
 4. When we are enriched for all liberality (i.e., blessed to give more), it produces much thanksgiving to God by those who are the beneficiaries of our giving) - **2 Co 9:11-14**
- **We should seek to excel in giving, to increase thanksgiving and praise to God by those who see the work of God's grace in our lives!**

CONCLUSION

1. **“How Much Should I Give?”** is not an easy question to answer...
 - a. There is no set percentage given to Christians in the New Testament
 - b. It is really between you and God as to how much you should give

2. But we have considered in this lesson...
 - a. Examples to inspire us
 - b. Principles to guide us
 - c. Suggestions to stimulate us

3. Based on the above, my personal recommendations are these...
 - a. Budget your giving to the Lord and to the poor, making it a priority item in your budget
 - b. Start out by giving ten percent of your gross income
 - c. Gradually increase the rate of your giving as your income increases
 - d. Give, not to be seen of men, but to glorify your Father in heaven - cf. **Mt 5:16; 6:1-4**
 - e. Give, not to earn salvation, but to lay up treasure in heaven - cf. **Ti 3:4-7; 1 Ti 6:17-19; Mt 6:19-20**

Have you given much thought lately to how much you should give? I hope in some way I have encouraged you to consider how you might excel in the grace of giving...

But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.

And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.

- 2 Co 9:6-8

How Well Do You Listen?

INTRODUCTION

1. During His earthly ministry, Jesus often concluded a lesson by crying out, **“He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”**
 - a. E.g., concerning John the Baptist - **Mt 11:15**
 - b. E.g., the parable of the sower - **Mt 13:9**
 - c. E.g., the explanation of the parable of the tares - **Mt 13:43**
2. In His letters to the churches of Asia, Jesus concludes each with a similar saying: **“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”** - **Re 2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22**
3. What is the point of these sayings?
 - a. It is akin to saying “What is being said is very important, so you had better pay attention and listen!” - cf. **Mk 4:23-25**
 - b. It illustrates that Jesus had a problem that often exists today
 - 1) Many people simply don't listen
 - 2) Or don't listen so as to understand
4. I am convinced that many today don't appreciate the importance of listening well...
 - a. It concerned Jesus...
 - b. So I believe it is appropriate to ask, **“How Well Do You Listen?”**

[It might be profitable to begin by pointing out there are...]

I. THREE TYPES OF LISTENERS

A. THE DULL OF HEARING...

1. Some of the Hebrew Christians were like this - cf. **He 5:11**
 - a. When a person has this problem, it is hard for others to explain things to them!
 - b. The fault is not with the **subject** material, nor the **presenter**, but with the **listener!**
 2. Isaiah wrote of such people, and Jesus applied it to many in His day - **Mt 13:13-15**
 - a. People are this way because they are **dull of heart!**
 - b. This prevents them from:
 - 1) Understanding God's truth
 - 2) Turning from sin to God
 - 3) And being healed (saved) by God!
- **Who would want to be this type of listener?**

B. THOSE WITH ITCHING EARS...

1. Paul describes these in **2 Ti 4:3-4**
 2. Such people listen only to that which is pleasing
 - a. So they don't like **sound doctrine** (which often requires the kind of preaching mentioned in **2 Ti 4:2**)
 - b. They will find the teachers they want...but then they turn from the truth to fables
- **Many today are often afflicted with this hearing problem!**

C. THOSE WHO HEAR WITH A NOBLE AND GOOD HEART...

1. Jesus speaks of these in **Lk 8:15**
 2. The Bereans were listeners of this kind - **Ac 17:11**
 - a. They were “fair-minded” (NKJV), thus willing to give Paul a fair hearing
 - b. It showed in how they “received” (or listened to) the word: “with all readiness”
- **This is the kind of listener we all should be!**

[Why is it so important to be this kind of listener? There are several reasons...]

II. THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD LISTENING

A. ESSENTIAL TO BEING BLESSED...

1. For those willing to listen properly, there are wonderful things to learn - **Mt 13:16-17**
 2. Many things which great people (David, Daniel, etc.) did not have the opportunity to learn
 3. Things pertaining to wonderful blessings that are now available in Christ! - cf. **Ep 1:3**
- **We miss out on these blessings if we do not carefully listen!**

B. ESSENTIAL TO SAVING FAITH...

1. God has ordained that we be saved through faith in Christ - cf. **Ro 1:16-17**
 2. Such faith comes through proclaiming the gospel, often involving listening to a preacher - cf. **Ro 10:14,17**
 3. While one can certainly gain faith through reading God's Word (cf. **Jn 20:30-31**), the fact remains that many are often dependent upon what they first hear proclaimed
 - a. One reason faith is often lacking is because people simply are not good listeners
 - b. They miss out on the evidence in God's Word which produces faith!
- **Does your listening hinder the development of your faith?**

C. ESSENTIAL TO BEARING FRUIT...

1. In the parable of the sower, the only kind of soil (heart) capable of bearing fruit was the one which listened properly - **Lk 8:15**
 2. That is because bearing fruit comes from **understanding** the grace of God! - cf. **Co 1:6**
 - a. Note that the gospel was bearing fruit in the Colossians
 - b. But that was “since the day you heard and knew (understood, NAS) the grace of God in truth;”
- **Only by listening well can we understand God's grace, and be thus motivated to bear fruit to His glory!**

D. ESSENTIAL TO PREVENTING APOSTASY...

1. There is a real danger of drifting, by neglecting “so great a salvation” - **He 2:1-3**
 2. The only solution is to “give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard”
- **Poor listening is often the first step to apostasy!**

E. ESSENTIAL TO AVOIDING REJECTION AND CONDEMNATION...

1. If we do not listen as we should...
 - a. Those who teach God's Word have a right to reject us - cf. **Mt 10:14-15**
 - b. We are judging ourselves unworthy of eternal life - cf. **Ac 13:44-49**
2. If we reject the gospel (perhaps by poor listening?), the men of Nineveh and the queen of the South will condemn us at the judgment! - cf. **Mt 12:41-42**
 - a. The men of Nineveh repented after hearing just one lesson from Jonah; will we reject

- the gospel of Christ after being given many opportunities?
- b. The queen of the South went great lengths to hear the wisdom of Solomon; are we willing to go just a short distance to hear God's Word proclaimed?
- **The rejection and condemnation is not limited to coming from just these individuals, it will come from God, too!**

[Hopefully, we appreciate the wonderful opportunities we have to listen to God's Word, and the importance of good listening! How then can we improve our ability to listen? For just as speakers need to learn to speak so as to be understood, people need to learn to listen so as to understand! Here are some ...]

III. STEPS TO BETTER LISTENING

A. MAKE LISTENING AN ACT OF WORSHIP...

- 1. How you listen to God's word being read or preached is as much an indication of your devotion to God as to how you pray or sing
- 2. So when you have opportunities to listen, do it with "a worshipful attitude"
 - a. Think of how you would listen if some great person were speaking
 - b. Imagine your rapt attention if you were listening to some famous person
- **Does not the proclamation of God's Word deserve as much attention?**

B. LISTEN FROM FIRST TO LAST...

- 1. I.e., pay attention all the way through
 - a. Do you expect to understand a novel by simply reading a sentence here and there?
 - b. So it is with listening...sentences, phrases, words, to be understood must be heard in light of the context in which they are presented
- 2. Speakers must follow certain rules of speech so as to be understood:
 - a. Introduce the subject
 - b. Present main points with supporting arguments
 - c. Conclude with a summary
- **So listeners must listen to ALL the parts to truly understand**

C. LOOK AT THE SPEAKER...

- 1. This greatly aids your concentration
 - a. Looking elsewhere makes it easy for your mind to wander
 - b. Closing your eyes makes it easy for you to nod off!
- 2. This requires self-discipline, but it is conducive to developing a longer attention span
- **Try it, and see if it doesn't make a difference!**

D. READ ALONG IN YOUR BIBLE...

- 1. You remember more of what you both see and hear over what you simply hear
 - a. Which is why visual aids are often used in sermons
 - b. But the greatest visual aid is your own Bible!
- 2. Your knowledge of the Scriptures can be greatly improved by doing this
- 3. It is hard at first to keep up, but persevere and it will soon become easier
- **We encourage our children to do this, shouldn't adults provide an example and do the same?**

E. LISTEN WITH FAITH...

1. I.e., listen with a willingness to accept and believe what is shown in God's Word
2. Notice **He 4:1-2**; those who died in the wilderness did not listen with faith!
- **If we don't listen with faith, the same sort of thing will happen to us; i.e., fall short of our heavenly rest!**

F. LISTEN WITH A MIND TO ACT...

1. Are we like the people in Ezekiel's day? - cf. **Eze 33:30-32**
 - a. They loved to hear him, but for the wrong reason
 - b. Do we love to hear sermons because of how well the speaker presents them?
2. Hearing must be accompanied by doing to be of any profit - **Ja 1:22-25**
- **As important as good listening may be, the blessedness comes only if we are doers as well as hearers!**

CONCLUSION

1. To be **blessed** in what we do...
 - a. That is my goal in presenting these thoughts on listening
 - b. For it all begins with listening in the proper way
2. How important, then, is listening...?
 - a. When it comes to listening to God, very important! - **Isa 55:2-3**
 - b. It is essential for the good of our soul!
3. Is there ever a time when **God** does not listen...?
 - a. Yes, when our sins are between us and God - cf. **Isa 59:1-2**
 - b. But we can take care of that problem by receiving God's Mercy - cf. **Isa 55:6-7**

Today, that mercy is offered through Jesus Christ, God's Son. And as God said:

"This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!" (Lk 9:35)

Have you heeded Him by obeying His word? Or does the following cry of Jesus apply to you...?

"But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say?" (Lk 6:46)

I Am Coming, Lord!

INTRODUCTION

1. When a person comes to Jesus in response to the gospel...
 - a. They are responding to the call of the Lord
 - b. They will receive wonderful blessings in Christ
2. A familiar song that describes these truths is “**I Am Coming, Lord**”...
 - a. Words and tune by **Lewis Hartsough** (1828-1919)
 - b. Frequently used as an invitation song following a sermon

[From the words of this song as found in many hymnals, let’s consider the call of the gospel and the blessings enjoyed by those who come to the Lord...]

I. FIRST VERSE

A. THE WORDS OF THE SONG...

I hear Thy welcome voice,
That calls me, Lord, to Thee,
For cleansing in Thy precious blood
That flowed on Calvary.

B. REFLECTING ON THE WORDS...

1. The first verse reminds us that God calls us, through the gospel - **2 Th 2:14; Mk 16:15-16**
2. The gospel calls us to benefit from the sacrifice of Christ for our sins - **1 Co 15:1-3**
3. Chief among those blessings is the remission of sins through His blood - **Ep 1:7**

[Have you heard the voice of the Lord calling you through His gospel...?]

II. SECOND VERSE

A. THE WORDS OF THE SONG...

Though coming weak and vile,
Thou dost my strength assure;
Thou doest my vileness fully cleanse,
Till spotless all and pure.

B. REFLECTING ON THE WORDS...

1. The second verse tells us that we come to Jesus as we are (weak and sinful) - cf. **Lk 5:27-32; 19:10**
2. Blessings in Christ described are twofold: strength and cleansing - **Jn 8:34-36; Ph 4:13**
3. Jesus offers freedom from both **the guilt of sin** and the **bondage of sin** - **Ro 8:1-2,12-13**

[Do not assume you must become **righteous** and **strong** before you can come to Jesus...!]

III. THIRD VERSE

A. THE WORDS OF THE SONG...

'Tis Jesus calls me on
To perfect faith and love;
To perfect hope, and peace and trust,
For earth and heaven above.

B. REFLECTING ON THE WORDS...

1. The third verse describes our growth in Christ after coming to the Lord - cf. **2 Pe 3:18; 1:5-11**
2. For we are not only to respond to His grace in conversion, but to bear fruit for God's glory as well - **Mt 28:19-20; Jn 15:8**
3. Our service will be both on earth and in heaven above - cf. **Re 2:25-27; 3:20-22; 22:1-5**

[Thus Jesus call us to grow in **grace** and **service**; will we respond to His call...?]

IV. CHORUS

A. THE WORDS OF THE SONG...

I am coming, Lord!
Coming now to Thee!
Wash me, cleanse me in the blood
That flowed on Calvary!

B. REFLECTING ON THE WORDS...

1. The chorus expresses the appeal for cleansing one desires when they respond to the gospel
2. The cleansing comes as one is baptized into Christ
 - a. For in baptism they are buried and crucified with Christ - **Ro 6:3-8**
 - b. In which their sins are washed away by the blood of Christ - cf. **Ac 22:16**
3. Thus baptism is for the remission of sins, and is an appeal for a good conscience
 - a. As proclaimed by Peter on the day of Pentecost - **Ac 2:38**
 - b. As expounded by Peter in his first epistle - **1 Pe 3:21**

CONCLUSION

1. Have you heard the welcome voice of the Lord...?
 - a. You have if you've heard the gospel of Christ!
 - b. He is calling you even now!
2. Do you desire cleansing in the blood of Calvary? Continued growth in the grace of Christ...?
 - a. Come to the Lord in faith, repentance and baptism! - cf. **Ac 2:36-38**
 - b. You will receive Christ into your life by putting Him on in baptism! - cf. **Ga 3:27**

Saved by grace through faith, you will then walk in good works ordained by God... - **Ep 2:8-10**

Into All The World

Using Bible Correspondence Courses

INTRODUCTION

1. With the **Great Commission** Christians were given a great task...
 - a. To make disciples of all the nations - **Mt 28:19**
 - b. To go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature - **Mk 16:15**
2. It was a task accepted by the early disciples...
 - a. They went everywhere, preaching the Word - cf. **Ac 8:4; 1 Th 1:8**
 - b. The gospel was proclaimed to everyone - cf. **Co 1:23; Ro 10:17-18**
3. They used whatever tools and resources at their disposal...
 - a. Traveling by foot, horse, chariot, or ship
 - b. In person, or through the written word (cf. **2 Th 2:15**)
4. Today, faced with the same task, we have many tools and resources...
 - a. Traveling by car, train, or airplane
 - b. In person, or by way of phone, radio, television
 - c. And most recently, by way of the Internet

[Among the many useful tools at our disposal, I have found the simple **Bible correspondence course (BCC)** to be an effective means to share the gospel. In this lesson, I wish to share how it can be used in person and around the world, especially through the Internet...]

I. OPPORTUNITIES FOR A BCC PROGRAM

A. THE POTENTIAL OF THE INTERNET...

1. E.g., my web site has been visited by more than **1 million people**
2. On average, **1000 people** visit the site daily
3. People from **130 countries** and every state in USA have visited the site
- **My web site is only one of many operated by brethren; several offer BCCs**

B. RESPONSES TO A SIMPLE OFFER...

1. I placed a simple offer for a BCC on my web page
2. In just **two weeks, 106 people** enrolled in the course
3. Besides the US, people have enrolled from the following countries in this short time:

a. Australia (3)	f. Netherlands
b. Canada (2)	g. Panama
c. El Salvador	h. Philippines
d. Finland	i. South Africa
e. Malaysia	
- **It is this response (and previous experience) that has prompted this lesson**

C. OTHER RESPONSES STARTING TO COME IN...

1. In answer to a press release, a couple from St. Cloud has enrolled

2. A member has mentioned several people are interested
- **We do not have to use the Internet to offer a BCC**

[Might this be **an open door** of opportunity the Lord has given us (cf. **Ac 14:27**), especially through the Internet? Whether or not, consider some of the benefits of using a BCC to reach out to others...]

II. ADVANTAGES OF A BCC PROGRAM

A. CHALLENGES INVOLVING PERSONAL WORK...

1. Finding prospects for study
2. Setting up the study
3. Teaching the material
4. Answering questions
5. Asking for a decision
- **These challenges have hindered many people from getting involved in personal evangelism**

B. A BCC PROGRAM ELIMINATES THESE CHALLENGES...

1. Through the offer at the web site, an advertisement in the paper, or a simple offer to a friend or acquaintance...
 - a. You find people who want to study the Bible
 - b. The study is automatically set up by those who respond to the offers
2. Through the use of a Bible correspondence course...
 - a. The student teaches himself or herself!
 - b. If questions are raised, you can study and answer them at your leisure
 - c. People are given the opportunity to make a decision
- **Using a BCC makes it very easy for Christians to share the gospel with others, even if the Christian is a babe in Christ!**

[If a church or individuals decide to utilize a BCC program, how should its success or failure be measured...?]

III. EVALUATING A BCC PROGRAM

A. MEASURING SUCCESS AND FAILURE...

1. In any program of evangelism, it is common to use the following measurements:
 - a. How many people come to services?
 - b. How many people are converted?
2. I contend that these are improper standards to measure an evangelistic effort
 - a. Our responsibility is to preach the gospel - **Mk 16:15; Ezek 3:17-18**
 - b. Conversion is the sinner's responsibility - cf. **Ezek 3:19**
 - c. Also, it is God who gives the increase - cf. **1 Co 3:5-7**
3. A proper measure is **“How many are we teaching?”**
 - a. Remember, saving souls involves both sowing and reaping
 - b. Sometimes we reap where others have sown - cf. **Jn 4:35-38**
 - c. Other times, we sow and the reaping is done by others
4. So the final standard by which we evaluate any effort should be this:
 - a. How much ground is being broken?
 - b. How much seed is being sown?

-- **The true measure should be, “How many souls are being taught?”**

B. APPLYING THIS MEASURE TO A BCC PROGRAM...

1. Every time a person enrolls, seed is being sown
 2. True, not everyone who enrolls completes the course
 - a. On average, only **fifty percent** return the first course
 - b. Only **ten to twenty-five percent** actually complete the course
 - c. It is not unusual for the conversion ratio from a BCC to be **one out of 100**
 3. If the response to the offer via the Internet keeps up with the average...
 - a. We can easily have **200-300 people a month** enroll
 - b. Which might result in **2-3 people a month** responding to the gospel
 - c. Who might in turn be the catalyst for others to respond
- **But remember, every time a person is taught, we are successful whether or not they respond favorably to the gospel!**

[For this reason I believe a BCC program can be a very successful way to fulfill the Great Commission. Ground can be broken, seed can be sown, people given the opportunity to learn the wonderful gospel of Christ! Finally, let me suggest some...]

IV. REQUIREMENTS FOR A BCC PROGRAM

A. THERE IS A NEED FOR VISION...

1. Vision is needed:
 - a. To provide direction
 - b. To sustain motivation
 2. We need to see:
 - a. The **power in the gospel** of Christ - **Ro 1:16; He 4:12; Ja 1:21**
 - b. The **potential for the seed** to bear fruit both near and far
 - 1) When we look at a seed, do we see only the plant?
 - 2) Or do we see the many seeds of the plant?
 - 3) Every soul converted to Christ bears the potential of reaching countless others
- **A BBC program can be used by the Lord to reach souls in our community and around the world!**

B. THERE IS A NEED FOR COMMITMENT...

1. A commitment to **cover the expense**
 - a. The cost of advertising, materials, postage
 - b. With a program directed just to the local community...
 - 1) The major expense is advertising
 - 2) With some expense for materials (for about 2-5 enrollments a **week**)
 - c. With the use of the Internet...
 - 1) The cost of advertising can be greatly reduced
 - 2) But the cost of materials increase because of the large number of enrollments (about 6-8 enrollments per **day**)
2. A commitment to **provide the time**
 - a. To offer the courses
 - b. To grade the lessons
3. A commitment to **offer the prayers**
 - a. To pray for the souls who are seeking, studying

- b. To pray for the brethren who are offering, helping - cf. **2 Th 3:1**
- **Some may be able to help with the expense, others with their time; but together with prayer, all is needed!**

CONCLUSION

1. There are many good ways to spread the gospel; I am **not** suggesting that the BCC program...
 - a. Is the best way
 - b. Is the only way
2. But it is a good way for us to go **“into all the world”**...
 - a. Into our community, as we offer the course personally, via ads, press releases, etc.
 - b. Into the world, via the Internet
 - **And I can't help but wonder if the Lord has provided an “open door” for the Word!**

Whether we use a BCC program or some other means, let us never forget the words of our Lord:

“The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.” - Mt 9:37-38

Is Your Baptism Scriptural?

INTRODUCTION

1. The necessity of baptism is quite clear in the Scriptures...
 - a. Jesus commanded baptism - **Mt 28:19; Mk 16:16**
 - b. His apostles and teachers commanded baptism - **Ac 2:38; 10:47-48**
2. Many denominations practice some form of baptism, yet vary as to..
 - a. The mode of baptism (immersion, pouring, sprinkling)
 - b. The subject of baptism (infants, those old enough to repent and believe)
 - c. The purpose of baptism (to be saved, to show that one is saved)
3. The Bible teaches that there is **one baptism (Ep 4:5)**...
 - a. Just as there is only one Lord, one faith
 - b. We can no more say there can be different baptisms than there can be different Lords!
4. Which raises several questions. One may have been baptized in some manner...
 - a. But was it scriptural?
 - b. Was it the one baptism commanded by the Lord?
 - c. Might one need to be re-baptized (or rather, scripturally baptized for the first time)?

[To aid us in answering such questions, let's first consider...]

I. AN EXAMPLE OF RE-BAPTISM

A. THE DISCIPLES AT EPHEBUS...

1. Paul found some "disciples" at Ephesus - **Ac 19:1**
2. He inquired as to whether they received the Spirit when they believed - **Ac 19:2**
3. From the context, we know Paul had in mind the miraculous reception of the Spirit by the laying on of hands by an apostle - **Ac 19:6-7; cf. 8:17-19**
4. Their lack of knowledge regarding the Spirit made Paul question their baptism - **Ac 19:2-3a**
 - a. Christ commanded a baptism in the name of the Holy Spirit - cf. **Mt 28:19**
 - b. How could they have been scripturally baptized if they had not even heard of the Spirit?
5. They had been baptized into John's baptism - **Ac 19:3b**
6. Paul explains that John's baptism was to prepare people for Christ - **Ac 19:4**
7. Hearing the difference, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus - **Ac 19:5**
- **Thus we have an example of "re-baptism" in the New Testament**

B. REGARDING THEIR RE-BAPTISM...

1. They had been previously "baptized"
2. But their baptism was lacking in some way
 - a. Even though it was immersion
 - b. Even though it was "for the remission of sins" - cf. **Mk 1:4**
3. But their baptism was not in the name of Jesus (see below) - **Ac 2:38; 10:48; 19:5**
- **Because their "baptism" lacked an essential element, "re-baptism" was necessary!**

[May we not conclude that if our baptism lacks an essential element, then “re-baptism” is necessary? To determine whether “re-baptism” is required of us, let’s review the...]

II. ELEMENTS OF SCRIPTURAL BAPTISM

A. THE PROPER MODE...

1. Baptism in the New Testament was a burial - **Ro 6:3; Co 2:12**
 2. The Greek word **baptizo** means “to immerse, to plunge, to dip”
 3. “For thirteen hundred years was baptism an immersion of the person under water.”
- **Brenner** (Catholic)
 4. “Baptism means immersion; and it was immersion...Unless it had been so, Paul’s analogical argument about our being buried with Christ in baptism would have had no meaning. Nothing could have been simpler than baptism in its first form. When a convert declared his faith in Christ, he was taken at once to the nearest pool or stream of water and plunged into it, and henceforward he was recognized as one of the Christian community.”
- **Cunningham** (Episcopalian)
- **The Biblical mode of baptism is immersion in water!**

B. THE PROPER AUTHORITY...

1. Baptism in the name of Jesus Christ - **Ac 2:38; 10:48; 19:5**
 2. That is, by His authority, and not by the authority of someone else
 3. Which would have been a baptism into the name of the Father, the Holy Spirit, and the Son, as Jesus Himself commanded - **Mt 28:19**
- **The Biblical authority of baptism is from Jesus Christ and no other!**

C. THE PROPER PURPOSE...

1. Baptism was for the remission of sins - **Ac 2:38; 22:16**
 2. Made possible by the fact one is buried with Christ into His death when they are baptized
- **Ro 6:3; Co 2:12**
 3. **Augustine** refers to the “apostolic tradition, by which the Churches of Christ maintain it to be an inherent principle, that without baptism...it is impossible for any man to attain to salvation and everlasting life.”
 4. “Baptism has been instituted that it should lead us to the blessings (of this death) and through such death to eternal life. Therefore it is necessary that we should be baptized into Jesus Christ and His death.” - **Martin Luther** (commentary on **Ro 6:3**)
- **The Biblical purpose of baptism is for the remission of sins, to be saved!**

D. THE PROPER SUBJECT...

1. Baptism was commanded of those capable of repentance - **Ac 2:38**
2. Baptism was permitted for those who possessed faith - **Ac 8:37; cf. Mk 16:16**
3. What about infant baptism?
 - a. “It cannot be proved by the sacred Scriptures that infant baptism was instituted by Christ, or begun by the first Christians after the apostles.” - **Martin Luther**, On Rebaptism
 - b. “Infant baptism was established neither by Christ nor the apostles. In all places where we find the necessity of baptism notified, either in a dogmatic or historical point of view, it is evident that it was only meant for those who were capable of comprehending the word preached, and of being converted to Christ by an act of their own will.” - **Jacobi**, Article on Baptism in Kitto’s Cyclopaedia of Biblical Literature, Vol. I, p. 287

-- **The Biblical subject for baptism is a penitent believer!**

[Remember, when one element was lacking, “re-baptism” was commanded (**Ac 19:1-7**). In that case, it was despite having the proper **mode**, **purpose**, and **subject**! Having surveyed the essential elements of scriptural baptism, consider some cases...]

III. WHEN RE-BAPTISM IS NECESSARY

A. IF OUR BAPTISM INVOLVED THE WRONG MODE...

1. Such as pouring or sprinkling
 2. As practiced by Catholics, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Methodists and others
 3. Our baptism lacked the proper mode (immersion)
- **“Re-baptism” would be therefore be necessary**

B. IF OUR BAPTISM INVOLVED THE WRONG AUTHORITY...

1. If we were baptized by the authority of anyone other than Jesus
 2. Such as Ellen G. White (Seventh Day Adventists), The Watch Tower Society (Jehovah’s Witnesses), Joseph Smith (Mormons), and others
 3. Our baptism was not by the only proper authority (Jesus Christ)
- **“Re-baptism” would be therefore be necessary**

C. IF OUR BAPTISM INVOLVED THE WRONG PURPOSE...

1. If we were baptized as a public confession of faith (thinking we were already saved)
 2. As practiced by most Baptists, Assemblies Of God and many others
 3. Our baptism was not for the right purpose (remission of sins)
- **“Re-baptism” would be required to ensure we have been scripturally baptized**

D. IF OUR BAPTISM INVOLVED THE WRONG SUBJECTS...

1. If when baptized we were not penitent believers
 2. As is the case when people are baptized...
 - a. When all their friends are doing it
 - b. Because their spouse, fiancé, or parents are pressuring them to do it (and they do it to please them, not God)
 - c. As infants incapable of faith or repentance
 3. Our baptism was lacking the right subjects (penitent believers)
- **Our need for "re-baptism" would be just as great!**

CONCLUSION

1. Remember, there is only one baptism (**Ep 4:5**)...
 - a. Baptism commanded by the authority of Jesus Christ - **Mt 28:18-19; Mk 16:16**
 - b. Baptism for the remission of sins - **Ac 2:38; 22:16**
 - c. Baptism which is a burial, an immersion in water - **Ac 8:38; 10:47-48; Ro 6:3; Co 2:12**
 - d. Baptism which requires a penitent believer - **Ac 2:38; 8:37**
2. My purpose has not been to unduly trouble one’s assurance of salvation...
 - a. But to make one’s calling and election sure - cf. **2 Pe 1:10**
 - b. To examine ourselves as to whether we are truly in the faith - cf. **2 Co 13:5**

Because of the many baptisms taught and practiced in the religious world, we must never hesitate to ask “Is our baptism scriptural?” If not, then as Ananias told Saul of Tarsus:

“...why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” - Ac 22:16

If we can assist you, do not hesitate to let us know...!

Jesus, My Lord

INTRODUCTION

1. The expression “My Lord” is used but a few times in reference to Jesus...
 - a. David wrote, “The LORD said to my Lord...” - **Psa 110:1**
 - b. Mary said, “...they have taken away my Lord” - **Jn 20:13**
 - c. Thomas said, “My Lord and my God!” - **Jn 20:28**
 - d. Paul wrote, “...Christ Jesus my Lord” - **Ph 3:8**
2. Yet it is important that every Christian...
 - a. Thinks of Jesus as “My Lord”
 - b. Appreciates what it means to have Jesus as “My Lord”

[To help us better understand what it means to have Jesus as “My Lord”, let’s consider the title of our study (“**Jesus, My Lord**”) and focus our thoughts on each word, beginning with “Lord”...]

I. JESUS, MY “LORD”

A. THE WORD FOR LORD IS USUALLY “KURIOS”...

1. Related to the word **kuros** meaning “power”
 2. Various translated “master”, “owner”
 3. Describes one having “power” or “authority”
- **Certainly Jesus has such power or authority - cf. Mt 28:18**

B. ANOTHER WORD FOR LORD IS “DESPOTES”...

1. From which we get the word “despot”
 - a. Today it is often used in a bad sense
 - b. E.g., “a person exercising power abusively, oppressively, or tyrannously”
 2. Its primary definition is “a ruler with absolute power or authority”
 - a. Used in reference to God - **Lk 2:29; Ac 4:24; Re 6:10**
 - b. Used in reference to Christ - **2 Ti 2:21** (Master); **2 Pe 2:1** (Lord)
- **Stronger than “kurios”, for it speaks of having “absolute” power and authority**

[Who has the power or authority to claim to be my master, my owner? The Christian should answer...]

II. “JESUS,” MY LORD

A. JESUS IS TO BE MY LORD...

1. As He Himself taught His disciples - **Jn 13:13**
 2. The apostle Peter also proclaimed Jesus as Lord
 - a. To the Jews on Pentecost - **Ac 2:36**
 - b. To the Gentiles at Cornelius’ home - **Ac 10:36**
 3. The apostle Paul also proclaimed Jesus as Lord
 - a. By virtue of His death and resurrection - **Ro 14:9**
 - b. To Christians, Jesus is the only Lord - **1 Co 8:6; Ep 4:5**
- **Jesus is the one who is our “kurios”, our “despotes” (our Lord and Master)**

B. THIS RULES OUT ANY OTHER “LORDS”...

1. Such as **my self**
 - a. I.e., my own will - cf. **Ga 2:20**
 - b. No, we must deny self and follow Jesus as Lord - **Lk 9:23-24**
 2. Such as **my flesh**
 - a. I.e., my own fleshly desires - cf. **Ga 5:24**
 - b. No, we must crucify the flesh, and look to Jesus as our example - **Co 3:1-11**
 3. Such as **the world**
 - a. I.e., anything outside my self which would lead me away from the Lord - **Ga 6:14**
 - b. This would include such things as:
 - 1) Work and family - **Lk 14:15-24,25-27**
 - 2) Philosophy and traditions of men - **Co 2:6-10**
 4. Such as **our brethren**
 - a. Certainly we are to submit to one another - cf. **Ep 5:21**
 - b. But some seem to fear their brethren more than they fear the Lord!
 - 1) E.g., watch their language and conduct in the presence of brethren
 - 2) E.g., attend services only to please the brethren, or get them off their back
- **While we may submit to those in authority (e.g., husbands, elders, government), it is because we have made Jesus our “one Lord” above all others!**

[Many Christians live as though their self, their flesh, the world, or their brethren were their “master” or “owner”. It may help to avoid this divided loyalty if we truly make...]

III. JESUS, “MY” LORD

A. THINKING OF JESUS AS “MY” LORD...

1. Thinking of Jesus, not simply as:
 - a) “The” Lord, as easily professed by those who simply accept Jesus **intellectually**
 - b) “Our” Lord, as often professed by those whose acceptance of Jesus is influenced primarily by one’s **environment** (parents, spouses, brethren, etc.)
 2. Thinking of Jesus as “my” Lord”
 - a) Making it a more personal commitment to His authority and power
 - b) Making it more likely that as individuals we will heed what He says - **Lk 6:46**
- **Jesus will not be our true master and Lord unless we view Him as “my” Lord!**

B. ATTITUDE OF JESUS AS “MY” LORD...

1. Involves a disdain for the things of the world - cf. **Ph 3:7-8**
 - a. Such as popularity, prestige, family
 - b. Willing to suffer loss of these things if necessary
 - c. Consider such things as rubbish in contrast to our Lord Jesus
2. Involves a consuming desire to know Christ - cf. **Ph 3:8-11**
 - a. To know Him personally
 - b. To know His righteousness
 - c. To know His power
 - d. To know His sufferings
3. Involves constantly pressing on toward perfection - cf. **Ph 3:12-14**
 - a. Not complacent in one’s service to Christ
 - b. Not satisfied with one’s level of spiritual growth
 - c. Willing to leave the past behind
 - 1) Neither glorying in past accomplishments

- 2) Nor wallowing in past failures
- d. Reaching forward, pressing toward the goal
- **Paul's attitude demonstrates the attitude of one who has truly made Jesus "my" Lord, the attitude of maturity as a disciple of Jesus! - cf. Ph 3:15**

CONCLUSION

1. Such is the attitude of one who really has made Jesus...
 - a. "My" Lord!
 - b. "My" Master!
 - c. "My" Owner!
2. What is Jesus to you...?
 - a. You might acknowledge Him as "the" Lord
 - b. You might join others in praising Him as "our" Lord
 - **Have you submitted to Him such that you can rightly say, "Jesus, MY Lord"?**
3. Jesus would have us accept Him as Lord...
 - a. For He has all authority, and expects us to observe what He commands - cf. **Mt 28:18-20**
 - b. Yet He warned of those who profess His Lordship, but fail to truly demonstrate it - cf. **Mt 7:21-23**

Are you doing the Father's will, and so demonstrating that Jesus is truly "your" Lord?

Jesus Our Shepherd

INTRODUCTION

1. Foretold in Old Testament prophecy is the promise of a Shepherd...
 - a. It would be glad tidings for the cities of Judah - **Isa 40:9-11**
 - b. He would gather Israel as a shepherd does his flock - **Jer 31:10**
 - c. He would feed them, a type of David (who would be his ancestor) - **Ezek 34:23**
2. Revealed in the New Testament is that Jesus is that Shepherd...
 - a. He is the **Good** Shepherd, who will bring other sheep into His fold! - **Jn 10:1-16**
 - b. He is the **Chief** Shepherd, who has other shepherds watching His flock! - **1 Pe 5:4**
 - c. He is the **Great** Shepherd, who through His blood makes us complete! - **He 13:20**
3. The motif of a shepherd is revealing...
 - a. It pictures the sort of blessings enjoyed by those who follow Jesus
 - b. It should remind us of the duties we have as His sheep

[What can we glean from the Scriptures concerning “**Jesus Our Shepherd**”? Certainly there are...]

I. THE BLESSINGS OF JESUS OUR SHEPHERD

A. HE GAVE HIS LIFE FOR US...

1. He laid down His life for His sheep
 - a. As foretold in the Old Testament - **Zech 13:7**; cf. **Mt 26:31**
 - b. As Jesus told His disciples He would do - **Jn 10:11,15**
2. Thus He is able to offer eternal life to His sheep - **Jn 10:28**; cf. **1 Jn 5:11-13**
 - a. Offering security to those who continue to believe
 - b. Such that none can snatch them from the hand of God
 - c. Though one can fall from God’s hand through neglect - **He 3:12-15**; cf. **Re 2:10**

B. HE NOW CARES FOR US...

1. Having called us (through the gospel) - **Jn 10:3**; cf. **2 Th 2:13-14**
2. Having gathered us into His one fold (even Gentiles!) - **Jn 10:16**; cf. **Ep 2:11-22**
3. As our Good Shepherd:
 - a. He knows us - **Jn 10:14,27**; cf. **2 Ti 2:19**
 - b. He feeds us - **Jn 10:9**; cf. **Psa 23:1,2**
 - c. He guides us - **Jn 10:3,4**; cf. **Psa 23:3**
 - d. He cherishes us tenderly - **Isa 40:11**; cf. **Ep 5:25-29**
 - e. He protects and preserves - **Jer 31:10**; **Jn 10:28-29**; cf. **Jude 28-29**

[Wonderful are the blessings of Jesus our Shepherd! Such blessings are prefigured in that most beautiful of psalms (**Psalms 23**).

But what does the Shepherd expect of His sheep...?]

II. OUR DUTIES TO JESUS OUR SHEPHERD

A. HEED HIS VOICE...

1. His sheep hear His voice - **Jn 10:2-3**
 2. His sheep follow Him, for they know His voice - **Jn 10:4**
 3. Thus Jesus expects His sheep to heed His voice
 - a. As proclaimed during His earthly ministry - **Lk 6:46**
 - b. As stated in the Great Commission - **Mt 28:18-20**
 4. Which we do today by heeding the words of His apostles
 - a. To receive them is to receive Him - **Jn 13:20**
 - b. Thus the early church continued steadfastly in their doctrine - **Ac 2:42**
 - c. For they taught the commandments of the Lord - **1 Co 14:37**
- **Are we following the Shepherd by heeding His voice?**

B. HOLD TO HIS FLOCK...

1. There is one flock (or one body) - **Jn 10:16**; cf. **Ep 4:4**
 2. We should strive to maintain the unity of that flock
 - a. For which Jesus prayed - **Jn 17:20-23**
 - b. For which Jesus died - **Ep 2:13-16**
 3. Which we do today by:
 - a. Not heeding the voice of “strangers” (false teachers) - **Jn 10:5,8b**; cf. **2 Jn 9,10**
 - b. Maintaining the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace - **Ep 4:1-3**
- **Are we doing our part to preserve the oneness of His flock?**

C. HELP HIS SHEPHERDS...

1. The Chief Shepherd has shepherds to guide His flock
 - a. They are the elders in a local congregation - **1 Pe 5:1-4**
 - b. Their duty is to oversee and pastor the flock - **Ac 20:17,28**; **1 Pe 5:1-3**
 2. Jesus expects His sheep to respect His shepherds
 - a. To submit to their oversight, make their duty a joyful one - **He 13:17**
 - b. To esteem them highly in love, being at peace - **1 Th 5:12-13**
- **Are we helping or hindering the work of the Lord’s shepherds?**

CONCLUSION

1. Wonderful are the promises for those who follow “**Jesus Our Shepherd**” - cf. **Re 7:13-17**
2. Yet Jesus warned of some who...
 - a. Are not His sheep, for they did not heed His voice - **Jn 10:26-27**
 - b. Though in His flock (kingdom), will one day be cast out - **Mt 13:41-43**; cf. also **Jn 15:1-2,6**

Yes, He described a Day in which the sheep and goats will be parted (**Mt 25:31-34,41**). What side will we be on? It depends on whether we fulfill our duties as His sheep...

The Laying On Of Hands

INTRODUCTION

1. A custom practiced in Bible times was that of “laying on of hands”...
 - a. Observed in Patriarchal times as well as during the Mosaic period
 - b. Administered during the ministry of Jesus as well as during the early church
2. Questions naturally arise regarding this “custom”...
 - a. What was its purpose?
 - b. Was it just a custom of those times, or does it have a role in the church today?
3. In **He 6:1-2**, it is included a part of the “elementary principles of Christ”...
 - a. Along with repentance, faith, baptism, the resurrection and judgment
 - b. Yet one often hears little taught on this subject in some churches

[Perhaps a good place to start is with a survey of its use as found in the Bible, beginning...]

I. IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

A. IN BESTOWING BLESSINGS...

1. As when Jacob laid hands on his grandsons - **Gen 48:14**
2. Apparently intended to convey some beneficial virtue (**ISBE**) - **Gen 48:17-20**

B. IN OFFERING SACRIFICES...

1. Such as peace offerings, sin offerings, and burnt offerings
 - a. Those practiced on normal occasions - **Lev 3:1-2,8,13; 4:4**
 - b. That practiced at the ordination of the Aaronic priesthood - **Lev 8:14,22**
 - b. That practiced at the Levites’ dedication - **Num 8:12**
 2. Such as during the annual day of atonement, by the high priest - **Lev 16:21**
 - a. Laying hands on the head of the live goat (scapegoat)
 - b. Confessing the iniquities of the children of Israel
- **On the day of atonement, the laying on of hands involved actual transference of guilt; on other occasions, the practice may have simply implied consecration**

C. IN ORDAINING TO SERVICE...

1. As in the inauguration of Joshua - **Num 27:18-23**
 2. Already possessing the Spirit, but who would be given the spirit of wisdom - **Num 27:18; cf. Deu 34:9**
- **In this case, one who already demonstrated godliness was blessed further with ability to serve his new role (similar to Ac 6:1-8)**

D. IN RELATION TO JUDGMENT...

1. Witnesses were to lay hands on a blasphemer prior to his stoning - **Lev 24:14**
2. Perhaps to show acceptance of the verdict (**ISBE**)

[Remarkably, this is all that is said about “laying on of hands” in the Old Testament. Yet we see its use continued...]

II. IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

A. DURING THE MINISTRY OF JESUS...

1. Blessed children through laying on of hands with prayer - **Mt 19:13-15**; cf. **Mk 10:13-16**; **Lk 18:15-17**
2. Healed people by the laying on of hands
 - a. Raised Jairus' daughter (though He actually "took her by the hand") - **Mt 9:18,25**
 - b. A few sick people in Nazareth - **Mk 6:5**
 - c. All who came to Him in Capernaum - **Lk 4:40**
 - d. The woman loosed from her infirmity of eighteen years - **Lk 13:13**

B. IN THE LIFE OF THE EARLY CHURCH...

1. The apostles healed by the laying on of hands
 - a. As foretold by Jesus in giving the Great Commission - **Mk 16:15-20**
 - b. As described by Luke in the book of Acts - **Ac 5:12; 28:8**
2. Ananias restored Saul's sight by the laying on of hands - **Ac 9:12,17**
3. Spiritual gifts were imparted by the laying on of hands
 - a. E.g., the Samaritans, by Peter and John - **Ac 8:14-17**
 - b. E.g., the Ephesians, by Paul - **Ac 19:6**
 - c. E.g., Timothy, by prophecy with the eldership - **1 Ti 4:14**
 - d. E.g., Timothy, by Paul - **2 Ti 1:6**
4. Appointment or dedication to service was accompanied with the laying on of hands
 - a. By the apostles in appointing the seven to serve tables - **Ac 6:1-6**
 - b. By prophets and teachers in sending out Paul and Barnabas - **Ac 13:1-3**
5. Caution was given regarding the laying on of hands - **1 Ti 5:22**
 - a. Which some take to refer to the ordination of elders
 - b. While others take to refer to the restoration of elders - cf. **1 Ti 5:19-21**

[To my knowledge, this exhausts what is revealed about "laying on of hands" in the Bible. With this information fresh on our minds, here are some thoughts regarding its use...]

III. IN THE CHURCH TODAY

A. IN SOME RESPECTS, ITS PURPOSE HAS CEASED...

1. There is certainly no need to lay hands on sacrifices as in the Old Testament
 - a. Which sacrifices could not truly remove sin - **He 10:1-4**
 - b. Which sacrifices came to an end with the sacrifice of Christ - **He 10:5-14**
2. The purpose for miraculous spiritual gifts has been fulfilled
 - a. Which was to reveal and confirm the Word - cf. **Mk 16:19-20**; **He 2:3-4**
 - b. Which was designed to be temporary - cf. **1 Co 13:8-10**

B. IN OTHER RESPECTS, ITS SYMBOLISM CAN HAVE MEANING...

1. In ordaining those who serve
 - a. Indicating acceptance and approval of those who have been selected by the congregation - cf. **Ac 6:1-6**; **1 Ti 5:22**
 - b. Beseeking God's blessing and protection on those who serve - cf. **Ac 13:1-3**
 - c. "...the imposition of hands, accompanied by fasting and prayer, was, in this case, as in that of the seven deacons [Ac 6:6], merely their formal separation to the special work to

which they had been called. This, indeed, is sufficiently evident from the context. What they did was doubtless what they had been told to do by the Holy Spirit. But the Holy Spirit simply said to them, ‘*Separate* me Barnabas and Saul *to the work* to which I have called them.’ The fasting, prayer, and imposition of hands was, then, merely their *separation* to this work. It was a ceremony deemed by infinite wisdom suitable to such a purpose; and, therefore, whenever a congregation has a similar purpose to accomplish, they have, in this case, the judgments and will of God, which should be their guide.” - **J. W. McGarvey, commenting on Ac 13:1-3**

2. In praying for those who are sick - cf. **Ja 5:14-15**
 - a. Nothing is said about laying on of hands in this passage
 - b. But its practice could certainly symbolize the blessing from God for which we pray
 - c. “The laying on of hands was accompanied by prayer, the imposition of hands being the outward symbol of the prayer.” - **Neil R. Lightfoot, commenting on He 6:2**

CONCLUSION

1. The Biblical evidence for this practice is rather scarce...
 - a. One tendency can be to make more of the practice than God intends
 - b. Another can be to ignore it all together
2. Based upon what the Bible reveals...
 - a. I believe the practice can have a useful place in the lives of Christians and the church
 - b. Its rich symbolism can have meaning, if for no other purpose
 - 1) In appointing those selected to serve as elders, deacons, etc.
 - 2) In praying for those who are sick

In the absence of such a practice, we are likely to adopt other customs which symbolize and convey similar things as did the laying on of hands (e.g., a handshake, a pat on the back, a hug, a holding of the hands). Why not utilize a Biblical custom to symbolize and convey such things...?

Laying Up Treasure In Heaven

INTRODUCTION

1. In **Ecc 5:10-16**, Solomon described the problem with earthly treasures...
 - a. Money and abundance do not truly satisfy
 - b. The abundance of the rich prevent good sleep, and often hurts the owner
 - c. Riches perish through misfortune, and cannot be taken with us when we die
2. In **Mt 6:19-21**, Jesus commands us to lay up treasure not on earth, but in heaven...
 - a. Likely a Hebrew idiom, in which a contrast is made for the sake of emphasis - cf. **Jn 6:27**
 - b. Not that it is wrong have earthly treasures per se, but our focus should be on laying up treasure in heaven

[Why should our focus be on laying up treasure in heaven? Also, how do we lay up treasure in heaven? In **Mt 6:19-24**, Jesus tells us...]

I. REASONS TO LAY UP TREASURE IN HEAVEN

A. TREASURE ON EARTH IS INSECURE...

1. Moth and rust destroy (material things are perishable)
2. Thieves break in and steal (material things are subject to theft)
3. There is also loss due to inflation, stock devaluation, bankruptcies, faulty investments, etc.

B. TREASURE IN HEAVEN IS SECURE...

1. Neither moth nor rust destroys (our treasures are imperishable) - cf. **1 Pe 1:3-4**
2. Thieves can not break in and steal (our treasures are securely guarded) - cf. **1 Pe 3:4-5**

C. OUR TREASURE IS WHERE OUR HEART WILL BE...

1. That is, where our affections, our hopes, our dreams will be
2. If our treasure is on earth, our hearts will experience much disappointment
 - a. As things for which you have affection decay or are one day destroyed by fire
 - b. As things in which you find your primary joy are suddenly gone through things like theft
3. If our treasure is in heaven, our hearts will not suffer great disappointments
 - a. For our treasure is “incorruptible, undefiled, and does not fade away”
 - b. Nothing can take our treasure away from us, for it is:
 - 1) “reserved in heaven for you”
 - 2) “kept by the power of God through faith”
4. Whatever happens on earth will not devastate us! - e.g., **He 10:32-34**
5. When these words are taken to heart and applied
 - a. The storms of life will not overwhelm us
 - b. Because we’ve built our foundation upon the words of Jesus! - cf. **Mt 7:24-27**

D. TO KEEP OUR EYE GOOD...

1. Understanding the metaphor used by Jesus:
 - a. The “body” likely represents the soul or inner man
 - b. The “eye” likely represents the gaze of the soul or the heart of man
 - c. The word “good” in Greek means “simple, single, uncomplicated”

- d. The word “bad” in Greek means “wicked, evil”
- e. In the Scriptures, the expression “evil eye” is used to mean “envious, covetous” - cf. **Pro 23:6; Mt 20:15; Mk 7:22**
- 2. Explaining the metaphor used by Jesus:
 - a. If the heart or gaze of the soul be “good” (“single” in its love for the things of God), then one is filled with “light” (goodness, righteousness, and truth) - cf. **Ep 5:8-10**
 - b. If the heart or gaze of the soul be “evil” (full of envy, covetousness), then one’s soul is filled with “darkness” (selfishness, wickedness, and falsehood)!
- 3. Thus the need for Jesus’ warning:
 - a. To guard what goes in your eye
 - 1) I.e., what you allow your eyes to dwell upon
 - 2) Remember, there is such a thing as “the lusts of the eyes” (i.e., materialism)
 - b. To be rich toward God, free from covetousness - **Lk 12:13-21**
 - 1) Note Jesus’ warning - **Lk 12:15**
 - 2) Note His conclusion - **Lk 12:21**
- 4. Paul likewise warns of the danger of materialism, or covetousness
 - a. Those who desire to be rich fall - **1 Ti 6:9**
 - 1) Into snares and temptations
 - 2) Into many foolish and harmful lusts
 - 3) To drown in destruction and perdition
 - b. The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil - **1 Ti 6:10**
 - 1) From which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness
 - 2) From which some have pierced themselves with many sorrows

E. TO MAKE GOD OUR MASTER...

- 1. No one can serve two masters - **Mt 6:24**
 - a. A master by definition demands "total loyalty", and we are unable to please two masters at the same time
 - b. Such is certainly true with God - cf. **Exo 34:14**
 - c. Mammon (Aramaic for riches) is evidently no different
- 2. We have to choose between God and mammon
 - a. When wealth is coveted, and becomes the priority in our lives, it becomes a god - cf. **Ep 5:5; Co 3:5**
 - b. So the choice becomes one as to whether we shall worship the One True God, or be “idolaters” following after a false god!
- 3. Choose to serve God!
 - a. As Jesus would later say, “Seek first the kingdom of God” - **Mt 6:33**
 - b. Do this, and God becomes our Master
 - c. Since we can’t serve two masters, this effectively eliminates Mammon from being our “god”!

[For such reasons, Jesus tells us **why** to lay up in treasure in heaven. Jesus also tells us **how** to lay up treasure in heaven...]

II. HOW TO LAY UP TREASURE IN HEAVEN

A. BY GIVING TO THE POOR...

- 1. Jesus connected giving to the poor with laying up treasure on two occasions
 - a. To His disciples - **Lk 12:32-33**

- b. To a rich ruler - **Lk 18:18-27**
- 2. Paul also connected sharing one's wealth with laying up treasure in heaven - **1 Ti 6:17-19**
 - a. To be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share
 - b. Storing up a good foundation for the time to come
 - c. To lay hold on eternal life

B. NOT THAT ETERNAL LIFE CAN BE PURCHASED...

- 1. Salvation is by grace through faith, not of works - **Ep 2:8-9; Ti 3:5**
 - a. We are redeemed by the precious blood of Christ - **1 Pe 1:18-19**
 - b. And as children of God we are joint-heirs with Christ, recipients of every spiritual blessing in Christ - **Ro 8:16-17; Ep 1:3**
- 2. But giving to the poor helps us to lay hold on eternal life
 - a. By freeing our hearts from covetousness (idolatry) - cf. **Ep 5:5**
 - b. By reminding us when our true reward will be received - cf. **Lk 14:12-14**

CONCLUSION

- 1. We are not called to asceticism...
 - a. God wants us to enjoy what we have - **1 Ti 6:17c**; cf. **Ecc 5:18-20**
 - b. Yet proper enjoyment requires a heart for giving - cf. **Ac 20:35**
- 2. Thus we are to work with our hands...
 - a. Not just to provide for our families - **1 Tim 5:8**
 - b. But also for others in need - **Ep 4:28**
- 3. Are we laying up treasure in heaven...?
 - a. Jesus told us **why**
 - b. Jesus (and Paul) also told us **how**

Have you given much thought as to how you can be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share? Store up a good foundation for the time to come, and lay hold on eternal life...!

Let's Make A Deal!

INTRODUCTION

1. The title for this lesson comes from a popular game show on television...
 - a. "Let's Make A Deal!", with Monty Hall
 - b. Some even recorded it on their VCR for later viewing!
2. We're going to borrow the basic concept from this game show...
 - a. To set the stage for our study
 - b. To help illustrate an important point in our lesson

[I want you to imagine that have within my power to offer you some great deals...]

I. LET'S MAKE A DEAL - THE GAME

A. MY FIRST OFFER...

1. I will give each of you **\$100,000** for your car(s) right now!
 2. Would anyone turn this offer down?
- **I doubt it; but before you spend the money, I have another deal to offer you**

B. MY SECOND OFFER...

1. I will give each of you **\$1,000,000** for your car(s), but...
 - a. You must give me back the \$100,000 I just "gave" you
 - b. You must wait one week
 - c. You must leave your car where it is parked right now until next week
 - d. You must be back here next Sunday to receive the money
 2. Would anyone turn this second offer down? I doubt it...
 - a. I suspect everyone would be willing to exchange \$100,000 for \$1,000,000
 - b. Not even the conditions would deter you; somehow you would:
 - 1) Get back home (even walk if you have to)
 - 2) Get along all week without your car
 - 3) Get back here next Sunday, no matter what
- **For the sake of illustration, let's assume everyone accepted the second offer**

C. LET'S ANALYZE THIS...

1. The first offer sounded exciting at first, but paled in comparison to the second offer
 - a. Who would wouldn't want \$100,000 for their car(s)?
 - b. But then the offer wasn't as exciting compared to the second offer
 - 1) \$1,000,000 is worth a lot more
 - 2) Even if you have to wait a week
 - 3) Even if you have the inconvenience of no car for a week
2. By accepting the second offer, you have turned down the first offer:
 - a. An offer of **immediate gain** for a much larger offer of **future gain**
 - b. An offer requiring **no effort or sacrifice** for a much larger offer requiring **much effort and sacrifice**

[With this illustration in mind, let's now talk about two deals in real life...]

II. LET'S MAKE A DEAL - IN REAL LIFE

A. SATAN OFFERS YOU A DEAL...

1. He will give you **immediate** pleasures and rewards
 - a. In regards to the lusts of the flesh (immorality)
 - b. In regards to the lusts of the eyes (materialism)
 - c. In regards to the pride of life (self-glorification)
 2. He requires virtually **no effort** or self-discipline on your part
 - a. If it feels good, do it!
 - b. If it looks good, take it!
 - c. If it sounds good, go for it!
- **The Bible refers to this deal as “the passing pleasures of sin” - cf. He 11:25**

B. GOD OFFERS YOU A DEAL...

1. He will give you **future** pleasures and rewards
 - a. An eternity of bliss
 - b. Far exceeding the pleasures and rewards of this life
 2. He requires **much effort** and sacrifice on your part
 - a. Such as faithful service
 - b. Such as resisting temptation
 - c. Such as enduring persecution
- **The Bible refers to this deal as “eternal life in Christ Jesus” - cf. Ro 6:23**

[With these two “deals” fresh on our minds, let’s make the application...]

III. LET'S MAKE A DEAL - THE APPLICATION

A. MANY ACCEPT SATAN'S DEAL OVER GOD'S...

1. **Why** is this so?
 - a. For the same reason anyone would keep \$100,000 and refuse \$1,000,000
 - b. They fail to appreciate the difference in value
 - c. This failure to appreciate the difference is especially true in real life
 - 1) The promises of Satan last only a lifetime (if that)
 - 2) The promises of God last for eternity - cf. **1 Ti 4:8; Mk 10:28-30**

-- Yet many people literally “sell their souls” to accept the deal Satan offers!
2. **Moses** understood the difference, and made the right choice - **He 11:24-26**
 - a. His choice?
 - 1) “to suffer affliction with the people of God (rather) than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin”
 - 2) “esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt”
 - b. His reason for this choice?
 - 1) “for he looked to the reward”
 - 2) He evaluated the “deals”, and made the right choice!

B. WHAT DEAL HAVE YOU MADE...?

1. Have you accepted the deal made by Satan?
 - a. The path of least resistance, the immediate pleasures of this life?
 - b. You have if you have yet to obey the gospel!

2. Even Christians may have accepted Satan's deal, for I fear there are many...
 - a. Who would have gladly accepted the second deal of \$1,000,000
 - 1) No matter how hard it would be to get home and back again
 - 2) They would not let anything keep them from being here
 - b. Yet do not consider the promise of eternal life worth the same effort
 - 1) They do not make the effort to be at services on Sunday and Wednesday nights
 - 2) They allow many things to hinder their service to God and to their brethren
 - c. Who evidently...
 - 1) Place a higher value on \$1,000,000 than on the gift of eternal life
 - 2) Selling their souls for much less (i.e., to the idols of money, materialism, or just plain laziness) - cf. **Ep 5:3-5**
 - 3) Have accepted the offer of Satan over God's offer!

CONCLUSION

1. My purpose has not been to bestow feelings of guilt, but to remind ourselves...
 - a. That each day we are making choices
 - b. We are choosing to serve either Satan (i.e., Satan) or God

-- **I hoped to illustrate the folly of letting immediate and temporary gratification keep us from a much greater and future reward**
2. **Brethren, let's make a deal...!**
 - a. To esteem the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of the world
 - b. To choose to suffer affliction with the people of God (even if it means assembling more often!) than to enjoy passing pleasures of sin and selfishness
 - c. To keep looking to the reward that God has prepared for His children

Together we can help each other **keep our priorities straight**, and receive the best "deal" that one can make!

The Lord's Supper

INTRODUCTION

1. An act of worship in which we engage each Sunday is **The Lord's Supper...**
 - a. Known also as **The Communion (1 Co 10:16)** and **The Breaking Of Bread (Ac 2:42)**
 - b. Today, some refer to it as **The Eucharist**, from the Greek **eucharisteo**, "giving of thanks", which Christ did at the time of its institution - **Mt 26:26-27**
2. It is a simple act, in which those who are Christians...
 - a. Partake of unleavened bread
 - b. Drink of the fruit of the vine
3. It is an important act, one that we should understand why we do it, lest our participation be...
 - a. Meaningless to us
 - b. Displeasing to God
 - c. Detrimental to us - cf. **1 Co 11:27**

[Therefore it behooves all Christians, especially those new in the faith, to be well acquainted with the meaning and practice of the Lord's Supper. Let's begin by carefully noting...]

I. THE MEANING OF THE SUPPER

A. IT IS A MEMORIAL...

1. Note Paul's account as given by the Lord Himself - **1 Co 11:23-25**
 - a. We eat the bread in memory of His body
 - b. We drink the cup (fruit of the vine) in memory of His blood
2. We therefore commemorate the death of Jesus on the cross - **Mt 26:28**
 - a. Whose death make the new covenant possible - **He 9:16**
 - b. Whose blood was shed for the remission of sins - **Ep 1:7**
- **As the Passover was a memorial commemorating Israel's deliverance from Egypt through the blood of the lambs on the door post, so the Supper is a memorial of our Lord's death who makes our deliverance from the bondage of sin possible**

B. IT IS A PROCLAMATION...

1. We proclaim our faith in the efficacy of the Lord's death - **1 Co 11:26a**
 - a. That His death was indeed for our sins
 - b. If we don't believe He died for our sins, why keep the Supper?
2. We also proclaim our faith in the Lord's return - **1 Co 11:26b**
 - a. For it is to be done "till He comes"
 - b. If we don't believe He is coming, then why keep the Supper?
- **Thus the Lord's Supper looks forward as well as backward, and will ever be observed by His disciples who trust in His redemption and anticipate His return!**

C. IT IS A COMMUNION...

1. A fellowship or sharing in the blood of Christ - **1 Co 10:16a**
 - a. As we partake, we commune with the blood of Christ
 - b. Perhaps in the sense of reinforcing blessings we enjoy through the blood of Christ - cf.

1 Jn 1:7,9

2. A fellowship or sharing in the body of Christ - **1 Co 10:16b-17**
 - a. As we partake, we commune with the body of Christ
 - b. Perhaps in the sense of reinforcing fellowship together in the body of Christ (i.e., the church), as we break bread together
- **The extent to which we share in the body and blood of the Lord as we partake may be uncertain, but dare we neglect whatever may be the benefits of that communion?**

[“**The Lord’s Supper**” certainly has great significance and should not be taken lightly. We do well therefore to consider what the Scriptures reveal about...]

II. THE OBSERVANCE OF THE SUPPER**A. TO BE DONE WITH REVERENCE...**

1. That is, “in a worthy manner” (NKJV) - **1 Co 11:27,29**
 - a. The KJV says “worthily”, which some have misunderstood
 - b. It is an adverb, describing **how** we take it, not whether we are worthy (none are truly worthy)
 2. With respect for the supreme price Jesus paid for our sins
 - a. E.g., the cruel torture and humiliation of His physical body
 - b. E.g., the spiritual anguish suffered as Jesus bore the punishment for our sins (“My God, My God, Why have You forsaken Me?”)
 3. Failure to observe with proper reverence brings condemnation - **1 Co 11:27,29**
 - a. One will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord
 - b. One will eat and drink judgment to himself
- **To make light of this memorial puts one in the same category as those who mocked Him as He hung on the cross!**

B. TO BE DONE WITH SELF-EXAMINATION...

1. Such as reflecting upon one’s spiritual condition - **1 Co 11:28**
 2. Are we living in a manner that shows appreciation for His sacrifice?
 - a. By accepting the grace of God in our lives? - cf. **2 Co 5:18-6:1**
 - b. By living for Jesus who died for us? - cf. **2 Co 5:14-15; Ga 2:20**
 3. Or are we by willful sinning, guilty of having:
 - a. “trampled the Son of God underfoot”?
 - b. “counted the blood by which [we were] sanctified a common thing”?
 - c. “insulted the Spirit of grace”? - cf. **He 10:26-29**
 4. Do we, by refusing to repent of our sins, “crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an shame”? - cf. **He 6:4-6**
- **In one sense, the Supper is a very private matter between a Christian and his or her God; a time to reflect on the past and to resolve for the future**

C. TO BE DONE WITH OTHER CHRISTIANS...

1. There is ample indication the Supper is designed to be **a communal meal**
 - a. The disciples “came together” to break bread - **Ac 20:7**
 - b. When they came together, they were to “wait for one another” - **1 Co 11:33**
 - c. Partaking together of “one bread”, they demonstrate they are “one bread and one body” - **1 Co 10:17**
- **We commune not just with the Lord, but with one another**

2. For this reason I personally question such practices as:
 - a. Observing the Supper by one's self when camping or traveling
 - b. Observing the Supper on Sunday night when just one or a couple of people in the congregation are partaking
 - c. Taking the elements to the sick or shut-in who were unable to assemble

-- **While such issues may fall in the realm of opinion, let's not forget that the Supper builds fellowship with one another as well as with the Lord!**

D. TO BE DONE OFTEN...

1. The Biblical evidence is that it was done weekly
 - a. Christians came together on the first day of the week to “break bread” - **Ac 20:7**
 - b. Other indications of a weekly observance:
 - 1) The church at Corinth was coming together to eat the Lord's Supper, though they were abusing it - cf. **1 Co 11:17-22**
 - 2) Instructions concerning the collection suggest their coming together was on the first day of the week - cf. **1 Co 16:1-2**
 - c. Following the divinely approved example of Christians in the Bible, we know God approves of a weekly observance on the first day of the week
2. The earliest historical evidence outside the Bible confirms the day and frequency
 - a. **The Didache** (ca. 95 A.D.) indicates Christians were to come together on the first day of the week to break bread - **Didache 14:1**
 - b. **Justin Martyr** (ca. 150 A.D.) records how Christians assembled on Sunday and partook of the Supper - **Apology I, 67**
 - c. “...the early church writers from Barnabas, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, to Clement of Alexandria, Origen and Cyprian, all with one consent, declare that the church observed the first day of the week. They are equally agreed that the Lord's Supper was observed weekly, on the first day of the week.” - **B. W. Johnson, People's New Testament**
3. Religious scholars confirm this was the practice
 - a. “As we have already remarked, the celebration of the Lord's Supper was still held to constitute an essential part of divine worship every Sunday, as appears from Justin Martyr (A.D. 150)...” - **Augustus Neander (Lutheran), History Of Christian Religion And Church, Vol. I, p. 332**
 - b. “This ordinance (the Lord's Supper) seems to have been administered every Lord's day; and probably no professed Christian absented themselves...” - **Thomas Scott (Presbyterian), Commentary On Acts 20:7**
 - c. This also is an important example of weekly communion as the practice of the first Christians.” - **A. C. Hervey (Episcopalian), Commentary On Acts 20:7**
 - d. “It is well known that the primitive Christians administered the Eucharist (the Lord's Supper) every Lord's day.” - **P. Doddridge (Congregationalist), Notes On Acts 20:7**
4. Some believe that a weekly observance diminishes the importance of the Supper
 - a. Which is why they may do it monthly, quarterly, or annually
 - b. But does the frequent practice of:
 - 1) **Assembling** diminishing its value and importance?
 - 2) **Singing praises** and **offering prayers** devalue their benefits?
 - 3) **Preaching** and **studying God's Word** decrease their significance to our lives?

-- **Our spiritual lives are dependent upon the value and benefits of our Lord's death on the cross; a weekly observance of the memorial helps us to live appreciatively and accordingly!**

CONCLUSION

1. **“The Lord’s Supper”** is a very special memorial of His death for our sins...
 - a. Instituted by Jesus Himself, He asked His disciples to do it in His memory
 - b. Jesus told His disciples that He would not eat of the elements again until:
 - 1) “...that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom.” - **Mt 26:29**
 - 2) “...that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.” - **Mk 14:25**
 - 3) “...it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God.” - **Lk 22:16**
 - 4) “...the kingdom of God shall come.” - **Lk 22:18**
 - c. There are two plausible explanations for what Jesus means:
 - 1) Some think it refers to Jesus having fellowship with us as we observe the Lord’s Supper in the church, which is His kingdom - cf. **1 Co 10:16-17**
 - 2) Others propose that it refers to the special communion we will have with Jesus in His Father’s kingdom, spoken often in terms of a heavenly feast - cf. **Isa 25:6-8; Mt 8:11; 22:2-14; Lk 14:15-24; Re 19:9**
2. The first Christians **“continued steadfastly”** in its observance...
 - a. Just as they did in the apostles’ doctrine, fellowship and prayer - **Ac 2:42**
 - b. Coming together on the first day of the week for that very purpose - **Ac 20:7**
3. Christians today should never lose sight of its significance for us...
 - a. A **constant reminder** of the great sacrifice Jesus paid for our sins
 - b. A **communion or sharing** of the body and blood of the Lord
 - c. A **time for self-examination and rededication** of our service to the Lord
 - d. A **means for building fellowship** with one another in the body of Christ

May such thoughts encourage us to never neglect opportunities we have to observe the Lord’s Supper, but to continue steadfastly and in so doing **“proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes.”**

The Lostness Of The Lost

INTRODUCTION

1. Seemingly absent in many churches and among Christians today is a strong concern for the lost...
 - a. Manifested by lack of personal evangelism
 - b. Evidenced by failure to actively support foreign evangelism
2. It is as though many have adopted the doctrine of universalism...
 - a. That many, if not all, people will ultimately be saved
 - b. That all sincere people, no matter their religion, will go to heaven

[Do we find ourselves not concerned for the souls of those who are lost? If so, then let Jesus and His apostles remind us of “**The Lostness Of The Lost**”...]

I. AS PROCLAIMED BY JESUS

A. IN HIS SERMON ON THE MOUNT...

1. Jesus spoke of the reality of hell - **Mt 5:22,29-30**
2. He warned that few will find the way that leads to life - **Mt 7:13-14**
3. Even many religious people who believe in Him will find themselves lost - **Mt 7:21-23**
- **Did Jesus not teach that most, even the religious, will be lost?**

B. IN HIS PARABLES...

1. Warning that many in His kingdom will be lost - **Mt 13:41-43**
2. Speaking of the separation of the wicked from the just - **Mt 13:49-50**
- **Did Jesus not teach even many in His kingdom will be lost?**

C. IN HIS GREAT COMMISSION...

1. Commanding His apostles to preach of salvation and condemnation - **Mk 16:15-16**
2. Requiring that repentance be preached in His name to all nations - **Lk 24:46-47**
- **Why give such a charge, unless Jesus believed in “The Lostness Of The Lost”?**

[Jesus not only proclaimed “**The Lostness Of The Lost**”, but also made it clear that **He is the only way** to God and salvation (cf. **Jn 14:6**). Note also the lostness of the lost...]

II. AS PROCLAIMED BY HIS APOSTLES

A. PETER...

1. Calling on the need to repent - **Ac 3:19**
2. Claiming salvation only in the name of Jesus - **Ac 4:10-12**
3. Who wrote of judgment and the scarcity of salvation - **1 Pe 4:17-18**
4. Who described the fiery judgment of the ungodly, thus the need for repentance - **2 Pe 3:7-12**
- **Peter clearly believed in “The Lostness Of The Lost”**

B. PAUL...

1. Who also preached of judgment, and the need for all to repent - **Ac 17:30-31**
2. Who wrote of God’s wrath, the need for mercy, and the judgment to come - **Ro 1:18; 2:4-11;**

3:23; 14:10-12; 2 Co 5:10

3. Who warned of the end of those who do not obey the gospel - **2 Th 1:7-9**
- **Paul clearly proclaimed “The Lostness Of The Lost”**

C. JOHN...

1. Who wrote that eternal life is only in the Son (Jesus) - **1 Jn 5:11-13**
2. Who taught that we must abide in the doctrine of Christ to have God - **2 Jn 9**
3. Who foresaw the judgment, and the terrible end of the wicked - **Re 20:11-15; 21:8**
- **Even John, “the apostle of love”, believed in “The Lostness Of The Lost”!**

[Who can deny that Jesus and His apostles believed and taught that people are lost, and that a terrible end awaits those who do not repent and obey the gospel of Christ?

What then, should be evident among Christians today who truly believe in “**The Lostness Of The Lost**”...?]

III. AS BELIEVED BY HIS DISCIPLES

A. THEY TAKE THEIR OWN SALVATION SERIOUSLY...

1. As exemplified by the apostle Paul - cf. **1 Co 9:24-27; Ph 3:12-14**
2. Growing in grace and knowledge, as instructed by Peter - cf. **2 Pe 3:17-18; 1:5-11**
- **Does concern for your own salvation reflect belief in “The Lostness Of The Lost”?**

B. THEY ARE CONCERNED FOR THE SALVATION OF OTHERS...

1. They will have compassion for the lost, like Jesus and Paul - cf. **Mt 9:35-36; Ro 10:1-4**
2. Such compassion, accompanied by a knowledge the lostness of others, will move them to act like Jesus and Paul did - cf. **Mt 9:37-38; 10:1,5-7; 2 Co 5:10-11**
3. They will either go to the lost themselves, or send others to go - cf. **Ro 10:14-15**
- **Does your concern for others’ salvation reflect belief in “The Lostness Of The Lost”?**

CONCLUSION

1. Certainly the gospel of Christ is not all “fire, hell, and damnation”...
 - a. It is good news of God’s grace, love, and mercy to sinners - **1 Ti 2:3-6**
 - b. Whatever delay there may seem to be regarding the Lord’s return is due to God’s desire that all be saved - **2 Pe 3:9**
2. But neither is the gospel of Christ a doctrine of universal salvation...
 - a. In which a benign God accepts everyone as they are with no need to repent
 - b. In which there is no compelling need to share the gospel of salvation to others

If we are to be properly motivated to save others, we need to be moved not only by the love of Christ, but also by a proper understanding of “**The Lostness Of The Lost**”...

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences.” - 2 Co 5:10-11

Love Your Enemies

INTRODUCTION

1. One of the more challenging commands given by Jesus is to **love your enemies**...
 - a. Given in His sermon on the mount - **Mt 5:43-44**
 - b. Again in His sermon on the plain - **Lk 6:27-28,35**
2. Yet when taken to heart and applied properly, loving your enemies can..
 - a. Bless and transform your own life
 - b. Truly make this world a better place

[Let's examine Jesus' command to love your enemies more closely by first asking...]

I. WHO IS YOUR ENEMY?

A. ANYONE WHO CURSES YOU...

1. Who speaks ill about you or to you - **Mt 5:44; Lk 6:28**
2. Like Shimei did to David - cf. **2Sa 16:5-8,13**

B. ANYONE WHO HATES YOU...

1. Who for some reason despises you - **Mt 5:44; Lk 6:27**
2. For either racial, political, religious, or personal reasons - e.g., **Jn 15:18-19**

C. ANYONE WHO SPITEFULLY USES YOU...

1. Who abuses, treats spitefully, falsely accuses you - **Mt 5:44; Lk 6:28**
2. To mistreat you in any way, like they did Jesus - **Mt 27:27-30**

D. ANYONE WHO PERSECUTES YOU...

1. Who prosecutes and pursues with repeated acts of enmity (**WordStudy**) - **Mt 5:44**
2. Like Saul of Tarsus (Paul) did the Christians - **Ac 8:3; 9:1-2; 22:4; 26:9-11; Ga 1:13**

[Our enemy can be a family member, neighbor, co-worker, fellow-citizen, or government representative (local or foreign). In other words, just about anyone who does not like us. Now let's ask...]

II. WHY LOVE YOUR ENEMY?

A. TO BE LIKE GOD...

1. To be sons of our Father in heaven - **Mt 5:45,48**
2. Who is kind to evil and unthankful men - **Lk 6:35-36; cf. Ro 5:8,10; Col 1:21**

B. TO BE UNLIKE SINNERS...

1. Who love those who love them - **Mt 5:46-47; Lk 6:32-33**
2. Which is human nature, but we are to be partakers of divine nature - cf. **2Pe 1:4; Ep 5:1-2**

C. TO OVERCOME EVIL...

1. Not letting evil overcome you - **Ro 12:20-21**
 - a. "I will never let another man ruin my life by making me hate him." - **George**

Washington Carver

- b. “Those who hate you don’t win unless you hate them - and then you destroy yourself.”
- **Richard Nixon**
- 2. Overcoming evil by doing good - **Ro 12:20-21**
 - a. “Am I not destroying my enemies when I make friends of them?” - **Abraham Lincoln**
 - b. “Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into friend.” - **M. L. King, Jr.**

[The ultimate goal should be to transform our enemies into brethren (cf. **Ro 10:1**). Is that not what God did with us? So let us now ask...]

III. HOW TO LOVE YOUR ENEMY?

A. BY BLESSING THEM...

- 1. As commanded by Jesus, Paul, and Peter - **Mt 5:44; Ro 12:14; 1Pe 3:9**
- 2. The word “bless” here means to “speak well of” or “speak well to” - **Barnes**

B. BY DOING GOOD TO THEM...

- 1. As taught in both Covenants - **Exo 23:4-5; Mt 5:44; Lk 6:27; Ga 6:10**
- 2. Which has the potential of transforming our enemies - **Pro 25:21-22; e.g., 2Ki 6:22-23**

C. BY PRAYING FOR THEM...

- 1. As Jesus taught - **Mt 5:44; Lk 6:28**
- 2. As Jesus and His disciples exemplified - **Lk 23:34; Ac 7:60; Ro 10:1**

D. WITH ACTIVE GOOD WILL...

- 1. Which is the meaning of the word “love” (Gr., **agape**)
- 2. Beautifully defined by Paul - **1Co 13:4-8** (imagine treating enemies like this!)

CONCLUSION

- 1. We **are not** commanded to love our enemies **with affection in our hearts...**
 - a. Experienced in families (Gr., **storge**)
 - b. Expressed among friends (Gr., **phileo**)
 - c. Especially with brethren (Gr., **philadelphia**)
- 2. We **are** commanded to love our enemies **with an act of the will...**
 - a. Displaying active good will toward them (Gr., **agape**)
 - b. Blessing them, doing to good them, praying for them

However, where **agape** love is consistently shown it is not unusual for **phileo** love to gradually develop. Even if not, we still have the duty and privilege to be “sons of the Most High”...

For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. - Tit 3:3-7

Making Wise Choices

INTRODUCTION

1. The Old Testament provides valuable lessons for the Christian - **1 Co 10:11**
2. One such lesson is the importance of “**Making Wise Choices**” in our lives...
 - a. Lot made a choice as to where to live, and as a result he experienced:
 - 1) War and kidnapping - **Gen 14**
 - 2) Oppression and torment by the ungodly citizens of Sodom - **2 Pe 2:7-8**
 - 3) Loss of all his possessions, death of his wife, and incest with his daughters - **Gen 19**
 - b. David chose to commit adultery with Bathsheba, and as a consequence he suffered:
 - 1) The death of his infant son - **2 Sam 12**
 - 2) A daughter molested by her half-brother - **2 Sam 13**
 - 3) That son killed by her vengeful brother - **2 Sam 13**
 - 4) A rebellion led by that son, who shamed him publicly, and whose death brought even more grief to David - **2 Sam 15-18**
3. With Lot and David illustrating the need for “**Making Wise Choices**”, let’s consider...
 - a. Some choices that greatly affect our lives
 - b. Suggestions for making wise choices
 - c. What to do when we have made the wrong choice

[We begin with a review of...]

I. CHOICES WHICH GREATLY AFFECT OUR LIVES

A. CHOOSING JESUS...

1. Will you follow Jesus or not?
 - a. Will you become His disciple?
 - b. Or will you refuse to accept His gracious offer of salvation - **Mt 11:28-30**
2. This one decision will affect your life more than any other!
 - a. It will determine your place in eternity
 - b. It will have a bearing on every other decision you make
 - 1) As a disciple, you will be concerned with doing His will
 - 2) As a disciple, you will not simply “do your own thing” - **Mt 28:18-20**

B. CHOOSING A CAREER...

1. Even from a worldly viewpoint, your choice is important
 - a. The job market is always changing
 - b. The wrong choice could lead to financial ruin or fiscal hardship
2. More importantly, the choice can have a lasting effect on:
 - a. Your marriage and family
 - b. Your service to God
3. Make the choice to honor God first, and you will be blessed - **Mt 6:33**
4. Make money the primary factor in your decision, and destruction will follow - **1 Ti 6:6-10**

C. CHOOSING A MATE...

1. This choice will determine to a great extent your degree of happiness - **Pro 12:4**
2. It will have a permanent bearing on your children and their emotional well-being
 - a. You may think you can simply divorce a person if they turn out to be a bad choice
 - b. But once you have children, there is no way to reverse the choice you made as to who is the mother or father of your children!
 - c. The children are not unaffected by the violence of divorce - cf. **Mal 2:16**

D. CHOOSING YOUR FRIENDS...

1. Having close friends can be a wonderful blessing - cf. **Pro 17:17**
2. But the wrong friends can be a curse - cf. **Pro 12:26; 1 Co 15:33**

E. CHOOSING WHERE TO LIVE...

1. It was this choice where Lot made his mistake
 - a. It appeared to be a sound business decision - **Gen 13:10-11**
 - b. But it was a poor moral decision - **Gen 13:13**
 2. Upon what basis do we choose where to live?
 - a. Is it based solely on how much of house we can afford?
 - b. Is it based upon the location to work, school, etc.?
 - c. Do we consider whether it will help or hinder our service to God and His church?
- **There may be some modern-day “Sodoms” and “Gomorrahs” to avoid!**

[For every action there is a reaction, and for every choice there is a consequence. To increase the likelihood that our choices will have good consequences, here are a few...]

II. SUGGESTIONS FOR MAKING WISE CHOICES

A. ASK GOD FOR WISDOM...

1. He promises to give wisdom to those who ask in faith - **Ja 1:5-8**
 2. Asking for wisdom requires diligence - **Pro 2:1-9**
- **Fill your prayers with requests for wisdom to make wise choices!**

B. ASK OTHERS FOR ADVICE...

1. There is safety in having many counselors - **Pro 11:14**
 2. There is wisdom in heeding the counsel of others - **Pro 12:15**
 3. Two great sources for counsel:
 - a. The Bible itself, especially a book like Proverbs
 - b. Older, mature Christians
- **Don't hesitate to ask others what they would do!**

C. COMMIT YOUR CHOICES TO THE LORD...

1. Trusting that you have made choices pleasing to Him, put them in His hands - **Psa 37:5-6, 23-26**
 2. Make your choices with the understanding, “if the Lord wills” - **Ja 4:13-15**
 3. One might even ask the Lord that if a choice is not according to His will...
 - a. He might frustrate the carrying out of the choice
 - b. Or to otherwise show you what is His will
- **Include God in your decision making, if you wish to make wise choices!**

[There will be times when it becomes apparent that we made poor choices, even wrong ones. What can we do to avoid making matters worse...?]

III. RESPONDING TO WRONG CHOICES

A. LEARN FROM THE MISTAKES OF OTHERS...

1. Do what **Lot** did: **Heed and flee!**
 - a. Heed the Word of God
 - b. Do what you now know to be right without reservation (remember Lot's wife!)
2. Do what **Peter** did: **Repent and serve!**
 - a. Repent, if sin is involved (as when Peter denied Christ)
 - b. Serve the Lord with what time you have left in this life
3. Do what **Paul** did: **Accept and live!**
 - a. Accept the forgiveness Jesus provides - cf. **1 Ti 1:12-16**
 - b. Determine to live for the Lord to the best of your ability - cf. **Ph 3:13-14**

B. THE WRONG THING TO DO...

1. **Continue** - remain in the choice you've made because of pride, or some other reason!
2. **Wallow** - just feel sorry for yourself over your guilt or loss!

CONCLUSION

1. May the examples of such men like Lot and David...
 - a. Teach us the importance of **"Making Wise Choices"**
 - b. Serve as a warning not to make our decisions lightly
2. May we ever be open to the wisdom from God and counsel of others as we make such choices as:
 - a. Our careers
 - b. Our spouses
 - c. Our friends
 - d. Where we will live
3. Have you made the most important decision you will ever face in this life...?
 - a. The decision which will determine your eternal destiny?
 - b. The decision to follow Jesus as your Lord and Savior?

Why not decide today to follow Jesus, and become His disciple? - cf. **Mt 28: 19-20; Ac 2:36-41**

The Measure Of A Strong Christian

INTRODUCTION

1. When Samuel was sent to anoint the new king of Israel, he learned that God's measure of a person was different than man's - **1 Sam 16:6-7**
2. The same is true today...God's measure of a Christian is often different than that applied by many people
3. In this lesson...
 - a. I want to review the measure often used by brethren to evaluate one another
 - b. And then consider what is God's measure, which ought to be ours as well

[We begin with...]

I. THE MEASURE OFTEN USED BY BRETHREN

A. WE OFTEN MEASURE CHRISTIANS BY...

1. Their **attendance** at the services of the church
 - a. If they attend **all** of the services, then they must be "faithful brethren"
 - b. If they attend **some** of the services, they must be "weak brethren"
2. Their **participation** in church-related activities
 - a. If they participate in **all** of the activities...
 - 1) Such as Bible classes
 - 2) Or Evangelism classes, Visitation programs, etc.
 -- Then they truly must be "strong brethren"
 - b. But if for **any** reason they do not participate in all that the church offers, their "commitment" is certainly suspect!
3. Their **leadership** abilities
 - a. Men are considered strong Christians if they...
 - 1) Lead singing, prayers, help serve the Lord's Supper
 - 2) Teach classes, preach sermons
 - b. Women are considered strong Christians if they...
 - 1) Teach children's classes, women's classes
 - 2) Prepare communion, clean the building

B. THE PROBLEM WITH THIS MEASURE...

1. It tends to measure the **outside** of man
 - a. People can do all these things, and still be spiritually destitute on the **inside** (I have known some like this)
 - b. "Hypocrites" can exist very comfortably with such a measure!
 - c. Brethren can remain in "spiritual immaturity" if this is the only measure given to them
2. It tends to neglect the multifaceted nature of the body of Christ
 - a. Especially if emphasis is on the public functions of the church
 - b. And if emphasis is placed on one function over another (e.g., teaching over service) - cf. **Ro 12:3-8**

[Because of these “tendencies,” the use of such measures is wrought with the potential of misjudging and condemning one another. This is something we want to avoid (**Ja 4:11-12**). What, then, ought to be the measure of a strong Christian?]

II. THE MEASURE OF A STRONG CHRISTIAN

A. IS FOUND IN SCRIPTURES SUCH AS...

1. **Ga 5:22-23**
 - a. Here are qualities of man who is truly **spiritual**
 - b. This is evidence that is truly led by the Spirit of God
 - c. Now one who is truly “spiritual” will certainly be involved in various “activities” of the church - e.g., **Ga 6:1-2**
 - d. But this measure requires that the “inner man” be changed first!
2. **Co 3:12-17**
 - a. Again, this measure begins with the “inner man”
 - b. But it carries over to our relationship with one another in such activities as Bible study and singing
3. Consider other passages, such as those given to:
 - a. **Preachers**
 - 1) One may preach a great sermon, but what of his personal life? - **1 Ti 6:11; 2 Ti 2:22**
 - 2) He may be willing to contend for the faith, but in the right spirit? - **1 Ti 6:12; 2 Ti 2:23-25**
 - b. **Bishops (elders, pastors)**
 - 1) They may be married and have children who believe - cf. **Ti 1-5**
 - 2) But are they quick to anger, unable to teach others? - cf. **Ti 1:7-9**
 - c. **Members, young and old**
 - 1) They may be attending the services faithfully
 - 2) But is their conduct becoming their stage in life? - cf. **Ti 2:1-8**

B. THE CHALLENGES OF SUCH A MEASURE...

1. It emphasizes the reformation of the **inside** of a person first, trusting that the outside will naturally follow
 - a. I.e., it requires “transformation,” when conformation would be a lot easier
 - b. Such transformation takes more time than simple conformation
 - 1) Time some brethren may not wish to take
 - 2) Either for themselves, or for those whom they want to quickly conform to their ideas and programs
 - 3) E.g., trying to get involved in teaching before one is ready, just to make oneself look good - cf. **Ja 3:1-2**
2. This is a measure that often only the **Lord** sees
 - a. We see each other only for a short time each week
 - 1) It is easy to “put on a front”, to pretend to be something we are not
 - 2) But the Lord sees us as we really are!
 - b. On the other hand, brethren who may seem “passive” when we are together may be extremely “active” when apart
 - 1) Active in their warfare against personal sin
 - 2) Active in their daily service to others in the name of Christ
 - Activity which we may never see, but the Lord knows!

CONCLUSION

1. The purpose in discussing the true measure of a Christian...
 - a. Has **not** been so we can go around and judge others
 - b. But to suggest caution in how we measure others!
 - c. And to make sure that we are properly measuring our own selves!
2. The statement of the Lord to Samuel still applies today:

“Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.” (1 Sam 16:7)

Let's be sure the “measure” by which we examine ourselves is the same one used by the Lord!

The Measure Of A Strong Church

INTRODUCTION

1. The practice of assembling with a church is important - **He 10:24-25**
 - a. Naturally, we hope the congregation we assemble with is a strong one
 - b. But such may not always be the case
 - 1) In NT times, there were many good congregations
 - 2) But some were not what they should have been - e.g., **Re 2:4, 14-15; 3:2,15-17**
2. What, then, is the **measure** of a strong church?
 - a. Some might consider it on the basis of:
 - 1) The building (or lack thereof); the number of programs, classes, etc.
 - 2) How smoothly it runs as an organization, with its committees, departments, etc.
 -- But a congregation can have all these things and still be dead!
 - b. I suggest a better measure is to think of the church in terms used in the Bible to describe it...
 - 1) Such as **body, family, temple, kingdom, bride**
 - 2) Granted, these are terms used to describe the **universal church**; but I believe these figures of speech can help us to properly measure the strength of a **local congregation**

[In other words, a **strong church** is one that...]

I. FUNCTIONS LIKE A BODY

A. THE CHURCH IS THE BODY OF CHRIST...

1. Note Paul's description - **1 Co 12:27**
2. As such, it is an organism, rather than simply an organization
3. You can have organization, but still not have life!
 - a. E.g., a dead body
 - b. "the foot bone's connected to the leg bone..." can just as easily be said of a corpse as with a living body

B. THE BODY OF CHRIST HAS MANY MEMBERS...

1. Not all have the same function - **Ro 12:3-8**
2. Every member must appreciate his or her own function - **1 Co 12:14-19**
3. Every member must appreciate the function of others - **1 Co 12:20-22**

C. THE BODY MUST HAVE MEMBERS WHO FULFILL THEIR FUNCTION...!

1. Growth occurs when "every part does its share" - **Ep 4:15-16**
2. We understand that a chain is as strong as its weakest link
3. So a body's strength is affected by weak and inactive members!
 - a. Injury or physical handicaps limit the ability of the body to perform
 - b. Others may try to help, but that limits what other work they would normally do

[How each of us functions as a member of the body affects the strength of this congregation!
A strong church is also one which...]

II. LOVES LIKE A FAMILY

A. THE CHURCH IS THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD...

1. I.e., it is the “family” of God - cf. **1 Ti 3:15**
2. Do we think of each other as family? We should! - cf. **1 Ti 5:1-2**

B. A STRONG FAMILY IS ONE WHERE THERE IS...

1. Concern and care for one another
2. Love for one another - e.g., the church at Thessalonica **1 Th 4:9-10; 2 Th 1:3**

C. TO DEVELOP A SENSE OF FAMILY REQUIRES...

1. A willingness to get to know one another
 2. Taking advantage of opportunities to spend time together
- **As congregations grow, it becomes harder to maintain a sense of family**

[But **how well we love one another** will be a true measure of the strength of this church! A strong church will also be one that...]

III. PRAISES LIKE A TEMPLE

A. TEMPLES OF OLD WERE BUILT TO GLORIFY...

1. The design of the structures were designed to praise the being to which they were dedicated
2. The sacrifices and services rendered in the worship also

B. THE CHURCH IS GOD’S TEMPLE TODAY...

1. We are the **temple**, and **priests** who offer **spiritual sacrifices** - cf. **1 Co 3:16-17; 1 Pe 2:5**
2. Our purpose: to proclaim the praises of God - **1 Pe 2:9-10**

C. HOW DO WE OFFER SACRIFICES AND PRAISE TO GOD...?

1. By lifting our **voices** in song and prayer - **He 13:15**
2. By doing **good deeds** - **He 13:16**
3. By offering **ourselves** as living sacrifices - **Ro 12:1-2**

[**How each of us praise God with our voices, body and service** is a true measure of this church, Let's be careful not to despise the name of the God we serve as a temple and priests (cf. **Mal 1:6-8**). And then consider that a strong church is one that...]

IV. SUBMITS LIKE A KINGDOM

A. AS THE CHURCH, WE ARE IN THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST...

1. As were the Colossians - **Co 1:13**
2. As was John the apostle - **Re 1:9**

B. A KINGDOM SUGGESTS ALLEGIANCE AND OBEDIENCE TO A KING...

1. Unfortunately, many churches are more like the kingdom of England
 - a. Where the king (or queen) is only a symbolical figure head
 - b. The true decision-making power is in parliament
2. But a strong church is one in which the citizens (members) submit to Christ as King in reality - **Co 3:17; cf. Ac 2:36**

- a. Where things are done as He directs, by His authority
- b. Where we follow His commands, and not make up our own rules

[**How each person submits to the Lordship of Jesus Christ** is a true measure any congregation.
Finally, a strong church is one that...]

V. IS PURE AS A BRIDE

A. **THE CHURCH IS THE BRIDE OF CHRIST...**

1. Paul wrote of the church as a bride - **2 Co 11:1-2**
 - a. One that he had betrothed to Christ
 - b. One that has a responsibility to be pure and chaste
2. Christ thinks of His church in the same way - **Ep 5:25-29**
 - a. He offered Himself to enable her to be pure and holy
 - b. He did this out of His great love for her!
3. John was told of the future marriage - **Re 19:6-9**
 - a. Note that the bride **has made herself ready**
 - b. She was adorned by the righteous acts of the saints

B. **AS THE BRIDE, WE MUST MAINTAIN OUR PURITY AND ADORNMENT...!**

1. By being cleansed through the blood of Christ...
 - a. First in baptism - **Ac 2:38; 22:16**
 - b. Then in confessing our sins - **1 Jn 1:9**
2. We also maintain our purity...
 - a. By our **righteous acts** - **Re 19:8**
 - b. By abstaining from unrighteous deeds - cf. **Ep 5:3-5**

CONCLUSION

1. Such is **The Measure Of A Strong Church**, one that...
 - a. Functions like a Body
 - b. Loves like a Family
 - c. Praises like a Temple
 - d. Submits like a Kingdom
 - e. Is pure as a Bride
2. How each person does his or her part will have an effect on the measure of this church...
 - a. We may have the best organization, and all the outwards signs of a strong congregation
 - b. But we may be just like the church at **Sardis** (“...you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.”) - **Re 3:1**

Are **all of us** doing what we can (indeed, what we must) to make the church strong in the eyes of the Lord?

Music In New Testament Worship - Part One

Types Of Worship In The New Testament

INTRODUCTION

1. The example of Nadab and Abihu serves as a very important example for us today in regards to rendering worship to God...
 - a. When they offered in worship something the Lord had not commanded, it was taken by the Lord as a sign of disrespect for His Holiness - **Lev 10:1-3**
 - b. Such examples were written for our learning - cf. **1 Co 10:11**
2. As children of God ...
 - a. We are to be holy before the Holy One who called us - cf. **1 Pe 1:14-16**
 - b. Therefore it is equally important that we treat God as holy!
 - c. This we can do in our worship by doing exactly as He instructs in His Word!
3. To be sure that we do this in regards to our **music in worship**, I would like for us to consider what the NT has to say about...
 - a. The nature of worship in general
 - b. And especially about the music in NT worship

[In this lesson, we will investigate what the NT says about worship in general. Beginning with the fact that there are different ...]

I. TYPES OF WORSHIP IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

A. "TRUE" WORSHIP...

1. Referred to by Jesus in **Jn 4:20-24**
2. This is the type of worship expected by God today ("an hour is coming, and **now is**")
3. Since this concerns us personally, we shall deal with it in more detail later

B. "VAIN" WORSHIP...

1. Referred to by Jesus in **Mt 15:7-9**
2. This worship is the result of:
 - a. Following traditions of men and ignoring the commands of God on a particular subject
 - b. Also, when worship is not done "from the heart"

C. "IGNORANT" WORSHIP...

1. Referred to by Paul in **Ac 17:22-23**
2. This is worship offered in the absence of a knowledge of God's will concerning who He is and how He is to be worshipped

D. "WILL" (SELF-IMPOSED) WORSHIP...

1. Referred to by Paul in **Co 2:20-23** (KJV)
2. This worship, closely aligned with **vain** worship:
 - a. Is the result of doing what **we** like and **we** think is good
 - b. But not taught by God in His Word (cf. Nadab & Abihu)

[It should be evident, then, that not just **any** worship is acceptable to God! There are different kinds that can be offered, but only **one** is acceptable. Since God will only accept “**true**” **worship**, we had better understand what is involved ...]

II. THE MEANING OF “TRUE” WORSHIP

A. AS DEFINED BY JESUS...

1. “the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth” - **Jn 4:23**
2. But what is meant by the phrase “in spirit and truth”?
3. Notice first the contrast being made by Jesus - cf. **Jn 4:19-24**
 - a. The Jews had been worshiping correctly by going to Jerusalem
 - b. But now the time was coming when place was not important (as it was in the OT)
4. Thus the contrast is between OT and NT worship!
 - a. Somehow, OT worship had not been “in spirit and truth”
 - b. But NT worship would be!

[The contrast becomes more evident as we define what is meant to worship “in spirit and in truth”]

B. WORSHIPPING GOD “IN SPIRIT”...

1. Some understand this to mean “to do so with sincerity, from the heart”
 - a. But this does not fit in with the idea that Jesus is making a contrast between OT and NT worship
 - b. For sincerity was required just as much under the OT - **Deu 6:4-7; Isa 1:10-18**
2. A better interpretation is that to worship in spirit means to offer “**spiritual worship**”
 - a. In contrast to worship that is physical or fleshly
 - b. This contrast is in harmony with the context
 - 1) Jesus began by saying “God is Spirit”
 - 2) Therefore the worship of Him is to be “spiritual”, that is, more in keeping with His nature
 - c. This interpretation is in harmony with what we learn elsewhere about the contrast between OT and NT worship
 - 1) From He 9:1-10 we learn that OT worship consisted of **fleshly** ordinances; e.g.:
 - a) A physical structure (tabernacle)
 - b) Special clothing for priests
 - c) Lamp stands
 - d) Burning of incense
 - e) Instruments of music
 - f) Animal sacrifices
 -- all of which appeal to the **physical** senses
 - 2) But NT worship is geared more toward the **spiritual** side of man:
 - a) God’s temple is spiritual, made up of Christians - **1 Co 3:16; Ep 2:19-22**
 - b) All Christians are priests, offering up spiritual sacrifices - **1 Pe 2:5,9; Ro 12:1; He 13:15**
 - c) Our prayers are sweet incense - **Re 5:8**
 - d) Our music is making melody with the **heart** - **Ep 5:19**
 - 3) The physical ordinances of the OT were to last until a “time of reformation” - **He 9:9-10** (which has occurred with the coming of the New Covenant)
 -- **To “worship in spirit”, then, is to offer up SPIRITUAL worship as taught in the NT**

and not the PHYSICAL as found in the OT

C. WORSHIPPING GOD IN “TRUTH”...

1. What is meant to worship in “truth”?
 - a. To worship according to the commands of God? (as so often interpreted)
 - b. Certainly we should do this
 - c. But again, this is no contrast to what God expected in the OT - cf. **Deu 5:32-33**
 - d. Jesus admitted that the Jews were right in their worship - **Jn 4:22**
 - e. So the contrast is **not** between “true” and “false” worship
2. The contrast is between that which is “true” (or real), and that which had been a “shadow” pointing toward the true!
 - a. Many elements of OT worship were simply a “shadow” or “figure” of what was to come
 - 1) The Tabernacle was a symbol - **He 9:8-9**
 - 2) The Law with its worship was only a “shadow” of that to come - **He 10:1**
 - b. Christ is now in the **true** tabernacle (heaven)- **He 9:11-12,24**
 - 1) Therefore we should expect the worship of the **true** to be different from that of the **shadow**
 - 2) And we have already seen that to be the case:
 - a) The OT worship, which was but a **shadow**, was **physical** in nature
 - b) But N. T. worship, which God now expects of “true worshipers”, is according to the **true** realities (God is Spirit, Christ in heaven) and is therefore **spiritual** in nature

CONCLUSION

1. We see that there are different types of worship, but only one is now acceptable to the Father
2. We see that this worship is “in spirit and in truth”...
 - a. It is not the physical worship found in the OT which was only a “shadow” of what was to come
 - b. But a spiritual worship which is the true substance of what God wants of us in worship

Our next study shall examine the **true, spiritual** music God wants in the worship of the church, as revealed in the NT...

Music In New Testament Worship - Part Two

Music In The New Testament Church

INTRODUCTION

1. In our last lesson, we noted various types of worship...
 - a. **Vain** worship - **Mt 15:8-9**
 - b. **Ignorant** worship - **Ac 17:22-23**
 - c. **Will** worship - **Co 2:20-23**
 - d. **True** worship - **Jn 4:23-24**
 - The last one being the only one acceptable to God!

2. We then considered what was involved in “true” worship, what Jesus meant when He said “worship in spirit and truth”...
 - a. It is more than just worshipping with the right attitude and in the right way (for such was true with regards to OT worship)
 - b. It is a **spiritual** worship which is in harmony with the **truth** concerning God’s nature (God is Spirit) and the location of the **true** tabernacle (in heaven)
 - c. Contrast this with OT worship with its **fleshly** ordinances which served only as a **shadow** until the **true** came along

3. In this lesson, we shall consider the **music** God wants in the worship of the church; in doing so...
 - a. We shall notice that it is indeed a **true, spiritual** music unlike that found in the OT
 - b. Also, that our understanding of the kind of music to be used in the worship of the church is supported by what many historians, reformers, and scholars have said on the subject

[Let’s begin with a look at...]

I. THE MUSIC IN “TRUE” WORSHIP

A. THE ONLY MUSIC COMMANDED IN THE NT WAS “VOCAL”...

1. The example of Jesus and His disciples - **Mt 26:30; Mk 14:26** (they “sung a hymn”)
2. The example of Paul and Silas - **Ac 16:25** (“singing hymns”)
3. Other references
 - a. **Ro 15:9** - “sing to Your name”
 - b. **1 Co 14:15** - “I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding”
 - c. **Eph 5:19** - “singing and making melody in your heart”
 - d. **Co 3:16** - “singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord”
 - e. **He 2:12** - “I will sing praise to You”
 - f. **Ja 5:13** - “Let him sing psalms”

B. THE MUSIC IN THE NT EMPHASIZED THE “SPIRITUAL”...

1. **Eph 5:19** - “singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord”
 - a. “making melody” (**psallontes**) - In the OT this had reference to the playing of musical instruments
 - b. But notice that now (in the NT) the “making melody” is to be done “in the heart”, not with mechanical instruments!

- c. Notice the contrast: the heart (**spiritual**) vs. mechanical instruments (**physical**)
- d. Since this music is to be offered “to the Lord”, we had better regard Him as Holy and offer exactly what He specified (cf. Nadab & Abihu)!
2. **Co 3:16** - “singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord”
 - a. This passage is parallel to **Ep 5:19**
 - b. Notice again that the emphasis is **spiritual**: “in your hearts to the Lord”

C. REVIEW THE CONTRAST BETWEEN OT MUSIC AND NT MUSIC...

1. OT music
 - a. Performed by a professional choir
 - b. Accompanied with various mechanical instruments
 - c. **Emphasis**: How it sounds to the human ear (appealing to the **physical** side of man)
2. NT music
 - a. Sung by all in the congregation (“speaking to one another in psalms...”)
 - b. The melody to be made in the **heart**, not on the **harp**
 - c. **Emphasis**: How it affects the soul (the **spiritual** side of man)

[Music in NT worship, therefore, is to be **spiritual** in emphasis:

- ◆ Sung by all
- ◆ With emphasis not on how we sound, but that we are making true melody in our hearts to the Lord!

Lest people think that we are unusual in this view of using only vocal music in NT worship, and choosing not to add mechanical instruments in worship, consider some interesting references...]

II. REFERENCES ON MUSIC IN THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

A. THE VOICE OF HISTORY...

1. “All our sources deal amply with vocal music of the church, but they are chary with mention of any other manifestations of musical art... The development of Western music was decisively influenced by the exclusion of musical instruments from the early Christian Church.” - **Paul Henry Lang, Music In Western Civilization, p. 53,54**
2. “Only singing, however, and no playing of instruments, was permitted in the early Christian Church.” - **Hugo Leichtentritt, Music, History And Ideas, p. 34**
3. “There can be no doubt that originally the music of the divine service was everywhere entirely of a vocal nature.” - **Emil Nauman, The History Of Music, Vol. 1, p. 177**
4. “We have no real knowledge of the exact character of the music which formed a part of the religious devotion of the first Christian congregations. It was, however, purely vocal.” - **Dr. Frederick Louis Ritter, History Of Music From The Christian Era To The Present Time, p. 28**
5. “Both the Jews in their temple service, and the Greeks in their idol worship, were accustomed to sing with the accompaniment of instrumental music. The converts to Christianity accordingly must have been familiar with this mode of singing...But it is generally admitted, that the primitive Christians employed no instrumental music in their worship.” - **Lyman Coleman (Presbyterian), The Apostolic And Primitive Church, p. 368-369**

[It may seem odd that music was entirely vocal in the early church, when instrumental music was

quite common in the worship of the Jews and Gentiles. But not when you recall that the worship in the NT was to be spiritual in its emphasis.]

B. THE VOICE OF VARIOUS RELIGIOUS SOURCES...

1. **Catholic** - "... the first Christians were of too spiritual a fiber to substitute lifeless instruments for or to use them to accompany the human voice." - **Catholic Encyclopedia**
2. **Greek Orthodox** - "The execution of Byzantine church music by instruments, or even the accompaniment of sacred chanting by instruments was ruled out by the Eastern Fathers as being incompatible with the pure, solemn, spiritual character of the religion of Christ." - **Constantine Cavarnos, Byzantine Sacred Music**
3. **Presbyterian** - "Musical instruments in celebrating the praises of God would be no more suitable than the burning of incense, the lighting up of lamps, the restoration of the other shadows of the law. The Papists, therefore, have foolishly borrowed this, as well as many other things, from the Jews. Men who are fond of outward pomp may delight in that noise; but the simplicity which God recommends to us by the apostle is far more pleasing to Him." - **John Calvin, Commentary on the Book of Psalms, Vol. I, p. 539**
4. **Methodist** - "I have no objection to instruments of music, in our chapels, provided they are neither heard nor seen." - **John Wesley (founder)**
5. **Methodist** - "Music as a science, I esteem and admire: but instruments of music in the house of God I abominate and abhor. This is the abuse of music; and here I register my protest against all such corruptions in the worship of the Author of Christianity." - **Adam Clarke (commentator)**
6. **Lutheran** - "Martin Luther called the organ an 'ensign of Baal'." - **McClintock & Strong's Encyclopedia**
7. **Baptist** - "I would as soon attempt to pray to God with machinery as to sing to Him with machinery." - **Charles H. Spurgeon**

[Why did these men object so strongly to instrumental music in the worship of the church? Because they properly realized:

- ◆ That such was a carry-over from the Jewish worship
- ◆ That as such it was out of harmony with the **spiritual** nature of NT worship
- ◆ That it rightfully belonged to the Old Law with its "shadows" and not the "true" worship of the NT

Finally, let's consider...]

III. JUSTIFICATION OFFERED FOR THE USE OF INSTRUMENTS

A. "IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN A TRADITION IN OUR CHURCH..."

1. Not really, as history reveals the use of instruments to be an innovation introduced hundreds of years after the NT Church began
2. In most cases, it has been used only during the last two centuries
3. Even so, as "traditions of men" it qualifies as **vain** worship - **Mt 15:9**

B. "I DON'T SEE ANYTHING WRONG WITH IT..."

1. Then your worship is **ignorant** worship - **Ac 17:22-23**
2. For you are not aware of the kind of worship God commands of you

C. “I LIKE IT IN MY WORSHIP TO GOD...”

1. Then it becomes **will** worship - **Co 2:20-23**
2. And you begin worshipping like Nadab & Abihu
 - a. Offering that which **you** like
 - b. But offering that which is profane, for God did not command it

D. “IT IS FOUND IN THE OLD TESTAMENT...”

1. So are a lot of other acts of worship which were “imposed until a time of reformation” - **He 9:10**
2. That time is come and God expects His people to worship differently - **Jn 4:23-24**
3. The fact that God may have commanded it in the past does not mean that He approves its use now (especially when He has revealed what He **does** want)
4. Consider the sin of Moses
 - a. God first told him to **strike** the rock for water - **Exo 17:5-6**
 - b. Later, God at another time told him to **speak** to the rock - **Num 20:7-8**
 - c. But Moses struck the rock as before, and in so doing sinned and lost his right to enter the promised land - **Num 20:9-12**
5. His sin? He did not treat God holy by doing **only** what God had commanded at the **present** time!
 - a. God may have commanded **instrumental** music in the past (OT)
 - b. But He now commands **vocal** music (NT)

CONCLUSION

1. Let’s not make the same mistakes as did Nadab and Abihu, Moses and Aaron, forfeiting our inheritance in the Promised Land offered to Christians (i.e., Heaven)
2. As we approach God in worship, let us treat Him as Holy by worshipping as He has commanded: **“in spirit and in truth”**
3. In regards to our music ...
 - a. Let it be singing with melody in our hearts to the Lord
 - b. And not with melody made with mechanical instruments

In doing so, we **know** we are on safe ground, and that our worship is well pleasing to Him...!

The Nature Of Faith

INTRODUCTION

1. What is faith? What does it mean to believe...?
 - a. **Some Christians think** it means blind acceptance: “You’ve just got to believe.”
 - b. **Some skeptics agree:** “Faith is believing in something without good reasons to do so.” - **Steven Pinker**, evolutionary psychologist who opposed mandatory religion classes at Harvard
2. Both are mistaken; such ignorance of the nature of faith leads to...
 - a. **Shallowness of faith** among Christians
 - b. **Prejudice against faith** among skeptics

[To avoid misunderstanding **the nature of faith**, especially **the nature of Christian faith**, this study will examine both, beginning with...]

I. THE NATURE OF FAITH

A. THE BIBLICAL DEFINITION OF FAITH...

1. As defined by **Easton's Bible Dictionary**:
 - a. Faith is in general the persuasion of the mind that a certain statement is true
 - b. Its primary idea is **trust**
 2. It is a strong **conviction** or **trust** in something
 - a. “Now faith is **being sure** of what we hope for...” - **He 11:1** (NET Bible)
 - b. “...**being convinced** of what we do not see.” - **ibid.**
 3. For example: you have faith that your parents are indeed your parents
 - a. Based upon your confidence in the reliability of their word
 - b. Such conviction or trust prompts you to respond accordingly
 4. We have such faith (trust, conviction) in many things
 - a. We believe in George Washington as a person of history
 - b. We believe in commercial aviation as a safe way to travel
- **Faith is trust or conviction in something or someone**

B. THE EVIDENTIARY NATURE OF FAITH...

1. Many people believe that faith is something blind (“you just gotta believe”)
 - a. Yes, faith can be a conviction in “things unseen” - **He 11:1**
 - b. Yes, we can “walk by faith, not by sight” - **2Co 5:7**
2. But there can be sound reasons (i.e., evidence) for believing in what you cannot “see”
 - a. Just as you believe in George Washington, though you have never seen him
 - b. Just as you believe in who your parents are, though you can't remember who was there at your birth
3. Other people believe that faith is a special gift from God for a select few
 - a. In one sense faith is indeed a “gift” from God - cf. **Ep 2:8; Ro 12:3**
 - b. But while faith owes its ultimate source to God, it is available to all
 - c. For God desires all men to be saved - **1Ti 2:3-6**
 - d. He desires that which produces saving faith to be proclaimed to all - cf. **Ro 1:16; 16:25-26**
4. The fact is that faith comes from **evidence**, provided by God Himself!

- a. Evidence of His existence in the universe - **Psa 19:1-3; Ro 1:19-20**
- b. Evidence of signs and wonders so we might believe in His Son - **Jn 5:36; 10:37-38; 14:10-11; 20:30-31**
- **Faith in the Bible is not 'blind faith', it is trust based on evidence!**

[The evidentiary nature of faith becomes clearer as we consider...]

II. THE NATURE OF CHRISTIAN FAITH

A. A RATIONAL, INTELLIGENT FAITH...

- 1. God expects us to use our minds - **Mt 22:36-38; Jn 8:32**
 - a. We do not have to commit 'intellectual suicide' in order to have faith
 - b. I am grateful, for "My heart cannot rejoice in what my mind rejects!"
 - c. Indeed, a weak faith is the result of the heart trying to believe what the mind rejects
- 2. **Does this mean we can have 100% proof?** No, but...
 - a. We often commit 100% with less than 100% proof
 - b. As when flying on an airplane (no 100% guarantee, but we commit 100% anyway)
 - c. Because the safety of commercial aviation makes it a rational, intelligent decision
- 3. So the question becomes: **"Is there enough evidence to warrant making a 100% commitment to Christ?"** I believe that there is...
 - a. Certainly enough to commit myself **100% for Him**, rather than be **100% against Him!**
 - b. There is no other alternative - **Mt 12:30**
 - c. Jesus is like an airplane; either we get on board totally, or we get left behind!
- **The Christian faith is based on making a rational, intelligent decision**

B. A HISTORICAL, FACTUAL FAITH...

- 1. Christianity appeals to history, and the facts of history
- 2. "The facts backing the Christian claim are not a special kind of 'religious' fact. They are the cognitive, informational facts upon which all historical, legal, and ordinary decisions are based." - **Charles Pinnock**
- 3. E.g., notice the historical reference to time, places, people and events - **Lk 2:1-5; 3:1-2**
- 4. Thus it is not a faith based on philosophy, myths, or legends
- **The Christian faith is based on facts of history**

C. AN OBJECTIVE FAITH...

- 1. Faith (trust) in an object: **Jesus of Nazareth**
 - a. Faith in **who He was**: The Christ, the Son of God
 - b. Faith in what He did: He rose from the dead on the third day
- 2. It does make a difference what we believe
 - a. The old cliché "It doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you believe in something" is inconsistent with Christian faith
 - b. It is not **faith in of itself** that is important
 - c. But **in Whom** (the object) our faith is based - **Jn 8:24; Ro 10:9**
- **The Christian faith is trust or conviction in a Person (Jesus)**

D. AN EVIDENTIARY FAITH...

- 1. A faith (conviction, trust) based on evidence
- 2. Evidence such as **eyewitness testimony** - **Ac 10:39-41; 13:31; 1Jn 1:1-4; 2Pe 1:16-18**
 - a. The same sort of evidence used in a court of law

- b. Basing convictions on the credibility of witnesses
 - 3. Evidence such as **fulfilled prophecy** - **Ac 17:2-3; 18:28; 26:22-23**
 - a. Based on the improbability of **over 300** fulfilled prophecies being coincidence
 - b. When just **8** prophecies and their fulfillment are considered, the likelihood of coincidence is **1 in 10¹⁷**; with just **48** prophecies the probability is **1 in 10¹⁵⁷** - virtually impossible!
- **The Christian faith is based on such evidence!**

CONCLUSION

1. We have seen that the nature of faith, in particular the Christian faith, is...
 - a. **Trust** that is intelligent and rational
 - b. **Trust** in a person of history, Jesus of Nazareth
 - c. **Trust** in who He is, what He did
 - d. **Trust** based on empirical and reasonable evidence
2. Faith (trust) does lead to believing in things not seen...
 - a. Such as God who is invisible - **Jn 1:18; 1Jn 4:12**
 - b. Such as promises we hope to receive (resurrection, eternal life) - **Ro 8:24**

But **such faith is not blind credulity**. There is solid evidence for such faith, which in turn leads us to trust in things not seen. Only those ignorant of the evidence ridicule faith, or find themselves wavering in their own faith. **Examine the evidence, and believe...!**

The Need For Vision

INTRODUCTION

1. Any successful endeavor requires a vision...
 - a. The word **“vision”**:
 - 1) Literally means the ability to see things that are visible
 - 2) But it also used to mean the ability to see other things
 - a) “unusual competence in discernment or perception; intelligent foresight” (**American Heritage Dictionary**)
 - b) “Vision is the art of seeing things invisible” (**Jonathan Swift**)
 - b. Such ventures as business or politics require **“men of vision”**
 - 1) Companies require CEOs with vision, countries require leaders with vision
 - 2) Without the ability to visualize worthy goals and how these can be realized, very little of importance is achieved

2. In the Lord’s work, we desperately need an elevated vision of what it is all about...
 - a. We need greater **goals** (what can be done) and greater **objectives** (how it can be done)
 - b. Jesus certainly had a great vision: **the saving of souls!** - cf. **Mt 9:36-38; Jn 4:35**
 - c. We need to be dreaming dreams that are worthy of the “King of kings and Lord of lords”

[What can help us to elevate and enlarge our vision in the Lord’s work? Let’s first notice how an inadequate vision can actually stifle our work...]

I. TWO WAYS OUR VISION CAN BE INADEQUATE

A. AN ILLUSTRATION OF AN INADEQUATE VISION...

1. Suppose a man is driven by the “vision” of “making as much money as possible”
2. Two things may keep him from making as much money as he should
 - a. He may be limited in his idea of what is “a lot of money”
 - b. He may never make any specific plans other than have the vague notion of “making as much as possible”
3. His problem? His vision:
 - a. May be too small concerning what can be done
 - b. May be too general without any plan for what he can be doing now to make his vision a reality

B. OUR VISION OF THE LORD’S WORK MAY LIKEWISE BE INADEQUATE...

1. We may have the vision of “teaching as many people the gospel as possible”
2. A noble vision on the surface, but we might be afflicted by the same shortcomings:
 - a. We may think too small concerning what can be done
 - b. We may think too generally about what we should be doing

C. THE PROBLEM OF A VISION THAT IS TOO GENERAL...

1. No dream has ever been achieved except by someone who dared to flesh it out in terms of the specifics necessary to make the dream a reality
2. For example, it is fine to plan:
 - a. To go to heaven

- b. To serve the Lord faithfully
- c. To do the work of evangelism
- 3. But how do we do such things?
 - a. By what means do we get those results?
 - b. What specific, measurable actions will take us where we want to be?
 - c. How much time, effort, and money will it take?
- **We need to see our vision of the Lord's work in concrete terms of things we can**

actual

D. THE PROBLEM OF A VISION THAT IS TOO LITTLE...

1. When we do think specifically about the Lord's work, we often fail to set our sights high enough
 - a. Perhaps we are hindered by our past experience
 - 1) Personal efforts made in the past may have not born fruit
 - 2) Congregational efforts did not seem to go anywhere
 - b. Perhaps we have been fed a steady diet of defeatism
 - 1) Told by others that people are not interested in spiritual matters anymore
 - 2) Telling ourselves that people are not interested
2. With small visions, many churches and individuals seem content with:
 - a. Just "keeping house for the Lord"
 - b. Just an occasional conversion, usually involving our children or spouses
- **With the limited vision of many churches, little is done and little is accomplished**

[I believe the Lord intends greater things for His church, especially for those servants with a willingness to work (cf. **Mt 13:31-33**; **1 Co 16:8-9**; **Re 3:8**). What does a vision worthy of our Lord's work require? Perhaps the following thoughts might be a step in the right direction...]

II. WHAT OUR VISION NEEDS

A. OUR VISION NEEDS TO BE GREAT...

1. E.g., to double in attendance every year
2. E.g., to spread the gospel to thousands in our community each year

B. OUR VISION NEEDS SPECIFIC ACTION-STEPS...

1. To double in attendance every year:
 - a. Invite two people a week; by the end of the year you will likely have a least one attending regularly
 - b. Provide transportation to people who can't drive; is the value of a soul not worth what time or effort might be involved? - cf. **Mt 16:26**
 - If each person succeeded is just getting one person to come regularly, the attendance would easily double
2. To spread the gospel to thousands in our community each year:
 - a. Give a tract to one person per week
 - b. A congregation of 50 would share the gospel with more than 2500 people per year
 - How does that compare to the past year, where no vision was present?

C. OUR VISION NEEDS FAITH...

1. Faith in the power of the gospel
 - a. To save souls - cf. **Ro 1:16-17**
 - b. To produce souls that have been born again - cf. **1 Pe 1:22-25**

2. Faith in the power of the Lord
 - a. To open doors for His prepared servants - cf. **1 Co 16:8-9; Re 3:8**
 - b. To empower His servants wanting to do His will - cf. **Ph 4:13; Ep 3:16,20**

D. OUR VISION NEEDS BOLDNESS...

1. A virtue displayed often by the early Christians - **Ac 4:13; 9:27; 13:46; 14:3; 19:8; 28:31**
2. For which they prayed and solicited prayers - **Ac 4:29,30; Ep 6:19-20**
3. A boldness based upon our hope in Christ - **2 Co 3:12**
4. To say what needs to be said, when it needs to be said, despite the circumstances - **1 Th 2:2**

E. OUR VISION NEEDS PERSISTENCE...

1. Not losing heart, for we shall reap in due time - **Ga 6:9**
2. Always abounding, knowing that our labor is not in vain - **1 Co 15:58**
- **Many visions are never realized because people give up too soon!**

CONCLUSION

1. Not all “vision” is good...
 - a. Some have “**tunnel vision**” - focusing on small and often insignificant problems in the church
 - b. Some have “**visions of despair**” - seeing only the negative, never the positive
2. But a vision that has...
 - a. A grand scope worthy of its mission (saving souls)
 - b. Specific steps to accomplishing its goal (teaching others)
 - c. Faith in the Lord and in His word
 - d. Boldness and perseverance in carrying it out...such a vision is what the people of God need today!

Is this your vision? Or have you allowed yourself to have “tunnel vision” or a “vision of despair”?
What not rather heed the words of Jesus:

“Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!” (John 4:35)

Note: The main idea and several thoughts from this lesson were taken from a lesson by Gary Henry. The URL for his web site containing many excellent articles and sermon outlines is:
<http://www.brasstacks.org>

A New Creation

INTRODUCTION

1. According to **2 Co 5:17**, a great change takes place in the life of one who is a Christian:

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”

2. But what does this change mean?
 - a. What position does this *“new creation”* hold in the eyes of God?
 - b. What type of life is he or she to lead?
 - c. How does this change affect his or her relationship to things pertaining to one’s old way of life?

[In Paul’s epistle to the Ephesians, we find the answers to such questions. Note first of all that a Christian is described as...]

I. SITTING WITH CHRIST IN HEAVENLY PLACES - Ep 2:6

A. OUR FORMER CONDITION...

1. We were dead in sin - **Ep 2:1**
2. We were quite active, walking and following after:
 - a. The world
 - b. Satan
 - c. The flesh - cf. **Ep 2:2-3**

B. OUR CURRENT CONDITION...

1. Out of love, mercy and grace, we who were dead are now alive! - **Ep 2:4-5**; cf. **Ro 5:6-8**
2. Now we are blessed to be:
 - a. Raised with Christ - **Ep 2:6a**; cf. **Co 2:12; 3:1**
 - b. Seated with Him in “heavenly places” - **Ep 2:6**
3. Definition of *“heavenly places”*
 - a. Lit., *“the heavenlies”*, found only in Ephesians - **Ep 1:3,20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12**
 - b. Various explanations often given: the church, heaven proper, the spiritual realm
 - 1) The church is ruled out by **Ep 3:10**
 - 2) Heaven proper is ruled out by **Ep 6:12**
 - c. Most likely refers to the “spiritual realm” as contrasted to the physical realm
 - 1) In the spiritual realm, we enjoy blessings in Christ - **Ep 1:3**
 - 2) In the spiritual realm, Christ rules at God’s right hand - **Ep 1:20**
 - 3) In the spiritual realm, we sit with Christ - **Ep 2:6**
 - 4) In the spiritual realm, principalities and powers learn of God’s wisdom by the church - **Ep 3:10**
 - 5) In the spiritual realm, we wrestle against spiritual wickedness - **Ep 6:12**
4. Compare our position with Christ in the “heavenly places”
 - a. Christ is seated at God’s right hand - **Ep 1:20**
 - b. We are seated together with Christ! - **Ep 2:6**
5. Our position with Christ certainly warrants a proper frame of mind - **Co 3:1-2**
 - a. We are to seek those things above

- b. We are to set our minds on thing above

[As “**A New Creation**,” sitting with Christ in heavenly places ought to affect the way we think. But also the way we behave, for as “**A New Creation**” we are to be...]

II. WALKING IN MANNER WORTHY OF OUR CALLING - Ep 4:1

A. THE PURPOSE OF OUR CALLING...

1. To be holy and without blame - cf. **Ep 1:3-4**
2. To be His beloved children through adoption - cf. **Ep 1:5**

B. A WALK WORTHY OF OUR CALLING...

1. Is one in which we “*walk in love*” - **Ep 5:1-2**
 - a. As beloved children, imitating their Father
 - b. Following Christ's own example of sacrifice
2. Is one in which we “*walk as light*” - **Ep 5:3-14**
 - a. Living lives holy and without blame
 - b. As light exposing the deeds of darkness by way of contrast
3. Is one in which we “*walk as wise*” - **Ep 5:15-17**
 - a. Understanding that time is short
 - b. Understanding the will of the Lord

[Walking in “love”, as “light”, as “wise”, will not be without controversy in the midst of a dark, perverted world (cf. **2 Ti 3:12**). And so “**A New Creation**” is to be...]

III. STANDING FIRM IN BATTLE - Ep 6:13

A. THE NATURE OF OUR BATTLE...

1. We are engaged in a spiritual warfare - **Ep 6:12**
 - a. The battle is taking place in “heavenly places” (the spiritual realm)
 - b. Our foe: the very things we had previously followed - cf. **Ep 2:2-3**
2. Thus the need to be strong - **Ep 6:10**
 - a. To be strong in the Lord
 - b. To be strong in the power of His might

B. THE NATURE OF OUR ARMOR...

1. We are given the armor of God, which we must put on - **Ep 6:11,13**
2. This armor is adequate for a strong offensive battle - **Ep 6:14-18**
 - a. Waist girded with **truth**
 - b. Breastplate of **righteousness**
 - c. Feet shod with the preparation of **the gospel** of peace
 - d. Shield of **faith** to quench the fiery darts of the wicked one
 - e. Helmet of **salvation**
 - f. The sword of the Spirit, the **Word** of God
 - g. Praying always with all **prayer** and **supplication**
 - Note the lack of protection from behind; this implies that we must be committed in standing firm against the enemy, and that to retreat insures defeat!

CONCLUSION

1. When a person becomes “**A New Creation**”, it affects how he she sits, stands, and walks...
 - a. **Sitting** with Christ in heavenly places
 - b. **Walking** in a manner worthy of our calling
 - c. **Standing** firm in battle

2. Compare this to the wicked person who is not blessed by God as described in **Psa 1:1-2**...
 - a. **Walking** in the counsel of the wicked
 - b. **Standing** in the path of sinners
 - c. **Sitting** in the seat of scoffers

What a remarkable contrast! Truly “old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” Has this proved true in our lives? Give careful thought to how and where you are sitting, walking, and standing, if you desire to be “**A New Creation**” in Christ!

The Old Testament And The Christian

INTRODUCTION

1. What benefit is the Old Testament (OT) to the Christian today...?
 - a. Is the Christian under the OT as a system of justification?
 - b. Should the Christian look to the OT for guidance regarding the work, worship, and organization of the Lord's church?
 - **If not, why even bother with reading and studying the OT?**

2. It is true that Christians are not under the OT...
 - a. Gentile Christians were never under the OT (or Old Covenant)
 - 1) The Old Covenant was made with the Israelites at Mt. Horeb (Sinai) - **Deu 5:1-2**
 - 2) Not even Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, etc., were under the Old Covenant - **Deu 5:3**
 - Therefore Gentile Christians were not required to be circumcised or keep the Law - **Ac 15:1-29**
 - b. Jewish Christians have been delivered from the OT law
 - 1) Through the body of Christ - **Ro 7:1-6**
 - 2) By His death on the cross, Jesus brought the OT covenant to an end - **Ep 2:14-16**
 - Its purpose was to lead the Jews to Christ - **Ga 3:23-25**

3. Unfortunately, some Christians conclude from this that we need not read the OT...
 - a. I have known individuals who have been Christians for more than sixty years who had never read through the OT once
 - b. I have heard of some who will not attend services if the Bible class or sermon series is based upon the OT
 - **"Why bother, if we are not under the OT?", is the reasoning of some**

4. Is that the proper attitude of Christians toward the OT? This attitude...
 - a. Is wrong, contrary to the teaching of the NT itself
 - b. Deprives the Christian of a wonderful source of peace and comfort God provides for His children today
 - c. Prevents the Christian from gaining wisdom and understanding concerning the life that now is, and that which is to come!

[To help us to appreciate the value of the Old Testament, let's begin by asking...]

I. WHY STUDY THE OLD TESTAMENT?

A. IT WAS WRITTEN FOR OUR ADMONITION...

1. Paul reminded the Christians at Corinth of Israel's fall in the wilderness - **1 Co 10:1-10**
2. Note carefully what he says in **1 Co 10:11**
 - a. The events described may have happened to Israel
 - b. But "they were written for **our** admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come"
 - c. What we call the OT was written and preserved especially for the benefit of Christians!
3. We should not be surprised to see how often the NT writers appealed to the OT in admonishing Christians

- a. As Paul does here
- b. As the writer of Hebrews, in exhorting Christians to remain steadfast - **He 3:12-19**
- c. As James, in encouraging Christians to be patient in their suffering - **Ja 5:7-11**
- d. As Peter, in warning of false teachers and scoffers - **2 Pe 2-3**

B. IT WAS WRITTEN FOR OUR LEARNING...

- 1. Paul appealed to a Messianic prophecy in the OT - **Ro 15:3**
 - 2. Note carefully what he said in **Ro 15:4**
 - a. Things “written before” (i.e., the OT) were “written for our learning”
 - b. Again, the OT was written and preserved especially for the Christians’ benefit!
 - c. The OT provides “patience and comfort”, that we “might have hope”!
 - 3. The OT provides a record of God’s faithfulness, how He kept His promises:
 - a. To Abraham and the nation of Israel
 - b. To judge the wicked and avenge the righteous
 - c. To forgive the penitent, and protect the humble
- **As we read the history of God’s dealings with Israel, it gives us hope that God will keep His promises to us!**

C. IT MAKES ONE WISE REGARDING SALVATION IN CHRIST...

- 1. Paul noted that Timothy had known the “Holy Scriptures” since childhood - **2 Ti 3:14**
 - a. When Timothy was a child, the only scriptures available was the OT
 - b. So Paul clearly had the OT in view
 - 2. He said the OT is “able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” - **2 Ti 3:15**
 - 3. How is this possible? The OT provides:
 - a. The fall of man and the rise of sin
 - b. The background and development of God’s scheme of redemption
 - c. Hundreds of Messianic prophecies which describe what to expect when He comes
 - 4. One cannot hope to fully understand such books of the New Testament like:
 - a. Hebrews, without an understanding of the Levitical priesthood
 - b. Revelation, without an understanding of OT prophecy and apocalyptic literature
- **If one wishes to be wise concerning their salvation in Christ, it is imperative to study the Old Testament!**

D. IT IS PROFITABLE FOR DOCTRINE, REPROOF, CORRECTION, INSTRUCTION IN RIGHTEOUSNESS... - 2 Ti 3:16-17

- 1. “All Scripture” would include the OT scriptures, especially in the context of this passage
- 2. Therefore the OT is profitable for:
 - a. **Doctrine** - such as the nature of God, man, and sin
 - b. **Reproof and correction** - the need for repentance
 - c. **Instruction in righteousness** - how to live godly lives
- 3. Note that the apostles frequently appealed to the OT in instructing Christians concerning their conduct:
 - a. E.g., **Ro 12:19-21; 2 Co 6:16-7:1; 9:7-10**
 - b. E.g., **Ja 2:20-26**
 - c. E.g., **1 Pe 3:8-12**

[Should the Christian study the Old Testament? Of course! Along with the NT, it was written:

“that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (2 Ti 3:17)

To not read and study the OT is to deprive one of much admonition, learning, wisdom, and instruction that God intended for His children! In encouraging others to study the OT, let me offer...]

II. SUGGESTIONS FOR STUDYING THE OLD TESTAMENT

A. INCLUDE IT IN YOUR BIBLE READING PROGRAM...

1. Do not limit your daily Bible reading to just the New Testament
 2. I encourage one to read the whole Bible through each year, both OT and NT
 - a. I usually start with Genesis and end with Revelation
 - b. Others prefer reading portions from both OT and NT each day throughout the year
- **The important thing is make the OT a part of your regular study of the Bible**

B. CONSIDER USING A MODERN TRANSLATION...

1. I grew up on the KJV, and had little problem with the NT; but the OT was extremely difficult for me
 2. In high school, I began reading the NASB, and the OT came alive for me!
- **I personally recommend either the NKJV or the NASB**

C. TAKE ADVANTAGE OF STUDY BIBLES, SPECIAL CLASSES...

1. Study Bibles provide historical background, maps, drawings, etc. (e.g., ESV)
 2. If your congregation offers classes or sermons in the OT, take it!
- **Don't be like some who won't attend whenever the class or sermon is on the OT**

D. GIVE SPECIAL ATTENTION TO PSALMS, PROVERBS, AND THE PROPHETS...

1. Certainly all of God's word is of great value
2. But one might appreciate the value of the OT more quickly, by giving attention to:
 - a. **The Psalms** - as a great source of comfort, peace, and drawing near to God, especially in troubling times
 - b. **The Proverbs** - as a great source of practical wisdom for everyday living
 - c. **The Prophets** - as a great source for learning about the righteousness, justice, mercy and love of God

CONCLUSION

1. Should one study only those Scriptures that pertain to the covenant or dispensation under which they live...?
 - a. Should the Jews have discarded Genesis, and the first fourteen chapters of Exodus?
 - b. Should we discard the gospels, since Jesus lived and died under the Old Covenant?

-- **Of course not!**
2. Neither should we ignore the OT, for it provides...
 - a. The background and setting of the NT
 - b. Much in the way of admonition, learning, comfort, hope, even wisdom concerning our salvation in Christ!

Be careful not to neglect that which was written and preserved for OUR benefit...

“For whatever things were written before were written for OUR learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.”
(Ro 15:4)

“Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for OUR admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.”
(1 Co 10:11)

And remember that...

“ALL Scripture is inspired of God, and is profitable...” (2 Ti 3:16)

The Parable Of The Lifesaving Station

INTRODUCTION

1. Songs that may be used to introduce this lesson...
 - a. "Throw Out The Lifeline"
 - b. "Let The Lower Lights Be Burning"
 - c. "Send The Light"

2. As Jesus often taught in parables, we begin our study with one, called...

"The Parable Of The Lifesaving Station"

On a dangerous seacoast where shipwrecks often occur there was once a crude little lifesaving station. The building was just a hut, and there was only one boat, but the few devoted members kept a constant watch over the sea, and with no thought for themselves, they went out day or night tirelessly searching for the lost.

Many lives were saved by this wonderful little station, so that it became famous. Some of those who were saved, and various others in the surrounding areas, wanted to become associated with the station and give of their time and money and effort for the support of its work. New boats were bought and new crews were trained. The little lifesaving station grew.

Some of the new members of the lifesaving station were unhappy that the building was so crude and so poorly equipped. They felt that a more comfortable place should be provided as the first refuge of those saved from the sea.

They replaced the emergency cots with beds and put better furniture in an enlarged building. Now the lifesaving station became a popular gathering place for its members, and they redecorated it beautifully and furnished it as a sort of club.

Less of the members were now interested in going to sea on lifesaving missions, so they hired life boat crews to do this work.

The mission of lifesaving was still given lip-service but most were too busy or lacked the necessary commitment to take part in the lifesaving activities personally.

About this time a large ship was wrecked off the coast, and the hired crews brought in boat loads of cold, wet and half-drowned people.

They were dirty and sick, some had skin of a different color, some spoke a strange language, and the beautiful new club was considerably messed up. So the property committee immediately had a shower house built outside the club where victims of shipwreck could be cleaned up before coming inside.

At the next meeting, there was a split in the club membership. Most of the members wanted to stop the club's lifesaving activities as being unpleasant and a hindrance to the normal pattern of the club.

But some members insisted that lifesaving was their primary purpose and pointed out that they were still called a lifesaving station. But they were finally voted down and told that if they wanted to save the life of all various kinds of people who were shipwrecked in those waters, they could begin their own lifesaving station down the coast. They did.

As the years went by, the new station experienced the same changes that had occurred in the old. They evolved into a club and yet another lifesaving station was founded.

If you visit the seacoast today you will find a number of exclusive clubs along that shore. Shipwrecks are still frequent in those waters, but now most of the people drown!

-- Taken from Personal Evangelism 101, by Brent Hunter

3. As the songs and the parable point out, the mission of the church is similar to that of a lifesaving station; unfortunately, with the passing of time many churches...
 - a. Lose sight of their original mission
 - b. Gradually evolve into something different than what Christ intended when He said: "I will build my church..." - **Mt 16:18**

[Lest we forget and succumb to the dangers that can befall a growing church, let's review...]

I. THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

A. TO BRING TO LIGHT THE GOSPEL OF GOD...

1. This was Paul's mission as an apostle - **Ep 3:8-9**
 2. This he did as a functioning member of the church
 - a. Which has as a primary purpose to make known the wisdom of God - **Ep 3:10**
 - b. A purpose planned by God for the church from eternity - **Ep 3:11**
 3. The mission of the church is no different than was the mission of Christ
 - a. Christ came to save sinners - **1 Ti 1:15**
 - b. He came preaching the gospel to lost and dying sinners - **Mk 1:14-15**
- Therefore Jesus wants the gospel made known to every person - Mk 16:15**

B. TO PROCLAIM THE PRAISES OF GOD...

1. God has made us a holy nation, His own special people - **1 Pe 2:9a**
 2. Our purpose? To proclaim the praises of God - **1 Pe 2:9b**
 3. What are the praises of God we are to proclaim?
 - a. How we were called from darkness into His marvelous light - **1 Pe 2:9c; Co 1:12-14**
 - b. How we have become the people of God - **1 Pe 2:10a**
 - c. How we have obtained mercy - **1 Pe 2:10b**
- How do we proclaim this? By proclaiming the gospel of Christ!**

[Our mission as the church, as the people of God, is a glorious mission! To proclaim the praises of God, which we do by bringing to light the gospel of God! But consider...]

II. HOW WE CAN FAIL OUR MISSION

A. THROUGH MISPLACED EMPHASIS...

1. By placing emphasis on the material rather than spiritual aspects of the church
2. A problem experience by the church in Laodicea - cf. **Re 3:14-19**
3. A problem often experienced by churches today
 - a. Evidenced by the time and energy spent...
 - 1) On the physical aspects of the church (e.g., the building)
 - 2) Compared to fulfilling the true mission of the church

- b. Not that physical needs shouldn't be met
 - 1) But the emphasis should be on getting the message out
 - 2) Rather than on the upkeep of the facilities
 - c. Something is wrong if...
 - 1) We get more worked up over the lack of air-conditioning than lost souls
 - 2) The "business meeting" of the church spends more time over physical matters than spiritual matters (what is the true "business" of the church anyway?)
- **Are we like the church in Laodicea? If so, we would be better off materially poor and spiritually rich like the church in Smyrna - cf. Re 2:8-9**

B. THROUGH SHOWING PREFERENCE...

- 1. By showing preference in our efforts to saving souls
 - 2. God wants all to be saved - **1 Ti 2:3-6**
 - 3. God is no respecter of persons, not should we be - cf. **Ac 10:28-29,34-35**
 - 4. We should not show preference...
 - a. On the basis of social distinctions - cf. **Ja 2:1-9**
 - b. On the basis of racial distinctions - cf. **Co 3:10-11**
- **Are we selective in sharing of the gospel? Or do we try to preach the gospel to every creature? - Mk 16:15**

CONCLUSION

- 1. What kind of "lifesaving station" are we?
 - a. One that is faithfully fulfilling its mission?
 - b. One that is basking in its heritage and former reputation?

-- **May the parable of the lifesaving station remind us of the folly of being the latter**
- 2. We have been given a noble mission...
 - a. One that warrants a frequent reminder
 - b. One worthy of being "stirred up" from time to time - cf. **He 10:24**
- 3. Sadly, many do not feel compelled to proclaim the mercy of God...
 - a. Perhaps it is for the same reason many do not grow
 - b. They have forgotten they were purged from their sins - cf. **2 Pe 1:9**

May God's grace and mercy shown toward us compel us to be active in sharing the same grace and mercy to others. This we can do by proclaiming the gospel of Christ! - cf. **Mk 16:15-16**

The Passion Of The Christ

INTRODUCTION

1. Much controversy has surrounded the movie “**The Passion Of The Christ**” by Mel Gibson...
 - a. Mostly for fear that it might incite anti-Semitic passions
 - b. Also because it is violently graphic in its depiction of Christ’s suffering
2. Without question, the suffering of Christ, leading up to and including the crucifixion was terrible...
 - a. The beatings, which must have been excruciatingly painful - **Mt 26:67; 27:26-31**
 - b. Nailed to the cross, which Jesus was willing to bear without drugs - **Mt 27:33-35**
 - c. A shameful way to die, mocked by some, crucified with thieves - **Mt 27:36-44**
3. While there may be a place for contemplating upon the physical passion Jesus endured...
 - a. He did not want people to weep for Him, but for themselves - cf. **Lk 23:26-31**
 - b. His concern for others was evident, even on the cross - **Lk 23:34**

[The significance and lessons to be learned from the suffering of Jesus should go far beyond feeling sorry for what He endured. For example, we should never forget that “**The Passion Of The Christ**” is...]

I. THE CONDEMNATION OF SIN

A. JESUS SUFFERED BECAUSE OF SIN...

1. As foretold, He died for our sins - **1 Co 15:3; Isa 53:5-6**
2. He gave Himself for our sins - **Ga 1:4**
3. He bore our sins on the cross - **1 Pe 2:24**
- **May the thought of His passion remind us of our own sinfulness and the need for redemption - 1 Jn 1:8,10**

B. JESUS KILLED SIN...

1. He condemned sin in the flesh through His death - **Ro 8:3**
2. Making it possible for sinners to destroy their own body of sin, when united with Him by baptism into His death - **Ro 6:3-6**
- **May the thought of His passion remind us of our duty to crucify the sinful lusts of the flesh - Ga 5:24; Co 3:5-11**

[To motivate us in our efforts to let Jesus’ suffering help us deal with the problem of sin, we should also remember that “**The Passion Of The Christ**” is...]

II. THE REVELATION OF LOVE

A. JESUS SUFFERED BECAUSE OF LOVE...

1. The love of the Father for a lost world - **Jn 3:16; Ro 5:8**
2. The love of the Son - **Ep 5:2**
- **May our contemplation of His passion never neglect the love that was behind the fact - 1 Jn 4:9-10**

B. JESUS THEREBY DEMONSTRATED WHAT TRUE LOVE IS...

1. We now understand the meaning of true love - **1 Jn 3:16; Jn 15:13**
2. His love serves as the pattern for our love - **Jn 13:34-35; 15:12**
- **May our contemplation of His passion remind us of the high standard of love we are called to show toward one another - 1 Jn 4:11**

[As we strive to overcome sin and love one another, assisted and motivated by the suffering of Jesus, we should also be mindful that **“The Passion Of The Christ”** is...]

III. THE REDEMPTION OF THE WORLD

A. JESUS SUFFERED FOR ALL...

1. God desires all men to be saved, not desiring any to perish - **1 Ti 2:3-6; 2 Pe 3:9**
2. Therefore He offered Jesus as a propitiation for all - **1 Jn 2:1-2**
- **May our meditation upon His passion include thinking about the need of others**

B. JESUS IS THE WORLD'S ONLY HOPE...

1. He is the only way to the Father - **Jn 14:6**
2. Only in His name is salvation to be found - **Ac 4:12**
3. Deny the Son, and one does not have the Father - **1 Jn 2:23**
4. Abide in His doctrine, and one has both the Father and the Son - **2 Jn 9**
- **May our meditation upon His passion move us to do what we can to proclaim the message of redemption to those lost in sin - cf. 2 Co 5:18-6:1**

[And so the suffering of Jesus on the cross should prompt us to look both **inward** and **outward**, to address both our spiritual needs and those of others. To what extent effort may be required in these areas, we should also view **“The Passion Of The Christ”** as...]

IV. THE INSPIRATION OF SACRIFICE

A. JESUS PROVIDED THE EXAMPLE...

1. His suffering demonstrated the mind of humility - **Ph 2:3-8**
2. His suffering demonstrated the example of suffering patiently - **1 Pe 2:20-24**
- **May our reflection upon His passion move us to consider what His sacrifice should inspire us to do**

B. JESUS' SACRIFICE IS DESIGNED TO INSPIRE US...

1. To walk in love - **Ep 5:2**
2. To walk in humility - **Ph 2:3-5**
3. To suffer patiently when mistreated for doing good - **1 Pe 2:20-24**
4. To give of ourselves to others - **2 Co 8:9; 1 Jn 3:16-18**
- **May our reflection upon His passion inspire us to a higher plan of devotion to God and others!**

CONCLUSION

1. Certainly more could be said about **“The Passion Of The Christ”**...
 - a. Both the movie, and the historical events it seeks to portray
 - b. E.g., the fact that any anti-Semitic reaction would be contrary to the will of Christ

2. But perhaps these few thoughts will increase our appreciation of Christ's suffering...
 - a. His passion is **the condemnation of sin**
 - b. His passion is **the revelation of love**
 - c. His passion is **the redemption of the world**
 - d. His passion is **the inspiration of sacrifice**

3. Have you taken advantage of what **"The Passion Of The Christ"** means for you...?
 - a. Have you been crucified with Christ?
 - b. Are you putting to death the deeds of the flesh?
 - c. Are you growing in love?
 - d. Are you concerned and doing something about the redemption of the world?
 - e. Are you inspired in your service to brethren and the lost by the example of Jesus' sacrifice?

May **"The Passion Of The Christ"** motivate you to **obey** and **serve** the One who died for you...

"For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again." - 2 Co 5:14-15

The Path To Salvation

INTRODUCTION

1. In June of 2008, the **Pew Forum On Religion & Public Life** released a **U.S. Religious Landscape Survey** based on interviews with 35,000 American adults
2. One of the issues covered was this one: **Is there more than one path to salvation?**
3. Here are the percentages of those who said “Many religions can lead to eternal life”...

a. Hindus - 89%	g. Historical black churches - 59%
b. Buddhists - 86%	h. Evangelical churches - 57%
c. Mainline churches - 83%	i. Muslim - 56%
d. Jewish - 82%	j. Mormon - 39%
e. Catholic - 79%	k. Jehovah’s Witnesses - 18%
f. Orthodox - 72%	
4. The responses are interesting...
 - a. Most people believe those of different faiths will be saved
 - b. Among Catholics and mainline Protestants, that view is overwhelming
 - c. Even the majority of those who view themselves as “evangelical” agree

[Clearly most people believe there are many paths to salvation. Is that true? What did Jesus and His apostles say about the path to salvation, the way to eternal life...?]

I. THERE IS ONLY ONE PATH TO SALVATION

A. ACCORDING TO JESUS...

1. He said the way to life was difficult and narrow, found by few - **Mt 7:13-14**
 2. He taught that unless we believe in Him, we will die in our sins - **Jn 8:24**
 3. He claimed to be the only way to the Father - **Jn 14:6**
- **There is only one path to salvation, and that is through Jesus!**

B. ACCORDING TO HIS APOSTLES...

1. Peter said salvation is found only in Jesus’ name - **Ac 4:12**
 2. John said whoever denies the Son does not have the Father - **1 Jn 2:23**
 3. Paul said those who do not obey the gospel of Jesus Christ will experience vengeance when Jesus comes again - **2 Th 1:7-8**
- **There is only one path to salvation, and that is through Jesus!**

[Both Jesus and His apostles were very clear: the path to salvation must go through Jesus Christ! **If not**, consider for a moment the implication of what many people believe...]

II. THERE ARE MANY PATHS TO SALVATION

A. IF SO, CONSIDER WHO LIED...

1. Jesus lied, when He said no man comes to the Father but through Him - **Jn 14:6**
2. His apostles lied, when they taught salvation comes only through Jesus - **Ac 4:12**

-- **If there are many paths to salvation, then Jesus and His apostles were liars!**

B. IF SO, CONSIDER WHO SUFFERED AND DIED IN VAIN...

1. Jesus' suffering and death on the cross was not necessary
 - a. Why die for our sins, if there are other ways to salvation?
 - b. Why suffer an excruciating death on the cross, if it was not necessary?
2. His apostles' suffering and deaths were not necessary
 - a. Why did apostles like Paul put up with his hardships? - cf. **2 Co 11:23-29**
 - b. Why did the apostles endure martyrdom if it was not necessary?
 - c. Why not simply live out their lives as fishermen, tentmakers, etc.?

-- **If there are many paths to salvation, then Jesus and His apostles died in vain!**

[If we profess to be Christians, then we must believe that there is only one path to salvation, and that is through Jesus! **Let's review the gospel plan of salvation, the path to salvation...**]

III. THE PATH TO SALVATION

A. WE MUST HEAR THE GOOD NEWS...

1. For faith comes by hearing the Word of God - **Ro 10:17**
 2. For this reason Jesus sent His apostles and preachers - **Ac 10:42-43**
- **Have you heard the gospel of Jesus Christ?**

B. WE MUST BELIEVE (TRUST) IN JESUS...

1. As the Son of God whom the Father sent because He loved us - **Jn 3:16**
 2. As the propitiation (atoning sacrifice) offered by God for sins - **1 Jn 4:9-10**
 3. Whose blood provides redemption, the forgiveness of sins - **Ep 1:7**
- **Do you trust in Jesus and His sacrificial death for your salvation?**

C. WE MUST REPENT OF OUR SINS...

1. For Jesus is coming to judge the world - **Ac 17:30-31**
 2. For we must turn from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God - **Ac 26:18**
 3. Otherwise, we will perish! - **Lk 13:3**
- **Have you made the decision to turn from your sins to serve the living God?**

D. WE MUST CONFESS JESUS AS OUR LORD...

1. If we want Jesus to confess us before His Father in heaven - **Mt 10:32-33**
 2. If we want to receive the salvation that Jesus offers - **Ro 10:9-10**
- **Have you acknowledged that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God?**

E. WE MUST BE BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST...

1. To be saved - **Mk 16:15-16**
 2. To receive the remission of sins and gift of the Holy Spirit - **Ac 2:38**
 3. To be raised with Christ from death to newness of life - **Ro 6:3-7**
- **Have you been baptized into Christ for the remission of your sins?**

F. WE MUST REMAIN FAITHFUL TO JESUS...

1. To learn from Him as His disciples - **Mt 28:19-20**
2. To imitate Him as our Mentor - **Lk 6:40**
3. To remain faithful to Him even to the point of death - **Re 2:10**

-- **Have you made Jesus your Teacher and Mentor, as well as your Savior?**

CONCLUSION

1. Believing there are many paths to salvation is...
 - a. A comforting doctrine to hold
 - b. Viewed by many as tolerant and loving

2. But if one really believes in Jesus, they must abide in His teaching (cf. **Jn 8:30-32**)...
 - a. That few will be saved
 - b. That Jesus is the only way to the Father
 - c. That we must obey His gospel plan of salvation
 - d. That we must follow Him as our Teacher and Mentor the rest of our life

Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life! Are you on that path that leads to eternal life...?

Perspectives For Success In Evangelism

INTRODUCTION

1. It is important to maintain certain perspectives in evangelism...
 - a. Many start out with great enthusiasm, but often get discouraged and apathetic
 - b. This happens even to those who are highly skilled in teaching others
2. The problem is one that **Zig Ziegler** might call “stinkin thinkin” (wrong way of looking at things)...
 - a. With the wrong perspectives, many personal workers eventually lose heart
 - b. Before long, evangelistic efforts dwindle and in some cases stop altogether
3. There are perspectives that are especially crucial to maintaining...
 - a. A high level of enthusiasm
 - b. Persistence in evangelism
4. From **The Parable Of The Sower** and elsewhere in the Scriptures we learn things that help..
 - a. Remove the discouragement and prevent the apathy that paralyzes so many today
 - b. Instill enthusiasm in serving as laborers in the vineyard of the Lord!

[The parable itself is found in **Lk 8:4-8**, and the explanation is found in **Lk 8:11-15** (please read). The first principle we can glean from this parable is that...]

I. THE POWER IS IN THE SEED (WORD)

A. THE PERSPECTIVE EXPLAINED...

1. The Word of God has always been capable of influencing people, accomplishing its intended purpose - **Isa 55:10-11**
2. As the author of Hebrews wrote, it is both “alive and powerful” - **He 4:12**
3. This is especially true of the **Gospel**, the “power of God unto salvation” - **Ro 1:16**

B. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PERSPECTIVE...

1. If people are going to be truly converted, it will not be through smooth speech or fancy presentations involving “hi-tech” equipment, but through the life-changing truth of the gospel
2. We can certainly use modern aids to present the gospel, but we must make sure that they are faithfully communicating the Word
3. True conversion (which involves a spiritual regeneration) will occur only if we plant the proper “seed”
4. Perhaps we don't get the desired result, because we don't sow the right seed!

[But even when we plant the proper seed, we often do not see the desired results. Understanding the reason why helps one to maintain the right perspective...]

II. THE RESULTS DEPEND UPON THE TYPE OF SOIL

A. THE PERSPECTIVE EXPLAINED...

1. We see that the same seed, when sown, produced different results
2. One result was no reaction whatsoever

3. Two others had only temporary success
4. Only one out of the four resulted in bearing fruit!
5. Where lies the blame?
 - a. Upon the SEED? No!
 - b. Upon the SOWER? No!
 - c. Upon the TYPE OF SOIL? Yes!
6. This illustrates where the area of responsibility lies
 - a. The **sower** fulfills his responsibility by sowing the seed - cf. **Eze 3:17-19**
 - b. If the **soil** rejects the seed, the soil is responsible; the sower should not feel accountable - cf. **Mt 10:14-15; Ac 13:44-46**
 - c. The positive implication is this: **Every time we sow the seed, we are successful! If a person rejects it, we have not failed, they have!**

B. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PERSPECTIVE...

1. We need to learn the **joy** of sharing the Word for its own sake!
 - a. There is joy in sharing Christ with others (we've got **good news!**)
 - b. Whether or not people accept Him (we are glad to serve our Lord in this way!)
 - c. Of course, we are delighted when someone believes and truly accepts Jesus as Lord
 - d. But we should consider it as the "icing on the cake"
 - e. Even if we don't experience the "icing," we can still enjoy the "cake"
2. Another significance of this principle concerns our **goals**
 - a. Goals should center on **how many are being taught, not converted!**
 - b. Too often, we make the number of baptisms (conversions) the measure of success or even faithfulness on the part of the teacher
 - c. But even the most faithful teachers may find themselves in circumstances like Jeremiah or Jesus, where very few people gave heed to their message
 - d. Shall we count them failures? Rather, let us count them faithful, if they have faithfully sowed the seed!

[Closely related to all this is the perspective concerning...]

III. WE ARE SIMPLY SEED THROWERS

A. THE PERSPECTIVE EXPLAINED...

1. It pertains to how we view ourselves as teachers
2. As illustrated in the parable and elsewhere, we are simply seed-throwers and water-boys - cf. **1 Co 3:5-7**
3. One may plant the seed, another may water, but it is God (through His Word in a receptive heart) who gives the increase!
4. Because of this, there is no place for boasting about numbers of people being converted

B. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PERSPECTIVE...

1. God can even use "defective" seed-throwers - cf. **Ph 1:15-18**
 - a. Not only defective in **motive** (as seen in the text), but also in **experience!**
 - b. This is because the **power** is in the **seed**, not the **sower!**
2. Therefore we should not feel like we have to be an accomplished salesman to present the Gospel
3. Even those who tremble and may not be eloquent can be used by the Lord to reach others - cf. **1 Co 2:1-5**

[Another perspective for success in evangelism is to keep in mind...]

IV. QUITE OFTEN, ONE SOWS AND ANOTHER REAPS

A. THE PERSPECTIVE EXPLAINED...

1. Winning souls involves both sowing and reaping
2. Jesus used these terms in talking to His disciples as recorded in **Jn 4:35-38**
3. Exactly what is the difference between “sowing” and “reaping”?
 - a. Sowing is the work necessary to one day being able to reap!
 - 1) In agriculture, sowing involves preparing the soil and planting the seed
 - 2) In winning souls to Christ, sowing likewise involves preparation and planting
 - a) In which the hearts are being prepared for the reception of the gospel
 - b) In which the hearts are first introduced to the gospel and its principles
 - b. Reaping is the actual “harvesting” of what has been sown
 - 1) In agriculture, reaping is the collection of the fruits which have produced by the sowing
 - 2) In winning souls, reaping is that harvesting which occurs when souls who have had the Word planted in their hearts decide to obey it!
4. It is important to appreciate the statement in **Jn 4:37**, “One sows and another reaps”
 - a. Those who sow do not always witness the reaping that may one day occur
 - b. And many times those who reap are benefiting from the efforts of those who did the sowing before them

B. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PERSPECTIVE...

1. In evangelism, this means that oftentimes you will be sowing the seed and it may appear that you are not getting any results
 - a. But some time later those souls you were trying to reach may decide to finally obey the gospel
 - b. Another Christian may actually do the reaping in your place!
2. Then again, there will be times when people just sort of “fall into your lap”
 - a. Ready and anxious to obey the gospel with little effort on your part
 - b. In this case, you are reaping what others have sown!
3. The point to keep in mind is that evangelism involves both “sowing” and “reaping,” and there will be times when what you sow will be reaped by someone else
 - a. Let this be an encouragement to you when it appears that you are not reaping as you would hope
 - b. You might actually be making it much easier for some brother or sister in the future!

[Then there are three related perspectives I find encouraging. The first of these is to remember...]

V. THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD IS AT WORK

A. THE PERSPECTIVE EXPLAINED...

1. In nearly every example of conversion, God worked in some way to create the opportunity for the person to hear the gospel
 - a. Philip was sent toward Gaza where he would meet the Ethiopian Eunuch (**Acts 8**)
 - b. The Lord saw to it that Saul and Ananias would get together (**Acts 9**)
 - c. Likewise, that the household of Cornelius would have a chance to hear the gospel from

Peter (**Acts 10**)

- d. The evangelization of Europe that started with the conversion of Lydia and the Philippian Jailor occurred after the “Macedonian Call” led Paul and his companions in that direction (**Acts 16**).
2. Granted, these circumstances are in keeping with the miraculous events in establishing the Lord’s church
 - a. But I believe they illustrate a principle that is just as valid for us today
 - b. That principle is this:
 - 1) The Lord, who knows the hearts of all men and seeks those who are seeking Him - cf. **2 Chr 16:9**
 - 2) He will make sure that those who “hunger and thirst for righteousness” will somehow be “filled” - **Mt 5:6**
3. This is where the providence of God comes in
 - a. When the Lord knows there are people who would be receptive to the gospel (e.g., in Corinth, **Ac 18:9-11**)
 - b. He will “open doors” to give those who are seeking the truth the opportunity to be reached by those who are prepared to do the teaching
4. It may not happen immediately, but I am persuaded...
 - a. That if there is someone who is “asking, seeking, and knocking” for the truth
 - b. The Lord will see that at some point in that person’s life they have an opportunity to hear the gospel

B. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PERSPECTIVE...

1. It is encouraging to know that we are not alone in our efforts to lead the lost to Christ
2. God will see that every soul who has an honest and seeking heart will one day come across someone prepared to explain the Gospel to him or her
3. When we engage in evangelism, we are “God’s fellow workers” - **1 Co 3:5-9**

[Of course, how useful we can be to the Lord leads to another perspective for success in evangelism...]

VI. GOD OPENS DOORS FOR PREPARED WORKERS

A. THE PERSPECTIVE EXPLAINED...

1. The Scriptures often speak of the Lord “opening doors” for His servants who are ready to serve Him
 - a. Paul wrote about an “open door” of opportunity that prompted him to remain longer at Ephesus - **1 Co 16:9**
 - b. He even wrote of one occasion where there was an “open door,” but circumstances were such that he did not take advantage of it - **2 Co 2:12-13**
 - c. From the Lord’s remarks to the church in Philadelphia, we learn that the Lord opens doors for those people He can use - **Re 3:8**
2. The implication regarding evangelism is this:
 - a. If we desire to be used in God’s providence to reach those who are seeking the truth
 - b. Then we must prepare ourselves to be useful! - cf. **2 Ti 2:19-21**

B. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PERSPECTIVE...

1. The principle of preparation applies to both individuals and congregations
 - a. **Individuals** must prepare themselves to teach, or to lead souls to those able to teach
 - b. **Congregations** must also be ready to assimilate new converts into the family of God

- where they can be nurtured and protected during a vital stage of their newfound life
2. Many congregations may not find “open doors” to reach others because they have not prepared themselves to be a place where “babes in Christ” will be cared for properly
 - a. Do we really believe that the Lord through His providence would “open doors” for a congregation filled with “carnal Christians” who would only devour the new Christian?
 - b. The Lord might often have to wait a long time before providentially working to see that a truth seeker has an opportunity to hear the gospel
 - c. Of course, we would anticipate in such cases that the Lord would use His providence to spare the truth seeker's life until there are people ready to teach and receive him or her into the family of God
 3. Whether or not the last point is true, the following is still valid and encouraging:
 - a. If we will prepare ourselves to be useful to the Lord
 - b. His providence will “open doors” of opportunity for us to reach those in our community who have honest and good hearts that are seeking for the truth

[And then there is important perspective...]

VII. PRAYER IS THE CATALYST IN EVANGELISM

A. THE PERSPECTIVE EXPLAINED...

1. If the providence of God is at work and it involves the lives of those who are prepared to be used as well as those who are seeking the truth, it should be easy to see that prayer would play an important role
 - a. In the case of Cornelius, his prayers that prompted God to take notice - **Ac 10:1-4**
 - b. It was a man given to prayer that the Lord chose to reach him - **Ac 10:9**
2. Sometimes much preparation for evangelism is not too different from preparing to make a sales pitch
 - a. It is almost as though people think that if you follow the right procedure with anyone, the desired results must necessarily follow
 - b. Certainly that is no one's intention; yet prayer is not often stressed in many books on how to do evangelism
 - c. In contrast, we find Paul teaching the Colossians to pray that God would open a door for the Word - **Co 4:3**

B. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PERSPECTIVE...

1. Think of prayer as a “catalyst” that starts the process of God's providence in bringing together the lost but seeking soul with the prepared and seeking servant of the Lord
2. When we have prepared ourselves to be useful to the Lord and then diligently pray “Lord, lead me to some soul today,” doors will open and we will begin to find souls who have been praying and will be receptive to the gospel!

[Finally, remember that ...]

VIII. THE PRINCIPLE OF SOWING AND REAPING

A. THE PERSPECTIVE EXPLAINED...

1. In **2 Co 9:6** we find this principle stated, and it easily seen in many different areas of life
 - a. In **sales**, the ratio of success is often one sale out of nine calls
 - b. In **acting**, the ratio can be as high as one job out of thirty auditions, even for successful

actors

- c. In **The Parable Of The Sower**, only one out of four produced favorable results
2. Successful people in different walks of life understand that the key to success is to increase the number of their efforts

B. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PERSPECTIVE...

1. It should be obvious: If we desire to **reap** more, we must be willing to **sow** more!
2. Many people fail in the area of evangelism because they “sow sparingly” and get discouraged by the meager results
3. If we increase the level of **sowing**, the level of **reaping** will rise proportionately
4. But again, to avoid discouragement, we need to set goals on how many are **taught**, not on how many are **converted**!

CONCLUSION

1. **Perseverance** is the key to success in evangelism; those who persist in sowing the seed eventually bear fruit
2. The **wrong perspectives** produce negative attitudes and eventual failure
3. The **right perspectives** maintain positive attitudes and eventual success!

It is hoped the **perspectives** shared above can help **maintain the positive attitude** necessary to persevere until Harvest Time is no more. Remember the words of the apostle Paul...

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”

- 1 Co 15:58

The Perverted Gospel

Its Message

INTRODUCTION

1. The Bible is filled with grave warnings against tampering with the Word of God...
 - a. There is the warning given through Moses - **Deu 4:2**
 - b. There is the warning given through John - **Re 22:18-19**
2. Perhaps the strongest warning is that given by Paul - **Ga 1:6-10**
 - a. Some had “perverted” (**metastrepho**, to turn around, turn around) the gospel of Christ
 - b. Like a belt that starts out right, but becomes twisted at some point
 - c. Such perversions were to be rejected, even if it taught by angels or apostles!
3. Since the gospel was first preached, it has often been perverted to teach something different than that proclaimed by the apostles...
 - a. Some taught that we must be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses to be saved - **Ac 15:1,6**
 - b. Others later stressed a similar doctrine of salvation through meritorious works
4. Today, many present a perverted gospel of Christ...
 - a. Often in reaction to the extreme doctrine of salvation by meritorious works
 - b. Proclaiming a doctrine of salvation by faith “only”
 - c. Denying any need of obedience in order to be saved

[In this lesson we shall consider this “perverted gospel” as often presented today, and note its contrast to the gospel as preached by Jesus and His apostles...]

I. THE MESSAGE OF THE PERVERTED GOSPEL

A. IT BEGINS WITH THE TRUTH...

1. Most commonly presented as “**The Four Spiritual Laws**”
 - a. Formulated and heavily propagated by the Campus Crusade For Christ
 - b. Though it begins with truth, it does eventually pervert the gospel
 2. Note the truth that is presented in “**The Four Spiritual Laws**”
 - a. **Law One** - God loves you, and has a wonderful plan for your life - **Jn 3:16; 10:10**
 - b. **Law Two** - Man is sinful and separated from God. As such he cannot know and experience God’s love and plan for his life - **Ro 3:23; 6:23**
 - c. **Law Three** - Jesus Christ is God’s only provision for man’s sin. Through Him you can know and experience God’s love and plan for your life - **Ro 5:6-9; Jn 14:6**
 - d. **Law Four** - We must individually receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Then we can know and experience God’s love and plan for our lives - **Jn 1:12; Ep 2:8-9**
- **Up to this point, “The Four Spiritual Laws” does a fine job in presenting the gospel message; but then the gospel is “perverted” (corrupted)**

B. THE ERROR IS IN TELLING ONE HOW TO RECEIVE CHRIST...

1. E.g., “We receive Christ by personal invitation, cf. **Re 3:20**”
 - a. It is true that Christ personally invites us to Him - cf. **Mt 11:28-30**

- b. But **Re 3:20** is an invitation to wayward Christians, not alien sinners - **Re 3:22**
- c. Failure to note the context leads to a perversion of the gospel!
- 2. E.g., “You can receive Christ right now through prayer”
 - a. “Then receive Him into your life by a simple act of faith. In prayer you can tell God that you know you are a sinner, and that you are sorry for your sins. Tell him that you want to turn from your old way of living, and you invite Jesus Christ to come into your life to be your Lord and Savior.” - **Billy Graham** (Writes On Religion)
 - b. People are often told to pray, “Lord Jesus, I need you. I open the door of my life and receive you as my Savior and Lord. Thank you for forgiving my sins. Take control of the throne of my life. Make me the kind of person You want me to be.”
- 3. While this sounds innocent, is saying “the sinner’s prayer” how we are to receive Jesus into our lives?
 - a. The Bible nowhere mentions “the sinner’s prayer”
 - b. Those who are taught to pray for forgiveness are already Christians
 - 1) E.g., Simon - **Ac 8:13,22**
 - 2) E.g., those to whom John writes - **1 Jn 1:6-10**
 - c. Again, **Re 3:20** (often used to support the idea of receiving Christ through prayer) was an invitation to erring Christians
- 4. To receive Christ so that we come to know Him, one must keep certain commandments!
 - a. As expressed by Jesus - cf. **Jn 14:21,23**
 - b. As written by John - cf. **1 Jn 2:3-6**

[The gospel message becomes perverted at the point when a person desires to receive Christ and is told to simply say “the sinner’s prayer.” Jesus and His apostles never taught that. What did they teach...?]

II. THE MESSAGE OF THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

A. IT INCLUDES THE BASIC CONTENT OF “THE FOUR SPIRITUAL LAWS”...

- 1. **Law One** - God loves you, and has a wonderful plan for your life - **Jn 3:16; 10:10**
- 2. **Law Two** - Man is sinful and separated from God. As such he cannot know and experience God’s love and plan for his life - **Ro 3:23; 6:23**
- 3. **Law Three** - Jesus Christ is God’s only provision for man’s sin. Through Him you can know and experience God’s love and plan for your life - **Ro 5:6-9; Jn 14:6**
- 4. **Law Four** - We must individually receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Then we can know and experience God’s love and plan for our lives - **Jn 1:12; Ep 2:8-9**
- **This is a fine presentation of the gospel thus far**

B. YET NOTE WHAT JESUS HIMSELF TAUGHT...

- 1. We must do the will of His Father in heaven - **Mt 7:21-23**
- 2. We must do what He Himself has said - **Lk 6:46; cf. Mt 28:20**
- 3. Certainly we believe that He is the Christ, the Son of God - **Jn 8:24**
- 4. We must also repent of our sins - **Lk 13:3; cf. 24:46-47**
- 5. We must be willing to confess Him before others - **Mt 10:32-33**
- 6. We must be baptized to be saved - **Mk 16:15-16; cf. Mt 28:19-20; Jn 3:5**
- 7. We must keep His commandments to receive Him and the Father - **Jn 14:21,23**
- **Jesus therefore taught that obedience is necessary, as expressed in faith, repentance, confession and baptism!**

C. NOTE ALSO WHAT HIS APOSTLES TAUGHT...

1. Christ is the author of eternal salvation to those who obey Him - **He 5:9**
 2. Therefore we must believe in Jesus and His words - e.g., **Ac 16:30-33**
 - a. Many stop with **verse 31**, concluding faith only saves
 - b. But the context reveals much more was taught, including the importance of baptism immediately
 3. We must repent of our sins - **Ac 2:38; 17:30**
 4. We must confess Jesus as Lord - **Ro 10:9-10**; e.g., **Ac 8:35-38**
 5. We must be baptized for the remission of sins - **Ac 2:38**; e.g., **22:16**
 6. Having thus obeyed the Lord, we receive Jesus into our lives and begin enjoying the blessings of an abundant life - cf. **Ga 3:26-27**
 - a. How do we become children of God by faith? By putting Christ on in baptism!
 - b. How do we receive Jesus into our lives? By clothing ourselves with Christ in baptism!
- **As the apostles proclaimed the gospel, they stressed the same need of an obedient faith as did their Lord!**

CONCLUSION

1. Some think stressing an obedient faith involving repentance and baptism is teaching salvation by works...
 - a. But repentance and baptism are acts of faith to **receive** salvation, not works of merit to **earn** salvation
 - b. Baptism in particular involves the working of God, to which man humbly submits - **Co 2:11-12**-- **A simple illustration of how a boy receives his uncle's inheritance by fulfilling a simple condition demonstrates how obedience does not nullify faith and grace**
2. Where does "**The Perverted Gospel**" stumble in its message...?
 - a. At the point of **how** one receives Christ and thereby enjoys forgiveness
 - b. In telling people to say "the sinner's prayer" to receive Christ
 - 1) Which is nowhere taught in the Scriptures
 - 2) Which neglects to tell people what Jesus and His apostles commanded
 - c. In failing to consider the context of passages used to support the concept of receiving Christ through a simple prayer

When one is ready to receive Christ into their life, they do well to heed the words of Jesus and His apostles themselves, and not those who through TV and other media have perverted the simple gospel of Christ! Have you received Christ through faith and putting Him on in baptism (**Ga 3:26-27**)...?

Note: For a short history on the development of "the sinner's prayer" in evangelical religion, visit the following web site: <http://www.bible.ca/g-sinners-prayer.htm>

The Perverted Gospel

Its Witness

INTRODUCTION

1. In another study, we examined the **message** of “**The Perverted Gospel**”...
 - a. A popular presentation of the gospel that begins with truth
 - b. Yet in telling the sinner what to do to receive Christ, perverts (turns around) the gospel
 - c. Calling for the sinner to respond with “the sinner’s prayer” instead of repentance and baptism
2. Another concern is the evidence that often accompanies “**The Perverted Gospel**”...
 - a. Not only have many changed the content of the gospel as to how to receive Christ
 - b. They also changed the type of evidence used to prove the gospel to be true!

[In this study, we shall consider the **evidence** or **witness** often presented along with “**The Perverted Gospel**”, and its potentially dangerous consequences...]

I. THE EVIDENCE FOR “THE PERVERTED GOSPEL”

A. COMMONLY REFERRED TO AS “WITNESSING”...

1. E.g., after explaining how one receives Christ, one is encouraged to do so by telling them of other people’s experiences in “accepting Christ”
 - a. This sharing of experiences of others’ conversion is called “witnessing”
 - b. It is used to convince one of the power of the gospel to transform lives
 2. New converts are often encouraged to quickly develop their own “witness”
 - a. I.e., a testimony proclaiming how their lives were changed
 - b. E.g., their testimony or “witness” might describe:
 - 1) Their actions and attitudes before they “accepted Christ”
 - 2) Circumstances that surrounded their “conversion”
 - 3) Changes that took place in life after “receiving Christ”
- **The more remarkable one’s story (witness), the better**

B. THE JUSTIFICATION OFFERED FOR SUCH “WITNESSING”...

1. The New Testament speaks of people being witnesses
 - a. E.g., “you shall be witnesses to Me” - **Ac 1:8**
 - b. This passage taken to mean that all Christians were to “witness” for Christ
 2. Yet one should consider these questions:
 - a. Are the “witnesses” in this passages referring to all Christians, or a select few?
 - b. What were they to bear witness to? Their own conversion, or something else?
- **Does this passage imply that all Christians to be “witnesses”?**

[To help answer this question, let’s take a moment and examine...]

II. WITNESSING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

A. WHO WERE TO BE WITNESSES FOR CHRIST...?

1. The context of **Ac 1:8** reveals it was **the apostles** - **Ac 1:1-11**

- a. They are specifically mentioned in verse 2
- b. Note the pronouns used throughout the text (to whom, them, they, you)
- c. They were “Men of Galilee” (i.e., not all the disciples, from other regions as well)
- 2. To be such a witness required very specific qualifications - cf. **Ac 1:21-16**
 - a. One had to have been with the apostles
 - b. From the time of Jesus’ baptism until His ascension to heaven
 - c. Because of what they were to bear witness
- **With one exception (Antipas, Re 2:13) the term “witness” was restricted to the apostles, who could bear witness because they had been with Christ - cf. Jn 15:27)**

B. WHAT WAS THEIR WITNESS FOR CHRIST...?

- 1. They bore witness to Jesus’ resurrection - cf. **Ac 1:22; 2:32; 3:15; 5:30-32; 13:30-31**
- 2. They also bore witness to His life - **Ac 10:38-42**
- 3. The apostle Paul was a special witness - **Ac 22:14-15; 26:16,22**
- **The focal point of the apostolic witness related to the resurrection of Jesus from the dead!**

[One may wonder what difference any of this makes. Does it matter, along as Jesus is glorified...?]

III. APPRECIATING THE DISTINCTION

A. BETWEEN THE CONTENT OF THE WITNESS...

- 1. **The perverted witness:** provides testimony involving one’s own conversion
 - a. Personal testimony that describes the change in one’s life
 - b. The more dramatic, the better
 - 1) Very prone to exaggeration, even fabrication
 - 2) Especially if one can “sell” their testimony through appearances, videos, books
- 2. **The apostolic witness:** provides testimony concerning the resurrection of Jesus
 - a. Eyewitness accounts based on empirical evidence - e.g., **1 Jn 1:1-2; Ac 10:40-41**
 - b. Evidence confirmed by:
 - 1) The number of witnesses
 - 2) The credibility of the witnesses (their life, teachings, sufferings, even death)
- **The former is very subjective evidence, the latter provides objective evidence**

B. BETWEEN THE PURPOSE OF THE WITNESS...

- 1. **The perverted witness:** to have you place your faith in Jesus on the basis of their conversion experience and manner of life
- 2. **The apostolic witness:** to have you place your faith in Jesus on the basis of historical facts that Jesus was raised from the dead and thereby declared to be the Son of God
- **The former produces faith based on emotional appeals, the latter produces faith based on historical evidence**

C. BETWEEN THE STRENGTH OF THE WITNESS...

- 1. **The perverted witness:** what if those upon whose testimony we came to believe later disappoint us?
 - a. Whose “conversion” proves to be less than real or short-term?
 - b. Will not our faith be shaken?
- 2. **The apostolic witness:** their testimony forever remains unchanged
 - a. Sealed by their manner of life, their exemplary teachings, their own blood

- b. Faith based on their testimony is more durable
- **The former leaves one open to great disappointment, the latter provides the foundation for a long life of strong faith in Christ**

CONCLUSION

1. Jesus acknowledged people would come to believe in Him through the words of His apostles...
 - a. As He mentioned in His prayer - cf. **Jn 17:20**
 - b. Therefore He equipped them with infallible proofs and the power of the Spirit - **Ac 1:2-3,8**
2. As impressive as many modern day testimonies may sound...
 - a. Beware of those who may be improperly motivated to “enhance” their story
 - b. Realize that remarkable transformations take place in many different religions

Place your faith in the witness Christ Himself has given to you and all: the testimony of His specially chosen witnesses, the apostles!

Have you heeded what they proclaimed...? - cf. **Ac 2:36-39**

The Power Of An Invitation

INTRODUCTION

1. There is something about an invitation...
 - a. An invitation makes us feel special
 - b. An invitation makes us feel wanted and accepted
2. An invitation is a powerful way to reach out to others...
 - a. A man invites a lady out for a date
 - b. A business person invites a client out for lunch
 - c. A housewife invites a friend over for coffee
 - d. A family invites another family to supper
3. Invitations are important in the Bible as well...
 - a. Both God and Jesus extended invitations
 - b. People extended invitations to their families and friends

[In this study we will look at some of the invitations found in the Bible. Beginning with...]

I. DIVINE INVITATIONS

A. GOD INVITED SINNERS...

1. "Come now, and let us reason together" - **Isa 1:18-19**
2. Offering forgiveness of sins to those willing to obey

B. GOD INVITED THE DESTITUTE...

1. "Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat..." - **Isa 55:1-3**
2. Offering those willing to hear that which truly satisfies

C. JESUS INVITES THE WEARY AND HEAVY LADEN...

1. "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden..." - **Mt 11:28-30**
2. Offering spiritual rest for those willing to become His disciples

D. THE HOLY SPIRIT INVITES THE THIRSTY...

1. "And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' And let him who thirsts come..." - **Re 22:17**
2. To all who desire the water of life

[We see that **God's message is often in the form of an invitation**. It should not surprise us, therefore, that servants of God would often reach out to the lost in the form of...]

II. HUMAN INVITATIONS

A. AS PROPHESED...

1. "Many people will shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord..." - **Isa 2:1-3**

2. As foreseen by Isaiah, many would invite their friends to learn about God

B. AS PRACTICED...

1. By **Andrew**, who invited Peter to meet Jesus - **Jn 1:40-42**
2. By **Philip**, who invited Nathaniel to meet Jesus - **Jn 1:43-46**
3. By **the Samaritan woman**, who invited her neighbors - **Jn 4:28-30**
4. By **Matthew (Levi)**, who gave a feast to introduce Jesus - **Lk 5:27-29**
5. By **Cornelius**, who invited his family and friends to hear Peter - **Ac 10:24,33**

[We see that **many came to know Jesus by way of an invitation**. And so it can be today! Consider, therefore...]

III. THE POWER OF AN INVITATION

A. WE HAVE SEEN IT WORK...

1. God and Jesus extended their invitation, and souls were saved!
2. The disciples extended invitations, and won souls to Christ!
3. Most people today have been saved by receiving an invitation

B. LET US PUT IT TO WORK...

1. **Invite people to services of the church**
 - a. "Come, and let us go..." - **Isa 2:3**
 - b. "Come and see..." - **Jn 1:46**
2. **Invite people to study the Bible**
 - a. "Come now, and let us reason together" - **Isa 1:18**
 - b. "Come...He will teach us His ways..." - **Isa 2:3**
3. **Invite people to obey the gospel of Christ**
 - a. "Come...all you who labor and are heavy laden" - **Mt 11:28**
 - b. "And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized..." - **Ac 22:16**
4. **Never give up extending invitations**
 - a. People will often make excuses - cf. **Lk 14:16-20**
 - b. Simply extend the invitation to others - cf. **Lk 14:21**

CONCLUSION

1. Have we made evangelism more difficult that it really is...?
 - a. Of course, calling it "personal **work**" may not help
 - b. When it can be as simple as extending an invitation: "**Come...**"
 - c. And should someone decline an invitation, we are free to offer it to someone else
2. Never underestimate the power of a simple invitation...
 - a. It transformed the life of Peter, brother of Andrew
 - b. It has transformed the lives of countless thousands ever since
 - c. Perhaps souls are not being saved because they are simply not being invited!

God and Jesus believe in the power of an invitation. They invite us to believe and obey the wonderful gospel of Christ. Have you accepted that wonderful invitation...? - cf. **Ac 2:36-41**

Note: Several ideas and illustrations were borrowed from a sermon outline by Bill Denton.

Prescription For Spiritual Health

INTRODUCTION

1. In **3 Jn 2**, John expresses his concern for Gaius' physical well-being...
 - a. Implied is the excellent status of Gaius' spiritual well-being
 - b. How about our spiritual health?
2. Spiritual vitality and strength are attained only through effort...
 - a. Just like physical health requires a proactive approach to wellness
 - b. What is need to maintain a good level of spiritual health?
3. While I am not a doctor, nor play one on TV...
 - a. Let's take a look at the Great Physician's "PDR" (physician's desk reference, i.e., the Bible)
 - b. To see if we can't come up with a "**Prescription For Spiritual Health**"

[Both physical health and spiritual health require...]

I. A STRONG IMMUNE SYSTEM

A. TO WARD OFF DISEASE...

1. Without a healthy immune system, relatively small threats can be deadly
2. Spiritually, how strong is our ability to withstand threats like:
 - a. Temptation?
 - b. False teaching?
 - c. Persecution?

B. TO FACE THE INEVITABLE...

1. Temptation and spiritual hardships are inevitable
 - a. We can't live in a bubble
 - b. Going out of the world to avoid all contact with temptation is not possible - **Jn 17:15**;
cf.. **1 Co 5:9,10**; **1 Jn 5:18**
2. Spiritually speaking, we need to build up our resistance - **Ja 4:7**

C. WITH A STRONG IMMUNE SYSTEM...

1. We will be able to take heed, lest we fall - **1 Co 10:12**
2. We will be able to live circumspectly - **Ep 5:15-17**
3. We will be able to withstand the wiles of the devil - **Ep 6:10,11**

[Contributing to a strong immune system is...]

II. REGULAR EXERCISE

A. WE THRIVE ONLY WHEN ACTIVE...

1. This is true spiritually as well as physically
2. There is the danger of becoming spiritually "sluggish" - cf. **He 6:11,12**

B. THE NECESSITY OF SPIRITUAL ACTIVITY...

1. We have been created to walk in good works - **Ep 2:10**
 - a. There is work to be done - **Ti 3:8,14**
 - b. We have been saved in order to serve - **Mt 20:27,28**
2. Each of us individually has work to do - **1 Co 12:6,7,18**; cf. **2 Ti 2:20,21**
 - a. We each need to exercise ourselves unto godliness - **1 Ti 4:7,8**
 - b. We must work while there is time and opportunity - **Ga 6:9**; cf. **Jn 9:4**
 - c. We can work most effectively within the framework of the local congregation!
 - 1) Fulfilling needed roles in evangelism, edification, benevolence
 - 2) Such as personal work, teaching Bible classes, ministering to the sick

[While there is much work to do, and work is conducive to spiritual health, so also is...]

III. PERIODIC REST

A. ENERGIES AND RESOURCES NEED REPLENISHING...

1. When much productive work has been done, we need rejuvenation to continue
 - a. We must stop and sharpen the saw
 - b. Otherwise we become exhausted, and suffer “burnout”
2. Periods of retreat characterized the Lord’s ministry - **Mk 6:30-31**
 - a. We are made such that we need some downtime
 - b. There is value in periodic solitude, where we can meditate, reflect, rest

B. WE FUNCTION BEST ALTERNATING WORK AND REST...

1. Spiritually, as well as physically, the Lord designed us to function best within the round of cycles and seasons that alternate between work and rest
2. The Lord Himself took time to be alone, to pray - **Mk 1:35**; **Lk 5:16**

C. SPIRITUAL REST DOESN’T MEAN DOING NOTHING...

1. It means doing something different that will refresh and restore our energy for work
2. It allows time for quiet prayer and Bible study
 - a. Releasing anxiety and enjoying the peace of Christ - **Ph 4:6-7**
 - b. Feeding our minds with things of virtue and good report - **Ph 4:8-9**

[Whatever the content of our usual activities, we simply cannot remain spiritually strong without significant periods of restful change. Not only for ourselves, but **do we also appreciate the need for our brethren to “take a break”?** Finally, let’s not neglect to mention the importance of...]

IV. A HEALTHY DIET

A. PROVIDING SPIRITUAL NOURISHMENT...

1. We do not live by bread alone, but by the Word of God - **Mt 4:4**
2. The Lord’s words are the words of life - **Jn 6:63,68**
3. We grow by virtue of the pure milk of the word - **1 Pe 2:2-3**

B. AVOIDING SPIRITUAL JUNK FOOD...

1. The Bible refers to that which is “sound doctrine” (lit., healthy teaching) - **Ti 2:1**
2. There is also that which is opposite “sound doctrine”
 - a. Anything which teaches contrary to the blessed gospel - cf. **1 Ti 1:9-11**
 - b. Which may appeal to those with “itching ears” - cf. **2 Ti 4:2-4**

- Health-giving nourishment involves both the assimilation of nutritious food, and the avoidance of toxic substances!

CONCLUSION

1. The **“Prescription For Spiritual Health”** is a simple one...
 - a. A Healthy Diet
 - b. Periodic Rest
 - c. Regular Exercise
 - Which together builds a strong immune system
2. If we follow this prescription, our spiritual health and progress will be evident - **1 Ti 4:11-16**
 - a. Saving not only ourselves
 - b. But blessing those around us as well (infecting them with good health!)

If we are not as spiritually healthy as we know we should be, then follow the Great Physician’s **“Prescription For Spiritual Health”**. If we are overcome by the disease of sin, then look to Him who provides spiritual healing and renewal:

*“Bless the LORD, O my soul;
And all that is within me, bless His holy name!”*
*“Bless the LORD, O my soul,
And forget not all His benefits:”*
*“Who forgives all your iniquities,
Who heals all your diseases,”*
*“Who redeems your life from destruction,
Who crowns you with loving kindness and tender mercies,”*
*Who satisfies your mouth with good things,
So that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.”*
- Psa 103:1-5

Note: The main idea and several thoughts from this lesson were taken from a lesson by Gary Henry. The URL for his web site containing many excellent articles and sermon outlines is:
<http://www.brasstacks.org>

Principles Of Church Growth

INTRODUCTION

1. The Lord desires for His church to grow...
 - a. He provides gifts to ensure spiritual growth and development - **Ep 4:11-16**
 - b. He provides increase through our connection with Him as the head - **Co 2:19**
2. Yet church growth is not automatic...
 - a. Some churches become stagnant
 - b. Other churches enter a downward spiral till they cease to exist

[To avoid either of these catastrophes, there are two important principles of church growth that must be understood and applied. The first of these is...]

I. EACH PART MUST DO ITS SHARE

A. CHURCH GROWTH IS ENHANCED...

1. When each member does his or her part as a member of the body - **Ep 4:16**
 - a. We all have a function to fulfill - **Ro 12:3-8**
 - b. Every member is important - **1 Co 12:12-22**
 2. When each member is drawing strength from the Head - **Ep 4:16; Co 2:19**
 - a. Directly through God's indwelling - **Ph 2:12-13; 4:13; Ep 3:16,20**
 - b. Indirectly from one another - cf. **2 Co 1:3-5**
- **Nourished from above and from within, a congregation is bound to grow**

B. CHURCH GROWTH IS ENDANGERED...

1. When members do not do their part
 - a. The church is handicapped by nonfunctioning members
 - b. The church cannot perform to its full potential
 2. When other members have to make up the difference
 - a. Who often struggle under the extra burden
 - b. Who sometimes become disheartened, even give up
- **When members won't do their part, a church cannot grow as God intended**

[The second principle of church growth that is crucial to understand and apply is...]

II. THE STRONG MUST BEAR WITH THE WEAK

A. CHURCH GROWTH IS ENHANCED...

1. When strong members understand the weakness in others
 - a. As the church evangelizes...
 - 1) There will always be babes in Christ
 - 2) There will always be those who are weak
 - b. As the church grows, such growth can be messy - cf. **Pro 14:4**
 - 1) Many new members haven't had the benefit of good role models
 - 2) Some families may not know their duties as parents, spouses, children
 - 3) It will take time for many Christians to learn principles of godly living

2. When strong members remember their duty toward the weak
 - a. To bear with the infirmities of the weak - **Ro 15:1-2; Ga 6:1-2**
 - 1) Not to please ourselves
 - 2) To restore those overtaken in faults
 - b. To be patient with the weak - **1 Th 5:14**
 - 1) We must accommodate the weak in order to grow (“**Growth comes out of weakness**”)
 - 2) Many churches fail to grow because the strong expect too much from the weak
- **With strong members bearing with weak members, the help needed for the weak to grow will be provided**

B. CHURCH GROWTH IS ENDANGERED...

1. When strong members become disheartened
 - a. They become weary of well-doing - cf. **Ga 6:9**
 - b. They begin to feel their labor is in vain - cf. **1 Co 15:58**
 - c. They think about leaving to go elsewhere
 - 1) Where they may be more appreciated
 - 2) Where there may be others willing to work
2. When strong members lose their source of strength; yet consider...
 - a. Longsuffering is a fruit of the Spirit - **Ga 5:22-23**
 - b. Longsuffering with joy is a gift from God - **Co 1:10-11**
 - c. Becoming disheartened can be an indication the strong are in trouble
 - 1) Because God’s strength is unlimited - cf. **Ep 3:20**
 - a) We may be depending too much on our own strength
 - b) Not looking to the Lord for the strength He provides - **Ep 6:10-13**
 - 2) We may forget...
 - a) The joy of serving for the Lord's sake alone, even if others do not appreciate it
 - b) The joy of eating cake, even when there is no icing on the cake
 - 3) We must not lose our perspective
 - a) There will always be the weak
 - b) Dealing with weak is necessary training for future shepherds and teachers

-- **If the strong members become weak, a church cannot grow!**

CONCLUSION

1. We have considered **two principles** of church growth...
 - a. Each part must do its share
 - b. The strong must bear with the weak
2. We have seen that...
 - a. Growth is **enhanced** when each part does its share
 - b. Growth is **endangered** when members don’t do their part
 - c. Growth is **enhanced** when the strong bear with the weak
 - d. Growth is **endangered** when the strong themselves become weary
3. May we consider **what we all need to be doing** to help the Lord’s church grow...
 - a. Fulfill our function in the body of Christ
 - b. Do our share in the work of the church
 - c. Grow as we should in the service of the Lord

- d. Bear with the infirmities of the weak
- e. Look to Lord for strength to avoid becoming disheartened

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”

- 1 Co 15:58

“And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.” - Ga 6:9

Private Devotions

INTRODUCTION

1. Great men of God were noted for engaging in private devotions...
 - a. Isaac meditated in the field at evening - **Gen 24:63**
 - b. David prayed three times daily, meditated on his bed at night - **Psa 55:17; 63:6**
 - c. Daniel's custom was to pray three times daily - **Dan 6:10**
2. Private devotions is encouraged by the Son of God...
 - a. Jesus sought solitary places at early morn and late night - **Mk 1:35; Lk 6:12**
 - b. He counseled His disciples to pray in secret - **Mt 6:6**

[You may faithfully attend public worship with God's people, but do you also take the time to engage in daily, private devotions...?]

I. WHY HAVE PRIVATE DEVOTIONS

A. TO DRAW NEAR TO GOD...

1. God is found by those who seek Him
 - a. As David advised his son Solomon - **1 Chr 28:9**
 - b. As Azariah told the king Asa - **2 Chr 15:2**
 2. God draws near to those who draw near to Him - **Ja 4:8**
- **Do you want a closer walk with God?**

B. TO RECEIVE SPIRITUAL NOURISHMENT...

1. We need spiritual nourishment in our lives - **Mt 4:4**
 - a. Man cannot thrive on physical food alone
 - b. We need spiritual food that nourishes the soul
 2. Spiritual growth comes from the Word of God - **1 Pe 1:23; 2:2**
 - a. We are born again through the incorruptible seed
 - b. We continue to grow by the Word of God
 3. God's Word provides spiritual strength - **Ep 6:10-17; cf. Psa 119:7-11**
 - a. We need God's help to fight our spiritual battles
 - b. The Word of God provides such help!
- **Do you want a stronger, spiritual life?**

C. TO FIND PEACE AND STABILITY...

1. We live in a world filled with anxiety; prayer provides the antidote - **Ph 4:6-7**
 2. We live in a world filled with pitfalls; God's Word keeps us from falling - **Psa 119:105,165**
- **Do you want inner peace and outer stability?**

[More than ever, we need to take the time to draw near to God, to receive spiritual nourishment, to find peace and stability. The habit of daily, private devotions can go a long way...]

II. HOW TO HAVE PERSONAL DEVOTIONS

A. FIND A TIME AND PLACE...

1. The **time** may vary for different individuals
 - a. For “night owls”, the best time may be late at night, after the children are in bed
 - b. For “morning larks”, early morning before the children wake up might be better
 - c. The key is to find a **quiet time**, free from worldly distractions
 2. The **place** may also vary for different people
 - a. Some may prefer a place outside, following the example of Jesus - cf. **Mk 1:35**
 - b. Some may prefer a place inside, following the teaching of Jesus - cf. **Mt 6:6**
 - c. The key is to find a **solitary place**, free from worldly distractions
- **To develop a habit, the time and place should be the same each day**

B. ENGAGE IN PRAYER, MEDITATION, AND PRAISE...

1. Approach God in **prayer**
 - a. Thank Him for your blessings - cf. **Co 4:2**
 - b. Confess your sins - cf. **1 Jn 1:9**
 - c. Make supplication for your needs - cf. **Ph 4:6**
 - d. Intercede on behalf of others - cf. **1 Ti 2:1-2**
 2. Spend time in **meditation** - contemplate on such things as:
 - a. The Lord Himself (His character) - **Psa 63:6**
 - b. His wonderful Works (both creative and redemptive) - cf. **Psa 77:12**
 - c. His revealed Word - **Psa 119:15,23,48,97-99,148**
 - d. Things that are wholesome and praiseworthy - cf. **Ph 4:8**
 3. Praise God in **song** - perhaps aided by recorded hymns
 - a. A natural response to joy in the heart - cf. **Ja 5:13**
 - b. Making melody in your heart - cf. **Ep 5:19**
- **Talk with God through prayer, praise; listen to Him by contemplating His Word**

CONCLUSION

1. Living in world filled with sin, there is much that would...
 - a. Fill our lives with stress and anxiety
 - b. Pull us away from God and things that are good
2. Making room for private devotions in our lives, will help greatly to...
 - a. Walk closer with our Father in heaven
 - b. Receive strength of heart and peace of mind in doing His will

If David, a man after God’s own heart, and Jesus, the Son of God Himself, found it needful to spend time alone with God, how much more do we...!

“I rise before the dawning of the morning, And cry for help; I hope in Your word. My eyes are awake through the night watches, That I may meditate on Your word.”

- Psa 119:147-148

The Problem Of Anxiety

INTRODUCTION

1. Everyone is familiar with anxiety; it is a problem of epidemic proportions
2. Yet as prevalent as it is, anxiety or worry is one of the most counterproductive things we can do...
 - a. Worry is like a rocking chair it will give you something to do, but it won't get you anywhere
 - b. Worry is a fast getaway on a wooden horse

[How should Christians approach the problem of worry? What can we do about it? Perhaps by first...]

I. UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

A. WHAT IS ANXIETY...?

1. Anxiety is distress about future uncertainties...
 - a. It is characterized by mental agitation and uneasiness
 - b. It may be mild or severe
2. It primarily has to do with what may happen in the future, either near or distant.

B. WHAT CAUSES ANXIETY...?

1. Anxiety is caused by real or imagined threats to our well-being...
 - a. We feel vulnerable and inadequately protected against these threats
 - b. Threats such as social rejection, physical injury or disease, poverty, death, and a wide range of other threats
2. Anxiety has three main elements...
 - a. **Insecurity:** something bad is going to happen
 - b. **Helplessness:** there is nothing I can do
 - c. **Isolation:** there is no one to help me
 - These causes may operate individually or in various combinations
3. Emotionally, they cause just as much anxiety if they are imagined as if they were real

[Anxiety is a form of fear, and must be recognized as such. With an understanding of the problem, we are closer to...]

II. OVERCOMING THE PROBLEM

A. TRUST IN GOD...

1. The best remedy is to deal with the problem's causes, not just its symptoms
2. What is the truth about insecurity, helplessness, and isolation with regard to the Christian?
 - a. While the Christian may feel insecure, the reality is that he is very secure - **Pro 3:21-26; He 4:16**
 - b. While the Christian may feel helpless, the reality is that he has great help - **Ro 8:31; cf. Psa 27:5**
 - c. While the Christian may feel isolated, the reality is that God is always at his side - **Psa 23:4; Mt 28:20; He 13:5,6**
3. The remedy for anxiety is complete trust and confidence in God's ability to deal with anything that threatens us - **Isa 40:31; Jn 14:1; Ph 4:13; cf. Deu 31:7,8; Ro 8:31**

- a. The more we learn about God, the more we know His infinite power and His concern for us - **1 Pe 5:6,7**
- b. The avenue of prayer is open to the Christian to request God's - **1 Jn 5:14**
- c. God has promised peace of mind to those who are willing to commit their anxieties to Him - **Jn 16:33; Ph 4:6,7; 1 Pe 4:19**

B. TAKE THESE PRACTICAL STEPS...

1. Read the Bible

- a. Committing ourselves to God's safekeeping requires that we grow in our knowledge of God and love for Him
- b. Thus, the most important thing we can do is study the Scriptures, pray, and meditate on God's promises to His faithful people - **Ro 15:4**

2. Be realistic

- a. Peace of mind does not depend on solving all the problems, righting all the wrongs, removing all the imperfections, or getting all we want - cf. **Ecc 8:16-17**
- b. Some things will not change and we need to be realistic enough to accept that
 - 1) There are problems that have no solutions
 - 2) There are situations that must simply be lived through
 - 3) The art of being wise is the art of knowing what to overlook (William James) - cf. **Pro 19:11**
- c. Realistic knowledge of our own limitations ought to cause us to relax and slow down
 - 1) Besides the noble art of getting things done is the noble art of leaving things undone
 - 2) The wisdom of life consists in the elimination of nonessentials (Gladstone)
- d. We must learn to let go of some problems and allow the Lord to be in charge of them - **1 Pe 5:7; cf. Pro 3:5,6**

3. Be flexible

- a. Change is inevitable we have got to be resilient, adaptable, adjustable - cf. **Ph 4:11-12**
- b. Under stress, if we can't bend, we will surely break
- c. Our faith must be in Him who changes not
- d. There are some changes we ought to resist without compromise; wisdom can tell us when to change and when to hold our ground

4. Focus on the good cares, minimize the unnecessary ones

- a. In the Bible, cares can be either good or bad
 - 1) Good - **1 Co 12:25; 2 Co 11:28; Ph 2:20**
 - 2) Bad - **Mt 13:22; Ph 4:6; 1 P 5:7**
- b. We tend to become distracted by many relatively unimportant cares, and don't care enough about the things we ought to - **Mt 13:22**
- c. When the mind is distracted by many pursuits, it derives but little benefit from any of them
- d. Really only one thing is necessary - **Lk 10:41,42; cf. Mt 6:33,34**

5. Learn to live one day at a time

- a. Proper use of today diminishes anxiety about tomorrow - cf. **Mt 6:34**
 - 1) Anxiety does not empty tomorrow of its worries and sorrows; it only empties today of its strengths
 - 2) Worry is the interest paid on trouble before it falls due
- b. Many, if not most, of our fears will turn out to be unfounded
 - 1) Winston Churchill said on his deathbed that he had had a lot of trouble in his life, most of which never happened
 - 2) In headaches and in worry vaguely life leaks away, and Time will have his fancy

tomorrow or today (**W. H. Auden**)

6. **Stay busy**

- a. Anxiety and idleness often go hand-in-hand
 - 1) Despair is a form of laziness
 - 2) Blessed is the person who is too busy to worry in the daytime, and too sleepy to worry at night
- b. Much good can be accomplished, even in adverse circumstances, if we will quit concentrating on what cannot be done and do what CAN be done
 - 1) Don't waste time in doubts and fears; spend yourself in the work before you, well assured that the right performance of this hour's duties will be the best preparation for the hours or ages that follow it (**Ralph Waldo Emerson**)
 - 2) Our great business in life is not to see what lies dimly at a distance, but to do what lies clearly at hand (**Thomas Carlyle**)
- c. There is no tranquilizer as effective as the knowledge that we have done our best and there is no pillow as soft as a good conscience

7. **Learn contentment**

- a. A lesson Paul had learned - **Ph 4:11-13**
 - 1) We need to be able to rejoice in the Lord, which we can do if we continually count
 - 2) The Christian ought to be able to see the silver lining in the darkest cloud
- b. The discontented Christian may lose his soul because of it - **1 Ti 6:6-8; He 13:5,6**
 - 1) Anxiety often comes from having too much, rather than too little - **Ecc 5:12**
 - 2) Our wealth depends not so much on what we have, as what we can do without
- c. When a problem produces anxiety within us, the very best thing we can do than bathe the problem in two things: **reverence** and **gratitude**

CONCLUSION

1. The Christian is given the means to deal with anxiety...
 - a. Peace that comes through prayer - cf. **Ph 4:6-7**
 - b. Reassuring confidence from trusting in God - cf. **Psa 23:1-6**
2. Whenever the feelings of insecurity, helplessness, and isolation produce anxiety...
 - a. Focus on putting your trust in God
 - b. Read the Bible, be realistic, be flexible, focus on the good cares, minimize the unnecessary ones, learn to live one day at a time, stay busy, and learn contentment

Note: The main idea and several thoughts from this lesson were taken from a lesson by Gary Henry. The URL for his web site containing many excellent articles and sermon outlines is:
<http://www.brasstacks.org>

The Problem Of Religious Division

INTRODUCTION

1. Every disciple who follows Jesus should be concerned with unity among believers...
 - a. In light of Jesus' prayer for unity - **Jn 17:20-23**
 - b. In light of Paul's condemnation of division - **1 Co 1:10-13**
2. From Jesus and Paul we learn...
 - a. Unity can be a powerful witness to the world
 - b. Division is often a mark of carnality and spiritual immaturity - cf. **1 Co 3:3-4**
3. Unfortunately, many who claim to follow Jesus...
 - a. Have not done a very good job in displaying unity
 - b. Have hindered the cause of Christ at different times and different places

[To illustrate what I mean, let's take a brief look at...]

I. THE PROBLEM OF DIVISION

A. EXISTED IN THE DAYS OF THE EARLY CHURCH...

1. The church at Corinth - **1 Co 1:10-13; 3:3-4; 11:18**
2. The conduct of Diotrephes - **3 Jn 9-10**
- **Such turmoil was anticipated by The Parable Of The Tares - Mt 13:24-30,36-43**

B. CONTINUED THROUGHOUT CHURCH HISTORY...

1. With the schisms between **Roman** and **Orthodox** churches
2. With the denominational divisions of the **Protestant** churches, despite statements as:
 - a. "I ask that men make no reference to my name, and call themselves not Lutherans, but Christians. What is Luther? My doctrine, I am sure, is not mine, nor have I been crucified for any one. St. Paul, in 1 Co. 3, would not allow Christians to call themselves Pauline or Petrine, but Christian. How then should I, poor, foul carcass that I am, come to have men give to the children of Christ a name derived from my worthless name? No, no, my dear friends; let us abolish all party names, and call ourselves Christians after Him Whose doctrine we have." - **Martin Luther**
 - b. "Would to God that all party names, and unscriptural phrases and forms which have divided the Christian world, were forgot and that the very name [Methodist] might never be mentioned more, but be buried in eternal oblivion." - **John Wesley**
 - c. "I look forward with pleasure to the day when there will not be a Baptist living! I hope that the Baptist name will soon perish, but let Christ's name last forever." - **Charles Spurgeon**

C. PRESENT IN THE RELIGIOUS WORLD TODAY...

1. As demonstrated by the literally thousands of denominations
2. Even among churches of Christ
 - a. Whose plea for unity as been a major theme in what makes them distinctive
 - b. Yet today there have been nearly twenty (20) identifiable divisions in the last 150 years
 - c. And there have been countless divisions in individual congregations over matters of

personality rather than doctrine!

[The problem of division continues, despite the devastating effect it has on our witness for Christ. What can be done by those who want to work toward the unity for which Jesus prayed...?]

II. THE SOLUTION FOR UNITY

A. ACCEPT THE SAME STANDARD OF AUTHORITY...

1. This is the first step toward religious unity
 - a. The need for a standard can be easily illustrated (e.g., agreeing on the length of a line)
 - b. For Christians, the standard must be the Word of God as revealed through Jesus and His apostles
 - 1) Jesus has all authority - **Mt 28:18**
 - 2) We must abide in His doctrine - **Jn 8:31; 2 Jn 9**
 - 3) The Spirit led the apostles into all the truth - **Jn 16:13; Ac 20:27; 2 Pe 1:3**
 - 4) We must continue steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine - **Ac 2:42; 1 Co 14:37**
2. This requires putting away all other standards of authority
 - a. Such as creeds, traditions of men, ecclesiastical councils, etc.
 - b. Also personal or parental preferences and opinions
 - c. Things not explicitly authorized in the Scriptures
3. The same standard of authority can quickly unify those willing to follow it
 - a. E.g., how many baptisms are there?
 - b. Those seeking to maintain the unity of the Spirit will answer: "one baptism" - cf. **Ep 4:3-6**

B. DEVELOP CHRIST-LIKE ATTITUDES...

1. This is required to maintain true unity in Christ
 - a. For many can claim to let the Bible be their only standard
 - b. Yet differing views often exist, for understandable reasons
 - 1) Varying degrees of maturity
 - 2) Varying levels of knowledge
2. Barton W. Stone, an effective promoter of Christian unity in the early 1800's, had these insightful words in an article entitled "Christian Union" published in The Christian

Messenger

(1828):

"On no other foundation can the parties ever meet, than on the Bible alone, without note

or

comment; and in no other name will they ever unite, but in that given to the disciples at Antioch--CHRISTIAN. But should all the professors of Christianity reject all their various creeds and names, and agree to receive the Bible alone, and be called by no other name than Christian, will this unite them? No, we are fully convinced that unless they all possess the SPIRIT of that book and name they are far, very far, from Christian union." (As quoted by J. M. Powell, *The Cause We Plead: A Story Of The Restoration Movement, 20th Century Christian, 1987, p. 56*)

3. So we must display **Christ-like virtues** as we seek the mind of Christ
 - a. Lowliness, gentleness, longsuffering, bearing with one another in love - **Ep 4:1-3**
 - b. A lack of selfish ambition or conceit, esteeming others better than ourselves - **Ph 2:1-5**
 - c. Patient, in humility correcting those in opposition - **2 Ti 2:24-26**

C. RESTRAIN PERSONAL LIBERTIES...

1. Much division results from brethren pressing what they perceive to be **freedom** in Christ
 - a. Imposing such freedom on those whose conscience would be violated
 - b. Forcing brethren to either leave or sin against their conscience
2. Paul taught brethren to restrain their **liberties** for the sake of their brethren
 - a. In writing to the saints in Rome - **Ro 14:14-15,21; 15:1-3**
 - b. In writing to the church at Corinth - **1 Co 8:9-13; 10:24,31-33**
3. When Christ-like attitudes are joined together with a willingness to restrain liberty...
 - a. Christians are more likely to remain **united in their actions** together
 - b. Christians are more likely to one day be **united in their thinking** as well!

D. FOCUS YOUR EFFORTS...

1. First, on **yourself!**
 - a. Resolve to be simply a Christian, a disciple of Jesus Christ
 - b. Put away any belief or practice based on traditions of men, not the Word of God
 - c. Develop the virtues that contribute to unity among Christians
 - 1) Those Christ-like attitudes mentioned earlier
 - 2) A willingness to restrain personal liberties for the sake of your brother
2. Next, on **your local congregation!**
 - a. That it not be one contributing to religious division (i.e., a denomination)
 - b. That it accepts the Word of God for its final authority
 - c. That it puts away all names, practices, traditions, not taught by the Scriptures
 - d. That it is concerned with the unity of believers
3. Then, on **others in your community!**
 - a. Individuals who desire to be true disciples of Jesus
 - b. Congregations willing to take Jesus' prayer and Paul's condemnation seriously

CONCLUSION

1. You may feel there is little one can do with the problem of division...
 - a. Denominationalism is so rampant
 - b. Religious division has been around so long
2. Yet two thoughts come to mind that encourage me to try...
 - a. I can at least save myself and those who hear me - cf. **1 Ti 4:16**
 - b. Great things can have a small beginning - cf. **Mt 13:31-33**

If unity among believers was so important to Jesus, how can we not make the effort to maintain the unity He made possible by His death on the cross? - cf. **Ep 2:13-16**

The Providence Of God

INTRODUCTION

1. In His sermon on the mount, Jesus talked of God's care...
 - a. For the birds of the air and the lilies of the field - **Mt 6:26-29**
 - b. For those who seek first the kingdom of God - **Mt 6:30-33**
2. Jesus was talking about the providential care of God...
 - a. That demonstrates His love for His creatures
 - b. In ways that are not necessarily miraculous or supernatural

[The providence of God and its working in our lives can be easily misunderstood. Perhaps these thoughts might help...]

I. THE DEFINITION OF PROVIDENCE

A. THE WORD...

1. The word "provide" (from Latin **providere**) means etymologically "to foresee" - **ISBE**
2. The corresponding Greek word, **pronoia**, means "forethought" - **ibid.**
3. The Greek word is actually found only twice in the Scriptures
 - a. Translated "foresight" (providence, KJV), and applied to Felix - **Ac 24:2**
 - b. Translated "provision" in **Ro 13:14**

B. THE CONCEPT...

1. Forethought and foresight imply a future end, a goal and a definite purpose and plan for attaining that end - **ISBE**
2. The word "providence" has come to be used...to signify that preparation, care, and supervision which are necessary to secure a desired future result - **ibid.**
3. Literally means foresight, but is generally used to denote God's preserving and governing all things by means of **second** causes - **Easton**
4. While miraculous acts of God can be described as providential, the concept of providence is generally used to describe His care through **natural** means

[In describing the providence of God, it is common to speak of it in two senses...]

II. THE DESCRIPTION OF PROVIDENCE

A. GENERAL PROVIDENCE...

1. The widespread care and supervision which God exercises over His created universe is commonly designated as His general providence which embraces alike the evil and the good - **ISBE**
2. God's general providence extends to:
 - a. The natural world - **Psa 104:14; 135:5-7; Ac 14:17**
 - b. The animal world - **Psa 104:21-29; Mt 6:26; 10:29**
 - c. The affairs of men in general - **Job 12:23; Dan 2:21; Mt 5:45**

B. SPECIAL PROVIDENCE...

1. There is a more special and particular providence which He exercises over and in behalf of the good, those whose wills are in harmony with the divine will - **ISBE**
 - a. God's general providence is and must be special, in that it descends to particulars - to the minute details of creaturely existence - and is always and everywhere active - **ibid.**
 - b. But the Scriptures teach that there is a more special care over and ordering of the lives of the spiritually good than pertains to the wicked, who have not the fear of God before their eyes - **ibid.**
 - c. The following Scriptures set forth in unmistakable terms the doctrine of a special providence exercised by the heavenly Father over and in behalf of the righteous (**Psa 37:23; Pro 3:6; Mt 6:33; Ro 8:28**) - **ibid.**
2. There are some things to keep in mind in regards to the special providence of God
 - a. **The ultimate end sought is man's spiritual good, not material benefits**
 - 1) Material blessings may come to one as a result of special providence - **Mt 6:33**
 - 2) Yet God may also allow financial hardship, illness, or other physical trials to occur if He deems them suitable for our spiritual benefit - cf. **Ro 5:3-5; Ja 1:2-4**
 - 3) Thus we conclude that His ultimate goal is our spiritual good
 - b. **We should not presume all things are the result of special providence**
 - 1) Things may happen that are accidental or coincidental - **Ecc 9:11**
 - 2) Too many credit God or give Him blame for every good or ill in life
 - 3) Some things may be the result of Satan's activity (remember Job?) - cf. **1 Pe 5:8-9**
 - 4) Other things may be the consequence of evil men's actions (e.g., drunken driver)
 - 5) Of course, God's special providence helps us overcome such evil - **Ro 8:35-39**
 - c. **Special providence and man's cooperation**
 - 1) Promise of God's care does not mean that we need not take action
 - 2) We must both pray and work for our food - cf. **Mt 6:11; 2 Th 3:10; 1 Ti 5:8**
 - 3) We must work out our salvation, while God helps us - **Mt 6:33; Ph 2:12-13; 1 Pe 3:10-12**

[Thus God graciously provides for His creation in both general and special ways, the latter being a particular blessing of walking with God. Even so, it is not easy to know when something is coincidental or providential...]

III. THE DETERMINATION OF PROVIDENCE

A. THE NEED FOR CAUTION...

1. Many are quick to interpret what happens as indications of God's judgment
 - a. If something bad happens, those who experience must be wicked
 - b. If something good happens, those who experience must be righteous
2. Yet the Bible reveals that there many exceptions
 - a. Bad things often happen to the righteous (cf. Job, the early Christians)
 - b. Good things often happen to the wicked - cf. **Psa 73:3-12; Job 21:7-13**
3. Likewise, we cannot always be certain whether something is providential
 - a. A series of events may be coincidental or happenstance
 - b. We can easily misread what happens, come to the wrong conclusion
 - c. The danger is even greater if we are ignorant of God's revealed will (the Scriptures)
 - d. We might conclude something to be right (because it seems successful), when it may be contrary to what God has spoken on the subject

B. THE BEST WE CAN DO...

1. Possess the perspective of Mordecai - cf. **Est 4:14**
 - a. He wondered whether Esther had been placed in her position by God
 - b. Yet he did not presume such was actually the case
2. Remain open to the possibility the Lord's will may be different - cf. **Ro 1:10; Ac 18:21**
 - a. We can only be certain in things pertaining to God's revealed will (the Scriptures)
 - b. There is an uncertainty pertaining to God's permissive will ("If...") - cf. **Ja 4:15**
3. In everything give thanks - **Ph 4:6**
 - a. For the good things that come our way
 - b. For the ill things too, as they can be used for our spiritual growth
4. Leave the ultimate determination of providence to God
 - a. We need not "whittle on His end of the stick"
 - b. We can believe in God's providence without being able to interpret every circumstance

CONCLUSION

1. The providence of God is a wonderful blessing...
 - a. We know that He is working toward our ultimate good, the salvation of our souls
 - b. His care will provide what we need, and often far beyond that
2. To ensure God's providential working for our ultimate good...
 - a. Seek first the kingdom of God
 - b. Study and apply what is God's revealed will
 - c. Make plans that are submissive to the Lord's permissive will ("If the Lord wills...")
 - d. In everything give God thanks

"For He who would love life And see good days, Let him refrain his tongue from evil, And his lips from speaking deceit. Let him turn away from evil and do good; Let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, And His ears are open to their prayers; But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil." - 1 Pe 3:10-12

A Reason For Our Hope

INTRODUCTION

1. In **1 Peter 3:15**, we find Peter giving the following command:

“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;”

2. Here we learn that we are to always be ready to explain the basis of our hope...
 - a. What reasons are there for the hope we have in Christ?
 - b. We must be ready to provide such reasons!
3. In this lesson, I wish to share with you a reason for **my** hope...
 - a. There are many reasons I could give, for the evidences for my faith are many
 - b. But this is where I would begin if I were called upon to give a reason for my hope
4. In sharing with you a reason for my hope, perhaps I can...
 - a. Strengthen and confirm the hope of my fellow Christians
 - b. Create faith and hope in the hearts of some who may not yet be Christians

[Let me begin by suggesting facts which no one can deny, even if one is an atheist or an agnostic...]

I. FACTS WHICH CAN'T BE DENIED

A. JESUS LIVED...

1. Only the most ignorant or prejudiced skeptic would question the historicity of Jesus
2. The reason? The evidence from unbiased sources:
 - a. Roman historians attest to this fact
 - 1) **Tacitus** (112 A.D.) in his “Annals”
 - 2) **Pliny the Younger** (112 A.D.) in his letter to the emperor Trajan
 - 3) **Seutonius** (120 A.D.), a court official under Hadrian
 - b. Jewish sources, while denying His deity, attest to His historicity
 - 1) **Flavious Jospheus** (b. 37 A.D.), a Jewish general and historian makes several references to Jesus
 - 2) **The Talmud**
 - a) Books of Jewish law, they speak frequently of Jesus
 - b) Denying not that Jesus lived, only that He was not what He or others claimed
 - c. **Thallus** (52 A.D.), a Samaritan historian who tried to explain away the darkness at the crucifixion
3. So overwhelming is the evidence, even atheistic historians admit Jesus lived
 - a. “One is obliged to say, ‘Here was a man. This part of the tale could not have been invented.’” (**H. G. Wells, Outline Of History**)
 - b. **Will Durant** spent two chapters on Jesus in his book, *The Story Of Our Civilization*

B. EVIDENCE FOR THE NEW TESTAMENT AS A HISTORICAL DOCUMENT IS REMARKABLE...

1. **Its authors claim to write as historians or even eyewitnesses to real events**

- a. Luke, the physician
 - 1) His gospel (Luke) and history of the early church (Acts) compose over a third of the New Testament
 - 2) He wrote as one describing historical events - **Lk 2:1-4; Ac 1:1-3**
 - b. John, the beloved disciple
 - 1) His gospel (John) was written as an eyewitness account - **Jn 20:30-31; 21:24-25**
 - 2) In his epistle (1st John), he claimed to be an eyewitness - **1 Jn 1:1-4**
 - c. Paul, the Jewish rabbi
 - 1) Half of the books of the New Testament are his personal letters
 - 2) He claimed to have been an eyewitness, along with others - **1 Co 15:3-8**
 2. **As a historical document, it's evidence is remarkable!**
 - a. It was written soon after the events it records
 - 1) As stated by **Nelson Glueck**, former president of the Jewish Theological Seminary in the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, and renowned Jewish archaeologist: "In my opinion, every book of the New Testament was written between the forties and eighties of the First Century A.D."
 - 2) "We can already say emphatically that there is no longer any solid basis for dating any book of the New Testament after 80 A.D." - **W. F. Albright**, Biblical archaeologist
 - b. It is noted for its historical accuracy in areas that can be tested
 - 1) "It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a Biblical reference." - **Nelson Glueck** (noted Jewish archaeologist)
 - 2) "Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy, he is possessed of the true historic sense...in short, this author should be placed along with the greatest of historians." - **Sir William Ramsay**
 - c. The manuscript attestation is for the New Testament unsurpassed
 - 1) In the number of copies for the purpose of comparison
 - a) There are over 4,000 Greek manuscripts, 13,000 copies of portions of the NT
 - b) Contrast that with other historical documents (Caesar's "Gallic Wars", only 10 Greek manuscripts; "Annals" of Tacitus, 2; Livy, 20; Plato, 7; Sophocles, 100)
 - 2) In the time between the originals and earliest copies
 - a) Fragments exist that are with 50-100 years; complete copies that are with 300-400 years after the originals were written
 - b) Compare this manuscripts of other classical histories:
 - 1/ "Histories of Thucydides" - earliest copy is 1300 years removed from the original
 - 2/ "Histories of Herodotus" - earliest copy is 1350 years removed from the original
 - 3/ Caesar's "Gallic War" - 950 years
 - 4/ Roman History of Livy - 350 years (the earliest copy is only a fragment)
 - 5/ "Histories" of Tacitus - 750 years
 - 6/ "Annals" of Tacitus - 950 years (there are only two manuscripts)
 - d. What variances that exist between the ancient copies are minuscule
 - 1) Only 1/2 of one percent is in question (compared to 5 percent for the Iliad)
 - 2) Even then, it can be stated: "No fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith rests on a disputed reading...It cannot be too strongly asserted that in substance the text of the Bible is certain: especially is this the case with the New Testament." - **Sir Frederick Kenyon** (authority in the field of New Testament textual criticism)
- Such evidence for the New Testament has led to the following statement: "The**

evidence for our New Testament writings is ever so much greater than the evidence for many writings of classical authors, the authenticity of which no one dreams of questioning. And if the New Testament were a collection of secular writings, their authenticity would generally be as beyond all doubt.” - F. F. Bruce

C. IF NOT TRUE, THE NEW TESTAMENT IS A CAREFULLY CONTRIVED LIE...

1. **The writers of the New Testament leave us no alternative**
 - a. They are either “eyewitnesses” or “false witnesses” - **1 Co 15:14-15**
 - b. Either the events occurred as described, or they are “cunningly devised fables” - **2 Pe 1:16-18**
 2. **We cannot say they might have been sincerely deceived**
 - a. Especially in reference to the resurrection of Jesus
 - 1) They claim they ate and drank with Him afterwards - **Ac 10:39-41**
 - 2) They claim they saw and touched Him - **1 Jn 1:1-4**
 - b. They leave us no room saying they were mistaken or deceived!
 - 1) Some sympathetic skeptics have tried to offer this as an alternative
 - 2) That perhaps in their grief and loss over the crucifixion of Jesus they hallucinated or had grief-inspired visions of Jesus
 - 3) But “hallucinations” and “visions” are highly individualistic experiences
 - a) One person might see the hallucination or vision
 - b) But several or many people don’t see the same vision at the same time!
 - 4) As outlined in the gospels and also **1 Co 15:4-8**, the resurrection appearances of Jesus were often witnessed by many at the same time (over 500 on one occasion!)
- **So they leave us no choice; either the New Testament is a “Book Of Truth,” or it is a “Book of Lies”**

[At this point I believe I can fairly say that no one can deny these three facts:

- ◆ Jesus lived
- ◆ The evidence for The New Testament as a historical document is overwhelming
- ◆ If not true, it is a carefully contrived lie!

Given that these facts are undeniable, then consider with me...]

II. THE IMPLICATIONS OF THESE FACTS

A. WE ARE FORCED TO MAKE A DECISION...

1. **Concerning Jesus**
 - a. We can’t deny that He lived
 - b. Therefore we must decide who He is
 - 1) Is He what His followers claimed, the Son of God? - cf. **Mt 16:13-17**
 - 2) Or is the New Testament’s representation of Him false?
2. **Concerning the evidence of the New Testament as a historical document**
 - a. We can’t deny the overwhelming evidence for the New Testament
 - b. Therefore we must decide concerning its historical reliability
 - 1) Will we accept it on the same basis we accept other historical documents?
 - 2) If so, then will we either accept it at face value, or reject it and along with all other historical documents whose evidence are much less?
3. **Concerning whether the New Testament is true**

- a. We cannot say that it was simply a sincere but mistaken effort to explain who Jesus was
- b. Therefore we must decide whether it is true, or a carefully contrived lie!
- It is this last issue upon which all else truly depends!

B. THE IMPLICATIONS OF OUR DECISION...

1. If we decide that the New Testament is a carefully contrived lie...

- a. Then we must concede that a book with the world's highest standard of morality was composed by a group of liars, frauds, and deceivers!
 - 1) For what book contains a higher standard of love and morality than the New Testament?
 - 2) E.g., Jesus' "Sermon On The Mount" (**Mt 5-7**), and Paul's "Discourse On Love" (**1 Co 13**)
- b. We must also concede that a book with overwhelming evidence as a historical document was carefully put together to deceive
 - 1) Known historical names, places and events were carefully intertwined with bold-faced lies
 - 2) Solemn affirmations concerning its truthfulness are made, intended to deceive those to whom such affirmations were made
- c. We must also concede that we know nothing about Jesus
 - 1) For outside the New Testament, there is no reliable historical record of Jesus' life and teachings
 - 2) And how can we trust the record of liars, frauds, and deceivers?
- But is it reasonable or logical to draw such a conclusion?

2. If we decide that the New Testament is true...

- a. We have a reason for our hope concerning salvation!
 - 1) For it tells us of the life and death of Jesus Christ
 - 2) And how we can receive remission of sins through His blood!
- b. We have a reason for our hope concerning this life!
 - 1) For it tells us of the teachings and promises of Jesus Christ
 - 2) And how we can have the peace and joy only He can provide!
- c. We have a reason for our hope concerning the future!
 - 1) For it tells us of His resurrection, ascension, and coming again
 - 2) And how we have the hope of our own resurrection along with eternal life!

CONCLUSION

- 1. One reason for my hope is therefore based upon three facts which can't be denied...
 - a. Jesus lived
 - b. Evidence for the New Testament as a historical document is overwhelming
 - c. If not true, then it is a carefully contrived lie
- 2. I have spent over forty years studying the New Testament...
 - a. To conclude that it is a carefully contrived lie makes no logical sense to me
 - b. Instead, I am persuaded that it contains a sincere, truthful account of who Jesus is and what He did

The testimony of the New Testament, then, is a strong reason for the hope that I have in Jesus Christ. May it be a reason for your hope as well!

Reflections On The Loss Of A Loved One

INTRODUCTION

1. The loss of loved one is a difficult burden to bear...
 - a. Only those who die young and before others escape this burden
 - b. All others will bear this burden at some point in their life
2. The Lord certainly knows our grief...
 - a. He wept when as He saw those weeping over the loss of a loved one - **Jn 11:33-35**
 - b. He sought to prepare His own disciples for when they would lose Him - **Jn 14:1-3**
3. Indeed, God can be a wonderful source of comfort...
 - a. In the here and now - cf. **2 Co 1:3-5**
 - b. In the hereafter - cf. **Re 21:4**
4. In the death of my mother...
 - a. I found God to be the God of all comfort
 - b. Indeed, I found that He provided many avenues of comfort

[As I reflected on my mother's passing, I found myself thankful for His many comforts. Perhaps you might find my thoughts helpful should you find yourself losing a loved one...]

I. SOURCES OF COMFORT DEFINED

A. HOPE IN CHRIST...

1. As Christians, we grieve, but not as those with no hope - **1 Th 4:13**
2. In Christ, we have the hope of resurrection and reunion - **1 Th 4:14-17**
3. This hope is a wonderful source of comfort - **1 Th 4:18**
- **I was comforted to have a mother who died in Christ**

B. PRECIOUS MEMORIES...

1. Memories can be a source of comfort - e.g., **Ph 1:3**
2. Especially when they involve one's faithful service to Christ - **Ph 1:4-5**
3. Such memories add to the confidence of our hope - **Ph 1:6**
- **I was comforted to have a mother who was a faithful Christian**

C. LOVE OF FAMILY, BRETHREN, FRIENDS...

1. One way that God comforts us is through other people
2. Who comfort us with comfort they have received from God - **2 Co 1:4**
3. In times of loss and suffering, it often brings out the best in people
- **I was comforted by many expressions of love and kindness from others**

D. THE WORD OF GOD...

1. The Word of God is a source of peace and strength - **Psa 119:165; 1:1-3**
2. If such was true of the Law, how much more the words of Jesus and His apostles!
- **I was comforted by God's words of peace, love and hope**

E. PRAYER...

1. Prayer is likewise a source of peace and strength - **Ph 4:6-7**
 2. It is an avenue in which to find grace and help in time of need - **He 4:14-16**
 3. Many people wrote to tell me that I was in their prayers
- **I was comforted by both personal and public prayers, offered by so many**

F. SONGS...

1. Songs of joy, faith, and hope were sung at the funeral
 2. Later, a congregation devoted an entire service to song in memory of my mother
 3. With hymns, psalms, and spiritual songs, singing both praises God and edifies one another
- **Ep 5:19; Co 3:16**
- **I was comforted (and moved most, providing an outlet for my grief) by songs of hope and faith that we have in Christ**

[With so many sources of comfort, I found the loss of my mother to be a reminder of how richly blessed I am, and how kind God has been to me. Yet I am aware that not all enjoy such blessings during the time of their loss. Which leads me to say a few words about the following...]

II. SOURCES OF COMFORT DEVELOPED

A. HOPE IN CHRIST...

1. Our wonderful hope is for those who are faithful to Christ till death - **Re 2:10**
 2. If we desire to have this hope, and to leave it as a legacy for those left behind, we must be faithful servants of Christ
- **Do not wait until it is too late; you will only add to the grief of your loved ones**

B. PRECIOUS MEMORIES...

1. Now is the time to be making memories
 2. Especially memories of your faithful service to God, your kindness to others, etc.
- **What kind of memories have you been creating lately?**

C. LOVE OF FAMILY, BRETHREN, FRIENDS...

1. Loving relationships take time to develop
 2. Don't think only of family, you might outlive all of yours; remember brethren and friends
- **What kind of relationships with people are you developing now?**

D. THE WORD OF GOD...

1. It also takes time to become familiar with the Word of God
 2. To learn where to turn to find comfort, peace, and strength
- **Are you familiarizing yourself with the Bible so it can help you in your grief?**

E. PRAYER...

1. Prayer is of value only if we are right relationship with God - **1 Pe 3:12**
 2. Prayer is comforting only if we are already close to God
- **Are you drawing closer to God by frequently talking to Him in prayer?**

F. SONGS...

1. Like the Word of God, songs comfort us when they are familiar to us
2. When we've had time to reflect, to understand what we are singing about

-- Do you sing spiritual songs enough to find comfort in them now?

CONCLUSION

1. The death of a loved one has been made easier to bear because of God's grace...
 - a. Jesus died to deliver us from the fear of death - **He 2:14-15**
 - b. The death of a righteous person is precious in God's sight - **Psa 116:15**
 - c. The loved one has finally gone home; if we remain faithful, the separation will be temporary

2. The blessings that God affords His children in time of death are so many...
 - a. But they must be received and acted upon
 - b. We must act now to benefit from them in the future

Are you preparing for the reality of death? Are you doing things today that will make the "death-day" of your loved ones (and your own) easier to bear, even a cause for celebration...?

Resolutions For A New Millennium

INTRODUCTION

1. We have the unusual opportunity to experience not only the start of a new year...
 - a. But also the beginning of a new century
 - b. And the beginning of a new millennium
2. On the verge of a new millennium, it is natural for Christians to reflect...
 - a. It has been almost 2000 years since the promise of our Lord's return - **Ac 1:9-11**
 - b. While a long time for us, it is an indication of the Lord's longsuffering - **2 Pe 3:8-9**
 - c. And so we continue to look forward to His coming - **2 Pe 3:10-12**

[As we enter the third millennium, permit me to suggest some "Resolutions For A New Millennium", beginning with a reminder of...]

I. OUR ULTIMATE GOAL IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM

A. TO BE READY FOR THE LORD...

1. To be found by Him in peace - **2 Pe 3:14a**
2. To be without spot and blameless - **2 Pe 3:14b**
- **Whenever the Lord returns, we certainly want to be ready for His coming!**

B. TO REMAIN STEADFAST...

1. Lest we fall - **2 Pe 3:17a**; cf. **He 3:12-14**
2. Lest we be led astray - **2 Pe 3:17b**; cf. **2 Pe 2:1-3**
- **To be ready for His coming, we must make sure we do not fall away through negligence, nor be led astray by false teachers!**

[What could be more important, than to be ready for when our Lord returns? If it was important for Christians in the first millennium (indeed, even in the first century), how much more for us in the third millennium? To ensure that we attain our ultimate goal, I offer several resolutions for...]

II. ATTAINING OUR GOAL IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM

A. READ THE BIBLE DAILY...

1. It is the way to salvation - **Ja 1:21**
2. It is nutrition for spiritual growth - **1 Pe 2:2**
3. It is protection against drifting, or being misled by false teachers - **He 2:1-3**; **Ac 20:29-32**
- **Resolve to spend time each day feeding upon the Word of God!**

B. PRAY EVERY DAY...

1. For the Christian, prayer is the means by which we remain holy and without blame, for it is the way to forgiveness - **1 Jn 1:9**
2. For the Christian, prayer is also the way to peace - **Ph 4:6-7**
- **If we desire to be found by the Lord in peace, without spot and blameless, then "pray without ceasing" (1 Th 5:17)!**

C. ATTEND ALL THE SERVICES OF THE CHURCH...

1. Our assemblies are designed to encourage faithful service - **He 10:24-25**
2. It is one way we edify one another against falling away - **He 3:12-13**
- **Do not discount the importance of assembling with other Christians to remain strong and faithful...attend every service you can!**

D. GROW IN THE GRACE AND KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST...

1. This was Peter's last written admonition - **2 Pe 3:18**
2. He wrote of the blessings found in the knowledge of Christ
 - a. Grace and peace are multiplied - **2 Pe 1:2**
 - b. All things pertaining to life and godliness are provided - **2 Pe 1:3**
 - c. There are exceedingly great and precious promises - **2 Pe 1:4**
 - d. We can be partakers of the divine nature, escaping corruption by the world - **2 Pe 1:4**
3. Peter described what is involved in growing in this knowledge - **2 Pe 1:5-8**
 - a. Applying all diligence
 - b. Developing the graces of a Christ-like character
4. He explained that diligence in this area will ensure an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord - **2 Pe 1:10-11**
- **This should be our 'prime directive', made possible through such tools as the Word of God, prayer, and the fellowship of the church!**

E. DISPLAY HOLY CONDUCT AND GODLINESS...

1. This we should do in view of what will one day happen - **2 Pe 3:10-11**
2. Without holiness, no one shall see the Lord - **He 12:14**
3. The exercise of godliness has promise of the life to come - **1 Ti 4:8**
- **This display of holy conduct and godliness is especially important as we spend the time of our sojourn among those of the world - 1 Pe 2:12**

CONCLUSION

1. Do we desire to remain steadfast...?
 - a. Not led astray by the error of the wicked?
 - b. Found by the Lord when He comes, in peace, without spot, and blameless?
2. Then simple resolutions such as ...
 - a. Read the Bible daily
 - b. Pray every day
 - c. Attend all the services of the church
 - d. Grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ
 - e. Display holy conduct and godliness...go a long way to ensure a proper state of preparedness

We will therefore be ready for His coming, whether He comes in this millennium or the next!

Resolutions For The New Year

INTRODUCTION

1. As a New Year begins, I am reminded of the fact that we are one year closer to...
 - a. The day of our death, or the day the Lord returns
 - b. That day when we shall stand before the Lord in judgment - **2 Co 5:10**
 - c. That day when He will either say...
 - 1) “Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” - **Mt 25:34**
 - 2) “Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels” - **Mt 25:41**

2. Since we are one year closer to that day when our final destiny will be forever determined, let me use this opportunity...
 - a. To **provoke your thinking** as to how you have used this past year
 - b. To **suggest some resolutions** for the coming year

[My goal is to encourage us to make better use of the time we have left, and to prepare us for the day of reckoning that awaits us. Let’s begin then, by asking...]

I. IN THE PAST YEAR

A. HAS OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD AND CHRIST IMPROVED...?

1. Have we drawn nearer to God? - cf. **Ja 4:8**
2. Bearing in mind that a close relationship depends upon good communication...
 - a. Have we been faithful in listening to God through His Word?
 - 1) Another year has gone by; did we read through the Bible this year?
 - 2) If not, and especially if we never have, can we honestly say that we are taking our relationship with God seriously?
 - b. Have we been steadfast in talking to God through prayer?
 - 1) Any effective communication requires a two-way street
 - 2) Therefore fervent Bible study should be joined with fervent prayer
 - 3) Has our degree of prayerfulness increased or decreased this year?

B. HAS OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH BRETHREN IMPROVED...?

1. Has our love for one another increased this year? - cf. **1 Th 4:9-10**
2. Are we any closer to one another than we were a year ago?
 - a. E.g., have we been in the homes of our brethren?
 - b. E.g., have any of them been in our homes?
3. Do we even know who our brethren are?
 - a. Each year brings new members into the family of God
 - b. Have we gotten to know them? Even by name?

C. HAS OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THOSE IN THE WORLD IMPROVED...?

1. As people of God, we have an important responsibility toward those in the world - cf. **Mt 5:13-16**
 - a. To be a positive influence (“You are the salt of the earth”)

- b. To demonstrate a better way (“You are the light of the world”)
2. Have we made progress this year in developing meaningful relationships with people in the world?
 - a. So the light of Christ can be seen in our lives
 - b. So the gospel of Christ can be communicated to them
3. Or are we like most “neighbors” in this day and age...
 - a. Living next to each other, but not really knowing each other?
 - b. Having forgotten the lost art of “Southern hospitality”?

[The questions I am raising can be summarized in this way: **“Another year has gone by; have we made good use of the time the Lord has given us, or have we wasted it?”** It is likely that all of us in some degree have not made good use of the past year. But at this point, let’s apply the words of Paul: **“Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” (Ph 3:13-14)** With this attitude of pressing forward, let me suggest some resolutions...]

II. FOR THE YEAR AHEAD

A. RESOLVE TO DRAW NEARER TO GOD AND CHRIST...

1. By having a daily reading program of God’s living and abiding word - **He 4:12**
 - a. Read the Old Testament this year - cf. **Ro 15:4; 1 Co 10:11; 2 Ti 3:14-17**
 - b. Read the New Testament also - **Ja 1:21; 1 Pe 2:2**
2. By being diligent in prayer - **He 4:14-16**
 - a. Let’s be a thankful people - cf. **Co 4:2; 1 Th 5:17-18**
 - b. Perhaps Daniel’s custom of praying three times daily would be worthy of our emulation - **Dan 6:10**

B. RESOLVE TO BECOME CLOSER TO THE BRETHREN...

1. By making it a point to learn every one’s name - cf. **3 Jn 14**
 - a. Get a directory
 - b. Each week, connect a couple of names and faces until you learn them all
2. By having a different person or family in your home each month - cf. **1 Pe 4:9**
 - a. It doesn’t have to be a fancy dinner
 - b. Just a simple visit to become better acquainted
3. Or by visiting a different person or family each month
 - a. It might not always be convenient to have people in your home
 - b. But you can arrange to visit them in their home (if you are alone, take someone along with you)

C. RESOLVE TO GET TO KNOW NON-CHRISTIANS BETTER...

1. By having one new neighbor or coworker in your home each month - cf. **Ga 6:10**
2. Or by visiting one new neighbor or coworker each month
 - a. It doesn’t have to be a fancy meal or formal visit
 - b. It is amazing how far simple hospitality and neighborly kindness can go...
 - 1) To build meaningful relationships
 - 2) In which opportunities can be created to share the gospel

CONCLUSION

1. These resolutions may sound simplistic; but if implemented, they would go along way...
 - a. To producing the kind of lifestyle that is becoming of Christians
 - b. To increasing closer relationships with God, our brethren, and the lost
 - 1) That will bless our lives
 - 2) And be a blessing to the church and our community
 - c. To create a clearer conscience next year at this time

2. Time is a precious commodity, given to us by God...
 - b. That is truly like a vapor - cf. **Ja 4:13-15**
 - c. That needs to be carefully redeemed - cf. **Ep 5:15-16**

-- **I hope that these suggestions for resolutions for a new year will help you in making better use of it!**

3. Finally, let me share with you the following poem “A New Year, A New Beginning”...

The old year ends, a new begins
With pages clean and new;
And what is written on each page
will now depend on you.

Resolve each precious day to do
Things good and kind and pure;
Though days and years may pass away,
These things shall still endure.

You can't relive the year that's past,
Erasing every wrong;
For once a year - or day - is spent,
It is forever gone.

You know not where your path may lead
Nor what's beyond the hill;
But know that God walks at your side,
If you will do His will.

But don't give up in dark despair
If you have failed some test;
Seek God's forgiveness and resolve
Henceforth to do your best.

All things are possible with God,
Though days be bright or dim;
So do your best and know that you
Can leave the rest to Him.

- **Author Unknown**

If you are not a Christian, or you are a child of God who has strayed from the Lord, you need to make the best use of the time you have **now**...

“We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For He says: ‘In an acceptable time I have heard you, And in the day of salvation I have helped you.’ Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” (2 Co 6:1-2)

Responding To Materialism

INTRODUCTION

1. We live in a very materialistic society...
 - a. As evidenced in our popular culture (music, TV, etc.)
 - b. As expressed in the desire for an affluent lifestyle
2. Materialism is dangerous foe to the Christian...
 - a. The **deceitfulness of riches** can render the Christian fruitless - **Mt 13:22**
 - b. The **desire for riches** can ensnare the Christian, leading him astray - **1 Ti 6:9-10**
3. What can we do as Christians, and as the church? Consider God's use of **Isaiah**...
 - a. Sent to a corrupt and materialistic society - **Isa 1:21-23**
 - b. Offering that which truly satisfies - **Isa 55:1-3**

[Today, **Jesus** has a similar response, which we can offer to a world that is starving for what truly satisfies...]

I. JESUS' RESPONSE TO MATERIALISM

A. EXPOSES THE DEFICIENCY OF RICHES...

1. Many think of "the good life" in terms of material prosperity
 2. Jesus taught there is more to life than material possessions
 - a. Man's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions - **Lk 12:15**
 - b. As illustrated in the parable of the rich fool - **Lk 12:16-21**
 3. Jesus taught the insecurity of riches - **Mt 6:19-20**
 - a. They are susceptible to corruption
 - b. They are open to theft
 4. Jesus taught the danger of riches - **Mt 6:21-24**
 - a. They can dominate our affections
 - b. They can blind us to the true light
 - c. They can prevent us from being able to serve God
- **Thus the message of Jesus is one of correcting our misconceptions; riches do not make one happy!**

B. EXTENDS THE TRULY ABUNDANT LIFE...

1. Jesus offers a life filled with **peace** - cf. **Jn 14:27**
 - a. Peace with God through justification - **Ro 5:1-2**
 - b. Peace with man through reconciliation - **Ep 2:14-16**
 - c. Peace with self through supplication - **Ph 4:6-7**

-- The peace Jesus offers "surpasses all understanding" - **Ph 4:7**
2. Jesus offers a life filled with **love** - cf. **Jn 15:9**
 - a. Love patterned after the Father's love for the Son - **Jn 15:9**
 - b. Love that can be fervent, yet pure between brethren - **1 Pe 1:22**
 - c. Love that can be extended even toward enemies - **Mt 5:43-45**

-- The love Jesus offers "passes knowledge" - **Ep 3:9**
3. Jesus offers a life filled with **joy** - cf. **Jn 15:11**

- a. His commandments, His promises, all are designed to impart joy - **Jn 15:11**
- b. A joy that can abound in any circumstance - e.g., **Ph 2:17-18; 4:4; 1 Pe 1:6**
-- The joy Jesus offers is “inexpressible” - **1 Pe 1:8**
- **By offering such peace, love, and joy, perhaps we can appreciate why Jesus said He offers an “abundant” life - cf. Jn 10:10**

[To communicate this response to a materialistic society, Jesus calls upon His church. While it certainly entails proclaiming the gospel, let me suggest some additional thoughts about...]

II. OUR RESPONSE TO MATERIALISM

A. EXEMPLIFY JESUS’ RESPONSE AS INDIVIDUALS...

1. As individuals we **must possess** the peace, love, and joy Jesus offers
 - a. Which comes through heeding His words - **Jn 15:10-11**
 - b. Which comes through spending time in prayer - **Ph 4:6-7**
-- If we fail to spend the time necessary in such activities, how convincing can we be that we have a more “abundant” life to offer?
2. As individuals we **must not depend on** material things for true happiness
 - a. If poor, learn the secret of contentment - cf. **1 Ti 6:6-8; Ph 4:11-13**
 - b. If rich, trust not in riches but be quick to help those in need - cf. **1 Ti 6:17-19**
-- Being content and willing to share goes a long way toward demonstrating that Jesus’ response to materialism really means something!

B. EXEMPLIFY JESUS’ RESPONSE AS A CONGREGATION...

1. The **value** of a congregational demonstration cannot be taken lightly
 - a. Jesus stressed the value of brotherly love and unity - **Jn 13:35; 17:20-21**
 - b. His church illustrated the value of congregational love and joy - cf. **Ac 2:46-47; 6:7** (in light of **6:1-6**)
2. We should **make sure** that our fellowship and worship demonstrates...
 - a. The love we have found in Christ (e.g., by the way we greet one another)
 - b. The joy of being Christians (e.g., by the way we praise God)
 - c. The peace Jesus made possible (e.g., by the way we work together)
3. We should **be careful** as a congregation not to fall into a materialistic trap
 - a. By placing too much concern over such things as:
 - 1) The physical facilities in which we meet
 - 2) The physical appearances of the members or visitors
 - b. Not that is wrong to have comfortable facilities or to look nice
 - 1) But that should not be our primary concern
 - 2) But not to the neglect of truly important matters (like saving souls)!
 - c. Otherwise we could be guilty of being like the Laodiceans - **Re 3:17**
 - 1) Who thought they were “rich, wealthy, and have need of nothing”
 - 2) Who were unaware they were “wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked”

CONCLUSION

1. The rampant materialism in our society provides us with **an opportunity...**
 - a. For materialism leaves one in a state of spiritual malnutrition
 - b. Therefore often ripe for the true feast Jesus has to offer

2. What does Jesus offer...?
 - a. **Rest** for a weary soul - **Mt 11:28-30**
 - b. **Rivers of living water** for a thirsty soul - **Jn 7:37-39**
 - Which He provides through His cleansing blood and life-quickening Spirit - **Ac 2:38-39**

3. But **if those trapped in materialism are going to believe** such is possible...
 - a. We need to make sure that we are offering the “abundant life” as a viable alternative
 - b. Both individually and as a congregation of God’s people!

Are we experiencing the **peace that “surpasses all understanding,”** the **love which “passes knowledge,”** and the **joy that is “inexpressible”?**

The Sabbath Day

INTRODUCTION

1. After God created the world in six days...
 - a. He rested on the seventh day - **Gen 2:1-2**
 - b. Then (at some point, see below) He blessed and sanctified the seventh day - **Gen 2:3**
2. The seventh day later became known as “The Sabbath Day”...
 - a. From the Hebrew word **shabbath**, meaning “to rest from labor”
 - b. The Greek word is **sabbaton**, and like English, a transliteration of the Hebrew
 - c. Thus it came to mean “the day of rest”
3. Questions often arise concerning “The Sabbath Day”...
 - a. What day of the week was the Sabbath day (Saturday or Sunday)?
 - b. Are Christians to keep the Sabbath?
 - c. Is Sunday now the “Christian” Sabbath?
4. The first question is the simplest one to answer...
 - a. The Sabbath was a day of rest after six days of work - **Gen 2:1-2; Exo 20:8-11**
 - b. According to Jewish reckoning, the seventh day began at sunset on Friday and ended at sunset on Saturday - **Judaism 101** (<http://www.jewfaq.org/shabbat.htm>)
 - c. Thus in the Bible the Sabbath generally refers to Saturday

[As for the other two questions, let’s first consider what is revealed about the Sabbath...]

I. IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

A. NOT COMMANDED OF THE PATRIARCHS...

1. From Adam to Moses (**Gen 3-Exo 15**), there is no mention of the Sabbath
 - a. “Moreover, all those righteous men already mentioned [after mentioning Adam, Abel, Enoch, Lot, Noah, Melchizedek, and Abraham], though they kept no Sabbaths, were pleasing to God; and after them Abraham with all his descendants until Moses...”
- **Justin Martyr, Dialogue With Trypho the Jew, 150-165 AD, Ante-Nicene Fathers , vol. 1, page 204**
 - b. “...God originated Adam uncircumcised, and inobservant of the Sabbath, consequently his offspring also, Abel, offering Him sacrifices, uncircumcised and inobservant of the Sabbath, was by Him commended... Noah also, uncircumcised - yes, and inobservant of the Sabbath - God freed from the deluge. For Enoch, too, most righteous man, uncircumcised and inobservant of the Sabbath, He translated from this world... Melchizedek also, the priest of most high God, uncircumcised and inobservant of the Sabbath, was chosen to the priesthood of God.” - **Tertullian, An Answer to the Jews 2:10; 4:1, Ante-Nicene Fathers Vol. 3, page 153**
2. This suggests that **Gen 2:3** may be a **prolepsis**
 - a. “a preface intended to anticipate and answer an objection to an argument” - **Encarta**
 - b. “the representation or assumption of a future act or development as if presently existing or accomplished” - **Merriam-Webster**
 - c. “anticipating and answering objections in advance” - **OneLook**

- d. “these words may be read in a parenthesis, as containing an account of a fact that was done, not at the beginning of the world, and on the first seventh day of it; but of what had been done in the times of Moses, who wrote this, after the giving of the law of the Sabbath; and this being given through his hands to the people of Israel, he takes this opportunity here to insert it, and very pertinently, seeing the reason why God then, in the times of Moses, blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it, was, because he had rested on that day from all his works, Exo_20:11 and the same reason is given here, taken plainly out of that law which he had delivered to them” - **Gill**
3. “Although God did not command man to keep the Sabbath at this time, He taught the principle of one day of rest in seven.” - **Believer’s Bible Commentary**
- **While God rested on the seventh day of Creation, He did not command anyone to rest on that day until thousands of years later**

B. COMMANDED OF THE ISRAELITES...

1. The Sabbath is first mentioned in regards to Israel collecting Manna - **Exo 16:23-30**
2. Shortly after the exodus of Israel from Egypt - **Exo 16:1**
3. When God actually blessed and sanctified the seventh day as a day of rest - **Exo 16:23,29**
4. For previously it had been unknown to them - cf. **Neh 9:14**
- **The Sabbath was made known, blessed, and sanctified in the time of Moses, with God’s rest on the seventh day of Creation as its basis**

C. CODIFIED IN THE LAW OF MOSES...

1. With the Ten Commandments, the Sabbath became part of the Law - **Exo 20:8-10**
2. The basis for the Sabbath is explained - **Exo 20:11** (and inserted in **Gen 2:3**)
3. The Sabbath became a **sign** between God and Israel as His special people - **Exo 31:13-17**
4. Commanded of Israel because they had been delivered from slavery - **Deu 5:15**
- **Thus the Sabbath became a weekly reminder of Israel’s deliverance from Egypt**

D. NEVER COMMANDED OF THE GENTILES...

1. All the commands regarding the Sabbath are directed toward Israel, no other nation
2. The exception was “the stranger who is within your gates” - **Exo 20:10**
3. The exception was to prevent being influenced to disobey - cf. **Neh 13:15-21**
4. It was to be a sign between God and His people Israel - **Exo 31:13,16-17; Eze 20:12,20**
- **Like circumcision, the Sabbath served as a sign between God and Israel**

[Thus there is no indication that the Sabbath was intended for all of mankind. But let’s now see what we can learn about the Sabbath...]

II. IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

A. JESUS AND THE SABBATH...

1. Jesus taught in the synagogues on the Sabbath - **Mk 1:21; 6:2; Lk 4:16,31; 13:10**
2. His actions on the Sabbath sparked controversy
 - a. Allowing His disciples to pluck grain in order to eat - **Mk 2:23-24**
 - b. Healing on the Sabbath - **Mk 3:1-6; Lk 13:10-14; Jn 5:9,16**
3. Jesus countered their objections
 - a. By showing their ignorance of the Law - **Mk 3:25-27; Mt 12:3-7**
 - b. By professing to be Lord even of the Sabbath - **Mk 3:28; Mt 12:8**
 - c. By pointing out their inconsistencies - **Lk 6:6-9; 13:14-16; 14:3-5; Jn 7:22-23**

4. Note the following observations:
 - a. The Law of Moses was still in effect prior to the death of Christ
 - b. As an Israelite, Jesus kept the Law (along with the Sabbath)
 - c. He displayed authority to forgive sin and interpret the Law - **Mt 9:6; 12:8**
- **There is nothing to indicate that Jesus extended the Sabbath to all nations**

B. THE APOSTLES AND THE SABBATH...

1. The apostles were to pray that their flight from tribulation not be on the Sabbath - **Mt 24:20**
 - a. A reference to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70
 - b. For in Judea the Jews would still be observing the Sabbath, closing the gates and thereby hindering flight - cf. **Mt 24:15-19**
 - c. This does not indicate whether or not the Sabbath was still bound by God
 2. Paul utilized the Sabbath during his evangelistic efforts - **Ac 13:14,42,44; 16:13; 18:4**
 - a. It was his custom whenever he came to a new city - **Ac 17:1-3**
 - b. He knew the Jews would be there, and he sought to teach them about Jesus
 - c. Just like he went to the market place to reach others - **Ac 17:17**
 3. Paul taught that the Law of Moses, including the Sabbath, had come to an end
 - a. That Jews died to the Law when they became Christians - **Ro 7:4-7**
 - b. That Jesus ended the Law with its ordinances through His death - **Ep 2:13-16; Co 2:14**
 - c. That the Law and ordinances like the Sabbath and circumcision should not be bound on others, especially Gentiles - **Co 2:16-17; Ga 5:1-4**
 - d. That a new, superior covenant had replaced the old - **2 Co 3:6-11; cf. He 8:6-13; 9:15**
 4. They taught observing the Sabbath was no longer necessary
 - a. Jewish Christians continued to observe elements of the Law - cf. **Ac 21:18-20**
 - b. Paul himself did so on occasion - cf. **Ac 18:18,21; 21:21-26**
 - c. But Paul (and the rest of the apostles) drew a clear line:
 - 1) The Law could not be bound on Gentiles - **Ac 15:1-2,19-29; cf. Ga 2:3-5; 5:1**
 - 2) The Law could not serve as a basis for their salvation - **Ga 5:4; cf. Ro 3:28**
 - d. But if an individual desired to keep one day above another (e.g., the Sabbath), that was between the individual and his Lord - cf. **Ro 14:5-6**
- **There is nothing in the apostolic practice and writings to suggest that the Sabbath was made a part of the New Covenant of Jesus Christ**

[If our reading of the New Testament regarding the Sabbath is correct, then we should not be surprised by what we learn...]

III. IN CHURCH HISTORY

A. CHRISTIANS ASSEMBLED ON THE FIRST DAY...

1. Expressed both explicitly and implicitly in the NT - **Ac 20:7; 1 Co 16:1-2**
2. **As per early “church fathers”;** a sampling:
 - a. “We keep the eighth day [Sunday] with joyfulness, the day also on which Jesus rose again from the dead” - **The Epistle of Barnabas, 15:6-8, 100 AD**
 - b. “And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits...” - **First Apology of Justin, Weekly Worship of the Christians, Ch. 68, 150 AD**
 - c. “But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world;

and Jesus Christ our Savior on the same day rose from the dead.” - **ibid.**

3. As per various **encyclopedias**; a sampling:
 - a. “Sunday, first day of the week; in Christianity, the Lord's Day, the weekly memorial of Jesus Christ’s resurrection from the dead. The practice of Christians gathering together for worship on Sunday dates back to apostolic times...” - **Encyclopedia Britannica**
 - b. “From the apostolic era to the present it has been customary for Christians to assemble for communal Sunday services...” - **Encyclopedia Americana**
 - c. “The celebration of the Lord's Day in memory of the resurrection of Christ dates undoubtedly from the apostolic age. Nothing short of apostolic precedent can account for the universal religious observance in the churches of the second century. There is no dissenting voice. This custom is confirmed by the testimonies of the earliest post-apostolic writers, as Barnabas, Ignatius, and Justin Martyr.” - **History Of The Christian Church, Philip Schaff, vol. 1, pg. 201-202**
 - d. “...it appears, therefore, from the New Testament itself, that Sunday was observed as a day of worship, and in special commemoration of the Resurrection, whereby the work of redemption was finished. The universal and uncontradicted Sunday observance in the second century can only be explained by the fact that it has its roots in apostolic practice.” - **ibid., pg. 478-479**

-- **Both internal and external evidence from the Bible indicates that Christians met together on the first day of the week, i.e., Sunday**

B. THE RISE OF THE “CHRISTIAN” SABBATH...

1. As we’ve seen, most early Christians did not observe the Sabbath
2. Some Jewish Christians continued to observe the Sabbath, including heretical groups such as the Ebionites
3. Gradually, though, many began to view the Lord’s Day as the “Christian” Sabbath
 - a. During the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries A.D., there was much controversy over whether Christians should keep the Sabbath (on Saturday)
 - b. Some sought to enjoin both the Sabbath and the Lord’s Day on Christians
 - c. Others, especially the Puritans, began to call the Lord’s Day (Sunday) the “Christian” Sabbath

-- **Today, many Catholics and Protestants routinely refer to Sunday as the Sabbath**

CONCLUSION

1. Basically, then, there are three views of the Sabbath...
 - a. **The Sabbatarian view** - that Saturday is the Sabbath and should be kept by Christians
 - 1) This is the view held by Seventh Day Adventists and other groups
 - 2) They are **correct** in saying that the Sabbath is Saturday, but **wrong** to say that Christians should keep the Sabbath
 - b. **The Sunday Sabbath view** - that Sunday is the Sabbath and should be kept by Christians
 - 1) This is the view held by most Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant churches
 - 2) They are **wrong** to call Sunday the Christian Sabbath, but **correct** to teach that Christians should assemble on the first day of the week (Sunday)
 - c. **The Biblical view** - that Saturday is the Sabbath, but Christians are not obligated to keep it
 - 1) This view is held by all those who respect the Biblical record as found in the Old and New Testaments
 - 2) “The Sabbath is the seventh day of the week, from sundown on Friday to sundown on Saturday. Nowhere in the NT are Christians commanded to keep the Sabbath.” - **Believer’s**

Bible Commentary

2. There is, however, a “rest” (**sabbatismos**) that remains for the people of God... - **He 4:1-11**
 - a. Not the **Sabbath** rest, the weekly rest instituted for Israel through Moses
 - b. Not the **Canaan** rest, provided for Israel by Joshua
 - c. But the **heavenly** rest, provided by Christ which requires diligence to enter

“There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His. Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience.” - He 4:9-11

If we are serious about entering that rest, then let us not forsake our assembling together, such as that done on the first day of the week (cf. **Ac 20:7**)...

“And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 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.” - He 10:24-25

Same-Sex Marriage

INTRODUCTION

1. Same-sex marriage will probably be a controversial issue for some time to come...
 - a. Precipitated by state justices in Massachusetts and the mayor in San Francisco
 - b. Likely to be an issue in many political campaigns
2. Churches and Christians everywhere will be confronted by this issue...
 - a. If same-sex marriages become sanctioned by the state, should the church accept them?
 - b. Should Christians view such marriages as ordained by God?

[For Christians who accept the Word of God as the ultimate authority in their lives, the answer lies in the Bible. What does it say regarding same-sex marriage? Let's first review...]

I. WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY

A. SURVEY OF BIBLICAL PASSAGES...

1. Old Testament references
 - a. The Sodom incident - **Gen 19:1-13**
 - b. The Levitical prohibition - **Lev 18:22; 20:13**
 - c. The Gibeah incident - **Judg 19:15-25**
 - d. The perverted persons (male temple prostitutes) - **1 Kin 14:24**
2. New Testament references
 - a. Women and men committing acts against nature - **Ro 1:26-27**
 - b. Practicing homosexuals and sodomites will not inherit the kingdom - **1 Co 6:9-10**
 - c. Sodomites (those who practice homosexuality) contrary to sound doctrine - **1 Ti 1:10**
 - d. Reference to Sodom and Gomorrah, going after 'strange flesh' - **Jude 1:7**

B. SUMMARY OF DIFFERENT VIEWS...

1. Arguments by those **approving** homosexuality
 - a. The incidents at Sodom and Gibeah were gang rapes, which are wrong whether homosexual or heterosexual
 - b. The Levitical prohibitions were condemning ritual sodomy and prostitution like that referenced in **1 Kin 14:24**
 - c. 'Acts against nature' are not against nature if you are born homosexual
 - d. The Greek words **malakos** and **arsenokoites** (**1 Co 6:9, 1 Ti 1:10**) refer to either temple prostitution, pedophilia, or male rape, not committed relationships
 - e. Some seek approval for gay sex from the relationships of:
 - 1) David and Jonathan - **1 Sam 18:1,3; 20:17,24; 2 Sam 1:26-27**
 - 2) Naomi and Ruth - **Ruth 1:16-17**
 - f. Gay sex by two loving, committed companions is never condemned in the Bible
 - 1) Jesus never mentioned it
 - 2) He condemned divorce and adultery, but not homosexuality
2. Observations by those **opposing** homosexuality
 - a. Every reference to homosexuality is condemned in the Bible; as per **Donald Sensing...**
 - 1) Jesus' failure to mention homosexuality is not an argument for its permissibility
 - 2) Prophets prophesied against things that needed fixing

- 3) The proscription against homosexuality in first century Judea was strong and certain
- 4) Jesus' silence shows He was in agreement with its proscription in Jewish law
- b. The Levitical prohibitions...
 - 1) Not just against pagan ordinances, but also 'the doings of the land' - **Lev 18:3**
 - 2) Forbid adultery, incest, bestiality; shall the same arguments be applied to them?
- c. The argument seeking to defuse **Ro 1:26-27**...
 - 1) Assumes one is 'born gay'; no scientific study has yet proved it
 - 2) Reproductive organs indicate otherwise, to use them in gay sex is 'against nature'
- d. The Greek words...
 - 1) **malakos** may have limited meaning (effeminate, catamite)
 - 2) But the word **arsenokoites** (male sex) can include any homosexual act
- e. The Bible does praise same-sex **platonic** relationships
 - 1) David and Jonathan illustrate the value of **friendship (phileo)**
 - 2) Ruth and Naomi exemplify the beauty of **familial love (storge)**
- f. There is not one indication of gay sex (**eros**) being approved in the Bible

[While many try to defuse passages condemning homosexuality, one fact is indisputable: **there is no evidence of gay sex of any sort being approved by God!** Now let's consider...]

II. WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES ABOUT MARRIAGE

A. SURVEY OF BIBLICAL PASSAGES...

1. Jesus' teaching on marriage
 - a. Marriage was instituted by God at the beginning - **Mt 19:3-4**
 - b. Marriage was designed for those created male and female - **Mt 19:4**
 - c. Marriage is for man and wife, who become 'one flesh' (produce offspring) - **Mt 19:5**
 - d. Marriage is a union that God joins, not the state - **Mt 19:6**
 - e. Man may try to put asunder, but only God puts asunder - **Mt 19:7-9**
 - 1) One may divorce and remarry, but still commit adultery - **Mt 5:31-32**
 - 2) God allows divorce only for fornication, and remarriage by the innocent - **Mt 19:9**
 - f. The kingdom of heaven may require some to 'make themselves eunuchs' (i.e. remain celibate) - **Mt 19:11-12**
2. The apostles' teaching on marriage
 - a. Sex in marriage is honorable, sex outside marriage is not - **He 13:4**
 - b. To avoid fornication, let each man have his own wife - **1 Co 7:1-2**
 - c. All other discussions pertaining to marriage describe husband-wife (male-female) relationships - **1 Co 7:3-48; Ro 7:1-4; Ep 5:22-33; Co 3:18-19; 1 Ti 3:2,11-12; 5:14; Ti 1:6; 2:4-5; 1 Pe 3:1-7**

B. SUMMARY OF BIBLICAL TEACHING...

1. All sex outside of marriage is sinful, whether heterosexual or homosexual
2. Marriage is a divine institution, not a civil one
3. God determines what constitutes a proper marriage, not man
4. Marriage throughout the Bible is always between a man and woman
5. There is not one mention regarding same-sex marriage (though the practice was known among the Gentiles)
6. There is no teaching on how same-sex marriages work (who is the head? who is to submit?)

CONCLUSION

1. Same-sex marriage is totally foreign to the Bible, and to the doctrine of Christ...
 - a. The only marriage approved of God is between male and female
 - b. All mention of same-sex relationships in the Bible are condemned
2. The sanctity of marriage has long been under attack...
 - a. Divorce and remarriage for any reason have undermined the institution for generations
 - b. Same-sex marriage is only the latest attack; it probably won't be the last
3. While same-sex marriage threatens the moral fiber of society...
 - a. So does adultery and unscriptural divorce!
 - b. All deviations from God's design for marriage and family should be opposed
4. God intended for children to be raised in a loving family...
 - a. With the emotional security and nurture provided by a loving father and mother
 - b. Divorce destroys what God intended, same-sex marriage cannot provide it
5. Since government is to...
 - a. Be God's minister for good - cf. **Ro 13:4**
 - b. 'Promote the general welfare' - **Preamble To the US Constitution**
- **It should be our prayer and goal that laws governing marriage and divorce be consistent with Divine revelation (and not secular humanism)**

For those caught up in the sins of fornication, adultery and homosexuality, please take notice of both the **warning** and **hope** offered in the gospel of Christ...

“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. “

“And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. “

- 1 Co 6:9-11

In a world morally adrift, plunging deeper and deeper into sin, let Jesus be the way to light and truth...

Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.” - Jn 8:12

Secrets Of The Abundant Life

INTRODUCTION

1. Suppose I could offer you a life that is guaranteed to give you...
 - a. A **“joy”** that is greater than any other
 - b. A **“blessedness”** that is happiness in its fullest measure
 - c. An **“assurance”** of entering the everlasting kingdom of our Lord
 - d. A **“peace”** that surpasses understanding

-- **Would you be interested?**
2. I cannot, but Jesus does...!
 - a. He came to provide the way to an abundant life - **Jn 10:10**
 - b. He shares with us the “secrets” to this life through His teaching - **Jn 15:11**
3. Through His teachings, then, we can learn the **“Secrets Of The Abundant Life”**...
 - a. Many of which are found in this very chapter (**Jn 15**)
 - b. Where Jesus pictures Himself as the Vine and His disciples as the branches - cf. **Jn 15:1-5**

[As branches we are to bear fruit, and this leads us to the first secret of the abundant life...]

I. THE SECRET OF LIVING IS BEARING FRUIT

A. DIFFERENT KINDS OF FRUIT WE CAN BEAR...

1. Winning souls to Christ and helping them to grow - **Ro 1:13**
 2. Sharing with those in need - **Ro 15:28**
 3. Developing a Christ-like character - **2 Pe 1:5-8; Ga 5:22-23**
 4. Praising God and giving thanks - **He 13:15**
- **These are “fruits” that we can bear as branches of the Vine**

B. THE BENEFITS OF BEARING SUCH FRUIT...

1. **Joy** for those who win souls - **3 Jn 4; 1 Th 2:19-20**
 2. **Happiness** for those who share with others - **Ac 20:35**
 3. **Assurance** for those who develop a Christ-like character - **2 Pe 1:8-11; Ga 5:23b**
 4. **Peace** for those given to thanksgiving - **Ph 4:6-7**
- **Such are the “benefits” of the abundant life Jesus offers**

[And what is the secret? Being a branch of the True Vine (Jesus) and **bearing fruit!** But Jesus also shares the secret to bearing fruit...]

II. THE SECRET OF BEARING FRUIT IS ABIDING

A. NOTE THE USE OF THE WORD “ABIDE”

1. Jesus uses the word “abide” ten times - **Jn 15:4-10**
 2. We must abide in Him, and He in us, to bear fruit
 3. Without Him, we can do nothing
- **The secret to bearing fruit is abiding in Christ! - Jn 15:5**

B. ABIDING IN CHRIST EMPOWERS THE CHRISTIAN....

1. Paul wrote what the power in Christ meant in his own life - **Ph 4:13**
 2. He wanted others to know of the power available to them - **Ep 1:18-20; 3:20**
 3. He gave examples of how this power could transform people - e.g., **1 Co 6:9-11**
- **Abiding in Christ empowers us to bear fruit, and thereby experience the abundant life!**

[But does Jesus also reveal the secret to abiding in Him? Yes...]

III. THE SECRET OF ABIDING IS OBEYING

A. OBEYING THE COMMANDMENTS OF JESUS...

1. By keeping His commands we abide in His love - **Jn 15:10a**
 2. By keeping His commands we will be His friends - **Jn 15:14**
 3. By keeping His commandments we abide in Him - **1 Jn 3:24a**
- **Obedience is the key to abiding in Christ!**

B. THE PRINCIPLE OF ABIDING THROUGH OBEYING...

1. Governed Jesus' relationship with His Father while on earth
 - a. He kept His Father's commandments, and so abided in His love - **Jn 15:10b**
 - b. Passages which illustrate Jesus' desire to keep His Father's Will - **Jn 4:34; 5:30; 6:38**
 2. And should govern our conduct as Christians as well
 - a. We abide in Christ by keeping His commandments - **1 Jn 2:3-6**
 - b. Otherwise we are liars if we profess to know Him and do not keep His word!
- **One cannot abide in Christ without obeying His commands!**

[To be successful in obeying His commands requires the right motivation. From Jesus we learn...]

IV. THE SECRET OF OBEYING IS LOVING

A. THREE DIFFERENT REASONS TO OBEY...

1. We can obey because **we have to** (the level of **fear**)
 - a. In order to avoid punishment
 - b. Like a child who obeys his parents to avoid a spanking
 2. We can obey because **we need to** (the level of **selfishness**)
 - a. In order to get what we want
 - b. Like a teenager who obeys his parents to gain favors
 3. We can obey because **we want to** (the level of **love**)
 - a. Because we love the person we are obeying
 - b. Like mature children who obey their parents out of love
- **People often obey Jesus they feel like they have to or need to**

B. JESUS DESIRES OBEDIENCE OUT OF LOVE...

1. He appeals to our sense of love - **Jn 14:15,23**
2. He knows that without love our obedience will falter - **Jn 14:24**
3. The secret to **consistent** obedience is loving!
 - a. Those who obey because they have to or need to will never be consistent
 - b. Once they meet their feeling of necessity, they cease to be obedient
 - c. As an example, take the command to assemble - cf. **He 10:25**

- 1) Those who obey only because they feel they have to or need to will assemble as little as it takes to salve their conscience
- 2) Those who obey because they want to, out of love for Jesus and their brethren, will assemble at every opportunity

-- **Why do we obey Jesus? Have we matured to obeying Jesus out of love?**

[When true **love** moves us to **obey**, we will **abide** in Jesus and **bear fruit** through our union with Him, resulting in the abundant life He offers. But what is the secret to having a true love for Jesus...?]

V. THE SECRET OF LOVING IS KNOWING

A. THIS SHOULD BE SELF-EVIDENT...

1. Love between husband and wife is based upon knowledge and understanding
 2. Strong friendships are also based upon knowing each other well
 3. Brethren who love one another are those who have made the effort to know each other
- **Should we expect it to be any different with Jesus?**

B. THE MORE WE KNOW JESUS, THE MORE WE LOVE HIM...

1. Especially as we grow in understanding His love for us - cf. **Jn 15:13; 1 Jn 3:16**
 2. We are more likely to walk in love, if we know His love for us - **Ep 5:2**
- **Increase our knowledge of Jesus, then, and our love for Jesus will increase!**

[This leads us to the final secret we shall consider in this study...]

VI. THE SECRET OF KNOWING IS READING

A. THIS IS ALSO SELF-EVIDENT...

1. As seen in our humanly relationships
 - a. Where there is communication, relationships grow
 - b. Where there is none, relationships flounder
 2. Even more so with our relationship with God and Jesus
 - a. The more we communicate, the better we know
 - b. And how does Jesus communicate with us? Through His Word!
- **The only reliable source for Jesus' words is the Bible**

B. THE MORE WE READ, THE BETTER WE KNOW JESUS...

1. As simple as it sounds, Bible reading is the **catalyst** to the abundant life
 - a. By **reading** we come to know
 - b. By **knowing** we come to love
 - c. By **loving** we come to obey
 - d. By **obeying** we come to abide
 - e. By **abiding** we come to bear fruit
 - f. By **bearing fruit** we experience the abundant life
 2. Yet many Christians neglect the Word of God
 - a. Even though its value in bearing fruit is seen even in **Psa 1:1-3**
 - b. How sad when we now have the full revelation of the New Testament
- **Neglecting the Word of God is why many do not experience the abundant life!**

CONCLUSION

1. In **Jn 15:11**, we find Jesus saying...

“These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.”

2. My purpose for sharing these “secrets” has been the same...
- a. Every person ought to be filled with the joy of Christ
 - b. Every person ought to experience the abundant life He offers

Let the words that Jesus spoke, revealed only in the Word of God, the Bible, be the catalyst that begins the chain reaction leading one to a truly abundant life!

Note: The general idea for this lesson was taken from “**Five Secrets Of Living**”, a small booklet written by Warren W. Wiersbe. I also have a five lesson series based on this theme at:

<http://bible.ca/eo/se.htm>

Shall We Dance?

INTRODUCTION

1. When one becomes a Christian, everything takes on a new perspective:

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” (2 Co 5:17)

2. This also applies to certain social activities...
 - a. Which before we may have considered harmless
 - b. But now understand may not be proper for Christians - cf. **1 Pe 4:2-3**
3. One such activity is dancing...
 - a. Especially in its modern and popular forms
 - b. Involving unmarried couples
4. What is wrong with dancing? In this lesson, I wish to...
 - a. Explain why dancing is unbecoming of those who call themselves Christians
 - b. Address commonly raised objections by those who seek to approve of dancing

[Our study begins with a close look at a word not familiar to many...]

I. THE SIN OF LASCIVIOUSNESS

A. LASCIVIOUSNESS CONDEMNED...

1. As a work of the flesh - **Ga 5:19** (KJV, ASV)
 - a. Translated “lewdness” in the NKJV
 - b. Translated “sensuality” in the NAS
 - c. Translated “debauchery” in the NIV
 - d. Translated “licentiousness” in the RSV
2. As that which defiles a man - **Mk 7:21-23** (KJV)

B. LASCIVIOUSNESS DEFINED...

1. The Greek word is **aselgia**, defined by **Thayer** as “unbridled lust...wanton acts or manners (including) filthy words, indecent bodily movements, unchaste handling of males and females”
2. The English word **lascivious** is defined “exciting sexual desires; salacious”
3. Anything which excites the lust of the flesh (words, bodily movements, unchaste handling) is therefore considered sinful
 - a. Of course, this applies to the stirring up of sexual desires and sensual pleasures outside the bond of marriage
 - b. The Bible recognizes the place for sexual expression, but limits such to those who are married - cf. **He 13:4**
 - c. The excitement of lust between those not married is sinful - **Mt 5:28**
 - 1) It is wrong to lust for another person
 - 2) It must therefore be wrong to arouse lust in another person

[Having defined the sin of lasciviousness, one must now ask: **“Does popular dancing arouse the lusts of the flesh, and therefore qualify as lasciviousness?”** My reply would be yes...]

II. THE SIN OF DANCING

A. NON-CHRISTIANS RECOGNIZE DANCING AS LUSTFUL...

1. “The popular teen-age dances of the mid 20th century have no set steps; the dancers respond spontaneously to the beat of the musicians. The degree of satisfaction attained by young people ‘twisting’ or ‘shaking’ to the blare of amplified music in dance halls, further enlivened by psychedelic lighting, is different from the pleasure derived by their elders waltzing to the ‘Blue Danube’ - but it is only a difference of age and time. Fundamentally, both age groups are enjoying the pleasure of dancing in their own way...The end product is doubtless the same - physical pleasure in the activity of dancing and sexual awareness of a partner, whether embraced or half-consciously observed.” - **Encyclopedia Britannica**, “The Art Of Dance”, Vol. 5, p. 455-456 (1979 edition)
2. “...The social dance has usually been the result of joint physical exuberance and sex stimuli...” - **Collier’s Encyclopedia**, “Dance”, Vol. 7, p. 683 (1964 edition)
3. “Another motive for the dance is the sexual motive - the dance has always been used as a means of expressing sexual desire and as a means of wooing...We find this same sex motive in the modern ballroom dance, which has now degenerated into dull and stupid forms, but it is a legitimate opportunity for contact.” - **Dance We Must** (1938, reprinted 1950), p. 6 (from a series of lectures given by Ted Shawn at George Peabody College For Teachers)
4. “All ballroom dancing in pairs looks toward intercourse. In this respect the Puritans were dead right...The development of no-contact dances has come about because one doesn’t now need a social excuse to embrace a girl, but as an excitant it need not involve contact at all - in fact, dances like flamenco or the twist are far more erotic than a clinch because you aren’t too close to see one another. At its best this sort of dance is simply intercourse by remote control.” - **The Joy Of Sex**, Alex Comfort, p. 162 (1972)
5. The Roman orator **Cicero** says: “No man who is sober dances, unless he is out of his mind, either when alone or in any decent society, for dancing is the companion of wanton conviviality, dissoluteness, and luxury.” - **New Unger’s Bible Dictionary** (1988)

B. COMMON SENSE TELLS US THAT DANCING IS LUSTFUL...

1. What would be your reaction if you saw an entire dance floor with people of the same sex dancing together?
 - a. If dancing was morally neutral, having no sexual overtones, there would be no reaction at all!
 - b. But most would be shocked, suspecting they had stumbled into a “gay” dance
2. Listen to what is simply common sense:
 - a. If we would expect such a dance to be an expression of “gay” sensuality...
 - b. ...how can we deny people of opposite sex dancing together is an expression of heterosexual activity?

[Both common sense and the testimony of people in the world confirm that dancing is an activity which has the arousal of sexual desires as its main appeal. Should Christians be making provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts? Not according to **Ro 13:14**. But almost invariably, those who desire to dance or allow their children to dance raise objections...]

III. COMMONLY RAISED OBJECTIONS

A. “DANCING MAY ‘TURN ON’ OTHER PEOPLE, BUT I DON’T REACT THAT WAY...”

1. For the sake of argument, let’s assume that some people either:
 - a. Do not have strong sexual urges
 - b. Have grown spiritually to the point they can keep their urges under control
2. The dancing under consideration involves two persons
 - a. Even if one is not so affected, the other may be!
 - b. In which case, the “spiritual” person becomes a stumbling block to the other person, an instrument for the other person’s indulgence in fleshly lusts

B. “I CAN’T CONTROL WHAT OTHER PEOPLE THINK...”

1. Just because we can’t force a person to think right...that is no reason to encourage them to think wrong!
2. We have a responsibility not to contribute to one’s moral delinquency
 - a. We must not be a stumbling block - **Ro 14:13,21; 1 Co 8:13; 10:31-32**
 - b. Otherwise we fall into grave condemnation - **Mt 18:6-7**

C. “HOW CAN ANYTHING WRONG GO ON...IT IS TIGHTLY SUPERVISED...?”

1. Bodily actions may be well-supervised, but no one can supervise the inward thoughts
2. Chaperons can inhibit only what happens on the dance floor...
 - a. What about afterwards...on the way home?
 - b. When there is no one to restrain expressing the desires that were aroused during the dance?
3. As stated by **Ann Landers**: “When you turn a guy on, he can be awfully hard to turn off.”

D. “DANCING IS GOOD EXERCISE...”

1. There are many alternative forms of exercise that do not excite the lusts of the flesh in yourself or others
2. Are you willing to become a stumbling block to others, just so you can get some exercise? Isn’t that rather selfish?

E. “DANCING IS MENTIONED IN THE BIBLE...”

1. There are four categories of dancing mentioned in the Bible
 - a. Religious dances of the Old Testament - **Exo 15:20-21; 2 Sam 6:14**
 - b. Expressions of great rejoicing - **1 Sam 18:6**
 - c. The play of children - **Job 21:11; Lk 7:32**
 - d. Passionate dances, like that of Salome, before King Herod - **Mt 14:6**
2. Do the first three categories justify Christians engaging in the modern dance today?
 - a. No, for these are nothing like what is being discussed in this lesson
 - b. There is no trace in the Bible that men and women danced as couples
 - 1) “While the mode of dancing is not known in detail, it is clear that men and women did not generally dance together, and there is no real evidence that they ever did. Social amusement was hardly a major purpose of dancing, and the modern method of dancing by couples is unknown.” - **Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia Of The Bible**, “Dancing”, Vol. 2, p. 12 (1977)
 - 2) “Social dancing, as we now understand it, was almost, if not altogether, unknown in ancient times...” - **Hastings Bible Dictionary**, p. 550
 - 3) “Women seemed generally to have danced by themselves...Of the social dancing of

couples in the modern fashion there is no trace.” - **International Standard Bible Encyclopedia**, “Games”, p. 1170

- c. In fact, dancing in the form of mixed couples did not exist before the 12th Century A.D. - “There is no evidence of couples dancing together, however; that was to happen much later, probably in Provence in the 12th Century.” - **Encyclopedia Britannica**, “The Art Of Dance”, Vol. 5, p. 452 (1979)
3. The only thing close to the modern dance today that is mentioned in the Bible is the dance of Herodias’ daughter, Salome (and look what happened!)

CONCLUSION

1. Shall we dance? There are two things we can be sure of...
 - a. It is wrong to lust in our hearts after others - **Mt 5:28**
 - b. It is wrong to conduct ourselves in any way as to excite the lusts in others; that is lasciviousness, which is condemned as a work of the flesh - **Ga 5:19-21**
2. That popular dancing involving unmarried couples is condemned, can only be denied...
 - a. By those ignorant of the Scriptures
 - b. By those hardened by the deceitfulness of sin
3. Again, let me read what others have said: “Because of its physical appeal, dance lends itself to erotic purposes and has been practiced to these ends by both sexes.” - **Encyclopedia Britannica**, “The Art Of Dance” (ibid.)

Let us also remember the words of Paul:

“The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.” (Ro 13:12-14)

The Significance Of The Birth Of Jesus

INTRODUCTION

1. “**Christmas**” (December 25th) is an annual holiday celebrated by many...
 - a. Millions commemorate the birth of Jesus on this day
 - b. Many consider it one of “the most holy” of religious holidays
2. Were you aware that...?
 - a. Christians in the NT did not celebrate the birth of Jesus as an annual observance
 - b. Most Protestant churches did not begin celebrating Christmas until the 19th century
3. As for the actual day of Jesus’ birth...
 - a. “The New Testament provides no clues in this regard.” - **Encyclopedia Britannica**
 - b. The NT simply states that it happened in the days of Caesar Augustus and while Quirinius was governing Syria - **Lk 2:1-2**
 - c. Sextus Julius Africanus popularized the idea that Jesus was born on December 25 in his Chronographiai, a reference book written in 221 AD. - **Wikipedia, “Christmas”**
 - d. However, Orthodox churches celebrate the birth of Jesus on January 6th or 7th
4. Many churches today do not celebrate “Christmas” per se...
 - a. They are content to abide in the apostles’ doctrine - **Ac 2:42**
 - b. They note Paul’s warning regarding religious holidays - cf. **Ga 4:9-11**
 - c. They value Jesus’ warning regarding the traditions of men - cf. **Mt 15:9**
5. This does not in any way demean the importance of the birth of Jesus...
 - a. It has great significance to both Christians and non-Christians
 - b. It is something we should think about often (certainly more than once a year)
 - c. It is an appropriate subject even at “Christmas time”, just as are sermons on...
 - 1) Thankfulness around Thanksgiving
 - 2) Mothers on Mother’s Day

[Assuming the birth of Jesus is on the minds of many, allow me to use this opportunity to **review the significance of His birth**. We note first it’s significance...]

I. AS PROPHESED

A. BY ISAIAH...

1. His birth and name (Immanuel) signified God would live among men - **Isa 7:14**; cf. **Mt 1:23**
2. It would portend the establishment of the kingdom of God - **Isa 9:6-7**

B. BY MICAH...

1. His birth in Bethlehem would give Israel a new Ruler - **Mic 5:2**
2. His reign would bless not only Israel, but even the ends of the earth - **Mic 5:3-5**

[The significance of Jesus’ birth is that **God has dwelt among men**, and **subsequently established His kingdom or reign** that now reaches to the ends of the earth! Next, notice its significance...]

II. AS PROMISED

A. TO JOSEPH...

1. His birth and name (Jesus) signified salvation from sin - **Mt 1:18-21**
2. As John the Baptist would later announce: “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” - **Jn 1:29**

B. TO MARY...

1. His birth and subsequent reign would fulfill the promise made to David - **Lk 1:26-35**; cf. **2Sa 7:12-13**
2. It would also fulfill the promise found in Daniel - **Dan 2:44**

[Again, the significance of Jesus’ birth is that **God was about to establish His kingdom** promised by prophets and angels. But also, that **He came to save us from sin!** Finally, consider its significance...]

III. AS PROCLAIMED

A. BY ANGELS...

1. His birth presented to the world a Savior and Lord - **Lk 2:8-12**
2. It offered peace and goodwill to men (or, peace to men of goodwill) - **Lk 2:13-14**

B. BY SIMEON...

1. His birth would result in giving light to Gentiles and glory to Israel - **Lk 2:25-32**
2. It would also result in the fall and rising of many in Israel, along with revealing of many hearts - **Lk 2:33-35**

C. BY ANNA...

1. She, like many others, were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem - **Lk 2:36-38**
2. She spoke of how Jesus’ birth had great significance for them

CONCLUSION

1. **The significance of the birth of Jesus** is that it made possible...
 - a. The establishment of the kingdom of God
 - b. Redemption and salvation from sin for both Jew and Gentile
 - c. Peace and goodwill among men
 - d. Revelation and judgment of the hearts of men
2. Of course, such things would not have been possible without the subsequent...
 - a. Suffering and death of Jesus on the cross
 - b. Resurrection and ascension of Christ to the right hand of God
3. Which may be why Jesus did not ask His disciples to commemorate His birth...
 - a. But His death - **1Co 11:23-26**
 - b. Which they did weekly, not annually - **Ac 20:7**

Whenever one reflects on Jesus’ birth, they should ask themselves: “He came to be my Lord and Savior, to save me from sins and reign as King in my heart; have I fulfilled the significance of His birth by responding to the significance of His death and resurrection ...?” - cf. **Ac 2:36-38**

The Significance Of The Resurrection Of Christ

INTRODUCTION

1. **“Easter Sunday”** is an annual holiday celebrated by many...
 - a. Millions of people commemorate the resurrection of Jesus on this day
 - b. Many consider it as “the most holy” of religious holidays
 - c. For some, it marks the only time they attend church services (Christmas runs a close second)
2. Christians in the first century did not have an **annual** observance of this event...
 - a. The word “Easter” is found only once in the KJV Bible - cf. **Ac 12:4**
 - b. The word in the Greek is actually “Passover”, and so translated elsewhere in the KJV
 - c. “It is reasonably certain that the NT contains no reference to a **yearly** celebration of the resurrection of Christ” (ISBE)
 - d. The annual observance is a human tradition, introduced in the second and third centuries
3. Churches today who follow the New Testament pattern do not celebrate “Easter” per se...
 - a. Like the church in Jerusalem, they are content to abide in the apostles’ doctrine - **Ac 2:42**
 - b. They note Paul’s teaching regarding religious holidays - cf. **Ga 4:9-11**
 - c. They value Jesus’ warning regarding the traditions of men - cf. **Mt 15:9**
4. This does not in any way demean the importance of the resurrection of Christ...
 - a. It has great significance to the Christian
 - b. It is something we should think about often (certainly more than once a year)
5. It is an appropriate subject even on “Easter Sunday”, just as sermons...
 - a. On thankfulness are around Thanksgiving
 - b. On mothers are on Mother’s Day
 - Even though churches may not celebrate such holidays per se

[With that thought in mind, allow me to use this opportunity to review the significance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ for the Christian. It’s significance can first be seen by considering...]

I. IF CHRIST WAS NOT RAISED

A. GOSPEL PREACHING IS VAIN... (1 Co 15:14)

1. The preaching of the apostles is empty, meaningless
2. Because they proclaimed nothing more than a fairy tale, a story of fiction

B. OUR FAITH IS VAIN... (1 Co 15:14)

1. Our belief in Christ would also be empty, meaningless
2. For our faith would be in a lie, a story of make believe, not truth

C. THE APOSTLES WERE FALSE WITNESSES... (1 Co 15:15)

1. They swore that God raised Jesus from the dead - **Ac 2:32**
2. They claimed to spend 40 days with Him after the resurrection, eating and drinking with

Him - **Ac 10:39-41**

3. There is no way they could have been deceived or mistaken; either they told the truth or they were deliberate liars, deceivers, and frauds!

D. WE ARE STILL IN OUR SINS... (1 Co 15:17)

1. It would have been a liar or lunatic that died on the cross
2. No such person could have provided a sacrifice that was holy and without blemish

E. BELIEVERS HAVE PERISHED AT DEATH... (1 Co 15:18)

1. Their faith would have been in a false Messiah
2. They would have had no atonement for their sins
3. Dying in their sins, there would be no hope

F. CHRISTIANS ARE TO BE PITIED... (1 Co 15:19)

1. Because we believe in a false Messiah
2. Because our faith in Him leads us to refrain from much worldly pleasure
3. Because we are often ridiculed or persecuted for our faith

[As Paul makes it clear, the resurrection of Christ is foundational to the Christian faith. If Jesus is not raised, then we should not be Christians! Now let's examine the significance from another angle...]

II. IF CHRIST HAS BEEN RAISED

A. IT VERIFIES OUR JUSTIFICATION...

1. Jesus was raised for our justification - **Ro 4:24-25**
2. Jesus claimed His blood would be adequate - **Mt 26:28**
3. By raising Jesus from the dead, God demonstrated His acceptance of Jesus as a sacrifice for our sins! - **Ro 8:33-34**

B. IT DEMONSTRATES THE POWER AVAILABLE TO THE CHRISTIAN...

1. For which Paul prayed that Christians would know - **Ep 1:18-20**
2. Power available at our conversion - **Co 2:11-12; 1 Pe 3:21**
3. Power available to live the Christian life - **Ro 8:11-13; Ph 2:12-13; 4:13; Ep 3:20; 6:10**

C. IT GIVES US HOPE CONCERNING OUR OWN RESURRECTION...

1. We were born again to a living hope - **1 Pe 1:3**
2. His resurrection gives us a living hope! - **1 Pe 1:21**
3. Especially concerning the resurrection of believers! - **1 Th 4:13-14**

D. IT DEMANDS OUR COMPLETE LOYALTY...

1. Jesus is to be our Lord, whether we live or are dead - **Ro 14:9**
1. He was raised and then exalted to become our Lord - **Ac 2:32-36; Ep 1:20-23**
2. Thus our lives and service belong to Him - **Ro 14:7-8; 2 Co 5:15**

CONCLUSION

1. The impact of the resurrection of Jesus should not go unfelt in our lives...
 - a. As a historical event it has everlasting implications
 - b. For both the believer and the unbeliever

2. The **believer** must never lose sight of the significance of the resurrection...
 - a. Do our lives demonstrate that we serve a risen Lord and Savior?
 - b. Do we possess the hope, peace, and strength that the reality and power of His resurrection gives to the Christian?

3. The **unbeliever** also needs to examine the significance of the resurrection carefully...
 - a. It verifies the deity of Jesus, that He has all authority - **Ro 1:4; Mt 28:19; Ac 2:36**
 - b. It verifies the truthfulness of what He taught, such as...
 - 1) No one can come to the Father but through Him - **Jn 14:6**
 - 2) His blood was shed for the remission of sins - **Mt 26:28**
 - 3) He came to offer abundant life - **Jn 10:10**
 - 4) He went to prepare a place for us - **Jn 14:2**
 - 5) He shall come again - **Jn 14:3**
 - 6) There will be a resurrection of the dead and ensuing judgment - **Jn 5:28-29; 12:48**
 - c. If Jesus rose from the dead, then one must believe in Him! - cf. **Jn 8:24**

May we never forget “**The Significance Of The Resurrection of Christ**” in our lives!

The Single Christian

INTRODUCTION

1. Lessons are often presented on the subject of “Home and Family”...
 - a. Discussing the challenges of marriage and parenting
 - b. Describing the responsibilities of spouses, parents, and children
2. In many cases, little is said concerning those who are single...
 - a. Perhaps because the “nuclear” family is assumed to be the norm
 - b. Yet many are single, and may feel left out

[The Bible does have things to say about being single. As we consider what is said, perhaps it may be beneficial to begin by answering some questions...]

I. QUESTIONS REGARDING THE SINGLE CHRISTIAN

A. WHY WOULD ANYONE BE SINGLE...?

1. Some may be single by **circumstance**
 - a. Such as women who have never been asked to marry
 - b. Such as men who have not yet found a woman to accept their proposal
 - c. Such as those who are divorced, perhaps through no fault of their own
 - d. Such as those who are widowed, suffering the loss of their spouse
 - e. Such as those too young to marry, or too sick, etc.
 2. Some may be single by **choice**
 - a. Perhaps they prefer the single life on its own merits
 - b. Perhaps they have chosen to remain single for other reasons
 - 1) Jesus said some would be single for the sake of the kingdom - cf. **Mt 19:11-12**
 - 2) Paul considered his singleness a “gift from God” - cf. **1 Co 7:7-8**
 - 3) Some may simply not be drawn toward the opposite sex
 3. Sometimes, **circumstances** make being single the best **choice**
 - a. As in times of persecution - cf. **1 Co 7:25-28**
 - b. Or in times of war, tragedies, etc.
- **With so many possible reasons, we should be careful not to presume why one is single**

B. WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS TO BEING SINGLE...?

1. **Freedom from care**
 - a. As in times of distress or persecution - cf. **1 Co 7:26-28,32a**
 - b. In such times, it is a blessing not to have to worry about a spouse and children
2. **Freedom to serve the Lord**
 - a. As Paul describes in **1 Co 7:32b-35**
 - b. There are opportunities to serve the Lord that may not be as open to with familial responsibilities
 - 1) E.g., preaching in foreign countries
 - 2) E.g., doing more for others in the local congregation

C. WHAT ARE THE DISADVANTAGES TO BEING SINGLE...?

1. **The danger of temptations**
 - a. Physical desires can be strong
 - 1) If so, then one should not be single by choice
 - 2) Marriage is for those who don't have the "gift" of singleness - **1 Co 7:8-9**
 - b. If single by circumstance, one needs to be extra careful
 - 1) They may not have the help of close supervision by other family members
 - 2) It is more tempting when no one is looking!
 - 3) They need to be extra sure to lean on the Lord - cf. **1 Co 10:13**
2. **The danger of loneliness**
 - a. Not to be confused with solitude, which many single people enjoy
 - b. Loneliness can lead to depression, which can render one ineffective in service to God
3. **The danger of self-centeredness**
 - a. Living alone, it is easy to become set in one's own ways
 - b. One may soon forget of the how or need to accommodate others

[The single life may not be better or worse than married life, only different. It does come with its own unique challenges, of which all Christians (married or single) should be aware. Now if I may, offer some...]

II. COUNSEL REGARDING SINGLES IN THE CHURCH

A. TO THOSE WHO ARE SINGLE...

1. **Utilize the advantages of being single**
 - a. Use your freedom to increase your service to God - **1 Co 7:32-35**
 - b. Don't be selfish with the extra time and freedom you have
 - c. Don't begrudge others who may not do as much as you because of their other responsibilities (e.g., children, spouse)
2. **Watch out for the dangers of being single**
 - a. Temptations - make an effort to develop a close relationship with the Lord
 - b. Loneliness - accept invitations to be with others, initiate opportunities to be with others
 - c. Self-centeredness - offer yourself in service to others; be flexible
3. **Remember that you are in the "family of God"**
 - a. You have many mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, children - cf. **Mk 10:29-30**
 - b. Make the effort to develop and utilize these relationships

B. TO THOSE WHO ARE NOT SINGLE...

1. **Be acceptive** toward those are single by **choice**
 - a. If they have the "gift of God" for singleness, don't consider them strange
 - b. Thank God for His diversity of gifts to His people
 - c. Utilize those who use their singleness for increased service to God
2. **Be understanding** toward those who are single by **circumstance**
 - a. The challenges they may face due to no choice of their own
 - b. The temptations they may face living the single life
3. **Be sensitive** toward all who are single, whether by **choice** or **circumstance**
 - a. Their need to be part of our "family" in Christ
 - b. Their need for friendship and involvement in our activities

CONCLUSION

1. No matter what our station in life, God can give us the strength and wisdom to lead productive and joyful lives!
2. If you are single, and your service to Christ has been hindered by misconceptions...
 - a. Either your own
 - b. Or those of others-- Then I hope this lesson may be of some help

May we all be sensitive to the particular needs of one another, and help each other glorify God with our lives, as diverse as they may be!

The Sovereign Rule Of God

INTRODUCTION

1. We live in a time of great uncertainty...
 - a. Turmoil in places abroad
 - b. Terrorism in places at home
2. It is easy to be filled with anxiety...
 - a. What does the future hold?
 - b. Will things get better, or only worse?
3. What attitude should the Christian have in such times as these...?
 - a. Should we fear the future?
 - b. Shall we worry for our well-being?

[The answer can be found in remembering that God is in control. But is He really? Even in times of uncertainty and anxiety? It may help to understand by reviewing “**The Sovereign Rule Of God**”...]

I. THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

A. DECLARED BY THE PROPHETS...

1. Such as **Isaiah**, who:
 - a. Prophesied God would have the Medes overthrow Babylon - **Isa 13:17-20**
 - b. Depicted the nations as “tools” in the hand of God - **Isa 10:5-15**
 - 1) Using wicked nations to punish other wicked nations
 - 2) But leaving none unpunished
 - c. Proclaimed God’s judgment upon such nations as...
 - 1) Babylon - **Isa 13-14**
 - 2) Assyria and Philistia - **Isa 14**
 - 3) Moab - **Isa 15-16**
 - 4) Damascus - **Isa 17**
 - 5) Ethiopia and Cush - **Isa 18**
 - 6) Egypt - **Isa 19**
 - 7) Edom and Arabia - **Isa 21**
 - 8) Jerusalem - **Isa 22**
 - 9) Tyre - **Isa 23**

-- All these judgments came true as prophesied; verifying God’s existence and sovereignty - cf. **Isa 46:8-11**
2. Such as **Daniel**, who:
 - a. When God revealed Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and its interpretation, came to realize the sovereign rule of God - cf. **Dan 2:19-21**
 - b. Prophesied the rise and fall of the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek and Roman empires - **Dan 2:36-40**
 - c. Explained that Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of a great tree and its fulfillment was to impress him with God’s sovereignty - **Dan 4:19-26**, cf. **34-37**

B. THE BASIS UPON WHICH GOD GOVERNED SUCH NATIONS...

1. Implied in **Pro 14:34**
 - a. A righteous nation is exalted, but a sinful nation is disgraced
 - b. This distinction based upon righteousness supported in **Jer 18:7-10**
2. Some illustrations of this principle
 - a. Babylon, to be punished for its evil treatment of its subjects - **Isa 10:1-4**
 - b. Other pagan nations, as listed by Amos - **Amo 1:3-2:3**
 - c. Likewise Judah and Israel - **Amo 2:4-8**

[God's sovereignty over the nations in Old Testament times was clearly manifested. But what about today...?]

II. THE SOVEREIGNTY OF CHRIST IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

A. PROCLAIMED IN MESSIANIC PROPHECY...

1. Pertaining to the Messiah's reign - **Isa 9:6-7**
 - a. The government will be on His shoulder
 - b. There will no end to increase of His government
 2. Regarding God's everlasting kingdom - **Dan 2:44**
 - a. Established in the days of the fourth kingdom, the Roman empire
 - b. A kingdom which will never be destroyed - cf. **Lk 1:31-33**
 - c. A kingdom which will break in pieces and consume all kingdoms
- **Such prophecies indicate that the sovereignty of God would continue in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ!**

B. PROFESSED BY JESUS AND HIS APOSTLES...

1. After His resurrection, Jesus claimed all authority - **Mt 28:18**
 2. His apostles taught that Jesus had all authority
 - a. He is head over all things - **Ep 1:20-22**
 - b. All have been made subject to Him - **1 Pe 1:22**
 - c. He is the ruler of the kings of the kings of the earth - **Re 1:5**
 - d. He will reign until He comes again - **1 Co 15:24-26**
 - 1) A reign "in the midst of His enemies" - cf. **Psa 110:1-2**
 - 2) Destroying with His coming the last enemy, death! - **1 Co 15:26**
- **The sovereignty once exercised by the Father is now being exercised by the Son!**

C. WHAT THIS MEANS FOR THE CHRISTIAN...

1. Jesus is truly Lord of lords and King of kings! - cf. **1 Ti 6:15; Re 17:14; 19:16**
2. No government exists without His approval - cf. **Ro 13:1-2**
3. What happens in governmental affairs is a matter of His concern
 - a. He rules the nations with a rod of iron - cf. **Re 3:26-27**
 - b. He brings nations into judgment, especially those that oppose Him (the theme of Revelation, **Re 17:14**)
 - c. As did His Father, the Son has various means at His disposal to judge the nations (war, famine, pestilence) - cf. **Re 6:1-8**
 - d. Don't forget, such judgment may involve using one wicked nation against another!
4. The best thing a Christian can do for the welfare of his country:
 - a. Spread the gospel
 - 1) It has the power to save men - **Ro 1:16**
 - 2) And to make them righteous - **Ro 1:17; cf. Pro 14:34**

- b. Pray fervently - **1 Ti 2:1-3**; cf. **Lk 18:7-8**
 - 1) Every time you pray, you are given a private audience with the King!
 - 2) Sincere prayer to the King will have more influence than a trip to the ballot box!
- c. Remember that our true strength is in the Lord
 - 1) Not in weapons (such as horses) - cf. **Isa 30:15-16; 31:1-3**
 - 2) But in righteousness, wisdom, and knowledge - cf. **Isa 33:5-6**

CONCLUSION

- 1. We need not look to the future with anxiety...
 - a. For the one in control is our Lord and Savior, Jesus
 - b. If we seek His kingdom and righteousness first, our needs will be provided - **Mt 6:33**
- 2. Even if persecuted, we can still rejoice...
 - a. For the kingdom of heaven is ours! - **Mt 5:10-12**
 - b. Jesus can help us to “weather the storms” - **Mt 7:24-27**
- 3. Speaking of the sovereignty of Christ...
 - a. His sovereignty over the nations began when He was raised from the dead
 - b. When we are united with Him in His resurrection, we can enjoy His sovereign rule

How can one be united with Christ in His resurrection? By being baptized into His death and then raised with Him to walk in newness of life...! - cf. **Ro 6:3-11**

Spirituality In Youth

Is It Possible?

INTRODUCTION

1. Many parents and churches are naturally concerned for their children...
 - a. They want so much what is best for them
 - b. They pray that their children will grow to love and serve the Lord
2. But should they expect their children to be spiritually minded...?
 - a. Especially as they go through the period of adolescence?
 - b. When they are confronted on every side by immorality and materialism?

[Is it possible for there to be spirituality in youth? If so, how, and why should young people want to focus on developing spiritually? To such questions, we answer...]

I. YES! MANY HAVE SHOWN IT IS POSSIBLE

A. OLD TESTAMENT EXAMPLES...

1. Joseph, resisting fornication - **Gen 39:7-10**
 2. David, fighting for God's honor - **1 Sam 17:37,42-47**
 3. Daniel, choosing not to defile himself - **Dan 1:8**
 4. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, refusing to worship an idol - **Dan 3:16-18**
- **These young men displayed faith and fortitude in their service to God!**

B. NEW TESTAMENT EXAMPLES...

1. Mary, who found favor with God and rejoiced in Him - **Lk 1:30,46-50**
 2. Little ones, whose faith and humility was praised by Jesus - **Mt 18:1-6**
 3. Timothy, who despite his youth was to be an example to others - **1 Ti 4:12; 2Ti 2:22**
- **There is certainly room in God's kingdom for the service of young people!**

[Even today, many young people demonstrate by their faith and service that it is possible for there to be spirituality in youth. But in answering whether it is possible, we must also say...]

II. YES! BUT IT IS NOT EASY

A. THERE IS THE WARFARE WITHIN...

1. The lust of the flesh, which wages war with the soul - **1 Pe 2:11; Ga 5:16-17**
 2. The lust of the eyes, greed which would drown the soul - **1 Ti 6:9-11**
 3. The pride of life, arrogance which also pulls one away from God - **1 Jn 2:15-17**
- **Young people struggle with challenges that destroy even older, mature people**

B. THERE IS THE WARFARE WITHOUT...

1. Peer pressure, encouraging them to do evil - **1 Co 15:13**
2. Societal pressure, such as humanism, hedonism, and atheism promoted in the schools and media - **1 Pe 4:3-4**
3. Hypocrisy and apathy in members of the church - **Re 2:4; 3:15**

-- **Such satanic influence weighs heavily upon our young people**

[Can young people be spiritually minded when confronted with warfare within and without? To that we answer...]

III. YES! BUT YOU NEED GOD'S HELP

A. TO OVERCOME THE WARFARE...

1. There is power in Christ - **Ph 4:13**
 2. There is help from God - **Ph 2:12-13; Ep 3:16,20; 6:10-13**
 3. You need God's providential aid - **1 Co 10:13**
- **God stands ready to help the young to be spiritually strong**

B. THE TOOLS THAT GOD PROVIDES...

1. His Word - **Psa 119:9,11; Mt 4:4,7,11; Ja 1:21**
 2. Prayer - **Mt 6:13; 26:41; Ph 4:6-7**
 3. The Church - **He 3:12-14; 10:23-25**
- **God provides everything the young need to be spiritually strong**

[Before we conclude our response to the question, "Is it possible for there to be spirituality in youth?", let me add one more thought...]

IV. YES! AND YOU NEED IT IN YOUR YOUTH

A. TO AVOID THE HARVEST SOWN BY 'WILD OATS'...

1. You will reap what you sow - **Ga 6:7-8**
 2. Many lives have been ruined by youthful indiscretions
- **Don't spend the first half of your life making the second half miserable!**

B. TO GAIN THE WISDOM THAT COMES FROM SPIRITUALITY...

1. True wisdom comes from God to those who ask in faith - **Ja 1:5-8**
 2. Such wisdom greatly enhances the quality of life - **Pro 3:13-18**
- **Wisdom gained early ensures a good start and a good finish in life**

CONCLUSION

1. Spirituality in youth is indeed possible...
 - a. Many young people have proven it to be so
 - b. Despite the warfare they faced within and without
 - c. By trusting in the Lord and looking to Him for strength
 - d. Ensuring that their lives were blessed by God from start to finish
2. Young people, do you want the best that life has to offer...?
 - a. Then let Joseph, Daniel, Mary, and Timothy be your role models
 - b. Accept the call to serve God in the prime of youth

Serve the Lord with all your heart, and you will not be disappointed...!

Studying With JW's

INTRODUCTION

1. It not uncommon for members of the Watchtower Society to come to your front door...
 - a. Who refer to themselves as “Jehovah’s Witnesses”
 - b. A term I hesitate to use, as they’ve neither seen Jehovah nor do they speak for Him
2. Their zeal is commendable...
 - a. They strongly believe in their faith
 - b. They desire to share their faith with everyone
 - Yet zeal alone will not save one - cf. **Ro 10:1-3**
3. Our heart’s desire and prayer should be for their salvation...
 - a. That they might know the truth concerning God’s righteousness
 - b. For which reason we ought to be glad for opportunities to study with them
4. Yet most opportunities to study with JW's are frustrating and unfruitful...
 - a. Differences regarding basic Bible doctrines are many
 - b. Discussions rarely make progress, and often become heated

[Why is this so? What can be done about? Is there anyway to lead a JW to “the way of God more accurately” (cf. **Ac 18:26**)? I don’t have all the answers, but the following thoughts might be helpful...]

I. THE CHALLENGE IN STUDYING WITH JW'S

A. THEIR DOCTRINE IS DIFFERENT...

1. Their views differ on many Biblical subjects, for example:
 - a. The deity of Christ, the person of the Holy Spirit
 - b. The nature of man, death, and hell
 - c. The bodily resurrection of Christ
 - d. The second coming of Christ
2. Their diverse doctrines make it difficult to communicate
 - a. We may use the same words, but they mean something different to a JW
 - b. E.g., salvation, spirit, soul, Son of God
 - **This makes it easy to wrangle over words, no matter what the topic, even the simple gospel plan of salvation!**

B. THEIR AUTHORITY IS DIFFERENT...

1. They claim to follow the Bible, but...
 - a. They accept only their translation (New World Translation) as reliable, which is slanted to support their peculiar doctrines
 - b. They accept only those Biblical resources approved by their organization
 - c. They do not consider the Bible alone as a sufficient guide to learn the truth
2. So with any topic of discussion...
 - a. They will accept only what is supported by their translation, their approved Bible study aids
 - b. They will not accept any view, even Scripture, that counters the official belief of their

organization

- **This makes any effort to discuss the Bible and what it teaches to be fruitless and frustrating**

[Unless we can agree on the same standard of authority, any effort to study the Bible with JW's or anyone else will not be productive. Understanding this will help us to realize what is...]

II. THE TASK IN STUDYING WITH JW'S

A. HELP THEM SEE THE STANDARD OF THEIR AUTHORITY...

1. That their authority is the **Executive Committee** (EC) of the Watchtower Society
 - a. That they believe only the EC is capable of properly interpreting the Bible
 - b. That they must accept whatever interpretation is handed down by the EC
 2. In this regard, they are not much different from other religious groups who have a standard of authority different from just the Bible alone
 - a. Roman Catholics accept the authority of the pope, and church traditions
 - b. Mormons accept the authority of Joseph Smith, and succeeding presidents of the church
 - c. Many Protestants accept the authority of their creeds, catechisms, councils, synods, etc.
- **Their standard of authority is what separates one religious group from another; the JW's are no different, and we must help them see that!**

B. HELP THEM SEE THE DEFICIENCY OF THEIR AUTHORITY...

1. This is the same task required with anyone who accepts a standard of authority outside the Bible alone; for example:
 - a. A Roman Catholic would have to see the fallibility of the pope and their traditions
 - b. Mormons would have to see that Joseph Smith was a false prophet
 - c. Protestants who claim to believe in sola scriptura (the Scriptures alone), would need to be shown where their creeds, manuals, etc., contradict the Bible
 2. With JW's, this involves demonstrating:
 - a. That the Watchtower Society considers the EC to be God's inspired spokesman or prophet today, who alone is able to properly understand the Bible
 - b. That the EC has made many prophetic statements based upon their interpretations which have not come to pass
- **We must help them see that the EC therefore fails the test of a prophet or spokesman for God, and qualifies as a false prophet who is not to be heeded - cf. Deu 18:20-22**

C. HELP THEM SEE THE SUFFICIENCY OF THE SCRIPTURES ALONE...

1. This is the same task with anyone who has been dependent upon some other source for authority in religion
 - a. They must be convinced that the Bible can be understood by all alike
 - b. While there are parts that are difficult, what is necessary for salvation is clear
 2. The problem is many people fall under the control of an authoritarian organization...
 - a. Before they have read much of the Bible themselves
 - b. Then told they cannot understand it on their own
- **We must develop confidence in the Bible as a book that can be understood, and was written to be understood by the average person**

[With these thoughts in mind, I offer the following...]

III. SUGGESTIONS FOR STUDYING WITH JWS

A. REVIEW THEIR DEPENDENCE UPON THE EC FOR THEIR AUTHORITY...

1. You might ask these questions:
 - a. Do you believe that anyone, anywhere, who just had a Bible, and no other literature, could understand it and be saved?
 - b. Can the Bible be interpreted correctly only by the Watchtower?
 - c. Are you allowed to read material by ex-Jehovah's Witnesses?
 2. Some other questions that might help:
 - a. Do you believe the New World Translation is the only reliable translation? (note: they do accept the old American Standard)
 - b. Are you willing to consider Bible resources other than those approved by the Watchtower Society?
- **An honest JW will admit his or her dependence upon the EC for their authority**

B. REVIEW PROPHETIC CLAIMS OF THEIR AUTHORITY...

1. **They believe the Watchtower Society is God's prophet today**
 - a. "So, does Jehovah have a prophet to help them, to warn them of dangers and to declare them things to come? These questions can be answered in the affirmative." (**They Shall Know That A Prophet Was Among Them, The Watchtower**, Brooklyn, NY, April 1, 1972, p. 197)
 - b. "He had a 'prophet' to warn them. This 'prophet' was not one man, but a body of men and women...Today they are known as Jehovah's Christian witnesses." (**ibid.**, p. 197)
 - c. "...this group of anointed followers of Jesus Christ, doing a work in Christendom paralleling Ezekiel's work among the Jews, were manifestly the modern-day Ezekiel, the 'prophet' commissioned by Jehovah to declare the good news of God's Messianic kingdom and to give warning to Christendom." (**ibid.**, p. 198-199)
 - d. "...Jehovah's witnesses today make their declaration of the good news of the Kingdom under angelic direction and support...And since no word or work of Jehovah can fail, for he is God Almighty, the nations will see the fulfillment of what these witnesses say as directed from heaven." (**ibid.**, p. 200)
 - e. "Yes, the time must come shortly that the nations will have to know that really a 'prophet' of Jehovah was among them." (**ibid.**, p. 200)
 - f. "...Jehovah is interested not only in the vindication of his own name, but also in vindicating his 'prophet'." (**ibid.**, p. 200)
2. **They believe the Watchtower Magazine is how God communicates to people today**
 - a. "Its pages gleam with Scriptural and prophetic truths now due to be published for the education, comfort and guidance of all who desire to take their stand (and hold it) on the side of God and His Son, Earth's Rightful Ruler." (from **an advertisement** for The Watchtower).
 - b. "Those who believe that God uses 'The Watchtower' as a means of communicating to his people, or of calling their attention to his prophecies, should study 'The Watchtower' with thankfulness of heart and give Jehovah God and Christ Jesus all the honor and credit and give neither honor or credit to any man." (**The Watchtower**, Brooklyn, NY, January 1, 1942, p. 5)
3. **An honest and informed JW believes the following:**
 - a. Their organization has been anointed and commissioned to be God's 'prophet'
 - b. They are under angelic direction and support, directed from heaven

- c. God helps them to understand the Bible through The Watchtower magazine
 - d. That God will vindicate them as His ‘prophet’
- **Just as Mormons look to Joseph Smith as a prophet, so JWs look to their organization as a prophet of God today. Do they pass the test of a prophet (cf. Deu 18:20-22)?**

C. REVIEW PROPHETIC FAILURES OF THEIR AUTHORITY

1. **What was supposed to happen to churches in 1918?**
 - a. “Until 1878 the nominal church had been in a sense God’s sanctuary or Temple; but He was from then on, culminating in 1918, to remove it with a stroke or plague of erroneous doctrines and deeds Divinely permitted.” (**The Finished Mystery**, Watchtower Bible And Tract Society, Brooklyn, NY, 1917, p. 484-485)
 - b. “Also, in the year 1918, when God destroys the churches wholesale and the church members by millions, it shall be that any that escape shall come to the works of Pastor Russell to learn the meaning of the downfall of ‘Christianity’.” (*ibid.*)
2. **Who was supposed to be resurrected in 1925?**
 - a. “That period of time 1575 before A.D. 1 of necessity would end in the fall of the year 1925, at which time the type ends and the great antitype must begin. What, then, should we expect to take place?” (**Millions Now Living Will Never Die**, Watchtower Bible And Tract Society, Brooklyn, NY, 1920, p. 88-91)
 - b. “The chief thing to be restored is the human race to life; and since other Scriptures definitely fix the fact that there will be a resurrection of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and other faithful ones of old, and that these will have the first favor, we may expect 1925 to witness the return of these faithful men of Israel from the condition of death, being resurrected and fully restored to perfect humanity and made the visible, legal representatives of the new order of things on earth.” (*ibid.*)
 - c. “Therefore we may confidently expect that 1925 will remark the return of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the faithful prophets of old, particularly those named by the Apostle in Hebrews chapter eleven, to the condition of human perfection.” (*ibid.*)
3. **What was supposed to happen in 1975?**
 - a. “According to this trustworthy Bible chronology six thousand years from man’s creation will end in 1975, and the seventh period of a thousand years of human history will begin in the fall of 1975 C.E.” (**Life Everlasting - In Freedom Of The Sons Of God**, p. 29)
 - b. “That millennium will bring a sabbathlike rest to the earth and all those then inhabiting it.” (**AWAKE**, 8 October 1968, p. 14)
 - c. “Are we to assume from this study that the battle of Armageddon will be all over by the autumn of 1975, and the long-looked-for thousand-year reign of Christ will begin by then? Possibly, but we wait to see how closely the seventh thousand-year period coincides with the sabbathlike thousand-year reign of Christ...It may involve only a difference of weeks or months, not years.” (**Why Are You Looking Forward To 1975?**, **The Watchtower**, August 15, 1968, Brooklyn, NY, p. 499)
 - d. “Reports are heard of brothers selling their homes and property and planning to finish out the rest of their days in this old system in the pioneer service. Certainly this is a fine way to spend the short time remaining before the wicked world’s end.” (**Kingdom Ministry**, May 1974, p. 3)
4. **How do JWs try to deflect criticism for such mistakes?**
 - a. By saying they admit their mistakes, while false prophets do not
 - b. That early Christians in Acts made mistakes, yet were spoken of with approval

- c. By claiming that they have been given “new light” to guide them more accurately
 - d. But no prophet of God made mistakes when it came to prophesying the future!
 - e. JW's want the **authority** of a prophet without the **accountability** of a prophet!
 - 1) They want people to heed the words of the Society as authoritative and final
 - 2) They don't want people to apply the test of a prophet to them
- **At worst, the Watchtower Society is a false prophet; at best, it is an unreliable interpreter of Scripture that has demonstrated its gross mishandling of the Word of God time and again!**

D. REVIEW THE ALL-SUFFICIENCY OF THE SCRIPTURES...

1. **The Scriptures were written to be understood, that one might:**
 - a. Know the certainty of what happened - **Lk 1:1-4**
 - b. Believe in Jesus, and have life in His name - **Jn 20:30-31**
 - c. Have an apostle's understanding of the “mystery of Christ” - **Ep 3:3-5**
 - d. Understand the will of God - **Ep 5:17**
 - e. Know they have eternal life - **1 Jn 5:13**
 2. **The Scriptures are an all-sufficient guide for our salvation**
 - a. The whole counsel of God has been preached - cf. **Ac 20:27**
 - b. All things pertaining to life and godliness has been given - cf. **2 Pe 1:3**
 - c. The Word can save us, and help us grow - **Ja 1:21; 1 Pe 2:2**
 - d. That incorruptible Word lives and abides forever - **1 Pe 1:22-25**
 - e. It has been revealed once for all - **Ju 3**
 - f. Not even angels or modern apostles have anything new to add - **Ga 1:8,9**
- **The Scriptures are able to make the man of God “complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” - 2 Ti 3:16-17**

CONCLUSION

1. This lesson is not intended to present an exhaustive and complete response to the errors of the Watchtower Society; rather, it is has been my purpose to...
 - a. Identify why efforts to study with them are often so frustrating
 - b. Suggest where one needs to begin, if true progress is to be made
2. Once a JW is willing to accept the all-sufficiency of the Scriptures, and not be dependent upon the Watchtower Society to tell them what to believe...
 - a. Then it might be fruitful to study fundamental issues
 - b. Such as the deity of Christ, the plan of salvation, etc.

Otherwise, we might easily find ourselves engaged in behavior contrary to that admonished by the apostle Paul:

“But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.” (2 Ti 2:23-26)

For an in-depth study of the Watchtower Bible And Tract Society, its history, organization, and doctrines, I recommend the following material:

Jehovah's Witnesses, Vols. I & II, Maurice Barnett

This material can be ordered from the Florida College Bookstore:

<http://www.flcoll.edu/bookstor/bkstore.htm>

You might also find these online web sites helpful:

History Of The Watchtower Society

<http://www.freeminds.org/history/history.htm>

Jehovah's Witnesses Exposed

<http://www.bible.ca/jw.htm>

Support Your Local Church!

INTRODUCTION

1. The title for our lesson was adapted from that of a movie starring James Garner (“**Support Your Local Sheriff!**”) made in 1969...
2. In most congregations, there are varying degrees of commitment among the members...
 - a. The **faithful few** who can always be counted on to do whatever is needed
 - b. The **fairly faithful** who attend somewhat regularly, but are not as dependable
 - c. The **C&E group** who attend only on Christmas, Easter, and other special days
 - d. Then there is the **FPO group** (using a church for funeral purposes only)
3. Membership in the body of Christ has many blessings...
 - a. A relationship with Jesus Christ and all that entails
 - b. But there are also responsibilities incumbent upon the members - e.g., **Ep 4:25**

[What are our responsibilities as members of the body of Christ? In particular, what are our duties to one another as members of a local church? Let’s first review the concept of...]

I. MEMBERSHIP IN THE CHURCH

A. THE CHURCH UNIVERSAL...

1. That is, the body of Christ, made up all the saved
 2. The church of which Jesus spoke in **Mt 16:18**
 3. One is **added** by the Lord to the church universal when they are saved - cf. **Ac 2:41,47**
- **Membership in the universal church is automatic upon one’s conversion**

B. THE CHURCH LOCAL...

1. That is, a local group of Christians who function together as a congregation
 2. We read of such churches in the New Testament - cf. **1 Co 1:2; Ro 16:16**
 3. One joins a local church when they seek to work with other Christians - cf. **Ac 9:26-28**
- **Membership in the local church is by mutual agreement among Christians**

C. IS LOCAL CHURCH MEMBERSHIP NECESSARY...?

1. Can one just have a “floating membership” without joining a particular congregation?
 2. The mere provision of local churches in God’s Word implies...
 - a. A divine purpose for the local church
 - b. A corresponding responsibility of Christians to avail themselves of it
- **The idea of becoming a Christian and never a part of a local congregation is foreign to the Scriptures**

[Membership in the church universal comes with responsibilities toward other Christians. Let’s now consider our...]

II. RESPONSIBILITIES TO THE CHURCH

A. ATTITUDES TO MAINTAIN...

1. Concern for one another - **1 Co 12:25-26**
 2. Humility, lowliness of mind - **Ph 2:3**
 3. A peaceable spirit - **Ro 14:17-19**
 4. Appreciation for others and their work - e.g., **1 Th 1:2-3**
 5. Willingness to cooperate, work together - **1 Co 12:21**
 - a. "It marks a big step in a man's development when he comes to realize that other men can be called on to help him do a better job than he can do alone" - **Andrew Carnegie**
 - b. "Coming together is a beginning, keeping together is progress, working together is success." - **ibid.**
 6. Friendliness, warmth - cf. **Phe 1:7**
 7. Gentleness, meekness - **Ga 6:1**
 8. Forbearance, longsuffering, patience - **Co 3:12-13**
 9. Forgiveness - **Co 3:13**
 10. Love - **Jn 13:34-35**
- **Such attitudes will insure that involvement in a local church will be a great blessing!**

B. ACTION STEPS TO TAKE...

1. Seek to join oneself with a faithful congregation (place membership) - cf. **Ac 9:26**
 - a. Drifters, "floating members", "members at large", are missing an important aspect of what it means to be a Christian
 - b. The same goes for passive "spectators", those "just along for the ride", "permanent visitors"
 - c. One places membership with the intent of being an actual, functioning member - not a mere appendage to the body
 - d. It involves making real commitments to the group to work and serve
2. Attend and participate in the assemblies of the congregation - cf. **He 10:24-25**
 - a. The Christian enjoys and benefits from private and family worship, but must not neglect God's provision for collective, congregational worship and Bible study
 - b. Every aspect of our assemblies is vital to the Christian
 - 1) The Lord's Supper - **Ac 2:42; 20:7; 1 Co 11:17-34**
 - 2) Praying - **Ac 2:42; 4:23-31; 12:12**
 - 3) Singing - **Ep 5:19; Co 3:16**
 - 4) Preaching and teaching - **Ac 20:7**
 - 5) Giving as we have been prospered - **1 Co 16:1-2; 2 Co 8,9**
 - c. Our assemblies provide opportunities for three different levels of involvement:
 - 1) Providing for the assembly - cleaning the building, preparing the communion trays, leading in the service, etc.
 - 2) Attendance at the assembly - attending every service is critical to the overall growth and health of the congregation (let alone self!)
 - 3) Participation in the assembly - to the extent of one's ability
 - a) Worship is not a spectator activity
 - b) The crucial question is not "How did the preacher or song leader do?", but "How did I do?"
 - c) If one can do no more than listen, then listen in a manner that shows reverence and respect to God's Word! - cf. **Ac 17:11**
 - d. Assembling together is not merely a routine to perform, but a God-given provision for our spiritual good
 - 1) Quibbles and questions about whether we have to, complaints, neglects, etc., reveal an attitude of taking lightly the opportunity for Christians to be together

- 2) God wants to give us something in our assemblies - our involvement or lack thereof reveals much about whether we desire to accept what God has for us!
 - 3) To minimize this aspect of Christianity jeopardizes not only one's own soul, but the souls of others!
 3. Engage personally and directly in the work of the congregation
 - a. Evangelism - e.g., **Ac 8:4**
 - b. Edification - **Ro 14:19**
 - c. Benevolence - **Ac 2:44-45; 4:34-35**
 4. Contribute financially to the work of the congregation - **1 Co 16:1-2, 2 Co 9:6-7**
 5. Pray for other Christians, especially those of one's own congregation - e.g., **Co 4:12**
 6. Help maintain unity in the congregation - **1 Co 1:10; Ro 15:5-7; Ep 4:1-3**
 7. Participate in the discipline of the congregation, both instructive as well as corrective - **1 Co 5:1-13; Ga 6:1-2; 2 Th 3:6-15**
 8. Extend courtesy and hospitality - **Ro 12:13; 1 Pe 4:9**
 9. Find an individual role and fill it - **Co 4:17; 2 Ti 4:5**
 10. Submit to the congregation's elders - **1 Th 5:12,13; He 13:7,17**
- **Such action steps will greatly increase one's level of involvement in a local church**

CONCLUSION

1. Too often, churches are like football games...
 - a. The players on the field could use a rest from their exertion
 - b. The spectators in the stands need to exercise more
2. Churches likewise have "players" and "spectators"...
 - a. The players are active members, faithfully supporting their local church
 - b. The spectators are members who benefit while expecting others to carry the load
3. Do we really love and appreciate the church of our Lord...?
 - a. For which He shed His blood? - cf. **Ac 20:28**
 - b. Then let us fulfill our responsibilities to the church, both universal and local!

Support your local church by being an active and involved member. Not only will you bless others in doing so, but you will be richly blessed in return...!

"For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister."

- He 6:10

Take Time To Be Holy

INTRODUCTION

1. Our songs in worship are designed to instruct as well as praise...
 - a. For in them we teach and admonish one another - **Co 3:16**
 - b. By them the Word of Christ can dwell in us richly - **Co 3:16**

2. A familiar song with an important message is **“Take Time To Be Holy”**...
 - a. Words written by W. D. Longstaff
 - b. Music composed by George C. Stebbins
 - **In “Hymns For Worship”, it is song #118**

3. Certainly the children of God are to be holy...
 - a. We are to be holy in our conduct - **1 Pe 1:15**
 - b. Even as our Father who calls us is holy - **1 Pe 1:15-16**
 - **Indeed, holiness is to be pursued, for without it one will not see the Lord - He 12:14**

[In this lesson, we will let the words of this song serve as the basis for our study. Note first that the song assumes...]

I. THE NEED TO TAKE TIME

A. THE WORLD RUSHES ON...

1. As expressed in the beginning of the second verse
2. Our lives are certainly hectic and fast-paced
3. Filled with activities that consume our time
4. And our lives are but a vapor - cf. **Ja 4:13-14**
- **Before we know it, time will have slipped by**

B. IT TAKES TIME TO BE HOLY...

1. The key presumption upon which this song is based
2. Holiness must be pursued - **He 12:14**
3. Holiness is the fruit of service to God - cf. **Ro 6:22**
4. Holiness must be perfected - **2 Co 7:1**
- **If we are not careful, time to develop holiness will be gone**

[So we must **“Take Time To Be Holy.”** It needs to be a priority in our lives. How does one take time...?]

II. THE WAY TO TAKE TIME

A. SPEND TIME WITH THE LORD...

1. The song encourages us to:
 - a. *“Abide in Him always”*
 - b. *“Spend much time in secret with Jesus alone”*
2. The means to do so involve:
 - a. **Prayer**, as suggested by the song

- 1) *“Speak oft with thy Lord”*
- 2) *“Forgetting in nothing His blessings to seek”*
- b. **The Word of God** (*“Feed on His Word”*)
3. Do we take time to be with the Lord?
 - a. Through prayer, where the Lord is ready to intercede? - cf. **He 4:14-16; 7:25**
 - b. Through the Word, which testifies of our gracious Lord? - cf. **Jn 5:39; 1 Pe 2:2-3**
- **We cannot overestimate the importance of finding time to be with the Lord alone through prayer and the Word!**

B. SPEND TIME WITH OTHERS...

1. This includes **fellowship** with other Christians (*“Make friends of God's children”*)
 - a. Which the early Christians continued in steadfastly - **Ac 2:42**
 - b. Which helps to ensure faithfulness and steadfastness - **He 3:12-14**
 - c. Which includes the idea of frequent assembling - **He 10:24-25**
2. This includes **service** to our fellowman (*“Help those who are weak”*)
 - a. A duty enjoined upon Christians - **1 Th 5:14-15; Ac 20:35**
 - b. Service toward all, but especially our brethren - **Ga 6:10**
 - c. Ministering our abilities to one another - **1 Pe 4:10-11**
- **We must not be so busy that we don't have time to be with brethren and to help others as we have opportunity!**

[As one takes time to be with the Lord, His people, and in service to them and others, a transformation slowly takes place...]

III. THE BENEFITS OF TAKING TIME

A. YOU WILL BE BLESSED...

1. With inner peace and happiness (*“Be calm in thy soul”*)
 - a. Through frequent prayer - cf. **Ph 4:6-7**
 - b. Through frequent meditation upon the Word - cf. **Psa 1:1-3; 119:165**
2. With renewed strength (*“Each thought and each motive beneath His control”*)
 - a. Through your relationship with Christ - **Ph 4:13**
 - b. Through the indwelling of the Spirit - **Ro 8:12-13; Ep 3:16,20-21**
3. With increasing realization of God's love (*“Led by His Spirit to fountains of love”*)
 - a. A manifestation of the Spirit in our lives - **Ro 5:5**
 - b. Whose fruit produces love - **Ga 5:22**
- **Is this not sufficient motivation to “take time to be holy”?**

B. YOU WILL BE MORE CHRIST-LIKE...

1. The ultimate goal of discipleship (*“Like Him thou shalt be”*)
 - a. As explained by Jesus - **Lk 6:40**
 - b. As foreordained by God - **Ro 8:29**
2. A transformation noticed by others (*“Thy friends in thy conduct His likeness shall see”*)
 - a. The result of spending time with Jesus - e.g., Peter and John, **Ac 4:13**
 - b. The result of giving yourself to such things - e.g., Timothy, **1 Ti 4:15**
3. Prepared for greater service (*“Thou soon shall be fitted for service above”*)
 - a. For we will serve God in heaven, and in the new Jerusalem - **Re 7:15; 22:3**
 - b. Indeed, we will reign with Christ and God forever! - **Re 22:5; 2 Ti 2:12**

-- Is this not even more motivation to “take time to be holy”?

CONCLUSION

1. Remember the need to take time...
 - a. The world rushes on, and would carry us along with it
 - b. Our time in this life is short, we must have our priorities straight
2. Are you taking time, indeed, making time...?
 - a. To spend time alone with God, in prayer and the Word?
 - b. To spend time with others, in fellowship and service?
3. We must take time, if we desire to...
 - a. Experience the blessed life Jesus offers
 - b. Become more Christ-like in our conduct

May this song (“**Take Time To Be Holy**”) always remind us of the need to slow down, and to do those things so crucial to our spiritual growth and happiness!

Have you taken the time to respond to the gospel of Christ...? - cf. **Mk 16:15-16; Ac 2:38**

To Seek Or To Serve?

INTRODUCTION

1. Why do you go to church...?
 - a. Some seek to be entertained
 - b. Others seek to encounter God

2. A news article suggest many young people are interested in the latter, but are often disappointed. Some excerpts from the article:
 - a. It's not that they don't care. In a study, 80 percent of people in their 20s said their faith is very important in their lives. Nearly 60 percent claimed to have made a commitment to Jesus Christ. Three-fourths told the Barna Research Group of Ventura, Calif., that they prayed during the past seven days."
 - b. But in a typical week, just three out of 10 of them attend church. Only 30 percent of adults in their 20s donated something to a church during the past year; the same percentage holds for those who have read the Bible during any given week.
 - c. "One of the trends we're noticing is people are looking for something that's real," said Charlie Granade, singles pastor at Dayspring Baptist Church in Mobile.
 - d. "College students are looking for a worship service where there's nothing fancy," Granade said, adding that his church offers such an experience during its 'Unplugged' service on Monday nights.
 - e. Sally Morgenthaler addressed such desires in her book *Worship Evangelism: Inviting Unbelievers Into the Presence of God*. "Young people want to encounter the 'other' at church, but they are not finding it there," she said. "They're finding programs, they're finding games, they're finding cute things to do, but they're not finding an experience with the 'other' they assume is there somewhere in the world."

-- **Young Adults Believe In God, Aren't So Crazy About Church, By Kristen Campbell, Religion News Service, January 3, 2004**

3. My feelings were mixed as I read the article...
 - a. I am encouraged that people want to find God, and not be entertained in church
 - b. Yet I wonder if they realize there is more to church services than "seeking God"

[So I ask again, "**Why do you go to church?**" To be entertained? To seek God? Or is there another reason, one that might be as important as seeking God? First let me say that..]

I. TO SEEK GOD IS GOOD

A. ONE SHOULD CERTAINLY SEEK THE LORD...

1. He is the source of sustenance and strength - **Psa 34:10; 105:4**
2. He is the source of wisdom and understanding - **Pro 28:5**
3. God wants us to seek Him - **Ac 17:26-27**
4. Jesus wants us to seek first His kingdom and righteousness - **Mt 6:33**

B. ONE WOULD HOPE TO FIND GOD IN CHURCH...

1. Paul wrote about possible reactions by visitors - cf. **1 Co 14:23-25**
2. We should hope that our services draw people nearer to God, not away from Him!

C. YET GOD IS FOUND IN OBEDIENCE, NOT ATTENDANCE...

1. The Father and the Son abide with us as we keep Jesus' commandments - **Jn 14:21,23**
 - a. This is how we truly know Jesus and the Father - cf. **1 Jn 2:3-5,24**
 - b. Abide in the doctrine of Christ, and we have both the Father and the Son - **2 Jn 9**
2. God (and Jesus) are found when we obey Their commands
 - a. Such as the command to believe - **He 11:6**; cf. **Jn 8:24**
 - b. Such as the command to repent - **Ac 17:30-31**
 - c. Such as the command to confess - **Ro 10:9-10**
 - d. Such as the command to be baptized - **Mk 16:16**; **Ac 2:38**
 - 1) In which we are united with Christ - **Ro 6:3-4**
 - 2) In which we put on Christ - **Ga 3:27**
3. When we are saved, the Lord adds us to His church (i.e., we have found God!) - cf. **Ac 2:41,47**

D. THEN GOD CAN BE FOUND ANYWHERE, ANYTIME...

1. Even in one's room, through prayer - **Mt 6:6**; cf. **He 4:13-16**
2. Even when forsaken by all others - **2 Ti 4:16-17**

[To seek God is good. But one will not find Him by just going to church. One must obey the Gospel, and abide in His Word. Then one can find God anywhere. **Then why go to church?** Because...]

II. TO SERVE GOD IS BETTER

A. FINDING GOD, WE MUST SERVE HIM...

1. For this reason we were cleansed by the blood of Jesus - cf. **He 9:14**
 2. For this reason we are receiving an unshakable kingdom - cf. **He 12:28**
 3. We will continue to serve God in eternity - cf. **Re 7:15**; **22:3**
- **What good is it to find God, if we do not serve Him?**

B. WE HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO SERVE IN CHURCH...

1. **As we offer the sacrifices of praise through song and prayer**
 - a. We are spiritual priests, ordained to offer spiritual sacrifices - **1 Pe 2:5**
 - b. We do so through the fruit of our lips - **He 13:15**
 2. **As we edify one another through our assembling and praise**
 - a. We exhort one another by not forsaking our assembling together - **He 10:24-25**
 - b. We teach and edify one another in the songs we sing - **Co 3:16**
 3. **As we make intercession for others through praying**
 - a. As Paul exhorted Timothy to do - **1 Ti 2:1-3**
 - b. If the prayer of one righteous man avails much, more so the prayers of many righteous - cf. **Ja 5:16**
 4. **As we partake of the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week**
 - a. In which we proclaim the Lord's death - **1 Co 11:23-26**
 - b. In which we display our unity in the one body - cf. **1 Co 10:16-17**
 5. **As we lay by in store on the first day of the week**
 - a. We minister to the needs of others through the collection - cf. **1 Co 16:1-2**
 - b. We encourage others to give thanks to God - cf. **2 Co 9:12-13**
- **Even if not a single sermon is preached, all of us have the opportunity to serve God every time we come to church!**

CONCLUSION

1. Regarding the reasons one may go to church, may I suggest that as Christians...
 - a. It is not to be entertained, against which Paul warned - cf. **2 Ti 4:3-4**
 - b. It is not even to seek God or experience the 'other' (for we are already His children)
2. We assemble together as the church **for the opportunity to serve...**
 - a. To serve God through our acts of devotion
 - b. To serve His children through the same means
3. With this attitude, it will not matter whether we assemble with 10 people or 10,000...
 - a. We still offer our service to our Lord and Creator
 - b. We still encourage those who are present
4. When we assemble with an attitude and readiness to serve God and our brethren...
 - a. We will get more out of any service we attend
 - b. For the more one puts into something, the more they get out of it
 - c. And as Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" - cf. **Ac 20:35**

Have you found God through faith and obedience to His Son? If so, are you willing to serve God and His children both in and out of the assemblies of the church...?

The Three Loves Of A Disciple

INTRODUCTION

1. In the Great Commission, Jesus wanted His apostles to make disciples... - **Mt 28:19-20**
 - a. A disciple is a learner, a follower, an adherent
 - b. Jesus wants us to learn from Him - cf. **Mt 11:28-30**
2. What does Jesus expect of us...?
 - a. Discipleship involves many things
 - b. But especially that we love - cf. **2 Pe 1:5-8**
3. But one might ask...
 - a. What are we to love?
 - b. How can we best manifest our love?

[In this lesson, “**The Three Loves Of A Disciple**”, I hope to help answer such questions. Beginning with...]

I. THE THREE LOVES DEFINED

A. LOVES THE LORD...

1. Jesus taught we should love God - **Mt 22:37**
 2. His disciple John wrote that loving God must also mean loving His Son - **1 Jn 5:1**
 3. Jesus expressed the same thought as John, but conversely - **Jn 15:23**
- **A disciple of Jesus is one who loves both the Father and the Son**

B. LOVES THE BRETHREN...

1. Jesus made this love a mark of true discipleship - **Jn 13:34-35**
 2. John made it a sign of spiritual life - **1 Jn 3:14**; cf. **1 Jn 2:9-11**
- **A disciple of Jesus is one who loves his fellow disciples**

C. LOVES THE LOST...

1. God the Father certainly loved the lost - **Jn 3:16**
 2. Jesus likewise had compassion for the lost - **Mt 9:35-38**
 3. Paul had great concern for the lost - **Ro 10:1**; cf. **1 Co 9:19-22**
- **A disciple of Jesus is one loves those who are lost in sin**

[Disciples also love their families, even their enemies, but such can be included in either the category of brethren or the lost. Knowing who we are to love, how can we manifest such love? Some thoughts on..]

II. THE THREE LOVES DEMONSTRATED

A. THROUGH WORSHIP...

1. This is how we can best demonstrate our love for God
2. Assuming that our worship is in harmony with what Jesus revealed
 - a. That it is in Spirit and truth - **Jn 4:23-24**
 - b. That it includes keeping His commandments - **Jn 14:15,21,23; 15:10**

3. We are to worship God in two ways:
 - a. Through our public assemblies - **He 10:24-25**
 - b. Through our private devotions - e.g., **Mt 6:6**
- **Disciples demonstrate love for God through public worship and private devotion**

B. THROUGH FELLOWSHIP...

1. This is how we can best demonstrate our love for the brethren
2. By not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together - **He 10:24-25**
3. We are to fellowship with one another in two ways:
 - a. By coming together as a church, for the Lord's Supper and other means of edification - cf. **Ac 20:7; 1 Co 14:26**
 - b. By extending hospitality to one another - cf. **1 Pe 4:8-9**
- **Disciples demonstrate love for brethren through fellowship in church and home**

C. THROUGH EVANGELISM...

1. There is no better way to show love for the lost
2. Jesus manifested His compassion in this way
 - a. By teaching the lost - **Mt 9:35-36**
 - b. By calling for prayer in behalf of the lost - **Mt 9:37-38**
 - c. By developing and sending forth laborers - **Mt 10:1,5-7**
3. We can show our concern for the lost in similar ways
 - a. Through personal evangelism - e.g., **1 Pe 3:15; Jn 1:45-46**
 - b. Through supporting foreign evangelists - cf. **Ro 10:14-15**
- **Disciples demonstrate love for the lost by engaging in both local and foreign evangelism**

CONCLUSION

1. We go a long way to becoming true disciples of Jesus by...
 - a. Loving the Lord
 - b. Loving the brethren
 - c. Loving the lost
2. We go a long way in demonstrating such love through...
 - a. Public worship and private devotion
 - b. Fellowship with one another in both church and home
 - c. Engaging in both local and foreign evangelism
3. Many Christians love only partially...
 - a. They worship God in public, but not in private
 - b. They fellowship with brethren at church, but not in their homes
 - c. They evangelize at home, but do nothing to support evangelism abroad

No matter how much we love as disciples of Christ, we can always improve...

And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, - Ph 1:9

Perhaps this study, "The Three Loves Of A Disciple," can provide direction for improving our love...

The Uniqueness Of The Bible

INTRODUCTION

1. Perhaps you have heard people say things like...
 - a. “Oh, you don’t read the Bible, do you?”
 - b. “Why, the Bible is just another book; you ought to read...”
2. Perhaps you have heard...
 - a. A teacher degrade the Bible before his or her students, ridiculing those who read it
 - b. Those who are proud to have a Bible on their bookshelf, but only as one book among other “greats” of literature
3. But the Bible is more than simply one of the “greats”; it is **unique**...
 - a. Meaning **“one and only”**
 - b. Meaning **“different from all others; having no like or equal”** (Webster’s)

[Our purpose in this lesson is to review in what way the Bible is unique, how it is truly “different from all others; having no like or equal”. For example, the Bible is...]

I. UNIQUE IN ITS CONTINUITY

A. HERE IS A BOOK THAT WAS WRITTEN...

1. **Over a long period of time**
 - a. About 1600 years
 - b. A span of 40 generations
2. **By approximately 40 authors from every walk of life**
 - a. Moses, political leader trained in the universities of Egypt
 - b. Peter, fisherman
 - c. Amos, herdsman
 - d. Joshua, military general
 - e. Nehemiah, cup bearer to the king of Persia
 - f. Daniel, prime minister in the courts of Babylon
 - g. Luke, physician
 - h. Solomon, philosopher king
 - i. Matthew, tax collector
 - j. Paul, rabbi and tentmaker
3. **In different places**
 - a. Moses in the wilderness
 - b. Jeremiah in a dungeon
 - c. Daniel on a hillside, and in a palace
 - d. Paul inside prison walls
 - e. Luke while traveling
 - f. John in exile on the isle of Patmos
 - g. Others in the rigors of a military campaign
4. **At different times**
 - a. David in times of war
 - b. Solomon in times of peace

5. **During different moods**
 - a. Some writing from the heights of joy
 - b. Others from the depths of sorrow and despair
6. **On three continents:** Asia, Africa, Europe
7. **In three languages:** Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek
8. **With subject matter involving hundreds of controversial topics**, such as:
 - a. The origin of man and the universe
 - b. The nature of God
 - c. The nature of man, sin, and man's redemption

B. YET THERE IS HARMONY AND CONTINUITY...

1. For example:
 - a. "The Paradise Lost of the book of Genesis becomes the Paradise Regained of Revelation." - **Geisler and Nix**
 - b. "Whereas the gate to the Tree of Life is closed in Genesis, it is opened forevermore in Revelation." - **ibid.**
2. Compare the continuity of the Bible with any other writings of men
 - a. Imagine what you would have it you took just ten authors...
 - 1) From one walk of life, one generation, one place, one time, one mood, one continent, one language
 - 2) Speaking on just one controversial subject
 - b. You would have a conglomeration of conflicting ideas, not harmony!

[The Bible is truly unique, one of a kind, in its continuity. It is also...]

II. UNIQUE IN ITS TRANSLATION AND CIRCULATION

A. THE TRANSLATION OF THE BIBLE...

1. One of the first major books translated
 - a. E.g., the Septuagint version of the OT
 - b. Translated into Greek in 250 B.C.
 2. Between 1950-1960, 3000 Bible translators were at work
- **"By the end of 1993, the whole Bible had been translated into 337 languages; 2,062 languages have translations of at least one book of the Bible." - Guinness Book of World Records (1998)**

B. THE CIRCULATION OF THE BIBLE...

1. As of 1804 - 409 million copies
 2. As of 1932 - one and a third billion copies
- **"The world's best-selling and most widely distributed book is the Bible, with an estimated 2.5 billion copies sold, 1815 - 1975." - Guinness Book of World Records**

["No other book has known the anything approaching this constant circulation" (**The Cambridge History of the Bible**). You would think that if a person were sincerely seeking truth, he or she would give serious consideration to a book that has drawn so much attention! The Bible is also...]

III. UNIQUE IN ITS SURVIVAL

A. ITS SURVIVAL THROUGH TIME...

1. Though written on material that perishes...
 - a. ...having to be copied and recopied for hundreds of years by hand
 - b. ...its style, correctness, or existence did not diminish
2. Compared with other ancient writings, the manuscript evidence of the Bible:
 - a. Is greater than any 10 pieces of classical literature combined!
 - b. Is sufficient to ensure that we are reading the words of the original

B. ITS SURVIVAL THROUGH PERSECUTION...

1. Many have tried to burn it, ban it, and otherwise outlaw it
 - a. From the days of Roman emperors
 - b. To the present Communist-dominated countries
2. **Two illustrations** of its survival through persecution:
 - a. In 303 A.D., the Roman emperor Diocletian issued an edict to stop Christians from worshipping, and to destroy their scriptures. Only 25 years later the Roman emperor Constantine called for 50 copies of the Bible to be prepared at the expense of the government!
 - b. Voltaire, French atheist who died in 1778, predicted that Christianity would be swept from existence and pass into history within 100 years of his time. 50 years after his death, the Geneva Bible Society used his printing press and house to produce stacks of Bibles!
 - **How true is the statement: "All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the LORD endures forever." - cf. 1 Pe 1:24-25**

C. ITS SURVIVAL THROUGH CRITICISM...

1. "Infidels for 1800 years have been refuting and overthrowing this book, and yet it stands today as solid as a rock. Its circulation increases, and it is more loved and cherished and read today than ever before. Infidels, with all their assault make about as much impression on this book as a man with a tack hammer on the pyramids of Egypt." - **H. L. Hastings**
2. "No other book has been so chopped, knifed, sifted, scrutinized, and vilified. What book on philosophy or religion or psychology...has been subject to such a mass attack as the Bible? With such venom and skepticism? With such thoroughness and erudition? Upon every chapter, line and tenet? And yet, the Bible is still loved by millions, read by millions, and studied by millions." - **Bernard Ramm**

[Next, consider how the Bible is...]

IV. UNIQUE IN ITS TEACHING

A. A BOOK OF PROPHECY...

1. "It is the only volume ever produced in which is to be found a large body of prophecies relating to individual nations (more than ten in Isaiah alone), Israel, all the peoples of the earth, certain cities, the coming Messiah and His kingdom." - **Wilbur Smith**
2. There is no other book of religious antiquity which provides so many explicit prophecies:
 - a. So distant in the future
 - b. Which came to pass

B. A BOOK OF HISTORY...

1. The Old Testament "embodies the oldest history writing extant" (**Cambridge Ancient**

History)

2. The Hebrews are the only race of people that can give such a clear and accurate picture of their origins
3. "...in all of my archaeological investigation I have never found one artifact of antiquity that contradicts any statement of the Word of God." - **Nelson Glueck**

C. A BOOK OF PERSONALITIES...

1. The Bible deals frankly with the sins of its characters, even its heroes:
 - a. Adam and Eve - putting off responsibility on to others
 - b. Noah - drunkenness
 - c. Abraham - cowardice, lying to save his skin
 - d. Moses - disobedience to God
 - e. David - lying, adultery, murder
 - f. Peter - denying the Lord, causing division through hypocrisy
 - g. Churches - divided, arrogant, materialistic
2. The Bible has the habit of telling it like it was, and is unique in its portrayal of its key personalities

[Finally, we briefly note that Bible is...]

V. UNIQUE IN ITS INFLUENCE**A. UPON THE LITERATURE OF THE WORLD...**

1. "If every Bible in any considerable city were destroyed, the book could be restored in all its essential parts from the quotations on the shelves of the city public library" (**The Greatest English Classic**)
2. No one can truly be called "educated" who is ignorant of the Bible, for they would be ignorant of that which has influenced so many great writers

B. UPON THE WORLD ITSELF...

1. Our judicial system is based upon many of the principles found in the Bible
2. Our standards of morality owe much to the Judeo-Christian ethic
3. Even within the ancient characters of the Chinese language, are references to the Genesis story of Adam and Eve, the garden, and the Flood

CONCLUSION

1. All of this is not offered to prove the Bible to be the Word of God...
 - a. Though its continuity and fulfilled prophecy are certainly evidences of it
 - b. Rather that it is truly **a unique book** ("different from all others; having no like or equal")
2. Of course, I believe that what makes it unique is...
 - a. **Its origin** - it comes from the mind of the One True God
 - b. **Its process of revelation** - it came by the work of the Holy Spirit, who guided the many writers and made their works harmonious
 - c. **Its central message** - that Jesus Christ is the Messiah, the Son of God who is the only Lord and Savior of mankind
3. Because of its uniqueness, I believe it may be rightly stated:

“If you are an intelligent person, you will read the one book that has drawn more attention than any other, IF you are searching for the truth.”

Of course, as unique as the Bible may be, it is of little value unless we receive it in our hearts and work it out in our lives:

“Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.”

“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”

“For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was.”

“But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.”

- Ja 1:21-25

May we never neglect this unique Book, but receive it into our hearts and lives the way God intended!

Note: Much of the material for this lesson was taken from **“Evidence That Demands A Verdict”**, Vol. 1, by Josh McDowell.

The Value Of Secret Prayer

INTRODUCTION

1. In His sermon on the mount, Jesus taught His disciples **the value of secret prayer...**
 - a. As opposed to prayer done to be seen of men - **Mt 6:5**
 - b. To ensure that the Father in heaven hears and responds to our prayers - **Mt 6:6**
2. In this study, we shall examine more fully **the value of secret prayer...**
 - a. To consider other advantages of this form of spiritual devotion
 - b. To encourage its adoption in our daily walk with God

[The value of secret prayer can be seen in that it...]

I. CULTIVATES OUR SPIRITUAL NATURE

A. THROUGH REGULAR EXERCISE...

1. Our bodies are developed through regular physical exercise
2. The spirit of man also benefits through regular spiritual or godly exercise - **1 Ti 4:7-8**
3. The practice of prayer is a form of spiritual exercise
 - a. "Prayer is the spiritual gymnasium in which we exercise and practice godliness." - **V. L. Crawford**
 - b. "...Prayer is educative. The man who prays grows; and the muscles of the soul swell from this whipcord to iron bands." - **Frederick B. Meyer**
4. The opposite is also true: "Seven days without prayer makes one weak." - **Allan E. Bartlette**

B. THROUGH FREEDOM FROM DISTRACTION...

1. Where else but in the privacy of one's closet or room...
 - a. Can one fully concentrate his efforts in communion with God?
 - b. Can one engage in prayer without outside distractions?
2. Even in the assembly of the church it is easy to be distracted
 - a. By noise or movements from others as we try to listen to others pray
 - b. By concern of how we sound as others listen to us pray

C. THROUGH EMPHASIS ON PERSONAL CONCERNS...

1. Public prayer by its nature rarely addresses the specific needs of the individual
2. Private prayer provides opportunity pour out one's soul to God

[The cultivation of our spiritual nature is greatly enhanced by secret prayer because it also...]

II. FORMS A HABIT OF CLOSE COMMUNION WITH GOD

A. CONSIDER THE LAW OF HABIT...

1. Man is a creature of habit, we cannot help but form habits
2. Habits can be bad or good
 - a. One who allows himself to engage in a sinful practice over time finds himself enslaved

by

force of habit to sin - cf. **Jn 8:34**

- b. For one who engages in a regular godly practice, the formation of habits can be a good thing

B. THE HABIT OF SECRET PRAYER IS NO EXCEPTION...

1. Regular practice of secret prayer soon forms a habit that lends itself to the development of close communion and fellowship with God
2. Once the habit of close fellowship with God has been formed, one cannot help but be influenced by the constant presence of God - cf. **Pro 13:20**

[With the help of habitual close communion with God, secret prayer also...]

III. PRESERVES US FROM MANY EVILS

A. THE SOURCE OF OUR WORST EVILS...

1. Is it not our own lusts and passions? - cf. **Ja 1:14,15; 4:1-3**
2. The lusts of the flesh wage war against what the Spirit desires - cf. **Ga 5:16-17**
3. Controlling the self is a difficult challenge - cf. **Pro 16:32**

B. PRIVATE PRAYER CAN HELP...

1. The problem of **pride** can be treated with humbling oneself in prayer, confessing one's own sins and inadequacies before Almighty God
2. The problem of **revenge** can be addressed when imploring forgiveness from God who says, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, says the Lord"
3. How can the problem of anger, wrath, malice...
 - a. Harbor in the heart of one who often prays with the help of the Spirit? - cf. **Ro 8:26**
 - b. That same Spirit whose fruit is "love, joy, peace, longsuffering..."? - cf. **Ga 5:22,23**

[Yes, private prayer can be instrumental in **controlling the flesh** while at the same time **cultivating the godly virtues of the soul!** Consider also that secret prayer...]

IV. SECURES FOR US MUCH GOOD

A. PRAYER IS MORE THAN PSYCHOLOGICAL...

1. Yes, it does help one in a subjective or reflective way
2. But it also reaches out to God, who hears prayer - cf. **Psa 65:2**
 - a. He will reward one openly - **Mt 6:6**
 - b. Especially when we ask according to His Will - **1 Jn 5:14-15**

B. PRAYER HAS BEEN KNOWN TO CHANGE GOD'S PLANS...

1. The prayer of **Hezekiah** gave him 15 more years - **2 Kin 20:1-6**
2. The prayer of **the Ninevites** spared them and their city - **Jon 3:1-10**

C. PRAYER IS TAUGHT AS EFFICACIOUS...

1. For receiving our daily food - **Mt 6:11**
2. For overcoming temptation - **Mt 26:42**
3. For escaping the wrath to come - **Lk 21:36**

[Since the God who hears prayer is our Father in heaven who delights in those who pray in secret, dare we neglect that which secures so much good for ourselves? Finally, we note that secret prayer...]

V. ENABLES US TO PROMOTE GOOD AND HAPPINESS FOR OTHERS

A. THROUGH SECURING GOD'S FAVOR IN THEIR BEHALF...

1. The prayers of **Abraham** did more to save Lot than any riches
2. The intercession of **Moses** saved the nation of Israel
3. We too can secure much good for others through intercession for them
 - a. We can bless our nation by praying for our leaders - **1 Ti 2:1-3**
 - b. We can bless our preachers' efforts by praying for them - **2 Th 3:1**
 - c. We can bless our sick brethren by praying for them - **Ja 5:16**

B. THROUGH THE EFFECT SUCH PRAYING HAS ON US...

1. The iceberg never promotes the growth of vegetation
2. The frosts of winter do not cause the bud and tender flowers to spring forth
3. The heart filled with envy, jealousy, and revenge has no power to win souls to Christ
4. But the soul of a man who through secret prayer...
 - a. Has subdued his evil passions
 - b. Has cultivated his spiritual virtues
 - c. Can be a lasting influence for good, a living illustration of the saving power of the gospel to transform souls!

CONCLUSION

1. Why do many not engage often in the practice of secret prayer...?
 - a. Perhaps they do not believe in the power of prayer
 - b. Perhaps they do not believe in the power of God who answers prayer
2. But we have seen "**The Value Of Secret Prayer**" which...
 - a. Cultivates our spiritual nature
 - b. Forms a habit of close communion with God
 - c. Preserves us from many evils
 - d. Secures for us much good
 - e. Enables us to promote good and happiness for others

If we desire to be good and do good, let us **make secret prayer a habit** in our lives. Then our Father who sees in secret will surely reward us openly...!

The Virtue Of Punctuality

INTRODUCTION

1. A longtime concern of mine has been the lack of appreciation regarding **punctuality**...
 - a. “the quality or habit of adhering to an appointed time”
 - b. “strict observance in keeping engagements, promptness; antonym: tardiness”
2. Especially as it relates to arriving on time for services of the church...
 - a. Not the occasional lateness due to unforeseen circumstances
 - b. But the habitual practice of being late due to a lack of concern of being on time
3. Is there a need for concern regarding the lack of punctuality...?
 - a. Evidently not in the mind of many Christians
 - b. Yet I believe it has an adverse effect on the spiritual growth and health of a congregation

[To appreciate the basis for my concern, let’s first consider some...]

I. VOICES ON POSSESSING PUNCTUALITY

A. SOME DO NOT TAKE IT SERIOUSLY...

1. “The trouble with being punctual is that nobody’s there to appreciate it.” - **Franklin Jones**
2. “I am a believer in punctuality though it makes me very lonely.” - **E. V. Verrall**
3. “Laugh and the world laughs with you, be prompt and you dine alone.” - **Gerald Barzan**

B. YET OTHERS VALUE IT HIGHLY...

1. “Promptitude is not only a duty, but is also a part of good manners; it is favorable to fortune, reputation, influence, and usefulness; a little attention and energy will form the habit, so as to make it easy and delightful.” - **Charles Simmons**
2. “I give it as my deliberate and solemn conviction that the individual who is habitually tardy in meeting an appointment, will never be respected or successful in life.” - **‘Rev.’ W. Fisk**
3. “Punctuality is the soul of business.” - **Thomas C. Haliburton**
4. “Punctuality is one of the cardinal business virtues: always insist on it in your subordinates.” - **Don Marquis**
5. “I owe all my success in life to having been always a quarter of an hour before my time.” - **Lord Nelson**
6. “Punctuality is the politeness of kings.” - **Louis XVIII**

[One might wonder whether punctuality is really all that important. How about for the Christian, is it a sin to be habitually late for one’s appointments? Consider some of the...]

II. VICIES OF LACKING PUNCTUALITY

A. MISTREATMENT OF OTHERS...

1. Lack of punctuality is a **theft of someone else’s time**
 - a. Especially as an employee who is late for work
 - b. But even as friends (or brethren), where we have agreed to meet at a set time
 - 1) “If I have made an appointment with you, I owe you punctuality, I have no right to

throw away your time, if I do my own.” - **Richard Cecil**

- 2) “Unfaithfulness in the keeping of an appointment is an act of clear dishonesty. You may as well borrow a person's money as his time.” - **Horace Mann**
2. Lack of punctuality is **a lack of respect for others**
 - a. E.g., our brethren whom we are to honor - **Ro 12:10; Ph 2:3**
 - b. Including our Lord, Who honors us with His presence - cf. **Mt 18:20**
 - c. Most would be unlikely to be late for an appointment with someone whom they want to honor (e., the President, or a boss at work)
 - d. If we honor others better than ourselves, we will make it a point to be on time when meeting with them
 - e. “Few things tend more to alienate friendship than a want of punctuality in our engagements. I have known the breach of a promise to dine or sup to break up more than one intimacy.” - **William Hazlitt**
3. Lack of punctuality is **a violation of the Golden Rule**
 - a. We are treat others as we would want to be treated - **Mt 7:12**
 - b. Are you not bothered when others are late in meeting you?
 - c. Suppose you were teaching a class, and half the class was consistently late?
 - 1) How would that make you feel about your efforts?
 - 2) Not only during class, but the time spent in preparation?
4. Lack of punctuality is **a violation of the Greatest Commandment**
 - a. We are to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength - **Mk 12:30**
 - b. “...when we are late for these meetings to worship God or to learn of God, it may be indicative God is not really as important as whatever causes us to be late, be it our bodily rest, our meals, our recreation, our chores, etc. We are, of course, not saying that all lateness for the appointed means would fall into this sin. But if we are habitually late for the means, we must really examine our attitude towards the Lord. One who is generally on time for other appointments but is usually late for worship or prayer is probably experiencing severe backsliding. One who is generally late for all appointments is probably also suffering some form of tardiness in the soul. No one who genuinely loves Christ can be late for an appointment with Him without feeling shame and embarrassment.” - **Pilgrim Covenant Church web site**

B. MISSED OPPORTUNITIES...

1. What others have said in this regard
 - a. “Tardiness often robs us opportunity, and the dispatch of our forces.” - **Niccolo Machiavelli**
 - b. “The best-laid plans, the most important affairs, the fortunes of individuals, the weal of nations, honor, life itself, are daily sacrificed because somebody is ‘behind time.’ There are men who always fail in whatever they undertake simply because they are ‘behind time.’ There are others who put off reformation year by year, till death seizes them; and they perish unrepentant, because for ever ‘behind time.’ Five minutes in a crisis is worth years. It is but a little period, yet it has often saved a fortune or redeemed a people. If there is one virtue that should be cultivated more than another by him who would succeed in life, it is punctuality; if there is one error that should be avoided, it is being ‘behind time.’” - **Freeman Hunt**
2. Think of the missed opportunities when we are late to services of the church
 - a. The opportunity to visit with brethren and visitors (more on this below)
 - b. The opportunity to be of service should there be a last minute need
 - c. The opportunity to hear some point, some truth, that was presented prior to arriving late

[Have we squandered opportunities due to our lack of punctuality? Let's take a look at the...]

III. VALUE IN PRACTICING PUNCTUALITY

A. THE IMPACT ON OUR VISITORS...

1. Who often arrive early themselves
 - a. It being their first time, they often allow more time to find the location
 - b. It being an opportunity for us to welcome them and briefly visit with them
 - c. OTOH, what must they think when there are no teachers to welcome their children, or when classes or services start and half the congregation is absent?
2. After services have begun
 - a. There will not be the distraction of others arriving 5-10-15 minutes late
 - b. They will observe the participation of the entire congregation
3. When the services are over
 - a. The visitors will likely leave quickly
 - b. Often the only time we have to visit with them is **before** the services

B. THE IMPACT ON OURSELVES...

1. It will make us better persons
 - a. "I have always been a quarter of an hour before my time, and it has made a man of me."
- **Lord Nelson**
 - b. "I could never think well of a man's intellectual or moral character, if he was habitually unfaithful to his appointments." - **Nathaniel Emmons**
2. It will make us better servants
 - a. Providing service to our visitors through meeting them before as well as after
 - b. Providing service to our brethren by edifying them through your prompt presence
 - c. Providing service to our Lord by honoring Him with your punctual arrival

CONCLUSION

1. I hope that I have encouraged you to appreciate "**The Virtue Of Punctuality**"...
 - a. "Better three hours too soon than a minute too late." - **William Shakespeare**
 - b. As someone else said: "Better late than never, but better never late!"
2. How to be on time, one may ask? It really quite simple...
 - a. Plan to be early, and start out early
 - b. Plan to arrive 15 minutes before services begin

"Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things." - cf. **2 Ti 2:7**

We Should Remember The Poor

INTRODUCTION

1. The early Christians demonstrated great liberality toward the poor, especially brethren...
 - a. The church at Jerusalem - **Ac 2:44-45; 4:34-37**
 - b. The church at Antioch - **Ac 11:27-30**
 - c. The churches of Macedonia - **2 Co 8:1-4**
2. Paul in particular was engaged in helping poor Christians...
 - a. He was asked to remember the poor - **Ga 2:9-10**
 - b. He instructed churches on how to take up a collection - **1 Co 16:1-4**
 - c. He accompanied such a collection to the needy saints in Jerusalem - **Ro 15:25-26**
 - **It can truly be said that the early church did “remember the poor”**
3. Today, some are more likely to revile the poor than remember them...
 - a. If someone is poor asking for help, they are assumed to be lazy
 - b. If inclined to help, the poor are expected to earn what they are given
4. Yet God has chosen to bless the poor...
 - a. In the words of Jesus - **Lk 6:20**
 - b. In the words of James - **Ja 2:5**

[Therefore a Biblical study on the subject of the poor and poverty can be beneficial, lest we fall short in our duty to “remember the poor”. Let’s start with...]

I. UNDERSTANDING THE POOR AND POVERTY

A. THOSE WHO ARE POOR...

1. Includes those who may have absolutely nothing, or very little - cf. **Mk 12:41-44**
2. Also those who have enough to offer meager sacrifices - cf. **Lev 14:21-22**
- **One does not have to be completely destitute to be considered ‘poor’**

B. CAUSES OF POVERTY...

1. Sometimes it is due to sinful actions on the part of the individual
 - a. Laziness - **Pro 6:6-11**
 - b. Refusing to heed correction - **Pro 13:18**
 - c. Pleasure seeking - **Pro 21:17**
 - d. Drunkenness, gluttony - **Pro 23:21**
2. Other times it is due to sinful actions of other men
 - a. Usury and extortion - **Pro 28:8**
 - b. Greed - **Isa 3:14-15**
 - c. Unfair labor practices - **Jer 22:13**
 - d. Oppression - **Amo 4:1**
 - e. Persecution - **2 Co 8:1-2; He 10:32-34**
3. It can also be due to natural disasters
 - a. Plague, economic depression, war
 - b. Hurricane, earthquake, tsunami

4. It may be due to God's chastisement
 - a. As was the case in Haggai's day - **Hag 1:5-11**
 - b. Again in the days of Malachi - **Mal 3:8-12**
 5. It can be due to voluntary choice
 - a. As in the case of Jesus - **Lk 9:57-58**
 - b. As in the case of His apostles - **Mk 10:28; 2 Co 6:10**
- **One cannot assume that poverty is due to laziness or wickedness**

[Poverty has many causes, and both Moses and Jesus taught the poor would be with us (**Deu 15:11; Mt 26:11**). God hears the cries of the poor (**Psa 69:33**), and it is interesting to note how He made provision for them in both the Old and New Testament...]

II. PROVISION FOR THE POOR IN THE LAW

A. AS CHARGED BY MOSES...

1. The poor were not to be charged interest - **Exo 22:25; Lev 25:35-38**
 2. The fruit of fallow ground during the seventh year was for the poor - **Exo 23:10-11**
 3. They were allowed to glean the fields after the harvest - **Lev 19:9-10; Deu 24:19-22**
 4. They could satisfy their hunger in the vineyards and grain fields- **Deu 23:24-25; Lk 6:1**
 5. The tithe for the third year was reserved for special groups of the poor - **Deu 14:28-29**
 6. Debts were to be canceled every seven years - **Deu 15:1-4**
 7. Hebrew slaves had to be set free after six years - **Deu 15:12-15**
- **Israel was charged to be careful in their attitude toward the poor - Deu 15:7-11**

B. AS COUNSELED BY SOLOMON...

1. Happy is the one who shows mercy to the poor - **Pro 14:21**
 2. He who oppresses the poor reproaches his Maker - **Pro 14:31**
 3. He who mocks the poor reproaches his Maker - **Pro 17:5**
 4. He who has pity on the poor lends to the Lord who will pay him back - **Pro 19:17**
 5. Whoever shuts their ears to the cry of the poor, will cry and not be heard - **Pro 21:13**
 6. The person with a generous eye will be blessed, having given to the poor - **Pro 22:9**
 7. He who gives to the poor will not lack, But he who hides his eyes will have many curses - **Pro 28:27**
 8. The virtuous woman extends her hand to the poor, and reaches her hands out to the needy - **Pro 31:20**
- **Such concern for the poor is a mark of righteousness and wisdom - Pro 29:7**

[If **the Law of Moses** displayed such concern and provision for the poor, we should not be surprised to find a similar concern and provision in **the gospel of Christ...**]

III. PROVISION FOR THE POOR IN THE GOSPEL

A. AS COMMANDED BY JESUS...

1. In His sermon on the mount - **Mt 5:42**
 2. In His sermon on the plain - **Lk 6:34-36**
 3. In His words to one who invited Him into his home - **Lk 14:12-14**
- **Jesus taught we should be willing to help the poor**

B. AS CHARGED BY HIS APOSTLES AND PROPHETS...

1. Paul, in several of his epistles - **Ro 12:13; 1 Ti 6:17-19**
 2. The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews - **He 13:16**
 3. James, in describing pure and undefiled religion before God - **Ja 1:27**
 4. John, in describing the love of God, exemplified by Jesus - **1 Jn 3:16-19**
 5. For needy Christians, churches were charged how to provide aid
 - a. With a weekly collection, as one prospers - **1 Co 16:1-2**
 - b. With thoughtful purpose, and a cheerful heart - **2 Co 9:1,7**
 6. Yet the local church must not be burdened (for its mission is spiritual, not social)...
 - a. Individuals are to fulfill their familial duties - **1 Ti 5:16**
 - b. Individuals have their duty to be a 'good Samaritan' - cf. **Lk 10:29-37**
- **As we have opportunity, we have the duty to do good unto all men - Ga 6:10**

CONCLUSION

1. Can we not see why the early Christians were so diligent to help the poor...?
 - a. They were not only obeying the commandments of Jesus and His apostles
 - b. They were also displaying compassion that has always characterized the people of God
2. There are certainly good reasons to "remember the poor"...
 - a. Those who do are blessed by the Lord - **Psa 41:1-3**
 - b. God has chosen the poor to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom - **Ja 2:5**
3. What can we do to remember the poor...?
 - a. Give liberally to the church, for the benefit of needy Christians
 - b. Give liberally to charitable organizations, to help others who may be in need

Let's honor God and glorify Christ by remembering the poor...

"Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith." - Gal 6:10

What Can Kill A Church

INTRODUCTION

1. In **Re 3:1**, the church at Sardis was described as a “dead” church
2. This reveals that churches can die - and they often do...
 - a. Where are the congregations we read of in the New Testament?
 - b. At some point in their history, they died
3. There are at least two ways a church may die...
 - a. It may cease to exist
 - b. It may die inwardly, even while it still lives outwardly
4. What can kill a church?
 - a. Are we aware of the different weapons Satan can use to destroy us?
 - b. Are there things that threaten our very existence even now?

[In this lesson, “**What Can Kill A Church**”, we will examine four things that can jeopardize any congregation of God’s people. The first is perhaps a rather obvious one...]

I. PERSECUTION

A. SATAN HAS OFTEN RESORTED TO PHYSICAL PERSECUTION...

1. E.g., against the church at Smyrna - **Re 2:9,10**
2. Indeed, he did so against many churches in the first century - **1 Pe 5:8-9**
- We should not be surprised if he does so today - **1 Pe 4:12**

B. PEOPLE RESPOND TO PERSECUTION DIFFERENTLY...

1. Some are silenced by it - cf. **Jn 12:42-43**
2. Others rejoice in it - **Ac 5:41-42; Ro 5:1-5; Ja 1:2-3**

C. HOW WE REACT WILL DETERMINE OUR FUTURE AS A CHURCH...

1. A church that is silenced by persecution will soon die
2. A church that rejoices in persecution will not go unnoticed by the Lord - **Mt 5:11-12**
 - a. As the Lord took note of the church in Pergamos - **Re 2:13**
 - b. As the Lord took note of the church in Philadelphia - **Re 3:8**

[But persecution is not the only weapon in Satan’s arsenal; when a congregation resists persecution, he will often seek to kill it through another means...]

II. FALSE TEACHING

A. SATAN HAS USED THIS TACTIC TO THREATEN MANY CHURCHES...

1. It threatened the church at Ephesus, but they had overcome - **Re 2:2,6**
2. It threatened the church at Pergamos, who while handling persecution faithfully, they were floundering with error in their midst - **Re 2:13-15**
- Both Paul and Peter warned of the danger of error - **Ac 20:29-30; 2 Pe 2:1-2**

B. TWO THINGS ARE NECESSARY IN GUARDING AGAINST ERROR...

1. We must not turn away from sound doctrine - **2 Ti 4:3-4**
 - a. Sound doctrine involves preaching the word, which includes both negative (“rebuke”) and positive (“exhort”) elements - **2 Ti 4:1-2**
 - b. We must beware of “pop” preaching which simply entertains rather than instructs
2. We must not support those who teach contrary to the doctrine of Christ - **2 Jn 9-11**

[When a church stands strong against persecution and false doctrine, that is certainly a good sign; but that does not mean Satan cannot yet kill it. Many “sound” churches have been destroyed by one of two more tools used by Satan. The first of these is...]

III. WORLDLINESS

A. WORLDLINESS INCLUDES IMMORALITY AND MATERIALISM...

1. Immorality is the lust of the flesh
2. Materialism involves the lust of the eyes
- Both are included in “the love of the world” - **1 Jn 2:15-17**

B. SATAN USES WORLDLINESS TO DESTROY CHURCHES...

1. E.g., the church at Thyatira was threatened by the influence of Jezebel - **Re 2:20-23**
2. Immorality has made havoc of many churches today
3. Materialism has drawn many Christians away from their service to the Lord
- Churches are hindered when members are rendered fruitless by worldliness - cf. **Lk 8:14**

C. TO WARD OFF WORLDLINESS...

1. We must have “the love of the Father” - **1 Jn 2:15-17**; cf. **Ja 4:4**
2. We must not be conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewing of our minds - **Ro 12:1-2**
3. We must “watch and pray” - cf. **Lk 21:34-36**

[A church that is “sound” on certain issues can still be a dead or dying church if worldliness is allowed to infect its members. A similar spiritual malady that Satan can use to destroy churches is...]

IV. INDIFFERENCE

A. A SUBTLE, YET EFFECTIVE WEAPON USED BY SATAN...

1. It jeopardized the standing of the church at Ephesus, who had left their “first love” - **Re 2:4**
2. It characterized the church at Laodicea, making it almost repulsive to Christ - **Re 3:15-17**
- We do not have to oppose the church to kill it, just be slothful and indifferent! - cf. **Pro 18:9; Mt 12:30**

B. SYMPTOMS OF INDIFFERENCE...

1. Irregular attendance of services
2. Lack of participation in the services (worship, Bible classes)
3. Consistently arriving late to services
4. Waning efforts to win souls to Christ
5. No personal and private devotions (Bible study and prayers)

C. FERVENT SERVICE IS THE ONLY ANTIDOTE TO INDIFFERENCE...

1. We must not grow weary in doing good - **Ga 6:9**
2. We must be diligent, and not become sluggish - **He 6:11-12**
3. We must hold fast the hope we confess by encouraging one another - **He 10:24-25**

CONCLUSION

1. While there might be more ways to kill a church, these four are certainly effective...
 - a. Persecution
 - b. False teaching
 - c. Worldliness
 - d. Indifference
2. What about this congregation? Is Satan making any progress in killing us...?
 - a. We might be free from physical persecution, and be known as a “sound” church
 - b. But are worldliness and indifference taking their toll?
3. To be forewarned is to be forearmed...
 - a. We need to be honest with ourselves - are we vulnerable in some areas?
 - b. Don't let the Great Deceiver succeed in deceiving us!

May we each do our part in bolstering our defenses against the one who seeks to destroy us! As Paul wrote:

“lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.” (2 Co 2:11)

Note: The main idea and several thoughts from this lesson were taken from a lesson by Gary Henry. The URL for his web site containing many excellent articles and sermon outlines is:

<http://www.brasstacks.org>

What God Has Joined

INTRODUCTION

1. There has been much news about redefining marriage...
 - a. State courts in America are considering whether it's unconstitutional to deprive gays and lesbians of the right to marry
 - b. Courts in Canadian provinces have already approved marriage rights for same-sex couples
 - c. Some legal scholars are proposing a 'delegalization' of marriage altogether

2. The definition of marriage has been undergoing change for quite a while...
 - a. Most states allow no-fault divorces, permitting remarriage under any circumstance
 - b. Many churches have followed suit; in some denominations the divorce rate is higher than among atheists and agnostics!

[There has never been a greater need to return to what the Bible teaches regarding the institution of marriage. When we do so, we learn that it involves two people that...]

I. ONLY GOD CAN JOIN TOGETHER

A. MARRIAGE IS AN INSTITUTION OF GOD...

1. Ordained by God 'at the beginning' - **Mt 19:4-5; Mk 10:6-8; cf. Gen 2:21-24**
2. God, not government, joins a man and a woman in holy matrimony - **Mt 19:6**
 - a. The wedding ceremony may vary according to local custom
 - b. Whatever the custom, it is God that does the joining
3. God, not man, defines the marriage relationship
 - a. Who has a right to marry
 - b. Who has a right to terminate a marriage

B. MARRIAGE IS A PRIVILEGE FROM GOD...

1. For the single man and woman - **Gen 2:21-24; Mt 19:4-5**
 - a. Male and female
 - b. Created for union together as one flesh
 - c. Thus biological design reveals that God created the male and female for heterosexual union, not homosexual union
 - d. A person with a reproductive organ cannot say that God made them for union with a person of the same sex!
2. For the widowed - **Ro 7:1-3; 1 Co 7:39**
 - a. God joins a man and a woman for life
 - b. Death releases the surviving spouse from the marriage bond
 - c. "Till death do us part" is a vow to be taken seriously
3. For the scripturally divorced - **Mt 19:9**
 - a. Only one exception is given in scripture for divorce and remarriage
 - b. A person may put away their spouse for fornication, and only then remarry without committing adultery

[Only God has the authority to dictate the definition and terms of marriage. Those willing to submit to His definition and terms can be assured that when they marry God indeed ‘joins’ them as husband and wife. For those so joined...]

II. ONLY GOD CAN PUT ASUNDER

A. MAN MAY TRY, BUT GOD MUST APPROVE...

1. Many Pharisees thought a certificate permitted any divorce without guilt
 - a. Their interpretation of the Law was amiss - **Mt 5:31**
 - b. They focused on the mention of a decree - **Deu 24:1-4**; cf. **Mt 19:7**
 - c. They failed to note the affect of the woman’s remarriage: why the first husband could not take his wife back even after the second husband died - **Deu 24:4**
 - d. The woman’s second marriage ‘defiled’ her, just as adultery is called a defilement - cf. **Jer 3:1**; **Lev 18:20**; **Num 5:13-14**
 - 1) “The second marriage of a woman who had been divorced is designated by Moses a defilement of the woman...a moral defilement, i.e., blemishing, desecration of the sexual communion which was sanctified by marriage, IN THE SAME SENSE IN WHICH ADULTERY IS CALLED A DEFILEMENT in **Lev 18:20** and **Num 5:13,14...**” - **Keil & Delitzsch**
 - 2) “Thus the second marriage of a divorced woman was placed implicit upon a par with adultery, and some approach was made towards the teaching of Christ concerning marriage (**Mt 5:32**)...” - **ibid.**
 - 3) “If the second marriage of a divorced woman was a moral defilement, of course the wife could not marry the first again even after the death of her second husband... because the defilement of the wife would be thereby repeated, and even increased, as the moral defilement which the divorced wife acquired through the second marriage was not removed by a divorce from the second husband, nor yet by his death.” - **ibid.**
 - e. For such reasons God hated divorce in OT times - **Mal 2:16**
 - 1) It is a treacherous act, covering one’s garment with violence
 - 2) Like polygamy, God tolerated it; but it was hurtful to women
2. God permitted the Jews to so mistreat their wives, but no more
 - a. It was allowed temporarily due to the hardness of their hearts - **Mt 19:8**
 - b. But now Jesus requires a higher standard of righteousness - **Mt 5:20**
 - c. He holds those who divorce without proper cause guilty of causing adultery - **Mt 5:32**
3. **Note well:** government may issue divorce papers, but God may still consider one married!
 - a. Giving your spouse papers doesn’t free them to remarry without guilt - **Mt 5:32a**
 - b. Marrying someone with divorce papers can still result in adultery! - **Mt 5:32b**

B. WHAT GOD APPROVES, MAN MUST HEED...

1. God approves two reasons for ending a marriage
 - a. The death of one’s spouse - **1 Co 7:39**
 - b. The fornication of one’s spouse - **Mt 5:32**; **19:9**
 - c. What about separation? What about abandonment?
 - 1) Separation must be by consent, and only for a short while - **1 Co 7:5,10-11**
 - 2) Abandonment by an unbeliever only frees one from marital obligations; there is no indication one is thereby free to remarry - **1 Co 7:12-16**
2. Reject God’s Word, and face grave consequences
 - a. God will judge fornicators and adulterers - **He 13:4**

- b. They will not inherit the kingdom of God - **1 Co 6:9-10**
- 3. Yet where there is repentance one can find grace
 - a. One can be washed, sanctified, and justified - **1 Co 6:11**
 - 1) The blood of Christ can wash away sin
 - 2) The Spirit of God can help one live a sanctified life
 - b. Though it may mean living a celibate life - cf. **Mt 19:10-12**
 - 1) Becoming a 'eunuch' by choice, if necessary to accept Jesus' sayings
 - 2) Because the kingdom of heaven is worth any sacrifice

CONCLUSION

- 1. **Those who accept Jesus' teaching** on marriage, divorce and remarriage...
 - a. Have the assurance that God joins them in holy matrimony
 - b. Avoid the sin and trauma of causing adultery or committing adultery
 - c. Can have the hope of entering the kingdom of heaven, though it may mean celibacy
- 2. **Those who reject the Bible's teaching** on marriage, divorce and remarriage...
 - a. May have papers saying they are divorced, or married, but God still holds them accountable
 - b. Have no basis for rejecting all sorts of ideas regarding the institution of marriage
 - c. Have no hope of inheriting the kingdom of God, though they may have temporal bliss

Jesus said that those who would be His disciples must abide in His Words and observe what He taught (**Jn 8:31-32; Mt 28:18-20**). How will you react to the teachings of Jesus?

“From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. Then Jesus said to the twelve, ‘Do you also want to go away?’ But Simon Peter answered Him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.’” - Jn 6:66-68

Are you willing to follow Him who has the words of eternal life...?

What Is Evangelism?

INTRODUCTION

1. The work of the local church has often been described as threefold...
 - a. **Edification** - equipping the saints for ministry
 - b. **Benevolence** - meeting the needs of destitute brethren
 - c. **Evangelism** - spreading the good news of Jesus Christ to the lost

2. The organization and worship of the local church naturally focus attention on...
 - a. **Edification** - the office of elders (pastors) speaks to the work of building up the saints
 - b. **Benevolence** - the office of deacons along with weekly contribution speak to supplying the needs of the saints

3. Unless frequent attention is given to **Evangelism**, it can become easy for churches...
 - a. To focus solely on edification and benevolence
 - b. To neglect evangelistic efforts both as congregations and as individuals

[To neglect evangelism is harmful to the spiritual life of the church. That we might not neglect this important duty, let's take this opportunity to address the question...]

I. WHAT IS EVANGELISM?

A. CONSIDER THREE GREEK WORDS...

1. The Greek word translated **gospel** is **euaggelion** - cf. **1 Co 15:1**
2. The Greek word translated **preach** is **euaggelizo** - cf. **1 Co 15:1**
3. The Greek word translated **evangelist** is **euaggelistes** - cf. **Ac 21:8**

B. NOTE THEIR CLOSE ASSOCIATION...

1. The word gospel (euaggelion) means "**good news**"
2. The word preach (euaggelizo) means "**to bring good news**"
3. The word evangelist (euaggelistes) means "**one who declares good news**"
4. In the NT, to "evangelize" refers to bringing the good news of Jesus Christ - cf. **1 Co 15:1-4**

[**Evangelism is sharing the gospel about Jesus Christ.** To appreciate the role of evangelism in the church and the lives of Christians, let's look a bit closer...]

II. EVANGELISM IS SHARING THE GOSPEL

A. AS COMMANDED BY JESUS...

1. Evangelism is sharing the gospel, just as Jesus commanded
2. In the Great Commission, first given to His apostles - **Mk 16:15-16**
3. He wants the good news proclaimed to every person in the world!

B. BY PREACHERS...

1. Evangelism is sharing the gospel, by preachers who were also known as evangelists
2. Like the apostles did on the day of Pentecost - cf. **Ac 2:36-38**
3. Like the evangelist Philip did, both to groups and to individuals - cf. **Ac 8:12,35**

C. BY ALL CHRISTIANS...

1. Evangelism is sharing the gospel, by all Christians and not just evangelists
2. As mentioned following the persecution at Jerusalem - **Ac 8:5**
3. For our duty as the people of God is to proclaim His praises - **1 Pe 2:9-10**
4. Thus we should be ever prepared to give a reason for our hope in Christ - **1 Pe 3:15**

D. BY CHURCHES SENDING...

1. Evangelism is sharing the gospel, by churches sending forth preachers
2. Preachers need to be sent that others may hear - **Ro 10:11-15**
3. Just as the church in Antioch of Syria sent Barnabas and Saul - **Ac 13:1-3**

E. BY CHURCHES HELPING...

1. Evangelism is sharing the gospel, by churches helping those who are preaching
2. Paul received help time and again from churches like Philippi - **Ph 1:3-5; 4:15-16**
3. They helped Paul preach elsewhere “without charge” - cf. **2 Co 11:8**

F. BY CHRISTIANS HELPING...

1. Evangelism is sharing the gospel, by individual Christians helping those who preach
2. As John praised his beloved Gaius for doing - **3 Jn 5-8**
3. In this way they become “fellow workers for the truth”

[Perhaps we see why the gospel spread so far and fast in the first century. Not just preachers, but all Christians both collectively (churches) and individually were involved in evangelism, either sending, helping, or going themselves! Finally, allow me to suggest a few thoughts as to...]

III. WHY EVANGELISM IS IMPORTANT

A. WHEN EVANGELISM CEASES...

1. Christians wither, and are cut off for not bearing fruit - **Jn 15:1-8**
2. Churches are removed from their relationship with the Lord, and die - cf. **Re 2:1-5; 3:1-2**

B. THUS EVANGELISM IS THE SPIRIT OF THE CHURCH...

1. Just as the body without the spirit is dead - cf. **Ja 2:24**
2. So Christians (and churches) without evangelism are dead!

CONCLUSION

1. Evangelism is therefore essential...
 - a. Not just for the saving of souls who **need** the gospel of Jesus Christ
 - b. But for the saving of souls who **have** the gospel of Jesus Christ!
2. What is your role in evangelism...?
 - a. To share the gospel of Jesus Christ!
 - b. Perhaps by going to other countries to tell others, or helping and sending those willing to go

Whether at home or abroad, let's make sure that both as individual Christians and as congregations that we never lose our heart for evangelism in all its forms...!

What Is The Church Of Christ?

INTRODUCTION

1. Occasionally I am asked questions like these...
 - a. “Are you Church of Christ?”
 - b. “Are you a Church of Christ preacher?”
 - c. “Are you a member of the Church of Christ?”
2. Rarely do I reply without some hesitation...
 - a. Not that I wish to be evasive
 - b. But the inquiry comes from a mindset that precludes an easy answer
 - c. If I offer a simple response, the inquirer will likely be left with the wrong impression
3. The difficulty revolves around this question, **“What is the Church of Christ?”**...
 - a. The phrase “Church of Christ” means different things to different people
 - b. The term “Church of Christ” must be understood alike to avoid misunderstanding

[To illustrate the challenge we face in talking to others about the “Church of Christ”, let’s review three different “views”...]

I. THE DENOMINATIONAL VIEW

A. EXPLANATION OF THIS VIEW...

1. The Church of Christ is made up of those churches with the name “Church of Christ”
2. The “Church of Christ” (as such) is but one denomination among many
3. Together with other denominations, they constitute the universal church, the Body of Christ

B. THOSE WHO MAY HOLD THIS VIEW...

1. **Those in other denominations**
 - a. E.g., Catholics, Baptists, Methodists, etc.
 - b. Understandably so, because of their denominational mindset in which they view their own “church” (denomination) as but a part of the Body of Christ
2. **Many in the “mainstream” churches of Christ**
 - a. I.e., the majority of congregations with the name “Church of Christ”
 - b. Especially members who came from denominations
 - 1) Bringing their denominational mindset with them
 - 2) Perhaps thinking they simply left one denomination for a “better” one
 - c. Including liberal preachers and elders in such congregations
 - 1) Perhaps reacting against a “sectarian” view (see below) held in the past
 - 2) Perhaps weary of trying to maintain a nondenominational view of the church

[In a religious environment where denominationalism is presumed to be the only option, most people have a denominational view of the Church of Christ which is reflected in their questions. There is another view that some may have...]

II. THE SECTARIAN VIEW

A. EXPLANATION OF THIS VIEW...

1. The Church of Christ is made up only of those churches with the name “Church of Christ”
2. Those churches constitute the one, true church, the Body of Christ
3. People in any other congregations cannot possibly be members of the Body of Christ

B. THOSE WHO MAY HOLD THIS VIEW...

1. **Many in “mainstream” churches of Christ**
 - a. Especially those viewing “Church of Christ” as the official name for the Lord’s church
 - b. Evidenced by their exclusive use of the expression “Church of Christ”
2. **Many in “non-mainstream” churches of Christ**
 - a. Including some who often identify themselves on the basis of one issue
 - 1) Who tend to judge a congregation’s faithfulness on the basis of a particular issue
 - 2) E.g., if it is “non-institutional” (opposing church support of human institutions), then it must be a faithful congregation
 - 3) E.g., if it is “mutual edification” (opposing located preachers), then it must be faithful
 - b. In particular those who identify themselves “International Church of Christ”
 - 1) Who demand allegiance to one head church, formerly located in Boston
 - 2) Who view any church that refuses allegiance to be “apostate”

[This view is often held by those trying to maintain a nondenominational view of the Church of Christ, yet react to one extreme by going to the opposite. Then there is what I will term...]

III. THE BIBLICAL VIEW**A. EXPLANATION OF THIS VIEW...**

1. **There is the Church of Christ in the “universal” sense**
 - a. Composed of all Christians
 - 1) The church to which Jesus referred in **Mt 16:18**
 - 2) Made up all the saved, both living and dead - cf. **He 12:22-24**
 - b. There is just one
 - 1) The universal church is called the “body” of Christ - **Ep 1:22-23**
 - 2) There is only one “body” (**Ep 4:4**); therefore, only one church!
 - c. Began on the Day of Pentecost
 - 1) In Jerusalem, following the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ - **Ac 2:1-47**
 - 2) As Peter later referred to this day, it was the “beginning” - cf. **Ac 11:15**
 - d. Enter only by being added by the Lord
 - 1) One cannot “join” the church by their own volition
 - 2) Rather, they are “added” by the Lord Himself when saved - **Ac 2:41,47**
 - e. The Lord keeps the books of membership
 - 1) There is no agency on earth that keeps the registry of true members
 - 2) Enrollment is in heaven; only the Lord knows who are truly His - **He 12:23; 2 Ti 2:19**
 - f. Consists of all the saved
 - 1) The Lord is presenting to Himself a church holy and without blemish - cf. **Ep 5:25-27**
 - 2) Those in the church who are sinning and refuse to repent are “cut off”, “cast out”, “spewed out” - cf. **Jn 15:2,6; Ro 11:19-22; Re 3:16**
 - g. Must be in this to be saved
 - 1) For the Lord is the Savior of the “body” (which is His church) - **Ep 5:23**

- 2) Since the Lord adds one to His church when they are saved, one cannot be saved and not be in the church **universal!**
 - h. Has no earthly organization
 - 1) The church **universal** has organization - cf. **Ep 2:19-22; 1 Pe 2:5**
 - a) What organization exists is spiritual in nature
 - b) E.g., Christ as the cornerstone, together with His apostles and prophets as the foundation, and all Christians as “living stones”
 - 2) There are no **earthly** headquarters for the church
 - a) E.g., no telephone number to call to speak with the “head” of the church
 - b) For the Head and His headquarters are in heaven!
 - i. Can't be divided
 - 1) For there is no **earthly** organization to divide!
 - 2) If division appears to exist...
 - a) Some unscriptural organization of churches must have been created
 - b) Such organizations can have division, but not the Lord's church **universal!**
 - 3) Those who would seek to divide the church through doctrine, conduct, etc., are simply cut off by the Lord Himself!
 - 4) There is and always will be, “one body”! - **Ep 4:4** (we need to make sure we are remaining faithful to be in it!)
 - j. Death doesn't affect membership
 - 1) The church **universal** is made up of the saved, both living and dead - **He 12:22-23**
 - 2) When one dies, they are still with Christ! - **Ph 1:21-23; 1 Th 5:10**
 - k. Does not have one official name
 - 1) No one exclusive name or term is used to describe the **universal** church
 - 2) Various terms used include church of God, body, kingdom, etc.- **1 Co 10:32; Ep 1:22-23; Co 1:13**
2. **There are churches of Christ in the “local” sense**
- a. Composed of Christians in one location
 - 1) A local church is made up of Christians in one geographical area
 - 2) E.g., the church at Corinth, the church of the Thessalonians - **1 Co 1:2; 1 Th 1:1**
-- In contrast, the church universal is made up of Christians everywhere!
 - b. There are many churches
 - 1) Paul had reference to local churches when he wrote **Ro 16:16**
 - 2) And again when he wrote **Ga 1:2**
-- When it comes to the church universal, though, there is just one!
 - c. Begins wherever people join together
 - 1) As the gospel spreads and people respond to it, those in a particular area start a local church when they agree to work together as one
 - 2) Just as the church in Antioch began later than the church in Jerusalem - **Ac 11:19-26**
-- Whereas the church universal began in Jerusalem on Pentecost, local churches have begun at different places and different times!
 - d. Enter by joining ourselves
 - 1) When one wishes to become an accepted member of the local church, they must “join themselves” to that church
 - 2) Such as Paul sought to do when he came to the church in Jerusalem - **Ac 9:26-28**
-- Whereas one is “added” by the Lord to the universal church, we can seek to “join” a local congregation (if its members are willing to accept us)
 - e. Enrolled by human judgment

- 1) Whether we are accepted into a local church is a decision made by the leaders or members of that church
- 2) Sometimes people are rejected when they should be received - **3 Jn 5-9**
-- Evil men may succeed in kicking one out of a local church, but only the Lord determines who stays in the universal church!
- f. Consists of both saved and lost
 - 1) Since enrollment occurs through human judgment, fallible decisions can be made
 - 2) A local church may therefore have some who are nominal Christians - cf. **Re 3:1-4**
-- Hypocrites may become members of a local church; but they don't sneak by the Lord to become members of the universal church!
- g. Do not have to be in this to be saved
 - 1) One can be saved, and not belong to any local church
 - 2) Such was the case of the Eunuch immediately following his conversion, and of Paul when he was in transit between Antioch and Jerusalem - cf. **Ac 8:39; 9:26**
-- Of course, this should be temporary; in the universal church, it is impossible!
- h. Has earthly organization
 - 1) A local church when scripturally organized will have bishops and deacons - **Ph 1:1**
 - 2) These bishops were also called "elders" and "pastors", whose role was to oversee and feed the local congregation - **Ac 14:23; 20:17,28**
-- The only role or position ever given men over the universal church on earth was the apostles and they were not replaced when they died - e.g., James in Ac 12:2
- i. Can be divided
 - 1) Local churches can easily be divided over doctrine or personalities
 - 2) Such was the case with the church at Corinth - **1 Co 1:10-13; 3:3,4**
-- While we can't divide the universal church, we can be responsible for dividing local churches!
- j. Death does affect membership
 - 1) When we die, our membership in a local congregation ends
 - 2) When Stephen died, he was no longer a member of the Jerusalem church - **Ac 8:1-2**
-- But our membership in the church universal continues on after death!
- k. May use different scriptural names
 - a. Showing relationship to God or Christ - **1 Co 1:2; Ro 16:16**
 - b. Identifying the location of the members - **1 Th 1:1; 2 Th 1:2**
-- There is no one official name, but we should use scriptural names!

B. THOSE WHO MAY HOLD THIS VIEW...

1. **Many in "mainstream" churches of Christ**
 - a. Though there is a definite trend toward denominationalism (cf. Reviving The Ancient Faith, The Story of Churches of Christ in America, Richard T. Hughes, p. 4)
 - b. There are those who still call for nondenominational Christianity
2. **Many in "non-mainstream" churches of Christ**
 - a. Especially those who often identify themselves as "non-institutional"
 - b. Who oppose that which leads to denominationalism
 - 1) Such as church support of human institutions
 - 2) Such as sponsoring church arrangements where one church oversees the work of others

3. **Many in churches unknown by others in churches of Christ**
 - a. Who may wear other scriptural names (e.g., Church of God?)
 - b. Yet hold true to the apostles’ doctrine revealed in the New Testament
 - c. But known and recognized by the Lord as belonging to Him
4. **Many in churches that may not be true in other respects**
 - a. Who may have a correct view of church origin and organization
 - b. But who may remain ignorant or in error regarding church worship, work, etc.

CONCLUSION

1. **What is the Church of Christ?** As I understand and use the phrase...
 - a. It is not a denomination among other denominations
 - b. It is not some sect identified by one exclusive name
 - **It is the Lord’s church, as defined and revealed in the New Testament**
2. The Lord’s church is thus spoken of in the Bible primarily in two ways...

The Church “Universal”	The Church “Local”
Composed of all Christians	Composed of Christians in one location
There is just one church	There are many churches
Began on the Day of Pentecost	Begins when people join together
Enter only by being added by the Lord	Enter by joining ourselves
The Lord keeps the books of membership	Enrolled by human judgment
Consists of all the saved	Consists of both saved and lost
Must be in this to be saved	Do not have to be in this to be saved
Has no earthly organization	Has earthly organization
Can’t be divided	Can be divided
Death doesn’t affect membership	Death does affect membership
Does not have one scriptural name	May use different scriptural names

3. Properly understood, the Church of Christ is...
 - a. The one Body of Christ, the church - **Ep 4:4**; cf. **1:22-23**
 - b. Made up of disciples, called Christians - **Ac 11:26**; **1 Co 12:27**
 - c. Who work and worship together in local churches - **Ro 16:16**
 - d. Abiding in the apostles’ doctrine - **Ac 2:42**; cf. **1 Co 4:17**
 - e. Honoring Jesus’ prayer for unity - **Jn 17:20-21**
 - f. Deploring religious division in all its forms, including denominationalism - **1 Co 1:10-13**
4. So in response to our original questions...
 - a. “Are you Church of Christ?”
 - b. “Are you a Church of Christ preacher?”
 - c. “Are you a member of the Church of Christ?”
5. I would likely respond...
 - a. “I am not ‘Church of Christ’, as that reflects a denominational concept.”
 - b. “I am a preacher of the gospel of Christ, an evangelist.”
 - c. “I am a Christian, a disciple of Jesus Christ, and member of His body, the church you read about in the New Testament.”
 - d. “I work and worship with a nondenominational congregation of Christians, known as the Fortune Road Church of Christ in Kissimmee, Florida.”

I strive to serve and follow Jesus without denominationalism. In view of His prayer for unity (**Jn 17:20-21**), and Paul's condemnation of religious division (**1 Co 1:10-13**), I pray that you will too...

What It Takes To Be Interested In The Lord's Work

INTRODUCTION

1. All admire one with strong faith, active in their work, happy and content...
 - a. As Paul was in Judaism - cf. **Ga 1:13-14; Ph 3:6**
 - b. Then later as he served Christ - cf. **Ph 3:12-14; Ga 2:20**

2. Yet the range of interest among Christians often varies widely...
 - a. Some are filled with **zeal** - cf. **1 Th 1:2-3; 2 Th 1:3-4**
 - 1) Attending services regularly
 - 2) Willing to make sacrifices
 - 3) Studying the Bible diligently
 - 4) Teaching and inviting others to the Lord
 - b. Others become **lukewarm** - cf. **Re 3:15-16**
 - 1) Attending services sporadically
 - 2) Giving "left overs" to the Lord
 - 3) Neglecting opportunities to study
 - 4) With little personal work
 - c. Some even become **cold**, forsaking the Lord - cf. **2 Ti 4:10**
 - 1) Quitting the services of the church altogether
 - 2) Covetous in their time and money
 - 3) With Bibles collecting dust due to lack of use
 - 4) Ashamed of the church and the gospel of Christ

[What does it take to maintain a high level of interest in the Lord's work? In **Co 1:9-10** we find Paul praying for the Colossians, in which he mentions **three things** that contribute to interest, desire, fervor, and zeal. Note that he prayed that they may be filled with...]

I. KNOWLEDGE

A. KNOWLEDGE INCREASES INTEREST...

1. Knowledge of a subject always increases in that subject
2. In sports, the more one knows, the more interested they become
3. The same is true with various hobbies - e.g., birding (bird watching)

B. KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S WILL INCREASES INTEREST...

1. The Colossians bore fruit in response to their understanding of God's grace - cf. **Co 1:6**
2. The more we learn of God's will, the more excited we will become - **Psa 119:111,162,164**
3. Obtaining this knowledge requires diligence
 - a. If we are negligent, we will have to be taught all over again - **He 5:12**
 - b. To grow, we must always desire the Word like a babe desires milk - **1 Pe 2:1-2**
 - c. The Psalmist provides a good example - **Psa 119:15-16,97-104**

[As we return to Paul's prayer for the Colossians (**Co 1:9-10**), we note his desire that they "walk worthy of the Lord". To knowledge, therefore, we must add...]

II. PARTICIPATION

A. PARTICIPATION INCREASES INTEREST...

1. This is true in many things
 - a. Sports - the difference between participants and spectators
 - b. Hobbies - fishing, birding, woodworking, sewing, etc.
2. The more you participate, the more you **want** to participate
 - a. Sitting on the bench is no fun
 - b. Having an opportunity to participate just makes you want to do more

B. PARTICIPATION IN GOD'S WORK INCREASES INTEREST...

1. There is a blessedness in the very doing of God's will - **Jn 17:13; Ja 1:25**
2. Happiness comes to those who walk in the ways of the Lord - **Psa 119:1-2**
3. Certainly there is a happier conscience, and a satisfaction of knowing that you are a doer of the Word, and not a hearer only! - cf. **Mt 7:24-27; Ja 1:22-24**

[Any labor that we do for the Lord will not be in vain (**1 Co 15:58**). And that leads to the third thing Paul prays for (bearing fruit, **Co 1:10**) that will lead to a heightened interest in the Lord's work...]

III. SUCCESS

A. SUCCESS INCREASES INTEREST...

1. If we engage in activities without success, discouragement can be the result
2. Failure to succeed has led many to lose interest in various ventures

B. SUCCESS IN GOD'S WORK INCREASES INTEREST...

1. Bible study - learning the meaning of a passage makes you want to learn more
2. Personal work - seeing someone obey the gospel makes you want to convert more
3. Personal edification - to see those you have taught growing in the Lord produces great joy - cf. **3 Jn 3-4**
4. Many lose interest in the Lord's work because they have never tasted the joys of success!

CONCLUSION

1. If you are not interested in the Lord's work, or have lost interest, it is likely due to a lack of these three things: a) knowledge b) participation c) success
2. For those willing to maintain interest in the Lord's work, Paul shares two more thoughts with us...
 - a. We will not be alone in our efforts; God will work with us! - **Co 1:11**; cf. **Ph 2:12-13**
 - b. We should be thankful that God has qualified us to receive the rewards to come! - **Co 1:12**

Are you showing your gratitude by maintaining a high level of interest in the work of the Lord...?

What Shall I Wear?

INTRODUCTION

1. **“What shall I wear?”** is a question many people ask nearly every morning...
 - a. As they dress for work, to relax, etc.
 - b. Usually weighing such issues as fashion versus form, style versus substance
2. When Christians ask this question, other issues should come into consideration...
 - a. Is it modest?
 - b. Is it proper for those professing godliness? - cf. **1 Ti 2:9-10**
3. The challenge is what constitutes modesty constantly changes...
 - a. At one time, it was immodest for a woman to expose her ankles
 - b. Today, even the most modest of dress would have been considered scandalous
4. So the question remains, **“What Shall I Wear?”**...
 - a. Should a Christian woman wear shorts, miniskirts, low-cut blouses, tight skirts or pants?
 - b. What about men? Should they be concerned about modest apparel?
 - c. What effect might this have on certain activities, such as mixed swimming and other athletic sports?

[I do not propose some easy answer, or simple guideline (such as “no higher than an inch above the knee”). Rather I encourage prayerful consideration of what the Bible has to say, which provides basic principles that can help one discern between good and evil. For example...]

I. IT IS SHAMEFUL TO EXPOSE ONE’S NAKEDNESS

A. CONSIDER THE EXAMPLE OF ADAM AND EVE...

1. After they sinned, they made “coverings” for themselves - **Gen 3:7-10**
 - a. Hebrew, **“chagorah”**, meaning a garment which covers the midsection
 - b. Despite such coverings, they still felt naked!
2. The Lord made “tunics” for them - **Gen 3:21**
 - a. Hebrew, **“kethoneth”**, a garment commonly reaching to knee
 - b. Evidently God was not pleased with the brevity of the coverings they had made

B. IT IS SHAMEFUL TO EXPOSE OR DRAW ATTENTION TO PRIVATE PARTS OF THE BODY...

1. Exposure of such parts was often a form of judgment intended to shame the wicked - cf. **Isa 3:16-17; 47:1-3**
2. Paul alludes to the fact that some parts are “unpresentable” and should be covered - **1 Co 12:23-24**

[At some point, then, there needs to be a line where it is a shame to cross, there are parts of the body that should remain private. Perhaps we can begin to determine what these may be as we consider another principle...]

II. WE MUST NOT PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR FLESHLY LUSTS

A. THIS IS CLEARLY CONDEMNED IN THE SCRIPTURES...

1. Look at **Ro 13:13-14**
 2. Can the way we dress excite fleshly lusts? Consider the following:
 - a. “An astonishingly great number of men are of the opinion that women are more attractive partly dressed - than nude. They prefer to see women partially disrobed to the sight of complete nakedness.” - **Theodor Reik** (Of Love And Lust)
 - b. “Mini-clothes are symbolic of those girls who want to seduce a man...” - **Mary Quant**, London fashion designer and mother of the miniskirt
 - c. When asked where it (miniskirts, etc.) was all leading to, Mary Quant replied with one word: “Sex.”
 - d. During the hijacking of the Santa Maria in 1967, the women on board were concerned the rebels might have designs on them, so they left off wearing “enticing clothing”; i.e., they stopped appearing in shorts and halter-tops, and quit swimming in the ship’s pool
- **If the “women of the world” know what is capable of stimulating the lust of the flesh, why not the “daughters of God”?**

B. JESUS WARNED ABOUT “COMMITTING ADULTERY IN THE HEART”...

1. Is there not a twofold responsibility here? - **Mt 5:27-30**
 - a. The man is responsible to guard his mind from impurity - **Ph 4:8**
 - b. Is not the woman to help prevent the lewd stare?
2. Though lust is inexcusable on the man’s part, if the woman by her apparel or conduct has encouraged it, she shares in the guilt! - e.g., **Pro 7:6-27**

[If the clothing we wear encourages the arousal of fleshly lusts in others, then we have clearly crossed the line. Of course, this requires honesty and objectivity on our part; we must be willing to true to ourselves and to God. To help us toward that end, consider another basic principle from God’s Word...]

III. CLOTHING MUST BE CONSISTENT WITH GODLINESS

A. CONSIDER CAREFULLY 1 TIMOTHY 2:9-10...

1. “modest” (**kosmio**)
 - a. “Orderly, well arranged, decent, modest” (akin to kosmos, in its primary sense as “harmonious arrangement adornment”; cf. kosmikos, of the world, which is elated to kosmos in its secondary sense as the world) - **Vine’s**
 - b. “The well-ordering is not of dress and demeanor only, but of the inner life, uttering in deed and expressing itself in the outward conversation” - **Trench**

-- In the context, this word applies not so much to brevity of clothing, but to gaudiness of clothing
2. “propriety” (**aidos**)
 - a. Translated “shamefacedness” in the KJV
 - b. “a sense of shame, modesty, is used regarding the demeanor of women in the church” - **Vine’s**

-- This word applies more to the issue of brevity of clothing: Can it be said that those who display their bodies so as to excite lust in others have the quality of “shamefacedness”?
3. “moderation” (**sophrosune**)
 - a. Translated “sobriety” in the KJV
 - b. “denotes soundness of mind” - **Vine’s**
 - c. “it is that habitual inner self-government, with its constant rein on all the passions and

- desires, which would hinder the temptation to these from arising...” - **Trench**
- Will not a sound mind take into consideration the affect one’s apparel has on another?
4. “not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing”
 - a. Excess, rather than actual adornment, is what is being condemned here - cf. **Isa 3:16-26** with **Ezek 16:10-14**
 - b. This is an example of the comparative use of “not” found frequently in the Bible:
 - 1) “Not” is sometimes used **absolutely** - **Exo 20:14**
 - 2) “Not” is sometimes used **conditionally** (not...if) - **Ga 5:21**
 - 3) “Not” is sometimes used **comparatively** (not...but) - **Jn 6:27; 1 Co 1:17; 1 Jn 4:10**
 - Outward adornment is not wrong absolutely, but in comparison to the adorning of the inner person by good works, it is to be of lower priority and lesser importance
 5. “proper for women professing godliness”
 - 1) That which is fitting, seemly, suitable, becoming - cf. **Ep 5:3; Ti 2:1**
 - 2) For women claiming to be reverent, pious - cf. **Ti 2:3-5**
 - 3) Would a woman who professes to be godly knowingly adorn herself in a way that excites lust in another person?

B. CONSIDER ALSO 1 PETER 3:1-6...

1. Note first the potential value of chaste conduct - **1 Pe 3:1-2**
 - a. Good behavior can influence one for good
 - b. Likewise, improper behavior (e.g., immodest clothing) can have an adverse effect!
2. In verse **3-4**, we have another example of the comparative use of “not”
 - a. The emphasis should not be one’s adornment (arranging the hair, wearing gold, putting on apparel)
 - b. Rather, it should be adorning one’s inner person
3. The adornment that greatly pleases God - **1 Pe 3:4-6**
 - a. The incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit
 - b. As worn by women like Sarah, who trusted God and submitted to her husband
- When a person disregards the effect their apparel may have on another, can it be said they are adorned with a gentle and quite spirit?

CONCLUSION

1. It has not been my goal to establish specific rules for what is modest apparel...
 - a. To do so would be to do what the Bible itself does not do
 - b. Rather, to offer the general principles that can help the Christian who desires to please God rather than self or man
2. When faced with the question “**What shall I wear?**”, may I suggest the following...
 - a. Prayerfully consider whether your adornment in any circumstance reflects your profession of godliness, and the principles found in God’s word
 - b. Seek counsel from those who are mature in the faith, whose senses have been exercised to discern good and evil (cf. **He 5:14**)

Do this, and one is more likely to fulfill that goal set for us by the apostle Paul, that we be...

“...blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world” (Ph 2:15)

What To Look For In A Church

INTRODUCTION

1. It is not uncommon for Christians having to look for a church...
 - a. They have an obligation to assemble with other Christians - **He 10:24-25**
 - b. With our mobile society and current job market, they often have to relocate
2. How does one decide which church to attend...?
 - a. People often use different criteria in making their decisions
 - b. Some prefer large, others like small
 - c. Some look for many young people, others want all sorts of programs

[Some factors are important, other not necessarily so. To help in making proper decisions, allow me to share some thoughts on...]

I. WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A CHURCH

A. WHERE THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST IS PROCLAIMED...

1. The church is not a social club, but is to be the body of Christ
 - a. In which Christ is the head - **Ep 1:22-23**
 - b. For which Jesus died to produce a glorious church - **Ep 5:25-27**
 2. Consider how Christ is building His church
 - a. Through the gospel, Christ calls us - **2 Th 2:14**
 - b. As we heed the gospel call, the Lord adds us to His body, the church - **Ac 2:41,47**
 - c. That is why it is so important that the gospel not be perverted in any way - **Ga 1:6-9**
 3. If the gospel proclaimed by a church is different...
 - a. By changing either the facts or commands of the gospel
 - b. Then people are not being saved, and the Lord is not adding them to His church!
 4. A church with a perverted gospel...
 - a. May have the nicest people, but they are still unregenerate people!
 - b. May wear the name of Christ, both as individuals and as a church, but are not truly the people of God!
- **Unless the gospel of Christ is preached in its simplicity and purity, a church cannot be pleasing to the Lord**

B. WHERE THE APOSTLES' DOCTRINE IS OBSERVED...

1. This is what characterized the churches of the New Testament - **Ac 2:42**
 - a. Our goal is not to emulate the churches of the 2nd, 3rd, 18th, or 20th centuries
 - b. Nor to simply imitate the traditions of Catholicism, denominationalism, etc.
 - c. But to be like the faithful churches of Christ in the first century A.D. - **Ro 16:16**
2. Such a church will have **worship** like that described in the New Testament
 - a. With such elements as singing, prayer, Bible study, preaching, and the Lord's Supper - **Co 3:16; 4:2; 2 Ti 2:2,15; 4:2; Ac 20:7; 1 Co 10:16-17; 11:23-29**
 - b. With assemblies stirring one another to love and good works - **He 10:24-25**
3. Their **work** as a congregation will be similar to that found in New Testament churches
 - a. Equipping the saints for ministry (**edification**) - **Ep 4:11-16**
 - b. Spread of the gospel by sending out evangelists (**evangelism**) - **Ph 4:15-16; 3 Jn 5-8**

- c. Meeting the needs of the saints as problems arise (**benevolence**) - **Ro 15:25-26; 1 Co 16:1-4; 2 Co 8:1-9:15**
- 4. Their **organization** as a congregation will seek to be like that found in the New Testament - cf. **Ph 1:1**
 - a. With **elders** (also known as bishops, pastors, presbyters, shepherds) qualified to oversee and tend to the local congregation - **Ac 14:23; 20:28; 1 Ti 3:1-7; Ti 1:5-9; 1 Pe 5:1-4**
 - b. With **deacons** qualified to minister to the local congregation - **1 Ti 3:8-13**
 - c. With **saints** (members) who sojourn in this world with conduct that is honorable and which gives glory to God - **1 Pe 2:9-12**
- **A church seeking to please Christ will let the apostles' doctrine guide its worship, work and organization, and not be based on traditions of uninspired men**

C. WHERE RIGHTEOUSNESS, PEACE, AND JOY IS FOUND...

- 1. Such is to be the **focus** of those in the kingdom of God - **Ro 14:17**
 - a. Not social entertainment and food, but matters of grace - **He 13:9**
 - b. Not social programs, for such can hinder the church - **1 Ti 5:16**
- 2. A place where brethren are focused on **peace** and **edification** - **Ro 14:18-20**
 - a. Pursuing things that make for peace, like love and unity - **Jn 13:34-35; 17:20-23**
 - b. Pursuing things that make for building up (edifying) brethren - **1 Co 14:26**
 - c. Avoiding those who cause divisions and occasions to stumble - **Ro 16:17-18**
- **A church should be conducive to spiritual growth, where people are encouraged to live holy lives in peace and joy**

[Such are the things to look for in a church, if one is serious about following Jesus. As one considers what to look for in a church, I have some other thoughts on...]

II. WHAT MAY BE NICE, BUT NOT NECESSARY

A. MANY PROGRAMS...

- 1. Some measure a church by its programs
 - a. E.g., the Bible classes they offer all ages
 - b. E.g., the evangelism efforts supported by the congregation
 - c. E.g., the benevolence being done
- 2. Not that such is wrong, but one should strive to be strong with or without such programs
 - a. Spiritual maturity is gained mostly by individual effort, through one's own personal devotions, Bible study, service - cf. **1 Ti 4:13-16**
 - b. One will not always be where there is a large congregation with many programs; will he or she be able to remain strong without them? - e.g., **Ac 16:25**
- 3. The majority of Christian duties takes place apart from the local church
 - a. How we live, work, and play - cf. **1 Pe 2:11-17**
 - b. What kind of workers we are, what kind of families we have - cf. **Co 3:18-25**
- 4. It can be easy to be caught up in "church overload"
 - a. Where one becomes busy in church meetings, activities, etc.
 - b. That they neglect their God-given duties to family, self and others
- **The true measure of a strong church is not how many programs they have; nor is the measure of true spirituality how many church activities one is involved in**

B. MANY YOUNG PEOPLE...

1. Parents often choose a church based on this factor
 - a. Out of a loving concern for their children
 - b. Assuming that the more young people, the better
 2. A congregation with more young people may be better, but not necessarily so
 - a. Children tend to form cliques with their peer group, then rarely associate with others outside their peers
 - b. Not all peers provide positive influence; I've seen good children ruined when they went from a small church with no peers to a large church with many peers
 - c. Children need to learn to relate to those outside their peer groups; such is often much easier in small churches without anyone their age
 3. Spiritual interest and faithfulness in children is affected more by parents than peers
 - a. Fathers have the charge to bring up their children in spiritual matters - **Ep 6:4**
 - b. Mothers and grandmothers can have a powerful influence - **2 Ti 1:5**
- **Parents should not abdicate their children's spiritual training to the church, or to their children's friends**

CONCLUSION

1. Over the years I have been privileged to be a member of many churches...
 - a. Some fairly sized (200-300) that provided lots of programs and children
 - b. Others rather small (10-100), even meeting in a home or storefront
2. I have found that wherever people faithfully proclaim the gospel and abide in the apostles' doctrine...
 - a. There is a family of God's people
 - b. There is a place where one can grow in faith, hope, and love

A church should be a group of Christians where as we assemble to worship, we are encouraged by other Christians to go out and live for Jesus, serve our brethren, and minister to those in our community.

Whether large or small, size does not matter. Where there is no church, one can start one in their home as was often the case in the New Testament... - cf. **Ro 16:5; 1 Co 16:19; Co 4:15; Phe 1:2**

What Visitors Have A Right To Expect

INTRODUCTION

1. It is not unusual for visitors to attend services of the church...
 - a. From the community, or those who are traveling
 - b. In tourist areas, or in regions where people move in and out frequently
2. A congregation should be thrilled to have visitors...
 - a. Those who visit display an interest in spiritual matters
 - b. It provides an opportunity for the church to be of service to them
2. A congregation should be concerned about what the visitors find...
 - a. One possible reaction, if things are amiss: “You are out of your mind” - cf. **1 Co 14:23**
 - b. A preferable reaction: “God is truly among you” - cf. **1 Co 14:24-25**

[What do visitors have a right to expect? While **1 Corinthians 14** describes a church that was abusing miraculous gifts, it contains principles that would be true in any given situation. For example, visitors have a right to expect...]

I. EDIFICATION

A. IN THE LETTER TO CORINTH...

1. The word “edification” appears many times - e.g., **1 Co 14:4,5,12**
2. A guiding principle to govern any assembly: “Let all things be done for edification” - cf. **1 Co 14:26**

B. MAKING APPLICATION FOR TODAY...

1. The word “edify” means “to build up”
2. An assembly should have people leaving stronger than when they came
3. Sermons, songs, prayers, etc., should be with this goal in mind
4. This goal should always be in the mind of:
 - a. Those who lead the services
 - b. The regular members who attend

[Every word spoken before, during, and after the services has an impact on whether visitors find edification. The visitors also have a right to expect...]

II. EXHORTATION AND COMFORT

A. IN THE LETTER TO CORINTH...

1. The words “exhortation” and “comfort” are also mentioned - **1 Co 14:3**
2. Commenting on this passage, **Sewell Hall** notes:
 - a. “Exhortation urges those present to do right and avoid wrong.”
 - b. “Comfort is accomplished by telling them of God's forgiveness and longsuffering toward those who are weak so long as they are diligently seeking to do His will.”

B. MAKING APPLICATION FOR TODAY...

1. Exhortation is a primary reason for assembling - cf. **He 10:24-25**
2. Exhorting people to do right often involves rebuking those that do wrong - cf. **Ti 1:9; 2:15; 2 Ti 4:2**
3. Yet it should be mixed with longsuffering and an offer of hope - cf. **2 Ti 4:2; 1 Th 5:14**
4. “Sin must be condemned, but there must be the encouragement to do what is right and the assurance that one can please God.” - **Hall**

[Visitors should leave knowing that a church encourages people to do right, and offers comfort for those wanting to repent of their wrong. The visitors should also find...]

III. TEACHING THAT CAN BE UNDERSTOOD

A. IN THE LETTER TO CORINTH...

1. Paul said he sought to be understood - **1 Co 14:19**
2. He earlier wrote that he did not use “excellence of speech or of wisdom” - **1 Co 2:1**

B. MAKING APPLICATION FOR TODAY...

1. Some challenging thoughts from **Sewell Hall** regarding **preaching**:
 - a. “The purpose of preaching is not to showcase the eloquence, the vocabulary or the education of the preacher.”
 - b. A sermon, regardless of how sound or erudite, is worthless if the hearers do not understand it. It was said of Jesus that ‘the common people heard Him gladly’ (**Mk 12:37**).”
 - c. “As we preach, we should be more concerned for instructing the uninformed and unbelievers among us than for gaining the approval of those who already know and believe what we are saying.”
2. Equally challenging thoughts from **Sewell Hall** regarding **singing**:
 - a. “Similarly, our singing should not be to impress visitors with our ability as leaders or with the congregation’s ability to sing hard songs, or even to sing simple ones artfully.”
 - b. “The purpose must be ‘teaching and admonishing one another’ (**Co 3:16**).”
 - c. “I am afraid too many of our songs produce more entertainment than edification.”

[Visitors have a right to understand what is being **said** or **sung**. They are to be won over by the **content** of the words, not the **delivery**. Visitors also have a right to observe...]

IV. PARTICIPATION BY THE MEMBERS

A. IN THE LETTER TO CORINTH...

1. It is assumed brethren participated by saying ‘amen’ in giving thanks - **1 Co 14:16**
2. In this way demonstrating their participation in the prayer offered

B. MAKING APPLICATION FOR TODAY...

1. Members can show their participation in several ways
 - a. Expressing ‘amen’ when prayers are offered - cf. **Psa 106:48**
 - b. Offering ‘amen’ when agreeing with a point made in the sermon
 - c. Joining in the singing, to the best of one’s ability
 - d. Opening their Bibles, reading along, taking notes
2. When visitors attend, do they see members participating?

- a. Is their impression one of active involvement by the members?
- b. Or is it one disinterest or distraction?

[Visitors have a right to see members **involved** in the service, with ears to hear and tongues to speak and sing. Visitors are **impressed** when they see such involvement, for it implies **interest** in something **important** and worth learning! Visitors also have a right to expect...]

V. DECENCY AND ORDER

A. IN THE LETTER TO CORINTH...

1. Paul gave instructions designed to create order
 - a. For those gifted to speak in tongues - **1 Co 14:27-28**
 - b. For those gifted to prophesy - **1 Co 14:29-32**
2. His final charge: “Let all things be done decently and in order.” - **1 Co 14:40**

B. MAKING APPLICATION FOR TODAY...

1. Services should start on time
 - a. Members should be present when services begin
 - b. Otherwise their late arrival can be distracting to the visitors
2. Services should show evidence of careful planning
 - a. Those who lead should be well-prepared
 - b. Announcements should be submitted in advance to avoid shouting from the audience

[If visitors are to “worship God and report that God is truly among you”, an **orderly** and **reverent** service contributes to that end. Finally, visitors should expect to find...]

VI. PEACE IN THE CONGREGATION

A. IN THE LETTER TO CORINTH...

1. Paul stated God was not the author of confusion, but of peace - **1 Co 14:33**
2. He also wrote that envy, strife, and divisions were indicative of carnality - **1 Co 3:3-4**

B. MAKING APPLICATION FOR TODAY...

1. Visitors have a right to see a congregation at peace
 - a. Where brethren love one another
 - b. Where brethren are glad to be together
 - c. Where brethren work through their differences
2. Jesus wants His disciples to be at peace
 - a. For our love for one another shows that we are his disciples - **Jn 13:34-35**
 - b. For our unity demonstrate demonstrates God’s love - **Jn 17:20-23**

CONCLUSION

1. What is our objective when visitors are present...?
 - a. That they may be able to worship God - **1 Co 14:25**
 - b. That they may be able to say, “God is truly among you” - **1 Co 14:25**
2. We should also hope that when visitors are present...
 - a. The Gospel of Christ will have free course

- b. Everything we do encourages reception of the Word
 - c. We do nothing to hinder their obedience to the Gospel
3. Some with **'ears dull of hearing'** and **'hard hearts'** will not be impressed regardless of our efforts, but those with **'good and noble hearts'** have every right to expect...
- a. Edification
 - b. Exhortation and comfort
 - c. Teaching that can be understood
 - d. Participation by the members
 - e. Decency and order
 - f. Peace in the congregation

Note: The main points and many of the observations were taken from an article by **Sewell Hall** by the same title ("What Visitors Has A Right To Expect") in **Focus Magazine**, Vol. 7, No. 3, Issue No. 68.

When Disaster Strikes

INTRODUCTION

1. In recent years, natural disasters have struck different regions of the world...
 - a. Tsunami in Asia (2004)
 - b. Hurricane Katrina (2005)
 - c. Cyclone in Myanmar (2008)
 - d. Earthquake in Haiti (2010)

2. When disasters like these strike, people often raise questions...
 - a. Why did it happen? Did God cause it? If not, why did He allow it to happen?
 - b. What can I do? Does it do any good?

[Since the Ethiopian famine in 1985, I have often thought about such questions. With the most recent disaster fresh on our minds, let's attempt to provide some answers...]

I. WHY DID IT HAPPEN?

A. DID GOD CAUSE IT...?

1. It is common to call such natural disasters "acts of God"
 2. Perhaps because God has used natural disasters in the past; for example:
 - a. The flood - **Gen 6:6-7,11-13,17**
 - b. Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah - **Gen 18:20; 19:24-25**
 - c. Famine, drought, pestilence, plague, war, earthquake, against Israel - **Am 4:6-12**
 3. But it would be a mistake to attribute **all** disasters to the hand of God
 - a. Disasters are part of a natural process in a planet's evolution and ecology
 - b. Sometimes God simply allows such events to run their course according to "time and chance", and so many experience tragedies due to no fault of their own - **Ec 9:11**
 - c. Some disasters are man-made (Chernobyl, Bhopal, bridge collapses, forest fires)
 - d. Suffering often comes upon the innocent - **Job 1:8-22; 2Co 11:23-27**
 - e. Thus we should not make the mistake of Job's friends, presuming guilt on those who suffer tragedy - **Job 42:7**
- **Without divine revelation, there is no way we can know if "God caused it"**

B. THEN WHY DOES GOD ALLOW IT...?

1. If God didn't cause it, why does He even allow it to happen?
 2. This relates to the overall problem of suffering, which God may allow for several reasons
 - a. It keeps this world from becoming too attractive, encouraging us to seek something better - **Mt 6:19-21; He 13:14**
 - b. It can bring out the best in people (patience, generosity) - **Ro 5:3-4; Jm 1:2-4**
 - c. It encourages people to think of God, to draw near to Him in repentance
 3. Whenever the innocent and righteous die, we should bear in mind:
 - a. The death of the righteous is precious in the sight of God - **Ps 116:15**
 - b. The death of the righteous removes them from all suffering and evil - **Isa 57:1-2**
 - c. The death of the righteous is truly a blessing! - **Re 14:13**
 - d. Even the innocent young are delivered from much heartache and sorrow!
- **Whether caused by God or not, disasters can result in much good!**

[Which leads to our next question, which often comes from those responding to disaster and suffering...]

II. WHAT CAN I DO?

A. AS WE HAVE OPPORTUNITY...

1. As we have opportunity, we are to do good - **Ga 6:10**
 2. What we can do depends on what we are able to do
 - a. Our skills, our resources
 - b. Whether we are nearby or far off
 3. If the need is nearby, we may be able to help directly
 - a. With skills like medical aid, trash cleanup
 - b. With resources like medicines, food, clothing, shelter
 4. If the need is far off, we can help indirectly
 - a. Supporting those with skills who desire to go
 - b. Supporting charitable organizations (NGOs)
 5. Thoughts about charitable giving
 - a. Give to established charities with experience in the affected area
 - b. Use guides like [Charity Navigator](#) to find one you can trust
 - c. Send cash, not food, clothing, etc.
 6. While donating tangible items might make you feel better, giving cash is almost always a better option - to understand why, read these two articles:
 - a. [Cash Is Best - Center For International Disaster Information](#)
 - b. [What's the absolute best way to help after a natural disaster abroad? - Slate.com](#)
- **Again, what we should do depends upon our opportunity**

B. DO GOOD TO ALL...

1. As we have opportunity, we are to do good to **all** men - **Ga 6:10**
 2. Like the Good Samaritan - **Lk 10:30-37**
 3. Non-sectarian, charitable organization are especially good for this, for example:
 - a. [Doctors Without Borders](#) (especially good for immediate help)
 - b. [Mercy Corps](#) (especially good for long term help)
 4. I prefer non-sectarian instead of faith-based organization for general charity, because many of the latter teach false doctrine while they seek to help - cf. **2Jn 1:9-11**
- **We should not hesitate to help those who may not be Christians**

C. ESPECIALLY THE HOUSEHOLD OF FAITH...

1. As we have opportunity, we are to especially help our brethren - **Ga 6:10**
 2. Like Gentile Christians did for their Jewish brethren in Christ - **Ro 15:25-26; 2Co 8:1-4**
 3. Churches can certainly send aid directly to such Christians - **1Co 16:1-4**
 4. Individuals can sometimes use other channels - e.g., [Open Hearts, Helping Hands](#)
- **When we know of Christians in need, we should not hesitate to help**

D. FINALLY, WE SHOULD PRAY...!

1. It is our duty as Christians to pray for all men - **1Ti 2:1-2**
 2. We should pray for those directly afflicted, and their loved ones
 3. We should pray for those providing relief (governments, NGOs, individuals)
- **The prayers of the righteous can accomplish much good - cf. Jm 5:16**

CONCLUSION

1. Disasters are terrible, but they can be occasions for much good in this world...
 - a. The wicked can turn to God
 - b. The righteous can draw closer to God
 - c. People can become more charitable, foes can become friends

2. With faith in God and love for our fellow man, we can make the best of the situation...
 - a. Strengthening bonds between brethren
 - b. Bringing communities together
 - c. Appreciating what is really important in life

So in times of calamity, **trust in God** and **reach out to aid your fellow man...!**

When The Election Is Over

INTRODUCTION

1. Many Christians are blessed to live in democratic countries...
 - a. Where elections are held to determine new leaders
 - b. Where Christians have a voice in the election process
2. When an election is over, feelings are often diverse...
 - a. Those whose candidates won are ecstatic and hopeful
 - b. Those whose candidates lost are often depressed and worried

[Whether one's preferred candidate won or lost, it is important that Christians remember certain things in regards to our living among the nations of men. When the election is over, we do well to...]

I. RENEW OUR TRUST IN GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

A. GOD IS ULTIMATELY IN CONTROL...

1. This truth was confirmed in the days of Daniel - **Dan 2:21; 4:17,34-35**
 2. It is affirmed in the writings of Paul - **Ro 13:1-4**
 3. Indeed, Jesus now has the ultimate authority - **Mt 28:18**
 - a. He is head over all things - **Ep 1:20-22; 1Pe 3:22**
 - b. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords - **1Ti 6:15**
 - c. He is truly the ruler over the kings of the earth - **Re 1:5**
- **No matter who is president, king, or dictator, God rules over all!**

B. WE MUST TRUST IN HIS SOVEREIGNTY...

1. All things work together for good to those who love God - **Ro 8:28**
 2. If God is for us, who can be against us? - **Ro 8:31-34**
 3. Nothing shall separate us from the love of Christ - **Ro 8:35-39**
- **No matter what rulers may do, for good or ill, we are in God's hands!**

[We may not know the future, but we know Him who holds the future in His hands. With God's sovereignty giving us both comfort and courage, we should also...]

II. REAFFIRM OUR HEAVENLY CITIZENSHIP

A. OUR TRUE CITIZENSHIP IS IN HEAVEN...

1. As declared by Paul to brethren who were Roman citizens - **Php 3:20**
 2. We are fellow citizens with the saints - **Ep 2:19**
 3. We are pilgrims living among the nations of men - **1Pe 1:1; 2:11**
- **We are citizens of the kingdom of God, first and foremost!**

B. WE MUST REAFFIRM OUR PILGRIM STATUS...

1. "This world is not my home, I'm just a passing through" - Albert E. Brumley
2. We should beware of becoming too attached to things in this world
 - a. Which can render us fruitless - **Lk 8:14**
 - b. Which can leave us unprepared for the Lord's coming - **Lk 21:34**

3. We must guard against the love of this world (including politics!) - **1Jn 2:15-17**
- **We may be citizens of an earthly nation, but do not become too attached!**

[Aware of our true spiritual identity as citizens of the kingdom of heaven, we should...]

III. REFOCUS OUR PRIMARY MISSION

A. OUR PRIMARY MISSION CONCERNS GOD...

1. To seek first the rule or reign of God in our lives - **Mt 6:33**
2. To proclaim the praises of God for His mercy - **1Pe 2:9-10**
- **The kingdom of God is our primary mission!**

B. WE MUST REFOCUS OUR EFFORTS ON THE GOSPEL...

1. For that is the commission Christ has given - **Mk 16:15-16**
2. To make disciples of all the nations - **Mt 28:19-20**
- **Are we as active in our evangelism as others are in their politics?**

[As we go about fulfilling the Great Commission, we should also...]

IV. RESOLVE TO GIVE LEADERS THEIR DUE

A. WHAT WE OWE THOSE IN AUTHORITY...

1. Our submission - **Ro 13:1-5; 1Pe 2:13-15**
 - a. For conscience' sake, and for the Lord's sake
 - b. To silence the ignorance of foolish men
2. Our taxes and revenue (ESV) - **Ro 13:6-7**
3. Our respect and honor (ESV) - **Ro 13:7; 1Pe 2:17; Jude 8-9; Tit 3:1-2**
 - a. Not speaking evil of those in authority
 - b. Just as we are not to speak evil of anyone
4. Our prayers - **1Ti 2:1-4**
 - a. For all who are in authority
 - b. That we might lead quiet and peaceable lives
- **These are our God-given duties as citizens living among the nations!**

B. WE MUST NOT FAIL OUR OBLIGATIONS...

1. Political differences do not justify speaking ill of our leaders
2. Even immoral conduct by our leaders is not justification (remember Nero?)
3. We may have liberty, but not to do or say that which is evil - **1Pe 2:16**
- **Are we committed to giving our leaders what God demands?**

[Rather than maligning our leaders (e.g., "president-bashing") and speaking ill of those with whom we may disagree politically, let us finally be sure to...]

V. RESUME OUR ROLE AS PEACEMAKERS

A. WE SERVE THE PRINCE OF PEACE...

1. The One foretold by Isaiah - **Isa 9:6-7**
2. The One announced by the heavenly host - **Lk 2:10-14**
3. The One who died to make peace between men - **Ep 2:13-18**

-- **Our King and Lord is truly the one hope for peace!**

B. WE ARE TO BE PEACEMAKERS...

1. If we are to be called the sons of God - **Mt 5:9**
 2. By loving our enemies, blessing those who hate us - **Mt 5:43-48**
 3. By displaying wisdom that comes from above - **Jm 3:17-18**
 4. Contending without being contentious - **2Ti 2:24-26**
- **Are we agents of peaceful discourse and interaction among divided mankind?**

CONCLUSION

1. The freedom to elect our leaders is a wonderful blessing, but there are dangers...
 - a. In the euphoria of victory we may neglect the duties of our true citizenship
 - b. In the dysphoria of defeat we may forget the One who is truly in charge
2. So when the election is over, whether our preferred candidate wins or loses, let us...
 - a. Renew our trust in God's sovereignty
 - b. Reaffirm our heavenly citizenship
 - c. Refocus our primary mission
 - d. Resolve to give leaders their due
 - e. Resume our role as peacemakers

"I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things, and before Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate, that you keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ's appearing, which He will manifest in His own time, He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen."

- *1Ti 6:13-16*

Note: the main points of this outline were adapted from [an article by Mark D. Roberts](#).

Who Killed Jesus?

INTRODUCTION

1. Movies depicting the death of Christ are often controversial...
 - a. Especially “The Passion” produced by Mel Gibson
 - b. Even “The Gospel Of John” has been criticized in this regard
2. The controversy is over the involvement of the Jews in the crucifixion...
 - a. Many have used their involvement as the basis for anti-Semitism
 - b. Seeking to place the entire blame for the death of Jesus on the Jews
3. Anti-Semitism with its hatred of Jews is certainly contrary to the scriptures...
 - a. Such hatred of anyone is contrary to the teaching of Christ - cf. **Mt 5:43-45**
 - b. The Jews are not alone in bearing responsibility for the death of Jesus

[Who killed Jesus, then? Let’s take a closer look by asking...]

I. WAS IT THE ROMANS?

A. INVOLVEMENT OF THE ROMAN AUTHORITIES...

1. The Jews had no power under Roman dominion to put one to death - **Jn 18:28-31**
2. It was the Romans (i.e., Pilate) who:
 - a. Gave the orders for Christ to be crucified - **Jn 19:16**
 - b. Carried out the actual crucifixion - **Jn 19:17-18,23,31-34,38**

B. JESUS PLACED GREATER RESPONSIBILITY ELSEWHERE...

1. Note the words of Jesus to Pilate - **Jn 19:10-11**
2. Pilate thought the power was totally his
3. Those who delivered Jesus to the Romans bore the greater responsibility

[“So it was the Jews who killed Jesus!” Well, not so fast. We should ask another question...]

II. WERE THE JEWS TOTALLY RESPONSIBLE?

A. THEY DID BEAR A GREATER ACCOUNTABILITY...

1. As the ones who delivered Jesus to Pilate - cf. **Jn 19:11**
2. As the ones who forced Pilate to have Jesus crucified - **Jn 19:12-15**
3. Indeed, the Jews who forced Pilate accepted responsibility for their actions - **Mt 27:22-25**
4. Paul (who may have participated in the call to crucify Jesus) laid blame for Jesus’ death on the Jews of Judah - cf. **1 Th 2:14-15**

B. YET IT WAS ACCORDING TO THE FATHER’S PURPOSE...

1. Note the sermon of Peter on Pentecost - **Ac 2:22-23**
 - a. Jesus was delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God!
 - b. The Jews and Romans were instruments in carry out God’s will!
2. Jesus understood this to be the case
 - a. That it was God’s will for Him to die - **Mt 26:36-42**

- b. That the Jews and Romans did not fully realize their sin - **Lk 23:33-34**

[”So it was God who killed Jesus!” Again, not so fast. Consider another question...]

III. WHY DID THE FATHER HAVE JESUS KILLED?

A. JESUS SHED HIS BLOOD FOR THE REMISSION OF SIN...

1. Jesus said His blood was to be shed for the remission of sins - cf. **Mt 26:26-28**
2. His sacrificial death for our sins was foretold by Isaiah - **Isa 53:4-6,10-12**

B. JESUS WAS KILLED BECAUSE OF ‘OUR’ SINS...

1. The Romans and the Jews were instruments of God (though they too bore responsibility)
2. But all who are guilty of sin must bear responsibility for Jesus’ death!
3. That includes everyone! - cf. **Ro 3:23**
4. Of course, forgiveness is now possible to all through the death of Jesus
 - a. Even as Peter offered to the Jews who killed Jesus - **Ac 2:36-38**
 - b. God now desires that all repent and be saved - **Ac 17:30-31; cf. 1 Ti 2:3-6; 2 Pe 3:9**

[Who killed Jesus? You and me, that’s who! Because of our sins God sent His Son to die on the cross. For those who accept God’s grace, there is one more question we do well to consider...]

IV. SHALL WE CRUCIFY JESUS AGAIN?

A. IT IS POSSIBLE, AS SOME HAVE...

1. The Hebrew writer spoke of some who were so guilty - **He 6:6**
2. By refusing to repent of sins after having once benefited from God’s grace - **He 6:4-6**

B. ARE WE CRUCIFYING JESUS AGAIN...?

1. We are if once saved we are living in unrepentant sin!
2. Of course, cleansing is always possible to those who confess and repent - cf. **1 Jn 1:9**
3. But not if we persist in sin with a rebellious attitude - cf. **He 10:26-31**

CONCLUSION

1. Who killed Jesus...?
 - a. The Jews and Romans involved in the actual crucifixion bear some responsibility
 - b. But God had Jesus killed because of our sins, so we all must bear responsibility as well
2. Perhaps the more pressing question should be “**Who is killing Jesus?**”...
 - a. Those who refuse to accept God’s grace still bear the guilt of their sins that caused Jesus’ death
 - b. Those who once accepted God’s grace but turn away to unrepentant sin crucify Him once again

Let us make sure that we do not receive the grace of God in vain...! - cf. **2 Co 6:1-2**

Why Are You Waiting?

INTRODUCTION

1. When God called Moses to lead His people out of Egyptian bondage...

- a. Moses tried to excuse himself by offering several objections
 - b. Yet God answered every objection, declaring them invalid
2. Today, God is calling all to obey His Son...
 - a. Calling them through the gospel of Jesus Christ
 - b. If you have not yet obeyed the gospel...
 - 1) It may be you think you have a valid reason
 - 2) But just as God answered every objection raised by Moses, so His Word answers any reason you may give for not obeying today!
 3. Indeed, one might properly ask the same question Ananias asked Paul...

“And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” (Ac 22:16)

[Why does one wait? Whatever the objection, the Lord has an answer. To illustrate, consider some of the objections often raised for not obeying the gospel, beginning with...]

I. “I WILL LATER...BUT NOT NOW. LET ME WAIT AWHILE.”

A. PROCRASTINATION IS ONE OF SATAN’S GREATEST WEAPONS...

1. He delights in using it on us at every stage of life; e.g., he gets the:
 - a. 12 year old to delay by saying “I’m much too **young** to think about God”
 - b. 18 year old to delay by saying “I’m much too **smart** to think about God”
 - c. 22 year old to delay by saying “I’m much too **happy** to think about God”
 - d. 25 year old to delay by saying “I’m much too **busy** to think about God”
 - e. 30 year old to delay by saying “I’m much too **smug** to think about God”
 - f. 40 year old to delay by saying “I’m much too **tired** to think about God”
 - g. 50 year old to delay by saying “I’m much too **worried** to think about God”
 - h. 60 year old to delay by saying “I’m much too **old** to think about God”
2. Much too often, death comes unexpectedly, and then it is too **late** to think about God!

B. THAT DELAY IS FOLLY SHOULD BE EVIDENT...

1. Would you delay if you knew...
 - a. There was a bomb in your house that could explode at any moment?
 - b. You had a terminal disease if left untreated?
2. Why then have this concern for the body, but not for the soul?
 - a. The soul is much more important than the body - **Mt 10:28**
 - b. If you know what to do, don’t delay; your soul is at stake!

[But then some say...]

II. “I DON’T KNOW ENOUGH YET”

A. A DESIRE TO LEARN MORE IS COMMENDABLE...

1. There is a lot more that I would like to know!
2. But being a Christian involves a growth process...
 - a. A lot of the teaching takes place **after** one becomes a disciple - cf. **Mt 28:19-20**
 - b. In fact, one can become a Christian with very little knowledge

B. HOW MUCH DOES ONE NEED TO KNOW...?

1. Consider the examples of conversions in the Book of Acts...
 - a. Most conversions resulted after one lesson; how many lessons or sermons have you heard?
 - b. E.g., when the Ethiopian eunuch wanted to be baptized after just one lesson, it was “faith” that was necessary, not “extensive knowledge” per se - **Ac 8:35-37**
2. If you understand, and are convicted in your heart...
 - a. That you are lost in your sins
 - b. That Christ offered Himself on the cross for your sins
 - c. That you can receive the benefits of His death through:
 - 1) Believing in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God - **Ac 8:37; 10:43; 16:30-31**
 - 2) Repenting of your sins - **Ac 2:38; 3:19; 17:30-31**
 - 3) Confessing your faith in Christ - **Ro 10:9-10; Ac 8:37**
 - 4) Being baptized for the remission of your sins - **Ac 2:38; 22:16; 1 Pe 3:21**
 - 5) Remaining faithful to the Lord - **Re 2:10**
 - Then you know enough to receive salvation and begin the Christian life!

[Then there are those who admit they know enough, but say...]

III. “I WANT TO WAIT UNTIL I AM SURE I CAN LIVE THE CHRISTIAN LIFE” or “I’M NOT GOOD ENOUGH YET, I WANT TO IMPROVE MY LIFE”

A. THIS IMPLIES A MISUNDERSTANDING OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE...

1. Some mistakenly believe they are expected to act like mature Christians
 - a. They look at those who have been Christians for years
 - b. They know they cannot act like that immediately, so assume they must change themselves completely before becoming Christians
2. Again, they forget that being a Christian is a growth process
 - a. We start out as *“babes in Christ”*, often still carnal in behavior - cf. **1 Co 3:1-4**
 - b. But we are to grow, gradually putting off the “old man” and putting on the “new” - **2 Pe 3:18; Co 3:8-10**

B. IN FACT, ONE CANNOT LIVE THE CHRISTIAN LIFE WITHOUT CHRIST...!

1. If you wait until you can live the Christian life to become a Christian, you will be waiting forever!
2. It is only in Christ that we receive the strength to overcome the struggles of the flesh - cf. **Ro 6:17-18; Ro 8:12-13; Ph 4:13**
3. To delay obeying Christ until one’s life is in order...
 - a. Is to “put the cart before the horse”
 - b. We need Christ and His strength in order to truly reform our lives!

[Then, some are bound to say...]

IV. “THERE ARE HYPOCRITES IN THE CHURCH”

A. TRUE, BUT THERE ARE HYPOCRITES EVERYWHERE...

1. In the PTA, civic clubs, etc.; do hypocrites in the stadium prevent you from enjoying a good sports event?

2. Their sin of hypocrisy is no excuse for you to continue in YOUR sins (remember, two wrongs don't make a right!)
3. Which is worse...
 - a. To spend **a few years in a church with a few hypocrites?**
 - B. Or to spend **eternity in hell with all the hypocrites?**

B. SOME OTHER THINGS TO REMEMBER...

1. Jesus did not refuse to worship in the synagogues though the religious leaders were hypocrites
2. Peter, James, John and the rest of the apostles did not leave Jesus because Judas was a hypocrite!
3. If you let the hypocrite come in between you and God...
 - a. You let the hypocrite become bigger than God!
 - b. You can't see God for the hypocrite! How tragic!

[To our list of excuses, we can add yet another...]

V. "I WANT TO WAIT FOR MY SPOUSE OR PARENTS"

A. YOUR CONCERN IS COMMENDABLE, BUT...

1. Will you help them by waiting?
 - a. They may be waiting for you to obey first
 - b. Your delay can only hinder their own obedience
2. Your example of obedience can be a powerful influence for good - cf. **1 Pe 3:1-2**

B. WHEN YOU STAND BEFORE THE LORD, IT WILL BE AS AN INDIVIDUAL...

1. It will not be in family groups, you will have to answer for yourself! - **Ro 14:12; 2 Co 5:10**
2. As much as you may love them, don't let them lose your soul for you!

[Finally, let's consider an objection that is somewhat similar to the one we've just discussed...]

VI. "I AM AFRAID OF WHAT MY PARENTS OR SPOUSE MIGHT THINK"

A. WE NEED TO KEEP IN MIND WHAT JESUS TAUGHT...

1. The Lord must come first - **Mt 10:34-37**
2. He has made it clear that we must be more concerned about what He thinks than what our loved ones might think

B. SOMETHING ELSE TO BEAR IN MIND...

1. At first they may think you are disregarding their feelings or beliefs
2. But in reality you are likely acting upon the fundamental principles they themselves taught you!
3. Did they not teach you...
 - a. To do what is right?
 - b. To not violate your conscience?
 - c. To stand on your own convictions?
 - So they really have no basis to think evil of you, do they?

CONCLUSION

1. There may be other excuses, reasons, or objections one might give for not obeying the gospel...
 - a. But this should suffice to illustrate that there is really no justifiable reason to put off your obedience to the gospel
 - b. There is really no justification for not accepting the grace God offers you through Jesus Christ!
2. So if you know what you need to do, why put it off any longer?

Together with Ananias, the disciple sent to tell Saul of Tarsus what he needed to do, we ask:

“And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” (Ac 22:16)

Why Attend Every Service?

INTRODUCTION

1. In my life as a Christian, I have noticed the following in every church...
 - a. There are some Christians who attend every service of the church when possible
 - 1) They are present for Bible study on Sunday morning and Wednesday evening
 - 2) They attend both Sunday morning and evening worship services
 - 3) When the church has a gospel meeting, they attend every service
 - 4) They frequently attend gospel meetings at other congregations
 - b. There are other Christians whose attendance is infrequent
 - 1) They attend only once on Sunday, and that sporadically
 - 2) They do not participate in the Bible studies
 - 3) They are not present for most services during local gospel meetings
 - 4) And as for attending a gospel meeting elsewhere...very unlikely
2. Why the difference...?
 - a. Why do some Christians attend every service, and others do not?
 - b. Does it really make a difference?
3. I am of the conviction that it makes a very real difference...!
 - a. It makes a difference in the spiritual life of the **Christian**
 - b. It makes a difference in the spiritual life of the **congregation**

[I wish to share with you some reasons why every Christian ought to attend every service, unless hindered by illness or circumstances beyond their control. There are several reasons why many Christians have chosen to attend as they do. To begin, we should attend every service...]

I. TO FULFILL THE COMMANDS OF GOD

A. THE COMMAND NOT TO FORSAKE OUR ASSEMBLING...

1. This command is found in **He 10:25**
2. It is warning against the complete abandonment of assembling with others
3. While one may not have abandoned our assembling by attending only once a week...
 - a. Forsaking that one assembly a week becomes a lot easier when you have been in the habit of forsaking many other assemblies!
 - b. Those in the habit of attending every service are not likely to begin skipping services that can lead to stopping attending altogether!

B. THE COMMAND TO EDIFY ONE ANOTHER...

1. We have a responsibility to build up one another - **Ro 14:19; 15:1-3; He 3:12-14**
2. Simply our presence alone encourages others in attendance
3. Can we really say that we are edifying others...
 - a. When we are absent most of the time?
 - b. When we attend so infrequently, we hardly know the other members?
 - c. When we are not present to notice that others have stopped attending?

C. THE COMMAND TO SEEK FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD...

1. Jesus commands us to put the kingdom of God first - **Mt 6:33**
 - a. We all have priorities, we must simply put them in the right order
 - 1) Many Christians will not accept a job if it means missing services, and yet they find that God provides for their needs
 - 2) Many Christians will not play sports, or other extracurricular activities that conflict with their service to God
 - It is one thing to miss because one provides critical services to others (such as medical needs), but to miss just to make money?
 - b. Some stay home on Sunday because of aches and pains, but on Monday go to work, the grocery store, or the mall with the same aches and pains (???)
2. Putting Christ first even before family - **Mt 10:37-38; Lk 14:26**
 - a. Some stay home because of family visiting - is that putting Christ first?
 - b. Who is our true family? - cf. **Mt 12:46-50**

[Can anyone say that they can faithfully keep such commands when they consistently miss most of the services of the church? Consider also that we should attend every service...]

II. TO GROW AND DEVELOP SPIRITUALLY

A. THE SERVICES ARE DESIGNED FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH...

1. Hearing sermons and attending Bible classes helps one to grow - cf. **He 5:12-14**
2. Even the songs are designed to teach as well as praise - **Co 3:16**
3. Prayer, the Lord's Supper, even the collection, are designed to bring us closer to God

B. OUR GROWTH IS DEPENDENT UPON OUR DIET...

1. One cannot grow as God intended on a starvation diet
2. Those who attend irregularly eventually suffer from "spiritual malnutrition"
 - a. Leaving them susceptible to temptation
 - b. Rather than living strong, joyful, peaceful spiritual lives

[I have never known a person who **chose** to attend only one service a week to be a strong, faithful Christian. They were more like the chaff than the rooted tree described in **Psa 1:1-6**. Another reason to attend every service is...]

III. TO HELP THE CHURCH FUNCTION PROPERLY

A. THE LOCAL CHURCH NEEDS WORKERS...

1. The church is like a body, needing every individual part to do its share - **Ep 4:15-16**
2. No one can say they're not needed, nor that they do not need others - **1 Co 12:12-19**
3. To function properly, a church needs both spiritual and physical service
 - a. Such as leading songs, prayers, reading scripture, and preaching
 - b. Such as teaching children and adult classes
 - c. Such as ushering, preparing communion, cleaning the building
 - d. Such as many things which take place outside the assembly...visiting the sick, helping the needy, teaching the lost, strengthening the weak

B. THE CHURCH IS DEPENDENT UPON ITS MEMBERS...

1. Members who attend infrequently rarely do little else for the church
2. Do you want the church to grow?

- a. Do you want to see souls saved?
- b. Do you want to see the weak encouraged?
- c. Do you want to see our (your) children have good teachers?
3. A church is no stronger than the collective strength of its members
 - a. The church is like the links in a chain
 - b. If there is a missing link in the chain, it can affect the entire chain

[Churches where the attendance drops on Sunday and Wednesday nights, where the members do not attend gospel meetings, will never live up to their potential in service to the Lord. Do we want to have to give an answer to the Lord for why we hindered His church?]

IV. TO PROVIDE A GOOD EXAMPLE AND INFLUENCE

A. CHRISTIANS ARE TO SET A GOOD EXAMPLE...

1. For one another - **1 Ti 4:12; Ti 2:7-8**
2. For those in the world - **Mt 5:14-16; Ph 2:15**

B. FAITHFUL ATTENDANCE IS ESSENTIAL FOR GOOD INFLUENCE...

1. It sets a good example for babes in Christ, the spiritually weak, and visitors
 - a. You may think you can survive on one service a week
 - b. But what of those who need encouragement, and they notice you missing?
2. It influences our friends, relatives, and neighbors - cf. **1 Pe 2:12**
 - a. They admire your conviction and devotion to the Lord
 - b. They may begin to wonder what it is that makes you so devoted to the church
3. It provides great support to the elders, preacher, and other Christians
 - a. Your presence alone is a source of great encouragement
 - b. Your absence creates anxiety for anyone concerned for your spiritual welfare

[We cannot escape being an influence to others. Will our influence be good or poor? Here is yet another reason to attend every service when possible...]

V. TO BE READY, WATCHING AND WAITING

A. DISCIPLES OF CHRIST ARE TO BE PREPARED...

1. Jesus warned against getting caught off guard - **Mt 24:44; 25:13; Mk 13:33-37**
2. Paul taught the need to be prepared - **1 Th 5:1-11**
3. It is part of enduring to the end - **Mt 10:22; 24:12-13**
4. It is part of making the best use of our time - **Ep 5:16**

B. ATTENDING EVERY SERVICE CONTRIBUTES TO OUR PREPARATION...

1. As we sing songs about the Lord's coming
2. As we study the Scriptures that promise His return
 - What if the Lord came Sunday or Wednesday night, and you were staying home out of convenience rather than assembled with your brethren?

[Can we say that we are ready, watching, and waiting for the Lord, when we willfully miss many of the opportunities to be with His disciples? Finally, consider another reason to attend every service...]

VI. TO HAVE A CLEAR CONSCIENCE

A. A GOOD CONSCIENCE IS IMPORTANT...

1. Jesus died to purify our conscience - **He 9:14**
2. We were baptized, as an appeal for a good conscience - **1 Pe 3:21**
3. We are to have faith and a good conscience - **1 Ti 1:19**
4. The goal of our teaching is to have a good conscience - **1 Ti 1:5**
- And so disciples like Paul sought to serve God with a good conscience - **Ac 24:16**

B. MISSING SERVICES CONTRIBUTES TO A GUILTY CONSCIENCE...

1. When you miss, not because of illness or circumstances beyond your control, you feel guilty
 - a. Because you know where you should be
 - b. You really don't need a lesson like this...common sense tells you that you would be better off assembling with the Lord's people
2. A guilty conscience soon leads to a hardened conscience
 - a. A conscience that is "seared", so that it no longer functions properly - e.g., **1 Ti 4:2**
 - b. Once your conscience is hardened regarding attendance, it is more likely to become hardened against doing what is right in other areas
3. Could you say what the writer of Hebrews did? - **He 13:18**
 - a. "...for we are confident that we have a good conscience, in all things desiring to live honorably"
 - b. If we make it a habit not to attend all the services of the church, can we really say "we have a good conscience, in all things desiring to live honorably"?

CONCLUSION

1. Why attend every service? The faithful and fruitful child of God attends...
 - a. To fulfill the commands of God
 - b. To grow and develop spiritually
 - c. To help the church function properly
 - d. To provide a good example and influence
 - e. To be ready, watching and waiting
 - f. To have a clear conscience
2. For such reasons (and many others), the faithful child of God will the same attitude as expressed by the sweet singer of Israel: "I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go into the house of the LORD.'" - **Psa 122:1**

Is that your attitude? In redeeming what time you may left (**Ep 5:16**), may you use as much of it as possible in service to the Lord and His people!

Why Did Jesus Die On The Cross?

INTRODUCTION

1. Movies like Mel Gibson's "**The Passion Of The Christ**" generate much controversy...
 - a. Regarding possible anti-Semitism
 - b. Regarding graphic depiction of scourging and crucifixion
2. Sometimes the controversy centers around the reason Jesus died...
 - a. Was His death accidental, an unintended consequence of His teachings?
 - b. Was it God's will, recognized and accepted by Jesus in advance?

[The gospel message is quite clear as to why Jesus died for us, **yet there is a reason that is often overlooked**. So let's review the Biblical answer to the question...]

I. WHY DID JESUS DIE ON THE CROSS?

A. HE DIED TO ATONE FOR OUR SINS...

1. This is the fundamental theme of the Gospel - **1 Co 15:1-3**
2. His suffering for our sins was foretold - **Isa 53:4-6,10-12**
3. He was the Lamb of God to take away the sins of the world - **Jn 1:29**
4. In love, God offered Him as the propitiation for our sins - **1 Jn 4:9-10**
5. Through such suffering, to reconcile us back to God - **1 Pe 3:18**
6. Providing redemption from sin through His precious blood - **1 Pe 1:18-19**
- **His death was no accident, but part of God's predetermined plan - Ac 2:22-23**

B. HE DIED THAT WE MIGHT DIE TO SIN...

1. This reason for His death is often overlooked
2. Yet it is clearly stated by Peter - **1 Pe 2:24**
 - a. He died for our sins that we might die to sin (cf. **ESV**)
 - b. He died for our sins that we might live for righteousness
3. He died that we might die! And so we read such statements as:
 - a. "if we died with Him..." - **2 Ti 2:11**
 - b. "If with Christ you died..." - **Co 2:20**
 - c. "For you have died..." - **Co 3:3**
 - d. "I have been crucified with Christ..." - **Ga 2:20**
- **Jesus died, not only to atone for sin, but to provide a means whereby we can die with Him to sin, and thereby live for righteousness - 1 Pe 2:24**

[Unless we also '**die to sin**', has Jesus' death on the cross fully accomplished its purpose? He died for our sins, but have we died to sin? In other words...]

II. HAS JESUS DIED FOR YOU IN VAIN?

A. HAVE YOU DIED TO SIN...?

1. When does God view you as...
 - a. Dying with Christ?
 - b. Being crucified with Christ?

- c. Being united with Christ in His death?
 - c. Dead to sin?
 - 2. Paul makes it very clear: **when we are baptized!**
 - a. Writing to Christians who had died to sin - **Ro 6:1-2**
 - b. Reminding them concerning their baptism into Christ...
 - 1) They were baptized into His death - **Ro 6:3**
 - 2) They were buried with Him through baptism into death - **Ro 6:4**
 - 3) Their old man was crucified with Him - **Ro 6:6**
 - 4) Their death freed them from sin, enabling them to live with Christ - **Ro 6:7-8**
 - 5) They should therefore consider themselves dead to sin - **Ro 6:11**
- **If we have not yet been baptized into Christ, then we have not yet died to sin!**

B. ARE YOU LIVING FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS...?

- 1. That is why you died to sin - cf. **1 Pe 2:24**
 - a. That you might be alive to God - **Ro 6:11**
 - b. That you might not let sin reign anymore - **Ro 6:12**
 - c. That you might present your members as instruments of righteousness - **Ro 6:13**
 - d. That you might become slaves of righteousness - **Ro 6:16-18**
 - 2. Having died to sin, we are to mortify (kill) the flesh
 - a. Aided by the Spirit of God - **Ro 8:13**; cf. **Ep 3:16**
 - b. Seeking to bring the flesh under subjection - **1 Co 9:27**
 - c. Abstaining from fleshly lusts - **1 Pe 2:11**
 - d. Putting to death (i.e., putting off) the sinful deeds of the flesh - **Co 3:5-9**
 - 3. Having died to sin, we are to live for righteousness
 - a. Putting on the new man, renewed in the image of Christ - **Co 3:10-14**; **Ep 4:22-32**
 - b. Growing in the true knowledge of Christ - cf. **2 Pe 1:5-9**
 - 4. How serious are we in this effort? As evidenced by:
 - a. Our willingness to learn and grow in the knowledge of Christ? - **2 Pe 3:18**
 - b. Our efforts to put off sin and put on Christ in our lives? - **Ro 13:13-14**
- **If we are not diligent in putting off sin and putting on Christ, then His death for us was in vain!**

CONCLUSION

- 1. When we consider the death of Jesus on the cross...
 - a. We should not just think of His death as an atonement for our sins
 - b. But also providing the means whereby we might die to sin and live for righteousness
- 2. The grace of God in Jesus is not complete until we are living as we should...
 - a. Denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, living soberly, righteously, and godly - **Ti 2:11-12**
 - b. Redeemed from every lawless deed, purified and zealous for good works - **Ti 2:13-14**

Those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh (**Ga 5:24**; cf. **Ro 6:6**). Are you Christ's...?

Why Did Jesus Suffer?

INTRODUCTION

1. The gospel message is that Jesus died and shed his blood for our sins...
 - a. According to the Jewish Scriptures - **1 Co 15:3; Isa 53:4-6**
 - b. Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins - **He 9:22; Ep 1:7**
2. Yet it is not unusual to wonder: why couldn't Jesus have simply died a quick death...?
 - a. Animal sacrifices were killed with a quick slice of the knife
 - b. Why did Jesus have to endure the scourging, mocking, and crucifixion?

[Why, then, did Jesus suffer? Before we consider the Biblical response to our question, let's first note that His suffering actually included much more than commonly thought...]

I. THE THINGS THAT HE SUFFERED

A. BEFORE HIS PASSION...

1. For thirty-three years He suffered **temptation**, the daily struggles against sin we endure - **He 4:15; 2:18**
 2. He experienced **rejection** by His own hometown - **Lk 4:16,28-30**
 3. There were **blasphemous accusations** when He was doing good - **Lk 11:14-15**
 4. There was **derision** by the Pharisees - **Lk 16:14**
 5. There were **deceitful questions** seeking to ensnare Him - **Lk 20:20**
 6. There was **defection** by many disciples - **Jn 6:60-61,66**
 7. He endured **ridicule** by members of his own family - **Jn 7:3-5**
 8. He had to put up with **ignorance** among the multitudes - **Jn 7:40-43**
 9. There was the **anticipation** that likely produced anxiety
 - a. He knew what was coming, told His disciples on three occasions - e.g., **Lk 18:31-33**
 - b. The disciples' lack of comprehension prevented them from being any source of comfort - **Lk 18:34**
 10. At the Passover meal
 - a. There were **petty quarrels** among His disciples - **Lk 22:24**
 - b. There were announcements of **betrayal, abandonment, denial** - **Mt 26:21,31,34**
- **The indignity of such things was magnified by knowing who He was, yet He humbly "made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant" - Ph 2:7**

B. DURING HIS PASSION...

1. In the Garden of Gethsemane
 - a. There was the **great agony** as He prayed - **Lk 22:44**
 - b. There was His **disciples' laziness** who could not watch with Him - **Mk 14:37-41**
 - c. There followed the **betrayal** with a kiss by Judas - **Mk 14:43-46**
 - d. Then He was **forsaken** by all His disciples - **Mk 14:50**
 - e. He was **arrested and bound** - **Jn 18:13**
2. Before Annas, father-in-law to Caiaphas the high priest
 - a. Here Jesus was **denied** by Peter - **Jn 18:17,25-27**
 - b. Jesus was **struck** with a blow - **Jn 18:22**
 - c. He was sent away **bound** - **Jn 18:24**

3. Before Caiaphas, in an illegal night assembly of the council
 - a. Jesus was **falsely accused** - **Mt 26:59-61**
 - b. The physical abuse intensified - **Mt 26:67-68; Mk 14:65**
 - 1) They **spit** on His face
 - 2) He was **blindfolded**
 - 3) Some of the council **beat** Him
 - 4) The officers **struck** Him with their palms
 - 5) They **mocked** Him to prophesy who struck Him
 - c. With many words they **blasphemed** Him - **Lk 22:65**
4. Before the council, in the morning
 - a. After consulting, they **bound** Jesus - **Mk 15:1**
 - b. He was **led away**, delivered to Pilate - **Mk 15:1**
5. Before Pilate the Roman governor
 - a. **Unaccompanied** by His accusers who wouldn't enter the Praetorium - **Jn 18:28-29**
 - b. **False charges** were made against Him - **Lk 23:2**
6. Before Herod the puppet king
 - a. The chief priests and scribes **vehemently accused** Him - **Lk 23:10**
 - b. Abused by Herod with his men of war
 - 1) Treated with **contempt** and **mocked** - **Lk 23:11**
 - 2) Arrayed in a gorgeous robe and sent back to Pilate - **Lk 23:11**
7. Before Pilate the second time
 - a. Barabbas, a murderer, robber, and rebel is released in His stead - **Lk 23:13-25**
 - b. Demanded that He be crucified, Jesus is delivered to be **scourged** - **Mk 15:15**
8. Abused by the Roman soldiers
 - a. **Surrounded** by the whole garrison - **Mk 15:16**
 - b. They **stripped** Him and put on a scarlet robe - **Mt 27:28**
 - c. They put on a **crown of thorns** on his head, a reed in His right hand - **Mt 27:29**
 - d. They bow the knee and **mock** Him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" - **Mt 27:29**
 - e. They **spat** on Him, **struck** Him on the head with the reed - **Mt 27:30**
 - f. They **mocked** Him further, then **stripped** Him of the robe and put His own clothes back on Him - **Mt 27:31**
 - g. They **led** Him away to be crucified - **Mt 27:31**
9. The journey to Golgotha
 - a. At first, He **bore** His own cross - **Jn 19:17**
 - b. A great crowd followed, including women who mourned and lamented Him; yet He **mourned** for them - **Lk 23:27-31**
10. At the crucifixion
 - a. He **refused** sour wine mixed with gall (an anesthetic) - **Mt 27:33-34**
 - b. They **crucified** Him, as He cried out for God to forgive them - **Lk 23:33-34**
 - c. The soldiers **divided** His garments, casting lots for them - **Lk 23:34**
 - d. People stood looking on, some **blasphemed** - **Mk 15:29-30**
 - e. The chief priests with the scribes **mocked** and **sneered** - **Mk 15:31-32; Lk 23:35**
 - f. The soldiers **mocked** - **Lk 23:36-37**
 - g. The two thieves **reviled** Him, one persisted in **blasphemy** - **Mk 15:32; Lk 23:39**
 - h. For **six hours** He hung on the cross - **Mk 15:25,33**
 - i. Finally He cried "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?" - **Mk 15:34**
 - 1) Perhaps indicating the burden of bearing the sins of the world - cf. **2 Co 5:21**
 - 2) Perhaps indicating the greatest suffering He endured was the **spiritual agony**
 - j. Then He died, possibly of a ruptured heart - **Lk 23:46; cf. Jn 19:34**

- **As prophesied, Jesus was stricken, smitten, afflicted, wounded, bruised, chastised, endured stripes, oppressed, led to the slaughter, cut off from the land of the living - cf. Isa 53:4-8**

[Again we ask “Why?” Why did it please the Lord to bruise Him, to put Jesus to grief (**Isa 53:10**)? Why could His death for our sins have not been more merciful? Why did Jesus suffer...?]

II. THE REASONS THAT HE SUFFERED

A. TO BRING US TO GOD...

1. Thus Peter explained in his epistle - **1 Pe 3:18**
 2. The suffering reveals **the terribleness of sin**
 - a. The universality of sin - **Ro 3:23**
 - b. The consequence of sin - **Ro 6:23**
 3. The suffering reveals **the greatness of God’s love**
 - a. The love of the Father - **Jn 3:16; Ro 5:8**
 - b. The love of the Son - **Jn 15:13; 1 Jn 3:16**
 4. God seeks to reconcile us back to Him - **Isa 53:6; 2 Co 5:18-21; Ro 2:4**
 5. Motivated by love, God sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins - **1 Jn 4:9-10**
- **His suffering should move us to repent and respond to God’s love!**

B. TO BE OUR HIGH PRIEST...

1. A good high priest must be compassionate - **He 5:1-2**
 2. His suffering prepared Jesus to be the perfect high priest - **He 2:10**
 - a. To aid those who are tempted - **He 2:17-18**
 - b. To sympathize with our weaknesses - **He 4:14-16**
 - c. To appreciate the challenge of obedience in the flesh - **He 5:7-9**
 3. Thus He lives ever ready to intercede for us - **He 7:25**
 - a. To provide mercy and grace in time of need - **Ro 8:34**
 - b. To provide strength to conquer in time of trial - **Ro 8:35-39**
- **His suffering makes Jesus the perfect high priest and intercessor on our behalf**

C. TO BE OUR EXAMPLE...

1. Of suffering for the sake of righteousness - **1 Pe 2:20-24**
 - a. When we are mistreated for doing good
 - b. How we should trust in God to judge rightly
 2. Of persevering in our battle against sin - **1 Pe 4:1-4; He 12:2-4**
 - a. As we seek to live for the will of God, not the lusts of the flesh
 - b. As we endure the ridicule of those in the world
 3. Of loving one another, and loving our enemies - **Jn 13:34-35; Ep 5:1-2; Mt 5:44-45**
 - a. Loving one another as He loved us
 - b. Blessing those who curse us, doing good to those who hate us, praying for those who persecute us
- **His suffering illustrates how far we must go for the sake of love and righteousness**

CONCLUSION

1. Perhaps we can now appreciate more fully why our Savior suffered...
 - a. To bring us sinners to God

- b. To be our perfect High Priest
 - c. To be our example and role model
 - **Will we let Jesus be our Savior, our Confidant, our Mentor?**
2. May the suffering of Jesus serve as inspiration for those...
- a. Who have yet to obey the gospel - cf. **Ac 2:36-38; 22:16**
 - b. Who have obeyed the gospel, but have fallen back into sin - **Ac 8:22; 1 Jn 1:9; 2:1**
 - c. Who desire to live for Christ in an unfriendly world - **1 Pe 4:12-16**

For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: - 1 Pe 2:21

Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator. - 1 Pe 4:19

A Woman's Contribution To The Local Congregation

INTRODUCTION

1. Attention is often given to the limitations placed on women in the assemblies of the church...
 - a. Because of what is said in **1 Co 14:34-37**
 - b. Because of what is written in **1 Ti 2:11-12**
 - **Such limitations notwithstanding, the early church benefited greatly by the contributions of many women**

2. In just the church at Rome, we read of...
 - a. The service of **Phoebe**, a helper of Paul and many others - **Ro 16:1-2**
 - b. The help of **Priscilla**, even risking her life for Paul - **Ro 16:3-4**
 - c. One named **Mary**, who bestowed "much labor" - **Ro 16:6**
 - d. Twin sisters, **Tryphena and Tryphosa** - **Ro 16:12**
 - e. The beloved **Persis** - **Ro 16:12**
 - **Even today, the growth of many churches is the result of "much labor" by women**

3. How can that be, if women are limited in what they can do in the public assemblies...?
 - a. Public assemblies are actually a small part of the overall work of a congregation
 - b. There is much work outside the assembly that must be done, if a church is to grow
 - **Women are often in a position to provide much of this needed work!**

[What can a woman do? How can she contribute to the growth and success of a local church? Let's answer such questions as we review the work of a local church...]

I. A WOMAN'S CONTRIBUTION IN BENEVOLENCE

A. BENEVOLENCE IS AN IMPORTANT WORK...

1. It is a mark of pure and undefiled religion - **Ja 1:27**
2. Ministering to brethren who are sick, poor, imprisoned, etc., is a service rendered to the Lord Himself - **Mt 25:34-40**
- **All Christians, men no less than women, are to be involved in this work - Ja 2:14-16; 1 Jn 3:17**

B. WOMEN ARE WELL-SUITED FOR BENEVOLENCE...

1. They bring a grace and a beauty that men are normally not capable of
 - a. The unique attributes of femininity lend themselves well to this work
 - b. E.g., mercy and compassion are almost second-nature to women
 - c. And mercy is one of the gifts the Lord has given to His church - **Ro 12:6-8**
2. They often possess skills through which benevolence can be rendered
 - a. E.g., making clothes, as **Dorcas** did for needy widows - **Ac 9:36-39**
 - b. E.g., cooking, baby-sitting, ministering to the sick, extending hospitality, etc.
 - **Indeed, women who might later be "taken into the number" were to be known or "well-reported" for the good works she had done in this area - 1 Ti 5:9-10**

[Any work that a woman does in the area of **benevolence** is a powerful contribution to the work and reputation of a local church! Now let's consider...]

II. A WOMAN'S CONTRIBUTION IN EDIFICATION

A. EDIFICATION IS AN ESSENTIAL WORK...

1. It involves building up the body of Christ, through the work of every member - **Ep 4:15-16**
 2. It entails following such instructions like:
 - a. "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" - **Ga 6:2**
 - b. "Comfort each other and edify one another" - **1 Th 5:11**
 - c. "Comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak" - **1 Th 5:14**
- **Some men were known for their work in this area; e.g., Barnabas - Ac 4:36**

B. WOMEN CAN ALSO DO MUCH TO EDIFY THE CHURCH...

1. Through formal teaching of others:
 - a. Grandmothers and mothers can teach children, as **Lois** and **Eunice** did Timothy - **2 Ti 1:5; 3:14-15**
 - b. Older women can and should teach younger women - **Ti 2:3-5**
 - c. Especially where there are people who come into the church without the benefit of godly mothers and grandmothers, in which Christian women can be surrogates
 2. Through informal words of encouragement:
 - a. It has been said that men are natural **producers**, women are natural **nurturers**
 - b. With so many dysfunctional families and emotional problems today, the gift of encouragement and nurturing possessed by many women is essential
 - c. Many teachers and preachers have been helped by godly women encouraging them in their work
- **There is a special need for women to see themselves as teachers of young people and other women, and as encouragers of men in their work of preaching the gospel**

[Where women are involved in the work of **edification**, their contribution to the work of the local church does not go unnoticed. Finally, let's take a look at...]

III. A WOMAN'S CONTRIBUTION IN EVANGELISM

A. EVANGELISM IS AN IMPERATIVE WORK...

1. It is the "Great Commission" given by the Lord to His church - **Mt 28:19-20**
 2. The gospel is God's power to save, so it must be shared with everyone - **Ro 1:16; Mk 16:15-16**
- **This is a work that can be done by everyone - cf. Ac 8:1,4**

B. WOMEN CAN DO MUCH IN THE AREA OF EVANGELISM...

1. They can help support those who preach the gospel
 - a. As did **Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna** - **Lk 8:1-3**
 - b. Providing much needed hospitality, as did **Lydia** - **Ac 16:15**
2. They can tell others about Christ
 - a. Consider the example of **the Samaritan woman**, who was instrumental in converting many people to Christ - **Jn 4:28-31,39-42**
 - b. Then there was **Priscilla**, who with her husband...
 - 1) Provided a place for Paul to stay during his ministry at Corinth - **Ac 18:1-4**

- 2) Converted Apollos at Ephesus - **Ac 18:24-26**
 - 3) Hosted a church at Ephesus in their home - **1 Co 16:19**
 - 4) Hosted a church at Rome in their home - **Ro 16:3-5**
 - c. Even without a word, **godly women** can lead others to Christ, including unbelieving husbands - cf. **1 Pe 3:1-2**
- **Many souls have been saved, and churches started, through the evangelistic efforts of godly women!**

CONCLUSION

1. There is certainly much that a woman can contribute to the work of the local church...
 - a. The very act of praying, which is no small thing
 - b. Beyond that, there is a wide range of activities women can engage in without going beyond the limitations placed on them in the public assemblies
2. The true measure of a local church is not defined only by what occurs in the assembly...
 - a. It includes what the members do day by day, in the home, at work, in the world
 - b. It involves what benevolence, edification, and evangelism takes place on a daily, personal basis
3. When godly women are active in the service of the Lord, using the unique talents and opportunities given to them...
 - a. Souls are saved, they are strengthened in the Lord, and cared for in times of need
 - b. The Lord's church is made stronger, and the kingdom of God is expanded in the world

May there always be a surplus of women in the Lord's church like Mary Magdalene, Dorcas, Lydia, Priscilla, Lois, Eunice, and of course, Phoebe...

"I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also. (Ro 16:1-2)

Would We Have Believed Them?

INTRODUCTION

1. I have often wondered...
 - a. How many of us living today, had we been living in the first century...
 - b. Would have been receptive to the preaching of those like:
 - 1) John the Baptist?
 - 2) Peter?
 - 3) Paul?
2. Most of us would probably say, "Of course, for we receive them now!"
 - a. But perhaps that is because what they taught has become socially acceptable
 - b. And more often than not, their teaching is presented to us in a non-offensive manner
3. But how was the truth originally presented?
 - a. By what manner of men?
 - b. If we had been there, would we have believed them?

[In this lesson I want to challenge our thinking along these lines. Imagine, therefore, would we have believed men like...]

I. THE HARSH HERMIT?

A. JOHN THE BAPTIST, WHO...

1. Did his preaching in the wilderness, forcing people to come out to hear him? - **Mt 3:1-2**
2. Dressed himself in camel's hair and a leather girdle, eating a diet of locusts and wild honey? - **Mt 3:4**
3. Called religious people coming to be baptized a "brood of vipers"? - **Mt 3:5-7**

B. I SERIOUSLY DOUBT WE WOULD, IF...

1. We balk at having to travel some distance to study God's Word!
 - a. As is sometimes the case today (e.g., going twice on Sundays, etc.)
 - b. But consider what Jesus taught in **Mt 12:42**
2. We tend to judge people by the clothes they wear!
 - a. It is easy to be affected by the "Dress For Success" philosophy
 - b. But we need to remember God's perspective - **1 Sam 16:7; Ja 2:1-4**
3. We get upset or offended when a preacher points out our faults!
 - a. Some would have preachers never preach "negative" sermons
 - b. But even Jesus demonstrated that sometimes the occasion calls for strong measures - **Mt 23:13-15**

[Would we have believed **the harsh hermit**? Not if we won't go far to hear the gospel preached, or prejudge the preacher by his appearance, or get upset if he steps on our toes! Or how about the...]

II. THE HILLBILLY HYPOCRITE?

A. THE APOSTLE PETER, A MAN...

1. Whose “country ways” demonstrated his lack of formal religious training? - **Ac 4:13**
2. Who denied Jesus three times? - **Mt 26:69-75**
3. Whose hypocrisy on one occasion split a church? - **Ga 2:11-13**

B. IT IS UNLIKELY WE WOULD, IF...

1. We expect a man to be formerly educated before we would want him as a preacher!
 - a. In some churches, a preacher is required to have a degree to be considered acceptable
 - b. But the wrong kind of learning can be a dangerous thing - cf. **1 Co 1:18-29**
2. We aren't willing to give others another chance who fail us, especially more than once!
 - a. If Peter had been treated like we sometimes treat fallen preachers today, would he have remained an apostle?
 - b. Fortunately, the early church took to heart what Jesus taught Peter about forgiveness - **Mt 18:21-22; Lk 17:3-4**

[Would we have believed **the hillbilly hypocrite**? If we demand that our preachers be formally educated and never make mistakes, then we would have rejected Peter outright! Finally, what about...]

III. THE NOTORIOUS NERD?

A. THE APOSTLE PAUL, WHO...

1. Had been a blasphemer, persecutor of the church? - **1 Ti 1:13**
2. Was not a fluent speaker? - **1 Co 2:3-4**
3. Had a physical appearance described as “weak”? - **2 Co 10:10**

B. I DOUBT WE WOULD HAVE KINDLY RECEIVED HIM, IF...

1. We hold a person's pre-Christian life against them!
 - a. Such people must not believe in the power of the gospel to transform lives
 - b. But consider what it did for the people of Corinth - **1 Co 6:9-11**
2. We don't care to hear preachers whose sermon presentation lacks polish!
 - a. Many people will not go to hear preachers who may be young, inexperienced, or who are not eloquent
 - b. Yet “smooth words and flattering speech” can often be used to deceive - **Ro 16:17-18**
3. We tend to judge people by their physical appearance (size, weight, etc.)!
 - a. So people first judged Abraham Lincoln
 - b. Again, we need to remember God's perspective on things - **1 Sam 16:7**

CONCLUSION

1. How we receive people today is a strong indication as to whether we would have received such as John, Peter, Paul and even Jesus! - cf. **Mt 13:54-58**
2. While we would like to think we would have been quick to listen and believe their message, perhaps we might have acted differently!
3. I trust we appreciate the importance of looking beyond the messenger and how his message might be presented, to the message itself
4. But there is another way to determine if we would have believed them back then: **Have we obeyed them today?**

- a. It may be speculation whether would have believed these men back in the first century
- b. But one thing is sure...if we are unwilling to obey them today, we certainly would not have done it then!

Have you obeyed the wonderful message of salvation presented through such “earthen vessels”?

WWJD

What Would Jesus Desire?

INTRODUCTION

1. It is quite common to see young people wearing a bracelet, T-shirt, or other article of clothing with the letters “**WWJD**”
 - a. WWJD stands for “**What Would Jesus Do?**”
 - b. Many young people like wearing something designed to remind them to always ask in any situation, “What Would Jesus Do?”
 - It is commendable that people would ask “What Would Jesus Do?”
2. In this lesson, however, I want to ask “**What Would Jesus Desire?**”
 - a. What would Jesus desire of you today?
 - b. Is there something Jesus would want you to do today?
 - c. Is there something Jesus would want you to be doing everyday?

[From His words in The Great Commission (cf. **Mt 28:19-20**), I believe there are several things we can note that Jesus would desire of every person. As we consider His words, ask yourself whether Jesus would desire it of you. For example, I believe Jesus would desire...]

I. THAT YOU BECOME HIS DISCIPLE

A. HE SAID, “MAKE DISCIPLES...”

1. He wanted His apostles to make disciples - **Mt 28:19**
2. A disciple is a learner, a follower
3. A disciple is one who desires to become like His teacher - **Lk 6:40**

B. WHY DOES JESUS WANT YOU TO BE HIS DISCIPLE...?

1. To learn from Him - **Mt 11:28-30**
 - a. The expression “take my yoke” in NT times meant to become one’s disciple
 - b. I.e., “hitch up” with Jesus and let Him lead you in the direction you should go
2. To offer you rest for your souls - **Mt 11:28-30**
 - a. He knows that you are under the burden of sin
 - 1) The burden of the guilt of sin
 - 2) Both the legal and emotional guilt of sin
 - b. Learn from Him how to become free from the burden of sin
 - 1) For freedom from sin is true freedom - **Jn 8:31-36**
 - 2) Only in Him can we become free from:
 - a) The legal guilt of sin (having transgressed the Law of God)
 - b) The emotional guilt of sin (having transgressed our own consciences)

[Jesus clearly wants you to be His disciple, to learn from Him and to let Him lighten your load; are you His disciple? Jesus also desires...]

II. THAT YOU BE BAPTIZED

A. HE SAID, “BAPTIZING THEM...”

1. He wanted His apostles to baptize people - **Mt 28:19**; cf. **Mk 16:15-16**
2. Which His apostles were quick to do - **Ac 2:38; 8:5,12; 10:48; 16:30-34**

B. WHY DOES JESUS WANT YOU TO BE BAPTIZED...?

1. As commanded by Peter, baptism is...
 - a. For the remission of sins - **Ac 2:38**
 - b. Remember, Jesus wants to free you from the burden of sin!
2. As explained by Paul, in baptism you...
 - a. Are united with Christ in His death and raised with Him to a new life - **Ro 6:3-7**
 - b. Put on Christ - **Ga 3:27**
 - c. Experience God’s work, Who forgives you of sin and raises you with Christ - **Co 2:11-13**

[Jesus therefore desires for you to enter in with this new relationship with Him. Have you been baptized? If so, then Jesus also desires that you...]

III. THAT YOU KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS

A. HE SAID, “TEACHING THEM TO OBSERVE...”

1. Baptism is only the beginning, there are more commands to follow - **Mt 28:20**
2. Doing what He says is what it means to be His disciple - cf. **Jn 8:31**

B. WHAT ARE SOME OF HIS COMMANDMENTS?

1. To love the brethren - **Jn 13:34-35**
 - a. Which is one way we show the world we are truly His disciples
 - b. Which implies the necessity of active involvement in a local congregation
2. To bear fruit - **Jn 15:8**
 - a. Such as saving souls, serving others, growing in grace
 - b. Unless we bear fruit, we will be cut off - **Jn 15:1-2,6**
 - c. Bearing fruit comes only through a personal connection with Jesus - cf. **Jn 15:4-5**

CONCLUSION

1. Our study was not intended to be exhaustive...
 - a. Certainly there is more that Jesus would desire of us
 - b. For He taught many other things
 - 1) Some taught to His apostles while on earth
 - 2) Others taught to His apostles through the Spirit - **Jn 16:12-13**
2. But I wanted to use the current popularity of WWJD to simply remind you...
 - a. Not only to ask “**What Would Jesus Do?**” in a particular situation
 - b. But to ask “**What Would Jesus Desire?**” of you right now!
3. I hope I have encouraged you to reflect on what Jesus would want you to do today:
 - a. If you have not committed to become His disciple...
 - b. If you have not been baptized...
 - c. If you are not observing His commands...

What would Jesus desire for you?