



The
Church
Divine

Louis Rushmore

The
CHURCH
DIVINE

By Louis Rushmore

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Preface

The Church Is Divine is submitted with the hope it will prove suitable for: (1) congregations searching for sound, thorough studies of fundamental Bible topics, (2) the students who study this volume and (3) teachers who are asked to teach it. Additionally, the author earnestly desires that God's people be reinforced in their pursuit of first century Christianity, and neighbors and friends compare their religious experiences to the church of the Bible.

The text, charts and questions are not intended to exclude other Bible passages, the personality and talents of teachers or additional teaching aids. Often contemporary class curriculum is a crutch instead of merely a basis for further study. Teachers should make adequate (and additional) preparation for their classes and present their lessons with the utmost sincerity and enthusiasm.

Whereas the teacher may not wish to emphasize every point or use all the questions with each chapter, he may also desire to take advantage of resources outside *The Church Divine*. For instance, consider the following possibilities and then think of your own.

A child's wooden puzzle is an excellent teaching illustration for any age group, including the adult class. First, let a student put a puzzle together — no problem. Second, ask a student to put a puzzle together with one or more pieces missing; the puzzle is incomplete and therefore unsatisfactory. Next, ask someone to put a puzzle together in which one or more pieces from another puzzle are substituted for the right pieces; again, things do not work out satisfactorily. **Lesson:** The New Testament defines the pieces to the church (as though it is a puzzle). Only the right pieces, all of them and without the introduction of wrong pieces, make the church what it ought to be. Each piece missing or substituted in place of the right piece proves unsatisfactory.

Consider a baby's building blocks. Build a pyramid of blocks. It is no longer a pyramid whether blocks are removed from the top or somewhere else. If lower blocks are removed, the whole thing will fall at once. **Lesson:** If any of the building blocks of which the Lord's church is made is removed, it is not the Lord's church anymore. If foundation blocks are removed, the whole thing will collapse. The New Testament specifies the building blocks for the church of the Bible.

A closed box can also be used effectively as an illustration. Ask students to guess what is in a box. There may be nothing in the box, or there may be something in the box. After all the guessing is done, still no one knows what is really in the box until the box is opened. **Lesson:** One may guess what the church should be or do, but no one really knows anything about the Lord's church until he opens and reads the New Testament.

Finally, films, slides, transparencies and books (some with useful pictures) are among extra resources that can be brought into any classroom, regardless of the subject being studied. For instance, Jule Miller's (Gospel Services) media (formerly filmstrips and VCR tapes) may have one or more frames suitable for a given chapter. The possibilities are limitless, restricted only by the extent of a teacher's imagination. Think about it! Study for it! Pray for it! Do your best!

~ **Louis Rushmore**

Dedication

Ray and Charlotte Weddington are jewels in the treasure chest of life for Bonnie and me. As Ray says, he was aware of us long before we became acquainted with them. Sight unseen, Ray and Charlotte became our encouragers and personally participated with us financially in our labors for the cause of Christ. Further, they led the Pleasant Cove Church of Christ to exhibit no less appreciation for us, which continues to manifest itself variously, including monthly financial support of Bonnie and me, which helps us to take the Gospel to the farthest reaches of planet earth.

Upon each occasion to visit them, brother and sister Weddington extend hospitality toward us worthy of royalty or heads of state. We are perpetually humbled by their insistence that we occupy their master suite while they resign themselves to more modest accommodations in a spare bedroom. Even when we are on our way somewhere else, they invite us to stop in, whereupon they bid us to use their home as though it were our personal bed and breakfast.

No one has been kinder and of more encouragement to Bonnie and me than Ray and Charlotte Weddington, Christians indeed! Thanks hardly seems adequate, and perhaps through this dedication to them, I can magnify our heartfelt, "Thank you."

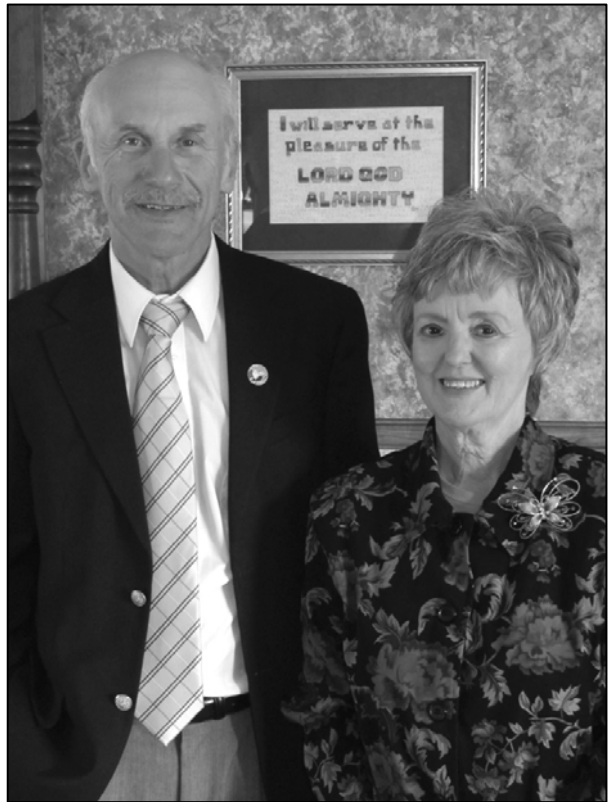


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TAKE YOUR CHOICE FROM GOD'S CHOICES

MY CHURCH—Matt. 16:18

CHURCH OF THE LIVING GOD—1 Tim. 3:15

CHURCHES OF CHRIST—Rom. 16:16

THE CHURCH—Acts 2:47; 8:12

CHURCH OF GOD—1 Cor. 1:2

BODY OF CHRIST—Eph. 4:12

BRIDE OF CHRIST—Eph. 5:21-32; Rev. 22:17

TEMPLE OF GOD—1 Cor. 3:16

KINGDOM OF HIS DEAR SON—Col. 1:13

HOUSE OF GOD—1 Tim. 3:15

Church Name

***Meets
Here***



Chapter 1

The New Testament Church Is Divine in Name

The church for which Jesus died (Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:25), over which He is Head (Eph. 5:23) and about which anyone can read in the Bible, is known by several biblical names. These names are divine in origin and always glorify God or Jesus Christ, with the possible exception of the simple term church (Matt. 16:16; Acts 2:47). Similarly, the New Testament records divinely given names for the members who comprise the church. Once the biblical names of the Lord's church and its members are learned, one can easily ascertain whether the names of contemporary churches and their members are divine or merely human in origin.

Biblical Names for the Church

In the strictest sense, the Lord's church has no *name*! Instead, the biblical names of the Lord's church are only descriptive terms. These terms describe the nature of the church or its relationship to God or Jesus Christ.

Commonly, names identify one *brand* of the same or similar product from another *brand*. If there were only one of something, distinguishing names would not be necessary; the item would be just called what it is or by its association with its maker.

Before the rise of the Catholic Church and denominationalism, biblically descriptive terms identified the one church without confusion. All these terms simply describe the church or its relationship with its Maker. However, now *denominational brand names* are used by the thousands to distinguish between the denominations and unintentionally also from the church of the Bible.

Hence, biblical names for the Lord's church are not *brand names*, whereas the many denominational names are *brand names*. The Lord died for and established only *one* (His) church (Matt. 16:18). Denominational names identify one *brand* of church from another and one *brand* of religion from another, instead of identifying the *one true church of the Bible* and simple New Testament Christianity.

The descriptive terms by which the Lord's church is biblically known include these: "my church" (Matt. 16:18), "the church" (Acts 2:47; 8:1), "church of God" (1 Cor. 1:2), "churches of Christ" (Rom. 16:16), "body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12), "church of the living God" (1 Tim. 3:15), "temple of God" (1 Cor. 3:16), bride of Christ (Eph. 5:21-32; Rev. 22:17), "kingdom of his dear Son" (Col. 1:13) and "house of God" (1 Tim. 3:15). Though wearing a divine name is a crucial identifying mark of that one true divine church of the Bible, wearing a divinely authorized name alone is not the only characteristic of the Lord's church.

Biblical Names for Members of the Church

Both testaments apply various descriptive names to God’s people. Many of the terms used in the Old Testament are also used in the New Testament. There is, though, a singularly different and new name given to the people of God in the New Testament.

Terms used in the Old Testament and applied to God’s people in the New Testament as well include: “members” (1 Cor. 12:27), “disciples” (Acts 6:1; 20:7), “believers” (Acts 5:14), “saints” (Acts 9:13; 1 Cor. 1:2), “brethren” (Rom. 8:14) and “children of God” (1 John 3:1-2). Add also these terms: “beloved of God” (Rom. 1:7), “heirs of God” (Rom. 8:17) and “royal priesthood” (1 Pet. 2:9).

There is yet another New Testament name for God’s people that was the subject of prophecy long before its application. Isaiah taught that once the Gentiles gained admittance into the kingdom (the church) and its blessings, all of God’s people would “be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name” (Isa. 62:1-2; 56:5). After the admission of Cornelius and his household, the new name *Christian* was given to God’s people (Acts 11:26). Used twice more in the New Testament (Acts 26:28; 1 Pet. 4:16), the term *Christian* uniquely describes one’s relationship to his Redeemer and serves as a perpetual reminder of Christ.

Conclusion

Every accountable soul should strive to be a **Christian only**, with the full knowledge that only Christians comprise the Lord’s divine church. Denominational names are human in origin and clutter the divine term Christian. There are no *brand name* Christians; **one is either a Christian only, or he is not a faithful Christian!**

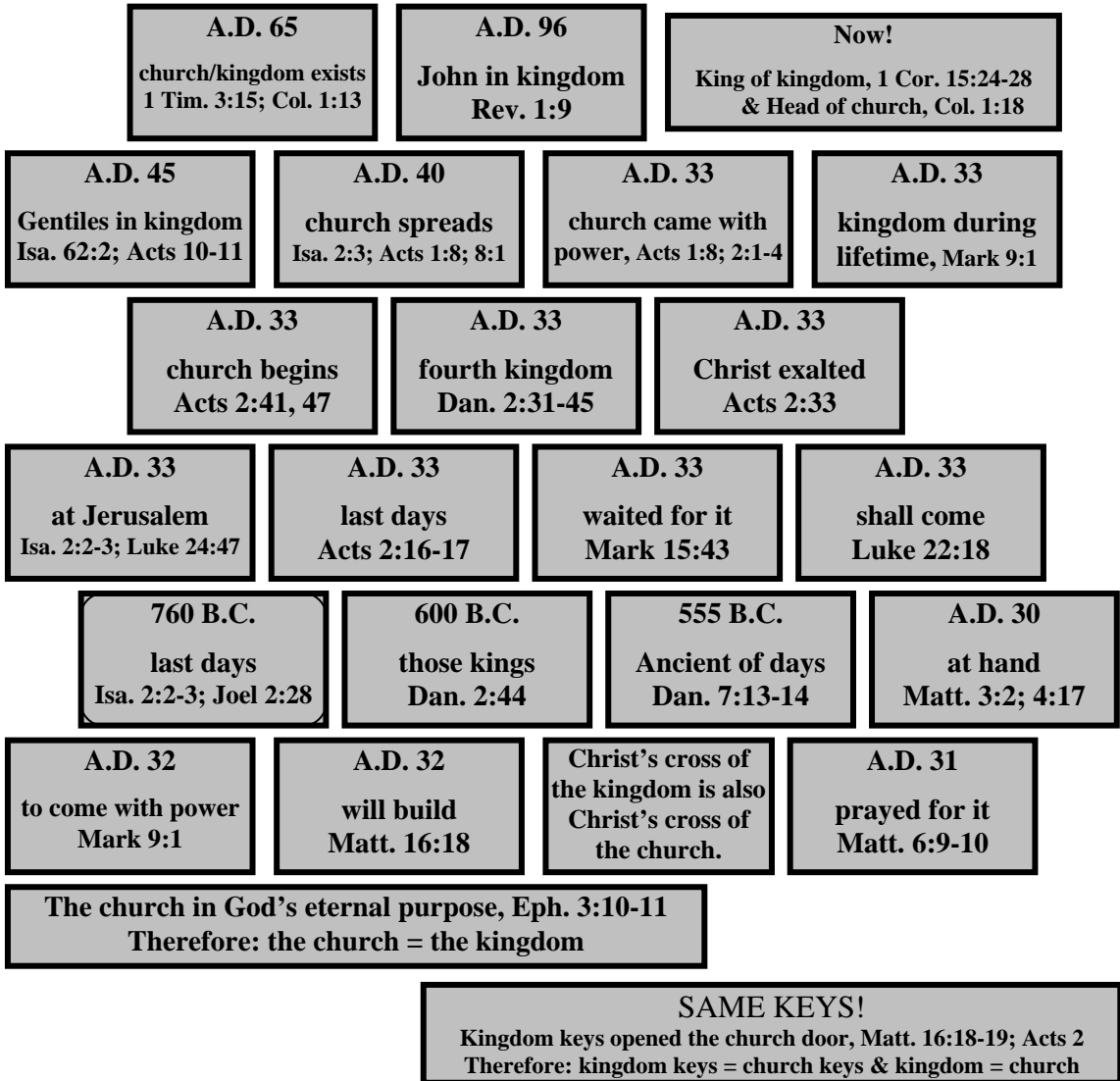
Thought Questions

1. What do the several biblical names for the Lord’s church, with the possible exception of the simple term “*church*,” have in common? How do these biblical names differ from many church names of human origin?
2. What is meant by the statement: In the strictest sense the church has no name? What is the function of the different scriptural, so-called names of the church?
3. Is it possible for a religious group to wear a biblical name and still not be the Lord’s church? Is it possible for a religious group to be the Lord’s church and not wear a biblical name?
4. Of the many names by which the children of God were known in both testaments, what is the new name given to God’s people in fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy? Of what value are denominational names when compared to the new name?
5. How might brand names compare to common religious names today versus divine names for God’s children? Does God really have brand name Christians today? Are there really, so to speak, brand names of the one true church that Jesus built?

More Questions

1. Bible names for the Lord's church are _____ in origin and always glorify _____ or _____, with the possible exception of the simple term _____.
2. The various names applied to the church are really only _____ terms.
3. The Lord died for and established only _____.
4. List the descriptive terms by which the Lord's church is known in Scripture.
5. List some of the names for God's people.
6. After the admission of Cornelius and his household, the new name _____ was given to God's people.
7. The prophet _____ foretold of a new name for God's people once the Gentiles (the nations) were admitted to God's kingdom.
8. This new name appears _____ times in the New Testament.
9. Every _____ soul should strive to be a _____.
10. Denominational names are _____ in origin.

SAME BUILDING BLOCKS: THEREFORE CHURCH & KINGDOM THE SAME



CHAPTER 2

The New Testament Church Is Divine in Origin

The one church over which Jesus alone is Head and that bears divinely given names (see *Chapter 1*) is also *divine in its origin*. Two factors primarily attest to the divine origin of the church, namely: (1) The first conception of the church is attributed by Scripture to the mind of God before creation, and (2) The divine hand mandated and established the church by the power and the authority of heaven. Especially after a careful examination of these points below, the earnest student should experience little difficulty identifying the church of the Bible, in spite of abundant denominational confusion in the religious world.

Origin in Mind of God

Many people mistakenly believe that the church was an afterthought of God, devised somewhat reactionary to the Jews' rejection of Christ as their Messiah. Not aware that the words *church* and *kingdom* are interchangeable terms (Matt. 16:16-19), they also view the church as a substitution for the kingdom. This scenario would defraud God and Christ of both their omniscience and omnipotence.

The apostle Paul explained to the Ephesians the unfolding of God's plan for man's redemption through the church (Eph. 3:3-12). In verses three through five, he noted that God's plan had formerly been a "*mystery*." "...by revelation he made known unto me the mystery...Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit." This mystery provided for the inclusion of the Gentiles: "That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel" (verse 6). Though unnoticed by the Jews and men in general, several prophecies acknowledge that both Jews and Gentiles together were always intended to be the beneficiaries of God's plan (Gen. 12:3; 22:18; Isa. 62:2; Joel 3:1-2; Luke 2:25-32).

The explanation and declaration of God's plan, first called a *mystery*, here said to be the *Gospel*, is charged to the church. Furthermore, the church is attributed to the *eternal purpose* or mind of God.

And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Eph. 3:9-11)

Titus 1:1-3 and 1 Peter 1:18-20 each also address God’s eternal plan for the redemption of man, which was clearly proclaimed only after the establishment of the church.

The church was God’s idea, not man’s idea. God planned to build the church from before the creation of the world and man himself. God determined Christ should be the Head and Savior of the church (Eph. 5:23). It was always God’s plan to redeem fallen man through the church. Hence, the saved are added to the church by the Lord (Acts 2:47); the Lord’s church is, therefore, the body of the saved.

Established by God

Not only did God establish the church in His mind from the dawning of eternity, but He chose a time suitable to Himself to establish that divine institution on earth. Fundamental to comprehending the transfer of the church from the mind of God to its establishment on earth, are: (1) The **church** and **kingdom** are synonymous terms for the same divine institution, (2) Therefore, all prophecies about the establishment of the kingdom equally pertain to the church, and (3) The kingdom (church) of prophecy is spiritual, not material in nature.

The suggestion that the words **church** and **kingdom** refer to the same institution appears absurd to many sincere religious people. A careful review of the pertinent passages, though, will reveal this is, however, biblical fact. Observed already, **kingdom** and **church** are used interchangeably in the same conversation of the Lord (Matt. 16:18-19). That text portrays Jesus promising “the keys of the kingdom” to Peter, which **keys** (authority to bind and loose, Matt. 16:19) he used in the first recorded Gospel sermon (Acts 2). Acts Two chronicles the birthday of the church; from that point forward all reference to the church is as a present entity, not yet future. Since Peter used the keys of the kingdom essentially to unlock the church, the church and the kingdom are the same institution.

Additionally, the apostles made no distinction between the church and the kingdom. Paul called Christians in Corinth “saints,” comprising “the church of God” (1 Cor. 1:2), whereas he addressed Christians in Colosse as “saints,” members of “the kingdom” (Colossians 1:2, 13). The apostle John also matter-of-factly stated he was a member of the kingdom (Rev. 1:9). All these were unquestionably members of the New Testament church, yet they were members of the kingdom, too. They were members of “**one body**” (Eph. 4:4), variously called “the church” (Eph. 1:22, 23), “the temple of God” (1 Cor. 3:16), “the house of God” (1 Tim. 3:15) and “the kingdom” (Col. 1:13). Each different designation merely employs another descriptive term for the same divine institution.

Since the kingdom and the church are biblically interchangeable terms, every prophecy that foretells the establishment of the kingdom refers also to the church. The establishment of the church or kingdom in complete fulfillment of numerous prophecies is remarkable testimony of the establishment of the church by God. Churches since Acts Two that were begun by men were not established according to prophecies about the church. God caused the **first church** to be built and established the **only church** corresponding to age-old prophecies.

Isaiah 2:1-5; Joel 2:28-3:2 and Micah 4:1-3 identify the city of Jerusalem as the place of the establishment of the kingdom or “house of the Lord.” Daniel 2:31-45 teaches the

Lord's kingdom was to be established during the days of the fourth world kingdom from and including the Babylonian kingdom. Universally, religious people note the Roman Empire was that fourth earthly kingdom. The establishment of the church in Jerusalem in about 33 A.D. corresponds to the time and place prophesied for the establishment of the kingdom of prophecy. Further, during His earthly ministry, Jesus told some they would not die before the establishment of the kingdom (Mark 9:1). This statement of the Lord corresponds to both the prophecies and the commencement of the church.

Unlike humanly devised churches, the church of the Bible has Christ alone as its Builder (Acts 20:28). Prophecy spoke of a *stone* cut from a mountain without the hands of men (Dan. 2:45), which stone is the "**rock**" (confession that Christ is the Son of God) of Matthew 16:16-18 on which Jesus promised to build His church, and the *foundation* of the church which is Christ (1 Cor. 3:11). Jesus, "**a living stone**, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God..." is "chief corner stone" (1 Pet. 2:4-8; Acts 4:11), making Jesus also Head of the church, Head of the body and King of the kingdom (1 Cor. 15:24-28).

To the surprise of the Jews, and to the amazement of countless souls today as well, Jesus Christ did not come to establish an *earthly* or material kingdom (John 18:36-37). Had Jesus intended to establish an earthly kingdom in Jerusalem, Pilate as Caesar's governor could not have openly declared of Jesus, "I find in him no fault at all" (John 18:38). Jesus botched one invitation to become an earthly king, were that His desire, when He evaded those who wanted to take Him by force and make Him king (John 6:15). Still a better opportunity to become an earthly king, which offer Jesus also declined, was when the devil offered all the kingdoms of the world to Him in exchange for adoration and homage (Matt. 4:8-10). (This would have been no temptation were the devil unable to fulfill his promise because Christ could know through His omniscience if the devil were lying. Nothing in the context indicates Jesus discounted the devil's claim, and the devil does rule in the kingdoms of men as the prince of darkness in this world, Eph. 6:12; John 12:30; 14:30.)

Even the apostles were confused about the nature of the Lord's kingdom before their baptism with the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:1-4. Their misgivings about the Lord's kingdom are apparent before the death of Christ (Matt. 24:1-3) and immediately preceding the Ascension of the Lord (Acts 1:6-9). Many of the Lord's disciples deserted Him when He taught them of the spiritual nature of the kingdom, but the apostles remained with the Lord (John 6:22-69).

The comparison of Zechariah 6:13 and Hebrews 7:14; 8:1-4 conclusively proves that Jesus Christ is not now ruling on earth, nor shall He ever rule on earth, enthroned in Jerusalem. Zechariah said Christ "shall rule upon his throne; and shall be a priest upon his throne." However, the writer of Hebrews says of the Lord, "For if he were on earth, he should not be a priest, seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law" (Heb. 8:4). The closest to the surface of this sphere any Scripture ever places the Lord in the future is in the air and the clouds (Acts 1:9-11; 1 Thess. 4:16, 17; Rev. 1:7).

Conclusion

Churches of human origin were begun by mere mortals instead of by the Holy Son of God Himself. They were begun after the establishment of the Lord's church, outside the era and influence of the Roman Empire, and in the wrong cities. Human churches are out of harmony with prophecies about the establishment of the Lord's church. At best, churches of man's devising can only sadly mimic the one true church, the one of the New Testament. The seed for harvesting a bumper crop of Christians and churches of Christ (Rom. 16:16) is the unadulterated Word of God (Luke 8:11). When something else is planted in the hearts of men or that heavenly seed is planted with an admixture of something else, a much different crop results. Speaking of these different crops, not the result of the Word of God, Jesus said, "...Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up."

Thought Questions

1. What relationship do saved souls maintain to the church (Acts 2:47)? Can anyone be saved apart from the church?
2. What were the keys of the kingdom? To whom were they given, and what did this person do with them? To what necessary conclusions must one arrive?
3. The New Testament prophecy by Jesus Christ in Matthew 16:18 predates the establishment of the church. What Old Testament prophecies foretell the establishment of the church?
4. To whom does the Bible attribute the origin of the church? From what sources have the several churches in the religious community come? What relationship do (1) Jerusalem, and (2) the period of the Roman Empire, sustain to the Lord's church? What relationship do the same references sustain to denominations?
5. Why did the Jews reject Jesus Christ? What kind of kingdom were the Jews expecting? What kind of kingdom do people today, mistakenly waiting for the establishment of the kingdom, expect Jesus to build? What did Jesus say to Pilate about His kingdom? What did Pilate say that indicates the type of kingdom over which Jesus would be king?

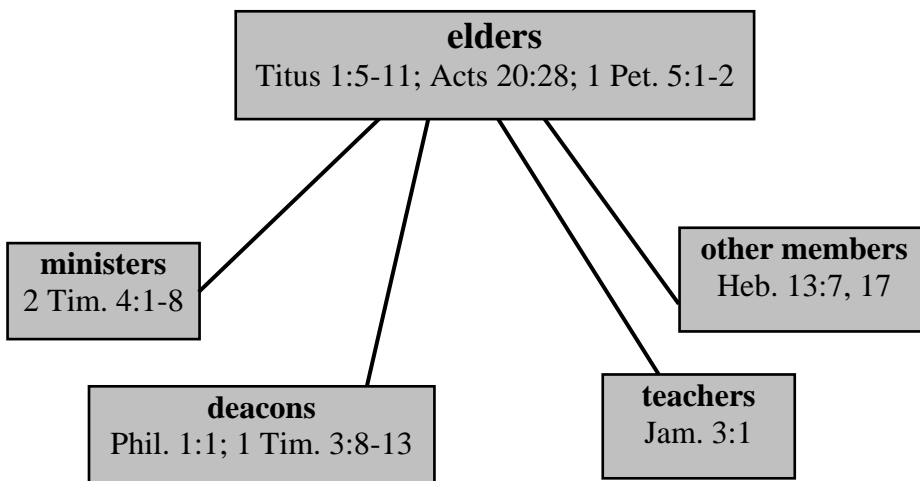
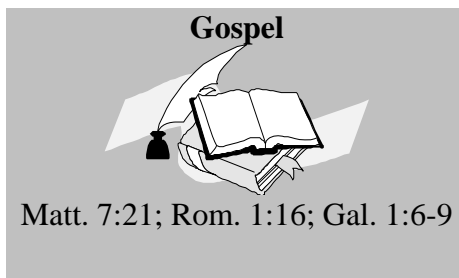
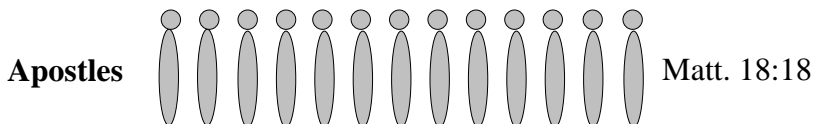
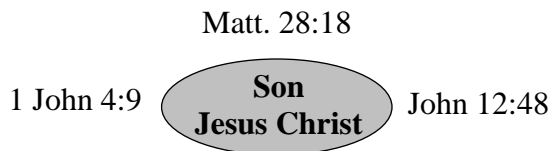
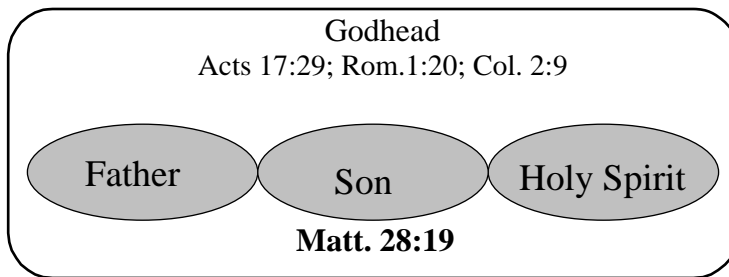
More Questions

1. The first _____ of the church is attributed by _____ to the _____ before creation.
2. The earnest _____ should experience little difficulty identifying the _____ of the Bible, in spite of much _____ confusion.
3. Many people mistakenly believe that the church was an _____ of God.
4. The words _____ and _____ are interchangeable terms.

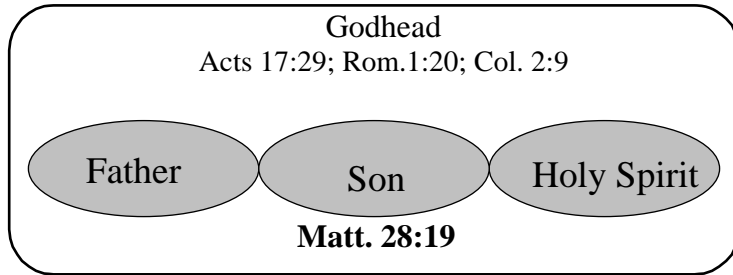
Chapter 2 – The Church Is Divine in Origin

5. The church was _____ idea, not _____ idea.
6. It was always God's plan to _____ fallen man through the _____.
7. _____ chronicles the birthday of the _____.
8. God caused the _____ to be built and established the _____
_____ corresponding to age old prophecies.
9. Jesus Christ did not come to establish an _____ kingdom.
10. The closest to the surface of this sphere any Scripture ever places the Lord in the
future is in the _____ and the _____.

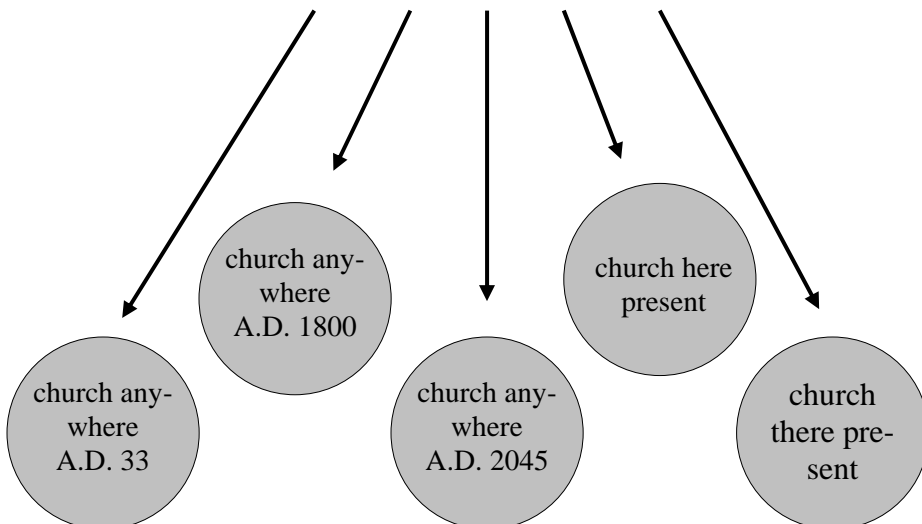
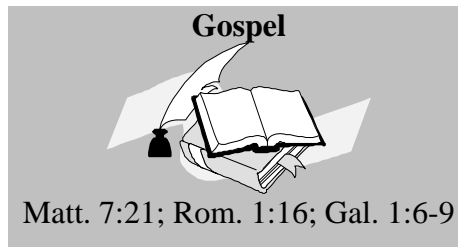
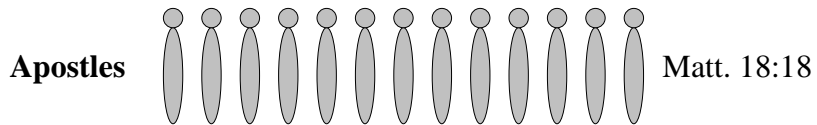
CONGREGATION ORGANIZATIONAL AUTHORITY CHART



UNIVERSAL CHURCH ORGANIZATIONAL AUTHORITY CHART



Matt. 28:18



CHAPTER 3

The New Testament Church Is Divine in Organization

Unlike many contemporary churches, the New Testament church has no chain of command through which newly formed dogma filters down to the masses. It has neither clergy, earthly headquarters nor human creed. Each congregation is autonomous and independent from every other congregation. The New Testament church is governed in matters of doctrine solely by God's Word, overseen by elders, served by deacons, taught by preachers and teachers, and supported morally and financially by all its members.

Heavenly Headquarters

Instead of an earthly head or a select group heading the church, the Lord's church is headed by Jesus Christ alone. Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28:18, ASV). Further, the Lord is the Head of the body, the church (Eph. 1:22, 23). Jesus Christ has not surrendered His throne, but is ruling now (1 Cor. 15:24-28). Not on earth, but from a heavenly headquarters, Jesus exercises His Headship over the church (Eph. 1:3; Phil. 2:9-11; 20-23; Heb. 8:1; Acts 7:55). The degree of and place from which Jesus Christ demonstrates His authority is concisely noted in Ephesians 1:20-23.

Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.

Plurality of Elders

Two or more elders were appointed over each fully organized church in New Testament times (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). Scripture always refers to a plurality of elders serving a single congregation and only the church over which they were appointed. Appointment of elders was not regarded lightly, but men were carefully chosen to oversee a church only after the congregation ensured those candidates complied with divinely mandated qualifications (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-11). Noting Christ is the Head of the church and the qualifications for elders enumerated in Holy Writ, elders may not legislate doctrine, only see that the New Testament is faithfully practiced in their congregation. In matters not addressed by Scripture, elders and the church may exercise liberty. Inspiration also calls

these men “*bishops*” (1 Tim. 3:1), “*the presbytery*” (1 Tim. 4:14), “*pastors*” (Eph. 4:11), “*overseers*” (Acts 20:28) and *shepherds* (1 Pet. 5:1-4).

Deacons: Special Servants

Though every member of the church may and should minister to the needs of brethren and non-members alike, deacons are special servants of the church. Unlike the elders, their degree of responsibility is departmental and lies in service areas. For instance, different deacons may direct benevolence, the treasury, maintenance of facilities, evangelism, the Bible school or some other area of concern requiring special attention. Deacons also are chosen after determination that they meet divinely given qualifications (Acts 6:1-6; 1 Tim. 3:8-13).

Preachers and Teachers

Gospel preachers (Rom. 10:14-15), also called evangelists (Eph. 4:11; 2 Tim. 4:5) and ministers (1 Cor. 3:5), are charged to “Preach the word; be instant [“urgent,” ASV] in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and doctrine” (2 Tim. 4:2). Preaching is a serious undertaking because a preacher affects not only his own soul, but the souls of his auditors as well. Therefore, the Bible urges preachers and teachers to be cautious (Jam. 3:1) and also prescribes a remedy to remove impenitent false teachers from their sphere of influence (Rom. 16:17-18).

The infant church of the first century was armed with an array of miraculously inspired religious instructors: “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:11-12).

The apostles no longer walk the face of the earth; the temporary, miraculous, but partial knowledge has been replaced with written revelation (1 Cor. 13:8-13; Jam. 1:25), and inspired prophets are also extinct today. However, pastors (elders), preachers (evangelists, ministers) and teachers equipped with the Bible are still charged with “...the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.”

Conclusion

The differences in organization between the church about which one can read in the Bible and contemporary churches are striking. Yet, few souls seem aware of these vivid contrasts. Divine name (*Chapter 1*), divine origin (*Chapter 2*) and divine organization are each crucial, identifying marks of the blood-bought, divine church (Acts 20:28). Divine worship (*Chapter 4*) and divine doctrine (*Chapter 5*) are two more key *fingerprints* of the church Jesus built. The churches of Christ today practice first-century Christianity in the present century by imitating the divine characteristics of the early church.

Thought Questions

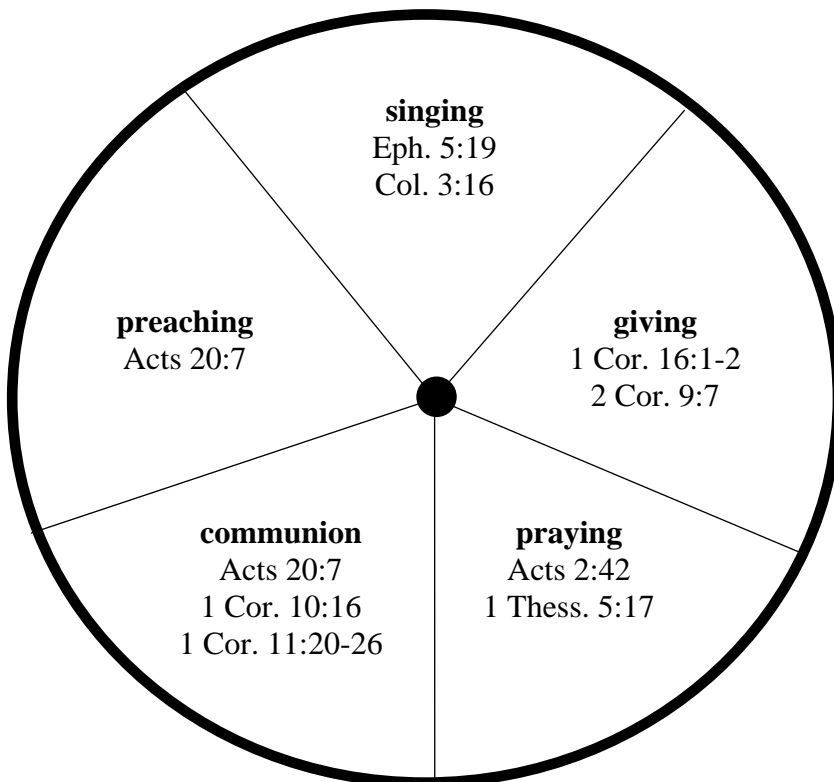
1. How does the origin and dissemination of doctrine typically differ between the church of the New Testament and denominations?
2. Since every New Testament congregation was independent, what common factor contributed to the unity of the Lord's church? What affect do creeds of human origin have on the religious community today? Is it possible to duplicate the independent nature and unity of New Testament congregations in the present century?
3. From what vantage point does Jesus serve as Head of the church? Where, then, is the headquarters of the Lord's church? Is there any biblical evidence whereby earthly heads and earthly headquarters are warranted for the church?
4. In what sense might one observe that the Lord indirectly participates in the selection of elders, deacons, teachers and preachers? Who legislates the qualifications, job description and extent of authority for these servants?
5. Discuss the difference between the preachers, elders, deacons and teachers of the first century versus the same servants in the church of this century. On what do these Christians rely today that was largely unavailable to the young church?

More Questions

1. The New Testament church has neither _____, _____ headquarters, nor _____ creed.
2. Each congregation is _____ and _____ from every other congregation.
3. The New Testament church is governed in matters of _____ solely by _____, overseen by _____, served by _____, taught by _____ and _____, and supported morally and financially by all its _____.
4. Instead of an _____ or a select group heading the church, the Lord's church is headed by _____ alone.
5. _____ has all _____ in heaven and earth.
6. Two or more _____ were appointed over each fully organized _____ in New Testament times.
7. Inspiration also calls elders _____, _____, _____, _____ and _____.
8. _____, also called _____ and _____, are charged to preach the Word.
9. The temporary, miraculous, but _____ has been replaced with _____.
10. The _____ today practice _____ Christianity in the present century by imitating the _____ of the early church.

NEW TESTAMENT WORSHIP

Five-part worship with no pieces added or subtracted!



CHAPTER 4

The New Testament Church Is Divine in Worship

The New Testament contains a *divine pattern* for worshipping God. At the inauguration of Judaism, God gave patterns to His people for the construction of the Tabernacle, its furniture and instruments, and their worship (Exod. 25:9; Ezek. 43:10; Heb. 8:5; 9:23). There is no less direction for worshipping God under the New Covenant than there was under the Old Covenant. John 4:24 says, “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.” Whereas worshipping God in *spirit* pertains to a proper attitude, worshipping God in *truth* corresponds to adhering to the pattern for worship of the divine law now in effect. The New Testament has superseded the Old Testament and is the religious law to which all people today are amenable (Heb. 8:6-13; Eph. 2:15).

There are similarities and dissimilarities between Old and New Testament worship practices. For instance, the New Testament neither requires nor authorizes the worship of God with sacrificial animal offerings, lighted candles or burning incense. One must turn to the New Testament alone to identify how God desires people living in the Gospel Age to worship Him. There are five activities of worship prescribed in the New Testament through which God desires to be worshipped today. *Each* of these must comprise Christian worship *each* first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2).

Music

The most obvious contrast between worshipful music employed by churches of Christ versus other churches is the absence of mechanical instrumental music among churches of Christ. This difference results from a sincere effort to practice precisely what the New Testament authorizes. Of the two possible types of music, vocal and instrumental, the New Testament commands vocal music or singing (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). Every example of worshipful music employed by the New Testament church is void of instrumental music (Matt. 26:30 [church was not begun yet]; Acts 16:25; Rom. 15:9; 1 Cor. 14:15; Heb. 2:12; Jam. 5:13).

Additionally, among the different sounds that can be uttered, only singing is able to “teach” and “admonish” (Col. 3:16). Humming, whistling and other vocal sounds that cannot *teach* and *admonish* oppose Scripture. Therefore, they are sinful in worshipful music.

What God may have allowed under the Old Testament or what God may permit in heaven does not affect worshippers amenable to the New Testament. The New Testament is the law of God now in effect. Man has been released from the Old Law (Rom. 7:6-7;

Col. 2:14) and yet living on earth does not come under the scope of some future, heavenly legislation.

To illustrate, consider the driving laws of various states. It may be the law in two adjoining states that a motorist can turn right on red after coming to a complete stop, provided he may do so safely. Suppose a licensed driver who is a resident of one state turns right on red in a neighboring state. By the authority of which state does the driver turn right on red? This is an experience common to most drivers. Obviously, every motorist is amenable to the authority of the state in which he is, in this illustration, when he turns right on red. Likewise, every person today is bound by the New Testament, irrespective of whether a New Testament instruction appeared previously in Patriarchy or Judaism also. Further, if the rules are different in heaven to come, still all people living today must conform to the New Testament alone.

The commandment to sing in worship (Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19) specifies a type of music to the exclusion of everything else or any combination with something else. Had God not specified what *kind of* music He wants, man could make his own choice, but God made the choice Himself. In much the same way, He chose unleavened bread and fruit of the vine for the communion to the exclusion of everything else.

Some might prefer instrumental music to a cappella music (singing) and find it more entertaining. Given the opportunity, mankind doubtless would greatly alter Christian worship and Christianity. This is precisely what has been attempted through denominationalism. It is, however, reasonable for God, the Object of our worship, to be worshipped in a way pleasing to Him. Worship was never intended to be vented toward the worshipper for his entertainment. Biblical worship is directed toward God. Hence, our personal preferences in the case of worshipful music dare not be instituted in place of what God has clearly required of us.

Communion

Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper or communion following His observance of that year's Passover meal (Matt. 26:17-30). The Lord stated that the latter supper of which He said "this is my body" and "this is my blood" was to be repeated for "remembrance" of Him (Luke 22:19). The apostle Paul called this supper "the communion" (1 Cor. 10:16). In correcting abuses of the communion by the Corinthian church, Paul urged the Lord's Supper not to be observed lightly, but remembering "the Lord's death" as often as (or each time) they observed it. Acts 20:7 indicates the frequency with which the early church observed the communion, and that with apostolic approval. There is no more doubt that the early church observed communion weekly (on the first day of the week) than faithful Jews observed the Sabbath weekly (on the seventh day of the week) (Exod. 20:8-1). There is no more doubt the early church observed communion weekly (on the first day of the week) than the early church observed (and contemporary churches observe) collecting a contribution weekly (on the first day of the week) (1 Cor. 16:1-2).

Giving

Though God required Old Testament people to give of their means for the support and progress of Judaism, there is a fundamental difference between then and how God desires New Testament people to support Christianity. Freewill offerings were welcome under Judaism (Deut. 12:6; Exod. 25:2; 35:29), but God also commanded the people to *tithe* or give ten percent of their increase to God (Lev. 27:30-34). The *tithe has not* been reinstated by God in the New Testament. Instead, New Testament giving is: (1) always a freewill offering (2 Cor. 8:12), (2) regulated in part by what one purposes in his heart to give cheerfully (2 Cor. 9:7) and (3) regulated in part by one's prosperity (1 Cor. 16:1-2). The last Scripture reference also details the first day of the week (implying the first day of each week) as the day on which the collection should occur. Though giving may occur on additional days (Acts 2:44-46; 5:1-10) as is also the case with praying, singing and preaching, giving is a part of New Testament worship on the first day of each week.

Praying

Praying to God has always been basic to worshipping God, and this is the case in the Gospel Age as well. Several passages attest the regularity with which the early church prayed and further was exhorted to pray (Acts 2:42; 1 Tim. 2:1-3; 1 Pet. 3:12). “And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him” (1 John 5:14-15).

The key in acceptable prayer is “according to his will.” All prayers are answered according to the will of God. If our prayer requests coincide with God's will, He answers our prayers essentially with a “yes.” Otherwise, the answer to our prayers may be “no,” “maybe, depending on unfolding circumstances” or “later.” Commonly, if God does not grant our requests per the degree and schedule of our petition, we complain that our prayers are not answered. God answers all prayers; sometimes we just do not like His response.

Preaching and Teaching

Teaching and preaching is essential to the establishment and maintenance of Christianity as they were essential to Judaism, too. Judaism was not just the religion of the Jews. It was their way of life, at home, in public, as well as when they worshipped God. The Jews were taught from childhood through adulthood God's Word (Neh. 8:1-8).

...he read the words of the law, the blessings and cursings, according to all that is written in the book of the law. There was not a word of all that Moses commanded, which Joshua read not before all the congregation of Israel, with the women, and the little ones, and the strangers that were conversant among them. (Joshua 8:34-35)

Edification of the children of God is one of the prime needs of the Lord's church (1 Cor. 14:12; Eph. 4:11-12). Evangelism constitutes the mission of the church (Matt. 28:18-20; 2 Tim. 2:2). Both of these holy tasks require preaching and teaching. This teaching and preaching can be accomplished privately from house to house or publicly, such as in the public worship (Acts 20:20). The context of Acts 20:7 not only indicates the frequency with which the early church observed communion, it also notes preaching comprises part of the Lord's Day worship. "And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight."

Conclusion

Often contemporary churches derive their worship practices from a confusion of formerly authorized practices under Judaism combined with selected activities of New Testament worship, well stirred with the seasoning of personal preference. All living souls are amenable to the New Testament and will be judged one day by it (John 12:48). Therefore, each soul should worship God "in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). The worship practices of the churches of Christ, then, are not intended to be *different*, but identical to what God through the New Testament requires (authorizes).

Thought Questions

1. How does one know if it makes any difference how he worships the God of heaven? Are worshipful acts that God commanded in former periods of religious history necessarily the same ways in which God desires to be worshipped now? If in heaven God may require the redeemed to worship Him in some fashion foreign to worship commanded on earth, what bearing would heavenly worship have on present worshippers of God?
2. If God had intended to be worshipped through vocal music to the exclusion of instrumental music, how would He have to word Scripture differently than He did in the New Testament? Does instrumental music conform to New Testament pattern for worship?
3. How do one of the Ten Commandments and Paul's instruction about the contribution (1 Cor. 16:1-2) affect one's biblical understanding of the frequency with which the communion should be observed? Is apostolic example inferior to apostolic command?
4. Preaching and teaching are fundamental to what two primary tasks of the church? Describe the probable affect on the church of weak teaching in the pulpit, in the classroom and the home.
5. In what ways might one say that the worship practices of the churches of Christ are both "different" and "identical"? From what is our worship different; to what is our worship intended to be identical?

More Questions

1. The New Testament church contains a _____ for worshipping God.
2. The New Testament has _____ the Old Testament and is the _____ to which all people today are amenable.
3. One must turn to the _____ alone to identify how God desires people today to _____ Him.
4. The two general possible types of music are _____ and _____; specifically, God has authorized _____ as the music for Christian worship.
5. The church of the first century observed communion on the _____ day of _____ week.
6. The Old Testament _____ has not been reinstated by God in the New Testament.
7. Giving as worship in the church is always a _____ offering, as one _____ in his heart and according to his _____.
8. Praying to God is a _____ part of worshipping God.
9. _____ of the children of God is one of the prime needs of the Lord's church.
10. This teaching or _____ can be accomplished _____ from house to house or _____.

DIVINE DOCTRINE

exclusive

redemptive

inspired

purposeful

changeless

**One
Creed:**

the Gospel only!

evangelistic

authoritative

complete

edifying

benevolent

a new covenant

CHAPTER 5

The New Testament Church Is Divine in Doctrine

The early church was taught an aversion to humanly devised creeds. Jesus declared a cardinal abuse under Judaism was the substitution of human doctrine for teaching of divine origin (Matt. 15:9). “But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.” The apostle Paul heartily affirmed that the Gospel alone leads to the salvation of men (Rom. 1:16; Gal. 1:6-12). The Gospel (New Testament) consists of: (1) instruction (doctrine or teaching), (2) God’s unfolded scheme for man’s redemption and (3) God giving of assignments to the church for it to perform.

New Testament: Only Creed of the Church

Creeds of human origin are the source of vast religious division around the world. Whereas human creeds change periodically, New Testament ink long ago dried, making the doctrine of the New Testament changeless. Even from a human perspective, accepting the New Testament as sole creed and doctrine in religion is more likely to achieve the unity for which Jesus prayed (John 17:20-21) than the sum of all alternatives that some ecumenical movement may promote.

Before the Judgment Bar at time’s end, all men will be judged by the covenant of God under which they lived (Rev. 20:12-15). Men cannot be sanctified by substandard, humanly devised righteousness (Rom. 10:1-3; Matt. 7:21-23). Neither will people living in the Gospel (New Testament) Age be received into heaven through compliance with the Old Testament standard from which we have been delivered (Col. 2:14; Eph. 2:15; Rom. 7:6-7; Heb. 8:6-13). Anyone trying to live by the Old Law (Testament) today is outside of God’s saving grace (Gal. 5:1-5). The New Testament alone is the absolute and final standard of authority in religion to which man must appeal today. It teaches man how to live with his fellow man, how to worship and serve God, and how to receive the blessings of the Gospel and hope of heaven.

Redemption

Redemption is inseparably tied to membership in the Lord’s church; the Lord adds the redeemed or saved to the church (Acts 2:47). However, the confused religious community challenges souls with a *religious shopping center* of different churches and accompanying redemption doctrines. It is imperative that the truth-seeker wade through the *swamp of human doctrines* and espouse only God’s redemptive plan and the church to which the Lord adds the saved. The “seed,” which when planted into the honest hearts of

men produces Christians only and only the Lord's church, is the "word of God" only (Luke 8:11).

The Gospel or New Testament addresses God's plan of salvation in several passages. Often, religious people acknowledge many of the divine prerequisites to salvation. As often, they select only those that they cherish and exclude other elements to which Scripture attributes saving power. Abbreviated, the divine plan of salvation requires: (1) hearing God's Word exclusively (Rom. 10:17), (2) nurturing a saving, obedient faith (John 8:24; Jam. 2:20, 24, 26), (3) repenting of past sins (Acts 17:30-31), (4) confessing Christ as Lord (Rom. 10:9-10), (5) burial (baptism) in water to wash sins away (Rom. 6:3-5; Acts 22:16) and (6) remaining faithful until death (Rev. 2:10). A divine appendix to the plan of salvation for erring *children of God* is penitent prayer (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9).

Evangelism, Benevolence and Edification

Scripture instructs the church to actively engage in evangelism, benevolence and edification. If something does not come under one of these departments, it may not be the responsibility of the church. A function can even be authorized by Scripture, and yet not concern the church. For instance, it may fall in the realm of the home's responsibility. The home is another divine institution, but the roles of the home and the church, though they often interact, are not the same.

The Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20; 2 Tim. 2:2) is fundamentally tied to the visible existence of the church in its local sense. This makes *evangelism the chief task of the church*. Yet, the church must also mature or edify itself to maintain God's favor (1 Cor. 14:12; Heb. 5:12-6:2). Too, the Lord's church must possess and exhibit the highest form of love toward fellow men (Matt. 22:37-40; Jam. 1:27; Gal. 6:10), in a small way imitating the love of God shown to man. The practice of benevolence also contributes to the goodwill of men toward the church and affords the church valuable contacts for the exercise of evangelism.

Immediately preceding His Ascension, Jesus Christ gave His apostles *only one job or mission* to do (Mark 16:15-16), to evangelize the world. Though Christians and the church have several responsibilities relevant to the divine instruction of the New Testament, taking the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the entire world ought to be the pervading sentiment of every Christian's Christianity. While each child of God must practice faithfully Christian worship, Christian living, Christian service and Christian doctrine, if the Christian does all of that, but fails to contribute in some way to the evangelizing the world with the Gospel, then he has failed to do *the only job Jesus Christ left His disciples to do* — that is, the mission of the Lord's church.

Conclusion

The churches of Christ are made up of tens of thousands congregations and several million members worldwide. Since each congregation is autonomous, it is nearly impossible to address figures with certainty. However, irrespective of the actual number of congregations and members, the vast brotherhood of churches of Christ is predicated up-

on no creed but the New Testament alone. Though there are several variant views on a handful of fields of biblical inquiry, these pale in comparison to creedal segmented denominationalism.

Following the New Testament only affords the Lord's church a measure of safety from worldwide apostasy. Individual Christians and churches that depart from the New Testament do not necessarily imperil other Christians and churches. Whereas, were the church bound to a human creed, as went the creed so would go *the whole church*. This is the plight of the bulk of the religious community today. "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Prov. 14:12).

Thought Questions

1. Is there a creed which if adopted has the potential of uniting all religious people? What affect do man-authored creeds have on religious unity? By which creed will men ultimately be judged?
2. Should a farmer expect to harvest a bumper crop from seed he never planted? How might a farmer expect ruined or contaminated seed that he may have sown to grow? Noting that the Word of God is compared in Scripture to seed, what will it produce if not planted in the hearts of men? What will it produce were the Word of God contaminated with other creeds?
3. Which of the biblical instructions for the church is unimportant enough to ignore? What worthy endeavor is important enough to be added to divine instruction for the church?
4. What advantage does independent organization of congregations have, noting that some churches may succumb to doctrinal error? What are some of the other provisions established by God to curb doctrinal error?
5. What relationship does the New Testament as a changeless creed sustain to first-century churches and the Lord's church in each subsequent generation, including our own? How are creeds of human invention unlike the creed of the church over which Jesus is Head?

More Questions

1. Creeds of _____ origin are the source of vast religious _____ around the world.
2. _____ creeds change periodically, but the doctrine of the _____ is changeless.
3. Anyone trying to live by the Old Testament today is _____ of God's saving grace.
4. The _____ alone is the absolute and final standard of _____ in religion to which man must appeal today.
5. It is imperative the truth-seeker wade through the swamp of _____ and espouse only God's _____.

Chapter 5 – The Church Is Divine in Doctrine

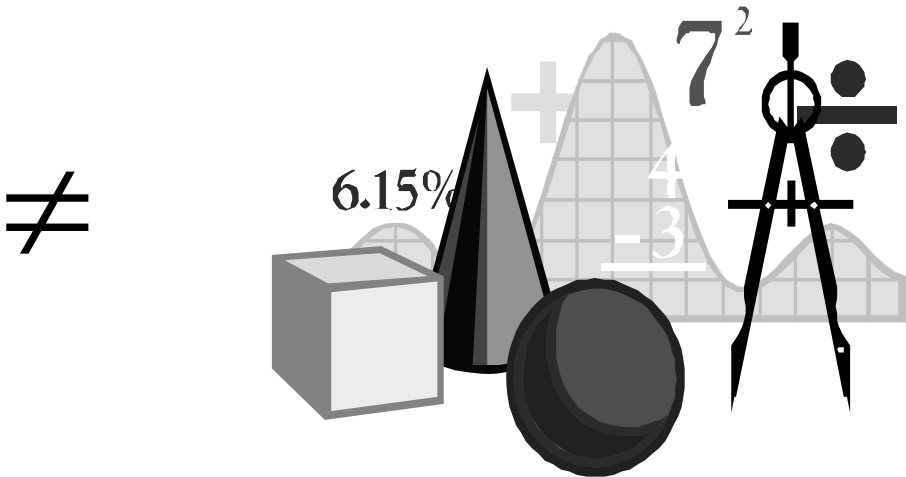
6. Abbreviated, the divine plan of salvation requires _____, _____, _____, _____, _____ and _____.
7. The God-given responsibilities of the church can be summarized as _____, _____, and _____.
8. The mission of the church is _____.
9. The practice of _____ contributes to the goodwill of men toward the church and the Gospel.
10. Following the _____ only affords the Lord's church a measure of safety from _____.

DIVINE UNITY

Mathematical Equations

$$1 + 2 + 3 = 6$$

$$1 + 2 + 4 \neq 6$$



Biblical Equations

Christian + Bible + Christian = Unity

Christian + Anything Else + Christian \neq Unity

Gal. 1:6-9

Christian + Bible + Non-Christian or Unfaithful Christian \neq Unity

Eph. 5:11; 2 John 9-11

CHAPTER 6

The New Testament Church Is Divine in Unity

True unity is an identifying mark of the New Testament church (John 17:20-23). Divine unity results from agreement on and practice of the Gospel alone as the final and absolute standard of religious authority today (Rom. 1:16; Luke 6:46; John 6:68). Biblical unity is not companion to the motto of at least one ministerial association: “We have agreed to disagree.” The prophet Amos said of such agreements (facades of unity), “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” (Amos 3:3). The implied answer to this rhetorical question is a resounding, “No!” The unity that should characterize the New Testament church is more than a mere union, as one contemporary proverb well illustrates. “Tying the tails of two cats together and tossing them over a clothesline is *union*, but it is not *unity*.”

Common Doctrine Essential

The New Testament is the sole doctrine by which the church Jesus built must be guided (John 12:48; Jude 3). There is no basis for unity wherein something less than, additional to or instead of the New Testament is the premise for religious cohesion (Rev. 22:18-19; Gal. 1:6-9). Sandwiched between the verses, “Endeavouring to keep **the unity of the Spirit** in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3) and “Till we all come in **the unity of the faith...**” (Eph. 4:13) are seven ones upon which unity in the Christian faith is predicated.

“There is **one body**, and **one Spirit**, even as ye are called in **one hope** of your calling; **One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God** and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Eph. 4:4-6).

One of the results of the attainment of biblical unity is stated in verse fourteen of this same context: “That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.”

What God Says, Not What God Did Not Say

Among those whose religious beliefs are nearly the same, a wholly different approach to Bible authority still divides them into separate fellowships. As long as each group maintains its perspective of hermeneutics, unity is impossible (1 Kings 18:21; John 4:20). True unity would still be impossible even were all parties to agree to pretend that their

differences did not matter. God refuses to endorse such covenants; He already gave man His covenant for today, and it is this covenant alone to which all men must conform.

Two verbal banners lead sincere religious people apart, rather than together. Those who rally to the verbal banner, *the spirit of Christianity* view Scripture oppositely from others who hoist their verbal banner, **“Speak where the Bible speaks, be silent where the Bible is silent; call Bible things by Bible names”** (1 Pet. 4:11). The former verbalization of hermeneutics views God’s Word as relative and more subjective than absolute. The latter expression recognizes God’s patterns, types, shadows, figures, principles, statements and commands as insoluble by contemporary sentiment toward them.

A case in point, over which hermeneutical controversy contributed to division between what are now known as the Christian Church and the churches of Christ, is “What kind of music is permissible in Christian worship?” The latter group tenaciously defends *singing* as the only authorized music in worship from statements in passages such as “Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Eph. 5:19) and “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Col. 3:16).

The Christian Church *plays and sings* in worship. Its hermeneutics for this music practice appears to postdate the introduction of instrumental music into the churches. Further, various defenses are used by this group simultaneously to offset the apparent affect of teaching contained in Ephesians and Colossians. In addition, Christian Church hermeneutics regarding the music question is ever undergoing re-fabrication and adjustment in attempts to bolster them. Summarized, the Christian Church uses a form of music that is both *additional to and different from what God did specify*. **The employment of instrumental music in worship ignores what God did say (Bible authority) in favor of what God did not say (no Bible authority).**

However, God’s Word (and application today) is unchanging. “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him” (Col. 3:17). The very next verse following Colossians 3:16, which teaches *singing*, exhorts Christians to do everything by the authority of Christ. Is it right to add, by the *spirit of Christianity*, playing instruments of music to the worship of God? Did God mean what He said by specifying *singing* in Christian worship? If something can be added to the music that God specified for worship, might other things (e.g., steak and eggs) be added also to another part of worship, the communion? God **did not** command *music* in worship. God **did not**, through His Word, teach men to *sing and/or play* in worship. God did, though, cause Paul by inspiration to twice record *singing*, a certain kind of music, for Christian worship. **The hermeneutical principle that leads men to practice in worship the kind of music authorized by God also leads Christians to view the entire New Testament with similar gravity.**

Sectarianism Opposes Unity

God cannot be subdivided like a piece of property. God is not idly watching with disinterest as religious people attempt to denominate themselves into various sects (and in

the process to denominate to themselves a piece of God). The prayer that Jesus prayed for unity is the will of the triune Godhead. “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me” (John 17:20-21).

Jesus built one church, which is also called the kingdom and body (Matt. 16:18-19; Acts 2:47; Col. 1:13, 18). The way into the eternal kingdom is specific and narrow, and unfortunately many will miss the kingdom to their eternal dismay (Matt. 7:13-14). Contrary to popular thought, not even every sincere religious person will be in heaven (Matt. 7:21-23). Religious groups foreign to that over which Jesus is Head and which He founded will be *rooted up* (Matt. 15:13). When the Corinthian church harbored the seeds of sectarianism (denominationalism), the apostle Paul rebuked Christians there.

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? (1 Cor. 1:10-13).

As the apostle Paul called for unity among believers at Corinth, unity can only exist today among those who “speak the same thing,” ‘spurn division’ and are “perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” Sectarianism and denominationalism represent division and are contrary to biblical unity.

Conclusion

Unity based on the adoption of the Gospel alone as the final and absolute standard of authority in religion is one divine characteristic of the Lord’s church. Left to his own ingenuity, man devises divisive creeds that are not only extra-biblical, but denominate people into sectarianism. The New Testament is the only premise for religious cohesion in this age (Gal. 1:6-9; Jude 3). There is only *one* church (body), *one* God, *one* faith (doctrine or teaching) and *one* Lord (Head of His church), among additional *ones* enumerated in Ephesians 4:4-6. Faithful Christians are forbidden to fellowship additional churches, gods, faiths, lords or anything contrary to New Testament prescription (2 John 9-11). Furthermore, Christians are exhorted to fellowship those who also are in fellowship with God (1 John 1:3, 7).

If the Bible means anything to anyone, it means something for what it says, not for what it does not say. The concept of Bible authority demands adherence to the Bible (in our age, the New Testament). Otherwise, there is no authority. The so-called *spirit of Christianity* approach to religion is at its heart subjective and only nominally aware of any authority in religion. However, in reality, *authority* is binding, or it is not authority!

Jesus did not pray for sectarianism or denominationalism, which are names for religious division. Jesus prayed for *unity*. Further, is it strange that Jesus would expect this unity to be characteristic of the church for which He died, which He built and to which He adds the saved (Acts 20:28; Matt. 16:18-19; Acts 2:47)? Also, is it strange that the churches of men, directed by the creeds of men, lack biblical unity? The New Testament church is divine in unity!

Thought Questions

1. What alone can provide the religious cohesiveness necessary to result in biblical unity? What affect do the creeds of men and their churches have on the pursuit for unity?
2. Is agreement in doctrine necessary for unity and fellowship? Are those who do not accept God's teaching in fellowship with God? Is it necessary for one to be in fellowship with God before Christians may extend their fellowship? Do we have the right to fellowship those who are not in fellowship with God?
3. Why is one's hermeneutical approach to the Bible important? Should *the spirit of Christianity* override the teaching of the Bible on any given subject?
4. Do Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 authorize *singing*, or *playing and singing*, or fail to authorize anything? What affect does one's view of passages such as Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16-17 have on his overall understanding of God's Word?
5. What more nearly testifies of Christ (the Son of God) entering the world to save men, *unity* or the *division* characteristic of sectarianism and denominationalism? What affect does division within the Lord's church have on its unity, image and divine identity?

More Questions

1. Divine _____ results from agreement on and practice of the _____ alone as the final and absolute standard of religious _____ today.
2. The _____ is the sole doctrine by which the church Jesus built must be guided.
3. There is no basis for unity wherein something _____, _____ or _____ the New Testament is the premise for religious cohesion.
4. Bible authority notes what God _____, not what God did not _____.
5. The use of _____ in worship ignores what God did _____ in favor of what God did not _____.
6. _____ and _____ represent division and are contrary to biblical unity.
7. Faithful Christians are forbidden to fellowship additional _____, _____, _____ or anything contrary to New Testament prescription.

Chapter 6 – The Church Is Divine in Unity

8. If the Bible means anything to anyone, it means something for what it _____, not for what it does not _____.
9. The so-called _____ approach to religion is at its heart subjective.
10. The _____ church is divine in _____.

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE

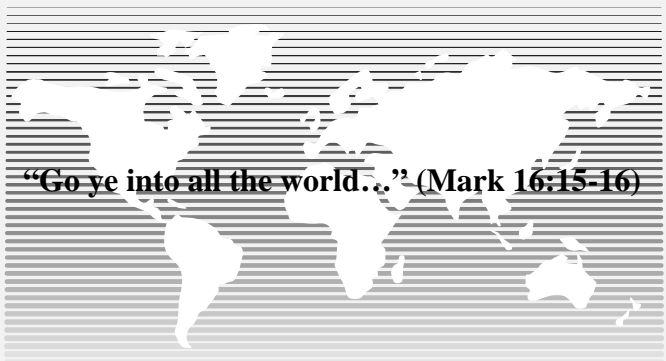
CONFIDENTIAL



“...your mission, Jim, should you
decide to accept it...”

“...your mission, Christians, which
you **must** accept...”

- ~ evangelism ~
- ~ edification ~
- ~ benevolence ~



“Go ye into all the world...” (Mark 16:15-16)

CHAPTER 7

The New Testament Church Is Divine in Mission

The church about which one can read upon the pages of the New Testament has a divine mission. This mission, however, is often said to be three-fold. Further, the Lord's church is the only institution possessing this mission. The churches and organizations of men, while attempting to participate in the divine mission, fail to fulfill the same, since they are not the church for which Jesus died, which He built and to which He assigned these responsibilities.

The *divine mission* of the church is not political, but is harmonious with responsible civil government and may even influence it. Neither is it primarily social in nature, though the mission of the church may favorably affect interpersonal relationships. The church's mission is not secular in scope, but it may alter social and economic conditions. Further, this mission is not material, but it may involve the use of physical things in its fulfillment. The divine mission of the church pertains to spiritual matters and involves the continuation "...of all that Jesus began both to do and teach" (Acts 1:1). What was the mission of our Lord (Luke 19:10) became the mission of the apostles (Matt. 28:18-20) and has been passed down to each generation of Christians (2 Tim. 2:2). The Book of Acts, among other considerations, is the history book of first-century mission work; it represents the doing of the mission of the church.

Mission Possible

Unlike the television show *Mission Impossible* that was popular for two decades, the Lord's church has a God-given mission that *is possible*. Not only is its mission possible, but the church is *obligated* to accept the mission. The familiar line from the TV series "...your mission, Jim, should you decide to accept it..." does not apply to the Lord's church and the Christians of whom it is comprised.

The overriding tenor of the church's divine mission is to evangelize the lost; the lost are constituted of both non-Christians and erring Christians (Mark 16:15-16; Jam. 5:19-20). Though perhaps not usually recognized as such, *evangelism* is an indispensable and identifying characteristic of the church of the Bible. No congregation today can successfully claim identity with the New Testament church while downplaying or ignoring evangelism.

Jesus Christ prophesied that the known world would have the opportunity to hear the Gospel within one generation of His earthly ministry (Matt. 24:14); twice in the first chapter of Colossians, the apostle Paul affirmed the fulfillment of our Lord's prophecy (Col. 1:6, 23). *Evangelism* was *mission possible* in the first century despite comparative-

ly limited mediums with which to proclaim the Gospel. Today, in spite of the earth's several billion (and still climbing) population, especially in view of the sophisticated means of communication available to us, the church has the ability to evangelize the world in each generation. *Evangelism* is still the church's *mission possible*; not only so, but evangelism is obligatory on the church and *each Christian*.

Edification of the church (1 Cor. 14:12) and benevolence toward sinners and saints (Gal. 6:10; Jam. 1:27; Acts 6:1-7) are parts two and three of the so-called, three-fold mission of the church. Both of these charges also indirectly contribute to evangelism and its effectiveness. Everything the church has a right or responsibility to perform relates to one or more of the parts of the three-fold mission of the church.

Edification or spiritual maturity is essential to the well-being of the church, each member and the success of the overall mission of the church. Unfortunately, as in the first century, today too, many Christians fail to properly mature in the Gospel (Heb. 5:11-6:2). The means by which every soul can mature or be edified is readily available. "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the **word** of his grace, which is able to build you up..." (Acts 20:32). "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the **word**, that ye may grow thereby" (1 Pet. 2:2). The Christian graces in particular and the Scriptures in general can edify us (2 Pet. 1:5-10; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). Once well on the road to edification, one can contribute to the spiritual growth of fellow Christians and answer the questions of non-Christians (1 Pet. 3:15).

Benevolence (or Christian love set in motion) toward those within and outside the church was gladly shouldered by the first-century church. The immediate needs of new converts closely following the establishment of the church were met by generous Christians in Jerusalem (Acts 2:44-45; 4:34-35). The church in Antioch of Syria also responded with Christian charity toward the less fortunate in Judaea during a time of famine (Acts 11:27-30). Churches in Macedonia and Achaia likewise practiced benevolence toward needy saints in Jerusalem (Rom. 15:25-26). Galatians 6:10 requires the same benevolent treatment of non-Christians (only a preference is encouraged toward Christians first). "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."

Some Things Not Church's Mission

Some things are not the mission of the church because they are part of the mission of another divine institution, the home. For instance, entertainment is strictly a function of the home, as are secular education, marriages and attendant bridal showers, funerals, baby showers, and such like. However, this fact does not necessarily preclude the use of the meetinghouse (the church, strictly speaking, is not mortar, stone and wood, but people). Properly, though, the home should sponsor and finance these affairs.

Some things are not the mission of the church because they are possible missions of individuals, governments or other organizations, but are not assigned in Scripture to the Lord's church. Since the New Testament church is directed by the Gospel to finance itself through freewill offerings (1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 9:6-7), business enterprises as such have no place in the church. Neither may the church champion wholly political proposi-

tions or parties (except some political issues that pertain to morality or other Bible subjects, which, of course, the church should address as widely as feasible).

Churches of Have Men No Divine Mission

Jesus decried the efforts of Jewish religious leaders of His day to remake Judaism into something more palatable to merely human whims. Speaking of these efforts of reorganization of God-given religion, Jesus said, "...Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up" (Matt. 15:13). A few verses before this, our Lord condemned the human teaching that fostered this departure from Judaism as God gave it. "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matt. 15:8-9).

Biblically speaking, there is only **one church**! Several passages illustrate truths about the church by comparing it to a body (Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:12-13; Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18); these verses directly or indirectly affirm that the church is called the body and is single, the only one. Ephesians 4:4 plainly declares this fact: "There is **one body**, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling."

Further, Jesus promised to build one church, His church (Matt. 16:18). This **one church**, variously named (see Chapter One), originated in the mind of God (see Chapter Two). Denominations, world religions and all other sects are the product of human ingenuity, not God's eternal purpose (Eph. 3:10-11). **The church of divine origin alone has a divine mission!** Churches of men exist in opposition to the New Testament and the divine church of which it speaks; these non-divine churches, therefore, are incapable of assuming the divine church mission. They cannot violate the Gospel by their existence in opposition to the divine church and at the same time faithfully proclaim the Gospel. Their mere existence is a *faithless* representation of the Word of God.

Conclusion

The New Testament church and the Christians of which it is comprised have a divine mission. No one else has the right to try nor indeed can succeed in fulfilling the mission of the Lord's church. If God's people today do not take upon themselves this responsibility, no one will. No one else can!

The time to perform the mission of the church is **now!** The New Testament does not charge Christians to do one thing *tomorrow*, or *yesterday*, but **now**. The mission of the church as portrayed in the Bible is one of extreme **urgency**. The church must act now, because its mission is divinely appointed and the sin-sick and dying world desperately needs to be saved. In addition to the upper call of God and the outer call of the world, each Christian should be pervaded with an inner call or desire to save lost souls.

We must, with the apostle Paul, similarly say with conviction: "So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:15-16).

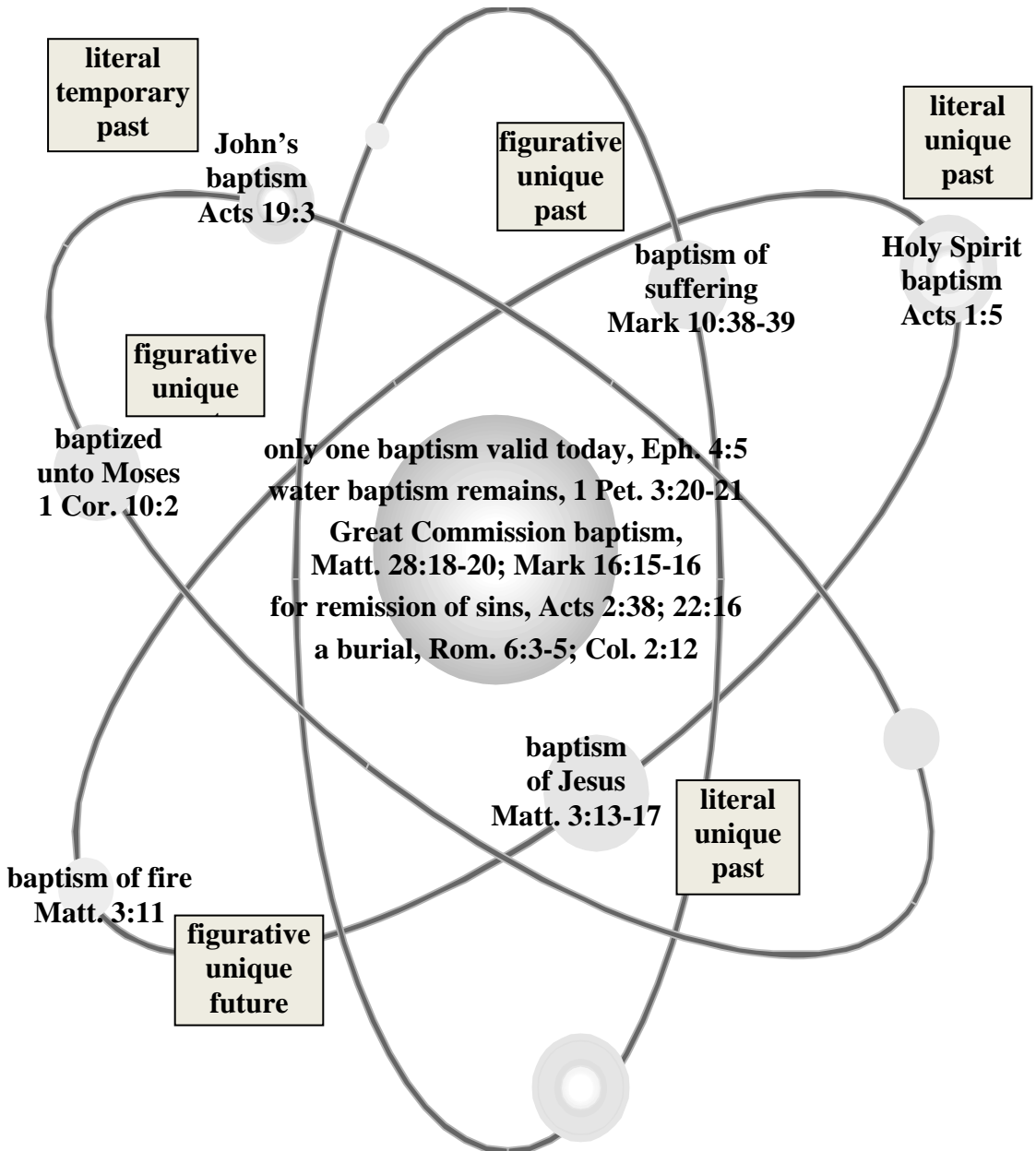
Thought Questions

1. Is it possible to reach the whole world in our day with the Gospel? If yes, what various means might be useful in the accomplishment of such an undertaking? Why do you suppose the church is not reaching the global population with the teachings of and about Jesus Christ each generation?
2. How might edification and benevolence contribute to the pervading theme of the church's mission, namely, evangelism?
3. List separately the appropriate functions that might be performed by the church versus what is the responsibility of the home or individual Christians.
4. Explain why churches of human origin do not have a divine mission.
5. What will happen in any area where the church and Christians fail to assume the responsibility of the divine church mission? When should the church's mission be undertaken?

More Questions

1. The divine mission of the church is not _____, but is harmonious with responsible civil government.
2. Though the mission of the church is not primarily _____, it may affect personal relationships.
3. The divine mission of the church pertains to _____ matters.
4. Not only is the church's mission _____, but the church is _____ to accept the mission.
5. No congregation can successfully claim _____ with the New Testament church while ignoring _____.
6. Unfortunately, many Christians fail to properly _____ in the Gospel.
7. _____ is strictly a function of the home.
8. Biblically, there is only one _____.
9. The church of _____ origin alone has a _____ mission.
10. The time to perform the mission of the church is _____!

ONE BAPTISM VALID TODAY



CHAPTER 8

The New Testament Church Is Divine in Baptism

The Bible speaks of several different baptisms, each with its own purpose and period during which it was valid. Which baptism addressed by the Bible is valid today? Further, the baptisms sought or performed throughout the religious community vary widely from each other; which of these baptisms (if any) are in harmony with God's Word and effective? Additionally, the dictionary definition of baptism ascribes its visible execution to pouring, sprinkling or immersion in water; does the Bible concur with this definition? Some sincere religious people yearn for other baptisms (e.g., Holy Spirit, fire); how many baptisms are available in this century, and what are they? Still one might ask, "What is the purpose of baptism?" or does the Bible assign a specific reason (or reasons) for which baptism should be performed?

Baptism Defined

The words *baptism*, *baptize* and derivatives that appear in our English translations are *transliterated* words (words brought wholly from one language to another except that Greek letters were replaced with corresponding English letters). Had they been *translated*, words like *immersion*, *submersion* and *to dip* would have appeared instead. Figuratively, *baptisma* (in the Greek) sometimes means *being overwhelmed*.

Both by original language definition and scriptural descriptions of baptism, one can know assuredly that Bible baptism is literally immersion in water. The element with which John the Baptist baptized was water, "much water" (Matt. 3:11; John 3:23; Acts 1:5). The early church also administered water baptism (Acts 8:36-39; Acts 10:47-48). This baptism was called a burial or planting, which is immersion, not pouring or sprinkling (Rom. 6:3-5; Col. 2:12). Among those who baptized in water were John the Baptist and his disciples (Matt. 3:11; 9:14), the disciples of Jesus (John 4:1-2) and the apostles and others after the establishment of the church (Acts 2; 8:12, 38; 16:15, 33; 18:8; 19:5; 1 Cor. 1:14-16).

Water Baptisms: Past and Present

In the closing days of the Jewish dispensation, a prophet of God initiated what became known as "the baptism of John" (Acts 18:25) or "John's baptism" (Acts 19:3). This water baptism was practiced by John the Baptist, his disciples and the disciples of Jesus (see above). Everything John the Baptist did, including the baptism he administered, prepared the way for the Messiah and His kingdom (Matt. 3:1-6). John the Baptist urged his audi-

tors to: (1) repent and be baptized for the remission of sins (Mark 1:4) and (2) believe on the Christ who would come after him (Acts 19:4). However, this baptism was preparatory and temporary; it was valid only if practiced before the establishment of the church (Acts 19:1-6). John's baptism was for the remission of sins *in prospect* of the death-burial-resurrection of Christ, much the way people formerly living under Patriarchy (e.g., Adam, Noah and Abraham) and those for whom atonement was made under Judaism were saved *in prospect* of redemption made possible through Jesus Christ (Heb. 10:4; 9:15).

Persons receiving John's baptism before the Pentecost of Acts Two received the remission of sins and membership in the Lord's church *conditionally* upon the establishment of the church. They were not re-baptized in the baptism of the Great Commission. Water baptism mentioned in the Bible from Acts Two forward was the baptism of the Great Commission, with the lone exception of Acts 19:1-6 where some disciples were incorrectly baptized in John's baptism and later re-baptized in the baptism of the Great Commission.

Another water baptism, the baptism of Jesus by John, was unique. Though John baptized persons repenting of and confessing sins, Jesus had no sins of which to repent or confess. The stated reason for which Jesus was baptized appears in Matthew 3:15, namely, "to fulfil all righteousness" (see Matt. 3:13-17). Though candidates for baptism today can follow the example of Jesus, no one can practice the precise baptism ("to fulfil all righteousness" and without repenting of sins) with which Jesus was baptized. For this reason and because John the Baptist (whose baptism is no longer valid) was administering the baptism, the baptism Jesus received is not the *one baptism* (Eph. 4:5) today.

The baptism of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-47) was first preached in Acts Two. It is the subject of proclamation throughout the New Testament (e.g., Acts 2:38; 8:36-38; 10:47-48; 22:16; 1 Pet. 3:20-21). Therefore, the *one baptism* of Ephesians 4:5 valid from the close of the first century through the present is the Great Commission baptism (immersion in water for the remission of sins). This baptism is **the only baptism practiced today by the authority of God**, whose instruction concerning the same is amply exhibited in the New Testament.

The only baptism valid today is water baptism for the remission of sins (Great Commission baptism). The purpose of this baptism is the remission of sins, to redeem the soul, to make one saved. Baptisms of more recent origin, for other purposes or to put one into a denominational body are not valid, nor have they ever been.

Figurative Baptisms: Past and Future

First Corinthians 10:2 refers to a figurative baptism and applies it to the fleeing Israelites, newly freed from Egyptian captivity. "And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea." A figurative, original language definition of baptism (already noted above) is *being overwhelmed*. Not literally, but figuratively, these Hebrews were in a sense immersed and certainly overwhelmed for as much as they were encased on either side by the waters of the Red Sea and shrouded overhead by the water vapor we call clouds. Obviously, there is no *baptismal* application in that context for today.

Jesus first, and His apostles and other martyrs later, underwent a *baptism of suffering*. Jesus was speaking in Mark 10:38-39 of this figurative baptism.

...Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? And they said unto him, We can. And Jesus said unto them, Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized. (see also Matt. 20:22-23; Luke 12:50).

Of course, this is not the *one baptism* (Eph. 4:5) that is valid and to be practiced today.

Another baptism, also figurative in nature, for which many people today ignorantly pray, is the *baptism of fire*. This baptism is erroneously associated in people's minds with the baptism of the *Holy Spirit*. This mistake is commonly made doubtless because (1) both the Holy Spirit baptism and the baptism of fire are mentioned in the same context (Matt. 3:11), and (2) the Holy Spirit baptism received by the apostles in Acts Two was accompanied by "cloven tongues **like as of fire**" above the apostles' heads (Acts 2:3, 4). However, the context of Matthew 3:10-12 only addresses *fire* in the most negative application.

And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and **cast into the fire**. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with **fire**: Whose fan is in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will **burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire**.

Each of these three references is to destructive fire, illustrations and references to eternal hellfire. Those present when John the Baptist made this statement included: (1) penitent people who were baptized by John (verses 5-6), (2) among whom were the apostles and (3) impenitent Pharisees and Sadducees (verses 7-10). Matthew 3:11 names three baptisms: (1) that administered by John the Baptist in water upon repentance and confession of sins for the remission of sins, (2) the then future baptism of the Holy Spirit to be administered by Jesus Christ and promised by Christ exclusively to His apostles (John 14-16) and (3) the still future baptism of fire to be administered by Jesus Christ at the end of time (2 Thess. 1:7-9; Matt. 25:41, 46; Rev. 20:15). **Properly understood, no one wants the baptism of fire.**

Holy Spirit Baptism: Past

Countless souls today earnestly desire the baptism of the Holy Spirit and believe they are entitled to it. Further, many contemporaries claim to have received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, with accompanying miraculous powers and new, divine revelations. However, regardless of man's desires or even remarkable claims, the New Testament unmistakably teaches that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is unattainable today and forevermore. Additionally, modern claims for Holy Spirit baptism are hollow, not demonstrable, in as

much as the supernatural power of which the Charismatics and Pentecostals boast is 100% elusive.

The only persons present when Jesus promised the baptism of the Holy Spirit were the apostles (John 14-16; Acts 1:1-8). They alone were the recipients of the promise of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:26-2:4, 7, 14, 42). The pronouns in Acts 2:1-4 refer to the apostles of Acts 1:26. The recipients of the baptism of the Holy Spirit were Galileans (verse 7), the apostle Peter and the eleven were the ones moved by Holy Spirit baptism to speak (verse 14) and the teaching resulting from the baptism of the Holy Spirit was called the “apostles’ doctrine” versus the “120’s doctrine” (verse 42).

The biblical limitation of Holy Spirit baptism to the apostles did not preclude the reception of miraculous power by different means to others than the apostles in the first century (Acts 8:14-17; 19:1-6; Acts 10-11). It is not within the scope of this lesson to address in detail the fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy (Joel 2:28-3:2) quoted by the apostle Peter (Acts 2:16-21, 38b-39). For that matter, it is not within the limits of this study to give a full discussion of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Suffice it to say, the baptism of the Holy Spirit (and all miraculous power) was purposed by God for temporary use by men upon the earth. The baptism of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles alone, and additional miraculous power conferred by the apostles on others, amounted to *God’s head-start program for the infant church*. Once the purpose of miracles was accomplished (Mark 16:20), miracles ceased (1 Cor. 13:8-13; Eph. 4:11-14). After the completed New Testament revelation was put in place by God, the temporary, piecemeal, partial revelations were no longer needed. The miracle-assisted apostles, elders, preachers and teachers were ultimately replaced by written-revelation-assisted elders, preachers and teachers, which we have today.

Conclusion

The New Testament church is divine in baptism. Of the several baptisms mentioned in Scripture, only one remains valid today. **The baptism of the Great Commission (immersion in water for the remission of sins) is the only baptism authorized by Scripture for the Christian Age.** Further, it is the only baptism that can save (1 Pet. 3:21). Baptisms of more recent origin, for other purposes or to put one into a denominational body are not valid, nor have they ever been.

After examination of John’s baptism, the baptism Jesus received, the Great Commission baptism, the baptism unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea, the baptism of suffering, the baptism of fire, the Holy Spirit baptism and contemplation of denominational baptisms, still Scripture affirms there is only one baptism today (Eph. 4:5). Which one? The Bible overwhelmingly attests that the baptism commanded today is immersion in water for the remission of sins (Acts 10:48; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38). “And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16).

Thought Questions

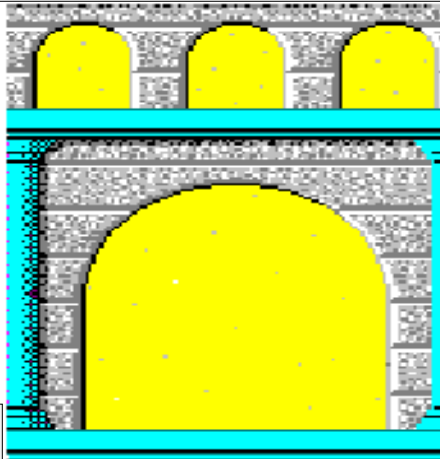
1. Explain the difference between *transliterated* and *translated* words. What significance does this consideration have to the chapter's study?
2. Name the administrators and candidates of each of the water baptisms and the Holy Spirit baptism.
3. Define the baptism of fire and its recipients.
4. Explain how one can know that the baptism of the Holy Spirit is unavailable today.
5. Why are the baptisms practiced by denominations ineffective and not pleasing to God?

More Questions

1. Both by original language definition and scriptural descriptions of baptism, one can know assuredly that Bible baptism is literally _____.
2. The baptism of John the Baptist was preparatory and _____.
3. Water baptism practiced from Acts Two forward was the baptism of the _____.
4. Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist to fulfill all _____.
5. The only baptism valid today is _____ for the _____ of sins.
6. Three figurative baptisms mentioned in Scripture are the baptism of the fleeing _____, the baptism of _____ and the baptism of _____.
7. The _____ alone were the recipients of the Lord's promise of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.
8. Miracles amounted to God's _____ program for the infant church.
9. Once the purpose of miracles was accomplished, miracles _____.
10. Of the several baptisms mentioned in Scripture, only _____ remains valid today; the baptism of the _____ (immersion in water for the remission of sins) is the _____ baptism authorized by Scripture for the _____.

DIVINE DISCIPLINE

self-discipline embodied in discipleship



self-control

positive	corrective	membership	origin	love
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Jam. 5:19-20	Titus 3:10-11	mission	eternity	baptism
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1 Cor. 5:5-6, 11	2 Cor. 6-8	doctrine	fellowship	Spirit
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Rom. 16:17-18	2 Thess. 3:6, 14	worship	Godhead	organization	unity
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God-given church discipline is a divine characteristic of the church

other identifying characteristics of the Lord's church

CHAPTER 9

The New Testament Church Is Divine in Discipline

Among the identifying, often unique characteristics of the church, about which one can read upon the pages of the New Testament, are such things as its: name, origin, organization, worship, doctrine, unity, mission and baptism. No less unique and descriptive of the church of the Bible is the *discipline* it practices upon itself. Usually, the word discipline is viewed solely as a negative term involving unpleasantness and punitive measures. However, synonyms for the word indicate a much broader potential application. For instance, the word discipline may mean: activity, drill, data, information, pursuit, vocation, self-control, course or study. Discipline involves teaching and essentially is embodied in discipleship.

Positive Discipline

To the extent that discipline relates to self-control and voluntary conformity to God-given data or information (namely, the Bible), discipline can be very positive. This type of discipline involves the active pursuit of the Christian vocation, that is, discipleship. This is no more than God requires of each who would name Christ as Lord.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. (Rom. 12:1-2)

Willing compliance to God's Word amounts to self-discipline and is admittedly positive. However, even encouragement of a weak or erring Christian to conform to God's Word is positive in purpose and potentially in result. Discipline is, in a sense, especially positive whenever it leads to the faithful practice of Christianity.

Home Versus Church

In principle, discipline in the church is much like discipline in the home. Everything the Christian father does regarding his children, whether it is viewed from either a negative or a positive perspective, should be calculated to be in their best interest. He has his children's well being or welfare in mind (Eph. 6:4). The apostle Paul used this father-children kinship to illustrate a spiritual relationship he maintained with the church at Thessalonica. "As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of

you, as a father doth his children, That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory” (1 Thess. 2:11-12). What is true in the home regarding discipline, and what was true respecting the relationship sustained between Paul and the Thessalonians, is equally true regarding discipline in the church of weak or erring members. Discipline, positive (edification) or negative (punitive), has as its purpose the best possible well being of the subject. Especially in the church, this pertains to one’s spiritual welfare.

Further, the precise relationship entertained at any given time between a Christian father and his children depends largely on the conduct of the children. Certainly, a father may enjoy a pleasant relationship with his children, and they with him. Yet, there are those occasions in which a father, ever how reluctantly, must exercise his authority by correcting or even punishing errant children. “He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes” (Prov. 13:24). Our heavenly Father also disciplines His people, because He loves us and desires the best for us.

And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. (Heb. 12:5-11)

Church Discipline

The New Testament clearly addresses the subject of church discipline. Further, there exists no exemption or suspension that removes the exercise of this responsibility from the church of the Lord. Therefore, **any body of believers today that purports to be identical to the church of the Bible must practice church discipline as needed.** Truly, **church discipline is as much an identifying characteristic of the churches of Christ as any other (e.g., names, origin, organization, worship, doctrine, etc.).** It, also coming from God, is likewise divine. Congregations that refuse or simply fail to practice the biblical doctrine of church discipline are to that extent unlike the church for which Jesus died and over which He is the Head. How many identifying characteristics of the Lord’s church can a contemporary congregation afford to ignore, and yet remain faithful?

Various New Testament passages pertaining to discipline in the local church stress different significant factors. The overriding principle, of course, should be the best possible spiritual welfare of the ones upon whom church discipline is exercised (1 Cor. 5:5). As

such, the primary purpose of church discipline is not to clear the slate, but to draw the wayward back. Ideally, a close fellowship between Christians develops, which when severed makes erring Christians painfully aware that they are out of fellowship with both God and fellow Christians. (Christians may only rightfully fellowship those who are in fellowship with God.) However, when Christians fail to develop a preference for brethren (Rom. 12:10; 1 Pet. 2:17), unfortunately, church discipline's effectiveness is greatly diminished.

Additionally, withdrawal of fellowship as discipline also prevents contamination of other Christians (1 Cor. 5:6); sin is contagious. Yet, withdrawal of fellowship is a drastic and final course of action after all other forms of discipline (exhortation and correction) have failed to produce penitence.

The speed with which withdrawal of fellowship may be practiced largely depends on two considerations. (1) Is the erring Christian a false teacher, and thereby endangering the souls of others besides his own soul? (2) Is the erring Christian open to the efforts of faithful brethren to restore him?

Obviously, someone infecting others with false teaching or creating rifts among brethren cannot be allowed to continue unchecked. Consequently, Scripture commands speedy action to curtail such (Rom. 16:17-18; Titus 3:10-11). James wrote of the weightier responsibility and corresponding judgment for teachers (Jam. 3:1). Among the qualifications and responsibilities of elders is the ability and task to stop false teachers (Titus 1:9-11). Since false teachers and factious persons pose such a great threat to the well being of any congregation, they must be addressed swiftly. This does not lessen the preciousness of their souls, but is mindful as well of the invaluable souls of others over whom they may exert a harmful influence.

Since Christians are commanded to withdraw from the disorderly (2 Thess. 3:6), irrespective of how distasteful it may be to some, church **discipline is not optional**. Though one may argue that it is counter productive, no one dare argue with God, which is precisely the case wherein one chooses to ignore God's Word on any subject. No one can win an argument with God!

Withdrawal of fellowship takes the form of faithful brethren having no pleasurable companionship with those from whom the church has withdrawn. This includes meals with these unfaithful brethren (1 Cor. 5:11). "And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed" (2 Thess. 3:14). Yet, unfaithful brethren are nevertheless brethren, not enemies, and the object of admonishments (2 Thess. 3:15; Jam. 5:19-20). Withdrawal of fellowship amounts to **a spiritual spanking** of unruly brethren by the balance of the church with the express purpose of encouraging godly sorrow and repentance (2 Cor. 2:6-7). Upon repentance, forgiveness and expressions of love should be forthcoming (2 Cor. 2:8).

Often, the very ones who by the practice of church discipline might have the greatest affect on erring Christians are also the ones least willing to practice it. This is sad and lamentable. For instance, family usually refuses to withdraw from family, and friends often will not withdraw from friends. (Almost everyone gladly withdraws from those for whom they do not care!) Admittedly, church discipline is not intended to interrupt other divinely approved relationships (e.g., husband/wife, parents/dependent children). Still,

there are many other associations among Christian family members and friends, which if curtailed due to others' unfaithfulness could encourage repentance.

Finally, withdrawal of fellowship, or discipline of any kind, is too frequently omitted altogether, or put off so long that people's consciences are seared and they cannot be recovered. Christians desperately need to develop a close personal fellowship and practice church discipline when necessary. Besides the joys and blessings inherent in Christian fellowship, it provides a safety valve by means of withdrawal of fellowship should one become unfaithful. Fellowship is essential to effective withdrawal of fellowship.

Conclusion

Church discipline is a God-given descriptive and identifying characteristic of the New Testament church. Thus, it is a divine characteristic. Further, church discipline is positive in purpose and potentially in result. Like discipline in the home, church discipline has as its goal the best possible well being of the subject toward whom it is exercised. Maybe reluctantly, **the Lord's church is obligated to police itself** and practice discipline when necessary. Besides perhaps saving erring brethren, withdrawal of fellowship prevents contamination of the bride of Christ. The success of the sometimes necessary withdrawal of fellowship depends on the prior establishment and maintenance of close fellowship. Christian love permeates both fellowship and the successful exercise of withdrawal of fellowship.

Thought Questions

1. What relationship does *discipline* sustain to discipleship?
2. Usually viewed as something negative, how might discipline be seen as really positive?
3. What similarities exist between discipline in the home and in the church?
4. Is a church that refuses or ignores church discipline wholly faithful and identical to the church for which Jesus died? Is a Christian who chooses not to practice the biblical doctrine of church discipline faithful before God?
5. Describe the various facets of withdrawal of fellowship, including: personal contact, purpose of contact, benefit to the one from whom withdrawal has occurred, benefit to the church, the speed with which discipline may be enacted and family involvement.

More Questions

1. _____ involves teaching and is essentially embodied in _____.
2. Willing compliance to God's Word amounts to _____ - _____.
3. Discipline has as its purpose the best possible _____ of the subject.
4. Any body of believers today that purports to be _____ to the church of the Bible must practice _____ as needed.

Chapter 9 – The Church Is Divine in Discipline

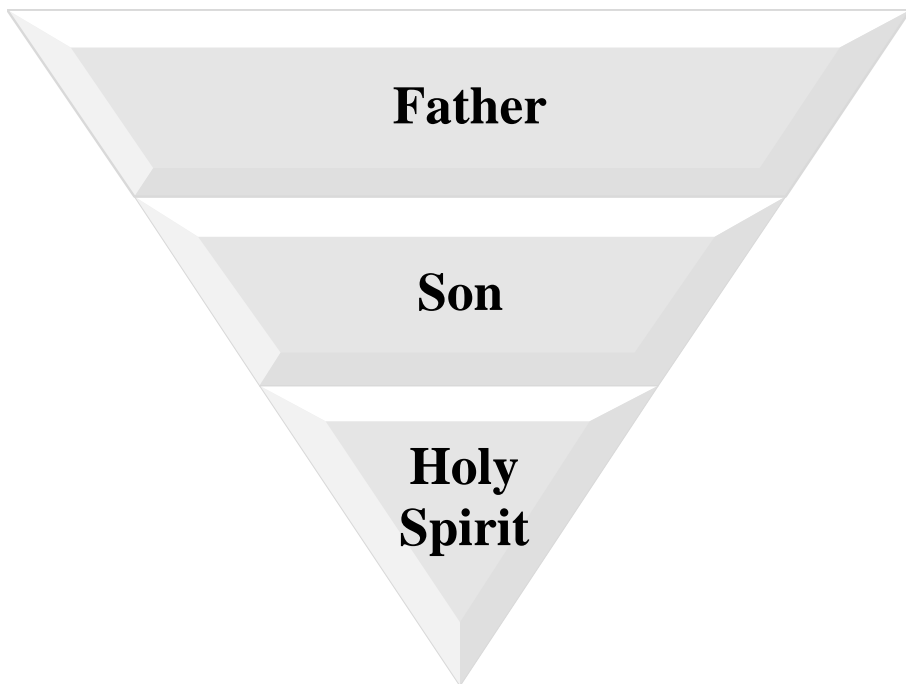
5. Ideally, a close _____ between Christians develops, which when severed makes _____ aware that they are out of fellowship with both _____ and fellow _____.
6. When Christians fail to develop a _____ for brethren, the affect of church discipline is greatly _____.
7. Withdrawal of fellowship prevents _____.
8. Since Christians are commanded to withdraw from the _____, church discipline is not _____.
9. Withdrawal of fellowship amounts to a _____ of unruly brethren by the balance of the _____ with the express purpose of encouraging _____ and _____.
10. Often, the very ones who by the practice of church discipline might have the _____ on erring Christians are also the ones _____ to practice it.

DIVINE GODHEAD

ONE GODHEAD

Acts 17:29; Rom. 1:20; Col. 2:9

John 14:26; 15:16; Acts 2:33 Rom.15:16, 30; 2 Cor. 13:14 Eph. 4:4-6; Heb. 9:14



**“...baptizing them in the name of the Father,
and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost,” Matt. 28:19**

CHAPTER 10

The New Testament Church Is Divine in Godhead

Truth is nevertheless truth whether it is recognized as such. Likewise, the Godhead is what the Godhead is regardless of whether It is properly acknowledged. This is said only to emphasize that though the religious world holds to several conflicting doctrines about the Godhead, the truth concerning this subject exists in spite of prominent errors. Namely, two primary factors are true about the Godhead. (1) The Bible distinctly teaches that the Godhead is made up of three divine persons. (2) The Bible teaches with equal certainty that the Godhead possesses precise (therefore predictable) divine characteristics. The very nature of God is revealed by the Bible.

Godhead Defined

At least two contemporary denominations deny that the Godhead consists of three persons (commonly called the doctrine of the *Trinity*). Whereas Jehovah's Witnesses deny that Jesus Christ is God, the United Pentecostal Church admits to only one person in the Godhead, Jesus Christ. In either case, they both disclaim that there are three persons in the Godhead.

The word Godhead is translated from words derived from the Greek, *Theos*, which simply means *divinity*. Romans 1:20 uses the word Godhead and refers to evidences apparent in the physical universe that testify of the divine nature of the Creator. The power responsible for creation is of incomprehensible magnitude and contrary to natural law, so much so it can only be the product of Divinity.

Acts 17:29 records the word *Godhead* in the speech of the apostle Paul before Greeks at Athens. There, the word conveys the idea of *the Deity, the one true God*. Paul also wrote to the Colossians of the Godhead (Col. 2:9). In that epistle, the apostle referred to the divine essence, the personality of Deity, the state of being God or Divine. The citations neither disclose the number of persons in the Godhead nor the precise nature of Divinity; these revelations are elsewhere found throughout the Bible.

One Godhead: Three Persons

In view of the multitude of passages addressing a plurality of persons in the Godhead, it is truly remarkable that anyone could doubt it. For instance, several passages place the Father in heaven while Jesus Christ was on earth (Matt. 5:16, 45, 48; 6:1, 9, 14, 26, 32; 7:11, 21; 10:32-33; 12:50; 15:13; 16:17; 18:10, 14, 19, 35; 23:9; Mark 11:25-26; Luke 11:2); Jesus, during His earthly ministry, said: "Whosoever therefore shall confess me

before men, him will I confess also before **my Father which is in heaven**. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before **my Father which is in heaven**” (Matt. 10:32-33).

Further, the heavenly Father is attributed with characteristics of a person. He sends physical and spiritual blessings (Matt. 5:45; Eph. 1:3). The Father possesses the quality of morality (Matt. 5:48). He is capable of rewarding (Matt. 6:1, 4). Our Father can see (observe, discern, know) (Matt. 6:6, 8, 18; Luke 12:30). He forgives (Matt. 6:15) and can hide things (Matt. 11:25). The Father can be known as a Person is known (Matt. 11:26-27); He has a will or volition (Matt. 12:50; Luke 11:2; John 5:30). God the Father also possesses a kingdom (Matt. 13:43), has glory (Matt. 16:27; Mark 8:38; John 1:14), receives prayers (Matt. 26:39, 42, 53; Luke 11:2; 23:34, 46; John 11:41; 12:28), is merciful (Luke 6:36), delivers things (Luke 10:22), makes appointments (Luke 22:29), receives spirits (Luke 23:46) and makes promises (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4).

He is referred to as possessing a bosom (John 1:18), loves (John 3:35; 5:20; 10:17; 14:23; 16:27), is to be worshipped (John 4:23), works or does things (John 5:17, 19-20, 37), has life (John 5:26), gives (John 6:32, 37; 12:49; 18:11), teaches (John 8:28) and is pictured as possessing a hand (John 10:29). The Father has a Son and adopted sons as well (Matt. 8:29; Luke 1:32; Luke 4:41; Luke 22:70; John 3:16; 10:36; Acts 3:13; Rom. 15:6; 2 Cor. 6:18; 11:31; Gal. 1:3; Eph. 1:3; 3:14; Col. 2:2; Heb. 1:5; 1 Pet. 1:3; 2 John 1:3; Rev. 1:6; 3:5). He gave Jesus the words He spoke (John 12:50; 15:15), possesses things (John 16:15) and puts things (Acts 1:7). All this confirms the personality of the Father.

The Holy Spirit is also attributed with characteristics of a person. The Spirit descends (Matt. 3:16), leads (Matt. 4:1; Rom. 8:14; Gal. 5:18) and speaks (Matt. 10:20; John 16:13; Acts 1:16; 8:29; 10:19; 13:2; 21:11; 28:25; 1 Tim. 4:1; Heb. 3:7; Rev. 2:11; 14:13; 22:17). The Holy Spirit can be blasphemed (Matt. 12:31), has a name (Matt. 28:19), reveals things (Luke 2:26; 1 Cor. 2:10), has before taken shape or form (Luke 3:22), teaches (Luke 12:12; John 14:26; 1 Cor. 2:13), comforts (John 14:16; Acts 9:31) and dwells (John 14:17; Rom. 8:9, 11; 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19; 2 Tim. 1:14). He testifies (John 15:26; Acts 20:23; Rom. 8:16; Heb. 10:15), guides (John 16:13), gives utterance (Acts 2:4), can be lied to (Acts 5:3), can witness things (Acts 5:32), can be resisted (Acts 7:51), sends (Acts 13:4), reasons (Acts 15:28), forbids (Acts 16:6-7), appoints (Acts 20:28), intercedes (Rom. 8:26), searches (1 Cor. 2:10), justifies (1 Cor. 6:11), gives gifts (1 Cor. 12:8-9), writes (2 Cor. 3:3), is sent (Gal. 4:6), can be grieved (Eph. 4:30), can be fellowshiped (Phil. 2:1), sanctifies (2 Thess. 2:13), signifies (Heb. 9:8) and can be mistreated (Heb. 10:29).

Scripture also notes that more than one person of the Godhead participated in creation (Eph. 3:9). “*And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...*” (Gen. 1:26). Still other Scriptures mention all three persons of the Godhead in a single breath or stroke of the pen (Luke 1:35; John 14:26; 15:26; Acts 2:33; 10:38; Rom. 15:16, 30; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 4:4-6; Heb. 9:14; 1 Pet. 3:18; 1 John 5:7). “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matt. 28:19). Here, not only the plurality of persons in the Godhead is proved by Scripture, but the number also (three persons).

Additionally, several other passages mention the Father or the Son and the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13; Rom. 15:30; 1 Cor. 12:3; Eph. 2:22). Couple with these more passages in which the Father and the Son are mentioned together (Mark 5:7; John 5:18, 22-23; 6:46; 10:32; 11:41; 12:26, 28; 13:1, 3; 14:21, 23, 28, 31; 15:1; 16:10, 28; 20:17; Rom. 1:7; Rom. 15:6; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2-3; Gal. 1:3; Eph. 6:23; Phil. 1:2; Col. 1:2-3; 2:2; 3:17; 1 Thess. 1:1; 3:11, 13; 2 Thess. 1:1-2; 2:16; 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2; Tit. 1:4; Phil. 1:3; 1 Pet. 1:2-3; 2 Pet. 1:17; 1 John 1:3; 2:1, 3; Jude 1:1; Rev. 3:5). Such verses attest the plurality of persons in the Godhead.

The Father raises the dead, including Jesus Christ (John 5:21; Acts 2:24, 32; 4:10; 5:30; 10:40; 13:33; Rom. 6:4; 10:9; 1 Cor. 15:15; Col. 2:12). This, too, affirms the plurality of persons in the Godhead. A plural Godhead is further evident by passages that declare the Father sent Christ (John 5:36-37; 6:44, 57; 8:16, 29, 42; 10:36; 12:49; 13:3; 17:3, 25; 20:21; Rom. 8:3; Gal. 4:4; 1 John 4:9).

The Person of the Godhead referred to as the Father is acclaimed to be God (Deity) in Scripture; He is called “God the Father” (John 6:27, 45; Gal. 1:1, 3; Eph. 1:17; 6:23; Phil. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1-2; 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2; Tit. 1:4; 2 Pet. 1:17; 2 John 1:3; Jude 1:1). The Bible also teaches that Jesus Christ is God (Matt. 1:23; 1 Tim. 3:16). Not only is there a plural number of Persons in the Godhead, namely three, but all are *Divine Persons*.

Passages that teach Jesus is not the lone Person of the Godhead are numerous (Matt. 27:46; John 8:16, 18, 28-29, 38, 54; 14:1, 28; 16:23, 27, 32; 17:3; 20:17; Acts 2:33; 7:55; 10:38, 40; Rom. 8:17, 34; 1 Cor. 8:6; 15:24, 28; Eph. 4:4-6; Phil. 2:6; Col. 1:15; 1 Tim. 2:5; 1 Pet. 3:22; 2 John 9-11). The Bible, matter-of-factly, overwhelmingly acknowledges three heavenly personalities in the Godhead.

However, the unity noted in Scripture among the persons of the Godhead does not do away with their plural number. This is obvious when one considers that Christians are one in God and God in Christians, yet our personality under these conditions is not questioned (John 14:20; 17:11, 21-24; 1 Cor. 8:6; Rev. 3:21). Finally, the plural number of persons in the Godhead can be seen in that prayer is to be made to the Father through Christ (Matt. 27:46; John 15:16; Rom. 1:8; 7:25; Eph. 5:20; Col. 3:17).

Nature of Godhead: What It Is Not

Were an objective, unbiased observer to carefully scrutinize the American religious community, he could only conclude that idolatry is rampant in our nation. This is true because of the distorted and contrasting pictures of God presented to the world by denominationalism. Every denomination attributes different characteristics to God and ascribes different laws to Him, including the way in which He is to be worshipped. Teaching about heaven and hell, or whether there is any eternity at all, also varies widely between sects. The whole nature of the Godhead is debated throughout the religious community; in essence, each religious group has its own unique God, heaven, hell and religious dogma. Amazingly, however, the followers of these several gods have the audacity to claim they are all really worshipping only one God, the God of the Bible.

The idols about which one can read in the Bible were fashioned by men from lifeless wood, molten metal and stone (Isa. 44:9-20; Hab. 2:18-19); modern men have fashioned idols from their imaginations. The power and hold of these idol gods emanates from the creeds that councils, conventions and synods have adopted. God refuses to walk with them who refuse to walk with Him (Amos 3:3). He will no more walk with modern day idolaters than He would walk with Israel and Judah in their idolatry.

The God of the Bible is not the god of denominationalism! Christians must recognize the distinctiveness of the Godhead; nothing should be allowed to cloud one's knowledge of the one, true God (Eph. 4:4-6). Denominationalism is strikingly similar to the idolatry with which the heathen and the children of God have been beset throughout human history. God views *idolatry* as *spiritual adultery* (Jer. 3:2, 6; Jud. 2:17; Ezek. 6:9), and doubtless views denominationalism no differently. **Mankind was never intended to be the consumer of a religious shopping center;** the church (or God), beliefs, salvation, worship, etc. of one's choice were never optional facets of God-given religion.

There is only one God by whom "we live, and move, and have our being" and who "will judge the world in righteousness" (Acts 17:28, 31). As Paul with great boldness declared the True and Living God to the Athenians, let us with the same boldness declare the same Almighty God to the world and keep ourselves from vain idols! "Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen" (1 John 5:21).

Nature of Godhead: What It Is

Whole volumes are devoted to the topic of the Godhead. Therefore, it is not the purpose of this writing to meet or surpass those treatises. However, it is within the scope of this exercise to confirm that the New Testament church is divine in Godhead. In other words, the Lord's church will believe what the Bible teaches concerning God, His Word and eternity. The Bible consistently teaches the same truths about God. Hence, the Godhead possesses precise (therefore predictable) divine characteristics.

The character of the Godhead is changeless (Heb. 13:8); "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (Jam 1:17). Summarized, the nature of God includes these divine traits. The Godhead is infinitely righteous or just (Psa. 145:17), but is tempered with boundless love and mercy (Eph. 2:4-5; Rom. 5:8), which results in matchless grace (Titus 2:11). Though loving, God is yet impartial (Acts 10:34; Rom. 2:11), wrathful and prepared to punish disobedient souls (Rom. 1:18; Eph. 5:6). There is a heaven into which all the faithful will one day be ushered (Matt. 25:34, 46), as well as a hell to which the unrighteous will be condemned (Matt. 24:41, 46). The Godhead has given man His Will (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:3), in which He expects us to abide (Matt. 7:21-23) and by which all humanity will be judged (Rev. 20:12-15).

Conclusion

The New Testament church ascribes to the Godhead only and all the characteristics attributed to God in the Bible. Therefore, the Lord's church teaches that the Godhead is

made up of three divine Persons who possess the same precise, divine traits. The word Godhead comes from the Greek, Theos, meaning divinity or the quality of being God. In contrast to the conflicting portrayals of the nature of God by denominationalism, the Bible consistently depicts God with changeless and uniquely divine but personal qualities. Lastly, there is an eternity to which we draw nearer each moment; will heaven or hell be our final abode is the ultimate question with which we must concern ourselves.

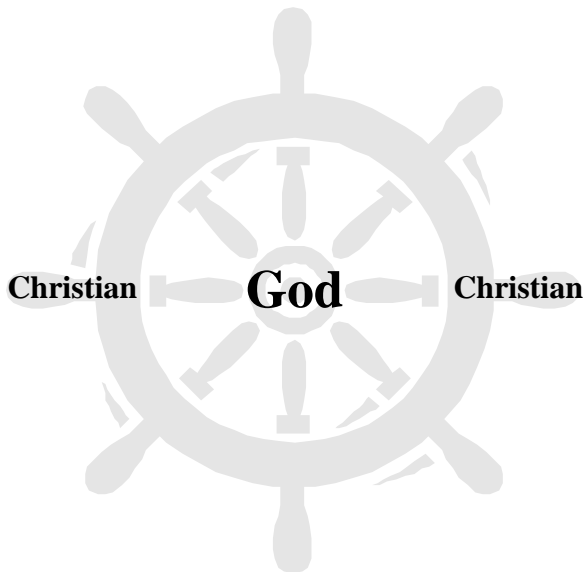
Thought Questions

1. What are the consequence and effect on man when he changes his concept of the Godhead (Rom. 1:23-32)?
2. How do the Jehovah's Witnesses and the United Pentecostal Church explain away a three-person Godhead?
3. List and explain some passages that teach about three persons of the Godhead existing simultaneously.
4. Explain how unity of purpose and moral qualities do not diminish the number of persons noted in the Godhead.
5. Comment and expand upon the observation that denominationalism is merely a modern form of idolatry.

More Questions

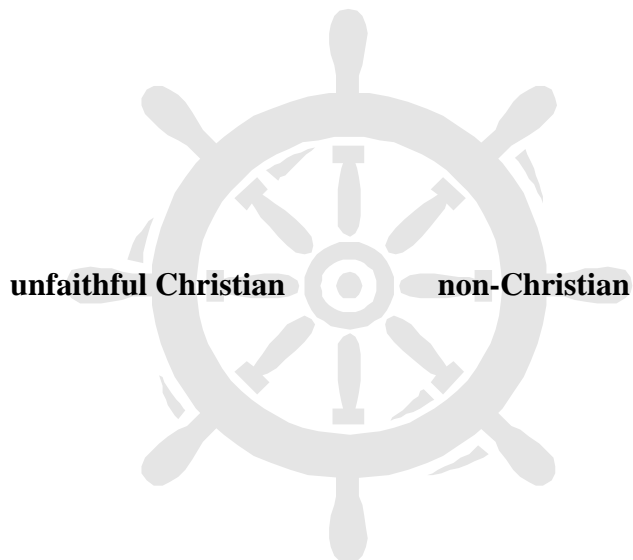
1. The Bible distinctly teaches that the Godhead is comprised of _____ divine persons.
2. The heavenly Father is attributed with characteristics of a _____.
3. The _____ is also attributed with the characteristics of a _____.
4. Scripture notes that more than _____ of the Godhead participated in creation.
5. Some verses of Scripture mention all _____ of the Godhead in a single breath or stroke of the pen.
6. The _____ noted in Scripture among the persons of the Godhead does not do away with their _____.
7. The idols about which one can read in the Bible were fashioned by men from _____, _____ and _____, but modern man has fashioned _____ from his _____.
8. The God of the Bible is not the god of _____!
9. _____ is strikingly similar to the _____ with which the heathen and the children of God have been beset throughout history.
10. God views _____ as spiritual _____.

DIVINE FELLOWSHIP



**Fellowship
with God
& man
1 John 1:3**

**Out of
fellowship
with God &
Christians
Eph. 5:11**



“That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ,” 1 John 1:3

CHAPTER 11

The New Testament Church Is Divine in Fellowship

Biblical fellowship should be the only religious fellowship in which the people of God have any interest. Furthermore, the definition of fellowship that can be gleaned from Scripture is the only definition sanctioned by God, and the only fellowship that will mean anything in judgment. Isn't it, therefore, rather pointless to subscribe to a counterfeit definition of fellowship, which can only mislead man now and certainly condemn him in eternity?

Does the Bible (and especially the New Testament or Gospel) clearly define biblical fellowship? Further, granting that a scriptural definition exists, is it necessary to accept and practice that fellowship? With whom may one have fellowship, and under what conditions (or are there any conditions)? Are there also others with whom the children of God are forbidden to practice fellowship? What does the Bible teach concerning the subject of fellowship? There are books devoted to the biblical doctrine of fellowship, so the following is obviously only an abbreviated examination of this topic.

Biblical fellowship must be established and maintained with God, and with those who are in fellowship with God. “That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3).

Further, man is not authorized to redefine fellowship or to extend it to those outside the scope of the biblical definition. The beginning of one's familiarity with God, a relationship with Him or understanding what God requires of mankind lies with faithful and regular consultation of the inspired Word of God. Implementation follows consultation. Faithfulness occurs after consultation and implementation, and will result in a heavenly hereafter with God. Following Bible teaching (doctrine) leads to fellowship with God and with those who are likewise in fellowship with God, and, in turn, brings about biblical unity as well. **Bible doctrine, genuine fellowship and true unity are inseparable companions!**

Biblical Fellowship Necessary

Led by the inspired apostles of Christ, the early church followed the doctrine (Gospel or New Testament) delivered to them and practiced fellowship with one another and God (Acts 2:42). Yes, it is not only desirable, but it is necessary that the New Testament church, regardless of in which century it exists, practice biblical fellowship. This is not an optional, but an obligatory matter. Whatever God requires of His creation is possible. The

New Testament does describe Christian fellowship; it can be understood; and this fellowship can be practiced accordingly.

Any attempt to alter the teaching (doctrine) of the Gospel assures the malfunction of true fellowship, a breach of fellowship with God and those who are in fellowship with God (Gal. 1:6-9; 1 John 1:6-7; 2 John 9-11). The only basis of biblical fellowship is the wholehearted acknowledgment of Bible doctrine. Fellowship must not be imagined to be limited to merely mental registration of Bible subjects (e.g., the seven ones of Eph. 4:4-6), but certainly requires the adoption of what Scripture *teaches* about them, too.

Fellowship and Discipleship Linked

First, fellowship is a condition of discipleship; “Then said Thomas, which is called Didymus, unto his **fellowdisciples**, Let us also go, that we may die with him” (John 11:16). Fellowship of the Gospel also resulted in common discipleship between the Philippian church and the apostle Paul (Phil. 1:5). It is equally true that discipleship is a condition of fellowship. Therefore, when Gentiles became disciples, they enjoyed fellowship with God and other disciples (Christians). “Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but **fellowcitizens** with the saints, and of the household of God” (Eph. 2:19). “That the Gentiles should be **fellowheirs**, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel” (Eph. 3:6).

Unless one is truly a disciple or Christian, he cannot entertain fellowship with God and with those who are in fellowship with God. This fellowship is the calculated result of “fellowship in the Gospel” (Phil. 1:5). Biblical fellowship does not exist in spite of the Gospel (teaching, doctrine), but because of it.

Laboring Together for God

Today, the subject of fellowship among brethren is often reduced to the consideration of a common meal together. However, biblically, comparatively few passages address this kind of fellowship (e.g., Acts 2:46). Perhaps more passages that pertain to fellowship depict it as *working together for the Lord* than any other activity. In this vein, Paul referred to Timothy as his “**workfellow**” (Rom. 16:21) and Titus as his “**fellowhelper**” (2 Cor. 8:23). The apostle named Clement among his “**fellowlabourers**” (Phil. 4:3). Others who were specifically designated as such included: Timothy (1 Thess. 3:2; Phil. 1:1), Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas and Lucas (Phil. 24). Justus was styled a **fellowworker in the kingdom of God** (Col. 4:11).

The activity in which fellowship involves laboring together for God primarily attends to being “**fellowhelpers to the truth**” (3 John 8). Scripture further describes fellowship among early Christians with these appellations: Epaphras and Tychicus were called **fellowservants** (Col. 1:7, 4:7) among others (Rev. 6:11; 19:10; 22:9). It is written of Epaphroditus that he was Paul’s “**companion in labour, and fellowsoldier**” (Phil. 2:25), and Apphia and Archippus are also called **fellowsoldiers** (Phil. 1:2). To exercise fellowship in spiritual labors makes each participant a “**true yokefellow**” (Phil. 4:3).

Fellowship and Suffering

Under the prevailing hostility toward the church in the first century, fellowship in the Gospel resulted in some becoming **fellowprisoners** (Rom. 16:7; Col. 4:10; Phil. 23). Not desirous by any means, however, the communion and partnership involved in biblical fellowship sometimes manifests itself among faithful brethren as the **fellowship of sufferings** (Phil. 3:10).

Fellowship and Worship

Though not limited to worship, biblical fellowship is enjoyed among Christians when they worship God. The Greek word for fellowship (koinonia) is translated “communion” and is applied to the Lord’s Supper. “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the **communion** of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the **communion** of the body of Christ?” (1 Cor. 10:16). Four verses later, the same Greek word is translated “**fellowship**” and applied to the relationship that exists between the worshipper and the worshipped (1 Cor. 10:20).

Giving is another side of worship in which fellowship results between man and God and between fellow Christians. Several Scriptures translate the Greek word for fellowship to “**communicate**” and apply it to giving (Gal. 6:6; Phil. 4:14-15; 1 Tim. 6:18; Heb. 13:16). Giving is also called fellowship in 2 Corinthians 8:4.

Inclusive and Exclusive

There are some with whom the children of God are forbidden to practice biblical fellowship. This is clear from at least two passages: “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?” (2 Cor. 6:14). “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them” (Eph. 5:11).

The word “communion” in 2 Corinthians 6:14 comes from the Greek word for fellowship; this text asks a rhetorical question, the answer to which is “None at all!” Both verses emphatically teach that no true fellowship can exist between camps wherein one holds to truth and the other does not. Not only so, but cordial association with sinners often leads to the corruption of the saints (1 Cor. 15:33).

Christian fellowship is described as “fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor. 1:9), “fellowship of the Spirit” (Phil. 2:1), fellowship with the Father (1 John 1:3), “fellowship one with another” (1 John 1:7), the apostles’ “right hands of fellowship” (Gal. 2:9) and “fellowship in the Gospel” (Phil. 1:5). Biblical fellowship is reserved for those who do the truth and walk in the light (1 John 1:6-7); these souls alone receive the blessing of the cleansing power of the blood of Christ.

Conclusion

Counterfeit fellowship will offer no consolation in eternity. It behooves us, therefore, to opt for only biblical fellowship now. We are not left to wonder about the nature of fellowship, for the Bible amply describes it. Biblical fellowship must be established and maintained with God and with those who are in fellowship with God. **Bible doctrine, genuine fellowship and true unity are inseparable companions.** New definitions are extra-biblical, corrupt doctrine and taint fellowship, and unity.

Further, the fellowship that God authorizes is not optional, but obligatory. Far be it from God's faithful children to endeavor to extend "koinonia" beyond the scope of its scriptural definition, hence assuring a malfunction and breach of true fellowship. The limits of fellowship include a divine relationship with God and with those who also entertain the same relationship with God. All others are excluded from this magnificent relationship. **Fellowship is as much a condition of discipleship as discipleship is a condition of fellowship.** Genuine fellowship is also the outgrowth of the practice of Bible doctrine. It manifests itself through laboring in the Gospel, suffering with the children of God and worship.

Thought Questions

1. With whom must fellowship be established and maintained? What leads to this fellowship?
2. How can one know that biblical fellowship is required? What relationship does the requirement to practice Bible fellowship sustain to scriptural authority?
3. Is a superficial acknowledgment of the existence of God and subjects He caused to be recorded in the Bible sufficient basis for establishing fellowship? Does one also have to believe what the Bible teaches about God and the fundamental truths He placed in the Scriptures?
4. Describe the relationship between fellowship and discipleship. Can biblical fellowship be legitimately exercised with non-disciples? Can there be acceptable discipleship without fellowship between disciples?
5. In what area does the Bible portray the most promising opportunity for the practice of fellowship? List ways in which fellowship should be practiced besides a common meal together. In what other way(s) may Christians also practice fellowship?

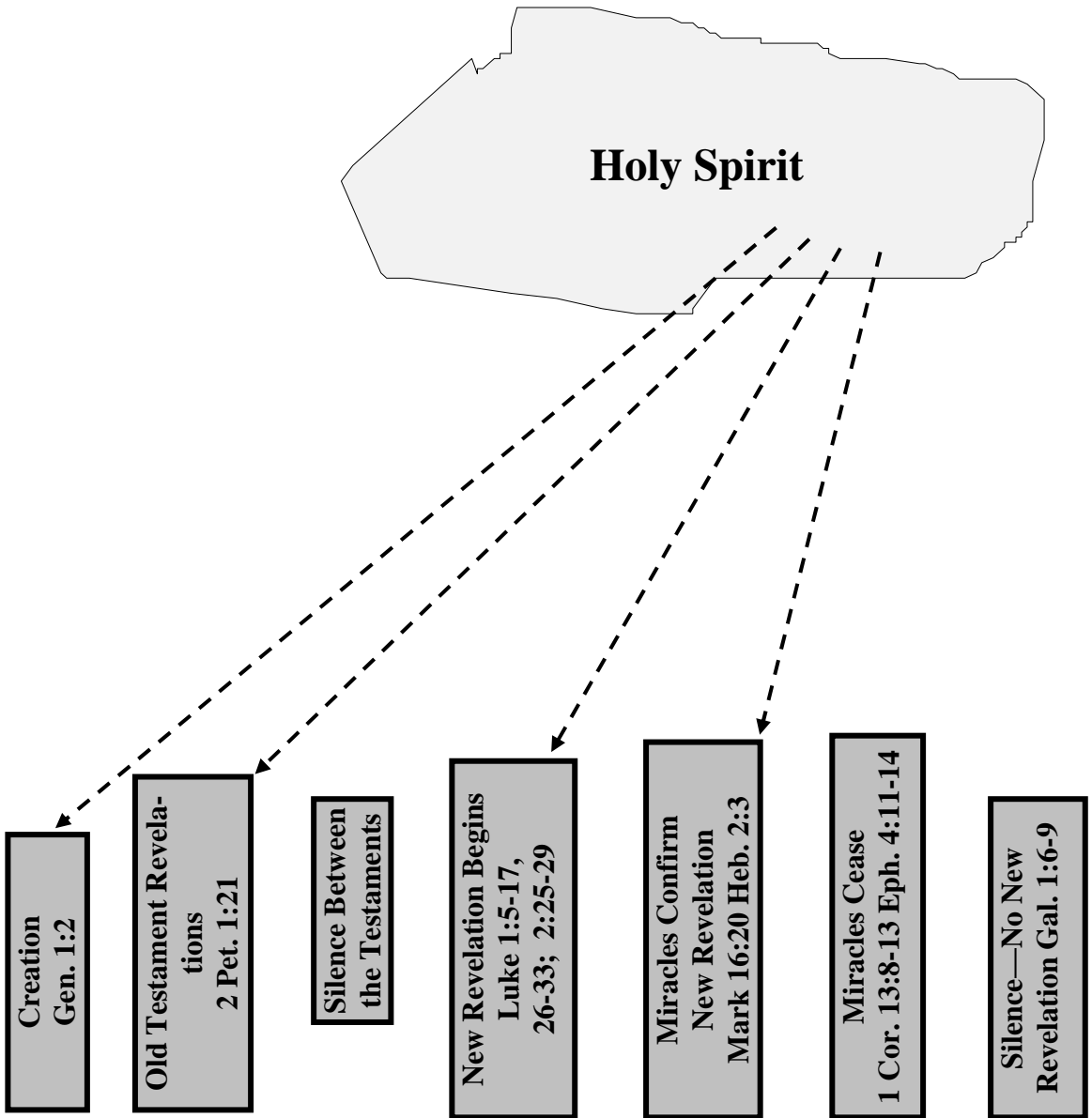
More Questions

1. _____ fellowship should be the _____ fellowship in which the people of God are interested.
2. Biblical fellowship must be _____ and _____ with _____ and with those who are _____ with God.
3. Man is not authorized to _____ fellowship.
4. Bible _____, genuine _____ and true _____ are inseparable companions.

Chapter 11 – The Church Is Divine in Fellowship

5. Any attempt to alter the _____ of the Gospel assures the _____ of true fellowship.
6. _____ is a condition of _____; but it is equally true that _____ is a condition of _____.
7. Fellowship involves _____ together for God.
8. Fellowship may involve _____.
9. Fellowship occurs in _____.
10. There are some with whom the children of God are _____ to practice biblical fellowship.

DIVINE IN SPIRIT



Abbreviated history of intervention by the Holy Spirit

CHAPTER 12

The New Testament Church Is Divine in Spirit

Much is said in contemporary religion about the Holy Spirit and His role in Christianity today. Unfortunately, almost as many spokesmen who speak for various religious groups, often purportedly explicitly guided by the Spirit, also teach different and conflicting doctrines about the Holy Spirit. Obviously, the Spirit of God is not the Author of these contradictions. However, what does the Bible, especially the New Testament, record concerning the Holy Spirit and His relationship to the Lord's church? Further, is there any difference between the role of the Spirit in the church of the first century and His role in the church of the present century? What is the scope of the baptism of the Holy Spirit? From what source came the miracles performed by others than the apostles? Finally, what were the stated purpose and duration of miracles? These questions suggest a direct correlation exists between the work of the Holy Spirit and miracles, which the following paragraphs will abundantly show.

The Holy Spirit of God makes his debut in Scripture in the opening verses of the Bible (Gen. 1:2). However, the Holy Spirit has not always interacted directly with creation, including the creature, man. For several hundred years following the close of the Old Testament until the announcements of the births of John the Baptist and Jesus the Messiah (Luke 1:5-17, 26-33), the triune Godhead was silent. There was no new, public revelation recorded during this span of time (though, the prophet Simeon, perhaps about the commencement of the Gospel histories, was apprised of the then impending birth of the Messiah and promised he would see Him before his death, Luke 2:25-29).

That the Godhead has not always miraculously interacted with mankind is mentioned, lest one should suppose it was some strange thing to suggest that the Holy Spirit does not now so interact with men. Really, the approximately 6,000 years of human history has evidenced comparatively few instances of miraculous intervention. After initial creation by supernatural law (miracle), procreation has continued since according to natural law. Throughout the Old Testament the Godhead only infrequently (comparatively speaking) visited the human race with divine judgments and new revelations; divine judgments, new revelations and miracles were **not *daily affairs***.

As mentioned previously, divine silence resounded for several hundred years between the Old and New testaments. Though especially the work of the Holy Spirit was again apparent on earth beginning with the Gospel records through the first century, prophecies foretold the cessation of the miraculous manifestation of the Spirit once more (1 Cor. 13:8-13; Eph. 4:11-14). Hence, it should be no surprise to the honest Bible student that the Holy Spirit does not presently interact in a miraculous way today.

The New Testament church of the first century was divine in Spirit when it understood and taught that the Gospel (then new revelation) *was being* miraculously received and confirmed (2 Pet. 1:21; Mark 16:20). The New Testament church of following centuries (including our century) is divine in Spirit when it understands and teaches that the Gospel *has been* miraculously delivered and confirmed. The difference is then the Holy Spirit exercised Himself miraculously, now He does not. Miraculous, partial revelations have been replaced with confirmed, recorded revelations (1 Cor. 13:8-13; Jam. 1:25). The miraculous role of the Holy Spirit in the church is complete.

Spirit Baptism: Limited Promise

The baptism of the Holy Spirit was promised solely to the apostles by Jesus, according to the Gospel record of John, chapters 14 through 16. Though, it is true that some of the teachings of the Lord in the context of John 14-16 generally apply to Christians today as well (e.g., Jesus will come back to get His saints, 14:1-3; true love exhibits itself by obedience, 14:15, 21, 23-24; disciples of Christ must bear fruit, 15:1-6), these things are also taught elsewhere in the Gospel. However, Jesus promised the baptism of the Holy Spirit only to the apostles, as Acts 1:4-5 clearly affirm. Associated with the baptism of the Holy Spirit was Spirit enabled miraculous power (Acts 2:1-4). Acts 1:26 identifies the apostles as the recipients of the baptism of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:1-4. (Remember that the *Chapter Two* heading was arbitrarily placed in the text by mortal men and should pose no disruption of the narration from Acts Chapter One to Chapter Two.)

The baptism of the Holy Spirit was promised exclusively to the apostles, and Scripture bears testimony that they alone received it in Acts Two. The role of the Spirit in the New Testament church of the first century included enabling the apostles of Christ to perform miracles (receiving new revelation and confirming that revelation with other miracles). Further, nowhere does the Bible ascribe to the Holy Spirit the responsibility of saving anyone from anything; those who believe contrariwise are mistaken. Read John 14-16 to discern the proper role of the Spirit in the first-century church.

Other Miraculous Power

Not through the baptism of the Holy Spirit, but through the imposition of an apostle's hands (with a single exception) others in the infant church received miraculous power, too. Cornelius, of course, and those who were with him represent the only exception to this biblical rule (Acts 10-11), and this owing to special circumstances surrounding the initial proclamation of the Gospel to the Gentile world. The baptism of the Holy Spirit and this miraculous power are included in the promise of Joel 2:28-29. "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit."

The manner of fulfillment and the degree to which individuals were enabled with the Spirit working miracles through them was left for New Testament definition. The apos-

bles received a greater abundance of miraculous ability than others (2 Cor. 12:12). Prophecy was fulfilled in the apostles through the baptism of the Holy Spirit, whereas others saw the fulfillment through the imposition of apostolic hands (except at the house of Cornelius, already noted).

Purpose and End of Miracles

The purpose of the Spirit working miracles through the apostles and others in the early church is clearly stated in Mark 16:20. “And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and **confirming the word** with signs following.” Once the Gospel (then new revelation) was confirmed (Heb. 2:3), and committed to written form (John 20:30-31; and the rest of the New Testament), attention was directed to the completed, perfected, written Word of God versus the verbal, partial revelations relied upon formerly (1 Cor. 13:8-13; Jam. 1:25; Eph. 4:11-14). Hence, when miracles had forever served their divinely prescribed purpose, and at least by the time the last apostle and the last person upon whom an apostle laid his hands to transfer power died, miracles ceased. At the same time, the task of the Holy Spirit in which He miraculously participated in the work of the church also ceased.

The *purpose* of miracles was never primarily to heal the sick, speak in foreign languages without prior study or any other miraculous manifestation; **miracles were not an end in themselves**. The Corinthian church, which truly did possess miraculous power, became infatuated with miraculous display and overlooked the true purpose of miracles. They were corrected for this error by the apostle Paul (1 Cor. 12-14). Had miracles not the divine purpose cited above, and were they used purely at the discretion of men, no explanation can be rendered for **not** healing sick saints (2 Tim. 4:20) and **not** raising dead apostles (Acts 12:2). For that matter, if Bible miracles existed today, what plausible reason could men offer now for not healing the sick instead of building hospitals and not raising the dead instead of preaching funerals?

Although several religious groups claim miraculous power in our day, the adage, “The proof is in the pudding,” applies in this regard. **These folk do not what they cannot, and would if they could**. It is astonishing and would be whimsical, too, were it not so tragic, that so many people today have the same erroneous infatuation with miracles as did the Corinthians, though **miracles have ceased**.

Conclusion

It is not a strange thing to consider the proposition that the Holy Spirit does not now interact miraculously with mankind. Comparatively speaking, the Godhead of whom the Spirit is part has only infrequently visited the human race with divine judgments, new revelations and other miracles; these have never been daily affairs.

It should come as no surprise to students of the Bible that the Spirit no longer enables men to perform miracles; the end of miracles was foretold in the Gospel. The New Testament church of the first century was divine in Spirit when it understood and taught that the Gospel *was being* miraculously received and confirmed. The New Testament church

of following centuries is divine in Spirit when it understands and teaches that the Gospel *has been* miraculously delivered and forever confirmed. The difference is that then the Holy Spirit exercised Himself miraculously, now He does not.

Prophecies such as Joel 2:28-29 began to be fulfilled by the apostles' reception of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Further fulfillment occurred when others received the power to perform miracles through the imposition of apostles' hands upon them. Whereas the purpose of miracles was foremost to deliver and confirm new revelation (the Gospel), and the Gospel has been confirmed, miracles are no longer necessary. Further, since the apostles have died as well as those they empowered to perform miracles, in a sense, subsequent miracles have died also. However, **the original miracles live on within the New Testament and are no less efficacious today than when first performed.**

Thought Questions

1. Give reasons why students of the Bible should not be surprised that the Spirit does not now miraculously interact with mankind.
2. Explain how the church of the first century could be divine in Spirit while teaching about a Spirit that enables men to perform miracles, whereas the Lord's church today **could not** be divine in Spirit were it to teach the same thing.
3. How can a context such as John 14-16 both contain information that applies exclusively to the apostles (e.g., baptism of the Holy Spirit) and other matters that apply to Christians today?
4. Does Joel 2:28-29 specify who was to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit? To what Scriptures must one turn to discern who were the intended recipients of the baptism of the Holy Spirit? To what Scriptures must one turn to learn who were intended to receive other miraculous power?
5. What was the primary purpose of miracles? How can one know that healing, etc. (the miracle itself) was not the purpose for which miracles were given? How does one's understanding of miracles relate to his concept of the role of the Spirit in the New Testament church?

More Questions

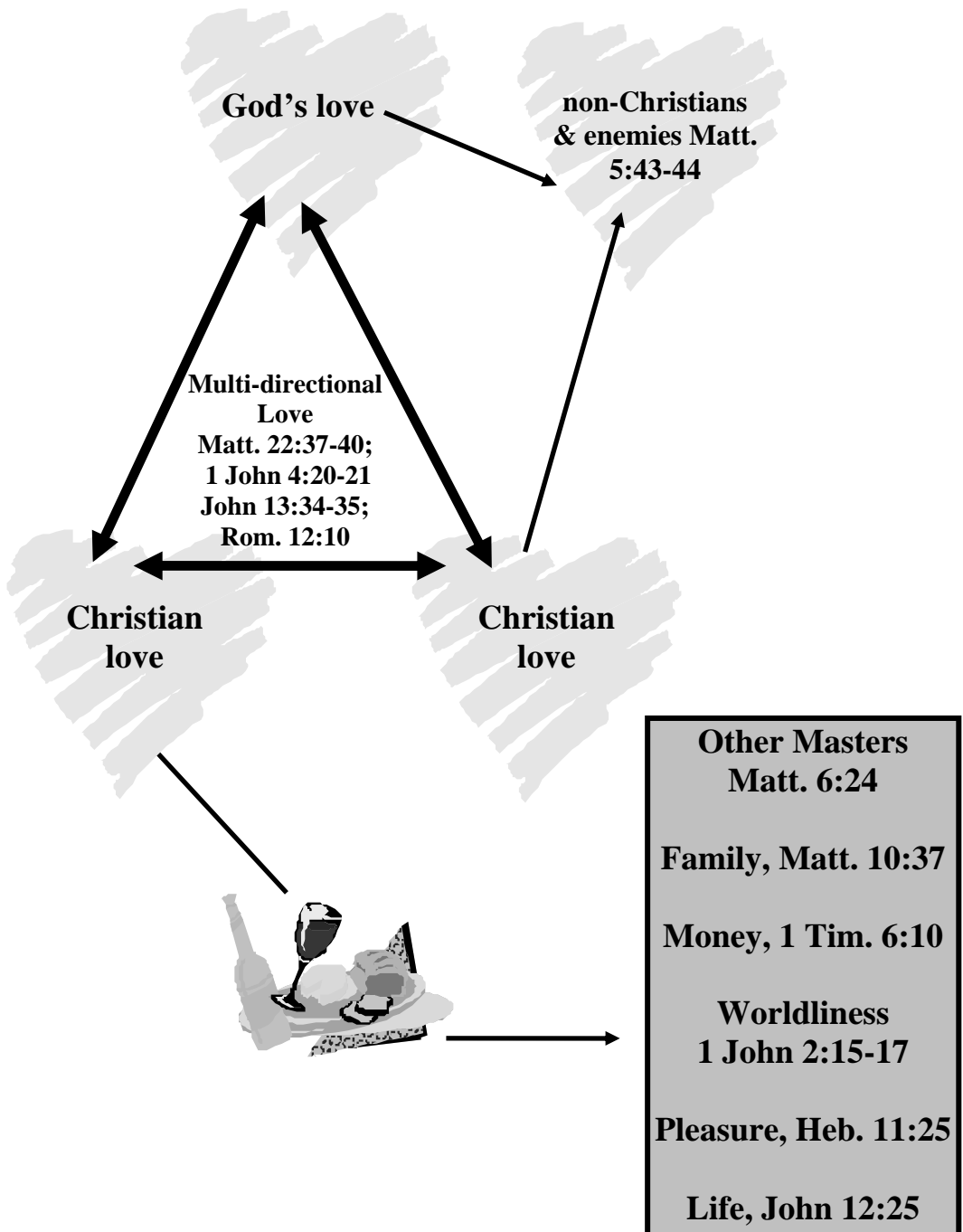
1. The approximately 6,000 years of human history has evidenced _____ instances of _____ intervention.
2. Divine _____, _____ and _____ were not daily affairs.
3. The baptism of the Holy Spirit was promised _____ to the _____.
4. Nowhere does the Bible ascribe to the Holy Spirit the responsibility of _____ anyone from _____.
5. Other than the apostles, the household of _____ alone received miraculous power without laying on of an apostle's hands.
6. The apostles received a greater _____ of miraculous ability than others.

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7. When miracles no longer served their divinely prescribed _____, and at least by the time the last _____ and the last _____ upon whom an apostle laid his hands to transfer power _____, miracles _____.
8. It should come as no _____ to students of the Bible that the _____ no longer enables men to perform _____.
9. Prophecies such as Joel 2:28-29 began to be fulfilled when the _____ received the _____.
10. Whereas the purpose of miracles was foremost to _____ and _____ new revelation, and the Gospel has been confirmed, _____ are no longer necessary.

DIVINE LOVE

Rom. 5:8
1 John 4:9-10, 19



CHAPTER 13

The New Testament Church Is Divine in Love

There are many legitimate perspectives from which the subject of love can be discussed. However, it is not the purpose of this chapter, for instance, to entertain such usage as: “I *love* ice cream” (though I confess I do). Rather, toward whom should the love of the New Testament church (and its members) be directed? In what form should these expressions of love manifest themselves? Further, what motivating factors should underlie and encourage the exhibition of such love? Will this love be rewarded by God? What are the outstanding qualities of love? Finally, what are the calculated consequences of the New Testament church exercising a divinely prescribed love?

Love Whom?

“To whom should the Lord’s church show love?” is concisely answered by Jesus Himself.

“Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matthew 22:37-40).

God wants His people to practice a multi-directional love. Generally, we must love God *and* our fellow man. This principle undergirds everything God desires His church and the Christians who comprise it to do in worship, duty and Christian living. We cannot hope to please God or satisfactorily do the bidding of the Lord in any regard, except we possess this multi-directional love.

First, one must love God foremost. The degree of love that rightfully belongs to the Godhead cannot be shared with another (Matt. 6:24). Christians must be careful, therefore, not to love parents or children (Matt. 10:37), money (1 Tim. 6:10), worldliness (1 John 2:15-17), pleasures (John 3:19; Heb. 11:25) or even life itself (John 12:25) more than God. We have the comforting assurance that nothing can separate us from the love of God (His for us and ours for Him) unless we allow it to happen (Rom. 8:35-39). Love for God is something that must be nurtured or cultivated and sustained (Jude 1:21). Further, God knows who loves Him (1 Cor. 8:3), and those who do not love God stand condemned (1 Cor. 16:22).

Man’s love for God naturally results in the manifestation of love toward his fellow man as well. “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that

loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also” (1 John 4:20-21). Wherever hatred, prejudices and bigotry are found among Christians, love for God is lacking. Man is ill prepared to love his neighbor until he has learned to love God; but unless he loves his neighbor, man is unable to demonstrate sufficient love for God. However, when one truly loves God, it is much easier to love his fellow man. Loving one’s neighbor is a prelude to loving an unseen God. Perhaps a paradox, loving God and loving man produces a reciprocal affect upon our multi-directional love. Loving God promotes our love of man, whereas loving man also promotes our love of God; so much so, that failure to love either God or man excludes sufficient love of both.

Many verses teach that we should love our “neighbor” (Matt. 19:19; Rom. 13:9-10; Gal. 5:14; Jam. 2:8) or “all men” (1 Thess. 3:12). Yet, it may not be easy to love some neighbors, especially if they are our enemies. However, Christians are obligated to manifest love toward enemies also (Matt. 5:43-44). Loving those who do not love us is one of the primary differences between the children of God and the rest of the world (Matt. 5:46; Luke 6:32). Love is the *badge of discipleship* that should be clearly visible to both the world and our brethren. “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:34-35).

Interestingly, more New Testament passages exhort Christians to love each other than direct us to love God or the lost. While we certainly cannot please God except we love Him supremely and love those outside Christ too, so many exhortations to love the brethren is a divine emphasis worthy of special attention.

Repeatedly, the Gospel requires Christians to “love one another” (John 15:12, 17; Rom. 13:8; 1 Thess. 3:12; 4:9; 1 Pet. 1:22; 1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7, 12; 2 John 5). Brethren are encouraged to practice “brotherly love” (Rom. 12:10; 1 Thess. 4:9; Heb. 13:1), “love the brotherhood” (1 Pet. 2:17), “love as brethren” (1 Pet. 3:8) and “love the brethren” (1 John 3:14).

Of course, within the scope of either loving our brethren or perhaps those outside Christ, we should love our families, too. Mom and dad head the list of family members toward whom we must show love (Matt. 19:19). The Gospel says more about exercising love toward one’s spouse than any other family member (Eph. 5:25-33; Col. 3:19; Titus 2:4). God highly values the divine institution of marriage and knows how essential love is to it. The family, after all, is the basic unit of both society and the church.

How Should the Church Show Love?

Especially the apostle John noted by inspiration in his writings the inseparable relationship between *love and obedience*. One simply cannot successfully contend that he loves God while refusing or neglecting the commandments of God. “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him” (John 14:21). “Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come

unto him, and make our abode with him” (John 14:23). “If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love” (John 15:10). “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous” (1 John 5:3).

How should the church show its love? Is there possibly a better way or an alternative to the biblical prescription? Besides, by practicing love, Christians will be compelled to also practice everything else within the Gospel toward everyone respectively. For instance, “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments” (1 John 5:2). Love is perfected in us by keeping the Word of God (1 John 2:5).

Why Should the Church Love?

Why the Lord’s church should practice love is also concisely answered in Scripture; “We love him, because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). My favorite passage anywhere in the Bible is Romans 5:8 because it illustrates this truth; “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” Though mankind was in the depths of sin, unable to lift himself from that miry, hopeless pit of despair, yet not even caring about his own eternity while seeking all the gusto one time around, God cared, and cared enough to send the sinless Son of God to die for us. I simply cannot fully fathom the measure of such divine love by a matchless God for fallen, despicable man, of whom I am one. “In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:9-10).

Will Love Be Rewarded?

Yes, love will be rewarded, both in this life and the eternal life awaiting the faithful. Now, God’s providence works on behalf of those who love Him; “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28). Ultimately, “the crown of life” or the eternal “kingdom” will be presented as the reward for loving God. “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him” (Jam. 1:12). “Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?” (Jam. 2:5).

Quality of Love

What is it that makes love a more admirable pursuit than anything else men pursue? Let’s see. Love makes no pretense, but is open, true and sincere (Eph. 6:24); it is not two-faced (Rom. 12:9); and, it is “unfeigned” or heartfelt (2 Cor. 6:6; 1 Pet. 1:22). Further, love seeks opportunities to serve those who are the object of its expression (Gal. 5:13);

this could be God or one's fellow man. Love is a frequent and familiar companion to faith (Eph. 6:23; 2 Tim. 1:13). High esteem of others and love go hand in hand (1 Thess. 5:13). Christian love is listed in various catalogs of qualities worthy of attainment (1 Tim. 6:11; Gal. 5:22-23; Eph. 5:8; 2 Pet. 1:7, "charity"). God thinks so much of love that He freely gives His children the spirit of love (2 Tim. 1:7).

True love is not an academic player only, but an action player; true love does something (1 John 3:18); and, true love labors or works (1 Thess. 1:3; Heb. 6:10). Love is also the quality that, along with other attributes, permits God to dwell in the Christian (1 John 3:17). Love tempers and motivates speaking the truth (Eph. 4:15). It, further, is a way of life; we "walk in love" (Eph. 5:2), abound in love (Phil. 1:9) and are "knit together in love" (Col. 2:2). When love actually exists in the life of a Christian, there is ample evidence or "proof" (2 Cor. 8:24).

Then, 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 is likely the Bible's single most definitive passage about love ("charity").

Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. (1 Cor. 13:4-7)

Consequences of Love

Probably among the two most important consequences of love are its affect on our (1) relationship with God and (2) subsequent, triumphant entry into heaven itself. "Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love" (1 John 4:17-18). Love can greatly help man arrive at his intended destination; so much so, without it he will not arrive. Shouldn't we provoke one another to love so our love might be multiplied (Heb. 10:24; Jude 2), since love is superbly suited to be an essential, contributing benefactor for the present life and the one to come?

Conclusion

Far more important than whether we love ice cream is do we truly love God first, and then our fellow man. Paramount in importance is the practice of love toward fellow Christians. The church and the individual Christians who comprise it can only thrive in an atmosphere of love.

Obedience to the commands of God is the proper response to love already extended to man by the Godhead. Happily, God will reward His children for their imitation of His love.

Pursuing Bible love can make each of us exactly what God wants us to be. Life will go better with us now, and eternity in heaven with God will be bestowed upon us as well, if

we will only practice love. Love even eliminates fear of death and judgment. Why would anyone not want to acquire this love of the Bible in view of what it can do for man now and eternally?

Thought Questions

1. Generally, to whom should Christians show love?
2. Why do you suppose so many passages exhort Christians to practice love toward fellow Christians?
3. How important of a factor is obedience to the demonstration of biblical love?
4. What is the prime motivation for practicing love?
5. Do you believe that Christians typically practice love, particularly toward brethren, to the degree urged by the Bible? If not, what can be done to promote more love? What can you personally do to encourage greater love among brethren?

More Questions

1. God wants His people to practice a _____ - _____ love.
2. We must love _____ and our _____.
3. The degree of love which rightfully belongs to the Godhead cannot be _____ with another.
4. Christians must be careful not to love _____ or _____, _____, _____, _____ or even _____ itself more than God.
5. Wherever _____, _____ and _____ are found among Christians, love for God is lacking.
6. Christians are obligated to manifest love toward their _____ also.
7. _____ those who do not _____ us is one of the primary differences between the children of God and the rest of the world.
8. Love is the badge of _____.
9. One simply cannot successfully contend that he loves God while refusing or neglecting the _____.
10. Love can greatly help man arrive at his intended _____.