



GREAT
COMMISSION
CHURCHES

NEW TESTAMENT CHRISTIANITY IN ACTION TODAY



GCLI
GREAT COMMISSION LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

SESSION III:
The Church and the Doctrine of God

SESSION IV:
Church Leadership/The Doctrine of Jesus Christ

WELCOME TO GCLI!

You are starting an exciting journey! To be a leader in the church of Jesus Christ is the greatest privilege in the world! In the Great Commission Leadership Institute, we believe:

1. *Our mission in the church rises and falls on leadership.*

That's why we are committed to seeing more leaders raised up for the Lord's kingdom.

2. *Leadership can be learned.* All great leaders in God's church were weak people who learned how to have a strong faith in a supernatural God.

3. *Leadership is best learned in the local church.* By combining "on the job training" in local church ministry with structured coursework, we have the best of both worlds—the practical with the academic.

May God grant you abundant grace as you aspire to serve the Lord Jesus Christ and His church in fulfilling His command to make disciples of all nations!

John Hopley
Editor, GCLI

General Table of Contents

I. Introduction	
*Questions and Answers	5
*How to Use this Notebook	10
*A Word to the Wives	10
II. Elder Qualification Test	11
III. The Great Commission Covenant	28
IV. The Church and the Doctrine of God	29
1. Overview	29
2. Overview of the Church	30
3. The Doctrine of God	36
4. Exercise: GCLI Teachings	41
5. The Church as God's Family: Reading & Exercise	43
6. Church History: Reading & Exercise	59
7. The Local Church and National Ministries: Reading & Exercise	92
8. Church Judgments: Reading & Exercise	108
9. Counseling & the Church: Reading & Exercise	134
10. Different Views of God: Readings & Exercise	148
V. Church Leadership/The Doctrine of Jesus Christ	163
1. Overview	163
2. Five Principles of Effective Church Leadership	164
3. Jesus Christ, the Son of God	168
4. Exercise: GCLI Teachings	172
5. Leadership Styles: Reading and Exercise	174
6. Elders and Leading the Local Church: Reading and Exercise	194
7. Women and Leadership: Reading & Exercise	214
8. Defending the Deity of Christ Against the Teachings of Contemporary Cults: Reading & Exercise	254
9. The Second Coming of Jesus Christ: Reading & Exercise	272

INTRODUCTION

GREAT COMMISSION LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE
Foundations Program
Questions and Answers

1. *What is the Great Commission Leadership Institute (GCLI) Foundations Program?*

GCLI is a 2-year national program, combining teachings, regional meetings, and local church mentoring, designed to systematically train pastor-elders who are part of Great Commission Churches (GCC).

2. *Why was this program developed?*

For over 30 years, God has raised up pastor-elders within Great Commission churches by the church leadership focusing on doctrine, character, and ministry skills of the men within their church. Also, during the 1990's, pastors in GCC churches consistently asked for help in training elders within their churches. A common question asked by men aspiring to be elders in churches was, "What practically can I do, and what steps can I take, to move closer to being an elder?" In response, the GCLI program was established. Since 1999, GCLI has been a program that combines local church mentoring with the structure of a national program to enhance what God has already been doing for several decades in GCC.

3. *What is the typical schedule for a man enrolled in the program?*

Each man will be asked to devote about 1-2 hours/week on homework. Each session will have two teachings (on CD with outlines) and up to five readings. Overall, each session has six or seven homework assignments—one based on the two teachings and five or six based on the readings. In addition, each person will participate in a 1-2 hour mentor group, usually twice each month, led by elders in his church. Also, each participant will have a personal mentor (an elder in the church), coaching him one-on-one in character areas and in ministry skills (which he will be exercising within the church ministry). Finally, each person will participate in the annual Pastor/Staff Conference, coupled with regional meetings with other elder-pastors in GCC churches near to them.

4. *Where will the regional meetings be held?*

The regional meetings will be held in regions throughout the United States. Contact your pastor for the one closest to you.

5. *What will be taught at these regional meetings?*

“Going deeper” teachings. That is, we will cover the core values and doctrines covered in the GCLI material, but with greater focus and depth.

6. *Why were the topics in the GCLI Foundations material chosen?*

Our desire in the GCLI is to give a basic orientation and overview of those issues that every man should know before he is appointed an elder. The topics taught on the CDs and the readings are ones that cover these essentials.

7. *Why not simply cover these topics within the local church? Isn't the local church adequate for teaching these topics to elder candidates?*

Yes, the church is adequate for raising up elders. And be assured that each local church in GCC is the foundation for the GCLI program. GCLI will only enhance what the church is already doing in developing men in doctrine/core values, character, and ministry skills. Further, the mentor group topics will all be covered in groups led by the elders of the local church.

8. *How will GCLI enhance men in doctrine and core values?*

A special dynamic occurs when the Word is taught in a group setting. Few churches have enough elder candidates to provide this dynamic for their local leadership training. Also, GCLI provides articles and testimonies from pastors who have broader gifts and effects than may be present in a particular local church. This impresses the truth more deeply into the lives of church leaders. Finally, specific doctrinal issues that pastors in GCC churches encounter in day to day ministry be the focus of study in the program.

9. *How will GCLI enhance the character training of those enrolled?*

As part of the program, each participant will take the elder qualification test to develop character qualities to grow in. The structure of the program, coupled with coaching by regional directors, will enhance the character training done by local pastors.

10. *How will the GCLI enhance the ministry skills training of men in the church?*

The structure provided by the program and coaching by regional leaders will help local pastors focus on developing practical ministry skills in each participant. Pastor's conference workshops and subsequent networking from the workshops will help develop participant's ministry skills. The mentor group topics are designed to deal with practical day-to-day ministry issues that every elder must be skilled in.

11. *Please describe the mentor group times.*

The mentor groups can best be described as “simulated elder meetings,” where doctrinal and ministry issues affecting the whole church are discussed. The elder candidates will not only be trained in ministry decision-making but will also be brought into a closer fellowship with the elders of the local church.

12. *What if the material covered is inconsistent with that which is taught in the local church?*

First, be assured that the program is designed to deal with doctrines and ministry issues relevant to every church in GCC. Controversial doctrines are addressed in a balanced way or are avoided altogether; and no one ministry model is emphasized. In addition, all pastors are invited to help in the development of materials for the program. The goal is that GCLI program represents the entire association of churches.

13. *Why are the articles written by Great Commission pastors, rather than others in the body of Christ?*

There are two primary reasons we chose Great Commission pastors to be the writers of these articles.

First, one of the goals of GCLI is for you to become part of the leadership community of Great Commission Churches. We are a band of brothers linked together to reach the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Reading articles by pastors within our association is a way for you to get to know some of the men that you are joining in the mission of world evangelization.

Second, we whole-heartedly believe that God can raise up any man to be an elder-pastor. The pastors in Great Commission Churches are not superstars. They are ordinary men who have been empowered by an extraordinary God. These articles show that any man can become a leader in God's church, if he simply is humble and committed to God, His word, and His church. Honest testimonies and practical articles by the association's pastors demonstrate to future pastors that being a pastor is not "out of reach"--it is very doable.

14. *What are the requirements for those interested in enrolling in GCLI?*

The GCLI program is for any man aspiring to be an elder in GCC who:

- * Is recommended by a pastor in his local church;
- * Agrees to participate in the Pastor/Staff conference and regional meetings; and
- * Agrees to participate in the mentor group in his local church.

15. *What are the guidelines local church pastors should use in selecting participants for GCLI?*

Here are some suggested guidelines:

- * Does he have a sincere desire to do the work of an elder and to aspire to that office?
- * Is there a general confidence that he could possibly be recognized as an elder in the next few years?
- * Is he presently doing effective ministry within the local church?
- * Has he had evangelism training in his church?
- * Has he had basic small group (or ministry) leadership training in the local church?
- * Has he participated in mission activities through the local church (e.g., High School LT, short-term international mission trip, domestic mission trip, etc.)?

16. *Is there a limit to the number of men who can participate in the program from any given church?*

There is no official limit. However, practically, there will be a limit to the number of men any given pastor will be able to mentor.

17. *Is there a recommendation as to the number of participants from each church?*

Although it will vary greatly from church to church, we recommend (and hope) that churches will typically have 1-4 elder candidates per existing elder enrolled in GCLI.

18. *What about women and those who are not elder candidates? Can they participate?*

Women and others may (and are encouraged to) participate in the Pastor/Staff Conference, regional conferences, and in the mentor group times (per the discretion of the pastors in each local church). Although the material is primarily designed for developing elders, the material can be used for training other leaders in the local church.

19. *What is the cost of GCLI?*

The program will cost each participant \$75 for the entire 2-year program. In addition, each participant will need to pay for registration and housing/food/transportation costs for the Pastor/Staff Conference and the regional meetings.

20. *What are the benefits that a participant receives for this cost?*

- Orientation to the essential topics that a prospective elder needs to know.
- Solid teaching on leadership, including a notebook of readings for the mentor groups.
- Greater unity and camaraderie with leaders in GCC through participation in the group sessions.
- Focused coaching in character and ministry skills.
- A certificate of completion from GCC to be given to all who complete the 2-year program.

21. *What if someone cannot financially afford GCLI?*

Scholarships are provided for those who have financial needs and are not able to afford the cost of the GCLI program. Ask your regional director for more information.

22. *If someone enrolls in the program, will it guarantee his appointment as an elder in GCC or in his church?*

Local church leaders ultimately make the decisions concerning who is appointed as an elder in their church. No GCLI participant is guaranteed that completion of the program will qualify him to be an elder. However, pastors will certainly have increased peace and confidence in appointing a man who has completed this course. Therefore, the GCLI is a tangible step toward becoming an elder for any man in a GCC church who desires this work. In addition, completion of the GCLI material is required for ordination by Great Commission Churches.

23. *Can a person enroll in GCLI at any point during the year?*

Yes, someone could enroll, for example, between Sessions II and III, or anytime during the program. GCLI is designed to be a continuous program that rotates every 2 years.

24. *If I have any further questions or suggestions as to GCLI or would like to contribute to the development of the program, whom should I contact?*

Contact your pastor, your regional director, or John Hopler (740-964-1002, gcusa1@aol.com).

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES: Unless otherwise identified, Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible* © The Lockman Foundation 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995. Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are from the *Holy Bible, New International Version*, copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, by International Bible Society; (NKJV) are from the Authorized or New King James Version of the Bible; (NLT) are taken from the *Holy Bible, New Living Translation*, © 1996.

HOW TO USE THE GCLI NOTEBOOK

GCLI is in four books with two sessions per book. Each of the two sessions contains six homework assignments. The first assignment of each session will be based on two teachings on CD. Listen to the CDs and follow along with the outlines provided.

In each church, the pastor(s) will lead a mentor group for six weeks per session. Mentor groups may prefer to meet weekly—others will meet every other week. Overall, in the course of one year, each mentor group will cover twenty-four assignments.

Each GCLI participant will do the homework assigned and come prepared to share at the mentor group time. The homework will include an exercise which will help develop your convictions in key doctrines and core values. The first week's exercise will be a discussion of what was learned from the CDs. The other 5 homework exercises will be based upon readings which have been included in this notebook.

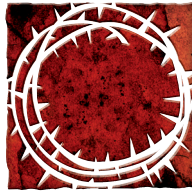
Each reading and exercise should take no more than 60-90 minutes to complete.

A WORD TO THE WIVES

For those married men who are participating in the GCLI program, a commonly asked question is: How can my wife participate with me as I pursue the path of leadership?

There are several ways for a man's wife to participate:

- 1. *Regional and national conferences.*** Wives are welcome to attend regional and national conferences. In addition, be aware that every other year at the pastors' conference there will be a special seminar track for the wives. Also, special seminars will be offered for the wives at several regional gatherings (see your regional coordinator for more details).
- 2. *CDs and readings.*** Wives are welcome (and encouraged) to listen to CDs of the teachings and to read the articles in the GCLI notebook. In this way, the values and truths are being imparted not just to the husband, but to the husband and wife as a team.
- 3. *Small groups in the local church.*** We urge each church to form small group activities specifically for the wives of those participating in GCLI. This could either be a wives' group or a couples' group that would meet, for example, monthly.
- 4. *One on one.*** Developing a strong personal relationship with the wife of another pastoral candidate would be one of the most valuable ministries that a pastor's wife can do.



GREAT COMMISSION CHURCHES

NEW TESTAMENT CHRISTIANITY
IN ACTION TODAY

Elder Qualifications Test (2nd Edition)

John Hople

An evaluation designed to help determine a man's maturity,
measured by the standards set forth in
Titus 1:6-9 and 1 Timothy 3:2-7.

Acknowledgements

Most of the original information in this booklet was derived from a discussion by the elders of Valley Brook Community Church in Columbia, MD, compiled in writing by Steve Huhta. The author extends his gratitude to them for their service and contribution to this work.

In addition, I want to thank fellow pastors Rick Whitney and Brent Knox for their input and suggestions to me in developing this test.

John Hople

2001 Great Commission Churches, 621 East Broad Street, Suite 2F, Pataskala, OH 43062. No part of this booklet may be reproduced without the written consent of the author. However, the Test Questions, the Qualifications Key, and the Answer Sheet may be reproduced for the purpose of allowing a man's wife, pastors, or associates to take the test in evaluating a man's life, as long as one booklet is purchased for each man being evaluated.

How To Use This Test

This is a tool to help discern whether (or how closely) a man is qualified to be an elder.

For any man who is seriously being considered for appointment, the test should be taken by:

- 1) The man himself.
- 2) All the elders (locally and regionally) who know him.
- 3) His wife (or roommate).
- 4) Other leaders who are close to him.

For those aspiring to leadership but not close to being appointed, the test should be taken by:

- 1) The man himself.
- 2) The elder who knows him best.
- 3) His wife (or roommate).

After this test is taken, the results should be discussed by the leadership and shared with the man whose life is being scrutinized. Page 27 gives further instructions on how to use the results of this test.

Test Questions and Qualifications Descriptions

Person being evaluated: _____

Person who is doing evaluation: _____

The purpose of this test is not to rate the spirituality or maturity of the elder candidate but to determine, yes or no, whether you personally have confidence that he is above reproach and thereby qualified to be an elder. Therefore, either answer Yes or No to the following questions, by writing a “1” for a Yes, and a “0” for a No. Record a “1” if the questions does not apply (e.g., a question as to children if the man has no children). Then add the four answers for a total and insert that number on the Summary Sheet on page 15.

A. Above Reproach (NASB, NIV)

Verse: 1 Timothy 3:2

Definition: Greek word “anepileptos” means “not to lay hold of.” That which cannot be laid hold of. Not open to censure, irreproachable, irreprehensible.
Phillips translation: of blameless reputation. Amplified Bible: give no grounds for accusation but must be above reproach.

Blameless (NIV)

Verse: Titus 1:6,7

Definition: Greek word “anegkleilous” means “not open to censure, irreproachable, unrebukable, irreprehensible.” Phillips translation: unquestioned integrity, of unimpeachable virtue.
Amplified Bible: men who are of unquestionable integrity and are irreproachable.

1. Is it true that no one has an unresolved justifiable complaint against him? _____
 2. Do those closest to him (wife, other church members) believe he is qualified to be an elder? _____
 3. Does he believe he is qualified to be an elder? _____
 4. Is he open and vulnerable with others as to his personal life? _____
- Total for A** _____

Additional Comments: _____

B. Husband of One Wife (NASB, NIV)

Verse: 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6

- 1. Is it true that neither he nor his wife (if he is married) have been divorced? Note: if a divorce in question was Biblically based, write down "1." _____
 - 2. Is he faithful to his wife physically? (If single, does he have control of his sexual desires?) _____
 - 3. Is he pure in his relationships with other women in the church? _____
 - 4. Does he have a high moral standard as to what he reads, or watches in theatres, videos, T.V. or the internet? _____
- Total for B** _____

Additional Comments: _____

C. Temperate (NASB, NIV)

Verse: 1 Timothy 3:2

Definition: Greek word "nephaios" means "sober, clear-thinking, mentally alert, able to make sound judgments." Thayer translation: a state untouched by any slumberous or beclouding influence. Phillips translation: a man of self-control. Amplified Bible: circumspect and temperate and self-controlled.

- 1. Does he regularly deny himself liberties, for the sake of benefiting others? (Romans 14; 1 Corinthians 8 & 10) _____
 - 2. Does he control his weight? _____
 - 3. Does he respond well when confronted with discouraging circumstances? _____
 - 4. Is he free from significant and uncontrolled financial debts (not including a house, car or school loan)? _____
- Total for C** _____

Additional Comments: _____

D. Prudent or Sensible (NASB)

Verse: 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8

Definition: Greek word “sophron” means “discreet, reasonable, sensible, serious, sound mind, self-controlled.” Implies sound judgment and a disciplined state of mind which is not characterized by impulsiveness or given to extremes. New International Version: self-controlled. Phillips translation: a man of discretion. Amplified Bible: sensible and well-behaved, sober-minded (discreet).

- 1. Does he generally display good common sense, particularly in financial areas? _____
- 2. Can he give good counsel on matters dealing with personal relationships? _____
- 3. Does he consistently go to the word of God when making important decisions? _____
- 4. Is he able to think creatively on how to see the church make progress? _____

Total for D _____

Additional Comments: _____

E. Respectable (NASB, NIV)

Verse: 1 Timothy 3:2

Definition: Greek word “kosmios” means “modest, honorable, decent, orderly, proper, trim, adorned, decorated, organized, attractive, beautiful.” Webster’s Dictionary: worthy of respect, decent or correct in character or behavior, proper. Wuest translation: one whose life is in accord with the position he holds and which is an adornment to it. Phillips translation: a man of disciplined life. Amplified Bible: dignified and orderly (disciplined) life.

- 1. Do others take his words to heart? _____
- 2. Does his external appearance measure up to what is considered proper both biblically and culturally? _____
- 3. Does he spend time regularly in planning out his time? _____
- 4. Does he keep his priorities? _____

Total for E _____

Additional Comments: _____

F. Hospitable (NASB, NIV)

Verse: 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8

Definition: Greek word “philoxenos” means “lover of strangers, hospitable.” Webster’s Dictionary: given to generous and cordial reception of guests, offering a pleasant or sustaining environment, readily receptive. Amplified Bible: hospitable, showing love for and being a friend to believers, especially strangers or foreigners.

- 1. Does he often use his home to minister to people? _____
- 2. At church meetings, does he go out of his way to meet visitors or people he doesn’t know? _____
- 3. Does he generally have a cheerful countenance? _____
- 4. Does he regularly invite people to church? _____

Total for F _____

Additional Comments: _____

G. Able to Teach (NASB, NIV)

Verse: 1 Timothy 3:2

Definition: Greek word “didaktikos” means “apt to teach.” Phillips translation: have the gift of teaching. Amplified Bible: be a capable and qualified teacher.

- 1. Is he able to share the word of God in a public group and have a good effect? _____
- 2. Is there clear growth in the lives of those people with whom he shares the word? _____
- 3. Has he led people to Christ? _____
- 4. Have there been people who have joined the church because of his sharing the word of God with them? _____

Total for G _____

Additional Comments: _____

H. Not Addicted to Wine (NASB)

Verse: 1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7

Definition: Greek word “paroinos” means “a man who sits too long at his wine, given to wine, drunken.” New International Version: not given to drunkenness. Phillips translation: not intemperate, not overfond of wine. Amplified Bible: not given to wine, not given to drink.

- 1. Is it true that there are no sins that have mastered him? _____
- 2. Does he make sure to do nothing that is causing a weaker Christian to stumble? _____
- 3. Is he sober emotionally? _____
- 4. Does he refrain from excessive drinking or taking addictive drugs? _____

Total for H _____

Additional Comments: _____

I. Not Pugnacious (NASB)

Verse: 1 Timothy 3:3

Definition: Greek word “plektes” means “excessively inclined to quarrel or fight, a bully, striker, quarreler.” New International Version: not violent. Phillips translation: not violent. Amplified Bible: not combative.

- 1. Is he able to maintain a concern for a person though personally offended by that person? _____
- 2. Is he diligent to not receive accusations against other people except on the basis of two or three witnesses? _____
- 3. Does he consistently abandon potential quarrels? _____
- 4. Does he handle criticism well? _____

Total for I _____

Additional Comments: _____

J. Gentle (NASB, NIV)

Verse: 1 Timothy 3:3

Definition: Greek word “epieidis” means “gracious, encouraging, considerate, kind, yielding, seemly, equitable.” Amplified Bible: gentle and considerate.

- 1. Is he flexible to change his positions on minor issues? _____
- 2. Is he a good and empathetic listener to people? _____
- 3. Is he kind and respectful towards those who are lowly or financially poor? _____
- 4. Is he able to secure the discipline of others without a show of authority? _____

Total for J _____

Additional Comments: _____

K. Uncontentious (NASB)

Verse: 1 Timothy 3:3

Definition: Greek word “amakos” means “peaceable, not quarrelsome, not apt to contend, not given to angry debate, abstaining from fighting or strife, not struggling or fighting or giving a violent effort to obtain something, not disputing.” New International Version: not quarrelsome. Phillips translation: not a controversialist. Amplified Bible: not quarrelsome but forbearing and peaceable.

- 1. Does he avoid foolish controversies or arguments about nonessential matters? _____
- 2. Does he promote peace, harmony and unity rather than division when doctrinal issues are discussed? _____
- 3. Does he see the good points in the views of other Christians with whom he generally disagrees? _____
- 4. Is he a man under authority (in the church, in business, and in society)? _____

Total for K _____

Additional Comments: _____

L. Free From the Love of Money (NASB)

Verse: 1 Timothy 3:3

Definition: Greek word “aphilarguros” means “not greedy, without love of money.”
Phillips translation: not greedy for money. Amplified Bible: not a lover of money — insatiable for wealth and ready to obtain it by questionable means.

Not Fond of Sordid Gain (NASB)

Verse: Titus 1:7

Definition: Greek word “aiskrokerdei” means “greedy, of base gain.” New International Version: not pursuing dishonest gain. Phillips translation: not greedy for financial gain. Amplified Bible: not grasping and greedy for filthy lucre (financial gain).

- 1. Does he trust God when tested financially? _____
 - 2. Is he generous with his money? _____
 - 3. Does he value ministering to people more than having a job on staff with the church? _____
 - 4. Does he tithe? _____
- Total for L** _____

Additional Comments: _____

M. Manages His Household Well (NASB)

Verse: 1 Timothy 3:4

Definition: Greek word “kalos proistamenon” means “to direct, be at the head, rule well, be concerned about, care for, give aid.” Also “to stand before; hence to lead, attend to, indicating care and diligence.” Wuest translation: preside over his own household. Phillips translation: must have proper authority in his own household. Amplified Bible: rule his own household well.

- 1. Does he lead out spiritually in his family? _____
 - 2. Does he take the lead in training his children in character? _____
 - 3. Is his house clean? _____
 - 4. Does he maintain a budget of his finances? _____
- Total for M** _____

Additional Comments: _____

N. Keeping His Children Under Control With All Dignity (NASB)

Verse: 1 Timothy 3:4

Definition: Greek word for control is “hupotage,” meaning “subjection.” Also, “primarily a military term, to rank under.” Greek word for dignity is “semnotes,” meaning “seriousness.” New International Version: see that his children obey him with proper respect. Phillips translation: able to control and command the respect of his children. Amplified Bible: keeping his children under control, with true dignity, commanding their respect in every way and keeping them respectful.

Having Children . . . Not Accused of Rebellion or Dissipation (NASB)

Verse: Titus 1:6

Definition: Greek word for dissipation, “asotia,” means “debauchery, wild, wastefulness.” The word for rebellion, “anupotaktuos,” means “not made subject, disobedient, undisciplined.” New International Version: not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. Phillips translation: not likely to be accused of loose living or lawbreaking. Amplified Bible: not open to the accusation of being loose in morals and conduct or unruly and disorderly.

Having Children Who Believe (NASB)

Verse: Titus 1:6

Definition: Greek word for believe, “pistos,” means “faithful, reliable, dependable, trustworthy, inspiring trust, confidence or faith.” Phillips translation: with children brought up as Christians. Amplified Bible: whose children are (well-trained and are) believers.

- 1. Are his children consistently well-behaved in public? _____
 - 2. Does he have a good, healthy relationship with his children? _____
 - 3. Do his children respect him and his words? _____
 - 4. Do his children respect other adults? _____
- Total For N** _____

Additional Comments: _____

O. Not A New Convert (NASB)

Verse: 1 Timothy 3:6

Definition: Greek word for new, “neophutos,” means “newly planted.” Not a recently saved or a younger believer, one who has had little opportunity to test his own faith or demonstrate faithfulness. Phillips translation: he must not be a beginner in the faith. Amplified Bible: he must not be a new convert.

- 1. Has he been a believer for a significant period of time? _____
- 2. Has he faced trying circumstances and succeeded? _____
- 3. Has he learned how to claim God’s promises over a period of time and see them fulfilled? _____
- 4. Has he shown proven character in serving in a church ministry? _____

Total for O _____

Additional Comments: _____

P. Good Reputation With Those Outside The Church (NASB)

Verse: 1 Timothy 3:7

Definition: The Greek words for good reputation, “kalos marturia,” mean “beautiful or good testimony.” Phillips translation: he should have a good reputation with the outside world. Amplified Bible: he must have a good reputation and be well thought of by those outside (the church).

- 1. Do fellow employees and workers who are unbelievers appreciate and value him? _____
- 2. Is he honest, demonstrating integrity in business and personal dealings? _____
- 3. Is his social life a good testimony before non-Christians? _____
- 4. Do his neighbors respect him? _____

Total for P _____

Additional Comments: _____

Q. Not Self-Willed (NASB)

Verse: Titus 1:7

Definition: Greek word “authades” means “self-willed, stubborn, arrogant, self-pleasing, self-centered, own authority, headstrong.” New International Version: not overbearing. Phillips translation: not aggressive. Amplified Bible: not self-willed or arrogant or presumptuous.

- 1. Has he surrendered his will to Jesus Christ in all areas of his life? _____
- 2. Is he a “team player” as to the goals and plans laid out by the leaders of the church? _____
- 3. Does he generally wait on the Holy Spirit’s leading before making decisions? _____
- 4. Does he often ask for advice when making decisions? _____

Total for Q _____

Additional Comments: _____

R. Not Quick Tempered (NASB)

Verse: Titus 1:7

Definition: Greek word “orgilos” means “inclined to anger, passionate, cross, irritable, sharp-tongued, short fuse.” Phillips translation: hot-tempered.

- 1. Does he hold his temper well? _____
- 2. Is he quick to forgive others who have wronged him? _____
- 3. Does he generally rejoice in trials? _____
- 4. Does he generally refrain from correcting his children in anger? _____

Total for R _____

Additional Comments: _____

S. Loving What Is Good (NASB)

Verse: Titus 1:8

Definition: Greek word “philagothos” literally means “to love (phileo) good (agathos), loving that which is good, a lover of good.” Amplified Bible: a lover of goodness — of good people and good things.

- 1. Are his closest associates godly people? _____
- 2. Does he quickly claim the grace of Christ when he sins or fails? _____
- 3. Does he believe the best about others? _____
- 4. Does he have a hopeful and optimistic view of life, based on the Scriptures? _____

Total for S _____

Additional Comments: _____

T. Just (NASB)

Verse: Titus 1:8

Definition: Greek word “dikaios” means “just, righteous in human relationships, upright, able to make proper judgments and act accordingly, correct, innocent.” New International Version: upright. Phillips translation: fair-minded. Amplified Bible: upright and fair-minded.

- 1. Is he fair and honest in his relationships with other people? _____
- 2. Does he listen to both sides of a discussion before coming to a conclusion? _____
- 3. Do others seek him out as a fair counselor? _____
- 4. Could he confidently and righteously lead in putting out of the church someone who deserved to be removed from fellowship? _____

Total for T _____

Additional Comments: _____

U. Devout (NASB)

Verse: Titus 1:8

Definition: Greek word “hosios” means “holy, pleasing to God, observable practical holiness, being undefiled, innocent, righteous, pious.” New International Version: holy. Amplified Bible: a devout man and religiously right.

- 1. Does he desire to please God more than men? _____
- 2. Does he have a strong prayer life? _____
- 3. Is he committed to obeying God and His word regardless of pressures or trials he goes through? _____
- 4. Does he regularly schedule extra time with the Lord? _____

Total for U _____

Additional Comments: _____

V. Self-Controlled (NASB)

Verse: Titus 1:8

Definition: Greek word “egkrates” means “disciplined, in full control of oneself, strong, master of, to have power over oneself.” New International Version: disciplined. Amplified Bible: temperate and keeping himself in hand.

- 1. Does he usually accomplish tasks on time? _____
- 2. Does he get to meetings on time? _____
- 3. Is his appearance neat and orderly? _____
- 4. Does he control his eating? _____

Total for V _____

Additional Comments: _____

W. Holding Fast the Faithful Word (NASB)

Verse: Titus 1:9

Definition: Greek word for holding fast is “antekomenon,” which means “clinging to, devoted to, paying attention to, holding firmly to.” New International Version: hold firmly to the trustworthy message. Phillips translation: a man who takes his stand on the true faith. Amplified Bible: he must hold fast to the sure and trustworthy Word of God.

Able to exhort (NASB)

Verse: Titus 1:9

Definition: Greek word “parakaleo” means “encourage, appeal, request, comfort, console, to call to or for.” New International Version: can encourage. Phillips translation: stimulate faith. Amplified Bible: to give stimulating instruction and encouragement.

Sound doctrine (NASB, NIV)

Verse: Titus 1:9

Definition: Greek word for sound is “hugianino,” meaning “to be sound, healthy.” Phillips translation: sound teaching. Amplified Bible: in sound (wholesome) doctrine.

Able . . . to refute those who contradict (NASB)

Verse: Titus 1:9

Definition: Greek word for refute, “elegkein,” means “convince, convict, expose, point out, reprove, correct, set forth.” Phillips translation: confute opposition. Amplified Bible: to refute and convict those who contradict and oppose it — showing the wayward their error.

- 1. Is he able to mobilize a small group or ministry team to serve Christ? _____
- 2. Is he able to boldly refute someone who is teaching wrong doctrine? _____
- 3. Does he have a good grasp of a wide variety of biblical doctrines? _____
- 4. Is he united with the other church leaders on all areas of major doctrine? _____

Total for W _____

Additional Comments: _____

Summary Sheet

Totals

A	Above Reproach/Blameless	
B	Husband of One Wife	
C	Temperate	
D	Prudent or Sensible	
E	Respectable	
F	Hospitable	
G	Able to Teach	
H	Not Addicted to Wine	
I	Not Pugnacious	
J	Gentle	
K	Uncontentious	
L	Free from the Love of Money/Not Fond of Sordid Gain	
M	Manages His Household Well	
N	Keeping His Children Under Control With All Dignity	
O	Not a New Convert	
P	Good Reputation with Those Outside the Church	
Q	Not Self-Willed	
R	Not Quick-Tempered	
S	Loving What Is Good	
T	Just	
U	Devout	
V	Self-Controlled	
W	Able to Exhort in Sound Doctrine and Refute Those Who Contradict.	

How To Evaluate The Test Results

1. First and foremost, understand that this is only a tool to help you evaluate if a man is qualified to be an elder. Reliance on the Holy Spirit and much prayer is needed when considering a man's qualifications.
2. The following is a scale to determine a man's qualifications based on the number in the "Total" column on the answer sheet:
 - 0: Not qualified
 - 1-2: Probably not qualified
 - 3: Perhaps qualified
 - 4: Qualified
3. The best way for the man being considered to use the results of this test is to take the one area of qualification in which there was the lowest rating and to devote himself to growing in that one area.
4. This ministry resource is provided by:

Great Commission Churches (GCC)
621 W. Broad Street, Suite 2F
Pataskala, OH 43062
740-964-1002
www.gccweb.org

GCC is a fellowship of churches and ministries devoted to Jesus Christ and fulfilling the Great Commission.



The Great Commission Covenant

As part of Great Commission Churches, I commit to:

1. Love God with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength.
2. Believe and follow God's word at all costs.
3. Love and honor my fellow believer in Christ as Jesus Christ has loved and honored me.
4. Uphold the following core values of Great Commission Churches.

Grace of God—God's grace through Jesus Christ is the basis and power, not only of our personal lives, but also of our ministry.

Commitment to God and His Word—Our aspiration is that our ministries will be marked by a wholehearted devotion to God, through prayer and by studying, obeying and teaching His Word.

All Nations Reached With The Gospel—Our goal and mission is to reach the whole world with the gospel of Jesus Christ, and to make disciples of all the nations.

Church—The local church is God's vehicle for accomplishing the Great Commission. The church is the place for winning people to Christ, building them to maturity, raising up leaders, and for preparing church planting teams to be sent out for the expansion of God's kingdom.

Church Leadership—We place a priority upon raising up pastors and other leaders of Christ-like character within the local church.

Oneness (Love and Unity)—We desire our ministry to be marked by a Christ-like, selfless love, loyalty, and unity with fellow believers.

Raising Godly Families—Strong families are the foundation for strong churches. Therefore we make it a priority to equip members and pastors in building their marriages and families.

Every Member A Minister—All Christians, pastor and non-pastor alike, are empowered through the Holy Spirit to be workers in the church. Therefore we seek to equip each member to utilize his/her spiritual gifts to serve others.

5. Strive to believe the best about any who make this covenant, to support them with a loyal tongue, and to be quick to defend them. I will be slow to accept an accusation against them and will not accept such an accusation unless it is supported by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If an accusation should prove to be valid, I will seek to gently and lovingly confront and restore my wayward brother to a faithful walk with Christ.

6. Love all those who make this covenant and to unite with them as fellow team members, believing in them, serving them sacrificially and holding them accountable to this covenant, as we unite together to bring glory to our Lord and to accomplish His work on this earth.

Session III: The Church and the Doctrine of God

OVERVIEW

This session's topics are the Church and the doctrine of God. Our desire is that you have a deep commitment to the Church as God's vehicle for accomplishing His purposes on this earth. Also, we have it as our goal that you have established convictions as to the person and character of God.

There are seven homework exercises:

- 1. Discussion From the Conference.** In this exercise you will reflect upon the main lessons you learned from the teachings.
- 2. The Church as God's Family.** In these readings there are several testimonies of leaders who are examples in making their church a loving and caring family. The goal of the exercise is that your church will likewise be an example of compassion and care for all people.
- 3. Church History.** In these two articles you will learn of the key moments in the history of the Church, together with the key events in the history of Great Commission Churches. The exercise will help you appreciate the past for the purpose of shaping your future.
- 4. The Local Church and National Ministries.** How does the local church relate to national ministries? This reading and the following exercise will address this question.
- 5. Church Judgments.** After reading Dave Bovenmyer's article on church judgments, you will be asked to answer questions that will test your knowledge and convictions on this very important subject.
- 6. Counseling and the Church** In this article, Dave Bovenmyer addresses the role of counseling individuals within the local church.
- 7. Different Views of God.** Tom Short and Matt Sherman have written some excellent articles on other religions' views of God and Jesus. This exercise will help you develop convictions on the character and nature of God according to the truth in the Scriptures.

The Church and the Doctrine of God

Overview of the Church

Pastor John Meyer, Fort Collins, CO



The word translated “church” comes from the Greek, *ecclesia*, which simply means a gathering or group. Its usage in the New Testament has two meanings—the “Church universal,” meaning all people who belong to Christ, past, present, and future:

“And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it” (Matthew 16:18, NIV).

“If I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15, NIV).

“And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way”
(Ephesians 1:22, 23, NIV).

and, secondly, local assemblies of believers united together:

“Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust” (Acts 14:23, NIV).

“The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house,” (1 Corinthians 16:19, NIV).

One of the foundational convictions of our movement has been that the local church is God’s _____ in fulfilling His purposes on earth.

Local groups of believers would be a natural outcome of a common faith. But does the Bible give us a basis to say local churches are more than this; that they are _____ specific idea and plan to fulfill His purposes?

- The word for church is used _____ times in the New Testament; most refer to a local assembly of believers, rather than the universal church.
- Most of the instructions for the church can only be fully carried out by a group of people that _____ one another. This requires some kind of stable relational organization.
- Leadership for _____ churches is the most clearly described leadership role in the Bible.
- The New Testament record tells us that the Apostles organized and assumed believers would be working together in _____ organizational construct—a local church.
- God calls every Christian to be part of a local church because it is _____ to live out the Christian life without being part of a local assembly of believers.

- A Christian who is not part of a local church is like:
 - a soldier without an _____.
 - a child without a _____.
 - a hand without the _____.
 - a football player without a _____.
- What do nearly all these have in common?
 - Individual parts or members combine together to create something that is _____ than just a sum of the parts.

What Is A Local Church?

- The New Testament uses many word pictures to describe the local church. They include a Bride (Ephesians 5:25-27), an Army (2 Timothy 2:3), a Flock (John 10:27), a Building (Ephesians 2:21-22), a Family (Ephesians 3:15), a Body (1 Corinthians 12), and a Fellowship (Acts 2:42).

We will focus on four of these word pictures.

The Church Is A Family.

“Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity” (1 Timothy 5:1-2, NIV).

- Family relationships are God’s plan to transmit _____ and _____, and the family of the church is no exception.
- God’s family values _____. A goal of church leaders is to build a _____.

“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3).

- In every issue that could have brought about a practical division in the church (race, gender, economic status, religious background, ecclesiastical preferences, leadership preferences, etc.), the Apostles stressed unity.
- God’s family has life-transforming _____.
- The “one another verses” contain 33 different commands given over 50 times.

“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves” (Romans 12:10, NIV).

“Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Ephesians 5:21).

“Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you” (Romans 15:7, NIV).
(See also: Ephesians 4:2; Galatians 5:13; John 13:34; Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:11; Hebrews 10:24; James 5:16.)

The Church and the Doctrine of God

Overview of the Church

- God's family is _____ to one another.

"... God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you'" (Hebrews 13:5, NIV).

"Keep on loving each other as brothers" (Hebrews 13:1, NIV).

- The divine standard of committed loving relationships lived out in a practical local context is the _____ of Christ's church. And above all else, _____ are to be the examples of love and unity.

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:34-35, NIV).

"May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me" (John 17:23, NIV).

The Church Is An Army.

- An army has an _____.

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age"
(Matthew 28:18-20).

- The objectives of the church are best achieved as we "think globally, act locally."

- An army has an _____.

"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms"
(Ephesians 6:12, NIV).

"Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8, NIV).

"Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes" (Ephesians 6:11, NIV).

- An army makes _____.

"Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus," (2 Timothy 2:3, NIV).

- Like an army, a church must be _____.

"These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you"
(Titus:15, NIV).

The Church Is A Body.

“Just as there are many parts to our bodies, so it is with Christ’s body. We are all parts of it, and it takes every one of us to make it complete, for we each have different work to do. So we belong to each other, and each needs all the others” (Romans 12:4, LIV).

- The church grows through its connection with _____, the Head.

“Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From Him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (Ephesians 4:15-16, NIV).

- Each part has been given a _____ purpose.

“But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as He wanted them to be. ... The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I don’t need you!’ And the head cannot say to the feet, ‘I don’t need you!’ On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable ... Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it” (1 Corinthians 12:18-27, NIV).

- Each part exists for the sake of the _____.

“Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms” (1 Peter 4:10, NIV).

- The reality of “spiritual gifts” means that the church operates through them rather than natural talents or experience (which would be present in any organization), and that God Himself makes each church complete through gifting its members.

The Church Is A Flock.

- Therefore God intends it to be led by _____.

“To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow-elder... Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers... not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock” (1 Peter 5:1-3, NIV).

- Three different terms are used in the New Testament to refer to the same church leadership position:
 - “Poimen” (Shepherd, Pastor)
 - “Presbuteros” (Elder)
 - “Episcopos” (Overseer, Bishop)

- The _____ appoints leaders for a local church.

“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers” (Acts 20:28, NIV).

The Church and the Doctrine of God

Overview of the Church

- The primary qualifications for leadership in the church are _____ -related.

“Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to much wine, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church?) He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil’s trap” (1 Timothy 3:2-7; See also Titus 1:5-9, 1 Peter 5:1-3, NIV).

- God charges pastors to lead as servants who will give _____.

“your leaders... keep watch over you as men who must give an account” (Hebrews 13:17, NIV).

“Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers — not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock” (1 Peter 5:2-3, NIV).

“Jesus called them together and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many’” (Matthew 20:25-28, NIV).

- God calls Christians to trust _____ through the elders He has appointed.

“Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you” (Hebrews 13:17, NIV).

- God has a specific plan for holding _____ accountable.

“Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses. Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning” (1 Timothy 5:19-20, NIV).

- God’s design is that leaders be _____ for their work.

“Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the food of the temple, and those who attend regularly to the altar have their share with the altar? So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel” (1 Corinthians 9:13,14, NIV).

Summary Statement

The Church is more than an organization or club for people who share a common faith. The local church is God's specific plan to accomplish His purpose in the world and in our lives. It is through the local church that we are able to grow and fulfill our identity as part of Christ's universal Church. The local church is a community of believers that models the practical holiness fitting for the Bride of Christ. In it we are also to have our closest and most life-changing relationships (like a family), we connect with the greatest purpose to which we could give our lives (like an army), and we discover the unique gifts God has given us to offer others (like a body). We also discover that God has provided leadership to help us grow (a flock), a pursuit of a Christ-like life that unites us (a fellowship), and that the Church has become the temple of God, financially supported by those who are part of it (a building).

The Church and the Doctrine of God

The Doctrine of God

Pastor Herschel Martindale, Columbia, MO



Human beings were created for the glory of God (Revelation 4:11). There is no higher purpose on earth than to know God and glorify Him. The rich, wise, and powerful are admonished to boast in their knowledge of God as being greater than their accomplishments (Jeremiah 9:23-24). Jesus taught that real life—life that would last to eternity—was rooted in knowing God (John 17:3).

And yet, people have always gone astray from the knowledge of God. Israel's is a history of straying into idolatry and forsaking the One true God despite the commandments in its Law (Exodus 20:1-6) and the pleading of its prophets. Today's world is filled with false gods and misconceptions of the true God. Christian leaders must endeavor to know the Lord and lead their flock into an accurate knowledge of God, for the Father seeks those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23).

A. Who, or what, is God?

“He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light; whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen” (1 Timothy 6:15-16).

“To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare with Him” (Isaiah 40:18)?

The God of Scripture is presented as transcendent and yet knowable. Yet, there are many mistaken ideas popular today about Who or what God is. Some of these descriptions include the Force, Nature, Energy, First Cause, the Ultimate Reality, the Great Spirit, and Allah.

There are many different “world views”, each with its own concept of God. Some of these are:

- Atheism There is a denial of any God.
- Agnosticism There is not sufficient evidence to deny or affirm God.
- Materialism Evidences of God are explained by physical or material causes.
- Polytheism The belief in many gods.
- Pantheism The belief that God is everything and everything is God.
- Deism There is an infinite God who can only be known through creation.
- Monism There is one impersonal force or principle at work in the universe.
- Dualism There are two equal, but opposite forces opposing one another.
- Pluralism There is no one body of truth or reality, but many forms and ways.
- Biblical Theism Believes that God has revealed Himself to His creation. As Francis Schaeffer wrote, “He is there and He is not silent.” He has revealed Himself through creation, angels, prophets and the Apostles, the Holy Scriptures, direct communication, and especially through Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

1. The primary difference between Theism and Deism is the belief that God has _____ Himself to mankind through the Bible.

2. The primary difference between Monism and Theism is the belief that God is a _____ God and that we can have a personal _____ with Him.

3. The primary difference between Theism and Pluralism is the belief that absolute _____ can be known and practiced by faith.

“There is no more exalted subject to which the finite mind may address itself than theism with its contemplation of the person and character of God. The natural man, though unable to receive the things of God, is, nevertheless, everywhere confronted with effects which connote a Cause and with design which connotes a Designer.” — Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer

B. Can human beings actually understand and know the infinite God? Yes, because:

- God has communicated with humanity in understandable _____ the Bible.
(2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:21)
- God created humans in His own image with the ability to _____ to Him.
(Genesis 1:26-28)
- God sent His Son _____ to reveal God to us and provide the way to God.
(Hebrews 1:1-3)
- God gave His _____ to live in us and reveal God to us more fully.
(John 16:13-16)

C. What is God like? What are His attributes?

“Though wholly inadequate, man’s conception of God is measured by those characteristics which he attributes to God. The Bible presents a revelation, though limited by restrictions that language must ever impose, ... of a Person, and this revelation attributes to Him those exalted qualities which are His.”
— Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer.

Personality has three component parts: intellect, emotions, and will. Each of these is present in God to an infinite degree.

- **Intellect:** The intellect of God is vastly different than that of mankind. God comprehends all things, past, present, and future. The understanding of God is infinite and all-inclusive.
(Psalm 147:5; Isaiah 46:9-10)
- **Emotion:** God is a divine, relational being who desires to communicate and commune with His creation. His emotions are pure and perfect.
(Examples: Grief: Gen. 6:6; Love: John 3:16, 1 John 3:16; Anger: Psalm 30:4-5)
- **Will:** The will of God is that which chooses and acts freely upon all that He determines.
(Romans 12:2; John 4:34; John 6:38-39; 1 Timothy 2:3-6)

The Church and the Doctrine of God

The Doctrine of God

God's Attributes

- **God is Spirit.** He is not physical or material in His essence (John 4:23-24). He is invisible, except when He chooses to reveal Himself.
- **God is Unique** (Isaiah 40:25). There is no other being in creation like Him.
- **God is perfect** (Matthew 5:48). He exists in a state of absolute perfection. He lacks nothing, and is correct and flawless.
- **God is eternal** (Psalm 90:2). He is the “I Am,” always has been, and will be forever. He has no beginning or end.
- **God is Holy** (Isaiah 6:3; 1 Peter 1:15-16). He is morally perfect, pure, and separate from all sin and evil.
- **God is Just** (1 John 1:9; Psalm 89:14). He has absolute right and authority over His creation. There is no partiality with Him. He will deal righteously with the righteous and the wicked.
- **God is loving.** (1 John 4:8; John 3:16). He is the complete source of all love. God's love was graphically demonstrated at the cross. He always seeks the highest good for His creation.
- **God is Good** (Mark 10:18). He always acts with the right motive, consistent with His Holiness and Love.
- **God is merciful** (Ephesians 2:4). He compassionately withholds judgments which we rightfully deserve.
- **God is gracious** (1 Peter 5:10; Psalm 103:8). He lovingly gives us freely what we do not deserve.
- **God is omniscient** (Psalm 147:5, Isaiah 46:9-10). He has all knowledge of all things past, present, and future.
- **God is Omnipresent** (Psalm 139:6-12). Since He is the Creator of space, He is not subject to it. He is both immanent and transcendent. God is everywhere at all times.
- **God is Truth** (Titus 1:2; John 14:6). What He says is absolutely correct, accurate, and reliable.
- **God is omnipotent** (Ephesians 1:18-19; Jeremiah 32:17). There is nothing which He cannot do or accomplish.
- **God is immutable** (James 1:17). There is no change in His character or His eternal truth. He always acts consistently with His character. He can be trusted. He is totally faithful.
- **God is Sovereign** (1 Chron. 29:10-12). As Creator, He has the authority, right, and power to rule over His Creation according to His will.

1. What attribute tells us that there is no partiality with God? _____
2. What attribute tells us that He withholds what we deserve? _____
3. What attribute tells us that He does not change? _____
4. What attribute tells us that He always has right motives? _____
5. What attribute tells us that He has always been and will be? _____

D. What is the Trinity?

As we read Scripture, it becomes obvious that there are distinctions in the Godhead. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit occur regularly as separate Persons with specific activities. The divine attributes and personality are attributed to each with consistency, while also stating that God is One. “Trinity” is never mentioned, nor doctrinally expounded in the Bible, yet this concept occurs from Genesis to Revelation. We accept this mystery by faith even though it is difficult, if not impossible, to fully understand.

“The basic concept of the Trinity is that the LORD is one God in three persons and three persons in one God. The persons are distinct, but not separate, and are all equally of one essence or nature.” — Dr. Dennis J. Mock

- The Father is declared to be God (John 6:27).
- The Son is declared to be God (Hebrews 1:8).
- The Holy Spirit is declared to be God (Acts 5:3-4).
- Some important texts: Genesis 1:26; Isaiah 48:16; Isaiah 63:7-10; Deuteronomy 6:4; Psalm 2:2,6-7; John 10:29-30; Matthew 28:19-20; John 14:13-16; John 1:1,14,18; Hebrews 13:20.

The doctrine of the Trinity affirms that a being may be _____ in one sense and _____ in another. For example, the immaterial and material elements of a human being combine to form one individual. So, the human being may be singular in one sense and plural in another. It is surely not the same, but if this is true in a human being, surely it can be true in a much greater way in the divine Being.

E. What is the greatest “prospect” as we contemplate the doctrine of God?

“Nothing less than the experience of the Divine Presence can ever satisfy the heart that has really tasted of His grace.” — H.G. Hewlett

“O God, You are my God; I shall seek Thee earnestly; my soul thirsts for You, my flesh yearns for You, in a dry and weary land, where there is no water” (Psalm 63:1).

“In Your Presence is fullness of joy; in Your right hand there are pleasures forever” (Psalm 16:11, NIV).

“One thing I have asked from the Lord, that I shall seek; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord and to meditate in His temple” (Psalm 27:4).

*“And Enoch **walked** with God, and he was not, for God took him”* (Genesis 5:24, emphasis mine).

*“And the Lord **appeared** to Abram”* (Genesis 12:7, emphasis mine).

*“The **friend** of God”* (James 2:23, emphasis mine).

The Church and the Doctrine of God

The Doctrine of God

*“By faith he (Moses) left Egypt... he endured, as **seeing Him who is unseen**”*
(Hebrews 11:27, emphasis mine).

*“My eyes (Isaiah) have **seen** the King, the Lord of Hosts”* (Isaiah 6:5, emphasis mine).

The greatest blessing possible for a human being is to have a personal _____ with this living God, daily enjoy _____ with Him, do His Will, then see Him face to face eternally.

“So, let us know, let us press on to know the Lord. His going forth is as certain as the dawn, and He will come to us like the rain, like the spring rain watering the earth” (Hosea 6:3).

EXERCISE

1. What were you most impressed and challenged with as you heard these messages? What implications should these have on your life?

2. The Church is described as an army, as a family, and as a body. On a scale of 1-10 (with 10 being the strongest), rate your church in each of these three ways. Based on this ranking, what steps would you take as a pastor to improve this church?

3. The four functions of Acts 2:42 are simple, yet vital for the life of the Church. Identify which of these functions you are strongest in and where you are weakest. Brainstorm on how to improve in each area.

4. What verses support the truth of the Trinity?

5. When you look at the character of God in Herschel's teaching, which character quality do you think is best communicated in your church? Which character quality do you think needs to be communicated better?

THE CHURCH AS GOD'S FAMILY

INTRODUCTION

In 1st Timothy, a book devoted to describing how God's Church should function, Paul tells Timothy that the goal of our instruction is love (1:5). Yes, the Church should be organized. Yes, the Church should be accurate in doctrine. And yes, the Church should be a church of prayer. But the bottom-line question to every leader of every church is this: Is your church a family where love abounds? The following articles will help motivate and instruct you on how you as a leader can build your church to be a loving family.

“Now the church is not wood and stone, but the company of people who believe in Christ.”

- *Martin Luther*

The Church as God’s Family:

The Church as a Family

Pastor John Hopler, Columbus, OH



The church has been described as an army, a family, and a business. In the earlier GCLI readings on the great commission, we looked at the Church as an army. I would now like to address the Church as a family and a business.

There is a real danger for leaders to overemphasize one paradigm over another. There are those who focus on the Church as a business and neglect the family perspective. Others emphasize the family perspective so much that they neglect to address the business issues that are important in a church.

I believe the church leader must consider both perspectives as vitally important, but that the family paradigm must take priority. By this, I mean that we must *begin* with the Church as family, and then, as we build the Church, we will add to our focus the vital business issues that a church must address. The reason I believe family comes first is the emphasis in the Scripture on the family paradigm. Throughout the New Testament, familial words like “brother” or “brethren” are used to describe church relationships. The whole goal in the Church is love (1 Timothy 1:5) and love is the greatest quality of all (1 Corinthians 13:13). The Church is to be the place where family-like love is demonstrated and experienced by all.

Although the leader may view a church as his “business,” (*e.g.* his flock [1 Peter 5:2] and his field [1 Corinthians 3:9]), it is vital that he sees his church as a family first before he sees it through this business paradigm. The “church growth” movement has drawn upon examples from the business world and applied these to the Church. Principles of marketing the Church, opinion surveys, management principles, etc., have been utilized to help churches affect their communities and to grow. I believe these business principles can be helpful as long as the family paradigm is the first emphasis.

Below is a list of ways in which the family and business paradigm can affect the Church.

	Church as a family	Church as a business
A person’s worth is:	Based on who he/she is, as a child in God’s family	Demonstrated when that person contributes to and serves the church
Morale of church is high if:	The church is loving	The church is growing numerically
We influence ones in the community by:	The love and care of the members	Excellence in the organization and ministries
Gatherings are:	Relational and informal	Planned and organized
The church meets:	In homes throughout the week	In sharper, public facilities
Large group gatherings will promote:	The entire family, including those who are weak & needy	Those who are especially gifted & excellent in their skills
A key role for the elders is to:	Model love for one another and unity in Christ	Be excellent in each one’s unique spiritual gift & ministry
A pastor will see the church as:	His spiritual family	His business
Ministry is done in the church:	According to the need of the moment	Through careful and strategic planning
A leader’s effectiveness is measured by his:	Love for people and his relational skills	His organizational and management skills

“The local church is the hope of the world.”
- *Bill Hybels*

I want to emphasize that both paradigms are crucial. The Church must be organized and well-managed for it to be effective in accomplishing its purposes. However, it must be first priority for the Church to be a loving family. If there is love and honor in Christ within the Church, a solid foundation will have been laid. Upon this foundation leaders in the Church can then excel in the many wonderful management and business principles which are so critical to learn for affecting our culture.

“The church is never a place, but always a people; never a fold but always a flock; never a sacred building but always a believing assembly. The church is you who pray, not where you pray. A structure of brick or marble can no more be the church than your clothes of serge or satin can be you. There is in this world nothing sacred but man, no sanctuary of man but the soul.”

- *John Havlik*

*The Church as God’s Family:
Cornerstone Community Church —
A Church with a Family Spirit*

Pastor Harry Poindexter, Belton, Missouri



Some time ago, I was sitting with an international student from Tanzania who was attending the English as a Second Language program at our local junior college. I asked her what she thought of Cornerstone. She has attended several different functions, a couple of Sunday worship times, and our cell group, as well as being a guest in our home. Her response was, “You are like a family.” This is a fairly common response from visitors. One family that joined our church in the past year commented that although they noticed one particular area where they thought we could improve, the family atmosphere was an overwhelming factor in their decision to join this church.

It is hard for me to understand fully how we are different from other churches, to the point that visitors consistently remark about the friendliness and family atmosphere they encounter at Cornerstone, but I will try.

Friendly—Probably the most significant influence upon people who visit Cornerstone is the fact that people are so friendly. No one can enter the building without being approached and engaged in conversation. People make a point of introducing themselves to new people both before and after the service. If you do it before the service you have something to talk about later. The pastors also make a point of greeting new people both before and after the service. We used to serve refreshments after the service to keep people around; but after we installed new carpeting two years ago we discontinued the treats, as we were averse to ground-in brownies and cookies. But to our surprise, the “hang around” atmosphere did not go away. People still hang around for 45 minutes to an hour after visiting the service.

Relational People—It goes with being friendly. We have a large supply of what I would call relational people. They like each other, they are open to others, they take visitors where they are, and they open up their homes and their lives to others. Our folks act as if people really are more important than things or projects. We have a small group structure that gives us something to which new people can come. We do not press people to get with us, but we do not hold ourselves aloof.

Informal Style—We have an informal appearance for the most part. People dress in a wide variety of styles, but the predominant look is slacks and nice shirts for men and nice dresses for the women. We involve a wide variety of people in service. Randy Becker, one of our main greeters, is one of the friendliest guys you will ever meet. Randy is blind. Kids will also help greet. Our children’s Sunday School is age integrated. We have 60 to 80 kids from the age of four to fourteen all meeting together in one group. We include the kids in the singing part of our service and dismiss them during the message. Leadership for the Sunday School is largely supplied by our teens.

Cornerstone Community Church -- A Church with a Family Spirit

Attitude—We think of ourselves as “family.” There may be differences of opinion at times and there are certainly areas in which we can grow, but we remain committed to loving one another, accepting one another, and being united through any and all difficulties. We continually stress the worth of every member of the church and our “for-ness” for each person. There is a very generous spirit towards people in need in our midst, and a readiness to respond to the needs of those who are coming in from outside the church.

Pastors—We are pretty strong in pastoral gifts and we try to model this family spirit towards new people, in the church body, and among ourselves. We do a lot of lunches and breakfasts, not only with the key people, but with a pretty broad spectrum of the church. We remark upon the family spirit and try to promote it as a value and strength of the church.

Just Do It!—The last factor I would comment on that contributes to us being a church with a family spirit is the presence of lots of families. We have a number of strong examples of loving families, large and small. It creates a certain amount of energy and joy (some might call it chaos). It definitely provides visitors with kids lots of points to connect. Overall, we make a point of approving and accepting everyone from singles to childless couples to families of every size.

We value our family spirit—we promote it. We see strong families and a strong family spirit in the church as a foundational value and a way for us to share Christ with those who do not know Him.

“Church attendance is as vital to a disciple as a transfusion of rich, healthy blood to a sick man.”
- *Dwight L. Moody*

“Kindness has converted more sinners than zeal, eloquence or learning.”

- *Frederick W. Faber*

The Church as God's Family: Friendship Clubs

Pastor Tim Honeycutt, San Antonio, TX



Lee's Summit Community Church started as a small group. We have always seen the need to stay small as our church grows larger. However, there was a certain segment of our church population that was not interested in becoming a part of a small group. The small group arena was too threatening. At that point, we instituted the Friendship Club concept. These are not Bible studies. They are purely a social gathering. The purpose of these groups is to build a bridge between the church and the un-church. They also build a bridge between the long-standing members and those who are new to the church.

Friendship Clubs are usually made up of between four and ten couples. They need to be large enough to take place even if one or two couples are unable to attend. Singles can also be incorporated into these groups as long as some care is taken to put more than one single in a group so that no one feels like the odd man out. Some friendship groups at LSCC are made up entirely of women. We have seen successful groups centered around a particular game such as cards or Bunko. Other groups are dinner clubs that either meet at people's homes or go out to a restaurant.

In the fall we have sign ups for those interested in participating in Friendship Clubs. Our group coordinator is responsible for getting the right mix in a group. He makes sure each group has believers, non-believers, those new to the church and a lead couple to organize the first meeting of the group. We distribute the following guidelines to each couple to make sure things run smoothly:

1. Host should call club members to remind them of the meeting a week before the meeting.
2. Host should divide up responsibilities for bringing dessert/snack items and drinks.
3. If your group is playing Bunko and a couple is unable to attend, that couple is responsible for finding a replacement for themselves.
4. At the end of your meeting determine the next date and host. It is suggested that each group decide a predetermined weekend out of each month, i.e., the 2nd Friday/Saturday of each month, realizing that all members may not always be able to attend every month.
5. Host should have available chairs, tables, games, cards, dice, index cards for Bunko, etc., as needed for their club.
6. If you have any questions concerning anything dealing with Friendship Clubs, please call _____ (list coordinator's number).

Friendship Clubs build a sense of belonging. People of different cultures, social status, and beliefs come together for the purpose of having fun and getting to know one another. Often, after people get acquainted in these Friendship Clubs, they are more willing to become involved in the small group ministry or other ministries within the church.

“Whether we are considering the smaller gatherings of only some Christians in a city, or the larger meetings involving the whole Christian population, it is in the home of one of the members that the ‘ekklesia’ is held—for example in the ‘upper room.’ Not until the third century do we have evidence of special buildings being constructed for Christian gatherings.”

- *Robert Banks*

“Shared joys are doubled; shared sorrows are halved.”
- *Unknown*

The Church As God’s Family: Apples of Gold

Pastor Greg Van Nada, East Lansing, MI



Many, if not most, people to whom we desire to minister to these days have been deeply hurt. They have developed a distrust of others and often carry these feelings over to us even though we have done nothing to deserve it.

Addressing this need is the reason I have become so excited about the Apples of Gold seminars. In fact, while I would never say that this is the *only* place to learn these vital ministry skills, I emphatically believe that no leader will be effective in ministry unless he learns the biblical skills which are so clearly taught in the Apples curriculum.

Apples actually is conducted in three sessions of about ten hours each. The format includes both a lecture and then breaking down into small groups to immediately practice the skills being learned. This is so important because truth alone does not change lives; it is the application of truth that changes lives. This course is set up to facilitate the *application* of truth.

Sessions can be done all at once as a weekend seminar or spread out over ten weeks of teaching and small group discussions. The advantage of doing it in one weekend is that all participants are sure to attend all the sessions. The advantage of the ten-week program is that it allows more time for these skills to be practiced and applied. However, we find it inevitable that some people will miss some weeks’ material and that can prove to be a major problem.

And just what are these vital ministry skills that Apples teaches?

Apples 1 is titled **Listening for Heaven’s Sake**.

As may appear obvious, the focus here is learning valuable listening skills which can prove to be a platform to help others. We cannot really help others until we properly diagnose their problem and we cannot properly diagnose their problem unless we listen carefully to discover what it is. Too often we fail at this. We answer before we really listen. We assume we know the problem, or we answer before we discover the real problem, and such assumptions cause nothing but strife.

Listening for Heaven’s Sake also teaches how to demonstrate warmth, empathy, and respect for others. This builds trust with the people we are seeking to serve. Without such trust, they are unlikely to open up with us so that we and they can discover their true needs.

Apples 2 is titled **Speaking the Truth in Love**.

In this section, a person learns how to identify root issues affecting character development and then set goals to address those needs. You learn to “speak the truth

in love” as you help a person determine whether they really want to change and if they are willing to be held accountable in reaching the goals they set for themselves.

The third in the Apples series is called **Renewing Your Mind**.

In this section a person learns yet another skill which is vital to discipleship, for a person will never experience genuine change if they do not learn how to speak the truth in their own mind. Romans 12:1-2 tells us that unless we learn to renew our mind we will be conformed to this world, its values, beliefs, and behaviors.

“Renewing Your Mind” is a tool to identify wrong beliefs—deeper beliefs that influence our emotions, thoughts, and actions. Often we do not like the way we act or think, but we have not identified the deeper lie that is affecting us. Identify the lie and you can change what you believe which can then lead to changes in your emotions and actions. This is what “Renewing Your Mind” is all about.

Essentially Apples is a tool to help a person apply the “one another” commands of Scripture. It enables us to address blind-spots in our own lives and the lives of others. It helps us be open and humble before God so we can change ourselves and be an agent of change in the lives of others.

The Apples courses have had a huge impact upon my own life, as well as many of the people in our churches. The first place I noticed fruit from Apples was in my own family. I have become far more sensitive and skilled in showing my wife and kids genuine love instead of simply trying to “fix” their problems. I think this would be excellent for any couple to go through whether they were in leadership or not.

Second, I have seen individual lives change as they learn to uncover and address root issues, applying biblical truths to those areas.

Third, I have seen our pastoral counseling cut significantly after our small group leaders went through Apples. Through just listening to people, we have kept molehills from becoming mountains, and ones that have already become mountains have been reduced back into molehills. We would like all of our small group leaders to understand the skills taught in Apples 1 and our coaches to understand the skills taught in Apples 2 and “Renewing Your Mind.”

And, lest I forget to mention, let me emphasize that I believe these skills are important for evangelism as well. People skills—communication skills—are vital for all situations in which we try to minister to anyone.

I know I sound enthusiastic, so let me say again that these are biblical skills which can be learned without Apples. However, I have found this curriculum to be so helpful that I can't help but recommend it. For information on how you can get Apples in your church, call Equipping Ministries International at 1-800-364-4769.

“The worldly man treats certain people kindly because he ‘likes’ them: the Christian, trying to treat every one kindly, finds himself liking more and more people as he goes on - including people he could not even have imagined himself liking at the beginning.”

- C.S. Lewis

“We are never more like Jesus than when we are choked with compassion for others.”

- *Unknown*

The Church as God’s Family: Compassion Ministries

Pastor Mark Darling, Minneapolis, MN



We often think of Jesus primarily in terms of Him sharing His truth with people. But I believe there were four primary things that He did while here on earth: 1) He trained disciples, 2) taught people His message, 3) died for the sins of the world, and 4) spent time healing diseases caused by sin.

Now, I do not have the gift of healing. And, over the years, I have given little time to help raise money or awareness in finding a cure for diseases. So, when we planted a new church, The Rock, I saw the chance to implant in the psyche of a church the desire to do practical things to help others. For years, we have practiced friendship and servant evangelism as individuals. But how are we, as a church, making a collective impact upon our communities?

We determined that once a month we would participate in some kind of compassion project. The first one we helped with was a March of Dimes walk. We did not want to just walk, but to do the work that many do not want to do—the grunt work of setting up tents, handing out water, tearing down the equipment. It was a way to get out into the community and make an impact, all in the name of Christ, to show people God’s love in action. The lady who was in charge of the walk could not believe it when she was told that 80 of us would be there to help that day. She said that no group ever offered 80 and had them all come. But 80 of us did show up that day and worked hard. We wore our “Rock” hats and t-shirts and handed out flyers to the young people, in an unobtrusive way. After the event, the lady wrote us and thanked us again for helping and having so many people involved. She said that by far it was the most successful event ever done. Primarily, it was due to The Rock’s hard work and enthusiasm.

We also participated in the Minnesota Aids Walk. We do not condone homosexual behavior and clearly see from the Bible that it is wrong. But we were involved because we wanted to make it hard for anyone to knock us for being homophobic. There were 120 workers there from The Rock, working in the pouring rain. We set up tents faster than anyone else had ever done in good weather. One girl also broke her leg while helping tear down equipment. Again, we received a letter afterward commending us for the hard work and being involved.

We helped with Special Olympics one summer with 100 workers. My then 15-year-old daughter went and came home that night exhilarated. She thought it was the greatest thing to hang medals around those kids’ necks and see them so excited and happy. She said it was a life-changing day for her.

The school in which we meet is in uptown Minneapolis. Over 80% of the kids live at or below poverty level; 70-80% of them come from single parent homes. We went to the principal and told her that we would like to do something for the kids, to give

back to the school. She was stunned—nobody had ever offered to do something like this! So we had a school supply drive. I gave our congregation a three-week notice and challenged them. Many of us had recently received a sizeable check in the mail from a sales tax rebate. We had not expected it. I asked people to take that check and go buy a new backpack and fill that pack with school supplies. We had an entire van full, packed to the ceiling and the front seat, of supplies! When we delivered all of that to the school, the principal and teachers were astounded, near to tears. We will do this sort of drive at least once a year, all in the name of Christ.

The goal of doing all of this is to get our name out into the community and show them that we, as Christians, as Christ's followers, really care. We want them to see God's love and that He is an active God, involved in their lives. He cares about school supplies. He cares about people who are sick. He cares about exciting little kids. He cares in practical ways. And we are trying to show this to the people around us, practically obeying God's desire.

Isaiah 58:6-11 says, *"No, the kind of fasting I want calls you to free those who are wrongly imprisoned and to stop oppressing those who work for you. Treat them fairly and give them what they earn. I want you to share your food with the hungry and to welcome poor wanderers into your homes. Give clothes to those who need them, and do not hide from relatives who need your help. If you do these things, your salvation will come like the dawn. Yes, your healing will come quickly. Your godliness will lead you forward, and the glory of the Lord will protect you from behind. Then when you call, the Lord will answer. 'Yes, I am here,' he will quickly reply. Stop oppressing the helpless and stop making false accusations and spreading vicious rumors. Feed the hungry and help those in trouble. Then your light will shine out from the darkness, and the darkness around you will be as bright as day. The Lord will guide you continually, watering your life when you are dry and keeping you healthy, too. You will be like a well-watered garden, like an ever flowing spring."*

What would Jesus' life have meant without miracles? Words are powerful, especially when Spirit-filled, but the world needs to see action. The world has a stereotypical view of Christianity and often we play right into that view. We do this when we take shortcuts around being involved, when we don't want to get our hands dirty, so to speak, and get into the midst of the hurting, hopeless, searching mass of mankind that Jesus came to save. Jesus' life proves that God loves us and that our lives are significant. He proved this by doing good and healing many.

Ephesians 2:10 says, *"For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that we can do the good things he planned for us long ago."* I'm excited about these compassion projects because I am leading our church into collective good works to benefit others' lives in our community. We do not fit into the stereotypical view that the world has of Christians. It has been a great benefit to our congregation too. It is good for young people to work for others. It instills the meaning of the value of others and shows them practically that it is more blessed to give than to receive.

"Do something wonderful, people may imitate it."
- Albert Schweitzer

The Church and the Doctrine of God

The Church as God's Family:

Compassion Ministries

"I choose kindness...I will be kind to the poor, for they are alone. Kind to the rich, for they are afraid. And kind to the unkind, for such is how God has treated me."

- *Max Lucado*

I would like to challenge other leaders and pastors: involving your church in the needs of your community is the most strategic thing you can do to impact your community for Christ. Jesus did not wait for the people to come to Him, although they did. He went out where the people lived and worked. It cost Him and it will cost us. But what an immense blessing to be obedient to God's Word!

All Scripture quotations in this article are from the New Living Translation

***The Church as God's Family:
Building a Region-wide Family Spirit***
Pastor Rick Whitney, Commerce City, CO.



When the Scripture compares a healthy church to a healthy family, the analogy can easily cause us to think of many good pictures. No matter what our family background might have been like, every one of us can conjure up those normal scenes of what a healthy family and what a healthy extended family should look like.

I was saved in this association of churches, and was soon taught that a healthy church is a lot like a healthy family. Immediately that doctrine resonated in my soul. The teaching probably struck a deep chord because of my own family background.

And just like in our physical families, where we grow up, get married and move away, these things soon began happening in my spiritual family, the church. Quickly my spiritual brothers and I jumped out of the nest and began to move to other cities and establish our own church families. Dear men that we knew and loved left the home church and landed across our region and nation.

If we were to follow the normal pattern in America, soon those “distant relatives” would drift apart, unless we made an effort to maintain our relationship. It is easy to let family reunions slip and not be there. But often adult men and women wake up thirty years down the road, after letting their family drift away, and recognize that they are now alone.

To see our lives multiply, we must maintain our family relationships, up and down the line. This always made sense to me. And so we men that started this spiritual journey together, have agreed to get together regularly and do whatever it takes to maintain our family spirit across the Northwest region.

These are a few of the things we do to maintain our friendship and commitment to one another, always recognizing that commitment is a two way street:

1. We recognize that we all have close friendships in our local churches. At the same time we know that men across the region can be easily out of sight and out of mind. And so with two or three regional overnights a year, since the beginning almost 30 years ago, we have faithfully come together to make sure that those distant men are not out of mind. “Regionals” are a normal part of our region.
2. We pray every time we come together. We never meet just for business, but always leave time for fellowship in our regionals. And there is always a lot of laughter. And more prayer.
3. We regularly include our wives for at least one of our regionals, every year. If we are not including our wives and kids, then we are not sharing our lives. With this in mind, we also have had youth conferences, every year, for many years.

“He who trusts men
will make fewer
mistakes than he
who distrusts men.”
- *Unknown*

The Church and the Doctrine of God

The Church as God's Family:

Building a Region-wide Family Spirit

"Every man dies,
not every man truly
lives."

- From the movie
Braveheart

And our pastors' kids are front and center. We share our sons and daughters, "*the apples of our eye*," and not only do the kids know one another, but these youth conferences also give opportunity for the dads to talk. This sometimes is a little hard, but always honest and, I believe, truly encouraging.

4. We have a regional newsletter that we print up and it is usually devoted to news from across the region, *spiritual family kind of news*. And all of us men, brothers in the faith, contribute to it. We have published over twenty editions in the last ten years. Sometimes we have let this newsletter slide and it is picked up in other avenues.

5. We communicate often on the phone and through e-mails across the region. This goes on all the time, now far beyond any initial example or encouragement we may have given. Every single pastor must individually feel ownership and responsibility for our "*spiritual, regional*" family.

6. We have a joint financial account here in the region and all the churches tithe toward it. The region sends a lot of our money right back into the region, so that we can help one another. We try to be there for each other in every way, spiritual as well as physical, whether it is a church need or a pastor's own family.

7. I am not a man given to change and I resist it if it will hurt the stability of the churches scattered across this region. But lately it has been very encouraging to see other brothers begin to do this same kind of overseeing and I can see a future where we multiply this region several times.

8. We also try to regularly write a normal letter to all the men in this region; where I just share my heart, what's going on in my life, and in my brothers' lives. By regularly, I mean, a letter or two, every single month. I have written these rambling "*epistles*" for over a dozen years. Again, sometimes, I have let it slide, but every time I pick it up, it deeply encourages many. And for that I am grateful.

9. I have never felt that this region was mine. Many men here have routinely taught all of us in the region for many, many years. They have born responsibility for every "*brother on the wall*." And I believe that each pastor feels a responsibility to the whole region, just as we encourage a local believer to feel a loyalty and responsibility to his home church.

10. There are now over 60 men laboring as pastors in the Northwest and in the Northlands. I feel that it is crucial that every single one of the guys have someone that they know who is involved closely in the oversight of the Northwest region. I think this can happen through the many men who are presently helping to lead the 60.

These are just a few of the things we try to do in our region in order to maintain our family spirit. These ways of communicating and our various activities are, in many ways, just like what we do in a local church. We all value a family spirit in our local church and I believe there is a tremendous benefit to also value the family spirit in every region in this GCC movement.

EXERCISE

1. What aspects of these articles do you feel contribute most to the church functioning as God's family?

2. In the readings, we saw some examples of how churches reached out in compassion to those in their community. How is your church doing that today? Are there other ways in which you think the church can be doing this in your community?

3. The small group is the church family in microcosm. Evaluate your small groups in your church. How are they strong? How can they improve?

4. In John Hopley's article on the church as a family vs. the church as a business, he states that the first priority is that the church be a family, but that both aspects need to be seen in the life of the church. Evaluate your church in these two aspects. Do you believe your church is balanced? Explain your answer.

5. Helping the poor within the church was a key ministry of the first century Church. Evaluate the effectiveness of your church in helping church members with financial need.

CHURCH HISTORY

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the ages, God has been working through His Church. Jesus said that He would build His Church (Matt. 16:18) and He has done so from the first century to the present day. What has God been doing in the Church over the past 2000 years? And what lessons can we learn from our spiritual forefathers? These two articles will help you in your understanding of God's working throughout the history of the Church so that you can more effectively lead God's Church into the future.

“Hold firmly that our faith is identical with that of the ancients. Deny this, and you dissolve the unity of the Church.”

- *Thomas Aquinas*

Church History

Pastor Jonathan Williams, San Antonio, TX



Why study Church history? Mark Noll, the author of *Turning Points*, lists four reasons why every thoughtful Christian should look to the past. First, he says, the study of Christian history provides “repeated, concrete demonstration concerning the irreducibly historical character of the Christian faith.”¹

Our faith is not mere intellectual exercise nor is it based on the repetition of myths. It is grounded in real, historical events. When God gave the Ten Commandments He introduced them by saying, “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”² When Luke wrote his Gospel, he reported that he was compiling an account “of the things accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word...”³ While Christianity may involve a moral code, theology, and a way of looking at the world, it is primarily about what God has done in history. These works of God did not end with Acts 28. Christian history is a study of God’s continued works through His people in varied times and cultures.

Second, the study of Christian history provides “perspective on the interpretation of Scripture.”⁴ Noll states,

If a contemporary believer wants to know the will of God as revealed in Scripture on ...(various) matters, it is certainly prudent to study the Bible carefully for oneself. But it is just as prudent to look for help, to realize that the question I am bringing to Scripture has doubtless been asked before and will have been addressed by others who were at least as saintly as I am, at least as patient in pondering the written Word, and at least as knowledgeable about the human heart.⁵

An overview of how God’s people interpreted Scripture should give us pause and humility for we are probably not the first to come up with our idea, insight, or question. It should also caution us about our own cherished interpretations of our favorite passages for Church history is strewn with the wild and bizarre such as the inferiority of black people or the certainty of the return of Christ in 1538!

Third, Christian history provides “a laboratory for examining Christian interactions with surrounding culture.”⁶ In our study of Church history, we will see how Christianity broke through the boundaries of Jewish culture as it expanded into the Roman world with its Hellenic culture. But this was only the beginning. Christianity had to adapt and make itself applicable to the cultures of Northern Europe. In the past few centuries Christianity has been translated into hundreds of cultures as our faith has truly become worldwide. As we in Great Commission Churches seek to be culturally relevant in the U.S. and throughout the world, we would do well to learn from those who have walked before us on these paths.

Fourth, a study of Christian history can aid us in developing proper perspectives and attitudes on life. What was absolutely crucial to the saints of old? What was only relatively important? What was not essential? Seeing how God's people answered these questions will help us answer them today and focus our time and energy on that which matters most. We will also grow in humility.

Church history did not begin in 1969 with "the Blitz."⁷ God has been working in every generation since the Apostles. To follow on trails blazed by God's people of old is a privilege. We will also grow in faith as we see that the heroes of the faith were people just like us—people with strengths and people with glaring weaknesses, but who triumphed through the grace of God.

The following overview of history will focus on twelve turning points selected by Mark A. Noll, the McManis professor of Christian thought and the professor of history at Wheaton College. It is a summary of his book, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity*. Noll acknowledges that Church historians will differ on the top twelve events and Noll lists several which were difficult to leave out.⁸ But the twelve Noll has chosen express, in his opinion, key events that were critical moments and forks in the road in Church history.

Finally, as you read the following pages, keep in mind that meaningful Church history did not jump from the first century to 1517 when Luther posted his 95 theses on the church door in Wittenburg. While Noll is a Protestant steeped in Reformation theology, he makes the following gracious comment: "... historical study has convinced me that confessional Protestants have sometimes honored the ideals of the Reformation more in words than in reality. Historical study also shows that believers in other Christian traditions regularly display Christ-like virtues and practice humble dependence upon God's grace more than my confessional Protestant convictions tell me they should."⁹

In other words, Christian history involves the study of God's work among Roman Catholics and Orthodox. We will come across Popes, monks, and bishops in the following pages. They too have been involved in the Story and many of them are our spiritual ancestors! Acknowledging their role is in no way an endorsement of everything they believed or did, nor is it an endorsement of everything their direct spiritual descendants believe and do today. Rather, it is a call to hold to our convictions humbly, for *the Lord* knows those who are His, and He, and not you or I, will be the Judge on the Last Day!

Turning Point One – The Church Pushed Out On Its Own: The Fall of Jerusalem (AD 70)

Christianity was born within Judaism. Christ was born under the Law and died under the Law.¹⁰ The first decades of Christian history were Jewish Christian decades as the followers of the Messiah looked to the leaders of Jerusalem for leadership and order. Three of the four Gospels and many of the Epistles were written by Jews to Jews

"The church is so subnormal that if it ever got back to the New Testament normal it would seem to people to be abnormal."
- Vance Havner

The Church and the Doctrine of God

Church History

“Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, there a church of God exists, even if it swarms with many faults.”

- *John Calvin*

about Jewish issues—to show how Jesus Christ fulfilled Jewish prophecy and history or to navigate believers through the new and difficult terrain of Jewish and Gentile relations. In its first decades, Christianity was largely Jewish.

But when the Roman general Titus destroyed the Jewish nation in September of AD 70, a turning point occurred in Christian history—Christianity would make major advances in becoming a universal religion rather than being recognized as an offshoot or sect within Judaism.¹¹ This transition had already started, especially through the ministry of Paul, yet the Fall of Jerusalem accelerated it. Jerusalem would be replaced by Rome and theological discussions would turn away from Jewish contexts to the philosophical problems posed by interaction with Greek culture.

Yet all links with Judaism would not and could not be severed. Christianity inherited at least three presuppositions from Judaism that guided it in the coming centuries as it emerged from its Jewish womb into the Hellenistic world. These were: 1) faith in divine revelation, 2) faith in a written record of that divine revelation, and 3) wisdom in organizing believers into communities (similar to synagogues) of faith and practice that honored God. These were protections for the Christians as they continued to spread throughout the Roman empire, for the empire was filled with spiritual dangers of immorality and false religions.¹²

As Christianity moved into the Mediterranean world with all its spiritual challenges, three factors stabilized the Church in the generations following the Apostles. These were the development of the New Testament canon, the rise of the episcopacy (bishops), and the use of creeds.

Canon

The word canon is derived from a Greek word, probably borrowed from Phoenician, which means a rod or ruler for measuring.¹³ It came to signify the measure or standard by which church leaders would judge writings as apostolic and therefore authoritative for church life. Practical circumstances necessitated the formation of the New Testament canon. The Church required 1) “standards for worship and models for prayers, liturgies, and sermons,” 2) “reading material for public and private devotion,” 3) “a theological standard for responding to non-Christian critics and for adjudicating doctrinal disputes,” and 4) “a set text to translate as the gospel message moved out.”¹⁴ This process, which resulted in our 27 New Testament books, took about 200 years. Noll states,

The fixing of a New Testament canon was an extraordinarily important step in stabilizing the early Church. Even a brief examination of that process, however, shows that the foundation provided by writings testifying authentically to the power at work in Christ and communicated by Christ to the Church through the testimony of the Apostles was critically important to the early Christians as they moved out into the Mediterranean world.¹⁵

Episcopacy

New Testament organization is simple and flexible. The church is to be led by elders (or bishops or presbyters or pastors) and deacons. But only a few decades after the final apostolic writings, the records show bishops ruling over churches or groups of churches in a region and by the end of the second century, when the duties of a bishop are listed, they are duties unknown to the New Testament (most likely because circumstances arose in the expanding Church which were not present in the first century). Almost no historical data has survived which explains this transition. Roman Catholics, Orthodox, and Protestants¹⁶ will differ on the meaning of the rise of bishops, but all will agree that their spiritual leadership helped to stabilize and guide the Church.

Creed

Creeds were viewed as “apostolic summaries of the Christian faith.”¹⁷ They were used as a means of organizing teaching for converts being readied for baptism and to draw the boundaries between true faith and heresy.¹⁸ Eventually they would be used in liturgies for the purpose of reminding the believers that their faith was grounded in historical reality. What we know today as the Apostle Creed did not receive its final form until about the year AD 700. It was based on the Roman creed (ca. 340) which states:

I believe in God almighty [the Father almighty]
and in Christ Jesus, His only Son, our Lord
who was born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary
who was crucified under Pontius Pilate and was buried
and the third day rose from the dead
who ascended into heaven
and sitteth on the right hand of the Father
whence he cometh to judge the living and the dead
and in the Holy Ghost
The holy church
The remission of sins
The resurrection of the flesh
The life everlasting.

Noll summarizes the first turning point in Christian history:

Before AD 70 Christianity was emerging in a definitely Jewish context. After that time, Christianity rapidly became a distinct religion. Although much else was involved as the Church moved out on its own, the most momentous aspects of that move were the establishment of a fixed set of authoritative Christian writings added to the Hebrew Scriptures, the emergence of an episcopal system to order the Church’s life, and the development of succinct statements of faith to express its grasp of the truth.¹⁹

“The Church has ever proved indestructible. Her persecutors have failed to destroy her; in fact, it was during times of persecution that the Church grew more and more; while the persecutors themselves, and those whom the Church would destroy, are the very ones who came to nothing.”
- *Thomas Aquinas*

Turning Point Two – Realities of Empire: The Council of Nicaea (325)

“The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.”

- *Tertullian*

May 20, 325 marked a major turning point in the history of our faith. On this day, church leaders from throughout the Mediterranean world gathered to determine the meaning of the divinity of Jesus Christ. The gathering was a turning point, not just because it was a worldwide gathering of Christian leaders, nor only because the theological question being answered was so crucial. It was a turning point because of the political and social forces at work—the council was not a result of the initiative of bishops, it was a result of the summons of the emperor Constantine.

For 150 years Christian leaders had debated the exact meaning of the divinity of Christ and His relationship with the Father. What did Scripture mean when it called Him the Son of God, the Word of God, and the Savior who was one with the Father? Many solutions had been proposed, but none were completely satisfactory. Some stressed the unity of the Godhead, but failed to distinguish properly between the Father, Son, and Spirit. Others stressed the distinctions, but came dangerously close to losing the oneness of the Godhead. Finally, one leader went too far.

Arius of Alexandria stressed the oneness and unity of God and the subordinate status of the Son in His nature. The Son was a creature. He had a definite beginning, was not immutable, and had the potential to sin. It was the promotion of this teaching that led to the call for the council in Nicaea. But why would the emperor call for the council?

Only one generation earlier, the church had suffered through one of its most terrifying times of persecution under the emperor Diocletian. Diocletian saw Christianity as a threat to imperial unity and therefore sought to eliminate it. But in 305 he divided the vast empire²⁰ into four regions and abdicated the throne. The father of Constantine was the leader of one of those regions. Eventually, Constantine took over its leadership and through a series of diplomatic and military victories emerged as co-emperor in 312.

The military victory that was most significant was his victory at Milvian Bridge. It was this victory that catapulted him to co-emperor. But more importantly was his reported vision that he received shortly before the battle. The 4th century church historian Eusebius stated:

He saw with his own eyes the trophy of a cross of light in the heavens, above the sun, and an inscription, CONQUER BY THIS, attached to it.... Then in his sleep the Christ of God appeared to him with the sign which he had seen in the heavens, and commanded him to make a likeness of that sign which he had seen in the heavens, and to use it as a safeguard in all engagements with his enemies.²¹

After his victory, Constantine immediately arranged with the co-emperor Licinius²² to legalize Christianity and to tolerate all peaceful religions. Constantine's motive

in doing this was pragmatic. Like Diocletian, he wished to unite and stabilize the empire, and he saw Christianity as the means to this end.

But to use Christianity as a uniting force meant that Christians should be united on their essential doctrines. With the Arian controversy spreading, it was necessary to call a council of bishops to settle once and for all the true doctrine of the divinity of Christ. Hence, to the city of Nicaea, bishops were called to settle the dispute, among them Arius and Athanasius, who would devote his entire life to defending the deity of Christ.

The Council of Nicaea was therefore important, for it expressed in clear terms biblical teaching about the deity of Christ, and put down the Arian heresy. The Council's key points were:

- Christ was very God of very God,
- Christ was of one substance with the Father,
- Christ was begotten, not made, and
- Christ became a man for the salvation of mankind.

But the Council left one other legacy. Because it was called and presided over by the emperor, the Church had left behind its status in its first three centuries as a pilgrim community alien to this world. Now, the Church would be an established part of this world. Noll states:

Much good came of this adjustment, especially as the church's evangelistic mission benefited from the help of rulers and when the church contributed its resources to the work of civilizing Europe's barbarian hordes. But the cost was also high. A world where an emperor could make the critical decision to resolve a great doctrinal crisis was a world in which the emperor's legitimate concerns for world order, success, wealth, and stability almost had to become concerns as well in the church.... In this sense, Nicaea bequeathed a dual legacy—of sharpened fidelity to the great and saving truths of revelation, and also, of increasing intermingling of church and world.²³

Turning Point Three – Doctrine, Politics, and Life in the Word: The Council of Chalcedon (451)

The precedent that Constantine established by calling a council of bishops was followed by the eastern emperor²⁴ Marcian who summoned bishops to gather at Chalcedon²⁵ to end theological disputes. The Councils of Nicaea and Constantinople²⁶ affirmed the deity of Christ. He was “very God of very God.” But if Christ was fully God, in what way was He human? And how did the divine nature interact with His human nature?

“Church is the only society on earth that exists for the benefit of non-members.”
- *William Temple*

The Church and the Doctrine of God

Church History

“The careful reading of the Acts afforded me a practical picture of the early church; which made me feel deeply the contrast with its actual present state; though still, as ever beloved by God.”

- John Nelson
Darby

Debate on the nature of Christ was passionate and detailed and engaged learned theologians for decades. In efforts to combat the heresy of Arianism (that Christ was not fully God—see Turning Point Two), theologians emphasized the deity of Christ, but to such an extent that He was seen as a divine soul in a human body (i.e., His soul was not human). Among these was Athanasius, the great defender of the deity of Christ at Nicaea who implied in his teaching that Jesus’ soul was the Eternal Logos of John chapter one. Apollinaris (ca 310 - ca 390) went further and denied human consciousness. This thinking which was weighted toward the divine side was centered in Alexandria, Egypt. Alexandrian thinking seemed to deny the full humanity of Christ and was countered by bishops along the coast of Syria, especially by Theodore of Mopsuestia (ca 350-428) who taught that Christ possessed two natures—one fully human and one fully divine.

An attempt to resolve this debate occurred in 431 in the city of Ephesus. Both viewpoints were well-represented, but emotion ran so high that the two groups could not meet in the same building and each group excommunicated the other! This stalemate prompted imperial interference, first by Emperor Theodosius II and later by Marcian who summoned the bishops to Chalcedon to end the rancor and debate.

Although eastern bishops (i.e., those from Constantinople, Alexandria, and Antioch) primarily engaged in this debate, God used a man from the west to articulate the teaching of Scripture. He was the Bishop of Rome, Leo the First, often called Leo the Great “because of his talent, seriousness, and dedication, and because of his lasting significance in the history of Christian thought.”²⁷

Leo carefully showed from Scripture that Jesus was a single person with two natures, one fully divine and the other fully human. He also showed how these two natures operated in one individual.²⁸ Not everyone agreed with Leo, and the bishops of Alexandria refused to sign Leo’s statement.²⁹ Yet the rest of the Church eventually signed on to his formulation.

What is the significance of Chalcedon? Noll mentions two. The first is

... the way the balanced statement of Chalcedon articulated fundamental Christian doctrine ... that Christ was a united and integrated person, that he was both God and man, that his human and divine natures were not confused, and that these natures were harmoniously joined in a single individual.³⁰

Second, Noll sees Chalcedon as marking

the successful translation of the Christian faith out of its Semitic milieu (where words and concepts were shaped primarily by the revelation of the Old Testament) into the Hellenistic milieu (where words and concepts were shaped primarily by traditions of Greek thought and Roman might).³¹

He goes on to say that “Chalcedon proved that the heart of the gospel message could be preserved, even when that message was put into a new conceptual language” and that “the message of God becoming incarnate to effect the salvation of His people was a message that could be heard distinctly, adequately, and powerfully in ... extrascriptural³² terms and within ... (the) non-Judaic intellectual milieu.”³³

“Good men are the blessing of the places where they live.”

- Matthew Henry

Turning Point Four – The Monastic Rescue of the Church: Benedict’s Rule (530)

There is no single day in history (as with the summoning of the councils) or earth-shattering event (as with the Fall of Jerusalem) to which one can point when talking about the fourth turning point for it is a way of life that developed over centuries. I am talking about monasticism. Selecting monasticism as a turning point for Christianity may come as a surprise to some of us in Great Commission Churches. It certainly would have been to me at one time.

More than once I have held up monks as an example of escapists who do not live in the real world. Their example is to be avoided. I will never again preach this. To be sure there were and are problems with monasteries and monks. Noll mentions some of the problems inherent in monasticism. He asks, “does ascetic privation of the body (which some monks practiced)³⁴ affect the true seat of sinfulness?”³⁵ A second question he asks is, “Does the incarnation of Christ, with the full humanity affirmed by Chalcedon, justify withdrawal from the world...?”³⁶

Yet, Noll makes the following statement: “The rise of monasticism was, after Christ’s commission to his disciples, the most important—and in many ways the most beneficial—institutional event in the history of Christianity.”³⁷ What would merit such a claim, especially from the pen of a Protestant steeped in Reformation theology?

First, the missionary expansion of Christianity was largely the work of monks. Boniface (680-754), evangelized the areas of modern France, Germany, and the Low Countries.³⁸ Eastern Europe was evangelized by the brothers Cyril and Methodius who also translated Scripture and liturgical material into Slavonic.³⁹ The Franciscans engaged in much cross-cultural evangelism, including Raymond Lull who sought to win Muslims with the Word rather than subdue them with the sword.⁴⁰

Second, education was the preserve of the monks. Cassiodorus of Rome (ca. 485-ca.580) founded the Vivarium for the purpose of saving Christian and secular manuscripts. In the late 7th century, an English monastery was the home of the Venerable Bede who wrote the first history of England, as well as biblical and theological works.⁴¹ And it was the Dominican, Thomas Aquinas, who was the greatest theologian of the 13th century and who reintroduced the works of Aristotle into academies of learning.⁴²

Third, service in the name of Christ characterized monasteries. Many are familiar with the work of Francis of Assisi and his ministry to the poor, the sick, and the

The Church and the Doctrine of God

Church History

“The greatest pleasure I have known is to do a good action by stealth and to have it found out by accident.”

- *Charles Lamb*

disabled. Not as well known were the Cistercians who sought to establish monasteries in difficult terrain. They learned and passed on skills of draining swamps, clearing forests, breeding cattle, and raising grain suitable for the climate in which they lived, which benefited the general population.⁴³

But if monks played such an important role in the history of our faith, where does Benedict (ca.480-ca.550) fit in? Little is known about his life. He was educated at Rome, but found city life so degenerate that he left it for a place of solitude and religious devotion. His reputation for spiritual insight attracted others and he eventually would establish twelve monasteries. One of them, in Monte Cassino, south of Rome, exists to this day and many scholars believe that it was here that he composed his Rule in an effort to regulate monasticism. This Rule became the norm for tens of thousands of monasteries. Noll states, “Never in the recorded history of Christianity has a person whose own life remains so obscure done a deed with greater public consequences.”⁴⁴

Benedict’s Rule⁴⁵ benefited the Church in the following ways. It:

- regulated a zealous spirit which sometimes bordered on fanaticism.
- curbed a practice of asceticism which often slid into heresies such as Gnosticism or Docetism.
- preserved the centrality of Scripture, important for movements that stressed inner illumination.
- called prayer back to the center of the Christian life.
- linked religious experiences (the mystical and other-worldly) with work, study, eating, and sleeping (this worldly).
- provided an ideal of monastic life which has inspired and encouraged believers for 1500 years.⁴⁶

Noll states:

For over a millennium, in the centuries between the reign of Constantine and the Protestant Reformation, almost everything in the church that approached the highest, noblest, and truest ideals of the gospel was done either by those who had chosen the monastic way or by those who had been inspired in their Christian life by the monks.⁴⁷

And those inspired included Luther, Calvin, Thomas Cranmer, Menno Simons, and other Reformation leaders who, after studying Scripture, would read the writings of the monks.⁴⁸ Noll concludes his thoughts on this turning point by stating:

A historian must also recognize that the holiness of monastic life—though never perfect, always in need of reform, and occasionally sunk in corruption—remains today ... a guide and inspiration to large sections of the Christian church. That recognition will temper, though not eliminate entirely, theological questions about the implications of the incarnation and ideals

of the Christian life. That recognition, whatever lingering qualms it may carry for a Protestant, is enough to certify the emergence of the monasticism represented by Benedict's Rule as not only a critical turning point in the history of Christianity but even, by God's grace, the very rescue of the church itself.⁴⁹

Turning Point Five – The Culmination of Christendom: The Coronation of Charlemagne (800)

On December 25, 800, in a church dedicated to St. Peter in Rome, the king of the Franks and Germans, Charles (Charlemagne), rose from prayer. When he did, Pope Leo III crowned him and said these words: "to Charles Augustus, crowned by God, great and peace-giving emperor of the Romans, life and victory."⁵⁰ A new emperor and empire had risen.

The church had come a long way. It was first a persecuted, pilgrim community. With the accession of Constantine it became a legalized and then official religion of the state. Now, it was exercising authority to legitimize rulers of the state. What contributed to this change? The answers are both ecclesiastical and civil.

On the ecclesiastical side was the rise of the Bishop of Rome to his position as Pope. One may ask, how did the Pope gain such authority to crown a secular ruler? It was a development that took centuries. Noll mentions the following:⁵¹

- During the second century, bishops of Rome were frequently called upon to coordinate rebuttals to heresy. It was the bishop, Victor (189-98), who played a major role in fixing a common date for Easter.
- In 255, Bishop Stephen used Matthew 16:18 to defend his views on an issue against the Bishop of Carthage. Matthew 16:18 was proof that the bishop of Rome should be followed.
- In 343, a council in Sardica (343) ruled that decisions of local councils could appeal to the Bishop of Rome for resolution.
- Bishop Damasus I (366-384), argued for the superiority of the Roman bishop over all other bishops.⁵²
- The rule of Leo I, whose theological study carried the day in the Council of Chalcedon, further articulated teaching on Matthew 16:18 as the basis for the authority of the Roman bishop over other bishops in spiritual matters and civil law.
- Gregory I (590-604), called "the Great," was so gifted⁵³ that his pontificate increased the prestige of all Roman bishops. Subsequent Popes would not rise to his level, but they would increasingly become involved in diplomacy.

Political events also contributed to this important date in history. It was Charlemagne's grandfather that stopped the spread of Islam in Europe in 732 at Poitiers. His father, Pepin, had been crowned king by Pope Stephen II.⁵⁴ Charlemagne followed in the footsteps of his father and grandfather with diplomatic and military

"Economic and military power can be developed under the spur of laws and appropriations. But moral power does not derive from any act of Congress. It depends on the relations of a people to their God. It is the churches to which we must look to develop the resources for the great moral offensive that is required to make human rights secure, and to win a just and lasting peace."

- John Foster Dulles

“As we face a new era of world history, there is an urgent need for the true Church of Jesus Christ, the Body of Christ, to be about the business God has called us to, the work of ministry. And this is a work that every believer is called to be actively involved in.”

- *Edward Bedore*

victories. He was successful against “the Saxons to his north and east, the Spanish to his west, and the Lombards to his south”⁵⁵ and ruled more of Europe than any man had in 400 years.

Charlemagne also sought to strengthen his relationship with the Pope. The Pope was interested in expanding the influence of Christianity in the regions ruled by Charlemagne,⁵⁶ thus, a church-state alliance was inevitable. Noll states that when Leo III crowned Charlemagne it “represented a strategic alliance between the papacy’s gradually expanding influence and a political power that, like the Pope, was also expanding in influence.”⁵⁷

The repercussions of this event cannot be overestimated for they would be felt for 800 years as “politics, learning, social organization, art, music, economics, and law of Europe would be ‘Christian’....”⁵⁸ A new empire had risen to replace the old Rome. Church and state were now allied, and all of life was to be a manifestation of the grace of God.

Turning Point Six – Division between East and West: The Great Schism (1054)

For those of us who live in the West and who are the spiritual descendants of the Reformation, with all its various Protestant denominations and sects, it may seem strange to us to think that there was a time when the Church was one. Yet, this was the case for almost 1000 years, until the year 1054 when the Church was divided between East and West,⁵⁹ Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism. Like many other events, the Schism between East and West was centuries in the making. Part of it was theological. The Nicæan Creed became standard doctrine for all churches in the early 4th century, but churches in the West beginning in the sixth century added three words to the Creed,⁶⁰ which Eastern churches saw (and to this day see) as theological error. Eastern churches believed Western churches, guided by Rome, had no right to change the Creed without consulting them and that this action violated the agreement not to change the wording of the Creed. Eastern churches also resented the increasing claims of papal superiority coming from Rome. The bishops of the major eastern churches were willing to concede the bishop of Rome as the first among equals, but no more.

The Schism between East and West also had roots in the cultural differences between the churches. Western churches used Latin, Eastern churches, Greek. The Latin language and way of thinking was more practical, concrete, and judicial. The Greek language and way of thinking was more speculative and mystical. Western theology was rooted in legal thinking and thinking on the Trinity started with the unity of the Godhead. Eastern theology was rooted in worship, liturgy, and thinking on the Trinity started with the “three-ness” of the persons. Latins spoke of the crucifixion in terms of the Victim, Greeks in terms of the Victor.⁶¹

...now that the two sides were becoming strangers to one another—with no political and little cultural unity, with no common language—there was a

danger that each side would follow its own approach in isolation and push it to extremes, forgetting the value in the other point of view.⁶²

In 1053, an attempt was made to close the growing rift between Eastern and Western churches. The Eastern emperor persuaded the bishop of Constantinople to send conciliatory messages to the Pope. The Pope responded with a three-man delegation to Constantinople, but neither side was ready to compromise. The bishop of Constantinople offended the leader of the Roman delegation and he in turn excommunicated the bishop!

Though the Schism is dated from 1054, there was another event that sealed it, the Fourth Crusade (1202-1204). All of the Crusades were a mixture of high-minded idealists and earthly minded materialists who were in it for gain. The Fourth Crusade was dominated by those with a lust for power and wealth. When the army from Europe arrived in Constantinople on their way to the Middle East, they pillaged the city, slaughtering, raping, and destroying priceless historical objects which the Church had guarded for centuries. Though the Pope would later condemn this brutality, the damage had been done and relations were so poisoned that Eastern and Western churches no longer cooperated with one another. There were further attempts at reconciliation in the 13th and 15th centuries, but these failed⁶³ and the Schism would remain.⁶⁴

Eastern Christianity continued to develop and they had their own cycles of decay and renewal, including outreach into Russia,⁶⁵ but the division between East and West meant the isolation of the East.⁶⁶ Eastern churches would be virtually cut off from the influence of the Renaissance, Reformation, the Scientific Revolution, the Enlightenment, and Commercialism.⁶⁷ Western churches would continue to develop within these historical events and the papacy would develop with it to the position of supreme ruler over the Church.

Turning Point Seven – The Beginnings of Protestantism: The Diet of Worms (1521)

In mid-April, 1521, a formal assembly (diet) in the city of Worms⁶⁸ met and demanded that an Augustinian monk publicly confess the errors in his writings. They were errors about the gospel, the nature of the Church, and Christendom. The monk, Martin Luther, asked for 24 hours to consider his reply. The next day, April 18, he gave it.

He said his writings were of three sorts. First, some were devotional books which no one would want withdrawn. Second, some were attacks against sin and evil in the papacy and Christendom. No one would want to defend such practices. Third, some things were written with a harsh tone which he would retract on one condition, that the substance of what he had written could be proved to be in contradiction to the teaching of the Apostles and Prophets.

“It is common for those that are farthest from God, to boast themselves most of their being near to the Church.”
- *Mathew Henry*

The Church and the Doctrine of God

Church History

“I am descended from a long line of Christian emperors of this noble German nation and of this Catholic king of Spain, the Archduke of Austria and the dukes of Burgundy. They were all faithful to the death to the Church of Rome and they defended the Catholic faith and the honor of God. I have resolved to follow in their steps. A simple friar who goes counter to all Catholicism for 1000 years must be wrong. Therefore I am resolved to stake my lands, my friends, my body, my blood, my life and my soul on this church.”

- *Charles V, Emperor to Martin Luther*

The spokesman for the Emperor replied that Luther had not really said if he would recant or not. His reply was ambiguous or “horned.” And to this Luther said the following:

Since then your serene majesty and your lordships seek a simple answer, I will give it in this manner, neither horned nor toothed: Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the Pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves) I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience.⁶⁹

Luther had struggled to find peace with God. His parents wanted him to train as a lawyer, but Luther took the vows of an Augustinian monk. It was in the monastery that Luther sought consolation for his sinful soul as he poured over Scripture. He read of God’s righteousness and holiness, which caused more distress about his own sinfulness. Finally, after years of meditation on the Word⁷⁰ he came finally to an understanding that the righteousness of God could be imparted to a sinner by faith. Righteousness could be received as a gift.

This insight was not new. The Bohemian reformer John Hus in the early 15th century and the Dutch preacher John Wessel (d. 1489) also rediscovered the teaching that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone. But when Luther protested⁷¹ that the Church was obscuring this message of grace⁷² by its teaching and its practices and that it must repent of its ways, the religious authorities took notice. It is one thing for a monk to express his teachings. It is quite another to challenge the authority of the Church.

Luther did not recant. Shortly after the Diet, he was whisked away to the safety of the prince of Saxony, Frederick the Wise. While under his protection, he translated the New Testament into German.⁷³ He would continue to write and his writings would influence noteworthy historical figures such as the composer Johann Sebastian Bach, the Baptist preacher John Bunyan, John and Charles Wesley, and the philosopher Soren Kierkegaard. It is important to note also that Luther was the first to exploit the printing press to get his message out to the world.

We still feel the effect of Luther’s protest to this day. Secular rulers broke with the papacy and aligned themselves with the Protestants. Authority of the government was no longer in complete alliance with Rome. And a new authority arose. It was the authority of the individual conscience which could be raised above the councils of the Church, above tradition, and even above the emperor himself! But the greatest effect of Luther’s protest was the wide-ranging influence of the doctrine of the Cross—that at the Cross the sinner can find not only his sin, but also the righteousness of God coming to him by faith. And it is on this truth that the Reformation was founded and Protestantism was born.

Turning Point Eight – A New Europe: The English Act of Supremacy (1534)

What do adultery, divorce, power, politics, and parliaments have to do with Church history? The following events explain. Henry VIII, King of England, was in a hurry. His mistress, Anne Boleyn, was pregnant, and he wanted an annulment of his marriage with Catherine. In this way he could marry Anne whose child would then be legitimate and hopefully a male heir to the throne. But the Pope was reluctant to give an annulment. He was not convinced this was scriptural. Besides, he was protected by the power of Charles V who just happened to be Catherine's nephew and who was adamant that his aunt's honor be upheld! But Henry was a man of action. If the Pope would not annul his marriage, Henry would find someone who would! This person was Thomas Cranmer, the archbishop of Canterbury, who ratified the divorce.

Why are such sorry and sordid details a turning point in the history of our faith? Because in these events, the Church of England broke completely with Rome. The break had been coming for years. The English Parliament had been meeting since 1529 and had already taken steps in the direction of a break. Parliament made it difficult for church decisions to be appealed outside England and for money to be sent to Rome. When Cranmer allowed Henry to divorce Catherine and marry Anne, Parliament ratified the decision and then prohibited English church decisions from being appealed to Rome. The break was now complete. But what did this signify? Noll puts it this way. It was, the beginning of "the rise in Europe during the second phase of the Protestant Reformation of self-consciously local, particular, and national forms of Christianity."⁷⁴ These were "small-scale alternatives to the universal Catholic Church."⁷⁵

Many forces converged to create these small-scale alternatives to Rome. Noll mentions the rise of nationalism,⁷⁶ new patterns in economic wealth and social life⁷⁷, and intellectual pursuits⁷⁸ as creators of a suitable environment for these alternatives. In addition, the leadership of Rome had been corrupt for generations. Popes had pursued worldly power and wealth⁷⁹ rather than spiritual leadership. These factors created this environment in which protest against Rome would be voiced and succeed⁸⁰, whether in the preaching of Luther or the political maneuvering of Henry the VIII. As a result, Europe, the world, and the Church would never be the same.

The key point to understand is that the break with Rome was inspired by national loyalties as well as faithfulness to God's Word. It is not just that theologians (such as Luther) could not tolerate the heresy and unjust practices of Rome. It is that rulers of Europe wanted autonomy from Rome. This in turn led to many forms of Protestantism because they would be tied with local civil authority. Protestantism therefore became, not one movement, but many movements.

To be sure, unity existed in many respects among the Protestants⁸¹. They were united that they need not heed the Pope. They were united that Scripture was the final authority. But differences soon emerged. If Scripture was the final authority, was it the only authority? Lutherans and Calvinists said no. There were other authorities

"Here I stand; I can do no other. God help me. Amen!"
- *Martin Luther*

“As a church, we seem to have forgotten the point of our message, like people who have a great joke to tell and who have forgotten the punch line.”

- Keith Miller

they could consult, although the Word of God was supreme and final. The Anabaptists said yes. Scripture and Scripture alone was the authority. Believers must not look to any tradition or to the state. But if Scripture is the final authority who can interpret Scripture properly? Differences in interpretation could be seen among all the Reformers on a wide range of issues⁸². And living in different parts of Europe with allegiance to new and emerging nation states contributed to the fractiousness that would characterize Protestantism.

The rise of Protestantism, though, “symbolizes the end of the unified Western church, an opening for replacing loyalty to the universal Church with loyalty to nations, and (ironically) a stimulus to forms of thought rejecting the guidance of any church,”⁸³ for if a man’s conscience, captive to the Word of God, can be exalted above Rome, so can a man’s conscience, captive to his lusts or humanistic way of thinking, be used to start a new church or even a new movement that is anti-god!

Turning Point Nine – Catholic Reform and Worldwide Outreach: The Founding of the Jesuits (1540)

Rome was on its heels. It had been rocked by Luther and Henry VIII. Some thought it would crumble and disintegrate. But a series of events brought badly needed renewal and reform to Roman Catholicism. It was not the reform that Protestants hoped for but major changes did take place in the 16th century that affected the course of Christian history.

The first of these was the rise of new religious orders. These included the Theatines, the Capuchins⁸⁴, the Discalced Carmelites⁸⁵, and others. Their adherents were in the thousands and Noll comments that no Protestant missionary society would be as large as even the smallest of them until the twentieth century!⁸⁶ These religious orders attached themselves to older medieval ideas of poverty, chastity, and obedience, and while some competed with Protestants for converts, most focused on living by these ancient ideals through prayer, service, and meditation.⁸⁷

The second was a commission ordered by Pope Paul III. This commission included bishops who were conciliatory toward Protestants⁸⁸ and who were serious about reform in the church. Their commission criticized the papacy for its exaggerated claims to power in the church and society and for the sale of church offices and the failures of bishops. Its calls for reform were stated in general terms, but served as a guideline for Rome for the future.

Third was the Council of Trent.⁸⁹ It was this Council that brought a high degree of uniformity within Catholicism. It began with a preoccupation with Protestantism and its rebuttals of Protestant doctrine, but it ended with a focus on missionary outreach. The missionary outreach would be led by the Jesuits.

The Jesuits were founded by Francis Loyola. A soldier who fought in the wars between Spain and France, the turning point in his life occurred shortly after being

wounded in battle. During his recovery, he was given a devotional tract on the life of Christ which so gripped him that he devoted himself to the priesthood. He published a book on discipleship⁹⁰ and his zeal and piety soon drew others to him. His order was recognized by the Pope in 1540 and became “the most powerful instrument of Catholic revival and resurgence in this era of religious crisis.”⁹¹ Noll lists three reasons why the Jesuits were so important. They thoroughly revitalized the Roman Catholic Church, they shaped the Roman Church for centuries to come, and they were fervent missionaries.

Francis Xavier is the best known of the Jesuit missionaries. He took Catholic Christianity to India, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Japan. He died in 1552, having arrived in China. Noll mentions that this effort was 150 years “before anything comparable can be found among Protestants and 250 years before anything comparable among English-speaking Protestants.”⁹² But it was more than the extent of his and other Jesuit travels and their cross cultural exchanges that was admirable. It was also their philosophy of adapting to local customs in order to win the people. Thus, Xavier himself forsook the plain cotton clothing that marked a vow of poverty for the silk clothing of Japanese lords to whom he was ministering.⁹³ To be sure, some Jesuits would go too far in adapting to local customs and the faith of some would be syncretistic, combining Christian truth with pagan practices. Nevertheless, the Jesuits broke ground in showing that genuine Christianity did not depend on European culture. As an example, the following guideline, sounding very modern, was issued in 1659:

Do not try to persuade the Chinese to change their rites, their customs, their ways, as long as these are not openly opposed to religion and good morals. What would be sillier than to import France, Spain, Italy, or any other country of Europe into China? Don’t import these, but the faith. The faith does not reject or crush the rites and customs of any race, as long as these are not evil. Rather, it wants to preserve them.⁹⁴

Rome was saved because of several influences and factors, but the primary reason was the work of the Jesuits. But in their work of saving the Roman church, the Jesuits also laid the philosophical groundwork that would be used by the Moravians, German Lutherans, and Hudson Taylor as they sought to adapt to the culture of the people to whom they were ministering cross-culturally in the gospel⁹⁵

Turning Point Ten – The New Piety: The Conversion of the Wesleys (1738)

How important were the Wesleys? The following two statements put their importance into perspective. They “...were the most effective proponents of the Reformation’s basic message in the two centuries since Protestantism began...”⁹⁶ and they were “...probably the most important single factor in transforming the religion of the Reformation into modern Protestant evangelicalism.”⁹⁷ How did this happen?

“Constant kindness can accomplish much. As the sun makes ice melt, kindness causes misunderstanding, mistrust, and hostility to evaporate.”

-Albert Schweitzer

The Church and the Doctrine of God

Church History

“When you set yourself on fire, people love to come and see you burn.”

- John Wesley

Their ministry was influenced by movements that began generations before their time, but which were becoming stale and cold. The emphasis on correct doctrine was not working its way into the daily concerns of the people. Into this cold atmosphere God raised up many servants who called for a lively, practical faith⁹⁸ such as Philipp Jakob Spener (1635-1705) who called the Church back to its first love. He proposed six reforms: 1) a more extensive use of Scripture, 2) the priesthood of all believers, 3) the authentic practice of the faith, 4) restraint and charity in religious controversies, 5) the training of ministers in piety as well as doctrine, and 6) the need for ministers to preach understandable, edifying sermons rather than dry, technical discourses aimed at other ministers.⁹⁹

Spener’s spiritual successor was August Hermann Francke (1663-1727). He was involved in a variety of works such as opening a school for poor children in his home, operating an orphanage, and setting up a publishing house, a medical clinic, and other institutions. At the university of Halle, where Francke taught, students trained under Franke would become Protestantism’s first cross-cultural missionaries. One of Franke’s students was Zinzendorf¹⁰⁰ who organized refugees from Moravia into a movement that would carry the gospel around the world. And it was on an Atlantic voyage during a storm that John Wesley noticed the calm and peace of some Moravians, a peace that he was lacking in his own heart. This intensified his search for peace with God and on May 24, 1738, he felt his “heart strangely warmed” as he listened to someone reading the preface to Luther’s commentary on Romans.¹⁰¹ He finally came to understand that his sins were forgiven in Christ and he was assured of his salvation.

But why were the Wesleys so pivotal in the history of Christianity? Noll attributes it to their fresh approach to the doctrine of the grace of God and their application of that grace to segments of the population overlooked by the Church.¹⁰² When Wesley first preached in public it was a radical ministry innovation.¹⁰³ But John and Charles were willing to take the risk for the sake of ministering to the needs in front of them. Noll mentions that John Wesley was an innovator

...who readily gave up traditions that now seemed old-fashioned; he laid great stress on testing the reality of faith by its “experimental” (or experiential) nature rather than on its conformity with traditional dictates; he was intensely interested in practical, even utilitarian, effects of faith, rather than merely its conformity to inherited truths; and he made the decisions of the individual critical for the life of faith as opposed to stressing dictates handed down from the previous generation.¹⁰⁴

It was this flexibility in ministry, along with a commitment to the Word of God (rather than tradition) and their discipline that was to be internalized and lead to true holiness that characterized the Wesleys. Noll concludes that the work of the Wesleys, along with others¹⁰⁵

...erected a new form of Christian faith. It was a Protestantism clearly marked by the inheritance of the Reformation, but also one that in its willingness to

discard tradition, its eagerness to adjust to widely diverse social realities, and its zeal for the practice of piety represented a significant new stage in the history of Christianity.¹⁰⁶

Turning Point Eleven – Discontents of the Modern West: The French Revolution (1789)

On November 10, 1793, a spectacle took place in France's greatest church, the Cathedral of Notre Dame. An opera singer, dressed in white, played the role of incarnated Liberty. She bowed to the flame of Reason and took her seat on a bank of flowers and plants while revelers danced in honor of Liberty and Reason.¹⁰⁷ This "worship service" is called by Noll the "high point in the French Revolution's program of dechristianization, whereby leaders of the Revolution attempted to throw off what they felt to be the heavy, dead hand of the church."¹⁰⁸ It also explains why Noll classifies the French Revolution as a turning point in the history of Christianity. The French Revolution is normally thought of as a secular event, and not an event, properly speaking, of the Church. Yet the events beginning in 1789 and continuing into the 1790s had a profound impact upon the Church which is felt to this day. Noll explains:

...the dechristianizing effort of the French Revolution was the end — or at least the beginning of the end — of European Christendom as the dominant expression of Christianity in the world. The ideal of Christendom had held sway in Europe for close to a millennium and a half. In that ideal the interests of Christianity and the interests of European civilization were regarded as two expressions of the same reality. But now at the end of the eighteenth century that ideal was very badly frayed.¹⁰⁹

Noll is not saying that the French Revolution destroyed Christendom in a day or a decade. But its expressions of humanism are a symbol for the major forces that were at work throughout Europe that eventually replaced Christianity, as the unifying force of life and culture, with secularism.

These forces can be traced, ironically to the work of Isaac Newton, a devout Christian, student of the Bible, and scientist. It was his description of the laws of nature in precise mathematical formulas that were seized upon by ungodly intellectuals as proof that nature could be understood and explained without a supreme God and the teaching of the Church. These intellectuals would include the French philosopher Voltaire, the Scottish skeptic David Hume, and the pantheist Spinoza.¹¹⁰ These and others were feeding France with a new way of thinking: basic reality is matter in motion, the human mind was the arbiter of truth, and the ultimate social good was human happiness.¹¹¹

Its effects would be seen in the following ways in the 19th century. In philosophy, Kant, Hegel, and Mill "labored to replace traditional dependence upon revelation and religious tradition with what they held were more secure foundations of the good, the

"I never was more opposed and never met with so great success."
- *George Whitefield*

The Church and the Doctrine of God

Church History

“As to the nature of Church power, it is to be remembered that the Church is a theocracy. Jesus Christ is its head.”
- Charles Hodge

true, and the beautiful.”¹¹² In science, Darwin’s *Origin of Species* “became a symbol of science proceeding on its own without reference to a Creator.”¹¹³ In theology, confidence in the Old and New Testaments was undermined as liberal theologians sought to explain them as “the products of evolving Semitic experience rather than of revelations from God.”¹¹⁴ In the arts, Romanticism would flower and man would be viewed as a god-like hero with unlimited potential.¹¹⁵

Perhaps most important to understand is that these changes in thinking occurred in the midst of economic and social revolution caused by the emergence of the modern economy in which

...the production of wealth, the uses of wealth, the disparities in possession of wealth and the application of wealth to social problems assumed a life of their own beyond the watch or guidance of the churches... (with the result that) by the second half of the century, Europe’s traditional churches, after having already lost the intellectuals, were losing the working classes as well.¹¹⁶

But what did this mean for Christianity? Noll explains that people’s loyalties were no longer with the Church. He states, “Christianity was not banished from Europe, but over the course of the nineteenth century it came to be marginalized.”¹¹⁷

But all was not lost. Noll shows that even though Christianity was losing in intellectual arenas, it was still blossoming in evangelism and in good works in some parts of Europe, but mostly in England and in North America.¹¹⁸ And though Europe as a whole would increasingly become secular, Christianity would blossom well beyond Europe. Just as the fall of Jerusalem coincided with the spread of Christianity into European culture, so the “fall of Christendom” in Europe would coincide with the spread of Christianity into cultures around the world. European Christendom was dying. Worldwide Christianity was alive and well.

Turning Point Twelve – A Faith for All the World: The Edinburgh Missionary Conference (1910)

They met in Scotland for ten days in June of 1910. They included Lord Balfour of Burleigh, a representative of former president Theodore Roosevelt, a representative of George V, the godly King of England, leading denominational figures, and missionaries from around the world. This was the Edinburgh Missionary Conference where topics such as how to take the gospel to all the world, the message of Christian missions in relation to non-Christian faiths, and how Christians of different denominations can be united for the cause of Christ were discussed.

Why was this a turning point in the history of our faith? First, the conference was ecumenical.¹¹⁹ Originally, the Church had been one structure for a thousand years, then two structures with the break between Rome and the Orthodox. It became three with the Protestant Reformation and finally many structures with the breakup of Protestantism into many denominations. Originally there was one church structure

in the world, then one church per geographical region (Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant). Then many churches per region, and now finally many churches working together for the cause of Christ. It was a long, painful, and sometimes bloody path. But God's people were uniting for His cause.

Second, the conference was significant because

...it represented just about the last moment when "worldwide Christianity" could in any meaningful sense be equated with the Christianity of Europe and North America. The wave of the future was toward a world Christianity defined as much outside of Europe and North America as by Europe and North America; the wave of the future was the indigenization of Christianity in countless regional cultures around the world....¹²⁰

This can be seen from the demographics of the conference. Of the 1200 delegates, over 80% were from Britain and the U.S. Only 170 were from European countries and only 18 from countries that were not European or North American.¹²¹ Contrast this with Lausanne in 1974 when the 2700 delegates were gathered from 151 countries!¹²² Christianity was becoming worldwide, and it was becoming worldwide because the gospel was being translated effectively into the cultures of the world.

The impetus for the worldwide scope of Christianity¹²³ can be dated to the 18th century. The godly king of Denmark and Norway, King Frederick IV, sent missionaries to Tranquebar, South India. Moravians also played a major role in this century.¹²⁴ But it was the 19th century that has been called "the great century" of Christian missions. In that century are found the labors of William Carey, Adoniram Judson, Hudson Taylor, David Livingstone, Mary Slessor, and Lottie Moon.¹²⁵

But the difference that began to take place in the late 19th and early 20th century was when the Christian faith was integrated appropriately into the cultures of the peoples of the world without compromising the truth of the gospel and when the locals themselves formed and led their churches.¹²⁶ Noll states:

Missionary outreach from the West, which from the early nineteenth century has played such a large role in the world history of Christianity, became permanently significant, however, only when it led to the appropriation of Christianity by non-Western peoples.¹²⁷

Samuel Crowther, a black Anglican bishop, paved the way for this influence with his work among the Yoruba people.¹²⁸ The Zionist¹²⁹ movement successfully combined the devotional teaching of Andrew Murray and others, elements of Pentecostalism, and elements of African tradition to convert millions in South Africa and other countries. The prophetic preaching of William Wade Harris in Liberia saw so many converted that churches in these areas were overwhelmed with the number of converts. Some of Harris' emphases were "strong anti-fetish accent on one God; prayer as a replacement for sacrifice; use of traditional music and dance;

"I believe that in each generation God has called enough men and women to evangelize all the yet unreached tribes of the earth.... It is not God who does not call. It is man who will not respond!"
- *Isobel Kuhn, missionary to China and Thailand*

The Church and the Doctrine of God

Church History

“Each generation of the church in each setting has the responsibility of communicating the gospel in understandable terms, considering the language and thought-forms of that setting.”

- *Francis Schaeffer*

use of the cross, Bible, calabash [a kind of gourd], and baptismal bowl as liturgical instruments.”¹³⁰

When the delegates at Edinburgh met and discussed world evangelization, they were correct in their prayers and hopes for evangelization to take place around the world. But they were incorrect in one area. They expected Christianity to look “...pretty much as it appeared in the precincts of Scotland’s United Free Church Assembly Hall.” God had a different plan. It was indeed for His gospel to go into all the world, but it was also to glorify Himself in the various patterns of thought and culture that existed in the world. Noll’s quote from Scottish historian of mission Andrew Walls summarizes the point well:

It is a delightful paradox that the more Christ is translated into the various thought forms and life systems which form our various national identities, the richer all of us will be in our common Christian identity.¹³¹

FOOTNOTES:

¹ *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity* by Mark Noll, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan (1997), 15.

² Exodus 20:2.

³ Luke 1:1-2.

⁴ Noll, 16.

⁵ Noll, 16.

⁶ Noll, 17.

⁷ “The Blitz” is a term that was used to refer to some of the first outreach in Colorado and the Midwest which resulted in some of the first Great Commission Churches.

⁸ See his list on p. 13.

⁹ Noll, 20.

¹⁰ Galatians 4:4-5.

¹¹ That Christianity was perceived by Roman authorities as a sect within Judaism can be seen in the following verses: Acts 18:14-17; 23:29; 24:5; 25:18-19. Noll mentions one Roman account of the destruction of Jerusalem in which General Titus thought he would eradicate both Judaism and Christianity by burning the Temple. See p. 25 of *Turning Points*.

¹² Noll mentions that late in the second century, the Christian apologist Irenaeus listed 217 different religions with which Christianity had to contend. See p. 30.

¹³ Noll, 34.

¹⁴ Noll, 34.

¹⁵ Noll, 38.

¹⁶ Noll states on p. 41, “To Roman Catholics and in some sense for the Orthodox, the bishops needed to rise, since they were the designated successors of the apostles charged with carrying on the apostolic work of testifying to Christ and organizing lives of service to him....A Protestant interpretation (is that) bishops, like all believers, could be regarded as apostolic when and if they upheld the message of the apostles about the salvation found in Christ, but they should not otherwise be considered uniquely apostolic in their ordination or in the exercises of their office.”

¹⁷ Noll, 44.

¹⁸ Noll mentions that almost every line of the old Roman creed was formulated to combat heresy.

¹⁹ Noll, 45.

²⁰ It stretched from the British isles to the Middle East.

²¹ Quoted in *Turning Points*, Noll, 50.

²² In 324, Constantine would overcome Licinius and become sole emperor of Rome.

²³ Noll, 63.

²⁴ By this time, the Roman empire was divided into two regions, the western region with its center in Rome and the eastern region centered in Constantinople, also called Byzantium, which is modern day Istanbul, Turkey.

²⁵ Chalcedon was located just across the Bosphorus Channel from Constantinople in modern day Turkey.

²⁶ This council was held in 381 and affirmed the decisions of Nicaea.

²⁷ Noll, 74.

²⁸ Noll states, “Here he was addressing the complex question of *communicatio idiomatum*—the interchange of attributes, or qualities. Is it proper, for example, to say that ‘God died’ on the cross or that ‘the man Jesus knew all things’? In his *Tome* Leo walked a tightrope that many before and since have fallen off. *Each form* of Christ as God and human *carries on its proper activities in communion with the other* (italics represent Leo’s wording quoted by Noll). With these words Leo kept together distinctiveness of natures along with unity of person.

²⁹ Noll gives an interesting historical note here, “So strong was Alexandrian ... (opposition) to almost the whole rest of the church, the ... position (that Jesus had only one [Greek *monos*] nature [*physis*]) ... became official dogma in the Egyptian church. And to this day the Coptic Church of Egypt retains a Monophysite Christology.

³⁰ Noll, 77.

³¹ Noll, 78.

³² By “extrascriptural,” Noll is referring to the utilization of Greek and Latin words (*ousia, hypostasis, substantia*) which are not found in Scripture but which express the ideas of Scripture in precise ways.

³³ Noll, 80.

³⁴ The monk Symeon Stylites (ca. 390-459) lived the life of an anchorite, a solitary monk. He eventually lived in a desert and made the top of a pillar his living quarters.

³⁵ Noll, 103.

³⁶ Noll, 104.

³⁷ Noll, 84.

The Church and the Doctrine of God

Church History

³⁸ Noll, 100. Some call him the apostle of Germany.

³⁹ Noll, 100.

⁴⁰ Noll, 101. Lull stated: "Missionaries will convert the world by preaching, but also through the shedding of tears and blood and with great labor, and through a bitter death."

⁴¹ Noll, 101.

⁴² Noll 102.

⁴³ Noll 102.

⁴⁴ Noll, 88.

⁴⁵ What is meant by Benedict's Rule? Noll states: "Benedict's Rule is famous for codifying vows of obedience, stability, and *conversatio morum* (continual conversion) which led on to the more general vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. But it was equally noteworthy for its far-sighted concern for what it would take to keep individual monks and entire monastic communities on an even keel. The Rule, though a relatively long document ... was also intentionally flexible. It suggested how its own guidelines could be adapted to local conditions defined by different stages of the ecclesiastical year, different climates, different quantities of available food and drink depending on the monks' health, age, and even degree of spiritual maturity...Benedict's Rule was not a manual for slackers...The Rule is marked throughout by a concentration on the spiritual realities that monasteries existed to embody. At the foundation was commitment to the practice of prayer."

⁴⁶ Noll, 86.

⁴⁷ Noll, 84.

⁴⁸ Noll, 85.

⁴⁹ Noll 104.

⁵⁰ Noll, 109.

⁵¹ This list taken from pages 111-117.

⁵² Noll (112) identifies Damasus I as the Bishop or Pope who commissioned his secretary, Jerome, to produce a Bible in Latin. This was the Vulgate which was the Bible of the Latin Middle Ages.

⁵³ Noll (114) mentions that Gregory oversaw Roman defenses against Lombard invaders, reformed the finances and worship of the church, was an avid student of Scripture, and was a highly regarded preacher, among other achievements.

⁵⁴ Noll, 116.

⁵⁵ Noll, 121.

⁵⁶ Part of this reason for the Pope's interest in these regions was the rise of militant Islam which made it difficult for western churches to work in the eastern regions which had been overrun by Islam. Western churches turned more to the north and expanded Christianity into Northern Europe and into Russia.

⁵⁷ Noll, 117.

⁵⁸ Noll, 121.

⁵⁹ East refers to those churches under the Byzantine empire. This would include the principle episcopacies of Constantinople, Antioch, Alexandria, and Jerusalem. West refers to those churches under the Holy Roman empire led by the Bishop (or Pope) of Rome.

⁶⁰ The three words were "and the Son" which set forth the belief that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father *and the Son* rather than the Father only.

⁶¹ Noll, p. 135, quoting from the Orthodox bishop, Kallistos Ware.

⁶² Kallistos Ware, p. 135 in *Turning Points*.

⁶³ Noll shows that in the 15th century attempt at reconciliation, an agreement was reached supported by all bishops and the eastern emperor, but vehemence against the west was so strong in the eastern churches that the agreement had to be nullified!

⁶⁴ Noll, 139-141.

⁶⁵ Noll, 142-144.

⁶⁶ The rise of Islam also contributed to this.

⁶⁷ Noll, 145-146.

⁶⁸ In this formal assembly were high officials of Rome and the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire Charles who viewed himself as the defender of the true Christian faith.

⁶⁹ Quoted in Noll, 154.

⁷⁰ Key passages that guided Luther were Psalm 31:1 – "In Thy righteousness deliver me" and Romans 1:17a – "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith...."

⁷¹ This protest was most forcefully made by his posting of *95 Theses* on the door of the church in Wittenburg.

⁷² One example of Luther's protest would be against the sale of indulgences. Part of the profits of these sales went to church officials, including the Pope.

⁷³ Noll mentions that Luther was a linguistic genius and that his writings, especially the New Testament translation made Saxon the standard for modern German. See p. 164.

⁷⁴ Noll, 179.

75 Noll, 179.

76 For example, Noll mentions that Henry VII united the factions of England and brought about a sense of a national identity stronger than any king before him. His son would exploit that national identity to break with Rome.

77 For example, new trading patterns helped to create urban wealth and concentrated power in the hands of merchants. This contrasted with land-based wealth.

78 For example, the use of the printing press and the preoccupation with the classics challenged much of medieval thinking patterns.

79 Noll mentions that the Pope who reigned during the time of Luther's protest was a great lover of architecture and fine art. In order to finance these loves, he needed money. The money came from the sale of indulgences which Luther attacked.

80 It must be noted here that Luther's intention was not to break with Rome. His desire was to reform Rome. As late as the 1540's Protestants were negotiating with Catholics to unite the entire church in reform, but negotiations failed.

81 Noll mentions how Calvin, Melancthon, and Bucer tried to coordinate Protestant reforms.

See p.192.

82 Noll, 193.

83 Noll, 194.

84 They were a spin-off of the Franciscans. Noll states they "...regularly set up small, hermitlike settlements in the vicinity of towns. They preached where they could, celebrated the Eucharist regularly, promoted special devotions in association with the main celebrations of the ecclesiastical calendar, and displayed fearless courage in caring for the sick, especially victims of the plague."

See p. 203.

85 "The Discalced Carmelites were a mainly Spanish group that took its name from the practice of not wearing shoes (discalced = unshod). Their reforms were inspired by the dynamic leadership of St. Teresa of Avila (1515-82), whose fervent piety and sharp common sense guided a religious community given to prayer and contemplation.

86 Noll, 204.

87 Their great influence can be seen from the following fact stated by Noll, "By 1600, almost all of southern Europe was once again securely Catholic." This included France, southern Germany and the south of the Netherlands, and also reached Poland, Hungary, and Bohemia. This explains much of why Europe today is the way it is denominationally.

88 Some engaged in conciliatory dialogue with Protestants and one exchanged letters with John Calvin.

89 The Council was held in three stages, from 1545-47, 51-52, 62-63. It was this Council that affirmed, among other things, that Scripture and tradition were equal authorities, the seven sacraments were necessary for salvation, the Mass was a propitiatory sacrifice of Christ, and the elements of the Mass became the body and blood of Christ.

90 Noll mentions a comment by J.I. Packer about this book. It contains exercises which "appeal to the will through understanding, imagination and conscience. They remain a potent aid to self-knowledge and devotion to the Lord Jesus, even for those outside the Catholicism in which they are so strongly rooted." See p. 199-200.

91 Quote by John Olin quoted in Noll, p. 201.

92 Noll, 202.

93 Noll, 216.

94 Noll, 217-218.

95 Noll, 219.

96 Noll, 223.

97 Noll, 224.

98 Noll mentions the ministries of Richard Baxter (1615-91), John Bunyan (1628-88), Johann Arndt (1555-1621) and the hymns of Philip Nicolai (1556-1608).

99 Noll, 230-231.

100 He was also Spener's godson.

101 John's brother, Charles, had been converted three days before as a result of reading Luther's commentary on Galatians.

102 Noll, 228.

103 Noll mentions that all spiritual activity was under the control of Anglican rectors. Baptists, Congregationalists, and Presbyterians needed licenses to hold meetings. Preaching took place on Sunday and was done in churches. Outdoor preaching was considered insidious, incendiary, and fanatical. See pp. 222-23.

104 Noll, 239.

105 Whitefield, the Moravians, and Pietists.

106 Noll, 242.

107 Noll, 246.

108 Noll, 246.

109 Noll, 251.

110 Noll, 253.

111 Noll, 258.

112 Noll, 255.

The Church and the Doctrine of God

Church History

¹¹³ Noll, 255.

¹¹⁴ Noll, 257.

¹¹⁵ Noll, 257.

¹¹⁶ Noll, 254.

¹¹⁷ Noll, 258.

¹¹⁸ Noll, 258-61.

¹¹⁹ Ecumenical among Protestants.

¹²⁰ Noll, 271.

¹²¹ Noll, 272.

¹²² Noll, 274.

¹²³ At least among Protestants. Remember, the Jesuits had already taken Roman Catholicism into much of the world.

¹²⁴ They started churches in Greenland, Surinam, South Africa, Estonia, Labrador, the Nicobar Islands, and Asia, Africa, North and Central America. See Noll, 277.

¹²⁵ See Noll, 274-283.

¹²⁶ Noll quoting statistics from missiologist David Barrett states that in 1900 there were less than 10 million nonwhite Christians. By 1997 this number had risen to 200 million!

¹²⁷ Noll, 285.

¹²⁸ Noll, 286

¹²⁹ So called because of the influence of a Moravian hymnbook called *The Songs of Zion* and because of theology that saw charismatic influences as a sign of the approaching New Jerusalem. See Noll, 288.

¹³⁰ Noll, 290.

¹³¹ Noll, 293.

Church History: Great Commission Churches

Pastor John Hopler, Columbus, OH



The Movement's Early Formation

The Great Commission church movement began in 1970 with a focus on planting and building churches that are devoted to Jesus Christ and to fulfilling the command given by Jesus to “Go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28: 19, 20). The movement began when a group of approximately thirty college-age Christians (who were associated with a Plymouth Brethren assembly) at Southern Colorado University embarked on a summer-long evangelistic outreach (which they called “the blitz”) to several university campuses in the southwestern United States. Involved with this outreach were three of the movement’s founders, Jim McCotter, Herschel Martindale, and Dennis Clark. Jim and Herschel were a part of the Plymouth Brethren assemblies and Dennis had been a staff member of Campus Crusade for Christ. The Navigators and Operation Mobilization also influenced the ministry in its early years.

The leaders that were left behind from this outreach started some of the first churches of the Great Commission movement. In the next few years, additional mission outreaches and training conferences took place and the gospel went out to many campuses. By the end of 1973, there were about 15 “works” established.

The Great Commission Church Movement in the 1970's

The early Great Commission church movement was characterized by a commitment to fulfill the Great Commission by following the pattern laid out in the New Testament. Years later the phrase “New Testament Christianity in Action Today” was used to describe the vision of the movement.

The founders of the movement taught that the New Testament church was to be the primary vehicle for fulfilling the Great Commission. They believed that since all believers are priests, a person need not be a clergyman to baptize or serve the Lord’s Supper. From the beginning, the campus fellowships that were started considered themselves churches, baptized new believers, and observed communion. Their structure was very simple, usually meeting in homes or in campus buildings.

The leaders emphasized that the church should be governed by a plurality of elders, also called “overseers” and “pastors” (Acts 20: 17, 28; 1 Peter 5:1). Elders were trained within the church and were appointed based upon the character qualities described in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.

Initially, these fellowships were quite loosely affiliated, with a unity based, not upon any formal association or doctrinal creed, but upon four factors: a common love for Christ and the Scriptures; a zeal to fulfill the Great Commission through the New Testament Church; a devotion to a covenant love and unity that went beyond the local church; and a commitment to meet together nationally and regionally as elders and as churches in conferences. The present day summertime GCC Pastors conference and

“Do not follow where the path may lead. Go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.”

- *Unknown*

The Church and the Doctrine of God

Church History:

Great Commission Churches

“Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm.”

- *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

the Christmas-time Faithwalkers conference are both designed to capture the spirit of those early conferences and to continue imparting the vision, mission, and values of the movement.

The Formation of Great Commission International (GCI)

By the late 1970's, as the number of fellowships grew to over 30, several of the movement's leaders recognized the need to have a more formal association of churches on a national level.

In 1983, ten leaders from various fellowships around the country moved to the Washington D.C. area to seek the Lord as to how He might want the movement to organize nationally. These men recognized that during New Testament times, as well as throughout all of Church history, God has raised up men to minister regionally, nationally, and internationally by starting churches and providing continuing guidance and oversight to those churches. Over the next few years, these leaders began to give direction to the association and provide pastoral care and oversight to local churches and leaders.

In 1983, Great Commission International, led by Jim McCotter and Dennis Clark, was formed to provide services such as publishing and fund raising for the developing association. In 1986, Jim McCotter announced his resignation from GCI. Jim believed that God wanted him to utilize his entrepreneurial abilities within the secular media field. In 1988, Jim moved to Florida and has not been part of Great Commission since that time. Since Jim McCotter's departure in 1986, God has continued to expand and multiply the movement, from over 5,000 attendees in 1986 to over 43,000 in 2005.

The Development of Great Commission Churches

In 1987, the new national leadership team (Dennis Clark, John Hopler, and Rick Whitney) focused on the basic ministry of prayer and teaching the Word in churches and in regions. It was at this time that *Daylights*, a daily devotional, began to be published.

In 1987 and 1988, more leaders were appointed to provide oversight to the national and regional ministry. Soon after, the movement experienced another period of growth. The majority of the new churches were planted in U.S. communities, rather than college campuses. The community churches were started mostly with college graduates in cities that were near campus locations.

During the late 1980's and early 1990's a concerted effort was made to reach out to people who felt that they had been hurt by GCI and GCI churches. At the initial urging of Tom Short, the GCI leaders and pastors published a paper as part of a plan to follow the biblical standard of humility and reconciliation in relationships. This effort towards reconciliation, formally called Project CARE, was led by Dave Bovenmyer and was instrumental in building unity with Christians within and outside of Great Commission. (For a copy of this paper, log on to: <http://gccweb.org/gcc/about/weakness.pdf>)

In 1989 GCI changed its name to “Great Commission Association of Churches.” (Today, the shortened name “Great Commission Churches” is used in public communications, in order to promote the central and historical vision of this movement.) In the early 1990’s Great Commission pastors developed a book of government, called the Articles of Association, which were formally approved in 1994. According to the Articles, local churches have final authority over their affairs, under the Lord Jesus Christ. Although each church is autonomously governed, each church is united with the other churches in the association and with national and regional ministries for fellowship, accountability, and mission (US and international church planting.)

In the 1990’s a formal process was established for the appointment of pastors (elders) in churches in the association. In 1999, the Great Commission Leadership Institute was formed as a ministry to support the training of pastors within the local church.

In 2002, Great Commission Association of Churches was accepted into the Evangelical Council for Accountability and into the National Association of Evangelicals in 2007.

In 2003 the first Faithwalkers conference was held, spearheaded by Mark Darling. The purpose of Faithwalkers is to teach the vision and core values of the Great Commission church movement, primarily to young people.

In 2006 Great Commission Churches was clarified to be a membership association for US based churches and ministries only. The Great Commission Association is a “right hand of fellowship” ministry to international churches and ministries which are united with Great Commission Churches in beliefs, values, and in the mission of reaching the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Presently (2006) the Executive Committee is Dave Bovenmyer (Ames, Iowa), John Hopley (Columbus, Ohio) and Rick Whitney (Denver, Colorado).

Campus Ministry in Great Commission Churches

The Great Commission church movement began on college campuses and has always had a focus on campus ministry.

In 1983, GCI launched the first summer Leadership Training conference which attracted college students for a summer of intensive training in evangelism and discipleship.

In 1985, GCI undertook a mass outreach and expansion effort (Invasion ‘85) with the goal of starting 50 new campus ministries. While the gospel was proclaimed and many churches were successfully established during I-85, most of the churches did not continue. As a follow-up to I-85 GCI did a series of “Vision” fund drives (1987-1989) in order to provide financial support to campus workers.

“God is sufficient
in all ages for His
church.”

- *John Nelson
Darby*

The Church and the Doctrine of God

Church History:

Great Commission Churches

“God is a God of missions. He wills missions. He commands missions. He demands missions. He made missions possible through His Son. He made missions actual in sending the Holy Spirit.”

- *George W. Peters*

In 1989, under the leadership of Dave Bovenmyer, Great Commission Ministries (GCM) was formed to mobilize people for campus ministry by training them to raise financial support. Over the next 15 years, GCM became a ministry through which many leaders (Tom Schroeder, Jeff Kern, Greg Van Nada and others) equipped churches in Great Commission for campus ministry.

In 2005 GCM, which had been providing leadership and pastoral care for a group of campus churches, was redefined and refocused as a service ministry serving the entire Great Commission movement. GCM exists to support the movement by helping mobilize Christian workers for ministry in the US and around the world through training them to raise financial support and other missionary support services.

Today in Great Commission Churches, as in the beginning, local churches provide leadership in reaching out to college campuses. Presently in GCC there are ministries to over 35 college campuses. This mission to reach college students is also supported by regional and national coaching, and conferences in Great Commission Churches, such as Faithwalkers.

International Ministry and other Ministries affiliated with GCC

Great Commission Churches partners with fellow ministries and churches that are part of the Great Commission movement around the world. The Great Commission Association was formed as a ministry of Great Commission Churches to encourage and support international churches and ministries that share the Great Commission Church vision. Outside of the United States, there are Great Commission churches in Asia, Canada, Europe, and Latin America.

The Asia ministry was started in 1987, primarily through sending teams of international students from US colleges back to their home countries. Today there are churches in Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Nepal, and the Philippines. Doug Brown provides leadership for GCC's ministry to Asia.

The Great Commission church in Canada, led by John Fairchild, was begun in 1975.

The European ministry, founded by Herschel Martindale, began in 1991 with an outreach to Dortmund, Germany led by Dan Goering. Today, there are Great Commission churches in Germany, Ukraine, Spain, Italy, Amsterdam, and Poland. Joe Dunn, Dan Goering, and Tim Powers provide leadership for the ministry in Europe.

The Latin American ministry began in 1976. Today Great Commission Latin America (GCLA), led by Nelson Guerra and a team of others, is based in Miami, Florida. Great Commission churches have been planted in countries throughout Latin America, including Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Venezuela, and Mexico.

In addition to the international ministries above, Herschel Martindale leads the GCC International Ministry Team designed to mobilize U.S. churches for overseas

expansion. Also, Jim Wiebelhaus leads the GCC ministry focusing on reaching international students who live in the United States. Finally, GCC churches mobilize hundreds of people for short-term mission trips, all with the hope of establishing new churches or strengthening existing churches.

In the US, GCC partners with GCM-Churches, which was formed in 2006 as a new U.S. church association with a primary focus on campus ministry.

Great Commission Churches is practically united with these affiliated ministries in many ways, working shoulder to shoulder to make disciples of all nations. Leaders from these ministries gather periodically in the Great Commission Global Fellowship for prayer and strategic planning in spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ.

As of December, 2005, Great Commission Churches is affiliated with churches in 20 countries throughout the world.

For more information about Great Commission Churches contact our office at info@gccweb.org.

“To know the will of God, we need an open Bible and an open map.”

- *William Carey, pioneer missionary to India*

EXERCISE

1. What aspect of Church history did you find the most interesting? Are there lessons from this history that apply to us today?

2. Step back and get a big picture perspective. What do you believe church historians will say about this time of Christian history in America and around the world?

3. As Noll points out, the Catholic church has played a central role in Church history. How do you evaluate the Catholic church both in the past and the Catholic church today? Do you see them as believers with some false teachings, or simply as ones who were (and now are) not true believers? Where and how do you think they got off-track?

4. Considering the history of GCC, what would you say are several of the most important lessons we have learned through our history that we need to pass on to those who come after us? Lessons learned can include things to hold on to and things to avoid.

5. What are the top five events in the history of your church? Explain your answer.

THE LOCAL CHURCH AND NATIONAL MINISTRIES

INTRODUCTION

A core value in Great Commission Churches is that the local church is the vehicle God uses to win people to Christ, to build believers, and to train leaders. What role, then, do national ministries play in God's plan? This article will address this question.

The Local Church and National Ministries in Great Commission Churches

Pastor John Hopler, Columbus, OH



INTRODUCTION: The purpose of this article is to answer questions related to Great Commission Churches (GCC) and the church ministry teams.

In GCC there are three types of national ministries:

1. **Regional Church Ministry Teams:** These are teams of leaders working with churches for the purpose of church planting, building those churches, and developing leaders. These are leaders like Paul who had a “daily pressure of concern... for all the churches” (2 Cor. 11:28). There are several Great Commission U.S. church ministry teams working with community/campus churches in various geographical regions throughout the United States. In addition, GCC partners with church ministry teams working overseas.
2. **General Ministries:** These are ministries that support church ministry teams and churches by providing teaching, evangelism and equipping to people in churches.
3. **Great Commission Churches (GCC):** GCC is the US-based organization, the association of churches in the U.S., that provides unity, accountability, and equipping to all the churches and ministries in GCC. Patterned after the example of the Jerusalem council in Acts 15, GCC establishes standards for doctrine, core values, membership, and ordination.

1. Does the GCC core value of “The Church” mean that the local church is totally self- sufficient for accomplishing God’s purposes on this earth?

Yes and no. In one sense, the church is self-sufficient in the same way that an individual believer who has the Holy Spirit can function adequately on his own. However, we also understand that God has designed the individual Christian to live and function within a community of believers led by elders. Similarly, God has designed local churches to live and function within a community of local churches, led by those who are part of a church ministry team within a general church association in national ministry, all, of course, under the headship of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Take the following example. Suppose there were 100 Christians and half of them were in close fellowship for over 20 years, ministering in their church and hearing God’s word taught each week. The other half neglected or rejected church involvement. At the end of those 20 years, which group do you think would be more spiritually healthy? Which group do you think would be more effective

“The Church, during the apostolic age, did not consist of isolated, independent congregations, but was one body, of which the separate churches were constituent members, each subject to all the rest, or to an authority which extended over all.”
- Charles Hodge

The Church and the Doctrine of God

The Local Church and National Ministries in Great Commission Churches

“The Great Commission is not an option to be considered; it is a command to be obeyed.”
- Hudson Taylor

in reaching people for Christ? The answer should be obvious. In like manner, suppose there were 100 churches and 50 of those churches over a 20-year period were regularly in fellowship and teamed up with a church ministry team as part of a general church association for starting more churches throughout the world. At the end of those 20 years, would you not have more confidence in the spiritual health and in the fruitfulness in missions of those 50 churches than those churches not in fellowship?

2. *What does the Bible say about national ministries?*

First, we see that the example in the Book of Acts was that of a close working relationship between churches. For example, through Paul’s ministry an offering was taken from the Gentile churches to help the poor in Jerusalem (Acts 11:29, 30).

Also, a key passage on this issue is Ephesians 4:11-13:

“And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.”

Here, we see that God’s desire is that the entire body (and not just one local church), be united (“attain to the unity of the faith”). The way that God does this is by using gifted leaders working within local churches (those with a pastoral and teaching ministry), as well as gifted leaders working with a network of local churches (those in an apostolic ministry).

The Book of Acts is filled with examples of Jesus Christ mobilizing His people through apostolic ministries to advance the gospel, to plant churches, and to build churches (vv. 8:14,15,25; 12:25; 13:1-5; 14:21-27; 16:4,5; 18:22,23; and many others).

3. *Are you saying that you believe that apostles exist today as they did in the first century?*

No. It is apparent that the original 12 Apostles and the Apostle Paul were unique in several ways:

First, the original Apostles had seen Jesus Christ after He had risen from the dead (Acts 1:22, 26; 1 Corinthians 9:1).

Second, the original Apostles had a special authority from Jesus Christ in laying the foundation of the Church (Ephesians 2:20).

The Church and the Doctrine of God

The Local Church and National Ministries in Great Commission Churches

Third, the original Apostles were given unique miraculous powers to testify that their message was from God (2 Corinthians 12:12).

Finally, many of the apostles (such as Peter, John, Paul, and Matthew) had a special role in that they were inspired by the Holy Spirit to write portions of the Scriptures.

There are no individuals today who possess these four characteristics. However, there are those today to whom Jesus Christ has given a ministry to plant, build, and oversee many churches. Consider the words of Bill Bright:

“Though we do not have people who could claim to be apostles in the original sense—those who had been eyewitnesses of the resurrected Christ (Acts 1:22,26)—today we would have those who may function much like an apostle... to give leadership to a number of churches and to show supernatural wisdom and authority in spiritual matters that relate to those churches” (The Holy Spirit, Thomas Nelson Publishers, [1980], p.214).

Today, those with this gifting are operating in various ministries and denominations. Their title might be bishop, district superintendent, conference minister, or regional director. In GCC we use the term “church ministry team” or “regional ministry” to describe the leaders providing a regional or national ministry to churches. Regardless of the title, the nature of the ministry is the same.

As to the term “apostle,” we do not use that term because of its connotation today. The term “apostle” is usually associated with the original 12 Apostles or with those who have a super authority in churches or with those who claim authority equal to the Scriptures (none of which we believe exists today). Rather we recognize (as Bill Bright and many others have recognized) that there are leaders in our day who have a multi-church ministry comparable to what Paul, Timothy, and Barnabas had 2000 years ago. Without such a gifting, how else would Jesus Christ accomplish His goal of fulfilling the great commission?

4. Describe in general how those in national ministry function within GCC.

A good word to describe this relationship is “partnership.” Paul refers to Philemon (who was probably an elder in Ephesus), as his “partner” (Philemon 17). Those in national ministry work as partners with pastors and local churches to help build churches, build leaders in churches, and to start new churches in the United States and overseas.

5. Practically how does this work out? How are those in church ministry teams really needed? Can't pastors do it on their own?

“All Church power arises from the indwelling of the Spirit; therefore those in whom the Spirit dwells are the seat of Church power. But the Spirit dwells in the whole Church, and therefore the whole Church is the seat of Church power.”
- Charles Hodge

The Church and the Doctrine of God

The Local Church and National Ministries in Great Commission Churches

“Expect great things
from God; attempt
great things for
God.”

- *William Carey*

As one in a church ministry team, I see several activities that could not be done effectively if I were only pastoring a local church:

- A. Vision-casting for reaching the world for Christ. Keeping the vision alive of GCC (such as church planting throughout the U.S. and the world), through teachings and encouragement to pastors is first priority. It is very easy in a local setting to get myopic as to the needs of the world.
- B. Building unity between churches. Unity does not happen naturally in a local church. Pastors need to build unity. So too, unity does not happen naturally between churches. Leaders in national ministry build that unity in areas of doctrine, ministry, and, generally, as members of God’s family.
- C. Strategic mission efforts. Many church plants simply will not happen unless someone is in national ministry providing prayer, relational and administrative support, and encouragement for those efforts.
- D. Arbitration in local churches. Many situations in local churches would have led to unresolved conflicts without the help of those in national ministry.
- E. Pastoring the pastors. Many pastors would have “thrown in the towel” had there not been someone in national ministry to be their pastor. The devil’s motto is “Strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered.” By pastoring the pastors, those in national ministry are able to be used by God to provide protection to the entire church.
- F. Coaching in ministry. Helping churches grow in health and in numbers is a key role for those in national ministry. Their greater breadth of ministry experience (as well as their knowledge of other pastors and their experiences) make those in national ministry valuable coaches, particularly to younger pastors.

6. How does the working of the church ministry team in GCC affect the governance of the local church?

In general there are three types of governmental structures seen in churches today:

- A. Elder led, where the elders in the church have final authority in the church. The examples of this in Scripture are many (Acts 14:23; Acts 20:28; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1-7). Presbyterians are examples of this church governance model.
- B. Congregational, where decisions are made by the congregation by a majority vote. The examples of this in Scripture include the

The Church and the Doctrine of God
The Local Church and National Ministries
in Great Commission Churches

involvement of the congregation in the selection of the leaders in Acts 6:1-6; and the participation by the whole church in the Council in Jerusalem in Acts 15 (note: v. 22). Many Baptist churches and denominations favor this type of government.

- C. Episcopal, where a central denominational agency has the final authority in each local church. Advocates of this model point to Paul's authority in the local church to appoint leaders and set church policy (as is seen in his letters to Timothy and Titus). Methodists have this form of church governance.

In the 1970's, when the Great Commission movement began, elders were seen as having the final authority in the local church. Influenced by our Plymouth Brethren roots, we very much valued the autonomy of the local church ruled by elders. In the 1980's, in our desire to be united as a movement to fulfill the great commission (and because of the influence of Campus Crusade for Christ), GCC was formed. A question existed for a time about whether we would favor more of an episcopal model or an elder-led governance model. After much counsel, the GCC articles were written in the early 1990's, in which the governance of GCC churches can best be described as:

Churches under the headship of Jesus Christ, led and governed by elders, seeking congregational affirmation in all decisions, and teamed up with GCC and GCC church ministry teams to fulfill the great commission throughout the U.S. and the world.

Overall, we recognize the final authority in the local church as being in the elders (under the headship of Jesus Christ). Further we recognize GCC's role being that of providing leadership in national and international ministry, and in supporting the local church in its ministry in its community.

7. *Does this mean that God desires each church to be independent?*

A better word statement is that God desires each church to be interdependent. Certainly God desires each church and each leadership team to hear from God as to His unique leadership in each local situation. However, we must always emphasize that Jesus is the Lord of the entire church and that He desires the church to work in harmony and as a team.

A good example of someone who heard from God, but who was also united with other leaders was the Apostle Paul. In Galatians 1:12, Paul states that his gospel was received as a direct revelation from God. Yet in Galatians 2:2, he states that he submitted his gospel to other leaders for fear that he had run in vain. Also, even though Paul was the "father" of the Gentile churches, he united with the elders and Apostles in Jerusalem on the circumcision issue, and urged those churches to follow the Jerusalem decree (Acts 16:4). What is interesting is the

"If the Church is a living body united to the same head, governed by the same laws, and pervaded by the same Spirit, it is impossible that one part should be independent of all the rest."

- Charles Hodge

The Church and the Doctrine of God

The Local Church and National Ministries in Great Commission Churches

“To God, the Church is the most precious thing on earth. In the face of many problems and labors, the greatest encouragement and incentive an elder can have is to know that he performs an exceedingly excellent work -- one that is worthy of the sacrifice of one’s life.”

- Alexander Strauch

fruit that resulted: “*So the churches were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing in number daily*” (Acts 16:5).

Paul realized that, as he heard from God and followed His direction as a church leader, and then united with, and was accountable to, other leaders in the body of Christ, a special blessing would result in his ministry. Paul did not have a “possessive spirit,” saying “These are my churches. I will do what I want!” Instead, he saw the Lord as the head of the Church and himself as a steward whose responsibility was to follow God’s lead and to unite with other leaders and churches in fulfilling Christ’s purposes on this earth.

8. What is the key to making this national/local organizational set-up work?

The key is trust. As leaders are humbly trusting Jesus Christ for His leadership and trusting one another in each other’s sphere of influence—national and local—the result will be unity and effective ministry. My experience has been that whenever there is a breakdown in our “governmental working together,” it is because somewhere trust has broken down. Throughout the history of the Christian Church, the gospel has spread powerfully when those in national ministry had confidence and trust in those working in local ministry, and those in local ministry had confidence and trust in those in national ministry. For this reason, we must always be diligent to maintain a spirit of trust in our relationships with one another.

9. Describe the goals and role of GCC in the local church.

The goal of Great Commission Churches is that every church in the association will indeed be a “great commission church”—committed to winning lost people to Christ, building them in the faith, training leaders, and starting new churches. Our desire is that the churches in GCC will be putting into action the type of Christianity that we see in the New Testament. Thus the by-line, “*New Testament Christianity in Action Today.*”

What role does GCC play in this? In answer to this question, here is the Mission Statement of Great Commission Churches:

The mission of the association is to assist member churches, member church ministry teams, and other member ministries by: 1) providing various forums to encourage, train, envision, and impassion their leaders for the work of the Lord, 2) encouraging cooperation between them, and 3) providing accountability to them in areas such as maintaining core values and basic doctrine (Ephesians 4:11-16).

As indicated, this mission statement is based on Ephesians 4:11-16 which describes the purpose and function of the universal Church:

The Church and the Doctrine of God

The Local Church and National Ministries in Great Commission Churches

“And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.”

Based upon the above passage, the general mission of Great Commission Churches is simply to equip, unite and to provide accountability in doctrine and core values. The ultimate result of these three mission purposes is that each local church will be more effective in winning, building, training, and sending.

For *equipping*, Great Commission Churches offers a number of ministries:

1. GCLI-Foundations
2. Supporting/coordinating regional leaders conferences
3. Pastors Conference
4. Faithwalkers
5. International ministry team regional coordinators
6. International Student Ministry
7. National campus ministry roundtable
8. Large Church Roundtable
9. Communication: (Emails; Website)
10. Publications (Books; Daylights)
11. Regional HSLT's (high school LT)
12. Summer Training conferences (such as GC Bootcamp)

For *uniting*, Great Commission Churches offer the following ministries

1. Uniting nationally around a National Leadership Council
2. Prayer Partners
3. Mission USA team (with national campus ministry)
4. GCC International Ministry Team/Antioch Project

For *accountability*, Great Commission Churches offers the following:

1. General accountability and oversight to member churches and ministries
2. Ordination
3. Arbitration for churches and leaders
4. GCLI discussions on doctrine and core values

“The church is foremost about Spirit. She must, at her core, be shaped and defined by the work of God in her midst. This doesn't eliminate the value of effort or tradition, but it does make it clear that the fuel of the church must be the Spirit.”

- Erwin McManus

The Church and the Doctrine of God
 The Local Church and National Ministries
 in Great Commission Churches

“The greatest challenge the church faces today is to be authentic disciples of Jesus.”
 - Dallas Willard

10. What is the attitude that the local church is to have towards GCC?

Jesus desires that all His believers be united in heart and spirit (Ephesians 4:3). He prayed that all of His followers would be one (John 17:21). In a local church, we desire that all the members be united in spirit: accepting one another, honoring one another, caring for one another, serving one another, and fellowshiping together. Our hope in the Lord is that the spirit of unity that we desire to exist in our local church will also exist at a national level within an association of churches. (And, it should be said, that this same spirit of unity ought also to exist between the association of churches and the general body of Christ.)

11. Assuming that this heart attitude exists, how does participation in an association of churches practically work itself out for the local church?

It is parallel to the participation of an individual in a local church. Consider the following:

	The individual to the local church	The local church to the national ministry
Fellowship	Sunday morning meeting; small groups; general fellowship	Pastors Conference; regional meetings; general fellowship with other pastors and leaders in the association
Ministry	Using gifts in ministry	Pastors (and other church members) contributing time and ministry outside the church to build churches in the association
Giving Financially	Tithing; special free will offerings	Church giving 10% to GCC church ministry teams; special free will offerings (special mission projects; helping other churches in need.)
Honoring leadership/ Accountability	Prioritizing schedule to team up with the church and its purposes; being personally accountable to the pastors	Pastors prioritizing their schedule and the church schedule to team up with GCC church ministry teams in achieving its purposes; pastors team being accountable to GCC and the GCC church ministry team for their personal lives and ministry.
Teaming in outreach	Participation in outreach efforts of the church	Teaming up with the GCC church ministry teams in short term missions and in church planting efforts

The Church and the Doctrine of God

The Local Church and National Ministries in Great Commission Churches

As you can see, one of the major reasons for being linked up with a national ministry is for the pastors and the local church to model to its members the type of involvement those members are to have in the local church. That is:

- If the pastors are modeling a spirit of fellowship in an association of churches, that will affect the depth of fellowship in the local church.
- If the pastors are voluntarily ministering outside their local church, this will be a model to members of the church to voluntarily minister within the church.
- If the pastors are generous with the church finances to support a national ministry within an association of churches, this will be a model to church members to give financially to their church.
- If the pastors are honoring those who are leading in national ministry, this will be a model to church members to be honoring those who are leading in local ministry.
- Finally, if pastors are teamed up with those in national ministry to advance church planting throughout the U.S. and the world, this will be a model to church members to team up with the pastors and the church to spread the gospel in their local community.

Overall, the relationship with the national ministry provides a great opportunity for elders to be examples to the flock (1 Peter. 5:3).

12. You mentioned that God desires unity in the body of Christ as a whole. How is this lived out through the ministry of GCC?

The first priority is that we have a spirit of honor and love towards all believers in the body of Christ. Scripture is clear that we need the entire body of Christ, both for our own personal lives and for the mission to be accomplished. Therefore, being diligent to preserve the unity of the spirit (Ephesians 4:3) with all believers and ministries is extremely important if we are to please the Lord in our lives and in our service to Him. On a practical basis, GCC has united with believers in the following ways:

- A. Joining with the Global Pastors Network in seeing 1 billion souls reached for Christ and 5 million churches planted.
- B. Teaming up with mission organizations (such as Campus Crusade for Christ and Samaritan's Purse) in mission projects.
- C. Through GCM, associating with and being accountable to mission associations such as EFMA (Evangelical Fellowship of Mission Agencies) and IFMA (Interdenominational Foreign Missions Association).
- D. Becoming a member of the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability and the National Association of Evangelicals.
- E. Contributing financially to many of the above organizations and individuals both for their ministry to us and to assist them in their ministry throughout the world.

“Let’s put away our logos and our egos and make Jesus Christ Number One.”

- Bill Bright

The Church and the Doctrine of God

The Local Church and National Ministries in Great Commission Churches

“Nor has the Church failed before the assaults of demons: for she is like a tower of refuge to all who fight against the Devil.”

- *Thomas Aquina*

13. What about other ministries in the United States (such as the Willow Creek Association, Touch Ministries [for cell churches], Rick Warren, John MacArthur, etc.)? How do you see these ministries in relation to GCC?

In general, we see these ministries as complementing what GCC does. God has raised up these fantastic ministries to provide resources and training to churches throughout the U.S. and the world. These ministries usually focus on training in a specific ministry model. For example, the Willow Creek Association is focused on helping churches with a seeker-focused (or very seeker-sensitive) church service. Many churches in GCC participate in conferences sponsored by the Willow Creek Association—and I personally encourage that participation. However, WCA is not a substitute for the relational leadership and association that GCC provides.

The analogy I would give is this: WCA is to a local church what a Christian bookstore is to a local church member. Both provide resources (tapes, books, and seminars), which can address pinpointed needs of the church or church member. Praise God for the ministry of WCA and the Christian bookstore! In contrast, GCC is to the local church what the local church is to the church member. Both GCC and the local church provide long-term relational teaming for the gospel, ongoing encouragement, accountability, and training. Just as the Christian bookstore is unable to replace the local church, WCA and other similar national ministries cannot replace GCC (or any other fellowship of churches). My opinion is that we have the best of both when a local church is teamed up with a fellowship of churches and then in addition receives more tailored ministry training from Willow Creek, John MacArthur, or any other similar ministry.

In a nutshell, Paul told the Corinthians that they had countless tutors in Christ, yet one “*father*” (1 Corinthians 4:15). The principle I would derive from this verse is that a local church will have many in the body of Christ providing wonderful teaching and training — but this is no substitute to the relational shepherding and ongoing personalized care and leadership given by those leading in a family of churches.

14. For the local church and local pastors, what are some pitfalls to avoid in their relationship with a national ministry?

Two dangers to avoid are over-dependence and unhealthy independence.

15. Describe how a church can be overly dependent on a national ministry.

At times, I have seen some elders in local churches become too dependent on a national ministry or on other churches in GCC for the overall direction of the ministry in that local church. Those elders did not adequately seek the Lord for His direction in that local church. They would hear about some program or ministry model adopted by other leaders in GCC and assume that this was the direction for their church to go. But later, after some ministry disappointments,

they learned that God is the One who must lead in the local church—and He has a unique plan for each fellowship of believers. Like the Corinthians who looked more to the individual gifted leaders like Paul and Apollos (1 Corinthians 3:4-6), we all need to realize that God is the One who causes the growth in the church.

16. Describe how a church can have an unhealthy independence towards a national ministry.

While the Corinthians were overly dependent on national leadership, Diotrephes (3 John 9) is an example of an individual who had a disregard for those in national ministry. Diotrephes exhibited an accusative spirit (“unjustly accusing us with wicked words” [v. 10]), and instead of building a unity with the believers outside of his church, he actually refused to fellowship with them (v.10). As mentioned earlier, pursuing a fellowship, accountability, and a teaming up with those in the fellowship of churches will be a guard against unhealthy independence.

17. How should a church deal with questions and concerns it has with a national ministry that is overseeing the fellowship of churches?

We realize that those leading in ministry—whether local or national—are fallible. Just as Peter needed to be reproved by Paul (Gal.2:11-14), so too, those in national ministry need to be corrected should their conduct be inconsistent with the Scriptures.

As in a local church, the goal is that the member church (or pastors) pursue a unity of mind with the leadership of the national ministry by initiating in a spirit of grace and truth. On the part of the leadership, God desires them to be teachable and humble, and to realize that they are servants and stewards of God’s ministry. Philippians 2:1-4 urges all parties to pursue humility towards one another and to seek a unity of mind, for this is what pleases the Lord.

18. What if a church or a pastor in GCC has strong convictions that differ from those held by the leadership in GCC?

Certainly that is a possibility. Throughout Church history, churches have left a fellowship of churches over doctrinal or ministry differences. However, it is our hope that in GCC that these instances will be few in number for three reasons:

- I. Heart. At the heart of GCC is not a doctrinal “hobby horse” or a particular ministry model. Rather, our vision is to fulfill the great commission by providing a relational network of churches devoted to Jesus Christ, to one another, and to the mission Jesus Christ gave to us. By holding to a basic sound evangelical doctrinal statement, by keeping the mission pre-eminent, and by stressing that our unity is based upon our simple love for one another in Christ, an atmosphere is

“The day we find the perfect church, it becomes imperfect the moment we join it.”
- Charles H. Spurgeon

The Church and the Doctrine of God

The Local Church and National Ministries in Great Commission Churches

“The church has made its greatest impact upon society, not when the church was large, rich, and at ease, but rather when it consisted of a people who were committed to God in spite of all the difficulties they confronted.”

- Findley B. Edge

maintained which allows for different doctrinal emphases and ministry models.

- II. Unity. We place a high value on pursuing a life-long unity together. Although we recognize that Jesus Christ is sovereign in what He does with any church, we also recognize the tremendous advantage of “sticking it out together” when disagreements arise. This sets a powerful example to members in our churches who are tempted to leave or who are tempted to sever marriage or other family relationships when conflicts surface.
- III. Humility and Stewardship. We place a high value on humility toward God and man. Each pastor understands that the real leader in each local church is not a pastor or the board of elders or GCC or a GCC church ministry team. The Scripture is clear that the real leader in each and every church is Jesus Christ. This humility leads each pastor and leader in national ministry to see that he is not an “owner,” but a steward in God’s universal Church. As a steward there is a sense of responsibility toward God to build the church in unity with others in GCC and the body of Christ. In particular, second and third generation pastors who have the benefit of building upon the foundations laid by other GCC pastors and leaders (1 Corinthians 3:10) will have an even greater sense of stewardship, not only toward God, but also toward those who labored before them.

19. Are there opportunities for others to get involved in national ministry?

Yes! In order to reach the world with the gospel, God must raise up more and more workers whose mission is to plant and care for churches. In GCC, regional directors are always eager to have pastors in local churches come forward to serve outside their local church, with the potential of eventually having a part-time or full-time national ministry.

20. In conclusion, what can local churches do to enhance the national and international ministry of GCC?

There are several things:

- A. Pray. Paul wrote to the Ephesians and asked that they pray on his behalf (Ephesians 6:19). In like manner, pray that God would continue to multiply His work throughout the U.S. and the world. Pray that God would strengthen and support the ministry of those who are leading nationally and in each local church. And pray that God would multiply workers for national ministry.
- B. Encourage. Paul noted Onesiphorus for his encouragement to him while he was in prison (2 Timothy 1:16). Everyone in ministry needs encouragement, including those in national ministry.

The Church and the Doctrine of God
The Local Church and National Ministries
in Great Commission Churches

- C. Support with workers. The leaders in Lystra seemed to provide support to Paul by allowing Timothy to join up in his team (Acts 16:1-3). There is no doubt that Timothy could have had a great ministry in Lystra. But the local leadership was not reluctant to have Timothy travel with Paul when Paul expressed a desire to have him on his team, and when it was clear that the Lord was leading Timothy to join Paul.
- D. Give financially. The church in Philippi is a tremendous example of a church contributing to someone who was ministering to a network of churches (Philippians 4: 10-19).
- E. General obedience to Jesus Christ. Both John and Paul stated that the greatest encouragement to them was seeing those in the churches walking in obedience to God (3 John 4; 1 Thessalonians 3:6-8).

May God cause there to be more national ministries to be raised up and greater unity between those ministries and local churches so that the gospel of Jesus Christ will spread throughout the world!

“The average pastor views his church as a local church with a missions program; while he ought to realize that if he is in fact pastoring a church, it is to be a global church with a missions purpose.”
- *Unknown*

EXERCISE

1. What was the main point you learned from this reading? How would you apply it to your life?

2. Do you believe that apostolic ministries exist today? Why or why not?

3. What potential dangers exist when a church becomes too independent? What are some benefits which can be derived from working with a national ministry such as GCC? In light of these answers, evaluate your church in its relationship with GCC and write down some ways it can improve.

4. What sort of role do you think other Christian ministries (other than GCC/GCM) should play in the life of your church? Be specific.

5. What are ways in which GCC is serving your church now? Can you think of some ways in which GCC could better serve this church? (Make sure someone passes these suggestions on to the GCC leadership.)

CHURCH JUDGMENTS

INTRODUCTION

Jesus Christ came into a world of sin. His mission and our mission is to lead people from bondage to sin to righteous living. Church judgments are a means God uses to accomplish this purpose. The following article will help you as a church leader to be equipped in this very important aspect of church life.

Church Judgments

Pastor David Bovenmyer, Ames, IA



1. What is a church judgment?

A church judgment is what has often been called “church discipline.” According to Webster’s, the word “discipline” refers to training that develops self-control, character, or orderliness and efficiency.” It can also refer to “correction, chastisement, or punishment inflicted by way of correction and training.”

In a fallen world, discipline is necessary in every arena of life—our personal life, our family life, our national life, and yes, our church life. The pull of the world, flesh, and Devil on our souls and minds requires effort and discipline, both from within and from without, to keep us on a path that is holy and pleasing to God.

Within the Church there are many ways that discipline is provided. In its broadest sense, discipline refers to anything that helps to train and educate God’s people to be holy and obey Him. Public teaching, self-discipline and restraint, mild reproofs and corrections in casual conversations between Christians—these are all a part of church discipline. Too often, “church discipline” is thought to refer only to the ultimate act of church discipline—a church judgment or excommunication. An understanding and practice of the broader nature of church discipline is essential to purifying and equipping the Church and will remove much of the need for the practice of the ultimate discipline.

This paper will talk about the ultimate discipline—church judgment. We will use the term “church judgment” rather than “church discipline” to distinguish this ultimate discipline from the broader forms of church discipline and to emphasize that, in most cases, it is to be applied to those that we judge to be radically out of step with God and very likely not even genuine believers.

2. What biblical passages deal with church judgment?

The primary passages that deal with church judgment are Matthew 18:15-20, 1 Corinthians 5:1-13, Romans 16:17-18, Titus 3:9-11, and 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15. As we study these passages, we must remember that each passage was written to a different group of people who presumably did not have the benefit of the other passages. Also, each passage addresses a particular type of sin, and some of the passages were written in response to a particular circumstance or situation.

It is clear from these passages that the Bible does not give us a formal legal procedure for “church trials” or a set of steps that must always be applied in every situation, but rather gives us instruction on what to do for different types of sin and in different situations. Sometimes the steps are slightly different. So, when studying one passage (for example, 1 Corinthians 5), we may refer to another passage for wisdom (for example, Matthew 18). However, there is no indication, in either passage, that the steps given in one (Matthew 18), must be followed in the other (1 Corinthians 5).

“For where God built a church, there the Devil would also build a chapel.”

- *Martin Luther*

“Nothing so clearly discovers a spiritual man as his treatment of an erring brother.”
- Augustine

3. *What are the purposes of a church judgment?*

Although there are some differences in the procedures that the Church should use in a judgment depending upon the sin involved, there seem to be two basic purposes in most of the church judgment passages: (all quotations from NIV)

1. To cleanse and protect the church from sin and error.

In 1 Corinthians 5:6, Paul warns that, “*a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough.*”

In Romans 16:18, Paul is concerned to protect “*naive people,*” from being led astray by “*smooth talk and flattery.*”

And in Titus 3:9, Paul commands Titus to protect the church from those who refuse to refrain from “*foolish*” and “*useless*” arguments and quarrels.

2. To attempt to reclaim and restore the person in error.

In 1 Corinthians 5:5, Paul commands the church to remove the immoral man from their midst so that “*his spirit*” would be “*saved on the day of the Lord.*”

The purpose of Jesus’ instructions in Matthew 18:15 is so that he will listen and you will be able to win your brother over.

In 2 Thessalonians 3:6, Paul instructs the church not to associate with certain people so that they might be “*put to shame*” and “*admonished,*” not as an enemy, but as a brother.

In addition, there is, most likely, a third purpose for church judgment—to preserve the Church’s holy and righteous witness to the world. This can be gleaned, not so much from the passages that directly address church judgments, but from other passages that show God’s concern that the Church demonstrate a holy life to the world (Titus 2:5, 1 Timothy 6:1, Romans 2:24, 1 Peter 2:9).

In the rest of this paper, we will take a close look at each of these passages and what they teach us about church judgments.

MATTHEW 18 — AN OFFENSE BETWEEN BROTHERS

“If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.¹⁶ But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan

or a tax collector.¹⁸ I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.²⁰ For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them” (Matthew 18:15-20, NIV).

In this passage, is Jesus giving a procedure for dealing with all types of sin, or is He dealing only with someone who sins against you personally?

The passage contains a textual variance. There are approximately 5,664 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament that are still in existence today, as well as over 8,000 Latin Vulgate manuscripts, plus an additional 8,000 manuscripts in Ethiopic, Slavic, or Armenian.¹ With all these different manuscripts, there were bound to be some copying errors. Yet despite the wide diversity of locations in which they were found, the very different languages used, and the centuries spanned by these copies, there are remarkably few debatable passages in the New Testament. Yet the words “*against you*” in Matthew 18:15 are some that are in dispute, being present in some manuscripts (the majority) and not in others (a few of the earliest). The New American Standard, Wuest, and New English Bibles do not have the words “*against you*,” whereas the New International, Berkeley, Amplified, New Living, King James, and Revised Standard all do. It is beyond the scope of this paper to delve into the specific details of how many and which manuscripts have the words “*against you*” and which do not.

But if we apply the saying, “If you wish to understand the text, look at the context,” we will see that a fairly substantial argument can be made that the words “*against you*,” even if not part of the original text, are implied by the context of the passage. In His words prior to verse 15, Jesus exhorts the disciples concerning the need for humility and not looking down on the “*little ones*” who, like children, are weak and insignificant in the eyes of the world. So the context preceding the verse has to do with the sin of despising those who seem insignificant.

Next is the passage in question in which Jesus discusses how to deal with a brother who sins, or sins “*against you*.”

Then following this passage (vs. 21), Peter asks the question, “*Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?*”

Apparently, Peter understood that Jesus was talking in verses 15 through 20 about what to do with someone who sins “*against me*,” since Peter’s question relates to this subject.

If, in the passage in question, Jesus had told them what to do with a person who sins against you and will not repent, a natural follow-up question might be, “what about the guy who does repent and gets right, yet still continues to sin against me?” Apparently, this is the person that Peter has in view. Peter takes a stab at being generous in forgiveness by saying, “up to seven times?” (The rabbinical thought was

“One leak will sink a ship; and one sin will destroy a sinner.”

- John Bunyan

The Church and the Doctrine of God

Church Judgments

“It may be a secret sin on earth, but it is open scandal in heaven.”

- *Unknown*

that after three times, no further forgiveness was needed.) But Jesus goes way beyond this, and expands it to 77 times, or if the marginal reading is correct, “*seventy times seven.*”

So, since the context before the passage in question refers to despising a “little one” and therefore mistreating him, and the context following the passage talks about someone who sins “*against you,*” it would seem likely that, in this passage, Jesus also had in mind the sin of a personal offense rather than any sin whatsoever.

4. *Why is this important? What are the ramifications of the words “against you?”*

If the passage is referring to sin in general, then it would apply to all sin, great or small. It would even apply to such things as smoking, overeating, failing to read the Bible, failing to attend church, failing to use our time wisely, grumbling, doubting, etc. All of these can be sins and disobedience to God. If this passage is interpreted as applying to sins in general, small or great, and if church members view this as a command to follow whenever they notice that someone has sinned, it could easily lead to a fearful, graceless atmosphere in the church. Even the smallest sins, if not repented of and forsaken, would be punishable by church judgment.

But if the passage refers to sins against an individual, then the type of sin in view is much more limited and the sin can only be prosecuted by the person sinned against. The passage would apply only to injurious offenses, where a person has been personally damaged, perhaps from stealing, defrauding, slandering, etc.

In summary, I see three reasons to believe that Jesus’ intent in this passage was to address personal offenses and not all sin in general:

- 1) The majority of the manuscripts include the words “against you.”
- 2) The context, especially the context following the passage, implies that a personal sin is being discussed.
- 3) A rigorous application of the passage to all sins would lead to a spirit in the church that is quite different from the rest of the New Testament.

5. *What is the first step in confronting someone who sins against you?*

The first step is to go to the one who has offended you in private. “*Go and show him his fault, just between the two of you.*” How seldom this is done. We are so quick to go to anyone and everyone else and tell them about our brother’s or sister’s faults rather than go to the source of the problem—to the only one who can do something about it. How much discord would be spared in the body of Christ if we would simply follow the first step in our Lord’s instruction. Peter exhorts us in 1 Peter 4:8 (NIV), “*Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.*”

Love seeks to protect another's reputation and therefore seeks to take care of an offense as privately as possible.

The goal of this first step is not to humiliate or judge or get back at the person that has wronged us, but rather to win him back to righteousness and to restore a relationship with him. *"If he listens to you, you have won your brother over."* A desire to correct a wrong against us, or even to seek restitution, is not ruled out by the passage and can be a valid motivation to confront someone who has wronged us. Yet a concern for the offending brother and for the continuation of a relationship with him is specifically mentioned and must be present in our attitude.

Wise reprovers will first examine their own hearts and motives before confronting others. Any hurt pride, selfish desire, anger, bitterness, or resentment must be set aside. When reproof is given with an attitude of love and genuine concern for the other person's welfare, the offender is almost always immediately restored.

6. What is the second step in confronting someone who sins against you?

If the problem is resolved in private, praise the Lord! The issue is settled. But if the person does not respond to private reproof, the person sinned against is commanded not just to drop the matter, but to pursue it farther by taking one or two others along to confront the offender.

Again, how seldom this is done. It is so much easier to just let the issue drop. Yet to leave an offense unresolved can have deeply negative repercussions. Bitterness can easily grow in our hearts. And if the offending person is not corrected, his spiritual life will suffer. And, inevitably, the unrepentant person will do harm to others as well.

It can be easy, especially in our age of "tolerance," to feel that we should just put up with a brother or sister who has taken advantage of us. Yet this is not the way of love. Love demands righteousness, not only in ourselves, but in others. It is not love to let a person go on in unrighteousness because we do not have the fortitude to lovingly confront him and keep on doing so until he repents. Sin is like a cancer that destroys the sinning individual and harms those around him. We must do all that the Scriptures prescribe to root it out.

Why are the one or two others to be taken along? Clearly, it is to help judge the situation. Some of their goals might be the following:

- 1) The witness(es) can investigate the issue, if need be, and confirm the truth of what actually happened. In this way, they can insure that the accuser is not a false accuser.
- 2) They can also confirm that the offense was truly a sin and not just a difference of opinion, or caused by a critical or overly judgmental brother who takes offense too easily.

"Sin wouldn't be so attractive if the wages were paid immediately."

- *Unknown*

The Church and the Doctrine of God

Church Judgments

“We have a strange illusion that mere time cancels sin.”

- C.S. Lewis

- 3) If they judge that the offender has truly sinned, the witness(es) can add their voices in reproof and, if need be, exhort and plead with the offender to repent.
- 4) If there is repentance, the witness(es) could help to determine what restitution or steps of reconciliation are appropriate.
- 5) Finally, if there is still no repentance, even after their admonition, the witness(es) can confirm this fact as well.

Who should these one or two others be? Jesus gives no qualifications. Yet the job that they are doing would require that they be men or women of wisdom and integrity, knowledgeable in the Word, aware of what is right and what is wrong, able to investigate between truth and error, and able to communicate a gentle, yet strong reproof. There is no requirement that they be elders in the church, but the nature of the job they are doing would make it advisable that they be fairly mature spiritually.

7. What is the third step in confronting someone who sins against you?

If the offending brother repents, praise the Lord! Reconciliation is accomplished and the issue is settled. But if he refuses to listen to the one or two others, the next step is to tell it to the church. But again, how seldom is this done? How often have offenses gone unresolved between brothers and allowed to fester, resulting in whole churches taking sides and even splitting because of personal offenses that should have been resolved years ago.

No, our Lord does not allow us to drop the issue when a person will not repent. Rather we are commanded to take the issue to the church. But how is this to be done? Jesus does not spell out the procedure, but it would seem wise to take it first to the elders, since they are entrusted by God to be shepherds and overseers of the church (1 Peter 5:2). As guardians of the flock, as well as of the accused individual, the elders should also investigate the issue, making sure that all their questions are answered, including the following:

Was the alleged sin truly a sin? What scriptures were violated?

Can the alleged sin be confirmed? Are there two or three individuals who witnessed the sin or heard the individual acknowledge that he committed the sin?

Did the person sinned against go in private and reprove the accused?

Did the person sinned against bring one or two others to reprove the accused?

Was the accused allowed to rebut the charges and present evidence and witnesses in his favor?

Were the charges clearly presented along with a clear presentation of the scriptures violated?

Did the accused fail to respond to the reproof?

If any of these questions cannot be answered affirmatively, then the elders should assure that the step is taken or the issue investigated. But if, in the eyes of the elders, these questions have been answered affirmatively, then they should assist the offended brother in bringing the matter up to the “*church*.”

Now one question we need to ask is, “What is the ‘*church*’ that Jesus is referring to?” When Jesus said these words, the Christian Church had not yet begun. Most likely, the disciples would have understood Him to mean the Jewish community, the people of God as they knew it. Yet Jesus may well have had the soon-to-be born Church in mind, even if the disciples could not understand Him at that time. Either way, the idea is to bring it to the people of God.

But how large a group of the “*church*” should be involved in hearing the offense and standing against it? Certainly it would be impossible today to bring it to the Church universal. Nor, in most cases, could the issue be judged by the entire church in a city. Perhaps the most practical group would be the local church. And indeed, a local church would generally have elders, mature men, to help judge the situation. Yet, what if the local church numbers in the thousands? Is it necessary to involve everyone? Or would it be sufficient to call a meeting of a home group or of whatever size group that would include those people who know the offender?

The passage does not specifically define what size or portion of the “*church*” should be involved, but the purpose of the passage would imply that, at a minimum, the group involved must be large enough to include those who know the offender and especially those who are in close fellowship and community with him. A major purpose of the passage is to bring the offender to repentance and to “*win him over*.” So at a minimum, those whom the offender would respect and desire affirmation from should be involved. On the other hand, there would seem to be no maximum limit as to how large a group of the “*church*” might be involved.

Does the person need to be present when you “*tell it to the church*?” It would seem not. Presumably, before the offended person took his “*witnesses*” along to confront the offender, he privately informed them of the nature of the offense. In the same way, it would seem appropriate to tell the church about the offense prior to the church confronting the offender. After hearing the testimony of the offended person and of the witnesses, the church could send representatives to inform the offender of the church’s judgment in the matter.

“This book (the Bible) will keep you from sin or sin will keep you from this book.”

- D. L. Moody

The Church and the Doctrine of God

Church Judgments

“God is not against us because of our sin. He is with us against our sin.”

- *Unknown*

Nothing in the passage advocates a church trial where the “*church*” is judging the matter with the individual present. First of all, it would be highly unlikely that most people would come to a meeting where the church examines their offense and then pleads with them to repent. And even if someone did agree to this, it could easily be because of a desire to sway people to his side and turn people against the one he is sinning against.

No, the job of the “*church*” is not so much to judge the case in a lengthy, detailed trial, but to add the weight of the Christian community as a whole to the judgment already made by the two or three witnesses and by the confirmation of the elders. The fact of guilt is “*established by the testimony of two or three witnesses,*” rather than by a whole-church trial or a vote of the church. However, this does not mean that any questions, concerns, or additional information that may come up in a meeting of the church should not be adequately addressed or investigated.

Verses 19 and 20 are interesting in regard to the judgment of the two or three witnesses. In context, these verses may well be more of a direct promise to those who would judge situations of dispute and offense between brothers than a promise for prayer in general. The Lord seems to be promising that when two or three come together in His name—in sincerity and faith—His presence will be with them in such a way that they can confidently judge and that their judgment already will have been bound in Heaven. (The more normal translation of the perfect tense makes the NIV marginal reading “will have been bound” preferable to “will be bound.”) Where two or three agree concerning such a judgment against an offending person, not only will their decision be carried out on earth, but Jesus’ Father in Heaven will also honor their petition (what they “*ask for*”) against the person. (The Greek word translated “anything” most often means “any matter,” or “any affair” and frequently was used to refer to affairs of court. In 1 Corinthians 6:1, it is translated “dispute,” referring to a dispute in court.)

So it seems that when we judge a dispute in the church, or judge a person to have committed an offense against another and to be unrepentant of that error, God evidently concurs with the judgment and adds His weight to it. Perhaps this helps explain what Paul meant when he commanded the Corinthian church to “*hand*” a blatantly immoral man “*over to Satan*” for the destruction of his flesh (1 Corinthians 5:5).

Even after the church throws its weight behind the offended person, the passage still gives the offender an opportunity to repent. He has one final opportunity to “*listen even to the church.*” This would imply that representatives of the church should go and communicate the church’s judgment and give yet another appeal for repentance. At this point, a letter from the church would be helpful and appropriate. In a reproof situation, the offender’s emotions can run very high and he may not always truly hear what is being said. A letter can help to clearly communicate the church’s judgment. This letter might wisely include the following:

- 1) A confirmation of the church's judgment against him.
- 2) A statement of the sin or sins of which he was judged guilty and the scriptural references showing that they are indeed sinful.
- 3) A reference to the verses the church followed in its judgment.
- 4) A statement of what is expected of him if he wishes to repent and be restored into fellowship with the church, including to whom he should talk or not talk in approaching the church about his repentance.
- 5) An explanation of how the church judgment applies to him should he not repent (i.e., how he can expect church members to treat him, whether, and on what circumstances, he can come to church, come to a church member's house, do business with a church member, etc.).
- 6) An assurance that the judgment made by the church is out of genuine love and concern for him and that the church is fervently desiring and praying for his repentance so that he can remain in fellowship or be restored to fellowship with them.

“Being a minister is just reminding people over and over, and then reminding them again, of what is most important in life.”

- Clifford Peale

Obviously, if the offender refuses to meet with the church's representatives, it can be assumed that he is refusing to listen to the church. If this is the case it would be important to send a letter, since this may be the only way the church has to communicate its judgment and call the offender to repentance.

8. What is the fourth step in confronting someone who sins against you?

Again, if the person repents after the admonition of the entire church, praise the Lord! But if he does not repent, the church should treat him as a *“pagan or a tax collector.”* In order to know how to apply this command, we must understand what the disciples would have understood Jesus to mean.

The Greek word translated “pagan” is *“eth-nee-kos,”* and is almost always translated “gentile” in the New Testament. Throughout its history, the Jewish nation was constantly tempted to compromise with the idolatry and immorality practiced by other nations, resulting in God's judgment and the exile to Babylon. This struggle against contamination from their neighbors led to so hard and exclusive an attitude toward other nations that by the time of Christ, for a Jew to stigmatize his fellow as “gentile” was a term of scorn. First century historian, Tacitus, said of the Jews that “they regard the rest of mankind with all the hatred of enemies” (Histories 5.5).² We learn from Acts 10:28, 11:3, and Galatians 2:12, that the Jews considered it against their law to visit, eat with, or associate with a gentile.

The Church and the Doctrine of God

Church Judgments

“If you are a pastor, you are always in a crisis – either in the middle of one, coming out of one, or going in to one.”

- Alan Redpath

The Greek word for tax collector is “*tel-o`-nace*,” and refers to a farmer of taxes. Tax collectors were personally responsible for paying the taxes to the government, but they were in turn free to collect extra taxes from the people in order to make a profit.³ Their generally extortionate practices made them an especially despised and hated class. In addition, the strict Jew regarded the tax collector as ceremonially unclean on account of his continual contact with gentiles and his need to work on the Sabbath. In addition, the rabbis taught their pupils that they should not eat with tax collectors.⁴

So we can see that both Gentiles and tax collectors were typically looked down upon and even scorned in Jewish society. To treat someone as a Gentile or a tax collector was to refuse to eat with them or to visit them or to associate with them. It essentially meant to avoid them whenever possible and have nothing to do with them, unless contact with them was absolutely necessary for business reasons or to pay taxes.

This is true love! This is God’s loving way of removing sin from the church so that righteousness might reign in His Church. It is the most loving thing for the church, as well as for the unrepentant person. God’s love is often a tough love. “*Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it*” (Hebrews 12:10-11, NIV).

One final thought on Matthew 18. Note that the person is judged not for committing a sin, but for being unrepentant. All men sin—but if a person is righteous, he will repent.

1 CORINTHIANS 5 — NOTORIOUS SINS

“It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father’s wife.² And you are proud! Shouldn’t you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this?³ Even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. And I have already passed judgment on the one who did this, just as if I were present.⁴ When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, ⁵ hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.⁶ Your boasting is not good. Don’t you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough?⁷ Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.⁸ Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth. ⁹I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people¹⁰—not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world.¹¹ But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do

*not even eat.*¹² *What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside?*¹³ *God will judge those outside. ‘Expel the wicked man from among you’*” (1 Corinthians 5, NIV).

9. What situation prompted Paul’s instruction to the Corinthians?

In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul gives instruction on church judgments in response to a situation that was occurring in the Corinthian church—someone was living with his “father’s wife”—evidently either his mother, or his step-mother. Paul sharply reproves the church because they had not already “*put out of ... fellowship*” the one who was doing this. And Paul commands them to immediately “*hand this man over to Satan.*”

Then he instructs the church not to associate with anyone who claims to be a Christian (a so-called brother), who is sexually immoral, an idolater, a slanderer, a drunkard, or a swindler—what might be called “notorious sins.” This passage differs from Jesus’ instruction in Matthew 18 in that these are sins that must be judged regardless of whether or not the person damaged by the sin initiates an accusation against the person sinning. Two church members may be immoral and neither one may feel that they have been wronged by the other. Or a church member may swindle or slander someone outside the church, who would usually not pursue the offender through the avenue of a church judgment. Or someone may be an idolater without personally harming others in the church. Yet the sins mentioned are so damaging to the reputation and moral fiber of the church that they must be judged even if no offended person comes forward to initiate an accusation.

10. What reasons does Paul give for the church judgment?

Paul’s first reason for putting this man out of the fellowship was so that his sinful nature (lit. “flesh”) may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord. Paul’s command was first of all for the benefit of the one who was sinning. His behavior was so contrary to the will and desire of God, that Paul appears to judge that he was not a genuine believer, or at least to seriously doubt that he was a believer. The discipline of church judgment was to bring him to repentance so that he would ultimately be saved on the judgment day.

How much damage is done to people’s souls because churches tolerate, and sometimes even embrace, those who are openly sinning—adulterers, swindlers, homosexuals, drunkards—allowing them to think they are Christians and are right with God, even though their behavior indicates otherwise.

And, in the case of this man, Paul’s prescription worked. The church carried out Paul’s instruction and the man repented of his immorality. In 2 Corinthians 2:5-8, Paul acknowledges this man’s repentance and instructs the church to “*forgive and comfort him so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow*” (2 Corinthians 2:7).

“Take heed of little sins.”

- John Bunyan

The Church and the Doctrine of God

Church Judgments

“Take care of your character and your reputation will take care of itself.”

- *Unknown*

A second reason Paul gives for judging this man was to protect the church from the invasive nature of this sin. Paul knew that Christians are like sheep and easily influenced by one another. He knew that “*a little yeast (sin) works through the whole batch of dough.*” Clearly, if one person was allowed to sin in such a blatant manner without any action or consequences from the church, the moral resolve of others would be weakened and others would be influenced to sin as well. Eventually, unjudged sin will leaven “*the whole batch of dough.*”

11. When can someone rightly be described as a “wicked man?” Should a church judgment be instituted after a single instance of sin, or is a pattern required?

In the case of the man that Paul was judging in 1 Corinthians, he had not simply stumbled once or twice in sin, he was evidently living with the woman—“*a man has his father’s wife.*”

It would seem apparent that an overall honest person could steal something, be grieved in his conscience, return what was stolen and not be considered a “*swindler.*” Certainly a person could over-imbibe and become drunk, acknowledge his error, and not be considered a “*drunkard.*” Or someone could say demeaning words toward another, repent of what they said, and not be considered a “*slanderer.*” Similarly, it would seem that a person could even sin in sexual immorality, repent deeply, and not be considered an “*immoral*” person.

All sin, even if only committed once, has consequences and requires repentance and restitution. And sometimes the consequences, even of one sin, can be severe and result in the termination of a marriage, the loss of a friendship or even time spent in prison. But the church judgment commanded in 1 Corinthians 5 should be reserved for those who either refuse to acknowledge that what they did was sin, or who verbally acknowledge the wrongness of what they did, but continue to do it anyway.

When evaluating if a person is a “*wicked man*” in need of church judgment, we must remember that certain sins, such as drunkenness or immorality, can be extremely addictive and difficult to conquer, even for a believer with the Spirit of God and a sincere desire to change. When a person is coming out of a lifestyle dominated by sin, stumbling is common. The sanctification process requires patience and, in many cases, a tremendous amount of support. We must be cautious with a person who is earnestly desiring and attempting to change and yet stumbles, perhaps even fairly frequently. It can be difficult to judge whether a person is a young or struggling Christian who is on the right track, yet sometimes failing, or whether he is a “*wicked man*” in need of church judgment. Such a judgment requires much prayer and wise evaluation of the person’s behavior, apparent motives, and responsiveness to advice and correction.

12. How should the sins that Paul lists be defined?

Sexually immoral (*por`-nos*) - a man who indulges in unlawful sexual intercourse, a fornicator.⁵ This word was used in New Testament times to include all types of sexual immorality outside of marriage, including adultery, premarital sex, rape, incest, homosexuality, or other physical acts of sexual perversion.⁶ The term appears to refer to those who are engaging in actual physical acts and is never used in the New Testament or in the Old Testament Septuagint (Greek) translation to refer to those who are only sinning mentally. So it may be stretching the meaning of the word to apply it to someone who views pornography. (However, a case could perhaps be made that a person who is deeply and persistently involved with pornography could be included in the definition of the word pornos as an “immoral person.”) The word also appears to refer only to sex acts with others, and, for the purposes of church judgment, should not be applied to the act of self-manipulation in private.

Greedy (*pleh-on-ek`-tace*) - one who has or claims to have more than his share; a covetous, avaricious person, one who defrauds for the sake of gain.⁷ At its heart, this word refers to a greedy person who takes advantage of others in order to gain what is not rightfully his. Almost always in the New Testament, this word and its related words refer to taking advantage of others for material gain, but can apply to defrauding others for sexual gain as well (Ephesians 4:19, 1 Thessalonians 4:6) and possibly even for gain in prominence or prestige (2 Peter 2:3). Although this word includes an inner desire, those desires can only be judged by outward actions—actions that result in the defrauding of others.

Idolater (*i-do-lol-at`-race*) - an idolater, worshipper of idols.⁸ The word is a combination of two words: “idol” and “to serve.” Although in largely protestant America, idolatry is rare, world-wide it is still common, and in many cultures, idolatry is mixed right in with various forms of Christianity.

Slanderer (*loy`-dor-os*) - abusive, railing, reviling.⁹ The word is an adjective used to depict a person who verbally attacks others. This could be through bold abusive speech or through smooth and subtle accusations behind the person’s back. In 1 Peter 3:9 and John 9:28, the noun form of this word is translated “insult” and “hurled insults.” In the Septuagint translation of Proverbs, the word is used for a “quarrelsome” wife (Proverbs 25:24) and for the “quarrelsome” man who is like “charcoal to embers and as wood to fire” in bringing strife (Proverbs 26:21). So the word seems to have a fairly broad meaning referring to a person who openly or subtly abuses and attacks others with his mouth.

Drunkard (*meth`-oo-sos*) - drunken, a drunkard.¹⁰ A person given to drunkenness. Most likely, this could also be applied to a person who uses mind-altering drugs.

Swindler (*har`-pax*) - a robber, an extortioner.¹¹ The root of this word means “to seize, to claim for yourself eagerly, to snatch away.” So this word refers to a person who steals the property of others, either overtly or by deceit.

“Reputation is who people think you are. Character is who you actually are.”

- Unknown

“Never follow the crowd if you want the crowd to follow you.”

- *Unknown*

13. Is Paul’s list of sins exhaustive, or are other sins implied?

Paul’s list would include most, if not all the “*fruit of the flesh*” as mentioned in Galatians 5 or other lists of sins in the New Testament. Murder would certainly be covered by the word “*greedy*,” taking advantage of others for selfish gain. Lying or deceiving would be covered either by “*greedy*,” or by “*swindler*.” However, there are some sins that seem not to be covered by Paul’s instruction, such as profanity (taking the Lord’s name in vain), or dishonoring your parents. Although these are serious and damaging sins, for the purpose of church judgments, we would probably be wisest to limit the punishable offenses to the list of sins specifically mentioned here by Paul.

14. How was the church to treat the “wicked man?”

Paul rebukes the Corinthians for not having already “*put out of your fellowship the man who did this*.” Later, he commands them to “*expel the wicked man from among you*.” Clearly, “wicked” people are not to be allowed to come to church meetings, large or small, or participate in the life of the church.

But Paul’s command goes beyond simply excluding such a person from the life of the church. He commands the Corinthians not to “*associate*” with such a one. The word “associate” is “*soon-an-am-ig’-noo-mee*” and means “to mix up with” (“sun”, with; “ana”, up; “mignumi”, to mix, mingle), signifies “to keep company with.”

The Corinthians were not even to eat with such a person. Additionally, the extent of what “*not to associate*” means is further defined by Paul’s statement that if Christians were not to associate with immoral people in the world, they would have to “*leave this world*” (vs. 10).¹²

So, in summary, Paul’s command is not to allow such a person to be involved in the life of the church, not to keep company with him, to avoid him, and not even to eat with him. Paul’s commands on how to treat the “*wicked man*” are similar, if not identical, to Jesus’ command in Matthew 18 on how to treat an unrepentant offender—like a “*Gentile or a tax collector*.”

15. When should a person be restored to fellowship? Should it always be upon a verbal repentance, or, in some instances, might a time of testing be in order?

In the case where the sin has been habitual and over a long period of time, a verbal repentance, no matter how sincere or emotional, may not always be sufficient to indicate that the offender is no longer a “*wicked man*.” Even prior to the church judgment, there may have been multiple occasions of sin, followed by seemingly sincere repentance, only to sin again. Sorrow and grief over sin are part of repentance and can lead to repentance, but genuine repentance goes farther than sorrow, and results in actions that back up the desire to do right (2 Corinthians 7:9-11). For this reason, when a person is judged to be a “*wicked man*,” the church may require a period of weeks or months to test the genuineness of a verbal repentance before

restoring the person to fellowship; especially if the sin has been a long-standing, habitual problem. During this testing period, the church's elders may wish to meet with the person periodically to give counsel and to gauge his progress.

The man that Paul was writing about did repent, and yet the church did not immediately restore him to fellowship until the genuineness of his repentance was evident. In 2 Corinthians 2:6-8, (NIV) Paul tells the Corinthians that "*the punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient for him,*" and that they should now "*forgive and comfort*" him and "*reaffirm their love*" for him.

16. Is a church judgment only to be applied to those who are official "members" of the church, or is it for anyone who attends? And what about those who are investigating Christianity and coming to church, or have just recently come to Christ and are coming out of a sinful lifestyle?

Paul commands church judgment for any "*wicked man*" who "*calls himself a brother,*" whether the person is a church member or not. Yet, he makes a distinction toward the non-believer. He specifically states that he does not mean that Christians should avoid "*people of this world,*" (unbelievers), who are wicked. People who are investigating Christianity may come to church, yet never claim to be a genuine Christian, or not even know what a true Christian is. Not surprisingly, such people will often be living lives that are not pleasing to God. Perhaps they are living with someone they are not married to, or addicted to alcohol or drugs.

Paul's instructions are not to avoid such people or put them out of the church, but rather are aimed at those who are claiming to be born again believers and considering themselves to be part of the church family.

(NOTE: If a person who claims to be a born-again believer and attends the church, but is not a formal member, and is to receive a church judgment, you are encouraged to check with legal counsel before announcing the judgment and the nature of their sin to the church.)

ROMANS 16:17-18; TITUS 3:9-11 — DIVISION, FACTION, STRIFE

"I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them.¹⁸ For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people" (Romans 16:17-18).

"But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless.¹⁰ Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him.¹¹ You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned" (Titus 3:9-11).

"One great power of sin is that it blinds men so that they do not recognize its true character."
- Andrew Murray

“Our days are few, and are far better spent in doing good, than in disputing over matters which are, at best, of minor importance.”

- C.H. Spurgeon

17. What is a divisive person?

Both Romans 16:17-18 and Titus 3:9-11 address a divisive person—a person who causes division. The Greek word translated “cause division” in Romans 16:17 is “*dee-khos-tas-ee`-ah*” and means, literally, “a standing apart,” (“*dicheu*”, asunder, apart; “*stasis*”, a standing; the root indicating division).¹³ It means “division” or “dissension” or causing disunity.¹⁴ The word “obstacles” is the word most often translated “stumbling blocks.” It is “*skan`-dal-on*”, and in the New Testament ordinarily refers to anything that “arouses prejudice, or becomes a hindrance to others, or causes them to fall by the way.”¹⁵

So, Paul is warning the Romans to be on guard for and watch out for people who bring “*contrary*” teaching that becomes a stumbling block and causes division. He tells the Romans to “*keep away*” or turn away from them—avoid them. By smooth talk and flattery, they deceive those who are ignorant or naive.

The words translated “smooth talk” and “flattery” are literally “good words” and “blessings.” Such people can be extremely eloquent, affirming, positive, and impressive people. They may say flattering words about those they are opposing (often church leaders), yet in the next breath subtly undermine the person’s character or question his motives or teaching. Proverbs 26:23-26 warns us about people like this: “*Like a coating of glaze over earthenware are fervent lips with an evil heart.*²⁴ *A malicious man disguises himself with his lips, but in his heart he harbors deceit.*²⁵ *Though his speech is charming, do not believe him, for seven abominations fill his heart.*²⁶ *His malice may be concealed by deception, but his wickedness will be exposed in the assembly.*”

Yet no matter how wise or sincere or persuasive such people may appear to be, if they are undermining the truth of the gospel or dividing Christians, even over more minor issues, they are putting stumbling blocks in the way of God’s people and must be avoided.

In Titus 3:9-11, Paul commands Titus to avoid “*foolish controversies,*” “*arguments,*” and “*quarrels*” because they are unprofitable and useless. These quarrels might be over portions of God’s *Word*—the Old Testament law. Or they might be over speculative and peripheral subjects, such as “*genealogies.*”

Earlier in his letter to Titus, Paul says that there are truths (in context, the truths of the gospel), that Titus must “*encourage and rebuke with all authority*” and not let anyone disregard him (Titus 2:15, NIV). And immediately prior to verse nine, he lays out truths that are “*excellent and profitable for everyone.*” Yet people can so easily get into debates about all kinds of non-important, non-essential issues. Paul says to avoid such “*foolish controversies*” because they are “*unprofitable and worthless.*” They produce no spiritual benefits and lead to no constructive results.

Then in verse 10, Paul turns from the controversies themselves to those who are bringing them. He says to “*warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him.*” With some people it is impossible to avoid foolish quarrels, arguments, and controversies. They are simply bent on a fight. In this case, you must avoid the person, after having attempted to correct him.

In Titus 3:10, the Greek word for “divisive” is “*hahee-ret-ee-kos,*” from which we get the word “heretical.” But the meaning of the word is broader than simply a person who brings a heretical teaching (a teaching that undermines the gospel). This word primarily denotes “capable of choosing; hence, causing division by a party spirit, factious.”¹⁶ And in the context of Titus 3:9, the word appears to be referring to some who were arguing as much about peripheral issues as they were about the core doctrines of the gospel.

If someone strongly insists on the importance and correctness of his own opinion, (even though it has little or no scriptural support), it can be just as divisive as someone who teaches false doctrine. Such a person usually has one note on his violin and plays it to death. Soon he gathers around him a group of people and begins to divide the church by promoting his own doctrinal hobbyhorse.

When thinking about non-essential doctrines, it is important to remember that throughout the history of the Church, God has put Christians into “*spheres*” (2 Corinthians 10:15-16) of influence and has led them by various Christian leaders. For a particular church or movement (a sphere) to be truly “Christian,” the basic truths of the gospel must be preached, believed, and obeyed. These are the truths Paul commands Titus to “*encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you*” (Titus 2:15, NIV). And if a church is denying the gospel, we must speak up for the truth that brings salvation no matter how much division it causes.

Yet different movements and churches have had many different interpretations and traditions in areas of the Scripture that could be considered debatable and that are not essential to the truths of salvation. Believers should be free to discuss issues like this and to share their opinions. But they are not free to push their opinion to such an extent that it causes division in the church.

So division, caused by “heretical” (divisive) people, can occur in the body of Christ in two ways. The first is when the divisive person undermines the truth of the gospel. The second is when the divisive person strongly or persistently opposes the “non-essential” teachings of the leadership of a particular church or movement. Such a person is failing to acknowledge that God has placed Christians in spiritual families under the care of spiritual leaders. And although the leaders may not always be right on every single issue of teaching, if they are preaching the truths of the gospel accurately, they should not be opposed on more minor issues, at least not opposed to the point of causing a division. These verses in Romans 16 and Titus 3 can be applied to either type of divisive person.

“This is the only place, in the whole scripture, where this word heretic occurs; and here it evidently means, a man that obstinately persists in contending about “foolish questions,” and thereby occasions strife and animosities, schisms and parties in the church.”

- John Wesley

This question was asked of Coach Lou Holtz: “What is the secret to your instilling such a positive attitude here at Notre Dame?” His answer: “I just get rid of those who have a negative attitude.”

18. What is involved in giving a first and second warning?

The word “warning” is the Greek word “*nou-thes-ee`-ah*” and means “admonition, warning, literally, a putting in mind (“*nous*”, mind; “*titheumi*”, to put).” “*Nouthesia*” is “the training by word,” whether of encouragement, or, if necessary, by reproof or argument.¹⁷

The person is to be admonished or reproofed for his divisive behavior twice before we “*have nothing to do with him.*” This “*warning*” or “admonition” appears to be an admonition showing the individual that the divisive teaching or behavior is wrong, not necessarily a warning that he is about to be rejected from the church.

In other words, if a person’s communication is divisive and he repents after being admonished, he may remain in fellowship. If he communicates divisively a second time and repents after a second admonition, he may still remain in fellowship. But if he communicates divisively a third time, he is to be rejected, no matter how repentant he may seem. We can be sure that such a person is “*warped and sinful.*”

In the case of a person who has been divisive and refuses to repent upon being admonished, it is important to note that the passage says nothing about a time period being required between admonitions. If, after the first admonition, the person doesn’t agree that what he is teaching is wrong or divisive, he can be immediately admonished a second time, even in the same conversation. Thus he can be rejected immediately if he will not repent and agree to refrain from divisiveness.

Note how much God hates division in His Church! A person could commit other sins many times and repent each time and still not be the object of church judgment. But a divisive person is allowed only two verbal repentances before we are to “*have nothing to do with him.*” God loves unity and hates disunity among His people.

19. How should a divisive person be treated?

Romans 16:17 says to “*keep away from them.*” The Greek word translated “keep away” is “*ek-klee`-no*” and means to “turn away from, to turn aside, lit., to bend out of (“*ek*”, out; “*klinom*”, to bend).”¹⁸

Titus 3:10 says that after a first and second warning, we should “*have nothing to do with him.*” The Greek word translated “have nothing to do with him” is “*par-ahee-teh`-om-ahee*” and means “to reject or repudiate.”¹⁹

So the divisive person should be “*turned away from*” and “*rejected.*” This would certainly include putting him out of the fellowship as well as instructing the church not to associate with him. To protect God’s people, it would be wise to inform the church of the nature of the false teaching or doctrinal hobbyhorse that the person is promoting and to answer any questions people may have about that teaching. Additionally, the church should be clearly instructed about what is and is not divisive

communication so that people can avoid causing division, but also not be afraid to share their opinions on doctrinal matters.

REFUSAL TO WORK (2 THESSALONIANS 3:6-15)

“In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us.⁷ For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you,⁸ nor did we eat anyone’s food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you.⁹ We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow.¹⁰ For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: ‘If a man will not work, he shall not eat.’¹¹ We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies.¹² Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat.¹³ And as for you, brothers, never tire of doing what is right.¹⁴ If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed.¹⁵ Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother” (2 Thessalonians 3:6-15, NIV).

20. What circumstances prompted Paul’s admonition to the Thessalonians?

Some believers in the Thessalonian church were not working to provide for their own needs, but were living off the generosity of others. They were “*busybodies*,” “*per-ee-er-gad`-zom-ahee*,” which literally means “to be working round about, instead of at one’s own business.”²⁰ They were minding everyone’s business but their own. And they were “*idle*”—“*at-ak`-toce*” meaning: “disordered, disorderly, undisciplined, unbridled, without law or order.”²¹

In his first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul had already admonished them to make it their ambition “*to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody*” (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12). Yet, evidently, some had not responded to his admonition.

So in his second letter, Paul gives them an even stronger admonition, first pointing to his own example and how he “*worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you*” (3:8).

Paul’s admonition clearly applies to those who are able to work, but are not willing to do so. Also, it is directed to those who were not meeting their own needs. Therefore we should not apply this passage to any of the following persons:

- 1) A person who is incapable of working because of sickness or injury.

“Christians don’t tell lies. They just go to church and sing them.”
- A.W. Tozer

The Church and the Doctrine of God

Church Judgments

“The confession of evil works is the first beginning of good works.”

- Augustine

- 2) A person who is spending his full-time looking for work.
- 3) A full-time student who is able to meet his needs through grants, loans, or other legitimate means.
- 4) A dependent of another.
- 5) A retired person who has adequate savings or other income to meet his needs.

21. What does Paul command the church to do with such an idle, undisciplined person?

Paul clearly commands them not to give him food or monetary help—*“If a man will not work, he shall not eat.”* This may seem uncaring and unloving, but again, love often involves tough measures.

Love does not enable a person to continue in behavior that is self-destructive or destructive to others. Supporting such a person would only encourage him toward a continued lifestyle of irresponsibility.

Additionally, Paul commands the church to *“keep away from”* every brother who will not work. This word (stel`-lo) means to “withdraw from or avoid.”²² He also commands them to *“take special note of”* any person who will not obey Paul’s command to get to work. This Greek word is *“say-mi-o`-o”* and means “to denote, to signify...to mark for oneself.”²³ Most likely Paul is talking about a public pointing out of the person and his problem. Paul also tells the church not to associate with him. This is the same word used in 1 Corinthians 5 for not associating with the *“wicked man.”* The reason Paul gives here for not associating with the undisciplined person was *“that he may feel ashamed.”* Again, the purpose of this church judgment is to bring shame and lead the person to repentance, a change of behavior, and restoration.

The question arises as to whether the discipline here in 2 Thessalonians 3 is in some way different from that in the other passages. Paul instructs them not to *“regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.”* This seems to be somewhat milder than Jesus’ instruction to regard the unrepentant offender as a *“Gentile or tax collector.”* Also, in this passage, Paul considers this undisciplined person to be a believer and calls him a *“brother,”* instead of a *“so-called brother”* as he did in 1 Corinthians 5. This seems to suggest that the discipline imposed by the church may be in some way less severe than that in Matthew 18 or 1 Corinthians 5.

Some commentators have suggested that Paul was allowing this brother to come to church meetings, but not allowing the church to associate with him outside of church meetings. But allowing him to come to church meetings would certainly not be *“keeping away from him,”* nor would it be not associating with him.

It is difficult to know exactly how this church judgment in 2 Thessalonians 3 differs from the others we have studied, or what Paul specifically means by “*don’t treat him as an enemy,*” while at the same time telling them to “*not associate*” with him and to “*keep away from him.*” Perhaps their attitude was to be less severe than in the other cases of discipline. Or perhaps they were to urge him toward obedience whenever they happened to run into him, rather than turn away from him altogether, as they might have done with a “*Gentile or tax collector.*”

“How rarely we weigh our neighbor in the same balance in which we weigh ourselves.”
- Thomas a Kempis

22. What are some general principles to keep in mind for any church judgment, no matter which passage applies?

1) Make sure that you have all the facts and that the facts are confirmed by two or three witnesses. Did more than one person witness the sin that was committed or hear an admission of guilt? This is the standard of evidence that the Scriptures require: “*One witness is not enough to convict a man accused of any crime or offense he may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses*” (Deuteronomy 19:15, NIV). Without this standard of evidence we must drop the matter, no matter how strong our suspicions may be or how much we may trust the integrity of the lone witness. We must believe that God, in His sovereignty, will make sure that two or three witnesses come forward when He wants the church to judge the matter. And if the person is guilty, yet there is only one witness, God is certainly able to judge the person Himself in some other way.

2) The person accused should have the chance to defend himself before those who are judging the matter. “*The first to present his case seems right, until another comes forward and questions him*” (Proverbs 18:17, NIV).

3) It is important to remember that the aim of church judgment is not permanent disassociation, but restoration to righteousness and fellowship. The church’s desire for restoration should be clearly communicated to the person who is judged. In this regard, it can be helpful to give the offender a letter explaining the reason for the church judgment, the love and concern of the church, and the way that reconciliation can be obtained. The section of this paper that deals with Matthew 18 gives some additional reasons for such a letter and a list of things that might be included.

4) We should attempt to keep the situation as confidential as possible: “*Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins*” (1 Peter 4:8). Church judgment, by its very nature, is a public judgment where sin is exposed and judged, yet there is no reason to unnecessarily broadcast the fact of the judgment or the specifics of the sin to the whole world. The purposes of the judgment—to protect the church and to restore the offender—should guide us as to how many people need to be informed.

5) If we learn that the person is attending another church, love for the offender and for our brethren in the other church would compel us to inform that church’s leadership of the church judgment.

The Church and the Doctrine of God

Church Judgments

“To be right with God has often meant to be in trouble with men.”

- *A.W. Tozer*

6) Wise counsel can avoid serious errors. In Great Commission Churches, counsel from a regional leader is required before member churches institute a church judgment. Also, in light of the growing tendency to take matters to court, it would be wise to seek legal counsel before informing the congregation of the reason for a church judgment.

7) In the case of a college student or other young person living away from home who is still a minor or a dependent of their parents, it can be helpful to inform the parents concerning the situation and the church’s attempts to correct their son or daughter and even to get their input prior to carrying out a church judgment.

8) Any meeting informing the church of the nature of the sin and non-repentance should include expressions of love and concern for the offender, a clear explanation of the reasons for the judgment, a teaching on the biblical basis for discipline, and prayer for the restoration of the sinning person.

23. What if someone gets wind of what is happening and leaves the church before the process of church discipline is complete?

In some cases, if the person is new to the church or hardly known by church members, no further action may need to be taken. However, if the sinning person has been an active part of church life, finishing the process of church discipline and exposing the sin to the church will most often be required. The reason for this is that most, if not all of passages relating to church judgment tell us not only to reject the person from fellowship, but also not to associate with him personally as well. Church members are not able to obey these commands if the church does not judge the situation. Rather, many of them may try to encourage the person, who is no longer coming, to come back to church—just the opposite of what the Lord commands.

Another reason that discipline may need to be carried out even after a person has already left the church is to protect the church by warning them to “watch out for” those who are divisive. Without such a warning, the divisive person may still be able to “*deceive the minds of naive people.*”

A third reason would be to bring “*shame*” to the one in sin, so that he may be convicted of his folly and seek restoration (2 Thessalonians 3:14).

24. In conclusion, why should the church practice church judgment?

The exercise of church judgment is a not a suggestion, but a biblical command. The church cannot neglect this command and be obedient to Christ any more than it would willfully ignore Christ’s commission to evangelize the nations.

Often we do not realize how much we have been affected by the philosophies of the world. Our society tends to promote “tolerance” as the highest of all moral virtues. The world sees any strong, painful discipline as unloving. But a surgeon has to cut and cause pain in order to save a life. It would be unloving and even hateful for a

doctor not to warn or treat a seriously ill person. The Scriptures say the same thing about dealing with serious sin. “Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But deceitful are the kisses of an enemy” (Proverbs 27:6). “Stripes that wound scour away evil, and strokes reach the innermost parts” (Proverbs 20:30). “For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines” (Hebrews 12:6).

Christian leaders must not be intimidated by societal or congregational resistance to the concept of church judgment. Careful teaching of the Scripture on the subject will dissolve most objections and prepare the way for this restoring and healing ministry. When required, church judgment must be carried out in love, and with tears and sadness, not in harshness. People resist a judgmental spirit, but respond to a broken heart.

The Church must maintain biblical discipline or it will be held in contempt both by those who love righteousness and by those who promote evil. The exercise of biblical church judgment requires much courage, great wisdom, and spiritual sensitivity. A correct understanding of the Scriptures and a willingness to submit to them is the key to responding to those who sin in our midst with the right mixture of grace, firmness, and genuine love.

FOOTNOTES:

- ¹ Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan Publishing House), 1998, p. 63.
- ² *Gentiles*, *The New Bible Dictionary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.) 1962.
- ³ *Publicans*, Achtemier, Paul J., Th.D., *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, (San Francisco: Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc.) 1985.
- ⁴ *Tax Collectors*, *The New Bible Dictionary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.) 1962.
- ⁵ Joseph Henry Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan Publishing House), 1975, p. 532.
- ⁶ Kittel, Gerhard, and Friedrich, Gerhard, Editors, *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged in One Volume*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company) 1985. “Later Judaism shows how the use of *porneé* broadens out to include not only fornication or adultery but incest, sodomy, unlawful marriage, and sexual intercourse in general.”
- ⁷ *The Analytical Greek Lexicon*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan Publishing House), 1977, p 328.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, p 117.
- ⁹ Vine, W. E., *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell) 1981.
- ¹⁰ *The Analytical Greek Lexicon*.
- ¹¹ Joseph Henry Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*.
- ¹² *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁴ *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁶ *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament*.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁹ *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*.
- ²⁰ *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament*.
- ²¹ *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*.
- ²² *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*.
- ²³ *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*.

“The truth is there are two great classes of sins---sins of the body, and sins of the disposition. The Prodigal Son may be taken as a type of the first, the Elder Brother of the second.”

- Henry Drummond

EXERCISE

1. What most impressed you as you read this article, and what implications should it have on your life?

2. How would you answer a person who felt a church judgment was unloving?

3. Did reading this article bring to mind any occasions from the past in which you think a church judgment would have been in order? Discuss this situation with others in the leadership group to determine what can be learned from this.

4. Do you agree with Dave Bovenmyer's point that new people coming into the Sunday service should not have these rules of church judgment applied as strictly? Where would you draw the line? When does the conduct of a newcomer become a reproach on the church?

5. What are your thoughts about the section on faction (divisiveness)? Do you think that the standard the church has had on this is above or below that which is established in the Scriptures?

COUNSELING AND THE CHURCH

INTRODUCTION

The following is a paper written by Dave Bovenmyer on the matter of counseling and the church.

Spiritual and emotional health and growth occur best within the church environment where Jesus Christ is Lord, where Biblical truths are believed, taught, and practiced. Within any church community, there will be weaker individuals who need more care and individual attention, sometimes even intensive and on-going counseling. Yet the need for such individual care will be greatly reduced when Biblical truth is taught and exemplified in the culture of a church that is led by the Holy Spirit.

Within Great Commission Churches, overall spiritual growth and emotional health finds its foundation in believing and applying our Biblical core doctrines and values. Therefore, I thought it would be helpful for us to review those eight core values one by one as a reminder that our passionate application of them within our church and lives is the most important and practical catalyst for individual and corporate spiritual growth and emotional health.

1. **Grace of God.** Lives are changed by the grace of God, through the gospel of Jesus Christ. When people realize their forgiveness in Christ, the depth of God's love for them, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the wonderful heavenly hope we have as believers, they become transformed. "The word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." (1 Cor. 1:18). We must remember that it is not the law that changes lives (as Romans 7 shows us) but the gospel of Christ. Therefore, all pastors and counselors must have a strong "grace/gospel" message in their counseling if they hope to see people grow in Christ.
2. **Commitment to God and His word.** Lives change through prayer and through His word. The more people are connecting with God in prayer and the more that their faith is grounded in the Scriptures, the more they will grow. In this regard, we must remember that every believer is in a spiritual battle. Therefore it is absolutely vital to do warfare in the power of God's Spirit, in prayer and His word, in order to overcome the evil one's attacks.
3. **Great Commission.** We recognize two truths: We are all sinful, broken people before God and we are all to be "on mission." We understand that God has made all of us for the purpose of reaching the world with gospel. The more a person can be actively engaged with the church in advancing the gospel, the healthier that person will be.
4. **The local church.** We believe that the local church is God's primary vehicle for building believers. Therefore, we need to look to the church as the primary instrument God uses to counsel people in their problems.
5. **Leadership based and trained in the church.** God has ordained pastors to do just that...pastor! Elders in the church are responsible for equipping saints so that they might grow in Christ (Ephesians 4:11-16). Counselors outside the local church can have a vital ministry. However, they are never meant to be a substitute for pastors. For this reason, although elders should seek any outside help they need, elders should never abdicate their role of pastoring their church members.

6. Love and unity. The more a church has a strong value of 1 Corinthians 13 love and loyalty, the healthier will be the environment for the growth of all church members.
7. Raising godly families. We all realize that there is a strong connection between the emotional needs of an adult and that adult's family upbringing. Therefore, churches that build healthy families will provide the right environment for healthy church members.
8. Every member a minister. We believe that all members loving and serving the whole body will build the body in love (Ephesians 4:16). Although we recognize the value of some specialists giving expertise on certain matters, our main emphasis in building spiritual health is equipping every member to be a minister, in love and in truth.

It is vital that these eight Biblical values are studied, lived out, and systematically taught. As we do so, by the grace of God, lives will be transformed and people will grow. So, as we consider the following issues related to counseling and the local church, let's always stay focused on practicing and teaching these eight Biblical values as we follow Christ's lead in building individuals and churches.

John Hopler
GCLI Editor

“The one who has Christ has everything. The one who has everything except for Christ really has nothing. And the one who has Christ plus everything else does not have any more than the one who has Christ alone.”

- Augustine

Counseling and the Church

Pastor Dave Bovenmyer, Ames, Iowa



Recently, I was involved in a conversation where a fellow-pastor expressed concern about how many people in his church were going for counseling. People were taking issues that he felt could and should be addressed within the church to a counselor—issues like struggles within marriage or with the kids, with anxiety, or discouragement. He questioned whether this was really good. Should our people be running off to counselors for issues that we can and ought to be addressing? It seems that psychiatric counseling has gained so great an acceptance in our culture that even within the church many people’s first impulse when confronted with a difficult problem is to seek a counselor, rather than a pastor or other church leader. Gradually, psychologists have replaced the clergy as the experts in how to change human behavior.

But this change doesn’t seem right. Shouldn’t Christian pastors be the authorities and experts in the healing of souls? Yet, on the other hand, from the place of the pastor, I’ve often been discouraged and frustrated with people’s problems. Often it seems that sharing the Word and prayer and fellowship have so little effect on people with deep-seated problems. Sometimes it seems that all the exhortation and accountability and encouragement and prayer and Scripture memorization just seem to run off people’s backs. People often remain stuck in their sinful behavior, many times for years, in spite of an apparent deep desire for change and great efforts to that end. Are we pastors missing something that a better-trained counselor could supply? Furthermore, the Lord exhorts pastors to devote themselves to the ministry of the Word and prayer. Where can a pastor or Christian leader find the time for ongoing counseling of troubled individuals? Sometimes it is certainly tempting just to refer those “extra-grace-required” people to a counselor and not have to deal with them ourselves.

What is the place of professional counseling in the Church? Does it have a place at all? And, if so, how should counselors and counseling interface with the discipleship efforts of the pastor and church? When should a Christian leader refer someone to counseling? And who should he refer them to? With such a bewildering array of approaches and philosophies, even among Christian counselors, it’s hard to know where to start. In this paper, I would like to address these questions as I present four points concerning how the Church can meet the needs of those who have persistent or life-consuming problems, and what part a professional counselor may be able to play in this.

1) We must have confidence in the ability of the Spirit and of the church to meet people’s deepest needs.

The Scriptures states that “*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*” (*Proverbs 9:10*). Faith in God and in Jesus Christ is the foundation of all right thinking and right living. Every problem and difficulty in life relates either directly or

indirectly to our faith in God and our fear of God. This includes behavioral problems, emotional problems, and psychological problems. The fear of the Lord and the wisdom of the Scriptures provide the foundation for the solution to every non-organic mental health problem. Therefore, only the community of faith can fully and properly address psychological and emotional problems.

The worldview that a “worker with souls” starts with is of utmost importance. There are many different worldviews that undergird various attempts to help hurting people and that it makes a huge difference what worldview you hold to as a foundation for your approach to helping people. We must hold to a thoroughly Christian worldview and not naively embrace approaches to helping people that are based on false views of God and man, man’s basic problem, etc.

This can be demonstrated even with the definition of mental health itself. Recently, I came across the World Health Organization’s definition of mental health. The definition included “subjective well-being” (happiness), optimal mental functioning, and the ability to achieve individual and collective goals.

“Mental health is not simply the absence of detectable mental disease but a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to contribute to his or her community.”¹

Yet, homosexuals could easily fit within this definition of mental health. But should we really consider someone mentally healthy who is thoroughly and deeply confused about his or her own God-given sexual identity? Or consider an atheist, who denies and suppresses the knowledge of God—rejecting one of the most obvious facts in the universe. Such repression is certainly far from mental health.

I suggest a better definition of mental health: “The ability to correctly perceive and accept reality and respond appropriately to it.” God is the greatest of all realities, and with this definition, proper mental health would include an acceptance of all we know of Him. By this definition, all sin would demonstrate a lack of mental health, a lack of acceptance of reality. The Christian goal for mental health can be no less than full sanctification, life lived in the image of Jesus Christ, in full recognition of reality as it actually exists. True mental health can only be found in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

So, a thoroughly Christian worldview is essential for all who seek to care for the souls of others. This is not to say that non-Christian counselors may not at times embrace Christian goals for the health of the soul. But they will not do so in fullness and will often have goals counter to those that God desires.

The word “psychology” is derived from the Greek word *psukhê*, “soul.” So, we might say that psychology is the study of souls. This is the pastor’s job, not only to study souls, but to care for them. Taking this broad definition, we could say that every pastor is in the business of psychology. The care of souls is our turf, our forte,

“It takes guts to care for people.”
- Neil Cole

The Church and the Doctrine of God

Counseling and the Church

“Generous people are rarely mentally ill.”

- Carl Meninger

our territory. We must not hand this job off to the world, to those who lack a biblical worldview and a fear of the Lord, which are the foundation of wisdom and of all true mental health.

Unquestionably, our most powerful resource in caring for souls is the gospel, the “good news” of our salvation. It is the “*power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes*” (*Romans 1:16*, NIV). Faith in the gospel not only brings us salvation from the wrath of God, but also salvation in every aspect of life, including proper mental functioning. The gospel is the only truly freeing solution for depressing and immobilizing shame that often plagues us as a result of our wicked thoughts, words, and behavior. In addition, the gospel validates our worth. We are immeasurably valuable to the only Person who ultimately matters. With the greatest possible demonstration of love—the death of His own Son—He forever proved how much He loves us and how much we are valued by Him. The gospel provides hope, it provides a purpose for life, and it gives a compelling argument for releasing destructive anger and bitterness—we must forgive others as we have been forgiven. The gospel is our most powerful weapon for life change and right thinking. We must proclaim it and the truths of our position in Christ from our pulpits, in our small groups and in our individual interactions with others. Through this means, we inspire true inner peace, kindle joy, foster hope, and promote right thinking and living.

As we proclaim the truth of the gospel, and indeed of the entirety of the Scriptures in our churches, we inspire an ever-growing number of people to accept the love of God and then to live out the truth of the gospel in flesh and blood relationships. Those who have been touched by the love of God are able to care, accept, admonish, forgive, engage, respect, and love. Such loving, caring saints give the Church powerful resources unavailable to the secular counseling community. Most “emotional problems” are rooted in, or exacerbated by, painful emotions or false beliefs—grief, worthlessness, shame, fear, worry, loneliness, insecurity, etc. The compassion, acceptance, forgiveness, security, and empathy of other human beings is often indispensable in helping people overcome their problems. The love of Christ, embodied in another human being is a powerful force for comfort, healing, admonition, and hope.

In addition, the Church provides models of right living that inspire and give hope. Couples within the church can serve as models of a loving marriage, especially for those who were raised by a single parent or in a home with a dysfunctional or abusive marriage. Parents can model what it means to be a caring father or nurturing mother for those who were abandoned, neglected, or abused by one or both of their parents. Attitudes are more often caught than taught. Living demonstrations of how to resolve conflict or deal with anger and bitterness often speak more powerfully than multiple sermons or counseling sessions.

Discipleship has been designed by God to be church-o-centric—revolving around the church and the community of faith. Much teaching and counseling and care of the soul will go on here. Rebellious children can be confronted. Fervent

prayer and honest concern can help bring peace to an anxious heart. As people weep with those who weep, sorrow is shared and made more bearable. Certainly, there will be times and conditions that need special attention and skilled intervention and advice, yet even here, skilled intervention works best within or in partnership with a caring community.

Dr. Larry Crabb, in his book *Connecting*, challenges the Church to rise up and lay hold of this hard spiritual work of discipleship that has partially drifted over to the “professionals.”

It seems very few Christians value the profound healing possibilities of friendship and shepherding enough to think hard about what that might require. An important conversation about difficult matters with someone who listens and understands outside of the counselor’s office is rare in our culture. As long as the resources of community remain undeveloped, professional counselors will occupy a legitimate place. What good counselors do more closely resembles what real friends, wise shepherds, and seasoned spiritual directors do than what we assume technical competence enables. Qualifications to effectively counsel have more to do with wisdom and character than with training and degrees. Wisdom and character should be developed in Christian communities. When it isn’t, we turn to educational institutions to provide us with trained, degreed helpers. When these folks are effective, however, it has more to do with their wisdom and character than with their technical knowledge or procedure.²

Much of what occurs in Christian counseling offices is not very different from the traditional function of discipleship. Marriage counseling, parental advice, encouragement for the discouraged, comfort for the grieving, admonition for the wayward—these are squarely within the traditional scope of discipleship. Bolstering our caring and discipleship skills will eliminate or diminish the need for many to seek a Christian counselor outside the local church.

When a church member chooses, or because of lacks in the church, to seek help from a person outside the church, the advice and help and follow-up are often disconnected from the community of faith. The leadership and authority of a pastor may not be present or engaged in the issue. Additionally, the counselor may have approaches, traditions, and core values that are different or at odds with those of the person’s church community and spiritual leaders, resulting in conflict or confusion.

We must maintain our confidence in the power of the Spirit and the resources He has given in His Church. In many ways they are much more powerful in helping the troubled than a weekly appointment with a counselor could ever be. And we must teach our people and encourage them to use the resources God has given within the church as their first and primary source of help.

“Jesus Christ is no crutch. He is the ground to walk on.”
- Leighton Ford

“Kind words can be short and easy to speak, but their echoes are truly endless.”

- Mother Teresa

2) We must create a healing atmosphere and culture in the church

Our churches must be places of power, where the power of the Spirit of God is changing lives. They must be powerful places where people connect with God in heart-changing ways. As leaders we must model this and make sure that our own hearts are honestly connecting with God in authentic relationship and our own lives are being transformed in a way that is obvious to all. *“Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress” (I Timothy 4:15, NIV)*. An additional way to encourage this atmosphere is to publicly celebrate what God is doing in the lives of others and lift up examples of people whose lives are being transformed in deep and powerful ways.

In addition, we must work to make the church a safe place, where people can openly struggle, find support, and know that they will not be condemned by others. Again, we do this primarily by modeling. When pastors openly share their struggles, temptations, and failures, it allows the whole church to breathe, to let down defenses, and reveal struggles. Again, celebrating what God is doing in the lives of those who have deeply struggled and even failed has the same effect.

When people open up about their struggles and temptations, it has a powerful healing effect. Paul says, *“But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light” (Ephesians 5:13)*. Darkness is dispelled by light. The first step in any growth in holiness is to wake up out of the darkness of sleep and come into the light (Eph. 5:14). This is primarily done by bringing the evil and impurity that we find in our hearts and lives to God and confessing it to Him. But it also involves confessing to others and seeking prayer, help, and encouragement from His body. Small groups are often a good place for this to happen. Small group leaders should encourage and model such openness. Those who are struggling with a particular problem or who have struggled in the past may find it helpful to band together in a small group especially designed to address the problem.

Our churches must recognize people’s brokenness and make allowances for it. People are deeply wounded by the sin of others and seemingly enslaved by sin of their own. Rapid change and “supernatural conversions” where people’s lives do an about-face are thrilling and encouraging. Yet many people, especially those who have been treated poorly or traumatically or who have had little or no example of loving relationships, take many months and even years to make significant progress. Our churches need the stimulus of the example of lives that are powerfully changing, yet the patience to love and accept those whose struggle is intense and change is slow.

Another key to creating a healing atmosphere within the church is to encourage people to pray through disappointments, hurts, and wounds from their past. In my own life, I’ve been learning that viewing my past experiences and hurts from God’s perspective is necessary for the greatest growth in faith or love. One example is unresolved anger or bitterness. The Scriptures command us to forgive those who have wounded us in the past. But of all the hundreds of people I’ve worked with

who were bitter or resentful, only a small minority acknowledged that they were bitter. Like the root of a tree or plant, roots of bitterness are often buried. People don't know how to deal with their anger and yet they know they shouldn't be angry, so they bury the anger and try to ignore it. Yet that root can't remain fully hidden and the anger and bitterness inevitably leak out, sometimes spilling out inappropriately toward innocent others, and sometimes festering and causing distress and depression.

The anger and bitterness must be brought to the light and acknowledged. The reasons for the anger must be remembered and the hurt must be owned. Then the anger must be released to God with the trust that He, as judge, can bring any needed vengeance much more effectively than we ever could. As the anger is acknowledged and released, God will often allow us to see the good that He worked, even in the most horrible of situations. Often when there is a bitter root, anger toward God is mixed in with anger toward others who have hurt us. Releasing this anger toward God and seeing how He worked good through the pain are often necessary before we can trust God at a deep and heart-felt level.

As with anger, the same basic scenario can be true with other emotions, such as fear. Take the example of a woman who is working at the sink, preparing dinner when her husband comes up from behind her and gives her a hug. But instead of appreciating her husband's loving and tender gesture, the woman reacts in anger, "Don't do that, I don't like that!" What's happening here? There's a good chance that this tender, loving gesture is reminding that woman of a time when she was held against her will and abused by someone who was neither tender or loving. And her mind's association with this traumatic event produces terror, which causes her to lash out in anger. The woman might not even realize where these emotions are coming from. She may simply think that she doesn't like to be held if it's a surprise. The truth is that all of us associate present situations with times in the past that were similar. And if those memories are filled with fear, shame, anger, or feelings of worthlessness, our minds and emotions will react appropriately, even if such a reaction is not appropriate in the present situation.

Again, what is needed is to face the fear in the memory and let God give His perspective. God may need to provide comfort at a deep level and may need to bring assurance that the trauma is over and that she is OK. Again, He may need to show her how He used that event for good in her life. As she understands and embraces God's perspective of the past trauma, she will be more fully able to trust the Lord in all kinds of life experiences as well as receive the loving affection of her husband.

All this is to say that a truth-filled and God-like view of past experiences and situations is an essential part of the sanctification process. Our minds have embraced attitudes and convictions or made firm decisions based on our past experiences. For example, we may have made a decision not to ever get close to anyone again, since the pain was so unbearably great that it is better to remain lonely and in isolation than to have the possibility of experiencing that pain again. Unless a person can see that painful situation from God's perspective and see how He was working there for good and renounce the decision to live in isolation because of it, he will have great

"When you say a situation or person is hopeless, you are slamming the door in the face of God."
- Charles Allen

The Church and the Doctrine of God

Counseling and the Church

“The Word of God well understood and religiously obeyed is the shortest route to spiritual perfection.”
- A. W. Tozer

difficulty loving others. He will remain isolated in his fear. And he may not even realize the reason for his inability to get close to others.

Our churches must be places that encourage people to work through these issues and resolve wounds from the past. We must be aware of these issues and speak about ways God has resolved bitterness or other hurts in our own past and encourage others who have done the same to share testimonies of what God has done in them.

3) We must seek wisdom concerning how to deal with broken, sinful people

*“An intelligent heart acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge.”
(Proverbs 18:15, English Standard Version)*

King Solomon sought wisdom from God, not for personal prestige, but so that he might have wisdom to govern God’s people for their benefit. God was pleased with his request and granted it. God is also pleased when pastors and Christian leaders seek wisdom to lead their church into greater sanctification and Christ-likeness.

When confronted with a problem that is beyond our experience or wisdom to handle, our first reaction should not be to refer to a counselor, or even to seek wisdom from a Christian author, but to seek wisdom from God in prayer and in the Scriptures. The Apostle Paul gives a fabulous promise for Christian workers: *“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16, NIV)*. Foundational to all pastoral care is a thorough knowledge and understanding of the Scriptures. The Scriptures show us the problems of man and the solutions of God and the goals of our work. Often we conclude too early that the Scriptures say little or nothing about a particular problem. But even though the Bible may not directly speak about issues such as eating disorders, panic attacks, depression, compulsions, and many other psychiatric disorders, it does thoroughly address the roots of all disorders of the soul, roots such as fear, shame, loneliness, insignificance, anger, discouragement, pride, and the like.

Each Christian leader must be on a journey of seeking to understand people, their problems, and God’s solutions. This is not a simple task and requires careful and persevering thought. Too often we share a verse, encourage prayer, or Bible reading without really understanding the depth of a person’s issues and sin. Often, we settle for shallow solutions, because we don’t really understand people and their problems. If we skip the difficult work of figuring out who we are, why we struggle so much, and how we can truly change, then our efforts to help people will be shallow and only marginally helpful.

One way we can learn more about people and their problems is to grow in the skill of listening. Paying close attention to what people say is going on in their hearts is, perhaps, the most basic and helpful way of gaining wisdom to help them with their problems. Of equal importance is the discipline of paying attention to what

is happening in our own hearts. *“Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it flow the springs of life” (Proverbs 4:23)*. If we are honestly grappling with the pride, rebellion, coping strategies, defense mechanisms, the deep longings of our own hearts, and finding the wisdom of God to cope, we will learn powerful lessons that will be able to deeply affect others as well.

When we fail to listen well, we often miss the right solution because we have missed the real problem. Paul instructs: *“We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone.” (1 Thes. 5:14)*. Whether we are to admonish, encourage, or help is dependent upon rightly diagnosing the problem. Is the person unruly, fainthearted, or weak? Applying the wrong solution may make the problem worse, even if your intention is totally pure.

It is amazing how often skillful listening and asking questions can uncover the roots of a person’s problem that were often hidden even from the person himself. *“The purposes of a man’s heart are deep waters, but a man of understanding draws them out” (Proverbs 20:5, NIV)*. Expressing empathy is also vital in listening. It communicates to the person that you not only heard what he said, but also felt the emotion that accompanied it. If he senses that you are truly listening and truly care, he will be much more likely to let you know more of what is going on in his heart and life. Often we fail to help people simply because we don’t have all the facts, and the reason we don’t have the facts is that the person does not sense a genuine interest and connection with their problem and withholds vital information.

As important as it is to seek God in prayer and the Word and to listen well, we must also seek wisdom from others. We must seek the experience and knowledge of wise and godly men who have sought God as deeply, and perhaps more so, than we have. Proverbs 13:14 says that *“The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life...”* and Proverbs 22:17 exhorts us to *“Incline your ear, and hear the words of the wise” (ESV)*. God commands us to seek wisdom from the wise. Many godly men have far more experience dealing with certain sins and behaviors than we have and it would be arrogant for us not to seek to learn from them.

However, this presents another problem. There is such a plethora of resources out there and a sometimes bewildering variety of approaches, that seeking wisdom can seem overwhelming. Who do we listen to? Which philosophy is correct? Sometimes it seems that we must become more expert than the experts to know which one to listen to.

All that I can say here is that we must start somewhere. Yes, reading and study can lead to seasons of confusion or to a lack of balance, but it can also open up our minds to new and more powerful understandings and approaches to helping people with their problems. We should not simply jump on the bandwagon of every new or novel approach that comes along, but neither should we bury our heads in the sand and keep doing what we’ve always done, even if it is only nominally effective. There is danger in studying an alternate view—we might be led astray into error. But there is also danger that, unbeknownst to us, our present point of view is in error.

“Oh therefore, see that you feel a tender love for your people in your hearts, and let them perceive it in your speech and conduct. Let them see that you spend and are spent for their sakes.”

- Richard Baxter

The Church and the Doctrine of God

Counseling and the Church

“The gospel alone is sufficient to rule the lives of Christians everywhere...any additional rules made to govern men’s conduct added nothing to the perfection already found in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”
- John Wycliffe

Certainly, this was a major problem for the Pharisees and Sadducees, who were so entrenched in their way of thinking that, even when confronted with the power of God displayed in Jesus, they refused to budge from their beliefs and way of thinking. So, as we seek to learn from the “experts,” let’s be open to learn, yet cautious, examining everything against the Scriptures.

Of course, pastors must take the lead in learning from the Word and from other men who are wise. Certainly, some pastors will be more passionate and gifted than others in helping deeply troubled people. But all should seek to learn and grow in their understanding of people’s problems and God’s solutions to them. Pastors who devote themselves exclusively to the public ministry of the Word and prayer, and spend little time with hurting individuals and grappling with their problems, will eventually become stale in their public teaching. If we are not growing in our ability to affect *individuals* powerfully and deeply, we will probably not be growing in our ability to affect *the church* powerfully and deeply through the public ministry as well. I am not arguing that we should neglect the public ministry of the Word, but that we should encourage growth in personal ministry at the same time. And some pastors and leaders will have passion and gifting to work with hurting individuals as a significant part of their ministry.

4) When necessary, we must use resources beyond the local church to help people overcome their problems.

Some situations will be beyond the ability of the local church to handle. An obvious example is when there is a serious threat that the person will harm himself or others, and law enforcement officials or social services need to become involved. Situations where children are obstinately rebellious may need similar involvement from public officials.

Even for less severe problems, many times a pastor or Christian leader’s care can be greatly augmented by the input of a Christian counselor. Some physical ailments can be resolved with self-care, others need the knowledge and skill of a doctor, while others require the additional knowledge and skill of a surgeon. The same is true for ailments of the soul. Someone who has worked with hundreds of people who have a particular dysfunction, such as homosexuality, or eating disorders, or panic attacks, will, no doubt, have experience and insights into the roots of these problems and can more easily and successfully point out areas that require repentance and mind renewal.

Pastors ought to have a sense for where they are equipped and be willing to refer those who are beyond their skill to other pastors, or Christian counselors, who are more thoroughly experienced and equipped. No pastor has all the gifts. Neither should we assume that every local church will necessarily have (or be operating strongly in) all the gifts, especially if the church is small. New Testament churches shared resources—both teachers and finances. Why should we be resistant to share resources between churches today? If a city has a pastor or pastors who are gifted at helping hurting people, why not seek their help? Or if there are lay ministers or

counselors who are both spiritually mature and gifted, why not seek their help as well? If you are faced with a problem or issue that is beyond your understanding or experience, first fervently seek the Lord in prayer and seek His wisdom in the Word. But also seek help from others who may have more experience and wisdom to help the particular problem.

But this presents a problem. Many, if not most, of us don't know mature and gifted and experienced pastors or counselors that we trust and have confidence in. Many counselors, even when they are truly Christians, employ approaches and techniques that they learned in a humanistically-oriented counseling department of a university or seminary. Just because someone is a Christian counselor and quotes the Bible, doesn't necessarily mean that the counseling he does stems from a thoroughly Christian worldview. (Note: I have put together some aids that may help in the search for a truly Christ-centered approach. If you are interested in these, email me at dave@stonebrook.org).

Whenever outside counseling is required, attempts should be made to integrate it with the care and counsel that the person is receiving in the church. The pastor or church leader involved should work together with the Christian counselor and either regularly talk with the counselor or even sit in on some or all of the sessions. A church leader's involvement can help insure unity in the counsel the person is receiving as well as help insure that the counseling is biblical. Leadership involvement may also help the leader learn how to better deal with similar problems in the future.

Professional counselors are required by law to maintain strict confidentiality. The person receiving counseling will need to sign a consent form before the counselor will be able to discuss the person's needs, progress, or any other details of the counseling sessions. If you send someone to a counselor, encourage them to ask for a form allowing you to discuss their progress with their counselor.

In conclusion, God has given the Church powerful tools to meet the deepest soul needs. Yet, as we minister to people and see the intensity of their struggles and the extent of the damage in their lives, we can easily become discouraged and overwhelmed. Truly, we have so little to offer in ourselves. Our human resources seem so puny and insignificant compared to the immensity of people's problems. But we must remember that it is God who is at work in us to will and to work for His good pleasure. God "...is able to do exceedingly abundantly beyond all that we ask or think according to the power that works within us" (Eph. 3:20, KJV). We must learn to tap into that power ourselves and teach others to do the same. We must foster in our churches an atmosphere where healing, growth, and sanctification are fostered and encouraged. We must also tap into the wisdom of God to understand the depth of people's problems and search the Scriptures for truth and solutions. And we must humbly seek to learn from others who have sought God as fervently as we have, or have gone before us in a particular area. May God bless us in our endeavors to help others.

"In my opinion, advocating, allowing and practicing psychiatric and psychoanalytical dogmas within the church is every bit as pagan and heretical (and therefore perilous) as propagating the teachings of some of the most bizarre cults. The only vital difference is that the cults are less dangerous because their errors are more identifiable."
- Jay Adams

EXERCISE

1. What was the main point you learned from these readings?

2. Give an example that shows the power that a living, flesh-and-blood demonstration of the grace and love of God has had on someone who was deeply troubled.

3. How well does your church do in creating a “safe” environment for hurting, wounded, and struggling people?

4. What training or resources have helped you or your church be effective helping troubled people?

5. People who have life-dominating problems can consume enormous amounts of a pastor's time or of church members' time. How do you balance priorities—helping the hurting without neglecting other important relationships and responsibilities? How can a pastor know his limits in counseling?

OTHER RELIGIONS' VIEWS OF GOD

INTRODUCTION

When we talk about God and who He is, we recognize that there are many people who describe Him in ways different than the way He is revealed in the Scriptures. As leaders who are devoted to communicate the truth of God to a lost world, it is vital that we know how other cultures and religions describe God. The following articles will give you a basic orientation to other religions' views of God.

Other Religions' Views of God

Pastor Tom Short, Columbus, Ohio



Our culture has embraced the idea that all religions are essentially the same and only superficially different. In reality, as Ravi Zacharias has pointed out, religions are essentially different and only superficially the same. The similarities between religions are usually based on a simple moral code of how we should treat others; the essential differences go to the heart of every religion – to theology – to our understanding of the very nature of God and, of course, how we are to relate to God.

In this article, we will look at the various ideas of the basic nature of God, identify which religions believe in which view, and show how these views differ from the view of God presented in the Bible. Of course, to say any particular religion views God in a specific way is difficult. Even among Christians, many people view God differently as we try and grasp His justice and mercy, His power and omniscience, etc. Thus, this paper will, by necessity, deal in generalities as to how the majority of adherents to a particular religion view God. Also, since volumes could be and have been written about the nature of God in just about every religion, I am submitting this paper in the hopes of making complex issues simple and to the point, but with the full knowledge that some of these descriptions and comments will be woefully inadequate.

Generally speaking, there are four major concepts of God we will look at:

1. Atheism: The belief that the material universe is all that exists and there is no God.
2. Pantheism: The belief that God and the material universe are one and the same.
3. Polytheism: The belief in many gods.
4. Monotheism: The belief that there is only one God.

Atheism

Atheism is the belief that there is no God – that this material universe is all that exists. The sister belief of Atheism is Agnosticism – the claim that there is not enough evidence to convince them, but not enough confidence to say there is no God. Practically speaking, both agnostics and atheists think and live as if there is no God.

Atheism is the root of such ideologies as naturalism and materialism. Naturalism teaches that there is a natural explanation for everything and has the profound faith that science and education will one day solve all of man's problems. Materialism is the belief that the physical world is all that exists. While neither of these philosophical presuppositions can be proven to be true, nevertheless, they are widely held beliefs in our culture (even deeply affecting how believers think) and those who hold these views consider themselves to be more intellectual than those who believe in a God who cannot be seen.

“What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”

- A. W. Tozer

The Church and the Doctrine of God

Other Religions' Views of God

“To be an atheist requires an infinitely greater measure of faith than to receive all the great truths which atheism would deny.”
- *Joseph Addison*

While atheism, agnosticism, naturalism, and materialism are not technically “religions,” nevertheless, their view of God is a predominant worldview in our culture and the greatest challenge to believers having a right view of God.

Pantheism

Pantheism is the belief that God is everything. Creation and God are one in the same. Thus, God is not a personal being whom we can know and worship, but rather is an impersonal and unknowable force.

Buddhists who believe in “god” (most don’t), New Age, and animism (worshipping rocks, trees and other natural objects) are pantheistic in nature. Pantheistic beliefs have invaded western culture in the past few decades in the form of New Age religion (a part of God dwells in all of us and in all of nature) and in some radical environmentalist groups who essentially believe in the worship of nature. Even in the Church (and especially in liberal churches) some interpret the omnipresence of God in pantheistic terms – God is in all of us and in all of nature.

Pantheists have made the fatal mistake Paul describes in Romans 1:24-25 when he tells of those who “worship and serve the created thing rather than the Creator” (KJV).

Also, pantheists have a terrible dilemma: since they claim that God and nature are one, they must either claim God is good and deny the reality of evil in the world or, recognizing evil in the world, conclude that God is also evil. Most pantheists opt for the former, thus denying the existence of evil. While this is a convenient way for New Agers to deny their own sinfulness, it simply doesn’t square with reality. However, this false concept of God is behind much of the New Age teaching that people are not sinners and the corresponding moral relativism that is sweeping through our culture.

Pantheism’s goal is to experience oneness with God – to become one with the cosmos. Thus, the individual is lost in the whole and really has no value as an individual. Certainly a person with this theology would have difficulty understanding how a personal God could send His Son to die for people who matter to Him.

Polytheism

Polytheism is the belief in many gods. The most common polytheistic religion in America is Mormonism. Although Mormonism refers often to the Bible and a belief in Jesus, yet it has a very different view of God. To Mormons, God the Father was once a man who became God, who still has a physical body. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three separate gods. And, one day, those men who are worthy may also become gods.

Worldwide, Hinduism is the predominant polytheistic religion. Hinduism is a very difficult and confusing religion to understand, sometimes holding sharply contradictory views that are troublesome to the Western mind, but embraced by the Eastern mindset.

Hindus believe in one universal spirit called Brahman. Brahman is not a personal god, but rather is understood philosophically as the one absolute of the universe. Brahman has many manifestations (gods and goddesses) and thus, Hindus worship multitudes of idols. In Hinduism, this worship of idols and devotion to gods and goddesses is not done out of a personal love relationship with the god, but out of great fear and duty, often bargaining with the god by bringing an offering in order to receive protection or prosperity.

Hindus don't go to Heaven. Instead, they seek oneness with Brahman. This oneness will come about after a nearly eternal succession of reincarnations in which good karma (reward for doing good) will release them from bad karma (punishment and suffering for doing bad, even if the bad was done in a previous life). When they escape this cycle of reincarnations, they will be absorbed, like a drop of water in the ocean, into Brahman.

Monotheism

There are three monotheistic religions in the world: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. It is often claimed that Jews, Christians, and Muslims all worship the same God. While there may be some truth to this, we will see areas in which these three religions have a common understanding of God and important ways in which they differ.

All three of these monotheistic religions understand God to be the Creator and the sovereign Lord of the universe. All believe we will ultimately be judged and give an account to God. All believe that God is omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient.

Judaism: Judaism and Christianity share the same Scripture (our Old Testament, their Torah) and thus, do have many similar ideas of God. However, over the past 200 – 300 years, Judaism has broken into three branches: Orthodox – those who believe strongly in the Torah and in Jewish traditions; Reformed – humanistic and theologically liberal Jews who have been “liberated” from a strict understanding of the Torah, many of whom don't believe God (in the biblical sense) even exists; and Conservative Jews – those who are somewhere in the middle. When speaking with a Jew, one should discover where they are coming from as each group does have a different view of the authority of Scripture and of the nature (or even existence) of “God.”

For those Jews who do believe in God, their biggest difference in understanding God concerns the biblical teaching of the Trinity. Judaism's most basic faith statement is: “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One” (Deuteronomy 6:4). Of course, Christians believe this as well, and we do not understand the teaching

“Jesus of Nazareth, without money and arms, conquered more millions than Alexander the Great, Caesar, Mohammed, and Napoleon.”
- Phillip Schaff

The Church and the Doctrine of God

Other Religions' Views of God

“As the centuries pass, the evidence is accumulating that, measured by His effect on history, Jesus is the most influential life ever lived on this planet.”

- *Historian Kenneth Scott Latourette*

of both Old (Isaiah 48:16) and New (Matthew 28:19-20, etc.) Testaments to contradict that God is one. Nevertheless, Jews (and Muslims as well) find our belief in the Trinity to be a stumbling block to accepting Christ (See GCLI article on the Trinity elsewhere in this section).

Islam: The most basic creed of Islam is “There is no God but Allah and Mohammed is His prophet.” Reciting this creed is how one becomes a Muslim.

Mecca, the city of Mohammed’s upbringing, was a very diverse city located on trade routes that brought travelers from around the known world. Thus, it was a city where people worshipped many gods. Mohammed’s revelation was that there was but one God, Allah. Mohammed suffered greatly for this exclusive view of God and, as a result, monotheism became the key teaching of Islam.

But Islam’s idea of God differs in some vital ways from the Bible’s revelation of God. Here are several key differences:

1. Islam repudiates the Christian Trinity. Muslims view those who worship Jesus as guilty of *shirk*, an unpardonable sin, for they have worshipped someone as a partner of Allah, thus, making themselves polytheists.
2. Islam presents Allah as distant and transcendent. Whereas Christians do understand God to reign as Lord of the universe, yet He came near to us in the person of Jesus Christ. This concept of God condescending to become like us is abhorrent to Muslims.
3. Islam rejects the idea that Allah would have a son – either Jesus as God’s unique Son or of believers as those born into His family. In Islam, it is a grave sin to call Allah your father; in Christianity, we are taught to address God as “our Father.”
4. Allah, the God of Islam, does not love sinners – in fact, Allah is not known for his love at all. He is known for his power and sovereignty – and even his mercy, but not his love. Allah has a general benevolence for his creatures, but not the caring, warm, and personal love we see in the God of the Bible – a God who would even love sinners enough to suffer on their behalf and for their benefit.
5. Allah is presented in Islam as having total sovereignty and thus, Muslims have an extreme view of predestination. All that happens, both good and evil, is his determined will. Islam has a very fatalistic view of life, allowing no room for men to have a free will.

Christianity: It is about being reconciled to God through the true knowledge of Jesus Christ. There are a multitude of religions and ideas out there that present conflicting views of God. We have addressed only some of the major religions and even with those, we have only been able to address them in a brief manner. But few people could ever hope to thoroughly examine and be familiar with all the religious ideas of God that billions of people have come up with. Instead, in addition to this brief study, let me encourage you to become thoroughly familiar with the one true

God. Know Him. Know His nature. Know His attributes. And, the better you know God, the better equipped you will be to identify and refute the multitude of man-made (and Devil-made) concepts of God that an active witness for Christ will encounter.

Other Religions' Views of Jesus

Perhaps the most important question Jesus ever asked His disciples was, "Who do you say that I am" (Matthew 16:15)? To this day, this remains a question of paramount importance and one in which different religions offer different answers.

The New Testament places a great emphasis on identifying Jesus as the true Christ of God. Salvation and the coming of God's Kingdom are wrapped up in understanding and believing in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus warned that false Christs would arise toward the end of time (Matthew 24:24) and, indeed, false Christs and a false understanding of Jesus Christ had begun to spring up even during the times of the Apostles. Nearly every New Testament writer included teaching on understanding the true identity of Jesus Christ.

Here is a sampling of what some major non-Christian and pseudo-Christian religions say about Jesus. Please refer to other GCLI articles in this section to find the biblical rebuttal to these positions.

Judaism

Of course, Jesus was a Jew and came first to the Jews, offering Himself as their Messiah. Many Jews believed, but most did not then, and most do not today. Non-believing Jews have a variety of opinions about Jesus, ranging from the belief that He was a great rabbi to the belief that he was a false prophet worthy of death for seducing the people into idolatry. While there are many "Messianic Jews," those who believe Jesus is the Messiah, most Jews today reject Jesus' claim to be the Messiah and are still awaiting their coming Messiah. To some Jews, this coming Messiah will be a person, but to others, the "Messiah" will only be a period of time in which peace and justice have been restored to this earth and God's Kingdom will be established.

Islam

Islam teaches that Jesus is one of the five great prophets sent by Allah. Along with Christians, Muslims believe that Jesus was born of a virgin, that He performed mighty miracles, that He is in Heaven today seated next to God, and that He will one day come again. Thus, Muslims usually take offense if told they do not believe in Jesus. However, Islam denies the two most important things about Jesus – His Person and His Work.

Muslims deny that Jesus is the Son of God. They believe it is blasphemous to claim God would have a son and are especially irritated that Christians would worship Jesus as the partner of (or equal to) God. To worship Jesus as the equal to

"I am a historian.
I am not a
Christian, but I
must admit that this
penniless preacher
from Galilee is
irrevocably the
center of history."
- *H.G. Wells*

The Church and the Doctrine of God

Other Religions' Views of God

“Whatever subject I preach, I do not stop until I reach the Savior, the Lord Jesus, for in Him are all things.”

- C.H. Spurgeon

God is, to Muslims, the sin of *shirk* – the worst sin possible and one which can never be pardoned if one dies in this state.

Muslims also deny that Jesus ever died on a cross – and even that He ever died at all. They believe Allah would never allow such a righteous man to suffer such cruel treatment as the cross and thus, Allah substituted someone in Jesus' place who looked like Him, and then took Jesus directly to Heaven without ever dying.

Of course, the Bible contains numerous references to:

- Jesus being the Son of God---Matthew 3:17, 16:16, Mark 14:61-62, John 3:16-18, Romans 1:4
- Jesus being divine---John 1:1-14, Philippians 2:5-11, Colossians 1:15-19, 2:9, Hebrews 1:1-4
- Jesus dying for our sins---John 19:33, Romans 5:8, 1 Corinthians 15:3, 1 Peter 3:18

Hinduism and Buddhism

Both Hinduism and Buddhism predate Jesus and thus, neither of them makes direct reference to Jesus. However, since Jesus is such an influential spiritual figure, modern Hindus and Buddhists often make reference to Jesus. Buddhists usually view Jesus as an enlightened being on par with other spiritual men who were themselves enlightened. Most Buddhists do not believe in God and thus, Jesus is not viewed as any sort of divine being. Hindus usually view Jesus as guru, teacher, or avatar (an incarnation of the god, Vishnu). It is not believed that He died to atone for our sins. He is not a central figure in Hinduism.

Some Hindus do not mind if a person “accepts Jesus” as a god along with their myriad of other gods – worshipping Jesus *along with* their gods rather than worshipping Jesus *alone*. Other Hindus and Buddhists see Jesus as a product of western culture and a threat to their way of life, and thus viciously persecute believers.

Mormonism

Mormonism is a fast growing pseudo-Christian group – meaning that they hold to some Christian teaching and claim to be the true Christian Church. Mormons believe themselves to be Christians and many people join the Mormon Church thinking they are becoming Christians. However, Mormonism does not teach the truth about Jesus, but rather includes these strange, distorted and unbiblical teachings: that He is the spirit child of the Father and the Mother in Heaven, that He is the spirit-brother of Lucifer and the elder brother of all men and all spirit beings. Mormons believe Jesus' fleshly body was created through sexual union between God the Father and Mary. His death on the cross does not atone for our sins. After His faithful life here on earth, He was exalted to a deity. As our elder brother, we too, can some day become deities like Jesus.

Of course, Scripture teaches that Jesus is the *only* begotten Son of God (John 3:16), the co-equal of the Father (John 1:1-2) and that He is eternally co-existent with the Father (John 1:1-2).

Jehovah's Witnesses

Jehovah's Witnesses, a pseudo-Christian group that claims to be the true Christian Church, believes Jesus to be the son of God and thus, a "god," but does not believe Him to be the divine Son of God, the second Person of the Trinity. JW's deny most orthodox teachings of Jesus, including His deity, bodily resurrection, and second coming. They have produced their own translation of the Bible, The New World Translation, which distorts and mistranslates most verses relating to the deity of Jesus, thus making it very difficult to persuade them of their false doctrine. Also, JW's have been thoroughly schooled in how to respond to the orthodox Christian theology.

Please refer to the GCLI article included in Session 4 for teaching on the Deity of Christ.

New Age

While not all New Age cults believe the same thing, nevertheless, most of them recognize Jesus as a very spiritual person whom they admire as a "Christ figure." Some of these religions believe Jesus was one in a long line of "Christs" who walked the earth throughout history – that He became the Christ at some point in His life, but that His Christ Spirit passed on to others throughout time and even dwells in enlightened ones now.

Of course, the Scripture speaks of one Christ, Jesus, and tells us that He was the Christ at His birth (Luke 2:11), during His ministry (Matthew 16:16), at His death (1 Corinthians 15:3), His resurrection (Romans 14:9) and His ascension (Acts 1:11, Ephesians 1:19-23). This same Jesus, the Christ, will come again (Acts 1:11). And, as if He had the New Age in mind, Jesus warned us not to be fooled by false Christs who would come (Matthew 24:24), for the only Christ who would return would be He, Himself and, when that happens there will be no doubt it is Him.

Gnosticism

Ancient Gnosticism has made a comeback in the past few decades and has been especially helped by the popular book, *The Da Vinci Code*. Many Gnostics believe that the Church conferred a position of deity upon Jesus at the Council of Nicea in 325 AD. These New Age / Gnostic ideas can vary widely, most think of Jesus as an enlightened teacher, but not divine. Also, since most New Age / Gnostics don't believe that we are sinful people, they also don't believe Jesus died for our sins. His resurrection is usually viewed by these people as being merely a "spiritual" resurrection.

"Buddha never claimed to be God. Moses never claimed to be Jehovah. Mohammed never claimed to be Allah. Yet Jesus Christ claimed to be the true and living God."
- *Unknown*

The Church and the Doctrine of God

Other Religions' Views of God

“We have better historical documentation for Jesus than for the founder for any other ancient religion.”

- *Edwin Yamauchi*

Conclusion

The central faith statement of the Christian church has to do with the identity and the mission of Jesus Christ. He is declared to be the only begotten Son of God, One with the Father and the Holy Spirit, who offered Himself as an atoning sacrifice for our sin, died, was buried and rose again. All other religions and pseudo-Christian religions will deny one or more of these core historical beliefs about Jesus. As we carefully study the Scripture's presentation of Jesus Christ, we will be equipped to thoroughly refute those who teach a false Christ and will help assure that those under our care not become deceived about this vital teaching.

ADDENDUM

*How Do the Jewish People View
Jesus Christ Today?*

Matt Sherman, Gainesville, FL



Many Christians wrongly assume that modern-day Jews must be the most obstinate people alive. How else could those who have read and studied the Hebrew Scriptures, the descendants of ancient Israel, reject the immense number of Messianic prophecies fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth? Modern Jewish thought places Jesus' role as, at best, a skillful Bible teacher, and at worst, a foolish heretic, a vicious blasphemer, who died justly at the hands of the Romans for equating Himself with the living God.

A non-religious Jew might acknowledge that Jesus' words are potentially life-changing and civilization-changing for those who have administered them. To have the world-wide influence He has had, Jesus must have been a good man, perhaps even a wise lifestyle teacher, who tried fervently to help others, but eventually dying a martyr's death for political reasons. This is by far the prevalent attitude of most Jewish people of Europe and the Western Hemisphere.

Others, who are more devoutly religious, including Orthodox, Samaritan, and Chasidic Jews, mainly understand Jesus to be an object of great fear, a black magician who deceived the masses through blasphemy and skillful oratory.

The great reluctance of Jews to hear claims about their Messiah is based on several factors. Jewish thought regarding the person of Jesus is based much more on traditions and the Talmud, rather than the Holy Scriptures. Also, a great amount of "bad press" has been circulated among the Jews, and indeed, their enemies for nearly two millennia, about the true Christ. Finally, the very definition of "Jewishness," adhered to by the vast majority of Jews, and a startling number of professing Christians, is that a Jew can be, think, and do nearly anything, but is excluded from being Jewish the very moment they become a Christian convert.

Witnessing to Jewish people can begin logically with Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament, as typical American Jews are not especially learned in the Hebrew Scriptures. Since the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 70 AD, most all fervent Jewish religious thought is fixated instead on traditions from the Talmud, a collection of oral teachings later written and preserved as the key anthology of Jewish biblical commentary and thought. An example of Talmud tradition is the prevalent belief among Jews that a person traces their lineage and religious identity through their birth mother, rather than their father as in all biblical genealogy.

The Talmud actually contains amazing references to Jesus indicating by implication His divine mission and heavenly anointing (see "Notes on The Talmud" at

"Fundamentally, our Lord's message was Himself. He did not come merely to preach a Gospel; He himself is that Gospel. ...He did not come merely to show the door; He said, "I am the door." He did not come merely to name a shepherd; He said, "I am the shepherd." He did not come merely to point the way; He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life."

- J. Sidlow Baxter

The Church and the Doctrine of God

How Do the Jewish People View Jesus Christ Today?

“As a child I received instruction both in the Bible and in the Talmud. I am a Jew, but I am enthralled by the luminous figure of the Nazarene.... No one can read the Gospels without feeling the actual presence of Jesus. His personality pulsates in every word. No myth is filled with such life.”

- Albert Einstein

the end of this article). The Talmud also sheds light on fascinating, curious aspects of Jesus' life on earth. Why did Jesus place His saliva on the tongue of a man (see Mark 7:32-35) to heal his mute condition? The Talmud tells the reader that the Messiah is so holy that even His spittle will contain divine healing! Where may Christians discover the admonition “in the law” for women to keep silence in the congregation, as 1 Corinthians 14:34 instructs? It is really the Talmud that gives this prohibition. The Talmud directs the Israelites to wash their hands before meals (see Matthew 15:2 and Mark 7:3, where the “tradition of the elders” to wash their hands refers to the then oral Talmud). Paul and the Gospel authors broke new ground by writing down the formally orally transmitted Talmud.

With the advent of Talmudic thought came the Jewish tradition still held today that Jesus did exist, but must have been a false teacher who led the unlearned masses away from true worship of the one God. In Jewish religious meetings today, including Hillel clubs and Yeshiva (religious school) training, young Jewish men and women are invited to participate in lessons on counter-missionary techniques. Young Jews are sternly admonished to watch out for the “false claims” and “biblical mistranslations” of zealous Christians who would bring them to Christ.

For example, a Christian might refer a friend to Isaiah 7:14 (KJV) which says, “...*A virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel, [God with us]*” as a clear prophecy of the virgin birth of Jesus Christ. But the commonly accepted translations used by Jews all read “young maiden” instead of “virgin” in Isaiah 7:14. Explaining to a Jew how it is that “a young woman, rather than a virgin bearing a child, is hardly a biblical sign to King Ahaz” is helpful, but much study is needed to skillfully combat anti-missionary techniques on apologetic grounds.

Christians must also be sensitive to the hatred Jews have experienced from Gentile groups that would destroy them. From Pharaoh's Egypt and Haman's wicked proclamation to Muslim jihad, Russian pogroms and expulsion from England, France, and Spain, Jews have been the target of intense religious hatred and persecution. Those who witness to Jewish people today will want to extend patient understanding toward those whose ancestors have been tortured and martyred “in the name of Christ” by Spanish inquisitors, Nazi persecutors, and countless other anti-Semites. The typical American, European, or Israeli Jew is taught that Gentiles are, by and large, not to be trusted —especially zealous “Christians” who come to convert Jews to “worship hated idols” (pursue church statuary and prohibited icons) and believe in “three different gods.”

Christians often fail to realize how traitorous it is considered for a Jew to be called a Christian. For most American Jews, somewhat non-observant in religious practice, they find their reform Rabbi to be extremely patient with their choices in life and faith, unless they would dare to become a hated Jewish Christian. The Rabbi of a “reform” (somewhat religious branch of Judaism) Jewish congregation or “reconstructionist” (radical modern conceptualization of Jewishness as being only traditions, apart from whether there is a God or not) congregation might lead classes

The Church and the Doctrine of God

How Do the Jewish People View Jesus Christ Today?

in Zen meditation or Buddhist-styled philosophy. If a Jew wants to explore mystic Zohar or Kabbalah (Jewish occultism), or finds a fascination in astrology, tarot cards, nihilist thinking, or other bizarre philosophies, that's fine. However, once a Jew becomes a Christian, he is immediately excommunicated from his synagogue or is subjected to such widespread ridicule and persecution that he soon leaves for brighter, Gentile Christian fellowship. This rift can cause tremendous pain for the new Jewish Christian believer, who may be unsure why he is being rejected just when Christ has suddenly filled his heart with newfound love for his people and for all men! Countless Jews have become born again over the centuries, only to fully assimilate in Gentile culture.

“Messianic Judaism” includes a range of options including Jews for Jesus (a mission-based organization seeking to affirm Jewish evangelism and Jewish identity), Jewish believers receiving discipleship within predominantly Gentile congregations, and full-fledged Messianic synagogues, where nearly every element of traditional Jewish worship is preserved inside Christian belief. Messianic synagogues can help Jewish people learn about Christ in a comfortable environment and also provide opportunity to witness to other Jews. Worship and teachings happen on Friday night and Saturday during daylight hours, the biblical day of Sabbath. Jesus is referred to in Messianic synagogue mainly as “Y’Shua,” a Hebrew conjunction for “Joshua.” Delightful and uplifting “Davidic Dancing” and Christian songs set to Jewish traditional music fill the congregational worship in Messianic synagogues. Though some Messianic synagogues have slipped into legalism, elitism, and separation from Gentile brethren, the person of Jesus as a Jew is well represented through Messianic Jewish belief. Additionally, Gentile Christians have strengthened their understanding of Jewish traditions, customs and the person and prophecies of Jesus Christ through experiencing “Messianic Passover Seders” or other Messianic Jewish observances.

In summary, feel free to witness with both the Old and New Testament Scriptures to the Jewish people. Typically our Jewish friends are unlearned in both Testaments and together they form the one Word of God which is able to save those who hear with faith (Romans 10:17). Be patient in explaining that not all who name Christ are born again, perhaps even apologizing for previous atrocities inflicted on the Jewish people. Work to learn about Jewish traditions, customs, and the teachings of the Old Testament. You will certainly learn more about God’s eternal plan and His Son as one happy result.

(Editor’s Note: Matt Sherman is a Jewish Christian who trusted Jesus Christ for salvation in 1990. Matt is a member of Gator Christian Life, a Great Commission campus church in Gainesville, Florida. He is author of a program entitled “Body Building,” a 16-hour course designed to train students in sharing the good news of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ effectively with their peers.)

“Jesus is God spelling Himself out in language that men can understand.”
- S.D. Gordon

The Church and the Doctrine of God

How Do the Jewish People View Jesus Christ Today?

“The bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the crowning proof of Christianity. If the resurrection did not take place, then Christianity is a false religion. If it did take place, then Christ is God and the Christian faith is absolute truth.”
- *Henry Morris*

Notes on The Talmud

The Talmud, being in nature an anti-Christian document and containing treatises sternly warning Jews not to convert to Christianity, by implication contains an incredible First Century witness to Jesus’ divine nature and Messianic authority. Below are some Talmudic references to Jesus, followed by the implication of each statement from this august body of Jewish thought:

- From Sanhedrin 106a. “She who was the descendant of princes and governors played the harlot with carpenters.” Also, in footnote #2 to Shabbath 104b it is stated that in the “uncensored” text of the Talmud it is written that Jesus’ mother, “Miriam the hairdresser”, had sex with many men. [Implication: Joseph was understood by First Century Jews not to be Jesus’ natural father!]
- Another passage from Sanhedrin 106: “‘Hast thou heard how old Balaam (Talmudic code word for Jesus) was?’ He replied: ‘It is not actually stated but since it is written, Bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days it follows that he was thirty-three or thirty-four years old.’” [Implication: Psalm 55:22-23 is referred to; and also that Jesus began His ministry at “about thirty years of age” and died at 33 1/2 years old!-See Luke 3:23]
- Sanhedrin 43a. Says “Yeshu” and in footnote #6, “Yeshu the Nazarene,” (code word for Christ as Yeshu has a blasphemous connotation) was executed because he practiced sorcery. [Implication: Jesus of Nazareth was killed because He performed “illegal miracles!”]
- Gittin 57a. Says Jesus (as per footnote #4) is being boiled in “hot excrement.” [Implication: New Testament-era Jews believed in a literal Hell, and so Jesus, regarded in league with Beelzebub, was known to walk among the Jews of His day and teach “divisive doctrines!”]
- Sanhedrin 43a. “On the eve of the Passover, Yeshu was hanged...Do you suppose that he was one for whom a defense could be made? Was he not a Mesith (an enticer)?” [Implication: Jesus was crucified, or “hanged” on Passover; Jesus made/had no defense on His own behalf; He had followers who were led (“enticed”) through His teachings and ministry and so traveled with Him as a Rabbi with disciples!]

EXERCISE

1. What was the main point you learned from these readings?

2. What did you learn from these articles that will help you in witnessing to those with a different religious belief?

3. Do you see any false concepts from Islam, Hinduism or Buddhism that is infiltrating the Church in our culture? If so, in what ways?

4. Various New Age cults claim to believe in Jesus, but claim that the Christ spirit now rests on their leader/guru/messiah. What Bible verses would you use to combat this false doctrine?

5. What major points about Jesus would you emphasize if you were witnessing to a Jew? To a Muslim? To a Hindu? To a Buddhist?

Session IV: Church Leadership/ The Doctrine of Jesus Christ

OVERVIEW

This session's topics are Church Leadership and The Doctrine of Jesus Christ. As a leader of God's church it is vital that you yourself be committed to building strong leaders in the church. In addition, as a teacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ, it is essential that you be doctrinally sound on key issues related to the person of Jesus Christ.

There are six homework exercises:

1. **Discussion from the GCLI teachings.** In this exercise, you will reflect upon the main lessons you learned from the teachings.
2. **Leadership Styles.** In these readings, Tim Haring introduces you to four different leadership styles. Then you will read four testimonies from leaders who excel in each of these styles. The goal of the exercise is that you will better understand how God has "wired you" and how you can better relate to those whose leadership style is different than yours.
3. **Elders and Leading the Local Church.** In this article by John Hopler, the focus is on the many "nuts and bolts" issues that face elders in leading, managing, and governing the local church. The exercise will help you evaluate your own church to be a church that is more effectively managed for God's purposes.
4. **Women and Leadership.** What does the Bible say about women in leadership? This very comprehensive reading, and the following exercises, will address this question.
5. **Defending the Deity of Christ from the Teachings of Contemporary Cults.** As a leader in God's church, you will be challenged on this very important doctrine. This reading by Kurt Jurgensmeier and the exercises that follow will equip you to refute those who deny that Jesus Christ is God.
6. **The Second Coming of Jesus Christ.** In this outline teaching, John Hopler addresses some of the key issues related to the future coming of the Lord Jesus.

Five Principles of Effective Church Leadership

Pastor Brent Knox, Bloomington, MN



INTRODUCTION:

Why is quality leadership so important to any organization?

1. The leadership organizational chart of the church is “flat.” There is only one type of leader in the church (excluding deacons and those in a national ministry).

“From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church.... ‘Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.’”

(Acts 20:17, 28)

- The Bible refers to this person with four different titles.
See also 1 Timothy 3:2; 1 Peter 5:1-2; Ephesians 4:11; Hebrews 13:7, 17.

a. _____

b. _____ or bishop (Gk. episkopoi)

c. _____ or pastor (Gk. poimen)

d. _____

- Why is this principle important?

2. The qualifications for local church leadership are clear. The emphasis is on _____.

“Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church?) He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil’s trap”
(1 Timothy 3:1-7). See also Titus 1:6-9.

- Church leaders are called to be living examples!

“Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers— not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock”
(1 Peter 5:2-3). See also Philippians 3:17; 1 Corinthians 11:1.

- Why is this principle important? Character is the key to _____.
“The root of the righteous yields fruit” (Proverbs 12:12).

Church Leadership/The Doctrine of Jesus Christ

Five Principles of Effective Church Leadership

- Contrast the qualification of character with:

- * Academic degrees

- * Gifting

- * Natural leadership abilities

“The most common mistake made by churches that are eager to implement eldership is to appoint biblically unqualified men. Because there is always a need for more shepherds, it is tempting to allow unqualified, unprepared men to assume leadership in the church. This is, however, a time-proven formula for failure: A biblical eldership requires biblically qualified elders.” —Alexander Strauch, *“Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership.”*

- 3. New pastors come from _____ the congregation rather than from outside the congregation.**
“Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust” (Acts 14:23).

- The advantages of recognizing pastors from within the congregation.
 1. The _____ knows the man.
 2. The _____ knows the church.

Question: Are there exceptions to this principle?

- 4. Pastors do not lead alone. They lead together in a “council of _____.”**

- The Principle of Plurality in the Scripture.
 1. Jesus did not appoint one man to lead His Church. He personally appointed and trained 12 men. The Twelve comprised the first leadership council of the church in Jerusalem.
 2. Many first churches had plurality of pastors.
1 Timothy 5:17; Acts 14:23; 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5; Philippians 1:1; James 5:14
 3. Other examples of shared leadership.
Acts 13:1; 15:35; 1 Corinthians 16:15, 16; 1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13;
Hebrews 13: 7, 17, 24
- The principle of plurality is not a command, but an important practice to follow.
- Why is the principle of plurality of leaders important? What are the benefits of a “council of equals?”
 1. _____ guarding and accountability.
“Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.”
— English Historian Lord Acton (his observation of world history)

Church Leadership/The Doctrine of Jesus Christ

Five Principles of Effective Church Leadership

“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers”
(Acts 20:28).

“To be a lone chief atop a pyramid is abnormal and corrupting. None of us are perfect by ourselves, and all of us need the help and correcting influences of close colleagues. When someone is moved atop a pyramid, that person no longer has colleagues, only subordinates. Even the frankest and bravest of subordinates do not talk with their boss in the same way they talk with colleagues who are equals, and normal communication patters(*sic*) become warped.” —Robert Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership*

2. Help spread the _____.

3. Better _____ of the church.

- Although the Bible describes the principle of plurality, there is recognition given to the concept of “first among equals.”

1. Among the Twelve, Peter, James, and John were “first among equals.” In Paul’s letter to the Galatians, Paul speaks of James, Peter, and John as the acknowledged “pillars” of the church in Jerusalem (Galatians 2:9).
2. Among the three, Peter seemed to be treated as “first among equals.” In all four lists of the Apostles’ names, Peter’s name is first (Matthew 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:14-16; Acts 1:13). Matthew actually refers to Peter as “the first” (Matthew 10:2). Peter was a predominant leader in the early Church.
3. Although Paul and Barnabas were co-equal missionaries, Paul was known as the chief speaker (Acts 13:13; 14:12).

5. Pastors are to be _____ - _____.

“Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:26-28).

- Be a _____.

“Nothing distinguishes the kingdoms of man from the kingdom of God more than their diametrically opposed views of the exercise of power. One seeks to control people; the other to serve people; one promotes self, the other prostrates self; one seeks prestige and position, the other lifts up the lowly and despised.” – Chuck Colson, former Special Counsel to the President of the United States

- Be a _____.

“Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you” (Hebrews 13:17).

“This is why I write these things when I am absent, that when I come I may not have to be harsh in my use of authority—the authority the Lord gave me for building you up, not for tearing you down”
(2 Corinthians 13:10).

Church Leadership/The Doctrine of Jesus Christ

Five Principles of Effective Church Leadership

Effective churches have two dynamics in place:

Leaders _____ and people _____.

“On that day Deborah and Barak son of Abinoam sang this song: ‘When the princes in Israel take the lead, when the people willingly offer themselves—praise the LORD!’” (Judges 5:1-2).

All Scripture quotations in this article are from the New International Version.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God

Pastor Herschel Martindale, Columbia, MO



Introduction

Jesus is, at once, the most influential and most controversial person to ever live. He is loved by multitudes, hated by many, and misunderstood by most. He claimed, and Christians believe, that He is the source of eternal life with God. Since He is so crucial to our eternal destiny, it is vital that we know and accept Him for who He really is. And thus, the controversy. Cults, false religions, intellectuals, you name it -- it seems that everyone has a different view of Who Jesus is. In this teaching, we will seek to accurately identify Who Jesus is and what He did.

Jesus: His Identity

1. The most important aspect of Jesus' identity is that He is the _____, the Son of the Living God.

"Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus said to him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it,'" (Matthew 16:16-18).

A. **"Christ" is not a name, it is His _____, meaning the "anointed One of God." Jesus, as the anointed of God, fulfilled the offices of Prophet, Priest, and King prophesied in the Old Testament.**

B. **Recognition and acceptance of Jesus as the Christ is the key to becoming part of His _____.**

C. **The Old Testament _____ affirm Jesus is the Christ (Messiah).**

• Place of birth	Micah 5:2	(Matthew 2:5-6)
• Born of a Virgin	Isaiah 7:14	(Luke 1:26-38)
• Flight to Egypt	Hosea 11:1	(Matthew 2:13-15)
• His Divinity	Isaiah 9:6	(Luke 2:11)
• Tribe of Judah	Genesis 49:8-10	(Revelation 5:5-7)
• Davidic Kingship	2 Samuel 7:11-16	(Luke 1:31-33)
• Filled with the Spirit	Isaiah 11:1-2	(Luke 4:14-22)
• Light to the Gentiles	Isaiah 60:1-3	(Luke 2:25-32)
• Savior of the World	Isaiah 49:6	(Luke 19:9-10)
• To be Crucified	Psalms 22:16-18	(John 19:20)
• Death and Burial	Isaiah 53:9	(Matthew 27:57-60)
• Resurrection	Psalms 16:9-11	(Matthew 28:2-8)
• To pay for our sins	Isaiah 53:4-7	(1 Peter 2:24-25)
• Second Coming	Zechariah 14:3-9	(Revelation 19:11-16)
• Eternal Kingship	Daniel 2:44	(Revelation 11:15)

2. As the Christ, Jesus was and is the _____, the second Person of the Trinity.

A. _____ understood His claim to deity.

The Apostle John: *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the Life was the Light of men. And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him”* (John 1:1-4, 14, 18).

The Apostle Paul: *“And He is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created by Him and for Him. And he is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the Church, and He is the beginning, the first born from the dead, so that He Himself might come to have the first place in everything. For it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven”* (Colossians 1:15-20).

His Enemies: *“If I do not the works of my Father, do not believe me, but if I do them, though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I in the Father... The Jews answered Him, for a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God”* (John 10:37-38. 33).

B. His _____ and _____ declare His Deity.

- Jesus. The Lord is Salvation. Matthew 1:21
- Immanuel. “God is with us” Matthew 1:23
- Christ. The anointed One. Messiah. Matthew 16:13-16
- Son of God. Matthew 17:5
- Son of Man. Luke 19:10, Daniel 7:13, Genesis 3:15
- “I am” (Jehovah). John 8:56-58
- Lord. Acts 2:36
- Savior. 2 Peter 1:11
- Only Sovereign. 1 Timothy 6:15
- King of Kings and Lord of Lords. 1 Timothy 6:15
- LORD (Jehovah) and GOD (Elohim). Isaiah 40:3-5 John 20:28

C. Jesus’ _____ and _____ demonstrate His deity

1. His ability to give eternal life demonstrates He is God (John 5:21, 24).
2. His eternal existence demonstrates His deity (Colossians 1:17; John 1:1-4; Hebrews 13:8).
3. His unlimited power and works declare His deity (John 5:36, 10:37-38, 11:42-45).

Church Leadership/The Doctrine of Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ, the Son of God

4. His ability to forgive sins reveals His deity (Matthew 9:2-7; Luke 1:76-77, 24:46-47).
5. His role in creation demonstrates His deity (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16-17).
6. His immutability demonstrates His deity (Hebrews 13:8).

3. Jesus also was fully human

Early Gnostic heretics denied that Jesus had come in the flesh (1 John 4:2-3). Modern day New Age Gnostics claim that the “Christ spirit” has gone from Jesus to other religious gurus. But we will see that the Bible teaches that each of the major works of the Christ were done by the man Jesus Christ.

1. The Incarnation. The Apostle John tells us, “*in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God*” (John 1:1). He goes on to say, “*and the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth*” (John 1:14). These two verses disclose both the deity and humanity of Jesus. John says, “*and we beheld His glory.*” He doesn’t say that they discerned His glory, but rather, “*beheld*” it. The glory of God shined forth at every step of His earthly ministry. It is important to keep in mind that He did not become the Son of God through the Incarnation, but that He has eternally been the Son of God.

a. “The Kenosis” (self limitation or emptying), Dr. Dennis J. Mock, (Bible Doctrine Survey): Through the incarnation, Jesus as God became real man. But how could God take on humanity and still be God? Philippians. 2:5-11 is the key text. Verse 6: “*Being in very nature God*” (Deity). Verse 7: “*Being made in human likeness*” (humanity). Verses 7: “*Made Himself nothing*” (“emptied Himself”). Verse 8: “*He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*” Christ then:

1. Voluntarily gave up the right to use some divine prerogatives, and His divine position for a time;
2. Condescended to add unglorified humanity to His Deity;
3. Limited the use of some of His divine attributes while a man;
4. Voluntarily depended on the Holy Spirit during His earthly ministry;
5. Sacrificially became God’s Servant.

b. The hypostatic union: The coming together of the divine and human natures of Christ in one person is called the “hypostatic union” (which means to stand together). The early church struggled with this issue. The Council of Nicea, 325, declared that “Christ is the same essence and being as the Father but, distinct in person.” Arius claimed that Christ was not eternal, but a created being. The Council of Chalcedon, 451, declared Christ to be “fully God and fully man inseparably united, but unconfused in one person forever.”

2. His miraculous birth. Truly His birth was unique, being born of a Virgin. Because of His deity, He could not be born of a human father. Had He been born without human parentage, He could have no claim to humanity. The divine plan by which He was generated by the Holy Spirit, but born of a woman, was the perfect solution to this problem. He was the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Judah, and the heir to David’s throne.

Jesus: His Works

1. **His sinless _____ and miraculous _____ validate His claims.**
2. **His sacrificial and substitutionary _____ on the cross fully atoned for our sins.** No event in time or eternity compares with the transcending importance of the death of Jesus Christ. The cross of Christ supremely revealed the holiness, righteousness, and love of God. On the cross Jesus Christ bore our sins in His body, paid our penalty and became sin in our place that we might be redeemed, forgiven, and brought back into right relationship to God.
3. **His bodily _____.** The bodily resurrection is the unique element of Christianity which separates it from all other religions and is the core of the gospel message. After being crucified, Christ was buried and on the third day bodily rose from the grave never to die again. In doing so, He conquered death and sin so that those who believe in Him might also live. The reality of Christ's resurrection is one of the best attested historical events of all time.
4. **His _____ and present ministry in Heaven.** Christ is now in Heaven, seated at God's right hand having resumed His pre-incarnate position of preeminence and power. He intercedes for the saints, protects the salvation of believers, gives help through the Holy Spirit, is Head of the Church, is preparing the Church to be His bride, gives spiritual gifts to the Church, empowers believers for service, sympathizes with their struggles, and gives them everything they need for life and godliness.
5. **His _____ ministry.** Christ will one day return for His Church, resurrect our bodies to conform to His body of glory, transform living believers, conduct the Judgment Seat of Christ giving rewards to believers, return to earth at His second coming to defeat His enemies and establish His Kingdom, cast Satan into the Lake of Fire, sit upon the Great White Throne in judgment upon unbelievers, and then reign eternally as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

EXERCISE

1. What did you find most challenging or enlightening from these two teachings?

2. In Brent Knox's teaching on leadership in the church, he emphasized five core values on leadership. How well do you think these values are lived out in your local church? Please explain.

3. Have you taken the Elder Qualifications Test? If so, what character area would you like to see God develop more strongly in your life? On a practical basis, how do you envision that character quality developing?

4. What do you understand the term “*emptied Himself*” (Philippians 2:7) to mean? Was Jesus still God after He emptied Himself? While on earth, did Jesus still have all the power and attributes of God?

5. What aspect of the identity and works of Jesus Christ do you find most challenged today by those in our society?

STYLES OF LEADERSHIP

INTRODUCTION

In the GCLI teachings, the focus was on the character qualities that all church leaders are to have. In this reading, there is recognition of the various leadership styles that exist among different leaders.

*Styles of Leadership:
What Does A Leader Look Like?*
Pastor Tim Haring, Morgantown, WV



For most of us, a particular image comes to mind when we think of the word “leader.” Perhaps we envision someone who is confident and has a charismatic or outgoing personality. Or perhaps we think of someone who has a clear vision and an ability to rally people around that vision. Some people just seem to be natural leaders.

From a biblical perspective, of course, we realize that the godly character qualities found in 1 Timothy and Titus are God’s true requirements for leadership within the church, but still, some people just seem to be “wired” to lead. They are what I would call “leader types.” What if we don’t possess the personality or gifting or skill set that most people associate with leadership? Can we still be strong leaders?

For most of my life, I have not viewed myself as being much of a leader, despite the fact that I have been co-leading a growing congregation for over 20 years and have been instrumental in planting other churches. I have even coached other leaders in how to be better leaders, but, because I do not possess the personality many associate with leadership, and I am not naturally visionary, I have had trouble viewing myself as a leader. I am not like many of the strong leaders I read about in Scripture.

David, for example, was a mighty warrior. I admire David for his strong leadership abilities. He was a natural at rallying people to his cause, and he led confidently as Israel’s most beloved king. Nehemiah is another example of a gifted and strong leader. He led the remnant of Israel to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, despite the challenges and opposition the people faced. The Apostle Paul is a New Testament example of someone who was obviously “wired” to lead. Even before Paul met Christ, he was a leader among leaders in Israel.

But I am not David or Nehemiah or Paul. Is it possible for someone with my personality and laid-back style to lead boldly and confidently? The obvious answer is yes.

I would like to make three observations that should be encouraging to those who do not view themselves as “leader types.”

Three Observations

First, in the Gospels, Jesus deliberately challenged the conventional view of leadership when he said to his disciples:

“The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead,

“Leadership is the capacity and will to rally men and women to a common purpose, and the character which inspires confidence.”
- *Field-Marshal Montgomery*

Church Leadership/The Doctrine of Jesus Christ

Styles of Leadership:

What Does a Leader Look Like?

“Elders are to be servant leaders, not rulers or dictators.”
- *Alexander Strauch*

the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves” (Luke 22:25b-26).

In these verses, Jesus was presenting a different paradigm on leadership. Worldly leaders in Jesus’ day exercised authority for their own personal benefit, but leaders in Christ’s Kingdom were to practice servant leadership. What I would like to emphasize is this: Jesus’ new approach to leadership does not require the same qualifications that might be helpful under secular authoritarian leadership.

Christ’s only requirement for his disciples was that they be willing to serve and to lay down their lives for others. This approach to leadership opens up the door of opportunity for those who may not naturally be “leader types.” The Apostle Peter understood this. He was a strong leader, and yet when he wrote about godly leadership, he emphasized that shepherds of God’s people are not to “lord it over those entrusted to their care,” but are to “prove to be examples to the flock.” They are to serve, not for personal gain, but for the Lord. This approach to leadership opens the door for many to serve as leaders who might not naturally be gifted as leaders.

A second observation I would like to make about biblical leadership relates the examples of leaders found in the Bible. I mentioned earlier that leaders such as David, Nehemiah, and Paul inspire me, but I cannot overlook the fact that many of those God chose to lead his people in both the Old and New Testaments were not natural leaders. Leaders in the Bible came in all shapes and sizes, and I am encouraged by that fact.

Gideon, for example, was fearful and uncertain as a leader. He viewed himself as the least in his family line. When God commanded him to lead the Israelites in battle, his perspective was, “Who me?” Three times, he asked God for a miraculous sign to confirm his “calling.” God indulged his requests and brought about a great victory through him, despite his hesitancy to lead. Sometimes the best leaders are reluctant leaders.

Another example was Moses. Moses was a reluctant leader. He didn’t want the job of leading the Israelites out of Egypt. He argued with God over his lack of ability to lead the people, “I am slow of speech; I can’t do it.” Yet, God used Moses in a great way. Moses was most known for his humility, not his strong leadership abilities. In fact, Moses’ father-in-law, Jethro, probably had more natural leadership abilities than Moses did! Jethro was the guy who came up with the great leadership principle of delegating the work to others. Moses did not fit the profile of what we might expect of a leader, and that’s why I am encouraged by his example.

In the New Testament, Timothy is an example of someone who was not a natural leader. Paul always had to challenge him against being timid or allowing others to look down on his youthfulness. Though it is speculative on my part, I believe that Timothy’s frequent stomach aches were a result of his response to the leadership challenges he faced. Paul told him, “Take a little wine for your stomach.”

Timothy was not like Paul. He was not a natural leader, and yet God used him to carry on the work begun by Paul

Even among the Apostles, different personalities and leadership styles were at work. Some were naturally strong leaders, such as Peter. Peter was a “take charge kind” of guy. The very qualities that made him a natural leader were also the qualities that got him in so much trouble! But John, on the other hand, was a different kind of leader. Both John’s Gospel and his Epistles reveal that John was a gentle leader, who was probably not known for his charismatic personality or visionary leadership style, but for his love. Leaders come in all shapes and sizes. God can use a variety of people with various personalities, gifts, and experiences to lead his people. I am grateful for that.

The last observation I would like to make relates to the list of qualifications for elders and deacons found in 1 Timothy and Titus. Those qualifications are not only character-based, as I mentioned earlier, but they seem to emphasize the consistency of a person’s spiritual walk, rather than personality or giftedness. Not one of the qualities mentioned in 1 Timothy 3 or Titus corresponds with the image we usually have when we think of what a leader should look like. In fact, just the opposite seems to be the case. God’s leaders are to reflect temperance, self-control, gentleness, etc. They are not to be overbearing. Ironically, strong “leader types” might have more difficulty being qualified under these requirements.

And so, when I consider what biblical leadership looks like, I am encouraged. I see the picture that Jesus paints of servant leadership; I see the example of leaders in the Bible who were unlikely candidates for leadership; and I see the emphasis on consistency in character rather than personality, self-confidence, or vision. I realize that God can use someone like me, despite the fact that I am not a “leader type.”

“A true and safe leader is likely to be one who has no desire to lead but is forced into a position of leadership by the inward pressure of the Holy Spirit and the press of the external situation.”

- *A. W. Tozer*

“A leader is a man who knows the road, who can keep ahead, and who pulls others after him.”

- John R. Mott

Styles of Leadership:

The Visionary/Directing Leader

Pastor Doug Brown, Lee's Summit, MO



The first order of business for a leader is to lead. Since this is a must, it is imperative that the leader knows where he or she is going—this is VISION. Secondly, the vision needs to be meaningfully communicated—this is CASTING THE VISION. This needs to be done intentionally, frequently, and in meaningful ways. Meaningful communication is relevant and pertinent. It moves the people so that they are motivated to take action.

Followers also have a need to trust the leader—this is INTEGRITY. Integrity is being the same in public as in private. Martin Luther King Jr. expressed in his famous “I Have a Dream” speech that people should not be judged on the color of their skin, but by their character. He was right. Leaders need to come to the place where they understand their strengths and weaknesses so they can build a team of players around them to complement their leadership style—this is HUMILITY.

VISION: “Poor eyes limit your eyesight, but poor vision limits your deeds” (Unknown). I am reminded of the story of a business man who was walking by a construction site and stopped to ask one of the workers what he was doing. The construction worker responded, “I am laying bricks.” The business man continued to walk and asked a second worker what he was building. The second said, “I am building a wall.” He came to a third brick layer and inquired what the man was doing. The third man responded by saying, “I am building a great cathedral!” Now, that is vision!

Without vision:

Noah would have never spent 100 years of his life building a boat.

Abraham would have never left his family and traveled 1500 miles to an unknown destination.

Joseph would have never endured 13 years of slavery and prison.

Moses would have never led the Israelites out of Egypt.

Joshua would have never crossed the Jordan River and faced the Canaanite nations.

Nehemiah would have never rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem.

Paul would have never finished the course.

“Centered in any great leader’s soul is a sense of a transcendent purpose” (Leighton Ford, *Transforming Leadership*, pg. 53). Visionary/directing leaders have a sense that God is doing a work that is greater than themselves. They are not content to just add another brick day after day. It is the leader who steps out of the “comfort zone,” gets “out of the box” and is the first to take “the step of faith.” “The Directing leader (DL) is the visionary force in the ministry, constantly reminding people of the unique calling God has given them as an entity, and motivating people to deepen their commitment to that vision” (George Barna, *The Second Coming of The Church*, pg. 114).

Nehemiah exemplifies this quality for me. He became aware of the reality of the situation: “the wall of Jerusalem is broken down” (Neh. 1:3). The walls of Jerusalem had been broken down for nearly 90 years and no one did anything about it. “The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. The last is to say thank you. In between the two, the leader must become a servant and a debtor. That sums up the progress of an artful leader” (Max DePree, *Leadership is an Art*, pg. 9). Nehemiah was moved. He took the next four months fasting, praying, crying before the Lord asking Him what could be done about the need to restore the honor and glory of God by rebuilding Jerusalem. After this period of seeking God, God put into Nehemiah’s mind what He wanted him to do (Neh. 2:12).

The first lesson we learn: vision comes from God. Vision is cultivated by spending time with the Visionary. The Scriptures teach us to wait on the Lord. As you see a need and begin to wait on the Lord ask Him to send out His light and His truth that they would lead you (Psalm 43:3).

CASTING VISION: “For if the bugle produces an indistinct sound, who will prepare himself for battle” (1 Corinthians 14:8). Nehemiah assessed the situation. God gave him a vision, which at the proper time He communicated to leading Jews living in Jerusalem. Nehemiah defined vision of rebuilding the wall and why they should commit to the task (Neh. 2:17). He inspired them. He gave them a cause worth living for. He cast the vision to them and gave them ownership and personal responsibility for it.

The people rallied to rebuild the wall because someone finally came and gave a clarion call to build something great. He gave them the reason why they needed to get involved—“that we may no longer be a reproach.” He shared the story of how God had worked it out with King Artaxerxes and how God had provided the necessary resources. Nehemiah called out, “Let us arise and build!”

A visionary/directing leader needs to give clear and meaningful communication to the people. He or she needs to define for the people a cause which is worth the sacrifice. It must be a cause that the people will personally “buy into.” They need to know why and how this cause benefits them. They also need to know how they can be a part: not just to lay bricks, but to build something great.

INTEGRITY: “Walk the talk.” Nehemiah not only assessed the situation, but he committed himself to the cause. He went before the king and asked permission to go to the city of his fathers. He did this, he says, “that I may rebuild it” (Neh. 2:5). When he approached the Jews in Jerusalem, he stated, “Let us arise and build” (Neh. 2:17). He didn’t ask them to do anything that he himself was not also prepared to do. In fact, Nehemiah was sold out to the cause and sacrificed as well.

We are in the midst of a multi-million dollar building expansion at our church. One of the expectations we have communicated to our people is— “we want you to know that each of your pastors have given sacrificially as well. For we do not want you to think that we are asking you to sacrifice without us giving sacrificially as well.”

“Leadership is not something you do, it’s something you are”

- Leighton Ford

Church Leadership/The Doctrine of Jesus Christ

Styles of Leadership:

The Visionary/Directing Leader

“Power mad leaders leave more battered sheep than we would ever believe. And the special tragedy of that is that battered sheep don’t reproduce.”
- Chuck Swindoll

If people are going to follow they must trust the leadership. Nehemiah won their trust by demonstrating that he was a servant leader, not a positional leader. A servant leader leads by personal example; a positional leader leads by power. Jesus said it best when he said, “But not so among you, but let him who is the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as the servant” (Luke 22:26). For some, leading is the way of serving.

HUMILITY: “The unexamined life is not worth living” (Socrates). Nehemiah exemplifies humility in many ways. He was constantly depending upon the Lord through prayer. Just reading through the Book of Nehemiah with an eye on his prayer life is very instructional for leaders.

He realized he could not do it alone. He enlisted the people to do the work with him. He appointed police, worship leaders, civil leaders, and military leaders. He worked as a team player with others based on their gifts, strengths, and skills (Neh. 7:1-5). Having been a pastor since 1981, I have learned that my gifts and strengths revolve around the big picture, communication, encouraging, and motivating people to action. I have discovered that I am not as adept at following through with details. Being a part of a cause that is bigger than I, and that will have eternal significance, motivates me. I have discovered that I get my energy from people, not from projects; I have more of a creative personality than a detail, fact-driven, reality-focused personality. My life is more spontaneous and flexible than well-planned and organized. This is why I need other leaders surrounding me that are competent in areas that I am not, and are able to turn vision into reality.

THREE COMMON TEMPTATIONS FOR A VISIONARY/DIRECTING LEADER: A major stumbling block for visionary/directing leaders (indeed, for any leader) is pride. Pride says, “Look at me.” “Look at what I can do and have accomplished.” It boasts in self. It does not like playing second fiddle; rather it enjoys being top dog. The Apostle Paul calls pride “empty conceit.” In other words, the one who walks in pride has his feet firmly planted in midair. Jeremiah said, “Are you seeking great things for yourself? Do not seek them” (Jer. 45:5).

The visionary/directing leader can easily get caught up seeking the praise of men instead of seeking the praise of the One. Listed below is a selection of Scriptures which have helped me keep a proper perspective on leadership:

“What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants (*doulos* = servant)” (1 Corinthians 3:5).

“Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants” (*huperetes* = “under-rower”) (1 Corinthians 4:1). Leaders are not the captain of the ship. A leader is under the top deck of a ship as one of the rowers.

“But by the grace of God I am what I am . . .” (1 Corinthians 15:10).

“Not that we are adequate in ourselves . . . our adequacy is from God,” (2 Corinthians 3:5).

Another stumbling block for the visionary/directing leader is discouragement. This can easily happen when there is a death of the vision. All of God's servant leaders have or will experience this.

Nehemiah rose above disillusionment and helped his people overcome discouragement through prayer, reminding the people of the greatness of God and organized them to deal with the challenges they faced. Nehemiah, being a wise visionary/directing leader, turned an obstacle into an opportunity for the people to "see" God. "What is the difference between an obstacle and an opportunity? Our attitude toward it. Every opportunity has a difficulty and every difficulty has an opportunity"(J. Sidlow Baxter).

It is also tempting for the visionary/directing leader to value the "dream" more than the people. The wise leader will keep in mind that the dream is people. Jesus said, "I will build My Church (people) and the gates of Hades will not overpower it" (Matt 16:18).

We are not here just to rebuild a wall or build a great cathedral. God has set us apart for us to rebuild people. This is the message, "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27).

"I'm not a genius,
just a plodder."
- William Carey,
who translated
the Bible into 34
languages

“The secret to caring for sheep is love. A good shepherd loves sheep and loves to be with them (2 Samuel 12:3). The best elders, likewise, are those who love people, love to be with them, and are fervently involved with them.”

- Alexander Strauch

Styles of Leadership: *Team Building Leadership*

Pastor Matt Gordon, Gainesville, FL



People want responsibility. They want to be a part of something bigger than themselves. They want to use their strengths and know that they are vital contributors. They want input and help along the way, but not overbearing control in their lives. They need vision for what they can accomplish. These are my presuppositions on the nature of most everyone I work with, and this is why I approach leadership as a team builder.

The M-team structure our church has incorporated complements a team building style of leadership. This structure is explained in detail in *The Purpose Driven Church* by Rick Warren. We have broken down the structure of the church into six categories: Membership, Maturity, Ministry, Missions, Magnify, and Management. Each M-team has a team leader whom I coach. The role I play as a coach is to establish the level of management with the leader, empower them with clearly communicated responsibility, and come alongside them to help them accomplish the full scope of their responsibility.

I used to feel the need to be in the know on everything going on within the church so I could do or delegate the tasks at hand. A significant portion of our leaders' meetings would involve finding volunteers for upcoming events. Now, as the M-team coach, my primary role is to help make my M-team leaders successful. It has been exciting to see these leaders take ownership of their team and scope of responsibility within the church. Our M-team leader meetings consist of updates from each M-team leader and suggestions for one another on how to be most effective in their predetermined responsibilities. To me, this is a major paradigm shift that has allowed our church to be structured for growth.

As a team building leader, I am developing a greater understanding of my coaching role. My players, the M-team leaders, are growing in motivation and ownership for their area of responsibility. I have found, though, that one of the greatest challenges to team building is developing and maintaining a team spirit. Just as in the game of basketball, you can have some impressive players who can slam dunk, dribble and shoot free-throws like all get out, but if they aren't working together smoothly and selflessly they might as well hang up their high tops. According to Rick Warren, a healthy church is one that is functioning well in all of the M-teams. So, our M-team leaders are encouraged to regard other M-team leaders as more important than themselves and not to merely look out for their own team's interest, but also for the interests of other teams (Philippians 2:3-4). To build this team unity and humility, we have had to work hard at having each M-team leader regularly communicate their plans with the other leaders and submit these plans for input from the other leaders. We have also seen the need to carve out time for the M-team leaders to get to know each other through planned interactive "hang out" times together.

Another arena of church responsibility that team building has had a very positive impact on, is in the area of teaching (preaching). As the only elder in our church, I feel that teaching is a major responsibility of mine, but I do not feel teaching is a gift for me. So, after getting counsel from Jeff Kern, I decided to take a team approach to teaching. For example, for our Sunday service this past semester three of our core leaders taught once each, and I alternated the remaining Sundays with a core leader who is gifted and experienced in teaching.

I stay involved weekly with the teaching by helping the younger teachers with their preparation and providing constructive critique afterward. I believe God is taking this need and developing it into a strength in our church, as the saints are enjoying a variety of teachers and new teachers are being raised up.

I believe King David was a team building leader. He was a master at surrounding himself with men of great strength, courage, and loyalty. They were not afraid to voice their opinions, and many had what could be classified as strong personalities. But David did not shrink back from recruiting them to his team. This team consisted of his “mighty men” along with noted leaders like Joab, Abner, and Amasa. An observation of David’s working relationship with Joab reveals both the strengths and potential pitfalls of team building.

It was a very critical time in the history of Israel when David was establishing his rule over all of Israel following Saul’s death. Abner, the commander of Saul’s army, made Ish-bosheth, Saul’s son, king over Israel. Only the house of Judah followed David. David’s army, under the command of Joab, was at war against Saul’s army, which meant Joab and Abner were not the closest of friends. Because of a major disagreement between Abner and Ish-bosheth, Abner switched sides and pledged his allegiance to David. This is one of many instances listed where David wisely took a strong personality, even one who had been in opposition to him, and added him to the team. The alliance would bring the two factions of Israel together under David’s rule.

David’s strategy had one fatal flaw; he did not envision the rest of the team on the value of adding a teammate, nor did he spend time and effort committing the team to unity. Joab comes back from battle to find that his arch enemy has been added to the team. This disgruntled commander takes matters into his own hands as he takes Abner aside and murders him.

David’s response to Joab’s action is a masterful mark of a team builder. He had Joab and the men close to him take part in mourning at Abner’s funeral. David takes the lead in mourning over the wrong that has been committed. The people saw from David’s actions that he was a king without deceit whom they could trust. *“So all the people and all Israel understood that day that it had not been the will of the king to put Abner the son of Ner to death”* (2 Samuel 3:37).

The preventive measure of unity building is crucial for the team. But spiritual assassinations within the team are going to happen especially when there are

“Leadership: The art of getting someone else to do something you want done because they want to do it.”

- Dwight D.
Eisenhower

Church Leadership/The Doctrine of Jesus Christ

Styles of Leadership:

Team Building Leadership

“Of a good leader,
who talks little,
when his work
is done, his aim
fulfilled, they will
say, “We did this
ourselves.””

- *Lao-tse* (c. 604–c.
531 B.C.)

strong personalities involved. When they do, the team builder uses it as a learning opportunity for those involved, as he leads the team in humbly confronting the situation.

I can relate to David as a team builder, especially in his areas of weakness. The Lord continues to gently remind me that He has blessed me with a great team of leaders whom He has uniquely put in our church. My job is to humbly get out of the way in areas that others are more gifted and available to tackle, and empower them to be a valuable part of our team.

Styles of Leadership: Strategic Leadership

Pastor John Hopler, Columbus, OH



I love to strategize! I love to figure out a game plan which will enable my team to “win the battle.” Here are five practical steps I have taken as a strategic leader when making plans for advancing the Lord’s Kingdom.

1. **Prayer.** Wisdom comes from God (James 1:5). When we as leaders need to know the next step, the first thing to do is to seek God in prayer. I have found that there are two types of prayer that are necessary for the strategic leader. First, there is the ongoing prayer throughout the days, weeks, and months where the leader is calling on God to supply grace to the situations facing him. For me, I have a habit of regularly praying through the Great Commission Prayer Partners card, praying for each church and ministry. During those prayer times, God has often put into my mind an idea that would strategically advance either that church or my ministry as a whole. Second, there is the seeking of God when there is a need for understanding the next major strategic move for your life. In 1987, I recall devoting much time in prayer before making the move from Washington D.C. to Columbus, Ohio. During those prayer times, God gave me clarity as to what I should do. And He has confirmed His direction through the fruit that came, not only in the many churches that have been started in Columbus, but also in the churches that were started in other regions throughout the country.
2. **Counsel.** When faced with the threat of death, Daniel not only sought the Lord in prayer, but he also made the need known to his companions (Daniel 2:17-18). The strategic leader understands that God gives wisdom through His Church, His people. Counsel from my wife, fellow elders, fellow leaders, godly leaders outside of the church, core people in the church, and from non-believers to whom we are ministering—all of this is crucial in order for a wise strategy to be developed. When Chris Phillips came on staff in 1998 with the community ministry team, the first thing he did was a survey of the pastors. Their opinions and counsel were invaluable for helping us devise a strategic plan for the ministry. Through the process of obtaining counsel, the strategic leader can more intelligently establish a ministry plan that “hits the mark.”
3. **Learn from the past.** The strategic leader will learn from the past to understand God’s plan for the future. A good question to ask is: What have we learned from the past that we should avoid? Also, what was God blessing in the past that we need to continue? For example, in 1987, as an association of churches, we saw that our roots were on college campuses. Therefore, we decided to do a fund drive to financially support campus workers, who, up until then, were ministering as volunteers. Two years later, we decided to establish GCM as an organization that would help campus staff raise financial support. Those strategic moves were made because we saw how God had blessed our campus ministry since 1970, and we

“A leader is great, not because of his or her power, but because of his or her ability to empower others.”
- *John Maxwell*

Church Leadership/The Doctrine of Jesus Christ

Styles of Leadership:

Strategic Leadership

“A leader is one who sees more than others see, who sees farther than others see, and who sees before others do.”

- Leroy Eims

understood that what was impeding that ministry was a lack of finances. A look back enabled us to look forward with more clarity.

4. Learn from knowing the facts. Someone once said, “If you know all the facts, then the decision is easy.” A strategic leader will devote time gathering data and statistics because he realizes that this information will give him a clue to how to proceed in the future. For example, it became obvious several years ago that in the Great Commission Churches, year by year, the number of teens was growing rapidly. Most of the churches were led by young pastors whose members also had young children. Those young children were growing to be young teens who were in need of a strong teen ministry, both locally and nationally. For this reason, we decided in GCC to allocate manpower and resources to the establishing of a teen ministry (High School LT, Student Intern Program). The point is: understanding the facts make strategic planning simple.
5. Be committed to a strategic process. The strategic leader is devoted to logically and step by step working through a reasonable process for determining the best strategic plan to take. What has helped me is the model that Jeff Kern developed several years ago in his workbook *How to Lead, Manage, and Reproduce the Local Church*. From this book, I have used these steps in my planning:
 - _Develop biblical convictions (Statement of Faith)
 - _Establish core values as a ministry
 - _Clarify vision, mission, and goals for the ministry
 - _Identify to whom to minister
 - _Develop a strategy for accomplishing the goals
 - _Develop a system for accomplishing the goals
 - _Establish a schedule for accomplishing the goals
 - _Identify staff for accomplishing the goals
 - _Clarify structures for accomplishing the goals
 - _Evaluate and make adjustments of all of the above

Each year I, with my staff, review the plan above and apply it to the situations and challenges of that next year. In this process the order is critical. For example, unless we are clear on the core values, it would be unwise to develop systems and strategies. By way of illustration, when we developed the GCLI program in 1999, we knew that it had to be consistent with the core values of GCC. One core value is that leaders be raised up within the local church. Therefore, we made the strategic decision to have most of the GCLI program’s activities occur within the local church (such as mentoring and small group discussion sessions.) This regimen above has been like a “mathematical formula” to help me strategically chart out the next step for the ministry.

Having said this, though, it should be emphasized that there is more to strategic planning than “working through a formula.” For this reason, I would urge you to look again at the first principle: prayer. God has a way of working outside of the “strategy guidelines” that we have established. God oftentimes does the unexpected

when leading us in His strategy sessions. I am certain that the Apostles would have found Philip's pursuing the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8) as an unwise initiative that was inconsistent with the conventional wisdom and strategy of preaching in towns and villages where there were more people. Yet the Holy Spirit led Philip to the Ethiopian and he got saved; leading, most likely, to a whole new open door for the gospel in a new country. My point is this: *strategic planning is not only a science—it is an art.* The Holy Spirit is the great Artist who moves us into those arenas which—at the time—seem like fruitless endeavors. But in the long run, we see the strategic wisdom of such moves, as God had plans beyond that which our feeble minds were able to understand. Many moves I have made in ministry—looking back—did not seem very wise by man's standards. But having 20-20 vision in hindsight, I see how the Holy Spirit did move in a marvelous way to lead to great fruit overall. After all, He is the great Strategic Planner!

In conclusion, it is my hope that every church would have at least one strategic leader as part of the leadership team. If there is not an elder with this gifting, I would urge that help be obtained from mature leaders in the church and from regional and national leaders. God's Church deserves to be led with wisdom and careful forethought—so that more and people will come to Jesus Christ and grow to maturity in Him.

“Plans are only good intentions unless they immediately degenerate into hard work.”
- Peter Drucker

“The minister should voluntarily impose upon himself a life of labor as arduous as that of a farmer, a serious student or a scientist. No man has any right to a way of life less rugged than that of the workers who support him. No preacher has any right to die of old age if hard work will kill him.”

- A.W. Tozer

Styles of Leadership: *Operational Leadership*

Pastor Mark Bowen, Bloomington, MN



1. How do you sharpen the saw to be more effective in your leadership style?

- ***Push myself to believe God for bigger things.*** BHAGs (as in “*Big, Hairy, Audacious Goals*”) for the future demand the very best from us. They are an enduring inoculation against complacency and stagnation (which, incidentally, scare me *even more* than the BHAGs do). Ferocious pursuit of God for ‘the ends of the earth’—including the corner I live in at the moment—brings the supernatural blessing of God and forces personal growth. I am sobered by this curious fact about entrepreneurial faith; in addition to being essential to progress, it is also indispensable to the maintenance of what has already been gained (Luke 8:18). My destiny is to keep my hand to the plow—believing God for the current field we are working and the ones we will be working in the future—while refusing to look back on how I might have spent my life’s energy on myself.
- ***Stay brutally honest about outcomes.*** Constantly monitoring objective critical success indicators helps us to answer the question of whether the systematic approaches that have enabled us to meet our goals in the past are still helping us meet our goals in the present. If yesterday’s “sacred cow” isn’t productive today, perhaps it is time to slaughter that bad boy and move on.
- ***Walk with wise men.*** Great systematic leaders are forever improvising and improving on yesterday’s methods. They are relentless, restless learners. The cross-pollinating effect of sitting at their feet at strategic conferences, as well as through other venues, is a great time saver and idea generator.

2. What practical steps do you take to gain followers according to your style?

Before a system can be confidently implemented on a broad scale, prudence requires that it demonstrate credibility. Most veterans of ministry have learned (many the hard way) to view “the latest and greatest (*fill in the blank*) ministry method” with a healthy (sometimes cynical) caution. Examples abound where well intentioned, but ill-advised mimicking of methods has left followers with disappointed, frustrated (*read: sick*) hearts as hopes and dreams of greater fruitfulness are deferred due to leaders prematurely jumping on (or broadly ‘pumping up’) a new ministry bandwagon. The thorough measuring of a method for compatibility with strategic goals, coupled with a trial application of the new tool wherever possible, protects against unintentionally undermining our leadership credibility.

By 1990, the veterans of small group ministry at Evergreen had been imprinted with the goal of growing productive and reproductive small groups. The growth of our small groups, however, lagged behind the more rapid growth of our congregation at large. Thanks to Brent Knox and Mark Darling, we had settled on a systematic approach to reaching people for Christ, but we were still

experimenting with a variety of methods for incorporating new attendees into our church family.

The initial step for gaining momentum for a single paradigm of small group ministry at Evergreen was to establish a visible track record of effectiveness. While we were still in the experimenting stage, Ken Johnson and I attended a Lyman Coleman Serendipity Small Group Seminar (at Brent Knox' suggestion).

Soon, I began leading a small group at Evergreen using the Serendipity approach. My foremost goal was to foster excellent fellowship and meaningful prayer in one small group setting—*mine*. I wanted to establish a small community where our relationships with God and each other would thrive. The first year leading the small group in this organized way was mostly devoted to working out the bugs, as this model was adapted to our unique locale. I was not aiming beyond personal fruitfulness at the time, but later it became clear that the practical authority for me to export a plan to achieve small group goals on a broad scale hinged largely on a foundation of personal success. This was especially true as I was not a recognized pastor at the time, and consequently had no positional authority to exercise.

The second, and more crucial step for gaining credibility for a systematic approach to small group ministry, was to reproduce the positive effects of one small group in second and third generation groups, each one led by a different (and differently gifted) leader than that of the first generation group. This began to happen when, at the end of the second year, four small groups birthed from the two that my wife, Judi, and I had been leading together. At that time, we made the transition from small group leading to coaching.

Each successive year since has been marked by refinements, additions, and deletions in the organized, purposeful way we go about doing small groups at Evergreen. Many wonderful leaders have contributed significantly to the plan. We have attempted to capture all that we are learning in a comprehensive *Small Group Leader's Orientation Manual*, which has had many revisions. No doubt there will be many more changes in the future.

3. What motivates you to excel as a leader in your particular style?

I am motivated in “systems” leading by the wonderful prospect of enabling broad progress toward kingdom goals by moving beyond the indispensable foundation of IDENTIFYING THE GOAL to describe in helpful and practical detail HOW TO DO IT. If the zenith of my achievement is only personal fruitfulness, then my impact in the Kingdom of God will be minimal compared to the effect of the reproductive leader. Jesus' shocking statement in John 14:12 (NIV) always challenges and refocuses me: *“I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than*

“Keeping one hand on the plow while wiping away tears with the other, that is Christianity”
- *Watchman Nee*

Church Leadership/The Doctrine of Jesus Christ

Styles of Leadership:

Operational Leadership

“No one deserves the right to lead without first persevering through pain and heartache and failure.”
- Charles R. Swindoll

these, because I am going to the Father.” Jesus was the most productive leader of all time. As fabulous and unprecedented as His immediate, personal impact was, Jesus’ reproductive impact proved far greater at the end of the day. The inescapable conclusion is that reproduction is paramount, and the reality is that systems enable reproduction.

My second objective in “systems” leading is survival. Perhaps you think I jest. *I could not be more serious.* Once upon a time, I dreamed of becoming personally fruitful. In my naïve scenario, being fruitful was beautiful, fluid, manageable, and glorious. The reality has proven different. Bearing fruit for Christ is full of hardship, irregular progress, overwhelming demands, and ugly setbacks. In fact, it can quickly become a personal (not to mention familial) nightmare unless we wisely enroll and empower many others in helping to fulfill the dream. I think this is part of what Jesus was alluding to when he said: “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest (Luke 10:2). As God is faithful to send laborers, I *must* be ready to incorporate His workers into a proactive plan that maximizes their kingdom impact. Otherwise, I should not be surprised if God leads them elsewhere to advance His Kingdom.

4. What Bible examples inspire you in your personal leadership style?

My favorite operational leader in the Bible is Moses. I love what God does with and through his life. He starts with uncommon promise and soon fails miserably in self-effort. After 40 years in the desert, he is ready to be used by God, although he does not know it.

Against all odds, he leads the Jews out of Egypt on a pilgrimage to the promised land. Along the way, the demands of his God-given job become overwhelming and unmanageable. He is becoming worn out, and so are the people who depend on him.

“Moses’ father-in-law said to him, ‘The thing that you are doing is not good. You will surely wear out, both yourself and these people who are with you, for the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone. Now listen to me: I shall give you counsel, and God be with you. You be the people’s representative before God, and you bring the disputes to God, then teach them the statutes and the laws, and make known to them the way in which they are to walk, and the work they are to do. Furthermore, you shall select out of all the people able men who fear God, men of truth, those who hate dishonest gain; and you shall place {these} over them, {as} leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens. And let them judge the people at all times; and let it be that every major dispute they will bring to you, but every minor dispute they themselves will judge. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear {the burden} with you. If you do this thing and God {so} commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all these people also will go to their place in peace.’”

The solution to the dilemma, offered in Exodus 18:17-23, involves the implementation of *a system* in order to provide for a great people and to protect a great leader.

5. What temptations and obstacles do you have to deal with in order to be an effective leader in your style?

When you believe in the value of methods, it can be difficult not to place the method before the mission. The greatest temptation I've faced in systematic leadership is that of becoming rigidly devoted to the system in place, and thereby counter-productive to the continued advancement of God's Kingdom. I have to constantly remind myself that I am married to a loving God and living out the great commission, not to a specific method of fulfilling both. When conditions change and a particular method becomes dated and ineffective (as they invariably do), I know I must be willing to change methods and adapt the system—or scrap it altogether—no matter how much I have historically or personally invested in the old or existing system. *I have found this is much easier to say than to do.* One benchmark for keeping me honest about whether or not I am remaining wisely open to change has been my receptivity (or lack of it) to allowing entrepreneurial testing of new systems or approaches under my watch.

Several years ago, Mark Davis, a small group leader at Evergreen, approached me with a plan for building a stronger base of support and recovery small groups at Evergreen—the types of groups that are devoted in Christ's name to helping people face and overcome life controlling issues. Mark's plan called for the recruitment of a new batch of leaders who would be devoted to this area of ministry, as well as a new training and coaching track that would be established specifically for them. I liked the goal, but the plan included steps that were a departure from what I considered to be “tried and true.” I said “No.”

Not easily put off, Mark wisely and boldly asked me for the chance to appeal: would I please put this matter before the pastoral team as a whole? If the consensus were that his plan was worth trying, he would proceed; if not, he would submit and take the “No” as from the Lord.

Thankfully, the other pastors were less emotionally invested in the existing system than I was, and more open to innovation.

In the years since Mark was given the green light, the growth rate of support and recovery groups at Evergreen has overtaken and surpassed that of the “mainstream” small groups. Praise God for entrepreneurial “systems” leaders!

“Here lies a man who knew how to enlist the service of better men than himself.”
- *Words on Andrew Carnegie's tombstone*

EXERCISE

1. What was the main lesson you learned from this reading?

2. Of these leadership styles, which one is your strongest? How can you develop more in this style?

3. Of these leadership styles, which is your weakest? What can you do in your ministry in the church to compensate for this weakness?

4. Of the leadership styles, which type of leader would you find yourself having the most difficult time being with? How can you deal with this difficulty in a way that brings harmony in the church?

5. Looking at the leadership team in the church presently, which style is evident and which (if any) is not? If there is a lack in any of the leadership styles, what can be done to help the leadership team of the church?

ELDERS AND LEADING THE LOCAL CHURCH

INTRODUCTION

In working with churches throughout the United States, I (John Hopley) have been asked many questions on how the church is to be led. How is it to be managed? How are decisions to be made? This article was written with these questions in mind. My hope is that upon reading this article, you will have a better grasp of how to lead, govern, and manage the local church.

Elders and Leading the Local Church

Pastor John Hopler, Columbus, OH



GENERAL BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES

What does the Bible say are the key principles for leading the local church?

In answering this question, I would begin with the book of 1st Timothy. In this letter, Paul says that his purpose for writing to Timothy is that he would “*know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth*” (1 Timothy 3:15). Rich insights can be gained through the diligent studying of this letter to know how to best lead the local church.

In the six chapters, I noticed six key principles of leading the church. They are:

- *Chapter 1:* Good leaders will make sure that the vision and message of the church is clearly communicated. Paul was exhorting Timothy in this chapter to silence the legalists and to establish clearly the message of grace through Jesus Christ.
- *Chapter 2:* Good leaders will be dependent on God in prayer: “*Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it*” (Psalm 127:1). Paul urged Timothy to make sure that the church was a church of prayer, because he realized that the church that is led by God would be a healthy and growing church.
- *Chapter 3:* Good leaders will govern by selecting qualified leaders and entrusting them with ministry responsibilities. In chapter three, Paul gives clear qualifications for elders and deacons who are to lead in the church.
- *Chapter 4:* Effective leaders will be teaching the Scriptures. Paul tells Timothy to “give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, and teaching” (4:13). The more the Word of God is studied, obeyed, and taught, the more effective will be the ministry in the church.
- *Chapter 5:* Effective church leaders will be overseeing the day-to-day ministries in the church. Paul devotes much attention in this chapter to the practical “nuts and bolts” of the church’s ministry to widows.
- *Chapter 6:* Good leaders will give attention to money matters. In this chapter as in chapter five, Paul focuses on the practical issues of money (including helping the widows and compensating pastors). He also urges Timothy to have a godly attitude towards money and to motivate the rich to be generous with their funds for the Lord’s sake.

In summation, we see that Paul covers these six areas in 1 Timothy:

1. Vision-casting
2. Prayer
3. Governance
4. Teaching

“True elders do not command the consciences of their brethren, but appeal to their brethren to faithfully follow God’s Word.”
- Alexander Strauch

Church Leadership/The Doctrine of Jesus Christ

Elders and Leading the Local Church

“When I am gone, say nothing about Dr. Carey; speak about Dr. Carey’s Saviour.”

- *William Carey*

5. Managing ministries

6. Financial management and fund raising

A few observations about this list above:

- The list seems to be comprehensive as to the key activities to which a spiritual leader is to be devoted.
- The order in which the above “job activities” are given is significant. For example, governance without first clearly setting the vision would be unwise. Or overseeing the financial aspects of the church without first being a church of prayer would lead to ineffective ministry.
- Finally, because these activities are emphasized in the Scriptures, we can have confidence that if a church leader is giving himself to excelling in these activities, the church will most certainly be well-led.

PLURALITY OF ELDERS

1. What does the Bible say about the structure of a church?

Throughout the New Testament the clear example is that the church is led by a plurality of elders (Acts 14:23; 20:17, 28; Philippians 1:1; Titus 1:5; 1 Peter 5:5). This is the biblical example. Regardless of our preconceived opinions or our previous experiences as to what would be an effective structure for the church, God’s Word establishes the strong model for a plurality of elders. Rather than one man being entrusted with overseeing the local church, the example throughout the New Testament is that of a group of men being entrusted with the care of the local church.

One time at a “Church Growth” conference, I heard a speaker being asked his opinion about a church being led by a plurality of elders. He responded that although he saw this principle in the Scriptures, he knew of no example where it “worked.” My experience has been that not only has a plurality of elders “worked,” it is the most effective way to lead the local church (assuming that other biblical principles are also followed, as we shall see later).

While it is true that there is no command that a church be led by a plurality of elders, nonetheless it would be inappropriate to argue that “anything goes” as to church management. Certainly there may be situations in which a plurality is not possible (for example in a new church that has just been planted). However, it would seem from the Scriptures that the ideal is that each church would eventually be led by a group of biblically qualified elders.

2. Why is a plurality of elders the most effective management structure?

There are several reasons:

1. Christ being exalted. When a group of men are entrusted with overseeing the church, there is automatically a clear statement being made that Jesus Christ is the real singular leader of the church. No one man is elevated.

Rather, it is a group of men who are serving the Head, Jesus Christ, who is the true Chief Shepherd of the church (1 Peter 5:4). And who can better lead the church than Jesus Christ Himself?

2. Humility. Every elder in a plurality model is not only a leader, but also a follower, in that he is to be under the authority and leadership of the Lord as the Lord leads through the elders. The humility that is modeled by each elder being under authority helps build a spirit of humility in the church which enables the church to be better led.
3. Protection. When a plurality of elders are strongly leading, no one man can take steps that would lead to the ultimate destruction of the church. His weaknesses or moral failings will not be devastating to the continued functioning of the church.
4. Multiplied effects. By having multiple leaders at the highest level of the church, there will be a multiplied gift, ministry, and effect in the church in the maximum way, leading to an overall fruitful and effective church.
5. Smoothness in transitions. Many examples can be cited of churches that sent out elders and teams to plant new churches, and the sending church did not “miss a beat” during the transition. The reason was that the church was not looking to one man, but to a plurality of elders, and that plurality still remained generally intact even though one or two elders left to plant the new church.
6. Inspiration to members to grow to maturity. By having a plurality of elders, the entire congregation (and particularly the men) see that it is a natural phenomenon for members to grow to maturity and to take on responsibility in the church.
7. Modeling the love of Jesus Christ. Perhaps the most significant advantage for the plurality of elders is that the power behind this structure is the love of Christ toward one another. This structure will only “work” if the elders are loving one another. But isn’t this the “product” of every church—love for Jesus Christ and love for one another? And does it not make sense that elders—above all—must be modeling this “product” to those in the church and those in the world? A plurality of elders model in essence “forces” this issue, because it will only work if the men love one another as brothers in Christ.

In regards to this last point, several years ago I asked Mark Bowen, one of the pastors at Evergreen Community Church in Minneapolis this question: Why has Evergreen (a church of over 3000 people) been such a fruitful church? His response was interesting. He did not talk about the church’s advertising program, or its music team, or its small group ministry (although all these are excellent features of the church). Rather Mark said that the foundation for the church was the commitment made by two of its pastors, Mark Darling and Brent Knox, to love one another as co-elders, despite differences in outlooks and personalities. This love for one another, as men working within a plurality of elders, was a model to the entire church, resulting in a very fruitful and effectively managed church. Because this foundation of covenantal love was laid, the elders in Evergreen were able to build on that foundation with the many gifts and effective ministry programs that have resulted in so much fruit.

“The Christian who is ambitious to be a star disqualifies himself as a leader.”
- *David Watson*

Church Leadership/The Doctrine of Jesus Christ

Elders and Leading the Local Church

“To effectively lead you must first learn the fine art of followership.”

- William Bennett

3. How does an elder practically relate to fellow-elders in a plurality?

First, each elder is to practice the “one another” verses towards fellow elders. Elders are to love one another, honor one another, care for one another, and pray for one another.

Second, each elder is to shepherd each other. Paul urged the Ephesian elders to “*Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock...*” (Acts. 20:28). Each elder is to allow himself to be shepherded by the other elders, by being accountable and open with his life, and each elder is to shepherd the other elders, by pursuing them and building them up in the Lord.

Finally, each elder is to be under the authority of the elders and each elder is to assume responsibility as an authority in the church. In this regard, there are two pitfalls to avoid. First, elders who are assuming more of a leadership role in a team of elders can tend to not be subject to the other elders as their authority. Second, elders who are younger oftentimes are too timid to take responsibility for the church, and dangerously so when more experienced elders are taking steps away from what would be for the betterment of the church. Younger elders (and all elders) are authorities, and should function as such; and older elders (and all elders) are under the authority of all the elders. Thus Peter writes:

“You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble” (1 Peter 5:5).

In order for the church to function effectively it is vital that each elder fulfill the God-given responsibility with which he has been entrusted. He is a brother who is to love and be loved. He is a member of the flock and a shepherd to the other elders. He is a learner and follower to the elders, and as an elder he is a leader and authority to the other elders.

4. How can an elder maintain these different perspectives?

In general, this is done by the elder simply being an obedient Christ follower towards his fellow-elder. Simply living out the “one another verses” (including verses dealing with speaking the truth to one another) is the most solid advice I can give. As brothers who are to come to a unity of mind on matters, through humbly listening to one another and by considering the other more important than himself (Philippians 2:3), elders are able to relate to one another in a very free environment as brothers in Christ.

As an elder who is to be subject to all the elders, this will work itself out through whatever management structure is established by those elders (more about this later). If an elder is to be accountable to another elder for his work, then to be accountable to that other elder is in essence to be under the authority of the elders as a whole. On the flip side, at certain instances, the “authority hat” will need to be put on by all elders when general church policies and plans are being proposed. Finally, there are those

occasional instances when a lead elder (or another elder) will need to be “reigned in” (in a spirit of love and grace) by the elders as a whole. When that time comes, it is vital that each elder not shirk his God-given responsibility as a steward of God’s church.

5. As a practical matter, differences of opinion will occur among leaders. How is conflict best resolved between elders?

First, it should be emphasized that most conflict is spiritual or relational in nature. A heart check is the beginning point for all involved in a conflict: “Am I trusting God to fulfill His purposes for me? Am I genuinely considering the other person’s interests above my own? Do I believe that God will bring about a unity if I simply am humble before Him and my fellow leaders?”

Having said this, it is nonetheless true that two leaders can be filled with humility and love and still have totally different convictions on a variety of doctrinal and ministry issues. What happens when two elders have different views on a key issue in the church?

For example, what if an elder has a conviction that there be no drums used in the Sunday service? Suppose further that the other elders do not see this as a valid limitation to be placed on the way ministry should be done in the church. In this situation, I would counsel that if the elders could not come to a unity of mind on this policy, the majority of the elders should determine whether to make this a limitation. If they decide against such a limitation, the other pastors would then have the freedom to do what they believed would best advance the ministry of the church. They might go ahead and use the drums or they might—out of sensitivity to a segment of the church—decide to abstain from the drums voluntarily. If they decided to use the drums, then the dissenting elder would have to decide whether he wanted to submit to this form of ministry or whether his convictions would demand that he minister somewhere else. In many such situations, a new church can be birthed—and this conflict was a means for God directing one of the elders into a new ministry. Or as one person has put it, when a conflict arises in a church, it isn’t always that the church is sick. Sometimes it’s pregnant!

One other point: I would strongly recommend that a representative from GCC (or another third party) be called into situations where there is a significant conflict between elders. Finally, many of these conflicts can be resolved if the church adopts an effective governance model where decision-making is delegated to elders ministering within their spheres of ministry. At the heart of this is the very key issue: Will there be a leading elder/pastor in the church? The next section deals with this very important issue.

“The first order of things to be changed is me, the leader. After I consider how hard it is to change myself, then I will understand the challenge of trying to change others. This is the ultimate test of leadership.”
- *John Maxwell*

“Leadership is a combination of strategy and character. If you must be without one, be without the strategy.”

- Gen. H. Norman Schwarzkoph

MANAGEMENT MODELS

1. Although many churches adhere to the plurality of elders model, it seems like the management of the ministry varies from church to church. What forms of management models have been used in churches which have a plurality of elders?

There are a least five management models used by elder-led churches:

1. *The “Single Pastor” model.* Many churches believe in having a plurality of elders, but for the time being they only have one pastor, who is also on paid staff. This is typical when a church is newly planted. Under this model, the pastor is the authority in the church, subject to a legal board made up of deacons.
2. *The “Lead Pastor/Managing Partner” model.* This is similar to a business partnership where there is a managing partner who coordinates the cooperative working together of the other partners. Each elder has his own sphere of ministry for which he is responsible. The lead pastor not only has his personal sphere of ministry, but also has been delegated the additional responsibility of providing unity and coordination between all the spheres of ministry. Typically under this model, at least the lead pastor is on paid staff. Historically, this has been the model used in GCC churches, particularly in churches where the founding pastor(s) is no longer there.
3. *The “Dual Lead Pastor” model.* This is similar to the “Lead Pastor/Managing Partner” model, except that there are two pastors who work to provide overall coordination and management to the church. An example of this is where one pastor is considered by the congregation as the “senior elder” (due to his age, character, and experience) but another pastor is more of an “executive pastor” or “CEO” (due to his leadership or administrative gifting). In this case, the “senior elder” will typically be responsible for overseeing the elders in shepherding the people while the “executive pastor” will be responsible for managing the ministry programs of the church.
4. *The “Senior Pastor” model.* This is similar to a business corporation where there is a leader who has final authority for the managing of the business. The Senior Pastor has his staff—made up of elders and non-elders—which he leads. Overall, the Senior Pastor is subject to the board of elders. This model is also used today in a few GCC churches, particularly where there is an apostolic leader, leading in the planting of churches.
5. *The “Pure Plurality” model.* This is a model where there is no designated lead pastor, but the church is managed by the elders as a group. This model occurs when a church is in transition or when there is a reluctance by the elders to designate a “first among equals” lead pastor for fear that it will undermine the “plurality of elders” model.

It should be noted that in each of these management models, the church is to be governed and led spiritually by a plurality of elders and that in no way is it intended that the final authority be placed in the hands of one man. Biblically, the church is placed under the authority of a plurality of elders, all looking to Jesus Christ as the Chief Shepherd of the church. The above management models have been used by churches simply to more effectively accomplish the needed work in the church.

Finally, as long as the pastors are humbly living out the life of Christ, any model can work effectively. The key is that the leaders are humble, loving, selfless servants to one another and to the Lord.

2. What about a lead pastor and senior pastor model? Would these models automatically contradict the plurality of elders model?

No. There needs to be a distinction between who has final authority in the local church and who has the responsibility for leading the elders and staff in the ministry of the local church. At issue is ministry effectiveness. Generally, a church is most effective when decision making is “pushed down the organizational chart.” The more effectively a group of elders can set clear parameters and then entrust responsibility to a qualified leader, the better. And the more effectively a qualified leader can entrust responsibilities to other qualified leaders, the better.

3. What about the title “senior pastor?”

Overall, it is a matter of semantics and communication. Overall the goal is to communicate roles in the church. It is important that church members understand that the church is led by a plurality of elders, and also that the church is effectively managed by qualified and gifted leaders who are assuming responsibility for the ministry. The question is: what term will best communicate this, in accordance with the ministry that the church aspires to have?

The term “senior pastor” is a culturally accepted term describing the person who has been entrusted by the board (be it elders or a deacon board) with the leadership of the church. But the term also may imply in our culture a “one man show” leadership structure—which is not an accurate picture of how the church is to be led. Another objection to the term “senior pastor” is that it is the term used of Jesus Christ in 1 Peter 5:4 (“Chief Shepherd,” NASB) and as such, that term should be reserved for Christ alone.

The question is whether the church wants to “fit in with the culture” and use terms (like “senior pastor”) that the culture is familiar with, and then clarify later (for example, in a newcomers class) or whether the church wants to highlight the different structure right up front. If a primary mission of the church is to “cut a new path in leadership structure,” then the term “senior pastor” may not be a good term to use. Rather the church—through its bulletins and other communications—would highlight the plurality of elders and then identify the roles of each of the elder/pastors according

“He who has learned to obey will know how to command.”
- *Solon* (c. 630–c. 560 B.C.)

Church Leadership/The Doctrine of Jesus Christ

Elders and Leading the Local Church

“A godly leader ... finds strength by realizing his weakness, finds authority by being under authority, finds direction by laying down his plans, finds vision by seeing the needs of others, finds credibility by being an example, finds loyalty by expressing compassion, finds honor by being faithful, finds greatness by being a servant.”

- Roy Lessin

to their primary role on staff. For example, some churches would have in the bulletin a list of the “Elder/Pastors.” In that list the term “Pastor” might be used for the leading pastor, and “Small Groups Pastor,” “Administrative Pastor,” or “Executive Pastor,” etc., for the other pastors. (For staff who are not elder/pastors, instead of, for example, “Small Group Pastor” the term “Small Groups Director” could be used.) In summation, each church must choose the best terms to communicate accurately to members and newcomers the leadership structure in the church. This will vary from church to church.

4. How can a church have a leading/senior pastor and a plurality of pastor/elders at the same time?

There are two basic issues: image and substance. That is, is the image in the church that there is one man leading or that the church is led by a plurality? Also, is the church in reality, and in substance, being led by one man or by a plurality?

To avoid both of these pitfalls, the following action steps can be done:

1. The lead/senior pastor must be accountable to the plurality of elders for the ministry of the church organization (more on this later). In addition, the lead/senior pastor shows his commitment to plurality by being part of the regional community of elders in GCC.
2. The elders in the church must truly be leaders in the church, rather than abdicating this role to one man (again, more on this later).
3. The more that all the elders can be in a public role—particularly teaching—the more there will be sense that the church is being led by the elders as whole.
4. In newcomers’ classes and in bulletins, the structure can be clearly spelled out, so that newcomers understand that elders lead the church.
5. In a true plurality, the lead/senior pastor/elder will be promoting the leadership of all the elders and not just himself. Therefore, it is vital the lead pastor make a commitment to humbly put the other elders forward in all that he does.
6. A real test is this: When the elders as a community disagree with the lead/senior pastor, does he submit to the decision of that elder community? This, more than anything else, shows that the elders have final authority, not one man.

5. Under the lead/senior pastor model, does the lead/senior pastor do all or almost all of the teaching when the church meets?

Not necessarily, although usually in the senior pastor model, the senior pastor will do 60-90% of the teaching. The issue is: what decision will bring about the best effect? Normally the lead/senior pastor will be the primary teacher. However, several leading pastors have developed a teaching team who share the teaching load. A leading pastor may teach only half (or even less than half) of the time. It is all a matter of gifting and what will best accomplish the purposes of the church.

6. What principles should be considered before selecting a lead/senior pastor? The key question is: Who would be the most effective person to be the point person for the staff? Who will best lead and influence this church to fulfill the Great Commission in this locale and throughout the world? This is obviously a very significant decision. The lead pastor's character, integrity, experience, and ability to influence others all play into this decision. Further, his ability to "bring out the best" in the other elders, and in the members of the church is also a key factor.

If someone led the team to plant the church, our practice in Great Commission is to view that founding pastor as the lead pastor—unless there is a very good reason why he should not be in that position. Much like a father starting a family, a man who leads a team to start the church is an "author"—and by virtue of that one fact, has unique "authority." This practice of honoring the founding pastor is a good one, because it puts a value on church planting. Oftentimes I have seen new elders come on staff in a church who begin to develop a different philosophy of ministry than what the founding pastor wants. In many (if not most) of these situations, the best action for that new elder is to start a new church rather than try to put "new wine in old wineskins."

7. Who should make the decisions as to staffing in the church?

The final authority for any decision (including staffing) is with the elders. In a senior pastor model, this particular decision is usually placed in the hands of the senior pastor. Certainly the elders will be involved in the process, for counsel and prayer. However, it is unusual for the elders to "pick the staff" for the senior pastor. Just like Jesus chose the Twelve, Paul chose Timothy, and Barnabas chose Mark, so too the senior pastor is usually given freedom to choose his staff (within the limitations laid down by the elders as whole). In general, a good principle to use is to let leaders choose their own staff. For example, if an elder/pastor is focusing on a campus ministry in a community church, it is best to allow that campus pastor the freedom to choose his own staff—as long as the staff person meets the requirements laid down by the elders.

8. How would the staff be managed?

In a senior pastor or lead pastor model, that pastor is the point person for the overall management of the staff. Within this, the other staff (elders and non-elders) would have staff to manage, as directed by the lead/senior pastor. The staff would be managed in the same way that the elders would manage the lead pastor. That is, the lead pastor would set the "ends," the limitations, and procedures for how he and the staff would relate to one another. Similarly, other pastors on staff would go through the same process with those staff that they are supervising.

As Olan Hendrix has pointed out, management is best done not in meetings, but one on one. Therefore, the lead/senior pastor should sit down with a staff person and on one piece of paper, clarify what is expected of him (the "ends"), set boundaries that cannot be crossed ("limitations"), establish a schedule and process for relating

"Trust men and they will be true to you; treat them gently and they will show themselves great."
- *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

Church Leadership/The Doctrine of Jesus Christ

Elders and Leading the Local Church

“If you trust men, you are going to get hurt. If you distrust men, you are going to hurt. You have to decide how you are going to get hurt. I decided long ago that I was going to get hurt by trusting in people.”

- *John Maxwell*

together as staff, and then release and empower the staff to seek God on getting the work done (letting “good things run wild”).

9. What principles should be taken into account before removing a pastor from that staff position?

First, a man may be a great elder and staff person, but he may lack as a leading or senior pastor. Or, a person may be a great elder, but not the one that should be on staff in a church. The question is this: Is God confirming his ministry through results? If so, keep him on! If not, I would urge that the following questions be asked:

1. Does the pastor simply need more mentoring or training? If so, make sure that he gets that training.
2. Does the pastor simply need more resources (people, finances) to do his work?
3. Does he need more time to verify his ministry plan? (The rule of thumb is: After a pastor is in a situation for three years, the church ministry is “his”—i.e., adequate time has passed for his ministry to be validated.)
4. Is he being evaluated fairly, by facts confirmed by two or three witnesses (rather than merely by the feelings or opinions of others)?
5. Is the standard by which he is being judged as to whether the “ends” have been met a reasonable standard? (Note: There are very few preachers that have seen 3000 saved in a day like Peter did! So do not expect your pastor to meet unrealistic goals.)
6. Is he slotted for the right ministry? Would he be more effective in another ministry role?
7. Has counsel been received from GCC before making the decision to remove a pastor from a staff position?

In general, it is important to remember that the elders have a responsibility as stewards to govern the church effectively—and the elders have a responsibility to be brothers to each pastor. Therefore, while a decision may be made to remove someone from a staff position, it is vital that the elders exhibit the love of Christ in dealing with gentleness, compassion, and grace towards any pastor who is removed. My strong advice is that a decision to remove a pastor not be made too hastily and only with abundant counsel from a GCC representative.

(Note: In order to remove an elder from the elder board [as contrasted from the position of leading pastor or from a staff position], a board is required under the GCC bylaws to first obtain counsel from a GCC representative.)

PRACTICAL ISSUES ON GOVERNING AND MANAGING THE LOCAL CHURCH

1. Practically, how does this work for elders to govern the church?

First it must be said that no governance system will work unless there is a strong atmosphere of faith and trust in the elders toward God and one another. At the heart of it all is the assumption that God is working in the life of the leading elder and in the lives of all the elders. God has given special grace to each to minister in His church as He desires. If the elders are loving God and loving one another, they will recognize that grace and work to see that grace put to work in the most effective way for God's church.

Second, it is a general principle of leadership that it is best to set general policies—guidelines and boundaries—and then release and empower people to minister in the Holy Spirit in faith and love. G.K. Chesterton said, “While it is true that Christianity has a certain amount of rule and order, the chief aim of that rule and order is to allow good things to run wild.” Well stated! It is vital that a group of elders keep this spirit in mind! And it is vital that a pastor (or any person on staff) have this “release and empower” perspective in doing ministry. Let's face it—without the Holy Spirit doing the work through us and through those with whom we minister, we are doomed to a life of ineffective ministry! Therefore the role of the elders is to govern the church by laying down boundaries and general goals, and then to allow the anointed leaders to dream and lead in the power of the Holy Spirit.

2. What direction should the elders give to govern the church?

Some excellent insight has been given on this subject by Olan Hendrix, who has done consulting for many churches on how to have an effective board. He is an advocate of the “policy governance model” taught by John Carver in his book, *Boards That Make a Difference*. Carver's book is a secular one that gives insight on how a board should relate to an executive on staff. Carver makes a distinction between management and governance. He says that, in general, the board's role is to govern whereas the role of the staff is to manage the ministry. In governing, the board is to focus on four areas:

1. Establishing the “ends” (as opposed to the “means” for achieving those “ends”)
2. Establishing executive limitations
3. Board-staff linkage: Defining the relationship between the executive and the board
4. Defining the board process

Although there are significant differences between a board-CEO relationship and the relationship between a board of elders and the staff, there are insights from Carver's model that can be applied to elders in a local church.

[NOTE: The word “staff” throughout this paper refers primarily to those on “paid staff.” However, we understand that all members doing ministry are “staff” in the sense of being “volunteer staff.”]

3. Describe how the elders would establish the “ends” of the church ministry.

“While it is true that Christianity has a certain amount of rule and order, the chief aim of that rule and order is to allow good things to run wild.”

- G. K. Chesterton

Church Leadership/The Doctrine of Jesus Christ

Elders and Leading the Local Church

“Be willing to make decisions. That’s the most important quality in a good leader.”

- General George S. Patton

The elders would simply ask the question: What are the bottom-line results that we want to see occur? Those results become the ends of the church ministry. In a church, it could include such simple “ends” as people saved, growing, trained for leadership, and sent out to start churches. Or it might be defined by the purpose statement of the church to grow in evangelism, worship, discipleship, ministry, and fellowship. The elders establish the “ends” and then the staff is released and empowered to lead out in devising and executing a plan to see those “ends” achieved.

An example of this is the example in Galatians 2 where Paul received the right hand of fellowship from the leaders in Jerusalem, where they gave him their blessing to spread the gospel for the salvation of the Gentiles. Paul had submitted his gospel to them (v. 2) and he was accountable to them. However, there is no indication that James, Peter, and John were deciding the “how to” for this ministry to the Gentiles. Paul, as the anointed leader, was empowered by God and recognized by these spiritual leaders to “go to the Gentiles” (v. 9) to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. And it was Paul who, through the leading of the Holy Spirit, made the practical day-to-day decisions on the “means” to achieving the “ends” of bringing the Gentiles to Jesus Christ.

4. Do the other elders have a part to play in determining the “means” and the overall ministry plans for the church?

Certainly! The elders will all play a critical role for determining the policies for the church, and would have ultimate authority over any plan. As to specific plans, the elders will give counsel (particularly in areas of ministry in which they are more personally focused). Also, it should be stated that an effective staff leader will seek to accommodate any and all suggestions and counsel from those in the church, particularly counsel from the elders. The process would go something like this:

1. The elders do the hard work of establishing the “ends,” the limitations on the staff (“executive limitations”), the rules for the relationship between the staff and the board of elders (“board-staff relationship”), and the rules for making decisions as elders (“board process”). (NOTE: This is a very significant step. This is not to be delegated to one individual. All the elders need to be involved and agree on these policies.)
2. The elders entrust to the staff the responsibility of establishing the “means” for accomplishing the ministry “ends.”
3. The staff will seek the Lord and seek counsel from all the elders and key ministry leaders in the church on the plans for the church.
4. The staff will return to the elders with the ministry plan for final counsel and approval.

One other key point in this process: In the senior pastor or lead pastor model, the effective lead/senior pastor will also treat his staff (elders and non-elders) with the same spirit of faith and empowerment as the elders treat the lead/senior pastor. In other words, just as the elders establish the “ends” for the ministry and then leave the “means” to the lead/senior pastor, so too the lead/senior pastor will establish

the “ends” for the staff and then ask each staff member to seek God to establish the “means” for his/her sphere of ministry. This is the way to manage the ministry effectively.

5. Describe what you mean by executive limitations.

Simply put, there are certain actions that the elders would find intolerable on the part of the staff. The elders are saying, “You may not do any of the following....” Here are some examples of executive limitations:

1. The church doctrinal statement. That is, the elders would be saying that the staff may not teach anything that contradicts the doctrinal statement.
2. A church position on a particular practice or theological issue (such as charismatic issues or women’s roles).
3. Financial policies (such as no borrowing without board approval, or no budgets that are not balanced).
4. Ethical policies (such as rules for counseling the opposite sex, or involvement in certain types of business practices or endeavors).
5. Specific ministry models. For example, elders of a church that has a long history of focusing on seekers in the Sunday service might make an executive limitation that no staff can be appointed who does not embrace this model.
6. No political involvement that will endanger the tax-exempt status of the church. For example, a church cannot endorse a candidate for public office, or devote more than a minimal amount of its resources to influencing legislation.
7. No financial dealings with individuals that would endanger the tax exempt status of the church.
8. Honoring the former pastors and leaders. For example, “The staff may not do anything that would dishonor those former pastors who once led in this church.”
9. Finally, one church has this in their executive limitations: “The staff will not do anything to damage the spirit of unity and relationship with Great Commission Churches.” (Amen! I like that one!)

An example from the Scriptures of an executive limitation is found in Acts 15 where the Apostles and the elders in Jerusalem were dealing with the controversy over whether Gentiles needed to be circumcised in order to be saved. The decision at this meeting affected Paul’s ministry to the Gentiles. The council decided that circumcision was not an “executive limitation,” but did identify four others (abstaining from things sacrificed to idols, and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication [v. 29]). Beyond these limitations Paul and the Gentile churches were free to minister as the Holy Spirit led. Once the elders clarify the executive limitations, the staff is free to act within the boundaries laid out for them.

6. Describe the policies established between the elders and the leading pastor (“Board-staff linkage”).

“How do we know if we have a servant’s heart? By how we act when we are treated like one!”
- *Unknown*

Church Leadership/The Doctrine of Jesus Christ

Elders and Leading the Local Church

“If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader.”

- John Quincy Adams

These policies define the relationship between the elders (as those governing the church) and the staff. It would include matters of how the staff will report to the elders, how the elders would evaluate the staff, and how conflicts would be resolved between the staff and the elders.

In general, what is most important here is that the elders be primarily “bean growers” and not “bean counters.” That is, the elders are to be supports to one another—cheerleaders—and in particular, the elders must be cheerleaders to the staff. A staff member has a special responsibility in the church and it is imperative that the elder/pastors create a climate of encouragement, faith, and support for that person.

Also, it is important that each not make the mistake that Saul made with David right before the battle with Goliath. Saul put his own armor on David, who promptly took it off because he was not used to it. Instead David picked up stones for his sling and approached his foe, now armed with the tools with which he was most familiar (1 Samuel 17:38-40). Analogously, an elder should not “put Saul’s armor” on any staff person. That is, do not expect him to do things the way that he (the elder) would do it. In the same vein, a lead/senior pastor needs to operate with the same sensitivity toward all the staff. We need to have the confidence that if each staff person is able to use their own personalized “five smooth stones,” that the Goliaths in the church will be defeated.

7. Describe the policies for elders making decisions (“Board process”).

These policies would define such issues as how often the elders are to meet, how the meetings would be conducted, who qualifies to be an elder, process for decision-making by the elders, the selection and removal of board members, and the process for resolving conflict between elders. Again, the most important element to make this all work is a mutual love and honoring of one another as fellow-elders. With this as a foundation, the practical “nuts and bolts” of decision-making will be accomplished much more smoothly.

8. In general, what are the benefits of this governance model?

This model shows clearly what is governance and how it is accomplished. This work of governance takes place infrequently. Everything else is shepherding, teaching, and leading; which takes place continually. The governing aspect of eldering is narrowly defined to the four functions (setting the ends, executive limitations, board-staff linkage, and board process). The result is that the staff is freed up to minister according to the grace God gives them. This model—which is based on biblical values—allows the leaders to pray, teach, shepherd, and lead strongly while at the same time preserving the God-given responsibility of the elders to effectively and efficiently govern the church as a whole.

THE LEGAL BOARD AND THE ELDERS

1. As a church which is organized under state and federal law, how does the legal board relate to the elders in the church?

Ideally, the legal board and the elders would be the same. As such, the policies that are adopted by the elders (such as the executive limitations) would be written down as the policies of the legal organization.

2. What do you do in situations where there are not enough elders in the church to make up the legal board for the church corporation?

What most churches have done is the following:

1. Place on the board men who meet the qualifications of deacon. The understanding is that when men are appointed as elders, that those men will replace those on the board who are deacons.
2. Communicate to the non-elders that they have *bona fide* legal responsibility for the church organization, but not overall spiritual responsibility for the people in the church. That is, they are stewards before God according to the government, but the non-elders will not give an account as the elders will for the lives of people in the church (Hebrews 13:17).
3. In case of a conflict, the board can refer it to a sub-committee of elders who would be responsible to make a proposal to the board. Should the conflict still exist, then the church would call in a representative of GCC to resolve the conflict. Another alternative is to have a representative from GCC on the legal board until elders are appointed to fill up the board positions.

3. What if a legal board is made up entirely or primarily of elders who are on paid staff? This model is perhaps the most biblical in that the true authorities and those who are ministering in the church make up the board. The downside is that those who are being paid are making the financial decisions in the church. This can appear unethical to many in the church, particularly new attenders who have not developed a trusting relationship with the elders. How can this concern be addressed?

There are several options:

1. Have the board made up of a majority of non-staff members, preferably elders.
2. Have a GCC representative on the board to make sure that a majority of the board members are not on staff.
3. Have salary decisions (or at least the leading pastor's salary) delegated to a committee of non-staff church members.
4. Have salary decisions delegated to GCC.

When salary decisions are being made, it is important that the process be one where those who are receiving the salary are not unduly influencing that decision. As an example of this, when my salary is determined by the GCM board, a board of which I am a member, I step out of the room when my salary is being decided.

Finally, it is vital that a church board is open and accountable to the church members,

“Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.”

- *Romans 13:1*

Church Leadership/The Doctrine of Jesus Christ

Elders and Leading the Local Church

“Out of love, true elders suffer and bear the brunt of difficult people and problems so that the lambs are not bruised. They bear the misunderstanding and sins of others so that the assembly may live in peace. They lose sleep so that others may rest. ...They see themselves as men under authority. They depend on God for wisdom and help, not on their own power and cleverness.”

- Alexander Strauch

making public the financial statement annually. And overall, it is important that the church board conduct itself in a way that will be winning people to Christ, having “*regard for what is honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men*” (2 Corinthians 8:21).

4. What are some actions every board should take in order to comply with corporate law?

Here is a checklist:

1. Conduct a board meeting (at least two per year or whatever is required by the state law).
2. Elect directors and officers annually, as required by law.
3. Take minutes of each meeting.
4. Approve minutes at the following board meeting.
5. Set the salaries of the staff.
6. Approve an annual budget, including capital purchases, as well as any deviations from the budget.
7. Review regularly the spending of the church and make sure that it is consistent with the approved budget.
8. Fully disclose to the board any conflict of interest by a board member.
9. Establish fair parsonage (housing) allowances at the beginning of each year for each pastor.

CONCLUSION

Elders are to be the ones who lead the church of God well (1 Timothy 5:17). In 2 Timothy 1:7, Paul tells Timothy that God had given him a spirit of power, love, and discipline (or “sound judgment”). From these two verses we can conclude that leading the church well requires three qualities:

Power By the grace of God each elder has power by the Holy Spirit, to teach the Word, to pray, and to minister in his spiritual gift. As each elder walks within the power of God, the church will be more effectively led.

Love As elders are loving one another within a model of plurality, modeling the humble servant qualities exhibited by our Lord, the church will be in a position for more fruitful and effective ministry.

Sound judgment As elders apply principles of management, such as pushing decision making down the organizational chart, the church also will be more effectively managed.

May God grant you grace as a leader of God’s people to be one who effectively leads His church to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout your city, your region, and the world!

RESOURCES

- The Books of Acts, 1st & 2nd Timothy, and Titus. There is no substitute for reading the Word of God for understanding how to lead His church!
- *Biblical Eldership-An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Leadership*, Alexander Strauch, Littleton, CO: Louis & Roth Publishers, 1986, 1988. This book emphasizes that elders are to be servants and to live in a plurality.
- *Boards That Make a Difference*, John Carver, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1990. A secular book, this nonetheless has good insight on how a board can effectively govern while allowing the staff to manage.

EXERCISE

1. What was the main lesson you learned from this reading?

2. In your church, would you say that the church is balanced on the plurality of elders value as well as the leading pastor value? Please explain.

3. What are some of the “executive limitations” that you think should be placed by the elders on those on staff in your church?

4. Overall, how would you rate your church in how well it is being managed?

5. What practical steps do you think that the elders can take to have this church be better governed and managed?

WOMEN AND LEADERSHIP

INTRODUCTION

When the subject of leadership arises, immediately the question is raised: What about women? In this very excellent article from *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, by John Piper and Wayne Grudem, most of the “nitty gritty” questions are answered on this very controversial topic.

(Special Note of Thanks: We, and all associated with the GCLI program, want to thank Crossway Books for their generosity in allowing us to print this excerpt from the book.)

Women and Leadership

John Piper and Wayne Grudem, “Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood”, © 1991, pgs 60-92. Published with permission from Crossway Books, a division of Good News Publishers, Wheaton, IL



“The modern sophists are sure of everything, especially if it contradicts the Bible.”

- Charles Haddon Spurgeon

This chapter offers an overview of the vision of manhood and womanhood presented in this book with cogent summary responses to the most common objections. Because every effort to answer one question (on this or any important issue) begets new questions, the list of questions here is not exhaustive. Nonetheless, we hope to give enough trajectories that readers can track the flight of our intention to its appointed target: the good of the church, global mission, and the glory of God.

1. Why do you regard the issue of male and female roles as so important?

We are concerned not merely with the behavioral roles of men and women but also with the underlying nature of manhood and womanhood themselves. Biblical truth and clarity in this matter are important because error and confusion over sexual identity leads to: (1) marriage patterns that do not portray the relationship between Christ and the church¹ (Ephesians 5:31-32); (2) parenting practices that do not train boys to be masculine or girls to be feminine; (3) homosexual tendencies and increasing attempts to justify homosexual alliances (see question 41); (4) patterns of unbiblical female leadership in the church that reflect and promote the confusion over the true meaning of manhood and womanhood.

God’s gift of complementary manhood and womanhood was exhilarating from the beginning (Genesis 2:23). It is precious beyond estimation. But today it is esteemed lightly and is vanishing like the rain forests we need but don’t love. We believe that what is at stake in human sexuality is the very fabric of life as God wills it to be for the holiness of His people and for their saving mission to the world. (See the “Rationale” of the *Danvers Statement* in Appendix Two.)

2. What do you mean (in question 1) by “unbiblical female leadership in the church”?

We are persuaded that the Bible teaches that only men should be pastors and elders. That is, men should bear *primary* responsibility for Christlike leadership and teaching in the church. So it is unbiblical, we believe, and therefore detrimental, for women to assume this role. (See question 13.)

3. Where in the Bible do you get the idea that only men should be the pastors and elders of the church?

The most explicit texts relating directly to the leadership of men in the church are 1 Timothy 2:11-15; 1 Corinthians 14:34-36; 11:2-16. The chapters in this book on these texts will give the detailed exegetical support for why we believe these texts give abiding sanction to an eldership of spiritual men. Moreover, the biblical connection

Church Leadership/The Doctrine of Jesus Christ

Women and Leadership

“A given man may make a very bad husband; you cannot mend matters by trying to reverse the roles. He may make a bad male partner in a dance. The cure for that is that man should more diligently attend dancing classes, not that the ballroom should henceforward ignore distinctions of sex and treat all dancers as neuter.”

- C. S. Lewis

between family and church strongly suggests that the head-ship of the husband at home leads naturally to the primary leadership of spiritual men in the church. (See Chapter 13.)

4. *What about marriage? What did you mean (in question 1) by “marriage patterns that do not portray the relationship between Christ and the church?”*

We believe the Bible teaches that God means the relationship between husband and wife to portray the relationship between Christ and His church. The husband is to model the loving, sacrificial leadership of Christ, and the wife is to model the glad submission offered freely by the church.

5. *What do you mean by submission (in question 4)?*

Submission refers to a wife’s divine calling to honor and affirm her husband’s leadership and help carry it through according to her gifts. It is not an absolute surrender of her will. Rather, we speak of her *disposition to yield* to her husband’s guidance and her *inclination* to follow his leadership. (See pages 46-49) Christ is her absolute authority, not the husband. She submits “out of reverence for Christ” (Ephesians 5:21). The supreme authority of Christ qualifies the authority of her husband. She should never follow her husband into sin. Nevertheless, even when she may have to stand with Christ against the sinful will of her husband (e.g., 1 Peter 3:1, where she does not yield to her husband’s unbelief), she can still have a *spirit* of submission—a *disposition* to yield. She can show by her attitude and behavior that she does not like resisting his will and that she longs for him to forsake sin and lead in righteousness so that her disposition to honor him as head can again produce harmony.

6. *What do you mean when you call the husband “head” (in question 5)?*

In the home, biblical headship is the husband’s divine calling to take primary responsibility for Christlike leadership, protection, and provision. (See pages 36-45 on the meaning of mature manhood, and question 13 on the meaning of “primary.”)

7. *Where in the Bible do you get the idea that husbands should be the leaders in their homes?*

The most explicit texts relating directly to headship and submission in marriage are Ephesians 5:21-33; Colossians 3:18-19; 1 Peter 3:1-7; Titus 2:5; 1 Timothy 3:4, 12; Genesis 1-3. The chapters of this book relating to these texts give the detailed exegetical support for why we believe they teach that headship includes primary leadership and that this is the responsibility of the man. Moreover, in view of these teaching passages, the pattern of male leadership that pervades the biblical portrait of family life is probably not a mere cultural phenomenon over thousands of years but reflects God’s original design, even though corrupted by sin.

8. *When you say a wife should not follow her husband into sin (question 5), what's left of headship? Who is to say what act of his leadership is sinful enough to justify her refusal to follow?*

We are not claiming to live without ambiguities. Neither are we saying that headship consists in a series of directives to the wife. Leadership is not synonymous with unilateral decision making. In fact, in a good marriage, leadership consists mainly in taking responsibility to establish a pattern of interaction that honors both husband and wife (and children) as a store of varied wisdom for family life. Headship bears the primary responsibility for the moral design and planning in the home, but the development of that design and plan will include the wife (who may be wiser and more intelligent). None of this is nullified by some ambiguities in the borderline cases of conflict. The leadership structures of state, church, and home do not become meaningless even though Christ alone is the absolute authority over each one. The New Testament command for us to submit to church leaders (Hebrews 13:17) is not meaningless even though we are told that elders will arise speaking perverse things (Acts 20:30) and should be rebuked (1 Timothy 5:20) rather than followed when they do so. The command to submit to civil authorities (Romans 13:1) is not meaningless, even though there is such a thing as conscientious objection (Acts 5:29). Nor is the reality of a man's gentle, strong leadership at home nullified just because his authority is not above Christ's in the heart of his wife. In the cases where his leadership fails to win her glad response, we will entrust ourselves to the grace of God and seek the path of biblical wisdom through prayer and counsel. None of us escapes the (sometimes agonizing) ambiguities of real life.

9. *Don't you think that stressing headship and submission gives impetus to the epidemic of wife abuse?*

No. First, because we stress Christlike, sacrificial headship that keeps the good of the wife in view and regards her as a joint heir of the grace of life (1 Peter 3:7); and we stress thoughtful submission that does not make the husband an absolute lord (see question 5). Second, we believe that wife abuse (and husband abuse) have some deep roots in the failure of parents to impart to their sons and daughters the meaning of true masculinity and true femininity. The confusions and frustrations of sexual identity often explode in harmful behaviors. The solution to this is not to minimize gender differences (which will then break out in menacing ways), but to teach in the home and the church how true manhood and womanhood express themselves in the loving and complementary roles of marriage.

10. *But don't you believe in "mutual submission" the way Paul teaches in Ephesians 5:21, "Submit to one another"?*

Yes, we do. But "the way Paul teaches" mutual submission is not the way everyone today teaches it. Everything depends on what you mean by "mutual submission." Some of us put more stress on reciprocity here than others (see note 6 on page 493 in Chapter 8, and the discussion in Chapter 10, pages 198-201). But even if Paul means

"If I cannot in honest happiness take the second place (or the twentieth); if I cannot take the first without making a fuss about my unworthiness, then I know nothing of Calvary love."
-Amy Carmichael

Church Leadership/The Doctrine of Jesus Christ

Women and Leadership

“God is God.
Because He is God,
He is worthy of my
trust and obedience.
I will find rest
nowhere but in His
holy will, a will
that is unspeakably
beyond my largest
notions of what He
is up to.”

- Elisabeth Elliot

complete reciprocity (wives submit to husbands and husbands submit to wives), this does not mean that husbands and wives should submit to each other *in the same way*. The key is to remember that the relationship between Christ and the church is the pattern for the relationship between husband and wife. Are Christ and the church mutually submitted? They aren't if submission means Christ yields to the authority of the church. But they are if submission means that Christ submitted Himself to suffering and death for the good of the church. That, however, is not how the church submits to Christ. The church submits to Christ by affirming His authority and following His lead. So mutual submission does not mean submitting to each other *in the same ways*. Therefore, mutual submission does not compromise Christ's headship over the church and it should not compromise the headship of a godly husband.

11. If head means “source” in Ephesians 5:23 (“the husband is the head of the wife”), as some scholars say it does, wouldn't that change your whole way of seeing this passage and eliminate the idea of the husband's leadership in the home?

No. But before we deal with this hypothetical possibility we should say that the meaning “source” in Ephesians 5:23 is very unlikely. Scholars will want to read the extensive treatment of this word in Appendix One. But realistically, lay people will make their choice on the basis of what makes sense here in Ephesians. Verse 23 is the ground, or argument, for verse 22; thus it begins with the word *for*: “Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. *For* the husband is the head of the wife. . . .” When the headship of the husband is given as the *ground* for the submission of the wife, the most natural understanding is that headship signifies some kind of leadership. Moreover, Paul has a picture in his mind when he says that the husband is the head of the wife. The word *head* does not dangle in space waiting for any meaning to be assigned to it. Paul says, “For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, *His body*,” (Ephesians 5:23). The picture in Paul's mind is of a body with a head. This is very important because it leads to the “one flesh” unity of husband and wife in the following verses. A head and its body are “one flesh.” Thus Paul goes on to say in verses 28-30, “In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body.” Paul carries through the image of Christ the Head and the church His body. Christ nourishes and cherishes the church because we are limbs of His body.

So the husband is like a head to his wife, so that when he nourishes and cherishes her, he is really nourishing and cherishing himself, as the head who is “one flesh” with this body.

Now, if *head* means “source,” what is the husband the source of? What does the body get from the head? It gets nourishment (that's mentioned in verse 29). And we can understand that, because the mouth is in the head, and nourishment comes through the mouth to the body. But that's not all the body gets from the head. It gets guidance, because the eyes are in the head. And it gets alertness and protection, because the ears are in the head.

In other words, if the husband as head is one flesh with his wife, his body, and if he is therefore a source of guidance, food, and alertness, then the natural conclusion is that the head, the husband, has a primary responsibility for leadership, provision, and protection. So even if you give *head* the meaning “source,” the most natural interpretation of these verses is that husbands are called by God to take primary responsibility for Christlike servant-leadership, protection, and provision in the home, and wives are called to honor and affirm their husbands’ leadership and help carry it through according to their gifts.²

12. Isn't your stress on leadership in the church and headship in the home contrary to the emphasis of Christ in Luke 22:26, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves"?

No. We are trying to hold precisely these two things in biblical balance, namely, leadership and servanthood. It would be contrary to Christ if we said that servanthood cancels out leadership. Jesus is not dismantling leadership, He is defining it. The very word He uses for “leader” in Luke 22:26 is used in Hebrews 13:17, which says, “Obey your *leaders* and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as ones who will have to give an account.” Leaders are to be servants in sacrificially caring for the souls of the people. But this does not make them less than leaders, as we see in the words *obey* and *submit*. Jesus was no less a leader of the disciples when He was on His knees washing their feet than when He was giving them the Great Commission.

13. In questions 2 and 6, you said that the calling of the man is to bear “primary responsibility” for leadership in the church and the home. What do you mean by “primary”?

We mean that there are levels and kinds of leadership for which women may and often should take responsibility. There are kinds of teaching, administration, organization, ministry, influence, and initiative that wives should undertake at home and women should undertake at church. Male headship at home and eldership at church mean that men bear the responsibility for the overall pattern of life. Headship does not prescribe the details of who does precisely what activity. After the fall, God called Adam to account first (Genesis 3:9). This was not because the woman bore no responsibility for sin, but because the man bore *primary* responsibility for life in the garden— including sin.

14. If the husband is to treat his wife as Christ does the church, does that mean he should govern all the details of her life and that she should clear all her actions with him?

No. We may not press the analogy between Christ and the husband that far. Unlike Christ, all husbands sin. They are finite and fallible in their wisdom. Not only that, but also, unlike Christ, a husband is not preparing a bride merely for himself, but also for another, namely, Christ. He does not merely act *as* Christ, he also acts *for* Christ.

“You do not lead by hitting people over the head—that’s assault, not leadership.”
- Dwight D. Eisenhower

Church Leadership/The Doctrine of Jesus Christ

Women and Leadership

“Decisions which are made in the light of God’s Word are stable and show wisdom.”

- Vonette Z. Bright

At this point he must not be Christ to his wife, lest he be a traitor to Christ. He must lead in such a way that his wife is encouraged to depend on Christ and not on himself. Practically, that rules out belittling supervision and fastidious oversight. Even when acting as Christ, the husband must remember that Christ does not lead the church as His daughter, but as His wife. He is preparing her to be a “fellow-heir,” not a servant girl (Romans 8:17). Any kind of leadership that, in the name of Christlike headship, tends to foster in a wife personal immaturity or spiritual weakness or insecurity through excessive control, picky supervision, or oppressive domination has missed the point of the analogy in Ephesians 5. Christ does not create that kind of wife.

15. Don't you think that these texts are examples of temporary compromise with the patriarchal status quo, while the main thrust of Scripture is toward the leveling of gender-based role differences?

We recognize that Scripture sometimes *regulates* undesirable relationships without *condoning* them as permanent ideals. For example, Jesus said to the Pharisees, “Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning,” (Matthew 19:8). Another example is Paul’s regulation of how Christians sue each other, even though “[t]he very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already,” (1 Corinthians 6:1-8). Another example is the regulation of how Christian slaves were to relate to their masters, even though Paul longed for every slave to be received by his master “no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother,” (Philemon 16).

But we do not put the loving headship of husbands or the godly eldership of men in the same category with divorce, lawsuits, or slavery. The reason we don’t is threefold: (1) Male and female personhood, with some corresponding role distinctions, are rooted in God’s act of creation before the sinful distortions of the status quo were established. (See Chapters 3 and 10.) This argument is the same one, we believe, that evangelical feminists would use to defend heterosexual marriage against the (increasingly prevalent) argument that the “leveling thrust” of the Bible leads *properly* to homosexual alliances. They would say No, because the leveling thrust of the Bible is not meant to dismantle the created order of nature. That is our fundamental argument as well. (2) The redemptive thrust of the Bible does not aim at abolishing headship and submission but at transforming them for their original purposes in the created order. (3) The Bible contains no indictments of loving headship and gives no encouragements to forsake it. Therefore it is wrong to portray the Bible as overwhelmingly egalitarian with a few contextually relativized patriarchal texts. The contra-headship thrust of Scripture simply does not exist. It seems to exist only when Scripture’s aim to redeem headship and submission is portrayed as undermining them. (See Question 50, for an example of this hermeneutical flaw.)

16. Aren't the arguments made to defend the exclusion of women from the pastorate today parallel to the arguments Christians made to defend slavery in the nineteenth century?

See the beginning of our answer to this problem in question 15. The preservation of marriage is not parallel with the preservation of slavery. The existence of slavery is not rooted in any creation ordinance, but the existence of marriage is. Paul's regulations for how slaves and masters related to each other do not assume the goodness of the institution of slavery. Rather, seeds for slavery's dissolution were sown in Philemon 16 ("no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother"), Ephesians 6:9 ("Masters . . . do not threaten [your slaves]"), Colossians 4:1 ("Masters, provide your slaves what is right and fair"), and 1 Timothy 6:1-2 (masters are "brothers"). Where these seeds of equality came to full flower, the very institution of slavery would no longer be slavery.

But Paul's regulations for how husbands and wives relate to each other in marriage *do* assume the goodness of the institution of marriage—and not only its goodness but also its foundation in the will of the Creator from the beginning of time (Ephesians 5:31-32). Moreover, in locating the foundation of marriage in the will of God at creation, Paul does so in a way that shows that his regulations for marriage also flow from this order of creation. He quotes Genesis 2:24, "they will become one flesh," and says, "I am talking about Christ and the church." From this "mystery" he draws out the pattern of the relationship between the husband as head (on the analogy of Christ) and the wife as his body or flesh (on the analogy of the church) and derives the appropriateness of the husband's leadership and the wife's submission. Thus Paul's regulations concerning marriage are just as rooted in the created order as is the institution itself. This is not true of slavery. Therefore, while it is true that some slave owners in the nineteenth century argued in ways parallel with our defense of distinct roles in marriage, the parallel was superficial and misguided. Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen points out, from 1 Timothy 6:1-6, that, according to the nineteenth-century Christian supporters of slavery, "even though the institution of slavery did not go back to creation . . . the fact that Paul based its maintenance on a revelation from Jesus himself meant that anyone wishing to abolish slavery (or even improve the slaves' working conditions) was defying timeless biblical norms for society."³ The problem with this argument is that Paul does not use the teachings of Jesus to "maintain" the institution of slavery, but to regulate the behavior of Christian slaves and masters in an institution that already existed in part because of sin. What Jesus endorses is the kind of inner freedom and love that is willing to go the extra mile in service, even when the demand is unjust (Matthew 5:41). Therefore, it is wrong to say that the words of Jesus give a foundation for slavery in the same way that creation gives a foundation for marriage. Jesus does not give any foundation for slavery, but creation gives an unshakeable foundation for marriage and its complementary roles for husband and wife.

Finally, if those who ask this question are concerned to avoid the mistakes of Christians who defended slavery, we must remember the real possibility that it is

"Blessed the man and woman who is able to serve cheerfully in the second rank -- a big test."

- Mary Slessor

Church Leadership/The Doctrine of Jesus Christ

Women and Leadership

“From all that
dims Thy Calvary,
O’ Lamb of God,
deliver me. Give me
the love that leads
the way, The faith
that nothing can
dismay, The hope
no disappointments
tire, The passion
that will burn like
fire; Let me not sink
to be a clod: Make
me Thy fuel, Flame
of God!”

- Amy Carmichael

not we but evangelical feminists today who resemble nineteenth century defenders of slavery in the most significant way: using arguments from the Bible to justify conformity to some very strong pressures in contemporary society (in favor of slavery then, and feminism now).

17. Since the New Testament teaching on the submission of wives in marriage is found in the part of Scripture known as the “household codes” (Haustafeln), which were taken over in part from first-century culture, shouldn’t we recognize that what Scripture is teaching us is not to offend against current culture but to fit in with it up to a point and thus be willing to change our practices of how men and women relate, rather than hold fast to a temporary first-century pattern?

This is a more sophisticated form of the kind of questions already asked in questions 15 and 16. A few additional comments may be helpful. First of all, by way of explanation, the “household codes” refer to Ephesians 5:22-6:9, Colossians 3:18-4:1, and less exactly 1 Peter 2:13-3:7, which include instructions for pairs of household members: wives/husbands, children/parents, and slaves/masters.

Our first problem with this argument is that the parallels to these “household codes” in the surrounding world are not very close to what we have in the New Testament. It is not at all as though Paul simply took over either content or form from his culture. Both are very different from the nonbiblical “parallels” that we know of.⁴

Our second problem with this argument is that it maximizes what is incidental (the little that Paul’s teaching has in common with the surrounding world) and minimizes what is utterly crucial (the radically Christian nature and foundation of what Paul teaches concerning marriage in the “household codes”). We have shown in questions 15 and 16 that Paul is hardly unreflective in saying some things that are superficially similar to the surrounding culture. He bases his teaching of headship on the nature of Christ’s relation to the church, which he sees “mysteriously” revealed in Genesis 2:24 and, thus, in creation itself.

We do not think that it honors the integrity of Paul or the inspiration of Scripture to claim that Paul resorted to arguing that his exhortations were rooted in the very order of creation and in the work of Christ in order to justify his sanctioning temporary accommodations to his culture. It is far more likely that the theological depth and divine inspiration of the apostle led him not only to be very discriminating in what he took over from the world but also to sanction his ethical commands with creation only where they had abiding validity. Thus we believe that there is good reason to affirm the enduring validity of Paul’s pattern for marriage: Let the husband, as head of the home, love and lead as Christ does the church, and let the wife affirm that loving leadership as the church honors Christ.

18. But what about the liberating way Jesus treated women? Doesn’t He explode our hierarchical traditions and open the way for women to be given access to all ministry roles?

We believe the ministry of Jesus has revolutionary implications for the way sinful men and women treat each other. “[S]hould not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free...?” (Luke 13:16). Everything Jesus taught and did was an attack on the pride that makes men and women belittle each other. Everything He taught and did was a summons to the humility and love that purge self-exaltation out of leadership and servility out of submission. He put man’s lustful look in the category of adultery and threatened it with hell (Matthew 5:28-29). He condemned the whimsical disposing of women in divorce (Matthew 19:8). He called us to account for every careless word we utter (Matthew 12:36). He commanded that we treat each other the way we would like to be treated (Matthew 7:12). He said to the callous chief priests, “...prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you,” (Matthew 21:31). He was accompanied by women, He taught women, and women bore witness to His resurrection life.

Against every social custom that demeans or abuses men and women the words of Jesus can be applied: “And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition?” (Matthew 15:3).

But where does Jesus say or do anything that criticizes the order of creation in which men bear a primary responsibility to lead, protect, and sustain? Nothing He did calls this good order into question. It simply does not follow to say that since women ministered to Jesus and learned from Jesus and ran to tell the disciples that Jesus was risen, this must mean that Jesus opposed the loving headship of husbands or the limitation of eldership to spiritual men. We would not argue that merely because Jesus chose twelve men to be His authoritative apostles, Jesus must have favored an eldership of only men in the church. But this argument would be at least as valid as arguing that anything else Jesus did means He would oppose an eldership of all men or the headship of husbands. The effort to show that the ministry of Jesus is part of a major biblical thrust against gender-based roles can only be sustained by *assuming* (rather than demonstrating) that He meant to nullify headship and submission rather than rectify them. What is clear is that Jesus radically purged leadership of pride and fear and self-exaltation and that He also radically honored women as persons worthy of the highest respect under God.

19. Doesn't the significant role women had with Paul in ministry show that his teachings do not mean that women should be excluded from ministry?

Yes. But the issue is not whether women should be excluded from ministry. They shouldn't be. There are hundreds of ministries open to men and women. We must be more careful in how we pose our questions. Otherwise the truth is obscured from the start.

The issue here is whether any of the women serving with Paul in ministry fulfilled roles that would be inconsistent with a limitation of the eldership to men. We believe the answer to that is No. Tom Schneider has dealt with this matter more fully in

“When I came to see that Jesus Christ had died for me, it didn't seem hard to give up all for Him. It seemed just common, ordinary honesty.”
- C.T. Studd

“The will of God is never exactly what you expect it to be. It may seem to be much worse, but in the end it’s going to be a lot better and a lot bigger.”

- Elisabeth Elliot

Chapter 11. But we can perhaps illustrate with two significant women in Paul’s ministry.

Paul said that Euodia and Syntyche “contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers,” (Philippians 4:2-3). There is wonderful honor given to Euodia and Syntyche here for their ministry with Paul. But there are no compelling grounds for affirming that the nature of the ministry was contrary to the limitations that we argue are set forth in 1 Timothy 2:12. One must *assume* this in order to make a case against these limitations. Paul would surely say that the “deacons” mentioned in Philippians 1:1 along with the “overseers” were fellow workers with him when he was there. But if so, then one can be a “fellow worker” with Paul without being in a position of authority over men. (We are assuming from 1 Timothy 3:2 and 5:17 that what distinguishes an elder from a deacon is that the responsibility for teaching and governance was the elder’s and not the deacon’s.)

Phoebe is praised as a “servant” or “deacon” of the church at Cenchreae who “has been a great help [or “patroness”] to many people, including me,” (Romans 16:1-2). Some have tried to argue that the Greek word behind “help” really means “leader.” This is doubtful, since it is hard to imagine, on any count, what Paul would mean by saying that Phoebe became his ‘leader.’ He could of course mean that she was an influential patroness who gave sanctuary to him and his band or that she used her community influence for the cause of the gospel and for Paul in particular. She was a very significant person and played a crucial role in the ministry. But to derive anything from this that is contrary to our understanding of 1 Timothy 2:12, one would have to *assume* authority over men here since it cannot be shown.

20. But Priscilla taught Apollos, didn’t she (Acts 18:26)? And she is even mentioned before her husband Aquila. Doesn’t that show that the practice of the early church did not exclude women from the teaching office of the church?

We are eager to affirm Priscilla as a fellow worker with Paul in Christ (Romans 16:3)! She and her husband were very influential in the church in Corinth (1 Corinthians 16:19) as well as Ephesus. We can think of many women in our churches today who are like Priscilla. Nothing in our understanding of Scripture says that when a husband and wife visit an unbeliever (or a confused believer—or anyone else) the wife must be silent. It is easy for us to imagine the dynamics of such a discussion in which Priscilla contributes to the explanation and illustration of baptism in Jesus’ name and the work of the Holy Spirit.

Our understanding of what is fitting for men and women in that kind of setting is not an oversimplified or artificial list of rules for what the woman and man can say and do. It is rather a call for the delicate and sensitive preservation of personal dynamics that honor the headship of Aquila without squelching the wisdom and insight of Priscilla. There is nothing in this text that cannot be explained on this understanding of what happened. We do not claim to know the spirit and balance

of how Priscilla and Aquila and Apollos related to each other. We only claim that a feminist reconstruction of the relationship has no more warrant than ours. The right of Priscilla to hold an authoritative teaching office cannot be built on an event about which we know so little. It is only a guess to suggest that the order of their names signifies Priscilla's leadership. Luke may simply have wanted to give greater honor to the woman by putting her name first (1 Peter 3:7), or may have had another reason unknown to us. Saying that Priscilla illustrates the authoritative teaching of women in the New Testament is the kind of precarious and unwarranted inference that is made again and again by evangelical feminists and then called a major biblical thrust against gender-based role distinctions. But many invalid inferences do not make a major thrust.

21. Are you saying that it is all right for women to teach men under some circumstances?

When Paul says in 1 Timothy 2:12, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent," we do not understand him to mean an absolute prohibition of all teaching by women. Paul instructs the older women to "teach what is good. Then they can train the younger women" (Titus 2:3-4), and he commends the teaching that Eunice and Lois gave to their son and grandson Timothy (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:14). Proverbs praises the ideal wife because "She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue," (Proverbs 31:26). Paul endorses women prophesying in church (1 Corinthians 11:5) and says that men "learn" by such prophesying (1 Corinthians 14:31) and that the members (presumably men and women) should "teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs," (Colossians 3:16). Then, of course, there is Priscilla at Aquila's side correcting Apollos (Acts 18:26).

It is arbitrary to think that Paul had every form of teaching in mind in 1 Timothy 2:12. Teaching and learning are such broad terms that it is *impossible* that women not teach men and men not learn from women *in some sense*. There is a way that nature teaches (1 Corinthians 11:14) and a fig tree teaches (Matthew 24:32) and suffering teaches (Hebrews 5:8) and human behavior teaches (1 Corinthians 4:6; 1 Peter 3:1).

If Paul did not have every conceivable form of teaching and learning in mind, what did he mean? Along with the fact that the setting here is the church assembled for prayer and teaching (1 Timothy 2:8-10; 3:15), the best clue is the coupling of "teaching" with "having authority over men." We would say that the teaching inappropriate for a woman is the teaching of men in settings or ways that dishonor the calling of men to bear the primary responsibility for teaching and leadership. This primary responsibility is to be carried by the pastors or elders. Therefore we think it is God's will that only men bear the responsibility for this office.

22. Can't a pastor give authorization for a woman to teach Scripture to the congregation, and then continue to exercise oversight while she teaches?

"We should expect to find in the church an element which unbelievers will call irrational."
- C.S. Lewis

Church Leadership/The Doctrine of Jesus Christ

Women and Leadership

“How many million more souls are to pass into eternity without having heard the name of Jesus?”

- Lottie Moon

It is right for all the teaching ministries of the church to meet with the approval of the guardians and overseers (=elders) of the church. However, it would be wrong for the leadership of the church to use its authority to sanction the *de facto* functioning of a woman as a teaching elder in the church, only without the name. In other words, there are two kinds of criteria that should be met in order for the teaching of a woman to be biblically affirmed. One is to have the endorsement of the spiritual overseers of the church (=elders). The other is to avoid contexts and kinds of teaching that put a woman in the position of functioning as the *de facto* spiritual shepherd of a group of men or to avoid the kind of teaching that by its very nature calls for strong, forceful pressing of men’s consciences on the basis of divine authority.

23. How can you be in favor of women prophesying in church but not in favor of women being pastors and elders? Isn’t prophecy at the very heart of those roles?

No. The role of pastor/elder is primarily governance and teaching (1 Timothy 5:17). In the list of qualifications for elders the prophetic gift is not mentioned, but the ability to teach is (1 Timothy 3:2). In Ephesians 4:11, prophets are distinguished from pastor-teachers. And even though men learn from prophecies that women give, Paul distinguishes the gift of prophecy from the gift of teaching (Romans 12:6-7; 1 Corinthians 12:28). Women are nowhere forbidden to prophesy. Paul simply regulates the demeanor in which they prophesy so as not to compromise the principle of the spiritual leadership of men (1 Corinthians 11:5-10).

Prophecy in the worship of the early church was not the kind of authoritative, infallible revelation we associate with the written prophecies of the Old Testament.⁶ It was a report in human words based on a spontaneous, personal revelation from the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 14:30) for the purpose of edification, encouragement, consolation, conviction, and guidance (1 Corinthians 14:3, 24-25; Acts 21:4; 16:6-10). It was not necessarily free from a mixture of human error, and thus needed assessment (1 Thessalonians 5:19-20; 1 Corinthians 14:29) on the basis of the apostolic (biblical) teaching (1 Corinthians 14:36-38; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3). Prophecy in the early church did not correspond to the sermon today or to a formal exposition of Scripture. Both women and men could stand and share what they believed God had brought to mind for the good of the church. The testing of this word and the regular teaching ministry was the responsibility of the elder teachers. This latter role is the one Paul assigns uniquely to men.

24. Are you saying then that you accept the freedom of women to publicly prophesy as described in Acts 2:17, 1 Corinthians 11:5, and Acts 2 1:9?

Yes.⁸

25. Since it says in 1 Corinthians 14:3,4 that “women should remain silent in the churches,” it doesn’t seem like your position is really biblical because of how much speaking you really do allow to women. How do you account for this straightforward prohibition of women speaking?

The reason we believe Paul does not mean for women to be *totally* silent in the church is that in 1 Corinthians 11:5 he permits women to pray and prophesy in church: “[E]very woman who *prays* or *prophesies* with her head uncovered dishonors her head.” But someone may ask, “Why do you choose to let 1 Corinthians 11:5 limit the meaning of 1 Corinthians 14:34 rather than the other way around?”

To begin our answer, we notice in both 1 Corinthians 14:35 and 1 Corinthians 11:6 that Paul’s concern is for what is “shameful” or “disgraceful” for women (*aischron* in both verses and only here in 1 Corinthians). The issue is not whether women are competent or intelligent or wise or well taught. The issue is how they relate to the men of the church. In 1 Corinthians 14:34 Paul speaks of *submission*, and in 1 Corinthians 11:3 he speaks of man as *head*. So the issue of shamefulness is at root an issue of doing something that would dishonor the role of the men as leaders of the congregation. If *all* speaking were shameful in this way, then Paul could not have condoned a woman’s praying and prophesying, as he does in 1 Corinthians 11:5 precisely when the issue of shamefulness is what is at stake. But Paul shows in 1 Corinthians 11:5-16 that what is at stake is not *that* women are praying and prophesying in public but *how* they are doing it. That is, are they doing it with the dress and demeanor that signify their affirmation of the headship of the men who are called to lead the church?

In a similar way we look into the context of 1 Corinthians 14:33-36 to find similar clues for the *kind* of speaking Paul may have in mind when he says it is “shameful” for a woman to speak. We notice again that the issue is not the ability or the wisdom of women to speak intelligently but how women are relating to men (*hypotassesthoson*— “let them be in submission”). Some kind of interaction is taking place that Paul thinks compromises the calling of the men to be the primary leaders of the church. Chapter 6 of this book argues in detail that the inappropriate interaction relates to the testing of prophecies referred to in 1 Corinthians 14:29. Women are taking a role here that Paul thinks is inappropriate. This is the activity in which they are to be silent.⁹ In other words, what Paul is calling for is not the total silence of women but a kind of involvement that signifies, in various ways, their glad affirmation of the leadership of the men God has called to be the guardians and overseers of the flock.

26. *Doesn’t Paul’s statement that “There is... neither male nor female... for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28) take away gender as a basis for distinction of roles in the church?*

No. Most evangelicals still agree that this text is not a warrant for homosexuality. In other words, most of us do not force Paul’s “neither male nor female” beyond what we know from other passages he would approve. For example, we know from Romans 1:24-32 that Paul does not mean for the created order of different male and female roles to be overthrown by Galatians 3:28. The context of Galatians 3:28 makes abundantly clear the sense in which men and women are equal in Christ: they are equally justified by faith (v. 24), equally free from the bondage of legalism (v. 25),

“I really don’t think ... you are in a bargaining position with God. He is the Master. He is the Commanding Officer. It is not for you to have input. It is simply for you to accept the orders as the orders are given.”
- Elisabeth Elliot

Church Leadership/The Doctrine of Jesus Christ

Women and Leadership

“May the Lord lead further and further those who do in earnest want to live the Joshua [i.e., transformed] life. It means a daily dying to self and what self wants; a daily turning to our Master with a ‘Yes, Lord’ to everything, even to what is most against the grain. May He quicken those who have not yet begun to live this life to see what they are missing, before it is too late.”
- Amy Carmichael

equally children of God (v. 26), equally clothed with Christ (v. 27), equally possessed by Christ (v. 29), and equally heirs of the promises to Abraham (v. 29).

This last blessing is especially significant, namely, the equality of being a fellow-heir with men of the promises. In 1 Peter 3:1-7, the blessing of being joint heirs “of the gracious gift of life” is connected with the exhortation for women to submit to their husbands (v. 1) and for their husbands to treat their wives “with respect as the weaker partner.” In other words, Peter saw no conflict between the “neither-male-nor-female” principle regarding our inheritance and the headship submission principle regarding our roles. Galatians 3:28 does not abolish gender-based roles established by God and redeemed by Christ.

27. How do you explain God’s apparent endorsement of women in the Old Testament who had prophetic or leadership roles?

First, we keep in mind that God has no antipathy toward revealing His will to women. Nor does He pronounce them unreliable messengers. The differentiation of roles for men and women in ministry is rooted not in women’s incompetence to receive or transmit truth, but in the primary responsibility of men in God’s order to lead and teach. The instances of women who prophesied and led do not call this order into question. Rather, there are pointers in each case that the women followed their unusual paths in a way that endorsed and honored the usual leadership of men, or indicted their failures to lead.

For example, Miriam, the prophetess, focused her ministry, as far as we can tell, on the women of Israel (Exodus 15:20). Deborah, a prophetess, judge, and mother in Israel (Judges 4:4; 5:7), along with Jael (Judges 5:24-27), was a living indictment of the weakness of Barak and other men in Israel who should have been more courageous leaders (Judges 4:9). (The period of the judges is an especially precarious foundation for building a vision of God’s ideal for leadership. In those days God was not averse to bringing about states of affairs that did not conform to His revealed will in order to achieve some wise purpose [cf. Judges 14:41.] Huldah evidently exercised her prophetic gift not in a public preaching ministry but by means of private consultation (2 Kings 22:14-20). And Anna the prophetess filled her days with fasting and prayer in the temple (Luke 2:36-37). We must also keep in mind that God’s granting power or revelation to a person is no sure sign that this person is an ideal model for us to follow in every respect. This is evident, for example, from the fact that some of those God blessed in the Old Testament were polygamists (e.g. Abraham and David). Not even the gift of prophecy is proof of a person’s obedience and endorsement by God. As strange as this sounds, Matthew 7:22, 1 Corinthians 13:2, and 1 Samuel 19:23-24 show that this is so. Moreover, in the case of each woman referred to above we have an instance of a charismatic emergence on the scene, not an installation to the ordinary Old Testament office of priest, which was the responsibility of men.

28. *Do you think women are more gullible than men?*

First Timothy 2:14 says, “Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.” Paul gives this as one of the reasons why he does not permit women “to teach or have authority over a man.” Historically this has usually been taken to mean that women are more gullible or deceivable than men and therefore less fit for the doctrinal oversight of the church. This may be true (see question 29). However, we are attracted to another understanding of Paul’s argument.

We think that Satan’s main target was not Eve’s peculiar gullibility (if she had one), but rather Adam’s headship as the one ordained by God to be responsible for the life of the garden. Satan’s subtlety is that he knew the created order God had ordained for the good of the family, and he deliberately defied it by ignoring the man and taking up his dealings with the woman. Satan put her in the position of spokesman, leader, and defender. At that moment both the man and the woman slipped from their innocence and let themselves be drawn into a pattern of relating that to this day has proved destructive.

If this is the proper understanding, then what Paul meant in 1 Timothy 2:14 was this: “Adam was not deceived (that is, Adam was not approached by the deceiver and did not carry on direct dealings with the deceiver), but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor (that is, she was the one who took up dealings with the deceiver and was led through her direct interaction with him into deception and transgression).”

In this case, the main point is not that the man is undeceivable or that the woman is more deceivable; the point is that when God’s order of leadership is repudiated it brings damage and ruin. Men and women are both more vulnerable to error and sin when they forsake the order that God has intended.

29. *But it does look as if Paul really thought Eve was somehow more vulnerable to deception than Adam. Wouldn’t this make Paul a culpable chauvinist?*

No. When someone asks if women are weaker than men, or smarter than men, or more easily frightened than men, or something like that, perhaps the best way to answer is this: women are weaker in some ways and men are weaker in some ways; women are smarter in some ways and men are smarter in some ways; women are more easily frightened in some circumstances and men are more easily frightened in others. It is dangerous to put negative values on the so-called weaknesses that each of us has. God intends for all the “weaknesses” that characteristically belong to man to call forth and highlight woman’s strengths. And God intends for all the “weaknesses” that characteristically belong to woman to call forth and highlight man’s strengths.

Even if 1 Timothy 2:14 meant that in some circumstances women are characteristically more vulnerable to deception, that would not settle anything about the equality or worth of manhood and womanhood. Boasting in either sex as superior

“What would I do with starry crowns except to cast them at His feet?”
- *Mary Slessor when asked about her rewards in heaven.*

“Until the will and the affections are brought under the authority of Christ, we have not begun to understand, let alone to accept, His lordship.”

- Elisabeth Elliot

to the other is folly. Men and women, as God created us, are different in hundreds of ways. Being created equally in the image of God means at least this: that when the so-called weakness and strength columns for manhood and for womanhood are added up, the value at the bottom is going to be the same for each. And when you take those two columns and put them on top of each other, God intends them to be the perfect complement to each other.

30. If a woman is not allowed to teach men in a regular, official way, why is it permissible for her to teach children, who are far more impressionable and defenseless?

This question assumes something that we do not believe. As we said in question 21, we do not build our vision on the assumption that the Bible assigns women their role because of doctrinal or moral incompetence. The differentiation of roles for men and women in ministry is rooted not in any supposed incompetence, but in God's created order for manhood and womanhood. Since little boys do not relate to their women teachers as man to woman, the leadership dynamic ordained by God is not injured. (However, that dynamic would be injured if the pattern of our staffing and teaching communicated that Bible teaching is *only* women's work and not the *primary* responsibility of the fathers and spiritual men of the church.)

31. Aren't you guilty of a selective literalism when you say some commands in a text are permanently valid and others, like, "Don't wear braided hair" or "Do wear a head covering," are culturally conditioned and not absolute?

All of life and language is culturally conditioned. We share with all interpreters the challenge of discerning how biblical teaching should be applied today in a very different culture. In demonstrating the permanent validity of a command, we would try to show from its context that it has roots in the nature of God, the gospel, or creation as God ordered it. We would study these things as they are unfolded throughout Scripture. In contrast, to show that the specific forms of some commands are limited to one kind of situation or culture, 1) we seek for clues in the context that this is so; 2) we compare other Scriptures relating to the same subject to see if we are dealing with limited application or with an abiding requirement; and 3) we try to show that the cultural specificity of the command is *not* rooted in the nature of God, the gospel, or the created order.

In the context of Paul's and Peter's teaching about how men and women relate in the church and the home, there are instructions not only about submission and leadership, but also about forms of feminine adornment. Here are the relevant verses with our literal translation:

1 Timothy 2:9-10, "Likewise the women are to adorn themselves in respectable apparel with modesty and sensibleness, not in braids and gold or pearls or expensive clothing, but, as is fitting for women who profess godliness, through good works."

1 Peter 3:3-5, “Let not yours be the external adorning of braiding hair and putting on gold or wearing clothes, but the hidden person of the heart by the imperishable (jewel) of a meek and quiet spirit, which is precious before God.”

It would be wrong to say these commands are not relevant today. One clear, abiding teaching in them is that *the focus* of effort at adornment should be on “good works” and on “the hidden person” rather than on the externals of clothing and hair and jewelry. Neither is there any reason to nullify the general command to be modest and sensible, or the warning against ostentation. The only question is whether wearing braids, gold, and pearls is intrinsically sinful then and now. There is one clear indication from the context that this was not the point. Peter says, “Let not yours be the external adorning of... wearing clothes.” The Greek does not say “fine” clothes (*NIV* and *RSV*), but just “wearing clothes” or, as the *NASB* says, “putting on dresses.” Now we know Peter is not condemning the use of clothes. He is condemning the misuse of clothes. This suggests, then, that the same thing could be said about gold and braids. The point is not to warn against something intrinsically evil, but to warn against its misuse as an expression of self-exaltation or worldly-mindedness. Add to this that the commands concerning headship and submission are rooted in the created order (in 1 Timothy 2:13-14) while the specific forms of modesty are not. This is why we plead innocent of the charge of selective literalism.

32. But doesn't Paul argue for a head covering for women in worship by appealing to the created order in 1 Corinthians 11:13-15? Why is the head covering not binding today while the teaching concerning submission and headship is?

The key question here is whether Paul is saying that creation dictates a head covering or that creation dictates that we use culturally appropriate expressions of masculinity and femininity, which just happened to be a head covering for women in that setting. We think the latter is the case. The key verses are: “Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering,” (1 Corinthians 11:13-15).

How did nature teach that long hair dishonored a man and gave women a covering? Nature has not endowed women with more hair than men. In fact, if nature takes its course, men will have more hair than women because it will cover their face as well as their head. There must be another way that nature teaches on this subject! We believe custom and nature conspire in this pedagogy. On the one hand, *custom* dictates what hair arrangements are generally masculine or feminine. On the other hand, *nature* dictates that men feel ashamed when they wear symbols of femininity. We could feel the force of this by asking the men of our churches, “Does not nature teach you not to wear a dress to church?” The teaching of nature is the *natural* inclination of men and women to feel shame when they abandon the culturally established symbols of masculinity or femininity. Nature does not teach what the symbols should be.

“This is my story,
this is my Song,
Praising my Savior,
all the day long.”
- Fanny Crosby

Church Leadership/The Doctrine of Jesus Christ

Women and Leadership

“Surely, there can be no deeper joy than that of saving souls.”

- *Lottie Moon*

When Paul says that a woman’s hair “is given to her for a covering” (v. 15), he means that nature has given woman the hair and the inclination to follow prevailing customs of displaying her femininity, which in this case included letting her hair grow long and drawing it up into a covering for her head. So Paul’s point in this passage is that the relationships of manhood and womanhood, which are rooted in the created order (1 Corinthians 11:7-9), should find appropriate cultural expression in the worship service. Nature teaches this by giving men and women deep and differing inclinations about the use of masculine and feminine symbols.

33. How is it consistent to forbid the eldership to women in our churches and then send them out as missionaries to do things forbidden at home?

We stand in awe of the faith, love, courage, and dedication that have moved thousands of single and married women into missions. The story told by Ruth Tucker in *Guardians of the Great Commission: The Story of Women in Modern Missions* is great. Our prayer is that it will inspire thousands more women—and men!—to give themselves to the great work of world evangelization. Is this inconsistent of us? Is it true that we are sending women as missionaries to do “things forbidden” at home? If so, it is a remarkable fact that the vast majority of the women who over the centuries have become missionaries also endorsed the responsibility of men in leadership the way we do (Tucker, p. 38). And the men who have most vigorously recruited and defended women for missions have done so, not because they disagreed with our vision of manhood and womanhood, but because they saw boundless work available in evangelism—some that women could do better than men.

For example, Hudson Taylor saw that when a Chinese catechist worked with a “missionary sister” instead of a European male missionary, “the whole work of teaching and preaching and representing the mission to outsiders devolves upon him; he counts as the head of the mission, and must act independently.” The paradoxical missionary strength of being “weak” was recognized again and again. Mary Slessor, in an incredible display of strength, argued that she should be allowed to go alone to unexplored territory in Africa because “as a woman she would be less of a threat to native tribesmen than a male missionary would be, and therefore safer.”²

Another example is A. J. Gordon, the Boston pastor, missionary, statesman, and founder (in 1889) of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. He strongly promoted women in missions, appealing especially to the prophesying daughters of Acts 2:17. But for all his exuberance for the widest ministry of women in mission he took a view of 1 Timothy 2:12 similar to ours: “Admit, however, that the prohibition is against public teaching; what may it mean? To teach and to govern are the special functions of the presbyter. The teacher and the pastor, named in the gifts to the Church (Eph. 4:11), Alford considers to be the same; and the pastor is generally regarded as identical with the bishop. Now there is no instance in the New Testament of a woman being set over a church as bishop and teacher. The lack of such example would lead us to refrain from ordaining a woman as pastor of a Christian congregation. But if the Lord has fixed this limitation, we believe it to be grounded, not on her less favored

position in the privileges of grace, but in the impediments to such service existing in nature itself.”³

We admit that there are ambiguities in applying Paul’s instructions about an established church to an emerging church. We admit that there are ambiguities in separating the Priscilla-type counsel from the official teaching role of 1 Timothy 2:12. We could imagine ourselves struggling for biblical and cultural faithfulness the way Hudson Taylor did in a letter to Miss Faulding in 1868: “I do not know when I may be able to return, and it will not do for Church affairs to wait for me. You cannot take a Pastor’s place in name, but you must help (Wang) Lae-djun to act in matters of receiving-and excluding as far as you can. You can speak privately to candidates, and can be present at Church meetings, and might even, through others, suggest questions to be asked of those desiring baptism. Then after the meeting you can talk privately with Lae-djun about them, and suggest who you think he might receive next time they meet. Thus he may have the help he needs, and there will be nothing that any one could regard as unseemly.”⁴

We do not wish to impede the great cause of world evangelization by quibbling over which of the hundreds of roles might correspond so closely to pastor/elder as to be inappropriate for a woman to fill. It is manifest to us that women are fellow workers in the gospel and should strive side by side with men (Philippians 4:3; Romans 16:3,12). For the sake of finishing the Great Commission in our day, we are willing to risk some less-than-ideal role assignments.

We hope that we are not sending men or women to do things that are forbidden at home. We are not sending women to become the pastors or elders of churches. Neither has the vast majority of women evangelists and church planters sought this for themselves. We do not think it is forbidden for women to tell the gospel story and win men and women to Christ. We do not think God forbids women to work among the millions of lost women in the world, which according to Ruth Tucker “was the major justification of the Women’s Missionary Movement.”⁵ Even if a woman held a more restrictive view than ours, the fact that over two-thirds of the world’s precious lost people are women and children means that there are more opportunities in evangelism and teaching than could ever be exhausted. Our passion is not to become the watchdogs of where women serve. Our passion is to join hands with all God’s people, *in God’s way*, to “declare his glory among the nations” (Psalm 96:3).

34. Do you deny to women the right to use the gifts God has given them? Does not God’s giving a spiritual gift imply that He endorses its use for the edification of the church.

Having a spiritual gift is not a warrant to use it however we please. John White is right when he writes, “Some people believe it to be impossible that the power of the Holy Spirit could have unholy consequences in an individual’s life. But it can.”¹⁶ Spiritual gifts are not only given by the Holy Spirit, they are also regulated by the Holy Scriptures. This is clear from 1 Corinthians, where people with the gift of tongues were told not to use it in public when there was no gift of interpretation, and

“If I crave hungrily to be used to show the way of liberty to a soul in bondage, instead of caring only that it be delivered; if I nurse my disappointment when I fail, instead of asking that another the word of release may be given, then I know nothing of Calvary love.”

- Amy Carmichael

Church Leadership/The Doctrine of Jesus Christ

Women and Leadership

“To take such a revolutionary step at the present moment, to cut ourselves off from the Christian past and to widen the divisions between ourselves and other churches by establishing an order of priestesses in our midst, would be an almost wanton degree of imprudence.”

- C. S. Lewis

prophets were told to stop prophesying when someone else had a revelation (14:28-30). We do not deny to women the right to use the gifts God has given them. If they have gifts of teaching or administration or evangelism, God does want those gifts used, and He will honor the commitment to use them within the guidelines given in Scripture.

35. If God has genuinely called a woman to be a pastor, then how can you say she should not be one?

We do not believe God genuinely calls women to be pastors. We say this not because we can read the private experience of anyone, but because we believe private experience must always be assessed by the public criterion of God’s Word, the Bible. If the Bible teaches that God wills for men alone to bear the primary teaching and governing responsibilities of the pastorate, then by implication the Bible also teaches that God does not call women to be pastors. The church has known from its earliest days that a person’s personal *sense* of divine leading is not *by itself* an adequate criterion for discerning God’s call. Surely there is a divine sending of chosen ministers (Romans 10:15); but there is also the divine warning concerning those who thought they were called and were not: “I did not send or appoint them” (Jeremiah 23:32).

Probably what is discerned as a divine call to the pastorate in some earnest Christian women is indeed a call to ministry, but not to the pastorate. Very often the divine compulsion to serve comes upon Christians without the precise avenue of service being specified by the Holy Spirit. At this point we should look not only at our gifts but also at the teaching of Scripture regarding what is appropriate for us as men and women.

36. What is the meaning of authority when you talk about it in relation to the home and the church?

This question is crucial because the New Testament shows that the basic relationships of life fit together in terms of authority and compliance. For example, the relationship between parents and children works on the basis of the right of the parents to require obedience (Ephesians 6:1-2). The civil government has authority to make laws that regulate the behavior of citizens (Romans 13:1-7; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13-17). Most social institutions have structures that give to some members the right to direct the actions of others. The military and business come most readily to mind (Matthew 8:9; 1 Peter 3:18-20). The church, while made up of a priesthood of believers, is governed in the New Testament by servant-leaders whom the people are called to follow (1 Thessalonians 5:12; Hebrews 13:7, 17; 1 Timothy 3:5; 5:17). And in marriage the wife is called to submit to the sacrificial headship of her husband (Ephesians 5:22-33; Colossians 3:18-19; 1 Peter 3:1-7). Finally, the source of all this authority is God’s authority, which is absolute.

What becomes clear as soon as we try to give a definition to this authority is that its form changes from one relationship to another. We would define authority in general as the *right* (Matthew 8:9) and *power* (Mark 1:27; 1 Corinthians 7:37) and *responsibility* (2 Corinthians 10:8; 13:10) *to give direction to another*. This applies perfectly to God in all His relationships. But it applies in very different ways to the different human relationships.

For example, with regard to the *power* to direct others, the state is invested with the sword (Romans 13:4); parents are given the rod (Proverbs 13:24); businesses can terminate an employee (Luke 16:2); and elders can, with the church, excommunicate (Matthew 18:17; 1 Corinthians 5:1-8). Similarly, the extent of the *right* to direct others varies with each relationship. For example, parents have the right to be directly involved in the minutest details of their children, teaching them to hold their forks correctly and sit up straight. But the government and the church would not have such extensive rights.

For Christians, *right* and *power* recede and *responsibility* predominates. “Jesus called them together and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,’” (Matthew 20:25-26). Authority becomes a burden to bear, not a right to assert. It is a sacred duty to discharge for the good of others. Excommunicating a church member is a painful last resort. A spanked child is enfolded in affection. Employers show mercy. But none of this is the abolition of authority structures, only their transformation as loving responsibility seeks to outrun rights and power.

The transformation of authority is most thorough in marriage. This is why we prefer to speak of leadership and headship rather than authority. The Bible does not give warrant to husbands to use physical power to bring wives into submission. When Ephesians 5:25-27 shows Christ bringing His bride toward holiness, it shows Him suffering for her, not making her suffer for Him. The husband’s authority is a God-given burden to be carried in humility, not a natural right to flaunt with pride. At least three things hinder a husband from using his authority (leadership!) to justify force: 1) the unique intimacy and union implied in the phrase “one flesh”—“... no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it. . .” (Ephesians 5:29-31); 2) the special honor commanded in 1 Peter 3:7 as to a joint heir of the grace of life; 3) the aim to cultivate shared maturity in Christ, not childish dependence. Thus authority in general is the right, power, and responsibility to direct others. But the form and balance of these elements will vary in the different relationships of life according to the teachings of Scripture.

37. If a church embraces a congregational form of governance in which the congregation, and not the elders, is the highest authority under Christ and Scripture, should the women be allowed to vote?

“One cannot imagine St. Francis of Assisi talking about rights.”
- Simone Weil

“There are those who insist that it is a very bad thing to question God. To them, “why?” is a rude question. That depends, I believe, on whether it is an honest search, in faith, for His meaning, or whether it is the challenge of unbelief and rebellion.”

- Elisabeth Elliot

Yes. Acts 15:22 says, “Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch.” This seems to be a biblical expression of the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6; 5:10; cf. Matthew 18:17). The reason we do not think this is inconsistent with 1 Timothy 2:12 is that the authority of the church is not the same as the authority of the individuals who make up the church. When we say the congregation has authority, we do not mean that each man and each woman has that authority. Therefore, gender, as a part of individual personhood, is not significantly in view in corporate congregational decisions.

38. In Romans 16:7, Paul wrote, “Greet Andronicus and Junias, my relatives who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was.” Isn’t Junias a woman? And wasn’t she an apostle? And doesn’t that mean that Paul was willing to acknowledge that a woman held a very authoritative position over men in the early church?

Let’s take these three questions one at a time.

1. Was Junias a woman? We cannot know. The evidence is indecisive. We did a complete search of all the Greek writings from Homer (B.C. ninth century?) into the fifth century A.D. available now on computer through the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* (Pilot CD ROM #C, University of California at Irvine, 1987), which contains 2,889 authors and 8,203 works. We asked the computer for all forms of *Iounia*- so that we would pick up all the possible cases. (We did not search for the possible first declension masculine genitive *Iouniou*, which morphologically *could* come from a masculine *Iounias*, because there is no way to tell if *Iouniou* might come from the man’s name *Iounios*; so that all these genitive forms would be useless in establishing a masculine *Iounias*.)

The result of our computer search is this: Besides the one instance in Romans 16:7 there were three others.

1. Plutarch (ca. A.D. 50-ca. 120), in his *Life of Marcus Brutus*, wrote about the tension between Brutus and Cassius, “... though they were connected in their families, Cassius having married Junia, the sister of Brutus (*Iounia gar adelphē Broutou sunoikei Kassios*).”¹⁷

2. Epiphanius (A.D. 315-403), the bishop of Salamis in Cyprus, wrote an *Index of Disciples*, in which he includes this line: “Iounias, of whom Paul makes mention, became bishop of Apameia of Syria” (*Index disciplulorum*, 125.19-20). In Greek, the phrase “of whom” is a masculine relative pronoun (*hou*) and shows that Epiphanius thought Iounias was a man.

3. John Chrysostom (A.D. 347-407), in preaching on Romans 16:7, said in reference to Junias, “Oh! How great is the devotion of this woman, that she should be even counted worthy of the appellation of apostle!”¹⁸

What we may learn from these three uses is that Junias was used as a woman’s name in the time around the New Testament (Plutarch). The Church Fathers were evidently divided as to whether Paul was using Junias that way, Epiphanius assuming it is masculine, Chrysostom assuming it is feminine. Perhaps somewhat more weight may be given to the statement by Epiphanius, since he appears to know more specific information about Junias (that he became bishop of Apameia), while Chrysostom gives no more information than what he could deduce from Romans 16:7).¹⁹ Perhaps more significant than either of these, however, is a Latin quotation from Origen (died 252 A.D.), in the earliest extant commentary on Romans: He says that Paul refers to “Andronicus and Junias and Herodian, all of whom he calls relatives and fellow captives (*Andronicus, et Junias, et Herodion, quos omnes et cognatos suos, et concaptivos appellat*)” (Origen’s commentary on Romas, preserved in a Latin translation by Rufinus, c. 345-c.410 A.D., in J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 14, col. 1289). The name Junias here is a Latin masculine singular nominative, implying—if this ancient translation is reliable—that Origen (who was one of the ancient world’s most proficient scholars) thought Junias was a man. Coupled with the quotation from Epiphanius, this quotation makes the weight of ancient evidence support this view.

Masculine names ending in *-as* are not unusual even in the New Testament: Andrew (*Andreas*, Matthew 10:2), Elijah (*Elias*, Matthew 11:14), Isaiah (*Esaias*, John 1:23), Zacharias (Luke 1:5). A. T. Robertson (*Grammar of the Greek New Testament* [New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1914], pp. 171-173) shows that numerous names ending in *-as* are shortened forms for clearly masculine forms. The clearest example in the New Testament is Silas (Acts 15:22) from Silvanus (1 Thessalonians 1:1; 1 Peter 5:12).

So there is no way to be dogmatic about what the form of the name signifies. It could be feminine or it could be masculine. Certainly no one should claim that Junia was a common woman’s name in the Greek speaking world, since there are only these three known examples in all of ancient Greek literature. Moreover the fact that Andronicus and Junias, like Prisca and Aquila (16:3), are given as a pair does not demand that they be husband and wife, because in 16:12 two women are greeted as a pair: “Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, those women who work hard in the Lord.” Andronicus and Junias could be addressed as two men, since Tryphena and Tryphosa are addressed as two women.

2. Was Junias an apostle? Possibly so, but this is not certain. Grammatically “of note among the apostles” could mean that the apostles held Andronicus and Junias in high regard. Thus they would not be themselves apostles. But this is unlikely

“From subtle love
of softening things,
From easy choices,
weakenings, (Not
thus are spirits
fortified; Not this
way went the
Crucified.)”
- Amy Carmichael

Church Leadership/The Doctrine of Jesus Christ

Women and Leadership

“I long to accomplish a great and noble task; but my chief duty is to accomplish small tasks as if they were great and noble.”

- Helen Keller

because Paul himself is an apostle and would probably not refer to them in the third person. On the other hand, since Andronicus and Junias were Christians before Paul was, it may be that their longstanding ministry (reaching back before Paul’s) is precisely what Paul might have in mind when he says “of note among the apostles.” They may well have been known among the apostles before Paul was even converted. Here again we cannot be certain.

3. Did Junias have a very authoritative position in the early church? Probably not. The word *apostle* is used for servants of Christ at different levels of authority in the New Testament. Revelation 2 1:14 refers to “the twelve apostles of the Lamb” (cf. Matthew 19:28; Acts 1:15-26). The twelve had a unique role in bearing witness to the resurrection of Jesus. Paul counted himself among the privileged group by insisting on having seen and been called by the risen Christ (Galatians 1:1, 12; 1 Corinthians 9:1-2). Very closely related with this unique inner ring were the missionary partners of Paul, Barnabas (Acts 14:14) and Silvanus and Timothy (1 Thessalonians 2:6), as well as James, the Lord’s brother (Galatians 1:19) and perhaps others (1 Corinthians 15:7).

Finally, the word *apostle* is used in a broad sense as “messenger,” for example, of Epaphroditus in Philippians 2:25, and of several “messengers of the churches” in 2 Corinthians 8:23. Therefore, if Andronicus and Junias were apostles, they were probably among the third group serving in some kind of itinerant ministry. If Junias is a woman, this would seem to put her in the same category with Priscilla, who with her husband seemed to do at least a little traveling with the Apostle Paul (Acts 18:18). The ministry would be significant but not necessarily in the category of an authoritative governor of the churches like Paul (2 Corinthians 10:8; 13:10).

39. Paul seems to base the primary responsibility of man to lead and teach on the fact that he was created first, before woman (1 Timothy 2:13). How is this a valid argument when the animals were created before man, but don't have primary responsibility for leading him?

The contextual basis for this argument in the book of Genesis is the assumption throughout the book that the “firstborn” in a human family has the special right and responsibility of leadership in the family. When the Hebrews gave a special responsibility to the “firstborn,” it never entered their minds that this responsibility would be nullified if the father happened to own cattle before he had sons. In other words, when Moses wrote this, he knew that the first readers would not lump animals and humans together as equal candidates for the responsibilities of the “firstborn.” We shouldn’t either.

Once this concern with the priority of animals is out of the way, the question that evangelical feminists must come to terms with is why God should choose to create man and woman sequentially. It won’t do just to say, “Sequence doesn’t *have* to mean leadership priority.” The question is: “What *does* this sequence mean?” Why didn’t God create them simultaneously out of the same dust? In the context of all the textual

pointers assembled by Ray Ortlund Jr. in his chapter on Genesis 1-3, we think the most natural implication of God's decision to bring Adam onto the scene ahead of Eve is that he is called to bear the responsibility of headship. That fact is validated by the New Testament when Paul uses the fact that "Adam was formed first, then Eve" (1 Timothy 2:13) to draw a conclusion about male leadership in the church.

40. Isn't it true that the reason Paul did not permit women to teach was that women were not well-educated in the first century? But that reason does not apply today. In fact, since women are as well-educated as men today, shouldn't we allow both women and men to be pastors?

This objection does not match the data in the biblical text, for at least three reasons: (1) Paul does not give lack of education as a reason for saying that women cannot "teach or have authority over a man" (1 Timothy 2:12), but rather points back to creation (1 Timothy 2:13-14). It is precarious to build an argument on a reason Paul did *not* give, instead of the reason he did give.

(2) Formal training in Scripture was not required for church leadership in the New Testament church—even several of the apostles did not have formal biblical training (Acts 4:13), while the skills of basic literacy and therefore the ability to read and study Scripture were available to men and women alike (note Acts 18:26; Romans 16:1; 1 Timothy 2:11; Titus 2:3-4). The papyri show "widespread literacy" among Greek-speaking women in Egypt, and, in Roman society, "many women were educated and witty" (*Oxford Classical Dictionary*, ed. N. Hammond and H. Scullard [second edition; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970], p. 1139).

(3) If any woman in the New Testament church was well-educated, it would have been Priscilla, yet Paul was writing 1 Timothy 2:12 to Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:3), the home church of Priscilla and Aquila. Beginning (*sic*) in 50 A.D., Paul had stayed at the home of Priscilla and Aquila in Corinth for eighteen months (Acts 18:2, 11), then they had gone with Paul to Ephesus in 51 A.D. (Acts 18:18-19, 21). Even by that time Priscilla knew Scripture well enough to help instruct Apollos (Acts 18:26). Then she had probably learned from Paul himself for another three years, while he stayed at Ephesus teaching "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27, *RSV*; cf. v. 31; also 1 Corinthians 16:19), and no doubt many other women in Ephesus followed her example and also learned from Paul. Aquila and Priscilla had gone to Rome sometime later (Romans 16:3), about 58 A.D., but apparently had returned, for they were in Ephesus again at the end of Paul's life (2 Timothy 4:19), about 67 A.D. Therefore it is likely that they were back in Ephesus in 65 A. D., about the time Paul wrote 1 Timothy (persecution of Christians began in Rome in 64 A.D.). Yet not even well-educated Priscilla, nor any other well-educated women in Ephesus, were allowed to teach men in the public assembly of the church: writing to Ephesus, Paul said, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man" (1 Timothy 2:12). The reason was not lack of education, but creation order.

"We ought not to be weary of doing little things for the love of God, who regards not the greatness of the work, but the love with which it is performed."

- Brother Lawrence

“Holiness has never been the driving force of the majority. It is, however, mandatory for anyone who wants to enter the kingdom.”

- Elisabeth Elliot

41. *Why do you bring up homosexuality when discussing male and female role distinctions in the home and the church (as in question 1)? Most evangelical feminists are just as opposed as you are to the practice of homosexuality.*

We bring up homosexuality because we believe that the feminist minimization of sexual role differentiation contributes to the confusion of sexual identity that, especially in second and third generations, gives rise to more homosexuality in society. Some evangelicals who once disapproved of homosexuality have been carried by their feminist arguments into approving of faithful homosexual alliances. For example, Gerald Shepard, a professor of Old Testament Literature at Emmanuel College in the University of Toronto, was nurtured in a conservative evangelical tradition and attended an evangelical seminary. In recent years he has argued for the ordination of women to the pastorate. He has also moved on to say, “On a much more controversial matter, the presence of gay and lesbian Christians and ministers in our churches is for me a similar issue. . . . I believe that the Gospel—as Evangelicals Concerned recognizes—should lead us at least to an affirmation of gay and lesbian partnerships ruled by a Biblical ethic analogous to that offered for heterosexual relationships.”²⁰

Another example is Karen J. Torjesen, who argues that removing hierarchy in sexual relations will probably mean that the primacy of heterosexual marriage will have to go: “It would appear that, in Paul, issues of sexuality are theologically related to hierarchy, and therefore the issues of biblical feminism and lesbianism are irrefutably intertwined. We need to grapple with the possibility that our conflicts over the appropriate use of human sexuality may rather be conflicts rooted in a need to legitimate the traditional social structure which assigns men and women specific and unequal positions. Could it be that the continued affirmation of the primacy of heterosexual marriage is possibly also the affirmation of the necessity for the sexes to remain in a hierarchically structured relationship? Is the threat to the “sanctity of marriage” really a threat to hierarchy? Is that what makes same-sex relations so threatening, so frightening?”²¹ The Evangelical Women’s Caucus was split in 1986 over whether there should be “recognition of the presence of the lesbian minority in EWCI.”²² We are glad that many evangelical women distanced themselves from the endorsement of lesbianism. But what is significant is how many evangelical feminists considered the endorsement “a step of maturity within the organization” (e.g., Nancy Hardesty and Virginia Mollenkott). In other words, they view the movement away from role distinctions grounded in the natural created order as leading inevitably to the overthrow of normative heterosexuality. It seems to us that the evangelical feminists who do not embrace homosexuality will be increasingly hard put to escape this logic.

Paul Jewett, too, seems to illustrate a move from biblical feminism toward endorsing certain expressions of homosexuality. In his defense of equal roles for men and women in *Man as Male and Female* in 1975, he said that he was uncertain “what it means to be a man in distinction to a woman or a woman in distinction to a man.”²³ That seemed to us to bode ill for preserving the primacy of heterosexuality. In 1983,

he reviewed the historical defense of homosexuality by John Boswell, who argued that Paul's meaning in Romans 1:26-27 was that the only thing condemned was homosexual behavior by heterosexuals, not by homosexuals who acted according to their "nature." Jewett rejected this interpretation with the words, "For [Paul] the 'nature' against which a homosexual acts is not simply his individual nature, but the generic human nature in which he shares as an individual."²⁴

This was gratifying, but it seemed strange again to us that he would say homosexual behavior is a sin against "generic *human* nature" rather than *masculine* or *feminine* nature. Then, in 1985, Jewett seemed to give away the biblical case for heterosexuality in a review of Robin Scroggs' book, *The New Testament and Homosexuality*. Scroggs argues that the passages that relate to homosexual behavior in the New Testament "are irrelevant and provide no help in the heated debate today" because they do not refer to homosexual "inversion," which is a natural orientation, but to homosexual "perversion."²⁵ Jewett says, "If this is the meaning of the original sources—and the scholarship is competent, the argument is careful and, therefore, the conclusion is rather convincing—then what the New Testament is against is something significantly different from a homosexual orientation which some people have from their earliest days."²⁶

Not only have we seen evangelical feminists carried by the logic of their position toward endorsing homosexuality, but we also see the clinical evidence that there is no such thing as a "homosexual child." George Rekers, Professor in the Department of Neuropsychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at the Medical School of the University of South Carolina, has argued this in many technical journals and some popular works. (For example, *Shaping Your Child's Sexual Identity* [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982]; *The Christian in an Age of Sexual Eclipse* [Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1981]. See also Chapter 17.) What Rekers means is that there are dynamics in the home that direct the sexual preferences of the child. Especially crucial is a father's firm and loving affirmation of a son's masculinity or a daughter's femininity.²⁷ But, we ask, how can this kind of affirmation be cultivated in an atmosphere where role differences between masculinity and femininity are constantly denied or minimized? If the only significant role differentiation is based on competency and has no root in nature, what will parents do to shape the sexual identity of their tiny children? If they say that they will do nothing, common sense and many psychological studies tell us that the children will be confused about who they are and will therefore be far more likely to develop a homosexual orientation.

To us it is increasingly and painfully clear that biblical feminism is an unwitting partner in unraveling the fabric of complementary manhood and womanhood that provides the foundation not only for biblical marriage and biblical church order, but also for heterosexuality itself.

42. How do you know that your interpretation of Scripture is not more influenced by your background and culture than by what the authors of Scripture actually intended?

"The time to be right is when everyone else is wrong."

- Unknown

“When ours are interrupted, his are not. His plans are proceeding exactly as scheduled, moving us always (including those minutes or hours or years which seem most useless or wasted or unendurable) ‘toward the goal of true maturity’ (Rom 12:2 JBP).”

- Elisabeth Elliot

We are keenly aware of our fallibility. We feel the forces of culture, tradition, and personal inclination, as well as the deceitful darts of the devil. We have our personal predispositions, and have no doubt been influenced by all the genetic and environmental constraints of our past and present. The history of exegesis does not encourage us that we will have the final word on this issue, and we hope we are not above correction. But we take heart that some measure of freedom from falsehood is possible, because the Bible encourages us not to be conformed to this age but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:1-2).

Whether feminists are more influenced by the immense cultural pressure of contemporary egalitarian assumptions, or we are more influenced by centuries of patriarchalism and by our own masculine drives is hard to say. It does little good for us to impugn each other on the basis of these partially subconscious influences. It is clear from the literature that we all have our suspicions. Nonetheless, our confidence in the convictions we hold is based on five facts:

1) We regularly search our motives and seek to empty ourselves of all that would tarnish true perception of reality. 2) We pray that God would give us humility, teachability, wisdom, insight, fairness, and honesty. 3) We make every effort to submit our minds to the unbending and unchanging grammatical and historical reality of the biblical texts in Greek and Hebrew, using the best methods of study available to get as close as possible to the intentions of the biblical writers. 4) We test our conclusions by the history of exegesis to reveal any chronological snobbery or cultural myopia. 5) We test our conclusions in the real world of contemporary ministry and look for resonance from mature and godly people. In humble confidence that we are handling the Scriptures with care, we lay our vision now before the public for all to see and debate in public forum.

43. Why is it acceptable to sing hymns written by women and recommend books written by women but not to permit them to say the same things audibly?

We do *not* say that a woman cannot say the same things audibly. When Paul says, “...be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs,” (Ephesians 5:18-19), we imagine women in the congregation reciting or singing for the church what God had given them (perhaps, in some cases, as a kind of “prophecy” mentioned in 1 Corinthians 11:5). Moreover, we rejoice in the inevitable fact that the men as well as the women will learn and be built up and encouraged by this poetic ministry. *Nor* would we say that what a woman writes in books and articles cannot be spoken audibly. The issue for us is whether she should function as part of the primary teaching leadership (=eldership) in a fellowship of women and men. We have not, of course, ruled out either small or worldwide ministries of teaching other women. Neither have we ruled out occasional lectureships and periodic addresses (as distinct from recognized Bible teaching in the church) in which women address men as well as women, for example, at the Urbana Missions Conference or any number of local and national conferences and convocations. We use the qualifiers *occasional* and *periodic* because the regularity of teaching one group of people is part of what

constitutes the difference between *official* teaching leadership, which is withheld from women in 1 Timothy 2:12, and the unofficial guidance given by Priscilla and Aquila in Acts 18:26. We recognize that these lectures and addresses *could* be delivered in a spirit and demeanor that would assault the principle of male leadership. But it is not necessary that they do so. This is most obvious when the woman publicly affirms that principle with intelligence and gladness.

We also recognize the ambiguities involved in making these distinctions between the kinds of public speaking that are appropriate and inappropriate. Our expectation is not that we will all arrive at exactly the same sense of where to draw these lines, but that we might come to affirm together the underlying principles. Obedient, contemporary application of ethical teachings (e.g., the teachings of Jesus on poverty and wealth, anger and forgiveness, justice and non-retaliation) has always been laden with difficult choices.

44. Isn't giving women access to all offices and roles a simple matter of justice that even our society recognizes?

We are aware that increasingly the question is being posed in terms of justice. For example, Nicholas Wolterstorff says, "The question that women in the church are raising is a question of justice. . . . Women are not asking for handouts of charity from us men. They are asking that in the church—in the church of all places—they receive their due. They are asking why gender is relevant for assigning tasks and roles and offices and responsibilities and opportunities in the church."²⁸ Clearly, we think gender *is* relevant for determining the justice of roles and responsibilities. Perhaps the best way to show *why* is to cite an article from the *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* from March 7, 1989 (p. 11A), entitled, "Gay Adults Should Not be Denied the Benefits of Marriage." The author, Thomas B. Stoddard, told the story of two lesbians, Karen Thompson and Sharon Kowalski, of Minnesota. "Thompson and Kowalski are spouses in every respect," he writes, "except the legal." (Every jurisdiction in the United States refuses to permit two individuals of the same sex to marry.) "They exchanged vows and rings; they lived together until Nov. 13, 1983— when Kowalski was severely injured when her car was struck by a drunk driver. She lost the capacity to walk or to speak more than several words at a time, and needs constant care. Thompson sought a court ruling granting her guardianship over her partner, but Kowalski's parents opposed the petition and obtained sole guardianship. They moved Kowalski to a nursing home 300 miles away from Thompson and forbade all visits."

Stoddard uses this story to illustrate the painful effects of the "monstrous *injustice*" of "depriving millions of gay American adults the marriages of their choice." His argument is that gay marriages "create families and promote social stability. In an increasingly loveless world, those who wish to commit themselves to a relationship founded upon devotion should be encouraged, not scorned. Government has no legitimate interest in how that love is expressed."

"When I get to heaven, the first face that shall ever gladden my sight will be that of my Savior."
- Fanny Crosby
(hymnwriter who was blind throughout her life.)

“Experience has taught me that the Shepherd is far more willing to show His sheep the path than the sheep are to follow. He is endlessly merciful, patient, tender, and loving. If we, His stupid and wayward sheep, really want to be led, we will without fail be led. Of that I am sure.”
- Elisabeth Elliot

This raises a very fundamental question: How does natural existence relate to moral duty? Or: What moral constraints does our birth as male or female put upon us? Does God intend that our maleness confront us with any moral demands that are different from the moral demands with which God confronts a woman by virtue of her femaleness?

The answer is not simple. On the one hand we would cry, No! The Ten Commandments apply equally to man and woman with no distinctions. But on the other hand, most of us would also cry, Yes! It is a sin for a man to marry a man. But it is not a sin for a woman to marry a man (Romans 1:26-27). If this is so, we *cannot* say that what we are by *nature* (gender) is unimportant in determining our moral duty in relation to other people. When a man stands before a woman, the moral duty that confronts him is not identical with his duty when he stands before a man. God has ordained that the natural and moral world intersect, among other places, at the point of our sexuality. Until the recent emergence of gay pride, scarcely anyone would have accused God of discriminating against woman by giving only to men the right to marry women. Historically, it did not seem unjust that *solely* on the basis of gender God would exclude half the human race as lawful spouses for women. It seemed “fitting” and “natural” and “right” (“just”) that a large array of marital feelings and actions should be denied to women and men in their relations to half the human race. The reason there was no worldwide revolt against this enormous limitation of our freedom was probably that it squared with what most of us felt was appropriate and desirable anyway. In His mercy God has not allowed the inner voice of nature to be so distorted as to leave the world with no sense of moral fitness in this affair.

It may be that evangelical feminists would say that gender *is* relevant in defining justice in regard to *marriage* because nature teaches by the *anatomy* and *physiology* of man and woman what is just and right. But we ask, is that really the only basis in nature for marriage? Are we left only with anatomical differences as the ground of heterosexual marriage? One of the theses of this book is that the natural fitness of man and woman for each other in marriage is rooted in something more than anatomy. There is a profound female or male personhood portrayed in our differing bodies. As Emil Brunner put it:

“Our sexuality penetrates to the deepest metaphysical ground of our personality. As a result, the physical differences between the man and the woman are a parable of psychical and spiritual differences of a more ultimate nature.”²⁹

Or as Otto Piper said, “Though [the difference between the sexes] has a sexual basis, its actuality covers all aspects of personal life.”³⁰

Perhaps, if evangelical feminists, who do not endorse the justice of homosexual marriages, would agree that the basis of their position is not mere anatomy but also the deeper differences of manhood and womanhood, then they could at least understand why we are hesitant to jettison such deeper differences when thinking through the nature of justice in other relational issues besides who may marry whom. The point of our book is that Scripture and nature teach that personal manhood and

womanhood are indeed relevant in deciding not only whom to marry but also who gives primary leadership in the relationship.

45. Isn't it true that God is called our "helper" numerous times in the Bible with the same word used to describe Eve when she was called a "helper" suitable for man? Doesn't that rule out any notion of a uniquely submissive role for her, or even make her more authoritative than the man?

It is true that God is often called our "helper," but the word itself does not imply anything about rank or authority. The context must decide whether Eve is to "help" as a strong person who aids a weaker one, or as one who assists a loving leader. The context makes it very unlikely that *helper* should be read on the analogy of God's help, because in Genesis 2:19-20 Adam is caused to seek his "helper" first among the animals. But the animals will not do, because they are not "fit for him." So God makes woman "from man." Now there is a being who is "fit for him," sharing his human nature, equal to him in Godlike personhood. She is infinitely different from an animal, and God highlights her value to man by showing how no animal can fill her role. Yet in passing through "helpful" animals to woman, God teaches us that the woman is a man's "helper" in the sense of a loyal and suitable assistant in the life of the garden. The question seems to assume that because a word (like *helper*) has certain connotations ("Godlikeness") in some places it must have them in every place. This would be like saying that because God is described as one who "works" for us, therefore no human who "works" is responsible to his boss, since the word couldn't have that meaning when used of God.

46. Literally, 1 Corinthians 7:3-4 says, "Let the husband render to the wife the debt, likewise also the wife to the husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband (does); and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body but the wife (does). Do not deprive each other except perhaps by agreement for a season that you might give time to prayer..." Doesn't this show that unilateral authority from the husband is wrong?

Yes. But let's broaden our answer to get the most from this text and guard it from misuse. This text could be terribly misused by unloving men who take it as a license for thoughtless sexual demands, or even lewd and humiliating erotic activity. One can imagine a man's sarcastic jab: "The Bible says that you do not have authority over your body, but I do. And it says, you *owe* me what I want." The reason we say this would be a *misuse* is because the text also gives to the wife the authority to say, "The Bible says that you do not have authority over your body, but I do, and I tell you that I do not want you to use your body to do that to me," (v. 4b). Another reason we know this would be a misuse is that Paul says decisions in this sensitive area should be made "by agreement" (v. 5).

This text is not a license for sexual exploitation. It is an application to the sexual life of the command, "Honor one another above yourselves" (Romans 12:10). Or: "In humility consider others better than yourselves" (Philippians 2:3). Or: "[D]o not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love" (Galatians

"Do you wish to rise? Begin by descending. You plan a tower that will pierce the clouds? Lay first the foundation of humility."

- Saint Augustine

“The ordinary arts we practice every day at home are of more importance to the soul than their simplicity might suggest.”

- *Thomas More*

5:13). The focus is not on what we have a right to take, but on the debt we have to pay. Paul does not say, “Take what you want.” He says, “Do not deprive each other.” In other words, when it lies within your power to meet your spouse’s needs, do it.

There is a wonderful mutuality and reciprocity running through this text from verse 2 to verse 5. Neither husband nor wife is given more rights over the body of the other. And when some suspension of sexual activity is contemplated, Paul repudiates unilateral decision making by the wife or the husband. “Do not deprive each other except *by mutual consent* and for a time” (v. 5). What are the implications of this text for the leadership of the husband? Do the call for mutual yielding to sexual need and the renunciation of unilateral planning nullify the husband’s responsibility for general leadership in the marriage? We don’t think so. But this text definitely shapes that leadership and gives added biblical guidance for how to work it out. It makes clear that his leadership will not involve selfish, unilateral choices. He will always strive for the ideal of agreement. He will take into account the truth that her sexual needs and desires carry the same weight as his own in developing the pattern of their intimacy.

This text makes it crystal clear that leadership is not synonymous with having to get one’s way. This text is one of the main reasons we prefer to use the term *leadership* for the man’s special responsibility rather than *authority*. (See question 36.) Texts like this transform the concept of authority so deeply as to make the word, with its authoritarian connotations, easily misunderstood. The difference between us and the evangelical feminists is that they think the concept disappears into mutuality, while we think the concept is shaped by mutuality.

47. If you believe that role distinctions for men and women in the home and the church are rooted in God’s created order, why are you not as insistent about applying the rules everywhere in secular life as you are in the home and the church?

As we move out from the church and the home we move further from what is fairly clear and explicit to what is more ambiguous and inferential. Therefore our emphasis moves more and more away from specific role recommendations (like the ones made in Scripture), and instead focuses on the realization of male and female personhood through the more subjective dimensions of relationship like demeanor, bearing, attitudes, courtesies, initiatives, and numerous spoken and unspoken expectations.

We believe the Bible makes clear that men should take primary responsibility for leadership in the home and that, in the church, the primary teaching and governing leadership should be given by spiritual men. We take this to be a biblical expression of the goodness and the wisdom of God concerning the nature of leadership in these roles and the nature of manhood and womanhood. That is, rather than leaving to us to judge for ourselves whether mature manhood and womanhood would be preserved and enhanced through the primary leadership of men or women in these spheres, God was explicit about what would be good for us. However, when it comes to all the thousands of occupations and professions, with their endlessly varied structures of

management, God has chosen not to be specific about which roles men and women should fill. Therefore we are not as sure in this wider sphere which roles can be carried out by men or women in ways that honor the unique worth of male and female personhood. For this reason we focus (within some limits) on how these roles are carried out rather than which ones are appropriate. (See Chapter 1, pp. 44-45, 50-52.)

48. *How can a Christian single woman enter into the mystery of Christ and the church if she never experiences marriage?*

Elisabeth Elliot has given an answer to this that we prefer to quote rather than try (in vain) to improve:

*“The gift of virginity, given to every one to offer back to God for His use, is a priceless and irreplaceable gift. It can be offered in the pure sacrifice of marriage, or it can be offered in the sacrifice of a life’s celibacy. Does this sound just too, too high and holy? But think for a moment—because the virgin has never known a man, she is free to concern herself wholly with the Lord’s affairs, as Paul said in 1 Corinthians 7, “and her aim in life is to make herself holy, in body and spirit.” She keeps her heart as the Bride of Christ in a very special sense, and offers to the Heavenly Bridegroom alone all that she is and has. When she gives herself willingly to Him in love she has no need to justify herself to the world or to Christians who plague her with questions and suggestions. In a way not open to the married woman her daily “living sacrifice” is a powerful and humble witness, radiating love. I believe she may enter into the “mystery” more deeply than the rest of us.”*³¹

49. *Since many leading evangelical scholars disagree on the questions of manhood and womanhood, how can any lay person even hope to come to a clear conviction on these questions?*

Two of the concerns that prompted us to form the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood were: 1) “the increasing prevalence and acceptance of hermeneutical oddities devised to reinterpret apparently plain meanings of biblical texts;” and 2) “the consequent threat to biblical authority as the clarity of Scripture is jeopardized and the accessibility of its meaning to ordinary people is withdrawn into the restricted realm of technical ingenuity.”³²

Serious students of the Bible must walk a fine line between two dangers. On the one side there is the oversimplification of the process of interpretation that neglects the disciplines of historical and grammatical study. On the other side there is the temptation to pull rank on lay people and emphasize inaccessible data and complicated contextual problems so much that they despair of confident understanding. We realize that there are “some things that are hard to understand [in Paul’s letters], which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction” (2 Peter 3:16). This will guard us from overstating the simplicity of Scripture. But we believe the emphasis should fall

“Provided that God be glorified, we must not care by whom.”

- Francis de Sales

“We must make humility the chief thing we admire in Him.”

- Andrew Murray

on the usefulness of all Scripture. “*All Scripture* is God-breathed and is *useful* for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16). We do not want to discourage any serious lay person that the usefulness of Scripture is out of his or her reach. We also want to stress that under divine inspiration the Apostle Paul was committed to clarity and forthrightness in his writing: “. . . we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God” (2 Corinthians 4:2).

We would also encourage lay people to view controversies over important issues not only as evidence of our sin and ignorance but also as evidence that truth matters, that it is worth striving for, and that harmful error is not carrying the day unopposed. Paul said to the Corinthians, “I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God’s approval” (1 Corinthians 11:18-19). We are far from doubting the genuine Christian standing of evangelical feminists. This will be made very clear in Chapter 26. The point here is that controversy is necessary where truth matters and serious error is spreading. Lay people should therefore take heart that the battle for truth is being fought. They should realize that many of the plain things they virtually take for granted in their faith today were once hotly disputed and were preserved for them through controversy.

On this issue of manhood and womanhood we encourage lay people to consider the arguments available to them, think for themselves, saturate themselves in Scripture, and pray earnestly for what Paul promised in Philippians 3:15: “[I]f on some point you think differently, that too *God will make clear to you.*” For more guidance in this process we refer you to what is said above in question 42 and to Chapter 26, pp. 418-420, where we discuss the guidance of the Spirit in this matter.

50. If a group of texts is hotly disputed, wouldn’t it be a good principle of interpretation not to allow them any significant influence over our view of manhood and womanhood?

No, this would not be a good principle of interpretation. First, because almost every text about precious and important things is disputed in some way and by some Christians. Never in history has there been so much pluralism under the banner of the Bible as there is today. Second, imagine what it would mean if we took no stand on things because they were disputed. It would mean that Satan’s aim to mislead us would be made much easier. He would not have to overthrow the truth of biblical texts; he would only have to create enough confusion that we would put the important ones aside. Third, leaving Satan out for a moment, we are all biased and would very likely use this principle of interpretation to justify neglecting the texts that do not suit our bias while insisting that the ones that suit our bias are crystal clear.

This, it seems to us, is the Achilles heel of the hermeneutical approach adopted by Gretchen Gaebelein Hull in her book *Equal to Serve*. She takes one set of texts to be clear and undisputed, then takes another set to be obscure and disputed, and then says that the obscure ones should not have a crucial say in shaping our understanding of the issue. Specifically, she takes Genesis 1-2, the examples of Deborah, Huldah, Miriam, Abigail, etc., the ministry of Jesus to women, the examples of ministering women in the New Testament, plus texts on the redemptive equality of women (like 2 Corinthians 5:14-21), and infers that they *clearly* teach that male headship, in any distinctive form, is wrong. But all the texts in the New Testament that seem to teach an abiding role distinction for women and men she says are obscure and cannot make their contribution to the shape of our vision of manhood and womanhood. In the following lines she illustrates her method *vis a vis* the love of God and then applies it to the issue at hand:

“Everything I know about God indicates that He is indeed love, so loving that He came Himself to die for me. Therefore I put to one side passages like the Imprecatory Psalms or the Canaanite Wars that I do not understand. But I do *not* throw out the known truth “God is love,” simply because some passages about the nature of God puzzle me.

So we should also treat the three “hard passages” about women [1 Corinthians 11:2-16; 14:33b-36; 1 Timothy 2:8-15], which we find in the New Testament and which appear to place specific restrictions on women only. To these we could add Colossians 3:18; Ephesians 5:22-24; and 1 Peter 3:1-6. . . . Therefore we may legitimately put these Scripture portions aside for the very reason that they *remain* “hard passages”—hard exegetically, hard hermeneutically, and hard theologically.”³³

In this way, very crucial texts are silenced by the governing theme of “sex-blind” egalitarianism which is itself built on texts the meanings of which are also disputed. This illustrates the danger of a principle that says, if a text is disputed, don’t use it. Our procedure should be rather to continue to read Scripture carefully and prayerfully, seeking a position that dismisses no texts but interprets all the relevant texts of Scripture in a coherent way. And then we are to obey that consistent teaching.

51. Since there is significant disagreement in the church over the issues of men’s and women’s roles, should we not view this issue as having a very low level of importance in defining denominational, institutional and congregational standards of belief and practice?

We need to realize first that significant disagreement in the church does not mean that the issue at stake is unimportant. The history of doctrinal controversy teaches us that very important matters (as well as less important ones) have been the subject of serious controversy. In fact the length and intensity of a controversy may be evidence of the importance of the issue, not of its unimportance. If we examine the lists of expected standards for most denominations, institutions, and congregations, we discover that some articles (perhaps most) were included because a controversy swirled around that truth and a stand needed to be taken for the health of the church

“To stay here and disobey God -- I can’t afford to take the consequence. I would rather go and obey God than to stay here and know that I disobeyed.”

- Amanda Berry
Smith

Church Leadership/The Doctrine of Jesus Christ

Women and Leadership

“Joy is not gush. Joy is not jolliness. Joy is simply perfect acquiescence in God’s will, because the soul delights itself in God himself. Rejoice in the will of God, and in nothing else. Bow down your heads and your hearts before God, and let the will, the blessed will of God, be done.”

- Amy Carmichael

and the cause of the kingdom of Christ. This means that many precious truths may not be included in our doctrinal and ethical standards at any given point in history because they were simply taken for granted in the absence of controversy. For example, until recently, standards have not generally included explicit statements on homosexual practice or certain kinds of drug abuse.

Today most Christian denominations, institutions, and congregations have long taken for granted the primary responsibility (*sic*) of a husband to lead his family and the primary responsibility of spiritual men to lead the church. Therefore, these biblical truths have not received explicit statement in the formal standards. Their absence is *not* a sign of their relative unimportance but (almost the exact opposite) of their deep, pervasive, and long-standing worth in the Christian community. Thus we have the anomalous situation today that institutional affirmations of faith and practice include things far less important, we believe, than what is at stake in the heart of this issue. For example, we would say that the health and mission of the church are less at stake in the issues of infant and believer’s baptism, premillennialism, and the divisions over presbyterian, congregational, or episcopal polity.

Moreover, not to take a stand on this issue in our culture is to take a very decisive stand because of the relentless pressure for change being applied on many sides by feminists. Public advocacy on this issue results in so much criticism that many Christian leaders strive to avoid it. But there is no avoiding it. It is a massive issue that goes to the depths of who we are as persons and therefore touches all of life. Our counsel here is not to set out a specific strategy to preserve God’s gift of sexual complementarity. Rather, we simply plead for Christian leaders to awaken to the importance of what is at stake and seek the wisdom from above for how to act for the good of the church and the glory of God.

All Scripture quotations in this article are from the New International Version.

Footnotes:

¹ This includes patterns stemming from negligence and abuses by both husband and wife. As the *Danvers Statement* (see Appendix 2) says, “In the home, the husband’s loving, humble headship tends to be replaced by domination or passivity; the wife’s intelligent, willing submission tends to be replaced by usurpation or servility.” Our concern is to work from both sides for what Christ really intended His relationship to the church to look like.

² One of the most pertinent Greek witnesses for the meaning of *head* in Paul’s time describes an image of the head on the body as having a role of leadership. Philo of Alexandria said, “Just as nature conferred the sovereignty (*hegemonian*) of the body on the head when she granted it also possession of the citadel as the most suitable for its kingly rank, conducted it thither to take command and established it on high with the whole framework from neck to foot set below it, like the pedestal under the statue, so too she has given the lordship (*to kratos*) of the senses to the eyes” (*Special Laws*, III, 184.)

³ Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, *Gender and Grace* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), p. 238.

⁴ The English work most cited on this question is the dissertation by J.E. Crouch, *The Origin and Intention of the Colossian Haustafel*, F.R.L.A.N.T. 109 (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1972). The examples of ostensible parallels translated into English can be read in this work.

⁵ The Greek word *prostatis* does not mean “leader” but “helper,” “patroness.” In the Bible it occurs only here.

- ⁶ Some contributors to this collection of essays do not endorse this view of New Testament prophecy. They would say that the New Testament gift of prophecy does not continue today because it was part of the unique revelatory moment in history and consisted of words having the infallible authority of God. They would say that women could prophesy in this sense but not teach because the authority attached so distinctly to the words and not to the person and the exposition as it does in teaching.
- ⁷ This understanding of prophecy in the New Testament is developed and defended in Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1988); Roy Clements, *Word and Spirit: The Bible and the Gift of Prophecy* (Leicester: U.C.C.F. Booklets, 1986); Graham Houston, *Prophecy Today* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1989); D.A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1987). This view of New Testament prophecy is the one held by the editors of this book, but some other contributors hold a different view. See p. 530, n. 15.
- ⁸ See note 6.
- ⁹ See also Wayne Grudem, "Prophecy, Yes, but Teaching, No: Paul's Consistent Affirmation of Women's Participation without Governing Authority," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 30:1, March 1987, pp. 11-23.
- ¹⁰ Ruth Tucker, *Guardians of the Great Commission: A History of Women in Modern Missions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988).
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 47.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, p. 83.
- ¹³ A.J. Gordon, "The Ministry of Women," *Gordon-Conwell Monograph* 61 (South Hamilton, MA: Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, n.d.), p. 10. Originally published in *Missionary Review of the World*, vol. 8, no. 12 (new series), December, 1894, pp. 910-921.
- ¹⁴ Dr. and Mrs. Howard Taylor, *Hudson Taylor and the China Inland Mission: The Growth of a Work of God* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1940), pp. 397-398.
- ¹⁵ Tucker, p. 117.
- ¹⁶ John White, *When the Spirit Comes with Power* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), p. 128.
- ¹⁷ *Plutarch's Lives of Illustrious Men*, trans. John Dryden (New York: John Wurtel Lovell, n.d.), vol. 3, p. 359.
- ¹⁸ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, xxxi.7, in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), first series, vol. 11, p. 555.
- ¹⁹ However, we are perplexed about the fact that in the near context of the citation concerning Junias, Epiphanius also designates Prisca as a man mentioned in Romans 16:3, even though we know from the New Testament that she is a woman.
- ²⁰ Gerald Sheppard, "A Response to Ray Anderson," *TSF Bulletin*, vol. 9, no. 4 (March-April 1986), p. 21.
- ²¹ Karen J. Torjesen, "Sexuality, Hierarchy and Evangelicalism," *TSF Bulletin*, vol. 10, no. 4 (March-April 1987), pp. 26-27.
- ²² "Gay Rights Resolution Divides Membership of Evangelical Women's Caucus," *Christianity Today*, October 3, 1986, pp. 40-43.
- ²³ Paul Jewett, *Man as Male and Female* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), p. 178.
- ²⁴ Paul Jewett, "An Overlooked Study: John Boswell on Homosexuality," *Reformed Journal*, vol. 33, issue 1 (January 1983), p. 17.
- ²⁵ Robin Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), p. 129.
- ²⁶ Paul Jewett, *Interpretation*, vol. 39, No. 2 (April 1985), p. 210.
- ²⁷ Gerald P. Regier, "The Not So Disposable Family," *Pastoral Renewal*, vol 13, no. 1 (July-August 1988), p. 20.
- ²⁸ Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Hearing the Cry," in *Women, Authority, and the Bible*, ed. Alvera Mickelsen (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press), 1986, p. 289.
- ²⁹ Emil Brunner, *Das Gebot und die Ordnungen* (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr/Paul Siebeck, 1933), p. 358.
- ³⁰ Otto Piper, *Christian Ethics* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1970), p. 299.
- ³¹ Elisabeth Elliot, "Virginity," *Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter*, March/April 1990 (Ann Arbor: Servant Publications), pp. 2-3.
- ³² These quotes are from the *Danvers Statement* of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood. It is printed in Appendix 2.
- ³³ Gretchen Gaebelein Hull (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1987), pp. 188-189.

EXERCISE

1. What was the main lesson you learned from this reading?

2. What questions do you have after reading this article?

3. In this article, the writers state that the office of elder in the church is restricted to men. Do you agree or disagree with this view? Explain your answer.

4. In this article, there is a commitment to gender roles, while at the same time affirming the ministry contributions that women can make in the church. Please rate your church on both of these points.

5. What can your church do to improve both in preserving the roles of men and women while at the same time affirming the priesthood of all believers, men and women alike?

DEFENDING THE DEITY OF CHRIST FROM THE TEACHINGS OF CONTEMPORARY CULTS

INTRODUCTION

Many young believers are faced with this critical issue: Is Jesus God or is He merely a special created being? Are you able to withstand the challenges to the faith on this very important doctrine? Kurt Jurgensmeier's very excellent article will help equip you to be one who is "*able to refute those who contradict*" (Titus 1:9).

Defending the Deity of Christ from the Teachings of Contemporary Cults

Pastor Kurt Jurgensmeier, Cedar Rapids, IA



1) Why is it important for a pastor to be thoroughly equipped in the doctrine concerning the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ?

God clearly requires the pastor to “*hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it*” (Titus 1:9, NIV). The scriptural teaching concerning the deity of Jesus Christ is certainly included in the “*sound doctrine*” that the Christian pastor is to “*hold firmly to*” and be able to “*refute those who oppose it.*” The following discussion should make it abundantly clear that fulfilling this God-given responsibility in regards to this doctrine is not as easy, nor as simple, as some would believe. The proper interpretation of some of the scriptures concerning Christ’s deity is not always readily clear for even well-meaning Christians. Modern day cultists and heretics are very creative and, at times, even seemingly convincing in their interpretations. A pastor needs to be relatively familiar with this topic so that he can teach it, protect it, and encourage others with it.

2) Why is the doctrine concerning the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ important to the Church?

There are several reasons why this doctrine is a cornerstone of the Christian faith. First of all, it is the clear teaching of the Word of God. Any practical reasons for its importance are secondary to the fact that the Bible teaches that Jesus Christ was God. Anything the Bible teaches, whether or not we can attach human pragmatism to it, is a sacred and essential truth. There are many things that God has not chosen to reveal in His Word. Those truths that He has revealed are to be taught, protected, and cherished as much as any other. Secondly, one obvious purpose of God’s Word to us is to reveal who and what He is. Christ’s deity is an integral attribute of who and what the Creator God is.

Thirdly, the fact that Jesus was fully God is the foundation of His being our sinless substitutionary sacrifice. The idea that anyone but God could be the sacrificial “*lamb without blemish or defect*” (1 Peter 1:19, NIV) is absurd. Jesus Himself said, “*No one is good— except God alone*” (Luke 18:19). The biblical fact remains: if Jesus Christ was not fully God, then He was not the sinless, perfect sacrifice required for our sins and we remain in a damned state. We need to be eternally thankful that our Savior was indeed the Almighty “I Am” in the flesh.

It is worth noting that throughout the Church’s history, those groups that have discarded a belief in the deity of Jesus Christ have eventually fallen away from a biblical Christian faith. Unitarianism is one of the more recent examples of this. The Bible warns us that if we deny such a foundational attribute of Christ as His deity, we

“After I set out to refute Christianity intellectually and couldn’t, I came to the conclusion the Bible was true and Jesus Christ was God’s Son.”

- Josh McDowell

Church Leadership/The Doctrine of Jesus Christ

Defending the Deity of Christ

from the Teachings of Contemporary Cults

“Christianity is not a doctrine, not truth as truth, but the knowledge of a Person; it is knowing the Lord Jesus. You cannot be educated into being a Christian.”

- T. Austin-Sparks

are in fact denying the Father and God Himself. The Apostle John writes: “*No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.*” And again, “*Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son*” (1 John 2:23; 2 John 1:9, NIV).

3) *Why is the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ attacked so relentlessly?*

A teaching of the Jehovah’s Witnesses will expose the spiritual reality surrounding this doctrine. The cult claims that worship is to be “directed only toward God,” not toward Jesus Christ (*Reasoning from the Scriptures*, p. 215). It is revealed here that the real issue is the proper worship and reverence of the Lord Jesus Christ. It must always be remembered in any dispute with false teaching that, “... *our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms*” (Ephesians 6:12, NIV). Although humans, including Christians, may not readily recognize the sacredness of the deity of Jesus Christ, “*the spiritual forces of evil*” do. These “*powers*” and “*forces*” delight in tarnishing the character of Christ in even the slightest way and are incessantly inspiring “*things taught by demons*” (1 Timothy 4:1, NIV) in order to diminish the proper worship of Him and steal any of the glory and honor that is rightfully due our Savior. Maligning His deity is one way in which this is accomplished and any true worshiper of Jesus Christ will diligently resist such slander against our Lord.

“... *our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*”

(Ephesians 6:12)

4) *What is the biblical teaching regarding the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ?*

A) Jesus emphatically claimed He was God (John 5:18, 8:58, 10:30, 33, 14:9).

B) The Scriptures clearly attest to Christ being God (Isaiah 9:6, 40:3; Romans 9:5; Titus 2:13; John 1:1,18; Philippians 2:5-6; Colossians 1:15,19, 2:9).

C) People worshiped Jesus as God and Christ did not correct them, as He surely would have done if He was stealing glory that was not His (John 5:22-23, 20:28). In Revelation, the worship that God the Father receives is exactly the same as that given to God the Son (4:10, 5:11-14).

D) The name “Lord” (*Kyrios* in the Greek text) is used interchangeably of both God and Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:10, 7:14, 21).

E) Old Testament passages clearly referring to God are ascribed to Christ in the New Testament (compare John 8:58 with Exodus 3:14; John 12:41 with Isaiah 6:1-5; Colossians 1:16-17 with Genesis 1:1; Hebrews 1:8 with Psalm 45:6; Revelation 1:7 with Zechariah 12:10; Revelation 1:15 with Ezekiel 43:2.)

F) Jesus Christ has eternally existed (Colossians 1:16-17; Micah 5:2; compare John 8:58 with Exodus 3:14).

5) What are the primary arguments used to deny the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ?

There are four main arguments (or methods) that cultists use in attempting to prove from Scripture that Christ is not God. In essence, the cults abuse the Scripture in order to A) claim that Christ is a created being, B) deny the equality of the Trinity, C) deny the mystery of the Incarnation, and D) manipulate the Greek text in order to support their claim. Each of these arguments is addressed below with a discussion of different verses that are used by the cults to deny the deity of Christ. Due credit is given to *When Cultists Ask* by Norman Geisler and Ron Rhodes (Baker Books, 1997), particularly for their listing of verses misinterpreted by contemporary cults and their quotes from cultic publications.

A) Cultists claim that Christ was Himself created. They deny that He has eternally self-existed and in fact, was Himself the One who created all things. This is derived from a faulty interpretation of several verses as will be shown below.

1) The Bible says that Jesus was “begotten” by God (Psalm 2:7 and elsewhere). Doesn’t this mean He was created by God?

The misinterpretation: Psalm 2:7 (KJV) says, “*Thou art My Son, this day I have begotten Thee.*” John 3:16 says, “*...He (God) gave His only begotten Son....*” Mormons use such verses to support their idea that Jesus was born as a “spirit child” (*Gospel Principles*, pg. 9). The Jehovah’s Witnesses use such verses to claim that Christ was created by the Father and thus is a lesser god (*Aid to Bible Understanding*, pg. 918).

Correcting the misinterpretation: Attempts by well meaning Christians (including Geisler and Rhodes) to suggest that “begotten” (*monogenes*) means “unique” or “one of a kind” instead of “being born of” seem to have little scriptural support. The word is most commonly used in the New Testament to mean a child being born to a man or by a woman. So what are we to make of the biblical fact that Jesus Christ was the offspring of God? It seems best not to deny this truth, but rather to apply it correctly. The error that the cults make is to apply this truth to Christ’s existence before coming to earth as a man. This, of course, contradicts the other Scriptures that clearly teach that Jesus has eternally existed (see 4F above). However, if the idea of Jesus Christ being the offspring of God is applied to His birth on earth as the God-man, we have additional scriptures that teach the same thing.

The Bible clearly states that the miraculous birth of Jesus Christ was empowered by God, the Holy Spirit. The angel told Mary, “*The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God*” (Luke 1:35, NIV). Likewise the angel told Joseph, “*what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit*” (Matthew 1:20, NIV). In this sense, the God-man Jesus Christ was “begotten” of God the Holy Spirit. It is not surprising then that the Bible would also claim that the God-man Jesus Christ was the offspring of God the Father, as the Father and the Holy Spirit are one and are God. It could be said, possibly, that God the Father initiated the incarnation, God the Holy Spirit

“Only Christ could have conceived Christ.”

- Joseph Parke

Church Leadership/The Doctrine of Jesus Christ

Defending the Deity of Christ

from the Teachings of Contemporary Cults

“If I might comprehend Jesus Christ, I could not believe on Him. He would be no greater than myself. Such is my consciousness of sin and inability that I must have a superhuman Saviour.”

- Daniel Webster

accomplished the incarnation, and God the Son fulfilled the incarnation. None of this, of course, makes God the Son anything less than God the Father or God the Holy Spirit.

2) Does Proverbs 8:22-31 teach that Jesus was created by God?

The misinterpretation: The Jehovah’s Witnesses in particular claim that the person identified as “wisdom” in Proverbs 8:22-31 is Jesus. Since this passage seems to imply that wisdom was created, it is thought that Jesus Himself was created as is communicated in the following: “He was a very special person because he was created by God before all other things.... For countless billions of years, before even the physical universe was created, Jesus lived as a spirit person in heaven and enjoyed intimate fellowship with his Father, Jehovah God, the Grand Creator. —Proverbs 8:22” (*The Greatest Man Who Ever Lived*, pg. 11).

Correcting the misinterpretation: The phrase, “*The Lord brought me forth as the first of his works*” (Proverbs 8:22, NIV) cannot be referring to the creation of Christ. Such a notion, again, contradicts all the other Scriptural truth regarding the deity of Christ. Solomon is simply personifying wisdom, just as he does in the first chapter of Proverbs, referring to wisdom as a woman who cries out in the streets (1:20-21).

3) Does John 1:1 teach that Jesus pre-existed only in God’s foreknowledge, as some cults claim, or was He really eternal God?

The misinterpretation: Paul Wierwille, founder of The Way International, denied the deity of Christ. In order to support his heresy, he interpreted John 1:1 as follows: “How was Jesus with God in the beginning? In the same way that the written Word was with Him, namely, in God’s foreknowledge In the Old Testament, Jesus Christ was in God’s foreknowledge and in the foreknowledge of God’s people as God revealed this prophetic knowledge to them. When Jesus Christ was born, he came into existence. Foreknowledge became a reality” (cited in *Kingdom of the Cults*, Walter Martin, pg. 87).

Correcting the misinterpretation: The interpretation of The Way International is not supported by a common sense approach to the Scriptures. John affirms that the “Word” (*Logos*) was a person, not just an “idea” in God’s mind. John 1:1 does not say, as The Way claims, that “foreknowledge” was in God’s mind eternally and that “foreknowledge” became flesh and dwelt among us. It says that the “*Word [Christ] was God*” (John 1:1) from all eternity and that this same person (not God’s foreknowledge of Him) “*became flesh and dwelt among us*” (1:14).

In addition, John speaks of Christ “the Word [*Logos*]” being “*with God*” (1:1) eternally. Knowledge would not be “with” God. God would have wisdom, but it would not be with Him. The word “with” implies another along side in an intimate relationship. Christ was another person in the Trinity, not the same person as the Father.

Church Leadership/The Doctrine of Jesus Christ
Defending the Deity of Christ
from the Teachings of Contemporary Cults

4) Jesus is referred to as the “firstborn,” in Colossians 1:15-17. Does this mean He was created first, and then He created all other things?

The misinterpretation: Colossians 1:15 says, “and He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.” The Jehovah’s Witnesses claim this passage teaches that Christ was simply the “first-created” among all of God’s creatures (*Reasoning from the Scriptures*, pg. 408). The New World Translation changes Colossians 1:16-17 so that, instead of teaching that Christ Himself created “all” things, it appears that after God created Christ, He then used Christ to create all “other” things in creation. “By means of him all [other] things were created in the heavens and upon the earth, the things visible and the things invisible, no matter whether they are thrones or lordships or governments or authorities. All [other] things have been created through him and for him. Also, he is before all [other] things and by means of him all [other] things were made to exist” (bracketed words from the translation).

“Thus he is shown to be a created being, part of the creation produced by God” (*Reasoning from the Scriptures*, pg. 409).

Correcting the misinterpretation: The reference to Christ being the “firstborn” is not implying that Christ was created, but rather is referring to His superior rank and pre-eminence over all creation. This is first of all demonstrated by the next verse which states that “For by Him all things were created,” the “For” pointing back to Christ being the “firstborn of all creation.” In other words, the reason that Christ is ranked above all creation is because He created everything that has or ever was created. To interpret this as saying that Christ was the first created being because He created all things that have been created is contradictory and meaningless.

This is, of course, why the Jehovah Witnesses’ New World Translation inserts the phrase “other things” throughout this passage, implying that although Christ was created, His creation is not included in the creation of “all things.” Obviously, there is no textual justification for inserting the word “other” in order to alter the meaning of “all” in this passage.

Isaiah 44:24 would also correct the Jehovah Witnesses’ claim that God first created Jesus and then, through Jesus, created everything else. “I, the LORD [Yahweh] am the maker of all things, stretching out the heavens by Myself, and spreading out the earth all alone.” If Yahweh made all things by Himself and all alone, obviously He didn’t create Jesus first and then create everything else through Jesus. If Yahweh is called the Creator of the universe, and if Jesus is called the Creator of the universe, then Scripture again equates Jesus with God.

The correct interpretation of “first-born” suggested above is further demonstrated a few verses later in Colossians when it says that Christ is, “the first-born from the dead; so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything” (Colossians 1:18). Obviously the phrase “first-born” here does not mean first in sequential order as

“Even Christ pleased not Himself. He was utterly consumed in the zeal of His Father’s house. As man He ever moved for God. As God He ever moved for man.”
- *Geoffrey T. Bull*

Church Leadership/The Doctrine of Jesus Christ

Defending the Deity of Christ

from the Teachings of Contemporary Cults

“I would like to ask Him if He was indeed virgin born, because the answer to that question would define history.”

- Larry King

the Jehovah’s Witnesses would interpret it in verse 15. Christ was not the first person to be raised from the dead (see John 11:43-44), but rather the pre-eminent person to be raised from the dead. This verse again makes it abundantly clear that the reason Christ is preeminent in rank is so that He might “have first place in everything.”

5) Does Revelation 3:14 indicate that Jesus was a created being?

The misinterpretation: Revelation 3:14 says, “*And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this.*” Jehovah’s Witnesses claim that the one spoken of in Revelation 3:14 “is a creation, the first of God’s creations, who had a beginning” (*Reasoning from the Scriptures*, pg. 409).

Correcting the misinterpretation: First of all, the above interpretation clearly and directly contradicts other Scripture. Jesus is Himself *The Creator* (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16). Secondly, the use of “Beginning” for the Greek word *arche* is not the only viable translation of this word. *Arche* is translated several different ways in the NASB New Testament including eight times as “rule” or “ruler” (for example, Luke 20:20; Colossians 1:16; Ephesians 1:21, 3:10, 6:12). The NIV and NLT translation of Revelation 3:14 reflects this alternative use of *arche*: “To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler (*arche*) of God’s creation.” This translation not only reflects the original Greek, but harmonizes with other descriptions of Christ in the Scriptures (Matthew 28:18; John 17:2; Hebrews 2:8; 1 Corinthians 15:27; Ephesians 1:20-22).

B) Cultists claim that Jesus Christ is distinguished from and therefore somehow less than God the Father. This is an attempt to deny the Trinity. God Almighty is indeed one, but He expresses Himself equally in the three Persons of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God’s diversity in three Persons cannot be used to diminish the deity of any one Person because of His absolute and complete unity.

1) Does John 1:14 teach that when Jesus became a human being He lost His deity?

The misinterpretation: John 1:14 reads: “*And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.*” Herbert Armstrong, founder of the Worldwide Church of God, interpreted the phrase “the Word *became* flesh” as meaning a “conversion exclusively into flesh.”

Correcting the misinterpretation: Once again, John is simply referring to Christ’s humanity without denying His deity. It is possible that John is alluding to the Old Testament idea of God dwelling with His people in the tabernacle. In Exodus 25:8, God instructs the Israelites, “... *let them construct a sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them.*” Christ’s human body of flesh was the New Testament counterpart to this Old Testament temple in which God dwelled among His people.

2) Does John 4:23 indicate that only God the Father, and not Jesus, is to be worshiped?

The misinterpretation: John 4:23 says, “An hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship (proskuneo) the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.” The Jehovah’s Witnesses use this verse to claim that only the Father is to be worshiped (*Watchtower*, 15 February 1983, pg. 18).

Correcting the misinterpretation: The same Greek word used for worshiping the Father (*proskuneo*) in John 4:23 is also used of worshiping Jesus Christ. Jesus was worshiped (*proskuneo*) by the wise men (Matthew 2:11), a leper (Matthew 8:2), a ruler (Matthew 9:18), a blind man (John 9:38), a woman (Matthew 15:25), the women at the tomb (Matthew 28:9), the angels (Hebrews 1:6), and the disciples (Matthew 28:17). Thomas worshiped Jesus as if He were God (John 20:28). Finally, in the Revelation, the worship that the Father receives (4:10) is exactly the same as the worship received by Jesus Christ (5:11-14).

3) Does Christ’s claim that He is the Son of God or “God’s Son” (John 10:36, NIV) mean that He denied His deity?

The misinterpretation: Jehovah’s Witnesses in particular use this phrase to claim that Christ Himself denied His deity by referring to Himself as the Son of God.

Correcting the misinterpretation: A very important passage regarding this question is found in John 10:22-39. The Jews had asked Christ who He was. Jesus had replied that, “I and the Father are one” (vs. 30). The Jews clearly understood this as a declaration of His deity and therefore prepared to stone Him to death, “for blasphemy, because you, a mere man claim to be God” (vs. 33). Jehovah’s Witnesses at this point claim that Christ defended Himself against the accusation of blasphemy by denying His deity. First Jesus quotes Psalm 82:6, which says, “I have said you are gods (elohiym).” The Jehovah Witnesses and other cults interpret Christ’s use of this verse to claim that even mere humans can be deity. New Age teachers tell us that, “we can be the God that Jesus proclaimed us to be: ‘Ye are Gods’” (*A Vision of Findhorn*, David A. Spangler, pg. 47). Mormons also cite this verse to support their view on the plurality of gods (*Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, Bruce McConkie, pg. 24).

First of all, when Asaph uses this term in Psalm 82 he is referring to human judges or authorities, not to deities. It is earthly “rulers” that are being addressed in this Psalm, not heavenly deities (see vs. 7). Also, “gods” (*elohiym*) is used in other Scriptures to refer to human judges or authorities (see Exodus 21:6, 22:8). In John 10:34, Jesus is basically saying that if human judges can in a sense be called “gods,” how much more can the “one whom the Father set apart” be referred to as *the* God.

Jesus then says, “Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, ‘I am God’s Son’” (vs. 36)? Here Jehovah’s Witnesses claim that Christ is defending Himself against the accusation of blasphemy by denying His deity. On the contrary,

“The Lord ate from a common bowl, and asked the disciples to sit on the grass. He washed their feet, with a towel wrapped around His waist - He, who is the Lord of the universe!”
- Clement of Alexandria

Church Leadership/The Doctrine of Jesus Christ

Defending the Deity of Christ

from the Teachings of Contemporary Cults

“Jesus Christ is to me the outstanding personality of all time, all history, both as Son of God and as Son of Man. Everything He ever said or did has value for us today and that is something you can say of no other man, dead or alive. There is no easy middle ground to stroll upon. You either accept Jesus or reject Him.”

- Sholem Asch

Christ is in fact defending Himself against the accusation of blasphemy by affirming that His claim to be God is true. The Jews knew that Christ had not in any way denied His deity or equality with God the Father by stating that He was God’s Son. This is clearly demonstrated by the fact that they still, “*tried to seize him*” (vs. 39). In addition, verses 37-38 clearly communicate Christ’s desire to further convince them that He “*and the Father are one*” by drawing attention to His miracles and again claiming that “*the Father is in me and I am in the Father.*” Again, none of this is a denial of His deity, but rather an affirmation of it and Christ’s answer to the Jew’s accusation of blasphemy.

4) Does 1 Corinthians 8:6 prove that Jesus is not God Almighty like the Father is?

The misinterpretation: 1 Corinthians 8:6 reads: “*For us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him.*” The Jehovah Witnesses claim that, since this verse clearly presents God the Father “as being in a class distinct from Jesus Christ” (*Reasoning from the Scriptures*, pg. 411), it follows that Jesus is not God in the same sense that the Father is.

Correcting the misinterpretation: Once again, the cults are trying to use an affirmation of the distinct, but equal personalities within the Trinity, as an argument against their deity. It should first be noticed that if the reference to the Father being the “one God” proves Jesus is not God, then the reference to Jesus as the “one Lord” likewise proves the Father is not Lord. This is obviously both faulty logic and not scriptural. Scripture calls the Father God (1 Peter 1:2) and Lord (Matthew 11:25), and calls Jesus God (John 20:28; Hebrews 1:8) and Lord (Romans 10:9). Clearly, the Father’s designation as God in this verse is not intended to exclude Jesus, nor the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14).

5) Since God is called the “head” of Christ in 1 Corinthians 11:3, is this an indication that Jesus is not God?

The misinterpretation: The Jehovah’s Witnesses argue that because the Father is said to be the head of Christ, then Christ cannot be God in the same sense as the Father. If Christ were God, then He would be the head (*Should You Believe in the Trinity?* pg. 20).

Correcting the misinterpretation: In answer to the above claim, it can be pointed out that Paul in the same verse said the man is the head of the woman, even though men and women are absolutely equal in terms of their human nature (Genesis 1:26-28; cf. Galatians 3:28). Therefore, someone’s appointed role in relation to others does not negatively reflect on their equality with those others. The same is true of Christ. Christ and the Father are equal in their divine nature (John 10:30), but Jesus is functionally under the Father’s headship (1 Corinthians 15:27-28).

Church Leadership/The Doctrine of Jesus Christ
Defending the Deity of Christ
from the Teachings of Contemporary Cults

Surprisingly, from a human perspective, submission is actually a demonstration of divinity. The fact that the three Persons of the Trinity are revealed in Scripture as submitting to one another in perfect love and unity proves them to be nothing less than God. Instead of Christ's submission to the Father being an argument against His deity, it is in fact an argument for it and an additional proof of the perfection of the Trinity.

6) Does the fact that Christ is the “mediator” (1 Timothy 2:5-6) between humanity and God mean that Christ himself is not God?

The misinterpretation: The Jehovah's Witnesses claim that if Christ is the Mediator, He must not be God, for the Mediator must be separate and distinct from those who need mediation (*Should You Believe in the Trinity?* pg. 16).

Correcting the misinterpretation: The above assertion is false on several accounts. If the above logic is accepted, then the fact that Jesus is the Mediator between God and humans would also mean Jesus was not human. This is clearly not true, and even a contradiction of the cult's own teaching. From a biblical perspective, Christ is the perfect and only acceptable Mediator between God and man because He is in fact, both fully God and fully man. It was only as a man that Christ could represent all humankind and die as a man. However, since Christ was also God, His death was the perfect sacrifice needed to pay for our sins. Therefore, only the death of the perfect God-man can truly mediate for sinful humanity to God.

7) In John 14:28 (NIV) Jesus said, “If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I.” What did Jesus mean by this?

The misinterpretation: This statement by Christ would obviously be one that cultists would use in order to deny that Jesus is equal with the Father. Again, it needs to be noted that the Apostle John is saying nothing here that would contradict all the other statements in his gospel that Jesus is equal with the Father (1:1, 18; 5:16-18; 10:30; 20:28).

Correcting the misinterpretation: Two possible interpretations are offered for Christ's statement. One is to recognize the fact that God the Father's true glory, power, and majesty is fully displayed in heaven without limit. In contrast, while Jesus was living on earth, His true glory, power, and majesty were hidden and confined to the limits of a normal human body. The way in which the Father was “greater” than the Son was in physical appearance and apparent glory. Those who loved Christ would desire Him to return to the Father so that Christ could again have His full glory, power, and majesty. (See also John 6:62, 17:5.)

There is, however, a second suggested interpretation that may fit the context even better, and affirms a very important teaching of the Bible. The Scriptures are not at all shy about revealing the fact that God the Son was, is, and always will be in subjection to the Father. A few verses after Christ's statement that, “the Father is greater than

“Jesus is the God whom we can approach without pride and before whom we can humble ourselves without despair.”
- Blaise Pascal

Church Leadership/The Doctrine of Jesus Christ

Defending the Deity of Christ

from the Teachings of Contemporary Cults

“Socrates taught for 40 years, Plato for 50, Aristotle for 40, and Jesus for only 3. Yet the influence of Christ’s 3-year ministry infinitely transcends the impact left by the combined 130 years of teaching from these men who were among the greatest philosophers of all antiquity.”

- *Unknown*

I,” He explains, “*I do exactly what My Father has commanded Me*” (vs. 31, NIV). Clearly, the Father was directing the Son in His ministry on earth. In addition, the Scriptures tell us even now that Christ “*has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him*” (1 Peter 3:22, NIV). Christ is certainly in a position of authority in His exalted state, but the fact that Christ is at the Father’s right hand suggests that the Son is still in subjection to the Father. And so it will be for all eternity: “*Then the end will come, when he (Christ) hands over the kingdom to God the Father....*” (1 Corinthians 15:24, NIV). Now when it says that “everything” has been put under Him, it is clear that this does not include God (the Father) Himself, who put everything under Christ. When He (God the Father) has done this, then the Son Himself will be made subject to Him (God the Father) who put everything under Him (Christ), so that God may be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:23-28).

What is difficult for humans to understand is that someone could be in subjection to someone else and yet be their equal. What the Trinity reveals is that true equality is not defined by equal authority. Jesus Christ was, is, and always will be “*equal with God*” (John 5:18), but the Father and Son have different roles within the Godhead. These equally divine, but distinctly different roles result in the fact that, among other differences, God the Father possesses more authority than God the Son or the Spirit. Again, it is our human perspective on authority that makes it difficult to recognize this difference in authority while maintaining their equality. But certainly the mutual subjection in the Trinity is to be reflected in the relationship between a human father and son. Indeed, the son is under his father’s authority, but who’s life is more valuable, the father’s or the son’s? Are they not equal in this respect? So it is with the Christian husband and wife: differing roles and authority but equal intrinsic value.

C) Cultists claim that Jesus Christ was only a man. This is an attempt to deny the Incarnation. The mistake that many cults make believes that Jesus was either all God or all man. They will not accept Him as being fully both. Therefore, when the Scriptures portray Christ’s humanity, the cults automatically interpret it as a denial of His deity. Although it may defy human explanation, the Scriptures clearly state that Jesus Christ was fully human and fully God. Our inability to comprehend the incarnation does not justify the denial of it. There are many more attributes of God that are equally difficult to comprehend, but absolutely true.

1) When Christ refers to Himself as the “Son of Man,” is He not denying his deity?

Correcting the misinterpretation: This is an obvious issue with many cults, especially the Jehovah’s Witnesses. Jesus refers to Himself as the “Son of Man” more often than any other title. His frequent use of it reveals an obvious desire to affirm His humanity. He was equally concerned that people understood He was a man, as much as the fact that He was God. Both were simultaneously and completely true. Therefore, His use of the title “Son of Man” simply affirms His humanity, but does not deny His deity. In addition, Jesus also used the title “Son of Man” when forgiving the sins of a paralytic, something that the Jews knew only God could do (Mark 2:5-11; see also the use of “Son of Man” in Matthew 26:63-66).

2) When Jesus rebuked the rich young ruler for calling Him “good,” was Christ denying His deity (Matthew 19:16-30; Mark 10:17-31; Luke 18:18-30)?

The misinterpretation: In Mark 10:17 (NKJV), the rich young ruler called Jesus “Good Teacher,” and Jesus rebuked him, saying, “*Why do you call me good? No one is good but One, that is, God.*” Jehovah’s Witnesses in particular think Jesus was again denying His deity: “Jesus was saying that no one is as good as God is, not even Jesus himself. God is good in a way that separates him from Jesus,” (*Should You Believe in the Trinity?*, pg. 17).

Correcting the misinterpretation: Jesus was not denying that He was God to the young ruler, but was in fact affirming His deity. Christ was simply forcing the man to consider the implications of calling Jesus “good,” if indeed only God could rightly be addressed in that way. Christ wanted the man to recognize that by addressing Him as “Good Teacher,” he was admitting that Christ was God, because only God is good.

3) Was Christ’s ignorance of the time of His second coming an indication that He was not the all-knowing God (Matthew 24:36; Mark 13:32)?

The misinterpretation: In these verses, Jesus denied knowing the time of His own second coming, saying, “*but of that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.*” Jehovah’s Witnesses argue, “That would not be the case if Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were coequal, comprising one Godhead,” (*Reasoning from the Scriptures*, pg. 409). For them, Jesus’ ignorance here proves that He is not God Almighty.

Correcting the misinterpretation: Here again, the cults misinterpret an affirmation of Christ’s humanity as a denial of His deity. Christ was not reluctant to demonstrate His humanness. At times He was physically tired (John 4:6), thirsty (John 19:28), and hungry (Matthew 4:2). However, these demonstrations of His humanity were not denials of His deity. When Christ distinguishes Himself from the Father by claiming not to know the timing of His return, He is speaking from the vantage point of His humanity. In His humanity, Jesus limited Himself at times in some ways including His physical strength and His knowledge. However, He also demonstrated His deity in both of these aspects at times by having divine power in performing miracles and possessing divine knowledge (see examples at Matthew 17:27; Luke 5:4, 6; John 6:64, 10:14, 11:11, 21:6-11). In addition, Jesus claimed He knew the Father as the Father knew Him and certainly this would require the same omniscience as the Father (Matthew 11:27; John 7:29, 8:55, 10:15, 17:25).

“I have read in Plato and Cicero sayings that are very wise and very beautiful; but I never read in either of them: ‘Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden.’”
- Augustine

Church Leadership/The Doctrine of Jesus Christ

Defending the Deity of Christ

from the Teachings of Contemporary Cults

“A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic-- on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg -- or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse.”

- C.S. Lewis

4) Does John 20:17 prove that Jesus is not God Almighty?

The misinterpretation: John 20:17 quotes Jesus as saying to Mary, “*Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren, and say to them, I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.*” The Jehovah’s Witnesses say that since Jesus had a God, His Father, He could not at the same time be that God (*Reasoning from the Scriptures*, pp. 212, 411).

Correcting the misinterpretation: This verse again merely demonstrates Christ’s humanity in being “*made like His brethren in all things*” (Hebrews 2:17), rather than denying His equality with the Father (John 10:30). In the incarnation, Christ simply added a human nature to His divine one, without losing His divine nature. In His humanity it was understandable that Christ would acknowledge God as “My Father” and “My God.” Although Christ here acknowledges God as any human might, from the perspective of His deity, He would not refer to the Father as “my God,” in the sense of being inferior to the Father, for Jesus was fully equal to the Father in every way regarding His divine nature. Jesus never denied His deity, not here or elsewhere.

5) Does Philippians 2:7 teach that Christ emptied himself of deity while on earth?

The misinterpretation: The NASB renders Philippians 2:7, “*but [Christ] emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.*” Jehovah’s Witnesses use this as biblical evidence that Christ did not have a divine nature while on earth, but only a human one (*Reasoning from the Scriptures*, pp. 198, 419).

Correcting the misinterpretation: This is yet another denial of the mystery and wonder of the incarnation. Although the most literal translation of the Greek, *heauton ekenosen*, is the NASB rendering “emptied Himself,” neither the text, nor the context specify that Christ emptied Himself of His divine nature. The verse prior to the one in question sheds considerable light on the issue. Verse 6 reads “*who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped.*” First of all, the verse affirms the biblical truth that Christ was fully equal with God. Secondly, the phrase “form of God” reveals that the context of this passage is dealing with the outward appearance of Christ, not His intrinsic attributes.

Simply put, Christ in His pre-incarnate state, possessed all the outward glory and majesty of God in His physical appearance or “form” (*morphe*). However, when Christ came to earth, He set aside His divine and glorious outward appearance and instead, took on “the likeness of men.” This of course is important to even the broader context communicated in verses 3-4, where Paul is encouraging the Philippians to humble themselves in relation to their brethren. The fact that Christ was truly God makes Paul’s illustration all the more powerful and confirms that the incarnation was indeed the most profound act of humiliation. Still, it should be remembered that Christ’s incarnation was not the subtraction of deity, but the addition of humanity.

A parallel passage in John 13 would confirm the above interpretation of this passage in Philippians: “When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. ‘Do you understand what I have done for you?’ he asked them. ‘You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you’” (John 13:12-15, NIV). Christ again affirms His deity by referring to Himself as “Lord” (*Kyrios*, see its use in Hebrews 1:10, 7:14, 21). However, this story is a graphic portrayal of God in Christ “taking the form of a servant” (Philippians 2:7).

D) Cultists manipulate the Greek manuscripts of the Bible in order to support their claims. This is particularly common with the Jehovah Witnesses’ New World Translation, as will be demonstrated here.

1) Is John 1:1 saying that Jesus is God or just a god?

The misinterpretation: The Jehovah’s Witnesses’ New World Translation translates this verse, “The Word [Christ] was a god” (insert added). The Watchtower magazine states that “because there is no definite article ‘the’ it means Christ is only ‘a’ god, not ‘the’ God” (*The Watchtower*, 7 December 1995, 4). Again, they claim the Greek of John 1:1, “is not saying that the Word (Jesus) was the same as the God with whom he was but, rather, that the Word was godlike, divine, a god” (*Reasoning from the Scriptures*, pg. 212).

Correcting the misinterpretation: It can first be said that the full deity of Christ is supported by other references in the Gospel of John (8:58, 10:30, 20:28). In addition, it is not necessary to translate Greek nouns that have no definite article (like “the”) with an indefinite article (like “a”). Dr. Donald Guthrie points out that in Greek there is a “tendency to omit the [definite] article in technical terms and proper names (“*The Pastoral Epistles*,” *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, pg. 213). Therefore, the word, *theos* (“God”) without the definite article *ho* (“the”) does not need to be translated as “a God” as the Jehovah’s Witnesses have done in reference to Christ. Simply put, the presence or absence of the definite article does not alter the fundamental meaning of *theos* (God).

2) Does John 8:58 indicate that Jesus was merely pre-existent, as opposed to being eternally pre-existent?

The misinterpretation: In John 8:58, Jesus tells the Jews, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.” “I Am” is the name God used to refer to Himself when Moses asked Him to identify Himself (Exodus 3:14-15). This name clearly reflects the fact that God never came into being at a point in time, for He has always existed. It is therefore understandable that when Jesus made the claim to be the “I Am,” the Jews immediately picked up stones to kill Him because they recognized that Christ was claiming equality with God. In order to avoid this clear declaration of Christ’s deity, the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ New World Translation reads, “Jesus said to

“Jesus Christ: The meeting place of eternity and time, the blending of deity and humanity, the junction of heaven and earth.”
- Unknown

Church Leadership/The Doctrine of Jesus Christ

Defending the Deity of Christ

from the Teachings of Contemporary Cults

“God will answer all our questions in one way and one way only. Namely, by showing us more of his Son.”
- Watchman Nee

them: ‘Most truly I say to you, Before Abraham came into existence, *I have been,*’” not “I Am,” (italics added). The Jehovah’s Witnesses prefer the latter translation in order to avoid the idea that Jesus was the great and eternally existent “I Am” of the Old Testament. They claim, “The question of the Jews [in John 8:57] to which Jesus was replying had to do with age, not identity. Jesus’ reply logically dealt with his age, the length of his existence” (*Reasoning from the Scriptures*, pg. 418).

Correcting the misinterpretation: There is no textual justification for translating *ego eimi* (“I Am”) in John 8:58 as “I have been.” The Greek words *ego eimi* occur many times in John’s Gospel and in every other occurrence even the New World Translation translates *ego eimi* correctly (John 4:26; 6:35, 48, 51; 8:12, 24, 28; 10:7, 11, 14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1, 5; 18:5, 6, 8). Only in John 8:58 do the Jehovah’s Witnesses mistranslate the phrase. This is an obvious attempt to manipulate the Greek texts in an effort to support their erroneous teachings.

3) Does John 20:28 support the deity of Christ?

The misinterpretation: When Thomas saw the risen Christ, he said, “My Lord and my God” (John 20:28)! Jehovah’s Witnesses re-interpret this verse in a way to avoid making it appear that Christ is God. They claim Thomas was merely expressing surprise at seeing Jesus by exclaiming something like, “My God!” (*Should You Believe in the Trinity?* pg. 29).

Correcting the misinterpretation: This is another attempt to subvert a common sense understanding of Scripture in order to support heresy. Surely if Jesus had thought that Thomas had spoken blasphemy by calling Him “God” (*theos*), Christ would have rebuked Him. Christ does no such thing.

4) Does Colossians 2:9 indicate that Jesus merely has divine qualities, or does it indicate that Jesus is really God?

The misinterpretation: The Jehovah’s Witnesses’ New World Translation translates Colossians 2:9 as follows: “Because it is in him that all the fullness of the divine quality dwells bodily.” They say this verse does not mean Jesus is intrinsically God Almighty like the Father is, but merely has divine qualities (*Reasoning from the Scriptures*, pg. 421).

Correcting the misinterpretation: The NASB renders Colossians 2:9 as follows: “For in Him all the fullness of Deity (*theotes*: the Godhead) dwells in bodily form....” Even if *theotes* is translated as “divine qualities,” as in the New World Translation, the fact that Christ has “the fullness” of these divine qualities affirms His equality with God. In order to support their claim, the cults would have to interpret this scripture as saying that Christ only had *some* of the divine qualities. However, this is precisely the heresy that Paul was trying to correct and the words he uses cannot be manipulated to say otherwise.

5) Does Titus 2:13 refer to two different Persons (God Almighty and Jesus Christ) or one person (God Almighty, Who is Jesus Christ)?

The misinterpretation: The Jehovah's Witnesses' New World Translation renders Titus 2:13 as, "the great God (the Father) and the Savior (Jesus Christ)." They argue that this verse "clearly differentiates between [God] and Jesus Christ, the one through whom God provides salvation" (*Reasoning from the Scriptures*, pg. 421).

Correcting the misinterpretation: The NASB translates this verse (Titus 2:13) as follows: "... looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus." It should be noted that in the New World Translation, the definite article "the" before "Savior" is not in the original text, but is supplied by the Jehovah Witnesses translators in an effort to distinguish "the Savior" from "God." However, the fact that the definite article is missing does not make the correct interpretation conclusive as many commentators suggest (see Donald Guthrie's discussion of Greek grammar regarding this verse in "*The Pastoral Epistles*," *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, pg. 213).

First of all, it can be said again that Paul is not communicating something contradictory to his clear conviction of Christ's deity as expressed elsewhere in his writings including Romans 9:5, NIV: "... from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen." Also, the teaching in Titus 2:13 that God is Savior is consistent with what we read elsewhere in Scripture regarding God. In Isaiah 43:11, NIV, God says: "*I, even I, am the Lord [Yahweh], and apart from me there is no savior.*" This verse indicates that a claim to be Savior is a claim to deity, and there is only one Savior, God. These parallel truths that only God is the Savior and that Jesus is Himself the Savior is yet another scriptural proof of Christ's deity.

The context of this verse provides additional evidence that Paul's use of "God" is meant to refer to Christ. This phrase is included in a statement concerning the "appearing" or second coming of Jesus Christ. Nowhere in Scripture is the "appearing" of God spoken of in terms that exclude the "appearing" of Jesus Christ, and this verse is no exception. The "appearing" of God is referring to the "appearing" of Jesus Christ, as it does elsewhere in Scripture.

Bibliography:

Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, *Aid to Bible Understanding*, (Brooklyn, NY: 1971)
Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, *Reasoning from the Scriptures*, (Brooklyn, NY: 1989)
Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, *Should You Believe in the Trinity?* (Brooklyn, NY: 1989)
Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, *The Greatest Man Who Ever Lived*, (Brooklyn, NY: 1991)
Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, *The Watchtower*, (Brooklyn, NY)
Geisler, Norman L. and Rhodes, Ron, *When Cultists Ask* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1997)
Guthrie, Donald, *The Pastoral Epistles*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990)
Martin, Walter, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1985)
McConkie, Bruce, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1976)
Spangler, David A., *A Vision of Findhorn: Anthology*, (Forres, Scotland: Findhorn, 1981)
copyright 2004, GCC 4.106

"I have one passion.
It is He, only He."
- Count Zinzendorf

EXERCISE

1. What was the main lesson you learned from this reading?

2. Do you think that the doctrine of the deity of Christ is so important that you would not associate with someone who claimed to be a follower of Christ but denied His deity? Explain your answer.

3. How would you respond to someone who claimed that Jesus is a created being? What Verses would you share?

4. How would you respond to someone who claimed that there is no Trinity - that God the Father is God but that Jesus is separate from and distinct from the Father and therefore not God? What verses would you use?

5. If you were witnessing to a Jehovah's Witnesses and he/she shared John 1:1 with you from their translation ("In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God and the word was a god."), How would you respond?

THE SECOND COMING OF JESUS CHRIST

INTRODUCTION

When we proclaim Jesus Christ and His work, it is vital that we talk not only of His death and resurrection but also of His coming again. The following article focuses on the important message of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

The Second Coming of Jesus Christ

Pastor John Hopler, Columbus, OH



“He [Jesus Christ] will return to earth personally, visibly and bodily to judge all men and establish His kingdom.” (GCC Statement of Faith)

Why is it important to teach on the Second Coming of Jesus Christ?

1. The emphasis placed on the Second Coming in the New Testament

The Second Coming is referred to 318 times in the New Testament. That is approximately once for every 30 verses. Should we not as teachers of the Word give the Second Coming a similar emphasis in our messages?

2. For building an eternal value system (Col. 3:1-4)
3. To keep believers focused on our ultimate hope (1 Peter. 1:13)
4. To build love for the brethren (Col. 1:3-5)
5. The emphasis placed upon this teaching by healthy and growing church movements:

The Christian Missionary Alliance was birthed through an emphasis on the teaching of the Second Coming. So too with the Great Commission Church movement in the 1970's.

6. To build purity and holiness in believers (1 John 3:2,3)
7. To give a right perspective amidst life's trials (1 Cor. 15: 19)

What are the various views in Christianity?

1. What are the views of the Millennium?

Key passage is Revelations 20: 4-6:

“I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.”

“The little time that remains between this moment and our death, should quicken our diligence to inherit the endless and unchangeable eternity of God.”
- *Stephen Charnock*

Church Leadership/The Doctrine of Jesus Christ

The Second Coming of Jesus Christ

“I see earth
receding; heaven
is opening, God is
calling!”

- *Last words of D. L.
Moody*

a. Premillennial

This view holds to the existence of a literal 1000-year period when Christ will reign in righteousness over the whole world. Before the millennium Christ will return and rapture His Church. This view is held by the vast majority of the evangelical world.

b. Millennial

This view denies a literal millennium, but instead sees the promises of Rev. 20:4-6 being fulfilled today in a spiritual way, either in Heaven or in the Church, as the Church submits to Christ day by day. This view sees good and evil growing together until the Second Coming of Christ, at which time there will be the resurrection (rapture), the final judgment, and the end of all things. This view is held by Catholics.

c. Postmillennial

This view holds that Rev. 20:4-6 is being fulfilled today through the preaching of the gospel and the ever-increasing expansion of the Kingdom of God. According to this view, the world will eventually be christianized and that Christ will return after a long period of righteousness and peace. This view is commonly found among Presbyterians and those from a Reformed theological tradition.

2. When is the “Rapture” in relation to the “Tribulation?”

The “Rapture” refers to the translation of believers to meet Christ in the sky at His return.

Key passage:

“For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.” 1 Thes. 4:16-18

The “Tribulation” refers to a seven-year period of sorrow and distress that will come upon the world around the time of Christ’s Second Coming.

Key passage:

“For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again.” Matt. 24:21

There are various views on the timing of the Rapture and the tribulation:

a. Pre-tribulation rapture

This view holds that the Church will be raptured before the Tribulation period begins. This view is held by a large percentage (if not a majority) of evangelicals today.

b. Post-tribulation rapture

This view holds that the Church will be raptured at the end of the Tribulation period. This is a commonly held view by many pre-millennialists.

c. Mid-tribulation rapture

This view holds that the Church will be raptured midway through the Tribulation period. This is not a widely popular view, but it is held by some pre-millennialists.

d. The pre-wrath rapture

This view holds that the Church will go through the Tribulation, but will escape the wrath of God's judgment upon the world at the close of the Tribulation period. This view is a recent view that is growing in popularity.

e. The past-tribulation rapture

This view sees the Tribulation period in Matthew 24 as already past, referring to the Temple's destruction 70 AD. This is not a widely held view (except that almost all evangelicals do believe Matthew 24 refers—at least in part—to the 70 AD events.)

f. Pan-tribulation

This view holds that it will “all pan out in the end!”

3. What is the view of the Great Commission Churches

a. As to the millennium issue, there is no requirement to believe in one view over the other to be a GCC pastor or church. However, GCC pastors and churches are almost exclusively pre-millennial in their beliefs.

b. As to the rapture/tribulation issue, GCC was strongly pre-tribulation in its roots. Today within GCC there is a wide range of views on this issue.

“Christ was content with a stable when he was born so that we could have a mansion when we die.”

- *Unknown*

Church Leadership/The Doctrine of Jesus Christ

The Second Coming of Jesus Christ

In the government approved churches in China, pastors are permitted to teach many truths from the Bible. But they are not permitted to teach the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

In this regard, consider the words of Wayne Grudem in his introduction to his chapter on the “end times” in his *Systematic Theology* (Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1994):

“Before examining the arguments for these...positions, it is important to realize that the interpretation of the details of prophetic passages regarding future events is often a complex and difficult task involving many variable factors. Therefore the degree of certainty that attaches to our conclusions in this area will be less than with many other doctrines.... I also think it important for evangelicals to recognize that this area of study is complex and to extend a measure of grace to others who hold different views regarding the millennium and the tribulation period” (p. 1114).

What pitfalls should be avoided in teaching on the Second Coming?

Pitfall #1: De-emphasizing the Second Coming in our teachings

Example: Because of the various views on the timing of the tribulation and the millennium, many pastors in Christianity have mistakenly responded by not teaching on the Second Coming at all.

Pitfall #2: Date setting and pre-occupation with speculation

Example: Pastors in evangelical churches who explicitly or implicitly stated that Jesus would return within 40 years of the return of Israel in 1948.

Pitfall #3: Imbalance in interpreting (“everything is literal” or “everything is figurative”)

Example: Some have mistakenly seen all of Revelation as symbolic. On the other extreme, some others have made wild predictions from Revelation without recognizing its allegorical nature.

Pitfall #4: Misunderstanding as to historical and future fulfillment in prophecies

Example: The recent “full pre-terist” position does not recognize in Matthew 24 the difference between a possible historical fulfillment in 70 AD and the future fulfillment at the Second Coming. Therefore they take the unorthodox position that the Second Coming of Christ and the rapture (1 Thes. 4:16-17) has already occurred and that there will be no resurrection of the body, as has been taught by the Christian Church for 2000 years (Rom. 8:11; Phil. 3:21).

Pitfall #5: Misapplying verses on the “Second Coming” views to negatively affect our practical lives

Examples: Some have allowed their view of the Second Coming to promote the unrealistic belief that “we won’t suffer in this life.” Others have been so fearful of the Antichrist that they do not have faith that the gospel will triumph and multiply. Still others have allowed their view on end times to negatively affect long-term career and job decisions.

“Keep the main thing the main thing.”
- *Unknown*

Pitfall #6: Overemphasis on temporal versus eternal victories

Example: The effect in the 1980’s by those influenced by the post-millennial “dominion theology” advocating a focus on changing the government more than advancing the gospel, which changes peoples’ hearts.

Pitfall #7: Disrespect for believers with different views

Example: Sadly, many churches have allowed these issues to cause strife and division.

Pitfall #8: Being distracted from the mission

Example: Some Christians have been consumed with the speculative aspects of prophecies to the point that they are not actively advancing the gospel message.

D. IN CONCLUSION:

Overall, on matters related to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, GCC emphasizes the instruction given to the disciples in Acts 1: 6-14:

“So when they met together, they asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.” Then they returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day’s walk from the city. When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.”

Church Leadership/The Doctrine of Jesus Christ

The Second Coming of Jesus Christ

“Precisely because we cannot predict the moment, we must be ready at all moments.”
- *C.S. Lewis*

1. Avoid speculation about these matters (v. 7)
2. Focus on the fulfilling of the great commission (v. 8)
3. Keep your hope on the Lord’s return (v. 11)
4. Pursue unity with believers for the fulfillment of the mission (v. 14)

All Scripture quotations in this article are from the New international Version.

ADDENDUM

1. Pre-tribulation view Advocates of this view point to:
 - a. Imminency verses. That is, verses that indicate that we are to hope for Christ's coming at any moment (Matt. 24:42; 1 Thes. 1:10, 5:1-8).
 - b. The fact that the Church is not mentioned in the Book of Revelation after chapter four when there is the description of the Tribulation period.
 - c. Rev. 3:10 which says that the Church will be kept from the hour of testing (i.e., the tribulation period).

2. Post-tribulation view Advocates of this view point to:
 - a. The passages such as Matt. 24:9-11 which indicates that the Church will go through the Tribulation.
 - b. The fact that the Bible makes no reference to two separate resurrections of believers, but describe it as one event (1 Cor. 15:23, 24).

3. Mid-tribulation view Advocates of this view point to:
 - a. The passages in Matthew 24 which indicate that believers will go through the Tribulation.
 - b. Passages (such as Matt. 24:42) that indicate an uncertainty as to when the Lord will return.

4. Pre-wrath view Advocates of this view point to:
 - a. A distinction between "tribulation" which believers will experience and "wrath" which believers will not experience (1 Thes. 5:9). Also, they distinguish the "Rapture" and "Day of the Lord," the latter being the Day of Judgment or wrath upon the world which all believers will escape.
 - b. 2 Thes. 2 which indicates that there will not be a coming of Christ until the Antichrist is revealed first.
 - c. Passages in Revelation that indicate that believers are in Heaven after going through the Tribulation, but before God's wrath comes (Chapters 7, 14, 19).

5. Past-tribulation view Advocates of this view point to:
 - a. The questions asked of Jesus before the Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21) that refer to the destruction of the Temple, which was still standing.
 - b. Matt. 24:34, which they argue indicates that the Tribulation was going to happen within the lifetime of the 1st Century disciples.

*"Come Lord Jesus!"
The last recorded
prayer in the Bible*

EXERCISE

1. What was the main lesson you learned from this reading?

2. In your church, how well do you think that the Second Coming of Christ is emphasized and taught? Please explain.

3. What are your personal opinions on the various views of the Tribulation and the Rapture?

4. If you and a co-elder in your church had a different view on the timing of the Rapture, how would you deal with this difference in leading the church?

5. What practical steps can you take as a church to insure that the people in the church have their hope on the Second Coming of Christ?



GREAT
COMMISSION
CHURCHES

NEW TESTAMENT CHRISTIANITY IN ACTION TODAY

www.gccweb.org