



BOOK · 4

Great Commission Churches

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

Great Commission Leadership Institute: Book 4

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Book 4: Love and Unity / The Doctrine of Salvation & Everyone a Minister / The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

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BOOK 4

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Article Guide

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7. Signs and Wonders in the Scriptures
8. An Evaluation of the Prosperity Gospel
9. Spiritual Warfare
10. Persecution and the Great Commission Christian



INTRODUCTION

Questions & 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 40 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 1990s, 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, the 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 one to two hours per week on homework. Each session will have two teachings (on CD with outlines) and five or more readings. Overall, each session has six or more homework assignments—one based on the two teachings, and five or more based on the readings. In addition, each person will participate in a one to two hour mentor group, usually twice each month, led by elders in his church. Each participant will also 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?

The regional meetings will cover the “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 GCLI is to give a basic orientation and overview of those issues that every man should know before he is appointed as 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 local 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. Furthermore, 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 will 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 in which to grow. The structure of the program, coupled with counsel by regional directors, will enhance the character training done by local pastors.

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

The structure provided by the program and the counsel by regional leaders will help local pastors focus on developing practical ministry skills in each participant. Pastors' 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 in which every elder must be skilled.

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?

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. 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 the GCLI program represent 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 ones 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 Pastors Conference and regional meetings; and
- Agrees to participate in the mentor group in his local church.

15. What are the guidelines that 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 and conferences through the local church (e.g., Faith-walkers, 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 would recommend (and hope) that churches have enrolled one to four elder candidates in GCLI 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 \$60 for the entire two-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?

No GCLI participant is guaranteed that completion of the program will qualify him to be an elder. Local church leaders ultimately make the decisions concerning who is appointed as elder in their church. Pastors will certainly have increased peace and confidence in appointing a man who has completed this course. Therefore, the GCLI program 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 church ordination within 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 two 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 (614-840-9900, jrhopler@gmail.com).

How to Use the GCLI Notebook

GCLI is in four books with two sessions per book. Each of the two sessions contains six or more 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 or more times. 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 30 teachings/articles.

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 five 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:

Regional and National Conferences. Wives are welcome to attend regional and national conferences.

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.

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.

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 could do.



Elder Qualifications Test

JOHN HOPLER

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

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 Hopler

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Elder Qualifications Test

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.



Elder Qualifications 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 do 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 26.

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 transparent 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, Titus 1:6

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, NIV)

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, for example, 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, Titus 1:6

Definition: Greek word “kosmos” 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 or 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, NIV)

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, NIV)

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. Does he manage well his physical home and his finances? _____
4. Has he equipped his wife to be a woman of character, who respects God and His word, who has loving and respectful relationships with others and whose words and actions would not hinder but would enhance his ministry? _____

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. Do his children believe in Christ? _____
 2. Does he have a good, healthy relationship with his children? _____
 3. Do his children obey and respect him and his wife? _____
 4. Are his children growing in serving others? _____
- 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.

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. 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 fairminded.

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. Is he a punctual person? _____
 - 3. Is his appearance neat and orderly? _____
 - 4. Does he control his eating? _____
- Total for V** _____

Additional Comments: _____

W. Holding Fast to 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: _____



GREAT
COMMISSION
CHURCHES

Elder Qualifications Test
SUMMARY SHEET

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



Elder Qualifications Test

HOW TO EVALUATE THE 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)
6797 N. High St.
Suite 319
Worthington, OH 43085
614-840-9900

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



The Great Commission Statement of Faith

The Scripture. The sole basis of our beliefs is the Bible, the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments. The Bible is unique in that every portion and every word was inspired by the Holy Spirit. It was without error in the original manuscripts, and has been passed down to us with great accuracy. It is the supreme and final authority in faith and life in this age.

God. There is but one God, everywhere present; infinite in power and knowledge; perfect in justice, goodness, and love; Creator of the universe; eternally existing in three persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit, each of whom possesses all the attributes of Deity and the characteristics of personality.

Man. God created the first man and woman in His own image and appointed them to rule and care for the earth. They lived in perfect relationship with God and each other. God instituted marriage, which is the life-long union of one man and one woman and the foundation for bearing and raising children in a family.

The Fall. The first man and woman doubted God's goodness and rebelled against Him. In judgment, God brought death into the world and creation fell from its state of perfection. Since then, all human beings are born with a corrupted nature and without spiritual life and are under the wrath of God because of their sin.

Jesus the Christ. God the Father, by His own choice, for His own glory, and out of love for sinful men and women, sent his Son, Jesus, the Christ, into the world to reconcile sinners to Himself. Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin. He was God in the flesh, both true God and true man. Jesus lived a sinless life and voluntarily suffered and died as our substitute to pay the penalty for our sins, thus satisfying God's justice and declaring righteous all those who trust in Him alone.

The Resurrection. Three days after His crucifixion, God raised Jesus from the dead in the same body, though glorified, in which He lived and died. He bodily ascended into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God the Father, where He, the only mediator between God and man, makes intercession for His own.

Salvation. Men and women are freed from the penalty for their sins not as a result, in whole or in part, of their own works, goodness, or religious observances, but by the undeserved favor of God alone which was given through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God forgives and accepts all who put their faith in Christ alone for their salvation.

The Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has come into the world to reveal and glorify Christ, to convict men and women of their sins, and to impart new life to all who place their faith in Christ. He permanently indwells believers from the moment of spiritual birth, guides them into truth, and empowers them to live a life pleasing to God.

Assurance. All who are born again of the Spirit can, through the sure promises of God, be fully assured that God will complete the work He has begun in them. They are sealed with the Holy Spirit, who is God's deposit, guaranteeing their eternal inheritance. Good works are not the basis for acceptance by God, but as believers grow in doing good, they grow in their assurance that they are truly children of God and that they will be with the Lord when they die.

Jesus' Future Coming. The Lord Jesus Christ will physically return to earth to reign in glory. He will raise the dead and judge the world in righteousness. The wicked will be sent to eternal punishment. The righteous will receive immortal bodies and be welcomed into eternal fellowship with God in a world where all things will be made new.

Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Jesus Christ has instructed those who believe in Him to be baptized in water as a symbol of their new birth in Christ. Baptism is only for those who have personally believed in Christ. Our practice is to baptize by immersion. The Lord also instituted the Lord's Supper as a remembrance of His suffering, death, and resurrection. Neither baptism nor the Lord's Supper has any merit in helping a person obtain eternal life.

The Church. All true believers make up the church worldwide and should assemble together in local churches for worship, prayer, fellowship, and teaching, in order to become conformed to the image of Christ and to become equipped to carry out the 'Great Commission' that Christ gave His followers in Matthew 28:19-20.



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 ultimate 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 are empowered through the Holy Spirit to be workers in the church, not just the pastors. 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 VII: Love and Unity / The Doctrine of Salvation

OVERVIEW

In Session VII of the Great Commission Leadership Institute, we will examine the core value of Love and Unity, and the doctrine of our salvation through Jesus Christ.

There are seven homework exercises:

1. Discussion from the Teachings

In the outline on Love and Unity, John Hopler examines five key principles we must understand and believe to be effective at building love and unity within the church. In the teaching on the Doctrine of Salvation, Tom Short examines the main truths related to our salvation in Jesus Christ.

2. Unity in Action

This reading contains the testimony of six pastors who have been tested (and proven) in their unity with other leaders.

3. Unity—Questions and Answers

In this reading, John Hopler works through common questions related to our unity as believers and leaders.

4. Water Baptism

Kurt Jurgensmeier's article focuses on the purpose of water baptism in relation to our salvation in Christ.

5. Eternal Security

Brent Knox explains and defends the truth that all genuine believers in Christ have eternal security—an assurance that they, for sure, are saved forever and will be in Heaven when they die.

6. God's Sovereignty and Man's Ability to Choose

Dave Bovenmyer addresses this mysterious subject, with the goal of providing a balanced view from the Scriptures on this very important matter.

7. Eternal Judgement

The doctrine of eternal judgement and hell is not a popular one today. However, the truth that God will judge the world is taught throughout the Scriptures. This article, by Dave Bovenmyer, addresses this very important doctrine.



GCLI TEACHING

Core Value of Love and Unity

Pastor John Hoper · Columbus, OH

Introduction

“The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me” (John 17:22-23).

One of the eight core values of Great Commission Churches is that of love and unity. Because God values love and unity, we too, as a movement, put a high value on love and unity in our personal lives, our families, our churches, and in our movement overall.

I would like to propose the following working definition of unity:

True Christian unity is that powerful and beautiful phenomenon when _____, led by the _____, _____ Jesus Christ, one another, and this lost world with the sacrificial love that Christ demonstrated at the cross, resulting in a _____ in Christ, for _____, and for the fulfillment of the _____.

Therefore, we understand that true Christian unity:

1. Is _____.

The uniqueness of each individual is valued and differences are accepted.

2. Values the leadership of _____ in each person’s life.

Jesus Christ’s lordship of each individual is recognized.

3. Is the fruit of _____ for God, one another, and for the world.

Where there is love, there is unity. And where there is true unity, there is true Christ-like love. Love and unity in Christ go hand in hand.

4. Is a _____ phenomenon.

Unity is not man-made. Unity is a dynamic work of God.

5. Results in _____ and in the fulfillment of Christ’s _____ on earth.

The world will know and glorify Jesus Christ when God’s people are united.

In order to be effective in ministry, every pastor must believe these five truths about unity:

1. Unity is especially _____.

“Make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose” (Philippians 2:2).

Paul, writing in the Spirit of God, reveals the heart of God. Unity makes God’s joy complete. Like a father who takes great joy in seeing his children “getting along,” so too, God takes great joy in seeing His children being united. Pleasing God is the supreme motivation for pursuing unity with fellow believers in Christ.

Also, the emphasis that God puts on unity in the New Testament is striking:

- Before His crucifixion, Jesus makes the unity of His followers His special focus in His prayer in John 17.
- The example that is presented and modeled in the Book of Acts is that of a church that was united—both Jews and Gentiles.
- Paul’s great exposition of the gospel in Romans concludes in chapter 15 with an appeal for unity.
- The first problem focused upon with the Corinthian church in Paul’s first letter to them was not their immorality or their wrong doctrine on the resurrection, but their disunity in chapter one.
- All throughout Paul’s writings, he emphasizes to the believers the importance of unity in Christ (Ephesians 4:1-16; Philippians 2:1-8; Colossians 2:2, 3:15).

If God makes unity an emphasis in the Scriptures, we need to make this an emphasis in our ministry.

2. Our unity will be _____ and requires an _____, _____ in order to be achieved.

Unity does not come easy. There are three opponents to unity that we face:

1. _____

His motto is “divide and conquer.” He is the “accuser of the brethren” (Revelation 12:10). His goal is to create division through strife, suspicions, and presumptions among God’s people.

2. _____ --“Jesus made the supreme sacrifice in order to bring unity between mankind and between men and God. We must follow in His steps.”

In America, in particular, the tendency is toward fleshly individualism. Because Christian unity is looked upon with great suspicion, there is peer pressure to be a “lone ranger” Christian.

3. _____

“Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:3-8).

Jesus made the supreme sacrifice in order to bring unity between mankind and between men and God. We must follow in His steps. The temptation will, in our flesh, always be toward selfishness and away from Christian unity. We must be vigilant in our efforts to overcome this temptation by living humble, selfless lives that will result in a true, Christ-centered unity.

3. God, in His power and grace, is _____ to bring about unity in the church.

“For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 15:4-6).

_____ gives perseverance through the Scriptures so that we might be united.

“The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me” (John 17:22-23).

_____ is praying for us that we might be united.

“Make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose... for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:2, 13).

What brings God pleasure is unity—and the _____ is in us to give us the desire and ability to be united.

The Holy Trinity—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit—is working in unity to bring about unity amongst Christians. Therefore, though unity is not achieved without a struggle, the momentum in God’s Church is *towards* unity.

4. The first priority for unity in the church is unity in the _____.

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another” (John 13:34).

Note: Jesus gave this command to the Twelve, not to the multitudes (although certainly it has application towards all believers). He understood that love and unity in the Church begins with love and unity in the leadership. Therefore, it is the solemn responsibility of every leader to make it a priority to love and to be united with his fellow leader.

In a church, the standard of love and unity among the plurality of elders will be the standard of love and unity for the church as a whole. Therefore, if love is considered to be the “greatest” (1 Corinthians 13:13), then there are few things more important in a leader’s “job description” than that leader loving his fellow leaders as Christ loved us.

Finally, it is important to note that Jesus gave this command to leaders who were to be involved in a national and international ministry. So, too, if we are to be effective in fulfilling the Great Commission, it is vital that our love and unity be not only with leaders in our churches, but with fellow leaders across the nation and the world who share a common vision of spreading the gospel throughout the earth.

5. _____ are promised for churches and leaders that are truly united.

There are several examples in the Scriptures that show that fruit and growth will result from unity.

- The Tower of Babel was built through the united effort of unbelievers. And here is what the Lord said about this group of dedicated people:

“Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same language. And this is what they began to do, and now nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them” (Genesis 11:6).

- The Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 worked to preserve the unity of the church between Gentiles and Jews. Notice the result:

“Now while they [Paul, Silas, and Timothy] were passing through the cities, they were delivering the decrees which had been decided upon by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem, for them to observe. So the churches were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing in number daily” (Acts 16:4-5).

- Jesus attaches our ability to fulfill the gigantic task of the Great Commission—of presenting the claims of Christ to the whole world—to our faithfulness in loving one another:

“By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35).

May God grant all of us the grace to value and pursue love and unity together, for the glory of Jesus Christ and for the fulfillment of the Great Commission!



GCLI TEACHING

The Biblical Doctrine of Salvation from Sin

Pastor Doug Brown · Lee's Summit, MO

Introduction

Man was created for God's pleasure and glory (Revelation 4:11). God intended man to love Him and have a relationship with Him. However, this relationship was destroyed when man sinned and death entered into the world. Salvation relates to man's deliverance from sin and restoration to the relationship God had originally intended.

What is Salvation?

Salvation (Gr. *soteria*) literally means "_____," and throughout Scripture, relates to deliverance from sin. The verb is used in three _____ throughout Scripture and it is important to distinguish between these tenses to avoid misinterpreting this important doctrine:

Verb Tense Deliverance from the... Biblical Doctrine Scripture Examples

Past _____ of sin _____ Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 10:10

Present _____ of sin _____ Philippians 2:12;;1 Peter 3:21

Future _____ of sin _____ Romans 13:11; 1 Thessalonians 5:8

The focus of this study will be deliverance from the **penalty** of sin (past tense).

Words Associated with Salvation

The following words refer to our salvation from the penalty of sin and help us to understand what salvation means. (Definitions are compiled from *Vines Expository Dictionary*.)

Regeneration (new birth): To be made alive as opposed to having been spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1). Salvation is shown to be a _____ (Titus 3:5, 1 Peter 1:23, John 3:5-6).

Redemption: To purchase in the marketplace, often referring to purchasing a slave. Salvation is when Jesus Christ _____ us out of the marketplace of sin, paying the price of His precious blood to make us His own (Ephesians 1:7, Colossians 1:14, 1 Peter 1:18, Revelation 5:9, 1 Corinthians 6:20).

Reconciliation: To change from enmity to friendship. Man, in his sinful condition and alienation from God, is invited to be reconciled to God, that is, to change his attitude and receive God's provision for his sin. This stresses that salvation involves entering into a new _____ with God, through Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:21-22, 2 Corinthians 5:18-21, John 17:3).

Justification: This does not mean “just as if I never sinned,” but actually goes beyond being declared innocent to being declared **righteous**. Our position in Christ is declared to be “_____” (Romans 3:24, 4:25, 5:18).

Propitiation: “That which expiates,” referring to Christ’s death being the _____ for our sins. This does not refer to appeasing God, but rather to removing that sin which prevents God, in His holiness, from having a relationship with us. It is similar to God looking upon the Old Testament Mercy Seat (Exodus 25:21- 22) and being satisfied with the blood sacrifice from sin. Jesus’ blood is the propitiary sacrifice for our sins (Romans 3:25, 1 John 2:1-2).

Summary: Salvation is the work of God accomplished through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ in which a lost sinner is forgiven, declared righteous and belonging to God, and, thereby entering into a new relationship with God.

How is Salvation Received?

Scripture consistently teaches that salvation is given to people as a gracious _____ from God (Romans 6:23, Ephesians 2:8-9, Romans 4:24, Titus 3:5). This gift is received by those who have _____ in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9, John 3:16, etc.).

1. True faith is more than intellectual assent, dead religion, or mere emotionalism. True faith (Hebrews 11:1-3) involves:
 - Knowledge: The _____ element of faith (understand - vs. 3)
 - Assent: The _____ element of faith (assurance - vs. 1)
 - Trust: The _____ element of faith (conviction - vs. 1)

(Commentary by A.H. Strong and Louis Berkhof in their respective works on Systematic Theology)

Therefore, in evangelism, we must work to make sure that our converts have genuine _____ faith and not an inadequate “faith” which will not save.

2. The object of our faith is not religion or philosophy. The object of our faith is Jesus Christ and the _____ He accomplished in saving us.
 - Who He is: The Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed of God (Matthew 16:15-20)
 - What He did: Laid down His life as an offering for our sin (Romans 3:24-25, 4:25, 2 Corinthians 5:21, 1 Peter 3:18)

Therefore, in our evangelism, we must stress the _____ and _____ of Christ, endeavoring to introduce people to the real Jesus Christ as revealed in the Bible and not simply a false Christ to fit passing fads.

3. True repentance is _____ with true saving faith (Luke 24:47, Acts 20:21, Acts 26:20). Repentance simply means a change of _____ and _____ toward God. Repentance does not mean a cleansing of our life from sin prior to salvation. Rather, repentance is simply turning one’s heart away from wrong things (such as idols, religious works as a basis of salvation, or general rebellion against God) and turning one’s heart toward God through Jesus Christ.

4. Salvation, by grace through faith in Christ, is often set against _____ in works of righteousness (Ephesians 2:8-9, Titus 3:5, Romans 4:5). However, faith in Christ will always _____ works of righteousness.

The distinction can be pictured this way:

“Religious” View:

Faith + Good Works = Justification

Biblical View:

Faith = Justification + Good Works

Therefore, in our evangelism, it is important that we help people abandon any prideful trust in themselves or their own goodness to achieve salvation, but that we don't go so far as to imply that good works mean nothing at all. We are not saved “_____” good works, but we are saved “_____” good works (Ephesians 2:8-10). For a further discussion of how repentance and good works are connected with salvation, read Dave Bovenmyer's article, “Grace, Works, and Lordship” in GCLI's Session VI.

Assurance of Salvation

The Bible teaches that a true believer _____ and _____ have assurance of his salvation (1 John 5:13). This is possible because our salvation is based on the work of Christ rather than our own efforts to gain approval with God.

Assurance of salvation is both _____ and _____.

- Objective assurance is based on right _____ concerning salvation.
- Subjective assurance is the _____ given by the Holy Spirit as our life becomes more and more conformed to the image of Christ (1 John).

Both objective and subjective assurances are important and both should be cultivated in the lives of Christians. A critical early step in the life of a new believer is _____. Christ commanded that His followers be baptized (Matthew 28:19-20). Baptism is a public means by which a believer professes his _____ with Jesus in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6:3-4).



GCLI TEACHINGS

Exercise

1. What was the main lesson you learned from these teachings?

2. What was the greatest test of unity that you have encountered in your Christian experience?
What enabled you to persevere in unity?

3. Give an example in your experience where making a decision to be united led to greater fruit and blessing for you personally or for the church.



GCLI TEACHINGS

Exercise

4. Think back on the day you became a Christian. What aspect of the gospel message of salvation most impressed you at that time? What aspect of salvation has had the greatest impact on you the last year?

5. In your opinion, what is the greatest threat to the doctrine of salvation today? What can your church do to equip members in the church to be sound in faith as to this doctrine?



LOVE AND UNITY / THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

Unity in Action

What Christian is there that does not agree with the truth that God wants unity in His Church? Certainly, we all desire that believers and leaders be loving one another. But theory is one thing—practice is another. The following are real life examples of unity in action.



UNITY IN ACTION

Unity Among Pastors

Pastor Rick Whitney · Stillwater, OK

I occasionally receive phone calls from pastors and have the privilege of dialoguing with them on their **relationship with their fellow elder(s)**. There is always a graciousness of speech and a desire to pursue unity with their brother. But it can be difficult. We each want to work things out, but it sometimes takes a lot of effort and communication. Therefore, I hope we can all benefit from a few reminders on how to achieve even greater unity amongst us.

A few months back, John Hopler shared a great verse found in the J.B. Phillips translation, taken from 2 Corinthians 7:4. *“To your face I talk to you with utter frankness; behind your back I talk about you with deepest pride.”* First, let me mention that this is always the spirit of my fellow pastors when they call me to discuss their relationship with one another. I, too, desire to speak this way with them. It is a tremendously high bar that the Apostle has set. Paul’s example shows a noble and honorable way of speaking. It is just the way we hope to speak about each other all the time.

And maybe this is where we need to start. Do we believe that there is integrity in our thoughts, *in each and every one of our thoughts*, when we think of one another? Are we also gentle and kind in our words, as well as truly frank and direct, when we do get a chance to speak to each other face-to-face?

Is there always honesty? Christian men filled with the Spirit can handle the honest truth. Jack Nicholson in that famous movie scene snarled, “You can’t handle the truth!” Maybe they can’t, but if we are walking with the Lord we can. Furthermore, speaking honestly is the only way to speak to one another.

Maybe we should restate Paul’s thought in the second phrase of the verse, *“behind your back,”* **Do I trust that others are speaking well of me when I am not around?** Or do I think I feel my ears tingling as others speak negatively about me? Often—and I will be honest based on my years in the ministry—it takes more faith than I ever imagined to believe my partners are speaking well of me. When we are apart, we can often wind up wondering and guessing about what our partner thinks about me in his “heart of hearts.” It takes mental discipline to refuse to wander down this path of speculating. If we walk down it, it can lead to suspicion, and as Proverbs says, “suspicion or presumption leads to strife.” Usually this strife begins in our own heart. We can then wind up arguing with ourselves, as to what we think our partner might think of us.

Winning the battle for unity with our fellow leaders begins in our minds.

To think well of each other is our own personal duty. No peace-maker or mediator can do this work for us. When it comes to our attitude towards one other, we must take a hold of our will and choose to believe the best. This is our own responsibility. We must each win this battle in our own heart.

“To your face I talk to you with utter frankness; behind your back I talk about you with deepest pride.”

- 2 Corinthians 7:4
J.B. Phillips translation

I have been privileged to work with many men that faithfully win this battle. Men that vigorously seek to believe the best. Men that carefully guard their hearts and their speech. Men that “go overboard” in giving their partner the benefit of the doubt. I guess we can never really go overboard in this area.

In our pursuit of unity, it helps to remember that we have a common enemy in our churches. It is not a man and it is not each other. It is Satan. He hates each of us, he hates all of us, he hates our love for each other, he hates our unity with each other, and he seeks to break that unity. And he keeps after it, day after day. As one woman once said, “Although it may seem against my Bible to praise the Devil, I have to admit that he is not a lazy rascal.”

Sometimes I simply share over the phone with my fellow elder that I think it is the Devil that is at work in the troubled relationship. I tell him to get mad at the Devil. It is okay to be mad at the Devil. Sometimes we should remember that it might be best and actually needful, to express a little more anger towards the Devil. He is smart and tricky, and maybe we need to be a little more humble and recognize that we can be duped.

There is nothing like a common enemy to unite men. Two brothers, surrounded by a gang of threatening individuals, would naturally and quite quickly face their attackers, back-to-back. At a time like that, we would trust our backside to our brother. Maybe we need to wake up and recognize that we have an opponent who is “*prowling*” and looking and probably working at this very minute, to divide us. Like the gladiator said to his fellow warriors, “We have a better chance if we stay together.” Pastors who have worked together for many years truly get to know each other. We see issues in each other’s lives. We know each other’s sins and failings. We forgive and we forget much, though, as hard as we try not to, we also remember certain things about each other.

What, then, should we do when we just can’t forget something that has bothered or offended us?

My suggestion is that we imitate our Savior. He knows all about us and He knows about our failings. And the Bible tells us that He has chosen to forget some things. “*I—yes, I alone—am the One who blots out your sins for my own sake and will never think of them again*” (Isaiah 43:25).

Yet, He also remains God and He does remember certain things about our lives and actions. In other words, I am simply suggesting that He is not naive in His love towards us. This is how we should seek to be towards each other. Just as He is gracious towards us and “forgetful,” so, too, we ought to be forgetting a whole lot. But when we remember certain things, we need to apply grace and love in those same memories.

We are just men, but we can imitate God in this. By an act of our will, we can choose to think graciously of one another and pursue unity.

One further note: If I desire greater unity with the men with whom I am working, I need to practice one important habit that I have seen in men I admire. I have observed that we are able to be more united with brothers of whom we habitually and vigilantly speak well.

“Never believe anything bad about anybody unless you positively know it to be true; never tell even that unless you feel that it is absolutely necessary—and that God is listening while you tell it.”

- William Penn

“A word of encouragement during a failure is worth more than an hour of praise after success.”

- Unknown

We must be our brother’s best cheerleader. We must seek to always be the first to praise our partner in public. We must outdo one another in this noble work. You cannot faithfully and consistently speak well of a fellow Christian and still harbor a grudge towards him. We’ve got to shine in this. This is something that we can do in a pro-active spirit and it will guard our hearts. When we otherwise might be tempted to wonder, praise for our partner(s) fills up the void in our mind and in our heart.

Once, in a public setting, a brother stood up and reproved another man who was challenging me. This brother rose to my defense. He was vigorous, outspoken and, perhaps, just a little too passionate. But, he spoke because he was moved to do so. He praised me publicly. Actually, I did not mind the challenge and I can’t even remember what the exact issue was. But I will never forget my brother standing up, interrupting me, and coming to my defense. My, how it touched my heart. I will not forget his spirit. This kind of action bonds hearts together and unites men at a very deep level.

I should state one last thing. It is no shame to draw on another man for help in communicating between two brothers. This is a great benefit of our association. We are not just united in name, but in a very real sense, we are united as fellow workers “on the wall.” Sometimes it just helps to have a third party listen and help resolve a deeper misunderstanding or speak to a real or perceived hurt. This kind of mediation is a very genuine scriptural principle.

It has been a privilege and honor to have been involved in this kind of service. I, too, have benefited in resolving certain tensions by the help of another brother. May God help each of us to be diligent in our pursuit of unity. Just as a soldier is diligent in protecting his outpost, we, too, must be diligent in guarding against any word, thought, or temptation that can lead to separation.



UNITY IN ACTION

Responding to Critics with Humility

Pastor John Hopley · Columbus, OH

As servants of Jesus Christ, we will be criticized. What does the Bible teach us on how to respond to critics? The answer is simple: humility.

From Jesus' words on the Sermon on the Mount, we see that God wants us to show humility in three ways:

First, God wants us to be humble before Him by learning how we can be more pleasing to Him. Jesus said *"First, take the log out of you own eye..."* (Matthew 7:5.). We need to ask ourselves, "Is any of the criticism valid? Is there anything that God wants us to learn?" As an example of this, our movement of churches went through a process in the late 1980s and early 1990s (described as Project Care) in which pastors made a concerted effort to listen to concerns expressed by members and former members of their churches. This led to the writing of the Weakness Paper in 1991—a paper that was part of a good faith effort by our movement of churches to "take the log out of our own eye."

Second, God wants us to be humble before men by seeking reconciliation. Jesus said, *"first be reconciled to your brother..."* (Matthew 5:24). God wants us to take the first step and pursue peace with our brothers. We are to seek to understand, then be understood. As an example, in the late 1980s and early 1990s pastors in Great Commission spent many hours pursuing peace with individuals who had offenses or concerns. As a result, misunderstandings were cleared up, apologies were given, and forgiveness was extended. Apart from a few exceptions, there was reconciliation with every person who was willing to talk through their offenses or concerns.

Third, God wants us to be humble before the world when mistreated. Jesus said *"Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great..."* (Matthew 5:11-12) and, *"Pray for those who persecute you"* (Matthew 5:44). We realize not everyone will think well of us. Jesus was criticized. So is everyone who serves Him. So what does God want us to do when unfairly criticized? He wants us to rejoice before Him and to pray for our accusers. As an example, one lesson we learned through Project Care is that some individuals have a critical nature, no matter how much you seek peace with them. We also became reconciled to the fact that not everyone will go through a biblical and honoring process of reconciliation. Instead of humbly seeking peace in a private setting or finding out the true facts behind some accusations, some people have chosen to publicly spread unfair characterizations of pastors and Christians in our movement. So, like Jesus instructed us, we rejoice before God and pray for our critics. And we make it our aim to continue to advance the Kingdom of God.

"The way we respond to criticism pretty much depends on the way we respond to praise. If praise humbles us, then criticism will build us up. But if praise inflates us, then criticism will crush us; and both responses lead to our defeat."

- Warren W. Wiersbe

“If what they are saying about you is true, mend your ways. If it isn’t true, forget it and go on and serve the Lord.”

***- H.A. Ironside,
on responding
to criticisms***

Through all of this, we must remember that our reputation matters little. What matters is God’s glory. Jesus said, *“Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven”* (Matthew 5:16). What people think of us or our church or Great Commission is not important. Rather, our desire is only that God is loved and worshipped through Jesus Christ His Son.

When criticism comes our way, may God grant us humble hearts as we seek to serve God and people. And amidst unfair criticism, may God accelerate our efforts to spread the message of the love of Jesus Christ to a world in desperate need of a Savior.



UNITY IN ACTION

All for One and One for All!

Pastor Greg Michael · Woodstock, GA

“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the day approaching” (Hebrews 10:24-25).

It is very easy for our churches to become islands unto ourselves. We become involved in the day to day responsibilities of running a church, the constant needs of the saints, the pressure of Sunday mornings, that we can neglect our fellow pastors in the region. We need to remember the words of the famous theologians, The Three Musketeers, “all for one and one for all.” We need each other!

We had failed to practice this regional love and unity at Woodstock Community Church. We spent several years neglecting the brothers and sisters throughout the country and had become too busy with what we were “doing for God.” We were ignoring such truths as, *“How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron’s beard, down upon the collar of his robes. It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the LORD bestows his blessing, even life forevermore” (Psalm 133:1-3, NIV).*

“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3, emphasis mine). I had used these verses many times for encouraging individual saints to stay in fellowship because we need each other for accountability. I know now that this is just as important for churches as it is for individuals. As leaders, we need to stay open and accountable to our peers.

We experienced a leadership crisis as a church at the beginning of 1999. It was one of the most difficult ordeals I have ever faced. But God used this to help the four pastors experience real unity and mutual respect for one another. We pastors reached out to the GCC national leadership for support and wisdom during the long ordeal. We found them to be gracious and a wonderful support for us, our wives, and the entire church.

We have sought to spread this same spirit of genuine care throughout the region since that time. It takes work to keep these relationships current, open, and building. It is like any marriage. It takes constant care, effort, and prayer to keep communication and love alive. Someone said that, “Most marriages die because of neglect.” This is true with pastors’ relationships, too.

It is my encouragement for you to work hard to keep love alive in your region. Call each other often. Pray for each other daily. Go to the GCLI regionals for encouragement and to help others grow. Work together in regional conferences or mission trips. God will bless your church and your load will be

“Morale is the state of mind. It is steadfastness and courage and hope. It is confidence and zeal and loyalty.”

- George Marshall

“There are no secrets to success. Don’t waste your time looking for them. Success is the result of perfection, hard work, learning from failure, loyalty to those for whom you work, and persistence.”

- Colin Powell

lighter. *“Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you”* (Luke 6:38, NIV).

It may not make sense at first, but God says when we serve others, He will take care of our needs. This is true in our regions as well. Your local church will grow and more people will become Christians as you are faithful to care for each other in the region and not merely look out for your own personal interests.

It is my prayer that we will strive to grow closer together as we work towards the reconciliation of the world.

MAKE EVERY EFFORT, MUSKETEERS! “ALL FOR ONE AND ONE FOR ALL!”



UNITY IN ACTION

Unity and Commitment to the Local Church

Pastor Rick Whitney · Stillwater, OK

“How committed should I be to my local church?” “What does Jesus Christ expect of me?”

These are important questions that pastors and leaders often have to deal with in our churches. We need to have an answer to these questions, and probably will need a good answer for years to come, unless the American church changes and becomes much more sold out and radical.

Consumers in the Church are not very committed

When we read the New Testament, we see that the Church is a great and glorious creation. God could have started this Christian age in a variety of ways, but He started this whole gospel business by creating His Church. And through the Church, He seeks to win this world.

But the Church has been reduced. It is smaller today. Often, we think of it as an add-on, a second thought or an afterthought. A good thing, but a small thing. Not strongly relevant to our society. But the Church is relevant and we need to redefine how great it is and how committed we must be to it.

There is a strong, ‘consumer mindset,’ often held unaware by us that has permeated much of our thinking and church culture. Given this widespread attitude, just how should we talk about commitment to our local churches?

When people visit the local church, many times they often first ask, “Is there anything in it for me?” We evaluate the church and rate it, often unconsciously, but often, nevertheless. Not necessarily with malice, but with expectation and a too quick, critical eye. “Do these people love me and appreciate me? Is there a quality Sunday School program? Do we like the music? Is there a strong youth ministry? Is the pastor funny? Is the preaching sound? Do I feel like I am loved in this church?” The questions go on and on and there is a kind of built-in, self-centered attitude in every one of them. “I want things from the church. I want those things according to my own personal or family’s schedule. Why should I, or anyone, question what I want? Don’t we all have a right to pick and choose? Here in America, we usually ask how we can get the most out of our local church- with the least commitment.

But our prayer and the hope of this paper is to help Christians ask, “How can I invest my life for maximum impact in my local church?”

George Barna, statistician to the Church, says that less than 40% of Christians who describe themselves as faithful members – even attend church. He says that 20- 25% of the Christians in America change church – every year!

“I have friends in overalls whose friendship I would not swap for the favor of the kings of the world.”

- Thomas Edison

“Loyalty is something you give regardless of what you get back, and in giving loyalty, you’re getting more loyalty; and out of loyalty flow other great qualities.”

- Charles “Tremendous” Jones

As Josh Harris writes in his book, *Stop Dating The Church*, “These days, experts describe America as a nation of ‘Believers’ but not ‘Belongers.’”

Harris’ book is a good personal testimony of how he decided to give his life to a local church.

Given this kind of church climate, questions of commitment and loyalty to the local church seem odd, out of place, even offensive. In this kind of Christian culture, the consumer is the final judge, arbiter, and the one who decides whether he is committed or not, based on his own personal standards. “If I don’t like the church, I’ll find another. Surely I can always find a good church? I might want to move to a better climate for better weather and probably I can find a good church there? What if my job leads me to another city?” Many of these questions might be answered, “Yes,” but what is really going on in our heart when we ask these kinds of questions?

It seems that the real question behind the questions is: “Who is Lord of my life?”

Because the church is often just a hobby to many of us, the important personal questions are answered, ultimately, all alone. And when we are alone, we often fall back upon our flesh. Our flesh “seasons” the answer. My fleshly desires - maybe all cleaned up, sanitized, spiritualized, and organized, but still just my flesh - are strongly positioned in the driver’s seat of my life. It is often my flesh that is working to insure that I keep my pleasures and pursue my comforts and we need to recognize it as such.

The flesh is always independent. The flesh wants to remain alone, the ultimate authority over our life. Our flesh always seeks its ease and leaving a church is always easier than sticking it out. Leaving community is usually easier for the flesh, but leaving community is usually not best for our spirit. And when we leave, relationships are fundamentally altered. There is a rupture. And then we have to start over again. Sadly, many Christians start over, and start over, and start over again and again throughout their Christian life.

There is very little nobility about being involved in just a club.

The local church is not a club. The local church is not a disposable thing and was not formed by God to serve our flesh.

Church is not a hobby. It has been designed by God to be a kind of family and a family like no other. It is the family of Jesus Christ. It is not a club or just an activity. In America, we often think of it this way. But it is surely not a hobby to us.

We recognize the Church as God’s glorious vehicle and God’s intended method to reach this world with the gospel. The vision He has given to the Church is a great thing, a grand thing. And if we are committed to it, we can be a part of the greatness of it.

When a Christian is not committed to the local church, we need to face up to the fact that we may have failed him in some way. Here is how. We may have failed to articulate just how glorious this church vi-

sion really is. Maybe they just did not embrace our vision, but maybe we did not share it as passionately as we should have.

The church is a very noble bond - among great men and great women.

1. We are to be committed to God, to family and to key people.

We know we should be committed to our Savior and to His Church universal, but just how committed should I be to my local church? What is God's heart on this whole subject?

Commitment speaks to loyalty. And loyalty speaks to courage. And no one wants to be ranked with cowards. So what does the Bible teach when it comes to loyalty and commitment? Or what are principles from the Word that could guide us in answering these questions? In tackling this, we probably first need to state some general truths.

First off, there are different levels of commitment and loyalty as taught and demonstrated in the Bible. Every Christian is first committed and loyal to our Savior and to His Word. This is an obvious truth, but one that needs to always be stated up front. Our Savior is the One who bought us with His shed blood (2 Corinthians 5:14-15). And to Him we owe our ultimate allegiance.

Commitment in marriage is another level that is clearly taught in the Bible. "Till death do us part," are not just words. They speak to a very real teaching and precedent, taught by our Lord Himself when He walked this earth (Matthew 19:4-6). Jesus said, "Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate" (Mark 10:9, ESV).

No one would debate that commitment in marriage is foundational to the health of a society. God wants us loyal to our mate for the rest of our lives - period. And the importance of this kind of commitment is on a higher plane than the commitment we are to have towards one another in the church.

Also, there is a unique commitment we are to have to our family members, particularly those who are believers. Children are to honor their parents and parents are to train their children (Ephesians 6:1-4). Paul's exhortation in 1 Timothy 5:8 is a solemn one: "But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his own household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." We believe that the church exists to support and encourage a strong commitment to the family.

In addition, we recognize that there are key people in our lives to whom we have made commitments. The commitment of one man to another is praised in many places in God's Word. For instance, the commitment of Jonathan and David as friends and soldiers, to each other, has been treasured for thousands of years.

"After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself" (1 Samuel 18:1, NIV).

"And Jonathan had David reaffirm his oath out of love for him, because he loved him, as he loved himself" (1 Samuel 20:17, NIV).

"There is nothing on this earth more to be prized than true friendship."

- Thomas Aquinas

“Loyalty is the cardinal virtue in Christian work. After wide observation and prolonged study of biography, I place it first.”

*- John R. Mott,
Missionary leader*

2. When we commit to our local church, we are following our Savior.

Our Lord Himself is our champion and first example in what it means to be passionately committed to the local church and the believers found in it. Even when we are faithless, He remains faithful, because He cannot deny who He is.

His faithfulness, loyalty, and strong commitment to each of us in the local church has already been demonstrated by His death on the cross.

Through inspiration, Paul often writes in each of his epistles, in great and grand terms, just how much Jesus Christ loved each of those local, New Testament churches.

At the end of the New Testament in the Book of Revelation, our Lord writes with warning and tenderness to seven different New Testament churches and reveals His great heart towards each of them.

Our Lord’s example is given to us to help us value and teach loyalty and passionate commitment. I believe God wants us to teach and promote loyalty and commitment within our local church, regardless of the culture we live in or the attitudes people might carry into our churches.

Paul taught commitment and patterned it. He was sold out as a servant to the local church and he challenged others to follow him. In Philippians 3:17, he wrote, “Brethren, join in following my example and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.” He invited believers to join him. We need to join with believers who are following Paul’s example – and then stick with them.

We cannot compare our standards to the present state of the Church. We must look to the Word and the heroic examples of commitment found in the Book of Acts, to begin to establish any kind of baseline on how we ought to act and behave towards each other today.

If we compare our present commitment to the 1st Century Church’s commitment - we would probably often be below average.

I believe that one of the single biggest decisions we will ever make, as a Christian, that will determine our success as a believer, is whether we will commit to our local church. Almost every major life lesson I have ever learned as a Christian, was taught to me in my local church. It is in community that our life and our mission are worked out. And it is in our local church where we can achieve greatness.

There are many other important spiritual decisions we each must make. But all of these decisions gain power and are tested when we see that God wants us to live them out, sold out for your own platoon. Your local church.

In the local church our sanctification is worked out. Hebrews 10:24 tells us how this happens, “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good deeds.”

If we have no involvement and commitment with a local assembly, we will not be able to obey this verse. Nor will others be able to obey it with us.

Sid Greenberg, an author, once wrote, “There is greatness in patient endurance, in unyielding loyalty, in steadfast adherence to vows given, to promises made.”

In our spirit, we know that commitment holds a greatness. But it is so rare today. “If I don’t like the school, I switch. If I don’t like the coach, I look for another. If I don’t like my neighbors, I move. If the job is hard, I start sending out the resume.”

This is the heart of the matter.

The language of the New Testament is not about “I.” The heartbeat of the New Testament is “We.”

“You can tell [my mother] that when you found me, I was with the only brothers I had left, and that there was no way I was deserting them.”

*- Pvt. James Ryan,
from the movie
“Saving Private Ryan”*

3. Commitment is tested through community.

“The acts of the sinful nature (flesh) are obvious: . . . selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy . . .” (Galatians 5:19).

When we remain alone as the ultimate authority for our life, sadly we will not get to where we deeply want to go. We want to do great things. God has made us this way. But we will never accomplish great things alone.

Mark Bowen from Evergreen Community Church asks just how can an individual Christian distinguish the leading of the Holy Spirit and separate that leading from our own emotions, our own personality, and our flesh?

He answers that we need to test it by examining the Word, and test what we think is God’s leading by giving it time, examining it over time.

But Bowen especially encourages all of us to examine what we think might be God’s leading - by presenting it to community. To fellow Christians. To fellow leaders. God completes, clarifies, confirms, and corrects our understanding of the leading of the Holy Spirit in community.

This understanding highlights the need for our being committed and involved with a local church of believers.

John Wooden, the famous UCLA coach, said, “We need someone or something, to which we must be loyal, if we are ever going to reach our potential.”

We need each other in the local church if we are ever going to reach our potential as Christians and as followers of Jesus Christ.

4. Commitment never quits.

What are a few biblical principles that can help us promote this noble trait? We already know deep down in our hearts that this is a value, a truth from God. But what are some biblical examples that might help us establish more commitment and love in our local church?

***“Laughter attracts.
Loyalty keeps.”***

- Unknown

Maybe we should start with the principle of covenantal love. The Hebrew word is, “hesed,” and is God’s expression of covenantal love, translated often as “loving kindness.” Covenant love is a great and heroic thing, as taught in the Bible. Covenant love is forever. God has shown us covenant love. Christ has shown us covenant love. And our Lord asks us to imitate Him in following His example.

When our Lord tells us in 1 John 5:1 that, “. . . everyone who loves the Father loves His child as well,” He has given us a focus, an outworking, a practical way to show our love for God and it is through our love for our fellow believers, within our local church.

Our church defines the “space” where relationships are cultivated and continued. Almost all relationships outside the local church context can often begin to wither away simply because those relationships are not sharing the same “space.” If we call ourselves disciples of our Savior, followers, then we will try to follow Him in a covenant heart attitude towards those brothers and sisters we walk with, every day.

1 Corinthians 13 tells us that love does not quit. It always trusts, it always hopes, it always perseveres. Jesus Christ has never quit on us. If we are going to be faithful to the Lord and follow Him, we will never quit on His people. And we will joyfully teach our people to not quit and so imitate Him.

“Love never fails.” These simple words are not just a general principle. God wants us to specifically live them out in our daily life with the people He has put us with.

We must not quit on the people right beside us. It is the Christians we live and serve and work beside that provide the opportunity to obey these words. To be faithful with them and to be committed toward them.

Mark Darling reminded me that it is impossible for a believer to obey and fulfill any one of the over 33, “one another,” verses in the New Testament, unless we are committed somewhere to some group of believers.

How can we...

- Love one another (John 13:34)?
- Be devoted to one another (Romans 12:5)?
- Honor one another (Romans 12:10)?
- Rejoice with one another (Romans 12:15)?
- Serve one another (Galatians 5:13)?
- Forgive one another (Ephesians 4:32), unless we are involved in a committed relationship with our local church?

Because our ultimate commitment is to God, our commitment to our local church may work itself out in actually being in a different church some day in the future. But the heart commitment to the people in your present local church and to the church as a whole will not change. And if God does lead you to leave, your commitment to that local church will be seen by how you leave that church. Do you involve the pastors and people in your church in the process of leaving? Are you leaving with their counsel and blessing? Do you make an effort to be in a new church that is somehow practically united in the Great

Commission with your present church? This is the kind of commitment, I believe, God wants us all to make.

5. Commitment to the local church is taught through the body, the army, and the family.

At times, we hear that someone is committed to the universal Church, but they do not follow this through in their thinking and see that they need to be committed to the Christian right beside them in their local church. The Apostles were not just involved with the universal church. They each were involved in planting and building local churches, over and over again.

“But in fact, God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as He wanted them to be” (1 Corinthians 12:18, NIV).

“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 that which 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” (Ephesians 4:15-16).

“Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of every day life, so that he may please the One who enlisted him as a soldier” (2 Timothy 2:3-4).

The church has been defined and explained in the Bible by using three analogies: The body, the army, the family.

What is taught by these analogies when we think of commitment to our local church? First off, what hand can believe in the whole body, but not care about the arm that it is attached to? Not to be trite, but, “The leg bone’s connected to the hip bone.” You cannot say you are committed to the army, but not be committed to the soldier right beside you. If anything, the soldier tells us that he would do anything for his platoon. That he would never leave his fellow soldier behind. Is there application here for us in the church? And how can we say that we believe in the family, in principle, but not care about our parents or brother or sister or other family members?

We first must belong to something before we can really understand it, appreciate it, serve it, or lead it. If we love the concept of the church as taught in the New Testament, then we ought to find a local church and show it. That may be a GCC church or a Christ-honoring church outside of GCC. Whatever church the Lord leads you to, “plant your flag” with that body of believers and “lay down your life for the brethren” (1 John 3:16).

You might ask at this point, what do you mean? How would I do that?

Easy. Commit your heart to your local church and then show it by serving your brothers and sisters in Christ with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. Serve your church until your heart is broken. Then serve some more. And keep on serving—because they are your spiritual family.

“Loyalty insures unity, confidence, liberty, and power in all Christian movements which year in and year out achieve the greatest spiritual results.”

- John R. Mott

“A man can counterfeit love, he can counterfeit faith, he can counterfeit hope and all the other graces, but it is very difficult to counterfeit humility.”

- D. L. Moody

As Paul served the Corinthians, serve your local church. Remember how he said that he most gladly spent his life for them, and then he went a little farther. He went on to say in 2 Corinthians 12:15 that he most gladly would be spent by them, “And I will most gladly spend and be expended for your souls.”

What a great heart. What a committed heart.

How can we honestly declare our loyalty to God or to the universal Church without also showing that loyalty to specific people? Our Lord desires brotherhood. That’s why I team with men who are loyal and courageously committed to the local church.

“To have no loyalty is to have no dignity and in the end, no manhood.” -Peter Taylor Forsyth.

6. Committed churchmen will accomplish great things.

When trials, persecutions, and tough times come, we understand the power of staying united.

“Never let loyalty and kindness get away from you! Wear them like a necklace; write them deep within your heart” (Proverbs 3:3, NLT).

All the best teams in sports usually get to a point in their season where they stop and say, “I’m just playing for the guys in this locker room.”

Who are we playing for? Don’t keep starting over, from team to team. God never leads a Christian to separate for himself; to seek his own desire. Do you remember that classic line, “He who trusts in men will make fewer mistakes than he who distrusts them?” Brothers, this is still true today.

Thinking about football, I read about some young players in California who succeeded in getting their league’s championship game moved from a Sunday to a Tuesday. How did they do it? Of the players on the team, five said they wouldn’t play if the game was in conflict with church. The rest of the team backed them up, and also pledged to boycott the game out of respect for their teammates. “We started as a team, we should end as a team,” said the quarterback, Jonathan Lyles, in the Los Angeles Times.

Men, we can choose to not be loyal or we can choose to be loyal. God help us to teach our people the incredible spiritual value of practicing commitment to our local church. How God will build our character through our local church.

Our greatest challenge will be to build covenant relationships within a consumer culture. We must be clear in our heart and convinced enough in our head, to build these covenantal relationships within our local churches. God wants us strongly committed to the local church.

7. Our understanding of how a New Testament church is led affects our commitment to our local church.

Our view of how a church should be governed has some bearing on this question of commitment to the local church.

There are two basic types of church governance: congregational and elder led.

While both types have strengths and weaknesses, we have held as pastors a commonly shared belief that God's pattern is for pastors/elders to lead. And to lead in plurality. This does not mean that pastors who lead effectively are not sensitive to the wishes, desires, and input of their flock. We believe strongly that God works through the ministry and counsel of each member in the body. But we see clearly in the New Testament that elders led. The congregations did not lead.

We read in Hebrews 13:17 (NIV), "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. . ." and 1 Peter 5:2 (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. . ." These verses teach that the church is to be led by elders. And that we are not only to follow and obey God's leaders in His local church, but we are to make them even smile when they think of us!

These passages would suggest that if a church member ever left his local church that he would at least seek the counsel and blessing of the pastors. How can church leaders give an account, without this kind of fundamental relationship with church members?

We believe we must always honor God and His word above all—but God's word also tells us to give double honor to elders (1 Timothy 5:17). Our commitment to God and to the local church will be tested and demonstrated by the way we love and respect the church's leaders.

8. Are there any reasons God might lead someone to leave his local church?

Are there any reasons why we believe that a Christian could be led to walk away from his local church? We have to answer, "Yes." God is the One who has bought us and is ultimately in charge of our lives.

We must first, however, search our hearts for any evil, selfish way, and recognize how our selfishness can taint and color our decision-making.

Our old nature wants to be independent and not a part of or in submission to almost anything. There is a flesh side to every one of us that just wants to be on our own. We need to recognize this and deal with our flesh, severely.

Decisions relating to commitment to our local church—when made without recognizing the strength and the power of our flesh—will always be suspect.

But God is the One who leads. And He can lead individuals in any way He chooses.

An interesting story is found in Judges 14:1-3, "Samson went down to Timnah and saw there a young Philistine woman. When he returned, he said to his father and mother, 'I have seen a Philistine woman in Timnah, now get her for me as my wife.' His father and mother replied, 'Isn't there an acceptable woman among your people?'"

"The decision to grow always involves a choice between risk and comfort. This means that to be a follower of Jesus you must renounce comfort as the ultimate value of your life."

- John Ortberg

"We are all in the same boat in a stormy sea, and we owe each other a terrible loyalty."

- G. K. Chesterton

This is where it is interesting. The Bible inserts the following phrase. "His parents did not know that this was from the Lord . . ."

We would counsel Samson to stay with his own people and to marry within his own nation, to be loyal, and committed. And we would be right in counseling him this way. But God had a different plan.

So, we recognize that God is the One who must lead each individual believer in choosing a church.

9. When would a Christian ever leave his local church?

When would a Christian ever leave his local church? We recognize that there may be many complex factors that would affect this decision. There may be health issues or personal or family issues. Also if a church changes its basic doctrines or its biblical core values or its view of leadership (such as deciding to ordain women as pastors/elders) I understand why an individual Christian would move to another church. We believe each individual must be in a church that holds to what the Scriptures teach.

On the matter of doctrine, you can plow a field with a team of oxen and you can plow a field with a team of mules. But it is almost impossible to plow a field with one ox and one mule hitched together. This may be a pragmatic answer, but it is still true.

However in all our years of ministry, I have rarely seen a church change its doctrines and move from one major camp to another.

Instead, I often see Christians divide over minor things and perceived hurts and a failure to recognize that the church is made up of sinners saved by grace, just like them. God usually is calling for greater courage and greater self-sacrifice from each of us when things are hard.

God wants us to be committed to Him, His Word, and His church, not just for three weeks or three months but for our whole lives. That means working through practical day to day issues at the local church level.

Just as we recognize the need to have clear boundaries when it comes to forming an association of churches, so we recognize that we need clarity and unity on certain doctrines, to be able to be teamed up with others locally.

Is our church a place where the Word is taught and where doctrines are sound and where the gospel is lifted up? Does my local church care about reaching the lost and are the leaders, servant/leaders? Do our people try to follow the Word, and are we characterized by great service?

In our movement, we are not perfect. But by the grace of God, I believe that the answers are, "Yes." And in churches in this movement, I believe God wants us to demonstrate, teach, and practice a standard of commitment and loyalty than we might not have seen in other spheres. Not for our glory, but for God's.

If a church member was sure that his pastors were not above reproach or qualified as pastors, then it is right for that member to leave and join a church with qualified leaders. But this kind of judgment

by a Christian is a sobering thing and should not be done lightly. If an elder is disobeying the Word, there is a process to follow. And I would urge a member to humbly and courageously follow that process. But I also hope we recognize that a wide door is opened up for the flesh, when we judge our leaders. In fact the Scriptures teach that no accusation should be accepted against a leader unless there are multiple witnesses to a specific sin. “Do not receive an accusation against an elder, except on the basis of two or three witnesses” (1 Timothy 5:19).

We can be loyal to our local church and still be involved in church planting and moving on from our home church. Many of us have been involved in planting many churches and I do not think we have lost our commitment or loyalty to any one of the churches we have been involved with before. The key thought here is that we were sent out by our local church to plant the new church. And we were sent as a part of a team. There was a sending, a blessing, and a releasing by our parent church and its leadership.

This is a wonderful and very New Testament pattern. It is probably one of the most exciting times where a Christian, maybe with sadness, but with tremendous anticipation, would move on and leave his local church to advance the gospel with his new church planting team.

Is our local church excited and behind us in our desire to move on in mission? And in this pattern, are we doing it together, in community? Are we involved in mission as a part of the team?

“And while they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away” (Acts 13:2-3).

If we are moving out and joining another church, with a sense of mission, has the receiving church blessed this desire? Does the leadership there welcome and receive us?

Again, we can trust the Lord to guide our lives through the counsel and ministry of local church leadership. Both the sending, as well as the receiving church leadership.

God often leads church members to leave a church in order to advance the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is when we leave our “brothers on the wall” to seek our own desire, that is when I think the Lord may have a question or two.

Here are a few questions to ask yourself if you are considering leaving your local church:

- A. In your leaving, are you seeking first the Kingdom of God?
- B. How does this help fulfill the Great Commission?
- C. How are you laying down your life for the gospel in this decision?
- D. Are you running from anything?
- E. Have you included your spiritual community in this decision? Have you sought counsel?

“Loyalty means nothing unless it has at its heart the absolute principle of self-sacrifice.”

- Woodrow T. Wilson

10. We believe in commitment to the local church and we believe in the greater body of Christ.

In our association and in our local churches, people are free to come and go. We are to bless people when they walk in and we are to bless them when they walk out. We recognize the greater body of Christ and that God will lead people differently.

In 1 Corinthians 4:3, Paul states that, “I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear . . .”

Paul did not judge his own heart and by the grace of God, we should follow him and, by the grace of God, continue to not judge those who might join us or leave us. They answer to God, not men.

But here in this paper, we are talking about the kind of commitment and loyalty God wants in people in local churches.

I want to finish this with a true story:

Two brothers were fighting in the same company in World War II. One was hit by a German bullet. The one who escaped asked permission of his sergeant to go back and bring his brother in.

“He is probably dead,” said the officer and, “There is no use in you risking your life.” But after more pleading the officer consented.

And just as the older brother reached safety with his wounded brother on his shoulders, the wounded kid brother died.

“There, you see,” said the officer, “you risked your life for nothing.”

“No,” replied Tom. “I did what he expected of me. When I found him and took him in my arms, he said, ‘Tom, I knew you would come.’”

There you have it. This is loyalty. Someone expects something noble and unselfish of us; someone expects us to be faithful. That someone is God. That someone is our brother.

-Walter MacPeck

*“Fidelity
purchased with
money, money
can destroy.”*

- Seneca



UNITY IN ACTION

Addendum: Statement on Commitment to the Local Church

Pastor John Hopler · Columbus, OH

The church is a gift from God to mankind. Through local churches, God has brought people into a relationship with Jesus Christ; ministered to the poor; healed and strengthened marriages and families; cared for the sick; encouraged people in the faith; equipped young people; trained leaders; and advanced the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the world.

The local church is one of the major ways that God brings His grace to mankind. For this reason, God desires people to be in a local church where they can experience God's grace in greater ways and become more effective channels of His grace to others. Because there are many different types of people with many different types of needs, God has provided many types of churches to meet those needs.

Our God is not only a God of grace but also a God of commitment. His commitment to us was so great that He sent His Son Jesus Christ to die for us on the cross that we might have our sins forgiven and receive eternal life (John 3:16). In response to God's great love for us, we are called to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength and to love people as ourselves (Mark 12: 30,31). Also, we are called to love our brothers and sisters in Christ like Christ loved us-by laying down our lives for one another (1 John 3:16). Further, in accordance with the Scriptures, men and women are to be devoted to a Christ-honoring, grace-filled local church where they are called, in a practical way, to love God and love people (Heb. 10:23-25; Acts 2:42-47).

If a person is committed to Christ and to a Christ-honoring church, that commitment to the church will be demonstrated in a variety of ways including:

- A committed member will be devoted to God and the Scriptures: Growing, learning, obeying and sharing God's word (Acts 2:42; Ephesians 4:11-16; 2 Timothy 3:16,17).
- A committed member will live a life of love--being kind to others, caring for others, serving others and giving to others (Romans 12:9-16).
- A committed member will be actively praying with the church and for the church (1 Timothy 2:1-8).
- A committed member will be using his or her spiritual gifts in ministry (1 Peter 4:10,11).
- A committed member will contribute financially to the local church (Galatians 6:6; 1 Cor. 16:1,2).
- A committed member will be faithful in attending the weekly worship service (Hebrews 10:25).
- A committed member will live in a loving and honoring relationship with the elders of the church who are given by God to provide humble, servant leadership to the local church (1 Peter 5:1-5).

- When a committed member believes that the local church is not following the Scriptures, he or she will make an honoring appeal to the church leadership so that the church can be corrected and become more honoring to Christ (Galatians 6:1; 1 Timothy 5:1).
- Should the Lord lead a committed member to leave a local church he or she will make a good faith effort to leave in a respectful manner, with the blessing of that church (Phil. 2:1-4; Acts 13:1-3). (Note: If a person decides to leave a local church—whether or not he or she does so in a respectful manner—we in GCC encourage pastors and church members to demonstrate the love of Christ by giving a blessing to the person who leaves (Romans 12:10).

At times pastors in our association have used the phrase “life-long commitment” when referring to local church involvement. This phrase has been used in order to urge people to be involved in a local church the rest of their lives. For the record, it is not the position of GCC that it is God’s will that every person be in the same local church their whole lives or that it is God’s will that a person should never leave a GCC church. As believers in Jesus Christ, we reaffirm that all Christians must follow Christ, not men, in all decisions regarding their local church involvement (Gal. 1:10). At the same time, we do affirm that there are some wonderful benefits for the individual and for the universal church of Jesus Christ when Christians avoid continual “church-hopping” and instead become committed to one local church in their community.

As a member of the National Association of Evangelicals, GCC has a deep love and respect for all churches that are part of the body of Christ. Further, GCC sees the value to individuals, to local churches and to advancing the gospel throughout the world when Christians have a continuity of relationship within the same church or the same group of churches over a long period of time—whether that church is a GCC church or another evangelical church or another church association.

In addition, our movement of churches has a vision of fulfilling the Great Commission of Jesus Christ by planting New Testament churches throughout the world that unite together for the advancement of the gospel. Because of this vision God has stirred many church members in GCC churches to make an on-going relational commitment to each other to work together year after year and decade after decade. Jesus said, “By this shall all men know you are My disciples by your love for one another” (John 13:35). This commitment to love one another for the sake of Christ and His gospel has been a foundation to the Great Commission church movement. That being said, we in GCC who have lived out this commitment throughout the years recognize and respect that each individual must follow God’s unique and personal leading at any given point in his or her life.



UNITY IN ACTION

Exercise

1. What was the main lesson you learned from these readings?

2. How would you rank the unity level of the pastors in your church?

3. In Rick Whitney’s article, he talked about speaking with honor about other leaders. What qualities do you appreciate about the leader(s) in your church? Do you personally follow Rick’s example in speaking highly of other leaders?

UNITY IN ACTION**Exercise**

4. In Greg Michael's article, he talks about the importance of regional unity in GCC. Evaluate the level of unity your church has in GCC. How can it improve?



GREAT COMMISSION LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

LOVE AND UNITY / THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

Unity: Questions and Answers

In working as a director for Great Commission Churches, I have encountered a number of “thorny” issues related to love and unity. What about doctrinal differences? How do elders maintain a unity when they have different opinions? How about unity nationally? These and other questions are answered in this next reading.



Unity: Questions and Answers

Pastor John Hopley · Columbus, OH

Introduction:

Over the past 20 years, I have been asked (and have personally had to deal with) a number of questions related to the core value of love and unity. Here are the main questions related to unity that I have found pastors encounter in doing ministry.

The Doctrine of Love and Unity

1. The phrase “the doctrine of love and unity” has been used in Great Commission over the years. What does this mean?

As pastors, I trust we are all committed to the Bible. I trust we are committed to right doctrine. God forbid that we should ever compromise on such important doctrines as the deity of Christ, salvation by grace through faith, or the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. But we must be equally committed to the “doctrine” of love and unity. We believe strongly as a movement that God desires unity in His Church and that we simply must make it a priority in all that we do.

One of my favorite verses in Psalm 119 is verse 66:

“Teach me good discernment and knowledge, for I believe in Your commandments.”

We are to believe in the truths God lays out in the Scriptures AND we are to believe in His commandments. Two of His commandments include His new commandment which is to love one another as He loved us (John 13:34), and His command to “be united” (e.g., Philippians 2:2). We believe in this doctrine of pursuing love and unity at all times—and making that pursuit a priority in our personal lives and in our ministry.

The early founders of this movement were very conscious of the tragic strife and division that occurred in the body of Christ because the doctrine of love and unity was not practiced. This does not mean that differences will not occur. Nor does it mean we are to compromise our personal convictions that we have developed based upon the Scriptures. It simply means that, like Jesus Christ, we are to be filled with grace and truth (John 1:14). We are to be “*speaking the truth in love*” (Ephesians 4:15). In fact, we understand from the Scriptures that love is essential in order for us to have right doctrine.

2. What verses show that love is connected to right doctrine?

Here are some key passages:

“If your boss demands loyalty, give him integrity. If your boss demands integrity, give him loyalty.”

- John Boyd

a. 1 Corinthians 13:1-2

“If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.”

Paul states plainly that knowing and speaking “right doctrine” without love makes me “nothing.”

“Teamwork: Simply stated, it is less me and more we.”

- Unknown

b. 1 Timothy 1:3-5

“As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines, nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith. But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.”

Paul contrasts his ways from the ways of those teaching false doctrine. At the heart of Paul’s teaching was the goal of love. If the Church is not more loving as a result of a pastor’s message, it was either wrongly taught or wrongly heard.

c. Paul’s prayers in his prison epistles

“For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:14-19).

“And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ...” (Philippians 1:9-10).

“For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face, that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God’s mystery, that is, Christ Himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:1-3).

What is remarkable about all three of these passages is that love precedes spiritual knowledge. This is a revolutionary concept! When I was a young Christian, this was life transforming for me. I saw early on the importance of diligently studying the Scripture in order to attain more spiritual knowledge and right doctrine. (As was taught in the GCLI session on Commitment to God and His Word, we must always emphasize this value and practice.) But what was so new to me was the truth that right doctrine does not come to those who merely study. It comes to those who practice what they study. And what is it that God wants us to practice the most? Is it not loving God and loving others? Therefore, I came

“It is better to be faithful than famous.”

- Theodore Roosevelt

to understand (and experience) that true understanding is given by the Holy Spirit, while studying the Scriptures, yes, but very importantly, by living a life of love for others. Countless times the Holy Spirit has enhanced (or altered altogether!) my understanding of the Scriptures as a result of my practicing and living out the life of love commanded by God in the Scriptures.

The bottom line is this: If you want to have confidence that your doctrine is right, you must not only be a student of the Scriptures—you must also be a person who loves others. And as we, in humility, pursue love and unity with other leaders and believers, the Holy Spirit can more powerfully and more accurately enlighten us with the right understanding of the Scriptures.

Unity and Local Church Leaders

1. What can be done to ensure that local church leaders stay united?

The first thing that comes to mind is this: Make a commitment to be united at all costs. Like a husband and a wife who make a covenant to remain married, so, too, I recommend that leaders make a covenant to pursue a unity of mind on all matters. Note: This does not mean that leaders will stay together in the same church for their lifetime. What it does mean is that leaders will work to pursue a unity of mind in every decision, including one which may lead the other to start another church or join another church.

Second, it is vital that leaders see their linking together to be primarily relational and not merely organizational. A covenant-relationship is at the heart of it all for any group of leaders. In this kind of relationship, co-elders are to be the greatest examples in the church of the “one another” verses in the New Testament: “Love one another,” “Honor one another,” “Accept one another,” “Pray for one another,” etc.

Third, when disagreements arise, leaders must make a commitment to resolve all differences.

2. What should be done when a disagreement does arise between leaders?

By way of introduction, let me first say that disagreements are very common among leaders. As a director in GCC, I devote a major portion of my time helping to resolve differences between leaders. In this regard, I recall the story of a mom who was embarrassed by her children arguing after church one Sunday when she was comforted by an elderly member of the church who said, “Don’t worry about these opinionated children of yours. They must be potential leaders.” How true! All leaders are opinionated! So why should we be surprised when disagreements arise among leaders? In counseling leaders involved in disagreements, I have found that there are five key steps to take:

1. Reaffirm the commitment to be united.

It is so reassuring to know that the other leader is committed to unity. If this commitment is true, there will be some “point of unity” where all the elders will meet. For example, it may be that, like Barnabas and Paul in Acts 15, there will be a “*parting of the ways.*” But the two apostles were still united under the Jerusalem Council decree and as fellow members of the Church of Jesus Christ. So, too, even if there is a disagreement in philosophy of ministry between two leaders that results in one of them starting a new church (for example), their commitment to unity would at the

minimum result in their being united as fellow members of GCC. Having said this, the commitment to unity will typically result in a unity of mind leading to the continued working together in the same church.

2. Take up the “shield of faith” toward God and your fellow-leaders.

In situations where there are disagreements with another leader, the biggest battle for me concerns my faith. I must fight to believe that God will bring about a unity of mind on the issue at hand. I confess that I have been tempted many times to “give up” on the possibility of unity. But then I am reminded of the truth that God desires unity and He will work to bring it about. Related to this is my faith towards my fellow-leader. Defending that leader in my heart— his motives, his thinking, his commitment to God and to me—is so critical in this process. If the Devil can get me to think evil of my fellow-leader, unity will be lost. But if I take up the shield of faith and I defend and honor my fellow-leader in my heart, unity can be achieved.

3. Consider the other leader(s) more important than yourself.

After Paul exhorts the Philippians to be united in Philippians 2:2, he urges them to “*Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit but with humility of mind, let each of you regard one another as more important than himself*” (Philippians 2:3). In conflicts this means to “first seek to understand, then to be understood.” Unity results when both parties are committed to serving one another, to advance the other’s interests and desires, to honor the other above himself.

4. Do not hesitate to bring in a third party to help bring about unity.

When there is an impasse, a third person can be helpful, if not essential, in order to help achieve a unity of mind. Many times I have been called into a church to help elders who were in a disagreement. A third person who has a fresh perspective and who is committed to the welfare of each elder and of the church as a whole can provide a valuable ministry to the church. If an impasse does occur, my hope is that one of the leaders will say, “We both are committed to unity, but we are having difficulty achieving it. What do you think about inviting _____ to help us?”

5. When conflicts arise, be sure to apply the “two witness rule.”

The Scripture says that a fact is confirmed by the mouth of two or three witnesses (Matthew 18:16). One of the biggest mistakes that Christians make—a mistake that causes great strife in churches—is asserting that something is a fact when there is only one witness to that fact. We might hear a statement like “Did you hear what this elder said? He said this....” As a result of this unconfirmed “fact,” we develop a case against our fellow leader. “*He who gives an answer before he hears, it is folly and shame to him*” (Proverbs 18:13). By steadfastly refusing to accept as fact (primarily negative) statements made about one another without first checking it out with corroborating witnesses, we will guard against the Devil’s scheme to create division in the leadership team and in the church.

- 3. In a group of elders, there will be times when there is not total agreement on an issue. What should be done then?**

“You can have no greater sign of confirmed pride than when you think you are humble enough.”

- William Law

“Patience is the companion of wisdom.”

- Augustine

There are several steps to consider:

First, it is the conventional wisdom to simply “wait it out” until a unity occurs. We must always guard against making a hasty decision. And the mere fact that there is not a unity of mind is often (although not always) an indication that God is not really leading.

Second, it may be a situation in which the majority should rule. At times the church is at a “fork in the road” and a decision—any decision—needs to be made.

I recall a time a few years ago when I was working with five other leaders and I was alone in my opinion on a particular matter. After extensively and thoroughly talking through the issue with the other leaders, I realized I had three choices. (1) I could “go along with the majority,” (2) I could insist that we “wait it out” until I was satisfied, and (3) I could submit to the majority while at the same time expressing my reservations with the decision and trust that God was leading in the process. I chose the latter option in this case because I saw that, for the good of the ministry, a decision needed to be made. I viewed the other leaders (as a group) as my authority to whom God wanted me to show honor and respect. As with any authority, I had the right of appeal. I also understood that if I felt strongly that the decision was in disobedience to God I would have the option of resigning. In this particular case, I honored the majority—in faith rather than in fear—and God did bring about positive results for the ministry.

4. Are there times when it is appropriate to separate as leaders?

Certainly. We must obey God and His calling for our own personal lives. But here are a few things to keep in mind.

- a. *Honoring authority.* A leader must always seek to honor the authority structure of which he is a part. Whether the authority is an elder board, a legal board, or a ministry board, if there is a leaving of that structure, do it in a way that honors the authorities of that church or ministry.
- b. *Slow to leave.* I generally recommend that leaders “take their time” before separating. In a disagreement, emotions often play too much of a role in the decision-making process. It is significant to note that many of the pastors who are with churches who have left the Great Commission Association of Churches have since expressed to me their regrets about rushing too quickly through the process in making that decision.
- c. *Character lessons.* Leaders have a penchant for being independent. They can be blind to the greater work that God wants to do in their character by staying in the situation they are in. The lessons many other leaders have learned over the years by humbly sticking it out with a co-elder are lessons that cannot be learned elsewhere. The character development that occurs in these situations is foundational to both the training of future leaders as well as developing the relational “glue” of the church family.
- d. *Stage of life issues.* One thing I have noticed is that leaders go through certain stages in their personal development. There is the “Timothy” stage where they are learning from an older leader. That is usually followed by a “Barnabas-Saul” stage where they are teamed up with a peer to do ministry. Then there is the “Building Your Own Team” stage, where like Paul picking Silas and Timothy

in Acts 16, the leader is the point person on a team. In possibly separating from another leader, one should take into consideration what stage of development he is in. Sometimes leaders move too quickly past (or bypass altogether) the “Barnabas-Saul” stage, and thereby miss important lessons of humility, servanthood, and unity. So, again, be cautious about separating too quickly.

- e. “Straining a gnat”. Overall, a leader needs to ask whether he is guilty of “straining a gnat” in his disagreement, and whether the unity of the team is really worth sacrificing for the particular issue at hand. The philosophy of ministry issue or doctrinal issue is oftentimes so minor compared to the value of staying united together to reach people for Christ.

5. But what about doctrinal issues? How does love and unity fit in with the importance of being faithful to the Scriptures?

First, it is important to identify the nature of the doctrinal issue. Some doctrinal issues are more major than others. I have found it helpful to identify four categories (or “Jars”) of doctrines. The chart below details these Four Jars:

	Type of Doctrine	Example
Jar 1	The Basic Gospel (Essential for salvation)	Jesus is the Christ; Resurrection of Christ by faith
Jar 2	Basic teachings of the Christian faith	Resurrection of all men; Second Coming; Person of Holy Spirit; Defining marriage
Jar 3	Teachings/practices of a church or group of churches	Elder rule; Eternal security; Only male elders; Charismatic policies
Jar 4	Disputable matters	Pre/post/mid-trib; Pre/post/a-millennial; Views on election

Needless to say, if we are dealing with a doctrinal issue in Jar 1 or Jar 2, there will be less patience to work things out then if there is a doctrinal disagreement in a Jar 3 or Jar 4 category.

6. Suppose a leader has a disagreement with the church or the elders in the church on a doctrinal matter. What should be the response of the elders as a board?

First, it is important to recognize that leaders have different stages of wrestling with doctrinal areas. There are four stages of conviction that he could be in:

- 1. *Discovery stage.* He does not have a conviction either way, but he is pursuing an understanding on the issue.

“Has it ever occurred to you that one hundred pianos all tuned to the same fork are automatically tuned to each other? ... So one hundred worshippers meeting together, each one looking away to Christ, are in heart nearer to each other than they could possibly be were they to become ‘unity’ conscious and turn their eyes away from God to strive for closer fellowship.”

-A.W. Tozer

2. *Opinion stage.* If on a desert island with only his Bible, the elder would think differently than the position of the church without any other views to consider—but in deference to the church, he would refrain from having a total conviction on the issue.
3. *Conviction and honor stage.* He would believe differently than the church statement of faith and practices, with a desire to teach his beliefs to others. However, in a desire to promote unity in the church and the body of Christ as a whole, he would agree to honor the church statement of faith and practices as written.
4. *Conviction and refusal to honor stage.* He would believe differently than the church statement of faith and practices and could no longer honor that church statement as written, believing that he has a responsibility before God to communicate his convictions in the church.

“The ruin of a kingdom is a little thing in God’s sight, in comparison with division among a handful of sinners redeemed by the blood of Christ.”

- Robert C. Chapman

If an elder is in “Discovery” stage, I would urge that patience be extended while he is working through the issues. Needless to say, more patience would be extended for a Jar 3 issue than a Jar 1 or Jar 2 issue. If there were significant doubts on an issue, such as the deity of Christ, it would be best for the sake of the church that the person not be in leadership. But it is important to extend patience, particularly on a Jar 3 or Jar 4 issue.

If the leader is in the “conviction and refusal to honor” stage, clearly it would be best for that leader to no longer remain on in the church. To stay on would cause division and strife in the church.

Generally, if an elder or leader has a disagreement (an opinion or conviction) on a Jar 1 or Jar 2 issue, I would think that he should not stay on as an elder. (I think there may be some unusual exceptions to this, but this would be the conventional wisdom.)

If it is a Jar 3 issue (such as no women elders), there may be more liberty to continue to have the elder remain in his position (unless he is in the “conviction and refusal to honor” stage). If a leader is in the “Discovery,” “Opinion,” or “Conviction and honor” stage in a disagreement on a Jar 3 issue, I have thought he may remain in his position if:

1. He agrees to be open with the elders about his questions.
2. He agrees to promote the teaching of the church, both by personally teaching it in his role as a representative of the church, and by encouraging other leaders to teach it.
3. He agrees to work to prevent dissension and doctrinal controversies in the church by actively avoiding discussions or teachings related to the doctrinal disagreement.
4. He agrees to submit to the elders as to his ministry role in the church.
5. It is in the best interests of the church for him to remain on as a leader.

Note: This last requirement is a key one. Assuming that the elder is humbly submitting to the other elders in accordance with 1-4 above, there may be some factors in a church which would cause the removal of that elder to be damaging to the church, even though he may have a different view on a Jar 3 issue. Whether it is in the best interests of the church for him to remain on as an elder will vary from situation to situation.

As to Jar 4 issues, although there may not be an official position of the church on a particular topic, it may also be true that there is a consensus among the elders on a particular issue. For example, in Great Commission, we have historically been a movement that has been premillennial in our view of the Coming of Christ.

Great Commission has no official position on this issue and there are a number of pastors in GCC who would not share the historical GCC view. I have counseled those pastors on this issue to feel free to share their views on this topic, but to do so in a way that promotes unity in the body of Christ. It is important to recognize that many godly believers—in this movement and in the general body of Christ— have different views on this (and similar) subjects. We may never figure it all out this side of Heaven.

But we do have a solemn responsibility to love and respect all of our brothers and sisters in Christ and to “*preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*” (Ephesians 4:3).

I appreciate the words of Wayne Grudem’s introduction to his chapter on the “end times” in *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).

7. You have answered the question about the attitudes of the elders toward one who has a disagreement with a particular doctrine. What about the disagreeing elder? What should his attitude be?

First, it is important to recognize that a doctrinal controversy can lead to unnecessary damage in the church. In a doctrinal disagreement, it is vital that we be both honoring and honest. We must honor one another as believers in Christ, and we must be honest with what we believe the Scriptures are saying.

Overall, the Scriptures condemn causing division in the church. Paul, writing to Titus, says, “*But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. Reject a factious man after a first and second warning, knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned*” (Titus 3:9-11).

It is significant that Paul wrote this to a leader. Let’s not be naïve. Divisions in the church are not caused by followers. Divisions are caused by leaders. Leaders can either promote unity in the church or they can promote division.

“He that is not a son of peace is not a son of God. All other sins destroy the Church consequentially; but division and separation demolish it directly.”

- Richard Baxter

“In necessary things, unity; in doubtful things, liberty; in all things, charity.”

- Augustine

Very few leaders fit the category of a “factious man” as described in Titus 3:10. Very few actively work to cause division in the church. Where most leaders fail in this arena is in not being diligent to guard the hearts of their listeners when doctrinal disagreements arise. Look at the difference between these two statements:

Statement I: “The Scripture teaches that Jesus will return before a thousand year reign upon the earth. We must be faithful to believe the Scriptures and to reject any false teaching. We must accept the Scriptures literally and oppose anyone who does not believe in a literal interpretation of the Bible.”

Statement II: “I believe that the Scriptures teach that Jesus will return before a thousand year reign upon the earth. I personally believe that this is the most accurate and most literal interpretation of the Scripture. At the same time, I recognize that many godly believers have a different view than this. These believers are just as committed as I am to the Scriptures and to interpreting the Bible literally. I honor these believers and am excited to be united with them in Christ and to fulfill the

great commission, even though we have different interpretations on this issue. I urge you to have the same spirit of love and honor, and to develop your own convictions from the Scriptures on the return of Christ.”

Do you see the difference? Statement I is not a factious statement. But it leaves room for division to rise up in the heart of the listener. Statement II provides a guard for the listener’s heart to be diligent to preserve our unity in the Spirit despite doctrinal differences.

8. If an elder has a doctrinal controversy, what steps should he take to resolve it?

Assuming that he maintains a loving and honoring spirit through the process, I would recommend three steps.

First, take time as elders to adequately discuss the doctrinal issue. The goal would be to have a written document that would clearly identify points of agreement and points of disagreement.

Second, if a disagreement continues, identify the significance of that disagreement. How important is this issue in light of God’s overall purpose for our lives and for the church? As an example, years ago I had a doctrinal controversy with another elder. After analyzing it, I realized that we were in total agreement as to the general truths taught in the Bible. The controversy centered on one verse and whether or not that one particular verse could be used to support what we both believed to be true. Needless to say, this was not a controversy worth separating over!

Third, if the disagreement is about a doctrinal issue worth separating over, do so in a way that preserves the unity of the church and in a way that helps fulfill the Great Commission.

9. When is it appropriate to start up a new church because of a doctrinal matter?

In answering this question, I am going to assume that the doctrinal controversy is not over a major issue such as the deity of Christ or salvation by grace through faith. The value we have had in our association of churches is to make moves that will advance the gospel of Jesus Christ. We do not start churches so that a pastor can preach his own “hobby-horse doctrine.” At the same time, we recognize

that church to church there are different views on a variety of doctrinal issues. And we recognize that the pastors in a church must teach in accordance with their personal conviction from the Scriptures.

In light of all this, I recommend that no pastor start a church merely because of a doctrinal controversy. It is important that there be a “Great Commission purpose” for any church plant. The goal is to reach people for Christ. At the same time, as in any church plant, it is only appropriate for the pastors to identify and teach their doctrinal positions in the church. Churches where there is a harmony in doctrine will function better than when there is an internal doctrinal controversy. For this reason, I am not alarmed when a minor doctrine becomes an issue in a new church plant. But it is vital that a minor doctrine not be the issue in a church plant. The Great Commission must always be kept as the issue in starting new churches.

“The communion of the saints means, not a series of loosely related cliques, but an all-embracing and self-abnegating fellowship.”

- H.M. Carson

10. Suppose the leading (or the most influential) pastor in a church is a second or third generation leader in the church (that is, he did not found the church, but became the lead pastor 10 or 20 years after the church was founded). Suppose also that this leading pastor develops significantly different convictions than the rest of the church or GCC. How should he deal with these differences?

I am assuming that we are not talking about a Jar 1 or Jar 2 issue, like the deity of Christ or salvation by grace. Needless to say, we all support actions to “break from the establishment” like Martin Luther did in the Reformation when a major doctrine was at stake. Assuming that the conviction relates to a minor doctrinal area or a matter of Christian practice, here are several thoughts to keep in mind:

First, a pastor who is a second or third generation pastor needs to recognize that he is a steward. He is building on another man’s foundation (1 Corinthians 3:10). Therefore, he needs to respect what God did beforehand and honor it. He must be diligent to not “*move the ancient boundary which your fathers have set*” (Proverbs 22:28).

Second, he needs to recognize that even though he is in a lead role, he is a man under authority. Christ owns the church, not him. Christ started the church with a different doctrinal view or philosophy of ministry. Therefore, he should not use his position to “force” a major change, but to allow the Spirit to bring about a change in His time as the pastor humbly submits his new convictions to the other pastors and the church.

Third, I generally recommend that if the lead pastor’s view is significantly different than what the church believes, and if the church has a belief that is generally accepted in a large part of Christianity, it is better for that pastor to either submit to the traditional view or to leave and launch out in a new ministry somewhere else. This promotes unity in the body in the best possible way. He can start up a new church with this new view. Or he can move to another ministry role in a church where he can more freely live in accordance with his conscience. But to stay and to “force” his view on others would be a misuse of his stewardship.

“Humility is the secret of fellowship, and pride the secret of division.”

- Robert C. Chapman

In regard to this last point, Jesus said: *“Nor do people put new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wineskins burst, and the wine pours out, and the wineskins are ruined; but they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved”* (Matthew 9:17). If the pastor desires to bring about a radical innovation, it is better to “pour wine into a new wineskin” and move to another location or start up a new church. If this is done, then both the old and the new wineskins will be preserved, and unity will be achieved.

Here are a couple of examples along this line. I know a pastor who was entrusted with a core group from another church. He led out and planted a new church with this core group using the same ministry model as the sending church, but in another part of the city. Years later, he desired to experiment with a more unique ministry model. He realized that the best way to do so was to plant a new church rather than to try to re-orient the present church into a new way of thinking. Also, I know of several lead pastors who were considering a doctrinal position which was different than what the church (and GCC) had historically taught. In integrity, these pastors refrained from promoting their views in the church, even though as the primary influencers in the church, it would have been very easy for them to sway people to their way of thinking. They remained subject to their elders and continued to promote the traditional view of the church.

In presenting these examples, I am not saying that second and third generation pastors should not be innovative. We should always encourage new and fresh ways of doing ministry. But when there is a crossing of a doctrinal boundary or a radical departure from some historical values and practices of a church, it is better for the unity of the church that the pastor be innovative by moving on and starting something new.

11. At times, we see situations where a leader separates from a church. Should we assume that there is a failure on the part of that leader or the other leaders to pursue love and unity? Should we assume that one or all of the leaders have disobeyed God?

Not necessarily. In situations like this, it certainly is possible that there was a failure on the part of the leaders to persevere in their love for one another. However, the example of Paul and Barnabas in Acts 15:39 (*“and there occurred such a sharp disagreement that they separated from one another...”*) indicates that God, at times, has greater plans and purposes than for us to stay on the same team. Barnabas had a ministry that included helping a weak leader (Mark) while Paul had a church planting ministry that seemed to grow faster once Paul separated from Barnabas. Therefore, I make it a habit when I see leaders separating from one another to refrain from judging the situation. I realize that I don’t know all the facts—and I certainly do not know all of God’s sovereign purposes for the individuals involved. In the meantime, I do all I can to pursue a love and unity with the leaders around me, in the hope that God will more clearly lead the church and my life personally.

Here is a list of ten steps you as a pastor can do to build unity in His church:

1. Model Philippians 2:1-8 humility in your relationship with your wife and children. If you are this way towards those in your home, you will set the example for those in your church.

2. Model Philippians 2:1-8 humility in your relationship with your fellow leaders. The church's unity is only as strong as the unity among those who are the leaders in the church.
3. Respect and honor the views of all members in your church. Do not be defensive when there are criticisms. Respect each person in the church as a valued and needed member of the body.
4. Regularly ask for input from the church as a whole. It is particularly important on major decisions, (such as appointing a new elder, starting a new service, raising funds for a building), that the entire congregation's input be solicited in order to help build a strong and united family spirit.
5. Teach regularly on unity. There are always threats to the unity of a local body of Christ. It is no wonder that the Apostle Paul taught on love and unity so much! The more the Word of God is shared on this topic, the more the church will bear the fruit of unity.
6. Be quick to see interpersonal conflicts resolved. Paul did not hesitate to confront the believers (like the church in 1 Corinthians 1-3) as to any strife that existed in their midst. We should not hesitate either. At times it is very messy. But if leaders persevere at removing the leaven of strife and disunity from the church, the fruit of unity will be produced.
7. When people leave the church, give a blessing. It is not easy when ones leave the church. The temptation is for the leader to feel rejected or dishonored. The way to overcome these temptations is by giving a blessing. Send the departing member a letter thanking them for their service over the years. Re-affirm them as fellow believers in Christ. Speak positively about them behind their back. By honoring all believers this way, you will be honored by God with unity within the church.
8. When people are not united, be giving, not demanding. I confess that it is a temptation to be hard on ones who are not team players. We must resist that temptation by loving and serving those church members, rather than putting them under the "Unity Law." Love them—and let the Holy Spirit draw them into the unity of the body rather than forcing them to be united.
9. Avoid the temptation of having a selfish unity. Practically speaking, as a pastor, I am excited when I see a unity within the church between two individuals—even if those people are not as emotionally united with me personally. I try not to be hurt that I am "left out." I try instead to rejoice that those two are united! The goal is unity in Jesus Christ to His glory—not unity with me for my glory! (One practical outworking of this is the promoting of small groups and ministries that work in unity together, even when the pastors aren't present. I once heard about a pastor that forbade home Bible studies in his church because they were a threat to his leadership. This sort of selfish unity needs to be avoided by pastors.)
10. Promote in the church a unity with GCC and with the general body of Christ. I have noticed a strong correlation between the unity within a church and the unity that a church has with GCC. A physical family (father, mother, and children) will be more healthy and united if they are part of a healthy and united extended family (grandfather, grandmother, uncles, aunts and cousins). So,

"The first thing I ask is that people should not make use of my name, and should not call themselves Lutherans but Christians. What is Luther? The teaching is not mine."

- Martin Luther

too, the local church as our primary spiritual family will be more united if it is united with the overall GCC family and the body of Christ as a whole.

Unity and Great Commission Churches

1. Why is unity with churches and ministries in GCC so important?

God desires unity within a church and He desires unity within a movement of churches. Both are equally important if we are determined to please God. Unity within a movement of churches will enable us to fulfill the mission Christ has given us to reach the world with the gospel. The unique challenge about national and international unity is that distance and logistics make it more difficult to maintain a unity. “Out of sight, out of mind” is the familiar maxim. And with fewer opportunities to interact, it is easier to develop negative and critical thoughts about one another. It requires maturity to believe the best and to pursue a unity when that unity is tested.

2. What steps can a leader take in order to build a unity within GCC?

First and foremost, understand that the unity we have in GCC is a covenant-relational unity. At the heart of this movement is our commitment to the Great Commission Covenant (attached at the end of this article). In this covenant, we have made a commitment to love God and His Word, to love all believers, and to uphold the core values of our movement. But we also have agreed to defend the other members of this movement and to pursue a unity together as we seek to fulfill the great commission.

I recall that when the GCC Board was initially drafting the GCC Articles of Association, I raised a concern that we emphasize that our linkage together is not primarily organizational, but relational. It was at that time that the covenant was proposed. Someone pointed out that during the early days of the Methodist movement, the leaders teamed with Wesley made a relational covenant together, similar to the Great Commission Covenant.

Therefore, our unity is primarily that of the heart. Just as leaders take steps to pursue a relational unity with leaders within a church in order build a unity locally, so, too, leaders in GCC take similar steps to pursue unity with other leaders in our association. We are a movement of leaders throughout the world who are devoted to Christ and one another—and we consider our unity to be very important, for our own lives, our churches, and for the fulfilling of the Great Commission.

Second, it is vital that leaders in Great Commission get together. If we don’t meet together, how can we practically unite together? Through the Pastors Conference, regional meetings, and uniting together on ministry projects (such as church plants and short-term missions), we build the type of unity needed in order to fulfill our mission.

3. What about unity within the various national ministry teams in GCC?

I cannot overemphasize the importance of the unity that those in national ministry must have with one another. We see this clearly in the life of the Apostle Paul. He was a leader who not only pursued

“Is it not enough that all the world is against us, but we must also be against one another? O happy days of persecution, which drove us together in love, whom the sunshine of liberty and prosperity crumbles into dust by our contentions!”

- Richard Baxter

his own personal calling and ministry from God, but also he pursued a working unity with other ministry teams (such as the Twelve and Apollos). In Galatians 2, Paul submitted his statement of faith to the Apostles in Jerusalem. He also agreed to gather funds for churches not in his sphere of influence. In Acts 15, Paul and all the ministry leaders submitted to the Lord and to one another in agreeing to a policy related to Gentiles and the obeying of the Mosaic Law. The result was that the churches in Paul's sphere of influence "*were strengthened in the faith*" and were "*increasing in numbers daily*" (Acts 16:5).

"If you can laugh together, you can work together."

- Robert Orben

Although GCC has grown as an organization over the past 30 years, our movement is not primarily organizational, but relational. And the key to that is the relational commitment we have as elders and as national ministry leaders, one to the other. In order to make unity a top priority, here are some questions I ask myself when I consider another pastor or another leader in national ministry:

1. Am I praying regularly for my fellow leader, asking God for His blessing on his life and ministry?
2. Am I always thinking well in my private thoughts towards my fellow leader?
3. Do the members of my ministry team have positive attitudes towards my fellow leader?
4. Do I promote oneness with my fellow leader as much as I promote my own ministry?
5. Do I actively promote my fellow leader's ministry?
6. Am I enthusiastic and positive (rather than covetous) about individuals leaving my leadership sphere and going to be under my fellow leader's guidance and direction?
7. Do I enjoy my relationship with my fellow leader?
8. Am I generous in giving money to my fellow leader's ministry?
9. Am I open with my fellow leader about any concerns I have as to his ministry?
10. Do I ask advice from my fellow leader as to how I can be more effective in ministry?

There are many relationships that I work at keeping strong. At the top of the list are pastors and other leaders in national ministry (such as Tom Short, Rick Whitney, and many others). I know that if our unity is solid, then God's grace will be released with great power for the benefit of the churches as well as for the people in the communities we want to reach.

4. What if a leader has a significant disagreement with a leader in GCC?

First, everything that was stated earlier in this paper about a conflict between leaders within a church would apply between a leader in a church and a leader in GCC. Go through the process of reaffirming your commitment to unity, defending one another, seeking to understand then be understood, getting outside help, if needed, and diligently applying the "two witness rule."

Second, the emphasis in the GCC Articles of Association is towards unity. While a member church may withdraw from the Association, that church is urged to pursue unity and to resolve any problems that may have arisen (Article 3, Section 3.5 of the GCC Articles). The Articles also detail a process for any church considering leaving the Association, including giving a three month notice before making

“Nothing disciplines the inordinate desires of the flesh like service, and nothing transforms the desires of the flesh like serving in hiddenness. The flesh whines against service but it screams against hidden service. It strains and pulls for honor and recognition.”

- Richard Foster

the decision to leave, and providing a forum for elders to interact with GCC leaders with hopes of resolving any concerns or conflicts (Article 3, Section 3.5.1-3.5.4). This provision was added to the Articles to make sure that no decision to leave is done hastily, and that adequate time and effort has been taken to allow the Lord to bring a unity of mind to the leaders involved.

If the local church is a “spiritual family,” then GCC is an “extended spiritual family,” providing extra support and strength to the local church family. We understand that there are sad consequences for any family to be separated from the larger extended family. Certainly we recognize that the Lord in His sovereignty may lead a church out of a family of churches. However, relational continuity within a local church and within a family of churches should not be quickly sacrificed. Maintaining a relational continuity within a physical family, a local church family, and within a family of churches will pay huge dividends decades from now.

I have seen situations where a second/third generation pastor will take the lead in a Great Commission church and then begin drifting away from the Association.

As mentioned above, we recognize the possibility of God leading a church out of the Association. However, in a situation involving a second or third generation pastor, I am of the opinion that he should resist the temptation to separate the church from GCC. The pastor has a stewardship to Christ and His Word—but he also has a stewardship to those who came before him, who entrusted him with a church that was part of a larger fellowship of churches. Therefore, I would urge that pastor to make a special effort to pursue a unity with the other churches in the Association in

order that together they might better fulfill the Great Commission.

In this regard, permit me to share my own opinion on this matter by way of a personal illustration. In the late 1980s, I took on the lead pastor role at Linworth Road Church (LRC) in Columbus, Ohio. That church had been started from the church plant at Ohio State University in 1973. At this stage of the church, I was a “second/ third generation pastor.” Over the 15 years prior to me being a lead pastor at LRC, hundreds of members and scores of leaders had worked unitedly to build the church. Also by this time, a new church building had been constructed due to the sacrifice of present and prior members. In addition, these previous leaders and prior members had worked to build a unity with the other Great Commission churches for the purpose of spreading the gospel throughout the world. (In fact, many of these churches had been planted from LRC.) At this time, I was going through an “independent” stage in my life. In particular, I was listening to a number of tapes and attending many conferences led by other Christian leaders in which I was being challenged in my convictions.

As I was forming and owning in a deeper way my own personal convictions, I made one clear decision from the start. I decided that, if I ever developed significantly different convictions than what was historically taught at LRC or GCC, I would not separate the church from GCC. (As it turned out, my personal convictions did not change.) I believe to have made a decision otherwise would have been a misuse of my stewardship before God as a second/third generation pastor. If my convictions would not have allowed me to stay in my present situation, I believe that the most honoring and unity producing choice would have been to move to another church ministry or to start a non-GCC church from LRC (if the elders would have permitted this). By putting “new wine into new wineskins,” I would

have preserved LRC's unity with GCC, while at the same time, I would have had the opportunity to live out my personal convictions in a new setting. (Again, for me personally, this step did not need to be taken.)

As stated earlier, if I really value unity, I will be as concerned about others being united together as I am about those same people being united with me. Therefore, if you are a second/third generation pastor, realize that God is pleased when you take steps to promote a unity between members in your church and other believers in GCC. Similarly, as the Director of GCC, I believe that God is pleased when I promote unity between members of GCC and the rest of the body of Christ (which relates to the next question).

"The poorest Christian can every day find occasion for practicing love and humility."

- J. C. Ryle

Unity Within the Body of Christ

1. **Certainly God wants unity within the local church and within a fellowship of churches like GCC. But what about unity with other believers? What can we do to build unity with the entire body of Christ?**

Although we have a practical working unity with a few believers, God desires unity in the entire body of Christ. How is this to be done?

Of first importance is our attitude toward fellow believers. The basis for my love and respect for a believer—any believer—ought to be the same: Jesus Christ loved and died for that person. When I think of anyone who is a genuine Christian—whether he or she be a fundamentalist, charismatic, Lutheran, or whatever—I aspire to see that believer the same way God does: As a precious new creation in Christ. I am to apply the “one another” verses in the Bible towards all believers, not just towards those in my church or those in GCC. (In fact years ago, God impressed on our movement the need to be honoring all believers and to avoid having an elitist attitude towards our fellow Christians.)

Second, participating in local, national, and international gatherings and projects is a practical way to unite with fellow believers. For example, I heartily recommend that every pastor participate in local ministerial associations that meet monthly or quarterly. Personally, as Director of Great Commission Churches, I participate with other evangelical leaders, such as the National Association of Evangelicals.

2. There are a lot of opportunities to be involved in interdenominational activities in our city. What is the best way to be involved?

Here are a few tips:

- a. Prayer is a good place to start. Because each church family is unique and has its own special doctrines and values, uniting together in some projects can be difficult. But it is always safe—and powerful (!)—to pray together.
- b. You don't have to join up with everything. We have limited time and some projects are more strategic than others. Pick and choose those projects that will most serve the God-given purposes of your church.

- c. Evaluate the leadership. I have noticed that the best citywide efforts to unite Christians occur when there is an anointed leader in the city who has a leadership gift to pull diverse groups together. Another key factor is: Does that leader have the time availability to be able to effectively lead and unite churches in the city? The stronger and the more available the leadership provided, the more confident I would be of being involved.
- d. Focus on the simple gospel. Efforts that are made to build an alliance to spread the gospel are going to be more effective than other efforts (e.g., projects like the *Jesus* film or the Billy Graham Crusade).

Conclusion and a Challenge

Recently, I heard a phrase that every leader would do well to take to heart: “Persevere in Plurality.” Amen! This is the great challenge for every leader. All leaders have some level of vision, ambition, and desire for achieving results. All leaders yearn to see their ministry dream fulfilled. The big challenge is for leaders to be united, to “persevere in plurality” with other strong leaders. Unity is hard work. It takes supernatural faith and perseverance. But when leaders unite together—what a great blessing results! When leaders persevere in plurality, they will see Christ glorified. When leaders persevere in plurality, they will see the Church become what God intended it to be. When leaders persevere in plurality, they will be effective in seeing the great commission of Jesus Christ fulfilled. So, persevere in plurality with the fellow leaders in your life! As you do so, may God grant you supernatural grace and unity with other leaders, to the glory of His Son Jesus Christ!

“The only humility that is really ours is not that which we try to show before God in prayer, but that which we carry with us in our daily conduct.”

- Andrew Murray



Addendum: 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 ultimate 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 are empowered through the Holy Spirit to be workers in the church, not just the pastors. 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.



UNITY: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Exercise

1. What was the main lesson you learned from this reading?

2. Look at the questions on page 89. Apply these towards your fellow elder/leader in the church. How did you do?

3. Look at the questions on page 89. Apply these toward the regional leaders in your region. How did you do?



UNITY: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Exercise

4. Do you presently have any significant disagreements with the church or GCC? How do you plan on resolving these?

5. Suppose you were leading this church years from now and you developed a theological conviction different than what has been traditionally taught. What steps would you take to resolve it?



GREAT COMMISSION LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

LOVE AND UNITY / THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

Water Baptism

When we consider the doctrine of salvation, it is important to focus on the subject of water baptism. What is the purpose of baptism? Is baptism necessary for salvation? How about infant baptism? These and other questions are answered in the following article by Kurt Jurgensmeier.



Water Baptism

Pastor Kurt Jurgensmeier · Cedar Rapids, IA

Introduction

Why Is This Topic Important?

The subject of water baptism is important for several reasons. First of all, it is a commandment of Jesus Christ and an important part of His great commission. Christ said, “... 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” (Matthew 28:19-20). It is obvious that if we do not properly understand or practice baptism, we are in danger of neglecting a very important desire of our Lord and Savior.

“Baptism points back to the work of God, and forward to the life of faith.”

- J.A. Motyer

Understanding the Bible’s teaching concerning water baptism is also important because we have an obligation to ensure that new converts to Christ understand the biblical view of baptism and its significance to their relationship with Christ.

It would be very unfortunate for any believer to experience water baptism without really understanding its meaning. Finally, it is important to discuss this issue because there are a number of disagreements within Christianity related to baptism. Some of these are relatively minor, but others are extremely important and are worth some discussion.¹

Section A will first discuss some introductory matters regarding the meaning of the word “baptism” and the different kinds of baptism in the New Testament (NT). Section B will cover specifically what the Bible teaches concerning the purpose, recipients, and method of water baptism. Finally, Section C will address some of the more controversial issues such as the place of baptism in salvation and infant baptism.

A. The Biblical and Historical Background of Water Baptism

1. What does the word “baptism” mean?

The Greek root word from which the NT derives the word “baptism” is *bapto*. *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (NIDNTT) says that: “In secular Greek *bapto* means (a) dip, (b) dip into a dye, and (c) draw water... In the LXX [Greek OT] *bapto* translates the OT Heb. *tabal*, dip... [In the NT] *bapto* only [has] the meaning “dip.”²

For example, *bapto* is used twice in John 13:26: “*Jesus answered, ‘It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped (bapto) it in the dish.’ Then, dipping (baptas) the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, son of Simon.*” Webster’s defines “dip” as: “to plunge or immerse momentarily un-

der the surface (as of a liquid).”³ It becomes obvious then that the root Greek word for baptism means to completely immerse or submerge something.

Greek words related to *bapto*, including the noun *baptisma* (“baptism”), and the verb *baptizo* (“to baptize”) are used over 100 times in the NT and clearly reflect the meaning of the root word (*bapto*: “to immerse”) in all cases except in three or four instances where the idea of Jewish “washing” is conveyed.

For example, we read of the Pharisees that “*When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash (rantisontai*: lit. “sprinkle”). *And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing (baptismos*: “immersion”) of cups, pitchers and kettles” (Mark 7:4; see also Luke 11:38; Hebrews 9:10). The fact that in this verse *rantisontai* is used in contrast with *baptismos* demonstrates the fact that the latter never meant sprinkling.

When “sprinkling” or “washing” was intended, the Greek language had many other words to choose from such as *rhantismos* (“sprinkling” e.g. Hebrews 9:19, 21), and *loutron* and *nipto* (“washing” e.g. Ephesians 5:26, Titus 3:5, Matthew 6:17). However, when the idea of “immersion” was intended, there was only one Greek word suitable: cognates of *bapto*. Even here concerning the washing of eating utensils, the NIDNTT points out that such “vessels were normally cleansed by immersing them in water.”⁴

So while, in rare instances, forms of *bapto* simply convey washing, it is clear that its primary meaning is immersion. This will be discussed further below in our discussion of the different modes of baptism.

2. Is there a cultural and historical background for baptism in the NT?

It is often suggested that both pagans and Jews were accustomed to the practice of baptism, but this is not at all certain. For sure, washing with water had medicinal and even religious purposes in both the Jewish and pagan cultures. But it seems unlikely that the kind of baptism that John the Baptist implemented was commonly practiced.

Some pagan mystery religions apparently had some initiatory rites that involved washing with water, but as Louis Berkhof has pointed out, “These heathen purifications have very little in common, even in their external form, with our Christian baptism. Moreover, it is a well established fact that the mystery religions did not make their appearance in the Roman Empire before the days of Paul.”⁶

The evidence for baptism among pre-Christian Jews is a little clearer, but not conclusive. It would seem there was a practice among some Jews in which Gentiles who wanted to convert to Judaism were required to not only be circumcised, but also to be baptized by full immersion. The parallels to Christian baptism are obvious, but it seems unlikely that John the Baptist and the Christians derived their idea of baptism from this Jewish ceremony. First of all, the first clear reference we have of the practice is in the Jewish *Mishna* [writings of rabbis] in a writing dated around A.D. 90,⁷ some 60 years after the ministry of John the Baptist. To conclude that Jewish proselyte baptism was a widespread practice significantly before that time is pure speculation. In fact, we are sure that it was never a widespread practice.⁸ Some also see a relationship between the practices of the Jewish sect in the Qumran community where the

“A part of the act of baptism in the church of India is for the candidate to place his own hand on his head and say, “Woe is me if I preach not the gospel.”

- E. Paul Hovey

“Since Muslims equate believer’s baptism with salvation, they often begin to step up persecution when that occurs. And rightly so, for at that point, the follower of Christ breaks with his or her old community of faith and enters the emerging Body of Christ, the church.”

- Nik Ripken

Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered. It is true that they had a fairly complex system of ritual washings, but their relationship to Christian baptism is suspect as well.⁹

In the end, it is suggested here that, although John’s practice of initiating someone into a relationship with God by a one-time immersion in water was not absolutely unknown, it was a relatively unique practice in his day. Someone might ask, then, how did John know that immersion into water was to be the rite of initiation into the New Covenant? The best answer is obtained from remembering how Abraham knew that circumcision was to be the rite of initiation into the Old Covenant: God simply told him (Genesis 17:12). So when *“the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert”* (Luke 3:2), he was not only given a message and a mission, but a method for people to demonstrate repentance to God.

3. What was the purpose of John the Baptist’s baptizing ministry and how does it relate to baptism today?

John’s baptism obviously has great significance to our study. It is repeatedly described as *“... a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins”* (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3; also see Matthew 3:11). It would seem that those who came to be baptized by John came for salvation. It was a salvation that was not complete until Christ had died and had baptized them *“with the Holy Spirit”* (Luke 3:16). Nonetheless, John’s baptism was the first step in receiving eternal life for these converts. They were obviously exercising repentance from their sin (Luke 3:10-14), exercising faith in the coming Messiah that John spoke of (Luke 3:15-16), and responding to the *“good news”* that John *“preached to them”* (Luke 3:18). And when we read that *“crowds”* (Luke 3:7) of *“The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins...”* (Mark 1:5), it becomes obvious that what we have here is nothing less than a massive, God-sent revival. These people were not baptized with the Spirit at this time, but they were certainly convicted by Him and, for many of them, that conviction eventually led to their full conversion to Christianity (see Acts 19:1-7).¹⁰

Like Christian baptism today, John’s baptism revealed that repentance and faith is the key to entering the Kingdom of God, and that a changed life, not an outward act, demonstrates you are accepted by God. However, there is one important difference between John’s baptism and Christian baptism today. Whereas the former was a symbolic act demonstrating the *first step* to spiritual conversion to Christ (i.e. repentance), Christian baptism is a symbolic act demonstrating a *completed* spiritual conversion to Christ.

4. What was the reason for, and significance of, Christ’s baptism?

Matthew tells us: *“Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?’ Jesus replied, ‘Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.’ Then John consented. As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased’”* (Matthew 3:13-17).

The reason for Christ's baptism has been a topic of considerable discussion. Christ's somewhat obscure statement that it was *"to fulfill all righteousness"* doesn't automatically make the matter any clearer. Obviously, any suggestion that Christ came to repent of sin, as did the others being baptized by John, can be rejected immediately. Even John makes it clear that Christ had no such need. The best understanding of why Christ submitted to baptism is simply that the Father commanded Him, and Christ obeyed. It was simply an act of obedience on Christ's part (cf. John 4:34, 10:18; 15:10). God had set apart John the Baptist as a bridge between the Old and New Covenants. God sent His Son Jesus to be born under the Law (Galatians 4:4) and to fulfill the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 5:17). Therefore it was only fitting—a fulfilling of all righteousness—for Christ to affirm and participate in John the Baptist's ministry by being baptized by John.

"A blameless life, a brilliant reputation, will not do. No, nor a Christian training either. 'Ye must be born again.' There must be a positive, actual, bona fide passage from death unto life.."

- C. H. Mackintosh

Christ's baptism was significant in at least a couple of ways. First, it was recognized as the starting point of His ministry on earth. When the Apostles were choosing someone to replace Judas, Peter says, *"... it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us"* (Acts 1:21-22). Likewise, a Christian's baptism can be seen as the beginning of their lifelong service to God. Secondly, Christ's baptism set an obvious example for all Christians in submitting to baptism, leaving none of us any excuse for not submitting to it as well.

5. What is the baptism of the Spirit?

John the Baptist had told the crowds, *"I baptize you with water, but he (Christ) will baptize you with the Holy Spirit"* (Mark 1:8). What was John talking about? First of all, it should be noticed that John distinguished between being baptized with water and being baptized with the Holy Spirit. They are not the same thing. This is an important point to make in a discussion concerning water baptism because many misleading teachings concerning baptism are based on the mistake of using verses of Scripture that are describing the baptism of the Holy Spirit, not water baptism.¹¹ Many of these verses will be addressed in the course of our discussion.

So what is the baptism of the Holy Spirit if it is not water baptism? Simply put, the baptism of the Holy Spirit is the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit in a born again believer's life, occurring at the point of saving faith in Jesus Christ. In Ephesians we read: *"... you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance..."* (Ephesians 1:13-14). Here we see a description of this indwelling of the Holy Spirit and it is described as a permanent *"deposit guaranteeing our inheritance"* and it occurs when we have *"believed."* This verse also speaks of one of the many purposes of the baptism of the Holy Spirit: It *"includes"* us in Christ, making us a part of the spiritual body of Christ. Paul describes it this way in 1 Corinthians: *"For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body (of Christ)"* (1 Corinthians 12:13; see also Romans 6:1-5, Galatians 3:26-28).

Another purpose of the baptism with the Holy Spirit is spiritual regeneration. Paul writes to Titus: *"He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior"* (Titus 3:5-6). Obviously, what is being *"poured out on us gener-*

ously” is not water, but the Holy Spirit. And it is not water baptism that “saved us” or brought spiritual “*rebirth and renewal*,” but the drenching, washing, and indwelling “baptism” of the Holy Spirit.

This points us to the important relationship between water baptism and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Water baptism is simply a physical and outward act designed to symbolize the spiritual and inward indwelling and “baptism” of the Holy Spirit. They are obviously then, not the same thing, nor were they intended to occur at the same time (see, for example, Acts 10:47). The inward baptism of the Holy Spirit must occur first in order for the outward symbolism of water baptism to have any meaning. Any other practice would seem not only meaningless, but also potentially misleading. In addition, it becomes clear that there may be people that are baptized with the Holy Spirit, but haven’t been baptized with water. Such people are obviously saved, but simply have not yet obeyed a clear command of their Lord. Likewise, there may be people who are baptized with water, but have not received Christ as their personal savior, and therefore have not been baptized by the Holy Spirit. Such people are, unfortunately, not saved--only wet.

The Pentecostal idea that the baptism of the Spirit is manifesting with speaking in tongues is clearly denied by the Apostle Paul when he tells the Corinthians, “*For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink*” (1 Corinthians 12:13), and yet adds a few verses later that not everyone will speak in tongues (cf. v. 29).

B. A Biblical View of the Purpose, Recipients, and Method of Water Baptism

1. What is the purpose and benefits of water baptism?

a. The biblical way of confessing saving faith

Perhaps the most neglected, yet primary purpose for water baptism is its function as the biblical way in which people profess saving faith in Christ. This is why water baptism is so closely tied to salvation in the NT. Accordingly, when the Apostle Peter is asked by a crowd what they should do to be saved he replied, “*Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins*” (Acts 2:38, emphasis mine). Likewise, Peter writes in his epistle: “*baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience*” (1 Peter 3:21; cf. Galatians 3:26-27; Colossians 2:12). Accordingly, Wayne Grudem writes concerning this passage:

“To be baptized rightly is to make such an appeal to God: ‘Please, God, as I enter this baptism which will cleanse my body outwardly I am asking you to cleanse my heart inwardly, forgive my sins, make me right before you.’ In this way baptism is an appropriate symbol for the beginning of the Christian life. Once we understand baptism in this way, we can appreciate why ‘Repent,

“When you tell your servant to do something, and he cannot comprehend it, if he turns round and says, ‘Please, sir, what for?’ you are quite clear that he hardly understands the relation between master and servant. So when God tells me to do a thing, if I say, ‘What for?’ I have taken the place which Faith ought to occupy, which is that of simple obedience to whatever the Lord hath said. Baptism is commanded, and Faith obeys because it is commanded, and thus takes her proper place.”

- C. H. Spurgeon

and be baptized ... for the forgiveness of your sins' (Acts 2:38) was an evangelistic command in the early church" (*Tyndale New Testament Commentary*, 163).

It would seem that the reason that baptism and repentance for salvation are so closely tied in Scripture is that water baptism is the biblical means by which we are to make a profession of saving faith. Another way of saying this is that the way that the "sinners prayer" functions in American Evangelicalism is how water baptism functioned in the NT. There is no example in the NT of the former to mark the moment in which a person professed saving faith; baptism fulfilled that function. This is precisely why for the vast majority of Christian history, baptism has been regarded as the moment someone is saved.

Obviously, a distinction between water baptism and salvation must be maintained in order to protect salvation by grace. Accordingly, we would separate a "sinner's prayer" from salvation as well. However, it is possible that in our desire to defend salvation by grace against those who claim baptism saves, we have separated them too much to the point that people feel comfortable saying they became a Christian years ago, but still haven't been baptized. This kind of response results from our having made baptism more of a post-conversion step of obedience instead of the biblical way in which believers profess their saving faith in Christ. Accordingly, we read in the *NIDNTT* entry on baptism:

"It is an embodiment of the gospel of grace and the supreme occasion for confessing it, hence the climactic point of the restoration of relations between God and the repentant sinner. Many of the confessional declarations in the epistles are thought to have originated as baptismal confessions (e.g. Romans 10:9; Philippians 2:6-11; Ephesians 4:4-6; Colossians 1:13-20), and from such beginnings the later creeds of Christendom developed" (*NIDNTT*, Beasley-Murray, I:147).

Likewise, commenting on Galatians 3:26-27, we read in the *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*:

"The two statements in Galatians 3:26 and 27 are complementary: verse 26 declares that believers are God's children "through faith," and verse 27 associates entry into God's family upon union with Christ, and Christ sharing his sonship with the baptized. It is an example of Paul's linking faith and baptism in such a way that the theological understanding of faith that turns to the Lord for salvation, and of baptism wherein faith is declared, is one and the same" ("*Baptism*" 2.1).

b. Water baptism is a physical symbol of our spiritual salvation.

A common mistake in discussions on baptism is to suggest that it has one primary meaning. For example, those who claim that pouring or sprinkling are the biblical means of water baptism, support their view by claiming that baptism is to primarily symbolize a washing away of our sins. Of course, this is one of the spiritual realities that water baptism conveys, but not the only one.

Spiritual rebirth is another spiritual reality that baptism symbolizes. It was pointed out earlier that the inward baptism of the Holy Spirit accomplishes the spiritual regeneration that occurs in our life when God brings us into a saving relationship with Him. Romans 6:2-4 provides a good description of this spiritual reality that is demonstrated in the physical act of water baptism: "We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized

"Before an individual can be saved, he must first learn that he cannot save himself."

- M. R. DeHaan

“If a person is already justified and has sins forgiven eternally at the point of saving faith, then baptism is not necessary for forgiveness of sins nor for the bestowal of new spiritual life. Baptism, then, is not necessary for salvation. But it is necessary if we are to be obedient to Christ, for He commanded baptism for all who believe in Him.”

- Wayne Grudem

into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”

It is common to suggest that Paul is only speaking of spiritual baptism here and not water. However, in light of our discussion above about how closely tied water baptism and the confession of saving faith was in the early Church, it is better to assume Paul is not making such a distinction. Nonetheless, there is no doubt that water baptism is to symbolize the fact that we have “*passed out of death into life*” (John 5:24).

Indeed, water baptism is absolutely chock-full of symbolic meaning that points to the most vital and valuable truths concerning our eternal salvation.

For example, there is much to be said about the act of going under the water. First of all, it speaks of God’s judgment and punishment of His Son. Water has been a symbol of God’s wrath since the days of Noah (Genesis 6:17). When Christ told the disciples “*But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed!*” (Luke 12:50), He was speaking of the wrath of Almighty God that was soon to be inflicted on Him for us! And our own submersion into the water is a reminder that all of the wrath, punishment, and condemnation that God would ever have for our sin has already been completely spent on His Son. There is none left for us. God only has love for us now because Christ subjected Himself to a “baptism” of God’s wrath in our place.

Going under the water is certainly also a reminder of Christ’s death and burial. The author of physical life and the giver of eternal life died when He took our sins upon Him. Likewise, when we are born again by the Spirit of God, we, too, die. Remember what Paul said? “*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live...*” (Galatians 2:20).

Those of us who have been born again know that our conversion to Christ was a very real death to our old selves. Much of our old thinking, old fears, old grudges, and old desires passed away when we were baptized with the Holy Spirit. Indeed, when Christ comes into our lives we are “*... a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*” (2 Corinthians 5:17). We have literally been recreated by God into a different creature. We are not even the same species of human anymore, for a human with the living God dwelling in them is a different animal altogether. So yes, there is a very real death that occurs in our salvation experience and being submerged in water is a very apt demonstration of that dying.

And thank God we are not to be left under the water! We should not forget that at that moment in water baptism the person is virtually in a place that would become their grave if they were left there. And just as surely as water can bring physical death, we too would be spiritually dead if left in our sins. But hallelujah! Christ rose from His grave! Because of His resurrection, we are raised from our spiritual death to eternal life! Submersion under water is not the end of water baptism because we too are raised and removed from not only something that could cause our physical death, but from that which symbolizes God’s wrath and our spiritual death in sin. Thank God that we not only physically come out of the water, but also out of the sin, death, and judgment that the water symbolizes.

Another vital truth, symbolized in water baptism by immersion, is found in Christ's words to Nicodemus: "... *I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit*" (John 3:5). It will be demonstrated below that Christ is not speaking of water baptism at all here, but rather our physical birth from our mother's womb. But there would seem to be some meaningful symbolism here as well for water baptism. Although it's not necessary to describe the details of what happens at our physical birth, it is important to be reminded that we are essentially *born out of water*. That is what we are surrounded by for the first nine months of our life. Likewise, coming out of the water of our baptism is symbolic of our being born again, not of water this time, but of the Spirit. Water baptism is a declaration to the world that God has granted us a second chance at life, to live the way we were supposed to and want to, because we know we "... *have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry*" (1 Peter 4:3). Indeed, the spiritual regeneration that water baptism symbolizes not only grants us life with God forever, but a new life now.

"We may never be martyrs but we can die to self, to sin, to the world, to our plans and ambitions. That is the significance of baptism; we died with Christ and rose to new life."

- Vance Havner

Finally, being immersed and raised from water obviously symbolizes the spiritual cleansing and complete forgiveness that occurs with our conversion to Christ. Ananias told Paul after his conversion: "*And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name*" (Acts 22:16). It will be demonstrated further below that water baptism has nothing to do with God's decision to forgive our sins. Paul certainly didn't think his baptism did, or he would have included it in the gospel he preached. But there is no doubt that Paul's baptism was a very helpful and meaningful experience to the man that a few days earlier had been "*the worst of sinners*" (1 Timothy 1:16). Saul of Tarsus was blessed by this symbolic "*washing...and renewing*" (Titus 3:5) of his past record of sin that is expressed through water baptism. This is obviously another reason why God chose this particular practice to mark the beginning of a new Christian's life: water baptism communicates complete and total forgiveness.

Someone might ask, "If water baptism is only a *symbolic demonstration* of God's saving grace, and not necessarily an actual *means* of His saving grace, how does it practically benefit us?" First of all, we would suggest that water baptism was viewed in the early Church as a means of grace much like Evangelical Christianity views the "sinner's prayer." There is no promise of salvation in the mere act of baptism just as there is no guarantee that someone who prays a certain prayer will be saved. However, these are means through which people do confess a saving faith to God which saves them.

In addition, there are many other benefits in the act of baptism. The most obvious way in which water baptism brings real benefit into our life is the same way the Lord's Supper benefits us. Jesus simply said, "*do this in remembrance of Me*" (Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25). Essentially, the Lord's Supper is a means that God has ordained for our consistent reminder of the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ for our sins (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:26) and that graphic reminder can be expected to strengthen our understanding and appreciation of our salvation whenever it is practiced. The same is true of water baptism. Also, for believers who witness a baptism, it reminds and increases their understanding of *their* own salvation. Finally, baptism is a public demonstration to non-believers of the truth of the gospel, and

as such, a public baptism is often used by God to bring people to salvation in Christ.

c. Water baptism is the physical demonstration of being identified with Christ

Romans 6:2-4 discussed above certainly conveys the idea that through water baptism we are identified with Christ. Paul says, “*all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death. We were therefore buried with him through baptism.*” This has several meanings. First, as described here, God accepts Christ’s death as our own death, therefore paying the penalty of our sin.

Our identification with Christ also means we belong to Him. This is illustrated in a significant manner in Paul’s handling of the divisions in the Corinthian church. He cites its members as saying, “I belong to Paul,” “I belong to Apollos,” “I belong to Cephas (= Peter),” “I belong to Christ” (1 Cor 1:12). Paul then asks, “Has Christ been apportioned to any single group among you? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?” Thus, Paul strongly suggests that to be baptized in the name of someone is to belong to them.

d. Water baptism is a public reflection of our membership into Christ’s Church.

As noted above, baptism symbolizes our belonging and membership in Christ (cf. Galatians 3:26-27; 1 Corinthians 12:12-13). Accordingly, we are placed into a universal, eternal, and privileged family when the Spirit indwells us. Water baptism is an outward symbolic expression of this. By being baptized as all of our brothers and sisters in Christ have, it communicates our desire to join them and identify ourselves with the most privileged group of people on earth, the people of God. And the cheers and hugs they respond with afterward reflect their acceptance of you into that very honored circle. Your willingness to be baptized puts other Christians, particularly those in your local church, on notice that you have been born again and that you want to follow Christ with them. The local church, by accepting your willingness to be baptized, is agreeing to accept you into the fellowship of Christ, with all of its responsibilities and privileges.

e. Water baptism is a public statement of our commitment to the Lordship of Christ.

By noting that the early Church viewed baptism as primarily a physical means by which one expresses saving faith, it certainly also operates as a public statement of our commitment to the Lord Jesus. Something, of course, that is practically the same as confessing saving faith.

It was noted earlier that Christ’s baptism was a demonstration of His obedience to the Father. Because Christ then commanded all of His followers to be baptized as He was, it is an act of obedience for us as well. But it is more than a one-time act of obedience. It is a declaration on our part that we intend to follow Jesus Christ for the rest of our life. By obeying Him in baptism, we are confessing and proclaiming Him as our only Master and Lord. The benefit here is essentially the same as any other time we obey our Lord. It is not necessarily an easy thing to publicly share your testimony, proclaim your commitment to Christ, and get dunked under water. But there is always a sense of abundant joy and peace when one is baptized, and it is a reminder to us all that we never lose by obeying Christ, even in something as simple (although meaningful) as water baptism.

“All our salvation consists in the manifestation of the nature, life and spirit of Jesus Christ in our inward new man. This alone is Christian redemption, this alone delivers from the guilt and power of sin, this alone redeems and renews.”

- William Law

2. When should someone be baptized?

While we suggested above that water baptism was understood to be the way in which people professed saving faith, the early Church understood that such faith must be present in order for baptism to have any meaning. This is clearly demonstrated in all of the NT examples and exhortations regarding baptism.¹³ The Book of Acts gives us several examples. Concerning the very first Christian baptism we read: *“Those who accepted his (Peter’s gospel) message were (then) baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day”* (Acts 2:41). Philip’s ministry in Samaria is similarly described: *“But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, (then) they were baptized, both men and women. Simon himself believed and (then) was baptized”* (Acts 8:12-13). Likewise, we read also that, *“... many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and (then) were baptized”* (Acts 18:8). In addition, the conversions and baptisms of both the Ethiopian eunuch and Paul seemed to have followed the same pattern (Acts 8:35- 39; 9:17-18).

“God’s people should be baptized because God commanded it, not because some church requires it.”

- John R. Rice

The presence of saving faith in water baptism is illustrated when Peter told a crowd: *“Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins”* (Acts 2:38). It can first be pointed out that only someone who has saving faith in Jesus Christ, could obey Peter’s instruction to *“be baptized... in the name of Jesus Christ.”* To do anything *“in the name of Jesus Christ”* is to be already identified with Him as your Lord and Savior. So Peter understands that only those who had *“accepted his message”* in faith (cf. 2:41, 37) and responded to his call to sincerely *“repent”* could indeed *“be baptized... in the name of Jesus Christ”* because they already belonged to Jesus Christ.

Therefore, genuine faith in Christ is always to accompany water baptism. Accordingly, a person should demonstrate a clear understanding of the gospel message, as well as a committed faith in Christ, before being baptized.

It should be noted that a willingness to obey Christ’s command to be baptized is an important indicator of the authenticity of the person’s faith. To be baptized, new believers need to come to a point where they truly desire to publicly confess their born again experience, their commitment to Christ, and their desire to serve and fellowship with other believers. The prospect of making a public declaration of such things may cause a good deal of apprehension in some, but these fears must be overcome by their love for God and desire to obey Him. No doubt it will be the first of many more times that obeying God will be a scary thing. When baptism is an act of trust and obedience, done not out of compulsion, but out of conviction and sincere desire, it is then that it is pleasing to our Lord.

3. How should someone be baptized?

At the actual baptism, it is suggested that new believers share their stories of how they were converted to Christ. Give them a list of questions to answer, like:

1. What was your life like before getting saved?
2. What circumstances, people, etc. did God use to bring you to Christ?
3. How has your life changed since being converted to Christ?

“Christ is the Son of God. He died to atone for men’s sin, and after three days rose again. This is the most important fact in the universe. I die believing in Christ.”

- Watchman Nee, (note found under his pillow, in prison, at his death).

4. Why do you want to get baptized?

Their explanation here should reflect a desire to obey and follow Christ and to commit themselves to the local church as described above. Biblically, any true believer can baptize another true believer, and the Bible gives us no indication otherwise. It is perfectly fine, in fact, if the person or persons who were instrumental in their salvation have the privilege of baptizing them. However, because water baptism would seem to be the biblical “rite of initiation” into not only the universal Church, but the local one as well, some have seen the value in having the local church leadership perform baptisms.

In performing the actual baptism, the person should be immersed completely under the water and publicly baptized “*in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit*” (Matthew 28:19), as Christ instructed. Obviously, there should be plenty of room for the whole church to gather, and the whole church should gather. A new baby brother or sister has been born into the family of God and all should be there to witness this advancement of the great commission and to offer their affirmation to the new sibling in Christ.

C. Other Questions About Water Baptism

1. Is baptism necessary for salvation?

Some churches¹⁴ believe, teach, and practice the conviction that water baptism is essential to someone’s eternal salvation. In other words, if someone is not baptized in water they will not go to Heaven, but rather, will be sent to Hell. This is, of course, contrary to the requirements of God’s New Covenant with humanity and the gospel of grace. The NT says plainly, “*This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe*” (Romans 3:22), “*... God credits righteousness apart from works*” (Romans 4:6), and “*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast*” (Ephesians 2:8-9). God could not be clearer. Any act or “work” for which we could take credit, can have absolutely nothing to do with our righteous standing before God. Any other teaching is “*... a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all.*” And even if “*an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the...*” gospel of pure grace apart from works, they are in danger of being “*... eternally condemned!*” (Galatians 1:6-8).

In general, we think that much confusion has arisen from the fact that water baptism was the accepted means by which someone professed saving faith. It was the “sinner’s prayer” of the early Church. Accordingly, some verses could give the impression that water baptism saves people, just like an Evangelical Christian may say that a “sinner’s prayer” saves people. In reality, we know that the physical act is an outward expression, not a substitute, for the spiritual reality of saving faith that really saves.

How do we then handle the NT verses that tie salvation and water baptism so closely together (cf. Mark 16:15-18; Acts 2:38; 1 Peter 3:20-21; Acts 22:16, etc.)? We need to hold two NT truths together: 1) Salvation is purely by God’s grace and not our works, and 2) Water baptism is the NT way of expressing our saving faith.

Accordingly, when Christ recognized the saving faith of the thief on the cross, he promised him salvation, even though he could not be baptized (cf. Luke 23:39-43).

Likewise, Paul makes it clear that water baptism is not essential to salvation when he tells the Corinthians: *“I am thankful that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius.... For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel.... For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God”* (1 Corinthians 1:14, 17-18). Elsewhere he writes *“... the gospel ... (that) is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes...”* (Romans 1:16), not water baptism. That is what Paul believed, and if we are to avoid serious and damaging doctrinal error, we must believe, proclaim, and practice the same.

“Eternal life is not a reward for effort; it is a gift to those who trust Christ.”

- J. Vernon McGee

While understanding the NT purpose for water baptism in the process of salvation helps to clarify the meaning of verses used to claim it is essential to salvation, there is an additional passage that should be addressed. In the Gospel of John, chapter 3, we read: *“Jesus declared (to Nicodemus), ‘I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.’ ‘How can a man be born when he is old?’ Nicodemus asked. ‘Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb to be born!’ Jesus answered, ‘I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again’”* (John 3:3-7).

Some contend that when Christ says *“born of water,”* He means Christian water baptism. And then they conclude that water baptism is essential to being *“born again.”* However, although water baptism and the baptism of the Spirit are at times mentioned together (Matthew 3:11; Acts 1:5; Romans 6:1-11), Christ makes it clear that he is speaking of a person’s physical birth as a baby, not water baptism. His statement that *“Flesh gives birth to flesh”* in verse 6 is synonymous with being *“born of water”* in verse 5, just as the *“Spirit giv(ing) birth to the spirit”* is synonymous with being *“born of... the Spirit.”* So the meaning of being *“born of water”* is defined by the meaning of the statement, *“Flesh gives birth to flesh.”* And the clearest understanding of that is that Christ is talking about a person’s physical birth. This interpretation is strengthened by Nicodemus’s statement that a person, *“... cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb to be born!”* All Christ is saying is that only people who are physically created by God, and then spiritually born again by the Spirit of God, will be saved.

In conclusion, none of the verses used to teach that the mere physical act of water baptism results in salvation can be used in this way. At the same time, however, these verses remind us of the important part that water baptism plays in giving the person the opportunity to declare and confess the saving faith they have in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

2. Should infants be baptized?

Infant baptism is practiced religiously among both Roman Catholics and many Protestant denominations including Presbyterian, Lutheran, and Reformed churches.

Roman Catholic theologians insist on what is called “baptismal regeneration” and argue that the sacrament actually spiritually converts the infant, putting them in a saving relationship with God. This will

not be addressed here, but it is suggested that such an idea is refuted in answering the previous question above. Although Protestant paedobaptists (paedo referring to infants) claim to deny the idea of “baptismal regeneration,” they insist that a baptized infant is a member of the “covenant community” of God. And this is the focal point of their theological argument for the practice. Unfortunately for our purposes (i.e. trying to wrap up what is supposed to be a rather short paper on baptism) the arguments that paedobaptists have developed are rather complex. Still, an attempt will be made here to honestly, but concisely, represent their position, and then to suggest why one might believe that the Scriptures teach otherwise.

Essentially, the theological argument for infant baptism under the New Covenant is based on the fact that infants were circumcised under the Old Covenant. Louis Berkhof in defense of the paedobaptist position in his *Systematic Theology* would seem to lay out their primary line of theological reasoning as follows:

“This [Abrahamic] covenant is still in force and is essentially identical with the ‘new covenant’ of the present dispensation... By appointment of God infants shared in the benefits of the [Abrahamic] covenant, and therefore received circumcision as a sign and seal... In the new dispensation baptism is by divine authority substituted for circumcision as the initiatory sign and seal of the covenant of grace... if children received the sign and seal of the [Abrahamic] covenant in the old dispensation, the presumption is that they surely have a right to receive it in the new [covenant]....”¹⁸

In response, it is true that circumcision was the sign of the Old Covenant and that baptism is the sign of the New Covenant. But does it follow that because infants were circumcised under the Old that infants should be baptized under the New?

Christian baptism and Jewish circumcision have some important similarities and some important differences between them. The clearest indication that they are in any way related is Paul’s words in Colossians: “*In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead*” (2:11-12). Accordingly, one fairly obvious similarity between OT circumcision and NT baptism was that they both were intended by God to set His people apart from the rest of humankind. It was circumcision, no doubt, that marked the Jews as the people of the Old Covenant and the rite was commanded of all those who were included in that covenant. The same is true of water baptism for those who partake in the New Covenant. So both practices were ordained by God as a physical demonstration of being set apart by God and belonging to Him.

However, there are some important differences between circumcision and water baptism because they represent two very different covenants. Under the Old Covenant, a person was considered set apart by God simply by being born into (or attached to) a Jewish family. The only reason infant circumcision had meaning under the Old Covenant was because that infant actually was included in the “covenant community” simply by its physical birth as a Jew and its circumcision. But all of this symbolizes things that now have no relationship to any characteristics of the New Covenant. We are not included in the New Covenant by being born into a Christian family, or having some religious ceremony performed

“Infant baptism when practiced can be no more than an expression of the faith and hope of the parents that their child will ultimately be saved.”

- Lewis Sperry Chafer

on our behalf. Entrance into a covenant with God now is through an actual (not an infant's presumed and possibly future) saving faith. Therefore, it is suggested here that infant baptism unfortunately symbolizes many things that are directly opposed to the gospel and such a practice has no place now that the Old Covenant has been abolished, and we live under the New.

This is, no doubt, why Paul fought so consistently against the circumcision of believers. In the OT, God commanded circumcision regardless of the spiritual condition of the person (Genesis 17:10-13, 23). Such a practice communicates an acceptance by God based on a physical act instead of an exercise of personal faith. But the gospel Paul preached involved a "*circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit*" (Romans 2:29). It is suggested here that Paul would deny the need or right for an infant to be baptized on the same grounds he denied the need for circumcision.

Further arguments for infant baptism are found in four verses. First, in Acts 2:39, Peter tells a Jewish crowd, "*The promise (of salvation) is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.*" It would seem that paedobaptists interpret this verse as saying that Peter is promising that the children of Christians will be saved. However, Peter explains that the promise is more specifically "*for all whom the Lord our God will call*" which will not include all children of Christian parents. It is suggested here that the paedobaptist's interpretation of Peter's words, and the practice of infant baptism as well, is based on presumption. There is no promise at all that the infant of Christian parents will be saved in the future, and a baptism that is to symbolize such a presumption would seem better left undone.

Second, in Matthew 19:14, "*Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.'*" The paedobaptist interpretation of these words is that Christ regarded these "*little children*" to be assured of future salvation and as such, presently included in "*the kingdom of heaven.*"¹⁹ First of all, Jesus is saying no such thing, but rather, is making the point that those who exercise saving faith like little children exercise childlike trust, will enter the Kingdom. In addition, although it is admitted that "*little children*" may exercise saving faith and be converted to Christ, it is insisted that such children would be saved by that faith, not by virtue of simply being children, or even children of Christian parents.

Third, Paul tells the Corinthians that a believer's unbelieving spouse and his or her children are "*sanctified*" and made "*holy*" by the presence of the believer (1 Corinthians 7:14). Paedobaptist attempt to use this verse to insist again that the children of a believer will be saved. First of all, Paul cannot be saying that the unbelieving spouse and children of a believer are, or will be saved, simply because of their relationship with the believer. This again not only violates the requirements for being accepted by God under the New Covenant, but such a conclusion is flatly denied when two verses later Paul asks the believing spouses, "*How do you know, (believing) wife, whether you will save your (unbelieving) husband? Or, how do you know, (believing) husband, whether you will save your (unbelieving) wife*" (1 Corinthians 7:16)? The answer is that they cannot know, and the same obviously applies to their children.

It would seem the best interpretation of Paul's use of "*sanctified (hagiazō)*" and "*holy (hagios)*" can have nothing to do with eternal salvation, but rather temporary Christian influence on the household. These words are not invariably used to refer to people possessing eternal salvation, but are also used,

"Salvation is a personal matter. It can never be enjoyed or experienced by proxy."

- Erling C. Olsen

“God has no grandchildren.”

- Unknown

for example, to describe things that are set apart for God’s purposes (e.g. Matthew 4:5; 7:6; 24:15). The only influence that a believer could expect to have in such a situation is possibly to influence the family’s values and lifestyle, maybe even making it seem to be a Christian family. It is suggested that it is merely this “sanctifying” influence that would make the family different from wholly pagan families, of which Paul was speaking.

Finally, an argument for infant baptism has to do with the NT descriptions of “households” being baptized. These include the households of Stephanus (1 Corinthians 1:16), the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:30-33), and Lydia (Acts 16:14-15). Paedobaptists contend that when the Bible says that whole households were baptized, we are to assume that infants in those families were baptized as well. However, in two of the three household baptisms in the NT this is clearly not the case. In regards to the family of Stephanas, it should be pointed out that at the end of 1 Corinthians Paul says, “... *the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints*” (1 Corinthians 16:15). The whole household of Stephanus were born again believers and therefore the whole household was baptized. Obviously, no infants could be described as “converts” or those who “*have devoted themselves to the service of the saints*” and the paedobaptist can find no biblical support here.

Likewise, regarding the household of the Philippian jailer, Luke is careful to point out that “*The jailer... was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole family*” (Acts 16:34). So again, we understand why “...*all his family were baptized*” (Acts 16:33), and again the passage denies the presence of infants for they could not have “... *come to believe in God... (as the jailer’s) whole family*” did. In the case of Lydia, there is no indication that there were any infants in her household, or even that she was married. In conclusion then, the fact that households are described as being baptized in the NT offers no support for the paedobaptist position. In fact, there is no instance or mention at all in Scripture of infant baptism, but only the baptism of those who have placed personal saving faith in Christ.²⁰

The arguments developed by paedobaptists assume that God still works with humanity in family units just as He did with the nation of Israel. However, they would seem to ignore how Christ described the effect of the implementation of the New Covenant and the preaching of the gospel: “*Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn ‘a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—a man’s enemies (not necessarily his fellow Christians) will be the members of his own household*” (Matthew 10:34-36). God deals with individuals now, and we have no indication whatsoever in the NT that being born into a Christian family will make someone a Christian themselves.

Obviously any historical arguments for infant baptism are considerably less valuable than biblical ones, but even here our paedobaptist brothers and sisters do not have a convincing case. Even the paedobaptist theologian Geoffrey W. Bromiley admits that:

“First, there is no decisive evidence for a common Jewish practice of infant baptism in apostolic times. Second, the patristic statements [of Church Fathers] linking infant baptism with the apostles are fragmentary and unconvincing in the earlier stages. Third, examples of believer’s baptism are common [actually, by far the majority] in the first centuries, and a continuing, if suppressed, witness has always been borne to this requirement. Fourth, the development of infant baptism seems to be linked with the incursion of pagan notions and practices [including

Origen's and Augustine's insistence that infant baptism removed "original sin"]. Finally, there is evidence of greater evangelistic incisiveness and evangelical purity of doctrine where this form of baptism [believer's] is recognized to be the baptism of the NT." ²¹

So it would seem that infant baptism, although practiced by many well-meaning Christians, cannot be supported on any biblical or historical evidence. It only remains to say that none of these arguments against infant baptism are meant to dissuade anyone from practicing what is commonly called "baby dedication," and although such a practice may not be clearly sanctioned by the Bible, it can be a good and meaningful event.

"We must not suppose that even if we succeeded in making everyone nice, we should have saved their souls."

- C.S. Lewis

3. What about other methods of water baptism such as sprinkling or pouring?

Many churches and denominations believe that simply sprinkling or pouring water on a person is the biblically prescribed way to perform baptism. Others insist that only baptism by immersion is acceptable. However, the fact that no water baptism in the NT is described in enough detail to dogmatically claim a particular method, should warn people in both camps of their potential misplaced legalism.

However, while it may be admitted that the Bible does not clearly prescribe the method of baptism, there are several indications that immersion was the preferred method in the early Church. The clearest argument for this is in the meaning of "baptism" itself as described above. There is no doubt that its primary meaning was immersion, and if the meaning of the Greek word *baptizo* were not embroiled in the debate concerning the method of Christian baptism, there would probably be no controversy on the meaning of the word. With that said, instances can be found in both Greek literature and even Scripture (cf. Luke 11:38) where "baptism" simply means to wash, and immersion is not specified. Therefore, while the meaning of *baptizo* is a strong argument for immersion, it is not a decisive one.

Likewise, while examples of baptisms in the NT seem to imply immersion, they do not certainly do so. For example, we read in John 3:23 that, "John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were constantly coming to be baptized." It would seem that the need for "plenty of water" would indicate that John was immersing people, but that would not have to be the case. Likewise, concerning Christ's baptism, we read in Mark 1:10 that, "As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove." The wording here might also suggest immersion, but it could simply mean Jesus was leaving the river. Finally, in Acts 8:38 we read, "Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him." It could be suggested that if Philip had thought that sprinkling or simply pouring water on the eunuch was sufficient for Christian baptism, there would not have been a need for both of them to go "down into the water." However, it is conceivable that they stood in the water while Philip poured the water on the eunuch. Additional support for this is that going "down into the water" certainly cannot be interpreted as immersion itself as that would mean Philip was immersed as well.

Perhaps the clearest biblical evidence that the preferred method of baptism is immersion is to remember what it is to symbolize. We have already noted that proponents of pouring or sprinkling make the mistake of claiming that the sacrament is to primarily or even exclusively portray the washing away of sins or the pouring out of the Spirit. If this were so, merely sprinkling or pouring of water may be

“If you have not chosen the Kingdom of God first, it will in the end make no difference what you have chosen instead.”

- William Law

sufficient. However, we have pointed out several equally important things regarding our salvation that baptism is to symbolize that sprinkling and pouring would not convey. The idea of spiritual death, regeneration, and resurrection are equally important truths that are to be conveyed by water baptism. In addition, baptism is described as being baptized “in Christ” (not with Him), also suggesting immersion. Sprinkling or pouring water on someone does not adequately convey any of these truths.

Immersion even conveys the idea of “washing” better than other methods as well. Obviously, baptism certainly involves the idea of “washing (Acts 22:16, Titus 3:5),” but a *total* and *complete* washing is intended by the term, not simply getting a little wet here and there. It was noted above that the term often means to dip something into dye. Sprinkling or pouring dye over something will not produce the desired effect and will leave certain parts unchanged by the dye. Likewise, water baptism is

intended to affect every part of our physical body, just like the spiritual baptism it symbolizes effects every part of our life.

Accordingly, it is suggested that immersion is the best method by which all that is to be symbolized in baptism can be portrayed, and that other methods would not at all symbolize some of these important elements.

It is interesting to note that the view suggested here is supported by a very important document from the early Church. While the method of baptism may not be prescribed with certainty in Scripture, the *Didache*, written around A.D. 70 specifically addresses this. While not eventually accepted as Scripture, it is believed to reflect the early beliefs and practices of the Church. On the subject of baptism it reads:

“Now concerning baptism, baptize as follows: after you have reviewed all these things, baptize ‘in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit’ in running water. But if you have no running water, then baptize in some other water; and if you are not able to baptize in cold water, then do so in warm. But if you have neither, then pour water on the head three times ‘in the name of Father and Son and Holy Spirit’” (ch. 7).

To baptize in “running water” or “in some other water” would clearly seem to mean immersion, as it is contrasted with pouring. Therefore, this is practically decisive evidence that the preferred method of baptism in the early Church was immersion. However, even here, practical considerations are respected and legalism is avoided. There are no doubt circumstances in which immersion may not be advisable or possible and the early Church allowed for that.

4. What is the baptism for the dead (1 Corinthians 15:29)?

In Paul’s defense of a bodily and future resurrection of believers, he tells the Corinthians: “*Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them?*” (1 Corinthians 15:29). What in the world is Paul talking about? The answer: Nobody knows. Gordon Fee, Professor of New Testament at Regent College claims that “at least forty different solutions have been suggested” to explain what Paul was talking about.²³ After a lengthy discussion, he suggests that,

“the most likely options are (a) that it reflects some believers being baptized for others who either were or were on their way to becoming believers when they died (e. g. as in 11:30), but had never been baptized; or (b) that it reflects the concern of members of households for some of their own number who died before becoming believers. What they may have expected to gain from it is not quite clear...”²⁴

Still, it would seem that we need not be overly concerned with understanding exactly what Paul was talking about. Such a practice is nowhere commanded in the Scriptures nor described. Fee adds: “There is no historical or biblical precedent for such baptism. The NT is otherwise completely silent about it; there is no known practice in any of the other churches nor in any orthodox Christian community in the centuries that follow; nor are there parallels or precedents in pagan religion... This is an especially strong argument against the Mormons, e.g., who would justify their practice on alleged “biblical” grounds (which is of some interest in itself since the exegesis of the biblical text generally holds very little interest for them)...This complete silence in all other sources [outside of 1 Corinthians 15:29] is the sure historical evidence that, if such a practice existed in fact, it did so as something purely eccentric among some in the Corinthian community”²⁵

Conclusion

Water baptism is an important practice to understand. Not only did Christ command it as part of making disciples, He Himself was baptized and expects all of His followers to do the same. Yet it need not be a burden for the true follower of Christ as it communicates, reminds, and symbolizes the most wonderful truths known to humanity. Through immersion, water baptism not only speaks of the washing away and forgiveness of our sins, but the spiritual death, regeneration, and resurrection that we share with Christ and that results in not only a new life now, but eternal life in Heaven. Obviously such a practice only has meaning if the inward spiritual realities of salvation have occurred in the person being baptized. It is hoped that controversies concerning the purpose (is it necessary for salvation?), the recipients (should infants be baptized?), and the mode (is sprinkling okay?) of water baptism will not be allowed to obscure what was intended by Christ to be a beautiful and meaningful act of obedience that symbolizes His own act of obedience that resulted in our eternal life.

“A little faith will bring your soul to heaven, but a lot of faith will bring heaven to your soul.”

- Dwight L. Moody

*All Scripture quotations in this article are from the New International Version.

End Notes

¹ Apart from the debates regarding immersion and infant baptism, the Concise Dictionary of Christianity in America (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), states that “For the Evangelical Free Church of America, baptism is optional, not required for local church membership. The Salvation Army and the Society of Friends [Quakers] do not practice water baptism at all.” (p. 33).

² New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 1:144-5.

³ Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary, (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, 1986), 357.

⁴ NIDNTT, Ibid.

⁶ Louis Berkhof, Systematic Theology, (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1958), 622.

⁷ George Beasley-Murray, Baptism in the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 24.

⁸ George Beasley-Murray, in his classic volume on baptism, points out that, “If proselyte baptism was a universally accepted institution in Judaism before the Christian era, how are we to explain the fact that there is not one clear testimony to it in pre-Christian writings and its complete absence of mention from the writings of Philo [Jewish philosopher and prolific writer living until c. 45 A. D.], Josephus [influential Jewish historian living until c. 100 A. D.], and the Bible, particularly the New Testament? The silence of these authorities is the more unexpected when it is recalled how interested they all were in the relations of Jews to Gentiles” (19). Beasley-Murray points out also that there are records of Gentile conversions to Judaism at this time that only mention circumcision, not baptism. (20). It is suggested that the evidence for this Jewish practice is commonly made too much of for what would seem to be the following reasons: 1) It attracts the intellectual curiosity of scholars, 2) It attracts those vying for the method of immersion in Christian baptism because when Jewish proselyte baptism occurred it was by full immersion, and 3) It attracts those arguing for infant baptism as it seems this also occurred in the practice. Still, the evidence for it would seem too little, and too late, to have any significant bearing on our understanding of Christian baptism.

⁹ Beasley-Murray quotes H. H. Rowley as concluding from his study that, “There is not a single feature of John’s baptism for which there is the slightest reason to go to Qumran to look for the source”. (15)

¹⁴ The “churches” in mind are primarily included in an association of churches called the Churches of Christ. However, it is not true that all churches in this association believe that baptism is required for salvation.

¹⁸ Berkhof, 633-4.

¹⁹ See, for instance, Robert L. Reymond, professor of Systematic Theology at Knox Theological Seminary who in his recent New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1998) insists that Christ is saying that “the kingdom of God belongs to... little children... who have covenant parents.” (941). There would seem to be no recognition that only born again people, saved by faith, are

members of Christ’s Kingdom. At this point, we might also ask our paedobaptist brothers and sisters why are infants and/or small children excluded from the Lord’s Supper, if they are, in fact, members of the “New covenant community”? This author has not found a paedobaptist response to this in the three Reformed systematic theologies, six books, and three scholarly articles that were consulted and that argued for infant baptism.

²¹ Geoffrey W. Bromiley, “Baptism, Believer’s”, Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, ed. Walter A. Elwell, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1984), 116.

²³ Gordon Fee, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, NICNT, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 762.

²⁴ Ibid., 767.

²⁵ Ibid., 764 including note 17.

WATER BAPTISM**Exercise**

1. What was the main lesson you learned from this reading?

2. Why is the subject of water baptism important?

3. What Scriptural arguments would you use to show that water baptism is not required for salvation?

WATER BAPTISM**Exercise**

4. When and how should someone be baptized and why?

5. Do you know someone who you should approach about being baptized?



LOVE AND UNITY / THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

Eternal Security

What a wonderful salvation we have received! We know *for sure* that we have eternal life in Heaven. But there are many Christians who argue that the Scriptures teach that a born again believer can lose his or her salvation. What do the Scriptures teach on this very important subject? Find out in the following reading by Brent Knox.



Eternal Security

Pastor Brent Knox · Minneapolis, MN

In Great Commission Churches, we have always taught the biblical truth that all genuine believers in Christ are eternally secure. This doctrine of “eternal security” is also known as the doctrine of the “perseverance of the saints.” This doctrine states that those individuals who are truly born again by the Spirit of God will be kept by God and will, by God’s power, persevere in faith their whole lives. Therefore, we, as believers in Christ, are eternally secure—we have total assurance that we will be in Heaven when we die.

Why is the issue of eternal security such an important doctrine? It relates to our joy in living and our confidence in God. There are so many Christians who suffer needlessly because they lack assurance of their salvation. They lack the confidence that their sins are completely forgiven and their place in Heaven is eternally secure. Their lives are filled with doubt, guilt, fear, anxiety, and intense self-introspection. There is a better way to live. That is why God wants us to know for certain that we have eternal life. In fact, this is one of the reasons why the book of 1st John was written. *“I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life”* (1 John 5:13).

If God is loving, then He would want us to know with certainty, before we enter eternity, whether or not we have eternal life! Imagine being on a plane flight from New York City to London. About half way through the flight, the pilot announces over the PA system, “Ladies and gentlemen, I have good news and I have bad news. First the bad news. There was a slight oversight that occurred before we took off. Someone forgot to refuel the airplane. According to our calculations, the plane will run out of fuel and plunge into the ocean shortly before London. There will be no survivors. But the good news is that this is a very fine plane and everything on the plane is now free! You can enjoy in-flight movies for free! Order any beverage for free! Ask the attendants for anything! And they will provide the best comfort for you as they can during the last few hours of your life.” The only person who will really be able to enjoy the next few hours will be the person with a parachute who can bail out before the plane crashes. Why? He knows that his life will continue on! In the same way, knowing with absolute assurance that we have eternal life adds greatly to our joy!

Let’s help our people “know” that they have eternal life and to live free of the anxiety and fear that they might some day do something to lose this wonderful gift.

Reasons for Believing in Eternal Security

1. The undeserved grace of God.

“In our first paradise in Eden there was a way to go out but no way to go in again. But as for the heavenly paradise, there is a way to go in, but no way to go out.”

- Richard Baxter

It is by grace we are saved.

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Eternal life is freely given as a gift—not as a result of any human effort. If we admit that human merit cannot save us, how can we say that human merit can preserve us? We did not earn it by our merit; we cannot lose it by demerit. Maintaining our salvation must not become a matter of works. This is a system of salvation by faith plus works that Paul condemns in Galatians 3:1-2. If this is the case, the believer would have room to boast. No part of salvation is by works.

“I am not what I ought to be. I am not what I want to be. I am not what I hope to be. But still, I am not what I used to be. And by the grace of God, I am what I am.”

- John Newton

2. The inseparable love of God.

There is no power that is able to separate us from the love of God.

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: ‘For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.’ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:35-39).

No event, no power, no person can destroy the bond of love that God has for us. There is no person or demonic power that can destroy Christ’s love for us. There is no time in which we are ever separated from His love. There is nothing in Heaven or Hell that can pry us from His love—not even we ourselves. As believers, we are not powerful enough to loosen God’s love for us. We cannot sin enough to diminish God’s love for us. Even by our own choice, we cannot break the bond. We aren’t powerful enough. “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” The obvious answer is no one—including ourselves.

3. The prevailing forgiveness of Christ.

We are forgiven of all our sins.

“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

“Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us” (Romans 8:33-34).

“Then he adds: ‘Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more’” (Hebrews 10:17).

On the cross, Jesus Christ died and paid for all of our sins—past, present, and future (when Christ died 2000 years ago, all our sins were paid for on the cross, even the sins we will commit tomorrow.

When Christ died, all our sins were yet future. How then can commission of sin(s) cause us to lose our salvation?). All of our sins were blotted out and forgotten. There is no sin that is more costly than the death of Jesus Christ. The death of Christ is more than a sufficient payment for all sin for all time for every person. Rebellion is sin and Christ has paid for it. Doubt is sin and Christ has paid for it. Even the sin a Christian may commit of being ashamed or embarrassed of the Lord has been paid for. Many Christians have denied the Lord during their walk with Him. Peter is an example of this. But Peter was forgiven and restored. The death of Jesus is sufficient for a life of many sins a Christian may temporarily lapse into—including rebellion, doubt, rejection, and denial. Praise God for the prevailing forgiveness of Christ!

In Romans 8:33-34, Paul asks two questions:

1. Who can accuse us and make it stick?
2. Who can condemn us and make us guilty?

The answer is the same: nothing and nobody. In fact, we cannot even do it ourselves. We cannot bring any condemnation on ourselves. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ (Romans 8:1)!

There are problems of logic that arise if a person believes that it is possible to lose salvation. What or how many sins can cause a believer to lose his salvation? How many doubts can cause a believer to lose his salvation? Where do we draw the line? Remember, Jesus taught that sin was not in the act, but in the thought. If loss of salvation is possible, then we would have all lost our salvation long ago, and most likely shortly after we acquired it!

4. The irreversible nature of our salvation.

There is so much that happened to us when we believed, can it be reversed?

NO. Perhaps part of the problem with Christians who struggle with their eternal security is they fail to understand all that happened to them when they got saved. When we believed, we received much more than just a “ticket to Heaven!”

- a. When we believed, we gained eternal life.

“I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life” (John 5:24).

Eternal life is eternal. It lasts forever. And we have it NOW!

- b. When we believed, we were “born again.”

“In reply Jesus declared, ‘I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again’” (John 3:3).

How many times can a person be born? Can a baby be born, then re-enter his mother’s womb and be born again? No. Just as Christ’s death on the cross was definitive, so the work that the Holy Spirit performs in bringing about a spiritual “birth” to the person who believes is definitive. It is not possible

“Every individual believer is precious in the sight of the Lord; a shepherd would not lose one sheep, nor a jeweler one diamond, nor a mother one child,... nor will the Lord lose one of His people.”

- Charles Spurgeon

for a person who has been spiritually reborn to become “unborn.” We have entered into a new state that cannot be reversed.

c. When we believed, our old sin nature was crucified, and we were given a new nature. We are now a new creature.

“We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection” (Romans 6:4-5).

“For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority. In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead” (Colossians 2:9-12).

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Our sinful nature was removed, crucified, cut away. We were given a new nature. We are not the same old people anymore. Something far more dramatic than just gaining a “ticket to Heaven” happened to us when we believed. A dramatic change occurred on the inside. We are different people. Our natures have changed. We were united with Christ. We have experienced a crucifixion of our sinful nature and we have experienced a resurrection of a new nature. Can this ever be reversed? NO. Once circumcision cuts away the flesh, can the flesh ever be reattached? NO. In the same way, once our sinful nature has been cut away, it can never be re-attached.

d. When we believed, we were adopted into God’s family as sons and daughters.

“Because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father’” (Romans 8:14-15).

“But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba, Father.’ So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir” (Galatians 4:4-7).

Charles Stanley writes, “In the ancient world, the child who was adopted actually had more rights than a child born into a family. A father could give up his natural-born child to adoption, but a child once adopted could never be given up again. It was illegal to do so. A natural-born child could be expelled from the family, disowned, or denied. An adopted child, however, could not be dissociated from the father who had adopted him. Paul was well aware of the legal rights and ramifications of adoption when he wrote that believers in Christ are full partakers of the ‘adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the services of God, and the promises’ once thought to be available only to the Jews

“From that time at age twelve, I’ve sinned, I’ve quit, I’ve failed, I’ve stumbled, I’ve fallen, I’ve landed in the mud puddle and come out drenched with mud. But one thing has been true: God set me apart and there’s no way that I could run away from God. I have tried.”

- Bob Pierce

“Though Christians be not kept altogether from falling, yet they are kept from falling altogether.”

- William Secker

(Romans 9:4). Believers in Christ Jesus are not just second-class members of the family of God but full sons and daughters of the Almighty!” He goes on to write, “The authors of the New Testament left us with detailed explanations of how one becomes a child of God; if that process could be reversed, doesn’t it make sense that at least one of them would have gone into detail explaining that as well?”¹

Can a child adopted by God become “un-adopted?” No. Once a son, always a son. At times, my sons may rebel or dishonor me, but they will always be my sons.

e. When we believed, we were raised up with Christ, glorified, and seated with Christ in Heaven. We have been justified, redeemed and reconciled. In fact, every word used to describe our salvation is used in the past tense.

“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:4-7).

It is difficult to believe that once we are seated with Christ in the heavenly realms that this could ever be reversed.

5. The continuing and effective prayers of Christ on our behalf.

Jesus is constantly praying for us. His intercessions are part of His great priestly duty. If anyone knows how to pray effectively, with great faith according to the will of God, Jesus does. His prayers will be answered!

“Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them” (Hebrews 7:25).

“Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us” (Romans 8:34).

“My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified... ‘Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world’” (John 17:15-19, 24).

Regarding Jesus’ great prayer in John 17, Charles Stanley writes the following:

“In summary, Jesus is praying that we will be delivered from evil, be victorious witnesses to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and behold the glory of Jesus. What a wonderful prayer is being made on your behalf every moment since you believed on Jesus Christ and received Him as your Savior! Do you think that God the Father will fail to answer the prayer of His Son—even for an instant? Jesus’ prayer for us is about our relationship with Him and with the Father. We certainly can err or sin by our will, but Jesus’ intercession for us will bring about our chastening so that our

eternal relationship with the Father might even become stronger and more intimate. Jesus' prayer attests to the permanence of our relationship 'in God' so that we become 'one' with Him and with Christ. With Jesus praying this about our relationship with God— which He purchased with His blood—how dare we believe that we can in any way negate, abolish, or supersede His prayer."²

God promises to answer prayers. Would He not answer every single prayer of His very own Son?

6. The lasting nature of the Holy Spirit's seal on our lives.

One aspect of the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives is to assure us of our eternal destiny.

"And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory" (Ephesians 1:13-14).

John MacArthur writes: "What does it mean to be 'sealed'? In the ancient world, a seal upon an item meant two things. First, the item was linked to a specific owner. Seals bore markings that indicated to whom the object belonged, from whom it had been sent, or by whom it had been purchased.

To be sealed by the Holy Spirit is an indication that we are now 'owned' by God the Father for His purposes. A seal also meant that an item was authentic. Seals were rarely forged because each seal was handmade, and therefore, variations were easily spotted. When we are sealed by the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit becomes the witness to the fact that we have believed in Jesus. It is as if the Spirit Himself says, 'Yea and amen' to our act of believing in and receiving Christ. Once the Holy Spirit indwells us, the very presence of the Holy Spirit is a 'living seal' that we are God's children, fully authentic as heirs of Christ. Nobody and nothing can undo the seal of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, we are no longer our own. Our bodies are members of Christ's body. The spirit within us is Christ's Spirit. We belong to God (See 1 Corinthians 6:15,17,19-20).

Just like a deposit is made on a purchase agreement when buying a house, so God has made a deposit guaranteeing our eternal destiny. If we have the Spirit, we WILL gain our eternal inheritance! The Holy Spirit is the firm guarantee that this redemption WILL take place! 'We are assured with an absolute certainty only God can provide. The Holy Spirit is the Church's irrevocable pledge, her divine engagement ring, signifying that as Christ's bride, she will never be neglected or forsaken.'"³

7. The enduring faithfulness of God.

God has made many promises regarding the lasting nature of our salvation. And God is faithful. These promises WILL come to pass.

"When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself...Men swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of

"God's call is founded on His decree, and His decree is immutable. Acts of grace cannot be reversed. God blots out His people's sins, but not their names."

- Thomas Watson

“Today Jesus Christ is being dispatched as the Figurehead of a Religion, a mere example. He is that, but he is infinitely more; He is salvation itself, He is the Gospel of God.”

- Oswald Chambers

his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged” (Hebrews 6:13,16-18).

Again, MacArthur writes:

“It was common in the New Testament times for a person to make an oath on something or someone greater than himself. A Jewish man would swear by the altar of the temple, the high priest, or even God Himself. Once such an oath was made, the argument was over. It was assumed that if someone was willing to make such a serious oath, he was fully determined to keep it. God, of course, doesn’t need to make such an oath, His word is every bit as good without an oath—as ours ought to be (cf. Matthew 5:33-37). But to accommodate the weak faith of mere men and women, God made an oath of His promise to provide His children with a future hope. Since there is nothing or no one greater than God, He swore by

Himself (Hebrews 6:13).”

That pledge did not make God’s promise any more secure; the bare Word of God is guarantee enough, but God gave an oath out of His kind consideration of us to affirm that He meant what He said. His intent was to provide us with “strong encouragement” (v.18).

The Greek phrase so translated refers to a great source of consolation and confidence.”⁴ Assurance of salvation because of our eternal security is not arrogant. It is not presumptuous. It is confidence in God’s promises. The following promises are just a few of the many great promises that God has extended to us to give us great consolation on confidence.

“All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:37-40).

“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand” (John 10:27-29).

“To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy” (Jude 1:24).

Praise God for His faithfulness! We need no other reason to believe in eternal security than this: God said that He gives eternal life to those who believe in Jesus Christ. What God says, God does.

Common Objections to Eternal Security

There are four common objections to eternal security.

1. “It will lead to license. Those who object to the teaching of eternal security believe if people know they can never lose their salvation they will sin with abandon.”

Answer: “A proper understanding of grace never leads to license. It instead leads to holy living. Our salvation is free to us, but costly to God! The more we understand God’s grace and what it cost Him the more we will hate sin. Paul addresses this issue in Romans 6:1ff: ‘What say we say then? Shall we go on sinning so that Grace may increase? By no means!’ If a person professes to be a Christian, yet is happy in his sin, something is wrong. ‘Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!’ 2 Corinthians 5:17. The bottom line is this: No one, saved or unsaved, should feel secure in sin!”⁵

“If you have eternal life at all, it simply means that you have the Son, Jesus Christ NOW!”

- W. Ian Thomas

“In the first place, a person who is genuinely born again will not want to sin or live “any way he desires.” If a person still has a strong desire to sin and live in a manner that is contrary to the will of God, he very likely has not been genuinely born again. When a person has experienced a spiritual birth, he is a new creature and will not want to sin. Second, “just making Heaven” is a poor excuse for an eternal state of being. At stake is a great loss of eternal reward... Third, the person who pursues sin after being born again is a person who is going to experience God’s chastening on this earth...”⁶

2. “It is just too easy to be true.”

Answer: It is our human nature (in its fallen state) to add ritual and all kinds of religious traditions to the gospel message in order to make it measure up to our expectations of what it should look like. In other words, people just can’t believe that something so wonderful and spectacular; something so great, so precious, and unequalled in human history as Christ’s death and resurrection and the resultant free gift of salvation (the very difference between Heaven and Hell and our eternal destination) can be “treated so loosely” as to think that once you have it, you no longer need to bother with the subject. Those who believe that salvation can be lost, view sin and sinning as an insult to God’s free, but precious gift and thus a rejection of it. But can the purchased thing reject the one who purchased it? Indeed, it cannot. If a sheep, of its own free will, leaves the flock, but then returns after a season, the shepherd gladly receives it back. But while the sheep was out of the fold, did the shepherd lose ownership of the sheep? No. Anyone finding that lost sheep would see the mark of the shepherd showing ownership of that sheep. Likewise, though we may stumble, or backslide, we do not repossess ownership of our soul from God.

3. “If a people are saved by their own free choice, they can lose their salvation by that same free choice.”

Answer: The Bible indicates that true believers will not renounce their faith. If someone does renounce their faith and turn their back on God, it indicates the person was never a real believer in the first place. People who object to the concept of eternal security say it has to be possible to lose eternal salvation or it violates man’s free will. However, those who hold this view believe it cannot happen in Heaven. This is inconsistent. We do not lose free will in Heaven. Also, we are not strong enough to break the promises, the prayers, and the power of God. If Jesus is praying for us, will we not inherit eternal life?

"We serve God because of, not in order to."

- Clarence Sexton

If God's power is protecting us, will we not inherit eternal life? Are we so proud to assume that our choice can negate the promises of God?

4. "There is ample evidence from Scripture to support the fact that believers can lose their salvation."

Answer: There are indeed about 20 passages in the Bible which, taken at face value, could be interpreted to teach that a person could lose their salvation, but there are also many passages and theological concepts that clearly teach the security of the believer. Both cannot be true or we have a logical absurdity! One interpretation must yield to the other. Personally, I believe the weight of Scripture and the points I've already made heavily favor the concept of eternal security and that the verses that seem to teach otherwise should be interpreted in light of this doctrine and not vice versa. Let's look at some of these verses and see if there are not legitimate interpretations that fit with other Scriptures as well.

a. "Am I disqualified for the prize?"

"No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize" (1 Corinthians 9:27).

There are two responses given by Bible commentators. One would say that the context (vs. 23) of this passage is rewards rather than eternal salvation. Paul is concerned about becoming ineffective in the ministry.

Another view is that Paul is simply using a figure of speech in order to get a point across. The overall context of 1 Corinthians 8-10 is Paul's answer to the believers' questions on eating meat sacrificed to idols. In 1 Corinthians 9:27, Paul is simply presenting himself as an example to the Corinthians as one who exercised self-control, to warn them against the dangers of going into idol temples where they will be tempted into idolatry (see 1 Corinthians 10:1-14). The argument, then, is that Paul is presenting a hypothetical situation which could not happen, of him falling away from the faith ("*lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified*") (NASB). He is using this figure of speech to show that he is serious about exercising self-control on matters that will affect his faith, and that the Corinthian believers should be just as serious in the decisions they make. His goal is not theological (he is not attempting to establish whether or not someone can lose their salvation). Rather, his goal is pastoral in that he desires to see the Corinthians make godly choices.

Whichever is the most accurate explanation of these verses, it is nonetheless true that this passage does not deny that all believers in Christ are eternally secure.

b. "Have I wandered away from the truth?"

"Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have wandered away from the truth. They say that the resurrection has already taken place, and they destroy the faith of some. Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: 'The Lord knows those who are his,' and, 'Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness'" (2 Timothy 2:17-19).

Hymenaeus and Alexander defected from the faith, and were leading others away. Here Paul seems to be saying clearly that they were never saved in the first place. Note his comment in verse 19: “...nevertheless, God’s solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: ‘The Lord knows those who are his,’ and ‘everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness.’” There are many who profess who do not possess. See also 2 Peter 2:22 and 1 John 2:19 for similar passages.

“All self-effort is but sinking sand. Christ alone is the Rock of our salvation.”

- H. A. Ironside

We all know of examples of people who seem to be genuinely converted, but then fall away and even deny the faith. Jesus clearly taught in the parable of the sower (Matthew 13) that not all converts are genuine. Judas is an example of this. He was a disciple and probably even led others to Christ. Jesus, however, stated that he was not one of His, but rather the “son of perdition.”

c. “Is it impossible to be brought back to repentance?”

“It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace” (Hebrews 6:4-6).

This is, admittedly, one of the most difficult passages in the Bible. This passage has been interpreted in four ways:

1. This is a passage describing the danger of a Christian losing his salvation, but this view is rejected because of biblical assurances that salvation is a work of God which cannot be reversed.
2. This passage is a warning against a mere profession of faith short of salvation, or tasting, but not really partaking of salvation (*The New Scofield Reference Bible*, p. 1315).
3. This is presenting a hypothetical situation that cannot happen (similar to 1 Corinthians 13:2 where Paul gives the hypothetical situation of a person having all faith but no love) in order to make a point. The writer is stating that hypothetically if a Christian could leave Christ, there is no provision for repentance, so therefore the Hebrews should be all the more diligent to follow Christ (*The Ryrie Study Bible*, p. 1736).
4. This is a warning given of the danger of a Christian moving from a position of true faith and life to the extent of becoming disqualified for further service (1 Corinthians 9:27).⁷

When deciding which of the above interpretations to believe, we must remember to interpret difficult to understand passages (like this one) in light of other passages which are more clear.

d. “Have I fallen away from grace?”

“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope” (Galatians 5:1-5).

A pastor was once asked, “Do you believe in eternal security?” He replied, “Yes, I do believe in eternal security—but be careful.”

“Your doctrine of grace and liberty is dangerous!” Paul’s enemies argued. “Why, if Christians are free from the Law, they will live wicked lives! We need the Law to control them!” So people have argued down through the centuries, little realizing that grace, not law, is the greatest teacher and “controller” in the world (Titus 2:11–12). Paul admonishes us to stand fast in our Christian liberty. If we step back into legalism, we risk entanglement and bondage. How well the Jews of Paul’s day knew what legal bondage meant (Acts 15:10). Circumcision was the seal of the old covenant, so Paul warns the Galatians that to turn back to the old covenant is to rob themselves of the blessings Christ had purchased for them. Christ cannot profit the sinner who rejects grace and trusts law; Christ cannot profit the saint who seeks to live by law instead of grace. “Circumcision” in vv. 2–3 stands for the entire Mosaic system. People who put themselves under the Law become debtors to the whole

system.

“*Fallen from grace*” (v. 4) does not mean “fallen from salvation.” Paul is not writing to people who have “lost their salvation” because such a thing is not possible. He is writing to saints who have moved out of the sphere of grace into the burdensome sphere of law. Watchman Nee says, “Law means I must do something for God; grace means that God does something for me.” How wonderful it is for the Christian to enjoy the liberty of grace! This means moving out of the bondage described in Romans 7 into the glorious liberty of Romans 8! Paul describes the true Christian walk in vv. 5–6: our power is in the Spirit; we receive this power by faith; this faith produces love and works in our lives. In other words, the doctrine of Christian liberty does not encourage a wicked life; instead, it binds us closer to Christ, and Christ lives out His life through the believer (2:20).⁸

“In Galatians 5:4, Paul was not referring to the security of the believer, but to the contrasting ways of grace and law, faith and works, as a means of salvation. He certainly wasn’t teaching that a person who has once been justified can lose his righteous standing before God and become lost again by being legalistic. The Bible knows nothing of becoming unjustified.”⁹

e. “Did I commit the “unforgivable” sin?”

“And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come” (Matthew 12:31-32).

It seems that nearly every week some Christian asks me about this verse. Sometimes they wonder if they have committed the “unforgivable” sin and their security is greatly shaken. This passage is adequately explained by the following commentaries.

“The nation, because of its leaders, was on the brink of making a decision that would bring irreversible consequences. They were about to attribute incorrectly to Satan the power of the Holy Spirit exercised through Jesus and thus to commit the blasphemy against the Spirit. This specific sin cannot be reproduced today, for it required Jesus’ presence on earth with His performing miracles through the Spirit’s power. If, however, the leaders, acting on behalf of the nation, concluded that Jesus was empowered by Satan, they would commit a sin that would never find national or individual forgiveness (in this Age or in the Age to come). The consequences would bring about God’s judgment on the nation and on any individual who persisted in that view.”¹⁰

“To conclude that Christ’s miraculous works—affected by the Holy Spirit to prove Christ’s deity—were actually done by Satan is to be in a hopeless state of rejection. Since the religious leaders had seen and heard all that Jesus had done and said, yet were still convinced it was satanic, they were obviously in a hopeless state before God. They had concluded the opposite of what was clearly true, and they had done so despite full revelation. What does that say to us? What is the application for today? In the first place, this was a unique historical event that occurred when Christ was physically on earth. Since He isn’t now, there is no primary application. Perhaps there will be in “the age to come” (the millennial kingdom), when Christ is again on the earth. Is there a secondary application? Yes, that unregenerate people can be forgiven anything if they are willing to repent and come to Christ. But continual blasphemy against the convincing and convicting work of the Holy Spirit, defined as fully knowing the facts about Jesus but nonetheless attributing His works to the devil, cannot be forgiven.”¹¹

“Men do not fall from grace by sinning, but by putting the Law in place of grace.”

- Williams Evans, commenting on Galatians 5:4

f. “What about the branches thrown away to be burned?”

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned” (John 15:1-2,4,6).

Warren Wiersbe writes, “It is important to remember that not everything in a parable must mean something. A parable teaches one main truth, and to try to make a parable ‘stand on all four legs’ is often the first step toward misinterpretation. The main truth Christ is teaching in this parable is the importance of abiding in Him in order to bear fruit. The word ‘fruit’ is used six times, and ‘abide’ at least fifteen times (but it is not always translated ‘abide’). The main point of the teaching here is fellowship, not sonship.”

To use verse 6 to teach that a Christian loses his salvation and is burned in hell if he fails to bear fruit is to twist the meaning of the parable. In the first place, such a teaching contradicts the plain teaching of other verses—John 6:27; 10:27–29; etc. Furthermore, note that the branch Christ speaks of in v. 6 withers after it is cast forth! If this branch pictures a backslidden Christian who loses his salvation, he should “wither” first, then fail to bear fruit, then be cast out. To abide in Christ does not mean to keep ourselves saved. It means to live in His Word and pray (v. 7), obey His commandments (v. 10), and keep our lives clean through His Word (vv. 3–4). The Christian who fails to abide in Christ becomes like a useless branch, like the salt that loses its taste and is good for nothing. First Corinthians 3:15 teaches that our works will be tested by fire. The Christian who fails to use the gifts and opportunities God gives him will lose them (Luke 8:18 and 2 John 8).

To be a branch in the Vine means we are united to Christ and share His life. As we abide in Him, His life flows through us and produces fruit. It is possible for the carnal Christian to produce ‘works’, but only the spiritual Christian can bear lasting fruit. Note that the fruitful branches are ‘purged’ (v.

“The Law and the Gospel are two keys. The Law is the key that shutteth up all men under condemnation, and the Gospel is the key which opens the door and lets them out.”

- William Tyndale

2—same word as “clean” in v. 3) so that they will bear more fruit. God cleanses us through the Word, chastening us to make us more fruitful, which helps to explain why a dedicated Christian often has to go through suffering. As believers move from producing “fruit” to ‘more fruit’ (v. 2) to ‘much fruit’ (v. 8), they glorify the Father. The evidences of the ‘abiding life’ are: a sense of the Savior’s love (v. 9), obedience to His Word (v. 10), answered prayer (v. 7), and joy (v. 11).¹²

g. “What about the verses where church members are urged to continue in the faith?”

A key passage along this line is Hebrews 3:6-14: *“But Christ is faithful as a son over God’s house. And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast. So, as the Holy Spirit says: ‘Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert, where your fathers tested and tried me and for forty years saw what I did. That is why I was angry with that generation, and I said, ‘Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known my ways.’ So I declared an oath in my anger, ‘They shall never enter my rest.’ See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called To-*

day, so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first.”

Throughout the centuries, Christians (even those who do not believe in the doctrine of eternal security) have generally agreed on two points:

1. Salvation is totally a work of God by His grace through faith.
2. Those who are saved will have a genuine faith, a faith that lasts until death.

This passage is merely highlighting this truth. Those who are genuinely saved will have a faith that perseveres. Their salvation will be demonstrated by a persevering faith. In fact, as mentioned earlier, the “doctrine of eternal security” is also known as the “doctrine of the perseverance of the saints.” That is, those who are born-again will persevere in faith, firm until the end. Genuine believers may sin, they may have doubts, and they may have rocky moments in their lives. But they will end their lives with a genuine faith in Jesus Christ for their salvation. The writer in Hebrews is simply saying that these believers have become sharers in Christ—and that this will be demonstrated by their holding firmly till the end the confidence they had when they first believed in Christ.

In this regard, as pastors and believers, we have two responsibilities:

1. We must proclaim the truth that salvation is a work of God; that it is God who causes us to be born again; and that it is God who preserves and protects us till the very end.
2. We must exhort each other to be diligent to believe God, to not trust in our own efforts, to obey God’s commands, to forsake sin and anything that would hinder our faith in God (this is what the writer in Hebrews is doing with the believers in this passage in Hebrews 3).

God works to bring about the “*perseverance of the saints*,” at least in part, through encouragements and exhortations like the ones given in Hebrews 3:6-14. But this does not deny in any way the glorious truth that those who are truly born again will have an enduring faith. Just as God has chosen to

use the sharing of the gospel by an evangelist to introduce ones to the faith that is in Christ Jesus, so too God uses the exhortations of pastors (like the writer of Hebrews) to encourage believers to persevere in that same faith.

In summation, passages (such as Hebrews 3:6-14) in which believers are urged to continue in their faith are in harmony with the truth that those who are born of the Spirit will continue in the faith and are eternally secure in their salvation.

“Salvation is a work of God for man, rather than a work of man for God.”

- Lewis Sperry Chafer

Conclusion

I have found the following illustration from Christian Information Ministries to be helpful. “Consider the analogy of a father holding a child’s hand as they walk together: In the opponents view, the safety of the child rests in the strength of the child’s grip on the father’s hand. If the child lets go he will perish. In the view of those who believe in eternal security, the child’s safety rests in the strength of the father’s grip. If the child fails the father’s grip holds firm.”

We are eternally secure because God has a strong grip. He will never let go. The focus is on God’s ability and not our inability. There is an extraordinary amount of comfort realizing that God is responsible for maintaining the grip!

Endnotes:

¹ Stanley, Charles, *Understanding Eternal Security*, (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 1998, pg. 47

² Stanley, Charles, *Understanding Eternal Security*, (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 1998, pg. 50

³ MacArthur, John Jr. *Saved without a Doubt*, (Colorado Springs, Co.: Chariot Victor Publishing) 1992, pg. 20

⁴ MacArthur, John Jr. *Saved without a Doubt*, (Colorado Springs, Co.: Chariot Victor Publishing) 1992, pg. 17

⁵ Christian Information Ministries

⁶ Stanley, Charles, *Understanding Eternal Security*, (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 1998, pg. 75

⁷ Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc.) 1983, 1985.

⁸ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Wiersbe’s Expository Outlines on the New Testament*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books) 1992.

⁹ MacArthur, John Jr. *Saved without a Doubt*, (Colorado Springs, Co.: Chariot Victor Publishing) 1992, pg. 25

¹⁰ Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc.) 1983, 1985.

¹¹ MacArthur, John Jr. *Saved without a Doubt*, (Colorado Springs, Co.: Chariot Victor Publishing) 1992, pg. 36

¹² Warren W. Wiersbe, *Wiersbe’s Expository Outlines on the New Testament*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books) 1992.



ETERNAL SECURITY

Exercise

1. What was the main lesson you learned from this reading?

2. Why do young believers doubt their salvation? What can you do to help?

3. Which of the “Reasons for Believing in Eternal Security” resonated most with you? Why?



ETERNAL SECURITY

Exercise

4. How would you answer a Christian who says, “I think I have committed the unforgivable sin”?

5. What is your interpretation of Hebrews 6:4-6?



GREAT COMMISSION LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

LOVE AND UNITY / THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

God's Sovereignty and Man's Ability to Choose

In church history, there has been an ongoing theological discussion (and controversy) between Arminians (who emphasize man's responsibility) and Calvinists (who emphasize God's sovereignty). Many churches and church associations have divided over this controversy. Our desire in Great Commission Churches is work together as fellow workers in the gospel in a way where each pastor has freedom to believe and teach his personal biblical interpretation on this topic. In that regard, please consider the following testimony from Tom Short:

In 1978 or 1979 I was a newly appointed elder. I felt a deep personal responsibility for what we taught in our church. Somehow, I came across a short book teaching the doctrines commonly known as the Five Points of Calvinism. I really enjoyed the book. It was the first I'd ever heard about these doctrines and, to be honest, I didn't even know there was another opposing point of view.

At our next elder's meeting, I enthusiastically shared what I was learning with the other brothers. But I was quite taken aback when one of my fellow elders stated that he didn't agree with these doctrines and actually shared some verses to the contrary. I didn't agree with his verses and it's obvious he didn't agree with me. Over the next several days, I began to develop a pretty negative attitude toward this brother and couldn't figure out why he held such a view that seemed so unscriptural to me. We were becoming divided over this issue.

As "fate" would have it, I was reading the biography of George Whitefield at this time. Whitefield and John Wesley had been best of friends, but they became divided over this very issue. As I contemplated this and the division that was occurring between me and my fellow-elder, I believe God spoke to me with a very simple message: "Tom, I used both George Whitefield and John Wesley in mighty ways even though they believed differently on these doctrines. If you would like Me to use you in a mighty way as well, focus your life on what these two men had in common – not on where they differed."

That is exactly what I have attempted to do these past 30-plus years. Whitefield and Wesley were men of humility, prayer, faith, and fervent, tireless evangelism. I have sought to become this type of man. And, until God shows me otherwise, I am content to leave these controversial doctrines on the back burner. While I do hold to my own personal opinions on these doctrines, I hold them

with humility, respect for those who differ and a firm conviction that there are plenty of far more important teachings in the Word for me to stand firm upon. And, as I changed my own attitude about this subject and my brother with whom I disagreed, I have maintained a wonderful working unity with that fellow elder. In fact, over all of these years, that brother and I have continued to closely work together for the furtherance of the gospel without one single difficulty arising from this difference of perspective.

In the spirit of love and unity, these two papers (written by Dave Bovenmyer and Rick Whitney) are offered. (For more information on how to maintain love and unity amidst doctrinal discussions see *Unity: Question and Answers* by John Hopler, page 74, in Book 4 of the GCLI.)



GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY AND MAN'S ABILITY TO CHOOSE

Brief Statements Concerning Sovereignty, Free Will, Election, and Salvation

Pastor Dave Bovenmyer · Ames, IA

The Great Commission Churches movement began in the early 1970s, birthed primarily out of the movement sometimes called the “Plymouth Brethren,” which originated in the early 1800s through the labor of John Darby and his colleagues. Darby is known for his role in developing and promoting a dispensationalist view of eschatology in opposition to the covenantal views that had dominated most of Protestantism since the reformation. And although Darby and early brethren tended to be Calvinistic in their view of salvation,¹ the Great Commission church movement was more widely influenced by more recent brethren leaders such as William McDonald, who took a mediate² position in the Calvinist/Arminian debate.³ Great Commission teaching was also strongly influenced by Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, who also took a mediate position, referring to himself as a moderate Calvinist.⁴

In accord with these beginnings, pastors and leaders within the Great Commission movement have also largely taken a mediate position, not fully identifying with five point Calvinism nor with five point Arminianism. Although strongly holding to the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints and to a sometimes slightly softened view of total depravity, Great Commission pastors have held and do hold a variety of opinions in regard to unconditional election, with limited atonement and irresistible grace being the Calvinistic doctrines most frequently questioned or rejected. From the movement's beginning, God's sovereignty and human freedom and responsibility have both been emphasized, and most of today's leaders would agree with William McDonald's comment on 1 Peter 1:2: “Any difficulty in reconciling God's election and human responsibility lies in man's mind, not in God's. The Bible teaches both doctrines, and we should believe both. The truth lies in both extremes,⁵ not somewhere between them.”⁶

Great Commission Churches has not taken a position on most of these issues in its doctrinal statement, nor are there plans to take a stand in that statement or elsewhere. Many leaders continue to read and learn regarding these issues. Study of the scriptures and respectful discussion on these issues is encouraged. Individuals or churches with more Calvinistic or Arminian convictions are present and welcome within the movement. (This includes five point Calvinists and some holding to a corporate election view.) Yet, as we discuss and continue to learn, it is important to remember that the movement has historical roots that continue to be widely held. It is helpful for those not familiar with Great Commission's history or perspective to know what they will likely hear taught at pastor's conferences and at national and regional conferences and in national training materials. And it is important for leaders who are coming from either a more strongly Calvinistic or Arminian perspective to be sensitive to the thinking and theological tradition of the majority. For this purpose the following statements are offered as summaries of the type of thinking that will most likely underlie Great Commission teaching

“Truth is not found in the statement ‘It is written.’ Truth is found in the statement, ‘It is written; and again it is written.’”

- G. Campbell Morgan

and emphasis, although, undoubtedly there will be much variety and many exceptions.

1. God is absolutely sovereign and nothing can happen without God choosing to cause it or to allow it to happen.^a God is aware and in control of even the smallest detail in our lives and world.^b
2. God sometimes gives people the ability to freely choose between various options.^c Although God sovereignly controls all that happens in His universe, He sometimes does so in a way that does not determine human choices.^d God is not the initiator or cause of every choice, particularly of morally evil choices.^e
3. God exhaustively knows all things, past, present, and future.^f Yet His foreknowledge of the future does not, in itself, restrict the choices of creatures created in His image. We may not know how God can know the future free choices of people without causing them, yet the scripture is clear that He does know them and allow them, yet is not always their cause.
4. Even though there are some things that God does not initiate, He does cause all things, even the most evil acts of men and angels, to work together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.^g
5. Although God is transcendent, He is also immanent and personal.^h God is a responsive God, who has sovereignly chosen to sometimes respond to the free choices of his moral creatures. When people sin, God often disciplines and judges. When they repent, He often relents. When they pray, He often answers.ⁱ
6. God is an emotional God, although His emotions are never out of control or extreme beyond what is appropriate. God loves, rejoices, delights, feels pleasure, becomes angry, experiences jealousy, and grieves.^j Scripture passages depicting His emotion are not to be understood as entirely anthropomorphic.
7. Verses like John 3:16, 1 Timothy 2:4, and 2 Peter 3:9 indicate that God loves all people and desires the eternal salvation of each and every individual of every race, class, and circumstance. Yet the scriptures teach that not all people will be saved^k and that God sometimes hardens the hearts of some people and groups of people.^l The teachings that God loves and desires the salvation of all, that some will be lost, and that God sometimes hardens, are all true, even though it may be difficult for us to reconcile them.⁷
8. Christ's death was sufficient to save all people,^m yet God's intention and plan is that the benefits of His death only be bestowed on those who believe in Jesus, who are the elect.ⁿ
9. Christ's death was more than symbolic or a means for God to uphold His governmental justice, but Christ actually suffered as our substitute and was punished for our sins in our place.^o
10. Fallen people are radically corrupt and fallen in every aspect of their being—physically, volitionally, rationally, and emotionally.^p Fallen people continue to possess the image of God^q and can do some good,^{8r} yet the image of God in them has been horribly marred and shattered.

“Heresy is not so much rejecting as selecting. The heretic simply selects the parts of the Scripture he wants to emphasize and lets the rest go.”

-A.W. Tozer

11. Fallen people are hopelessly lost and entirely unable to save themselves from God's wrath or by their own efforts to fully regain the glory and image of God.^s Justification and acceptance by God can only be achieved through the person and work of Jesus Christ.^t Transformation can only be achieved through the work of the Holy Spirit and God's Word. Faith and repentance can only be achieved through the calling, drawing, and working of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.^u
12. People must believe in Christ to be saved from the wrath of God stored up against them because of their rebellion and refusal to love Him and their fellow men.^v Through creation, the conscience, His word, His people, and His Spirit,^w God works to bring people to Himself, but people must repent and believe. Faith is God's requirement for salvation and justification.^{9x}
13. Although people must believe in Christ to be justified, their faith is not a work that merits or earns salvation. Rather, faith is the opposite of such a work, requiring people to abandon all trust in their own good works and self righteousness and trust only in the work that Christ has done on their behalf.^y Therefore, whether faith is a freely-chosen response, as some believe, or whether it is entirely determined by the working of God, as others believe, faith is in accordance with grace^z and is not a work that earns or merits justification.
14. There is disagreement within the association concerning whether God's election is entirely unconditional; is conditioned upon something like foreknown humility, repentance or faith; or is corporate in nature, but there is universal agreement that election and salvation are unmerited, unearned, and undeserved.^{aa}
15. Three elements are involved and necessary in each person's salvation: a) the good news of Christ must be communicated, b) God must work in the heart, and c) the person must believe.^{bb} The importance of any of these elements should not be diminished. Evangelism should involve our prayer, presence, proclamation, and persuasion.^{cc}
16. A person is often drawn to God in steps or stages, often believing in Christ only after months or years of influence through the witness of creation, through the word of God, through the testimony of the church, and through the working of the Holy Spirit.
17. All who believe in Jesus Christ receive the entire person of the Holy Spirit, in what is called the baptism of the Spirit.^{dd} Christians need no "second blessing" or "second work of grace," but rather need to learn to walk in step with the Holy Spirit who is already wholly present within them.^{ee}
18. Believers in Christ will grow in sanctification and Christ-likeness until death or until the coming of Christ. Although the Spirit can work in believers to bring them to deeper, sometimes radically deeper, steps of commitment and consecration, we will not reach a state of ongoing and entire sanctification in this life.^{ff}
19. God does many irreversible things in and for a person who repents and believes. These include regeneration, adoption, justification, reconciliation, receiving the Spirit, and initial sanctification.^{gg} Therefore all who truly believe can know that they are eternally safe and secure in God's forgiveness and acceptance.^{hh}

"The great guardian principle of all conduct in the church of God is personal responsibility to the Lord."

- J. N. Darby

20. All people who genuinely believe in Christ and are truly born again will, in accordance with the promise of God and through His sustaining, preserving work, persevere in faith until the end of life in this age.ⁱⁱ No true believer can lose his or her eternal salvation.

In summary, GCC as an organization has taken this position in the Core Values Paper: *"We believe in a balance between God's grace and man's responsibility. We believe the Bible teaches both the sovereign grace of God and the solemn responsibility of man to trust, obey and serve God (Philippians 2:12-13)."* Individual pastors and leaders in the movement occupy a variety of positions along the spectrum of Calvinist to Arminian views regarding the role of God's sovereignty and man's free will in salvation. Churches and leaders with different convictions on these issues are present and welcome in the movement. And, as the Great Commission name implies, the focus of our movement has been evangelism, discipleship, and church planting. We have sought to avoid becoming embroiled in endless theological debates in order to fulfill the mandate that we, as part of His glorious church, received from our Lord Jesus that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in Christ's name to all the nations.

"No doubt all history in the last resort must be held by Christians to be a story with a divine plot."

- C.S. Lewis

Endnotes:

¹ See, <http://verticallivingministries.com/tag/was-j-n-darby-a-calvinist>

² Mediate means "occupying a middle position," in this case somewhere between five point Calvinism and five point Arminianism

³ Two other prominent Plymouth Brethren leaders also took a mediate position—see Calvinism and Arminianism — One-sided Theologies? by C. H. Mackintosh at <http://www.plymouthbrethren.com/chmm604.htm>, and Ironside on Calvinism, at <http://www.thebereanall.org/node/8145> by H. A. Ironside

⁴ See, http://www.docstoc.com/docs/6268596/Moderate_Calvinism

⁵ MacDonald, W. (1995). Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments (A. Farstad, Ed.) (1 Peter 1:2). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁶ Some pastors within the association do not agree that these verses teach that God desires the salvation of every individual in every class of people, but only that He desires the salvation of some people from all classes. Other pastors do not agree that God actively hardens people, but simply allows their hearts to stay in their own chosen hardness. Yet statement seven captures what seems to be the majority view.

⁷ Some pastors believe that faith is a freely-chosen response—people could have chosen otherwise. Others believe that faith is determined by God—their choice is "free" in the sense that they chose in accord with their desire, yet their desires and choice were entirely determined by the working of God in their hearts. Whether faith is freely chosen or determined, all agree that human faith is necessary for justification and salvation.

⁸ Some pastors believe that the retained, though shattered, image of God enables fallen people to do some good. Others believe that God grants "common grace" to "totally depraved" fallen people and that this grace enables them to do some good.

⁹ Some pastors believe that faith is a freely-chosen response—people could have chosen otherwise. Others believe that faith is determined by God—their choice is "free" in the sense that they choose in accord with their desire, yet their desires and choice are entirely determined by the working of God in their hearts. Whether faith is freely chosen or determined, all agree that human faith is necessary for justification and salvation.

Scripture References: ^aPs. 115:3, 1 Ch. 29:11, 2Ch. 20:6 ^bMt. 10:29, Lk. 12:7 ^cJos. 24:14-15, Ac. 7:51, Lk. 7:30 ^dAc. 7:30 ^eJas. 1:13 ^fIsa. 41:22-23, 46:8-10 ^gRom. 8:28, Ac. 4:27-28 ^hIsa. 57:15 ⁱresponds—Rom. 2:6-11, disciplines/judges—2Ch. 36:15-17, relents—Jer. 18:7-8, answers—Ex. 32:11-14 ^jLoves—1Jn. 4:8, rejoices—Zep. 3:17, delights—2Ch. 9:8, feels pleasure—Ps. 69:31, becomes angry—Ex. 22:23-24, becomes jealous—Dt. 4:24, and grieves—Ge. 6:6 ^kMt. 7:13-14 ^lRom. 9:18, 11:25 ^m1Jn. 2:2, 1Ti. 2:5-6, Jn. 3:16 ⁿHeb. 10:38-39, Rom. 1:16-3:31 ^o1Pe. 2:24 ^pRom. 3, Rom. 7, Jer. 13:23 ^qGen. 9:5-6, Jas. 3:9 ^rRom. 2:14-15 ^sRom. 1-3 ^tAc. 4:12, Jn. 14:6 ^uJn. 6:44-45, Jn. 16:8 ^vRom. 2:5 ^wcreation—Rom. 1:19-20, the conscience—Rom. 2:14-15, His word—1Pe. 1:23-25, His people, Mt. 5:13-14, His Spirit—Jn. 16:8-10 ^xAc. 16:31 ^yRom. 3:28, Gal. 2:16, Rom. 4:4-5, Rom. 11:6 ^zRom. 4:16 ^{aa}Eph. 4:8-9 ^{bb}good news communicated—Rom. 10:17, God works in heart—Ac. 16:14-15, person believes—Jn. 3:16, 5:24, 20:31, Eph. 2:8 ^{cc}2Co. 5:11 ^{dd}1Co. 12:13 ^{ee}Gal. 5:16-26 ^{ff}Php. 3:12, 1Jn. 3:2 ^{gg}regeneration—1Pe. 1:3, adoption—Gal. 4:5, justification—Rom. 5:1, reconciliation—Rom. 5:10, receiving the Spirit—Eph. 1:13-14, initial sanctification—1Co. 6:11 ^{hh}1Jn. 5:11-13 ⁱⁱ1Co. 1:8-9



GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY AND MAN'S ABILITY TO CHOOSE

Wesley and Whitefield

Pastor Rick Whitney · Stillwater, OK

Brothers-on-the-wall,

As you men know, John and Charles Wesley and George Whitefield were all in the same, small, Oxford University Bible study. Along with a few others.

Although the study was small, the men were not. Over time they proved to become great lions for God. God used these young men to shake the world.

The following are a few excerpts from Arnold Dallimore's biography of George Whitefield, *George Whitefield: The Life and Times of the Great Evangelist of the Eighteenth-Century Revival*.

Dallimore writes about the relationship, friendship, future difficulties and restoration of a friendship between John Wesley and George Whitefield. Specifically, how their friendship was strained because of their different biblical convictions on this important area that we are discussing in this GCLI paper.

Recently, I pulled the Dallimore book off my shelf, because I remembered there was quite a bit in this biography about how and why these two great men separated - and how they came back together again. I believe Dallimore writes with grace and kindness and respect - towards both John Wesley and George Whitefield. The tensions between the two, the cause of their separation, as well as their renewed friendship - are all clearly laid out. There are some things from these pages, that can help us and help us guard our own hearts and attitudes.

"John Wesley and George Whitefield, often with an ocean between them, each grew to believe in different aspects of the 'mystery of the ages,' that is, divine sovereignty and human responsibility. While both are true, if irreconcilable by finite reason, undue emphasis on either has always divided good men. ... While as each began to emphasize different aspects of this mystery, the beginning of their public separation was when Whitefield published a criticism of a sermon by John Wesley called 'Free Grace.'... Wesley's sermon was widely circulated in England and had severe arguments and strong words that had influenced many to accept Wesley's doctrines. It had also left others confused and had aroused others to vigorously oppose Wesley. So Whitefield wrote a response to Mr. Wesley's sermon. Many there were who clamored for some explicit statement from George Whitefield. Would he continue silent or would he declare his stand? Whitefield had returned to England from America and was known for a more Calvinistic view on this question. ... Accordingly, despite George Whitefield's utter dislike of bringing the differences between himself and Wesley before the public, Whitefield felt he had no other course to follow, and therefore he now published in England

"Man is a responsible moral agent, though he is also divinely controlled; man is divinely controlled, though he is also a responsible moral agent."

- J.I. Packer

the document he had previously published in America entitled, 'A Letter to Reverend John Wesley in answer to his sermon entitled "Free Grace..."

Whitefield was conflicted. He loved John Wesley, but he also felt he needed to write out his thoughts.

"Whitefield wrote 'Ten thousand times would I rather have died than part from my old friends.'"

Nevertheless, Whitefield did write out his doctrinal position. John read it and was offended.

"Wesley was irritated, offended. So Whitefield wrote Wesley seeking forgiveness and restitution of their relationship and friendship... Mostly it was Whitefield who reached out to Wesley. But Wesley seemed to rebuff Mr. Whitefield, again and again. ...George Whitefield continued to reach out to Wesley. And was, at times, ignored. Whitefield wrote Wesley letters and John Wesley did not respond. ...But Whitefield persisted."

And not only persisted, but George defended his old friend John Wesley. At one time, an American accused John Wesley of ill-behavior during Wesley's time in the Colonies. George Whitefield defended John Wesley's character at every turn.

Finally, Wesley responded.

Since phones and our modern ease of travel did not exist, these two great churchmen communicated with the only means available – pen and ink. It took time. Although some of Wesley and Whitefield's correspondence and letter are lost, John Wesley eventually responded to George's overtures.

John must still have been somewhat accusatory in his reply toward Whitefield.

But George seemed to take the high road and wrote the following to John:

"Whitefield wrote back to John, 'I was not in the least offended. The more open you are with me, the better. If nature and pride arise in my heart, I will go to Jesus, abhor myself and pray for my dear reprovers.'"

George Whitefield continued with these thoughts to John:

"I thank you for your kind reproof. Henceforward I will beg of God to keep the door of my lips, that I offend no more with my tongue. I would not willingly have one unprofitable word proceed out of my mouth. ...I am often with persons that commend me; I take it as a cross. I love you the more for reproving me."

So John wrote to George again. The letter is lost.

But George replies – again:

"Blessed be our Lord. There is a greater prospect of union than ever. It is what my soul longs after and labours for. It is a great pity that poor Pilgrims should fall out in their way to heaven. ..."

"God does all, and we do all. God produces all, we act all. ... God is the only proper author and fountain; we only are the proper actors. We are in different respects, wholly passive and wholly active."

- Jonathan Edwards

“As Whitefield continued to seek out peace with his old friend John, Whitefield began to receive criticism that he was softening his theological views. ... Whitefield wrote one of his critics, speaking about John and Charles Wesley; ‘I dare not look on them as willful deceivers, but as persons who hazard their lives for the sake of the Gospel. Mr. Wesley is gone in some things, yet I believe that he, as well as others, with whom I do not agree in all things, will shine bright in glory.’”

Some of the principle parties and their leading men all decided to get together for a face to face, to pray and discuss and seek understanding.

“Men from the Calvinistic Methodist Branch, the Arminian Methodist Branch and the Moravian Branch of that Great Revival suggested a conference with the hope of removing discord and if possible achieving union. Wesley agreed. ... There would be three points to the conference: 1. Unconditional election, 2. Irresistible grace, and 3. Final perseverance. ... Wesley wrote on these three topics and expressed a large measure of acceptance of these doctrines and indicated a sincere effort to find some basis of agreement... Their differences continued. And Whitefield continued to support John Wesley.

George Whitefield continued to not only support his friend John Wesley with pen and ink, but also with word and deed:

“When John was attacked by a mob and dragged from one end of the town (Staffordshire) to the other and his life threatened – Whitefield came to his rescue... When some of Wesley followers were attacked and their homes were burned and their property stolen, Whitefield raised an equivalent of \$40,000 to help those Wesleyans in that town. ... Some months later Wesley wrote about his relations with Whitefield, ‘Disputings are no more. We join hand in hand.’... There was indeed a much larger measure of fellowship. But the idea that an entire harmony was achieved is by no means correct. ... Charles Wesley, John’s brother, remained aloof and somewhat critical of Whitefield. And years passed before Charles’s attitude changed.

But once again, Charles came to regard Whitefield with deep affection and the two men shared an enriching friendship, which was severed only by death.”⁴

Remember that these men were young men together in the same college and in the same Bible study. They began their spiritual lives at the same time. Their history together was a special thing. As all early relationships are between young Christians in any church. And these men each passionately loved their Savior. And vigorously studied His Word, concerning all manner of life and faith. And reading God’s Word, they recognized that pursuing unity is of critical importance with their same Savior.

“The relationship between John and George was strained, but their love and respect for each other was never quenched.

It was John Wesley, (who was to outlive George Whitefield by twenty-one years), who upon hearing of his old friend’s death, gave Whitefield the most generous tribute as he gently chided another friend who asked, ‘Do you think we shall see Mr. Whitefield in Heaven?’ ...

“People are all standing in a room with several doors. Above one door [the door to heaven] is a sign which reads ‘All who will may enter.’ Those who choose to enter the door find on the back side of the door a sign which reads, ‘Chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world.’

- Donald Grey Barnhouse

*Wesley replied, 'No, sir, I fear not. Mr. Whitefield will be so near the Throne and we at such a distance we shall hardly get sight of him.'*⁵

There were strong differences between these two men. But there was also a measure of reconciliation and understanding and their support for each other in the Gospel, financially, and other ways. Their example, hopefully, can instruct us and help us guard our own hearts.

"Brethren, do something; do something, do something! While societies and unions make constitutions, let us win souls. I pray you, be men of action all of you. ... Our one aim is to win souls; and this we are not to talk about, but do in the power of God!"

- Charles Spurgeon

Endnotes:

¹⁻³ Taken from Volume 2, 'Chapter 2: Whitefield Meets the Supreme Trial of His Life' and 'Chapter 3: Whitefield's Reply to Wesley's Sermon'

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid



GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY AND MAN'S ABILITY TO CHOOSE

Exercise

1. What was the main lesson you learned from this reading?

2. Have you encountered any instances where there was an individual in the church who was out of balance on God's sovereignty? How did you deal with that individual?

3. Have you encountered any instances where there was an individual in the church who was out of balance on man's responsibility? How did you deal with that individual?

GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY AND MAN'S ABILITY TO CHOOSE**Exercise**

4. Was there a time when you and another brother had a tense theological difference like Wesley and Whitefield? How did you work through it?

5. Practically, how do these issues affect you in ministry, particularly in the matter of sharing the gospel with unbelievers?



LOVE AND UNITY / THE DOCTRINE OF SALVATION

Eternal Judgment

The eternal judgment of God is a key topic in the Scriptures. It is not popular today to teach on eternal judgment and hell. But what does the Bible teach on this subject? The following paper by Dave Bovenmyer addresses this question.



Eternal Judgment

Pastor Dave Bovenmyer · Ames, IA

In 2011 a group of pastors from Great Commission churches formed a doctrinal ministry team which was tasked with the job of reviewing and recommending improvements to the association's written documents, including the statement of faith and the Great Commission Leadership Foundations material. In 2012 a review of the doctrinal statement was started and slowly progressed until a modified statement was presented to the National Leadership Counsel in 2015. The only substantive doctrinal change that was recommended concerned the ultimate destiny of the wicked. The original statement of faith said:

At physical death, the believer enters immediately into eternal, conscious fellowship with the Lord and awaits the resurrection of his or her body to everlasting glory and blessing. At physical death, the unbeliever enters into eternal, conscious separation from the Lord and awaits the resurrection of his or her body to everlasting suffering, judgment, and condemnation.

The recommended statement is:

The Lord Jesus Christ will physically return in glory to reign on earth. He will raise the dead and judge the world in righteousness. The wicked will be sent to eternal punishment. The righteous will receive immortal bodies and be welcomed into eternal fellowship with God in a world where all things will be made new.

When writing a statement of faith, we want to include assertions that are certain, that are clearly taught in the scriptures. Therefore, when we considered what to communicate concerning those who die as unbelievers, it was recommended that we use the precise wording found in the scriptures (specifically, Matthew 25:46). This change also aligns our statement with the statements of the majority of other evangelical groups.

We realize that the subject of the ultimate destination of the wicked has become a subject of increasing controversy among evangelical churches. Therefore in 2015 the Doctrinal Ministry Team (DMT) decided to study the subject in greater depth, particularly whether a change in the Great Commission Leadership Institute (GCLI) article on the subject of hell was in order. As a result the DMT developed the following paper to be used in the GCLI material.

The Nature of God's Eternal Judgment

1. Our convictions regarding the nature of God's eternal judgment must be based on scripture alone since scripture is the inerrant Word of God. Throughout the ages, the church has interpreted scripture and we should not ignore these historical interpretations, but should never elevate them to the level of scripture itself. We should seek to understand the author's mean-

ing as heard by his original audience. When our understanding of the author's meaning diverges from the church's historical interpretation, we should humbly re-check our work but ultimately give precedence to our best understanding of authorial intention rather than to interpretive traditions.

2. Some who have studied the topic of hell have also deviated from a grammatical/historical approach to interpretation and have fallen into considerable error in doctrine. We reject any liberalizing of the scripture in order to fit the whims of current opinion and rededicate ourselves to form our convictions upon the scriptural author's intended meaning.
3. God's judgment against sin and sinful people is displayed in the fact that all human beings die (Genesis 2:16-17, 3:19, Romans 5:12).
4. God's wrath is displayed in the fact that He turns men over to the corruption of their sin and to sins' consequences (Romans 1:18-32).
5. Throughout history, God's wrath has been demonstrated through specific judgments upon individuals and nations. Chief among these are the world-wide flood (Genesis 6:13), the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18:20-21 & 19:25), and the judgment and exile of Israel (2 Chronicles 36:15-16).
6. The cross of Jesus powerfully demonstrates God's wrath against sin, as Jesus died on behalf of sinners. God offered His own Son as a sacrifice for sin and this great act is the sole means of salvation from the wrath of God. The fact that God poured out His wrath against sinners onto His own Son proves that God's wrath is very real indeed and must not be trivialized (Romans 3:21-25, 5:9).
7. God is patient with sinful people, but His patience will not last forever. He is storing up wrath against unrepentant sinners for a future day of wrath when His righteous judgment will be revealed (Romans 2:5).
8. Vengeance belongs to God. He will repay every evil action. Therefore humans never need to avenge themselves, but can leave retribution with God (Romans 12:19-21).
9. On a future day, all who are in the grave will hear God's voice and rise, those who have done good will be resurrected to life, and those who have done evil will be resurrected to judgment (John 5:29, Daniel 12:2, Acts 24:15, Revelation 20:12-13).
10. God's judgment on the Judgment Day will be perfectly just; the punishment will precisely fit the nature of the crimes committed (Matthew 11:21-24, Revelation 20:12). No one will be unjustly treated in any way.
11. The punishment of the wicked will include banishment from God and from His kingdom and its blessings. While watching others enter the kingdom, some will be thrown into the "outer darkness," or, as many translations say, "outside into the darkness," where there will be

"God save us from living in comfort while sinners are sinking into Hell!"

- C. H. Spurgeon

weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 8:10-13).

12. The wicked will be punished in a place that Jesus called Gehenna (customarily translated “hell”). This is likely the same place as the lake of fire described in Revelation. It is a place so terrible that Jesus says that it would be better to cut off your hand or gouge out your eye than go there (Matthew 5:29-30). It would be better to have a large millstone tied around your neck and be thrown into the sea (Mark 9:42).
13. Since Jesus depicts Hades (the realm of the dead) as a place of fire bringing anguish to a wicked man, it is clear that that the image of fire in the New Testament does not always depict destruction and annihilation (Luke 16:19-31). It is reasonable to assume that the fire of Gehenna might also be an image of punishment rather than destruction.
14. The punishment of the wicked will be eternal (Matthew 25:46). The prevailing view among pastors in Great Commission Churches has been that conscious punishing will continue forever. However, the revised Great Commission statement of faith gives room for pastors who think it is possible that only the effect of the punishment will continue forever.¹
15. The Bible repeatedly states that the wicked will perish and be destroyed (Matthew 7:13, 10:28, 13:40-42, John 3:16, Rom 2:12, Gal 6:8, Philippians 3:19). Great Commission Churches has historically interpreted these phrases to refer to the nature of the experience of the wicked while suffering forever in hell. Yet the view that these phrases apply to the destruction of the wicked in their actual existence is compatible with the revised GCC statement of faith.
16. We reject the universalism that says that people can be saved apart from faith in Jesus. We affirm that the gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes and that faith in Jesus is the way that people are justified before God. Jesus is the only name by which people can be saved from God’s wrath (Acts 4:12).
17. The prevailing view amongst Great Commission pastors is that those with little or no moral awareness, such as infants and the severely mentally disabled, will be saved from hell and welcomed into the kingdom of God (Deuteronomy 1:39, 2 Samuel 12:15-23, Matthew 19:13-15).
18. We do not know of any Biblical passages that clearly indicate that God will offer to anyone a chance for repentance and faith after death. We see that the scriptures command immediate repentance and faith, warn us of the coming of God’s wrath, and urge us not to procrastinate or put our hope in a second chance (2 Corinthians 6:1-2; Hebrews 9:27).

“Some wish to live within the sound of church and chapel bell. I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of Hell!”

- C.T. Studd

¹ Verses where the word “eternal” is used to describe the eternal effect of an action that does not itself last for eternity include Jude 7, Heb. 5:9, 6:2, 9:2 and Mark 3:29

19. We should exhibit a degree of humility when forming our convictions regarding the specific details of God's future judgment, since Jesus' first coming involved many surprises regarding the specifics of Jesus' life (1 Peter 1:10-12). Also, His life, death, and resurrection brought unanticipated changes concerning the identity of the people of God (Ephesians 3:1-6). With His second coming, God may again reveal mysteries that are presently hidden or relatively obscure in scripture.
20. We encourage Great Commission leaders to make efforts to reach agreement on the issues of eternal judgment, rather than merely acquiescing in disagreement (1 Corinthians 1:10). We encourage study of this subject in community (not independently), and we pray and urge that our conversation not involve needlessly disuniting rancor or condemnation (Titus 3:9).

***"God had an only
Son and He made
Him a missionary."***

- David Livingstone

Pastoral Considerations

1. We urge pastors to clearly and boldly preach the scripture's warnings about God's coming judgment since His wrath against sin and sinners is so clearly evident in history, in the scriptures, and in the crucifixion of Christ. Such warning should be included in gospel presentations and outreach efforts (Ezekiel 33:7). (See below for a list of the many New Testament verses about God's future judgment.)
2. Pastors should view the proclamation of God's coming judgment as an act of love. It should be accompanied by earnest pleading and alarm, never with a contemptuous attitude. Preaching about eternal judgment is best accompanied by tears rather than anger and condemnation. In humility we must realize that "There, but for the grace of God go I" (Titus 3:3-7).
3. Where a deceased person's relationship with God is unclear, or even apparently hostile, we caution against explicit pronouncement of that person's eternal destiny. In such cases, we urge the presentation of the gospel of Christ and the eternal consequences of unbelief in more general terms (Colossians 4:6).
4. We urge pastors and teachers to focus on the all-sufficient work of Jesus to forgive each and every sin for all who believe in Him so that believers do not fear God's future judgment but rest in the finished work of Christ. Those who believe *have* peace with God (Romans 5:1) and there is *no condemnation* for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1).

"I cared not where or how I lived, or what hardships I went through, so I could but gain souls to Christ."

- David Brainerd

Verses on Eternal Judgment

From the New American Standard Bible

Matthew 10:14-15: Truly, I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of **judgment** for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town.

Matthew 12:36: But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of **judgment**.

Luke 11:32: The men of Nineveh will rise up at the **judgment** with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.

John 5:24: Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into **judgment**, but has passed from death to life.

John 5: 25; 27-29: Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.... And He has given Him authority to execute **judgment**, because He is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear His voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of **judgment**.

Acts 10:42: And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as **Judge** of the living and the dead."

Acts 17:31: He has fixed a day in which He will **judge** the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.

Romans 2:3-8: Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the **judgment** of God? Or do you presume on the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous **judgment** will be revealed. He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, He will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.

Romans 14:10: Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the **judgment** seat of God.

1 Corinthians 4:5: Therefore do not pronounce **judgment** before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.

2 Timothy 4:1: I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to **judge** the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom.

Hebrews 9:27: And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes **judgment**.

Hebrews 10: 26, 31: If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of **judgment** and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.... It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Hebrews 13:4: Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will **judge**.

2 Peter 3:7: But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of **judgment** and destruction of the ungodly.

Jude 1:6: And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the **judgment** of the great day.

Revelation 20:12-15: And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were **judged** by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

"You have had pleasant feelings, pleasant songs, pleasant meetings, pleasant prospects. There has been much of human happiness, much clapping of hands, and much shouting of praises – very much of heaven on earth. Now then, go to God and tell Him you are prepared as much as necessary to turn your back upon it all, and that you are willing to spend the rest of your days struggling in the midst of perishing multitudes, whatever it may cost you."

- Gen. William Booth

ETERNAL JUDGMENT**Exercise**

1. What was the main lesson you learned from this GCLI reading on Eternal Judgment?

2. How much do you talk about eternal judgment and hell when you share the gospel with unbelievers? Or when you teach in the church? Is it a regular part of your message, or is it rare? Why do you think that is?

3. How would you answer someone who says, "How could a loving God send someone to hell?" How do you share truth and love in these kinds of sticky conversations?

ETERNAL JUDGMENT**Exercise**

4. What would you say to someone who asks, “How will God judge those in cultures who have not heard the gospel of Jesus Christ?” And what about people from distant countries many centuries ago? How did God reach them?

5. What would you say to a church member whose loved one died as an unbeliever? And how do you speak at a funeral with family and friends of someone who may not have known Christ?



GREAT COMMISSION LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

Session VIII: Everyone a Minister / The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

OVERVIEW

In Session 8 of the Great Commission Leadership Institute, we will examine the core value of Everyone a Minister, and the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

There are eight homework exercises:

1. Discussion from the Teachings

In the teaching, *Every Believer is a Minister*, Brent Knox presents the biblical basis for this core value that every person is to be a minister through lessons from Scripture and biblical examples. In *The Holy Spirit (Pneumatology)*, Herschel Martindale examines the truths related to the Holy Spirit; who He is, when we receive Him, and the role He plays in our lives.

2. Testimonies of Everyone A Minister

This reading contains the testimony of seven pastors who have practiced the value of “Everyone a Minister” in their churches.

3. Effective Teaching

In this reading, John Hopler shares practical ideas of how you, as a leader, can communicate in a clear, concise way. Words are powerful and must be used to reach a lost generation and to build up people in Christ.

4. The Doctrine of Vocation

Our vocation is a key part of our worship and walk with God. This issue of vocation was studied by the Stonebrook Community Church elders in Ames, Iowa. In this GCLI article, Matt Heerema gives a synopsis of this study.

5. The Spirit-Filled Church

John Hopler looks at the distinctions between charismatic and non-charismatic churches.

6. Signs and Wonders in the Scriptures

Doug Brown presents his perspectives on the important subject of signs and wonders.

7. *An Evaluation of the Prosperity Gospel*

Dave Bovenmyer addresses what the Scriptures say on this type of gospel.

8. *Spiritual Warfare*

We are in a spiritual battle for the hearts and souls of people. This article will equip you as a leader to be victorious in that battle.

9. *Persecution and the Great Commission Christian*

If we are serious about following Jesus Christ, we must be prepared for opposition and persecution. This article addresses this very important, but often overlooked, topic.



GCLI TEACHINGS

Every Believer is a Minister

Pastor Brent Knox · Minneapolis, MN

The Problem Stated

“I believe the spiritual reformation begun by Martin Luther’s Ninety-five Theses is a process which has continued through the present day. It has proceeded in phases. First was the realization of the direct approachability of God through our high priest, Jesus Christ. The Scriptures were placed back where they belonged, in the hands of believers, and translated to the common man [who] could read then with understanding. The decentralization of the Church was another phase, and the rediscovery of the Great Commission another.

One of the few uncharted territories remaining in this spiritual reformation is mobilizing lay leaders for ministry. Although Luther steered us away from the centralized authority of the Church elite as the definers and owners of ministry, he was unable to complete that process to include the people in the pews. The church still makes a crippling distinction between the clergy and the laity, a distinction in which the clergy say, ‘We are the experts in ministry, trained in special schools called seminaries. Leave the ministry to us’, and the laity acquiesce and say, ‘Okay. Minister to me.’ To placate them the clergy involves the laity in committees, boards, and social functions, but gives them no real license to minister.”

—Robert E. Logan in “Beyond Church Growth”, pg. 161

The Problem Solved

A core value of Great Commission Churches: Every Believer is a Minister.

A Biblical Basis for “Every Believer a Minister”

“As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in Scripture it says: ‘See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.’ Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone,’ and, ‘A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.’ They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for. But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy” (1 Peter 2:4-10).

Contrasts between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant

- | | |
|---------------------------|------------|
| 1. temple..... | temple |
| 2. Stones of | stones |
| 3. tribe of priests | of preists |

Duties of the new kingdom of priests. Hebrews 13:15-16

1. _____
2. Do (or, minister)

Lessons of Romans 12:1-8

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God— this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.” (Romans 12:1-8)

1. An important and practical way of offering yourself to God is to use your _____ faithfully.
2. God has organized the church on the model of a _____.
3. Honest and personal evaluation is _____.
4. We are commanded to _____ our lives in the direction of our spiritual gift(s). Therefore, people should _____ their spiritual gift(s).

Lessons of 1 Peter 4:10-11

“Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen” (1 Peter 4:10-11).

1. Each believer has a _____. Implied: each believer has an _____ contribution to God's work.
2. Each believer should use their gift(s)_____ .
3. Spiritual gifts were given to _____.

Lessons of Ephesians 4:11-16

"It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. 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 4:11-16).

1. A main responsibility of leaders is to " _____ " people for works of service—not to do the works of service.

"prepare" Gk. *katartismos* literally, "for the perfecting or equipping; complete furnishing"

How to "prepare" God's people for works of service:

- a. _____ the Word fully and accurately (2 Timothy 3:17).
 - b. _____ the church to allow people to easily serve in meaningful ways according to their spiritual gifts.
 - c. _____ tasks to people.
 - d. _____ and _____ people for their tasks.
2. The church builds itself if each part does its work.

Biblical Examples of Organizing God's People to Do Ministry:**Acts 6:1-7**

1. What was the problem?

2. What was the solution?

3. What were the results?

Exodus 18:13-27; Deuteronomy 1:9-18

1. What was the problem?

2. What was the solution?

3. What were the results?



GCLI TEACHING

The Holy Spirit (Pneumatology)

Pastor Herschel Martindale · Columbia, MD

A. Key Passages of Scripture

“Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, ‘If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.’ But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive, for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified” (John 7:37-39).

These words of Jesus are very important because they reveal several things about the Holy Spirit.

- The Holy Spirit would indwell each believer (his innermost being).
- The Holy Spirit would give encouragement and empowerment (rivers of living water). • His ministry would be continual (flow).
- The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament was 1. only for _____ and 2. _____. (Example: He came upon Saul for power, then later left when Saul sinned.)

“Not yet come” the same way as in the New Testament.

1. _____ 2. _____

- The Holy Spirit would come in a special way after Jesus went to Heaven (glorified). *“And I will ask the Father and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever, that is the Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and **will be in you**. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you” (John 14:16-18, emphasis mine).*

Jesus now instructs His disciples about the coming Holy Spirit. The message to the multitude (above) was rather general, but now, it is very specific:

- “another Helper.” *Another*, literally “one like me.” Jesus had been their daily Shepherd.
- “Helper,” One called alongside to help. He is our Helper in _____.
- He will **live in us forever**. He does not come and go. **He is with us all the time**.
- “*He abides with you*” in Jesus.
- “**will be in you.**” The indwelling Holy Spirit.
- An orphan is by himself and rather helpless. We will never be orphans.

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be my witnesses, both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

- The ministry of the Holy Spirit is to give _____ to help us in every aspect of life.
- A primary result of His power is that we will be _____ to His message and person.
- The purpose of His witness through us will be to reach the whole world with His message.
- The implication is that **His power will enable us in all areas of life** resulting in _____ .

B. When and How Does A Person Receive the Holy Spirit?

“In Him, you also, after (upon, when-1st Aorist Part.-point action) listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed (when you believed, upon believing-1st Aorist Part.), you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of His glory” (Ephesians 1:13-14).

When we heard the gospel and personally believed and trusted Christ as Savior, we were _____ WITH the Holy Spirit who had been promised by Jesus and the Old Testament Prophets.

This is also the moment of “ _____ ” (John 3:1-7) and Regeneration (“made alive”- Ephesians 2:5).

C. Who is this Holy Spirit?

1. His titles reveal Him to be God.

- 2 Corinthians 3:3 Spirit of the God
- Luke 4:18 The Spirit of the Lord
- Romans 8:9 The Spirit of Christ
- Acts 16:7 The Spirit of Jesus
- John 14:17 The Spirit of Truth

2. His character reveals Him to be God.

- 1 Corinthians 2:10-11 His omniscience
- Romans 8:11 His omnipotence
- Psalm 139:7-12 His omnipresence

3. He is not just an impersonal force. He is a person, the third person of the Godhead.

- Ephesians 4:30 He has emotions
- Romans 8:27 He has a mind
- 1 Corinthians 12:11 He has a will
- John 15:26 He speaks
- Romans 8:14 He leads
- John 16:13 He guides
- Ephesians 4:30 He can be grieved

D. What is the Baptism With the Holy Spirit?

There are seven passages in the New Testament that mentions the Baptism with the Holy Spirit. A careful study of these passages clearly reveals what the Baptism is:

- Matthew 3:11 John the Baptist says that Jesus **will** baptize with the Holy Spirit. It is future.
- Mark 1:7-8 The same passage repeated in Mark
- Luke 3:16 The same passage repeated in Luke
- John 1:33 The same passage repeated in John
- Acts 1:5 Jesus said, "You will be baptized **not many days from now.**" Soon!

In Acts 2, the Jews at Pentecost received the Holy Spirit; they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke in other languages. The word "baptism" does not occur here, but later Peter refers to what happened in Acts 2 as the Baptism with the Holy Spirit.

- Acts 11:13-18 Peter tells those in Jerusalem about his going to Cornelius' house (Acts 10), and the Gentiles receiving the Holy Spirit. Verse 15, "*The Holy Spirit fell upon **them**, just as He did upon us **at the beginning.***" "Them" refers to the Gentiles (Acts 10:43-45) and "*us at the beginning*" refers to the Jews at Pentecost (Acts 2).

Peter went on to say, (vs 16-17) "*And I remembered the Word of the Lord, how He used to say, 'John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' If God therefore gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?"*

Peter clearly understood that the Baptism was with the Holy Spirit. It occurred at Pentecost (Acts 2) with the Jews and in Acts 10 with the Gentiles. John said, "It will happen" and Jesus said, "It will happen soon." Then Peter said, "It did happen."

1 Corinthians 12:13, "*For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.*"

The word "baptism" means to "_____ " or "immerse." When we received Christ as savior (Ephesians 1:13-14) we were given (drank) and sealed with the Holy Spirit. This baptized (placed us into) the _____, the "church of the first born."

Important note: After this initial forming of the body of Christ, (Acts 2-Jews, and Acts 10- Gentiles) when God united both Jews and Gentiles into one body, no one was ever again told to expect, seek, pray for, or experience the "baptism with the Holy Spirit."

Some teach that the Baptism and the Filling are the same. When they were filled, some say that was also the Baptism. There was one "_____" but many "_____." The confusion comes from Acts 2 where it says they were "filled" when they received the Spirit. The same people were also filled in Acts 4 and Acts 6.

There is also confusion about Acts 19. Some say that this is an example of believers getting the Holy Spirit after they had been saved. Note that these "disciples" were disciples of John the Baptist, and didn't really understand the gospel. There were disciples of John, the Herodians, the Pharisees, and Jesus. Only Jesus' disciples were true believers.

E. The Ministry of the Holy Spirit Today

2 Corinthians 3:7-11 *"The ministry in the Old Testament came with glory, but that glory is almost nothing compared with "the glory that surpasses it," the ministry of the Holy Spirit today. The Holy Spirit is in every believer and never leaves us. He wants to give us the power to be all that God wants us to be. "Having therefore such a hope, we use great boldness in our speech" (2 Corinthians 3:11-12).*

- Acts 1:8 Empowers us so that we can be a witness to Jesus
- Ephesians 3:16-19 Empowers us to serve God in His fullness.
- 2 Corinthians 3:18 Transforms us to be like Christ.
- 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 Gives spiritual gifts to each member of Christ.
- & Romans 12:5-8
- Ephesians 4:1-4 Unites God's people to accomplish His work.
- Ephesians 5:18 Fills us for service.
- Romans 8:14 Leads and guides.
- Romans 8:26-27 Prays and intercedes for us.
- John 16:13-16 Teaches and reveals the riches of Christ and His Word to us.
- Galatians 5:22-23 Produces Christ-like qualities and character in us.
- John 16:8-11 Convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment to come.
- 2 Thessalonians 2:6-7 Restrains evil on the earth.
- Romans 8:16 Assures us of salvation.
- 1 John 4:1-4 Discerns false doctrines and spirits.
- Ephesians 3:20 Enables us to do more than we can even ask or think.

F. What is the Impact of His Indwelling?

In Joseph's dream, he was reminded of the Prophets' words, *"they shall call his name Immanuel, which translated means, 'God with us'"* (Matthew 1:23). This was great news, but it could mean simply that the Messiah would come and live on the earth "with us." Jesus, however, took this a great step further when He said, *"He will give you another Helper"* (*paraklete*: Para = beside, kletos = called). It was great news that we would have another Helper like the Lord Jesus. He didn't stop there. He went on, *"...that He may be with you forever."* Then He said, *"He will be in you"* (John 14:16-18).

This truth is perhaps one of the _____ of Christian reality. The living, loving, powerful, gracious, holy, truthful, patient, kind, merciful, good, forgiving, eternal God is **with** me, **in** me forever. Second Corinthians 6:16 says, *"As God has said, 'I will live in them and walk in them and I will be their God and they shall be my people.'" God is with me on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, each day of the week, in the dark hours of the night, during the stress times of the day, in traffic, when I'm lonely, in crowds, in pain, in fear, in anxiety, in panic, in sickness, in suffering, in temptation, in failure, in humiliation, in victory, in joy, in triumph, in need, in abundance, in conflict, in discouragement, in youth, in old age, in mid-life crisis, in the hospital, and in death.*

Why does this truth not energize and propel us more? The disciples asked the Lord Jesus in Matthew 17:19- 20, *"Why couldn't we drive it out?" He answered, "Because of your _____."* He could do no mighty works in his home town "because of their unbelief" (Matthew 13:58). If I do not freshly turn to Him daily in all the challenges, temptations, and needs of life, call upon the Helper, and trust Him completely, He will not do _____ in me as well. Lord, help my unbelief.



GCLI TEACHINGS

Exercise

1. What was the main lesson you learned from the teachings?

2. What convictions or beliefs must a pastor, and a congregation, have in order for a balanced ministry to take place (i.e. a healthy balance of work between the congregation and pastoral staff in ministry)?

3. Why is it easy for pastors to do too much ministry and delegate too little ministry to people in the congregation?



GCLI TEACHINGS

Exercise

4. What are some of the main challenges to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit that you have encountered in ministry?

5. What verses would you use to support that the baptism of the Holy Spirit occurs at salvation rather than after salvation?



GREAT COMMISSION LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

EVERYONE A MINISTER / THE DOCTRINE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Testimonies of Everyone a Minister

The core value of “Everyone A Minister” is only a value if it is lived out in reality. The following are examples of churches which have made this value “come to life” in their experience. Read on to see how your church can be living the truth of the priesthood of all believers.



TESTIMONIES OF EVERYONE A MINISTER

Mobilizing People for Strategic Service

Pastor Dave Putthoff · Lee's Summit, MO

Someone once said, "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."

Strategic service in a church means a TEAM approach, because in the body of Christ, Together Everyone Adds More. To go the distance, church leaders must foster an environment that heightens the expectation that every member will be a minister and that every ministry will have church members doing the work of service. All pastors and ministry leaders can relate to the complaint of Moses when he was feeling the burden of ministry and expressed to the Lord, "*I alone am not able to carry all this... it is too burdensome for me*" (Numbers 11:14). Every leader in ministry for any length of time comes to realize the necessity of mobilizing God's people as ministers for their own well-being, as well as for God's glory and the people's own good. People benefit from discovering and employing their gifts by finding their place in the body, resulting in a healthier church building itself up as each individual part works as it should...and God is glorified.

"The Christian who tugs on the oars hasn't time to rock the boat."

- A.A. Lewis

God has placed every believer into the body of Christ to join Him in accomplishing His purposes. It takes competent leadership to mobilize every member to joyful and fruitful involvement in building His Church and Kingdom. It takes skillful church leaders to help members identify their gifts, passion, and personality type and thereby match them to ministry needs and opportunities. The leader's role is to enable and empower God's people to be fulfilled ministers in a meaningful place of service. Leaders have the challenge and the joy of unwrapping God's gifts to His Church.

From our early days as a church plant, Lee's Summit Community Church has embraced a philosophy of ministry that includes motivating each person to utilize their spiritual gifts and talents in service to God in order to achieve our common purpose of making disciples. We have envisioned committed workers regularly entering the volunteer ranks of the church, enthused with fresh discovery of their God-given uniqueness and eager to make a kingdom impact. Having grown by God's grace to approximately 1100 in weekly worship attendance with regular ministry to about 1300 people, we now have over 50 identified ministries offering opportunities for strategic service with over 100 men and women in our leadership community.

Some critics of larger churches wrongly assume that these congregations must be a mile-wide, but only an inch deep. But what qualified pastor would be satisfied with a church huge in numbers, but shallow in character? Depth actually can become more essential to an enlarging church. Increased attendance makes the pastors as much, if not more, dependent on every member doing their part in the work, and thereby needing to grow in the spiritual maturity necessary for assuming ministry roles. And more ministry can actually be done more effectively with gifted volunteers than if all the work falls on a paid pastor or staff person. Maximum potential and impact is achieved by maximum involvement.

It is not wise to assume that quality discipleship is compromised or sacrificed to attract and hold a large quantity of people. In fact, quality can help attract and produce quantity. Granted, larger is not necessarily better. This is why deepening levels of spiritual maturity are addressed before deepening levels of ministry are assigned. God is more concerned with who we are than what we do. He is more concerned with character than ministry; a process of growth more than production. Yet, being stretched by ministry involvement actually enhances spiritual growth. Consistent growth results from consistent service.

Strategic steps *before* mobilizing for strategic service include embracing all attenders as loved and cared for, incorporating all believers as valued members of the church family, and then developing all members as devoted disciples committed to spiritual growth and maturity. Beyond this, our goal is to move the right people into the right places of service for the right reasons. Then, these rightly placed people begin to realize positive results and experience the personal satisfaction and the joy of knowing they are making a difference.

What is our strategy for equipping members for ministry? It can be summarized in these three steps:

Step 1) **Examine!** Provide spiritual gifts discovery and character, skill, and doctrinal qualification. Romans 12:3 (PHILLIPS) instructs, “*Don’t cherish exaggerated ideas of yourself...have a sane estimate of your capabilities.*” First Timothy 3:10 (LB) adds, “*Before they are asked...they should be given other jobs in the church as a test of their character and ability, and if they do well, then they may be chosen.*”

Step 2) **Employ!** Mobilize believers to be fruitful and fulfilled in a meaningful place of service based on giftedness and maturity. First Peter 4:10 exhorts, “*As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving...*”

Step 3) **Empower!** Affirm every member as a minister and appoint qualified leaders in areas of ministry based on passion or giftedness. Acts 6:6-7 (The Message) reads “Praying, the apostles laid on hands and commissioned them for their task. The Word of God prospered. The number of disciples... increased dramatically.”

What are key steps pastors can take to strengthen this core value of every-member ministry in their church? As with strengthening any core value, certainly prayer and the ministry of the Word are essential. Leaders also must model the value and help people make application. Take simple steps, yet be consistently challenging. Bringing about any change that builds the Kingdom is nothing short of a battle.

First, PRAY for a movement of the Holy Spirit. Ultimately, mobilizing members for ministry is the ongoing work of God. As theologian John R.W. Stott once noted, “The cross is the blazing fire at which the flame of our love is kindled, and we have to get near enough for its sparks to fall on us.” Pray before you seek to place people in any ministry. Ask God to work before you ask others to work. Any approach to mobilizing people for ministry must remain distinctively Spirit-led.

“Let me tell you what I believe the need of the hour is. I believe it is an army of soldiers, dedicated to Jesus Christ, who will believe not only that He is God, but that He can fulfill every promise that He has ever made, and that there isn’t anything too hard for Him.”

- Dawson Trotman

“When God raised Joseph up out of the prison, there was no time to prepare. You are what you are.”

- Unknown

The Acts 2 account describing when God planted the very first church showcases a movement of the Holy Spirit and highlights the wonderful work that God had done through His ministers. This early church had a deep sense of awe, which resulted in worship as well as service. God’s anointing on this first congregation was evident, just as it was in the earthly ministry of Jesus. Acts 10:38 reveals that God anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit and with power. Jesus ministered as a result of God being with Him. So first, pray for God’s power and presence...this supersedes any strategy, method, or model.

A prayerful, humble leader receives God’s grace, whereas a superego receives God’s opposition. The greatness of a church is merely a reflection of the greatness of God who built it. Analyzing why a church grows can be difficult, because it is ultimately a movement of the Holy Spirit in the direction of His own choosing (John 3:8). Regardless of a church’s size, God’s outpouring can be made manifest. Again, bigger is not better. Better is better! And a better church can certainly be defined as one that displays God’s power and presence.

God moves to create a ministry culture in a church whose pastors insist that the church operates based on the value of spiritual gifts and provide ministry placement based on the principle that God gives each believer a unique shape for strategic service in His body. This is a key to releasing the Holy Spirit’s power in a church. A person’s giftedness enables them to make a direct hit to impact this world and advance the Kingdom. Christians ministering based on God-given giftedness display the Holy Spirit’s power with generally less reliance on one’s own strength.

Second, TEACH the biblical basis to create understanding and a ministry culture. The body is more than a metaphor. It is a way to do church. Marching orders are found in Romans 12:6— servers serve, teachers teach, leaders lead, etc. Yet most churches do not have a gifts orientation. In fact, surveys show that every-member ministry is very far from reality. A Gallop survey revealed that only 10% of American church members are active in any kind of ministry and that 50% of all church members have no interest in serving in any ministry. A Barna survey discovered that 90% believe that ministry is the job of the pastor. A Natural Church Development survey found that 80% of Christians could not identify their gift.

Rick Warren called the church a sleeping giant adding, “Each Sunday, church pews are filled with members who are doing nothing with their faith except ‘keeping’ it.” Gifted teaching can awaken this value within the Church and create an unstoppable force. Correct understanding that we are all priests and that there is no biblical distinction between clergy and laity is key in creating an expectation that all Christians are to participate in ministry.”

We have used our weekend services to periodically teach the biblical basis for every-member ministry (Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4, and 1 Peter 4:10-11), and communicate principles like every believer is a minister and that every ministry and believer is important and interdependent. We have included such messages in a stewardship emphasis in the winter before all the activity in the spring, and as part of a sermon series in the summer before the fall ministries kickoff. In conjunction with these teachings, twice a year, we have a small group and ministry fair weekend with balloons on tables set up to promote ministries and groups. These together help foster a culture of serving and an environment of high expectations for all to be ministers.

Lee's Summit Community Church offers a four-week spiritual gifts workshop (discussed further below) and has also used a one-day seminar format. Small groups also provide a great setting. Never stop teaching and promoting the importance of every believer being active in ministry. One teaching tip is to begin with the individual's gifts not the church's needs. Don't "guilt" people into service. Guilt may meet a short-term need, but a long-term effect comes from tapping into people's God-given motivations. Avoid creating an annual recruitment war that people learn to resist. When communicating to a weekend crowd, limit the use of the term "recruit." Instead, "invite" people to participate in the vision.

Certainly, there will be times to supersede a gift-based appeal to exhort for action to meet a glaring need of the moment. Service by those that respond out of love definitely glorify God (Matthew 5:16) and express true discipleship (John 13:35). And those with the spiritual gift of service or helps will also respond to such opportunities to meet pressing needs. Teach for both Spirit-led service motivated by love and Spirit-ordained ministry according to Spirit-equipped abilities. This is a power-packed combination that can have an explosive impact.

Third, MODEL the value to provide an example. As a pastor or leader, you owe it to yourself, your spouse and family, your congregation, and especially your God who uniquely shaped you to gain as much insight as you can about your own gift mix, passions, and personality type. What Kingdom work are you so equipped to do and so passionate about that you would still accomplish it even if you lost your current position in your church? What mission or purpose would take your untimely death to keep you from fulfilling? What vision puts a fire in your heart and gives you a sense that you were born for such a time as this? Apply yourself as an example in these spheres of ministry.

Freshly consider the following passages: "As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God; whoever serves, let him do so as by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs all glory and dominion forever..." (1 Peter 4:10,11). "...kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you..." (2 Timothy 1:6). "Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you.... Take pains with these things, be absorbed in them, so that your progress may be evident to all" (1 Timothy 4:14, 15).

This discovery process can be a great staff training exercise as well. Take pains to know yourself, your fellow leaders, and staff. Each person's unique combination has benefits and liabilities. Apply yourself to adapt your behavior to the staff team and church environment that you are in. When selecting staff and key leaders, include giftedness and passion in determining job fit. Be aware that a lack of joy may be a symptom of being wrongly slotted based on giftedness or passion, or the result of some personality conflict. On the other hand, if the joyless team member is NOT out of position, they may be poorly coached or inadequately trained. These are issues requiring leadership. Certainly, a member may be failing due to a lack of effort, a character-related flaw, or a spiritual life defect. But beyond this, team members need coaching that enables them to see where they are best fitted for ministry.

"The fact remains, God can do little with those who love their lives or reputations, but there is absolutely no limit to what God can do with men or women who care not whether they live or die so long as they are allowed to fight for Christ and do the will of God."

- C.T. Studd

“A man has made at least a start on discovering the meaning of human life when he plants shade trees under which he knows full well he will never sit.”

- D. Elton Trueblood

As we expect competent ministry from every member, every member in turn deserves competent coaching. Peter Drucker, the father of modern management, once said that every soldier has one right: the right to competent command. We as leaders must have a clear picture of the church’s purposes and enable people to help the church fulfill them.

There are several implications as to why pastors or leaders may resist implementing ministry by giftedness or may not model this value.

Implication #1— Possibly the most personal and troubling implication is that we, as a pastor or leader, may be wrongly slotted based on giftedness. The self-examination discussed above may reveal that we ourselves are out of position. This may necessitate a job or position change. Don’t get me wrong, the qualifications for pastoral leadership involves character and skill, but the positioning of pastors involves giftedness and passion. Modeling this value may require some courageous self-leadership.

A growing church requires increased focus on organizational leadership, functional structure, and the teamwork of all staff to ensure an environment conducive to the realization of the church’s mission and vision. As a church becomes large, each point pastor or leader “over” a purpose of the church now needs to be an organization builder. To accomplish this effectively over time, a “speaking” or “equipping” gift that has a leadership effect becomes more necessary for the pastor in the lead position over each purpose. A lead role at this level may no longer be a fit for a pastor with a “serving” gift designed more for a “direct hit” pastoral approach. Ministering directly may be much more meaningful for them. This can eventually result in a lack of joy or motivation, a sense of being overwhelmed, stifled growth, and people quitting on them in the end.

A participant of our spiritual gifts workshop who had just started attending LSCC pulled me aside after the final class to reveal that he had served as a senior pastor and associate pastor for many years. He added that the workshop confirmed that he had the gift of encouragement and the heart of a pastor, but that he did not have the giftedness necessary for an ongoing equipping and organizing effect in his previous churches. His “thing” was direct care to his people. This caused him much frustration and lack of joy while in the lead pastor positions. Since stepping back from these roles that were “just not him,” he is now again being renewed and his life is full of joy again. He reminded me of “The Peter Principle” which proposes that “every employee tends to rise to his level of incompetence.”

We need to be faithful to how God has designed each of us. We need to be in a role where our gift, whether a “speaking” or “serving” gift, is deployed and our passion is displayed. This will result in a more fruitful and fulfilling ministry in a meaningful position of service...and this brings joy!

Implication #2—It could be that a pastor does not see the difference it can make in his own ministry. It could be that a leader does not really see that a gift-orientation could result in a noticeable difference in the church. In reality, it makes all the difference. Simply imagine the impact of a significant increase in committed workers using their gifts in your church.

Implication #3—A lot of time and effort goes into deploying people for ministry. The temptation is to do ministry ourselves when we can do it better or faster versus trying to delegate and show others how to do it. If we give in to this temptation, we miss opportunities to equip an apprentice and we lose the long-term benefits of multiplication. Multiply ministry by having as many apprentice leaders involved

as possible. Leadership development is essential for the ongoing health and resulting growth of a church.

If a church grows to twice its size, this does not equate to the pastors being twice as fatigued. Growth can provide breathing room if the people are trained not to expect the pastors to do all the work and be available beyond what is consistently possible. But God may not move us to the next level of growth till we learn to effectively give away more ministry to others. As Carl George once wrote, “Until you become dispensable you cannot become promotable.”

“Moody, the world has yet to see what God will do with a man fully consecrated to Him.”

- Henry Varley

Implication #4—Gift-oriented ministry can be difficult to apply practically especially when traditionalism has taken root. Evaluating forms of ministry based on the fulfillment of purpose and needed reorganization may result in short-term chaos.

If any church is to become or maintain a gift-oriented ministry, its leadership must understand that it is a process that must be managed consistently over time.

A traditional church is structured so that paid staff do all the work and the congregation with its consumer mentality attends church to be served, resulting in a lost world being ignored. Rather, a leading-edge church structures for growth versus control. In a larger church, the pastors can't really know everything that is going on anyway, much less exercise ongoing control over it all. In this larger church setting, the pastors certainly govern and protect, but also lead, manage, and equip the people. The congregation is then equipped and doing the work of ministry...and the community and world is being reached rather than being neglected.

Implication #5—Mobilizing people implies the need for organizing ministry. It may not be all that difficult for a veteran pastor or gifted leader to come up with vision and ideas for ministry. But extensive planning and teamwork is involved in bringing vision and ideas from inception to implementation in order to move a church or ministry to the next level. Organize by developing functional structure and clarifying needed ministries with corresponding roles. This strengthens a church's position to channel the people God provides into areas of service and connect them to leaders that are building their teams.

Determine which ministries are most critical to your church. Prioritize and clarify what programs are most essential. Odds are that those you are attracting from your cultural setting have some basic expectations and programs for which they are looking for in a church. Determine what volunteer roles are critical and do everything you can to maintain involvement in these ministries. Other ministries may need to be dropped, reduced, or put on hold until God supplies the people and resources needed. These are the hard calls of leadership. Some vision requires prayerful waiting and some ideas need to be developed. God's timing may be revealed when He provides the right person to lead out and run with it.

Additionally, don't buy into the criticism that a larger church must become a business to operate because of the demands of a larger organization. The church remains a living organism whose mission doesn't change with size. The purposes of a church are all about changing as many lives as possible—making more and better disciples. As Drucker once stated, “The function of management is

“The first ministers were the twelve disciples. There is no evidence that Jesus chose them because they were brighter or nicer than other people. Their sole qualification seems to have been their initial willingness to rise to their feet when Jesus said, ‘Follow me.’

- Frederick Buechner

to make the church more churchlike, not to make the church more businesslike.” The church is a distinctively Christian arena. Our focus is more on the person than performance...the process more than production. Good organization does not bind people or burden the church. It frees people to minister as God designed them.

Regarding the question of whether a church should organize by age groups (children, youth, adults, and seniors) or by purpose or function (worship, evangelism, fellowship, discipleship, and ministry), allow for some overlap. It is not realistic to force every ministry to fit into only one category. At LSCC, our organizational structure starts with the purposes of the church, integrates the age groups where appropriate, divides out leadership development and missions, and adds administration to support all the other departments. As a smaller church’s Sunday attendance grows, it can most simply organize with only three divisions—Sunday program, pastoral ministry, and administration which facilitates the other two departments. Administration should never exist for itself.

Organizational charts can be very helpful for establishing clear reporting relationships for staff and volunteers. This clarifies to whom a volunteer is accountable and to whom a staff person reports. Supervision works best one-on-one. But beyond the organizational value of charts, don’t apply to ministry an extreme view of the church as a pyramid with leaders on top doing all the work and having all the authority. When implementing ministry, turn your organizational chart upside down

with servant-leaders at the bottom pushing ministry responsibility and corresponding authority up to people. You could also view the church as a series of circles of ministry with leaders out front. Or view the church as concentric circles with deepening levels of commitment and with the inner circle representing ministry workers and leaders at its core as servants. Whatever your paradigm, the point is this: If the pastors trust people with ministry, then the people will trust the pastors with leadership.

Don’t allow people to elevate the pastors to clergy status. Clergy and laity distinctions are still strong within society, but such differentiation works against an every-member-a-minister culture in a local church. Limit using the term “lay ministry.” There are no laypeople, only ministers. Volunteers and paid staff alike are treated with the same respect. God’s economy includes only first-class ministers.

Fourth, develop a SYSTEM of gifts discovery and ministry placement. Create or adopt a vehicle that assists people in applying this value. Develop a repeatable process by which people identify their giftedness and connect with ministry possibilities. Here is a three step process:

Step 1: Offer a workshop or seminar that includes spiritual gift and personality assessment tests and group interaction. When possible, include the observations of others in assessing giftedness since many find it hard to discern or admit they have a particular gift. Provide exercises that help them discover their unique God-given S.H.A.P.E.

Spiritual Gift(s)—What they are equipped to do.

Heart (passion or sense of call)—Where they are motivated to serve.

Abilities (talents) —What they are naturally good at.

Personality (people or task oriented, etc.)—How they can best serve.

Experience—Educational, vocational, spiritual, ministry, and painful experiences.

Step 2: Offer a follow up consultation interview one-on-one that allows for more individualized interaction and personal assistance. Pastors, staff, or volunteers trained as guides refer and connect people with leaders building their ministry teams.

Step 3: Ministry placement is the objective, not merely gift discovery or consultation. The goal is unique contributions of service in the body of Christ. Have people begin serving in levels appropriate to their current maturity and availability. Some may need to experiment and try different areas of service and observe ministries in action. Some ministry positions may require a certain commitment of time, but generally allow people the freedom to change ministries as God's picture of their unique shape becomes clearer.

Periodically recognize new ministry workers at a weekend service or commission new ministry leaders at a monthly leadership summit. Motivate volunteers with genuine encouragement and occasionally award or spotlight servants that go the extra mile. Congregational gatherings like a church-wide banquet and separate ministry banquets are great opportunities to express appreciation for a job well-done or consistent servanthood. Rick Warren writes, "You bring out the best in people by giving them a challenge, giving them control, and giving them the credit."

Prior to this spiritual gifts workshop, we offer a newcomers class which makes membership more strategic by including a commitment to team ministry. This communicates up front to new people our expectation that all our members are to participate in ministry. No "pew potato" believers allowed. Seekers may sit and examine the claims of Christ, but once those claims are embraced— then out of their seats and into service.

In a big church, newcomers may think that plenty of people are involved and that they are not needed or that their participation would be insignificant. An every-member ministry culture dispels such wrong thinking. From our newcomer's class on, we communicate that there is no more significant way to invest one's life than in service for Christ. We make no apology for telling people that the most important thing they may do with their lives is to join a church and get involved in a ministry. As we all see ourselves as the ministers and priests that we are, our church will be an unstoppable force for Jesus Christ.

"If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together" (Unknown author). Together, you and the people you lead are God's gifts to His Church. Start unwrapping and see just how fruitful, fulfilling, and meaningful ministry can be...and see just how far it can go!

"It is a daunting task to change a church from a place that serves consumers, to a place that creates servants."

- Brad Smith



TESTIMONIES OF EVERYONE A MINISTER

Creating a Culture of Gift Based Ministry

Pastor Van Birrer · Indianapolis, IN

How does it work? Have you ever seen a biblical principle clearly and yet been frustrated on its implementation? From the beginning of Eagle Creek Community Church, we recognized the role of spiritual gifts in the Scriptures. We knew that they were a key to dynamic ministry, but we didn't know how to make it work. We tried different spiritual gift tests and personality profiles, but we didn't make much progress. We had good tools, but that was not enough. **We needed to build a culture that fostered gift discovery and development.**

Visualize the Dynamic of Spiritual Gifts

In Ephesians 4:11-16, Paul gave us an insider's look at "How do you grow a church?" In this passage, he focused on two growth mechanisms: the role of leadership and the dynamic of every member ministry. These two mechanisms are related. Leaders are to "equip" the members so that every member can minister. Since God has given each Christian at least one spiritual gift, part of the equipping process must include helping members recognize, develop, and utilize their gifts for the common good.

Imagine what would happen if every member in our churches were energized, equipped, and actively participating in the church. Our "work force" would multiply, our members would take ownership of ministry, and our churches would grow dynamically!

Steps to Create a Culture

Here are the steps we are following to build this culture at Eagle Creek Community Church.

1. Clarify your mission, vision, and core values.

Gift-based ministry should unite a church, but as in 1 Corinthians 12-14, it certainly can be divisive. As the Scriptures note in 1 Corinthians 12, there are different kinds of gifts, ministries, and effects. Without unity on vision and values, this diversity will tend to divide.

2. Organize your leadership team according to their gifts.

Does your focus of ministry require you to excel in your gifts? Frankly, as I looked at myself, I realized that most of my time was spent on work that simply had to be done. But what was the unique work that God wanted me to do? I needed to step back and make a serious evaluation. In the process, I developed a profile that we use with each member of our leadership team.

"Anything that is definitely God's will for you will grow more intense, more demanding, more attractive as you think and pray about it."

- Robert Cook

Here are the some of the questions we ask:

- a. What is your passion for ministry? What gets you excited?
- b. What natural talents do you have?
- c. What is your temperament?
- d. What are your spiritual gift(s)?

The answers to these questions became the basis for organizing our leadership team according to their gifts and passions. Our goal was to guide people into ministry that fits.

(On occasion, I will ask, “If you could do anything you want in ministry, what would you do?” I have noticed that this question works well with entrepreneurial temperaments and gift mixes, but usually frustrates people with gifts in serving and helps. They are wired to be servants and not visionaries.)

We gave our leaders the freedom to change ministries and responsibilities. Servant leadership is rightfully a strong value for all us. However, the healthy desire to serve can result in leaders taking responsibilities that meet needs in our church, but are not personally a good fit.

Since God has designed us as a whole person, I believe the Lord will direct people into ministries that fulfill their passions and fit with their temperaments, talents, and gifts.

3. Begin new ministries only when you have people with the gifts and passion to lead them.

Our Food Pantry has been an excellent example of a ministry started by gift and passion. When the idea was first presented by one of our members to our leadership team, I was skeptical. Frankly, I didn't see the need. However, since we truly are committed to passion driven, gift based ministry, we encouraged them to start the pantry. The response was far larger than I anticipated!

When the initial leader move to the opposite side of town, God raised up another member with the gifts and passion to lead the ministry. Begin and maintain ministries when you have the people with the gifts and passion to lead them.

4. Pay attention to giftedness in your leadership development.

In 2015, the Lord reminded me of the value of giftedness in developing our next leaders. For several years, one of my responsibilities had been to oversee our Vacation Bible School program. When I learned that my cancer had reoccurred, we began evaluating what responsibilities we could give to others. As I thought about our VBS program, I realized that one of the key men I was mentoring was an ideal fit to lead the program. Not only did Bill take my place, but he did a much better job than I could have done. Given the opportunity to use his passion and gifts, he flourished.

Make a Long-term Commitment

Culture building takes time and constant attention. At Eagle Creek, it took us almost two years to establish gift-based ministry in our church. Each year we offer our *Personal Vision* workshop and

“Next to faith this is the highest art -- to be content with the calling in which God has placed you.”

- Martin Luther

“Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination are omnipotent.”

- Calvin Coolidge

teach on spiritual gifts. While we have made substantial progress, we are working to improve our follow-through.

God has blessed our effort as we have built this culture. Much more ministry is taking place and more people are willing to risk a “ministry failure.” One healthy by-product has been a decrease in contention as members appreciate differences and focus on how they can contribute. As God has promised, “the whole body...builds itself in love, as each part does its work” (Ephesians 4:16, NIV).



TESTIMONIES OF EVERYONE A MINISTER

Evergreen Small Group Training

Pastor Mark Bowen · Minneapolis, MN

At Evergreen, we have found that there is no better training for future small group leaders than participation as a member in a thriving small group. While we believe in the value of structured training and require it for new leaders, first-hand experience of a loving relationship with God and others in community is just the ticket for giving new leaders a clear picture of what success looks like. What would you rather do: read a manual about love or be loved? Which one would you expect to leave a more long-lasting impression: listening to a talk about fellowship and prayer, or connecting authentically with God and others over a period of months and years? Nothing surpasses the value of having success modeled in living color.

When relationship-based small groups were introduced at Evergreen, we had some work to do in changing the culture. Many of our existing and aspiring small group leaders had to cut their teeth on a Bible study model for small groups. After attending a Serendipity training seminar, I spent the next two years learning by doing. The first year was devoted to adapting to the new approach and working out the bugs. Looking back, I now know that I unintentionally, but consistently, sabotaged the success of that group because of my own inexperience and entrenched paradigm from past small group experience. By the end of the second year, the two groups my wife and I were leading began to thrive and four new groups were birthed. Shortly thereafter, we were tasked with exporting what we were learning to other interested leaders.

At that point, I could have lectured aspiring leaders until I was blue in the face that small group leaders need not be qualified to teach, but must be qualified to model, love, serve, and carry out the “one another” commands, but mindful that a picture is worth a thousand words, we decided to show them instead. We broke prospective leaders (and interested experienced leaders) down into groups of 12-16. We met for two hours, every week, for six weeks over the summer (our off-season). In essence, we became a small group together. First, we practiced what we were trying to accomplish in a small group by doing an icebreaker, splitting into groups of four for a Bible discussion, and ending with an application question and prayer. The second hour was spent discussing objectives, the new methodology, and answering questions.

As the relationship model for small groups gradually became entrenched at Evergreen (more thriving groups, led by a variety of leaders, growing and birthing new groups), the practice of giving new leaders “a taste” of this style of small group became unnecessary. We then shifted to a Small Group Leader Orientation Class with more time for instruction. This class is now offered at least once a year. A manual is provided to each new leader and apprentice that includes basic vision, methods, sample handouts, and tips for responding to the challenges a leader faces over time. We continue to compile “best practices” and make ongoing revisions to the manual.

“I often think that God must have been looking for someone weak enough and small enough for Him to use, and He found me.”

- John Wesley

***“Lower the bar
how church is
to be done, and
raise the bar of
what it means to
be a disciple.”***

- Neil Cole

Continuing education is provided in the form of a September through May monthly Leadership Community Meeting (where vision and skills refreshers are provided), and through personal coaching. Leaders are typically coached by the leader of the group from which they birthed. When a leader gets to the point of coaching three groups, they usually “retire” from leading their own small group to become a full time coach. An overseeing pastor coaches each coach.

When we get to the end of the road and the Lord allows us to look behind the curtain, perhaps extended times of prayer will have been the most high leverage small group practice of all. Periodic prayer overnights have played a key role in mobilizing and equipping small group leaders at Evergreen. Again and again I have heard from small group leaders who trace the beginning of their leadership journey to having been invited to a prayer overnight by their group leader or apprentice. To spread the practice of extended prayer throughout the church, we’ve begun to incorporate periodic “24” hours of prayer, where the whole church is mobilized to pray for one day, with each small group signing up to pray together for a one hour window during the 24 hour period. When people devote themselves to seeking God together, everyone and everything changes.



TESTIMONIES OF EVERYONE A MINISTER

Multiplying Pastors

Pastor John Hopley · Columbus, OH

In 1973, a team of a dozen people planted a church in Columbus, Ohio. Apart from the great number of lives that have been affected for Christ through this church and its daughter churches, one of the most remarkable testimonies has been the number of pastors multiplied throughout the years. As of December 2000, over 50 pastors have been raised up through the Columbus church and its daughter churches.

*“You are immortal until
your work is finished.”*

- Jim Elliot

Several years ago, I was asked by Pastor Tim Honeycutt in Lee’s Summit, Missouri, this question: “John, what practical lessons can we learn from the Columbus church on how to multiply pastors?” The first thing that came to my mind was this: God’s grace was powerfully working through the united and gifted ministry of three pastors in the church (Mike Keator, Dennis Clark, and Terry Bartley) resulting in the multiplication of pastors throughout the United States.

The leadership development that God brought about in Columbus is not attributed to one man. God did it through a team of men—a plurality of pastors—whose unique gifts, ministries, and effects were fully operating, leading to some astounding results.

The Columbus Pastoral Team

Let’s take a look at each of these three pastors and see how they contributed to the leadership development process.

Mike Keator is gifted in personal evangelism and excels in his zeal for the Lord. Mike set a standard in Columbus of being sacrificial and “sold out” for Christ.

Dennis Clark is known for his humble and tender spirit, both before the Lord and before men. Dennis set a standard of releasing men to do ministry, cheering them on to do greater works than himself.

Terry Bartley has excelled in developing simple strategies that worked. Terry’s practical wisdom in crafting a small group system that effectively multiplied leaders brought accelerated growth to the pastoral development process.

Mike’s zeal, Dennis’ humility, and Terry’s wisdom—these were dynamic gifts that worked in synergy during the 1970s in Columbus.

The Lesson to Learn from the Columbus Example

The main lesson to learn from Columbus is this: a key way for a church to multiply leaders is by receiving grace from God through a multiplicity of leaders. Yes, one-on-one discipleship is very important. (Let me hasten to mention that each of the three pastors did have a handful of men that each one was focusing on one-on-one.) However, one-on-one discipleship is only part of the picture.

In Ephesians 4:11-16, we read:

“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.”

***“It is better to fail
in a cause that
will ultimately
succeed than
to succeed in a
cause that will
ultimately fail.”***

***- Doug Coe’s words to
Chuck Colson***

This passage highlights two points. First, it takes a multiplicity of gifted leaders (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers) to build up the body. Second, God uses the entire body to build up the body. From this, we can glean that God desires to use the entire body of pastors (as well as the church body as a whole) to train leaders within the church. The Columbus church was the beneficiary of three pastors with different gifts, working in harmony together leading to the multiplication of pastors. In church teachings, in leadership retreats, in mission trips, and in one-on-one conversations, potential leaders were exposed to all the pastors, their personal lives, and their ministries. And there has been some marvelous fruit resulting from this synergistic working by those three pastors.

An Attitude and Two Action Steps

How does this apply to your situation as a leader in God’s Church? Let me suggest one attitude and two action steps.

The attitude is that of humility. You need others to build potential leaders in your church. God has given you gifts. Use them! But God has also given other leaders gifts. Make sure that you use those gifts as well in the developing of leaders in your church.

The two action steps I would propose are prayer and planning. First, make it a priority to pray for the leaders on your team to be effective in building leaders. If you are alone as a leader, pray that God would give you teammates whose gifts complement yours. Second, make plans to have potential leaders in your church exposed to many leaders. This is one reason why I emphasize the GCC regional and national meetings. These times provide a forum for potential pastors in our churches to be affected by leaders whose gifts and effects are different than the pastors in the local church.

Ultimately, the goal is that each church would have a strong team of pastors with diverse and unique gifts and effects who will work as “one man” in developing leaders in the church. This local church team combined with the teaming with other ministries and churches nationally and internationally is extremely powerful! May God grant grace to your church and to your church’s pastors to multiply leaders throughout the world as they unite together with other leaders devoted to Jesus Christ and the fulfilling of the Great Commission.



Missions

Pastor Terry Lewis · Lewis Center, OH

“That Would Be It”

As a 10 year old, I remember saying to my dad, “If I only had that Huffy bicycle with the banana seat and the 5 foot u-bar on the back, *that would be it.*” I got that bike for Christmas, but “it” faded. In high school I thought, “If only the blond saxophone player in band would go out with me, *that would be it.*” She did, but “it” faded. When I got to college I thought, “If only I could make the OSU Marching Band, *that would be it.*” I marched four years in the band and went to four bowl games, but the “it” faded. Even as a Christian, it has crossed my mind that if only I had a better job, a bigger house, a car that didn’t break down, or a church that was bigger, then that would be “it.” I have come to realize that the only “it” that lasts is doing God’s bidding, the way God has shaped me, and doing it with people that I love.

There are people all around you looking for that “it” that will last. What is stopping them from discovering it? It could be that nobody has come up next to them and helped them discover the truth and joy of every member being a minister according to the special shape God created them with.

*“I want Thy plan,
O God, for my life.
May I be happy and
contented whether
in the homeland or
on the foreign field;
whether married or
alone, in happiness
or sorrow, health or
sickness, prosperity
or adversity—I want
Thy plan, O God,
for my life. I want
it; oh, I want it!”*

- Oswald J. Smith

Theology Meets Reality

For as long as I’ve been involved with Great Commission churches, we have embraced the principle of the priesthood of all believers or “every member a minister.” I cannot remember the first time I heard this message taught, but I clearly remember when I first experienced it. I had decided to participate in a spring break outreach to the campus of Florida State. On the way there, in the middle of the night, one of the busses we were on broke down. I was asked to stay and lead half the team until we reunited in Florida. “Who am I to do this,” I asked. “I’m not an elder or even a deacon.” It was that night that my theology and my reality came together. A friend turned me to Ephesians 4:11-13 where he explained that God gave us those elders and deacons not so they would be the only ones to do all the work, but to be an example and train us to be a part of building God’s Kingdom as well. It was an “ah-ha” moment. I gave it my best shot, I gathered for prayer with those of us that were ‘left behind’ and watched as God did some miracles. Sure enough the next afternoon we arrived in Florida and I was a different man.

Since then I have enjoyed discovering how God has shaped me to be involved in the Kingdom building business and how I, as a leader of God’s people, can help others discover and live out the wonder of how God has shaped them. If you are a leader in your church, Ephesians 4:12 is for you. In whatever task you are doing for the Kingdom, are you also equipping others for the work of service? There are people in your church who are shaped in ways that would bring them to life and surely add a dimen-

“Nothing will ever be attempted if all possible objections must first be overcome.”

- Samuel Johnson

sion to your church’s ministry if you helped them discover how God shaped them to be involved in His Kingdom business.

Church Planting and Every Member a Minister

When God laid it on our hearts to be involved in planting a new church in Lewis Center, Ohio, my wife, Kelly, and I immediately began to think about who were the gifted people that would fill all the necessary roles for such an endeavor. We needed musicians, ministry leaders, others excited about hospitality and small groups and many other areas. After a few months, what I considered the “dream team” was recruited, on board, and dreaming about the future. What happened next was one of the best blessings I’ve ever experienced. Person after person would approach me and share how they believed God was leading them to be a part of the church plant.

Together we would pray how God has shaped them to be a part of the team, and what God did made my spiritual temperature jump through the roof. I saw folks that had been involved in our mother church for years and I never knew they had experience in playing a guitar, or the passion for outside-the box children’s ministry, or the heart for organizing a weekly men’s breakfast. Were they complacent in the other church? No, I don’t believe they were. They just lacked the opportunity. Is church planting about reaching out to the lost in another community? Absolutely. But I have to say that, as a leader, I get as much of a kick out of seeing an excited member ministering in the way God has shaped them, and knowing that I helped them get there, as I do seeing an unchurched couple walk through our doors for the first time and taking a step closer to salvation. I love watching them experiencing “it.”

Conclusion

In conclusion, if you are wondering why folks in your church are not ministering as much as you would like, consider this: Is it time in your church to start a new mission venture? Starting a new church, going on a mission project, or starting up a new worship service will cause ones to see how their ministry is needed in order to build the church and to fulfill the great commission. As I have found, the more we as a church are going out on the limb, the more the members of the church will minister, resulting in greater fruit for Christ.



TESTIMONIES OF EVERYONE A MINISTER

Exercise

1. What was the main lesson you learned from these readings?

2. What are reasons why non-staff are reluctant to take on important church ministry? What can you do to help?

3. What is your spiritual gift? How are you personally using it in ministry?

TESTIMONIES OF EVERYONE A MINISTER**Exercise**

4. How is your church doing at mobilizing members according to their spiritual gifts? How can the church improve?

5. In Terry Lewis' article, he points out the value of mobilizing people for ministry by the leaders launching a new mission project. What are some mission projects that God may be leading your church to initiate in the near future?



EVERYONE A MINISTER / THE DOCTRINE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Effective Teaching

In our movement of churches, when we say that every member is a minister, we mean that every member is a minister of the Word. We are all to share the Word in whatever context God has us. This may be in the family, in the church, or in a secular setting. God may have you teaching one-on-one, in a small group, or before a large crowd of people. Regardless, we are all to be teachers of the Word. In this article, you will learn some practical helps that will enable you to fulfill the God-given responsibility to be a minister of the Word.



Effective Teaching

Pastor John Hopley · Columbus, OH

“For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the Lord, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel” (Ezra 7:10, NIV).

God desires teachers of the Word. To fulfill the Great Commission, we need more and more teachers who are faithfully studying, obeying, and teaching the Word of God. It is true that some are especially gifted in teaching the Scriptures. But equally true is the exhortation given by Peter to all the believers:

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

Also, consider the words of Paul to the church in Colossae:

“Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (Colossians 3:16).

In addition, we understand that New Testament leaders are simply those who have been faithful to obey the Word and then teach the Word:

“The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:2).

The purpose of this article is to give you some practical helps as you develop as a teacher of the Word of God.

I. What are the characteristics of an effective teacher of God’s Word?

A. An effective teacher keeps Christ as the primary focus.

“When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:1-2, NIV).

“I do not expect to live long . . . therefore I speak very plainly.” - Robert Murray McCheyne

“It’s a sin to bore people with the word of God.”

- Howard Hendricks

I have a challenge for you. Go through Paul's epistles and count the number of times he refers to "Christ" or "Jesus." If each epistle were a sermon, you would find that Paul would have referred to Christ dozens of times in that sermon. In comparison, how many times does the name "Jesus" or the word "Christ" pass your lips? If you were giving a 25 minute sermon, would the audience be continually focused on Jesus Christ? Remember: The Holy Spirit will work when Christ is exalted. So, talk about Jesus—a lot!

"Each time the preacher states a deep, broad, general truth, the mind of the audience asks, 'For instance?' That's when you need an illustration."

- Haddon Robinson

B. An effective teacher has the goal that the listeners will grow in love, not just knowledge.

Consider the words of Paul:

"The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith" (1 Timothy 1:5, NIV).

"Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up" (1 Corinthians 8:1, NIV).

Paul was not merely interested in imparting information. His goal was that the listeners would be growing in love. Jim McCotter once said this: "Fellow-pastor, if the people in your church are not more in love with God and with one another after you have taught, then either you have not taught correctly, or the people in your church have not listened correctly." Well said!

C. An effective teacher has the goal of the church growing in Christ-likeness.

"We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ." Colossians 1:28 (NIV)

Paul had the expectation that he would make a "present" to God—a church that was complete in Christ. When we teach the word to people, we are like friends going to a birthday party and preparing a gift for the honored person at the party. Someday God will receive this gift from us. Let's make every effort to teach so that the hearers will become like Christ, a glorious present to our loving Father.

D. An effective teacher has passion for God, His Word and His mission.

People will "sit up and listen" to the one who is passionate. Passion indicates that the message is "worth listening to." Consider the following quotes:

"But if I say, 'I will not mention Him or speak any more in His name,' His word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot" (Jeremiah 20:9, NIV).

"A message from the head will reach the head. A message from the heart will reach the heart."
-Leonard Ravenhill

"I love those that thunder out the Word. The Christian world is in a deep sleep. Nothing but a loud voice can awaken them out of it." -George Whitefield

"I preached as never sure to preach again, and as a dying man to dying men." -Richard Baxter

“Our sermons are delivered hot, in 30 minutes or less, or your money back.”

- Domino’s sermon promise

E. An effective teacher is bold.

“So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord...” (Acts 14:3, NIV).

What makes a message powerful is the courage demonstrated by the speaker of that message. A.W. Tozer said, “We must preach as to jeopardize our future, our ministry, even our life itself. We must make God responsible for the consequences and speak as one who will not have long to speak before being called to judgment. Then the people will know they are hearing a voice and not a mere echo.”

F. An effective teacher is hard working.

“Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you. Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress” (1 Timothy 4:13-15, NIV).

Teaching is not a mere academic exercise. It is hard work! Jerry Falwell said it well:

“You can mark it down. If there is a message going out that is powerful, someone has paid a price somewhere in sweat, tears and heartbreak.”

G. An effective teacher is obedient to God’s commands.

In 1976 I went to a conference where the speaker shared Psalm 111:10 (NIV): “*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow His precepts have good understanding...*”

Up until that time in my life, I had equated “understanding” with “studying.” That day, my paradigm changed. According to this verse, understanding comes through following God’s precepts. For that reason, an effective teacher has first learned to obey God—then teach His word. Robert Murray Mc-Cheyne said, “Above all cultivate your own spirit. A word spoken by you when your conscience is clear and your heart full of God’s Spirit, is worth 10,000 words spoken in unbelief and sin.”

“God is not looking for brilliant men, is not depending upon eloquent men.... talented men in sending His Gospel out in the world. God is looking for broken men, for men who have judged themselves in the light of the Cross of Christ. When He wants anything done, He takes up men who have come to an end of themselves, and whose trust and confidence is not in themselves but in God.”

- H. A. Ironside

H. An effective teacher has a Great Commission mindset.

*“Therefore go and make disciples [salvation] 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”
(Matthew 28:19-20, NIV).*

“You must get enthusiasm for life, or life is not going to have a lot of enthusiasm for you.”

- J. Harold Smith

The goal in all teaching is to lead others to salvation and then to teach them to become obedient to Christ’s commands. Simple, isn’t it?

Jonathan Edwards, the great 18-century American preacher said, “I go out to preach with two propositions in mind. First - every person ought to give his life to Christ. Second - whether or not anyone else gives Him his life, I will give Him mine.”

I recall going to a conference years ago. The teacher (who was very effective) at one point got off the stage and grabbed the person in the first row and said, “Brother, serve the Lord!” Then he went to the woman next to him and said to her, “Sister, serve the Lord!” He went down the aisle and exhorted each person in like manner. I realized that this man wasn’t just giving a speech—he was looking for people to obey the Great Commission. He was looking for results!

Don’t settle for making a “nice speech.” Aim for people fulfilling the Great Commission.

I. An effective teacher is loving.

*“...Speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Him who is the Head, that is, Christ”
(Ephesians 4:15, NIV).*

I am aware of one church where the people said that they left church Sunday after Sunday with the feeling of being “beaten up.” The goal of teaching is not to abuse the listeners! The goal is to give “*grace to those who hear*” (Ephesians 4:29). What is the need of the listeners? Do they need comfort? Do they need encouragement? Information? Practical tips? A challenge? Whatever the need is, meet it as effectively as possible.

J. An effective teacher is humble and authentic.

The most effective communicators are not necessarily those who are the most polished. Rather, the best communicators are usually those who are the most personal and intimate. This is particularly true because of television where there is an illusion of intimacy that the viewer has with the person on the screen. Now more than ever people expect the speaker—any speaker—to be open and vulnerable. Paul realized this 2000 years ago when he said, “*Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me*”(2 Corinthians 12:9). Sharing your life, your experiences, and your weaknesses makes for good communication.

K. An effective teacher is committed to a correct understanding of the Bible.

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, as a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).

In order to be an effective teacher of the Word, one must first be an effective student of the Word. For this reason, before you share—particularly publicly—it is vital that you have devoted time to accurately understanding the passage of Scripture you are teaching.

II. What are some practical tips to keep in mind when teaching publicly?

Here are some simple tips:

1. Prepare your message well in advance (I am usually thinking about a message a month before I deliver the message).
2. Never go too long. Stay well within the time limit allotted. No one has ever objected to a speaker who keeps it short and to the point. Like someone said, “If you haven’t struck oil in 25 minutes, stop ‘boring!’”
3. Make sure the room is situated for “easy listening.” Is it too hot? Is it too cold? Are there noises or visual distractions that need to be eliminated?
4. When speaking, look at the audience, front and back, to the left and to the right.
5. Before you speak, spend time “mixing” with the audience. It will help you relax if you “feel part of the group.”
6. Avoid the “ums”!
7. Eliminate fidgeting or other distracting habits.
8. Use creativity to capture people’s attention (see the addendum for some creative devices you can use to capture people’s attention).
9. Make one key point per message.
10. Enjoy yourself. The audience will always connect to a joyful person.
11. Share your experiences. People like stories—particularly your personal stories.
12. Wherever possible, get the audience to interact with you. 13. Practice, practice, practice your teaching.
14. Ask others to critique your teaching.
15. Listen to yourself on tape and critique yourself.
16. Know how you are going to end, with a closing story or a closing point. Otherwise, you may drag on and on beyond your time limit.
17. Consider scripting your message, word for word. It is a discipline that will help you in the long run.
18. Consider the needs of the audience. Be flexible in what you share and how you share it.

“Biblical preaching is the proper exegesis of the text delivered in the power of the Holy Spirit to the needs of the audience through the personality of the preacher.”

- Tony Evans

19. Start well. A good story or a good illustration will grab people's attention.
20. Last—but most important—pray! God will bless as you call on Him!

III. What are some tools you have used in public speaking?

A. Ken Davis Dynamic Communicators Workshop

Ken shared at the 2001 Great Commission Pastors Conference principles on public communication. He has a transferable system that trains speakers in preparing and delivering a message. Ken offers his material via video tapes as well as through training conferences. I would heartily recommend this system.

B. P.R.E.A.C.H.

Years ago, I developed my own personal system for message preparation. For each message, I ask myself six questions:

- P Am I *proclaiming* Christ and are the Scriptures exalted in my message?
- R Do I have a clear *result* that I want to accomplish—a clear action step for those listening to my message?
- E Am I sharing my personal *experiences* and testimonies in this message?
- A Have I *adapted* my message to this particular group of listeners? Am I really meeting their need and relating to their culture?
- C Will my message really *capture* their attention, using stories, props, videos, visual outlines, etc.?
- H Is my *heart* in this message, where I can deliver it passionately and with enjoyment?

C. Your own personal system

This is the best one! I would urge you to develop your own personal template for message preparation and delivery. You know what motivates you, and what you need to remember to be effective in public communication. Develop a system like Ken Davis' or P.R.E.A.C.H. and use it! As you work at being an effective teacher of the Word, God will empower you to be a tool in His hands to fulfill the great commission.

"There are some things God will bless as a supplement that He will curse as a substitute."

- Puritan saying



EFFECTIVE TEACHING

Addendum: Creative Communication Ideas

Dave Murray · Lee's Summit, MO

Programming Elements

Drama Interviews/Testimonials Children's sermon
 Special music
 Worship music tied to theme (include updated hymns)
 Secular "cover songs"

Video / Multimedia

Digital photos
 Movie clips
 Projected announcements, prayer requests
 David Letterman-style "roving camera"
 Dramatic ("story") videos
 Video testimony
 "Thanks clips" / congregation response
 Man on the Street

Environment

Set pieces
 Props
 Decorations
 Banners
 Plants
 Lighting: colors, shadow, patterns
 Slides / Video images on walls
 Things on seats
 Smells
 Sound effects (e.g. nature)

Ideas for the Message

"Props"
 Clothing variations/costumes
 Speaking from different locations
 "Thought Bubbles" (audio or visual)
 Sound effects
 Lighting effects
 Other special effects (e.g. stage "tricks")
 Physical position of speaker (e.g. stool)
 Handout "props"
 Team teaching
 Dramatizations—"acting out" roles

Congregational Interaction

Testimony/"Open Mic" time
 Communion—different approaches
 "Altar offerings" (e.g. nailing "sins" to cross)
 Small group discussion, sharing, prayer
 Personal reflection/commitment
 Scripture reading/responsive reading
 "Plants" in audience
 Question/Answer time
 Other updated traditions



EFFECTIVE TEACHING

Exercise

Prepare a five-minute message for the GCLI mentor group related to one of the core values covered in the GCLI material. Afterwards, have them tell you the following:

1. In one simple sentence, what was the main point of your message?

2. What were the main supporting reasons/rationale for your main point?

3. In general, what was the strength of the message?

EFFECTIVE TEACHING**Exercise**

4. What is one way in which the message (or the delivery of the message) could have been improved?



GREAT COMMISSION LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

EVERYONE A MINISTER / THE DOCTRINE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Doctrine of Vocation: Worshiping God and Living out the Great Commission

As a movement of churches we have a high commitment to God and His word—to teach, as Paul said, the “whole purpose of God” (Acts 20:27). An important part of God’s purpose for each Christian is that person’s vocation.

At the 2013 Pastors Conference I noted that the Greek word for “ambition” is used in a positive way three times by the Apostle Paul. First, he said that his ambition was to be pleasing to Christ (2 Corinthians 5:9). Second, his ambition was to preach the gospel of Christ where He was not already named (Romans 15:20). Third, Paul exhorted the newly saved Thessalonians with these words: “Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you; so that you may behave properly towards outsiders and not be in any need” (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12).

In keeping with Paul’s exhortation in 1 Thessalonians 4, the following GCLI article was written to equip pastors and churches in the matter of vocation. This article was written by Matt Heerema, pastor at Stonebrook Community Church, the GCC church in Ames, Iowa. Matt and two of his co-pastors, Dave Bovenmyer and Brad Barrett, taught a Sunday morning series on vocation in 2013. This article is based on that series.

In addition, I have included in this paper a section which addresses commonly asked questions related to vocation.

It is our prayer that God will use this paper to help pastors and churches in GCC to equip members to glorify and worship God and to fulfill the Great Commission of Jesus Christ through their vocations.



EVERYONE A MINISTER / THE DOCTRINE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Doctrine of Vocation: Worshiping God & Living out the Great Commission

Matt Heerema · Ames, IA

Most of us have a hard time understanding how Sunday morning worship connects to our daily work at a desk, on the construction site, in a classroom, in the field, or in the home.

Could it be that our work at writing code, processing insurance claims, changing diapers, building houses, growing crops, or studying math or biology matter to God? Or are we simply “out of the game” of kingdom building until the bell rings or the whistle blows when we can get to the “real work”?

Is there value in my work for God’s kingdom beyond the souls I can evangelize, or the money I can earn to donate to the “real work”?

If we don’t get this right then we will sense, as I’m guessing many of us do, a disconnect between our spiritual life and our work life, and we will fall into one of several traps:

- If we consider our daily work as eternally meaningless, then we might put zero thought and effort into a potential career in the marketplace that could very well be one or five or ten of the talents that our Heavenly Master is entrusting into our care!
- Some of us might buy into the world’s system of doing work, according to the world’s philosophies of how to conduct business and treat each other, and if you are a believer this will likely cause you a great amount of guilt or confusion and distance from God.
- Perhaps you will simply resign yourself to the drudgery of a “meaningless” work life, gritting your teeth against the inherent worldliness and worthlessness of it all.
- We may even go so far as to feel guilt or shame when we show up to a gathering of the church because we are a “mere engineer” and never did “go on staff” or “into the ministry” or are not pursuing becoming an elder because the other demands on our life are too great at the moment. (I happen to suspect this may be one of the main reasons many men are checking out of participation in church.)

In every case we will miss the joy, pleasure, and power we can experience when we realize our daily “mundane” and “secular” tasks can glorify God and expand His kingdom in real ways.

My heart, in writing this, is:

- To spark reflection and conversation on our current attitudes toward and understanding of work and calling.
- To call us to a fully Biblical, balanced view on work in ministry, the home, our communities, and the marketplace.

Cause every task of your day to be a sacred ministry to the Lord, however mundane your duties; for you they are a sacrament.

- Richard J. Foster

- To encourage us by the fact that our daily tasks, *all of them*, matter to God and *will count for something eternal*.
- To challenge us to encourage our fellow believers, who may not be involved in ministry full time, with this.
- And most of all, my heart is that we'll become equipped to live every moment of our lives with a constant awareness of His presence, His help, His concern, and His pleasure with and for our work. Let us do all that we do for His glory and encourage others to do the same!

MY STORY

I am a pastor at Stonebrook Church in Ames, and I also own a web strategy and graphic design business. Apart from my “pastoral duties,” I also volunteer time in service of the church and the community like most church members. I play in the band. I help lead a small group. I help run a local community and arts center. I attend various business-related gatherings. I go to conferences to further my understanding of theology and of my trade of web design. Underneath all that, I am married and have three beautiful daughters, so I guess you could say my life is very, very full. And I love every minute of it. Stress and strain, sweat and tears, and all.

What drives me is this. At my conversion, I realized that if God is God and Jesus is His Son then my whole life, every moment of it, is His by right. He is my Lord—my Master. I must do what He says and follow Him at every cost. All of my goals, dreams, and hopes shifted away from myself, my desires, and my ideas.

I interpreted this as a call into full-time ministry—to pursue becoming a missionary or a pastor. This was the only framework I had for fully-devoted Christian service at the time. So, flash-forward to the end of my college career, which I largely wasted because, “Well, I’m going to go into ministry anyway.” My aim was to become a supported, campus missionary through Great Commission Ministries, because I thought that was the most spiritual, significant way *anyone* could serve God.

I would say things like, “I want to be freed up to serve God full-time.” I didn’t want to have to have a normal job, which I thought would mean I would have to sit on the sidelines of God’s service eight hours a day, with a few exceptions of when I might be able to evangelize a coworker or have a Bible study with office-mates.

Later, I came to find out how wrong my line of thinking was.

In order for us to rightly understand this concept, it is vitally important that we take a careful look at the scriptures and dispel some wrong-thinking that pervades evangelicalism in the West—stuff that I had been brought up in Stonebrook to believe, not so much by explicit teaching, but more by examples and attitudes.

The big point is this: Every task you undertake is a spiritual act of worship. Something being a spiritual act of worship **has nothing to do with the category or type of task**, but rather any task can be a spiritual act of worship because:

“Every day is important for us because it is a day ordained by God. If we are bored with life there is something wrong with our concept of God and His involvement in our daily lives. Even the most dull and tedious days of our lives are ordained by God and ought to be used by us to glorify Him.”

- Jerry Bridges

1. God is the one calling you to those tasks (Ephesians 2:10).
2. You are ultimately working for God in each task (Colossians 3:24).
3. God is using your tasks to accomplish His work (Philippians 2:13).

And as we, in faith, apply ourselves to our tasks in light of these things, all our work will be spiritual acts of worship.

WHY WE GET THIS WRONG (HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY)

But we don't think like this, do we? There is a division in our minds between spiritual activities and our everyday work. I want to show you where this came from so we can understand *why* we think like we do, and we can examine the consequences of those ideas.

So, we need a brief lesson in the history of Western thought. Hang with me here.

ARISTOTLE

Greek philosophers, most notably Aristotle, reasoned that the highest form of humanity is contemplation, debate, and teaching things like politics and philosophy, because everything else we do, all the physical work, is just like the animals: working to eat, eating to live, reproducing, and dying. So, of course, the more time you spend in pure contemplation the more human you are. For Aristotle and those who followed, the most virtuous and highest humans were those who spent nearly all their time in contemplation.

They had a problem though, that every mother in the room will recognize instantly: *someone* had to grow and make the food, clean up, and generally keep order. Their solution to this economic problem? Slavery. In fact, their reasoning around this was so complex and thorough that they actually convinced themselves that some humans were actually designed by nature to be slaves. They were *less human*.

This is a piece of Aristotle's overarching philosophical perspective called "dualism." Do you see the inherent problem with dualism? Dualism is our problem. Dualistic thinking is rampant in evangelical Christianity, including our circles.

EUSEBIUS

This pagan way of thinking (which totally ignores the fact that there is vastly more going on with our work than simple provision of our physical needs) wormed its way into the Christian church early on and was most clearly articulated by a man named Eusebius, a Roman historian and bishop of the church in Caesarea in the early 300s AD. The way of thinking he articulated has been infecting the church ever since.

Eusebius and others were infected with this dualistic thinking, but with a "Christianized" spin. In other words, just like Aristotle, those that held this view believed that there are some things you can do which are "more spiritual," and so the best and highest Christians are those who spend all of their

"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them."

- Ephesians 2:10

time doing these things, which they label “the service of God” (meaning prayer, fasting, studying the Bible, preaching, evangelizing, etc.).

Eusebius had the same economic problem as Aristotle. Very, very few Christians could realistically pursue this “level” of “spirituality”. Someone had to provide for the community! His solution: “lay people.” His thought process was so thorough that he actually reasoned that God had created some people as “lower class Christians,” bound to be *less spiritual*.

What nonsense!

The idea of a “higher calling,” is a false idea. And the proof is that if every Christian were obedient to this “higher calling” then we would lose about a billion people from the global workforce and the world economy would collapse!

A SUBTLE TRAP IN OUR LOVE FOR OUR VOCATION AS MINISTERS

There is a more subtle reason this pattern of thinking is seductive to us as ministers of the Gospel. It appeals to our pride, both the good and bad kind of pride.

We rejoice in our vocation as full-time ministers. We love the fact that we get to do this job all day, every day! We sense immense satisfaction and a feeling of God’s imminent pleasure and presence

with what we do. The Bible is replete with easy-to-understand verses about the importance of missions, evangelism, preaching, and prayer. So we have a hat trick of sources, internal and external, verifying the importance and validity of our work. And when Aristotle comes along and says that this is because physical work is of no value and the life of the mind and soul is the only important work, and when the church has held this belief up for hundreds of years, we believe them.

But I have also seen this same enthusiasm, proof-texting, and false hierarchies in engineering classes from my professors, and at design conferences from world-class professionals.

We *all* think that our chosen vocation is the most significant and important work possible on the planet because we are proud and, like the builders of Babylon (The Tower of “Babel”), seek to assign hierarchy of personal significance and rule over each other. It’s just that it’s far easier to proof-text vocational ministry’s superiority.

THE BIBLICAL VIEW

The Bible gives us clarity here. It stands in stark contrast to the idea that work is a necessary evil. The Biblical view is that work, all kinds of it, is something God Himself does, for the ultimate end of glorifying Himself, and it’s something we do on this planet as His representatives, to glorify Him.

"It is pure invention that pope, bishops, priests and monks are to be called the 'spiritual estate'; princes, lords, artisans, and farmers the 'temporal estate.' That is indeed a fine bit of lying and hypocrisy. Yet no one should be frightened by it; and for this reason —namely, that all Christians are truly of the "spiritual estate," and there is among them no difference at all but that of office.

- Martin Luther

The whole story line of the Bible, indeed the story of the Gospel itself, tells the story of the nature of work.

CREATION

In the beginning, God worked.

Genesis 1:1–2 (ESV)

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was *without form and void*, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

Then God spent six days bringing form to the formless, and filling the void. He made light and separated it from the dark. He separated the water from the heavens, and the sea from the dry land. Then he filled the land with plants, the heavens with lights, the sky with birds, the sea with fish, and the dry land with animals, and then...

Genesis 1:26–31 (ESV)

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

The crown jewel of God’s work was man and woman—made in God’s own image.

Much has been written about what Moses meant about man being in the image of God. I think the simplest meaning is the best here. We were made to *reflect (image)* God’s glory: His character, attributes, and work.

Genesis 2, backs up into the sixth day of creation and pinpoints the location on Earth where God bent down into the dust and got His hands dirty, forming man.

Here we see that God created a garden in the middle of a typical mid-eastern desert, perfectly fit for human thriving with fruit trees, rivers, gold, and precious jewels all there for Adam’s use. (And by the way, all these things show up later in the story, in the tabernacle God commands Moses to build.)

Obviously we recognize Eden as paradise, as perfection! No pain, everything we need at ready reach, meaningful work, no sin, no corruption. How do you improve on this? You expand it! Adam was given the most significant possible job to do: guard and expand the Garden of Eden.

“Christians ought to have a different approach to business. As believers, we should view work as both service and a form of worship.”

- Charles W. Colson

But it is not simply the expansion of utopia that makes this job so significant and so wonderful. *The image of God's glory* (man!) filling the Earth is the wonderful thing!

THE PURPOSE OF WORK: TO GLORIFY GOD BY PROMOTING HUMAN THRIVING.

1 Corinthians 10:31 says to “do everything you do to the glory of God.” We were created to glorify God, our purpose is to glorify God. The purpose of our work is to glorify God: to help others to clearly see, and to see more clearly for ourselves, who God is and what He is like. We do this by “being fruitful and multiplying, filling the earth and subduing it, and having dominion over it”—that is to say, by expanding Eden. In other words, we work toward human thriving, in every possible way.

We are more than just spiritual beings—we are also physical beings. We have social, economic (physical), and spiritual needs, so we work to help others thrive spiritually, economically, and socially.

THE FALL

Adam and Eve rebelled against God's command by deciding to work for *their own* glory. They wanted to be “wise” and be the ones defining good and evil, rather than submitting to their loving Creator's definitions. As a result of this rebellion, the man and woman became cursed, and the ground itself became cursed.

Genesis 3:16–19 (ESV)

To the woman he said, “I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.”

And to Adam he said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

Notice how these curses directly target man's work. Our task has not changed, but the parameters have all changed!

Multiplication is painful. There is strife between the man and his co-worker. Work is now filled with trouble. Work is now compulsory. What was once a freely offered act of worship is now a compulsory act of survival. We are now mortal. This lifetime is cut short. Sickness, disease, violence, freak accidents, or simply old age end our individual lifespans in the span of a few short decades. This hampers our ability to acquire knowledge, wisdom, and skill that might otherwise be possible.

REDEMPTION

Jesus, the Son of God, was born into the world as a man into the family of a... prophet? No. Priest? No. King? No. Philosopher? No.

"A husband's work as provider will be so difficult that it can only be fulfilled in the power of the Spirit and a transformed life."

- John F. MacArthur Jr.

Wealthy merchant? No.

He was born to Mary and Joseph, a carpenter, a manual laborer. Think about that for a moment.

Unlike any other human being, Jesus lived a life of perfect obedience to His Heavenly Father, which apparently involved several decades of work in Joseph's trade. Jesus, in His submission to his parents, and 20 years (!) of carpentry work, glorified God, not through miracles, evangelism, teaching, or "doing great things for God," but through humble obedience to God's call on His life. He then went on to fulfill His unique task with a short three-year teaching and healing ministry where He reminded us of and clarified God's charge on our lives.

*"Only God can
make the common
sacred."*

- Beth Moore

Matthew 5:16 (ESV)

In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Matthew 6:3-4 (ESV)

But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

John 13:34 (ESV)

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

He reminded us that the purpose of all our work is to glorify God, and He clarified that this looks most specifically like *self-sacrificing love for the good of those who do not deserve it, even if no one is around to witness that work.*

RESTORATION

But Jesus didn't stay dead. He rose from the grave three days later. He came back to physical life! He ate fish, He let people touch Him and He spoke to hundreds of people. And then He ascended into heaven still in His physical (but glorified) body. He is currently ruling over all creation until the exact right moment when He will come back to restore all things.

See this remarkable passage about that day:

Isaiah 65:17-23 (ESV)

For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness. I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress.

No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days, for the young man shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed.

They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and My chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.

They shall not labor in vain or bear children for calamity, for they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the Lord, and their descendants with them.

The Bible is crystal clear that we will live in a physical place, called the new earth, for the rest of eternity. It is clear that we will have jobs to do, live in cities, build houses, plant vineyards, eat fruit. Understanding this changed everything for me.

To be honest, I found heaven to be boring, an eternity gathered around a throne, singing the same song over and over. I comforted myself with the thought that “it will be more amazing than I can possibly imagine so maybe that amazement will last forever.” But if I was really honest, even with the realization that my fallen mind can’t comprehend how wonderful sitting around on clouds singing songs will be, something about that picture seemed off.

But consider this picture—can you imagine an eternity of productive and creative work with no effects of the fall?

What inventions will minds, unhindered by sin, selfishness, pride, flawed logic, and physical misfires, be able to come up with? What will teams of people, all working together in unity with no thought of self-aggrandizement be able to build, all to glorify their great Creator and King? I have a hunch that the vastness of space, the intricacy of every star and planet in the universe, will not be wasted. God fully intends for us to explore and discover, and understand more about Him.

Jesus’ parable of the talents gives us a clue that people will rule over cities. Revelation 21 mentions kings coming into the New Jerusalem, bringing their glory with them to offer to God.

We all connect with the frustration of our political situations, don’t we? Whatever your party affiliation, it always seems like, with only a few exceptions, the wrong people are in charge! In a new world where sin is not in the picture, this will no longer be the case. We will see the rulers of these cities and say, “Yes! HE is the right man for the job! God was so wise to put him in charge over here. I am so glad I am under him!”

Our destiny: An eternity of fulfilling, fruitful, futility-free work, in a sinless new heaven and Earth, to the glory of God!

The results of the Fall on our work and also on our disposition toward our Creator show us why we have maladjusted attitudes toward work, and have, in our folly, invented and bought into the dualistic way of thinking.

The fact that we were created for, and are destined for a life of fruitful work, to the glory of God, shows us the importance God places on work and utterly demolishes the dualistic view of work.

“Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will stand before kings; He will not stand before obscure men.”

- Proverbs 22:29

“Nothing’s work unless you’d rather be doing something else.”

- John C. Maxwell

THE PROTESTANT WORK ETHIC

Back to another short history lesson. Martin Luther and those after him in the Protestant Reformation understood this Biblical view of work. These men rejected the pagan influence of dualism on the church and recaptured a robust and biblical “doctrine of vocation.” This renewed understanding paved the way for the free-market economy and led to explosive, historically unprecedented, growth in national economies and overall thriving of populations who embraced this understanding.

Direct lines can be drawn from this to the founding of the “New World” and the eventual success of the Puritan pilgrims and the founding of The United States of America.

Although the label is fading, for generations this high view of work has been labeled “The Protestant Work Ethic.” Communities that still embrace it, still thrive.

A dualistic understanding of work—that some tasks are “more Christian” than others, of higher rank and importance—undermines this work ethic.

TRUE PARITY OF ALL VOCATIONS

The meaning of the term *vocation* can be confusing. Typically the term is synonymous with *job* or *career*. In certain corners of Christendom it means being part of a religious order or the priesthood. But since the Reformation the term most rightly has meant simply this: God’s calling on your life—all of it.

All kinds of work we are called to are high callings because God is the one asking us to do it. Ephesians 5:16 teaches us to “make the most of every opportunity for the days are evil,” but the way to make the most of every opportunity depends on the moment. Let me give a few examples.

When an airplane is in its landing sequence, what is the most important job that pilot has? To land the plane! When it’s harvest season, the farmer’s most important job is to bring the crop in. They rightly drop everything else to get that work done.

When the plane is on the ground, and the pilot with his coworkers, or when the farmer has brought the crop in, then it is important for them to remember that everyone will die and then stand before the throne of God, facing judgment for the deeds they have done in life, so we ought to be very bold in evangelism as well!

If your neighbor or coworker whom you’ve been trying to reach out to for months or years, one evening wanders over to your yard with something heavy weighing on his heart, wondering about his eternal destiny, that may be the time for you to drop your plans for the evening to spend time with him.

In the fall, boatloads of new students land in town and on campus. Our college and international ministries drop everything to go crazy bananas doing everything they can to meet new people and reach as many as possible with the news of the Gospel! Perhaps more of us need to be thinking about ways we can jump in and help them in that effort.

On the flip side, there are some long-range efforts, projects, and jobs that need to be sustained by those students and ministers, even through that several week, "crazy bananas" period. We also have to keep the long view, being faithful with *all* the work God has called us to, not neglecting these other needed *callings* even during the several week rush.

Those of us who take the Great Commission seriously will really wrestle with the question of importance. Is it not true that the winning of souls is far more valuable work than mowing your lawn? This seems intuitive, doesn't it?

The issue is one of scope and priority.

THE ISSUE OF SCOPE

It is good stewardship of my property and loving to my neighbors (both are commands of the scriptures!) to tend my lawn. But this only takes so much time, and then the task is complete.

There is necessary time to be spent on all kinds of work, and as such, these works are spiritual, important, significant, and valuable when kept in scope.

We go wrong when we absolutize one type of task over another categorically, because God will not call us to contradictory tasks. For example, take two important tasks in my life: providing for the physical needs of my family, and my involvement in the Great Commission, spreading the news about Jesus. I cannot rank these two. They are not in conflict. God has called me to work toward both.

I have to pray and think hard to plan my days, and in faith make decisions moment by moment to make sure I am being effective with both. But I cannot make a blanket statement that one is higher than the other.

A good way to conceive of the problem is the issue of deployment. Every Christian has 168 hours in each week to spend faithfully and to God's glory. The average, faithful Christian, of any vocation, will likely spend 56 of these hours (33%) sleeping, another 72 hours (43%) in "normal life" type of work: caring for their family; worship, fellowship, service, and study with the church; evangelism, discipleship, rest, recreation, and serving in the home—and a mere 40 hours (24%) engaging in their paid work.

The question we are discussing is the different way each believer is deployed for that 24% of the time: caring for children, working in an office, in the field, on a construction site, on the mission field, in the pastor's study, in the classroom. This helps put the conversation in perspective (and perhaps helps put a full-time pastor's job description in perspective!).

"The maid who sweeps her kitchen is doing the will of God just as much as the monk who prays – not because she may sing a Christian hymn as she sweeps but because God loves clean floors. The Christian shoemaker does his Christian duty not by putting little crosses on the shoes, but by making good shoes, because God is interested in good craftsmanship."

*- attributed to
Martin Luther*

"No task will be so sordid and base, provided you obey your calling in it, that it will not shine and be reckoned very precious in God's sight."

—John Calvin

THE ISSUE OF PRIORITY

Although every task that God calls us to is valuable and, indeed, the most valuable task we could possibly do at that moment, no matter how insignificant it may seem, yet it is also true that not every task is equally profitable when compared to any other in a given moment. Indeed, God desires us to evaluate the profitability of the many good tasks before us and choose the ones that are the most profitable, that result in the most glory for Him and love for others. Ephesians 5:16 doesn't say, "Just do something good," it says, "Make the *most* of your time." In Philippians 1:10 Paul prays that the Philippians would be able to discern what is "best" (NIV and several other translations).

For example, imagine that you have two job offers that are equal in every way except that one pays five dollars an hour more than the other. Which should you choose? Certainly, the higher paying one, for that job would enable you to do more good and love more people. So, when we seek to discern the calling of God, we can and should ask ourselves questions like, "In which task can I best glorify God?", "In which task can I best advance the kingdom?", and "In which task can I love others the most?"

WHAT IS GOD CALLING ME TO?

In a certain sense, because God is sovereign over all things, it is possible to say that your current vocation (calling from God) is whatever it is that you are doing right now, with the exception of unrepentant patterns of sin. God calls us to contentment and faithfulness in our circumstances. He has you where you are for a reason and a season, to be salt and light, to reach out and know Him better, to behold and to reveal His glory.

But there is another sense that we are usually concerned with, and that is about what God is calling you *toward*. What does God want from you *next*?

Although discerning the answer to this is nuanced and best understood in counsel and in community, it really is not that mysterious of a process. It's not simple or easy, but it's not mysterious. Look around and ask the following questions:

- What needs do you see that you can meet?
- What opportunities have you been given?
- What is your sphere of influence?
- What resources do you have at your disposal?
- What are you inclined to do?
- What spiritual gifts do you have?

With a firm grasp of scripture, a close Christian community, and asking for and following good, godly advice, you are not going to go wrong here. And most of all, through these things, take into consideration what you *desire to do*. God has given believers a renewed heart and desires, and the Holy Spirit is able to lead us through the above means in concert with our desires to do His will.

WE WORK FOR THE LORD CHRIST

All tasks are a spiritual act of worship to our God because He is the one who is calling us to them and

because we work for God in them. He is the one you are ultimately serving in your task. He is your boss and He is benefiting from your work because He is glorified when you follow His call on your life.

Colossians 3:23–24 (ESV)

Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.

This brings dignity and humility to all work, high and low. It removes pride and boasting from high profile, high prestige jobs; it brings dignity to the messiest, most menial tasks.

Charles Spurgeon on Colossians 3:24 - (from “Morning and Evening”):

This saying ennobles the weary routine of earthly employments, and sheds a halo around the most humble occupations. To wash feet may be servile, but to wash His feet is royal work. To unloose the shoe-latchet is poor employ, but to unloose the great Master’s shoe is a princely privilege. The shop, the barn, the scullery, and the smithy become temples when men and women do all to the glory of God! Then “divine service” is not a thing of a few hours and a few places, but all life becomes holiness unto the Lord, and every place and thing, as consecrated as the tabernacle and its golden candlestick.

Think of the implications of this for a minute. The Lord Christ is the one you are actually doing the task for. So, if I am building God’s web site, how am I going to go about my work? If I am building God’s apartment complex, if I am farming God’s land, if I am cleaning God’s house, if I am doing God’s laundry, how am I going to go about my tasks?? With extreme excellence! With care and precision, with careful research, and with joy!

It is remarkable that this statement was given to slaves, to those in the lowest possible position, though it does apply to us. If this reminder was given to government officials, or kings, or others in high positions, it would not have had the same impact.

So, this truth, that we are working for God, makes it a little clearer how our tasks are an act of worship. All tasks are a spiritual act of worship to our God because He is the one who is calling us to them and because we work for God in them—and also because He is working in and through your tasks to carry out *His* work!

YES, MISSION AND EVANGELISM ARE CRITICAL

This paper is intended as a call to balance. Much of the discussion that has gone into the creation of the paper, and much of the response from presentation of these ideas to pastors in our association in other contexts are often met with a bit of bristling at what is left out: namely an assertion of the critical importance and glory of work in evangelism, pastoral work, and mission. Let me fill those gaps in with a few assertions:

- The Great Commission (rightly understood!) is the mission of

“What if followers of Christ stopped looking for work in places where the MOST number of Christians lived and started looking for work places where the LEAST Christians lived?”

- David Platt

It is the general rule of the moral universe that those men prosper who do their work with all their hearts, while those are almost certain to fail who go to their labour leaving half their hearts behind them."

- Charles Haddon Spurgeon

The Church. It is the *necessary* mission of The Church this side of the fall and in this New Covenant era. The “first great commission” or the cultural mandate of Genesis 1:28 now requires the Great Commission because the image of God in man is shattered and only through union with Christ and the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit is that image (progressively) fully restored in man.

- There is no such thing as a Christian who is not called to active participation in the life of the church, evangelism, and a life of discipleship.
- Pastoral work is important and a valid calling—as important and valid as any other calling.
- Some people are indeed called to full-time ministry and missions. The balance is that these people are not somehow necessarily “more spiritual” or “more committed” disciples.
- Those who are called to the marketplace should value and respect vocational ministry just as this paper is calling vocational ministers to value and respect those who are called to the marketplace.
- There are Christians who are called to full-time ministry who are avoiding the call by working in the marketplace out of fear or weak faith—and vice versa.

So please do not hear what I am not saying. Again the issue is one of deployment. God needs His people everywhere. He desires salt and light in all spheres of life.

VOCATION AND THE GREAT COMMISSION

A crucial pastoral question we must answer is how this fully-fledged, Biblical perspective on the importance of all kinds of work helps us equip all Christians to be engaged in the primary mission of the church: The Great Commission. The answer requires a bit of careful thought.

Every Christian is called to work in The Great Commission, the spreading of The Gospel to all nations. (You can say that every Christian has participation in The Great Commission as part of their vocation, their calling from God!)

My goal with unpacking a full-forged biblical doctrine of work is to help men and women feel God’s pleasure and concern with them at all times because if we are aware of God’s presence and care for and in all our tasks, we are going to be more consistently mindful of Him and more fully aware of Him. He will be closer to the top of our mind as we do our work.

This in turn aims our work directly at the expansion of the Kingdom. As we are unashamedly aware of God’s presence in our work, we will care more about our work and we will think harder about how our work is going to serve the people benefitting from it. This will result in higher quality work, more expansive vision of the impact of our work, more joy in our work, more awareness of God’s care and concern for coworkers, clients, customers, supervisors, and others.

As we connect God’s involvement in our work with the people impacted by our work more mindfully and immediately, we will begin to desire to share His care, concern, and love with them.

In short, I see that encouraging people in their vocation, to really focus on it, lean into it, love it, and understand that God is in it *is* encouraging them toward participation in the Great Commission, in bigger and wilder ways than we’ve ever experienced.

QUESTIONS IN REGARD TO VOCATION

John Hopley

1. In the Great Commission Church movement, what has been the historical view toward vocation?

Because each church is autonomous in GCC, the answer to this question depends largely upon what church was doing the teaching. That being said, here are some trends that affected the teaching of vocation in churches in the Great Commission Church movement in the past.

In the 1970s, there were several factors that affected the church members' views on vocation. The movement began on college campuses, during a season where "noble causes" were promoted highly. On the positive side, members were taught to make Christ the Lord over all areas of their lives, including financial security and worldly pursuits. On the negative side, it was common for people to downplay the importance of developing and excelling in a vocation. Also, during the 1970s the churches were affected by the teaching in popular books such as *The Late Great Planet Earth*. This teaching highlighted present events which, the teachers said, pointed to the near return of Jesus Christ. On one hand, this built a strong eternal value system in the churches. On the other hand some young people reasoned that it was not worth pursuing a vocation that required more extensive education and training if Jesus were going to return soon.

Because each church was autonomous, this imbalance in the 1970s in regards to vocation was greater in some churches than in others. But overall, because of the youthfulness of the movement in general, this imbalance was one that needed general correction. These imbalances were corrected in the 1980s as more and more members in community churches saw the Biblical emphasis of members developing excellent vocational skills.

2. How has GCC's teaching on the Great Commission affected member churches' teaching on vocation?

In GCC, we have emphasized the importance of every church member embracing the Great Commission of making disciples of all the nations. The positive result of this "every member a minister" value has been that Christians in GCC churches have made faith-filled choices in their careers in order to honor Christ and His mission. An imbalance has been that some have not adequately emphasized spiritual gifts—that vocational missionaries differ from church members who are sharing their faith in their vocations and neighborhoods. This has caused some to see their vocation as "second-class" compared to missionaries.

3. But aren't we told in Matthew 9:38 to pray especially for gospel workers? Doesn't this show that being a gospel worker is the most important work?

"Some man will say perchance, 'What, must we not labor in our callings to maintain our families?' I answer, this must be done, but this is not the scope and end of our lives. The true end of our lives is to do service to God in serving of man; and for a recompense of this service, God sends his blessings on men's travails, and he allows them to take for their labors."

- William Perkins

All work done for the Lord is God's work, whether it is done with serving gifts or speaking gifts (1 Peter 4:11). That being said, it is important to keep in mind the following:

First, the workers referred to in Matthew 9:38 were gospel workers—missionaries who were to be supported financially in their work (“*The worker is worthy of his support.*” Matthew 10:10). The church is much like a country during wartime. All people—soldiers and civilians alike—are vital for the war effort. But because of the strategic role of the soldiers in that war effort, there is special support given to those soldiers. Similarly, because of the strategic impact of the gospel on a society, Jesus emphasized praying for those soldiers who were set apart vocationally to spread the gospel into new areas. While all members of the body of the Christ are important and vital for the work, there is a special need for paid gospel workers who are on the frontlines in sharing the gospel.

Second, there is a sense in which Matthew 9:38 applies to all believers. We all are to do our part in advancing the gospel. This might mean sharing the gospel in the workplace, volunteering in doing ministry in the church, or being part of a church planting team. Every Christian is called in Matthew 6:33 to “seek first His kingdom and His righteousness.” This means excelling vocationally for the Lord's glory—but it also means making sacrifices by uniting with the church and the church leaders to build the kingdom of God. Many Christians in GCC have been led by the Holy Spirit to make financial and vocational sacrifices by leaving their homes and jobs for the sake of Christ and His gospel (Mark 10:29,30).

Third, because of the strategic importance of multiplying the word of God, elders and teachers who are proclaiming God's word are emphasized in the Scriptures. When faced with the need to feed widows, the apostles in Jerusalem said, “*It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables...but we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word (Acts 6:4,6).*” Also, the church in Corinth was urged to pray for the greater (speaking) gifts (1 Corinthians 14:1). And Paul gave special affirmation to those who desired to be elders in the church: “*It is a trustworthy statement: If any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do (1 Timothy 3:1).*”

That being said, what is most important is that individuals love and honor Jesus Christ in their lives and in their work. For each individual, being a missionary or an elder is not as important as being willing to do whatever Christ wants—whether that be a missionary or an elder on staff in a church or a clerk or a nurse or a carpenter. Once an individual discerns the Lord's vocation, the best way that individual can honor Jesus Christ is by walking in those good works ordained by God for that person. And those works include that individual person's vocational works as well as his works in spreading the gospel.

4. What should be taught to young people today in regards to vocation?

Lamentations 3:27 states: “*It is good for a man that he should bear the yoke in his youth.*” A major way that God matures young people is in their work. Perseverance, faithfulness, and humility are character qualities that God develops in young people as they excel in their vocations. People forget that Jesus worked as a carpenter till the age of 30 before starting His ministry. His youth was devoted not to fulltime ministry but to working a normal job. While God has His unique plan for each individual, my personal opinion is that most young people would benefit by taking the same path that Jesus travelled and learn

"Have thy tools ready. God will find thee work."

- Charles Kingsley

those valuable life lessons that the workplace offers.

Also, some idealistic but naïve young people may not seriously consider how much it costs to provide for a family in our society. More and more young people are fatherless or are those whose parents did not guide them well. It is therefore wise for pastors to emphasize the importance of vocation in their teaching, so that young people develop skills that will enable them to provide for their families' needs.

“If our identity is in our work, rather than Christ, success will go to our heads, and failure will go to our hearts.”

- Timothy J. Keller

5. What practical ways can pastors teach on vocation in their churches?

There are several ways. First, a Sunday teaching series devoted to this topic could be considered. Second, consider sprinkling in Sunday messages throughout the year this value of glorifying God in one's vocation. Third, offer seminars on developing vocationally. This might include offering workshops on how to develop your own business. Fourth, and this one is really important—include a section about vocation in your basic discipleship material. Just as the Apostle Paul emphasized the importance of work to the new believers in Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 4: 11-12; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15) my counsel is that your basic discipleship material also include this important topic. Finally, include testimonies of members excelling at their work during the Sunday services. What we promote publicly shows what we really value.

6. As pastors, what proactive steps can we take to help people excel in their vocations?

At the 2014 GCC Pastors Conference I shared the importance of elders proactively and personally pastoring people to love and obey God. This includes helping all church members excel in their vocation. One of the points made in that 2014 message is distinguishing between building programs for the church and pastoring/discipling members, personally and proactively. Here are four factors to consider:

First, it is good for pastors not to have a “tunnel vision” in regards to the church ministry. We have an interest to recruit church members to help us with our organized ministries—which is good! We want more small group leaders and ministry team leaders to build the church programs. While this work pleases the Lord, we must remember to make our first priority the pastoring and discipling of members. This means finding out how members are doing personally and vocationally. We want to build the church ministry—and this means loving people while building well run programs. Love means helping members enough to pastor them into godly vocational paths.

Second, I have known some members who volunteer for church ministry when they should be working harder at developing their vocations. The church ministry seems more “spiritual” to them than their vocations. So, they might work a part-time or low-end job rather than excel in their work—but then show up four nights a week to volunteer at the church. Some might even do this while their family's financial needs are not adequately met. If we pastor well people like this, we may find ourselves insisting that they *not* volunteer for church ministry so that they can focus on developing vocationally.

Third, recognize that some members are very responsive to requests made by pastors to do ministry. Their respect for God and for spiritual leaders may lead them to make decisions to take on church ministry responsibilities that may go counter to what God wants them to do vocationally. This is why it is vital that pastors are personally aware of members' vocational health when recruiting them for ministry programs.

Fourth, many churches have promoted the Financial Peace University (FPU) program, which urges members to "go the extra mile" to get out of debt. This often means taking on a second job or getting training for a better job. If we as elders offer the FPU class, it is important that we care for members in a way that is consistent with what is taught in that class. This may mean pastoring people to take on a second job rather than volunteering at the church for a season.

Bottom line, the goal of our instruction is love (1 Timothy 1:5) and to build disciples who are fully obedient to Jesus Christ. If we keep this as a focus by pastoring people to excel in their vocation, God will bless that individual, the church and the spreading of the gospel.

7. What relationship is there between the vocation chosen and the value that vocation adds to society?

This is an important issue. We glorify God in our work when we do our work with diligence, exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit. But it is also vital that our work not compromise our Christian testimony. For example, when I was a new Christian, I worked for a prestigious law firm in Columbus, Ohio. A major focus of the firm's work was to defend the pornography stores in town. As I matured in Christ, I decided to resign from this firm because of my growing commitment to promote God's standards of morality.

On the positive side, a person's vocation should benefit the welfare of the society as a whole. Some people choose professions that uniquely meet the needs of people (such as medical needs or helping oppressed people.) While God is glorified in any profession that meets genuine societal needs, it is good for Christians to prayerfully consider vocations where they can bless the world for Christ in the most powerful way.

"One good deed is more worth than a thousand brilliant theories. Let us not wait for large opportunities, or for a different kind of work, but do just the things we 'find to do' day by day."

- Charles Haddon Spurgeon



THE DOCTRINE OF VOCATION:
WORSHIPING GOD & LIVING OUT THE GREAT COMMISSION
Exercise

1. What was the main lesson you learned from this article?

2. What is your vocation? Why did you choose that vocation?

3. Give some examples during your work day where you have seen God work in a special way.



THE DOCTRINE OF VOCATION:
WORSHIPING GOD & LIVING OUT THE GREAT COMMISSION

Exercise

4. What is the vocational health of people in your small group? How about in the church at large?

5. What steps can be taken to build a Biblical perspective of vocation in your church?



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The Spirit-Filled Church

In Christianity, all believers are part of one body, the body of Jesus Christ. However, it is clear that distinctions do exist. One of the most obvious distinctions is that between charismatic and non-charismatic churches. What perspective does God want us to have about these differences?

In this next article, we will look at this important issue.



The Spirit-Filled Church

Pastor John Hopler · Columbus, OH

Introduction

The charismatic movement is widespread throughout the United States and the world. God has done many wonderful things through this movement. There have been countless numbers of people who have been won to Christ and built up in Christ in charismatic churches.

I have often been asked if my church is “Spirit-filled.” What the person usually is asking is whether my church belongs to this movement of churches characterized as charismatic. My answer is, “Yes, my church is Spirit-filled—but perhaps in a different way than you mean.” This would then lead to the question, “What do you think of the charismatic movement?” After assuring them that I love and value all members of the body of Christ, I go on to describe our movement of churches as neither charismatic nor “charis-phobic.” Our vision as a movement is that of glorifying Jesus Christ as we pursue the mission of making disciples of all the nations by planting Great Commission churches throughout the world. Even though we, as a movement, have some different teachings and practices than the typical charismatic church, I would still describe GCC as a fellowship of churches which is friendly towards our charismatic brothers and sisters.

Having made this introduction, I would like to turn now to the purpose of this paper. My goal is to give a perspective of the charismatic movement by giving attention to the following:

1. My personal journey as to the charismatic movement.
2. What we can learn from the charismatic movement.
3. Pitfalls to avoid when considering the charismatic movement.
4. A biblical outline for a Spirit-filled church.

My Personal Journey

I was saved and discipled in a non-charismatic church. The GCC church that began in 1973 in Columbus, Ohio was considered by some outsiders to be a charismatic church because of its enthusiastic spirit and its non-traditional format. However, the teaching of the church was clearly contrary to the charismatic movement on such issues as tongues and the sign gifts.

In 1994, I began to do a more serious study of the charismatic movement. I was intrigued by the claims of miraculous healing in some of the charismatic churches. In addition, I was aware that the Vineyard churches had adopted an evangelical position on the “Baptism of the Spirit,” which is that the bap-

“No matter what a man does, no matter how successful he seems to be in any field, if the Holy Spirit is not the chief energizer of his activity, it will all fall apart when he dies.”

-A.W. Tozer

tism of the Spirit occurs at salvation rather than at another time in a person's life. It seemed to me that many of these charismatic churches were similar to those in GCC in many ways, but held to clear differences in relation to the sign gifts. This, coupled with the fact that I and others in Great Commission had developed friendships with brothers and sisters in Christ who were part of charismatic churches, made me eager to learn more about this movement.

Over the next year I read many books by and about charismatics. I attended some charismatic meetings and was involved in some personal interactions with charismatic pastors. At the end of this time, I came to the following conclusions:

1. Fruit in charismatic churches is attributed to biblical obedience.

It became evident to me that the reason that many charismatic churches were growing is that they were simply being obedient to sound biblical commands and practices. For example, John Wimber, the founder of the Vineyard movement, had practical experience in how to lead a church into growth. He was the founder of the Fuller Institute for Church Growth. As Christian Schwarz has noted in his study on Natural Church Development, there are eight principles for church growth that are universal throughout the world:

- Passionate spirituality (Loving God wholeheartedly – Matthew 22:37)
- Loving relationships (Loving one another – John 13:34)
- Inspiring worship service (Weekly worship, teaching the Word – Acts 2:42)
- Holistic small groups (Meeting to fellowship in small groups – Acts 2:42)
- Gift-oriented ministry (Using spiritual gifts for serving the church – 1 Peter 4:11, 12)
- Need-focused evangelism (Reaching out with the gospel – Matthew 28:19, 20)
- Empowering leadership (Multiplying leadership – 2 Timothy 2:2)
- Functional structures (i.e., no sacred cow organizational structure – Mark 2:27)

It has been apparent to me that churches—charismatic or non-charismatic—will be healthy if they simply follow these biblical guidelines.

2. There seemed to be little difference between the frequency and nature of miracles, healings, and signs occurring in Spirit-filled charismatic churches compared to Spirit-filled non-charismatic churches.

I do believe that God can and will heal people and do miracles today. And there are some seemingly reliable reports of supernatural healings, particularly in third world countries where the gospel is on the frontier. The question I had was this: Is God doing supernatural healings and wonders today in a way (and frequency) similar to what is described in the Book of Acts?

It is not my purpose here to give a theological answer to these questions. I only wish to share my personal observations. Churches that pray for the sick and pray in faith for God to demonstrate His power

“If the Holy Spirit guides us, He will do it according to the Scriptures and never contrary to them.”

- George Muller

“Spirit filled souls are ablaze for God. They love with a love that glows. They serve with a faith that kindles. They serve with a devotion that consumes. They hate sin with fierceness that burns. They rejoice with a joy that radiates. Love is perfected in the fire of God.”

- Samuel Chadwick

have seen God work, whether those churches are charismatic or non-charismatic. In my (admittedly unscientific) survey of pastors and churches in the United States, I came to the opinion that there was little difference between the frequency and nature of miracles, healings, and signs occurring in charismatic churches compared to non-charismatic churches. Although some charismatic churches put more emphasis on this aspect of the Christian life, it does not appear to me that this emphasis has led to more spectacular and more frequent miracles than those that occur in churches without this emphasis. (Again, I am not presenting this as a proof for any doctrinal position. I am only sharing my personal observations.)

3. It is important to recognize that some of the distinctives are merely cultural.

Each church, or group of churches, has its own culture and language. There is a certain lingo and practice that charismatic churches have—cultural distinctives which create a differentiation between charismatics and non-charismatics. For example, someone in a charismatic church who believes that God has a message for his friend in the church might approach that person with the statement, “I have a word of knowledge for you.” In a Great Commission church, the same person might simply say, “I felt that the Lord wanted me to mention this to you.” In both cases, the listener might be astounded by what the speaker was saying, and would be convinced that something supernatural had just occurred. In this example, it is not that the charismatic church member had a special measure of grace from God, but he was simply expressing himself in a way that was peculiar to his culture. It seems to me that the charismatic churches do not have special gifts and blessings from God dif-

ferent than other believing churches. Rather, their gifts are the same given to non-charismatic church members, but expressed by those non-charismatic church members in a way consistent with their church culture.

4. There are many wonderful lessons to learn from the charismatic movement.

God has raised up many strong leaders in this movement. William MacDonald once said, “There is not a believer in the world who cannot teach me something.” Lutherans, Baptists, Nazarenes, charismatics—whatever the segment of the body of Christ, God has some lessons to teach each one of us. We are all one body and we all need one another (1 Corinthians 12). I have identified seven lessons we can learn that have proven to be beneficial to me.

Seven Lessons from the Charismatic Movement

1. A strong emphasis on the ministry of the Holy Spirit

Someone once commented, “If you emphasize the Word of God without the Spirit of God, you will ‘dry up.’ If you emphasize the Spirit of God without the Word of God, you will ‘blow up.’ If you emphasize the Word of God and the Spirit of God you will ‘grow up.’” Well said!

I grew up in a church that had a strong emphasis on the Word of God. I am so grateful for this training. The Word of God is the foundation for knowing the mind of God. Having said this, what has

been refreshing to me about the charismatic movement has been the emphasis on the ministry of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is talked about often, and He is frequently referred to in casual conversation. There seems to be a greater consciousness of His presence and His ministry. Henry Blackaby's book, *Experiencing God*, also has this effect. I appreciate Blackaby's statement: "God speaks by the Holy Spirit through the Bible, prayer, circumstances, and the church to reveal Himself, His purposes, and His ways" (Blackaby, 77). What is so encouraging about this definition is that Blackaby is focusing on the person of the Holy Spirit with an emphasis similar to what I see in the Scriptures. Sometimes evangelicals are reluctant to talk about the Holy Spirit. What a tragedy! The Holy Spirit—the third Person of the Trinity—has been given to us by God. Let's be conscious of His ministry in our lives, and let's allow Him to personally lead us into the life God intended us to have.

"Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm."

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

I have noticed a phenomenon among evangelical Christians who have grown up with an emphasis on the Scriptures. As they continue to follow the Lord, God will impress upon them the personal and special relationship that they have with God, the Spirit. They will become more conscious of His prompting and ministry. This was what happened to Campus Crusade several decades ago. As a ministry that was devoted to the Scriptures, Crusade was moved by God to focus more upon the Holy Spirit and His work in the lives of their staff.

I believe that we can learn from charismatics in their continued emphasis on the Holy Spirit and His ministry in our lives. The Holy Spirit is not just for charismatics. He is for all believers in Jesus Christ.

2. Enthusiasm

Jesus said, "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind*" (Matthew 22:37, NIV). We are to be enthusiastic about God and the things of God! Oftentimes in churches we are more emotionally stirred up over a football team or a political election than about God and His Kingdom. In this regard, I have appreciated the emotional enthusiasm exhibited by many charismatic churches in their pursuit of God. Certainly we do not want to define Christianity as simply "emotionalism." On the other hand, if we really do love God with "all our soul," we will be emotional in our devotion to God.

3. Expression in worship

One of the greatest contributions by the charismatic movement to the body of Christ has been the standard of worship set in these churches. Like David who worshipped with all his might in the bringing of the Ark into Jerusalem, there is an expression of excitement about God in worship that is truly pleasing to God (2 Samuel 6:12- 23). The songs of worship that have been written in charismatic churches have been blessings to the entire body of Christ. In particular, I have appreciated those that are "love songs to God"—music that is sung directly to the Lord in expression of our delight in Him. Coupled with this is the freedom of expression, such as lifting hands in worship, which was originally associated with charismatic churches. Now it is a common occurrence to see hands raised even in non-charismatic churches. This is not a new idea that charismatics invented. Lifting holy hands to the Lord is a biblical practice (see Psalm 28:2, 63:4, Psalm 143:6, 1 Timothy 2:8). It seems to me that this

practice was more widespread in charismatic churches simply because they were uninhibited enough to follow the Scriptures.

4. A belief in the miracle-working God

How easy it is to put God in a box. We can so easily walk by sight rather than by faith, looking at the natural and thereby missing the supernatural working of God. Although I do have serious questions about the validity of claims made by some charismatics as to the miracles God has allegedly performed, I nonetheless do appreciate the child-like faith exhibited by these same people in the greatness of God. God is a wonder-working God. He does answer prayers. Jesus Christ does work miracles in the lives of people everyday—and these miracles are due to nothing less than the supernatural initiatives of God. God forbid that we would ever get cynical about God's power simply because there is an exaggeration made about someone being healed!

5. Expression in fellowship

One practice that is associated with the charismatic movement is the physical expression of warmth and brotherly affection toward fellow Christians. I appreciate the family-like spirit that is demonstrated when brothers in Christ hug one another when they greet. Similarly, several years ago in GCC, there began to be a more common practice of laying hands on those we were praying for. Again, this is not an original idea with charismatics—this is a biblical practice (see Acts 6:6; 9:17; Mark 5:23; 1 Timothy 4:14). Expressing in an uninhibited way our devotion to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ is very pleasing to the Lord.

6. An emphasis on our unity with the body of Christ

Many Christians have advocated a greater unity in the body of Christ. I have appreciated the steps that leaders like Bill Bright and Paul Cedar have taken to promote unity. My personal experience (and again this may be unique to me) is that there has been a greater enthusiasm among charismatic churches to accomplish this goal. In particular, I recall the support offered by charismatic pastors at various times in my ministry with GCC. When criticisms have been made in the past about our movement, it seems to me that we received more support from charismatic pastors than fundamentalist and evangelical pastors. I think that this is a wonderful attitude to have—to accept and support other churches and Christians, as fellow believers who are united under Christ's headship to advance His Kingdom.

7. General ministry contributions by charismatic churches

God has given each part of the body of Christ some special gifts. Many unique ministries that began in charismatic churches have benefited the entire Church worldwide. One that comes to my mind is the wonderful example of servant evangelism set by the Vineyard church in Cincinnati, led by Steve Sjogren. Believers in that church offer practical service in the name of Christ, such as cleaning public restrooms and offering coffee free of charge in public places. This example has been an inspiration to

“A church in the land without the Spirit is rather a curse than a blessing. If you have not the Spirit of God, Christian worker, remember that you stand in somebody else's way; you are a fruitless tree standing where a fruitful tree might grow.”

- C. H. Spurgeon

churches everywhere. May more churches follow their example in demonstrating the love of Christ to this lost world!

Pitfalls to Avoid When Considering the Charismatic Movement

God desires unity with all believers, charismatic and non-charismatic. God also desires us to learn from all believers, charismatic and non-charismatic. At the same time, each of us must individually develop our own convictions on various issues. In addition, God desires us to pursue a unity of mind on these issues, particularly with the leaders in our church with whom we are teamed for the sake of the gospel.

This next section is in no way meant to be a criticism of the charismatic movement. The cautions that are expressed relate equally to non-charismatic churches, as well as charismatic churches. We are told in Romans 12:3 to exercise “*sound judgment*” in our Christian walk. When considering the charismatic movement, or any group of Christians or churches for that matter, here are some pitfalls that came to my mind that I personally purpose to avoid:

1. Enthusiasm without love for mankind

Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:13-14:

“For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are of sound mind, it is for you. For the love of Christ controls us...”

This verse shows Paul’s example—that of loving God enthusiastically, but in a way that relates to mankind. In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul likewise urges the church to refrain from speaking in tongues without an interpreter because unbelievers would see it as weird (1 Corinthians 14:23).

1 Corinthians 13 and 14 are tremendous chapters to show that enthusiasm for God that is not worked out in a love for mankind is worthless. Therefore, as we seek to express our love for God—both privately and corporately as a church—a key question to always ask is this: Is my behavior loving towards mankind, effective at reaching people to be won and built up in Christ?

To illustrate, several years ago I was interacting with a charismatic pastor who had changed his ministry style towards being more “visitor friendly.” He commented that many of the cultural practices of his church—done out of enthusiasm for God—were hindrances towards reaching people in his community.

I recognize that there will be differences in our ministry to non-believers versus believers. I also recognize that a believer’s service will be very different than a seeker event. My only point is that when we are considering “how to do church,” it is important that our enthusiasm and love for God be combined with a love and sensitivity to people, believer and non-believer.

“As the sun can be seen only by its own light, so Christ can be known only by His own Spirit.”

- Robert Leighton

“More than ever today we need the unction of the Holy Spirit...When the Holy Spirit takes control of a church, there will be blessing and unity and power. Souls will be saved and the gospel will go out.”

- Oswald J. Smith

2. Being overly impressed with that which is “emotionally exciting”

We all love emotional “highs.” However, the Christian life has a lot of “down” times. It is a life of suffering—not only physically, but also emotionally. In this regard, I appreciate George MacDonald’s quote: “That man is perfect in faith who can come to God in the utter dearth of his feelings, under the weight of failure, low thoughts and wandering forgetfulness and say to God, ‘Thou art My refuge.’” On a similar note, A.W. Tozer once said, “What our will is set to do is what really matters at last. Feeling is the play of emotion over the will, a kind of musical accompaniment in the business of living; and while it is indeed most enjoyable to have the band play as we ‘march to Zion,’ it is by no means indispensable. We can work and walk without music and if we have true faith, we can walk with God without feeling.”

So what is my point? Simply this: While we certainly desire to demonstrate our emotions and excitement toward God, we must recognize that the priority is living a life of faith and obedience even when the emotion is not there. We all love the mountaintop experiences (such as a conference or a short term mission trip). However, as someone has pointed out, most crops grow better in valleys than on mountaintops! The fruit that God grows in us in the mountaintop experience is great. But so is the fruit born through persevering through the valleys and trials in our lives.

We wait for a day when all suffering will cease—and although we do experience a foretaste of Heaven in this life, the perfection of Heaven has not yet come to this earth.

The more I walk with the Lord, I have become more impressed with the believers and churches that are quietly, faithfully, and humbly following Christ and less impressed with those who “make a big splash” at the outset, but have not demonstrated the character of perseverance. Let me hasten to say that I believe that this issue of emotionalism versus faithful obedience is a problem that relates to all churches—charismatic and non-charismatic. Also, it seems to me that the more youth oriented the ministry, the more this issue needs to be addressed. I only want to make the point that churches—charismatic and non-charismatic—which have been so effective at capturing people’s emotions need to be especially careful at emphasizing these other aspects of our Christian walk.

3. Evaluating a leader on his charisma rather than his character.

When studying the Scriptures on the subjects of leadership and spiritual maturity, I have noticed the following:

- The qualification for spiritual leadership is character (1 Timothy 3:1-7).
- The greatest quality to have is not oratorical skills or charisma, but Christ-like love (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).
- The emphasis in the church is to have a plurality of leaders of character, rather than one “superstar” leader (Acts 14:23, Titus 1:5).

We all know the tragedies that have occurred when a church puts more emphasis on the charisma of one leader than on faithfulness and godly character. The stereotypical story is too often repeated; that of the preacher who can dazzle the crowd and fill the pews, but who then commits adultery with the church secretary. Again, non-charismatic churches are just as prone to falling into this pit as charis-

matic churches. But I wanted to mention this in context of this paper on charismatics that we're careful not to put too much emphasis on the charisma of one individual.

In this regard, I have noticed certain leaders with charisma have done very well in GCC when one condition exists: That individual is living in accountability with a plurality of leaders. This plurality structure is what allows such a gifted individual to flourish and to be a blessing to the church for a lifetime of ministry.

"God sends no one away empty except those who are full of themselves."

- Dwight L. Moody

4. A preoccupation with (rather than an appreciation for) "signs" and "supernatural confirmations" from God.

Let's look again at Henry Blackaby's quote, "God speaks by the Holy Spirit through the Bible, prayer, circumstances, and the church to reveal Himself, His purposes, and His ways." God does indeed reveal Himself by the Holy Spirit in the four ways Blackaby describes. The question is: How much emphasis should be placed on circumstances in general and upon "signs" and "supernatural confirmations" in general?

It is noteworthy that signs were given to confirm the Word:

"How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by the gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His will" (Hebrews 2:3-4).

Also, it is interesting that Peter, when talking about the Transfiguration of Christ (see Matthew 17) states that the effect of this majestic event was to make *"the prophetic word more sure"* (2 Peter 1:19). The point is this: God's Word is the basis of our beliefs. Yes, God does work through circumstances and in extraordinary ways in our lives. But the whole aim is to make us have a greater confidence in His Word.

In 1995, my wife Sandy discovered that she had kidney cancer. She went on to have successful surgery and her health is fine today. However, at that time, it was, needless to say, a major test for our faith. We discovered that she had cancer on a Friday and spent the weekend seeking the Lord, waiting to see a medical specialist on Monday. God did comfort me through the Scriptures over the weekend, but my stomach was still tied up in knots.

On Saturday night, a brother in the church (who did not know that Sandy had cancer) had a dream. In that dream, he saw someone lying on an operating table with a "dark spot" in the right side of that person's midsection (the tumor that Sandy had was in her right kidney). In the dream, he prayed for the person and the "dark spot" went away. Amazingly, the next morning he went to church and heard the pastor announce that Sandy had cancer in her right kidney. On Tuesday, he called me on the phone and told me about the dream. Later that day, Sandy and I met with him for a time of prayer.

What perspective are we to have about such incidents? Here are my thoughts:

- *Did God speak through the dream?* I don't know for sure. But, I tend to think that this was from God for this reason: From the time I talked to this brother until Sandy's surgery was declared to be a success, my anxious thoughts about the surgery ceased. I had an experiential peace and confidence that "God was here." As one brother said to me, he saw this as the "comforting work of the Holy Spirit." I am not as confident that God was speaking through this dream as I am about Christ's deity or that He rose again from the dead. And when I go to Heaven, if God tells me that He was not speaking through the dream it would not be upsetting to me. But I tend to think that this was the Holy Spirit's work.
- *Should this dream have been a basis for my decision making?* Absolutely not! God speaks through His Word and in obedience to His Word. For example, Proverbs 24:6 states that "*in abundance of counselors there is victory.*" For that reason, we received counsel from friends and medical specialists on the best action to take. Some might have interpreted this dream as a directive from God to "trust Him for healing" and to not get surgery. How foolish! No, we trusted in God for His leading through the sound counsel we received and we had the life-saving surgery done. While we appreciated the ministry we experienced through the brother who had the dream, we did not see this dream as a "sign" as to whether or not we should proceed with the surgery.
- *Should I expect God to speak through dreams and other similar ways on a regular basis?* My personal opinion is, "No." My wife's cancer was a unique trial in our lives—and therefore it is understandable that God might take some added and extraordinary steps to communicate His love and grace to us. On a similar note, it is striking to me that in Matthew 1 and 2, God spoke to Joseph in dreams when some crises threatened God's purposes and plans for the Messiah. One has to wonder if God normally spoke to Joseph in dreams after these crises were over.
- *Did having this dream show that we and the brother with the dream are "especially spiritual?"* I don't think so. It is altogether possible that unusual confirmations and signs from God may actually be an indication that we have some immaturity. I once read that Hudson Taylor had more "supernatural coincidences" as a younger Christian than as an older Christian. He reasoned that as he matured, God did not need to "hit him over the head" with a "sign" in order to get his attention.

"Be assured, if you walk with Him, and look to Him, and expect help from Him, He will never fail you."

- George Muller

I greatly appreciate what God did through this brother and the dream. I believe that God used it as a ministry in my life. At the same time, I have not made this exciting incident a foundation for my Christian walk. Rather Jesus Christ and His gospel is my foundation. The truth that Jesus is the Christ, that He died and rose again, that He is seated today in authority over the whole universe, calling all mankind to Himself— now there is an exciting story! And there is no doubt about the certainty and truth of that story! So let's appreciate the "supernatural workings" of God in our lives. At the same time, let's be careful to not *define* our lives by the "supernatural coincidences" that occur, or do not occur, day to day. If God makes these kinds of things happen, great! If not, realize that true spirituality has much more substance than whether or not such events occur—which leads us to our concluding section.

What is True Spirituality?

What does it mean to be a spiritual Christian? And what does a truly spiritual church look like? The Scriptures have the answer in Ephesians 5:18-21:

“And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.”

In this passage, I see seven indications of a Spirit-filled church:

1. Not out of control

The Spirit-filled church is not “drunken” and “dissipated.” A Spirit-filled church is a church that is orderly and in control.

2. Filled with God

The Spirit-filled church is filled up with God. The Spirit is God and to be filled with the Spirit is to be filled with God. And how does a church become filled with God? In Ephesians 3:19, Paul says that when a church knows “*the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge*” that church will be “*filled up to all the fullness of God.*” Therefore, a church that is captivated by the love and grace of God in Christ Jesus will be a Spirit-filled church.

3. Speaking the Word of God

If you are filled with God, God will “spill out” in your words. In the Book of Acts, it is noteworthy that when someone was described as being filled with the Spirit, that person began speaking the Word about Christ. In Colossians 3:16 (the related passage to Ephesians 5:18-21), Paul says “*Let the word of Christ richly dwell in you...*” Therefore, the Spirit-filled church will overflow in speaking the Word of Christ to mankind.

4. Worship

The Spirit-filled church will be a church that is passionate in its worship of God. Just as King David sang love songs to His God, the Holy Spirit will also move the church into a heart-felt worship of God.

5. Faith expressed in thanksgiving

The Spirit-filled church will not be discontent, but thankful and appreciative of the good gifts received from the hand of God. Even in trying circumstances, the church will see that God is on the throne, providing graciously to His children, resulting in an overflow of thanksgiving by that church to our heavenly Father.

“You might as well try to hear without ears or breathe without lungs, as to try to live a Christian life without the Spirit of God in your heart.”

- D.L. Moody

"I used to ask God to help me. Then I asked if I might help Him. I ended up by asking Him to do his work through me."

- James Hudson Taylor

6. Humility towards brothers and sisters in Christ

The Spirit-filled church will be marked by true practical humility. The members will not merely be serving each other—they will be subject to each other as bondservants. This requires a powerful humility—the type exhibited by Jesus Christ when He died on the cross. This sort of humility results in a church that has a supernatural unity that only the Spirit can create (Philippians 2:1-8).

7. Recognizing the Lordship and presence of Jesus Christ

The Spirit-filled church lives in the “fear” or “reverence” of Christ. Jesus Christ is the Lord. He is present when two or three gather in His name. He is building His Church. And the Spirit is here for the express purpose that Jesus Christ be honored and revered in all of our thoughts, words, and deeds.

May every church—in GCC and every church that names the Name of Jesus Christ—be marked by these qualities! May every church truly be a Spirit-filled church!

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THE SPIRIT-FILLED CHURCH

Exercise

1. What was the main lesson you learned from this reading?

2. In this article, John Hopley tells of his personal experiences in studying the charismatic movement. Compare and his experiences to yours. How are they the same? How are they different?

3. In what ways do you think that your church can learn from the charismatic movement?



THE SPIRIT-FILLED CHURCH

Exercise

- 4. Evaluate your corporate worship times as a church. What do you like about those times? How can they be improved?

- 5. What pitfalls listed in this article do you think that your church must be careful to avoid? How can these pitfalls be avoided?



GREAT COMMISSION LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

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Signs and Wonders in the Scriptures

Very few of us go very long in ministry before someone asks a question about signs and miracles. Does God heal today in miraculous ways? Is God doing supernatural wonders like He did in the Book of Acts? What about the gift of tongues? In this article, Doug Brown gives his perspective on what the Bible teaches on this important subject.



Signs and Wonders in the Scriptures

Pastor Doug Brown · Lee's Summit, MO

[Editors note: By way of introduction, I want to make it clear that GCC has no official position on the issues discussed in the following paper. To be a member church or a pastor in GCC, there is no requirement that the church or pastor hold to a certain view on tongues or other charismatic issues. Our desire in GCC is to love and honor all believers, regardless of their views on these issues. The following paper is representative of the position generally held by leaders and pastors in GCC (although I acknowledge that there are a variety of different views as to many of the specific points made in this article). This paper, I trust, will be helpful for the purpose of each reader developing his or her own convictions on this topic. Overall, we in GCC want to communicate that we are genuinely thrilled to be united with anyone who loves Jesus Christ, regardless of his or her views on these issues. —John Hopler, Editor of GCLI]

“Wonder is the basis of worship.”

- Thomas Carlyle

Preface

I have applied myself to put down a few thoughts regarding God and the supernatural. Most of these ideas have been simmering on the back burner for a long time. With some of them I have a settled conviction. With others, I am still stirring the pot, but I include them so they can be evaluated.

I must say that in approaching this subject we tread on holy ground. Our God is a great and awesome God. There is no other. He transcends all and everything that we can even conceive. There is no limit to Him or to His power. And *“behold, these are the fringes of His ways”* (Job 26:14).

My desire is not to put out any person’s fire, but to examine everything carefully—to find the gold, realizing that in so doing we may very well come out with some dirt. For me, this has not been an academic exercise. Rather, this has been an enjoyable journey conversing with God in much prayer and meditation on the Scriptures. My horizon has been expanded and my hope has been enlarged. I willingly acknowledge that this journey is far from completion.

We have just begun to explore the depths of Almighty God. Is it not an awesome wonder to learn the ways of God? And that is what this journey is. It is not an attempt to label and box God in a corner, but it is an effort to discover the very ways of God. As it says in Psalms 103:7, *“He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the sons of Israel.”* I enjoy the acts of God, but let’s not stop there. We have been invited to come in and fellowship with the Almighty in order that we may know Him, the power of His resurrection, the fellowship of His suffering, being made in the likeness of His death (Philippians 3:10). We have been invited to know the ways of God!

Does that fire you up? It fires me up. For it is He who makes “*His ministers a flame of fire*” (Hebrews 1:7). With a whole heart, filled up to the all the fullness of God, let’s serve the Lord Most High with a fervent spirit. May God ignite each of us for His glory!

Oh mighty God, maker of heaven and earth, ignite our hearts and our lives for Your glory. Teach us Your ways, O Lord, and we will walk in Your truth! Amen!

**“Don’t seek signs...
Don’t forbid them.”**

*- Christian and Missionary
Alliance slogan*

1. Preliminary Observations of The Holy Spirit and the Supernatural

“We must be very careful in these matters. What do we know of the realm of the Spirit? What do we know of the Spirit falling on people? What do we know about these great manifestations of the Holy Spirit? We need to be careful lest we be found fighting against God, lest we be guilty of quenching the Spirit of God.” —D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

A. We see in a mirror dimly (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Who can understand the supernatural ways of God? Who has a handle on when or where God intervenes supernaturally? These are not easy questions to answer, for we are not God. But, I believe that as we become better acquainted with Him, we will know His ways and not just His acts (Psalm 103:7).

B. The Spirit moves wherever He wishes (John 3:8).

The Holy Spirit is likened to wind. Man is not able to predict when nor where the wind will be moving. We have discovered some natural patterns by which the wind moves normally, but then there are times in which the wind moves wherever it wishes. So it is with the Spirit in salvation (John 3:1-8), in awakenings, and revivals.

God is God. He transcends His creation and natural laws. He is God and He does whatever He pleases (Psalm 115:3). God always acts in accordance to His holy nature. He does not act arbitrarily or capriciously. Rather, He always acts after the counsel of His will (Ephesians 1:11).

Having said that God is “limited” by His holy character, the Scripture is clear in that there is no limit to His power (Numbers 11:23). He is moving today in ways we don’t understand or wouldn’t believe even if we were told (Habakkuk 1:5). His purpose and choices are unsearchable and His ways are unfathomable (Romans 11:33).

C. People can misuse the manifestations of the Holy Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19-21).

Although the Spirit may be in it, man can misuse it. In every fresh movement of God, excesses have always accompanied awakenings or revivals.¹

D. Power is not a reward for holiness (Acts 3:12).

Power is not a badge of merit, sanctification, or of spiritual maturity. God’s power is given by God according to His sovereign will. The Corinthian church had all the gifts being expressed in their church

(1 Corinthians 1:7), but does that mean the Corinthians were spiritually mature? Not at all. In fact, Paul states that they were quite immature (1 Corinthians 3:3).

God used Samson in a powerful way, but was Samson a holy man? No, Samson lacked moral self-control which ended up costing him his life. Yet, at the same time, God used him in powerful ways to deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines.

“Two distinguishing marks of the early church were:

1) Poverty 2) Power.”

- T.J. Bach

E. The Holy Spirit is not given to us to make us feel good, but to accomplish His holy purpose in us and through us.

1. We are to be transformed by the Spirit (Galatians 5:16-17).
2. We are to bear the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:2).
3. We are to witness in the power of the Spirit (Acts 1:8).

The Church has been infiltrated by a “feel good” culture, an experience-oriented society (see 2 Peter 1:17-21). We, the American Church, have become guilty of hungering and thirsting after experiences. We have sought after happiness, satisfaction, and fulfillment as the goal of our life. As a result, we end up thirsting for more and more. In contrast, Jesus said, that if we hunger and thirst for righteousness we would be satisfied (Matthew 5:6). This word “satisfied” means to be fulfilled. The one who pursues righteousness is the one who experiences happiness and satisfaction. Could it be God is interested more in our holiness than our happiness?

The danger today is to make a movement out of an experience. We desire experience at the expense of Scripture because the Church is not hungering and thirsting after being right with God and one another.

“The condition of the church is like someone who is tired and weary and just doesn’t have much punch any more. The church is lethargic. There is a malaise that has taken over the church and there is a kind of passionless attitude. It’s the kind of thing when we’ve tried it all, done it all, we’ve shot our best rockets . . . now there is nothing left.’ The church growth movement has not succeeded. The statistics in 1991 were after \$22 billion was spent on what we call the church growth movement, 8 out of every 10 new church members was someone who moved from one church to another church...”²

Experience is not the criteria of truth. When the Holy Spirit was poured out on Pentecost, the unbelievers thought the Christians were filled with sweet wine. Peter’s response was to authenticate the experience as having been rooted in God’s Word (Acts 2:16-21). Also see 2 Peter 1:17-21.

F. Evidences of the presence of the Holy Spirit

The moving of the Holy Spirit will be evidenced by a conviction of sin, repentance, godliness, the fruit of the Spirit, evangelism, knowledge of God and His Word, and power over sin.

Ephesians 5:18-21 singing, godly speech, submissive, thankful

Galatians 5:22 love, joy, peace

Romans 8:12-13 putting to death the deeds of the body
 John 16:8 conviction of sin, righteousness, and judgment

***“Faith is not belief
 without proof, but trust
 without reservations.”***

- Elton Trueblood

G. Three basic attitudes towards every awakening and/or revival

Historically, there have been three basic responses to the move of God. The first response is one of selfish ambition which leads to a hunger for power. Simon, in Acts 8, is a prime example of one who coveted the power that Peter and John exhibited when they laid hands on the Samaritans. He selfishly coveted this power. Peter rebuked him, telling him he was in bondage to sin.

The second response is one of resistance which leads to unbelief. The Pharisees resisted the move of God. Stephen charged them as men who were *“stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears always resisting the Holy Spirit”* (Acts 7:51).

The third response is the response of the Bereans (Acts 17:10-11). They received what God was doing with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were true.

This third attitude of acceptance while examining everything carefully is a healthy response which keeps us from quenching the Spirit (Acts 5:34-39; 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21).

H. How fear quenches the Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19)

1. Fear of false emotions and emotionalism.

We must learn to distinguish between being moved emotionally and emotionalism. Emotionalism is attempting to constantly live on good feelings expecting God to replicate those emotions. We cannot demand that God moves us in a particular way. If we do, we have become idolaters— worshipping God falsely (Exodus 20:4). We have become like the Baal worshippers trying to get their god to answer them according to their desire (1 Kings 18:26-29). *“We must not attempt to command the presence of God by whipping God’s people into a lather of praise.”*³

However, there is a place and an urgent need in the Church today for “holy emotions” for the Lord.

- a. The Scriptures say to shout for joy and be glad (Psalm 32:11).
- b. We are to tremble at His Word (Isaiah 66:1-3).
- c. Some danced before the Lord (Exodus 15:20-21; Psalm 30:11, 149:3).
- d. We are to enter His gates with praise and courts with thanksgiving (Psalm 100:4).
- e. People who have been moved by God emotionally are aware of the presence of God and their utter need for Him.
- f. God has emotions. We should express our emotions and not hide them, bury them, or avoid them—emotions such as hope, joy, love, laughter, anger, zeal, compassion, mercy, hatred towards evil, grief, etc.
- g. All of our emotions need to be under the Lordship of Christ and guidance of the Holy Spirit.
- h. Godly emotions are essential for a healthy spiritual life.

2. Fear of the supernatural.

- a. We can't control the supernatural so we tend to deny it or be afraid of it.
- b. We don't like things that are unexplainable to our "rational" minds. Yet God is greater than our minds (Romans 11:33-36).
- c. The danger is to put an emphasis on experience above the Scriptures.

This can lead to false doctrine.

"Fanaticism is a terrible danger we must always bear in mind. It arises from a divorce of Scripture and experience, when we put experience above Scripture claiming things that are not sanctioned by Scripture, or are perhaps even prohibited by it. But there is a second danger and it is equally important that we should bear it in mind. The second is the exact opposite of the first, as these things generally go from one violent extreme to the other. How difficult it always is to maintain a balance! The second danger, then, is that of being satisfied with something very much less than what is offered in the Scripture, and the danger of interpreting the Scripture by our experiences and reducing its teaching to the level of what we know and experience; and I would say that this second is the greater danger of the two at this present time."⁴

"Faith is different from proof; the latter is human, the former is a gift from God."

- Blaise Pascal

I. Danger of seeking signs

Jesus said it is an evil and adulterous generation that craves for a sign (Matthew 12:39). Why is this? Because either we will try to manipulate God around our will or we will place an unhealthy reliance upon them and not just simple faith in the Sovereign God (Job 42:1-6).

If we try to attract people by the spectacular, we will have to keep them by the spectacular. Which means that our appetite will always be hungry for more and better signs and wonders. This leads to an emotional response and a demanding of God that He must bless us with wonders. An over-emphasis and heavy reliance upon signs and wonders keeps us immature in our faith. *"Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed,"* Jesus said (John 20:29). God exhorts us to press on to maturity (Hebrews 6:1).

J. Danger of rejecting signs

There are some today that don't accept miracles, much like the Pharisees and Sadducees in Acts 4:14-17 and 5:16-17, who rejected the supernatural work of God even though they saw and experienced it with their own eyes. God is a miracle-working God and rejecting the supernatural is ultimately rejecting Him. We try to put God in a box with what He can and can't do according to our theology. I believe a good motto is found in the position of the Christian and Missionary Alliance— "DON'T SEEK SIGNS . . . DON'T FORBID THEM!"

K. Things to consider in reference to the miraculous

Be on the look out for spiritual pride. The Apostle Paul tells us that God inflicted him with a thorn in the flesh to keep him humble after the supernatural things he had seen (2 Corinthians 12:1-11). Be on the alert for counterfeits. Be wary of ones who take stands on visions he or she has seen (Colossians 2:18). Check the fruit of their character and ministry (Matthew 7:13-23).

Don't believe everything you hear or are told. Rather, test the Spirit (1 John 4:1).

Here is a list adapted from Jonathan Edward's list as he evaluated the move of the Spirit in the Great Awakening. Ask yourself, "Does my experience:"

- a. Honor Jesus as the Messiah come in the flesh—fully God and fully man; Son of God/Son of Man; unique Savior of the world?
- b. Help me to resist Satan, sin, lust, the world, and pride?
- c. Help me become a better servant of Jesus and help me in making disciples unto all the nations?
- d. Help me to love God and others especially those who are of the household of God?
- e. Teach me to trust God?

"Faith is to believe what we do not see, and the reward of this faith is to see what we believe."

- Augustine

L. Concluding Scripture and Prayer:

"Look among the nations! Observe! Be astonished! Wonder! Because I am doing something in your days—You would not believe if you were told" (Habukkuk 1:5). God is a miracle working God. He is working redemptively in our days in ways we can't even imagine. Instead of stifling the work of God, we need to be open to the moving of the Spirit with the Scriptures as our compass. Our proclivity is to expect God to move according to our own preconceived ideas. Speaking ironically, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said, "Fancy upsetting the clock-like, mechanical perfection of a great service with an outpouring of the Spirit! The thing is unthinkable!"⁵

"Take heed therefore, so that the things spoken of in the Prophets may not come upon you: 'Behold, you scoffers, and marvel, and perish; For I am accomplishing a work in your days, A work which you will never believe, though someone should describe it to you'" (Acts 13:40-41).

Many in Jesus' day were blinded by their own theological understanding of Who the Messiah would be and how He would come and as a result, rejected Jesus the Christ. The same is found during the Apostles' day. May we be found to be believers in the redemptive movements of God and not mockers or scoffers.

"Do not quench the Spirit; do not despise prophetic utterances. But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil" (1 Thessalonians 5:19-22).

Openness to the Spirit—yes! Search the Scriptures to discover the ways of God—a must! Avoid abuses of power—yes!

"Lord, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, O Lord. Renew them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy" (Habukkuk 3:2).

Pray! We need God to move. We cannot demand nor determine how and where God will move, just like we can't control the wind. But we can humble ourselves and ask, and leave the results in the sovereign hand of God.

"Duty is ours, consequences are God's." (General "Stonewall" Jackson)

2. God is a Supernatural God

Miracles take place throughout the entire Scripture through the hand of God. The supernatural certainly has not ceased, for that would mean that God is no longer God. The Scripture is replete with miracles from Genesis to Revelation. All one has to do is read the Book.

3. Signs, Wonders, Miracles, and Gifts of the Holy Spirit

A. Primary Purpose

The purpose of signs and wonders is to confirm and authenticate the redemptive move of God. The Lord had stated in the Old Testament that every fact was to be established on the basis of two or three witnesses. Supernatural signs and wonders validate the message and the messenger. As an example of the necessity of authenticating the message we read in Hebrews 2:3-4, “...After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it (salvation), was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.”

What we learn from this passage is:

1. Jesus presented the gospel message.
2. It was confirmed to us by those who heard = Apostles = (#1 witness).
3. God bore witness with them (the Apostles) both by signs and wonders and by various miracles (#2 witness) and by gifts of the Holy Spirit (#3 witness).

Notice this: Signs, wonders, and miracles are *different* from the gifts of the Holy Spirit:

1. The word “*both*” indicates that there are two different groups and gifts of the Holy Spirit.
2. Signs and wonders and miracles are attesting miracles for validating God’s revelation of a redemptive truth which He previously had not made known. These signs, wonders, and miracles are witnesses establishing the redemptive truth as fact (Mark 16:17-20; Romans 15:19). “From the days of apostles to the present countless sign-miracles of healing have occurred, particularly *where the gospel of Christ has been introduced for the first time*” (emphasis mine; The Children’s Bread, Keith Bailey, p. 32)

“Faith is deliberate confidence in the character of God whose ways you may not understand at the time.”

- Oswald Chambers

<i>Signs / Wonders / Miracles</i>	<i>Gifts of the Holy Spirit</i>
God sends signs to witness, to establish, and to authenticate a new redemptive truth being revealed by God	God, the Holy Spirit, gives miraculous gifts to the Church (Universal) to demonstrate His supernatural ability which builds up and encourages the faith of His people. They also can be a sign authenticating the gospel message. (e.g. tongues in Acts 2:4-11).

- The gifts of the Holy Spirit (e.g. healings, miracles, and tongues) also authenticate the message and messenger, but they have a wider purpose. These gifts demonstrate the supernatural ability of God working in the Body of Christ.

These gifts remain present throughout the Church Age while signs, wonders, and miracles do not.

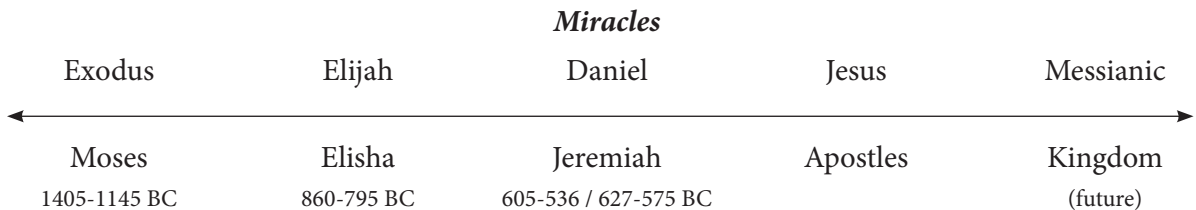
B. Signs, Wonders, Miracles, and Redemptive Movements of God

Signs, wonders, and miracles take place during special redemptive movements of God. The redemptive movements of God in Scripture are always accompanied by signs and wonders.

For example:

- World flood—Rainbow
- Nations—Various kinds of languages
- Exodus—The Plagues
- Elijah—Elisha (God stirring His apostate people—revival)
- Jesus—Apostles (Redemption of mankind and offering the Messianic Kingdom)
- Times of revivals have witnessed the mark of the Holy Spirit through miracles. It could be possible for signs to break out in accordance with Mark 16:17-20 since the Lord did not shut the door on this verse directly with the Apostolic Age. “He could well have meant that such signs would break out temporarily again and again as credentials of the gospel to meet successive emergencies or challenges. Nevertheless, it still remains that our Lord’s words do not give us any authority to preach supernatural healings as a part of the gospel message to men.”⁶
- The future Messianic Kingdom will come with signs, wonders, and miracles.
- Signs also occurred during King Saul’s appointment as King of Israel, in Jeremiah’s day just prior to the Babylonian captivity, and in Daniel’s time in the Babylonian captivity.

The major redemptive movements are illustrated on the chart below:



C. The signs and wonders and miracles validate, confirm, and establish as fact the new redemptive movement of God.

- Signs: Stars in the heavens give witness to the creator (Genesis 1).

“For those with faith, no explanation is necessary. For those without, no explanation is possible.”

- Thomas Aquinas

2. Signs: Exodus—Moses (1445-1405 BC). Validate Moses' and God's purpose (Exodus 4:9, 17, 30, 7:3, 10:1; Numbers 14:11, 22; Deuteronomy 4:34, 11:3, 26:8, 29:3, 34:11; Joshua 24:17; Psalm 78:43, 105:27, 135:20; Nehemiah 9:10; Jeremiah 32:20-21).
3. Signs: Saul becoming King (1043-1011). In God's permissive will, Saul becomes king confirmed by God through specific signs (1 Samuel 10:7, 9). These signs helped verify this new move of God.
4. Signs: Elijah and Elisha's ministry (860-795 BC). Were replete with signs, wonders, and miracles. It was a spectacular time of the miraculous and wonders God used as a wake up call to Israel prior to judgment. They did not listen. The time of Elijah and Elisha was a dark day of apostasy. J. Sidlow Baxter, *Explore the Book*, p. 127, Vol. 2 says, "Elisha's ministry fell in a period which bears ominous parallels with today. The very fact that the ministries of Elijah and Elisha were so full of supernatural wonders is itself intense with meaning. God is meeting a critical situation by supernormal measures. Apostate and degenerate as the nation has become, a final bid shall be made, by special messengers and startling miraculous signs, to recall the sinning people to Jehovah and to the true faith of Israel."
5. Signs: Jeremiah (627 - 575 B.C). In Jeremiah 32:30, we read that God was still using signs. Jeremiah prophesied just prior to and during the Babylonian exile to Judah and the exiles left in Judah.
6. Signs: Daniel (605-536 BC). God was not defeated by the Babylonians. God allowed His people to be taken captive. Heaven rules. This was confirmed by the various signs in Daniel.
7. Signs: Jesus in the Gospels (Mark 16:17, 20; Luke 21:11, 25; John 2:11, 3:2, 4:48, 6:2, 7:31, 9:16, 11:47, 12:37, 20:30; Acts 2:22).
 - a. The purpose of these signs were to confirm Jesus' Messianic-Kingship message.⁷ (John 5:36; Acts 2:22)
 - b. Jesus performed signs, wonders, and miracles like no one else before Him or after Him. "Nothing like this was ever seen in Israel" (Matthew 9:33).
 He healed — instantaneously, immediately, completely (Matthew 12:13)- everyone that came to Him (Matthew 12:15), not necessarily based upon faith (John 5:1-9), ordinary occasions (Matthew 9:27-29), untreatable by the medical community (Matthew 9:20).
 Examples of miracles — water into wine, calming storms, walking on water, feeding 5,000 + people, raising Lazarus from the dead after four days.
 - c. Jesus delegated authority to the Apostles (Matthew 10:1) and the 70 (Luke 10:1) to perform signs to verify His messiahship.
 - d. Jesus' instruction on preaching with the authority of signs were unique for His own lifetime and were not to be repeated in our present time (Matthew 10:1-10).

"The Holy Spirit longs to reveal to you the deeper things of God. He longs to love through you. He longs to work through you. Through the blessed Holy Spirit you may have: strength for every duty, wisdom for every problem, comfort in every sorrow, joy in His overflowing service."

- T.J. Bach

If we claim to have the authority of signs today from this passage, we would then need to apply all the instructions Jesus gave to His disciples. This would mean:

1. *Don't go to the Gentiles;*
2. *Only go to Israel;*
3. *Don't go to the Samaritans;*
4. *Preach the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand;*
5. *Do not take any luggage.*

"Nothing is yet in its true form."

- C.S. Lewis

Nobody suggests that we follow these instructions now. It is obvious from the context that this was unique to the historical setting.

8. Signs: The Apostles in Acts (Acts 2:19, 43, 4:30, 5:12, 6:8, 8:6, 8:13, 14:3, 15:12; Romans 15:19; 2 Corinthians 12:12).
 - a. The only ones recorded in Acts performing the signs, wonders, miracles are the Apostles and those upon whom they laid hands---Peter, Stephen, Philip, Paul, Barnabas—later possibly Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:14 and 2 Timothy 1:6. (I will deal with the issue of tongues and gifts of healing later on.)
 - b. Luke is careful to record that these attesting signs were performed by the hands of the Apostles or those they had laid their hands on (Acts 2:43, 4:33, 5:12, 6:8, 8:6, 14:3).
 - c. Signs accompanied the salvation message (Mark 16:17-20). The signs were never the main event.
 - d. They healed—their healings were signs (Acts 4:22), not the gifts of healings which is given to the Church (1 Corinthians 12:9, 28, 30).
 - instantaneously
 - completely
 - everyone that came to them
 - not necessarily based upon faith
 - ordinary occasions—not a healing meeting
 - untreatable by the medical community
 - e. They were presenting the Kingdom offer once more, a second chance, for Jesus prayed on the Cross, *"Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing"* (Luke 23:34). God granted forgiveness and gave them a second chance. The Kingdom offer was real, verified by kingdom signs (Acts 2:17-21). If Israel had repented, Jesus would have returned then and set up the Messianic Kingdom (Acts 3:19-21). Israel did not. The national Jews rejected Christ as their Messiah-King and the Kingdom (Acts 7 with Stephen being martyred). No more signs are recorded in Jerusalem after this rejection. The international Jewry also rejected the message (Acts 28:25-31). The Kingdom offer has been removed and with it the kingdom signs, until the age of the Gentiles is fulfilled and the nation of Israel repents (Romans 11:25-26).

9. Signs in the Epistles

Signs accompanied Paul as an apostle of the good news. He did not go out to have a ministry of signs, but a ministry of preaching the gospel (Romans 15:19).

The signs acted as witnesses to the message and to Paul as a messenger of God (2 Corinthians 12:12).

The signs and wonders and miracles that were performed through the Gospels and Acts were specifically verifying or validating the Messianic Kingdom offer. These signs accompanied the expansion of the gospel to the Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles (Mark 16:17-21). As the nation of Israel rejected the Messianic Kingdom and the passing of the Apostles, they also rejected the signs, wonders, miracles, and the other “abnormal” elements of the time. What are some of these “abnormal” events?

- Acts 4 The place of prayer shook.
- Acts 5 Ananias and Sapphira died on the spot because of lying.
- Acts 5 Peter’s shadow healed.
- Acts 8 Holy Spirit not yet given to the Samaritans, even though they believed.
- Acts 8 Philip disappeared and was found miles away.
- Acts 9 Jesus actually appeared to Paul.
- Acts 13 Elymas struck blind by Paul.
- Acts 16 All prison doors fling open.

“Neither from our Lord’s miracle healings nor from those of the Apostles can we safely deduce that such are meant to continue today, nor should we presume so. If such healings were divinely intended to continue in the same way today, then all who come for healing today would be healed without exception, as was the case in the days of our Lord and the Apostles. But thousands who come for healing today are not healed. Therefore, by that simple, practical test we know that healings today are not on the same basis as in those days of long ago.”⁸

“As I look across the Body of Christ, I don’t see anyone who has the quality and quantity of miracles that took place in the apostle’s ministry.”⁹

*“We have a God
who delights in
impossibilities.”*

- Billy Sunday

D. Are miracles for today?

Because the apostolic signs are not present today, does this mean that miracles do not happen today? Some say:

<i>Theory</i>	<i>Reason</i>	<i>Answer</i>
<i>Can't Happen</i>	No more Apostolic age	The miraculous was not limited to the Apostles (Acts 2, 8, 11:28, 19; 1 Corinthians 12; Galatians 3:5).
<i>Won't Happen</i>	Purpose is fulfilled	The Purpose of signs and wonders is to authenticate the gospel (Hebrews 2:3-4) Is there no need for verifying today?
<i>Don't Happen</i>	Faded out with apostasy	Does this mean that since the Apostolic age believers have been apostate?
<i>Can Happen</i>	God continues to do miracles, however not the same as in the life of Jesus and the Apostles.	Miracles do happen today (1 Corinthians 12:7-1-; Galatians 3:5; James 5:3-17).

Summary:

Miracles are for today. God is a supernatural God and He can do as He pleases. However, “Signs and Wonders and Miracles” as performed by Jesus and the Apostles are not present today. “Signs and Wonders” validated a new redemptive move of God and once authenticated, the “signs and wonders” ceased.

4. What About the Miraculous Gifts of the Holy Spirit? Are They For Today?

A. Gifts of Healing in the Church (1 Corinthians 12: 9, 28-30)

The gifts of healing are different from signs, wonders, and miracles (SWM). SWM are God’s signs verifying the gospel to unbelievers. The gifts of healing are for God’s people. God has different purposes for both. When God was authenticating His Word through signs—everybody was healed (see Luke 4:40 and Acts 5:16).

However, God’s purposes for His children are different. Physical illnesses may be healed by God, but He also may sovereignly permit sickness as a vehicle of transforming His children into the image of Christ (Romans 8:28). Sickness may also be a discipline from the Lord to help bring about spiritual maturity and holiness (Hebrews 12:10).

This explains why Paul was able to heal anyone (unbelievers) whether they had faith or not. This was a “sign gift.” However, Paul had an infirmity that could not be healed (2 Corinthians 12: 7-9), Epaphroditus almost died because of sickness when he was with Paul, but Paul did not heal him (Philippians 2:25-27), Timothy had a stomach ailment which went unhealed (1 Timothy 5:23), and Paul left Trophimus sick (2 Timothy 4:20). Why? Because God’s purpose is not always to heal His people in this life. These are not verifying signs. God uses healing and suffering sovereignly in His people’s lives to conform them to the image of Christ (Romans 8:28). If a Christian is sick due to God’s will, he will be healed only when God’s purpose is complete. Ultimately, every Christian will be healed (Romans 8:11). It may be today, tomorrow, or it may be when the “perfect” comes.

The norm for healing in the church is the James 5:13-20 model. James was one of the earliest books written. If the gifts of healing were resident or permanent gifts, then why didn't James tell the believers to find a "healer?" Rather, James gives instructions to the believers as to what they are to do if they are sick. This is the norm for the church.

Listed below are six statements about healing in the church.

1. The gift of healing is always spoken of in the plural—gifts of healing. This may indicate that the gift was not given as a permanent gift like serving, teaching, or administration. This may also suggest that the gift is temporary to the one who heals the infirm. No one claimed then, and no one can claim today, that they are God's "healers" in the church.
2. The gifts of healings and miracles are primarily given to the church for the common good (1 Corinthians 12:7). What an encouraging thing it is to have someone give testimony to a divine healing! This fact alone may indicate that the gift is still active today. The same can be said of miracles.
3. God is for our body (1 Corinthians 6:12-20). He heals today through divine healing, prayers of faith in accordance with His will, and through the gifts of healings.
4. God has a purpose for sickness and may not heal a believer until he or she is in the presence of the Lord (2 Corinthians 12:7-9).
5. Sickness can be caused by sin, but this is not always the case (John 9).
6. The reason why believers can still get sick while being in the will of God now is that even though we are saved and redeemed from the curse, our bodies have not been redeemed from the curse yet (Romans 8:10-11, 23).

"The winds of God are always blowing, but you must set the sails."

- Unknown

B. The Gift of Tongues

1. What is the gift of tongues?

Tongues are a supernatural ability to speak in a human language which the speaker has never learned. The Greek word "tongue" is "*glossa*," which means either the actual tongue in our mouth or the language or dialect used by a particular people distinct from that of other nations. In every instance where the word "tongue" is used in the New Testament, it is the translation of this Greek word. We find the first instance of tongues in Acts 2 where the believers are speaking in human languages or dialects of those who came to Jerusalem for the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-11). "*And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born*" (Acts 2:8)?

In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul identifies the gift of tongues with human languages. "*There are, perhaps, a great many kinds of languages in the world, and no kind is without meaning*" (1 Corinthians 14:10).

Tongues were also able to be interpreted (1 Corinthians 14:5, 14). Only languages which have meaning can be interpreted.

2. What about speaking in the tongues of angels? Doesn't this indicate that tongues are a heavenly language?

“If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging symbol” (1 Corinthians 13:1).

Paul is not claiming that we can speak with the tongues of angels. What he is saying is that if we could speak as the most eloquent speaker, or even if we could speak like an angel, if we don't have love, we are a zero. He goes on to say that if we knew all mysteries and all knowledge and had all faith so as to move mountains, but don't have love, we are still a big fat zero. Obviously, Paul is using hyperbole or exaggeration to illustrate the importance of love.

“The devil can counterfeit all the saving operations and graces of the Spirit of God.”

- Jonathan Edwards

This passage emphasizes the value and importance of love. It is not referring to tongues as a heavenly language. Besides, whenever angels speak in the Scripture, they always speak in languages which are understood. They speak in human languages.

3. What about tongues being “groanings too deep for words?”

“And in the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words” (Romans 8:26).

This verse is not speaking in reference to tongues at all. Instead, it states that the Holy Spirit is the one who prays for us, with groanings deeper than anything our words could ever express. What a wonderful truth! But it has nothing to do with tongues.

Also, this verse indicates that the Spirit intercedes for every believer. While the Scripture also teaches that not every believer will speak in tongues (1 Corinthians 12:30).

4. What is the purpose of tongues?

In Genesis 11, God divided the people by creating many different languages. In Acts 2, God had his people speak in many different languages as a sign that God's blessing and redemption was to reach to all tribes and people. This is evident by the way Peter used the prophecy from Joel 2:28-32. Peter quotes the passage from Joel as an explanation for the experience of tongues. However, the Joelian passage doesn't speak of tongues or any such thing in this passage. It does say, however, that the Holy Spirit would be poured out on all flesh. The sign gift of tongues was a confirming sign that the gospel was for all people, for they all heard them speaking in their own language. Every people group that was present that day at Jerusalem heard their native language giving praise to God.

One further confirmation of this position is this: There is no indication that Jesus ever spoke in tongues. He did not need to, for He never left Israel. On the other hand, the Apostles and the believers went all over the world spreading the gospel to different language groups.

Tongues are a sign gift to unbelievers (1 Corinthians 14:20-22). If they were spoken in the church they were used to speak to any unbelievers who were in the service. A person speaking in tongues would speak an unlearned language to those who did speak the language and understood the message. It would then have to be interpreted for the rest of the congregation to be edified. Even at this, tongues were to be regulated for the sake of order (1 Corinthians 14:26-33). For if everyone spoke in tongues (not necessarily all at once), there would be so much confusion that even the unbelievers for whom the sign gift was given would be confused (1 Corinthians 14:23).

“Paul does, in effect, order away from the common society of believers those men of mere show, who look only to themselves.”

- John Calvin, commenting on 1 Corinthians 14:4

Even though tongues are a sign to unbelievers, they also can be a benefit to the Church. Paul mentions this when he says, “... *greater is one who prophesies than the one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edifying.*” (1 Corinthians 14:5). This would make the gift of tongues like the gift of prophecy which profited the church (1 Corinthians 14:6). This is why Paul promotes prophecy over tongues in the church (1 Corinthians 14:1, 3, 5, 12, 19). The one who prophesies edifies, exhorts, and consoles the body of Christ. While the one who speaks in tongues without interpretation would only edify himself (1 Corinthians 14:2, 4).

5. What about tongues as a means for personal edification?

The reason the Holy Spirit gives spiritual gifts is for the common good (1 Corinthians 12:7). Paul declares that the proper use of tongues in the church is, first of all, to speak to unbelievers and, secondly, to build up the body of Christ. Spiritual gifts are not given to us for our own edification. In fact, Paul had just stated that love does not seek its own (1 Corinthians 13:5). In other words, God did not give us spiritual gifts just to benefit ourselves. Now, it is true that if I had the gift of tongues, I could pray in tongues and I could even sing in tongues (1 Corinthians 14:14-17); but Paul

is not advocating this as the purpose of tongues. Instead, he declares that if one did pray in a tongue, his mind would be unfruitful. Because this is undesirable, he gives instruction to pray for interpretation so that the mind understands what is being said. He promotes praying with the spirit and the mind, singing with the spirit and with the mind, to bless with the spirit and the mind (1 Corinthians 14:15-16). In other words, pray, sing, and bless in a language that will be understandable to you and to others.

6. What does Paul mean when he says, “one who speaks in a tongue edifies himself” (1 Corinthians 14:4)?

This verse is often used as a proof text that God gave tongues for our personal benefit. Yet, the problem with this is that Paul is not encouraging this practice. If we read this verse and this chapter as instruction or teaching on how to use tongues, it will lead us to certain conclusions regarding tongues. Or, if we read this chapter as mainly corrective (which it is), it will lead us to a completely different conclusion. On the following page is a comparison of the two views:

Corrective Instruction

1. Pursue love/desire the gift of prophecy (1 Corinthians 14:1).
2. Pursue prophecy because when there is no interpretation the only one who understands is God. They had been speaking in tongues without interpreting (1 Corinthians 14:2).
3. Prophecy edifies the church, but the one who speaks in tongues without interpretation ends up edifying himself. This is not the goal (1 Corinthians 14:4, 13:5).
4. Tongues are beneficial to the church only when there is interpretation, for then it is like the gift of prophecy. Prophecy is greater in the church because it edifies the whole church (1 Corinthians 14:5).
5. Our speaking needs to be profitable. Speaking in tongues in the church does not profit unless interpreted (1 Corinthians 14:6).
6. Be zealous to edify the church (1 Corinthians 14:12).
7. Paul exhorts the Corinthians to incorporate interpretation each time tongues were used in church. Tongues without interpretation is unfruitful. This is not admirable. Paul uses an example of prayer. If we prayed in the church without interpretation, then the rest would not be blessed and their minds would be left unfruitful and not edified. Paul is not advocating praying in tongues nor singing in tongues, though it is possible; rather, he is using prayer and singing as an example of how to benefit everybody when both spirit and mind are involved (1 Corinthians 14:13-17).
8. In the church the most profitable way to edify the church is through the use of a known language so that others would be instructed (1 Corinthians 14:18-19).
9. The “mature” (vs. 20, 21) view and the primary purpose of tongues is that tongues are a sign gift for unbelievers, not for believers. This is God’s stated purpose of tongues (1 Corinthians 14:20-22).
10. The abuse of tongues in the church will lead even the unbeliever to think that Christians are mad. If everyone spoke in tongues in church, it does not necessarily mean at the same time (1 Corinthians 14:23-25).
11. Paul lays out a proper order for the use of tongues in a public setting: two, at the most three, each in turn, and with interpretation (1 Corinthians 14:26-33).
12. Summary: Desire to prophecy in the church and don’t forbid speaking in tongues.

vs***Teaching***

1. Tongues are for speaking to God (1 Corinthians 14:2)
2. Tongues benefit you (1 Corinthians 14:4)
3. The one who speaks in tongues should also pray that he may interpret. It is possible to pray and sing in tongues. (1 Corinthians 14:13-17)
4. If there is no interpreter the person is to remain silent and speak to himself and to God. (1 Corinthians 14:28)

The point of this little exercise is that if we view this chapter as teaching on tongues then we would learn that tongues are for speaking to God, edifying yourself, and they can be used in prayer, but when used in church if there is no interpretation, then we must remain silent and speak to God. In church, there is a limit as to how many can speak in any given service. All of this sounds very familiar and similar to the modern tongues movement, except for the limiting statements.

“Tongues served well to show that God was moving from the single nation of Israel to all the nations.”

- O. Palmer Robertson

But this chapter is not teaching on tongues. Rather, it is clear that Paul’s instruction on tongues is to correct the misuse of tongues in the church. The letter to the Corinthians is a letter of response to issues the Corinthians raised, of reproof and correction for a wide range of fleshly behavior. Paul reproves the Corinthians for divisions, jealousy, contentions, sexual immorality, abuse of liberty, disorder in public meetings, abuse of spiritual gifts, and wrong attitudes toward the resurrection.

The church was steeped in strife and jealousy (1 Corinthians 3:3). It was this environment that led to a misuse and abuse of the spiritual gifts, especially with the miraculous gift of tongues. The Corinthians wrongly exalted the gift of tongues as a pre-eminent gift. Paul corrects their misuse and abuse of the gifts in chapters 12-14. In this section, Paul doesn’t put gifts or tongues down, but he puts them in the right perspective and priority.

Chapters 12-14 are outlined this way:

Chapter 12 Spiritual Gifts in the Church

1. True worship honors Christ as Lord (1 Corinthians 12:1-3).
2. The Holy Spirit distributes a variety of gifts, not just the gift of tongues (1 Corinthians 12:4-11).
3. The Body of Christ is united and diverse (1 Corinthians 12:12-30).
 - a. No place for an attitude of inferiority
 - b. No place for an attitude of superiority
 - c. Be zealous for the greater gifts
 - d. Love is the greatest of all gifts

Chapter 13 Love the Greatest Gift

1. The priority of love (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).
2. Characteristics of love (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).
3. Love is superior to gifts (1 Corinthians 13:8-13).

Chapter 14 Edify Others With Your Gifts

1. Use your gifts to edify the church, not yourself (1 Corinthians 14:1-5).
 - a. Prophecy is superior to tongues
 - b. Tongues only benefit if interpreted
2. Tongues have limited profit in the church (1 Corinthians 14:6-12).

- a. Various illustrations
 - b. Seek to abound to edify the church.
3. Tongues and edification (1 Corinthians 14:13-19).
 - a. Pray for interpretation.
 - b. Un-interpreted tongues leave the mind unfruitful
 - c. Un-interpreted tongues do not benefit the church
 4. Purpose of tongues (1 Corinthians 14:20-25).
 - a. Tongues are a sign to unbelievers.
 - b. Misuse of tongues will not save unbelievers
 - c. Prophecy, even though for believers, can convict unbelievers
 5. Orderly use of gifts (1 Corinthians 14:26-40).
 - a. All practices done for edification of others, not for self
 - b. For the sake of order and peace
 - tongues: two, or at the most three, and each in turn with one to translate
 - prophecy: two or three; women with questions ask their husbands

“It is hard to believe that in [1st Corinthians 14:4 it] means that [those] who do not know what they are saying will yet edify themselves, when in verse 5 [and throughout the whole chapter] he denies that the listening church can be edified unless it knows what they are saying.”

- J. I. Packer

Paul exhorts the Corinthians to value all spiritual gifts, but to earnestly desire the greater gifts (1 Corinthians 12:31). The greater gifts are the gifts that have the greatest influence in the church (e.g. apostles, prophets, and teachers in 1 Corinthians 12:28). Tongues are listed last. The Corinthians had things out of priority. Instead of pursuing tongues, Paul encourages them to pursue prophecy (1 Corinthians 14:1), because the one who prophecies influences the entire church (1 Corinthians 14:3, 5, 39).

When viewed this way we learn that tongues are of lesser profit in the church and that they are a sign gift to unbelievers. When they are spoken in the church, they are limited to no more than three, and always with interpretation. Otherwise, they are to remain silent.

7. What about tongues being a private prayer language to help us pray?

This issue obviously gets us into more controversy over the purpose of tongues. I certainly don't want to deny anyone's experience or hinder anyone from a practice that better enables him or her to pray. So, personally, I don't make it an issue to be debated in our church. But are tongues as a prayer language the same gift of tongues as described in the Bible? Here are a few thoughts to ponder as you sort this out with the Scripture.

The first thing that comes to my mind is the episode when the disciples came to Jesus and asked Him to teach them how to pray. They observed Jesus perform incredible miracles and preach authoritatively like no other. They also observed Him in prayer. It was His prayer life with which they were intrigued and they wanted Him to teach them how to pray personally and intimately with God (Luke 11:1).

“If we are full of ...pleasure and the world, there is no room for the Spirit of God. I believe many a man is praying to God to fill him, when he is already full--of something else. Before we pray that God would fill us, I believe we ought to pray for Him to empty us.”

- D.L. Moody

If tongues were a prayer language that can help one pray and connect with God, why did Jesus not bless them with the prayer language of tongues?

Secondly, the Scripture teaches that tongues are not for every Christian, just like the gifts of teaching, mercy, or giving are not for every Christian. This being true, wouldn't tongues as a prayer language mean that some Christians would be able to have a deeper, more personal, walk with the Lord than others? I have a real problem with this. For the Scripture teaches that every believer has received everything he or she needs to be all that God wants them to be (2 Peter 1:3-4).

The modern use of tongues promotes this gift as a prayer language which helps believers express their heart to God more personally or more deeply. This is why those who promote tongues consider tongues to be a universal gift. All Christians are encouraged to speak in tongues. But this is clearly contrary to the Word of God.

“For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge... and to another various kinds of tongues...” (1 Corinthians 12:8, 10).

“All do not have the gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they” (1 Corinthians 12:30)?

The obvious answer to the last verse is no. All believers do not speak with tongues. The Holy Spirit gives gifts to whom He wishes (1 Corinthians 12:11).

So then, if tongues were a special prayer language, does that not imply that those without this prayer language are “second class” Christians and not as spiritual as others? One of the major reasons the Holy Spirit was given was to establish us in Christ and to make us one body in Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13), not to make various classes or divisions of Christians. No one in the body of Christ can claim superiority (1 Corinthians 12:21-26) or feel inferior (1 Corinthians 12:15-17).

Jesus taught His disciples a model on how to pray that applies to every believer. This is how Jesus prayed and He had the most intimate and dynamic prayer life of all.

8. Why then does Paul speak in tongues?

Paul stated that he spoke in tongues more than the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 14:18). In what context—the church? For personal benefit? A private prayer language?

We know that Paul did not speak in tongues in church much at all (1 Corinthians 14:19). So when he states that he speaks in tongues more than the Corinthians, we can assume it was not in the church for the believers.

Also, Paul is not referring to tongues as a personal prayer language, for how could he say that he spoke in tongues more than others? If the purpose of tongues was a prayer language, how would Paul know that he spoke in tongues more than others? How would he know how much or little the Corinthians personally and privately “prayed” in tongues?

In 1 Corinthians 14:14-16, Paul is not advocating or proposing that this is the primary purpose of tongues. He is simply stating that if tongues are used in prayer or in song, it doesn't benefit those who are listening. He is encouraging the Corinthians to speak, pray, or sing in a manner that allows their

minds to be fruitful (1 Corinthians 14:14) and that they may be edified (1 Corinthians 14:17).

Therefore, if Paul did not speak in tongues much in church or in personal prayer, in what context would he have spoken in tongues? In my opinion, he spoke in foreign languages as he traveled sharing the gospel to different people groups. Paul traveled extensively for the sake of the gospel. The Corinthians did not. Paul says that tongues are a sign for unbelievers (1 Corinthians 14:22). Tongues in the Book of Acts were evident with the gospel spreading to new people groups. Paul states in Romans that as he was proclaiming the gospel in new areas, God worked through him with signs and wonders in the power of the Spirit (Romans 15:19). Although I cannot at this time verify reports of tongues being used in opening up new territories for the gospel, I have heard of situations where people have spoken in a foreign language where the gospel has never been introduced before.

“The object of opening the mind as of opening the mouth is to close it again on something solid.”

- G. K. Chesterton

9. *What does God say is the purpose of tongues?*

The answer is given in 1 Corinthians 14:20-22:

“Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature. In the Law it is written, BY MEN OF STRANGE TONGUES AND BY THE LIPS OF STRANGERS I WILL SPEAK TO THIS PEOPLE, AND EVEN SO THEY WILL NOT LISTEN TO ME,” says the Lord. So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophecy is for a sign, not to unbelievers but to those who believe” (emphasis mine).

This is the “mature” (v. 20) view of the gift of tongues. This is God’s purpose for the gift of tongues—*“In the Law* (inspired by God) *it is written.”* This is the only verse in the Bible that specifically and explicitly explains what the gift was for.

The purpose of tongues is a sign to unbelievers. Believers will supernaturally speak the unbeliever’s native language. The believer doesn’t know what he is saying unless there is an interpretation. This would be a sign to the unbeliever that God is speaking to them.

From this passage it is apparent that tongues are a human language and not ecstatic utterance. The word for strange tongues in this Old Testament quote is “*eteroglossois*.” This word “*glossolalia*” is the only word used for tongues throughout the Scripture. As mentioned earlier, “*glossa*” means the actual tongue or human language. The tongues spoken of here is the Assyrian language, not some ecstatic utterance.

10. *Are tongues strictly for unbelieving Jews? “I will speak to this people...”*

“This people” from the quote refers to Jews, but Paul does not specifically apply it to Jews, rather he takes the Old Testament and he applies it to unbelievers in general (1 Corinthians 14:22).

In Acts, the gift of tongues is evidenced in three chapters—Acts 2, 10, 19 and possibly Chapter 8. In every case, the gospel was going out to unbelievers— new people groups—Jews, Samaritans, Gentiles, and a special group of unbelievers— followers of John the Baptist or Apollos.

11. Do tongues exist today?

1 Corinthians 13:8 states that, “Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they shall be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away.” Here is what I know:

1. Love will continue to have its influence. It will not lose any of its force; love will not cease.
2. Prophecy and knowledge will be done away (*katargeo* - to be put out of action; to reduce to inactivity—in the passive voice meaning something will act upon the subject to cause it to be abolished).

They will be abolished by the “perfect.” “But when the perfect comes, the partial (prophecy and knowledge—1 Corinthians 13:9) will be done away.” The perfect is the eternal state when Christ returns (1 Corinthians 13:12). So prophecy and knowledge gifts will continue through to the end.

3. Tongues, however, are not a part of the partial (prophecy and knowledge—1 Corinthians 13:9). Tongues will cease (*pauo* - to stop—in the middle voice indicating that they will cease by themselves). Nothing has to take place to act upon them to cease. In other words, tongues will continue until their purpose is fulfilled. Tongues are an authenticating sign of the gospel for evangelizing unreached areas for the gospel. The gospel is still going out today into regions where the gospel has never been preached. Therefore, I believe that tongues do exist today for the purpose of authenticating the gospel.

A common theory today is that tongues ceased at the close of the Apostolic Age. Because of the uniqueness of the signs and wonders and miracles ministry of the Apostles has ended, therefore, so has tongues.

However, even though the unique ministry of signs by Jesus and the Apostles has ended, this does not mean that God has not used signs since. Nowhere did God shut the door on signs at the end of the Apostolic Age. As we have already seen God has used signs in the past. Can He not also employ them again? Tongues will cease when their purpose is fulfilled in a particular area of outreach with the gospel. This does not mean that they could not be active or start up in other areas as a sign gift to reach those peoples.

Another common theory is that tongues were a specific judgment sign only to unbelieving Israel. The Old Testament quote in 1 Corinthians 14:21 is taken from Isaiah 28 when God warns unbelieving Israel of impending judgment by using the Assyrians to speak to them. Since Israel rejected God's warning and did not acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah, God has placed a partial hardening on Israel and temporarily placed them on the shelf. And, as a result, tongues have ceased.

Although this view may be true, my thoughts are that Paul uses this quote to prove the point that tongues are a sign to unbelievers in general (1 Corinthians 14:20-22). In his summation, he does not specify unbelieving Jews, but he applies it to all unbelievers. In 1 Corinthians 14:23, Paul again says that if unbelieving men came into their assembly and witnessed the misuse of tongues, they would

“When you consider the fact that there are manifestations of tongues in such religions as Hinduism and Islam...and also in cults such as Mormonism, then this in itself ought to make us a bit wary of the manifestation and desire indeed to test it as to whether it is genuine or not.”

- Ray Stedman

think they were mad. Now, does Paul mean only Jewish unbelievers or any unbeliever? Or, is the unbeliever who comes in and is convicted by prophecy and falls down to worship God, only an unbelieving Jew? If we say that Paul could not use an Old Testament quote this way, what would we say to the way Matthew uses Isaiah 7:14 to prove that the Messiah would be born of a virgin when the prophecy specifically applies to Isaiah's son to be born from his wife? Or of Peter referring to the Gentiles raging in Psalm 2:1 as applying it to the Jewish religious leaders of his day (Acts 4:25)?

In summary, I believe the gift of tongues is a supernatural ability to speak in a foreign language that authenticates the gospel in regions where the gospel has never penetrated before. Once the gospel has been established the purpose of tongues is fulfilled and thus ceases at that location. In the Church, the gift of prophecy is to be desired over tongues. Prophecy edifies the whole body while tongues would only edify the speaker, unless, of course, it is accompanied by interpretation. It takes two gifts (tongues and interpretation) in order for the gift of tongues to be properly utilized.

5. Summary

God is a supernatural working God. Miracles have occurred throughout history and still do. There are special times, however, in which God employs signs, wonders, and miracles as testifying to His work. These signs are to unbelievers. This has occurred in the past and occurs currently according to the sovereign will of God. These signs are not normative in every day experience. There are still valid reasons for signs to authenticate God's message in today's world, especially to the areas that have not been reached with the gospel and to areas where apostasy has taken root.

There is a difference, however, with the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit. These gifts, along with the non-miraculous gifts, are to demonstrate the supernatural ability of God and for the edifying and building up of the Church (God's people), again in accordance with God's purpose.

The miraculous gifts are not resident gifts like the non-miraculous gifts. That is, these gifts are not given permanently to any particular individual, but are given to the Church as God deems fit in any given situation and circumstance. They may be manifested at a particular time and, at another time, they may not. This explains why some Christians are healed and some are not.

Finally, the miraculous, whether it be signs or gifts, are not to be the primary focus of a ministry or of a particular person. They are to accompany and aid, but not take pre-eminence. The Word of God is, and must be, our strong foundation and Jesus Christ must be our focus; spreading the gospel must be our purpose and love must be our aim.

"It would be a strange calculus which concluded that a modern Charismatic lives on a higher spiritual plane than did, say, Augustine, Jonathan Edwards, Count Zinzendorf, or Charles Spurgeon, since none of these spoke in tongues."

- D. A Carson

Where Do We Go From Here?

I suggest:

1. We major on the majors:
 - A. Jesus Christ
 - B. Salvation and the Great Commission
 - C. Love and unity of God's people in spite of differing views
 - D. Seek to be holy: The greatest demonstration of the Spirit is a changed life
 - E. Bring Christ glory in all we do and say
 - F. Don't seek signs ... Don't forbid them ... Welcome them.
2. Have a child-like faith that not only says, but also believes that our daddy (Heavenly Father), can do anything He pleases.
3. Be open, yet cautious, with the things not seen clearly. For the Devil can appear as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14).

"In no case is there any evidence for the use of tongues in private. It is a public gift by virtue of its purpose as a sign for unbelievers."

- Ray Stedman



Appendix #1: Observations on Healing

1. Divine healing: “...direct intervention of the one and only true God” —J. Sidlow Baxter, *Divine Healing of the Body*, p.18

Does divine healing happen today? YES!

2. Miracle healing: “...the immediate action of God as distinguished from the mediate action through natural laws.” —A. J. Gordon, *The Ministry of Healing*

Do miraculous healings occur today? YES!

YET, the miraculous is not always of God...

- a. Miracles can be performed by Satan and the demonic world.
 - Pharaoh’s magicians
- b. False prophets can perform signs and wonders.
 - Deuteronomy 13:1-2: false prophets giving a sign or wonder
 - Matthew 7:22-23: did we not do miracles in your name?
 - Matthew 24:24: false prophets will show great signs
 - Acts 8:9: Simon the magician
 - 2 Thessalonians 2: 9-10: activity of Satan—all power, signs, and false wonders
 - Revelations 13:13: the beast performs great signs
 - Revelations 16:14: demons working signs
 - Revelations 19:20: false prophet who worked signs

3. Faith Healing: *healing that comes through faith*

Does healing come through faith today? YES! But not always.

- a. Oldest form of healing in the world, including non-Christian healing.

Mental healing—positive thinking, illusions, and power of suggestion used sincerely and abusively. There is death and life in the power of the tongue (Proverbs 18:21) and one person can move a crowd however he or she wants (James 3:4-5).

Healing can occur with a change of attitude and perspective when the illness is a functional disease. This type of healing does not “cure” organic diseases. The healing of functional illnesses are

*“God will not use
dead tools for
working living
miracles.”*

- C. H. Spurgeon

not what the Scriptures refer to when it speaks of healing. Healing, in the Scriptures has to do with organic diseases. Functional disease: “A functional disease is one associated with a change in function of a bodily organ or tissue without any tissue damage.” —Dr. Erico Chico, Medical doctor¹⁰

Organic disease: blindness, lameness, “An organic disease is one associated with a demonstrable change in a bodily organ or tissue.”¹¹

Magnetic healing—as in the power to attract through mass hypnosis and mass hysteria. Any healing that comes from this environment is produced by manufactured emotions and priming the attitudinal pump. These healings are not inherent in the Scripture for they are similar to the healing of functional healing.

An example of this was observed by Dr. Verna Wright in attendance with John Wimber in Leeds, England. Dr. Wright reports, “There were hours of repetitious chorus singing which began the proceedings. A fair amount of reeling and writhing ... at the start of the singing. No space was found for a Scripture reading as such. The congregation was at no time called to prayers of confession of sin and repentance. ‘Hold your hands. Feel heat coming through you. Your eyelids may feel heavy. You may feel like falling; some persons may scream. It is all right. You can see the Holy Spirit resting on people, the power of God resting on many people....’ As one expected from hypnotic states, these things happened more or less at once ... Uncontrollable laughter, crying, groaning, shrieking and sobbing....”¹²

Spiritualistic healing—occult, cultic. This non-Christian healing which many cultic and occultic groups claim to happen.

Faith healing—There are legitimate examples of people being healed today by faith in the Almighty. However, no one is healing people today like the Apostles or Jesus did. Rather, there are plenty of examples of abuses of so-called faith healers today misusing the name of Christ in order to promote their own agenda.

“It is no sin to doubt some things but it may be fatal to believe everything.”

-A.W. Tozer



Appendix #2: Experiencing The Power of God

God designed the Christian life in such a way that it is impossible to live apart from the power of God. I didn't say it was difficult. I said it is impossible to live the Christian life without the empowerment of God. Too often, we rely on Jesus Christ for our salvation, but when it comes to living out our salvation (Philippians 2:12), we endeavor to do it on our own. The result is performance-oriented life, stressed-out and burned-out Christians, a lack of joy and a loss of peace. Obeying God becomes a burden, not a blessing. This is not what God describes as the victorious Christian experience.

On the contrary, Jesus stated that He came so that we might have life and might have it abundantly (John 10:10). The Scripture tells us that if we are to experience life abundantly, we must learn to rely on the Holy Spirit every day of our lives. The Holy Spirit is the key to living the Christian life. He is our power source. He is the one who sanctifies us and empowers us. The difference between living a devastated life like that described in Romans 7:14-25 and the victorious life described in Romans 8 is the Holy Spirit.

"He makes His ministers a flame of fire. Am I ignitable? God deliver me from the dread asbestos of 'other things.' Saturate me with the oil of the Spirit that I may be aflame. But flame is transient, often short lived. Canst thou bear this, my soul - short life? ... Make me thy fuel, Flame of God."

- Jim Elliot

A. The power of God is experienced through the Holy Spirit.

"Does He then, who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith" (Galatians 3:5)?

"Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit," says the Lord of hosts" (Zechariah 4:6).

God called Zerubbabel to rebuild the Temple of God. He laid the foundation, but the work stopped because of fear from the enemies of Israel (Ezra 4:4, 24). About 14 years later, God exhorts Zerubbabel through the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to get back to work in accomplishing the task God called him to do. It is in this context that God instructs him that the work of God must be done in reliance upon the Holy Spirit and not upon his own energy or ingenuity.

We have a calling from God to live holy lives (Ephesians 1:4) and to live as salt and light in this world (Matthew 5:14-16). Our God-given task is to reach the nations with the gospel of Jesus Christ (Mark 16:15). Is this not a mission impossible? In our own strength, yes! In fact, it is impossible to live the Christian life at all apart from the empowerment of God. Do not be misled. It is impossible. But with God, all things are possible.

"Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us" (Ephesians 3:20, KJV).

B. The Holy Spirit richly dwells in every believer “whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior” (Titus 3:6)

There is no such thing as a Christian that does not have all of the Holy Spirit. Not only does every Christian have the Holy Spirit dwelling in him or her, but all Christians have all of Him (Colossians 3:11). It is a theological error for Christians to seek the baptism in the Holy Spirit, or what is commonly referred to as the “second blessing” of the Holy Spirit. This is commonly encouraged so that Christians can live a life empowered by God—a sanctified life. But this is a theology that has holes in its bucket—it just won’t hold water.

1. Nowhere does the Scripture command or imply that Christians should seek the baptism in the Holy Spirit.
2. It creates two classes of Christians: A spiritually-sanctified group of Christians and a group of powerless Christians. Nowhere is this taught in the Scriptures.
3. The Baptism in the Holy Spirit places us in the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13). There are only seven verses in the entire Scripture that specifically relate to Baptism in the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11, Mark 1:8, Luke 3:16, John 1:33, Acts 1:5, 11:16, 1 Corinthians 12:13). The first five of these refer to the baptism as something that had not happened yet. In every case when the baptizer is identified, he is identified as Jesus. Jesus is the one who baptizes us in the Spirit. In every case, the element into which a person is baptized is into the Holy Spirit. The only verse which explains the purpose of the baptism is 1 Corinthians 12:13, which teaches us that we are placed into the body of Christ. As a result, we are members of one another; one body with many members glorifying the Head.
4. The Baptism in the Spirit is not the same thing as the filling with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). The Baptism takes place once for all, at the moment of salvation (1 Corinthians 12:13, “...we were all made to drink of one Spirit.”)

When did we drink of the Holy Spirit? At the time of salvation (John 7:37-39). The filling is continual. Christians are commanded to be continually filled with the Holy Spirit. Daily, we are to yield our lives to the Holy Spirit and let Him lead us. This is the essence of the Christian life. The issue is not one of seeking a “second blessing,” but one of possession. Every Christian possesses the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit does not possess every Christian. As Christians, we need to experience the fullness of the Holy Spirit that we already have.

C. The power of God is experienced through a yielded life—yielded to God

A Yielded Life = brokenness

The Holy Spirit works through broken vessels. He does not work through people who are strong in themselves, but through His servants who are strong in Him. This means we must experience brokenness so that we may be strengthened by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 3:16).

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus addresses His disciples and begins to teach them the type of life that is pleasing to God. The first three statements refer to our brokenness. “*Blessed are the poor in spirit...*” This speaks of our utter spiritual poverty before Almighty God. “*Blessed are those who mourn ...*” This

“The greatness of a man’s power is the measure of his surrender.”

- William Booth

speaks of a broken spirit in regard to sin. *“Blessed are the meek...”* This speaks of our brokenness toward our fellow man. We learn that God’s blessing comes through brokenness.

Brokenness is not weakness. Instead, it is like a wild horse that has brought its will under subjection to its new owner. To live the Christian life and experience God’s power in our lives, we are to come under the Lordship of Christ and yield our lives, ambitions, desires, hopes, and dreams to Him. It is a death to our self-centered, egotistical lives and living the resurrected life (Matthew 16:25-26). These are the ones who have taken up their instrument of death (the cross) and willingly yielded their lives to follow the Lord’s will and not their own (Luke 9:23).

This truth is also found in Galatians 2:20-21. These two verses are descriptive of living the Christian life. Here Paul states five truths that instruct us how to live the Christian life.

1. *“I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who live...”* Here we discover that our old man (who we were in Adam—see Romans 5:12-7:6), is dead or crucified. As a result, we are no longer regarded by God as sinners or under condemnation from God.

2. *“...but Christ lives in me...”* We have a new life. We are now alive to God and dead to sin (positionally) and we have a new power living in us (Christ through the Holy Spirit—Galatians 3:2). God Himself dwells in us! He is the one who empowers us to change. He is the one in whom we put our hope for changing us from glory to glory.

3. *“... and the life I now live in the flesh (human body) I live by faith in the Son of God...”* This is the key to successfully living out our salvation. We are to live by faith, not by sight. We are to live by faith, not by our power. We are to live by faith, not by our ingenuity. We are to live by faith for it pleases God and He rewards those who seek Him (Hebrews 11:6). Living by faith means we let God be God and let Him lead our lives in accordance with His Word.

4. *“...who loved me and gave Himself up for me.”* This is why we would place our trust and faith in Him. Because He loves us and He sacrificed Himself for us so we could be brought to glory (Hebrews 2:10).

5. *“I do not nullify the grace of God...”* There it is. The grace of God. It is His desire, His favor and willingness to work in our lives to transform us and fit us for the Kingdom of God. If we rely on our own performance and power we nullify His grace. We void it out and we end up burned out. However, our culture is a pleasure-seeking culture. At all costs it avoids the hard things of life. We are ever seeking satisfaction in pleasure, yet never becoming filled up. This hedonistic lifestyle has also penetrated the Church. As Christians, we think God could never intend for us to go through hard things or God forbid, painful things. We think of God as our “genie in the lamp” and all we have to do is rub some biblical promises His way and our wish is His command. We want the crown, but we don’t want the cross. We pursue happiness, not holiness. We look for instant spirituality and power. Our Christianity has become man-centered rather than God-centered. We expect God to work according to our agenda and not His. God wants us to experience joy and pleasure and power, but they must come on His terms,

“Paul and Silas in the jail, back raw from the stripes, feet in the stocks in the inner filthy prison but singing hymns and praises at midnight. No wonder God worked an earthquake on their account. And then the old boy preached at Troas from sundown to sunrise. We need not think it strange that God threw in a resurrection from the dead as a small contribution to show His approval.”

- C. T. Studd

not ours (Psalm 16:14). God's power is experienced when we are yielded to Him; when we bring our will under subjection to His; when we get off the throne of our lives and exalt Him as Lord in our hearts. The Scripture is replete with examples of broken and yielded lives. Here are just a few of those examples:

- *The grain of wheat (John 12:24-25).*

If it holds onto its life it remains by itself, but if it dies it bears much fruit. There is life on the inside of a kernel of wheat. For it to bear fruit, the outer shell must be broken for the life to burst forth. Even so, Jesus says, if we love our life (soul - desires, will, hopes,...) we will lose it, but if we hate (comparatively speaking) these things we will experience life.

- *The Alabaster Vial (Mark 14:3-5).*

If the alabaster vial is not broken there won't be any fragrance. The vial, however nice, was not meant to be the primary attraction. Rather, the fragrance on the inside was meant to come forth. If we are not broken and yielded to the Lord, then the fruit of the Spirit will not blossom.

- *Jacob Wrestling With God (Genesis 32:22-32).*

Jacob wrestled with God and prevailed only when he was broken (in the thigh). He learned how to seek the Lord and experience His blessing. It was through brokenness, where instead of wrestling with the angel, he was clinging to the angel.

- *The Life of Christ is Manifested Through Brokenness (2 Corinthians 4:7-11).*

"But we have this treasure (the glory of God) in earthen vessels, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves." Paul went through many hardships (2 Corinthians 1:8-10, 4:8-11, 6:4-10, 11:22-12:10). Why? God used these difficulties, these afflictions, to break the earthen vessel so that the power of God might shine out of darkness.

- *Gideon and the Clay Jars (Judges 7).*

Gideon attacked the Midianites with the God-appointed three hundred men. God had purposely whittled down their numbers so that when they were victorious over the Midianites they would not be able to boast in their might or power, but in God alone. Gideon had the men place torches inside clay jars and then surround the Midian camp at night. At Gideon's signal they were all to break their jars and let the torches shine. The Midianites were not only surprised, but thought they were under attack by a massive army and in their confusion they fought each other. It was a great victory for the nation of Israel. God had taught them that victory comes through brokenness.

- *The Farmer and Grain (Isaiah 28:28).*

"Grain for bread is crushed." The farmer has to break down the grain in order to turn it into bread. Even so, God uses the pressures of life to break us so that we can be transformed into something useful to the Lord.

"God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world."

- C.S. Lewis

- *The Thorn in the Flesh (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).*

God gave Paul a thorn in the flesh to keep him from becoming proud. It was very unpleasant. Paul kept entreating the Lord to remove it until he heard the Lord say, “*My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.*” Only when we are weak in the flesh can we be strong in God’s grace, which is His power in our lives.

The Lord is not on the look out for those who are mighty, strong, and wise. He is looking for those whose hearts are yielded to Him. He opposes the proud but He gives grace to the humble (1 Peter 5:5). The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken spirit and a contrite heart God will not refuse (Psalm 51:17). The Lord is not impressed with what we can accomplish through our might and power. What impresses God is one who is humble and contrite of spirit and who trembles at His Word (Isaiah 66:1-3).

Do these attributes describe your heart condition right now? Are you dependent daily upon the Lord and obedient to Him? Is your spirit sensitive like a fresh bruise is sensitive to touch? Do you tremble before His Word? This is the one with whom God is impressed and the one whom God works through. Instead of seeking power, seek the Lord of power. Instead of seeking signs and wonders, seek Him. Instead of demanding how God should act and respond in your life, take up your cross and follow Him.

D. The Result of Living by the Power of God

When our lives are yielded to the Lord and we are strong in His might, then God gives us POWER (*dunamis* - ability to do) to be WITNESSESS (Acts 1:8). We will ABOUND IN HOPE by the POWER of the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:13). We won’t rely on persuasive or eloquent words to lead people to Christ. But FAITH will come because of the POWER of God (1 Corinthians 2:4-5). We will have a new spirit of generosity and we will GIVE according to POWER (2 Corinthians 8:3). God’s GRACE will be manifested in our lives (2 Corinthians 12:9). It is through the POWER of God that we will MINISTER as God’s representatives (Ephesians 3:7). We will be STRENGTHENED with POWER by the Holy Spirit in our inner man (Ephesians 3:16). God will work in our lives beyond what we could ever imagine according to the POWER that works in us (Ephesians 3:20). God also will work in us to strengthen us with ALL POWER so that we remain STEADFAST AND PATIENT (Colossians 1:11). He also has given us the ability to OVERCOME TIMIDITY through POWER (2 Timothy 1:7).

This is just a sampling of what happens in a believer’s life when he or she is yielded to the Lord and is relying upon God’s power. We will have the ability:

- to witness
- to be God’s minister
- to abound in hope
- to be strengthened in our inner man
- to stimulate faith
- to experience God at work in our lives beyond our imagination
- to give
- to remain steadfast and patient
- to experience God’s grace
- to overcome fear
- to ...

“The best cure for discouragement or qualms is another daring plunge of faith.”

- C.T. Studd

“There is no better evangelist in the world than the Holy Spirit.”

- D. L. Moody

The Kingdom of God does not consist of mere words, but of the power of a changed life (1 Corinthians 4:20). God will perform signs and wonders through some of His people and that is indeed wonderful, but God also desires to work powerfully in transforming every believer.

Jesus must be our passion and our priority...for then we will know His power.

This was Paul’s passion. He declared, *“that I may KNOW HIM and the POWER OF HIS RESURRECTION, and the FELLOWSHIP OF HIS SUFFERINGS being CONFORMED IN THE LIKENESS OF HIS DEATH”* (Philippians 3:10, emphasis mine). Brethren, let us join in following Paul’s example and make Jesus our passion and the great commission as our mission. Expect God to do great things in you.

Expect God to do great things through you. Someone has been quoted as saying, “Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God.”

God did not call us to sit in idleness until He returns. He told us to do business until He returns (Luke 19:13). It is the sailors that are out to sea that see the wonders of God, not those sitting in harbor (Psalm 107:23). God called us to get out into the deep, calling upon His name. We were not made to be land-lovers, but to launch out, trusting in the promises of God, the power of God, and the presence of God (Joshua 1:1-9). This is what kept Joshua strong and courageous as he was victorious in taking the land of promise.

Brethren, what are you expecting God to do in you? What are you expecting God to do through you? Is it in accordance with His promises? What are you, by faith, attempting for God? Let’s get out there and believe in God!

“Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,” says the Lord” (Zechariah 4:6).

Endnotes

¹ John White, "When the Spirit Comes In Power"

² H.B. London, Vice President of Pastoral Ministry for Focus on the Family, Christian Counseling, the Church and Christian Leaders (The American Association of Christian Counselors, 1994), audio tape. ³ Bob Sorge, Exploring Worship, pg. 34

⁴ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Joy Unspeakable, p. 18

⁵ D. Martyn Lloyd Jones, The Sovereign Spirit: Discerning His Gifts, p. 56

⁶ J. Sidlow Baxter, Divine Healing of the Body, p. 117.

⁷ (See Power Religion, p. 99 - 103)

⁸ J. Sidlow Baxter, Divine Healing of the Body, p. 123

⁹ Jack Deere, Surprised By The Power Of The Spirit, p. 68

¹⁰ The Healing Promise by Richard Mayhue, p. 52

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Dr. Verna Wright, A Medical View of Miraculous Healing, p. 211-213



SIGNS AND WONDERS IN THE SCRIPTURES

Exercise

1. What was the main lesson you learned from this reading?

2. Explain briefly Doug’s position on sign and wonders. Do you agree or disagree with his viewpoint? Please explain.

3. Describe Doug’s position on healing. Do you agree or disagree with his viewpoint? Please explain.



SIGNS AND WONDERS IN THE SCRIPTURES

Exercise

4. What is Doug's view of tongues? Do you agree or disagree? Please explain.

5. Suppose someone in your church has a view on these subjects different than what your church teaches. What would you communicate to that individual?



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An Evaluation of the Prosperity Gospel

There are those who teach that it is God's will that we be wealthy and healthy all the time. What do the Scriptures say on this subject? Learn from the following article by Dave Bovenmyer.



An Evaluation of the Prosperity Gospel

Pastor Dave Bovenmyer · Ames, IA

What is the Prosperity Gospel?

Prosperity theology is not confined to a denomination or a tradition, but is a multi-faceted movement that has infiltrated much of modern-day Christianity, influencing primarily the charismatic movement, but also non-charismatic churches as well. Preachers of the prosperity gospel include some of the most popular and successful Christian media personalities of the late 20th century— Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth Copeland, Benny Hinn, Robert Tilton, and Marilyn Hickey. Other advocates include Paul Yonggi Cho, pastor of the world's largest church in Seoul, South Korea, and Paul and Jan Crouch, founders of Trinity Broadcasting Network.

Advocates of the prosperity gospel claim that God wants all believers to be materially prosperous and free from sickness. Thus, if a believer is poor or sick, he is outside the will of God for his life. Through faith and obedience to God's principles, the believer has the power to heal any sickness and gain amazing wealth. If the promised blessing is not immediately received, patience and a refusal to doubt or to speak a "negative confession" will eventually bring about healing or prosperity. Thus the prosperity movement is often called the "word-faith" movement.

"It ill becomes the servant to seek to be rich, and great, and honored in that world where his Lord was poor, and mean, and despised."

- George Muller

What Are the Roots of the Prosperity Gospel?

The founding father of the Prosperity or Faith movement is commonly held to be Kenneth Erwin Hagin, the man termed by Charisma magazine as "the granddaddy of the Faith teachers," and "the father of the Faith movement."¹ Many prominent Faith teachers, including Kenneth Copeland, K. C. Price, Charles Capps, and many others acknowledge Hagin as their spiritual mentor or "father." However, according to D. R. McConnell in his book, *A Different Gospel*, the bulk of Hagin's theology did not originate with himself or from his alleged visions, revelations, and divine visitations. Rather they came largely from the writings of Baptist preacher, E. W. Kenyon.²

And, according to McConnell, Kenyon's theology can be traced to his personal background in the metaphysical cults, specifically New Thought and Christian Science. In an effort to revitalize the church, Kenyon attempted to combine some of the teachings of New Thought metaphysics with orthodox evangelical Christianity. This resulted in what is called "syncretism," the combining of two or more different, even contradictory, religious beliefs in an attempt to form one system.

Indeed, most of the distinctive teachings of the faith movement are similar, if not identical, to teachings found in the metaphysical cults. These cults, by and large, promote the notion that sickness and suffering ultimately have their origin in incorrect thinking and that man can create his own reality

through the power of positive affirmation (confession). Metaphysical practitioners teach their adherents to visualize health and wealth, and then to affirm or confess them with their mouths so that the intangible images may be transformed into tangible realities.³

*“Beware you be not
swallowed up in
[worldly] books.”*

- John Wesley

What Are the Specific Doctrinal Claims of Prosperity Adherents?

There are three specific teachings of the prosperity movement that will be addressed in this paper. Prosperity theology teaches that:

1. It is not God’s will for any Christian to be sick. In defense of this position, it is alleged that physical healing is part of what was achieved in the death of Christ. Because healing is part of the atonement, it is as readily available to the believer as forgiveness.
2. It is not God’s will for any Christian to be poor. On the contrary, any believer who exercises sufficient faith can be exceedingly wealthy.
3. Faith is considered a “force” that compels God to act according to His promises. And faith is indicated and controlled by the words we speak. Thus we must only speak “positive” words and avoid “negative” faith-defeating words.

Is Healing Found in the Atonement?

Prosperity adherents claim that it is not in God’s will for anyone to be sick. For example, Kenneth Hagin teaches, “Don’t ever tell anyone sickness is the will of God for us. It isn’t! Healing and health are the will of God for mankind. If sickness were the will of God, heaven would be filled with sickness and disease.”⁴

The primary support for this claim is the idea that power for healing is found in the atonement and, therefore, healing of all diseases is guaranteed in the Cross. Let’s first look at Isaiah 53:4-5, the primary verse that is used to support this claim, and at Matthew 8:16, where Isaiah is quoted.

“Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, but he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed” (Isaiah 53:4-5, NIV).

“When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick.¹⁷ This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: ‘He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases.’” (Matthew 8:16-17, NIV).

One question at issue in Isaiah 53:4-5 is whether Isaiah is referring to physical healing or to spiritual healing. The Hebrew word translated “healed” in verse five has a broad meaning, similar to the English word “healed.” It is used in Scripture to refer to physical healing from sickness, but it is also used to refer to the healing of nations from their troubles or the healing of personal hurts and distress. Similarly, the word “infirmities” in verse four can refer to physical sickness or weakness, but also to grief (as it is translated in the NASB). The context of Isaiah 53:5 would seem to fit a figurative meaning for “healed” just as easily, and perhaps more easily, than a physical meaning.

“We must all have the spirit of martyrdom, though we may not all die martyrs.”

- George Whitefield

The suffering servant was punished for our iniquities, bringing us “peace,” carrying our “sorrows,” and bringing us “healing.” The meaning of the words “infirmities” and “healed” could definitely include healing from physical sickness, but would seem to include other figurative types of healing as well. A fairly strong argument can be made from Matthew 8:17 that physical healing of sicknesses is indeed included in the concepts of healing mentioned in Isaiah 53:4-5, since Matthew points to Jesus’ healing ministry as a fulfillment of Isaiah 53:4. So, it seems that the “healing” and “infirmities” referred to by Isaiah must at least include physical healing, even if Isaiah’s intent was to be broader than only physical healing.

But note that the passage does not teach that Christ’s death immediately took away all sickness. It does imply that He took away all our iniquity—“*the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*” Other passages teach even more clearly that He died for all our sins (for example Colossians 2:14 and Hebrews 10:12, 17). Yet the fact that He bore all our sins does not necessarily mean that He has immediately taken away all the consequences of sin. For example, Isaiah says that He “*carried our sorrows,*” yet Christians are still sorrowful at times. His punishment brought us “*peace,*” yet Christians still have trials and relational conflicts.

In this age, His death has brought us increased peace and has diminished our sorrows, but it has not brought total peace, nor totally eradicated our sorrows. There is an issue of timing involved. Not all of the consequences of sin were immediately taken away at the death of Christ. An obvious example is physical death. Death is a consequence of sin, yet 1 Corinthians 15:50-55 tells us that death will not be destroyed until the Second Coming of Christ. Many other consequences of sin will also be with us until the return of Christ, such as mourning, crying, and pain (Revelation 21:4), as well as the curse (Revelation 22:3).

Some preachers have stressed the tense of Isaiah 53:5 (NIV), “*by his wounds we are healed.*” It doesn’t say that we “*will be healed,*” but that we “*are*” healed—right now! Yet, we must not forget that Isaiah 53:5 is a prophesy, written 700 years before Christ. He speaks of Christ’s death in the past tense. Should we conclude from this that Christ died before Isaiah wrote these words? No! Rather, Isaiah, caught up in the Spirit of God, prophesied from the reference of a different time frame than his own experience. In light of this prophetic literary device, we should be careful not to make too much of the tense employed.

In conclusion, there is nothing in Isaiah 53 that demands or even clearly implies that Christ died to bring us immediate physical healing from all sickness. Although the verse shows that His death was for all our sins, it does not state that His death immediately took away all the consequences of sin.

Does the Bible Teach That Believers are Still Subject to Sickness and Bodily Injury?

Many verses teach that, in this age, a believer’s physical body is still subject to weakness, corruption, and even illness. Romans 8:18-24 talks about the “*sufferings of this present time*” and how they are not worthy to be compared to the glories to be revealed to us. Creation itself is “*groaning as in the pains of childbirth,*” longing to be liberated from its “*bondage to decay.*”

Believers also “groan inwardly” and wait eagerly for the redemption of their bodies. This passage makes it clear that, in this age, our bodies are still subject to suffering and to the bondage of decay that all creation continues to experience.

In 2 Corinthians 4:16, Paul speaks of how his “outer man” (physical body) was “decaying,” yet his “inner man” was being renewed day by day.

In Philippians 3:21, Paul longs for the day when Christ will “transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body” (NIV).

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul speaks of our bodies as “perishable” and “mortal.”

In 2 Corinthians 4:7-10, Paul talks of how we have the treasure of the knowledge of God housed in “earthen vessels,” in order that the all-surpassing power might come from God and not from ourselves. Paul goes on to describe how he was “persecuted,” “struck down,” and that “we always carry around in our body the death of Jesus.”

In 2 Corinthians 12:7, Paul tells of how he was given a “thorn in the flesh” to keep him from exalting himself because of the tremendously great revelations he was receiving. The term “flesh” is clearly referring to his physical body. Whatever this bodily affliction was, it must have been severe, since Paul says that it was given to “buffet” (NASB) or “torment” (NIV) him. Paul learned to actually delight in this bodily affliction, since the Lord imparted to him that God’s power was revealed and perfected in our weaknesses. Far from a lack of faith or of spirituality, Paul’s bodily affliction was specifically allowed by God because of his spirituality and the greatness of the revelations he was receiving.

In Galatians 4:12-16, Paul reminds the Galatians that it was because of an “illness” that he preached the gospel to them. Evidently, this illness must have involved his eyes, since the Galatians were so grateful to him that they would have “torn out” their eyes and given them to Paul, if they could have done so. Perhaps this is the same illness that Paul refers to as a “thorn in the flesh” in 2 Corinthians 12.

In 2 Timothy 4:20, Paul writes that he left his fellow-worker Trophimus sick at Miletus. Trophimus was one of Paul’s traveling companions and a representative of the churches in Asia Minor when they sent their gift to Jerusalem. He was not an insignificant Christian who might tend to be weak in faith, but was a well-known Christian leader from a large church (Ephesus). It would seem that Trophimus had a significant illness, since it prevented him from continuing on his journey with Paul.

A particularly instructive passage is Philippians 2:25-30 (NIV) concerning Epaphroditus’ illness. “But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs. For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor men like him, because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me.”

Here is a man, Epaphroditus, undoubtedly a leader in the church at Philippi, who was sent to bring a gift to Paul in his imprisonment in Rome. Again, we see that even Christian leaders in the Bible became ill, and, in this case, so seriously ill that he almost died. But notice Paul’s reaction to his illness.

“A poor believer [monetarily] certainly is looked down upon in certain churches, and yet he may be the richest man spiritually in that church.”

- J. Vernon McGee

“The Lord gets His best soldiers out of the highlands of affliction.”

- C.H. Spurgeon

Had Paul believed the prosperity theology, he might have written, “Pray that God would increase our brother’s faith, so that he has faith enough not to become ill like that again.” But Paul says nothing about a lack of faith. On the contrary, he highly commends Epaphroditus and views his service that led to his sickness as “*risking his life*” for the work of Christ. So, rather than casting doubt upon Epaphroditus’ faith, Paul commends it.

In 1 Timothy 5:23 (NIV), Paul writes to Timothy, “*Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses.*” Here again, we see Timothy, a prominent Christian leader and an apostle (1 Thessalonians 1:1 and 2:6), battling with frequent illnesses. Again, Paul gives Timothy no exhortations to believe or to confess positive words. Neither does he point him to promises that God will heal all illnesses. He does not speak of healing as an entitlement we can claim as a result of the death of Christ. Rather, he points to a practical medicinal approach—drink a little wine.

Clearly, these verses give abundant testimony that faithful and faith-filled believers in the New Testament, from Epaphroditus to Timothy to Paul himself suffered from bodily afflictions and illness. McConnell summarizes the error of the prosperity teaching like this:

“Contrary to the Faith anthropology, the believers body is not made impervious to disease through faith, the new birth, positive confession, or anything else. I remain a ‘perishable’ body of ‘weakness’ and ‘dishonor.’ But at the return of Christ, the believer’s decaying and mortal body will undergo an incredible change (1 Corinthians 15:51-55). Disease will only be defeated when death is finally defeated: at the return of Christ and the general resurrection. The error of the Faith theology is that it ascribes a power to faith healing that will only be manifest at the end of the age.”⁵

What Do the Prosperity Teachers Teach About Material Prosperity?

Prosperity preachers teach that material prosperity is available to all believers, not simply to meet our needs, but to bring us wealth. Consider the following statements:

“He wants His children to eat the best, He wants them to wear the best clothing, He wants them to drive the best cars, and He wants them to have the best of everything.”⁶ —Kenneth Hagin

“Did God put...silver, and gold here on earth for the devil and his bunch?...No! He put these things here for His people to enjoy. He wants us to have the best!”⁷ —Kenneth Hagin

“You can have what you say! In fact, what you are saying is exactly what you are getting now. If you are living in poverty and lack and want, change what you are saying. It will change what you have. ...Discipline your vocabulary. Discipline everything you do, everything you say, and everything you think to agree with what God does, what God says, and what God thinks. God will be obligated to meet your needs because of His Word. ...If you stand firmly on this, your needs will be met.”⁸ —Kenneth Copeland

Prosperity preachers advance numerous verses and arguments in support of their contention that God desires wealth for all His children. In Joshua 1:8, God gave a promise to Joshua that if he obeyed God, he would be prosperous and successful.

In 2 Chronicles 20:20 (NIV), King Jehoshaphat spoke to Judah, *“Have faith in the LORD your God and you will be upheld; have faith in his prophets and you will be successful.”*

In Nehemiah 2:20, Nehemiah replies to his enemies, *“The God of heaven will give us success.”*

Psalms 1:3 states that the righteous man will prosper in whatever he does. Psalm 35:27 indicates that God takes pleasure in the prosperity of His servant.

In 3 John 2, the Apostle John writes to Gaius, *“Beloved, I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers.”*

An appeal is also made to the Abrahamic covenant, of which believers have become partakers through Christ. The personal blessings God bestowed on Abraham are extrapolated as benefits for believers today. According to Hagin, Abraham’s blessings were threefold: spiritual, physical, and also financial.⁹

Justification for applying Abraham’s prosperity to Christians today is sought in Galatians 3:14, *“in order that in Christ Jesus, the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles.”*

Achieving prosperity, according to prosperity preachers, involves three things: knowing, obeying, and believing. First, the believer must know and be convinced that it is God’s will for him to prosper. Secondly, obeying the laws of God are necessary for prosperity: *“If he doesn’t obey the laws of God that produce prosperity, he will not be able to appropriate them.... Obedience is the key to prosperity!”*¹⁰ And finally, faith must be exercised. Faith amounts to claiming authority over the financial resources already guaranteed by God: *“If you make up your mind...that you are willing to live in divine prosperity and abundance, Satan cannot stop the flow of God’s financial blessings. ...You have exercised your faith in the covenant that you have with God.”*¹¹

The prospects of wealth can be astounding. Mark 10:30 is claimed as the basis of God’s financial blessings. *“You give \$1 for the gospel’s sake and \$100 belongs to you, give \$10 and receive \$1,000; give \$1,000 and receive \$100,000. ...Give one house and receive one hundred houses or one house worth one hundred times as much. Give one airplane and receive one hundred times the value of the airplane. Give one car and the return would furnish you a lifetime of cars. In short, Mark 10:30 is a very good deal.”*¹²

Of course, the hundred fold return is not automatic. You must “believe in it.” The “force of faith” must be continually exerted, and if the pressure of faith relaxes, the return will stop flowing in. Faith is the means of collecting the amount owed from the hundred fold return. According to Kenneth Copeland, *“When a man makes deposits with God, he has a right to call upon these deposits and make withdrawals.”*¹³

How Should We Evaluate These Verses and Arguments?

One of the primary rules of interpretation is to interpret a verse in its context. If we look at the context of Joshua 1:8, we see that God is promising Joshua prosperity and success in military victory, not finan-

“We can stand affliction better than we can prosperity, for in prosperity we forget God.”

- Dwight L. Moody

“The Lord commonly gives riches to foolish people, to whom He gives nothing else.”

- Martin Luther

cial success. It specifically relates to the conquest of the Promised Land by Israel as the outworking of the land promises given in God’s covenant to Abraham.

The same is true in 2 Chronicles 20:20. Jehoshaphat’s exhortation to have faith in God’s prophets and be successful relate to military victory, not financial prosperity. Nehemiah’s response to his enemies, that the God of Heaven would give them success, was referring to success in rebuilding Jerusalem’s wall, not financial success. In fact, the wall was rebuilt in the midst of a famine (Nehemiah 5:3).

The promise of prospering in Psalm 1 uses the same word used in Joshua 1:8. The word does not necessarily carry the connotation of financial prosperity. It is most often used in a more general way to refer to success in whatever endeavor is undertaken. Two points must be noted about Psalm 1.

The first is that even a righteous man bears fruit “in season.” Continuous success is not promised.

Secondly, the promise envisions that the prospering man is following the will of God, which he ascertains and responds to as a result of meditating on God’s Word. The Psalm does not promise success in whatever endeavor a man may undertake, whether or not the undertaking is in the will of God. Rather, the Psalm promises success to those who meditate on God’s Word, follow His leading, and undertake endeavors that are His will. Nothing in the Psalm indicates that it is God’s will for every righteous person to be continually financially prosperous.

Psalm 35:27 uses a different Hebrew word for “prosperity,” the word “*shalom*.” The word brings the idea of completeness, and is most often translated “peace.” Here it means “welfare” (RSV), or “well-being” (NIV), and is not specifically referring to financial prosperity. God delights in our well-being, yet there may be times when our well-being may actually be furthered more by financial want than by abundance. Sometimes God is more concerned with developing our character than granting our comfort.

John’s prayer in 3 John 2 that Gaius might “*prosper*” in all respects was simply a prayer for health and safety. There is no promise or indication of God’s will in the verse. The Greek word literally means “good journey” and does not necessarily carry the idea of financial prosperity, but rather has the idea that things would go well. Actually, the prayer seems to assume that Gaius was prospering spiritually and needed special prayer for his health. John was not as confident in Gaius’ good health physically as he was in his good health spiritually.

Concerning the argument that the Abrahamic covenant promises us wealth, God’s promise to Abraham did involve a promise to his descendants of land and blessing. The promise also speaks about a blessing that would extend to the whole world through Abraham. Over 400 years later, the Law of Moses, given to the nation of Israel, set forth blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. These blessings certainly included material blessings. However, these promises and warnings were given in a specific time to a specific nation and do not necessarily apply to the Church in this age.

Galatians 3:14 states that the blessing of Abraham has come to the Gentiles, yet goes on to state that it came “*so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.*” We receive a blessing of infinitely greater value than material blessing. We receive the Spirit of God. Nothing in this verse teaches that any material blessings promised to Abraham and the people of Israel have been transferred to the Church.

And finally, concerning Mark 10:29-31 (NIV), we must take into account the context of the verse. *“I tell you the truth,” Jesus replied, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields— and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”*

This verse does promise a hundred-fold return for things sacrificed for Jesus and the gospel, and the promise is to be realized in “this present age.” However, it is a violation of the sense of the verse and its context to say that God will give back a hundredfold for every gift given for the gospel.

First of all, the passage would seem to apply primarily, if not exclusively, to those who have left their careers and embraced a life of privation in preaching the gospel full-time, as the Apostles had done.

Secondly, the passage indicates that the hundredfold return may not be in the same form as what was given up. Neither is it clear that the Apostles would actually possess these hundredfold returns. For example, no man can have a hundred literal mothers or brothers or sisters. Clearly, Jesus is talking about relationships with other disciples in the Kingdom who become like mothers or brothers or sisters. Similarly, the “homes” need not mean that they would possess 100 homes for every one they gave up. Most likely, the idea is that there will be hundreds of people who will share their home with you, or the produce of their field with you were you to need their help. Jesus was assuring the Apostles that their sacrifices for Him and for the gospel would not go unrewarded and assuring them that their future was secure, even in this life. Yet the fulfillment of the promise seems to envision the care and generosity of other disciples in the Kingdom of God, rather than the acquisition of great personal wealth.

We should ask ourselves, “How were these verses fulfilled in the lives of the Apostles?” From what we know of their lives, none of them ever actually possessed a hundred homes or fields. Yet they did have hundreds of people who sold property and laid the proceeds at their feet. But they did not keep the money. Instead, they distributed it to any who had need. And they certainly had hundreds and thousands of people who would have let them use, or even given them homes or fields if they had need of them. Yet, there is no indication that any of the Apostles ever pursued or achieved great personal wealth. The testimony of the Bible and of early Church history would indicate just the opposite.

Are There Examples of Faithful and Faith-filled Believers Who Lived in Poverty in the Bible?

Numerous verses refute the prosperity teaching that financial prosperity will be obtained by every faith-filled believer. One of the most devastating is in Hebrews 11.

“Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect” (Hebrews 11:36-40, NIV).

“The figure of the Crucified invalidates all thought which takes success for its standard.”

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer

“Nothing is more contrary to a heavenly hope than an earthly heart.”

- William Gurnall

Here are some men and women of God who were “*destitute*,” going around in “*sheepskins and goatskins*” and living in “*caves and holes in the ground*.” Obviously they experienced great financial need and privation. Was it because they did not know about God’s promise of prosperity or did not have the faith to claim it? No! They were commended for their faith. So much so that they even made it into the Bible’s hall of faith in Hebrews 11.

Another powerful refutation of the material aspect of the prosperity theology is to look at the life of the Apostle Paul. In Philippians 4:11-13, Paul writes that he knew what it was like to be in need and what it was like to live in plenty. He learned that he could do everything through Christ, Who gave him strength. Paul’s secret for getting along in “*need*” was not through exercising a “*faith*” that changed his circumstances, but through learning to be “*content*.” He knew that God would supply his bare necessities, yet he also had to learn to be content in privation and need. His contentment in need directly flies in the face of the “name it, claim it” prosperity philosophy. Paul himself was poor. More than that, he boasted in being poor.

In his defense of his apostleship in 2 Corinthians 6:3-10, Paul gives a list of sacrifices he had made and difficulties he had endured. He gives the list to “commend” himself and his companions as “servants of God.” Paul’s list includes “poor, yet making many rich,” and “having nothing, and yet possessing everything.”

Clearly in this passage, Paul boasted in his poverty and saw it as establishing his credibility as a servant of God.

In 2 Corinthians 11:27, Paul resorts to “*boasting*” in his effort to regain the Corinthians’ respect and to undermine the false apostles whom they were tempted to follow. Then he gives a list detailing the incredible sacrifices he had made to bring the gospel to others. Included in that list is the statement, “*I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked*.”

Again we see that Paul was not only poor at times, but he boasted in his poverty. If Paul had believed or taught the “prosperity gospel,” he would have never boasted in his poverty, since the prosperity teaching says that poverty is a result of a lack of knowledge, obedience, or faith. The prosperity teaching says that wealth is an indication of spirituality, yet Paul appeals to just the opposite. To him, poverty (at least poverty endured because of a choice to love others and preach the gospel to them) was an indication of spirituality and gave him tremendous bragging rights over the false apostles who were trying to steal the Corinthians’ affections (as well as their money).

A final example from Paul’s life is found in 1 Corinthians 4:8-16 (NIV):

“Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have become kings—and that without us! How I wish that you really had become kings so that we might be kings with you! For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men. We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored! To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world. I am not writing

this to shame you, but to warn you, as my dear children. Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. Therefore I urge you to imitate me.”

The Corinthians had become “rich” and “full” and “kings.” These three blessings that will characterize the future messianic kingdom, were “already” being claimed by the Corinthians now.

Paul admonishes them that the time for fullness, richness, and reigning had not yet arrived. Then he points to his own life and states that to the very hour of his writing, he and his companions were hungry and thirsty and homeless. They were the “scum of the earth, the refuse of the world.”

At the end of the passage, he admonishes them to “imitate me.” He did not want to “shame” them, but to “warn” them that they were not living rightly in this present age. Apparently, the Corinthian believers had come to believe a teaching similar to the prosperity gospel. Perhaps they were embarrassed by Paul’s sacrificial life and sufferings. Evidently, like many modern Christians, they were impressed by supposed “apostles” who had the three P’s—power, prestige, and prosperity. Paul’s stinging rebuke, as he compared their lives with his, is a clear indication of what he (and, of course, God) thought of their “prosperity” theology.

Jesus, Himself, is the final, but most significant, example of a man of God who lived in poverty. Our Lord left the riches of Heaven, became a man, and embraced a life of deprivation and hardship. He was born into and grew up in a poor family.¹⁴ During His ministry, He told His disciples that He had nowhere to lay His head (Matthew 8:20). He had to perform a miracle in order to pay the two-drachma temple tax (Matthew 17:24-27). At His death, the Roman soldiers cast lots for His clothing, His only earthly possessions (Luke 23:34). He left behind no estate, having asked John the disciple to care for his mother (John 19:26-27). No one would dare to suggest that God the Son was out of harmony with the will of God the Father or that He had lacked the faith to obtain wealth.

Can We Claim Financial Prosperity As A Result of Christ’s Death On Our Behalf?

Similar to their teaching concerning healing, prosperity teachers teach that prosperity is part of the atonement. The chief verse used to defend this idea is 2 Corinthians 8:9, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.” But a look at the context of the verse shows that Paul is not telling the Corinthians that they can anticipate great wealth because of the work of Christ. Rather, Paul is exhorting them to follow the example of Christ and give of what they have to meet the needs of others.

As the verse says, Christ did come to make us rich. Yet, the issue is when—now in this age or when Christ comes in His Kingdom? Unquestionably, we have already received abundant spiritual wealth in this age. Romans 8, Ephesians 1, and other passages list the blessings—forgiveness, reconciliation, justification, sanctification. Ephesians 1:3 states the we have received “every spiritual blessing in ... Christ.” We have also received the gift of the Holy Spirit, who is a down-payment “guaranteeing our inheritance.” The death of Christ does make us rich, yet we have not yet received the majority of our in-

“All earthly joy begins pleasantly, but at the end it gnaws and kills.”

- Thomas a’Kempis

“It is not good to have everything one wants.”

- Blaise Pascal

heritance. What we have so far is only the down payment. And what we have received now is primarily spiritual blessings.

The underlying assumption of the prosperity gospel is that Christ went to the cross so that we won't have to. He took not only our sins, but our sickness and poverty. Yet the teaching of the New Testament is radically contrary to that. The message that the New Testament constantly emphasizes is that we also must take up a cross. As the Father sent Jesus, so Jesus has sent us (John 20:21). Rather than leading us to believe that all our difficulties have been taken away, the cross should inspire us to follow in Jesus' footsteps and voluntarily accept difficulties in our mission to reach out to and save others.

Jesus did not endure the cross so that His followers could indulge in the lusts of the world. Quite the contrary—only those who make Jesus' cross their cross can even claim to be His followers. In Mark 8:34 (NIV), He says, “*Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: ‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.’*” Jesus' point is that those who want to follow Him must expect and prepare themselves to make the same sort of sacrifices that He did, even losing their lives as He did.

In Matthew 10:24 (NIV), Jesus says, “*A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master.*” Should we really expect to have more or live a more comfortable life than our Master did? In God's plan, some believers may do so, but this verse teaches that no believer has a right to expect or demand a better life than our Master. Rather, we should expect to be treated like He was and face similar trials.

Acts 14:22 (NIV) is a fascinating verse. Paul and Barnabas returned to the cities where they had preached, “*strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. ‘We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,’ they said.*” Isn't this an odd way to strengthen and encourage people—“You're going to have a lot of problems”? Why was this message encouraging? Because these believers were going through immense difficulties. Paul and Barnabas were telling them: “It's OK. This is normal. Troubles like this are part of the plan of God. Yet, understand that after the troubles are over, we will enter paradise in the Kingdom of God.” Such a message builds faith that God is in control, even in the tribulation. It is all part of His plan. In this regard, the prosperity gospel, rather than building people's faith, has often discouraged it. When believers encounter “*many hardships*” such as sickness, poverty, or persecution, the prosperity gospel forces them to conclude that either they are extremely weak in faith or that God is not faithful.

What Does the Scripture Teach About Wealth?

The prosperity gospel also ignores or minimizes the many scriptural warnings and admonitions concerning wealth. Consider the following verses:

“Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’” (Hebrews 13:5, NIV).

The author's point is that since we have God, we should be content with Him and not be in love with material wealth.

“Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied” (Luke 6:20-21, NIV).

“But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry” (Luke 6:24-25, NIV).

“Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.’” (Matthew 19:23-24, NIV).

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:19-21, NIV).

“No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money” (Matthew 6:24, NIV).

“Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful” (Mark 4:18-19, NIV).

“Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him” (James 2:5, NIV)?

“Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you” (James 5:1, NIV).

“The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus. He said to them, ‘You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but God knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in God’s sight’” (Luke 16:14-15, NIV).

“You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God” (James 4:4, NIV).

“When our back is to the breathtaking beauty of God, we cast a shadow on the earth and fall in love with it. But it does not satisfy.”

- John Piper

What Has God Promised in Regard to Money?

God has promised that if we seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness, He will meet our needs. In Matthew 6:33 (NIV), Jesus says, *“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”* What are “these things” that Jesus talks about? They are the concerns expressed in the questions: *“What shall we eat?”* or *“What shall we drink?”* or *“What shall we wear?”* (Matthew 6:31). These are the basic needs of survival. God promises to meet our basic needs. We have no promise that we will become wealthy in this life.

Paul sets forth the same standard for contentment in 1 Timothy 6:6-8 (NIV): *“But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.”*

"I have held many things in my hands, and I have lost them all; but whatever I have placed in God's hands, that I still possess."

- Martin Luther

God may bless us at times so that we have plenty, as He did Paul (Philippians 4:12). But the New Testament standard seems to be that we should be content as long as we have food and covering. We should not reject the prosperity that God may bring in the belief that money or possessions are inherently evil, for God "*richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment*" (1 Timothy 6:17, NIV).

On the other hand, we must not accept the world's view of money. And when we have abundance, we should heed God's warnings about the seductive nature of wealth and prosperity. One way to do this is to do what Paul commands for those who are rich: "*...to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life*" (1 Timothy 6:18-19, NIV).

What is Wrong With the Prosperity Theology's Concept of Faith?

Prosperity teachers tend to view faith as a formula. Words such as "formula," "law," "steps," and "principles" appear quite often in Faith literature. For example, Kenneth Hagin claimed that Jesus appeared to him in a vision and said, "If anybody, anywhere will take these four steps or put these four principles into operation, he will always receive whatever he wants from Me or God the Father." With these "steps," Jesus said to Hagin, "You can write your own ticket with God." The four steps that Jesus gave Hagin were: 1) Say it, 2) Do it, 3) Receive it, and 4) Tell it.¹⁵

Thus faith becomes a force. As Kenneth Copeland says, "Faith is a power force. It is a conductive force. It will move things. Faith will change things. Faith will change the human body. It will change the human heart. Faith will change circumstances. ...The force of faith is released by words. Faith-filled words put the law of the Spirit of life into operation."¹⁶

Note that the words we speak "release" the force of faith. Words, whether spoken or said in the mind, have a powerful effect on faith and thus have the power to affect reality, to "change things." Thoughts of doubt are anathema to the person seeking prosperity because it produces "the power of negative thinking." In the words of Tilton, "I feel sick. I look sick. I must be sick.' When you agreed with those thoughts which are contrary to the Word of God, it (sickness) entered in."¹⁷ In other words, just as positive thinking ("faith") creates positive reality, negative thinking ("doubt") creates negative reality.

It is hard to differentiate between this prosperity concept of faith and the teachings of New Thought metaphysics. Metaphysical practitioners have long taught adherents to visualize health and wealth, and then to affirm or confess them with their mouths so that the intangible images may be transformed into tangible realities. Indeed, Hagin seems to acknowledge this similarity when he states that this "force of faith" or "law of faith" can work equally for Christian and non-Christian alike: "It used to bother me," explains Hagin, "when I'd see unsaved people getting 'results.' Then it dawned on me what the sinners were doing: They were cooperating with the law of God—the law of faith."¹⁸

This concept of faith as a force that works for anyone is totally unbiblical. True biblical faith is trusting God to do His will, not the will of man. Biblical faith is not confidence in the force of faith or the power of words, but confident reliance and trust in another, in God. Instead of being something that is exerted to move God into action, faith is a resting and relaxing in trust in Him. The value of faith

is not found in the faith itself, but in the worthiness of the object or person that is being trusted. Biblical faith understands that God cannot be manipulated by our thoughts and words. He can and does say “No” to our prayers. Or He can answer them in a timing or a way very much different from our expectations and prayers. In short, biblical faith trusts in God to do His will, not our own will.

The stories of the men and women listed in God’s hall of faith in Hebrews 11 show that none of these people viewed faith as a force to get what they wanted. Usually, their faith was in response to an initiative from God. Abraham was called, Noah and Moses were commanded—most of the great people of faith were called or commanded by God and their faith was in response to His initiative. A few on the list, like Rahab and David, took initiative in faith, but their initiative was always for the glory of God and in keeping with His promises and desires. Nowhere in the Scripture do we see the concept of faith as a force that always produces results and forces God into action.

One passage that is often used to justify the concept of faith as a force is Mark 11:22- 24 (NIV): *“Have faith in God,” Jesus answered. ‘I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”*

This passage, and the parallel passage in Matt 21:21-22 seem to give us a blank check with God. Jesus’ words were in response to the disciples’ amazement that a fig tree, which Jesus had cursed, had immediately withered. Casting a mountain into the sea would seem to be about the most difficult miracle imaginable, implying that we can receive anything we ask for and believe. Also, neither casting a mountain into the sea, nor causing a fig tree to wither, are manifestly evident as being the will of God. The passage could seem to indicate that God will respond to our initiative, even when there is not a clear indication or specific promise that what we pray or believe is God’s will.

Unquestionably, Jesus’ words were spoken to challenge and inspire the disciples to greater faith and to cause them to realize that God will respond in powerful ways to their faith and prayers. Yet, this passage, and others like it, must be interpreted in light of the whole teaching of Scripture. Other verses talk about prayers being answered only when they are in accord with God’s will (1 John 5:14-15) and are asked with pure motives (James 4:3) or other qualifications. Certainly God, who delights in the well-being of His servants, will not give us answers to our prayers if He knows that what we ask for would be bad for us. Mark 11:22 must be understood in the broader context of the Bible’s teaching on prayer and on the nature and character of God. In our discussion of faith, it is important to note that the problem with the “faith” of the prosperity teachers is not in the intensity of their faith or their willingness to believe that God will do impossible things. Abraham is commended for believing “*against all hope*” (Romans 4:18, NIV).

All of the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11 believed in things that were humanly impossible and seemed ridiculous and even irresponsible to those without faith. The prosperity teacher’s problem is not with the intensity of their faith, but with their false presumptions concerning the will of God. God has not promised total healing or material prosperity in this age. God has not given us a blank check to receive

“You say, ‘If I had a little more, I should be very satisfied.’ You make a mistake. If you are not content with what you have, you would not be satisfied if it were doubled.”

- Charles Spurgeon

“When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die.”

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer

absolutely anything we believe in strongly enough. What we pray for or trust God for must be the will of God and based upon the true promise of God.

In summary, the “faith” of the prosperity teachers is a false concept of faith that, if embraced, leads to the acceptance of other theological errors. For example, it tends to reduce the sovereignty of God. God becomes a being that can be manipulated to give us anything we want if we can exercise the force of faith long enough and hard enough. Faith “forces” God to work. God becomes man’s servant, waiting to do his bidding—if he has enough faith. Such “faith” also exalts man by giving him creative powers through the force of his faith and positive confession. As one former faith adherent states, “Not realizing it at the time, I was subtly buying into the idea that I had the ability to alter reality or even create it, all by using the power of faith.”¹⁹

This concept of faith also tends to diminish our understanding of the person-hood of God and causes us to view Him as an impersonal force. He becomes almost incapable of making independent decisions apart from the power of faith working upon Him. Another former faith adherent says, “I no longer came to God to fellowship with Him and to know what was His word for my life. He was squeezed out, and replaced by faith-words and demands that He live up to His scriptural promises. ...Prayer had become a mantra, almost! ...Now I have rediscovered the loving, gentle Father I had always known, and I felt ashamed for leaving Him behind.”²⁰

Lastly, this concept of faith puts a tremendous burden upon the believer, to only think and speak “positive” thoughts and words and to never think or say anything “negative,” since our thoughts and words determine what will happen in our lives. This concept of faith becomes almost magical and even superstitious, with our words becoming the incantation that supposedly controls reality.

How Would You Summarize the Problems With the Prosperity Movement?

Ephesians 4:14-15 admonishes us to be solidly grounded in the Truth and to be careful not to be blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. In accordance with the weaknesses of the church at the time, different winds of false teaching tend to blow more strongly and be accepted more easily than others. Right now, this prosperity teaching seems to be a particularly deceptive and attractive message for Christians in suburban America.

Hank Hanegraaff, president of the Christian Research Institute, warns of the subtle deception of the word-faith movement:

“Much has been written over the past few years about the New Age movement and the threat it poses to historic Christianity. As real as this threat is, I have become equally concerned about the ominous threat that the word-faith movement poses to the body of Christ. If the New Age movement is the greatest threat to evangelical Christianity from without, I believe the word-faith or ‘positive confession’ movement may well be considered its greatest threat from within.”²¹

The prosperity movement threatens historic Christianity and the faith of the body of Christ in numerous ways, some of which are:

It falsely promises healing and prosperity to all, leading to disappointment, self-doubt, and doubt toward God.

It places an incredible burden upon the sick or people with financial problems. If a person is sick or poor, he has only himself to blame.

It causes healthy and wealthy believers to look down upon those who are ill or poor as out of the will of God or lacking in faith.

It promises blessings now, that God has reserved for the next age.

It subverts the demands of the cross for self-denial.

It sets up worldly success as the standard of spirituality and of God's blessing.

It tends to reduce God to a means to an end, causing us to view Him as a force rather than a person.

By redefining faith as a "force" or "power," it tends to reduce the sovereignty of God and exalts the abilities of man.

It falsely attributes power to words that we speak, giving them creative, even magical power.

In 2 Timothy 4:3 (NIV), Paul warned Timothy that the time would come when men would not put up with sound doctrine, but would "*gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear*"—the promise of worldly gain. We must faithfully preach the true message of the cross—a message of self-denial and sacrifice for the sake of others and for the glory of God. Jesus said, "*In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world*" (John 16:33, NIV).

"To become Christlike is the only thing in the whole world worth caring for, the thing before which every ambition of man is folly and all lower achievement vain."

- Henry Drummond

Endnotes:

¹ Sherry Andrews, "Kenneth Hagin: Keeping the Faith," *Charisma*, October 1981, p. 24.

² McConnell, D. R., *A Different Gospel, A Historical and Biblical Analysis of the Modern Faith Movement*, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, Massachusetts. On page 7, McConnell states, "Actually, it would not be overstated to say that the very doctrines that have made Kenneth Hagin and the Faith movement such a distinctive and powerful force within the independent charismatic movement are all plagiarized from E. W. Kenyon.

³ Hanegraaf, Hendrick H., "What's Wrong with the Faith Movement — Part One: E. W. Kenyon and the Twelve Apostles of Another Gospel," *Christian Resource Journal*, Winter 1993, p. 16.

⁴ Kenneth E. Hagin, *Redeemed from Poverty, Sickness, and Death*, Faith Library Publications, 1983, p. 16.

⁵ McConnell, p. 160.

⁶ Kenneth Hagin, *Authority of the Believer*, Faith Library, 1967, p. 22.

⁷ Kenneth Hagin, *How to Turn Your Faith Loose*, Faith Library Publications, 1983, p. 15.

⁸ Kenneth Copland, *The Laws of Prosperity*, Kenneth Copeland Publications, 1974, pp. 98, 101.

⁹ Hagin, *How to Turn Your Faith Loose*, p.14.

¹⁰ Savelle, Jerry, "True Prosperity — What is it?" *Christian Life*, July 1983, p. 47-48.

¹¹ Gloria Copeland, *God's Will Is Prosperity*, KC Publications, 1978, pp. 37-38.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 48.

¹³ Kenneth Copeland, *The Laws of Prosperity*, p. 92.

¹⁴ According to Luke 2:22-24 and Leviticus 12:8, the sacrifice Mary and Joseph offered when they presented the infant Jesus to the Lord was prescribed in Mosaic Law for the poor of the land.

¹⁵ Hagin, *How to Write Your Own Ticket with God*, Faith Library, 1979, pp. 5, 20, 21, 32.

¹⁶ Copeland, *The Force of Faith*, Kenneth Copeland Publications, 1983, p. 10, 16.

¹⁷ Robert Tilton, *God's Laws of Success*, Word of Faith Publications, p. 200.

¹⁸ Kenneth Hagin, *Having Faith in Your Faith*, Faith Library, 1980, pp. 3-4.

¹⁹ Beard, Jeff, *Christian Research Newsletter*, Volume 3: Number 4, 1990.

²⁰ Tillin, Tricia, "My Word of Faith Testimony," [http://www.banner.org.uk/articles/Tillin testimony of following Copeland.htm](http://www.banner.org.uk/articles/Tillin%20testimony%20of%20following%20Copeland.htm).

²¹ Hanegraaff, Hendrick H., "Faith in Faith or Faith in God," *Christian Research Journal*, Winter/Spring 1990, p. 31.



AN EVALUATION OF THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL

Exercise

1. What was the main lesson you learned from this reading?

2. Was there anything in this article that you disagreed with or any questions that you had? If so, what?

3. What verses would you use to show that, at times, God allows sickness in order to achieve greater purposes in our lives?



AN EVALUATION OF THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL

Exercise

4. Write a short paragraph on God's perspective of wealth in the New Testament, particularly related to the issue of standard of living and proper expectations of financial success. In your opinion, how closely do the members of your church generally share this view?

5. Comment on Mark 11:22-24. What do you think Jesus is saying in these verses?



GREAT COMMISSION LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

EVERYONE A MINISTER / THE DOCTRINE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Spiritual Warfare

If we define our lives and ministries in a way that ignores the truth that Satan is actively working in this world, we will be hindered in our efforts to advance God's Kingdom. We believe that if we live out the following eight biblical core values, we will walk in the victory Christ has already won at the cross:

The Grace of God: Jesus Christ and the gospel of grace is our central message—and it is God's power in winning the spiritual battle.

Commitment to God and His Word: A life that is devoted to prayer and obeying and teaching the Scriptures is the way to combat the Evil One.

The Great Commission: The best defense is a good offense: advance the gospel, win the lost, and plant new churches, then the spiritual battle is won.

The Local Church: "I will build My church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). Therefore, it is vital that we build and work through the local church if we are to defeat the forces of Satan.

Church Leadership: "I will strike down the shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered" (Matthew 26:31, KJV). If we strengthen and protect pastors, always wary of the attacks of the Evil One on leaders, we will thwart the Devil's attempt to destroy the Church.

Love and Unity: The Evil One is the accuser of the brethren (Revelation 12:10). As we humbly love, serve, and defend each other, the unity of the Church is able to withstand the attacks of Satan.

Raising Godly Families: "Or how can anyone enter the strong man's house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong man" (Matthew 12:29)? A key strategy against the Devil in his attack on the family is to build strong husbands and fathers to lead in their families.

Every Member a Minister: Every believer is a priest before God. Therefore, as we equip each member to do his or her part in building the Church, ground is taken in the spiritual battle.

We also want to emphasize the importance of pastors being strong in loyalty. The Devil's strategy is to "divide and conquer." As we are spread out over the nation and the world, we must "believe the best" of our fellow workers in other cities. In this regard, ask yourself, "How am I doing in fulfilling Point Five of the Great Commission Covenant?"

As a participant in the Great Commission church movement, I make a commitment: To 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 any accusation should prove to be valid, I will seek to gently and lovingly confront and restore my wayward brother to a faithful walk in Christ."

The following article, written by Herschel Martindale, addresses some of the issues pastors face concerning the spiritual battle.



Spiritual Warfare

Pastor Herschel Martindale · Columbia, MD

A Real Challenge

The spiritual challenges of today are very real and do not have easy answers. Precious lives are at stake. We live in a complex world. The Bible describes:

A sinful nature: “The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, and envy; drunkenness, orgies and the like” (Galatians 5:19-21).

A spiritual enemy: “Be self controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings” (1 Peter 5:8-9).

Satan’s deceptions: “When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44).

“The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray” (Revelation 12:9).

“I am afraid, that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ” (2 Corinthians. 11:3).

A deceived world and culture: “For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes, and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world” (1 John 2:16).

The statistics of divorce, alcohol and sexual addiction, marital conflict and infidelity, emotional and mental distresses, anger and violence, and even occult activity are obvious in almost every segment of society. Spiritual leaders who relate to their members beyond the superficial find themselves confronted by these problems regularly. It’s convenient to simply refer people to professional counselors rather than get involved. There is surely a place for professional help in counseling and medication, when needed. But what can spiritual leaders and loving, caring Christians do to help people with serious temptations and needs?

“The devil is a greater scholar than you, and a nimbler disputant.”

- Richard Baxter

The Simple Answer

Some answers at first appear simple, but often are difficult to apply and not even experienced by a majority of Christians.

Jesus: "I am the vine, you are the branches. If a man remains (stays close) in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

John: "You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

Paul: "I can do everything through Him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13).

How can a spiritual leader help people gain spiritual victory?

"For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does." (It is clearly a spiritual battle, not merely human effort or positive thinking.) "The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds" (2 Corinthians 10:3-5, emphasis mine).

The weapons that God has given us have DIVINE POWER. God has chosen to work powerfully in response to these weapons. This is critical both to the believer and also to the spiritual leader. It is in this area that most defeat takes place in lives. We do not understand the power of our weapons and we often do not know how to use them effectively.

"We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5).

Notice the critical action here:

- a. We demolish arguments and everything opposed to what God says.
- b. We take every thought captive to make it obedient to Christ.

IF a believer has the knowledge of God's Word needed, and
IF he/she has the faith and will to refuse wrong thinking, chooses to trust God and walk in faith, then victory is certainly possible. In many cases, this will not be the case, and the believer can easily be hurt and overcome by sin.

Spiritual leaders, such as pastors, staff, small group leaders and mature Christians can have a vital ministry in the church using these weapons.

"There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors, and hail a materialist or magician with the same delight."

- C.S. Lewis

What are these weapons of spiritual warfare?

Ephesians 6:10-18:

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power.” (Notice that the strength or power comes from the Lord, NOT the activity. His power goes into action when we use the weapon He has provided.)

“Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes” (strategies or attack points). It is through these WEAPONS that we TAKE OUR STAND (either as a believer or as a leader).

“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.” (This is the only time in Scripture when such a detailed account is given of the demonic forces of our world. This is not a description of human instruments, but of the evil demonic forces actively opposing the work and people of God.)

“Therefore, put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand firm.” (The day of evil could be an experience of temptation, or it might even be a more severe time of suffering, imprisonment, or even death. GOD WANTS US TO STAND AND NOT COLLAPSE IN TEMPTATION AND TRIAL. We will never be strong until we learn how to use the weapons that God has given to us. Leaders will never see really strong churches overcoming sin until we use and train others to use the weapons to help believers stand.)

“Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.”

All of these weapons are essential for winning the spiritual battle. For the purpose of this paper, I wanted to focus on three of these weapons.

Article I. Three primary offensive weapons

1. The Word of God.

“Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.” The helmet identified for which army a person was fighting. We must always stand firm in our identity in Christ in all that He has made us through Christ. The actual weapon was the sword. The Sword that the Holy Spirit will use today is the Word of God.

“For the Word of God is living and active...” (Hebrews 4:12).

“The devil is a crafty enemy and one soon finds one needs Christ’s armor not only in front but on both sides, and especially on one’s back. There is nothing in the world like war against the devil, and no pleasure so great as to be in the middle of the battle.”

- C. T. Studd

"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).

"I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the Word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one" (1 John 2:14).

"Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32).

"My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one...Sanctify them by the truth; your Word is truth" (John 17:15, 17).

"And we also thank God continually because, when you received the Word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it, not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the Word of God, which is at work in you who believe" (1 Thessalonians 2:13, emphasis mine).

"Get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the Word planted in you, which can save you. Do not merely listen to the Word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says" (James 1:21-22, emphasis mine).

The Sword of the Spirit is the Word of God. God will speak to our hearts, convict us, reveal truth to us, guide us, strengthen and transform us through His Word. Believers who have established a firm habit of reading, meditating, memorizing and obeying the Word of God daily are way ahead in the spiritual battles of life. Others who have been indulgent and undisciplined in this area will often be victims of their fleshly desires and Satan's lies, and are easily deceived and defeated. They will need the help and guidance of those who can share the Word with them.

If we have the promises of God within us, we can refuse Satan's deceptions and bring our thoughts captive so that we can choose to obey Christ. Without this, we are victims of the rationalizations of our world system, and our emotional desires and feelings.

The Importance of Equipping the Church to Apply the Word of God

My personal experience. I am very thankful for the man who led me to Christ. The day that I was saved, he asked me to come to where he was staying so that he could get me started in my Christian life. He clearly explained to me the way of salvation and how to live the Christian life. Then he said, "I want to challenge you to begin today to read and meditate upon the Word of God and to make this a daily habit for the rest of your life. He started me with a color system of reading and studying the Bible. I have continued that until this day. I consider that this is one of the most important factors of my entire life. (For more information about this color system, see the article, "Yearly Reading Through the Bible" in Session 2 of GCLI.)

When we realize that the Word of God is the primary instrument by which the Holy Spirit reveals, leads, instructs, corrects, and encourages us, it is easy to see why Satan fights every Christian in this area. Spiritual leaders must succeed in equipping people in this habit and way of life.

"We are evidently no friends of Satan. Like the kings of this world, he wars not against his own subjects. The very fact that he assaults us should fill our minds with hope."

- J.C. Ryle

The example of Janie. Janie is a wonderful high school girl and is active in her church and youth group. She confides to her girlfriend that she and her boy friend went too far last night and were immoral. She says, “I really don’t know what to do. I can’t even pray anymore. I feel so guilty. I don’t know if God will ever forgive me. I don’t want to come back to church because I feel that everyone is looking at me. Please don’t ask me to talk to the pastor; I don’t want anyone preaching to me. What if I get pregnant? Sometimes, I just want to leave town and get lost in the big city. Please don’t tell a soul.”

This is typical of Satan’s lies and attempts to devour a believer. She doesn’t want to talk to God, go back to church, read her Bible or talk to a leader. She would just like to get lost and even end it all. She desperately needs help. Spiritual leaders face many situations like this regularly. She needs a Word from God for each concern.

Jesus sets the example.

“Jesus...was led by the Spirit in the desert, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry. The devil said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.’ Jesus answered, ‘It is written, ‘man shall not live on bread alone’” (Luke 4:1-13, emphasis mine).

You are probably familiar with the context. Satan presented Jesus with three strong temptations, and Jesus answered each with the Word of God. “Satan left him until an opportune time.” He could not destroy Jesus with his deceptions because of Jesus’ use of the Word.

Each temptation was attractive to Jesus’ humanity at that moment. Temptations often relate to actual needs in our lives, but Satan attempts to convince us to fulfill them in ways that are not of God. Jesus answered each with an appropriate answer from the Word of God. The Word is a clear weapon that God will use powerfully to help us in our struggles.

It is here that we often fail.

Too often we do not apply the Word as Jesus did, or we do not act in faith according to His instructions and promises. In Hebrews 4:2, we are reminded, “we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith” (emphasis mine). Is it possible that the Word can be of no value to us? YES, if we do not believe and trust God for what He says. A spiritual leader must help others to believe and trust God. Many will not have a habit of finding truth for themselves. Leaders and loving believers will be able to help them understand and fight the spiritual battle with truth.

2. The shield of Faith.

“Take up the shield of Faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.” The second offensive weapon of the believer and leader is the shield of faith. It is so amazing that God says that EVERY attack of Satan can be overcome through believing and trusting God (remember that “faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the Word of Christ” Romans 10:17).

“I know well that when Christ is nearest, Satan is also busiest.”

***- Robert Murray
McCheyne***

"A father said to Jesus, 'If you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.' 'If you can?' said Jesus. 'Everything is possible for him who believes.' Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, 'I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief'" (Mark 9:22-24).

"Jesus said, 'I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you'" (Matthew 17:20).

"Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6).

"Yet he (Abraham) did not waver in unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what He had promised" (Romans 4:20-21).

"Resist him (Satan), standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings" (1 Peter 5:9).

"Open the throttle of the engine to the full every time the devil waves the red flag of danger or the green flag of caution, and let's go full steam ahead. We shall smash or jump over every one of the devil's obstacles and rejoice the heart of our God by our trust in Him."

- C.T. Studd

3. Prayer is the third vital offensive weapon in our warfare.

"And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints" (Ephesians 6:18, emphasis mine).

"Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective" (James 5:16, emphasis mine).

"Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful" (Colossians 4:2, emphasis mine).

"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him" (Matthew 7:7-11, emphasis mine)?

"And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name and I will do it" (John 14:13-14).

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7, emphasis mine).

Remember that God says that these weapons have DIVINE POWER (2 Corinthians 10:3-5). They are only powerful when we in faith believe God's Word and trust Him. It is God acting in response to them that gives the POWER, not the act itself. We can learn to be "*strong in the Lord and in His*

mighty power” (Ephesians 6:10-12). Then we can stand against the schemes of the devil who plans to “*devour*” (1 Peter 5:8) as many as possible and “*take people captive to do his will*” (2 Timothy 2:26).

Every leader and every Christian can learn how to “be filled with the Spirit” and use these powerful weapons. Read over the list given in Galatians 5:19-21 again, and ask yourself how often one or more of these areas has affected your life or your friends. God commands us to love one another. God wants to use you and me to help, or even set free, those who may be oppressed and deceived by Satan or his forces of evil. The Word of God, and our faith as we lovingly pray and encourage one another, may be just what is needed in a special time of difficulty or discouragement.

“But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:57).

What are some things a leader can do in this “fight of faith”?

“We will give ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word” (Acts 6:4).

“And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the Word of God boldly” (Acts 4:31). We can keep a strong priority of being filled with the Holy Spirit, so as to speak clearly and boldly the Word to the church and to individuals.

“I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone” (1 Timothy 2:1).

- Set up regular faith filled prayer groups:
 - Groups for intercessory prayer for known needs
 - Meaningful staff faith-filled prayer times
 - Pastors and leaders pray over segments of the church
 - Small group prayer times
 - Follow Jesus’ example of extended prayer times for needs
 - Pastor “alone” times to increase devotion to God
 - Husband and wife times to pray for family members
 - Pastor support prayer group
 - Prayer for life transformation in leaders and members
 - Prayer for the conversion of the lost
 - Prayer for the youth of the church
- Regular correspondence to the church to remind people of the challenges and God’s assured victory.
- Recruit someone from each small group to share prayer concerns. Give them written information about spiritual warfare and promises.

“When a Christian shuns fellowship with other Christians, the devil smiles. When he stops studying the Bible, the devil laughs. When he stops praying, the devil shouts for joy.”

- Corrie ten Boom

- Help start small Encouragement and Accountability groups of 2-4 people among those who are not able to be in small groups.
- Encourage small “Saturday Strategy” groups to meet for challenge, sharing, and recapturing a vision and devotion to Christ.
- Extended prayer with leaders is essential for leadership development.
- Church retreats where pastors share vision, challenge, and commitment
- Regular special classes to equip the saints for dealing with spiritual issues:
 - Divorce recovery
 - Marital conflict and difficulties
 - Anger management
 - Winning over addictions
 - Priorities for growth and victory
 - Dynamic living in a complex world
 - Preparing for marriage
 - Financial success from God’s viewpoint
 - Developing leadership qualities
 - Divorce proofing your marriage
 - Raising spiritually committed children
 - Sharing your faith effectively
 - Defending your faith on campus

“There is constant invisible warfare that has to be waged against the powers of darkness.”

***- Rowland Bingham
missionary to Africa***

The Apostle Paul said, *“I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak. Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn? Everything we do, dear friends, is for your strengthening”* (2 Corinthians 11:28-29; 12:19).



SPIRITUAL WARFARE
Exercise

1. What was the main lesson you learned from this article?

2. How much of an emphasis does your church put on the reality of the spiritual battle?

3. What are the main tactics you think Satan would use to destroy your church?

SPIRITUAL WARFARE**Exercise**

4. From reading this article, what practical steps do you believe God wants you to take to equip your church?

5. What questions related to the matter of spiritual warfare would you like to talk about with pastors in your GCLI discussion?



GREAT COMMISSION LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

EVERYONE A MINISTER / THE DOCTRINE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Persecution and the Great Commission Christian

As followers of Jesus Christ, it is vital that we remember this truth: We will suffer opposition and persecution. How do we respond when we are opposed in our faith? How can a leader prepare the church for persecution? This article by John Hopler answers these and other questions related to persecution and the Great Commission Christian.



Persecution and the Great Commission Christian

Pastor John Hopler · Columbus, OH

Consider the following stories, all of which occurred in Great Commission churches in the United States:

- *A newly saved Christian is rejected by his family because of his faith.*
- *A pastor is escorted away by the police for preaching the gospel on a college campus.*
- *Because some parents in their state have been put in jail for home schooling their children, a father and mother move their family out of their state in order to educate their children at home.*
- *A college student is given a lower grade on his test because he is vocal about his biblical convictions.*
- *After a pastor is threatened with physical harm by someone who is later arrested and jailed, the church establishes a policy to provide bodyguards to any pastor speaking on Sunday morning.*
- *While preaching the gospel on a street corner a small group leader is physically abused by a passerby.*
- *A pastor finds out that a website has been created by an antagonist for the sole purpose of mocking and reviling him.*
- *A church is labeled as a cult on the Internet.*

"So, if you are a Christian looking for an easy ministry in a post-Christian culture where Christians are a minority, you are unrealistic in your outlook. It was not to be so in Jeremiah's day, and it cannot be so in ours."

-Francis Shaeffer

Every group of churches that is serving Jesus Christ will have stories like this. As believers in Jesus Christ, we must realize that persecution is part of walking with God—especially when we are actively advancing the gospel of Jesus Christ. As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 16: 9: “*For a wide door for effective service has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.*” The opposition we face in the United States is mild in comparison to what our fellow-Christians experience in other countries. However, we must be prepared for persecution in whatever form it comes, particularly in light of the increased hostility towards Christianity in the United States in recent years.

This article addresses this very important aspect of the Christian life: Persecution and the Great Commission Christian.

1. Persecution and the grace of God.

Our God is a God of grace. He loves us, He forgives us, and He showers His grace on us. His grace comes to us in many ways. And one way is through persecution.

Throughout the history of the church, some of the greatest gospel advances have occurred in persecuted countries. Although this may not seem logical to us, it is nonetheless true. As Tertullian said: “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.” Richard Wurmbrand, who suffered under communism, gives this insight on the relation between persecution and the advancement of the gospel:

Persecution has always produced a better Christian—a witnessing Christian, a soul-winning Christian. Communist persecution has backfired and produced serious, dedicated Christians such as are rarely seen in free lands. These people cannot understand how anyone can be a Christian and not want to win every soul they meet.

On one hand, we are to pray for peace in our country so that the gospel might spread (1 Timothy 2:1-4). On the other hand, we see in the book of Acts that the word of the Lord multiplied greatly during times of persecution. In Acts 5, after the apostles were flogged (v.40) we see that they continued to preach Jesus as the Christ in the temple and house to house (v. 42.) After the martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 7) and the subsequent persecution (8:1), the believers went about “preaching the word” (8:4). And after being opposed in Ephesus, Paul continued to speak out boldly, resulting in everyone in that region hearing the gospel (Acts 19:10).

Based on the testimony of the first century believers, we who desire to fulfill the Great Commission should not be afraid of persecution. Although we pray for times of peace, our main desire is not times of tranquility but the advancement of the gospel. As His followers, it is important that we have the mature perspective that persecution may be a vital part of God’s gracious plan to fulfill this mission.

2. All godly Christians will face some sort of persecution.

Jesus warned His disciples that we would be hated by those who hated Him:

“If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:18-20).

Those who follow Christ in this age will receive many blessings—and also, persecutions. Just as we should expect eternal life in the age to come, we should expect persecutions in the present age:

“Jesus said, ‘Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel’s sake, but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life’” (Mark 10:29-30).

For God’s sake, we may suffer persecution:

“If you live in such a manner as to stand the test of the last judgment, you can depend upon it that the world will not speak well of you.”

-Alistair Begg

“Persecution is simply the clash between two irreconcilable value-systems.”

-John Stott

“Because for Your sake I have borne reproach; Dishonor has covered my face” (Psalm 69:7).

“You who know, O LORD, remember me, take notice of me, and take vengeance for me on my persecutors. Do not, in view of Your patience, take me away; know that for Your sake I endure reproach” (Jeremiah 15:15).

If we are representing Jesus well, we may suffer persecution. Persecutors are really persecuting Jesus:

“And he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ And he said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And He said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting’” (Acts 9:4-5).

The apostle Paul also affirmed that those who follow Christ will suffer persecution:

“Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12).

This is a very sobering verse. According to 2nd Timothy 3:12, Christians who aspire to live godly in Christ Jesus will receive some form of persecution at some point in their lives. Some may say in response, “Is this really true? I know many godly Christians who do not receive opposition.”

There are several answers to this objection. First, there is a form of “corporate persecution” that we all experience as believers. We are one body in Christ. When one Christian is persecuted, the rest of Christ’s body suffers to some degree.

Second, some suffer much more than others because of their zeal for Christ. Persecution is often closely tied to obedience to the Great Commission of Jesus Christ, given in Matthew 28:19-20. Christians and churches that are not actively making disciples—reaching lost people in their community—may not receive much persecution. But those that are more vocal in their faith will likely suffer much more. Also, churches that do not have a strong teaching that Christians are to obey the commands of Christ may also not suffer great persecution. But if a church is reaching the lost—resulting in radically changed lives and changes in social relationships in obedience to God’s Word—persecution will likely follow. Remember: Persecution occurred in the book of Acts as the apostles were actively sharing the gospel and people’s lives and social relationships began changing.

Third, the context of 2 Timothy 3:12 is one missionary speaking to another missionary. There is a far greater cost to pay when someone is leading out as a missionary into new territories that are hostile to the gospel.

Finally, the emphasis of this verse is on “desiring to live godly in Christ Jesus.” Our goal is not to seek persecution but to live a godly life. On the one hand someone should not be overly introspective if he or she is not being persecuted. On the other hand, Jesus said, “*Woe to you when all men speak well of you*” (Luke 6:26). If a Christian has never received opposition or persecution, perhaps he or she should ask God, “Lord, am I really living a life that is honoring to you? Am I being timid in sharing Christ with people? Am I shrinking back from obeying your commands because of a fear of man?” A healthy humility before God, in which we allow Him to speak into our lives, is always good.

3. There are people who are actively opposing and persecuting Christians.

Many Christians are naïve to the fact that some people are actively working to hurt or destroy those associated with Christ, just as there were people who worked to destroy Christ Himself.

“And He was teaching daily in the temple; but the chief priests and the scribes and the leading men among the people were trying to destroy Him” (Luke 19:47).

The Greek word for persecution is also translated “pursue.” [For example, “Flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace...” (2 Timothy 2:22) and “Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12, emphasis mine).]

There are individuals who are actively pursuing (persecuting) Christians to hurt them. The apostle Paul also was “pursued”:

“[I, Paul was] serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews” (Acts 20:19).

As Christians, we need to be prepared for the worst if we are going to follow Christ. We must remember that the devil inspires persecution:

“And Satan entered into Judas who was called Iscariot, belonging to the number of the twelve. And he went away and discussed with the chief priests and officers how he might betray Him to them. They were glad and agreed to give him money” (Luke 22:3-5).

“Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death. And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this: ‘I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells’” (Revelation 2:10-13).

“Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him” (Zechariah 3:1).

4. Opposition comes from non-religious and religious people.

Persecution comes through various sources.

- *The world: “If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you” (John 15:18). (See also 1 John 3:13.)*
- *Earthly governments: “But be on your guard; for they will deliver you up to the courts, and you will be flogged in the synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony”*

“Therefore, I bind these lies and slanderous accusations to my person as an ornament; it belongs to my Christian profession to be vilified, slandered, reproached and reviled, and since all this is nothing but that, as God and my conscience testify, I rejoice in being reproached for Christ's sake.”

-John Bunyan

(Mark 13:9). (See also 1 Kings 19:2; Nehemiah 6:1,9; Esther 3:6; Psalm 119:161; Jeremiah 38:6; Daniel 3:13-17; Matthews 10:17; Acts 12:1-3.)

- *Religious people:* “But the high priest rose up, along with his associates (that is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with jealousy; and they laid hands on the apostles, and put them in a public jail” (Acts 5:17, 18). (See also 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16; Jeremiah 26:8; Amos 7:12-13; Matthew 23:34-37; Acts 4:27-29; 22:4.)
- *Family and friends:* “And a man’s enemies will be the members of his household” (Matthew 10:36). (See also Micah 7:6; Genesis 4:8; Matthew 10:21; Mark 3:21; Galatians 4:29.)

Because we are Christians, we should expect to receive some opposition from the world. That persecution becomes more intense when the persecution is supported by earthly governments, as is the case in some Islamic countries. Also, persecution can come from religious and non-religious people. The religious leaders handed Jesus over to the secular leaders to be crucified. Paul was persecuted by Gentiles, as well as the religious leaders of his day (Acts 20:19).

Although true believers will generally support their fellow Christians, it is common to receive opposition from professing Christians. In fact, oftentimes the worst persecution comes from those who claim to be followers of Jesus Christ. But this has been the pattern throughout history:

*“The church in the wilderness praised Abraham and persecuted Moses.
The church of the kings praised Moses and persecuted the prophets.
The church of Caiaphas praised the prophets and persecuted Jesus.
The church of the popes praised the Savior and persecuted the saints.
And the multitudes of today, in the church and in the world, applaud the courage of the patriarch’s and prophets, the apostles and martyrs.
And condemn the faithfulness of the few as stubborn and foolish.”*

-From the article “Alone” (Author Unknown). (Complete article at the end of this section)

The most painful opposition often comes from family and friends and those who were once part of our church community:

“I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them” (Acts 20: 29-30).

So, do not be surprised if opposition comes from those who are professing Christians.

5. Persecution comes in various forms: physical, economic and verbal.

Jesus was crucified. Paul was beaten (2 Corinthians 12: 24-25). And many of our brothers and sisters in Christ overseas are being tortured, maimed, and put to death for their faith. In the United States, physical persecution is illegal, and so it comes in different forms: economic (denying job benefits, for example) or verbal (character defamation, false accusations, and slander).

*“To be right with
God has often
meant to be in
trouble with men.”*

-A.W. Tozer

As to verbal persecution, websites are being used more and more in order to defame individual Christian leaders. In particular, we need to be wary of allegations made on anonymous blogs where the truth of the statement cannot be adequately examined. We must not be naïve about this verbal opposition that Christians are suffering in this Internet age.

Verbal persecution could include:

- *False Reports:* “Blessed are you when men revile you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me” (Matthew 5:11). (See also Psalm 38:12; 1 Kings 21:10; Ezra 4:12-13; Psalm 35:11; Jeremiah 20:10; Amos 7:10; John 7:12; Acts 6:11; 21:21, 28; 24:5.)
- *Threats:* “Then the people of the land discouraged the people of Judah, and frightened them from building” (Ezra 4:4). (See also Daniel 3:15; John 9:22; Acts 4:17.)
- *Ridicule:* “When we are slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, even until now” (1 Corinthians 4:13). (See also Nehemiah 4:1-3; Hebrews 13:13; Revelation 2:9.)
- *Ostracism:* “They will make you outcasts from the synagogue; but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God” (John 16:2). (See also Matthew 10:22; John 9:29, 34; 12:42.)

“God had a Son that had no fault, but He never had a son that was not found fault with. God Himself was slandered in paradise by Satan. Let us not expect, therefore, to escape from the venomous tongue.”

-Charles Spurgeon

6. There are many promises and blessings associated with persecution. As believers there are many motivations for continuing in faith when persecuted:

- *God gives us grace to endure:* “What persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord delivered me” (2 Timothy 3:11)! (Also see Lamentations 3:22-23; Psalm 18:17-19; Nahum 1:7-8; Romans 8:18, 35-39; Hebrews 13:6; Revelation 3:10.)
- *God promises to be with us:* “I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5). (See also Psalm 23:4; Isaiah 43:2, 5; Matthew 28:20; 2 Corinthians 4:9.)
- *God promises the future triumph of Jesus Christ:* “For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet” (1 Corinthians 15:25). (See also Obadiah 21; Philippians 3:20-21; 2 Thessalonians 1:6-8; Revelation 11:15.)
- *God promises to judge righteously in the future:* “And while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously” (1 Peter 2:23). (See also 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10; Jude 24; Ezra 6:8; Esther 6:11-13; Psalm 126:1; Daniel 6:26, 27; Haggai 2:22-23; Revelation 2:10; 7:13-17; 12:11.)
- *We are partakers in the suffering of Jesus:* “That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death” (Philippians 3:10). (See also 1 Peter 2:20-23; 1 Peter 3:14-17; 1 Peter 4:13-14.)

- *Because of all these wonderful promises we are to rejoice when persecution occurs: “But to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation” (1 Peter 4:13). (See also Romans 5:3-5; Psalm 30:5; Matthew 5:11-12; Acts 5:41; 16:22-25; Colossians 1:24; 1 Peter 1:6, 8.)*

7. Christians are to respond to persecution with humility, rejoicing and love.

A common temptation when persecuted is to fret. But God wants us to take refuge in Him during trying times:

“Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right” (1 Peter 4:19).

“And we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure;” (1 Corinthians 4:12).

“O LORD my God, in You I have taken refuge; save me from all those who pursue me, and deliver me,” (Psalm 7:1).

“All Your commandments are faithful; they have persecuted me with a lie; help me!” (Psalm 119:86).

God uses persecution as a way to keep us humble---and humility is the path for future grace: *“And He has said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.’ Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12: 9-10).*

God may want to use persecution to teach or discipline a person, leaders, or even an entire church. When opposition arises, humble people will ask themselves, “What is God trying to teach me?” Before we dismiss criticism too quickly as unfair or view it as a sign that we are living a godly life (2 Timothy 3:12), humble people seek God and examine themselves. There may be truth in the midst of poorly communicated criticism, even if it comes from people with malicious hearts. David’s response to Shimei (2 Samuel 16:5-13) is a good model to us:

“If he curses, and if the Lord has told him, ‘Curse David,’ then who shall say, ‘Why have you done so’” (2 Samuel 16:10)?

If we are humble, we will respond to persecution in two ways. First, like Jesus commands in Matthew 5:11-12, we will rejoice when persecuted: *“Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”*

“...but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation” (1 Peter 4:13).

Second, when persecuted, we will love, bless and pray for our opponents:

“But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you” (Luke 6:27-28).

“It was a deal; we preached and they [the communists] beat us. We were happy preaching. They were happy beating us, so everyone was happy.”

-Richard Wurmbbrand

“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse” (Romans 12:14).

Have you heard the story of Dirk Willems? In 16th century Holland Willems, an Anabaptist, was jailed for being “re-baptized” and for holding Christian meetings in his home. He escaped from jail and was pursued by an officer across a pond of ice. The pursuer was a heavy man, whose weight cracked the ice. He fell into the water and began to drown. Willems turned around and saw his pursuer’s predicament. Before he fell in the water the officer was a “wolf” to Willems. Now he viewed him as a “lost sheep.” Willems came back and pulled the officer out of the pond, saving his life. Willems was then escorted back to jail and later burned at the stake. Dirk Willems stands as a shining example of a Christian who loved the man who persecuted him. In so doing, Willems glorified God through his life:

“But if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name” (1 Peter 4:16).

8. Opposition may be a sign of mature spiritual leadership.

When experiencing opposition, a pastor may be tempted to think he is doing something wrong. But opposition may indicate that a pastor is doing something right—that he is a worthy follower of Jesus Christ. Note the example of the apostles in the first century:

“...And after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and then released them. So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name” (Acts 5:40-41).

Also, a stunning verse is found in Acts 28:22. Paul was approached by some Jews who said this about the Christians: *“But we desire to hear from you what your views are; for concerning this sect, it is known to us that it is spoken against everywhere.”*

Can you imagine if your church or ministry was “*spoken against everywhere*”? Yet this is what Paul experienced. And we know that Paul was in the center of God’s will. This example shows that criticisms do not necessarily indicate that a pastor’s ministry is flawed. Criticisms may indicate that a pastor’s ministry is on target.

A legitimate question is asked: How can we know if a criticism of a pastor is valid or invalid? Here is my answer: I assume that a criticism is invalid unless it has been established by the testimony of two or three witnesses, in a just process. This would normally involve the pastor submitting to other pastors or godly Christian leaders who provide him accountability (1 Timothy 5:19-21). Therefore, when I see a pastor being criticized I look at these three factors:

Factor #1: Accountability structure: Is there is an accountability process in place to address valid criticisms of a pastor--a process based on the Scriptures? (Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Timothy 5: 19-21). For example, in Great Commission Churches, a member with a concern can go through this appeal process: Meet one on one with the pastor; then with one or two other pastors; then with the church board; then with a Great Commission Churches representative. The purpose of this process is to discern whether or not the criticism is legitimate and to bring correction if needed.

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

-Tertullian

“Wicked men seem to bear great reverence to the saints departed; they canonize dead saints, but persecute living.”

-Thomas Watson

Factor #2: Humility of the pastor: Is the pastor’s response to the criticism one of humility? Does he ask God and men, “Is there some way that I am not being obedient to Jesus Christ?” In particular, does the pastor demonstrate humility by submitting himself to the church’s accountability process?

Factor #3: The willingness of the critic to work through the accountability structure: If the critic is aware of the accountability process, is he or she willing to submit his or her concerns to that process? Or does the critic choose instead to defame the character of the pastor through private or public communications (such as blogs)?

Honorable people with valid concerns will pursue an honorable process. But if a pastor is submitted to his church accountability process and his critic ignores that process, it raises serious questions about that critic, not the pastor. The legitimacy of the criticism is especially in question if the critic ignores the established accountability process and instead spreads negative characterizations of that pastor, one-on-one or through blogs.

So, if you are being opposed in ministry, maintain humility and faith. Humble yourself before God and be accountable to your church. And maintain faith in God and in the ministry He has given you. While a specific criticism may be valid and require correction on your part, other criticisms may actually indicate that you are doing something right—particularly if you are humble and accountable to God and men.

9. When a Christian is being persecuted, our responsibility as fellow followers of Christ is to quickly support and identify with that Christian.

How are we to respond when fellow Christians are opposed?

We must recognize that it is a temptation for us to “hope” that Christians will live the “pain-free” Christian life. So, when Christians are persecuted, particularly those in America, we will be tempted to be apathetic or even judgmental of those who are suffering for their faith. We might think, “If that Christian had been wiser or more sensitive or more kind he would have not have been opposed.” But we must remember that no one was wiser and more sensitive and kinder than Jesus Christ. Our Lord healed the sick, gave sight to the blind and fed the multitudes...and they still crucified Him. As churches we are to be a blessing to our communities through service projects that we do. But God forbid that we do so under the false thinking that it will guarantee us protection from persecution.

So, when Christians are persecuted for being bold in their faith, it is imperative that we reject a judgmental spirit and respond in humility, by supporting them for their courage. At the end of his life, Paul was suffering for the cause of Christ. Phygelus and Hermogenes turned away from the apostle, while Onesiphorus and his household supported Paul (2 Timothy 1:15, 16). In light of this, Paul urges Timothy: “*Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God*” (2 Timothy 1:8).

May we all follow this example and strengthen our brothers when they are persecuted—verbally or otherwise. As we support and strengthen our fellow Christians we play a key role in advancing the gospel.

10. How can pastors prepare churches for persecution?

First Step: Self-Examination. Spend time before God in the word, examining your own life in regards to the teachings in the Scriptures on persecution. If you have not suffered or very seldom suffered from some form of opposition, is there some way that you are not living a life that is godly in Christ Jesus? If you are being criticized, are you learning what God wants to teach you? If you are being persecuted, are you responding with humility, joy and love?

Second Step: Support those who are being persecuted. It is vital that we come to the aid of those who are being persecuted, whether they are in our own church, in Great Commission Churches, or in the body of Christ at large. I encourage you to support the persecuted church through ministries such as Voice of the Martyrs. Also consider joining with other churches to promote the November International Day of Prayer for the persecuted church.

Third Step: Teach and equip the church. Jesus warned and equipped His disciples that they would be persecuted. So did Paul and Peter. We are to do the same through our public teaching and our one-on-one pastoring. Also, encouraging members to read the biographies of heroes of the faith will equip members for persecution.

Fourth Step: Build families, small groups and house churches. It has been pointed out that house churches are more able to withstand persecution. It is a wise strategy to build strong communities (be it a family, small group or a house church) where Christians support each other—spiritually, relationally and economically—should persecution arise.

Fifth Step: Build Alliances. Pastors are wise to build alliances with other churches and other Christians, not only because this honors the Lord but also because of the mutual support that can be provided in the case of persecution. (This is one reason I personally see GCC's involvement with the National Association of Evangelicals to be important as America becomes increasingly hostile to the faith.) Start by strengthening your relationship with the other GCC churches in your city and your region. In addition, work closely with evangelical ministeriums hosted in your city.

Sixth Step: Serve the community in the name of Christ. Blessing unbelievers in your city through serving the poor and helping the needy should be done with the motive of loving God and loving people. However, these acts of kindness may help to protect churches against false accusation and persecution in days to come.

Seventh Step: Be prepared legally. Get connected to Christian attorneys who can defend you, should persecution arise.

Eighth Step: Just Sow It! Continue to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. Do not allow the threat of persecution to hinder the advancement of the gospel.

May God grant you and your church grace to love and obey God amidst persecution, and to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth.

“If you are going to walk with Jesus Christ, you are going to be opposed ... In our days, to be a true Christian is really to become a scandal.”

-George Whitefield



PERSECUTION AND THE GREAT COMMISSION CHRISTIAN

Addendum

ALONE

(Author Unknown)

It is human to stand with a crowd, it is divine to stand-alone. It is man-like to follow the people, to drift with the tide; it is God-like to follow a principle, to stem the tide,

It is natural to compromise conscience and follow the social and religious fashion for the sake of gain or pleasure; it is divine to sacrifice both on the altar of truth and duty.

"No man stood with me, but all forsook me," wrote the battle-scarred apostle in describing his first appearance before Nero to answer for his life for believing and teaching contrary to the roman world.

Truth has been out of fashion since man changed his robe of fadeless light for a garment of faded leaves.

Noah built and voyaged alone. His neighbors laughed at his strangeness and perished in style. Abraham wandered and worshipped alone. Sodomites smiled at the simple shepherd, followed the fashion, and fed the flames. Daniel dined and prayed alone.

Elijah sacrificed and witnessed alone. Jeremiah prophesied and wept alone.

Jesus loved and died alone.

Of the lonely way His disciples would walk, He said, "Straight is the gate and narrow the way which leads unto life and few there be that find it."

Of their treatment by the many who walk in the broad way, He said, "If you were of the world, the world would love his own; but because you are not of the world, therefore the world hates you for My Names-sake."

The church in the wilderness praised Abraham and persecuted Moses.

The church of the kings praised Moses and persecuted the prophets.

The church of Caiaphas praised the prophets and persecuted Jesus.

The church of the popes praised the Savior and persecuted the saints. And the multitudes of today, in the church and in the world, applaud the courage of the patriarch's and prophets, the apostles and martyrs. And condemn the faithfulness of the few as stubborn and foolish.

Wanted Today! Men, women, young and old, who will obey their convictions of the Truth and Duty at the Cost of fortune, and friends and life itself.



PERSECUTION AND THE GREAT COMMISSION CHRISTIAN

Exercise

1. What was the main lesson you learned from this reading?

2. Describe a time in your life when you were reviled or persecuted because of your faith. What was your response?

3. Consider this sentence in the introduction: “However, we must be prepared to be opposed in whatever form it comes, particularly in light of the increased hostility towards Christianity in the United States in recent years.” Do you think that this statement is true; that there is increased hostility towards Christianity in the United States? Why or why not?



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Exercise

4. Describe a time when someone you know was criticized or persecuted for his or her faith. How did you support that person?

5. What steps is your church taking to prepare for persecution? What are some other steps that can be taken?
