

# THE MEASURE OF A CHURCH

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This study is adapted from an American Missionary Fellowship (AMF) course entitled “Foundations for Christian Leadership” by Dr. Gene Getz.

This study, and the separate outline, were used to present this teaching to our local church. [Click here for the outline.](#)

**Note:** This teaching was originally accompanied by a supporting video series which elaborated on the material summarized in this written presentation.

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## THE MEASURE OF A CHURCH (Lesson 1)

1Th 1:3 We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

This sums up the theme of the lesson. These are the characteristics which will and must be consistently evidenced in the body if it is healthy. We will not reach perfection, but the acknowledged and agreed-upon goal must be to fulfill the spirit of this and the other supporting scripture passages we will examine.

These are what Paul looked for - and based on his findings, he encouraged, admonished, rebuked and corrected. We will be looking further at the need and purpose for these in the last lesson of this series. For now, let me just mention that a major reason why local churches become or remain unhealthy - failing to “measure up” - is that the prevailing Christian culture has adopted the way of our secular culture - failing to offer exhortation, admonishment, rebuke and correction. We are uncomfortable with these, convincing ourselves that it is none of our business. Many people do not get to know each other well enough to become comfortable exercising them. Where strong and healthy relationships otherwise allow for them, we either do not recognize our responsibility in these areas, or do not invest the time and study to learn how to employ them correctly.

On the other hand, when they are indeed offered properly, so often they are not properly received. Again, we do not see our responsibility to accept them, and have not or will not learn how to react and respond biblically. In churches where the worst case scenario rules, this infects and corrupts leadership which then functions more and more as a dictator or tyrant - and the membership becomes fearful of offering the meekest of suggestions because input is not valued, solicited or accepted. Churches like that do not grow, do not minister, and become ineffective and destructive.

### **... work produced by faith ...**

Is our faith producing the quantity, quality and types of works which are consistent with true saving faith? Do we remain vigilant and aware of our responsibility to work out our faith by working *out of* our faith - and is this vigilance and the fulfillment of our responsibility easily accomplished because of our constant presence with God? To that end, do we endeavor to be constantly aware of God's presence?

### **The call and exhortation from God's Word**

- Eph 2:10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.
- Jam 2:14-17 What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? <sup>15</sup>Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. <sup>16</sup>If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? <sup>17</sup>In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.
- Jam 2:26 As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.
- Heb 10:24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.
- Heb 13:16 And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.
- Tit 2:14 who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.
- Tit 3:1 Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good,
- Tit 3:8 This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.
- Tit 3:14 Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good, in order that they may provide for daily necessities and not live unproductive lives.
- 1Ti 2:9-10 I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, <sup>10</sup>but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.
- 1Ti 5:9-10 No widow may be put on the list of widows unless she is over sixty, has been faithful to her husband, <sup>10</sup>and is well known for her good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the saints, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds.
- Col 1:10a-b And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work,

### **Proper preparation**

- 2Ti 2:20-21 In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for noble purposes and some for ignoble. <sup>21</sup>If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.
- 2Ti 3:16-17 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup>so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

### **As an example to others**

- Mt 5:16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.
- 1Th 4:11-12 Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, <sup>12</sup>so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.
- 2Co 8:21 For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men.
- 1Pe 2:12 Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.
- 1Pe 2:15 For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men.

### **The strength, desire, encouragement and provision are from God himself**

- Phl 2:12b-13 continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, <sup>13</sup>for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.
- 2Th 2:16-17 May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, <sup>17</sup>encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.
- 2Co 9:8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.
- Heb 13:20-21 May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, <sup>21</sup>equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

### **Actions tell the true story**

- 2Co 9:12-13 This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. <sup>13</sup>Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.
- Tit 1:16 They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.
- Mt 7:17-20 Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. <sup>18</sup>A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. <sup>19</sup>Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. <sup>20</sup>Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.
- 3Jn 11 Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God.

### **... labor prompted by love ...**

Are we laboring in love for the sake of each other, for the sake of those outside our local assembly, and most importantly, for *God's* sake; that is, for *God's* interests for Himself, *His* interests for others, and *His* interests for ourselves - rather than our own interests - even and especially our seemingly most sincere interests in seemingly the most virtuous causes? Are we pursuing *His* plans and purposes, *His* honor and glory - or our own?

Labor requires sweat, pain, sacrifice, toil, perseverance and selflessness. But there is a joy and excitement about all this when we consider, understand and appreciate its purpose - and when we remember that our Creator and Sustainer promises to provide the strength, endurance and all that is needed (2Co 9:8). Scripture often employs the illustration of childbirth to describe how we should labor with joy, excitement and purpose (Jn 16:21, e.g.).

Are we truly and actually rooted in love; constantly driven by it; consistently manifesting it? Can we be seen in 2Th 1:3?

2Th 1:3 We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing.

### **Love defined and demonstrated**

1Co 13	(All)
1Jn 3:16	This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.
Jn 13:1	It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.
Rom 5:8	But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
2Co 8:24	Therefore show these men the proof of your love and the reason for our pride in you, so that the churches can see it.
Rom 8:36	As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."
Phl 2:17	But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you.
Gal 5:6b	The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

### **Commanded to love**

Mk 12:28b-31 Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" <sup>29</sup>"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. <sup>30</sup>Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' <sup>31</sup>The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

- Jn 15:17 This is my command: Love each other.
- 1Jn 3:17-18 If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? <sup>18</sup>Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.
- Rom 12:9-10 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. <sup>10</sup>Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.
- 1Pe 1:22 Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.
- 1Jn 3:11 This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another.
- 1Jn 3:23 And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.
- 1Co 16:14 Do everything in love.

### **Laboring out of love for God**

- Jn 21:15-16 When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." <sup>16</sup>Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."

### **Laboring out of love for one another**

- Jn 15:12-13 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup>Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.
- 1Jn 4:11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.
- Gal 5:13-14 You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. <sup>14</sup>The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."
- 2Co 5:14 For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.

### **Laboring out of love for others**

- Lk 6:32 "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' love those who love them.

### **Love; the motivation to labor**

- Jn 14:15 "If you love me, you will obey what I command.
- Jn 14:21a Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me.
- Jn 14:23-24 Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. <sup>24</sup>He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.
- Jn 14:31a but the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me.

### **Love; the evidence of true faith**

- Jam 2:8 If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right.
- 1Jn 2:3-6 We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. <sup>4</sup>The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. <sup>5</sup>But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: <sup>6</sup>Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.
- 1Jn 3:14 We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death.
- 1Jn 4:7-8 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup>Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.
- 1Jn 4:21 And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.
- 1Jn 5:3 This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome,
- 2Jn 6 And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love.

### **The goal of loving one another**

- Jn 13:34-35 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. (not "new", but for a new purpose) <sup>35</sup>By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."
- 1Jn 4:12 No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.
- Rom 13:8-10 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. <sup>9</sup>The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." <sup>10</sup>Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

### **Misplaced love; false love**

- 1Jn 2:15-17 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. <sup>16</sup>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. <sup>17</sup>The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.
- 1Jn 4:20 If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.
- Lk 11:42 "Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone.

### **... endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.**

Are we enduring - inspired by our hope in Jesus Christ? When we consider how profound that hope is - if it is real to us, if it is sure though unseen, if we have a proper appreciation for what it holds for and means to us - we will endure enthusiastically (2Co 4:17-18; Rom 8:18). How easily do we find ourselves giving up? How quickly and how often do we turn to God when we sense our endurance being tested? Do we have a positive, optimistic view of, and approach to our struggles - or are we pessimistic and defeatist in our response?

#### **Enduring, despite suffering**

- Jam 1:12 Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.
- 2Th 1:4-5 Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring. <sup>5</sup>All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering.
- 1Pe 2:19, 20b For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. ... <sup>20</sup>But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.
- 1Pe 4:19 So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.

#### **Enduring, despite weariness**

- Gal 6:9-10 Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. <sup>10</sup>Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.
- 2Th 3:13 And as for you, brothers, never tire of doing what is right.

#### **Enduring, with our eyes fixed on the prize**

- Col 1:4-5 because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints- <sup>5</sup>the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel
- Phl 3:12-14 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. <sup>13</sup>Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, <sup>14</sup>I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

#### **Enduring, because others have blazed the trail**

- 1Co 4:16 Therefore I urge you to imitate me.
- 1Co 11:1 Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

## **Are we maturing?**

Are we like the church at Corinth - functioning as infants when we should be acting like adults? Are we in need of Paul's admonishment to them - and the rebuke of Heb 5:11-6:1a?

Heb 5:11-6:1a We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. <sup>12</sup>In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! <sup>13</sup>Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. <sup>14</sup>But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. <sup>6:1</sup>Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity,

Peter exhorts us, as well:

1Pe 2:2-3 Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, <sup>3</sup>now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Have we not tasted, indeed, that the Lord is well beyond "good"?

Today's Christian community has become more and more tainted by the surrounding secular culture; filled with much immature behavior, thinking and speaking (on both the spiritual *and* human levels). If our church is to measure up, we must mature individually and corporately.

1Co 13:11 When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.

This concern for spiritual maturity will be the subject of our next lesson.

## **The biblical picture of ministry working out of faith, laboring in love and enduring through hope in Christ**

2Co 6:3-10 We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. <sup>4</sup>Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; <sup>5</sup>in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; <sup>6</sup>in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; <sup>7</sup>in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; <sup>8</sup>through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; <sup>9</sup>known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; <sup>10</sup>sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

## **Lesson 1 summary: The Measure of a Church**

Our faith must be producing works

Our love must prompt us to labor

Our hope in Jesus Christ must inspire us to endure

We must exhibit love constantly - and love must be at the root of all that we think, do and say

We must be maturing

So, how does our church measure up? Each one of us is responsible for monitoring this - for our own well being, for the good of one another and our church, and for the sake, honor and glory of God. This is a constant need. Moreover, we have the further duty to report and act on our findings - whether good or bad - for the sake of the common, greater good of all.

## **PRODUCING A MATURE CHURCH** **(Lesson 2)**

Act 2:42-47 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. <sup>43</sup>Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. <sup>44</sup>All the believers were together and had everything in common. <sup>45</sup>Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. <sup>46</sup>Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, <sup>47</sup>praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

This passage points out the three basic ingredients of spiritual maturity:  
Learning, fellowshiping and witnessing.

### **We must be learning**

God's Word repeatedly exhorts us to our responsibility to learn and to know. We must be ever-growing in our knowledge of God and His Word. Of course, this must be purposeful - we must gain understanding, wisdom and insight so that, combined with our desire to obey and please God, we may apply it to our lives effectively. In a study on the attributes of God, R. C. Sproul points out that churches which neglect the teaching of theology (the study of the doctrine of God) are left with nothing more than social activity. Ultimately, they are worshiping an unknown god and engaging in idolatry. He states further that the mainline denominations have lost hundreds of thousands of members, primarily because the worship service is seen as boring and irrelevant; folks are not learning about, and being excited by the character and workings of God. Are we excited to know more about God and His Word?

### **Growing in knowledge**

- Eph 4:11-13 (God's formula and provision for church sanity) It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup>to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up <sup>13</sup>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.
- 1Pe 2:2-3 Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, <sup>3</sup>now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.
- Eph 1:17 I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.
- Phl 1:9-11 And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, <sup>10</sup>so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, <sup>11</sup>filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ-to the glory and praise of God.

Col 1:9-10 For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. <sup>10</sup>And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God,

Col 2:2 My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ,

2Pe 3:18 But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.

**Seek Truth; obtain knowledge, understanding, wisdom and discernment**

Pr 23:23 Buy the truth and do not sell it; get wisdom, discipline and understanding.  
 (Pr 19:2 It is not good to have zeal without knowledge, nor to be hasty and miss the way.)  
 (Rom 10:2b they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge.)  
 Pr 2:6 For the LORD gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.  
 Pr 4:5 Get wisdom, get understanding; do not forget my words or swerve from them.  
 Pr 4:7 Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding.  
 Pr 8:10-11 Choose my instruction instead of silver, knowledge rather than choice gold, <sup>11</sup>for wisdom is more precious than rubies, and nothing you desire can compare with her.  
 Pr 16:16 How much better to get wisdom than gold, to choose understanding rather than silver!  
 Pr 15:14 The discerning heart seeks knowledge, but the mouth of a fool feeds on folly.  
 Pr 18:15 The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge; the ears of the wise seek it out.  
 Pr 19:8 He who gets wisdom loves his own soul; he who cherishes understanding prospers.  
 Pr 23:12 Apply your heart to instruction and your ears to words of knowledge.  
 Pr 24:14 Know also that wisdom is sweet to your soul; if you find it, there is a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off.  
 Ps 119:66 Teach me knowledge and good judgment, for I believe in your commands.

In view of Tit 3:9-10 and 2Ti 2:23-26, it is indeed wise to avoid arguing over doctrine, but the context there is that we must not engage in “useless,” “unprofitable,” “foolish” or “stupid” arguments and quarrels. There are essentially two situations which cause our efforts to fall into these categories: First, when we deal with contrary people who are just stirring up trouble, dissension and division (1Ti 6:3-5). The bible calls them foolish and ignorant, among other things. Therefore, we must be wise, recognizing when we are violating Mt 7:6 by “tossing pearls before swine.” Second, when the doctrine in question does not bear on the issues under immediate consideration (though the doctrine is not then to be ignored when and where it *does* apply), or when the doctrine cannot be confidently supported by scripture (there is no other source!). In this last case, we must find rest in Dt 29:29 - while continuing to faithfully apply what we *do* know, undistracted by what we do not.

Nevertheless, we are clearly commanded to promulgate and stand for sound doctrine (Tit 1:9). To do so, we must be learning in order to have confidence in our understanding. A great disservice is being done by many folks in the Christian community who are excited to “worship” and partner with anybody who claims to be worshipping the same god. Often, these folks will clearly state that they do not allow doctrinal differences to be a barrier to them - sometimes betraying pride in a superior spirituality which allows them to be “nonjudgmental,” more “inclusive” and “tolerant.” This type of thinking has corrupted the church and, according to 2Pe 2:2, has “brought the way of Truth into disrepute.”

### **Warnings to stick to the Truth**

- Ecc 12:11-12a The words of the wise are like goads, their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails-given by one Shepherd. <sup>12</sup>Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them.
- 2Co 10:5 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.
- 2Ti 3:14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it,
- 2Ti 4:2-4 Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage-with great patience and careful instruction. <sup>3</sup>For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. <sup>4</sup>They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.
- Lk 8:18 Therefore consider carefully how you listen. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken from him."
- Heb 2:1 We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.
- 1Jn 2:20-21 But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. <sup>21</sup>I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth.
- 1Jn 2:27 As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit-just as it has taught you, remain in him.
- Rev 1:3 Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.
- Rev 22:7 "Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book."
- Pr 30:6 Do not add to his words, or he will rebuke you and prove you a liar.
- Dt 4:2 Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the LORD your God that I give you.
- Dt 12:32 See that you do all I command you; do not add to it or take away from it.
- Rev 22:18-19 I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. <sup>19</sup>And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.
- (Hos 4:6a my people are destroyed from lack of knowledge.)

## **Warnings to guard against false teaching**

- Gal 1:6-7a I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel- <sup>7</sup>which is really no gospel at all.
- Pr 14:15 A simple man believes anything, but a prudent man gives thought to his steps.
- Eph 4:14 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.
- Col 2:8 See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.
- Mt 16:12 Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.
- 1Ti 1:3-4a As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer <sup>4</sup>nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies.
- 1Ti 4:1-2 The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. <sup>2</sup>Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.
- 1Ti 4:7 Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly.
- 1Ti 4:16a Watch your life and doctrine closely.
- 1Ti 6:3-4a If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, <sup>4</sup>he is conceited and understands nothing.
- Tit 1:9-11 He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it. <sup>10</sup>For there are many rebellious people, mere talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision group. <sup>11</sup>They must be silenced, because they are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach-and that for the sake of dishonest gain.
- Tit 2:1 You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine.
- Tit 2:15a These, then, are the things you should teach.
- Heb 13:9a Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings.
- 2Pe 3:15b-17 just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. <sup>16</sup>He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction. <sup>17</sup>Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position.
- 2Jn 10-11 If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. <sup>11</sup>Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work.

### **Warnings to watch out for false prophets and deceivers**

- Mt 24:4-5 Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. <sup>5</sup>For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many.
- Jn 10:1-2, 9a "I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. <sup>2</sup>The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. ... <sup>9</sup>I am the gate;
- Mk 13:21-23 At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'Look, there he is!' do not believe it. <sup>22</sup>For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and miracles to deceive the elect-if that were possible. <sup>23</sup>So be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time.
- Eph 5:6-7 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. <sup>7</sup>Therefore do not be partners with them.
- Col 2:4 I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments.
- 2Th 2:3a Don't let anyone deceive you in any way,
- Jam 1:16 Don't be deceived, my dear brothers.
- 2Pe 2:17-19a These men are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them. <sup>18</sup>For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error. <sup>19</sup>They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity-
- 2Pe 1:20-21 Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. <sup>21</sup>For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.
- Jn 7:18 He who speaks on his own does so to gain honor for himself, but he who works for the honor of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him.
- 1Jn 2:26 I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray.
- 2Jn 7 Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist.

### **Warnings regarding those who cause divisions**

- Rom 16:17-18 I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. <sup>18</sup>For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people.
- Gal 1:7b Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.
- 1Ti 1:4b These promote controversies rather than God's work-which is by faith.
- 1Ti 6:4b-5 He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions <sup>5</sup>and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.
- Jude 17-19 But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold. <sup>18</sup>They said to you, "In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires." <sup>19</sup>These are the men who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit.

## **We must be fellowshiping**

God's Word explains the purposes and benefits of fellowship among believers. Many people who claim to be Christians convince themselves that they do not need to be associated with a local church. Though we cannot judge for certain, most of these are probably not Christians at all. At the very least, they are spiritually immature, not being disciplined, and destined to remain in that condition unless and until they respond to the biblical view of fellowship.

However, fellowshiping is not defined by, or limited to the church's event schedule. It must extend well beyond, into the daily and weekly interactions between individual members and groups of members - involving work, meals, recreation and other life activities. The body of Christ cannot function properly and fully with disconnected members, or without interaction.

## **Mutual encouragement**

- Heb 10:25 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.
- Heb 3:13 But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.
- Heb 10:24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.
- Rom 1:12 that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.
- 1Th 4:18 Therefore encourage each other with these words.
- Act 11:22-24 News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. <sup>23</sup>When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. <sup>24</sup>He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.
- Act 14:27a On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them
- Act 15:32 Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the brothers.
- Act 16:40 After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and encouraged them. Then they left.
- Act 20:1 When the uproar had ended, Paul sent for the disciples and, after encouraging them, said good-bye and set out for Macedonia.
- Col 4:8 I am sending him to you for the express purpose that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts.
- 1Th 3:2 We sent Timothy, who is our brother and God's fellow worker in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith,
- 1Pe 5:12b I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it.
- 1Th 2:11-12 For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, <sup>12</sup>encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

### **Mutual edification**

- Rom 14:19 Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.
- Rom 15:14 I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another.
- 1Th 5:11 Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.
- Eph 4:29 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.
- Rom 15:2 Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.
- 1Co 14:12b try to excel in gifts that build up the church.
- Act 2:42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.
- Jude 20 But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit.
- Pr 27:17 As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.
- Eph 5:19a Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.
- Col 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

### **Mutual concern and compassion**

- Act 4:32 All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had.
- Act 2:44-47 All the believers were together and had everything in common. <sup>45</sup>Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. <sup>46</sup>Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, <sup>47</sup>praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.
- 1Co 12:25-26 so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. <sup>26</sup>If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.
- 2Co 1:3-7 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, <sup>4</sup>who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. <sup>5</sup>For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. <sup>6</sup>If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. <sup>7</sup>And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.
- 2Co 7:6-7 But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, <sup>7</sup>and not only by his coming but also by the comfort you had given him. He told us about your longing for me, your deep sorrow, your ardent concern for me, so that my joy was greater than ever.
- 1Pe 5:5b All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another,

- Eph 4:2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.
- Rom 12:10b Honor one another above yourselves.
- Phl 2:3-4 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. <sup>4</sup>Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.
- Gal 6:2 Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.
- Eph 4:32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.
- Jam 5:16a Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.
- Col 3:12-14 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. <sup>13</sup>Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. <sup>14</sup>And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.
- 1Pe 4:9 Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.
- Heb 13:22 Brothers, I urge you to bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written you only a short letter.
- Lk 3:18 And with many other words John exhorted the people and preached the good news to them.

### **Mutual love**

- Jn 13:34-35 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. <sup>35</sup>By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."
- Eph 4:16 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.
- Rom 12:10a Be devoted to one another in brotherly love.
- Heb 13:1 Keep on loving each other as brothers.
- Col 2:2a My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love,
- 1Pe 4:8 Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.

### **To seek, develop, maintain and conduct ourselves in like-mindedness and unity; with common purpose**

#### **Partakers of the one (and only) Living Bread**

- 1Co 10:17 Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.
- Jn 6:33-35a For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." <sup>34</sup>"Sir," they said, "from now on give us this bread." <sup>35</sup>Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life.
- Jn 6:48-51 I am the bread of life. <sup>49</sup>Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. <sup>50</sup>But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. <sup>51</sup>I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

### **Many parts, many members; one body**

- 1Co 12:12-20 The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. <sup>13</sup>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. <sup>14</sup>Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. <sup>15</sup>If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. <sup>16</sup>And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. <sup>17</sup>If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? <sup>18</sup>But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. <sup>19</sup>If they were all one part, where would the body be? <sup>20</sup>As it is, there are many parts, but one body.
- Rom 12:4-5 Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, <sup>5</sup>so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.
- Eph 4:3-6 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. <sup>4</sup>There is one body and one Spirit- just as you were called to one hope when you were called- <sup>5</sup>one Lord, one faith, one baptism; <sup>6</sup>one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.
- Eph 4:16 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.
- Eph 4:25 Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.
- Col 3:15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

### **Absence of divisions**

- 1Co 1:10 I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.
- 1Co 12:25-27 so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. <sup>26</sup>If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. <sup>27</sup>Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

### **Like-mindedness; common doctrine and purpose; unity in Christ**

- Phl 2:1-2 If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, <sup>2</sup>then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.
- Eph 4:13 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.
- 2Co 13:11 Finally, brothers, good-bye. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.

Col 2:2a My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love,  
 Act 4:32 All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had.

Rom 15:5-7 May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup>so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>7</sup>Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

(Rom 14:13 Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way.)

1Co 3:8a The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose,  
 1Th 5:13b Live in peace with each other.  
 1Pe 3:8 Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble.

Ps 133:1 How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!  
 Jn 17:20-23 "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, <sup>21</sup>that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. <sup>22</sup>I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: <sup>23</sup>I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

### **Strength in numbers**

Ecc 4:9-12 Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: <sup>10</sup>If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! <sup>11</sup>Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? <sup>12</sup>Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

Mk 6:7a Calling the Twelve to him, he sent them out two by two  
 Mt 18:20 For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."

### **In remembrance of Jesus and what He has done for us**

1Co 11:24-26 and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." <sup>25</sup>In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." <sup>26</sup>For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Act 20:7a On the first day of the week we came together to break bread.

### **As Christians, we HAVE fellowship with one another**

1Jn 1:7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

## **We must be witnessing**

If we have a proper appreciation for what God has done for us in salvation, we should have hearts of passion for those still lost. We should be excited and honored that God will use us as His holy instruments to reach them for Christ (2Ti 2:21). He has appointed us as His ambassadors for this very purpose (2Co 5:20). We ought to recognize the privilege God grants us, by His mercy, to minister to others on His behalf (2Co 4:1).

The consideration of cost or suffering in this effort is lost in the eternal view (Rom 8:18; 2Co 4:17-18). We must not be ashamed of the gospel (Rom 1:16) or its Author (2Ti 1:7-8). Rather, recognizing its power unto salvation for all who will believe, we ought to be very bold (2Co 3:12) in proclaiming its message to a lost and dying world. This work is not at all reserved for full time evangelists - we are all called to do our part. But we must be prepared and practicing regularly. The biblical ignorance so prevalent nowadays results in much counterproductive "witnessing" of the gospel to others, thus damaging the cause of Christ.

## **Pointing/reconciling others to God**

- Isa 6:8            Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"
- (Ex 4:13            But Moses said, "O Lord, please send someone else to do it.")
- 1Jn 1:1-3        That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched-this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. <sup>2</sup>The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. <sup>3</sup>We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.
- Mt 5:16            In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.
- 1Pe 2:12          Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.
- Tit 2:7-8        In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness <sup>8</sup>and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.
- Jn 7:38            Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."
- 2Co 9:12          This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.
- 2Co 5:18-20      All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: <sup>19</sup>that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup>We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

- Jn 1:41-42a The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). <sup>42</sup>And he brought him to Jesus.
- Act 4:20 For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."
- (Act 26:19 "So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven.)
- Act 4:31 After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.
- Act 5:19-21a But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. <sup>20</sup>"Go, stand in the temple courts," he said, "and tell the people the full message of this new life." <sup>21</sup>At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people.
- (Act 5:28 "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name," he said. "Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood.")
- (Mt 27:24-25 When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. "I am innocent of this man's blood," he said. "It is your responsibility!" <sup>25</sup>All the people answered, "Let his blood be on us and on our children!")
- Act 5:42 Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.
- Act 8:4 Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.
- Act 8:25 When they had testified and proclaimed the word of the Lord, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages.
- Act 10:42 He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead.
- Act 28:23b From morning till evening he explained and declared to them the kingdom of God and tried to convince them about Jesus from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets.
- Act 28:31 Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Jam 5:20 remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.
- Act 10:24b Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends.
- 1Pe 3:15 But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,
- Col 4:5-6 Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. <sup>6</sup>Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

However, our responsibility does not end with merely proclaiming the Word. When the Holy Spirit causes the lost to respond unto salvation, we must provide nurture and care so that new converts mature, learning to apply new understandings of God and His Word to their lives, experiencing and enjoying the full measure of God and His blessings. Ultimately, they must be able to join in the witnessing effort, thereby multiplying its effectiveness and reach.

This is the great failing of modern-day churches, Christian “ministries,” and pervasive easy-believism. Ironically, this is a major reason why passionate believers abandon the local church; they cannot grow or serve God in meaningful ways there. Many folks then migrate into individual or “parachurch” ministries where growth and effective service are fostered.

Yet, parachurch ministry comes under much criticism - some deserved, some not. As with all types of organizations - including local churches - there are good and bad. However, in my experience, the greatest criticism of those who are sincerely endeavoring for Christ comes from those who are not. If local church leadership was tending to its responsibilities to care for and feed the flock - nurturing healthy growth - folks would not be looking elsewhere for care and feeding, frustrated due to lack of growth, and stifled in their own efforts to achieve it.

One tragic fallout of immature churches which are not spiritually equipped to meet their nurturing responsibilities is the exposure of their most vulnerable - the new or immature believer - to the danger of falling prey to false teachers and cults. This is one of the prime purposes of God’s appointed shepherds - to guard the sheep (Jn 10:1-15). As we saw in various sections above, scripture is replete with warnings of this danger.

### **Aftercare**

- Act 8:14      When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them.
- Act 11:21-23      The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord. <sup>22</sup>News of this reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. <sup>23</sup>When he arrived and saw the evidence of the grace of God, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts.
- Act 11:25-26      Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, <sup>26</sup>and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.
- Act 13:43      When the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God.
- Act 14:21-22      Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, <sup>22</sup>strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith.
- Act 14:28      And they stayed there a long time with the disciples.
- Act 15:36      Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us go back and visit the brothers in all the towns where we preached the word of the Lord and see how they are doing."
- Act 15:41      He (Paul) went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.
- Act 16:5      So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.

- Act 18:11 So Paul stayed for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.
- Act 18:23 After spending some time in Antioch, Paul set out from there and traveled from place to place throughout the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.
- Act 18:24-26 Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. <sup>25</sup>He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. <sup>26</sup>He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.
- Act 18:27 When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. On arriving, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed.
- Act 19:9b-10 He (Paul) took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. <sup>10</sup>This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.
- Act 19:20 In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.

The bible sternly exhorts us to our duty as witnesses of the Word, providing examples of those who have boldly gone before us. Just as their effort and obedience produced fruit then and continues now, so our sowing will produce a harvest now and in the future.

### **Exhortations and examples**

- 2Ti 2:15 Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.
- 1Pe 4:10 Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.
- Mk 16:15 He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.
- Mt 28:18-20 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup>Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup>and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."
- Mk 16:19-20 After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God. <sup>20</sup>Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.
- Lk 8:39 "Return home and tell how much God has done for you." So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him.
- Phm 6 I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ.
- 2Co 3:12 Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold.
- Phl 1:27c-28 contending as one man for the faith of the gospel <sup>28</sup>without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved-and that by God.

- 2Ti 1:7-8 For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. <sup>8</sup>So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God,
- Rom 12:11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.
- Eph 6:19-20 Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, <sup>20</sup>for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

### **Basic “flavors” in the American church today**

There are three basic emphases among local churches today. Churches which classify themselves as “Bible-teaching” emphasize the learning experience - providing strong, accurate teaching of the scriptures. The teaching leader may have the title of “pastor” or “elder” (pastor-teacher). Churches which emphasize the relational experience focus on building relationships and concern themselves with each others’ feelings. They are characterized by solid, sincere friendships that last. The leader in these may use the title of “brother”. Churches which see the importance of evangelism concentrate on witnessing. They train and encourage their members to actively share what God has done for them and is able to do for those they witness to. Their leaders may carry the title of “preacher”.

All three of these approaches - correctly balanced and understood, maintained in proper perspective - are necessary to grow and sustain a healthy, maturing church. Unfortunately, many churches provide only one or two of these - sometimes openly disdaining the other(s). Or, they may inappropriately focus on, and employ them in ways that are out of balance with their biblical purpose. For example, feelings and relationships may trump the Word of God - or evangelism may be undertaken by individuals who have shallow or no relationships with each other - or learning God’s Word may evolve into a prideful and/or never-ending quest, to the exclusion of ever putting it to work for God’s glory.

However, the most dangerous results occur when teaching and learning are omitted or neglected, or entrusted to those who are not qualified to fulfill 2Ti 2:15. Without accurate bible teaching, proper doctrine is ignored. This provides fertile ground for the sprouting up of false-teaching cults and for apostasy among previously rightly-founded churches.

### **Lesson 2 Summary: Producing a Mature Church**

Are we teaching and learning biblical doctrines thoroughly and accurately - with God-pleasing goals in view? Are we putting our knowledge to work for God’s purposes?

Are we fellowshiping in the Holy Spirit regularly and purposefully in a manner pleasing to God - establishing sincere, lasting relationships while building each other up?

Are we witnessing to the world in word and deed, with a wholehearted passion to see them embrace Christ unto salvation (starting at home and in our local community)? Are we ashamed and embarrassed to represent Christ - or are we proud of our Savior; bold in our witnessing efforts, eager for opportunities, and excited to represent Him in spirit and in truth?

Do we have a balanced view and application of teaching/learning, fellowshiping, and individual and corporate evangelism? If so, there will be steady, healthy growth among us - and those whom God adds to our number will experience healthy growth as well.

## **BUILDING UP ONE ANOTHER** **(Lesson 3)**

Eph 4:15-16 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. <sup>16</sup>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.

After reviewing God's formula and provision for church sanity in Eph 4:11-13 (the God-designed plan of leadership for accomplishing the growth and work of the church unto unity, maturity and the full experience of God's blessings), vs 15-16 move from the roles and responsibilities of God-given church leaders for the church, to the responsibilities of church members for one another. Now then, having submitted to God's plan for the church, having benefited as He intends by the wisdom of His provision, and having successfully navigated vs 14 - that is, having grown up in our faith so as to avoid being tossed aimlessly about as spiritual infants - this lesson will examine a biblical picture of the results in action. This is what healthy, productive, God-honoring church life is all about.

The concepts in this lesson are so integral to right-functioning Christian relationships in the church that our previous lessons have already included most of the scriptural support. Refer to the categorized scripture excerpts of those lessons for application to this lesson's theme.

Our first lesson, "The Measure of a Church," looked at many passages related to the building up of one another - because building one another up is a fundamental responsibility which God assigns and expects us to fulfill as a church. We quite naturally encountered these scripture texts in our previous examination of works produced by faith, labor prompted by love, and the God-pleasing results of being rooted and growing in love for one another. Building one another up is a key component to the successful measuring up of a local church.

Likewise, as we examined the ingredients necessary to produce a mature church in lesson 2, we were faced with a multitude of scriptural teachings and exhortations as we considered the need for, and benefits of godly, Christian fellowship. At once, godly fellowship flows from the building up of one another - and building up one another flows from and flourishes amidst godly fellowship. God's design for Christian maturity includes and requires one another!

We would do well to review those portions of our previous lessons with our spiritual minds, eyes, ears and hearts deliberately and steadfastly adjusted to the perspective of this lesson - building up one another. Properly motivated by a heightened and renewed appreciation for this duty we have to one another, we may find greater success in applying those principles.

Of course, biblical principles have many and varied applications. Sometimes, when we find ourselves struggling to apply a particular principle, we can escape the cycle of failure by being motivated from a different perspective; that is, we may overcome our struggle by seeking and finding a purpose which excites us unto obedience. For example, if we become bored, rebellious, complacent, disobedient, unwilling, resentful and/or out of agreement with a biblical principle such as praying or regular bible reading (or some other clear principle of scripture), we may regain our excitement and overcome all of those spiritually unhealthy attitudes when we consider our call and desire to build up those we love in the Lord.

Though we would desire to obey and please God in all things, we may too easily fail when we become overwhelmed by maintaining too large a picture; “biting off more than we can chew.” Our daily plan becomes too complex, and we lose sight of our goals as they become abstract and confusing. Reducing our effort to smaller, more personal, more immediately measurable components is sometimes more effective. Still, we must examine ourselves regularly to be certain that everything is indeed fitting into the overall goal: doing all for God’s glory, honoring Him, attracting others to Him, and pleasing Him through obedience in all things. Straying off course happens quickly when our eyes do not remain fixed upon Jesus (Heb 12:2; Mt 14:30).

Sometimes, succinct axioms are offered as suggestions to help us stay focused. However, there are so many of these that choosing among them becomes overwhelming in itself. Some folks attempt to mandate one or another, but the bottom line is that it is impossible to concentrate on all of them (or even one), let alone fulfill them, in a legalistic attempt to succeed at godly living. They must naturally flow from our right relationship with God, and from our continued immersion in His Word; from a sincere appreciation for all He has done, is doing and will do for us, and from a true love for, and mature understanding of scriptural truth.

One useful approach is to actually vary, from time to time, which of these kernels of God’s Word we choose to concentrate on (but not to the exclusion of the others). However, failure to regularly examine the harmony between our application and the “full picture” can result in our finding ourselves horribly off-track. Still, deliberately holding some sound axioms in close view can actually be very helpful when their relation to our overall accountability to God is maintained. And so, here is one more for us to consider: This lesson’s theme - simply stated - is that we need to be continually mindful that we are indeed members of one another, jointly functioning according to the picture of Eph 4:16; each assigned a place and role in the body.

This truth must permeate all of our interactions and interrelations with fellow members of the body. Our minds must be saturated with it, and our whole being must be trained and disciplined by it so that our impulses and responses are governed by it. When we violate the principles of this truth, we violate ourselves - when we hurt or offend another member, we are hurting and offending ourselves. Conversely, when we build up and strengthen other members of the body, we build up and strengthen ourselves. Thus, the body operates and attains to the utmost of its design and capacity - and maintains itself in optimum health.

Yet, one of the greatest hindrances to the building up of one another - and therefore, the building up of the church - is not something we do wrong, but something we do not do at all. It is one of many corrupting influences which the church has adopted from the surrounding secular community. Since the positive reinforcements this lesson presents (in the video\*) are, if not easily applied with a sincerity and consistency pleasing to God, nonetheless easily understood and agreed upon, and since we reviewed those quite exhaustively in our previous lessons, we will emphasize and focus on the other duties this lesson calls us to - those which are unfairly stigmatized. That is, they are not enjoyable and do not make us feel good. They are intimidating and involve uncomfortable risk. We would like to avoid them - and so we do.

\* See the opening notes at the beginning of this study. Also, refer to the [outline](#) to view a summary of topics originally included in this lesson. As mentioned above, this written presentation excludes the “positive reinforcements” listed there since they were covered in this writing in Lessons 1 and 2.

What we will be considering now are the duties of exhortation, correction, admonishment and rebuking - one of another, in love, as necessary and appropriate, with the overall good of fellow members and, therefore, the whole body in view. Although we may find these difficult, distasteful, unsettling and risky, and though we may fear to fulfill them, we must do so. God's Word commands them for good reason - the health of the entire body relies upon it.

And though they are less emphasized, taught, studied, understood and employed, they are nonetheless as absolutely necessary as all other biblically-mandated responsibilities. When properly employed, they work in concert with the others for positive and successful growth in the body and its members. These duties to one another - for the sake of the whole body - are not optional. In fact, their neglect, especially in recent times, has been a prime cause of the absence of healthy growth - and the flourishing abundance of unhealthy growth - in the body.

Nowadays, when the need for these remedies becomes apparent (sometimes obviously so), fellow Christians are too often looking for, and taking the "easy" way out. The church has come to reflect the common secular philosophy of the day: "Mind your own business." Yet, if we are two generations old, we can remember when erring folks were careful to hide their wrongdoing because someone was sure to rebuke and correct them if it became known. Now, we "keep to ourselves" while improper behavior goes on right under our noses.

To illustrate, using the oft-employed biblical metaphor of the body, we do not ignore a bleeding cut or a broken bone or a loss of breathing or heart difficulties, because the health of the body - its ability to maintain its necessary functions - requires that we tend to the problem. Furthermore, we would consider these emergencies, and would drop all else to remedy such threats to our physical well-being immediately. Yet, when equivalent dangers to the spiritual body are - or ought to be - just as apparent, we seem to be able to ignore them. Whether we simply fail to recognize them or, doing so, consider them somehow trivial, we go about our individual and corporate daily business while the ailing member goes unattended.

While we would never allow a cut to go on bleeding, we allow a brother in the Lord - another part of our spiritual body - to languish untreated. Since we have failed to master the notion that we are indeed members of one another - jointly functioning spiritually as the body does physically - we find ourselves in the dangerous position of someone with nerve damage who cannot feel pain. Lacking the God-provided mechanism which notifies us of an abnormality in the body which requires our immediate attention, we ignore the damage being done and allow it to become more serious and debilitating.

Similarly, we would not stand by as our child wandered into traffic, or as a family member attempted to drive off drunk or dive into shallow water, but we easily ignore a spiritual family member equivalently flirting with even greater danger. Again, mindful that we are members of one another, failing to intervene is not only critical for the affected member - it is vital to our own well being, as well. While a severe arterial cut does not immediately prevent the eye from seeing, if not dealt with it will eventually bring death to the entire body, including the eye.

Yet, man does indeed have a great capacity to cover up and ignore harmful effects on the physical body. Shirking his responsibilities and refusing to deal with difficult issues, he masks

the physical, psychological and emotional pain and suffering with drugs, alcohol, promiscuity, work and various sinful behaviors. This is far too common now and is ruining our culture. Of course, man's self-administered treatment eventually causes greater harm, requiring larger and more frequent self-destructive doses of whatever will numb the pain. Ultimately, some even choose suicide in an attempt to remove the pain forever. Sadly, however, that will only bring a much greater pain which will last for all of eternity and which nothing will ever quench.

Spiritually, we are employing a similarly destructive approach. More and more, churches and individual members are unequipped, unable (through ignorance or immaturity) or otherwise refusing to deal with difficulties biblically. First, they ignore the problem until it can be ignored no longer. Then it is masked in ways which are equivalent to the physical example above.

Spiritual problems are covered up by the busy-ness of church attendance, prayer meetings, small groups, Sunday School, bible study, church programs, conferences and seminars, popular books and CDs containing the latest and most "powerful" overcoming techniques, mowing the church lawn, bake sales, even the work of ministry itself, and on and on. These become the equivalent of the alcohol and drugs, etc., which take the physical mind off of physical problems. Likewise, however, the cause remains unidentified and untreated.

However, due to lack of proper preparation and training, if an attempt to address the issue is indeed made, it is then evaluated with false or misunderstood doctrine; misdiagnosed by replacing God's characterization and declarations concerning it with man's. And then, it is treated with secular philosophy and worldly methods instead of applying the clear and unadulterated teaching of God's Word. Ultimately, the feelings and "well-being" of the offender are being considered ahead of his responsibilities to the One who is being offended.

Understanding smiles and short lectures provide no true help for the alcoholic - or the sinner.

In both the physical and spiritual realms, folks seek - and convince themselves they have found - satisfaction and relief in the "remedies" above. But it is all just an illusion and a cruel deception. Whatever relief is obtained is merely temporary; the true disorder continues to be ignored, inevitably causing even more serious and painful long-term consequences. Since it is human nature to want ourselves to feel better, we employ these empty "cures" to cover the underlying causes which we would rather not deal with. But that does not resolve them.

Then (focusing on the spiritual), beyond doing nothing to address the real problem (and staying busy to avoid doing so), some folks responsible for coming to the rescue make the situation worse instead. Difficulties are compounded by actions and behaviors which serve to tear others down, rather than the biblical desire and design to build others up. Problems are sometimes "dealt" with by gossiping, backbiting, withdrawing relationship precisely when a member needs it most, excluding him from the church's "health-care" benefits and responsibilities, etc. Just when the member needs the God-commanded care of the brethren most, he is abandoned and torn down instead of ministered to and built up.

However, when God arranges for another's weakness or failing to come to our attention, it is not for gossip, gloating, abandonment or tearing down - His purpose is that we should

appropriately pray for and minister to such a one. Often among Christians, intercession of this type is absent, and a hurting member simply and quietly goes away in his misery - sometimes unnoticed. But, if a believer in need cannot find help among fellow believers (whether he realizes he needs it or is looking for it or not), where *can* he find it?

Of course, some of the untreated maladies in the body are the fault of the ailing member himself. Just as we avoid the doctor (afraid of the diagnosis, cost and/or physical pain of treatment) or, upon seeing him, fail to reveal an ailment we fear to resolve, members of the spiritual body are to blame when they hide their pains and ailments from others in the family.

However, when family members are rightly related in God's love, when these relationships are established and nurtured, when - as a result - a secure trust and genuine concern, one for another, is engendered among them, this is less likely to occur. Yet, in churches today, relationships are too often merely superficial. Folks do not *really* know each other - not nearly well enough to be able to involve themselves with each other in these responsibilities.

A family member in need must have confidence that the rest of the family cares and will always seek his best interests. The family needs to do its best to build this type of trust in each member - while each member humbles himself to recognize his own dependence upon the family's support. Sooner or later, each will most likely have a difficult, sometimes embarrassing circumstance which will be easier to overcome when confidence of such support exists. And that support will be more quickly sought and easily obtained where trusting relationships are in place. The time to develop these necessary loving, trusting relationships is now. Each day we delay risks another member hiding a need from the family.

Of course, just as in the human family, a member's difficulties do not need to be known by all if they can be dealt with successfully (using biblical standards) by one, or perhaps a few members of the family. Yet, each member must be able to obey Jam 5:16 and find the comfort of 2Co 1:3-4. This will not happen where failure "is not allowed" and restoration is not the goal. Still, Gal 6:1 warns that those who seek to restore others can themselves become easily entrapped - whether in pride, or by the temptation of the sin involved.

Unfortunately, as mentioned, the world's view of our role as our brother's keeper has permeated the church. In the culture of our day, we are trained to "mind our own business." This *can* be good advice - both practically and spiritually - and is even mentioned in scripture (1Th 4:11). As with all such teaching, however, we must achieve spiritual discernment and balance - in context - through consideration of the whole counsel of God's Word.

Today, "mind your own business" has become a convenient cover for ignoring the needs and interests of others, and for shirking responsibility. We see this in earthly families, with brothers, sisters, parents and children turning their backs on one another. That is not "minding our own business" - that is sinful (1Ti 5:8)! Still, when Phil 2:4 tells us to look to the interests of others, sometimes their interests are best served when we confront them concerning some attitude or behavior which is harmful to their spiritual well-being (and that of others); that is, when we approach them to remind them of *God's* interests in them.

Nevertheless, opposite the extreme of simply “writing off” those whom we ought to be helping is the misapplication of the biblical mandates to encourage, exhort, teach, correct, admonish, rebuke and serve one another in love. And this extreme holds two extremes itself.

First, we have the judgmental, angry, fire and brimstone, condemnation approach. This technique repels others with counterproductive anger, scolding, intimidation and cruel shame. The sinner slinks away and may never again seek the proper attention he requires. This is *not* loving and does *not* serve the best interests of the sinner, the Church, or God Himself.

It is also not loving and does not serve anyone’s best interests when liberal religious groups claiming the name of Christ coddle sinners and accept their sin (and sinful lifestyles), seeking to protect them from the God-ordained consequences of such behaviors (as if they could), and then encourage them to feel better about it all. Nor is it loving (or biblical) when parents “help” a child who is in and out of trouble by providing easy money, access to a vehicle, a place to live, and other sympathetic enablement while the child continues in the way of sin.

The loving thing to do is to strategically confront sinners with the truth of God’s Word. To do so, however, we must thoroughly know, confidently trust, accurately handle, effectively apply, and firmly stand upon it without compromise; with wisdom and discernment only the Holy Spirit can provide. We do well, also, to employ the balance of two familiar axioms: One - No one cares how much you know until they know how much you care. And two - Truth without love is too harsh; it deadens the heart, stresses the mind, and paralyzes the will. Love without truth is too soft - it soothes the heart without engaging the mind or motivating the will.

Now, in the world among unbelievers, this task is made difficult from a practical standpoint because the sinner must first be successfully evangelized. Admonishment from God’s Word may be lost on one who does not accept, understand or value it. Yet, the truth of God’s Word is all we have; it is all there is - but that is all we need! So we employ it, and rely on its inherent power and the working of the Holy Spirit. The lesson of this writing, however, addresses interrelationships among *true believers* - members together in the body of Christ.

Unlike unbelievers, among the body there is an accepted and agreed-upon standard of godly behavior. This standard serves as the basis for resolution whenever sincere disagreements are encountered. Possessing a love for Christ, with hearts yielded to God, believers are relieved and comforted to know that God’s interests can be known and achieved as difficulties are addressed and resolved. Great satisfaction can be enjoyed as fellow members of the family experience the blessing of restored unity - knowing that God is pleased. Unfortunately, however, in our day this is not as easy as it sounds or should be.

Among various other impediments to the process, many modern-day Christians are woefully unacquainted with the true standard: God’s Word (Hos 4:6a). Some have an unsophisticated or elementary understanding of it (Heb 5:11-6:1a); others possess a “cafeteria” mentality - accepting what they desire and rejecting what they do not; still others have been misled by liberal “religion” or other false teaching. Furthermore, making matters worse, today a sinning “Christian” does not have to search very far to find “Christian fellowship” which accepts him as he is - sin and all - with none of the undesired lifestyle changes the bible implores!

So then, as we seek to confront another in love - for *God's* purposes; in view of *His* interests in *all* of us - we must begin, of course, with the universal first steps of prayer and Holy Spirit enablement. Next, we must seek to discern - as accurately and completely as God allows - whatever will be helpful to resolve the situation; whatever He may reveal about the one we seek to restore and the difficulties involved. God may reveal these in various ways: confession and explanation directly from the one in need, our own first-hand observation, public knowledge, notification by others, or however God chooses to involve us.

First then, we must confirm that we are dealing with a true believer. Next, we must be sure to employ a God-directed wisdom and strategy which allows the greatest possibility of success (from God's view). We must fix ourselves on the biblical goal: restoring our brother (Gal 6:1). This will prevent our approach, response and reactions from being corrupted by the types of sinful motivations which can so easily creep in - sometimes without our even being aware of it until after we have done a lot of damage. We must rid ourselves of anger, bitterness, improper judgmentalism, legalism, condemnation, seeking of personal justice or recompense, vengeance, etc. The effort must be driven purely and entirely by a loving desire to see a needy brother restored to right relationship with God - and thus, with the body as a whole.

Yet, it is not the intent of this lesson to address the details of the Mt 18 discipline process. The goal here is to simply admonish us to fulfill our responsibility to the more informal, caring, family duty to come alongside another member in need, thereby averting the more serious requirement to invoke formal church discipline.

The reason for much of the corruption in local churches today (resulting in spiritual dullness and relative ineffectiveness) is the ignoring of sin in the body; an apparent lack of concern for church purity and the consequences which inevitably follow. People attend church "faithfully" for years - continuing in the same sins they first brought with them (and others they have added since)! This is to the shame of the churches - their leadership and congregants alike - which are charged with the responsibility to address and resolve such matters.

And so, there is great need today to issue a reminder of the biblically-mandated imperatives of exhortation, correction, admonishment and rebuking. This applies not only to individual Christians, but also to Christian groups and institutions as well (Martin Luther's actions, e.g.).

Moreover, sometimes we are forced to consider correcting another for not correcting others - as when our pastors or other ministry leaders fail to correct those in their charge, or when another parent (a Christian) neglects the correction of his child (now *that* is a tough one, is it not?). Some churches today allow congregants who are openly cohabitating, yet unmarried, not only to become members, but even to serve in various ministries of the church (among other distressing examples)! Then there is the dilemma of children in professing Christian families who become involved in publicly known sin while it is ignored or excused by the parents, and while no elder or fellow member dares to come alongside the parents in love before the danger more fully manifests itself and greater damage results.

These situations, and others, hold great potential for harm - not only to the integrity of the sinning members, but to the testimony, reputation and effectiveness of the local church and universal Church, as well. This brings the truth into disrepute (but differently than 2Pe 2:1-2).

Leaders of such churches - and parents of such children - should be approached by fellow members for correction. Typically, however, such churches are spiritually dead (or dull due to spiritual immaturity) and the members and leaders alike do not sense or appreciate the gravity of the danger. Sometimes the church is merely languishing in spiritual infancy, and fulfilling the event schedule is all the excitement they desire. These types of churches and Christians pose no threat to Satan's interests because they represent a great threat to God's! Eventually, the true believers move on, while those who remain retire to a comfortable religion, enjoying a false sense of security as they blissfully await the final judgment.

Sadly, a growing phenomenon today is replacement of the godly counsel of local elders with more convenient and professional self-help books, CDs, seminars and conferences which are written and conducted by the "big names;" the national and international ministry leaders with name recognition and reputation. Many churches do not even recognize that God expects them to fulfill this role as one of their intrinsic functions! And some *intentionally* do no "in-house" counseling, having decided and made arrangements to ship all such work out!

Still, often the reason for the absence of involvement by the immediate family in its members' counseling needs is simply that many local church elders are either not qualified or do not desire to do the work themselves - so they "subcontract" this responsibility out, relying on the "experts" to do it for them. This introduces many problems.

First, when a member does indeed recognize his sin or error before confrontation from a brother occurs or becomes necessary, he may properly discern that help is not available locally and seek it through the avenues mentioned above. This may be done independently, so that the local family is not even aware of the need or how it is being handled. Second, when the help *is* available from the family, the "reputations" of these other methods may cause the one in need to bypass the God-provided, God-intended, closest, most effective help. This decision may be made by the individual himself, or he may be steered in that direction by well-meaning friends - perhaps even the elders themselves.

Third, the methods above have become modern-day industries unto themselves. As such, they have become more and more infiltrated by the world (2Co 2:17; 11:13-15; Jude 4; Act 20:30 and more). And so, many of those who are involved in these businesses are motivated by worldly considerations to varying degrees - some totally so. New and immature Christians in need of help are not in the best position to sort out the charlatans from the godly.

Further, the methodology and offerings of these "Christian" sources has become, more often than not, merely repackaged secular philosophy and psychology. The "theology" established as the underlying basis for the advice and counsel being dispensed has become diluted and corrupted with the "religion" of our day - so much so as to render itself useless. This brings to mind the admonition of Col 2:6-8. We need to be anchored in Christ; in the truth of His Word - especially when we need guidance and assistance through occasions of sin and trial.

To introduce and emphasize a final problem, here are five points to consider regarding lack of involvement by Christians in each others' lives when someone is caught in sin (Gal 6:1):

- 1) Many of us have not understood our responsibility
- 2) It is time consuming
- 3) It is very draining emotionally
- 4) Most of us fear rejection
- 5) We feel unworthy

This list nails the problem quite squarely. To elaborate on item 1, however: Unfortunately, many Christians are unprepared for the task (which will lead us to our final problem).

As we recognize and agree that Christians have a duty to serve one another in the areas of exhortation, correction, admonishment and rebuke, we must be equally convinced that avoiding this duty for whatever reasons is to do a *disservice* to our fellow Christians. Loving service calls us to obedience in *all* of our responsibilities to one another. Every Christian must endeavor to overcome the impediments and excuses listed above (and any others).

So then, we come to the final problem to be discussed in this lesson: Before any progress can be made in properly attending to the duties under discussion, many Christians are already in need of an admonishment which not enough other Christians are qualified or prepared to issue. That is, many Christians need to be admonished to be immersing themselves in the Word so as to be prepared and qualified to serve others effectively and purposefully using the biblical tools of exhortation, correction, admonishment and rebuke.

Nowadays, there just does not seem to be the hunger and thirst for God's Word which ought to exist - and which is necessary for spiritual growth unto maturity - among the everyday Christian. Though many in the church neglect bible reading and study to one degree or another, this involves more than "mere" bible reading and "dutiful" study - we are speaking of enthusiastic, excited, Spirit-led, wholehearted plunging into the Word to gain spiritual insight, wisdom and discernment with an attitude toward life application that far surpasses whatever excited endeavor we have ever undertaken, or have ever dreamed of undertaking before.

Still, it is not enough to merely know biblical right and wrong; we must be keenly aware of the affect sin and error have on the body (the Church), along with their impact on the world; that is, how they influence the world's view of Christians, Christianity, the Church, God's Word and God Himself - even the world's view of itself. We must maintain a sober appreciation of their consequences, and a healthy respect for the danger of allowing such things to fester.

As a fire extinguisher used properly to put out a fire, we must be able to accurately, knowledgeably, promptly and effectively snuff out spiritual flames by applying God's Word in love (2Ti 2:24-26; Tit 1:9, e.g.). This requires a passion for, and a mastery of God's Word which is apparently and sadly well above what passes for acceptable in today's churches, but which every Christian should enthusiastically desire to attain to.

The church today lacks mature members of functional wisdom (it has plenty of *old* members, but not necessarily *mature* ones - it has some wise ones, but their wisdom is not being employed). Especially missing are the men - more specifically, qualified elders of godly discernment and knowledge. No wonder then, that the local church finds itself unprepared and ill-equipped to address sin issues among its membership. When members observe that leadership is ignoring difficult issues, they learn to do the same - or they become impatient and frustrated as such issues compound themselves, receiving no attention. A proper effort to resolve them is not, or cannot be mustered, and eventually the serious members move on.

And so, this deficiency presents another facet of the same problem - confrontation these days usually includes the prerequisite of teaching; that is, those we exhort, correct, admonish and rebuke are often spiritually ignorant, needing to be *taught* God's Word rather than merely reminded of, and admonished with what they should already know and be in agreement with. No doubt the additional labor and skill of this effort prevents many from undertaking the task.

Further, if the one confronted is not open to correction, the effort to teach can cause resentment and rejection. Such a one may suppress his genuine need of learning and applying God's Word - of adjusting his lifestyle to conform to it - with a self-serving and ego-soothing judgment that the critic is exhibiting the self-righteousness of a "holier-than-thou" attitude. Often, he seeks to uncover or remind himself of the weaknesses of the one showing him his fault (Mt 18:15), somehow justifying or allowing himself to feel better in his sin.

Our approach, therefore, must be wise, gentle and compassionate (though firm and uncompromising). And though none of us walks in perfection, this difficulty reminds us of our own need to be godly examples of Spirit-led, holy living. As stated earlier however, the entire process is made a whole lot easier - and barriers such as this one are avoided or overcome - when loving, trusting relationships are already in place.

In closing then, let us consider: When did we last lovingly serve a brother or sister through exhortation, correction, admonishment or rebuke? When were we last served by someone else in this manner? Obviously, this is not a call to some spiritual witch hunt - a mass effort of undercover investigation to discover the sin and weaknesses of others in order to call them to task and exercise some spiritual skill. God will call us to employ these tools often enough without any need for searching out on our part. When *He* calls a situation to our attention, we can approach it with a godly motivation and focus, confident that we are doing His will.

What is paramount is to realize our biblical duty to grow in knowledge and love of one another and to look out for each others' spiritual well-being - just as we properly concern ourselves with all the other appropriate interests of one another. However, we must also remember that we will not all grow at the same rate or in the same ways. God will work in each of us according to *His* plans and *His* purpose to prosper us. We must encourage others in the way *God* is leading them - not in the way *we* want them to go.

Some will grow more quickly than us; we must not hold them back, tear them down, become envious or jealous, or measure ourselves against them (Gal 6:4). We must simply remain faithful to, and content with God's plan for us. Some will grow more slowly; we must not push

or scold them, or become impatient or judgmental - or seek to substitute our plan and wisdom for God's. We must not pridefully or self-righteously lord over them the fact that God is moving us along more quickly. We must fix our minds on, and direct our efforts toward God's plan for us, seeking to please him in obedience. That may include being used of him to gently and lovingly lead others along, but we must never doubt that God knows what He is doing and does not need or benefit from our unwanted or harmful "assistance."

Lastly, if we are not building up we are tearing down - and when we ignore sin in the body, shirking our duty to exhort, correct, admonish and rebuke, we are not building up.

And so, Col 3:16.

### **Lesson 3 summary: Are we building up one another in the Lord?**

Do we recognize and live in light of the fact that we are members of one another?

Are we doing our part in the "working together" for the building up of the body, or are we a cause of body dysfunction?

Are we a family - devoted to and serving one another in brotherly love?

Are we contributing to an atmosphere of unity among the family?

Are we enjoying true like-mindedness - because we share the mind of Christ? Are we focused in common purpose and wholeheartedly working together in the effort?

Do we contribute to, and vigilantly guard an environment of security for our fellow family members? Does our fellowship provide a safety net in the areas God intends?

Do we honor and accept one another in the Lord?

Do we encourage one another and look for opportunity to build each other up?

Do we greet one another sincerely - truly interested in and involved with one another?

Are we overshadowing and competing with one another, or are we doing all we can to make one another perform better? Are we our brother's accompanist?

Do we exhort, admonish, correct and rebuke one another appropriately? Do we receive and accept these from one another, and do we respond as God intends?

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## **3-Lesson Final Summary**

We need to take regular "soundings" of our church performance from God's view, willing and prepared to take corrective action whenever we find ourselves off course.

We need to be actively and continually maturing; individually and as a local church.

In order to fulfill God's purpose in and through our church, we must be building up one another in Christ, our Head. Part of this responsibility involves rooting out sin in the body.

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