

Church Truths

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Four Marks of a Christian Home

Exodus 10:21-23; 12:1-11

The Christian home has a unique place in both the OT and NT.

The neglect of the principles laid down in the Word regarding the conduct of the home has brought the sad conditions so evident around us. Divorce, break up of homes, rebellion of children, and juvenile delinquency all find their origin in the lack of Christ's teaching in the home.

One of the ten reasons given by the historian Gibbons for the fall of the Roman empire was the break up of the family unit. The family unit is one of the most important institutions of our civilization.

The bulwark of the nation is the home. Upon the home rests the whole fabric of civilization. If the solidity and sanctity of the home disappears, the nation disintegrates also.

Do not blame the moral and spiritual declension upon Communism, liberalism, modernism, agnosticism, materialism. Blame the fundamental breakdown of the home. The Word of God has been set aside and its precepts ignored.

The family is in need of immediate help. The institution of marriage is floundering in heavy seas. Some can see the end of marriage and the family as we have known it.

Marriage in the spiritual circles is in great danger. In many believers homes the standards set are so insipid that the family is not welded together nor spiritually

fortified. Doting mothers, possessive and permissive parents are spoiling Christian families the world over.

Our reading in Exodus 10 reminds us that God put a difference between the households of the Jews and the Egyptians. In the one there was darkness, in the other there was light.

It was the light of God's presence that illuminated the darkness. In the Christian home today God, in His triunity, should be known intimately, revered and worshipped. Jesus should be recognized as Lord and Head of the household. In this kind of home God is given His rightful place. Each member works together under God. The love of God is experienced and practiced. The Word of God is read and obeyed.

In this kind of home the voice of prayer and praise is heard. Jesus, the "Light of the world", shines in all his glory. Such a home becomes a Bethany.

Read Deuteronomy 11:18-21. This is a description of what God wishes to see in every home. He desires that the Word be laid up in every parent's heart. That it be bound as a sign upon the hand. That it should be written upon the doorposts of the house and upon the Gates. In such a home there is the glory of heaven.

So then the first thing that should characterize a Christian home is that heavenly light should illumine it and shine from it.

The second thing that characterized the Jewish homes was the "blood on the doorposts."

The godly father had heard the voice of God. In obedience he had taken the lamb and killed it, sprinkled its blood upon the doorposts of his house. He believed

that this was the only way to protect his firstborn against the destroying angel.

Beloved Christian parents, what do you know of the protecting and powerful blood of the Lamb of God? Thank God for its saving qualities, but we should cover our families with the powerful blood of Christ as they move in this world of sin. We should tell them of the precious blood as a symbol of safety and forgiveness. Through it salvation is procured, our sins are forgiven, we are delivered from the bondage of sin, and we are secured eternally in Christ.

The third thing that characterized the Jewish home on this great occasion was that they feasted on the roast lamb. A look into a humble Jewish cottage would reveal an unusual sight. The family is standing around a rough table. They have a staff in their hand, and their feet are well shod. They are feasting on roast lamb. This in type is a true picture of the ideal Christian family. This family feeds on Christ. He should be the food of the soul at all times, "the family altar."

The Jewish father portioned out the roast lamb to those of his household. So the Christian father should share the person and the glories of Christ with his family. Christ's name should be a household word. He should be the center and circumference of the family activities.

The fourth thing that characterized the Jewish homes was that they were "ready to move."

The Christian home should be saturated with thoughts of heaven, just as the Jewish family was of Canaan. The pilgrim character of the Christian should always be kept before the family.

Last but not least, the family should be reminded constantly of the soon return of the Lord. Oh the inestimable value of godly parents who can teach these truths to their children, and in the process convey the ecstasy and joy of heart and soul.

From homes like these there are no delinquent children. From this sacred and spiritual atmosphere come the future men and women of God.

The Priesthood of Parents Exodus 2:9

The basic duty of the priest was (1) to represent God before the people, and (2) to represent the people before God.

This was an awesome task involving tremendous responsibilities.

Beloved, the roll of being priest for the family involves representing God to the family and representing the family before God. This has awesome responsibilities but is compensated by unspeakable joy, as they see their children walk in truth.

1. Parents are called upon to present God to their children. They do this principally through example, through teaching the Word, and in the exercise of family worship.

2. Parents are called upon to present their children to God. They would do this through the exercise of prayer. Deuteronomy 6:4-9.

If we carry these instructions out in a perfunctory manner, that is, without care or interest, merely as a form or routine, it will serve no purpose.

Parents must know the truth of verse 5. Love, sincere and open love to God, must be displayed by the parents before their children. Insincerity or hypocrisy in any form is detrimental to the spiritual growth and welfare of your child. Our insincerity would be evident/exposed if we spent hours watching TV and only a few hurried moments for family worship.

Parents must have a living, vibrant relationship with the Lord as they function as family priests.

Children appreciate sincerity, but they despise a phony or hypocrite. We all should pray continually, "Lord make me real."

Things we must avoid:

1. A set of dry rules and regulations.
2. A stern and uncompromising moralism.
3. A dreamy round of formal religious duties performed with no excitement and no real joy.

We cannot fool children. They have the uncanny discernment of spotting an actor. Often when a young person rebels he is mostly not rebelling against God, but against a dead religious formalism seen in the home in particular, and in the local church in general.

Parents who desire earnestly to present God to their children in an understandable and exciting way must first cultivate an intimate relationship with Him.

The second function of the family priest is to present our children to God. This primarily means constant and unceasing intercessory prayer. No amount of moral or religious instruction, firm discipline, or forced

attendance at meetings can make up for the lack of praying priestly parents.

Praying for our families is one of our most important duties. We are doing serious business with God.

Prayer for our family is essential and rewarding. St. Augustine attributed his conversion to his mother's prayers. Despite his indifference, Monica, his moth, prayed until his heart was melted. No child is too young to claim for Christ.

Not only should parents pray for their children, but they should pray for each other. Husbands should pray for their wives as they fulfill the arduous tasks of motherhood.

Wives should pray for their husbands as they seek to provide for their family, and as they engage in the Lord's work. Wives should stay on their knees to keep their husbands on their feet.

Beloved, prayer is powerful; the family that is enveloped in prayer brings joy to God and produces family members that bring blessing to many.

Marks of a Healthy, Spiritual Assembly

They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine—Acts 2:42.

A mark of a spiritual assembly is “sound doctrine.” This was true of the Jerusalem assembly. Christian truth is known in the Scripture as “sound doctrine” (Titus 1:9) and as “the faith” (Colossians 1:23; Jude 3).

The source of all doctrine is the Scriptures. The whole body of truth as it came from God is contained therein. Paul says that the Scriptures are “profitable for doctrine”—2 Timothy 3:16. In Acts 2 the NT had not been written, and doctrine had to be transmitted orally by the apostles. This is why it is called the apostles' doctrine—it was the truth as taught by the apostles.

The importance of the doctrine:

1. We are exhorted to earnestly contend for the faith—Jude 3.
2. Anyone who denies “the doctrine of Christ (that is, His deity, Sonship, virgin birth, atoning death, and resurrection) is not a believer at all”—2 John 9; 1 John 2:23.
3. Men who deny the fundamental doctrines are debarred from assembly fellowship—Titus 3:10; 1 Timothy 1:19-20; 2 Timothy 2:17-18; 2 Timothy 4:14-15.

Some of the fundamentals:

1. The inspiration of the Scriptures. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God”—2 Timothy 3:16. Literally it

reads in the original, "All Scripture is God-breathed." Just as God breathed into man the breath of life and he became a living soul (Genesis 2:7), so God breathed upon holy men and they wrote as they were moved by the Spirit. They were so possessed and energized by the Spirit, so under His divine control that the words that they wrote were the very words of God Himself. 2 Peter 1:21. So then the Book that we hold in our hands is nothing less than the Word of God. Compare also Hebrews 1:1.

2. The virgin birth. In Eden's garden God foretold the coming of the savior who would bruise the head of the serpent, and described Him as the "seed" of the woman. Genesis 3:15. This word "seed" occurs frequently in the Scriptures and is always used with reference to the father, and not the mother, save in this one case. There was something unusual about the birth of the Savior—"the seed of a woman." Isaiah explains the unusual event in this way: "Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." Isaiah 7:14. Prior to the birth of Jesus an angel assured Joseph, Mary's husband, "that which is begotten in her is of the Holy Spirit." Matthew 1:20. Notice how meticulous the Spirit is when recording the genealogy of Joseph in Matthew 1:18. "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was in this way." This suggests something different from the births that preceded, births that were of natural generation. The angel who announced the birth of John said to Zachariah, "Thy wife, Elizabeth, shall bear thee a son"—Luke 1:13. But when the angel spoke to Joseph, he said, "Mary thy wife shall bring forth a son." He was God's Son. This is a most important doctrine. It provides us

with a sinless Savior. A claim which could never be made for any man born with a human father.

3. The Deity of Christ. The Scriptures teach emphatically that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and also God the Son. John 1:1 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." In verse 14 we read, "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth." Verse 1 asserts His deity, and verse 14 identifies Him as Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is God. Also in Hebrews 1:8 we read, "Unto the Son, He saith, Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever." In this verse the Father recognizes Him as God the Son. In 1 John 5:20 it is written, "We know that the Son of God is come, and we are in Him, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life." Note that this verse speaks first of all of the Son of God. That there should be no misunderstanding about who is meant, He is identified as Jesus Christ. Then comes the awesome statement, "This is the true God." This fundamental teaching was part of the apostles' doctrine, and needs to be reiterated with emphasis in these modern days of infidelity. Please also note that "whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father." 1 John 2:23.

4. Atonement through the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. The gospel which the apostle Paul preached displayed three great truths: (1) the death of Christ, interpreted according to the Scriptures; (2) His burial; (3) His resurrection interpreted according to the Scriptures in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4. There are three things which the Scriptures teach concerning His death: (1) His death was propitiatory, Romans 3:24-25. Propitiation is that

which meets the claims of God's holiness on account of man's sin, and makes it possible for God to show mercy in forgiving sin. Man's sin is an offense against God's holiness. The death of Christ met all the claims of God's holiness. So thoroughly did He do this that it is written, "He put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself"—Hebrews 9:26. 1 John 2:2 says, "He is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." (2) Christ's death is redemptive—Romans 3:24. Redemption means to buy back by the payment of the ransom price, and then to set free. Mankind is sold unto slavery, he is the captive of Satan. The death of Christ is the ransom price to buy back the sinner and set him free. Matthew 20:28, 1 Peter 1:18-19, Ephesians 1:7. Propitiation is that part of Christ's death that meets God's claims. Redemption is that aspect of Christ's death that meets the sinner's needs. (3) Christ's death is substitutionary. The term substitutionary does not occur in the Scriptures, but the doctrine of substitution is one of Scripture's foremost truths. Isaiah 53:5-6.

Please note three parallel truths:

1. Sin-bearing. "The Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all." "Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree."
2. Substitutionary sacrifice. "Wounded for our transgressions." "While we were yet sinners Christ died for our sins."
3. Salvation resulting from that sacrifice. "By His stripes we are healed." "For Christ also has once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God."

From these and other Scriptures we conclude that our atonement is by the death of Christ. In this death God has been propitiated in that his holy claim against man's sin has been met. Through His death mankind can be bought and brought back to God. These great blessings were brought to us through the substitutionary death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Resurrection of Christ

The two doctrines which were greatly stressed in the Apostolic Age were the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. What proof could we have of Christ's death being accepted as a propitiation for our sins unless God had raised Him from the dead.

What proof could we have of our redemption as a result of His death unless He were raised from the dead. 1 Corinthians 15:17, Luke 24:34, Romans 4:25. In the resurrection lies the proof of our redemption.

In the resurrection of Christ lies the proof that the dead in Christ will be raised. 1 Corinthians 15:20-23.

Then there lives the unanswerable declaration of His deity in His resurrection. Romans 1:4.

This fundamental truth, which is so essential to the Gospel (1 Corinthians 15:4; Romans 10:9) has been attacked vigorously by the enemies of the Cross. Yet the Scriptures remain unmoved and avers that Christ was made known "by many infallible proofs" during His 40 days of manifestation.

During the days of manifestation He was seen by His disciples, He showed them His hands and His feet and His side, He ate supper in an Emmaus house, He broiled fish on the shores of Galilee and gave to His disciples,

He made arrangements with His disciples to spread the Gospel, He led them out from Jerusalem to Bethany, He blessed them ere He ascended into glory where He is now seated a Prince and a Savior.

The disciples preached constantly the resurrection of Christ. See Acts 2:24, 32; 3:15; 4:2, 10, 17-18; 24:15; 26:8.

We read in 2 Timothy 3:16, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine," etc. Doctrine or teaching is an essential part of Christianity. Its principles are propagated by teaching and preaching. The only authoritative statement on what we should believe is to be found in the Scriptures themselves.

Here are some other facets of sound doctrine: the second coming of Christ. The disciples were sad when they heard the Lord say, "Yet a little while I am with you." John 14:1-3—"Let not your hearts be troubled...If I go, I will come again."

When Jesus ascended into heaven, two men from heaven brought them this message. This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as you have seen Him go into heaven. Acts 1:11.

The apostle Paul enlarges on this theme in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17: "For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout," etc.

Words cannot be plainer than these. "I will come again", "This same Jesus shall come", "The Lord Himself shall descend from Heaven." Praise God, Jesus is coming. He is coming personally. He is coming to receive His won to Himself. "I will come again and receive you unto Myself." We which are alive and remain shall be caught

up with them to meet the Lord in the air. Praise His ever-blessed name.

The Ruin of Man

This is an unpopular doctrine. Despite man's progress in material things—science, medicine, art, business—the Bible teaches that man is a fallen creature. Romans 3:10, 20, 23; 6:23. One of the most concise summaries of the Bible doctrine of the fall and ruin of man is found in Romans 5:12.

The New Birth

The complementary truth to the ruin of man is regeneration or the new birth. The Lord was the first to mention this in John 3:3. See also 1 Peter 1:23.

We must be born of God—John 1:12-13. All that believe on the Lord Jesus Christ are “born of God” and become the “sons of God.”

All Believers Have Eternal Life

John 3:16, 10:27-28; 1 John 5:13. The Scriptures declare that the believer has eternal life and cannot lose it.

Unbelievers will be punished eternally. The complementary truth to the eternal life of the believer is the eternal punishment of the unbeliever. Matthew 25:41, 46; Revelation 19:20, 20:10, 15.

Those who inhabit this place are tormented day and night forever and ever. Brethren, this is a very solemn truth.

The Trinity of the Godhead

The Scripture teaches that there is one God (1 Timothy 2:5), His name is Jehovah (Deuteronomy 4:35), There is none beside Him (Isaiah 44:6).

But in the one God there are three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. 2 Timothy 1:2.

In Acts 5:3 we read that Annanias lied to the Holy Spirit, then in the next verse it is recorded that he lied unto God. The Holy Spirit is God. Since there is one God that exists in three persons it is not surprising to find the name of God written thus, "The name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Some further doctrines: the personality of Satan, the creation of the worlds, the justification of the believer, the believer's two natures, the believer's subjection to the Holy Spirit, the believer's accountability at the Judgment Seat of Christ, the believer's fellowship with God, the Lordship of Christ.

In such an assembly Christ is the center, circumference, and the focal point in all church gatherings and activities. He is the authority of all church administration. In the epistles God gives Christ the preeminent place in the church. He is the center of His people and must ever govern in all church affairs.

This is true in the marks of a healthy, spiritual assembly.

Assembly Reception

Peter's preaching on the Day of Pentecost was vigorous and effective. Those who received the message were converted to God. They gave public testimony of their conversion by being baptized.

Then they went a step further: they identified themselves with the local believers. "The same day there were added to them about three thousand souls."

Reception into an assembly and its fellowship is a great blessing and should be coveted by every true believer.

Who should be received into assembly fellowship?

Verse 41 points out that it was those who received the Word, and had been baptized, who were added to the fellowship. In verse 47 "such as should be saved" were added to the church. 5:14 says that "believers were the more added to the church." This is the work of the Lord and should always precede reception into a local assembly.

Those who met in assembly capacity and enjoy assembly privileges and fellowship are described in the Scriptures by various names: saved ones (Acts 2:47), believers (Acts 5:14), Christians (Acts 11:26), saints (1 Corinthians 1:2), and brethren (Colossians 1:2).

God has conferred upon His own, who gather in His prescribed manner, those lovely descriptive names.

Two principles are laid down in the Scriptures for the guidance of assemblies in the matter of reception:

1. We should receive those whom the Lord has received. We are to receive "the weak in the faith" because God has received him. We should receive on the basis of life and not on light. Those who do not understand the Scriptures and the blessings and liberties that are in Christ Jesus will receive, generally speaking, better teaching and a more suitable spiritual environment in the assembly than in most places.

2. Reception is refused to those who are morally or doctrinally unclean. There are six moral evils listed in 1 Corinthians 5:11 which exclude a person from fellowship, even though they may be believers.

Fornicator—A fornicator is one who engages in illicit sexual intercourse.

Covetous—A person who desires more, in an evil sense. Love of money, etc.

Idolator—A person who turns away from God to worship idols.

Railer—A person who uses abusive or violent language against another.

Drunkard—A person who is a slave to drink.

Extortioner—A person who plunders and robs by unlawful extortion.

With these we are exhorted not to have fellowship and certainly not to receive anyone practicing these sins into fellowship.

The assembly is the house of God—1 Timothy 3:15. It is the habitation of God through the Spirit—Ephesians 2:22. Being God's dwelling place, the assembly must be kept clean—Psalm 43:5.

Doctrinal evil is also a barrier to assembly fellowship. Titus 1:9, 10-11; 3:10. The first admonition would come from the elders who would try to convince him of his error from the Scriptures. If he continues to preach or teach his error, "his mouth must be stopped." This is the second admonition. If these steps fail to curb his teaching of evil, then he must be rejected.

Weakness of faith is no barrier to reception. Diseased faith and the holding of unsound doctrines exclude a man from fellowship. In essence, we should receive those whom the Lord has received, those who are godly in life and sound in doctrine.

Studies on the Church

“Gather my saints together unto Me, those that have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice”—Psalm 50:5.

We move forward in history about 400 years from the time God gave instructions regarding the gathering of His people at a place which He had chosen to place His name. We find God is still interested in the gathering of His saints.

In Psalm 50 God sets forth the principle of that gathering. There are six characteristics which we will consider:

1. The authority for gathering. It is God who speaks and these can be no greater authority. The gathering together of OT saints rested on this sure foundation, “Gather My saints together unto Me,” etc. They obeyed and were blessed.

2. The members of the gathering. “Those who have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice.” These alone were embraced in the divine command. As in OT days so today, believers are those who have been brought into covenant relationship with God. This covenant is based on the cross-work of the Lord Jesus. The Lord said, “For this is the blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remissions of sins”—Matthew 26:28. Christ negotiated this covenant “by means of death”—Hebrews 9:15. He ratified it with His own blood—Hebrews 9:18; 22:26. He guarantees it by His life at God’s right hand—Hebrews 7:25.

3. The center of the gathering. The Lord gathers His people together that they may be gathered around Him.

In the wilderness He said, “Let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them.” Prior to their redemption from Egypt, God never dwelt in the midst of His people. He only dwelt among them after they were redeemed by blood. When the sin of idolatry broke out in the camp (golden calf), Moses took the tabernacle and “pitched it without the camp.” Exodus 33:7. That position without the camp separated those on the Lord’s side from the evil within the camp, and identified them with Himself. How important and precious to hear the NT exhortation, “Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach.” Hebrews 13:13. When we do this our position is that of gathered saints with Jesus in the midst. See Matthew 18:20. What a privilege to meet the Lord in this capacity.

4. The separation of the gathering. It was always God’s will that His people be separated unto Himself. Separation in the Scripture is always twofold—from and unto. From that which displeases Him, unto Himself. The NT emphasizes this truth in Hebrews 13:13, “Let us go forth,” etc. 2 Corinthians 6 says, “Come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.” The unclean thing from which we are to be separated is clearly defined in the immediate context—the unbeliever, the unrighteous, darkness, Satan, infidels, and idols. God would have His people separated from all this and gathered unto Himself. In this situation God will be able to display His father’s heart and love to us. We will be to Him that which He would desire a son or daughter to be.

5. The unity of the gathering. If God would have us separate ourselves from that which is evil, He does not contemplate division among His saints. “Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity”—Psalm 133. The new church in Jerusalem was a good example of this condition. “All that believed were together and had all things in common.” “They met daily with one accord.” There was gladness and singleness of heart among them, as they praised God and found favor with the people.—Acts 2:44-47. Such a gathering of believers is assured of the blessing of the Holy Spirit. “There the Lord commanded the blessing.”

6. The purpose of the gathering. Worship, prayer, discipline. God’s purpose in gathering His people together is that they might worship Him. “Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the Most High”—Psalm 50:14. One of the responsibilities attacked in Hebrews 13 to going forth unto Him without the camp, is offering the “sacrifice of praise to God continually, the fruit of the lips, giving thanks to His name.” one of the characteristics of the early church was steadfastness in prayer. Acts 2:42. “And when they had prayed the place was shaken where they were assembled, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the Word of God with boldness”—Acts 4:31.

Immediately after the call to gather unto Him there comes the declaration, “He shall call to the heavens above, and to the earth, that He may judge His people.”

God dwells in the midst of His saints that He may praise the holy character of His own house. Matthew 18:20

—“Where two or three are gathered together in My Name there am I in the midst.”

Deuteronomy 26:1-11

Not only is the assembly a “place of separation” and a “place of commemoration,” it is a “place of worship.” Note how this worked out in the experience of Israel in Deuteronomy 26:2. During their wilderness pilgrimage Israel neither planted or reaped harvests. Yet they did not want, God fed them with manna.

When they reached the Promised Land they ate “the old corn of the land.” Then they had to sow the seed for themselves. This generation had never seen this sowing and reaping process. What a thrill it must have been as they watched what they had sown in faith months before gradually mature and finally become ready to harvest. God instructed him that the first-fruits, the grain that was ready first, was to be put in a basket and given to the Lord in the place where He had chosen to put His name.

The golden grain in the basket was the first-fruits of his harvest. It was also a promise of the coming harvest. It was also a sample of what that harvest would be like.

God required of His ancient people that they should bring “the first of all the fruit of the earth,” and “put it in a basket” and go to the place which the Lord thy God shall choose to place His name.

Before the Israelite could present his basket of first-fruits to the Lord and worship Him, there were three conditions which he had to meet.

1. Confession of ruin—v. 5. This was a confession of what he was before he was redeemed. He confessed to a poor

genealogy. By birth he had no claim upon God. "A Syrian ready to perish was my father."

2. Acknowledgement of redemption—v. 7-8. "We cried unto the Lord." "The Lord brought us forth from Egypt with a mighty hand." How uniquely the story is summarized in these few words. Selecting a lamb without spot or blemish. Proving it until the 4th day of the month. Killing it at evening-time, catching the blood in a basin, sprinkling the blood on the door posts, taking shelter behind these blood-sprinkled doors. God passing over their households, preserving them from the destroyer. Eating the roast lam, marching out of Egypt, crossing the Red Sea, the destruction of their enemies, singing in the wilderness.

3. A profession of separation. Not only had the Lord brought them out of Egypt, but "He hath brought us to this place." Into a land which floweth with milk and honey. A land full of temporal blessings, full of spiritual blessings. In this land, separated from evil nations and idol worship, the Lord God chose a place to put His name. To this place of separation these faithful ones came with their baskets of first-fruits.

The Israelite, after have confessed that he sprang from ruined stock, acknowledged his redemption by blood from Egypt, and witnessed to his separation from all but the place to which God had brought him, he presented his basket of first-fruits unto the Lord, and worshipped with rejoicing in His presence.

So with the believer in Christ today. He comes to the place which God has chosen, where God has promised to be. In coming to worship we must first confess our ruin, our redemption by blood, our separation from the evil

world system. Then with rejoicing we present our basket of first-fruits, which is Christ who once was dead, but is now alive, the first-fruits of that coming harvest. He gratefully remembers the Lord in His death. "As the corn of wheat that died," etc. As he breaks the bread and drinks from the cup the solemn scenes of Calvary come before him by the Spirit. Then his thoughts are led to rejoice in a risen Savior, the first-fruits of a great harvest.

Studies in Isaiah 6

Isaiah's vision: "In the years that king Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple."—v. 1.

Isaiah had this vision "in the year that king Uzziah died."

Describe the earthly glory of Uzziah.

Israel had never enjoyed such prosperity since the days of Solomon.

v. 3—God blessed Uzziah because he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord.

v. 5—He sought God in the days of Zechariah.

v. 5—As long as he sought the Lord, God made him to prosper.

v. 7—And God helped him.

v. 8—And his name spread abroad.

v. 15—He was marvelously helped, till he was strong.

v. 16—"But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction, for he transgressed against the Lord."

v. 16-20—Describe Uzziah's sin.

v. 21—Uzziah's inglorious end.

It was in the year that King Uzziah died that Isaiah saw the glory of the Lord. It seems that the glory of the earthly monarch had blinded his eyes and diverted his attention. When the earthly was removed, then the glory of the Lord filled his whole life.

Maybe there is some person or thing blotting out the full vision of the Lord. These must go before we can see Him in all his glory.

Spiritual expansion is expensive and sometimes excruciating. There are no reduced rates for revolution of the soul.

The vision was for a purpose. This was Isaiah's call to service, his experience with the Lord changed his life completely.

A vision without a task makes a visionary. A task without a vision is drudgery. A vision with a task makes a missionary.

Isaiah's vision was in three dimensions.

v. 5—"Then said I, 'Woe is me! For I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips.'" A word of confession.

v. 7—"Lo this has touched thy lips, thine iniquity is taken away and thy sin purged." A word of cleansing.

v. 9—"Go and tell this people." A word of commission.

This must always be the order:

1. The vision of the glory of God.
2. A vision of our uncleanness, then the confession of the same.
3. As we genuinely confess our sin we experience being cleansed from all uncleanness.
4. In this changed and cleansed condition we are commissioned to go into all the world.

This vision was a comprehensive one, and all-inclusive. It was:

1. An upward vision. He saw the Lord high and lifted up.
2. An inward vision. He saw himself.
3. An outward vision. He saw the world.

Most of the men whom God used in His service had similar experiences. Moses at the burning bush, Gideon had a revelation while threshing wheat in the winepress, Paul was enveloped in the glory of the risen Lord.

Some have a vision but no task. They are but visionaries. Others have a task but no vision. Their life is dull, their service fruitless. Thank God for those who have a vision and a passion for God's service and for the souls of men and women. They are those who, if necessary, will battle mountainous seas of human criticism and storm the flinty heights of devilish opposition to plant the Cross of Christ.

It is my earnest prayer that some of you who have been creeping along in conventional Christianity will be possessed with spiritual alertness, become aggressive in the battle of the Lord, and have a quenchless zeal for the lost.

May all of us have Jacob-like wrestlings with the Lord and come out stripped of the flesh, but changed and strengthened by the Holy Spirit.

The Growth of the Church

Acts 11:19-26 v. 19—Because of the persecution some Christians fled to Phoenicia, Cypress, and Antioch. They preached the word, but their vision was limited. They preached to the Jews only.

v. 20—Some of those who came to Antioch were from Cyprus and Cyrene.

Cyprus was a large island in the northeast Mediterranean.

Cyrene was a port city on the northern coast of Africa.

Believers from these places brought the message to Antioch and they preached to the Gentiles.

The result was the establishing of a thriving church. Note the absence of officialism at Antioch. We do not know the names of any of the people used in this work.

Yet it was might and was of God. See v. 21.

Examples of whom God can use:

Acts 9:36-41—Dorcas had a needle, etc.

Judges 3:31—Shamgar had an oxgoad.

Judges 15:15—Samson had a jawbone.

1 Samuel 17—David had a sling.

Mark 6—Five loaves and two fish.

“These men preached the Lord Jesus”—v. 21.

If there is one thing that contributed to the growth of the church it was their Christ-centered preaching.

Acts 5:42—They ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ daily in the temple and in every house.

Acts 8:4—They that were scattered went everywhere preaching the Word.

Acts 8:35—Philip preached unto the eunuch about Jesus.

Acts 10:36—Preaching peace with God through Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 1:23—But we preach Christ crucified.

Galatians 1:8—“If we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached, let him be accursed.”

Note two points here: (1) Only the preaching that exalts Christ is really blessed. (2) Salvation is only to be had in Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 15—Christ died according to the Scriptures. Christ was buried according to the Scriptures. Christ was resurrected according to the Scriptures.

v. 22—News came to the church in Jerusalem of the week in Antioch. They immediately dispatched Barnabas.

v. 23—When he saw for himself that God had been working he was glad. He exhorted them to, “cling to the Lord with all their heart.”

Urge all, but especially young converts to do this.

1. Desire the sincere milk of the word, etc.
2. Pray without ceasing. Men ought always to pray, etc.
3. Forsake not the assembling of yourselves. Fellowship.

4. You shall be my witnesses.

Note the characteristics of Barnabas—v. 24.

1. He was a righteous man.

2. He was full of the Holy Spirit.

3. He was full of faith.

Through the ministry of this man, “many people were added to the Lord.”

Barnabas was a man of God. May each of us seek to be like him.

v. 25—The work got too big for Barnabas. He went to tarsus and found Saul. The young converts needed the teaching of Saul.

v. 26—Together they preached and taught for a whole year. The teaching had a profound effect on the believers. It changed their lives, and they became like Christ.

The Place of Ministry in the Local Church

Deuteronomy 18:6-8

God appointed the son of Levi to a special ministry to connection with the Tabernacle. When the camp moved, under the direction of God, they carried the vessels, the furniture, the coverings, and the pillars. Read Numbers 3-4.

Theirs was a God-given ministry to be performed in the place where the Lord had chosen to place His name. The tribe of Levi was divided into three and each section was given by God a definite task to perform.

The Kohathites were given charge of the most holy things. The Gershonites were set aside by God to serve and to bear burdens. They bore the curtains and door hangings, the skins, and the instruments used in offering sacrifices. The Merarites carried the boards, the pillars, and the sockets.

As the Levite performed his God-appointed tasks he made available to the Israelites the service of the Tabernacle.

Today as God's servants minister Christ to the saints of God, he is performing the same service as the Levites did so long ago. 1 Corinthians 12 teaches us that the Holy Spirit has gifted certain men for certain definite work. Ephesians 4 tells us that the Lord has placed these gifted men in the church—evangelists, pastors, teachers—"For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."

The ability to minister is the gift of the Holy Spirit to man—1 Corinthians 12:11. The gifted man is the gift of the risen Lord to His church—Ephesians 4:8-12.

Preparation for Ministry

Gifted men need exercise of soul before they seek to minister the holy things of God to the people. In Deuteronomy 18:6 we read that the Levite came “with all the desire of his mind,” that is, exercise of soul, unto the place which the Lord had chosen.

It is a principle taught in the Word of God, that exercise of soul and preparation for ministry must precede the delivering of the message.

There are three essentials given by Paul to a young preacher named Timothy. 1 Timothy 4:6.

These essentials according to Paul are:

1. Thorough acquaintance with the subject. “Where unto thou hast attained.” Another version puts it “which thou hast fully followed up.” God expects us to search the Word for information regarding any subject. He has revealed Himself and His truth here a little and there a little. It is important then that we should “follow up” a subject before we attempt to minister it in public.

2. The personal application of the truth. “Nourished up in the words of faith and good doctrine.” This implies that the man who teaches truth shall first have experienced that truth in his own life. In other words nourished up in the word which he ministers. How disappointing to hear a man minister truth which he does not practice. In the wilderness manna that was gathered but not eaten “bred worms and stank”—Exodus 16:20. It is important that we first appropriate

truth to ourselves before we teach it to others. With such exercise of soul, thorough knowledge and personal application of the truth, the appointed vessel is now ready for the third step.

3. Public ministry. "Put the brethren in remembrance of these things." Lay these things before the brethren. With his subject mastered and lived the servant may rise in the assembly of saints and minister the Word of God.

When should a brother minister the Word? The answer to this question is found in 1 Peter 4:10-11.

There are four conditions that should be met before one ministers the Word of God.

1. He should have a gift. "As every man hath received a gift so let him minister the same." When God calls a man for any type of work, He fits him for that work. He gives him a gift.

2. He should have a message from God. "If any man speak let him speak as the oracle of God." The message must be from God, and based on Scripture.

3. He should minister in dependence upon God. "If any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth." The servant who would attempt to express the mind of God must do it in complete dependence upon God and to the best of his ability.

4. Finally the servant should be able to minister to the glory of God. "That God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ." A man may have a gift, he may have a message, he may have God-given ability, but he must wait for God's time to give it. This it will be for the glory of God. What are the tests of a God-given ministry? The tests of a preacher's ministry are threefold. 1

Corinthians 14:3. The three tests are: (1) Edification, building up, a ministry of instruction to the soul; (2) Exhortation, stirring up, a ministry of stimulation for the conscience; (3) Consolation, binding up, a ministry of encouragement for the heart.

The Principles of Christian Giving

In these days of financial crisis, life for many of us in the 20th century is very complex. The complexities of this century have ravaged not only the business world, but the tentacles have reached into the domestic and religious world as well.

Never in the history of the Church have such vast sums of money been poured into so-called Christian work. The annual expenditures by evangelical and fundamental groups are unprecedented in Church history. This raises the following questions:

How should this money be raised?

Where should it come from?

How can we best support the Lord's work around the world?

What methods should we use?

We must go to the Scriptures for the principles and guidelines that God would have us employ.

Tithing in the Patriarchal Age

Abraham gave tithes to Melchizedek, "priest of the most high." Genesis 14:20.

This was more than 400 years before the giving of the Law. Later in history Jacob promised God a tenth of all he received. Genesis 28:22.

Apparently there were laws and statutes given to the Patriarchs which have not been incorporated into the Scriptures.

Conditions in the Mosaic Economy

Israel was instructed that the tithe belonged to God. Leviticus 27:30-32.

These tithes were to be used for the support of the Levites who served in connection with the tabernacle. The welfare of the priests, the buildings (tabernacle and temple) were financed through the free-will offerings of the children of Israel. The upkeep and renovation of the tabernacle and temple was provided for through the half-shekel tax taken from every adult over 20 years of age. Exodus 30:12-16.

The financial principles that seem to emerge from these facts are:

1. The Lord's work was supported by the Lord's people.
2. Those who served the Lord were supported by certain obligatory tithes and free-will offerings.
3. Faithfulness in connection with the giving of the tithe brought the blessing of God. Malachi 3:8-10.

Consider Paul's Teaching on Christian Giving

Paul deals with this question in only 3 chapters out of the hundred he wrote: 1 Corinthians 9, 2 Corinthians 8 and 9.

Despite the scarcity of information regarding financing the Lord's work, certain principles evolve which are unique:

1. Paul never made reference to his own immediate or future needs.
2. He never made appeals for funds for the Lord's work.

3. His eyes were on the Master, and he knew that “omnipotence has servants everywhere.”

4. Interestingly enough while he never asked anything for himself, he reminds believers of their stewardship of material possessions, and exhorted them to use their substance for the Lord.

5. His exhortations were not directed to the Lord’s servants to rely on the Lord, but rather to the Lord’s people to render to the Lord that which is rightly His.

Paul’s exhortations may be classified in the following ways:

1. Exhortation to industry—Titus 3:14.

2. Exhortation to liberality—Romans 12:8; Hebrews 13:16.

3. Exhortation to regularity—1 Corinthians 16:1-3.

4. Exhortation to love—Romans 15:25-27; Ephesians 4:28.

5. Exhortation to hospitality—Romans 12:13; Hebrews 13:2.

6. Exhortation to responsibility—Galatians 6:6; Philippians 4:3.

A careful study of 1 Corinthians 8 and 9 reveals some Scriptural principles which should characterize our giving.

1. The Lord’s work and workers are to be supported by the Lord’s people.

2. Their offerings were to be given:

a. Regularly—1 Corinthians 16:2.

- b. Liberally—2 Corinthians 9:6.
- c. Cheerfully—2 Corinthians 9:7.
- d. Proportionately—1 Corinthians 16:2.
- e. Voluntarily—2 Corinthians 9:7.
- f. Unobtrusively—Matthew 6:1-4.
- g. Worshipfully—Philippians 4:8.

3. Those who are the recipients of spiritual ministry have a definite responsibility to materially support the:

- a. Evangelist—1 Corinthians 9:11, 14.
- b. Pastor—1 Timothy 5:17-18.
- c. Teacher—Galatians 6:6.

Finally in 2 Corinthians 8 Paul tells us how we should give:

- 1. Sacrificially
- 2. Willingly
- 3. Eagerly
- 4. Spiritually

Paul was surprised at the intensity and generosity of their giving. "But they first gave themselves to the Lord."

Principles of Spiritual Giving

1 Corinthians 9:14.

One of the clichés which is overworked today is, "If a man is the Lord's servant, the Lord will provide for him." While this is true, the only way God can provide for His

servants is through His people. The giving of the tithe was not an act of charity, but a sacred responsibility.

All unpaid debts of this sort will come up for settlement at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Clearly there are degrees of obligation as to the gifts we make:

1. In one sense everything belongs to God. David prayed, "Of Thine own have we given Thee."

2. In another sense everything belongs to us. Peter said to Annanias, "Whilst it remained was it not thine own, and when it was sold was it not in thine own power?"

The question now is how can we best use that which God has entrusted us with?

1. There are the home responsibilities. "If a man provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." Love and care begin at home and end abroad.

2. Then each believer has obligations to the local church. We owe something for the maintenance of the local work and buildings.

3. Then in his stewardship the believer must support the Lord's servants. To NT believers Paul writes, "As we have opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them that are of the household of faith." Galatians 6:10.

a. As to the evangelists we are left in no doubt. We must support them in their work. 1 Corinthians 9:14.

b. Instruction in our care of the teacher is just as emphatic. Galatians 6:6.

c. To the maintenance of the pastor we may apply the principle of 1 Corinthians 9:7.

If the shepherd has the moral right to live on the produce of the flock, can we withhold material support from those who feed us spiritually?

The Scriptural Pattern of Planting Churches

The church in Jerusalem had leaders who were raised up by God. After the fourth persecution many were scattered abroad, and they went everywhere preaching the Gospel. These were probably the first missionaries. Among them were Philip, a man full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. These are two of the basic essentials and credentials of a true servant of God.

No one should launch out into the Lords work without them.

The first Samaritan church was probably established in the city of Samaria.

The exodus of believers from Jerusalem leads us to believe that many Jewish and Samaritan churches were established.

See Acts 9:31—"Then had the churches rest throughout Judea, Samaria, and Galilee."

The first Gentile church was established in Antioch. Please note that this thriving church was ruled by men of God. Acts 13.

I believe that it is imperative that local churches should be governed by spiritual men, God-appointed elders. An assembly cannot function scripturally apart from elders, neither can it rise above the spirituality of its elders.

Acts 13 and 14 show us how Paul went about establishing local churches. He preached the Gospel and the converts were taught and formed into a church.

Of necessity these newborn churches were then left for a short period. When Paul reached the limits of his missionary exercise, he retraced his steps. He visited the young churches, appointed elders with much prayer and fasting, and then he committed them to the Lord.

The elders were appointed as an expedient in the first instance, but some later abused the office. This necessitated the issuing of explicit instruction regarding the qualification of future elders.

Important Factors in Starting a New Work

The birth of the church at Pentecost was the result of Christ's suffering and death. The birth of any new local church should be the outcome of the agonizing and deep spiritual exercise of godly men before the Lord.

Brethren, whatever you do, you must have God's mind on any matter before you can have God's approval. Your movements must be controlled by the Holy Spirit. They must be for the glory of Christ. They should have the support and prayerful and financial interest of the State Assemblies.

You cannot build a fruitful local church with a few new believers, or with carnal men at the helm. For the spiritual welfare and the expansion of the local church there has to be spiritual leadership, either in the form of a qualified full-time worker or spiritual elders. The ideal is to have both.

Choosing a Full Time Worker

He must be raised and led by the Spirit.

Qualifications:

1. He must be a man of God.
2. He must have a heart for the work.
3. He must be a pastor as well as a teacher.
4. He must know how to counsel with people.
5. He must know how to handle and relate to people.
6. He must know how to involve people in the work.
7. He has to be active and yet stay in the background.

He must be a visitor. Personal visitation is a must. Give some experiences here.

The bringing of a full time worker into the area is probably one of the most effective ways of reaching the community but it is fraught with difficulties and pitfalls.

The Birth of a Church

Before considering this very important event, let me remind you that when God wanted an ark to save His own from the flood, He gave Noah implicit instructions and the exact measurements. When God wanted a house in which to dwell on earth He gave Moses the exact details. They were not to be questioned nor altered.

This was God's work. Man had only to follow His instructions.

Note the unity of these followers as they waited in the upper room. "They were together." "They continued with one accord in prayer and supplication." Acts 1:13.

v. 14—Note the phrase "with the women."

When the church was born, note the conditions in which the birth took place.

"They were with one accord in one place"—2:1.

In these circumstances the Holy Spirit was free to move.

There were 120 people in the upper room united in purpose. They were baptized with the Holy Spirit and made one in Christ. This was a miracle—120 isolated individuals who had been living separate lives, are now, by one mighty act, by the Spirit baptized into one body.

Note now the three symbols associated with this event:

1. The Wind—a symbol of invisible power. It is sovereign, mighty, powerful, irresistible, invincible, but it is invisible. These people were filled with the Holy Spirit, and they were endued with power. This is God's concept of the local church.

2. The Fire—passion and purity. Fire in the OT depicts at least two things: (1) it is a purifier, burning up the dross and waste; (2) it is a symbol for enthusiasm, passion and purpose. If these two elements are present in any local church there will be a hunger for God that will purify the lives of those in fellowship.

3. Tongues which speak of Proclamation. Those baptized into one body, filled with the Holy Spirit, lost no time in proclaiming the Good News. The first proclamation of the Gospel was presented miraculously in 15 different languages.

Each time we read of the apostles or the church being filled with the Holy Spirit they always spoke or proclaimed the Gospel with boldness, clarity and power. This is a picture of what every local church should be today. The epitome of power, passion and proclamation.

Against the picture of the biblical birth of the church there are many new things springing up. My considered judgment of these is that although they were launched

with the best of intentions they have gotten out of hand, they are not of God. They are simply gratifying to the flesh.

Having said that, let me hasten to say that many assemblies are not remiss in adding confession to the chaotic religious scene. We lag behind other evangelistic groups where once we were leaders. Our evangelical zeal has waned and in many cases is non-existent. We seem to be sinking into an introverted exclusivism.

The Birth of a Church

Silver Spring - September 1975

Before considering this incredibly important event, let me remind you that when God wanted an Ark to save His own from the flood, He gave Noah implicit instructions with exact measurements. Then when God wanted a house in which to dwell on Earth, He gave Moses the exact details, which were not to be questioned nor altered. Both of these events show that it was God's work, and man had only to follow His instructions.

Let us take note of the unity of those early church followers of Jesus as they waited in the upper room in Acts 1:13-14. Luke reports that they were together, continuing "with one accord in prayer and supplication." Also note that here Luke makes sure to mention they were "with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus..." When the early church was born shortly after Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension, we should also take heed and note the conditions in which this birth of the church took place. Because they "were with one accord in one place" during Pentecost, these circumstances allowed the Holy Spirit to be free to move among them. (Acts 2:1) There were one hundred and twenty people in the upper room united in purpose, baptized by the Spirit, and made one in Christ. This was quite a miracle that one hundred and twenty isolated individuals who had been living separate lives, were now, by one mighty act, baptized by the Spirit into one body.

Let us examine the three symbols associated with this event. First, the wind is evident as a symbol of invisible

power. It is identified as sovereign, mighty, powerful, irresistible, and invincible, but it is altogether invisible, just like the wind. These people present at Pentecost were filled with the Holy Spirit and endowed with power; this is ultimately God's concept of the local church. Secondly, we see the symbol of the fire, which represents passion and purity. In the Old Testament, fire depicts at least two things: either a purifier, which burns up the dross, garbage and waste, or a symbol of enthusiasm, passion and purpose. If these two elements are present in any local church, there will be a hunger for God that will purify the lives of those in fellowship. Thirdly, there is the symbol of tongues, which speaks of proclamation. This meant that those baptized into one body and filled with the Holy Spirit wasted no time in proclaiming the good news. The first proclamation of the gospel was presented miraculously in fifteen different known languages. Each time we read of the apostles or the church being filled with the Holy Spirit, they always spoke or proclaimed the gospel with boldness, clarity and power. This is also an illustration of what every local church should be today: the epitome of power, passion, and proclamation.

Against the picture of the biblical birth of the church, there are currently many new things springing up. In my humble opinion, although these were launched with the best of intentions, they have gotten out of hand and are not of God, rather are simply gratifying to the flesh. Having said that, let me hasten to say that many assemblies are not remiss in adding confusion to the chaotic religious scene. We lag behind other evangelistic groups, where once we were leaders. Our evangelical

zeal has waned and in many areas is non-existent. We seem to be sinking into an introverted exclusivism.

The Scriptural Pattern of Planting Churches

The church in Jerusalem had leaders who were raised up by God. After the fourth period of persecution in the Roman Empire, many early Christians were scattered abroad since they had to leave Jerusalem, so they traveled and settled in many places preaching the gospel. These ordinary Christians were probably the first missionaries. Among these men was Philip, a man who possessed two of the basic essentials and credentials of a true servant of God: wisdom and fullness of the Holy Spirit. No one should pursue or launch into the Lord's work without these two vital aspects of Christian service.

The first Samaritan church was probably established in the city of Samaria. The diaspora of believers from Jerusalem leads us to believe that many Jewish and Samaritan churches were established. In Acts 9:31, Luke reports, "Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied." We also know that the first Gentile church was established in Antioch. This thriving church was ruled by men of God, as we can see from Acts 13:1-3. Luke reports, "Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers...as they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away." I believe it is imperative that local

churches should be governed by spiritual men which are God-appointed elders, because an assembly cannot function scripturally apart from elders, neither can it rise above the spirituality of its elders.

Acts 13:16 also teaches us valuable lessons in church planting by seeing how Paul went about establishing local churches. First, he preached the gospel, and then the converts were taught and formed into a church. Of necessity, these newborn churches were then usually left for a short period of time so Paul or his workers could travel on to other locations. When Paul reached the limits of his missionary exercise of traveling to new places and establishing churches, he then retraced his steps, visiting the young churches, appointing elders with much prayer and fasting, then committing them to the Lord. The elders were appointed as an expedient in the first instance, but because later some began to abuse their office, an issuing of explicit instructions regarding the qualifications of future elders was necessary.

Important Factors in Starting a New Work

The birth of the church at Pentecost was the result of Christ's suffering and death. In much the same way, the birth of any local church should be the outcome of agonizing, deep, and spiritual exercise of godly men before the Lord. Brothers, whatever you do, you must be seeking God's mind and His wisdom over any matter before you can have God's approval. In addition, your movements must be for the glory of Christ and controlled by the Holy Spirit. Your work should always have the supportive, prayerful and financial interest of the state assemblies. After all, you cannot build a fruitful

local church with a few new believers or with carnal men at the helm. For the spiritual welfare and the expansion of the local church, spiritual leadership is absolutely necessary, either in the form of a qualified full-time worker or spiritual elders, but the ideal is to have both. If you are indeed in the process of choosing a full time worker, let us look at the qualifications for such a person. First and foremost, this person must be raised and led by the Spirit. He should be a man of God, have a heart for the weak, and a Pastor as well as a teacher who knows how to counsel, handle, and relate to people well. He must also know how to involve other people in the work of the church, yet he should be active while still staying somewhat in the background. Personal visitation is also very important with a full-time worker. We should also always remember that while the bringing of a full time worker into the ministry is probably one of the most effective ways of reaching a community, it is sometimes fraught with difficulty and pitfalls.

The Truth of Godly Separation

2 Corinthians 6:14-18

“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.”

Note this separation is from unbelievers. This principle would apply to marriage, business, lodges or secret societies.

In the following verses Paul enumerates several more areas of our lives in which separation must be practiced.

No fellowship between righteousness and unrighteousness.

No communion between light and darkness.

No concord between Christ and Belial.

No part between believer and unbeliever.

No agreement between the temple of God and idols.

When we function as the temple of God—pure, clean, holy—then God dwells with us in His glory, majesty and power. He walks with us and walks in our midst. He reveals Himself to us as our God. V. 16.

v. 17-18—These verses are a further exhortation and revelation. “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing.”

This separation here is from what is contrary to the mind of God, and unto God Himself.

There must be no compromise or complicity with evil.

This separation also includes separation from the evil world system. Separation from false teachers who are

vessels of dishonor. The reward for such a separation is the enjoyment of the Fatherhood of God. This includes unhindered communion and worship and fruitful service. Conformity to the world and compromise with the world involves the loss of these.

Jeremiah 6:16—The Old Gate—“Thus saith the Lord, stand in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths where is the good way, and walk in it, and ye shall find rest to your souls.

What Do We Mean By The Church?

The word “church” is a translation of the Greek word, “ekklesia”, which means a gathering, or an assembly. The most common use of this particular word is to describe a group of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. This group of people or assembly is a “called out company.”

This company is unique and precious to God. Paul speaks of them as “the church of God which He hath purchased with His own blood.” Acts 20:28. The Lord Jesus “loved the church and gave Himself for it.” Ephesians 5:25.

It is God’s desire that this purchased company should meet in the place of His choosing and around the Person in whom is all His delight.

Where is this place? And this Person? Hebrews 13:13 says, “Let us go forth, therefore unto Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach.”

This separation has always been God’s plan and purpose for His children. Consider the Prophecy of Shiloh in Genesis 49:10. Jacob lay dying in Egypt. He called his sons to bestow a father’s blessing. God enabled him to look into the future and tell what would befall the descendants of his sons.

Two things should be noted in this Scripture:

1. There was to be a place where God’s people should gather—Shiloh. 200 years later, as the people were about to enter the Promised Land, God decreed that they should separate themselves from the places where

the heathen worshipped their gods. Deuteronomy 12:5. God made a promise to Israel: (1) That He would choose a place in the land; (2) Where He would put His name; (3) Wherein He would dwell; (4) To which His people should come. Seven years later we read, “The whole congregation of the children of Israel assembled together at Shiloh, and set up the Tabernacle there”—Joshua 18:1

2. The second thing we notice in the verse is that they were not only to gather in an appointed place, but they were to gather around a person. “Unto Him shall the gathering of the people be.” Who was this One whom the Patriarch named Shiloh? Shiloh means “peace-bringer.” There is only one who brings real peace to any heart—the Prince of Peace. On that occasion Jacob received a great vision of future things. Not only did he see Israel gathered unto God, but figuratively he saw the Christian Assembly gathered unto the Lord. Matthew 18:20.

Beloved, our gathering center must ever be the place of the Lord’s choosing, where He has placed His name and where His presence is. This place should be a place of separation. Deuteronomy 12:10-14, 29-32.

Israel was commanded to separate themselves from the world’s religion. Their offerings, sacrifices and tithes were to be brought to the place which God had chosen. They were commanded to separate themselves from the world’s ways.

One purpose for which Christ died on the cross is found in Galatians 1:4. Being thus delivered, we are exhorted to “present our bodies, a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God.” Romans 12:1.

To have no fellowship with unbelievers, unrighteousness, darkness, Satan, with everything which is unclean, that God and Christ may be all in all.

The local assembly should also be a place of commemoration. Israel was instructed by God to keep the Passover, to remember their deliverance from Egypt. In perfect harmony with this divine picture we see the early assemblies meeting on the first day of the week to break bread in memory of Christ. As the Passover was held on the Sabbath, a holy day, it is fitting that the Lord's Supper should be held on the "first day of the week", a special day, the day of our Lord's resurrection.

Who Are Qualified to Serve God

Numbers 4:3—30 to 50 years of age. Kohathites, Gershonites, Herarites.

Leviticus 21:16-21—The physical disqualifications of a priest.

The consecration of the priests—Exodus 29.

They were washed with water, clean, clothed, anointed with blood, and anointed with oil.

Leviticus 10:1-3—Strange fire. See 9:24; 16:12-13.

Numbers 12—Miriam's sin. She was shut out of the camp seven days "and the people journeyed not till Miriam was brought in."

Let us now see how this works in the NT church.

God prepares His servants.

Acts 2—The church is filled, baptized, sealed, anointed at one and the same time. The result is a pure and active church that is blessed.

Acts 4—The Christians were again filled. They spoke the word with power, they were of one heart, of one soul. They were endued with great power, and great favor rested upon them.

Strange fire—Acts 5. This chapter introduces a note of tragedy. Into that pure church came the sin of insincerity, hypocrisy, and lying in its most grievous form. Describe this incident. The result was the removal of the guilty ones.

Sin in any church is a hindrance to blessing. Nothing will sap the power of a church more than pews filled with sinning Christians. Nothing will evoke the displeasure of God more than unqualified servants offering strange fire.

A pure church is always a powerful church.

If God worked today as He did then our churches would be turned into cemeteries.

Let us consider for a moment the hindrances that a sinning believer can be to a local church.

1. He can impede its spiritual progress—Miriam.
2. He can stumble others in the way—Romans 14.
3. He can stop the power—Joshua 6.

For this reason it is important that every brother and sister should be clean and should know that the present service engaged in has the approval and commendation of God.

According to Paul the church is like a human body. Some members are seen, some are not. Some occupy a more prominent place than others, but all are important and necessary to the ideal condition of the body. Think of the situation that would arise if the hand suddenly decided to be a foot, or if a leg decided that it could serve better as an arm. The situation would be comical but it would also be tragic because: (1) the physical form would be spoiled, and (2) its efficiency would be negated. (3) It could not perform the function expected of it. (4) Think of the pain and discomfort that would ensue from such a monstrosity.

Did it ever occur to you that such a condition can and does happen in a local church because:

1. Believers have never bothered to ascertain their proper spiritual gift and place in the assembly.
2. Like Nadab and Abihu sometimes believers take upon themselves self-appointed tasks for which they are not qualified and which are not approved by God nor appreciated by the local company.

The result is a spiritual monstrosity.

Now let us have a look at what one would term “the ideal Church.” Acts 11.

The church at Antioch was characterized by:

1. The preaching of Jesus Christ crucified, risen, exalted, and coming again.
2. The hand of God was with them.
3. A great number were saved.
4. God both raised up and sent teachers among them to teach them more perfectly the mind of the Lord.
5. They were a liberal church. They gave each one according to his ability.

In conclusion let me sum up the main points of our discussion: “Who are qualified to serve God?”

1. Only those who are called of God should serve Him publicly.
2. There is a dignity in the service of God.
3. A servant must be a clean vessel.
4. One who determines his own course and place in the assembly will sooner or later evoke the judgment of God.

5. The ideal Church is one where every member is fitly joined together and in their God appointed place. Anything less than this will draw forth God's disapproval. It will impede the spiritual progress and stop the spiritual power of the whole assembly. The Scripture says, "Let a man examine himself."

The Worship and Service of a Local Church

“A scriptural assembly is a company of believers gathered together by the Holy Spirit, around Christ, to worship and serve God.”

The composition of a local church is made up of elders, deacons, and saints or believers. This model is evident in Philippians 1:1, where Paul addressed his letter to the Philippian church saying, “To all the saints in Christ Jesus, who are at Philippi, with the bishops, overseers, elders, and deacons.” In addition to this pattern, every believer in the body of Christ has also been given a spiritual gift and the sufficient grace to use it. In Ephesians 4:7 Paul said, “But unto everyone of us is given grace according to the measure of Christ’s rich and bounteous gift.” Here, the word grace can be understood as strength and wisdom for believers to aptly use the gifts given to them.

In this section of Ephesians, Paul mentions five kinds of spiritual gifts: Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors, and Teachers. The spiritual gifts given to the first century apostles and prophets had supernatural qualities, because they were given by and attributed to the ascended Lord. (See Ephesians 4:8) Certain men and women received these gifts for the advancement and maintenance of the local churches. Three of these five spiritual gifts should be evident in the ideal local church.

First, Evangelists are those who have a burning passion for the lost and share the news of the Gospel with others, as we see Paul praising in Romans 10:15: “How

beautiful are the feet of them that preach the Gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things.” Secondly, Teachers are those who can explain and expound the Word for others to hear and learn. The Teacher has an unbridled desire to teach the pure, uncluttered, and unadulterated principles of the Word. Thirdly, Pastors are identified as Shepherds who have a deep compassion for the saints and are responsible for taking care of the needs of the flock. It is significant to note the distinguishing features of a pastor described in the Scriptures. As an example, Timothy was a pastor or shepherd of the flock. If we look at Paul’s letters to Timothy, he exhorted and advised Timothy, serving in the church in Ephesus, to “neglect not the gift that is in you” and “stir up the gift of God which is in you.” (1 Timothy 4:14 and 2 Timothy 1:6) Timothy’s gift was feeding and nurturing the sheep and lambs. He also cared for the needy of the flock in the way a shepherd would feed and protect the flock, by gathering the lambs in his arm, carrying them in his bosom, and gently leading those who have their young, just as Isaiah 40:11 describes.

Another useful illustration for the pastor in Scripture is that of the Good Shepherd from John 10:11-27. Jesus proclaims, “The sheep hear and recognize My voice.” Jesus is intimately acquainted with each sheep in His flock and calls them by name. Jesus also leads them and goes before them so that the sheep follow Him because they know and trust His voice! Let us consider an example of the Great Shepherd, the Lord, in more detail. In Psalm 23, David wrote, “The Pastor is my Shepherd, he feeds, guides, and shields me. He makes me to lie down in fresh, tender green pastures. He leads me

besides still and restful waters. He restores and refreshes me. He leads me in paths of righteousness. Though I walk through the deep, sunless valley of death, I will fear no evil, for He is with me. His rod protects me. His staff guides and comforts me. He prepares a table before me in the presence of my enemies. He anoints my head with oil. My cup runs over. Goodness and mercy follow me all the days of my life. I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever." When we review the preceding and following psalms of David's, Psalm 22-24, we see the same Great Shepherd, but portraying other qualities in His great character. In Psalm 22, we see how David considers him as a Good Shepherd, who "took me out of the womb; you made me trust while on my mother's breasts. I was cast upon you from birth. From my mother's womb you have been my God." And in Psalm 24, warrior images characterize the Lord, the Chief Shepherd, who is "strong and mighty," "mighty in battle," "the King of glory" and "Lord of hosts." The Lord is indeed the Good, Great, and Chief Shepherd supreme over all the body, the ultimate Pastor shepherding his flock.

Reigning over all of these roles and spiritual gifts stands the risen Head who gave these gifted Christian men to the church. Paul also reminds us in 1 Corinthians 12 that the Holy Spirit bestows spiritual gifts to all believers for service, not just the first century Christians. The permanent spiritual gifts given by the Spirit are: ministering or helps, administration or ruling, exhortation, giving, showing mercy, and faith. These six gifts of the Spirit, combined with the three given by the risen Lord, are necessary for the well being of the

church. So let each believer ask himself, “What is my gift?”