



21
STEPS
TO A
STRONGER
CHURCH
FOR THE **21ST**
CENTURY

David W. Cloud

21 Steps to a Stronger Church for the 21st Century

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PO Box 610368, Port Huron, MI 48061
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Canada: Bethel Baptist Church
4212 Campbell St. N., London Ont. N6P 1A6
519-652-2619

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Introduction

In a time when the average Baptist church is getting steadily, shockingly weaker, moving farther down the contemporary path with each passing decade, we are intent on moving in much stronger direction, and we are thankful for the churches that we know of personally that are on the same path. We have no intention of following the crowd, and we are not afraid of being in the minority.

The church we see in the New Testament is a church of born again disciples of Christ who are committed to serving Christ. We see this church throughout the New Testament.

We see it in the first church, in which all of the members “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:41-42). We see it as the ever-purifying church of 1 Corinthians 5:6-8. We see it as the turning, serving, waiting church of 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10. We see it as the edifying, perfecting body of Ephesians 4:11-16. We see it as the spiritual house composed of living stones who are serving priests of 1 Peter 2:5.

This is God’s sole standard for a New Testament church. In vain do we look to the church fathers, the Waldensians, the Lollards, the Anabaptists, the Lutherans, the Anglicans, the Reformed Calvinists, the covenant Presbyterians, the Puritans, the Methodists, the Pentecostals, the Brethren, the Fundamentalists, the Evangelicals, the denominational Baptists, or any stream of fundamental Baptists. *All* of these must be measured by the absolute standard of God’s Word.

It can be demonstrated from Scripture that a true New Testament church maintains a regenerate church membership, has a first love for Christ, has qualified leaders, has a disciplined environment and an atmosphere of charity, is strong in God’s Word and prayer, is a reproofing church,

maintains God's standards for workers, is zealous for biblical separation, is careful about music, is a hard working church, builds godly homes, disciples youth, educates and protects the church from every spiritual danger, has a strong vision for evangelism and world missions, and trains preachers well.

Most churches today have moved away from the New Testament pattern, and as a result they are falling prey to all sorts of errors and moving into an increasingly weaker, softer, more worldly stance.

Churches *can* get stronger if they have the will. We are seeing it. Consider Berean Bible Baptist in metro Manila. When I first visited this church in 2004, it appeared to be a good church by numbers and enthusiasm and church planting. But it was actually spiritually weak and on the verge of sliding down the contemporary slippery slope. The members didn't have a consistent, effectual daily Bible reading habit, didn't know how to study their Bibles, had no study tools, and didn't know why they needed such things. Many of the young people were lukewarm because they were products of empty child professions. Many fathers were not the spiritual heads of their homes. They were working on party ships and neglecting their families. Mothers weren't keepers at home. The people were uneducated about things like New Evangelicalism and ecumenism. The music was quickly going contemporary. Looking back on this in January 2019, the pastor said, "We were on the verge of disaster." After fifteen years of moving in a stronger New Testament direction, this church has made great progress. The majority of the people are Bible readers and Bible students. Many of the youth are serious disciples of Christ. Fathers have quit working on party boats and are paying attention to their families. More mothers are keepers at home. The children are getting more attention after the fashion of Deuteronomy 6:6-9, Ephesians 6:4, and Titus 2:4-5. The church is more of a praying church than it has ever been. The preaching and

teaching is more biblically solid. The music is sacred on purpose and the people are being educated about music to an increasingly higher level. This change didn't come easily or quickly, but it has come because the senior pastor wanted it to happen and was willing to pay the price. While the typical fundamental Baptist church in the Philippines is getting spiritually weaker, this church (and some others associated with it) is getting stronger.

There is no program that will produce a perfect church. There never has been a perfect church on this earth, but there are many things we can do to make churches much stronger. All we need is the spiritual conviction to follow the infallible Scripture. The church is the house of God, and God is ready to do His part!

A New Testament church is *a unique environment in which the Spirit of God can operate freely to do His supernatural work of regeneration and sanctification*. By building a true New Testament church, we are building an environment that doesn't exist anywhere else on earth. It doesn't exist in an unscriptural church; it doesn't exist in a weak church; it doesn't exist in any parachurch organization; it doesn't exist even in a godly home that is not functioning as an integral part of a New Testament church.

Looking at a Stronger Church

This section consists of expository messages on key Bible passages that provide the pattern for the church for the entire age.

As we noted earlier, the pattern is not found in the church fathers, the Waldenses, the Lollards, the Anabaptists, the Lutherans, the Anglicans, the Reformed Presbyterianism, the Geneva Calvinists, the Brethren, Pentecostalism, Charismaticism, Fundamentalism, Evangelicalism, New Reformed Calvinism, denominational Baptists, or any of the streams of Independent Baptists.

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A Church That is the House of God, the Pillar and Ground of the Truth

“But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15).

This is a foundational passage about the church with far-reaching implications. It teaches the pre-eminence of the church in God’s plan.

The church is “*the house of God*” (1 Ti. 3:15).

Under the law of Moses, the house of God was the tabernacle (1 Ch. 6:48) and later the temple in Jerusalem (2 Ch. 3:3). Today the house of God is the church.

In the context of 1 Timothy 3:15, the “house of God” clearly refers to the assembly with pastors and deacons. It does not refer to a “universal church,” nor does it refer to a mere Bible study or prayer meeting.

That the church is God’s house means *the church belongs to God*. This is emphasized by the repetition (“*the house of God, the church of the living God*”).

That the church is God’s house means *the church is the most famous and important house on earth*. The most famous is not George Washington’s or Bill Gates’.

That the church is God’s house means *the church is only for God’s children*. It is necessary to be born again to be qualified to be a church member, as we see in the example of the first church (Ac. 2:41-42). Haste and carelessness in this is the most fundamental cause of apostasy. The church is always one generation away from spiritual destruction if the door is not guarded by the principle of a regenerate church membership. The church is the restoration of man’s relationship with God through redemption. It is better than Eden.

That the church is God’s house *means the church is a family*. The church is where the people of God are loved,

protected, nurtured, educated, developed, disciplined. It is where they learn to know the Father through the Son. It is where they learn the will of the Father. It is the nursery for spiritual infants and the training school for spiritual warriors.

That the church is God's house means *the church is where God's business is conducted*. It is the headquarters of world evangelism (Acts 13). The church should be at the center of every believer's life. How can I say that I love and honor God, if I don't love His house in the sense of being committed and engaged and faithful?

That the church is God's house means *the church is to be operated by God's laws*. We must behave ourselves by His rules. Man has never had the authority to make a different kind of church than the church that is revealed in Scripture. In the church, nothing is insignificant! Everything must be considered carefully, prayerfully, and weighed by God's Word. ***To operate the church by human thinking and tradition is a great evil; it is no small thing.*** We don't want an American church, a British church, an Australian church, a Spanish church, a Nepali church; we want a biblical church! **This is written first of all to church leaders. They are responsible to make sure that God's will is done in the church, and they will give account to God for how things are conducted.**

The church is “*the church of the living God*” (1 Ti. 3:15).

He is the true and living God as opposed to dead gods. “Living” encompasses all that God is. The church is the possession of the God who is the source and sustainer of all life. He is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, eternal, unchanging, unconquerable, utterly trustworthy. The church is BIG business!

The church is the *pillar and ground of the truth* (1 Ti. 3:15).

Truth is the church's chief business. Nothing is more important and more valuable than truth in this dark world of

lies. The truth is God's Word ("thy word is truth," Joh. 17:17). The truth is Christ ("I am the truth," Joh. 14:6).

Ground refers to the foundation, and **pillar** refers to the proclamation. Being the pillar is the chief work of the church, so it is mentioned first in this verse. What good is it for the church to be the foundation of the truth if it is not also the pillar of the truth to broadcast the truth to needy sinners? Bible study without evangelism is not God's will. But since in practice the ground must precede the pillar, we will discuss the church as the ground first.

*The church is the **GROUND** of the truth by possessing the truth.* The apostles and prophets delivered the truth to the churches, and the churches received the truth (1 Th. 2:13). Christ promised that He would send the Spirit which would guide the apostles into all truth (Joh. 16:13). We see this process in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, where Paul said he received the gospel from Christ, and he then delivered it to the churches, and in 1 Corinthians 11 where Paul said he received the Lord's Supper from Christ. The New Testament church is where every person must come who wants to find the truth. They must come to the despised New Testament church! Not to the great religions, the great universities, the great philosophers, the great scientists, the United Nations.

The church is the ground of the truth by preserving the truth. The church is tasked with preserving the Bible. The completed canon of Scripture has been placed into the hands of the churches to be kept. It is to be passed on from generation to generation by being committed to faithful men (2 Ti. 2:2). Each generation is to be taught to observe all things that Christ has commanded, which refers to the entire canon of Scripture (Mt. 28:20). The Old Testament was preserved by Israel (Ro. 3:2), particularly by the Levites (De. 17:9-13). The Jewish Masorete scribes kept every jot and tittle. They counted every letter on a page, and if they made a mistake they destroyed the whole page. The churches should

care about God's Word like this! The Bible text version issue is fundamental! Should the word "God" be in 1 Timothy 3:16? Should Acts 8:37 be in the Bible? Is there a question about the divine inspiration of the last 13 verses of Mark?

The church is the ground of the truth by understanding the truth. It is not enough that the church possess the Word of God; it must understand it. The church should not merely have a Bible Institute, it should be a Bible Institute.

The church is the ground of the truth by defending the truth. Compare Jude 3, "earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints." Because there are many enemies of the truth, no position can be maintained without constant indoctrination and aggressive defense. It is said that "no position can be maintained with a campaign." It is like a castle being attacked from every side. If the defenders do not watch one of the walls or towers, it will be taken from that side. The full New Testament faith is the church's castle, and each doctrine of the faith is assailed by "doctrines of devils" (1 Ti. 4:1). The apostles give the example of defending the whole truth. The church must be so well educated in Bible truth that it can maintain the truth against every error.

The church is the ground of the truth by serious Christian living. Doctrinal orthodoxy is not enough. The truth must be demonstrated. Note in the following passage that living blameless lives is necessary to shining as lights in the world. "Do all things without murmurings and disputings: That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world" (Php. 2:14-15). Verse 14 describes the church as the ground of the truth, and verse 15 describes the church as the pillar of the truth. This is the theme of Titus 2. The godly living described in that chapter is what "becomes sound doctrine" (Tit. 2:1). Every category of Christian is named: aged men, aged women, young women, young men, and servants. All are given their instructions

about good Christian living, and it is this that causes the Word of God *not* to be blasphemed (Tit. 2:5). It is this that adorns the doctrine of God (Tit. 2:10).

The church is the ground of the truth by discipline, which keeps the light of the gospel pure. We see this in 1 Corinthians 5:6-8. The church that pleases God is likened to a pure loaf of unleavened bread, and this requires discipline. If the church members live wicked lives and aren't disciplined, the church's light becomes corrupt; the world cannot see the pure truth about Christ. I think of a church member who did not pay her debts, did not pay her rent on time, and got into fistfights with unbelievers. She gave the truth of Christ a bad name until she was disciplined for her sin.

All of this is foundation work, ground work. It is not a small task, and it is not something that can be done and then forgotten. It is a big and continual work. The church's foundation must be deep and strong, and it must be maintained so that cracks do not appear and spread.

The church is also the **PILLAR** of the truth (1 Ti. 3:15).

The church is the pillar of the truth to hold it up high before the world. The church is the pillar of truth by proclaiming God's Word, by preaching the gospel. The church as the pillar of truth is the church as the candlestick of Christ (Re. 1:20). To be the pillar of the truth is to "preach the gospel to every creature" (Mr. 16:15). It is to "hold forth the word of life" (Php. 2:15). It is to be witnesses of Christ to all the earth (Ac. 1:8). It is to be "ambassadors for Christ" who proclaim the message of reconciliation with God (2 Co. 5:20).

As previously noted, the pillar is mentioned first, before the ground, though the ground or foundation is what upholds the pillar. Perhaps the pillar is mentioned first because it is the often the first thing to be left off of the church's program.

The church must be both the ground and pillar of the truth. As we have said, to be the ground of the truth is not enough. To love and study and preserve God's Word is an

essential business of the church, but it is not an end in itself. It is the foundation from which the Word of God is to be proclaimed to a needy world of lost and dying sinners. A church that focuses on Bible study for the saints but neglects the evangelization of the lost is a selfish, disobedient, and dying church. Likewise, it is not enough for a church to be the pillar of the truth while neglecting the ground. Many churches have emphasized evangelism while ignoring serious Bible study and godly Christian living.

1 Timothy 3:15 summarizes the church's main business, which is Christ's Great Commission (Mt. 28:18-20). Churches must not get sidetracked to less important things, such as entertainment, sports, politics, and any type of social gospel. Other institutions in this world can do those things and do them better than the churches, but only the churches can fulfill Christ's Great Commission.

A Spiritual House Made of Living Stones Church

"If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious. To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:3-5).

Peter describes the New Testament church as a spiritual house that God is building with living stones.

We see the Chief Cornerstone of the spiritual house.

- God always begins with Christ. Every true church is Christ-centered. He is the Saviour, the Lord, the Apostle and High Priest, the Chief Shepherd, the Bishop, the King, the Elder Brother, the Head of the body, the Bridegroom, the Chief Corner Stone, the Foundation Stone.

- Christ is "**disallowed**" ("*disallowed indeed of men ... the builders disallowed,*" 1 Pe. 2:4, 7). He was disallowed by Israel. They said He was demon possessed (Joh. 7:20), that He

performed miracles by devils (Mt. 12:24). They called for His crucifixion (Mt. 27:22-25; Lu. 23:18-23; Joh. 19:13-15). He was disallowed *by the nations*. For 2,000 years, Christ has been preached to the nations, and the response has largely been rejection. The age will culminate in worldwide rejection. See Psalm 2:1-3.

- Christ is **“chosen of God”** (1 Pe. 2:4). Christ is God’s chosen, God’s elect, God’s anointed. That is the meaning of “Christ” in Greek and “Messiah” in Hebrew. The Father chose the Son to be incarnated as the last Adam (1 Co. 15:45). He chose the Son that in Him all things will be one (Eph. 1:10). He chose Christ to be the Saviour, the Firstborn, Lord, King, Head.

- Christ is **“precious”** to God (1 Pe. 2:4). “Precious” is the Greek *entimos*, meaning “estimable, dear, costly, valuable.” Christ is the eternal Son of God in whom the Father has always delighted. “Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth” (Isa. 42:1). “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Mt. 3:17; 17:5). Christ is the “dear son” (Col. 1:13).

- Christ is **“precious”** to the believer (1 Pe. 2:7). Christ is precious to God, precious to the believer, precious to the elect angels, and precious to all of God’s sensible creatures. He is precious to the new believer, precious to the aged saint, and will be ever more precious throughout eternity as we grow in understanding of His infinite character.

- Christ is **“a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence”** (1 Pe. 2:8). Here Peter describes the judgment of all who are disobedient to Christ by rejecting the gospel. Christ is the stone of salvation for those who believe and the stone of judgment for those who disbelieve. “**Stone**” is *lithos*, which means a small rock (Mt. 4:3), and “**rock**” is *petra*, which refers to “a projecting rock, cliff.” Christ’s tomb was hewn out of the *petra* (Mt. 27:60). In this life, when someone rejects Christ, it appears to be of little consequence, like stumbling over a

stone. The individual seemingly goes on as if nothing has happened, but in reality he has thereby determined that he will appear at the Great White Throne Judgment and be crushed eternally by the rock of God's perfect justice.

We see the living stones and occupants of the spiritual house (1 Pe. 2:4-5).

- What a high calling! Without Christ, the sinner has no relationship with God and His spiritual house, but in Christ the redeemed sinner is lifted up to heavenly places and made great, and it is all by God's amazing grace through the blood of Christ.

- All of these blessings are obtained by coming to Christ ("**to whom coming**," 1 Pe. 2:4).

- The church is "**built up**" (1 Pe. 2:5). Churches are built. They don't just happen; they don't evolve. *The house is built by God.* It is God's plan, God's program, God's business; He is right in the middle of it. *The house is built by men.* Paul calls himself a wise masterbuilder and describes the believers as builders (1 Co. 3:10-13).

- The church is "**a spiritual house**" (1 Pe. 2:5). A church that has members that are nowhere to be found, whose salvation is questionable, who aren't faithful, who aren't serving Christ as priests, is not a New Testament church. The apostolic churches had plenty of problems (e.g., Corinth), but the problems were confronted unequivocally and dealt with zealously, as we see in the Epistles and in Revelation 2-3. A carnal or lukewarm condition was not accepted as the status quo. Paul exhorted the members of the church at Corinth to "examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith" (2 Co. 13:5). Christ warned the lukewarm Laodicea that He would spew them from His mouth. He warned backslidden Ephesus that He would remove their candlestick.

- The church is made of "**living stones**" (1 Pe. 2:5). *Each stone of the building is living.* A natural stone is a dead thing. It can be beautiful and colorful and shaped to interesting

forms, but it is still dead. There is nothing whatsoever that man can do to make a stone live. But God can. This describes the supernatural new birth. *Each stone has a divinely appointed place and purpose in God's house.* Each stone is created and shaped by God. The believer doesn't choose his calling; he surrenders to God's calling and seeks to prove the perfect will of God by spiritual growth and ministry (Ro. 12:1-8). Every born again believer is a living stone, and it is his privilege and opportunity to *surrender to* this reality and to seek to be the stone that God intends for him to be in God's house. *Living stones must be perfected.* A living stone is the only right material that the builders can use in constructing a holy temple, but a living stone is not born perfect. Only God can make a living stone, but it is the builders' job to shape the living stones into perfect conformity to God's will.

- The church is "***a holy priesthood ... royal priesthood***" (1 Pe. 2:5, 9). In Israel, *some* were priests, but in the church, *all* are priests. And in Israel *none* were *royal* priests! Israel's kings are in the lineage of Judah, not Levi, so there are no kings in Israel who were priests. The church is composed of kings who will rule and reign with Christ. This is big business!! Compare Revelation 1:5-6; 2:26-27; 3:21; 5:10. In Christ's millennial kingdom, the apostles will sit on twelve thrones judging the tribes of Israel (Mt. 19:28). Christ is a King-Priest; He "shall sit and rule upon his throne and he shall be a priest upon his throne" (Zec. 6:12-13), and the church will reign with Him as king-priests. The priesthood of the believers is the major theme of 1 Peter. The priesthood means that the believer's entire life is devoted to the worship of God ("to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God," 1 Pe. 2:5, "to show forth his praises," 1 Pe. 2:9). "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Col. 3:17). The New Testament priest worships God by seeing His hand in all of life and

learning of Him and worshiping Him in all things. The astronomer Johannes Kepler said, “I was merely thinking God’s thoughts after him. Since we astronomers are priests of the highest God in regard to the book of nature, it benefits us to be thoughtful, not of the glory of our minds, but rather, above all else, of the glory of God” (“Kepler,” *New World Encyclopedia*). The glory of God is seen in every drop of water, in every detail of the butterfly wing, in every facet of the living cell, in every element of the periodic table. **In this epistle, Peter explains how to be a priest. BY PATIENCE IN TRIALS** (1 Pe. 1:6-7). See also 1 Pe. 2:19-21; 3:14, 17; 4:12-14. By holding fast to God’s promises in trials without wavering the believer glorifies God and does the work of a priest. **BY HOLINESS** (1 Pe. 1:14-16). Before the Levitical priests could minister in the tabernacle, they had to wash in the laver (Ex. 30:18-21). Through their sin, Eli’s sons disgraced the priesthood and brought reproach upon God’s name (1 Sa. 2:12-17, 22). **BY PREACHING THE GOSPEL** (1 Pe. 1:25). The priests are also ambassadors. God is glorified in the gospel, whereby His love and grace and wisdom are made known, and by preaching the gospel the believer priests “shew forth the praises of him who has called you out of darkness.” **BY AN HONEST REPUTATION** (1 Pe. 2:12). Unbelievers are watching. The believer must not lie, steal, or cheat, must keep his promises, pay his debts, etc. Such “ordinary Christian living” is priestly work. **BY SUBMITTING TO GOD-ORDAINED AUTHORITY** (1 Pe. 2:13-14); God is the author of authority (Ro. 13:1). The believer must be a law-abiding person; he must have an attitude of respect toward authority. He does this by having his eyes on God (“for the Lord’s sake” 1 Pe. 2:13; “as unto the Lord” Eph. 5:22). This is how all of God’s people submit to authority: children to parents, wives to husbands, church members to church leaders. This is priestly work. The only exception is if the lower authority requires the believer to do something contrary to the higher authority (Ac. 5:29). **BY HONORING ALL MEN** (1 Pe. 2:17).

This is to treat all men as creatures made in God's image, as creatures having an eternal soul, of value to God. It is to recognize that both men and women are made in the image of God. To honor all men is to treat men equally, knowing that there are no superior races and no caste systems with God. All men alike are sons of Adam. To honor all men is to know that all men, without exception, are loved by God and are invited to salvation (Joh. 3:16), so it entails preaching the gospel to as many men as possible. To honor all men is to treat them sincerely without respect to covetousness, not trying merely to get something from them and to use them for one's own purposes. To honor all men means not to speak evil of them, which means not to speak maliciously, wrongly, with evil intent, with ill will (Tit. 3:2; Jas. 4:11). Christ is the example in honoring all men. He treated the lowliest servant the same as He treated the highest governor. He saved both men and women, Jews, Tyrians, and Samaritans. To treat all men in a Christ-like manner is the opposite of the way of the world, which is the way of inequality and maliciousness. The way of the world is the way of "living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another" (Tit. 3:3) **BY LOVING THE BROTHERHOOD** (1 Pe. 2:17). God is love and His kingdom is a kingdom of love. The two highest laws are to love God and to love my neighbor (Mt. 22:37-40). To love the brotherhood is the "one another" ministry that is emphasized in the New Testament. **BY BEING A GOOD WORKER** (1 Pe. 2:18-20). This is emphasized in Scripture by repetition. See also Eph. 6:5-9; Col. 3:22-25; Tit. 2:9-10. I do priest work by being dependable, honest, not stealing time by being late or leaving early or unnecessary talking, by using the phone or internet for personal use, by just sitting around (wasting just one half hour a day adds up to 180 hours a year stolen from one's employer), by working more slowly than I am capable of working, by buying something other than what I am authorized to buy. Christians should have the reputation of being best workers. Pharaoh searched for men of activity (Ge.

47:6), and businesses are doing the same today. Tennessee Temple students in the 1970s were desired by businesses because of their honesty and work ethic. **BY GODLY LIVING IN THE HOME** (1 Pe. 3:1-7). Being a godly husband, wife, father, mother, child is priest work! **BY A SEPARATED PILGRIM LIFESTYLE** (1 Pe. 4:1-4). The contemporary philosophy of running with the world to reach the world is the opposite of a pilgrim lifestyle. **BY PRAYER** (1 Pe. 4:7). Intercessory prayer is priest work. **BY MINISTERING HIS GIFTS** (1 Pe. 4:10-11). Teaching God's Word was a major part of the Levite's work (Eze. 44:23; Mal. 2:7; 2 Ch. 17:7-9). Likewise, every believer priest has the ministry of teaching (Heb. 5:12-14; Tit. 2:3-4), and some are called and gifted specifically for this task.

A Regenerate, Faithful, Growing Church

“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:36-42).

This is the first church, and though there were temporary characteristics that are not patterns for the future (e.g.,

apostles, apostolic signs, communalism), the following characteristics should mark every New Testament church:

Salvation (Acts 42:41)

- The fundamental mark of a New Testament church is a regenerate church membership.

- A regenerate church membership requires *the preaching of the gospel* (Christ crucified and risen, Acts 2:22-36; “many other words” Acts 2:40). It is the gospel that is the power of God unto salvation (Ro. 1:16). Salvation requires coming unto the knowledge of the truth (1 Ti. 2:4). It involves obeying from the heart “that form of doctrine which was delivered you” (Ro. 6:17). Christ taught that the gospel is to be preached to every creature, and those who believe the gospel are those who are saved (Mr. 16:15-16). The gospel is summarized in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4.

- A regenerate church membership requires *conviction* (Acts 2:37). This is the supernatural work of the Spirit, drawing, enlightening, convicting. There is no salvation apart from this work.

- A regenerate church membership requires *repentance* (Acts 2:38). Repentance is commanded by Christ (“except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish,” Lu. 13:3, 5) and by Paul (“God now commandeth all men every where to repent,” Ac. 17:30). Paul preached “repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Ac. 20:21). Repentance is to turn to God in submission. It is a change of mind that results in a change of life. Repentance is not works salvation; it is a change of mind, not a change of life. But it produces a changed life. Paul preached “that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance” (Ac. 26:20).

- A regenerate church membership requires *glad faith* (Acts 2:41). Their faith was not manipulated or pressured. When the Ethiopian eunuch asked Philip if he could be baptized, Philip replied, “if thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest” (Ac. 8:37).

- A regenerate church membership requires *conversion* (Acts 2:42). True salvation is regeneration. It is being made a new creature in Christ (2 Co. 5:17). It is to be translated from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light.

- Supernatural salvation is the fundamental of fundamentals for a sound New Testament church. We have gotten ever more careful about this.

Baptism (Acts 2:41)

- This is believer's baptism by immersion. It depicts the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, which is the gospel, and the believer's identification with Christ (Ro. 6:4-5). It is commanded by Christ (Mt. 28:19). It is a fundamental doctrine and practice.

- Salvation and baptism are the requirements for church membership--"and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls" (Ac. 2:41).

Discipleship (Acts 2:42)

- They continued stedfastly. This is a strong emphasis of their obedience, zeal, and faithfulness.

- The most common name for a New Testament believer is "disciple" (*methetes* in Greek). The term "believer" appears two times (Ac. 5:14; 1 Ti. 4:12); "Christian" appears three times (Ac. 11:16; 26:28; 1 Pe. 4:16); "saint" appears 62 times; "brethren" appears about 135 times; but "disciple" (referring to a disciple of Christ) appears about 268 times. Jesus defined a true disciple as follows: "Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, *then* are ye my disciples indeed" (Joh. 8:31).

Apostles Doctrine (Acts 2:42)

- The members of the first church loved doctrine. They loved Bible study. No one had to order them to be present in Bible teaching meetings. As soon as I was saved at age 23, for the first time in my life, I loved to read and study the Bible

and was eager for good Bible preaching/teaching, and by God's grace, that has not waned in 47 years.

- This is evidence of true discipleship. "He that is of God heareth God's Words" (Joh. 8:47). "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed" (Joh. 8:31-32). "My sheep hear my voice" (Joh. 10:27).

- They loved *sound* doctrine. They continued in the apostles' doctrine, not the doctrine of heretics. A church that continues in apostolic doctrine has a testing mindset. See 1 Th. 5:21-22. A New Testament church exercises a ministry of proving, evaluating, analyzing, judging. This is not a critical attitude. The objective is a positive one to avoid error and to "hold fast that which is good."

- A church that continues in doctrine is a serious Bible study church. We aim to make every member a serious Bible student. "Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus" (Col. 1:28). "... for every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Heb. 5:12-14). We are convinced that the equivalent of a Bible Institute education is the *beginning* of the level of Bible knowledge that is required for a fruitful Christian life in God's will.

- A church that continues in doctrine involves the right kind of preaching/teaching that feeds the sheep and builds them up in the faith and teaches them how to study and understand the Bible for themselves.

Fellowship (Acts 2:42)

- The members of the first church loved the brethren. This was their family, their crowd. And they loved *zealous* brethren.

- True fellowship is spiritual. It is not just eating and playing together. The world does that. The spiritual character

of a church will be seen in what the members love to talk about. What do the young people talk about? The men? The women?

Breaking of Bread (Acts 2:42)

- The members of the first church loved the Lord's Supper. Compare Acts 20:7.

- It is an important and essential practice. It is the time of remembering Christ, of learning of Christ, of expecting Christ's return.

- It is a very serious practice. It is a time of heart searching (1 Co. 11:27-32) and an element of church discipline ("with such an one no not to eat," 1 Co. 5:11).

Prayers (Acts 2:42)

- The members of the first church loved prayers (plural). It was a praying church.

- Prayer is mentioned at least 415 times in Scripture; 129 times in NT; 35 times in Acts; 25 times in Paul's epistles. It was a major emphasis of Christ's teaching.

- The true disciple is a praying Christian. His life is a life of prayer. He loves prayer. He has a daily prayer closet. He has seasons of prayer. He intercedes in prayer. He prays without ceasing. He is in communion with his God all through the day. He prays with his wife and family. He loves corporate prayer. He loves praying with the brethren. He has prayer partners.

- This is in great contrast to the typical church today. How can a church claim to be a New Testament church if its people don't "continue in prayers"?

Acts 2:41-42 is the *image* of a NT church. And it is the *test* of a NT church.

An Acts 2:41-42 church is not a church without sin and without problems. Compare Acts 5 and 6. But it is a congregation of true disciples of Christ who are zealous for the things of Christ.

We need to stop following tradition, even Baptist tradition. Tradition has weakened churches, not strengthened them.

I think of the southern Baptist church in which I grew up in Florida. All the kids made professions of faith, but there was no caution, no wisdom, no looking for evidence, and the professions were never questioned later on, regardless of how empty they proved to be. My former best friend (growing up) died at age 62, having lived a Christ-rejecting, filthy life, and being steeped in Native American spirituality, which is demonism, but his Southern Baptist mother thought he was in heaven because of his empty childhood profession. That is typical.

I think of **Highland Park Baptist Church** in Chattanooga, Tennessee, in its heyday. The governing principle seemed to be “get as many as you can as fast as you can.” When Lee Roberson became pastor in 1942, the membership was 1,000, the Sunday morning attendance was 400, and the mid-week service attendance was about 10, so 60% of the members were nowhere to be found and only 1% had enough Christianity to attend a mid-week service. (These statistics are from James Wigton, *Lee Roberson: Always about His Father’s Business*, 2010, p. 22.) That was and is typical both for Southern Baptists and for fundamental Baptists. And that pattern never changed at Highland Park even as the numbers exploded. When Dr. Roberson retired in 1982, Highland Park’s membership was 63,000, but Wednesday night attendance was about 3,000. That is the best measure of active membership, and that would leave 60,000 unaccounted for! The huge membership numbers got Highland Park listed as the world’s largest church, but since the vast majority of those “members” were not active, what did it mean?

Acts 2:41-42 Christianity is not “negative” or “boring” to saved people. Our young people enjoy their Christian lives. They love prayer. They love studying the Bible. There is zero pressure from them for entertainment. They love separation

from the world because they want God's will and they don't want to be devoured by the devil. They have turned from drugs, given up beautiful but worldly girlfriends, given up worldly social media, given up immodest dress, given up secular education that was hindering their spiritual lives. They love playing and singing sacred music. They love Christian ministry.

A Purifying Church

“Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Corinthians 5:6-8).

This is a true New Testament church. If a church is not purging, it is not a New Testament church. This means that most churches today are man-made. They are following human tradition rather than God's Word. Members can commit fornication with the world (James 4:4) with no consequences.

Paul likens the church to the feast of unleavened bread (Ex. 12:15). It began on the day of Passover, which signifies salvation (Ex. 12:1-14). It lasted seven days, the number of completion, signifying the entire Christian life. Beginning with salvation, the child of God is to purify himself of leaven, which is defined as “malice and wickedness” (1 Co. 5:8). This refers to the sins of the spirit and the flesh.

The purging is *absolutely necessary* (1 Co. 5:6). “Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?” A church that is not purging out leaven is being leavened and is on the way to apostasy, which can happen in one generation. If young church members are

allowed to live in worldliness with no consequences, that church is doomed.

The purging is a *strong command* (1 Co. 5:7). “Purge out” is the Greek aorist which is like a military command, “Purge it out!” God doesn’t accept sin in the Christian life and church. “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not” (1 Jo. 2:1). Sin is present, but it must not be ignored. It must be dealt with by repentance and confession, or God will chasten as He did some at Corinth who were abusing the Lord’s Supper and were not judging themselves (1 Co. 11:28-32).

The purging is *because of Christ’s sacrifice* (1 Co. 5:7). He died to save us from our sins, not that we might continue in our sins. “Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Tit. 2:14).

The purging is *strict*. “... there shall no leavened bread be seen with thee” (Ex. 13:7). The purging of all leaven describes the aim for perfect holiness in the Christian life. “... let us cleanse ourselves from ALL filthiness of the flesh and spirit” (2 Co. 7:1). “Wherefore laying aside ALL malice, and ALL guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings” (1 Pe. 2:1). “And have NO fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness” (Eph. 5:11). These Scriptures are to be applied to every area of the life: personal life, family life, church life, music, dress, occupation, entertainment, literature, social media, friends, associates. This is a very strict way of life!

The purging must be *continual, persistent, unceasing* (1 Co. 5:8). To “keep the feast” points to a process. The feast of unleavened bread in Israel was a week long, seven days, which is the number of completion. The feast of unleavened bread in the Christian life is lifelong. It is a daily, continual purging. It is a process of putting off the old man and putting on the new man (Eph. 4:22-24). It requires an atmosphere of

purging, a purging type of church, which consists of such things as 2 Timothy 4:2-type preaching, effectual teaching, personal Bible reading, study, memorization, and meditation, exhorting one another, discipline. As soon as the purging stops, the growth stops. When a church ceases to be a purging church, it is on the path of eventual apostasy.

There are two aspects of sanctification in this chapter. There is positional sanctification, which is the believer's position "in Christ"; it is eternal and unchanging ("ye are unleavened," 1 Co. 5:7). And there is practical sanctification, which is progressive sanctification, Christian growth ("purge out therefore the old leaven," 1 Co. 5:7).

A purging church requires a regenerate church membership. Unsaved people will not respond to spiritual purging. It is impossible to have a pure lump church if it is a mixed multitude of saved and lost.

This is not a church that is content with a congregation full of leaven as the status quo. Paul didn't allow even one member to continue in disciplinary sin. For a pastor to be content with a leavened lump is to be a rebel against God. That is not a New Testament church.

The purging pleases Christ and has His blessing and power (1 Co. 5:4). "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ." We must not fear man. We must not fear the human consequences of discipline. If God be for us, who can be against us!

A Turning, Serving, Watching Church

"Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father; Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God. For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among

you for your sake. And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost: So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing. For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come” (1 Thessalonians 1:3-10).

Chapter 1 describes the character of the church members, while the rest of the epistle contains God’s instructions to them. You can’t disciple people who aren’t truly saved. The foundation of a regenerate church membership is absolutely essential.

They had clear evidence of election. The evidence was manifold. It consisted of their work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope (1 Th. 1:3), being followers of Paul and of the Lord (1 Th. 1:6), having joy in affliction (1 Th. 1:6), being examples to all that believe (1 Th. 1:7), sounding out the word of the Lord (1 Th. 1:8), turning to God from idols (1 Th. 1:9), serving the living and true God (1 Th. 1:9), and waiting for his Son from heaven (1 Th. 1:10). The evidence of their election was unequivocal and ever increasing.

They turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God (1 Th. 1:9). This is a definition and example of biblical repentance. It is a turning. It is a change of mind about God that results in a change of life. It is to turn to the true and living God, and it is to reject false gods, false religion, false philosophy, false gospels.

They were waiting for Christ’s return (1 Th. 1:10). The imminent return of Christ is a fundamental and essential doctrine. It must be a major emphasis of the church. It is

motivating and purifying. Looking for the imminent return of Christ is an evidence of salvation. Compare Hebrews 9:28--“unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.”

They sounded out the Word of the Lord (1 Th. 1:8). The church had evangelistic zeal, missionary vision. Macedonia and Achaia included all of Greece today, an area about 50,000 square miles! To be such a gospel preaching powerhouse should be the goal of every church.

A Church in Which the Brethren Are Full of Goodness, Filled with All Knowledge

“And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another” (Romans 15:14).

This is the picture of a true New Testament church.

Paul is addressing the whole church. “You” is plural; “brethren” is plural. This is not a church in which a few of the members are full of goodness and filled with knowledge, while the rest are half-hearted, uncommitted, undependable, barely involved.

Paul was persuaded or confident of the church at Rome because he had reason to believe that they were born again (“my brethren”) and that they would do what he was instructing them to do. It was a sound church. Paul did not have to correct them on many things as he did the church at Corinth. He only had to teach and exhort them to keep growing and progressing.

We see the characteristics that are necessary for a effectual “one another” ministry in the church. The Spirit of God encapsulated the entire spiritual life of the church into two major characteristics.

First, the brethren must be “**full of goodness.**” This is the spiritual life. It is the life filled with good things by the Spirit. Every brother and sister must pursue goodness. Note that the goal is to be “full of” goodness. This speaks of a passionate pursuit of spiritual growth as described in 2 Peter 1:4-8. Here we see the characteristics of “goodness”--virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, charity.

Second, the brethren must be “**filled with all knowledge.**” This is knowledge of the Word of God, Spirit-taught wisdom. Note, again, that the goal is to be “filled with all” knowledge. This is not the description of a professing Christian who reads the Bible once in a while, hit and miss, who doesn’t know how to interpret the Bible for himself, who has been saved for years but is still a babe in the use of Scripture, still unskilful (Heb. 5:12-13). Romans 15:14 is the description of a believer who is a passionate, effectual Bible student, who reads it, studies it, memorizes it, meditates on it day and night, applies it to his life, has his spiritual senses exercised by it to discern both good and evil (Heb. 5:14).

This is a true New Testament. This must be the measure and the goal.

A Church That Is Perfecting Every Member

“Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God; Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory: Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus: Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily” (Colossians 1:25-29).

This is not a church that is full of members who never grow. This is not a church that lets the members live contrary to God's Word with no serious effort to change them and no consequences if they don't change.

The New Testament church is to fulfill the Word of God (Col. 1:25).

This is the purpose of everything in life. It was Paul's purpose. It is the purpose of every saint. It is the church's purpose. Everything must be done in accordance with God's Word and will. The church is at the heart of God's purpose in this present age. It is very big business!

The New Testament church is a mystery (Col. 1:26-27).

Church truth was hidden in the Old Testament era and is now "manifested" by God to the saints by New Testament Scripture. The Bible is divine revelation. We can't know these things by ourselves. It is a product of God's great love and mercy.

The mystery is that Christ will dwell in Gentiles ("Christ in you, the hope of glory," Col. 1:27). Here we see true salvation. (1) Salvation is in Christ. (2) Salvation is for "the Gentiles." It is for people who don't have God's law and covenants, who are "without Christ, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12). (3) Salvation is "riches." The riches are the incomprehensible riches of being joint heirs with Christ (Ro. 8:17), of possessing "all things" (1 Co. 3:21). (4) Salvation is "Christ in you." It is an intimate relationship with the Son of God. (5) Salvation is a "hope." This means it is sure and steadfast (Heb. 6:19). (6) Salvation is glory. "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory" (Col. 3:4). Christ will come in glory (Mt. 24:30).

The New Testament church is a body of people who have "Christ in you" (Col. 1:27).

We see a regenerate church membership. It is impossible to disciple people who are not born again. They must be reconciled (Col. 1:21-22). It is impossible to present men perfect in Christ Jesus unless they are in Christ!

The evidence of salvation is not only a changed life but it is to “continue in the faith grounded and settled” (Col. 1:23).

The New Testament church is for the preparation of God’s people (“Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus,” Col. 1:28).

This is the goal of every New Testament church. We aren’t an entertainment center, a social center, a dance club, a debating society, a sports venue. We aren’t building Christ’s kingdom or saving the earth.

Note some of the lessons in this practical Scripture.

1. We are to preach Christ (“whom we preach”). Christ must be the center and focus. He is the only Saviour, the High Priest, the Advocate, the Chief Shepherd, the Bishop, the Head of the church, the firstborn from the dead, the Lord, the King. The people must know Christ and must be built up in Him. He must be the focus of Bible study, of preaching, and of fellowship. The Bible is Christ-centered; the new creation is Christ-centered; every believer is to be Christ-centered; every home is to be Christ-centered; every church is to be Christ-centered; the millennial kingdom will be Christ-centered; the New Jerusalem will be Christ-centered. Everything outside of Christ-centeredness is vanity and death. God’s eternal plan is “that in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him” (Eph. 1:10).

2. We are to aim to present “every man.” God doesn’t save groups, He saves individuals, and He has an eternal plan for each of His redeemed saints. No one is to be neglected or left behind. Every man is a member of the body (1 Co. 12:27), has spiritual gifts (Ro. 12:3-8), is an ambassador of Christ (2 Co.

5:20), is a member of the priesthood (1 Pe. 2:5). The people are the Lord's, and each will give account of himself to Christ. The church's job is to prepare each member to hear, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

3. Every man is to be warned ("warning every man"). Note that warning is mentioned first. This is a way to emphasize its importance. To mention warning first is a loud reproof of the tendency of contemporary churches to neglect this ministry. Warning is difficult. It is hard to receive and hard to give. It is often the first thing that slips away from a ministry. Warning refers to a ministry of exhortation, reproof, rebuke, and correction toward sin and error. This is necessary for making true disciples of Jesus Christ. It is a necessary part of the atmosphere that produces disciples. Consider the following emphasis from Scripture: Ac. 20:31; Eph. 5:11; 1 Th. 5:14; 1 Ti. 5:20; 2 Ti. 4:2; Tit. 1:13; 2:15; Re. 3:19. Warning is necessary because God's people are still sinners in this present world. The "old man" is present (Eph. 4:22). "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 Jo. 1:8). There are sins that easily beset us (Heb. 12:1). Warning is not only done through the preaching; a personal warning is what is often missing in churches. It is not enough to warn publicly from the pulpit. The warning must also be an "every man" ministry. Warning involves discipline. Laws and rules without enforcement produce confusion and anarchy.

4. Every man is to be taught ("teaching every man"). This refers to teaching the whole counsel of God (Ac. 20:27), teaching them to observe all things (Mt. 28:20). This requires pastors and teachers who are serious students and gifted educators and disciplers. It requires that the church not only *have* a Bible institute, but that it *be* a Bible institute.

5. This ministry is to be done "with all wisdom." This is not learning mere Bible facts and rote memorization. The Word of God must be *taught* with wisdom, which again points to

the right kind of leaders. And the Word of God must *produce* wisdom. The Word of God must be understood by the people so that it produces practical wisdom and permeates every part of their daily lives with God's will.

6. This ministry is to aim for perfection ("perfect in Christ Jesus"). We are to aim high. If we aim for perfection, we will keep moving. "Perfect" means "thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Ti. 3:16-17). This is not a church that is content with a low level of spirituality.

7. This ministry requires much labor ("labor, striving" Col. 1:29). "Labour" is the Greek *agonizomai*, which was used of the public games. It is translated "striving for the mastery" (1 Co. 9:25). It refers to giving one's all, straining every nerve, hyper-focused on an objective. This describes qualified, hard-working, ever-studying preachers and teachers.

8. This ministry requires God's working ("according to his working, which worketh in me mightily," Col. 1:29). God's working is a "mighty" working!

9. The aim is to "present every man." This refers to presenting every man to Christ. Members don't belong to pastors any more than children belong to parents. The church is Christ's flock. Pastors should imagine bringing their members before Christ and presenting them to him, like a shepherd bringing the sheep to the owner.

A Pure Heart Church

"Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Timothy 2:2).

This is a New Testament church in a nutshell.

This is Christian discipleship in a nutshell. It is fleeing youthful lusts, and it is following righteousness, and it is done in the context of pure-hearted saints.

Any one without the other three does not work. If I put evil things out of my life, I create a vacuum that must be filled with things that are godly. If I try to live a victorious Christian life alone, it doesn't work well.

Observe that Paul mentions the "negative" part of this process first. Fleeing youthful lusts is first. Separation from evil must be prominent in the Christian life and home and church. It's not optional. When Paul taught about knowing the will of God, he put non-conformity to the world at the center (Ro. 12:1-2). The apostle John is emphatic that "if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 Jo. 2:15), and James says, "whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (Jas. 4:4). Separation from unrighteousness and from the evil things of the world must be front and center in every church. It must be reflected in the preaching and teaching and throughout the church's ministry.

There are "**youthful lusts.**" There are lusts and temptations associated particularly with youth. These are things such as vanity, self-absorption, selfish ambition, sexual experimentation and illicit pleasure, longing for fame, desire for popularity, and rebellion to authority. These sins and temptations are common to all ages, but youth are inexperienced and untested and have not yet discovered the suffering that comes with the pursuit of sinful pleasure. Typically, youth only see the "pleasures of sin" and are ignorant of the fact that the pleasures are but "for a season" (Heb. 11:25). Youth see the pleasures of the "strange woman," referring to fornication in all of its variations, and do not see that "her end is bitter as wormwood" (Pr. 5:3-4). That there are "youthful lusts" is why the modern pop culture is so successful and alluring. It appeals to youthful lusts through its attitude, its music, its dress, its humor, its philosophy of life, its entertainment. At its heart is "live as you please; be your own person; don't let anyone tell you what

to do.” The generation gap is an appeal to youthful lusts. “Be young and free; don’t let older people determine how you live; they don’t understand you.” It is rebellion to God, who instructs youth to use youth wisely because it is fleeting and cannot be regained. “Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them” (Ec. 12:1).

Fleeing from sin is necessary. If I see that I am tempted in a certain matter, I must flee that temptation. To every extent possible, I must avoid every situation that involves that temptation. I must imitate wise Joseph, who was about 18 years old when he fled from the wicked wife of Potiphar (Ge. 39:7-12). The word “*flee*” is very strong. It speaks of zeal and passion. Victory won’t come through half-hearted, lukewarm Christian living. It requires serious discipleship. Whenever the believer finds that he or she is being tempted by evil, he must flee from that thing as from a poisonous snake. As much as possible, he must avoid situations in which he will be tempted. When I quit smoking as a young believer I had to be careful to avoid those situations that brought back the desire to smoke. I stopped drinking coffee for a while, for example, because I always smoked when I drank coffee. The former drunkard must stay far away from anything that would enflame that unholy appetite again. He must stay far away from places that sell liquor and from anything that reminds him of his past. Fleeing from evil lusts requires that the man avoid magazines and movies that depict women in sensual dress, and bathing beaches where women parade around half naked, and internet sites and social media which draw his attention to immodest women. For a woman, it requires fleeing from any situation that would cause her to have romantic thoughts toward a man other than her husband, whether it is literature or movies or a relationship with a co-worker.

Victory over sin also requires following righteousness, faith, charity, peace. “**Follow**” is *dioko*, which means to pursue. It is a strong word. It is translated “given to” (Ro. 12:13) and “press toward” (Php. 3:14). It is most often translated “persecute,” as Saul persecuted Christians (Ac. 22:4). He pursued them with great passion and diligence. Likewise, the child of God must *pursue* righteousness, faith, charity, peace, and every good thing that pleases and glorifies God. That’s what Paul pursued after his conversion. Instead of pursuing Christians, he gave his full attention and energy to pursuing Christ and the things of Christ. “Follow” is present tense indicating continuous action. God is instructing the believer to follow and keep on following, to follow and follow and follow. “Follow” is imperative mood, meaning it is like a military command!

Victory over sin requires close fellowship with godly believers (“***with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart***”). Fellowship with the right people is essential. One’s environment plays a major role in one’s spiritual and moral condition. The Bible warns that “evil communications corrupt good manners” (1 Co. 15:33). I must have the right friends. This is one of the many reasons why it is so necessary to be a faithful, committed, serving member of a *good* church. The fellowship must be in the right church and with the right saints. It must be with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. This is not a nominal Christian. It is not a Sunday morning only Christian who spends the rest of the week pursuing his own passions rather than God’s perfect will. It is not a hypocritical Christian who professes to love Christ but his heart actually loves the world. A pure heart is a regenerated heart, a heart that loves Christ, a heart that loves holiness, a heart that is passionate for the Word of God, a heart surrendered to God’s will.

A Ministering Body Church

“And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (Ephesians 4:11-16).

We see a New Testament church in Ephesians 4:11-16. It is an edifying, ministering body, with the leaders building up the members and each member having an important part in the ministry.

This is a serious church.

The New Testament church is the most important, serious business on earth. It is a product of the Son of God's incarnation, atonement, and ascension (Eph. 4:10). It is a perfecting entity (Eph. 4:12). It is the body of Christ (Eph. 4:12). It is the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ (Eph. 4:13).

We don't see an entertainment program here. We don't see lukewarm, half-hearted Christianity. We don't see a church that is just going through the motions of following tradition. We don't see a mixed multitude in which only a small percentage of the body is serious about the things of Christ. This is a “perfecting, edifying, no more children, grow up into him in all things, every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working” type of church.

This is a church that is a body of “saints” (Eph. 4:12).

Saints are the redeemed who are set apart in Christ, owned by God, justified, sanctified. This describes a regenerate church membership.

The members of the church at Ephesus are described in chapters 1-2. They are the faithful in Christ Jesus (Eph. 1:1), blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ (Eph. 1:3), chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy before him in love (Eph. 1:4), predestinated unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:5), accepted in the beloved (Eph. 1:6), redeemed through his blood (Eph. 1:7), obtained an inheritance (Eph. 1:11), sealed with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13), made alive (Eph. 2:5), raised up to sit in heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:6), saved (Eph. 2:8), created in Christ Jesus unto good works (Eph. 2:10), made nigh by the blood of Christ (Eph. 2:13), fellowcitizens with the saints and of the household of God (Eph. 2:19).

A church cannot possibly function according to Ephesians 4:11-16 if it is the typical mixed multitude of saved and lost, faithful and unfaithful, true disciples and lukewarm.

This is a church with the right leaders (Eph. 4:11).

This is the first thing that is mentioned in the passage. Without the right leaders, there can be no right churches

Apostles and prophets were temporary ministries. The apostles had sign gifts to authenticate their ministries (2 Co. 12:12). Prophets operated until the completion of the full canon of Scripture.

Evangelists, pastors, and teachers are abiding ministries. Pastors and teachers are two positions. Every pastor must be able to teach, but not every teacher is a pastor. There is a gift of teaching (Ro. 12:7). Evangelists are like Philip who preached in Samaria and to the Ethiopian eunuch and in the cities of the coast of Judea (Ac. 8). Pastors, teachers, and evangelists work together to build up the churches.

Here we see teams of leaders, as throughout the New Testament. There were 12 apostles. Missionaries were sent out by teams (Acts 13:1-4; 15:40). There were prophets and teachers at Antioch (Ac. 13:1). Elders, plural, were ordained in the churches (Ac. 14:28; Php. 1:1).

These are God-called leaders (“he gave”). Paul said to the elders at Ephesus that the Holy Spirit had made them overseers (Ac. 20:28). The ministry is a divine calling.

It is the leaders’ job to prepare the whole church for the work of the ministry. There is large work to be done for God in this present world. The church is God’s chosen instrument, and every member has an essential part. A New Testament church is a working church! It is the work of the Great Commission, which is the work of evangelism and discipleship (Mt. 28:19-20; Mr. 16:15). The leaders are the principals of the church as a Bible institute. They are the overseers of the church as the headquarters for world missions. They are the superintendents of the spiritual armory, to equip the saints for warfare.

The goal is perfection. “Perfecting” is the Greek *katartismos*, which means to finish, to make complete, to make fully ready, to set up, to establish, to put a thing in its appropriate condition. Paul used the imagery of building a house in 1 Corinthians 3:9-12.

- *The perfecting of the saints is to edify the church* (Eph. 4:12). The goal is to produce a spiritual, Christ-centered, biblically-educated people, not just a busy people. It is a crock pot approach vs. a microwave approach.

- *The perfecting of the saints means to bring the church to the unity of the faith* (Eph. 4:14). The goal is perfect unity, no divisions, one mind in Christ (1 Co. 1:10).

- *The perfecting of the saints means to bring the church to a perfect man* (Eph. 4:13). The perfect man is the fulness of Christ. The churches are the beginning of the fulfillment of God’s eternal plan, which is “in the dispensation of the

fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ” (Eph. 1:10). The church’s chief goal is to grow into the image of Christ. “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren” (Ro. 8:29). “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Co. 3:18).

- *The perfecting of the saints means to bring the church to spiritual maturity so that the members are no longer children* (Eph. 4:14). A church of perpetual children is not God’s will, and the leaders must never be content to pastor such a church.

- *The perfecting of the saints means to protect the church from spiritual danger* (Eph. 4:14). A New Testament church is aware of the presence of spiritual danger, and it is aggressively protecting itself. A New Testament church understands the Bible’s teaching about apostasy (“evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived,” 2 Ti. 3:13). A New Testament church aims not to be tossed about by *any* wind of false doctrine.

- What a big, serious task! We see that the leaders must be highly capable men; they must be able to minister in such a way that they produce perfection. We see the necessity of the standards that are emphasized in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. They must have good quality spiritual lives so they can back up what they teach by how they live. They must be skillful Bible preachers and teachers. They must have spiritual discernment, to discern the saved from the lost, to recognize spiritual gifts and callings, to see through hypocrisy and deception. They must be able to protect the church from false teachers, which requires serious knowledge, courage, and wisdom. They must be able to train the church in evangelism and prepare workers for the harvest. They must be able to instruct the families so that they are built up in Christ and

can produce a godly seed. They must be able to reprove, rebuke, correct, and discipline.

The leaders must have authority to do the work of perfecting. They must be in control of the church's preaching/teaching ministries. That the church is a body and every member is a minister does not mean all have equal authority. It doesn't mean the church is a democracy and everything must be approved by church vote. Some are overseers (Ac. 20:28). Some "have the rule over you" (Heb. 13:7, 17).

This is a church that is growing (Eph. 4:15).

It is a church that is making progress. It is moving ahead, getting stronger. This is the opposite of the direction that most churches are moving, which is weaker, less wisdom, less power, less fruit, less vision, less zeal. The church that is growing is not going backwards.

It is a church that is growing "in Christ." He is our wisdom, our way, our life, our strength.

It is a church that is growing "in all things." This was what Christ commanded, "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Mt. 28:20). This is a big job. Every saint should be passionate to grow up into him in all things.

This is a church that is an edifying body (Eph. 4:16).

A New Testament church operates as a body with every member having an important part in the life of the body. Compare 1 Co. 12:12, "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ."

The life and ministry flows from Christ. "From whom" points to Christ in verse 15. He is the source of all spiritual life by the Spirit. All His people have to do is to be "led by" (Ga. 5:18), "walk in" (Ga. 5:25), "be filled with" (Eph. 5:19), "yield to" (Ro. 6:19), "mind the things of" (Ro. 8:5), and "put on" (Eph. 4:24) the Spirit.

The body is to be “fitly joined together and compacted.” It is to be united in God’s Spirit and God’s will. It is to be joined together like the human body for which it is a metaphor. This is serious unity. This is spiritual unity, not worldly unity.

Every member is to supply his part to the work of the body (“that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part”). This is the “one another” ministry that is emphasized throughout the New Testament Epistles--“admonish one another” (Ro. 15:14), “by love serve one another” (Ga. 5:13), “bear ye one another’s burdens” (Ga. 6:2), “forgiving one another” (Eph. 4:32), “forbearing one another” (Col. 3:13), “teaching and admonishing one another” (Col. 3:16), “comfort one another” (1 Th. 4:18), “edify one another” (1 Th. 5:11), “exhort one another” (Heb. 3:13; 10:25), “consider one another, to provoke unto love and to good works” (Heb. 10:24). Each member of the church is to be thinking about how he or she can contribute to the edifying of the body. How can I help? What can I contribute? How can I encourage and strengthen my fellow brethren? What can I say? What can I do? What can I give? How can I pray?

The leaders’ part is to build up all of the members so they can do what God has called them to do. The leaders are not to do all of the work of the ministry; they are to prepare all of the saints for the work of the ministry.

Every member has a function in the body, but every member is not of equal function. Every member does not have the same authority. We see pastoral authority in 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 and Hebrews 13:7, 17. The authority of the church leaders is seen in the term “bishop,” which means overseer (Ac. 20:28; Php. 1:1; 1 Ti. 3:1, 2; Tit. 1:7; 1 Pe. 5:2).

The members are placed in the body according to God’s will. God is sovereign over these things. “But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will” (1 Co. 12:11). Every member must,

therefore, seek his place and accept his place in the body. Every member must do his unique part. If a member does not do his part, the whole body suffers. If a member tries to do a part that is not his, the whole body suffers. If the hand says, "I want to be a foot," or the eye says, "I want to be an ear," the body is crippled, because a hand is not a foot and an eye is not an ear. "For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith" (Ro. 12:3).

The body is to "increase." God has designed every body to be fruitful and to increase. When God made the creation, He made it to bear "fruit after his kind" (Ge. 1:11). Every church should be growing spiritually *and* increasing numerically, not just one or the other.

The body is to "edify itself in love." The members are to love the church and seek to edify it. They are to love one another. Everything is to be done in love. God is love, and His kingdom is a kingdom of love, and the church is the forerunner and outstation of the coming kingdom. To participate in the ministry of the body must be a major focus of the believer's life in this world. I am not saved to live for myself or unto myself or by myself. I am saved to be a member of a body. This is the very opposite of a self-centered life. It is a giving life, a life that lives for others, which is the Christ-life.

This type of church requires heart-level commitment and faithfulness on the part of all members.

- Consider the services. Every service of such a church should be carefully designed to build up the body, and every member is a necessary part of this. Every member must attend to get as much out of the service as possible and to contribute as much as possible.

- To get as much as possible from the prayer. The church must have a lot of corporate and body prayer, and the people must be present for this ministry to be most effectual. Contrast churches in which only a tiny percentage of the members attend prayer meetings. I could mention church after church after church that I know of personally that is in this terrible condition. To neglect corporate prayer is a great sin. These are not Ephesians 4 churches. I once rebuked such a congregation by saying, "If God saw that His people really cared about praying so that they were in attendance at the prayer meetings and were fervent about praying, would He not be moved?"

- To get as much as possible from the song service. It is a "one another" ministry (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). In contrast, we think of churches in which the people don't sing, don't sing out heartily, even talk and text during the song service.

- To get as much as possible from the preaching and teaching. There must be as few distractions as possible: no one going in and out unless absolutely necessary, phones turned off or in airplane mode so there are no notifications. The people's minds must be focused on hearing God's Word: listening carefully, taking notes, capturing things, learning to understand the Bible better, looking for God's message for me personally, considering what I need to change, noting things that can be discussed with the family.

- To get as much as possible from, and to contribute as much as possible to, the fellowship: coming with the mindset to encourage and build up the brethren (to love, admonish, and exhort one another), to minister to the visitors, not just to enjoy my little clique, and not to discuss the things of the world.

In these passages, we have looked long and hard at a true New Testament church. This is the pattern for every church of every time and place.

Let's leave tradition and pragmatism and the *status quo* behind and get back to the Bible!

An Antioch Missionary Church

“Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away” (Acts 13:1-4).

Every true New Testament church is an Antioch church. It must have a missionary, church planting vision and zeal.

It is a church that raises up ministry-gifted men to be preachers, teachers, pastors, evangelists. This must be a *major* business of every church. It is done by earnest, persistent prayer for God to raise up workers (Lu. 10:2). Only God can call them and gift them. It is done by an effectual discipling program that encompasses all ages, from the children to the elderly. It is done by persistent exhortation of the brethren to surrender themselves 100% to Christ and to His work in this needy world (Ro. 12:1-2). It is done by having a strong, constant emphasis on Christ's Great Commission as the vision that every believer is to catch for his own life (Mt. 28:18-20; Mr. 16:15; Lu. 24:44-48; Ac. 1:8). It is done by a strong Bible training program for workers, preachers, teachers, evangelists, pastors (2 Ti. 2:2; Tit. 1:9).

It is a church that is busy reaching its own area with the gospel. The church was founded upon zealous gospel preaching (Ac. 11:19-21). An Antioch church has the goal of getting the gospel to every soul as Christ has commanded (Mr. 16:15). That is a never-ending job. It requires training, planning, organization, action, participation by every member. The Great Commission begins at home, with our

own Jerusalem, then proceeds out to our Judea and our Samaria, then to the uttermost part of the earth through the sending out of, and the support of, missionaries. “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Ac. 1:8).

It is a church that is listening to the voice of the Spirit of God, yielding to Him, following Him, open to His every leading (Ac. 13:2).

It is a church that ordains and sends out missionary church planters to multiply itself (Ac. 13:3-4). Their work is not finished until there are New Testament churches established with their own leaders (Ac. 14:23).

A church lacking this vision and zeal is not a New Testament church, and if a church lets this vision and zeal grow dim, it ceases to be a New Testament church.

A Christ-Owned Church

I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet,

Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.

And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks;

And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle.

-- His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire;

And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters.

And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.

And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last:

-- I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive forevermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.

Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter;

The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches (Revelation 1:10-20).

This is the only place in the New Testament where we see Christ speaking directly to the churches. In other places, He is speaking through apostles and prophets. And in other places, He speaks to churches in general. In Revelation 1-3 He speaks to churches individually and particularly. We see that this is Christ's way. This is how He deals with every church that He owns: personally and individually.

If a church is truly a New Testament church, it will be under the ministry of Christ in exactly the fashion we see here. If a church can become worldly and lukewarm and not characterized by first love for Christ as the status quo, how can it be called a New Testament church?

He is the risen, ascended, glorified Head of the new creation. He was dead, but is alive forevermore (Re. 1:18). He is described in His glory (Re. 1:13-16). He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; in all things He has the preeminence; He has a name above all names. He has been

exalted far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named. All things are under His feet.

He owns the churches and values them. They are described as golden candlesticks (Re. 1:12). He shed His blood for them.

He stands in the midst of the churches (Re. 1:13). He is not far off. He is no distance away at all. He is right in the midst of the churches. He is right there in the midst of the people and their daily lives and the church functions.

He sees the churches individually and deals with them individually. There are seven churches of Asia, not the “church of Asia.” There is a “general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven” (Heb. 12:23), but the New Testament epistles deal with individual churches. The church that is the house of God, the pillar and ground of the truth, is the church that has pastors and deacons (1 Ti. 3). There is no practicality to “the church of Asia” or the “church of Manitoba.”

He holds the pastors of the churches. The “stars” are the churches’ messengers (Re. 1:20). Pastors don’t own churches. They are stewards for the chief Shepherd and they will give account for everything they do and teach (1 Pe. 5:1-4). One of the most important things a church can do is ordain the right pastors and appoint the right teachers and ministers. Failure here has resulted in widespread corruption.

He has an earthly purpose for the churches. They are described as candlesticks (Re. 1:13), which refers to the Great Commission of preaching the gospel and standing for the truth in a dark world. This is a big, full-time work, which entails preaching the gospel to every person in every nation (“every creature,” Mr. 16:15; “all nations” Lu. 24:47) and discipling believers so that are taught to “observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Mt. 28:20). The church

as candlestick refers to the church as the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Ti. 3:15).

He sees the churches and knows them. His eyes are “as a flame of fire” (Re. 1:14). This signifies Christ’s omniscience. It signifies “his piercing, penetrating, perfect knowledge, a thorough insight into all persons and all things” (Matthew Henry). Nothing can be hidden from Him. He knows every secret thought and motive. “Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do” (Heb. 4:13). David said, “O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether” (Ps. 139:1-4). To each church Christ says, “I know thy works” (Rev. 1:1, 9, 13, 19; 3:1, 8, 15).

He speaks to the churches. With “a great voice, as of a trumpet” (Re. 1:10). “His voice as the sound of many waters” (Re. 1:15). “Out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword” (Re. 1:16). The word of Christ is likened to a trumpet, a great waterfall, and a sword. It is awakening, powerful, overwhelming, enlightening, convicting. The Scripture is the Word of Christ, and it is by the Scripture that Christ speaks to His churches. The church is under the authority of God’s Word and must pay *serious* attention to it. The Bible is indeed the church’s sole authority for faith and practice. It is the very voice of Christ. The church must receive the Bible as the infallible Word of God, believe every word of it, read it, study it, rightly divide it, memorize it, meditate upon it day and night, honor it, delight in it more than honey, love it more than silver and gold. The people must pay heed to the Bible as a trumpet blast, focusing full attention on it, not allowing themselves to be distracted from it. They must allow it to keep them awake from the sleep of backsliding. As they read

it and study it and hear it preached and taught, they must let the Bible do its searching work as the quick and powerful two-edged sword, piercing even the dividing asunder of soul and spirit (Heb. 4:12). They must let it discern their thoughts and intents of the heart to bring conviction, confession, and obedience.

He judges the churches. “And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace” (Re. 1:15). “That is, his feet were so bright that they seemed to be like a beautiful metal glowing intensely in the midst of a furnace” (Barnes). The brass burning in a furnace signifies God’s judgment on sin. “The day is coming when He shall put His feet on everything contrary to truth and righteousness. Everything unholy will be stamped out in divine judgment” (Ironside). Christ judges sin in the churches as we see in Revelation 2-3; He does not overlook sin. The feet like unto fine brass as if they burned in a furnace also points ahead to the judgment seat of Christ, when “every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is” (1 Co. 3:13).

He praises the churches. Ephesus - “but this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate” (2:6). Pergamos - “I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan’s seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth” (Re. 2:13). Philadelphia - “I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name” (Re. 3:8).

He encourages the churches. Smyrna - “Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye

shall have tribulation ten days; be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life” (Re. 2:10).

He exhorts the churches. “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.” “Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown” (Re. 3:11).

He promises rewards to the churches. “But that which ye have already hold fast till I come. And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star” (Re. 2:25-28). “He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels” (Re. 3:5). “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne” (Re. 3:21). Philadelphia - “I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name. Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee. Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth” (Re. 3:8-10).

He purifies the churches. He warns and reproves and rebukes. “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent” (Re. 3:19). Sin and error come into churches, but Christ doesn’t accept sin and error as the status quo and neither should pastors. We see that Christ speaks plainly; He doesn’t beat around the bush; He doesn’t pull the punches. His rebuke is sharp if necessary. Ephesus -

“Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent” (Re. 2:5). Pergamos - “But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate. Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth” (Re. 2:14-16). Thyatira - “Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works” (Re. 2:20-23). Sardis - “Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee” (Re. 3:2-3).

He rejects apostate churches. *First, there is the danger of being rejected as a candlestick.* Ephesus - “Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent” (Re. 2:4-5). Note that first love is

identified with first works. Love for Christ is *evidenced* by obedience, service, purity, holiness, surrender, dying to self, true discipleship. Jesus said, "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him" (Joh. 14:21), and John said, "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous" (1 Jo. 5:3). Since the candlestick is the church's testimony, Christ was warning Ephesus that if it did not rekindle its first love, it would no longer function as a church of Jesus Christ before Him. This does not mean that the church would cease to exist physically. Multitudes of churches exist in this world that are not true candlesticks before the Lord. They go through the motions of church life, but Christ has departed. Any church that does not have first love, first works passion for Christ, has either been removed as a candlestick or is in imminent danger of it, even if it is doctrinally sound like the church of Ephesus. ***Second, there is the danger of being spewed out.*** Laodicea - "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth" (Re. 3:15-16). Christ's warning to spew them out of His mouth is a warning to the church. A church is in Christ's mouth in the sense that it is His mouthpiece. The church is to be the oracles of God in preaching the truth (1 Pe. 4:11). Christ was going to reject this church. It would no longer be His mouthpiece, His ambassador, His light. It would continue to go through the motions of being a church, but Christ would not own it. Since this is how Christ views the lukewarmness, this is how God's people must view it. *We must not accept the lukewarm as church members.* If a person professes faith in Christ but does not exhibit a fervent spiritual testimony and lifestyle (not cold or lukewarm, but hot), he is not church member material. And if a church member backslides and becomes lukewarm, we must not

accept it. We must deal with it, and we must continue to deal with it until the matter is solved. The spirit of lukewarmness is contagious and it will pull the spiritual temperature of the entire church down if not dealt with. Pastors must not be content with carnality, lukewarmness, unfaithfulness, unrepentant sin. They must ever strive for a pure body. They must remove the leaven (1 Co. 5:6-7). Carnality, backsliding, unfaithfulness, sin, and error must be dealt with in whatever ways are necessary, and these things must never be allowed to become the status quo. *And we must not perceive lukewarm churches as acceptable churches.* The only ministry a preacher should have to a lukewarm church is the ministry of rebuking it and calling it to repentance, as Christ did to the church at Laodicea. There are multitudes of churches that are known as “Bible believing,” “conservative,” “King James,” Baptist, etc., but are lukewarm. This is true, in fact, for the vast majority of Southern Baptist and Independent Baptist churches. The membership is composed of a mixed multitude of saved and unsaved, with a predominant representation of lukewarm people. Christ does not accept such churches, and neither should we.

(Christ’s dealing with the churches in this passage teaches parents how to deal with children and pastors how to deal with congregations.)

In light of Revelation 1-3, consider the average church today, even the average “fundamentalist,” “Bible-believing,” “conservative,” “Independent,” “King James,” “Baptist” church. It is lukewarm at best. There are few members that know anything at all about a first love passion for Jesus Christ. The daily lives of individuals and homes are filled with worldliness. (Look at the spiritual condition of the homes; look at the social media; look at the video games; look at what the young people do in their free time; look at the young people’s goals and aspirations.) It is not uncommon, even, that the churches are infiltrated with heresies of various sorts.

There are plenty of Nicolaitans and Jezebels. And this condition is accepted as the status quo. These are held up as the better, the more conservative churches. They aren't "liberal." They aren't "denominational." The pastor might bemoan some things, but he doesn't do anything effectual about changing the overall character of the church. He accepts lukewarm, worldly members as the status quo. He doesn't want to rock the boat much. He is terribly afraid of people leaving and not giving.

A church in which sin and error have become the status quo is not a New Testament church. Where is Christ's ministry to such a church after the fashion that we see in Revelation 1-3? Where is the trumpet rebuke? Where is the sharp warning against losing the first love? Where is the fierce warning against lukewarmness?

In truth, the churches we have described, which are typical "Bible-believing churches" today, have already been rejected as candlesticks and spewed from Christ's mouth. They aren't New Testament churches.

21 Steps To a Stronger Church

These are suggestions for moving a congregation to a more consistent, thorough-going New Testament stance.

We have found the major elements to be a regenerate membership, immersion in prayer, immersion in God's Word, effectual expository preaching with reproof and rebuke, biblical standards for all workers that are consistently enforced, the effectual discipling of every member, the effectual ministry of the whole body in love, congregational singing that is built on the principles of Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16, the exercise of biblical discipline, and a strong vision and zeal for fulfilling the Great Commission.

Outline

The leaders must have spiritual revival

The leaders must be courageous

Start with a biblical examination of the church

Be ready to engage in a difficult battle

Be patient

Be confident of God's help

Pastors must be real leaders

Pray for a ministry team

Immerse the church in prayer

Aim for a regenerate church membership

Focus on the real disciples

Strengthen the church covenant

Set up biblical standards for workers

Immerse the church in Scripture

Disciple all of the people

Deal with sin

Emphasize separation from the world

Emphasize Bible prophecy

Double down on evangelism

Have a strong vision for church planting and world missions

Aim to incorporate all the biblical elements of a discipling church

The Leaders Must Have Spiritual Revival

Revival must start with the leaders. The church is not going to change until the leaders change.

Pastors are God's stewards and will give account for everything that goes on. This accountability cannot be escaped. How much wiser it is, then, to stand back and evaluate the situation *now* and do everything possible to rectify errors than to wait until the judgment seat of Christ!

It has been said that everything rises and falls on leadership, and how true that is. The New Testament has three epistles that address church leaders and every aspect of their work (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus). There are two chapters that describe the qualification of leaders in great detail (1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1). When Paul wrote to Titus about "setting things in order," he began with the right kind of leaders (Tit. 1:5). Paul called for the elders of the church at Ephesus and instructed them one last time (Acts 20:17-36), and that instruction is recorded in Scripture. James warned, "be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation" (Jas. 3:1). Peter exhorted the elders (1 Pe. 5:1-4).

Revival begins with confession of sin.

"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:8-9).

The leaders need to evaluate their own lives and families and ministries before God and acknowledge their own faults in allowing the church to become backslidden, worldly, and lukewarm.

If the church is a mixed multitude of saved and lost, that is the fault of the pastors in not maintaining a regenerate church membership, which is clearly taught in Scripture and which was practiced by Baptists of old until they capitulated to modern culture. (For documentation, see *The Discipling Church*, chapter three “The Disappearance of Discipling Churches,” www.wayoflife.org.) If the families are in poor spiritual condition, the church leaders must take some responsibility for that. If the youth are in poor spiritual condition, the church leaders must take some responsibility for this. God’s instruction about the home is given in epistles that are addressed to the churches and the preachers (Eph. 5-6; Col. 3; Tit. 2; 1 Pe. 3), and the churches are to use that instruction to build up the homes. So the fathers and mothers have a responsibility in the condition of the families, but the church also has a responsibility.

The leaders must ask themselves what have they done or what have they neglected to do that has contributed to the spiritual weakness of the church as a whole and of the individuals and of the families, and they must take responsibility before God for the present condition of things in His house.

Revival requires brutal honesty before God. True confession of sin which brings forgiveness and cleansing (1 John 1:9) is the very opposite of making excuses. Many pastors make all sorts of excuses for the sorry condition of their churches. They compare themselves among themselves and they compare their churches with other weak churches instead of comparing themselves and their churches by the absolute standard of God’s Word. They are puffed up instead of humbled. They are laughing when they should be sad.

Pastors must repent of following tradition, other preachers, pragmatism, human thinking, and culture rather than God's Word. They must repent of letting the church become a mixed multitude instead of a spiritual house of living stones and serving priests (1 Pe. 2:5). They must repent of letting the people set the standards in the church instead of governing the church by God's Word.

This is no small thing; it is a great sin. The church is God's house and must be governed strictly by God's Word. Pastors are under-shepherds who are commissioned to care for the church under the authority of the Chief Shepherd, and as stewards they will give account to the Chief Shepherd for everything. They are "they that must give account" (Heb. 13:17). They will "receive the greater condemnation" (Jas. 3:1). Bishops will give account to *the* Bishop (1 Pe. 2:25).

It is idolatry that keeps preachers from pursuing these clearly biblical things. They fear man more than God; they don't trust God 100% to meet their needs; they want a church more than they want a church that pleases God. One pastor told me, "I don't think Acts 2:41-42 will work today." Others have said, "Those things won't work in America. What if the people get upset? What if they don't agree? What if they leave? What if they stop giving? If I am careful about baptism I won't baptize any. If I maintain high standards for workers I won't have many left. Being strict about biblical things will harm my church!"

Instead of examining themselves by the standard of 1 Timothy, they compare themselves with other preachers.

There will be no spiritual revival until there is admission of our true condition and real confession of sin.

We must compare our churches with the standard of the first church in Acts 2:41-42 and with the constantly purifying lump of 1 Corinthians 5:6-8 and with the spiritual house made of living stones of 1 Peter 2:5 and with the edifying body of Ephesians 4:11-16. These are God's own descriptions

of a church that pleases Him. We must learn from Christ's exhortations and reproofs in Revelation 2-3. This is how He is going to judge every church and every church leader.

The path of revival is seen in James 4:4-10.

“Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy? But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.”

Note that revival comes by renouncing worldliness. A lot of pastors are worldly. Their minds and hearts are filled more with things of the world than the Word of God. They are light and trivial rather than sober-minded. Revival comes by trading lightness for sobriety, pride for humility. Many pastors boast about numbers or scholarship or buildings and property or some such thing, boasting in man rather than in Christ alone. Revival comes by submitting to God and being ready to obey Him in everything. Revival comes by resisting the devil. There must be spiritual warfare, which requires serious, fervent prayer, even prayer with fasting. Revival comes by drawing nigh to God, loving Him, abiding in Him, meditating on Him, learning of Him. Revival comes by cleansing the hands of sin. It comes by purifying the heart with confession and the cleansing power of the Word of God. Revival comes by being afflicted and mourning because of one's sorry spiritual condition instead of accepting it as the

status quo. Revival comes by turning worldly joy into heaviness.

The path of revival in James 4:4-10 would require repentance of turning the house of God into an entertainment program. “Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness.” It would require repenting of entertaining the youth instead of discipling them in a truly serious, fervent biblical fashion. A church has no authority in Scripture for entertaining youth. It is a man-made program that was invented to coddle unregenerate, carnal, spiritually lukewarm youth and hopefully keep them in church. The command of Christ is clear: “teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Mt. 28:20). What will the Lord say to those pastors who traded this solemn job for the entertainment business? To teach God’s people to know and obey the “all things” Christ has commanded requires teaching them the entire Bible, and that is no small task. It is a full-time, hyper-focused job. Fulfilling Matthew 28:20 doesn’t leave time in this brief life for a slew of fun and games outings! Matthew 28:20 doesn’t describe an entertainment program with a thin veneer of Bible and prayer. Can you imagine Paul leading young people in the churches into a Christianized version of the Greek games? He would have considered it worldly wickedness. That would have been the way, rather, of Demas, who left Paul because he loved the world (2 Ti. 4:10).

We are convinced that the entertainment program came because carelessness and lack of wisdom in baptism and church membership produced mixed multitude congregations that cannot be biblically discipled and disciplined. In 1889, Archibald Brown, a student of Charles Spurgeon, wrote a book entitled *The Devil’s Mission of Amusement*. He said, “Providing recreation for the people will soon be looked upon as a necessary part of Christian work

and as binding upon the church of God as though it were a Divine command. ... From speaking out, as the Puritans did, the Church has gradually toned down her testimony, then winked at and excused the frivolities of the day. Then she has tolerated them in her borders, and now she has adopted them.”

Brown’s words were prophetic. Recreation is looked upon today as a necessary part of Christian work, from the children’s department to the senior citizen’s ministry.

Revival would require repentance of turning the pulpit into a forum for joking and flippancy and lightness.

There must be repentance of trusting man more than God. What keeps a great many pastors from making the changes that the Word of God requires in their congregations? Fear of losing people and losing income. But that’s idolatry. It is trusting man rather than God. The church is God’s house and must be ruled by God’s Word, and He will surely take care of His house if things are done according to His will. If we obey God, we need not fear what man can do. One man with much experience in living by faith observed, “God’s work done in God’s way will never lack God’s supply.” God’s wonderful, double-emphasized promise, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee,” is given in the context of supplying the saints’ needs when they live in dependence upon Him (Heb. 13:5-6).

Revival comes by immersion in God’s Word on the part of the leaders. Paul said to the elders at Ephesus, “I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up” (Acts 20:32). There must be hours spent in Bible reading, serious study, and memorization. Preachers are solemnly commanded by God, “Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. ... Meditate upon these things; give thyself WHOLLY to them; that thy profiting may appear to all” (1 Ti. 4:13, 15). The Word of God must be one’s meditation all the day long (Jos. 1:8; Ps. 1:2). It must not be crowded out by the vain things of this world like professional

sports, Rush Limbaugh, FoxNews, and the junk that populates 99% of social media. It doesn't take much of these things to crowd out the Word of God.

It is only when the leaders themselves have spiritual revival that they will have the spiritual wisdom and power and courage necessary to lead the church in revival.

Caring deeply about the existence of life-changing, New Testament churches, and knowing how essential the right leaders are in that objective, I am praying passionately for 1,000 special preachers. They are God-called men; biblically-qualified men; Christ-centered men of good Christian character and testimony; men who are the spiritual leaders of their homes; men who love their wives and train their children; well-educated men (in the Bible and in all other issues facing the churches); studious men; men who are committed to God's Word rather than human tradition; men to whom the Bible is truly *the sole authority* for faith and practice; humble men who can work with a team of men as we see in Acts; men of faith; men of Spirit-wrought courage; men who fear God more than man; men who are Christ-centered, not man-centered; men who are not intimidated by any old boy's network or preacher's association or school or "camp"; men who are willing to walk alone if necessary for the truth's sake; men of serious spiritual wisdom and discernment; men of passion for the truth, who esteem God's precepts concerning all things to be right and hate every false way (Ps. 119:128); men of large vision and zeal for gospel preaching and world missions and church planting; men who are wise about salvation, understanding the gospel and repentance and knowing that saving faith is always accompanied by a change in life; men who are careful about church membership; men who reprove and rebuke sin and error in a plain way; men who are ready and willing to exercise biblical discipline when necessary and will not draw back because of its difficulties; men who are hard workers;

men who multiply themselves by training preachers; men who hate religious pragmatism for the evil thing that it is in God's sight (e.g., making decisions about the ministry based on what "works" to produce a desired goal as opposed to making decisions based *strictly* on Bible truth).

This type of preacher is the product of prayer (Luke 10:2) and of the right kind of churches that provide the right kind of preparation.

The Leaders Must Be Courageous

I want to single out the need for courage on the part of pastors and anyone who determines to engage in the business of building a stronger church.

To read about what needs to be done is one thing; to actually *do* those things is an entirely different matter.

In a conversation with me some years ago, a Navy jet pilot described aircraft carrier landings as "a dynamic environment." Indeed! The ship is steaming along and bobbing in the rolling ocean; the 54,000-pound plane is approaching at 150 miles per hour; the flight deck is only a 1000 feet long and 250 feet wide; the four arresting wires are spaced 50 feet apart; there are unmovable obstacles in front of the flight deck (the ship's fantail) and along the sides, and planes are often parked at the far end; the light is changing; the wind is shifting.

A church is also a dynamic environment made up of people with thoughts and feelings and traditions and backgrounds and personal interests and friends and relatives. There are all sorts of people: husbands, wives, children, unmarried, young, old, cheerful, grouchy, spiritual babes and gray-haired saints, fired up and not very fired up, healthy and sick, mature and immature.

To stand up in the midst of such a dynamic environment and proclaim and enforce God's Word takes supernatural courage.

Recently, a pastor who is trying to move his "mixed multitude" church into a stronger stance said, "Brother Cloud, pray that I will have courage."

Pondering that, I realized that we don't need to pray for courage. God has said that courage is available to the saint who obeys Him.

"Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands. For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind" (2 Ti. 1:6-7).

We see that God never gives fear. Fear comes, but it is not of God. Fear is of the flesh and the devil. Giving in to fear is disobedience and breeds more fear. It is a crippling progression.

Instead of fear, God has given His people the spirit of power, of love, and of a sound mind. When the believer stirs up the gift of God, which is done by rising up and doing exactly what God has told him to do, power, love, and a sound mind are present and effectual.

Courage is mentioned many times in Scripture, but it is never, to my knowledge, mentioned in the context of prayer. It is not something to ask for or to seek; it is something to *do*.

Consider what God said to Joshua,

"There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I swear unto their fathers to give them. Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou

goest. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success. Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest” (Jos. 1:6-9).

God did not tell Joshua to pray for courage; He told him to *be* courageous. He repeated it five times by way of emphasis. “... be strong and of a good courage ... be thou strong and very courageous ... be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed.”

God told Joshua to be filled with the Word of God (“this book of the law ... thou shalt meditate therein day and night”), and to obey the Word of God (“that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein”), and to trust that God was 100% with him and committed to helping him (“I will be with thee; I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee”), and therefore to be strong and courageous. Just *be* it! As the preacher is filled with Scripture and obeys the Scripture, courage is available.

God says reprove, rebuke, exhort (2 Ti. 4:2; Tit. 2:15), and when the preacher obeys, courage is available.

God says practice discipline (1 Co. 5), and when the preacher obeys in this difficult matter, which is always attended by fears, courage is available.

God says that He requires that stewards be found faithful (1 Co. 4:2), and when the preacher obeys and requires faithfulness of all workers, courage is available.

God says to earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3), and when the preacher obeys, courage is available.

God stands ready to work. “Let us rise up and build” (Ne. 2:18!

Start with a Biblical Examination of the Church

If a church leader wants to pursue a stronger biblical course, he must stop measuring the church by numbers, whether Sunday School or membership or special meetings or offerings or missionaries supported or property. Such a test isn't found in Scripture. It is a man-made invention, and the fruit has been terrible. In truth, numbers mean nothing in relation to the true spiritual condition of a church, and to focus on numbers can only puff up or discourage.

In modern times, the numbers philosophy was invented by men such as J. Frank Norris. Chester Tulga called it "jumboism." There was a constant emphasis on numbers, a constant reporting of numbers, a constant boasting about numbers. The numbers were published in Norris's paper. In Sept. 13, 1929, it was reported that 12,000 attended First Baptist of Ft. Worth's three services. The numbers racket increased when Norris pastored Temple Baptist in Detroit and First Baptist in Ft. Worth at the same time. He used every opportunity to brag about the big numbers. In the first few pages of *Practical Lectures on Romans* (1946), Norris reported on 11 years of joint pastorate strictly in terms of numbers: 18,200 additions; \$1,900,000 raised; \$2 million in real estate; 15 million copies of the *Fundamentalist* paper distributed; traveled 854,000 miles. He boasted that the two churches had "the two largest Sunday Schools in the world judged by the average attendance." The combined membership was reported to be 25,000. Norris boasted of pastoring the largest church in the world.

The philosophy of "jumboism" was adopted by a great many of the fundamental Baptists who came after Norris. It can be summarized by "**get as many as you can as fast as you can.**" It was promoted by the *Sword of the Lord*. I saw it practiced at Highland Park Baptist Church in Chattanooga, Tennessee, when I was a student at Tennessee Temple in the 1970s. When Lee Roberson became pastor in 1942, the

membership was 1,000, the Sunday morning attendance was 400, and the mid-week attendance was about 10 (James Wigton, *Lee Roberson: Always about His Father's Business*, 2010, p. 22). So 60% of the members were nowhere to be found, totally inactive, and only 1% had enough Christianity to attend a mid-week service. That pattern has been typical both for Southern Baptists and for fundamental Baptists, and that pattern never changed at Highland Park even as the numbers exploded. When Dr. Roberson retired in 1982, Highland Park's membership was 63,000, but Wednesday night attendance was about 3,000. That is the best measure of active membership (ignoring the fact that the 3,000 included many Temple students who weren't members of Highland Park). That would leave 60,000 unaccounted for, which is truly an "invisible" church! The huge membership numbers got Highland Park listed as the world's largest church in the early 1970s, but since the vast majority of those "members" were not active, what did it mean? And the church no longer exists. It didn't even survive one generation beyond Dr. Roberson's pastorate.

By the test of numbers, the "increased with goods" church at Laodicea was preeminent over the "little strength" church at Philadelphia (Re. 3:8, 17), but we know that this was not true in Christ's eyes.

The pastors in the early churches are never introduced as "great," and the churches are never called "great," "biggest," "fastest growing," or "most exciting." That is not New Testament language; it is the language of the world.

To seek to be the biggest and the greatest is not the lowliness of mind whereby each esteems others better than themselves (Php. 2:3). It is not being clothed with humility (1 Pe. 5:5).

A church of 50 that is striving to be a pure lump for Christ (1 Co. 5:6-8) and a true spiritual house made up of living stones (1 Pe. 2:5) is more pleasing to God, has more true

spiritual potential, than a church of hundreds that is a mixed multitude.

Instead of “How many members do you have?” or “How many are you running in Sunday School?” or “What’s your Sunday morning attendance?” or “What was the attendance of your last special day?” or “How many young people are attending activities?” or “How many kids were at camp this year?” or “How are the offerings?” or “How much is your property worth?” or “How many professed Christ last year?” biblical questions would look like the following:

- *Is the church seeing any life-changing conversions of sinners?*
- *What percentage of those who have professed Christ have gone on to be baptized and to grow in Christ and serve Him?*
- *What percentage of the members are real Bible students?*
- *What percentage of the members faithfully, enthusiastically attend prayer meetings?*
- *Does the church have real prayer meetings in which the members themselves actually spend time in prayer?*
- *What percentage of the homes are holy and separated from the world?*
- *What percentage of the homes are effectually raising their children for Christ?*
- *What percentage of the husbands are the spiritual leaders of their homes and are modeling a serious walk with Christ, Bible study, prayer, love for souls, ministry in the church?*
- *What percentage of the wives are spiritual keepers at home?*
- *What percentage of the children in the homes are properly disciplined and biblically educated?*
- *What percentage of the youth are on fire for the Lord, meaning surrendered to Christ and separated from the world from the heart, testing their friends, music, fashion, and social media by God’s Word, and are being transformed by the renewing of the mind by being serious Bible students,*

and are seeking to prove the perfect will of God according to the path of Romans 12?

- *What percentage of the members are actively seeking to share the gospel and win people to Christ? Does the church have an aggressive program to reach everyone in the community and beyond with the gospel?*
- *What percentage of the members participate in the church's evangelistic outreaches?*
- *Is the church holding the line against the world's music and contemporary music? Is it being properly educated in this important issue?*
- *Is the church seeing men called to preach and is it training any men for the ministry?*
- *Is the church spiritually stronger today than it was 10 years ago?*
- *Is the church starting other sound churches? Is it multiplying itself?*

If these are the questions that preachers are asking, they will have different goals, different plans, different programs, different emphases than most churches today. And they will be laying a foundation to avoid the great collapse that we see on every hand.

When it comes to numbers, God's thoughts are not our thoughts. When Gideon had an impressive army of 32,000, God said, Too many. After 22,000 went home, God said, Still too many. God cut Gideon's army down to 300, because He doesn't want man to get any glory for what God does (Jg. 7:2). When David counted his people to ascertain his greatness, God was not pleased (2 Sa. 24:1-17).

One day God said to the church at Corinth, in effect, "You have too many members; you must excommunicate one because of his unrepentant sin. Then you will have a pure body and then you will have my power." See 1 Corinthians 5.

To decrease in numbers by biblical discipline and spiritual purifying is the path to spiritual blessing. This is God's way of thinking and operating.

There are no "great" men, only faithful or unfaithful ones. The same is true for churches. Jesus taught that when we have done everything that God has commanded, we should say, "We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do" (Lu. 17:10).

The preacher who takes the Bible seriously in these days and sets out to lead a church that is striving to be a pure lump (1 Co. 5:7-8) and a spiritual house (1 Pe. 2:5), will probably lose people in the short term. It's almost guaranteed if the foundation wasn't properly laid. But having a truly biblical church that pleases the Lord is worth any price. Every shepherd will give account to the Chief Shepherd. There will be no joking or boasting on that occasion, and no sports statistic or golf score will matter. The judgment of pastors will not be in groups. There will be no support from one's heroes, buddies, or favorite schools. "So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Ro. 14:12).

Let me hasten to say that we don't have a goal to make churches small, and we don't believe that small is necessarily godly. The goal is to make churches pure. And a pure church has power with God. It will grow, because God is the God of fruit, but it will grow properly in God's will and God's way and God's time, not by human methodology and pragmatism.

It is very sad that men have spoiled God's plan with their worldly thinking.

Be Ready to Engage in a Difficult Battle

There is no easy way to change a mixed multitude* to a discipling church. The elements of the world, the flesh, and the devil that have become entrenched in the congregation are not going to like it. There are going to be battles. (* By

“mixed multitude” we refer to a church in which a large number of members appear to be unregenerate or spiritually lukewarm at best, by such standards as lack of passion for God’s Word, for prayer, for seeking the perfect will of God, for a separated pilgrim walk, for godliness in the home, and for looking for the imminent return of Christ.)

A pastor must be convinced that a New Testament church is what pleases God, and no other type of church pleases Him. He must be 100% committed to doing those things that are necessary to make this happen, because he loves and fears God more than man, and he knows that he will give account to God, and not to man, for his ministry.

In 1962, James Leo Garrett, Jr., called upon Baptist churches to restore discipline, and he acknowledged that it would be a difficult job. He said,

“Those who would lead in the renewal of discipline must be thoroughly convinced of its TERRIBLE URGENCY” (Garrett, Baptist Church Discipline).

Be Patient

Patience is a necessary element. A church doesn’t become a mixed multitude overnight and it won’t be brought overnight to a New Testament stance. Impatience can cause more harm than good. The goal is not to harm the church and scatter the sheep; the goal is to strengthen it; though typically a church that moves from a weak to a strong stance will lose people in the process.

It is important to formulate a clear plan before the Lord and then patiently and steadfastly work toward its implementation. It will be a multi-year plan, a multi-decade plan, not a multi-week or multi-month one.

Be Confident of God's Help

A church that seeks to be faithful to God's Word no matter what the cost will have God's best blessing. It might not be the biggest church, but it will be the most blessed, and what else matters?

The church is God's plan. He has given the pattern of the New Testament church in His Word. This is the only type of church that pleases Him, but such a church pleases Him *well*.

If God's people acknowledge their sin of corrupting or weakening the biblical pattern and seek His help in restoring the church to His will, this impulsion is from God's Spirit. It is certain that such a desire does not come from the world, the flesh, or the devil.

God stands ready to help those who want to obey Him, no matter how weak and backslidden the situation might be. When Christ called Ephesus to repent of losing their first love (Re. 2:4-5) and Pergamos to repent of false doctrine (Re. 2:14-16) and Thyatira to repent of worldliness (Re. 2:20) and Sardis to repent of spiritual deadness (Re. 3:1-3) and Laodicea to repent of lukewarmness (Re. 2:15-18), He was not just talking. Those churches *could* repent and Christ stood ready to help them if they *did* repent.

Christ hasn't changed, and if God be for us, who can be against us?

Pastors Must Be Real Leaders

For a church to be what it needs to be, so that it is not swept along by the apostasy of the 21st century, pastors must be leaders, not followers.

None of the things that are necessary for this task are easy. They require serious leadership. They require real courage. They require a preacher that fears God more than he fears people.

Take setting up and maintaining spiritual standards for all who participate in the ministry. That requires leadership. There will often be a big pushback on such things. If a pastor starts removing people who lead church ministries because of their unfaithfulness, carnality, worldliness, and lack of agreement with the church's doctrine, there will be problems. A true leader will persist in doing God's will in spite of any pushback from the people.

But a great many pastors are followers, not leaders. The pastor might try to instigate something that he knows to be right and biblical, but if the people resist, he backs down. He might try to have a real prayer meeting, but when the people don't attend, he shuts the prayer meeting down. He might try to employ good standards for music workers, but when there are complaints, he allows the situation to return to the status quo. He might demand faithfulness of all workers, but when some aren't faithful, there are no serious repercussions. The pastor backs down. The people rule.

May God give us church leaders with real backbone!

Pray for a Ministry Team

We rarely see men ministering alone in the book of Acts. The exception is Philip the evangelist (Ac. 8:5). But the normal pattern is for men to labor together in ministry teams. We see Christ calling 12 apostles. We see the Spirit of God sending out missionaries by teams (Ac. 13:1-4). We see Paul ordaining teams of pastor/elders in the first churches (Ac. 14:23).

I have always prayed earnestly for this in my own ministry, and the Lord has always answered. I did that when we were called to start the first Baptist church in Nepal in the early 1980s, and God answered by bringing two men of God into the work, and we started that church as a team. I was the senior member, but it was a team and we operated in good

unity. I have always prayed for this with confidence, because I can see in God's Word that it is His will.

Immerse the Church in Prayer

Prayer is the most powerful spiritual tool we have, and scriptural prayer will bring God's help into any situation. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (Jas. 5:16). Jesus said, "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God" (Lu. 18:27). Based on the Bible's strong emphasis on prayer, it has been said, "No prayer, no power; little prayer, little power; much prayer, much power."

Prayer is mentioned at least 415 times in the Bible, 129 times in the New Testament, 35 times in Acts, 25 times in Paul's epistles. James and John and Jude mention prayer. Prayer is a major emphasis of Christ's teaching (e.g., Mt. 6:5-13; 7:7-11). The prominent saints in the Bible were praying people (e.g., Enoch, Abraham, Hannah, Samuel, David, Jeremiah, Daniel, Nehemiah, Paul, Lydia).

Prayer was one of the four foundational characteristics of the first church ("they continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship, and breaking bread and PRAYERS," Acts 2:42).

Prayer is to be "FIRST OF ALL" (1 Ti. 2:1-2).

The prayers of the saints are kept before the throne of God as sweet odors before Him and are effectual in producing His great works on earth. Prayers are mentioned at the opening of the seven-sealed book which contains God's plan for overthrowing the rebellion on earth and establishing Christ's eternal kingdom (Re. 5:8; 8:3-4). These are not the selfish prayers of nominal believers; these are not the prayers of those who pray for comfort and help while they live a lukewarm, worldly life; these are the prayers of the saints who are living according to God's will and praying according to

God's will, like the saints recorded in Scripture. These are intercessory prayers. They are the prayers of "righteous" men and women (Jas. 5:16).

To pray in faith is to pray according to God's will as revealed in Scripture (1 Jo. 5:14). Since we know it is God's will that the church be a purifying lump with a regenerate membership of true disciples of Christ, the Lord's people can pray with confidence for God to bring this to pass.

The pastor should seek **prayer partners**. This is what Paul did. Compare Ro. 15:30-32; 2 Co. 1:11; Eph. 6:19; Php. 1:19; Col. 4:3-4; 1 Th. 5:25; 2 Th. 3:1; Phm. 22; Heb. 13:18-19. Paul sought prayer partners, and he showed us that the prayer requests to partners should be specific. There is great power when God's people agree together in prayer for specific things. I could write a large book filled with the answers to prayer we have experienced through prayer partners. I'm not talking about a prayer letter to a group of people, such as a missionary prayer letter, though that certainly has its place. Here I'm talking about a select number of men and women who are known to be true and active prayer partners for me and my situation in particular and whom I can depend on for prayer support. I learned the importance of prayer partners early on in my Christian life. My maternal grandmother taught me this. After an unsuccessful battle to quit smoking that lasted several weeks, I was able to quit after asking for prayer from the church. I have seen a steady stream of miracles in answer to prayer for 47 years, such as starting Way of Life Literature and *O Timothy* magazine and new churches and full-time Bible schools. Every time I have started a new ministry, I did not have the resources to do it, and I had to proceed by earnest prayer, and partners were always an important part of the process.

There need to be **special prayer meetings** in which God's help can be sought to make the church stronger. If only a few show up for these meetings, then it should be recognized that

this remnant is the true spiritual core of the church, however tiny it might be. Great numbers are not required for powerful answers to prayer. God can answer two or three as well as 100 (Mt. 18:20).

There should be **training in prayer**, so God's people can know how to pray more effectively. (See the course *Effectual Prayer for Perilous Times*, available from Way of Life Literature.)

There must be **individual prayer** (prayer closet, intercession, without ceasing).

There must be regular **prayer meetings**, and the more the better.

There must be **corporate prayer**. This is church prayer led by one of the men. The church is God's house, and the Bible tells us that Christ is present (1 Ti. 3:15; Mt. 18:20). His ears are open to the prayers of the body in a special way. We see corporate prayer in Acts 4:23-31. When the Bible says that "they lifted up their voice to God with one accord," it means they were led by one of their leaders and all of the individuals joined in the prayer by hearing it and agreeing to it. God answered by filling them with the Holy Spirit and giving them boldness to preach (Ac. 4:31). We have seen powerful answers to corporate prayer. Years ago, the Maoists were revolting in Nepal with the object of establishing a communist state. They announced that they would close the churches and turn the public schools into a Marxist indoctrination system. Thousands of people were killed. They steadily gained power and controlled large swaths of the country. The king and police and army were helpless to stop them. In April 2005, *Time* magazine published a front-page report comparing the Nepali Maoists to the Khmer Rouge regime that killed 1.5 to 2 million people in Cambodia in the process of establishing a Maoist state. We started praying corporately in each main service according to 1 Timothy 2:1-5. In 2006, the Maoists gave up their revolution, put down their arms, and joined the

political system. Seven years ago, we decided to add Luke 10:2 to our corporate prayers. This prayer is led by various young men who have good testimonies. Within months, some of our young people had surrendered to prepare for the ministry and stated their willingness to leave secular college if we would start a Bible college. Since then a steady stream of young people have followed in their footsteps. A year ago we added Ephesians 1:16-18 to our corporate prayers. Since then we have seen an increase in spiritual understanding and greater zeal on the part of the members to know Christ and to do His will.

The **mid-week prayer meeting** must be a real prayer meeting, not just another preaching service with a couple of minutes of prayer tagged on. The people should divide up and really pray instead of being led by one or two people for a few minutes, as is so typical. There needs to be plenty of time allotted for the prayer, not just a few minutes. We think of churches that pray for a full hour. And the content of the prayer should not be limited to physical needs. Paul prayed for his physical situation (2 Co. 12:7-10), but the bulk of the prayers in the New Testament are for spiritual needs.

There should be **prayer before the services** and the goal should be that as many of the members as possible would be in attendance. I have heard pastors argue that they don't want to pressure the people to come to prayer meetings, but they "pressure" the people about all sorts of other things! The frightful fact *might be* that they are content with a lukewarm *status quo* and don't want to shake the boat.

If only a handful of people are ready to really pray, then that's where we begin. If I only had one man who was ready to pray with me, I would start with him, and we would meet for prayer before the services and at other times, and we would join our hearts together before God to ask for more prayer partners.

There should be prayer meetings at other times: **men's prayer meetings, women's prayer meetings, youth prayer meetings.** And these should be real prayer meetings, not occasions just to talk or to do something other than actually pray. A Bible study, a meal, a fellowship time, these are not prayer meetings. Talking about the day's events, reading prayer lists, even talking about praying, is not praying. I think of a prayer meeting I attended recently before a church service in a church that runs about 300 on Sunday. I think there were four men present, and the pastor and associate pastor weren't among them. The prayer meeting consisted of reading from a long list of church members and discussing them, followed by a bare few minutes of prayer by one of the men. It was obvious that most of the members on the list don't attend the church and weren't even known by the men at the prayer meeting. And I was told that this is the only men's prayer meeting that the church has during the typical week.

There should be **prayer meetings before Bible conferences and special meetings.** These used to be called "cottage prayer meetings" and were common, but today it is rare to have serious prayer services before a special meeting. No wonder there is little power and little lasting spiritual results.

There needs to be **husband-wife prayer and family prayer.** We have seen so many mighty answers to prayer by this means. The children need to hear their parents pray, and they need to learn how to pray themselves, and they need to see that God answers prayer.

There needs to be **evangelistic prayer.** The sowing of the gospel must be watered by prayer. In *Effective Evangelistic Churches*, a survey of 576 growing churches, Thom Rainer observed, "Most churches that are effectively reaching the lost have broken out of the 'rut' of prayer-as-usual and have experienced wonderful results brought about by effective

emphasis on praying for the lost. ... 'A Florida pastor shared that their Wednesday evening prayer services 'had become Who's who in the hospital. Our young people avoided the service like the plague.' Many churches, perhaps most churches in America, focus their corporate prayers on physical needs: sickness, bereavement, and hospitalizations. While these prayer needs are valid and need fervent intercession, the eternal needs of those without a relationship to Jesus Christ are even more critical. ..." (Rainer, pp. 74). "Focusing the church's attention on intercession for the lost has brought the Lord's blessings time after time. One pastor shared the thought that, 'Praying for the lost did more to refocus our church than any single factor. We became a church with an outward focus after being an inwardly focused church for years'" (p. 78). Another said, 'Our growth through conversions? It's the result of our prayer ministry'" (Rainer, p. 69). 'I recently reviewed my consultation notes of dozens of churches I visited over the past few years. Most of them were in a slow decline. Perhaps more than any single factor, the absence of dynamic corporate prayer ministries was the contrasting element. I could not find one declining church that had an ongoing prayer ministry specifically for the lost. Perhaps these dying churches have not because they ask not" (Rainer, p. 77).

There needs to be **prayer with fasting**. Jesus said that some kinds of demonic strongholds "goeth not out but by prayer and fasting" (Mt. 17:21). When a church has become a mixed multitude of saved and lost, disciples and lukewarm, this is no small problem. It means that it is populated with carnal, stubborn, rebellious people who will act out their true character when confronted with the Word of God. The situation can be changed, but not without the power of God. It requires "prayer and fasting." Berean Bible Baptist Church in metro Manila has a monthly day of fasting and prayer by

the whole congregation. I know of a church that has a weekly day of congregation-wide fasting and prayer.

Metropolitan Tabernacle of London, England, during Charles Spurgeon's pastorate (1854-1882) is an example of a praying church. The preaching was effectual and the church was aggressive in evangelism (e.g., street preaching, aggressive tract distribution, 27 Sunday Schools ministering to over 8,000 children with 612 teachers). Thousands were saved with changed lives as evidence, and Spurgeon attributed this largely to prayer. "Spurgeon regarded the prayer meeting as 'the most important meeting of the week.' He often said that it was not surprising if churches did not prosper, when they regarded the prayer meeting as of so little value that one evening in the week was made to suffice for a feeble combination of service and prayer meeting. ... A.T. Pierson, who ministered at the Tabernacle during Spurgeon's last illness, said, 'This Metropolitan Tabernacle is a house of prayer most emphatically ... prayer is almost ceaselessly going up. When one meeting is not in progress, another is. ... There are prayer meetings before preaching, and others after preaching. ... No marvel that Mr. Spurgeon's preaching has been so blessed. He himself attributes it mainly to the prevailing prayers of his people'" (*Wonders of Grace: Original testimonies of converts during Spurgeon's early years*, p. 14). Spurgeon warned about the prayerlessness that characterized many of the Baptist churches of his day. He attributed the "downgrade" in doctrine in the Baptist Union to the weak spiritual condition of the churches. He wrote, "Are churches in a right condition when they have only one meeting for prayer in a week, and that a mere skeleton? Churches which have prayer-meetings several times on the Lord's-day, and very frequently during the week, yet feel their need of more prayer; but what can be said of those who very seldom practice united supplication? Are there few conversions? Do the congregations dwindle? Who wonders that this is the case

when the spirit of prayer has departed?" (*The Sword and the Trowel*, Aug. 1887).

There is a chapter in *The Discipling Church* on making the church strong in prayer. This is available as a free eBook from www.wayoflife.org.

Aim for a Regenerate Church Membership

The foundation for a New Testament church is a regenerate membership. Anything less is to build a house on sand.

This is the most important one thing that can be done to strengthen a church. A biblical church is a spiritual house made of living stones (1 Peter 2:5). A living stone is supernatural. It is a metaphor of the new birth. When we are born the first time, we are natural stones, dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1). There is nothing that man can do to turn a natural stone into a living stone. Religion can't do it; philosophy can't do it; sacraments can't do it; science can't do it; art can't do it; lapidary can't do it. For a natural stone to become a living stone is a divine miracle. And when a dead stone becomes a living stone, it is certain that there will be clear evidence!

Without a regenerate church membership, we can't make disciples, can't have love for God's Word, can't have spiritual ministries, can't have biblical separation, can't have godly homes, can't keep sacred music, can't have a spiritual vision for reaching the world with the gospel.

Two things are necessary to have a regenerate church membership: caution and wisdom about receiving candidates for baptism, and maintaining biblical standards for membership.

1. A regenerate church membership requires being extremely careful and wise about salvation and baptism.

The course *Sowing and Reaping* and the book *The Discipling Church* deal with this in more detail. Both are available from www.wayoflife.org.

Here we would mention the following things that will cut *way down* on empty professions.

Take time to deal with people carefully and wisely. Be patient. Get to know people. If an individual isn't interested enough to spend time learning the gospel, as the Ethiopian Eunuch did, he isn't interested enough to be saved. It is necessary to become "wise unto salvation" through the knowledge of the Scriptures (2 Ti. 3:15). It is necessary "to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Ti. 2:4). It is necessary to believe "that form of doctrine delivered you" (Ro. 6:17). Even on the day of Pentecost, Peter used "many other words" (Ac. 2:40) to deal with the people, and these were people who had a strong knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures and the law of God, not benighted pagans who know nothing about God, creation, the fall, sin, holiness, judgment, and redemption.

Patiently and carefully teach the gospel. It is the gospel that is the power of God unto salvation (Ro. 1:16). It is summarized in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4. Every point of the gospel must be understood and believed. The evangelistic course *Seeker's Bible Study* (www.wayoflife.org) deals with every element of the gospel: who is Christ? What is Scripture? What is sin? What does it mean that Christ died for our sin? What does it mean that Christ died for our sin "according to the Scripture"? What does it mean that Christ rose from the dead?

Teach repentance and faith. Paul summarized the way of salvation as "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ac. 20:21). Most soul winner programs don't even mention repentance, let alone explain it, and don't carefully explain saving faith, either. *Seeker's Bible Study* rectifies this error.

Look for evidence (Joh. 10:27; 2 Co. 5:17; Tit. 1:16; 1 Jo. 2:3-4). We deal with this in “Looking for Evidence of Salvation,” www.wayoflife.org.

Be especially careful in dealing with children. They can be saved (Mt. 19:14), but they are children. Every child growing up in a Bible-believing church “believes in Jesus,” but so do the devils (Jas. 2:19). Salvation is not a mere belief in Jesus; it is understanding the gospel and exercising repentance and saving faith that produces a born again experience that sets an individual on an entirely different course in life. We give the following suggestions in dealing with children: (1) Be very patient and don’t put *any* pressure on them. (2) Continually teach them the gospel; explain every word. (3) Let them initiate salvation and even then be very careful and patient in dealing with them. (4) Look for evidence (especially a change in attitude toward authority, a change in relationship with the Bible, the knowledge of God as Abba Father, a change in attitude toward the world). (5) Don’t be in a hurry to pronounce them saved and baptize them. It can’t hurt to be patient and make sure, but it can hurt to be impatient. This can result in false hopes, doubts, and confusion. (6) Let God give them assurance (Ro. 8:15-16). Don’t give them a “spiritual birth certificate.” That is God’s job, not man’s, because only God knows the secrets of the heart. (7) Have a junior church membership program whereby the children have a check point at age 18. In our church, we receive children under 18 who show clear evidence of salvation, and they are junior church members. They can take the Lord’s Supper and participate in some ministries at an age appropriate level but they can’t take part in church business. At age 18 the junior church membership expires, and they must of their own will seek full membership. It is a check point to re-evaluate their salvation at a time in their lives when they are entering adulthood. If they have doubts, they can express that and settle it before

becoming a full church member. This program is intended to help young people not continue to live on a false decision and to protect the church from being populated with unsaved members. (See “Careful Child Evangelism,” www.wayoflife.org.)

2. A regenerate church membership requires being extremely careful and wise about church membership.

What we require in a nutshell is what we see in Acts 2:41-42 and 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10. What we see here is spiritual regeneration with clear evidence. In Acts 2:41-42, those received into the membership of the first church were saved and baptized and “continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.” This is serious evidence. This is true New Testament Christianity. Those in 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for his Son from heaven...” Here we see clear repentance and evidentiary salvation. Again, this is simply true New Testament Christianity.

For membership we require the following major things: (1) Clear evidence of salvation. (2) Spiritual growth. (2) 100% agreement with our doctrine and practice (1 Co. 1:10). Each prospective member must read the church covenant and answer the review questions and agree 100%. In the case of someone who has been involved with teaching that is contrary to our doctrine, we require more than a statement of agreement with our covenant and doctrinal statement. We require a clear *renunciation* of the former doctrine, such as ecumenism, New Evangelicalism, Mid-tribulation or Post-tribulation Rapture, Calvinism, charismaticism, contemporary music, or the heresy of losing one’s salvation. (3) Faithfulness to every service and required function (such as our Bible conferences), unless providentially hindered such as by poor health. Not only do we see faithfulness as a major characteristic of membership in the first church, but in a

practical sense it is impossible to have the type of church we see in Scripture without faithfulness on the part of the members. For example, the leaders are commanded to feed the flock and to warn and teach every man (Ac. 20:28; Col. 1:28), but this is impossible if the sheep are not faithful to the preaching meetings. The best meal is of no dietary benefit if the family members are not present at the dining table. Further, each member has an essential role in the building up of the body (Eph. 4:16) and this is plainly given in Scripture as one of the reasons the members are not to forsake the assemblies (Heb. 10:25).

Establish an inactive membership program. See “Inactive Church Membership,” www.wayoflife.org. This is discussed in *The Discipling Church* in the chapter “A Discipling Church Has a Disciplined Environment.”

All of this is our effort to maintain a spiritual house made of living stones, as we are taught in Scripture (1 Pe. 2:5).

We are convinced that such a membership is obedience to God and therefore has God’s best blessings. We have no desire to keep the membership small. We seek growth. We are zealous to sow the seed of the gospel and earnest for fruit. But we are convinced that a membership of 20 regenerate, growing, serving saints has far more potential for true growth in God’s will than a membership of 100 or 200 or 1,000 that is a mixed multitude of saved and lost, true disciples and lukewarm.

We are not required to receive whoever desires to be a member. We receive only those who are qualified by the Bible’s standards. Those who aren’t members are welcome to attend services and functions and to benefit from our ministry, so long as they don’t cause trouble, but everyone knows who is “in” and who is “out.” This protects our church body from being weakened by those whose testimony of salvation is questionable or those who have a spirit of

rebellion toward authority or those who are not 100% in agreement with us in doctrine and practice.

Today our members take it for granted that church members are perfectly faithful and we have no problem from them about this fundamental matter, but it wasn't like this 10 years ago.

See the following books and reports at www.wayoflife.org -

“Regenerate Church Membership”

<https://www.wayoflife.org/reports/a-regenerate-church-membership-and-evidence-of-salvation.php>

“Charles Spurgeon and a Regenerate Church Membership”

https://www.wayoflife.org/reports/charles_spurgeon_and_a_regenerate_membership.php

“Careful Child Evangelism.”

<https://www.wayoflife.org/reports/careful-child-evangelism.php>

“Seeker's Bible Study”

https://www.wayoflife.org/free_ebooks/seekers_bible_study.php

Focus on the Real Disciples

If a church has been established on a mixed multitude philosophy, it will have a lot of members who are not real disciples according to Christ's definition.

“Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed” (Joh. 8:31).

Our suggestion to pastors who are trying to strengthen the character of a church is to focus your attention more on those who are real disciples.

We want all of the people to come along and to press on to higher ground, and we should do everything we can toward that end (Col. 1:28), but oftentimes this doesn't happen, particularly if the church was not striving for a regenerate membership in the past. Those who are "settled on their lees" (Jer. 48:11; Zep. 1:12) tend to remain where they are spiritually. They have heard a lot of preaching and teaching, but they haven't responded and haven't obeyed, and this is evidence of a dire spiritual condition, as Christ said:

"He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God" (Joh. 8:47).

Of the rebel, there comes a time when God says, "Let him alone" (Hos. 4:17).

Christ has no sympathy with or acceptance of lukewarm Christianity. "So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth" (Re. 3:15-16). Why, then, should pastors put up with lukewarm people year in and year out?

The pastor who wants to make a lukewarm church a discipling church must keep his focus on those who truly love the Lord and want to obey Him, regardless of how small that group is. He should work with them to make them stronger and to educate them well in the direction the Lord is leading him, so he will have a core of people who support his biblical vision. If there is one man who is eager to pray, then spend much time in prayer with that one man. If there are two young people who have a heart to pursue God's will, then focus on those two youth.

Strengthen the Church Covenant

In the past, Baptists have used church covenants to much spiritual advantage. The Waldenses had covenants in the 11th to 15th centuries. These emphasized regeneration and holy living. The Baptists in England and America of the 17th to the

19th centuries typically had covenants. They published many books on their order and discipline, such as J.M. Pendleton's *Baptist Church Manual* of 1853 and J.L. Dagg's *Manual of Church Order* of 1857.

By the late 19th century, a large percentage of Baptist churches in America were spiritually weak and biblically shallow and had stopped practicing strict discipline. Their covenants pledging holy living and separation from the world gradually became museum pieces, odd relics of the past. As a boy growing up in such a Baptist church in the South, I can remember puzzling over the wording of the old covenant (which was posted prominently on a front wall of the auditorium) that pledged the members to do such things as the following: "We engage to maintain family and secret devotions; to religiously educate our children; to seek the salvation of our kindred and acquaintances; to walk circumspectly in the world..." The reason I found this puzzling is that I didn't know anyone who lived like this, including the pastors and Sunday School teachers!

It is better not to have a church covenant than to have one that isn't enforced.

Far better than that, though, is to have a good covenant that the people take seriously.

An effective church covenant will present a regenerate church membership and state such things as the standards for workers, standards for music, and principles of discipline.

We have placed a sample church covenant at the Way of Life web site that emphasizes these things.

Sample covenant: www.wayoflife.org/covenant.php

We started strengthening our church covenant several years ago and have continued to do so. This requires patiently educating the people and seeking unity in the changes and additions.

The goal is to leave no member behind, though typically some will be left behind because they lack a spiritual mindset

and refuse to obey God's Word. The lukewarm should not be allowed to perpetually hold back the spiritual progress of the church. At some point they must be left behind.

In some cases, it might be best to reconstitute the church around a strong covenant.

“Examples of the covenants of other churches may be consulted, but churches would do well to personalize and individualize their covenant so that the congregation as a whole owns it as their covenant, not one imposed upon them. Then, when the church has developed a covenant that expresses their commitment to one another and to Christ as his church, the church would vote to dissolve the present membership and reconstitute around those who sign their names to the church covenant. This would be preceded by several announcements of the proposed signing day. I would even encourage the pastor to send a letter to every member of the congregation with the proposed covenant and the decision of the church to reconstitute around it.

“There is a biblical precedent for such action in Nehemiah 9-10. After a time of renewal and confession in Nehemiah 8-9, Nehemiah records the decision of God's people: ‘We are making a binding agreement, putting it in writing, and our leaders, our Levites and our priests are affixing their seals to it’ (9:38). After listing all the leaders by name, the text states that the rest of the people joined with them (10:28-29). Their ‘binding agreement,’ or covenant, specified the areas of their lives that needed specific commitments. In that context, the key issues were avoiding intermarriage with the surrounding pagans, conducting no business on the Sabbath, and supporting the temple worship (10:30-39).

“Contemporary covenants would list the areas of commitment contemporary churches see as central to their life together. The people in Nehemiah's day concluded with a summary statement of their commitment, ‘We will not neglect the house of our God.’ Adopting a church covenant is one way God's people today can say, ‘We will not neglect our church.’

“This biblical example gives a beautiful model for contemporary church covenants. The covenant would be their ‘binding agreement,’ specifying areas of their commitment to Christ and one another. At the conclusion of a service celebrating the adoption of the covenant, the church leadership could be invited to come and sign their names to a roster attached to the church covenant. Then all who are willing to accept the covenant responsibilities would be invited to come and sign. The same document and roster would be taken to shut-in members who are not able to come but are still committed to the church. Those who sign would become the church’s membership. Part of the process for adding subsequent members would involve the signing of the covenant, and existing members would be asked to sign their commitment afresh every year. It could become an annual church renewal event” (Restoring Integrity in Baptist Churches, Kindle loc. 331).

Set up Biblical Standards for Workers

God has standards. He *requires* that stewards be found faithful (1 Co. 4:2). The church is the house of God, and if God requires faithfulness, every church must require it and will give account to God if it doesn’t require it. Being found faithful is not merely faithfulness to church services. It refers to being faithful to God; it refers to an all-around faithful Christian life that pleases God. That is the standard in a nutshell.

Setting up spiritual standards for workers is a way to strengthen the church even when many of the members are lukewarm and worldly. You can’t force people to be spiritual, but you can keep unspiritual people from being in ministry positions (e.g., teaching, music, even ushering).

That way, they aren’t allowed to have a serious level of influence. And it sends a strong message to them that their unbiblical way of Christian living is no small matter.

I think of a man who operates the sound system of a church, but his teenage son plays Pokemon on his mobile phone, and he even does it in church. I think of worldly teens who sing in choirs. I think of women who dress immodestly during the week, yet they sing specials in the church and teach Sunday School classes. I think of men who don't study their Bibles and aren't the spiritual leaders of their homes, yet they are ushers, or even deacons. I think of members who don't attend prayer meetings and bossy women who do not have the meek and quiet spirit that pleases God (1 Pe. 3:3-6), yet they have ministry positions in the church.

The young people in our church who are growing are those who have given up worldly media and worldly social media and are careful about their friends and associations. Those are the young people that we want in ministries, not those who are messing around with worldly things and hanging around with worldly friends, and our standards for workers reflect this.

When J. Frank Norris was called to be the pastor of First Baptist Church of Fort Worth, Texas, in 1909, the church was a typical Southern Baptist congregation in that it was controlled by the deacons and their wives. They had fired pastors prior to Norris, and when he began preaching against their sin and worldliness, they tried to fire him. But instead, he fired them! And he fired the worldly choir director. And he shut down all of the women's committees. He took the authority that God's Word gave him as pastor. It was a battle royal, but when it was over the church was unified in the Word of God, and every deacon, teacher, choir member was required to separate from worldly practices. Norris said, "No disgruntled individual, however good, or high, they may be or have stood, will be tolerated to go around trying to sow seeds of discord." Years later the pastor said, "What is needed today in the churches is wholesale destructive work. Use the broad axe of John the Baptist, not a little pearl handle pen

knife on the worldly card-playing, dancing, hell-raising choir, the board of deacons, and the teaching force. Clean out all worldliness. There can be no revival in a church that is run and dominated by the worldly element. ‘For the time is come when judgment must begin in the house of God’” (*The Inside Story of First Baptist Church*).

We deal with standards for workers in *The Discipling Church*, in the chapter entitled “A Discipling Church Maintains God’s Standards for Ministers and Workers.” There we deal with the following:

Arguments against Standards

Reasons for Maintaining Standards

Standards Our Church Maintains

Implementing and Enforcing Standards

Are Standards Contrary to Compassion?

Standards and Foundation Building

Some Things That Can Weaken Standards and Discipline

A Matter of Faith

Immerse the Church in Scripture

The Word of God has the power to bring about all of the good things required for God’s people to be perfect in all of God’s will and good pleasure.

The Word of God is quick and powerful and able.

By the Word of God children are made wise unto salvation.

By the Word of God, the redeemed know their God; they are conformed to the image of their Saviour; they are sanctified and built up spiritually; they are protected from dangers that are rife in these last days. By the Word of God, they are transformed by the renewing of the mind so they can prove that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.

See the following beautiful verses on the sanctifying power of Scripture: De. 11:18-21; Jos. 1:8; Ps. 1:2-3; 119:9, 11, 105; Ac. 20:32; Ro. 12:1-2; 2 Ti. 3:15-17; Heb. 4:12; 1 Pe. 2:2.

The church needs to be immersed in God's Word, from the youngest children to the oldest adults.

The people must read the Bible. The most basic aspect of being immersed in God's Word is simply to read it and read it and read it. A good practice is for the church to use a plan to read the Bible together each year.

Following are some Bible reading plans:

<http://www.blueletterbible.org/dailyreading/>

<https://www.biblestudytools.com/bible-reading-plan/one-year-immersion-plan.html>

<https://www.biblestudytools.com/bible-reading-plan/classic.html>

The people must memorize the Bible and learn to effectually meditate on it.

https://www.wayoflife.org/free_ebooks/memory_verse_journal.php

The people must learn how to effectively study the Bible.

https://www.wayoflife.org/s3/effectual_bible_student.php

The people must study the Bible as families. Moms and dads need to be taught how to have effectual family devotions.

https://www.wayoflife.org/reports/the_family_altar.html

The children need to be taught to have a daily Bible reading habit and gradually taught how to study the Bible for themselves.

https://www.wayoflife.org/reports/teaching_children_to_have_bible_reading.html

Immersion in God's Word requires that the Lord's people hear the Bible preached and taught in an effectual manner. This requires that the church develop serious Bible training

programs to educate all of the people: children, youth, parents, grandparents, new Christians and old, novices and preachers.

Way of Life currently publishes the following Bible teaching courses, with new ones being added regularly:

Acts

Baptist Music Wars

The Bible and Diet

The Bible and Islam

Bible Times & Ancient Kingdoms (illustrated with PowerPoints, 2020 edition)

Bible Separation

The Bible Version Issue

The Calvinism Debate

Daniel

Defense of the Faith

The Discipling Church

Dressing for the Lord

Effectual Bible Student (book and video)

Effectual Prayer in Perilous Times (scheduled for 2020)

First Corinthians

The Four Gospels

Give Attendance to Doctrine

Hebrews

The History of the Churches from a Baptist Perspective (illustrated with PowerPoints)

Holiness: Pitfalls, Struggles, Victory

Isaiah

James

Jeremiah

Jews in Fighter Jets: Israel Past, Present, and Future (illustrated with PowerPoints)

Job

Keeping the Kids: A Course in Child Training and

Discipleship (book and video)

Minor Prophets

The Mobile Phone and the Christian Home and Church

Music for Good or Evil (video course)

New Evangelicalism: Its History, Characteristics, and Fruit
The New Testament Church
One Year Discipleship Course
The Pastoral Epistles
Pastors, Deacons, and Church Members
The Pentecostal-Charismatic Movements
A Plea to Southern Gospel Music Fans
A Portrait of Christ: The Tabernacle, the Priesthood, and the Offerings
Proverbs
Psalms
Revelation
Romans
Sowing and Reaping: A Course in Evangelism (book and video)
Steps to a Stronger Church for the 21st Century (video)
Understanding the Bible for Yourself
Understanding Bible Prophecy
An Unshakeable Faith: A Course on Christian Apologetics (illustrated with PowerPoints)
What Every Christian Should Know about Rock Music
What Is the Emerging Church?
Woman and Her Service to the Lord

An effectual Bible teaching program requires that the church train skilled preachers and teachers and appoint only such teachers to minister God's Word. In visiting churches over the years, I have often been discouraged by boring, unskilled teachers. I am convinced that this is one reason why so many young people run away from church. I ran away from a church like that when I was young! I had no idea that the Bible was a thrilling, life-changing book, a book that speaks directly to my everyday life. Because of boring, unskilled teaching, the Bible seemed to be just a bunch of strange old stories that had nothing to do with my life in these present times. I had no idea that I could learn how to study the Bible with understanding and profit.

If a church has only one effectual teacher, then it should have only one teacher until others are raised up and trained.

Immersing the congregation in God's Word also involves extended preaching meetings. It takes time for the Spirit of God to use the Word to cut through carnality, worldliness, lukewarmness, and tradition, to bring conviction of sin and repentance and change of direction. In our church, we see powerful results when our people come apart from the world and become immersed in the preaching and teaching of God's Word for extended periods. We have three-day meetings multiple times each year that are attended by all of our people. These are all day meetings, not just evening meetings. People turn off their cell phones and forget their personal business as much as possible and concentrate wholly on God and His Word. This honors and pleases God and brings spiritual revival and serious growth. We have seen this happen year after year. We require all of our members to attend these meetings, unless they are in the hospital or something of that nature, because it is impossible to build up the whole body without 100% participation. If all the people won't come, then those who do come are the ones who will be revived and grow, and they will be the ones who can be the basis for a growing core of spiritual people.

Disciple All of the People

We seek to build up every member to his highest potential in Christ. This ministry should characterize every church.

“Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus: Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily” (Col. 1:28-29).

We dealt with this in the section on “Looking at a Stronger Church.”

Here we will give some practical suggestions. Recently a preacher asked me how we personally implement the ministry of warning and teaching every man, and I replied as follows:

The “every man” ministry begins with all of the preaching and teaching in all the services and the Bible conferences.

The preaching and teaching is serious and effectual. It is aimed to feed the flock a healthy, balanced, tasty, whole-counsel, entire Bible diet (Joh. 21:15-17; Ac. 20:27-28; 2 Ti. 4:2; 1 Pe. 5:2). This is why we emphasize good expository preaching. This is how we train our young preachers in the Bible college. We don’t merely have a course on expository preaching. The full three years focuses on this. The students have lots of opportunities to preach, and the preaching is critiqued. I have found that it is difficult for men to grasp the principles of good expository preaching. It takes a lot of training and practice. I am preparing to publish a course on that.

The services and conferences are carefully planned to accomplish the most in building up the flock. We don’t do things just because that is the way things have been done here or anywhere else. Everything is considered prayerfully, planned, done on purpose. We try to analyze and re-think things in order to make progress. For example, in our main service each week we begin with a half hour of uninterrupted congregational singing, not broken up by the distractions of announcements, etc. I have trained two young men as our song leaders these days, and a lot of thought and prayer and preparation goes into the song service to make it effectual in edifying the body and worshiping the Lord, which are the two purposes emphasized in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16. My course on “Marks of Good Song Leading” deals with the type of things we emphasize. Then we go over the week’s memory verse and have one or two or three people quote it (and often quote the verses from previous weeks so as not to

forget them) and someone reads from their *Memory Verse Journal* to the rest of the congregation. Then we deal with the weekly church Bible reading and have the people raise their hands if they have accomplished that project. This is to assist the people by way of accountability. Then we have any other preliminaries, such as announcements. Then we have an hour or more of preaching. Sometimes we have two preachers, one of the younger ones for experience and an older one. This is to give younger preachers opportunities to preach while not subjecting the church to the sole ministry of a learner.

Our Lord's Supper is a major part of building up the body. It is held monthly after the main service when the visitors have left. We conduct our church business then, but we use it for serious training of the body, because only members are present.

We have regular training/discipling meetings geared for men, women, and youth. We have a monthly youth meeting on one evening and an annual three-day one. These are serious Bible training forums, no goofing around. We have a half hour weekly men's discipling meeting that is before the main service.

The Bible conferences (the missions conference, the annual youth conference, and usually a couple of Bible conferences) are extremely serious building forums. They are three full days. The meetings begin at 10am and last until 7pm. It is a time to come out of the world and immerse in the Word of God and spiritual fellowship. It creates a powerful environment for the Spirit of God to work. We often see salvations and always many life-changing decisions.

The requirement of faithfulness is an important part of building up each member. Our members are required to be faithful to all services and required functions such as conferences, unless they are providentially unable due to sickness or something like that. (This is considered by the leaders on a case by case basis.) This is based on Acts 2:42;

Ephesians 4:14; Colossians 1:28; Hebrews 10:25; 1 Peter 2:5, etc. It is impossible for us to build the people up as God commands, and for them to exercise their ministry in the body, if they are absent. We put a lot of attention and work into every service and conference, and the people must be present and in a good mind to receive God's Word or what we have done is in vain. When it comes to the conferences, not only do they attend all the services, but we urge them to forget their own business insofar as it is possible and concentrate as fully as possible on the theme of the conference and the things of God.

It isn't because the culture in South Asia facilitates people more easily coming to meetings that we have won this battle. People in Kathmandu today are as busy with their own affairs as the people in Sydney or Seattle or Singapore.

Victory in this goes back to requiring a regenerate church membership so that the members are truly and clearly saved and growing and serving, and by requiring faithfulness from the very beginning of their lives as church members.

We also use tools such as a church-wide daily Bible reading program, the weekly memory verse journal, and a one-on-one discipleship program.

Every new member goes through the 52 lesson *One Year Discipleship Course* under the instruction and guidance of a mature member who meets with them weekly. This also draws the people closer to one another and helps create unity in doctrine and practice.

Our church covenant is a major teaching tool. It is not only a basic numeration of things such as standards for members and workers, it has serious instruction about church discipline, music, and many other things. Prospective members are required to go through it and to answer the review questions that assist in understanding.

We have courses that the people can take privately (such as Way of Life's *Advanced Bible Studies Series*). I consider the

following courses absolutely foundational: *Effectual Bible Study*, *Old Testament History & Geography*, *The Four Gospels*, and *Acts*. The first gives basic principles and methods of Bible study, while the other three give a survey of the Bible's history. The people can take these courses privately as individuals or with their families or with friends.

We *emphasize* the pursuit of serious study on the part of every member. We impart the philosophy that the equivalent of a Bible Institute education is the BEGINNING of the level of Bible education that is necessary for a fruitful Christian life.

Beyond this, we have private meetings to address particular individual and family situations. If we know of an unresolved issue, such as marital problems, neglect of family devotions, worldliness, signs of backsliding, we meet with individuals and husband/wives, etc., privately and try to help them along.

One Year Discipleship Course

[https://www.wayoflife.org/publications/courses/
one_year_discipleship.php](https://www.wayoflife.org/publications/courses/one_year_discipleship.php)

“One-on-One Discipleship Program”

[https://www.wayoflife.org/reports/
one_on_one_discipling_program.php](https://www.wayoflife.org/reports/one_on_one_discipling_program.php)

Memory Verse Journal

[https://www.wayoflife.org/free_ebooks/
memory_verse_journal.php](https://www.wayoflife.org/free_ebooks/memory_verse_journal.php)

Church Covenant

[https://www.wayoflife.org/free_ebooks/
fellowship_baptist_church_covenant.php](https://www.wayoflife.org/free_ebooks/fellowship_baptist_church_covenant.php)

Effectual Bible Student

[https://www.wayoflife.org/s3/
effectual_bible_student.php](https://www.wayoflife.org/s3/effectual_bible_student.php)

Deal with Sin

The church body must be continually purified or it will be corrupted. This is what Paul emphasized in the chief New Testament passage on discipline.

“Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us” (1 Co. 5:6-7).

When God’s people persist in not obeying Him, they are to be reprovved and rebuked, and if they do not respond to that, they must be disciplined.

A great many churches are being leavened by the sin that is not being dealt with biblically by the leaders, and as a result they are getting spiritually weaker by the year. I think of churches in which deacons (and their wives) are not good spiritual examples in their personal lives and homes, are unqualified by God’s standards, yet remain in that important office. I think of teenage and young adult church members, even the children of pastors, whose social media reflects worldly hearts and lives, yet nothing is done.

Oftentimes, if such things are brought to the attention of the leaders, they make excuses, ignore it, shove it under the rug. They even turn against those who report the sin, unlike how Paul responded to the reports of the house of Chloe (1 Co. 1:11). Such leaders have a lot to account for before Christ. In a New Testament church, every member has a responsibility to edify and purify the body (Eph. 4:15-16). Every member has the divine obligation to “admonish one another” (Ro. 15:14) and to “exhort one another” (Heb. 10:25).

Sin Must Be Dealt with by Reproof and Rebuke.

Dealing with sin biblically requires reproof and rebuke (2 Ti. 4:2; Tit. 1:13; 2:15).

This is one of the major ways that God chastens His people today. Jesus said, “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent” (Re. 3:19). How does He do that? He does it by the rebuke of biblical preaching as the man of God speaks “as the oracles of God” (1 Pe. 4:11).

God emphasizes the necessity of reproof and rebuking in preaching. It is not an option. In 2 Timothy 4:2, “reprove, rebuke” are mentioned before “exhort” and “doctrine.” This is by way of emphasis. We know that in practice, teaching is first, then exhortation, then reproof and rebuke. First we teach people what God wants them to do, then we exhort them to do it, and only when they refuse to do what they know to be right, are they reproofed and rebuked. But in 2 Timothy 4:2, the Spirit of God puts reproof and rebuke first. That emphasizes how important and necessary this ministry is. It is possibly mentioned first, also, because it is the most difficult part of a biblical preaching ministry and because it is usually the first thing that disappears down the path of apostasy.

For a pastor not to rebuke sinning people in his congregation is rebellion against the God who called him and the God to whom he is going to give account. It is no small thing.

God was pleased when the priest Phinehas took a javelin and killed the Israelite who was committing fornication with a Midianitish woman (Nu. 25:5-14). And the man he killed was a chief man of the tribe of Simeon, and the woman was a princess of the Midianites. “And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, hath turned my wrath away from the children of Israel, while he was zealous for my sake among them, that I consumed not the children of Israel in my jealousy” (Nu. 25:10-11). Phinehas was not sitting around worrying about what would happen to him if he punished some big shots; he was consumed with zeal for God and God’s Word.

Of course, preachers aren't commissioned to kill people today, but they are certainly commissioned to "reprove, rebuke, exhort" and to exercise discipline in the case of steadfast impenitence.

A young preacher recently said to me, "It seems that many pastors are unwilling to deal with issues in the assemblies and think that 'more teaching' will somehow benefit. When in fact they must take the lead like Phinehas and spearhead the issue by a practical means, not necessarily just preaching."

God was pleased when King Asa removed *his own grandmother* from the position as queen mother and publicly destroyed her idol (1 Ki. 15:13). Asa wasn't sitting around worrying about what the extended family might think or do. He was filled with zeal for God and God's Word.

If, after being properly instructed and exhorted, people refuse to attend prayer meetings, for example, they should be rebuked for their rebellion against the clear commands of God and for their spiritual lukewarmness. Paul, Peter, and Jude commanded God's people to pray (Ro. 12:12; Eph. 6:18; Col. 4:2; 1 Th. 5:17; 1 Ti. 2:1; 1 Pe. 4:7; Jude 1:20). It's not a suggestion. So if the people persist in not attending prayer meetings after they have been instructed and exhorted, they should be rebuked plainly. There should be clear repercussions. The pastor shouldn't act as if things are fine in his church when his members don't even want to pray! In fact, in our church, such people would not be allowed to be members, since they obviously don't fit the standard of the first church members who "continued steadfastly ... in prayers" (Ac. 2:42). A true New Testament saint is a praying person.

If men are not the spiritual leaders of their homes, if they don't have a serious walk with Christ, aren't serious Bible students, aren't men of prayer, aren't leading their families as God commands, all of which things are basic New Testament

Christian obligations, they should be rebuked in no uncertain terms.

If the mothers who have children at home disobey God and are not “keepers at home,” and they have no good excuse for it, they should be rebuked.

If the women dress like the world instead of obeying Christ’s teaching on modesty, they should be rebuked.

If the young people love the world, they should be rebuked.

This is for Christ’s sake, for the church’s sake, for the family’s sake, for the children’s sake, and for the spiritual welfare of those who are sinning.

And reproof and rebuke must also be given face-to-face and not only in the public preaching. *Every* member is to be warned and taught (Col. 1:28). If a brother is overtaken in a fault, he is to be restored, not ignored (Ga. 6:1). If a father neglects to be the spiritual leader of his home or a mother neglects to be the keeper at home or if a teenage member is in love with the world or if members neglect the prayer meetings, etc., and if they don’t change through the public preaching and reproof, they must be dealt with directly. If unrepentant sin is ignored, it will leaven the whole church (1 Co. 5:6).

Sin Must Be Dealt with by Discipline.

When church members persist in sin after being taught, exhorted, reprovved, and rebuked, they must be disciplined. To fail in this for any reason is to doom the church’s spiritual character.

A Tennessee pastor told me in November 2019 that he knows “a lot of pastors,” but only perhaps four or five churches in the South, other than his, that practice discipline. In 2017, a pastor friend in Georgia told me that he personally knows of no other church in the state that practices discipline other than his.

Fundamental Baptists have become no better in spiritual character than Southern Baptists.

There is an extensive study of the practice of biblical discipline in *The Discipling Church*, available from www.wayoflife.org. This study also includes the history of discipline in Baptist churches in former times. Their biblical strictness and zeal for holiness reproves the lukewarmness that prevails in our day, even among churches that consider themselves to be very “conservative.”

Emphasize Separation from the World

There can be no true New Testament church without separation from the world. Separation is commanded by God and is a necessary part of the spiritual environment. When separation is given up, the world will eventually devour everything.

Separation must be founded on Scripture.

True biblical separation is much stricter than that which is practiced in most churches. Even the most “conservative” churches, typically, are patterning their separation after the shifting-sand standard of other “conservative” churches rather than the absolute standard of Scripture. This is why the standards of separation have gradually weakened over the decades, even in the most conservative of churches.

The Bible has very strong things to say about separation from the world. Love of the world is spiritual adultery (Jas. 4:4). Those who love the world do not have the love of the Father (1 Jo. 2:15-16). Association with the world is fellowship with unrighteousness and darkness (2 Co. 6:14).

Consider how strict the separation must be:

“Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and **TOUCH NOT** the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you” (2 Corinthians 6:17).

“Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from **ALL** filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Corinthians 7:1).

“And have **NO** fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove *them*” (Ephesians 5:11).

“Abstain from **ALL** appearance of evil” (1 Thessalonians 5:22).

“Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, *and* to keep himself **UNSPOTTED** from the world” (James 1:27).

“Love not the world, neither the things *that are* in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For **ALL** that *is* in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever” (1 John 2:15-17).

Separation must be applied.

The Bible’s separation standards must be applied to every area of Christian living. God’s people must be looking for every unclean thing, every filthiness of the flesh and spirit, every unfruitful work of darkness, every appearance of evil, every spot of the world, everything that pertains to the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eyes, and the pride of life.

When it comes to applying these biblical truths, nothing is out of bounds. Everything must be examined: the individual life, the home, the work environment, music, fashion, friends, associates, entertainment, hobbies, literature, social media, employment.

Separation must be preached and taught.

For separation to be effective, it must be a major aspect of the church’s preaching and teaching ministry. Proper education requires that the whole church family, from youngest to oldest, be taught and re-taught. The teaching must be thorough and practical. It is not enough to have a list of dos and don’ts. It is not enough to mention a few pet peeves and hobby horses in the preaching. God’s people need

to know the biblical principles of separation and the reasons for it so that they can live it out.

There should be expository messages on key passages dealing with separation.

We spend a lot of time instructing our church about separation. It is not a matter of legalism and Phariseism. It is a matter of spiritual conviction and spiritual protection. Our young people separate from the world because they love Christ and want to prove His good and acceptable and perfect will, and they know that this requires non-conformity to the world (Romans 12:1-2). Dozens of them have given up drugs, drinking, polluted social media, the world's music, the world's fashions, worldly friends, etc., of their own volition.

Consider, for example, some major principles of separation from Romans 12:1-2. This is the type of education that is needed.

- True separation flows from salvation and full surrender. Otherwise it is mere external religion.

- Separation is an issue of non-conformity. The Bible-believing separatist is the true non-conformist. The word “conformed” is *suschematizo*, which refers to a blueprint, a pattern. It is translated “fashion” in 1 Peter 1:14--“not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts.” It means to “stop being molded by the external and fleeting fashions of this age” (*Complete World Study Dictionary*). The child of God must refuse to allow the world to shape him.

- Separation is strict. There is to be no conformity to the world.

- Separation is a mindset (“renewing of your mind”). The fundamental of separation is a mind filled with Christ and the Word of God. The renewing of the mind happens by the power of Scripture through reading, studying, memorizing, meditating, applying, obeying. As the mind is renewed, the vanities of the world look shallow and foolish and empty. A renewing mind is a sober, vigilant, testing mindset. If you

aren't testing and resisting the culture, you are being conformed to it. We don't want the world messing with our minds by its music, advertisements, literature, social media, blogs, etc.

- Separation requires the transformation of one's life and the pursuit of God's will. The individual who is not growing and serving will not be separated.

There are two lessons on separation in the *One Year Discipleship Course*.

https://www.wayoflife.org/publications/courses/one_year_discipleship.php

There are many more studies on separation in *Bible Separation: Its Doctrine and Practice*.

https://www.wayoflife.org/publications/books/bible_separation.php

Separation must be enforced for all workers

A major way to raise the standard of separation from the world in a church is to have clear standards of separation for all workers. If a young person intends to love the world, he or she should not be allowed to have any ministry in the church. A ministry is not a *right*; it is a *privilege* for those who are spiritually qualified.

Build Godly Families

Another fundamental step toward building a stronger church for the 21st century is to focus on building godly families.

Without godly, separated, discipling families, a church is incredibly weak.

We see two houses in 1 Timothy, and they are to work together. First, we see the "house of God" (1 Ti. 3:15). This is the New Testament church. The context is a church with pastors and deacons. Its purpose is to nurture, protect, train,

equip, prepare, and discipline God's people. The church is the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Ti. 3:15). It is tasked with being the headquarters of world evangelism and discipleship in this age. Second, we see thine "own house" (1 Ti. 3:4, 12; 5:8). This is the Christian home. Its purpose is to raise up a godly seed for God's glory. Children do not belong to parents; they belong to God. "Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine..." (Eze. 18:4). Malachi 2:15 says that God seeks "a godly seed" from the homes.

We don't need a "home church," so to speak. We need a church that ministers *to* the home and works together *with* the home.

The church should support the home's program of raising a godly seed for the Lord, and the home should support the church's program of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8).

Families are addressed through the church epistles (e.g. Ephesians 5:22 - 6:4; Colossians 3:18-21; Titus 2:4-5). The spiritual education of the home is contained in the epistles addressed to churches and preachers. So it is the church's task to build up the homes by this teaching.

The church must teach about the husband-wife relationship, the father's role in the home, the mother's role, family devotions, child discipline, child training, holiness, and separation from the world.

The church must train the younger women (Titus 2:3-5).

A major emphasis should be to build up the men to take their spiritual responsibilities seriously. It is the father who is to take the headship and oversight of his family. The fathers are instructed to bring up the children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). The father doesn't do all of the work of raising the children, but he is in charge of all of the work and he oversees all of the work, and he must have a very active role.

We spend a lot of time and effort preparing our young people and single adults for marriage. The time to begin learning how to be a good husband, wife, and parent is before you get married. When we teach on marriage and child training, we are not addressing the married couples only. We are addressing the single people to prepare them for marriage.

Some of the fundamental elements of the home that produces a godly seed are these:

1. Husband and wife having good Christian character; consistency in Christian living; hypocrisy is one of the most destructive things in raising a godly seed

2. Good husband/wife relationship

3. Commitment to and faithfulness to and serving in a sound New Testament church.

4. The father the spiritual head of the home.

5. Dad and mom 100% committed to raising the children for Christ; a major priority.

6. Mom and Dad being prayer warriors

7. Biblical child discipline; this needs to be a serious matter of study and application.

8. The mom a keeper at home (Titus 2:5).

9. Serious Bible education (training the children to be Bible students). 2 Ti. 3:15, "And that from a child thou hast known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."

10. Wisdom and extreme caution about education in general.

11. Separation from all evil things (1 Jo. 2:15-16; Eph. 5:11); constantly examining, evaluating; toys, books, entertainment, recreation, clothing, friends, relatives, everything.

12. Wisdom and extreme caution about the Internet, smart phones, computers, social media.

13. Wisdom and extreme caution about bringing the children to salvation.

Following are some suggested materials for building good Christian homes:

God's Wisdom for Marriage and the Home by Scott Markle

Keeping the Kids: How to Keep the Children from Falling Prey to the World by David Cloud, www.wayoflife.org

Training Your Children to Turn out Right by David Sorenson, www.northstarministries.com

A church that doesn't build godly homes is doing something terribly wrong. The homes are the fruit of the church. Not every home will be subject to God's Word and respond to a church's ministry, but generally speaking, a church that is doing what it should be doing will be building holy homes that are producing a godly seed. It will be baptizing and receiving into membership only those people who show good evidence of salvation, and such people are eager to learn, grow, and obey (Acts 2:41-42; 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10).

Why should people be allowed to be members of a church if they aren't submitted to God's Word in such fundamental things? Why should a man or a woman be allowed to be a member in good standing in a church if he or she refuses to aim to be, with some real zeal, the husband and father or wife and mother that God demands that they be? Why should such brazen disobedience be accepted year after year with no real consequences? This is not Acts 2:41-42 Christianity.

In taking steps to build a stronger church, if a pastor finds that he has no godly homes that are producing a godly seed, he should first of all repent of his part in building such a church. He should accept some real blame for this mess. Too many pastors shift the blame for such things on everyone and everything other than themselves: a former pastor, the people themselves, the culture, the times, etc. That is not confession;

it is excuse making. “For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged” (1 Co. 11:31).

If there is true repentance on the pastor’s part for producing the terrible fruit of not building godly homes, let him rise up and build. The church membership should be purged of lukewarms who make Christ sick to His stomach (Revelation 3:16), and move forward with what is left.

If there are zero fathers/husbands and wives/mothers in the membership who will submit to God’s Word about the home, that church (unless it is a new one) has nothing and is nothing and should probably disband so as not to further harm the testimony of Christ.

If there is one family that will submit to God’s Word, then focus on that one family and proceed from there.

Emphasize Bible Prophecy

Prophecy is a major theme of Scripture. It gives a proper worldview, a right understanding of the times. It shows that we are living in a time of apostasy. It shows that the hour is late and therefore the work of God must be done now, while there is opportunity. A right understanding of prophecy gives a tremendous sense of urgency to fulfilling the Great Commission.

Prophecy must be interpreted literally. This is the key to understanding it.

The return of Jesus Christ is a *major* New Testament doctrine, and the preaching and teaching of it is essential for holy living. It was emphasized by Christ (Mt. 24:29-31; Mr. 13:24-27). It was a theme of apostolic preaching in the book of Acts (Ac. 1:11; 3:19-20). It is mentioned in nearly every Epistle, and it is said to be imminent. See Ro. 11:26; 1 Co. 1:7-8; 11:26; 15:51-58; Php. 1:6, 10; 2:16; 1 Th. 1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:15-17; 5:23; 2 Th. 1:7-9; 2:1, 8; 3:5; 1 Ti. 6:14; 2 Ti. 4:1, 8; Tit.

2:13; Jas. 5:7-9; Heb. 9:28; 10:37; 1 Pe. 1:7; 5:4; 2 Pe. 3:10-13; 1 Jo. 2:28; 3:2; Jude 14-15; Re. 1:7; 19:11-21; 22:7, 12, 20.

The mindset of always looking for Christ's return was modeled by the church at Thessalonica, which "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for his Son from heaven..." (1 Th. 1:9-10).

The imminent return of Christ must, therefore, be a fundamental part of every believer's worldview, a major theme of all biblical preaching, a constantly-emphasized doctrine of every church.

There are signs that preaching on Bible prophecy is being neglected even among "fundamentalist" churches. The following is from a reader: "About three years ago I was speaking with another fundamental Baptist pastor here in the area. I mentioned that I truly believed the Lord was coming soon. He said, 'You know, everybody was preaching on this back in the 70's, 80's and 90's and thought surely Christ would come before 2000. I really don't preach that much any more.' I about fell on the floor and responded to him, 'If Christ did not come by then, how much closer now?' I said, 'I preach His coming regularly trying to wake people up to holiness and living for Christ so that they won't be ashamed at His coming.' Speaking to a missionary friend who spoke at our church recently, I mentioned this story. His words were, 'I have heard more from you today about the second coming than I have for months in other fundamental Baptist churches. This is from a man from a large missions ministry who preaches regularly across the country. Our people live in denial of this truth and unfortunately our preachers are also.'"

At the International Fellowship of Fundamental Baptists meeting in February 2020, one of the speakers observed that "you hardly hear anyone preaching on the Second Coming."

Other readers sent the following comments:

"Fundamental Baptist preachers seem very reluctant to delve into prophecy. ... I don't think I have ever heard a really solid

message from an Independent Fundamental Baptist preacher from the mountain of Old Testament prophecies with momentous future fulfillment.”

“I was talking to my wife recently about how that prophecy preaching has all but gone away.”

“I have never heard a Baptist Bible Fellowship preacher speak on the Second Coming or related themes, not once!”

“Some years ago I was leading a Bible conference as the director of Britain’s Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry. When I and several pastors visited Spurgeon’s church (2002) its pastor ... said we were wasting our time on prophecy and also God was done with the Jewish people. How sad. I recently created a video on the reasons for the decline of fundamental churches in the USA. ... Based upon ... several surveys, including one very telling and significant in Britain, I could sum it up simply: Pastors - Prayer - Prophecy. Most people believe pastors are not teaching all Scripture and what they do teach on is very Calvinistic in outlook and does not reflect the Scriptures. Most people believe the churches corporate prayer life is weak at best. ... Sadly, few people are learning to pray. Finally, many attribute the loss of people in the church due to the lack of teaching prophecy, i.e. what is coming and what will be believer’s role in the Millennium and in eternity. I find young adults (20-45 year olds) really are interested in careful expository teaching on prophetic issues, when done in a literal/normal-historical-grammatical way. When the pastoral ministry is not biblical, when there is no real prayer, and when prophecy is ignored, the people leave the churches. Sadly, the churches are allowing the sheep to wander without shepherds.”

This is a serious matter. Preachers who neglect Bible prophecy are not preaching the whole counsel of God and are not qualified for the ministry.

God’s people must be taught how to interpret prophecy for themselves. The entire church needs to be educated in Bible

prophecy, such as by going through courses in Sunday School or some other forum.

We recommend the course *Understanding Bible Prophecy*
[https://www.wayoflife.org/publications/abss/
understanding_bible_prophecy.php](https://www.wayoflife.org/publications/abss/understanding_bible_prophecy.php)

Double Down on Evangelism

A mixed multitude church is not going to be changed overnight. If a church has been overly hasty in proclaiming people saved without clear evidence and careless in baptism and receiving members, this will usually be reflected in a low level of spiritual life across a significant portion of the congregation.

Unsaved and carnal people do not respond readily to the type of preaching that will increase the spiritual level of the congregation, to say the least!

What such a church needs is new members who exhibit new life. A pastor who is trying to move a church beyond a mixed multitude condition must give a lot of attention to evangelism, while also being very careful about baptism and receiving members going forward.

One pastor friend talks about putting out a lot of fishing lines. The more hooks you have in the water, the more likely it is that you will catch fish. Evangelistic fishing lines are things like the following:

- An aggressive, well planned door-to-door visitation program to reach one's entire area
- An effective tract distribution program (obtaining quality tracts, keeping them in stock, teaching the people how to use them, exhorting them to use them, teaching the people to set personal goals of tract distribution)
 - Preaching on the streets and in market places
 - Using the church's web site or Facebook for evangelism (gospel material, apologetics material)

- Gospel Bible studies in homes (see the *Seeker's Bible Study* at the Way of Life web site)
- Gospel ministries to nursing homes, schools, truck stops, prisons, etc.

In a typical church today there won't be many members that will join the pastor in aggressive evangelism, but a man has to start where he is and use whatever resources he has. If he can start by getting one or two people enthused about this business, that is better than none.

The ultimate goal is to get every member involved. Every child of God has been appointed an ambassador of Christ (2 Co. 5:20). And the pastor must lead in this and not leave it to someone else. When a preacher starts a new church, he is usually very visionary and aggressive in evangelism. If that vision has shriveled, it must be revived.

Following are materials that can be helpful for this task:

SOWING AND REAPING: A COURSE IN EVANGELISM. This course is unique in several ways. It is unique in its approach. While it is practical and down-to-earth, it does not present a formulaic approach to soul winning, recognizing that individuals have to be dealt with as individuals. The course does not include any sort of psychological manipulation techniques. It does not neglect repentance in soul winning, carefully explaining the biblical definition of repentance and the place of repentance in personal evangelism. It explains how to use the law of God to plow the soil of the human heart so that the gospel can find good ground. The course is unique in its objective. The objective of biblical soul winning is not to get people to "pray a sinner's prayer"; the objective is to see people soundly converted to Christ. This course trains the soul winner to pursue genuine conversions as opposed to mere "decisions." The course is also unique in its breadth. It covers a wide variety of situations, including how to deal with Hindus and with skeptics and how to use apologetics or evidences in

evangelism. There is a memory course consisting of 111 select verses and links to a large number of resources that can be used in evangelism, many of them free. The course is suitable for teens and adults and for use in Sunday School, Youth Ministries, Preaching, and private study. OUTLINE: The Message of Evangelism, Repentance and Evangelism, God's Law and Evangelism, The Reason for Evangelism, The Authority for Evangelism, The Power for Evangelism, The Attitude in Evangelism, The Technique of Evangelism, Using Tracts in Evangelism, Dealing with Skeptics. 104 pages,

https://www.wayoflife.org/publications/video/sowing_and_reaping.php

SEEKER'S BIBLE STUDY is a Bible study for unbelievers and non-Christians. It explains the gospel of Jesus Christ, repentance, and faith. It begins with a study of the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 which deals with the Bible, Christ, sin, Jesus' atoning death for sin, Jesus' burial and bodily resurrection. The studies on repentance and faith are extremely practical. The last section answers the question, "When Is Jesus Coming?" The study is designed to be used as a multi-week, one-on-one teaching course. In our church, we assign a qualified believer to go through the course with every willing visitor. The teacher is instructed to try to grow the class by involving family, neighbor's, and friends of the original student. The teacher's notes can be found in the file "Seeker's Bible Study - Teacher's Notes." Both the study and the teacher's notes are available at the following page:

https://www.wayoflife.org/free_ebooks/seekers_bible_study.php

IDEAS FOR EVANGELISM. This book is packed with practical suggestions for evangelism. Following are some of the topics that are covered: The Importance of Pastoral Leadership, Training and Challenging the People, Discipleship, Standards for Church Workers, Training the Church to Be Visitor Conscious, The Church Services,

Prayer, Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, Door-to-Door Visitation, New Move-ins, Religious Surveys, Advertising, Church Papers, Correspondence Courses, Adopt a Bus Kid, Testimony Gospel Tapes, Gospel Tracts, Telephone Calls, Christmas Plays, Targeting Special Community Events, Tragedy Outreach, Campus Ministry, Foreign Exchange Students, Immigrants, Foreign College Students, The Deaf, Ministry to Military Personnel, Creation Science, Evangelistic Bible Studies, Tent Meetings. Fourth edition, 236 pages
https://www.wayoflife.org/free_ebooks/ideas_for_evangelism.php

WITNESSING WITH GOSPEL TRACTS

https://www.wayoflife.org/reports/witnessing_with_gospel_tracts.php

Have a Strong Vision for Church Planting and World Missions

Have a goal to build an Antioch church, which is a church with a vision of preaching the gospel as far and wide as possible and planting New Testament churches. An Antioch church prepares and sends out missionary teams to do this work (Ac. 13-14).

Surrendering to God's will is not merely surrendering to live a godly Christian life and to be a good citizen and to separate from the world. It is surrendering to my part in God's great business on earth, which is Christ's Great Commission.

Pray for laborers for the harvest (Lu. 10:2). As stated previously, we started doing this in our main service each week in 2012, and ever since then the Lord has been calling workers to the ministry from our congregation. A young man with a good spiritual testimony leads the congregation in this prayer.

We founded a three-year, full-time Bible School to train those that God calls, and as I write, we are preparing to start the third class.

We consider the annual three-day (all day) missionary conference the most important conference, and we emphasize it the most. It is intended to give God's people an ever-increasing vision for Christ's command of world evangelism and to give them ever-increasing training for this work (Mt. 28:18-20; Mr. 16:15; Lu. 24:44-48; Ac. 1:8). It is our policy that every member must plan to attend every service unless providentially hindered with an excuse that would be acceptable to God. We plan vacations and many other things, and it is dishonoring to God not to plan to be present in important church meetings. How can God speak to His people when they aren't present? We teach the people that when God has business, it is time to forget your own business. How can God lead the body in unity when part of the body is absent? It is impossible, of course, and the lackadaisical way that Bible conferences are treated in most churches today is absolutely a sin against God. To put my business before God's business is idolatry.

We have dealt with these and many other things in the book *The Discipling Church*. There we also deal with right leadership, a disciplined environment, education, an atmosphere of charity, discipling youth, and caution about music. *The Discipling Church* is available in print or as a free eBook from www.wayoflife.org.

21 Steps Review Questions

Looking at a Stronger Church

1. What verse says the church is the house of God, the pillar and ground of the truth?

2. What is the meaning of the “church” in that context?

3. Under the law of Moses, the house of God was what two things?

4. What are five things that are indicated by the church being the house of God?

5. Haste and carelessness in what thing is the most fundamental cause of apostasy?

6. According to the Gospel of John, the truth is what two things?

7. What are six ways that the church is the ground of the truth?

8. The church should not merely _____ a Bible institute, it should ____ a Bible institute.

9. What verse exhorts to earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints?

10. What book and chapter exhorts God’s people to do all things without murmurings and disputings in order to shine as lights in the world?

11. What book and chapter describes every age category of Christian and gives them instructions for good Christian living?

12. What book and chapter describes discipline for sins such as adultery?

13. What does the Bible mean when it says the church is the pillar of the truth?

14. List four verses that describe the work of being the pillar of the truth?

15. What is a reason why pillar and mentioned before ground?
16. What book and chapter describes the church as a spiritual house made of living stones?
17. What is the meaning of “Christ”?
18. What is the Hebrew equivalent of Christ?
19. What is the meaning of the word “precious” in 1 Peter 2:4 (“chosen of God and precious”)?
20. How does a sinner become a living stone?
21. That the church is to be a spiritual house made of living stones tells us what about church membership?
22. What book and chapter says New Testament believers have been made kings and priests and we will reign with Christ on earth?
23. What are five of the ways that Peter describes Christian priestly work?
24. In Acts 2, the members of the first church continued stedfastly in what four things?
25. The fundamental mark of a New Testament church is a _____ church membership.
26. How does Acts 2 describe the way that the 3,000 on the day of Pentecost received God’s Word before they were baptized?
27. What did Peter say that the people had to do before being baptized?
28. In what verse did Paul instruct the churches to warn every man and teach every man in all wisdom?
29. The breaking of bread in Acts 2 refers to what?
30. What book and chapter says the church is to be a new lump without leaven?
31. This refers to what Old Testament feast?
32. In what book and chapter is this feast first mentioned?

33. What verse says that Christ gave himself that he might purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works?

34. What verse says we are to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit?

35. What verse says we are to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness?

36. How does Paul describe the conversion of the believers at Thessalonica?

37. The Word of God sounded forth from this church to what region?

38. What two major characteristics of a New Testament church found in Romans 15:14?

39. What does it mean for a believer to be full of goodness?

40. How does a believer become full of goodness?

41. List six things that are necessary for a believer become filled with all knowledge.

42. To present men perfect in Christ Jesus requires what fundamental spiritual reality?

43. What does “perfect” mean in Colossians 1:28?

44. In this verse, why is warning mentioned before teaching?

45. What does it mean to warn and teach “with all wisdom”?

46. What is the meaning of “present every man” in Col. 1:28?

47. What book and chapter describes the church as a spiritual body that is built up by the leaders and members working together?

48. In what way does this passage describe a regenerate church membership?

49. What is the first thing that is mentioned in this passage that is necessary for the church’s ministry?

50. This passage mentions a “perfect man.” What is that?

51. This passage says every joint and every part should contribute to the body. What does this mean?

52. What are four characteristics of an Antioch church?

53. What are five ways that a church raises up ministry-gifted men?

54. How do we know that the church at Antioch was walking in close fellowship with the Spirit of God?

55. In what passage of the New Testament do we see Christ speaking directly to individual churches?

56. What are the stars of Revelation 1:20?

57. What is the significance of the churches being represented by golden candlesticks? List as many lessons from this as you can.

58. What is the significance of Christ's eyes being depicted as "a flame of fire"?

59. What is the significance of Christ's voice described as "of a trumpet" and "a sharp two-edged sword"?

60. What is the significance of Christ's feet being described described as "like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace"?

61. What are the nine ministries that Christ has to the churches in this passage?

21 Steps toward a Stronger Church

62. What book and chapter describes revival by the path of separation, humility, submission, cleansing, purifying, mourning?

63. What was the title of Archibald Brown's 1889 book?

64. What book and chapter says God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind?

65. Courage is not something to ask for or to seek; it is something to _____.

66. In the context of commanding Joshua to be of good courage, God told him to do what three things?

67. What did Chester Tulga call the frenzy for big church numbers statistics?

68. What man in 1929 claimed to pastor the churches with the world's largest Sunday School attendance?

69. What is a "mixed multitude" church?

70. James Garrett said, "Those who would lead in the renewal of discipline must be thoroughly convinced of its _____."

71. What verse says "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much"?

72. About how many times is prayer mentioned in the Bible?

73. What did Paul say about prayer in 1 Timothy 2?

74. 1 John 5:14 says we can have confidence that God hears us in prayer if we what?

75. Paul gave the example of seeking prayer _____.

76. What verse says "this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting"?

77. What verse says it is necessary to be "wise unto salvation"?

78. What verse describes salvation as obeying from the heart "that form of doctrine delivered you"?

79. What two verses contain a summary of the gospel?

80. In what verse does Paul describe salvation as "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ"?

81. In what verse did Jesus say His sheep hear His voice and follow Him?

82. What book and chapter says that those who say, I know him, and keep not his commandments is a liar?

83. What is the evidence of salvation in 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10?

84. What verse exhorts believers not to neglect the assemblies?

85. How did Jesus describe a “disciple indeed” in John 8:31?

86. What verse says he that is of God hears God’s words?

87. How do we know that Christ doesn’t accept lukewarm Christianity?

88. At what time did a great many Baptist churches in America stop practicing church discipline?

89. What verse says that God requires that a steward be found faithful?

90. What does this refer to?

91. Write out five verses on the sanctifying power of Scripture.

92. What verse instructs the preacher to speak, exhort, and rebuke with all authority?

93. What verse says a little leaven leaveth the whole lump, in reference to sin in the church?

94. What book and chapter says love not the world, neither the things that are in the world?

95. That passage defines the world in what three ways?

96. What verse commands God’s people to abstain from all appearance of evil?

97. What verse commands cleansing from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit?

98. What verse says to “touch not the unclean thing”?

99. What verse says to “be not conformed to this world”?

100. The command to be not conformed to this world is given in the context of teaching on what subject?

101. That passage also commands “the renewing of your mind”? How is this done?

102. What are the two houses in 1 Timothy?

103. How can children belong to parents when the Bible says “all souls are mine”?

104. What verse says God seeks a “godly seed” from the homes?

105. What is the church’s program of the “great commission”?

106. How do we see in Scripture that it is the church that is to build up the homes?

107. In what book and chapter do we see older women teaching the younger?

108. What verse says, “And that from a child thou hast known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus”?

109. What is Acts 2:41-42 Christianity?

110. What verse says, “For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged”?

111. Write out one verse each from the Epistles of Paul, James, and Peter that teach that Christ’s return is imminent.

112. What is an Antioch church?

113. Where in Scripture do we find this church?

114. In what verse in the Gospel of Luke did Jesus instruct His disciples to pray the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest?

Suggested Materials from www.wayoflife.org

- *The Discipling Church*
- *21 Steps to a Stronger Church for the 21st Century*
- *Effectual Bible Study*
- *Effectual Expository Preaching* (scheduled for publication summer 2020)
- *Church Covenant*
- *One Year Discipleship Course*
- *Memory Verse Journal*
- *The Satanic Attack on Sacred Music* (video series)
- *Seeker's Bible Study*
- *Keeping the Kids: A Course in Child Training and Discipleship* (book and video)
- *Sowing and Reaping: A Course in Evangelism*
- *Advanced Bible Studies Series courses* (particularly *Old Testament History & Geography, The Four Gospels, Acts, Understanding Bible Prophecy, Daniel*)
- *Bible Times and Ancient Kingdoms*
- *Woman and Her Service to God*
- *An Unshakeable Faith: A Course on Christian Apologetics* (illustrated with PowerPoints)
- *Bible Times & Ancient Kingdoms* (illustrated with PowerPoints)
- *Bible Separation: Its Doctrine and Practice*
- *The Satanic Attack on Sacred Music*