Course #6:

The Local Church

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**Resources:**

1. *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* by Mark Dever
2. *Real Church* by Paul Chappel
3. *The Master’s Plan for the Church* by John MacArthur
4. *He is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World* by R. Albert Mohler, Jr.

**Day 1**

**What are the marks of a true church?**

*“Upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”*

–Jesus, 30 AD. Matt. 16:18

God created three institutions: the family, the government, and the church. Christ came to establish and grow His church.

**Goal for today:** To develop a biblical definition for the local church

**Definition of a true church:** A church is a called out assembly of baptized believers who have joined themselves together under the authority of Christ to love God, grow together, and make disciples of all nations until His return.

**Homework:** Memorize the definition of a church

Why is it important to determine the definition of a true church? Acts. 20:28-30

Wolves seek to deceive sheep by creating a false church with a false message

**Lesson 1 What is a church?**

*Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.* –Acts. 15:14

What a church is not:

1. The church is not a building
2. The church is not a denomination tied to an earthly city

What does the word “church” mean?

Acts 15:14 *Ekklesia-* This is the original Greek word (ἐκκλησία) for “an assembly of called out ones”.

What is the church made of? People

Where is the church called from? The nations

Who is the church called by? God

When did the church begin?

1. Jesus himself founded His church
   1. Acts. 20:28 His bought the church with his blood on the cross
   2. Matt. 16:18 He promised to be the builder and foundation of the church
   3. Matt. 18:17 His teaching organizes and instructs the church
2. The church was empowered by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost
   1. Read the story of the empowering of the first church Acts 1:7-8, 2:1-47
   2. What were the requirements according to Acts 2:41 for an individual to be part of the first local church? Each one must believe and be baptized

**Pictures for understanding the Meaning of the Church**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Reference** | **What physical analogy does the Bible use for the spiritual church?** | **What is the significance of this analogy?** | **Extra notes** |
| **1 Cor. 12:27** | The Body of Christ | We are Christ’s’ visible instruments to speak His Word and do his works in this world |  |
| **John 3:29, Rev. 21:9** | The Bride of Christ | We are chosen for Christ and are awaiting His return | Eph. 5:25-27 |
| **1 Peter 2:5** | A Spiritual Building | God is building us up together not being complete alone |  |
| **1 Peter 2:5** | A Holy Priesthood | We are to offer up to God an acceptable sacrfice, the faith of the gentiles |  |
| **1 Peter 2:10-12** | The people of God | We belong to God because we have been bought by Him | See vs. 13-17 for how we look different |
| **1 Pet 2:25** | A flock of sheep | We are supposed to gather together and follow Christ our Good Shepherd | Also referred to as God’s portion I Pet 5:3-4, Acts 15:14 |
| **1 Jn 3:1, 1 Jn 3:1** | A family of brothers with one Father | Our strongest connection in this world is with each other. We are connected from our spiritual birth. |  |
| **1 Tim. 3:15** | The pillar and ground of the truth | We have been given the responsibility to preach truth in this dark world |  |

The Definition of a church thus far seen:

A church is a called out assembly of baptized believers

**Lesson 2 Why is the local church important?**

*“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.”* –Heb. 10:25

There are two ideas presented in the Bible:

1. A local church
   1. It is made up of believers who have committed themselves to one another
   2. It is visible
   3. It can meet in one place
   4. It is structured with membership and leadership
2. A universal church
   1. It is made up of all believers everywhere bought by the blood of Christ
   2. It is invisible
   3. It will not meet in one place until Christ returns
   4. It is unstructured

If we are all part of the universal, invisible church, why is the local church important?

1. The meaning of the word “church”
   1. It means “gathering”. This only happens today in the local church. You will not be part of a gathering of the universal church until the return of Christ.
2. The usage of the word “church”
   1. A quick look at the word “church” shows that it is used 117 times in the NT. 95 of those times it is referring to a local congregation of believers.
3. Many epistles are written to local congregations.
   1. Letters to specific local congregations
      1. 1 Cor, 2 Cor, Gal, Eph, Phil., Col., 1 Thess., 2 Thess
4. Each local church will be commended and/or rebuked by Christ individually
   1. Rev. 1:20-3:22
5. The commandments of the New Testament to you as a believer can only be fulfilled by being part of a local, visible congregation

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| **Reference** | **Command** | **Example** |
| Matt. 28:19-20 | Baptize new believers | Acts 2:41 |
| Luke 22:19 | Observe the Lord’s supper correctly | 1 Cor. 11:20-34 |
| Heb. 10:25 | Gather on a regular basis (Sunday) | Acts 20:7 |
| Titus 1:5-7 | Ordain qualified elders | Acts 14:23 |
| Heb 13:7&17 | Obey the elders among you | 1 Tim. 4:6&11 |
| Matt. 18:15-17 | Discipline those who err | 2 Tim. 2:17-20 |
| Matt. 28:20 | Defend truth against error | Titus 1:9-11 |
| Rom. 12:10, Heb. 10:24-25 | Love one another | Acts 9:36-39 |
| John 20:21 | Send missionaries | Acts. 13:1-4 |
| 1 Cor. 16:2 | Gather offerings |  |
|  |  |  |

**The Definition of a church thus far seen:**

A church is a called out assembly of baptized believers who have joined themselves together

**Lesson 3 What role does Christ play in the church?**

*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.* -Eph. 4:15-16

The church is different than any other religious or nonreligious group because it is NOT an ORGANIZATION but an ORGANISM.

What are the differences between an organization and an organism?

1. An organization can be formed by men but an organism can only be formed by God
2. An organization is dead but an organism is alive
3. The individual parts of an organization have life by themselves but the individual parts of an organism depend on each other for life.

Jesus Christ is the head of the Church. How is he the head?

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Reference** | **What is the title of Christ in the church?** | **What are Christ’s activities in the Church?** |  |  |
| **Eph. 5:23** | He is the Savior of the body | Matthew 1:21  Acts 4:12  He saves by giving us his name: Christian | Lev. 17:11  Heb. 9:22  Matt. 26:28  He saves by giving us his blood to seal the new covenant |  |
| **Hebrews 13:20-21** | He is the Good Shepherd of the sheep | John 10:1-5 He calls out among the nations and his sheep know his voice and come | John. 10:7-18 He gives his life for the sheep to protect her from the wolves | 1 Peter 5:1-11 He is the chief of the Shepherds. They give account to him. |
| **Rom. 1:3-6** | He is the Lord of his people | Rom. 1:3 He rules his church | Rom. 1:5 He sends his church to the world | John 16:12-14 He teaches his church |
| **Eph 5:25-27** | He is the Sanctifier of His Bride | Eph. 5:26 He washes her clean with the Word | Heb 13:21 He works in us to make us perfect |  |

**The Definition of a church thus far seen:**

A church is a called out assembly of baptized believers who have joined themselves together under the authority of Christ

**Lesson 4 What is the purpose of the church?**

*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. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.”* Acts 2:41–47

What are some wrong reasons people might want to be part of a church?

1.

2.

3.

What was the purpose of the first church as given by Christ in Matt. 28:19-20?

1. Teach all the nations the Gospel
2. Baptize those who believe in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost
3. Teach the believers to keep all the commandments from Jesus

The purpose of the church has not changed in 2,000 years. The best way to see how that purpose should be carried out is to look at the original church and imitate those who were closest to the beginning.

What were the purposes of the first church?

1. Their purpose was to love God Acts 2:41

Deut. 6:5, Mark 12:30 What did Jesus teach them was their first priority?

* + 1. Love for God begins with the new birth

Acts 2:41When can a person truly begin to fulfill this purpose?

John 1:11-12 When does a son begin to love his Father? When they are first born

John 10:27-28 When do sheep begin to love the shepher? When they first hear his voice and follow him.

*“True love begins with God and loves Him for His own sake. Self love begins with self and loves God in the interest of self.”-Jonathan Edwards*

1 Jn. 4:16-19 How does God cause us to love Him? By loving us first

* + 1. Love for God continues with identification

Acts 2:41 How does a person identify himself with Christ?

* + - 1. By identifying with Christ’s death and resurrection by baptism Rom. 6:4
      2. By identifying with the church
    1. Love for God is cultivated through worship

Eph 5:19-21 How does gathering with the church help us love God?

1. Their purpose was to grow together Acts 2:42

How did the believers grow? They continued in the apostles teaching and in fellowship and in breaking of bread and prayer

* 1. Through Biblical preaching

2 Tim. 4:2-3 What is the leadership of the church supposed to do? Preach the Word

Col. 2:7 What is purpose of the church meetings? To root and build up the faith of believers with teaching

* 1. Through fellowship

1 John 1:3 Who is our fellowship with? Each other because of our fellowship with the Father and Son

* 1. Through the Lord’s supper

How would sharing the Lord’s supper help the believers grow? They would remember the death, resurrection, and return of Christ together

* 1. Through prayer

1. Their purpose was to serve others Acts 2:43-47
   1. Discover your place in ministry

How did they serve each other?

Rom. 12:4-8 How do the members of your church serve each other with their own spiritual gifts?

* 1. Develop a passion for the lost

How often did new people believe on Christ according to verse 47?

Where did many of those believers come from according to John 1:40-42?

Can a church fulfill its purpose without evangelizing the lost?

**The Definition of a church thus far seen:**

A church is a called out assembly of baptized believers who have joined themselves together under the authority of Christ to love God, grow together, and make disciples of all nations

**Lesson 5 What are the signs of a healthy church?**

*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.*

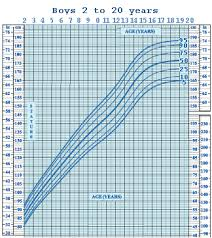
*-* Col. 1:27-29

What is the final purpose of the preaching, warning, and teaching in the church? *To present every man perfect in Christ Jesus when He returns*

What does it mean to “be perfect in Christ Jesus”? *That each believer would grow more and more like Christ in the way he thinks, acts, and loves and less and less like the old man he was.*

Who do we work together with to complete this job? *The inner working of God in each believer.*

When is this job done for the church? When He returns

It is important to remember that the church is more like a growing child than a full grown adult.

*The reason for this is that we expect a child to not be perfect but to be improving in every area both physically and mentally. An adult is expected to be mature and complete. Since the church should always be full of new believers, it will always be growing and never perfect. We cannot expect perfection or we will grow frustrated and leave the church. However, we can expect the church to be growing and improving in all areas.*

A doctor knows how to determine if a child is healthy by looking at a growth chart. If a child is not continuing to progress then the doctor will know that the child is not healthy.

In the following chart you will determine how the church is expected to be like Christ. You should ask yourself first if you are growing and the example to the church. Finally you should discuss examples of growth or lack of growth together. Growth Indicators in the life **of the church:**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **How is the church to be like Christ?** | **Are you growing in this area?** | **Is the church growing in this area?** | **Can you give examples?** |
| **Matt. 26:29, Phil 2:12-13, Luke 6:46, 1 Jn 2:5** | Obedience |  |  |  |
| **Phil. 2:3-8** | Humility |  |  |  |
| **John 3:16, Romans 5:8, 1 John 4:16, Matt 5:43-45** | Love |  |  |  |
| **John 17:21-23** | Unity |  |  |  |
| **John 13:12-17** | Service |  |  |  |
| **John 17:13, Phil. 4:4** | Joy |  |  |  |
| **John 14:27, Phil. 4:7, 1 Thess. 5:13** | Peace |  |  |  |
| **Luke 10:21, 1 Thess. 5:18** | Thankfulness |  |  |  |
| **Matt. 6:12, 14-15** | Forgiveness |  |  |  |
| **Heb 10:21, 1 Cor. 4:2, 2 Tim 2:2** | Faithfulness |  |  |  |
| **1 Pet. 1:14-16** | Holiness |  |  |  |

**The Definition of a church thus far seen:**

A church is a called out assembly of baptized believers who have joined themselves together under the authority of Christ to love God, grow together, and make disciples of all nations until His return.

**Lesson 6 Discussion Questions**

From lesson 1:

1. What are some examples of churches that do not meet the criteria to be called a true church?
2. What does the word church mean?
3. How many of the eight Biblical pictures of a church can you name?
4. Which of the analogies for the church was new to you?
5. How did these analogies help you understand the church better?

From lesson 2:

1. What is the difference between the universal church and the local church?
2. How do we know that it is God’s will for every believer to be part of a local church?
3. What are some of Christ’s commands that cannot be followed if a person is not part of a local church?
4. Does Matt. 18:20 confirm that two believers meeting at a café for a Bible study is a church? Why or why not?

From lesson 3:

1. Why is a church an organism and not an organization?
2. How many of the four roles of Christ with His church from lesson 3 can you remember?
3. Which one of these roles was new to your understanding?
4. How many of the ten activities of Christ in the church you remember from lesson 3?

From lesson 4:

1. What is the three fold purpose of the church in this lesson?
2. With what two things do we identify when we are baptized? Christ and His church
3. In what two ways did the first church grow? Doctrinal teaching and fellowship
4. How has a clearer understanding of Biblical teaching in the church helped your growth?
5. How has fellowship with other believers helped your growth?
6. What are some gifts you have that help others in the church?
7. With whom have you recently shared the Gospel?

From lesson 5:

1. What is the final purpose of preaching in the church?
2. If the primary purpose of preaching in the church is not evangelism, who is supposed to carry out evangelism according to Eph. 4:12-13?
3. Who is our colaborer in completing the transformation and sanctification of the believers?
4. Has your church grown to be more like Christ in the eleven areas mentioned in the last year?
5. Where does it need the most work?

**Day 2**

**What are the habits of a healthy 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:* Eph. 4:11-12

A shepherd leads his sheep to good pasture to keep them healthy. He protects them from wolves and heals their injuries.

A mother feeds her children the right foods, provides exercise for his body, and organizes the education of his mind so that he will be healthy in all areas.

These are habits that shepherds and mothers have to make sure their sheep and children are healthy and growing.

**Goal for the day:** Determine what are the nine biblical habits of a healthy church

\*No church is perfect but an imperfect church can be healthy because it is growing.

**List of nine marks of a healthy church:**

Habit 1: Expositional Preaching

Habit 2: Biblical Theology

Habit 3: The Gospel

Habit 4: A Biblical Understanding of Conversion

Habit 5: A Biblical Understanding of Evangelism

Habit 6: A Biblical Understanding of Church Membership

Habit 7: Biblical Church Discipline

Habit 8: Effective Discipleship

Habit 9: Biblical Church Leadership

**A church may not be growing numerically but be healthy if:**

(A note about why a growth in numbers of conversions or baptisms is not a part of the list.)

1. The seed of the Gospel is being planted and watered with patience. There is a time between planting and harvest where no growth will be seen but the church may be in fact healthy.
2. The ultimate goal is to glorify God. God often uses small numbers of suffering believers to glorify His name. Ex: Gideon.
3. A growth in numbers is the result not the goal in itself. If the church makes its goal to be biblically healthy then God will give the increase in His time.
4. Obedience to Christ is the passion of every Christian. If the pastor of a church wants growth at any cost he will disobey Christ. Our purpose in this section is to know what pleases Christ in the church; what he has commanded.

**Lesson 7: The Habit of Expositional Preaching**

*Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.* -2 Tim. 4:2

**What preaching is not:**

Preaching is not saying something interesting about God.

Preaching is not sharing what each person thinks or feels about a passage of scripture.

Preaching is not general talking about the Bible.

Preaching is not giving a man’s opinion.

**What is preaching?**

“Preaching is the event of God bringing to an audience a Bible-based, Christ-centered, life-impacting message from Himself through the mouth of a spokesperson.” –J.I. Packer

**Unpacking the definition:**

1. **Preaching is the event of God bringing to an audience a message**

*“God’s people have never created God’s Word. From the very beginning God’s Word has always created His people!”* –Mark Dever

Gen 1:26-27 How did God create man? By speaking

Gen. 12:1-4 How did God make a nation for his name? By speaking and by Abraham obeying

Ex. 19:4-7 How did God bring his nation out of slavery? By speaking to them through a spokesperson

Ez. 2:4-5 What was the job of the Old Testament prophet? To speak the Word of God

(The phrase “The Word of the Lord came” is repeated more than 3,800 times in the Old Testament.)

Heb. 1:1-2 How has God spoken in these last days? By His Son

John 1:10-14 How does God birth spiritual children today? Through His Word made flesh

Mark 7:32-35 How did Jesus open deaf ears? By speaking to them

Rom. 10:17 How does God give men faith? By them hearing the Word of Christ

Acts 2:14-41 By what event did the first church begin? A sermon by Peter

Preaching is the central, primary, and indispensible thing in any Christian church. Without preaching there is no church.

Understanding the above truth, what should be the posture and position of the preacher during a church service?

1. **Preaching is the event of God bringing to an audience a Bible based message**

2 Tim. 4:2 What was the content to be of preaching in the church? The Word

The difference between topic-based preaching and bible-based preaching:

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| **A Topic based sermon:** | **A Bible based sermon:** |
| Starts with a topic and seeks to find a text | Starts with a text and seeks to find God’s message |
| Is focused on the needs of the people | Is focused on the Word of God to the people |
| Knows what the message is before God speaks through his word | Does not know what the message is until God speaks through his Word |
| Is a preacher uses God’s Word | Is a preacher being used by God’s Word |
| Is man over God Word | Is man submitted to God’s Word |
| Only allows the church to grow to be like the preacher | Causes the church to grow into Christ like-ness |

Neh. 8:8 What are the steps of a Bible based sermon? The Word is read, the meaning is explained, the people understand

1. **Preaching is the event of God bringing to an audience a Bible based, Christ-centered message**

1 Cor. 1:23-24 What is the message of the Christian preacher? Christ and Him crucified

Acts 2, How can a Christian preacher preach from the Old Testament? By pointing to Christ as the completer of all prophecies

Acts 4:12 What is the central them and final word of every Christian sermon? Christ

Acts 13:48-50 How should we expect that people will respond to this kind of preaching? The unbelievers will mock it and the believers will rejoice in it

1. **Preaching is the event of God bringing to an audience a Bible based, Christ-related, life-impacting message**

Matt. 4:4 What role does the Word of God play in the life of a man after he believes? He lives on it like bread.

John 17:17, Eph. 5:25-26 How does God cleanse his people of their evil ways? Through His Word.

The preaching of the Word should change the life of the people that are hearing it.

Every sermon in the church should have application: How should the message change the way I think and live today?

1. **Preaching is the event of God bringing to an audience a Bible-based, Christ-related, life-impacting message from Himself through the mouth of a spokesperson.**

Acts 6:4 What was the priority of the first pastors of the first church? To give attention to prayer and the ministry of the Word

I Cor. 1:21 How will God save people in these days? By redeemed voices speaking God’s Word

John 1:23 How did John the Baptist see himself? As a voice crying in the wilderness

God will use you if you are willing to be his voice.

**Lesson 8: The Habit of Teaching Biblical Theology**

*And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.* –Acts 2:42

The first church “continued in the Apostles doctrine”. That is, those men who had spent a few years of training with the Word of God made flesh, were given the position as teachers of who God is, what He has said, and what He requires of us.

The following outline uses the opening lines from the Apostle John’s Gospel record to determine what the Apostles taught about God.

A healthy church will habitually teach and remind the church of the following five things about God:

*(Note to teacher: Read the verses with the student and let him determine what to fill in the blank above the verses.)*

1. **God is a Creating God**

John 1:3 What can exist without Christ? Nothing

Col. 1:13-18 What role did Christ play in the creation and in the existence of all things?

Example: Paul’s sermon at Athens Acts 17:24

Application: Because God created us and all things we are His under his complete authority

1. **God is a Holy God**

John 1:4, 1 John 1:5 How is God different than man? He is light with no darkness at all

Heb. 4:15 What is the difference between Jesus and Adam including all of the sons of Adam? Christ was tempted yet without sin

Example: Peter’s second sermon Acts 3:14

Application: Because our God is Holy he has created us to be Holy

1. **God is a Faithful God**

John 1:5 Did God change from being light because we had become children of darkness? No, he is faithful when all men are unfaithful

Heb. 2:17 What is the difference between Christ and all the priests of the Old Testament? Jesus Christ is faithful when all the priests of the OT were unfaithful

Example: Acts 2:24-26 God’s faithfulness was their hope

Application: We should be faithful because He is faithful to us when we were not faithful

1. **God is a Loving God**

John 1:6-10 Was God required to send light into our darkness? No, he owed us nothing

John 3:16 Why did God send His Son, his light, to save us? Because of his love for us

Example: The Apostle John’s first letter

Application: We can now love God because He first loved us

1. **God is a Sovereign God**

John 1:11-13 By whose will are we born again? God’s

Matt 6:10 Whose will does the church desire to see done? God’s

Example: Peter shows how God orchestrates his will Acts 2:23

Application: In the church we are to be focused on the will of God, not of the people

Why does it matter that God’s people understand these things about God?

How does the world, the flesh, and the Devil fight to destroy this knowledge of God?

**Lesson 9: The Habit of Preaching and Living The Gospel**

*And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.*

–Mark 16:15

**Why is the Gospel the only message of the church?**

1. Mark 16:15 Christ commanded it

3. Gen. 3:15, Luke 4:18 It is the consummation of all the promises of all the ages of the prophets

4. Mark 16:16, Rom. 1:16 It is the “good news”. It is the only hope for man.

5. Mt. 24:14, Rom. 15:19-20, Rev. 14:6 The Gospel is to be preached to the ends of the earth

“There is no church without the Gospel. The Gospel created the church, the church did not create the Gospel.”

**How does the church preach the Gospel?**

Can you name 10 ways a Gospel sermon sounds different from a religious sermon?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **A religious sermon says:** | **A Gospel sermon says:** |
| Be more religious and more dedicated. | You are dead in your sins and you must be born again |
| You must love God more! | God loved you first |
| Do better! Try harder! Turn over a new leaf! | Christ alone did better |
| Everything except the cross of Christ. | Christ died, was buried, and rose again |
| Read your Bible every day, pray every day, and go to church and then God will help you | Walk in the grace that is in Christ Jesus every day. He is our help. |
| You must keep the law to please God | God is pleased with you in Christ |
| If you don’t tithe you are stealing from God and will be cursed. | There is no curse and no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus! Give from grace. |
| Get closer to God. | You are fully reconciled to the Father in Christ |
| Ends with a list of moral instructions for a better life. | Ends with God’s grace in Jesus Christ. |

**How does the church live the Gospel?**

*Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.* -Philippians 1:27

Can you think of five ways that the lives of the people in the church should reflect the Gospel?

*(The five below may vary.)*

1. Rom. 6:13-14 We walk in the purity to reflect the purity of the blood of Christ on their account
2. Mark 8:35, Acts 20:24 We give it more value than anything on this earth even our own lives
3. Eph 4:32 We forgive each other as we were forgiven
4. Matt. 5:44-45 We give ourselves for each other and our enemies
5. Col 4:6 We speak words of grace to each other

**Question for application?**

1. How can an Old Testament sermon center on Christ and the Gospel?
2. Discuss the following statements:
   1. “Gospel-centered preaching does not exclude commandments. Rather, it always grounds the commandments (what you must do) in grace (what God has done for you in Christ).
   2. A message is not-gospel centered and not Christian when it calls listeners to be or to do something without presenting it as a response to God’s grace in the power that God’s grace provides through the finished work of Jesus Christ.
   3. For nonbelievers, the call for a response centers on entrance into God’s kingdom through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. For believers, the call for response centers on a lifestyle worthy of the gospel of Christ (see Phil 1:27).

**Lesson 10: The Habit of Teaching Saving Faith**

*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.*

Eph. 2:8

A healthy body is made of healthy, living parts. A body with dead members is very unhealthy. Likewise a church with members who are not truly born again will be very sick.

What could be three consequences of having unregenerate membership in the church?

*(Let the student think of these. Below are some examples to give hints.)*

1. There will be many sitting and few serving

2. There will be little difference between the sinful world and the sinful church

3. Many will be lost forever while thinking on earth they were saved

According to Jesus in Matt. 7:21-23, will there be people in hell who thought they were Christians on earth? Yes

What habit can the church develop to solution this problem? The preaching of saving faith and the need of every man to be born again

The healthy church has a habit of teaching what an unsaved person is like:

The healthy church has a habit of teaching what an unsaved person needs:

The healthy church has a habit of biblically expressing what a saved person is:

What is not biblical language for saving faith?

“Become a Christian”

“Changed religions”

“Entered into Christianity”

“I was saved by praying and asking for it”

The healthy church has the habit of teaching the signs of saving faith:

Helping people recognize the signs of a dead faith:

**Lesson 11: The Habit of Evangelism**

*And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.* Mark 16:15

How is evangelism viewed by the world? ­­­­­­­­\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

We need God’s idea on evangelism. We will seek to have a biblical understanding of evangelism by answering the following three questions from the Bible:

1. Who should evangelize?

2. How should we evangelize?

3. Why should we evangelize?

Question #1: Who Should Evangelize?

Matt. 28:19-20 Who does Jesus say should evangelize? His disciples

Acts 8:4 Who preached the Gospel in outside of Jerusalem? The new believers

Finish this sentence: In a healthy church, all believers will evangelize.

Question #2: How Should We Evangelize?

1. In Paul’s letter to the Romans, he first mentions Christ in 3:21 (not counting the introduction of 1:1-17). What did he tell the people before anything else? Rom. 3:10, 23

Tell people with honesty that they are sinners far from God.

2. Luke 13:6-9 According to this parable, what will happen to those trees that do not bear fruit?

Tell people with urgency that judgment is coming and they must decide now.

3. Mark 1:15 According to Jesus Christ, what must a person do to be saved?

Tell people with joy that if they repent and believe the Gospel they will be saved.

4. Acts 8:30-35 What was the main tool for evangelism of the first church?

A healthy church uses the Scriptures.

5. John 13:34-35

A healthy church shows the Gospel with their love for each other.

6.Acts 4:31, 6:6, 9:40 What accompanied the miraculous work of God in the first church?

A healthy church prays for God to work for the salvation of men.

Question #3: Why Should We Evangelize?

Can you give verses for these three reasons?

A Desire to Be Obedient to the Great Commission

A Love for the Lost

A Love for God

Why are each of these reasons important?**Lesson 12: Discussion Questions**

**Questions from lesson 7:**

What is preaching?

How does God create his people?

What is the difference between a Bible message and a topical message?

What is the focus of every Christian sermon?

**Questions from lesson 8:**

What are five truths about God that we must teach?

**Questions from lesson 9:**

What is the only message of the church?

What is the difference between a religious sermon and a Gospel sermon?

**Questions from Lesson 10:**

What is the most dangerous thing for a church according to lesson 10?

What are some differences evident between an unbeliever and a believer?

What things should the preacher always be reminding the congregation of?

**Questions from Lesson 11:**

Who should evangelize?

How should we evangelize?

**Day 3**

**Lesson 13: The Habit of Church Membership**

*Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.* Acts 2:41

What would you think of a man who said he loved a girl but refused to commit to her in marriage?

What would you think of a dad who said he loved his kids but refused to commit to take care of them?

What would you think of a Christian who said he loved his brothers and loved the church but refused to commit himself to it in membership?

Consider the following reasons for why a church should know who its members are:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Reference** | **What does this passage teach?** | **Why does this teaching require a formal membership among the local body of believers?** |
| **1 Peter 5:1-4** | Shepherds will get rewards from their work with the flock from the chief shepherd. | Shepherds should know which sheep make up their flock. |
| **Hebrews 13:17** | Leaders must give an account for those who follow them in the local church. | Elders can lead the people and give an account to God for their spiritual well-being only if they know who they are. (John MacArthur) |
| **Matt. 18:17** | Christ commanded an erroring person should be put out of the church. | A church must know who are their members to know who is in and who is out. |
| **Acts 14:23** | The members of a local church choose their elders | Only members should vote so the membership must be defined. |
| **Heb. 10:24-25** | The members of the church are to look after the spiritual growth of each other and meet continually | As a member of the church I must know who I am responsible to stimulate and meet with. |
| **Rom. 12:6-8** | The members of the church are to work together with their differing gifts | A member needs to know what local congregation he is to be using his gifts to build up. |

It is not the responsibility of the church to make members, but to recognize whom God has made members by the new birth.

Application questions:

When is a person to be considered a member?

Should there be an official list of members?

Does your church have a list of members? Who are they?

**Lesson 14: The Habit of Dealing Biblically with Sin**

*Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother*. –Matthew 18:15

Seven passages that discuss how the church is to handle sin among its members:

Heb 12:1-14

When do we begin to experience discipline? When we enter into a Father-Son relationship with God

What is the purpose of our heavenly father’s discipline? That we may share in his holiness.

Matt. 18:15-17

What are the steps that Christian brothers are to take when disciplining one another?

• Go to your brother personally, privately

• Bring another brother with you

• Take the matter before the whole church

What is the purpose of confronting a brother about sin? To gain him

1 Cor. 5:1-11

Why would the Corinthians have been proud of that man in their church? Maybe they thought they were a great example of love and grace

What was the sin that disqualified this man from being part of the church? Sexual sin that was well known

Why did Paul tell them to not associate with this man? To keep the testimony of the church before the world

What was the church supposed to do with this man after he repented and corrected his wicked lifestyle? Restore him as a full member 2 Cor. 2:5-11

Gal 6:1

What attitude ought discipline to be done in? Humility

2 Thess. 3:6-15

What is the sin mentioned in this letter to the Corinthians? Sloth

What were the measures of discipline to be taken with a lazy man? He was not to be given food, they were not to associate with him.

1 Tim. 5:19-20

What are the requirements for an elder in the church to be accused of a sin? Two or more witnesses

If the sin is public, how should the rebuke be handled? Publically

Titus 3:9-11

What was the issue that Titus was dealing with? Divisive people trying to divide the church

How many times was he supposed to warn these divisive people before he stayed away from them? Twice

What were the results of times when you saw sin handled in this biblical way?

What were the results of times when you saw sin not handled in this biblical way?

Why is it dangerous to the health of a church to not practice discipline in this manner?

**Lesson 15: The Habit of Effective Discipleship**

*Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: 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 2:1-5

A healthy church grows healthy disciples:

Why do we disciple others?

1. Matt 28:19-20 It is a command from our Savior

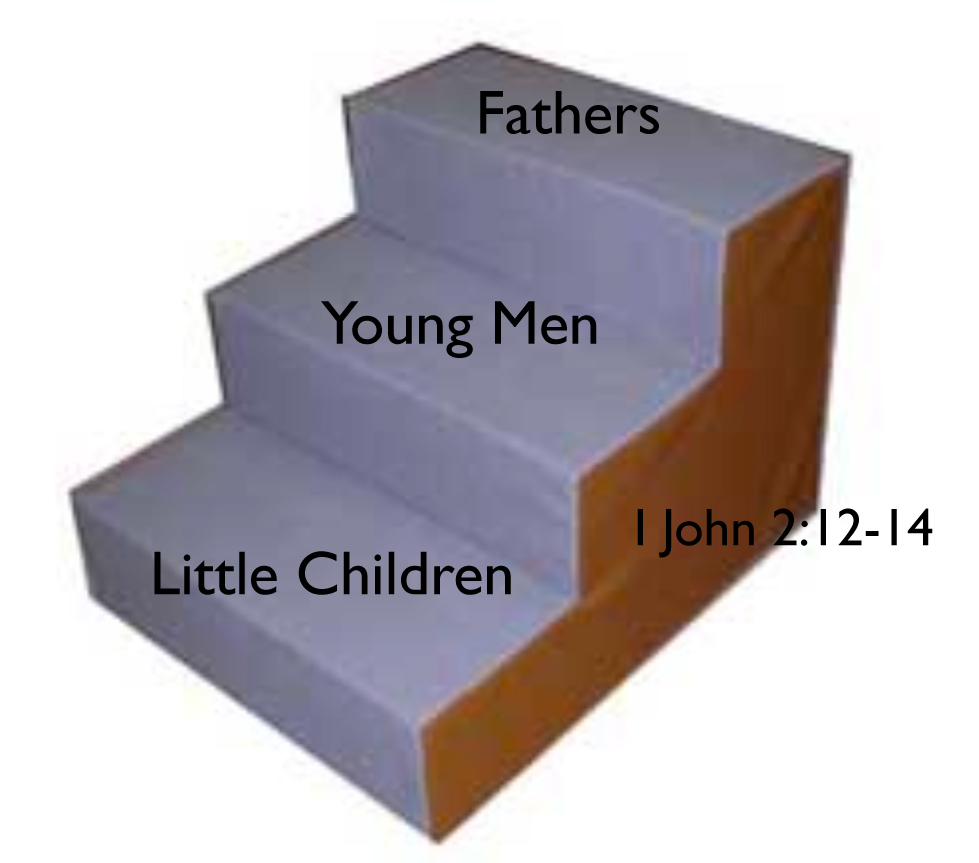
2. Mark 3:14 It was the main strategy of our Savior

3. Mark 3:14 It is how the world will hear of our Savior

What discipleship is not:

1. Teaching a series of lessons in a classroom

2. Imparting information to the mind

3. Exercising authority over another as a boss

What is biblical discipleship?

1. I Cor 4:17 It is loving someone as a son in the faith

2. I John 3:16 It is laying your life down in the form of time for another

3. Mark 3:14 It is spending time

Three levels of growth I John 2:10-15

What are the three levels of spiritual growth in the church?

Every healthy church has people in each growth level.

Every healthy church helps people to grow from one level to the next.

1. Little Children  1-2 years

Three tools to help a child take the step to become a strong, young man in the faith:

1. Tool #1: 2:10-11 The Church

What will help a young believer to walk in the light without stumbling? His love for his brothers

What is the group of brothers that a new believer should learn to love: THE CHURCH

What should be the goal of a discipler with his disciple? The discipler should help the disciple to grow in faithfulness to attend the church and to love other believers.

What are the tools a discipler can use to accomplish this? Weekly small groups for teaching and church services on Sunday.

Are you faithful to church and to fellowship with the brothers of your church?

1. Tool #2: 2:12-13 The Word of God

What are the two reasons that John wrote to the new believers (little children)? Because their sins are forgiven and they have known the Father

What is the source of information to establish a young Christian in his relationship with the Father? THE WORD of God

What should be the goal of a discipler with his disciple? The discipler should teach the disciple to spend time with God each day. The discipler and the disciple should share their devotions with each other.

What are the tools a discipler can use to accomplish this? The Bible and a devotional journal

Question for the discipler: Do you read the Word every day and write down something?

3. Tool #3: 2:14-15 Time

What characteristics does a young man have according to verse 14 that distinguish him from a young child? He is strong, the Word abides in him, and he has overcome the wicked one.

What does it mean that the young man has overcome the wicked one? He lives a holy life. He has cut ties with their relationship to their old life of sin and the world

A new believer has bad habits that need to be replaced with good habits for him to be truly happy in his Christian life. A Christian continuing in sin is the saddest of all people.

What should be the goal of a discipler with his disciple? The discipler will need to walk the disciple out of his sinful habits and be honest in pointing them out.

What are the tools a discipler can use to accomplish this? Time. The discipler must spend time with the disciple to help him overcome these sins.

Question for discipler: In what areas has the Lord helped you overcome sin and the Devil in your life? What areas could you continue to grow in?

A test to see of a little child has grown into a young man

#1:  Is the new believer spending time with Christ each day in the Word as a joyful habit?

#2: Is the new believer faithful to attending and participating with the church?

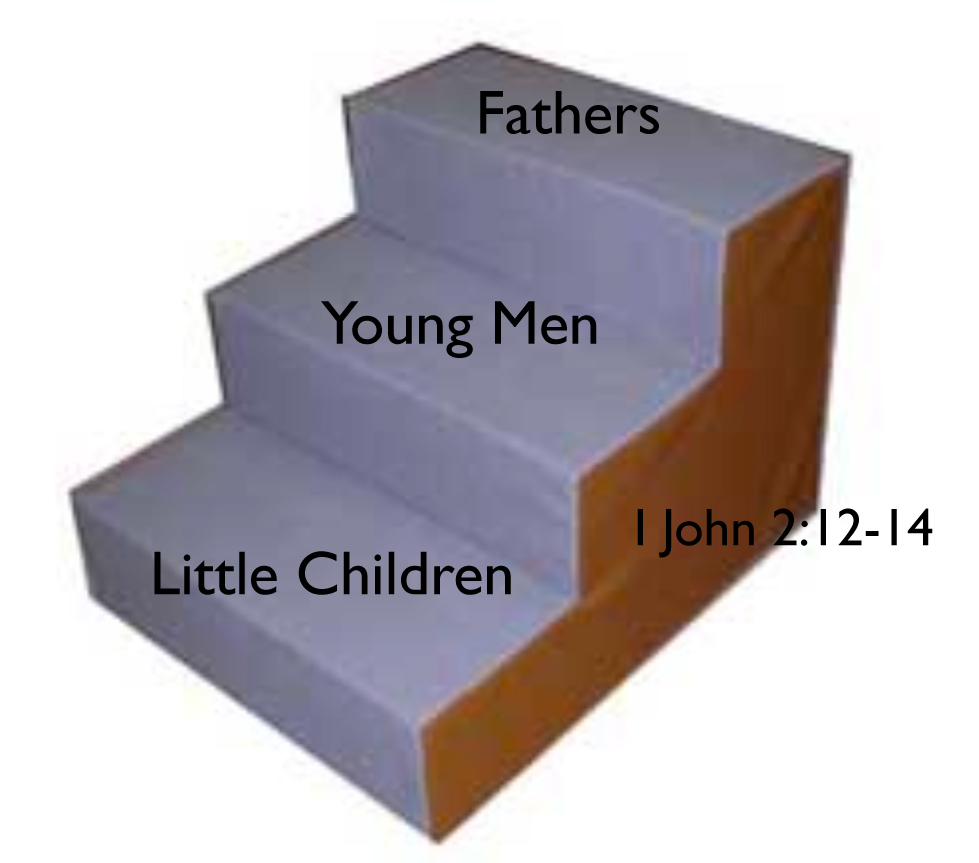
#3: Is the new believer rid of sinful habits?

Are people in your church growing in this manner in the one to two years?

A healthy church grows healthy disciples.

**Lesson 16: The Habit of Training New Ministers**

*And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.* 2 Tim. 2:2

What is the goal for the growth of every Christian according to 1 John 2:12-14? A father

What is it that makes a man a father in the church? That he has spiritual children that he is raising responsibly

A healthy church helps believers grow from:

Stage #1: Babies in the faith

To

Stage #2: Strong young men

To

Stage #3: Fathers who are reproducing

What are some Old Testament examples of men of God who trained other men of God to lead?

Joshua 1:1-9 Moses and Joshua

1 Kings 19:16-21 Elijah and Elisha

What are some New Testament examples of men being trained to be spiritual fathers and leaders?

Mark 3:14 Jesus and the disciples

Acts 16:1-3 Paul and Timothy

Why has God given leaders in the church according to Eph. 4:11-12?

To perfect the saints

What is the purpose of the saints according to Eph. 4:12?

To do the work of the ministry to the edifying of the body of Christ

Pastors and teachers should focus at the earliest possible moment on training others to do the work of the ministry. If the pastor focuses on this, the church will be built as a result.

Who should be a disciple according to 2 Tim. 2:2?

1. People
2. Faithful people
3. Who can teach others

What is the most important attribute of a spiritual father according to 1 John 2:12-13?

He has known Jesus, the one who is from the beginning

Why do you think that is so important that John would mention it twice referring to fathers?

Application: Who are you training from to learn to be a spiritual father?

Who are you training to be a spiritual father and minister of the Gospel?

**Lesson 17: The Habit of Biblical Leadership and Organization**

*“For though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the stedfastness of your faith in Christ.  As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.”* Colossians 2:5-7

Why was it so important to Paul that the church in Colossae be well organized and rooted according to verse 4? There were men trying to beguile the church with enticing words

A church without organization is like a car with no steering wheel or a game with no rules. A home with no parents, or a world with no God.

**Responsibilities of an organized church:**

Gal. 1:6-9

It is the responsibility of the church to reject a false Gospel and lying teachers

2 Tim. 4:3

The unhealthy church gathers false teachers but the healthy church rejects them

What should the men in a church do if its pastor begins preaching another gospel?

Acts 6:2-5 The role of faithful men in the church

They serve tables so the pastors can focus on preaching and prayer

The church chooses deacons

What are examples of needs of the church outside of preaching and prayer?

Administration

Maintenance

Care of those with physical needs.

Romans 12:6-8 What does Paul tell the church that they are to organize? The using of their gifts

Application questions:

How are you helping your pastors to focus on the Word and prayer?

If you are the pastor, what are you doing outside of the Word and prayer that could be given to some faithful man in the church?

**The church’s responsibility to organize leadership:**

Acts 14:23; 16:4; 20:17; 21:18; Titus 1:5; James 5:14 Where did elders and pastors come from in the New Testament? From the churches themselves

Titus 2:1-5, I Tim. 3:1-7- What are the requirements for a pastor/elder/bishop?

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1 Cor. 9:14, 1 Tim. 5:17-18 What should be the goal for the local church concerning the work of its pastor? That he live of the offerings of the church

Heb 3:17 How does a church make its pastor’s work joyful? By obeying

Rom. 10:14-15 What should the church do concerning cities that have no Gospel witness? Send missionaries

**Lesson 18: Discussion Questions**

**Lesson 13**

Who is responsible to make new members of the church? God

Who is responsible to recognize these new, baptized believers as member? The church

What are three reasons that it is important to know who are the members of your local church?

**Lesson 14**

What are the steps that Christian brothers are to take to correct sin in another?

What is the purpose of discipline in the church?

What is an example of sin that should not be tolerated in the church?

**Lesson 15**

Why does a healthy church disciple others? (3 reasons)

What are the three levels of growth in a Christian’s life?

What are the three tools to help a baby Christian grow to be a young man?

**Lesson 16**

What makes a Christian mature in his faith? That he has children in the faith that he is responsible to raise. He is a father.

Should everyone in the church be fathers or just the pastors?

What is the main job of the leaders in a healthy church?

**Lesson 17**

Why is it important that a church be well organized?

Discuss some of the responsibilities of an organized church.

Discuss how a church is supposed to organize its leadership.

**Day 4**

**What makes a mature church?**

In day one we learned the definition of a church. We answered the question, “What is a biblical, New Testament, local church?”

In day two and three we learned what habits to instill in a church to help it be healthy and growing like a child. We answered the question, ‘What makes a healthy church?”

Today in day four we will learn what is the goal of a new church plant. We will answer the question, “What makes a mature church?”

No church is perfect but it can be mature.

**Lesson 19: What is the long-term goal when starting a church?**

*“As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.”* Colossians 2:6-7

A church is like a person. It will grow through three stages: (We will look at the church in Ephesus as an example)

What are the signs that a church is ready to be commended to God? What are the signs of a mature church? The church in Ephesus provides a good example of the three signs of a church ready to stand on their own:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Reference** | **What were the activities that the church in Ephesus learned to do on their own?** | **The church in Ephesus was…** | **Conclusion** |
| **Acts 19:9-10, Acts 20:18-21** | The new disciples were taking the word and preaching it all around | Self Propagating | A mature church will preach the Gospel, disciple new believers, and start new churches on their own. |
| **Acts. 20:17, Eph. 4:11-14** | The leaders were equipping the saints | Self Governing | A mature church will organize themselves, submit to one another, and work together without needing the missionary/church planter |
| **Acts 20:33-35** | They were giving. They were taking care of the needy in the church. | Self Supporting | A mature church will financially take care of their own needs and the needy in the church. |

**Lesson 20: What does the church do when it meets?**

*And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.* -Acts 2:42

What were the four things the first church continued stedfastly in when it met together? (write them in the spaces below)

**1. The Apostle’s teaching**

1 Tim. 4:6 What was Timothy supposed to do to be considered a good minister of Jesus Christ? Put the brethren in remembrance of the Apostle’s doctrine

2 Tim. 4:2 What are the components of preaching in the church? Doctrine, longsuffering, rebuke, reproof, exhortation

Acts 20:7 When did the church meet to hear this preaching? Sunday

John 20:1, 19 Why do you think the church met on Sunday? It was the day Jesus rose from the dead

Note: By the time the last Apostle died, they were already calling Sunday, “The Lord’s day” Rev. 1:10.

**2.Fellowship**

Acts 14:27-28 What did the church talk about together when they fellowshipped? All the great things God was doing in their missionary efforts. They encouraged each other.

Read these verses to see how God loves to hear his people and all creation sing to Him: Ex. 15:21, 1 Chr. 16:23, 2 Chr. 20:22, Ps. 104:33

**3. Breaking of bread (Lord’s supper)**

Luke 22:19-20 Who did Jesus ask to remember his death by sharing the Lord’s supper? His disciples, his church

Why is the Lord’s supper such an important part of Christian worship in the church? We remember what makes us different, our redemption from the world by God.

How often were they instructed to share this supper? No set amount

1. **Prayer**

Who should the church be praying for?

James 5:16- Each other, sickness

Acts 13:2-3 Missionaries

Heb. 13:3 Believers in bonds

Can you think of anything else the church ought to pray for?

Why do you think corporate prayer is important? It shows a church’s dependence on God

Are your church services missing any of the important aspects?

**Lesson 21: What things should NOT be part of a church meeting?**

*Let all things be done decently and in order.* -1 Cor. 14:40

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Reference** | **What is Paul telling the church in Corinth that there should NOT be when they get together?** | **Why should this not be part of a church meeting?** |
| 1 Cor. 5:4-7 | Glorying in sin | \*Allowing a little sin in the church causes it to affect every member.  \*Jesus is sinless and we are his body. |
| 1 Cor. 11:16-18 | Division and contention | **\***Christians do not have this custom from Christ. |
| 1 Cor. 11:19 | Heresy or wrong doctrine | **\***The church is Christ’s |
| 1 Cor. 11:20-34 | Regular meals and getting drunk | \*Some will over eat and drink and others will have none. |
| 1 Cor. 14:4-5, 19, 22-23 | Unknown tongues | \*Only words that are understood edify the body.  \*The unbelievers will think you are crazy. |
| 1 Cor. 14:26 | Teaching and songs from everyone | \*This comes from pride, everyone wanting to be heard, not a desire to edify others. |
| 1 Cor. 14:33, 40 | Confusion or disorganization | \*God is not the author of confusion. |
| 1 Cor. 14:34-35, 1 Tim. 2:11-14 | Women preachers | \*The Law says men should lead. (Gen. 3:16)  \*The man was formed first to lead.  \*Women are more easily deceived. |

**Application assignment:** Write out an organized schedule of service for your church this Sunday incorporating the biblical components of a meeting of the church.

What will you do and who will participate in each part?

**Lesson 22: Should a church collect an offering?**

Many people feel uncomfortable to collect money at church. One argument is that since church is a place for spiritual things, we should not worry about physical things like money. But what does the New Testament say? Should a church pass an offering basket? Should that be part of the worship service of a church?

**What attitude are Christians to have about giving an offering in church?** 2 Cor. 8

Vs. 1-2 How did Paul describe the giving of the church of Macedonia? It was the grace of God

Vs. 3, 12 How much should a person give? According to each person’s ability

Vs. 5 What should be given before one gives his money? His own self

Vs. 8 What does giving prove? The sincerity of our love (John 3:16)

*Ill- Can a man say he loves his wife and not ever get her a gift or buy her food?*

Vs. 9 How did Jesus become our example in giving? He gave of himself (John 3:16, Rom. 5:8)

Vs. 11 How could the leadership of the church help the members perform the offering they are willing to give? Buy organizing and collecting it

Vs. 13-15 What should giving cause? An equality so that no one lacks necesities

9:7 What kind of giving does God love? Cheerful giving

9:9-11- What does giving show about the heart of the giver? He understands that all he has has been given to him by God

GIVING IS PART OF WORSHIP TO GOD.

**How should the church collect offerings?**

1 Cor. 16:1-3

1. It should be gathered
2. On Sundays, when the whole church meets
3. Not when the need is present

**Should a church pay its pastor?**

1 Tim 5:17-18

Who are worthy to be rewarded according to Paul? Those who minister in the word and doctrine

Luke 10:7

Did Jesus agree? Yes

1 Cor. 9:6-10

A pastor is a soldier going to war paid a salary by his country

A pastor is a vineyard keeper eating of the fruit of the vineyard

A pastor is a shepherd who drinks the milk of the flock.

A pastor is an ox who eats of the field he plows.

2 Cor. 12:13 What does Paul say about a church that does not take care of its pastor? It is inferior to churches that do

**How should the church administer offerings?**

We have seen, then, that the church could use their offerings to:

1. Pay their pastor (s)
2. Send missionaries (I Cor. 16:1-3)
3. Give to the needs of believers (Acts 11:29)

**Lesson 23: How can local churches work together?**

While churches are to be independent and local in leadership, the New Testament represents local congregations that were interdependent on each other in many ways. Let’s consider the ways that churches worked together in the New Testament:

What were some ways that the churches of the New Testament worked together?

1. 2 Cor. 8:1-4 To send financial help to missionaries who were advancing the Gospel
2. Acts 11:29 Churches with excess gave to churches being persecuted
3. Titus 1:5, 1 Tim. 1:3 Newer churches benefited from the teaching ministry of stronger churches and preachers

WARNING

What would be the danger of working closely with a church like the church of Pergamos? Rev. 2:12-17 The false doctrine that is allowed to exist at that church would influence my church

Was the church in Pergamos a real church? Yes Did their doctrine please God? Not all of it

There are then three types of church:

1. Those who call themselves churches but are not part of the Body of Christ. They are not brothers. They are not born again. They teach another Gospel.
2. Those who are part of the body of Ch7rist but are not walking in sound, biblical doctrine.
3. Those who are part of the body of Christ and are walking in biblical doctrine.

With your teacher, fill in the following chart. Write the kind of doctrine that disqualifies a church from being brothers in Christ for the first group. Then write the kind of doctrine that would make it impossible to work with a church made up of brothers in Christ. Then write down the kind of church that you could work with.

**Lesson 24: Discussion Questions**

**Lesson 19**

What are the three stages of growth for a church?

What stage of growth is your church in?

What does your church yet lack to be mature and independent?

**Lesson 20**

Why do you think it is important that they sang TO the Lord and not just ABOUT the Lord? Reconciliation. Only God’s people can sing TO Him.

What aspect of Christian worship in the church most impacted you when you first started coming to church? Why?

Which one of the four aspects of Christian worship in the church needs strengthening at your church?

**Lesson 21**

How could a church be guilty of glorying in sin during the church meeting?

Which of the things mentioned in lesson 21 are the biggest problem in the churches today?

Why? And what is the consequences of this?

**Lesson 22**

How should an offering be gathered during Sunday’s church meeting?

How could the leadership of your church help the people understand giving?

How could the receiving, counting, and distribution of the offering be organized in a church?

**Lesson 23**

Should a church work with any other church as long as they are brothers? Why or why not?

Can you identify some churches close to yours that you could work with more closely?

What are some ways you could work together in the next year?

Why do you think its important that churches work together as much as possible?