

Christ's Church
"The Church described In the New Testament"

A message from the author

Dear Reader,

This Bible study is the fifth in a series designed to teach you the basics of the New Testament.

The basic conclusions reached in this study are as follows:

1. The purpose of the church is to seek and to save the lost; and everything is subjected to that purpose for which Jesus died.
2. The church is to be governed locally by elders, who are also called bishops and pastors. These men are subject directly to the Holy Spirit.
3. Elders are to be paid, and are appointed by evangelists.
4. The church is the kingdom of God.
5. God describes the church in various descriptive terms to bring out certain desirable characteristics in its members.
6. God has dictated the practices of the church in the New Testament.
7. The church must practice evangelism.
8. Christians must worship in spirit and truth.
9. Christians must love as Jesus loved.
10. The church must keep the devil out.

We want to stress that the major point in this whole study is to throw away man-made differences, which destroy Christian unity, and press for the Spirit Jesus prayed that we might have.

We remind the reader that the author of this booklet is a human being subject to error, ignorance, and misunderstanding. You yourself must study "to see if these things are so."

The New American Standard Version of the Bible was used in preparation of this study, and is quoted throughout.

Your Servant,
Jay Wilson

"The Bible only... makes Christians only..."

INTRODUCTION

"Upon This Rock I Will Build My Church"

When Jesus Asked His apostles to tell Him who He was, Peter answered, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" ([Matthew 16:16](#)). Commending Peter for his answer, Jesus then said, "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it" ([Matthew 16:18](#)).

Jesus was going to build His church on the bedrock truth that He was the Son of God, and Peter would be a small stone in that building.

The point of this section of our introduction is that Jesus does have a church. He said that He would build what He called *My church*.

We are not interested in finding churches built by mere men - we want to find the church built by Christ. And where shall we find such a church? And how would we recognize it if we did find it? To answer these questions we shall flee for refuge to the sacred scriptures, which are "able to give [us] the wisdom that leads to salvation" ([II Timothy 3:15](#)).

Jesus' Prayer for Unity

Shortly before the Temple police came to arrest Jesus, before He came to the Garden of Gethsemane, He prayed earnestly to the Father, not only for the eleven remaining apostles, but also "for those who believe in Me through their word, that they all may be one... that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me" ([John 17:20,21](#))

Shall the prayer of the Lord, prayed in such earnest as you and I have never seen, go unanswered? Shall those who claim the name of Christ continue to exalt their petty differences above the urgings of the Holy Spirit of God? Or shall we follow the inspired instruction of Paul: "Now I exhort you brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree, and there be no divisions among you, but you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment" ([I Corinthians 1:10](#))?

This study is directed toward the end of making us all of the same mind and of the same judgment; it is directed toward the exaltation of instructions given in God's holy word above the precepts and decrees of

mere men. If we are to be united in Christ, the practical aspect of that union will be found in promoting the same practices as were promoted in the New Testament. Such "unity of faith" is not an unattainable ideal; it is the earnest prayer of our Lord Jesus!

Our union will come when we willingly lay aside the practices of mere men; when we cease to promote traditions rooted in nothing other than someone's "good idea." Let's listen carefully to the words of the Holy Spirit: "All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" ([II Timothy 3:16,17](#)).

If we need teaching, the word of God can instruct us. If we need reproof, the Bible can reprove us. If we need corrected, the scripture can correct us. If we need training in righteousness, that training can come through God's inspired word. The Bible is an entirely adequate guide for us, not only individually, but also for us as we work together in the local church. Are we willing to follow the instruction of that infallible guide?

"Ekklesia"

Our word "church" is translated from the Greek word *ekklesia* - which literally means, "those called out." When you were in grade school, you probably had fire drills. When the alarm rang, the whole school went outside. The children assembled outside the building became an *ekklesia* - they had been "called out" of the school building.

The church consists of all those who belong to Christ. This is called "the general assembly and church of the first born" ([Hebrews 12:23](#)).

The word "church" is also used to describe the local assembly, or local congregation ([Acts 14:23](#)). Christ's church functions only at the local level - this is where the work gets done. Our attention in this study will be directed toward the practices of the local assembly.

A Comparison

Some years ago I belonged to the Jaycees in Great Falls, Montana. We were affiliated with the Jaycee International Organization. The policies of the local unit were directed by the parent organization, and even the basic programs of the chapters were dictated by the international. We had a Jaycee Creed, which we dutifully said at every meeting.

Of course, if we didn't want to follow the International's programs, or didn't want to organize in the way set forth by the International, we could withdraw our affiliation, change our name to something other than "Jaycees" and "do our own thing."

We will find that the same thing is true of Christ's church. The headquarters of the church are located in heaven, the true holy place ([Hebrews 9:24,25](#)), where Jesus is the head of the church ([Ephesians 1:22,23](#)). In the scriptures we have been granted "everything pertaining to life and godliness" ([II Peter 1:3](#)).

Therefore a complete description of everything pertaining to the church is contained in the pages of the New Testament - these are the directions and programs from headquarters.

Of course, if a person does not want to follow the instructions contained therein, or does not want to organize in the way set forth in the scriptures, then he can withdraw his fellowship from the Head of the church, change his name to something other than "Christian," and "do his own thing."

In this study we will try to set forth, in the same spirit as they are set forth in the scripture, the directions from the Lord concerning His church.

Attitude of a Christian

We all recognize, because of a human nature, that we are subject to error and misunderstanding. We all recognize that before we became Christians, we were included in the group which Paul described in this manner: "the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving" ([II Corinthians 4:4](#)), which included the "righteous Pharisees" as well as the "heathen idol worshippers." Following our conversions, we then began to grow with respect to salvation" ([I Peter 2:2](#)), but we recognize that in many respects we are still ignorant and not able to understand many of the things which were "written for our instruction" ([I Corinthians 10:11](#)).

So what is our attitude when we come to new understanding? What is our attitude when we discover new light? Do we try to "get around" the teaching of the Bible - do we try to rationalize what it says? Or do we in humble obedience to the word of God (not the word of men!), do what He says?

Our attitude should meet the standard expressed by the Lord Jesus: "He who is faithful in a very little thing is also faithful in much..." ([Luke 16:10](#)). Let us strive to please the Lord in even little things, for if we are not faithful in those little things, we are not faithful in larger things either. If you discover something new in the Bible as a result of this study, follow the scriptures' instructions.

OUTLINE

The Purpose and Organization of the Church

The Nature of the Church

The Practices of the Church

I. PURPOSE AND ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH

THE PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH

To Seek and Save the Lost

In [Luke 19:1-10](#), it is recorded that the Lord went down to the town of Jericho, where a tax-gatherer named Zaccheus anxiously awaited to see Him. When Jesus approached the tree which Zaccheus had climbed, He asked him to come down, "for today I must stay at your house" ([Luke 19:5](#)).

The crowd was grumbling about Jesus stooping so low as to eat with so loathsome a sinner. At that point Jesus taught them (and us) an eternal lesson: "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. *For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost*" ([Luke 19:10](#)).

Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. That is why He died ([I Corinthians 15:3,4](#))!

But before He could contact many of the world's people personally, He was killed. So He spoke these words: "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go to the Father" ([John 14:12](#)).

The works that Jesus came to do were to seek and to save the lost. Even the miracles which He performed were for the purpose of proving that He was indeed the Son of the living God, the Messiah (or Christ) ([John 20:30,31](#)). Unless a person believes that basic fact, he cannot be saved. But since He died, He left his work to be carried out by those who believe in Him. Those who believe in Him can not only do the work that the Lord did, but they can do greater works than He did! He had only three and one-half years in His ministry in which to seek and to save the lost - the Christian may have 50 or more.

For this reason Jesus gave the commission to the apostles, which serves as instruction for all of us: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, immersing them into the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" ([Matthew 28:19,20](#)).

In one short set of instructions Jesus gave us the program that will work for any Christian at any time in any culture:

Go

Make disciples

Immerse them into the name of the Father and Son and Holy Spirit

Continue to teach them

If every Christian will set himself to carrying out the Lord's instructions, the church will accomplish its task of seeking and saving the lost.

Since the commission was given to the apostles, some Christians try to say that it does not apply to us now, and that we individually have never been commissioned to go and make disciples. But what distinguishes this from other statements Jesus made only to the apostles were the closing words, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Jesus anticipated that His marching orders would be carried out after the death of the apostles by all Disciples of Christ. And, as one of the apostles of Jesus said: "Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ" ([I Corinthians 11:1](#)). The responsibility is right back where it belongs - on us!

Ephesians 4:11-16

When it comes to carrying out the work of seeking and saving the lost, however, the Christian finds that he needs help. And so "He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ" ([Ephesians 4:11,12](#)).

The work of the church leadership is to equip the saints for the work of service. The purpose of equipping the saints is so that the body might be built up.

There are two ways in which the body can be built up. The first kind of building is in internal strength. In much the same way as a building might be strengthened by reinforcing certain inner walls, the church can be strengthened internally by edifying the saints.

The second way in which the body can be built up is by increase in numbers. Without the increase, the body loses its enthusiasm and its sense of direction. Without this increase, the body soon dies for lack of "replacement cells." Once again, the emphasis is on seeking and saving the lost, as "the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the *growth of the body* for the building up of itself in love" ([Ephesians 4:16](#)).

Summary

Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. In dying He left the church - His body - to carry on His work. It is the function of the church leadership to provide the edification - education, training, and motivation - for the body to carry out its appointed task.

ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH

Elders

The office of elder is probably the most important office in the church that Jesus established. Jesus built His church upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets ([Ephesians 2:19-22](#)), and left us complete instructions in the New Testament as to the manner in which we build upon that foundation. In order to be the church that Jesus built, our elders are going to have to meet the same qualifications, and serve in the same manner, as they did in the New Testament churches.

Names for Elders: As Paul was traveling to Jerusalem from Greece, he passed near the city of Ephesus, stopping at the port of Miletus. "And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church" ([Acts 20:17](#)).

Speaking to these men, with whom he had closely worked for several years, for the last time, Paul exhorted them: "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you *overseers*, to *shepherd* the church of God which he purchased with His own blood" ([Acts 20:28](#)).

From these two verses we learn the three descriptive words applied to the office of elder:

Presbuteros - elder, older man

episkopos - overseer, bishop

poimen - pastor, shepherd

The interchange of elder and bishop is substantiated in [Titus 1:5,7](#); and the interchange of elder and pastor (shepherd) is verified in [I Peter 5:1,2](#).

Over the years tradition has obscured the fact that the words *elder* and *bishop* refer to the same office. One of the earliest deviations from the New Testament pattern was the elevation of one of the elders of the congregation, and reserving for him alone the title of *Bishop* (Phillip Schaff; *History of the Christian Church*, William B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI; vol.1, p.493).

Another tradition that had developed in more recent generations is the artificial distinction between "elders" and the "pastor." By tradition, the preacher of the local church has come to be the "Pastor." But in the New Testament it was not so - the elders were the pastors - the shepherds - of the flock. And it is to be the same today!

Qualifications of Elders: The Holy Spirit lists the qualifications He requires in a man who desires to be an elder of Christ's church in [I Timothy 3:1-7](#) and [Titus 1:5-9](#).

In [I Timothy 3](#), Paul begins: "It is a trustworthy statement; if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a *fine work* he desires to do." Paul began by emphasizing "the work." Above all else, the man who wants to be an overseer (bishop) in Christ's church must desire the work! Over the years countless church squabbles could have been avoided had someone emphasized "the work" rather than "the position."

It is clear, upon examining the qualifications of an elder, that the man must be a family man with just one wife, and with children who believe - products of a well-run family. Apparently the family is the training ground for the future elder. As Paul put it: "if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?" ([I Timothy 3:5](#)).

It is also clear that any man who aspires to the office must be a very good man. He must have excellent personal habits, and he must have a good reputation outside the church.

Finally, he must be an older man. This is implied in the use of the word "elder"; also in that he must have children who are old enough to believe ([Titus 1:6](#)). He must not be a new convert, but one who has had years of experience in handling the sword of the Spirit, "that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict" ([Titus 1:9](#)).

The Appointment of Elders: Paul instructed Titus, who served in a similar fashion as Timothy as an evangelist or preacher ([II Timothy 4:5](#)), to "appoint elders in every city as I directed you" ([Titus 1:5](#)). Similarly, as Paul and Barnabas were finishing their first missionary journey, working their way back through the congregations which they had established earlier, they "appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, [and] they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed" ([Acts 14:23](#)). Once again, those who served in the capacity of preachers (see [II Timothy 1:11](#)) appointed elders in the respective congregations.

In a section dealing with Timothy's relationship to elders, Paul cautions him: "Do not lay hands upon anyone too hastily and thus share responsibility for the sins of others" ([I Timothy 5:22](#)). The laying on of hands to appoint someone to a position of leadership dates all the way back to Moses ([Deuteronomy 34:9](#)) - Joshua was appointed to take Moses' place by laying on of Moses' hands. In the New Testament, a Christian might receive one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit (such as the gift of prophecy) through the laying on of an apostle's hands (see the study entitled *The Holy Spirit*). However, Timothy was not an apostle, and could not pass on this kind of gift. But there was apparently something that Timothy could do through the laying on of hands, and this something had to do with elders.

Based on the information in [Acts 14:23](#) and [Titus 1:5](#), we conclude that this laying on of hands was in appointment of elders. The New Berkeley Version of that Bible translates [I Timothy 5:22](#) in this way: "Lay hands of ordination on no one hastily..."

In [Acts 6](#), seven men were "put in charge" of caring for the widows of the Jerusalem congregation. The process of appointment (the same word is used in [Titus 1:5](#) concerning the appointment of elders) was accomplished through the laying on of the apostles' hands following the selection of the men by the congregation. The same word - *epitithemei* - is used in Acts 6 concerning the appointment of these seven men as is used in [I Timothy 5:22](#) concerning elders. From this we conclude: *Elders are selected by the congregation; appointed by the laying on of hands by a preacher.*

Although the appointment of elders is in connection with the will of the congregation, Timothy was charged with final responsibility in the appointment, being cautioned "Do not lay hands on anyone too hastily and thus share responsibility for the sins of others" ([I Timothy 5:22](#)). He therefore had veto power over the selections of the congregation as the one responsible to God.

These are all the verses of scripture there are concerning the appointment of elders. From these we want to emphasize these points:

1. Elders are appointed by evangelists, by means of laying on of a preacher's hands, with prayer and fasting.
2. This appointment may be done in consultation with the will of the congregation.
3. Preachers are responsible to God for the appointment they make, and share in the sins of those chosen too hastily.

What is the term of the appointment of an elder? Recall that he has been set aside to do the *work* of an elder. Recall that qualifications required by God demand a lifetime of preparation for that great work. Recall that an elder must desire the work. These facts, coupled with the meaning of the word "appoint," indicate that as long as a man continues to do the work of an elder, he remains an elder. If anyone had a complaint against an elder, he was to talk to an evangelist. And these are the instructions for the preacher: "Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses" ([I Timothy 5:19](#)).

Some people today do not follow the New Testament pattern concerning the appointment of elders. They say it does not work; that it gives elders too much authority; that real men can never meet the theoretical qualifications for elders given in the Bible; that the scripture is not sufficient - additions to the Bible and alterations in the pattern are necessary. And so church constitutions and by-laws are written with all the election schemes of men incorporated concerning the appointment of elders.

Remember that what we have studied is the New Testament pattern! And no pattern - even the Lord's - is any better than the men who fill the slots in the pattern. If the pattern is not working, it's because someone

was not careful in the appointment of those elders. Paul even warned the elders of Ephesus: "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from *among your own selves* men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them" ([Acts 20:29,30](#)).

The solution to the problem is to build men who can function in God's pattern; not replace God's pattern with one of human design.

One other thought before we leave the appointment of elders. In the New Testament, every mention of elders is always plural. There is no mention of there ever being just one elder in a local congregation. The instructions of Paul to Titus were "appoint *elders* in every city" ([Titus 1:5](#)). This is the New Testament pattern - *elders* in every congregation. If there are not at least two men who meet the qualifications, and who want to do the work, the church functions without them until there are at least two men who do.

The Work of Elders: In his tearful departure from the elders of the church at Ephesus, Paul exhorted them: "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" ([Acts 20:28](#)).

These men, who were made elders by the Holy Spirit in accordance with guidelines now written in the Bible, were to shepherd the church at Ephesus. They, as overseers of the local congregation, were to be on guard against false teaching.

The descriptions of elders as overseers, or bishops, gives us an indication of one aspect of the elders' work. They superintend the activities of the local church. They are the local "bosses." Paul describes the elders' function as to "rule" ([I Timothy 5:17](#)). Since they have such serious responsibility bestowed upon them by the Holy Spirit, He in turn gives them the authority necessary to carry out their responsibility.

But the elders are also described as shepherds. A shepherd guides and cares for a flock of sheep. He makes sure that the sheep are fed and protects them from wolves and other dangerous animals. In [I Timothy 3:5](#) Paul states that elders are to "care" for the flock.

In carrying out the work of guiding the flock, Peter cautions: "Shepherd the flock of God among you, not under compulsion, but voluntarily; according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock" ([I Peter 5:2,3](#)).

It is difficult to move a heavy log chain by trying to push it. It is much easier to grab one end and pull the chain - leading it by going before it. People are like log chains: they can't be pushed. But a good shepherd leads the flock by going before it and the sheep will follow. Elders, therefore, are to lead by example! Even our Lord Jesus led primarily by example. "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin" ([Hebrews 4:15](#)).

Elders are to lead for the purpose of pleasing the Lord Jesus - not some ecclesiastical authority! Bishops of the local church are responsible directly to the Holy Spirit, and not to some devilish diocesan concept of men ([Acts 20:28](#)). Every congregation is to be independent, responsible directly to the Head of the church, the Lord Jesus Himself! Ecclesiastical orders, denominational discipline, and the like are substitute measures of men, and betray lack of trust that the Head of the church is capable of directing His body as He should.

To summarize: The work of an elder consists of all the responsibility of caring for the flock of God, which He purchased with His own blood. He, with his fellow elders, must be concerned about the continuing spiritual growth of each Christian entrusted to his care. He must oversee the ongoing work of seeking and saving the lost. He must lead the flock by example - not pushing his weight around. And he must face responsibility with eagerness, responsible to and desiring to please the Master in heaven.

Responsibility of Christians to Their Elders: "Obey your leaders and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you" ([Hebrews 13:17](#)).

Any team, in order to function well, must have a coach or coaching staff. The same is true with the church, the Lord's team on earth. In the spiritual battle with the devil, the game is much more serious than any other that has ever occurred on earth. And just as any team will lose unless every team member cooperates in playing according to the game plan of the coaching staff, the local church will fail in its portion of the battle against the forces of evil unless every member cooperates in following the plan of the eldership. Paul explained it to Timothy in this way: "And also if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules" ([II Timothy 2:5](#)).

So the Holy Spirit places upon the Christian one of the most difficult commands ever issued: "*obey*" and "*submit*."

The elders are not free in this regard either. They will give an account. Of course, if the elder does his job but the Christian does not do his, then the elder will not be able to give a joyful report when he meets with the Being on the great white throne. That will be unprofitable for the Christian.

Christians Are To Pay Their Elders: "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. For the scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing,' and 'The laborer is worthy of his wages.'" ([I Timothy 5:17,18](#)).

The "honor" that the Bible speaks of not only includes respect and acclamation, but also cold cash. When a man does the Lord's work, and works hard at it, he deserves to be paid. And an elder who works hard at preaching and teaching along with his regular duties of overseeing the Lord's work is worthy of "double honor."

Although many congregations have restored the form of the church of Christ, they deny the power of it. In practice they have a clergy-laity system where the preacher is paid and does most of the work, and the elders are merely figureheads. It does not take a very large congregation to guarantee plenty of work for a couple of full time elders.

If a man really desires to do the work of an overseer, he will be willing to leave his employment in this world in order to be in full-time employment of King Jesus. And if he is willing and qualified, how can the church afford not to have his full-time services?

I want to stress this point: It is more important to have full-time elders than it is to have a full-time preacher, full-time secretaries, full-time associate ministers, full-time youth ministers, full-time choir directors, etc. No man who works in a job eight hours a day and just part-time for the church can be on an equal plane with a man who spends his whole day involved in the affairs of the local congregation. The devil has certainly blunted the force that the church has in this world by convincing us that our most able, most qualified men should not be paid to work full-time in the most important office in Christ's church. By this one act alone, he probably has reduced the effectiveness of the church to reach the lost by 25-50%. The scripture says, "elders are worthy of double honor!" Let's seek and find men who are qualified and willing to do the work of an elder, then let's make sure that they are the first to be paid out of the Lord's treasury.

Summary: The Bible uses three names to describe one office: elder, bishop (overseer), and pastor (shepherd). A man must desire the work of an elder, and he must meet the qualifications given by the Holy Spirit. Elders are responsible directly to God for the souls of men entrusted to their care, and are to oversee the activities of God's flock; and Christians are therefore to obey their elders. Elders are appointed by the laying on of hands by an evangelist, and are to be full-time in the service of God, paid for their labors.

Evangelists

"And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers..." ([Ephesians 4:11](#)).

In the early church, the apostles were present to guide the church in the absence of the New Testament. Certain men received the gift of prophecy by the laying on of the apostles' hands ([see the study on The Holy Spirit](#)) and also guided the local congregations in the absence of the apostles. With the death of the apostles, the gifts of the Holy Spirit ceased. Providentially, however, by this time the New Testament was completed as an infallible guide to the will of God and functioning of the church. So we see that the church has been built "upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone" ([Ephesians 2:20](#)).

Once that foundation was completed, the church had no need of apostles and prophets. But the church is to continue to be built by the evangelists, and pastors, and teachers. In the previous section we dealt with pastors, or elders; in this section we will examine the office of evangelist.

Evangelist: The word "evangelist" comes from the Greek word *evangel*, which means "the good news." An evangelist is one who announces, or preaches, the "good news." In the Bible, sometimes the word "preacher" is used ([II Timothy 1:11](#)). From the Biblical standpoint, preacher and evangelist are usually interchangeable - Bible preachers are to preach the "good news".

In the errant tradition of our day, a "Pastor" is a preacher who preaches at one fixed location for a period of time, and an "Evangelist" is a traveling preacher who holds revival meetings. But in the Bible, a pastor is one of the names applied to overseers of the local church; and any preacher is an evangelist.

The Work Of An Evangelist: Paul told Timothy: "preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; rebuke, reprove, exhort, with great patience and instruction" ([II Timothy 4:2](#)).

Paul emphasized the importance of such preaching by bringing to bear on Timothy these thoughts: "I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom..." ([II Timothy 4:1](#)).

It shouldn't surprise us that Paul so emphasized the preaching of the word. "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe" ([I Corinthians 1:21](#)). The only way to be saved is through the message of God. When God took a special hand in the conversion of the first Gentiles to become Christians by sending an angel to the Roman soldier Cornelius, even the angel said, "Send to Joppa, and have Simon, who is called Peter, brought here; and he shall speak *words* to you by which you will be saved, you and all your household" ([Acts 11:13,14](#)). "So faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" ([Romans 10:17](#)). So the primary work of a preacher is to *preach the word!*

Paul told Timothy to "be ready in season and out of season." The preacher always faces the temptation that right now is not the proper time to talk to someone about the Lord Jesus. Whether it is convenient or inconvenient, the word of God must be preached. The preacher is to be ready at any moment, at any opportunity to preach the "good news" about Jesus. Paul said, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes . . ." ([Romans 1:16](#)). The evangelist should never be afraid to preach the gospel; he should never be ashamed of God's message.

Timothy was told to "reprove, rebuke, and exhort with great patience and instruction." The meaning of "reprove, rebuke, and exhort" may be illustrated in this manner. If a man is driving down the road, and starts to drift into the left lane, you would reprove him; he is headed in the right general direction, but needs to correct his course somewhat. If a man takes a wrong turn someplace along the way, you rebuke him; he is headed in the wrong direction entirely. If he is on the right road, but needs to go faster, you would exhort him. So it seems that two thirds of a preacher's work is correcting the mistakes of others, and one third exhorting them to work harder.

In his preaching, Timothy was to use "great patience and instruction." Even the best of men only change slowly, and with great effort on their part. Patience is a characteristic of God ([II Peter 3:9](#)), and those who preach His word must exhibit the same characteristic. Neither do men change without good reason. The only reason that men should change is because of the will of God; not because of some wisp of man's teaching that may blow down the road. Therefore, God's evangelists are to correct others with both great patience and great instruction.

Timothy was also warned of the great hazard of preaching to please men. "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths" ([II Timothy 4:3,4](#)). The temptation is great to tell people what they want to hear, and to entertain them. But the gospel preacher must preach for those who can "endure sound doctrine"; and those who can't must be left to walk the broad way that leads to destruction.

Finally, Timothy himself was exhorted: "But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry" ([II Timothy 4:5](#)). Any man who preaches the gospel must be willing to recognize the seriousness of his task. He must be willing to work hard, and to endure hardship in order to fulfill his ministry. There are no shortcuts, no easy "programs" that guarantee a fruitful life as a gospel preacher. As Paul told the church in Corinth, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth" ([I Corinthians 3:6](#)). The only successful program is to go, make disciples, immerse them into Christ, and continue to teach them; this repeated over and over and over again is the only way God's kingdom will show any long-term increase.

Titus, another of Paul's evangelist companions, was told to "set in order what remains, and appoint elders in every city" ([Titus 1:5](#)). Preachers are to try to put things in order with the scripture where they labor, and to appoint elders when men who qualify are willing to do the work.

To summarize: Evangelists' primary responsibility is to preach the good news to the lost, without compromise and with great patience and instruction. They are to set things in order wherever they go, and to appoint elders where possible.

The Appointment Of Evangelists: In [Acts 13:1-3](#), Saul (the apostle Paul) and Barnabas were set aside for special work by the laying on of hands by leaders of the congregation of Christians in Antioch. Paul reminded Timothy: "Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed upon you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery" ([I Timothy 4:14](#)). The spiritual gift within Timothy referred to here was not one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit - they were given through the laying on of hands of one of the apostles of Christ ([II Timothy 1:16](#)). The other kind of gift mentioned in

the Bible includes evangelists ([Ephesians 4:8-11](#)). We conclude that Timothy was given the gift of being an evangelist through the laying on of hands of the elders (presbytery) of a congregation. The laying on of hands in Timothy's case was in response to a prophecy about Timothy. We therefore conclude that Timothy was appointed through the laying on of hands of the elders, and Paul was appointed a preacher ([II Timothy 1:11](#)) by the laying on of hands by some of the congregation in Antioch, and that this sets the pattern for today.

Since there are no prophets today, how do we know if someone should be set aside to do the work of an evangelist? He would probably have to prove his desire by getting out and doing the work for some period of time - he would probably have to be tested in a congregational situation before a presbytery would consent to lay hands on him. He would have to prove his desire to seek and to save the lost.

Can women be evangelists? The evidence in the Bible is that they cannot. All the instruction to Timothy and Titus are written from the point of view that men are to function in "preacher situations." "Let a woman receive instruction quietly, with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet" ([I Timothy 2:11,12](#)). "Let the women keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but let them subject themselves, just as the Law also says" ([I Corinthians 14:34](#)). Because women are to be silent in the churches, and because they are not to exercise authority over men, it follows that they are not able to carry out the instructions given to Timothy and Titus. (Remember that the scripture is inspired by the Holy Spirit - if these are His instructions, women are obligated to joyfully obey.)

Preachers Are To Be Paid: In [I Corinthians 9:1-18](#), Paul defended his right to get his living from the gospel. Explaining that soldiers get their pay from the government, and that farmers reap materially from their own labor, he expressed this principle, as it applies to evangelists: "So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel" ([I Corinthians 9:14](#)).

Although Paul often, for the benefit of those whom he taught, did work to support himself, he also often preached the gospel full time ([Acts 18:1-5](#)). Similarly, Paul explained to the Galatians: "And let the one who is taught the word share all good things with him who teaches" ([Galatians 6:6](#)). Christians are to willingly share their material things with those who teach them spiritual truths.

Congregations often think in terms of "hiring a minister." In the New Testament, preachers were apparently free to come and go as they saw fit, leaving the care of the local congregation to the elders. "But concerning Apollos our brother, I encouraged him greatly to come to you with the brethren; and it was not at all his desire to come now, but he will come when he has opportunity" ([I Corinthians 16:12](#)). If Apollos had chosen, he could have come into Corinth and gone to work as he had done some years earlier, without a "call" from the congregation.

Summary: An evangelist is one who proclaims the good news. His primary function is to seek and to save the lost, for that is the only way they can be saved - they must hear the gospel and obey it. Part of an evangelist's work is setting things in order where necessary, and appointing elders. A man is set aside to do the work of a preacher by the laying on of hands of the men of a congregation, or the elders of that congregation. He is to be paid by those who are grateful for the services he has rendered.

Deacons

Our word "deacon" comes from the Greek word *diakonos*, which means "servant or waiter." Sometimes the word is used to apply to servants in general; but there was a specific office of deacon in the New Testament church, as evidenced by Paul's letter to the church at Philippi: "... to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and *deacons*" ([Philippians 1:1](#)). The emphasis is on serving, not on a position.

In [I Timothy 3:8-13](#) the Holy Spirit lists the qualifications for deacons. Like elders, deacons must be good, holy men. But the qualifications are not so strict as they are with elders - the deacon does not have to have believing children, and can be a younger man with less knowledge of the scriptures.

In [Acts 6:1-6](#) seven men were appointed to meet the physical needs of widows of the Jerusalem congregation. Although it is not specifically mentioned that these men were deacons, they did serve the church in a special fashion. The apostles, being guided into all truth by the Holy Spirit ([John 16:13](#)), would have already been building the church "according to the pattern." We find, for example, the church in Jerusalem already under the guiding hands of elders by the close of [Acts 11](#). It is our conclusion, therefore, that these men were selected by the congregation, and appointed by the apostles, to do the work of deacons or servants in the church at Jerusalem.

Today men would probably be appointed to the office of deacon by an evangelist through the laying on of hands.

In [1 Timothy 3:11](#), Paul states: "Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things." The context clearly indicates the scripture is referring to the wives of these male servants of the church. Unless the women are involved and helpful, the ability of the man breaks down also. Paul also wrote to the church of Rome: "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea." ([Romans 16:1](#)). In addition to the men being humble bond-slaves of the Lord, there is a definite need for godly women to minister to the needs of others in the local assembly.

Apostles

Our word "apostle" comes from the Greek word *apostolos*, which means "one sent out, a special delegate, a messenger, missionary."

Jesus chose twelve men from all His disciples to be His apostles ([Matthew 10:2](#)). On the day when Jesus ascended to heaven, He gathered together the eleven remaining apostles ([Acts 1:2](#)) - Judas had already hanged himself. Paul was also an apostle of Jesus, beginning his letters with "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ" ([1 Corinthians 1:1](#)).

But there is another sense in which the word "apostle" is used in the New Testament. In Acts [13:1-3](#), Paul and Barnabas were "sent out" by the church in Antioch. In [Acts 14:4](#) we find them referred to as "the apostles." At the close of their journey, we find them back in Antioch to make a report to the Christians there ([Acts 14:27](#)).

Was Barnabas an apostle of Jesus Christ? Does he rank with Peter and Paul and Andrew and James and John? There is no reference to him in this manner, and there is no indication that he was able to pass on gifts of the Spirit by the laying on of his hands. One thing is certain: he and Paul were both "sent out" from the church at Antioch. And in the same sense both Barnabas and Paul were "apostles (missionaries)" of the church in that Syrian City. So the word apostle does not necessarily mean "apostle of Jesus Christ" (see [Romans 16:7](#), for example).

The sending out of Paul and Barnabas by the church in Antioch points out to us today the most effective way to begin congregations patterned after the church revealed in the Bible. If local congregations will follow the example of Antioch and "send out" men to establish churches - being responsible to God for their moral and financial support - the "missionaries" would be much freer to preach the gospel in a manner pleasing to God.

There are those today who form "Evangelistic Associations" to accomplish the establishment of new congregations. It is this writer's opinion that such associations are a deviation from the New Testament pattern, and are more dangerous than meets the eye. Such organizations remove the responsibility of evangelizing from the local congregation, and place the responsibility on a more distant "quasi-church" organization. Not only that, the fact that the Association is sending money to the preacher in the new work, coupled with the bigness and force of the Association, places a subtle influence on the preacher to conform to the norm established by the Association, rather than feeling free to follow the Bible. Such conformity, in this writer's opinion, will result in the eventual formation of a denomination in order to enforce the norm gradually established by such associations.

But the establishment of new works by free and independent congregations who jealously guard their freedom to serve the Holy Spirit, and who pass on that jealousy to their new works, is the only force that will prevent the gradual tendency to establish a denominational hierarchy.

There are no apostles of Jesus Christ today. There can be apostles of local congregations, sent out to establish churches in the pattern revealed in the New Testament.

Some Closing Comments

The New Testament is a complete and sufficient guide to the structure and working of the local congregation. It is only when men lose their faith in the inspiration of the Bible that they feel the need to add to or subtract from the instructions contained in it.

It is clear that the local congregation is to be free to serve the Lord, and that its elders are responsible directly to the Holy Spirit and not to the strictures of a formal denomination. Note that a return to the Bible pattern would destroy the man-made creeds and traditions, which separate those who earnestly seek to follow Christ. And the prayer of the Lord was that we all be one ([John 17:20,21](#))!

Also note that the New Testament pattern for the organization of the church meets every need that the local congregation has. Evangelists can be the primary thrust of the church toward seeking and saving the lost. The elders can shepherd those who have become a part of the church, to ensure their continuing growth. Deacons can serve and meet many of the needs of the congregation. Missionaries from the local church can start new works elsewhere. And teachers (which we didn't particularly cover above - see [Ephesians 4:11,12](#)) can assist the shepherds in the instruction of the flock.

CONCLUSION

The church is God's organization on earth. Its central purpose is to seek and save the lost, and it is organized to carry out that purpose. The evangelist's prime calling is to preach the word to the lost. The elder's work is shepherding those who are being saved, and servants are to meet the physical and other needs of the congregation. The early church sent out apostles (missionaries) to begin new works in distant places.

II. THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH

INTRODUCTION

The New Testament describes the church in a number of different ways. Each of these descriptive phrases illustrates a basic concept of the nature of the church and points out ways in which members of the church ought to behave.

THE CHURCH AS THE KINGDOM OF GOD

It is written: "For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son" ([Colossians 1:13](#)). Notice the tense of the verbs - Christians have already been taken out of the domain of the devil and are already in the kingdom of God's Son! What is the kingdom, which Christians are already in? Jesus told Nicodemus, "truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" ([John 3:3](#)). Explaining further, He said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" ([John 3:5](#)). Why can't a person see the kingdom of God unless he is born again? What is this kingdom which one may not enter unless he is born of water and Spirit?

Jesus Is Now king

Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah. *Christ* is derived from a Greek word meaning "the anointed one;" *Messiah* is its Hebrew equivalent. For nearly 1500 years the Israelites had been expecting someone to come, from the days of David they expected a king like David to deliver them from their oppressors. They called the expected king the *Messiah* from the God-given practice of anointing the kings with oil.

The apostle Peter explained it this way to the Jews on the Day of Pentecost, 30 A.D.: "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ - this Jesus whom you crucified" ([Acts 2:36](#)). Again, later in the Temple, and to the Jewish High Council, Peter kept hammering on this theme: "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross. He is the One whom God exalted to His right hand as a *Prince* and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins" ([Acts 5:31](#)). So now Jesus is the "King of kings, and Lord of lords" ([I Timothy 6:15](#)).

What is Jesus now king over? All things are not yet in subjection to Him ([I Corinthians 15:25-28](#)). But it is evident that Jesus *now* has a kingdom, and Christians are in His kingdom ([Colossians 1:13](#)). Let's see if we can establish exactly what that kingdom is.

The kingdom Prophesied

The Old Testament prophesied the coming of a kingdom. "For a Child will be born to us, a Son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his *kingdom*..." ([Isaiah 9:6,7](#)). So at the time the angel visited Mary, he told her, concerning her son Jesus: "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the *throne* of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and His *kingdom* will have no end" ([Luke 1:32,33](#)).

Daniel also prophesied the coming of the kingdom of God: "And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a *kingdom* which will never be destroyed" ([Daniel 2:44](#)).

With the appearance of John the Immerser, excitement about the coming kingdom began to build, for John said, "Repent, for the *kingdom of heaven* is at hand" ([Matthew 3:2](#)). Jesus intensified the excitement, saying, "Repent, for the *kingdom of heaven* is at hand" ([Matthew 4:17](#)). Then Jesus sent out the twelve, instructing them to say, "The *kingdom of heaven* is at hand" ([Matthew 10:7](#)).

Then Jesus told the disciples: "There are some of those who are standing here who shall not taste of death until they see the *kingdom of God* after it has come with power" ([Mark 9:1](#)). The kingdom of God was going to come with power before some of those disciples died!

But many misunderstood the nature of the kingdom. "Jesus therefore perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force, to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone" ([John 6:15](#)). Jesus tried to explain the nature of His kingdom to Pontius Pilate: "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting, that I might not be delivered up to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm" ([John 18:36](#)).

The kingdom Come!

With the establishment of the church on the Jewish feast day of Pentecost in 30 A.D., what now is the message of the inspired men of God concerning the kingdom of God?

In [Acts 8](#), Philip (one of the seven of [Acts 6](#), not the apostle Philip - see [Acts 8:1](#)) went down to Samaria. "But when they believed Philip, preaching the *good news about the kingdom of God* and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike" ([Acts 8:12](#)). What would this tremendous good news about the kingdom of God be: that it was still coming?

Later Paul explained to the elders of the church in Ephesus: "And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about *preaching the kingdom*, will see my face no more" ([Acts 20:25](#)). What was this kingdom which Paul went about preaching?

In [Romans 14:17](#) Paul explains: "For the *kingdom of God* is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." Paul affirms our suspicions from the book of Acts - the kingdom of God has already come! The kingdom of God is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit!

Now we understand the events of the day of Pentecost. Jesus had promised the apostles that some of them would not die until they had seen the kingdom of God come with great power. And on the day of Pentecost, great power was evident as the apostles were baptized with the Holy Spirit; and as a result of the preaching of that day, 3000 souls turned from their ways and were immersed in water for the forgiveness of their sins. The kingdom of God came on that day with great power; it was the church of the living God.

And from that point, the inspired men of God no longer spoke of the kingdom of God as yet to come, but announced the good news that it had come!

Throughout the New Testament, the kingdom is designated by different names. A comparison of [Mark 4:11](#) and [Matthew 13:11](#) will show that the kingdom of God is the same as the kingdom of heaven. And a comparison of [Mark 9:1](#) with [Matthew 16:28](#) will make it plain that the kingdom of God is the same as Jesus' kingdom.

It becomes clear that we enter the kingdom of God's Son ([Colossians 1:13](#)) when we are born of water and Spirit ([John 3:5](#)) in Christian immersion.

The Parables of Jesus

Most of Jesus' parables are about the kingdom of heaven. Since we have established that the kingdom of heaven is the church, we can now proceed to interpret His parables. We can test our understanding because Jesus interprets a couple for us, leaving the rest for us to work on by ourselves.

The parable of the tares: The parable of the tares is recorded in [Matthew 13:24-30](#) and explained in [Matthew 13:36-43](#). "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field." We immediately recognize that Jesus is talking about the church, and our present age (that is, since His death on the cross). The church's function is to carry on Jesus' work of seeking and saving the lost. We therefore also conclude that the man who sowed good seed in the field is Jesus Himself, sowing His word in the world. And when we compare our conclusions with [Matthew 13:36,37](#), we see that we are right on track.

"But while men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat." Jesus' enemy is the devil. And the tares (empty weeds that in this case look almost like wheat) would be those who are

following the devil, as contrasted with Christians. A check of [verses 38 and 39](#) prove that we are still on target.

"But when the wheat sprang up and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. And the slaves of the landowner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?'" We would guess that the slaves mentioned would be angels, since Christians would be wheat and non-Christians tares. And our guess would be right, according to [verse 39](#).

"And he said to them, 'An enemy has done this!' And the slaves said to him, 'Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?' But he said, 'No, lest while you are gathering the tares, you may root up the wheat with them. Allow both to grow together until the harvest and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, 'First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.''" We now guess that the harvest is the day of Judgment at the close of this age. And [verses 39-43](#) prove this to be so. All the bad ones will be taken out of the earthly kingdom on that Day and the good will continue to shine forth in the eternal kingdom in heaven.

The parable of the mustard seed: We shall now strike out on our own to interpret the other parables of Jesus. The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed..." Once again Jesus is talking about His church. "... which a man took and sowed in his field..." Jesus would be the man again, and the field would be the world.

"... and this is smaller than all the other seeds; but when it is full grown, it is larger than the garden plants, and it becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches." It seems as though the church was going to start small in comparison with the businesses of this world, but when it was full grown, it was to be larger than any of them. And looking back in history, we can see that this is true - the church started with 12 men, and has since gone to the ends of the earth.

The parable of the leaven: The next parable we consider is the parable Jesus told in [Matthew 13:33](#). "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven (yeast) which a woman took, and hid in three pecks of meal, until it was all leavened."

Once again the kingdom of heaven is the church. The three pecks of meal would be the world, and the woman represents God or Jesus.

Just as yeast works upon a loaf of bread to make it rise, so the church works in the world to affect its policies and thinking; and the church uses the world to reproduce itself just as yeast does in bread dough.

Valuable treasure: We next want to examine two parables together. "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it" ([Matthew 13:44-46](#)).

The purpose of these two parables is to illustrate the great value of the church. Many people read these parables and assume that they are talking about the great value of heaven. But notice that the parables are concerned with the *kingdom* of heaven - the church!

Why should it surprise us to think that the church is the treasure hidden in the field, and the pearl of great value, worth all that a man has? Jesus bought the church with His own blood ([Acts 20:28](#)). If the church was worth all that Jesus had, shouldn't it be worth all that we have also? And what do you think Jesus meant when He said, "But seek first His *kingdom* and His righteousness..." ([Matthew 6:33](#))? The church of Christ is to be earnestly sought for; and when found; it is worth all that a man has!

The parable of the dragnet: "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea, and gathering fish of every kind; and when it was filled, they drew it up on the beach; and they sat down and gathered the good fish into containers, but the bad they threw away. So it will be at the end of the age; the angels will come forth, and take out the wicked from among the righteous, and will cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" ([Matthew 13:47-50](#)).

This time the church is pictured as a dragnet. Note that in this parable all the fish are in the net; that is, there are both good and bad fish within the church. The parable is not concerned with the fish that "got away." This is Jesus' way of telling us that there will always be hypocrites in the church; but they will be sorted and judged in the end.

The parable of the wedding feast: We have chosen just one more parable to illustrate Jesus' manner of communicating with us. The parable we have chosen is given in [Matthew 22:1-14](#).

"The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king, who gave a wedding feast for his son." The purpose of the church, and the events surrounding its existence are about to be illustrated. The king is the Father, and the son is Jesus.

"And he sent out his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding feast, and they were unwilling to come. Again he sent out other slaves saying, 'Tell those who have been invited, "Behold, I have prepared my dinner; come to the wedding feast."' But they paid no attention and went their way, one to his own farm, another to his business, and the rest seized his slaves and mistreated them and killed them." ([Matthew 22:3-6](#)).

Jesus had always intended for the Israelites to be the first to inherit the kingdom of heaven, and the Law was only intended to bring people to an understanding of the gospel (see [Galatians 3:15-29](#)). So the prophets that the Lord sent to announce the coming of God's kingdom were stoned and mistreated long before the "good news" took effect. And when it came time for the Jews to become members of God's spiritual kingdom - the church - most rejected God's plan of salvation through the Messiah.

"But the king was enraged and sent his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and set their city on fire" ([Matthew 22:7](#)). God gave the Jews a forty-year grace period following the establishment of the church. Then in 70 A.D. He sent the Roman armies to utterly destroy Jerusalem and the Temple. This brought an end to the Jewish nation and priesthood.

"Then he said to his slaves, 'the wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. Go therefore to the main highways and, as many as you find there, invite to the wedding feast.' And those slaves went out into the streets, and gathered together all they found, both evil and good, and the wedding hall was filled with dinner guests" ([Matthew 22:8-10](#)).

With the Jewish rejection of the Messiah, the gospel went to the Gentiles. The church is to search everywhere and invite those who will come to the marriage supper of the Lamb. In the letter to the Romans, Paul explains: "As He also says in Hosea, 'I will call those who were not My people, "My people," and her who was not beloved, "Beloved." And it shall be that in the place where it was said to them, "You are not My people," there they shall be called the sons of the living God'" ([Romans 9:25,26](#)). The Gentiles, who were not of God's people in times past were now to become God's people through the gospel. But of the Jews it was written: "All day long I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient and obstinate people" ([Romans 10:21](#)). And so those who have and who will answer the invitation to the wedding feast will come primarily from the ranks of the Gentiles!

"But when the king came in to look over the dinner guests, he saw there a man not dressed in wedding clothes, and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?' And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' For many are called but few are chosen" ([Matthew 22:11-14](#)).

Our parable brings us through the entire church age to the Day of Judgment. Here we see one of our Gentile Christians who didn't have on his wedding garments. "For all of you who were immersed into Christ have *clothed yourselves* with Christ" ([Galatians 3:27](#)). "Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy, but *put on the Lord Jesus Christ*, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts" ([Romans 13:13,14](#)). Those who are called must keep putting on the Lord Jesus Christ following their immersion into Him in order to be properly clothed for the wedding feast.

Once again we see that the church is the means God is using to seek and save the lost.

Summary

The church is the kingdom, which was anxiously awaited for 1500 years. The nature of the church is set forth in the parables, which Jesus told about the kingdom of God, where it is primarily pictured as the means God is using to spread His word and to save the souls of men.

THE CHURCH AS THE BODY OF CHRIST

Not only is the church described as the kingdom of God, but it is also described as the body of Christ. "And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the *church, which is His body*, the fullness of Him who fills all in all" ([Ephesians 1:22,23](#)).

Paul goes on in I Corinthians to explain to us the significance of being part of Christ's body. "For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body; so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all immersed into one body, whether Jews or Greeks whether slave or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot should say, because I am not an eye, I am not part of the body, it is not for this reason any

the less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? *But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired* ([I Corinthians 12:12-18](#)).

Every member of Christ's body is important and has an important function to perform. Many Christians don't feel capable of preaching or teaching and therefore sometimes feel unneeded. The great need of the church is people who are willing to do what they can. Jesus said, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest" ([Matthew 9:37,38](#)).

A human body works as a unit. Not all parts of the body perform the same function, but they all work together to accomplish the immediate task. The eye does the visual work, the hands and the arms work together to perform what is needed. And if the hands seem to slip for a second, the knee will even come to the rescue. And the knee does not complain to the hands about something slipping; it was primarily interested in getting the job done. So it is with Christ's body, it should work together, without complaining; to get the job of seeking and saving the lost done!

THE CHURCH AS THOSE WHO ARE BEING SAVED

Following the establishment of the church on the day of Pentecost, it grew rapidly. "And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were *being saved*" ([Acts 2:47](#)). The tense of the verb indicates that following one's immersion into Christ, he is in the process of being saved. [I Corinthians 1:18](#) uses a comparable expression: "For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are *being saved* it is the power of God."

The church, then, is the fellowship of those who have undergone the new birth and are now in the process of living out their Christian lives, growing in respect to salvation ([I Peter 2:2](#)).

What is involved in this process of being saved? Peter answers: "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing..." ([I Peter 4:12,13](#)).

There are those who promise that the Christian life is trouble-free. "Just become a Christian," they say, "and watch those blessings roll in." God has never made such fleshly promises to the Christian. He has promised the Christian the opportunity to suffer: "And indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" ([II Timothy 3:12](#)).

So Peter warns us not to be surprised "at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing." Part of the process of refining gold is to make it pass through fire, where everything but the gold evaporates away, leaving a small nugget of gold in the crucible. In the same way, God uses the fire of suffering to evaporate away the dross of our character, leaving behind the pure gold of faith.

Not only does God allow us to suffer joyfully in the process of our being saved, but He also disciplines us: "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reprovved by Him. For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son who He receives" ([Hebrews 12:5,6](#)). We can draw a parallel with our Christian lives and when we lived with our parents. "Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness" ([Hebrews 12:9,10](#)).

One particular quality about discipline is that it is painful. "All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness" ([Hebrews 12:11](#)). When the Christian errs, or needs to learn a lesson, he should expect that the caring Father in heaven will discipline him in such a way as to make that mistake or lesson evident. Christians are going through the process of being saved. "Christianity is not a bed of roses - God puts the Christians through the adversities of suffering and discipline in order that we might share His nature. Even Jesus, "although He was a Son, learned obedience through the things which He suffered" ([Hebrews 5:8](#)). If Jesus had to learn obedience through suffering, think how much more suffering you and I are going to have to go through in order to learn obedience.

THE CHURCH AS A FAMILY

Another way that God wants us to picture the church is as a family. "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are *children of God*, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow-heirs with Christ,

if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him" ([Romans 8:16,17](#)). (Notice how the Holy Spirit brought in suffering again).

In the Christian family, God is the Father, and Jesus is the elder brother, the first-born from the dead. The rest of us are brothers and sisters in Christ, and we all get a share in the inheritance!

But there is another condition for our being a part of the family of God: "Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God just as God said, 'I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate,' says the Lord. 'And do not touch what is unclean; and I will welcome you. And I will be a Father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to Me,' says the Lord Almighty" ([II Corinthians 6:14-18](#)).

The Christian is obligated to leave this world behind, and to enjoy his life in the family of God. He is to be closer to his Christian family than to his fleshly family if they are "of this world." He has obligations to his fleshly family that the name of Christ may not be spoken against ([Ephesians 6:1-4](#), for example). But the Christian must never forget that Jesus said, "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies shall be the members of his household. He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me" ([Matthew 10:34-37](#)).

The Christian is also warned: "Do not be deceived: 'Bad company corrupts good morals'" ([I Corinthians 15:33](#)). One of the primary reasons for the existence of the church is to provide "a family atmosphere" in which Christians can find enough fellowship to leave their friends of the world behind if necessary. Each member of the family of God should be helping the other members of the family to get to heaven.

The apostle John exhorts us: "The one who says he is in the light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. The one who loves his brother abides in the light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness, and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes" ([I John 2:9-11](#)). There is no room for hate or resentment in the family of God, only grace to overlook each other's weaknesses and faults.

Again, it is written: "So then while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially those who are of the household of faith" ([Galatians 6:10](#)). And Jesus exhorts His family: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" ([John 13:34,35](#)).

The church is to resemble a family. The members are to care for each other with the same honest concern that a mother might have for her child. They are to come out of this world into the family of God, and work to help each other on the road to heaven. If God's family does not really care for each other, the world will not be able to recognize that Christians are disciples of Jesus.

THE CHURCH AS AN ASSEMBLY OR CONGREGATION

There is a movement today to do away with "the organized church." In this section I want to show that in the New Testament, Christians worked together in local, organized assemblies.

In Acts 5, as a result of the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira, "great fear came upon *the whole church*, and upon all who heard of these things" ([Acts 5:11](#)). There was an organized church in Jerusalem.

Paul and Barnabas went to Antioch, "And it came about that for an entire year *they met with the church*, and taught considerable numbers" ([Acts 11:26](#)). There was an organized church in Antioch.

Paul wrote to the church at Corinth: "For in the first place, when you come *together as a church*, I hear that divisions exist among you..." ([I Corinthians 11:18](#)). There was an organized church in Corinth.

Some instructions were given to the Colossians: "And when this letter is read among you, have it also read in *the church of the Laodiceans*; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from the Laodiceans" ([Colossians 4:16](#)). There was a church in Colossae and one in Laodicea about seven miles away.

As Paul and Barnabas completed their first missionary journey, they went back through the churches they had established a few years earlier. "And when *they had appointed elders for them in every church*, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed" ([Acts 14:23](#)). Not only did they have "organized" churches in the New Testament, that organization was explicitly spelled out.

Paul wrote to the Romans: "All the churches of Christ greet you" ([Romans 16:16](#)). Church of Christ is not the name of a denomination. The indication simply is that the congregation belonged to Christ. It is clear

that the congregations belonged to Christ. It is clear that there were churches, which belonged to Christ, scattered all over the Roman Empire, and it was from these congregations Paul sent his greetings. There is no denominational name that might be given to one of Christ's churches. Sometimes in the Bible the church is called "the church of God" ([Acts 20:28](#)), or other longer names such as "churches of God in Christ Jesus" ([1 Thessalonians 2:14](#)).

It is clear that there were "organized" churches in the New Testament. Let's build "according to the pattern" ([Hebrews 8:5](#)).

THE CHURCH AS THE BRIDE OF CHRIST

"And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband" ([Revelation 21:2](#)). The New Jerusalem is the church ([Hebrews 12:22](#)), and is here pictured as the bride now ready for her husband - Jesus Christ. Of Jesus' Second Coming it is written: "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready. And it was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. And he said to me. 'Write, "Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb."'"[\(Revelation 19:6-9\)](#).

Paul uses the relationship between husbands and wives to illustrate the relationship between Christ and His bride. In [Ephesians 5:22-33](#), he makes the following points:

1. As the husband is the head of the wife, Christ is the head of the church.
2. As the church is subject to Christ, so also wives are to be subject to their husbands.
3. Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her.
4. Christ is purifying the church that He might present her to Himself as a pure virgin bride.
5. Christ nourishes and cherishes the church.
6. There is hidden meaning in Moses' statement: "For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh." This was really a prophecy concerning the marriage of Christ to His church.

The church is pictured as the bride of Christ to bring us to the breathless expectation of the wedding day, and to purify ourselves as a pure and sinless virgin for Christ's sake.

SUMMARY

The church is a living, active body, described by God in different terms to bring out desirable characteristics in its members. The church is pictured as the kingdom of God, the body of Christ, those who are being saved, the family of God, an assembly or congregation, and as the bride of Christ. ([the church is also pictured as the temple of God, but that will be covered in the study entitled *The Lord's Second Coming*](#)). The church is a practical means of uniting all believers in local service and love.

III. THE PRACTICES OF THE CHURCH AS DICTATED BY CHRIST

EVANGELISM - SPREADING THE GOOD NEWS

Following the death of Stephen, Saul (later known as the apostle Paul) led a violent persecution against the church. As a result, the church was scattered all over Judea and Samaria; but the apostles somehow managed to remain in Jerusalem. Of the church it was written: "Therefore, those who had been scattered went about preaching the word" ([Acts 8:4](#)).

The Christians in the New Testament were capable of spreading the word of God without the apostles. They had continued devotedly "to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" ([Acts 2:42](#)) for a long enough period of time that they were equipped to carry out the most important function of the church - to seek and to save the lost! If we are able to follow the example of the Jerusalem church, the saints in our congregations are going to have to make evangelism their practice also! It is easy to say that the purpose of the church is to seek and to save the lost. But it is a more difficult matter to make that our practice.

Jesus warned the church at Ephesus: "The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this: 'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot endure evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you have found them to be false; and you have perseverance for My name's sake, and have not grown weary.'

But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you, and will remove your lampstand out of its place - unless you repent" ([Revelation 2:1-5](#)).

What was it about Christ's church in Ephesus that was so serious that unless they repented of it, God would remove their candlestick out of its place?

The church in Ephesus did not give up easily, for the Lord knew of their perseverance.

The church in Ephesus upheld sound doctrine, for they had tested those who claim to be apostles, and found them to be false.

And it wasn't that they didn't love Jesus, for He said, "You have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake."

Whatever it was, they had lost their first love, and the remedy was to repent and do the deeds that they did at first. What does any congregation have to do at first? They have to evangelize! They have to spread the word! If a new congregation does not, they will soon cease to exist.

By the process of elimination, we conclude that in Ephesus the church had a lot of "Meat Loaf Martha's," but if that busy and active congregation did not carry out the practice of seeking and saving the lost, they would cease to be "of Christ" by order of loving Jesus Himself.

And if our congregations today get too comfortable with their size and fellowship, that same King Jesus will just as surely remove our lampstands out of their places! If we are to be Christ's church, evangelizing being the deeds we did at first - must have the Number One priority. We must follow the example of the church at Jerusalem and "go about preaching the word!"

WORSHIP AND SERVICE

The second practice of Christ's church we are going to examine is the worship of God through Jesus Christ. In a conversation with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, Jesus told her: "But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" ([John 4:23,24](#)).

True Christian worship expresses itself in service, touching everything that the Christian does. "I urge you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service" ([Romans 12:1](#)). Under the Old Covenant, the priests offered up to God their various sacrifices. Under the New Covenant, we willingly offer ourselves every precious second of our lives, as those who will give an account for the deeds done in the body ([II Corinthians 5:10](#)).

God is seeking those who will worship Him in spirit and truth. Those who worship God will voluntarily do the right things for the right reason.

In addition to the individual worship which the conscientious Christian carries out moment by moment, there are certain things that he carries out in conjunction with other Christians. These things done in conjunction with others would be the practices of the church. And once again the scriptures give us a complete guide in the expression of our worship as a group.

The Lord's Supper

Shortly before Jesus crossed the brook Kidron, He and His apostles shared together in the Passover meal. "And while they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said 'Take, eat; this is My body.' And He took a cup and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is to be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until the day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom'" ([Matthew 26:26-29](#)).

With the coming of the kingdom of God on the Day of Pentecost some seven weeks later, it became the practice of the church to meet for the purpose of partaking of the Lord's Supper with the Lord, as He had promised: "I will not drink of this fruit of the vine *until* that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."

But very early, Christians began to lose sight of their reason for assembling together. Paul excoriated the church at Corinth: "For in the first place, when you come together as a church I hear that divisions exist among you; and in part, I believe it. For there must also be factions among you, in order that those who are approved may have become evident among you. Therefore, *when you meet* together it is *not* to eat the Lord's supper..." ([I Corinthians 11:18-20](#)).

Then Paul went on to remind them: "For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, 'this is My body, which is for you; *do this in remembrance of Me.*' In the same way He took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood; *do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.*' For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" ([1 Corinthians 11:23-26](#)).

When the church comes together, they are to proclaim the Lord's death in the Lord's Supper, doing it in remembrance of Christ. The church is not to meet together to promote division or denominationalism. "Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly" ([1 Corinthians 11:27-29](#)). If a man does not judge the body of Christ (the church) properly, if he is promoting division and discord instead of the unity of the Spirit, he eats and drinks judgment to himself. We have been asked to honor a dying Man's last request: "Do this in remembrance of me." Those who earnestly desire to follow Christ will honor that last request.

Jesus emphasized the importance of the Supper shortly after He fed the 5000 with five barley loaves and two fish. "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat of the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life; and I will raise him up on the last day" ([John 6:53,54](#)).

Although Jesus did not mention the Lord's Supper specifically, the inference is just as clear as that in [John 3:5](#) referring to immersion. If we absent ourselves from the Lord's table, we absent ourselves from eternal life. Just as a person's finger will turn black and fall off if the circulation of the body's blood is cut off; so also will the member of Christ's body turn black and fall away if he does not keep in contact with the blood of Jesus ([Hebrews 6:4-6: 10:26-31](#)). He did say, "Unless you eat My flesh and drink My blood, you have no life in yourselves."

And so the early church was "continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the *breaking of bread*, and prayer" ([Acts 2:42](#)). "And on the first day of the week, when we were gathered together *to break bread...*" ([Acts 20:7](#)). "Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing [communion] in the blood of Christ? Is not *the bread we break* a sharing [communion] in the body of Christ? You cannot drink of the cup of the Lord and the cup of the demons; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons" ([1 Corinthians 10:16-21](#)).

The reason that the early church met on the first day of the week was "*to break bread.*" We must do so also today in order to fulfill the requirements of being Christ's church.

"But," you say, "there's no command in the New Testament for having communion every Sunday." Recall the words of Jesus. "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, immersing them into the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, *teaching them to observe all that I commanded you...*" ([Matthew 28:19,20](#)). Although all commands of our Lord aren't recorded ([John 20:30](#)), the early church observed the Lord's Supper as their reason for meeting on the first day of the week. Therefore, Jesus commanded the Lord's Supper every first day of the week.

On The First Day of the Week

When shall the church assemble to break bread? Shall they meet on the Sabbath? Is the assembly on Sunday merely a popish tradition?

In the only assembly of the saints we are permitted to view in the New Testament, the Christians met on the *first day of the week* to break bread! (See [Acts 20:7](#)) Are our hearts so callous that we need more than one example to convince us that this is God's ordinance?

We read in I Corinthians about a special offering that was being taken for the needy saints of Judea: "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. *On the first day of every week* let each of you put aside and save, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come" ([1 Corinthians 16:1,2](#)). Why the first day of every week? The language certainly indicates that this is when the saints would be assembled anyway, as alluded to earlier in [1 Corinthians 11:20](#).

In [Revelation 1:10](#), we read these words by the apostle John: "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day..." What is the Lord's Day, or the Day of the Lord? We find it written: "Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible *day of the Lord*" ([Malachi 4:5](#)). The Day of the Lord is something connected with Jesus' first coming, for John the Immerser was referred to as "Elijah, if you care to accept it" ([Matthew 11:14](#)).

Peter also quotes the prophet Joel in connection with the Day of the Lord: "And I will grant wonders in the sky above, and signs in the earth beneath, blood and fire, and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and glorious *day of the Lord* shall come. And it shall be, that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" ([Acts 2:19-21](#)). Examination of [Matthew 27:45-54](#) will show that the events prophesied by Joel occurred in connection with the death of Jesus on the cross, and that Joel says that these things would happen *before* the Day of the Lord would come. And then, after the Day of the Lord, "it shall be that *everyone* who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." It was through the resurrection of Jesus that all of us are saved. "And corresponding to that, immersion now saves you - not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience through the *resurrection of Christ*" ([I Peter 3:21](#)). The Day of the Lord, then, is the day on which Jesus was resurrected from the dead. The continuing use of the term "Lord's Day" evidenced by John shows that the term was generally applied to the day of the week on which Jesus arose; that is, the first day of the week! Under the New Covenant, God's people assemble on the first day of the week, Sunday, the Lord's Day - to break bread.

In the Assembly

Not only is the local church described as an assembly, it also practiced the regular gathering together. We find that the church at Corinth came together ([I Corinthians 11:18](#)), and their purpose for so assembling should have been to share in the Lord's Supper. And, according to [I Corinthians 14:2-35](#), singing, preaching, praying, and the use of spiritual gifts were all exercised in the assembly. ([See the study of *The Holy Spirit for more on the spiritual gifts.*](#))

The writer of Hebrews encourages us: "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, *not forsaking our own assembling together*, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near" ([Hebrews 10:23-25](#)). Christians were exhorted to not forsake the assembly, but rather to encourage one another and to stimulate one another to love and good deeds! Following the exhortation came a stiff warning: "For if we go on sinning willfully [in direct context, forsaking the assembly] after receiving the knowledge of truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment, and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, 'vengeance is Mine, I will repay.' And again, 'the Lord will judge His people.' It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God" ([Hebrews 10:26-31](#)). Those who broke the Sabbath died without mercy upon the testimony of two or three witnesses. He who forsakes the assembly: (1) Tramples under foot the Son of God; (2) Regards as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified; and (3) Insults the Spirit of grace! Assembling together must be the practice of the whole church!

Singing Praises to God

Under the Old Covenant, the priesthood day by day offered up to God sacrifices which could never make the worshipers perfect in conscience ([Hebrews 9:9](#)). Under the New Covenant, different sacrifices are offered by the priesthood, which consists of all Christians: "Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God; that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name" ([Hebrews 13:15](#)). One way of offering up that sacrifice of praise is through singing. In the church at Corinth there were those who would sing a psalm to the assembly ([I Corinthians 14:26](#)). Therefore, it is written: "...be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord..." ([Ephesians 5:18,19](#)); and, "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God" ([Colossians 3:16](#)).

Prayer

In the church at Corinth, there were public prayers - partly for the edification of the hearer, with the saying of, "Amen" at the giving of thanks ([I Corinthians 14:14-17](#)). This also would be a "sacrifice of praise." We read that the early church devoted itself to prayer ([Acts 2:42](#)).

Jesus told us to seek, and that we would then find ([Matthew 7:7-11](#)). The Lord told the apostles, "And everything you ask in prayer, believing, that you shall receive" ([Matthew 21:22](#)). The mountains Jesus was concerned about us moving through prayer are not made of stone!

We ask for things through the name of our High Priest - Jesus ([John 14:13,14](#)). We must ask with the right motive in order to receive our requests ([James 4:2,3](#)). "Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the sky poured rain, and the earth produced its fruit" ([James 5:17,18](#)).

Prayer just as with singing, is to be employed constantly, individually, and collectively with other saints. One of the main purposes of both these sacrifices of praise is to develop the new creation to be like Christ ([see the study on *The New Creation*](#)).

Giving

The only example of individual giving in a congregational setting is a special offering for the saints in Judea ([I Corinthians 16:1-4](#); [II Corinthians 8 and 9](#); and other related scripture). In the early days of the church, people were individually bringing the proceeds of their land sales and laying the money at the apostles' feet ([Acts 4:34,35](#)). The church at Antioch sent money to the elders of Jerusalem ([Acts 11:30](#)). But concerning the individual's regular offering, there is no New Testament example. But we can draw upon the Old Testament character of Abraham as a foreshadow of our own time. Paul wrote: "Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come" ([I Corinthians 10:11](#)).

Long before the giving of the law, Abraham paid a tenth of the spoil of a battle he won to his High Priest Melchizedek ([Genesis 14:17-20](#)). In Hebrews, it is pointed out that Christ is the High Priest of the order of Melchizedek ([Hebrews 7:17](#)); and in [Galatians 3:29](#), it is pointed out that Christians are the spiritual descendants of Abraham. Christians are to pay tithes to their High Priest - Jesus.

Jacob paid tithes ([Genesis 28:22](#)), and under the Law, tithes and offerings were mandatory. (See [Malachi 3:7-10](#)).

It therefore follows that 10% has been God's minimum standard throughout the ages; and that Christians, with God's laws written in their hearts and in their minds ([Hebrews 8:10](#)), will earnestly desire to at least match that.

Jesus said, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" ([Matthew 6:21](#)). Regardless of how sincere a man may profess to be, his heart is not in Christianity unless his money is also.

It must be remembered that God is seeking those who will worship Him in spirit and truth. Giving is not the proper outgrowth of worship unless it is done with the right attitude! (See [II Corinthians 9:7](#))

Summary

Worship of God constitutes the total life of a Christian. In connection with his constant private worship, he meets in the assembly with others of like precious faith. There they share with the Lord Jesus in His body and blood. They meet on the first day of the week in the assembly to encourage one another, which may be accomplished through sharing together in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, in prayer, and through the apostles' teaching. A believer in Christ recognizes that his total worship of God is not complete without presenting God his tithes and offerings through the local congregation.

CHRISTIAN LOVE (CARING)

In order for a congregation to be recognized by Christ as belonging to Him, the individual must practice Christian love. Jesus spoke these words: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" ([John 13:34,35](#)). Jesus was not content with giving us a command to love one another. He gave us a personal example, which He expects us to follow. We must love one another as He loved us. Jesus told us, "If any one wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me" ([Matthew 16:24](#)). We do not exhibit Christian love until we begin to crucify ourselves on the cross of service for others. Until their needs become more important than our needs, we have not yet denied ourselves!

In the parable of the sheep and the goats ([Matthew 25:31-46](#)) Jesus stressed the importance of feeding the hungry, providing drink for the thirsty, housing strangers, clothing the naked, and visiting the sick and the

prisoners. Those who do such things inherit the kingdom of God for eternity - those who don't, inherit eternal punishment!

John states it this way: "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen" ([I John 4:20](#)).

The great need of our time is to restore the New Testament love to the practice of those congregations, which truly follow Christ.

THE CHURCH - A MONOLITHIC BOOY

In a democratic body, everything is done by majority vote. The devil likes majority vote - he can either control the majority, or through a vocal minority he can throw a monkey wrench into any program which might make him particularly vulnerable. That's why companies and armies are not run by majority rule - they have jobs they have to get done and the men at the top are the only ones with the energy and ability to see that these jobs get done.

So the church is a monolithic body. It is one huge, unsplinterable chunk. That is what Jesus had in mind when He said, "Upon this rock [a monolith, if you will] I will build My church" ([Matthew 16:18](#)).

Jesus is the head of the church ([Ephesians 1:22,23](#)), and the church is to be subject to Christ ([Ephesians 5:23,24](#)). Christ has delegated authority to elders, and the church is to be subject to them ([I Peter 5:1-5](#)).

The church is not a democracy at all.

When trouble does come, God has written, in the Bible, ways to solve these problems - problems that hinder the progress of seeking and saving the lost.

In [Matthew 18:15-18](#), Jesus outlines a four-step plan of dealing with errant souls:

1. Reprove your brother in private.
2. If he refuses to listen, take two or three witnesses.
3. If he still refuses to listen, take it to the church.
4. If he still refuses to listen put him out of the church fellowship.

In I Corinthians 5, Paul instructed the church at Corinth to deliver a very immoral man over "to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" ([I Corinthians 5:5](#)).

Evidently, when his body would be disintegrated, he might, as the prodigal son, "come to his senses."

In [II Thessalonians 3:6-15](#), those who wouldn't work were to be put away from the fellowship of the saints - and the saints were to welcome them back with open arms as soon as those disorderly ones returned to the straight and narrow way. The principle still holds: "If anyone will not work, neither let him eat" ([II Thessalonians 3:10](#)).

In [Galatians 5:9](#), the churches are warned that those who preach false doctrines are to be removed from the fellowship. "A little leaven leavens the whole lump." The apostle is strong in his warning about smooth-talking characters in his letter to Rome: "Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissension's and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting" ([Romans 16:17,18](#)).

It is just as important that the local congregation practice God's program for keeping the devil out, as it is for us to practice any of God's other programs!

SUMMARY

The church of the Lord carries on distinctive practices as dictated by King Jesus Himself. These practices include its purpose of evangelism, its worship of the Creator and the One who raised Jesus from the dead, its acting Christian love, and its program for keeping the devil out.

IV. SUMMARY OF ENTIRE STUDY:

We have examined the purpose and organization of the church; the nature of the church; and the practices of the church. Some of the more important points are:

1. The purpose of the church is to seek and to save the lost; and everything is subjected to that purpose for which Jesus died.
2. The church is to be governed by elders, who are also called bishops and pastors. These men are subject directly to the Holy Spirit.
3. Elders are to be paid, and are appointed by evangelists.
4. The church is the kingdom of God.

5. God describes the church in various descriptive terms to bring out certain characteristics in Christians.
6. God has dictated the practices of the church in the New Testament.
7. The church must practice evangelism.
8. The church must worship in spirit and truth.
9. Christians must love as Jesus loved.

The overall purpose of this study has been to examine the relationship of Christians to the church. Throughout this study, the fervent prayer of our Lord - praying for those who would believe in Him, that we all might be one has been uppermost in our mind. In each of the specifics discussed in this study, we examined carefully the word of God to find His Counsel. It is our earnest belief that if we could return to the basic Bible practices, our differences would disappear, and the Lord's plea for unity would be answered.

Let's go everywhere "preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 8:12).

THE GREAT COMMISSION

Who will go to the ends of the earth?
 Who will share the news of the great new birth?
 Who will brave the rock-strewn coasts and stormy seas?
 Who will proclaim that Jesus died, "for such as these"?
 Who will storm sinners' ranks and brave the lion's den?
 Who will sell all that he has to be a humble fisher of men?
 It's always easier, some may say,
 To preach the good news to those far away.
 But open your eyes and you will see
 A harvest at home, white as can be.
 Open your ears, the Savior's calling for thee,
 "Take up your cross NOW; follow Me!"
 Yes, the call goes out to go far and wide,
 But for this call no man is fitted until he can first decide,
 Though the gospel must go to other nation, and other shore,
 He can never qualify unless he can first go to the man next door.
 The Spirit says, "Come," and so does the bride.
 The Savior says, "Go," to His mighty marching tide.
 But fitted for His service we never shall be,
 'Til we say to Him, "Lord, to my neighbor send me."
 Jay Wilson

A Special Study THE SABBATH

The Claim of Sabbatarians

The claim of the Seventh Day Adventists, the Seventh Day Baptists, and other groups is that we must worship on Saturday - the seventh day of the week - rather than assembling on the Lord's Day - the first day of the week.

The claim further extends to say that those who do not worship on the Sabbath (Saturday) do not inherit salvation, for those who worship God must worship in "spirit and truth" ([John 4:24](#)).

The Bases for the Claim

That we worship on the Sabbath is based on the following points:

1. "And by the seventh day God completed His work which He had done; and He rested on the seventh day from all the work that He had done. *Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it*, because in it He rested from all His work which God created and made" ([Genesis 2:2,3](#)).
2. "*Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy...* For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy" ([Exodus 20:8-11](#)- the fourth of the Ten Commandments).

3. *Jesus worshipped on the Sabbath* - "And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up, and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read" ([Luke 4:16](#)).
4. *Early Christians worshipped on the Sabbath*: "Now Paul and his companions put out to sea from Paphos and came to Perga... But going on from there, they arrived in Pisidian Antioch, and on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down" ([Acts 13:13,14](#)).

Answering the Claims

There is nothing wrong with the scripture quoted; there are some things lacking in the application of the scriptures, however.

1. God did indeed bless the Sabbath and sanctify it. There is no record of anyone observing the Sabbath, however, until the people of Israel came out of Egypt.
2. The command to remember the Sabbath is the fourth commandment of the Law. The Law was taken out of the way by Christ's death on the cross; hence, this scripture does not apply to Christians and the New Covenant (see [Colossians 2:14](#)). "Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, *until the seed should come* to whom the promises had been made" ([Galatians 3:19](#)). The *seed* spoken of is Christ.
3. Of course, Jesus kept the Sabbath holy. The Old Testament Law was still in effect until His death. "For where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it. For a covenant [will] is valid only when men are dead, *for it is never in force while the one who made it lives*" ([Hebrews 9:16,17](#)). Jesus' will (the New Covenant) did not take effect until after He died - Jesus lived and died under the Old Covenant. But worship (*proskuneo*) was, under the Old Covenant, something done only in Jerusalem at the feast days. The meeting on the Sabbath was not called worship; men went to Jerusalem to worship ([consider John 4:19-21; Acts 8:27; Acts 24:11](#), for example).
4. Paul went into the synagogue, but not to assemble as a Christian. He went that he might preach the gospel to the Jews. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, *to the Jew first*, and also to the Greek" ([Romans 1:16](#)).

The Law and the Christian

Because the scripture so clearly points out that the Law was taken away with Christ's death on the cross (and with it Sabbath worship), the Sabbatarian is then forced to try to defend this position: "There are two parts to the Law - (1) the Ten Commandments, and (2) the Ordinances (the sacrifices, the ceremonial law, etc.). The Ordinances were taken away at Christ's death, but not the Ten Commandments."

The verse of scripture which is appealed to in order to justify this position is [Ephesians 2:14,15](#): "For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups [Jews and Gentiles] into one, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in the ordinances . . ." According to a Sabbatarian, not all of the Law was taken away through Christ's death; only the commandments contained in the ordinances.

The question for us is this: "Is this division of the Law into the Ten Commandments and the Ordinances a valid division?" If it is, then the Ten Commandments may still be binding upon us, and we would be obligated to keep the Sabbath (note that Sabbatarian does not have a concept of new covenant worship at all, or the old covenant, when he believes they "worshipped in the synagogue").

An examination of the New Testament on the subject of the Law reveals that the New Testament authors (who were inspired by the Holy Spirit) used the term *law* in many different contexts, and furthermore used contexts interchangeably (see [Acts 28:23](#) and [Romans 2:12-16](#), for example). The summary of New Testament teaching is that any law which condemns a man, whether the Ten Commandments or the law of conscience, is taken away in Christ!

But with one bound by misconceptions concerning the Sabbath, it is necessary to show that the Ten Commandments, specifically, were taken away in Christ. There are two scriptures, which do this:

1. [Romans 7:4](#) - "Therefore, my brethren, you also were made *to die to the Law* through the body of Christ, that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead." What Law that is, is pointed out in [Romans 7:7](#). It is the Law that contained the following words: "You shall not covet."

2. [Hebrews 9:4](#) - In [Hebrews 8](#), the Holy Spirit points out that the first covenant was taken away, and replaced by the new covenant. In connection with the first covenant, the author is describing the tabernacle of Moses which was used in the wilderness: "And behind the second veil there was a tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies, having a golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden jar holding manna, and Aaron's rod which budded, *and the tables of the covenant*" ([Hebrews 9:3,4](#)). By referring to the stone tablets as the "tables of the covenant," the Holy Spirit clearly shows that the Ten Commandments were a part of the first covenant, which was replaced by the new covenant. The new covenant is "not like the covenant which I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt" ([Hebrews 8:9](#)).

The Christian's Guide

Paul wrote approvingly that the church in Thessalonica imitated "the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea" ([1 Thessalonians 2:14](#)). We also are to imitate the original church - the one that Jesus built. Our guide then becomes the practices of the church as described in the New Testament. In our guide regarding the day of the week on which we are to meet we find two examples:

1. "And *on the first day of the week*, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them..." ([Acts 20:7](#)).
2. "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. *On the first Day of the week* let each one of you put aside and save, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come" ([1 Corinthians 16:1,2](#)).

There is no record of any Christian congregation meeting on the Sabbath in the New Testament. In the absence of any other scriptures, we are forced to conclude that the New Testament church met on the first day of the week, and we are to do likewise.