

What A True Church Is Like

Most (if not all) Sabbath-keeping churches are nothing more than Sunday churches that go to church on Saturday. By that I mean they sing the same songs, have a similar format of opening/closing prayers, special music, offertory, prayers for the sick, the poor, and the military, meet and greet, and so on. The details vary somewhat, but for the most part there really isn't any difference.

Does that seem right to you? Why do those who suppose themselves to be God's true church behave the same way as God's enemies? The answer is easy – because they're not really God's true church. They merely have a *FORM of godliness*, but without the power thereof (**2 Timothy 3:5**). God said "*Learn NOT the way of the heathen*" (**Jeremiah 10:2**), and commanded us NOT to learn from THEIR false gods, NOT to say "*How did these nations serve their gods? even so will I do likewise*" (**Deuteronomy 12:28-31**). How did He want us to worship Him? **Verse 32**.

So we should not go to the false Christians of our day, and say "how do you worship your God? I will do likewise!" True church services should be so different as to be nearly unrecognizable to the counterfeit Christians of our day. And trying to understand just what God had in mind for church services is...

LESSON 40: WHAT A TRUE CHURCH IS LIKE

I was happily shielded from churches during most of my childhood, which was rather similar to John's childhood in some ways (**Luke 1:80**). So while most of you probably have more experience attending churches than I do, I think you'll find the things I say will apply to all the churches you've attended as well.

I gave churches an honest try in my early twenties, to try to learn from them, and "*not lean to my own understanding*" (**Proverbs 3:5**). Later I realized that the alternative to "mine own understanding" was NOT the understanding of a church, but – from that same verse – the understanding of the BIBLE. To trust the LORD'S words, and not to trust your own interpretations and things that you made up!

But I was young and thought I was doing the right thing – and for who I was and what I understood at the time, it *was* the right thing. I *needed* the experience I gained there, working with false Christians and trying to separate the truth from the lies.

I tried very hard to learn from churches who claimed to love God and believe the Bible; but the more I learned about God, the more I realized how far from the truth these churches really were. So I followed the command to "*provoke them to love and good works*"; and I did indeed provoke them; I provoked them to ask me to leave. So I went elsewhere and did it again.

Paul had similar dealings with the Jews. He tried really hard to take the gospel to the Jews; how did that work out? **Acts 13:14-16, 37-51**. So Paul went to other Jews in another city, how did that go? **Acts 18:4-6**. And again in Rome? **Acts 28:22-28**. The gospel HAD to go to the Jews first (**Romans 1:16**); it was their

birthright, which you'll study in other lessons. But once they "*judged themselves unworthy*" of the gospel, it was time to go to someone who WOULD listen.

All the Jewish churches in Paul's day had been corrupted with the traditions of the Jews and doctrines they brought back from Babylon (**John 7:19**, **Matthew 15**, **Matthew 23**, etc). Nonetheless, the core of their religion contained most of the true doctrines; they kept the laws about the Sabbath, holy days, unclean meats, and so on.

But in spite of the fact that they were so close to the truth, Paul discovered they were not interested in learning anything new; not interested in having their cherished traditions abolished and true doctrine installed in their place. In our day, too, there are many Sabbath-keeping churches and some that also keep the holy days, unclean meats, and so on. But I found them to be the same as the churches in Paul's day – **they're as close to God as they believe they need to be, and thus as close as they will ever be.**

If you were going to a church when you started this course, and if you've told them anything about what you've learned – which you certainly should have – then you've found the same thing as Paul did, just as Jesus prophesied in **Mark 2:17**. Like the Jews, these people are *almost* "healthy", and they have no need of a physician. Or so they think. And more importantly, **we are not sent to those people.**

Those who think they already have salvation are not interested in learning anything that might rock the boat – **Proverbs 27:7**. You can't teach someone who already has all the answers they need, and who believes they have salvation as they are. Jesus Himself couldn't do it when He tried to talk to the Pharisees. So He told them, warned them, then went and talked to prostitutes and bookies. To paraphrase that proverb, the Pharisees loathed even a pleasant truth; but to the hopeless sinners even the harsh words of God were sweet. You'll find the same thing in every modern church.

We cannot simply copy the pattern of these false churches and paste true doctrines on top of them, which sadly, is what everyone does. We cannot take their tainted traditions and try to build good doctrines around them; we must abolish everything and start over (**Daniel 2:44**). As one of my favorite quotes says "*Civilization will not attain perfection until the last stone from the last church falls on the last priest*". Émile Zola didn't have the answers either, but there he summarized the problem well.

PROPER CHURCH SERVICES

The best example of an actual church service in the Bible is found after the Jews returned from Babylon. There they rediscovered the true religion which they had lost or corrupted in captivity, largely due to the efforts of Ezra the priest and Nehemiah the governor. Read **Nehemiah 8:1-8**. Though this was done on the Feast of Shouting, it should still apply to a typical Sabbath service as well. And it is also the only detailed record of a church service anywhere in the Bible.

Everyone attended who "could hear with understanding" – i.e., except perhaps the very young or the very old or the mentally incompetent. The group stood while praying, as in **1 Kings 8:14**. But as you studied before, this is a matter of attitude and doesn't necessarily constitute a "thus saith the Lord" on the subject. The service lasted from morning until midday – so perhaps 9:00 to 12:00. The speaker stood on an elevated platform so everyone could see him, and he was there with 13 other priests.

Nehemiah 8:6 is plain enough on its own. In **verse 7** note that all 14 people on the platform (counting Ezra) "*caused the people to understand the law*". And the service consisted of reading the book of the law clearly and giving the meaning and helping the people to understand it. Not in telling cute stories and worldly poems like so many do today.

WHERE AND HOW TO HAVE SERVICES

As I've mentioned before, church services were held many places in the Bible. They were held in front of the temple while there was one, but later in people's houses, alongside streams, in synagogues, and so on. No doubt they were also held on boats, for Paul was on a boat for 2 weeks, thus there must have been at least one Sabbath aboard ship in **Acts 27**.

The point is, it really doesn't matter. A bus station, a bedroom, a rooftop, a desert, a garden; it really doesn't matter. Why? **Matthew 18:20**. Can you find God in a special place? **Deuteronomy 30:11-14**. There has been holy ground in the past, for a physical people to approach to God; like Sinai and the temple; but those things were for an OC people. Where is our "holy ground"? **1 Peter 1:15-16**, **1 Corinthians 3:17**. So wherever two or more of us are, God is there, too, and it is qualified to be holy ground, just as holy as if it were in the temple. More so, in many ways.

So much for where; now, how. In the example above, there was an opening "blessing"; this has been interpreted as opening prayer by most churches, and in some ways I suppose it is; but most of them ask God to be there, which is redundant since God already promised that He would be there automatically.

But I cannot find any NT example of opening prayer. Arguments from silence are never conclusive, but it is odd that there are no examples of it, before, say, the sermons in **John 6**, **Matthew 5**, **Acts 2**, etc. In each of those examples, the speaker simply stood up and started speaking.

There was not, however, a closing prayer of any kind mentioned anywhere in the Bible. And what purpose does it really do? Isn't a closing prayer rather like saying "OK God, we're done here – now get lost"? If you bless God at the opening of your services, is it really necessary to do it again at the end? If so, where is it commanded? Or for that matter, where is it commanded to do opening prayers?

Remember, an example is not a command; it's a good idea to follow examples, but think about this: **what exactly do the examples show us?** We have opening prayers recorded only at very special occasions, like the dedication of the temple, the first holy day season after the return of the Jews from Babylon, Jesus setting up the NT Passover, that sort of thing.

So what the examples show us is that **on special occasions** or perhaps at the beginning of the Holy Day seasons we should have an opening prayer. Granted, most of the stories in the Bible are about special occasions, so this isn't proof that we *shouldn't* have opening/closing prayers on a weekly basis... but here is another way of looking at it:

I've experienced opening prayers for many years, given many, heard many more. No matter how well-intentioned or sincere the speaker is, eventually they become empty, meaningless formulaic prayers; "be here God; bless us; guide the speaker; thanks; amen". And as you should have gleaned from Lessons 36-38, nothing good ever comes of such prayers.

My conclusion from this information – which I offer as my conclusion, not as a "thus saith the Lord" – is that these prayers should be saved for special occasions. Times when something unique needs to be done or said, or some special request needs to be made; for example, at the beginning/end of FOT or ULB; that sort of thing. That way it doesn't become "vain repetition" (**Matthew 6:7**).

TAKING OFFERINGS

There is no hint of offering baskets being passed. The best practical examples we have in the Bible of how offering money was collected is **Mark 12:41-44** and **2 Kings 12:9-15**. There had been mismanagement of church funds (a common event in history), as you can read in **verses 1-8**. This was the high priest's

solution. But both of those examples were of low-pressure donations. Those wouldn't bring in as much money as guilting and embarrassing people would – it would only bring in what God inspired to be brought. So they don't work so well for televangelists and false Christian churches.

A “piggy bank” for offerings is the clear principle we glean from those examples. Preferably in a discrete place, to avoid the rich making a show of it while the poor are embarrassed by their offering. And where possible, anonymity is even better – all of which can be understood from **Matthew 6:1-4**.

SONGS IN CHURCH

This is a difficult question because it's not as simple as it seems. Clearly, David wrote Psalms which were played on the Sabbaths in the temple (**Psalms 92:1**). There was a whole tribe of priests devoted to music for the temple (**1 Chronicles 16:1-12**). There are many references throughout the Psalms to singing for church services (**Psalms 95:1-2** for instance).

In the NT, similar statements appear, such as **James 5:13**. Jesus and the disciples sang a hymn after passover (**Matthew 26:30**). Several places have commands to sing psalms, such as **Ephesians 5:19** and **Colossians 3:16**. But songs were also a source of dissension and pride among the Corinthians (**1 Corinthians 14:26**). Though to be fair, *everything* was a source of dissension and pride among the Corinthians.

So I do not deny that psalms had a part of temple service, and that they should probably have a part in church services today, and in life in general. That said... it's not that simple.

Can you sing a song about the trinity to give thanks to the true God? Can you sing about heaven and hell to give praise to the true God? Can you sing about predestination, salvation by grace alone, that God loves sinners whether they repent or not, that Jesus died on a cross (and not a stake)? Can you sing about Christmas to honor the birth of the true God? **It is just as wrong to sing a lie as it is to tell a lie.**

If you examine the world's false Christian songs critically, you can hardly find a single one that doesn't contain some fatal error, some reference to a false God. Can you take out the verse or two about the trinity and keep the rest to honor the true God? Let's see what God says. Can you bring something clean out of something unclean? **Job 14:4**. If you have something holy and it touches something unclean, are both holy – or both unclean? **Haggai 2:11-14**.

So can something written to honor a false god, something sung weekly on the day of the Sun by false Christians, be “made holy” by changing a few words and being used to honor the true God? This is the crux of the question, because that reasoning is EXACTLY how we got Easter, Christmas, Sunday, crosses, lent, celibate priests and nuns, idols and every other unclean thing today masquerading under the name “Christian”!

Christian radio was invented to sing songs that honor the false Jesus, not the true Jesus. Their praise music was invented for Satan, not for God. There is a place, apparently a fairly important place, for music in the true Church **but not by copying Satan's songs and writing God's name on top of them!**

That said... we are not the first true Christians to ever exist; God has had other people who sincerely tried to obey Him and some few of them wrote music which still exists even though the Church that wrote it has long since disappeared. However, frankly, the music wasn't very good. Plus it has been tainted by association with the corrupted remnants of that dead church, and my opinion is that their music should die with the church that wrote it.

So as I said; it's not so simple. It's a difficult question to answer, because we are faced with a command which it seems is impossible to obey. So until God calls some "sons of Asaph" to solve the problem, I am content to skip music – unless and until God gives me a better understanding of the question and a way to solve it.

DRESS CODE

This is a slightly complicated question as well; for what constitutes "well dressed" changes from decade to decade, from nation to nation, and religion to religion. The pagan priests of Babylon wore black robes when they served their god. Catholic priests/nuns wear brown, black, red or white depending on their rank.

God's high priest wore white linen and gold. The saints are arrayed in white after their resurrection (**Revelation 3:4-5**), and Jesus seems to be dressed in a white bathrobe in **Revelation 1:13**. At least, that's what we'd call it. The young man – probably the author of the gospel of Mark – was apparently wearing a sheet in **Mark 14:51-52**.

In Biblical times, who could afford soft, fancy clothes? **Matthew 11:8**. What did prophets wear? **Zechariah 13:4**. What did Elijah wear? **2 Kings 1:8**. What did Isaiah wear? **Isaiah 20:2**. For how long? **Verse 3**. What did John the baptist wear? **Mark 1:6**. But of all these types of clothes, I would wager that none of them wore wingtips and a three-piece suit!

The point is, exactly WHAT you wear doesn't really matter. It certainly isn't the issue most churches make of it. That said, there is another side to this subject as well. Were the priests required to change their clothes before approaching the temple? **Exodus 28:40-43**, **Ezekiel 42:14**. What do filthy garments represent? **Zechariah 3:3-5**. Who must change your garments? (Same verses).

Did God, the "king" in this next parable, get angry at someone who showed up to the wedding supper poorly dressed? **Matthew 22:1-14**. That last passage is usually used to show how God feels about someone who doesn't show up to church in a suit and tie. Is that REALLY what it's saying?

This point of this parable is clearly that "*many are called, but few are chosen*". God called many to the wedding supper of the Lamb described in **Revelation 19**, where the Lamb marries His bride. He called Israel first, but like the Pharisees, they were more interested in their land, their money, their regular lives; some even killed the prophets of God who came to call them to the wedding!

So God was angry, and said that none of those people would come to His Son's wedding! (**Verse 8**). So He sent more servants to the Gentiles and the sinners, "both bad and good" – that is, at the time HE called them – and offered all of them a chance to attend the wedding. And thus the guest list was filled – the 144,000 of Revelation.

But one of them – one of these new guests at the wedding had not cleansed his garment! He had not "*washed his clothes in the blood of the lamb*" (**Revelation 7:14**). And God was angry with this sinner who had been called **but who had not repented and changed his ways!** So he was "*cast into outer darkness*" – the grave – until the second resurrection came around. When it does, there will be great weeping among those who were called, but were not willing to follow God wherever He led.

THAT is the meaning of that parable. Not someone showing up to church without expensive clothes. Do people come to church wearing a variety of qualities of clothes? **James 2:1-5**. This proves beyond question that this poor man in ragged clothing and this rich man in his fine suit were both attending the same service. It ALSO proves that preferring the rich man, just because of his dress, was a SIN for the church! Jesus Himself warned us about those in fine clothing in **Luke 20:46**.

That said; you should approach to God in your best. The parables of God do indicate, in principle, that the best dress you have is what you should wear to church. They should at least be clean. In addition, coming to church dressed like a bunch of hippies or in stinky overalls gives others an excuse to criticize us, which should be avoided where possible (**1 Thessalonians 5:22**).

But having ushers stop you outside of church and refuse to allow you to enter unless you're wearing a tie is a clear sign of a church that has lost sight of what matters, and can only cling to a FORM of godliness. From such, we are commanded to turn away.

Oh, and the modern "well dressed" man in false Christian churches happens to wear a black suit, which is vaguely reminiscent of the ancient black-robed priests of Baal. That *might* be a coincidence.

SERMON LENGTH

In a given church service today, you're lucky to hear 15 minutes of actual Bible instruction; and generally that's a dull monologue on **1 Corinthians 13** or the Lord's prayer, or a very poorly understood explanation of the parable of the talents or the prodigal son – something like that. Ezra kept them there at least *three hours!* And all of that time was spent *reading out of the law and making it easy to understand!*

As I said, a typical church service today has about 15-20 minutes of actual Bible study of some kind; some few more Bible-oriented churches stretch it out to an hour and a half **but they still only had 15 minutes' worth of stuff to say; the rest they just filled up with unnecessary facts and stories because they had to fill the time!**

I've never heard a sermon that was an hour and a half that wouldn't have been a LOT better if given in 15 minutes. If you understand your subject, you can make most points in 15 minutes. You can make ANY point in 30 minutes. That doesn't mean you can tell the story of the Exodus in 15 minutes; but you can convey any single, solid, useful point in 30 minutes.

And to profit from a sermon, most of them should be about only one or two points; that's all you can clearly convey at once. And if you don't have something to say that people can take home and profit from and use next week, **you shouldn't be speaking.** Yet those who desire to be a minister are usually those with the least to say, as described in **1 Timothy 1:7**.

The congregation would usually profit more from hearing five people each give a 15 minute "sermonette", each from their own unique points of view and with their own unique understanding, than from struggling to stay awake while one person droned on to try to fill up an hour and a half when he really didn't have anything useful to say. And this is much more in keeping with the principle of Ezra and *thirteen others* "teaching out of the law and making it plain".

ALL TEACHERS

Of course, it may be a long time, if ever, before there is such an abundance of people in one place that this becomes a practical example; but it wouldn't take as many people as you might think, for if done correctly **the entire church should be teachers (Hebrews 5:11-12)**. Any church that isn't that way is "dull of hearing". And, probably, dying. Moses understood this, and said, "*would God that all the LORD'S people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit upon them!*" (**Numbers 11:29**).

Realistically, that will never be the case in a world with carnal people in it. But that's the goal. I have done my best to impart to each of you the ability to teach others. That's what the essays in the tests are about; they are forcing you to learn to express your thoughts succinctly, get to the point, and be confident in your statements. That's the first step in becoming an effective teacher.

And I expect you not only to be able to teach well, but to teach better than me; for it is a poor student that cannot surpass his teacher. After all, you have the benefit of the headstart of my years of effort and understanding. That alone can save you nearly a decade.

However, I am both an idealist and a pragmatist simultaneously. I know that you won't all be able to do this; but to the extent that you understand the truth and submit yourself to the will of God, He will use you to help others if you so desire. We are not all intended to be the mouth on the body of Christ (**1 Corinthians 12:12-27**). Some of us must be the hands, and the ears, yes, and some of us must be the armpit and the toe fungus.

That is WHY the offices spoken of in the previous lesson were created (**verses 28-30**). These are some of the many ways (**verses 4-11**) in which we can each be useful as a part of the body of Christ. And while some parts are more useful and needed, and it's good to desire to be one of those "attractive parts" (**verses 31**) ... still, these things are not really the point.

Paul goes on to tell us the point in **1 Corinthians 13:1-3**. What you do for others is a good thing; being useful is a great thing; but it is deceptively unimportant. Not everyone is able to do things; not everyone is able to be a teacher, or to cook for people or to play piano for services. You may be too old to get out of bed; that doesn't matter, not really; what matters is what you ARE, not what you DO.

More importantly, it's very easy to lose yourself in fluffing pillows and doing "good works", and those very acts – good in themselves – cause you to drift from the truth and become a less righteous person (**Luke 10:38-42**). What's more, the very act of doing good works can make you feel your sins are justified because "look at all the wonderful things I did for You and Your people, God! How dare You judge me!" (**Matthew 7:21-23**).

Obviously I'm not opposed to taking care of others, helping others, and wanting to be useful. But those things are not the point of the Christian life, merely a part of it. There will come a time when you are too old, too sick, or too tired to help others; what is left then? Or what if there are no people who need your help? **If that is your life, what becomes of you when you can no longer do that?** That's why Jesus praised Mary for choosing "*that good part, which shall not be taken away from her*".

What really matters is that you are a person who loves your neighbor more than yourself; who seeks the good of his enemies above his own. **Put differently, what really matters is how much your spirit is like God's spirit.** Regardless of how *useful* you are, what matters is how *good* you are. That's what Paul means when he refers to "love", the end of the commandments, the result of a lifetime of becoming like God.

THAT matters far more than being a mouth on the body of Christ. For many of those mouths get puffed up with spiritual botox, become full of themselves, compromise, and eventually fall off – to pursue a metaphor that is rapidly becoming disturbing.

WHY MINISTERS FALL AWAY

No minister ever gets up one morning and says, "I'm tired of preaching the truth; I'm going to go work for Satan today". No, it's a gradual and reasonable-sounding process that usually takes years. And they never do realize that they're working for the wrong side; when they deliver you up to be killed, they still believe they are doing God's work (**John 16:2**). Mr. Man-of-Sin himself, the Pope, probably believes he's serving the true God.

And there *will* be false teachers among us. There **MUST** be (**2 Peter 2:1-3, Matthew 18:7, 1 Corinthians 11:19**). You already know *why* there must be. But here I want you to understand how the individual teacher

changes from a true Christian to a false Christian. The short answer is always the same: **the justification for compromising the truth is ALWAYS the “good” of the people.**

Most ministers are aware that the Bible teaches the Sabbath. It's not like it's a secret. Some even believe it's the proper day of worship; but they also know if they were to teach that, they'd lose their job, their flock; and they reason, “it's better to stay here with a few false doctrines and do SOME good, than to lose my job and not be able to help ANYONE!”

That is the reasoning that led to the Catholic Church; a willingness to meet the heathens halfway just to get them into, or keep them in, the church. A willingness to rename ancient winter solstice festivals with a “Christian” name and call it “Christmas”. Every false Christian minister is either grossly deceived, or guilty of this reasoning. Or more likely, both.

Of course, that's the public reason; their private, sometimes unconscious reason is that more people in the church means more money, more respect, more power. But it's better to live alone in righteousness than to lead ten thousand false Christians down the broad and easy way – a principle which you can see in **Proverbs 25:24** and **Proverbs 15:16-17**.

But even if gaining new converts at any cost is not their desire, there is constant pressure on the ministry from both within and without the church to soften the commands of God to make them easier for people to obey. Carnal people drag their feet at every word of God, and it takes a strong man to stand up against that for a lifetime.

But on the other side of that coin are the people who won't make a single decision for themselves without running it past the preacher. The ministry has a very specific purpose – to teach you about God and, when necessary, to correct those in the church who need it. **But the NC ministry is not Moses.** Their job is *not* to interpret the fine points of the law for you, *not* to tell you what color to paint your house, how many sheets of toilet paper you can pull off the roll on the Sabbath, or just how far from the pig a slice of beef has to be to be considered “clean”. **That is why YOU have a conscience.**

Moses was, in many ways, a conscience for the people. He made decisions like this for them on a day-to-day basis, **because they refused to let the spirit of God do it.** But if you are a NC Christian, you are expected to make decisions like this for yourself. God's spirit dwells in you so that you can make these decisions on your own, not so you can let the ministry make them for you.

A proper minister will send anyone who asks such simple questions to go study it for themselves and refuse to give them an answer. The minister is there to answer questions you CAN'T answer, not questions you don't have the *courage* to answer for yourself!

But having their opinion matter so much to people, easily corrupts a carnal soul. That adoration and constant fawning by the people makes it easy to become like Diotrefes whose “*desire is ever to have the first place among them*” (**3 John 1:9, BBE**). Being in charge, especially over a church, can be like a drug to the carnal spirit. If you do your job well, you will be constantly flattered, your opinion solicited, your ego fluffed at every opportunity. And gradually, people who are initially well intentioned are led away by their own vanity and position (**Proverbs 27:21, Ezekiel 28:17**, etc).

You remember the story of Saul, how when he was “little in his own sight” God made him king. But later, that position went to his head and he began to reinterpret the commands of God (**1 Samuel 15:17-19**). Did Saul still believe that he HAD obeyed God's commands? **Verses 20-21.** Notice, he HAD obeyed God's command, but added a “but”! How did God feel about that? **Verses 22-23.** And who did Saul blame? **Verse 24.** Why did Aaron make the golden calf? **Exodus 32:21-24.** On whom did Adam blame his sin? **Genesis 3:12.**

It was the PEOPLE who made them do it! And it wasn't just an excuse – the people truly did want it! But that doesn't mean that listening to the people wasn't a sin, for it was their **JOB** to lead them in righteousness, but they gave in and changed the commands of God to please the people! The same thing happens with ministers that fall away. It's just a little thing at first; God said something, they do it – “but”.

For instance, God said “travel for ULB”, but the people say “that's too much of a burden”, so the soon-to-be-false minister decides that “it's OK to keep the feast at home. It's just as good, and God wouldn't want the people to suffer!” When the correct answer is “the true Christians will join me at the feast; the rest can stay home until they are ready to obey God **IN THE WAY He commanded**” – or as Joshua said “*as for me and my house, WE will serve the LORD*” (**Joshua 24:15**). Whom did Paul seek to please? **Galatians 1:10**.

The bottom line is, this is about you and no one else. You can't change what other people do; you can't control your minister, although you can certainly go to him and correct him if you have the Bible on your side. Nor can the minister force the people to obey; but if the people will not follow him into righteousness, he can go elsewhere. Some may follow him out of the church – or he may be alone and have to get a job delivering pizzas. Either way is far better than what Aaron or Saul did.

WHEN YOU REALIZE YOU'RE FOLLOWING SAUL...

Ministers working for God are entitled to money, as you learned in Lesson 17, and respect as you learned in the last lesson; and elders that rule well are worthy of double honor (**1 Timothy 5:17**). So a true minister is entitled to respect and honor. But it is easy to cross the line between “respect” and “worship”, between “a willingness to learn” and “blind obedience”. They're worthy of the one, not the other. And so John told Gaius “*follow not that which is evil, but that which is good*” (**3 John 1:11**).

So if your minister is out of line, go to him with your Bible. If he won't listen, and if you have any friends in the church, take them with you. Then you'll find out who your friends truly are – and find you have fewer than you thought. If he still won't listen, then tell the church why you're leaving, and “*shake the dust from off of your feet*” (**Matthew 10:14, Mark 6:11**). You can't make them listen, but they can't make you “*sit with the wicked*” in the “*congregation of evildoers*” either! (**Psalms 26:4-5**).

I've said this many times, but I can't say it too often since it is the #1 problem in religion: **No man, not me, not even an angel from heaven, has the authority to command you to do evil (Galatians 1:8)**. No apostle, no minister, no preacher, regardless of what authority he may have been given by God in the past or what signs and miracles he may have done, has the right to ask for your obedience contrary to the word of God.

That might seem self-evident, but I assure you that it isn't. Diotrephes didn't just suddenly announce to the church “as of next week we'll all be accepting the mark of the beast, and worshiping a false Jesus now instead of the real one”. No, it starts gradually, with good-sounding arguments and an appearance of holiness, in the name of love and worship and good works to help the people to love God.

You may be tired of hearing this, but I belabor the point because you can learn and understand and love every other thing in these lessons, and miss this one point and lose your salvation. You can eagerly accept everything you've read and believe it, and trust someone – perhaps me – too much. What if later in life I compromise and then start leading you astray. Would you be ready? Would you see it happening, and jump ship before I take you down with me?

PUTTING OUT OF THE CHURCH

This topic is really no different than what you've already studied in Lesson 31, but most people don't realize all these scriptures are just extensions of the **Matthew 18** process. Once God hits on a good

principle, He uses it for EVERYTHING! So once you truly understand these root principles, the Bible becomes a much simpler book to understand!

How many times should you correct a heretic? **Titus 3:10**. Notice it's three times; first, you go to him; then you go to him with one or two witnesses; and the third time, you call him before the church and if he won't hear the church, "reject" him! It fits perfectly with **Matthew 18!**

And why are you to do this? **2 Thessalonians 3:14-15**. This is, hopefully, going to make him think about what he did and get him to repent! And if you do have contact with him, that contact should only be to "admonish" him, to condemn his actions and convince him to repent. How should you treat heretics? **2 John 1:10-11**.

"Godspeed" is short for "may God speed your journey", which is the same as saying "Goodbye" in modern English, which is short for "God be with you on your journey". Saying that to this one-time brother who has been admonished for the last time would be blessing him in his sins, and would make you "*partaker of his evil deeds*". So you admonish him, and then "*let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican*" (**Matthew 18:17**).

With that foundation the scattered scriptures about marking and excommunicating people all make sense. For example the "marking" in **Romans 16:17-18** is clearly after the "first and second admonition" has taken place; and who does it? **1 Corinthians 5:4-5**. I cannot overemphasize that this is not something the minister "binds" or "looses" and then announces at services to the rest of the group – that's how every pagan church on Earth deals with problems.

In God's system, the WHOLE Church is involved in these judgments. This is the ONLY way in which **1 Corinthians 1:10** can ever happen! You can't all have the same judgment if only one or two men in the congregation make all the decisions in private! And without this process, you cannot have a happy church – or home! (**Proverbs 22:10**).

Just to be clear, these rules about "marking" don't really apply to the world (**1 Corinthians 5:9-11**). If you were to avoid fornicators and idolaters, you would quite literally have to leave the world. But if someone thinks of themselves as your BROTHER in Christ – even if the feeling may not be mutual – then you have to do something. You have to do this: **2 Thessalonians 3:6**.

SPIRITUAL EXECUTION

When God installed Saul as King over Israel, it was because they had rejected God as King (**1 Samuel 8:7, 1 Samuel 12:12**). Ever since the time of Moses, they had no king but God. But now they demanded a human king in between them and their King. God allowed this additional layer of government, and remained the Head of the nation of Israel. In theory, anyway.

Since "God's kingdom" is a kingdom God rules, and since God ruled Israel through Saul and later David, it was the kingdom of God. A type of it, at least. And when the kingdom of God is here, that kingdom wages war against sin and sinners (**John 18:36**). So since the kingdom of Israel "was of this world", His servants had the authority to execute judgment; including executing convicted sinners against the OC.

But when God set up the church, it replaced the physical kingdom with a spiritual kingdom of God (**1 Timothy 1:17**). Because the church is a group of people whose king is God, it is a kingdom of God. At least, another type of it. But this kingdom is *not* of this world – it doesn't have physical power on this Earth, only spiritual power. And so it can only execute sinners *spiritually* (**1 Corinthians 5:5**).

By putting this man out of the church, they are delivering him “unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh” – spiritually “killing” him unless/until he repents. At that point, as before his conversion, the sinner is dead to God (**Ephesians 2:1-3**, **Colossians 2:13**, etc).

When we were called and converted, we were “made alive” to God through grace. If someone sins, and refuses to repent after repeated opportunities, then they have “despised the grace of God”, the grace of the NC. Now if someone despised the terms of the OC, what happened to them? **Hebrews 10:28**. So someone who despises the terms of the NC and uses grace as license to commit sin is worthy of what punishment? **Verse 29**.

So Jesus commands His Church to return him to the world from which grace had delivered him – to return him to that state of death from which he came! **Hebrews 10:29** says this spiritual punishment is much greater than a simple death by stoning under the Old Covenant. The wages of sin is death! That has not changed under the New Covenant. However, the wages of sin against a *spiritual* covenant is a *spiritual death* – just as the wages of sin against a physical covenant was a physical death!

This spiritual death cannot happen to one who has not first been made spiritually alive, by first tasting “*the good word of God*” (**Hebrews 6:4-8**). Which is why, again, fornicators and idolaters and drunkards in the world are immune to this process. You cannot take from them that which they do not possess – spiritual life!

GOD LOVES DIVISION

We’ve talked about this subject before, but I want to sweep up the crumbs while we’re on this subject. As you go to churches and condemn people of their sins, they’ll tell you “God loves unity!”, based on **Psalms 133:1**. Surely God loves that! They also quote **Ephesians 4:13**. This is a common “favorite scripture”, among people who don’t quite get the point of the Bible. It is indeed a pretty picture, but it clearly is *future tense*! It is in the FUTURE that we will ALL come in the unity of the faith!

First, we must all GROW UP in Him (**verses 14-15**). To do that, we must learn to recognize *and avoid* the deceptions of men and their false doctrines! We won’t come to “the unity of the faith” by compromising with those false doctrines! That is been TRIED by every church on Earth! And it FAILS!

What are the vessels of God? **1 Thessalonians 4:4**, **2 Timothy 2:20-21**. How should we keep our vessels clean? **Isaiah 52:11**. Can we be saved by making peace at the expense of truth? **Jeremiah 51:6**. What must we do if we find ourselves among them? **2 Corinthians 6:17**. What if you don’t do that? **Numbers 16:21, 26**. How do we follow the way of understanding? **Proverbs 9:6**.

Should we stay and bicker with people after the first and second admonition? **1 Timothy 6:5**. Even if that means being completely alone? **Jeremiah 15:17**. How does God feel about those who “lean to their own understanding”, and choose the law of God as a companion over a corrupt church? **Psalms 1:1-3**.

We, as individuals or as a group, will come to the unity of the faith by actively practicing the laws of God, by using **Matthew 18** and separating ourselves from those who hate the law of God. We cannot have a unity of the faith with the faithless. This truth is self-evident, but the world ignores it.

This does not mean people have to be perfect to associate with them; but it means they must sincerely love the truth and accept it when the Bible clearly commands something. If not, then we follow the example in **Acts 19:8-10**. The group divides, and those who “are hardened” against the truth stay and those who love the truth go elsewhere. God loves this – that’s why he brought division. Because until the crop grows nearer to maturity, you cannot tell a tare from the wheat (**Matthew 13:25-30**).

ORDINATION IN THE CHURCH

The word “ordain” is translated from several different Greek words into one English word, but the best general translation to modern English is “appoint”. Paul was ordained, or APPOINTED, as an apostle to the Gentiles (**1 Timothy 2:7**). This does not necessarily mean there was a fancy ordination ceremony; it just means that Paul was SENT to do this job, a job which God had APPOINTED him to do. Simple – truth is always simple!

The apostle John was given the job of caring for Jesus’ mother – both literally (**John 19:25-27**), and allegorically; for John was the apostle who outlived the others, canonized the Bible, wrote the last books of it, and cared for the church of God, the “elect Lady” (**2 John 1:1**), who is pictured as Jesus’ mother (**Revelation 12:1-5**). John’s job was to care for the whole church, gentile and Jew alike, and prepare it to survive the wrath of the devil during the dark ages.

Everyone has the authority to speak the truth. Everyone has the authority to teach the gospel – if they speak the true gospel, that is. You don’t need a special certificate or permission to do so (**Mark 9:38-40**). But the apostles were called to do **certain specific jobs**. Peter was made an apostle to feed God’s sheep – the Israelites. Paul was given a different job, as was John. And to do their jobs, they had authority to enforce their decisions – spiritual authority. Men did not give them this authority, **but these men can give some of THEIR authority to others.**

Just as God took of Moses’ spirit and gave it to the seventy elders (**Numbers 11:17**), by ordaining men under them these men could share the burden of their God-given mission with others. When Paul was given the job of taking the gospel to the Gentiles, he was *ordained* by God to do so. But Paul then took his own ordination and, on his own authority, ordained subordinates under him.

Paul told Titus, “*these things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee*” (**Titus 2:15**). This is Paul giving Titus the authority to speak all these things, **the things God had given Paul to teach!** Paul was passing these things on to Titus and *ordaining him to “speak, exhort, and rebuke with all authority”*. In a sense, Paul was asking God to take “*of the spirit which was upon him*”, and placing it on the elders he ordained, just like Moses and the seventy.

It was not unlike Elijah and Elisha (**2 Kings 2:9-11**). This was a passing of authority from one leader to another, appointing Elisha in Elijah’s office (**1 Kings 19:16**). Only rather than receiving only a portion of Elijah’s spirit, Elisha asked for double what Elijah himself had – a large request, but God granted it.

Back to the NT, once Paul gave Titus of his authority, it was limited by the same limits that Paul had; Paul could not grant him more authority than Paul himself had! So Paul did *not* give Titus authority to teach *in James’ church* “with all authority”. **Only James or God could give that.** Paul gave Titus of HIS authority, the authority over the Gentiles that God had given him. And as Paul could give that authority, he could take it away (**1 Timothy 1:18-20, 2 Timothy 2:16-18**).

We don’t know if Paul ordained and then un-ordained those two, but he did specifically warn people about listening to them. And it is likely they were once teachers of the truth who went astray, from the context. A GREAT many do. Far more than you can at present imagine.

THE SOURCE OF ORDINATION

God is the Almighty. And He has given the Son all power in heaven and on Earth. Then the authority splits; one branch goes to the spirit realm, the angels whom God uses to govern the Earth in various ways. These angels, the eyes of God who “*are in every place, beholding the evil and the good*” (**Proverbs 15:3**), lead various empires and governments (**Daniel 10:19-11:1**).

They are the civil government, and through them Obama and Hussein, Kim Jong Un and Angela Merkel all derive their authority, who then in turn pass it through their layers of echelon to the lowest outsourced labor in the world. These powers are *all* ordained by God (**Romans 13:1**).

The other branch is the spiritual government, and it goes through Christ to the saints, whom Jesus has given authority greater than that of the angels (**Luke 9:1, Luke 10:17-20**). This authority goes from the head of the church, Jesus, to the apostles and prophets, then to the evangelists, and so on down to the least converted sincere Christian on the planet.

This authority is absolute so long as it is wielded righteously. But when it departs from the law of God, you are free – indeed, obligated – to refuse to obey the authority and obey God instead. “I was just following orders, God!” won’t be accepted as an excuse for sin in the kingdom of God.

God raises up churches through men; generally, through individual men. He gives these men great understanding, and whatever gifts may be necessary to spread the gospel in the way He wants it spread. These men are apostles, men whom God sent to do a certain job.

And as God uses them to call people, those people are their “children in the faith”, and they raise them up in the truth as a father raises up children, no matter what their relative ages. When some of these children distinguish themselves, they become the “older” children, spiritually – thus making them “elders” in the church.

When they prove by their conduct that they love the truth and can be trusted with the spiritual lives of younger siblings, and can be trusted to have “children” of their own, then they are ordained – appointed – by the apostle. This means they are given some of HIS authority and use it, and speak as if it were him speaking (**1 Corinthians 4:17**), and are left to “baby-sit” their younger brothers and sisters, which is why Paul left Timothy the orders in **1 Timothy 5:1-2** about *how* to baby-sit his “family”.

THE FAMILY BUSINESS

Timothy was called by God through Paul; Paul was his spiritual father. And so when Timothy proved that he was “old enough” to be considered an elder, Paul ordained him to help in the family business – Paul’s business. Timothy was not appointed by God directly, as Paul had been. So Timothy’s ordination, his “appointment” **which was made by God, through Paul**, was to help Paul do *his* job.

You might say Timothy was ordained an *evangelist* to the Gentiles. A teacher whose job it was to help Paul do *his* job. Paul did not lay on another man’s foundation (**Romans 15:20, 2 Corinthians 10:15**), **but Timothy did! That was his job – to build upon Paul’s foundation!**

Of course, Timothy didn’t have to *accept* the appointment, just as a son is not morally obligated to go into the family business; he could have sought ordination from Peter or John. But it’s normal, and generally a good idea to stay in whatever state God calls you (**1 Corinthians 7:17-24**).

But if he accepts that appointment then he IS obligated to follow Paul’s leadership as long as Paul does not depart from God’s law. **Perhaps he will even inherit the “business” one day**, as Joshua inherited it from Moses. Or, if they reach a point where they cannot see eye to eye about how Paul interprets the Bible, then Timothy would have to obey his own conscience and depart.

Paul and Barnabas worked together a great deal, first as partners and then, after the blinding of Elymas, Paul was clearly in charge (compare **Acts 13:7** with **verse 13**; then read the verses in between). Paul and Barnabas went onto the island. Paul and *company* left the island. Barnabas was demoted from first billing in **verses 2 and 7**, to not even being listed except as part of Paul’s “company”.

Because above all else, truth ordains you. God makes those He wants to be leaders visible through signs, wonders, wisdom, gifts, and so on (**Acts 2:22, Mark 16:17, 2 Corinthians 12:12**, etc). What does the kingdom of God consist of? **1 Corinthians 4:20**. And when you meet someone who blows you out of the water with the truth, you should follow that man; **if the time comes when God gives you wisdom that turns the tables, he should gladly follow you**. That's what authority is supposed to do, help the less converted be as righteous as their teachers – or more so (**Psalms 119:97-104**).

UN-ORDINATION

In time these men, still partly carnal as all of us are, had a huge fight in **Acts 15:36-39**. We know at least one of them was partly carnal because of what **Proverbs 13:10** tells us. So Barnabas, who was one of “Paul’s company”, left Paul. **And when he left Paul, he lost any of Paul’s authority that he may have had**.

Had Timothy had similar issues with Paul’s teachings or guidance, Timothy could have forsaken his appointment as Evangelist and struck out on his own, hoping that God might side with him and carry on a work through him; if not, Timothy’s “splinter group” might wither and die. Or one day, like Barnabas, he might have reconciled with Paul, and Paul may have changed his mind about the bone of their contention, as he clearly changed his mind about Mark/Marcus (**Colossians 4:10, 2 Timothy 4:11**).

In any case, Timothy was always free to follow his conscience. But if Timothy had left Paul, it would have automatically un-ordained him, un-appointed him as part of Paul’s company (**1 John 2:19**). He would no longer have been able to speak as Paul’s evangelist, nor take part in the blessings God had given Paul. Because he would no longer be “of us”.

It would have then been just God and Timothy – and whether Timothy could make that work would depend on his character, God’s plan, and why Timothy left Paul. But whether God promoted the hypothetically-dissident Timothy to apostle or not, it wouldn’t really matter. Not in the long run; for what does God say about un-ordained prophets and un-sent apostles who speak His words? **Jeremiah 23:21-22**.

At the end of the day, it doesn’t really matter whether you’re an apostle, a prophet, a layman, an independent Christian or the leader of two million Israelites. Whether God sent you and you are entitled to sign your letters “an apostle of God by the grace of Jesus Christ” or not. None of that matters. What matters is whether you stand in God’s law to turn people from their evil ways. Do that, and God will eventually notice, whether He sent you or not.

WHAT IS THE POINT OF AUTHORITY?

If the authority of apostles and other people who speak for God is strictly limited to the law of God and what the Bible says, then what is the point of having them at all? First, as I said in the last lesson, they are not necessary for a righteous people. If you will govern yourself, you will not need to be governed.

But laying that aside, there is another purpose as well. In any society, no matter how small or how large, no matter how converted or how carnal, they always appoint a leader, elder, guide, spokesman – whatever. This person is the visible face of the group, and makes decisions that would take too long to put before the group.

There are many things not explicitly covered in the Bible. Many judgments and decisions to make that the Bible is vague about. How long should sermons be? Where should we have the Feast? Can we spend second tithe on the day of Shouting? Should we have songs before services? How long is “long hair”? (**1 Corinthians 11:15**).

A million things like that which need an answer; most can be reasoned out of the Bible's examples. But on some things, "I have no [clear] commandment from the Lord" (**1 Corinthians 7:25**). So that is a judgment that the patriarch responsible for the group must make. The person in the position to best understand the will of God (**1 Corinthians 7:40**). If he isn't that person, then someone else should be the leader.

Then there are the simple administrative details. Who should be in charge of printing booklets? How much money should we spend in advertising? Where should we set up headquarters? Should we buy a new printer? Should we send a minister to the Philippines? How much second tithe assistance should we give that person, if any? Those are decisions that the patriarch or the people he ordains must make.

Without all these things, no church could grow very large, function very efficiently, or remain righteous.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The kingdom of God is a family structure. Every governmental structure God set up in history has been modeled after the divine Family. So the church of God is also the family of God. The head of the church is Jesus, the "patriarch". Under Him is the next spiritually eldest patriarch, then the next spiritually eldest, and so on.

We have all given up family and friends for this newer family, and God promises us – both in this life AND in the life to come – ample replacements in a new family (**Mark 10:29-30**). But that's a matter of faith, and you have to first be willing to leave your family, if necessary, before you find your new family members. And even then, you may have to wait for years – otherwise, you wouldn't need faith! (**Romans 8:24-25**).

Under Solomon, how did God's family appear to other nations? **1 Kings 10:1-9**. How should Israel – and the church of God – make the rest of the world feel? **Deuteronomy 4:5-8**. These laws should make people JEALOUS of us, because they see how peaceful, happy, and harmonious our families are – whether literal or metaphorical.

This WILL happen in the millennium after Jesus returns (**Zechariah 8:20-23**). But we can make it happen today, with every person we meet; we are spiritual Israelites if we have accepted the spiritual covenant of Abraham, and we should be a light to the spiritual Gentiles – this was a command, not just for the Head of our house, but for US! (**Acts 13:47**).

This happens by understanding, accepting, and practicing the power and authority of God. Use your authority, however little of it He may have given you, to bring peace and happiness through the law of God to whatever you control – whether it's a large corporation, a family, or only over your chickens.

Use that authority wisely, righteously, and mercifully, and God will give you more. If you are faithful in a few things, God will make you ruler over many things (**Matthew 25:23**). But if you can't even manage your own miserable life, how can God make you ruler over anyone else's? (**Luke 16:10-12**). If you can't even manage your own family, how can you run a church? (**1 Timothy 3:5**). **And if you couldn't run a church, how could you hope to manage ten cities in the Kingdom of God!**

This work is completely non-denominational and is meant to fulfill Christ's great commission to "*preach the gospel to every creature*" (**Mark 16:15**). **This publication is not to be sold**; "*freely ye have received, freely give*" (**Matthew 10:8**).

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