

# VISION & COMMITMENT

— COURSE —

A COMPANION BOOK TO THE VIDEO SERIES

PRESENTED BY:



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# INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Living Light Christian Church’s Vision and Commitment Course. We’re glad you’ve decided to join us, and we’re excited at the prospect of going through this course with you. During the course, we will explore biblical truths that for thousands of years have transformed the lives of countless believers to the glory of God.

## THE PURPOSE OF THE COURSE

The course has undergone much change and development over the years, but its purpose remains to establish the essential foundations of Christian faith and experience in the lives of all those who participate. The course also serves as the doorway into the life of this expression of the Church. It provides an opportunity for the leadership of this congregation to express clearly the biblical truths that have been revealed to us. These truths determine what we believe, what we do, and how we do it.

This is not to say that this course is only for those that wish to join Living Light, nor is there any obligation on the elders to consider someone to be a part of Living Light simply because they have completed it. However, all those who believe they are to be joined to Living Light are asked to complete the course. You may be here as one who has known the Lord for many years, as a new Christian, or as one simply searching for truth. Whichever is the case, if you have a hungry and teachable spirit, we know that God will reveal Himself and His purposes to you in new and deeper ways.

## “VISION AND COMMITMENT”?

Why do we call this a “Vision and Commitment Course”? In answer to that question, let’s look at a couple of scriptures:

“Where there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint...” [Proverbs 29:18](#)

The phrase “cast off restraint” could also be translated “go astray” or “run wild.” Just as lack of physical vision can cause us to go off course (or indeed, to not even know that there is a course), so a failure to see what God wants to reveal to us (prophetic vision) will have serious consequences for how we live life. God wants us to see what He sees. We then have a responsibility:

“Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it.” [Habakkuk 2:2](#)

The vision that God wants to impart to us is not a dreamy ideal that is vaguely inspirational but difficult to understand and put into practice. God has a purpose for our lives, which He wants us to see, understand, outwork, and share with others. Therefore, our desire is that, by the grace of God and the working of His Holy Spirit, you will so clearly see the *vision* that has gripped our hearts that you too will wholeheartedly *commit* to it.

## HOW DOES GOD IMPART VISION?

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” [Psalm 119:105](#)

In particular, and most reliably, God communicates to us through His written Word, which we usually refer to as “the Bible,” “Scripture,” or “the Word of God.” Jesus demonstrated His own knowledge and reliance on God’s written Word in defeating the Devil by resisting his temptations in the desert ([Matthew 4:1-11](#)).

“...It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”  
[Matthew 4:4](#)

We will hand out a paper entitled “The Authority of Scripture” at the end of this session, and we will also look in more detail at the nature and importance of the Bible later on in the course. However, it should be understood right at the outset that this whole course—indeed our existence as a church—is founded on the following conviction (quoted from Living Light’s Statement of Faith):

*The Bible is God’s inerrant, infallible Word to all people at all times. Human authors under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit wrote it. As such, it is the supreme source of truth and is a completely reliable revelation of God. The Bible alone is the final authority in all matters of doctrine and practice (2 Timothy 3:16).*

Accordingly, our commitment is to root everything we teach in Scripture, which we reference throughout the materials.

## THE NEED FOR “REVELATION”

You will hear us speak again and again of the vital importance of receiving revelation on what God says. This is more than intellectual understanding. It’s possible to go through a course like this and acquire a lot of information and yet experience little change and growth. That would be disappointing to say the least! Thankfully, it’s not God’s intent. Through the Holy Spirit, whom we look to as the principal teacher of this course, God wants to reveal His truth to you in a way that is impacting and life-changing. Determine to be open and expectant for this to happen.

“Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.”  
[1 Corinthians 2:12-14](#)

## BUILDINGS AND FOUNDATIONS

It is not enough merely to know what God says in Scripture, or even to have revelation on it. We must outwork it in our lives, individually and corporately. **James 1:22** says, “**But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.**” To help us grasp the significance of how we are to apply the Word of God in our lives, the Bible frequently uses building terms. Jesus likens the hearing and putting into practice of His words to building on a solid foundation:

“**Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.**” **Matthew 7:24**

Later, when the apostle Peter was applying this concept to the Church, he said,

“**you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house...**” **1 Peter 2:5**

And the apostle Paul developed this building theme as follows:

“**Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.**”  
**Ephesians 2:19-22 (NIV 1984)**

This theme is so central to courses like this that they have often been referred to as “Foundation Courses.” It is imperative that we heed the warnings of Jesus regarding the devastating consequences of failing to build according to His instruction:

“**Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you? Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who hears and does not do them is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the stream broke against it, immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great.**” **Luke 6:46-49**

“EVERYONE THEN WHO HEARS THESE  
WORDS OF MINE AND DOES THEM  
WILL BE LIKE A WISE MAN WHO BUILT  
HIS HOUSE ON THE ROCK.”

Matthew 7:24

Consider the following illustration:



**The house on the right** is well built and has a foundation—but the foundation is in sand. This is like the millions of individuals who are steadily building their lives without a relationship with Jesus Christ, the solid rock on whom we are to build. Ultimately, this house is destined for ruin.

**On the lower left** is a trailer home. It could represent people who have some knowledge of the truth and would consider themselves to be Christians but are not committed to a lifestyle of obedience. Like many professing Christians of our day, a trailer home has no secure foundation; it may be close to the rock but is not actually built into it. The trailer home is designed for relocation, not permanence. As we all know, when the tornado sweeps through, these homes are the first to go.

**The house on the upper left** illustrates the building principle that we will focus on for the remainder of this course. It is the house built into the rock, with a clear and definable foundation, that is able to withstand all the elements that come against it.

## RESTORATION

This type of commitment to live our lives according to the Word of God could be described as “radical.” The word *radical* is used in many different ways to mean different things. In fact, it is derived from the Latin *radix*, meaning “a root.” Being radical is, therefore, going to the root or origin of a matter. This is highly appropriate to this course and Living Light in general, as we are committed to seeing a restoration of the root strengths, values, and structure of the original Church as described in the New Testament.

By comparison to much of the modern Western church, the standards and goals presented in this course may seem very challenging. In fact, they represent no more than Bible-based Christianity, a return to the normal Christian life of the early Church. We would recommend that before we meet for the next session you take the time to read through *The Acts of the Apostles* (usually referred to as Acts), which clearly shows the radical lifestyle of the early Church. By the power of the indwelling Spirit, this way of life is within the reach of us all.

## SOME GENERAL POINTS...

**PRESENCE** — We appreciate that attending the full twenty sessions of this course is a substantial commitment. However, if you do decide to take the course after this introduction, please prioritize it and determine to attend through to the end. This will be beneficial not only to you, but also to the rest of the group.

**PUNCTUALITY** — Please try to arrive on time, but if you are going to be late, don't be discouraged from coming. Better late than never!

**PARTICIPATION** — We want the course to be as interactive as possible; therefore, questions, observations, and testimonies are more than welcome. There is no such thing as a stupid question. No one is born with the knowledge of all the truths of God (that's why we need revelation). So determine to speak up!

**PREPARATION** — There's unlikely to be any set homework with this course, although at the end of each set of notes there will be suggestions for further study on the subject. If you are to receive all God has for you, we recommend that, after each session, you at least review the material, think about the Scriptures, ask God what you should do in the light of what you've seen and heard, and commit yourself to obeying Him. Come to the next session ready with any questions or comments from the previous one.

**PARTNERS** — Occasionally, we link first-time participants with "partners" from Living Light who have previously completed the course. The partners usually receive much for themselves in taking the course again, but their principle function is to help others receive the maximum benefit from it. If you miss a session, your partner could arrange a time to go over it with you. You can also ask them questions you may not be able to ask in class, either relating to particular sessions or other matters.

**We're believing for nothing less than dynamic, Spirit-filled times of revelation in God's Word together. Be blessed and enjoy the course!**

## RECOMMENDED READING

1. *The Acts of the Apostles*
2. Supplemental Reading: "The Authority of Scripture"



# THE GOSPEL

In this session, we are going to look at the heart of the Bible's message. We are going to delve into what God has done to save us. This message is called the gospel, and it is powerful:

**“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 word *gospel* means good news. This immediately tells us two things about this message:

First, it is news. The gospel is a message about real events that have occurred in history. It is not just principles or religious teachings, but a true story. In the gospel, God proclaims the reality of the way things are.

Second, the Scripture declares that this news is good. It is the declaration of a message that will be a joy and a relief to hear. Satan has often tried to misrepresent the gospel as a message that is condemning, restrictive, and mean-spirited. The truth is that the gospel is just the opposite of this. It is a message of mercy to sinners and liberty to captives.

To truly understand the good news, we must consider the history of God's dealing with mankind. We will do this by looking at three biblical events:

1. CREATION | GOD'S ORIGINAL INTENTION
2. THE FALL | WHAT WENT WRONG
3. REDEMPTION | GOD'S SOLUTION



## CREATION

### THE VALUE OF CREATION

The first thing we need to understand is that He created everything. The world does not exist by some random set of circumstances. It is the result of the express desire of a good and loving God and, therefore, is in itself good. Just to emphasize this very point, during the process of creation, God paused to acknowledge that what He had made was good. He wanted to highlight the value of what He had created, as well as His own delight in it.

This process builds in anticipation, culminating in the creation of Adam and Eve. They stand as the pinnacle of God's creative genius. Humanity is not a product of evolution that has ascended by chance to dominate the earth. We were created in His own image and bear a unique dignity and capability for good because of this.

It is vital for us to understand the goodness of God's original creation if we are to appreciate how tragic the fall was. If I spilled water on a painting I found in my attic, it may be mildly upsetting. If I discovered it was a priceless Monet, it would be devastating.

In the same way, because God values and loves what He created, He was not prepared to discard it after the fall. Instead, He saved it.

**“For God so loved the world [Greek *kosmos* lit. universe or creation], that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” John 3:16-17**

### THE PURPOSE OF CREATION

God's creation was not only valuable but also purposeful. This purpose is seen in the commands that He gave to Adam and Eve:

**1. REPRODUCE** — His purpose was to fill the earth with His glory through the multiplication of men and women bearing His image. In His goodness, God offered all of creation the best thing there is—Himself.

**2. RULE** — They were placed as God's representatives on earth to rule, subdue, cultivate, and care for it.

To sum up, God had made a creation that was full of value and purpose. At the center of all God had made, He placed men and women as the supreme objects of His love, entrusted with the future of creation.

## THE FALL

Though creation was originally good, things did not stay that way. Sin entered through the disobedience of Adam and Eve. This original sin has infected every person since then. The Bible is very clear that every person who has ever lived has sinned and is in need of God's forgiveness.

**“We all, like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him [Jesus] the iniquity of us all.” Isaiah 53:6 (NIV 1984)**

To help us understand what sin is, we will look at the main Greek word translated as “sin” in the New Testament, and at two other closely related words.

### 1. SIN (*HAMARTIA*)

“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” Romans 3:23

The word literally means to “miss the mark,” e.g., when an arrow misses its target. In failing to fulfill the purpose for which God created us, we have all “missed the mark.” Sin has so marred the value of creation that, in a tragic reversal of God’s declaration, now it could be said that things are “not good.”

### 2. TRESPASS (*PARAPTOMA*)

“But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God’s grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!”  
Romans 5:15 (NIV 1984)

The term *trespass* derives from a verb meaning “to fall.” This is not just an accidental slip, but a falling even though one could and should have remained standing. We have failed to live up to our own understanding of what is right, let alone God’s much higher standards. We were created for noble purpose, but have fallen and been broken in a way that is beyond our ability to fix.

### 3. DISOBEDIENCE (*PARAKOE*)

“For as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.” Romans 5:19

This word is related to the verb *to hear* and means “to disregard,” in the sense of a refusal to hear and obey. This describes the refusal in our minds and hearts to listen to God when He tells us how we are to live. We disregard Him and His ways and do what we want instead. We express the same sentiment in the popular Sinatra song, “I did it my way.”

## THE SINFUL NATURE

As we consider the above definitions, we can see that all of us have acted in ways that can be described by each of these terms. If it were just these actions that were the problem, we would have enough to deal with. However, the problem is compounded by the fact that when humanity sinned, human nature itself fell. In other words, it is not just what we have done, but the fact that we have now become less than God intended.

God’s definition of sin runs deeper than mere deeds of sin, but rather is rooted in our very nature. It is the attitude of our hearts: independence, self-centeredness, rebellion, and going our own way. We do not want to be told what to do or what to believe by anyone, including God. These issues are not only common to all men, but are also glorified in an unredeemed culture.

Like Adam and Eve, we have chosen to decide for ourselves what our lives will be. We may listen to the advice of others, and maybe even consider the teachings of the Bible, but we set our own targets and goals for our lives. In setting our own targets, we show an ignorance or abandonment of God’s target.

“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.” Ephesians 2:1-3

## THE WRATH OF GOD

The problem of humanity's separation from God is made far worse by the reality of God's wrath against sin and sinners. It is not only our sin that stands in the way of our relationship with God, but also His wrath.

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.”

Romans 1:18-20

Despite this, people still try to excuse or justify their sin. We live in days when people use positive-sounding terminology in an attempt to disguise or soften the harsh realities of sin, but this does not alter the reality of God's holiness or His judgment. *Holy* means “set apart” or “other than”; God's standards are wholly different than ours.

The wrath of God against sin demands justice for the wrongs we have done. His wrath is not like human fits of rage; it is a reasoned demand for justice, resulting from His righteousness.

“But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. God ‘will give to each person according to what he has done.’” Romans 2:5-6 (NIV 1984)

“All this is evidence that God's judgment is right...He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power” 2 Thessalonians 1:5a, 8-9 (NIV 1984)

It is a dire situation. Our actions, our nature, and God's wrath all stand against us. Where can we turn for help?

## REDEMPTION

How can God's wrath, toward sin and sinner, be reconciled with His love for what He created? In Christ. The good news is that God has done something about the fall in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He proved His love, not by setting aside His wrath, but by satisfying it. God showed Himself to be both just and Justifier. All who are in Christ:

“...are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.” Romans 3:24-26 (NIV 1984)

He is the One who releases us from our sins by paying the price for us. Forgiveness is not just God “letting things go” or “letting bygones be bygones.” Since Christ paid the price for sin, God would now be unjust to hold sins against those who trust in Christ. Christ was our substitute, taking away the wrath of God. What God has done in Christ is powerful enough to undo all the damage that sin has caused.

“FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD, THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY SON, THAT WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM SHOULD NOT PERISH BUT HAVE ETERNAL LIFE. ”

John 3:16



In the Bible, we find various analogies to describe the problem of sinful humanity, and God's solution in Christ:

### 1. ECONOMIC

“knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.”

1 Peter 1:18-19

Humanity was sold into slavery to sin. Christ came and purchased our freedom, paying the full debt that we owed. He redeemed us from bondage to sin.

### 2. RELATIONAL

“Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.” Romans 5: 9-11

Sin broke our relationship with God. Our opposition to Him made us His enemies. We stood divorced from Him and under His wrath. However, Christ loved us and died for us. He satisfied God's wrath and won our hearts again. He reached across the divide, removing all the obstacles between us and God. He reconciled us back to Him.

### 3. LEGAL

“by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he [God] set aside, nailing it to the cross.” Colossians 2:14

Paul's reference here is to the Roman practice of nailing to the cross a list of the crimes committed by the person being crucified. In sinning, we have broken God's holy Law. We are guilty and should receive the punishment for our crime, namely an eternity in hell. However, Christ paid the penalty for us instead. He was innocent, but suffered for the guilty. When we look back in faith, we see the list of our own sins nailed to the cross of Christ. Christ died as our substitute.

### 4. MILITARY

“And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he [Christ] made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.” Colossians 2:15 (NIV 1984)

Through sin, we surrendered to the enemy and came under his dominion. But Christ crushed Satan and stripped him of his power. Now, Christ has all authority, even over death and Hell, and can transfer those who trust in Him from the Kingdom of Darkness to the Kingdom of Light. He has triumphed for us.

God accomplished all this in the mission of Christ. Let us look at Him, God's only begotten Son, the Author and Perfector of our faith:

#### 1. He was fully God and fully man.

“Who [Jesus], being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.”

Philippians 2:6-7 (NIV 1984) (see also John 1:1&14, Isaiah 9:6)

**2. He perfectly revealed to us the will, power, purpose, and nature of God.**

“The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.” Hebrews 1:3a (NIV 1984) (see also John 14:9, Colossians 1:15)

**3. He was tempted and tested in every way and therefore is able to identify with all of mankind’s difficulties.**

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.” Hebrews 4:15

**4. He lived under the scrutiny of heaven and earth and was found to be completely sinless.**

“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us,” 2 Corinthians 5:21a (NIV 1984)

“Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, ‘I find no guilt in this man.’” Luke 23:4 (see also vs. 13-16)

**5. He fulfilled every just requirement of the Law.**

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.” Matthew 5:17

**6. He willingly suffered on our behalf, satisfying God’s wrath by dying on the cross.**

“In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him, ‘He saved others,’ they said, ‘but he can’t save himself! He’s the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’” In the same way the robbers who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him. From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land. About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?’—which means, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’” Matthew 27:41-46 (NIV 1984) (see also Isaiah 53, Romans 5:9-10)

**7. He was raised from the dead, proving God’s acceptance of Jesus’ sacrifice and His victory over death.**

“and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord,” Romans 1:4 (see also 1 Corinthians 15:6)

**8. He ascended and has been exalted over all things.**

“[Christ] has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.” 1 Peter 3:22 (see also Ephesians 1:18-23, Mark 16:19, Luke 24:50-51, Acts 1:9-11)

Christ did all of this for the glory of the Father and out of love for us. He did it because we could not do it for ourselves. We contribute nothing to our salvation. The joy for the Christian remains that our life rests securely in what God did in Christ. This is good news indeed.



## WHAT SHOULD OUR RESPONSE BE?

“Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’ And Peter said to them, ‘Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.’” [Acts 2:37-39](#)

## RECOMMENDED READING

1. *Romans*
2. *The Cross of Christ* by John Stott
3. *In My Place Condemned He Stood: Celebrating the Glory of the Atonement* by J.I. Packer and Mark Dever
4. *A Gospel Primer* by Milton Vincent



# BEING BORN AGAIN

“Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, ‘Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.’ Jesus answered him, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.’ Nicodemus said to him, ‘How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?’ Jesus answered, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, “You must be born again.” The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.’” [John 3:1-8](#)

In this passage, we are introduced to a man named Nicodemus. Nicodemus was clearly very religious, believed Jesus to be a teacher who had come from God, and acknowledged Him as one who did the works of God. Nicodemus displayed many of the characteristics one would today expect of a Christian. However, Jesus’ response to Nicodemus, far from being affirming, appears confrontational.

Jesus declared to Nicodemus man’s inability to enter or even “see” the Kingdom of God unless he is **“born again.”** By Nicodemus’ response, we can see his difficulty in understanding what Jesus was saying. The fact is that Nicodemus would have to experience a transformation so radical that it would, in fact, be a new birth.

In this session, we will discover what the Scripture has to say about being born again, which is also called the “new birth.” In particular, we will answer the following questions:

- **What is being born again?**
- **Why do we need to be born again?**
- **How are we born again?**
- **What are the evidences of being born again?**

## WHAT IS BEING BORN AGAIN?

To some of us, the concept of being born again may seem as strange as it did to Nicodemus. It sounds both absurd and impossible. Others may be familiar with it, but simply consider it equivalent to believing in Jesus. The frequent and/or incorrect use of the term has immunized many against the reality of its meaning. Since the new birth is essential for us to even begin to understand the Kingdom of God, we must be clear regarding what exactly Jesus meant when He stated that we “**must be born again.**”

One of the deceptions of “religious” thinking is that we can work ourselves into the will of God. So-called “religion” offers many alternatives to the new birth:

- **Being born in a “Christian country”**
- **Having Christian parents**
- **Being “baptized” or christened as a baby**
- **Making mental assent to some facts or doctrines**
- **Doing your best to live a good life**
- **Taking sacraments or attending church meetings**

Right relationship with God is not something we naturally inherit (it is “**not of natural descent**” John 1:13 - NIV 1984) or earn (it is “**not a result of works**” Ephesians 2:9).

In contrast to all of these, being born again is coming to life by the Holy Spirit, as the very nature of God courses through us. It is the regenerating experience of God’s supernatural power.

The new birth is the creation of something new. It is not just a “fresh start” or the improvement of your old life. The new birth is the life of Christ in us. It brings into existence that which did not exist before:

“**Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.**”  
2 Corinthians 5:17

This does not mean that everything about us instantly changes. We still look the same, have the same personality and many of the same traits. However, we are new. Our desires, attitudes, and actions begin to change to reflect our new life in Christ. We are alive to God in a way that we never knew was possible. We need not be held back by our past sins, old weaknesses, or hereditary patterns.

## WHY DO WE NEED TO BE BORN AGAIN?

The Bible states several reasons why new birth is necessary. One of the ways it does this is by stressing who we are apart from the new birth. Before we are born again:

### 1. We are dead

“**And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—**”  
Ephesians 2:1-2

### 2. We love what is wrong

“**And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.**” John 3:19-20 (see also Romans 7:18)



**3. Our hearts are hard and unable to submit to God or please Him**

“For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.” Romans 8:7-8 (see also Ephesians 4:18, Ezekiel 36:26)

**4. We are slaves to Satan and sin**

“But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed,” Romans 6:17

**5. We are under the Law**

“that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives... Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.” Romans 7:1b, 4

**6. We are unable to come to Christ and receive the gospel**

“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.” John 6:44 (see also Ephesians 4:18, 1 Corinthians 2:14, John 6:37, 65)

To be freed from the above conditions, we need to be born again.

**HOW ARE WE BORN AGAIN?**

God causes the new birth. We do not. This is an important truth. Nicodemus asked how we can be born again. Jesus answered stating that the wind blows wherever it wills. We don’t cause it; we just see its results. In the same way, the Holy Spirit is the One who causes us to be born again of His own will. We just see the results.

“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—” Ephesians 2:4-5

Just as a baby cannot cause itself to be born, or a dead person cannot raise himself, so we cannot cause ourselves to be born again. Someone else must act on our behalf. This is the very thing God does. He is so rich in mercy and love for us that He takes the initiative in giving us new life.

The Bible describes our experience of being birthed by God as hearing God’s call:

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” 1 Peter 2:9

Before the call, each of us may have thought very differently about Jesus Christ. We may have hated Christianity and sworn we would never become a Christian. We may have been indifferent to it, without giving it much thought. We may have felt that we always believed in Jesus Christ deep down, even though we never really followed Him.

Also, each of us may experience the call differently. It may come in a moment of intense conviction or we may just experience a subtle shift, after which everything is different.

However it is experienced, the result is the same. We begin to feel that God is speaking to us. We simultaneously know conviction of the truth of the gospel, sorrow for the way we have lived, and a desire to live differently. We may not even be able to say why, but we believe the gospel.

The call of God is experienced through the declaration of God's Word. His Word comes and is implanted within us, and the Holy Spirit brings us to life through it.

“For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.” 1 Peter 1:23 (NIV 1984)

“So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” Romans 10:17

## WHAT ARE THE EVIDENCES OF BEING BORN AGAIN?

When a natural birth occurs, we certainly know about it! In the same way, when we have been born again, there are clear evidences of the new life.

“I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.” 1 John 5:13

### The new birth is evidenced in the following ways:

**FAITH IN GOD** — Being born again is not just some ambiguous spiritual experience. It awakens within us real conviction in Jesus of Nazareth, both in who He was historically and is eternally. We come to believe in Him and to love Him. This is authentic faith.

One way this trust is shown is through our faith in His Word. We begin to read the Bible with a real faith in all that it says. We become convinced that its message is for us, drawing specific encouragement from the Scriptures that refer to salvation. We know that we are born again because God has declared it.

“...if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.” Romans 10:9-10

**THE INDWELLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT** — We will cover this more thoroughly when we talk about being filled with the Spirit, but for now we want to note two assurances of the new birth that the Holy Spirit gives to us:

a) When we are born again, God takes up residence in us by His Spirit, who assures us inwardly of the change that has taken place:

“you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,” Romans 8:15b-16

b) The indwelling of the Spirit empowers us to live the Christian life. We find a new ability within us to stop sinning and to start living righteously:

“You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.” Romans 8:9

**WORSHIP** — When we are born again, we not only believe in God but we delight in Him. We become amazed at how awesome and wonderful He is. We do not feel forced to obey Him, but want to please Him. We develop a genuine preference for what God wants.

“work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” Philippians 2:12b-13



This free offering of ourselves is our worship to God:

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.” [Romans 12:1](#)

**OBEDIENCE** — When we are born again, we begin to take on the characteristics of the life of Christ within us. Our lives begin to resemble the obedience that was fully manifested in Jesus’ life. Obedience often begins with repentance, which is the act of changing your mind or turning around. This process has a two-fold rhythm. We turn from our old ways of living and turn toward God’s will. This means that while God causes us to be born again, we still have a role to play. We have a responsibility to work out what God has worked in us.

So complete is this inner change that the Bible declares that we can recognize this new birth by the absence of habitual sin. We are not perfect, but the habits of our lives begin to reflect obedience to God:

“You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him... No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God.” [1 John 3:5-6, 9](#)

## CONCLUSION

Being born again is the start of spiritual life. There is no other start. There is no other way. There is no other answer. If a man achieves everything there is to achieve in life but is not born again, he has less than nothing. All that we will leave this life with is either our spiritual life in Christ, which will lead us into eternity with Him, or our spiritual death through not responding to His glorious gospel, which will lead us into an eternity in Hell.

“Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!” [2 Corinthians 13:5](#)

In the light of such sobering truths, we urge you to consider Paul’s words and examine yourself in the faith. Whether this examination exposes something that is lacking, or confirms what is present, our prayer is that all will come to an unshakable assurance of the authenticity of their salvation.

## RECOMMENDED READING

1. *Finally Alive* by John Piper



# WATER BAPTISM

“...Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” [Acts 2:38](#)

This is Peter’s answer to the question of what we should do in response to the gospel. First, he says we must repent, which we looked at in the previous session. Next, he says we must be baptized, which we will consider in depth in this session.

With all of the mystery, confusion, debate, and division in the Church over the centuries regarding the necessity, method, and effect of water baptism, someone unfamiliar with Scripture might be surprised to find out just how straightforward the Bible is on the subject. Why has this clear and simple command so often been the subject of contention? Perhaps because it’s so important! From the beginning, the Devil’s strategy has been to lead us to question and doubt God’s commands, and ultimately to disobey Him. In fact, if we want to know the issues God considers of greatest importance in the advance of His Kingdom, it may be that we need look no further than those that the Devil has attacked most vigorously over the years.

Thankfully, in every generation there have been saints who have stood for the truth on this issue, though in some cases it cost them everything. Water baptism is an issue that has produced many martyrs. As we approach this session, let us seek God for a glimpse of the revelation and conviction they had on this vital subject.

## NEW TESTAMENT WATER BAPTISM

Water baptism in the Bible was simply a symbolic act of response whereby an individual was briefly but fully immersed into a body of water. The first time we encounter water baptism in the Scripture is in [Matthew 3:5-6](#):

“Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him [John the Baptist], and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.”

Here we find John the Baptist baptizing in the Jordan River those who had responded to his challenging message to repent. Curious though dunking people in a dirty river may seem to us, no one queried it at the time. Although it is the first biblical mention of water baptism, it was a practice well known to the Jewish people, albeit for a different reason. One of the conditions for those wishing to convert to Judaism (along with circumcision for males) was that they had to be ceremonially immersed in water, symbolic of cleansing.

However, the surprising thing about John's baptism was that it was intended for his Jewish hearers. As part of John's prophetic calling to "prepare the way for the Lord," he was calling the people to repentance—a change of mind resulting in a change of life—symbolized by water baptism. He also made clear that this baptism was preparatory to a greater baptism:

**“John answered them all, saying, ‘I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.’” Luke 3:16**

He was, of course, speaking of Jesus. We will look in a later session at baptism in the Holy Spirit, but for now we should note that Jesus was Himself baptized in water by John. This was not for the forgiveness of sin, as Jesus was without sin, but rather to “fulfill all righteousness” (Matthew 3:15) and to set an example for all that would follow Him.

## DOES BAPTISM HAVE TO BE BY FULL IMMERSION?

Yes. The word *baptize* is a transliteration (a simple adaption of a word from one language to another) of the Greek word *baptizo*, primarily meaning “to dip, immerse, submerge, or plunge into a liquid.” It was used to describe the action of plunging a material into dye, and of the submerging of a ship. Baptism must, therefore, be by immersion.

Furthermore, there is no biblical example of baptism by any other form. Nowhere in the New Testament is it suggested that a mere handful of water is sufficient. All the evidence is that there needed to be a large and plentiful supply of water—enough, in fact, to entirely cover the person being baptized.

**“...and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. And when they came up out of the water...” Acts 8:38-39**

**“John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there...” John 3:23**

## WHAT ABOUT BAPTIZING INFANTS?

Not once does the New Testament refer to such a practice. This is not surprising since, as we have seen, baptism is to follow repentance, which requires the ability to make a decision. In every instance, it was those who had become believers (which, again, requires a certain level of mental development) who were commanded to be baptized. It is not wrong for children, even young children, to be baptized, but only when they have a clear faith in Jesus as their Lord and Savior, and because they want to obey Him by baptism.

Therefore, the only babies to be baptized are “spiritual babies,” i.e., those who have just been born again.

## WHY SHOULD BELIEVERS BE BAPTIZED?

A desire to follow the example of Jesus should be reason enough, but the most simple and straightforward answer to this question is that Jesus commands it!

**“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you...” Matthew 28:19-20**

This command of God is often referred to as “The Great Commission” and has always been accepted as a succinct description of the mission of the Church. Though the Lord brought many teachings during His ministry on earth, water baptism was one of the very few ordinances (i.e., commanded practices) that He gave to the Church. This is why we teach that every born again believer needs to be baptized.

It is such an integral part of the right response to the gospel that in the New Testament professions of faith in Christ are usually followed more or less immediately by water baptism. Take the following verses for example:

“So those who received his word were baptized...” Acts 2:41

“...And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized.” Acts 18:8

So closely is water baptism linked with believing in Jesus that some scriptures, like Acts 2:38, place them side by side when talking of becoming a Christian. Here are other examples:

“And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.” Acts 22:16

“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” Mark 16:16

However, it is important to note that the balance of Scripture makes clear that an individual is not born again by being baptized. In nearly 200 scriptures, like the ones following, faith alone is referenced as the means to salvation.

“But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” John 1:12-13

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” Ephesians 2:8-9

We don’t get baptized to receive forgiveness and new life, but rather because we’ve received forgiveness and new life.

## THE “LOST” RESPONSE TO THE GOSPEL

Although much confusion developed over the centuries regarding how water baptism might be practiced, its necessity for every professing Christian was not questioned until fairly recently in Church history. Bearing in mind the clear scriptural mandate for baptism, how is it that in our day it seems to have become merely an “optional extra” for many Christians?

Part of the problem, of course, has been the prevalence of infant baptism. Many who have subsequently come to faith in Christ have assumed that the act done for them as a baby can suffice in response to the command of Jesus. However, modern evangelistic methods have also (albeit perhaps unwittingly) served to diminish the importance of baptism in the eyes of many.

In the early to mid 1700’s, men like John Wesley, George Whitfield, and Jonathan Edwards emerged (in what became known as “The Great Awakening”) with an emphasis on prayers of repentance/commitment, which came to be understood as the active response to the gospel and the means of conversion to Christ. This emphasis continued with the outstanding revivalists of the 1800’s such as Charles Finney, Dwight Moody, and R.A. Torrey. In the twentieth century, the likes of Billy Graham have spearheaded what has become the standard practice of evangelistic crusades with “altar calls” leading to the refined and formularized “Sinner’s Prayer”—but little or no instruction on the need to respond with baptism. The required response to the gospel has ceased to be water baptism and has become the prayer of commitment.

All these ministries and evangelistic methods have been used by God to bring millions of people into an authentic salvation experience, and we do not believe that these servants of God in any way intentionally minimized the importance of water baptism as a response to the gospel. However, consideration of the development of this methodology does help us to understand why baptism has been relegated in its importance as a response to the gospel.

## WHAT DOES BAPTISM DO FOR THE BELIEVER?

Having seen that baptism does not save us, one might ask whether it has any effect on us.

Some church traditions believe that water baptism is “sacramental,” i.e., that something is conveyed/imparted to the person being baptized irrespective of the state of their own mind or heart. However, water baptism is clearly intended to be an outward expression of an inward reality. It is both symbolic and an act of obedience. If the person being baptized is truly born again, there is nothing they receive in water baptism that has not already been given to them in the new birth. If a person not yet born again were to be baptized (an infant for example), they would simply go from being a dry sinner to a wet one!

However, the fact that water baptism is symbolic in nature does not make it unimportant, nor does it mean that God does not use the practice as a means of conveying grace and revelation to those who approach it in faith. God in His wisdom gave us water baptism, and when rightly practiced, it imparts multiple blessings to the life of the believer. For many, it is water baptism that brings home the truths of the great salvation they received when first they believed. Consequently, they go on to experience a new measure of freedom and victory thereafter.

Scripture has much to say of the symbolism and imagery connected to water baptism, and the truths of which it speaks so vividly. Let’s look at some:

### DEATH, BURIAL, AND RESURRECTION

“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.” [Romans 6:3-4](#)

The immersion into the waters of baptism is described here as a picture of the death and resurrection of Jesus and our association with Him in it. We are “buried” under the water, marking the end of the old life. Then, just as Jesus came out of the tomb, we come up again to start a new life of victory.

### CIRCUMCISION OF OUR HEARTS

“And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart...so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.” [Deuteronomy 30:6](#)

“...REPENT AND BE BAPTIZED EVERY ONE OF YOU IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF YOUR SINS, AND YOU WILL RECEIVE THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.”

Acts 2:38



In Old Testament practice, Israelite boys were circumcised as a physical sign of belonging to the nation of Israel. But even in those days, God was clearly after His people's hearts, and He made promises that would be fulfilled in a better covenant that would come.

In the new covenant, those who are born again receive a spiritual circumcision, or circumcision of the heart, which is confirmed in the waters of baptism. Through our faith in the finished work of the cross, the power of the old ways has been cut off. Like all God's blessings, this must be received by faith if we are to live in the good of it. Again, it is water baptism that Scripture references to help us grasp this reality.

**“In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.” Colossians 2:11-12 (NIV 1984)**

## THE WATERS OF JUDGMENT AND RESCUE

At times, God has used overwhelming waters to bring righteous judgment upon those who are unrelenting in sin and rebellion. Most drastically, this is seen in the account of Noah's life. God caused the whole earth to be engulfed in the flood, but through faithfulness and obedience to God's command, Noah and his family were rescued.

**“...God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you...”**  
1 Peter 3:20-21

Again, water is used in the dramatic escape of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt (see Exodus 13-15). God brings His absolute judgment upon the Egyptian slave masters as they try and pursue His people into the Red Sea:

**“The waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen; of all the host of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea, not one of them remained.” Exodus 14:28**

This is another prophetic picture of the total defeat of the Devil, who once held us all in the slavery of sin.

Furthermore, the Apostle Paul specifically uses baptism terminology and imagery to describe the principle of God's people being rescued and united under Moses' leadership:

**“For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea,” 1 Corinthians 10:1-2**

Many see this as a foreshadowing of our union with Christ through baptism in water and the Holy Spirit.

## REVELATION THROUGH OBEDIENCE

Although there is great significance and revelation to be seen in these scriptures, it is important to note that God does not require that newly converted believers grasp all of this wonderful biblical imagery before they respond to the challenge of being baptized. God wants to establish in us a pattern of obedient response to Christ that is not conditional on understanding. Are we able to demonstrate that we know how to take orders from the Lord in this first, clear-cut command?

We live in a culture that has deified knowledge and independence and that increasingly rejects the very idea of obedience, let alone obedience where there has not been a full and acceptable explanation of what is being required. However, we are challenged to live a different way:

**“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.” Proverbs 3:5**



Those who learn to “walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7) understand that it is often the narrow door of obedience that leads to the broad place of revelation, and revelation is far greater than mere understanding.

## BUILDING ON THE FOUNDATION

In Hebrews 6:1-3, “instruction about baptisms” is one of the subjects listed as elementary and foundational to the life of the believer, which must be in place for there to be progress towards maturity.

Baptism is foundational in that it establishes something significant in our lives and in our testimony, confirming our profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and our submission to Him as Lord. Memories of the occasion when we received the Lord may become a little hazy in time, but there can be no forgetting being plunged under the water! Baptism, therefore, sets up a spiritual milestone to which we can look back with assurance.

In addition, it tells the other people who witness it or hear about it that we are serious about our faith. They may doubt our words, but when they see us submit to baptism, they know that we mean it.

**In closing this session, we leave you with six reasons we believe water baptism matters:**

- 1. It is the direct command of the Lord Jesus Christ**
- 2. It is clearly taught in Scripture as foundational**
- 3. It establishes a pattern of obedience in the life of the believer**
- 4. If practiced correctly, it conveys great revelation and blessing**
- 5. The Devil has vigorously attacked it over the centuries**
- 6. One day, we will encounter those who laid down their lives to maintain this New Testament practice**

We are committed to seeing individual lives and the Body of Christ built according to the New Testament pattern. Because of this and for all the reasons given in this session, we would expect everyone who professes Jesus as Savior and Lord, and who wishes to be part of this congregation, to have been baptized in water as a believer, or to be baptized at the earliest opportunity. So, have you been baptized by immersion as a believer?

## RECOMMENDED READING

1. Supplemental Reading: “Water Baptism Within the Context of Church History”



# THE PERSON AND WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

“...I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth... You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you...he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.” [John 14:16-17, 26](#)

As we’ve seen already, God created us to know Him as our Father. Even when our sin separated us from Him, He loved us so much that He gave His Son, Jesus Christ, to die for us. In putting our trust in the saving work of Jesus on the cross, we’re restored to right relationship with our Father in Heaven. What good news!

But it’s even better than that! So often, the gospel message we hear, and the teaching we receive on living the Christian life, leave out any reference to the Holy Spirit. Many Christians can identify with the disciples Paul met in Ephesus, who told him, “...we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit!” [Acts 19:2](#)

Why is it that the Holy Spirit has so often been ignored or misunderstood in the Church and the world? It could be because He doesn’t seem as tangible to people as God the Father and Jesus, both of whom we can “picture” (even if that picture isn’t particularly accurate) and, therefore, relate to on some level. Or perhaps it’s because we’re not sure what He actually does. Or maybe it’s because we’re uncomfortable with the supernatural dynamic associated with the Holy Spirit’s activity.

In fact, the Holy Spirit plays a vital role in every aspect of us becoming and being a Christian. Therefore, in this session and the two that follow, we’ll look in some detail at who He is and what He does. Let’s start with a couple of essential facts about the Holy Spirit.

## HE IS A PERSON

The personhood of God the Father and Jesus Christ is challenging enough for most of us to grasp, but it can be even more difficult for us to see the Holy Spirit as a person. Perhaps part of the problem is that He’s called the Holy Spirit (and in older translations of the Bible, He is referred to as the Holy Ghost, which can add to the strangeness). We can tend to think of a spirit as a “force” or “essence”—an “it” rather than a “He.” However, the Holy Spirit is never referred to in the Bible as “it” (so let’s determine never to refer to Him that way ourselves), but as “He” or “Him.”

It's also important to know that when Jesus tells the disciples that the Father would give them “another Helper” (John 14:16), the Greek word translated “another” signifies “another of exactly the same kind.” Jesus was—and is—a person, so the Helper to come must also be a person in order to be “exactly the same kind.”

Quite apart from how He is referred to, His interaction with and response to us shows that He is no mere “force” or “thing.” For example:

**HE MAKES JUDGMENTS** — “For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements.” Acts 15:28

**HE SPEAKS** — “While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said...” Acts 13:2

**HE LEADS** — “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.” Romans 8:14

**HE INTERCEDES** — “...the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words...the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.” Romans 8:26-27

**HE CAN BE INSULTED, GRIEVED, AND LIED TO** — “How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has...outraged the Spirit of grace?” Hebrews 10:29

“...do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” Ephesians 4:30

“...Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit...” Acts 5:3

## HE IS GOD

Having seen clearly from the Bible that the Holy Spirit is a person, we must remember that He is not just any person—He is God! This brings us to something very important—the nature of and relationship between God the Father, God the Son (Jesus Christ), and God the Holy Spirit. We’ll come back to focusing on the Holy Spirit shortly, but first we need to touch on this even bigger subject.

## THE MYSTERY OF THE TRINITY

In Deuteronomy 6:4, we see the declaration, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.” This was an important truth for the people of Israel to grasp, surrounded as they were by nations that promoted the idea that there were multiple “gods.”

However, even in the Old Testament, it was clear that there was something intriguingly “plural” about the one true God (and perhaps that’s why the declaration in Deuteronomy 6:4 had to be made). For example, right at the beginning of the Bible, we see the “dialogue” that God has regarding His intention in creating us:

“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...’” Genesis 1:26

Who is He talking to? Who else made us? In whom else’s image were we made? Of course, God alone made us, in His image alone, as Genesis 1:27 goes on to clarify:

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”

The “dialogue” was, in fact, with Jesus and the Holy Spirit, both of whom were actively involved in creation, as we see in (for example) Colossians 1:16 and Genesis 1:1-2. So God alone created us, acting in the fullness of who He is.

The oneness of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit is often referred to as “the Trinity.” This is not a word found in the Bible, but is a term used by the Church through the ages to describe the truth found in Scripture that, although there is only one God, He manifests and acts in three distinct persons. This mystery is evident all the way through the Bible. We’ve seen it already in [Genesis 1](#), but let’s look at a few other scriptures that show it:

### ONENESS IN LORDSHIP

As we have seen in [Deuteronomy 6:4](#), there is one Lord. And who is that one Lord?

He is God the Father:

“For you are our Father...**you, O LORD, are our Father**, our Redeemer from of old is your name.” [Isaiah 63:16](#)

But consider the following statements:

“...at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that **Jesus Christ** is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” [Philippians 2:10-11](#)

“Now **the Lord is the Spirit**, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from **the Lord who is the Spirit.**” [2 Corinthians 3:17-18](#)

So there is only one Lord, and that one Lord is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

### ONENESS IN IDENTITY

“And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’” [Matthew 28:18-20](#)

It’s interesting that Jesus is commanding the disciples to baptize in “**the name**” (singular) of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Though they are three, they have one name. In Scripture, names have particular significance and convey aspects of identity and nature. This is especially true of God Himself, and this statement confirms the nature of the triune God as “one.”

We also see this oneness in identity in the Old Testament, for example in [Isaiah 9:6](#):

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

We often hear this scripture read at Christmas, and we know that the child/son referred to is Jesus. But it says that He would be called “**Wonderful Counselor.**” As we’ve already seen, the Holy Spirit is referred to (by Jesus) as the “Counselor.” What’s more, we see that Jesus will also be called “**Mighty God**” and “**Everlasting Father.**” So the Son is one with the Spirit and the Father.

“...I WILL ASK THE FATHER, AND HE WILL GIVE YOU ANOTHER HELPER, TO BE WITH YOU FOREVER, EVEN THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH...”

John 14:16

## ONENESS IN PURPOSE

Even where Scripture emphasizes the distinction of the persons of the Trinity, the singleness of purpose remains evident. For example, the following verses show how each person of the Trinity is involved in the single act of giving us life.

“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us...made us alive together with Christ...” [Ephesians 2:4-5](#)

“For the bread of God is he [Jesus] who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” [John 6:33](#)

“If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.” [Romans 8:11](#)

And the following passage shows us how each person of the Trinity works in and through the people of God:

“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone.” [1 Corinthians 12:4-6](#)

## GOD IN ALL HIS FULLNESS

Though the reality of the Trinity is clear from Scripture, it is still difficult to grasp with our minds. Thankfully, this needn't rob us of the joy of experiencing the wonderful triunity of God, as He expresses Himself to us and blesses us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit:

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.” [2 Corinthians 13:14](#)

So, keeping in mind that the Holy Spirit is God, let's look further at what He has done and continues to do.

## THE ACTIVITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The fact that many Christians are ignorant of the Holy Spirit's role and work is surprising bearing in mind the abundant evidence of it in Scripture.

We've already seen in the Old Testament that the Holy Spirit was involved in the creation of the world and of man. We see Him at work thereafter in and through the people of God, empowering, enabling and equipping them in diverse ways. Look at examples in [Exodus 31:1-5](#) (Bezalel anointed for artistic craftsmanship), [Numbers 11:16-17 & 24-26](#) (Moses and the elders enabled to prophesy), [Judges 6:14-16 & 34](#) (Gideon leading the people to victory), [Judges 15:14-15](#) (Samson empowered for a fight), and [Isaiah 61:1-3](#) (Isaiah anointed to proclaim good news and do good works in the name of the Lord).

However active though the Holy Spirit was in the time of the Old Testament, He only came upon particular people at particular times for particular tasks. It's interesting that in the incident recounted in [Numbers 11](#), Moses goes on to exclaim, “**Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!**”

Maybe Moses didn't know it, but this desire was prophetic. God did indeed have something greater in store for His people, as He later specifically promised:

“...I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit.” [Joel 2:28-29](#)



And what's more, He promised that His Spirit would not just come upon people temporarily (for a particular time and task), but would be in them and would change them from the inside out:

“And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.” [Ezekiel 36:26-27](#)

How would the Holy Spirit be able to reside within unholy people? Only by the cleansing work of Jesus on the cross. Moving from the Old Testament to the New Testament, we see the significant role of the Holy Spirit in the coming of Jesus.

## THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE BIRTH OF JESUS

The virgin Mary became pregnant as a direct work of the Holy Spirit ([Luke 1:35](#)). Surrounding this event, there was a dramatic increase of the Holy Spirit's activity.

In [Luke 1:15](#), the angel of the Lord tells Zechariah that the son he was going to have, John the Baptist, would be “filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb.” His wife Elizabeth, pregnant with John, was filled with the Holy Spirit when Mary visited her ([Luke 1:41](#)), and after John was born, Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied ([Luke 1:67](#)). We also see the Holy Spirit working prophetically through the lives of Simeon ([Luke 2:25-35](#)) and Anna ([Luke 2:36-38](#)).

Even though this accelerating activity of the Holy Spirit was still only in specific and isolated incidents, it speaks of the promised outpouring that would come through Jesus.

## THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE LIFE AND MINISTRY OF JESUS

Though Jesus had been conceived by the Spirit, His public ministry began with an empowering experience of the Holy Spirit when He was baptized:

“Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.’” [Luke 3:21-22](#)

Jesus is described thereafter as being “full of the Holy Spirit” and as being “led by the Spirit in the wilderness” ([Luke 4:1](#)), where he was able to resist the Devil's tempting. We are told that he then returned to Galilee “in the power of the Spirit” ([Luke 4:14](#)). He “went public” with his ministry and mission in the synagogue in Nazareth when He read out the words from [Isaiah 61](#) to which we referred earlier, declaring himself to be the fulfillment of that scripture:

“And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.’ And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, ‘Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’” [Luke 4:17-21](#)

In this, Jesus declared that the power in which He would operate would be by the anointing of the Holy Spirit.



## THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE MISSION OF JESUS

It's interesting that Scripture shows us that the Holy Spirit was involved not just in the birth and ministry of Jesus, but also in His pivotal act of dying on the cross for us:

“how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.” [Hebrews 9:14](#)

By His death on the cross, Jesus has paid the price for our sins. But His mission goes beyond even this. See John the Baptist's declaration of what God had revealed to him regarding Jesus:

“And John bore witness: I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.” [John 1:32-34](#)

So Jesus, empowered by the Holy Spirit to speak, minister, die, and rise from the dead, would ultimately “baptize” us in the Holy Spirit. We'll look more at this wonderful truth in the next session. For now, having mentioned earlier the part that the Holy Spirit played in the birth of Jesus, let's look at the role He has in our new birth.

## THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN SALVATION

“And when he [the Holy Spirit] comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment:” [John 16:8](#)

The Holy Spirit works in the hearts of unbelievers to bring them to a place where they recognize their need for salvation. It's only then, by the Holy Spirit, that someone can be born again:

“Jesus answered, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.’” [John 3:5-8](#)

And it's not just what the Holy Spirit does in us when we're born again; it's what He brings us into. By Him, we become part of the Body of Christ:

“For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.” [1 Corinthians 12:13](#)

So we receive new life by Him, and are brought by Him into the life of the Body of Christ. And that's just the beginning! In the next session, we will look more at what it means to be baptized in the Holy Spirit.

## RECOMMENDED READING

1. *Father, Son, & Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance* by Bruce A. Ware





# BAPTISM IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

“...He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.” [John 1:33](#)

In the previous session, we looked at the person of the Holy Spirit and saw some of the ways in which He has worked in the lives of people from creation onwards. In this session, we are going to look at what it means to be baptized in the Holy Spirit in a way that empowers us for life, enables us to be effective in sharing the gospel with others, and equips us with the gifts God gives us to glorify Him.

## THE PROMISED GIFT

The Book of Acts begins by telling us of Jesus’ interaction with His disciples over the forty-day period between His resurrection and His ascension. His disciples, having been confused and discouraged at the time of His death, were no doubt more enthusiastic than ever at this point, and eager to spread the good news and see the Kingdom of God established. However, Jesus gives them this instruction:

“...he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, ‘you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now’...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses...”

[Acts 1:4-5, 8](#)

They probably had little or no idea what Jesus meant or what to expect, but we can see in [Acts 2](#) how they began to experience the fulfillment of this promise at Pentecost. Peter went on to speak boldly of this as something that was part of the total gift of salvation:

“...Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” [Acts 2:38](#)





## WHAT IS BAPTISM IN THE HOLY SPIRIT?

Christians refer to this experience in several different ways, for example, “receiving the Spirit,” “being empowered by the Spirit,” “being filled with the Spirit,” and “being baptized in/with the Spirit.” There’s biblical justification for all of these terms, but in this session, we’ll use the term “baptism in the Holy Spirit” to speak of a Christian’s first, tangibly empowering experience of being filled with the Holy Spirit.

As we’ve seen when looking at the subject of baptism in water, to be “baptized” means to be fully immersed, with no part of us left untouched by the experience. What’s more, it is something we do in wholehearted obedience and faith. It’s helpful for us to bear this in mind as we consider what it means to be baptized in the Holy Spirit.

Whatever one calls the experience, it is important to understand how essential a part of the purpose and intention of Jesus it is to pour out His Spirit in this way ([John 1:32-33](#)). We should want for ourselves what He wants for us, and it’s to Him that we look as we seek to come into the fullness of this promise.

## IS BAPTISM IN THE HOLY SPIRIT FOR ALL BELIEVERS?

Yes. It isn’t just for a select few. God promised: **“I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh”** ([Acts 2:17](#)). Concerning the gift of the Holy Spirit, Peter clearly proclaimed:

**“For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”** [Acts 2:39](#)

This means that if you’re a Christian, the promise is for you! Besides, if all God’s children are to be His witnesses, and if they cannot be effective witnesses without the baptism in the Holy Spirit ([Acts 1:8](#)), then all God’s children should expect to receive it. To send a new believer to face a sinful world without the power received in this way is like sending out a new recruit into battle with no weapons. By the baptism in the Holy Spirit, God equips His soldiers.

## DON’T ALL CHRISTIANS HAVE THE HOLY SPIRIT?

Yes, in one sense they do. As we’ve seen in previous sessions, no one can become a Christian without the work of the Spirit. We know that we are **“born of the Spirit”** ([John 3:5](#)), and Paul tells us that **“Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him”** ([Romans 8:9b](#)).

But Scripture speaks of an impartation of the Holy Spirit that goes beyond even this. The idea that we can and should receive more of the Holy Spirit shouldn’t be surprising to us. Jesus was, of course, conceived by the Holy Spirit. However, as we have seen, before He embarked on His public ministry, He had a distinct experience when the Holy Spirit came upon Him in a special way, empowering Him for the work the Father had for Him to do (see [Luke 3:21-22, 4:1,14](#) and [Acts 10:38](#)).

It was the same with Jesus’ disciples. There can be much speculation and theological debate over when they actually became Christians, but it is probably safe to assume that by the time we see them in [Acts 1](#), being addressed by the risen Lord Jesus, they were born again! Nevertheless, they were told to wait in Jerusalem until they received and were empowered by the Holy Spirit. As we have seen, that happened on the day of Pentecost, and from that point forward they were launched into the mission God had for them.

What was true for Jesus and his disciples is true also for us. Born again though we may be, we need to receive the empowering fullness of the Holy Spirit.

Ideally, being born again, being baptized in water, and being baptized in the Holy Spirit belong together, part and parcel of the single business of becoming a Christian. Unfortunately, incomplete teaching has meant that many people enter into their full inheritance in bits and pieces. But better late than never!

## HOW DOES A PERSON RECEIVE THE BAPTISM IN THE HOLY SPIRIT?

Sometimes, people are baptized in the Spirit without the involvement of anyone else, as happened to the disciples on the day of Pentecost ([Acts 2:1-4](#)) and to the household of Cornelius ([Acts 10:44-47](#)). Others are baptized in the Spirit as people lay hands on them and pray with them, as in Samaria ([Acts 8:14-17](#)) and Ephesus:

“And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying.” [Acts 19:6](#)

The most important thing to bear in mind is that we are baptized in the Holy Spirit in the same way that we receive all the blessings of God—by faith, i.e., we believe that God is willing and able to do what He has promised to do, and we act accordingly. Sometimes our faith can be hindered by our conscience because of sin issues. If that is the case, we should simply repent and receive the forgiveness of God.

There is no formula to being baptized in the Holy Spirit, and people’s experiences vary greatly, but the following steps may be helpful:

1. **Ask God for the gift of the Holy Spirit.** Jesus said: “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” ([Luke 11:13](#)). And if we look at the promise in [John 7:37-39](#), we see that our motivation should far exceed a mere willingness to receive and should, in fact, come from a recognition of need and an earnest desire:

“On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, “Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.”’ Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.”

2. **In asking, be actively reaching out to receive.** Where the Bible speaks of “receiving” the Holy Spirit and His power (e.g., in [Acts 1:8](#), [2:38](#), [19:2](#)), it’s an active word, not a passive one (it could be translated as “take hold of”). Expect to know a positive touch from God. When people in the Bible were baptized in the Spirit, they knew it—and so did the people around them!
3. **Knowing that God has heard and is answering your prayer, begin to praise God and worship Him with thanksgiving.**

## WHAT ABOUT THE GIFT OF TONGUES?

When the subject of baptism in the Spirit is discussed, “speaking in tongues” is usually part of the discussion. This shouldn’t be a surprise since, as we’ve seen, the gift of tongues is closely connected in Scripture with instances where people were filled with the Holy Spirit (e.g., [Acts 2:4](#), [10:44-46](#), [19:6](#)). *Tongues*, as used in these instances in Scripture, means “languages.” The gift of tongues is the God-given ability to speak in languages that you have not learned and do not (naturally) understand.

“...YOU WILL RECEIVE POWER WHEN THE HOLY SPIRIT HAS COME UPON YOU, AND YOU WILL BE MY WITNESSES...”

[Acts 1:8](#)



## WHAT IS THE POINT OF SPEAKING IN TONGUES?

One thing that's worth noting is that we're told in [James 3:7-8](#) (and most of us know from experience) that the tongue is the hardest part of the body to tame. Perhaps God wants to demonstrate the mighty power of His Spirit in us by tackling the toughest part first. Or perhaps God is deliberately challenging the reluctance we can have to obey Him in things that are unfamiliar or uncomfortable and that seem foolish. The issue of tongues can reveal whether we are really willing to submit to His Lordship by trusting and obeying Him despite our natural inclinations.

What is clear from Scripture, however, is that God intends this gift to be a help and blessing for Christians. As we'll see in the next session, there is an aspect of the gift of tongues that is for the building up of the whole church. Not all believers will minister to the body in this way, but every Spirit-filled Christian can benefit from the personal use of the gift of tongues. In fact, every Christian should seek this gift as something that is intended to be a great blessing. For example:

- In [1 Corinthians 14:4](#), we see that **“one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself”** (see also [Jude 20](#)). Who wouldn't want that—and for which of His children would God not want that?
- Whether we are praying or praising God, we can sometimes feel limited by our lack of knowledge or our inability to find the right words. Thankfully, the gift of tongues releases us from these constraints, enabling us to express what is deep within, beyond what we can articulate—or perhaps even perceive—ourselves (see also [1 Corinthians 2:10b-13](#)).

In [1 Corinthians 14:14-15](#), the apostle Paul says, **“For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful. What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also.”** When we pray (or sing) in tongues, it's not produced by our minds, but is instead the Holy Spirit enabling our spirit to pray. This doesn't mean, however, that we should “switch off” our minds. Instead, we allow the Holy Spirit to bring to mind the areas on which our spirit is focusing as we pray or praise. It's both assuring and exciting to be led by the Spirit in this way:

**“...the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace.”** [Romans 8:6 \(NIV 1984\)](#)

Paul makes it clear in [1 Corinthians 14:18](#) how important the use of the gift of tongues was to him personally (**“I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you”**). His exhortation at the beginning of that chapter is to **“eagerly desire...spiritual gifts,”** ([1 Corinthians 14:1 - 1984](#)) and though his main goal is to encourage prophecy, he implicitly affirms the gift of tongues, expecting that believers will be progressing from just using this self-edifying gift to moving in gifts that build up the church.

## MUST I SPEAK IN TONGUES?

Some Christians are nervous about the gifts of the Holy Spirit because they are uncomfortable with the supernatural in general. This can especially be the case with the gift of tongues as, even more than other gifts, it is so obviously outside of natural, rational experience.

Although speaking in tongues is the most common initial evidence (in Scripture and experience) of having been baptized in the Spirit, it is possible to have been filled with the Spirit but not yet have spoken in tongues. This is because, despite the fact that we now have the ability to speak in tongues, we must (as with every God-given gift) step out in faith to do it.

[Romans 5:5](#) tell us that **“God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us,”** and Jesus tells us that **“out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks”** ([Matthew 12:34](#)). It is, therefore, not surprising that the tangible experience of God's Spirit being poured upon us, and the further assurance this brings us of His love, results in a bubbling up in praise and thanksgiving to God that our natural words can't express.

## HOW DO I SPEAK IN TONGUES?

It is at this point that, as mentioned above, we must do our part. Without the enabling of the Holy Spirit, we can't speak in tongues, but He won't make us do it or do it through us without our willing participation. Prejudice, fear, or a lack of confidence can be hindrances at this point, but if we are open and expectant, we will find ourselves prompted and enabled to form syllables or words that are not in our natural language. We should step out by giving voice to them.

**“And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.” Acts 2:4**

We will not understand the words we are saying, nor should we expect to do so. However, once we begin, we should expect the language to start flowing naturally.

And when you've received this wonderful gift, use it! Knowing how it benefits us in our communion with God and builds us up, we should be intentional about praying and singing in tongues every day. What's more, this shows God that we appreciate and value His gracious gift.

## CONTINUALLY BEING FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT

Being baptized in the Holy Spirit is the gateway to a life of being continually filled with the Spirit. In [Ephesians 5:18](#), Paul exhorts:

**“And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit,”**

A fuller way to translate this from the original Greek would be to say, “Be continually being filled with the Holy Spirit.” Receiving the fullness of the Holy Spirit is to be a way of life for us, not just a one-off experience to look back on.

It's interesting that the lifestyle we are to adopt is contrasted with drunkenness. A drunkard stays drunk by continually turning to alcohol. We, however, are to stay filled with the Spirit by continually asking for and receiving more of Him:

**“...how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” Luke 11:13**

We'll look more in the next session at what it means to live a Spirit-filled life. In doing so, we will see the transforming effect the fruit of the Holy Spirit has on our lives individually, and the transforming effect the gifts of the Spirit have on the Church and the world.

## RECOMMENDED READING

1. *Joy Unspeakable: Power & Renewal in the Holy Spirit* by Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones
2. *You Shall Receive Power: Receiving the Presence of the Holy Spirit into Your Life* by Derek Prince
3. Supplemental Reading: “Baptism in the Spirit” by Arthur Wallis



# THE SPIRIT-FILLED LIFE

**“Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.”**

1 Corinthians 12:7 (NIV 1984)

As we have seen, all those who have been born again by the Holy Spirit can (and should) expect to experience the promised baptism in the Holy Spirit—the gateway to a life of being continually filled with the Holy Spirit.

God’s intention has always been that His people, individually and corporately, should manifest His likeness and outwork His purpose on the earth (see [Genesis 1:26-28](#)). This would be impossible were it not for His Holy Spirit, who enables us to be all that we are called to be and to do all that we are called to do.

In this session, we are going to consider further what the Spirit-filled life should look like for us as individuals and for the gathered church—and at the implications of this for the world.

## THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE INDIVIDUAL

We should always be seeking more of the Holy Spirit because by Him we can increasingly enjoy the amazing blessings of our relationship with God. For example:

### THE ASSURANCE THAT WE ARE GOD’S CHILDREN

The wonderful reality that we **“are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus”** ([Galatians 3:26 - NIV 1984](#)) can be hard to grasp for those who have spent years feeling separated or distant from Him. We need the help of the Spirit:

**“For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,”** [Romans 8:14-16](#)



## THE ASSURANCE OF GOD'S LOVE

Not only does the Holy Spirit testify that we are God's children, but He enables us to experience God's love:

"...God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." [Romans 5:5](#)

## THE ABILITY TO KNOW AND UNDERSTAND THE MIND AND HEART OF GOD

The Holy Spirit reveals God to us ([Ephesians 1:17](#)), and it is by the Spirit that we can have the joy and privilege of knowing God's thoughts:

"For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God." [1 Corinthians 2:10b-12](#)

## SENSITIVITY TO THE VOICE OF GOD

"While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.'" [Acts 13:2](#)

Not only does the Holy Spirit enable us to hear the voice of God, but it is also by Him that God will speak through us, whatever the situation:

"And when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit." [Mark 13:11](#)

## CONFORMITY TO THE LIKENESS OF CHRIST

"Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit." [2 Corinthians 3:17-18](#)

We have seen that in Old Testament times, the Holy Spirit came upon certain people at particular times, anointing them for a specific task or purpose. Sadly, although these times may have been powerful and dramatic, the characters of those being used by the Spirit often seemed to remain unchanged—and in several cases they behaved in a way that was far from God-glorifying! However, God's promise was that things would be different under the New Covenant.

"And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules." [Ezekiel 36:26-27](#)

Although God created us to be in His likeness, we fell short of that because of sin ([Romans 3:23](#)). However, in Jesus, God wonderfully restored His image in the earth ([Hebrews 1:3](#)). Now by the pouring out of His Spirit, we can experience transforming power, enabling us to become holy and Christ-like. We can see the work of the Holy Spirit in two aspects of our ongoing conformity to the likeness of Christ:



## SANCTIFICATION: CHRIST'S HOLINESS EVIDENT IN US

The Holy Spirit empowers us to live in a godly way:

“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other...”  
Galatians 5:16-17

## THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT: CHRIST'S CHARACTER EVIDENT IN US

And by the working of the Holy Spirit we are changed from the inside out, as His fruit is produced in us:

“...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control;”  
Galatians 5:22-23a

The gifts of the Spirit (which we will look at in a moment) can manifest instantly, but the fruit of the Spirit takes time to develop. Gifts reveal a lot about the giver, but not necessarily much about the recipient. Fruit, however, reveals a lot about the “tree” that bears it (see [Matthew 7:15-20](#)). The gifts of the Spirit operating through us show people how wonderful God is. The evidence of the fruit of the Spirit in our lives shows people how Christ-like we are.

## THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE CHURCH

We can often be inclined to think very individualistically when considering the work of the Holy Spirit, but it is important to understand that God's desire is for a people who collectively become a dwelling place for the Holy Spirit.

“In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.” [Ephesians 2:21-22 \(NIV 1984\)](#)

There are many ways that God's Spirit should be evident in the Church, including in our unity with one another (“For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body...and all were made to drink of one Spirit.” [1 Corinthians 12:13](#)) and in our worship (“For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh” [Philippians 3:3](#)). However, one of the clearest ways in which the Spirit manifests His presence in the Church is through spiritual gifts.

## THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

Gifts of the Spirit are referenced throughout the New Testament, but the main passages in relation to them are [Romans 12:3-8](#) and [1 Corinthians 12-14](#) (though see also [1 Peter 4:10-11](#) and [Ephesians 4:7-16](#), which focuses particularly on the gifted ministries that Christ gives to the Church and which we'll look at in detail in later sessions).

In this section, we'll concentrate on the gifts listed in [1 Corinthians 12:7-11](#). Though not exhaustive, this list helps us to see important principles for God's purpose in giving gifts and His desire in their use.

At the opening of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, he positively affirms the fact that they “do not lack any spiritual gift” ([1 Corinthians 1:7 - NIV 1984](#)). Despite excesses and disorderly behavior, not to mention issues of major sin still present in this young church, Paul wants to encourage and instruct them in the gifts of the Holy Spirit, not shut them down. His concern was that they would not be ignorant about spiritual gifts ([1 Corinthians 12:1](#)). Let's look at his apostolic instruction to them:



“Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.” 1 Corinthians 12:7-11 (NIV 1984)

## SPECIFIC GIFTS

Scripture does not give us definitions or direct explanations of most of these gifts, but from what we do have in Scripture and from what many have experienced under the leading of the Holy Spirit, we can briefly say the following in relation to them:

**THE MESSAGE (OR WORD) OF WISDOM** — the Spirit revealing to us how to deal with a (perhaps difficult) situation or person, including what to say and/or how to say it.

**THE MESSAGE (OR WORD) OF KNOWLEDGE** — the Spirit revealing to us information about a person or situation that, naturally speaking, we could not have known. This can often bring conviction of sin or unlock a situation, leading to salvation, healing, or spiritual/emotional release.

**FAITH** — though all Christians obviously have some level of faith, the reference here is probably to a person having and communicating a particularly high level of faith in something that God has said, thereby building others up in their faith.

**GIFTS OF HEALING(S)** — in the original Greek, both of the key words are plural, which should remind us that there are more types of healing than just physical, and that healings can outwork differently in different people and situations.

**MIRACULOUS POWERS** — of course, healings would usually come within this category. However, this is generally understood to be when God enables us to speak or act so as to overrule natural laws—either to protect or help people, to confirm the proclamation of the Gospel, or just to demonstrate His power.

**PROPHECY** — declaring the mind and heart of God by speaking or acting as prompted by the Spirit. This is the most frequently mentioned (and most encouraged) of the gifts of the Spirit, and we will devote a later session to it.

**DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN SPIRITS** — the ability to discern whether a spirit that is operating through a person is a human spirit, a demonic spirit, or the Spirit of God, and to weigh words, deeds, or motives accordingly.

**SPEAKING IN DIFFERENT KINDS OF TONGUES** — speaking to God or people in a language, whether earthly or angelic, that has not been learned by the speaker. It is different from the personal gift of tongues (discussed in the previous session) because the intention is that others hear it and are edified by it, which will require its interpretation.

**THE INTERPRETATION OF TONGUES** — the supernatural ability to interpret a message in tongues into the language of the hearers.

The interpretation (and, therefore, the message in tongues) may be a prayer, a revelation, knowledge, a prophecy, or a word of instruction (1 Corinthians 14:6). Although tongues and interpretation are separate gifts, Paul does say that the person bringing the tongue should pray for the interpretation (1 Corinthians 14:13). God may have us move in more than one gift, and we should never limit what He can do through us.





One might ask why God would use tongues at all, rather than just having the contribution come directly in a language that everyone can understand. Scripture doesn't specifically address this question, but perhaps one of the reasons is that the bringing of a message in tongues captures the attention of those present in a way quite unlike any other contribution, and often stirs sensitivity to the voice of God in many present. It can also provide a great example of the body of Christ working together by the leading of the Spirit.

## DESIRING SPIRITUAL GIFTS

There is much misunderstanding on the subject of the “availability” of spiritual gifts—what we can rightly aspire to and what initiative we can or should take. What is clear is that we cannot choose or “work up” gifts, nor do we earn or achieve them. It is God who sovereignly gives them:

“All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and He gives them to each one, just as he determines.”  
1 Corinthians 12:11 (NIV 1984)

Of course, it is not wrong to ask God for gifts; in fact, we are commanded to do that (1 Corinthians 14:1)! However, we want to be led by the Spirit even in our asking, and we must realize that God will only give what He wants to give, when He wants to give it, and in the measure He wants to give it.

Scripture does seem to allow for the concept of the impartation of gifts through the laying on of hands—for example, in 2 Timothy 1:6, where Paul reminds Timothy to fan into flame the gift of God which was in him through the laying on of Paul's hands. However, in our opinion, this still does not give the person laying on hands the liberty to “impart” a gift purely of their own initiative or at the request of the person for whom they are praying.

## GROWING IN GIFTING

As we also see from that verse, we can and should “fan into flame” the gift of God within us. We can do this by praying, reading what Scripture has to say about the gift, looking to biblical and other examples of those who moved in the gift, spending time with those who currently move in that gift, and, of course, stepping out in it.

The regular use of a gift, taken hold of by faith, may lead to the recognition of a particular “ministry” (area of service/anointing) connected to that gift, and even to an “office.” For example, one prophesying regularly might ultimately be recognized as a prophet in the Ephesians 4:11 sense of the term. More on that in a later session.

## THE PURPOSE OF THE GIFTS

In all of this, we must remember the purpose of the gifts and the motivation we should have in reaching for and seeking to exercise the gifts. In 1 Corinthians 12:7 (NIV 1984) Paul says, “to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the **common good**” (with the sense that it will bring everyone together), and in 1 Corinthians 14:12 (NIV 1984) he says, “since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church.”

“NOW TO EACH ONE THE MANIFESTATION OF THE SPIRIT IS GIVEN FOR THE COMMON GOOD.”

1 Corinthians 12:7 (NIV 1984)



It is clear in Scripture that everyone must do what God has called and equipped them to do if the Church is to be built up and built together to maturity (see also, by way of further example, [Ephesians 4:7-16](#)). With the exception of the personal gift of tongues, we are not to seek gifts for ourselves, but rather in order to build others up, strengthen the church, and glorify God.

“What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.”

[1 Corinthians 14:26 \(NIV 1984\)](#)

## THE MOST EXCELLENT WAY

In connection with the above reminder, we must not make the mistake so many Christians have made over the years, focusing on [1 Corinthians 12](#) and [14](#) but ignoring [1 Corinthians 13](#), or treating it as a separate subject. (Of course, many more have focused on [1 Corinthians 13](#) and ignored the other two!)

The gifts are to manifest God—not just His power and will, but also His nature. He is love ([1 John 4:8, 16](#)), and we misrepresent Him if we exercise the gifts of His Holy Spirit outside of love. The gifts of the Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit (of which love is the foremost part) should be inseparable in our lives.

## THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE WORLD

Finally, we must not forget that the Holy Spirit is not just at work in the Church, but also through the Church as it reaches out to the world.

### POWER EVANGELISM

We have already looked at the Holy Spirit’s role in bringing conviction to the unbeliever and how essential it is that He empowers us to be witnesses. Beyond this, we see that gifts of healings, miracles, and words of knowledge are not just for the blessing of believers, but can play an important part in people coming to faith in Christ. Jesus Himself said:

“Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.” [John 14:11-14](#)

Jesus referred to miracles as an authentication of who He was and His ministry, and as a means of bringing glory to God (see also [John 10:25](#) and [Luke 7:20-23](#)). It was the same for Paul:

“...my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.” [1 Corinthians 2:4-5](#)

“So they [Paul & Barnabas] remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.” [Acts 14:3](#)

It should be the same for us. We are called not only to declare the Gospel but also to demonstrate it.



## WE HAVE RECEIVED POWER!

“His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence,” [2 Peter 1:3](#)

Jesus promised that we would receive power by the Holy Spirit. His power is indeed all we need in order to be who we are called to be and to do what we are called to do. So, let’s live in the fullness of Him—every day!

## RECOMMENDED READING

1. *1 Corinthians*, Chapters 12-14
2. *Romans*, Chapter 12
3. *Joy Unspeakable: Power & Renewal in the Holy Spirit* by Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones
4. *You Shall Receive Power: Receiving the Presence of the Holy Spirit into Your Life* by Derek Prince



# LIVING IN THE GRACE OF GOD

“And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.” Ephesians 2:6-7 (NIV 1984)

The grace of God is an enormous subject, underpinning everything we have looked at so far in this course, from the gospel (“For by grace you have been saved” Ephesians 2:8) to the Spirit-filled life (“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace” 1 Peter 4:10). Revelation of God’s grace pours through all the writers of the New Testament. It was the essential theme of Paul’s letters, all of which start and end with references to it, and the driving motivation of his ministry:

“But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the **grace of God.**” Acts 20:24

It is central to our vision as a leadership that every individual in our churches be established on a foundational revelation of this doctrine. Though this one session can do no more than serve as an introduction, our prayer is that it will inspire you to pursue a lifelong exploration of the inexhaustible wonders of God’s amazing grace.

## WHAT IS GRACE?

In popular usage, we can think of “grace” as dignified/polite behavior, elegant movement or as the prayer often said before a meal. However, when we see the word in Scripture, it is typically a translation of the Hebrew word *hesed* or the Greek word *charis*, most frequently conveying the concept of God’s unmerited favor expressed in gifts.

## GOD—GRACIOUS FROM THE BEGINNING

Unquestionably, the life and work of Christ revealed the grace of God to mankind in an unprecedented way, but the evidence of His grace is seen throughout the Old Testament. This is not surprising as, contrary to what some have mistakenly thought when looking at the Old and New Testaments, God has not changed. “For I the Lord do not change” Malachi 3:6 (see also Hebrews 1:12 and 13:8).

In [Exodus 34:6](#), we see one of God’s earliest revelations to man of His identity and nature:

“The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, ‘The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,’”

This truth that God is “**merciful and gracious**” is repeatedly declared and seen throughout the Old Testament. The ultimate demonstration of His grace in and through Jesus Christ is, therefore, totally in keeping with this intrinsic aspect of His nature.

## GOD’S SOVEREIGN GRACE

What is also clear throughout Scripture is that God’s grace towards us is an outworking of His sovereignty. We see in [Exodus 33:19](#) that God said to Moses, “I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name ‘The Lord.’ And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.” God elects to bestow grace and mercy on us completely of His own initiative. He is in no way being reactive or responsive to us in doing so. This is clearly seen to be the case in our salvation, as scripture after scripture confirms. For example:

“You did not choose me, but I chose you...” [John 15:16](#)

“We love because he first loved us.” [1 John 4:19](#)

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,”  
[Ephesians 2:8](#)

Some struggle with the concept of God’s absolute sovereignty in salvation. This can be for different reasons. At times, it is just a reflection of man’s desire to be in control—which is sin. We like the idea of salvation being a product of our choice rather than merely our God-orchestrated response to His choice. Of course, to many it genuinely feels like it was their initiative, their choice—that they sought God and “found” Him. A. W. Tozer helpfully explains what they are feeling:

*“Salvation is from our side a choice, from the divine side it is a seizing upon, an apprehending, a conquest by the Most High God. Our ‘accepting’ and ‘willing’ are reactions rather than actions. The right of determination must always remain with God.”*

Another reason why some struggle is because the idea of “unmerited favor” violates their concept of “fairness.” We should all be thankful, however, that salvation is not dependent on fairness (and certainly not on our warped sense of fairness). To be “fair,” everyone should go to Hell! “**For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God**” ([Romans 3:23](#)). No one is deserving of salvation; no one has earned anything other than the wages of sin, namely death ([Romans 6:23](#)). It is outrageously unfair that Jesus had to suffer and die for our sins. It is unfair that any of us should receive salvation. For a detailed explanation of God’s sovereignty in election, see [Romans 9](#).

It is good for us to be reminded of the nature of God when thinking about these things:

“He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he.” [Deuteronomy 32:4 \(NIV 1984\)](#)

We should be relieved and full of joy that God is indeed sovereign. He chooses to exercise unmerited mercy and compassion towards us in a way that may confound our understanding, but is perfect and just. Praise God for His sovereign grace!

## GRACE AND PROMISES

From the beginning, God has outworked His relationship with mankind through covenants, within which He has made promises. God has always been faithful to His Word, despite man's unfaithfulness.

In [Genesis 12](#), God chooses Abram (who would become Abraham) and makes a covenant with him that was rich with many wonderful promises. In God's dealings with Abraham, we have many clear insights into His ultimate redemptive purpose in Christ:

“And he brought him outside and said, ‘Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.’ Then he said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be.’ And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.” [Genesis 15:5-6](#)

“For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith.” [Romans 4:13](#)

## LAW AND GRACE

In order to fully comprehend the wonder of God's grace, we need to understand something of His righteous expectations of and dealings with His people. Through Moses, God instituted the Law (known as the “Old Covenant”) as a means by which His people might properly respond to Him.

The Law was far more than just the Ten Commandments. It was a whole set of detailed instructions intended to help Israel follow God and grow into a mighty nation. The Law instructed the people of God in His righteous ways and was, in itself, good:

“The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether.”  
[Psalm 19:7-9](#)

Despite the glowing affirmation of the Law in the above scripture, other passages in the New Testament describe it in seemingly less positive terms. This has left many Christians unsure regarding what to think about the Law. What purpose did it serve—and what could it not do?

### THE LAW REVEALED SIN

“...Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin...” [Romans 7:7](#)

As we have said, the Law showed what was required in order to live righteously before God. However, in doing so, it actually revealed man's inability and/or unwillingness to obey and respond rightly to God, showing how inherently sinful mankind was:

“Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.” [Romans 3:20 \(NIV 1984\)](#)

Though the Law was righteous, it was unable to impart righteousness. In [Romans 7](#), Paul uses the example of marriage to illustrate the binding relationship the people of God had with the Law. He likens the Law to a husband who always points out the right thing to do, but never actually helps his wife do it, and is impotent when it comes to imparting the fruit of righteousness.

## THE LAW PROVOKED SIN

Not only did the Law reveal sin, it actually provoked it! [Romans 7:9 \(NIV 1984\)](#) states that “sin sprang to life” as a reaction to the commandment. This is not because the Law was bad, but rather because its goodness evoked a sinful reaction, exposing the extent of mankind’s depravity, the absolute hopelessness of his plight:

“Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.” [Romans 7:13](#)

“Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,” [Romans 5:20](#)

## THE LAW AS A GUARDIAN

“Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.” [Galatians 3:23-24](#)

When Paul refers to the Law as a guardian, he uses the Greek word *paidagogos*, which was someone employed to supervise children until they were old enough to come into the “full rights of sons” ([Galatians 4:5 NIV 1984](#)). We come into those full rights by way of the New Covenant:

“For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” [John 1:17](#)

The New Covenant in the blood of Jesus Christ is indeed a much better covenant than that of Moses. Let’s look at some of the amazing truths that we experience through the grace of God.

## THE RICHES OF GOD’S GRACE

### GRACE AND JUSTIFICATION

“but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.” [Romans 5:8-9](#)

Justification results in right legal standing before God. With regard to our sin, it means that we stand before God as though we have never sinned! Our account of wrongdoing—past, present and future—is done away with once and for all. This is why Paul could assert with such confidence, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” ([Romans 8:1](#)).

### GRACE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

“For if, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.” [Romans 5:17](#)

It is not just that the slate is clean, not just that He has paid our debt—He has also credited our account with His righteousness! This means that God doesn’t merely see us as debt-free, but as rich in righteousness, having Christ’s perfect life attributed to our account. We can identify with Paul in his confident aspiration:

“... in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—” [Philippians 3:8-9](#)



It is only because of this that we can “with confidence draw near to the throne of grace” (Hebrews 4:16). How wonderful it is that we no longer relate to God on the basis of our performance, but rather on the basis of Christ’s! This means that, regardless of any current sin and failure we might be experiencing, our position before God remains the same.

## DANGEROUS GRACE?

Many feel nervous when contemplating this truth, concerned that this doctrine is dangerous and might promote sin and careless living. Clearly, they are not the first to see the risk. Paul raises and answers the obvious question himself:

“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?... What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?” Romans 6:1-2, 15-16

As Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said,

*“The true preaching of the gospel of salvation by grace alone always leads to the possibility of this charge being brought against it. There is no better test as to whether a man is really preaching the New Testament gospel of salvation than this, that some people might understand it and misinterpret it to mean that it really amounts to this, that because you are saved by grace alone it does not matter at all what you do; you can go on sinning as much as you like because it will redound all the more to the glory of grace. That is a very good test of gospel preaching. If my preaching and presentation of the gospel of salvation does not expose it to that misunderstanding then it is not the gospel. If a man preaches justification by works, no one would ever raise this question.”*  
(Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: The New Man, An Exposition of Chapter 6*, Banner of Truth Trust, 1972)

It is important to note that when Paul says we should “by no means” go on sinning, his reasoning is not the fear of judgment, but rather because it is inconsistent with Christ’s work in our lives. Far from granting a license to sin, grace actually teaches and empowers us to say “no” to ungodliness:

“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age,” Titus 2:11-12 (NIV 1984)

## GRACE AND SANCTIFICATION

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind...” Romans 12:2

Of course, while we are in this tent of sin-infected flesh, we are still tempted to give in to desires that wage war against the Spirit. However, God is committed to our gradual but complete transformation—not merely in some “doctrinal” and intangible way, but in our day-to-day life. This process is called sanctification, and it too is produced by the grace of God:

“In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.” Romans 6:11-14 (NIV 1984)

How are we then to deal with the sin we commit? 1 John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (see also 1 John 2:1).





## GRACE AND POWER

Many Christians can function for periods of time relying on their own abilities and strengths, but sooner or later, they will find themselves crushed under the weight of things that can only be sustained supernaturally.

“But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’” James 4:6

This principle of humble dependency upon God’s grace was very evident in the life of Paul, as one who had much to boast about in terms of training, position, and intellectual ability. Paul struggled with an undefined challenge, which he referred to as a thorn in his flesh. Despite his repeated requests for relief, God allowed it to remain:

“But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” 2 Corinthians 12:9

But God’s grace to us is not just sustaining power enabling us to endure hardship and pressure. It is also dynamic power for the advancement of the gospel:

“And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.” Acts 4:33

“And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people.” Acts 6:8

## GRACE AND IDENTITY

“For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.” Ephesians 1:4-6 (NIV 1984)

The reality of God’s grace in our lives can be so transforming that it redefines us, literally giving us a new identity and sense of purpose:

“Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God’s grace, which was given me by the working of his power.” Ephesians 3:7

It is also by His grace that we are energized and equipped for ministry:

“But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.” 1 Corinthians 15:10

## GRACE THROUGH FAITH

From our salvation onward, faith is the means of accessing the grace of God. The gospel is not just “good news;” it is almost unbelievably good news! In other words, it might be described as “too good to be true!” It requires a gift of faith from God even to start to believe. Once that initial gift is given, our maturing and growing in God is all about faith in His continuous grace towards us:

“For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.” John 1:16



## BEWARE OF LEGALISM

Having clarified earlier that, in itself, the Law was good, it is important for us to understand that the greatest enemy to living in the grace of God is legalism.

Legalism is the false notion that right relationship with God can be earned by returning to either the Law of Moses or some other set of rules and regulations. Its emphasis will always be one of “trying harder.” It is when addressing legalism that Paul uses his harshest rebukes to the Church:

“O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?” Galatians 3:1a

“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another one,” Galatians 1:6-7a

Paul describes turning to the Law for salvation or sanctification as falling away from grace!

“You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.” Galatians 5:4

The spirit of legalism is at the core of false religion and has spawned many successful cults. It has also been the most corrupting influence in the Church throughout the centuries. It is very subtle, not playing on the typical appetites of the flesh, but rather feeding off the results of these acts, namely shame, guilt, emptiness, and hopelessness. And it offers a logical remedy—religion! Even within strong local churches, legalism can be pervasive. It infiltrates in small quantities like yeast, but before long, works through the whole batch of dough (Matthew 16:6-12). It must be identified and rooted out at all costs!

## ABOUNDING GRACE

“..All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God’s grace in all its truth.” Colossians 1:6 (NIV 1984)

It is the understanding of God’s grace in all its truth that produces the fruit He desires. We are called to live in the lavish grace of God and encourage others to do so:

“See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no ‘root of bitterness’ springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled;” Hebrews 12:15

As the grace of God in Jesus Christ is the central theme of Scripture, it is fitting that the final verse of the Bible should reference this:

“The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s people. Amen.” Revelation 22:21 (NIV 1984)

## RECOMMENDED READING

1. *God’s Lavish Grace* by Terry Virgo
2. *Grace Alone* by R.C. Sproul
3. *Putting Amazing Back into Grace* by Michael Horton
4. *What’s So Amazing About Grace?* by Philip Yancey





# THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST

“Therefore God has highly exalted him [Jesus] and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” [Philippians 2:9-11](#)

The message of the New Testament is not merely “Jesus is the answer,” but “Jesus is Lord.” In the Bible, the word “Savior” is found 37 times while the word “Lord” is used 7,736 times. Jesus Christ, God the Son, is the Lord of Heaven and Earth. In this session, we are going to look specifically at what it means for Jesus to be our Lord on a personal level, and how His rule (that is, His Kingdom) is advancing in the earth.

## JESUS CHRIST—MY LORD AND MY GOD

Most of us have been raised in free, democratic countries with either no monarch or, by comparison to biblical and other historic models, a token one. Subsequently, we are not conditioned to think in terms of sovereign rule and obedient submission. However, whether we realized it or not, before we were born again, we were in submission to Satan, sin having brought us under his control. The saving work of Jesus not only cleansed us from the pollution of sin but also freed us from the power of sin and Satan:

“He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” [Colossians 1:13-14](#)

After Christ redeemed us (that is, bought us back), we were not left as “free agents” but were placed under a new authority—that of the Lord Jesus. The apostle Paul, whom God chose to be an example for all of us, described himself as “a bond-servant of Christ” ([Galatians 1:10 - NASB](#)).

## “JESUS IS LORD!”

The most striking characteristic of Christians, as distinct from unbelievers, is that by the working of the Holy Spirit, they are enabled to say (and mean), “**Jesus is Lord,**” both in turning to Him for salvation and as a lifelong confession:

“...no one can say ‘**Jesus is Lord**’ except in the Holy Spirit.” 1 Corinthians 12:3

“...if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” Romans 10:9

As we saw from [Philippians 2:9-11](#) at the beginning of this session, one day every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord. The Christian does it now!

Outside of the Church, *lord* is not commonly used, but in everyday language it means “boss or owner, the one who gives orders and expects to be obeyed.” When we come to Christ, we are in effect saying, “I no longer wish to be guided by Satan or by my own desires; I want to submit every thought, word, and action to you, Lord. If your command cuts across my feelings or natural inclinations, it is your command I will obey.”

“You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.” 1 Corinthians 6:19b-20

So, Jesus is our Lord, our King. We are in a Kingdom, subjects of a King who loves us and is totally dedicated to our welfare.

### DOES KING JESUS GIVE ORDERS TO HIS SUBJECTS?

Yes! It is a mistake to think there is no requirement of obedience in the New Testament. As we considered in detail when looking at the grace of God in Session 8, we are now empowered to live in a righteousness that goes beyond the Law.

“And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them **to observe** all that I have **commanded** you.’” Matthew 28:18-20a

“...not being outside the law of God but **under the law of Christ...**” 1 Corinthians 9:21

Under the Law of Moses, fear of judgment and death was the primary motivation for obedience. But now, having been justified freely by God’s grace, our motive as believers for keeping the law of Christ is love and gratitude.

“We love because he first loved us.” 1 John 4:19

### WHO IS SERVING WHOM?

An incomplete message of the gospel says, “Come to Jesus and get joy, peace, all your problems solved, prosperity, excitement, and blessing.” The authentic gospel cries out, “Come to Jesus and submit your life to Him. Give yourself as a living sacrifice and seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness” (see [Matthew 6:25-34](#)). Under the incomplete message, I am Lord and Jesus is my servant. Whereas under the authentic gospel, Jesus is Lord and I am His servant.

“...**we serve** in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.” Romans 7:6



Of course, all of the promised benefits of the incomplete message are included in the authentic gospel, but it is important to understand that they come as a result of the Lordship of Jesus in our lives. If people have heard only the incomplete message, and Jesus doesn't respond like a "genie in a bottle," they get frustrated and quit when God wants them to grow up. If we submit to Jesus and allow Him to lead us, we won't be disappointed:

**"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want."** Psalm 23:1

**"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits,"** Psalm 103:2

## PRACTICAL LORDSHIP

If Jesus is truly Lord of our lives, then every area of our life must be submitted to His will. The instant we are born again, we are new creations. However, if we are to come into our inheritance as saints, we must cooperate with the Holy Spirit in the process of gradual transformation to the likeness of Christ. This includes the putting off of things that do not pertain to righteousness and the putting on of things that do (Ephesians 4:22-24). Even though many experience dramatic release from particular patterns of sin at their conversion, there will still be areas that will require the challenge of making good, but difficult, choices if they are to mature.

Furthermore, we have an enemy who is working against us in this. Despite the fact that, at the point of our salvation, Satan lost his hold on our lives, he remains committed to inhibiting our relationship with God. He wants to render us ineffective and fruitless, particularly with regard to the mission of reaching others. As long as we are in our physical body, Satan will be looking for an opportunity to establish a stronghold in us. He is able to do this in areas where we are unwilling to yield to Christ. Whether the problem is merely our own reluctance to change or Satan's direct influence, we will refer to such areas as "Lordship issues."

We are not so much referring to occasional tripping and falling, but rather the decision to live with a recurring pattern of sin and refusing to truly repent. It is also important to understand that a Lordship issue may not necessarily be something that is obviously "bad"; it can simply be anything that we put before God and are unwilling to submit to Him. The Lordship of Christ can be challenged in any and all areas of life, including our relationships, careers, finances, time, habits, and recreation.

Let's look at some of the typical areas where many struggle with Lordship:

**MONEY & POSSESSIONS** — Jesus confronted the god of money, "mammon," more frequently than any other idol. As this is such a major potential challenge to the Lordship of Christ, we will cover it more thoroughly in a later session, but for now let's consider the following verses:

**"No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."** Matthew 6:24

**"For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs."** 1 Timothy 6:10

**ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS** — The desire and expectation of finding fulfillment in a partner can be very intense, and the enemy has had great success in manipulating the emotions of many individuals in this area. More than any other issue, this has led single men and women who were once zealous for God to abandon or compromise their faith. Failing to trust in the timing and provision of God with matters of the heart has doomed many to a tragic, fruitless existence.

**EDUCATION & CAREERS** — To study and become qualified for meaningful work is a good thing. However, God does not intend for our work to be our Lord or our life! Work is a means of productively serving Him. At times, He will challenge us to make decisions that are seemingly not the best for our careers, but are based on higher Kingdom priorities like family or church.



**SEXUAL PURITY** — Sex is given for our pleasure and fulfillment within the right context of marriage. However, we live in a culture that is saturated with sexual impurity of every kind. In [Philippians 2:15](#), we are exhorted to live a life where we “**shine as lights**” in a “**crooked and twisted generation.**”

“But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people.” [Ephesians 5:3 \(NIV 1984\)](#)

“For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality;” [1 Thessalonians 4:3](#)

**ADDICTIONS** – There are many things in life that are good and given to us by God but can become addictions through excess. For example, food, rest, and exercise are all spoken of positively in Scripture, if taken in moderation, but can become controlling factors if we let them.

However, we specifically want to address addictions to substances and practices that are harmful, even in moderation. For example, drugs such as tobacco, marijuana, opiates, etc. are used by Satan to entrap and destroy people. The pleasure of these drugs is primarily derived from the fulfilling of a self-induced craving, but the underlying effect is devastation of physical, mental, and spiritual health. The same can be said of the use of pornography, which has grown to epidemic proportions with the development of modern technology.

When we submit to the Lordship of Christ, we find a freedom and liberty that cannot be found in any other way. Consider the following verses:

“For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.” [Galatians 5:1](#)

“‘Everything is permissible for me’—but not everything is beneficial. ‘Everything is permissible for me’—but I will not be mastered by anything.” [1 Corinthians 6:12 \(NIV 1984\)](#)

## ESTABLISHING AND MAINTAINING CHRIST’S LORDSHIP IN LIFE

We must remember that our transformation is not the product of us “trying harder” but rather the renewing of our minds ([Romans 12:1-2](#)). God has done a magnificent work in us so that now we are “**more than conquerors**” ([Romans 8:37](#)). He won the battle for us before we struck a blow; He qualified us before the test began. Far from being disappointing and displeasing to God, as so many Christians feel, the truth is that we are His delight and He has fashioned us for victory:

“...he rescued me, because he delighted in me.” [Psalm 18:19](#)

“...I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” [Jeremiah 31:33](#)

“For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world.” [1 John 5:3-4a](#)

We must set out to discover, from the Scriptures and from the promptings of the Holy Spirit, what the Lord wants of us. Having found it, we must deliberately do it, regardless of how we feel. Right actions will be followed by right feelings.

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” [John 14:15](#)

## LORDSHIP AND LEADERSHIP

Every individual Christian has the means of receiving orders directly from King Jesus—through the indwelling Holy Spirit, prayer as a direct two-way communication with Him, and His written Word, the Bible.

However, the New Testament does not conceive of Christians normally living in spiritual isolation; they are part of a community of believers, the local church. Because of the widely varying degrees of spiritual maturity and experience among Christians, there is in the church a structure of delegated authority under Christ. Leaders share an element of Christ’s authority in order to lead Christians in the right ways. Compare these verses:

“Submit yourselves therefore to God.” James 4:7a

“Obey your leaders and submit to them...” Hebrews 13:17

It is the elders of the church who are given this delegated authority by the Lord. In later sessions, we will look in more detail at the subject of leadership in the church. The most important thing for us to grasp at this point is that leadership in the church is given to us by God and is always to represent His heart towards us.

The New Testament gives at least two word pictures of the kind of leadership Christ has in the Church:

### SHEPHERD

The word *leader* in Hebrews 13:17 is the same Greek word (*hegeomai*) used for Joseph as “governor” over Egypt in Acts 7:10. Joseph’s was a real rule, though exercised in the people’s interests. The word is used also of Jesus in Matthew 2:6b, where it says of Bethlehem, “for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.”

The job of the shepherd is to feed, guide, and protect. And it is interesting to bear in mind that the Eastern shepherd walks in front of the sheep, not behind. Church leaders lead people forward by example. They feed them on the nourishing food of God’s Word, guide their lives in accordance with God’s pattern, and protect them from harmful pressures and influences. Such was Paul’s advice to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:28-30.

### PARENT

“The elders **who direct** the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.” 1 Timothy 5:17 (NIV 1984)

“We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you **and are over** you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work.” 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13a

The Greek word translated by the emboldened phrases above (*proistemi*) is explained in 1 Timothy 3:4 (NIV 1984), where it is used of the elder who “**must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect.**” So, the church leader must have a parental kind of concern for the people. Accordingly, he will give commands at times:

“Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you.” Titus 2:15

The Greek word translated “**authority**” here (*epitage*) means “authoritative command.” Like Paul, the local church elder will embody the care of both a father and a nursing mother in self-sacrificial concern—exhorting, encouraging, and charging the people of God to lead a life worthy of God (1 Thessalonians 2:7-12).



## THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM

In the previous session, we marveled at the wonders of the gospel of God’s grace—and rightly so, as His grace is indeed good news. However, it is also important for us to see that the gospel is also the good news of His Kingdom. The Kingdom rule of God means ongoing freedom from sin’s consequence and control.

“Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, ‘The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, “Here it is,” or “There it is,” because the kingdom of God is within you.’” Luke 17:20-21 (NIV 1984)

Every time we determine to repent and make the right choice regarding sin, we establish the Kingdom of God internally. However, the effect of our internal transformation is anything but private.

One of the things Jesus taught us to pray was this: “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10).

The strategic plan of God has always been to have a people who are inwardly transformed to His likeness and collectively fill the entire earth with the knowledge of His glory.

“For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.”  
Habakkuk 2:14

## THE CHURCH AND THE KINGDOM

“according to the working of his [God’s] great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things 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 1:19b-23

The true Church that Jesus is building is the primary means of displaying His glory in the earth. Rather than some beaten down and defensive remnant, the Scripture depicts the Church rising to become the indomitable force that even hell cannot withstand.

“...I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Matthew 16:18

We must respond personally to the challenge of the Lordship of Christ, but what is at stake is far more than personal gain. As believers, we are members of His body, a part of His advancing Kingdom. As such, we urge you to address the Lordship issues in your life. Allow the Holy Spirit to bring conviction over things that need to be submitted to Christ, and by faith, receive God’s transforming grace.

## RECOMMENDED READING

1. *The Gospel of the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God* by George Eldon Ladd
2. *The Unshakeable Kingdom and the Unchanging Person* by E. Stanley Jones
3. *The Kingdom and the Power: Rediscovering the Centrality of the Church* by Peter Leithart
4. *The Pursuit of Holiness* by Jerry Bridges
5. *Victory Over the Darkness: Realizing the Power of Your Identity in Christ* by Neil T. Anderson







# GROWING IN GOD

“His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness... For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” 2 Peter 1:3, 5-8 (NIV 1984)

As we have seen, God has graciously given us new life and has, by His Holy Spirit, equipped and empowered us with everything we need to live it to the full for His glory. However, just as children start off doing nothing for themselves, but gradually play an increasing role in their own development, so God intends that we should be active participants in our growth as Christians.

## GROWING IN KNOWING THE LORD

When the Scripture quoted above refers to our “**knowledge**” of Jesus, it is not referring merely to “head” knowledge, but rather to experiential knowledge—actually knowing God, not just knowing about Him. This is what our life is all about:

“...this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” John 17:3

It is our privilege and responsibility to give ourselves to growing in our knowledge of God, and it is to be a life-long pursuit. Catch the heart of these two great examples:

David: “One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple. You have said, ‘Seek my face.’ My heart says to you, ‘Your face, Lord, do I seek.’” Psalm 27:4, 8

Paul: “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.” Philippians 3:10-12 (NIV 1984)

The type of passionate desire seen in David and Paul isn’t outworked through unfocused “yearnings,” but rather in an intentional lifestyle. God has given us specific means through which we can grow in our knowledge of Him, and we are going to look at some key ones in this session: **bible study, worship, prayer, and fasting.**

## GROWING THROUGH DISCIPLINE

These activities, when approached deliberately and consistently, have often been referred to as “spiritual disciplines.” This term isn’t actually found in the Bible, and for many it doesn’t evoke a positive reaction. *Discipline* can be associated with punishment, hardship, and self-deprivation. It is, therefore, not surprising that some have preferred to use other terms, such as *devotions*. There is certainly a biblical connection here, recalling the attitude of the early Church to their growth:

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” Acts 2:42 (NIV 1984)

Nevertheless, the term *discipline* is a good one to use when we understand it and consider our goal. The word comes from the Latin word *disciplina*, which means “instruction” or “tuition.” It is connected, of course, to the word *disciple*, which conveys the idea of one who follows, is trained by, or is being shaped into the likeness of another. As disciples of Jesus, we commit ourselves to following His example in, among other things, our devotion to the Word, worship, prayer, and fasting. Furthermore, we are transformed into His likeness as we engage in these activities.

## THE CHALLENGE OF DISCIPLINE

In Hebrews 12:11, we read that, “For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.” Although this Scripture is primarily addressing the type of discipline that is brought to us, the principle is the same for disciplines to which we voluntarily give ourselves. Disciplines require application even when we don’t feel like it, and they often involve some degree of self-denial.

For this reason, it is not surprising that little attention is given in the Western Church to self-discipline, which has been referred to as the “forgotten fruit of the Spirit.” Our consumer-driven culture has produced Christians who expect to be spoon-fed by their spiritual leaders, rather than taking responsibility for their own spiritual growth. This mindset is extremely detrimental to the maturing of the Church.

The emphasis nowadays on diet and exercise is good, but we should bear in mind Paul’s exhortation regarding what is more important: “train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come” (1 Timothy 4:7-8).



## A PROPER FOUNDATION

It is all too easy to approach the spiritual disciplines with wrong motivations and expectations. As with everything in our walk with God, we need a proper foundation in place in order to build and grow. This will include an ongoing revelation of grace, love, and faith:

**GRACE** — “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” [Ephesians 2:8-9](#)

Without a revelation of grace, we can find ourselves engaging in spiritual disciplines to win God’s favor, resulting in self-righteousness if we “succeed” and (more often) self-condemnation if we “fail.” Let’s remember that our right standing before God is not dependent on our performance in this or any area, but on Christ’s perfect sacrifice on the cross. Furthermore, any attempt to grow in godliness will only bear fruit if we recognize that His grace is leading us into it and enabling us to meet Him in it.

**LOVE** — “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” [Mark 12:30](#)

True love motivates us to act and to make sacrifices in the use of our time, money, and energy. Actions that otherwise would seem arduous are undertaken with joy for the sake of the one we love. Similarly, our engagement in spiritual disciplines should come from a desire to know and please God. When this is the case, the things He calls us to do will not seem burdensome ([1 John 5:3-4](#)).

**FAITH** — “And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.” [Hebrews 11:6](#)

Spiritual disciplines are not ends in themselves and will be fruitless if not approached rightly, as Jesus pointed out regarding praying and studying the Scriptures ([Matthew 6:7](#) and [John 5:39-40](#)). The right approach is one of faith. Faith is taking God at His word—hearing what He says, believing it, and acting accordingly. We do not undertake the disciplines out of duty or dull routine, but because we trust God’s promise that He will encounter us in them and transform us through them. Therefore, faith leads us to engage in spiritual disciplines, which in turn build up our faith (see [James 2:17-18, 22](#)).

## THE BIBLE—GOD’S WORD TO MAN

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” [Psalm 119:105](#)

The Bible is amazing! It was written in three different languages by some 40 Holy Spirit-inspired writers in three continents over a period of about 1600 years. It records events from creation to the late 1st century AD, and speaks prophetically of events beyond that time and still to occur. Yet there is such a striking unity of theme and purpose that only God could be its author. It is the primary means through which He reveals Himself and His purposes to us, and is vital for us if we are to grow in godliness. The Word of God not only feeds and guides us, but it also convicts, equips, and protects us (see [Hebrews 4:12](#), [2 Timothy 3:16-17](#), [Ephesians 6:17](#)).

We benefit in all these ways and more as we receive and apply God’s Word by:

**HEARING** — “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” [Romans 10:17](#)

**READING** — “Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy...” [Revelation 1:3](#)

**STUDYING** — “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.” [2 Timothy 2:15](#)



**MEMORIZING** — “I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.”

Psalm 119:11

**MEDITATING** — “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.” Joshua 1:8 (see also Psalm 1:2, 119:97)

**SPEAKING/CONFESSING** — “With my lips I declare all the rules of your mouth.” Psalm 119:13

A commitment to grow in God will require a commitment to be in His Word. Just as we need regular meals to remain physically healthy, we need to feed regularly on God’s Word to remain spiritually healthy. The occasional “snack” is not enough. And we need a balanced diet from the Bible as well, not just the parts we like most and find easy. While not essential, it is a good discipline to have a daily reading plan, for example one that takes you through the Bible in a year.

*“The great need of the hour among persons spiritually hungry is twofold: first, to know the Scriptures, the second, to be enlightened by the Spirit, apart from whom the Scriptures will not be understood.” – A.W. Tozer*

## WORSHIP

“But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” John 4:23-24

For many Christians today, “worship” is primarily thought of as the singing part of a church service. In fact, the Bible teaches that our worship is to be the laying down of our whole life for God’s glory. We are to dedicate everything we are and everything we do to Him, and consequently, every thought, word, and action can become a means of honoring and glorifying Him.

The Greek word *proskyneo*, often translated as “worship” in the Bible, conveys the idea of coming and bowing down before a superior out of respect, submission, awe, and adoration. The English word actually derives from “worth.” We worship because we recognize God as worthy, and our worship should reflect what we consider He is worth.

Another important concept to have in mind when we consider worship is that of sacrifice. The first time the word *worship* appears in Scripture is where Abraham is called to sacrifice his son, Isaac (Genesis 22:1-5), and the connection between worship and sacrifice is throughout the Scriptures, for example in Romans 12:1: “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”

These concepts should be borne in mind even when we return to the idea of worship that is expressed vocally, for example in song. Scripture does place a particular emphasis on the vocal expression of our worship, whether it be on our own (see Psalm 57:7-8 and 119:172) or with others (see 1 Corinthians 14:26 and Ephesians 5:19-20).

Our worship to God will include thanksgiving and praise for who He is, what he has done, and what He has promised to do. God gives us clear examples, and even commands in Scripture regarding how our worship should be expressed. As true worshipers, we should not allow our personality or background to determine our obedience. Let’s consider some of the main biblical expressions of worship:

**SPEAKING** — “Then my tongue shall tell of your righteousness and of your praise all the day long.”

Psalm 35:28 (see also Psalm 34:1, 40:5 & 10, 145:21)



**SINGING** — “Sing praises to the Lord, O you his saints, and give thanks to his holy name.”

Psalm 30:4 (see also Psalm 32:11, 47:6, 95:1; Isaiah 12:5-6; Colossians 3:16)

**SHOUTING** — “Shout for joy to God, all the earth; sing the glory of his name; give to him glorious praise!”

Psalm 66:1-2 (see also Psalm 27:6, 35:27, 47:1, 98:4; 2 Samuel 6:15)

**PLAYING MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS** — “Praise him with trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp! Praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with strings and pipe! Praise him with sounding cymbals; praise him with loud clashing cymbals!” Psalm 150:3-5 (see also Psalm 33:2-3, 71:22, 144:9; 2 Samuel 6:5)

**KNEELING** — “Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!”

Psalm 95:6 (see also 2 Chronicles 6:13, Luke 22:41)

**LIFTING UP HANDS** — “So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands.”

Psalm 63:4 (see also Psalm 134:2, 141:2; 1 Timothy 2:8)

**CLAPPING** — “Clap your hands, all peoples! Shout to God with loud songs of joy!”

Psalm 47:1 (see also Psalm 98:8, Isaiah 55:12)

**DANCING** — “Let Israel be glad in his Maker; let the children of Zion rejoice in their King! Let them praise his name with dancing, making melody to him with tambourine and lyre!”

Psalm 149:2-3 (see also 2 Samuel 6:14-16; Psalm 30:11, 150:4; Jeremiah 31:4, 13)

You may not feel particularly comfortable with expressing your praise, thanksgiving, and adoration in some of the above ways. Good! It’s an opportunity for you to really worship—to do something for God that costs you something, dying to yourself in a wholehearted, obedient response to Him. Great victory and extraordinary liberty come as we are set free from self-consciousness and brought into the God-consciousness of sacrificial praise and worship.

“Through him [Jesus] then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.” Hebrews 13:15

## PRAYER

“...pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests...” Ephesians 6:18 (NIV 1984)

Of all the disciplines, prayer can seem like the most familiar. We were created with an awareness of God, and even before we really knew Him, we probably all prayed at some point. However, God’s desire is for more than just our cries for divine help in times of need, and He is certainly not interested in the repetitious chanting of traditional prayers (see Isaiah 29:13). Prayer is intended to be conversation with God, a spiritual dialogue between child and Father, between loving servant and loving Lord.

### THE “WHY” AND “HOW” OF PRAYER

There are many reasons why we pray and many ways in which we can and should pray. Not surprisingly, the best instruction comes from Jesus, who said to His disciples:

“Pray then like this: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.’” Matthew 6:9-13



This is, of course, “The Lord’s Prayer.” Jesus was not confining us to these exact words, but was showing us how to pray:

“**Our Father in heaven...**” — First and foremost, prayer flows from our relationship with God. He loves it when we come to him crying, “**Abba, Father!**” (Romans 8:15), reveling in the reality that we belong to Him and that He cares for us.

“**hallowed be your name...**” — Although He is our Father, we recognize that He is also the Holy God, King of kings and Lord of lords. Prayer and worship are inextricably linked. Our prayer should include specific thanksgiving, praise, and adoration (Psalm 100:4, Philippians 4:6, Colossians 4:2, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

“**your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven...**” — Though we will have requests to bring to God, our primary desire should be to see His will done in and through our lives, and beyond us to the ends of the earth. His will is revealed to us as the Holy Spirit speaks to us through the Word—so studying the Bible is essential if we are to grow in effective prayer.

“**Give us this day our daily bread...**” — In prayer, we acknowledge our dependence on God for everything. He takes pleasure in meeting our needs and responding to our Spirit-led requests, as He has promised (see Matthew 7:7-11, 21:21-22; John 14:12-14, 15:7-8; 1 John 5:14-15). Jesus doesn’t instruct us to pray in terms of “my and me,” but rather “our and us.” Therefore, we are not just to petition God for our own needs, but also for the needs of others (see 1 Timothy 2:1, Romans 8:26-27, James 5:15-16).

“**forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors...**” — Confession of sin, repentance, and the seeking of forgiveness were part of our conversion and should, where necessary, continue to feature in our prayer life (see Psalm 32:5 and 1 John 1:9).

“**And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil**” — We pray that God will lead us into the good that He has for us (Ephesians 2:10) and away from the snares of the enemy. By prayer, we also equip ourselves to resist the attacks of Satan and to advance the Kingdom of God (see Ephesians 6:13-18, 2 Corinthians 1:8-11).

## PUTTING PRAYER INTO PRACTICE

If prayer has not been a significant part of your walk with God to this point, consider how that might change in the days ahead. Without making any rash vows that might lead you into a legalistic schedule (and possibly set you up for failure), determine how you might develop your prayer life. Many people find that it is helpful to have a particular time and place to pray (see Psalm 5:3, Mark 1:35, Matthew 14:23, Matthew 6:6 and Luke 5:16).

Remember, prayer is conversation with God, so you shouldn’t do all the talking! Ask Him to speak to you, and take the time to listen. Having heard God’s voice, be determined to obey.

## FASTING

“**But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.**” Matthew 6:17-18

Though most Christians acknowledge the importance of Bible study, worship, and prayer—and engage in these disciplines to varying extents—fasting does not receive the same recognition. However, the practice is evident all the way through the Bible. We see God directing His people to corporate fasts, and the people giving themselves to fasting at critical times. Many of the most prominent individuals in the Bible fasted, including Moses, David, Elijah, Esther, Daniel, Paul, and Jesus Himself.

Jesus didn't just say to his disciples, "if you fast," but rather, "when you fast." It is assumed that fasting will be part of the lifestyle of those who follow Him. In fact, in [Matthew 9:15](#), Jesus specifically said that His disciples would fast when He—the Bridegroom—was taken from them. So during this time, while we are waiting for the return of the Bridegroom, we are to fast.

### WHAT IS FASTING?

Fasting is deliberately abstaining from all food for spiritual purposes. In [Luke 4:2](#), we are told that Jesus "ate nothing during those [forty days of fasting]. And when they were ended, he was hungry." Since it does not say that he drank nothing or that he was thirsty, we can assume that he continued to drink water. This would be a "normal fast" (except that most fasts will not be for forty days!). Such fasting is not likely to be harmful for people in reasonably good health, and can actually have physical benefits.

[Esther 4:16](#) and [Acts 9:9](#) show instances of "absolute fasts" from all food and drink. These seem exceptional and should probably only be undertaken for short periods at the clear leading of God.

### THE PURPOSE OF FASTING

Revelation is necessary for us to engage—and continue—in any spiritual discipline, but it is probably especially important when it comes to fasting, since it can seem so unattractive as a concept and so uncomfortable as an experience! Sometimes Christians fast simply because they feel they "ought" to, or with a completely wrong motive. If our fasting is not unto God, we have missed the point.

Fasting is not a "spiritual hunger strike" by which we hope to gain God's attention or sympathy and get what we want from Him. It is not a means of proving to Him (or others) how spiritual we are and how much we are willing to suffer. It is a way in which we are able to focus wholly—including physically—on God. Fasting has been described as "praying with your body," letting the natural yearning for food remind us of our deeper yearning for God, the One who truly sustains and satisfies us.

Much revelation can come through fasting. First, it reveals a lot about us. It is easy to be content when you have everything you want, including a full stomach. When deprived of this, we can feel a lot more than just hungry! If anger, bitterness, jealousy, or frustration are within us, they will surface during fasting. However, those who want to be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ will welcome this potential for inner cleansing. David writes, "I... humbled myself with fasting" ([Psalm 35:13 - NIV 1984](#)). Whatever is revealed, healing and freedom can be found in Christ.

Also, fasting can give us greater revelation of God. At first allowing our body's natural cravings to prompt us to reach to God, then gradually finding ourselves freed from those distractions to focus fully on Him, we can enjoy a wonderful season of intimacy, clarity, and breakthrough. Like Anna the prophet ([Luke 2:37](#)) and the apostolic company of Antioch ([Acts 13:2](#)), our fasting should be an aspect of our worship of God.

"HIS DIVINE POWER HAS GIVEN US EVERYTHING WE NEED FOR LIFE AND GODLINESS THROUGH OUR KNOWLEDGE OF HIM WHO CALLED US BY HIS OWN GLORY AND GOODNESS."

2 Peter 1:3 (NIV 1984)



## VISION FOR GROWTH

“...he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 1:6 (NIV 1984)

In His commitment to our maturity, God has graciously given us the spiritual disciplines as channels through which we can know Him, and the Holy Spirit can apply His transforming power to our lives. Let us determine to gratefully embrace these wonderful gifts for His glory.

### RECOMMENDED READING:

1. *The Spirit of the Disciplines* by Dallas Willard
2. *Celebration of Discipline* by Richard J. Foster
3. *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* by Gordon D. Fee & Douglas Stuart
4. *Exploring Worship* by Bob Sorge
5. *With Christ in the School of Prayer* by Andrew Murray
6. *A Hunger for God* by John Piper
7. *God's Chosen Fast* by Arthur Wallace







# THE CHURCH

“His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Ephesians 3:10-11 (NIV 1984)

So far, we have focused primarily on our individual Christian experience and our personal foundations as believers. In the remaining sessions, we will concentrate on the bigger picture of God’s corporate purpose for His people—the Church.

## WHAT IS “CHURCH”?

1 Corinthians 12:13 says, “in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.” That “one body” is what we now call *church*.

The English word *church* comes from the Old English and German word *kirche*. This word has its origin in the Greek word *kuriakos*, which means “pertaining or belonging to the Lord.” Perhaps surprisingly, it is used only twice in the New Testament, but on these occasions it is not translated in our English Bibles as *church*. In 1 Corinthians 11:20, it is used to refer to “the Lord’s supper,” and in Revelation 1:10, it is used to refer to “the Lord’s day.”

The Greek word translated as *church* in our English Bibles is *ekklesia*. This word comes from the combination of two Greek words, *ek* meaning “out” and *kaleo* meaning “to call.” It could, therefore, be thought of as literally meaning “called-out (ones).” It was not a religious word, but would have been used either to refer to a group of people summoned together for a particular purpose, or more generally to any gathering of people. It is used in Acts 19 to refer to both a mass assembly of citizens (verses 32 and 41) and a legal assembly that could settle a dispute (verse 39). However, of the 115 times that *ekklesia* appears in the New Testament, those are the only three times that it does not specifically refer to the people of God, and where it is not translated in most English versions of the Bible as *church*.

So why, in our Bibles, has the word *church* rather than, say, *assembly*, been chosen for *ekklesia*? The phrases *ekklesia kuriake*, meaning “assembly of the Lord,” and *oikos kuriake*, meaning “house of the Lord,” were commonly used by the post-New Testament Church. The emphasis was on *kuriake*—that which distinguished the people from just any assembly, and the building from just any house. By the time the Scriptures were being translated into English, *church* had similarly become established as the name given to those who assembled in the name of the Lord, and to the buildings in which they met. Subsequently most translators decided that *church* was an acceptable substitute for *ekklesia* where it was clearly referring to the people of God.

Though *church* can mean different things to different people today, our understanding must line up with what Jesus would no doubt have had in mind when he chose the word *ekklesia* (Matthew 16:18). For example, *ekklesia* could never be sensibly used for a religious building, as by definition it refers to people. Neither could His *ekklesia* have been a mixture of believers and non-believers, as His use of the word could only refer to those who are “elected” and “called out,” both being terms that apply to believers only (2 Peter 1:10). This is an important point that we should consider further.

## A SET-APART PEOPLE

God’s purpose has always been to have a chosen, set-apart people. All through the Old Testament, He emphasizes the importance of His people being distinct from those around them, so as to avoid corruption and in order to be clearly seen as different from those who do not belong to Him. He gave commands that would distinguish them and warned them against adopting the ways of other nations, inter-marriage with them, and so on. He even gave commands prohibiting the combination of certain ingredients in food and materials in clothing, as ongoing reminders of His abhorrence of mixture.

This principle continues with the Church. We are a people who have been chosen and “called out” by God to belong to Him and bear testimony to Him in the world (see, for example, 1 Peter 2:9). In the New Testament, Christians are often referred to as *saints*, translating the Greek word *hagios*, meaning “those who have been set apart and consecrated as holy” (so all true Christians are saints, contrary to the way that certain denominations have interpreted the word).

Therefore, a *church*, which is an unashamed mixture of Christians and unbelievers, is a contradiction in terms, just as one could not properly use the term *flock* to describe a mixed group of sheep and cows. Historically, where *church* has become a mixture of saved and unsaved, dilution and corruption have resulted, and the testimony and work of God have suffered greatly. This has been the case where, for example, Christianity has become the national religion and where church membership has been a product of citizenship, culture, or family, rather than authentic conversion.

## PURITY AND CLARITY

Of course, non-Christians should be welcome as visitors to the assembly of the saints, but they should not be allowed to fall into the delusion that they are Christians by virtue of association and mental assent. Quite apart from the potential negative effects on the Church, we do these visitors a terrible wrong if it is not clear to them that, unless they are born again, they are not, and indeed can not be, part of the *ekklesia*.

In recent times, some evangelical churches have gone to great lengths to accommodate unbelieving visitors and to make them feel comfortable. This philosophy regarding the so called “unchurched” (a term which confusingly focuses on whether people have “attended church,” rather than on whether or not they have been “called out” and saved) has often not resulted in clear and radical conversions to Christ. Instead it has been another means of producing the confusing mixture of saved and unsaved, genuine believers and mere churchgoers.



Because in these churches “success” inevitably becomes primarily measured by numbers, the subsequent pressure to “give the people what they want” is very intense. Tragically, while the unsaved are made to feel most at home in the meetings of the church, the Holy Spirit is often ignored or even “shut out” from what should be *His* home. This happens as gifts and manifestations of the Holy Spirit are discouraged for risk of offending the unbeliever!

Perhaps a more literal translation of *ekklesia* may have proved helpful in maintaining the purity and testimony of the Church over the years. However, if we are to continue using the word *church*, it is very important that we hold to the original meaning of *ekklesia* as we consider its use in Scripture.

## THE CHURCH IN SCRIPTURE

The Bible presents two views of the church:

### 1. THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

“And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Matthew 16:18

In scriptures such as this, *church* is being used in a universal sense. The “universal Church” (also known as the “invisible Church”) is all born-again people—past, present and future. Many have died and are already in heaven (Ephesians 3:14-15). Those on earth will be in a host of different locations, conditions and denominations. However, because they are all born again, they are spoken of collectively as the one true Church, the redeemed community.

### 2. THE LOCAL CHURCH

“Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.” Acts 14:23 (NIV 1984)

In scriptures such as this, *church* refers to a group of Christians living in the same locality who are joined in intentional, committed fellowship under properly established leadership:

“This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you—” Titus 1:5

The letters written by the apostles addressed and defined the church in any given location as all those who were genuine believers. Originally, the local church in each city or area was one, as the following verses indicate:

“To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:”

1 Corinthians 1:2

“Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:”

1 Thessalonians 1:1

“Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons:” Philippians 1:1

So scriptures such as these again confirm that there is no notion in the writings of the New Testament of Church being a mixture of believers and unbelievers. Neither does the concept of denominations fit into the biblical picture.



## THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH

“I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. For it has been reported to me by Chloe’s people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. What I mean is that each one of you says, ‘I follow Paul,’ or ‘I follow Apollos,’ or ‘I follow Cephas,’ or ‘I follow Christ.’ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?” [1 Corinthians 1:10-13](#)

There is no support in the Bible for the Church being legitimately divided over relational or doctrinal disagreements. In fact, the entire weight of Scripture emphasizes the central significance of unity. Although joinings to specific apostles were evident, Paul clarified that this would not be grounds for denominationalism, which he would have described as a dividing of the body of Christ.

Over the centuries, the body of Christ has been broken, fragmented and “denominationalized” so that in every town and city today there are many local churches, all with different labels. Ultimately, the unity of all God’s people must become more than just theological truth. It must also be a manifest reality. Jesus prayed for this in [John 17](#) and His prayer is guaranteed its answer:

“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.” [John 17:20-23](#)

Because of our histories and backgrounds, for some of us it may be hard to grasp the beautiful simplicity of the Bible’s view of the Church. But we must work at reshaping our concepts.

The twin culprits responsible for the grossly fractured Church are the neglect of the Holy Spirit and the neglect of the Word of God. But, as dire as the overall state of the Church might be, we are living in days of restoration. Throughout the world, Christians are submitting afresh to the infilling, leading, and gifts of the Holy Spirit. Combined with this, the Bible is once again triumphing over tradition, false teaching, and misleading experiences. There is a renewed confidence in the authority of Scripture and the wisdom of God regarding how we are to co-labor with Him in the building of His Church. We must be faithful to the structural principles God has given to us in His Word if we are to experience the miracle of true unity.

## GOD’S STRATEGY FOR UNITY

“As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” [Ephesians 4:1-6 \(NIV 1984\)](#)

It is wonderful to know that the unity of the Spirit has been given to all believers. We do not need to work at achieving it, but are simply instructed to maintain it. The vital components for the outworking of unity are revelation and right response. We must first have a revelation of the oneness that has been won for us in Christ. Secondly, we must respond with an attitude that demonstrates the fruit of the Spirit.

However, in addition to the unity of the Spirit, there is a further unity God requires for His children—unity in the faith. To attain this unity, we require the assistance of divinely-empowered individuals. These too, God has provided for us:

“But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Therefore it says, ‘When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.’ (In saying, ‘He ascended,’ what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,” [Ephesians 4:7-13](#)

God’s strategic plan was to demonstrate His wisdom by pouring out His Spirit on the Church and seeding it with these gifted individuals, who would in turn equip, unify and bring her to maturity in readiness for His triumphant return. In the next four sessions, we will explore these gifted ministries in detail.

## GOD’S STRATEGY FOR MATURING THE CHURCH

When we are born again, it is as spiritual infants. We are born of the Spirit with, as it were, the DNA of Christ within us. The analogy of a baby craving milk and then moving on to solid food is precisely the language Scripture uses in reference to the Word of God in our spiritual development. However, as critical as the disciplines are to our spiritual growth, Scripture makes clear that it is not by them alone that we are able to be thoroughly transformed into His likeness. It is, in fact, the ministry of the apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, and teacher—functioning in unison—that will bring the entire Church to full Christ-likeness.

“...we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.” [1 John 3:2](#)

It is vitally important for us to realize that it is Jesus Himself that is the ultimate Apostle ([Hebrews 3:1](#)), Prophet ([Hebrews 1:1-3](#)), Evangelist ([Luke 4:18](#)), Shepherd ([Psalm 23](#)) and Teacher ([Mark 9:5](#)). In fact, these ministries are actually nothing more than expressions of who He is. He has now imparted these characteristics as gifts to individuals so that they might give themselves to the Church to help shape and equip God’s people in the process of being transformed into His likeness.

God’s intention is not simply for these ministries to be present and functioning, but rather for them to have completed their task, resulting in the entire Body becoming apostolic, prophetic, evangelistic, and able to teach and shepherd—in other words, to be just like Jesus!

## THE RETURN OF JESUS CHRIST

It is important for us to bear in mind that the perfecting of the Church is leading to a glorious goal. The ultimate objective of the united, mature, Christ-like Church is the return of the Bridegroom, Jesus Christ.

“Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready;” [Revelation 19:7](#)

One of the evidently distinguishing features of the first century Church, compared to much of the modern Church, was its anticipation and longing for the return of Jesus. This must be restored to the generation that will have the privilege of greeting the coming King.

“The Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come’... He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming soon.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!” [Revelation 22:17, 20](#)





# APOSTLES TODAY

“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,” [Ephesians 4:11-13](#)

When considering those who lead and serve in the Church, people may be familiar with titles such as priest, vicar, reverend, bishop, minister, and pastor. However, many of the titles used cannot be found in the Bible, or have been used in a way that is inconsistent with their original meaning. At the same time, certain biblical ministries seem absent or are ignored. In this and the next three sessions, we are going to look at specific roles of leadership and service that God has ordained for His Church. We will begin with those listed in the above passage, focusing in this session on apostles.

## WHAT IS AN APOSTLE?

Unlike titles such as priest or prophet, which have a rich heritage in the Old Testament, *apostle* first appears in our Bibles in the New Testament and was introduced by Jesus Himself.

The English word *apostle* comes from the Greek word *apostolos*, which literally means “one who is sent or dispatched.” By New Testament times, however, *apostolos* had come to be used by Greeks and Romans to refer to specially commissioned leaders who were sent out to advance their empires. These *apostles* were typically proven generals or admirals, and were given power and authority to pioneer into new territories, transforming the culture as they went.

Similar to what we have seen with the Greek words *baptizo* and *ekklesia*, Jesus deliberately took this familiar word, with everything it already conveyed of authority, commissioning, and kingdom advancement, and gave it new application and significance. We will benefit by keeping its original meaning and use in mind as we now consider the nature and role of apostles in the Church.

## APOSTLES IN THE BIBLE

The word *apostle(s)* is used 81 times in the New Testament, in each case referring to an individual(s) chosen, authorized, and sent out to accomplish a specific mission. We can, however, identify at least three “categories” of apostle referred to in Scripture:

First and foremost, **the Lord Jesus Christ**. He is the ultimate “sent one,” and as we saw in the last session, He is the “**apostle and high priest of our confession**” (Hebrews 3:1).

Secondly, the twelve apostles in the Gospels. As mentioned earlier, it is from Jesus that we first hear the word *apostle* in the New Testament, as the designation He gave to those He specifically selected to be with Him and to be sent out by Him (Mark 3:14). The Twelve (Judas Iscariot having been replaced by Matthias: see Acts 1:26) are referred to in Revelation 21:14 as the “**twelve apostles of the Lamb**.” They were clearly unique, and their role as witnesses of the events in Christ’s earthly ministry was of particular significance (Acts 1:21-22).

Thirdly, the apostles given by the risen Christ. Having chosen and sent out the twelve apostles, the Lord subsequently gave other apostles to His Church after His resurrection and ascension. These are obviously the apostles referred to in Ephesians 4.

Of course, the most prominent New Testament apostle, Paul, comes within this category. Other apostles mentioned in the New Testament are James, the brother of Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:7, Galatians 1:19), Barnabas (Acts 14:14), Apollos (1 Corinthians 4:6, 9), Silvanus/Silas (in the “**we**” of 1 Thessalonians 2:6), and Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:25). Note also the general reference to the “**apostles of the churches**” in 2 Corinthians 8:23 (NIV 1984). Paul’s condemnation in 2 Corinthians 11:13 of “**false apostles**” shows that the Church must have accepted that there were many apostles beyond the Twelve, otherwise no one would have been able to pretend to be one. Similarly, in Revelation 2:2, the church in Ephesus is commended for testing those who claimed to be apostles but were not. If there could be no legitimate claim to apostleship beyond the Twelve, what testing would there need to be?

This “category” of apostles continues to the present day. The Scriptures are clear that apostles (along with prophets and the more traditionally accepted ministries of evangelists, pastors and teachers) are to function “**until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ**” (Ephesians 4:13). Unless we believe this is an accurate description of the state of the Church today, we need apostles now.

## APOSTLES TODAY

During the first 100 years of the Church (known as the Apostolic Period), apostles were widely recognized and received, and functioned effectively. However, the increasing institutionalization of the Church contributed both to it drifting farther and farther away from true apostolic ministry, and to the distortion of the very concept of the apostle. It ceased to be a term that could be applied to ordinary men with a practical and necessary ministry in the Church, but instead took on a mystical aura.

Therefore, from the first century until relatively recently, though God still graced certain individuals with clear apostolic gifting (for example Martin Luther, John Wesley, William Booth, and Watchman Nee), few were actually called apostles in their day. Thankfully, we are living at a time when the reality of and necessity for apostolic ministry is increasingly being recognized and can, therefore, have its full, intended effect in the Church. The growing acceptability of apostles has led to some churches just attaching themselves to an “apostolic network,” or having a “token apostle” who has little involvement in the local church, or to whom the church pays mere “lip-service.” In situations like this, the absence of real apostolic involvement often proves to be the root of many of the problems they face. If we are to take the Scriptures seriously, we must realize that we simply will not be unified, or brought to maturity, without true, functioning apostles.

## THE GIFTING AND CALLING OF APOSTLES

Unlike the other Ephesians 4 ministries, the function of the apostle is not obvious from the name. Prophets become recognized as such by their prophesying, evangelists by evangelizing, teachers by teaching, and pastors by shepherding. There isn't an equivalent verb for the apostle. How, then, can we recognize true apostles, and what do they do?

### APOSTLES ARE PIONEERS

“While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.” Acts 13:2-3

When considering apostles, we should keep in mind the simple core meaning of the word: an apostle is “one who is sent”—sent by God to pioneer new territory for His Kingdom. Apostles are initiators, often sparking off new projects, breaking ground with the gospel, and planting new churches. One of the characteristics of an apostle is the ability to function to a significant degree in all of the other Ephesians 4 gifts, i.e. prophecy, evangelism, teaching, and shepherding. This is essential, particularly in the formative stages of a newly-planted church, when other ministries are not yet in place and the apostle must supply what is lacking.

The Western church is primarily built on pastoral ministry, and can, therefore, tend to become inward-looking. However, churches built on an apostolic foundation, with the regular inspiration of the apostle's involvement, will usually be far more missional by nature. As networks of churches grow, there is a danger that the apostle can merely become (or be seen as) the head of an institution. Although apostles play a very important role in bringing care and maintenance to the people of God, they should remain passionately given to expansion and always ready to be “sent.”

### APOSTLES LAY FOUNDATIONS

“...you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,” Ephesians 2:19-20

Nothing determines what can be built more than the foundation. To build well requires not just a plan or blueprint, but also an architect's visionary skill and experience. The spiritual landscape today is littered with churches that have been started by individuals who have “desire without knowledge” (Proverbs 19:2), passion but not sight. Sadly, the result is invariably frustration and injury both for them and for those in their care.

Apostles bring the necessary insight, skill, and experience to the building of the Church, in accordance with the blueprint we have in Scripture. Apostles and prophets are often together known as **foundation ministries**, because their visionary interaction and impartation lays the foundation for local church life (see Ephesians 3:2-5).

In Acts 9, we read of Paul's dramatic encounter with Jesus and his consequent conversion. Blinded by a heavenly light, he was made to realize that, in persecuting the Church, he was persecuting Jesus. His natural sight was restored three days later, but more importantly he went on to receive extraordinary vision and insight into the heavenly realms and God's intention for the Church. A defining moment for Peter in his apostolic calling was his God-given revelation of Jesus as “the Christ, the Son of the Living God” and it was on the basis of this revelation that Jesus said His Church would be built (Matthew 16:13-18). Apostles carry a major significance in church-planting and leadership because of their ability to understand Church in the context of the overall plan of God, and to see what the Church should look like if it is to manifest Christ. They can see the overall “shape” of a church situation and have the God-given authority, wisdom, and gifting to do what is necessary to help it.



## APOSTLES ARE GIFTED BUILDERS

“According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it.” 1 Corinthians 3:10

Although we have used the term *architect* to highlight an aspect of the apostle’s role, it could misrepresent the true nature of his labor. When Paul describes himself as “a skilled master builder,” it conveys the “hands-on,” rather than merely advisory, nature of his apostolic work.

Of course, with all these building analogies, we must not forget that the apostle is working with “living stones”—people (1 Peter 2:5). Subsequently, the masterful dynamic of true apostolic gifting is often evidenced most in the ability to envision, inspire, and win the hearts of others.

Also, God’s equipping of apostles is not limited to the other Ephesians 4 giftings already mentioned. It may range from moving in signs and wonders to discerning and dealing with issues that threaten to hinder the building work. Apostolic intervention might bring to light a sin issue that has festered under the surface and jeopardized a church. Sometimes apostolic involvement will be a forerunner to a significant move of the Holy Spirit, encouraging the people and bringing a fresh dynamic to the work. In these and many other ways, apostles tend to be agents of change and development for churches.

## APOSTLES ARE TEAM LEADERS

“I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now,” Philippians 1:3-5 (NIV 1984)

The apostolic heart is to work in team, and apostles are able to draw leaders and other gifted ministries into effective working relationships. As noted above, apostles tend to be able to move in all of the other Ephesians 4 gifts, and this allows them to identify, connect with, encourage, and inspire these ministries. Apostles will typically work alongside such men and women, and will send them at times to work with other individuals and churches.

Rather than being hierarchical, these partnerships are built on mutual love and respect, and the recognition of the joining of God. For example, though Paul clearly carried authority within his apostolic sphere, he spoke of those joined to him as “fellow servants,” “fellow prisoners” (literally, “co-fighters”) and “fellow workers” (Colossians 4:7-11). He was clearly committed to them, expressing love, concern, and appreciation for them. In return, they responded in loving and enthusiastic service, submitting their gifts and their very lives for the accomplishing of the apostolic mission. Far from being crushed or limited when working with apostles, many leaders find that they become clearer as to their identity and purpose, and experience a wonderful expansion and fruitfulness in their ministry.

Though called to work closely with others, an apostle must be completely given to God’s agenda. There is no room for personal ambition or politics in the apostle or his team. He must be free from attempts to influence and control him through, for example, flattery or criticism. He must be secure in his calling and able to exercise discernment, grace, and patience as he interacts with many different gifts and personalities. If apostles function in this way, they will become secure hubs from which the other ministries will draw great strength, encouragement, and fulfillment. In turn, the entire Church will grow in its revelation of unity and its development to maturity.

## APOSTLES REPRESENT GOD’S PARENTAL HEART

“For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. I urge you, then, be imitators of me.” 1 Corinthians 4:15-16



It is not just about gifting. Many passages of Scripture, including the one above and the following ones, give us wonderful insights into the heart of the apostolic ministry:

“...though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us. For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. For you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.” [1 Thessalonians 2:6-12](#)

“Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears.” [Acts 20:31](#)

No matter how gifted a person might be, we must keep in mind the heart the apostle should have if he is to care effectively for a church—the heart of a loving father and nursing mother. Apostolic ministry has been misrepresented and given a bad name by those who have behaved like company CEOs, or operated in an unapproachable, authoritarian style. This is the opposite of the humble, servant-hearted expression we see in Scripture—and could indicate that the men in question are false apostles! True apostles recognize that they are servants of Christ and that they must prove faithful with that which has been entrusted to them (see [1 Corinthians 4:1-2](#)).

*“An apostle does not just set up an empire of churches over which he reigns and from which he receives glory and honour. Instead the charge of all the local churches that God gives him becomes a gut-wrenching, intensely emotional, heartfelt, passionate ministry of life to precious souls! It is an awesome responsibility. It is not an arms-length transaction. The apostle must feel the very heartbeat, the pulse of the church, and be in touch with the lives of its people.” — Dick Iverson*

## APOSTLES GOVERN AND BRING ACCOUNTABILITY

While apostolic ministry is expressed at times in tender encouragement and advice, that only reflects one aspect of the parental role. It is also evident from Scripture that apostles bring government and direction into the affairs of the local church. As well as exhorting and comforting the elders and churches, Paul was not averse, when necessary, to instructing, admonishing, and commanding:

“...each one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches.” [1 Corinthians 7:17 \(NIV 1984\)](#) (see also [2 Thessalonians 3:10](#))

The government that apostles are to bring to churches goes, of course, to the very foundation. Ideally, apostles should be involved in the birthing of churches and in the initial establishing of leaders within them. One of the growing, biblical trends in the Church these days is the shift from a one-man leadership model to that of a plurality of elders. However, what is often ignored is the fact that biblical eldership was built on biblical apostles. Local elders were not the product of a democratic church vote, but were appointed by or at the direction of apostles:

“And when they [Paul and Barnabas] had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.” [Acts 14:23](#)

“This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you—” [Titus 1:5](#)

Apostolic involvement did not end there. It is clear in the New Testament that the apostles continued to bring instruction, direction, warning, and correction to the elders and deacons of the churches, not just through their written communications, but by taking every opportunity to meet with them:

“As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey.” Acts 16:4 (NIV 1984)

“Now from Miletus he [Paul] sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him.” Acts 20:17

Though all Ephesians 4 ministries are God’s gifts to the entire Church (see 1 Corinthians 3:21-22), and in a very real sense are the blessing of God to all who will receive them, this does not mean that every apostle can or should seek to carry government into every church. The apostle Paul recognized this:

“If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you, for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.” 1 Corinthians 9:2

“But we will not boast beyond our measure, but within the measure of the sphere which God apportioned to us as a measure, to reach even as far as you. For we are not overextending ourselves, as if we did not reach to you, for we were the first to come even as far as you in the gospel of Christ; not boasting beyond our measure, that is, in other men’s labors, but with the hope that as your faith grows, we will be, within our sphere, enlarged even more by you, so as to preach the gospel even to the regions beyond you, and not to boast in what has been accomplished in the sphere of another.” 2 Corinthians 10:13-16 (NASB)

## WORKING WITH APOSTLES

The governmental authority that apostles bring is critical for a church’s protection and development. However, it only works in the context of voluntary submission and loving relationship—which is the only context in which a true apostle would want to work. The following scripture shows us how apostolic authority should be received in the local church:

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” Acts 2:42 (NIV 1984)

Sadly, in this as in many areas of life, past experience has left many damaged or disillusioned, either by harsh and excessive authority, neglect, or the facade of “nominal” apostleship. However, we must not let these wrongs rob us of authentic apostolic leadership, which God has designed to be an indispensable blessing to the Church. When someone has truly received revelation of this highly significant and foundational ministry, it becomes far more than a mere style of church leadership. It becomes one of the most critical issues to be considered in joining a local church.

“ACCORDING TO THE GRACE OF GOD GIVEN TO ME, LIKE A SKILLED MASTER BUILDER I LAID A FOUNDATION...”

1 Corinthians 3:10



## “LORD, RAISE UP APOSTLES!”

Having understood just how important apostles are for the unity and maturity of the Church, the obvious question many have is, “How does someone become an apostle?”

As with all Ephesians 4 ministries, it is the risen Christ who gives apostles to the Church. Only God can call and equip someone for apostleship. They appear to be trained, to a large extent, in the challenges of life, often undergoing many hardships and disappointments as they are shaped to function in the sufficiency of God’s grace. Far from the glamorous notion some might have of apostleship, theirs is not an easy road, as Paul plainly points out:

“For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men.”

1 Corinthians 4:9 (NIV 1984)

However, for the true apostle, success is measured in just one way—simple obedience to God. For our part, we must pray that God will continue to raise up apostles who, like Paul, will give themselves unreservedly so that a glorious Church might be built upon a firm foundation, ready for and worthy of the return of King Jesus:

“For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.” 2 Timothy 4:6-8

## SUGGESTED READING

1. “A Review of Biblical Evidence for Present Day Apostolic Ministry and Authority” by Stuart Cathrow (available for download at [www.teaching.onechurchministries.com](http://www.teaching.onechurchministries.com))
2. *Apostles Today* by David Matthew
3. *Does the Future Have a Church?* by Terry Virgo



# PROPHETS AND PROPHECY

“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,” [Ephesians 4:11-13](#)

In the last session, we looked at apostles as the first and most foundational ministry to the Church. In this session, we will continue by looking at prophets, the next ministry listed in [Ephesians 4](#). We will consider the invaluable role they, and the gift of prophecy, have in God’s great plan for His people.

## WHAT ARE PROPHETS?

“For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” [2 Peter 1:21](#)

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word translated “prophet” is *navi*. Its root meaning was “openness,” but generally it meant “spokesperson.” In [Deuteronomy 18:18](#), we have perhaps the fullest description of God’s intention for its use when He says to Moses, in reference to the coming of Christ, “I will raise up for them a prophet [*navi*] like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.” Thus, the *navi* was thought of as the “mouth” of God. In the New Testament, the Greek word *prophetes* carries the same sense, basically meaning one who makes declarations, but more particularly referring to those who interpreted and conveyed divine communications.

Prophets are individuals whom God specifically calls to communicate His heart and mind. They see through the natural, visible realm and into the spiritual and eternal. In a word, they are people of vision. In fact, in the Old Testament, prophets were sometimes referred to as *seers*.

## PROPHETS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Prophetic ministry is evident throughout the Old Testament, and played an essential role in God’s relationship with His people, individually and corporately. However, prophecy was not just for the people of Israel, and was often directed to Gentile nations and individuals.

God called prophets (male and female) from a variety of backgrounds. Some were highly educated, like Moses, Daniel, and Isaiah, and some were priests, such as Ezekiel and Jeremiah, while others came from a rural background, like Amos (a herdsman) and Elisha (a plowman). Abraham, called “the father of the faithful,” was the first person referred to as a prophet in Scripture (Genesis 20:7). In Hebrews 11:10, we are told that “**he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.**” He began his journey with prophetic vision, and went on to receive promises from God of which we are both a fulfillment and the inheritors. Moses, the great shepherd of God’s people, was also tremendously significant as a prophet, “**testifying to what would be said in the future**” (Hebrews 3:5 - NIV 1984).

All of the judges who led Israel were prophetic, and some were specifically identified as prophets, including Deborah, Eli, and Samuel. With the establishing of Israel’s monarchy, the role of prophets did not diminish but in fact increased. As kings both good and bad came and went, it was the prophetic ministry of men like Samuel, Nathan, Elijah, and Elisha that primarily directed them when their leadership was righteous, and rebuked and judged them when it was not.

Whether plainly setting out the next step to be taken, as the minor prophets Joel and Haggai did, or prophetically painting a magnificent visionary landscape, as Isaiah and Jeremiah did, God consistently used prophets to reveal His unfolding purpose. Furthermore, we have wonderful and at times baffling glimpses of future events through the prophecies of men like Daniel and Ezekiel.

Prophets were frequently given glimpses into the wider intention of God for His people. Moses at one point spontaneously expressed God’s heart by saying, “**I wish that all the Lord’s people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!**” (Numbers 11:29 - NIV 1984). This outpouring of the Holy Spirit would come through the ministry of Jesus.

## THE ULTIMATE PROPHET—JESUS CHRIST

“**Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power...**” Hebrews 1:1-3

The New Testament opens with John the Baptist, the prophetic preparer of the way for the ultimate prophet, Jesus—the Word made flesh and the exact imprint of His nature. However, far from closing the prophetic chapter, He came to usher in a whole new prophetic era. He went to be with the Father so that the Holy Spirit might be sent to equip God’s people prophetically. In Acts 2, when Peter explains the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, he emphasizes that the consequent prophetic gifting is the fulfillment of the promise spoken through Joel:

“**And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.**” Acts 2:17-18 (see also Joel 2:28-32)

## PROPHETS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Though people tend to think of prophets in the context of the Old Testament, they were clearly prominent in the early Church. [Acts 13:1](#) tells us that there were prophets in the church in Antioch. In [Acts 15:32](#), Judas and Silas are identified as prophets, and in [Acts 11:26-28](#), Agabus (who appears again in [Acts 21:10-11](#)) is named as being among “prophets” who came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. In [Acts 21:9](#), we read that Philip had “four unmarried daughters, who prophesied.” Paul, in [1 Corinthians 12](#) and [Ephesians 3 and 4](#), affirms the existence of the office of prophet. In [1 Corinthians 11 and 14](#), he gives instructions as to how prophets are to function. Of course, in the book of Revelation, John shows himself to be a worthy New Testament successor to his prophetic forefathers Daniel and Ezekiel, with the visions he saw and conveyed.

## PROPHETS TODAY

While accepting the existence of prophets in New Testament times, some are reluctant to acknowledge modern day prophets. As we were reminded in the last session, the risen and ascended Christ gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers until the Church comes to unity, maturity, and the full measure of Christ ([Ephesians 4:11-14](#)). Since that process is still going on, prophets, along with all the other Ephesians 4 ministries, are still with us.

## PROPHETIC TRAITS

Consistent with the biblical pattern, it appears that God still calls prophets from a wide variety of backgrounds, life experiences, and personality types. However, there are certain things that many prophetically gifted people often seem to have in common, for example:

**PAST EXPERIENCE** — They have usually known extreme highs and lows, often resulting from unusual life events. Extraordinary trials, such as physical and emotional suffering, tragic loss, rejection, and disappointment, might have led to seasons of disillusionment, but also resulted in intimate and empowering encounters with God. He equips them through all of this to communicate to others the height and depth of His heart.

**PERCEPTION** — Of course, they see things differently to most people, not being as prone to distraction or influence by “natural” or “logical” thoughts. However, prophetic people can tend to think that what they perceive must be obvious to everyone, as it is so clear to them ([2 Kings 6:15-17](#)). At times, they see the big picture but are unable to know the practical outworking of it. Alternatively, sometimes they focus in on one issue without seeing how that fits in a broader context:

“For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away... For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.” [1 Corinthians 13:9-10, 12](#)

**PASSION** — Although prophets do not see everything, they tend to be very passionate about what they do see. They are driven to convey that which God has shown them, unashamedly bringing the same message again and again if necessary. In their uncompromising commitment, their very lives often become an embodiment of the things that God reveals to them.

Prophets do not always find it easy to relate to others, even in the Church. Their experiences, insight, and zeal set them apart. They can feel—and communicate—frustration when people do not see and respond to what they are seeing. Seemingly impractical and awkward to work with at times, many prophets have been misunderstood and poorly handled by the Church. They can, therefore, be tempted to choose a path of separation and isolation. However, this is not only a great loss to the Church, but a grave mistake for them. They desperately need to be in fellowship to receive the care and leadership they require for their development, and in order to persevere in the outworking of their gift.

## THE ROLE OF THE PROPHET

“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,” [Ephesians 2:19-20](#)

Here, Paul makes clear that prophets work alongside apostles as foundational ministries in the building of the Church. While not sharing the governmental role of apostles, prophets are pivotal in providing direction, strategic insight, and motivation to the local churches and the apostolic work. The voice of God spoken through the prophet is essential in shaping all that is built.

This, of course, requires that prophets are themselves joined to and working with apostles. Only in this context will they find the balance and perspective they need, and be able to outwork their gifting to the fullest and most fruitful extent. Prophets need more than mere tolerance, or even respect. They need the loving care, understanding, correction, and guidance that the other Ephesians 4 ministries can bring. In the context of such relationships, they will know great blessing and protection from many dangers.

As well as their foundational role, they also play a vital role in equipping the saints for the building up of the Body of Christ. It is perhaps significant that in [Ephesians 4:11](#) (and indeed [1 Corinthians 12:28](#)) prophets are listed next after apostles. When considering how God’s people are to be prepared “for the work of ministry,” we must remember that God desires a prophetic people who see and hear Him, are attuned to His thoughts and feelings, and who act accordingly. It is principally through the provoking, inspiring, and envisioning ministry of prophets that God produces such a people.

## RESPONDING TO PROPHETS

“Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies,” [1 Thessalonians 5:19-20](#)

Even those who accept the concept of prophets and prophecy today can still fail to respond properly in practice. As already noted, prophets are not always the easiest people to relate to, and sometimes the words they bring—and even the way they bring them—can be challenging, confusing, and even upsetting. Also, prophets often experience rejection by those closest to them, on the principle that “familiarity breeds contempt.” Even Jesus encountered this problem, and said, “A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household” ([Mark 6:4](#)). We must not be dismissive of prophets, or the words they bring, simply because we have preconceptions regarding who they are and the extent to which we think God can use them:

“The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward...” [Matthew 10:41](#)

There is something very specific that we receive when we recognize and accept a gift ministry according to the call of God upon their lives. In the case of the prophet, we receive “a prophet’s reward,” which we might reasonably assume to be the word of God, as that is what the prophet longs for and receives.



## BECOMING PROPHETIC

“Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, **especially the gift of prophecy**... everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their **strengthening, encouragement and comfort**... he who prophesies edifies the church. I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. He who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may be edified.”  
1 Corinthians 14:1, 3, 4b-5 (NIV 1984)

Having briefly considered prophets themselves, and understanding that part of their ministry is to equip the entire Church to develop as prophetic people, we will now take a closer look at the gift of prophecy itself and how we can all grow in it.

**EAGERLY DESIRE** — First, we must recognize that, although not all of us are called to be prophets, we are all instructed to “**eagerly desire spiritual gifts...especially prophecy**.” For the church-wide instruction in 1 Corinthians 14 (NIV 1984) to make any sense, we must all be capable of prophesying. And when we truly understand that prophecy is one of the major means God has provided for us to be strengthened, encouraged, and comforted, why would we not want this?

**HUMBLY ASK** — We should simply begin to ask God to open our eyes and ears prophetically, and to speak to us. The profound comment in James 4:2, “**you do not have, because you do not ask**,” could pertain to many things, but would certainly apply here.

**EXPECTANTLY WAIT** — After having asked God, believing that He hears us, we must take time to listen and watch for what He *will* reveal to us. This is faith!

**SOBERLY DISCERN** — Prophetic sensitivity can develop gradually, and the voice of God can come in quite non-dynamic ways—we don’t need to have an “out of body” experience! In fact, it is not always immediately distinguishable from natural senses. This was the case for the boy Samuel (1 Samuel 3), later to become a great prophet. However, we should bear in mind that not everything that God enables us to see is to be shared. We should ask Him to confirm whether we are to share it, and if so, when and how. At times, we may receive things purely so we can pray with insight for people or situations. At other times, our responsibility may end by sharing what we have with leaders, or others who can help weigh and judge the rightness of a word.

**FAITHFULLY GIVE** — If we know we are to prophesy, we should “bring the word, the whole word, and nothing but the word.” Some are inclined to be brief if they are uncomfortable with public speaking. Others may be tempted to embellish or extend what they have in order to make it “clearer” or more impressive. Realistically, we are unlikely to be mistaken for Isaiah when we first start prophesying! God might give a single word or simple impression, but we must determine to share what we have. We must not despise “**the day of small beginnings**” (Zechariah 4:10 - CEV). As when God spoke to Jonah about Nineveh, we may not even like what we are told to bring. Whatever the case, we must remember that we are acting as God’s “spokesperson” and must let the fear of God determine what we do, no matter what the result!

As we grow in this area, we must avoid becoming discouraged along the way. People beginning to develop in prophetic sensitivity can sometimes despair when, having sensed something that they felt was from God but having hesitated through uncertainty, someone else goes ahead and brings the same thing! In situations like this, rather than feeling frustrated or condemned, we should be encouraged that we are indeed hearing from God, and that He had the situation covered. Next time though, rather than assuming that what we have is just our own thought, let’s accept that it may well be His thought, and at least share it with a leader who can help us to discern it.

## PRACTICALITIES IN PROPHECY

Some view prophecy in an overly-mystical way, and might be surprised at the very practical approach taken so far in this session. They might view “**the spirit of prophecy**” as just something that comes upon us unpredictably, and over which we have no personal responsibility or even control. However, Scripture gives us many practical guidelines and helpful instructions regarding prophecy, for example the following:

“**Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said... For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. For God is not a God of disorder but of peace.**” 1 Corinthians 14:29, 31-33a (NIV 1984)

God intends that both His order and His care be expressed in how prophetic ministry operates. As God has given us this measure of control in how we are to function prophetically, we need not fear asking God not just *what* to say but *how* we should say it so as to properly communicate His heart.

We do not need to start every prophecy with “the Lord says,” nor always prophesy in the first person. This is not to say these practices are wrong, but “styles” of prophecy (even prophesying in “King James English”) do not make the word any more or less authentic.

The prophets we find in the Bible are an extraordinary array of demonstrative personalities, and should leave us in little doubt that God intends that prophecy should communicate His heart with conviction and passion. Therefore, we should faithfully give ourselves to expressing His word in whatever way He leads us.

With this in mind, we should be open regarding whether the word we have might be better brought in a form other than regular speech, for example, with some type of visual presentation (see Agabus in Acts 21:11), or perhaps as a song. In weighing this, however, it is helpful to remember that God did choose you to bring this word, and without being closed to an exception, if, for example, you happen to have an awful singing voice, this could potentially detract from rather than add to the impact of the word. Obviously, the same could be said of dance, mime, or any other artistic expression.

## PERSONAL PROPHECY

As we draw to the conclusion of this session, we would encourage particular caution regarding directional words for individuals, and recommend the following guidelines:

### BRINGING PERSONAL WORDS

1. Bear in mind the purpose of prophecy:

“**...everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort.**”  
1 Corinthians 14:3 (NIV 1984)

Although words God gives us for others may not always sound positive, we should at least be sure that, if received properly, the word will ultimately result in strengthening, encouragement, and comfort.

2. Remember that when you prophesy, you are being God’s spokesman, conveying what God thinks and feels. Be careful that you are not being unduly influenced by natural factors, for example the things that you think about the person or would really want for them, or even your frustrations with them!
3. Consider carefully what we said earlier regarding whether the word you have received should be shared or is simply for you to pray with insight.

4. Do not be quick to act the first time you receive a word, vision, or dream that may have a great impact on someone's life. Scripture shows us time and time again God's willingness to repeat and confirm words of great significance to us, often multiple times (for example, with Samuel's call, Joseph's dreams, Gideon's confirmation, and Peter's rooftop vision).
5. In most cases, we would recommend submitting directional personal prophecies to the leaders of the church prior to bringing them directly to people. Quite apart from their ability to help you weigh the word, leaders have care and responsibility for the person and will no doubt be involved with them as they seek to respond rightly to the word. Leaders are often able to guide us with the right timing, which can be critical in bringing words. **Proverbs 25:11** says, "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver."
6. Seek God for a word of wisdom regarding how it might be delivered (see Nathan with David, **2 Samuel 12**). Prophecy can function in conjunction with other gifts, such as words of knowledge and words of wisdom, which can help in the delivery and receiving of the words.

## RECEIVING PERSONAL WORDS

**"Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good." 1 Thessalonians 5:20-21**

Many believers have been inspired, guided and enriched by prophetic words spoken over them. However, this has not always been the case. Some have received erroneous words, sometimes from false prophets, but often just from well-meaning but mistaken brothers and sisters. No matter who brings a prophecy to us, we should neither dismiss it nor fully accept it as the word of the Lord until it has been properly weighed. Here are a few general principles for testing a word before accepting it:

1. Does it line up with biblical truth? No prophetic word from God will contradict or cast doubt on the written Word of God. In assessing this, you might want to seek the counsel of those with strong scriptural knowledge:
 

**"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness," 2 Timothy 3:16**
2. If you are unsure regarding the meaning of a prophetic word, ask whoever brought it to clarify exactly what they heard or saw. They may also tell you what they think the word means, though caution should be exercised here. Those bringing words can easily put their own interpretations on words they bring.
3. Ask God for independent confirmation from other sources, including others who are prophetically sensitive and, of course, those who carry governmental leadership in your life. Interestingly, those who have received multiple prophecies from various people often notice significant similarities and repeated themes. This is because people with prophetic vision who pray over us will often see the same key words and callings that God has placed over our lives.
4. Do not worry about words that you can do little about. Trust God and see if they come to pass. If they do not produce faith and peace in you, be free to reject them. Sometimes words declare that something will happen in a certain timeframe. If this does not happen, you can probably throw them out completely as false! It will do you no good to hang on to them after their "sell by date."

**"FOR THE LORD GOD DOES NOTHING WITHOUT REVEALING HIS SECRET TO HIS SERVANTS THE PROPHETS."**

Amos 3:7



If opportunity allows, give honest feedback to those who prophesy over you. This can be very helpful in encouraging and correcting those learning to grow prophetically.

## GROWING AS A PROPHETIC PEOPLE

The prophetic word is incredibly powerful, both in the lives of individuals and the Church corporately. We are grateful to God that He has given us much instruction in Scripture regarding how we are to function with this gift. The leaders of this family of churches are committed to creating an environment where every member of the body grows in prophetic gifting.

Consider the following remarkable statement:

**“For the Lord God does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets.”** Amos 3:7

This being the case, rather than dismissing or minimizing the role of the prophet, we should be praying, “Lord, raise up a host of prophets to help us become an increasingly prophetic people.”

Arthur Wallis, a recognized prophetic teacher and author, is quoted as saying, *“It is my conviction that recognizing apostles and prophets, and letting them function, will yet prove the most important restoration breakthrough of our time.”*

## RECOMMENDED READING

1. *Developing Your Prophetic Gifting* by Graham Cooke
2. *Prophetic Ministry* by T. Austin-Sparks

# EVANGELISTS AND EVANGELISM

“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,” [Ephesians 4:11-13](#)

Because prophets are the most prominent ministry in the Old Testament and apostles are the most prominent in the New, we have a wealth of scriptural insight into their gifting and calling. However, this is not the case with the evangelist. We must, therefore, be diligent to glean what we can from Scripture about this essential ministry. At the same time, the relatively limited amount of biblical definition and instruction allows us a degree of liberty in exploring how this ministry might function to its fullest in the Church.

## WHAT ARE EVANGELISTS?

The English word *evangelist* comes from the Greek *euangelistes*, which appears only three times in Scripture: in [Acts 21:8](#), where Philip is specifically named an evangelist; in [Ephesians 4:11](#), where it is listed among the gifts of the risen Christ; and in [2 Timothy 4:5](#), where Timothy is instructed by Paul to “do the work of an evangelist.” However, there are two other closely associated and more frequently appearing Greek words that share the same root meaning, and which will help us to gain an understanding of the role of the evangelist.

**1. EUANGELION** — This Greek word appears 77 times in the New Testament. It literally means “a message of good,” and is most often translated “gospel” or “good news.” It is from *euangelion* that we draw the term *evangelism* to refer to the mission of proclaiming the gospel, though it should be pointed out that the word *evangelism* is not found in most English Bibles. When *euangelion* is used in Scripture, the content of the “message of good” is quite varied and includes the Kingdom of God, the life and ministry of Jesus, the grace of God, truth and salvation, life and immortality, resurrection from the dead, and the future judgment of the wicked and rest for the righteous.



**2. EUANGELIZO** — This Greek word appears 55 times in the New Testament, and from it we get our English verb *evangelize*. It literally means “a proclaiming of that which is good” and in most translations it is rendered “to preach the gospel.” There are multiple individuals and groups in the New Testament who are specifically named as “proclaiming that which is good,” including angels, John the Baptist, many of the apostles, Philip, and of course Jesus himself.

Again, the “good” proclaimed in the New Testament varies and includes hope for the poor and sick, the coming birth of Jesus, the Kingdom of God, future judgment of the wicked and rest for the righteous, Jesus and His resurrection to life, peace with God through Christ Jesus, the word of the Lord, the faith and love of the saints, the mystery of God’s eternal will, justification through faith, and the nations blessed in Abraham.

So, from the above we can conclude that an evangelist is “a messenger of good.” As with the word *apostle*, *evangelist* is introduced to us in the New Testament but was already a familiar word at that time, albeit not as a religious term. In the first century Greek world, it was used quite generally for messengers bearing any good news. However, it is interesting to note that in a military context (from which Paul often drew analogies), the term had a very specific application. When a military campaign had been won, a particularly swift soldier would be sent out to herald the message of the good news of victory to all he encountered. This soldier would be known as an evangelist.

## AN EPHESIANS 4 EVANGELIST

With the great emphasis in Scripture on the mission of preaching the gospel, it is surprising to many that there is only one individual who is specifically called an evangelist in Scripture, namely Philip. However, as we look closely at his example, we find that there is a lot we can learn from him.

### PHILIP: SPIRIT-FILLED SERVANT

We first encounter Philip in [Acts 6:5](#), where he is selected as one of the seven men (commonly thought of as deacons) to serve in practical ways to allow the apostles to concentrate on prayer and the ministry of the Word. This tells us two very important things that were evident in Philip prior to the emerging of his evangelistic ministry. He was servant-hearted, and he was full of wisdom and the Holy Spirit, as this was the requirement for those to be chosen ([Acts 6:3](#)).

### PHILIP: PIONEERING WITH POWER

Before His ascension, Jesus said to his disciples in [Acts 1:8](#), “**you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.**” It was only following the terrible but wonderful martyrdom of Stephen, and because of the subsequent persecution of the Church in Jerusalem, that believers did start to fulfill the wider aspect of this commission. Philip is recorded as among the first to break out of Jerusalem, pioneering new territory and functioning with great power:

“Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed.” [Acts 8:5-7](#)

This wasn’t just a case of advancing the gospel geographically but also ethnically, taking it beyond the Jews to the Samaritans, who were of mixed Israelite and Gentile blood. Directly following this, we find Philip used by God in the first recorded Gentile conversion, that of the Ethiopian eunuch ([Acts 8:26-38](#)).

## PHILIP: PARTNERED WITH APOSTLES

It is fascinating to note that despite the extraordinary power in which Philip moved, it required the apostolic ministry of Peter and John to bring the newly-converted Samaritans into the foundationally vital experience of the infilling of the Holy Spirit:

“Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.” Acts 8:14-17

It is also interesting to see that this was followed by the exposing and confronting of Simon the Sorcerer, whose wrong motives had gone unchallenged prior to apostolic involvement.

All of this demonstrates a remarkable openness and understanding on Philip’s part as he willingly partners with the apostles. As we saw with prophets, evangelists will only build effectively when working in this context.

## PHILIP: HOME AND FAMILY

Philip makes one last appearance in Scripture some twenty years on from the events in Acts 8. In Acts 21:8-9, we find him (by this time referred to as “Philip the evangelist”) hosting Paul and his team at his house in Caesarea, and we learn that he has four prophetic daughters. It is greatly encouraging to see that Philip had clearly remained true to and been recognized in his calling, and had become established in a local community where he had raised a family noteworthy in their passion and gifting in God. There is much modern evangelists might learn by following Philip’s example in this regard.

## EVANGELISTS TODAY

When you think *evangelist*, what impressions come to mind? There are many differing thoughts on this ministry today, sadly not all positive. For many, a shining example of evangelistic ministry is Billy Graham, who for decades was anointed by God with an extraordinary reaping ministry. However, others may find showier but less appealing images coming to mind: white suits, tanned faces, strange hairstyles, etc.

Whether positive or negative, the stereotype of the evangelist preaching to the masses has caused many to miss a more biblical understanding of this ministry. Even on a more local level, there are often characteristics that seem to be associated with evangelists that can be unhelpful. For example, it is often assumed that all evangelists need to be raving extroverts or natural sales people. In fact, it is the naturally timid Timothy who is exhorted by Paul to “do the work of an evangelist” in 2 Timothy 4:5.

However, evangelists are typically gripped with a passion for the lost that in most cases exceeds that of the average church leader, thus causing them to feel restricted and stifled in regular church life. This has led to many breaking out of the perceived inflexibility of the Church and into independent ministry or “para-church” organizations. The focused zeal of such organizations can result in them being very fruitful, particularly over the short term, but their tendency to be one-dimensional and the absence of other Ephesians 4 gifts renders them tremendously prone to imbalance and ultimate collapse.

Our passion is to see the evangelist restored to effective functioning in the local church. For this to happen, we need to be missionary-minded enough that someone with an overriding concern to see people born again feels most at home in the Church. So, let us consider further what exactly the role of the evangelist is in the local church.

## WHAT DO EVANGELISTS DO?

**1. PREACH THE GOSPEL** — For evangelists, the task is clear and simple: to proclaim the gospel of God’s grace. This is, of course, something that all believers are called to do, but evangelists are especially gifted in proclaiming the gospel (whether on a personal or public level) in such a way that people are brought to faith in Christ as a result. If apostles and prophets are primarily given to outworking the visionary foundation for the spiritual building, it is evangelists that work at the quarry-face, blasting stones from the rock with which to build. Their lives reflect their passion—they will rarely miss, and usually create, opportunities to proclaim the gospel, typically bearing much fruit. Simply stated, people get born again when evangelists speak!

**2. EQUIP THE CHURCH** — We must not, however, make the mistake of concluding that the evangelist’s role is to do our evangelism for us! According to [Ephesians 4](#), evangelists were not given primarily to the world of lost humanity but to the Church, to help it be conformed to the likeness of Christ. He is the ultimate Evangelist ([Luke 4:18](#)), and evangelists are specifically given to see the missional aspect of Jesus evident and functioning in the Church. In their calling “**to equip the saints for the work of ministry**” ([Ephesians 4:12](#)), their ministry will be one of stirring everyone to reach out with the gospel, and stimulating all of us into action by their own example and enthusiasm. Genuine evangelistic gifting is wonderfully contagious, and many reaping skills can be taught (or perhaps we could more accurately say, “caught”) in time spent with evangelists. Evangelists also tend to be both pragmatic and strategic, and God will often give them insight regarding how the entire Church can become more effective in its interaction with the world.

## BEING AN EVANGELISTIC PEOPLE

**“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”** [Matthew 5:14-16](#)

The Church’s mandate to impact the world with the gospel of God’s grace is yet another aspect of His unchanging but unfolding purpose for His people. Throughout the Old Testament, we see His desire to have a people who were distinct and set apart, but who because of this were able to manifest His nature and represent Him in the earth. God’s word speaks repeatedly of the light of His salvation shining on and through His people, and the prophet Isaiah in particular declares God’s intention for His people to be this light to the Gentiles:

**“...It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.”** [Isaiah 49:6 \(NIV 1984\)](#)

Of course, Jesus came as the ultimate embodiment of God’s light in the world (see [John 1:4 & 9](#)). However, it is interesting that He said, **“As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”** ([John 9:5](#)) and, as we see from [Matthew 5:14-16](#), His followers inherit this nature and role from Him. Evangelism is as much about who God has made us to be as what He has called us to do. Nevertheless, as Jesus also makes clear, that light is seen as we step out in obedience to God’s word.

**“...‘THE HARVEST IS PLENTIFUL, BUT THE LABORERS ARE FEW; THEREFORE PRAY EARNESTLY TO THE LORD OF THE HARVEST TO SEND OUT LABORERS INTO HIS HARVEST.’”**

[Matthew 9:37-38](#)





## GROWING IN EVANGELISM

### THE STARTING POINT—PRAYER

“Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.’” [Matthew 9:37-38](#)

Our impulsive reaction to the challenge to become more evangelistic can be frenzied activity that, sadly, is often fruitless. The command of the Lord in light of the waiting harvest is that we pray for Him to send out laborers. The harvest will be brought in as His laborers go where He wants them to go and do what He wants them to do. This requires that we seek His direction, listen for His voice, and be led by His Spirit to pray in accordance with His will. The first thing we must do, therefore, is pray, and that is what we must continue to do. If we omit it, or pay mere lip service to it, we will ultimately be disappointed.

### WINNING SOULS

People have sometimes referred to leading people to Christ as “winning souls.” The term is taken from [Proverbs 11:30 \(NIV 1984\)](#), which says, “**he who wins souls is wise.**” In fact, this scripture is referring to winning someone’s heart and trust rather than to conversion, but it does have something to say to us on the subject of evangelism. The apostle Paul was very intentional about connecting with people to create a bridge for the gospel. He says in [1 Corinthians 9:22b-23](#), “**I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.**”

There are steps we can take to cultivate openness in people to receive the gospel. Evangelists are all gifted in varying degrees with this soul-winning ability, but through the leading of the Holy Spirit, we can all grow in this area. A frequently overlooked factor in winning the hearts of unbelievers is simply listening to and truly hearing what they are saying. When we do this, we earn the right to speak into their lives, and we learn things (from what they say and from what the Spirit is also telling us) that will help us to be relevant in what we communicate.

### DEMONSTRATING THE GOSPEL

Another key factor in preparing people to receive the gospel is demonstrating the love, kindness, and mercy of God. It has been said that Christians are to be good news before they share good news. Jesus said, “**In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven**” ([Matthew 5:16](#)). He has actually prepared these good works in advance for us:

“**For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.**” [Ephesians 2:10](#)

In [Acts 2:47](#), we are told that the newly-birthed church in Jerusalem experienced “**favor with all the people.**” It is reasonable to assume that this is because the people saw—and benefitted from—their goodness, and this no doubt contributed to the daily growth of the church.

### PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL

“...‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?” [Romans 10:13-14](#)

Good works are important as a demonstration of the gospel, but they are not a substitute for proclaiming it. God has commanded that His good news is to be spoken forth, and though we may not consider ourselves to be particularly articulate or persuasive, we can have confidence that there is power in the message itself:

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes...”

Romans 1:16

## POWER EVANGELISM

“And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’” Matthew 28:18-20

This text, known as “The Great Commission,” is possibly the best-known exhortation to evangelism, but it is rare that much attention is given to the opening and closing statements: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” and “I am with you always, to the end of the age.” His authority and His presence are to be tangible factors in our evangelism, and are experienced as the Holy Spirit, who empowers us to be witnesses (Acts 1:8), equips us for every situation with, for example, words of knowledge and wisdom, prophecy, gifts of healings, and miracles. As previously noted, Paul was very aware of the importance of this dynamic:

“...Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders.” Acts 14:3 (NIV 1984)

“My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power.” 1 Corinthians 2:4-5 (NIV 1984)

## THE PURPOSE OF THE GATHERED CHURCH

As evangelism is so much a part of what we are called to do (not just to reach a lost world but also for the maturing of the saints), there is a risk that it can become the entire focus of the Church—an objective to which many an evangelist is unashamedly given! The danger in this is that the gatherings of the “called out ones” become increasingly geared towards unbelievers and away from the worship of God and the maturing of the saints, which happens through teaching and the functioning of the gifts of the Spirit. The emphasis shifts from a “go and tell” to a “come and see” mentality, and the church meeting, rather than the world, becomes the forum for the preaching of the gospel. This approach is absent from the New Testament, where the gospel was preached in, for example, the Temple Courts, the synagogues, Solomon’s Colonnade, the Halls of Tyrannus, the Temple in Athens, Mars Hill, and most significantly house to house.

The clearest insight we have into the nature and purpose of church meetings comes from Paul’s instructive first letter to the Corinthians. Here, we see a highly charged and extremely charismatic environment which, although needing guidance, was in no way discouraged by Paul. Rather than advocating a gearing of the meeting towards unbelievers, Paul merely addresses the potential scenario of how any unbeliever who may turn up is likely to react:

“But if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in while everybody is prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, ‘God is really among you!’” 1 Corinthians 14:24-25 (NIV 1984)

This is a far cry from the modern tendency to structure and “tone down” our entire gatherings for the comfort of unbelievers.

## THE ULTIMATE GOAL OF EVANGELISM

In his excellent book on missions, *Let the Nations be Glad*, John Piper makes the following profound and provoking statements:

*“All of history is moving toward one great goal, the white-hot worship of God and His Son among all the peoples of the earth. Missions is not that goal. It is the means. And for that reason it is the second greatest human activity in the world.”*

*“Missions is not the ultimate goal of the Church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn’t. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man.”*

It is, therefore, our fervent and continuous prayer that, by the grace of God, we will continue to develop evangelistically without losing anything of our passion for corporate worship and functioning in the gifts of the Spirit. The biblical key to this development is the emerging of Ephesians 4 evangelists, so let us continue to beseech Jesus to give them to the Church, while personally accepting the apostolic challenge to “do the work of an evangelist” (2 Timothy 4:5). Who knows how many might find that God has gifted them in this respect beyond what they have asked or imagined!

## RECOMMENDED READING

1. *Let the Nations Be Glad!* by John Piper
2. *Evangelism & the Sovereignty of God* by J. I. Packer
3. *Invading Secular Space: Strategies for Tomorrow’s Church* by Martin Robinson & Dwight Smith
4. *Divine Appointments* by Larry Tomczak
5. *The Greatness of the Great Commission* by Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr.





# SHEPHERDS AND TEACHERS

“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,” [Ephesians 4:11-13](#)

Having considered apostles, prophets, and evangelists in the last three sessions, we will now look at shepherds and teachers. We might think we are on more familiar ground here than in previous sessions since, of all the Ephesians 4 ministries, shepherds (frequently referred to as “pastors”) and teachers are the most common and accepted in the Church at large. However, as we examine what the Word of God says about them, we can expect to be challenged in our preconceptions and expanded in our understanding of these gifts to the Church.

## TWO MINISTRIES OR ONE?

In the context of [Ephesians 4](#), some consider shepherds and teachers to be a single ministry, namely the “shepherd-teacher.” One reason for this is linguistic, as in the original Greek, *shepherds* and *teachers* are not separated from one another in quite the same way as are the preceding gifts. Another reason is that the two ministries have many overlapping responsibilities and functions, and one might argue that it is impossible to properly fulfill the role of one without moving to some degree in the gift of the other. However, while acknowledging these points, we feel there is sufficient distinction and individual significance in these ministries to consider them separately. We will actually start by looking at teachers.



## TEACHERS IN SCRIPTURE

When we come across the word *teacher* in the Old Testament, it is often translating the Hebrew word *sofer*, which is from a verb meaning “to tell or inscribe,” and could also mean “a secretary, scribe or writer.” It came to refer to a distinctive class among the priesthood who specialized in preserving and interpreting sacred writings. In the New Testament, the Greek word used to refer to teachers in the Church is *didaskalos*. It was understood to refer to those who were recognized authorities in the interpretation of Scripture.

“Behold, God is exalted in his power; who is a teacher like him?” Job 36:22

God’s heart has always been to impart understanding to His people so that they might know Him and fulfill His purpose. In His interaction with Moses in Exodus, we see His desire not only to communicate His will to His servants, but also that they would communicate it to others:

“Teach them [the people] the decrees and laws, and show them the way to live and the duties they are to perform.” Exodus 18:20 (NIV 1984)

The faithfulness of teachers to confront God’s people with His Word, and the importance of their doing so, is evident throughout the Old Testament. For example, Ezra and Nehemiah’s teaching ministries were vital at a time of restoration in Israel’s history:

“They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read.” Nehemiah 8:8 (NIV 1984)

## TEACHERS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

In the Gospels, Jesus Christ is revealed as the ultimate Teacher (“You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am” John 13:13). Since His Church is to reflect every aspect of who He is, it is not surprising that He gave teachers to help equip and shape it, and that they have such a fundamental place in God’s strategy:

“And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers...” 1 Corinthians 12:28

As in Ephesus and Corinth, the church in Antioch had teachers, including Paul (then still known as Saul – Acts 13:1), who acknowledges this aspect of his gift and calling in 1 Timothy 2:7 and 2 Timothy 1:11. It is clear that Apollos was also a prominent teacher in the early Church (Acts 18:24-26). The caution expressed in James 3:1 (“Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness”) shows that it was a recognized role in the Church throughout the nations, to which many aspired.

## THE GIFT AND CALL OF THE TEACHER

Past experience of teaching in the Church and the world may have left some with negative preconceptions. In their effort to convey a deeper understanding of Scripture, teachers do tend to be more meticulous and methodical than the other ministries.

However, far from being dry or dull, the gift of teaching, operating under the anointing of God, should be captivating and revelatory, and should not only inform and equip, but also inspire us to live in the good of the Word of God. Again, we are conscious of the fact that this may not have been people’s experience of teachers, but that is probably because they have not encountered true, Ephesians 4 teachers. These may vary greatly in style and personality, but they do seem to share certain characteristics:



**A PASSION TO KNOW THE TRUTH** — Teachers tend to be motivated by a general desire to learn and understand, but in particular they have a hunger for the truth of God’s Word. They treasure it, love to spend time in it, and love to talk about it. They want to know everything about it! Whereas others might shy away from some parts of Scripture as “too difficult to understand,” teachers are excited to take up the challenge by diligently studying and reaching to God for revelation.

**A PASSION TO INTERPRET THE TRUTH** — No aspect of the truth stands in isolation from the rest of God’s Word. Therefore, teachers should always consider Scripture in the light of Scripture, and the smallest detail in the light of the big picture. This is often expressed in a desire to maintain balance or to hold the truths of God in tension, but the root is their desire to know the whole counsel of the Word of God.

**A PASSION TO CONVEY THE TRUTH** — It should perhaps go without saying that the foremost characteristic of the teacher is the ability to teach. While all Christians should have some ability in this regard, teachers are obviously gifted by God with a far greater measure than others. Once teachers gain understanding, they can impart it. Rather than making simple issues complex, they endeavor to cast complex issues in clear and simple terms, thus making the Word of God accessible to all people.

**A PASSION TO APPLY THE TRUTH** — Teachers should never be content with things staying in the realm of theory. They share the conviction of Moses regarding God’s truths: **“they are not just idle words for you—they are your life”** (Deuteronomy 32:47 - NIV 1984). Their passion is to see what they have taught outworked in practical and God-glorifying ways in people’s lives, and the Kingdom of God extended as a consequence.

## PREPARING GOD’S PEOPLE TO TEACH

As with all the Ephesians 4 ministries, it is important to keep in mind that the teaching ministry is given to equip the saints for the work of ministry. This involves assisting in the process of transformation that comes by the renewing of the mind (Romans 12:2). The goal of an Ephesians 4 teacher is that everyone in the church will hunger for, interpret, apply, and convey God’s Word themselves. Part of “The Great Commission” (Matthew 28:18-20) is that we are all to teach new disciples to observe everything that Jesus has commanded us. Although we will not all be teachers in the Ephesians 4 sense, it is interesting to note these challenging words from the writer to the Hebrews:

**“In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God’s word all over again.”** Hebrews 5:12a (NIV 1984)

There is, therefore, an expectation that everyone ought to be able to teach at least the elementary truths. Teachers can and should equip us for this work of service. Furthermore, we see in 1 Timothy 3:2 that an elder must be **“able to teach,”** and in Titus 1:9 that he must be able to **“give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.”** Part of the role of Ephesians 4 teachers will no doubt be to help to equip local elders in these respects.

## TEACHERS IN THEIR RIGHTFUL POSITION

To a large extent today, sound biblical teaching has been side-lined or even abandoned in favor of the pursuit of “experiences” or feel-good philosophies:

**“For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.”**  
2 Timothy 4:3 (NIV 1984)

This results in a selfish and ineffectual church. As R. T. Kendall has said, *“A dearth of solid teaching in the church reveals that the body of Christ needs more than good experience—it needs good theology.”*



However, it is also very important to remind ourselves not to elevate the role of the teacher to an inappropriate place. Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones observed that churches can be “*perfectly orthodox and perfectly useless!*” This can certainly be the case where a teacher functions apart from the other gifts, or is the lead gift in the church. Our desire is for the restoration of the biblical model of teachers working alongside the other gifts, particularly apostles and prophets.

Having looked at teachers, let us now consider the Ephesians 4 shepherd.

## SHEPHERDS OR PASTORS?

Surprising as it was to learn that *evangelist* appears only three times in our Bibles, it is even more surprising to learn that *pastor*—the most common and accepted of all the Ephesians 4 terms—appears only once in most English translations of the Bible!

The term translated *pastors* in most versions of [Ephesians 4:11](#), is translating the Greek word *poimenas*, meaning “shepherds.” The singular and plural forms of this Greek word actually appear seventeen other times in the Greek New Testament, but in all these other instances, most English translations correctly use *shepherd/shepherds*. Why did they not do so in [Ephesians 4:11](#), and why did they use the word *pastors*? *Pastor* comes from the Latin word *pastoris*, which has the root meaning of “feeding” (it relates to the English word *pasture*) and was used in Latin in connection with shepherding. As such, if one were looking for a substitute for *shepherds* when translating *poimenas*, it is a reasonable choice. We cannot say for sure why the early Bible translators *did* want to use a word other than shepherds here. Perhaps they felt that *shepherd* did not sound spiritual enough, or that people might actually confuse it with the farming role.

Whatever the reason, and no matter how well-intentioned it may have been, we have already seen in this course how the enemy can seize upon a mistranslation as an opportunity to distort a truth and wreak havoc in the Church. With the word *shepherd*, the nature of the ministry would have been clear. With *pastor*, the Church has had to accept whatever definition (if any) has been presented. This has led to the term being confusingly applied in some churches not just to the person leading the church, but to anyone leading a particular area of ministry, even if the role does not actually involve shepherding, e.g., the “Worship Pastor,” “Evangelism Pastor,” “Pastor of Administration,” etc.

## PASTORS TODAY

In much of the modern church, *Pastor* has basically become the title given to the leader of the church. Since most churches do not have biblical elderships, the “pastor” is the primary, if not sole, authority. Such “pastors” *may* have a measure of one or more of the Ephesians 4 gifts, but are looked to by the congregation as the supplier of *all their* needs in terms of ministry, care, and government. This is often a source of great frustration for the church, and can be a crippling weight on the “pastor.” That said, the term *Senior Pastor* in larger churches often refers to someone who functions as a manager, or even in a CEO-like role, with little hands-on care for people. So then, even when the term *pastor* is used, it is important that we remain faithful to the original word being translated—shepherd/shepherds. We need, therefore, to take a brief look at what the Word of God shows us of shepherds.

## SHEPHERDS IN SCRIPTURE

The image of the shepherd is prevalent and significant throughout the Bible. God Himself is often referred to as a shepherd, most famously in [Psalm 23:1](#):

**“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.”**

Prominent figures in the Old Testament who were shepherds by occupation include Jacob and his sons, Moses, the prophet Amos, and of course the writer of [Psalm 23](#), David. God had deliberately placed David in this role to prepare him for his greater destiny as the shepherd of His people:

**“He chose David his servant and took him from the sheepfolds; from following the nursing ewes he brought him to shepherd Jacob his people, Israel his inheritance.”** [Psalm 78:70-71](#)

As with David, God often referred to those who ruled His people as shepherds. In [Ezekiel 34](#), God speaks against the “shepherds” of Israel who failed to care for, and indeed mistreated, His flock. In this instance, God declared that He would intervene to shepherd His flock Himself. Nevertheless, His purpose remained that His care would be outworked through faithful and anointed servants (**“And I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding”** [Jeremiah 3:15](#)).

## SHEPHERDS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew references the prophet Micah in speaking of the coming of the ultimate Shepherd, Jesus:

**“And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.”** [Matthew 2:6](#)

Jesus referred to Himself as **“the good shepherd”** ([John 10:11,14](#)) and is called **“the great shepherd of the sheep”** ([Hebrews 13:20](#)), **“the Shepherd and Overseer”** of our souls ([1 Peter 2:25](#)) and **“the chief Shepherd”** ([1 Peter 5:4](#)). Once again then, it should not be surprising that one of the gifts we see Him giving to the Church in [Ephesians 4](#) is a ministry by which His very nature as Shepherd is made manifest in His people.

Although no individual is specifically identified as a “shepherd” in the New Testament, it is significant to note the shepherding mandate given to Peter when Jesus re-commissions him in [John 21:15-17](#).

## THE GIFT AND CALL OF THE SHEPHERD

[Ephesians 4](#) shepherds have a God-given desire to care for, nurture, guard, and guide the flock. Their genuine love for people is tangibly felt, as it is evidenced in real concern and practical care for individuals. As seen in the Parable of the Lost Sheep in [Luke 15](#), the shepherd’s heart is at times more focused on rescuing and restoring the one lost sheep than managing the many.

However, it requires more than love and good intentions to fulfill the role of the shepherd. Having mentioned earlier God’s choosing of David to be the shepherd of His people, let’s note the qualities he had for the job:

**“...David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skillful hands he led them.”** [Psalm 78:72 \(NIV 1984\)](#)

Shepherds deal with people’s lives and are looked to and relied upon by them. They must act with absolute integrity, as befits any servant of God. They must never be self-seeking, or abuse the trust they are given by being controlling or manipulative. Their focus must always be on the righteous will of God and the best interests of the people.



It is equally important that shepherds are skilled in dealing with people, individually and corporately. Although some of this skill may have come from the experiences of life, it is primarily the anointing of the Holy Spirit that enables the shepherd to do the work of the Great Shepherd.

## PREPARING GOD’S PEOPLE TO SHEPHERD

As we will see in the next session, elders obviously have an important responsibility when it comes to outworking God’s shepherding heart and care for His people. Both Paul and Peter exhort elders to “shepherd” the people of God whom they oversee (Acts 20:28 - NIV 1984 and 1 Peter 5:2). Though some translations render the exhortation, “be shepherds,” in the Greek it is the verb not the noun that is used. The instruction is what they are to do, not who they are to be. These instructions may, therefore, be like Paul’s instruction to Timothy to “do the work of an evangelist” (2 Timothy 4:5), the implication being that this was not the work that he was necessarily most gifted or inclined to do, but was the work that his position and the circumstances required. Similarly, it is unlikely that shepherding was the primary gifting of all of the elders Paul and Peter addressed. They, like elders today, would need substantial help to enable them to do this.

Since the Ephesians 4 shepherd is to prepare God’s people for the work of ministry, an important part of this task will be to inspire and enable the whole church, and especially elders, to shepherd all those whom God will bring into His Kingdom. As with apostles, prophets, evangelists, and teachers, this will typically lead the Ephesians 4 shepherd to have a ministry wider than their home church. This equipping aspect of the shepherding ministry has rarely been seen, and desperately needs to be restored to the Church.

## EMBRACING CHRIST’S GIFTS TO THE CHURCH

“so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.” Ephesians 4:14-16

Together, shepherds and teachers help to see the body of Christ built up to shepherd and instruct one another in accordance with God’s ways. To continue the building metaphor, they work to see the individual stones shaped so that they fit smoothly into the overall structure. However, much of the modern Western church, predominantly led by shepherds and teachers, has been guilty of producing increasingly fat and inactive sheep. The key to their God-intended effectiveness will come as they are partnered not just with one another, but also with the other Ephesians 4 ministries.

“AND HE GAVE THE APOSTLES, THE PROPHETS, THE EVANGELISTS, THE SHEPHERDS AND TEACHERS, TO EQUIP THE SAINTS FOR THE WORK OF MINISTRY, FOR BUILDING UP THE BODY OF CHRIST,”

Ephesians 4:11-12



These gifts are given by God to ordinary individuals, whom Christ then gives to the Church. There can be a tendency to want the benefit of the gift without real relationship with the person through whom Christ gives it. This should not be so, as it is made expressly clear in Scripture that we will lack tremendously, and in fact will fail to mature, if we do not embrace these indispensable parts of the body.

## THE WORD AND THE WORKERS

**“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” 2 Timothy 3:16-17**

Most Christians rightly accept the essentiality of Scripture for growth and maturity. However, it is interesting to note the correspondence between what these verses say of the role and function of Scripture, and what **Ephesians 4:11-13** says of the role and function of these ministries. Just as all Scripture is given by God, these ministries are given by Christ. Just as Scripture is given to the man of God, these ministries are given to the people of God. Just as Scripture is given to thoroughly equip the man of God, these ministries are given to prepare God’s people. Just as Scripture prepares the man of God for every good work, these ministries prepare God’s people for the work of ministry.

As we hope has been shown over these recent sessions, the Ephesians 4 ministries, as well as the Word of God, are absolutely essential for the equipping and maturing of the Church. Our prayer is that everyone attending this course will be left with a lasting conviction regarding how God intends to build His house.



# ELDERS AND DEACONS

“Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith... Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.” [Hebrews 13:7, 17](#)

We have seen how essential the Ephesians 4 ministries are as they lead and serve in the body of Christ. In this session, we will look at those who are called by God to particular positions of leadership and service in the local congregation. Our society increasingly balks against authority in all its forms, and does not think of servanthood as something virtuous. We may, therefore, need to adjust our thinking as we approach this subject, and we would do well to start by focusing on the ultimate model of leadership and servanthood.

## CHRIST—THE SERVANT LEADER

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder...” [Isaiah 9:6](#)

“...Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.” [Ephesians 5:23](#)

Jesus came not only to be our Savior, but also to be our Lord and to exercise a real rule in our lives. However, though it might seem like a contradiction, He also came to serve:

“...the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” [Matthew 20:28](#)

The Church is built on Jesus, the foundation and chief cornerstone ([1 Corinthians 3:11](#), [Ephesians 2:20](#)), and should reflect Him in every way. His nature should especially be seen in those holding positions of responsibility in the local church. Later in this session, we will look at how servanthood is exemplified by deacons, but first we will look at those who lead the congregation.

## LEADERSHIP IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

As already noted in this course, there is much confusion in the Church today when it comes to leadership roles and titles. We saw in the last session that even the familiar term *pastor* is not actually used in the New Testament to refer to those who lead the local congregation. That responsibility is given to elders, also called overseers.

However, *elder* is yet another term that has often been misunderstood and misapplied. Many churches have “elders” who just operate as a board, elected by the congregation to serve a term of office, during which they meet occasionally to make administrative decisions. In many cases, they have little or no involvement in actually leading, teaching, and caring for the flock. They leave that to the “Pastor,” the “professional” whom they (as one of their administrative decisions) will hire to handle the “spiritual” aspects of the life of the church—and whom they will fire if the job isn’t done the way they like it!

The leadership of the local church, as described in the New Testament, was by a plurality of elders who were deeply involved in the practical and spiritual care of the people. However, before examining what Scripture shows us about church eldership, let’s look at elders in Israel prior to the birthing of the Church.

## ELDERS IN SCRIPTURE

Elders are mentioned throughout the Old Testament. The term quite literally referred to aged or older men, but came to be used beyond that to refer specifically to those recognized as wise, experienced, and of proven character, and who were, therefore, looked to as leaders in:

1. The family or tribe ([Deuteronomy 5:23](#))
2. Civil government ([Exodus 3:16-18](#); [1 Chronicles 11:3](#) and [Joshua 20:4](#))
3. Religious life ([Leviticus 4:15](#); [2 Kings 19:2 - NIV 1984](#); [Isaiah 37:2 - NIV 1984](#))

In the New Testament, it is clear from the Gospels and Acts that elders still had a similar status and role in the life of the Jewish community. The Greek word translated as “elder” is *presbuteros* which, like its Old Testament counterpart, conveyed the concept of maturity and character. It is, therefore, not surprising that this term was adopted by the newly-birthing community of Christians to refer to its leaders.

## ELDERS AS OVERSEERS

As mentioned above, the other term used in the New Testament for church leaders is *overseers*. This translates the Greek word *episkopos*, a compound of *epi*, meaning “over,” and *skopos*, meaning “to look/watch, peer about, oversee.” The word “bishop” is derived from *episkopos*, (i.e., *piskop* became “bishop”), and in many denominations has come to refer to a hierarchical, regional position. However, in the New Testament, *episkopos* is interchangeable with *presbuteros* as a term for the leaders of the local congregation. For example, in [Acts 20:17](#), we read that Paul sent to Ephesus for the “elders” of the church, whom he then addresses (in [verse 28](#)) as “overseers.” One could say that “elder” emphasizes who the person is, and “overseer” what the person does.

“REMEMBER YOUR LEADERS, THOSE WHO SPOKE TO YOU THE WORD OF GOD. CONSIDER THE OUTCOME OF THEIR WAY OF LIFE, AND IMITATE THEIR FAITH...”

Hebrews 13:7

## QUALIFICATIONS FOR ELDERSHIP

Much of the Church today would consider the necessary qualifications for leadership to come in the form of certificates from seminaries or other academic institutions. This is not what we see in the New Testament. Following are the two passages of Scripture that set out most deliberately and clearly the qualifications for an overseer/elder:

“Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded [i.e., clear-headed, thoughtful], self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome [lit. peaceable], not a lover of money [lit. not covetous]. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church? He must not be a recent convert [lit. novice], or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.” 1 Timothy 3:2-7

“...appoint elders in every town as I directed you— if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers [lit. are faithful] and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. For an overseer, as God’s steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant [not self-willed] or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.” Titus 1:5b-9

These requirements relate to **character**, **capability**, and **confirmation**.

**CHARACTER** — God is not looking for executives to run a business, but for mature men of integrity who will care for and lead His family (1 Timothy 3:4-5), so it is not surprising that character takes prominence over gifting when appointing elders. The overriding requirement is that an elder be “above reproach.” In the above passages, Paul gives specific examples of this requirement.

**CAPABILITY** — Though good character is essential, elders must also be able to fulfill certain responsibilities. The areas of ability listed by Paul can be summarized as follows:

- **SOUND DOCTRINE** — An elder must hold firm to sound doctrine and encourage others to do so, rebuking those who contradict it. This requires him to be skilled in correctly handling Scripture (see also 1 Timothy 1:3; 2 Timothy 2:2; Titus 2:1; and 2 Timothy 2:15).
- **COMMUNICATION** — An elder must be able to teach others—encouraging, comforting, instructing, training, correcting, and rebuking (see also 2 Timothy 2:24-25 and 3:16).
- **LEADERSHIP** — An elder must be able to lead, having demonstrated this by how he manages his own household. He must not be a novice, but should have a history of faithfulness in what has been entrusted to him (see also 2 Timothy 2:2).

**CONFIRMATION** — Elders should have a good reputation and be respected both within the congregation and in the wider local community (1 Timothy 3:2, 7).

## THE APPOINTMENT OF ELDERS

In 1 Timothy 3:1, we read that “if anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.” However, elders are not self-appointed on the basis of their own sense of call. Nor are they “democratically” elected on the basis of their popularity. Scripture shows us that there is a process by which a man comes to this position:



## THE HOLY SPIRIT ANOINTS

**“Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers,”**  
Acts 20:28a

When looking at the Ephesians 4 ministries, we saw that it is God who appoints those who are to serve Him in key roles (1 Corinthians 12:28) and that Christ gives these gifts to the Church (Ephesians 4:11). It is not surprising, then, that God plays the primary role in raising up leaders in the local congregation.

## THE APOSTLE APPOINTS

**“Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.”** Acts 14:23 (NIV 1984)

The appointment to eldership will be by, or at the direction of, the apostle who serves that church. His apostolic vision enables him to see the hand of God on the emerging elder. His shepherding engagement with the local church enables him to hear the heart of the people. These are aspects of his anointing as a wise master builder.

**“The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you.”** Titus 1:5 (NIV 1984)

Incidentally, the biblical pattern shows that elders continue in relationship with, and remain accountable to, the apostle. One cannot have a biblical eldership without biblical apostleship.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF PLURALITY

It is important to note that in both the Old and New Testaments, eldership is always a plural concept (e.g., Acts 20:17; 1 Timothy 5:17; Titus 1:5; 1 Peter 5:1 and James 5:14). Nowhere in the New Testament do we find a sole elder placed over a church. On one level, this just seems like common sense. No one man is gifted or strong enough to be able to adequately care for and minister to an entire congregation on an on-going basis; we have already considered the adverse consequences for all concerned when someone tries.

However, God’s heart for plurality in leadership is more than just a practical concern. An essential characteristic of God is His triunity. He Himself is plurality manifesting in oneness. His intent is to be reflected on the earth by a Church which is one, though comprised of many. The Church will be brought to this state as it is equipped by Ephesians 4 ministries, working together in unity. On a local congregational level, it is matured and shaped by the example and care of a team of elders working together as one.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF EQUALITY

In many elder-led churches, the practice is to designate one as the “lead” or “senior” elder. The main thought behind this is that, even among a group that seeks for consensus in decision-making, there will inevitably be occasional impasses which will require someone with recognized authority to determine a way forward. However, Scripture says nothing of the role of a “lead” or “senior” elder, and our concern is that this practice diminishes true equality in the way elders function. Many an eldership has started with good intentions to function in plurality, only to devolve into an unbiblical structure reminiscent of the “Pastor” and “Associate Pastor” model.

Some will argue that a true equality among elders is impractical and unworkable. Without a genuine and mutual submission to the Holy Spirit, we would agree. However, as is so often the case in the Church, we believe that it is the intention of God to demonstrate something of His manifold wisdom through eldership functioning in equality and agreement. In real terms, this requires a level of humility and yielding as the Holy Spirit leads through one and then another as He sees fit. With regard to occasional impasses as mentioned earlier, it would be the apostle's job to step in and bring help and direction at these points.

## GIFTING AND RESPONSIBILITY

Though there should be governmental equality in an eldership, we should expect to see different degrees of gifting and responsibility in the elders. For example, all elders must be able to shepherd and teach the people of God; however, their level of gifting in these areas will vary and most will not be shepherds or teachers in the Ephesians 4 sense.

In [1 Timothy 5:17 \(NIV 1984\)](#), we read that **“The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.”** This seems to imply that, though there should be governmental equality in an eldership, there will be some elders who are particularly given to directing the affairs of the church. It certainly indicates that preaching and teaching will not be the primary work of all elders. Since **“double honor”** here refers to financial reward, it is probably reflecting the fact that, while many (perhaps, most) elders will fulfill their function in the church while retaining secular employment, some will be released and resourced to work for the church. Consequently, some will take more responsibility than others for the day-to-day administration, the shepherding care, the teaching and preaching, etc.

Indeed, some elders may be (or may become) recognized as apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds or teachers, and may combine their local eldership involvement with a wider Ephesians 4 ministry. For example, Peter was, of course, an apostle, but he was also an elder of the church in Jerusalem ([1 Peter 1:1, 5:1](#)).

## THE AUTHORITY OF ELDERS

**“Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.”**

[Hebrews 13:17](#)

Elders carry responsibility not just for the welfare and direction of the congregation as a whole, but for each individual. Jesus is concerned with every area of your life (not just your “spiritual life”), and so are elders. They may, at times, bring very clear correction and direction to you. If you want to become part of a local church committed to New Testament practice, you must ask yourself whether you are willing for its elders to have this degree of involvement and authority in your life.

To bring this into perspective, however, we must recognize that a father directs his toddler quite specifically at first, but expects to see in the child a growing ability to know—and willingness to do—the right thing. Similarly, a new Christian, unfamiliar with the teachings of God's Word, may need specific direction in many areas. However, a godly leader's intention will be to bring that believer to a level of maturity in Christ where he is able to know—and willing to do—what is right before God.

A good parent doesn't discourage questions, and you should feel free to share with your elders any concerns you may have regarding their direction or counsel. Also, just as good parents rejoice to see growing initiative, you do not need the permission of the elders before making every decision, or taking any step in serving the Lord. They will, however, be interested to know what you are doing in order to offer you counsel, encouragement, etc.

## RESPONDING TO AUTHORITY

Romans 14:12 tells us that “each of us will give an account of himself to God.” However, Hebrews 13:17 shows that church leaders will also give an account of how they took care of the flock in their charge. Elders, therefore, take their responsibility very seriously. Their aim is to please God and to be good stewards of those He has entrusted to their care.

It is also interesting to note from Hebrews 13:17 that we are to obey our leaders so that their work will be “with joy and not with groaning,” and that the latter “would be of no advantage” to us. Our willing submission is not for the purpose of exalting them, but rather for our own maturity and growth. As John Calvin points out when writing about this verse, “if the salvation of our souls be precious to us,” then we should consider with high regard “those who watch out for it.”

Having looked at what the Scriptures have to say about elders, let us now consider deacons.

## DEACONS

“Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons:” Philippians 1:1

*Deacon* comes from the Greek word *diakonos*, meaning “servant, waiter, attendant, or minister.” Of course, every member of the church is to serve the whole in one way or another, but clearly the term *deacon* is reserved in Scripture only for some.

Although not specifically named as such, many consider Stephen and the other men chosen in Acts 6 to be the first deacons. This is because they were appointed to relieve the apostles of the responsibility to “wait on” (Greek verb, *diakoneo*) tables, thereby enabling the apostles to give their attention to prayer and the ministry of the Word (Acts 6:1-7).

## QUALIFICATIONS FOR DEACONS

These seven men were chosen on the basis of being “full of the Spirit and of wisdom” (Acts 6:3). However, when considering the qualifications for deacons, attention is usually given to 1 Timothy 3:8-13. The requirements there are surprisingly similar to those for elders, and can again be summarized as character, capability, and confirmation. However, it is important to note that the ability to teach and defend the faith is not a requirement, and unlike elders, their function in the church is not governmental.

## THE APPOINTMENT OF DEACONS

In Acts 6, the deaconing role emerged from a practical need that was causing problems in the church and threatening to take the leaders away from their primary responsibilities. We might, therefore, conclude that deacons are not merely appointed for the sake of having them, but to meet particular needs that arise from time to time.





Secondly from [Acts 6](#), we might conclude that people are appointed as deacons when their ability to serve stands out beyond the normal. The deaconing role has sometimes been thought of as a less ‘spiritual’ function, one that can be left to more “practical” types. This is certainly not the basis on which the Seven were chosen. Indeed, it requires servants who are empowered by the Holy Spirit to produce the sort of fruit subsequently seen in that instance:

“And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.” [Acts 6:7](#)

Therefore, as with elders, we must first look for the anointing of the Holy Spirit when appointing deacons. This must be seen and confirmed by the congregation, who must also be aware that the candidates fulfill the requirements set out in [1 Timothy 3](#). The elders will then pray for them and lay hands on them, as the apostles did with the Seven.

## THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF DEACONS

Deacons operate on behalf of the elders and are accountable to them. Their responsibilities in the church are not general, but are limited to their designated area of service, which may be administrative (e.g., organizing aspects of the life and ministry of the church, handling the finances, etc.) or more shepherding (dealing with specific needs, working with homegroups, children’s work, etc.). Though they do not carry governmental authority, their responsibilities will no doubt include administering and directing others in areas of service. Because they are known to be acting on behalf of the elders, and because they are respected for who they are and what they do, they will receive the willing co-operation of those working with them.

## A NURTURED CHURCH

Jesus is referred to in [1 Peter 2:25](#) as “the Shepherd and Overseer” of our souls. He has fully provided for the maturing and equipping of His Church by giving His Word, His Spirit, and the Ephesians 4 ministries. However, He did not stop there. He has brought an intimate care to each local congregation by establishing elders and deacons to lead and serve His people on a daily basis.

Be thankful for them and be determined to make their work as easy as possible. They need your love, help, and prayerful support!

## RECOMMENDED READING

1. *Biblical Eldership* by Alexander Strauch



# DEVOTED TO THE FELLOWSHIP

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.” [Acts 2:42-47](#)

This description of the newly-birthed church in Jerusalem provides one of Scripture’s clearest pictures of what the Christian community should look like. Though the Body of Christ has had two thousand years to mature since then, and has grown to comprise millions of believers worldwide, it would be hard to find a congregation today that matches this inspiring precedent. However, Jesus will return for a Church that will be more glorious than anything previously seen. To become that Church, we must continue to recapture the commitment to God, His people, and His purpose that we see in the book of Acts.

## BEING DEVOTED

The first thing we should note is the attitude with which the early Church approached their relationship with God and their life together. [Acts 2:42](#) tells us that the believers “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” The Greek could be translated to say that they were “wholly given over to” or “adhering themselves to” these things. It conveys the idea of total, ongoing commitment in heart and mind.

This is a foreign concept to many today. People tend to think of church involvement merely in terms of attendance, and it can be a fairly casual step into—and out of—church “membership.” However, nothing about our life in God is to be casual or half-hearted. We are told: **“And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength”** (Mark 12:30). This passionate approach to God will be reflected in how we outwork the calling He has for us together.

## WHAT IS FELLOWSHIP?

**“Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul,”** Acts 4:32a

One of the things that the early Church was devoted to was **“the fellowship.”** Sometimes, Christians can tend to think of “fellowship” merely as socializing with others in the church, but it has a much stronger meaning than this. The Greek word is *koinonia*. It literally means joining or partnering with others in something. It is another example of a word that would not have had a particularly religious connotation at the time. In fact, when we read in Luke 5:10 that James and John were Simon Peter’s **“partners”** in his fishing business, the word used there is from the same root. It conveys the idea of being united with other people by and for a common purpose.

It is important to note that Acts 2:42 tells us that the believers **“devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship.”** It isn’t just that they were avid listeners, but that they were devoted to outworking together what they heard. True fellowship is not present unless we are responding together in obedience to what God is telling us to do. Of course, this cannot happen unless individually we are being obedient to God. Therefore, before we look further at the shared aspect of our life in Christ, we must remind ourselves of the importance of our personal response.

## THE INTEGRITY OF THE INDIVIDUAL

Obviously, Christian fellowship can only exist between Christians:

**“Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?”** 2 Corinthians 6:14

However, the degree to which even Christians can experience fellowship will depend on the individual relationship each has with God. Integration requires integrity. Ongoing sin in the life of a believer will hinder our communion with God and with others:

**“If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.”** 1 John 1:6-7

Therefore, for the sake of our intimacy with God and our fellowship with one another, we must **“abstain from every form of evil”** (1Thessalonians 5:22). We must never be guilty of hypocrisy, acting one way in church circles and another way elsewhere (see Luke 12:1). Instead, we must pursue godliness in every aspect of life. For example:

- **In the home**, our attitude should be one of patience, understanding, and kindness, and our conduct should be consistent with God’s will for the family:

**“Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.”** Colossians 3:18-21



- **In the workplace or school**, the Christian should be honest, respectful, faithful, and hard-working, and should never be guilty of lying, contentiousness, unreliability, or laziness:

“Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.” [Colossians 3:22](#)

In fact, we should act righteously in every relationship and every interaction in the world: “Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed” ([Romans 13:7](#)). How we conduct ourselves in life reflects not just on our own personal testimony but also on the congregation to which we belong, on the Church generally, and indeed on the Lord Himself:

“Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.” [1 Peter 2:12](#)

## THE INTEGRITY OF THE BODY

So, maintaining personal integrity is the only way to ensure the integrity of the body of believers. This will flow into how we relate to one another. Regrettably, there is always potential in the church for relational issues to arise that, if not addressed properly, can have devastating consequences. Many a congregation has collapsed as a result of disagreements, jealousy, suspicion, or gossip, grieving the Lord and causing the world to ridicule and dismiss the Church. We must guard and act against such strategies of the enemy. We will briefly consider just two potential problems, though the principles involved in dealing with them have much wider application.

### GOSSIP

“A perverse man stirs up dissension, and a gossip separates close friends.” [Proverbs 16:28 \(NIV 1984\)](#)

Authentic church life creates an environment of friendship and trust, in which many personal things are shared. When information is inappropriately passed on, and particularly when confidences are broken, the effects can be very damaging. Scripture strongly condemns gossip, and we need to eradicate this poison from the church. However, where people are genuinely interested and involved in one another’s lives, it can sometimes be difficult to know when the sharing of information is legitimate and when it is gossip.

The root of gossip is malice (see, for example, [1 Timothy 6:4 \(NIV 1984\)](#) and [3 John v.10 \(NIV 1984\)](#)) and the goal, both in the telling and the hearing, is sensationalism (“[The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to a man’s inmost parts](#)” [Proverbs 18:8 - NIV 1984](#)). It is, therefore, helpful to ask ourselves these questions when considering whether to share or listen to information regarding another: Is my intention to benefit the person concerned? Am I, on some level, enjoying the sharing of this information, even though it relates to something negative? Would I be happy with the person concerned knowing about this conversation?

Before leaving this subject, it is important to note that we should also exercise wisdom and discretion when discussing church-related concerns (whether regarding individuals or the congregation) with those outside the church. Quite apart from the issue of confidentiality, such people are unlikely to be able to help in resolving the issues, so what is the point of sharing them?

### GRIEVANCES

“For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.” [Galatians 5:14-15](#)



Misunderstandings can arise and mistakes can be made in any relationship—and of course, Christians are still able to act in a deliberately sinful way at times. In any of these situations, we must respond rightly, and Jesus directs us how:

“So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.” [Matthew 5:23-24](#)

“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.” [Matthew 18:15-17](#)

Whoever is in the wrong, it is always up to you to make the first move. If you know (or even suspect) that you have offended a brother, don’t wait for him to come to you—go and put matters right. If you feel a brother has wronged you, don’t wait for him to come to you—go and put matters right. If the attempt does not succeed, try again. When necessary, [Matthew 18:15-17](#) shows how to involve other people. We are exhorted in [Ephesians 4:3](#) to be “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” In humility and submission to God, we must do everything we can to bring about restoration.

“I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.”  
[1 Corinthians 1:10 \(NIV 1984\)](#)

## THE IMPORTANCE OF FORGIVENESS

“bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.” [Colossians 3:13](#)

Of course, a vital component in resolving relational problems is forgiveness. We are repeatedly commanded in Scripture to forgive one another—so the assumption is that there will always be plenty of need for this in church life! Christians, of all people, should be good at forgiving others, since we are all beneficiaries of the most amazing and undeserved mercy. We must commit ourselves to being those who continually flow in the grace and mercy of God towards one another, in obedience to Him and for the sake of the unity of the body of Christ.

## LOVING ONE ANOTHER

“Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others... Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.” [Romans 12:4-5, 10 \(NIV 1984\)](#)

“AND THEY DEVOTED THEMSELVES TO THE APOSTLES’  
TEACHING AND THE FELLOWSHIP, TO THE BREAKING OF  
BREAD AND THE PRAYERS.”

[Acts 2:42](#)



1 Corinthians 12:13 tells us that “in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.” Independence is not a viable option for us—we belong to one another. We must bear in mind that our relating within the body of Christ is in all ways to be an outworking of this fundamental instruction:

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” John 15:12

We must ask God to show us how He sees those around us and to enable us, by the Spirit, to know His love for them. Thus envisioned and equipped, we will find it easier to think and act in true love:

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.”

1 Corinthians 13:4-8a (NIV 1984)

Here are some further practical expressions of our love for one another:

## PREFERRING ONE ANOTHER

“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor;” Romans 12:10 (NASB)

We live in an individualistic culture that advocates self-importance, self-advancement, and self-fulfillment. However, our focus as Christians is to be on God first, then on others, being more concerned for their good than for our own:

“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.” Philippians 2:3-4

## SERVING ONE ANOTHER

“...through love serve one another.” Galatians 5:13

Jesus did not come to be served, but to serve (Matthew 20:28), and similarly we are in the church not primarily to receive, but to give. Every Christian has some means of serving, whether publicly or “behind the scenes.” Everyone should be actively seeking to contribute to the building up of the local church. There are many ways of doing so, and we would encourage you to speak with one of the elders to learn about ways you can serve. If you are a member of one of our Living Light churches, you can fill out the serving survey at [livinglightchurch.com/serve](http://livinglightchurch.com/serve).

## ENCOURAGING ONE ANOTHER

“...encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.” Hebrews 3:13 (NIV 1984)

There are many Scriptural exhortations to encourage one another, and most of us know from experience the powerful effect of encouragement (or the lack of it). We should, therefore, take to heart the above instruction from Hebrews, determining not to let a day go by without encouraging someone. Any kind words we speak to others will no doubt be appreciated, but God is the God of all encouragement (see 2 Corinthians 1:3 - NIV 1984), and people will be most built up when our encouragement is conveying His mind and heart, lovingly communicating the truth of His Word.

## MINISTERING TO ONE ANOTHER

“Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.” 1 Peter 4:10 (NIV 1984)

The well-known passage on love from [1 Corinthians 13](#) comes in the middle of Scripture's most extensive treatment of why and how the body of Christ is to function in the gifts of the Spirit (see [1 Corinthians 12](#) and [14](#)). We should be looking to build one another up in this way, taking every opportunity to respond to the Spirit's leading, whether by bringing a contribution publicly in a meeting, or by ministering to an individual.

## OFFERING HOSPITALITY

**“Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.”** [1 Peter 4:9 \(NIV 1984\)](#)

As far as circumstances allow, our open hearts to one another should be reflected in open homes, where we are happy to provide others with a place to stay, enjoy a meal, or just relax. This can be a particular blessing for those who live alone, or whose homes offer no Christian warmth or encouragement. We should not be overly concerned about having the house spotlessly tidy, or providing impressive meals. The essence of hospitality is our welcome and our willingness to share what we have, be it much or little.

## MEETING TOGETHER

**“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”**

[Hebrews 10:24-25](#)

To be able to outwork fellowship, we need to be together! The believers in the early Church were very committed to this, and so should we be. Hopefully, we will always come away from meetings feeling built up, but this should not be our primary motivation in going. We should go to bless God and others. Having this perspective will help us to prioritize fellowship over other, more self-serving options.

Looking again at the church in Jerusalem, we see that **“And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved”** ([Acts 2:46-47](#)). This passage indicates that there were public meetings, smaller gatherings in homes, and the sharing of life on a day-to-day basis.

## THE CONGREGATION

**“I will thank you in the great congregation; in the mighty throng I will praise you.”** [Psalm 35:18](#)

The Sunday morning meeting is an excellent opportunity to come together to celebrate the goodness of God and to hear His Word to us. It also provides a very public testimony to the world. We should never take times such as these for granted, but should approach them with faith and excitement, fully available for all that God wants to do in and through us.

## HOMEGROUPS

**“...When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.”** [1 Corinthians 14:26 \(NIV 1984\)](#)

Wonderful though the large gathering can be, it is not the best environment for everything that God wants to do in our lives. For example, it does not usually provide the opportunity to build significant relationships, ask questions,



learn to contribute, give and receive care, etc. Small gatherings such as homegroups usually provide a better context for these, and indeed for the consistent outworking of much of what we have looked at in this session. We, therefore, place a great emphasis on the importance of homegroups, and expect everyone who is part of this church to belong to one, with all this implies in terms of attendance and participation.

## SHARING LIFE

“...all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.” 1 Peter 3:8

Even attendance on a Sunday morning and involvement in a homegroup is not enough. If we are devoted to the fellowship, we will seek out opportunities to spend time with our brothers and sisters in Christ. The believers in Jerusalem were so committed that they met together every day! This does not translate into a packed schedule of church events, but rather speaks of a desire to share life and rejoice in the goodness of God together. In doing so, we are to be Christ-like and Kingdom-minded, reaching across worldly barriers of age, race, upbringing, life circumstances, interests, etc.

## CORPORATE PRAYER

“...they devoted themselves to...the prayers.” Acts 2:42

The commitment of the early Church to corporate prayer is clear throughout the book of Acts (see also Acts 1:14, 4:24-31 and 12:12). This commitment no doubt sprang from the apostles’ teaching, which would itself have been the passing on of Jesus’ teachings on prayer. Corporate prayer is an important aspect of fellowship, in which we join together in heart and voice, calling upon God to move mightily in, through, and beyond us.

## A TESTIMONY TO THE WORLD

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” John 13:34-35

Though He calls us into real community, God does not want us to be insular and exclusive, but rather to be interacting with the world and a visible demonstration of His love. We see that the church in Jerusalem, though focused on God and committed to one another, were “having favor with all the people” and that “the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47). We believe for this to be our testimony too, as we give ourselves wholeheartedly to fellowship with God and one another.

## RECOMMENDED READING

1. *The Safest Place on Earth* by Larry Crabb
2. *Hospitality Commands* by Alexander Strauch
3. *Does the Future Have a Church?* by Terry Virgo
4. *Paul’s Idea of Community* by Robert J. Banks





# GIVING AND RECEIVING

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.” [Acts 2:42-47](#)

In the last session, we saw that to be in fellowship means to be joined together with others in outworking a common purpose. The Greek word translated as “fellowship” in [Acts 2:42](#), *koinonia*, is translated elsewhere in the New Testament as “sharing.” In this session, we will look at two further ways in which we express fellowship with God and one another: sharing bread and wine (“The Lord’s Supper”), and sharing our finances.

## THE LORD’S SUPPER

“And he [Jesus] took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, ‘This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.’” [Luke 22:19-20](#)

As we see in [Acts 2](#), the early Church was devoted to breaking bread with one another. This term can simply mean eating together, but we know that they were also committed to sharing bread and wine in obedience to the command of Jesus, and in remembrance of Him. Churches through the ages have practiced this in one form or another. In some cases, it has become so ceremonial and ritualistic as to have lost all sense of intimacy. In others, it has become so casual as to have lost all sense of awe and wonder. We need to look at the intention of Jesus in directing us to remember Him in this way, and it is helpful to start by considering the roots of the practice.

In [Luke 22](#), we have an account of what has become known as “The Last Supper.” Jesus had gathered with His disciples to partake in the Passover Meal, an annual Jewish event commemorating one of the greatest moments in Israel’s history—the deliverance of their ancestors from slavery in Egypt ([Exodus 11-12](#)). By His imminent death, Jesus was going to bring about a far greater deliverance—deliverance from slavery to sin and Satan. In anticipation of this, He inaugurated a wonderful way to help us contemplate the significance of this deliverance, and to celebrate it.

## A COVENANT MEAL

As already noted, this act can be referred to simply as “breaking bread,” but it has been given several specific names by the Church: the Lord’s Supper ([1 Corinthians 11:20](#)); the Eucharist (from the Greek verb meaning “to give thanks” in [1 Corinthians 11:24](#)); the Lord’s Table ([1 Corinthians 10:21 - NIV 1984](#)); and Communion ([1 Corinthians 10:16 - KJV](#)).

It has also often been referred to as “The Covenant Meal.” A covenant is a binding agreement or special arrangement. Covenants in biblical times were usually celebrated with a meal, rather like a marriage banquet (marriage is, of course, a covenant; see [Malachi 2:14](#)). As Christians, we are beneficiaries of the New Covenant, the arrangement that God made, enabling those who trust in the saving work of Jesus on the cross to live in right relationship with Him. Our “covenant meal” celebrates this. It is not a “once only” meal, like a wedding reception, or even just once a year, like the Passover Meal. We can and should celebrate it regularly.

**WHERE?** Sometimes breaking bread will take place at gatherings of the whole church (see [Acts 20:7](#) and [1 Corinthians 11:20-22](#)), but it can be anywhere that any Christians are together. As already noted, the believers in Jerusalem were “**breaking bread in their homes**” ([Acts 2:46](#)). The home can provide a great environment in which to share, give thanks, and pray together in an unhurried and meaningful way.

**WHAT?** The bread is just ordinary bread, and the wine ordinary wine. They are not “sacred” in and of themselves, nor “made sacred” by prayer or any other process. They represent the body and blood of Jesus, but—contrary to what some denominations teach—they do not become His actual flesh and blood!

**WHEN?** The Bible does not tell us exactly when or how frequently to do it. The believers in Jerusalem met together every day, and may have broken bread in this way every day ([Acts 2:46](#)). In [Acts 20:7](#), we read that the believers in Troas came together on the first day of the week to break bread, though we cannot assume they only (or even always) broke bread on the first day of the week. However, since Jesus commanded us to do it in remembrance of Him, it should certainly be a regular part of our fellowship.

**WHO?** Only those who know they are saved through Christ’s death on the cross should participate, because it only applies to them. However, *all* for whom this is the case can participate—a believing child does not have to have attained a certain age, nor does a person have to be a “member” of the congregation. A church leader does not have to “officiate”; any Christian may offer the bread and wine to others.

## WHAT’S THE POINT OF IT?

The Lord’s Supper is sometimes referred to as a *sacrament*. By *sacrament*, some denominations mean a religious act that is an outward/physical sign of an inward/spiritual reality, though others go as far as to say that sacraments convey a benefit to the partaker, irrespective of that person’s spiritual state. There is no biblical justification for this latter view. Just as baptism (which is also often referred to as a sacrament) does nothing unless one is submitting to it in obedient response to salvation, neither does taking the bread and wine. However, just as baptism *is* of great significance for those who approach it properly, the Lord’s Supper should be also.



So what is the significance of the Lord's Supper, and what truths are conveyed by it? In [1 Corinthians 11:17-34](#), Paul shows that our attention is to be directed in several different ways as we participate in this act. We are to:

**LOOK BACK** — “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.” [1 Corinthians 11:26](#)

The Lord's Supper directs our thoughts back in history to the cross. The bread reminds us of Christ's body, given up for us, and the wine reminds us of his blood, shed for us. We are sobered and filled with gratitude as we consider the cost of our salvation, paid willingly by Jesus out of His great love for us. We proclaim it to one another, and determine to proclaim it to the world.

**LOOK UP** — Jesus said, “...‘Do this in remembrance of me.’” [1 Corinthians 11:24](#)

We take the bread and wine in remembrance not just of His death, but also to focus on Jesus Himself. While not brushing over Christ's suffering on the cross, we must never forget that it was followed by the resurrection. He is no longer dead! The Supper reminds us to look up, with the eyes of faith, to see Jesus seated at the Father's right hand in glory (see [Colossians 3:1](#)), and to worship Him.

**LOOK AROUND** — “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.” [1 Corinthians 10:17](#)

The Lord's Supper is a communal meal; we take it with other Christians. When Paul refers in [1 Corinthians 11:29 \(NIV 1984\)](#) to “recognizing the body of the Lord,” he is speaking not of the bread but of fellow believers, the body of Christ. As he goes on to say, “now you [plural] are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it” ([1 Corinthians 12:27 - NIV 1984](#)). So as we eat and drink, we should look around at our spiritual brothers and sisters, thanking the Lord for joining us to them. There is a sobering aspect to this, too...

**LOOK WITHIN** — “A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.” [1 Corinthians 11:28-29 \(NIV 1984\)](#)

Many suppose this to mean that we need to check whether we are free of sin before we eat “the body of the Lord” (i.e., supposedly the bread). This can lead some to refrain from partaking if they do not feel “worthy.” The Lord's Supper can certainly make us mindful of shortcomings in our walk with the Lord, but where necessary we should just repent and receive God's forgiveness. We can then thankfully participate in the act that reminds us that we rely on Christ's performance, not our own!

However, as previously noted, “the body of the Lord” that we are to recognize, and in regard to which we are to examine ourselves, is our spiritual family. The problem in Corinth was that many were selfishly being disrespectful and dismissive of their brothers and sisters in Christ. Their approach to the Lord's Supper made it a travesty, and brought God's judgment. This covenant meal is meant to demonstrate our oneness as believers. By it, we declare, “We are joined together in Christ; I love you and am for you!” If this is not actually our heart, we are inviting God's judgment (see [1 Corinthians 11:27-30](#)). We must, therefore, take the opportunity to deal with any grievances there and then (see [Matthew 5:23-24](#) and [18:15-17](#)).

**LOOK FORWARD** — “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.” [1 Corinthians 11:26](#)

It is not just about the past or even the present—it is also about the future. Our celebration now is just a foretaste of the unspeakable joy that awaits us when Christ returns. The Bible describes this in terms of a marriage, when Christ, the Bridegroom, will at last be united with the Church, His Bride. Therefore, as we partake in the Lord's Supper now, we look forward to “the marriage supper of the Lamb” ([Revelation 19:9](#)). It will be the meal to end all meals, a great heavenly banquet that will last forever.



## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

God, in His great wisdom, has given us this practice so that we might be continually reminded of what He has done for us through Christ. It should be as significant to us as baptism, but with the advantage of it being something we can do again and again, with ever-deepening revelation.

Let us turn now to another way of expressing fellowship—with our money!

## FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP

“And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need... There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.” Acts 2:44-45, 4:34-35

This aspect of the life of the early Church may seem surprisingly radical to us, but it is entirely in keeping with their wholehearted response to the gospel. It is also in keeping with God’s intention for His people.

Even a casual reading of Scripture reveals that money plays an important part in the Kingdom of God. It has been estimated that around 15% of Jesus’ words recorded in the New Testament relate to money and financial issues, and that He says twice as much on these subjects as on faith and prayer combined, or on Heaven and Hell combined!

## MONEY: THE HEART MONITOR

Contrary to popular belief, the Bible does not say that money is the root of all evil. Money is not evil; God blesses us with it! However, in 1 Timothy 6:10, we see that “the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils.” Our attitude towards money, and our handling of it, can reveal a lot about us (“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” Matthew 6:21). It is also a basis on which God will determine what of real and eternal value can be entrusted to us:

“One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in that which is another’s, who will give you that which is your own?” Luke 16:10-12

If our desire is to be faithful to God with what He has given us, we must learn the importance of giving.

## GODLY GIVING

“But just as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us—see that you also excel in this grace of giving.” 2 Corinthians 8:7 (NIV 1984)

“AND THEY WERE SELLING THEIR POSSESSIONS AND BELONGINGS AND DISTRIBUTING THE PROCEEDS TO ALL, AS ANY HAD NEED.”

Acts 2:45



Before looking at specific types of giving, there are some fundamental truths that must be understood. First, we see in the above passage of Scripture that Paul refers to giving as a “**grace.**” It is something that God graciously enables us to do, first by providing the resources, then by putting it in our hearts to share those resources with others. Giving is to be a Spirit-led act of worship to God, and a way of ministering His love to others. Secondly, we see that it is a grace in which we can grow and excel. This will happen as we reach to God for a greater revelation of His mind and heart in this regard—and as we actually do it! Scripture gives us some very practical guidance to help us get started. Our giving is to be:

**SYSTEMATIC** — “**On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income,**” 1 Corinthians 16:2a (NIV 1984)

Thought, prayer, and preparation should go into our giving. We should not be taken by surprise when it is time for the collection. And we should determine to give regularly and consistently. Some are inclined to wait until they feel “led” to give, or to postpone it with the intent of catching up later in the month/year. They tend to end up giving relatively little. God understands how this can happen—so He tells us to give regularly and consistently!

**IN PROPORTION TO OUR INCOME** — “**On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income,**” 1 Corinthians 16:2a (NIV 1984)

When deciding what to give, we start by looking at what we receive. Our giving should never be at the mercy of our fluctuating expenses.

**SACRIFICIAL** — “**For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord,**” 2 Corinthians 8:3

Our giving is to be an act of worship to God and an expression of love for others. As we have seen previously in this course, worship involves sacrifice, and true love gives sacrificially (see [John 3:16](#)). The early Church clearly grasped this truth. Therefore, when deciding what to give, we should determine a figure with which we feel comfortable—then go beyond it!

**WILLING/JOYFUL** — “**Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.**” 2 Corinthians 9:7 (NIV)

Again, our giving is to speak of grace not law, and of wholehearted love for God and others. If we are reluctant, something is wrong that needs to be put right. We should always be able to rejoice in the privilege we have to give, be it much or little (see [2 Corinthians 8:12](#)).

With these general principles in place, we can move on to look at particular types of giving.

## TITHES

*Tithe* means “tenth.” The first biblical record of tithing is in [Genesis 14:17-20](#), where Abraham (then called Abram) tithes to the priest and king, Melchizedek (who, interestingly in the light of our earlier subject, offered him bread and wine). In [Genesis 28:20-22](#), we see Jacob vowing to tithe. Tithing was subsequently included in the Law of Moses (see, for example, [Leviticus 27:30-33](#)).

Some think that tithing has no relevance for Christians under the New Covenant. While it is true that tithing is not specifically commanded in the New Testament, there are several reasons why we should not reject it. For example:

1. Though tithing was included in the Mosaic Law, we have seen that it did not originate there, but rather with Abraham. We can, therefore, assume that tithing (like marriage and one day of rest in seven) is a principle that, though later embodied in the Law, is of a more enduring nature.

2. [Hebrews 7:1-10](#) specifically references Abraham's tithe to Melchizedek to emphasize the fact that it was of greater significance than tithing to the Levitical priesthood.
3. We are elsewhere in Scripture exhorted to follow the example of Abraham, the father of the faithful (see, for example, [Galatians 3:6-9](#)). Why would we not follow his example in this faith-filled act of devotion?
4. Perhaps most significantly for us, Jesus affirmed the practice of tithing when, in rebuking the legalistic and hypocritical Pharisees, He said:
 

“...For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, **without neglecting the others.**” [Matthew 23:23](#)
5. We have already seen that in the New Testament we are directed to give systematically and in proportion to our income. On what basis would we assume that, living in the good of the New Covenant with its far greater blessings, we would give proportionately less than under the Old Covenant?

For all these reasons, we teach the principle of tithing and strongly encourage its practice.

## THE USE OF THE TITHE

In the Old Testament, the tithe supported the Levites, the religious leaders of the people. They were thereby freed from regular work to concentrate on religious duties (see [Numbers 18:21](#)). The principle of financially supporting those who minister to the people of God flows into the New Testament:

“...the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.” [1 Corinthians 9:14](#)

“Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor [here referring to financial reward], especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.” [1 Timothy 5:17](#)

Tithes are, therefore, usually used for people: the support of the ministries of the church and visiting speakers, wages for support staff, gifts to overseas workers, help for the needy in the church, and so on.

## PRACTICING TITHING

The following two questions often arise when people are considering tithing:

*“Do I calculate the tithe on my gross income or my net income?”*

“Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine.” [Proverbs 3:9-10](#)

The tithe is to be a tenth of your income, not a tenth of what's left of your income! Though most of us have tax automatically deducted from our salary, our heart should still be that the Lord receives first. The tithe should, therefore, be calculated before tax.

*“Do I have to give all of the tithe to the church, or can I divide it between different recipients, e.g., the church, a Christian TV ministry, a charity, and people I know who are in need?”*

“Bring the **whole** tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house.” [Malachi 3:10a \(NIV 1984\)](#)

The tithe is for the local spiritual “house,” or community, to which you belong. Other desired giving would constitute offerings.

## OFFERINGS

God does not limit us to one tenth—that is just the starting point. What we give beyond the tithe constitutes offerings. Whereas tithes are primarily for people, offerings are usually applied towards outgoings for, e.g., evangelism, buildings, utilities, special projects, etc. This distinction is, however, a guideline rather than a strict rule. For example, we may from time to time take up an offering for the poor.

That very example leads us to a third type of giving required by the Lord and identified in Scripture.

## GIVING TO THE POOR

“Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord,” Proverbs 19:17a

God’s heart for the poor and needy is clear throughout Scripture. He directs us to identify with—and manifest—His heart to them in practical ways. We each have an individual responsibility in this regard, and as a church, we are committed to giving to the poor, both in our congregation and beyond.

## THE FINANCE TEST

“I am not commanding you, but I want to test the sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others.” 2 Corinthians 8:8 (NIV 1984)

We mentioned at the beginning of this section that our approach to money reveals our hearts. Some Christians become offended when challenged in the area of giving, but Paul had no qualms about it being a basis on which to judge real love for God and His people.

However, God is also willing to put Himself to the test in this area:

“‘Test me in this,’ says the Lord Almighty, ‘and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.’” Malachi 3:10b (NIV 1984)

The principle of the blessing that flows from this obedience to God is also clear in the New Testament:

“give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.” Luke 6:38 (see also 2 Corinthians 9:6)

Receiving is not to be our motivation for giving. Jesus said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35), but as we give, we will surely be blessed—so that we can, in turn, bless others and glorify God:

“And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work... He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.” 2 Corinthians 9:8, 10-11

## RECOMMENDED READING:

1. *The Covenant Meal* by David Matthew
2. *Money, Possessions, and Eternity* by Randy Alcorn





# BIBLICAL MANHOOD AND WOMANHOOD (PART 1)

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” [Genesis 1:27](#)

“I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.” [Psalm 139:14](#)

Throughout this course, we have seen that God has a purpose in everything He does, and a plan to outwork that purpose for His glory and our benefit. We have considered this in issues such as the way He calls us, gifts us and joins us together in fellowship. In these final two sessions, we will look at what the Bible teaches concerning the significance of God creating us male and female. In doing so, we will see what we have in common and where God, in His wisdom, has determined that our roles and responsibilities should differ.

There is always enormous pressure on the Church to conform to the pattern of the world, and scarcely any subject is as emotive and bitterly controversial today as gender distinction. However, the Bible is remarkably clear throughout on this subject. Once again, we are faced with the challenge to be faithful to the Word of God, not merely in theory, but also in practice (see [Romans 12:1-2](#)).

## THE MODERN WORLD VIEW—AND ITS RESULTS

“You turn things upside down, as if the potter were thought to be like the clay! Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, ‘He did not make me’? Can the pot say of the potter, ‘He knows nothing?’” [Isaiah 29:16 \(NIV 1984\)](#)

The increasing movement in recent history to establish the equality of men and women has regrettably led to a tendency to seek to minimize the significance of being male or female. This belittling of God’s design is a terrible mistake, and has tragic consequences. It has taken a tremendous toll on generation after generation of individuals, who have lost all sense of the wonder and privilege of being created a man or a woman.



Confusion regarding sexuality today is at epidemic levels. The result of this confusion is not a happy harmony among gender-free people, but rather increase in divorce, sexual abuse, homosexuality, and promiscuity. The loss of a sense of God-given identity has also led not just to social awkwardness, but to emotional distress leading even to suicide.

Meanwhile, much of the Church, which is called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, seeks to conform to the philosophy of the day by arguing against or simply ignoring the many passages of Scripture giving us doctrine and practice when it comes to God's wisdom and intention for men and women. So, let us consider this subject, starting at creation.

## GOD'S ORIGINAL INTENTION

“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” [Genesis 1:26-27](#)

This scripture clearly identifies the *equality* of man and woman in creation, their *joint representation* of the image of God and the mandate for them to rule *together*; but it is in [Genesis 2](#) that we are given the specific details of their creation. First, God created the man, put him in the Garden, commissioned him to work it and take care of it, and commanded him not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil ([Genesis 2:7-8, 15-17](#)). We are then told:

“Then the LORD God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.’ Now out of the ground the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, ‘This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.’” [Genesis 2:18-23](#)

So, woman was specifically created, from the very essence of man, to complement him and help him outwork the purpose God had given him. Though they were to function together as one, it is important to remember that the mandate was first given to Adam. Male headship was an aspect of the “good” instituted by God at creation (see [Genesis 1:31](#)). However, the beautiful harmony was soon to be horrendously distorted.

## THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE FALL

Tragically, Adam and Eve sinned and thereby brought upon themselves terrible consequences, including this judgment on the woman:

“To the woman he [God] said, ‘I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.’” [Genesis 3:16 \(NIV 1984\)](#)

Increased pain in childbirth is obviously a bad thing, but why would a wife's “desire” for her husband constitute a curse? And why would his consequent “rule” over her be a curse, especially since male headship was already established and good? An understanding of the original Hebrew words is helpful here. The word translated “desire” comes from the Hebrew word *teshuqah*, and could be better translated “desire to conquer.”

It is the same word used later in [Genesis 4:7 \(NIV 1984\)](#), where God warns Cain that “**sin is crouching at your door; it desires [teshuqah] to have you, but you must master it.**” Similarly, the word translated for the husband’s “rule” comes from the Hebrew word *mashal*, and could be better translated “dominant/oppressive rule.” So began the saga of strife we have known through the centuries, referred to in recent times quite accurately as the “battle of the sexes.” But God was, of course, committed to His purpose, and would not ultimately leave us at enmity with Him or one another.

## RESTORING ORDER

“His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.” [Ephesians 3:10-11 \(NIV 1984\)](#)

God’s plan of restoration was, of course, put into effect through Christ’s saving work on the cross. This enabled us to be brought back into right relationship with God and one another. We have been redeemed and restored not just for our own benefit, but for a purpose—our original purpose. As His people, we are to reflect Him and outwork His rule. God has determined that the world should look to us, the Church, to see His glory and His wisdom, primarily in the area of how we relate to one another. Recognizing God-ordained order is an important part of this.

Some have argued that teaching on authority and submission is restrictive and even “enslaving.” In fact, the exact opposite is true. A proper understanding of godly submission is, in fact, the key to freedom and the ability to move in godly authority. This is a principle most powerfully seen in Christ Himself:

“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” [Philippians 2:5-11 \(NIV 1984\)](#)

## ROLES IN THE NEW COVENANT

New Testament teaching on the respective roles of men and women is rooted in this same liberating principle. Leadership and submission have nothing to do with superiority and inferiority. God’s design is a partnership of two spiritually equal people, within which the man bears the primary responsibility to lead in a God-glorifying way. Some, while acknowledging that this principle was evident at creation, suggest that all distinctions are to be disregarded as a result of the amazing covenant we now have in Christ. The following verse is often used to support this position:

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” [Galatians 3:28 \(NIV 1984\)](#)

In fact, in this scripture, Paul is pointing out that our differences in race, status, and gender are no longer the basis of our value, and that our spiritual position is now the same. This does not mean that distinctions have ceased to exist, or that all have the same function within the body.

There are actually seven texts in the New Testament that specifically address issues of gender and roles. They are in [1 Corinthians 11](#), [1 Corinthians 14](#), [Ephesians 5](#), [Colossians 3](#), [1 Timothy 2](#), [Titus 2](#), and [1 Peter 3](#). We will look at a number of these passages in this and the following session, and will see that in many respects they run contrary to, and indeed confront, the philosophies of our day. Let us look first at a passage that speaks of God’s design for marriage.

## A BEAUTIFUL RELATIONSHIP

“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.”  
Ephesians 5:22-33

Although this is essentially addressing husbands and wives, it gives us a wonderful picture of Christ’s relationship with His Bride, the Church, and a tremendously valuable insight into God’s intention in male headship. The model of headship is our Lord, the Head of the Church, who gave Himself for us. The antithesis of Christ-like male headship is, in fact, male domination, the assertion of man’s will over woman’s will, without regard to her spiritual equality and value. That is the fruit of the fall.

This scripture shows us the wisdom and glory of God in marriage. In his relationship with his wife, a godly husband has the high calling of demonstrating the sacrificial and servant-hearted love Christ has for the Church. And, of course, it shows that a godly wife is to be a picture of how the Church is to respond to Christ. It is important to note that they both have a primary responsibility. The requirement for the husband to fulfill his obligation is not conditional on the wife fulfilling hers, or vice versa.

Moving on from this, let us consider what Scripture teaches regarding the outworking of creational order in the wider family of the church, focusing on the sometimes confusing and controversial issue of the role and function of women.

## WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

Certain scriptures relating to women have led to much contention over the years. In recent times, they have often been ignored for appearing (or being interpreted as) demeaning or too restrictive of women, and contrary to what is considered “fair” in our society. Here are two examples:

“Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.” 1 Timothy 2:11-14

“Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged, and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.” 1 Corinthians 14:29-35

If we are committed to honoring Scripture, and if we only had these two passages, we would have to conclude that women should have no voice in the Church. However, one of the principles for the proper interpretation of the Bible (hermeneutics) is known as harmonization of Scripture. This is when we consider a passage in the light of the rest of Scripture, in order to find God's full counsel and thereby obtain greater clarity. It is striking to note that perhaps the most significant scripture we have in clarifying the right and responsibility of women to be heard in the Church is one that is also often rejected and dismissed.

## SPEAKING WITH AUTHORITY

“I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the teachings, just as I passed them on to you. Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is just as though her head were shaved. If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head. A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head. In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God. Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering. If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God.” 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 (NIV 1984)

We will not focus at this point on the actual practice Paul is addressing here, but we can see that this scripture gives clear instruction on women praying out and prophesying in church meetings. This, therefore, allows us (even requires us) to search for a meaning beyond the obvious when Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14 that women are to “remain silent.” In fact, it is reasonable to consider Paul's comment in 1 Corinthians 14 to be within the context of the judging of prophecy, as this is the issue directly preceding it. The judging of prophecy would carry a measure of governmental authority. This, we believe, is the crux of the issue, and leads us on to another important subject.

## TEACHING AND GOVERNMENT IN THE CHURCH

“I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man...” 1 Timothy 2:12

Having concluded that a woman can contribute vocally in meetings, what about teaching? Looking more closely at the direction Paul brings in 1 Timothy 2, it is interesting to note that in the Greek, the word *teach* is in what is called the present active infinitive tense. It could be translated “to teach and continue to teach,” or “be continually teaching.” We believe this could be why it is used in conjunction with the other part of the prohibition, “or to exercise authority over a man,” as any person who is continually teaching into a situation will, intentionally or otherwise, become the authority in that situation.

“SO GOD CREATED MAN IN HIS OWN IMAGE, IN THE IMAGE OF GOD HE CREATED HIM; MALE AND FEMALE HE CREATED THEM.”

Genesis 1:27



Furthermore, there are different types of teaching. Some teaching is governmental in nature, such as the establishing of doctrine and practice, whereas other teaching merely expounds upon what has already been established. It is clear that Paul's concern is that women should not assume a function that is governmentally authoritative in the church. That would be contrary to God's order in creation.

However, his instruction and intent does not, in our view, prohibit a woman from other types of teaching. She may share what God is showing her in the Word, and occasionally speak on what is already established doctrine and practice. Scripture specifically affirms the teaching role of women in certain circumstances. For example, Paul instructed Titus as follows:

“Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.”

Titus 2:3-5

We also see in [Acts 18:26](#), Aquila *and* his wife, Priscilla, explained “**the way of God more accurately**” to Apollos, one of the prominent teachers in the early Church.

## PRACTICING SOUND DOCTRINE

“Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.” [1 Timothy 4:16 \(NIV 1984\)](#)

Our conviction is that the balance of Scripture teaches that governmental authority should rest with men. Only in the most extreme and unusual circumstances would we see a potential justification for women functioning in this way.

This is not to say that women do not carry *spiritual* authority. In fact, all believers have been given this, and in many ways, spiritual authority is a far greater kingdom dynamic than governmental authority. By governmental authority, we are referring to the commission given to those who lead and direct the affairs of the church. Specifically, this would apply to apostles and elders, whose ministries intrinsically carry government within their spheres. Governmental authority may also be carried by those authorized by an apostle, as seen in the ministries of both Timothy and Titus.

Prophets and evangelists can, and usually do, function *without* carrying government to the local church; therefore, these ministries would be as open to women as they are to men. Similarly, shepherds and teachers do not intrinsically carry government but are frequently commissioned by the apostle to do so. In our view, this type of commissioning would be inappropriate for women. However, women could be recognized in these roles, to the extent that they function solely towards other women.

## CONCERNING 1 CORINTHIANS 11:2-16

As we draw to the close of this session, we must return to the doctrinal issue and practice specifically addressed by the apostle Paul in [1 Corinthians 11:2-16](#). Paul was so gripped with the importance of recognizing creational order that he brought an apostolic command regarding complementary practices intended to keep these truths visually before the Church. These were the practices of men removing any headcovering when praying out and prophesying, and women covering their heads when doing so.



This passage of scripture has been ignored or rejected by a huge part of the modern Western Church, but it is clear to us that Paul is establishing a practice based on a doctrine, by which we mean the full biblical teaching on a given topic, intended for application in life. Because of this, we are going to devote our final session to a thorough examination of this text, as we seek to be faithful to the biblical practice.

## HOLDING TO THE WORD OF GOD

“I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the teachings, just as I passed them on to you.”  
1 Corinthians 11:2 (NIV 1984)

We are very aware that the teachings in this lesson are challenging and provocative, and that they fly in the face of the spirit of our age. However, we believe they are restored truths that God is bringing to us with power and life. We encourage you to face the Word of God with an open heart and a determination to let nothing hinder you from obeying it.

## RECOMMENDED READING

1. *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood* by John Piper and Wayne Grudem
2. *Women in the Church: An Analysis and Application of 1 Timothy 2:9-15* edited by Thomas R. Schreiner and Andreas J. Köstenberger



# BIBLICAL MANHOOD AND WOMANHOOD (PART 2)

“His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.” [Ephesians 3:10-11 \(NIV 1984\)](#)

In the previous session, we considered the wisdom and purpose of God in creating us male and female. We saw how sin affected the complementary and harmonious relationship men and women were designed to have. Through the redemptive work of Christ, however, we once again have the power and privilege of manifesting God’s original intention.

While looking at several New Testament passages giving gender-specific instruction on roles and functions, we briefly considered [1 Corinthians 11:2-16](#), which shed light on the subject of women speaking out in church gatherings. That passage comes in a section of Paul’s letter where he is addressing various issues pertaining to the meeting together of the saints. He later brings instruction on the covenant meal and the gifts of the Spirit, but here his focus is the practice of men removing any type of head covering when praying out or prophesying, and its parallel instruction that women should wear a head covering when doing so. This is what we will look at in this, our final session.

## DOCTRINE AND PRACTICE

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,” [2 Timothy 3:16](#)

Some might wonder why we would devote an entire session to this relatively obscure subject. The very fact that most Christians seem to know so little about this passage is, perhaps, reason enough to look into it. More than that though, we are committed to facing and responding obediently to all of God’s Word, and we have a particular responsibility where Scripture commands **practice** (i.e., an established form of practical outworking) based on **doctrine** (i.e., the full biblical instruction on any given subject, presented for the purpose of application in life).

Some things we do are not rooted in doctrine but are simply “practical,” such as screening the microphone at public meetings. Such practices should not, of course, be *contrary* to sound doctrine, and may indeed serve scripturally-directed goals (e.g., in this particular case, that meetings are conducted in an orderly manner by providing guidance to those bringing public contributions). Nevertheless, they are not of an enduring nature and are subject to change.

Practice based on doctrine is of a wholly different nature. The subject matter of [1 Corinthians 11:2-16](#) falls within this category. Our goal when establishing this type of practice in the church is revelation, both individually and corporately, and this comes as we study the Word (see [Psalm 119:105](#)).

Obviously Paul knew that “**All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable**” ([2 Timothy 3:16](#)), but he also knew that not all issues had the same weight or priority:

“For I delivered to you **as of first importance** what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,”  
[1 Corinthians 15:3-4](#)

Similarly, while emphasizing the importance of understanding and outworking the doctrinal practice in [1 Corinthians 11:2-16](#), we wish to make clear that we *do not* consider it to have the same measure of priority and importance as many of the other subjects covered in this course. That said, let us look at some of the reasons that this subject has been treated as if it had no importance.

## KINGDOM CULTURE AND VARIOUS REACTIONS

It is important to point out that, although unusual today, the apostle Paul’s teaching on this practice was accepted by the early Church. The earliest evidence of this is the painted walls of the Catacombs, where the persecuted first century Church would meet. Here, women are depicted as distinct from men in that their heads are covered in worship. The practice continued, in some form or other, for virtually the entire 2000 years of Church history, that is, right up until the 1960’s. However, in recent times, the subject has evoked various negative responses ranging from quick dismissal to passionate objection. Following are some of the main reasons for this:

**1. GENERAL IGNORANCE** — The first problem is not so much that [1 Corinthians 11:2-16](#) has been taught badly, but rather, that it has hardly been taught at all! This passage is not usually addressed in the teaching of local churches, and any awareness of it tends to be more a product of believers stumbling over it in their personal readings. The second problem is that, due to the recent lack of sound teaching, the Church has been robbed of its ability to refute curious but frequently made “explanations,” such as, “the passage is referring to Corinthian prostitutes,” or “the instruction was simply a cultural thing.” Subsequently, these suggestions are accepted by millions of believers, resulting in a dismissal of actual obedience to the apostolic command.

**2. CULTURAL IRRELEVANCE** — Those from certain traditional church backgrounds may be somewhat familiar with the concept of head coverings in connection with respect. Some may recall their mothers or perhaps grandmothers wearing hats to church, and most of us are familiar with the image of men removing hats as a sign of respect when praying or singing a national anthem. However, despite these practices having a root in a truth once understood, they are now rejected as meaningless, like so many practices that have continued by way of tradition without revelation.

**3. VARIOUS ABUSES** — Regrettably, some churches that have practiced head covering have done so as part of a regime of male domination, the devaluing of women, and legalistic control. This has resulted in individuals being fearful of anything they associate with those negative experiences.





**4. GENUINE INTERPRETATIONAL DIFFERENCES** — We recognize that there are many who share our passion for adherence to the Word of God, but have earnestly arrived at different conclusions regarding how faithfulness to Paul’s original intention might be practiced in the modern church. In our passion to see this passage taught and the practice restored, we are keen to maintain a non-judgmental attitude to those of other persuasions.

**5. THE SPIRIT OF THE AGE** — Beyond these seemingly rational reasons for not practicing head covering, we would be naive to think that we are unaffected by the worldly culture in which we have been raised. Sometimes this effect is subtle, but can produce surprisingly vehement feelings and irrational thoughts, even among those who are typically balanced and biblical in their approach.

## HERMENEUTICS

Before we systematically work through the text, we need to explain the principles that we will be employing as we attempt to correctly understand its meaning. These principles are what theologians call **hermeneutics**, which is the science of understanding, translating, and interpreting Scripture. It is a way of outworking Paul’s exhortation to Timothy to be “**a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth**” (2 Timothy 2:15).

The first hermeneutical principle is that we are to interpret literally what is said. The term “literal” comes from the Latin *litera*, meaning “letter.” To interpret the Bible literally is to understand it according to the letters and words used. Although the Bible is the inspired Word of God, each passage should be interpreted according to the type of literature that is used. Scripture can be in the form of historical narrative, poetry, metaphors, prophetic imagery, parables, practical instruction, authoritative command, etc. Depending on what and how God’s Word is communicating, different responses are required. For example, the required response to a poetic text might be nothing more than joy and inspiration, whereas the required response to an authoritative command is clearly one of obedience.

If a passage of Scripture is written in a clear, straightforward way, then we are to simply receive it in that way. We do not have the liberty to seek for a hidden meaning beyond the obvious and apparent unless there is a clear historical or linguistic reason to do so.

Another hermeneutical principle we referenced in the previous session, and one we will return to later in this session, is the harmonization of Scripture. This is when we consider a passage in the light of the rest of Scripture in order to find God’s full counsel, and thereby obtain greater clarity.

## INSTRUCTIONS WHEN PRAYING AND PROPHECYING

In the light of these principles, let us approach this passage of Scripture with an open heart and mind. We will start by reading from the New International Version (1984), then go verse by verse, considering its literal meaning. This will include looking at a number of the original Greek words, and will help bring clarity and dispel some common misunderstandings.

“NOW I WANT YOU TO REALIZE THAT THE HEAD OF EVERY MAN IS CHRIST, AND THE HEAD OF THE WOMAN IS MAN, AND THE HEAD OF CHRIST IS GOD.”

1 Corinthians 11:3 (NIV 1984)



“I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the teachings, just as I passed them on to you. Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is just as though her head were shaved. If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head. A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head. In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God. Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering. If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice – nor do the churches of God.” 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 (NIV 1984)

## APPLYING HERMENEUTICAL PRINCIPLES TO THE PASSAGE

In accordance with the first hermeneutical principle, we should start by asking ourselves, “Does Paul appear to be giving any straightforward instruction in this passage, and if so, what is it?” Most would agree that, at the very least, Paul is saying that men should not pray or prophesy with their heads covered, and that women should cover their heads when praying or prophesying. Some might feel a little embarrassed to admit to having arrived at such a simple conclusion.

The fact is that this conclusion is consistent with the overwhelming majority of great Christian thinkers for the last two thousand years of Church history. Many of the great leaders of the Church, such as Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian of Carthage, Hippolytus, John Chrysostom, Jerome, Augustine, John Knox, John Calvin, and John Wesley, made strong defenses of the practice in their generations. However, it’s not our intention to teach from Church history, but from the Scripture itself.

Despite this passage clearly being straightforward instruction, it is one of the few scriptures where people, for no immediately obvious reason, will reach for a hidden meaning. This New Testament passage is undeniably written as direct apostolic command and is nestled between two instructive passages relating to the Lord’s Supper, neither of which is contested as anything but enduring instruction for church practice.

Furthermore, the principle of harmonization of Scripture does not alter the conclusion, as there is no other text of Scripture that addresses the subject directly. Therefore, we are left with the question, “Is this one, clear apostolic command enough to require of us obedience?”

### EMBRACING ETERNAL TRUTH

It is our conviction that the appalling treatment of this Scripture is primarily due to the fact that it underscores the doctrine of God’s creational design for men and women, and their distinctive roles as taught in the previous session. This doctrine is largely rejected by the modern Western church.



This is not to say that this is only a modern problem. The fact that Paul addresses the issue and brings the instruction that he does is a clear indication that the issue was neither fully understood, nor totally accepted, even in his day. How easy it would have been for Paul to have removed any confusion by dismissing this practice. Remember, this is the same apostle who actively dismantled so much Jewish tradition, even something as foundational as circumcision. An important question for us to answer is, “Why did he go to such lengths as to lay a doctrinal foundation for a practice that would be irrelevant in future cultures?” And perhaps an even more important question would be, “Why would God in His sovereignty allow it to be included in the canon of Scripture?”

As we go through the text, we will draw much from an exegetical study paper, which you can access online with the videos at [onechurchministries.com](http://onechurchministries.com).

## 1 CORINTHIANS 11:2-16 (NIV 1984)

**VERSE 2** — “I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the teachings, just as I passed them on to you.” Paul starts by commending them for holding to his “teachings,” or “traditions” as other translations say. By this, Paul was emphasizing “apostolic tradition”—something beyond normal instruction, that was to be held to precisely, hence the phrase “just as I passed them on to you.” Later in this same letter, Paul makes the following remarkably authoritative statement: “If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord’s command. If he ignores this, he himself will be ignored” (1 Corinthians 14:37-38 - NIV 1984).

**VERSE 3** — “Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.” Paul launches his teaching with nothing less than the Godhead, and starts with the most powerful expression of voluntary submission in Christ. There is no stronger theological foundation Paul could have used than this as the basis of his argument.

As an alternative to the principle of submission, some in recent years have sought to argue that the word *head* (Greek, *kephale*) could mean something other than “authority over another.” The possibility of “source” (like the head of a river) has been suggested. However, to apply this meaning in this text is dubious. There is a complete lack of evidence, both in Scripture and the Greek literature of Paul’s day, that the term “head” means “source” when used in reference to people. Furthermore, the meaning of “authority over another” makes the best sense in all other Scriptural occurrences of the word. To take just one example, **Ephesians 5:23** says, “For the husband is the head of the wife” In what meaningful way is the husband the *source* of the wife?

**VERSES 4-5** — “Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is just as though her head were shaved.” As we look at what Paul is saying here, it should be noted that throughout this text, the actual type of covering is not defined. What we do know is that Paul does not use the word for the full veiling often associated with Middle Eastern tradition. Furthermore, Paul uses the Greek verb *katakalypto*, meaning “to cover.” This word is used somewhat generally in Scripture to describe the act of covering with something. Therefore, from what we can ascertain, Paul simply required that women wear some type of head covering when praying or prophesying in the church.

In these verses, Paul uses highly potent language. He describes a “dishonor”—actually a “disgrace”—taking place. However, the Greek language here conveys much more than its English equivalent. The person spoken of is continually, persistently, willingly, actively, or directly performing an act of public humiliation, shame, disgrace, and embarrassment to his or her head. It is not indicating necessarily that the person in question is intending or even aware of the reality of what is happening. Nevertheless, from Paul’s apostolic perspective, a public disgrace is continually occurring either by a man covering his physical head, or a woman not covering hers when publicly praying out or prophesying.

This brings us back to the teaching on apostles in Session 12. One of the key gifts of the apostolic ministry is an ability to see into the heavenly realm. For example, Paul spoke of insight into mysteries hidden from previous generations but now revealed to apostles and prophets ([Ephesians 3:4-5](#)). He spoke of being caught up to the third heaven and hearing inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell. He referenced a thorn in the flesh given to him to prevent him from becoming conceited because of the surpassingly great revelations he received ([2 Corinthians 12:1-10](#)). Is it not then reasonable for us to believe that the apostle Paul was seeing something that we may not yet recognize?

But why should the covering of a man's head when praying or prophesying be disgraceful, and why should the opposite be disgraceful for a woman? Perhaps the answer lies in God's requirement that men and women appear clearly distinct from one another, and in doing so display acknowledgment of His creational order.

**VERSE 6** — **“If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head.”** Paul assumes certain things here, like the disgrace and shame associated with a woman having her hair shaved off. Up until very recently, and still to some extent today, the shaving of a woman's head has always been a sign of humiliation. Paul knows that the Corinthians would have understood this. Some have speculated that a shaved head was the sign of prostitution in Corinth, but this is highly doubtful. It is much more likely that Paul is addressing the loss of, perhaps, the clearest expression of a woman's femininity, that being her long hair.

**VERSES 7-9** — **“A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.”** Paul here uses the term “glory,” which conveys the idea of honor, and he is again arguing the truths of creation. Notice this has nothing to do with the culture of the day and nothing to do with the Fall. It is original intention, not fallen condition, that Paul is referencing. When we lead out in prayer or prophecy, we engage in a most amazing privilege, that of acting as the very mouthpiece of the church to God or of God to the church. It appears to matter to God that, at this time of functioning with such authority, we do something to outwardly acknowledge Him and our submission to His authority as our Creator.

**VERSE 10** — **“For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head.”** We should note three things in this statement:

**“For this reason, and because of the angels”**—Beyond Paul's previous reason for the practice (the dishonor demonstrated by lack of acknowledgment of creational order), he now introduces a further reason—angelic observation of this fact. Because Paul does not elaborate on this point, it has been easy for many to dismiss it. Again, it stands in complete contradiction to the cultural argument. What have angels to do with trends in Corinth? Angels are mysterious creatures, and although Scripture does not give us a lot of insight into the angelic realm, it is nevertheless apparent that a major part of God's agenda is fulfilled in the Church's demonstration to the heavens:

**“His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms,”** [Ephesians 3:10 \(NIV 1984\)](#)

What we do know about angels should give us an insight into why our example of responsive obedience is important to them. In Scripture, angels operate under divine command. These incredibly powerful creatures (in [Isaiah 37:36](#), one angel destroyed 185,000 people!) function as messengers and ministering spirits on God's behalf. It appears that an astounding third of the angels in heaven were deceived by Satan when he disregarded his own place in creation and rejected God's authority ([Isaiah 14:12-14](#), [Revelation 12:4](#)). It is also clear that angels and their fallen counterparts, demons, are unable to see into the hearts of men.



However, angels are observers of outward signs, as was most dramatically seen in the Passover. This is when the enslaved Israelites were instructed to put ram's blood on the doorposts of their houses. When **“the Destroyer”** (Hebrews 11:28, whom many have understood as the “angel of death”) passed over God's people, he saw the blood and spared the firstborn. How tragic it would have been for any who failed to be obedient that night, trusting instead in the idea of “God knowing their heart.”

We are given very little direction regarding our interaction with angels. What a shame it is that we ignore this one clear directive we are given for their benefit—and we being the people who will one day judge them (1 Corinthians 6:3)! Perhaps, our disregard of them in this matter may be a contributing factor as to why our interaction with them seems so infrequent compared with that of the early Church.

**“ought”** — The word *ought* is used several times in this passage. It has lost some of its strength in modern usage, and some mistakenly take it to imply an option or choice. However, this word means “to owe, to be bound by debt or to be morally obligated.” To take these meanings and apply them to the text would cause it to read, “On account of the previously stated reasons, the woman, therefore, is bound by a sense of debt and moral obligation to have authority upon the head.” Choice is not in view. The Fall is not in view. Culture is not in view. However, moral obligation to the created order of God is in view.

**“sign of authority”** — Despite the fact that most translations use the term *sign* or *symbol* of authority, it is interesting to note that the Greek text is more accurately translated: “the woman is morally obligated to have authority upon the head on account of the angels.” The term translated **“authority”** here can also mean “right, liberty, ability, or capability.” The text says nothing about a symbol or a sign, which Paul very simply could have stated by using the appropriate Greek word for this. Thus, the head covering carries another significance beyond voluntary submission to male headship. It is the possession of her liberty, right, and indeed authority to pray and prophesy in the public gatherings—to act as the very mouthpiece of the church, or even of God.

**VERSES 11-12** — **“In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God.”** Recognizing the potential for a polarization between men and women if they do not handle rightly what he is saying, Paul now re-emphasizes our equality of worth and interdependence.

**VERSE 13** — **“Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?”** It has been suggested by some that, when Paul uses the phrase **“judge for yourselves,”** he is in some way relenting, and is now saying that it is up to the individuals to assess for themselves whether or not to be faithful to this apostolic directive. This is an absurd argument, and would not be put forward by any serious theologian. Paul is employing a style of rhetoric to say, “In the light of all I have systematically laid out, make the right judgment!”

**VERSES 14-15A** — **“Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory?”** The first thing we should point out is that these verses referencing hair length for men and women are not Paul's central argument, and that there is no apostolic command or specific definition stated here regarding what is long and short. Paul is making a natural observation as a supporting argument to his main objective of establishing the practices we have discussed thus far. He is developing the point he introduced earlier in verse 6, that of the importance of clear distinction between men and women, and disgrace when this is blurred.

Here, we acknowledge that Paul's statement is more difficult to understand in a culture where the length of hair does not define manhood and womanhood to the same degree that it once did. However, at the very least, it is clear to us that Paul would consider it to be a disgrace for a man to appear in such a way that he could be mistaken for a woman and vice versa.

**VERSE 15B** — **“For long hair is given to her as a covering.”** By this, Paul is drawing an illustration from the natural realm to help us visualize the spiritual reality. However, some have wondered whether Paul is saying that if a woman has long hair, that is her head covering. Closer examination of the structure of Paul’s argument proves this to be a completely illogical conclusion. If Paul’s main argument was the importance of women having long hair, why wouldn’t he have started by stating this, and only applied head covering to those who had shaved heads? However, the clearest verse to refute this conclusion would be **verse 6**: **“If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off.”** See how illogical it would be to substitute long hair for a head covering in this verse: “If a woman does not have long hair, she should have her hair cut off”!

**VERSE 16** — **“If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God.”** Some have suggested that Paul is saying, “If anyone has a problem with this teaching, we don’t practice it ourselves and neither do any of the other churches! So ignore all that I’ve just said!” However, Paul’s intention, in his closing statement, is the opposite of this. He meant it to close down any contention by pointing out that this was not merely a Corinthian issue, nor unique to his apostolic sphere, but was accepted apostolic practice for the entire Church.

## PRACTICING THIS DOCTRINE

In our examination of **1 Corinthians 11:2-16**, we believe the directives that Paul gives supersede issues of time and culture, and are aspects of the wisdom of God that we, as the Church, are to display. Therefore, we ask that *when leading out in prayer* (that is, in such a way as commands the attention of others) or *prophesying in public/church gatherings*, men remove any head covering and women wear some type of head covering.

With the implementation of the practice of this doctrine, we have faced some challenges. However, we have also enjoyed great blessings. These have included the following:

1. The peace and joy of having faced a challenging passage of Scripture in a way that is faithful to sound hermeneutical principles, and having established a practice consistent with our conclusions.
2. Greater revelation of the wonder of godly submission.
3. A deeper honor and respect between men and women.
4. An increased sense of authority among women in the realm of prayer and prophecy in the church.
5. Tremendous opportunities to engage with others in explaining the principles of adherence to Scripture, and sharing insights into God’s order in creation.
6. Many opportunities to bring healing to those who have been injured by previous abuses of authority.
7. Constant and victorious confrontation with the spirit of the age.

## RECOMMENDED READING

1. “An Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 11:12-16” by Christopher Johnson

