

Hegemones

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Introduction

Premise

The attractiveness of Jesus was his virtue and character.¹ That which draws people to the true God is His goodness.² Jesus illustrated His leadership style by washing the feet of His disciples during the evening in which He was arrested.³ Yet, the vast majority of congregations and associated hierarchies are authoritarian.

The title of this volume, the third in a series, is a tongue-in-cheek rendition of the seldom-used descriptor of a leader, hegemon, and the equally rare style of leadership, hegemony. However, both words arose from the New Testament words *hegemon* and *hegemonia* and *hegeomai*, all of which were translated in the KJV into English words implying authority: governor, prince, ruler, reign, chief, have rule over. Newer translations have followed the same theme. But the idea of hegemony is influence, not subjugation. For example, the United States has hegemony over many countries. Those nations choose to structure their economies after the US model because the leaders of those countries perceive this to be in their own best interests. Some have tried the Marxist model of the former Soviet Union. Others have adopted the Islamic model. In each case, the country choosing the follower's role does it voluntarily, not because of invasion or other form of force. (Conquest is a separate issue.) The objective of this volume is to establish that leadership in the church should be by influence and voluntary following, not authority.

Liberty is a major theme in the New Testament, yet people who are “different” are rarely tolerated. Liberty implies that the individual retains responsibility for choices, and that choices are encouraged, not regulated. Of course, the liberty of one cannot overshadow the liberty of another, so some sort of mediation function will be required, but not authority.

Law, using force to control the behavior of the masses, is the foundation of all governments and businesses. We are comfortable with it. The New Testament recommends it for the non-Christian world.⁴ Switching to a different model in the church is frightening, mostly because we fear that some will take advantage if no rules are in place. But the concept in the New Testament is that anyone with God's collection of character traits (grace) can get along easily with those of like mind without rules, because everyone is automatically looking out for the welfare of everyone else. Similarly, law is contrasted in the New Testament with faith (mutual trust). The church, theoretically, perks along because everyone trusts everyone else to do the right thing, although each one's understanding of the nature of God (goodness) is only as good as their relative positions on the growth curve. When someone chooses less than optimally, the rest of the group works with it and moves on, trusting that better decisions will be forthcoming through growth.

Jesus led through serving. Governments and businesses which might adopt this model would implode in less than a year. But the faithful are enjoined to adopt the model and trust that God knows what He is doing. The marriage relationship between a Christian husband and a Christian wife (not mixed marriages or non-Christian marriages) should be the walking illustration of the relationship between Jesus and His bride, the church. The model is service, not

¹ 2 Peter 1:3

² Romans 2:4

³ John 13:1 – 20

⁴ 1 Timothy 1:8 – 11

authority. Historically, church leaders have had little confidence that such a prototype would be practical, so they have retained the authority structure.

Since most church hierarchies desire to align with the New Testament, Greek words relating to honor, obey, authority, example, and follow have been re-defined by translators to fit the cultural model to which they were accustomed. The entire middle voice of the Greek language of the first century has been dropped, deleting the voluntary nature of following and the importance of liberty. Further, cultural preconceptions are the filter through which the Scriptures are understood, so the assumption that authority is necessary leads to the self-deception that the New Testament recommends it.

Included in this volume is a detailed description of the Mosaic sacrificial system and its applications in the New Testament. The Mosaic system was not focused on cruelty, death, bloodshed, or sorrow. Rather, it was a celebration of forgiveness with family and friends in the presence of God. The death of an animal was a daily occurrence because they lacked food preservation techniques. Going back just a century or two from the present, dinner preparations began by catching the main course which was running around in the yard. The death of the animal made one's mouth water in anticipation; the family did not mourn its passing. The central point of the Mosaic system was thanksgiving for having been forgiven already. Pagan sacrifice was aimed at manipulation of their god(s), either to gain a desired outcome or to avoid a disagreeable one. Nearly all Mosaic sacrifices were cooked and eaten; very little was burned. Pagan sacrifices were mostly wasteful. Modern Christianity has replaced the Mosaic model with the pagan. The sacrificial model espoused by a congregation greatly influences the style of leadership.

Target Audience

As with the other volumes, advocating the immediate overthrow of church hierarchy would be counterproductive. Rather, the target audience is composed of those who can see the problems with the various leadership styles of churches, but who have not found a suitable replacement. Simply abandoning the entrenched style would create chaos. So, the ideas contained herein are long-term goals that may find opportunities to enter the mainstream over years or decades.

Present leadership maintains its position by control of the assets and the teaching. Further, congregations, having known nothing else, cannot fathom a leadership style without authority. The first step toward being released from this self-perpetuating problem is release from the constraints of assets. The second step is being released from the tyranny of the auditorium, an arrangement that focuses attention on the authority figure. Third is the establishment of a true extended-family gathering (see volume 2 of this series).

Admittedly, the proposals in this volume are rarely, if ever, encountered in modern churches. But, the present leadership styles are not working. Congregations and whole denominations are sinking. These ideas may introduce a loyalty between individuals that transcends authority politics, building the unity which Jesus prayed would be proof of His authenticity.⁵

⁵ John 17:20 – 23

Chapter 1: Liberty

“Give me liberty or give me death.” That famous line from Patrick Henry closed a speech that motivated the Virginia Assembly to join the revolution. Liberty was prized to the point that men jeopardized fortune and reputation, not to mention life itself, to possess it. Yet, people now, people then, people throughout history have misunderstood it.

While pondering the concepts of “the law of liberty”,⁶ “the liberty of the children of God”,⁷ and being “free [liberated] from sin and death,”⁸ I thought I might be able to find some good illustrations in quotes from our founding fathers. As I read, I was more and more impressed by the close parallels between the liberty upon which this nation was founded and the liberty upon which the Kingdom of God was founded. But that should not have been so amazing to me. The ragged band of free thinkers who came to this wilderness came for liberty, willing to fight to possess it. Their concept of liberty was not a parallel to the New Testament; it was the New Testament. They took what had languished for many centuries all across Western Civilization and brought it back to life.

Curiously, the French watched our little experiment in liberty carefully, tried their own, and failed. Their revolution quickly degenerated into revenge, collapsed into a new monarchy, and evolved into what we see today. What was the difference? I liken it to “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”⁹ Immediately following is this, “We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image.”¹⁰ Liberty without transformation fails.

Political and New Testament liberty have deteriorated along identical tracks. Liberty both in the church and in the world has become a balancing act, a series of compromises, an illusion carried off by smoke and mirrors. I read a quote from Ron Paul that I have embellished a little, “Conscription, forcing men into the military, as a means to defend liberty makes no sense. Those who desire to preserve what they believe to be liberty take that liberty from some to preserve it for others. Those for whom they try to preserve it would not fight to keep it nor will they appreciate or understand the gift or the price of it.”

Knowing what liberty is, what the word means in the New Testament, seems an important endeavor. Liberty is not about me. My liberty is about you. That’s the point of James’ line, “So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty.”⁶ If liberty is focused on my right to make my own choices, we are back to performance, how well I chose. Rather, the law of liberty by which we will be judged has to do with how I integrated my liberty with yours – love – and how I trust God to make this impossible system work (which is faith), especially when we mark out conflicting boundaries. We are those who look intently into the perfect law of liberty,⁶ seeing that only with godly character can I be successful in a system of faith and love.

Abraham Lincoln said, “Our defense is in the preservation of the spirit which prizes liberty as a heritage of all men, in all lands, everywhere. Destroy that spirit and you have planted the seeds of despotism around your own doors.”

⁶ James 2:12

⁷ Romans 8:21

⁸ Romans 8:2

⁹ 2 Corinthians 3:17

¹⁰ 2 Corinthians 3:18

Abraham Lincoln also said, “The shepherd drives the wolf from the sheep's for which the sheep thanks the shepherd as his liberator, while the wolf denounces him for the same act as the destroyer of liberty. Plainly, the sheep and the wolf are not agreed upon a definition of liberty.” I think it useful for each person to develop his or her own definition of liberty from all of its passages in the New Testament. In English, you need to look into all the free or freedom passages and all the liberty passages, because the same root word, sometimes a noun and sometimes a verb, is translated both ways. Your concordance can sort them out. There are less than 30.

Let's start with John 8:31 – 32, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.” More accurately, “You shall know the truth and the truth shall liberate you.” What did Jesus mean by that? In the exchange with the audience that followed you can see two applications: (1) You can be freed from slavery to sin, and (2) you can be freed from self-deception.

Looking at the second one first, do you know people who are slightly out of touch with reality? How do people get that way? I suppose you could catalog lots of reasons. Perhaps a lot of them could be lumped under, “Avoiding the uncomfortable.” I just don't want to deal with my particular problem, so I'll fool myself into believing that I'm really OK.

- Many addicts sincerely believe they could quit if they wanted to.
- Both men and women absolutely believe that the latest fashion looks good on them.
- Many people have convinced themselves that their problems are either bad luck or the fault of other people or the fault of the government, and have nothing whatever to do with the fact that they can't hold a job and spend money on cell phones instead of the electric bill.

And why do they stick with this failed world view? Just consider the responses Jesus got in John 8. “We are Abraham's descendants and have never been in bondage to anyone.”¹¹ Today's history book writers don't have a corner on revisionist tendencies. Or, “Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?”¹² If you can't deal with what is plainly happening in front of you, attack – make up something so far out that no one can answer it – because it is that stupid. Repeat it three or four times and even you will begin to believe not only that it makes sense, but also that it is true. From the addict to the fashion disaster to the victim mentality, self-deception is a way of life for the majority of the world.

“You shall know the truth”¹³ – most people find that terrifying. Truth and light are the enemy unless the liberty they bring also comes with a way to break out of the downward spiral of life. Sin exercises control in several ways. One is through self-deception. God has promised that we will be able to handle the truth about ourselves – and not that we will become accustomed to being failures. Liberty must, either in the gospel or in government, be transparent, honorable, and healing – so that sin (or corruption or conspiracy or mismanagement) will no longer be a refuge, but rather a place from which to escape at all costs.

In Romans 7, Paul wrote a touching and honest lament from a person in whom the Spirit does not live. “For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not do, that I practice.”¹⁴ That is an apt description of true slavery to sin. Don't apply that “slavery-to-sin” label to those who volunteer for sin, who willingly embrace it. They are not slaves but hired men, free agents, even equal partners with evil. Slaves are not such voluntarily. They fell into it

¹¹ John 8:33

¹² John 8:48

¹³ John 8:32

¹⁴ Romans 7:19

by bad choices and now they are stuck, able to escape clinical depression only through self-deception.

Without transformation, liberty fails. The burden of failure will become too heavy and we will collapse. Being forgiven is not enough. If we were only forgiven, we would still be slaves of sin – forgiven slaves, but slaves nonetheless. Freedom from sin, liberated from sin, is not about being forgiven and it is not about redemption. Redemption is what Jesus did for all people, once for all.¹⁵ We are no longer in fear of justice on that Day. Forgiveness is when God pushes aside our pasts to re-establish a relationship based on mutual trust despite our well-proven untrustworthiness. Liberated from sin means that we are being transformed, no longer trapped in behaviors we hate anyway. “Redemption just gets you even. Faith puts you in the black.” Jesus said, “If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.”¹⁶ Emancipation – from what? Thomas Jefferson observed, “The natural progress of things is for liberty to yield and government to gain ground.” We need something better than the natural progress of things. Jefferson’s answer for government was, “The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants.” If Jefferson were alive today, even as the oldest living ex-president, he would still be on the no-fly list.

In Romans 8, Paul wrote about being free, liberated, from the law of sin and death. Death – meaning both physical death and spiritual death. People fear death because of the unknown it represents, and because of the justice they fear will follow. As Hebrews 2:15 says, “Release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.”

The liberty to which we have been called is simple. (1) We can live in reality, not self-deception, which makes life so much easier. (2) We have been freed from the natural downward spiral by the power of the Spirit that dwells in us. (3) We are freed from fear of death, rather being in haste to get there, which is one of the symbolism of the unleavened bread in the Lord’s Supper. I can no longer be coerced or manipulated into things I would rather not do because coercion and manipulation imply fear (as John put it, “There is no fear in love.”¹⁷). I’m free. If you want me to do something, just ask. If I like the idea, I’ll go along. Liberty is the death knell of authority.

Back in 1974, then-Secretary of the Treasury William Simon said, “If it were not for the basic honesty of the American people, this government would collapse in a month. We could not hire enough people to enforce our tax codes, if indeed there would be enough honest people to do it.”

We pay taxes, theoretically, because it’s the right thing to do. We abhor corruption (and, having travelled a bit, that notion rises higher and higher on my list of things I love about our country – we abhor corruption). We volunteer for military service. And on top of that, we rescue wounded enemy soldiers and treat them. We fund the vast majority of humanitarian efforts around the world. And we do not do it because we are rich. Other countries are wealthy enough to muster some compassion once in a while. We do it because – that is what liberty does. Liberty means we can see the needs and not be restrained by fear that in the near future we will need those resources to combat oppression. Our liberty has been granted by God. It is ours. Only the victim mentality can take it away. Liberty means that I can break out of my self-deceived cocoon and see the badly abused liberty of others. In our government or in the church – it’s the same liberty. Liberty makes love possible. Without liberty, we are mired in self-

¹⁵ 1 John 2:2

¹⁶ John 8:36

¹⁷ 1 John 4:18

deception and cannot see beyond ourselves. Liberty makes faith possible. Without liberty, we have no confidence that doing the right thing will ever work. Liberty is the focal point of worthwhile life.

In 490 BC, the Persian empire was expanding rapidly, rolling over anyone so foolish to resist them. In the court of Darius and later of Xerxes was a Greek advisor. As plans were made to overrun Greece with an army of overwhelming size, the Greek advisor repeatedly cautioned them. “You don’t understand. The Greeks are free men, not slaves like your armies. They will stand and fight to the last man, not for their homes or their families. Surrender would preserve their homes and families. They will stand and fight for liberty.” Neither of those Persian kings understood liberty, so dismissed the advice – and lost – twice – which so weakened the Persian empire that they never rose again. Ever since that time, military historians have used the heroic stands of Greek warriors as an example that soldiers fight harder when defending their homes and families. Those historians do not understand liberty either. Surrender will preserve peace; my home and family will survive. Instead, risking home and family, I stand and fight for liberty. Even in death, they were free.

Our liberty in the gospel is even more powerful than the misunderstood and underestimated liberty of Greek warriors. We have the power of the Spirit to free us from the constant drag and erosion of sin. We have the unvarnished truth; we get to live in reality. We accelerate toward the end of physical life. Give me liberty or give me death.

Liberty – the right to choose based on facts without pressure, deception, or fear. With something so basic and so powerful, what could possibly go wrong? As Will Rogers said, “Liberty does not work so well in practice as it does in speeches.”

Both Peter and Paul found it necessary to correct a common misunderstanding of liberty in their time, which I observe has continued to this day. “Do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh.”¹⁸ “Not using liberty as a cloak for vice.”¹⁹ Yes, liberty says that you can make your own choices. But a bad choice is still a bad choice. Liberty does not turn a bad choice into a good choice.

But if I am redeemed, what difference does it make? The reasons for good behavior have been badly taught for many centuries – perhaps because some people think that they need a weapon to keep liberty in check. Political liberty gets abridged because those in authority fear that someone will take advantage and get away with it. So, all give up liberty so that a few might be caught. I tried to put that as kindly as I could, and it still doesn’t make any sense. The problem is the fundamental assumption. People think of good behavior as a goal, rather than a by-product of another process. If regulated behavior is the goal, liberty cannot survive. Yet, governments and churches keep trying to make it work. The New Testament motivations for good choices, good behavior, are completely different from the behavior management school of delusion. Listen to the reasons for good behavior given by the liberty school of reality and notice that all of them are centered on someone else, not on me. My choices are not about me, my liberty is about others:

- All things are lawful but... not all things are profitable or edifying.²⁰
- We are the Temple of the living God, therefore, clean this place up.²¹

¹⁸ Galatians 5:13

¹⁹ 1 Peter 2:16

²⁰ 1 Corinthians 6:12 – 20, 10:23 – 33

²¹ 2 Corinthians 6:16 – 7:1

- Unrighteousness is not “fitting”²² Fitting? “That the world may believe that Thou sent Me.”²³ We advertise liberty, not license.
- Malice and wickedness spoil sincerity and truth.²⁴
- Display the power of God through liberty.²⁵
- Works of the flesh are contrary to the fruit of the Spirit.²⁶
- We are no longer slaves of sin;²⁷ stop acting like a slave.
- Everyone who has this hope purifies himself just as He is pure.²⁸
- Failing to put off the old man grieves the Holy Spirit of God.²⁹
- Inconsistent behavior causes the name of God to be blasphemed.³⁰

Do you see how liberty is not about me, it’s about you? Liberty is about displaying the power of God, not about being a nice person. I am free to choose what is in your best interests. Until church-goers and voters stop looking at their own interests, liberty will continue to wither.

Liberty allows us to succeed. A lack of liberty has us sniffing around the edges for loopholes.

Thomas Jefferson said, “Rightful liberty is unobstructed action according to our will within the limits drawn around us by the equal rights of others. I do not add, ‘within the limits of the law,’ because law is often but the tyrant’s will, and always so when it violates the rights of the individual.”

The tyrant is anyone who thinks that you need to follow their liberty, not your liberty.

- Paul wrote, “Why is my liberty judged by another’s conscience?”³¹ The context concerns meat sacrificed to idols. Paul presented a balanced view. I am free to eat, but I also seek to give no offense. This is the answer to the “squeaky wheel syndrome” so prevalent in churches and special interests. The list of acceptable activities is governed by the least mature and the most vocal. Stand and fight. How? Teach them about liberty: without liberty there can be no faith, no love, no rescue. We would be hopeless.
- “...to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ.”³² A great many church-goers have the idea that we have liberty within a set of boundaries. The problem is that your boundaries and their boundaries are not the same. Paul related, “We did not yield submission to them for even one hour.”³³ Stand and fight. How? Teach them about liberty. If I give in to what I believe to be wrong, liberty, faith, love, and rescue die. If you must take my liberty by asserting yours, you are rejecting Jesus’ prayer for unity³⁴ and walking away from the very gospel you seek to maintain by your authority, proving that the Spirit does not dwell in you.

²² Romans 1:28, Galatians 5:1 – 14

²³ John 17:20 – 23

²⁴ 1 Corinthians 5:8

²⁵ 2 Corinthians 4:7

²⁶ Galatians 5:16 – 25, Colossians 2:18 – 3:10

²⁷ Romans 6:1 – 18, 8:13

²⁸ 1 John 3:3

²⁹ Ephesians 4:30

³⁰ Romans 2:24, Isaiah 52:5, Ezekiel 36:22

³¹ 1 Corinthians 10:29

³² Galatians 2:4

³³ Galatians 2:5

³⁴ John 17:21

- Peter wrote, “While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves.”³⁵ Peter’s description paints a picture of the clever word merchant who can make bad sound good. The gospel is simple. If it sounds complicated, it is probably wrong. However, dismantling bad doctrine is hard – because a lot of thought went into blowing it by the unsuspecting. Stand and fight. Teach liberty, because liberty is simple. Bad doctrine is complicated. Bad doctrine abridges liberty.

Many church-goers believe that one must have all the right doctrines to be acceptable to God. If that were true, we are all toast – burnt toast. It is as if the gospel went underground for hundreds or even thousands of years only to be recently rediscovered by my group. Think of it this way – the church is an illustration of God’s sense of humor. Good News – truth, freedom, liberty – are all in the custody of people. OK – faithful people, but still... As an insightful man said in class one Wednesday evening, “God didn’t need to be a rocket scientist to know that people were going to mess this up.” Another piece of evidence against evolution – we are no closer to getting it right today than they were at Jerusalem in Acts 15. That’s part of the plan.

Liberty includes the right to be wrong. Liberty does not convert wrong back into right, but it gives me the space to figure it out. So, why would I ever be concerned about whether you have the right understanding – as measured against my understanding? Because what I see is a crack in the foundation of your faith. You may get lucky and that crack will cause nothing catastrophic. But, my experience has been that foundation cracks bring leaks, settling, damage to the load-bearing walls, and an out-of-kilter appearance. When trials of faith come, and they will come, the damaged house may collapse. I do not want you to lose your investment in the house, and I do not want to lose my investment in you.

“Stand fast in the liberty by which Christ has made us free.”³⁶

Thomas Jefferson said, “Educate and inform the whole mass of the people. They are the only sure reliance for the preservation of our liberty.”

So we have this precious gift, liberty – freedom to live in reality without pressure, deception, or fear. But, as commonly presented in a skewed, self-centered manner, the liberty part is overlooked in favor of the gift part. This gospel is made to appear as the receivers’ paradise. We tend to appeal to the self-centeredness of the weak by emphasizing that many things from God are called gifts. We invoke the birthday-present mentality instead of responsibility. God’s gifts, including liberty, are “things given,” not honoraria, not gaily wrapped tokens of love. Rather, the things God has given are tools that we may accomplish God’s eternal purpose. Consider the gift-list of the New Testament and the context of each, how each gift is a tool, not a grant, not a dowry:

- The gifts of enlightenment, partaking of the Holy Spirit, the Word of God, and the powers of the age to come are tools for building hope.³⁷
- Salvation is a gift³⁸ – a tool to protect our thinking.³⁹
- The gift of righteousness by grace results in justification⁴⁰ which puts us in control, no longer slaves.
- The gift of eternal life⁴¹ gives us the liberty to do well.

³⁵ 2 Peter 2:19

³⁶ Galatians 5:1

³⁷ Hebrews 6:4 – 5, 11

³⁸ Ephesians 2:8

³⁹ Ephesians 5:17

⁴⁰ Romans 5:15 – 21

- The gracious character of God in us is a gift⁴² to enable sharing.
- The gift of service⁴³ with the ability which God supplies is given to glorify God.
- The gift of answered prayer⁴⁴ spreads thankfulness to many.
We tend to teach, “Gimme, gimme, gimme,” rather than stocking my toolbox to build a better temple.

I can participate in this giving by presenting my most treasured possession – my liberty.

- “Having been set *free* from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.”⁴⁵
- “Though I am *free* from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more.”⁴⁶

The gospel is about liberty, not birthday presents. The things God promises and gives are things that are beyond the physical grasp of a human being. It’s a no-brainer that God was going to have to supply those things if His plan were to work. What are labeled as gifts are really just God’s set-up for our success. I stand in the middle of a stage full of props placed by God. I have the liberty to use them – it is almost terrifying that I have to make choices about God’s stuff, which is why the next step after liberty is faith.

My Lord has given me the right to make my own choices, to make my own mistakes, to be free from self-deception and able to unravel outside deception, to be enslaved no longer by all those times when my good sense took a vacation because someone else lives in here, too, who keeps things going when I’m out. I look forward to getting off this Titanic, the earlier the better. My liberty is precious and I will fight to defend it. God gave it. No church and no government can take it, unless I believe them and give it away.

But how do I do that?

Pull that civil liberty parallel back into focus. According to the founding fathers, each citizen has the right to make unfettered choices within the boundaries of the equal liberty of others. This is where we find the only legitimate function of government – to regulate boundary disputes. Each citizen cedes consent, not liberty, to a central organization to decide where my liberty ends and yours begins. But exactly how that is to work, the limits of that power, are a bone of considerable contention.

Ronald Reagan said, “Concentrated power has always been the enemy of liberty.”

Thomas Jefferson said, “I would rather be exposed to the inconveniences attending too much liberty than those attending too small a degree of it.”

George Washington said, “It will be found an unjust and unwise jealousy to deprive a man of his natural liberty upon the supposition he may abuse it.”

Liberty in our country and liberty in the Kingdom of God are the same. As Paul put it to Timothy, “Law is for the lawless.” Our various levels of government make laws about behavior, again theoretically speaking, in order to protect the liberties of those whose libertarian space has been invaded. The wisdom and the effectiveness of those attempts to protect liberty have had their good days and bad days.

Liberty in the Kingdom has the same problems. Reagan’s observation about concentration of power works just as well for organized religion. Jefferson’s inconvenience has been found to

⁴¹ Romans 6:23

⁴² 2 Corinthians 9:15

⁴³ 1 Peter 4:10 – 11

⁴⁴ 2 Corinthians 1:11

⁴⁵ Romans 6:18

⁴⁶ 1 Corinthians 9:19

be too inconvenient. Washington could have been describing the lack of confidence of church leaders toward their own followers, upon the supposition that they may abuse liberty.

Many believe that we must find a balance between liberty and authority. Jesus taught in the parable of the wheat and tares that we can't start pulling out the weeds in the world, because in doing so we will trample all over the wheat.⁴⁷ Wait for harvest at which time the separation is easy. So, we can't be in the business of fixing the world. Besides, then we would need a chief agronomist to decide which is which, and to inspect the seed before planting.

Authority can be an attractive alternative to liberty, especially with the inconveniences of true liberty, the hard work of making my own choices, and the frightful responsibility liberty entails, especially responsibility for my own bad choices. If I cede my liberty to you, I can blame you.

Liberty and authority are mutually exclusive. You can't have both. With apologies to Ben Franklin for quoting him way out of context, "Those who would give up essential liberty to purchase a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety."

But how would that work? The church without people in authority? Such a concept is foreign to most.

Some years ago, on Sunday afternoons, we embarked on a study first of "honor," as in "honor your father and mother." This led to a study of "obey," then to "authority," and finally, "liberty." Bottom line, the only humans granted authority in the church were the apostles, and then only in the areas of financial support and edification. Sadly, they are all dead leaving no heirs.

The most concise advice about whom to follow is in Hebrews 13:7, which, by the way, uses both the middle voice, implying voluntary action, and hegemony, following another because it makes good sense for my prosperity. It should read like this, "Volunteer to follow your hegemonies (sorry, there is no English equivalent), who have spoken the Word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct."

Whose faith follow. Look for successful faith. Follow it. Don't follow a person or an office or an authority figure; follow the faith. In so doing, liberty is not compromised because you are choosing to follow a successful model of the faith you seek. No coercion, manipulation, or fear. This will result in different people following different manifestations of faith even in the same congregation, which, of course, makes central organization impossible. But, as the book unfolds, this impossible leadership structure is how it was supposed to be.

Authority seeks to cause good behavior. It does not work. Even if we could bring people to a highly consistent level of good behavior, we would be assembling nothing more than a group of very well behaved lost people because they lack liberty. Godly behavior is an outcome of liberty, to be expected and highly prized. But the pathway is essential – starting from liberty; because of liberty, through faith; because of faith, through love. Liberty is the linchpin. Liberty without transformation fails.

Give me liberty or, please, give me death.

⁴⁷ Matthew 24:24 – 30

Chapter 2: Examine Yourself

Introduction

In the longest passage about the Lord's Supper is the line, "Therefore, whoever eats this bread and drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But, let a man examine himself and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup."⁴⁸

This can sound scary. Examine myself? Those who participate in an unworthy manner are guilty of the body and blood of the Lord? What does that mean? Where's the line between worthy and unworthy? The context doesn't help. No details or explanations are given.

So, I set about to figure that out. I looked up all 91 passages that contained the Greek word that is translated, examine. In the following passages, the word that is translated from the same Greek word is in italics, because, often, different English words are used. Overall, it turns out that it should not be that scary. It is not so much an examination, but deciding what you think about yourself. How do you see yourself? And the expectation is that the individual is fully capable of being honest rather than self-deceived. The connection to the Lord's Supper is simply asking you to be realistic about yourself, then go ahead and participate.

Of course, we could make a list of all the things we wish we did better, but that is a depressing way to approach life. Think about when you were in school. When you got a test back, the score was written as the percentage you got right, not the percentage you got wrong. If the teacher handed back the chemistry tests, and at the top is said 94%, would you be bummed out over the six points you got wrong? Certainly, the teacher wants you to go over the things you missed so those problem areas won't trip you up later, but it is not a terrible task. You already got your 'A.' You should be quite happy, and fixing the few things you missed is no big deal.

So, in this chapter, we will look at the wide range of things that are on the test. Of course, the New Testament contains cautions, "For if anyone thinks himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one *examine* his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another."⁴⁹ The point is to rejoice, not to get depressed. And, it's about you doing what you do, not how you compare to others.

How does this relate to leadership? Typically, the examination is performed by an authority figure who desires all to fit in a narrow range of each of several parameters. To the contrary, the New Testament model requires individual introspection because the assumption is made that those in whom the Spirit dwells are fully capable of being objective about themselves. No outside entity is necessary. As John wrote, "But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him."⁵⁰ Certainly, faithful people may learn from the examples set by the successful faith of others, and should pursue such examples. But, as in the chapter on liberty above, this is a voluntary exercise. Self-proclaimed authorities have no legitimate authority.

⁴⁸ 1 Corinthians 11:27 – 28

⁴⁹ Galatians 6:3 – 4

⁵⁰ 1 John 2:27

Simplicity

I categorized the passages about how to evaluate yourself into four areas, the first being simplicity. You should feel good about yourself if you keep it simple.

In the paragraph in which Paul compared the church to a body composed of many different parts, he wrote, “Those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. And those members of the body which we *think* to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor.”⁵¹ His point is that all the parts work together; they can’t make it on their own. And, the parts of our bodies we keep covered up, we tend to consider really important. So, when I examine myself, do I work in harmony with the other parts, even though we are all different? Are all my friends just like me, or do outsiders wonder how we could all be family. I mean, you don’t even look like each other. Am I one of those parts that no one sees? That’s a good thing, a plus point on the test.

Another caution, “Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you *thinks himself* to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise.”⁵² If the outside world thinks of you as one of those great thinkers, that’s a problem. The gospel should be so simple that ordinary working people think it’s easy, that it makes sense. Use your mental ability to find the simplest way to introduce Jesus. If outsiders think, “Why didn’t I think of that?” then you are on the right path. I know a man who thinks little of himself in the kingdom, and neither does his wife, because he can’t call to mind just the right Scripture at just the right time. But he is honest and hardworking and kind, so when he makes a simple statement about the gospel, people know that it is sincere and sensible. He should mark that one a plus, not a red mark.

Some church people think they should run things because they have the knowledge. But Paul wrote, “If anyone *thinks* that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know.”⁵³ The context surrounding this chapter is about people in the early church who wanted to make grand generalizations, to answer questions before they became questions. They started with the way they wanted to see things done, and made them into rules so everyone would be just like them. The problem with rules is that we don’t foresee the future very well. We want the comfort of having everything lined out in advance, not considering that there may be other circumstances that make my rule silly. Rather, evaluate each situation as it arises, in its own context. If you find yourself trying to make a one-size-fits-all rule, that’s a minus. If you use your wisdom to figure out what to do as each situation develops, that’s a plus.

“Therefore, let him who *thinks* he stands take heed lest he fall.”⁵⁴ Various groups of Christians through the centuries have tended to follow the guy with the answers – or at least he thought he had the answers. But, looking back, he was almost laughable he was so far wrong. Alternately, if you know that you don’t have the answers, but are absolutely confident that the Spirit of God who dwells in you will help you choose well, that’s a plus.

Christ in You

And that’s my transition to the second area in which we should examine ourselves, Christ in you. You can be simple and successful because of the Spirit who is given to every faithful

⁵¹ 1 Corinthians 12:22 – 23

⁵² 1 Corinthians 3:18

⁵³ 1 Corinthians 8:2

⁵⁴ 1 Corinthians 10:12

person as a helper and remodeling contractor. Paul assumed that Christians would rely on the work of the indwelling Spirit, so they would not doubt themselves: “Examine yourselves [more accurately, “Look at the evidence about yourself.”] as to whether you are in the faith. *Test yourselves* [more accurately, “How do you see yourself?”]. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? – unless indeed you are disqualified.”⁵⁵

Most church-going people examine themselves and compare themselves to an artificial standard. Perhaps they have been told that they are OK – or not OK. Many make up their own “good enough” standard. The New Testament says that you know that God approves of you when you see the Holy Spirit working in or through you.⁵⁶ But what does that mean?⁵⁷ Here are the benchmarks of self-examination that are actually in the New Testament.

You know that the Spirit is hard at work in you when you overcome what Paul calls “the deeds of the body,”⁵⁸ bad habits that you tried and tried to defeat but couldn’t. Then, it just happened. It doesn’t have to be something dramatic like drug or alcohol addiction. It could be anger management, the development of patience, suddenly making sense of the Scriptures, and many other things.⁵⁹

John spelled out another signal, “If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been made consistent in us. By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.”⁶⁰ Love – doing what is best for the other person regardless of the effect on me. The world does not have it. The ability to love as God loves is one of the jobs of the Spirit.⁶¹ That is why outsiders have so much trouble being selfless – no Spirit. And the longer you are a Christian, the harder it gets to understand how people can be so self-centered.

John also wrote, “And this is His commandment, that we should believe on the name of His Son, Jesus, the Christ, and love one another, as He gave us commandment. Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him and He in him. By this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.”⁶²

This is how we are to examine ourselves. Do we love one another? Do we think about the needs of the others in the group (one-anothering) all the time, as we go through our daily lives? Do we see opportunities for them? Sale prices on things we know they have been thinking of buying? Job openings? Fun, wholesome, and cheap things to do? One of the main reasons Christians get together is to get into each other’s lives, to share successes and comfort those having problems. Armed with those connections, we see opportunities for the others as we go about our normal activities.

Seeing the Spirit working in ourselves is sometimes difficult. We don’t want to seem arrogant. I think that the problem is that we see ourselves every day, and we tend to forget that what we see today is not what has always been. It’s like when someone comes to visit, perhaps a relative you see a few times a year, and says, “Wow. Your kids have really grown.” And you’re thinking, “Really? They look about like they did 10 minutes ago.” So, how can we have this confidence that the Spirit works in me, that I am growing, so that I can examine myself and say, “Yes, the Spirit is working in me, so God thinks I am OK”? My suggestion is that we should do

⁵⁵ 2 Corinthians 13:5

⁵⁶ 1 John 3:24, 4:12 – 13

⁵⁷ See *Think as a Spirit*, Chapter 6: The Work of the Spirit, How Do We Know the Spirit Dwells in Us?

⁵⁸ Romans 8:13

⁵⁹ See *Think as a Spirit*, Chapter 6: The Work of the Spirit

⁶⁰ 1 John 4:12 – 13

⁶¹ Romans 5:5

⁶² 1 John 3:23 – 24

this for each other. When we get together, we need to tell one another what we see, how I can see the Spirit working in you. When someone else can see it, it means a lot more than when you decide such a thing about yourself, which is another good reason for getting together, to encourage and to be encouraged by people who are just as ragged as you are. And, such a practice gets us outside of ourselves as we build up the others, which, in itself, is a work of the Spirit. An earlier volume details convenient lists of what promises God has made about our growth, and a list of the promised works of the Spirit.⁶³

Seeking Good

My third area in which we examine ourselves – Seeking good. One of the ways in which we examine ourselves is asking ourselves, “Am I seeking that which is good?” The question is, “What is good?”

Paul wrote, “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the light is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), *finding out* what is acceptable to the Lord.”⁶⁴ The big point there is, “Finding out.” It’s not all or nothing. Our examination is based on finding out, which is one of the jobs of the Spirit that is given to all the faithful, to help us figure that out.

The world is full of messed up people, all trying to find their way. Except for a very few mentally unbalanced people, everyone is seeking what is good – for themselves. Many people think they seek what is good by making more money, or by relieving their stress through drugs or alcohol, or by filling their lives with entertainment, or achievement or a host of other possibilities. Very many people reject the idea of seeking what is “acceptable to the Lord” because they don’t think it will make them happy. On the contrary, they think Christianity will suck all the joy out of their lives. Over the centuries, the church has done a very bad job of presenting joy.⁶⁵ Our task, our examination of ourselves is, partly, “Am I seeking good stuff and, just as importantly, is that good stuff making me happy?” As Paul wrote, “And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may *approve* the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ.”⁶⁶

Again, it’s a growth thing, “that you may abound still more and more.”

So, when examining yourself, ask the question, “Am I sorting through the many options and finding what is actually good?” As Paul wrote, “*Test* all things; hold fast to what is good.”⁶⁷ We should be experimenting – testing all things. Then, keep the good stuff. Part of a successful self-examination is, “Am I seeking or am I stuck in a rut?” I’m not saying that you need to try out everything the world offers. You would probably die within a year. Some of that stuff out there is just plain dumb. But, we should be checking things out – with reasonableness and caution. If we haven’t changed in years, we aren’t testing the limits of how joyful life can be.

⁶³ See *Think as a Spirit*, chapters 5 (Promises) and 6 (Work of the Spirit).

⁶⁴ Ephesians 5:8 – 10

⁶⁵ See *Think as a Spirit*, Chapter 8 (Joy in a Broken World).

⁶⁶ Philippians 1:9 – 10

⁶⁷ 1 Thessalonians 5:21

And this joy is not just for me. “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may *prove* what is the good and acceptable and consistent will of God.”⁶⁸

When European explorers of the 16th through the 19th century went out to discover strange new lands, they didn’t keep it to themselves. They overthrew old ideas and opened up whole new ways of thinking. The generally accepted flat-earth point of view, at which we laugh today, was irrational. It generated more questions than answers. Why don’t the oceans drain out over the edge? What if you do get to the edge? What happens if you fall off? To where would you fall? What holds the whole thing up? Explorers in Africa and in the Americas searched for fabulous societies of unimaginable wealth. But they found only poverty and disease.

We are the explorers of a strange new land, in search of joy and peace and meaning for life. We, like those who searched Africa and the Americas, are blowing up old, inconsistent, sometimes ridiculous theories about life, but rather bringing in reality. We prove what is good and acceptable and consistent.

That’s the test. Are we exploring, bringing light to the self-defeating objectives of the world? Or, as the legalistic, authority-driven church, are we looking for the right practices, the right leaders, and the right doctrines so that we can stop exploring and settle back into nothingness. Sounds more like Buddhism to me. In every age, from the time of the apostles all the way to the end of the universe, we will be seeking and growing. Every era has its laughable inconsistencies. We fix some of the problems of the past and introduce whole new ones. The point is not that we get it just right, but that we are growing, searching, and hanging on to the good stuff. When we examine ourselves, we need to see exploring and growing.

Many people hear that line about examining themselves and set out finding all the things they have done wrong. No, it’s about seeking good, hanging on to what you find, and demonstrating that the good you found is real, leading to joy and peace. We need to be asking the question, “Am I the explorer or the one stuck in the way it has always been?” Explorers rarely find El Dorado. But they do find the truth, and that is worth more than that mythological gold.

Looking Forward

This takes me to my fourth area of examining ourselves, that we need to be looking forward, beyond the need of the moment.

“For indeed they [parents] for a few days disciplined us as *seemed* best to them, but He [God] for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no discipline *seems* to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”⁶⁹

First, some definitions. Discipline and punishment are very different, although children often cannot tell them apart. However, discipline looks forward; punishment looks backward. Discipline is training for the future; punishment is a penalty for the past.

Although Paul compares this discipline with that of parents for their children – to make the point that God is a good parent, not a tyrant – we might make the comparison to training or practicing. Parents with children who played a musical instrument in school enforced practice time, or tried. The child thought it was agony, cruel and unusual punishment. But it was training

⁶⁸ Romans 12:2

⁶⁹ Hebrews 12:10 – 11

so that, when the concert or contest arrived, the child could perform well. Paul says the result of God's enforced practice time is the peaceful fruit of righteousness – so when the hard choices come, the child will be able to do the right thing without a lot of stress. It will be reflex.

One of the ways we should examine ourselves is to evaluate our training regimen. Are we practicing so that, when the tough choices come, we can choose the right thing without stress? Do we have a character-building training program? When training for a sport, you must show up and train or the coach won't put you in the game, maybe not even keep you on the roster. Our God is like that coach in some ways, but different in others. For example, God is not leaning over your shoulder, watching you practice your math facts, or shouting instructions during a football drill, or playing the role of a boot camp drill sergeant. God presents the exercises and occasionally engineers a test scenario to sharpen our skills, but He is not hovering over us to keep us on task. We have to choose to get with the program.

So, what would such a character-building training program look like? I think there is considerable flexibility in how it might be done, but certain basic exercises are necessary so that you don't throw out your back or pull a hamstring the first time you get in the game.

As with any exercise program, you have to warm up or you will hurt yourself just practicing, let alone when you face something more difficult. Further, an exercise program must be regular, not all at once. Imagine trying to pack a month's worth of training into the day before the game. Also, you must practice at the same level of intensity as you play or, then game day arrives, your enthusiasm will just cause worse injuries because there is no strength to back it up.

So, what should our character-building training program look like? And remember; this is about self-examination, not examination by an authority figure.

I would think it would involve regular prayer, so when you really need some help, you know how to reach the guy who can provide it.

Character-building requires that you know your objective, so training must include reading (or listening to) the gospels in order to see how godly character plays out in the real, messed-up world.

Character-building requires that you spot the flaws in your technique. Shooting free-throws requires a reproducible sequence of motions – always exactly the same. A baseball swing must be smooth, not jerky or hitched in the middle as you turn your wrists over. Follow-through is essential in everything. So, we read the letters to see how other well-meaning Christians overcame their hitches, inconsistencies, and blind spots. We examine ourselves as we train for life in the real world.

Also, recognize that training is a lot easier than the real contest. You can go back and repeat something you messed up in practice, no harm, rather than making all your mistakes in the game. You don't feel nearly so stupid when you mess up in practice, because that's what practice is for – to iron out the bugs. Whereas, in the game, you are supposed to do it correctly, and everyone can see how you do.

So, what is your training program for life in the kingdom of God? Do we put in the time or just wing it? Bible classes, usually, are good training, but what if you trained for anything else just an hour a week? We need to train daily – maybe not the exact same thing every day, but a diversity of exercises so you improve coordination and skill. Pray every day. Read (or listen) every day. Think out the things of God every day. Then, when you have to leave the house and interact with the messiness that is life, you have the skills to do it right.

Inappropriate Standards

The New Testament also presents some erroneous standards for self-assessment which the faithful should review to weed out self-deception.

- “Do not *think* to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham for our father.’”⁷⁰ Jesus addressed this to the Pharisees and Sadducees who surmised that God approved of them because of their heritage. Similar confidence is displayed by some today who identify with this or that sect or authority figure and thereby assume that God has accepted them. First, God accepts individuals, not groups. Second, this assessment technique runs counter to the idea of objective examination of the self.
- “They *think* they will be heard for their many words.”⁷¹ Jesus’ stated reference were “the heathen,” pagans, non-Jews. But, the concept certainly generalizes to the ritualistic mindset both of some Jews in Jesus’ day and of Christians in this, who assess themselves through the standards of ritual and attendance rather than by the work of the Spirit.
- “Do you *think* they were worse sinners than all who live in Jerusalem?”⁷² Jesus addressed the concept of His time, which still exists today, that bad things happen to people because they sinned. Jesus refuted the idea with simple logic. The people in view had died at the hands of the government, presumably unjustly. Certainly the listener could think of people who did far worse things who remained unpunished. Yet, many church-goers today assume that God accepts them because nothing horrible has happened to them or their families.
- “You search the Scriptures, for in them you *think* you have eternal life.”⁷³ Jesus responded to the religious leaders of His day because those leaders objected to His healings on the Sabbath. Certainly, those objecting were well-versed in the Scriptures, but, as Jesus pointed out, their fundamental assumptions about the Scriptures had led them to ridiculous conclusions. The fact that Jesus could perform all sorts of miracles should have suggested that perhaps the common teachings about the Sabbath had gone astray somewhere, rather than insisting on tradition (even though based on the Law, albeit loosely) while ignoring obvious power from above. Many groups have recreated this manner of thinking, declaring themselves correct based on tradition loosely founded on Scripture, while ignoring clear works of the Spirit. They find “approved” practices in various places, inconsistently picking those passages that support their tradition, but ignoring practices not within their tradition. Rather, each person should view the gospels as a series of accounts of how godly character can triumph consistently in the midst of a chaotic world. Further, the letters should be viewed as reminders of how we drag culture into the church and mess things up. These are wake-up calls, not patterns for imitation.
- “Whoever kills you will *think* that he offers God service.”⁷⁴ In His final advice to the Eleven, Jesus described in advance how they would be treated, and how their detractors would think. Certainly, ordinary people do not often turn to murder to settle differences of opinion. Yet, in the first few centuries of the church, many non-believing Jews became convinced that killing Christians was their appropriate response. Taking a step back, each

⁷⁰ Matthew 3:9

⁷¹ Matthew 6:7

⁷² Luke 13:2 – 4

⁷³ John 5:39

⁷⁴ John 16:2

one should have been able to see that this was extreme and had a high probability of going terribly wrong. The same thinking still results in the deaths of Christians in many Middle Eastern and Asian countries. Jesus' point was not to condemn the perpetrators, but to prepare the Eleven (and future Christians) to deal with the mindset. Their attackers were not evil, just misguided. Most of them may be persuaded with logic and a display of gracious character. Further, this may be applied to Christians who perpetrate harm upon others in the name of God. Certainly, this world is violent and spirally downward. One may find occasions when violence is the only response we can find. But we cannot fall into the trap that harming others is somehow appealing to God.

- “Rest on the Law and approve the things that are excellent.”⁷⁵ Paul addressed the Jewish Christian mindset that they should be the leaders of the new church because of their familiarity with the Law and the workings of God. Paul pointed out that their confidence made them blind to their own shortcomings. Too often, Christians create their own standards of acceptance based on what they already know, not leaving room for what they may have missed.
- “If anyone thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so.”⁷⁶ Paul crossed paths with all sorts in the church. Some claimed to be important based on their backgrounds or their hardships or their notoriety among other Christians. Paul listed his own vitae to make the point that such accomplishments mean nothing when compared to knowing Jesus and the transformation that results. It was like claiming priority of one engineering design over another based on Cub Scout merit badges.

In chapter one, liberty was addressed, showing that liberty and authority are mutually exclusive. In this chapter, the task of assessment of accomplishment and progress is for the individual, not the authority figure. The authority-driven church severely compromises both. So, dear reader, please keep considering how the church might be organized so that liberty and self-assessment may be preserved.

⁷⁵ Romans 2:18

⁷⁶ Philippians 3:4

Chapter 3: All Things are Lawful

Knowing why we do things sets the tone for how we go about doing them. In authority-driven congregations, which constitute the vast majority, Paul's assertion, "All things are lawful,"⁷⁷ is unsettling. Those with leadership titles tend to have a low opinion of the potential performance of those whom they control: without rules, the masses cannot be held in check. Yet Paul wrote to Timothy, "Law is not enacted for the righteous but for the lawless."⁷⁸

What is Law?

In the New Testament, Law usually refers to the Law of Moses, but sometimes the context is more general, indicating any system of rules. The Law of Moses, the only civil law code written by God, is the best standard for comparison because that system of rules does not suffer from the internal contradictions and almost comical nonsense that finds its way into every code written by people. So, in the New Testament, law is compared and contrasted with grace, faith, and liberty, showing that these three principles do a far better job of regulating human behavior than any code of conduct, including one produced by God.

Only a tiny fraction of the world's population was ever subject to the Law of Moses. Rather, it was a contract between God and the nation of Israel. God needed a stage on which the Messiah would play; Israel was hired to do the job. God inserted illustrations like the tabernacle (and Temple), festivals, and sacrifices into the Law, along with the predictions of the prophets after Moses, to develop an anticipation for the Messiah and the necessary evidence that Jesus was He. Israel was selected because of Abraham; Abraham was God's friend.⁷⁹ God had to choose a group of people for this task, so He chose the descendants of His friend. The citizens of Israel were no better or worse than any other ethnic group, they just had the inside track due to Abraham. The fraction of faithful people in Israel at any point in their history was on par with every other ethnicity – probably never exceeding single digit percentages.

As payment for services rendered, Israel would get large families, big crops (as well as large herds and flocks), and victory in battle.⁸⁰ Israel had no promise of eternal life other than that which was extended to any faithful person. They were contractors, not family members. Further, the devastation often visited by God on Israel was for the purpose of getting them back on task (building the stage on which Jesus would play). And, those devastations came directly from the penalty clauses built into the contract.

God put a decisive end to the practice of the Law by destroying Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 AD. The apostles (all of whom were Jews) continued to practice the ordinances of the Law throughout the period between the Ascension and 70 AD. A comparison may be made to the attitude of David when he was being chased by King Saul. Although David had been told that he would be the next king, he declined to kill Saul, although he had ample opportunity to speed the process along. Rather, he said, "I will not raise my hand against the Lord's anointed."⁸¹ He let God take care of the transition of dynasties. The apostles knew that the time for the Law was complete, but allowed God to cause the transition. Although no prophets have or will arise after

⁷⁷ 1 Corinthians 6:12 – 20, 10:23 – 33

⁷⁸ 1 Timothy 1:9

⁷⁹ James 2:23 citing 2 Chronicles 20:7

⁸⁰ Deuteronomy 7:12 – 16, 28:1 – 14

⁸¹ 1 Samuel 26:9 – 12, 24:6 – 7

that destruction,⁸² the location of the Temple has been powerfully withheld from Israelite control since that time, first by a Roman edict prohibiting Jews from even being within sight of the Temple mount, and then by possession of the site by those who desire to exterminate them, the Muslims.

The difference between the Law and the gospel is concisely described.⁸³ The law was written on stone; the gospel is written on the heart. Israel was composed of a vast majority of unfaithful people, so trying to prompt them to know God was a constant struggle. Under the new covenant, only those who are dedicated to God are on the inside, so all of them already know God. Hence, no evangelism is necessary inside the church. Further, law cannot transform people, but only remind them of past failures.⁸⁴

James contrasted the Law of Moses and the “law of liberty.”⁸⁵ Many have missed the tongue-in-cheek use of the word, law, and set about to create a set of regulations to control Christians and the church. The standard of acceptance by God always has been faith. Abraham was counted righteous long before the Law of Moses and Jesus.⁸⁶ All of the faithful people listed in Hebrews 11 lived and died before Jesus, and a significant number also were before Moses. The prophets also stressed the importance of faith rather than law.⁸⁷ James’ use of “the law of liberty” was to remind the reader that the self-centered viewpoint of rule-keeping was ineffective, whereas liberty requires that I think of how my liberty interacts with that of others.

The Criteria for Making Choices

“All things are lawful to me, but not all things do profit; all things are lawful, but I will not be mastered by anything.”⁸⁸ “All things are lawful, but not all things edify.”⁸⁹ Paul laid out three general principles: profitability, control, and edification. In the first passage, Paul’s examples began innocuously with dietary rules, but quickly transitioned to immorality. In modern times, the two appear drastically different in importance. But in their time, dietary rules were a major stumbling block, as evidenced by Peter’s reaction to a vision in which he was told to consume forbidden meats.⁹⁰ And, while immorality was condemned in the Law, the Hellenistic culture was much more accepting of it, so lines were blurred. In the latter citation, the illustration was meat that had been sacrificed to idols and was afterward sold in the market. Paul’s conclusion was that, although each individual was free to eat such meat because the idol was of no importance, one should be sensitive to the scruples of others. One should not go so far as to let the squeaky wheel dictate the behavior of all, but maintain a good rapport while building up the one weak in faith.

Obviously, this decision tree makes behavior rules very difficult to codify. Yet, Paul was clear that participating in prostitution was just wrong. Paul’s “all things are lawful” idea did not declare all behaviors acceptable, but rather required that people think about what they are doing rather than being guided by a set of behavior rules. First, people tend to look for loopholes born

⁸² Daniel 9:24 – 27, Zechariah 13:1 – 6

⁸³ Hebrews 8:7 – 13, citing Jeremiah 31:31 – 34

⁸⁴ Hebrews 10:3 – 4, Galatians 2:16, 3:21, Romans 3:20

⁸⁵ James 2:12

⁸⁶ Romans 4:1 – 5, *et al*

⁸⁷ Micah 6:6 – 8, *et al*

⁸⁸ 1 Corinthians 6:12

⁸⁹ 1 Corinthians 10:23

⁹⁰ Acts 10:11 – 14

of self-deception. Second, people tend to ban too much. For example, the Bible is clearly opposed to drunkenness, but endorses responsible drinking.⁹¹ Yet, many oppose all alcoholic beverages on “Scriptural” grounds. Certainly, even in the first century, some took Paul’s principle too far and taught that behavior was of no consequence because Jesus had redeemed everyone, once for all.⁹² Both Peter and Paul found it necessary to correct that inaccurate perception: “not using liberty as a cloak for vice”⁹³ and “do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh.”⁹⁴ Even in the first century church, the thinking man’s organizational structure had some trouble getting started. Authority was a convenient alternative, although it is guaranteed to fail.

Reasons for Good Behavior

The New Testament provides some detail to Paul’s three evaluation criteria in 1 Corinthians 6 and 10. The following reasons may be classified under one or more of Paul’s three major headings. They are reasons, not rules; methods for evaluation, not a seedbed for multitudes of rules as the Pharisees did with “Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.”⁹⁵

- “We are the Temple of the living God”⁹⁶...“therefore, having these promises, we should cleanse ourselves from every defilement of flesh and Spirit, having consistent holiness in the fear of God.”⁹⁷ Paul began the paragraph with an appeal to consistency, “What connection has righteousness with lawlessness?”⁹⁸ A primary motivator for good behavior is to be consistent with the Temple of God who the faithful are. In this paragraph, Paul cited Ezekiel 37:26 – 27 and Isaiah 52:11, predictions of the nature of the Messianic kingdom. The concluding phrase, “in fear of God,” is not that the faithful should behave properly out of fear of being cast out, but with fear for the unbelievers who might misconstrue inconsistent behavior as being of no importance. The overall subject of the Sermon on the Mount was consistency, peaking with the line, “Be ye consistent as your heavenly Father is consistent.”⁹⁹
- “As they did not see fit to have God in knowledge, God gave them into a depraved mind, to do things not proper.”¹⁰⁰ Examples of what is not “proper” follow in a list of various bad behaviors.
- In Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane, He made specific requests concerning future believers,¹⁰¹ that they be united and that they have His character as evidence that He was sent from the

⁹¹ Proverbs 31:4 – 7. Many inaccurate claims have been published concerning wine in the New Testament. Dilution was not practiced except in times of short supply. Grape pressings became wine within days. Non-alcoholic wine was not technically possible in that day. Preservation techniques were designed to keep the wine from becoming vinegar, not to prevent fermentation. In John 2:9 – 10, Jesus turned water into alcoholic wine of high quality. For more information, see Volume 4, *Weeds Among the Wheat*.

⁹² 1 John 2:2

⁹³ 1 Peter 2:16

⁹⁴ Galatians 5:13

⁹⁵ Exodus 20:8 – 11

⁹⁶ 2 Corinthians 6:16

⁹⁷ 2 Corinthian 7:1

⁹⁸ 2 Corinthians 6:14

⁹⁹ Matthew 5:48

¹⁰⁰ Romans 1:28

¹⁰¹ John 17:20 – 23

Father. Therefore, for the faithful, a major motivator for godly behavior is as evidence that Jesus was who He said He was.

- “Therefore, let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”¹⁰² Malice and wickedness spoil sincerity and truth. In this paragraph about immorality being accepted and approved in the congregations of Corinth, Paul used as an illustration the Passover feast in which leaven was scrupulously avoided.¹⁰³ The faithful pay close attention to their behavior because the whole celebration of being passed over by the death angel can be marred by the encroachments of malice and wickedness. The faithful are walking celebrations of forgiveness (living sacrifices¹⁰⁴), so such leaven is to be studiously avoided.
- “Now we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the pre-eminence of the power may be of God and not out of us.”¹⁰⁵ The faithful display humanly impossible ethics so that the power of God may be displayed. The context indicates that the observer draws this conclusion, that the behavior of the faithful could not be due to superior self-control, but must have a higher source. Therefore, the faithful pay attention to the promises of God concerning overcoming the deeds of the flesh¹⁰⁶ so that the gospel may spread miraculously.
- “I say now, walk by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.”¹⁰⁷ The motivation for good behavior is not authority or fear of punishment, but a natural manifestation of the Spirit who dwells in the faithful. Lengthy contrasts were presented in two places¹⁰⁸ to illustrate this change of focus. Good behavior is no longer pursued directly, but is obtained as a by-product through a focus on the indwelling Spirit and the promises that engenders.
- “Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be entirely idle, that we are no longer slaves of sin.”¹⁰⁹ In this context,¹¹⁰ Paul repeatedly declared the faithful free from slavery to sin, whereas outsiders, despite their best efforts at good behavior, continuously fail. The motivation is to allow the Spirit to perform its promised transformation rather than to continually battle bad behavior.
- “Everyone having this hope upon Him purifies himself just as He is pure.”¹¹¹ The motivation for good behavior is to imitate Jesus, as opposed to focusing on right-and-wrong, good deeds, fear of punishment, or merit.
- “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God in whom you were sealed into the day of redemption.”¹¹² God’s objective is to build a big family that will last. Family implies relationships. So, the faithful are developing relationships with the divine as well as with other faithful spirits. Therefore, grieving a family member would be an undesirable

¹⁰² 1 Corinthians 5:8

¹⁰³ Exodus 12:15 *et al*

¹⁰⁴ Romans 12:1

¹⁰⁵ 2 Corinthians 4:7

¹⁰⁶ Romans 8:13

¹⁰⁷ Galatians 5:16

¹⁰⁸ Galatians 5:16 – 25, Colossians 2:18 – 3:10

¹⁰⁹ Romans 6:6

¹¹⁰ Romans 6:1 – 8:13

¹¹¹ 1 John 3:3

¹¹² Ephesians 4:30

outcome. Just as the behaviors of many have been guided by maintaining family reputation and relationships, so are those in the eternal family.

- “‘The name of God is blasphemed because of you,’ as it is written.”¹¹³ Inconsistent behavior causes the name of God to be spoken against. Christian slaves who do not honor their unbelieving masters cause the same for the name of God and His doctrine.¹¹⁴ Poor behavior by older women (perhaps including all Christians) causes the same for the word of God.¹¹⁵ So, the faithful are motivated to good behavior to safeguard the reputations of God’s nature, His teachings, and His philosophy.

In summary, God promises the ability to overcome. Faith causes the defeat of bad behavior. The faithful focus on the successes of faith (joy) rather than the failures of the flesh, choose good behavior to please the God they love (not the God who made the rules), and to enable the spread of the gospel.

What is Grace?

In the New Testament, lawfulness is contrasted with grace, faith, and liberty. Leadership is closely connected to these contrasts. Many church leaders are law-oriented. Just as Paul was accused of promoting bad behavior,¹¹⁶ many leaders fear that teaching about grace will give the hearers the impression that behavior does not matter. Of course, such would be the case only if the teacher were unclear or incomplete. The reasons for good behavior given in the New Testament, delineated above,¹¹⁷ fit exactly with teaching about grace, whereas have little if any intersection with teaching about law. To appreciate the distinction, one must first define the terms.

Simply put, grace is the collection of godly character traits. The grace, or the gracious nature, of God encompasses all His character traits and how they interrelate to create a consistent, entirely good person. In the sections which follow, various passages in which grace is used expand on this set of traits, highlighting certain traits for the purposes of that context. In some places, grace is in a list with certain traits (like mercy or compassion), while in other passages those same traits are used as an example of certain facets of grace. So, I propose that, while grace incorporates all godly character traits, the focus is on the consistency and integration of the collection. When grace is in a list with other traits, the inference is that the other traits in the list are those of particular note in the context, but they are still part of an integrated and consistent whole.

Christians receive the Holy Spirit to accomplish the re-development of the consistent, godly character of Jesus in themselves. Grace is closely connected with glory, which is a parade of God’s character traits. Leadership in the church must be centered on displaying and teaching these godly traits. Neither authority nor control are among them.

Often, the context surrounding a mention of the gracious nature of God does not provide details into what that grace includes. But, the following do, each of which illustrates the characteristics of godly leadership:

¹¹³ Romans 2:24, from Isaiah 52:5 and Ezekiel 36:22

¹¹⁴ 1 Timothy 6:1

¹¹⁵ Titus 2:5

¹¹⁶ *e.g.*, Romans 6:1 – 2

¹¹⁷ Reasons for Good Behavior. [Click as hyperlink.](#)

- “...bearing witness upon the word of His grace.”¹¹⁸ The “word” comes from the Greek *logos*, meaning, the body of thought concerning something. So, Paul and Barnabas were logically connecting the attributes of God. Many have made the assumption that God is power (as have the Muslims) or that God is wrath (as those who focus on everything negative). These apostles focused on the logic that God must be the collection of positive character traits, a completely consistent being.¹¹⁹ In another place, Paul reminded the elders of Ephesus of the same concept, “which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”¹²⁰ The logic of being consistent with the godly character traits builds up the individual and qualifies the faithful to an inheritance among those who are reserved for godly purposes.
- “...believed through grace.”¹²¹ Apollos went to Corinth and greatly helped the fledgling believers. Luke’s descriptor is that they believed because of their understanding of the grace of God. Apparently, Paul had spent considerable time convincing people in Corinth that God was composed of all the positive character traits, or, as expressed to the Roman congregations, “the goodness of God leads you to repentance.”¹²²
- “...to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.”¹²³ (Acts 20:24) Addressing the elders of Ephesus for the last time, Paul characterized the gracious nature of God as good news. In this region, the Greek pantheon and Diana, the goddess who fell from heaven, dominated religious thinking. None of these gods were consistent and none were the personification of good. Rather, all were somewhat unpredictable and known for capricious behavior. The goodness of the one true God was a stark contrast and truly good news.
- “Justified freely by means of His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”¹²⁴ Redemption of all people was accomplished by Jesus as a result of His gracious nature. Knowing that people did not have anything of sufficient value to compensate justice, Jesus determined to pay off the justice system personally, thereby allowing people to become acceptable by their faith. The grace of God included a consistent balance of justice and patience and kindness and more; one facet did not overpower the others.
- “the grace of God and the gift by grace of the one Man”¹²⁵ The gracious nature of God resulted in the justification and righteousness of the faithful. As a result of this gift, the faithful are no longer enslaved to sin, so the faithful are free to develop a similar gracious nature through the power of the indwelling Spirit.
- “My grace is sufficient for you.”¹²⁶ Paul recounted some of the many hardships he had endured while spreading the good news, including a “thorn in the flesh” for which he had thrice requested release. God declined. Understanding the consistent and entirely good character of God provided sufficient strength to carry on. Physical health was not essential.
- “Called me through His grace.”¹²⁷ Paul was referring to the event on the road to Damascus,¹²⁸ which Paul characterized as an illustration of God’s nature. Further, Paul

¹¹⁸ Acts 14:3

¹¹⁹ See *Think as a Spirit*, Chapter 1, “In the Beginning”

¹²⁰ Acts 20:32

¹²¹ Acts 18:27

¹²² Romans 2:4

¹²³ Acts 20:24

¹²⁴ Romans 3:24

¹²⁵ Romans 5:15 – 6:2

¹²⁶ 2 Corinthians 12:9

¹²⁷ Galatians 1:15

claimed that he was summoned to his present avocation by recognizing the nature of the character of God.

- “...into the praise of the glory of His grace, which He has freely given us [has graced us] in the Beloved, in whom we have redemption through His blood, remission of sins, according to the riches of His grace.”¹²⁹ The glory of His grace may be envisioned as a parade of God’s character traits, as Moses requested and observed.¹³⁰ Paul inserted a small pun based on the figurative use of grace to describe a blessing typically said over food. One facet of grace mentioned here is that God’s consistent character resulted in coming to earth as Jesus to become the sacrifice through which all are redeemed.
- “That He might show in the ages that are coming the surpassing riches of His grace in His kindness into us in Christ Jesus.”¹³¹ A major facet of grace is kindness. God came to earth not out of desperation or manipulation, but kindness.
- “Since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth.”¹³² Truth is a description of reality. The hope and trust of the faithful are based on reality, not wishful thinking. The character of God is a certainty.

The gracious nature that is imparted to believers also is presented in many passages. Some, in their contexts, single out certain character traits for emphasis:

- “Great grace was upon them all.”¹³³ The generosity and unity of the first Christians were emphasized as dominant features of the gracious natures being built in them by the Holy Spirit.
- “When he had come and seen the grace of God.”¹³⁴ Barnabas was sent by the apostles to investigate the report that Hellenists in Antioch were responding to the good news. He observed their gracious natures, apparently to a degree not humanly achievable.
- “Through Whom we have received grace and apostleship into obedience of faith in all the Gentiles on behalf of His name.”¹³⁵ The apostles received a gracious nature as essential to their task as the original leaders of the church.
- “Grace to you and peace.”¹³⁶ The vast majority of the letters include this phrase in the first few verses. Many commentators pass over them as customary salutations, forgetting that, in the first century, no other group had as its objective the development of a gracious nature and a peaceful mindset, so no one would have thought to use it as a salutation. Not until the New Testament was completed did this become a common opening as various authors copied the inspired writers. Most of the letters both begin and end with this sentiment, announcing the objective of the letter. The topics between these statements of purpose were tailored methods for achieving that purpose. Each addressee had different needs, so the instructions are all different. But the objective was the same in all cases: development of a gracious nature and peace in a chaotic world.

¹²⁸ Acts 9:1 – 19, 22:3 – 21, 26:9 – 18

¹²⁹ Ephesians 1:6 – 7

¹³⁰ Exodus 33:18 – 19, 34:5 – 7

¹³¹ Ephesians 2:4 – 9

¹³² Colossians 1:6

¹³³ Acts 4:33

¹³⁴ Acts 11:23

¹³⁵ Romans 1:5

¹³⁶ Romans 1:7, 1 Corinthians 1:3, 2 Corinthians 1:2, Galatians 1:3, Ephesians 1:2, Philippians 1:2, Colossians 1:2, 2 Thessalonians 1:2, 1 Timothy 1:2, 2 Timothy 1:2, Titus 1:4, Philemon 3, 2 John 3

- “...we have access by faith into this grace”¹³⁷ In this context, the characteristics of grace into which the faithful enter are peace with God, joy, hope, perseverance, and love.
- “Through the grace given to me.”¹³⁸ The grace given to Paul enabled his message, including boldness, wisdom, and revelation.
- “Gifts differing according to the grace given to us.”¹³⁹ The context that follows includes prophecy, faith, service, the ability to teach, the ability to exhort, liberality, leadership, mercy, love, kindness, affection, joy, hope, longsuffering, and hospitality. Everyone receives a different mix of God’s character traits.
- “For the grace of God that was given to you.”¹⁴⁰ Paul thanked God for the grace that had been imparted to the faithful of Corinth, specifically including public speaking and knowledge.
- “If I partake with grace...”¹⁴¹ Paul used a play on words between the grace of God and thanking God for a meal to show that a gracious nature includes an attitude of thankfulness.
- “We conducted ourselves...by the grace of God.”¹⁴² The specific character traits in this context were simplicity and sincerity.
- “Grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.”¹⁴³ Despite their many problems, the faithful of Corinth were so remarkably gracious, as compared to their former manner of life, that observers thanked God for this parade of godly character traits (glory).
- “Not to receive the grace of God in vain.”¹⁴⁴ The preceding context specifies that this grace is not of appearance but of heart, including the traits of love, service, and a devotion to spreading the message of reconciliation.
- “The grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia.”¹⁴⁵ This grace included generosity, faith, speech, knowledge, diligence, and love.
- “God is able to make all grace abound into you.”¹⁴⁶ This grace included sufficiency to accomplish every good work.
- “The grace of God in you.”¹⁴⁷ This grace included steadfastness and sharing.
- “To each one of us grace was given.”¹⁴⁸ In this case, the specific examples were leadership positions.
- “Impart grace to the hearers.”¹⁴⁹ That grace to be imparted included edification and was in contrast to corruption.
- “You all are partakers of grace with me.”¹⁵⁰ That grace included affection, knowledge, discernment, sincerity, and the fruits of righteousness.

¹³⁷ Romans 5:2

¹³⁸ Romans 12:3, 15:15, 1 Corinthians 3:10, 15:10, Galatians 2:9, Ephesians 3:2, 7, 8

¹³⁹ Romans 12:6

¹⁴⁰ 1 Corinthians 1:4

¹⁴¹ 1 Corinthians 10:30

¹⁴² 2 Corinthians 1:12

¹⁴³ 2 Corinthians 4:15

¹⁴⁴ 2 Corinthians 6:1

¹⁴⁵ 2 Corinthians 8:1

¹⁴⁶ 2 Corinthians 9:8

¹⁴⁷ 2 Corinthians 9:14

¹⁴⁸ Ephesians 4: 7

¹⁴⁹ Ephesians 4:29

¹⁵⁰ Philippians 1:7

- “Singing with grace in your hearts.”¹⁵¹ The specific characteristics of the grace in their hearts were wisdom, teaching, and admonishing.
- “Let your speech always be with grace.”¹⁵² Grace was characterized as wise, witty, and capable of being explained in several ways as necessary for the comprehension of the hearer.

Grace versus Law

In Galatians and Romans, Paul contrasted grace versus law.¹⁵³ The summary statement was “You are not under Law but under grace.”¹⁵⁴ Being under Law implies slavery to sin because all have sinned and have no inherent mechanism to overcome the debt. The fact that Jesus paid the debt for everyone¹⁵⁵ released everyone from that slavery, so people are indebted to His gracious nature, not simply released from responsibility.

Paul was aghast that the faithful of Galatia were being deceived by legalists who wanted to incorporate the Law into the gospel, in particular circumcision but sometimes including the observation of the dietary rules and the festivals.¹⁵⁶ The summary was that “if righteousness comes through Law, then Christ died needlessly.”¹⁵⁷ Legalism and grace were entirely at odds. Attempts to merge them would result in expulsion from the family of God.¹⁵⁸ Yet, many church leaders excuse the incorporation of rules (neglecting grace) as necessary to follow the example of the first century church (a notion debunked in the appendix¹⁵⁹), or to corral the immature.

Faith versus Law

Biblical faith has been defined elsewhere.¹⁶⁰ Paul contrasted faith and law in both Romans and Galatians.¹⁵³ Certainly, both government and business would collapse without law, because, to summarize Paul’s comment to Timothy, “Law is for the lawless.”¹⁶¹ Both God and church leaders operate on a different level, which is one of the remarkable characteristics of the church. The individuals get along and function as a body without law because they love one another. Church leadership must be by faith, not law.

- “Gentiles, not pursuing righteousness, have attained righteousness, righteousness now that is out of faith; however Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, into law has not attained. Why? Because it was not out of faith, but as out of works.”¹⁶² Certainly, some faithful people dotted the history of Israel, as attested in Hebrews 11. But, the majority were

¹⁵¹ Colossians 3:16

¹⁵² Colossians 4:6

¹⁵³ Of course, one could develop separate descriptions of each topic, as I have done, then compare the various facets developed in those descriptions. However, the comparison sub-sections have been limited to passages in which a direct contrast was made by an inspired writer. Our uninspired conclusions about differences may or may not be valid or, if valid, may or may not be important to God.

¹⁵⁴ Romans 6:14 – 15, the context being 5:15 – 6:15

¹⁵⁵ 1 John 2:2

¹⁵⁶ Galatians 1:6 – 9

¹⁵⁷ Galatians 2:21

¹⁵⁸ Galatians 5:4

¹⁵⁹ Appendix: Authority of the Scriptures. Click as hyperlink.

¹⁶⁰ *Think as a Spirit*, chapter 4, “The Faith Economy”

¹⁶¹ 1 Timothy 1:9

¹⁶² Romans 9:30 – 32

neither faithful nor followers of the Law. Paul wrote here of the minority who had some notion of the One True God, but sought to be acceptable (righteous) by following the rules. Both the rule-followers and the faithful performed the same rituals and observed the same festivals. Motivation was the key factor. For nearly two millennia, a disturbing number of church leaders have opted for rules over faith. Of course, those leaders cannot speak for themselves, being long dead, so their motives must remain unknown. Perhaps this is all they knew. Perhaps they distrusted followers. Perhaps they were afraid that someone could manipulate God and be accepted inappropriately. Paul's point was that following rules has a long and unbroken history of failure. Faith is God's objective and has a much higher success rate of good behavior.

- “A man is not justified out of works of law but through the faith of Christ Jesus, even we into Christ Jesus have believed, that we may be justified out of the faith of Christ and not out of the works of the law; for out of the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.”¹⁶³ See the discussion of “faith in” versus “faith of” elsewhere.¹⁶⁴ The faithful are not declared square with justice (justified) as a result of their own faith, but out of Jesus' faith which made Him the acceptable sacrifice through which the right-and-wrong system was paid up. The works of the law were illustrations and demonstrations of concepts, not goals in themselves. The practices of the Law of Moses were for a small percentage of the world's population, in a limited geographic region, for a defined period of time. The faithful today have different illustrations and demonstrations to act out, but the reasoning is the same. The works themselves do not square one with justice; Jesus did that once for all.
- “He who is supplying the Spirit to you and working miracles in you, is it out of works of law or out of hearing of faith? Just as Abraham, ‘believed God and it was accounted to him into righteousness.’¹⁶⁵ Know then that those out of faith, these are sons of Abraham. Having foreseen then the Scripture that God justifies the Gentiles out of faith, foretold the gospel to Abraham that ‘In you all the nations shall be blessed.’¹⁶⁶ So then those out of faith are blessed with believing Abraham. For as many as out of works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.’¹⁶⁷ Now, that in law no one is justified is evident because, ‘the righteous out of faith will live.’¹⁶⁸ Yet, the law is not out of faith, rather ‘the man who does them will live in them.’¹⁶⁹ Christ redeemed us out of the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone hanging upon a tree’¹⁷⁰), to that the blessing of Abraham might come into the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, so that the promise of the Spirit we might receive through faith.”¹⁷¹ Leaders who depend on rules to achieve certain behavioral results achieve only condemnation. A great many church leaders rely on rules to keep order and control, but thereby forfeit the miraculous work of the Spirit to achieve the humanly impossible.

¹⁶³ Galatians 2:16

¹⁶⁴ *Think as a Spirit*, chapter 4, “The Faith Economy”

¹⁶⁵ Genesis 15:6

¹⁶⁶ Genesis 12:3, 18:18, 22:18, 26:4, 28:14

¹⁶⁷ Deuteronomy 27:26

¹⁶⁸ Habakkuk 2:4

¹⁶⁹ Leviticus 18:5

¹⁷⁰ Deuteronomy 21:23

¹⁷¹ Galatians 3:5 – 14

- “Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; having been orchestrated by angels in the hand of a mediator. Now a mediator is not for one only, but God is one. Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given able to impart life, truly out of law would have emerged righteousness. But the Scripture has confined all under sin, so that the promise out of the faith of Jesus Christ might be given to those believing. But before faith came, we were kept under custody under the law, confined into the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore, the law became our tutor into Christ, so that out of faith we might be justified. Faith having now come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through the faith that was in Christ Jesus.”¹⁷² Paul was writing to a group composed of predominantly Jewish Christians who were having trouble reconciling the Law (which was given by God) with salvation by faith. Paul explained that one of the functions of the Law of Moses was to hold Israel together until the time for the Messiah could come. At that time, faith would become the governing principle. Acceptability by God based on achieving certain benchmarks was disallowed. Rather, the faith of Jesus was the quality that was able to pay off the right-and-wrong system, thereby allowing for the adoption of the faithful into the family of God.

Spirit versus Law

The contrast between the Spirit and the Law¹⁵³ was most succinctly expressed in the section above, “He who is supplying the Spirit to you and working miracles in you, is it out of works of law or out of hearing of faith?”¹⁷³ The faithful have abilities beyond what normal humans have due to the Spirit that dwells in them. So, leadership in the church should be dedicated to training others how to access that power rather than the thoroughly human and guaranteed-to-fail rules. In His last conversation with the Eleven, Jesus noted that His departure was to their advantage because, when He went away, the Helper would come.¹⁷⁴ In the two following passages, a strong argument is made that taking advantage of the power of the indwelling Spirit is a necessity.

- “Likewise, my brethren, you also have been put to death to the law through the body of Christ, into belonging to another, – to the One having been raised out of the dead, so that we should bear fruit to God. For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions that were through the law were at work in our members into bringing forth fruit to death. But now we have been released from the law, having died in that which we were bound, in order for us to serve in newness of Spirit and not in oldness of letter.”¹⁷⁵ Paul’s comparison was to marriage which is ended when, in Paul’s example, the husband dies. The Jewish Christians were released from their lifelong commitment to the Law so that they could be married to Christ. In the continuing context, Paul reminded his readers that rules cause people to ponder the line between right and wrong, and to contemplate sin, which arouses sinful passions through the contemplation of them. The Spirit, in contrast, focuses the faithful on good only. Because all other organizations are built around rules, leaders are guaranteed to

¹⁷² Galatians 3:19 – 26

¹⁷³ Galatians 3:5

¹⁷⁴ John 16:7

¹⁷⁵ Romans 7:4 – 6

see that rule-keeping mindset in all new Christians, and must immediately work to release them from their marriage to law and refocus them on the power of the Spirit.

- “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death...But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. However, if anyone has not the Spirit of Christ, he is not of Him. If, however, Christ is in you, indeed the body is dead through sin, but the Spirit is life through righteousness. Now if the Spirit of the One having raised up Jesus out of the dead dwells in you, the One having raised up Christ Jesus out of the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit dwelling in you. So then, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”¹⁷⁶ Obviously, the faithful seek good behavior as an outgrowth of their faith. Paul explicitly states that the indwelling Spirit must be present and in control for the individual to be a part of the family of God. One of the functions of that Spirit is putting to death old bad habits. Rules bring forth evasive tactics to avoid the truth about oneself. The Spirit crushes bad behavior. Again, the task of leaders is to demonstrate how that works.

Liberty versus Law

See chapter 1 for a lengthy description of New Testament liberty.¹⁵³ As in countries in which liberty is allowed, history shows that those liberties are slowly eroded out of fear and laziness. Throughout history, people with liberty often have exchanged it for an illusory safety. The same is true in the church. Not understanding the power of the Spirit, the faithful give up liberty out of fear or laziness. Church leaders must resist the tendency to distrust followers, despite the fact that they often are, in fact, untrustworthy. Rather, they must teach others how to access that power.

- “Through false brothers brought in secretly, who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might enslave us.”¹⁷⁷ The context reveals that the objectives of these false brethren were to import facets of the Law of Moses into the gospel. Modern congregations have imported seemingly normal customs of their cultures, hardly recognizing the loss of liberty. For example, in most congregations in the United States, democracy is a valued concept. So, democratic processes have been introduced despite God’s displeasure with the attempt by Korah to introduce it into Israel. God’s clear disapproval of democracy in the kingdom was displayed by the earth opening up and swallowing all the democrats.¹⁷⁸ Liberty is the death knell of authority. Church leadership must not be allowed to morph into authority.
- “In liberty, Christ has set us free. Stand firm therefore and not entangle yourselves again with a yoke of slavery.”¹⁷⁹ The preceding context relates an analogy between Sarah and Hagar versus freedom and bondage. Isaac was the child of promise, the miraculous, unnatural child. Ishmael was born by the usual, natural way. Liberty seems impossible, just as Isaac was impossible. Law is the natural way, but is called bondage. Church

¹⁷⁶ Romans 8:2, 9 – 13

¹⁷⁷ Galatians 2:4

¹⁷⁸ Numbers 16

¹⁷⁹ Galatians 5:1

leadership must embrace the impossible liberty of the gospel and not resort to the natural way.

What are Works?

The word is used in several contexts in the New Testament. God worked;¹⁸⁰ Jesus worked;¹⁸¹ Jesus finished God's work;¹⁸² some works are not related to God but just the things we do;¹⁸³ some works are evil;¹⁸⁴ the good works of some faithful people were applauded;¹⁸⁵ faithful people are enjoined to good works;¹⁸⁶ faith is said to be a type of work;¹⁸⁷ and our judgment is said to be based on works.¹⁸⁸

Many have claimed that works are unimportant to the faithful, which is an obvious overstatement in light of the references in the paragraph above concerning faithful people being enjoined to good works. The attitude of that claim, while purporting to express freedom from law, is legalism in disguise when the faithful are discouraged from good works. The proponents have set a physical threshold of zero. Rather, as James wrote, "Faith without works is dead."¹⁸⁹

Others emphasize that faith must result in works, shifting the focus to the works at the expense of faith. The checklist mentality arrives.

Others cite only the nine passages that state clearly that we will be judged by our works (not faith), overlooking the twenty-odd passages that connect salvation with faith.

Rather, works may be seen by God as good, evil, or misdirected, depending on the context. As long as we are physically alive, we will work. What we must learn is how God interprets that activity and, most importantly, how God interprets our motivation for that activity. Simply put, an activity motivated by trusting the promises of God is viewed positively.

Faith versus Works

Faith and works are contrasted in the letters of Paul and James.¹⁵³ As will be apparent in the context of each, the works under consideration are those performed for the purpose of earning a benefit from God. As listed in the previous section, the faithful are enjoined to do good works as a natural outgrowth of faith, not to avoid good works so that grace might increase.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁰ Acts 15:8, Romans 14:29, Philippians 1:6, Hebrews 1:10, 3:9, 4:3, and Revelation 15:3.

¹⁸¹ Matthew 11:2, Luke 24:19, John 5:20, 5:36, 7:3, 7:21, 9:3 – 4, 10:25 – 38, 14:10, and 15:24.

¹⁸² John 4:34 and 17:4.

¹⁸³ Mark 13:34, Acts 7:2, and 2 Peter 3:10

¹⁸⁴ Matthew 23:3, 23:5, John 3:19 – 21, 7:7, Acts 7:41, Romans 13:12, a Corinthians 5:2 – 3, Galatians 5:19, Ephesians 5:11, Colossians 1:21, 2 Timothy 4:14, 4:18, Hebrews 6:1, 9:14, 2 Peter 2:8, 1 John 3:8, 3:10, 2 John 11, 3 John 10, Jude 15, Revelation 2:6, 2:22, 3:2, 3:2, 3:15, 9:20, 16:11, and 18:6.

¹⁸⁵ Matthew 26:10, Mark 14:6, Acts 5:38, 9:36, 13:2, 13:41, 14:26, Romans 15:18, 1 Corinthians 3:13 – 15, 9:1, 15:58, 16:10, Philippians 2:30, Revelation 2:2, 2:5, 2:9, 2:13, 2:19, and 3:8.

¹⁸⁶ Matthew 5:16, John 8:39 – 41, 14:12, Romans 13:3, 2 Corinthians 9:8, Galatians 6:4, Ephesians 2:10, 4:12, Philippians 1:22, Colossians 1:10, 3:17, 1 Thessalonians 1:3, 2 Thessalonians 1:11, 2:17, 1 Timothy 2:10, 3:1, 5:10, 5:25, 6:18, 2 Timothy 2:21, 3:17, 4:5, Titus 2:7, 2:14, 3:1, 3:8, 3:14, Hebrews 4:10, 6:10, 10:24, 13:21, James 1:4, 1:25, 1 Peter 2:12, and 1 John 3:18.

¹⁸⁷ John 6:28 – 29 and Acts 26:20

¹⁸⁸ Romans 2:6 – 7, 2:15, 2 Corinthians 11:15, 1 Peter 1:17, Revelation 2:23, 2:26, 14:13, 20:12 – 13, and 22:12.

¹⁸⁹ James 2:26

¹⁹⁰ Romans 6:1

In a lengthy passage in Romans,¹⁹¹ Paul first pointed out that a primary function of law is to codify and illustrate bad behavior. Unfortunately, learning about the line between right and wrong brings a contemplation of wrong, followed by temptation and crossing the line.¹⁹² Historically, people have not done well with laws, although laws are necessary for maintaining a society composed of a substantial fraction of non-faithful people. However, God's purpose in creation was not to select out those who do marginally well with rules, who achieve an arbitrary benchmark of legal success. If good works were the goal, God could have achieved it through robots. Creating people with all their variations and having the freedom to choose would run counter to a behavioral objective. Rather, God created for the purpose of building an incubator for faith.¹⁹³ Faith is an essential characteristic for participants in an eternal family. Without mutual trust, a family will fall apart. So, faith (mutual trust) is the benchmark for acceptance, not behavior. Paul used Abraham as his example. Certainly, Genesis records several mistakes made by Abraham. Yet, God called him acceptable. The standard of that acceptance was faith. Flawless execution is not the point, but rather that every choice be made with an absolute trust that God's promises will happen. Our quirks and foibles were paid up by Jesus, the propitiation. The acceptance criterion for people always has been trust.

Later in Romans, Paul approached the topic of faith versus works from a different direction: God's promises versus human achievement.¹⁹⁴ The illustrations were of Abraham facing childlessness, Jacob versus Esau, the Pharaoh who opposed Moses, and a potter with some clay and the pottery he made. Abraham's trust that he would have a son through Sarah despite their advanced ages was the qualifier. Those with that level of trust¹⁹⁵ are accepted. Humans, no matter the ethnic group, are accepted if their lives are characterized by acting on God's promises.

Jacob was chosen not because he achieved. In fact, he was a scoundrel. The illustration is that Jacob was chosen by God before birth; he was not acceptable because he was successful. God did not choose Jacob to endorse bad behavior, but to illustrate that God can work with defective people and still execute the plan.

Keeping in mind the necessity of free will (because without free will there is neither faith nor love, and therefore no purpose for creation), Paul cited the example of the Pharaoh who opposed Moses. Paul concluded that Pharaoh could not have been judged if God had caused him to make those choices.¹⁹⁶ God used him. God did not violate Pharaoh's free will, but rather placed him in a series of situations in which he repeatedly chose badly. God promised faithful people that they would never face a temptation greater than they could bear, and that a way of escape always would be provided.¹⁹⁷ Pharaoh, obviously, had no regard for the one true God, so was doing the best he could against an overwhelming foe.

The last illustration was of a potter who made all types of pots from the same clay. The pottery, if it were animate, would not be allowed to complain about its form or application. It is what it is. Paul's point was that the differences between people are not up for debate. Anyone can be faithful, although the performance of each will be drastically different. Therefore, a law system, which by nature treats everyone as if they were equally skilled, can never find success.

¹⁹¹ Romans 3:19 – 4:8

¹⁹² Romans 7:7 – 24

¹⁹³ See *Think as a Spirit*, chapters 3 and 4.

¹⁹⁴ Romans 9:6 – 33

¹⁹⁵ Romans 4:16

¹⁹⁶ Romans 9:19

¹⁹⁷ 1 Corinthians 10:13

Multiple times, Paul specified that his readers have been justified (or found righteous) based on Jesus' faith. Unfortunately, translators, most of whom refuse to believe that Jesus had faith, have changed those passages from "the faith of Jesus" to "faith in Jesus," tremendously overvaluing the quality of our faith.¹⁹⁸ Paul drew a contrast between Jesus' faith and the works of the law.¹⁹⁹ If, as translated by many, this is a contrast between the quality of my faith versus the quality of my works, Paul's point might be lost. My experience has been that, for many church goers, the works are of higher quality than their faith. However, in this contrast, the objective was to define the source of justification. On what basis did God pay up the right-and-wrong system? Paul's conclusion was that righteousness became available because of Jesus' faith. Law has no inherent ability to make people right, only to declare them wrong.

Reviewing the history of the gospel in central Turkey (Galatia) that is recorded in the New Testament reveals that Paul brought a message of faith, but after he moved on to new fields, some Jewish Christians who had not yet let go of their baggage came along and convinced the Gentile Christians of that region that, to be Christians, one should be circumcised and observe the dietary and holiday rules. The hearers should have seen that something was amiss because a Jew in central Turkey cannot abide by the Law because the Temple is simply too far away to be able to visit it four times each year (Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles, and Yom Kippur) as required. So, these Jewish Christians were teaching a rationalized version of the law. Paul, however, focused on an even more obvious flaw in their additions and corrections to Paul's gospel. "Did you receive the Spirit out of the works of the law, or out of the hearing of faith?...Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made flawless in the flesh?...Therefore, The One supplying to you the Spirit and working miracles among you, is it out of the works of the law or out of the hearing of faith?"²⁰⁰ Historically, the law did not cause people to perform miracles. Faith did. Updating to modern times, the miraculous works of the Spirit who indwells the faithful should be the death of legalism.

Paul continued with another comparison between the results of faith versus the results of law.²⁰¹ Those under law can only be cursed for shortcomings. By contrast, because of Jesus' faith allowing for justification, the just shall live by faith. That life is made possible by the Spirit who is given to dwell in the faithful.

Paul repeated the idea²⁰² with the added caveat that, since redemption was a gift resulting from God's gracious nature, the faithful have no grounds on which to boast that they achieved acceptability either through their own faith or through works. Paul ended the thought by identifying the proper position of works; the faithful were "created in Christ Jesus for good works." Good works are expected of the faithful²⁰³ as a response, not a rite of passage.

James provided a lengthy treatise on the place of works in a system governed by the gracious nature of God and the confident expectations (hope) of people.²⁰⁴ He affirmed quite pointedly that if self-proclaimed faith does not result in good works, the claim is without foundation. Works verify the reality of faith to the observer. Without physical proof, claims to faith are empty. Apparently, some had reduced the proof of faith to ridiculous minimums, so that mere claims were enough. First, God cannot be fooled with empty claims. Only those who

¹⁹⁸ See *Think as a Spirit*, Chapter 4, The Faith Economy.

¹⁹⁹ Galatians 3:16

²⁰⁰ Galatians 3:2 – 5

²⁰¹ Galatians 3:10 – 14

²⁰² Ephesians 2:8 – 10

²⁰³ Titus 1:16

²⁰⁴ James 2:14 – 26

have God's version of faith are acceptable. Second, empty claims dilute the gospel so that faith is on par with idol worship. Those whose faith is only self-deception spread that expectation to those whom they teach. So, the Spirit never gets the chance to provide miraculous transformation. Christianity is the only religion with physical evidence.

Leadership in the church focuses on faith, not works. Building faith using God's descriptions¹⁹⁸ produces the works. Focusing on the works fails to give the follower the tools to accomplish them. Anyone can do nice things. Only those who rely on the power of the indwelling Spirit can accomplish the humanly impossible. Outsiders who accept the gospel because of slick doctrine and many verses never learn of the promises of God (an essential facet of Biblical faith), so what they follow never rises above human effort: works. But, when the gospel is accompanied by works that are beyond what ordinary people can do, the goodness of God, not the goodness of people, is displayed. The observer can tell the difference.

Grace versus Works

Another contrast to be illustrated and emphasized by leaders is that between grace and works. Works arises from an attitude of earning, even manipulating God to achieve acceptance, instead of realizing that the source depends, first and foremost, on the gracious nature of God, as pointed out by Paul, "Wages are not counted as grace but as debt."²⁰⁵ Certainly, all of the positive character traits of God (grace) must be in harmony. Fortunately for humans, God chose to satisfy justice through His own life on earth and subsequent sacrifice, allowing room for patience and justification through faith. Paul quoted David in expressing, "Blessed [above the cares of this life] are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin."²⁰⁶ Works attempt to pay off justice; the grace of God did that through Jesus, so wages have no place in the forgiveness equation.

"Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer out of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace."²⁰⁷ As illustrated by Paul in this context with a reminder about the lament of Elijah, thinking he was the only one left, God reminded Elijah that He had at least 7000 faithful just in the Northern Kingdom. Those who chose to trust God (the faithful) were termed the elect, those who waited faithfully for God to fix their debt to justice because they understood that works could never rise to that level of compensation.

"[God] has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to His own purpose and grace, having been given to us in Christ Jesus before time eternal, but has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ..."²⁰⁸ God's purpose (a big family that will last) and gracious nature produced a plan before the beginning for redemption by Jesus, although the plan was not revealed until that time. Jesus was not a stopgap measure after several plans had failed, but the one and only plan. Works never were the coin of the realm; faith was. The plan sprang from God's gracious nature. People have been rescued through that appearing and were called into that plan.

"But when the kindness and the love of humanity, of God our Savior, appeared, not out of works in righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through

²⁰⁵ Romans 4:4

²⁰⁶ Romans 4:7 – 8 from Psalm 32:1 – 2

²⁰⁷ Romans 11:5 – 6

²⁰⁸ 2 Timothy 1:9

the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified out of His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”²⁰⁹ All through human history, people have assumed incorrectly that the purpose of life was to behave well. First, that sentiment has not come from God but rather is a filter through which the Scriptures have been interpreted. Second, the goal is unattainable because those who set out toward it invariably fall short and have no means by which to satisfy justice. So, God’s plan has always included the fix for what ailed us (mercy: one step beyond compassion, including an unquenchable desire to fix the problem) by coming to earth to pay off justice and to provide the indwelling Holy Spirit to accomplish the transformation of the faithful into that same gracious nature.

Leadership in the kingdom helps other faithful people avoid the pitfalls that have plagued humanity since the beginning – not in terms of behavior since we have proven that we fail repeatedly; try harder, fail bigger. But, because the part of humanity that cares not for God needs to be harnessed if society is to function at all, everyone is accustomed to regulations; people drag their outside cultural norms into the church. Leadership in the kingdom illustrates the true goal, to be of the character of Jesus, which is accomplished through the power of the Spirit. The sacrifice of Jesus was a gift, unearned, as is the indwelling Spirit. The objective is not good behavior but good character. Regulation to achieve good behavior fails while good character succeeds.

Grace versus Wrath

Many have incorrectly characterized God as being different before and after Jesus, that the God of the Old Testament was a God of wrath whereas the God of the New Testament is a God of love. Paul specifically refutes this error by citing Abraham, that he was accepted as a result of his faith, along with all who have Abraham’s type of faith: “For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise of no effect, because the law brings about wrath; for where there is no law there is no transgression. Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.”²¹⁰ Law brings wrath. The grace of God, which resulted in redemption through Jesus’ sacrifice, makes the promise of inheritance certain.

Certainly, wrath is mentioned more times in the Old Testament than in the New: 400 to 50. The reason is obvious. Much of the Old Testament describes the history of a contractual relationship between God and Israel. Israel was to build the stage on which Jesus would play. As payment for services rendered, Israel was to receive big families, big crops, fertile cattle, and victory in battle. The penalty clauses for non-performance included a laundry list of calamities. When Israel became distracted from their contracted tasks, the wrath of God was displayed because they were in violation of the contract. God invoked the penalty clauses as any contract manager would do. The Law was not for “going to heaven.” The Law was for setting up for Jesus. The percentage of faithful people in Israel never got very large. The fortunes of the country were determined by whether those faithful people were in charge or not. The vast majority of the population had to be managed through laws because that is what unbelievers need

²⁰⁹ Titus 3:4 – 7

²¹⁰ Romans 4:13 – 16

for their society to function. Oddly, the grace of God is mentioned far more times in the Old Testament than in the New, probably due to relative numbers of pages. God did not change; the humans in the stories changed, from largely unfaithful to largely faithful.

Leadership in the kingdom must remind the faithful that their long habit of law is not needed in the kingdom, only out in the world. The family of God is built upon mutual trust and selfless concern. With those, the faithful can get along just fine.

Summary

The family of God on earth and that in heaven are almost the same. The difference is the physical stuff. Faithful humans, both breathing and not, angels, and God are all part of the picture. When the physical passes away, this family of spirits will be of one composition: spirit. For the sake of visualization, a good substitute for spirit is character. Within the family, we will interact with the characters of other faithful beings. We can see on earth that different faithful people are different, largely depending on maturity and experience, but even the mature are significantly different from each other. Our unity is not based on uniformity but on mutual trust and selfless concern. Within the earthly church are many different levels of successful decision making. But, because we trust and care about each other, we laugh off the sincere-but-misguided attempts and set off together again. I picture the same in eternity. The collection of faithful characters will encompass a lot of differences. Rather than letting it upset us or divide us, we will laugh, pick up the one who stumbled, and get back to working together. Among the faithful, truly all things are lawful because we trust each other and fix things as we continue building character. Leadership in the church must stop distrusting the followers and stop demanding uniformity. Our diversity should be a source of joy and laughter.

Chapter 4: Leadership

Post-Apostolic Church Leadership

How should the post-apostolic church be governed? Various models have been developed, all with some connection to the Scriptures. Regardless of the vigor with which a particular style is defended or supported, history shows that all leadership structures focus on control of the teaching and the assets. Not at issue are those who have usurped leadership roles because of their lust for power or their greed. Bad motives by practitioners do not invalidate appropriate methods, or the church itself should be abandoned.

The church described in the New Testament was led by “apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers.”²¹¹ Various churches around the globe have leaders with all those titles plus a few more, despite Jesus’ expressed displeasure with religious titles.²¹² Further, the method of succession for the apostles is not given in the New Testament. Prophets were predicted to drop from God’s methodology after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.²¹³ Evangelists are hardly mentioned. What little is known will be addressed in the next section. The expected qualities of pastors,²¹⁴ also called bishops or elders or presbyters, are listed but a method for their selection in the post-apostolic world is lacking. While teachers endowed from above existed in the first century, determining whether a proposed teacher has specific power from God for that function is hard to prove today. Apostles, certainly, could perform the humanly impossible.²¹⁵ Prophets were proven by their accuracy in predictions of the future²¹⁶ and their adherence to certain basic norms.²¹⁷ The pastors of whom we have any knowledge were appointed by special people. Transferring this pattern to the post-apostolic church is fraught with difficulties.

Further, separating works of the Spirit into the miraculous and the non-miraculous is an artificial modern construct based on the assumption that such a division, if even possible, is appropriate. What action goes in which list is entirely speculative. Certainly, the ability to speak for God (including but not limited to predicting the future), along with instantaneous linguistic skills without attending foreign language school, and instantaneous knowledge without study of the subject were predicted to pass away.²¹⁸ No similar statements are made in the New Testament concerning other clear violations of natural law. Whether such things as healing and wisdom are still available on a “power from above” scale is simply not addressed. Certainly, healers have their own proof, assuming the repairs were instantaneous and visible, and that the malady was verifiably present beforehand. Wisdom is harder to prove.

The church is a body, not a group of single-celled organisms that happen to be in the same general location. Paul’s illustration of the church as a body,²¹⁹ the members of which have different yet coordinated functions, lists some skills that are blatantly beyond what people

²¹¹ Ephesians 4:11

²¹² Matthew 23:8 – 9

²¹³ Daniel 9:24 – 27, Zechariah 13 – 14

²¹⁴ 1 Timothy 3:1 – 7, Titus 1:5 – 9

²¹⁵ 2 Corinthians 12:12

²¹⁶ Deuteronomy 18:20 – 22. Of course, this is part of the Law of Moses and not the gospel. However, I assume that the principle remained among the early Christians.

²¹⁷ Deuteronomy 13:1 – 3, 1 John 4:1 – 3, 1 Corinthians 12:3

²¹⁸ 1 Corinthians 13:8 – 10

²¹⁹ 1 Corinthians 12:4 – 31

normally can do, while others are more common. Perhaps this arose from arbitrarily re-classifying more mundane skills as hospitality, generosity, and cheerfulness²²⁰ as “natural” when the context clearly attributes them to a gift from God, so should be viewed as outrageously and impossibly generous, hospitable, or cheerful.

As long as the indwelling Spirit is still transforming the characters of the faithful, miracles are still happening. As long as people pray and God changes how things would have played out naturally, miracles are still happening. So, the claim, “the age of miracles has passed,” is inaccurate. Rather, the age of endorsement has passed. Without verifiable endorsement from God, the post-apostolic church cannot continue the leadership model of the New Testament.

Unfortunately, the various models of local church leadership extant assume that, since Jesus,²²¹ Paul and Barnabas,²²² and Titus²²³ all appointed elders (also called pastors, bishops, or presbyters), elders are something we should have. Whether Timothy appointed elders is not given specifically, although Timothy was told “not to lay hands upon anyone too hastily”,²²⁴ but the context included more than elders. And, unlike Titus who was told to travel around Crete, Timothy was to remain in an area in which Paul spent over three years. The appointment process could have been completed in that geographic area before 1 Timothy was written. Whether Timothy was to be included in the list of those who appointed elders or not, all the elders of whom we have knowledge were appointed by special people. No congregation or church hierarchy was told to appoint elders.

The argument that evangelists appoint elders begs the question, since one cannot show that evangelists exist today, either. The evangelists-and-elders argument results in one class appointing the other, so the church could not spring naturally from the Word alone. A physical visit from an authorized evangelist or elder would be necessary to keep the cycle alive. Only the Roman Catholics have preserved the doctrine of necessary continuity. The same argument that would continue the office of elder (or evangelist) into the present time could be used equally well to justify apostles today.

Most importantly, the passage that specifies “apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers”²²⁵ has an expiration clause.²²⁶ Many have come to the conclusion that we have not “all come to the unity of the faith,”²²⁷ so some of the five functions will remain in the church until Judgment. This creates three problems.

First, although prophets certainly have been discontinued,²¹³ the other four functions cannot be separated logically. In the post-apostolic church, anyone can claim to occupy those functions, generally without providing physical evidence of God’s endorsement. The fact that such functions were gifts from Jesus can be asserted to be continuing because there is no physical test for the validity of the claim. Further, Jesus did not bestow these gifts at one instant in time, since Paul became an apostle well after the others, and the other functions appear at various times through Acts. So, one can assert that Jesus is still bestowing three of the five gifts, although the logic for separating the functions is tenuous.

²²⁰ Romans 12:3 – 21, 1 Peter 4:7 – 11

²²¹ Ephesians 4:7 – 16

²²² Acts 14:23

²²³ Titus 1:5

²²⁴ 1 Timothy 5:22

²²⁵ Ephesians 4:11

²²⁶ Ephesians 4:13

²²⁷ Ephesians 4:13 – 16

Secondly, part of Jesus' prayer in the Garden²²⁸ specifically names unity as a future proof that Jesus was sent by the Father. In the same prayer, "glory" and "perfect" are two other descriptors used by Jesus concerning future believers. Asserting that the expiration clause will not happen until Judgment causes Jesus' prayer and His proof to fail.

Thirdly, the numerous mandates concerning unity in the New Testament become encouragements to a status that has been assumed to be unattainable.²²⁹ The numerous promises of transformation to glory²³⁰ and perfection²³¹ also become unattainable. The point of the list of job titles is that Jesus provided leadership by direct means without human help.²³² Arguments that Jesus continues to do this invalidate two of the stated objectives: unity and transformation.

If the Biblical job titles of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers have expired, how does the church function? Historically, people have found leadership a necessary evil. To summarize nearly two thousand years of sad history, if we assume that most of those leaders had the best interests of God at heart (leaving out those motivated by power and greed), church leadership has been found to be necessary for control of teaching and control of assets. "False teachers" don't come with nametags, so church leaders have felt the need to protect the flock. First, this illustrates a perception by leaders toward the sheep - that followers are basically incapable of recognizing error. Second, the result is a body that lacks an immune system, like a child raised in a germ-free environment. When they go out in the world, they get really sick.

The control of assets issue is common to this world; the Kingdom can do better. Church leaders make financial commitments in all good conscience, and the leaders want to be able to satisfy those commitments. Again, church leaders demonstrate a lack of confidence in the followers, so they legislate giving and control spending because the sheep can't be trusted to do the right thing.

An example of poor leadership in the New Testament is Diotrephes.²³³ Making the assumption that he had good motives, he found it necessary, in order to protect the flock, to ban even the apostle John. Perhaps his thinking was that, since Peter and Barnabas had gone wrong once,²³⁴ this may be John's time to be wrong.

Paul predicted that incorrect and divisive teaching would arise from among the elders of Ephesus,²³⁵ even though they were among Paul's closest friends. Both Peter and Paul predicted a severe spate of bad teaching not long in the future to them.²³⁶ Paul even hinted at the future penchant for choosing our own leaders, but doing it badly.²³⁷

Nowhere in all of this does an inspired writer give any hint as to how to continue the office of elder or any of the other leadership positions, but rather predicts that those offices will be the source of many future problems. Appropriation of Biblical titles by people who have no proof of endorsement seems unwise. Many use Biblical titles for the authority those titles imply in our society. At the least, such titles cause confusion among the less mature because they draw the

²²⁸ John 17:20 – 21

²²⁹ For example, Ephesians 4:1 – 6, which immediately precedes the expiration clause.

²³⁰ For example, 2 Corinthians 3:18

²³¹ For example, Hebrews 12:23

²³² Ephesians 4:8 – 16

²³³ 3 John 9 – 10

²³⁴ Galatians 2: 11 – 21

²³⁵ Acts 20:28 – 30

²³⁶ 1 Timothy 4:1 – 4, 1 Timothy 6:3 – 5, 2 Timothy 3:6, 2 Peter 2:1 – 3

²³⁷ 2 Timothy 4:3 – 4

natural conclusion that the title-holders in our time are equivalent to the people specifically gifted and endorsed by Jesus in the first century.

But, anarchy is not the answer either. Spiritual good sense tells us that the less mature need to seek out the more mature in order to develop. The New Testament implies that leaders lead because followers follow, and that each Christian ought to be seeking someone to follow.²³⁸ In Hebrews, the author does not mention any leadership positions, but rather the generic word, leader, which has as its Greek root our modern word, hegemony.²³⁹ As a simple definition, hegemony describes the situation in which people follow a leader because it makes good sense to the followers to do so.²⁴⁰ The original recipients of the New Testament writings probably would associate the word primarily with apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. But this admonition to followers has a more generic flavor.

The admonition is addressed to followers, not leaders.²⁴¹ Because we all have the ability to choose, and because we will be judged on the basis of our choices, each believer must either try to go it alone, or look for a trustworthy leader. The existence of the church as the bride of Christ implies that the relationship of hegemony is God's choice, as opposed to each believer being entirely independent. When each believer is judged, no earthly church leader will be present to give or withhold an endorsement. Each of us must stand or fall on our own choices. Therefore, each follower must decide whom to follow, but remains responsible for the choices that were made on the basis of advice from one's selected leader. Leaders are not inherently in control of the teaching and activities of the church. Even among the elders and evangelists gifted by Jesus, no enforcement capability was granted.

Of course, a system in which the less mature decide whom to follow can result in division.²⁴² However, the problem was not that followers learned from a favorite teacher, but that some leaders turned a good practice into an opportunity for self-promotion. Paul had no quarrel with the existence of multiple teachers, and in fact endorsed the concept,²⁴³ if the follower would recognize that all teachers have a place and all work together. The key concept is, "Whose faith follow."²⁴⁴ Followers are enjoined not to follow specific leaders, but to follow those who display faith ("considering the outcome of their conduct"). Further, people develop faith at different rates, as illustrated in both 1 Corinthians and Hebrews. One could choose to follow the faith of someone of significant spiritual maturity, only to find that, after a time, that leader had stagnated or had been surpassed. Further, following the faith of those more mature is part of humility.²⁴⁵ Whose faith to follow is likely to change over time. The faithful are enjoined to follow the faith, not the person or the office-holder.

So, the problem at hand is to facilitate a leadership structure in which followers choose whom to follow that also accomplishes the functions of the growth of the body. As noted previously, the two major sticking points are control of teaching and control of assets.

Most churches have one person who does most of the teaching. Some spread that task across several people. But in both cases, the list of teachers is tightly controlled. For example,

²³⁸ Ephesians 5:21, Galatians 5:13, 1 Corinthians 12:12 – 31

²³⁹ Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24

²⁴⁰ The remaining usages of this root word may be found in Matthew 2:6, Luke 22:26, and Acts 7:10, 14:12, and 15:22.

²⁴¹ 1 Thessalonians 5:12 – 15

²⁴² 1 Corinthians 1:10 – 17

²⁴³ 1 Corinthians 3:4 – 23

²⁴⁴ Hebrews 13:7

²⁴⁵ Romans 12:3

pulpits are generally not open to those of other denominations. Intentionally inviting purveyors of unfamiliar doctrines to speak feels like a bad idea. But this conclusion is more a result of our method of having few speakers rather than a need to control information.

In the first century, the Scriptures paint a picture that whoever wanted to present something to the group was allowed to do so. Of course, some common sense boundaries, such as length of message, would be necessary. But, apparently, those with odd ideas were granted time to speak.²⁴⁶ However, the speaker would need be prepared to be contradicted on the spot.²⁴⁷ Paul faced this model in the synagogues. He was allowed to speak, but also was challenged by the elders.

That scenario needs to be re-introduced as a leadership style that will foster real growth among all members, to the point where followers will have the skills to become leaders. Men should be encouraged to prepare some remarks for every Lord's Day, but must also be prepared for contradiction without the difference becoming acrimonious. Of course, in an immature congregation, this would quickly degenerate into swapping ignorance with little or no edification. But, the goal remains to foster a climate in which the less mature give way to the more mature, and many ideas are defended or overcome. The result will be Christians with healthy immune systems, having been exposed to many ideas and with the tools to evaluate ideas.

Spiritual leadership develops through teaching an unbeliever. When evangelism is a natural facet of faith, each Christian becomes a leader and parent of an expanding spiritual family over a lifetime, resulting in hegemony. If the leader stagnates, the follower has the responsibility to find another leader. Every Christian is a leader; every Christian is a follower.

Evangelists

Ευαγγελιστής (Evangelist) is used three times in the New Testament.²⁴⁸ Whether this function should still exist in the church is the point in question. People who "spread the good news," as implied by the etymology of the word, will remain until Judgment. But the continuation of a similarly-named function does not imply the continuation of the title or the position. For example, a prophet is one who speaks forth for God. But we in American culture would consider it improper for someone today to call himself a prophet because he speaks forth for God from the Scriptures. We would consider that to be usurping the authority of the title without God's approval of the particular application, although adoption of such titles in West and East Africa is common.

The reference to Philip the Evangelist²⁴⁹ reveals little about who an evangelist is or whether that function, as a specific office, should still exist in the church. It is reasonable to assume that Philip was one of those servants of the church selected for a specific task.²⁵⁰ He was included in a group that was described as "being of good reputation, full of the Spirit, and of wisdom." The apostles laid hands on that group, but no specific result was given. However, Philip was able to perform great miracles later, in Samaria.²⁵¹ It is possible that the laying on of the apostles' hands

²⁴⁶ 1 Corinthians 14:26

²⁴⁷ Titus 1:9

²⁴⁸ Acts 21:8, Ephesians 4:11, 2 Timothy 4:5

²⁴⁹ Acts 21:8

²⁵⁰ Acts 6:1 – 6

²⁵¹ Acts 8:5 – 7

was for that purpose (as noted by Simon the Sorcerer),²⁵² but that is not necessary, since the laying on of hands was for several reasons.²⁵³ Since Philip was “full of the Spirit” before that laying on of hands that accompanied his appointment as a servant,²⁵⁴ he may not have needed to have superhuman abilities imparted to him a second time. Philip, presumably the same person, was instrumental in teaching the gospel to the Ethiopian.²⁵⁵ Philip exited the scene preaching the gospel to all the cities from Azotus to Caesarea. Although his activities include spreading the gospel, he is not therein called an evangelist. Since a number of years pass before he appears again in the narrative,²⁵⁶ it may not be asserted with any certainty when the appellation, evangelist, came to be ascribed to Philip.

Timothy was told by Paul to “do the work of an evangelist.”²⁵⁷ But, neither job description nor qualifications were given. The activities of Timothy were mentioned in a number of places, but which of those activities were parts of being an evangelist is unknown. Timothy, like Philip, had had hands laid upon him on two occasions which are recorded.²⁵⁸ The first, through the laying on of hands by an eldership, imparted a “spiritual gift” through “prophetic utterance.” The context has the trappings of a superhuman event. Although a modern leadership might bestow a godly charge on an individual (perhaps, with a little stretching of the language, called a spiritual gift), but no modern leadership will have a true prophet to instigate it. Redefining “prophetic utterance” to mean simply applying the Scriptures does violence to the context, in the same way as modern day “prophets” wish to usurp the authority of the title without the gift generally implied by the term. The other occasion in which Timothy had hands laid upon him was by Paul. The context seems Spirit-controlled, although not necessarily. Assigning the non-Spirit activities of Timothy to modern-day evangelists is a case of picking the attributes we want to keep, and ignoring those that would ruin our position. Timothy most certainly was an evangelist. He may or may not have received that office through the laying on of hands. The Scriptures do not make the connection. If he did receive the office through the laying on of Paul’s hands, then modern evangelists need an apostle to appoint them. If Timothy received his office through the laying on of the hands of the elders, the modern evangelist needs a prophetic utterance, which cannot be replaced by the written Word, since the prophetic utterance was specific to Timothy whereas the written Word is not specific to any individual in modern times. Knowing which portion of the written Word to apply is based solely on the imagination of an uninspired reader, rather than on the specific directions of the Spirit communicated through a prophet. Prophets and apostles, in the sense in which those terms are used in the New Testament, have been in short supply for some years.

The final reference²⁵⁹ also puts the office of evangelist in a Spirit-controlled context. The passage begins, “But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift.”²⁶⁰ If this were all the information given, many conclusions would be possible. The point to be taken from this verse is that, whatever this gift was, it was from Christ and was bestowed when He returned to heaven, which connected that action to a well-known Messianic

²⁵² Acts 8:18

²⁵³ Acts 6:6, 8:17 – 19, 9:17, 13:3, 19:6, 28:8, 1 Timothy 4:14, 2 Timothy 1:6, Hebrews 6:2

²⁵⁴ Acts 6:6

²⁵⁵ Acts 8:26 – 40

²⁵⁶ Acts 21:8

²⁵⁷ 2 Timothy 4:5

²⁵⁸ 1 Timothy 4:14 and 2 Timothy 1:6).

²⁵⁹ Ephesians 4:11

²⁶⁰ Ephesians 4:7 – 8

prophecy.²⁶¹ The gifts in Paul’s immediate view were enumerated.²⁶² Certainly there were other gifts.²⁶³ Apostles and prophets certainly are no longer appropriate offices in the church. Pastors and teachers certainly are commonly bestowed titles in the church today. The title in the middle, evangelists, is the subject of this discussion. The end of the sentence contains the contextual answer, “until we all attain to the unity of the faith.” If “until” points to Judgment, then apostles and prophets are proper offices in the church today. However, the context fits much better with the era ending approximately with the destruction of Jerusalem. The office of prophet was slated for termination by prophecy.²¹³ The office of apostle was given a similar prophecy.²⁶⁴ Teachers endowed by the Spirit were noted.²⁶⁵ Another list of gifts²⁶⁶ implies that all had been bestowed by the Spirit, not gained by study or practice. Leaders were mentioned in the same verses. Although Spirit-bestowed leadership skills are not specifically mentioned in the appointment of elders in central Turkey,²⁶⁷ it is reasonable to assume that the requirements for eldership would be difficult to meet in the short time since the gospel had come to that region.

Some would appeal to “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets,”²⁶⁸ to separate those from evangelists, pastors, and teachers. Neither of the contexts of these passages addresses the point at hand. Rather, this is an exercise in synthesizing a new context from pieces of verses, which is always a dangerous practice.

No duties are given for evangelists in the Scriptures. The most common arguments in support of modern evangelists as a Scriptural office in the modern church make the assumption that whatever Timothy did, since he was without question an evangelist, are the appropriate duties. This assumption is applied inconsistently in the case of Philip, another early Christian who was unquestionably an evangelist. Philip was responsible for food distribution in the church.²⁶⁹ If any task performed by an evangelist is to be included in the list, then all evangelists should have this task. Instead, the duties of one of the two known evangelists are used to assemble the list of duties for all evangelists, ignoring the charge to Timothy to stay on in Ephesus.²⁷⁰

The task of appointing elders is not a natural conclusion to draw from the title “good news bringer.” Certainly, Titus was charged with appointing elders in a certain geographic region,²⁷¹ but Titus is nowhere called an evangelist. The assumption that Timothy had this same function of appointing elders is not clearly stated,²⁷² and Timothy was working out of a congregation which probably already had elders. The laying on of hands mentioned there could have been for appointment to any task, and may have been by elders and not by Timothy.

The common argument assumes that, since Timothy was an evangelist and Titus did many of the same things, Titus must be an evangelist; Timothy and Titus both went about preaching

²⁶¹ Psalm 68:18

²⁶² Ephesians 4:11

²⁶³ *e.g.*, 1 Corinthians 12:28

²⁶⁴ Revelation 11:7

²⁶⁵ 1 Corinthians 12:28

²⁶⁶ Romans 12:6 – 8

²⁶⁷ Acts 14:23

²⁶⁸ Ephesians 2:20

²⁶⁹ Acts 6:2-3

²⁷⁰ 1 Timothy 1:3

²⁷¹ Titus 1:5

²⁷² 1 Timothy 5:22

the good news, therefore all tasks they performed were those of an evangelist, including the appointment of elders. The list of unsupported assertions in this argument disallows the premise.

The process by which elders should be appointed is not given in the Scriptures. The only examples of appointments were through the agency of Paul and Barnabas, or Titus, and no process is given which could be reproduced without the intervention of the Spirit.

Qualifications and qualities are given for those who originally occupied the leadership role and performed the majority of the teaching. Neither qualifications nor qualities are given for evangelists. The argument for appointment of evangelists by elders is circular, since many require elders to be appointed by evangelists. For either elders or evangelists to be legitimate today, if indeed the laying on of hands by one on the other is a necessary part of the ordination process, then each elder and evangelist would need to be able to recite his pedigree all the way back to an apostle. Without that documented linkage, the office holders would be, according to that theory, unapproved. Further, those who desire to be modern evangelists will always lack the prophetic utterance or apostolic endorsement that the New Testament included in the description of such men.

Those who go about spreading the good news will always be a part of the church. Evangelism is a natural result of Biblical faith.²⁷³ The church always will be composed of those with greater and lesser faith. Those with more faith will do the jobs of spreading the gospel and leading those who find them faithful. However, adopting a title in order to appropriate an extra measure of authority which God did not provide is inappropriate.

Authority

All the organizations in the world function through authority. The leader of a business has the authority to hire and fire, except when the government steps in, for better or for worse, and abridges that authority. Teachers are the authority figures in the classroom, but they, too, are under authority to the academic hierarchy. The military is famous for its chain of command.

However, sometimes authorities lack the power to enforce that which, theoretically, should be in their sphere. For example, in the United States, the ordinary citizen pays taxes voluntarily, albeit grudgingly. But in Europe, evading taxes is viewed by the majority of the citizenry as acceptable despite being illegal. As a result, European governments collect well less than half what has been levied. The power to collect the taxes, while theoretically available, is insufficient. Those governments could not hire enough tax enforcement agents to pursue what is owed, if indeed they could find enough agents who would not side with the citizens. In contrast, because of the tacit consent of the vast majority of American citizens, the Internal Revenue Service has the capability to pursue those who do not abide by the law, although small-time cheats generally get away with their minor frauds because the cost of prosecution is greater than the debt that could be collected.

The question here is whether church leaders have authority, if they have the power to enforce, or if they have neither. Of course, those with power but no authority are the charlatans of the industry who are not under consideration because everyone already agrees that they are beneath contempt.

The only New Testament passages that grant authority to church leaders are those which refer to the apostles who had the right to be supported²⁷⁴ and who were the authorities of

²⁷³ 2 Corinthians 4:13

²⁷⁴ 1 Corinthians 9:4 – 18, 2 Thessalonians 3:9

edification.²⁷⁵ So, Paul could have demanded money for his living expenses, although he declined in most cases so as to avoid incorrect conclusions by immature believers.²⁷⁶ Further, apostles had the authority to teach at a different level than others, as if speaking for God rather than suggesting their own understanding.²⁷⁷

But did the apostles have the power to enforce this authority? The strongest reaction was a recommendation to exclude certain persons from the assembly, which was much easier to do in the first century. In modern times, meeting places are tax-exempt and defined as “public” assemblies, so entry cannot be denied except for reasons of public safety. In the first century, all that was necessary was not to tell the offender where and when the next meeting was being held. The only persons for whom exclusion was recommended were those who called bad things good,²⁷⁸ those who were divisive,²⁷⁹ the lazy,²⁸⁰ and those who claimed that Jesus did not come in the flesh.²⁸¹ But, they did not have power to confiscate property, imprison, or enforce judgment on the last day. So, although the apostles had authority, conventional enforcement was lacking.

However, followers were enjoined to support teachers financially.²⁸² So the power was from the bottom up, not from the top down. In my opinion, no business, school, or government would work using this model. Outsiders need laws with teeth,²⁸³ the faithful are inclined to do the right thing.

The New Testament specifically gives the faithful responsibility for themselves, illustrated five ways:

- Christians have authority over themselves.²⁸⁴ Many translators substitute “liberty” for “authority” in this place without linguistic support. Liberty has more to do with permission, whereas authority has more to do with rights. Paul cautioned against taking one’s power too far and thereby disrupting the faith of the weak. Authority must be wielded with wisdom. But in making this statement, Paul asserted that the faithful have individual power of enforcement over themselves; outside forces, including church hierarchies, do not. We may harken to the advice of those whom we deem farther along in the development of their faith and we may weigh the potential repercussions, but we have that authority over ourselves.
- Christians alone have authority to eat the sacrifice of Jesus.²⁸⁵ The specific contrast is with those who eat of the sacrifices of the tabernacle (the Levitical priests). In keeping with the idea that the church is a kingdom of priests,²⁸⁶ all the faithful have this right, not just permission. No human has the authority to refuse them.

²⁷⁵ 2 Corinthians 10:8, 13:10

²⁷⁶ Acts 20:33, 1 Corinthians 4:12, 2 Corinthians 11:7 – 9, 1 Thessalonians 2:9, 2 Thessalonians 3:6 – 9

²⁷⁷ 1 Corinthians 2:10, 14:37, 2 Corinthians 12:12, Galatians 1:11 – 12, Ephesians 3:1 – 7, 1 Thessalonians 2:13, 1 Peter 1:12, Revelation 1:1.

²⁷⁸ 1 Corinthians 5:11

²⁷⁹ Titus 3:10

²⁸⁰ 2 Thessalonians 3:6

²⁸¹ 2 John 7 – 10

²⁸² 1 Corinthians 9:11, Galatians 6:6

²⁸³ 1 Timothy 1:8 – 11

²⁸⁴ 1 Corinthians 8:9

²⁸⁵ Hebrews 13:10

²⁸⁶ Revelation 1:6, 5:10, 20:6, 1 Peter 2:5, 2:9

- Christians have authority over the nations with Jesus.²⁸⁷ The faithful truly trust in the promise from God that they are in control of this world. Certainly, governments and other powers assert their wills over the hapless, and Christians are enjoined to obey the civil government.²⁸⁸ However, serving governments composed of unbelievers is much easier when the faithful realize that they possess ultimate control. Jesus replied to Pilate, “You could have no power at all against me unless it had been given you from above.”²⁸⁹ Paul wrote, “There is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.”²⁹⁰ All the faithful need is patience and the wisdom to know when to exercise their authority over the nations. This is not to say that the church should be in the business of overtly overthrowing governments. Historically, evil governments, although capricious, generally avoid persecuting those who pay their taxes and never stage revolutions. This is why the Roman government never persevered in persecution of Christians, because it was not cost effective. Persecution costs money to pay soldiers and removes the very people who pay the bulk of the taxes with minimal collection expense. The counterpoint is the prophecy of Nahum who reminded the Assyrian authorities that God had raised them up to accomplish a task, that they had gotten full of themselves as though they had done it themselves, so God was taking them down. In addition, occasions will arise in which the faithful will decline to submit and offer themselves for the government-provided second option: civil or criminal punishment. Governments destroy those who whine and those who resist. But when the mainstays of peace and revenue suddenly become burdens on the state, the system collapses on itself. Truly faithful people are in control. Jesus was still executed; Paul was still beaten and imprisoned. But, over the long haul, the faithful are still here but the Roman Empire is long gone. It is a matter of patience and perspective.
- Christians have the authority to eat of the tree of life.²⁹¹ In the context of things to happen soon,²⁹² this authority was in the present for the original audience. The gift of redemption paid up the demands of justice. Faith prompted the gift of the indwelling Spirit. That Spirit engaged in character development with the end result of overcoming, or “washing their robes.” Access to the New Jerusalem and the Tree of Life thereby became a right.
- Prophetesses were to wear head coverings to illustrate that they had not forsaken their role in the marriage illustration.²⁹³ In the first century, a woman could be selected by God as a prophet. (After the first century, God selected no more prophets at all, as predicted by Daniel and Zechariah.) If that female prophet also were married, a potential conflict presented itself. Prophets, simply by being able to deliver messages from God, were held in high regard. Although they were merely conduits, the appearance was of being in charge. At the same time, women in a Christian marriage played the role of the church in the Jesus-and-His-church image.²⁹⁴ So, they let their husbands lead in the way that the church lets Jesus lead. Paul borrowed a custom of the time to overcome this short-lived potential problem of perception. At that time, the Roman empire was multicultural, and Corinth was a microcosm of it. This presented a problem to retailers. In some of those

²⁸⁷ Revelations 2:26

²⁸⁸ Titus 3:1, Romans 13:1 – 7, 1 Peter 2:13 – 17

²⁸⁹ John 19:11

²⁹⁰ Romans 13:1

²⁹¹ Revelation 22:14

²⁹² Revelation 22:6, 12, 20

²⁹³ 1 Corinthians 11:10,.

²⁹⁴ See *Family Gathering*, Chapter 9: Women in the Church

cultures, women had the same rights as men. In others, women were definitely second-class. The first group could bargain and seal a contract; the second group could do no more than offer a price set by her husband, take it or leave it. So that the retailers could determine which customer had which capabilities, a fashion statement developed. Shawls were popular. Women who wore their shawls over their heads could not bargain. Those with their shawls over the shoulders were independent agents. So, married female prophets added a shawl over the head to illustrate that they had not abandoned the Jesus-and-His-church illustration when they were prophesying. As a side note, Christian women had the right to make deals in the same way as the virtuous wife described by Solomon.²⁹⁵

Unfortunately, the leadership of most groups is based on the authority of the leader rather than the authority of the followers. Church leaders, to varying degrees, claim authority over the lives of members, congregational activities, and, of course, the assets. The situation has been developed as a result of accumulation of congregational assets and distrust among supposed fellow believers. The early church had no assets. Mutual trust was expected.²⁹⁶

Characteristics of Spiritual Leadership

In the famous foot-washing scene,²⁹⁷ Jesus both illustrated and explained the concept of leadership through service. In that same evening, He enjoined the same principles in a direct contrast to conventional leadership of this world.²⁹⁸ Spiritual leadership, church leadership, was to be of a different nature than that of the world. Unfortunately, church members are generally incredulous that such a system could ever work. So, they drag their cultures into the church in a variety of business and governmental organizational models. Even though Jesus specifically taught against adopting such models, the sheer impossibility of leadership through service becomes too great for those of little faith to accept. Church leadership boils down to a choice: walking by sight or by faith.

In the New Testament, spiritual leadership was described as possessing the following characteristics:

- Timothy certainly would have been viewed as a sort of authority figure in the first-century church. Yet, Paul's advice to him was that "a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, forbearing, in humility training those opposing, if God perhaps will give them repentance, into a knowledge of the truth, and that they may come to their senses out of the devil's snare, having been captured by him into his will."²⁹⁹ Several character traits are listed, and one skill: able to teach. Of course, a wide variety of educational methods have been propounded, some in keeping with godly character and some not. So, one task of a potential spiritual leader is to evaluate various teaching styles and weed out the worldly ones.
- When Paul wrote to the Christians of Thessalonica shortly after being driven out of that city by a mob instigated by the unbelieving Jews of Philippi, he recounted his leadership

²⁹⁵ Proverbs 31:10 – 31

²⁹⁶ For example, Philemon 5

²⁹⁷ John 13:1 – 20

²⁹⁸ Luke 22:25 – 27

²⁹⁹ 2 Timothy 2:24 – 26

style as a contrast to those who attacked him physically and figuratively:³⁰⁰ gentle, nurturing, brotherly, encouraging, comforting, admonishing, without a desire for compensation, and without a desire for personal praise. Judging from the success of the congregation in Thessalonica, this appears to be a model for successful leadership.

- “And I, in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, was with you, my teaching [*logos*] and my preaching not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.”³⁰¹ Paul’s anxiety in Corinth prompted a visit from Jesus (in a vision), reassuring him,³⁰² which accounts for his description of weakness, fear, and trembling. The important leadership trait was Paul’s reliance on the power of the Spirit. While many dismiss this power as not available today, such is not the case. Certainly, prophecy, tongues, and miraculous knowledge have passed, but the others appear to be available.³⁰³ If the faithful were not routinely accomplishing the impossible, the gospel they espoused would not be the one in the New Testament. So, today’s leaders should convince others to follow because they speak from a platform of humanly impossible actions, not because they are specially educated or present all the right theories. Humans have a sad history of following those with a good story (persuasive words of wisdom) rather than those who can overcome the world.
- “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her.”³⁰⁴ Jesus portrayed the optimum leadership style. Husbands are to do the same. The comparison is equally valid for church leaders: giving themselves up for the church.³⁰⁵
- Godly leadership, shepherding, was characterized by Jesus as voluntary, not imposed by an organization.³⁰⁶ Further, the godly leader facilitates the often-difficult transition (the door) between relating to fellow believers versus relating to the world. Godly leaders know each follower personally. They give themselves up, appearing to the world to be losing everything, but in reality gaining everything.
- When the question of Gentiles abiding by circumcision and the requirements of the Law came to a head,³⁰⁷ “much discussion having taken place,”³⁰⁸ the apostles and elders made presentations and reached a resolution. The leadership method is important. Everyone was allowed to speak. Obviously, some of them presented erroneous material. The leaders made public presentations; nothing was done in private. The rank-and-file were convinced, not coerced.³⁰⁹ Apparently, the leaders were not concerned that the less knowledgeable would be led astray by opposition doctrine. Facts were presented and the problem was resolved. Certainly, after this point in history, the same problem arose again.³¹⁰ Apparently, the leaders did not consider this a failure, but merely addressed it again. Bad

³⁰⁰ 1 Thessalonians 2:1 – 12

³⁰¹ 1 Corinthians 2:3 – 5

³⁰² Acts 18:1 – 18

³⁰³ See *Think as a Spirit*, Chapter 6, The Work of the Spirit, subsection “God’s Spirit Lives in Us” for details.

³⁰⁴ Ephesians 5:25

³⁰⁵ e.g., John 13:2 – 17, Matthew 20:25 – 28, Mark 10:42 – 45

³⁰⁶ John 10:1 – 21

³⁰⁷ Acts 15:1 – 29

³⁰⁸ Acts 15:7

³⁰⁹ Acts 15:22

³¹⁰ e.g., Galatians 5, Romans 2 and 14, 1 Corinthians 8, Ephesians 2

ideas die hard. The leaders did not resort to an authoritarian structure to prevent future outbreaks.

- Leaders recognize the value of liberty. Although Paul, as an apostle, had the authority to demand compensation and to control the teaching, he opted to “present the gospel without charge, so as not to use up my right in the gospel. For being free out of all, I myself became a servant to all, that I might gain the more.”³¹¹ Paul recognized the liberty of others, so he made no demands by authority. Each believer holds ideas that he or she assumes to be correct. Paul used “conscience” to characterize those beliefs. Although one person may understand the Scriptures differently than another, liberty demands that my understanding, no matter how correct I believe I am, cannot impose those views on another. Paul posed the question, “Why is my liberty judged by another’s conscience?”³¹² Authority-driven leadership routinely abridges the liberty of others based on the enforced viewpoints of those in power. But, “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”³¹³ Of course, liberty must not be used as a covering for vice (see Chapter 1: Liberty). Nevertheless, spiritual leaders must find a leadership style that preserves that promised liberty.
- All Christians should be encouraged to seek out those whose faith has a strong history and follow them.³¹⁴ Hegemony is the concept, following those whom the follower sees as the best option. Authority rules from the top down. Hegemony develops from the bottom up. In most English translations, the Greek word, *hegemon*, is translated “ruler,” which does not convey the true meaning. Rather, followers choose to follow those whose faith has obvious positive outcomes. This wreaks havoc with authority structures, since the followers are free to follow different people, or even to change whom they follow as the role models do better or worse. The choice of leader is with the follower. Of course, many have negated this concept by claiming that the followers collectively endorse specific leaders who then have authority. But, that concept is absent from the Scriptures. At the other end of the spectrum are those whose concept of liberty becomes extreme individualism. On the contrary, all the faithful are enjoined to submit to one another,³¹⁵ so liberty is tempered by love. And, all the faithful are capable of learning independently,³¹⁶ so leaders are not essential, just convenient.

Such a radically different organizational structure (without authority figures) may appear impossible or doomed. But consider what would happen if authority-driven church leaders were faced with faithful people who simply did not recognize their authority. Self-proclaimed authority figures will have no input at judgment. Each person stands before the throne of God independently. Neither can an authority figure influence God’s judgment, nor can the individual blame any shortcomings on those whom they followed. The power of the authority figure does not go beyond inclusion in or exclusion from the membership directory. They may rant or threaten, but they have no power. Certainly, the authority figures will retain custody of congregational assets such as buildings and bank accounts, but both are not things the New Testament addresses and have no bearing on who will be adopted into God’s family. Actually,

³¹¹ 1 Corinthians 9:18 – 19

³¹² 1 Corinthians 10:29

³¹³ 2 Corinthians 3:17

³¹⁴ Hebrews 13: 7, 17, 24, 1 Thessalonians 5:12 – 16

³¹⁵ Ephesians 5:21, 1 Peter 5:5, Galatians 5:13, 1 Corinthians 12:12 - 31

³¹⁶ 1 John 2:27

those who turn over their decision-making to authority figures disqualify themselves from inclusion because, without free will, neither faith nor love are possible. In the final analysis, adopting a libertarian outlook will result in the financial assets defaulting to the self-proclaimed authorities, the faithful walking away, and the social Christians remaining. To me, this is a plus.

Objectives of Church Leadership

When the church first began, everyone was a new Christian. No mature leaders existed. So, Jesus gave “apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers”³¹⁷ for leading the initial build. They were to lead until the church was able to “edify itself in love.” The major objectives listed in that paragraph brought the first church to self-sufficiency, so maintenance of the church thereafter should proceed along the same lines.

- Equipping all for service. Peter described this function as “serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.”³¹⁸ Paul summarized it as “through love serve one another.”³¹⁹ But service, in many cultures, implies an undesirable station. So, Jesus emphasized and demonstrated the attitude of service among leaders and followers in His kingdom several times.³²⁰
- Building up the body. As Paul wrote concerning the times when Christians assembled, “Let all things be done for edification.”³²¹ The primary building materials were to be sensibility,³²² the work of the Holy Spirit in the faithful,³²³ the teaching of the apostles,³²⁴ selflessness,³²⁵ thanksgiving,³²⁶ faith,³²⁷ comfort,³²⁸ and compassion.³²⁹
- Unity. Jesus planned and prayed for the unity of future believers, which would become a proof that He was from God.³³⁰ Without a conscious effort toward unity, the church will not only fragment, but also fail to prove the validity of Jesus’ claims. Unity does not mean that everyone must agree, but that all trust the promise of God that,³³¹ if we will keep searching, agreement will happen. In an atmosphere of unity, the divisive will give up and leave.
- Knowledge. One of the specific gifts of the Holy Spirit is knowledge.³³² Certainly, this was promised to some in the first century by miracle, but that promise seems to have come with an expiration date.³³³ But, the principle remains: the faithful need to know what they are talking about. In our time, knowledge needs to be obtained the old-fashioned way.

³¹⁷ Ephesians 11 – 16

³¹⁸ 1 Peter 4:10 – 11

³¹⁹ Galatians 5:13

³²⁰ Matthew 20:25 – 28, Mark 10:42 – 45, Luke 22:25 – 27, John 13:1 – 17

³²¹ 1 Corinthians 14:26

³²² 1 Corinthians 14:3 – 5, 14:17, Colossians 2:7, 1 Timothy 1:4

³²³ Acts 9:31, Romans 14:19

³²⁴ 2 Corinthians 10:8, 13:10, Ephesians 2:20 – 22, 4:16

³²⁵ Romans 14:19, 15:2, 1 Corinthians 8:1, 10, Ephesians 4:29

³²⁶ Colossians 2:7

³²⁷ 1 Corinthians 14:12, 26

³²⁸ 1 Thessalonians 5:11

³²⁹ Jude 20

³³⁰ John 17:20 – 21

³³¹ Philippians 3:15

³³² 1 Corinthians 12:8

³³³ 1 Corinthians 13:8

- Consistent. Jesus also prayed that future believers would be “perfect,” better translated “consistent.”³³⁰ If the faithful are not consistent between belief and action, Jesus’ proof fails.
- Fullness. This promise of attaining to the fullness of Christ is repeated several times, so is not an unobtainable goal: “...to the church which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all;”³³⁴ “...that you may be filled with all the fullness of God;”³³⁵ “of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace.”³³⁶ The church as an integrated body will attain to that fullness.
- Stability. Many groups demand uniformity as the means of achieving stability, but this only serves to hinder growth. Rather, stability is achieved when the faithful learn how to evaluate proposed positions. For example, the facet of faith that Paul names as of first importance is evidence.³³⁷ Certainly, every faithful person misunderstands some portion of the Scriptures, so confident assertions that begin with “The Scriptures clearly state...” have no value. Rather, the faithful must be assured of the promise that God will provide the proper understanding.³³⁸ In the meantime, each must be patient and keep discussing.
- The body edifying itself. The clergy system has inflicted the most damage in this area. Building up has become the province of the staff. Certainly, every faithful person should listen to the ideas of others, especially those whom they view as farther along than themselves. But, the bottom line is that no faithful person requires another human to obtain understanding. The indwelling Spirit has been tasked with that job.³³⁹

Many claim that the church will never attain to the level of being able to edify itself. This position has several serious problems. Most importantly, the proposed proof that Jesus is the Messiah fails³⁴⁰ because neither unity nor consistency is achieved. Second, the church always is in need of miraculously appointed leaders, but none making those claims today have any proof, whereas those in the first century had miraculous proof.³⁴¹

Those claiming that divinely appointed leaders will always be necessary often point to the fact that the church will always contain new Christians, so the church can never be mature. The problem with that argument is that Paul was writing about the church as a group, not about every individual. The body of Christ will always have many members, and those members will always be different from one another. The group is capable of edifying itself, nurturing those who might be characterized as children. In fact, Paul wrote in Hebrews that the group already could be characterized as consistent.³⁴² Peter described those who were taking on the divine nature as having already escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.³⁴³

A second way of envisioning the objective of church leadership promotes the body of Christ image. In what ways does the body resemble Jesus? The following topics should dominate our teaching about the body.

³³⁴ Ephesians 1:22 – 23

³³⁵ Ephesians 3:19

³³⁶ John 1:16

³³⁷ 1 Corinthians 15:1 – 8

³³⁸ Philippians 3:15, 1 Corinthians 2:9 – 12, Ephesians 1:17 – 19

³³⁹ 1 John 2:27

³⁴⁰ John 17:20 – 23

³⁴¹ *e.g.*, 2 Corinthians 12:12, Acts 8:6

³⁴² Hebrews 12:22 – 24

³⁴³ 2 Peter 1:2 – 8

- Righteousness. “To have put on the new man, according to God having been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.”³⁴⁴ In the context, that “new man” resulted from putting off the futile, dark, ignorant deceitful ways of the world and putting on sharing, edification, graciousness, kindness, tenderness, and forgiveness. The process is not as easy as it sounds. So, those who are more faithful must be available to advise those of less faith concerning how to take advantage of the power of the indwelling Spirit to achieve transformation. The holiness theme was repeated by Peter, citing the Law, “Be ye holy, for I am holy.”³⁴⁵ It’s a group effort, therefore the body is essential.
- Love. “Whoever may keep His word, truly in him the love of God has been made consistent. But this we know that we are in Him. He who claims to abide in Him ought himself to walk just as He walked.”³⁴⁶ We learn to do consistently what is best for others without regard to the effect on ourselves by putting into practice the principles set forth by Jesus. Those selfless models of faithfulness in the church provide practical illustrations of how that works.
- Unfading glory. “We all, having been unveiled in face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image, from glory into glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.”³⁴⁷ The bulk of the promises in the New Testament relate to transformation, which is a major task of the indwelling Spirit. These promises are well beyond what humans can do on their own. So, many have not been taught or do not believe that such transformation into the fully integrated character traits of Jesus is possible. Teaching on that subject is good, but demonstration is better. Those of greater faith (those to whom the others should turn for advice) will have several such experiences in their own lives to present as examples and evidence.
- Evangelism. “We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us, ‘We implore on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God.’”³⁴⁸ In the modern church, spreading the gospel has become the province of specially trained and sent people. But the attitude expressed by an unknown psalmist and quoted by Paul, “‘I believed and therefore I spoke,’ we also believe and therefore speak,”³⁴⁹ should characterize the church, not just specialty staff.
- Knowledge. “Do not lie into one another, since you have put off the old man and his deeds, and have put on the new, the one being renewed into knowledge according to the image of the One who created him.”³⁵⁰ Another facet of the “new man” theme noted above is knowledge, not so much miraculous knowledge as some received at the beginning, but rather the counterpoint of self-deception. The renewal of the faithful results in making sense of the experiences of life. This is a “one-another” activity.
- Character. “For whom He foresaw, He also marked out beforehand into be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.”³⁵¹ God planned for a big family that would last. To make this work, the plan had to contain a

³⁴⁴ Ephesians 4:24

³⁴⁵ 1 Peter 1:16, Leviticus 11:44, 45, 19:2

³⁴⁶ 1 John 2:5 – 6

³⁴⁷ 2 Corinthians 3:18

³⁴⁸ 2 Corinthians 5:20

³⁴⁹ Psalm 116:10, 2 Corinthians 4:13

³⁵⁰ Colossians 3:9 – 10

³⁵¹ Romans 8:29

means for conforming the characters of the faithful into that of Jesus, which is now the task of the Spirit. The image is couched in family terms, not individual.

- Suffering. “For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow His steps, ‘Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth;’ who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously.”³⁵² Bad stuff happens. Jesus demonstrated how a gracious nature deals with it. This exhortation is in a context of sheep with a Shepherd, so again it is a group effort.
- Faith. “...into Him to be just and justifying those out of the faith of Jesus.”³⁵³ “...not to think of himself more highly that he ought, but to think into sobermindedness, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.”³⁵⁴ “Here is the endurance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.”³⁵⁵ Modern translators have rejected the notion that Jesus had faith, so have changed all the passages concerning “the faith of Jesus” into “faith in Jesus.” Even amongst the minority who will acknowledge that Jesus had faith, Jesus’ level is viewed as unobtainable. However, one of the promises of God is that He will provide the faith to overcome ourselves. The contexts are about the faith of the group, not the lone wolf.

But the question naturally arises as to when the body will bear this resemblance to Jesus. Some push that transformation off to the Last Day, so that the faithful are transformed as the universe is burned up and everyone arrives at the Judgment. However, the paragraph about miraculously-appointed leadership³⁵⁶ assumes that this maturity and fullness happens in the short term to the author. The original recipients were told that they had already come to the “church of the firstborn, who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made consistent.”³⁵⁷ Peter described his audience as having already “escaped the corruption in the world in lust.”³⁵⁸ The body is characterized this way, not every individual in it.

Those who have been around the block a few times often have advice about how to avoid the more obvious pitfalls and about the more productive paths. Paul contributed warnings about those who cause division (to avoid them);³⁵⁹ not to keep company with excuse-makers;³⁶⁰ to flee immorality;³⁶¹ to learn from the bad examples of Israel in the wilderness;³⁶² and to flee idolatry.³⁶³ On the positive side, the faithful were enjoined to imitate those of great faith;³⁶⁴ to know what the Scriptures say;³⁶⁵ to think about good stuff;³⁶⁶ to pursue peace with all men, and

³⁵² 1 Peter 2:21 – 23

³⁵³ Romans 3:26

³⁵⁴ Romans 12:3

³⁵⁵ Revelation 14:2

³⁵⁶ Ephesians 4:7 – 16

³⁵⁷ Hebrews 12:22 – 24

³⁵⁸ 2 Peter 1:2 – 11

³⁵⁹ Romans 16:17

³⁶⁰ 1 Corinthians 5:11

³⁶¹ 1 Corinthians 6:18 – 19

³⁶² 1 Corinthians 10:11

³⁶³ 1 Corinthians 10:14

³⁶⁴ Philippians 3:17, Hebrews 13:7

³⁶⁵ Colossians 3:16, 1 Peter 2:2

³⁶⁶ Philippians 4:8

holiness;³⁶⁷ to seek things above;³⁶⁸ to test all things and keep the good parts;³⁶⁹ to comfort and edify one another,³⁷⁰ and to get together with fellow believers often.³⁷¹

Another positive source for the subject matter of good leaders may be found in the longest single passage about evangelism.³⁷² As Paul admonished Timothy, “Commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”³⁷³ Our understanding never fades, but shines on outsiders constantly.³⁷⁴ We have liberty from hierarchy, sin, death, and other restrictions to faith.³⁷⁵ We see the character of Jesus developing in ourselves individually and collectively.³⁷⁶ We receive mercy: Jesus has sent the Spirit to repair our root problems of damaged characters.³⁷⁷ We must accept that some people will never understand; stop beating dead horses.³⁷⁸ We demonstrate the power of God.³⁷⁹ We have the same spirit of faith that Jesus had.³⁸⁰ The development of gracious character promotes thanksgiving.³⁸¹ We have a confident expectation of success.³⁸² We focus on the unseen.³⁸³ We earnestly desire to depart this life.³⁸⁴ But, we fear for the destination of outsiders and therefore stay.³⁸⁵ The love of Christ compels us.³⁸⁶ We regard no one by earthly measures but by heavenly ones.³⁸⁷ We are God’s ambassadors,³⁸⁸ so we are careful not to besmirch the office.³⁸⁹

Those who lead develop in others not the attitude of a follower, but a one-another attitude. We submit to one another voluntarily; we let others lead sometimes.³⁹⁰ We serve one another, not ruling or following, with the gifts which God supplies (which implies that these gifts are beyond normal human ability).³⁹¹ We admonish,³⁹² comfort,³⁹³ and exhort one another (even daily in the case of exhortation).³⁹⁴ We build up and teach one another.³⁹⁵ We show affection

³⁶⁷ Hebrews 12:14
³⁶⁸ Colossians 3:1
³⁶⁹ 1 Thessalonians 5:21
³⁷⁰ 1 Thessalonians 5:11
³⁷¹ Hebrews 10:25
³⁷² 2 Corinthians 3:12 – 6:10
³⁷³ 2 Timothy 2:2
³⁷⁴ 2 Corinthians 3:12 – 16
³⁷⁵ 2 Corinthians 3:17
³⁷⁶ 2 Corinthians 3:18
³⁷⁷ 2 Corinthians 4:1
³⁷⁸ 2 Corinthians 4:3, Romans 1:24, Ephesians 4:17 – 19, 1 John 2:9 – 11
³⁷⁹ 2 Corinthians 4:7
³⁸⁰ 2 Corinthians 4:13
³⁸¹ 2 Corinthians 4:15
³⁸² 2 Corinthians 4:16
³⁸³ 2 Corinthians 4:18
³⁸⁴ 2 Corinthians 5:1 – 8
³⁸⁵ 2 Corinthians 5:11, Philippians 1:21 – 26
³⁸⁶ 2 Corinthians 5:14
³⁸⁷ 2 Corinthians 5:16
³⁸⁸ 2 Corinthians 5:18 – 20
³⁸⁹ 2 Corinthians 6:3
³⁹⁰ Ephesians 5:21
³⁹¹ 1 Peter 4:10 – 11
³⁹² Romans 15:14
³⁹³ 1 Thessalonians 4:18, 5:11
³⁹⁴ Hebrews 3:13, 10:24 – 25
³⁹⁵ 1 Corinthians 14:46, Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16

for one another.³⁹⁶ We trust each other to the point of talking about embarrassing failures.³⁹⁷ And we reaffirm our connectedness and miraculous unity with one another in the Lord's Supper.³⁹⁸

Leaders are those who have had more repair work done by the Spirit, so they are in a position to help others access that same power through asking for the Spirit,³⁹⁹ endeavoring to be filled with the Spirit,⁴⁰⁰ redeeming the time,⁴⁰¹ understanding the desires of the Lord,⁴⁰² singing about God,⁴⁰³ giving thanks,⁴⁰⁴ submitting to one another,⁴⁰⁵ knowing the Word,⁴⁰⁶ praying,⁴⁰⁷ walking by the Spirit,⁴⁰⁸ and using God's power rather than our own.⁴⁰⁹

Those who lead by faith grow faith in others by encouraging trust in those promises about being transformed,⁴¹⁰ assuring them that their advancement will be at a rate they can handle,⁴¹¹ that there is a step-wise growth,⁴¹² that God adds faith as needed,⁴¹³ and that God adds gifts as needed.⁴¹⁴

Becoming a Leader

Each believer has the liberty (and, therefore, the responsibility) to make decisions.⁴¹⁵ Authority exercised by modern church leaders infringes on that liberty. Each faithful person displays the ability to overcome (transformation), the ability to do so being provided by the Spirit.⁴¹⁶ However, the church, the group of faithful people, is necessary.⁴¹⁷ In it the faithful find role models⁴¹⁸ and encounter answers to questions and new ways of thinking about service⁴¹⁹ and patience.⁴²⁰ The picture of submitting to one another⁴²¹ is, simply put, letting someone else lead for a while. Leading in the church does not mean authority or control, but becoming a resource to whom people come for help.

³⁹⁶ 1 Corinthians 16:20, 2 Corinthians 13:12, 1 Peter 5:14

³⁹⁷ James 5:16

³⁹⁸ 1 Corinthians 11:17 – 34

³⁹⁹ Luke 11:13

⁴⁰⁰ Ephesians 5:18

⁴⁰¹ Ephesians 5:16

⁴⁰² Ephesians 5:17

⁴⁰³ Ephesians 5:19

⁴⁰⁴ Ephesians 5:20

⁴⁰⁵ Ephesians 5:21

⁴⁰⁶ 2 Thessalonians 2:15

⁴⁰⁷ Ephesians 2:18, 6:18, Romans 8:26

⁴⁰⁸ Galatians 5:25

⁴⁰⁹ 1 Peter 4:10 – 11

⁴¹⁰ 2 Corinthians 3:18, Romans 8:29

⁴¹¹ 1 Corinthians 10:13

⁴¹² 2 Peter 1:2 – 11

⁴¹³ Romans 12:3

⁴¹⁴ Ephesians 4:7, 1 Peter 4:10

⁴¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 8:9

⁴¹⁶ 1 Thessalonians 1:6 – 7, 2 Corinthians 4:7

⁴¹⁷ See the previous volume, *Family Gathering*.

⁴¹⁸ Hebrews 6:12, 13:7

⁴¹⁹ e.g., John 13

⁴²⁰ e.g., 1 Timothy 1:16

⁴²¹ Ephesians 5:21

Chapter 5: Obedience

Conventional church leadership demands obedience to some degree. Different groups have different thresholds of tolerance for free thinkers. So, an investigation of the concepts of obedience, honor, and authority as expressed in the New Testament are in order. As a companion thought, since the Restoration Movement was initiated upon the premise that the church should use the examples found in the New Testament as a pattern for the modern church, an investigation of “example” has been appended.

Honor

Arguably the best known New Testament passage using “honor” (τιμεω) is the Ten Commandments quote, “Honor your father and mother.”⁴²² In Hebrew, the word translated “honor” comes from a figure of speech, “to make heavy.” The same is true for, “These people honor Me with their lips.”⁴²³ However, the phrase, “Crown with glory and honor,”⁴²⁴ comes from a Hebrew figure of speech meaning “to ornament.”

That Greek word in the New Testament may be used figuratively or literally. The figurative usage has been translated “price” or “value,”⁴²⁵ including the famous, “You were bought with a price,” “The precious blood of the Lamb,” and the 30 pieces of silver as the price of blood. The monetary value of something was closely related to its “honor.”

The remainder of the usages yield the sense of respected or respectable, to be counted worthy, special, and desirable.⁴²⁶ Authority is not implied in any of the contexts.

Obey

Three different Greek words have been translated “obey” (each in various parts of speech) in the New Testament. Each will be treated separately and in no particular order.

The Greek word used in “Children obey your parents”⁴²⁷ is ὑπακούω. The most literal use is of Rhoda “attending to the gate.”⁴²⁸ In the passage where Jesus stilled the wind and sea,⁴²⁹ Jesus did not overpower them (or demons or a mountain⁴³⁰), but with a word, those forces responded. In another place, Sarah made the choice to do what Abraham wanted, as indicated by the middle voice.⁴³¹ Obedience is used as a figure of speech for faith in several places,⁴³² again

⁴²² Exodus 20:12, quoted in Matthew 15:4 – 6, 19:19, Mark 7:10, 10:19, Luke 18:20, and Ephesians 6:2

⁴²³ Isaiah 29:13 quoted in Matthew 15:8 and Mark 7:6

⁴²⁴ Psalm 8:4 – 6 cited in 1 Corinthians 15:27, Ephesians 1:22, and Hebrews 2:8

⁴²⁵ Matthew 27:6, 27:9 twice, Acts 4:34, 5:2, 5:3, 19:19, 20:24, 1 Corinthians 3:12, 6:20, 7:23, Colossians 2:23, James 5:7, 1 Peter 1:7, 1:19, 2:7, 2 Peter 1:4, Revelation 17:4, 18:12, 18:16, 21:11, 21:19

⁴²⁶ Mark 6:4, Luke 14:8, John 4:44, 5:23, 8:49, 12:26, Acts 5:34, 28:10, Romans 2:7, 2:10, 9:21, 12:10, 13:7, 1 Corinthians 4:10, 12:23 – 24, 1 Thessalonians 4:4, 1 Timothy 1:17, 5:3, 5:17, 6:1, 6:16, 2 Timothy 2:20 – 21, Hebrews 2:7, 2:9, 3:3, 5:4, 13:4, 1 Peter 2:17, 3:7, 2 Peter 1:17, Revelation 4:9, 4:11, 5:12, 5:13, 7:12, 19:1, 21:24, 21:26

⁴²⁷ Ephesians 6:1, Colossians 3:20

⁴²⁸ Acts 12:13

⁴²⁹ Matthew 8:27, Mark 4:41, Luke 8:25

⁴³⁰ Mark 1:27, Luke 17:6

⁴³¹ 1 Peter 3:6

⁴³² Acts 6:7, Romans 1:5, 5:19, 6:16, 6:17, 10:16, 15:18, 16:19, 16:26, 2 Corinthians 2:9, Philippians 2:12, 2 Thessalonians 1:8, 1 Peter 1:22

indicating that a choice was made, since faith cannot exist without free will. Similarly, obedience to the flesh is a choice.⁴³³ The flesh has no actual power or authority. In the remainder of the cases, obedience was a choice.⁴³⁴ The Old English word, *hearken*, is a better translation, meaning to listen to good advice (or avoid bad advice). The word does not carry overtones of authority but rather a recommendation to pay heed to the advice or desires of another.

The second Greek word, as used in “disobedient to parents,”⁴³⁵ is *πειθαρχέω*. It is often used to describe things that are done in response to the instructions of another, either positive or negative.⁴³⁶ And, it is used as a figure of speech for faith.⁴³⁷ In all but two instances, the word is used simply as a description of what happened, not implying authority by the one being obeyed. One of the remaining two cases is “Obey those who have hegemony over you,”⁴³⁸ which is in the middle voice, specifying that the action was the choice of the one obeying. The other is the admonition to obey earthly leaders,⁴³⁹ which specifically gives authority to those leaders of civil government.

The third Greek word often translated as obey or its various parts of speech is *ὑποτάσσω*. In addition, it is translated “submit,” or “subjection.” In the active voice, the verb describes the domination of one over another, as in “The creation was subjected to futility.”⁴⁴⁰ Those in the passive voice are similar.⁴⁴¹ But every passage that references obeying other humans, middle voice is used, specifying that it was the choice of the one obeying.⁴⁴²

Children

Ephesians 6:1 – 3 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother,” which is the first commandment with a promise: “that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.”

This statement was addressed to those who have parents who also were capable of abstract thinking and logic. In other words, Paul was not writing to those who were not yet capable of being on their own. Further, the letter was addressed to the faithful of Ephesus, not the general population. Plus, this admonition to children followed on the heels of a long treatise on marriage. Only three verses back, Paul cited Genesis 2:24 about a man leaving his parents to be joined to his wife.⁴⁴³ Not only was the original audience of age to be married, but also the

⁴³³ Romans 6:12, 1 Peter 1:14

⁴³⁴ Acts 7:39, 2 Corinthians 7:15, 10:5 – 6, Ephesians 6:5, Philippians 2:8, Colossians 3:22, Philemon 21, 2 Thessalonians 3:14, Hebrews 5:8 – 9, 11:8, 1 Peter 1:2

⁴³⁵ Romans 1:30, 2 Timothy 3:2

⁴³⁶ Acts 5:29, 5:36 – 37, 26:19, 27:21, Romans 2:8, 10:21, 11:30 – 32, Ephesians 2:2, 5:6, Colossians 3:6, Titus 1:16, 3:1, 3:3, Hebrews 13:17 (middle voice), James 3:3, 1 Peter 3:1, 3:20

⁴³⁷ John 3:36, Acts 5:32, 14:2, 19:9, Romans 15:31, Galatians 3:1, 5:7, Hebrews 3:18, 4:6, 4:11, 11:31, 1 Peter 2:7 – 8, 1 Peter 4:17

⁴³⁸ Hebrews 13:17

⁴³⁹ Titus 3:1

⁴⁴⁰ Romans 8:20. Similar active voice passages are 1 Corinthians 15:27, Philippians 3:21, Hebrews 2:5, 2:8

⁴⁴¹ Romans 10:3, 2 Corinthians 9:13, Galatians 2:5, Hebrews 12:9

⁴⁴² 1 Corinthians 14:34, 16:16, Ephesians 5:21 – 22, Colossians 3:18, 1 Peter 3:1, 3:5, 1 Timothy 2:11, 3:4, Titus 2:5, 2:9:1, 1 Peter 2:13, 2:18, 5:5

⁴⁴³ Ephesians 5:31

explanation of the paragraph about children must not encroach on the picture of “leave and cleave.”

Some teach that children are under the authority of their parents until they marry, making Ephesians 6:1 – 3 refer only to the unmarried. This forces the conclusion that the “leave and cleave” prescription illustrates that human relationships have priorities. But, this does violence to the context, setting verses in opposition to one another. If we decide that we must have priorities to solve the competition for our time and attention, we have missed something. The faithful should be able to coordinate their lives without neglecting anything. Further, Paul endorsed the option of remaining unmarried in order to devote full time to Kingdom pursuits⁴⁴⁴ without mentioning the role of parents. Certainly, culture pressures many parents to encourage marriage for their children.⁴⁴⁵

Some teach that “the will of the father IS the will of God,” drawing parallels with obedience to pagan governments,⁴⁴⁶ which makes an obviously false assumption that all parents are faithful. So, many give children the option to invoke, “We must obey God rather than men.”⁴⁴⁷ Such an understanding creates a contradiction in the Scriptures, since adult children and their parents often sincerely and honestly disagree.

Further, widows appear to retain their independence of choosing whether to marry,⁴⁴⁸ rather than reverting to the authority of the father (or brother if the father is deceased).

Some define “honor” and “obey” through incomplete research, choosing only passages about honoring God and obeying God, failing to note the voluntary factor introduced by the middle voice.

If Christians must accede to every command of parents, then those who are the children of Muslims must renounce Jesus. Obviously, this is an extreme illustration in our culture, but is very real in most of the world. However, the New Testament gives no hint as to the existence of a line between commands that must be obeyed and those that may be ignored. Again, resorting to “we must obey God rather than men”⁴⁴⁷ begs the question with poor hermeneutics; that answer leaves the option to the individual, which denies authority while pretending to support it.

In what way and to what extent we choose to respond to parents depends on the demands of the parents and the objectives of the children. Parents will not be given the opportunity to advise Jesus on whom to accept. Paul advises children to give serious consideration to the advice of parents: to “hearken” and voluntarily to go along when possible. Children must be prepared to accept the repercussions of their choices, either of declining good advice or of accepting faulty advice.

Authority Expanded

As a parallel to the admonition to children, leadership in the church is defined by hegemony, not authority. Followers choose whom to follow; leaders are never instructed to subjugate. Claiming a title does not result in authority. Rather, followers are enjoined to follow

⁴⁴⁴ 1 Corinthians 7:7 – 9, 7:32 – 35

⁴⁴⁵ 1 Corinthians 7:36 – 38

⁴⁴⁶ Romans 13:1 -7, 1 Peter 2:1 – 17, Titus 3:1

⁴⁴⁷ Acts 4:19 – 20 and 5:29

⁴⁴⁸ 1 Corinthians 7:39

successful faith.⁴⁴⁹ Authority appears to be the pivotal concept for understanding both honor and obey.⁴⁵⁰

The main word translated “authority” is ἐξουσία, also translated jurisdiction, liberty, power, right, and strength. The “power” translation is misplaced. When enforcement needs to be implied, power (δυνασθησ) is expressed as “power and authority.” Authority most often indicates “right;”⁴⁵¹ someone has the right to do something, although the power to accomplish it may be lacking unless implied by the context.

Four other Greek words are translated “authority,” once each, but each of them should be translated differently.

- The Ethiopian eunuch had great power (δυνασθησ), not great authority.⁴⁵²
- The kings for whom all should pray are “those on top” (ὑπεροχη), not those in authority.⁴⁵³
- Paul did not permit women to teach or “act independently of” (αυθεντεω) a man, which is not about authority but about teamwork.⁴⁵⁴
- Titus was admonished to exhort and rebuke with all commandment (επιταγη),⁴⁵⁵ not authority.

Authority over Assets

See also *Family Gathering*, Chapter 8: Tithes.

In Western culture, and most others, church authority focuses on monetary assets and control of teaching. This section addresses only the control of assets. Several passages suggest that the faithful have an obligation to financially support certain people:

- The early Christians in Jerusalem shared with each other.⁴⁵⁶
- Christians in several distant regions sent funds to Jerusalem for famine relief.⁴⁵⁷
- Teachers of the gospel were to be supported financially.⁴⁵⁸
- Needy brethren were to be helped.⁴⁵⁹
- In general, the poor were to be helped.⁴⁶⁰
- Taking care of needy relatives was essential.⁴⁶¹

Sharing blindly was not implied. Rather, certain attitudes were necessary:

- Sharing must be from love.⁴⁶²
- Poverty will not be eradicated; honoring Jesus is a more worthy expenditure.⁴⁶³

⁴⁴⁹ Hebrews 13:7

⁴⁵⁰ See Chapter 4: Leadership, Authority

⁴⁵¹ Approximately 85 occasions.

⁴⁵² Acts 8:27

⁴⁵³ 1 Timothy 2:2

⁴⁵⁴ 1 Timothy 2:12

⁴⁵⁵ Titus 2:15

⁴⁵⁶ Acts 2:44 – 45, 4:34 – 35, 5:4

⁴⁵⁷ Acts 11:29, 1 Corinthians 16:1 – 3, 2 Corinthians 8 – 9

⁴⁵⁸ 3 John 6, Titus 3:13, 1 Corinthians 9:3 – 14, 1 Timothy 5:17 – 18

⁴⁵⁹ Matthew 25:35 – 40, 1 John 3:17

⁴⁶⁰ Ephesians 4:28, Galatians 2:10, Luke 14:12 – 14

⁴⁶¹ 1 Timothy 5:8

⁴⁶² 1 Corinthians 13:3

⁴⁶³ Matthew 26:11, Mark 14:7, John 12:8

- Deciding how to share is not a matter of resources or priorities, but of faith.⁴⁶⁴
- Children ought not to lay up for the parents, but parents for the children.⁴⁶⁵

But this raises the question, who decides with whom I am to share? The apostles had authority to demand support; they are not recorded to have used that right. Today, one who claims authority over the finances of another takes what God has not granted. Asserting that someone else must give money to a certain cause in order to have worthy faith is ungodly manipulation. All believers have liberty. Each must assess his or her own generosity and share accordingly.

Examples

The Restoration Movement organized its doctrine around the premise that the practices of the First Century church should be reproduced by the modern church. Unfortunately, the list of required practices varies from group to group because the concept of essential examples is not spelled out in the New Testament. Separating the essential from the expedient is in the eye of the beholder. Even when the example is plain, exactly how to replicate it has been the source of many disputes.

Examples appear in the English New Testament resulting from four Greek words from which our language has adapted design, mimic, type, and graphic. For the sake of interest, not content, the source word group has been included in parentheses.

Various facets of Jesus were recommended as examples: His suffering (graphic);⁴⁶⁶ His mercy toward Saul of Tarsus (type);⁴⁶⁷ His character, specifically His love, kindness, tenderness, and forgiveness (mimic);⁴⁶⁸ and footwashing (design).⁴⁶⁹ Other aspects of Jesus life were not mentioned, such as following the Law of Moses, eating in an upper room, or praying in a garden.

Several faithful people were held up as examples:

- The prophets were an example of suffering, patience, and endurance (design).⁴⁷⁰ This is a generalization, since both King Saul and Balaam prophesied and were spoken against. Islam teaches that all facets of a prophet's life are without sin, so the behavior of prophets serves as appropriate examples for us. Obviously, Saul and Balaam are not appropriate examples for us.
- Timothy was to be an example of speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity (type). We cannot extend this to the language that he spoke (as the Muslims do with Arabic) or the locations in which he preached.⁴⁷¹
- Paul recommended following his own example (type).⁴⁷² In the preceding context, several items termed “confidence in the flesh” are not recommended. But his self-described shortcomings of faith are included in the good list because of his attitude toward them. Many other actions and ideas of Paul were not held up as examples. Extending the list is

⁴⁶⁴ 1 Corinthians 8:12, 9:6, 9:7

⁴⁶⁵ 2 Corinthians 12:14

⁴⁶⁶ 1 Peter 2:21

⁴⁶⁷ 1 Timothy 1:16

⁴⁶⁸ Ephesians 5:1

⁴⁶⁹ John 13:15

⁴⁷⁰ James 5:10

⁴⁷¹ 1 Timothy 4:12

⁴⁷² Philippians 3:17

arbitrary and therefore inappropriate.

- Paul gave the example of a teacher paying his own way (type).⁴⁷³ He specifically wrote that this should be an example to mimic.⁴⁷⁴
- The evangelism of the Thessalonians was held up as an example (type).⁴⁷⁵
- Elders were to be examples of leadership without invoking authority (type).⁴⁷⁶
- Titus was to be an example of good deeds, purity of doctrine, being dignified and of sound speech (type).⁴⁷⁷ Other facets of his life were not specified as examples.
- Timothy was to hold fast the pattern of sound words which he had heard from Paul (type).⁴⁷⁸
- The faithful in Corinth were to imitate Paul's attitude toward poverty, deprivation, persecution, and slander (mimic).⁴⁷⁹
- Imitate (mimic) those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.⁴⁸⁰
- Follow those whose faith produces positive results (mimic).⁴⁸¹
- Paul commended the faithful of Thessalonica for being imitators (mimic) of the church of God in Judea.⁴⁸²
- Paul wanted the faithful of Corinth to imitate him as he imitated Christ (mimic).⁴⁸³ The context ahead of that statement describes Paul's methods of evangelism. What follows are things he had taught them, not things about Paul that they could imitate.

Negative examples also are used. Sodom and Gomorrah were given as examples of gross immorality and other specified sins that we are not to imitate (design).⁴⁸⁴ Other aspects of their lives, such as living in towns or having an agricultural economy, were not under consideration by the authors. The acts of disobedience by the Israelites in the wilderness were used as examples (design) of unbelief not to be imitated.⁴⁸⁵ The same idea was presented to the faithful of Corinth (type).⁴⁸⁶ The actions of bad leaders like Diotrephes were termed an evil example (mimic) to be avoided.⁴⁸⁷

And finally, the Israelites were told to copy (design) the tabernacle and its furnishings according to the pattern (type) shown.⁴⁸⁸ The descriptions were very specific and clearly listed. They were not told to search other portions of Scripture and infer additional specifications.

So, the New Testament does not hold up the practices of the early church as an example, but rather their character traits. The foundational assumption of the Restoration Movement was groundless.

⁴⁷³ 2 Thessalonians 3:9

⁴⁷⁴ 2 Thessalonians 3:7

⁴⁷⁵ 1 Thessalonians 1:7

⁴⁷⁶ 1 Peter 5:3

⁴⁷⁷ Titus 2:7

⁴⁷⁸ 2 Timothy 1:13

⁴⁷⁹ 1 Corinthians 4:16

⁴⁸⁰ Hebrews 6:12

⁴⁸¹ Hebrews 13:7

⁴⁸² 1 Thessalonians 2:14

⁴⁸³ 1 Corinthians 11:1

⁴⁸⁴ Jude 7, 2 Peter 2:6 – 22

⁴⁸⁵ Hebrews 4:11

⁴⁸⁶ 1 Corinthians 10:6

⁴⁸⁷ 3 John 11

⁴⁸⁸ Hebrews 8:5

Chapter 6: Sacrifice

What is the connection between sacrifice and leadership? Certainly, every faithful person is to be a living sacrifice.⁴⁸⁹ All the sacrifices specified in the Law had as their objective to illustrate true sacrifice as opposed to pagan sacrifice, the characteristics of Jesus, and the characteristics of all faithful people. Leaders must demonstrate, illustrate, and explain these concepts to those who choose to follow so that all may achieve God's desired objective.

Language Notes

The majority of the information about God's idea of sacrifice (as opposed to pagan sacrifice) is in the Old Testament, but the important applications of that concept to Jesus and Christians are in the New Testament, so the original languages are different. Unfortunately, languages do not have a word-to-word correspondence. This issue can be resolved by finding passages that were written originally in Hebrew but were later quoted by the inspired writers of the New Testament in Greek. Many times, the citations appear to be directly from the Septuagint. However, a blanket endorsement of the Septuagint would be unwise. Rather, we may safely assume that the New Testament citations which match the Septuagint reveal that the cited passage was translated correctly in the second century before Jesus. From those New Testament citations, the correlation between Greek and Hebrew words regarding sacrifice may be determined with confidence.

Starting with Hosea 6:6 (cited in Matthew 9:13, 12:7) and Psalm 40:6 (cited in Hebrews 10:5, 8), this generic Hebrew word translated as "sacrifice" is used in various places in the Old Testament to refer to peace offerings, the Passover lamb, burnt offerings, and sin offerings. The Greek word used in those citations in Matthew and Hebrews also are translated "sacrifice" in English and are also used in the New Testament to describe sin offerings,⁴⁹⁰ Abel's sacrifice,⁴⁹¹ and Temple sacrifices in general.⁴⁹² Further, the same Greek word for sacrifice was used to describe Christians,⁴⁹³ Jesus,⁴⁹⁴ a gift,⁴⁹⁵ praise,⁴⁹⁶ doing good and sharing,⁴⁹⁷ and general Christian activities.⁴⁹⁸ So, no argument can be made concerning exactly what type of sacrifice was intended based on which word was used in Greek or Hebrew. The context is the only clue concerning which type of sacrifice was intended.

When an inspired writer was being poetic or wanted to include all types of sacrifices, the phrase "sacrifice and offering" has been used.⁴⁹⁹

When Paul brought offerings for himself and four others, the exact type was not specified. If this were part of a Nazirite vow, the offerings would have been both sin and burnt offerings,

⁴⁸⁹ Romans 12:1

⁴⁹⁰ Hebrews 5:1, 7:27, 8:3, 9:9, 10:1, 10:3, 10:6, 10:11

⁴⁹¹ Hebrews 11:4

⁴⁹² Luke 13:1

⁴⁹³ Romans 12:1, Philippians 2:17

⁴⁹⁴ Ephesians 5:2, 1 Corinthians 5:7, Hebrews 9:23, 9:26, 10:12, 10:26

⁴⁹⁵ Philippians 4:18

⁴⁹⁶ Hebrews 13:15

⁴⁹⁷ Hebrews 13:16

⁴⁹⁸ 1 Peter 2:5

⁴⁹⁹ Hebrews 10:5, 8, quoting Psalm 40:6

perhaps including grain, drink, peace, wave, and heave offerings.⁵⁰⁰ If the offerings were for some other type of uncleanness, the ritual would include sin and burnt offerings. There is not enough detail in Acts to establish a context. Offering is used in a generic sense.

Three other Hebrew words also relate to this topic. Corban, as used in Mark 7:11, is simply “a thing brought.” In that passage, once something was identified as a donation to the Temple or as a sacrifice, it was labeled corban.

A final note on language: several times in the past few centuries, preachers have decried the demise of “strong preaching,” often lamenting the use of different words for sin and trespass. The accusation is made that this softens the message to be more palatable to modern audiences. Sin and trespass are touted as “strong” words. However, both sin and trespass are figures of speech. “Sin,” if translated literally to expose the figure of speech, would be “to miss the mark,” a term that well could have originated in archery. “Trespass,” taken literally, is “to side-step,” referencing the common human habit of finding creative excuses.

Types of Sacrifices in the Law

Peace Offering

The methods to be used for peace offerings are described in Leviticus 3. The occasions given in the Law are sealing a promise,⁵⁰¹ fulfilling a vow,⁵⁰² as a reminder to God that the faithful were still there,⁵⁰³ thanksgiving,⁵⁰⁴ freewill (a type of thanksgiving),⁵⁰⁵ and a grain offering from a harvest.⁵⁰⁶

Sin Offering

The methodology for sin offerings is detailed in Leviticus 4:1 – 6:7, 6:24 – 7:10. The reasons for performing it were unintentional sin by a priest,⁵⁰⁷ unintentional sin by the nation,⁵⁰⁸ unintentional sin by a common person,⁵⁰⁹ generic but unspecified sins,⁵¹⁰ consecration,⁵¹¹ and Yom Kippur.⁵¹²

Burnt offerings were a type of sin offering. Its specific methodology may be found in Leviticus 1 and 6:8 – 13. The continual burnt offering is described in Number 28 – 29. Burnt offerings were to be performed at all the annual festivals.⁵¹³ The reasons listed for performing it

⁵⁰⁰ Number 6:2 – 21

⁵⁰¹ Exodus 24:5, Leviticus 9:4, 23:19, and cited in Hebrews 9:18 – 20

⁵⁰² Leviticus 22:21, Numbers 6:14

⁵⁰³ Numbers 10:10

⁵⁰⁴ Leviticus 7:11 – 15

⁵⁰⁵ Leviticus 7:16 – 18

⁵⁰⁶ Leviticus 2

⁵⁰⁷ Leviticus 4:1 – 3

⁵⁰⁸ Leviticus 4:13 – 14

⁵⁰⁹ Leviticus 4:27 – 29, 5:14 – 19

⁵¹⁰ Leviticus 5:1 – 13, 6:1 – 7

⁵¹¹ Exodus 29:36, Leviticus 8:2

⁵¹² Leviticus 16:22

⁵¹³ Leviticus 23:37

were as a reminder to God that the faithful were still there,⁵¹⁴ unintentional sin by a leader,⁵¹⁵ consecration of priest,⁵¹⁶ consecration of the people,⁵¹⁷ and cleanness.⁵¹⁸

Wave Offering

Wave offerings were called such because they were waved before God, then given to the priest.⁵¹⁹ Heave offerings and wave offerings seem to be together. Usually the distinction is by weight. For example, waving a quarter of a calf could be difficult. But at least once the heave offering was just a loaf of bread,⁵²⁰ but it could have been a lot of loaves. In one place, only heave offerings are mentioned,⁵²¹ but I can see no distinction. Perhaps wave offerings are sheaves and heave offerings are products.

Wave offering were included in Aaron's ordination,⁵²² some peace offerings,⁵²³ grain offerings,⁵²⁴ in the cleansing of a leper,⁵²⁵ the first-fruits offered at the Feast of Unleavened Bread⁵²⁶ and the Feast of Pentecost,⁵²⁷ with the adultery test,⁵²⁸ and at the end of a Nazirite vow.⁵²⁹

Summary

In general, peace offerings were for consecration and thanks. Burnt offerings were a reminder to the people and to God of that consecration. Sin offerings were for atonement. The blood was never eaten, rather poured out, because "the life is in the blood."⁵³⁰

When an individual Israelite brought a sin offering, a peace offering was required to come with it. Of course, "whole burnt offerings" were consumed by fire. However, all other sacrifices were consumed by people. Only a small part of each sacrifice was burned, generally an inedible part. Sin offerings belonged to the officiating priest and his family. Peace offerings were divided. Traditionally, the officiating priest received the right front quarter. The offeror received the other three quarters, which had to be cooked and eaten in the tabernacle or temple compound. Leftovers were burned after two days. So, the offeror generally brought as many family members and other relatives (and sometimes the beggar at the gate) to consume it all in the allotted time. All types of sacrifices were described as a soothing aroma before God. In short, the Mosaic sacrifices were a celebration of forgiveness with family and friends in the

⁵¹⁴ Numbers 10:10
⁵¹⁵ Leviticus 4:22 – 26, Numbers 15:22 – 24
⁵¹⁶ Leviticus 8
⁵¹⁷ Leviticus 9
⁵¹⁸ Leviticus 12:6, 14:13, 15:15, 15:30
⁵¹⁹ Numbers 18:8 – 20
⁵²⁰ Leviticus 7:14
⁵²¹ Numbers 15:17 – 21
⁵²² Exodus 29:24 – 28, Leviticus 8:22 – 29
⁵²³ Leviticus 7:11 – 34, 9:21
⁵²⁴ Leviticus 10:12 – 15
⁵²⁵ Leviticus 14:1 – 32
⁵²⁶ Leviticus 23: 6 – 15
⁵²⁷ Leviticus 23:16 – 21
⁵²⁸ Numbers 5:23 – 26
⁵²⁹ Numbers 6:13 – 20
⁵³⁰ Hebrews 9:22

presence of God. In a world dominated by the pagan view of sacrifice, this is the image of sacrifice that must be portrayed by leaders.

Sacrifices under the New Covenant

The same Greek word that was used for grain offering⁵³¹ also was used for Paul's offering of the Gentiles,⁵³² Jesus,⁵³³ and offering for sin.⁵³⁴

Jesus was compared to several types of sacrifices: Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement),⁵³⁵ Passover,⁵³⁶ peace and sin offerings,⁵³⁷ the sprinkling of His blood to purify the tabernacle in heaven,⁵³⁸ blood atonement,⁵³⁹ participation in a sacrificial meal of which Jesus was the figurative main course,⁵⁴⁰ and a reminder of forgiveness.⁵⁴¹

Christian activities were compared to several types of sacrifices: evangelism,⁵⁴² praise,⁵⁴³ doing good and sharing,⁵⁴⁴ general Christian activities,⁵⁴⁵ faith,⁵⁴⁶ and the bodies of the faithful.⁵⁴⁷

Several times, "gift" was used instead of sacrifice or offering: gifts distinguished from sacrifices for sin,⁵⁴⁸ Abel's gift was a sacrifice,⁵⁴⁹ gifts were brought to the altar in the Temple,⁵⁵⁰ and gifts were brought for purification.⁵⁵¹

The part of the sacrifice that became the portion of the priest was likened to gifts for those who spread the gospel.⁵⁵²

Specific comparisons are not made in the New Testament concerning heave or wave offerings. Having no inspired commentary, all I can do is speculate. Wave and heave offerings are, in some cases, first fruits. Jesus, Christians, and the indwelling Spirit are all first fruits.⁵⁵³

God designed the Mosaic sacrificial system so that it would teach important attitudes about life on earth. No mention is made of giving anything up (which is pagan sacrifice), or that it might be painful. As in the Mosaic system, sacrifices were not wasteful. Very little was burned. Rather, the sacrifice became the main course for a family meal. No one at the meal lamented the

⁵³¹ Hebrews 10:6, 8

⁵³² Romans 15:16

⁵³³ Ephesians 5:2, Hebrews 10:14

⁵³⁴ Hebrews 10:18

⁵³⁵ 2 Corinthians 5:21

⁵³⁶ 1 Corinthians 5:7

⁵³⁷ Ephesians 5:2

⁵³⁸ Hebrews 9:23

⁵³⁹ Hebrews 9:25, 10:12

⁵⁴⁰ 1 Corinthians 10:16 – 21

⁵⁴¹ 1 Corinthians 11:23 – 27

⁵⁴² Romans 15:16

⁵⁴³ Hebrews 13:15

⁵⁴⁴ Hebrews 13:16, Philippians 4:18

⁵⁴⁵ 1 Peter 2:5

⁵⁴⁶ Philippians 2:17

⁵⁴⁷ Romans 12:1

⁵⁴⁸ Hebrews 5:1, 8:3 – 4, 9:9

⁵⁴⁹ Hebrews 11:4

⁵⁵⁰ Matthew 5:23 – 24

⁵⁵¹ Matthew 8:4

⁵⁵² 1 Corinthians 9:13 – 14

⁵⁵³ 1 Corinthians 15:20 – 23, James 1:18, Revelation 14:4, Romans 16:5, 1 Corinthians 16:15, Romans 8:23

death of the animal. The Christian attitude toward those activities that were compared to Mosaic sacrifices was a celebration of forgiveness with family and friends in the presence of God. Leaders characterize the entirety of Christian life, even when it is uncomfortable, as a celebration. Celebrations are good news.

Appendix: Authority of the Scriptures

1. Although the title above would seem to be a concept widely accepted by Christians, the theory by that name is at the heart of the extraordinary division found among churches of Christ.
 - a. Denominations with centralized authority may or may not ascribe to this theory. Among those that do, division is avoided by definitions established by their authority figures.
 - b. Rather than being drawn from the Scriptures, the theory is a filter through which the Scriptures are interpreted.
2. The first assumption made in this theory is that the New Testament church should imitate the church described in the New Testament.
 - a. The congregations described in the New Testament were different than those today
 - 1) Different problems
 - 2) Different cultures
 - 3) Different spiritual gifts
 - b. The New Testament does not address a method by which to separate the features that were specific to that time from those that would apply to all times. Therefore, different congregations have different lists of essential features, resulting in division.
3. The four basic tenets of the Authority of the Scriptures, that which governs congregational practices, are based on the commands, examples, and necessary inferences of the New Testament, and that the silence of the Scripture implies opposition.
 - a. Commands
 - 1) The term is used 71 times in the New Testament. (Commandment handout)
 - 2) The only specific commandments are faith and love.
 - 3) Paul, Peter, and John considered their writings to be “the Lord’s commandment.” Determining which parts of their writings are to be considered commandments has been the source of much division. Examples:
 - a) Not on the list: 1 Corinthians 16:20 “Greet one another with a holy kiss.” (Also 1 Peter 5:14 and Romans 16:16)
 - b) On the list: 1 Corinthians 16:2 “On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing as he may prosper,” despite 2 Corinthians 8:8, “I speak not by way of commandment.”
 - 4) Paul warned Timothy that some would attempt to turn their good advice and insight into rules (1 Timothy 1:5 – 9) “Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from a sincere faith, from which some, having strayed, have turned aside to idle talk, desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm. But we know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully, knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate...”
 - 5) Any list with more than two commandments is based on faulty logic.
 - b. Examples
 - 1) In the New Testament, Christians are enjoined 16 times to follow (or not to follow) certain examples. See the detailed description in Chapter 5.

- 2) In each case, the specific parts of the example to be copied by Christians are given. Expanding beyond the context is arbitrary and has been the source of much division.
- 3) In most cases, the character traits of various people are to be imitated, not their practices.
- 4) Several clear examples are ignored
 - a) (Acts 2:44) “They had all things in common.” (Acts 4:32) “Not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them.”
 - a. Many have cited Acts 5:4 (“While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control?”) to negate these two clear examples. This sets two passages in the same book against one another, requiring the conclusion that the nature of the gospel changed between Acts 4 and Acts 5.
 - b. Paul cautioned against this conclusion in Galatians 1:6 – 9, “I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.”
 - c. The nature of the gospel does not change.
 - b) (1 Timothy 2:8) “Lifting up holy hands.” This is a clear direction from an apostle concerning the assembly. Yet, few practice or recommend it, and extremely few require it,
 - c) (James 5:14) “Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.” This is a clear direction in the Scriptures for all Christians.
 - d) The theory of Binding Examples requires that all congregations of all centuries, cultures, and climates have the same practices. This makes the assumption that one’s understanding is flawless and will fit exactly everywhere. Further, it assumes that local authority is of no consequence, since my understanding automatically supersedes that of the leadership of another place.
 - e) The theories are applied only to matters of the assembly. For example, some believe that individuals can contribute to orphans’ homes, but not congregations. Certain behaviors are not permissible in the assembly, but are permitted at any other time. This is inconsistent.
- 5) Re-enacting the Lord’s Supper is not a command. Since we obviously do not follow all the examples of the early church, claiming to perform the Lord’s Supper because it was left as an example for us would be arbitrary. We do it for two reasons: Jesus asked to be remembered in this way and it illustrates some important concepts about which we need frequent reminders.
 - c. Necessary Inference – may or may not be necessary

- d. Silence of the Scriptures
- 1) The foundation premise is that if a practice is not given as an example by the early church, then it is prohibited.
 - 2) Many common practices of congregations are not described in the New Testament.
 - a) No New Testament congregation met in a building constructed for that purpose.
 - b) A congregational treasury is not described.
 - c) Neither song books nor song leaders are mentioned.
 - d) Vocal harmony was invented many centuries after the New Testament was written, so could not be implied.
 - e) Neither utilities nor environmental control had been invented.
 - f) Orphans homes, clapping, Bible classes, Christian schools and colleges, semi-permanent paid preachers are not mentioned.
 - g) In 1 Timothy 5:23, Timothy is enjoined to take a little wine and not water only. These are the only two beverages permitted to evangelists, the wine only in the case of frequent stomach ailments. By extension, since all Christians must spread the gospel, these are the only two beverages permitted for any Christian.
 - h) The theory is based on a confusion with the principle of mutual exclusivity. Actions or characteristics are mutually exclusive if they cannot be true at the same time. An example is Hebrews 7:14, "It is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood." If you tell me to ride a horse, I know I should not walk. But I do not know whether or not to use a saddle.
 - 3) The following examples are taken from the tract, "The Silence of the Scriptures," by John Isaac Edwards, published by the Guardian of Truth Foundation. Although many arguments are made in favor of the theory of the Silence of the Scriptures, these are given as representative of the general illogic of the theory.
 - a) Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10:1) were consumed by fire from the door of the tabernacle not because of Silence of the Scriptures, but because of mutual exclusivity. They were told exactly how to mix the incense. They chose deliberately to do otherwise. Any mixture other than the one given would be wrong. The theory of the Silence of the Scriptures gains no support from this example. The principle of mutual exclusivity is demonstrated.
 - b) Moses smote the rock instead of speaking to it (Numbers 20:11). God was upset with Moses not because of Silence but because of mutual exclusivity. We do not have all the details of the incident, so we do not know if there were any other details given by God that Moses did follow exactly. We only know for certain the specification he chose to change. But let us suppose that God had made no specifications about whether to approach the rock from the north or the south. Then Moses could approach from whichever direction that would, in his understanding, be the most profitable for God at that moment. This is not to say that he

could not do whatever he pleased in choosing a compass direction. Rather, he would be required to choose what was best for the purposes of God based on his best understanding. Again, the theory of Silence of the Scriptures is not supported in this passage, only mutual exclusivity.

- c) The early church had difficulty deciding what to do about circumcision. The statements of Peter and James are claimed to support approved examples (Acts 15:12), necessary inferences (Acts 15:7 – 11), and the Silence of the Scriptures. Such claims are examples of arguing from the specific to the general, which is unacceptable in any field of study, and even by common logic. One must prove that all such examples are binding and that all silence is significant. Numerous examples have been cited above to the contrary, so the claim fails. Peter noted that Gentiles received the Holy Spirit from God without circumcision (Acts 15:6 – 11). James quoted Amos, who predicted that Gentiles would become a part of the Kingdom of God. They determined that circumcision and the Law were for Israelites, not everyone, because God had revealed it through Amos and demonstrated it through Cornelius. These events cannot be re-interpreted to support a man-made theory.
- d) Hebrews 1:5 is cited as an example that no angel is God's Son, "For unto which of the angels said He at any time, 'Thou art My Son, this day I have begotten Thee?'" The author of the tract makes an argument not made by the Scriptures. One could cite any verse in Scriptures and claim that it is silent concerning driving automobiles, so Christians cannot drive them to the Christian assembly (although driving would be permitted at any other time). The inspired writer is making a point about the superiority of Jesus over the angels. There is no inference from silence.
- e) The author of the tract claims that, "The statement to do one thing excludes the doing of others." This claim is only partly true. If the thing stated can be shown to be mutually exclusive with another thing, the theory can be maintained. The author's examples are all based on mutual exclusivity, but he fails to mention that fact. In succeeding paragraphs, claims are made concerning activities that are not mutually exclusive, as shall be explained in the following paragraphs.
- f) The author cites Numbers 15:30 – 31, "But the soul that doeth ought presumptuously . . . that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Because he has despised the word of the Lord, and hath broken His commandment, that soul shall utterly be cut off; his iniquity shall be upon him," to condemn those who disagree with him. He makes the assumption that those who have a different understanding are presumptuous, and that they despise the word of the Lord. This is an unethical argument that, in a debate, would cause the moderator to end the session and disbar the proponent of such unfounded assertions.
- g) The author cites 1 Corinthians 4:6, "Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that in use you might learn not to exceed what is written..." However, the author stopped quoting too soon, since the context of the passage refutes the author's

concept, “That no one of you might become arrogant in behalf of one against the other.” Reading the context reveals that Paul’s injunction is against standing resolute on a favorite doctrine, thereby creating division. The author condemns himself.

- h) Many other misapplications of Scripture are contained in this tract. Many pages would be required to expose them all. These few examples are sufficient to demonstrate that the common defense of the Silence of the Scriptures has no foundation in either logic or Scripture.
4. Those who justify division reveal that they are not Christians
 - a. Christians will always have differences of understanding. (1 Corinthians 11:19)
 - b. Christians are promised that God will resolve the difference in understanding. (Philippians 3:15)
 - c. The weaker brother concept (Romans 14, 1 Corinthians 8) applies to both parties in a difference because each considers the other party to be weaker.
 - d. Remaining weak is not an option (Hebrews 5:11 – 6:8), so no one can claim a right to a practice by asserting that others must concede to the weak. The weak must instead follow the strong.
 - e. The practices of another person cannot cause (force) me to sin. Paul’s dividing line for separation was if the Gentiles thought it was horrible (1 Corinthians 5:1).
 - f. Jesus said that unity would be a sign to the world of the true church. (John 13:34 – 35)
 - g. We cannot choose an understanding of one portion of Scripture that invalidates another portion, so division is never acceptable.
 - h. Constructing a list of essentials causes division because each person’s list is of a different length.
 - i. The unspiritual (non-Christian) nature of a person is revealed when he or she justifies division for supposed “Scriptural” reasons. (1 John 2:19, Acts 20:30, 1 Corinthians 3:3) Paul recommended staying away from divisive people. (Romans 16:17 – 18, Titus 3:10 – 11). See also Jude 19.
 - j. With every temptation (in this case, to divide) is provided the way of escape. (1 Corinthians 10:13)
 5. Historically, these principles have resulted in and endorsed division despite Jesus’ clear prayer for unity and Paul’s repeated teaching on unity.
 - a. It assumes that, if someone else’s actions are contrary to my conscience, division is justified. This is a misunderstanding of conscience (1 Corinthians 8, Romans 14). Many people use the tangentially Biblical phrase that some practice offends his or her conscience. Using the context from which that is taken, the person is announcing that he or she will return to worshipping idols and give up on Jesus if things don’t change.
 - b. The Scriptures enjoin us not to force others to practice what they think is wrong, or to flaunt our liberty to those who are weak in faith. Those who practice division expand the Scriptures to include the idea that if someone else does something that I think is sinful, whether I can see it or not, this violates my conscience. This is exactly opposite to the Scriptures because it is entirely self centered. Those who use this argument of conscience conveniently overlook that, having identified themselves as those weak in faith, they should turn to others for wisdom, not try to resolve the problem from a position of weakness. Many have extended this conscience argument

- to include practices by people far away about which the person objecting has no personal knowledge. On the basis of gossip, division is justified. The Scriptures require us to allow others the right to be wrong. Anyone who demands that his position be given preference because of his conscience or his weakness is claiming both weakness and understanding at the same time, which is an untenable position.
- c. Others extend the conscience theory to cover church finances. If collections are accumulated in one account, then there is no reasonable way to sort out what income is going to which expense. So, if any expenditure of the church treasury is against one person's opinion, then no one can participate. Of course, this is a result of a series of misconceptions. The New Testament has no church treasury, so all the regulations that have been invented to govern it rest on nothing.
 - d. The theory assumes that it is sinful to be in the same congregation as others who practice what I believe to be sin. Therefore, division is justified. This is based on a misunderstanding of the concept of "fellowship." Those who espouse this theory insist that Christians must first agree on a set of rules before they can have fellowship. This is not the concept presented in the New Testament. Instead, we have fellowship because we each walk in the light, not because we agree (1 John 1:7). Those who insist on agreement in order to have fellowship have set up a standard contrary to the apostle John. Those who justify division because others have different practices operate in direct contradiction of the writings and actions of Paul.