



THE FUTURE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

by

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The Future of the New Testament Church or From Here to the Hereafter (Eternity)

The purpose of this study is to first of all look at the history of the church, it's early days until today and see what we have done right and what we have done wrong. We will learn here have we (the churches) earned the praise of Jesus (in Revelation) and where we have earned his rebuke.

Our goal is to find out how to prepare future church workers (i.e. discipleship) for labor in the end time's church. We want to do the training correctly so that the result will be pleasing to God. We want to share in the work to fulfill his prophecy that he (Jesus) would be coming back for a church without spot or wrinkle, in a spiritual sense.

To do that we must look at many aspects including salvation, repentance, restitution, qualifications for deacons and elders, spiritual gifts, fellowship norms and the end times church.

We will learn how the good can be apprehended and the bad can be avoided and corrected by using the biblical formula for the selection of our spiritual leadership.

We wish to help prepare the church for what is to come. We want the saints to be ready for the difficult but yet exhilarating times that are just ahead of us, if our understanding of prophetic time is correct. Even if the end is not yet, our topic concerns things that we should have been doing since the beginning of the church age.

If you absorb most of what is in this book you will have more spiritual acumen than most theological academicians. You will have the understanding of the Christian walk from salvation to leadership. You will also understand much about future prophecy concerning the church from today until the last judgment and beyond. It is my sincere hope that this work will help at least a few people prepare for the return of Jesus Christ.

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Section 1: Making Your Calling and Election Sure

“Make Disciples of All Nations....” Matt 28:19”

Matt. 28:19 NIV Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

The final command of Jesus Christ to his disciples just before he returned to the Father, was to make disciples of all nations.

John 17:15-20 NIV My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified. “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message,

As it says, it is not just for the apostles only, or for those who would believe in the apostle’s report, but for all those who would believe through their message.

When Peter preached on the day of Pentecost, He was beginning the fulfillment of Christ’s final command to the disciples. He preached with the power of the Holy Spirit, the consciences of the listeners were touched, and then Peter told them what to do.

Acts 2:37-38 KJV Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Peter told the new converts to repent and be baptized and receive the gift of the Holy Ghost, which would seem to be a good place for us to start also with our discipleship study.

Acts 2:39 NIV For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.

In my own personal life I know that after a public profession of faith

and water baptism the pace of my spiritual growth seemed to accelerate. I have spoken to many others who have shared the same experience. After belief and repentance the bible commands baptism as the third step in growing in Christ.

After baptism it is Peter's teaching is that one should have received the Holy Ghost (or Spirit) and then (sometimes later) be empowered for Christian living and for service. There are exceptions to the order of these things noted in the scriptures, but that is not our topic in this study. The norm is that one receives the evidence of Holy Spirit after water baptism. The evidence can be manifestations of spiritual gifts or the evidence of a changed life and empowerment for service. Receiving of the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential to continuing on with the spiritual journey. Without the person and work of the Holy Spirit further progress is not just impeded but well nigh impossible. Without the Holy Spirit scripture cannot be understood, spiritual gifts cannot be exercised and power for ministry is not available.

Time Line For Normal Spiritual Growth

The length of time the disciples themselves received training was three and one half years. They spent three and one half years learning by spending time with Jesus. Forty-two months is probably the equivalent of five to seven years of college, time wise. (They didn't have a summer break and also spent the Jewish holidays with Jesus, not to mention the fact that they were being taught by the greatest teacher of all time) We cannot spend time with the physical Jesus at present, but we can spend time in prayer, in the Word and with his people. By doing so we will be beginning and continuing our Christian education.

I think it would be safe to say that a new believer who dedicates his or her life to serving Jesus Christ should be a full grown Christian in a four to seven year time frame. Of course, not all are but they SHOULD be, they ought to be.

Heb. 5:12 NIV In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!

When I say fully-grown, I mean prepared for service. We should never stop growing in Christ as long as we are alive.

Rom. 15:14 NIV I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews the author states that those He is writing to should by now be able to teach. So, while not all are professional teachers as a vocation, all should be able to give account of their reason for hope in Christ and share the basics of the Christian faith. Paul wrote to the Romans that they were complete in knowledge and competent to instruct although the time frame for their learning is uncertain.

1Pet. 3:15 NIV But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,

We are not given the length of time between the conversion of those written to and the writing of the letter to them, but due to the slowness of travel and the examples of other missionary journeys that we do know the facts about, four to seven years seems to me to be a reasonable assumption.

So then, let us begin by stating that after completing the basics, belief, repentance, baptism and receiving of the Holy Spirit one should then be disciplined in the rudimentary elements of the faith. Now what I have said above does not mean it takes four to seven years to learn the basics. That time period is for spiritual growth after learning the basics.

Heb. 6:1-2 NIV Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God,

instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.

The elementary teachings of the Christian faith are listed above. It is expected that the new convert would be instructed in these subjects immediately after conversion if not before. These are simply the basic tenets of salvation, an outline of the true plan of salvation if you will.

Baptism

In the early history of the church a new convert was to have received instruction in the basics of the faith before baptism. The record of Phillip and the eunuch orchestrated by the Holy Spirit support that position.

Acts 8:29-31 AMP Then the [Holy] Spirit said to Philip, Go forward and join yourself to this chariot. Accordingly Philip, running up to him, heard [the man] reading the prophet Isaiah and asked, Do you really understand what you are reading? And he said, How is it possible for me to do so unless someone explains it to me and guides me [in the right

Acts 8:35-36 AMP Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this portion of Scripture he announced to him the glad tidings (Gospel) of Jesus and about Him. And as they continued along on the way, they came to some water, and the eunuch exclaimed, See, [here is] water! What is to hinder my being baptized?

Acts 8:37-39 AMP And Philip said, If you believe with all your heart [if you have [!]a conviction, full of joyful trust, that Jesus is the Messiah and accept Him as the Author of your salvation in the kingdom of God, giving Him your obedience, then] you may. And he replied, I do believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he ordered that the chariot be stopped; and both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and [Philip] baptized him. And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord [[m]suddenly] caught away Philip; and the eunuch saw him no more, and he went on his way rejoicing.

After instruction in the basics baptism should follow. Usually the faster this happens the better. The same day or at the next gathering of the body is a good practice. In this way a new convert can swiftly get off of milk and into the meat of the word. I have noticed that those who are slow to be baptized are usually slow to grow.

Heb. 5:14 KJV But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

Communion or The Lords Supper

Following instruction and comprehension of the basics, the converts are now permitted to participate in the communion also called the Lord's Supper and the Eucharist. In the early church according to the historical record (the Didache) a new convert was not permitted to participate in the communion until after baptism.

Didache 9:5 But let no one eat or drink of your thanks-giving except those who have been baptized in the name of the Lord, for the Lord has said, "Do not give that which is holy to the dogs."

To read the entire text of the historical church document "The Didache" go to URL: <http://www.countdownto6000.com/didache.html>

Heb. 5:14 NIV But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

Following baptism and I guess what we could call confirmation" new believers are expected to use the teachings and tools given them by their instructors and by the Holy Spirit. Note that it is by reason of use, in other words it is by doing, not by hearing, that one has their senses exercised to discern good from evil. Sitting in the pew listening to sermons will not get the job done. Neither will sitting in a classroom listening to instructors. You cannot learn to swim by reading about it. At some point you must jump in the water and actually do it to become proficient at it. It is the same with Christianity, as the writer of Hebrews teaches us.

The Apostolic Fathers, J.B. Lightfoot and J. R. Hammer, Edited and revised by Michael W. Holmes. 1989 Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI. (The Didache, the Teaching of the 12 Apostles.) Chapter 9

The Definition of Repentance

Before we can continue we must be absolutely sure that the foundation is properly in place. In Hebrews 6:1 we were told that repentance from acts that lead to death is the foundation of our faith (after belief in Christ of course) followed by baptism and other doctrines. Repentance is absolutely necessary for salvation. Let's see what Jesus had to say about it.

Matt. 4:17 NIV From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Mark 1:15 KJV And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.

Mark 6:12 NIV And they went out, and preached that men should repent.

Acts 3:19 KJV Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;

Repentance From What?

First of all from unbelief in the truth which is the same as repenting from belief in false religion or no religion.

Mark 1:15 NIV “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!”

Secondly from the works of the flesh which lead to eternal death, which is hell.

Galatians 5:19-21 AMP Now the doings (practices) of the flesh are clear (obvious): they are immorality, impurity, indecency, Idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger (ill temper), selfishness, divisions (dissensions), party spirit (factions, sects with peculiar opinions, heresies), Envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you beforehand, just as I did previously, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

Everyone should be able to find at least one thing to repent of in the verses above. If not, you are better than most and well on your way to spiritual growth. Now that we know what we are repenting from (unbelief and the works of the flesh) we can continue on with our study.

Jesus Chastens Those He Loves

Rev. 3:19 KJV As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous

therefore, and repent.

Jesus disciplines those that he loves and urges them to come to repentance. If you are living an ungodly life and are not receiving the chastening of the Lord beware: it may be because you do not belong to the Lord at all and are still not cleansed from your sins. He has to rebuke and chasten those he loves when they fall into sin and stay there or he would be a liar, and the scripture says, "God cannot lie." (Titus 1:2)

James 1:22 NIV Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

If you hear the word of God but do not begin to perform it in your life, you may be deceiving yourself and you have not been truly converted. It is the doers of the word, not the hearers who have made a true and good repentance and have passed from death unto eternal life.

John the Baptist also preached about repentance and gave us more information so we could recognize it.

Producing Fruit

Luke 3:8 NIV Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.

Luke 3:8 KJV Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance,...

True repentance produces fruit, or fruits as the KJV reads. Some may immediately argue and accuse us of trying to be saved by good works. For clarity, fruits are not works. Fruits grow naturally on a tree. The tree doesn't have to work at it. The gardener might work, but not the tree, it just grows. If that were not enough proof, Jesus said it so that is the final word on the subject.

Matt. 7:16 & 20 KJV Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

John the Baptist could see with his eyes (and by the Holy Spirit) that the Pharisees had not repented. There was no change in their attitudes or actions. No fruit. Before anyone can be discipled they must first have truly repented or else they are not yet converted and on the path of salvation. No one knows at what moment salvation is considered to be completed in the heavenlies. Of course God knows all, the beginning from the end, but his created beings do not. Let's look at the verse below and see if we can discover how the angels of God view things.

Luke 15:7 NIV I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

Luke 15:10 NIV In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

To the angels in Heaven, it is "repenting" that signifies the change, the conversion, and the evidence of salvation. Belief and faith may come first, and spiritual growth and reward building later, but repenting is the visible sign in the heavenlies to the angels, that a human being has truly begun the journey on the road to the Kingdom of God. That is when they rejoice over a converted sinner, when he repents.

If this is how they must view it, so must we. Again, before a person can begin to be discipled, they absolutely must have made a good repentance.

Not having made a good repentance may be why many people appear to be saved and then later lost. If they have not made a good repentance then they were not converted in the first place. To some denominations they were saved and then lost, but in truth they were never "saved" or rejoiced over by the angels.

1John 2:19 NIV They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.

When they leave the fellowship of believers and deny Christ it is because they never truly belonged in the first place. We should ask ourselves, "Have the angels truly rejoiced over us?"

A True Story

I will recount to you here a true story that happened in a church in which I was a leader.

A woman and her husband joined our fellowship. The woman seemed to be the most spiritual but the man was trying hard to get his life in order and overcome a drinking problem. He did faithfully help with the work of building the church and the woman attended bible studies. They both attended Sunday services regularly.

After about four years the man fell back into heavy drinking and the marriage ended in divorce. The woman arranged a meeting with the pastor after the divorce and told him that he had failed her and that God had failed her and she would not be darkening the doorway of the church again, and indeed, we never saw her again. She had tried to make a bargain with God, if he would save her marriage she would be a Christian. If not, then she would not.

We cannot bargain with God in that manner. He holds all of the cards and we have nothing to offer but our sins and the rest of our life to be used as he sees fit. When we come to God we must have the attitude that even if He wants us to be miserable every day for the rest of our lives we will yet maintain our faith. We must be able to say with Job, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust (or hope) in him."

Job 13:15 KJV Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him:

Job 13:15 NIV Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him;

With that attitude in place for all of our life, we will never turn back from following Christ. If we do not have that attitude at the outset then we must do what Paul says before continuing on in the Christian life.

Phil. 2:12 NIV Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling,

The verse above does not mean that we work for our salvation, but rather that we settle it with God by understanding what it is that we must do to be saved. It is similar to what Franklin D. Roosevelt

required of the Japanese at the end of world war two, there is only one option: Unconditional Surrender.

Unconditional Surrender is surrender without conditions, in which no guarantees are given to the surrendering party.

(www.wikipedia.com) http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unconditional_surrender

We must surrender our life one hundred percent to Christ; He must be our Lord and Savior. If we do that, no one, not even Satan, can snatch us out of his hand.

John 10:28-29 NIV I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.

We cannot place conditions on God of what he must do for us other than give us the eternal life, which he has promised. We cannot say: (and force him to do it) if you make me rich, if you make me happily married, if you heal me of all disease sorrow and heartbreak, if you do this that or the other, then I will serve you. In truth there is no reason to bargain with God. As a loving parent he knows what is best for us, better than what we would choose for ourselves. There is no risk in putting our life totally in his hands. The risk is in not doing it.

Job 5:7 NIV Yet man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward.

If we try to force God to our bidding by bargaining we will eventually find an excuse to break our contract with God and backslide. I can guarantee you, because the scripture says it, even those with the most blessed life among us have problems as it says in Job 5:7.

If having problems after coming to Christ will make you deny him you may as well wait to commit until you can give him one hundred percent because if you are alive and breathing you will have problems.

Repentance and complete surrender of our life to Christ is the foundation, which must be laid before true discipleship can begin.

What Then Shall We Teach and How Shall We Teach It?

We will now look at “what” and “how” we are to teach those desiring a closer walk with Jesus.

There is so much information in the bible (and all of it worthwhile) that to study it all will take more than a lifetime. Therefore we must pick and choose wisely for our teaching about foundational beginnings.

Matt. 5:19 NIV Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Notice in the verse above, bad doctrine will not send you to hell. Even those who are completely befuddled and teach people to disregard the commandments of Christ will be saved if they have been truly converted. What a relief that is. If bad doctrine would send us to hell we should almost all be lost.

1Cor. 4:6 NIV Now, brothers, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, “Do not go beyond what is written.” Then you will not take pride in one man over against another.

Another important point before we continue on is to warn people not to go beyond what God commands and invent man made laws and traditions. It leads to spiritual pride, like the Pharisees had. Do what is written, no more, no less. There is plenty of work there to last a lifetime. Note: I have noticed that people in denominations that add man made laws to biblical doctrine are often very argumentative and proud of their religion. Avoid such people.

2Tim. 3:16 KJV All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

Paul cites four things as being important to learn when studying the scriptures, doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction in righteousness.

In choosing a course of action it would seem that by teaching

“instruction in righteousness” the first three themes will also be addressed. Once instruction in righteousness has been accomplished the student will also have been educated in doctrine, reproof and correction because they can use the “instruction in righteousness” to reprove and correct others. Therefore, “instruction in righteousness” is the subject we must primarily teach in order to disciple properly.

John 7:17 KJV If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.

Doctrine will also become known by “doing or performing” the Word of God. If we begin to perform God’s word in our lives, later we will understand the reasons, the doctrine behind it.

A True Repentance Includes Restitution

One of the things that seems to have been forgotten in Christian training is righting old wrongs and performing restitution and restoration.

Ezek. 33:15 KJV If the wicked restore the pledge, give again that he had robbed, walk in the statutes of life, without committing iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die.

2Sam. 12:6 KJV And he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.

1Sam. 12:3 KJV Here I stand. Testify against me in the presence of the LORD and his anointed. Whose ox have I taken? Whose donkey have I taken? Whom have I cheated? Whom have I oppressed? From whose hand have I accepted a bribe to make me shut my eyes? If I have done any of these, I will make it right.”

Ex. 22:4 KJV “If the stolen animal is found alive in his possession—whether ox or donkey or sheep—he must pay back double.

Lev. 6:4 KJV when he thus sins and becomes guilty, he must return what he has stolen or taken by extortion, or what was entrusted to him, or the lost property he found,

Lev. 6:5 KJV or whatever it was he swore falsely about. He must make restitution in full, add a fifth of the value to it and give it all to the

owner on the day he presents his guilt offering.

Luke 19:8-10 NIV But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

Salvation came to Zacchaeus on the day he repented, according to Jesus. Notice that the "evidence of fruit" for repentance was restitution.

How Do I make Restitution?

While restitution is a key component in repentance from dead works, many may not have known before reading the previous section that it is also a key component of the biblical legal code. A thief could not get out of jail until restitution was made.

Matt. 5:26 NIV I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.

How much better off would we be if we followed this today. Instead of sentencing Mr. Bernard Madoff to 120 years in prison, he could get out if he or someone else returned the money that was stolen. The victims would have their goods back, he would be free, and the taxpayers would be relieved of the burden of paying for his care in prison. What a great system God had.

The spiritual lesson here is that Christ has done that for us. He paid the price on the cross for our sins, making restitution and peace with God the Father for us. You may ask, "why are you then teaching that we must make restitution for ourselves?" Christ has made restitution for us with the Father, but when we begin a relationship with him He does not restore goods we have stolen or right the wrongs we have done in the earthly realm. We must follow Christ's example and do that ourselves in order to let our light shine and show the world that we truly have been changed, that all things have become new. We cannot keep our ill-gotten gains and be a fully committed servant of Christ.

Matt. 5:15-16 NIV Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

Before leaving the subject of restoration and going on to other things I want to give a practical example of how to accomplish this. Remember, this is a “hands on” manual for those who really want to excel in their Christian life. This is no a book for pew sitters.

The Twelve Steps

It can be a useful project to work some of the twelve steps of AA even if you are not an alcoholic. They are biblically based and may catch a few things you forgot about when you performed your first repentance. While the founders of AA did not include salvation as an aspect of their program, they based their post drinking behavior model on biblical principles. Work steps four through eleven and see if it does not improve your Christian walk. If it doesn't, it is still good practice for Christian behavior.

The steps of Alcoholics Anonymous, beginning with step four and continuing through step eleven.

4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

A written inventory is best.

5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

This is akin to “confessing our sins to one another. (James 5:16) Be careful whom you confess to though, make sure that they are trustworthy. I did mine to a prison chaplain who was known for keeping confessions to himself.

6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

We must be ready and open for God to change us.

7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

We must then ask him to changes us. We will have not if we ask not.
(James 4:2)

8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.

<http://www.aa.org/bigbookonline/> The Twelve Steps

If you worked step four, this is a continuation of it. First we identified our weaknesses and now we make it personal by adding to it those persons we have sinned against due to our weaknesses and shortcomings. (Sinful nature)

9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

We confess and make restitution for our previous sins wherever possible without injuring others, such as confessing about adultery that occurred years ago where it may cause divorce of others today. Let God take care of those cases where you cannot make restitution without consequences to others who are not ready to repent. Pay the biblical price for sin by giving it to charity if you cannot directly repay for goods you stole.

10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

This is an ongoing never-ending process. If we do this we will constantly be correcting our sinful behavior. Ouch, how difficult this is with spouses and co-workers.

11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.

Our desire needs to be to do God's will not our own will for our entire lifetime.

For a complete set of the 12 steps and other pertinent material go to <http://www.aa.org>.

The founders of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) found the principles for their program in the bible. Dr. Bill Wilson and his associate Dr. Bob Smith put the biblical principles in an order that enabled them to be worked as steps. Dr. Bill as he is called stayed sober for the last thirty-six years of his life after his spiritual conversion. Hundreds of thousands of people have also found sobriety after working all 12 steps. I believe that there are two reasons for that. One, because biblical principles work even for unbelievers because they are God's laws. They work almost like gravity. You don't have to believe in God to keep from floating off of the earth. His law keeps even atheists from floating into outer space. Two, I believe that once a person has went through all of the work to complete the steps (for some it takes years) very few want to backslide and have to repeat them all over again at a later time. If you truly work them you will see what I mean. It is a very embarrassing to go to someone you have wronged and ask for his or her forgiveness. Once having done so it is more preferable not to steal, gossip or sin against others rather than to embarrass oneself again by going again and asking for forgiveness.

Matt. 18:21-22 KJV Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.

Luke 17:3 NIV So watch yourselves. "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him

That is why it probably has never happened with sincerity and probably never will that a person has sinned against someone 490 times a day and asked for forgiveness every time. Can you imagine doing this with your wife or husband? If you can't do it to the closest one to you how could it possibly be done to those who dislike or hate you? Once having completed steps four through eleven, no one wants to do it again from the beginning. It is difficult enough to keep up with repenting for new sins on a daily basis let alone revisiting old ones.

Making a good repentance and restitution is a good prerequisite to insist on prior to personal discipleship training or mentoring. This weeds out the phonies and those who are not really serious about Christ. It eliminates those who desire salvation but not service, and a life of service for Christ is what discipleship is all about.

Someone who has not fully repented and made restitution should be treated as a babe in Christ, teaching them again the basics of Christianity. There is no sense trying to disciple someone who is still drinking milk and not able to eat meat. Discipleship is meat, salvation is milk.

1Cor. 3:14-15 KJV If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.

I'm not saying that those who never accomplish much in life for Christ are lost, only that if they want to be pew sitters, they shouldn't waste an instructor's time by taking discipleship classes. They need milk not strong meat. When they get off of the baby formula then comes training in the deeper things of God.

Heb. 5:13 KJV For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe.

Work the steps or read the bible yourself and make restitution accordingly and then go on ahead and continue on the Christian path. Oh, and don't forget, making restitution and repentance also includes forgiving everyone who has ever sinned against you.

Prov. 10:12 NIV Hatred stirs up dissension, but love covers over all wrongs.

1Pet. 4:8 NIV Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.

Love covers all sins. God and Christ's love covers our sins and our love must forgive (cover) the wrongs of those who sin against us. As the scripture says; "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

Matt. 6:14-15 KJV For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Lord, Lord, Verses and Explanation

Many will be shocked on the Day of Judgment or on the day of their death that they are not saved. The Jews believed that being physical descendants of Abraham saved them all. The Islamic terrorists believe they will be counted with the righteous by destroying “infidels” (non believers in Islam) by suicide missions, and many people assume that they will be saved because they are “good people” or because at some point in their life they said a little prayer in the church and shook the preachers hand at the end of the service. All will be in deep distress when they stand before Jesus. Many ministers believe that they are saved because they do church work and perhaps even perform miracles.

Matt. 7:21-23 NIV “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’

Notice that Jesus says to this group of people, “I never knew you.” He does not say, “you were saved once, too bad you lost your salvation.” Also notice that many of these are “religious people.” They both participated and led in church activities, and did so “in the name of God.”

Luke 6:46 NIV “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?

Luke 6:47-49 NIV I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice. He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete.”

Many people perform religious activities in the “name of the Lord” but have never truly had their own conversion and salvation settled. They may have even led others to Christ without being saved themselves.

What is the key here? It is personal repentance from dead works. Many have the outward form of religion in place, a façade, but do not have it internally. They have head knowledge, they are even able to share that head knowledge with others who become true believers, but they themselves do not have and never have had a real relationship with Jesus Christ.

You may ask, doesn't God keep his word? What about the verses that say: "Believe on (or in) the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved?"

Acts 16:31 KJV And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.

The problem here is that true belief always results in action, when there is time for it. (The thief on the cross being the exception) We in our Greek thought based western culture have made the word "belief" mean "intellectual assent." There is more to it than that. It is not just intellectual assent, but a change of life that results in action and salvation. Let's look at the amplified translation of this verse.

Acts 16:31 AMP And they answered, Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ [[a]give yourself up to Him, [b] take yourself out of your own keeping and entrust yourself into His keeping] and you will be saved, [and this applies both to] you and your household as well.

Let's look at a comparison example: If you see a \$100.00 bill lying on the ground, will you bend over to pick it up? If you inherit ten million dollars from a long lost uncle, will you appear in court to get it? If you had the winning lottery ticket for 120 million, would you cash it? If a person would go into action for earthly things that vanish in a few years, how much more important is it to do so for heavenly things?

James 1:22 KJV But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

True faith, saving faith, will always result in change in a person's life, and that change in attitude results in a change in behavior. If there has been no change in behavior after a so-called conversion then it is very doubtful that the conversion has actually taken place. Of course the scriptures say that there will be a few that are saved like a man running out of a burning building, just barely. But, do you want to take that risk? In speaking of works the following verse explains it well.

1Cor. 3:15 NIV If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.

To make your calling and salvation sure, make a good repentance. Make sure that your mind and life have changed, for the better. Make sure the Holy Spirit is leading you.

Matt. 25:23 KJV His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

Then you can be assured of being welcomed into God's kingdom with the words "Well done thou good and faithful servant."

Peter gives us an order of things to work on to move toward our spiritual maturity. There is enough in these few verses to last us for years.

2Pet. 1:3-4 NIV His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

2Pet. 1:5-7 NIV For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge;
2Pet 1:6-7 NIV and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love.

2Pet. 1:8-9 NIV For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.

2Pet. 1:10 NIV Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall,

Making your calling and election sure involves “doing” the things the bible commands, not just hearing, reading, or knowing.

Everything written so far is just necessary preliminary groundwork. Without an assurance of salvation and a firm commitment to follow God’s will for one’s life, the rest of this writing is of less than no value to anyone reading it. It is in a sense of negative value. If you are not saved and are going to hell anyway, you may as well live for pleasure. Why serve God at all if it is all for naught? Don’t waste time here, go have fun!

Actually, I’m exaggerating to make a point, there is always value in studying God’s word because it never returns void. (Is 55:11) I’m just trying to shock some people into thinking, “if this Christianity thing is really real, I better get serious and get on with the program.”

Section 2: The New Testament Church Organization

Everything thus far said was preliminary groundwork to get to this point, where we can actually begin with real teaching about the church and discipleship. In a sense they are one and the same. Discipleship is actually learning how to use your gift to edify the body of Christ, in other words, to work effectively in the church. What you are going to learn next is how to prepare yourself for discipleship, how to find a good place to be useful after your training, and what to expect the future to hold if we are indeed in the end times.

Note: By “the church” I do not always mean a congregation with a building and a mortgage. I mean using your gifts to build up the body of Christ wherever you may find one or more believers to minister to. In addition it includes being ready to give unbelievers a reason for your hope in Christ and of course the normal way you would understand it, to work for the Lord in a local body of believers.

The “Gates of Hell” Will Never Overcome the Church

Matt. 16:15-18 NIV “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades (Hell) will not overcome it.

The church, like an old battleship has taken many direct hits down through the centuries. It has been battered, like the old song “The Anchor Holds” says. Most of it we have caused or have done to ourselves, Christians killing Christians and incorporating bad doctrine into our theology. But, in spite of all that the church will survive until Jesus returns. The church has thrived during times of persecution and it will surely thrive in the end times because the greatest persecution of all time is yet to come.

So, do not despair as you see how far we (the church) have fallen short of following Jesus perfectly. Instead rejoice, because you are living in the time when it will be cleaned up and made into a spotless bride awaiting the marriage supper of the lamb.

1Th. 4:16-17 NIV For the Lord himself will come down from heaven,

with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

Titus 2:13 NIV while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ,

Jesus Christ will lift his saints off of the earth (old and New Testament saints, the dead ones first) and the saved of all ages will meet him in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord. This is our blessed hope.

Dan. 11:35 NIV Some of the wise will stumble, so that they may be refined, purified and made spotless until the time of the end, for it will still come at the appointed time.

Rev. 19:7 NIV Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready.

The church and the saved of all ages will unite as the bride of Christ. We, in this generation have the unique opportunity to be the trainers, the disciples of those who will meet Christ at his second coming. Some of the younger ones among us who are reading this may even have that experience themselves. (To live until Christ's return)

What a time to be alive, there has been none better! So let's get on with our journey into preparing ourselves to meet our maker and hear him say, "Well done thou good and faithful servant." (Matt 25:21 & 23)

Setting Up a Church

Now we are going to look at how to set up a New Testament fellowship, commonly called a "church" in the English language, ekklesia in the Greek sometimes spelled ecclesia. 4(Greek; ekklesia: "gathering of those summoned")

<http://encyclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com/Ekklesia>

So, how do we start and run a church. Oh, you might say, that's easy,

rent a storefront, hire a preacher, get some new members and then buy a building. After we grow some more we buy a bigger building and recruit even more members. Now we can afford to purchase television time and get donations from people who don't even attend in person and that will give us enough money to build a mega sanctuary as big as a Wal-mart or a football stadium. With that in place we can invite in the biggest names in Christian music and preaching and pack the place out and get even larger offerings. That's how you do it, right? We now have a successful ministry, just like the bible says, right?

Sound familiar? Hmmm, not so fast, is that really in the New Testament?

Leaving that scenario for a moment let's view things from a totally different perspective. Let's pretend that we live on an isolated South Seas island with a climate similar to Hawaii's. The people of the island you live on have never heard the gospel. None of the 10,000 inhabitants have any preconceived notions about Christianity. Mainlanders using google satellite mapping recently discovered our Island, but no other human has visited us yet. We have been isolated since 100 BC.

Now, along comes a missionary airplane and drops 10,000 gospel tracts over our Island. Every person who can read (somehow they figured out what language we speak) gets one and studies it. All of the people have read it and 120 have accepted Jesus as Savior and Lord. They all eventually meet one another and gather together on a regular basis to eat and to talk about Jesus. They have an idea that there is more to this than what they are doing but do not know how or what to do next.

Six months later the missionary plane flies over again and lo and behold, they drop 120 bibles right near the town square where the meetings are taking place. Every believer now gets a bible and begins to study it with the intention of finding out what they should do next to follow the Christian path.

The first thing that they find is that there needs to be some leadership appointed, some elders and some deacons. There didn't seem to be anything in the bible about securing a building before doing anything else. They are still meeting outside in the marketplace when it is

closed on Saturday.

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

Acts 6:3 KJV Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.

(Deacons, such as Stephen, were to take care of the widows and church business)

Before we can appoint these elders and deacons we need to find out what the qualifications are for these positions. We will do that now.

Requirements For Church Workers

Called in scripture: elders, bishops, overseers, deacons, pastors, shepherds and priests, but including all who labor in the church for Christ.

I have taken you on this little mental journey in order to get you in the mindset of taking a fresh look at the scriptures to see what exactly does the bible say our overseers should be like. We cannot be refined by Christ like gold and silver if we hold to old and false traditions, the traditions of men, traditions not substantiated by the word of God.

Zech 13:9 NIV And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The LORD is my God.

Matt. 15:9 NIV But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.

Mark 7:8 NIV You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men.”

We need a fresh start. We need to forget about our old comfortable way of doing things as we have done them, sometimes for almost

2000 years. We cannot hold on to false traditions and at the same time have our lamps filled with fresh oil (the Holy Spirit) like the wise virgins waiting for the bridegroom in Matthew chapter 25.

Church Corruption

There is a lot of corruption in the Church today. The main cause of it is that we do not hold our leadership to the required biblical standards.

The same holds true for government. Our government leaders are liars, thieves, adulterers and greedy for personal gain. Why then are we surprised that our country's economic and moral situation is worsening with each passing day? A politician may not need to meet the standards of a preacher, but he or she should at least be honest, moral and care about the well being of the people, not just about lining their own pockets.

The New Testament commands of Jesus and Paul are these: teach, baptize, make disciples, appoint deacons, and ordain elders. In this section we are primarily looking at the requirements for church workers. ("Deacon" means "servant" and includes all church workers.)

Those who are candidates to be deacons and elders will have already been discipled, baptized, taught the basics of the faith and more. They will not be a novice in the faith. (1 Tim 3:6)

Preparing someone to be a deacon or an elder is tantamount to discipling them. Of course, everyone may not desire to hold a position in leadership but may want the deeper spiritual growth that comes from the study of it. Basically what I am saying is the studies needed for discipleship and preparing to be a church worker are basically the same. Of course after the basics in discipleship have been learned one may want to specialize in an area that enhances the use of their gift(s).

The First Church Deacons

Acts 6:1-8 RSV "Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists murmured against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the body of the disciples and said, "It is not right

that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brethren, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

"And what they said pleased the whole multitude, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands upon them."

"And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith. And Stephen, full of grace and power, did great wonders and signs among the people."

The apostles for handling the day-to-day functions of the church implemented the position of deacon, especially where it involved distribution of money or goods purchased with money. This helped keep the distributions fair and the church free from financial wrongdoing caused by greedy unspiritual people. (Although that is never 100% possible, even Jesus had Judas) It also freed the apostles from menial labor so they could concentrate on reaching people for Christ. They did not let the deacons run the church so they could hide in the church basement and get drunk while pilfering from the collections. (Not that anyone would do that today of course)

The deacons took care of the day-to-day duties mostly near where they lived while the apostles were free to travel and do missionary work wherever the Spirit led them.

Titus 1:4-5 KJV To Titus, mine own son after the common faith: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour. For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee:

The office of Elder is also a position created by the Apostles. The office of elder is similar to what we would call pastor, overseer, bishop or shepherd. These words are somewhat interchangeable and refer to anyone in church leadership. However, there is no precedent

that each group of believers would have just one person lording over the congregation. “Elders” plural, meaning more than one was always the norm.

Professional Clergy and Money

There are going to be many references to money in the guidelines for appointing church workers. Rather than explain each one separately as we read the scriptures it will be more expedient to treat money as a separate issue and do so here at the beginning.

Matt. 20:25-28 NIV Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

The prosperity gospel contradicts Jesus and has the church leadership living like kings with no concern whatsoever if some in the congregation are living in poverty. The money that they use for their own gain is the money that should be being used to help widows and orphans and do missionary work. Of course the bible is clear that everyone should be paid for their labor, but that should be in accordance with the average income of the congregation.

Where do you get that in the bible you might ask? Well, if you look at how God set up the income for the Levites in the Old Testament you will see the principle. There were twelve tribes. One tribe (Levi) performed the duties of the priesthood. The other eleven tribes were to tithe to support them. So, it took the tithes of eleven workers from the other tribes to support one Levite. For the sake of simplicity we will use the number ten for division and there are always going to be a few who do not pay their tithes so ten percent will be a good figure to use.

Let’s try calculating what a pastor should make using that principle. Let’s say that our average church family makes \$40,000.00 a year. The tithe from ten families equals, tada, \$40,000.00. Of course there are many other things to be done with tithes besides supporting church workers. Don’t forget about widows and orphans and of

course maintaining a building in climates where it is necessary. So, with a congregation of one hundred and twenty members, perhaps 30 families of four people, that makes the total annual income \$120,000.00. That's enough for one full time worker, two part timers (ten hours a week) with \$60,000.00 left over for buildings, widows and orphans and missionary work.

James 1:27 NIV Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

That's how it should work, but of course it doesn't. Not everyone tithes and the preachers increase their salaries as membership increases. The buildings get larger too, but where is the support for the widows and orphans? We have gotten away from the real purpose of the New Testament local fellowship, helping others and ministering and made it a business.

The Didache

During the first three centuries after the ascension of our Lord a document called in Greek, The Didache (The Teaching) was circulated as a manual for new believers and for common church practice. Let's look at some of the things that were taught about money in early church history.

The Didache: Chapter 11

11:1 Therefore, whoever comes and teaches you all these things aforesaid, receive him. (Referring to the first ten chapters)

11:2 If the teacher himself is perverted and teaches a different doctrine to the subversion thereof, do not listen to him; but if he increases your righteousness and knowledge of the Lord, receive him as you would the Lord.

11:3 And concerning the apostles and prophets, do according to the command of the Gospel.

11:4 Let every apostle who comes to you be received as you would the Lord.

11:5 He will stay one day, and if necessary, a second day, but if he stays three days, he is a false prophet.

11:6 Let the apostle when departing take nothing except bread until he arrives at his next lodging. But if he asks for money, he is a false prophet.

11:10 If any prophet who teaches the truth does not do what he teaches, he is a false prophet.

11:12 If anyone says in spirit, "Give me silver," or whatever else, do not listen to him; but if he tells you about others in need, that you should give to them, let no one condemn him.

Chapter 12

12:1 Let every one who comes in the name of the Lord be received, and then examine him judiciously -- right and left -- for the opinions he holds.

12:2 If the one who comes is a traveler, assist him as much as you can, but he shall not stay with you more than two or three days, unless there is a necessity.

12:3 If he wishes to settle with you and is a craftsman, let him work for his living.

12:4 If he is not a craftsman, decide according to your own judgment how he shall live as a Christian among you, but not in idleness.

12:5 If he will not do this, he is one who makes gain from Christ. From such keep aloof.

Chapter 13

13:1 Every true prophet who desires to settle among you is worthy of his food.

13:2 Likewise, a true teacher also is worthy, but like the craftsman, he works for his living.

13:3 Therefore, take the first-fruits of every product of the wine-press

and threshing-floor, of oxen and sheep, and give it to the prophets, for they are your chief priests.

<http://www.countdownto6000.com/didache.html>

This is how it was taught to be done concerning money, traveling prophets and Christians in general at the beginning of the church age. It seems that they (the prophets and teachers who lived among them) were given blessings of food, but they still worked for a living. Traveling evangelist received food and shelter, but only for a short period of time, normally not more than three days.

Acts 18:2-4 There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them. Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.

Paul is our example of a traveling evangelist plying his trade as a tent maker wherever he traveled yet he no doubt was blessed with both food and shelter as he founded churches throughout Asia. He preached on the Sabbath after working all week.

Now, before all the full time pastors get out their tar and feathers and begin hunting for me let me clarify this. Being a pastor or leader is a full time job if the people desire services other than teaching and preaching the gospel. Maintaining a church building, supervising other staff such as custodians and secretaries, visiting the sick in hospitals, counseling, funerals, marriages and more. Everything that a pastor does outside of what is commanded by Jesus and the New Testament writers is secular labor and he should collect wages for it in whatever manner the congregation decides. Teaching and preaching is what we are supposed to be doing for Jesus for free. That is everyone's job as a believer. If people want a full time pastor to meet other needs or wants then they can expect to pay for it. The point is that we have somehow come to believe that this is God's way of running the church. We have lost our way and have returned to a simile of the Old Testament priesthood that Jesus abolished.

Heb. 7:24 NIV but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood.

Heb. 10:10 NIV And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

The Old Testament priesthood had a big job to do. Offering blood sacrifices to atone in similitude for the sins of the people, foreshadowing the first coming of the Messiah as a sacrificial lamb. Now that the Messiah has come there is no longer any reason for that type of priesthood to exist, but we have adopted it as our own in Christianity.

The job of an Old Testament priest was abolished when the veil was rent in the temple when Christ was crucified. That vocation was no longer necessary. Of course people are free to run their fellowships as they see fit but most have been so accustomed to our traditional way of doing things that they cannot even imagine it any other way. Our traditions, while they may not be sinful in themselves, may actually hinder the cause of preaching the gospel. How so you might ask? By giving the impression that the paid church workers are supposed to evangelize the world and the rest of us are to hide out and not let anyone know we are Christians. Well, maybe that's going a little too far but a comparison would be that if we hire a maid to clean our house all of the occupants can become totally lazy and just leave a pig pen style mess everywhere we go in the house, after all, the maid can clean it up. That is kind of the attitude that has become prevalent in our fellowships, hire a preacher, and pay him decent. Let him do all the work, and call it "God's way, while we the congregation live like pigs in the parlor.

Rev. 2:6 NIV But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

While on the subject, God hates the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which in simplified Greek means "victory over the laity." It is a description of a hierarchical clergy lording it over the congregation, just exactly what Jesus warned his disciples not to do and reconfirmed it in Revelation.

After we have become accustomed to having a professional clergy it's not long before we no longer care how the pastor lives either, as long as we don't have to do any work. Having a non-God ordained Nicolaitan ministerial system has caused us to let a convenience become a disaster.

Before we go on with our study of money we are going to take a look at spiritual gifts because we need to understand more about them before continuing.

Section 3: Using Your Gifts in the Church

Spiritual Gifts

1 Corinthians 12:1 & 3-4 NIV now about Spiritual Gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant. Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus be cursed," and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit. There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit.

God has given to us the gifts that he desires us to have, to be used for the purpose of helping others and to preach the gospel.

1 Corinthians 12:8-12 NIV to one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between Spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.

Not all of us have the same gifts and abilities, and it is not God's intention that we do.

1 Corinthians 12:14 NIV the body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. Now the body is not made up of one part but of many.

1 Corinthians 12:18 NIV but in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.

Along with gifts of the spirit God has also gifted the church with people who have special talents in ministry.

1 Corinthians 12:28 NIV and in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.

1 Corinthians 12:31 NIV but eagerly desire the greater gifts. And now I will show you the most excellent way.

Paul then goes on to say that without love, even the best gifts are worthless.

Love

1 Corinthians 13:1-3 NIV if I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

1 Corinthians 13:8 NIV love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.

1 Corinthians 13:13 NIV and now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

Paul states that the greatest gift is love. As we continue this study remember that we are not learning a set of rules and regulations and when we are able to follow them we become a “disciple” rather than just a new sheep in the flock. What we are really working toward and learning is how to be led by the Holy Spirit in all things and how to love. Eventually, if we are walking in the Spirit and have love we will not need any rules at all because we will know the Lord’s will without them. However even though we will not need to consciously think about the rules we will do most of them automatically.

This is what Jesus spent most of his ministry trying to explain to the Pharisees and his disciples. If you reach the point of walking in the spirit you will not perform the deeds of the flesh without following a strict man made or even a biblical code of behavior.

This is what the salvation by works people do not understand yet today. It is because they do not have the love of God in their hearts that they do not understand how God could forgive anyone without the grief and anguish of trying to keep the law. Because they themselves are unloving and unforgiving, they think that God must be

also.

1 Corinthians 14:1 NIV follow the way of love and eagerly desire Spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.

1 Corinthians 14:39 NIV therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues.

1 peter 4:10 NIV each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.

Now we will move on and see how we are misusing the spiritual gifts today and find out how they should be used.

Section 4: The Most Visible Gifts

Evangelists, Prophets, Musicians and Singers

Our accepted method of subsidizing prophets/evangelists and musicians/singers and others on the church circuit is to take up love offerings. The better the performance the greater the offering. This is not how it was commanded to be done in the early days of the church.

1Cor. 14:26 NIV What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.

In the formative days of the church a persons spiritual gifts were to be used as a means of building up the body of Christ, the members of his church. We just read that in the last chapter that 1Cor 12:28 included apostles, prophets and teachers in the list of spiritual giftings that God has given to the church.

God did not give us the gifts to help us make money. What can I say, should each of us begin to charge the other a fee for use of a spiritual gift? Can you imagine it? Pray for me brother, I need a healing, here's a 20.00 bill. Or I need direction from the Lord concerning a job change, can you prophesy over me? What's the price? How much? \$50.00?

Why should singers, musicians and some preachers be the only ones paid for building up the body with their gifts? Why can't we all get a piece of the action? Like it was said in a mafia movie, there is enough water in the pond so that we all may dip our beaks! Can you see how ludicrous this is? Why is it that we have elevated some gifts to the status of receiving payment and others nothing? Paul said that love was the greatest thing. If I do you a favor and say it was out of love should you give me a hundred dollars? That's ludicrous isn't it? But, think about it, that is almost what we do with some gifts.

The point is that if God has given someone a gift to be used in the church there should not be a charge for it. If someone wants to be a professional singer or musician for a living, no problem. But, don't practice your money changing in the temple. Jesus drove the

moneychangers out. Have a concert in an auditorium or park and sell tickets, but not in the church on a Sunday morning.

Why you may ask? Why? Because if you take money for using the gift that God has given you (freely) to build his church you have lost your heavenly reward. Not only that but asking for money during a church service borders on extortion. I have served as an usher for many services with both guest speakers and evangelists. It's embarrassing when we take up three offerings. One for the tithes, one for the speaker and one for the singer. No wonder unbelievers say, "All the church wants is your money." I'm embarrassed to invite anyone to one of these services. When I said it borders on extortion I meant that people feel pressured to put something in the plate every time it goes by even if they didn't like the preaching or the singing. They look side to side to see if anyone but the usher is watching and pass the plate on without putting anything in if they think they can do it with no one noticing. Is this how God intended we use our gifts for the building up of the body? We have completely twisted the scriptures to arrive at this tradition. Lets look at someone who tried to do that in the early days of the church, Simon the sorcerer.

Acts 8:9-11 NIV Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great, and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, "This man is the divine power known as the Great Power." They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his magic.

Acts 8:12-13 NIV But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.

Acts 8:14-17 NIV When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

Acts 8:18-19 NIV When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

Simon wanted the power to impart the Holy Spirit, not to build up the church but to make money. He wanted to add it to his bag of magic tricks. That was his job, traveling magician. If he could lay hands on people and have them be slain in the spirit or speak in tongues he could make a lot of money and build an even bigger reputation for himself.

Acts 8:20-23 NIV Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin."

Simon wanted to cash in on using his spiritual gift and Peter rebuked him sternly for it calling him wicked and captive to sin. Is it possible that we could be guilty of the same thing when we receive money for our so-called "blessing the church" and receiving a love offering in return? Well, we may not be quite that bad because we were not stealing intentionally before today as that is what our traditions have taught us to do. Now that you understand though please stop charging for your gift. At worst God will chasten you at best you will lose your reward in heaven.

Everyone in the early church was commanded to use their gift(s) to minister to the body of Christ, not just the elders and deacons. As the old saying goes, "Many hands make light work." Over time, it evolved that the elder became a full time employee and ran the day-to-day operations of the church while mostly everyone else just contributed some money for his support. In our modern day church it seems that if anyone exercises their gift on a Sunday morning on the stage or platform they expect to be paid for it. This is our tradition and it is wrong.

Pharisees and Glory Seekers

Matt. 23:5-7 KJV "Everything they do is done for men to see: They

make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them 'Rabbi.'

Matt. 23:8-10 KJV "But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have only one Master and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor are you to be called 'teacher,' for you have one Teacher, the Christ.

Matt. 23:11-12 NIV The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

Today we don't generally wear long robes and stand on street corners to pray. But the Jews call their spiritual leaders "rabbi" the Catholics "father." The term "teacher" in this verse does not mean like a schoolteacher or bible study leader. It has the connotation of spiritual master, similar to a guru. These folks love the praise of men, and they have lost their reward and may not even be saved.

Matt. 6:1-6 NIV "Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. "So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.

But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Some may ask, "but brother, how can I sing and bless the congregation in secret?" Or how can I be a guest speaker and preach the word in a closet? Very good question. We can't get to the right answer without the right question. The answer is that you can't very

often bless others with most spiritual gifts in secret. But, and here is the answer, when we receive money for using our spiritual gifts it is very nearly if not exactly the same as receiving the praise of men. You sing well, you get a good offering. You preach well, you get a good offering. You are receiving the “praise of men” by receiving their money. Money is the praise value that people put on your talent. It is not the being seen in the church that is the problem if you are truly using your gift to bless the congregation, it the desire for accolades and money. The people should probably not even clap for a great solo in the church lest the person singing it lose their eternal reward from God.

Like the Pharisees who pray on the street corners and have received the praise of men, you have nothing more coming if you have received man’s payment for it. The devil wants us all to go to the judgment seat of Christ broke. He can no longer take us to hell with him and his angels but he wants us to lose our eternal rewards. When we trade the working of our spiritual gifts for a little bit of cash here we will be shocked at the judgment seat of Christ when we are left with wood, hay and stubble instead of gold and silver. (Figuratively)

1Cor. 3:8-16 The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, God’s building. By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man’s work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames. Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you?

For preachers especially there is a very grave danger in the “love offering” venue. The world is filled with people both saved and unsaved who have itching ears and just want to hear a good happy message.

2Tim. 4:3 KJV For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;

Ask yourself truthfully; if you went to two fortunetellers for a reading (and I'm certainly not recommending it) and in both cases the payment was to be a love offering of whatever amount you chose to give. The first one tells you that all will be well. You will have a healthy, wealthy and happy life. You will live to be 105 and have many wonderful children and grandchildren, which you will see to the fourth generation. You pay the lady and go on to the second one. The story here is different. This fortune teller says that you will be fired from your job next week, you wife is leaving you for another man, your children hate you and have drained your bank account, you will soon be homeless and die broke in a few years after pushing a grocery cart around the town with all of your belongings in it. Now, about that love offering. What if the second reading was true and the first was false. Would you have voluntarily paid as much for the second as the first before you knew the outcome? If not, then you know why love offerings for performance are wrong. It is Satan's way of stealing the rewards of both the giver and the gift receiver.

Matt. 10:8 KJV Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give.

The temptation when preaching is to give the people what they want and receive a good offering. When no money is involved you can speak the truth in love without fear of financial loss. When money is involved we are all subject to temptation. There is temptation to twist or bend the truth to make things sound and pleasant in order to get a good offering. If you preach well you know that you will be invited to larger and larger venues with larger and larger and larger offerings. The same goes for musicians and singers. Do your best for God when using your gifts, but don't seek the praise of men or money.

1Tim. 6:5 NIV and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.

I realize that everyone has to make a living, but don't do it in the church unless you are a hired staff worker. You make yourself into a moneychanger. This may offend some but what is it that you want?

Short lived riches here on earth or eternal rewards? The choice is yours.

Luke 16:13-14 NIV “No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.” The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus.

Are you sneering? If so continue reading.

The Moneychangers

Matt. 21:12-14 KJV And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves, And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves. And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple; and he healed them.

Use your gifts in the church for free and if you sing make recordings and sell them in the music stores. If you are a great preacher perhaps you should write books or make tapes and sell them as self-help materials or maybe teach at self-improvement seminars. Whatever your gift is, use it freely in the church or you may find that if there are paupers in heaven, that you will be one of them.

All right. Have I angered you enough yet? Are you through reading this treatise? Are there one or two who want to keep going? Well, that is enough about money, at least for now. Let's continue on and find out a little more about the requirements for real church workers, not knaves, charlatans, tramps and thieves.

Section 5: Biblical Qualifications for Church Workers

Elders and Deacons

The very first deacons had to be honest, wise, and full of the Holy Ghost. That is the starting point. Paul, in his letters outlines just what a person with these traits will be like.

1Tim. 3:8-9 NIV Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience.

The deacons were chosen by the group and then commissioned for the work (ordained?) by the Apostles with prayer and the laying on of hands. This then is certainly one way to choose deacons. It may not be the only way but it certainly is a good method. The group chose seven deacon candidates and then the most spiritual people among them, the Apostles, approved them. They had to understand and hold to the deeper truths of the faith.

1Tim. 3:10 NIV They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.

In the previous section you learned a lot about what not to do when working in church leadership or in sharing your gifts with the body of Christ. Now we are going to learn how to be a good example, some more don'ts and then some do's.

It is an honorable thing to desire to be a deacon, elder, pastor or any other office in the church. But, as previously stated, one must meet the requirements, and a degree from a bible college or university is not even mentioned to the slightest degree. Paul counted everything but his knowledge of Christ to be worth less than nothing and he was a highly educated man. Even his enemies acknowledged that.

Acts 26:24 NIV At this point Festus interrupted Paul's defense. "You are out of your mind, Paul!" he shouted. "Your great learning is driving you insane."

Acts 22:3 NIV "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. Under Gamaliel I was thoroughly trained in the law of our

fathers...

Phil. 3:7-8 NIV But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ

It is a man's character that is the most important thing, not his status as an academic. You can be the smartest person in the world as far as book learning goes and still be completely unfit for the ministry. Of course as we will see, one must be competent to teach from the word of God. One may achieve that by personal study and discipleship or at a university or professional mentoring. There is nothing wrong with academic learning, but that is not the criteria for being a faithful servant of God.

1Tim. 3:13 For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

The purchase one makes with holding a church office faithfully and honorably is a great boldness in the faith, a boldness to testify about Jesus. This is the degree we want.

1Tim. 3:1 Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task.

The requirements for deacons and elders are almost identical. To be an elder you must of course meet the requirements for the lower office of deacon, and then also everything else mentioned for elders. Because of the similarities we will cover the requirements for both offices together. As you will see, the standards are high, much higher than what we require in the church today.

Faithful in Marriage and Fit as Fathers

1Tim. 3:12 NIV A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well.

1Tim. 3:2 NIV Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife,

Titus 1:6 NIV An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient.

There has been much discussion down through the centuries as to whether or not the requirements refer to a person who is divorced or to one who is a polygamist or involved in multiple relationships.

Whatever the case may be a man certainly must at the present time be married to only one woman and faithful to her. Adultery, fornication, having mistresses and consorting with prostitutes are considered to be the same as multiple marriages according to the bible. However you may decide to interpret the requirements for marriage, if one is unfaithful in marriage, they will probably be unacceptable in other areas as well. So, let's not get into a dispute over this one issue unless a person meets every other requirement. Then we can go back and revisit it.

Anyone involved in such things (sexual sin) should not even be considered for the position of deacon or elder for quite some time after all immoral activity has ceased. (Probably at least four years.) More on that later) Anyone involved in immorality should be immediately removed from their position and treated as a novice, not yet fit for duty. They need to show by their behavior over time that they have repented and are now able to exercise the self-control needed to be involved in Christian leadership.

1Cor. 7:37 NIV But the man who has settled the matter in his own mind, who is under no compulsion but has control over his own will,...

In speaking of sexual matters Paul makes it clear that one must have self-control, (of course through the power of the Holy Spirit) to stay single and celibate or married and faithful to one wife. Anyone not having that ability is unfit for a leadership position.

1Cor. 6:16 NIV Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, "The two will become one flesh."

In the bible marriage is consummated by a physical relationship. It has nothing to do with a piece of paper or a church service. Any man

involved in more than one physical relationship, biblically has multiple wives. We won't even go into a discussion of sodomy. If even multiple heterosexual relationships are forbidden, obviously all other illicit relationships are definitely out of the question for church leaders. No one even remotely involved in deviant sexual behavior should ever be considered for church leadership except after repentance and a long period of chaste behavior.

Animal Lust

Sex sells! That is why we have so much temptation in the world today. Everywhere we go and on every TV show we watch we are bombarded with it. Sex makes money. Why does it do so? Because God has placed in the instincts of every creature to reproduce according to it's kind.

This is about the only command of God mankind has ever followed. God made it pleasurable to the senses fooling even atheists into doing his will and reproducing the species. The earth would be just about empty if males could figure out how to have foolproof sex without babies. Who wants to pay child support if the marriage or relationship fails? If men had their way the world would be full of buildings and machines but not many children. But, God had other plans.

Gen 1:22 NIV God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

Gen. 8:17 NIV Bring out every kind of living creature that is with you—the birds, the animals, and all the creatures that move along the ground—so they can multiply on the earth and be fruitful and increase in number upon it."

The birds and the bees do not have to be told what to do, they know by instinct. Some species seem to go overboard in this department like male dogs, rabbits and lizards. (Party animals) In one sense it is no different with mankind. We live in a mammalian body on this earth and have the natural desire to reproduce or at least to engage in the reproductive act. However, only in mankind has God given the brain the power to overrule the body. You do not have to be a Christian and filled with the Holy Spirit to be a

faithful husband or wife. There are faithful people all over the world of every race, culture and religion who are monogamous. God has given the power for the “will” to overrule the body to all people.

That does not mean it will not be a difficult task to do so for a lifetime. From puberty until death or at least near it, the desires of the flesh are with us. Even the ancients recognized it.

In an apocryphal (non-biblical) book called “The Second book of Adam and Eve” animal lust is recognized as problem.

The Second Book of Adam and Eve Chapter 4

Then God drove Satan away from before Adam, whom He strengthened, and whose heart He comforted, saying to him, “Go down to the Cave of Treasures, and separate not yourself from Eve; I will quell in you all animal lust.”

From that hour it left Adam and Eve, and they enjoyed rest by the commandment of God. But God did not the like to any one of Adam’s seed; but only to Adam and Eve.

Then Adam worshipped before the Lord, for having delivered him, and for having layed his passions. And he came down from above the cave, and dwelt with Eve as aforetime. This ended the forty days of his separation from Eve.

<http://www.scribd.com/doc/531622/The-2nd-Book-of-Adam-Eve-Revised-English>

We are in no way trying to elevate this book to any status but fiction. The point here is that since it was written long ago even the ancients recognized the problems associated with sex, namely indwelt animal lust and passion.

Today we try to fix things up by giving a one-hour sex education seminar in physical education class and then if anyone has more questions they can talk to a counselor for a few minutes at a later time. The teachers themselves are not even free from it in many cases so they are trying to teach something that they have not even apprehended themselves.

No wonder we have so many pornographers, rapists, pedophiles and the

like. We bury our heads in the sand and deny the real problem until it is too late. Sex can become an addiction just like cigarettes, booze or drugs. As the old saying goes “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” It is very difficult to get Pandora’s germs back in the box or Frankenstein back on the laboratory table after they have escaped. It’s like trying to eradicate something that has been posted on the Internet. It almost can’t be done.

The point I’m trying to make is that if a person is caught up in the sins of the flesh this has to be dealt with before becoming a church worker. If not the result is adultery, fornication, pedophilia, sodomy and the like IN THE CHURCH. The sins of the flesh must be conquered and eradicated before one is useful for the service of God.

God has given us the power over our own will to deal with this before we become addicted. Once addicted often God will give a new convert a one-time cleansing from evil desires. But, if we wade back into it after he has removed it, the road to recovery will be difficult, but it can be done.

1Cor. 9:27 NIV But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

1 Corinthians 9:27 AMP But [like a boxer] I buffet my body [handle it roughly, discipline it by hardships] and subdue it, for fear that after proclaiming to others the Gospel and things pertaining to it, I myself should become unfit [not stand the test, be unapproved and rejected as a counterfeit].

2Cor. NIV 10:5 We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

Phil. NIV 4:8 Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

The key to recovery is to take every thought captive to Christ. Once we have a problem in an area, either before or after salvation, we need to be on guard for the rest of our lives not to let that sin beset us again. I have no problem with the temptation to eat broccoli, but ice

cream, now there's a problem. In the same way we have to guard our thoughts concerning sex for the rest of our lives if we have had a problem in that area. The Holy Spirit will help us but we must be willing to accept his help.

Do not attempt to become an elder, a deacon, a pastor or anyone involved in leadership in the church until you have successfully dealt with the sins of the flesh.

Luke 8:17 NIV For there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, and nothing concealed that will not be known or brought out into the open.

Someday these sins will be exposed and it will be embarrassing to both yourself and your family and a detriment to the cause of Christ. Not only that you will lose your eternal rewards. Any good you may have accomplished in the ministry will be undone by your scandal. You will profane the name of the Lord in the eyes of both the church and the heathen. Get your own problems fixed first and then you will be ready and able to help others.

Luke 6:41-42 NIV "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,' when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye?"

You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

As to criminal sex offenders our culture seems to think that a few years in jail along with some therapy will cure the rapist or pedophile. Not so. It takes a major change in ones life to be free from lust. The best change is salvation through Christ followed by everything we have learned so far and everything that we will learn. Most sex offenders return to prison after a few years and many of those who don't are not truly rehabilitated, they either don't get caught again or live a miserable life trying to cope with the problem. There is hope, there is freedom. The answer is found in Jesus.

Rom. 13:14 NIV Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

Gal. 5:16 KJV This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.

Behavior of Wives and Children

1Tim. 3:4-5 NIV He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?)

1Tim. 3:11 NIV In the same way, their wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.

If you noticed in the verses above, the wives and children of Church leaders must also be following the dictates of the scriptures.

Some may think that this rule is unfair, as it would disqualify many pastors in the pulpit today. However, while their own (the pastors) life may be in order, it is not his (own) life that is in question here, it is his leadership skills.

A man with an unruly wife and wild disobedient children apparently either made a bad choice in marriage or somehow did not lead his family well down God's path for their lives. Whatever the case may be, if he cannot get and keep his own household in order, how can he possibly teach and counsel someone else in how to do it? It is obvious that his own methods have failed in his own life therefore he is not qualified to give advice to others or they may wind up with the same result that he has. In order for a man to lead the Church he must prove his leadership skills by leading his own family effectively first. (If he has a family)

A Blameless Lifestyle

Titus 1:7 NIV Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain.

1Tim. 3:3 NIV not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.

WOW! This takes a lot of people out of the application and screening

process. They must be blameless, meaning no one has a valid grudge or complaint about them. They cannot be overbearing, (how many would fail on that criteria) not hot tempered, not a heavy drinker, and not a greedy money lover. How many television and mega-church preachers would be fired if these things were required? But, we are not even done yet. Those are just the “don’ts,” we also have some “do’s.”

Positive Characteristics of A Church Leader

Titus 1:8-9 NIV Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

In the verses above the KJV translates the word overseer as bishop. Verse six which is not shown also requires that a man’s children be believers and are not wild and disobedient. We covered this earlier but it is repeated again. How many ministers today would have to give up their pulpit if the actions of their children were not up to at least basic moral standards? What about drug and alcohol abusers, gay and lesbian children? According to how I understand this a child engaging in such activity would exclude their parents from church leadership. You may disagree, but then what is your interpretation of these scriptures?

Now lest we seem to harsh in our interpretation here it is not about a “preachers kids’ experiencing the normal problems of growing up, especially in the teen-age years. Pastor’s kids have the same problems from 12-21 as everyone else’s. But if there is a pattern that is prevalent such as a leader that has four children and every one of them has turned out bad, and continued in that mode for years and years, something is wrong. It is not for us to judge what and try to fix it but only to say ‘brother, you need to get your own family together before you can help me fix mine.’ This is just common sense. Anyone leading has to have the goods and be able to show that what they teach and preach really works in their own life. If it is not working they need to voluntarily step down from leadership for a time and get it together. Then come back and help others.

Sometimes even the children of godly parents go astray. Pastor Jim

Cymbala, author of “Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire,” recounts in his book how his daughter left home and strayed away from the Lord for some time. His other children were fine. The congregation supported him and continued to pray for his daughter.

Prov. KJV 22:6 Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.

One evening in a prayer meeting a breakthrough came. A prophecy came forth that his daughter would be restored. Two days later she returned from another state ready to repent and serve the Lord and has ever since. The real question is more about how the leader has shepherded his children. If his family is for the most part serving the Lord the qualifications are met. One stray or black sheep in the flock does not disqualify the person from serving.

Sometimes though a person’s whole life can go spinning out of control. Consider the case of Job. Do you think he could still pastor (if he had been a pastor) effectively during his terrible time of testing? Not likely. Even he, who did nothing wrong himself to bring on his situation just would not have been able to minister to others during his crisis. He would have had to step down temporarily until it was resolved.

Luke 4:23 NIV Jesus said to them, “Surely you will quote this proverb to me: ‘Physician, heal yourself!’

It’s like the proverb they quoted to Jesus, physician, heal thyself! If a minister or church worker steps down from their position voluntarily to get their life back together then that shows they are in tune with God and the scriptures. When they feel ready they should be able to return to ministry. Now if a pastor gets caught fooling around with the church secretary and steps down because he got caught, that is a different story.

1Cor. 5:12-13 NIV What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. “Expel the wicked man from among you.”

That person should drop down to the bottom rung and spend at least four years being rehabilitated and observed before being permitted to be an elder or deacon again. If we judge ourselves in the church we

will not have to be judged by others. (The court system) The pedophile priests and pastors should have been thrown out of their offices long before the secular law enforcement agencies got involved. If the churches had done this they would not now be facing incredible lawsuits.

If you are doing church work and are involved in sin and do not meet the requirements for church workers you need to fix the problems instantly or quit immediately. To do otherwise puts you in line for the judgment of God, both in this life and in the life to come.

Care of Widows and Family

In the early church there were no denominations or ecclesiastical hierarchies. In other words, you did not send in a portion of the tithes to denominational headquarters. The tithes and offerings were used in the local body for the care of widows and orphans, to assist other suffering saints in need, and for evangelism. Generally, most church workers were unpaid volunteers, often including the elder. There were rules for widows though before they could receive assistance.

1Tim. 5:3-4 NIV Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need. But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God.

1Tim. 5:5-6 NIV The widow who is really in need and left all alone puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help. But the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives.

1Tim. 5:8 NIV If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

1Tim. 5:9 NIV No widow may be put on the list of widows unless she is over sixty, has been faithful to her husband, and is well known for her good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the saints, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds.

Immediate family should care for the needs of elderly parents and poor relatives first. If someone has no one to help them that is when the church should be stepping into the picture. Those receiving help though have to be living for the Lord

Younger Widows

Tim. 5:11-15 NIV As for younger widows, do not put them on such a list. For when their sensual desires overcome their dedication to Christ, they want to marry. Thus they bring judgment on themselves, because they have broken their first pledge. Besides, they get into the habit of being idle and going about from house to house. And not only do they become idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying things they ought not to. So I counsel younger widows to marry, to have children, to manage their homes and to give the enemy no opportunity for slander. Some have in fact already turned away to follow Satan.

1Tim. 5:16 NIV If any woman who is a believer has widows in her family, she should help them and not let the church be burdened with them, so that the church can help those widows who are really in need.

Younger widows should remarry rather than be a ward of the church. Of course, this refers to those making a long-term commitment to stay single and serve the Lord in the church in exchange for support. Short-term help for people going through a rough patch in life is an entirely different matter. That type of help for the brethren should always be available by members of the congregation who can help.

Family Includes Parents

A church worker needs to be honoring his or her parents also. This includes helping them in their old age. Lets see what Jesus had to say about it.

Matt. 19:19 KJV Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

Mark 7:9 -10 NIV And he said to them: "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and,

‘Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.’

Mark 7:11-12 NIV But you say that if a man says to his father or mother: ‘Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban’ (that is, a gift devoted to God),

Mark 7:12 then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother.

What the Pharisees were doing here was weaseling their way out of helping pay for the care of their aged parents leaving them destitute or forcing the other siblings to shoulder the load without their help. When they said “corban” they meant I can’t give you anything because I am a holy man, a priest, therefore everything I own belongs to God. So, I can’t give any of it away to help you. In this way they could get people to give them tithes and offerings but once they received them then they said that they had to keep it, they could not give to charity. There is no command in scripture for any such rule. They made it up because of their greed. They wanted to receive but not give.

Mark 7:13 NIV Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that.”

Jesus said that they were violating the word of God by their traditions. A man, especially a “Holy Man” or church worker should certainly help his parents. Other members of the family would also be included but not carried to an extreme. You don’t have to give lazy dope head sibling money for crack cocaine.

Discipline of Children

Many parents today defend their children’s actions even when their children are in the wrong. When I was growing up if you got in trouble at school or on the bus you got a whipping at home later too if your parents found out. Now, if the slightest bit of discipline occurs at school the cry is sue, sue, sue, and it’s not a hog-calling contest. Some parents today believe that they are doing a good thing by defending their sires even when they are clearly the culprits and are in need of discipline. Often the bully’s parents are suing the victims.

Rev. 3:19 KJV As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.

Even God chastens and disciplines Christians whom he loves, and Christ has paid for our sins. So why the chastening? Why? Because God knows the road ahead better than we do and he wants the best for us. If we are going down a bad road he wants to correct our course before we get ourselves into deep trouble. Parents should love their children in like manner. Correcting a child's course so they avoid trouble is showing love, it is love in action. Letting them go their own way without restraint is laziness, hatred or just plain stupidity. We train our dogs to go to the bathroom outside. Should we not train our children to pursue righteousness and therefore have a happy life?

Mal. 2:15 NIV Has not [the LORD] made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth.

Here is a verse that is often overlooked in the Christian abortion/family discussions. What is it that God desires of believing parents? Godly offspring, or a Godly seed as the KJV translates it. It means that the Lord desires/requires Christian parents to do their best to raise God fearing children. Of course just like in farming, Sometimes there is something wrong with the seed and it just won't grow healthy plants but you will never know what type of crop would have been produced if you do not plant, water and nurture all of your plantings at least equally. Some may even require special care.

It is therefore a requirement for all Christian parents to bring their children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. How much more so should it be required of our leadership?

Deut. 21:18-21 NIV If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who does not obey his father and mother and will not listen to them when they discipline him, his father and mother shall take hold of him and bring him to the elders at the gate of his town. They shall say to the elders, "This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a profligate and a drunkard." Then all the men of his town shall stone him to death. You must purge the evil from among you. All Israel will hear of it and be afraid.

God is so serious about the need for discipline that in the Old Testament it was a parent's duty to have their child executed if they

were continually disobedient. Now I'm not recommending this as Jesus removed that penalty by his example with the woman caught in adultery. However, the Old Testament law should serve as a warning as to how important discipline is in the life of a child in order to have them turn out well.

Indeed, there are many ministers today who should step down from the pulpit because their kids have turned out to be very evil. That may seem unfair but the scripture says that if a man cannot manage his own family well, guiding them to a successful life, how can he possibly do so for the people in the church? It is just common sense.

My grandfather used to say, if you want to be wealthy take advice from a rich man, not a poor one. If a person cannot even make what they preach work in their own life, how can they possibly help others? Would you want to take advice from a bankrupt stock advisor? How about taking horse tips from a bloke who always loses? Why would you want to be discipled by a minister who was a failure in his own personal life? That is all that the bible is really saying. Make sure the preacher has the goods before you commit to making him your shepherd or you may become a sheared, starving and ignorant sheep.

We do not have just one temple today. There are churches on every corner. Use due diligence and choose your pastor and teachers wisely. Then you will be able to serve them as you would the Lord.

The biblical job description for church leaders eliminates a lot of people. Some have told me they could not even find one candidate for deacon, elder or pastor if they had to follow these rules for their church. My answer is, if you can't do it God's way perhaps your church should cease to exist. If you cannot find one elder to serve as pastor and two deacons who meet these requirements then you are in an ungodly church, which should probably be disbanded. You should leave and go find a church that has found it possible to appoint godly leadership. If godly leaders are that scarce perhaps two or three churches should merge until they can put together at least one biblically approved leadership team.

Female Pastors

One more thing that has often caused controversy is the question

“can a woman be an elder (pastor) in the church?”

There is no biblical or historical record of a woman being an elder. There are female deacons (deaconesses) Phoebe being one mentioned in the scriptures.

Romans 16:1-2 RSV "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deaconess of the church at Cenchreae, that you may receive her in the Lord as befits the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a helper of many and of myself as well"

Deacon and Deaconess are English words that were derived from the Greek word diaconos, meaning a servant. The original Greek word was used in a general sense for all servants, with no religious connotation, however the apostles adopted the term for individuals who were given the responsibility of taking care of practical matters within the church.

In a sense, every pastor's wife is automatically a deaconess. If she does not meet the qualifications for deacon then he does not meet the qualifications for pastor. Every elder's wife should help her husband in the work of the ministry, which makes her a church worker. The word "deacon" means servant or helper in the Greek, so every pastors or elder's wife is automatically a deaconess in that sense, because she is his helpmeet. (Helper)

Gen. 2:18 KJV And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.

Once again though, there is no biblical foundation for female pastors, elders and bishops.

1Tim. 2:12 NIV I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man;...

You may say, "isn't that prejudice not allowing female pastors?" My answer would be this: "prejudice or not I do not know, but it is biblical."

Some may disagree and that's OK. If you can find a divorced person or a female who meets every qualification but divorce or gender I

wouldn't be one to quarrel with your elevation of him or her to a leadership position. Not that I am your judge anyway. I will just leave it at this: It is going to be very difficult to find one Christian man out of a thousand to meet these requirements and probably even more difficult to find a woman.

Eccl. 7:28 NIV while I was still searching but not finding—I found one [upright] man among a thousand, but not one [upright] woman among them all.

Solomon couldn't find but one godly man out of a thousand men, and not one woman out of a thousand. That doesn't mean that this is some type of mathematical formula and it is always true. It just shows how rare it is to find qualified leadership. As rare as it is among men it is even scarcer among women. I'm not talking about rarity in finding Christians. There are probably more Christian women than men. I am talking about finding people of any gender who meet all of the qualifications we have covered so far.

Why is it more difficult to find a female elder candidate you might ask? How many candidates to be a female pastor have a husband who can meet the requirements for the helper or (deacon/deaconess) position and are completely willing to do so? Remember, if the woman is an elder, the man has to be her servant and helper in the ministry. If he is not willing then she does not meet the criteria.

1Pet. 3:5 NIV For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands,

Not very many men I would think want to be in the position of being ruled over by their wife in the ministry. If a man is that committed to the Lord he will probably want to be a leader himself. A lot of men are big teddy bears at home, but they don't necessarily want everyone else to know about it. There is also a scriptural problem here, should a man be submissive to his wife in church leadership functions? You decide.

Even if he (the husband) was willing to do so, should he? Does a wife with a wimp for a husband meet the qualifications for leadership? Is it biblical? You decide for yourself, but the bible seems to me to teach otherwise. I sincerely doubt that you will ever have a problem in this

area if you follow the biblical qualification requirements. Basically a female elder would have to be unmarried and live a life of celibacy. How many would want to do that even if it were a biblical option? After you find a single woman who has been celibate for seven years then you can check out the rest of her credentials.

Now, those widows over sixty who have decided never to remarry and have dedicated the rest of their lives to serving Christ in the church are very close to and might be considered elderesses. (Is that a word?) They can of course teach women and children and do almost all of the work of the Lord in the church. Their only limitation is in overruling the male leadership in the fellowship, the appointed elders. They are as close to being a female elder as it gets.

Women in Ministry Who are Not Deacons or Elders

There are female church workers who are not in the position of deaconess. These are ladies who want to serve but may not desire or qualify for deaconess.

1Cor. 7:39 NIV A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord.

Some may be widows who are interested in remarrying but have not as yet. They are waiting for the right Christian man to come along. For that reason they may not want to attain a church office at the present time.

Titus 2:3-4 NIV Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children,

Rom. 1:29 NIV They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips,

1Tim. 5:13 NIV Besides, they get into the habit of being idle and going about from house to house. And not only do they become idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying things they ought not to.

I think it will be very difficult though to find a woman who never gossips, who obeys her husband in all things or a divorced person male or female, with at least seven or eight years of celibacy or the same amount of time of faithfulness in a second marriage. Oh, and of course they still must meet all of the other qualifications for an elder. The odds of finding one are so slim that it is not even worth arguing about. It is like arguing about how to invest up our one hundred million dollar lottery winnings. It probably ain't gonna happen so don't waste time worrying about it.

You may ask. Why so long a wait for a divorced person to serve as an elder, if at all? Well, basically when one falls down to the bottom of the ladder one must climb it again one rung at a time, and under even more scrutiny. Remember, even a deacon cannot be a novice which I would conclude by Jesus ministry is at least three and one half years. To move to the next level (of elder) it should reasonable to observe ones actions in the position for about the same length of time as it takes to finish high school, another three and one half or four years. If a fallen minister or novice Christian desires to move into church leadership, serving the same amount of time under scrutiny as it takes to go through middle and high school does not seem unreasonable.

Remember, it takes four years to get a bachelors degree, and that is going to school full time. I'm suggesting that Christian training for leadership can be done in the church without a formal college education, but what it takes is to live a pure life before the congregation for three to four years before serving as a deacon, and then serving another three to four as a deacon before becoming a pastor or an elder. If one can do that, male or female, divorced or not, I think they qualify. However they have to be celibate (if single) all of that time and afterward. That rules out most single people of both sexes. First Thessalonians gives us a picture of what not only the elders and deacons should be like, but the whole congregation.

1Th. KJV 5:12-23 And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves. Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men. See that none render evil for evil unto any

man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men. Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil. And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

There is much more that could be said about the leadership providing a good example for the congregation, to lead them in to all truth. But, that would make this entire work about behavior rather than organization. We have merely touched on Christian behavior citing the minimum requirements to work in the position of elder or deacon in the congregation. If one wanted to nit pick there are many more things that could be explored, but we have just about excluded everyone already, so we will now move on to other things. If you can find someone to lead who meets the things we have discussed your congregation will do well.

The Baptism of the Holy Spirit

We (the church) have replaced the power of the baptism of the Holy Spirit with creeds and formulas. Those who lacked the true power and calling of God on their lives for service instead have relied on mans wisdom and devices such as creeds and programs to attempt to do God's work of reaching the world for Christ. That is why there has been failure in many cases.

No one can minister effectively without the empowering of the Holy spirit for service. Some may say that they received all of the Holy Spirit that is available when they believed. Without arguing the point there are many instances in the New Testament of fresh infillings of the Holy Spirit after the initial one.

Like an automobile we need to fill up with gas every week and change the oil regularly to keep things running smoothly. It's ironic (or is it divine wisdom) that God used "oil" in the scriptures to symbolize the Holy Spirit. It is a perfect parallel.

We have lost our first love as the Ephesians did because we lost the teaching of and the power of the Holy Spirit.

For an in depth study of this subject you may want to read “The Baptism of the Holy Spirit” by R. A. Torrey. It is available from Amazon.com.

Church Without the Holy Spirit

What a different church history we would have if all popes, bishops, priests, ministers, pastors, elders, deacons down throughout the centuries had received the baptism of the Holy Spirit before embarking on their ministerial service. Then they and we would know that they have been truly called by God for service to his people. Then they would have had the power for service, not just academic learning.

No wonder there are pedophile priests and pastors throughout all denominations. No wonder we do not show unity and oneness of doctrine in our 2000 plus denominations. No wonder we are more concerned (in some churches) with the color of the carpeting and the padding of the pew seats than with reaching a lost and dying world for Christ. No wonder our mission is no longer “win the lost at any cost” but sit and coast the winner having toys the most.”

Because we have lacked the fire and power of the Holy Ghost, we have no burning desire in our hearts to win souls. We let them pass into hell as we pass the buffet bowls.

Section 6: Fellowship Norms

Choosing a Fellowship to Worship and Work In

Many today set themselves up as pastors and teachers who do not have the call of God or empowering of the Holy Spirit on their lives to do so. Many want to be preachers for the money, the job, the respect or many other reasons, but not biblical ones. These are wolves in sheep clothing, avoid them at all costs. You will know them by their fruits, if they do not meet the biblical criteria and have their lives together and are living according to the commands of scripture then they are false ministers of Christ.

Today, while we should have one body (one denomination) we do not. Therefore you have the option (requirement) to choose whom to serve under. Many just church hop for most of their lives never putting down roots in a fellowship in order to serve and use their spiritual gifts. Whenever a pastor says or does something they don't like they pull up stakes and leave. They never settle in for the long haul. You need to find a pastor that you can honor, respect and serve under in order to maximize the use of your gifts. It'd difficult for a loner to get much accomplished. Working in teams and groups gets a lot more done. If that were not so we would just send Rambo to fight every war. Why bother with other troops? We are in a spiritual war and we need to band together to get the job done and the battle and the war won. If you serve faithfully you will be laying up a good treasure in heaven. Find a Moses to serve under and be a Joshua or a Caleb.

The Organization of the Fellowship of Believers

Well, we have come a long way since that airplane dropped those gospel tracts out of its belly. We are ready now to form a fellowship of believers, a congregation. How shall we proceed?

We have already chosen two elders, five deacons and two deaconesses from our one hundred and twenty believers. We had to circumvent the time rule and choose the most spiritual among ourselves because it was only a year ago that we all believed. However, it was not that difficult because we had many members who met most of the qualifications before they believed. We had some good little people on our good little island.

In truth, I have known many people who meet the qualifications for deacon or elder with the exception of spiritual knowledge before they were converted. I know people who are faithful in marriage, have well behaved children and are honest and above reproach in business. There are honorable men and women in every place and every culture who once they have received Jesus as savior and Lord are ready for service. Not as deacons or elders because they do not have the scriptural knowledge, but certainly in other positions such as greeters, ushers, food pantry, lawn care, nursery, tape ministry, etc. There are a lot of people in the world who better fit the qualifications for elder or deacon than those currently serving in some churches.

So, our leadership team has informed us that we need to meet regularly, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together.

Acts 2:42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Heb. 10:24-25 NIV And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

We have decided to meet on every Sabbath day, not because it is the Old Testament law, but because we normally have that day off of work on our island. We have also decided to meet in the evening at about 6:00 PM. This is our Saturday night out with family and friends and a time to share our spiritual gifts with one another.

We will enjoy food and fellowship and share an evening meal together along with celebrating the Lord's Supper after the meal. We have read Corinthians chapter eleven and see that we should either eat at home or be filled eating together before the communion so we do not behave like pigs when we celebrate the Lord's Supper.

1Cor. 11:23-25 NIV For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance

of me.” For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

After the meal we share our blessings and our problems with each other. We build each other up and encourage one another in the faith. Some of us share a song or a something special that the Lord has taught us recently. None of us charge for using our gifts.

Col. 3:16 NIV Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

Rom. 14:19 NIV Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.

1Th. 5:11 NIV Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

Then our elders will each read a portion of scripture and share some deeper meaning that they have found to be true in their own life or from the life of a biblical personage.

If there are any recent converts who are interested in learning more about Jesus we appoint a mentor or two for them, kind of like a sponsor in AA. Of course the new person will learn many things at the love feast gatherings, but for more in depth and personal training a private meeting alone or with a smaller group will accomplish so much more so much faster. We will also baptize the new converts tonight.

Our little group has grown in the past year. We have more than two hundred people attending now, too many for our outdoor meeting in the town square or any of our members back yards. Most of these new people are coming from the neighboring village. We have decided that the neighboring village should have their own love feasts and our elders are sending out two of our elders or deacons each week to help them begin their own meeting. When they are ready with our help they will appoint their own elders and deacons. We will still meet with them jointly though, perhaps monthly to share all that the Lord is doing for us.

One Year Later

Greater things are coming too, We have never had television on this island but we have recently been notified that “The Bible Christian Network “ will soon put a satellite receiver on our island and put a large screen television at our new meeting place (called a church) that they are going to help us build. They said that we are just babes in Christ and that they will show us how it is really done correctly. They say we can watch spirit filled televangelists who will lead us out of the wilderness 24 hours a day 7 days a week. We can't wait. Praise the Lord.

Two Years Later

Wow, are we ever a real church now. Some missionaries from the mainland came over and really showed us how to do church. They sent us a fast talking well-dressed guy to be our “overseer.” Now with the new TV's they brought us we realize that his wife looks just like a movie star. Before we didn't even know what a movie star was.

They (the pastor and his wife) take up a collection every week and now have the largest house in town up on the hill. Also the new 25,000 sq. ft. church building is almost ready and soon we will have all of the preachers and performers from Christian television coming to our little island. We have more than a thousand members now. We got rid of our elders and deacons, hey were just a bunch of old fuddy duddies anyway. These new folks are really fun. They have introduced us to all kinds of new things like Easter and Christmas and prayer beads, statues and love offerings and sun worship, oh and some occasional wine and hanky panky. This is great, we really feel like a true part of the body of Christ now. We are following the book of first Corinthians for our doctrine. Wheee, Christianity is great isn't it?

Oh, we no longer fellowship with our former sister church in the neighboring town because another television network of a different denomination has set up shop there. They are bad people now we are told, they don't interpret the scriptures properly.

That little fairy tale may seem silly, but it is probably more truth than fiction of how modern Laodicean Christianity could soon destroy a thriving pure Christian fellowship.

How Did They Do It In the Early Church?

First of all they studied, they immersed themselves in the Apostles teaching, which was the explaining of the Old Testament promises as they were fulfilled in Jesus. Their teaching became the New Testament.

Secondly they had fellowship and took meals together along with the Lords supper. Then they devoted themselves to prayer, communing with God after fellowshiping with each other.

So, without saying that this is a formula, it is an example.

1. Bible Study
2. Fellowship
3. Prayer

What this resulted in was:

Acts 2:43 NIV Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.

Whether or not there will be signs and wonders of the type that occurred then (in the end times) remains to be seen, but certainly based on our knowledge of prophecy their will be great response to the preaching of the gospel and millions will be converted an amount that no man can number is how Revelation describes it.

Rev. 7:9 NIV After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands;

What About That Discipleship Training?

John 15:20 NIV Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also.

We find something very interesting in the verse above. Jesus said that if people obeyed his teaching they would obey the teaching of his true followers also. Wow! Is that powerful or what? If we are teaching correctly and truthfully in the power of the Holy Spirit then we will

obtain the same results as Jesus would have. And it is by his plan and authority that it occurs. That's incredible that we can be used by Jesus to do his work and he will cause the results to be the same as if he were doing it himself. What an honor. What a God, what a Lord. If that doesn't get us excited about discipling and mentoring people I don't know what will. The creator of the universe is giving us the power to do exactly what he would do and obtain exactly the same results!

John 15:15 NIV I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

Your discipleship training? Let me tell you my friend, you have just had it with both barrels. If you can cut the mustard thus far, you are that one in many thousands that Solomon talked about.

If you can meet the criteria for baptism (and did it) know and understand the basics of Christianity, Made a good repentance and restitution and worked AA steps 4-11 you are almost there.

After baptism you have received the power of the Holy Spirit for service and you are now working towards or have already met the criteria for being an elder or a deacon. You are just living for the Lord in obedience and waiting for enough time to pass (4-7 years) so you are no longer be considered a novice and can serve admirably in the church. In the mean time you are honing your spiritual gift(s) by using them to bless the saints of God whenever and wherever possible without charge.

If you are doing all of this brother or sister, you have almost arrived. Just keep it up until the end of your life and you will be welcomed into God's kingdom with King Jesus' blessing.

You may possibly need some personal mentoring to get over some obstacles in your life, but what needs to be done is pretty plain and simple to understand. Christianity is not complicated. We make it complicated when we try to make it an academic religion rather than a process of learning by doing. Like the shoe manufacturer says: Just Do It! (It ain't rocket science)

Basically that covers our study from conversion through spiritual

growth to the level of elder. We are going to continue on with some prophetic teaching to prepare both the reader and those he or she are teaching about the things that will come upon the earth in the last days. If we are truly in the last days we will need this information to keep from being deceived or disheartened. Some reading this may live until the second coming of Christ and need to be at least somewhat prepared for what is to come. Also this information will be helpful in preparing church organizations to survive the onslaught by Satan through human government to destroy the church. As we have already learned, he will not be successful in his efforts.

Section 7: The Future (End Times) Church

Christ's Admonition to the Churches

In the book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, which he gave to his servants for their benefit, he gives overviews of the behavior of seven churches in Asia. It is almost like he is a schoolteacher giving out grades with comments. An entire book could easily be written about the seven churches of Revelation. For our purposes we only want to focus in on how Jesus Christ grades the performance of his servants so we will excerpt the positives and the negatives and discuss them as groups.

Revelation Chapters 2 and 3 Summary

The Good

Jesus commended many of the churches of Revelation for various good things. Hard work, testing for wickedness, enduring hardships, hating evil practices, suffering persecution, not renouncing their faith under duress, good deeds, clean clothing (righteousness) not denying his name and enduring patiently. These are things we ought to be doing.

The Bad

In some areas though some of the churches were not doing so well. One had forsaken it's first love, Jesus and lost it's fire, others allowed idol worship and immorality to creep in, one was so fast asleep it appeared to be dead, and the last, Laodicea was wealthy in money but blind to spiritual things. That is a good example of a bad example for today.

The Promises

No, it's not the ugly, it's the promises. Every church had a promise for those in it who were faithful. One would eat from the tree of life, another would not be harmed by the second death, one will receive some type of award, the next receives authority over the nations, and there will be no blotting out of names from the book of life. Some will be pillars in the temple of God others will sit with him on his throne. In truth, we may all get to do everything as eternity unfolds.

Truthfully we all have plusses and minuses in our churches and in our personal lives. We need to use the examples of the churches of Revelation as a reminder to keep ourselves pure. If we do we will inherit the promises to the saints.

My main reason for including the churches of Revelation in this study is because we are going to finish by looking at the future of the church as told in what follows the description of the aforementioned churches. We are going to look at our own future and use that information to prepare for what is coming.

The Future of the Church

As we saw earlier from the scriptures (Matt 16:18) not even the “Gates of Hell” including Satan and all of his demons will be able to destroy the church. It will survive until Jesus returns for it.

However, even though Satan cannot destroy the church, we will still undergo a time of testing due to the purifying of it by God unlike anything that has ever been seen in history. Jesus is returning for a church, a bride that is without spot or wrinkle.

Eph. 5:27 KJV That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

When Christ returns he will find a glorious bride waiting for him, not a bride who looks like she stayed out all night drinking and slept in a dumpster before waking up and rushing to the church.

The fact that Christ will rapture an almost perfect bride has caused some to say that carnal Christians will not go up in the rapture but will miss it and have to go through the tribulation because they were not cleaned up and ready to go. There is nothing in scripture that indicates a bunch of carnal Christians will be hiding out in caves in the mountains during the tribulation period. That’s is a doctrine that men came up with because they could not figure out what God was going to do to purify the end times church. Notice in Ephesians 5:27, God is presenting his bride to himself. Jesus will get the Church ready if the bride does not make herself ready, as she should.

How you might ask? Well, it may not be any more pleasant for some than going through the tribulation, but it is what the scripture says.

Rev. 2:20-22 NIV Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways.

Rev. 2:23 NIV I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds.

Rev. 3:1-2 NIV "To the angel of the church in Sardis write: These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God.

Rev. 3:3 NIV Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.

If you notice Jesus said to Thyatira that he will strike dead those who don't clean up their act. He even says that the other churches will see it as a sign and understand why it is happening. Then look at the comment to Sardis in that if they do not watch he will surprise them like a thief. It is perfectly clear that our Lord really is talking to these representative churches about the end times. Compare the terminology to these verses.

1Th. 5:4 NIV But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.

2Pet. 3:10 NIV But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night;

Rev. 16:15 NIV Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.

The dead churches with spiritually dead members will probably wind up physically dead by seemingly natural causes if they do not repent and get ready for Christ's second coming. That may shock some but it is a far more scriptural answer to the problem of Carnal Christians before the rapture than to leave them behind so they can suffer for their sins. Christ paid for our sins; we do not have to go through the tribulation to atone for them.

Rev. 3:10 NIV Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.

1Th. 5:9 NIV For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The wrath of God will not fall on Christians, carnal or otherwise. Chastening will fall on believers living in sin, but chastening is an entirely different animal than wrath. Wrath destroys, chastening corrects. Lets look at some examples of wrath. Carnal or not all believers who are alive must go up in the rapture.

The Days of Noah

In the book of Jasher it is recorded that God allowed all of the believers to die before the flood so none of them would suffer by drowning in it. The world was one hundred percent lost people except for the eight that entered the ark. Jesus said that in the end times conditions on Earth would be like they were during the time of Noah.

The book of Jasher is a Jewish historical book that is mentioned in the bible. (See Joshua 10:13 & 2 Samuel 1:18)

Luke 17:26-27 NIV "Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all.

Jasher 4:16-20 And all the sons of men departed from the ways of the Lord in those days as they multiplied upon the face of the Earth with sons and daughters, and they taught one another their evil practices, and they continued sinning against the Lord. And every

man made unto himself a God, and they robbed and plundered every man his neighbor as well as his relative, and they corrupted the Earth, and the Earth was filled with violence. And their judges and rulers took their wives by force from their husbands according to their choice, and the sons of men in those days took from the cattle of the Earth and the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air, and taught the mixture of animals of one species with the other, in order to therewith provoke the Lord; And God saw the whole Earth and it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted its ways upon Earth.

Jasher 5:21 "And all the sons of men who knew the Lord, died in that year before the Lord brought evil upon them. For the Lord willed them to die, so as not to behold the evil that God would bring upon their brothers and relatives as he has so declared to do

Isa 57:1 KJV "The righteous perishes, and no man takes it to heart. Merciful men are taken away, while no one considers that the righteous is taken away from evil"

Matthew 24:37-38 NIV As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.

Not many have considered that God could allow people to die rather than go through the tribulation or he could cause carnal Christians to die so that they would not be hindering the preaching of the gospel to every creature before the rapture. They would go up in the rapture anyway but as part of the dead, not the living. That would make it so there were only two groups of people on the earth just before the tribulation begins. The saved who are living for Christ, and the lost. If you study Revelation closely that is exactly how it appears to be. I'm not saying that this is the only way God could fulfill his word without any contradictions, but it is one way that should be considered.

The lost are eventually going to be hiding in caves, in the mountains and wishing for death because they know the return of Christ is near and they are going to suffer his wrath. For some reason they are unwilling or unable to repent.

Rev. 6:16-18 NIV They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?" The nations were angry; and your wrath

has come. The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great—and for destroying those who destroy the earth.”

The church is not destined to endure God’s wrath. What kind of a blessed hope would that be? However, that does not mean that God cannot make sure that those who live to meet him in the air are keeping the faith and his commandments. Also notice in the verses above that two things are happening almost at once. First the dead, the prophets and the saints are going to be rewarded now, (when this verse is fulfilled) meaning the rapture has just take place and these people just got to or are on their way to heaven. Without even ending the verse he (Jesus) goes right on to say that it is time to destroy those who are destroying the earth. (Antichrist and his followers with their nuclear and chemical wars) Do you see the order here? First we go up, and then the wrath comes down. No carnal Christians or any believers left behind.

Rev. 14:12 NIV This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God’s commandments and remain faithful to Jesus.

Those who refuse to repent and fill their lamps with clean oil are destined to die before the rapture. Don’t think you can live in sin as a carnal Christian and then evacuate this world just before things get really bad. Church, (both denominations and individuals) you have a choice to make and here it is: “Clean Up or Die.”

Wow, you may say, that’s harsh. Well, It may be harsh but it is biblical. Judgment begins at the house of God and then moves on to unbelievers.

Ezek. 8:6 NIV And he said to me, “Son of man, do you see what they are doing—the utterly detestable things the house of Israel is doing here, things that will drive me far from my sanctuary? But you will see things that are even more detestable.”

Ezek. 9:4 NIV and said to him, “Go throughout the city of Jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of those who grieve and lament over all the detestable things that are done in it.”

God put a seal on his people so the avenging angel would not harm

them.

Ezek. 9:5-6 NIV As I listened, he said to the others, "Follow him through the city and kill, without showing pity or compassion. Slaughter old men, young men and maidens, women and children, but do not touch anyone who has the mark. Begin at my sanctuary." So they began with the elders who were in front of the temple.

In the Old Testament when God punished Israel he had an angel slay those who were doing horrible things in Israel and in his house. He began with judgment on the elders, the leaders of his temple service. He then moved on to the general population

Ezek. 9:7-11 NIV Then he said to them, "Defile the temple and fill the courts with the slain. Go!" So they went out and began killing throughout the city. While they were killing and I was left alone, I fell facedown, crying out, "Ah, Sovereign LORD! Are you going to destroy the entire remnant of Israel in this outpouring of your wrath on Jerusalem?" He answered me, "The sin of the house of Israel and Judah is exceedingly great; the land is full of bloodshed and the city is full of injustice. They say, 'The LORD has forsaken the land; the LORD does not see.' So I will not look on them with pity or spare them, but I will bring down on their own heads what they have done." Then the man in linen with the writing kit at his side brought back word, saying, "I have done as you commanded."

The next thing that happens in Ezekiel 10 is that the glory of the Lord is seen in heaven. I believe that this symbolizes the rapture. Satan will mark his people with 666 but God has sealed his people with the Holy Spirit. Then, up we go, to the throne of God. The verses in Ezekiel portray a type of that event.

Ezek. 10:1 & 4 NIV I looked, and I saw the likeness of a throne of sapphire above the expanse that was over the heads of the cherubim. Then the glory of the LORD rose from above the cherubim and moved to the threshold of the temple. The cloud filled the temple, and the court was full of the radiance of the glory of the LORD.

When we (the saved of all ages) are safely in the arms of Jesus, look out world, God's wrath is about to fall on the earth. The point is that we all have a decision to make. For unbelievers it is whether to repent and be saved and churches and Christians it is whether to live

for the Lord or for pleasure. It is unlikely that those who choose live for pleasure will live to see the return of the Lord. Will they be saved? Yes, if they are saved when they die before the rapture. But they will not get the opportunity to be a part of that special group that will pass from life on earth to meet the Lord Jesus Christ in the air and receive their new bodies without ever tasting death.

The Lord is going to refine his church and bring it through the fire BEFORE he pours out his wrath on the earth. The church will preach the gospel to all nations, be raptured and then a second witness, an angel, will preach the gospel before God's wrath is poured out. Later, after the time of wrath is over, Christ returns with his saints and destroys the armies of the world at Armageddon. Then the millennium begins.

Rev. 14:6 NIV Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people.

Church, it's time to get ready for what is to come.

Mystery Babylon

One can argue theology forever, but the instantaneous change that occurs when one becomes a Christian is what has kept Satan from stamping out the church for nearly 2000 years. You can't argue with a personal spiritual awakening in which all things have become new, as the scripture says. Behold, all things become new.

Satan has had his own religion though down through the centuries. It began before the flood, was revived by Nimrod after the flood and still exists today. It is the religion of pleasing the senses, sight, hearing, taste, touch and smell. It is the religion of pleasure. Epicureanism and hedonism. Sex, money, food and today sports. Things haven't changed much since the days of bread and circuses in Rome.

Mystery Babylon has taken many forms down through the past 6000 years but one thing remains the same: it is the search for pleasure in this life. It is the "if it feels good do it" mentality. Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we may die. Gods and Goddesses of this religion vary in name and by language and region but the behavior is the same. Satan will have his greatest moment of deception in the end

times. After the rapture the whole world (except the 144,000) will be his for a moment. I'm including this because he is now and will be promoting his false religion more and more as we draw nearer to Christ's return. It is good to know what and whom we are at war with.

The Woman on the Beast

Rev. 17:3-4 NIV Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into a desert. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries.

Rev. 17:5 NIV This title was written on her forehead:

MYSTERY BABYLON THE GREAT THE MOTHER OF
PROSTITUTES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

Rev. 17:6-7 NIV I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus. When I saw her, I was greatly astonished. Then the angel said to me: "Why are you astonished? I will explain to you the mystery of the woman and of the beast

False religion is portrayed in revelation as a harlot, a woman who revels in the pleasures of the flesh, who is drunk, but not with wine, but with the blood of the followers of Jesus. This is the nature of the false religion that will dominate the end times. A wanton spirit of pleasure, calling evil good and good evil, in a hypnotic state of drugs or drunkenness and persecuting the true saints of God.

However, this is still not Satan's ultimate goal, to cause people to only worship pleasure and reject good, including God, and to spend eternity in hell. No, even all of this is not enough for him. He wants all of these things but he wants one more thing too, he wants worship directed towards himself.

Rev. 14:8 NIV A second angel followed and said, "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries."

Rev. 14:9-11 NIV A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: "If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name."

Satan is not satisfied with simply leading people to hell through a life in pursuit of pleasure, He wants more, he wants to receive worship vicariously through his false messiah figure that we call the Antichrist. As God has Jesus Satan has "the beast." Worship of Jesus goes through him to God the father, Worship of "the beast" is directed to Satan. Satan craves the adoration of both men and angels.

Rev. 17:6 NIV I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus. When I saw her, I was greatly astonished.

Rev. 20:4 NIV I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

Rev. 12:11 NIV And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.

So then, this is the future of the church. If we are truly in the end times then every believer less than three score and ten ought to be preparing for this time. Those over three score and ten out to be preparing the aforementioned people to minister and lead the millions to Christ and withstand the Antichrist.

Rev. 11:15 The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ,

What is the Gospel of the Kingdom?

To me, it is the gospel, the good news of salvation coupled with the message that Jesus is coming soon and that he will rule and reign for all eternity. It is simply the gospel with the admonition to prepare yourselves for the return of Christ and all that that entails. The study of end times prophecy can be a part of the gospel of the kingdom.

After the Rapture

The next section is not really for the church or Christians, but we may as well finish up the story. Some may be sitting on the fence reading this still trying to decide whether to make a decision for Jesus or not. If this next section doesn't convince (scare) you nothing will. After the rapture God is going to pour out his wrath on the earth. Let's look at some verses from Isaiah concerning that time period.

Is. 24:1 NIV See, the LORD is going to lay waste the earth and devastate it; he will ruin its face and scatter its inhabitants—

Is. 24:2-6 NIV it will be the same for priest as for people, for master as for servant, for mistress as for maid, for seller as for buyer, for borrower as for lender, for debtor as for creditor. The earth will be completely laid waste and totally plundered. The LORD has spoken this word. The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers, the exalted of the earth languish. The earth is defiled by its people; they have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes and broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse consumes the earth; its people must bear their guilt. Therefore earth's inhabitants are burned up, and very few are left.

Is. 51:6 NIV Lift up your eyes to the heavens, look at the earth beneath; the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment and its inhabitants die like flies. But my salvation will last forever, my righteousness will never fail.

Is. 13:12 NIV I will make man scarcer than pure gold, more rare than the gold of Ophir.

Is. 24:17-20 KJV Terror and pit and snare await you, O people of the earth. Whoever flees at the sound of terror will fall into a pit; whoever climbs out of the pit will be caught in a snare. The floodgates of the

heavens are opened, the foundations of the earth shake. The earth is broken up, the earth is split asunder, the earth is thoroughly shaken. The earth reels like a drunkard, it sways like a hut in the wind; so heavy upon it is the guilt of its rebellion...

Is. 24:21-23 KJV In that day the LORD will punish the powers in the heavens above and the kings on the earth below. They will be herded together like prisoners bound in a dungeon; they will be shut up in prison and be punished after many days. The moon will be abashed, the sun ashamed; for the LORD Almighty will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before its elders, gloriously.

Do you see why it is important to be saved? Who would want to live through this even if they could? It will be horrifying. Revelation has more to say about the same time period.

Rev. 16:1 NIV Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go, pour out the seven bowls of God's wrath on the earth."

Rev. 16:2-3 NIV The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the land, and ugly and painful sores broke out on the people who had the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it turned into blood like that of a dead man, and every living thing in the sea died.

Rev. 16:4-7 NIV The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say: "You are just in these judgments, you who are and who were, the Holy One, because you have so judged; for they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve." And I heard the altar respond: "Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments."

Rev. 16:8-10 NIV The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and the sun was given power to scorch people with fire. They were seared by the intense heat and they cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify him.

Rev. 16:10-11 NIV The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness. Men

gnawed their tongues in agony and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done.

Rev. 16:12-14 NIV The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East. Then I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet. They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty.

Rev. 16:16 NIV Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.

Rev. 16:17-21 NIV The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying, "It is done!" Then there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earthquake. No earthquake like it has ever occurred since man has been on earth, so tremendous was the quake. The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath. Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found. From the sky huge hailstones of about a hundred pounds each fell upon men. And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible.

There is much much more concerning the time of the end in the bible. As bad as you may think it is from reading these few verses, let me tell you, it's even worse than you think or imagine. This will be the most horrible time the planet earth has ever endured. You think the dinosaurs being wiped out was bad? The flood, it was just a trickling stream compared to this. Jesus said so himself.

Matt. 24:22 NIV If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.

This time will be so bad that if God did not intervene every human being on earth would die. If that happened god could not fulfill his promises to Israel of a kingdom on earth during the millennium. He

will cut it short before all life is destroyed, but remember, there were only eight people left to start the whole thing over after the flood. I think there will be more than eight this time, but not many compared to having seven billion people on earth now. There may only be a few million left on each continent to repopulate the earth for the next 1000 years, the millennium.

So, make your choice people. What will it be? Jesus and righteousness and the possibility of escaping death and going straight to heaven, or death with hell following or even worse having God's wrath poured out on earth while you yet live and then being thrown into the lake of fire.

Choose to day whom you will serve, God or Satan.

Heb. 3:7-8 So, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts

2Cor. 6:2 For he says, "In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.

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