

Chapter 7

New Testament Churches

As mentioned in a previous chapter of this study, there is probably more misunderstanding about the work of the Holy Spirit than any other teaching in the Bible. Close behind, however, are the common misconceptions regarding the character and nature of New Testament Churches. Studying the true nature of a church has been ignored for so long that few Christians have little more than a fuzzy idea of the Biblical concept of a New Testament church. Much of this confusion and misunderstanding may well be laid at the feet of the men who translated the Old and New Testaments into English. As most are aware, King James of England authorized the translation of the Bible into English in 1611. Clearly, there were other English translations that were made earlier, however, the King James translation was, and remains, the most widely used by the Christian world today.

Much misunderstanding in Christianity has been caused by the misinterpretation of certain key words in the King James translation. For example, the Greek word *baptizw* (*baptizo*), which means to immerse or dip, was not translated at all; rather it was simply transliterated as the word, *baptize*. This seemingly insignificant oversight has caused much confusion among English speaking

Christians today. An accurate translation of the word in its literal sense of, "to immerse or dip," could easily be understood without confusion. The word, "baptize", however, now is frequently understood as including "sprinkling or immersion." The meaning of the word, however, does not allow the idea of "sprinkling."

The next word that has caused much confusion is the Greek word *ekklhsia* (*ekklesia*), which the King James translators translated as "church." There are not many language students who fail to understand the meaning of *ekklhsia* as assembly. At first glance, this change does not appear significant; however, instead of the word "assembly," which could be easily understood as "a local visible assembly," the word "church" has taken on a new meaning that is almost mystical in character. This erroneous concept of a "church" teaches the possibility of an invisible, universal church. This difference will be made clear as the study unfolds. In the balance of this study the word "church" will appear with quotation marks indicating the word would be better translated as "assembly."

I. THE ETYMOLOGY OF THE WORD "ekklhsia".

A. The word "church" never occurred in the Greek language.

1. Without exception, the word translated "church" in the New Testament is *ekklhsia*.

Since this is the Greek word used exclusively in the New Testament, and, with rare exception, was translated by the King James translators as "church," a look at the etymology of the word should prove extremely helpful.

2. The Greek word is a compound word formed by combining two other Greek words.

a. The first word is *ek* that is a preposition that means "out of" or "out from within."

There is little or no controversy over the meaning of this word. It refers to something or someone that has "come out from within the prior state."

b. The second word is *kalein*, which is the infinitive form of the verb *kalew* and, therefore, means "to call."

This word was commonly used in the Greek language, and the meaning was quite clear. In "Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament," edited by Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, the meaning is defined as:

"In the NT *kalew* has the following variants in meaning: a) with acc.: call someone, in the sense of call to oneself, invite; b) with the double acc.: name, pass.: be named, have as a name (*kaloumenoj* = named, by the name of). The broad distribution of these meanings corresponds to usage outside the NT.

C). Alongside the primary sense call, invite, *kalew* also frequently has the fig. Meaning appoint, under the influence of the LXX. This appears predominantly in Paul's letters and writings influenced by Paul, where the verbal subst. *klhsij*, appointment, and the adj. *klhtoj*, called, appear." (Balz and Schneider, vol. 2 1991 p. 240).

c. Therefore, the word *ekklhsia* is accurately translated as, "assembly," or "the ones called out."

Again, there is little debate among language students regarding the meaning of this word.

3. The word *ekklhsia*, in New Testament times, was a common term for a meeting of officials who were called to discuss the business or affairs of a free state.

The corresponding meaning in 20th century America would be that of a town council, or any government body which needs to meet and discuss the business of a city, county, state or the nation.

4. This word always described a visible assembly of citizens who were normally called out from among the other citizens by the town crier.

While most cities do not have a town crier today, notice of a meeting of officials may be made by the modern methods of mail or telephone; yet, the meaning is exactly the same.

5. Therefore an *ekklhsia* was, and is, a local, visible assembly of citizens called out from among the

other citizens to discuss the business of the government entity.

B. The term *ekklhsia* is not a religious term.

1. Each Greek city had an *ekklhsia* or city council.

Much like cities or towns of today, there was a group of people who, however chosen, were required to accomplish the usual business of the city or town. It might be said they were the representatives of the city or town. They had limited authority to act in behalf of all of the citizens. This concept is clear and without ambiguity for those who live in a democracy.

2. The term *ekklhsia* was understood, without exception, as an assembly.

As an assembly, the term would represent a local, visible group of people gathered for a specific purpose. Clearly, it would be preposterous for the term to be used to represent an invisible and universal group of people. While one may speak in generic terms regarding certain groups of people such as: (1) the mother, (2) the father, (3) the school, (4) the lion etc; however, all understand that there exists no universal mother, father, school or lion. In fact, if one ever encounters any of the above, it will always be in the form of a specific mother, father, school or lion. As it would be impossible to encounter a universal and invisible school, so too it would be impossible to encounter a universal and invisible *ekklhsia*.

3. Acts 19:24-41 states this principle:

"For a certain *man* named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen; Whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth. Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands: So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshipeth. And when they heard *these sayings*, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great *is* Diana of the Ephesians. And the whole city was filled with confusion: and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theatre. And when Paul would have entered in unto the people, the disciples suffered him not. And certain of the chief of Asia, which were his friends, sent unto him, desiring *him* that he would not adventure himself into the theatre. Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the assembly was confused; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together. And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting

him forward. And Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made his defence unto the people. But when they knew that he was a Jew, all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great *is* Diana of the Ephesians. And when the townclerk had appeased the people, he said, Ye men of Ephesus, what man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians is a worshiper of the great goddess Diana, and of the *image* which fell down from Jupiter? Seeing then that these things cannot be spoken against, ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly. For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess. Wherefore if Demetrius, and the craftsmen which are with him, have a matter against any man, the law is open, and there are deputies: let them implead one another. But if ye enquire any thing concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a lawful assembly. For we are in danger to be called in question for this day's uproar, there being no cause whereby we may give an account of this concourse. And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the assembly."

The contextual setting of this passage of Scripture was while the Apostle Paul was in the city of Ephesus. Paul spent three years in this city and enjoyed a very successful ministry. Many people were saved while many others recognized Jesus as the Messiah and became followers of "the way." Paul preached and taught the citi-

zens in that city the fact that there was only one true God and Jesus, His Messiah. Those who believed would no longer need a silver statue of the goddess Diana. This, clearly diminished the sale of these statues and caused the silversmiths to be greatly concerned. An ekklesia was, therefore, called for the purpose of stopping the proclamation of the Gospel.

It is of interest to note how the King James translators translated the word ekklesia, in this instance, correctly as "assembly." This is the same word that was, in most other instances, translated as "church."

4. Clearly, the assembly in the above reference was not what could be called a "church" today.

This group was a mob, and therefore, it would not be accurate for the group to be called a "church"; so, the translators were forced to acknowledge the correct meaning of the word. In fact, it would be silly to think of this group as universal or invisible. This mob represented a genuine threat to Paul because they were indeed local and visible. An invisible and universal assembly would hold no immediate threat. Perhaps an illustration would be of assistance in making this concept clear. While one might ponder, in the abstract, an invisible and universal lion, there would be no immediate danger; however, if one were to face a local, visible and fierce lion the situation would be much more dangerous.

5. Acts 7:37-38 states:

"This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear. This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sinai, and *with* our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us:"

In this Scripture, Stephen was giving his defense to the High Priest and other rulers of Israel. In recounting the history of Israel, in the Old Testament, Stephen referenced the fact that the Israelites were gathered at Mt. Sinai following their exodus from Egypt. Stephen used the word *ekklesia* to refer to the entire nation that was gathered in a local, visible assembly to receive the Law of God through Moses.

In this instance, the translators used the incorrect word "church" for this gathering of the entire nation of Israel. Indeed, this error has caused much confusion in the understanding of this Scripture; however, those who heard Stephen understood the meaning well and accurately.

6. The word "church" in the above Scripture did not identify an invisible and universal assembly. It clearly identified a local and visible assembly of the nation of Israel.

Just as one will have tremendous hermeneutical difficulty in understanding the above translation of *ekklesia* as "church," the difficulty is immediately re-

moved when the word is properly translated as "assembly."

7. There is nothing religious or special about the term *ekklesia* until it is identified as belonging to the Lord.

a. Jesus said in Matthew 16:18:

"And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

In this Scripture, Jesus was teaching His disciples about who He was and what He was going to leave on the earth. Clearly, one of the most important things which Jesus started Himself and left on the earth, until He returns, was the establishment of His *ekklesia*. The assembly to which Jesus referred was different than a common assembly in that it belonged to Him.

b. Jesus said that "I will build (dome up, build, or erect) MY local, visible assembly (*ekklesia*)."

It must be noted that Jesus did not refer to His church, but to His assembly. The word "church" was not in the Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek vocabulary at that time. There was no misunderstanding by His disciples as to the meaning of His words.

C. The history of the word "church."

1. Since there is so much misunderstanding about the concept of a New Testament church, it will be of

great value to examine the etymology of the word "church."

2. Dr. L.D. Foreman, in his book "The Bible in Eight Ages," addressed this subject very ably.

"According to most authorities, the word is derived from the Greek Kuriakon doma, "the Lord's house," and is common to many Teutonic, Slavonic and other languages, under varied forms, e.g., Scottish kirk, German kirche, Swedish kirka, Danish kirke, Russian tserkon, Bulgarian cerkova, Czechoslovak cirkev, and Finnish kirkko. The term was originally applied to the building used for Christian worship and later extended to the assembly (ekklesia) itself.-Ency. Brit. (Foreman, 1973 p. 367).

It is easy to see that the term used for the building has come to be used to refer to the people themselves. This is clearly not the meaning of the word ekklesia; however, this word had devolved into this meaning many years prior to the authorization, by King James, to translate the Old and New Testaments into English language.

3. Dr. Foreman states further:

"Our English word church comes from the Anglo-Saxon, the language brought into England in the fifth and sixth centuries by the Germanic invaders and there developed. The word church was then circe. The mistake made about this time was to associate the words, Lord's house (the meeting place of the assembly), with the con-

gregation." (Foreman, 1973 p.367).

4. At this time in history, the official religious institution of England was known as the Church of England.

Clearly, King James (that great Bible scholar!) believed there was no difference between the word, "church" and the Biblical word *ekklesia*; he, therefore, ordered his translators to translate "*ekklesia*" as "church." It must be noted that this improper translation was made, not to clarify the meaning; rather, to force the words of the Bible to fit a tradition of the Church of England.

5. Therefore, instead of a term all could easily understand ("assembly," which is neither mystical nor invisible), the mystical word "church" was used.

Clearly, the term "assembly" requires one to assemble in order to participate, however, as is common in most Christian denominations, "church" has become something of which one can be a part and never participate. This concept is exactly opposite of that taught in the Bible.

One might rightly ask why this clear meaning has not been more widely adopted today. Surely, through misunderstanding of the Bible, some believe there is some sort of protection, by God, if one is a "member" of a "church." To honest translators of the Bible, this is an absolute corruption of the language. This teaching makes the form of having one's name on

a "church" membership list, or other census, with no responsibility to participate, equal to being a member of the Lord's assembly.

Clearly, this concept is alive and well today in Catholicism, Protestantism, and even among many who call themselves Baptist. The concept of belonging to a mystical and invisible "assembly" has largely replaced the correct meaning of *ekklesia* as "a local, visible assembly." The writer believes the reason for the wide acceptance of this error is because nothing is demanded from the "members." Some, for example, attend only on certain holidays, while others never participate at all. This behavior could not be possible if correct use of the word "assembly" was used. H. L. Willmington wrote in his "Willmington's Guide to the Bible" the reason why the Biblical institution of the local "church" is so hated today. In his book, he quoted from an article entitled, "If I were the Devil" where it is stated:

"6. Understressing certain doctrines. Perhaps the one great biblical truth downplayed today is that vital doctrine of the local church. To quote once more from the article, "If I Were the Devil":

"Then I would turn to that most despised and deadly institution of all—the local church! I would continue to attack it from the outside (just to keep in practice), but would concentrate the bulk of my evil efforts from within. "The church is dead" would become

my creed and cry. If I were the devil I would do my utmost to convince professing Christians that the local church is finished! Not weak, not ineffective; but dead and decaying! I would encourage them to dig a hole, carve an epitaph, and bury it as quietly and quickly as possible. Christianity could then proceed to new glories where cell groups would replace Sunday nights and sermons would be set aside for buzz sessions." (Willmington, Willmington's Guide to the Bible, 1981, p. 765-766).

This quote summarizes Satan's understanding of the power of the local "church." The best method to achieve his goal of destroying the most powerful institution on earth was to simply change the literal meaning of *ekklesia* from assembly to "church."

7. This "small" change has led to much misinterpretation of Scripture today.

While it must be admitted the lack of required participation is very attractive to some in their "religious" life, it totally violates the meaning of the word. This incorrect concept allows one to "have a form of Godliness, but denying the power thereof" as Paul told young Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:5.

This pernicious error has evoked many other misinterpretations of many Scriptures that speak of commitment to Jesus Christ and His work on earth. A lack of commitment to the work of the Lord, and a lack of participation in His "assembly" is foreign to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Perhaps an illustration of the confusion that exists regarding this subject will prove helpful. W. A. Criswell, in his "Criswell Study Bible" wrote in his notes on First Corinthians 12:13:

"At conversion, the believer is born again by the Holy Spirit (John 3:3-6). He is also baptized by the Holy Spirit, which unites him to the body of Christ, the Church, and to Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection (Rom. 6:3-5)." (Criswell, 1979, p. 1357).

In this note, it is clear that Dr. Criswell believed in the "universal and invisible church" consisting of all of those who have been saved. In his book, "Ephesians, an Exposition", however, he wrote the following:

"But the church that we know and the only church with which we have anything to do and the church to which the Apostle belonged is always a local congregation. "Christ also loved the church (the local church), and gave himself for it." He died for it. In the New Testament where we read of it, and in life when we have anything to do with it, the church is always the local congregation, the assembly of Christ...always the church in our life and experience, in New Testament life and presentation, is the local congregation, this church." (Criswell, Ephesians, an Exposition, 1974, p. 258). He writes further:

"This is the church of our experience and of our lives; we know no other. A man could not join the invi-

ble church or belong to the invisible redeemed, triumphant, glorified congregation of the Lord. It is not here, nor do we ever see it or know it on earth. The only church that we know is the church that is presented to us through the New Testament which, without exception, is a local congregation, the assembly of Christ's believers." (Criswell, 1974, p. 259).

D. A good definition of the Lord's Ecclesia.

1. It is extremely important to arrive at a Scriptural definition of this concept, therefore the following is offered:

"A local, visible assembly of saved, Scripturally baptized believers, called out and covenanted together for the purpose of giving glory to the Lord through obedience to His Word."

2. This definition automatically rules out the concept of an invisible, universal "church" made up of ALL believers.

This is a very popular teaching today. As stated above, even some (or perhaps most) Baptists have accepted the concept of an invisible and universal "church" into which people are placed, by God, when they are saved.

3. All, who have been saved by the grace of God, are members of the "family" of God.

Salvation does not depend upon any works by the individual except repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

Clearly, one who has received the free pardon and forgiveness of God, through Jesus Christ, should desire to serve Him; yet, sadly, that is not often the case. It should also be noted that eternal life is not contingent upon subsequent beliefs or denominational affiliation. Though many will protest, one who has been saved and become a part of the "family" of God is properly referred to as "brother" or "sister." This is an appropriate title for those who are members of the same family.

In human experience today, many families have members who conduct themselves in a manner that brings sorrow and dishonor to the rest of the family, yet they still belong to the family. This is a fact because of their birth, not their subsequent behavior. Clearly, in most families, there are honorable members and dishonorable members.

4. To be a member of the "Lord's assembly," however, requires more than the new birth; rather, it requires commitment, presence and participation in the "assembly."

This truth has become repulsive to most people who have been saved because they demand anonymity and abhor commitment in their "religion." Much error is taught because many demand that all of the saved stand on equal footing before God, thus, their interpretation of Scripture is always valid. If the proper understanding of a New Testament assembly is examined, one will clearly see that commitment to the

Lord, participation in a Scriptural assembly, and commitment to learning, living and teaching the truth of God's Word is required to be obedient and pleasing to Jesus Christ. This is the plan of God for spiritual reproduction, and that is the reason the saved individual remains on the earth after his salvation. Since the Bible states that heaven is "far better" than existence on this world, it follows that there is a very important reason why the saved are still here on the earth. Their purpose is to honor God by obedience to His Word, thus becoming living monuments of His grace. Peripherally, for the Christian who labors in accord with the Word of God, he will accrue rewards in heaven.

II. THE KIND OF "CHURCH" THAT JESUS BUILT.

A. This is the only Scriptural pattern.

1. If the above definition is correct, then it must match, exactly, the assembly that Jesus built.

The entire premise of this study is to discover what the Bible has to say about different subjects. There can be no variation from the Bible. Since the Bible teaches absolute truths, any variance from plain Bible teaching must be rejected. This principle must apply to the Lord's New Testament assemblies. Any valid definition must be in total harmony with the nature of the assembly that Jesus built, taught and commissioned to be His ambassador to this world.

2. Jesus Himself established His assembly during His personal ministry on earth.

It is imperative that one understands this Biblical teaching if he ever hopes to come to a proper understanding regarding the character and nature of a church of Jesus Christ. It must also be noted that a correct understanding of the nature of a "church" is necessary if one is to give proper honor and glory to his savior because Paul said in Ephesians 3:21, "Unto him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."

The idea of serving God without strictly following His Word is simply not acceptable. Too many today seem to believe that the Word of God is simply intended to be a general "guide", and not the absolute commandments of God Himself. For example, those who hold to the universal church idea teach that Jesus did not begin His assembly during His personal ministry, and thus, they teach the error that the "church" began on the day of Pentecost. However, as has been said, any "church" that did not begin during the personal ministry of Jesus Christ is too young to be considered a true "assembly" of Jesus.

3. Since Jesus started His "assembly" during His personal ministry, a close examination of Scripture is required.

a. John 1:35-42 states:

"Again the next day after John stood, and

two of his disciples; And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God! And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest thou? He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day: for it was about the tenth hour. One of the two which heard John *speak*, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone."

The setting for these Scriptures was at a location where John the Baptist was baptizing in the Jordan River, those who had repented of their sins. John's arrival on the scene was significant because he was considered a prophet, and there had been no word from God through a prophet in Israel for four hundred years. Since the appearance of John was a subject of great interest in Israel, many people came to hear his teaching. His message was one of repentance because the kingdom of heaven was at hand; in fact, the King was here. Certainly, there were many sites where John was preaching and baptizing; yet,

no doubt, it was in the land of Judea. Jesus had already been baptized by John, and had gone into the wilderness for forty days and nights where He was tempted by Satan. Upon His return to the place where John was baptizing, John saw Him coming and identified Jesus as the "lamb of God," or the long-awaited Messiah. Following this identification, two of John's disciples followed Jesus and actually stayed with Him that day.

One of the two disciples who followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. Andrew found his brother, Simon Peter, and brought him to Jesus. Jesus then had a conversation with Peter and actually changed his name from Simon to Cephas (Peter, which means "rock"). Therefore, one could hardly deny the fact that Peter, Andrew and another, unnamed, disciple of John the Baptist knew Jesus early in His personal ministry. Jesus had been identified as the Messiah and had actually spent several hours teaching these men.

All of these men had been saved, repented of their sins, and been baptized by John the Baptist. Also, these three had met Jesus and recognized Him as the Messiah.

b. The scene changes from the Jordan River to the Sea of Galilee where Matthew states in Matthew 4:18-20.

"And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his

brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left *their* nets, and followed him."

It must be noted here that the southern tip of the Sea of Galilee is seventy-five miles from the northern end of the Dead Sea into which the Jordan River empties. The home of Peter and Andrew was Capernaum, located at the north end of the Sea of Galilee. The distance from the place where John the Baptist was baptizing, and where Andrew and Peter met Jesus, to the north end of the Sea of Galilee was probably nearly one hundred miles. It must further be noted that there were no rapid means of transportation, therefore, considerable time had elapsed since Jesus had met Peter and Andrew.

Now, often the encounter mentioned above is said to be the first encounter between Jesus and these two men, however, that could not be true. It is further taught that this encounter was the time when Peter and Andrew were saved. If this was the time of their salvation, then, Peter and Andrew were saved by leaving their occupation, as fishermen, and following Jesus. Yet, Jesus did not call them to repentance and faith, rather, He called them to follow Him so that He could make them "fishers of men." Clearly, these men were already saved and Scripturally baptized by John the Baptist. They also had met and talked with Jesus;

they knew Him.

This writer would have grave doubts about the possibility of one, who has never heard about Jesus Christ, and upon hearing the commandment to "follow me," immediately leaving his livelihood and following Him. Clearly, if this encounter was the first meeting between Jesus and these men, their action would require much more than faith. Also, Jesus did not mention anything about the requirements for salvation, therefore, their salvation would be based upon their works.

c. These men were already saved and had been baptized by John the Baptist.

From the above Scriptures, there can be no serious question about this matter; Peter and Andrew had met Jesus, the Messiah. They had been taught by Him and then returned to their home and their occupation. No doubt, they were excited and energized by the appearance of the Messiah. They probably reviewed and discussed often their first encounter with Jesus. They did not know what to do, so they waited and went about their normal occupation. Then, one day Jesus Messiah came and called them to follow Him, and they responded with a demonstration of serious commitment.

d. The job of John the Baptist was to prepare a people for the Lord as stated in John 1:23 which states:

"He said, I *am* the voice of one crying in the

wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esais."

e. Acts 1:21-22 strongly suggests that baptism by John the Baptist was required for one to be an apostle.

"Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection."

The setting for these verses was the time, after the ascension of Jesus, that Peter suggested that this first "church" select a replacement for the traitor, Judas. There seemed to be no question that all of the other eleven had been baptized by John the Baptist, and this would be a requirement for the man who would replace Judas. Without commenting on the validity of such a requirement, these Apostles considered baptism by John to be necessary for Apostleship.

4. In light of these facts, it must be concluded that when these men answered the call of Jesus, they constituted "a local, visible assembly of saved, Scripturally baptized, called out and covenanted together for the purpose of giving glory to God through obedience to His Word."

This definition of the assembly that Jesus started, during His personal ministry, fits exactly the

definition mentioned previously. This being correct, it follows that since Jesus started His "church," all future "churches" must be constituted similarly. An understanding of this definition will eliminate a tremendous amount of false teaching about what is or is not, a true "church" of Jesus Christ.

5. It must also be noted here that Judas Iscariot, though he assembled together with the other eleven, was not a member of the Lord's church because he was not saved.

a. Jesus stated in John 17:12:

"While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled."

It may be clearly seen that following the "form" of religion can never make one saved. Judas apparently was just as committed and trusted as the other Apostles, yet he had never accepted Jesus Christ as his savior. Thus, it is clearly seen, that one cannot be saved by placing his name on a church role, even if he is outwardly a diligent follower of Jesus.

6. It was to this "church" that Jesus gave the two ordinances, His authority and the principle of "church" discipline.

a. Matthew 28:18-20 states:

"And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen."

Here Jesus gave His "church" the authority to make disciples, baptize disciples and to teach disciples to do whatever He had commanded. Clearly, there were many other people who had been saved and baptized by John the Baptist, yet they had no such authority for they were not a part of Jesus' "church." He further stated that He would always be with His true "churches."

b. Jesus further stated in Matthew 18:15-17:

"Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear *thee*, *then* take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell *it* unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican."

This was the occasion when Jesus gave the principle for dealing with an offense, between brethren, in His "assembly." The assembly had the authority, by Jesus Himself, to withdraw fellowship from an unrepentant and unruly brother.

7. The "church" which Jesus started had all of these things, given by Jesus Himself while He was still on the earth. His "church" was clearly started BEFORE the Day of Pentecost.

8. Thus, it must be concluded that Jesus built His "church" during His personal ministry, and the above definition conforms to the character and nature of that "church."

9. As a footnote, it must be noted that the events, which happened on the Day of Pentecost, constituted the once-and-for-all-time empowering of the Lord's "churches." Jesus had given His "church" His authority before He ascended back to heaven, yet He empowered them on Pentecost.

B. The teachings of the Lord's "churches."

1. 1 Timothy 3:15 outlines the teachings of a "church" of Jesus Christ:

"But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."

Paul was writing to young Timothy whom he had sent to the "church" at Ephesus. Clearly, Paul assumed that he would shortly be released from house arrest in Rome, and he would soon visit Timothy. Yet, he did not know if his visit would be soon or late, therefore, he encouraged Timothy for his work with the "church" in

that city.

Two phrases in this verse need further attention. First, Paul spoke of the "house of God," which is a correct translation of the Greek words *oikw| qeou*. The next phrase which needs attention is "church of God," which is an incorrect translation of the Greek phrase *ekklhsia qeou*. Paul clearly was referring to the "assembly" of God in Ephesus. This instruction was meant for Timothy as he ministered within the assembly in that city. Most of the writings of Paul, in fact, were written to a specific "assembly" in a specific geographical location. In every case he refers to the local "assembly" as the "church" of Jesus Christ. If the meaning of "church" was universal, then he would have referred to it as "part of the assembly of God." This truth clearly emphasizes the local and visible nature of a "church" of Jesus Christ.

Paul also, in this Scripture, referred to the "church," and indeed any Scriptural "church" as "the pillar and ground of the truth." It is precisely here that the teaching of a Scriptural "church" is defined; she will teach the truth. Therefore, there exists a corollary. If a "church" does not teach the truth, then she is not a true "church" of Jesus Christ. The authority Jesus gave His "church" is dependent upon that body teaching and practicing the truth. If a particular body does not teach and practice the truth, they have no Biblical authority.

2. The only thing that remains is to discover the

source of truth.

a. Jesus stated in His prayer in John 17:17:

"Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth."

The contextual setting for this verse was when Jesus was praying to the Father on behalf of His "church." He wanted these men to be sanctified, or set apart to God, in order that they might enjoy the help of the Holy Spirit and fellowship with God. He knew this sanctification was only possible as they were faithful, in their words and actions, to the truth of the Word of God. There are many books written by man which contain some truth, however, only the Bible claims to be truth in its entirety.

b. Paul wrote to Timothy the words in 2 Timothy 2:15:

"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

Once again, Paul admonished Timothy to "rightly divide the word of truth." This was the only source of instruction where Timothy, or believers of today, may turn to as a source of truth. Timothy was not to teach his own words and wisdom, he was simply told to rightly divide, and then present the Word of truth. Such admonition is totally appropriate for the believer, especially preachers and teachers, as they stand and purport to speak for God. It truly is not a light thing for the Word

of God to be handled casually or incorrectly. Since the Word of God is truth, in character and nature, it remains only for the teacher or preacher to rightly divide it, and then teach it.

c. Paul further stated in 2 Timothy 3:16:

"All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."

In this Scripture, Paul claims the inspiration of God as the source for the entire Bible. If this statement was not correct, then the Christian faith would have no basis on which to stand because these are the specific instructions, given by God, whereby acceptable service might be rendered. Notice, that the Word of God is "profitable for doctrine (teaching), reproof (refutation of error), for correction, for instruction in righteousness". Timothy needed this admonishing just as those who teach the Word of God today.

3. Therefore, a true "church" of Jesus Christ must adhere strictly to the only source of truth, the Bible. When modern ecclesiology is examined, one is struck by the lack of emphasis placed upon the Word of God. Indeed, even when the Word of God is mentioned, there is very little emphasis placed upon hermeneutical and contextual examination of the text. This type of preaching and teaching, that is so prevalent today, violates the admonishment that Paul gave to Timothy in the above reference.

Some will protest that times are different today, and the message of the Bible must be "updated" in order to attract and keep Christians in "church" and interested. This statement is used especially regarding young people; however, if the "old" message of the truth from the Word of God will not keep them, surely, all inferior methods are doomed to failure.

4. There is no room for compromise on this point.

Believers are not authorized to make any "improvements" in the Word of God. Thus, the work of the believer, especially in a New Testament church, is simply: (1) learn the truth, (2) live the truth and (3) teach the truth to others. How is it that such a simple, direct truth has become so complicated by "marketing techniques" employed by men who see success for a "church" simply in the number of attendees and the financial condition of the "church." No, there is no room for compromise. A Scriptural "church" must teach the truth of the Word of God and then leave the results to Him. It is, indeed, somewhat audacious to assume God just did not know all the obstacles which are faced by the "churches" of today.

5. This fact rules out the unscriptural notion that all saved people are part of the Lord's "church."

Again, it must be noted that most of Christianity has embraced the concept of an invisible and universal "church" into which one is placed at the moment of salva-

tion. If the subject of the teaching of a true "church" is identified in the Bible, then, the only logical conclusion would be, a "church" which does not teach and practice the truth is not a "church" of Jesus Christ. A little logic will be of great value at this point:

a. Some teach that Salvation is a free gift without any works whatsoever, yet others teach some other contingency or "good work" to obtain or keep eternal life.

b. Some teach that a saved person can never lose his/her salvation, yet others teach that God will revoke eternal life for certain undesirable behavior.

c. Some teach there is a literal place of eternal torment for the unbeliever, yet some teach that such a concept is only figurative and not to be taken literally.

d. Some teach and practice immersion as the only mode for Scriptural baptism, yet others practice sprinkling or pouring.

6. Clearly, teachings so opposite cannot all be true.

If salvation is a gift of the grace of God, then it cannot be earned. If the believer has eternal life, then the concept of "falling from grace" is not truth. If there is a place of eternal torment for the unbeliever, then to call such a concept merely a "figure" is not truth. If immersion in water is the Scriptural mode for baptism, then sprinkling is not truth.

The writer understands clearly the hostile

emotions by some, even believers, which this teaching generates; yet, it must be remembered that it was God who "made the rules." Some will see the concept of a "church" teaching only the Bible as a greatly limiting disability that will hinder "church growth." One only has to examine the sixth chapter of the Gospel of John to see that Jesus taught the truth without compromise, even when many were offended and went away. It simply would not be correct to attribute this abandonment to a lack of salvation since many of these men were saved; they simply chose not to believe His Word. This same rejection of truth is seen in many "churches" today when the truth is perceived as too restrictive. Believers do not lose their salvation if they become disobedient to God, or refuse to believe and practice the truth; they simply do not please God. Indeed, there are many groups that call themselves "churches" of Jesus Christ, but where the truth is scarcely found. The reader is asked to remember that eternal life is a gift of the grace of God without contingencies based on future acts or beliefs.

7. Therefore, it must be concluded, "churches" that do not teach the truth cannot be Scriptural "churches."

Again, some will view this statement as harsh and unchristian, yet the Word of God must be more important than personal popularity. It also follows that if a "church" is not a true "church" of Jesus Christ, then it does

not have the authority to administer the ordinances (baptism and the Lord's Supper), or "church" discipline. Then, surely, it does not have the promise of the "Comforter" to help them.

8. Clearly, there are some, if not many, people who have been saved, in the membership of unscriptural "churches."

It must ever be remembered, the believer will never be forced by God to practice or teach the truth. Certainly, He desires His children to know, live and teach His truth, however, salvation is not contingent upon those conditions. What a gracious and loving heavenly Father!

9. In light of these truths, it must be concluded that the teachings and practice of a "church" determine whether or not it is a Scriptural "church" of Jesus Christ.

A very dangerous practice is to attempt to determine whether or not a "church" is Scriptural based solely upon an associational or denominational affiliation. The name that a "church" bears does not define what it teaches and practices.

C. The work of the Lord's "churches".

1. Many today seek to use their "church" as a vehicle for social change.

One of the great dangers of true "churches" today is the enormous pressure placed upon them by the culture, the government, and fleshly goals of some in the

membership. The writer has heard it said that benevolence is the only reason for "churches" to exist. Clearly, those who hold this position will use the tax-exempt status of "churches" to coerce benevolence and social action. Some of the social changes being thrust upon true "churches" are:

a. Feeding the poor.

If feeding the poor becomes the goal of a true New Testament "church", the members will surely fail to reach their goal. The media is largely at fault in this realm, as they serve a daily diet of starving children in other countries, with the inevitable tag line of, "something must be done." This not so subtle method of distracting "churches" from their responsibility has been fairly successful. It must be remembered that the United States government has not been successful in eliminating hunger in the world despite spending hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars. Jesus addressed the subject of the poor in John 12:1-8 which states:

"Then Jesus six days before the passover came to Bethany, where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead. There they made him a supper; and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him. Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscar-

iot, Simon's *son*, which should betray him, Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein. Then said Jesus, Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this. For the poor always ye have with you; but me ye have not always."

The context for these verses was when Mary used a very expensive ointment to wash the feet of Jesus. Judas, who was the treasurer, scolded Mary for not using the money she could receive by selling the ointment and giving the money to the poor. Certainly, the motive of Judas was not to feed the poor, rather, to keep the money for himself. Jesus, however, used this opportunity to teach a great lesson about the poor when He said, "the poor always ye have with you." Indeed, if giving money would eliminate poverty, the "war on poverty" campaign adopted by the United States government would have eliminated it.

Some will ask then about the Scriptural position of a "church" regarding the poor. Certainly, the Christian should feel compassion toward those who are poor and help them because of that compassion. To do less would be un-Christian, however, that is not the responsibility of a New Testament "church." Such misplaced priority will destroy the effectiveness of a "church".

b. Political action.

As with feeding the poor, political action is seen by many, both inside and outside of "churches," to be a valid priority of a "church." The 1980's brought about a "religious" political group called The Christian Coalition. While many of the goals were noble, this writer could not support the agenda proposed by this group. Clearly, believers should be good citizens who work and vote for godly political goals, yet that is an individual responsibility and not the responsibility of true New Testament "churches."

c. Fighting abortion.

To many believers, this is the greatest cause on earth, and the practice must be stopped at all cost. While abortion is clearly murder, the "churches" of Jesus Christ must not make the elimination of abortion their priority. One of the inconsistencies of those who hold the view that stopping abortion should be the number one priority of "churches," is that they urge their members to violate the civil law in order to protest this evil practice. It must be remembered, God never told His people to prevent sin, rather He simply told His people not to engage in immoral or illegal activities. Now, clearly, should the time come when the government decrees that all, even believers, engage in abortion, then the believer must abstain. As long as abortion is legal in this nation, however, the believer has no right to violate the civil law in order to accomplish a good cause. Jesus, as well as the

Apostle Paul, addressed the responsibility of the believer to civil authority:

(1). Jesus stated in Mark 12:12-17:

"And they sought to lay hold on him, but feared the people: for they knew that he had spoken the parable against them: and they left him, and went their way. And they send unto him certain of the Pharisees and of the Herodians, to catch him in *his* words. And when they were come, they say unto him, Master, we know that thou art true, and carest for no man: for thou regardest not the person of men, but teachest the way of God in truth: Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not? Shall we give, or shall we not give? But he, knowing their hypocrisy, said unto them, Why tempt ye me? bring me a penny, that I may see *it*. And they brought *it*. And he saith unto them, Whose *is* this image and superscription? And they said unto him, Caesar's. And Jesus answering said unto them, Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's. And they marveled at him."

The "religious" Jews hated Jesus and constantly sought ways to trap Him into saying, or doing, things for which He could be accused before the Roman government. Since the Romans were ruling Israel at that time, the Pharisees and Herodians thought they could trap Jesus by asking if it was necessary for the Jews to pay taxes to Rome. Jesus' response was classic and in total harmony with His teaching regarding the believer's

submission to civil government.

(2) Paul stated in Romans 13:1-7:

"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to *execute* wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute *is due*; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour."

This is a strong and unmistakable statement by Paul, regarding the responsibility of the believer to civil government. The fact is that no government can rule without the permissive will of God. That fact does not make God responsible for immoral and corrupt government, however, the responsibility of the believer is to submit to civil government. This

truth, clearly, irritates many believers today; yet, the appropriate response, by the believer, to corrupt civil government is to be submissively obedient while trusting God to change the government. It must be remembered that no government can stay in power unless God allows it to. Tough teaching, yes but that is exactly what the Bible says on the subject.

2. While these three goals may be desirable by believers, Satan has used these worthy goals to distract true "churches" of Jesus Christ from their God-given task.

Perhaps an illustration would add insight. When the writer was involved in the construction business, most of the contracts were with government agencies. As anyone knows who has worked on government projects, there is never a shortage of inspectors. Indeed, inspectors sometime outnumber the workers and cause much delay in progress. On one particular occasion, a defect was found in a piece of pipe that would cause it to be replaced. When the inspector told the job superintendent that the piece of pipe was defective and would have to be replaced, the superintendent protested and refused to immediately replace it. He said that, even though he knew that the pipe would have to be replaced. The response of the rest of the inspectors was to leave their posts and thoroughly investigate the damaged pipe as they prepared for a bitter dispute. This was done with considerable thoroughness, so much so, that the rest of

the job proceeded at a quite rapid pace. The inspectors had been diverted from their assigned responsibility. As all of those inspectors converged in their yellow pickups at the same place, much good progress was made on other parts of the jobsite. It is clear that Satan is very clever, and will do most anything to divert "churches" from their God-assigned duty. When "churches" respond to these "crises" (such as the three listed above), one can almost see those yellow pickups converging on an unsolvable problem at the expense of their assigned duties. As a side note, when the rest of the job was done, the pipe was replaced without protest!

While the ethics of this action could not be defended, this experience clearly demonstrates the cunning of Satan. If he can cause the "churches" to become "righteously" indignant over social ills, then they become very easily distracted from their primary jobs as members of a "church" of Jesus Christ.

3. No matter how great the social problem, that is never the priority of the local "church."

Here lies the reason for much ineffectiveness of "churches" today. They have converged, in their "yellow pickups," to solve social problems, and are thus working out of category.

4. God understands the social ills of this world are rooted in the sinful hearts of man.

As the world moves toward the twenty-first century, it is clearly seen that the rules and regulations

established by man offer no cure for social ills. Indeed, all of the money and time that has been expended in a vain attempt by the United States should serve as a case study to reinforce this truth. Man is evil because of his sinful nature.

5. Therefore, the only way to positively change the condition of the world is for the hearts of men to be changed!

6. The only thing that can change the hearts of men is the proclamation of the Gospel accompanied by the convicting power of the Holy Spirit.

All other attempts at curing social ills will surely fail until men are saved and have a genuine change of heart. It must always be remembered that "churches" work in the spiritual realm and not the physical.

7. Therefore, this is the job of New Testament "churches."

The proclamation of the Gospel (all of the Word of God) and the living of a life which supports the worth of the Christian life is difficult in this world. In fact, Jesus spent much time teaching His apostles that their message would not be well received. This ought not to surprise believers, as Jesus was killed by "religious" men who did not like His teachings.

a. Acts 1:8 states:

"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses

unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judeo, and in Samara, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

The context for this verse was just before Jesus ascended back to heaven following His resurrection. He met with His "church" and told them that they would receive "power" after He left them and the Holy Spirit, once and for all, empowered New Testament "churches." It is extremely interesting to note that Jesus had already given His "church" (local, visible, assembly) authority (*exousia*) to carry out His work. Yet, they did not have the power (*dunamin*) necessary to actually accomplish that work until the Day of Pentecost.

b. Simply stated, the work of a New Testament "church" is not hard to determine for Jesus gave the orders in Matthew 28:18-20:

"And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen"

These verses have been misunderstood by many well-intentioned believers, as separating the work of "churches" into three separate and distinct areas. The commandment of this "Great Commission" is "make disciples as you go." Clearly, this was a refer-

ence to the assumed "new" normal life of a believer who has committed himself to carrying out the work of Jesus Christ. The phrase "make disciples" is the Greek word, μαθητεύσατε which is an aorist imperative, or command. Clearly, the message of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ was necessary in the disciple-making process. Salvation, however, is not the end of Christianity because the word "disciple" means "learner." An individual, therefore, who has repented of his sin and trusted Jesus Christ as his savior, needs to be "discipled" regarding his new life in Christ. This is all part of the "disciple-making process." Then a believer who becomes a "disciple" should submit to Scriptural baptism by the authority of a New Testament "church." The disciple, then, should be "taught to observe ("to do", not "to look at") all things whatsoever I have commanded you."

It must be noted that the commission does not consist of three separate and distinct projects, but one continual "disciple making" process. This is the work of a true "church" of Jesus Christ.

It should be understood that there are requirements for "church" membership. Having one's name on a "church" roll does not make the individual a member. They must have been saved, Scripturally baptized and then must have covenanted with others who meet these requirements. One of the greatest hindrances to understanding the nature of true "church"

membership is the development of the "church" roll. This device became necessary because of legal requirements of government in order for the "church" to be able to buy and sell property. In fact, if it was not for the need to acquire and dispose of property, no roll would be needed because the "church" would be assembled whenever they met. One can see the problems that have developed due to the establishment of the "church" roll. Clearly, having one's name on a "church" roll soon was seen as a right of "ownership or control" to some degree.

8. No other institution, board or organization has the authority and power to accomplish this great work.

9. May God grant His "churches" the faith and courage to keep their focus on their number one priority!

D. The ordinances of New Testament "churches."

1. There are only two ordinances which the Lord gave to His "churches."

a. The ordinance of Baptism as seen in Matthew 28:19:

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:"

The subject of Baptism will be discussed more fully in a subsequent chapter of this study, yet the

authority to administer Scriptural baptism was given only to Scriptural New Testament "churches."

b. The Lord's Supper. 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.

"For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the *same* night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake *it*, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also *he took* the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink *it*, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come."

This subject also will be dealt with in a subsequent chapter of this study, however, the Apostle Paul was writing to the members of the "church" in Corinth when he wrote these words by inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

2. Both of these ordinances are pictorial and memorial ordinances only, and thus have nothing to do with receiving or keeping salvation.

E. The government of the "churches" of Jesus Christ.

1. Every "church" of Jesus Christ is independent and sovereign unto Jesus Christ.

a. Paul wrote to the "church" at Ephesus on this subject when he wrote in Ephesians 5:22-27, 32:

"Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so *let* the wives *be* to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, 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...This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church."

In this passage of Scripture, Paul was writing about the relationship that exists between Jesus Christ and His "churches." In so doing, Paul used the illustration of the relationship between a husband and his wife. For centuries, this husband-wife relationship, though not always followed, was well known. Only in the last half of the twentieth century have the lines of responsibility in marriage become not only dim, but obliterated.

In a God-honoring marriage relationship, the duty of the wife is to be submissive to her husband. This submission is due to the fact that the husband is the "head," or authority, of the wife. Quickly, it must be

noted that along with authority, the husband is responsible for the well-being of the wife. There is nothing in these verses implying that a wife is to be abused in any way, indeed, the husband is told to "love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it." If the husband truly loves his wife to this extent, no abuse or selfish interest of the husband would be possible. In fact, the well-being of his wife would be second only to his service to Jesus Christ.

Clearly, Paul was using well-established principles of education in this teaching. He was explaining a well-known relationship and then applying those same principles to an unknown subject. In this case, he used the husband-wife relationship to illustrate the relationship between Jesus Christ and His "churches." Just as a wife should be voluntarily submissive to her loving husband and to him alone, so too a "church" should be submissive to Jesus Christ, and Him alone. In this illustration, the role of the wife is the "church" and the role of the husband is Jesus Christ.

If this concept is followed, a New Testament "church" will seek to know the will of God, and then to submit to that will. It must be noted that the only place to find a knowledge of the will of God is in His Word. If a "church" will learn the Word of God and then submit to doing what He demands, then He as a loving "husband," will provide protection and abundant provision for the "wife." Just as a wife is not to be submissive

to any other man, so the "church" is not to be submissive to anyone other than Jesus Christ.

Jesus did not leave His "churches" on the earth without protection while they carried out His commandments, rather He told them He would always love, provide for and protect them. The job of "churches" is simply to do whatever His Word commands and not question their ability to accomplish the task. It is not their responsibility to provide the ability to accomplish specific tasks, indeed, it is the responsibility of Jesus to provide the "ways and means" for His "churches" to accomplish His work. This is a clear and simple relationship, but one that is not often understood or implemented by His "churches." This great truth is seen when "churches" understand the Word of God, yet sit powerless because they fear they cannot afford the cost! That portion of the relationship with their Lord does not belong to "churches."

2. Each New Testament "church" stands or falls independent of any "denominational" affiliation.

In the modern day ecclesiastical world, many believe that more good can be accomplished by groups of like-minded "churches" than by independent "churches," therefore, they form denominations. Yet, clearly, the "church" which Jesus built was "a local, visible assembly" that would be responsible only to their head, Jesus Christ! It must be concluded, therefore, that denominations are man-made and without

Scriptural precedent. It does not matter how "efficient" they may appear, the work of the Lord must be accomplished by the kind of "church" Jesus Himself started while He walked this earth.

As most have seen, denominations inevitably degenerate into political institutions where popularity is terribly important. On the contrary, Jesus was not popular while He was on the earth, rather, He was concerned about teaching the truth. Generally speaking, denominations depend less and less upon Biblical authority and more and more upon the wisdom of men. For example, most missionaries are appointed by a denomination, and therefore, are responsible to the denomination instead of a Scriptural "church." It is incumbent upon the "churches" of Jesus Christ to always be vigilant and never give up their authority because they will not answer to a denomination, but to Jesus Christ!

3. A true New Testament "church" will not be held accountable for the teachings or practices of any other "church."

This fact greatly simplifies the task of the "churches" of the Lord. Indeed, their job is not to police other "churches," rather, to simply carry out the work of the Lord as found in His Word. So much harm is done to the work of the Lord today as "churches" attempt to approve, control or correct what other "churches" teach and practice.

Some will, no doubt, say that this concept is far

too narrow-minded, yet that is exactly what the Bible says and man has yet to improve upon the Word of God. Following the directions of God, without compromise, may not bring the desired growth in the number of members in a "church," yet God is honored by faithfulness much more than by numerical success.

4. No "church" of Jesus Christ is to have any control, or authority over another "church."

It would not be a Scriptural practice for one true "church" to exercise control over another "church." At this point, it will prove invaluable to restate the definition of a Scriptural New Testament "church." It is, "A local, visible assembly of saved, Scripturally baptized believers, called out and covenanted together for the purpose of giving glory to God through obedience to His Word." Many, even in Baptist ranks, attempt to circumvent this truth by calling a new "church" a "mission." This allows the "mother church" to maintain access to membership and control over the activities of this "mission church." When all pretense is stripped away, the issue is clearly one of the control of money and assets. Mission work is expensive and far too many "churches" are unwilling to help a struggling "church" without strings attached.

This is not written to disparage anyone, rather for the intent that all New Testament "churches" might enjoy the liberty and autonomy which God desires for them. Those who sincerely believe this would be a dan-

gerous practice, because property might be lost, should contemplate the "process" of denominationalism. A "church" will honor God by staying absolutely obedient to His Word and leave the results to Him. All money given to help other "churches" is really given to the Lord, and it would not be right to attempt to control His money. At this point, it must be noted, a "church" is people, not a building and property; therefore, the "church" is not dependant upon property or buildings. When a "church" is lost to a heretical group, the building and property should be the last thing on the mind of other "churches." A much more grave concern is that believers have embraced error and become unprofitable to the Lord.

5. In the "religious" world there are three basic forms of "church" government:

a. Episcopal: rule by a hierarchy of Bishops.

This form of government is based on the assumption that the Bishops are closer to God, and thus have a greater knowledge than the average "church" member. Clearly, this form of government is subject to abuse by the whims of men.

b. Presbyterian: rule by a board of Elders.

This form of "church" government is simply the Protestant version of the Episcopal. It differs only in that "laymen" may sit on these boards.

c. Congregational: a democracy where each member has an equal vote.

Since believers are on equal footing before God, it would follow that congregational, or democratic, rule would be the best, because every believer who is willing may know the will of God.

6. Yet, the God-assigned government of New Testament "churches" is not a democracy, rather it is to be a Theocracy!

In this form of "church" government, "churches" are not to seek the will of the majority, rather the will of God. For example, a "church" has no right to meet and vote whether the Bible is truth or falsehood. The members of a New Testament "church" have only the responsibility to learn the Word of God, live the Word of God, then teach it to others. This concept seems so simple that many refuse to trust the Word of God in business matters, yet God has a will for His "churches," even in business.

a. Acts 1:21-26 gives an account of a poor attempt at the practice of a Theocracy:

" Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection. And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all *men*, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen,

That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place. And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles."

The context for these verses was after Jesus had ascended back to heaven following His resurrection. He had met personally with His "church" and told them specifically to "wait for the promise of the Father." They knew they would soon be empowered, though they did not know the specific time. As is true with most people they were impatient, therefore Peter decided that while they waited they must elect a replacement for the traitor, Judas Iscariot. It must be noted that God did not tell this "church" to do this, yet they did anyway.

As is common when a "church" does not wait on the Lord, the members are very likely to make mistakes. In this case, they made several mistakes; First, they assumed the office of Apostle must be filled by one who had the exact same qualifications that they possessed. Since all of the Apostles had been baptized by John the Baptist and walked with Jesus, it was assumed these were the requirements for the new Apostle. Second, the Apostles selected two men who fit this profile, Joseph and Matthias. In effect, they limited the choice to only two men. Then they prayed and asked God to "show whether of these two thou hast chosen." The fact that

they asked God for direction indicates they understood God has a divinely perfect will for His "churches."

The problems with the actions of this "church" were, first, God did not tell them to replace Judas; and second, they limited the choice of God to only two men whom they had selected. Perhaps an illustration will be helpful. Suppose a believer, who was a Pastor of a "church," awakened on a beautiful Sunday morning and said, "Father, today I can play golf, or I can go fishing; now, tell me, which of these two activities you have chosen for me." The clear fallacy of this request is that neither activity might be the will of God for the Pastor. So too, neither of the men selected by the Apostles was the man which God had chosen to be the twelfth Apostle, but this fact did not hinder this "church" from electing Matthias as the replacement Apostle. All of this was done under the pretense of doing the will of God.

Surely, those who are familiar with the Bible know there are indeed twelve Apostles. They also understand that Paul was the twelfth Apostle, and he was not selected by the "church," but by Jesus, Himself. Although this "church" voted to take this action, they used a democratic rather than theocratic approach to "church" government. Paul was such a prominent Apostle, and was clearly the twelfth Apostle, it must be concluded God overruled their democratic choice. One might well inquire as to the correct method this "church" should

have employed to make this choice. The answer was simply to ask God if they needed to take that action. He would then have revealed that it was not their responsibility to fill this office.

Problems, world without end, would be avoided if "churches" of Jesus Christ would adopt and practice a theocratic form of government. The greatest hindrance to this practice is because most "church" members believe they know what is best for the "church," yet God has promised to lead His "churches," Himself. The question is, will they be willing to let Him lead?

b. A "church" of Jesus Christ has no right to seek the will of a majority of the members, rather she must seek the will of God if she is to be pleasing to God.

A brief examination of the process of "calling" a Pastor for a "church" would be beneficial at this point. When a Pastor dies, leaves or is run off, most "churches" will elect a "pulpit committee," and ask the members to submit names of prospective Pastors. From this list, three to five men will be asked to come and "preach in view of a call." Following this, a vote will be taken, generally based upon the impression made by the men during a very brief visit. Usually, very "spiritual" criteria are considered by the congregation, such as the size of his family, his appearance in the pulpit, the musical ability of his wife, and the behavior of his children. The man who presents himself the best usually is elected

to pastor the "church." Clearly, God and His will are, most often, programmed out of the process at an early stage. This was exactly what happened in the selection of a replacement for Judas.

For those who ask for an alternative to this flawed process, several questions should be asked in a theocracy. First, does God know that the "church" is without a Pastor? Second, does God have a man selected to lead that particular "church?" Third, will God send the man He has chosen to that "church"? The answer to all three of these questions is absolutely yes. These questions clearly prove that God does desire to lead His "churches" and will do so, if the members will simply inquire of Him and wait for His answer! The writer understands that this concept may be offensive to members of "churches," who, (including him), have used this process to call a Pastor. To many, the above process has never seemed to be a totally correct method, yet Acts, chapter one has been used as a Scriptural pattern for the vitally important selection of a Pastor. Clearly, as with the "church" in Jerusalem, any true "church" of Jesus Christ should simply inquire of God, and then wait!

7. While the duty of New Testament "churches" is to conform their actions to the Word of God, there are some questions regarding "ways and means" which are not specifically addressed in the Bible. The members, therefore, should pray and then wait for God to reveal

His will in all such matters. Some of these matters are:

- a. Calling a Pastor.
- b. Deciding where to send a Missionary.
- c. Buildings, property and finances.

8. It is wonderfully refreshing to know God always has the perfect solution to any problem that one of His "churches" may face; further, He desires to lead His "churches" to that perfect solution if they will only ask and wait upon Him.

F. The reward of the Lord's "churches".

1. For those Scriptural "churches" which remain true and faithful to the Lord, and those members of those "churches" who remain true and faithful, there will be a special reward in Heaven.

Let there be no doubt, salvation is immediate and permanent, yet faithfulness to the Lord is the criteria for rewards. Salvation is a gift given by the grace of God which could never possibly be earned, therefore, Heaven is the certain destiny of all who have trusted Jesus Christ as their savior. The basis used by God to determine rewards, however, is faithfulness to His Word.

2. The highest reward for believers will be the selection, by Jesus Christ to be a part of His "Bride."

The question of the composition of the "Bride of Christ" has been the subject of many heated discussions, yet the Lord will ultimately make the selection

Himself. There is no Biblical way to determine, for sure, who will, or will not, receive this honor until Jesus Himself selects those at the "Judgment Seat of Christ." It must be added at this point, if the labor of a believer is motivated by the desire to receive this reward, then he is not serving the Lord simply because he loves Him and desires to please Him, consequently this behavior will disqualify him from the honor. It is utter folly for the believer to think having his name on the roll of a particular "church" will guarantee this highest honor in heaven. The proof of the truth of this statement is quite clear; all will acknowledge that not all of the people whose names are on the "church" roll are even saved. Most have witnessed times when a person whose name is on the "church" roll will come professing Jesus Christ as their savior, and acknowledging the fact they had not been saved before that time!

3. Two Scripture references will be used to demonstrate the reality of this special honor:

a. Ephesians 5:26-27 states:

"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, 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."

In this Scripture quoted above, Paul was il-

lustrating the relationship between the Lord and His "churches" by comparing it to the husband-wife relationship. God has wonderful plans for His "churches," yet there are requirements for such plans to be fulfilled. The members of these "churches" must be willing to learn the purifying Word of God. This requirement has nothing to do with the salvation and ultimate destiny of the believer. It simply explains the criteria for receiving great rewards, including the possibility of being a part of the "Bride of Christ." Joyful faithfulness to the Word of God by the believer, without expectation of reward, will bring the greatest reward.

b. Revelation 19:6-9 states:

"And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed *are* they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God."

In this Scripture, the Apostle John was privileged to witness a great scene in heaven. This grand event is called the "Marriage Supper of the Lamb." John

describes the bride in these terms: "His wife hath made herself ready." Without question, this is not a reference to the salvation of an individual believer, because the believer has nothing he can do to "make himself ready." This marvelous event follows the selection of believers, who, based upon the character and nature of their works, have been selected by God Himself to receive the reward of greatest honor throughout eternity.

4. Clearly, not all "churches" have been totally faithful to the Lord and His Word.

Oftentimes, the quest for numerical growth may lead some "churches" to diminish certain teachings that might be considered harsh or unloving. The "churches" of Jesus Christ must teach disciples to observe all things whatsoever He has commanded. "Churches" have no right to eliminate any of the Word of God in order to acquire numerical growth.

5. Just as clearly, not all members of Scriptural "churches" have been totally faithful to the Lord and His Word.

6. Therefore, selection of those who will receive this great reward must be reserved to Jesus Himself.

The only three criteria known for sure are, first, salvation; second, membership in a New Testament "church"; third, faithfulness in service to God through one of His "churches." Beyond this, the final selection must be left to Jesus Christ alone. One thing remains clear, not all of those who have been saved

will receive this reward.

7. This is not salvation, but a special place of honor throughout eternity.

8. The greatest motivator for faithful service to the Lord, in spirit and truth, is out of deep appreciation for what Jesus did on the cross of Calvary.

