

Is One Church As Good As Another?

By David Lasseter

How often have you heard this question asked? If your experiences have been like mine, you have likely heard this question expressed as a statement. One may say, "One church is as good as another", while someone else says, "It doesn't matter how you worship or what you believe, as long as you worship in some manner." On the other hand, members of one religious organization may vehemently defend their worship practices as being the only "true" way to worship God, while another entirely different organization makes the same claim. It's obvious to any outside observer that they both cannot be "right." So, is one "right" and the other "wrong", or are they both in error? How is one to know?

This is a study I've been pondering for quite some time. How does one best approach a topic such as this? As I was preparing to write this article I came across an astounding statistic: there are some 28,000 different "Christian" religious organizations in existence today!! They all call themselves "Christian", but the majority have little if anything in common. America was founded upon the bedrock of religious freedom. In America, one has the right to worship God in any manner one should wish. I firmly believe each and every American should be grateful beyond measure for this liberty. But is God pleased with the results of our liberty? Did God intend for the "Christian" religious world to be so diversified and confused? With freedom comes responsibility. Henry Brooke Adams once said:

Absolute liberty is absence of restraint; responsibility is restraint; therefore, the ideally free individual is responsible to himself.

What, if anything, does this mean when we consider religion? I believe it makes a point we must consider. Peter tells us in 2 Peter 1:10 to "make your calling and election sure." Paul, in Philippians 2:12, tells the Philippian Christians to "work

out your own salvation with fear and trembling." In each of these passages we see the responsibility of the individual to make their salvation sure. In order to do so, each person must know what is required to achieve a saved state, and then make sure they are meeting those requirements. If one has the goal of worshiping God as He wishes, that individual has the responsibility to evaluate their worship practices and make sure they are in keeping with the wishes of the Father. Jesus tells us in Matthew 15:9 that it is possible for us to worship God in vain. Not only does He tell us that our worship to God may be empty (vain), He tells us what makes it so--teaching for doctrine the commandments of men. The very fact that Jesus warns us about the possibility of worshiping God in vain tells us that we must be able to determine how to worship Him properly. But what is doctrine? How do we know which doctrines are of men, and which are of God? My purpose in this study is to review the teachings regarding the church found within the Bible. We will look to the scriptures and determine how we can properly worship God. We will look at examples of vain worship, and consider why their worship was vain. We will study in detail Jesus' words in Matthew 16:18, and determine what they mean for us today. We will look to the scriptures to find the worship practices of the Church authorized by God. Once we have done so, the answer to our question will be clear.

Throughout this study only those teachings which can be found within the Bible will be considered authoritative. If you have not yet completed my study entitled, "Why we must use the Bible only", you might wish to do so if you have questions regarding my reasons for using the Bible only as authority. I will briefly revisit points made within that study from time to time, but will not deal with the specific reasons in the same depth during our current study.

I pray that, at the completion of this study,

(Continued on page 2)

(Continued from page 1)

you will have a clear understanding of the answer to our question. By knowing what worship is pleasing to God you may know that by abiding to the plan He has given us that He is pleased with your worship. Before dealing with the question, "How is one to know", we must determine whether it is possible for us to know how God wants us to worship Him. If we cannot know how to worship God, it is pointless to try and answer the question "How". Pasted below is an excerpt from my study entitled, "Who is a Christian?"

Does God wish for men to worship Him properly? Most certainly so! We read in John 4:23 and 24 that God seeketh men to worship Him in spirit and in truth. Now let's put these two thoughts together. First, Jesus warns that we may worship Him in vain by teaching for doctrine the commandments of men. Next we learn that God desires men to worship Him in spirit and in truth. Is it possible for men to know how to properly worship God? Absolutely! It must be possible, or Jesus would have no right to condemn men for worshipping God improperly! It must be possible, or Jesus would have no right telling men that we are to worship God in spirit and in truth! If we are to worship God in spirit and in truth, we must ask ourselves "What is truth." Does that question sound familiar? It should--we asked and answered it earlier in our study. Recall Jesus words in John 17:17. He tells us what is truth--the word of God!

So we see from John 4:23 and 24 that God is seeking men who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. Since Jesus warns us that we may worship God in vain (Matthew 15:9), God must have given us instructions on how to worship Him properly. Therefore, we can know how to worship God in spirit and in truth. Since the word of God is truth, we will find the answer within the word of God. So, in the process of answering the question "Can one know how to worship God properly?" we have answered the question, "How is one to know." One must look to the Bible for God's instructions on how we are to worship Him

in spirit and in truth.

We'll cover several topics during the course of this study. I'll start with reviewing a few of God's characteristics, so we may learn how God considers man and our worship to Him. Next, we'll review examples of vain worship as recorded in the Bible. We've all heard (and possibly quoted directly) the words spoken by George Santayana:

Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.

William Hastie, a U.S. judge and politician, once said:

History informs us of past mistakes from which we can learn without repeating them. It also inspires us and gives confidence and hope bred of victories already won.

The apostle Peter shows us the importance of bringing to remembrance the things which are already known, so they won't be forgotten (2 Peter 1:12-15). In the same spirit I'd like to bring to our remembrance past mistakes made in worship to God. We'll look at the relationship between the old law and the new law, and determine where we may look for religious authority today. The organization of the Lord's church will be studied, after which we'll look to the scriptures and identify how God wishes us to worship Him today.

I pray that you will have a tender heart, open to the teachings of God's word as we consider this vital topic. I also pray that you will objectively evaluate your worship practices and determine to make your worship to God pleasing in His sight.

Characteristics of God

As we begin our evaluation of worship I would like for us to consider a few of God's characteristics. The Bible tells us much about the nature of God, and His nature directly impacts man's relationship with Him. Every human being has a relationship with God, since we are all created in His image (Genesis 1:27). However, that relation-

(Continued on page 3)

(Continued from page 2)

ship will be either good or bad. An understanding of God's nature will allow each individual to determine whether their relationship with their Heavenly Father is positive or negative.

1. God doesn't change. Unlike human beings, who frequently change from one position to another, God is unchangeable. Malachi records, "For I am the Lord, I change not;" (Malachi 3:6). We read in Hebrews 13:8 of the unchanging nature of Jesus: "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and forever." The fact of God's unchanging nature is a tremendous blessing to mankind. We don't have to wonder what God's "mood" will be today. I'm sure everyone reading this study has experienced repeatedly the changing moods of their fellow man, and the frustration these changes bring to a relationship. In our relationship with God we are the only ones changing! If we have a poor relationship with God, it's our own fault! If we strive to learn what God expects from us and are obedient to his will, we know our relationship with Him is good.

2. God is no respecter of persons. In Acts 10:34,35 Peter states: "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him." Paul, in Colossians 3:25, records: "But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons." Again, in 1 Peter 1:17, we read, "And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear:" Again consider the frustration you've likely experienced when another human being wrongs you, simply because of their respect for another exceeds their respect for you. It happens on the athletic field, at work, and at home. You know your qualifications exceed those of another, but still you aren't given the promotion at work simply because of man's respect of persons. But in your relationship with God, you don't have to worry about God's unwillingness to accept you. If you fear Him,

and work righteousness, you will be accepted. But does He accept everyone? No! If He did, He'd be a respecter of persons! Think about that statement for a moment. On the right hand we have a person who has diligently feared God and kept His commandments to the best of his ability. On the left hand we have one who has no fear of God and has refused to keep His commandments. Does God love them both? Yes! We read in Romans 5:8 how God showed his love for us in that He was willing to send Jesus to die while we were yet sinners. However, will both be accepted of God? No! He cannot accept the one who is disobedient and continue to be one who doesn't respect one person over another. Only the one who has feared Him and kept His commandments will be accepted of Him. Please consider this point in light of point number 1. Since God doesn't change and He is no respecter of persons, He has never been and never will be a respecter of persons! Since the creation of mankind God has accepted those who fear Him and keep His commandments, and He will continue to do so until Jesus comes again!

3. God seeks men to worship Him. Jesus states in John 4:23, "But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him." Let's break this verse down. First, we learn that the hour of which Jesus speaks has now come ("But the hour cometh, and now is"). But what hour is that? The time when true worshipers will worship God in spirit and in truth ("when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth"). He concludes the verse with this statement: "for the Father seeketh such to worship Him." So we are *now* in the period of time when those who truly worship God will do so in spirit and in truth. But Jesus doesn't say that all worshipers will worship in this fashion. Only the "true worshipers" will worship God in spirit and in truth. If there are "true worshipers" present today there must also be "false worshipers." Since Jesus refers to one group of people there must also be the

(Continued on page 4)

(Continued from page 3)

second group. There would be no need to include the adjective "true" when referring to those who worship the Father in spirit and in truth if there weren't also those who worship in a false manner. What separates the true from the false? **How** they worship! The true worshipers worship in spirit and in truth, and the false worshipers don't. Do both worship? Yes! Is the worship of both groups acceptable to God? No! Only those who worship in spirit and in truth are sought by God to worship Him. Notice how a true worshiper applies both spirit **and** truth to his worship of God. A false worshiper may fail to apply either or may apply only one of the two. Now please consider characteristic 3 in light of numbers 1 and 2. God has always sought men to worship Him in the manner He authorized and He always will. Those who did so were always accepted and those who failed to do so were always rejected. This will not change.

Historical examples of vain worship

We've learned much about God and worship to Him by considering a few of His characteristics. Let's consider some examples of unacceptable worship recorded in the Bible and look for the characteristics of God we've examined as we continue our study of the church.

1. Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:1-7): We see in the earliest writings of the scriptures how God has always demanded obedience to His commands in our worship to Him. Cain and Abel were two brothers, the sons of Adam and Eve. They had different occupations: Abel was a shepherd and Cain a farmer ("tiller of the ground"). Both were worshiper of God. However, the manner in which they worshiped God differed. Abel brought the firstlings of his flock to sacrifice to God, but Cain brought fruits of the ground. Was God pleased with both sacrifices? No! We see how God "had respect unto" Abel and his offering, but unto Cain and his offering He "had not respect." Cain was angry with God's acceptance of Abel and his offering, but lack of acceptance for his own. Did Cain know what God expected?

Yes! He must have known. We know that God is not a respecter of persons, but he had respect for Abel's offering. Why? Because Abel obeyed His commands. If God had respect for Abel's offering but hadn't told either what He expected, then His respect would have been for Abel rather than the offering. At some point in time God had told both Cain and Abel what He expected of them in worship. Abel was obedient, and Cain disobedient. As a result, Abel was accepted and Cain rejected. God asks Cain, "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?" Cain knew what he had to do to "do well", but refused to do so. As a result he was rendered a "false worshiper" of God.

2. Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10:1,2): Nadab and Abihu were sons of Aaron, the High Priest of God. As such they were members of the tribe of Levi, which was given responsibility for the tabernacle and to carry out the various acts of worship to God for the people of Israel. One day, Nadab and Abihu decided to change their worship to God. They took their censers and offered "strange fire" unto God. As a result, God consumed them by fire sent from heaven and they "died before the Lord." To our modern way of thinking it may seem harsh, mightn't it? After all, they only used different fire in their worship to God. They were still carrying their censers, they still offered incense upon them, they were still continuing to worship God. The people witnessing their acts of worship almost certainly knew nothing of the "insignificant" change they had made. However, God had given them specific instructions as to where to obtain fire for their worship to Him, and any variation from this source was disobedience! God demonstrated His rejection of their worship in a dramatic fashion! Why do you think our loving God would be so full of wrath over something so seemingly insignificant? Because any variation in worship to Him is not insignificant! If He tells us what He wants us to do, He is pleased with nothing other than obedience "to the letter"! We have been blessed with having the example of Nadab and

(Continued on page 5)

(Continued from page 4)

Abihu recorded for us, so we can consider the seriousness of the manner in which we approach Him in worship. Now, since God is unchanging, do you believe He is any less serious about our worship to Him? Absolutely not! How we worship Him has changed since the time of Nadab and Abihu, but God hasn't. He has given us specific instructions on how we are to worship Him today. We must follow those instructions to the letter, or face being rejected by God in the judgment.

3. King Saul (1 Samuel 13:1-14): When Saul had been king of Israel for 2 years he attacked a garrison of Philistines with 3,000 men. He instructed a trumpet be blown throughout the land of Israel, so the people might hear of his battle. However, the Philistines weren't going to ignore this attack. They gathered an army of 30,000 chariots, 6,000 horsemen, and "people as the sand which is on the seashore in multitude" and pitched for battle. The Israelite soldiers saw they were in a bind and hid in caves, thickets, rocks, high places, and pits. Samuel had instructed Saul to wait for him in Gilgal for 7 days. When Samuel was late and Saul saw the people scattering from him he instructed a burnt offering and peace offering be brought to him. As he finished offering the burnt offering Samuel came. Saul shortly learned of the Lord's displeasure with his sacrifice of the burnt offering. Samuel asked him, "What has thou done." Saul proceeds to explain the reasons he offered the burnt offering: "I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that thou camest not within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered themselves together at Michmash; therefore said I, 'The Philistines will come down now upon me to Gilgal, and I have not made supplication unto the Lord': I forced myself therefore, and offered a burnt offering." From our point of view, it sounds reasonable, doesn't it? "I'm in trouble, so I'll do what I can to please the Lord." But the Lord wasn't interested in sacrifice. He demands obedience. Samuel responds to Saul's defense, "Thou hast done foolishly:

thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God, which He commanded thee." Samuel goes on to tell Saul that the Lord would take the kingdom from him, and give it to a man "after His own heart." Again we see the importance of the heart in our worship to God. Saul thought the Lord was interested only in sacrifice, but learned His real interest lies in obedience.

4. King Saul again (1 Samuel 15:1-31): In the 15th chapter of 1 Samuel, the Lord gives a command to Saul: "Go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass." We read in verse 2 why this order was given: The Amalekites had laid in wait for Israel as they left Egypt (Exodus 17:8-16). The Bible records that "The Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation." We see Saul going forth to destroy the Amalekites with 200,000 footmen and 10,000 men of Judah. Saul laid in wait in a valley while the Kenites escaped the slaughter. Then Saul with his army smote the Amalekites. However, one person escaped the slaughter alive: the king of the Amalekites, Agag. In addition, Saul permitted the best of the livestock of the Amalekites to survive. The Lord told Samuel that, "It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king: for he is turned back from following me, and hath not performed my commandments." Saul returns from the slaughter and tells Samuel, "I have performed the commandment of the Lord." Samuel proceeds to tell Saul how wrong he was. Saul brought back the livestock for a seemingly good purpose: to sacrifice to the Lord. However, Samuel sums up God's displeasure with Saul in verses 22 and 23: "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry." Please consider again how God doesn't

(Continued on page 6)

(Continued from page 5)

change. Has God all the sudden become more interested in sacrifice than obedience? No! Saul thought that the Lord would be pleased with his offering the best of the flocks of the Amalekites for sacrifices. They would still die, but on the altars of the Israelites rather than the battlefield. In the end, they would still be dead. But we see God's displeasure in good motives that go against His will. Samuel equates Saul's actions with rebellion, and tells him that rebellion is no different than the sin of witchcraft!

5. **Korah** (Numbers 16:1-50): In Saul we saw how disobedience to the commands of God is rebellion; In Korah we have an example of rebellion that we would all recognize. Korah, Dathan, and Abiram along with 250 princes of the Israelite rose up against the authority of Moses and Aaron. Numbers 16 records their fate. God demonstrated to the entire congregation of Israel that He had given Moses and Aaron the authority they claimed. In punishment for their rebellion Korah, Dathan, and Abiram along with their families suffered an unusual death: The earth swallowed them up. The 250 princes of Israel didn't escape punishment: They were consumed by fire from the Lord. But what do we see the nation of Israel doing the very next day: They murmured against Moses and Aaron for the deaths of these men and their families! Did the Lord overlook their grumbling? No! He caused a plague to run through the congregation, which eventually led to the deaths of an additional 14,700 people! Only when Moses and Aaron intervened for the people did the plague stop. The Lord instructed Moses to tell Eleazar the son of Aaron to make a covering for the altar from the brazen censers carried by the 250 princes of Israel. This covering would serve as a reminder to the people that, "no stranger, which is not of the seed of Aaron, come near to offer incense before the Lord; that he be not as Korah, and as his company." In this account we see the Lord giving religious authority to a certain group of men, and

anyone who would try to usurp that authority is rebelling against God. Has God changed? No! Today, if we see religious authority given to a specific group of people by God, anyone attempting to usurp that authority is rebelling against God as surely as Korah and his confederates in Numbers 16.

In these examples we've seen God's displeasure with man's disobedience to His commandments regarding worship. We've seen how He rejects the worship of one who chooses to devise his own worship style (Cain), how He is displeased with one who changes the way he is instructed to worship (Nadab and Abihu), how God looks at obedience and sacrifice (Saul), and how God rejects those who attempt to usurp the religious authority of those to whom He has given it (Korah). Now let's move from a consideration of worship practices in the Old Testament to worship as authorized in the New Testament. Before we do, let's consider the relationship between the old covenant and the new covenant today.

The old covenant and the new covenant

Before we consider worship in the New Testament I'd like to review the relationship between the Old and the New Testaments. The examples we've considered so far have all been from the Old Testament. What role does the O.T. play in our religious lives today? It is important to understand the role of the O.T. today before we continue with a study of NT worship.

I'm sure most of you have heard of the controversy regarding a judge who wishes to have a copy of the Ten Commandments displayed within his courtroom. On first glance this seems like a noble gesture. After all, doesn't this reflect the judge's trust in God, to have a copy of these O.T. commandments displayed for all to see? I'm sure many of the cases he encounters are a result of people violating one or more of these instructions. Let's take a deeper look at the Old Covenant and see if such a display truly reflects one's trust in God.

(Continued on page 7)

(Continued from page 6)

- 1. To whom were the Ten Commandments given?** (Exodus 34:27,28) Before we can establish the validity of a law in a given case we must determine whether the one being judged was subject to that law. If the law never applied to the person in question, then that law cannot judge them. Paul emphasizes this point in Romans 3:19 when he states that, "Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law:" In Exodus 34 we discover the group of people to whom the old law was given: The nation of Israel! God tells Moses on Mount Sinai to, "Write thou these words: for after the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with thee and with Israel." Only the Israelites were ever subject to the old law, and therefore the Ten Commandments (which were part of the old law given Moses by God). If you were (or are) a Gentile, the Ten Commandments never applied to you! So, if the judge mentioned above is a Gentile, the Ten Commandments displayed in his courtroom is a law to which he was never subject. I was watching "televangelist" Ed Young recently. At the end of the program he advertised a tape he was selling entitled, "What you don't know about the Ten Commandments: Back to Basics." He began the advertisement with snapshots of newspaper headlines, emphasizing the point that the headlines reflected a lack of obedience to the Ten Commandments. Unfortunately, I doubt his tape will truly tell one what they don't know about the Ten Commandments. As we've seen above, the old law applied only to the Jews, never to the Gentiles.
- 2. Was the old law meant to be in force forever?** Now that we know to whom the old law was given, are the Jews still subject to it today? To answer this question we will again turn to the scriptures and see if they tell us of the fate of the old law. Let's begin by looking at the promise made to Abraham by God, as recorded in Genesis 22:15-18. In the earlier part of Genesis 22 we see Abraham and his willingness to offer Isaac as a burnt offering to

the Lord. An angel made two appearances to Abraham during this event: Once to stop Abraham's hand as he held the knife over Isaac, and a second time to tell Abraham of God's promise to him. The angel tells him that, "in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (verse 18). But to what nations was the angel referring and who is the seed through which these nations will be blessed? To find the answer let's turn to Galatians chapter 3. First, notice verse 8. Paul records, "And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, in thee shall all nations be blessed." So the "heathen" is included in the nations of people mentioned by the angel. But who is the "heathen" spoken of here? Move down a few verses in chapter 3 to verses 14-16. Here we read, "that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ" (verse 14), and that the seed spoken of by the angel was Jesus Christ (verse 16)! So through Jesus Christ (the seed of Abraham) all nations (Gentiles included) would be blessed. But didn't the old law *exclude* the Gentiles from this promise? We know the old law was given exclusively to the Jews. Well, let's see. When was the promise made to Abraham? In Genesis 22. When was the old law given to Moses? After the exodus from Egypt while the people wandered in the wilderness (Moses on Mt. Sinai is recorded in Exodus 19-32). How much time passed between the promise given to Abraham and the old law given to Moses? 430 years! (Galatians 3:17) As you recall from our earlier study, God doesn't change. Since God doesn't change what must we conclude about the old law? ***At the time it was written it was destined to eventually cease being a valid covenant!*** God's promise to Abraham *included* the Gentiles, but His covenant with Moses *excluded* them. But doesn't this show a changing nature to God? No! Remember, the *way* we worship God has changed throughout history, but God Himself *hasn't* changed. God's will from the Garden of Eden was that

(Continued on page 8)

(Continued from page 7)

Jesus would come and "bruise the head" of Satan (Genesis 3:15). The promise made to Abraham reflected the fulfillment of that promise. The covenant made with the people of Israel separated a people unto God through which the promise would be fulfilled. Please don't continue with this study until you have this thought (that the old covenant was destined to cease) firmly rooted in your mind. For clarity I'd like to re-emphasize this point. Abraham was given a promise that through his seed (Jesus Christ) *all nations* would be blessed. 430 years later a covenant was made between God and *one nation*: the Jews. In order for the promise made to Abraham to come to fruition what *must* occur: the covenant excluding all nations except the Jews *must cease to exist* as a valid covenant between God and the Jews. As long as the old law separated Jew from Gentile the promise made to Abraham could not be fulfilled. Paul records in Ephesians 2:13-16 what Jesus Christ did for the Jew and the Gentile, "But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For He is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in Himself of twain one new man, so making peace;" Jesus Christ came to the earth to fulfill the law (Matthew 5:17,18). However, once the law was fulfilled it ceased to function as a "middle wall of partition" between Jew and Gentile. Now all are one in Jesus Christ. But the Jews cannot be one in Christ with the Gentiles as long as they are under the old law. So today, any person of Jewish heritage who tries to live under the old law is attempting to revive a covenant that ceased to be valid nearly 2000 years ago!

3. **What purpose does the old law serve today?** Since we now know the old law was given only to the Jews and was destined to cease as a valid covenant between man and God, why do we have it recorded and included as part of

God's Word? Please turn to Romans 15:4. Paul tells us that, "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope." We have the Old Testament recorded for us and included as part of God's Word so that we might learn from them. Since the law of Moses (the old law) ceased as a covenant between God and man upon the death of Christ I cannot look to the old law for religious authority. However, I can look to the old law and learn of God. Remember, God doesn't change. His nature before the death of Christ was no different that it is now. The mistakes the Israelites made should serve as warnings to us, so that we won't make the same mistakes. We see this thought recorded by Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:1-12. Paul reminds us how God was displeased with the children of Israel after their passage through the Red Sea. They served as examples for us, to warn us not to lust after evil things as did they, to avoid idolatry, fornication, and murmuring against God. They warn us not to "tempt Christ" as some of them did. God expects us to be aware of the writings in the Old Testament, to know how displeased He is with these and many other sins. However, when it comes to religious authority the Old Testament has ceased being valid. In Galatians 3:24,25 Paul states, "Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster." So the Old Testament teaches us about God, but we are no longer under its religious ordinances today. We are under the New Testament, and it is the sole source of religious authority today.

Summary: The Old Testament is a valuable resource for us today. From it we learn much about God and what He expects from man in our worship to Him. In the Old Testament we learn of the promise God made to Abraham that through Christ all nations of the earth would be blessed. 430 years later the law of Moses (including the

(Continued on page 9)

(Continued from page 8)

Ten Commandments) was given to the Jews, and served as their guide for worship to God until Jesus Christ shed His blood on the cross, thereby fulfilling the old law, breaking down the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile, and putting into effect the New Testament. Today the source of religious authority for both Jew and Gentile is found in the New Testament. Only within its pages will we find the instructions which, when followed, renders our worship to God fruitful.

Matthew 16:13-19

At this time each of you should be fully aware of three of God's characteristics: He doesn't change, He is no respecter of persons, and He seeks men to worship Him. You know of several examples of vain worship recorded for us within the scriptures. You understand the role the old law plays in our religious lives today. We have studied scriptures that reveal to us the identity of the seed of Abraham who would break down the dividing wall between the Jews and the Gentiles. We know this dividing wall was the old law, and the seed of Abraham is Jesus Christ. We've seen how Jesus is the mediator of the New Testament, and upon His death the old law ceased as a valid source of religious authority. We now live under the New Testament and must look to its pages in order to learn how to worship God in spirit and in truth.

We're now ready to consider the church herself. The background we've completed was necessary to make sure we look to the proper source when considering the church and her role in our lives today. Let's begin by considering Matthew 16:13-18.

Jesus opens this discourse with His apostles by asking them, "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?" The disciples responded, "Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets." In this response we see the disciples telling Jesus who the general population of people thought He was. But next He asks, "But whom say ye that I am?" Now Jesus is asking those disciples present with Him who they thought He was. We have recorded the words of Peter, who said, "Thou art the Christ, the

Son of the living God." The next several words of Jesus recorded in Matthew 16 are, I believe, a source of much religious confusion today. Jesus tells Peter, "Blessed are thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. 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." Jesus acknowledges Peter's wisdom in believing that Jesus was truly the Son of God, rather than listening to the crowd who believed Jesus was John the Baptist, Elias, or another prophet. But who is this rock upon which Jesus will build His church? The Catholic Church would argue that Peter is the rock upon which Jesus would build His church. Is he? Let's spend some time determining the answer to this important question.

1. Who (or what) is the rock?

- a. *Petros* and *Petra*: In John 1:42 we see Jesus telling Simon Barjona (the son of Jona) that he would be called Cephias (by interpretation, "a stone"). Jesus used the Greek word *Petros* to refer to "Cephias" in this verse. However, in Matthew 16:18, when He refers to the rock upon which His church would be built, He uses the word *Petra*. There is a tremendous difference in the meaning of these two words. The word *Petra* is used 16 times in the NT. I'd like for us to consider each usage of this word:
 - i) Matthew 7:24 and 25; Luke 6:48: Here we see the word *Petra* used four times. Each time it refers to the solid rock upon which the wise man built his house. Once built upon this rock it failed to collapse despite the tempest around it.
 - ii) Matthew 16:18: See above.
 - iii) Matthew 27:51: Rocks were torn asunder when Jesus died on the cross.
 - iv) Matthew 27:60; Mark 15:46: Jesus tomb was hewn out of a rock.
 - v) Luke 8:6,13: Some seed fell upon a rock, what that rock represents.
 - vi) Romans 9:33: The Jews would

(Continued on page 10)

(Continued from page 9)

- stumble over a rock of offense.
- vii) 1 Corinthians 10:4: *Petra* used twice. Israel drank of the spiritual rock that followed them, Jesus Christ.
 - viii) 1 Peter 2:8: The disobedient stumble at a rock of offense.
 - ix) Revelation 6:15,16: *Petra* used twice. People hiding in the rocks, asking them to fall upon them.
- b) In addition to *Petra*, the Greek word *petrodes* is used to refer to rocky ground. Matthew 13:5,20 and Mark 4:5,16 both use this word when referring to the rocky soil upon which some seed fell in the parable of the sower (see Luke 8:6,13 above).
 - c) Vine's Expository dictionary summarizes the difference between *Petros* and *Petra*. *Petros* refers to, "a detached stone or boulder, or a stone that might be thrown or easily moved." However, *Petra* refers to "a type of sure foundation."
 - d) Let's consider now the other usages of *Petra* as we search for the answer to our question, "Who or what is the rock upon which Jesus will build His church?" In the references noted above we see *Petra* used to refer either to an object or a person. References 1, 3, 4, 5, and 9 refer to objects (i.e. geological objects we refer to as rocks). However 6, 7, and 8 refer to a person. The account in 1 Corinthians refers to this person by name: Jesus Christ. We can determine who the person is in the other two accounts by looking at a couple more scriptures. In Ephesians 2:20, Paul tells us who the chief cornerstone is: Jesus Christ. In 1 Peter 2:7,8 we read that the head of the corner is the one who is the stone of stumbling and the rock of offense. Therefore, the rock of offense mentioned in Romans 9:33 and 1 Peter 2:8 is Jesus Christ. That leaves reference 1, Matthew 16:18. Is *Petra* in this verse referring to a thing or a person? I believe all would agree that no evidence exists to support this verse referring to an inanimate object. Therefore, since it's not a thing, then the

rock must be a person or something related to a person. But who is that person? Let's use some logic to determine the answer:

- i) That person is someone already mentioned in these few verses. This only stands to reason, for it would be very difficult for the disciples with Jesus and for us today to properly determine whom this rock was if Jesus was bringing in a person outside the current discussion but not telling us directly who it is.
- ii) The disciples present with Jesus understood who or what this rock was. Elsewhere in the scriptures we see the disciples asking Jesus the meaning behind some of his teachings. We don't see that here, and we don't see Jesus volunteering an answer even though He wasn't asked.
- iii) The disciples agreed with the person Jesus selected as the rock upon which His church would be built. Again, we see no evidence of disagreement, argument, etc. expressed by the disciples after Jesus made this statement.

Now let's use these three statements and determine whom (or what) this rock is. First, who else had been mentioned by Jesus during this discourse? Jesus, His disciples, John the Baptist, Elias, Jeremias, one of the prophets, Simon Peter, and God. It stands to reason that if Jesus was referring to a person, He was referring to one of these (As we noted in statement number 2, those with Jesus understood what he was saying). Now let's consider those mentioned in this discourse and determine which the disciples would agree with. We can exclude John the Baptist, Elias, Jeremias, and one of the prophets from the beginning, since the disciples recognized that these men weren't Jesus Christ. Remember how this discussion started: Jesus asked the disciples who the

(Continued on page 11)

(Continued from page 10)

general population of people thought He was. The disciples didn't believe John the Baptist, Elias, Jeremias, or one of the prophets was the Son of God, so they wouldn't have agreed with Jesus' plan to build His Church upon them. That leaves Jesus, His disciples, Simon Peter, and God. We can safely exclude His body of disciples as being the rock. There's nothing indicating the rock as being a plurality of persons. So, if a person is referenced, then Jesus, Peter, or God would be the target. While God would certainly make a solid foundation, He transferred all authority in heaven and on earth to Jesus (Matthew 28:18). Jesus wouldn't transfer the authority upon which He would build His Church back to God. So that leaves Jesus Christ or Peter, if the rock references a person. Let's use statement 3 above and see if Peter is the rock upon which Jesus would build His Church. Would the other disciples have agreed with this decision?

i) Let's look at Peter as recorded in the gospels, prior to Matthew 16:18. In Matthew 14:22-33 we have recorded the account of Jesus walking on the water. The disciples were in a ship and saw him, and thought they'd seen a spirit. But Jesus immediately (straightway) reassured them, telling them that it was He and to not be afraid. But Peter wanted proof it was Jesus. To prove it was Jesus he asked that Jesus bid him to come to Him on the water. He was told to come. Peter stepped out of the ship and walked on the water for a short time. But when he looked around and saw the wind and waves he was afraid and began to sink. He asked the Lord to save him. When Jesus caught him He asked, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" Now imagine you're one of Jesus disciples with Him in Matthew 16:18. Jesus states that,

"Upon this rock I will build my church." If this rock is Peter, what are you likely to say to Jesus? I know I'd have some questions for Him. Why would Jesus establish something against which the gates of hell would not prevail on someone with such little faith as Peter? Yes, I believe Peter's faith strengthened after Jesus rose from the dead. However, none of His disciples in Matthew 16:18 had any idea that Peter's faith would mature to the level it did. Still, they show no evidence of disagreement with Jesus' plans to establish His church upon this rock. Their lack of disagreement makes the rock mentioned by Jesus certainly not Peter.

ii) If the disciples recognized the rock as being Peter, and didn't disagree with Jesus' plans to build His church upon Peter as the foundation, they evidently accepted Peter's pre-eminent position in the kingdom of God. But did they? In Mark 8:27-30 and Luke 9:18-21 we read additional accounts of the events recorded in Matthew 16:18. But what happens in Matthew 20:20-24 and Mark 10:35-45? We see James and John asking Jesus to give them the positions of pre-eminence when He comes in His glory! Now, if Jesus had already determined that Peter would occupy the pre-eminent position in the establishment of His church, why would Peter be displeased with the other apostles at the request of James and John? In Matthew 20:24 we see that he was included among those who were displeased. In addition, why would the two brothers think they had any hope of occupying these positions, since Jesus had just told all of them how He was going to place Peter in such a prominent position? And do you not think some strife would have arisen among these apparently

(Continued on page 12)

(Continued from page 11)

somewhat ego-driven individuals when Jesus gave Peter such an important role? "But why not me?" almost certainly someone would have asked in Matthew 16. But they didn't. This wasn't the last time the apostles strove among themselves about who would be the greatest. We see another account of the same thing taking place during the Passover supper prior to Jesus' death. Luke 22:24 records this event. So, it appears the self-serving goals of the apostles continued to come to the surface repeatedly during their time with Jesus. But we don't see that happening in Matthew 16! The absence of their consternation when Jesus magnified Peter as the rock upon which He would build His church means Peter wasn't the rock.

Below I've pasted an excerpt from a catholic apologist's website dealing with Matthew 16:18. You may read the entire essay at <http://www.cathinsight.com/apologetics/adventism/peter.htm>. The Catholic Church firmly bases its foundation upon Peter, and claims the papal line extends from him. Please consider the following words:

With that in mind, namely, that Simon is the Greek *Petros* and the Aramaic Cephias, we can now proceed to further clarify who is the Rock of Matthew 16:18 upon whom or which the Church is built. Now, the Aramaic Cephias means "rock," and "rock" ONLY; it does NOT mean "stone." Therefore, we conclude that when Jesus said that Simon was now Peter, he meant to apply the title "Rock," *Petra* in Greek, to him, since the other translation of "Peter" is Cephias--"rock." So Christ built his Church "upon this

Rock"--Peter. The reason Jesus did not call Simon *Petra* is very simple: the word *Petra* has a feminine ending because it is a feminine noun. It is not appropriate to give a male person a female name. So Jesus makes this female noun "male" by switching the female -a ending into the male -os ending, so that the Greek word "Rock" can be applied to Peter. Again, we know that Jesus means to call Peter ROCK and not STONE because in Aramaic he calls him Cephias, which can only mean "rock" and not Evna, which is the Aramaic name for "stone," and because he could have called him Lithos instead, the Greek word for "stone," which even possesses a male ending already.

Here we read that "The reason Jesus did not call Simon *Petra* is very simple: the word *Petra* has a feminine ending because it is a feminine noun. It is not appropriate to give a male person a female name. So Jesus makes this female noun "male" by switching the female -a ending into the male -os ending, so that the Greek word "Rock" can be applied to Peter." One of the reasons I went through each account of the use of *Petra* in the NT was to address the erroneous logic used to justify this position, and presumably that of the Catholic church, with regards to Peter being the rock mentioned in Matthew 16:18. Notice how he states, "it is not appropriate to give a male person a female name." Now turn to 1 Corinthians 10:4. Paul records, "And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ." The Greek is *Petra* both times the word "Rock" is used in this

(Continued on page 13)

(Continued from page 12)

verse. But Paul states plainly that this *Petra* was Christ! Every instance I know of in the NT Jesus is addressed using masculine pronouns (He, Him, etc.). Jesus was a man (that is, of the masculine gender), but Paul refers to Him as the "Rock", and uses *Petra* to make this claim! Therefore, to justify one's position by saying Jesus didn't call Simon *Petra* because he was a man is a fallacy! Why didn't Jesus call Simon *Petra*? Because he wasn't a *Petra*! He was a *Petros*! Why didn't Jesus say He was going to build His church "upon this *Petros*?" Because He wasn't! He was going to build His church "upon this *Petra*", and this rock was not Peter!

- e) Other scriptures and points which indicate Peter was not the rock:
 - i) Mark 8:29 and Luke 9:20. This is another account of the same event recorded in Matthew 16:18. Despite the fact Jesus had just told the disciples of the rock upon which He would build His church, Mark and Luke don't record Jesus as stating that Peter was that rock. All they record is Peter's response, "Thou art the Christ." If Jesus started this discussion planning to reveal Peter as the one upon which the church was built, Mark and Luke would have recorded this. What they did record would be pointless if Jesus' reason for entering this discussion was to make this revelation concerning Peter. Why didn't they tell us more?
 - ii) Once the church had been established, no inspired writer of the New Testament places any special significance on Peter and his role as the foundation upon which the church was built. Why?
 - iii) Peter himself exalts Jesus and His role as the chief cornerstone laid by God, serving as the foundation upon which they, the "lively stones" are built up into a spiritual house (1 Peter 2:5-8). If Peter were serving as the rock upon

which the church was built, why would he assign this role to Jesus?

- iv) Other apostles confronted Peter in his hypocrisy after the establishment of the church. Paul records in Galatians 2:11-15 how he confronted Peter in front of witnesses when Peter withdrew from the Gentiles, fearing them that were of the circumcision. Why would the rock upon which the church was built, and the apostle who first brought the word to the Gentiles, be guilty of such behavior toward people whom God had clearly shown to be clean in His sight (Acts 10:10-17)? What confidence would the Christians of that day have in this body that Jesus established if it was truly built upon such a weak foundation? Paul indicates that other Christians, including Barnabas, were "carried away with their dissimulation", showing the negative influence Peter had on the church regarding this event (Galatians 2:13).
 - v) The other apostles and prophets are given the same place as Peter, serving as foundation of the household of God, with Jesus serving as the chief cornerstone (Ephesians 2:19-22). Only Jesus is given a special place in these verses, with all of the apostles and prophets given an equal position. If Peter occupied a pre-eminent position, why wouldn't Paul acknowledge his place?
- 2) The scriptures show how Peter could not possibly have been the rock upon which Jesus would build His church.** So, that leaves only Jesus, if the rock mentioned in Matthew 16:18 was a person. But if it wasn't a person, what else could it have been?
- a) Please turn again to Mark 8:27-29. Recall how Mark records the same event, but closes his writing with Peter's confession of Jesus' divinity, "Thou art the Christ."

(Continued on page 14)

(Continued from page 13)

Mark and Luke give a more succinct record of this discourse between Jesus and His disciples. In all three accounts, Jesus opens the dialogue with the question, "Who do men say that I am." Mark and Luke record only the response of the disciples, telling Him who the general population thought He might be, and the confession of Peter stating that He was the Son of God. Would Mark and Luke leave out such an important fact as the very rock upon which Jesus would build His church? No! So what would that rock be? The confession of faith that Peter expressed when he acknowledged Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. Do we have other accounts of people making the same confession before becoming members of the Lord's church? Yes, we do. In Acts 8:26-39 we have recorded the account of the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch. The eunuch was studying Isaiah 53, but didn't understand the words he was reading. Philip started at that point and preached unto him Jesus. When they came to a body of water the eunuch asked Philip, "See, here is water. What doth hinder me to be baptized?" Philip said, "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest." The eunuch replied, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." After making this confession, the eunuch was baptized and became a member of the Church established by Jesus Christ. Jesus said He was going to build His church, right? Do we have scriptures showing Him doing this? Yes! Acts 2:47 reads, "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." Are the members of the church ever referred to as building material? Yes! We've already studied 1 Peter 2:5-8 where the members of the spiritual house are called "lively stones." So in these verses we see Jesus actively involved in the construction of His church. But He is selective when it comes to the materials He uses to build His church. Not just any stone will be

added to this building: Only those stones that have complete faith in the builder will become part of the spiritual house built by Jesus. Any stone unwilling to acknowledge his faith in Jesus as the Son of God is unfit to be included in this spiritual structure and is not added by the builder.

b) The rock certainly could also be Jesus Christ. We've seen in 1 Corinthians 10 how He was called the "Rock", with the same Greek word, *Petra*, being used. In 1 Peter we've seen how the lively stones are built upon Jesus as the foundation. Without a doubt He serves as the chief cornerstone upon which the entire Church is supported. The lively stones are anchored to the cornerstone by faith, and express their faith in Jesus as the Son of God prior to being included as a part of His Church.

3) **What else can we learn about His church in Matthew 16:18:** There is only one church built by Jesus Christ. Recall our study of Jesus' word, as recorded in John 8:31? Remember how Jesus' use of the singular pronoun "my" indicates the presence of other words that people could hear, but only one of them is His word? We see the same singular personal pronoun used in Matthew 16:18 when Jesus speaks of His church. The fact that He said He would build His church indicates the fact that other churches would come. If no other churches would ever arise, He would have said, "Upon this rock I will build the church." But He didn't. He said, "I will build My church." Since He didn't use the definite article ("the") we know other churches will come. In addition, He tells us that only one of those churches is His church. If the church He was going to establish was one of many, each of which was valid in God's sight, He would have said, "Upon this rock I will build a church." Jesus also tells us of the power of the one church He would build. It is the only one against which the gates of hell would not prevail! Every other man-made church is destined to fall to the power of

(Continued on page 15)

(Continued from page 14)

Satan. Since we know many churches were destined to be built, but only one is valid in the sight of God, how does one tell which is the church built by Jesus Christ and which are the ones built by men? Before you finish this study you'll know the answer. I'm as sure as I can possibly be that every honest person studying with me has a sincere desire to be a part of the one church which will stand up against Satan. In the end, to be a part of any other is no different than being a part of none. Please continue our study of the one church built by Jesus as we consider the church and the body.

The church and the body

In our study of Matthew 16:18 we saw how Jesus used a singular phrase to refer to the church He was going to build. He didn't say, "And upon this rock I will build My churches", but "Upon this rock I will build My church." As we continue our study of the church we need to understand the meaning of two terms used by several writers in the New Testament: The church and the body.

The word "church" in the New Testament is translated from the Greek *ekklesia*, which transliterated means "a calling out of." Vine's gives an excellent discussion on the use of *ekklesia*. We see in the NT that *ekklesia* is translated into two words in English: church and assembly. *Ekklesia* may refer to either a religious or a non-religious assembly. Please turn to Acts 19. In verses 21-41 we read of an assembly of Ephesians who gathered in response to the cries of Demetrius and the other silversmiths who made statues of the goddess Diana. They were afraid that Paul, through his teaching and conversions of many people, would turn people away from worshiping Diana. They were full of wrath and began crying out, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians." (verse 28) Eventually the town clerk was able to calm the assembly and dismissed them. The word translated "assembly" in this account is *ekklesia*. Today, everyone I'm aware of uses the word "church" to refer to a reli-

gious assembly. Merriam-Webster's dictionary contains references only to a religious group when defining the word "church."

The word "body" in the NT is translated from the Greek *soma*. In the NT *soma* is translated using the words "body", "bodies", "bodily", and "slaves" (once, Revelation 18:13, literal="bodies"). It may refer to a human body, an animal body, plant or celestial bodies. It may refer to a living or a dead body. In our discussion today we'll consider its use when referring to a spiritual body.

To this point in our study we've seen how the words "church" and "body" are used in the NT. But why would I want to include a discussion of these two words when considering the question, "Is one church as good as another?" Obviously, the word church would be important, since it is the focus of our study. But how do the "church" and the "body" tie in together?

Below I've pasted quotes from the national websites of several religious denominations. Each one deals with that denomination's philosophy regarding the church and the body. Please consider these positions. Afterwards, we'll examine the New Testament's claims regarding the church and the body, and determine the validity of these positions.

Baptist

(<http://www.utm.edu/martinarea/fbc/bfm/6.html>;
<http://www.abc-usa.org/resources/resol/callmin.htm>)

A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel; observing the two ordinances of Christ, governed by His laws, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth. Each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes. In such a congregation each member is responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord. Its scriptural officers are

(Continued on page 16)

(Continued from page 15)

pastors and deacons. While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture.

The New Testament speaks also of the church as the body of Christ that includes all of the redeemed of all the ages, believers from every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation.

American Baptists believe that every person who confesses faith in Jesus Christ is called to discipleship and ministry. The New Testament concept of "laos," the people of God, declares that all Christians are called to ministry in every area of life. Believer's baptism not only signifies faith in Christ, but also a call to discover and use the gifts of the Holy Spirit for ministry in our daily lives. "Ministry" is a translation of the Greek word "diakonia" which means "one who serves." Ministry of all believers describes works of service performed in response to the call of God in the church and in the larger society with a conscious understanding of Christ as Lord.

The church as a living organism and body is one of the primary images of the New Testament. Christ is the head of the body. There are many members, but none that dominate or that are mere appendages. The identification and deployment of individual gifts and ministries of every member actualizes Christ's body: "The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11-12). Also see I Corinthians 12:8-11;14-26, Romans 12:6-8.

Statement of Purpose of American Baptist Churches

American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A., as a manifestation of the church universal, bears witness to God's intention to bring redemption and whole-

ness to all creation. American Baptists believe that God's intention can be sought and followed in local congregations and other gatherings of Christians and in associational, regional, national and world bodies as they receive from one another mutual counsel and correction. Since Jesus Christ is the head of the church, each body of Christians, seeking to order its life in accordance with the Scriptures under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, has a proper responsibility under God for maintaining its life of worship, witness, and ministry.

American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. acknowledges that it shares a common faith in Christ with churches which may be quite different from it in history, polity and practice. Consequently, it seeks to share with them a common ministry and to express it faithfully. (Emphasis mine, DHL)

METHODIST

(<http://www.umc.org/genconf/pets/bd92/text/d0241.html>)

What do I have to do to become a member of The United Methodist Church?

Sometimes we think of membership like being a member of the Auto Club or the Country Club where we pay for services and privileges. Church membership is different. The apostle Paul used the image of a living body: "For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body-Jews or Greeks, slaves or free-and we were all made to drink of one Spirit." (I Cor. 12:13) In this biblical sense, to be a member is to be part of a living organism--a vital community animated by the Spirit of God to love and to serve. Paul's statement also points to the inclusiveness of the church: anyone may make the journey into life in the church.

(Continued on page 17)

(Continued from page 16)

Since all that seek to be members come with different experiences and backgrounds, there are a number of pathways to follow in becoming a member of The United Methodist Church. If you have never been baptized and you desire to be a Christian with United Methodist Christians, you will prepare for baptism. If you were baptized as an infant or young child and have not made a profession of faith and been confirmed, then you will prepare to reaffirm your baptismal covenant. *If you are a member of another part of the church (such as Baptist, Presbyterian or Lutheran), then you will want to prepare to transfer your membership from that church to a local United Methodist Church.* (Emphasis mine, DHL) If you are a member of another Christian church that does not transfer membership, you will want to prepare to make a profession of faith and be received as a member.

241. A pastor upon receiving a request from a member to transfer to a church of another denomination, or upon receiving such request from a pastor or duly authorized official of another denomination, shall (with the approval of the member) issue a certificate of transfer and, upon receiving confirmation of said member's reception into another congregation, shall properly record the transfer of such person on the membership roll of the local Church; and the membership shall thereby be terminated. For the transfer of a member of The United Methodist Church to a church of another denomination, an official "Transfer of Membership to Another Denomination" form shall be used.

PRESBYTERIAN

(<http://www.presbycoalition.org/Declaration.htm>)

By our union with Christ the Church binds together believers in every time and place. *We turn away from forms of church life that identify the true Church only with particular styles of worship, pol-*

ity, or institutional structure. (Emphasis mine, DHL) We also turn away from forms of church life that ignore the witness of those who have gone before us.

LUTHERAN

(<http://www.lcms.org/ctcr/docs/fellow-2.html>)

We consider the variety of denominational heritages legitimate insofar as the truth of the one faith explicates itself in history in a variety of expressions. (Emphasis mine, DHL) We do not overlook the fact that such explications of the faith have been marked by error which has threatened the unity of the Church. On the other hand, it needs to be seen that a heritage remains legitimate and can be preserved, if it is properly translated into new historical situations. If it is, it remains a valuable contribution to the richness of life in the Church universal.

EPISCOPALIAN

(<http://www.ecusa.anglican.org/governance/canons/FrameSet.html>)

Sec. 3. The Bishop and Commission shall actively solicit from the clergy and laity of parishes, college and university campus ministry centers, and *other communities of faith* (Emphasis mine, DHL), nominations of persons whose demonstrated qualities of Christian commitment, leadership and vision, and responsiveness to the needs, concerns and hopes of the world mark them as desirable candidates for positions of leadership in the Church. The Commission shall invite such nominees to engage in a process of discernment appropriate to the cultural background of the nominees by which to ascertain the type of leadership, lay or ordained, to which they may be called. When this discernment process has been completed, the Commission shall commend to the agencies with their procedures as established under (c) and (e) above, those

(Continued on page 18)

(Continued from page 17)

whose vocation is to lay ministry, and shall present to the Bishop those whom it wishes to support as Postulants for ordination to the Diaconate or Priesthood, and who have indicated their willingness to be so nominated.

WORLD CHURCH OF GOD
(<http://www.wcg.org/lit/church/ministry/idealchurch.htm>)

Our quest is not to find the Ideal Church; it is to help improve the Real Church. *Jesus wants us to commit ourselves to the Real Church, his church, in one of its real, flawed denominations or congregations.* (Emphasis mine, DHL) And there he will give us strength to persevere in the quest to improve it. Flawed as it is, that church is the form Jesus has chosen to take in this world. If you have been looking for the Ideal Church, give up your quest. Commit yourself instead to the Real Church and to the daily work of improving it.

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
(<http://www.ucc.org/faith/princip.htm>)

Principles of the Christian Church.
Christ is the only head of the Church.
Christian is a sufficient name for the Church.
The Holy Bible is a sufficient rule of faith and practice.
Christian character is the only requirement for membership.
The right of private judgment and the liberty of conscience are rights and privileges for all.
Union of all Christ's followers is sought.
(Emphasis mine, DHL)

THE DISCIPLES OF CHRIST (CHRISTIAN CHURCH)
(<http://www.disciples.org/whoare.htm>)

A heritage of openness.

The Disciples have a long heritage of openness to other Christian traditions -- actually having come into existence as sort of a 19th century protest movement against denominational exclusiveness. (Emphasis mine, DHL)

It wouldn't be possible for me to paste a similar statement from every denomination with a national website and maintain a reasonable length to this study. I encourage you to research the Internet should you have a question about a specific denomination. But what can we say about the position the denominations listed above take on the relationship between the church and the body? *The church is a single organization made up of many denominations, and the various members of the body represent these different denominations.* So the denominational view is that, when Jesus said, "I will build my church", His construction of this group of called out individuals took many forms, which we know as the various denominations today. But is this what Jesus intended? Let's turn to the scriptures and search for the answer.

1. Ephesians 1:22,23: "And hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all."
2. Colossians 1:18: "And He is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things He might have the preeminence."
3. Colossians 1:24: "Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body's sake, which is the church:"

What have we learned from these three scriptures? *The church and the body are one in the same.* When Jesus used the singular phrase "My church", He indicated that there would be only one body also. A superficial examination of the

(Continued on page 19)

(Continued from page 18)

denominational statements above would suggest their teaching agrees with these verses. There is one body and one church, and that one church is made up of many different churches that comprise the whole. But we must ask ourselves, "Can one church truly be made up of thousands of different churches?" The truth to this statement isn't readily apparent. Can we confirm its truth in the scriptures? Let's look at some characteristics of the body as we evaluate this question.

In 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, Paul gives an analogy of the church using the human body. In these sixteen verses Paul uses the word "body" seventeen times. What does he say about the "body"?

1. It is one. (verse 12)
2. It has many members. (verse 12)
3. All of the members are members of the one body. (verse 12)
4. Christ is one body. (verse 12)
5. The members are baptized by one Spirit into the body. (verse 13)
6. Members are not excluded based on race or status. (verse 13)
7. Different members have different functions. (verses 15-17)
8. God has set the members as it pleased Him. (verse 18)
9. All members are important, regardless of function. (verses 21-24)
10. Members should have the same care, one for another (verse 25)
11. The members are the body of Christ. (verse 27)

Again in Romans 12:4-5 Paul uses a similar analogy. What does he say in these two verses?

1. There are many members in one body. (verse 4)
2. Not all members have the same office. (verse 4)
3. Many members make up the one body in Christ. (verse 5)
4. Everyone is a member, one of another. (verse 5)

Let's think of our own bodies for a moment as we consider whether the body of Christ can be comprised of many different churches. Obviously our physical bodies are highly complex, made up of untold billions of individual cells. These cells are grouped into organs, which perform different functions within the body. Each organ has its own individual function, without which the body as a whole would not be complete. On the surface it would appear that the body is truly a whole made up of many different parts that share nothing in common. But is that true? No! Even though each organ may serve a different function, each cell making up that organ is identical in the most fundamental way: They all have the same 46 chromosomes, and the arrangement of genes on those chromosomes is identical. While my heart may consist of millions of heart muscle cells performing their pumping function and my brain millions of nerve cells performing their brain function, they are all identical in the most important way. Because my heart cells, brain cells, liver cells, etc. are identical, my body works together for the good of the whole. We see this fundamental unity when we transplant organs from one body to another. Lets say my heart becomes diseased and is no longer able to perform its function. If that function isn't replaced, the entire body dies. With the advances in medicine today we are able to remove the heart from one body and place it within another. Sounds good, doesn't it! Take one pump out, and put another in. But what problem do we have to overcome before this new pump will work? Rejection! But why would my body reject an organ that is performing such a vital function for the good of the whole? It is fundamentally different than the rest of the body! Its 46 chromosomes has genes arranged in a different fashion, and the rest of the body recognizes this different arrangement of genes. While the new heart is perfectly capable of performing its pumping function, it can never change its arrangement of genes and therefore will always be considered a part of a different body, rather than my own.

With these thoughts in mind lets go back to the church. Paul tells us that the church is one

(Continued on page 20)

(Continued from page 19)

body, made up of many members, and those members are all part of the same body. The different members all have different functions, but they all care for one another. The body isn't complete if any one of the members is missing. Does this sound like the arrangement of our physical bodies we considered earlier? Yes! While each member has different functions, they are all the same in one fundamental way: They have the same mind! Just as our physical bodies are made up of untold billions of cells, each with an identical nucleus, the church is made up of millions of members, each with the same mind, and this mind is the mind of Christ. (1 Corinthians 2:16) In Philippians 2:1-8 we see some characteristics of the mind of Christ. He didn't consider His own thoughts and desires as more important than those of His Father. He was willing to submit His will to that of God. So with Christ as our head and each individual member having the same mind, one who is truly a member of the body of Christ will consider his own will inferior to that of God and will submit readily to each and every command his heavenly Father gives him.

But what do we see in this concept of the church being comprised of many different denominational organizations? Do we see the same mind demonstrated throughout all of the members of the body of Christ if this application of Paul's teaching was true? Absolutely not! How can denomination x and denomination y be a part of the same body when their minds have absolutely nothing in common? They can't! They are parts of two different bodies, each with its own mind. Since they are parts of two different bodies, they have two different heads. But we see in the scriptures that Christ is the head of the body, which is the church. (Ephesians 5:23 and Colossians 1:18) Just as we saw above, there is only one body and one church. So how does one become a part of the body of Christ? Have Christ as the head! But how does one know one has Christ as the head of the spiritual body of which they are a part? They must have the mind of Christ! If they have the mind of Christ, then they may know they are a part of the body of Christ. But where does one find the instructions on how to have the mind of Christ? One must look to the source that records

the thoughts of Christ, which is the Bible. Is it enough to look to this source? No! One must apply the teachings within it in order to truly have the mind of Christ. If one is unwilling to submit their will to God in each and every aspect demanded within the scriptures, they don't have the mind of Christ. In the scriptures we see the will of God recorded for our learning. Just as Christ submitted His will to His Father, we must submit our will also. It's not enough to look to function when determining whether one is a part of the body of Christ. Just as the transplanted heart in our physical bodies will be rejected despite its normal function, it's not enough to perform good works and be considered a part of the body of Christ. Many different religious organizations look like the body of Christ on the outside (that is, they perform many good works demanded of one who is a member of His body), but they are fundamentally different on the inside. One who is a member of such an organization will be rejected as surely as is the transplanted heart containing the different arrangement of genes. I cannot state this enough: It isn't enough for one to perform good works! One must perform these same good works AND have the same inner makeup in order to truly be a member of the body of Christ, which is the church.

How does one become a member of the Lord's church?

In order to receive the benefits of being a member of the Lord's church, one must first become a member. In this study we'll briefly review a few of the benefits of membership in the Lord's body and how one becomes a member.

Benefits of membership

- 1. Spiritual blessings.** Paul tells us that God has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ (Ephesians 1:3). What spiritual blessings exist outside of Christ? None! Every spiritual blessing is available only to those in Christ. Paul tells us that we are one body in Christ (Romans 12:5). We know from our earlier study that the

(Continued on page 21)

(Continued from page 20)

church is the body, and the body is the church. Therefore one may exchange "one church" for "one body." In Romans 12:5 Paul states that we are all one church in Christ. Since the individual members of Christ's body are all one church in Christ, and all spiritual blessings are in Christ, then all who are members of His church have access to all spiritual blessings. On the other hand, if one is not a member of the one church in Christ one has no access to any spiritual blessings. The next question you should be asking is, "How does one get in Christ?" The answer: One must put Him on. How does one put on Christ? In baptism (Galatians 3:27). Is one in Christ before baptism? No. Is one in the church before baptism? No. Does one have access to any spiritual blessing prior to baptism? No.

- 2. Salvation.** We read in Acts 2:47 that "the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved." (NKJV) Who did the Lord add to the church? Those who were being saved. If one was not being saved, did the Lord add them to His church? No. Did the Lord exclude any people who were being saved from addition to His church? No. If you were being saved, He added you. So we see in this verse that salvation is found exclusively in the one church established by Jesus. If one is a member of a church not established by Jesus, is that one saved? No! Luke uses the definite article ("the") in Acts 2:47. He didn't say, "and the Lord added to a church daily those who were being saved." The use of the definite article tells us which church the saved belong to, and it tells us which ones they don't! They have been added to the Lord's church and none other.

We've mentioned only two of the benefits of membership in the Lord's church. But consider the significance of the two we've discussed. No spiritual blessings are outside His church, and one cannot be saved without being a member of the church built by Jesus. These are benefits any reasonable person would crave. But how does one become a member of His church? Please return to Acts 2:47. How did Luke tell us those who were

being saved became members of Christ's church? They were *added*. How do many (if not most) religious organizations grant membership today? Prospective members *join* the organization. Let's consider the importance of the difference between being *added to* and *joining* a church. If I'm added to some organization, who has the final authority granting my membership? It's not I! Some person or persons has been given authority to determine who is fit to become a member and who isn't. However, if I join an organization I do so under whose authority? Mine! I decide if the group is right for me, and declare myself a member if I feel it is. In the Lord's church I cannot declare myself fit to join the other members of His body. Jesus decides if I meet the qualifications. If I do, then He adds me to the membership roll of His body. What qualifications does He require? One must be saved. But how do I know if I'm saved? I have to look to the requirements for salvation. But where do I find these requirements? In the Bible. If I have met the requirements for salvation then I *know* I have been added to His church. Again consider how Jesus adds every saved person to His church. If I'm saved, I've been added. On the other hand, I can know that I'm not a member of His church. If I've followed some pattern for salvation other than that we have recorded in the scriptures then I *know* I'm *not* saved and therefore am not a member of His church. In such a state I have no access to any spiritual blessing.

It's beyond the scope of this study to consider the first principles one must obey to receive forgiveness of sins. Please link to my study on first principles should you have any questions.

Organization of the Lord's church

In our last study we discovered how the body of Christ and His church are one in the same. We studied the body and how it is made up of many members, but all are the same in that they share the mind of Christ despite their varied functions. We saw how the denominational approach to the Lord's body cannot be valid, in that each religious organization has a different mind, therefore a different head. We considered how each of us might know we have the mind of Christ: through obedi-

(Continued on page 22)

(Continued from page 21)

ence to His word, just as He was obedient to the will of His Father. Now let's take a detailed look at the Lord's body.

I'd like to start by considering the organization of the church. In the religious world today we see many different organizational schemes to the various religious bodies around us. They range from complete autonomy for an individual congregation on one hand, to near complete lack of autonomy and subjection to a national or international organization on the other. What guidelines on organization does the Holy Spirit through the Bible give us?

1. **What non-miraculous offices are authorized within a local congregation of the Lord's body?**

I emphasized non-miraculous in this point, since we know that the church had people in the first century who were endowed with miraculous gifts and served the church with these gifts (1 Corinthians 12). We have seen in another study ("Why must we use the Bible only") how miraculous gifts ceased upon the death of the last person to whom these gifts were given by the laying on of an apostle's hands. Today, only non-miraculous offices exist in the Lord's church. What are these offices?

- a. **The Elder** (also referred to as the bishop, shepherd, overseer, or pastor) The elders are the overseers of an individual congregation of the Lord's body. Notice how I included the terms "bishop" and "pastor" in the list of synonyms for the office of the elder. Many denominations have established separate offices for bishops and pastors. Why did I include these two terms as synonyms for the elder? Please turn to Acts 20:17. Here we see Paul calling the elders of the church to meet him at Miletus. Now turn to Acts 20:28. Here Paul tells the elders to "take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood." Here we

see Paul referring to the elders as "overseers." The Greek word translated "overseers" is *episkopos*. The word is translated into English using two different words: overseer and bishop. Only one other Greek word is translated "bishop" in the NT: *episkope*. *Episkopos* refers to the bishop himself, and *episkope* refers to the office he occupies. In the Greek, there is no difference between the overseer and the bishop. In Acts 20:17 we see Paul calling the elders "overseers." Those who translated the NT from Greek into English could have used "bishop" instead. So we see that the elder may correctly be referred to as an elder, overseer, or bishop. But what about "pastor?" This word is used only once in the entire NT (KJV): Ephesians 4:11. Here the Greek word is *poimen*, and is translated elsewhere in the NT as "shepherd" or "shepherds." What did Paul tell the elders to do in Acts 20:28? "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers" What does a shepherd do? He feeds the flock! Isaiah tells us about this duty of a shepherd in chapter 40, verse 11 of the book named for him: "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd." So when Paul tells the Ephesian elders to feed the flock entrusted to their care, he was telling them to serve as a shepherd to the flock. The Greek word translated "shepherd" is *poimen*, which is translated "pastors" in Ephesians 4:11.

- i. Who may serve as an elder? Specific qualifications for the bishop are given in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. I've provided links to these verses so you may study them for yourself. I'll mention a couple of these qualifications, since they relate directly to the qualifications for bishops established by many denominations. We see from these two passages that

(Continued on page 23)

(Continued from page 22)

the bishop must be a married man ("the husband of one wife") and he must have children ("having his children in subjection..."). Many denominations teach that the bishop must be unmarried.

- ii. How many elders comprise an eldership? More than one. Paul sent Titus to "ordain elders in every city" (Titus 1:5). Luke records in Acts 14:23 that there were elders ordained in every church established by Paul on his first missionary journey with Barnabas. The singular "elder" is used only 8 times in the NT, and each time refers to a specific individual or one of advanced years. Paul warns the Ephesian elders that some among them would "arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:30). So even among the eldership there would be those who would pervert the truth of God. If a single elder were appointed, the opportunity for the flock to be corrupted by his evil-doing would be greatly enhanced. Having a plurality of elders offers an opportunity for the faithful elders to discipline the one doing evil before the entire flock is corrupted. Paul tells Timothy to hear an accusation against an elder only if two or more witnesses to his wrongdoing are present. But if they are, that elder is to be rebuked before the entire congregation, so that others also may fear (1 Timothy 5:19,20). The elders are to serve as examples to the flock they lead (1 Peter 5:3).

- b. **The Deacon** We read of the office of deacon in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. The Greek word translated "deacon" is *diakoneo*, and is translated elsewhere in the NT using the terms ministered, ministering, serve, serveth, and served. The plural *diakonoi* is translated minister, servants, and servant

in addition to "deacons." Clearly we see the role of a deacon in these terms: one who serves the church. However, this is not a minister as we usually think of the word today (that is, a preacher). While a deacon certainly may preach, the deaconship has been given a particular place in the church. Paul states, "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" (1 Timothy 3:13). So we see the deaconship is a specific office in a local congregation of the Lord's church, to be filled by qualified men. Paul lists the qualifications necessary before one can be considered for the office of deacon in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. Please link to the scripture above for a full account, but again we see that the deacon must be a married man with children. We read of the presence of both bishops and deacons in the church at Philippi in Paul's introduction to his letter to the Philippians (Philippians 1:1). Since an eldership must be present to oversee the congregation, the office of deacon should be vacant until after a group of elders have been appointed. Once this has occurred, deacons may be appointed to serve the congregation under the oversight of the eldership.

- c. **Other positions of service within the church** Only the eldership and deaconship are specific offices within the local congregation, to which Paul gives specific requirements before one may occupy them. However, other positions of service with the church are mentioned in the NT. These include evangelists and teachers (Ephesians 4:11). In this verse Paul also mentions apostles and prophets, but we know from study of the NT that nobody today can fulfill the requirements one must meet to fill these positions. In Acts 1:21-22 Paul lists the requirements one must meet to be selected as an apostle.

(Continued on page 24)

(Continued from page 23)

Nobody today was alive during the time of the baptism of John to the ascension of Jesus into heaven after His resurrection. In 1 Corinthians 12:10 Paul lists "prophecy" as one of the miraculous spiritual gifts given to members of the church. However, we seen in Acts 8:14-17 how those prophets gained this ability: through the laying on of an apostles' hands. When the last apostle died, the last true prophet had been made. When the last true prophet died, the end of prophecy occurred. So these were miraculous positions filled by men during the period of time prior to the completion of the written word of God. For further study please see my article titled, "Why must we use the Bible only?" In Ephesians 4:12 we see the purpose of these various positions of service: "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ;". So those who serve as evangelists and teachers have a responsibility to minister and edify.

d. **The Members** Peter describes the members of the Lord's body as "lively stones" who "are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5). He continues in verse 9 of the same chapter: "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people;". Here we see that each and every member of the Lord's church is a priest, making up a royal priesthood to show forth the praises of Him who hath called us out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9). We see in these verses the source of the denominational practice of a priesthood separate from the membership of the congregation: this doctrine is of man, not of God. Likewise the members of the Lord's body are referred to as saints throughout the NT writings. The plural "saints" is used 60 times in the NT, while

the singular "saint " is used only once (Philippians 4:21). The one time Paul uses the singular he is actually referring to the plural, instructing the Philippians to "salute every saint in Christ Jesus." He tells them to salute each member of the body in a personal fashion. Philippians 1:1 is a good example of the use of the plural "saints" in the NT. Paul writes this letter "to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:" So again we see the denominational practice of declaring special honor upon long-dead members of a religious body by calling them "saints" is a practice not of God, but of men. Living members of the Lord's body are each and every one a saint and a priest.

2. **Is a congregation of the Lord's church autonomous, or is it subject to a national/international organization?** What does that word "autonomous" mean? I've provided a link to Merriam-Webster's online dictionary should you wish to read the definition for yourself. M-W tells us that something that is autonomous has the right or power of self-government, can carry on without outside control, or is capable of existing independently. The word "denomination" refers to the absence of autonomy of an individual congregation of a particular religious organization. M-W defines a denomination as "a religious organization uniting local congregations in a single legal and administrative body." So any religious body, which has any type of organization unifying more than one congregation of people together in an administrative or legal sense, is a denomination. Therefore any congregation of people belonging to a religious denomination is incapable of existing independently (in one fashion or another). The local or national organization of that religious body carries some legal or administrative control over the individual congregation of members.

(Continued on page 25)

(Continued from page 24)

3. Do we find within the scriptures support for a local or national organization of the Lord's body? Since the word "denomination" is so prevalent when referring to religious organizations today, is that word found in the New Testament? No. The word denomination referring to different religious bodies is a term used by man to refer to these various organizations. But is the concept of denominationalism applied to the Lord's church found within the NT, even though the word is not?

a. Let's begin by considering again the eldership. As we noted above, elders were appointed in every city visited by Paul on his first missionary journey. The eldership has the responsibility of looking out for the spiritual welfare of the flock they have entrusted to their care. There are no scriptures in the NT authorizing the establishment of a bishop or groups of bishops that oversee an area, region, state, nation, or denomination. Again consider the wisdom of this autonomous arrangement of individual congregations. If a bishop or group of bishops who were not faithful to the word of God oversaw an area or region, then the entire area or region is at risk of apostasy. We've seen this time and again with different denominations in the very recent past. I'm sure many of you are aware of the embezzlement scandal within the leadership of the Baptist church a few years ago. Such a scandal would never have occurred had the commandments regarding church organization given by God been followed. Unfortunately we frequently hear of scandals within the Catholic priesthood, which often include charges of molestation involving one of the priests and a young boy. Had the commandments regarding marriage and fatherhood for bishops given by God only been followed it is likely many of these unfortunate events would never have occurred. Paul tells us in Romans 6:19

that good cannot come from iniquity. When man fails to follow the commandments of God, only iniquity results. But when man follows the commandments of God and yields his members as servants to righteousness, holiness results (Romans 6:19).

I've heard of Acts 15:1-29 being used as justification for a central authority for a denominational group. Let's look at these verses and determine whether this is valid or not. We see in verse 1 that certain men came from Judea had come to Antioch (chapter 14:26-28) and began teaching that the saints at Antioch could not be saved unless they were circumcised after the manner of Moses. Paul and Barnabas disputed with them (verse 2). It was decided that Paul, Barnabas, and certain others would go to Jerusalem and ask the apostles and elders about this question (3). In Jerusalem, they declared to the church, the apostles, and the elders all that God had done with them (4). But in the church at Jerusalem there were Pharisees who were believers. This group rose up during this meeting and declared that it was necessary to keep the law of Moses with regards to circumcision (5). The apostles and elders came together as a group to discuss this matter (6). Peter and James delivered eloquent speeches showing how God had declared the Gentiles partakers of His grace in the church, and that the Jews were unable to bear the yoke of circumcision during the period of time the law of Moses was in effect (7-21). It was decided that a letter would come from the apostles, elders, and the whole church instructing the Christians in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia to do the following: abstain from meats offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and to keep from fornication (22-29). Why was it necessary for them to write this letter and to send these men out again to deliver it? Because certain people had gone out from the Jerusalem church, troubling the saints in Antioch with the demand that they must be circumcised to be saved (24)! The meeting was held in Jerusalem for several reasons: the apostles were there, and the false teachers had come from the Jerusalem congregation. This wasn't a general conference of bishops from around the world who

(Continued on page 26)

(Continued from page 25)

met to discuss how a denomination would practice its religion. This was a meeting between religious leaders from a church that had been taught false doctrine and the leaders of the church from which the false teachers had come. The letter generated from this meeting was sent specifically to the congregations in the region affected by the false teaching. One cannot use this example to justify the existence of central bodies that guide the doctrinal stance and practices of so many religious organizations today. Congregations of the Lord's body are designed to exist independent of every other congregation. By doing so, should one congregation fall into apostasy as the result of false teaching, all of the congregations in an area, region, state, or even nation won't fall into the same trap.

Summary: In our study of the organization of the Lord's body we've discovered that the church consists of believers who have been added to the body of Christ (Acts 2:47). These saints reside in various locations throughout the world, but as a whole make up the church. The Lord has instructed His people to assemble on a regular basis. These local congregations of His people throughout the world are organized in a fashion authorized by God. Each congregation is independent and is overseen by a group of elders. Deacons serve the congregation in various ways. Commonly an evangelist is present among the members of the congregation. Several members also serve as teachers. We've seen how the Lord does not authorize the various denominational conferences. The practice of exalting one man as bishop over an area or region is also not scriptural. To declare a long-dead member of a religious body a "saint" is a practice devised by man and has no authorization in the inspired word of God. To many these points may seem trivial. But unfortunately the news is frequently filled with accounts of wrongdoing that result directly from man's unwillingness to obey the commandments of God dealing with the organization of His church. We'd do well to remember Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 1:25: "Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men." When we question the pat-

tern authorized by God for the organization of His church we are relying on the wisdom of man, which will never match even the foolishness of God. The Ecclesiastes writer closes his book with the admonition: "Fear God and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." (Ecclesiastes 12:13,14)

Introduction to scriptural worship

Now that we've studied in depth the scriptural organization of the church, we need to determine the worship practices authorized by scripture. As with church organization we see many different worship practices among the various denominations in the world today. Some meet on Sunday, others meet on Saturday. One uses the native language to perform the various acts of worship, while another uses a language largely foreign to the worshipers. Some "speak in tongues" and engage in other "miraculous" acts during their assembly periods while others deny the existence of such events today. One religious body may use mechanical instruments of music while another will shun their use and sing only during their worship services. We've already seen how the various religious organizations around us today cannot all be part of the same body. So one must ask the question, "Of these varied types of worship practices, which are practiced by the members of the one body of Christ?"

Before examining the scriptures and studying their instructions with regards to worship practices we need to understand worship and what it is. If we don't understand what worship is, we will have a difficult time understanding the worship practices outlined in the New Testament. First, let's consider the word "worship." There are seven different Greek words translated "worship" in the KJV. The one used most frequently is *proskuneo*, which is translated "worship" or "worshipped" 60 times in the NT. Other Greek words translated "worship" and their frequencies of use in the NT are:

1. doxa (1)

(Continued on page 27)

(Continued from page 26)

2. *eusebeo* (1)
3. *therapeuo* (1)
4. *latreuo* (3)
5. *sebazomai* (1)
6. *sebomai* (6)

Other concepts of worship recorded in the NT include:

1. *ethelothreskeia*, translated "will worship"
2. *theosebes*, or "worshiped of God"
3. *sebasma*, translated "that is worshiped"
4. *threskeia*, translated "worshiping"
5. *latrueo*, *neokoros*, and *proskunetes*, all of which are translated "worshiped"

As you can see, the concept of worship is a complex one, with thirteen different Greek words being used by the writers of the NT. In addition to the above words being translated "worship" or something similar, they are also translated into other English words, such as "religion" or "devotion." I'd recommend those who are interested in a more detailed examination of worship link to the above words and read the various scriptures in which they are used, and also study the other words the English translators decided to use when translating the KJV.

Time won't permit me to include every example of worship in our study today, but I'd like to include a few examples that will help us understand worship.

1. Let's begin in Matthew. Turn to chapter 2, verses 1-8. Here we see the wise men that had seen the star God placed in the sky. They came to worship Jesus (2). Herod heard of these things, and was troubled by what he heard (3). He then consulted the chief priests and scribes as to where the Christ should be born (4-6). Herod called the wise men to him, asking when they had seen the star (7). He then sent them to Bethlehem, telling them to search for the child and bring him word again once they had found him (8). What was his reason for asking this: So that he might worship Jesus also! But was Herod's motive in worship the same as that of the wise men?

No! We see the wise men worshipping Jesus in verse 11, presenting precious gifts to Him. Afterwards God warned them in a dream to return to their homeland by another route. Why? Because Herod sought to kill Jesus! (13) So we see two entirely different motives to worship in this account. One designed to worship God in a manner of reverence, the other with a motive to destroy the Son of God.

2. In Matthew 4:9,10 we read of Satan tempting Jesus to worship him. But Jesus replies by stating, "Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve." In both instances the word *proskuneo* is used, one time referring to the worship of Satan, the second referring to the worship of God. Do we have other accounts recorded, indicating the possibility for one to worship Satan rather than God? Yes, we do. *Proskuneo* is used to refer to the worship given to a man (Matthew 18:26); to the Dragon by men (Revelation 13:4); to the Beast (Revelation 13:4,8,12); to the image of the Beast (Revelation 13:15); to demons (Revelation 9:20); and to idols (Acts 7:43).
3. In Colossians 2:18-23 we read the following: "Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God. Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not; Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body: not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh." The verb *katabrabeuo* is translated "beguile" in this passage, and is the only time this word is used

(Continued on page 28)

(Continued from page 27)

in the NT. The above link will take you to a Greek lexicon, and I'd also recommend you consider Vine's definition of this word. As Vine's notes, this word refers to the lost reward of one who follows the words of false teachers. Paul tells us in these few verses that these false teachers don't hold to the Head, from which the body is nourished and held together. (We know from our earlier study that the Head of the body is Jesus.) In Jesus we are free from the rudiments of the world. Since we are free, why subject ourselves to the ordinances, commandments, and doctrines of men? These doctrines have an appearance of wisdom in will worship, humility, and neglecting the body, but "are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh." (NKJV, verse 23) But what is this will worship Paul mentions? Will worship is defined in the Greek lexicon as "voluntary, arbitrary worship; a: worship which one prescribes and devises for himself, contrary to the contents and nature of faith which ought to be directed to Christ; b: said of the misdirected zeal and the practice of ascetics." So Paul gives us a grave warning against following false teachers, who don't derive their doctrine from the Head of the body, and whose teaching has an appearance of wisdom through their self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body. (NKJV verse 23) Does this sound familiar to us today? We see these characteristics abound in religious doctrine today. Paul tells us that we cannot use these outside indicators as evidence of doctrine derived from Christ! False teachers, whose doctrine is of men, oftentimes display these characteristics, and may draw many sincere people away from the true doctrine of Christ leading them to lose their reward! We must not

succumb to the appearance of humility and sincerity, worshiping in a fashion devised by men but which is contrary to the contents and nature of faith, which ought to be directed to Christ.

4. Do we read elsewhere of man worshiping God in a fashion devised by men? Yes, we do. If you've read any of my other studies, you know the verse I'm thinking of. Matthew 15:9, "But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." In Colossians 2:18-23 we read of false teachers teaching doctrine devised of men. Jesus tells us the value of worship according to these doctrines: it is vain! The Greek word translated "in vain" in this verse is *maten* and means "fruitlessly." So false teachers teach doctrine which is not derived from the Head of the body, leading others to lose their reward through obedience to such doctrine, and making their worship to God fruitless! How incredibly sad! Are these people worshiping Yes! Jesus didn't say that "In vain do they carry on certain religious rites", or something to that effect. These people are worshiping God, but their worship is fruitless. What makes it fruitless? Teaching for doctrine the commandments of men, which they learn through false teachers who look someplace other than the Head of the body for their authority. Does their worship appear genuine? Yes! Sincerity is not the issue. Undoubtedly these people are genuinely sincere in their efforts to worship God. If sincerity is not the issue, then what is? Authority. We learn in Colossians 2 and Matthew 15 where vain worshiper gain their authority: from men! When the false teachers preach their false doctrine, to whom are they not holding fast? The Head of the body (Jesus Christ). When members of

(Continued on page 29)

(Continued from page 28)

the one body of Christ worship God, to whom will they hold fast? The Head of the body. Worship to God by members of the body of Christ will be fruitful, because the doctrine they hold fast is not of men, but of God. If one is truly a member of the body of Christ, they will be able to confirm this fact by objectively evaluating their worship practices. As I've said in my other lessons, Jesus would have no right to condemn men for worshipping God according to the commandments of men if men couldn't know how to worship God properly. It is the responsibility of each and every one who desires to worship God in a fruitful manner to search the scriptures and determine what worship is holding fast to the Head of the body, and what doctrines are holding fast to the teachings of men.

From these verses we see that God desires us to worship Him in a specific way. Do the scriptures tell us what that way might be? Yes! Jesus tells the woman of Samaria, "But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshiper shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him." (John 4:23) So God "seeketh" men to worship Him in spirit and in truth. Let's take a closer look at this statement. What does Jesus mean when He says God "seeketh" men to worship Him in this fashion? Paul tells us in Acts 17:25 that God doesn't need anything from man, seeing how He is the source of all things anyway. But God seeking men to worship Him almost sounds like He needs something from us. Let's go back to the original language one more time. The Greek word translated "seeketh" in this verse is *zeeteo*. It has two principle definitions: to seek for, seek after, or strive for something; or to demand something from someone. Which definition of *zeeteo* makes most sense in this context, and

in light of Acts 17:25? To demand something of someone! When Jesus tells the woman of Samaria that God seeks men to worship Him in spirit and in truth, He is telling her that God *demand*s men to worship Him in this fashion. To worship Him any other way is to worship in vain. For another example of *zeeteo* meaning "demand" please turn to Mark 3:31,32. Here we see Jesus' mother and brothers, standing outside the place He was, calling Him. In verse 32 the multitude about Him said to Him, "Behold, thy mother and thy brethren without seek for thee." Were His mother and brethren seeking to find Him? No! They'd already found Him, and were calling for Him outside the place He was. They were demanding to see Him. The KJV translators use "seek" to express this demand.

Jesus teaches us that God demands worship to Him be in spirit and in truth. Here we see two requirements before one can worship God acceptably: spirit and truth. Remember our study of the conjunction "and" in an earlier lesson? "And" is a coordinating conjunction, and serves to connect two words or word phrases of equal grammatical importance. Our worship to God is acceptable only if it is both in spirit AND in truth. To be in spirit but not in truth renders worship vain, as does worship which is in truth but not in spirit. Please consider the worship Herod would have offered Jesus. Would it have been in truth? Most likely. He would have put forth the necessary physical actions to appear to be worshipping the savior. But in spirit, hardly! He wanted to know where Jesus was so he could eliminate Him as a threat to his throne. When Paul tells the Colossian brethren to beware of false teachers who put on a show of religion through their ascetic acts, were those who followed the teaching of these false prophets worshipping in spirit? Most likely. They were likely genuinely sincere in their offering of worship to God. But

(Continued on page 30)

(Continued from page 29)

what made their worship vain? Failing to also worship in truth. When man combines the true acts of worship with the true spirit of worship, then man's worship is not in vain but is fruitful and acceptable to God.

As you consider the worship practices of the various religious bodies today, which do you believe is lacking, spirit or truth? We know one or the other is lacking, because we've shown that they aren't all part of the one body of Christ. Since they are different bodies, they have different heads. The fact they have different heads means that all but one of these bodies (the one being the true body of Christ) have failed to hold onto the Head of the church and have followed false teachers into vain worship. But what makes their worship vain, lack of spirit or lack of truth? As I observe religious people today, to me it is nearly always lack of truth. People who attend worship services do so with a sincere desire to worship God. Their spirit is not in question most of the time. Certainly, there will always be people who go to worship services lacking the proper spirit. There are undoubtedly those who are part of the one body of Christ whose worship is vain due to a lack of spirit in their worship. But for the majority of religious organizations today their worship is vain due to absence of truth in their worship. But how does one correct this problem? One must look to the source of truth in order to determine what worship practices are truthful. We know what that source of truth is: The Bible, which is the inspired word of God. Jesus puts this issue to rest in John 17:17. If we are to discover what demands God has of us to make our worship truthful, we must look only to the word of God for His instructions.

This concludes our study on the basics of true worship. Now we will look to the scriptures and discover the instructions

God has given us to make our worship acceptable to Him.

Music in New Testament Worship

In this portion of our study we'll examine the use of music in our worship to God. Every religious group I know of uses music in their worship, but many different types of music are used. What are the Bible's instructions regarding music in our worship to God? To answer this question we'll study the NT scriptures dealing with music, consider the Greek words used by the NT writers as they recorded the scriptures, and review the history of music in Christian worship.

1. Definitions

- a. *Sumphonia* (Strong's 4858, translated "musick")
- b. *Mousikos* (3451, "musicians")
- c. *Ode* (5603, "song")
- d. *Hoplōn* (3696, "instruments"; also translated "weapon" and "armour")
- e. *Adō* (103, "sing", "singing")
- f. *Humneo* (5214, "had sung", "sang", "will sing")
- g. *Psallo* (5567, "sing", "will sing", "making melody", "sing psalms")
- h. *Kymbalon* (2950, "cymbal")
- i. *Kalkos* (5475, "sounding brass"; also translated "money")
- j. *Paizo* (3815, "play")
- k. *Kithara* (2788, "harp", "harps")
- l. *Kitharizo* (2789, "harped", "harping")
- m. *Kitharodos* (2790, "harpers")
- n. *Aulos* (836, "pipe")
- o. *Auleo* (832, "have piped", "what is piped")
- p. *Auleetes* (834, "pipers", "minstrels")

(Continued on page 31)

(Continued from page 30)

2. Old Testament References to Music (partial list):

- a. Instrument(s) of music: 21 references
- b. Play musical instruments: 4 references

The Bible has much to say about music in our worship to God. In our quest to understand the worship practices of the one body of Christ we must spend a significant period of time considering music. As we look around us we see many different types of music practiced by different religious organizations. These varied types of music can be broken down into two major groups: vocal and mechanical. While all forms of music are in some way mechanical (that is, an instrument generates different wavelengths of sound, producing different tones), when I speak of mechanical forms of music in this study I'll refer to the varied forms of non-vocal music. Instruments producing such forms of music include the piano, organ, guitar, trumpet, etc. Vocal music will refer solely to music produced by the human voice.

With the definitions established let's proceed with a detailed examination of music in the Lord's church. While I'm sure there are many different ways to approach music in the church, I'd like to do so by asking and answering a series of questions. Once we know the answers to these questions we'll understand music as it is authorized for the members of the one body of Christ. Below I've included every NT scripture (KJV) containing the words music (musick in the KJV), musicians, song, instrument (or instruments), making melody, sing, sang, sung, singing, cymbal, sounding brass, harp, harps, harped, harpers, harping, pipe, piped, pipers, minstrels, or play. I've included the verses in the table below. Following each verse is a series of columns. Each column contains the answer to one of the following questions:

- 1. Is vocal or mechanical music practiced in this verse?**
- 2. If vocal music is practiced, what was its purpose?**
- 3. If mechanical music is practiced, what was its purpose?**
- 4. Does this verse refer to music as practiced in heaven or on earth?**
- 5. If this verse refers to music on earth, is it music offered by members of the Lord's body in an assembly of the church?**

The left-hand row lists the verses under consideration, and the top column lists the questions noted above. By following each row across to the right you will find the answer to each question.

Verse	1	2	3	4	5
Matthew 9:23	M		Reflect Mood	E	N
Matthew 11:17	M		Example	E	N
Matthew 26:30	V	Worship		E	N
Mark 14:26	V	Worship		E	N
Luke 7:32	M		Example	E	N
Luke 15:25	Either	Secular		E	N
Acts 16:25	V	Worship		E	N
Romans 6:13	Neither				
Romans 15:9	V	Worship		E	N
1 Corinthians 10:7	Neither				
1 Corinthians 13:1	M		Example	E	N
1 Corinthians 14:7	M		Example	E	N
1 Corinthians 14:15	V	Speaking		E	Y
Ephesians 5:19	V	Speaking, Worship		E	Y
Colossians 3:16	V	Teaching, Admonition		E	Y
Hebrews 2:12	V	Worship		E	Y
James 5:13	V	Reflect Mood		E	Y
Revelation 5:8	M		Worship	H	
Revelation 5:9	V	Worship		H	
Revelation 14:2	M		Worship	H	
Revelation 14:3	V	Worship		H	
Revelation 15:2	M		Worship	H	
Revelation 15:3	V	Worship		H	
Revelation 18:22	M		Secular	E	N

From the table we can now evaluate the use of vocal and mechanical music as authorized by New Testament scripture.

1. Mechanical forms of music are recorded as being used on earth and in heaven. On earth, this form of music served to reflect a mood (sorrow at the death of a ruler's daughter) or as an illustration (a parable spoken by Jesus, showing how those of that generation were like children who didn't dance when a pipe was played; to show how one speaking in tongues without love is like a "sounding brass or tinkling cymbal"; to show how one speaking in tongues with no interpreter is like a pipe or harp playing indistinct notes; to show the sad state of "Babylon" after its destruction in that there would no more be heard the sounds of harps or pipes in this city). There is no record of it being used as part of a worship assembly. In heaven, it is recorded as being used in worship to God (harps).
2. Vocal music as well is recorded as being used on earth or in heaven. On earth it was used in a secular sense or in worship to God. In a secular sense, the elder son heard music coming from his house after the return of his prodigal brother. In worship, it was used in either an assembly of the members of the Lord's church, or outside such an assembly. In Matthew and Mark we read of Jesus and His disciples singing a hymn prior to entering the Mount of Olives shortly before Jesus' crucifixion. In Acts we see Paul and Silas singing praises while imprisoned. In Romans we see the response of the Gentiles to the good news that Jesus was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God (Romans 15:8-12). In each of these three occasions we see vocal music being used to worship God outside an assembly of the Lord's church. In an

assembly of the Lord's church we see vocal music serving several functions: speaking to one another, worship, teaching, admonition, and to reflect the mood of one who is merry. Vocal music used in heaven is recorded as being used to worship God.

3. What conclusion must we reach from a study of the NT scriptures that deal with music used in the worship assemblies of the Lord's church? *Only vocal music is authorized!* But why do so many religious organizations use instrumental music in their services? Authorization for such use could come from one of two sources: commandments of men or the Old Testament. In this study of the church I could redo lessons that many have already published on the Internet. But I feel that would be of limited value and would do little other than to increase the volume of material already available. In my study of the church I chose to spend most of my time establishing authority, and limit the time I spend on topics such as instrumental music. In the end, what I say makes absolutely no difference. However, if what I teach is based on a firm foundation, then one would do well to seriously consider these studies. We've already laid the foundation. We know that today one cannot look to the Old Testament for religious authority. We know that one cannot look to the unfounded teachings of men for religious authority. Opinions abound regarding instrumental music in worship. Having established the New Testament as the sole authority in religious matters today renders a study of music in the worship assemblies of the Lord's church fairly simple. If it's not authorized in the NT, it's not authorized at all. Naturally, in order to justify the use

(Continued on page 34)

(Continued from page 33)

of instrumental music, several have attempted to twist the meaning of *psallo* to force it to include the use of instruments in its meaning. I would like to take a brief look at this word to see if instruments could possibly be included in its definition.

Psallo

The word is used 5 times in the NT:

1. Romans 15:9
2. 1 Corinthians 14:15 (twice)
3. Ephesians 5:19
4. James 5:13.

We see from the table above that the account in Romans does not refer to music used in an assembly of the Lord's church (even if it did, it is translated "sing" and the same rules noted below apply). Therefore we will limit this discussion to the latter 3 verses. In each of the three we see an absolute exclusion of mechanical instruments of music (other than the voice). Why? What did Paul tell the Corinthian brethren to do? To sing with the spirit and with the understanding. But how does this exclude non-vocal music? Please notice who (or what) is to have the spirit and the understanding: the one singing! How does a piano sing with understanding? It cannot! The same statement can be truly made regarding every other non-vocal instrument. The instrument cannot understand anything. It simply responds to the commands given it by the musician. One group may say, "I'll sing while playing an instrument." This doctrine still cannot overcome the difficulties presented in 1 Corinthians 14:15. Every instrument "singing" is required to do so with understanding. Even with the members singing and playing an instrument, the instrument will never be capable of understanding what it is "singing." We see a similar dilemma in

Ephesians. In this verse we see that we are to speak to one another, "in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord;". Again we must consider who is doing the singing: The one with the melody in his heart. But how does an organ develop a melody within its heart? It cannot! Just as the piano is a lifeless instrument with no understanding, the organ is equally lifeless and incapable of making a melody within its heart. Here we again have that coordinating conjunction "and", which we've spent much time considering in other studies. "And" renders "singing" and "making melody in your heart" of equal importance. Someone will say, "Singing may refer to an instrument of music, while making melody in the heart refers to the one playing the instrument." Is this valid? Let's look at all of verse 19 to answer this question. Notice what Paul says, "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord;". Before Paul mentions singing he uses the following words: "speaking", "psalms", "hymns", and "spiritual songs." Let's look at each of these as we evaluate the validity of the position noted above.

1. Speaking: The Greek word is *laleo*. This word refers to the use of the voice to utter articulate sounds, to use words, to talk.
2. Psalms: The Greek word is *psalms*. The word may refer to either the striking or twanging of a musical instrument, or to a pious song. *Psalmos* is derived from *psallo*.
3. Hymns: The Greek word is *humnos*. This word refers to a song in the praise of gods, heroes, or conquerors, or a sacred song.
4. Spiritual: The Greek word is *pneumatikos*. The definition is complex, so please link to the online lexicon for further study.

(Continued on page 35)

(Continued from page 34)

5. Songs: The Greek word is *ode* and is translated "song." *Ode* is derived from the primary word *ado*, which means "To the praise of anyone, to sing."

With these definitions in mind lets return to Ephesians 5:19. Paul begins the verse with the phrase, "speaking to yourselves." The word "speaking" requires the use of the voice to utter articulate sounds (Greek *laleo*). This word excludes instruments of music. His next phrase states, "in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." The word "in" is a preposition, and serves as a "function word to indicate means, medium, or instrumentality." So the voice is to be used as a means to utter articulate sounds in the form of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. The phrase "singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" follows Paul's commandment for us to speak to each other. Can we correctly interpret the word "singing" in Ephesians 5:19 to include musical instruments? No! To do so would require taking the word "singing" completely out of the context of the verse in which it lies. Everything before it requires the voice, as does everything after it (again, a lifeless musical instrument is incapable of making melody in its heart). So to state that "Singing may refer to an instrument of music, while making melody in the heart refers to the one playing the instrument" is an erroneous interpretation of Ephesians 5:19.

With this in mind, what other proof do we have that a musical instrument is not authorized in this verse? Let's say one decides that "singing" in this verse can be done with a guitar. What will be required of the congregation in this scenario? Each and every member must have a guitar and must be playing the instrument! "But why do you say that" some might ask. Because the two phrases are connected by a coordinating conjunction! Singing is just as important as

making melody in the heart. If a group decides that musical instruments will be used in their services, they are required to provide each member with an instrument to play. But who takes this necessary step to properly apply this erroneous interpretation of this verse? No religious group I'm aware of. So we see that those who wish to use this verse to justify instrumental music misapply it two different ways! First, an instrument cannot make a melody within its heart. Second, even if it could, each member of the congregation would be required to play one.

In James we read the third verse in which *psallo* is used to indicate music during a worship service. James says to his readers, "Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray. Is any merry? Let him sing psalms." The phrase "among you" specifies an individual who is part of the brethren to whom James is writing (the "Twelve tribes which are scattered abroad", whom James calls "My brethren" in chapter 1:1-2). Chapter 5:13 could certainly indicate the one who is merry singing by himself, so this verse may be applied to either the worship service or one singing as an individual. In either situation we see again that instruments of music are absolutely excluded. What is required of the one who sings? They must be merry! Again, how can a set of drums be "merry?" Just as with the piano, organ, guitar, trumpet, violin, banjo, or any other non-vocal instrument they are incapable of experiencing emotion. Only the voice has the necessary ties to one's heart to sing in the fashion required by James. If you look at the Greek words for "sing" and "psalms" in this verse, you'll find that they are both the same word, *psallo*! Here James lays to rest the issue of *psallo* referring to one plucking the strings of a mechanical instrument of music. *Psallo* is an act of the one who is merry. Musical instruments experience no emotion and cannot be merry. The strings which are plucked in James 5:13

(Continued on page 36)

(Continued from page 35)

are the strings of the heart, and is manifest as songs sung using the voice of the one who is merry.

Summary: The purpose of this study on music in the Lord's church has been to evaluate the teachings found in the New Testament dealing with this topic. My intention was not to re-write previously published material recording the history of instrumental music in "Christian" worship. Many sources may be easily found on the Internet that provide a concise review of the acceptance of instruments of music in "Christian" worship. As we've seen in our study, the Lord never authorized inclusion of musical instruments in our worship to God. "But what difference does it make!" some will ask. If you are asking this question yourself, please reconsider the account of Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10:1,2; page 5 of this study). As you recall, they made one seemingly insignificant change in their worship to God. As human beings we are prone to ask, "Fire is fire. What difference does it make where the fire came from?" With regards to music in the church some might say, "Music is music. What difference does it make what type of music I use in worship?" Such questions are not ones we can ask. All we must do is accept God's pattern for worship. Such worship we can confidently affirm is in spirit and in truth. As we've seen, Jesus tells us that the time has now come when the true worshiper of God will worship Him in such a fashion (John 4:23). To change the pattern of worship delivered to us is to fail to worship God in truth. Such worship is vain. I hope this study of acceptable music in the Lord's church has been of benefit to you. I'm sure the concept of instrumental music rendering worship vain is foreign to many people. If you find yourself in this group, please carefully reconsider the teachings of the New Testament and determine to worship God as

He has instructed us.

The Lord's Supper

In the "Christian" religious world today we see many different practices regarding the Lord's Supper. Some partake every Sunday, others once a month and still others less often. Some have the members partake of both the communion bread and the fruit of the vine, while others have the members partake of the bread only and the "clergy" partake of the fruit of the vine. Some teach that the emblems used in the Lord's Supper become the actual body and blood of Christ ("transubstantiation"), while others use the emblems as a memorial of the broken body and shed blood of Christ but the emblems themselves remain bread and juice. Again we must ask ourselves why these differences exist. Are the teachings of the Bible so unclear as to result in such confusion, or are we witnessing the doctrines of men corrupting the clear teachings of the scriptures? Let's look to the scriptures and see what they teach regarding this act of worship.

When was the Lord's Supper instituted? The Thursday before Jesus' crucifixion He and the 12 apostles gathered together in the upper room to eat the Passover meal (Matthew 26:17-20, Mark 14:12-17, Luke 22:7-14). The Bible records that they were eating the Passover meal when Jesus revealed to the 12 that one of them would betray Him (Matthew 26:21, Mark 14:18). As they were eating the Passover meal the Bible records that Jesus "took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat: this is my body." (Matthew 26:26, Mark 14:22). Luke records Jesus' instruction for them to do this in remembrance of Him (Luke 22:19). He tells them that "This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many. Verily I say unto

(Continued on page 37)

(Continued from page 36)

you, I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God (Mark 14:24-25). Here we learn that Jesus Himself instituted the Lord's Supper the evening before His crucifixion.

What emblems were used in observance of the Lord's Supper? In Exodus we read the instructions the Lord gave Moses regarding the feast of unleavened bread (Exodus 12:14-20), which began the day after the Passover (Leviticus 23:5-6). The Passover in Exodus 12 was the final plague brought upon the Egyptians. That night the Lord slew the firstborn of all the Egyptians, from Pharaoh the king to their livestock (Exodus 12:29). The Israelite were commanded to kill a lamb and strike its blood on the two side posts and the upper door post of their houses (Exodus 12:3-7). They were to eat the flesh of the lamb that night, leaving nothing left over. Anything uneaten was to be burned. The flesh was to be roasted, not boiled or raw. The people were to have their loins girded, their shoes on their feet, and their staffs in their hands. They were to eat the Passover lamb in haste (Exodus 12:8-11). They were to be ready to leave as soon as Pharaoh freed them. More detail regarding the feast is given in Deuteronomy 16:1-8. Moses was given repeated warnings regarding leaven for this feast. The Lord tells him that, "there shall be no leavened bread seen with thee in all thy coast seven days;" (Deuteronomy 16:4). The first day of the feast they were to remove all leaven from their houses (Exodus 12:15). Therefore, during the Passover meal Jesus and His apostles would have partaken of unleavened bread. We are given no details regarding the drink consumed by the Israelite as they prepared to leave Egypt. However, common sense would indicate the drink was unfermented. These people had to be ready to leave Egypt at a moment's notice. To have them drunk with wine would be inconsistent with the urgency

we read in Exodus 12. As Jesus and His apostles partook of the Passover feast, the beverage they used almost certainly was unfermented grape juice. Old testament references to the fruit of the vine indicate they were grapes (Leviticus 25:5, Deuteronomy 24:21, Job 15:33, Song of Solomon 2:15, Isaiah 5:2-4, Jeremiah 8:13). Jesus tells us that the drink they used for this memorial was "fruit of the vine." Therefore, given the old testament references to the fruit grown on a vine, and the urgency seen in the instructions given to the Israelite on the Passover night, one is on a solid foundation if one claims the "fruit of the vine" spoken of by Jesus was unfermented grape juice.

What is the purpose of the Lord's Supper? Jesus tells us in Luke 22:19, "This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me." Paul, in 1 Corinthians 11:26, tells us "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come." So the Lord's Supper is a memorial of the death of Christ, in which we proclaim His death for our sins through the breaking of unleavened bread and drinking of the fruit of the vine.

Who may partake of the Lord's Supper? In the first Lord's Supper we see Jesus partaking of the bread and of the fruit of the vine with His apostles. As He left the earth to return to His Father He tells the apostles to "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." (Matthew 28:19-20). In Acts 2:40-45 we see those who were baptized continuing steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. So Jesus commands the apostles to teach those who were baptized to observe all things He had commanded them (the apos-

(Continued on page 38)

(Continued from page 37)

les), and in Acts 2:42 we see this command being put into practice. One part of the apostles' doctrine recorded by Luke was the "breaking of bread." We see the breaking of bread referring to the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 10:16 and 11:23-24. In 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 Paul tells us specifically who should partake of the Lord's Supper. In verse 17 we read, "For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread." Recall our study of the body and the church? Paul tells us that "we being many are one bread, and one body:". Who is the body of Christ today? The church! He continues with the phrase, "For we are all partakers of that one bread." What "one bread" does Paul speak of? Notice verse 16: "The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" So the bread that they brake together was the unleavened bread of the Lord's Supper, and those who broke that bread were members of the body of Christ. Being members of the body of Christ is synonymous with being members of the church, since the body is the church. Paul confirms this statement in 1 Corinthians 11:27-30. Here he warns us against partaking of the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner. He states that many of the Christians in Corinth were "sick", "and many sleep" (verse 30). The reason they were either spiritually sick or dead was their lack of consideration of the significance of the Lord's Supper as they participated in this memorial (verse 29). So these were Christians who were participating in the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner. Can a non-Christian ever participate in a worthy manner? Jesus tells us in John 3:18, "He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." The Greek word *pisteuo* is translated "believeth" and "believed" in this verse. Do you recall the meaning of "faith" in the NT?

Here I've pasted a section from Vine's Expository dictionary. Notice the significance behind the word *pisteuo*:

The main elements in "faith" in its relation to the invisible God, as distinct from "faith" in man, are especially brought out in the use of this noun and the corresponding verb, *pisteuo*; they are (1) a firm conviction, producing a full acknowledgment of God's revelation or truth, e.g., 2 Thess. 2:11,12; (2) a personal surrender to Him, John 1:12; (3) a conduct inspired by such surrender, 2 Cor. 5:7.

So *pisteuo* includes a firm conviction, a personal surrender, and conduct inspired by personal surrender. Many people today have a firm conviction, but the personal surrender is lacking. This is not faith. According to Jesus such a one is condemned already, because they have failed to surrender to the commandments of Jesus and therefore cannot manifest conduct consistent with such surrender. We've seen in several examples how those who participated in the Lord's Supper were members of the church, the body of Christ. If one has failed to follow the requirements for entry into His church, has one believed in Him? No! Such a one is condemned already because of their lack of obedience to the commands of the Lord. The Greek word translated "damnation" in 1 Corinthians 11:29 is *krima*, a word derived from *krino*. Where do we see *krino* used elsewhere in the NT? John 3:18, where *krino* is translated "condemned"! So a derivative of the word "condemned" used by Jesus to refer to those who haven't believed (*pisteuo*) in Him is used to refer to those who fail to discern the significance of the Lord's Supper as they

(Continued on page 39)

(Continued from page 38)

participate in this memorial. But how can one who is already condemned ever participate in the Lord's Supper in a worthy manner? They cannot! Therefore one who has failed to obey the commandments of the Lord with regards to entry into His church has failed to manifest the personal surrender and conduct required of those who believe on Him and is condemned already. Such a one cannot participate in the Lord's Supper in a worthy manner. One must be a member of the body of Christ before one may cease partaking of the Lord's Supper unworthily.

Are all Christians to partake of both the bread and the fruit of the vine? In Matthew 26:26-27 Jesus commands the apostles regarding the bread and the fruit of the vine used during the Lord's Supper. Notice what Matthew records, "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it;". The apostles were commanded to partake of the broken bread and the fruit of the vine. Does this apply to us? Most certainly. Again recall Jesus' words in Matthew 28:20, "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." Jesus commanded the apostles to partake of both the bread and the fruit of the vine. The apostles were also commanded to teach others to observe all things Jesus had commanded them. Therefore, all Christians are commanded to partake of both the bread and the fruit of the vine during the Lord's Supper.

How often are we commanded to partake of the Lord's Supper? We have one NT reference indicating the frequency the first century church partook of the Lord's supper: Acts 20:7. Here we read, "And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came to-

gether to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight." In this verse we see both a frequency and a purpose. Frequency: the first day of the week. Purpose: to break bread. I don't think many would argue about the frequency. They came together on the first day of the week. Each week has a first day. Therefore we know they met every Sunday. However, many seem to disagree on the purpose. What does it mean to "break bread?"

1. Let's see if the original language answers this question for us. 9 different Greek words are translated "break" in the NT. *Klao* is the Greek word translated "break" in Acts 20:7. A review of the use of the word in Matthew 14:19 and 26:26 shows us that the word is used to refer to either the Lord's supper or the breaking of bread for a meal. Since the word in the original language could mean either a meal for nourishment or the Lord's Supper, we must consider the context of the verse to answer the question.
2. What does the context tell us? In Acts 20:7 the breaking of bread by the Christians at Troas occurred on the first day of the week. Let's see if the frequency mentioned by Luke sheds some light on this act of the Christians at Troas. Did the Christians meet one day every week to have a meal together? Please turn to Acts 2:46. Here we see the disciples "continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart;". Here again we see a frequency and a purpose. Frequency: daily. Purpose: breaking bread from house to house. In this verse we see the disciples coming together daily as a unified group in the temple and from house to house, breaking

(Continued on page 40)

(Continued from page 39)

bread and eating their meat with gladness. The breaking of bread by the disciples in Acts 2:46 is clearly a meal for nourishment. However, in Acts 20:7 we see the Christians at Troas meeting once every week. Therefore, the purpose must be different. Let's look further at the context of 1 Corinthians 11:17-22. Paul tells them that he doesn't praise them for some practice of theirs (11:17). He condemns them for their factions (11:19), and for their eating practices (11:21). We see the Corinthian Christians in disarray. As one eats to his satisfaction, another is hungry, and a third person is drunk. Paul asks them, "What? have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not? what shall I say to you? shall I praise you in this? I praise you not." (11:22) He condemns them for doing something when they come together which they should be doing in their own houses: eating and drinking. We've seen two different frequencies noted in the scriptures regarding the breaking of bread: daily and once a week on Sunday. We've seen in 11:20 how Paul was speaking of their coming together to partake of the Lord's Supper. Did they do so daily, or once every week? Recall Acts 2:46. In this verse we know the "breaking of bread" referred to a gathering to eat meat together. They gathered daily for this purpose. In 1 Corinthians 11:20 we see a different purpose for their gathering. Since the purpose is different, the frequency of gathering for this purpose must also be different. We've seen only two frequencies of gathering for the purpose of breaking bread. Since daily gathering referred to partaking of nutrition, the gathering on Sunday must refer to the Lord's Supper. In addition, Paul separates

the Lord's Supper from taking meat in this passage. He condemns them for using their time together for observing the Lord's Supper as a time for eating a meal. This is something he commanded them to do at home.

So we see that the first century Christians observed the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week. Since every week has a first day, the Lord's Supper is to be observed every Sunday. Many religious organizations fail to follow this example and observe the Lord's Supper much less frequently. This is a deviation from the practice of the Lord's church and is a sign of a religious organization that is not the one body of Christ.

Do the bread and the fruit of the vine become the actual body and blood of Christ? The Catholic Church teaches that, during the "Eucharist" (the name they use for the Lord's supper), the emblems of bread and fruit of the vine become the actual body and blood of Christ. Does the New Testament support this claim? During my study of this topic the Catholic church appeared to use two verses to bolster their claim that "transubstantiation" occurs: John 6:47-66 (specifically, 53-56) and Jesus' statement that "this is My body" and "this is My blood" as he distributed the bread and the fruit of the vine during the Passover meal (Matthew 26:26-28). Let's look at this claim in greater detail.

1. John 6:47-66: I'm sure many of you are very familiar with this passage. Here Jesus teaches us that He is the bread of life that fulfilled the two criteria which identifies the true bread of God (John 6:33): He came down from heaven, and He gives life to the world. Many angels have come down from heaven, but they didn't give life to the world. In John 6:47-66 Jesus expounds on the fact that He is the one who gives life to the world.

(Continued on page 41)

(Continued from page 40)

Jesus' lesson regarding the bread of life was given to refute the false teaching of the people who followed Him to the other side of the Sea of Galilee (6:22-31). He had just finished feeding the 5,000 with five barley loaves and two small fishes (6:9-10). That night His disciples took a ship across the Sea of Galilee, and Jesus followed them walking on the water (6:16-21). The next morning the people couldn't find Jesus and His disciples, so they too sailed across the sea and found Him in Capernaum (6:22-25). They asked Jesus how he crossed the sea, but He didn't even answer their question. He went right to their motive for seeking Him: The day before they ate of the loaves and were filled (25-26). Jesus, as He was so effective in doing, shifted the topic from physical nourishment to spiritual food (27). He tells them, "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed (27). In the next 3 verses we read, "Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered and said unto them, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." They said therefore unto him, "What sign shewest thou then, that we may see, and believe thee? What dost thou work?" (28-30). In verse 31 we learn of their belief regarding the manna their fathers received: It represented the bread spoken of in the scripture that said, "He gave them bread from heaven to eat." Jesus then tells them of the bread of God, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth

life unto the world (32-33). They believed that the manna their fathers received was the bread from heaven recorded in the scriptures. Jesus is showing them the error of this teaching. Verse 34 reveals their response to Jesus' statement, "Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread." However, they didn't expect the response Jesus would give. Verse 35 reads, "And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst." They murmured at this statement (41-42), but Jesus continued His teaching (44-47). Verses 50-58 are used by the Catholic Church to justify their claim that the bread and fruit of the vine become the actual body and blood of Christ. Jesus teaches those at Capernaum that, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me (53-57). Now His disciples started murmuring. Notice verses 60-61, "Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it? When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this offend you?" Verse 62 is key to understanding Jesus' teaching in these several verses. Notice His question asked of His disciples, "What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?" Why is this key? It shows us that Jesus didn't mean a literal consumption of His flesh

(Continued on page 42)

(Continued from page 41)

and blood, as those to whom He was speaking believed. What if they were to see Jesus ascend up where He was before? If they were to literally eat His flesh in order to receive eternal life, they would have no hope! If His body was no longer on the earth, they could no longer eat His flesh or drink His blood. Jesus tells us the meaning of His teaching in verse 63, "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." If the flesh profiteth nothing, how could Jesus be referring to a literal consumption of His flesh and blood in order to receive eternal life? He couldn't! The spirit gives life, and the words He spoke were spirit and life. One must "eat and drink" the words spoken by Jesus in order to have eternal life. He tells us what those who are of His fold will hear in John 10:4-5: They will hear only His voice, and not that of a stranger. To do so is life for His sheep. In John 4:13-14 He tells the Samaritan woman, "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." If one is going to say that one must eat of the literal body and blood of Christ in order to receive eternal life then one must search out the water spoken of by Jesus which will serve as a permanent thirst-quencher and a well springing up into everlasting life! We all know such physical water doesn't exist. We all should also know that it is unnecessary for us to consume the literal body and blood of Christ. It is His words we must consume! Again, in order to be consistent, one who holds to the idea that we must literally consume His flesh must also teach that Jesus consumed the flesh

of His Father! Notice John 6:57, "As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me." If our life is generated by the consumption of His flesh, then His life came from the consumption of His Father's flesh. Ridiculous, you say? Of course it is! But why is it ridiculous? It is simply a logical conclusion one must reach if one requires literal flesh and blood to fulfill this passage. It is ridiculous because the teaching, which led to this conclusion, is ridiculous! Jesus tells us what His meat was in John 4:31-34, "In the mean while his disciples prayed him, saying, Master, eat. But he said unto them, I have meat to eat that ye know not of. Therefore said the disciples one to another, Hath any man brought him ought to eat? Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." Jesus' life on earth was dedicated solely to doing His Father's will. Our lives on earth must be dedicated solely to the same purpose.

2. For us to consume the blood of Christ would directly violate another New Testament teaching. As you recall, Judaizing teachers were going forth from Jerusalem and teaching the Gentiles that they must be circumcised in order to be saved (Acts 15:1). This led to the meeting of the apostles and elders in Jerusalem, which we reviewed earlier in our study. What did they state in their letter to the churches at the conclusion of this meeting? We read in Acts 15:28-29 that, "it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well." What?! They were

(Continued on page 43)

(Continued from page 42)

to keep from blood?! If they were to literally consume the blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper then it would have been impossible for them to keep these instructions, which came from the Holy Spirit Himself! This is a terrible dilemma for those who teach that the fruit of the vine becomes the blood of Christ. To do so would indicate a direct contradiction of the Holy Spirit's teaching. In one place He tells us to drink the blood of Christ, in another to abstain from blood. What must we conclude? The doctrine of transubstantiation is of men, not of the Holy Spirit. Since it is of men, to practice it leads to vain worship (Matthew 15:9).

3. I'll make only a few brief comments regarding Matthew 26:26-28. Notice the tense of the verb Jesus uses in these verses. "Is" is the present singular form of "be." The significant word in that sentence is "present." When Jesus said "This is my body" He couldn't have meant that it was His literal flesh. His flesh was holding the bread, which He stated, was His body. They were obviously two different things. Jesus' use of the present verb "is" must mean that the bread represented His body. His body and the bread cannot be the same thing since "is" shows the relationship between them. The same reasoning applies to the fruit of the vine. The bread and the fruit of the vine remain physical bread and grape juice during the Lord's Supper. They represent the broken body and shed blood of our savior.

Summary: In this study we've considered the Lord's Supper in depth. Such a study allows one to objectively identify the one true church that Jesus said He would build. Jesus instituted the supper on the Passover before His crucifixion. Unleavened bread and grape juice ("fruit of the vine") are used to represent

Jesus' body and blood. The supper serves as a memorial of the death of Christ, and is practiced by members of His church. Only faithful members of His church may partake of the supper in a worthy fashion. Those who partake without considering His death, or those who partake and who are not members of His church eat and drink damnation unto themselves. All members of His church partake of the supper every Sunday, and partake of both the bread and the fruit of the vine. The emblems remain bread and grape juice during the supper.

The role of women in the Lord's church

Perhaps few issues in the recent past have defined and divided various "Christian" religious organizations more than the role women play in the worship services of these organizations. Recently former president Jimmy Carter severed ties with the Baptist organization of which he had been a part for several years, due to their increasingly conservative stance on the role women play in that particular Baptist denomination. It is not at all uncommon to see women serving as evangelists in pulpits and on television programs today. Until recently, this issue was a non-issue. Why has this changed? What does the Bible say regarding the role of women in the worship services of the one church built by Jesus? Let's examine the scriptures and answer this question.

1. **May women serve as elders or deacons?** We've examined these offices in our study of the organization of the church. I'll briefly review the qualifications of elders and deacons as they relate to the gender of the one serving in these offices. In 1 Timothy 3 we read the qualifications for elders and deacons as authorized by the Holy Spirit. Notice how each must be "the husband of one

(Continued on page 44)

(Continued from page 43)

wife" (the elder, verse 2) and "their wives must be grave" (the deacon, verse 11). Here we see gender roles clearly assigned to the elder and the deacon. Since each must be married, and the spouse is identified as the wife, then we see that the ones who hold these offices must be men. Women are not authorized, and are specifically forbidden, to serve as an elder or a deacon. We reviewed the Greek words defined as "elder" in our study on the organization of the church. Recall from our study of the organization of the church how an "elder" may also be called an "overseer" or a "pastor." Therefore, any religious organization that assigns the role of "pastor" to a woman is doing so contrary to the teachings of the New Testament.

- a. But one may ask, "What about Phoebe in Romans 16:1? Wasn't she a deaconess?" Let's consider Phoebe for a few minutes. We know she was a woman. Paul states to the Roman Christians, "I commend unto you Phoebe our sister..." He continues in 16:1 by stating, "which is a servant of the church which is a Cenchrea:" However, is this verse sufficient to claim Phoebe filled the office of deacon for the Cenchrean church, and therefore women today may also serve in this capacity? If so, then the list of qualifications for deacons given by Paul in 1 Timothy is meaningless. If he states in one place that a deacon must be the husband of one wife (1 Timothy 3:11,12), but elsewhere indicates that a woman (who cannot be the husband of one wife) is filling this office then Paul must not have intended to limit the office to men and therefore should not have written 1 Timothy 3:11 and 12.
- b. Lets look at the word translated

"servant" in the KJV and used to describe Phoebe. The Greek word is *diakonos* and is used 31 times in the NT. It is translated "minister", "servant", and "deacon" in the KJV. Of nine translations of the Bible available to me I found this word translated as "servant" in five, "minister" in one, "ministrant" in one, "helps in the church" once, and "deaconess" once (the Revised Standard Version) in Romans 16:1. Did Phoebe rightly occupy the office of deacon, or is the use of "deaconess" by the RSV (and potentially other versions unavailable to my study) confusing the true position held by this faithful sister?

- c. I believe the most efficient way to answer this question is to search for other instances in the NT where *diakonos* was used to refer to one who clearly did not occupy the office of a deacon. If such a scripture could be found, then it is right to claim that the use of "deaconess" to refer to Phoebe in Romans 16:1 is confusing and would best be translated "servant" (rather than to use a word which could easily be misunderstood as indicating a woman occupying the office of deacon).
 - ◆ Romans 13:4. Here Paul uses the word *diakonos* twice, each time to refer to those in government authority and the command for us to obey them.
 - ◆ 2 Corinthians 11:15. The ministers of Satan transforming into the ministers of righteousness, their end being according to their works.
 - ◆ Ephesians 3:7. Paul (an apostle) was made a minister of the gospel.
 - ◆ John 12:26. All who serve Jesus

(Continued on page 45)

(Continued from page 44)

will be where He is, and will be honored by the Father.

In these passages we see the word *diakonos* used to refer to one who occupies a position of civil authority, the servants of Satan, one of the Lord's apostles, and anyone who serves Jesus. Clearly *diakonos* in these verses does not apply to one serving as a deacon in the Lord's church. But one may ask, "Why might an apostle not serve as a deacon?" In Acts 6:1-6 we see the twelve apostles selecting seven men to appoint over the business of "serving tables." These men would perform the day-to-day duties of the church (such as making sure the Grecian widows were not neglected) while the apostles would devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word. "Serve" in verse 2 is the Greek word *diakoneo*, and "ministry" in verse 4 is *diakonia*. Both words are derived from *diakonos*. So we see the apostles serving the word, while the seven men selected by them served the church. Paul indicates his similar position to the twelve apostles in Acts 6 when he states that he was made a minister of the gospel in Ephesians 3:7. It doesn't make sense that an apostle would reassume the day-to-day duties of a deacon after they had transferred those duties to men capable of performing them.

- d. Since we now know that *diakonos* may refer to either one who occupies the office of deacon or one who serves the church in another capacity, how does one determine whether the office of deacon is indicated in a particular verse? Context. The office of deacon has specific qualifications associated with it. If the scriptures

mention a person serving the church and that person cannot meet the qualifications of a deacon, then that person is serving the church in a capacity other than deacon. We've already reviewed the qualifications required of a deacon outlined by Paul in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. Paul clearly limits the office of deacon to one gender: male. Only a man may fulfill the qualification of being the husband of one wife. Therefore Phoebe was serving the church at Cenchrea in a capacity other than deacon. Was her service valuable? Most certainly! Paul states that her service was of great help to many people, including him (Romans 16:2). Women today are expected to serve and to be of great help to many, just as Phoebe was. They may do so just as Phoebe did: by recognizing the role the Lord assigned to them in His church and fulfilling that role to the best of their abilities. Not being able to serve as deacon in no way minimizes the value of women and their service to the body of Christ. However, when a woman usurps the authority given to a man by the Lord she has failed to recognize the role assigned to her by Him and has become a source of potential conflict and division within His body. By doing so she demonstrates her selfish ambition and lack of love for the Lord. Such a one fails to meet other qualifications for the deacon. Paul states in 1 Timothy 3:8 that the deacon must be "grave." The Greek word is *semnos* and means "to be venerated for character." Venerated means "to regard with reverential respect or with admiring deference" (Merriam-Webster). So a deacon must be admired for his character before he is qualified to

(Continued on page 46)

(Continued from page 45)

serve in this office. How do we look at people whose motives are purely selfish and self-serving? They are not admired for their character! So we see how a woman, even if Paul hadn't limited the office of deacon to a man, could not serve as a deacon if she insisted on filling an office she is not qualified to fill. A man who demonstrates such character is also not qualified to serve as deacon. Such motives are self-serving and not worthy of admiration.

2. **May women serve as evangelists?** The Greek word translated "evangelist" is *euaggelistes*, and is derived from the word *euaggelizo*. Links are provided to allow you to review the definition of each. *Euaggelizo* is translated "preach" 23 times in the KJV of the NT. We see from the usage of these words that an evangelist is one who preaches or declares glad tidings to another. Necessary to one who preaches is the act of teaching. What does the Holy Spirit tell us regarding the role women serve as teachers in the worship services of the Lord's church? In 1 Timothy 2:11-14 Paul instructs Timothy on the role of women in the services of the church. He tells Timothy that women are to "learn in silence with all subjection" (verse 11). Verse 12 states, "But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence." The word "suffer" (Greek *epitrepo*) simply means "permit", or "give liberty." Paul tells Timothy that he does not permit a woman to teach. Does this mean a woman is not permitted to teach at all? No! Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obe-

dience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church." Paul instructs women to be silent in the church. We read in Titus 2:3-5 that the aged women are to be "teachers of good things; that they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed." In the church a woman is warned against usurping authority from a man (1 Timothy 2:12). *Authenteo* is translated "usurp" in this verse, and carries the idea of forcibly taking control over one who has been rightly given authority. Vine's includes the idea of "to domineer over" in the definition of "usurp." Many women are excellent teachers, and their talents are sorely needed in the church. However, in the church they are limited to teaching the young women and children. They are not permitted to teach a man. Since they are not permitted to teach a man, in virtually every congregation of any religious denomination a woman cannot serve as an evangelist (which may also be known as a minister or preacher). If men are members of the congregation, the women are not permitted to teach. Why did Paul place a restriction such as this on women? On his own he didn't. He taught what the Holy Spirit through inspiration instructed him to teach. Therefore, one who refuses to submit to this commandment is disobeying God, not Paul. Gamaliel, in Acts 5:38-39 advised the members of the council as they were considering what to do to Peter and the other apostles. The apostles had continued to preach Jesus, despite being ordered by the leaders of the Jews not to do so. Gamaliel tells those of the

(Continued on page 47)

(Continued from page 46)

council, "Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God." Once who refuses to obey the commandments God gives is fighting against God and will not prevail. A woman who insists on disobeying the commandments of the Holy Spirit and teaches anyone in the congregation is fighting against God. Paul gives a reason for the Holy Spirit's instructions regarding women and the warning to not permit a woman to usurp authority over a man. He writes, "For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression." (1 Timothy 2:13-14). It is not our place to ask why the Holy Spirit noted Eve's transgression as a reason for commanding women to be silent in the churches. Our responsibility is to obey.

3. **What service is a woman to perform in the Lord's church?** I've spent most of my time in this study addressing false teachings regarding a woman's role in the Lord's church. I'd like to address the roles a woman may fulfill in the church. As we've seen above, a woman is not permitted to teach a man or to serve as an elder or a deacon. She is also commanded to not usurp the authority God has given the man.
- a. Let's return to Romans 16:2. Here Paul states that Phoebe had been a succourer of many. The Greek word translated "succourer" is *prostatis*, and refers to one who is "caring for the affairs of others and aiding them with her resources." We have examples of women using their resources for the cause of Christ recorded in the New Testament.

- b. In Acts 16 we read of Lydia. Luke records her conversion in verse 14. In verse 15 we see her using her resources for the good of Paul and his companions. After her baptism she opened her house to them and they stayed with her for a period of time. She again opens her house to the brethren in verse 40. When Paul and Silas were released from prison they entered the house of Lydia and comforted the brethren.
- c. In Acts 9:36-41 we read of Dorcas (also known as Tabitha). She was a disciple who was "full of good works and almsdeeds" (verse 36). Dorcas died and was greatly mourned by those who knew her (39). When they heard that Peter was in Joppa (which was near to Lydda) they sent two men who asked Peter to come with them without delay (38). Peter did so. When he arrived in Lydda he was shown the garments that Dorcas had made during her lifetime (39). Peter put them out of the upper chamber and prayed, after which he brought Dorcas back to life (40). Here we see another faithful sister who used her resources for the good of those in Lydda.
- d. In 2 Timothy 1:5 we read of Timothy's mother and grandmother. In this verse we read, "When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also." Here we see Lois and Eunice teaching Timothy the way of truth, and Paul acknowledging their contribution to his faith. We know very little about Timothy's father. In Acts 16:1 we read that Timothy's mother was a Jewess and believed, but his father

(Continued on page 48)

(Continued from page 47)

was a Greek. Because of the teaching of his mother and grandmother Timothy developed an unfeigned (Greek *anupokritos*, meaning "undisguised, sincere") faith and was one of Paul's closest companions. Priscilla was a faithful sister who was mentioned by Paul several times in the New Testament. In Acts 18:1-3 we learn that Paul met Priscilla and her husband Aquila in Corinth. They were Jews who were ordered by Claudius to leave Rome. Paul resided with them in Corinth and practiced his trade that he shared with Aquila and Priscilla: They were tentmakers. After some time Paul left Corinth and was accompanied by Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:18). They came to Ephesus where Paul left Aquila and Priscilla (18:19). While in Ephesus they met Apollos, a Jew who was "an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures", "instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John" (18:24-26). Aquila and Priscilla heard him and realized the limitations of his understanding of the word. They "took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly" (18:26). As a result, Apollos became one who "mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ" (18:28). Because of the efforts of this husband and wife team a valuable teacher was gained for the cause of Christ. In Romans 16 Paul continues his closing remarks by asking the Roman Christians to "Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus: Who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto

whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. (verses 3,4). Here we learn that these two had placed their own lives in danger for Paul, and not only was he grateful but also were all of the churches of the Gentiles! In Rome they continued to serve the Lord by having a group of Christians meet in their house (16:5). This wasn't the only congregation of Christians these two had supported. While in Ephesus Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians. He tells them in 16:19 that "Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house." So, while in Ephesus this husband and wife team hosted another congregation of the Lord's body. While Paul was in Rome awaiting execution he wrote his final letter, 2 Timothy. One of the final requests he makes during his lifetime was that Timothy would "Salute Priscilla and Aquila" for him (4:19). Throughout the writings of Luke and Paul we read of the impact this faithful husband and wife team had as they traveled throughout Asia. Aquila is never mentioned alone. Each time he is mentioned his wife Priscilla is noted as well. This fact shows the impact a woman can have for good in the Lord's church. She doesn't need to hold some office to be of unquestioned value to the Lord! By simply serving Him in the manner He has authorized she is capable of untold good in her service to the Lord.

Summary: In this brief study we've reviewed the New Testament teachings regarding the role of women in the church. Women play an important role, but it is equally important that they understand this role and

(Continued on page 49)

(Continued from page 48)

serve the Lord according to His will. A woman minister or preacher cannot do as Paul did and claim, "For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." (Acts 20:27) while she is standing in the pulpit teaching men in direct violation of the word of God. One must evaluate the role women play in an individual congregation to determine whether that congregation is obedient to the commandments of the Lord. If they are, and they also follow the other teachings we've reviewed in this study, one may confidently worship God as a member of that congregation knowing their worship is pleasing to their heavenly Father. However, if a congregation is willing to let women exercise authority over men, in direct violation of the teachings of the New Testament, then it is likely they are also willing to let error rule in other aspects of the worship. Such a group of people is not part of the one body of Christ and therefore is not part of the one church He built. Women have many talents that may be used for the good of the church of Christ, as we've seen in only a few examples of women at work for the Lord, serving in ways He authorized.

Conclusion

Is one church as good as another? The Bible answers our question with a resounding NO! Jesus built one church. That one church is His body. He is the head over one church. Each congregation is made up of individual members, but they all have the same mind. Different denominations have different minds, therefore they cannot be part of the same church. One cannot "join" the one church built by Jesus. Only Jesus has the authority to add new members to His body. These new members are added only after being saved! Before one is saved, one must obey the commandments necessary for salvation recorded in the New Testament.

Salvation occurs only after baptism, therefore one cannot become a member of the one church built by Christ without submitting to water baptism for the remission of sins. Recall how Jesus added to the church, "such as were being saved." Not only is salvation necessary to enter the church, salvation is not found anywhere other than the one church established by Jesus. Any church which invites you to "join" its membership, teaches salvation prior to baptism (or any doctrine other than that found in the Bible), allows instruments of music to be played during the worship, partakes of the Lord's supper less often than every Sunday, prohibits certain members from partaking of both the bread and the fruit of the vine, or allows women to teach, preach, serve as "pastors", elders, or deacons, or in any other way exert authority over a man is not the one body of Christ. Anyone who is a member of such an organization is not saved!

In the introduction to this study I asked the questions, "Is God pleased with the results of our liberty? Did God intend for the "Christian" religious world to be so diversified and confused?" We see clearly that God is NOT pleased with our abuse of the liberty we've been granted in America! We should be using our liberty to worship Him freely in the way He wishes to be worshiped. Instead, we use our freedom to devise our own ways to worship God. Freedom of religion should mean nothing more than our ability to meet every Sunday and follow exactly the pattern authorized by God without fear of retaliation.

I am writing this article as a warning. It not God's will that anyone should perish. He wants everyone to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). However, untold millions will refuse to repent. These people are lost! God has given us all we need to know His will and to be pleasing in our service to Him. If one is lost, it's his own fault. On the Day of Judgment we will all be judged by the word spo-

(Continued on page 50)

(Continued from page 49)

ken by Jesus (John 12:48). In our earlier studies we have established the fact that the word spoken by Jesus is the Bible. Therefore, the scriptures will judge us in the last day. Are you obedient to that by which you will be judged? I pray that you are. If you aren't, I pray that you will determine TODAY to do what is necessary to receive forgiveness of your sins and the hope of eternal salvation.

Within this written text you may have come across references to my website. The domain is www.noeo.net. Please visit and continue your study of God's word on the internet.