

CHURCH LIFE AS TAUGHT IN SCRIPTURE

ORGANIC

RELATIONAL

SPONTANEOUS

CONSENSUAL

PARTICIPATORY

HOLY SPIRIT LED

JESUS CENTRED

HOME

FAMILY

EVERYWHERE

By *Anonymous*
(*so that God alone may receive all the glory!*)

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simple by **Design**

Church practice is taught in the New Testament, and is still applicable today

meeting together in the homes of believers

meeting every *Lord's Day to joyfully eat the Lord's Supper (an evening meal which includes the 'one bread/loaf and the cup')

*(not related to the idea of a religious 'rest day')

participatory meetings for the mutual building up of the body

children are present (meaning that things are not perfectly quiet – small children may e.g. colour in or play near their parents, but it is expected of the parents not to let them get too noisy or wander off in the host's house)

new believers are immediately baptised as a testimony to their new position (they don't need to first complete a course)

elders (= pastors/shepherds = overseers/bishops) are ordinary brothers recognised from within, with no hierarchical authority or title, and do not receive a salary from the church

no tithing!

giving to needy believers and to itinerant apostles (known today as missionaries, though not everyone called a missionary today would fall into this category), evangelists and pastor-teachers

men and women are equal, but their roles and responsibilities differ (in marriage, but also in the church – women can e.g. pray or prophesy during a church meeting, but don't teach, though they do teach their children at home, as well as younger women outside of church meetings; the idea of women being silent during a church meeting is to promote family unity and divine order, where husbands are encouraged to take the lead as heads of their families)

collective decision-making by all the brothers

led by the Holy Spirit, to the glory of the Head – **Jesus Christ**

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INTRODUCTION

You and a few friends have just put your trust in the Word of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, for salvation. You have accepted His sacrifice as the redemption for your sins through faith. Happy about the peace and assurance of eternal life you now have, you start wondering what to do next. You have the Scriptures, and wonder if God left us with specific instructions on the church life you so desire to have, or will anything do?

This is an important question for all of us as Christians today. After the establishment of the church following the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem on 29 'May' 30 AD, we see that things took quite a long time to develop initially, as everything was completely new. Of the thousands of foreign Jews who had also been in the city for the Passover Feast, 3000 had now come to believe. Rapid growth in the church in Jerusalem continued for several years, but when persecution hit the church in 38 AD, the church in Jerusalem basically got transplanted into Judea by those who fled and settled there. Many churches were formed during the next four years in Judea. Of those fleeing a small band reached Antioch, where many Gentiles came to believe. In the meantime, some who were scattered started returning to Jerusalem from about 41 AD, as persecution was now less intense, meeting together in secret. Upon hearing about what had happened in Antioch, the church in Jerusalem sent Barnabas there in 43 AD. After arriving in Antioch and encouraging the believers, Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, earlier known for persecuting the church, but by then a believer for about six years, and brought him back with him to Antioch. In 47 AD, while worshipping and fasting, the Holy Spirit sent out Barnabas and Saul (who was also called Paul) for the work they had been called to amongst the Gentiles. Here we are surprised when looking at how Paul established new churches.

Firstly, in Galatia four churches come into being, with the first in Antioch of Pisidia being established in four months, but then left unvisited for two years. Next, Iconium, then Lystra, and then Derbe, where in each city a church is established in four months. The two *apostles go back to Antioch, visiting the first three churches on the way, and together with the churches, recognise the elders whom the Holy Spirit has by now raised up in each. They do not return for two more years. When Paul returns he takes Silas with him. They stay for about a week or two in each of the four churches, and leave with a gifted young man from the church in Lystra, also well spoken of in Iconium, called Timothy. The three go to Macedonia where they establish another three churches, of which the first is in Philippi, where they stay for three weeks. They continue to Thessalonica and then to Berea, where in both cases they stay for about four or five months, moving on to end up in Greece and establish the church in Corinth. Here Paul stays for 18 months. Paul now goes back to Antioch, passing through Ephesus. On his third journey Paul first goes from place to place through Galatia and Phrygia to strengthen the disciples there. He then goes to Ephesus where he stays for three years, establishing another church.

*[For more on what an 'apostle' is, see the section on 'Gifts\Ministry Gifts\Apostles.']

Were these churches set up in a deliberate manner, or were they just set up according to the culture of the day, or in a way specific to only those churches involved? Were they left with specific, clear instructions on church life, and if so, does this still apply to us as Christians today?

CHURCH PRACTICE TAUGHT

Almost all the New Testament letters are occasional documents, written in response to problems and needs the various churches experienced. Even so, we find that they were also circulated widely amongst the other churches, and carried the same authority as the Old Testament Scriptures themselves. Peter writes:

15 and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, wrote to you, 16 as also in all his letters, speaking in them about these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the unlearned and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures. (2 Peter 3:15-16) (Also see verses 2-3.)

We also read the following in Paul's letter to the Colossians:

16 And whenever this letter is read before you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you also read the *one* from Laodicea. (Colossians 4:16)

This is because Jesus, in speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God, had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen when He appeared to them during the forty days after His resurrection:

1 The former account I made concerning all things, O Theophilus, which Jesus began both to do and teach, 2 until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, 3 to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God. (Acts 1:1-3)

Concerning Paul, we read the following which Ananias, sent by the Lord Jesus Christ, told him:

14 And he said, 'The God of our fathers has chosen you to know His will, and to see the Righteous One, and hear the voice from His mouth. (Acts 22:14) (Also see Acts 26:16; 1 Corinthians 9:1; 11:23a; 15:3a, 8; 2 Corinthians 12:7; Galatians 1:11-12; Ephesians 3:3-7)

Jesus also finally sent them the Holy Spirit to teach them all things and to remind them of all things which He had said to them:

25 "These things I have spoken to you while I remain. 26 But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and will remind you of all things which I said to you. (John 14:25-26)
13 However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own *authority*, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will announce to you things to come. 14 He will glorify Me, for He will take from what is Mine and He will announce it to you. 15 All things which the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He takes from what is Mine and will announce it to you. (John 16:13-15)

In 1 Corinthians 4:17 Paul had sent Timothy to Corinth to remind the church there of his ways in Christ in which he wanted them to imitate him. In the context here this had to do

with being faithful and humble. Paul's ways in Christ were what he taught everywhere in every church, and what he wanted all churches to imitate him in:

14 I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I admonish you.

15 For though you might have ten thousand tutors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.

16 Therefore I exhort you, be imitators of me.

17 Because of this I sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church. (1 Corinthians 4:14-17)

Even though 1 Corinthians 4 does not specifically deal with church practice, it is clear that Paul would have wanted them to also imitate him in this regard, and that he did have a specific way he wanted certain things done, as we see when Paul writes to Titus:

5 For this reason I left you behind in Crete, so that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and you should appoint elders in every city as I commanded you: (Titus 1:5)

Similarly, we also read at the end of 1 Corinthians 11, after Paul had written about the Lord's Supper:

34 ...And the rest I will put in order when I come. (1 Corinthians 11:34b)

Paul continues to exhort the Corinthians to imitate him, instructing them to do all things to the glory of God, and to seek the profit of others so they may be saved:

31 Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all things for the glory of God.

32 Be without offence, both toward Jews and toward Greeks, and toward the church of God,

33 just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.

1 Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ. (1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1)

He then carries through the same idea into matters of church practice, first praising them for keeping the handed down traditions:

2 Now I praise you, brothers, because you remember me in all things, and you hold fast the *traditions just as I handed down to you. (1 Corinthians 11:2)

*[Note that some translations wrongly translate the Greek word "paradoseis" (singular 'paradosis') here as 'teachings.' The correct translation, however, is "traditions," having to do with an inherited way of doing things. So though this word does include the idea of 'teachings,' it is much wider than that, especially in the context where others were taught by modelled example, and not only by lectures. The same word in verb form, "hand down" / "deliver," appears both here and in verse 23:

23 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered unto you: that the Lord Jesus, during the night in which He was betrayed, took bread; (1 Corinthians 11:23)

This is perhaps due to the fact that Christians have come to believe that handed down 'traditions' only belong to the old covenant, and even there were condemned (Matthew 15:1-9; Mark 7:13). However, what we do see here is that not all handed down 'traditions' in Scripture are wrong, especially in the case of new covenant 'traditions' which in fact came from God, and not from man.]

Though Paul only deals with the subject of women's head coverings here (1 Corinthians 11:3-16) (which we will look into later in the section on 'Family Women's Head Coverings'), he praises the church for remembering him in all things (v. 2), not just in what he wanted them to remember regarding head coverings. What he wanted them to remember was not only applicable to the church in Corinth, but to all other churches as well:

16 But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God. (1 Corinthians 11:16)

He goes on to mention that which he does not praise them for regarding the way they observed another church practice, the Lord's Supper:

17 Now in giving these instructions I do not praise you, because you are not coming together for the better, but for the worse. (1 Corinthians 11:17)

In 1 Corinthians 14:33b-34 Paul teaches another church practice (which we will look into later in the section on 'Family/Women's Silence'):

33 ...As in all the churches of the saints,

34 let your women be silent in the churches, for it is not permitted for them to speak, but to be in subjection, just as the law also says. (1 Corinthians 14:33b-34)

Again, what Paul taught here was also what he taught in all the other churches. It seems as if the Corinthians were doing something differently to what was taught in all other churches, and so he rebuked them in the following way:

36 Or did the word of God go forth from you? Or did it come to you only? (1 Corinthians 14:36)

He then strengthens his argument even more by pointing out that what he is teaching are not his own ideas, but the commandments of the Lord:

37 If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or is spiritual, let him recognise that the things which I am writing to you are the commandments of the Lord. (1 Corinthians 14:37)

We also see Paul commanding the Thessalonian church to hold to the traditions they were taught, and though 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 refers to end time events, the church is commanded to hold to all the traditions (plural) they were taught:

15 So then, brothers, stand fast and hold to the *traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our letter. (2 Thessalonians 2:15)

*[Again some translations wrongly translate the word "traditions" here as 'teachings,' but as in 1 Corinthians 11:2, the correct word is "traditions."]

Similarly, the church is also commanded to keep to another tradition, namely not to be idle, but to also follow them in this:

6 But we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother living in idleness, and not according to the *tradition which they received from us.

7 For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us... (2 Thessalonians 3:6-7a)

*[This is the same word as indicated in 1 Corinthians 11:2 and 2 Thessalonians 2:15 above, but in the singular form. Some translations wrongly translate it as 'teaching,' but the correct word is "tradition."]

In summary, holding to the traditions of the apostles handed down to the churches was a command to all churches, and is still applicable to churches today.

8 Finally, brothers, as many things as are true, as many as are honourable, as many as are just, as many as are pure, as many as are lovely—if there is any virtue and if there is any praise—meditate on these things.

9 The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, practise these things; and the God of peace shall be with you. (Philippians 4:8-9)

So let us start looking at these church practices (traditions) as taught in Scripture.

FAMILY

'Family' is the key word to understanding church. We read that believers are, amongst other descriptions, called "the *household of God":

19 So then, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, (Ephesians 2:19)

*[The Greek word used here and in the next verse below is "oikeios," of which the sense is one of intimacy, as in the case of being blood related and so belonging to a house or family.]

10 So then, as we have opportunity, let us work what is good toward all, but especially toward those who are of the household of faith. (Galatians 6:10)

We also see that as believers, we are called "children of God" in a spiritual sense:

12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the authority to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name; (John 1:12)

14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

15 For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again unto fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father."

16 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

17 And if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer together, so that we may also be glorified together. (Romans 8:14-17)

1 Now I say, for as much time as the heir is a minor, he does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all,

2 but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father.

3 Even so we, when we were minors, were enslaved by the elements of the world.

4 But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law,

5 so that He might redeem those under the law, so that we might receive the adoption.

6 And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!"

7 Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ. (Galatians 4:1-7)

And so for this reason we call God "Father":

6 But you, whenever you pray, enter into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you openly.

7 But when you pray, do not babble like the heathen, for they think that they will be heard for their many words.

8 Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows what things you have need of before you ask Him.

9 Therefore pray in this manner: Our Father who is in the heavens, hallowed be Your name... (Matthew 6:6-9)

5 And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as sons: "My son, do not despise the discipline of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are reprov'd;

6 For whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and scourges every son whom He receives."

7 It is for discipline *that* you endure; God deals with you as with sons. For what son is there whom a father does not discipline?

8 But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

9 Furthermore, we have had human fathers who disciplined us, and we respected *them*. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?

10 For they indeed disciplined us for a few days, as seemed best to them, but He *disciplines us* for *our* good, so that we may partake of His holiness.

11 Now no discipline seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, later it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those having been trained by it. (Hebrews 12:5-11)

As believers we are furthermore called brothers and sisters:

8 "But you, do not be called 'Rabbi'; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brothers.

9 Do not call *anyone* on the earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in the heavens. (Matthew 23:8-9)

16 By this we have come to know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives on behalf of our brothers. (1 John 3:16)

1 Do not sharply rebuke an older man, but *rather* exhort him as a father, younger men as brothers,

2 older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, with all purity. (1 Timothy 5:1-2)

13 Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine. (Romans 16:13)

15 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food,

16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the necessary things of the body, what *is* the benefit? (James 2:15-16)

1 I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, 2 so that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and you may stand by her in whatever thing she may need from you; for indeed she has proved to be a helper of many and of myself also. (Romans 16:1-2)

15 But if the unbelieving *spouse* separates, let *him or her* separate; the brother or the sister has not been bound in such cases; but God has called us to peace. (1 Corinthians 7:15)

5 Do we not have *the* right to take along a wife *who is* a sister, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas? (1 Corinthians 9:5)

Another image used in Scripture is that of Jesus being the Bridegroom, with us as the church being called His bride:

15 And Jesus said to them, "Can the groomsmen mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast. (Matthew 9:15) (Read verses 14-17 for context.)

29 "He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the voice of the bridegroom. Therefore my joy has been fulfilled. (John 3:29)

2 For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy, for I have betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. (2 Corinthians 11:2)

7 Let us rejoice and be exceedingly glad, and let us give Him glory, for the wedding of the Lamb has come, and His wife has prepared herself."

8 And to her it was granted that she should be dressed in fine linen, bright and pure, for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

9 Then he said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb!' " And he said to me, "These are the true words of God." (Revelation 19:7-9)

9 Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls being full with the seven last plagues and spoke with me, saying, "Come, I will show you the wife, the bride of the Lamb." (Revelation 21:9)

Membership

So we see in Scripture that the universal church of Jesus Christ, His bride in other words, is the worldwide family of God. To become a member of this family, it is not enough to only be born as a human (John 3:5-6; also see John 1:12-13; Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 1:3, 23; 1 John 5:1), but you also need to be reborn spiritually, and so be born into this family through faith in Jesus Christ:

1 Now there was a man of the Pharisees whose name was Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.

2 This man came to Him by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."

3 Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

4 Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born, being old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"

5 Jesus answered, "Most assuredly I say to you, unless one is born of water and of Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

7 Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'

8 "The wind blows where it wills, and you hear its sound, but you do not know from where it comes and where it goes. So is everyone who has been born of the Spirit."

(John 3:1-8)

Where a few of these reborn individuals relate to one another as church in a community, this is then called a local church, and is an independent little family unit of the worldwide extended family of God's people. The idea is therefore to 'be church' rather than to 'do church.'

(Initially there was no real concept of 'church membership' in the church, and especially not one of 'joining an organisation.' Already as early as the end of the first century, becoming a member of a church was based on the acceptance of the church's dogma and discipline. To make sure that all new members had a good grasp of what that meant,

baptism, just like church membership, wasn't a spontaneous expression of faith in Jesus Christ anymore, as it had originally been, but had turned into the culmination of an extended period of formal instruction on the faith. For more see the section on 'The Lord's Supper\Practical Issues\How Do We Do It\Baptism.')

To better understand the idea of God being our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ being the Bridegroom of the church, we need to look at God's principles for each of the individual family units that make up a local church. Understanding the scriptural principles for family life will also help us understand church life better, since church is family.

Marriage

God's principle is clear and simple:

4 Marriage is honourable among all, and the bed undefiled; but *fornicators and **adulterers God will judge. (Hebrews 13:4)

*[The word 'fornication,' from which the word "fornicators" is derived, includes all sinful sexual activities a person may be involved in. (The English word 'pornography' also has its roots in the Greek word for 'fornication,' namely 'porneia.')

For this reason it is also often correctly translated as 'sexual immorality' or 'sexual sin.' It can also symbolically mean to forsake God or follow after idols.]

**[The word 'adultery,' from which the word "adulterers" is derived, refers to a married person not being faithful to his or her spouse. It can also refer to being faithless toward God spiritually, for instance through idolatry, covetousness, or apostasy.]

This verse basically tells us that God only approves of sexual relations between a husband and his wife. Marriage is the safe place God has given us for such a covenant relationship to function in. This also includes an attitude of the heart, as we see Jesus Himself teaching us:

27 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.'

28 But I say to you, that whoever looks at a woman in order to lust after her has already committed adultery *with* her in his heart.

29 If your right eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is better for you that one of your members be lost, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.

30 And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is better for you that one of your members be lost, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. (Matthew 5:27-30)

This simple principle is continued in Jesus' teaching on marriage:

3 The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?"

4 And He answered and said to them, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,'

5 and He said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'?

6 So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate."

7 They said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?"

8 He said to them, "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it has not been this way.

9 And I say to you, that whoever shall put away his wife, except *it be* for fornication, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marrying a divorcee commits adultery." (Matthew 19:3-9)

31 "Furthermore it has been said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a divorce certificate.'

32 "But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife, except for a matter of *fornication, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorcee commits adultery. (Matthew 5:31-32) (Also see Romans 7:2-3)

*[Even if a wife committed fornication (here referring to adultery), she can repent and her husband can accept her, as the church would do too (also see John 8:3-11), and he doesn't have to necessarily divorce her. This would be the ideal situation. If after having been reprimanded she continues committing fornication, she cannot be part of the church anymore (also see the section on 'Family\Church Discipline'), and he would have the scriptural right to divorce her. The same would apply the other way around.]

So Scripture makes it very clear - God hates divorce, and does not prefer it in any way:

13 And this second thing you do. You cover the LORD's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favour from your hand.

14 But you say, "Why does he not?" Because the LORD was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant.

15 Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in it? And what was the One seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth.

16 "For the LORD, the God of Israel, says that he hates divorce, and him who covers his garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless." (Malachi 2:13-16)

But we see that because of the hardness of their hearts, Moses allowed the Israelites to divorce their wives:

1 "When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favour in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house,

2 and if she goes and becomes another man's wife,

3 and the latter man hates her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter man dies, who took her to be his wife,

4 then her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled, for that is an abomination before the LORD. And you shall not bring sin upon the land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance. (Deuteronomy 24:1-4)

God never wanted divorce in the first place, nor did He want for anyone to marry a divorced person, but rather that they become reconciled to one another again. However, even though it was not His perfect will for us, where people do get divorced He still has grace towards them, and if they get married again He acknowledges this marriage too, not wanting them to get divorced, just as much as He never wanted it in the first place.

The question many now ask is what constitutes marriage for believers? The answer is quite clear, namely that whatever will be a legal marriage between a man and a woman in their own country, is also what God sees as necessary for them to adhere to in order to be considered married by God Himself. When a persecuting authority does not allow its Christian citizens to get married, they may, however, have to do so without the government's license (also see the section on 'Church Leadership\Spheres of Authority'):

16 Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here."

17 The woman answered and said, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You have said well, 'I have no husband,'

18 "for you have had five husbands, and *the one* whom you now have is not your husband; in this you have said truly." (John 4:16-18)

In all six cases the Samaritan woman lived with a man in a similar way, except that in the last case, even though she lived with him like all the others, she wasn't married to him. So God acknowledges the marriage contract, even though marriage between believers is more than just a contract. For believers marriage is a covenant ("a covenant of God," Proverbs 2:17), because the marriage was made in God's name, just as with the entering into other covenants in Scripture where the Lord was called on to witness (e.g. Genesis 31:50), which in turn was then called a "covenant of the Lord" (e.g. 1 Samuel 20:8). (Also see the section on 'The Lord's Supper\Background' for more on covenants.)

Paul adds another principle regarding believers married to unbelieving spouses:

10 Now to those who have married I command, yet not I, but the Lord: A wife is not to be separated from her husband—

11 and even if she does separate, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband—and a husband is not to divorce his wife.

12 But to the rest I, not the Lord, say: If any brother has an unbelieving wife, and she consents to live with him, let him not divorce her.

13 And a wife who has an unbelieving husband, if he consents to live with her, let her not divorce him.

14 For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy.

15 But if the unbelieving *spouse* separates, let *him or her* separate; the brother or the sister has not been bound in such cases; but God has called us to peace. (1 Corinthians 7:10-15)

This brings us to a point of great importance for us as believers, namely the scriptural principle that a believer is free to marry whoever he or she wants *if it falls within the blessing of his and her parents, and as long as that person is a believer too:

14 Do not become unequally yoked with unbelievers; for what participation is there for righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion is there for light with darkness?

15 And what agreement is there for Christ with Belial? Or what part is there for a believer with an unbeliever?

16 And what union is there for the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God, just as God has said: "I will dwell in them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be My people."

17 Therefore "Come out from the midst of them and be separated," says the Lord. "Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you."

18 "I will be a Father to you, and you will be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." (2 Corinthians 6:14-18)

*[Of course after the marriage the parents have no authority over the couple anymore, as we see in Genesis 2:24: Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.]

16 Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?

17 If anyone destroys the temple of God, God shall destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which *temple* you are. (1 Corinthians 3:16-17)

12 All things are lawful for me, but all things are not profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything.

13 Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy both this *stomach* and these *foods*. Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.

14 Now God has both raised up the Lord, and will also raise us up through His power.

15 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make *them* members of a harlot? By no means!

16 Do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body *with her*? For "the two," He says, "shall become one flesh."

17 But he that is joined with the Lord is one spirit *with Him*.

18 Flee fornication. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits fornication sins against his own body.

19 Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?

20 For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's. (1 Corinthians 6:12-20)

39 A wife has been bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband also dies, she is free to be married to whom she desires, only in the Lord. (1 Corinthians 7:39)

So where there is a spiritual bond between a husband and a wife, this is only for as long as both of them are alive:

30 For in the resurrection neither do they marry, nor are they given in marriage, but they are like angels of God in heaven. (Matthew 22:30)

In summary, marriage should be between one man and one woman only, and they should never get divorced, but only death should separate them from one another.

- If a married person committed fornication (here referring to adultery) and repented, he or she can be accepted by his or her spouse, as the church would do too, and doesn't have to necessarily get divorced. If after having been reprimanded the person continues committing fornication (adultery), he or she cannot be part of the church anymore, and his or her spouse would have the scriptural right to divorce.

- Should a husband and wife in a church both consent to separating or getting divorced, it is that church's responsibility not to allow them to be part of that church anymore, unless they become reconciled or get married to one another again. They should rather be encouraged to work at their relationship if problems exist.

- A person whose spouse left or divorced him or her is not expected to leave a church if he or she did not consent to the other person leaving.

Should divorced believers, whether now being single or married, having repented, wish to become part of an existing church, of course he or they may be accepted. However, should such couples separate or get divorced while being members of that church, the same principles apply as mentioned above. Similarly, if a person with more than one wife wishes to become part of a church, he and his wives may be allowed. Should any existing married member, however, want to marry another wife, this cannot be allowed (e.g. 1 Corinthians 7:2, 4), and a person continuing to pursue this can no longer remain part of that church. If a wife has a husband who continues to abuse her or the children, she

should report this to the local authorities (also see the sections 'Church Discipline' and 'Spheres of Authority').

Because these principles form the basis for understanding godly relationships and church life, and because they represent God's relationship with us so strongly, a church member who *has been divorced, or who has been married to more than one wife before becoming a believer, cannot become an elder in the church:

2 It is necessary, therefore, for an overseer to be irreproachable, the **husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, well-behaved, hospitable, skilful at teaching; (1 Timothy 3:2)

4 one leading his own house well, having *his* children in submission with all reverence;

5 (for if one does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); (1 Timothy 3:4-5)

*[This would apply to a man who has divorced his wife or has been married to more than one wife at a time, whether before having become a believer, or afterwards. When the instruction was given to the church, it had been in existence for a relatively short period of time, and these instructions would have applied to those who had done this before becoming believers. If a man in the church for example divorced his wife, except for fornication, he would either have had to repent and be reconciled to her again, or would have had to leave the particular local church, meaning that the instruction couldn't have been referring to those who, while having been believers, had either divorced their wives or who had been married to more than one wife at a time.]

**[Or literally a "one-woman man," as seen similarly in 1 Timothy 3:12 and also in Titus 1:6 below]

6 if a man is unimpeachable, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or *who are* insubordinate. (Titus 1:6)

The same principles apply to those serving in any prominent assisting capacity in the church, since they represent what the church stands for:

11 Likewise their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things.

12 Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children well, and their own houses. (1 Timothy 3:11-12)

Having looked at the basic principles of marriage itself, we now need to turn our attention to what Scripture teaches on the roles and responsibilities of husbands and wives in marriage.

- Roles and Responsibilities in Marriage

God is the head of Christ, Christ the head of every man, and the head of a woman is her husband:

3 But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. (1 Corinthians 11:3)

• Head

As Christ is equal with God the Father, but submitted to Him, so a wife is equal to her husband, but submitted to him. So though equal, husbands and wives' roles and responsibilities in marriage are different. The role of the husband in marriage is that of the head. This does not imply that the husband dominates his wife, as is evident from his responsibility which will be seen shortly. As head he is also the provider for the family:

8 But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. (1 Timothy 5:8)

- **Helper**

The role of the wife in marriage is that of the helper of her husband:

18 Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper corresponding to him."

20 The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for the man there was not found a helper corresponding to him. (Genesis 2:18, 20)

The main place where the wife's role of helper is acted out, is the *household. She also has the responsibility of being the "manager" of the household:

14 Therefore I desire the younger widows to marry, to bear children, to **manage the house, to give no opportunity to the adversary because of reproach. (1 Timothy 5:14)

**[We find the masculine form of this Greek word in Matthew 20:1 (and Luke 13:25), speaking about the "housemaster."]

3 Older women likewise are to be reverent in demeanour, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teaching what is good,

4 so that they may urge the young women to be lovers of their husbands, lovers of their children,

5 temperate, pure, keepers at home, good, submitting to their own husbands, lest the word of God be blasphemed. (Titus 2:3-5)

*[In the context in which Scripture was given, as is still the case in many cultures today, work was an extension of the home, where the whole family would often partake in a family business and sons would learn their fathers' trade, and where there wasn't a great divide between family life and work life. The Greek word for household in Acts 10:2; 11:14; 16:15, 31; Titus 1:11 (and even as part of 1 Timothy 5:14 and Titus 2:5 here, and similarly used in Matthew 20:1 and Luke 13:25 in the masculine), namely "oikos," denotes one's entire household establishment, one's entire property. The word 'economy' in English and some other languages can be traced back to the Greek word 'oikonomos,' meaning 'one who manages a household,' which in turn is derived from 'oikos' and 'nemein' (meaning 'to manage') (also see the sections on 'The Lord's Supper\Practical Issues\How Do We Do It\Activities' and 'Money Matters\Summary' for more). It is therefore clear from 1 Timothy 5:14 and Titus 2:5 that the wife helps the husband, and does not have a separate career outside of the 'household,' as seen in the case of the Proverbs 31 woman (Proverbs 31:10-31, and notice v. 23) and in the case of Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18-19) for instance.]

- **Wives Submit Themselves / Husbands Love**

Furthermore, regarding their responsibilities in marriage, wives are to submit themselves to their own husbands in everything, while husbands are commanded to love their wives as Christ loves the church:

22 Wives, subject yourselves to your own husbands, as to the Lord,

23 because the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Saviour of the body.

24 But just as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives be to their own husbands in everything.

25 Husbands, love your own wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,

26 in order that He might sanctify her, cleansing her by the washing of water by the word,

27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and blameless.

28 So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he that loves his own wife loves himself.

29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as also the Lord does the church.

30 For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones.

31 "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."

32 This is a great mystery, but I speak in reference to Christ and to the church.

33 Nevertheless you also individually, let each one love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respect her husband. (Ephesians 5:22-33)

18 Wives, subject yourselves to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

19 Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them. (Colossians 3:18-19)

1 Wives, likewise, subject yourselves to your own husbands, so that even if some are disobedient to the word, *that* by the conduct of their wives, without a word, they shall be gained *for Christ*,

2 when they observe your chaste conduct with fear.

3 Of whom let it not be the outward adorning of braiding of hair, and wearing of gold, or of putting on of *fine* clothes,

4 rather *let it be* the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible *attitude* of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious before God. (1 Peter 3:1-4)

7 Husbands, likewise, live together according to knowledge as with a weaker vessel, with the wife, showing her honour as also a fellow heir of the grace of life, in order that your prayers may not be hindered. (1 Peter 3:7)

Note that the husband is to love his wife, irrespective of whether she submits herself to him or not, just as a wife is to submit herself to her husband, irrespective of whether he loves her or not. Each is responsible only for his or her part, and will be judged for that alone. In the same way, a husband's headship is not dependant on his wife's behaviour, just as a wife being her husband's helper is not dependant on her husband's behaviour.

In the context of all of Scripture a wife's submission of herself to her own husband will reach its limits when what he wants her to do is either immoral (being against the laws of God, e.g. Acts 5:1-10), illegal (being against the just laws of the land), or life threatening. (Also see the section on 'Church Leadership\Spheres of Authority.')

Apart from that, she is to submit herself to him in everything, even if his decision may be heartbreaking for her.

Remember that when a husband makes a decision contrary to his wife's liking, it doesn't necessarily mean that he did not take her opinion into consideration. On the contrary, looking at the description given of love in 1 Corinthians 13 (see the last Scripture quotation in the section on 'Gifts'), a husband who truly loves his wife will consider her input in making decisions, trying to make her happy as far as possible. A husband obedient to God's leading, loving his wife dearly, will not deliberately do anything that may cause her harm.

The interaction between a husband and wife in decision-making works similarly to a tandem bicycle for instance, where both husband and wife have to pedal together, but where only one can steer. So though the wife's equal input is very important and should always be allowed to be given, and though a loving husband should take it into account as

they discuss matters together, the final decision on matters they may both agree or disagree on, lies with the husband. However, if the wife feels that she was left out of the decision, she is still to submit herself to her husband.

In this same way, families also function as family units in the church, rather than as separate individuals. So for example, in a matter to be discussed by the church (see more on how decisions are made by the church in the section on 'Church Leadership\Eldership'), a family with a husband, wife, and five children will as one family unit only have one public voice, and not seven, with the father at the head. If the wife differs in opinion on any matter, she should discuss it with her husband at home.

Submitting oneself is more than just obeying (which is what parents teach their children), though it includes obeying (also see 1 Peter 3:6). It involves an attitude of the heart that precedes the action, which cannot be done when the wife does not respect her husband. For this reason wives are also commanded to respect their husbands:

33 Nevertheless you also individually, let each one love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respect her husband. (Ephesians 5:33)

Lastly, to keep the unity between a husband and a wife healthy, since marriage is the place God has given us for the sexual relationship between them, husbands and wives are not to deny each other:

1 Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman.

2 Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let each *man* have his own wife, and let each *woman* have her own husband.

3 Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband.

4 The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband *does*. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife *does*.

5 Do not deprive one another, except by mutual agreement, *and that* for a season, so that you may devote yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, lest Satan tempt you because of your lack of self-control. (1 Corinthians 7:1-5)

Where God always remains our first priority, when one gets married one's wife or husband becomes one's first ministry. As seen from the following explanation, an important principle can be highlighted by rephrasing the sentence to say that in marriage one's spouse really becomes one's first 'work.' The reason for this is that God wants to holistically reign in and through each person's whole life, where He sees all aspects of it in relation to the person, where no distinction between ministry and work is made, and where as pointed out in the previous section on 'Family\Marriage\Roles and Responsibilities in Marriage\Helper,' work is an extension of one's home and family life, all forming part of one's 'household,' and consequently one's sphere of influence (also see the sections on 'The Lord's Supper\Practical Issues\How Do We Do It\Activities' and 'Money Matters\Summary' for more). When understanding this, the idea of making Jesus Christ the Lord of one's whole life, allowing Him therefore to reign in you and through you, also makes more sense! This is also in preparation for when we will reign with Christ (see Luke 19:11-27; Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 4:1-7; 2 Timothy 2:11-13; Revelation 5:9-10; 11:15-18; 19:6-7; 20:4-6; 22:1-5). Similarly, when children come along, the husband and wife still remain each other's first 'work' as pointed out, with the children now second, before any other work.

• Children

Children are to obey both their parents. The responsibility for all areas of children's development lies solely with the parents in their distinct roles, where both unconditional love and discipline are equally important in training up children.

**6 Train up a child in the way he should go;
even when he is old he will not depart from it. (Proverbs 22:6)**

13 But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, because your prayer has been heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear a son to you, and you shall call his name John.

14 And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth.

15 For he shall be great before the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, while still in his mother's womb.

16 And he will turn many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God.

17 And he himself will go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,' and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." (Luke 1:13-17)

5 And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as sons: "My son, do not despise the discipline of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are reproved;

6 For whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and scourges every son whom He receives." (Hebrews 12:5-6)

1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

2 "Honour your father and mother," which is the first commandment with a promise:

3 "that it may be well with you, and you may live long on the earth." (Ephesians 6:1-3)

4 And fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and admonition of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:4)

20 Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing in the Lord.

21 Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. (Colossians 3:20-21)

Children are also present during church meetings, sitting near their parents, with no separate 'children's church' or 'Sunday School.' (If children were not present in the Ephesian church meetings, they would not have heard Paul's instruction to them in Ephesians 6:1-3 when the letter was read.) Their spiritual growth is the responsibility of the parents, and especially that of the father as spiritual head of the home. They will learn about church life through it being modelled for them and experiencing it. Sons will also learn manhood from their fathers, as daughters will learn womanhood from their mothers. During meetings small children may e.g. colour in or play, but when they get too noisy or wander off in the host's house, it is expected of the parents to deal with them (and here a parent may have to take the child to another room for a while, just as a nursing mother would also not nurse her baby in the presence of everyone else). Also remember that since all families partake equally during church meetings, no one individual is ever singled out to entertain the others' children, even though all members will to a certain degree look out for them - so try to ensure that your children don't distract another brother or sister continually during a meeting. Children's behaviour is a great way to determine who is fit to be an elder!

2 It is necessary, therefore, for an overseer to be irreproachable, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, well-behaved, hospitable, skilful at teaching; (1 Timothy 3:2)

4 one leading his own house well, having *his* children in submission with all reverence;

5 (for if one does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); (1 Timothy 3:4-5)

6 if a man is unimpeachable, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or *who are* insubordinate. (Titus 1:6)

The same principles apply to those serving in any prominent assisting capacity in the church, since they represent what the church stands for:

11 Likewise their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things.

12 Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children well, and their own houses. (1 Timothy 3:11-12)

The most important ingredient in training up children is the presence of their parents, loving each other and functioning in their marriage roles and responsibilities.

If you understand God's divine order, it is also easier to understand the following:

Women's Head Coverings

2 Now I praise you, brothers, because you remember me in all things, and you hold fast the traditions just as I handed down to you.

3 But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.

4 Every man who prays or who prophesies with his head covered, dishonours his head.

5 But every woman who prays or who prophesies with her head uncovered dishonours her own head, for that is one and the same as if her *head* were shaved.

6 For if a woman is not covered, let her also have her hair cut. But if it is a shameful *thing* for a woman to have her hair cut, or to be shaved, let her be covered.

7 For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man.

8 For man did not come from woman, but woman from man.

9 Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.

10 Because of this, the woman ought to have a *symbol of* authority on her head, because of the angels.

11 Nevertheless, neither is the man apart from the woman, nor the woman apart from the man, in the Lord.

12 For as the woman is from the man, even so the man is by the woman; but all things are of God.

13 Judge among yourselves. Is it proper for a woman to pray to God uncovered?

14 Does not nature itself teach you, that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonour to him?

15 But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory for her; because her long hair has been given *to her* in place of a covering.

16 But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God. (1 Corinthians 11:1-16)

When praying or prophesying women should have their heads covered (1 Corinthians 11:5). The reasons for this are based on timeless and universal principles given, namely the chain of headship (God-Christ-man-woman, v. 3), the priority of creation (vs. 8-9), the angels (v. 10), and nature itself (v. 14). Moreover, Paul calls this practice a “tradition” which he has handed down and to which he expects churches to hold (vs. 2, 16).

Paul first takes one tone from verses 3-10, but then from verses 11-16 he takes another tone. Verse 11 is the pivot point of the two tones. The key phrase in verse 11 is “Nevertheless...in the Lord.” Preceding this phrase Paul makes several observations that he balances after verse 11.

To understand the issue, we need to look at verse 16: “But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God.” It seems clear that someone or some contentious group insisted that the church take a specific position on women’s head coverings, namely that women should wear head coverings. Paul is responding to what the Corinthian church wanted to know about this, perhaps having written to him about it (see 1 Corinthians 7:1a: “Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me...”). Paul not only says that “we have no such practice,” but also firstly praises the Corinthians because they did not give in to the pressure of the contentious group but, instead, they “hold fast the traditions just as I handed down to you” (v. 2). He then in verses 3-10 begins to outline the building blocks upon which those in the contentious group have built their teaching that women need to wear garments as head coverings. Paul does not disagree with the building blocks used by those in the contentious group to develop their theology of garments as head coverings. On the contrary, he agrees that a woman does indeed need a head covering when praying or prophesying to show that she is under her husband’s authority. He confirms this by pointing out that woman was created in the image of man (v. 7), that woman is dependent on man and that man was created independent of woman (v. 8) - he believes all of this to be true, but he does not believe it to be the whole truth. Yes, woman was, in a sense, created in the image of man (v. 7) (it was from Adam that Eve was created), but ultimately she, too, was created in the image of God (v. 12). Yes, woman is dependent upon man for her initial existence (v. 8), but so is man dependent upon woman for his further existence (vs. 11-12). So, while Paul does not disagree with the theological foundation of those in the contentious group, he does not think that they have gone far enough in building their theology, having a lopsided view of a woman’s status before God. Paul also does not disagree that, on the basis of male headship, women should have a covering on their heads when praying or prophesying (v. 5), but his disagreement is with the application of this principle, namely the type of covering, in the church. In verses 13-15 Paul asks the Corinthians two questions: “Judge among yourselves. Is it proper for a woman to pray to God uncovered?” and: “Does not nature itself teach you, that ... if a woman has long hair, it is a glory for her...” The two questions are to be answered as a set. By answering the second question first, the answer to the first question should then become obvious. So the answer to the second question, namely that a woman’s hair is her glory (meaning that it keeps her from the shame of being uncovered), makes the answer to the first question obvious: no, it is not proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered. However, Paul has another covering in mind. Where the contentious group insisted that the covering be a garment (such as a woman’s headscarf or a shawl), Paul is arguing that in the case of the church (“Nevertheless...in the Lord,” v. 11), the covering is the woman’s own hair. Paul argues

that long hair is the glory of a woman (v. 15), continuing the point in the very next phrase: “because her long hair has been given *to her* in place of a covering.”

So the principle is still authority, but a practical universal practice is given to demonstrate this in the church, namely that where men have short hair (v.14), women have long hair as a sign of this authority. How long this exactly is isn't the most important issue, and may differ slightly from culture to culture.

Women's Silence

33 ...As in all the churches of the saints,

34 let your women be silent in the churches, for it is not permitted for them to speak, but to be in subjection, just as the law also says. (1 Corinthians 14:33b-34)

How one interprets these verses will be determined by whether or not 1 Corinthians 11:4-5 refers to 'praying and prophesying' as taking place in the context of a church meeting:

4 Every man who prays or who prophesies with his head covered, dishonours his head.

5 But every woman who prays or who prophesies with her head uncovered dishonours her own head, for that is one and the same as if her *head* were shaved. (1 Corinthians 11:4-5)

If this passage does not refer to praying and prophesying taking place in the context of a church meeting, one may interpret 1 Corinthians 14:33a-34 as meaning that women are not to speak at all during a church meeting, or at least that they are not at any point to address the whole church. The church that I am part of, however, understands 1 Corinthians 11:4-5 to be referring to praying and prophesying as taking place in the context of a church meeting. Thus women may pray and prophesy during a church meeting, but only if they are doing it under their husband's authority by having their heads 'covered' with long hair as a sign of this authority (see the previous section on 'Women's Head Coverings'). Extending this principle, we see 1 Corinthians 14:33a-34 as meaning that in order not to exercise authority over the men, the women don't do the following:

Women don't teach during church meetings;

11 Let a woman learn in silence with all submission.

12 And I do not permit a woman to teach, nor to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. (1 Timothy 2:11-12)

However, older women are otherwise commanded to teach younger women:

3 Older women likewise are to be reverent in demeanor, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teaching what is good,

4 so that they may urge the young women to be lovers of their husbands, lovers of their children,

5 temperate, pure, homemakers, good, submitting to their own husbands, lest the word of God be blasphemed. (Titus 2:3-5)

Women don't take part in discussing (testing) prophecy given during church meetings, nor ask anything of a speaker;

We understand 1 Corinthians 14:34 to be given in the context of verse 29 where the others should judge what is said, carrying the same idea of not teaching men in 1 Timothy 2:11-12 over into verse 35:

29 Let two or three prophets speak, and let others discriminate.

- 30 But if *something* is revealed to another who sits by, let the first be silent.**
31 For you can all prophesy *one* by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged.
32 And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.
33 For God is not *the author* of confusion but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints,
34 let your women be silent in the churches, for it is not permitted for them to speak, but to be in subjection, just as the law also says.
35 And if they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church. (1 Corinthians 14:29-35)

Rather, women ask their husbands at home if they want to inquire about something during the meeting:

- 35 And if they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church. (1 Corinthians 14:35)**

The idea of women being silent is to promote family unity and divine order, where husbands are encouraged to take the lead as heads of their families. So even though we interpret women as being allowed to pray and prophesy, we still maintain that they shouldn't speak more than their husbands during a church meeting, and that their contribution, as in the case of the men, should be edifying for the whole church. (Also see the section on 'Participatory Meetings' for more.)

Parents, Widows and Orphans

Since the church is not a registered institutional organisation, taking care of poor family members also takes place in an organic way. Believers have the responsibility to take care of their parents when they are in need or when they cannot take care of themselves anymore (especially sons, since as heads they are the providers for their own respective families). Similarly, believers also have the responsibility to take care of their own widows and orphans. The church can always help financially if necessary, but the responsibility still lies with the believing family members. Where the Christian poor, especially widows and orphans, do not have Christian family to take care of them, this responsibility lies with the church.

- 1 Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem approached Jesus, saying,**
2 "Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands whenever they eat bread."
3 He answered and said to them, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God on account of your tradition?"
4 For God commanded, saying, 'Honour your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, with death let him die.'
5 But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother, "*It is a gift to God, whatever profit you might have received from me*"—
6 then by no means should he honour his father or mother.' Thus you have invalidated the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition. (Matthew 15:1-6)

- 10 For Moses said, 'Honour your father and your mother'; and, 'Whoever speaks evil of father or mother, let him surely die.'**
11 But you say, 'If a man says to *his* father or to *his* mother, "*Whatever you might be profited by me is Corban*"— (that is, a gift),

12 then you no longer allow him to do anything for his father or his mother,
13 *thus* nullifying the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down.
And many similar things you do." (Mark 7:10-13)

3 Honour widows who are really widows.

4 But if a certain widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety to their own household and to make repayment to their parents; for this is acceptable before God.

8 But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his *own* house, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

16 If any believing man or believing woman has widows, let *that one* relieve them, and do not let the church be burdened, that it may relieve those who are really widows. (1 Timothy 5:3-4, 8, 16)

14 Therefore I desire that the younger widows to marry, to bear children, to manage the house, to give no opportunity to the adversary because of reproach. (1 Timothy 5:14)

27 Pure and undefiled religion before God and *the* Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world. (James 1:27)

(See the section on 'Money Matters' for more.)

To the unmarried

While stressing the importance of family life and marriage in all respects, marriage should not be sought after to the extent that it keeps one from fully being in close relationship with God. So as believers waiting for the right person, we should still have a full life in Christ, having Him meet all our needs, and always keeping Him as our first priority.

25 Now concerning virgins, I have no command of the Lord; but I give judgment, as having received mercy by the Lord to be faithful.

26 Therefore I consider this to be good because of the present distress, that *it is* good for a man to be as he is:

27 Have you been bound to a wife? Do not seek to be released. Have you been released from a wife? Do not seek a wife.

28 But even if you should marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin should marry, she has not sinned. But such will have trouble in the flesh, and I would spare you.

29 But this I say, brothers, the time has been shortened; so that from now on even those having wives should be as though they had none,

30 and those weeping as though not weeping, and those rejoicing as though not rejoicing, and those buying as though not possessing,

31 and those using this world as not using it up. For the form of this world is passing away.

32 But I want you to be without anxiety. The unmarried man cares about the things of the Lord—*about* how he may please the Lord.

33 But the *man* having married cares about the things of the world—*about* how he may please his wife.

34 And the wife and the virgin are different. The unmarried woman cares about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But the woman having married cares about the things of the world—*about* how she may please her husband.

35 And this I say for your own profit, not that I may put a snare upon you, but for that which is proper, and that you may serve the Lord without distraction.

36 But if any man thinks he is behaving dishonourably toward his virgin, if she is past her youth, and thus it must be, let him do what he desires. He does not sin; let them marry.

37 But *he* who stands in his heart, not having necessity, but has power over his own desire, and has decided this in his heart that he will keep his virgin, does well.

38 So then he who gives *her* in marriage does well, but he who does not give her in marriage does better.

39 A wife has been bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband also dies, she is free to be married to whom she desires, only in the Lord.

40 But she is happier if she remains as she is, in my opinion—and I think I also have the Spirit of God. (1 Corinthians 7:25-40)

7 For I wish that all men would be as I myself. But each one has his own gift from God, one in this way and another in that.

8 But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they should remain as I also *remain*;

9 but if they are not exercising self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn *with passion*. (1 Corinthians 7:7-9)

We need to keep our minds and bodies clean, whether married or unmarried. It may also help to understand that due to their physiology, it is not considered to be a sin for men to have a natural emission of semen while unmarried. Under the old covenant law, a man who had an emission of semen was ceremonially treated just as a husband who had an emission of semen when lying with his wife:

16 "If a man has an emission of semen, he shall bathe his whole body in water and be unclean until the evening.

17 And every garment and every skin on which the semen comes shall be washed with water and be unclean until the evening.

18 If a man lies with a woman and has an emission of semen, both of them shall bathe themselves in water and be unclean until the evening. (Leviticus 15:16-18)

Finally, however much we are commanded to love our family members, this love is to be considered as 'hatred' in comparison with the love we have for Christ:

26 "If anyone comes to Me and does not **hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.*

27 And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. (Luke 14:26-27)

*[Jesus does not command us to hate others here (Matthew 5:43-48; 22:36-40; 1 John 2:9-11; 1 John 3:15: 4:20-21). Note that these words are given in the same sense that a disciple of Christ is to hate "his own life also." The meaning here is that these must all be given up and turned away from if we have to choose between them and Christ.]

Church Discipline

Understanding church to be family, and understanding more about family life in general, we now also have a better understanding of how to deal with various issues related to church life, such as church discipline for instance. Church discipline is the responsibility of the whole church, and Scripture gives us a clear guideline on how this should be done:

15 "And if your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have won your brother.

16 But if he does not hear, take along with you one or two more, so that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.'

17 But if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you as a heathen and a tax collector.

18 Assuredly I say to you, whatever you bind on the earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on the earth shall have been loosed in heaven.

19 Again, assuredly I say to you that if two of you agree on the earth about anything that they may ask, it will be done for them by My Father who is in the heavens.

20 For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst." (Matthew 18:15-20)

9 I wrote to you in my epistle not to associate with fornicators.

10 Yet I certainly did not mean with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to leave this world!

11 But now I have written to you not to associate with anyone named a brother, who is a fornicator, or covetous person, or an idolater, or abusive person, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a person.

12 For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside?

13 But those who are outside God will judge. Therefore "put away the evil person from yourselves." (1 Corinthians 5:9-13)

1 Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to court before the unrighteous, and not before the saints?

2 Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you incompetent to judge *even* the smallest matters?

3 Do you not know that we will judge angels? Let alone ordinary *matters*!

4 If then you have ordinary lawsuits, do you appoint those who are disdained within the church to judge?

5 I say *this* to your shame. So is there not among you a wise *man*, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brother *and another*?

6 But brother goes to court against brother, and that before unbelievers!

7 Actually then, it is already a defeat for you that you have lawsuits against one another. Why not rather accept wrong? Why not rather accept being defrauded?

8 But you wrong and defraud, and these things *to your own* brothers! (1 Corinthians 6:1-8)

Church discipline often relates back to Hebrews 13:4, which we looked at in the beginning of the section on 'Family\Marriage,' where for example unmarried believers live together or where married believers separate, or where a believer continues practising homosexuality (Leviticus 18:22; Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; 1 Timothy 1:8-11; Jude 6-7), or sexual relations outside of marriage. The church in Corinth also had such a case which Paul instructed them to deal with in the following way:

1 It is actually heard that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father's wife!

2 And you have become arrogant, and have not grieved instead, so that he who did this deed would be removed from your midst.

3 For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has done this deed in this way,

4 in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ,

5 hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, in order that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. (1 Corinthians 5:1-5)

Summary

In summary we see therefore that each church is an independently functioning spiritual family unit, and not a registered institution or organisation with a 'name' and bank account. This is the context in which we as believers grow best, just as any person would do as a member of his earthly family.

Community based church

For daily fellowship it is therefore more practical when members of a church are from the same geographical area.

46 So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were sharing food with joy and simplicity of heart, (Acts 2:46)

THE LORD'S SUPPER

What do all families do together? They EAT together! And as members of a local church family, we also eat together - the Lord's Supper!

The Reason the Church Came Together

7 Now on the first *day* of the week, the disciples being assembled to break bread, Paul was discussing with them, being about to leave on the next day, and extended his message until midnight. (Acts 20:7)

The language in Acts 20:7 clearly shows that the reason the church was assembled, was to break bread (to eat the Lord's Supper), as we also see in 1 Corinthians 11:33:

33 Therefore, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. (1 Corinthians 11:33)

The centrality of the Lord's Supper is also evident in the church's meetings in the following verses pertaining to the church in Jerusalem:

42 And they were continuing in the teaching of the apostles, and in fellowship, and in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. (Acts 2:42)

46 So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were sharing food with joy and simplicity of heart, (Acts 2:46)

Paul also reprimanded the church in Corinth for not coming together to eat the Lord's Supper in the manner in which it was intended:

17 Now in giving these instructions I do not praise you, because you are not coming together for the better, but for the worse.

18 For first of all, when you come together in church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it.

20 Therefore when you assemble in the same *place*, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper.

21 For when you eat, each one takes first his own supper, and one goes hungry and another is drunk!

22 What? Have you not houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God, and disgrace those who do not have? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you. (1 Corinthians 11:17-18, 20-22)

So the main reason for the church coming together, is to eat the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper was central to the church meeting every Lord's Day after work (or 'Sunday' evening, as is pointed out clearer in the section on 'The Lord's Supper\How Often') - and indeed, was the very focus of the meeting. The entire meeting very likely took place while they were at table, and the eating likely lasted throughout the entire meeting (e.g. see v. 11 of Acts 20:7-12).

Background

The very first Lord's Supper is also called the Last Supper, because it was the last meal Jesus shared with his disciples before His crucifixion. The occasion for the meal was the Passover (Luke 22:7-16). This meal typically lasted for hours, and we know from the way the Passover was celebrated (Exodus 12:1-27; Deuteronomy 16:1-8) that the table Jesus and His disciples reclined at during this Passover Feast would have been heaped with

food. During the course of the meal, "as they were eating" (Matthew 26:26), Jesus took a loaf of bread and compared it to His body. He had already taken up a cup and had them all drink from it (Luke 22:17), when later, "after supper" (Luke 22:20), Jesus took the cup again and compared it to His blood, which was soon to be poured out for our sins. And so the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper were introduced in the context of a full Passover meal.

The Passover celebrated both the deliverance from Egypt and the anticipated coming Messianic deliverance, and so not long after that Last Supper, Jesus became the ultimate sacrificial Passover Lamb (John 1:29), suffering on the cross to deliver us from our sins. Jesus fervently desired to eat that last Passover with His disciples (Luke 22:15), saying that He would no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God (Luke 22:16), nor would He drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes (Luke 22:18). He also said that He bestowed a kingdom on them so that they may, amongst others, eat and drink at His table in His kingdom (Luke 22:29-30). The idea of heaven as a time of feasting at the Messiah's table wasn't new in any way. We read:

15 Now when one of those who sat at the table with Him heard these things, he said to Him, "Blessed is he who shall eat dinner in the kingdom of God!" (Luke 14:15)

Jesus Himself said:

11 And I say to you that many shall come from east and west, and recline to eat with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of the heavens; (Matthew 8:11)

In the Book of Revelation we also read Jesus saying:

20 Behold, I stand at the door and I am knocking. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, then I will come in to him and I will dine with him, and he with Me. (Revelation 3:20)

And so we read the following in Revelation 19:7-9:

7 Let us rejoice and be exceedingly glad, and let us give Him glory, for the wedding of the Lamb has come, and His wife has prepared herself."

8 And to her it was granted that she should be dressed in fine linen, bright and pure, for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

9 Then he said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb!' " And he said to me, "These are the true words of God." (Revelation 19:7-9)

In addition, the making of a covenant in Middle Eastern culture in Old Testament times was often accompanied by the cutting of the right forearms of those making the covenant, after which they would mingle their blood with one another by putting their forearms against one another. This then was also used when enemies approached by showing them the right arm so they could see how many allies the particular person had made covenants with. To ensure the mark would show clearly, salt was rubbed into the wound (and so we read often of "a covenant of salt," which signifies an everlasting covenant, where salt itself is an emblem of perpetuity, e.g. in 2 Chronicles 13:5, pointing to the Messiah who would spring from David, and Numbers 18:19; 25:13 which pointed to the fact that Christ's priesthood would be forever, and for this reason we see in Leviticus 2:13 that all the food offerings had to be seasoned with salt). This is one of the reasons why Scripture speaks of 'cutting a covenant.' *(In Genesis 17:10-11 for instance, the sign of the covenant between God and Abraham was also a mark in the flesh, namely male circumcision.) The Hebrew word for covenant itself is derived from a root which means 'to cut,' indicating that a covenant is a 'cutting.' This was also in reference to the cutting of

animals into two parts, and those making the covenant passing between them in making the covenant (e.g. see Genesis 15:1-18; Jeremiah 34:18-19). Afterwards those who made the covenant ate a covenant meal together (e.g. Genesis 26:26-30). In Exodus 24:1-11 we see at the cutting of the Sinai covenant, when Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and the seventy elders of Israel when up on Mount Sinai they "beheld God, and ate and drank" (Exodus 24:11). As we saw earlier, a marriage relationship between believers is also a covenant ("a covenant of God," Proverbs 2:17), because the marriage was made in God's name, just as the Lord was called on to witness the entering into a covenant (e.g. Genesis 31:50), which in turn was called a "covenant of the Lord" (e.g. 1 Samuel 20:8). In all covenants an oath, or promise, was made (e.g. Deuteronomy 4:31; Psalm 89:3; Hebrews 6:13-20; Luke 1:68-75), and it was accompanied by a sign (e.g. the Sabbath as a sign of the Sinai covenant that God made with Israel as seen in Exodus 31:12-18, or wedding rings as a sign between a husband and a wife). Understanding this, also gives more significance to the Lord's Supper as a covenant meal of the new covenant. We read:

26 And as they were eating, Jesus took the bread, and giving thanks, He broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is My body."

27 Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you,

28 for this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many, for the forgiveness of sins. (Matthew 26:26-28)

*[The circumcision was the sign of the old covenant, only until the Messiah would fulfil it and institute the new covenant (Romans 2:25-29, 3:30, 4:9-12; 1 Corinthians 7:17-24; Galatians 2:1-9; 3:14; 5:1-6; 6:12-15; Colossians 2:11; 3:11; Titus 1:10; Acts 15:1-29).

The following interesting facts may help us appreciate more how the old was fulfilled and the new came in its place:

- The hill in the land of Moriah (Genesis 22:2), where God in testing Abraham and showing him what He was going to do in the future, ordered him to sacrifice Isaac, his son through whom He made the covenant promise to him (Genesis 17:15-21), and where He provided the ram of redemption in Isaac's stead (Genesis 22:13), is the same place where Jesus Christ, the Eternal Word of God who became flesh (John 1:1, 14), was later crucified as the sacrificial Lamb of God for our sin (John 1:29) (also see Genesis 22:8, 14). This is the same hill where Jeremiah, via an underground tunnel, hid the ark of the covenant in a grotto between the city wall and the siege wall (2 Chronicles 3:1; 2 Kings 25:3-5; Jeremiah 21:4), explaining why they did not find it when Jerusalem was invaded by the Babylonians in 586 BC. (This was 35 years after King Josiah of Judah had reformed the country and had put the ark of the covenant in the temple, again celebrating the Passover, as seen in 2 Chronicles 35:1, 3, 19. Also note that the ark was not amongst the items taken by the Babylonians: 2 Kings 24:13, 25:13-18; Jeremiah 52:17-23.) Here, for the final time, Jesus Christ's sacrificial blood for the complete atonement of our sins, was poured out (see Leviticus 16). At His death we read that the veil of the temple behind which the ark used to be, was torn in two from top to bottom, and the earth was shaken and the rocks were split (Matthew 27:51). Then, as His blood poured down when the soldier pierced Him in His side (John 19:31-37), it flowed down the cross and through a crack, onto the ark of the covenant underneath. (Also see Jeremiah 3:16.)

- This idea of Isaac representing God's promise to believers is continued in Galatians 4:21-31. In verse 25 mention is also made of Mount Sinai in Arabia where the law was given. Mount Sinai is today called 'Jabal Al-Lawz' in Saudi Arabia (also referred to by the locals as 'Jabal Moosa' (Moses' Mountain). Archaeology, satellite images of the area and the depth of that part of the sea, show us that the Red Sea crossing of the Israelites (Exodus 14:1-29) was from Nuweba in Egypt, to the corresponding site in Saudi Arabia. There, on each of the two beaches, Solomon erected inscribed columns in commemoration of the great miracle which God had done in dividing the sea. These have been moved to other sites in relatively recent times by the two respective governments.]

The Primary Focus of the Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper, though symbolising Jesus' body and blood given for our sins, mainly has a future focus. In the early Christian community this can be seen in the messianic 'joy' with which they partook of their meals together (Acts 2:46). The atmosphere during the

Lord's Supper therefore, is that of a wedding banquet, the wedding banquet of the Lamb it foreshadows.

The Form of the Lord's Supper - a Banquet!

The Greek word for 'supper,' namely 'deipnon,' always refers to nothing less than a banquet or feast in the New Testament. Literally it means 'dinner / the main meal toward evening / banquet.' The Lord's Supper was originally, and still is, a full meal. What Paul calls the "Lord's Supper" in 1 Corinthians 11:20-21 is not the bread and the cup, but the full meal around which the one bread and the cup are central (vs. 23-26), and apart from which the Lord's Supper cannot properly be called a 'supper':

20 Therefore when you assemble in the same *place*, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper.

21 For when you eat, each one takes first his own supper, and one goes hungry and another is drunk! (1 Corinthians 11:20-21)

This meal, also known as the 'Agape' or 'love-feast,' is alluded to by both Jude (Jude 12) and Peter (2 Peter 2:13). A phrase often assigned to the Supper was 'breaking bread' (Acts 2:42; 2:46; 20:7, 11; 1 Corinthians 10:16) - probably because of the bread that Jesus broke when He instituted the Supper (Matthew 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:23-24). Another phrase used was 'the Lord's table' (1 Corinthians 10:21). (Some churches today even use the term 'communion,' taken from 1 Corinthians 10:16, but usually only in reference to the bread and the cup of the Lord's Supper, which they eat and drink separated from the meal.)

The deep divisions of the Corinthian believers resulted in their Lord's Supper meetings doing more harm than good (1 Corinthians 11:17-18). They were eating the Supper "unworthily" (vs. 27, 29). The wealthier people among them, perhaps not wanting to eat with the lower social classes, came to the meeting so early and remained there so long that some became drunk. So by the time that the working-class believers arrived, perhaps delayed by employment constraints, all the food had been eaten, and the poor went home hungry (vs. 21-22). Some of the Corinthians failed to recognise the Supper as a sacred, covenant meal (vs. 23-32). These abuses were so serious that what was supposed to be the Lord's Supper had instead become their own supper (vs. 20-21). And so Paul asked: "Have you not houses to eat and drink in?" (v. 22). If simply eating their own supper was the goal, which it was not, eating at home in private would do. Their sinful selfishness went against the very essence of what the Lord's Supper is all about. The nature of this abuse shows us that the Corinthian church regularly partook of the Lord's Supper as a full meal, just as the Last Supper it commemorated was a full meal 20 years earlier.

This they were told to keep on doing, but in the correct way:

33 Therefore, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. (1 Corinthians 11:33)

However, those who were too hungry, undisciplined or selfish to wait for the others, were instructed to "eat at home" (v. 34).

The Lord's Supper has numerous forward looking aspects to it. As a full meal, it looks forward to, anticipates, and prefigures the Messianic Banquet in the coming kingdom, the marriage supper of the Lamb, and is therefore intended to foreshadow it. The scriptural imagery associated with the coming banquet is one of celebration and abundance of food:

6 On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined.

7 And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations.

8 He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken. (Isaiah 25:6-8)

4 Again, he sent out other servants, saying, 'Say to those who are invited, "See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding."' (Matthew 22:4)

9 Then he said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb!' " And he said to me, "These are the true words of God." (Revelation 19:9)

This is also exactly what we find in the apostolic practice of the Lord's Supper, itself having been intended to take the form of a banquet. Just as the sacrificial death of Christ was prefigured by a real death, and as was the eternal rest into which we enter when we come to Christ foreshadowed by a real Sabbath rest (Hebrews 4:1-11), so too is the coming Messianic Banquet foreshadowed by a real banquet - the Lord's Supper. Some time after the apostolic age 'the early church fathers' separated the meal from the bread and wine, and much later moved the 'Lord's Supper' to a special building where Christian prayers and praises that had developed from the synagogue services and other sources, were added to create a grand ceremony. However, this is contrary to what this communal meal which Jesus Himself instituted before His death, and which was shared together as an actual meal in the homes of Christians, was intended to be.

The Functions of the Lord's Supper:

- Reminding Jesus

Eating of the one bread and drinking of the cup as an integral part of the meal reminds Jesus of His promise to return. We also see the idea of reminding God of His covenant promises in other parts of Scripture:

- In the covenant God made with Noah, He promised never to destroy the whole earth by a flood again, signifying it by the rainbow. So though this sign reminds us of God's promise, we read:

12 And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations:

13 I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.

14 When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds,

15 I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh. And the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh.

16 When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." (Genesis 9:12-16)

- Later as a part of His covenant with Abraham, God promised to bring the Israelites out of their coming Egyptian bondage. Accordingly, at the appointed time, we read:

24 And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.

25 God saw the people of Israel--and God knew. (Exodus 2:24-25)

- During the Babylonian captivity, Ezekiel records that God promised Jerusalem the following:

59 For thus says the Lord GOD: I will deal with you as you have done, you who have despised the oath in breaking the covenant,

60 yet I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish for you an everlasting covenant. (Ezekiel 16:59-60)

- The Lord's Supper is the sign of the new covenant. As Jesus took the cup He said: "for this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many, for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:28). Again, this covenant sign is to serve as a reminder of the promises of the covenant. And so literally in the text Jesus says that we are to eat the one bread "to My remembrance" (Luke 22:19), in effect making the Lord's Supper an enacted prayer.

In the same way, we read in 1 Corinthians 11:26:

26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. (1 Corinthians 11:26)

Eating the Lord's Supper proclaims as a constant reminder to the Lord that His death on the cross initiated the new covenant in which our forgiveness was made certain, with the goal of reminding and persuading Him (until, 1 Corinthians 11:26) to fulfil (Luke 22:16) His promise to return. So again we see the Lord's Supper looking forward to and anticipating His return.

Jesus Himself instructed us to pray: "Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as *it is* in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). This is much like the plea of the martyrs in Revelation 6:10 who cried out with a loud voice: "How long, O Lord, holy and true, do You not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" In the same way, early Christians also sounded this petition for the Messiah to come again by using the words "maran atha!" ("Our Lord, come!") with one voice as a prayer in connection with the Lord's Supper, which was similar to the Jewish practice during the Passover to petition God to send the Messiah the first time. This early church practice of sounding a plea for the coming of the Lord in an attempt to speed His coming is quite similar to Peter urging his readers to look for and hasten the coming of the day of God (2 Peter 3:12).

- Creating Unity

Just as the form of the Lord's Supper as a full fellowship meal prefiguring the wedding banquet of the Lamb is important, so equally important is the form of the bread and the wine. Jesus' atoning death for us on the cross is the very basis of the Lord's Supper, where the bread and the wine serve as representations of His body and blood, and so remain a vital part of the Supper (1 Corinthians 11:23-26). We read of the cup of blessing (singular) and of the one bread:

16 The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?

17 Because we, *though* many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake from the one bread. (1 Corinthians 10:16-17)

So not only does the one bread picture our unity in Christ, but it also creates unity! Looking at the church in Corinth again, we see that part of the reason they were not unified is precisely because they failed to eat the Lord's Supper together. Some were guilty of eating the Lord's Supper "unworthily" (1 Corinthians 11:27, 29). The wealthy did not want to eat the Supper with the poor, and so arrived at the place of meeting so early that when the poor got there later, some of the rich had become drunk and all the food had been eaten, resulting in the poor going home hungry. This was completely contrary to the unity the Lord's Supper was supposed to create. What they did was so serious that the Supper they were eating could not be considered to be the Lord's Supper as He intended it, instead having become their "own" supper (1 Corinthians 11:20-21). These divisions in class resulted in divine judgment, causing many among them to be weak and sick, while many had died (1 Corinthians 11:27-32). The inspired solution to this was simple: "Therefore, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another" (v. 33). However, those who were too hungry, undisciplined or selfish to wait for the others, were instructed to "eat at home" (v. 34).

So even when our roles (for example in marriage) may differ, the Lord's Supper compels the Christian community to live out the theology of equality of status of all in Christ.

- Fellowship

In having a meal together, part of the purpose of the Lord's Supper is to have fellowship together. The church had fellowship with one another as they broke bread together:

42 And they were continuing in the teaching of the apostles, and in fellowship, and in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. (Acts 2:42)

The eating was done with "joy and simplicity of heart":

46 So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were sharing food with joy and simplicity of heart, (Acts 2:46)

So we see that the church enjoyed the Lord's Supper as a time of fellowship and joy, just as one would do at a wedding banquet.

- Providing for the Poor

Another purpose of the Lord's Supper was to provide food for those in the church "who do not have":

22 What? Have you not houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God, and disgrace those who do not have? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you. (1 Corinthians 11:22)

Instead of doing this, the wealthy Corinthians despised the church of God and disgraced the poor.

In all likelihood, all brought what food they could, especially the rich, to demonstrate their love for those less fortunate. It is probably this practice that resulted in the adoption of the title 'Agape' ('love-feast').

Who May Eat the Supper?

27 Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord unworthily will be guilty of the body of the Lord and of the blood of the Lord.

28 But let a man examine himself, and in this way let him eat from the bread and drink from the cup.

29 For he that eats and drinks unworthily eats and drinks judgment to himself, not judging correctly the body of the Lord.

30 Because of this many among you are weak and sick, and many have died.

31 For if we judge ourselves correctly, we would not be judged.

32 But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord, in order that we may not be condemned along with the world. (1 Corinthians 11:27-32)

In 1 Corinthians 11:27-32 eating the bread and drinking the cup “unworthily” do not refer to the spiritual state of the eater (which would have meant that the person himself would be unworthy), but to the manner in which he eats the Lord’s Supper. In the case of the Corinthians, the culprits who were sick and dying were not so judged due to their inward state (which certainly did not seem to be very good), but rather for them conspiring to exclude the poor from the Supper, while they themselves ate of it sumptuously, even to the extent of getting drunk. They were judged for the manner in which they ate the Supper.

The New Testament setting of the Lord’s Supper as a full meal and as the focus of the meeting held in the homes of its members, holds significance for just who is allowed at the Supper. The entire meeting very likely took place while they were at table, and the eating likely lasted throughout the entire meeting (e.g. see v. 11 of Acts 20:7-12). We know that *unbelievers did occasionally visit the church:

23 If then the whole church comes together at the same place, and all speak in tongues, and there come in *those that are* unlearned or unbelievers, will they not say that you are mad?

24 But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an unlearned person comes in, he is reproved by all, he is discerned by all.

25 And so the secrets of his heart become clear; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God, reporting that God is truly among you! (1 Corinthians 14:23-25)

*[Although church meetings are not there for unbelievers, unbelievers can be present. Preaching, which scripturally means preaching the gospel, never took place during a church meeting. Though not all are apostles and evangelists as such, all Christians are at all times witnesses and disciples wherever they are, reaching out with the gospel to all people. Also see the earlier section on ‘Family\Marriage\Roles and Responsibilities in Marriage’ and the sections on ‘The Lord’s Supper\Practical Issues\How Do We Do It\Activities’ and ‘Money Matters\Summary’ for more.]

If during a church meeting, an unbeliever walked in, or if an unbelieving spouse decided to accompany a believing spouse to the meeting, and they brought their young children along, it would have been very awkward for the church to eat the meal, had these visitors not been allowed to eat with them. Rather, it is clear that the church allowed it. The Lord’s Supper needed no protection, and no one was denied the Supper in the context of the New Testament church meeting - except in the case of the Corinthians who were precisely being judged for denying the Supper to some. Even Jesus Himself set a precedent for us when, even after expressly identifying Judas Iscariot as “a devil” (John 6:70-71), unclean (John 13:10), not “chosen” (John 13:18), the one who would “betray” Him (John 13:21), and “the son of perdition” (John 17:12), He still dipped the bread in the bowl and gave it to him to eat:

25 Then Judas, the *one* betraying Him, answered and said, "*Surely* not I am *the one*, Rabbi?" He said to him, "You have said *it*."

26 And as they were eating, Jesus took the bread, and giving thanks, He broke *it*, and gave *it* to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is My body."

27 Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave *it* to them, saying, "Drink of it, all *of you*,

28 for this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many, for the forgiveness of sins.

29 But I say to you, that I will by no means drink of this fruit of the vine from now on, until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom." (Matthew 26:25-29)

17 And when it was evening, He came with the twelve.

18 And while they were reclining and eating, Jesus said, "Assuredly, I say to you, one of you eating with Me will betray Me."

19 And they began to be sorrowful, and to say to Him one by one, "Is it I?" And another said, "Is it I?"

20 But answering He said to them, "It is one of the twelve, the one dipping with Me in the bowl.

21 The Son of Man indeed is going away just as it is written of Him, but woe to that man through whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man not to have been born."

22 And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them and said, "Take, eat; this is My body."

23 And taking the cup and giving thanks, He gave it to them, and they all drank from it.

24 And He said to them, "This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many. (Mark 14:17-24)

By the middle of the second century the 'eucharist,' referring only to the bread and the wine, stood as a separate ceremony from the accompanying meal, in order to keep it from becoming profaned by the participation of unbelievers. This led to the love-feasts eventually becoming purely social until they were later completely abandoned, whereby the 'eucharist' in the symbolic form (without 'real food') became the accepted way to eat the 'Lord's Supper.' This wrong idea of the Lord's Supper needing to be 'protected' is based on a faulty reading and misapplication of the 'self examination' passage in 1 Corinthians 11:27-32 which we pointed out in the beginning of this section. This led to the idea in later churches that each person eating the 'Lord's Supper,' as the 'eucharist' had by then become known, had to be engaged in introspective contemplation before and during the 'Supper,' making sure that he ate it worthily, and thereby not bringing judgment on himself. This would involve confession of any residual sin, quiet examination of the heart, and sombre reflection on the event of Christ's death while eating of the bread and drinking of the cup. Much later, in 1215 AD, the idea of the 'transubstantiation' of the 'wafer' (as it had by then come to be used in the 'mass') and wine was declared, whereby it was said that these elements change into the body and blood of Jesus at the incantation of the priest! In 1444 AD the Roman Catholic Church even went as far as to forbid the 'communion cup' to lay people! For most still following this line of thought today, it means having to first make sure the person is a believer, while many will not allow someone from another denomination, or even from the same denomination whom they do not know, to eat it. This is because they feel that the church first has to make sure if anyone eating it is in a correct 'state' before the Lord. In most of these churches the Lord's Supper is not eaten as a full weekly meal anymore.

But as we have seen, the Lord's Supper needs no protection. When we examine ourselves, it is in the context of making sure our attitude towards our brothers and sisters eating the Lord's Supper with us, is that of love and unity. The one eating the Supper unworthily "eats and drinks judgment" only "to himself" (v. 29), and not to anyone else. Therefore a local church eating the Lord's Supper together is innocent, and the Supper is

legitimately the Lord's Supper, even if one among them eats and drinks judgment to himself. The command is for each one to examine himself, and not for the church to withhold the Supper from him. This is because it is the Lord's Supper, and not the church's supper. Indeed, it is a sacred covenant meal, and so every person ought to examine himself before arriving for the meal, to be sure he is not guilty of the same sin that the Corinthians were guilty of, namely failing to recognise the body of the Lord in his fellow believers (1 Corinthians 11:28-29). It is when the Supper fails to enjoy the consensual unity of its participants that it cannot be considered to be the Lord's Supper as He intended it (1 Corinthians 11:17-22). However, when this visible expression of unity is present, the singularity of the one bread and the cup actually causes bodily unity. Once we have each judged ourselves, we can come to the meal without fear of judgment and enjoy the fellowship of the Lord's Supper as the true wedding banquet it is intended to be.

How Often?

We see in Acts 20:7 that the regular gathering of the church in the New Testament is weekly, on the first day of the week, after work (or 'Sunday' evening), explaining the fact that they ate a real 'supper.' (In many languages the first day of the week is called 'Sunday,' from the pagan 'Day of the Sun.' This was initially a normal working day, and only became a public 'rest day' in 321 AD after the Roman emperor Constantine had become a *'Christian' and Christianity was made the official religion of the Roman Empire.) The Greek language in Acts 20:7 is also very clear about the fact that the church did not just come together, which incidentally happened to be on the first day of the week, but rather clearly points out the inextricable link between meeting together as a church and meeting together on the first day. Moreover, the language in Acts 20:7 doesn't refer to the 'Saturday' (from the deity 'Saturn's day' in many languages) evening, which the Jews took as being the beginning of the first day, **this also being the order of days at creation, but refers to the 'Sunday' evening as the Gentiles rendered it (also see John 20:19, 26 below), and which the Jews would have taken to be the beginning of the second day. The very purpose of the regular meeting of the church was to eat the Lord's Supper, indicating that the Supper, too, was eaten on a weekly basis. This is not surprising given that both the 'Lord's Supper' and the 'Lord's Day' have very similar titles, perhaps even by design!

*[The main reason for Constantine's conversion to Christianity was his desire to bring unity to the Roman world and to do it by having just one religion, closely subordinated to the state. He believed that he ruled by the grace of God, and as God's representative on earth, any disobedience to him was defilement. Aside from his affection for God, he was also afraid of Him if he did the wrong thing. However, this affection did not cross over to Jesus, as he took little interest in Him. To him the cross was more a magic symbol confirming his victories than one of suffering. (In 326 AD, when Constantine's mother, Helena, 'discovered' what she thought to be Jesus' grave with His cross inside, she had portions of it as well as nails from it sent to him. But even prior to this, Constantine also introduced other charms for protection, such as the Chi-Rho emblem, formed from the first two letters of the Greek spelling of Christ, namely 'P' 'X.')

He had shallow knowledge of the Scriptures, and spent countless hours in theological study, especially as he grew older. His lack of knowledge put him at the mercy of any theologian who caught his ear.]

**[At creation a day was reckoned (just as by the Jews, see Leviticus 23:32), from sunset to sunset (see Genesis 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31). The division of the day by hours is first mentioned in Daniel 3:6, 15; 4:19; 5:5. This mode of reckoning was borrowed from the Chaldeans. The reckoning of twelve hours was from sunrise to sunset, and accordingly the hours were of variable length (John 11:9).

(Note that the 'Christian' or 'western' calendar followed by most of the world today is the Gregorian calendar, or put in other words, the calendar of 'pope' Gregory XIII, 1502-1585 AD.)]

Regarding the resurrection day, the Lord's Day:

1 But after *the* Sabbath, at the dawning toward *the* first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb.

9 And as they were going to report to His disciples, then behold, Jesus met them, saying, "Rejoice!" So they came and held His feet and worshipped Him. (Matthew 28:1, 9)

9 Now having arisen early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom He had cast out seven demons.

10 She went and reported to those who had been with Him, as they were grieving and weeping. (Mark 16:9-10)

1 And on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they, and certain other women with them, came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared.

13 Now behold, two of them were travelling that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was about seven miles from Jerusalem.

14 And they were conversing with one another about all these things which had happened.

15 So it was, as they were conversing and discussing, that Jesus Himself drew near and started to travel with them. (Luke 24:1, 13-15)

19 Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the *doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, "Peace to you." (John 20:19)

*[Note that grammatically the verse says that the doors were shut for fear of the Jews, and not that the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews. They were assembled, and while being assembled, the doors were locked for fear of the Jews.]

26 And after *eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been closed, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!" (John 20:26)

*[That is, after another week, the same day a week later, which is eight days later when counting both the day in which Christ rose and appeared to Mary Magdalene and later His disciples, and the day in which He now appeared to the disciples with Thomas. The writings of Josephus (who lived from 37-100 AD) show us that the Jews used to express a week by eight days.]

1 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also:

2 On the first day of the week let each one of you put *something* aside, storing up whatever he may prosper, in order that there be no collections when I come. (1 Corinthians 16:1-2)

Paul assumes that his churches are meeting together on the first day. If the practice were one of preference, and if not all churches subscribed to meeting on the first day, Paul's words would make little sense. In that case, it would be more appropriate to give the churches instruction to take this collection on whatever day they chose to meet. As it is, Paul's instruction to the Corinthian church is the same as the one he gave to the other churches in Galatia.

10 I was in *the Spirit* on the Lord's Day, and I heard a loud voice like a trumpet behind me, (Revelation 1:10)

The "Lord's Day" here refers to the day of the Lord's resurrection. Note that the Sabbath day (the seventh day, counted from the 'Friday' [from the deity 'Freya's day' in many languages] evening to the 'Saturday' evening) was never called the Lord's Day, except by

the Roman Catholic Church calling it so - and wrongly saying that it has been changed to Sunday as the new Lord's day:

"The church ... after having changed the day of rest from the Jewish Sabbath, or seventh day of the week, to the first, made the third commandment refer to Sunday as the day to keep holy as the Lord's day." (Catholic Encyclopaedia, Vol. 4, p.153)

The Convert's Catechism of Catholic Doctrine, page 50, by Peter Geleermann, states:

Question:

Which is the Sabbath day?

Answer:

Saturday is the Sabbath day.

Question:

Why do we observe Sunday, instead of Saturday?

Answer:

We observe Sunday instead of Saturday because the Roman Catholic Church in the Council of Laodicea (364 AD), transferred the solemnity from Saturday to Sunday.

However, the correct answer for Christians would be:

We don't!

The first day was called the Lord's Day for a totally different reason. The Greek behind the translation "Lord's Day" is literally "the Day belonging to the Lord." The Greek word translated "belonging to the Lord," namely "kuriakos," occurs only here and in one other place in the New Testament. The other instance is 1 Corinthians 11:20 where Paul refers to the "Lord's Supper" (literally, "the Supper belonging to the Lord"). The significance of this word appearing in only these two instances cannot be missed. The Lord's Supper was, in the first century, the purpose for the church meeting. Likely, the reason that the Supper was called the "kuriakon deipnon" - "the Supper belonging to the Lord" - is precisely because the day for eating the Supper was itself called the "kuriakon hemeran" - "the Day belonging to the Lord."

According to many post-apostolic writings, it was the belief of the early church that Christ's second coming would occur on the same day of the week that He arose from the dead. The eating of the Lord's Supper was a plea for the second coming. Christians met on that day not only to celebrate the resurrection, but also to petition Christ to return on that very day. Meetings were filled with excitement and anticipation.

Christians meeting on the Lord's Day after work to eat the Lord's Supper, had nothing to do with a rest or worship day. Even if Jews in Old Testament, New Testament, and modern times use the seventh day as 'the' day of worship, the essence of the Sabbath day was that of a day of rest, and not that of a 'day of worship.' Nowhere in Scripture is the Sabbath day commanded to be the day of worship. The idea therefore that many have of the Lord's Day as a day of worship or day of rest does not have scriptural foundations, but is wrongly taken from the understanding people have of the Sabbath day.

- So How Should We Treat the Sabbath?

Although God's rest on the seventh day (Genesis 2:2-3; Exodus 20:8-11) did foreshadow a future Sabbath law, there is no record in Scripture, from Adam to Moses, that Sabbath-keeping was practised before the children of Israel left the land of Egypt.

The Word of God is clear on the fact that Sabbath-keeping was a special sign between God and Israel:

3 while Moses went up to God. The LORD called to him out of the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel:

4 You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.

5 Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine;

6 and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel." (Exodus 19:3-6)

16 Therefore the people of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath throughout their generations, as a covenant forever.

17 It is a sign forever between Me and the people of *Israel that in **six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed." (Exodus 31:16-17)

*[Those who teach Sabbath-keeping often quote verses such as Mark 2:27: "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath" out of context to say that the Sabbath was made for man in general and not for the Jews alone. But this is not what Jesus meant here. Let us examine the context: In the passage prior to this verse in the Gospel of Mark (Mark 2:18-22) a dispute is recorded between the Pharisees and Jesus regarding Jesus' disciples not fasting, upon which Jesus told them that those invited to the wedding do not fast (hunger) as long as the bridegroom (Jesus) is present with them, and that patching an old garment (Judaism with its obsolete rituals) with a piece of unshrunk cloth (Christ's teachings supported by the power of the Holy Spirit) will lead to the tearing of the garment and loss of its contents. Now follows the passage in the context of which our verse (Mark 2:27) is mentioned, explaining what Jesus meant by the old and the new not being homogeneous. Jesus' disciples started picking up the heads of grain as He was going through the grain fields, rubbing them in their hands and eating them (v. 23). In the tradition of the Pharisees this involved three forbidden types of work on the Sabbath: harvesting (the disciples picking up heads of grain), grinding (rubbing them in their hands), and passing through the fields (since it was only allowed for a Jew to walk to the synagogue on a Sabbath, or a distance equal to that between his home and the synagogue (a 'Sabbath's Travel')). Jesus then gave them an example from the life of David to show that when in hunger a man may do what is forbidden (the eating of the showbread, which was not lawful to eat except by the priests). Similarly, it would be allowed for a man to do things on a Sabbath that might violate the Sabbath laws in order to preserve his life. For man was not made for the Sabbath (to be a slave to the Sabbath), but the Sabbath was made for man (to serve man with the intention to provide him with rest rather than hardship). To treat the Sabbath in this way is not compatible with the hardened (inflexible) Jewish mindset, but strongly clashes with it (see vs. 21-22). Therefore Jesus wanted these obsolete Jewish traditions to be treated objectively while focusing on the spirit of the law, originally intended for man's welfare and benefit, and not on the letter of the law that makes a god of it and enslaves man. Jesus ended the dialogue in verse 28 by saying: "So then the Son of Man is Lord, even of the Sabbath," as if He intended to say: As it was allowed for David's companions before to do what was usually not allowed because they were the companions of the one who was anointed to be king, so it would be allowed for My companions to do the same because they are the companions of the One who is anointed to be King and High Priest. I am the Lord of the Sabbath and can do with it what I want, and not what you want. (Also see John 5:16-17.)]

**[(Also see Exodus 20:11.) Note that the universe was created in six literal days, showing us historically that the earth was created around 4004 BC. Had these days symbolically referred to long time periods, it would mean that death would have existed before sin (see Romans 5:12). However, if one takes the great worldwide flood of around 2348 BC (Genesis 7:11-12, 17-24; 8:1-14) into account, which most 'scientists' today don't, the literal six day creation of the universe is perfectly scientific. It is also interesting to note that man lived together with dinosaurs (they became extinct after the flood), and that Adam's son Seth most probably knew Noah, since Seth died after Noah was born.]

In Deuteronomy 5, Moses restates the ten commandments to the next generation of Israelites. Here, after commanding them to observe the Sabbath day in verses 12-14, Moses gives the reason the Sabbath was given to the nation of Israel:

15 You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.

Therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.
(Deuteronomy 5:15)

When looking at the Sabbath laws in the context of Jeremiah 34:13-14, one is able to understand the reason behind this better:

13 "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: I myself made a covenant with your fathers when I brought them out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, saying,

14 'At the end of seven years each of you must set free the fellow Hebrew who has been sold to you and has served you six years; you must set him free from your service.' But your fathers did not listen to me or incline their ears to me. (Jeremiah 34:13-14)

But the Sabbath rest also had a very important symbolical function, pointing to the gospel from the very beginning. We read firstly in Genesis 2:1-3:

1 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.

2 And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done.

3 So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation. (Genesis 2:1-3)

This section is referred to again in Exodus 20:11:

11 For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. (Exodus 20:11)

This (Exodus 20:11) was when the ten commandments had been given the first time, after the section below commanding the Israelites to keep the Sabbath day:

8 Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

9 Six days you shall labour, and do all your work,

10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. (Exodus 20:8-10)

Just as the whole temple order in the Old Testament pointed to Christ who would Himself become our ultimate High Priest (Hebrews 8; 10:1-18), this part of the law, regarding the Sabbath, also pointed to Him. The actual rest on the seventh day at creation, again referred to in Hebrews 4:1-11, foreshadowed the eternal rest into which we enter when we come to Christ:

1 Therefore let us fear, lest while the promise remains to enter into His rest, any one of you seems to have fallen short.

2 For indeed we have had the gospel preached to us just as those also; but the word which they heard did not profit those, not having been mixed with faith in those having heard it.

3 For we who have believed enter that rest, as He has said: "So I swore in My wrath, they shall not enter My rest," although His works were finished from the foundation of the world.

4 For He has said somewhere concerning the seventh day thus, "And God rested on the seventh day from all His works;"

5 and again in this place: "They shall not enter My rest."

6 Therefore since it remains *for* some to enter into it, and those formerly having the gospel preached *to them* did not enter on account of disobedience,

7 again He appoints a certain day, saying in David, "Today," after such a time, just as it has been said: "Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts."

8 For if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not have spoken afterward of another day.

9 Therefore there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God.

10 For he who has entered into His rest also rested himself from his works, as God *did* from His own.

11 Therefore let us be diligent to enter into that rest, lest anyone falls in the same example of disobedience. (Hebrews 4:1-11)

God's intention in giving the Sabbath to Israel was not that they would remember creation, but that they would remember their Egyptian slavery and the Lord's deliverance. Just as He delivered them from the Egyptian slavery, through Jesus Christ He would also deliver them, and us, from the bondage of sin.

Note the requirements for Sabbath-keeping: A person who was placed under that Sabbath law could not leave his home on the Sabbath (Exodus 16:29), he could not kindle a fire in his dwelling place (Exodus 35:3), and he could not cause anyone else to work (Exodus 20:10; Deuteronomy 5:14). Anyone breaking the Sabbath law was to be put to death (Exodus 31:14-15; Numbers 15:32-36).

The Sabbath is mentioned in Acts for evangelistic purposes to the Jews only, and the setting is usually in a synagogue (Acts chapters 13-18). Paul wrote: "and to the Jews I became as a Jew, in order that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, in order that I might win those who are under the law" (1 Corinthians 9:20). Paul did not go to the synagogue merely to fellowship with and edify the saints, but to convince them of the gospel. Once he had stated to the Jews: "Your blood *be* on your *own* heads; I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles" (Acts 18:6), the Sabbath is never again mentioned, except in Colossians 2:16-17, which actually instructs us not to observe it. In fact, instead of suggesting adherence to the Sabbath day, the remainder of the New Testament implies the opposite.

There is no obligation for the New Testament believer to keep the Sabbath. The law, including the Sabbath requirement, was abolished on the cross:

13 And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our trespasses,

14 having blotted out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and He has taken it out of the midst, nailing it to the cross. (Colossians 2:13-14)

And so we read further:

16 Therefore do not let anyone judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or of a new moon or of *Sabbaths,

17 which are a shadow of things to come, but the body is of Christ. (Colossians 2:16-17; also see Ezekiel 45:17)

*[The "Sabbaths" in verse 16 were the jubilee Sabbath, which was one year in fifty, the Sabbath of the land, which was one year in seven, and the seventh day Sabbath.]

We also read the following in Romans 14:

1 Receive one that is weak in the faith, not for disputes over opinions.

2 One indeed believes that he may eat all things, but another, being weak, eats *only* vegetables.

3 Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him.

4 Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he shall be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.

5 One indeed judges one day above another; but another judges every day *the same*. Let each be fully assured in his own mind.

6 He that regards the day, regards it to the Lord; and he that does not regard the day, to the Lord he does not regard it. And he that eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he that does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and he gives thanks to God. (Romans 14:1-6) (Also read vs. 7-23.)

In addition, in Galatians 4:9-11 we read:

9 But now, having known God, or rather, having been known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and worthless elements, to which once again you wish to be slaves?

10 You observe days and months and seasons and years.

11 I am afraid for you, lest somehow I have worked hard for you in vain. (Galatians 4:9-11) (Also read vs. 12-31 and the rest of the letter to the Galatians.)

We need to understand context when reading Scripture. One reads the Old Testament in the light of the New Testament as one Book with one message, where most of the Old Testament prophecies, and especially those relating to the coming of the Messiah, have been fulfilled in the New Testament. We need to remember that Jesus Christ Himself lived under the law which He fulfilled perfectly (e.g. see Galatians 4:4-5; Romans 15:8), but that the new covenant only came about when He was crucified, and not before the crucifixion (Hebrews 9: 11-18). Most importantly we need to remember that the whole law, including the commandments, and the prophets, pointed to Jesus Christ Himself, and that in the new covenant we are not under the law anymore, but under Christ:

20 and to the Jews I became as a Jew, in order that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, in order that I might win those who are under the law;

21 to those outside the law, as *one* outside the law (not being outside the law toward God, but subject to *the* law toward Christ), in order that I might win those outside the law; (1 Corinthians 9:20-21)

14 For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace. (Romans 6:14) (Also read Galatians 5:18; Romans 7:1-13; 13:8-10; James 2:10-11.)

16 Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises spoken. He does not say, "And to seeds," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ.

17 And this I say, that the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, does not annul the covenant previously confirmed to Christ by God, so that it should make the promise of no effect.

18 For if the inheritance *comes* by the law, it is no longer of promise; but God has given it to Abraham by promise. (Galatians 3:16-18)

24 Therefore the law has become our custodian, *leading us* to Christ, so that we might be justified by faith.

25 But after faith has come, we are no longer under a custodian. (Galatians 3:24-25)

14 For He Himself is our peace, who has made *both *groups* one, and has destroyed the dividing wall of separation,

15 having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, that He might create in Himself one new man *from* the two, *thus* establishing peace,

16 and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, putting to death the enmity in Himself. (Ephesians 2:14-16)

*[The two groups here refer to the Jews and the Gentiles, meaning all the non-Jews in the context and period in time.]

Regarding the new and better (Hebrews 8:6) covenant, we read:

13 In that He says, "A new *covenant*," He has made the first obsolete. And whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear. (Hebrews 8:13) (Also see Hebrews 7:18-19.)

Concerning the word "commandments," we also read the following:

3 Now by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments.

4 He who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

5 But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him.

6 He who claims to abide in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked. (1 John 2:3-6)

7 Brothers, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which you heard from the beginning.

8 Again, a new commandment I am writing to you, which *thing* is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light already shines.

9 He who says that he is in the light and hates his brother is in darkness until now.

10 He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him.

11 But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes. (1 John 2:7-11)

22 And whatever we should ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and we do the things pleasing before Him.

23 And this is His commandment: that we should believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ and should love one another, just as He gave commandment.

24 And the *one* who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, from the Spirit whom He gave us. (1 John 3:22-24)

20 If anyone claims, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how is it possible *for him* to love God whom he has not seen?

21 And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God should love his brother also. (1 John 4:20-21)

1 Everyone that believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone that loves Him that begot also loves him that is begotten of Him.

2 By this we know that we love the children of God, whenever we love God and keep His commandments.

3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome,

4 because everything having been born of God overcomes the world: and this is the victory that has overcome the world—your faith.

5 Who is he that overcomes the world, if not he that believes that Jesus is the Son of God? (1 John 5:1-5)

4 I rejoiced greatly that I have found some of your children walking in truth, just as we received commandment from the Father.

5 And now I ask you, lady, not as writing a new commandment to you, but one which we have had from the beginning: that we love one another.

6 This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, that you should walk in it. (2 John 4-6)

17 And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went off to make war with the rest of her seed, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus. (Revelation 12:17)

12 Here is the endurance of the saints; those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. (Revelation 14:12)

14 Blessed are those who do His commandments, so that their right shall be to the tree of life, and they may enter by the gates into the city. (Revelation 22:14)

In summary we see in the Book of Acts that whenever a meeting is said to be on the Sabbath, it is a meeting of Jews, not Christians. On the other hand, the first day after work, meaning 'Sunday' evening as counted by the Gentiles, was the normal meeting day for Christians, and not the seventh day nor the 'Saturday' evening. The Sabbath was given to Israel, not the church. The seventh day, counted from 'Friday' sunset to 'Saturday' sunset, is still the Sabbath, and not the first day, and has never been changed. However, Christ has freed us from the bondage of the Old Testament law (Galatians 5:1), of which the Sabbath is a part. Sabbath-keeping is not required of the Christian - be it the seventh day or 'Sunday.'

Where?

The original churches held their meetings primarily in private homes:

40 And coming out from the prison, they entered into *the house of Lydia*; and seeing the brothers, they encouraged them and departed. (Acts 16:40)

3 Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus,

4 who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.

5 And greet the church that is in their house. (Romans 16:3-5a)

19 The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord, together with the church that is in their house. (1 Corinthians 16:19)

15 Greet the brothers who are in Laodicea, and Nymphas and the church in his house. (Colossians 4:15)

1 Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, to Philemon our beloved and fellow worker,

2 to Apphia the beloved, and to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church at your house: (Philemon 1-2)

2 For if a man enters into your assembly with a gold ring, in fine clothes, and there should also come in a poor *man* in dirty clothes,

3 and you have respect for him that wears the fine clothes and you say to him, "You sit here in a good seat," and say to the poor man, "You stand there," or, "Sit here under *my* footstool,"

4 and so did you not differentiate among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? (James 2:2-4)

*[Note that the words "my footstool" indicate that James referred to a church meeting in a home in this example.]

This was also the case in the large initial Jerusalem church:

46 So continuing daily with one accord in the *temple*, and breaking bread from house to house, they were sharing food with joy and simplicity of heart, (Acts 2:46)

*[The Jerusalem church consisted of newly converted Jews who had lived their whole lives under the law, and, who, together with the converted priests, were still very much attached to the things of the old covenant, and worship in the temple which was about to pass.]

We also see the church in Jerusalem meeting in Solomon's Porch:

12 Now by the hands of the apostles, many signs and wonders took place among the people. And they were all with one mind in Solomon's Porch. (Acts 5:12)

So though they did make use of a larger venue, and especially here at the birth of the church, it was not continued perpetually after this unique need was met, just as when Paul debated in the school of *Tyrannus* in Ephesus (Acts 19:9). (Also see the section on 'The City-Wide Church.')

*[The school of *Tyrannus* was not used by the church in Ephesus for their weekly meetings, and Paul also taught believers there in private homes:

20 how I kept back nothing that was profitable, but declared it to you, teaching you publicly and from house to house, (Acts 20:20)]

This practice of meeting in homes was continued long after the Apostles had passed away. This was not because of persecution (nor because of a lack of other informal social venues such as coffee shops) but simply because it was the way believers functioned properly as churches. We see for instance in Acts 2:46-47 that while they were meeting in houses, they were also "having favour with all the people." In fact, there was no empire-wide persecution of the church until the Roman emperor Decius in 250 AD (followed by Gallus, 251-253 AD, then Valentine, 257-259 AD, and finally Diocletian, 303-311 AD). The Roman officials themselves often intervened to protect Christians from persecution, even by unbelieving Jews (Acts 16:35; 17:6-9; 18:12-16; 19:37-38; 23:29; 25:18-20, 24-27; 26:31-32). So persecution wasn't always an issue, and even when it did break out, meeting in houses did not keep Saul from knowing where to go to arrest believers (Acts 8:3). Where Christians did at times in history have to respond to persecution by literally meeting underground, this, too, happened in smaller, home-sized congregations. So where the Jews had synagogues and the Gentiles had their temples, Christianity did not need any special building for the church to meet in. But when the Roman emperor

Constantine became a 'Christian' and made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire, he ordered the construction of 19 Christian buildings in 327 AD, known as basilicas, which were the most popular style of the time (basilica literally means 'royal hall'). Until then religious buildings were seen as shrines. These were constructed in three places, namely one in Bethlehem and two in Jerusalem (for Christ's birth, crucifixion and resurrection), nine in the city of Constantinople, and seven in the city of Rome, and *initially had no pews. In Constantinople, the new capital built on the site of the old Byzantium, these buildings were primarily built for this brand new city in the east. This city also had many **pagan temples, each named after a god or a goddess. Constantine similarly ordered that each one of these nine Christian buildings be named after first century ***'saints.' (He also gave Greek pagan names such as Eirene, meaning 'Peace,' and Sophia, meaning 'Wisdom,' to some of the other 'church buildings' there, although pagan worship was not recorded in the new city of Constantinople.). One of the seven Christian buildings constructed in Rome that year was a shrine placed on the side of a hill just outside the city walls - of which the slope of the hill was called Vaticanus... (Saint Peter's basilica in Rome was established as the seat of the 'bishop' of Rome, who later became the ****'pope' of what is today known as the Roman Catholic Church, or Western Church. The structure's basilican form, rebuilt in the sixteenth century, became important as a model for later 'church buildings.' Many of the features in Constantine's 'Christian basilicas' were copied from pagan basilicas.) These buildings later came to be known as 'churches,' and were constructed throughout the empire, with no new pagan temples being built or repaired. Existing pagan temples were also later transformed into cathedrals, and in addition to those built, were handed over to the *****'bishops' who by now had developed into powerful church leaders (for more on scriptural church leadership, see the section on 'Church Leadership'). This happened by government decree, and believers were driven out of their house meetings into these large basilicas. Even then many still met in homes, especially since that was what they knew church to be. Then, just over half a century later, in 380 AD, 'bishops' Theodosius and Gratian ordered that there should be only one state-recognised orthodox church, and one set of faith - the orthodox dogma. Each Roman citizen was, to put it lightly, forced to be a member and was made to believe in the 'lex fidei,' the law of faith. Other groups and movements - including those meeting in homes - were forbidden. This led to many Christians over time wrongly believing that God dwells in a special way in 'church buildings' (similar to the Jews who considered God to physically dwell in the temple before it was destroyed in 70 AD). This later even led to the church proudly establishing graveyards close by the 'holy church buildings,' where people felt their mortal remains would be safe from the monsters and dragons of the deep. So historically we see that there is no evidence of meeting places larger than homes before Constantine, nor is there any literary or archaeological indication that any such homes were converted into church buildings. The reality is that everything in the New Testament was written for a home-sized church, where ideal church life and church meetings take place in a smaller, family-like setting in the homes of church members conducive to the kind of intimate table fellowship demanded by the Lord's Supper.

*[Unlike the Italian Christians in Rome, the Greek Christians in Constantinople did not put chairs in these large new buildings, because they felt that out of respect for Christ they should remain standing, explaining why the Eastern Orthodox churches today still remain standing throughout their meetings.]

**[As much as Christianity was spreading, and as much as he would have liked to make it the sole religion of the state, Constantine advanced his new belief carefully and methodically since paganism still remained the most popular religion. He remained friendly to pagans, often hosting debating get-togethers. However, he did not stay static as he slowly pushed the old religion aside in favour of the new one. He gradually converted pagan symbols in coins to more neutral concepts. Around 331 AD he began to introduce measures against paganism, including the removal of treasures from pagan temples. Some temples were destroyed and sacrifices prohibited. Consultations with pagan oracles also terminated. He strived to weaken pagan practices without disturbing its structure until it would crumble at its own pace. He eventually succeeded.]

***[The New Testament often refers to Christians as saints. The English word 'saint' comes from the Latin word 'santus,' which means 'holy.' Later, however, the word was used increasingly to honour Christian martyrs. By the fourth century the understanding of 'sainthood' was also applied to many desert hermits. In time, very devout 'bishops' and theologians also became known as 'saints' upon their deaths. In 995 AD the Roman Catholic Church declared the 'canonisation' of 'saints,' and in 1234 AD it established the first official criteria for 'canonisation.']

****[The title 'pope' in English is derived via Old English from 'papa' in Late Latin, and from 'pappas' in Greek, meaning 'father' or 'daddy.' In the second and third centuries the title was at first used to show respect to male clergy of every rank in the church. In the Western Church it gradually came to be restricted to 'bishops,' and later exclusively to the 'bishop' of Rome. In the Eastern Church the title 'popov' or 'papas' continued to be used for all priests. After the Roman Empire split in two and the Western Empire went to the emperor Gratian (360 AD), Damasus I (366-384 AD), the 'bishop' of Rome, was given the title 'Pontifex Maximus' ('supreme pontiff'), meaning 'big bridge-builder,' which previously had been used by the Roman emperors to describe themselves as high priests and gods of the Roman Empire. The first 'bishop' of Rome to call himself 'pope' was Siricius, who wrote the first papal decree in a letter in 385 AD.]

*****[He decreed that those engaged in ecclesiastical duties received the same privileges accorded pagan priests. They, and the churches, were exempt from taxation. The Christian church also acquired the right of inheritance, meaning that anyone could endow his possessions to the church. He retained the power to appoint 'bishops.' They received, amongst others, special judicial powers, and became advisers to the emperor. During the height of Constantine's reign there were 1800 'bishops.']

In the new covenant believers themselves are the temple of God, being living stones that come together to make up a spiritual house with Jesus Christ Himself as the chief cornerstone, of which the temple order in the Old Testament was a shadow (Hebrews 8; 10:1-18):

4 Coming to Him as to a living stone, having been rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious,

5 you also, as living stones, are being built *into* a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 2:4-5)

19 So then, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,

20 being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone,

21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord,

22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:19-22)

16 Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? (1 Corinthians 3:16)

19 Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? (1 Corinthians 6:19)

Practical Issues:

- Grape Juice or Wine?

At the institution of the Lord's Supper, the words used by Jesus literally were "fruit of the vine" (Matthew 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 22:18). From a number of facts we know that this was clearly *wine, for instance the Corinthians who got drunk (1 Corinthians 11:21), the good imagery wine is associated with in Scripture (Genesis 27:28; Isaiah 25:6), and the fact that wine was quite acceptable in Old and New Testament times (and not

drunkenness!). This was because they only had grape juice a few weeks of the year after the grape harvest had come in. The grape juice couldn't be kept from fermenting and becoming wine, which they drank all year round. Similarly, throughout the following ages the ancients never drank water by itself because it used to cause diseases. The general public became accustomed to mixing it with beer, while the rich used to mix the water with wine. On the other hand, however, we also have evidence that the Romans and the Jews who lived during the time of Christ never drank pure wine. They rather mixed it with an equal portion of water (as drinking pure wine was considered to be a barbaric act). This said, with the large scale of alcohol abuse in our day and the negative connotations associated with it in many circles, when the church that I am part of meets, we use grape juice, which is today available throughout the year. This is in accordance with the scriptural principle in Romans 14:21:

21 It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor to do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or becomes weak. (Romans 14:21) (Also read vs. 14-23.)

*[Though our interest lies with the apostolic era of the first century, the following portion is taken from what Tertullian wrote (196-212 AD) about their Lord's Supper meetings, the Agape (love-feast) still being inclusive of the 'eucharist' here:

"After washing our hands and lighting the lamps, each is invited to sing a hymn before all to God, either taken from holy writ (i.e. the Holy Scriptures) or of his own composition. So we prove him, and see how well he has drunk. As it began, prayer ends the banquet; and we break up not in bands of brigands, nor in groups of vagabonds, nor do we burst out into debauchery..."]

In doing this, especially where a stranger or someone from an alcoholic background may visit, we make sure he doesn't stumble or become weak because of his negative connotations associated with wine or his lack of self control.

- Leavened or Unleavened Bread?

In the Passover meal the Jews ate unleavened bread to symbolise the quickness with which God brought them out of Egypt. Jesus, too, used unleavened bread in the Last Supper. However, nowhere in the New Testament is anything mentioned about Gentile churches using unleavened bread in the Lord's Supper. Though in 1 Corinthians 5:6-8 we see yeast associated with evil, Jesus also compared the kingdom of heaven to it! (Matthew 13:33). The type of communal loaf of bread used in the Lord's Supper is scripturally a matter of freedom, and so the best would be to simply use whatever bread is normally eaten or available in your area.

- How Do We Do It?

Showing you how the church that I am part of eats the Lord's Supper, may give you some guidelines on how to do it yourself:

Every 'Sunday' at about 17:30 we start gathering. Each one (able) brings food and/or drink to share. We take turns, but if we rotate houses the host provides the "one" cup filled with the fruit of the vine (grape juice in our case, per Romans 14:21), and the "one" loaf (e.g. a bread roll, loaf of bread, piece of Middle Eastern round bread...), which are put in the middle of the rest of the food, for all to take. The Supper is a fellowship time in a festive atmosphere. We like therefore to have the food on a colourful tablecloth on a low table in the middle of the lounge, with us sitting around it. Before we start eating one of the men will pray (if we rotate houses this will again be the host). Since all believers are priests under the new covenant (1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6) we don't have anyone breaking the bread and handing it out or passing the cup around. Each one takes of it how and whenever he wants to. (Of course if someone is sick it would be practical for that person to

pour some of the grape juice into a separate glass for himself.) During this time of eating together and sharing, we also share according to 1 Corinthians 14 (see the section on 'Participatory Meetings'), according to the principles mentioned earlier in the section on 'Family/Women's Silence.' We don't have a formal division between when we fellowship in a more general way and when we share in a 1 Corinthians 14 way. Usually in a natural way, at a certain time (often when all have eaten enough) this will spontaneously happen, after which the sharing will become more general towards the end. Throughout the meeting interaction takes place naturally, but only one person will speak at a time, though sometimes in between a parent may have to guide a small child in a personal matter. We also leave the food and drinks on the table throughout the entire meeting, so that anyone can still eat and drink at any time. There is no specific ending time, but afterwards all help to clean up. We rotate the meeting place amongst families with dwellings (which may mean sitting and eating on the floor of a small living room), unless someone with the gift of hospitality offers to have it held more regularly in his home, and the church agrees to it. Children are present during the meetings. We don't have separate children's meetings, which segregate the family and deprive them from learning by experiencing church life and seeing their dads taking leadership. The responsibility for all areas of their development, including their spiritual growth, lies solely with the parents. This may take some time getting used to, but things don't have to be perfectly quiet. Small children may e.g. colour in or play near their parents, but when they get too noisy or they wander off in the host's house, it is expected of the parents to deal with them with both unconditional love and discipline, which are equally important in training up children. (Here a parent may have to take the child to another room for a while, just as a nursing mother would also not nurse her baby in the presence of everyone else.)

- **Dress code** is modest as always (1 Timothy 2:9-10; 1 Peter 3:3-5), so as to not be a stumbling block in the way of anyone. Clothes are also comfortable, since we are family and meetings are not formal. (The idea of 'dressing up for a church meeting' came about when people had to be dressed 'fit for the king' and his company, because the Roman emperor Constantine also attended church 'services' after he had become a 'Christian' and Christianity was made the official religion of the Roman Empire. This also explains why shabby houses couldn't do anymore, but cathedrals had to be built.)

(Based on Deuteronomy 22:5 many Christians wrongly teach that women shouldn't wear pants. The text here instructs women not to wear men's clothing, and men not to wear women's clothing. Essentially it addresses the perversion associated with cross-dressing (transvestism). It was given in the context where men, just like in the Arab world today for example, themselves wore 'dresses'! The instruction correctly applied in countries where men for instance wear pants would therefore be that women may wear pants, as long as they are women's pants, and just as in the case of the men, these pants are of course not revealing their body parts. At its root, however, it teaches us that any form of perversion is an abomination to God.)

- **Feasts** - As a church we don't celebrate 'Christian' feasts instituted by 'church fathers' or through church traditions, which in many cases had the initial goal of 'redeeming' pagan feasts and practices rooted in 'sun and moon' worship. For example we don't celebrate Easter, which originated from the dawn goddess Eostre. We neither celebrate 'Christ'mas' (as it was called from the 11th century in many languages), of which 25 December (the sun god's birthday), 336 AD, was its first recorded celebration. These and many other 'Christian' feasts, such as 'St' Valentines day for instance, are also celebrated by non-Christians today. The significance of what our Lord has done, and promised to still do, is fully signified in the Lord's Supper, and baptism (see the section on 'The Lord's Supper\Practical Issues\How Do We Do It\Baptism'), which He Himself instituted.

• **Activities** - Interaction of members is centred on the idea that church is family. So apart from the weekly church meeting we don't have any other regular 'formal' meetings or activities. Fellowship during other times is spontaneous. A church (if the members corporately decide to do so) or individual believers may organise or partake in *separate prayer, teaching, or 'praise and worship' meetings, even on a larger scale with other churches. However, it is every member's personal responsibility to study and grow in the Word and maintain a healthy personal relationship with our Lord. **Though not all are apostles and evangelists as such, all members are at all times witnesses and disciples wherever they are, and are encouraged to reach out with the gospel to all people.

*[Larger 'praise and worship' and teaching meetings, where only one gifted person speaks, as well as Scripture study, teaching or specific prayer meetings are great, but should not be confused with the weekly church meetings. For more, see the section on 'The City-Wide Church.']

**[Note too that preaching, which scripturally means preaching the gospel, never took place during a church meeting. A Christian's total sphere of influence is where he will preach the gospel. In the context in which Scripture was given, as is still the case in many cultures today, work was an extension of the home, where the whole family would often partake in a family business and sons would learn their fathers' trade, and where there wasn't a great divide between family life and work life. The Greek word for household in Acts 10:2; 11:14; 16:15, 31; Titus 1:11 for example (and even as part of Matthew 20:1; Luke 13:25; 1 Timothy 5:14 and Titus 2:5), namely "oikos," denotes one's household establishment, one's entire property. The word 'economy' in English and some other languages can be traced back to the Greek word 'oikonomos,' meaning 'one who manages a household,' which in turn is derived from 'oikos' and 'nemein' (meaning 'to manage'). (From 'oikonomos' was later derived 'oikonomia,' which had not only the sense of 'management of a household,' but also senses such as 'thrif,' 'direction,' 'administration,' 'arrangement,' and 'public revenue of a state.' The first recorded sense of our word 'economy' found in a written work possibly composed in 1440 AD, was 'the management of economic affairs,' in the case of a monastery. It was later recorded in other senses shared by the word 'oikonomia' in Greek, such as 'thrif' and 'administration.' Our current sense of 'the economic system of a country or an area' was not developed until the 19th or 20th century.) And so a Christian's business is his household, which includes all that he does, and which is also his sphere in which he preaches the gospel. When understanding this, the idea of making Jesus Christ the Lord of one's whole life, allowing Him therefore to reign in you and through you, also makes more sense! This is also in preparation for when we will be reigning with Christ - see Luke 19:11-27; Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 4:1-7; 2 Timothy 2:11-13; Revelation 5:9-10; 11:15-18; 19:6-7; 20:4-6; 22:1-5. God wants to holistically reign in and through each person's whole life, where He sees all aspects of it in relation to the person, where no distinction between ministry and work is made, and where it is an extension of one's home and family life. (Also see the earlier section on 'Family\Marriage\Roles and Responsibilities in Marriage' and the section on 'Money Matters\Summary' for more.)

The idea of a 'sermon' (being preached during a church meeting) is based on Aristotle's concepts of oration long before Christianity came into existence. It became part of Christianity when one of the great early orators, John Chrysostom ('John the Golden-mouth') brought his Aristotelian sermon skills into Christianity, and in so doing quickly became the leading priest in Antioch and Syria, since the whole city of Antioch came to hear his orations. And so we see the origin of one of the seven major pastoral duties of Roman Catholic priests, and subsequently that of the Sunday morning sermon as still practised in many church meetings today. Because John Chrysostom (who later was 'bishop' of Constantinople in 398 AD) as a heathen had long practised the heathen custom of bringing a pagan oration over the dead, he continued this practice when he became a Christian orator, and so began the 'Christian funeral' and the 'funeral oration' that goes with it. This was regarding the Western Church. In the Eastern Churches customs that prevailed before Christianity were followed. The Coptic Church for example adopted the custom of praying over the dead three days after the passing away 'to release (dismiss) the spirit' away from the dead body, which is also what the ancient Egyptian priests used to practise. The Coptic Church also adopted the anniversary of 'The Fortieth' or '40th,' which used to mark the completion of the mummification days (forty days after death) and the dead body's readiness for burial. In the same way, we can also trace the Greco/Roman heathen roots of reading from the Scriptures before a 'sermon' is delivered, as well as the division of Scripture into chapters and verses, dating back to between 400 and 500 AD. (When the pagan orator stepped out upon the stage of a Greek amphitheatre, he first walked to the centre of the stage, turned his back on the audience, and draped an orator's gown about him. He then turned, faced the audience and opened a scroll, usually one of the writings of the author Homer or another well known Greek writer. The writings of Homer and other popular writers of Greek/Roman literature was divided into chapters, and each chapter had a number. Each sentence in that chapter also had a number. This pagan practice was carried over into the Christian faith.)]

- **Growth** - When the church gets too big to function in this way, or when members cannot fit into hosts' homes anymore, we prayerfully decide how to form another independent church.

- ***'Baptism' (or when translated into English: Immersion)**

All who by grace have been saved through faith are partakers of the new covenant, and should also be baptised at the first opportunity after having come to faith. Believing members who have not yet been baptised will be encouraged to have themselves baptised. The requirement for a baptiser is that he must be a baptised believer himself. Practically we do it as follows: Both standing in any available pool of water, the baptiser will ask the believer: "Who is Jesus Christ to you?" and based upon his profession (which should include something of Him being his Lord and Saviour) (also see Acts 22:16), he will say: "I baptise you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19)," and will then dip him under the water, holding his head, and either let him come up (if he went in forwards) or bring his head up (if he went in backwards). It is a good principle to let those who lead others to the Lord also baptise them, but even here we would let the men do the baptising, as it is the pattern in Scripture. (So if a married woman would lead someone to the Lord, her husband will baptise the person, and if a girl would do so, her father. In the case of a single woman who doesn't have her own family in the church, one of the brothers in the church will do the baptising.)

3 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptised into Christ Jesus have been baptised into His death?

4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, so that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also should walk in newness of life.

5 For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be *in the likeness of His* resurrection;

6 knowing this, that our old man was crucified *with Him*, so that the body of sin may be done away with, *that* we should no longer serve sin.

7 For he who has died has been justified from sin.

8 But if we died with Christ, we believe that we also shall live together with Him,

9 knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, no longer dies. Death is no longer master *over* Him.

10 For what *death* He died, He died to sin once for all; but what *life* He lives, He lives to God.

11 Likewise you also, consider yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:3-11)

*[We see in Scripture that believers were baptised as soon as they believed (Acts 2:38-41; 8:12-13, 35-38; Acts 9:17-18; 10:44-48; 16:14-15 with vs. 40, 29-34; 18:8; 1 Corinthians 1:16 with 16:15; the word "faith" in v. 12 of Colossians 2:11-12, with Galatians 3:6-9, 29). There was no formal baptismal preparation, nor any need for a special church meeting or for leaders to be present. Whoever was instrumental in bringing someone to faith in Jesus also baptised him there and then. However, a course of instruction prior to baptism soon became customary, especially for non-Jewish converts. A convert's occupation and personal relations were even later scrutinised, and then came pre-baptismal instruction which took three years (and even longer in Syria)! Factors like good progress or the arising of persecution could shorten the period. More intensive preparations, including fasting, exorcism and blessing, immediately preceded baptism, and baptism also now commonly occurred only once a year. The converts were often taught by laymen, but by the fourth century the clergy had taken over the instructions of converts, and the 'bishop' had become personally responsible for the concentrated teaching and discipline immediately before baptism. Careful preparation for baptism was seen as essential, because baptism was by then commonly thought of as dealing with a person's past corruption, but not his future faults, and therefore the practice of delaying baptism, the development of a system of penitence to cover sins after baptism, and even the insistence on purity before

baptism emerged. (For these reasons many people by the fourth century put off getting baptised until they were near death, including the Roman emperor Constantine, who got baptised shortly before his death in 337 AD.) The systematic teaching of converts along these lines flourished in the third and fourth centuries, but faded as infant baptism became increasingly common. As with these practices, the practice of infant baptism was also rooted in the false teaching of 'baptismal regeneration,' already evident in writings from the middle of the second century. We first read of infant baptism at the end of the second century when Irenaeus specifically mentioned it (182/188 AD). By 215 AD immersion was not a requirement for baptism anymore, and by 416 AD infant baptism (now only by sprinkling) had even become compulsory in the Western Church! This all came about due to some foundational errors pointed out more clearly in the section on 'Wrong Traditions.'

Some still teach 'baptismal regeneration' today, wrongly using verses such as the following to support their view that one becomes reborn at baptism:

- John 3:5: **Jesus answered, "Most assuredly I say to you, unless one is born of water and of Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.**

Note that "water" here refers to one's physical birth, meaning that just as one is physically born in the flesh as a human, one also needs to be spiritually reborn (see v. 6: That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.). So as one is born into one's earthly family, one also needs to be born into one's spiritual family, as indicated earlier in the section on 'Family\Membership.' Also see John 1:12-13; Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 1:3, 23; 1 John 5:1.

- Mark 16:16: **He that believes and is baptised shall be saved; but he that does not believe shall be condemned.**

Note that the words "but he that does not believe" appear without the phrase "and is baptised," clearly indicating the link between only the initial phrase "he that believes" with "shall be saved."

- 1 Peter 3:20-21: **20 who formerly disobeyed, when the longsuffering of God was waiting in the days of Noah, when the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water; 21 which as an antitype, baptism now also saves us—(not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,**

Note that in verse 20 it wasn't the water that saved Noah, but the ark, represented by Christ in verse 21: "through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." Also see Hebrews 11:7, and note the word "faith": By faith Noah, having been warned *by God* concerning the things not yet seen, being reverent, prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, through which he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

However, the scriptural truth is that all who by grace have been saved through faith alone are partakers of the new covenant, and they alone should therefore be baptised at the first opportunity after having come to faith. So though we believe that children who die before reaching the age of understanding will not be lost, we acknowledge that only those who by grace through faith have been saved are part of the new covenant, and that they therefore have the responsibility to bring their children up in the best possible way so that they will also be able to understand this and make their own decision on whether they want to become part of this new covenant or not, available to all through faith. So where God takes the initiative by knocking on everyone's heart, we also have a choice, and should we respond and in time accept His revealing of this truth to us, He then chooses us on the basis of what Jesus Christ has done on the cross, causing us to also become part of His elect. How wonderful to know that there will be no condemnation for God's elect on Judgment Day. For those who are not in Him, His righteousness will be revealed when their deeds will be judged.]

PARTICIPATORY MEETINGS

We have seen that the church came together on the first day of the week, the Lord's Day, after work (or on 'Sunday' evening), to eat the Lord's Supper (i.e. an evening meal). We now continue with something else instructed "whenever you [*meaning the church*] come together" [*to eat the Lord's Supper,*" in the context of 1 Corinthians 11:20, 33, and Acts 20:7]:

26 What is *the outcome* then, brothers? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. (1 Corinthians 14:26)

1 Corinthians 14 is the inspired correction Paul instructed the Corinthian church to practise, where they were deviating from what was supposed to happen in a church meeting. This is why we read the words: "As in all the churches of the saints," in verse 33, and why he wrote the following:

36 Or did the word of God go forth from you? Or did it come to you only?

37 If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or *is* spiritual, let him recognise that the things which I am writing to you are the commandments of the Lord. (1 Corinthians 14:36-37)

The idea of the churches having had participatory meetings is also evident in other parts of Scripture:

7 Now on the first *day* of the week, the disciples being assembled to break bread, Paul was **discussing with them, being about to leave on the next day, and extended his message until midnight.* (Acts 20:7)

*[In Acts 20:7 Paul was "discussing" with the church. Some translations wrongly have the idea of Paul 'preaching' or 'delivering a sermon' translated into this word. The Greek word for "discussing" here is "dialegomia" which literally means "to consider and discuss / to argue." The word 'dialogue' is derived from it. This shows us that the meeting in Troas (v. 6) was interactive. It is also the same word translated "debating" in Acts 19:9: **But when some became hardened and disbelieving, speaking evil against the Way before the multitude, he withdrew from them and separated the disciples, each day debating in the school of a certain Tyrannus.**

Looking at Acts 20:20 where Paul told the Ephesian elders that he had kept back nothing from them that was profitable, having taught them publicly (when he debated in the school of Tyrannus) and in private, we see that even when it was not as part of a regular weekly church meeting, the way in which Paul taught was interactive: **how I kept back nothing that was profitable, but declared it to you, teaching you publicly and from house to house,** (Acts 20:20)]

We also read in Colossians 3:16:

16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. (Colossians 3:16)

In Hebrews 10:24-25 the readers of the letter were urged not to forsake the assembling of themselves, but to rather consider one another so that in meeting together they could stir up one another for love and good works, and exhort one another. Forsaking the assembling of themselves would result in this stirring up and exhorting not happening:

24 And let us consider one another for the stirring up of love and of good works, 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves, just as is the custom for some, but exhorting *one another*, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. (Hebrews 10:24-25)

This “admonishing” (Colossians 3:16), “stirring up” (Hebrews 10:24) and “exhorting” (Hebrews 10:25) of one another show us the participatory nature of church meetings, and bring us to the next important point.

The purpose for anything done in the church meeting was for the edification (the building up or construction, that is, the promotion of spiritual growth in another) of everyone present (“Let all things be done for edification,” 1 Corinthians 14:26).

The practical guidelines in Scripture for a participatory meeting are given in 1 Corinthians 14:26-40 (also see the earlier section on ‘Family/Women’s Silence’ and the section on ‘Gifts/Manifestation Gifts/Revelation Gifts’):

26 What is *the outcome* then, brothers? Whenever you come together, each of you has *a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.****

27 If anyone speaks in an *unknown* tongue, let it be by two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret.

28 But if there is no interpreter, let him be silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God.

29 Let two or three prophets speak, and let others discriminate.

30 But if *something* is revealed to another who sits by, let the first be silent.

31 For you can all prophesy *one* by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged.

32 And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.

33 For God is not *the author* of confusion but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints,

34 let your women be silent in the churches, for it is not permitted for them to speak, but to be in subjection, just as the law also says.

35 And if they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church.

36 Or did the word of God go forth from you? Or did it come to you only?

37 If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or *is* spiritual, let him recognise that the things which I am writing to you are the commandments of the Lord.

38 But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant.

39 Therefore, brothers, seek to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak in tongues.

40 Let all things be done properly and according to order. (1 Corinthians 14:26-40)

*[Where a tongue, a revelation, an interpretation and a prophetic word for instance will take place spontaneously if the Holy Spirit gives it in a particular church meeting, a song and a teaching for instance can also be prepared. So where the ladies will be involved in preparing the food for the Lord’s Supper, I encourage the men to also spend some time in preparing a teaching, perhaps on something each one himself has learnt during the week, that, even if shared spontaneously, may in turn be edifying for the church, just as the Lord’s Supper is physically edifying for all.]

**[Any member may sing a song (“psalm”) meant to edify the church, if led to do so. (If any corporate singing takes place during a meeting, members able to play instruments do not lead the singing, but follow according to what is sung spontaneously by all or suggested by any member.)]

New Testament church meetings were open, spontaneous, participatory, discussion type, interactive meetings, with no one leading ‘from the front,’ but everything happening under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The requirement for any contribution was that it had to be edifying (building up or constructive, that is, promoting spiritual growth in another) for all present.

It is true that false teachers trying to deceive believers may visit the church. Very early on the church was warned against such people:

***10 If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house, and do not greet him; (2 John 10)**

*[The verse applies to a house church with its participatory meetings.]

It may also be that a brother brings an erroneous teaching or application, in which case the elders must gently correct the error. Regarding one of the qualifications of an elder we read:

9 holding fast to the faithful word as he was taught, that he may be able to exhort by sound doctrine, and to convince those who oppose it. (Titus 1:9)

This is necessary when considering an elder's task:

10 For there are also many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision,

11 whom it is necessary to shut *their* mouths, who overturn whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain. (Titus 1:10-11)

The elders, just like Titus here, had to:

13 ...rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith,

14 not giving heed to Jewish myths and to commands of men turning away from the truth. (Titus 1:13b-14)

These elders are usually the older, more experienced and spiritually-mature brothers in the Lord, whose character has been proved in the context of church life, and who, in order to do the above, are required to be able to teach (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:9) (see the section on 'Church Leadership\Eldership' for more on elders). So elders play a key role in helping everything that goes on in the meeting to "be done properly and according to order" (1 Corinthians 14:40). This they do as 'guardians' of the church. So where they participate equally as any other brother would in church meetings, they will act with more prominence when problems arise.

We therefore see in summary that the main reason the church came together was to eat the Lord's Supper, and the main purpose for believers meeting was for mutual edification. Very simple!

Having said earlier that we should not confuse larger 'praise and worship' and teaching meetings, where only one gifted person speaks, with the weekly church meetings, we do, however, see in Scripture cases mentioned, especially in the Jerusalem church, where many more believers met together in one place. This brings us to the next chapter, the city-wide church.

THE CITY-WIDE CHURCH

The word 'church' ('ekklesia' in Greek) is both used in the context of the universal church, which consists of all believers throughout all the ages (e.g. Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18; Hebrews 12:22-23), and the *local church, which consists of living members in a localised community who meet weekly in the homes of its members.

*[An 'ekklesia' (the Greek word for 'church,' or more correctly translated, an 'assembly') is a meeting or an assembly. The word church is not a synonym for 'people of God,' but it is rather an activity of the 'people of God.' Literally it means 'a called out people,' and the idea in reference to the local church is that of a people called out, that is, assembling. Churches meet. The idea here is that if it doesn't meet, it isn't a local church. (Also see the section on 'Church Leadership\Eldership' for more on the word 'ekklesia.')

(On the other hand, the word 'church' in English, as in many other languages, is derived from the Greek word 'kuriakon,' which means 'belong to the Lord,' and which was understood to mean 'house belonging to the Lord,' or 'the Lord's house,' referring to the place of worship, which has absolutely nothing to do with the actual Greek word 'ekklesia.' In fact, in the New Testament context there is no such concept as 'the Lord's house' in reference to Christianity. This meaning was later extended to refer to the people who gathered in a particular locale, as well as to whole denominations. However, the New Testament knows only the 'ekklesia,' the community of the saints - which is the house of the Lord, but built with living stones.)]

Many wonder about whether or not scripturally there should only be one church in a city. This is because in a few cases in the New Testament only one church is mentioned in a particular city, and there is never specific reference to 'churches' (plural) within the same city. For example, in Revelation 1:4 we read: "to the seven churches *which are* in Asia," after which each church (singular) in each of the seven cities in that province is addressed (Revelation 2:1, 8, 12, 18, 3:1, 7, 14).

Another example is the greeting in 1 Corinthians 1:2: "to the church of God which is at Corinth," suggesting that there was only one church in Corinth.

We also read in Titus 1:5:

5 For this reason I left you behind in Crete, so that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and you should appoint elders in every city as I commanded you: (Titus 1:5)

We need to understand the idea of the city- or even region-wide church correctly in order to know how it relates scripturally to the house church. It is true that apart from references to the universal church, whenever the word 'church' occurs in the New Testament, it refers to a group of believers who really did all gather together in one place for regular church meetings. However, by looking more closely at the churches referred to here will reveal more.

Looking at the Jerusalem church first, we see that it is one of the few examples where Scripture does refer to only one church in a city (e.g. Acts 8:1). The reason being that the believers in Jerusalem did all meet together in one place as a single organised entity (e.g. Acts 6:1-3). In fact, after the church was established following the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the Jerusalem church as an entity was not a house church, even though they broke bread from house to house (Acts 2:46). Going back to Pentecost we see that three thousand (Acts 2:41) were added to the original 120 disciples (Acts 1:15), after which many more believed and their number grew to about five thousand (Acts 4:4). The word of God continued to grow, and as the number of disciples in Jerusalem was being multiplied exceedingly, a great many of the priests were also obeying the faith (Acts 6:7). The Jerusalem church was a very large church, and initially the entire church meeting took place in Solomon's Porch, which was a huge assembly area and a portico on the east of the temple, consisting of a roof supported by columns with open sides (Acts 5:12). Looking

at the Jerusalem church's unique circumstances will help us understand why this happened.

The Jerusalem church was the very first church, and was in both its infancy and in the infancy of the church at large. It consisted of newly converted Jews who had lived their whole lives under the law, and, who, together with the converted priests, were still very much attached to the things of the old covenant, and worship in the temple (e.g. Acts 2:46) which was about to pass. This explains the many cultural accommodations that were made in Jerusalem which did not apply to all the other churches later formed. The church in Jerusalem was instantly confronted with a great number of religious pilgrims, both Jews and proselytes, who had travelled to Jerusalem to observe Passover and Pentecost (see Acts 2:5, 9-11), now having converted (Acts 2:41), together with several thousand more local residents shortly after that (Acts 4:4), with only 12 apostles to organise the church. Therefore these new believers were, amongst others, continuing in the teaching of the apostles (Acts 2:42). Because of these unique circumstances, the church voluntarily had all things in common (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-37), which, like many other things that happened in the Jerusalem church, were not the perpetually taught general pattern for all churches, and ceased when the need wasn't there anymore.

As in the unique Jerusalem church, in the few other instances in the New Testament where we read about the church (singular) in a particular city, this was simply because there was only one church and meeting place at that time in that city. Later, as the church in that city grew, multiple organised churches and meeting places in that city were established.

The church in Corinth with all its members for example, even though it was a relatively large church, was still able to meet together in one place to eat the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:17, 20, 33), have a participatory meeting (1 Corinthians 14:26), as well as corporately practise church discipline (1 Corinthians 5:1-5), as one house church, meeting in the house of Gaius. In Paul's letter to the Romans which he wrote from Corinth, we read:

23 Gaius, my host and the host of the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the treasurer of the city, greets you, and Quartus, the brother. (Romans 16:23)

So when a new local church was established in a city where no other churches existed, there would have been only one meeting place, but as the number of believers grew, so would the number of meeting places too, and so also the number of churches within that city. The intention was never to continue to have only one house church meeting per city.

We also come across another interesting scenario in Paul's greeting to the Romans:

7 To all those who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 1:7)

Paul did not greet the church in Rome as such, for the same reason the New Testament never refers to it - because there was more than one congregation in Rome. When Paul wrote the letter to the believers in Rome he had never been to Rome himself, but he knew Aquila and Priscilla (Prisca), a Jewish couple living in Rome, from when they had lived in Corinth (Acts 18:1-3) and Ephesus (Acts 19:18-19), and so he greets them in his letter:

**3 Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus,
4 who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.
5 And greet the church that is in their house.** (Romans 16:3-5a)

So unlike when Paul referred to all the saints in Rome in verse 7 (of which there were many, even more than in Corinth), Paul here singles out the church that is in Aquila and Priscilla's house. This is because there was more than one church in Rome, as we see for example from Romans 16:14:

14 Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brothers who are with them. (Romans 16:14)

and 15:

15 Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them. (Romans 16:15)

(And these greeted by name were only those whom Paul had personally known.)

It is therefore clear that at the time Titus was sent to appoint elders in every city in Crete, there was only one church in each of the cities to which elders had to be appointed:

5 For this reason I left you behind in Crete, so that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and you should appoint elders in every city as I commanded you: (Titus 1:5)

Adding his vote to the appointing of elders (see the section on 'Church Leadership\Eldership' for more) in the churches he had previously established is what Paul did everywhere, as we see him and Barnabas doing in Acts 14:23:

20 ...And the next day he went out together with Barnabas to Derbe.

21 And having preached the gospel to that city and having made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, and Iconium, and Antioch,

22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, urging *them* to continue in the faith, saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God."

23 And having chosen elders for them in every church, *and* having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. (Acts 14:20b-23)

So in summary it is clear that the house church is the proper expression of the local church, the evidence being that, with the exception of Solomon's porch (the temporal reason for which was dealt with earlier), every time the New Testament mentions the place a local church met regularly, it was in someone's home. Throughout early church history, for more than two hundred years after the apostles had passed away, the believers continued to meet only in the living rooms of private dwellings. There is no evidence of larger places of meeting before 327 AD, when special 'church buildings' were built by the Roman emperor Constantine, and where Christian prayers and praises that had developed from the synagogue services and other sources, were added to create a grand ceremony. Where these house churches did grow, rather than finding ever larger places to meet, they started new house churches within the same city. Each house church became a true autonomous church in its own right.

Scripture does not speak of an organised regional church, no more than it speaks of an organised universal church. There is no instance of any organised regional church. In the New Testament churches within a region are referred to in the plural (Acts 15:41; 1 Corinthians 16:1, 19; 2 Corinthians 8:1; Galatians 1:2). The only exception is in the case of the Critical Greek Text, which in Acts 9:31 reads "church," where the Majority Greek Text and Received Greek Text (a few manuscripts from the Majority Text family) both read "churches":

31 Then the churches throughout all Judea, and Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified, and going in the fear of the Lord and in the encouragement of the Holy Spirit, were multiplying. (Acts 9:31)

It seems, however, that the more correct reading is “churches,” as used in reference to the churches of Judea in Galatians 1:22, written years after the Jerusalem church had been scattered:

22 And I was unknown by face to the churches of Judea which are in Christ. (Galatians 1:22)

Consequently, those fleeing from Jerusalem started new local churches in Judea during the years following the scattering.

So though there is no scriptural basis for having a church whose earthly organisation or authority extends beyond that of its local congregation, it is common today for believers to speak of an abstract regional or city church, made up of all the local churches, however few or many they may be, in that region or city. For instance, we may refer to the persecuted church in Saudi Arabia, or mention how strongly the church in Tehran is growing.

Considering the Critical Text’s reading of Acts 9:31 again (“the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria”), its reading may allow for a possible alternative way to view regional church, namely one abstract church in each region, made up of many organised local house churches. Where each house church is the scriptural expression of the local church, believers can in the same breath also view themselves as a part of the greater church in their region. Thus the regional church may exist in our minds as an abstract reality, but with no intended earthly organisation or authority. Here our attitude should be that there is indeed one church per region, and that we are an integral part of it. Yet the house church is the proper unit of organisation of the local church, and not the regional church.

Some may argue for an organised city-wide church indicated in Acts 20:20, since later in Revelation 1:11 and 2:1 mention is only made of the one church of Ephesus:

20 how I kept back nothing that was profitable, but declared it to you, teaching you publicly and from house to house, (Acts 20:20)

The text here refers to Paul telling the Ephesian elders that he has kept nothing back from them that was profitable, having taught them publicly (when he debated in the school of Tyrannus, Acts 19:9) and in private, “from house to house.” “From house to house” here seems rather to refer to him having taught them in private, than to him having taught them during church meetings.

Neither a regional church nor a city church has any scripturally modelled organisation, meetings, or authority, just as the universal church hasn’t. Applied practically, the idea of an abstract regional or city church should result in an attitude of cooperation with other true churches, for instance in teaching, benevolence (as when Paul took up a offering from the churches to help the church in Jerusalem, e.g. 1 Corinthians 16:1-3; 2 Corinthians 8-9), missions and evangelism (just like the churches helped apostles and evangelists on their way, e.g. 1 Corinthians 16:5-6, 11: 3 John 5-8, sometimes hosting them for a short period, e.g. 1 Corinthians 16:5-6, 10, and even sending money to them, e.g. Philippians 4:15-18 with Acts 18:1-5; 2 Corinthians 11:7-9). The idea is to create oneness and overcome divisions, where we have an attitude of love for all the brethren and interest in

believers outside of our own church. However, the proper expression of the organised local church remains the house church, not the regional church or the city church.

CHURCH LEADERSHIP

Before examining what leadership in the church entails, we will first look at the various spheres of authority.

Spheres of Authority

All authority belongs to God. But we also read in Scripture that we are to obey higher authorities:

1 Let every person submit to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except by God, and the authorities that exist are established by God.

2 Consequently the *one* resisting the authority has opposed the ordinance of God, and those opposing shall receive judgment to themselves.

3 For rulers are not a fear to good works, but to evil. And do you wish not to fear the authority? Do what is good, and you shall have praise from the same.

4 For he is God's servant to you for good. But if you do evil, fear; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's servant, an avenger for wrath to the *one* practicing evil.

5 Therefore it is necessary to be subject, not only on account of wrath, but also for conscience' sake.

6 For on account of this you also pay taxes, for they are ministers of God, always giving attention to this very thing.

7 Render therefore to all their dues: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour. (Romans 13:1-7)

We read further that we are to obey God rather than man:

29 But Peter and the apostles answered, and said: "We must obey God rather than men. (Acts 5:29)

So how can we know the exceptions to obeying, and at what point are we no longer under authority?

All authority is derived from God and must answer to Him, but He has delegated some authority to angels, governments, husbands, wives, and the church. For example husbands have authority that neither the government nor the church has, just as governments have authority that the church doesn't have. God has also given to each sphere of authority its own jurisdiction, for example neither governments nor husbands have the right to legislate belief or morality, but only God, and the church does not have the right to intrude into family matters, unless false doctrine or immorality is involved. In the same way, a husband doesn't have the right to break the just laws of man (the government) and God, nor does he have the right to force his wife and children to do so. Where God has given authority, He has also given a certain amount of control to that authority, irrespective of how the specific authority exerts it. He also allows scope for that authority to be wrong, while still remaining in its office. During our entire lives all of us must answer to others, who in turn must answer to God.

Concerning this we read Jesus' answer to the Pharisees:

15 Then the Pharisees went and plotted how they might trap Him in His speech.

16 And they sent their disciples to Him with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that You are true, and teach the way of God in truth; nor do You show favouritism to anyone.

17 Tell us, therefore, what do You think? Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?"
18 But Jesus, knowing their wickedness, said, "Why do you test Me, you hypocrites?"
19 Show Me the tax money." So they brought Him a denarius.
20 And He said to them, "Whose image and inscription is this?"
21 They said to Him, "Caesar's." And He said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."
22 When they had heard these words, they marvelled, and leaving Him, they went away. (Matthew 22:15-22)

Here, for example, we observe that both the government and God have their jurisdiction, and these are not in conflict with the other's sphere of authority. When God created governments to rule in earthly matters He also gave them the power to tax as they please. God does not step in and stop the government from unjust taxation, as this is a sphere of authority that belongs to government, even if they abuse their power. This principle would apply to all delegated authorities, but only in the realm that God has given to each authority does He allow them to use or abuse that power without interfering. If an authority abuses its power beyond that which God has allowed, it becomes subject to a higher power. For instance, when a husband physically abuses his wife, he becomes subject to the power of the government. God allows governments to *license their citizens, to act unjustly, and even to abuse their regulatory powers, yet we are still obligated to obey them. However, should a government attempt to regulate belief (e.g. commanding parents not to teach their children that homosexuality is sin, or telling people they are not allowed to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour), then it has stepped outside the sphere of authority which belongs to government. Therefore it is important to know from Scripture the extent of jurisdiction God has given to each authority. Before investigating what Scripture teaches on authority in the church, we will look at one more example, namely the husband's sphere of authority.

*[When the Roman emperor Constantine became a 'Christian' in 312 AD, and in his Edict of Milan made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire in 313 AD, he also appointed priests who were approved and 'licensed' to conduct weddings and other functions in a more and more professional and public manner. Today one of the main reasons why Christians are afraid of not being part of an institutionalised church is because of the wrong idea that it is the church's task to marry and bury people, and so they don't know if the church will still do it if they are not on its 'membership list!']

A wife doesn't have to choose between God and her husband, because God will not take back the husband's sphere of authority that He has given him. Thus, as unreasonable or insensitive as he may sound, a husband has the right to for example tell his wife what to wear, where not to go, etc., but he does not have the authority to command her to view pornography with him or to assist him in committing a crime. (In the same way, a parent does not have the right to tell a child to participate in abortion or anything that may defile the child's conscience before God, or that will cause him to violate the just laws of the land. Yet the child must continue to honour the office of father, even if the father is immature, verbally abusive, or excessive in his corporal discipline, as long as the father remains within the just laws of the land and God.) A wife is even to submit herself to an unreasonable husband, unless for instance he were to command her to lie to the Holy Spirit as Ananias did (Acts 5:1-10), in which case she should rather obey God. A husband has the authority to have natural sex with his wife, but he does not have the authority to command her to participate in unnatural anal sex. Likewise, the wife has the authority to access her husband's body for sexual gratification (1 Corinthians 7:3-5). So wives are commanded to submit themselves to their husbands in everything (Ephesians 5:22, 24), but if the husband steps outside of his sphere of authority and wants her to do something illegal or immoral for instance, she has the right to not submit herself, and obey the

government or God, whatever the case may be. God won't tell a wife to do something contrary to what her husband wants, though He may use her as a catalyst in what He wants her husband to do. Therefore, if she for instance feels that she, being a believer, wants to meet with the rest of the church in their area, but her husband, an unbeliever, refuses to let her do it, the answer is clear - she should submit herself to her husband and not go! God doesn't override the husband's authority even when he uses it unjustly, unless he crosses the line of criminal acts or imposing immoral acts on the family, causing God or the government to intervene.

The reason God allows someone to suffer wrongfully is firstly that God keeps the chain of authority which He has established intact, even to the point of allowing some abuse. However, the second and most important reason is given in 1 Peter 2:20, namely His glory. We are created to glorify God (see the section on 'Mandate.'). In the same way we have an example in Jesus Christ who, after having suffered, was glorified (1 Peter 1:11; also see John 6:38). We were called by God for the very purpose of suffering for Him, just as Christ suffered for us (1 Peter 2:21). As He committed Himself to a higher Judge, God, who judges righteously (v. 23), we too must commit ourselves to the one under whose authority we are, knowing that they will have to answer to God. We must answer to God for how we respond to our authority - even when it causes us to suffer. 1 Peter 3 continues the same idea, applying it further, starting with wives who are required to submit themselves to their husbands, even if their husbands are not believers (vs. 1-6), just as citizens should submit themselves to their governments and slaves to their masters (or employees to their employers today):

13 Therefore subject yourselves to every human institution on account of the Lord: whether to the king as to *one* having authority,

14 or to governors, as to those being sent for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of *those* doing good.

15 For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may silence the ignorance of foolish men—

16 as free, yet not using freedom as a cover for wickedness, but as bondservants of God.

17 Honour all *people*. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.

18 Servants, subject yourselves to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the crooked.

19 For this is admirable, if because of conscience toward God someone endures pain, suffering unjustly.

20 For what glory *is it*, if when you sin and are beaten, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer *for it*, you endure, this is admirable before God.

21 For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving behind an example for you, that you should follow in His footsteps,

22 "Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth";

23 who, being verbally abused, did not return verbal insults, when *He* suffered, *He* did not threaten, but committed *Himself* to Him who judges righteously; (1 Peter 2:13-23)

(Also see 1 Peter 3:8-17.)

Thus various spheres of authority exist, with different forms of government in each of these spheres, influencing how decisions are made. This is especially true in the church.

Eldership

Churches have leaders too, called elders. However, the authority elders have is much different from the authority leaders in other spheres have. This will become clear in what follows.

*Firstly, we see that a pastor (or shepherd), overseer (or bishop), and elder (or presbyter) all scripturally refer to the same person:

1 The elders who are among you I exhort, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed;
2 shepherd the flock of God among you, overseeing not by compulsion, but rather willingly, not in fondness for dishonest gain, but rather eagerly;
3 nor as being masters over allotments, but rather being examples to the flock.
4 And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. (1 Peter 5:1-4)

*[The term 'overseer' refers to their task relative to the church as a corporate body, while the term "pastor" or "shepherd" is associated with their task relative to individual church members, and the term "elder" has to do with their age, spiritual experience and maturity and standing character which has been proved in the context of church life as part of the necessary personal qualifications for the task. These terms refer to the same person, but each presents a different aspect of their function.]

The same is evident when Paul spoke to the Ephesian elders:

17 Now from Miletus, having sent to Ephesus, he summoned the *elders of the church.

28 Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit placed you as overseers, to shepherd the church of the Lord, and of God, which He purchased with His own blood. (Acts 20:17, 28)

*[The Greek word "presbuteros" in verse 17 correctly translated is "elders," as it also appears in most translations of the Scriptures. However, in a few translations it has been translated wrongly using a more institutionalised word carrying the idea of hierarchical authority. But as we will point out in this section, an elder in the church is not a position, and especially not a hierarchical one, but a function.]

These elders were recognised from within the church by the people they would be leading. As churches were established they initially did not have any elders, but these elders would emerge over time, as the Holy Spirit would raise them up and as others would naturally relate to them in this way. As apostles revisited the churches they had previously established, they took part with the church in the choosing of these *local elders (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5), allowing them to completely leave these churches to function on their own as they continued establishing new churches. Not only did these elders have experience in church life by the time they were chosen, but their family life and character would have been evident to the other members of the church, these being necessary requirements for anyone to qualify as an elder:

1 Faithful is this word: If anyone aspires to the position of an overseer, he desires a good work.

2 It is necessary, therefore, for an overseer to be irreproachable, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, well-behaved, hospitable, skilful at teaching;

3 not given to wine, not a bully, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not loving money;

4 one leading his own house well, having *his* children in submission with all reverence;

5 (for if one does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?);

6 not a new convert, lest being puffed up *with pride* he fall into the *same* condemnation as the devil.

7 Moreover he must have a good testimony among those outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. (1 Timothy 3:1-7)

6 if a man is unimpeachable, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or *who are* insubordinate.

7 For an overseer must be unimpeachable, as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money,

8 but hospitable, loving good, prudent, just, holy, temperate,

9 holding fast to the faithful word as he was taught, that he may be able to exhort by sound doctrine, and to convince those who oppose it. (Titus 1:6-9)

*[This localised eldership was complemented by men with wider itinerant ministries (Ephesians 4:11, see the section on 'Gifts\Ministry Gifts') who function more widely than only in the churches they come from and where they are co-equal members of corporate decision-making, as pointed out in the rest of this section.]

Note that elders are always male *("the husband of one wife," or literally a "one woman man," 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6), and that there should be a plurality of elders (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5; throughout the New Testament churches always had a plurality of elders). They are also recognised from within the church they are part of. Considering their qualifications, this was necessary as character could only be assessed by those who spent time with them, especially in their homes, in order to know them that well.

*[Elders therefore cannot be divorced, nor married to more than one wife at a time.]

A key role elders play in the church is to help everything that goes on in the meeting to "be done properly and according to order" (1 Corinthians 14:40). This is done in a non-prominent way, where visitors won't even know who the elders are unless a problem occurs. One such a problem may be false teachers visiting the church trying to deceive the members. Very early on the church was warned against such people:

10 If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, **do not receive him into your house, and do not greet him;* (2 John 10)

*[The verse applies to a house church with its participatory meetings.]

An elder's task includes dealing with such visitors:

10 For there are also many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision,

11 whom it is necessary to shut *their* mouths, who overturn whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain. (Titus 1:10-11)

The elders, just like Titus here, had to:

13 ...rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith,

14 not giving heed to Jewish myths and to commands of men turning away from the truth. (Titus 1:13b-14)

Another problem may be that a brother brings an erroneous teaching or application, in which case the elders must gently correct the error. Regarding one of the qualifications for an elder we read:

9 holding fast to the faithful word as he was taught, that he may be able to exhort by sound doctrine, and to convince those who oppose it. (Titus 1:9)

This is exactly why one of the qualifications for being an elder, as we have already seen, is the *ability to teach (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:9). Elders are usually the older, more experienced and spiritually-mature brothers in the Lord, whose character has been proved

in the context of church life. In protecting the church against deceivers and erroneous teaching they act as 'guardians' of the church, but will otherwise participate equally in church meetings as any other brother would.

*[Being able to teach doesn't have anything to do with having gone to 'seminary,' which itself would have been a completely foreign concept to the church. When these instructions were given, the New Testament, though already written, had not yet been compiled and available to the church as we have it today. It was, however, available and practised by believers as being handed down by the apostles, explaining the importance of elders having to have experienced church life themselves first. Today we have these handed down traditions available in the Scriptures (see the earlier section on 'Church Practice Taught'), as do we have apostles (see the section on 'Gifts\Ministry Gifts\Apostles') teaching them in the new churches they establish, pastor-teachers (or teachers, see the section on 'Gifts\Ministry Gifts\Pastors and Teachers') and the Holy Spirit Himself, all of which, in the context of church life, enable those whom the Holy Spirit is raising up to become elders, to be able to teach.]

But how do elders relate to decision-making in the church? It is quite interesting that the apostles themselves, from what they had received from the Lord Jesus Christ and from what they knew the church had to be, already started relating to the church in the way the elders later would, even before any elders existed yet. At the very first decision they had to make, even before the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, we read the following:

15 And in those days Peter, rising up in the midst of the disciples (altogether the number of names was about a hundred and twenty), said,

16 "Men *and* brothers; it was necessary *for* this Scripture to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus;

17 'for he was numbered with us and obtained a portion in this ministry.'"

20 For it is written in the Book of Psalms: 'Let his homestead become desolate, and let no one dwell in it'; and, 'May another take his **oversight*. '

21 Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us in every time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us,

22 beginning from the baptism of John until the day in which He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection."

23 And they nominated two: Joseph who is called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias.

24 And they prayed and said, "You, O Lord, knower of all hearts, show whom You have chosen of these two

25 to receive a portion in this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place."

26 And they cast their lots. And the lot fell on Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles. (Acts 1:15-17, 20-26)

*[Many translations wrongly translate the word "oversight" (or "overseership") here as 'office' or 'position.']

Where Peter took the lead by pointing out the decision that had to be made, they all (v. 20) took part in the actual making of the decision itself. There was no dictatorship here with only one person ('the leader') making a decision, nor a democracy with a majority vote. What we discover is what existed throughout the New Testament whenever decisions had to be made in the church, namely consensus.

The same happened in the initial church of Jerusalem, now with more than five thousand believers (Acts 4:4), when some problems arose:

1 Now in those days, as the disciples were increasing in number, there arose a complaint from the Greek speaking Jews against the Aramaic speaking Jews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution.

2 Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not pleasing to us that we should forsake the word of God to serve tables.
3 Therefore, brothers, select seven men from among you, of *good* reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint for this need.
4 But we will faithfully engage in prayer and in the ministry of the word."
5 And the word was pleasing before all the congregation, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch,
6 whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them. (Acts 6:1-6)

The leadership, instead of making a decision and expecting everyone to follow, pointed the way forward, with the proposal only being adopted because there was consensus among the whole gathered body of believers. The actual choice of the seven men who were to fulfil the need was left entirely to the church, which having chosen them, set them before the apostles.

After the persecution, when some had returned to Jerusalem again, the church in Jerusalem was much smaller and had by now also elders appointed. A unique event then occurred, namely that the church gathered to consider an important a matter on which the *church in Antioch wanted their input:

1 And certain men coming down from Judea were teaching the brothers, "If you are not circumcised in the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."
2 Therefore when there arose a serious dissension and debate with Paul and Barnabas, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem concerning this issue.
3 Therefore, being sent forth by the church, they were passing through Phoenicia and Samaria, telling in detail *about* the conversion of the Gentiles; and they were causing great joy to all the brothers.
4 And having come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders; and they declared all that God had done with them.
5 But some of those from the sect of the Pharisees rose up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses."
6 And the apostles and elders gathered together to see about this matter.
7 And after much debate, Peter arose and said to them: "Men *and* brothers, you know that from early days God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.
8 And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as also *He did* to us,
9 and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.
10 Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?
11 But through the grace of the Lord Jesus, we believe that we will be saved in the same manner as they."
12 Then all the multitude stopped speaking and listened to Barnabas and Paul telling as many signs and wonders as God had done among the Gentiles through them.
13 Now after they had finished speaking, James answered, saying, "Men *and* brothers, listen to me:
14 **Simeon has related how God first visited *them* to take from the Gentiles a people for His name.

19 Therefore I judge that we must not cause trouble for those who are turning to God from *among* the Gentiles;

20 but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, and from fornication, from things strangled, and *from* blood.

21 "For Moses has had from ancient generations those who proclaim him in each city, being read in the synagogues from one Sabbath to another."

22 Then it seemed best to the apostles and the elders, together with the whole church, to send men being chosen from them to Antioch, together with Paul and Barnabas, *namely*, Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brothers.

23 Writing by their hand these things: The apostles, the elders, and the brothers, to the brothers in Antioch, and Syria, and Cilicia who are of the Gentiles: Greetings.

24 Inasmuch as we have heard that some went out from among us and troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, 'that you must be circumcised and keep the law'—to whom we gave no *such* command—

25 it seemed best to us, being like-minded, to send chosen men to you, with our beloved *brothers* Barnabas and Paul,

26 men who have risked their lives for the sake of the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

27 We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who will also tell you the same things by *word of mouth*.

28 For it seemed best to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to put on you no greater burden except for these necessary things:

29 that you abstain from meat offered to idols, and from blood, and from *anything* strangled, and from fornication; from which keeping yourselves back, you will do well. Farewell. (Acts 15:1-14, 19-29)

*[It is interesting to note that just as the church in Jerusalem made decisions corporately, so the church Antioch too, as a whole, sent some to Jerusalem for input on this matter (vs. 2-3). Unlike the church in Jerusalem, they did not have elders yet.]

**[That is Simon Peter]

Here the decision the church had to make was to establish a point of doctrine and practice. Again the leaders were taking the lead by convening the necessary gathering. The apostles and the elders carried out the debate with "all the multitude" present and listening. When James eventually summed up from his point of view, it was the apostles and the elders, together with the whole church who decided to send chosen men to Antioch with their judgment on the matter contained in a letter written in the name of the apostles, the elders, and the brothers (vs. 22-23). Thus it was the whole church which collectively and consensually made the decision. This is the pattern for decision-making in the church, and we not only see examples of it having been so in matters of appointment, doctrine and practice, but even in the extremely serious act of church discipline:

15 "And if your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have won your brother.

16 But if he does not hear, take along with you one or two more, so that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.'

17 But if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you as a heathen and a tax collector. (Matthew 18:15-17)

It is the gathered church finally putting someone out of the church. This was also the case in the Corinthian church, where a man who had taken his father's wife had to be removed from their midst:

4 in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ,

5 hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, in order that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. (1 Corinthians 5:4-5)

This brings us back to the word "church" itself, as chosen by Jesus here (Matthew 18:17). As mentioned earlier, the Greek word for church is 'ekklesia.' The origin of the word was the Athenian legislative assembly, and so though it literally means 'a called out people,' the idea in reference to the local church was that of people called out (i.e. assembling), where the word 'church' itself implies the idea of collective decision-making.

What stands out is that leadership in the church is in no way hierarchical. Elders may take the lead in pointing out problems or a decision that needs to be made, but as brothers are part of the decision-making process with everyone else. Being raised up by the Holy Spirit from within the church and chosen by the church, elders are trusted and their opinions regarded, but in no way are they in charge. Here we are reminded of Jesus' words:

25 But Jesus, having summoned them, said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.

26 Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, shall be your servant.

27 And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave;

28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:25-28)

In speaking here to His disciples who later became the apostles, Jesus made it clear how they were to serve and lead. Whereas in other spheres of authority it was common knowledge that hierarchy and position were included, in the church this was not the case. He doesn't say here that they were to exercise authority in a good manner rather than in a bad manner, but what He said was that there was to be no hierarchy amongst them at all - and there is a very important reason for this in the church.

In the church there already is a hierarchy: Jesus - and everyone else! He is the one in charge of His church. Where Jesus is the Head, the church is His body on the earth (Romans 12:3-5; 1 Corinthians 10:16-17; 12:12-27; Ephesians 1:22-23; 2:16; 4:11-12; Colossians 1:18; 2:19). So not only is He the head of the universal church, but also the head of each individual local church. The veil of the temple was torn when Jesus died on the cross (Matthew 27:50-51; 2 Corinthians 3:14; Hebrews 6:19-20; 9:1-15), and now we have direct access to the Father through Him. No priests are needed, and certainly no elders acting like priests. So the Head leads the body with no middle men. It is therefore the responsibility of all, and not just some, to establish from God's Word, through prayer and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, what His will is concerning whatever issue may arise.

However, where we do find hierarchy in the church, is within the family, which forms the basis of church life. Referring to the earlier section on 'Family\Marriage\Roles and Responsibilities in Marriage,' we noticed that, though equal in status, the husband outranks both his wife and children, just as his wife, together with him, outranks the children. In collective consensual decision-making in the church, families will function accordingly, as family units, rather than as separate individuals. A family for instance with a husband, wife, and five children will only have one public voice, and not seven, with the father at the head. Husbands will therefore obey Christ, wives submit themselves to their husbands, and children obey their parents, where in this context decision-making as a gathered body, though being elder led, is collective and consensual by all the men in the church. So the idea of 'women's silence' here relates back to family hierarchy (see the earlier section on 'Family\Women's Silence'), and not to elders having any hierarchical

position. If the wife differs in opinion on any matter, she should discuss it with her husband at home.

The fact that eldership is a function, rather than a position, is also seen in the New Testament letters which were written to churches, and not to their 'leaders.' We do see elders mentioned in the greeting of the letter to the Philippians, where the saints in Philippi are greeted together with them and the deacons (Philippians 1:1) - but they are not mentioned again in the rest of the letter. Similarly, we also see that they are greeted with all the saints (in Jerusalem and Judea) at the end of the letter to the Hebrews (Hebrews 13:24).

Today, however, due to the way the unscriptural institutionalised church (though still true church, but just *unscriptural in its practice) has developed since 'the early church fathers,' we find that especially hierarchy is often wrongly translated into words applying to elders, as will be shown below:

12 And we request of you, brothers, to recognise those who labour among you, and care for you in the Lord and warn you,

13 and to regard them beyond all measure in love, because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13)

*[Also note that not all house churches are scriptural in their practices either!]

Many translations translate the phrase "care for you in the Lord" as 'are over you in the Lord.' The Greek word for "over you" here is "proistemi," and it literally means "to stand before" (i.e. to lead) / "to attend to" (indicating care and diligence). It is therefore clear that this is not a hierarchical word. In fact, the same word occurs in another context in Titus 3:8 and 14, where it can be translated as "maintain" / "devote." We also find the same word in the following passages:

8 whether exhorting, in the exhortation; whether sharing, with simplicity; whether leading, with diligence; whether showing mercy, with cheerfulness. (Romans 12:8)

- Here translated as "leading."

17 Let the elders having led well be counted worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in *the* word and teaching. (1 Timothy 5:17)

- Here translated as "led."

When understanding that elders in their leading actually 'care for' the church, rather than 'be over' or 'rule' it, a more correct view of scriptural leadership is formed.

The passage where a wrong understanding of scriptural leadership has influenced both its translation and reading the most, is Hebrews 13:17. Starting at verse 7, we read:

***7 Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you, of whom considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.**

17 Obey your leaders, and submit to *them*, for they keep watch over your souls, as giving an account, in order that they may do this with joy and not groaning, for this *would be unprofitable for you.* (Hebrews 13:7, 17)

*[Since the past tense "spoke the word of God to you" is used, some think the leaders in Hebrews 13:7 were dead. At the date of this epistle, James, the brother of John, the son of Zebedee and Salome, and James, the "brother" of the Lord, the son of Alphaeus (Cleopas), had suffered martyrdom. (Regarding James, the brother of John: Matthew 4:21 / Acts 12:1-2, 44 AD // Regarding James, the brother of the Lord: Galatians 1:18-19; Matthew 13:55; Mark 15:40, 47; John 19:25; Cleopas was the brother of Joseph, the husband of Mary, through whom Jesus was born through the miraculous working of the Holy Spirit of God; Mary, the wife of Cleopas, was also sister to Mary, through whom Jesus was born through the miraculous working of the Holy Spirit of God; Also see Genesis 12:5, 13:8; 29:12, 15; Leviticus 10:4 / Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke

6:15 / 1 Corinthians 15:7 / Acts 1:13 / Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18 / He was the author of the epistle of James / Josephus recorded that he was put to death in 63 AD.]]

Most translations translate the Greek word “hegeomai” here and in verse 24 as “leaders” or “those going before you” (i.e. “guides”). What is important here is to again note that the word, even when used in this context, is not hierarchical. Just as one would follow a guide in acknowledgement that he knows the best way, one is in no way under his authority. And this is exactly the case with elders in the church. The same word is clearly used in a non-hierarchical manner in other places in the New Testament, just as in Luke 22:26, where even though it can be translated as “leader,” it actually teaches the opposite to hierarchy, as seen earlier in Matthew 20:25-28:

26 But *it is not this way with you; but let the greatest among you, let him be as the youngest, and he who leads as he who serves.* (Luke 22:26)

Here Jesus is teaching the apostles that their leadership was to entail no more hierarchical authority than that of a child or a servant.

Returning to the word in Hebrews 13:17 mostly translated as “obey,” we notice again how not understanding scriptural leadership in the church has influenced the word choice in translation. There is a word in the Greek language which means to obey higher authority: ‘hupakaou.’ It is used in relation to children having to obey their parents (Ephesians 6:1-3), and slaves obeying their masters (Ephesians 6:5-8, or applied these days, employees obeying their employers). Now this word does indeed mean to obey someone because he is in authority over you. However, this is not the word in Hebrews 13:17. The Greek word here is “peitho,” and we also find it used elsewhere in the New Testament, where it is usually translated more correctly. It primarily means ‘to persuade,’ and is linked to another Greek word, ‘pisteuo,’ which means ‘to trust’ or ‘to have faith in.’ So though it can be defined as ‘to persuade’ / ‘to win over to’ / ‘to listen to’ / ‘to obey,’ the obedience suggested is not that of obeying authority, but that resulting from persuasion. The idea here is rather to be persuaded by them (since they are trusted and, though not necessarily always, generally wiser than you), instead of having to obey the elders standing before you in the church because ‘they are over you’ (which we have seen they are not). So where we should have an obedient response to the elders, we still have a choice in the matter, and if we do obey it is because we have been won over by what has been suggested and have ourselves decided that that is the wisest course of action. Simply putting in the word ‘obey’ by itself misrepresents the actual meaning. The only reason this is done where the word has to do with those leading, is because of people generally having a wrong understanding of what scriptural leadership in the church entails. (In other words, translators sometimes translate according to their own preconceived ideas and doctrinal positions.) To better grasp this word, we can look at a few other passages where it appears in other contexts:

20 But the chief priests and elders persuaded the crowds that they should ask for Barabbas, but they should destroy Jesus. (Matthew 27:20)

- Here it is translated as “persuaded.”

41 Likewise the chief priests also, mocking *Him* with the scribes and elders, and Pharisees, said,

42 He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe on Him.

43 He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now, if He will have Him; for He said, ‘I am the Son of God.’ ”

44 Even the thieves who were crucified with Him were reviling Him with the same *insult.* (Matthew 27:41-44)

- Here it is translated as “trusted” in verse 43.

3 And I wrote this very thing to you, so that when I came, I would not have sorrow from those from whom I ought to have joy, having confidence in you all that my joy is *the joy of you all*. (2 Corinthians 2:3)

- Here it is translated as "having confidence."

The last word in Hebrews 13:17 we need to look at is "submit." Again we need to first point out that there is a word in the Greek language that means to submit to someone because he has authority over you. The word is *'hupotasso,' and it literally means 'to array/arrange under,' and we have seen the word used earlier in relation to wives submitting themselves to their husbands. However, this is not the word here. The Greek word here is "hupeiko," which does indeed mean to submit, but submission here is not to hierarchical authority as in the case of wives to their husbands or citizens to the governing authorities. Rather the word means to submit to greater strength, like in a wrestling match or war, where the weaker party should surrender to the stronger, not on the basis of authority, but of greater strength. The idea here is that if you don't, you will only hurt yourself, so since you can't prevail against the stronger party, rather give in and submit.

*[Note that it is the word "hupotasso" that is used in 1 Corinthians 16:16:

15 I urge you, brothers (you know the household of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints)

16 that you also subject yourselves to such *people* and to everyone who works and labours with us.

17 I rejoice over the coming of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, for what was lacking on your part they have supplied.

18 For they refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore give recognition to such *men*. (1 Corinthians 16:15-18)

However, here the submission is towards the household of Stephanas (Stephen), and rather indicates an attitude of respect that needs to be shown to such as these mentioned. But whatever the case, it doesn't show hierarchical eldership.]

Hebrews 13:17 is therefore simply saying that we should be willing to be persuaded by those elders standing before us in the church (by giving them the benefit of the doubt), and not fighting against them all the time.

Though we have seen that elders scripturally do not have hierarchical authority over the church, young single people in the church are required to submit themselves to the elders and to the older people. However, this submission of themselves to the elders rather has to do with them being young and the elders being older, than having to do with hierarchy attached to eldership. In fact, it follows the thought of Hebrews 13:17 where we are not to fight against the elders all the time, but rather give in to their greater strength (due to their character, age and experience), which, in the case of single young people, usually is even more applicable.

5 Likewise, younger *people*, subject yourselves to *the elders*. And all of you be subject to one another, and be clothed with humility, because "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." (1 Peter 5:5)

It is clear that it is essentially the Holy Spirit who places elders:

28 Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit placed you as overseers, to shepherd the church of the Lord, and of God, which He purchased with His own blood. (Acts 20:28).

However, how this process of appointing elders practically took place is another area of misunderstanding with regards to eldership that we need to look at. We read in two passages about elders being appointed, and a different Greek word is used in each case:

21 And having preached the gospel to that city and having made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, and Iconium, and Antioch, 22 strengthening the souls of the disciples, urging *them* to continue in the faith, saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God." 23 And having chosen elders for them in every church, *and* having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. (Acts 14:21-23)

Here we see that as churches were established they initially did not have any elders, but as apostles revisited the churches they had previously established, they 'chose' local elders, allowing the apostles to completely leave these churches to function on their own as they continued establishing new churches. Some translations wrongly use the word 'ordained' here (which nearly makes it sound as if elders are like priests). However, we mostly find words used in the lines of 'appointed' or 'chose.' The Greek word used here, "cheirotoneo," simply means "to stretch out the hand," and was used for voting in the Athenian legislative assembly (where, as pointed out earlier, the word 'ekklesia,' or church, originates from). The idea behind the word is the appointment of elders by recognising those who had been manifesting themselves as gifted by the Holy Spirit to function as elders. So upon revisiting the churches they had previously established, the apostles joined in with the brothers in recognising those whom God has gifted and raised up from within the church to be elders, and who have been put forward by the gathered church. They then 'added their vote' to the names of those recognised. Those chosen were recognised from within the church by the people they would be leading, since they would know their character the best. These elders emerged over time, as others would naturally relate to them in this way. Not only did they have experience in church life by the time they were chosen, but their family life and character would have been evident to the other members of the church, these being necessary requirements for anyone to qualify as an elder (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9).

The second passage about elders being appointed reads as follows:

5 For this reason I left you behind in Crete, so that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and you should appoint elders in every city as I commanded you: (Titus 1:5)

Here we see that when Paul came from Macedonia to Greece (Acts 20:2), he left Titus behind in Crete to set in order what was lacking and appoint elders in every city (and as we have pointed out earlier in the section on 'The City-Wide Church,' there was only one church in every city where elders were appointed in at that time). The Greek word here, "kathestemi," does mean "to appoint someone," and where it can mean to appoint someone to a position of authority, *it doesn't necessarily have to be the case that the position to which the person is appointed is one of rank, but simply means that an appointment has been made. This word is also used in Acts 6:3 when 'the seven' were appointed:

3 Therefore, brothers, select seven men from among you, of *good* reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint for this need. (Acts 6:3)

The seven were appointed to a single responsibility, namely the daily distribution of food to the widows (Acts 2:45; 4:45; 6:1-2), and this task did not involve the idea of hierarchical position. It was the gathered body of believers who actually chose them and set them before the apostles (vs. 5-6). In the same way, it is clear that Titus was not to decide alone who were going to be elders, but was simply to appoint those whom the gathered body of believers were to recognise and choose.

*[The word 'appoint' doesn't necessarily imply rank. If I would appoint my three-year old son to gather wood for a fire, it doesn't mean that he is now in hierarchical authority over the family!]

Having looked at the scriptural nature of eldership, we can also understand Paul's words to the Ephesian elders better:

17 Now from Miletus, having sent to Ephesus, he summoned the *elders of the church.

18 And when they were present with him, he said to them: "You know from the first day which I arrived in Asia, how I was with you the whole time,

19 serving the Lord with all humility, and with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plots of the Jews;

20 how I kept back nothing that was profitable, but declared it to you, teaching you publicly and from house to house,

21 solemnly bearing witness to both Jews and to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus.

22 And now behold, I, having been bound in the spirit, am going to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there,

23 except that the Holy Spirit in every city is solemnly bearing witness, saying that bonds and tribulations are waiting for me.

24 But I count myself as nothing; nor do I regard my life as valuable to myself, so that I may complete my course with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to bear solemn testimony to the gospel of the grace of God.

25 And now behold, now I know that you all, among whom I have passed through preaching the kingdom of God, will no longer see my face.

26 Therefore I testify to you this very day, that I am innocent of all blood.

27 For I did not draw back from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.

28 Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit placed you as overseers, to shepherd the church of the Lord, and of God, which He purchased with His own blood.

29 For I know this, that savage wolves will come in after my departure, not sparing the flock.

30 Also from among you yourselves will arise men speaking things having been distorted, *in order* to draw away the disciples after them.

31 Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years, night and day I did not cease, with tears, exhorting each one.

32 So for the present, I entrust you, brothers, to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who have been sanctified.

33 I have coveted the silver or gold or clothes of no one.

34 You yourselves know that these hands have rendered service to my needs, and those who were with me.

35 By all things I have shown you, that thus labouring it is necessary to help the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' "

36 And having said these things, he knelt down, together with them all, and prayed.
(Acts 20:17-36)

*[The Greek word "presbuteros" in verse 17 correctly translated is "elders," as it also appears in most translations of the Scriptures. However, in a few translations it has been translated wrongly using a more institutionalised word carrying the idea of hierarchical authority.]

It is evident from verses 29-30 that false teachers were going to come in from the outside, while even from within their midst men would arise who would distort the truth. Later, in

Revelation 2:1-7, written to the church in Ephesus, it seems as if the church, at least initially, did heed to Paul's warnings:

1 "To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, 'These things says He that holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands:

2 "I know your works, and your labour, and your endurance, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you tested those who say that they are apostles and they are not, and you found them *to be false*;

3 and you have endurance and you have born patiently on account of My name, and you did not become weary.

4 Nevertheless I have *this* against you, that you have left your first love.

5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen, and repent and do the first works; but if not, I am coming to you quickly and I will remove your lampstand out of its place, unless you repent.

6 But this you have, that you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him that overcomes will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of My God." ' (Revelation 2:1-7)

The church was praised for hating the works of the Nicolaitans, something which was held against the church in Pergamos:

15 Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, *which likewise I hate*. (Revelation 2:15)

One of the first attempts at inventing the non-scriptural distinction between 'clergy' and 'laity' was made by the Nicolaitans. They were a group that emphasised the difference between 'the listening lay people and the ministering brothers.' They go back to Nicolas, who was one of 'the seven' (Acts 6:5), and who, later influenced by Greek Dualism, went on to develop "the doctrine of the Nicolaitans" (Revelation 2:15), which the risen Christ says He 'hates' (Revelation 2:15). The word 'Nicolaitan' in Greek is composed of two words, 'Nicao,' which means 'to conquer / to be above others,' and 'laos,' which means 'common people.' 'A Nicolaitan' is someone conquering the common people, climbing above the 'laity.' Nicolaitans are therefore those who make laity out of God's people by raising up clergy to lord it over them. The conduct of climbing over and above the common believers as a mediatorial class is what the Lord detests and hates. However, in 1 Peter 5:2-3 we read:

2 shepherd the flock of God among you, overseeing not by compulsion, but rather willingly, not in fondness for dishonest gain, but rather eagerly;

3 nor as being masters over *allotments, but rather being examples to the flock. (1 Peter 5:2-3)

*[As if they are their inherited possessions, i.e. the congregation/'subjects' allotted to them.]

The Greek word translated as "allotments" here is "kleros," which is also where the words 'cleric' and 'clergy' originate from, precisely saying the opposite, namely that the non-elders are 'clergy'! The concept of a special clergy caste was already evident early in the church as we also see from the writings of 'the early church fathers.' See the section on 'Wrong Traditions' for more.

In summary we see that eldership in the church is non-hierarchical (meaning co-equal), male, plural and from within the church. Elders are simply older, more experienced and spiritually-mature brothers in the Lord who, having been placed by the Holy Spirit, have been recognised in the context of church life. As guardians they look out for the church,

but otherwise function in the same way any other brother would. While they point the church forward where important decisions need to be taken, all the brothers partake equally in collective and consensual decision-making, where it is the responsibility of all, and not just some, to establish from God's Word, through prayer and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, what His will is concerning whatever issue may arise. An elder is not the first amongst equals, he is just one amongst equals!

A final reference made to elders concerns praying for sick church members:

14 Is anyone among you sick? Let him call on the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. (James 5:14)

For those unfamiliar with the topic, I have added a section on anointing the sick with oil, before continuing to the next subject, since it does relate to church life:

In Old and New Testament times olive oil was applied for common medical purposes:

6 From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but bruises and sores and raw wounds; they are not pressed out or bound up or softened with oil. (Isaiah 1:6)

34 And coming to him, he bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and putting him on his own animal, he brought him to an inn, and took care of him. (Luke 10:34)

(It was usual for the Jews to mix olive oil and wine together for the healing of wounds. Olive oil and wine were for example mingled together and used to heal the sore caused by circumcision.)

Olive oil was also applied:

- For anointing the body or the hair: Exodus 29:7; 2 Samuel 14:2; Psalm 23:5; 92:10; 104:15; Luke 7:46.
- In some of the offerings: Exodus 29:40; Leviticus 7:12; Numbers 6:15; 15:4; but was excluded from the sin-offering: Leviticus 5:11; and the jealousy-offering: Numbers 5:15.
- For burning in lamps: Exodus 25:6; 27:20; Matthew 25:3.
- For anointing the dead: Matthew 26:12; Luke 23:56.

It was one of the most valuable products of the country (Deuteronomy 32:13; Ezekiel 16:13), and formed an article of extensive commerce with Tyre (Ezekiel 27:17). The use of it was a sign of gladness (Psalm 92:10; Isaiah 61:3) and its omission a token of sorrow (2 Samuel 14:2; Matthew 6:17). It was very abundant in Galilee.

In New Testament times we read of people being cured by the following means:

- By expressing some words: Acts 9:34; 14:10; 16:18.
- By the taking by the hand, or embracing: Acts 3:7; 20:10.
- By the laying on of hands: Mark 16:18; Acts 9:17.
- By anointing with oil: Mark 6:13.

In the context of the above there can at least be three possible interpretations of what anointing the sick with olive oil in the name of the Lord after having prayed for them in James 5:14 may mean:

- It can refer to olive oil used in a common medicinal way, as it was often used in the eastern countries for most disorders, and so elders may have been instructed to pray and use ordinary medicine;
- It can refer to one of the possible means of miraculously healing the sick, referring to the extraordinary spiritual gift of healing (see the section on 'Gifts\Manifestation Gifts\Operational Gifts\Healings'), as for example sometimes happened by touching (e.g. Matthew 8:3, 15), by the laying on of hands, or by expressing some words, and so in this case by anointing with olive oil (not done in a ceremonial way, as if anointing with olive oil in itself had any value in divine healings, as explained in the next answer below);
- It can also refer to bestowing honour, refreshment and grooming on the sick. In James 5:14 and Mark 6:13, the other passage where reference to healing the sick with olive oil is made, it is significant to note that the Greek word for "anoint" is "aleipho" ("rub with oil"), the same word used in Matthew 6:17, Luke 7:38 and Luke 7:46 for example, and not 'chrío' ('ceremonially anoint'). The former is the 'mundane' word and the latter is 'the sacred and religious word.' Therefore one may say that James is not suggesting a ceremonial or ritual anointing as a means of divine healing. Instead, he is referring to the common practice of using olive oil as a means of bestowing honour, refreshment, and grooming. Here it therefore doesn't literally have to apply to us in the same way today, using other means of bestowing honour, refreshment, and grooming to one another.

GIFTS

We have seen earlier in the section on 'Family' the symbolism used of us as the church being betrothed to Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2), looking forward to the "wedding of the Lamb" (Revelation 19:7-9; 21:9), knowing that He is preparing a place for us and that He will come again to receive us to Himself (John 14:2-3). Following the same symbolism, just as a man betrothed to a woman gives her an engagement gift as guarantee that he will come to take her to himself when his house is ready, so we as believers also have received the gift of the Holy Spirit as His pledge to us. (As believers this also gives us tremendous assurance of the fact that we are children of God! - see Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 4:1-7; Hebrews 10:22-23; 1 John 5:13.) In order to highlight this, a few repeated words are underlined in the passages that follow, pointing out the scriptural pattern seen in relation to the Gentiles who believed after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost:

37 Now on the last day, the great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.

38 He that believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his belly will flow rivers of living water."

39 (But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him were about to receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet *given*, because Jesus was not yet glorified.) (John 7:37-39)

4 And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem, but to await for the promise of the Father, "which," He said, "you have heard from Me;

5 for John baptised with water, but you shall be baptised with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." (Acts 1:4-5)

(Also see Matthew 3:1-12.)

37 Now having heard this, they were cut to the heart, and they said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men *and* brothers, what shall we do?"

38 Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let each of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

39 For the promise is for you and for your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call." (Acts 2:37-39)

(To avoid some confusion with regards to the last phrase, see Matthew 20:16, 22:14.)

44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word.

45 And those of the circumcision who believed were astounded, as many as had come with Peter, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also.

46 For they heard them speaking in tongues and magnifying God. Then Peter answered,

47 "Surely no one can forbid water, can he, that these should not be baptised who received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" (Acts 10:44-47)

Peter now, referring to the passage just seen in Acts 10:44-47, speaks to the Jewish believers in Judea in defence of the Gentiles also having received the gift of the Holy Spirit:

15 "And when I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them, as also on us in the beginning.

16 And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, 'John indeed baptised with water, but you shall be baptised with the Holy Spirit.'

17 "If then God has given to them the same gift as He gave to us, when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to hinder God?" (Acts 11:15-17; also see 15:7-9)

21 Now He who establishes us together with you in Christ and who has anointed us is God,

22 who also has sealed us, and given us the *down payment of the Spirit in our hearts. (2 Corinthians 1:21-22)

*[This is the same Greek word found in 2 Corinthians 5:5 and Ephesians 1:14, meaning "deposit," and is also translated as 'pledge' or 'guarantee' in some translations.]

5 Now He who has prepared us for this very *thing* is God, who also gave to us the down payment of the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 5:5)

13 Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree,"

14 so that the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. (Galatians 3:13-14)

13 in whom you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise,

14 who is the down payment of our inheritance until the redemption of the possession, to the praise of His glory. (Ephesians 1:13-14)

In essence the Holy Spirit has come into the world to reveal and glorify Christ (John 15:26; 16:14) and to apply the saving work of Christ to those who accept Him as their Lord and Saviour through faith. He convicts and draws sinners to Christ, imparts new life to them when they believe, continually indwells them from the moment of spiritual birth, and seals them until the day when Christ will come again. His fullness, power, and control are appropriated in the believer's life by faith.

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

In line with this last verse, even though as believers we may have the Holy Spirit dwelling in us (also see 1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:12-20; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18), it is also possible for us to ignore His guidance and grieve Him due to sin. We are therefore commanded to rather be filled with the Holy Spirit at all times, being sensitive to Him:

18 And do not get drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit,

19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord,

20 giving thanks always concerning all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

21 subjecting yourselves to one another in the fear of God. (Ephesians 5:18-21)

31 And when they had prayed, the place where they were gathered was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness. (Acts 4:31) (Also see Acts 4:8; 13:9.)

Two important personal outcomes of a believer filled with the Holy Spirit are that he will show the fruit of the Spirit, and that he will also be empowered for work in God's kingdom - or when plainly put, he will live in the power of the indwelling Spirit. This means that he will not fulfil the lusts of the flesh, but will bear fruit to the glory of God. Scripture gives the fruit of the Spirit as follows:

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

23 gentleness, self-control—against such things there is no law. (Galatians 5:22-23)
(This is opposite to the works of the flesh we read of in vs. 19-21.)

Jesus also said to His disciples:

***8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.**" (Acts 1:8) (Also see John 20:21-22, where He gave a symbol pledge and confirmation of what they were to receive on the day of Pentecost.)

*[To better understand the depth of what Jesus said to His disciples, the inherent meanings behind the Greek of the verse will now be highlighted:

But you shall receive power [*not temporal power*] when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me [*not only...but also*] in Jerusalem, and [*likewise/also/indeed/even*] in all Judea and [*likewise/also/indeed/even*] Samaria, and [*likewise/also/indeed/even*] to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:8)]

Much more can be said of the Holy Spirit, but we will now focus our attention more on the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This is also significant in the context of the local church meeting together weekly, where 1 Corinthians 14 also points out how the gifts of the Spirit, in operation through believers, build up the church.

Ministry Gifts, also known as Four-fold Ministry Gifts

11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,

12 with a view to the perfecting of the saints; for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ, (Ephesians 4:11-12)

[i.e. He gave ... for the work of ministering and building up of the church, with the goal of perfecting (or equipping) the believers.]

The ministry gifts are functions of ministry given to the church at large. Here the particular believers called and sent to function in this way are the gifts to the church themselves. We need to therefore receive the person as a gift to the body. This means that they are itinerant, and unlike elders, serve not only in their own local churches. They come about by the Holy Spirit calling and sending them (e.g. see Acts 8:26, 29, 39-40; 13:2, 4a; Romans 10:14-15), and therefore will be operative in a dynamic way, as God determines. Their preparation, just as in the case of any believer's discipleship, takes place in the context of church life, where character is important. When looking at Ephesians 4:11, four of these gifts are evident, namely apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastor-teachers (or teachers). We read the words "and some as" before each of the gifts, showing us that "pastors and teachers" is the same person. The intent of the text is: "and some as [both] pastors and teachers," meaning that in addition to being local pastors (i.e., elders) some are also teachers given to the church at large (v. 12).

(Some see “pastors and teachers” as two separate gifts, referring to the ‘five-fold ministry gifts’ of Ephesians 4:11. In this case ‘pastors’ are the same as local church elders or overseers as we have indicated in the earlier section on ‘Church Leadership\Eldership,’ while ‘teachers’ are the same as ‘pastor-teachers’ as indicated in this book.)

- Apostles

The word ‘apostle’ comes from the Greek word ‘apostolos,’ which means ‘sent one’ / ‘messenger,’ and is always used in Scripture in the context of being sent by God to found, raise up and build the church. In essence one could say that they plant the seed of the kingdom (see 1 Corinthians 3:5-6). Because they lay the foundation (1 Corinthians 3:10) for new churches, they are also often today referred to as ‘church planters.’ Another word widely used for them today is ‘missionaries.’ The word ‘missionary’ in English comes from the Latin word for ‘apostle.’ However, this usage of the word has become so wide and general, that many who are called ‘missionaries’ today would not scripturally qualify to be called ‘apostles’ (not meaning that what they are doing is invalid!). Practically apostles will therefore pioneer new territory, especially focusing on people groups where no church yet exists among them. *So once a church is established, they will leave the church and move on, though they may still remain in contact with the church, but in a non-controlling way. Their function also touches on that of the other three ministry gifts of Ephesians 4:11, and so, in addition to establishing new churches, they will also build into existing churches. (In the same way, Jesus was sent by the Father from Heaven to earth to establish the kingdom of God.)

*[Note here that unlike Paul’s travels where he could get by using Greek everywhere he went in the first century, it may not be sufficient to do the same with English amongst most unreached people groups today. So depending on whom the Holy Spirit calls and where He sends him to, it may therefore be necessary for an apostle to also learn the language of the particular people group that needs to be reached, implying a longer time spent there. Another factor today is the fact that followers of many religions such as Islam for instance, already have a wrong idea about Christian concepts instilled in them, making them hostile towards the gospel before having even heard it once. (Similarly, Mark, for example, spent a long time in Egypt before the first person accepted the gospel.) These factors are also faced by evangelists, but because they usually stay in places for a shorter amount of time than apostles, they, just like pastor-teachers (or teachers) and even prophets, can also function through an interpreter if being sent somewhere by the Holy Spirit for a short time. Of course any Christian may relocate his household (also see the earlier sections on ‘Family\Marriage\Roles and Responsibilities in Marriage’ and ‘The Lord’s Supper\Practical Issues\How Do We Do It\Activities,’ and the section on ‘Money Matters\Summary’) if led by the Holy Spirit to do so, in which case being more effective may also imply learning the local language.]

- Prophets

Practically prophets can be seen as guides, correcting and pointing the way forward. They reveal and articulate clearly the present heart of God to the church so that we can see what God sees for us. This involves *revealing truth, as well as seeing the future when the church needs to be prepared for something beforehand (e.g. Acts 11:27-29; 13:1; 15:32; 21:10-11). (In the same way, Jesus only did what He saw the Father doing and only said what He heard the Father saying.)

*[Prophets speaking truth are different from teachers doing the same in the sense that what they say comes as a word from God on a matter on which there is no specific revealed scriptural teaching.]

We do read of prophetesses before the apostolic era (Exodus 15:20-21; Judges 4:4, however, Deborah being a judge wasn’t the natural pattern, vs. 5-9; 2 Kings 22:14-20 / 2 Chronicles 34:22-28; Nehemiah 6:14; Isaiah 8:3-4; Luke 2:36-38), and we also read of women prophesying during this era (Acts 21:9; 1 Corinthians 11:5).

- Evangelists

Evangelists proclaim Christ (Acts 8:5) / the good news of the things concerning the kingdom of God (Acts 8:12) / the gospel (Acts 8:40), be it public or private. While they will also especially focus on least evangelised and unreached people groups, unlike apostles, they move on after having proclaimed the gospel, and do not stay on to establish a church themselves (even though what they do will lead to churches being established, e.g. Acts 8:14). Although as believers we are at all times witnesses and disciples, this is different to being called, gifted and sent as an evangelist. An example of an evangelist in Scripture is Phillip (Acts 8:5-8, 26-40; 21:8). (In the same way, Jesus came to seek and save the lost.)

Christians working in foreign countries, even if led by the Holy Spirit to do so and even if the citizens there are of least evangelised or unreached people groups, as well as those in their own countries being faithful witnesses, are not necessarily apostles or evangelists. This was also true of the majority of the believers in the church in Jerusalem who were scattered during the persecution that arose in Acts 8:1. We read:

4 Therefore those who were scattered went about preaching the word. (Acts 8:4)

19 Then those who were scattered because of the tribulation coming about over Stephen, went about as far as Phoenicia, and Cyprus, and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews only.

20 But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, entering into Antioch spoke to the Greek speaking Jews, preaching the good news of the Lord Jesus.

21 And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed, and turned to the Lord. (Acts 11:19-21)

- Pastors and Teachers, or Pastor-Teachers

Pastor-teachers (or teachers) are elders who “labour in the word and teaching” (1 Timothy 5:17). In the first century they were of the few (only about 10%) who could read and write, and had the ability to disclose Christ through the Old Testament Scriptures. (Today, where many more can read or easily learn to read, but not all have access to the Scriptures in their own language, one could for example probably even place those working on translating the Scriptures in this category.) We have already examined what the ‘pastor’ part of their function entails in the earlier section on ‘Church Leadership\Eldership.’ These are elders in their own local churches, where they, together with the other elders and any other brother, can teach. So as elders they act as guardians, protecting the sheep against deceivers and erroneous teaching. (In the same way, we see Jesus being the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep.) Concerning the ‘teacher’ part of their function, they present the truth of Scripture to the church at large, instructing and grounding believers on matters of doctrine. Where they have a passion for the truth, they also bring simplicity and clarity to complex matters. (In the same way, the gospel as recorded by each of its four writers is abounding with Jesus’ teachings, where His disciples called Him “Teacher.”)

Ministerial Gifts, also known as Motivational Gifts

4 For just as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function,

5 so we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.

6 Having then gifts differing according to the grace having been given to us, *let us use them*: whether prophecy, *let us prophecy* according to the proportion of faith;

**7 whether ministry, *let us use it* in our ministry; whether teaching; in the teaching;
8 whether exhorting, in the exhortation; whether sharing, with simplicity; whether leading, with diligence; whether showing mercy, with cheerfulness. (Romans 12:4-8)**

The ministerial gifts are part of each believer's spiritual personality or temperamental predisposition. They are given in order for each believer to be able to fulfil his place in the church and in the world. God gives it to each when they are born, and it is therefore permanently present in each person and accessible at will. Each believer possesses a ministerial gift, and we should therefore appreciate our differences and know how we compliment one another. There are seven ministerial gifts.

- Prophecy

Believers who have this gift perceive and declare what is acceptable to God and what is not and so keep us focussed on spiritual principles. They see everything in black and white, good or bad, right or wrong. They get to the root of things.

- Ministry

Believers who have this gift serve in practical ways, and so keep the work of the ministry going. They are quick to notice opportunities to do things for others, and they fulfil an important role by doing what is needed.

- Teaching

Believers who have this gift like to research and teach, and so keep us studying and learning. They will investigate matters in the quest for truth, and are able to offer explanations.

- Exhorting

Believers who have this gift encourage us to personal progress, and so keep us positive. They always look for opportunities to encourage others in their pursuits. They look for the positive.

- Sharing

Believers who have this gift very easily and naturally give material assistance, and so help in meeting specific needs, such as those of poor believers (see the section on 'Money Matters' for more). They help others in the church to see where to give, since they are quick to see a material need. They are also quick to give from whatever they themselves have.

- Leading

Believers who have this gift give leadership and guidance, and so keep us organised and help to increase our vision. They are easily able to grasp the overall dimensions of a situation and therefore make things happen.

- Showing Mercy

Believers who have this gift provide personal and emotional support to others, since they find it easy to show compassion, and so help to maintain right attitudes and relationships. They are quick to recognise hurt and wounds, always seeking opportunities to express love. They comfort the distressed.

Manifestation Gifts, also known as Spiritual Gifts or Temporal Gifts

1 Now concerning spiritual *gifts*, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant.

7 But to each *one* the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the profit *of all*.

8 For to one is given a word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another a word of knowledge according to the same Spirit,

9 and to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit,

10 to another the working of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another discerning of spirits, and to another *different* kinds of tongues, and to another interpretation of tongues.

11 But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills. (1 Corinthians 12:1, 7-11)

These gifts are supernatural manifestations, given by the Holy Spirit to whomsoever He wants when He wants, in order to meet a need, either in the church, or in witnessing to the world. Once the need is met, the gift is not manifested anymore. Any believer can at any time manifest any of these manifestation gifts, depending on how the Holy Spirit gives it. There are nine manifestation gifts, in three categories.

• Revelation Gifts

- Word of Wisdom

This is a supernatural impartation of divine wisdom to deal with a difficult situation. It is not wisdom gained by age or experience. An example of a word of wisdom in Scripture is found in the way Solomon settled the dispute between the two mothers (1 Kings 3:16-28).

- Word of Knowledge

This is a supernatural impartation of information inaccessible by natural human means. It is not knowledge gained by learning, study or research. An example of a word of knowledge in Scripture is found in the way that Peter knew what Ananias and Sapphira had done (Acts 5:1-10).

- Discerning of Spirits

This is a supernatural ability to differentiate between sources of spiritual operations. (Four spirits exist: Holy, human, evil, and angelic.) It is not a high degree of natural perception, suspicion, or being critical or faultfinding. An example of discerning of spirits in Scripture is found when Paul discerned the operation of an evil spirit in the slave girl (Acts 16:16-18).

• **Operational Gifts, or Power Gifts**

- **Faith**

This is a supernatural release of faith that transcends natural faith limitations. It is not natural faith built up by prayer, fasting or the word of God. An example of the gift of faith in Scripture is found in the crippled man who, after having heard Paul speaking, had faith to be healed (Acts 14:8-10; Matthew 14:28-31; also see Acts 3:16; 6:5; 11:24).

- ***Healings**

*[The original Greek noun always occurs in the plural ("gifts of healings," see 1 Corinthians 12:9, 28, 30), indicating that there are specialisations in the healing of different types of sicknesses.]

This is a supernatural release of power of God to effect healing in a sick body. It is not healing through natural or medicinal means. An example of a miraculous healing in Scripture is found when Peter healed a lame man (Acts 3:1-8).

- **Working of Miracles**

This is a supernatural ability to do something that defies the laws of nature. It is not amazing confidence, optical illusionary, magic, or trickery. Examples of miracles taking place in Scripture is found where Stephen performed great wonders and signs among the people (Acts 6:8), and when Phillip performed miracles and signs (Acts 8:13). (Also see Acts 19:11-12.)

• **Inspirational Gifts, or Utterance Gifts or Vocal Gifts**

- **Prophecy**

This is an utterance under divine inspiration for edification, exhortation, comfort and/or prediction. It is not the four-fold ministry function of a prophet, nor the ministerial gift of prophecy, or fortune-telling or guessing. An example of prophecy in Scripture is found when Paul explains to the church in Corinth how an unbeliever or unlearned person will worship God and know that He is fully with them when the secrets of that person's heart are made clear by prophecy (1 Corinthians 14:24-25).

- **Tongues**

This is a supernatural utterance in a language unknown to the speaker. It is not a natural affinity to languages. Also see 1 Corinthians 14, especially verses 26-28.

- **Interpretation of Tongues**

This is the supernatural ability to interpret a message given by one supernaturally speaking in tongues. (Note that it is an 'interpretation,' and not a 'translation.')

It is not the natural ability to translate from one language into another. Also see 1 Corinthians 14, especially verses 13, 26-28.

We also find two more lists of gifts:

27 Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.

28 And those whom God has appointed in the church are: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, kinds of tongues.

29 All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles?

30 Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?

31 But strive for the better gifts. And yet I make known a more excellent way. (1 Corinthians 12:27-31)

Here we find a combined list of nine gifts already mentioned, with some being ministerial and some manifestation gifts, to show harmony and order in the church, and to encourage believers to strive for that which will build up the body.

We also read the following in the first letter of Peter:

7 Now the end of all things is at hand; therefore be of sound mind and self-controlled in your prayers.

8 And above all things have fervent love for one another, because "love will cover a multitude of sins."

9 Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.

10 As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

11 If anyone speaks, let him speak as the utterances of God. If anyone serves, let him serve as from strength, as God supplies, so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom is the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 4:7-11).

Here we also find examples of gifts already mentioned, showing the importance of having love for one another, and to focus our attention on the fact that in all things God should be glorified.

In completing 1 Corinthians 12:31: "But strive for the better gifts. And yet I make known a more excellent way," we end off with an important instruction on this "more excellent way":

1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become as sounding brass or a clashing cymbal.

2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

3 And though I give away all my possessions to feed the poor, and though I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.

4 Love is patient, love is kind; love does not envy; love does not boast, is not arrogant;

5 does not behave disgracefully, does not seek its own, is not provoked to anger, thinks no evil;

6 does not rejoice over unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth;

7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

8 Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they shall pass away; whether there are tongues, they shall cease; whether there is knowledge, it shall pass away.

9 Now we know in part, and we prophesy in part.

10 But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is partial shall pass away.

11 When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I thought as a child, I reasoned as a child; but when I became a man, I put away the things of the child.

12 For now we see through a mirror by reflection, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.

13 And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love. (1 Corinthians 13)

MONEY MATTERS

Many of us have heard the words of the Lord Jesus: "It is more blessed to give than to receive." The context in which these words were said is interesting. These words of Jesus are not found in the writings of the four Gospel writers, but are quoted by Paul when speaking to the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:18-35). In Acts 20:35 where these words appear, he actually instructs the elders that through labouring with their hands just like he did, they should provide for themselves, and so be in a position of giving silver and gold and clothes to help the weak, rather than covet this from anyone (vs. 33-35):

33 I have coveted the silver or gold or clothes of no one.

34 You yourselves know that these hands have rendered service to my needs, and those who were with me.

35 By all things I have shown you, that thus labouring it is necessary to help the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' (Acts 20:33-35)

Moreover the elders themselves had to watch out for those deceivers who wanted to enter into their midst, who taught what they did "for the sake of dishonest gain":

10 For there are also many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision,

11 whom it is necessary to shut *their* mouths, who overturn whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain. (Titus 1:10-11)

The elders, just like Titus here, had specific instructions on how to deal with them:

13 ...for which cause rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith,

14 not giving heed to Jewish myths and to commands of men turning away from the truth. (Titus 1:13b-14)

The elders themselves were furthermore exhorted not to shepherd the flock for a fondness of dishonest gain:

1 The elders who are among you I exhort, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed;

2 shepherd the flock of God among you, overseeing not by compulsion, but rather willingly, not in fondness for dishonest gain, but rather eagerly;

3 nor as being masters over allotments, but rather being examples to the flock.

4 And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. (1 Peter 5:1-4)

Thus we see that elders do not receive money from the church, but on the contrary should set an example of giving to the poor (the "weak," Acts 20:35) in the church.

The Poor

Just as in the case of elders, all Christians are commanded to work and not be lazy:

11 and that you aspire to be quiet, and to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, just as we commanded you,

12 in order that you may walk decently toward those that are outside, and may have need of nothing. (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12)

This command is so strong, that we are even commanded to keep away from fellow Christians (see the earlier section on 'Family\Church Discipline') walking in idleness:

6 But we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother living in idleness, and not according to the tradition which they received from us.

7 For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you;

8 nor did we eat bread from anyone without paying, but in labour and hardship, working night and day, so as not to be a burden to any of you,

9 *not because we do not have authority, but in order that we may give ourselves as a pattern to you, so that you might follow us.

10 For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone is not willing to work, neither let him eat!

11 For we hear *that* some are walking among you in a disorderly way, not working at all, but being busybodies.

12 And to such *people* we command and urge by our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread. (2 Thessalonians 3:6-12)

*[As apostles they had the right to receive money from the churches they had established, as well as from the church in general, as we will see later.]

Just as in the case of elders, one of the reasons for working with our own hands is in order to have something to share with him who has need:

28 Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labour, working that which is good with his hands, in order that he may have something to share with him who has need. (Ephesians 4:28)

There will always be people around us who really have nothing - either because of not finding work, or because of being unable to work (also see verse 11 of Matthew 26:6-13).

Throughout the Old Testament the poor are considered important. In the New Testament we see similar instructions given with regard to poor Christians. In Romans 12:13 in the section on love, we are instructed to "share in the needs of the saints" and to "pursue hospitality."

We also read in the letter of James:

15 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food,

16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the necessary things of the body, what *is* the benefit? (James 2:15-16)

In the context of church being family and not a registered institutional organisation, we need to understand that taking care of poor family members also takes place in an organic way. This is clearly demonstrated when looking at our natural families.

One's Parents

Believers firstly have the responsibility to take care of their own families:

8 But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. (1 Timothy 5:8)

In the context in which the above verse appears it is clear that this responsibility includes taking care of one's parents when they are in need or when they cannot take care of themselves anymore. This is especially true of sons, since as heads they are the providers for their own respective families. So apart from a husband being the provider for his wife

and children, he is also commanded to take care of his parents when they are in need or when they cannot take care of themselves anymore:

1 Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem approached Jesus, saying,

2 "Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands whenever they eat bread."

3 He answered and said to them, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God on account of your tradition?"

4 For God commanded, saying, 'Honour your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, with death let him die.'

5 But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother, "*It is a gift to God, whatever profit you might have received from me*"—

6 then by no means should he honour his father or mother.' Thus you have invalidated the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition. (Matthew 15:1-6)

10 For Moses said, 'Honour your father and your mother'; and, 'Whoever speaks evil of father or mother, let him surely die.'

11 But you say, 'If a man says to *his* father or to *his* mother, "Whatever you might be profited by me is Corban"— (that is, a gift),

12 then you no longer allow him to do anything for his father or his mother,

13 *thus* nullifying the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down. And many similar things you do." (Mark 7:10-13)

This responsibility also spreads out to our extended earthly family members, especially to widows and orphans.

Widows

1 Now in those days, as the disciples were increasing in number, there arose a complaint from the Greek speaking Jews against the Aramaic speaking Jews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution. (Acts 6:1)

Not only (as in Acts 6:1 above) did the church look after its widows in the large initial Jerusalem church where everyone had everything in common (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-37), but the Gentile churches were also instructed to do so:

3 Honour widows who are really widows.

4 But if a certain widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety to their own household and to make repayment to their parents; for this is acceptable before God.

8 But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his *own* house, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

16 If any believing man or believing woman has widows, let *that one* relieve them, and do not let the church be burdened, that it may relieve those who are really widows. (1 Timothy 5:3-4, 8, 16)

14 Therefore I desire that the younger widows to marry, to bear children, to manage the house, to give no opportunity to the adversary because of reproach. (1 Timothy 5:14)

Therefore believers with widows in the family also have the responsibility to take care of them. The church can always help materially if necessary, but the responsibility still lies with the believing family members to take care of their own widows and orphans.

Orphans

The same principle applies to Christian orphans:

27 Pure and undefiled religion before God and *the* Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world. (James 1:27)

Where the Christian poor, especially widows and orphans do not have Christian family to take care of them, this responsibility lies with the church. As an organism, rather than an organisation, the general idea is therefore to take them into our homes, rather than simply sending them to old age homes or orphanages, as would be the case with our extended natural family members.

Collections

1 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also:

2 On the first day of the week let each one of you put *something* aside, storing up whatever he may prosper, in order that there be no collections when I come.

3 But when I arrive, *those* whom ever you approve by letters, these I will send to carry your gracious gift to Jerusalem.

4 But if it is fitting that I go also, they will go with me. (1 Corinthians 16:1-4)

The reason Paul took up these collections, was because of the poor Christians in Jerusalem. They had initially sold their possessions and had all things in common (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-37), and later also experienced a great persecution (Acts 8:1). So when James, Peter and John made an agreement with Paul and Barnabas that they would be apostles to the Gentiles, they requested from them to also remember the poor in Jerusalem:

7 but on the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted *with* the gospel for the uncircumcised, just as Peter was *with the gospel* for the circumcised,

8 (for He who worked with Peter in *the* apostleship to the circumcised, worked also with me in *that for* the Gentiles),

9 and when James, *Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace which was given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we *should go* to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised;

10 only they desired that we should remember the poor, which indeed I made every effort to do this very thing. (Galatians 2:7-10)

*[That is Peter]

Consequently, there are two whole chapters in the second letter of Paul to the Corinthians devoted to stirring them up for this purpose. Though the collections were only temporal until the need was met, the general scriptural principles of giving in these two chapters still apply today:

1 Now we make known to you brothers, the grace of God which has been given to the churches of Macedonia,

2 how that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their generosity.

3 For I bear witness that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing,

4 with much appeal, begging us *for* the grace and the fellowship of the ministry to the saints—

5 and not as we hoped, but they first gave their own selves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God,

6 so that we urged Titus, that just as he had begun before, thus he would also finish this grace also in you.

7 But as you abound in everything—in faith, in word, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us—see that you abound in this grace also.

8 I speak not by a command, but I am testing the genuineness of your love by means of the diligence of others.

9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet on account of you He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.

10 And I give *my* opinion in this: For this is profitable for you, who not only previously began doing *this*, but also desired to, since last year.

11 And now also complete doing *it*; that as indeed there *was* the readiness to desire *it*, thus also there *may be* the completion from what you have.

12 For if there is first a readiness, it is acceptable according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have.

13 For I do not *mean* that others should be relieved and you burdened;

14 but by way of equality, that now at the present time your abundance *may supply* their need, that their abundance also may supply your need, in order that there may be equality.

15 As it is written, "He *who gathered* much did not have too much, and he *who gathered* little had no lack."

16 But thanks be to God who puts the same earnest care for you in the heart of Titus.

17 Because he accepted my appeal, but being more diligent, he came to you of his own accord.

18 And we sent together with him the brother whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches,

19 and not only *that*, but who was also chosen by the churches as our travelling companion with this gift, which is ministered by us to the glory of the Lord Himself and *to show* our readiness—

20 avoiding this, lest anyone should blame us in this abundance which is ministered by us;

21 having regard for honourable things, not only before the Lord, but also before men.

22 And we sent together with them our brother whom we often approved in many things, being diligent, but now *being* much more diligent, by *his* great confidence in you.

23 If *anyone inquires* about Titus, *he is* my partner and fellow worker concerning you; or if our brothers *are inquired about*, *they are* messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ.

24 Therefore show to them the proof of your love, and of our boasting concerning you, before the churches. (2 Corinthians 8)

1 Now concerning the ministering to the saints, it is unnecessary for me to write to you;

2 for I know your readiness, about which I boast concerning you to the Macedonians, that Achaia has been prepared since last year, and your zeal has provoked the majority.

3 And I have sent the brothers, lest our boasting about you lose its justification in this matter, that just as I said, you may be prepared,
4 lest perhaps if *some* Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we (not to mention you!) should be ashamed of this confident boasting.
5 Therefore I thought it necessary to urge the brothers, that they should go before *me* to you, and should arrange in advance your generous gift, which you had previously promised, *that* this would be ready, thus as a blessing and not as grudgingly given.
6 But this *I* say: he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.
7 Let each *one* give just as he decides in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.
8 And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that in everything always having all sufficiency, you may abound for every good work,
9 just as it is written: "He has dispersed, He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever."
10 Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness;
11 in everything being made rich to all generosity, which produces thanksgiving through us to God.
12 Because the ministry of this service not only is supplying the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God,
13 while through the approved character of this ministry, they glorify God for the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ, and *for the* generosity of your sharing toward them and toward all,
14 and by their prayer for you, who long for you because of the surpassing grace of God in you.
15 Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift! (2 Corinthians 9)

In summary we see that though *a collection can be taken up, in the case of the churches set up by the apostles it was not a perpetual instruction, and ceased when the need ended. However, as believers we are commanded to work in order that, amongst other things, we may have something to share with a Christian in need. The principle is for each one able to give just as he has decided in his heart, and not grudgingly or out of compulsion (2 Corinthians 9:7).

*[In the church I am part of no collections are taken. Each believer gives as the Holy Spirit leads him, directly to eligible believers, as pointed out in this section on 'Money Matters.']

Apostles

9 For you remember, brothers, our labour and toil; for labouring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. (1 Thessalonians 2:9)

6 But we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother living in idleness, and not according to the tradition which they received from us.

7 For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you;

8 nor did we eat bread from anyone without paying, but in labour and hardship, working night and day, so as not to be a burden to any of you,

9 not because we do not have authority, but in order that we may give ourselves as a pattern to you, so that you might follow us.

10 For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone is not willing to work, neither let him eat!

11 For we hear *that* some are walking among you in a disorderly way, not working at all, but being busybodies.

12 And to such *people* we command and urge by our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread. (2 Thessalonians 3:6-12)

9 For I think that God has exhibited us, the apostles, last, as men appointed to death; for we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men.

10 We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are lauded, but we are despised!

11 Even unto this present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are naked, and beaten, and homeless.

12 And we labour, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure;

13 being defamed, we encourage; we have become as the sweepings of the world, the off-scouring of all things, until now. (1 Corinthians 4:9-13)

1 Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord?

2 If I am not an apostle to others, yet indeed I am to you. For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

3 My defence to those who examine me is this:

4 Do we not have *the* right to eat and drink?

5 Do we not have *the* right to take along a wife *who is* a sister, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?

6 Or is it only Barnabas and I who must work for a living?

7 Who ever serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not drink from the milk of the flock?

8 Do I say these things as a *mere* man? Or does not the law say these things also?

9 For it is written in the law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it threshes." Is it oxen God is concerned about?

10 Or does He say *this* altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, for it is written, that he that ploughs should plough in hope, and he that threshes, in hope should partake of his hope.

11 If we have sown spiritual things for you, *is it* a great thing if we reap your material things?

12 If others partake of this right over you, do not we even more? Nevertheless we did not use this right, but bear all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ.

13 Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat from the temple, and those who serve at the altar have a share in the altar?

14 Thus also the Lord commanded those who proclaim the gospel to live from the gospel.

15 But I used none of these things, nor have I written these things that it should become thus for me; for it is better for me rather to die than that anyone should make my boasting void.

16 For if I preach the gospel, there is nothing for me to boast about, for necessity is pressed upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!

17 For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if unwillingly, I have been entrusted with a commission.

18 What then is my reward? That when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ free of charge, so as not to exploit my rights in the gospel. (1 Corinthians 9:1-18)

Note that 1 Corinthians 9:1-18 continues from 1 Corinthians 8, where we are instructed not to cause our brothers to stumble by what we eat. The idea continues further from 1 Corinthians 9:19, where Paul said that he took others into consideration in order that they might be saved. Paul continues with this thought until he concludes it in 1 Corinthians 10:33, where he instructs the Corinthians to do all things for the glory of God, and to be without offence both towards Jews and Greeks, and towards the church of God (v. 32). This shows us that the goal of this section wasn't to limit or extend the categories of those who had the right to receive support from the church. The examples used, though valid, were therefore only illustrations.

It is clear that apostles had the authority and right to be supported by the church in order that they could be freed to do the work God had called and sent them to do (see Acts 13:2, 4a). Even though this is true, Paul did not make use of his right here in order not to hinder the gospel, but to show an example of how we ought to work, as well as to show his pure motives for doing the work he did.

However, we do read the following in his second letter to the Corinthians:

7 Or did I commit sin in humbling myself in order that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you freely?

8 I robbed other churches, taking wages *from them* to minister to you,

9 and when I was present with you, and in need, I did not burden anyone; for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied my need. And in everything I kept myself from being a burden to you, and so I will keep myself. (2 Corinthians 11:7-9)

1 Now after these things, having departed from Athens, Paul came to Corinth.

2 And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, having recently come from Italy with Priscilla his wife (because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to depart from Rome); *and* he came to them,

3 and because he was of the same trade, he remained with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade.

4 And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks.

5 Now when both Silas and Timothy came down from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, solemnly bearing witness to the Jews that Jesus *is* the Christ. (Acts 18:1-5)

In Corinth Paul worked in his trade of tent-making (v. 3), until Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia with supplies (v. 5). These were the "brothers who came from Macedonia" (2 Corinthians 11:9).

It is therefore clear that Paul did receive support at times, which was given out of the free will of the churches that gave to him:

15 Now you Philippians also know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I went out from Macedonia, no church shared with me in an accounting of giving and receiving except you only.

16 Because even in Thessalonica, both once and again you sent *help* for my needs.

**17 Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit which is increasing to your account.
18 And I have all things and abound. I have been made full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God. (Philippians 4:15-18)**

In the beginning of this section, in 1 Thessalonians 2:9 and 2 Thessalonians 3:6-12, Paul as an example to the Thessalonians did not burden them and did not take bread from anyone without paying for it, but in labour and hardship, worked night and day. As was the case later in Corinth (Acts 18:3), it is clear that whether Paul worked in his trade of tent-making or not, he was still working as an apostle (Acts 13:2, 14:26; 15:38), and was never a burden to the churches he was establishing.

Paul endorsed the giving of the Philippians, not because of the fact that his motive was to receive when he was in need, though he was grateful for it, but because it would return to them in God's blessings (Philippians 4:17).

It was customary for churches to host apostles and evangelists (see the next section) and send them on their way again, as they were also instructed to do:

**5 Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you work for the brothers and for strangers,
6 who gave testimony concerning your love before the church, with reference to whom you will do well if you send them forth in a manner worthy of God,
7 for on behalf of the Name they went out, taking nothing from the pagans.
8 We therefore ought to receive such, in order that we may become fellow workers with the truth. (3 John 5-8)**

This is why Paul could write about this to the Corinthians in the way he did in 1 Corinthians 16:5-6, 10-11 below. Even though he wouldn't ask them for anything for preaching the gospel of Christ to them, it would not be shameful to ask them to host him and send him on his way again to work somewhere else, or collect money for the poor saints in Jerusalem (1 Corinthians 16:1-3):

**5 Now I will come to you when I go through Macedonia (for I am coming through Macedonia).
6 And perhaps I will remain, or even spend the winter with you, that you may send me on my journey, wherever I may go.
10 Now if Timothy comes, see to it that he may be with you without fear; for he does the work of the Lord, as I also do.
11 Therefore let no one despise him. But send him away in peace, that he may come to me; for I am waiting for him with the brothers. (1 Corinthians 16:5-6, 10-11)**

Paul did at times receive help from individual Christians too. Phoebe for instance was a *helper to him and many others:

**1 I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea,
2 so that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and you may stand by her in whatever thing she may need from you; for indeed she has proved to be a helper of many and of myself also. (Romans 16:1-2)**

*[The word "helper" here is the name by which such were called by the Athenians who took care of the sojourners. It seems as if Phoebe was such a person to the poor believers of Cenchrea. This was not done as an official 'office' in the church, but she voluntarily took this upon herself, at her own expense.]

What is interesting to note is that in the two places where Paul stayed the longest, Corinth (Acts 18:11) and Ephesus (Acts 20:31), he also worked in his trade of tent-making (Acts 18:2-3, 18-19; 20:34).

Essentially, however, the apostles had their discipleship under Jesus Himself as a guideline, when He sent them to the lost of Israel in preparation for their future task (Matthew 10:16-42; 24:14; 28:16-20; Mark 16:14-18; Luke 24:44-49 John 20:19-23; Acts 1:8):

1 And summoning His twelve disciples, He gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every illness.

2 Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the *son* of Zebedee, and John his brother;

3 Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the *son* of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus, who was surnamed Thaddaeus;

4 Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him.

5 These twelve Jesus sent forth, commanding them, saying, "Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter *any* city of the Samaritans.

6 But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

7 And as you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of the heavens is at hand.'

8 "Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.

9 Do not acquire gold nor silver nor copper in your money belts,

10 not a knapsack for the road, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor staffs; for a worker is worthy of his food.

11 And whatever city or village you enter, inquire who in it is worthy, and stay there until you go out.

12 And as you enter into a household, greet it.

13 And if indeed the house should be worthy, let your peace come upon it. But if it should not be worthy, let your peace return to you.

14 And whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet.

15 Assuredly I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city! (Matthew 10:1-15) (Also see Mark 6:7-13.)

35 And He said to them, "When I sent you without a money bag, and a knapsack, and sandals, did you lack anything?" And they said, "Nothing."

36 Then He said to them, "But now, *he who has a money bag, let him take it, and likewise also a knapsack; and **he who has no sword shall sell his garment and buy one.

37 For I say to you that this which has been written must still be accomplished in Me—the *saying*, 'And He was numbered with the transgressors.' For the things concerning Me have a fulfilment."

38 So they said, "Lord, look, here are two swords." And He said to them, "It is enough." (Luke 22:35-38)

*[Jesus hereby told the disciples that from that time forward, immediately after His departure from them, after His death, resurrection, and ascension, when they were going to be sent into all the world to preach the gospel, they would not be received and entertained in the manner in which they had been when He sent them out in Matthew 10:1-15 (and Mark 6:7-13).]

**[This phrase was not to be taken literally, but was a striking way of saying that not only would they not be received and entertained, but wherever they would come and a door be opened for the preaching of the gospel, they would have many adversaries, and even violently be persecuted, so that they might seem to stand in need of swords to defend themselves. The phrase expresses the danger they would be exposed to, and their need for protection, and therefore it was wrong for them to be disputing about which of them was the greatest (Luke 22:24; 9:46) and to be looking out for and expecting personal glory (Matthew 20:20-21; Mark 10:35-37), when they would soon see this affliction and distress begin in Jesus Himself. He did not literally mean that they had to each buy a sword, as also shortly afterwards seen in Luke 22:49-51; John 18:10-11; Matthew 26:51-54.]

Looking at the sending out of the seventy in Luke 10:1-12 we find very similar instructions to those seen above in Matthew 10:1-15 and Mark 6:7-13, which one can apply to evangelists in the same way.

Evangelists

14 Thus also the Lord commanded those who proclaim the gospel to live from the gospel. (1 Corinthians 9:14)

Amongst the examples Paul gives in 1 Corinthians 9:5, 7, 9-11, 13-14, he uses the example of evangelists here (v. 14) to show that just as they had the right to be supported (and in fact, the Lord Himself commanded this), so too did apostles. As in the case of apostles, the fact that evangelists (those who proclaim the gospel) are commanded to live from the gospel doesn't imply a salary from the church (in fact, nobody ever got a salary from the church!). The intent here is that evangelists should live from the gospel principle, namely faith. This means that they should, like apostles, trust that God who called and sent them will also provide for them, just as one has to receive Christ through faith in order to be saved. As seen with apostles, evangelists will preach the gospel free of charge to non-Christians, but Christians should support them in this without them asking for anything.

Thus it was customary for churches to host apostles and evangelists and send them on their way again, as they were also instructed to do:

**5 Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you work for the brothers and for strangers,
6 who gave testimony concerning your love before the church, *with reference* to whom you will do well if you send them forth in a manner worthy of God,
7 for on behalf of the Name they went out, taking nothing from the pagans.
8 We therefore ought to receive such, in order that we may become fellow workers with the truth.** (3 John 5-8)

Christians working in foreign countries, even if led by the Holy Spirit to do so and even if the citizens there are of least evangelised or unreached people groups, as well as those in their own countries being faithful witnesses, are not necessarily apostles or evangelists. This was also true of the majority of the believers in the church in Jerusalem who were scattered during the persecution that arose in Acts 8:1. We read:

4 Therefore those who were scattered went about preaching the word. (Acts 8:4)
**19 Then those who were scattered because of the tribulation coming about over Stephen, went about as far as Phoenicia, and Cyprus, and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews only.
20 But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, entering into Antioch spoke to the Greek speaking Jews, preaching the good news of the Lord Jesus.
21 And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed, and turned to the Lord.** (Acts 11:19-21)

Pastor-Teachers (or Teachers)

Even though there is no hierarchy in the church, we do see that elders should be honoured:

12 And we request of you, brothers, to recognise those who labour among you, and care for you in the Lord and warn you,

13 and to regard them beyond all measure in love, because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13)

But we also see that some elders are worthy of double honour:

17 Let the elders having led well be counted worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in *the* word and teaching.

18 For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox threshing *grain*," and, "The worker is worthy of his wages." (1 Timothy 5:17-18)

Note that when Paul wrote this letter to Timothy, he had left him at Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:3), which is also where he earlier in Acts 20:33-35 spoke to the elders there, telling them that they were not to covet anyone's silver or gold or clothing, but rather were to be in a position where they could help the weak.

The context in which 1 Timothy 5:17-18 appears is that of honour, as seen in the beginning of the chapter:

1 Do not sharply rebuke an older man, but *rather* exhort him as a father, younger men as brothers,

2 older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, with all purity.

3 Honour widows who are really widows. (1 Timothy 5:1-3)

After verses 17-18 this thought is continued:

19 Do not receive an accusation against an elder unless on *the basis of two or three witnesses*.

20 Those who are sinning rebuke before all, that the rest also may have fear. (1 Timothy 5:19-20)

Paul then concludes this particular subject in the beginning of Chapter 6:

1 Let as many as are slaves under a yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, so that the name of God and *His* teaching may not be blasphemed.

2 And those having believing masters, let them not despise them because they are brothers, but rather let them serve as slaves, because those receiving the good service are believing and beloved. Teach and exhort these things. (1 Timothy 6:1-2)

So though elders are generally to be honoured, those elders who lead well, especially those who labour in the word and teaching, are to be counted worthy of double honour. These elders are those itinerant gifts mentioned earlier called *pastor-teachers (or teachers), who were of only about 10% of the people in the first century who were literate, and who had the ability to disclose Christ through the Old Testament Scriptures. They would therefore be elders teaching more widely than only in their local church, travelling to various churches. Within the context of the passage being 'honour,' 1 Timothy 5:18 can be understood as saying that just as muzzling an ox threshing is not honouring the ox, and just as one honours a worker by giving him his wages, so an elder who labours in the word and teaching is worthy of double honour. Here, also considering what Paul said to the same elders in Acts 20:33-35, the passage seems not to include the idea of material support at all. However, in 1 Timothy 5:3 "honour" also included supporting the widows materially (as pointed out already in the earlier section on 'Family\ Parents, Widows and Orphans' and the section on 'Money Matters\Widows'). We also find that 1 Timothy 5:18 similarly appears in 1 Corinthians 9:9, Matthew 10:10 and Luke 10:7. Considering 1 Timothy 5:17 in this context, it seems quite possible that these elders, just like apostles and evangelists, were also eligible for material support by the church (also see Galatians 6:6).

*[When looking at Ephesians 4:11, we see that as pointed out in the earlier section on 'Gifts\Ministry Gifts' there are four gifts given to the church. We read the words "and some as" before each of the gifts, showing us that "pastors and teachers" is the same person. The intent of the text is: "and some as [both] pastors and teachers," meaning that in addition to being local pastors (i.e. elders) some are also teachers given to the church at large (v. 12).]

Acts 20:33-35 indicated that elders do not receive material support from the church for being elders, but should rather be in a position where they can help the weak. 1 Timothy 5:17-18 read in the context of Acts 20:33-35 can also suggest that even though some elders, being pastor-teachers (or teachers), have the right to material support from the church, they should not make use of it, but rather be willing to work in their trade. This view is conceivable if considered in the context of Titus 1:10-11, 13b-14 and 1 Peter 5:1-4.

If a believer or a church, being instructed to give double honour (which, as shown, could also include material support) to these elders who labour in the word and teaching (i.e. pastor-teachers, or teachers), decides to give material support to them, it does not mean that these elders are in hierarchical authority over such a church, nor that they are in any hierarchical authority over any of the churches they may teach in. They should also not dominate any church meeting, which is participatory in nature in the first place.

Open Houses

While it is important for us to give of our material substance, we need to remember that we as believers are family, and therefore, just as we need to help our earthly family members in an organic way (see the earlier section on 'Family\ Parents, Widows and Orphans' and similarly this section on 'Money Matters'), the same applies to our spiritual family members. So in addition to giving of our material substance, we need also to give of our time and space by showing hospitality to our brothers:

40 "He that receives you receives Me, and he that receives Me receives Him who sent Me.

41 He that receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward. And he that receives a righteous *man* in the name of a righteous *man* shall receive a righteous *man's* reward.

42 And whoever gives one of these little *ones* only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward." (Matthew 10:40-42)

Though the context of this passage is written in reference to apostles, it also amongst others makes mention of prophets. Prophets neither received support as Levites and priests did in the Old Testament, nor is there any pattern in the New Testament for them doing so either. However, they were often hosted by others (1 Kings 17:9-15; 18:3-4; 2 Kings 4:8-10). Matthew 10:40-42 makes it clear that we should also show this kind of hospitality to any disciple of our Lord (also see Matthew 25:40).

1 Let brotherly love continue.

2 Do not forget hospitality, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.

3 Remember the *prisoners as if having been bound with them, those who are ill treated, as you yourselves are in the body also. (Hebrews 13:1-3)

*[Many Christians were imprisoned for Christ's sake (also see 2 Timothy 1:16-18).]

Summary

As individual believers we should be sensitive to give of our material substance as the Holy Spirit leads. One can either give personally, or if consensus is reached, corporately as a church. Scripturally the following people should receive material support from Christians: one's needy parents; poor Christians, especially poor Christian (true) widows and orphans who do not have Christian families to take care of them; apostles and evangelists (especially those working towards establishing churches amongst unreached people groups, see the section on 'Mandate'); and pastor-teachers (or teachers), who are elders teaching more widely than only in their local church, as they have all been given to the church at large (Ephesians 4:11-12), working free of charge. Elders (i.e. pastors, overseers, bishops) serving in their local church do not receive material support from the church for being elders as such. However, apart from giving of our material substance, we are reminded to show hospitality to one another as members of the same spiritual family.

Those itinerant gifts (Ephesians 4:11) called and sent by the Holy Spirit should make the necessary arrangements (e.g. getting passports and visas if necessary) and go, trying to find work wherever they are sent, should they have to remain there for long periods. If they receive help from Christians or churches it releases them to do the *work they are sent to do 'full-time,' if not - then they should simply work in their trade to provide for their needs.

*[Note again that if an itinerant gift (Ephesians 4:11) does the work he is sent to do 'full-time,' it doesn't mean that he is not working during the period/s in which he may not be working in his trade. What he does full-time is his work! (e.g. see Acts 13:2, 14:26; 15:38; John 4:34; 17:4). On the other hand, if he is working in his trade, like Paul did at times (Acts 18:2-3, 18-19; 20:34) and like Mark did in Egypt, and like most will have to do to gain access if they need to stay for a longer time period in any place amongst unreached people groups, it in no way makes them less called and sent. God wants to holistically reign in and through each person's whole life, where He sees all aspects of it in relation to the person, where no distinction between ministry and work is made, and where it is an extension of one's home and family life. This is also in preparation for when we will be reigning with Christ - see Luke 19:11-27; Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 4:1-7; 2 Timothy 2:11-13; Revelation 5:9-10; 11:15-18; 19:6-7; 20:4-6; 22:1-5.

Christians who are not apostles, evangelists, or pastor-teachers (or teachers), which is the majority of Christians, will work in their trade. A Christian's total sphere of influence is where he will preach the gospel. In the context in which Scripture was given, as is still the case in many cultures today, work was an extension of the home, where the whole family would often partake in a family business and sons would learn their fathers' trade, and where there wasn't a great divide between family life and work life. The Greek word for household in Acts 10:2; 11:14; 16:15, 31; Titus 1:11 for example (and even as part of Matthew 20:1; Luke 13:25; 1 Timothy 5:14 and Titus 2:5), namely "oikos," denotes one's household establishment, one's entire property. The word 'economy' in English and some other languages can be traced back to the Greek word 'oikonomos,' meaning 'one who manages a household,' which in turn is derived from 'oikos' and 'nemein' (meaning 'to manage') (also see the earlier sections on 'Family\Marriage\Roles and Responsibilities in Marriage' and 'The Lord's Supper\Practical Issues\How Do We Do It\Activities' for more.). And so a Christian's business is his household, which includes all that he does, and which is also his sphere in which he preaches the gospel. When understanding this, the idea of making Jesus Christ the Lord of one's whole life, allowing Him therefore to reign in you and through you, also makes more sense!]

Tithing

Tithing (meaning the giving of a tenth), like other Old Testament laws, is not a New Testament requirement. Many people wrongly teach that Christians need to first give 10% of everything they earn to 'the church.' Apart from the fact that the whole temple order in the old covenant has passed away, being fulfilled in Christ to whom it pointed (see the earlier section on 'The Lord's Supper\So How Should We Treat the Sabbath'), looking at what tithing in the Old Testament was will also clearly show that modern day tithing is based on many false assumptions.

- Tithing Was Always Only Food

Throughout the Scriptures tithing was always only food. In Deuteronomy 14 we clearly see this in a summary on tithing:

22 "You shall tithe all the yield of your seed that comes from the field year by year.

23 And before the LORD your God, in the place that he will choose, to make his name dwell there, you shall eat the tithe of your grain, of your wine, and of your oil, and the firstborn of your herd and flock, that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always.

24 And if the way is too long for you, so that you are not able to carry the tithe, when the LORD your God blesses you, because the place is too far from you, which the LORD your God chooses, to set his name there,

25 then you shall turn it into money and bind up the money in your hand and go to the place that the LORD your God chooses

26 and spend the money for whatever you desire--oxen or sheep or wine or strong drink, whatever your appetite craves. And you shall eat there before the LORD your God and rejoice, you and your household.

27 And you shall not neglect the Levite who is within your towns, for he has no portion or inheritance with you.

28 "At the end of every three years you shall bring out all the tithe of your produce in the same year and lay it up within your towns.

29 And the Levite, because he has no portion or inheritance with you, and the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, who are within your towns, shall come and eat and be filled, that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands that you do. (Deuteronomy 14:22-29)

The tithe was always only food from the farms and herds of only Israelites who only lived in Israel - *where money was an essential non-tithed item. There are 15 verses from 11 chapters and 8 books from Leviticus 27 to Luke 11 describing the contents of the tithe:

Leviticus 27:30, 32; Numbers 18:27, 28; Deuteronomy 12:17; 14:22, 23; 26:12; 2 Chronicles 31:5, 6; Nehemiah. 10:37; 13:5; Malachi 3:10; Matthew 23:23; Luke 11: 42.

*[Many centuries before Israel entered Canaan and began tithing from the land, money was an essential everyday item. In the Book of Genesis alone the word 'money' ("silver") is found in 32 texts, and it appears 44 times before the tithe is first mentioned in Leviticus 27.]

This is also the case in Matthew 23:23:

23 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you pay tithes of mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the more important *things* of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These things you should have done, and not have neglected the others. (Matthew 23:23)

Note the words "tithes of mint and dill and cumin" and "law" here. Remember that Jesus Christ Himself lived under the law which He fulfilled perfectly, but that the new covenant only came about when Jesus was crucified, and not before the crucifixion. Most importantly we need to realise that the whole law, including the commandments, and the prophets, pointed to Jesus Christ Himself, and so in the new covenant we are *not under the law anymore, but under Christ (see the earlier section on 'The Lord's Supper\So How Should We Treat the Sabbath' again).

*[Had we been under the law, those amongst us who qualified would not only have had to tithe food, but we would also for instance have had to refrain from eating certain foods like shrimps (Leviticus 11:9-12) and from wearing certain types of clothes together (Deuteronomy 22:11).]

- Jesus, Peter, Paul and the Poor Did Not Tithe

Neither a carpenter, nor a fisherman nor a tentmaker qualified to be tithe-payers, let alone the poor who, as we will see, actually received tithes! Only farmers and herdsmen gathered tithes from the increase of what God produced.

- Four Tithes

There were four tithes:

- the first tithe called the *'Levitical tithe' consisted of two tithes, the first of which went to the servants of the priests (see Numbers 3:5-37), namely the Levites (Numbers 18:21-24; Nehemiah 10:37b);
- who in turn gave one tenth of the tithe (i.e. 1% of that which the people initially tithed) to the priests (Numbers 18:25-28; Nehemiah 10:38);
- the second tithe called the 'feast tithe' was eaten by worshipers in the streets of Jerusalem during the three yearly festivals (Deuteronomy 12:6, 11, 17; 14:22-26);
- and the third tithe called the 'poor tithe' was kept in the homes every third year to feed the poor (Deuteronomy 14:28-29; 26:12-13).

*[Levitical tithes went first to the Levitical cities, and not to the temple (2 Chronicles 31:15-19; Nehemiah 10:37). Portions then went to the temple to feed the 24 courses of Levites and priests who were ministering there in weekly rotation (Numbers 18:21-28; 2 Chronicles 31; Nehemiah 10:37b-39; 12:27-29, 44-47 / 1 Chronicles 23-26). So while the Levites ate the tithe, the priests could also eat from the first-fruit-, firstborn- and other offerings (Nehemiah 10:35-37a; Exodus 23:19a; 34:26a; Deuteronomy 18:3-4).]

Thus when we read in Malachi 3:10 that the children of Jacob had to bring the full tithe to the *storehouse, the "full tithe" refers to the portion that went to the temple (see the footnote above), which was what the Israelites were not doing (also see Malachi 3:7; 4:4; Leviticus 27:34; Nehemiah 10:34-39, 13:4-13 for context).

*[As we have already indicated in this book, the new covenant church is neither a building nor a storehouse. (Some people actually teach that Christians should tithe money to 'the church' which they in turn use for 'church buildings' and all the administrative costs involved in keeping the institution running!)]

In exchange for receiving tithes, the Levites and priests forfeited all rights to permanent land inheritance inside Israel (see Numbers 18:20-26; Deuteronomy 12:12; 14:27, 29; 18:1, 2; Joshua 13:14, 33; 14:3; 18:7; Ezekiel 44:28). These tithes were not sufficient for those who received them to live off them alone. Levites and priests lived on borrowed land surrounding the Levitical cities where they farmed and raised tithed animals (Numbers 35; Joshua 20-21; 1 Chronicles 6:48-80). Eventually limited old covenant priests were replaced by all believer priests (1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6), with Jesus being our High Priest (Hebrews 2:17; 3:1; 4:14-5:11; 6:20-10:25; 13:8-16). The fact that tithes were holy to the Lord (Leviticus 27:30-33) does not make tithing an eternal moral principle (also see vs. 28 and 29 of Leviticus 27).

- Other Tithes

In 1 Samuel 8:14-17 the ruler collected the first and best 10% for political use. During Jesus' time on earth Rome also collected the first 10% of most food and 20% of fruit crops as its spoils of war. In fact, tithes themselves were often used as political taxes in the sense that the Levites, as political representatives of the king, used their tithe money to serve as civil (and religious) judges, officers, guards, tax collectors, treasurers and professional soldiers (1 Chronicles 12:23, 26; 23:2-5; 26:29-32; 27:5).

- First-fruits are Not the Same as Tithes

The first-fruit was a very small amount of the first crop harvest, and the firstborn was the first offspring of animals. These went directly to the temple where they were to be totally consumed inside the temple by the ministering priests (Deuteronomy 26:1-4, 10; Leviticus 23:17; Numbers 18:13-17; 2 Chronicles 31:5a).

- Abraham's Once-off Tithe to Melchizedek Reflected Pagan Tradition

Abraham's once-off tithe in verse 20 of Genesis 14:17-24 was only from pagan spoils of war. Abraham could keep these spoils of war as his right, as was required in many nations, and as also was reflected in the pagan tradition here (v. 21). (In Numbers 31 God only required 1% of spoils of war.) However, Abraham did not keep anything for himself, but gave it all back (vs. 22-24). Abraham's tithe is nowhere quoted to enforce tithing - not even in the old Levitical order. (If it were, we would have also had to give the other 90% away!) Neither Abraham nor Jacob had a Levitical priesthood to support.

- 10% or 23.3%?

It is important to note that altogether the eligible Israelites' tithes amounted to 23.3% per year - the Levitical tithe (10%), the feast tithe (10%), and the poor tithe (10% every third year). This is without all the other political and temple taxes and offerings.

- Tithing Only Became a Church Law in 777 AD

For at least the first 200 years early church 'leaders' (see the section on 'Wrong Traditions' for more on 'the early church fathers') were self-supporting. Clement of Rome (95 AD), *Justin Martyr (150 AD), Irenaeus (177 AD) and **Tertullian (196-212 AD) all correctly opposed tithing as not belonging to the church. Around 250 AD Cyprian unsuccessfully tried to impose tithing in Carthage, North Africa. His idea, which included equal redistribution to the poor, was not adopted. (At his conversion, however, he gave away great personal wealth to the poor and lived under a vow of poverty.) Even after Christianity became legal in the fourth century, many of the church 'leaders' continued taking such vows of deep poverty, unlike those who taught tithing. In 585 AD the local church Council of Macon in France tried unsuccessfully to enforce tithing on all its members, but only in 777 AD did Charlemagne legally allow the church to collect tithes.

*[Justin Martyr was a noted apologist who was born around 100 AD and martyred in Rome around 165 AD.]

**[The well-known Christian apologist Tertullian (155-222 AD) was converted in 193 AD. He lived in Carthage in Africa. His many writings date from 196-212 AD, and in one of these we read:

"Even if there is a treasury of a sort, it is not made up of money paid in initiation fees, as if religion were a matter of contract. Every man once a month brings some modest contribution - or whenever he wishes, and only if he does wish, and if he can; for nobody is compelled; it is a voluntary offering...to feed the poor and to bury them, for boys and girls who lack property and parents, and then for slaves grown old... So we, who are united in mind and soul, have no hesitation about sharing property. All is common among us - except our wives. At that point we dissolve our partnership..."]

MANDATE

The strategic mandate of the church, today more commonly referred to as 'frontier missions' or 'missions,' is stated in Matthew 24:14:

14 And this good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed in all the world for a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come. (Matthew 24:14)

We also see it prophetically fulfilled in the Book of Revelation:

8 And when He took the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls being filled with incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

9 And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; because You were slain, and You redeemed us to God by Your blood, out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation;

10 and have made them kings and priests to our God; and they will reign on the earth."

11 Then I looked, and I heard as it were the voice of many angels around the throne, and the living beings, and the elders. And the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and a thousand thousands,

12 saying with a loud voice: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive the power and the wealth and wisdom and strength, and honour and glory and blessing!"

13 And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: "Blessing and honour and glory and power to Him that sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever. Amen!"

14 -and the four living beings said "Amen!" And the elders fell down and worshipped. (Revelation 5:8-14)

9 After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no man could number, out of every nation, and *from* tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, having been clothed in long white robes, with palm branches in their hands.

10 And they cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation *belongs* to our God, to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

11 And all the angels stood around the throne, and the elders and the four living beings, and they fell down on their faces before His throne and they worshipped God,

12 saying: "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, and thanksgiving and honour and power and might, *be* to our God forever and ever. Amen." (Revelation 7:9-12)

The end goal of this mandate being fulfilled is all nations, tribes, peoples and tongues of the earth bringing our Lord glory, that which He created us for in the first place.

36 For of Him and through Him and to Him *are* all things; to Him *be* the glory forever! Amen. (Romans 11:36) (Also see Colossians 1:15-18.)

6 I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Do not withhold; bring My sons from afar and My daughters from the end of the earth,

7 everyone who is called by My name, whom I created for My glory, whom I formed and made. (Isaiah 43:6-7)

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

28 Father, glorify Your name." Then a voice came out of heaven, saying, "I have both glorified *it* and will glorify *it* again." (John 12:28)

31 When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in Him.

32 If God has been glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and will glorify Him immediately. (John 13:31-32)

13 And whatever you may ask in My name, this I will do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. (John 14:13)

8 By this My Father is glorified, that you may bear much fruit; and you will become My disciples. (John 15:8)

20 For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's. (1 Corinthians 6:20)

12 Beloved, do not be surprised by the fiery trial among you, taking place to test you, as though some strange thing was happening to you;

13 but inasmuch as you partake in the sufferings of Christ, rejoice, in order that also at the unveiling of His glory, you may rejoice with great happiness.

14 If you are reviled in the name of Christ, blessed are you, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On the one hand according to them, He is being blasphemed, *but* on the other hand according to you, He is glorified. (1 Peter 4:12-14)

10 whenever He comes, in that Day, to be glorified among His saints and to be marvelled among all those who have believed, because our testimony among you was believed.

11 Therefore we also pray always concerning you that our God may count you worthy of *this* calling, and may fulfil all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power,

12 in order that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Thessalonians 1:10-12)

7 so that the genuineness of your faith, which is more precious than gold that perishes, though being tested with fire, may be found to praise, honour, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 1:7)

18 Most assuredly I say to you, when you were younger, you used to dress yourself and used to walk where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and will carry *you* where you do not wish."

19 But this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me." (John 21:18-19)

*Though not all are apostles and evangelists as such, all Christians are at all times witnesses and disciples wherever they are, and are encouraged to reach out with the

gospel to all people - not only because we love those who are lost, but so that as a result of this God may receive maximum glory!

*[Note too that preaching, which scripturally means preaching the gospel, never took place during a church meeting. A Christian's total sphere of influence is where he will preach the gospel. In the context in which Scripture was given, as is still the case in many cultures today, work was an extension of the home, where the whole family would often partake in a family business and sons would learn their fathers' trade, and where there wasn't a great divide between family life and work life. The Greek word for household in Acts 10:2; 11:14; 16:15, 31; Titus 1:11 for example (and even as part of Matthew 20:1; Luke 13:15; 1 Timothy 5:14 and Titus 2:5), namely "oikos," denotes one's household establishment, one's entire property. The word 'economy' in English and some other languages can be traced back to the Greek word 'oikonomos,' meaning 'one who manages a household,' which in turn is derived from 'oikos' and 'nemein' (meaning 'to manage') (also see the earlier sections on 'Family\Marriage\Roles and Responsibilities in Marriage,' 'The Lord's Supper\Practical Issues\How Do We Do It\Activities' and 'Money Matters\Summary' for more.). And so a Christian's business is his household, which includes all that he does, and which is also his sphere in which he preaches the gospel. When understanding this, the idea of making Jesus Christ the Lord of ones whole life, allowing Him therefore to reign in you and through you, also makes more sense! This is also in preparation for when we will be reigning with Christ - see Luke 19:11-27; Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 4:1-7; 2 Timothy 2:11-13; Revelation 5:9-10; 11:15-18; 19:6-7; 20:4-6; 22:1-5. God wants to holistically reign in and through each person's whole life, where He sees all aspects of it in relation to the person, where no distinction between ministry and work is made, and where it is an extension of one's home and family life.]

All of life is worship, including what we do when we meet as a church or when we sing to our Lord.

19 The woman said to Him, "Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet.

20 Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where it is necessary to worship."

21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father.

22 You worship what you do not know; we Jews worship what we know, because salvation is of the Jews.

23 But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.

24 God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

25 The woman said to Him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When He comes, He will proclaim to us all things."

26 Jesus said to her, "I am He, the One speaking to you." (John 4:19-26)

Worship is the fuel for 'missions,' causing us go out with a passion for His name - until every nation, tribe, people and tongue bring glory to Him alone for ever and ever!

WRONG TRADITIONS

It is God's glory and His will alone that we seek, drawn closer to Him by His immeasurable love for us. As we long for more of Him, we find that for Him to still this longing, we have to follow Him to the place where He resides. This journey of getting closer to Him is not one about black and white or turning away from what is wrong as such. However, this section outlines some of the wrongs that become apparent as we journey together in search of truth, in search of more of Him alone.

When the church came into being Christianity was the only 'religion' in history where its members met in homes, and which was 'lay' led. It had no institutions, no temples, no silent laity, and no set rituals to be repeated in the same liturgical manner. Not long after the death of the apostles, and lasting for a few hundred years to come, the church was led and greatly influenced by a group of men, today widely known as 'the early church fathers.' The New Testament had by then already been written, but was not yet compiled and *available to the church, contributing to the early church's general acceptance of what they taught, still evident from what is taught and practised in the church till this day. But though these men had the best intentions in defending the faith against deception and spreading it in the face of great adversity, where they **deviated from the truth, we are to follow what is taught in Scripture. This is especially important when it comes to church practice. We see that the very first and foundational deception into which 'the early church fathers' fell, like many of the others, touched the very heart of organic church life as taught by the apostles. In this section we will start by pointing out some of the very initial foundational errors that made their way into many post-apostolic churches, before advancing through time to where we find ourselves today.

*[Though the New Testament was not yet compiled and available as we have it today, it was, however, available and practised by believers as being handed down by the apostles, though not followed and known by all in post-apostolic times anymore.]

**[Today, where we have the Scriptures available, the burden of explanation should fall on those who deviate from scripturally taught practices, rather than on those keeping them. But even amongst Christians we find the opposite to be true. Today those not part of the widespread institutionalised church, just as those not going along with the Humanist teachings of the day, or even those deciding to home-school their children, are the ones expected to do the explaining! What is ironic is that most Christians have never really been to a scriptural church meeting, but only 'go to church' to 'attend' a 'worship -' or a 'preaching service.' Many do this in trying to keep the 'Sabbath' (see the earlier section on 'The Lord's Supper\How Often' and 'The Lord's Supper\So How Should We Treat the Sabbath' for more).]

It is now 95 AD. Paul had died a martyr's death in 67 AD, and *John the apostle was still alive and recently banished from Ephesus to the island of Patmos by the Roman emperor Domitian (81-96 AD). Here, as he was writing down the Revelation of Jesus Christ which he had received, great deception had already crept into the church. In his epistle to the Corinthians, **Clement of Rome wrote the following:

"The high priest has been given his own special services, the priests have been assigned their own place, and the Levites have their special ministrations enjoined on them. The layman is bound by the ordinances of the laity."

*[On the accession of the Roman emperor Nerva (96-98 AD) the following year John was recalled from exile and returned to Ephesus where he recorded the gospel in 97 AD and wrote his epistles, before dying at the age of about 100 in the third year of the Roman emperor Trajan (98-117 AD) in 100 AD.]

**[Clement of Rome (30-100 AD) was one of the earliest 'leaders' of the church at Rome. He wrote a famous letter to the church at Corinth in 95 AD.]

Very early in its history the wrong application of the old covenant Levitical priesthood to the leadership in the church, and the non-scriptural distinction between 'clergy' and 'laity,' made their way into the church. But as pointed out earlier in the section on 'Church

Leadership\Eldership,' the way the elders are to shepherd the flock is, amongst other things, not by compulsion, nor as being masters over "allotments" (as if they are their inherited possessions, i.e. the congregation/'subjects' allotted to them), but rather by being examples to the flock (1 Peter 5:2-3). The Greek word translated as "allotments" here is "kleros," which is also where the words 'cleric' and 'clergy' originate from, precisely saying the opposite, namely that the non-elders are 'clergy'!

Ignatius, 'bishop' of Antioch in Syria, wrote seven epistles to various churches while travelling to Rome, where he was eventually martyred in 110 AD. He wrote in his epistle to the Ephesians:

"Your reverend presbytery...is tuned to the bishop as strings to a lyre... Let us then be very careful not to resist the bishop, that through our submission to the bishop we may belong to God... Clearly then we should regard the bishop as the Lord Himself..."

To the Magnesians he wrote:

"I advise you, be eager to always act in godly concord; with the bishop presiding as the counterpart of God, the presbyters as the counterpart of the council of the apostles...Thus, as the Lord did nothing without the Father (being united with Him), either by Himself or by means of the apostles, so you must do nothing without the bishop and the presbyters."

And to the Trallians:

"When you are obedient to the bishop as to Jesus Christ, it is clear to me that you are not living as ordinary men but according to Jesus Christ... It is therefore necessary that you should do nothing without the bishop... Likewise let all men...respect the bishop as the counterpart of the Father, and the presbyters as the council of God and the college of the apostles: without those no church is recognised."

And also to the Smyrneans:

"All of you follow the bishop, as Jesus Christ followed the Father... Let no-one do anything that pertains to the church apart from the bishop... It is not permitted to baptise or hold a love-feast independently of the bishop. But whatever he approves, that is also well pleasing to God; that all your acts may be sure and valid."

So as individual churches started to be led by priests (who later became offering priests reproducing what Christ did) they were also being led by priests who were now collectively under the authority of an all-powerful 'bishop.'

These foundational false teachings were justified by what later came to be known as 'The Doctrine of the Apostolic Succession.' This 'the early church fathers' did to convince the people that they were right concerning the truth about the Lord Jesus Christ and His salvation, since at a time where the Scriptures weren't yet fully compiled many movements sprouted up with leaders claiming to be inspired by God. Since the apostles were the ones who initially organised and raised up the church, having been called and sent by Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, they reasoned that anyone who was to be recognised as having authority in the church had to be a successor to the 'position' held by the apostles. As they were the apostles' 'successors,' and could trace their 'office' back in clear line to descent from the very earliest apostolic times, they stood in an apostolic succession. Clement of Rome wrote:

"The Apostles received the gospel for us from the Lord Jesus Christ: Jesus the Christ was sent from God. Thus Christ is from God, the Apostles from Christ: in both cases the process was orderly, and derived from the will of God... The apostles...appointed their

first-fruits, after testing them by the Spirit, to be bishops and deacons for those who were going to believe.”

This unscriptural doctrine was continued, as is still the case in some Christian denominations today. Irenaeus (130-202 AD), who studied under Polycarp (69-155 AD) the ‘bishop’ of Smyrna, and later became ‘bishop’ of Lyons in France in 177 AD, wrote:

“By ‘knowledge of the truth’ we mean: the teaching of the apostles; the order of the church as established from the earliest times throughout the world: the distinctive stamp of the body of Christ, preserved through the episcopal succession: for to the bishops the apostles committed the care of the church which is in each place, which has come down to our time, safeguarded without any written documents.”

Cyprian, who became a Christian in 246 AD and was made ‘bishop’ of Carthage two years later, added:

“Therefore we should be careful to observe and keep the procedure we received from the divine tradition and from the practise of the apostles, which is kept among us...”

What the ‘bishops’ said began to wrongly be considered just as authoritative and binding as Scripture itself.

Not very long after these times, having just survived a fierce empire-wide persecution, Christianity was made the official religion of the Roman Empire in 313 AD. Basilicas were built and later pagan temples were by government decree turned into cathedrals, and believers were driven out of their home meetings and into these huge buildings. These large meetings, having become very formal, were now more of a show or service, where Christian prayers and praises that had developed from the synagogue services and other sources, were added to create a grand ceremony. Monologue oration became standard practice during church meetings, and church ‘leaders’ began to wear special costumes. Worship aids such as incense, icons, and hand gestures were being introduced, continuing even today to a lesser or greater degree. When the German monk Martin Luther more than a millennium later posted his famous 95 theses on the door of the castle ‘church’ at Wittenberg on October 31, 1517 AD, the so called Christian Church had by then even lost the very gospel of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ alone (referring to much more than the Council of Ephesus in 431 AD erroneously proclaiming the blasphemous worship of Mary as the ‘mother of God’...). Though he reformed much of the theology, he didn’t do much to reform church practice, and like the other ‘Reformers’ (and even those today), basically replaced the existing church framework with a Protestant version of it, only taking out the Old Testament temple altar which by then had also become part of existing ‘church buildings.’ In 1526 AD he distinguished three ‘orders of service,’ namely the Latin Mass, which was a public meeting for all in *Latin which he designed for the young people, the German Mass, which was a second public liturgy in German, and a third kind of meeting about which he wrote:

“The third kind of service should be a truly evangelical order and should not be held in a public place for all sorts of people. But those who want to be Christians in earnest and who profess the gospel with hand and mouth should sign their names and meet alone in a house somewhere to pray, to read, to baptise, to receive the sacrament, and to do other Christian work.”

(In fact, Luther even saw the need for a celebration type ‘service’ amongst ‘pagans and Turks’ which would attract the masses.)

*[Latin was the cosmopolitan language of the time, just like Greek was in the New Testament time and English is today.]

Sadly, however, he never got to implement this restructuring of the church, and on this subject said:

“But as yet, I neither can, nor desire to begin such a congregation ... for I have not yet the people for it, nor do I see any who want it. But if I should be requested to do it and could not refuse with a good conscience, I should gladly do my part and help as best I can.”

Afterwards Luther changed his mind and turned back to almost Roman Catholic forms of ‘service,’ giving in to the pressure of the secular authorities. He was even directly responsible for the martyrdom of many thousands of Christians who did not go along with his teachings. He was just like John Calvin, who, amongst his other innovations, tried to make every citizen of Geneva attend the ‘worship services,’ or otherwise pay a fine or ultimately face excommunication, also torturing and murdering many ‘heretics’ during his ‘reign.’ From 1530 AD Luther maintained that all Christians who publicly preached and taught the Word of God without being ‘pastors’ had to be put to death, even if they taught correctly. Unhappy with his achievements, however, he wrote the following at the end of his life:

“Amongst thousands there hardly is one true Christian. We are almost pagans with Christian names.”

And so history continues, filled with examples of how various ‘reformers’ persecuted those who attempted to not only reform the content, but also the form. Many other attempts to restore the house church structure were also prematurely aborted in history, where, just like today, it seems as if Christians just cannot decide to break loose from the sociological forms of church that came about since the time of Constantine, and are still alive today, long after his passing away in 337 AD.

Even today, many continue to read into the New Testament their preconceived ideas, rooted in the undoubted practice of the second and subsequent Christian centuries. As Christians it is impossible to be committed to both the teachings of the Scriptures and that of ‘the early church fathers’ so widely practised in Christianity today. And so when it comes to church practice the choice before us is clear, namely scriptural traditions as taught in the pages of the New Testament (see the earlier section on ‘Church Practice Taught’ again), or the unscriptural traditions of ‘the early church fathers,’ or even that of the more modern times we live in today.

The Man behind the Scenes

In Daniel 7 we read of the dream Daniel had towards the end of the Babylonian kingdom. The dream repeats the same represented events king Nebuchadnezzar dreamed about in Daniel 2.

1 In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel saw a dream and visions of his head as he lay in his bed. Then he wrote down the dream and told the sum of the matter.

2 Daniel answered and said, "I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four *winds of the heavens were stirring up the great **sea.

3 And four great *beasts came up out of the sea, different from one another.**
(Daniel 7:1-3)

*[Prophetically winds mean wars here: Jeremiah 49:36-37: **36 And I will bring upon Elam the four winds from the four quarters of the heavens. And I will scatter them to all those winds, and there shall be no nation to which those driven out of Elam shall not come. 37 I will terrify Elam before their enemies and before those who seek their life. I will bring disaster upon them, my fierce anger, declares the LORD. I will send the sword after them, until I have consumed them,**]

[Prophetically sea means nations here: Revelation 17:15: **Then he said to me, "The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues.]

***[Prophetically beasts mean kingdoms here: Daniel 7:17: **'These four great beasts are four kings who shall arise out of the earth.** Daniel 7:23a: **"Thus he said: 'As for the fourth beast, there shall be a fourth kingdom on the earth...'**]

Scripture itself interprets what these four kingdoms were:

4 The first was like a *lion and had eagles' wings. Then as I looked its wings were plucked off, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man, and the mind of a man was given to it. (Daniel 7:4)

*[A lion with eagle's wings was one of the symbols of Babylon, as is also confirmed by archaeology.]

The first kingdom in the dream Nebuchadnezzar had in Daniel 2, the head of gold (v. 32), Daniel identified as *Babylon (605-539 BC) (vs. 38-39). The first kingdom in Daniel 7:4 also stands for Babylon, and parallels the head of gold in Daniel 2. We also see this prophesied in Jeremiah 4:7, where the same symbolism of the lion is used:

7 A lion has gone up from his thicket, a destroyer of nations has set out; he has gone out from his place to make your land a waste; your cities will be ruins without inhabitant. (Jeremiah 4:7)

*[The word 'Babel' means gate ('bab') of or to God ('el'), here signifying another way to God, other than His way.]

The second kingdom:

5 And behold, another beast, a second one, like a bear. It was raised up on one side. It had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth; and it was told, 'Arise, devour much flesh.' (Daniel 7:5)

This beast would come and devour the flesh of the previous one, making war against it and replacing it. The next kingdom in Daniel 2 which was represented by the image's chest and arms of silver (v. 39), was Medo-Persia (539-331 BC) (Daniel 5:28; 6:8, 12, 16, 28; 8:20; 10:1, 13, 20; 11:2). We also know that, being unequal in power, the Medes and the Persians weren't equally yoked, as represented by the bear in Daniel 7:5 which was raised up on one side. In history the Medes were at first more prominent, and later on the Persians rose to be the equivalent, even becoming higher than the Medes. The three ribs in the bear's mouth represent the three major wars that were associated with that conquest, namely the first thrust into Lydia, the second into Babylon itself, and the third one down into Egypt.

The third kingdom:

6 After this I looked, and behold, another, like a leopard, with four wings of a bird on its back. And the beast had four heads, and dominion was given to it. (Daniel 7:6)

The next kingdom was the Greek kingdom (331-168 BC) (Daniel 8:21; 10:20; 11:2-4). When Greece was at the height of its power and Alexander the Great died, the kingdom was divided under four of his generals, Cassander (over Macedonia), Lysimachus (over Asia), Ptolemy (over Egypt) and Seleucus (over Syria), represented by the beast's four heads.

The fourth kingdom:

7 After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong. It had great *iron teeth; it devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns.

8 I considered the horns, and behold, there came up among them another horn, a little one, before which three of the first horns were plucked up by the roots. And behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things. (Daniel 7:7-8)

*[We also find the symbol of iron in Daniel 2:33, 40. Iron was a symbol of the Roman Empire.]

The prophecies in Daniel form the key for understanding the Book of Revelation, and could be seen as a template for it. So far we have seen seven heads, which is the same number as the beast in Revelation 13:1-2 which also had seven heads, and also had components of each of the four beasts seen in Daniel 7.

Regarding this fourth beast, we read the following:

19 "Then I desired to know the truth about the fourth beast, which was different from all the rest, exceedingly terrifying, with its teeth of iron and claws of *bronze, and which devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet, 20 and about the ten horns that were on its head, and the other horn that came up and before which three of them fell, the horn that had eyes and a mouth that spoke great things, and that seemed greater than its companions.

21 As I looked, this horn made war with the saints and prevailed over them, 22 until the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was given for the saints of the Most High, and the time came when the saints possessed the kingdom.

23 "Thus he said: 'As for the fourth beast, there shall be a fourth kingdom on the earth, which shall be different from all the kingdoms, and it shall devour the whole earth, and trample it down, and break it to pieces.

24 As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings shall arise, and another shall arise after them; he shall be different from the former ones, and shall put down three kings.

25 He shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and shall think to change the times and the law; and they shall be given into his hand for a **time, times, and half a time.

26 But the court shall sit in judgment, and his dominion shall be taken away, to be consumed and destroyed to the end.

27 And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heavens shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey them.' (Daniel 7:19-27) (Also see Revelation 13:1-8.)

*[Note that the third kingdom of bronze (Daniel 2:39), the Greek Empire, was basically incorporated by Rome. Greek philosophy was the very basis of the Roman Empire. When Rome split into the two legs (Daniel 2:33), namely the Byzantine Empire and the Western Empire, these two parts were ruled from Constantinople, which is where Greek philosophy abounded.]

**[(Also see Daniel 12:7.) This is three and a half prophetic years. A year in the prophetic sense had 360 days, because the Hebrew year had 360 days, in this case adding up to 1260 prophetic days. This period is also referred to in Scripture as 42 months, where a month scripturally consisted of 30 days, which parallels the time period we read of in Revelation 11:2, 3; 12:6, 14; 13:5. Should one interpret a prophetic day to equal a year of our reckoning, this period may very likely be 1260 literal years.]

The fourth kingdom would politically be the strongest of the four. This beast was different from the other beasts, and had ten horns (also remember the ten toes of the image in Daniel 2:41-42). We see in Daniel 7:24 that these ten horns are ten kings that were going to arise out of Rome, and among them another was going to arise, and he was going to be different from the others. Three horns would be removed as a consequence of this little horn power arising. He was going to rule until the Ancient of Days would come and judgment be given to the saints (Daniel 2:35, 44-45; 7:26-27). In history we see that Rome

ruled from 168 BC to *476 AD. However, scripturally we see that the system of this beast, which would be different from those before him due to this last horn arising, would remain until the Ancient of Days would come, and judgment be given for the saints (Daniel 7:22).

*[In 4 September 476 AD the last emperor of the Western Roman Empire, Romulus Augustus, was deposed and not replaced. Before this date the Empire had been divided into Western and Eastern halves, with the Roman emperor Diocletian, who retired in 305 AD, having been the last sole Emperor of an undivided Empire. The Western Roman Empire declined and fell apart in the course of the fifth century. The Eastern Roman Empire, known today as the Byzantine Empire, preserved Greco-Roman legal and cultural traditions along with Hellenic and Orthodox Christian elements for another millennium, until its eventual collapse with the conquest of Constantinople at the hands of the Ottoman Empire in 1453 AD.]

This little horn power which would remain until the second coming of Christ (2 Thessalonians 2:8) is a European power, because historically the ten horns among which it came up arose out of the Western Roman Empire. Also note that the symbolism of the horn which would have eyes like a man and who would speak great things, is similar to that found earlier in reference to Babylon in Daniel 7:4, where the first beast was made to stand on two feet like a man, and the mind of a man was given to it.

As a kingdom was being set up on earth of which the seat and power lie in the little horn power, we also see a judgment taking place where all power will be given to Christ:

9 As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire.

10 A stream of fire issued and came out from before him; a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened.

11 I looked then because of the sound of the great words that the horn was speaking. And as I looked, the beast was killed, and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire.

12 As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season and a time.

13 I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of the heavens there came one like a Son of Man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him.

14 And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and tongues should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. (Daniel 7:9-14) (Also see Daniel 7:26-27.)

(Also note the description of Jesus in Revelation 1:12-16:

12 And there I turned to see the voice which was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands,

13 and in the midst of the seven lampstands stood One like the Son of Man, having been clothed in a robe reaching to His feet and having been girded across His chest with a golden belt.

14 And His head and His hair were white, and like white wool, like snow, and His eyes were like a flame of fire;

15 And His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters;

16 He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth proceeded a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was as the sun shining in its strength.)

And so we see the contrast - Christ, the ultimate Victor in the end, and the Antichrist, working against each other - the one, setting up a kingdom upon this earth, and the other One, setting up the eternal kingdom that will never be destroyed.

Note what John wrote in about 97 AD, not regarding the Antichrist himself, but regarding his 'spirit' (also see 2 Thessalonians 2:7 further below):

1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are from God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

2 By this the Spirit of God is known: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God,

3 and every spirit which does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the *spirit* of the Antichrist, which you have heard that it is coming, and now is already in the world. (1 John 4:1-3)

Before this Paul also made reference to this man of sin, describing when this Antichrist power would arise:

1 Now, brothers, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we beseech you,

2 not to be quickly shaken from your mind, nor be disturbed, neither by spirit nor by word nor by letter, as if from us, *as though* the day of Christ has come.

3 Let no one deceive you by any means; for *that day will not come* unless the **falling away* comes first, and the man of sin is unveiled, the *son of perdition*,**

4 who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God, or every object of worship, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

5 Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things?

6 And now you know that which is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time.

7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now **restrains will continue* until one arises from out of *the* midst.**

8 And then the lawless one will be unveiled, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth, and will destroy by the brightness of His coming;

9 *even he*, whose coming is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders,

10 and with all deceit of unrighteousness among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. (2 Thessalonians 2:1-10)

*[The falling away refers to the church that would first go into apostasy.]

**[Note that only two persons in Scripture are called "son of perdition," the one was Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus (John 17:12), and the other one is the man of sin. It is also important to note that Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss (Matthew 26:48-49; Luke 22:48; especially note Mark 14:45), pretending that he was one of them... This power is therefore, too, a subtle power, working just like Judas did.]

***[Tertullian wrote the following:

"He who now hinders must hinder until he is taken out of the way. What obstacle is there but the Roman state, the falling away of which by being scattered into ten kingdoms shall introduce Antichrist."

John Chrysostom also wrote:

"Only there is one that restrains now until he be taken out of the way, that is when the Roman Empire is taken out of the way, then he (Antichrist) shall come."

Edward Elliot who wrote a commentary on the Apocalypse in 1862 also wrote:

"We have the consenting testimony of the early fathers from Irenaeus, the disciple of saint John, down to Chrysostom and Jerome, to the effect that it was understood to be the imperial power ruling and residing at Rome. While the caesars held imperial power it was impossible for the predicted Antichrist to arise. On the fall of the caesars he would arise." (Chrysostom lived from 347-407 AD, and Jerome from 340-420 AD)]

The **Antichrist* therefore arose when Rome was divided into its powers, and will rule until the second coming of Christ - meaning that he is present with us today!

*[meaning another christ, in the place of Jesus Christ.]

We know that when the Roman Empire had disintegrated, its place was taken by a number of Barbarian kingdoms. Looking at historical maps of the Western Roman Empire in 476 AD, the ten kingdoms spoken of in the Book of Daniel which were not part of the old regime anymore, though established on Roman soil, can clearly be identified. Three of these kingdoms posed a threat to the throne in the city of Rome. When the last of these, the Ostrogoths, were uprooted by the decree of the Roman emperor Justinian (527-555 AD) under the direction of Belisarius in 538 AD, imperial Rome was replaced by another power residing in Rome. This power, still around today, is in essence nothing other than the ghost of the deceased Roman Empire, sitting crowned on its grave - a religious power, but with political influence. In a historical map of 550 AD the whole of Italy, from its northern border to the islands of the south, and across the sea to Carthage, is under the control of Rome once more - yet without any emperor residing there...

This little horn power, though not as visibly active as it was during the 1260 years it had politically reigned, is still with us and will remain until the second coming of Christ. It will devour the whole earth, but, working just like Judas, is doing this in a more subtle way - so subtle that even the church at large is under its influence...

SUMMARY

The main reason for the church meeting together in the homes of its members every Lord's Day (i.e. every first day) after work (or on 'Sunday' evenings) is to eat the Lord's Supper (i.e. an evening meal) - a full fellowship covenant meal which includes the 'one bread/loaf and the cup,' mainly looking forward to the wedding banquet of the Lamb when Jesus Christ Himself will eat it with His church again. In this context the meetings are open, spontaneous, participatory, discussion-orientated and interactive, where the children are also present, with no one leading 'from the front,' but everything happening under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The main purpose of the meetings and therefore the requirement for any contribution, is that it must be mutually edifying (building up or constructive, that is, promoting spiritual growth in another) for all present. This is done in accordance with the differing roles and responsibilities of members within each separate family in the church, where families will function as family units, rather than as separate individuals, each family only having one public voice. Just as family forms the basis of organic church life, it being the context in which we as believers grow, so each church in turn is also an independent functioning spiritual family unit of the worldwide extended family of believers. Here we also see that God wants to holistically reign in and through each person's whole life, where He sees all aspects of it in relation to the person, where no distinction between ministry and work is made, and where work is an extension of one's home and family life. This all forms part of one's 'household,' and consequently one's sphere of influence where every Christian participates in preaching the gospel. Though elders will emerge and be recognised in time as the Holy Spirit raises them up, since eldership is a non-hierarchical function decisions are still made consensually by all the brothers in the church. Thus it is the responsibility of all, and not just some, to establish from God's Word, through prayer and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, what His will is concerning whatever issue may arise. This localised eldership is complemented by men with wider itinerant ministries who function more widely than only in the churches they come from and where they are co-equal members of corporate decision-making. All of life is worship, including what we do when we meet as a church. We are created for God's glory. And so, Jesus Christ, as the Head of every church and the only One in charge, reigning in us and through us, is sending out His church at large to reach all people groups with the gospel until every nation, tribe, people and tongue bring glory to Him alone for ever and ever!

36 Then He spoke a parable to them: "No one puts a patch of a new garment on an old one; otherwise both the new *garment* tears, and also the patch that was taken out of the new *garment* does not match with the old *garment*.

37 And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the new wine will burst the wineskins and it will be spilled, and the wineskins will be ruined.

38 But *one* must put new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved together.

39 And no one, having drunk old *wine*, immediately desires new; for he says, 'The old is better.' " (Luke 5:36-39)