

## The Origin Of The Church

**LESSON AIM:** The student will affirm the origin of the New Testament church to have been during the personal, earthly ministry of Jesus Christ.

### SCRIPTURES TO READ

Text:Matthew 16:18; Mark 3:13-21.

Background Study: Matthew 3:1-6; 18:15-19; 26:26-29; Mark

1:1-8, 14-20; 2:13, 14; 14:22-25; Luke 22:19, 20; John 1:35-45; Acts 20:28; Revelation 1:4-6.

Devotional Reading: The True Vine, John 15:1-S.

#### 1. \_\_\_\_\_ Introduction

For the next three months we will be studying about the church in the New Testament. We are living in a time when the Lord's churches are often viewed as relatively unimportant even by professed children of God. But the truth is that we **cannot** overemphasize the importance of God's churches, not as a means to achieve salvation, but as a means of loving, faithful service to our precious Lord.

The logical starting place for this set of lessons is "The Origin of the Church." Our word "church" comes from the Greek word *ecclesia*, which means "the called out." It could rightly be interpreted as a congregation or assembly. The *ecclesia* was an assembly of town citizens called together to conduct business. So, we are going to study the origin of Jesus' "called out assembly."

#### 2. \_\_\_\_\_ **What part Did John The Baptist Have?**

John the Baptist was not privileged to be a part of the Lord's first church, but he did have a very important role in its origin. Mark wrote, "As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight" (Mark 1:2, 3). John was the forerunner of Jesus. He prepared the way for His coming.

John's message was that of repentance. He would only baptize those who had repented and given evidence of their repentance (Matt. 3:7-9). He wanted to be as sure as he possibly could that people were already saved before he administered baptism to them.

John the Baptist had a powerful testimony concerning Christ. He preached, "There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose. I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost" (Mark 1:7, 8). John never tried to promote himself but always pointed others to Jesus. He knew that Jesus was the Lamb of God who had come to take away the sin of the world (John 1:29, 36).

John also prepared the material that went into the makeup of the first church-the church that Jesus built (John 1:35-37). He was the only man alive who had the authority from God to baptize at that time. Jesus even came to him for baptism (John 1:29-34). When a replacement was being sought for Judas Iscariot, they looked for a man who had John's baptism (Acts 1:21, 22).

DISCUSSION: Talk about John the Baptist's role in relation to the first church. What was his testimony concerning Jesus?

### 3. \_\_\_\_\_ The Origin of the Lord's First Church

The majority of the religious world places the origin of the Christian church at the day of Pentecost. However, this cannot be true because Jesus had already called out His assembly of baptized believers during His personal, earthly ministry. Jesus' church was already witnessing, baptizing and observing the Lord's Supper before Pentecost.

So when did that first church begin? It began when Jesus called out His first disciples. This is in keeping with the meaning of the word "church" as was seen in the introduction of this lesson. Some think the church started when two of John the Baptist's disciples followed Jesus (John 1:35-45). This is not likely because at this time they only temporarily followed Him.

It seems more probable that the Lord's church started when He called out Simon, Andrew, James and John from their fishing boats on the shores of the Sea of Galilee (Mark 1:14-20). There was a definite calling by Jesus and a following by the disciples. He would later call out Levi (Mark 2:13, 14). The nucleus of His church was formed.

It is absolutely vital to the glory of God that all see that this first church was built upon Jesus Himself. Paul called Jesus the "chief corner stone" (Eph. 2:20). After God the Father had revealed to Peter that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God, Jesus declared to him that His (Jesus') church was built upon that truth and upon His person (Matt. 16:13-18). In verse 18, the Greek word for "Peter" is *petros*, which means "a stone." The word for "rock" is *petra*, which means "a large massive rock." If Jesus had been establishing Peter as the foundation of the church, He would have used the same word in both instances.

DISCUSSION: What difference does it make when the Lord started His church? At what point do you think the *ecclesia* was formed?

### 4. \_\_\_\_\_ The Lord's First Church In Its Organization

It has now been shown that the Lord's church was begun by Him no later than His calling out of Andrew, Peter, James and John along the shores of Galilee (Mark 1:16-20). After its origin, Jesus started to work on its organization.

Every organization needs good leaders, so Jesus chose twelve men whom He called apostles (Mark 3:13-19, Luke 6:12-16). These men would work closely with Him throughout His ministry. They would (with the exception of Judas Iscariot) be able to carry on His work upon His departure with the assistance of the Holy Spirit. Mark wrote, "And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils" (Mark 3:14, 15). They would be eyewitnesses of His majesty in year to come.

Then, Jesus gave His new church a great organizational sermon, called the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7). He laid down certain kingdom principles in this message, showing the new church members how they were to be different from the unsaved world. Their lives were to be characterized by things such as purity, meekness and peace. He taught them that righteousness begins in the heart and works its way out.

Later, Jesus would send out seventy workers, two by two, with a limited commission to go unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Luke 10). Before Jesus ascended to heaven after His death

and resurrection, He extended that commission to all the world (Matt. 28:18-20).

DISCUSSION: What steps did Jesus take to organize His newly formed church into a working organization?

5. \_\_\_\_\_ The Lord's First Church

In Its Operation

Now that Jesus had called out His core group of followers and organized them, it was time for them to be busy about His work. He did not start His church for it to be idle. This church did everything a church was supposed to do before Pentecost.

Jesus' church was active in its operation of baptizing new converts. Early in His ministry, He and His called out, baptized assembly were already making and baptizing more disciples than John (John 4:1, 2). There were about one hundred twenty people on the church roll before the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:15).

Jesus also instituted the Lord's Supper, and the church observed it while He was bodily here on earth (Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:19, 20). Thus, both church ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Supper, were given and participated in before the day of Pentecost. This certainly appears to be a church in operation, does it not?

Jesus had even instructed His young church concerning their interpersonal operations (Matt. 18:15-19). If one brother had been offended, he was to go to the offender and tell him. If that did not work, he was to take two or three witnesses and go back. If that did not work, he was to take the matter to the church for disposition. No one had problems understanding what Jesus meant by "church." Why? Because His church was already going strong. It was in full operation.

DISCUSSION: Talk about three things that show the Lord's church in operation before His earthly ministry was over.

6. \_\_\_\_\_ Conclusion

The Lord is still calling children of God to follow Him through His churches. It is His will for every person He saves to work for Him in this manner. God loves His churches. Paul preached to preachers, saying, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28).

The Lord's churches still belong to Him. They are not ours to change and make into something for our entertainment. They are sacred institutions which are supposed to bring great glory to His holy name. Praise God that Jesus built His church, and that He still has churches in the world!

## The Foundation Of The Church

### LESSON AIM

The student will state that Jesus Christ is the head and founder of the New Testament church.

### SCRIPTURES TO READ

- Text: Matthew 16:13-18.
- Background Study: Matthew 4:12-25; 10:14-23; 1 Corinthians 3:10-17; Ephesians 1:20-23; 2:20-22; Hebrews 2:9-13.
- Devotional Reading: That Rock Was Christ, I Corinthians 10:4.

#### 1. \_\_\_\_\_ Introduction

A few years back, I was involved in moving a house from one location to another. We were very concerned about its new foundation, so we did all we could to make it as strong as possible. Time always reveals that a house is no better than its foundation.

Time has also revealed that the Lord's churches have the durability given them by their head and founder, Jesus Christ. For almost two thousand years, the gates of hell have tried to prevail against them, but to no avail. This is because each scriptural church has God the Son as its foundation.

In last week's lesson it was established that the church was begun during Jesus' personal, earthly ministry. It was shown how that church was fully operational before Jesus ascended to Heaven. Nothing happened on the day of Pentecost to turn that group into a church-they already were one. Now, let us center our attention on Jesus as being the head and founder of His church, the very foundation of that first church and all succeeding ones.

#### 2. \_\_\_\_\_ A discussion of Our Text

Few passages have been abused and misused more than Matthew 16:18. One entire religious denomination uses it to show that Peter was the foundation of a gigantic, universal church. What this text shows about Peter is that he was a blessed man who was used by God the Father to reveal a wonderful truth concerning His Son, Jesus.

In the text, Matthew 16:13-18, the following events took place. (1) Jesus asked His disciples who men were saying He was (verse 13). (2) They replied that people were saying He was John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah and other prophets (verse 14). (3) Then, Jesus asked them who they thought He was (verse 15). (4) Simon Peter answered that He was the Christ, the Son of the living God (verse 16). (5) Jesus told Peter that the Father in Heaven had revealed that truth to him (verse 17). (6) Jesus then told Peter that He would build His (Jesus') church upon this rock (verse 18).

What, or who, was "this rock"? One can rule Peter out quickly. Even before looking at the meaning of the Greek words involved, it is clear that Jesus was speaking of something, or someone, other than Peter. He would have said, "Thou art Peter, and upon you I will build My church," if He had been talking about him. But He did not say that.

The meaning of the Greek words for "Peter" and "rock" also bear this out. The word "Peter" means a stone, while the word "rock" means a massive boulder. Jesus was not building His church on a stone that could be moved, but rather on a huge rock that could not be moved.

"This rock" of verse 18 is speaking of Christ and the great truth revealed about Him through Peter in verse 16. Jesus, the Christ and the Son of the living God, was already the foundation of His church when He called out His first disciples as recorded in Mark 1:14-20.

DISCUSSION: Talk about why "this rock" of Matthew 16:18 could not be speaking of Peter.

### 3. \_\_\_\_\_ Jesus Is the Founder Of His Churches

A founder is one who takes the first steps in building or establishing something. This is what Jesus did when He called out baptized believers as recorded in Matthew 4:18-22. He then called out and sent out apostles to lead (Matt. 10). He took the first steps in the building of His first church. He is still building His churches today. His churches are still built on the foundation of Jesus.

As founder, Jesus laid the best foundation that could possibly be laid-Himself. Paul wrote, "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Corintios 3:11). The Lord knew that neither Peter nor anyone else could qualify as this foundation, except for Himself. (See Ephesians 2:20-22.) He is the Rock (1 Corintios 10:4).

As founder, Jesus has the claim of ownership of His churches. He said, "And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). He had already been building His church, and He was going to do so in the future. True churches are His. All other churches are built upon mere human beings, and they cannot stand.

DISCUSSION: Since Jesus is the founder of His churches, why would He want to build them on some sinful human being?

### 4. \_\_\_\_\_ Jesus Is the Head of His Churches

Jesus not only set Himself up as founder and foundation, but He also made Himself the head of His churches. Paul said, "Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places. And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church" (Eph. 1:20, 22).

Jesus is the head of His churches because any other person would be limited by finite wisdom and leadership. A head of His churches, He always knows exactly what is best for each or them. Through His Holy Spirit He is able to lead them as He would have them to go.

As the head, Jesus is a functioning part of His churches. He is not a bystander looking on at what is happening. He is a participant in each church. When one of His churches is hurt, He is hurt. When His churches rejoice, He rejoices. He told His church, "He that receives you receives me, and he that receives me receives him that sent me" (Matt. 10:40). Anything that affects His churches affects Him.

DISCUSSION: Since Jesus is the head of His churches, what are all of His church bodies to be doing?

5. \_\_\_\_\_ Conclusion

As long as a church depends upon the sufficiency of Jesus Christ for its existence, work and doctrinal practice, its foundation is rock solid. What a blessed privilege it is to be a member of one of His churches! Have you followed Jesus in baptism and become a part of one of them?

## The Purpose Of The Church

### LESSON AIM

The student will understand the mission of a New Testament church to be threefold: evangelizing the world, baptizing believers and teaching them the Scriptures.

### SCRIPTURES TO READ

- Text: Matthew 28:18-20.
- Background Study: Matthew 9:37, 38; Mark 1:17; 16:15; Luke 24:46-48; Acts 1:8; 20:20, 21, 26, 27; 1 Corinthians 1:18-25; 15:14; 1 Thessalonians 1:5-8.
- Devotional Reading: They Went Everywhere, Acts 8:4-6.

#### 1. \_\_\_\_\_ Introduction

Why did Jesus organize His first church? Why are there thousands of His churches in existence today? Why is the church of your membership around? It may be that many of God's children have never really considered the answer to these questions. To answer them might mean a change of attitude and action toward the church of one's membership.

God took some pretty drastic action to usher in the church age. He temporarily took kingdom business from the Jewish nation; He took a course that would necessarily involve the Gentiles. Jesus even went to the cross to purchase His churches (Acts 20:28). These things certainly merit a look at each church's purpose for existence. Pray with me that all of us will recognize that purpose and find renewed zeal to fulfill it.

#### 2. \_\_\_\_\_ What the Purpose Is Not

A person can look at the world's churches and come up with many things that appear to be their purpose for being here. Even some of the Lord's churches have gotten into things that are, at best, questionable as to practice.

Some seem to think that entertainment is the purpose of the churches. They would never say out loud that this is true, but the fact still remains. Many people look for a church that can provide them with many activities, regardless of what is coming from the pulpit. The Lord's churches have to be very careful not to fall into the trap of competing with other churches in this area.

God's preachers must beware lest they get to the point in their preaching where the simple truth is not enough. They feel they must "put on a good show" for the folks or they might not return. This is surely not the purpose of the Lord's churches.

Further, it is not the purpose of the Lord's churches to solve the social and physical ills of the world. Churches sometimes get blamed for not taking care of all the sick and hungry, but these

things cannot be blamed on them. In fact, churches arc out of the realm of the Great Commission when they start owning and operating hospitals, nursing homes and other secular institutions.

DISCUSSION: Can you think of other areas which are not the purpose of the Lord's churches?

### 3. \_\_\_\_\_ The Lord's Churches Arc To Go Into All the World

Jesus stated the purpose of His churches in no uncertain terms in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:46A8; Acts 1:8). Jesus began the commission by saying, "Go ye therefore" (Matt. 28:19). There must be a willingness to go before God's purpose for His churches can be accomplished. At least three people, or groups of people are affected here.

One, there must be a missionary who is willing to go. The apostle Paul was such a man. When Paul was saved, God told Ananias to baptize him. Ananias was reluctant to do so, but God told him concerning Paul, "Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel" (Acts 9:15). Paul gladly responded to God's call. There is a great need for men to respond to God's call today (Matt. 9:37, 38). He is calling; it is the believer's job to respond.

Two, there must be local churches who arc willing to send missionaries once they are called. The church at Antioch listened to the voice of the Holy Spirit as He led them to send Paul and Barnabas with the gospel (Acts 13:1-3). God's way is that a missionary be responsible to one church-the church that sent him. Sometimes, missionaries have problems finding a church who will send them. Churches should seriously pray for the Holy Spirit's guidance concerning sending a missionary.

Three, there often must be associational support to make it possible for a man to go where God has sent him. Not very many churches are financially able to fully support a missionary when they send him, so they need help from their sister churches. Paul received help from churches other than Antioch (Phil. 4:10, 15, 16). The missionary is still responsible to the church of his membership, but others get a share in the blessings of helping.

DISCUSSION: What is the very first part of the Great Commission? Talk about three things necessary to fulfill that part of it.

### 4. \_\_\_\_\_ Go with the Message Of the Gospel

Those things discussed in the first part will accomplish nothing unless the missionary has the proper message after he reaches his field of endeavor. Jesus commanded, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations" (Matt. 28:19), and "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). The purpose of each of the Lord's churches is to preach the gospel to all the world.

Paul defined the gospel to the Corinthians (1 Corintios 15:1-4). It is the good news of how Jesus died, was buried and rose again according to the Scriptures. Any other so-called gospel is not good news. Paul warned the Galatians, "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:8).

There is power in the preached gospel. Paul wrote, "For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake" (I Thess. 1:5). The gospel, and only the gospel, is the power of God unto salvation to the believer (Rom. 1:16).

The Lord's purpose for His churches is not that they go into an area and make better people of

the residents, but that they preach the gospel to them. By preaching the gospel and winning them to Christ, God will make better people of them. Reform, higher morals and better living conditions will follow when a person asks Jesus into his heart for salvation (Acts 19:20, 21, 26, 27).

DISCUSSION: What is the gospel? Talk about why the gospel is the only hope for the lost world.

5. \_\_\_\_\_ The Lord's Churches Are To  
Baptize Willing Saved People

God's purpose for His churches is not complete until all phases of the Great Commission have been accomplished. Jesus commanded, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matt. 28:19). Each phase, in its order, is as important as the others.

Jesus left the authority for baptism in the hands of each of His churches. Nowhere in the Scriptures does one find this authority anywhere else. Only those who have accepted Christ as personal Savior qualify, ruling out infant baptism. The mode of baptism is, of necessity, complete immersion because a burial cannot be pictured otherwise.

Further, the purpose of baptism is all-important. It is not in order to receive forgiveness of sins. Repentance and faith in Jesus take care of that (Eph. 2:8, 9). Baptism is a pictorial ordinance. It shows those who watch a picture of the Lord being buried and rising again from the dead. It pictures the death of that professed believer to self and to the world, and his rising to newness of life.

If the ordinance of baptism is twisted, then the purpose of the Lord's churches is not accomplished. Every saved person should realize that the purpose of God for his life cannot be fulfilled until he submits to scriptural baptism and becomes active in one of the Lord's churches.

DISCUSSION: Talk about where the ordinance of baptism fits into God's purpose for His churches.

6. \_\_\_\_\_ The Lord's Churches Are  
To Teach Their Members

The Lord's final instructions to His first church was, "Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Man. 28:20). His purpose for His churches is not complete until church members are taught to observe His commands.

Paul told the Ephesians that he had not failed to declare unto them all the counsel of God (Acts 20:27). This is exactly what God calls upon each of His churches to do today-declare the whole counsel of God. Although this teaching ministry falls heavily upon the pastor, it also includes church-elected teachers and deacons, parents and the rest of the church in some way.

God is glorified when His Great Commission comes first in His churches. His glory is what it is all about (Eph. 3:21). Jesus has promised to be with His churches until the end of the age.

Please discuss what a blessed privilege it is to be a member of one of His churches.

LESSON 4, September 26, 1993

## The Nature Of

# The Church

## LESSON AIM

The student will define the New Testament church as a called out assembly of scripturally baptized believers who are covenanted together to carry out the Great Commission of Christ.

### - SCRIPTURES TO READ

- Text: Acts 2:41-47.
- Background Study: Acts 1:12-14; 2:1; 4:32; 8:115:41; Romans 16:1, 5,16, 23; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 16:1, 19; 2 Corinthians 1:1; Galatians 1:2; Ephesians 5:23-33; Philippians 1:1; 4:15; Colossians 4:15, 16; 1 Thessalonians 1:1, 2; 2 Thessalonians 1:1; Revelation 1:4, 11, 20; 2:1-3:22.
- Devotional Reading: In Every Church, Acts 14:23-27.

### 1. \_\_\_\_\_ Introduction

The first paragraph of our Church Covenant reads, "Having been led, as we believe, by the Spirit of God to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour, and on the profession of our faith, having been baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, we do now in the presence of God, angels, and this assembly, most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another, as one body in Christ." Much of the nature of the Lord's churches is summarized in this paragraph.

We are living in a time when Baptists are being deceived concerning the nature of the Lord's churches. One of the most popular misconceptions is that the church can be defined as a universal, invisible assembly of all believers. What difference does it make? It makes the difference between truth and error. It opens the door for other errors such as open communion, and so-called "believer's" baptism. It pleases God when the truth is told.

### 2. \_\_\_\_\_ The Lord's Churches Are Called Out Assemblies

The Greek word *ecclesia* literally means called out. It was commonly used as a term to designate an assembly of people called out from their homes to a certain designated place for the purpose of taking care of some kind of business. Such an assembly is spoken of in Acts 19:39. "Assembly" in that verse is *ecclesia*.

*Ecclesia* is used one hundred fourteen times in the New Testament. Five of these refer to general gatherings or civic assemblies. The rest refer to the Lord's New Testament churches. It never has a different meaning than a called out assembly.

It has already been established in a previous lesson (Lesson 1) that Jesus started His church while He was on earth. and that it was fully functional at that time. He personally called out His assembly. Each of His churches from then to now has His calling through the Holy Spirit. Thus, all of His churches are still called out assemblies.

DISCUSSION: What is the meaning of the word "church"? Does it ever mean anything other than a called out assembly?

### 3. \_\_\_\_\_ An Assembly Of Baptized Believers

Luke wrote, "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:41). This verse gives the scriptural

order of church membership: salvation ("gladly received his word"), baptism and church membership.

The nature of all true churches is the same—they are made up of baptized saved people. Not once in the New Testament is there found a person who was saved as a result of his baptism. Baptism is a result of salvation, not a means.

Special emphasis should also be placed on the fact that His churches are to be composed of His children. Paul wrote, "Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both their's and our's" (1 Corintios 1:2). Those members were sanctified and called—they were saved.

DISCUSSION: A New Testament church is more than an assembly. What are two other things mentioned in this part that are necessary?

#### 4. \_\_\_\_\_ Churches Must Have The Proper Covenant Relationship

The Great Commission lays out what each church's reasons for existence are (Matt. 28:18-20). Each church is to go into all the world, win people to Christ and teach them to observe His Word. For an assembly of baptized believers to exist with purpose, they must covenant together to carry out that commission.

This takes place best when a church's members are in one accord. It is impressive to note how unified that first church in Jerusalem was. The Lesson Text stated, "And all that believed were together, and had all things common" (Acts 2:44; see also Acts 4:32). When they met together, they were in one accord (Acts 1:14; 2:1). There is no telling what a church could accomplish today in missions if its members were all in one accord.

So, the nature of the Lord's churches includes their covenant relationship within each local body to carry out the Great Commission of Christ. A group of baptized believers could meet together and serve no purpose unless they meet with the proper purpose.

DISCUSSION: Talk about your own church's purpose of fulfilling the Great Commission and how well it is being done. What could be changed to do it better?

#### 5. \_\_\_\_\_ The Local, Visible Nature Of the Lord's Churches

Most of the Scriptures used in the Lesson Text and Background Study teach the local, visible nature of the Lord's churches. Since the meaning of the word *ecclesia* is assembly, then any kind of universal, invisible church is ruled out. The class is encouraged to go through the given Scriptures and notice that those churches were located in particular places.

Someone may ask, "What about those passages that do not refer to a particular place?" In such passages the church is existing in its "institutional" sense. It is used this way in Ephesians 5:25 when Paul wrote, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it. Today's expressions such as "the American housewife," "the American athlete" and "the American flag" are used in their institutional sense. When spoken of as an institution, "the church" refers to each and every church assembly.

A church exists as an institution from the time it dismisses from one service and reassembles for the next one. When Jesus promised the continued existence of His church, He was not saying that there would be some church somewhere assembled at all times, but rather that the church institution would remain in existence.

Another fact that displays the local nature of churches is that they are sometimes spoken of singularly and plurally. Saul of Tarsus persecuted "the church which was at Jerusalem" (Acts 8:1), while John wrote letters to "the seven churches which are in Asia" (Rev. 1:4). This clearly indicates the local and visible nature of God's churches.

Anyone who would like to read more about the local, visible nature of the Lord's churches would do well to read *The New Testament Church - A Local Body* by the late Dr. A. J. Kirkland.

**DISCUSSION:** What are some things that indicate the Lord's churches to be local and visible in nature?

## The Membership Of the Church

### LESSON AIM

The student will list the qualifications for church membership in a New Testament church and discuss the responsibilities of a church member.

#### - SCRIPTURES TO READ

- Text: 1 Peter 2:5.
- Background Study: John 13:35; Acts 2:41-47; 20:28; Romans 12:3-21; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27; Galatians 6:10; Ephesians 2:19-22; 4:16; 5:30; Philippians 2:3,4; I John 2:19; 4:11.
- Devotional Reading: A Few Names, Revelation 3:4.

#### 1. \_\_\_\_\_ Introduction

It seems that far too many Baptists are more concerned with how many members they get into their churches than they are with what kind of members they get. The Scriptures teach much about quality and little about quantity when it comes to admitting folks into the Lord's churches. It should still be the same.

Listen to what some of our Baptist forefathers, the Donatists and Novatianists, of the fourth century, believed to be important: "First, For purity of church members, by asserting that none sought to be admitted into the church but such as are visibly true believers and true saints. Secondly, For purity of church discipline. Thirdly, For the independency of each church; and fourthly, They baptized again those whose first baptism they had reason to doubt. They were consequently termed rebaptizers and anabaptists" (*The church That Jesus Built*, Foreman and Payne, page 68).

Let us take a serious look at the things involved in the membership of one of our Lord's churches. It deserves our attention.

#### 2. \_\_\_\_\_ A Regenerated Membership

Peter wrote, "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5; see further Ephesians 2:19-22). These words were written to the believers who were scattered throughout the countries, but they definitely can be applied to the Lord's churches. The spiritual houses of God's churches are to be made up of a priesthood of lively, or living, stones. God wants His churches to consist of a regenerated, or saved, membership.

The Lord adds those who have been saved to His churches (Acts 2:47). No lost person can get past Him for membership as far as His roll is concerned. However, human beings do not have the ability to know the hearts of those who walk the aisle to join a church. As a result, many church rolls are dotted with unsaved members in spite of all that can be done.

What can churches do to insure themselves that their rolls are free from lost people? There will

probably always be some unsaved people on the rolls of the best churches in this age, but there are some things that can be done to help the situation.

One thing that can be done is to take greater care in receiving members. When an unsaved person expresses a desire to accept Christ, the time must be taken to make sure he understands God's plan of salvation. He must know 'that his sins have separated him from God and that he has a personal responsibility to call upon Him to be saved (Rom. 3:23; 10:13). No one else can do that calling for him.

DISCUSSION: Talk about some reasons why unsaved people get into the Lord's churches.

### 3. \_\_\_\_\_ A Regenerated Membership (Continued)

There is so much to talk about in this part that two parts are needed to cover it adequately. Not only is it important to be careful when winning someone to Christ, it is also important to be careful when those who have already professed Christ come for membership.

Churches should exercise care when they receive members by letter or statement. A little time and a few phone calls might save a church a lot of trouble down the road. Potential members who are constantly moving from one church to another and causing problems in each one may need to be saved, and for sure need to grow up spiritually if they are saved.

One other thing can be done to help insure a regenerated membership-practice the exclusion phase of church discipline. People who are heretics, those who will not make personal offenses right, and those who will not apologize for public offenses should be removed from the church roll. In so doing, many unsaved people will no longer be members. I personally think that members who have not attended services for years for no good reason should be included in this number.

Paul wrote, "That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:27). No church will ever be perfect, but when it does all that it can to have a membership of saved people, it will come much closer to meeting God's expectations.

DISCUSSION: Think of other ways in which churches could better insure themselves of a regenerated membership.

### 4. \_\_\_\_\_ A Regenerated, Baptized Membership

Luke wrote, "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:41). The logical and scriptural thing to do when one is saved is to follow the Lord in baptism. Those in the above text were not added to the church until they were baptized.

True baptism is the total immersion of a willing believer by a scriptural church. Its motive is to show forth the burial and resurrection of the blessed Lord. One reason why this act of baptism is a qualification for church membership is that it identifies believers. It identifies them with others who believe the same way as they do. It identifies them with the Lord Jesus who set the example for them.

Jesus commanded His churches to baptize willing believers (Matt. 28:18-20). He gave this command with all the power and authority of the Father. If His churches are commanded to baptize believers, it follows that believers are to submit themselves to His churches for baptism. By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Peter commanded repentant believers to be baptized because of their remission of sins (Acts 2:38). God demands baptism as a pre-requisite to church membership.

Dr. J. R. Graves wrote, "In addition to his most emphatic command, he affectionately urges obedience to it upon his regenerated disciples by all the motives drawn from his love and death for their salvation-in fact, he makes it a test of the sincerity of their profession of friendship for him: 'If a man love me he will keep my commandments.' 'Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you' " (*The Act of Christian Baptism*, page 5).

Baptism is not simply a nice thing to do. It is a vitally important part of the Christian's life. Jesus began His ministry with it, and so should His disciples today.

DISCUSSION: Is baptism a qualification for church membership? Why?

5. \_\_\_\_\_ A Responsible Church  
Membership

Every church member should desire to contribute to the well being and strength of his church. He should search the Scriptures, his heart and his abilities to find ways of making his church a better one. It falls upon the pastor to be a responsible church member himself, and then, to teach the same to the people (Acts 20:28).

The greatest responsibility of church members is the same as the greatest commandment which Jesus gave, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Matt. 22:37, 39). Love is the primary responsibility.

Love is so important because the world identifies Jesus' disciples by it (John 13:35; 1 John 4:11). Church members' love for each other is a vital part of their ability to witness to the lost around them. Love has been called the circulatory system of the saved and of the Lord's churches. Without it, Paul said that a church becomes as "sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal" (1 Corinthians 13:1). A church body grows to maturity as its members cooperate together in love (Eph. 4:16).

When love abounds within a church, its members will be seen clothed in humility and regarding others above themselves (Phil. 2:3, 4). They will be doing good to all men, "especially unto them who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10).

Paul gives an entire list of church member responsibilities in Romans 12:3-21:

1. Do not think too highly of yourself.
2. Use your abilities to their highest possibilities.
3. Make sure your love is real, not with dissimulation or hypocrisy.
4. Be honest in your business dealings.
5. Be patient in tribulation.
6. Be instant in your prayers.
7. Be good to those in need.
8. Live in unity with your brothers and sisters in Christ.
9. Do not try to get even with those who do you harm, but rather be good to them.
10. Live peaceably with all men as far as possible.

## The Authority Of the Church

### LESSON AIM

The student will explain that a church is sovereign under God to evangelize, administer the ordinances, discipline its members and govern itself.

### SCRIPTURES TO READ

- Text: Matthew 16:19.
- Background Study: Matthew 16:18; 18:18, 19; 28:18-20; John 20:19-23; Acts 1:8, 15-26; 2:38-42; 1 Corinthians 5:12,13; Revelation 1:11, 20; 2:5.
- Devotional Reading: The Church at Antioch, Acts 13:14.

#### 1. \_\_\_\_\_ Introduction

Have you ever heard someone say, "That church can't tell me what to do"? This is usually stated when that person is being approached because of some sin in his life. Can a church tell its members what to do? How much authority does a church have over its membership? How much authority does a church have in other areas? These questions should be answered in this lesson.

Webster's dictionary defines authority as "a power to influence or command thought, opinion, or behavior; freedom granted by one in authority: right." Church authority falls within the confines of the will of God as revealed in His holy Word, the Bible.

#### 2. \_\_\_\_\_ Sovereign Under God

The Lord's churches are sovereign under Him. This means they are free from external control other than that which God exerts upon them. There is no religious or denominational power upon earth to which a New Testament church must answer. Every church is independent and sovereign under God to do His work as His Word and Spirit may direct.

Jesus told His first church, "And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 16:19; see also Matthew 18:18, 19). The "keys" speak of authority given from Jesus to His churches. God has promised to sanction those things in Heaven which His churches do on earth that are in accordance with His will.

Jesus had all power or authority (Matt. 28:18), and He built His assembly upon Himself, the Rock, the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matt. 16:16, 18). He had the right to pass that authority on to His churches who were to carry on His business after He ascended to Heaven.

The Lord underlined His giving of authority to His churches when He breathed upon them and told them to receive the Holy Spirit (John 20:19-23). His actions and words were prophetic and symbolic of what was to come. The church would be baptized in the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, empowering it and all of His churches thereafter to do God's will. Not only do His churches have the sovereign right under God to do His work, they have the Holy Spirit to lead them.

It cannot be stated too strongly that Jesus did not give His churches the right to make rules. His churches can only bind and loose within the limits of the Scriptures. They can only identify those whose sins are retained and remitted as those who have either rejected or accepted Jesus as personal Savior. The Lord's churches have no saving power, but they have the message of Jesus who can save everyone everywhere.

DISCUSSION: Talk about the importance of realizing that churches only have sovereignty under God. Also, talk about the fact that much authority has been vested to His churches.

3. \_\_\_\_\_ Authority To Evangelize Jesus said, "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). The Lord's last words before His ascension reminded His followers of their all-important task of evangelizing the world.

His churches were given the exclusive right to carry the gospel to everyone. No one else has this authority. Other individuals and groups do spread the gospel, but they do so without His authority. Argument is made as to what difference it makes as long as the gospel is being presented. The great difference involves what happens to those evangelized outside of His churches. The reason a person is saved is to bring God glory, and the way that is to be done in this age is through His churches (Eph. 3:21). People won to the

Lord are to be directed toward being baptized and uniting with one of His churches.

It should be pointed out here, also, that the Lord did not give any association, convention or fellowship of churches this authority. Churches cannot delegate their authority to such groups. Churches can choose to associate together in the work, but the moment any messenger body exerts any authority over any church, or group of churches, it has overstepped its bounds.

Now, since the Lord gave the authority to evangelize to His churches, and since no one else can do it for them, it stands to reason that each church should renew its zeal and determination to be about the great work. Are we doing what Jesus left us here to do?

DISCUSSION: Who has the authority from God to evangelize? Why cannot churches redelegate their God-given authority to an association or other group? Are we successfully evangelizing on a local level? state? interstate and foreign?

4. \_\_\_\_\_ Authority To Administer  
The Ordinances

The Lord's churches alone have the right to administer baptism and the Lord's Supper. In His instructions to His first church, Jesus said to baptize those who had been won to Him (Matt. 28:19). That same church is seen in operation on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:38-42). That assembly baptized those who gladly received the Word, and then they partook of the Lord's Supper (verses 41, 42).

Along with the authority to administer the ordinances comes the great obligation to protect their true meaning. Both ordinances have been distorted by those who have no authority to administer them-by those who teach that they have some kind of saving power. It is the duty of each New Testament church to defend the purpose of the ordinances until the Lord returns.

The Lord's churches are to be sure that the gospel message is presented in picture from the two ordinances. Jesus' death is seen in the unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine. The bread is symbolic of His broken body, while the drink shows His precious shed blood. Then, in scriptural baptism, the onlookers see a picture of the Lord's burial and resurrection as the candidate is

submerged beneath the water and brought up from it. What a responsibility it is to be authorized to administer the ordinances, and what a blessing to behold them!

DISCUSSION: What is scriptural baptism? What do the two ordinances picture?

#### 5. \_\_\_\_\_ Authority To Discipline

Many of the Lord's churches seem to have given up their authority to discipline their members. Discipline involves the entire training process of a church's membership, but it also includes the right to exclude members from membership when it becomes necessary. There is a great need for this authority to be recognized today

The church at Corinth was advised by Paul to exercise the authority to discipline. He wrote, "For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judges. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person" (1 Corintios 5:12, 13). A church has no authority over people outside its membership, but God expects the church to judge those who are within. Surely, no individual is to judge others (Matt. 7:1), but church bodies are required by God to do so.

The Lord has authorized His churches to withdraw from members who are guilty of heresy (Titus 3:10, 11), for unresolved personal offenses (Matt. 18:15-17) and for public offenses (1 Corintios 5). The church itself is responsible for carrying this out, not the pastor or some committee.

Churches must exercise their authority to discipline with great care and love. The object should always be to gain a brother rather than to lose one. The prayer of that church should be that the errant one would repent and get back into its fellowship.

#### 6. \_\_\_\_\_ Authority To Govern

Church government in the New Testament was local, and each church was self-governing (Acts 1:15-26). When the church at Jerusalem was in need of a replacement for Judas Iscariot, they nominated two men and voted on them. This is still the way churches are to be governed.

All auxiliaries of a church such as ladies' auxiliary, men's brotherhood, committees and classes are subject to that church. They have no right to formulate or dictate the church's policies or actions. They can make recommendations, but their church should make the final decision.

This does not mean that a church must vote every time they change a light bulb, but things that affect their policy and action as a church should meet with their approval. God's way is government by the membership.

## The Ordinances Of the Church

### LESSON AIM

The student will list the two church ordinances and explain their purposes.

### SCRIPTURES TO READ

- Text: 1 Corinthians 11:2.
- Background Study: Matthew 3:5-8, 13-17; 26:26-30; 28:19; Acts 2:41, 42; 8:35-39; 1 Corinthians 11:20-34.
- Devotional Reading: It Behooved Christ To Suffer, Luke 24:46, 47.

#### 1. \_\_\_\_\_ Introduction

What is an ordinance? Webster's dictionary says it is "an authoritative decree or direction: order; a prescribed usage, practice, or ceremony." Church ordinances are decrees set forth by Christ Himself by which the observing church is to remember and celebrate the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ.

Jesus gave two such authoritative decrees: baptism and the Lord's Supper. Some have taught that foot-washing was given as an ordinance (John 13), but Jesus was teaching His disciples a great lesson in humility on that occasion. His command there was for His church members to remember their servitude toward each other.

Baptism and the Lord's Supper are sometimes taken as sort of an elective offered by Jesus-not too important but nice if you choose to observe them. Such is not the case at all. God is highly displeased with any of His children who do not obey Him in their observance.

#### 2. \_\_\_\_\_ No Saving Power

One popular misconception about both ordinances is that they in some way help a person make it to Heaven. Some teach that the word "for" in Acts 2:38 teaches baptism in order to obtain salvation. In reality, it teaches a person to be baptized because he is saved. No passage anywhere in the Bible teaches baptismal regeneration.

Some also teach that the Lord's Supper in some way helps a person to be saved. In the nineteenth century, Alexander Campbell wrote, "When the disciples assemble on the first day of the week, there is something eaten. If we fail to take food for the physical man, body, we will perish - die. So in the life of God's children; if they fail to eat the spiritual food, they dwindle away - die." He taught that the eating of the Lord's Supper is needed in order to keep the spiritual man alive.

The Scriptures teach that only Jesus can save, and only He can keep one saved. Peter, the same man who said the words of Acts 2:38, preached, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). The repentant sinner needs to call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, trusting Him and Him alone for his salvation (Rom. 10:13).

Types and pictures of Christ cannot save. If they could have, the Law of Moses and its system would have been sufficient and Jesus would never have had to come (Heb. 10). Pictures that reflect back toward Jesus' death and resurrection can no more save than those which reflected forward toward them. Salvation is in Jesus-by grace through faith in Him (Eph. 2:8, 9).

### 3. \_\_\_\_\_ The Purposes of the Ordinances

Someone says, "Well, if you Baptists don't think the ordinances have any saving power, then why do you bother with them at all?" For many reasons, all of which are in line with the Bible. A few of these are seen in this lesson.

One great reason for observing the ordinances is obedience from hearts of love. Jesus told His disciples, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). He then strengthened that command by saying, "If a man love me, he will keep my words" (John 14:23). Later, He said, "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you" (John 15:14). A person who truly loves Jesus will obey Him by following Him in baptism and rightly observing the Lord's Supper.

Another great reason for the ordinances is in order that a proper picture of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus might be portrayed. Jesus wants His people in His churches to remember what He did for them. What better way can this be remembered than through the ordinances? The Lord's Supper pictures that broken body and shed blood of Jesus as the unleavened bread and fruit of the vine are taken (1 Corintios 11:24-26). Every baptismal service shows His burial and resurrection.

Other reasons for keeping the ordinances are that they honor Christ, they secure His promised blessings, faith is professed in Him through them, discipleship is confessed, evidence is given of friendship with Jesus, and unity is witnessed among the membership.

DISCUSSION: Talk about the purposes of the two ordinances.

### 4. \_\_\_\_\_ Proper Observance Of The Ordinances

The ordinance of baptism has been discussed some already in the past lessons of this quarterly (Lessons 3 and 5). It cannot be properly observed unless there is a saved candidate who is totally immersed by the authority of a New Testament church with a motive of obedience to Christ's command.

More needs to be said about the observance of the Lord's Supper. It can be abused in several different ways. First, it can be abused as to its purpose. It is a pictorial ordinance of Jesus' death. Never does it have the purpose of salvation.

Then, it can be abused as to participants. Only saved, baptized members of a local church can partake of it. It was given to the local church (Matt. 26:26-30), and only members of a local congregation partook (Acts 2:42).

It can also be abused by the members themselves (1 Corintios 11:28). They are called upon to examine themselves and to confess any secret sins. The Lord strongly warned His people about eating and drinking in an unworthy manner. Paul wrote, "For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body" (1 Corintios 11:29). Many of the Corinth members were sick and some of them were dead because of their abuse of the Lord's Supper.

The Lord's Supper can further be abused by using the wrong elements. The Lord used unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine when He instituted it (Matt. 26:26-30), and that is what should be used now.

There is no set time for the Lord's Supper to be observed. God's Word only instructs His churches to be sure they show forth His death until He comes (1 Corintios 11:26). There is a set place where the Lord intends for the Supper to be eaten, and that is in His church assembly (1 Corintios 11:33). Individuals cannot take the Lord's Supper to nursing homes, hospitals, or any other place where the local church is not assembled.

**DISCUSSION:** Why should churches be extra careful as to how they observe the ordinances?

## The Offices Of The Church

### LESSON AIM

The student will list the two ordained offices of a New Testament church and discuss their duties.

### SCRIPTURES TO READ

- Text: 1 Timothy 3:1-13.
- Background Study: Acts 6:1-7; 14:23; 20:28; 1 Corinthians 1:26-28; 1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13; 1 Timothy 1:12; Titus 1:5-9; Hebrews 13:7, 17; 1 Peter 5:1-4.
- Devotional Reading: Called of God, Hebrews 5:4.

#### 1. \_\_\_\_\_ Introduction

The New Testament bears record of two ordained offices in the Lord's churches: the pastor and the deacon. Obviously, there is much misunderstanding today as to what is involved in these offices. That is seen from all the different things some church members expect of them. Thankfully, there are many who have a scriptural view of these offices.

Pastors are sometimes called bishops, elders, overseers and shepherds. The word "deacon" means servant or helper. When pastors and deacons work together as teams in the Lord's churches, much is accomplished. Both offices have distinct places and, when rightly used, they complement each other. When one tries to run the business of the other, there is often turmoil, or at best, there is a lack of maximum accomplishment in the Lord's work.

The Lord wants churches to effectively work with their pastors and deacons. He further wants pastors and deacons to cooperate together as they lead in God's great kingdom work. A study of His Word and submission to Him will accomplish this.

#### 2. \_\_\_\_\_ what a Pastor Should Be

The apostle Paul gives an extended list (sixteen items) in the Lesson Text of things that should characterize a pastor. Before looking at some of these, it should be mentioned that true pastors are called of God. Paul said, "This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work" (1 Tim. 3:1). The words "desire" and "desireth" have the idea of reaching for and passionately longing for the good work of being a pastor.

God enables men and puts them into the ministry (1 Tim. 1:12). It is unlike any other calling in the world. The Holy Spirit Himself makes men overseers through His call and leadership (Acts 20:28; 1 Corinthians 1:26-29). Any man who attempts to pastor without this calling will be miserable indeed.

Paul started the list of qualifications with, "A bishop must then be blameless" (verse 2). His life is to be such that the world cannot find fault with him. He must constantly guard his morals and conduct so that his ministry will not be in vain (1 Corinthians 9:27).

Then, the pastor is to have high values concerning marriage and the home (1 Tim. 3:2, 4, 5). He

is to be a "man of one woman." His love for his wife should be so obvious that no one in the congregation would doubt his devotion to her. Further, he is to be a good father to his children. He must have them under control. Sometimes, pastors need to be reminded that ministerial duties do not supersede parental duties.

The pastor is to be vigilant, which means he must learn how to exercise good judgment in all situations. He must be sober, or serious about the work he is called to do. He must be a man of good behavior. He is a man who is "given to hospitality," literally, "a lover of strangers." He must be able to teach the Word of God. The pastor is to be a patient man. One commentator calls this patience "sweet reasonableness." All of this will give him a good report before the saved and the unsaved.

DISCUSSION: List the things a pastor is supposed to be.

3. \_\_\_\_\_ What a Pastor Should Not Be Paul's list in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 also shows some things that a pastor is not to be. He warned against the drinking of alcoholic beverages (verse 3). There is no way any Christian can justify the use of alcoholic beverages, and especially not a pastor.

A pastor is not to be a striker or a brawler (verse 3). He must not be quarrelsome and contentious. He is to be a peacemaker, not a troublemaker. Paul told Titus, "To speak evil of no man, to be no brawler, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men" (Titus 3:2).

Then, the pastor is not to have the wrong attitude concerning money and material riches (verse 3). "Filthy lucre" is money gained in shameful ways. A "covetous" pastor is one who is a lover of material riches and money. This person could not possibly have the cause of Christ uppermost in his mind. This in no way means that a pastor is supposed to be poor and own nothing. Rather, these things must not control him.

Finally, the pastor is not to be a novice (verse 6). This means he is not to be a new convert. One who has only recently been saved has not had time to mature in the faith. This leaves him open to ungodly pride because of the exalted position he would have as pastor and would leave him open to the snares of the devil.

Discuss the things a pastor is not to be.

4, \_\_\_\_\_ what a Pastor Is To Do Every pastor has wrestled with the problem of what falls under pastoral responsibility. Much has been placed on the pastor that does not belong there. Sometimes others put those things there, and sometimes the pastor takes them upon himself. However, his job lies in the realm of spiritual leadership. It will be seen later that the deacons have the responsibility of the material leadership.

God's Word does not leave the pastor in the dark as to what his primary responsibilities are. The apostles realized that three of their main duties were the study of the Word, the ministry of the Word and prayer (Acts 6:2, 4). When they were free to do those things, the Word of God grew and the number of disciples increased (Acts 6:7). Churches should see to it that their pastors have the time needed for study and prayer.

Paul told the elders at Ephesus, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28; see also 1 Peter 5:2). It is impossible for a pastor to prepare the spiritual food needed by a church unless he has the time to do so. It is also necessary for pastors to wisely use the time they have.

Another scriptural duty of pastors is to preach the Word (2 Tim. 4:2). He is to preach Christ

crucified, buried, risen and coming again. All the truths of the Scriptures revolve around this. He is to preach in purity, in love, without the fear of offending others and without the fear of being without a place to preach. He is to preach all of the Word, not just the popular parts. He should preach positively, simply and as often as he can without neglecting his family and church.

A pastor is the shepherd of the people he pastors and the undershepherd of Jesus, the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4). Not only is he to feed the flock, but he is also to guide them by word and example. He is to guard them by teaching them the right way and warning them against the wrong. He is a leader, not a driver. (Read 1 Peter 5:1-4; Hebrews 13:7, 17.)

DISCUSSION: Space does not permit a discussion of all pastoral duties, both real and supposed. Talk about some of these.

#### 5. \_\_\_\_\_ The Office of the Deacon

The characteristics of deacons is very close to those of the pastor. (Compare in I Timothy 3:1-13.) The men chosen by the church in Jerusalem were not called deacons, but most agree that they were (Acts 6:1-7). That church chose men who were (1) honest, (2) yielded to the Holy Spirit, (3) wise and (4) able to handle business. This kind of man is still needed for the deaconship today.

Those men in the Jerusalem church were elected and ordained for the purpose of relieving the apostles of work they were not supposed to be doing (Acts 6:2). Deacons are still to make it possible for their pastor to do the job to which God has called him. It should be remembered that deacons are to help pastors and not create problems for them.

The work of the deacon involves watching over the widows and needy of the membership. They should be aware of the physical needs of the church facilities, building expansion needs, mission endeavors and other needs that involve business sense.

The office of deacon is still needed today. There is no record of it being done away. Pastors need the help which deacons can give them. Churches need deacons to promote harmony within their membership. Churches need men to lead and direct in material matters. Thank God for the many faithful men working as deacons in the Lord's churches today!

DISCUSSION: Talk about the work of deacons.

## The Discipline Of the Church

### LESSON AIM

The student will discuss a church's responsibility to exercise discipline upon its members:

### SCRIPTURES TO READ

- Text: 1 Corinthians 5:1-13.
- Background Study: Matthew 18:15-35; Acts 5:1-11; Romans 16:17, 18; 2 Corinthians 13:1-5; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15; 1 Timothy 5:19-21; Titus 3:10.
- Devotional Reading: Set in Order, Titus 1:5.

#### 1. \_\_\_\_\_ Introduction

I will never forget about an incident that happened more than twenty-five years ago. In a regular business meeting of our church, a lady stood in tears and brought charges against her husband for his use of intoxicating drink. That church withdrew fellowship from him that night, but within a few weeks he made his apologies to the church and became a productive member. If she and that church had not loved him enough to exclude him, he might have never been right with the Lord again.

Church discipline involves the entire training process of a church. The word "discipline" comes from the root word "disciple." Discipline means "training that corrects, molds, or perfects . . . moral character." Discipline includes teaching members what they are to do, what they are not to do, and under certain circumstances, excluding them from the membership. This lesson will deal with the exclusion, or withdrawal, part of discipline.

#### 2. \_\_\_\_\_ Objections to Church Discipline

Many churches make little or no effort to check sin and heresy when a member is known to practice them. For certain, each New Testament church is an independent body and must make its own decisions, but lack of discipline weakens and can eventually destroy a church. Just a little time should be spent looking at some objections made to church discipline.

One favorite objection heard often is that no one has the right to judge anyone else. These people use the words of Jesus who said, "Judge not, that ye be not judged" (Matt. 7:1). Yet, Paul instructed the Corinthian church to judge its members (1 Corintios 5:1-13). There is no contradiction. Individual believers within the Lord's churches are not to judge one another, but the church as a body is commanded to do so.

Another objection sometimes heard is that a church has waited too long, and to exercise discipline would cause too much damage. No doubt this makes it much more difficult. However, obedience to God has no cutoff date. God expects all of His commands to be obeyed, including this one.

**DISCUSSION:** You may know of other objections to church discipline. Ask the class to discuss

them with you. Discuss the fact that exclusion does not condemn anyone to hell. It is Christ who saves, not any church.

### 3. \_\_\_\_\_ Is Church Discipline Scriptural?

The bottom line for every New Testament church and each child of God in it should be the determination of whether or not a thing is scriptural. Does God's Word teach that members should be excluded from membership? Beyond a shadow of a doubt.

Jesus commanded His churches to teach their members "to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:20). This included not only teaching what the Bible says about matters, but also teaching observance of them. This, at least, allows for withdrawal from those who refuse to observe His Word.

Paul rebuked the Corinthian church because it had not removed the sinful man from their rolls (1 Corinthians 5:1-13). He told them to deliver that man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh (verses 4, 5). Their entire church body was contaminated by that one man's sins. Paul wrote, "Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?" (verse 6). Then, he told them to purge out the old leaven, or to withdraw fellowship from the sinful man (verse 7). In case there was any doubt as to what they were supposed to do, Paul ended the chapter with the words, "Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person (verse 13).

Other passages such as Matthew 18:15-17, 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 and Titus 3:10 leave no doubt as to what God has to say about excluding church members under certain circumstances. Please take time to read and discuss those passages.

### 4. \_\_\_\_\_ The Purposes Of Church Discipline

All of God's commands have purpose. This one is no different. One purpose of church discipline is to protect a church from outside slander. When a member is living for and like the devil, the community talks about the church of his membership. Withdrawal from such a person allows the world to know that the Lord's churches do not condone his actions.

Another purpose of church discipline is to keep a church as pure as possible from known sin. Paul said, "Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new~ lump, as ye are unleavened" (1 Corinthians 5:7). This action would rid a church of known moral sins as well as doctrinal sins. (See Ephesians 5:27.)

Yet another purpose is to rid a church of members who hold back its progress. This might be unsaved people who made false professions of faith, or it might be backslidden people who refuse to repent. Either way, withdrawal from them would help the church go forward for Christ.

Church unity is an additional purpose for church discipline. When carried out as the Bible has instructed, no two members would ever stay offended at each other. They would either be reconciled or not remain members (Matt. 18:17). Brothers and sisters would be gained in God's service.

Church discipline would give a clean, wholesome, morally pure church for children of God who desire one. Parents could know that their children were being given a wholesome atmosphere. Members would be able to promote the Lord's church without shame.

Finally, the greatest purpose of all for church discipline is that God is glorified through the love and obedience of His churches. Really, no other purpose is necessary.

DISCUSSION: List the purposes of church discipline.

### 4. \_\_\_\_\_ The Way of Church Discipline

It is very important that churches understand that this is "church" discipline. This is not something that can be put off on a committee, the deacons or the pastor. Paul told the Corinthian church to take care of their discipline problem "when ye are gathered together" (1 Corintios 5:4). The church as a body is to discipline its members.

The Word of God tells of three types of offenses with which churches must deal: heresy, personal offenses and public offenses. God tells how to handle each of these. Concerning the matter of heresy (false doctrine), Paul told Titus to admonish the guilty person twice and then reject him if he does not repent (Titus 3:10, 11).

Jesus addressed the issue of personal offenses (Matt. 18:15-17). The offended person is to approach the offender one-on-one and try to settle the matter without others being involved. Most problems would be resolved at this point. If reconciliation fails, he is to take one or two witnesses and try again. If this fails, he is to take it to the church of his membership. If no settlement can be reached there, the church is to exclude the guilty party.

Paul dealt with the matter of public offenses in the Lesson Text (1 Corintios 5:1-13). He wrote, "But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat" (verse 11). He commanded the Thessalonian church to withdraw from brothers who were guilty of a disorderly walk (2 Thess. 3:6). When there is common, factual information that a church member is guilty, the church is to meet together and withdraw from him.

A church that is spiritually ready to properly exercise discipline will have prayed for, pleaded with and wept over such an errant brother or sister before exclusion takes place. Discipline is not an act of selfish anger but of love. It is not something a church does to a member, but what it does for him. It is always done with the intention of gaining a brother.

## 6. \_\_\_\_\_ Conclusion

When done properly, church discipline will bring about a more godly membership. People will take the Lord's churches more seriously, personal problems will be resolved, and public sins will be fewer. Again, most of all, God will be seen as One who loves His people, but One who also expects holiness from them.

The Lord did not leave this great doctrine of church discipline as an option for us. It is a command. We need to remember that all of His commands are given for our good and for His glory.

## The Perpetuity Of the Church

### LESSON AIM

The student will explain the promise of Jesus concerning the continual existence of New Testament churches until He returns to earth.

### SCRIPTURES TO READ

- Text: Matthew 16:18.
- Background Study: Matthew 28:20; John 14:3; Ephesians 3:21; 5:23-25, 27, 29, 32; 1 Timothy 3:15; Hebrews 12:22, 23; 13:5; Revelation 22:16.
- Devotional Reading: I Will Not Leave, John 14:16-20.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Introduction

"From the instant Jesus instituted His church during His personal ministry on earth until now, there's never been a moment in time when New Testament Churches have or will fail to exist in the world. The church today who satisfies this claim, believes and practices New Testament teaching as the sole authority for their actions and government is the church Jesus organized" (*The Church That Jesus Built*, Foreman and Payne, page 13).

Church perpetuity means that from the time of the origin of the Lord's churches until now there has never been an instant when His churches were not in existence. True Baptists believe that Jesus instituted His first church, and that there will be true churches awaiting Him when He returns in the air for His saints. Jesus promised it.

2. \_\_\_\_\_ Jesus Loves His Churches One great reason why the gates of hell have not been able to prevail against the Lord's churches is His great love for them. Paul told the Ephesian elders, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost has made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). Jesus paid the same price for His churches that He paid for unsaved sinners-His own blood. Satan could never win over this kind of love.

Jesus' love for His churches was illustrated by a husband's love for his wife. Paul wrote, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it" (Eph. 5:25). This love is unconditional and lasting. His love nourishes and cherishes His churches (Eph. 5:29). It is a love that would conquer anyone or anything that threatened their existence.

Jesus loves His churches so much that He has great expectations from them. Paul said, "That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:27). Those expectations will not be blotted out by Satan overcoming and wiping out the Lord's churches.

### QUESTIONS:

1. What price did Jesus pay for His churches?
2. What are some ways in which Jesus has shown, and does show, His love for His churches?

### 3. \_\_\_\_\_ Jesus Promised Church Perpetuity

Historical documentation verifies the presence of New Testament churches in every century since Jesus started His first one during His personal ministry on earth. However, even if that evidence were lacking, the promises of Jesus would be enough to assure the believer of church perpetuity. He promised it at least four times in the Text and Background Study of this lesson.

Jesus emphatically promised His church that the gates of hell would not prevail against it (Matt. 16:18). Next week's lesson will surely show that Satan has given it his best shot, but he will not be able to stamp out the Lord's churches. If a time has existed that there was no church anywhere on the earth, then Satan would have prevailed. But, because of Jesus' promise, that time has never been and never shall be in this age.

One of the last things Jesus told His church before He went back to Heaven was that He would be with it until the end of the world (Matt. 28:20). That promise could not be true if His churches ever ceased to exist, even if for a short period of time. He has been with His churches every moment of every day because His churches have continually existed, His promise of "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Heb. 13:5) has been kept.

Still another time Jesus told His assembly, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto my-self; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:3). This promise assures the existence of His churches at the time of His second coming. It should be noted that this promise was not exclusively made to His churches. All of the saved, in churches and out, will go with Him when He comes.

Paul emphasized that God would receive glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages (Eph. 3:21). While this is not a promise made directly by Jesus, it is a fact that verifies the continued existence of His churches from their beginning. God's Word is all the proof needed for church perpetuity.

#### QUESTIONS:

1. What are three promises made by Jesus that assure us of church perpetuity?
2. How does Ephesians 3:21 verify it?

### 4. \_\_\_\_\_ **The Protestant Reformation**

This part may seem out of place, but some have the misconception that Baptists had their beginning with the Protestant Reformation, and that false idea needs to be clarified. Baptists are not, and never have been, Protestants.

The Protestant Reformation came about because of dissatisfaction within the Roman Catholic Church membership. Corruption had reached such a peak that leaders within the work felt something had to be done. Therefore, they protested against the ungodly Catholic teachings and practices and sought to bring about reform. Thus, the Protestant Reformation period began. Martin Luther (1483-1546) is given credit for starting this revolt.

Probably, the thing that has caused the misconception is that the Lord's churches did not acquire the name "Baptist" until the fifteenth or sixteenth century. However, they had been in existence since Christ was on earth. The Lord's churches are not traced by their name but by their beliefs.

Historian John T. Christian wrote, "The footsteps of the Baptists of the ages can more easily be traced by blood than by baptism. It is a lineage of suffering rather than a succession of bishops; a martyrdom of principle, rather than a dogmatic decree of councils; a golden chord of love, rather than an iron chain of succession, which, while attempting to ratify its links back to the apostles, has been of more service in chaining some protesting Baptist to the stake than in proclaiming the truth

of the New Testament. It is, nevertheless, a right royal succession, that in every age the Baptists have been advocates of liberty for all, and have held that the gospel of the Son of God makes every man a free man in Christ Jesus" (*A History of the Baptists*, Volume 1, pages 22, 23).

## The Persecution Of the Church

### LESSON AIM

The student Will discuss ways a church member may withstand and overcome persecution.

### SCRIPTURES TO READ

- Text: 1 Peter 4:12-16.
- Background Study: Mathew 5:10-12; John 15:18-25; Acts 4:13-21; 5:17, 18, 40, 41; 7:57-59; 8:1; 12:14; 1 Thessalonians 2:14, 15; 2 Timothy 2:10-12; Revelation 6:9-11.
- Devotional Reading: Counted Worthy, 2 Thessalonians 1:4-10.

#### 1. \_\_\_\_\_ Introduction

Severe persecution of God's churches looms heavy today. Moral decay has eroded the basic fibers of our civilization. States are seeking to increase finances through the poor and ignorant by means of the lottery systems. Homosexuality as a life-style is accepted at the very highest level of government. Churches and individual Christians who oppose these sins and others are made to appear backward and judgmental by the humanistic media.

One alarming and sad thing that occurs to me is that some church members are sympathetic to the present sinful situation. These people think that churches are to mind their own business and not oppose immorality except in generalities. These so-called Christians will fall by the wayside when the heavy persecutions come. Only those who are truly saved will endure (Matt. 24:13).

We should not be deceived by the lie that we have nothing to fear. False religions already speak evil of God's churches. Government has made its anti-Christian stand. They will all be ready to move in for the kill. You and I need to know how we can withstand and overcome these persecutions when they come. God's Word tells us how.

#### 2. \_\_\_\_\_ The One Who Suffered Most

From the onset of this lesson, there needs to be a reminder of how Jesus was persecuted and how He suffered more than any believer ever can. He said, "Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day" (Luke 24:46). He endured it all so that sinners could have a way to be one with God.

The Lord's sufferings were voluntary. No one took His life from Him, but rather, He laid it down on His own accord (John 10:17, 18). This does not mean that He enjoyed the suffering. Instead, He knew that it was necessary for the glory of God and the good of men.

The Lord's sufferings sprang from His grace and love. There was nothing in man that merited what Jesus went through. He did it all because of who He is, not because of good in men. Paul

wrote, "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich" (2 Corintios 8:9).

DISCUSSION: Any amount of persecution that you and I might have are small when compared with our Lord's. Talk about some of the specific persecutions He went through for us.

### 3. \_\_\_\_\_ The Fact of Persecution

Paul told Timothy, "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12). Peter wrote, "Be-loved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you" (1 Peter 4:12). The Lord's churches and their members who live for Him are going to suffer persecution. In fact, Jesus issued a warning concerning those of whom all spoke well (Luke 6:26).

The early churches suffered persecution. Peter and John were first threatened by the religious Jews for preaching and teaching about Jesus (Acts 4:13-21). Only a few days later, Peter and the other apostles were again caught preaching about Jesus (Acts 5:17, 18, 40, 41). This time they were imprisoned, beaten and threatened once more.

Deacon Stephen was stoned to death (Acts 7:57-60). Saul of Tarsus made havoc of the church at Jerusalem (Acts 8:1-3). Herod killed James and arrested Peter (Acts 12:1-4). Paul (previously Saul) was repeatedly hounded everywhere he went. All of these and many more were persecuted for righteousness' sake.

Baptist history books record accurate accounts which verify the fact of persecution of the Lord's churches and people. Any Christian who thinks he can serve the Lord without Satan's harassment has deceived himself.

DISCUSSION: Talk about the sufferings of the early Christians and their obvious love for the Lord.

### 4. \_\_\_\_\_ Reasons Why God's Churches Are Persecuted

What explains the world's reactions toward the Lord's churches? Christians have historically been good citizens, good neighbors and good people. They are not known for intentionally agitating others or for being troublemakers. To the contrary, like their Savior, they are people who go about doing good. So, why do they suffer at the hands of the very people they try to help?

Jesus explained some of this to His first church (John 15:18-25). He told them that the world hated them because it did not know Him and His Father. Unsaved men are of their father, the devil (John 8:44), and saved men are of their Father, God. Since unsaved people are against God, they are also against His children. Thus, they persecute them.

Another reason why the unsaved religious world persecutes the Lord's churches is because they feel threatened by the churches. When the members of the Jerusalem church were preaching Jesus, people were responding and being saved. The leaders of the Jews saw their hold on the people slipping away. Rather than repent and change themselves, they chose to try to get rid of the Christians (Acts 5:17, 18). The same thing happens today when churches get busy promoting the gospel of Jesus.

Still another reason why the world persecutes the Lord's churches stems from their response to the preached Word. The Holy Spirit convicts sinners of their need to accept Jesus as their personal Savior. Those who refuse Him often strike out at those who preached the message.

It seems, also, that the world persecutes Christians just for the fun of it. Herod proceeded to imprison Peter because he saw it pleased the Jews (Acts 12:3). During the Dark Ages, Christians

were brought out into arenas before crowds of people and fed to the lions for sport. Today, many make fun of believers because they enjoy doing it.

DISCUSSION: Why does the world persecute the Lord's churches?

#### 5. \_\_\_\_\_ How To Withstand And Overcome Persecution

One of the many wonderful things about God is that He always has an answer for every problem His children face. Although Christians can be certain of receiving persecution, they can know how to deal with it in a godly manner.

First, a Christian should examine the facts and make sure his persecution is not of his own doing. Peter warned, "But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters" (1 Peter 4:15). Some people are persecuted because of their lack of tactfulness, or because they purposely insult others. Such people are bringing suffering on themselves.

Second, God's Word teaches that a proper attitude is necessary in withstanding and overcoming persecution. It is an attitude of rejoicing. Peter said, "But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's suffering; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy" (1 Peter 4:13).

The proper attitude toward persecution is one of humility. Jesus told His church members to remember that the servant is not greater than his lord (John 15:20). Since Jesus suffered for His children, they should be humbly ready to suffer for Him.

Third, the way of withstanding and overcoming persecution is through a total dependence on the Word of God and the Holy Spirit of God. When Peter and John were confronted by their persecutors, they replied, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen ~d heard" (Acts 4:19, 20).

DISCUSSION: List and discuss three ways to withstand and overcome persecution.

#### 6. \_\_\_\_\_ The Blessed Results Of Persecution

When children of God react to persecution in a godly way, there are some blessed results for them. It may seem strange, but God's Word teaches that these people are happy and blessed (1 Peter 4:14; Matt. 5:10). They are happy because they know they have glorified God and pleased Him.

God has also promised great rewards for those who are persecuted. Jesus said, "Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you" (Matt. 5:12; see also James 1:12).

In addition to rewards, Jesus has promised those who suffer a place of prominence in reigning with Him (2 Tim. 2:12). Our Lord will give His children robes of white (Rev. 6:9-11) and their troubles will all be past. May God give us the grace to endure persecutions as Jesus did.

## The Pertinence Of the Church

### LESSON AIM

The student will discuss the positive effect which New Testament churches have had upon the societies of the world.

### SCRIPTURES TO READ

- Text: Matthew 5:13-16.
- Background Study: Matthew 24:14; 28:19, 20; John 3:19-21; Acts 1:8; 2:41; 6:7; 13:47-49; 17:6; Romans 1:16; Titus 2:11-14; Hebrews 4:12; 1 Peter 2:9-15.
- Devotional Reading: Not in Vain, 1 Corinthians 15:58.

#### 1. \_\_\_\_\_ Introduction

Have the Lord's churches made a difference? Have they really mattered? Are they still necessary? Of course, we believe they have made, and presently make, a world of difference. Pertinent is "having a clear decisive relevance to the matter at hand; applicable, appropriate, fitting, germane." For almost two thousand years now, true churches have had a positive effect upon the societies of the world, and they still do.

God makes no mistakes. The Lord Jesus built His church and promised that the gates of hell would never prevail against it. Such a church is pertinent. Churches are still working who are like that first one. Praise the Lord for His churches! Praise Him because they do make a difference!

#### 2. \_\_\_\_\_ Pertinent as the Salt

#### Of the Earth

Jesus said, "Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his Saviour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men" (Matt. 5:13). Salt has value as a preservative, flavoring and antiseptic.

As a preservative, churches have not only preserved the truths of God's Word, but they have kept a check on the progress of corruption also. There is no way to know exactly what advantage to the whole world they have been, but it is known that areas in which there are strong churches have less moral decay than areas without them. Many cities and communities have been spared the rottenness of intoxicating drink, gambling and other ills because of churches who fought against those things. Those churches were pertinent.

The preserving power of churches may run even deeper than mentioned above. When one thinks of how God would have spared Sodom and Gomorrah if only ten righteous people could have been found in them, who knows how many places have been spared because of His churches being located there.

As an antiseptic, the Lord's churches are not only to be pure, but also to purify others. Of course, this is done through the presentation of Jesus to the lost world. Only He can forgive sins. When the church at Jerusalem presented the gospel of Christ on the day of Pentecost, there were three thousand souls saved, baptized and added to it (Acts 2:41). Churches are pertinent because of their purifying quality.

Churches should realize that salt will neither preserve, flavor nor purify if it is left in the bag or saltshaker. It has to make contact with its object. Even so, churches, if they are to be pertinent, must be reaching the lost world with the gospel of Jesus.

DISCUSSION: Talk about two reasons why churches are pertinent as shown by the analogy to salt.

3. \_\_\_\_\_ Pertinent as the Light  
Of the World

Jesus also told His first church that they were the light of the world (Matt. 5:14-16). The sinful world is filled with darkness, and unsaved men and women love this darkness (John 3:19, 20). They would be content to wander in this darkness if they were left on their own.

However, God in His grace and goodness has seen fit to bring light to a lost world (Acts 13:47). Of course, Jesus is the great source of true light, but He has commissioned His churches to reflect His light through themselves. Down through the ages the Lord's churches have witnessed of Jesus and brought light to lost mankind.

This light is pertinent because it is the only light. False religions and cults have promised light, but their salvation by works has resulted in the blind leading the blind into the ditch of everlasting punishment. Peter wrote to people who had stumbled in the darkness of sin, but because of the work of the Lord's churches, the marvelous light was brought to them (1 Peter 2:9).

Discuss how the Lord's churches are still the light of the world.

4. \_\_\_\_\_ Pertinent to the Entire World

One thing stands out in the Scriptures given in this lesson-God intends for the entire world to benefit from the churches' message of Jesus. Churches are the salt of the earth, the light of the world (Matt. 5:13, 14). The Lord said, "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come" (Matt. 24:14). The world benefits from the gospel presented by the churches.

Churches are pertinent to the entire world because Christ died for the entire world. Since Jesus died for everyone, He wants everyone to hear the good news (Matt. 28:19, 20; Acts 1:8). The early church was accused of turning the world upside down for the Lord (Acts 17:6). His churches have spent almost two thousand years getting this message to the "uttermost part of the earth."

The world needs to hear that it is responsible to Jesus. The Hebrews were told, "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. 4:12). The Lord is not only the Savior of mankind, but He is the righteous judge of mankind also. It is the churches' job to tell this to the world.

Discuss the churches' relevance to the world as far as spreading the gospel is concerned.

5. \_\_\_\_\_ How the Lord's Churches  
Can Remain Pertinent

For the Lord's churches to remain pertinent, they must continue to do what true churches have

been doing since Christ was on earth. They must contend for doctrinal principles which other religious groups have either distorted or forsaken. They must not compromise doctrines and principles in order to be more influential and effective in their communities. Churches must remain salt and not try to become sugar.

Churches remain pertinent by boldly proclaiming the gospel without shame (Rom. 1:16). They must teach, practice and require separation from the world within their memberships (Titus 2:11-14). God's people are to be a "peculiar" people, apart from the world and "zealous of good works."

Please read 1 Peter 2:9-15 and list those things required of God's people. Those are necessary items if the Lord's churches are going to remain pertinent. These are needed in order for His churches to have a positive effect on the world.

## The Destiny Of The Church

### LESSON AIM

The student will discuss the blessings, present and eternal, which are in store for New Testament churches.

### SCRIPTURES TO READ

- Text: Ephesians 3:21.
- Background Study: Ephesians 5:25-27; 1 Thessalonians 2:19; Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26-29; 3:5, 6, 12, 13, 20-22; 19:7-9.
- Devotional Reading: The Joy of Thy Lord, Matthew 25:20-23.

#### 1. \_\_\_\_\_ Introduction

During these last twelve weeks, we have studied about "The Church in the New Testament." We are privileged to be a part of this divine institution. By now we should be able to explain the importance of God's churches, and we should be willing to apply ourselves to faithful service as members.

This final lesson is about the destiny or the future of the Lord's churches. Our aim is to discuss the blessings, both now and eternally, which are in store for them. It is not our aim in this lesson to rehash arguments about who is to be the bride at the marriage of the Lamb. Faithful church members will have their reward. New Testament churches are important!

#### 2. \_\_\_\_\_ Special Blessings Now

Before looking at the future blessings that await the Lord's churches, it is important to see the present ones. Several very special terms are used to show the relationship of Christ to His people, such as "mother," "brother" and "sister" (Matt. 12:49, 50). But none is more precious than a particular term used to designate His relationship to His churches. That term is "the bride."

Paul used this relationship as he taught the church at Ephesus concerning the duties of husbands and wives (Eph. 5:22-33). Paul described a present relationship. Jesus is the head of His churches now, and churches are to be subject to Him now in the same manner that wives are to be subject to their own husbands.

This present relationship goes much deeper than friendship. Churches are more than brothers and sisters to the Lord. They have the intimacy that can only be enjoyed by husband and wife. The church as an institution, which involves each church individually, enjoys the unique privilege of being the bride of Christ.

Being in a scriptural church, the bride of Christ, puts the child of God in a position to serve Him successfully. God is to receive glory "in the church" now (Eph. 3:21). Other blessings presently enjoyed by the Lord's churches involve the peace and contentment of knowing one is pleasing

Christ. Also, there are the blessings of partaking of the ordinances and having fellowship with God's people.

DISCUSSION: List some other blessings presently enjoyed by those who are in the Lord's churches.

3. \_\_\_\_\_ A Future of Glorifying God

Paul wrote, "Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen" (Eph. 3:21). God's people need to be glorifying Christ now because they will be doing so throughout eternity. He will receive eternal glory as a result of the present work of His churches. But, He will receive glory forever from His children who were in them, as well as from the rest of His children of all ages.

John gave some insight concerning things that would one day take place around the throne of God (Rev. 4). He spoke of twenty-four elders who would cast their crowns at His feet as they declare, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created" (verse 11).

Some think that these twenty-four elders represent the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles (the Lord's churches). Whether the churches are seen in that passage or not is not certain. It is certain, however, that the twenty-four elders are seen doing what all the saints will do forever-glorifying God.

It is wonderful to know that Christians will be able to bring glory to the Lord without the limitations they have in this age. The sin nature will be a thing of the past. Sinful thoughts and tendencies will no longer hinder the believer's ability to praise Him. "Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20).

4. \_\_\_\_\_ Blessings Promised To  
Over comers

God had a message for the seven churches in Asia (Rev. 2; 3). At the close of each of those messages, He pronounced one or more blessings upon the over comers. Much can be learned about what is in store for God's people from these passages.

Who are the over comers? John gave the answer in 1 John 5:4, 5 where he wrote, "For whatsoever is born of God overcomes the world: and this is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcomes the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God." Therefore, all saved people are over-comers. Since John was speaking directly to the churches as recorded in Revelation 2:3, those blessings are especially to the saved within the Lord's churches, but not exclusively to them.

Over comers are promised nourishment from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God (Rev. 2:7). The tree of life was in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:9). Man's sin kept him from eating of the tree then, but the blood of Jesus has made it possible for believers to eat its fruit in eternity.

Next, the overcomes will not be hurt of the second death (Rev. 2:11). John later wrote, "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years" (Rev. 20:6). The second death will swallow up all the unsaved, but God's people will not be touched by it.

The next blessing pronounced upon the over comer is the reception of hidden manna and a white stone (Rev. 2:17). The stone will have a new name written in it which no one knows except the person receiving it. The manna may have reference to Jesus who is hidden from those who refuse to see Him. The white stone may have reference to the ancient practice of jurors showing white stones if a person was innocent and black ones if he was guilty. In Christ, each believer is

declared innocent.

5. \_\_\_\_\_ More Blessings Promised  
To Over comers

The fourth of the seven blessings which God promised to His people in the seven Asian churches involves positions during the Millennium (Rev. 2:26-29). These believers will have power over other nations and will rule with a rod of iron. It should be noted that this promise has a stipulation that none of the other six have. Not only must this person be a child of God, but he must also keep Christ's works until the end. This indicates that those who rule with Christ during His millennial reign must be more than saved church members. They must be faithful.

The next blessing promised to the over comer is the blessing of security (Rev. 3:5, 6). His people will be clothed in white because they have been washed in the blood of the Lamb. Their robes of white are symbolic of their righteousness (Rev. 19:7-9), which is actually the imputed righteousness of Christ. Their names will never be taken out of the book of life, and Jesus will confess their names before the Father and the angels.

The sixth special blessing promised to the over comer seems to involve the Heaven ages (Rev. 3:12, 13). The saints will be "pillars" in the temple of God, which means their position will be of great importance. They will have permanent dwelling with God in His holy city and will have His new name written upon them.

The last of the seven messages to the churches of Asia includes a promise that is hard to comprehend (Rev. 3:20-22). Over comers are promised a seat with Jesus on His throne! What grace! It is no wonder that the four beasts and the twenty-four elders will sing His praises. God will make of His children kings and priests, and they shall reign on earth with Him (Rev. 5:10).

DISCUSSION: List seven special blessings promised to the seven churches in Asia.

6. \_\_\_\_\_ Conclusion

"But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him" (1 Corintios 2:9). As stated in the beginning of this lesson, our aim was not to discuss the bride or the marriage of the Lamb. Those who would like to study these subjects might want to read *The Bride of Christ* by J. R. Alexander, or *The Marriage of the Lamb* by C. N. Glover.