

**HIGH SCHOOL  
STUDENT**

**YOUR  
LIFE  
LIVING FOR CHRIST  
AS A  
DISCIPLE**

**SUNDAY SCHOOL  
SUMMER QUARTER, 2013  
JUNE, JULY, AUGUST**



## DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

1. We believe that love one for another as Jesus loves the believer manifests our discipleship, proves our love for God and symbolizes our authority as New Testament churches. Love is therefore the great commandment of the LORD Jesus Christ upon which all others are dependent (Matt. 22:35-40; John 13:34, 35; John 15:12; 1 John 4:7-21; 1 John 5:1-3; Rev. 2:4, 5).
2. We believe in the infallible, verbal inspiration of the whole Bible and that the Bible is the all-sufficient rule of faith and practice (Psalm 119:160; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17).
3. We believe in the personal triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, equal in divine perfection (Matt. 28:19).
4. We believe in the Genesis account of Creation (Gen. 1; 2).
5. We believe that Satan is a fallen angel, the archenemy of God and man, the unholy god of this world, and that his destiny is the eternal lake of fire (Isa. 14:12-15; Ezek. 28:11-19; Matt. 25:41; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 6:10-17; Rev. 20:10).
6. We believe in the virgin birth and sinless humanity of Jesus Christ (Matt. 1:18-20; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Peter 2:22).
7. We believe in the deity of Jesus Christ (John 10:30; John 1:1, 14; 2 Cor. 5:19).
8. We believe the Holy Spirit is the divine Administrator for Jesus Christ in His churches (Luke 24:49; John 14:16, 17; Acts 1:4, 5, 8; Acts 2:1-4).
9. We believe that miraculous spiritual manifestation gifts were done away when the Bible was completed. Faith, Hope and Love are the vital abiding Spiritual Gifts (1 Cor. chapters 12—14).
10. We believe that Man was created in the image of God and lived in innocence until he fell by voluntary transgression from his sinless state, the result being that all mankind are sinners (Gen. 1:26; Gen. 3:6-24; Rom. 5:12, 19).
11. We believe that the suffering and death of Jesus Christ was substitutionary for all mankind and is efficacious only to those who believe (Isa. 53:6; Heb. 2:9; 1 Peter 2:24; 1 Peter 3:18; 2 Peter 3:9; 1 John 2:2).
12. We believe in the bodily resurrection and ascension of Christ and the bodily resurrection of His saints (Matt. 28:1-7; Acts 1:9-11; 1 Cor. 15:42-58; 1 Thess. 4:13-18).
13. We believe in the premillennial, personal, bodily return of Christ as the crowning event of the Gentile age. This event will include the resurrection of the righteous to eternal heaven, and the Millennium will be followed by the resurrection of the unrighteous unto eternal punishment in the lake of

fire and that the righteous shall enter into the heaven age (John 14:1-6; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; 2 Thess. 2:8; Rev. 19; Rev. 20:4-6; Rev. 20:11-15; Rev. 21:8).

14. We believe that the depraved sinner is saved wholly by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, and the requisites to regeneration are repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Luke 13:3-5; John 3:16-18; Acts 20:21; Rom. 6:23; Eph. 2:8, 9), and that the Holy Spirit convicts sinners, regenerates, seals, secures, and indwells every believer (John 3:6; John 16:8, 9; Rom. 8:9-11; 1 Cor. 6:19, 20; Eph. 4:30; Titus 3:5).
15. We believe that all who trust Jesus Christ for salvation are eternally secure in Him and shall not perish (John 3:36; John 5:24; John 10:27-30; Rom. 8:35-39; Heb. 10:39; 1 Peter 1:5).
16. We believe that God deals with believers as His children, that He chastises the disobedient, and that He rewards the obedient (Matt. 16:27; Matt. 25:14-23; John 1:12; Heb. 12:5-11; 2 John 8; Rev. 22:12).
17. We believe that Jesus Christ established His church during His ministry on earth and that it is always a local, visible assembly of scripturally baptized believers in covenant relationship to carry out the Commission of the Lord Jesus Christ, and each church is an independent, self-governing body, and no other ecclesiastical body may exercise authority over it. We believe that Jesus Christ gave the Great Commission to the New Testament churches only, and that He promised the perpetuity of His churches (Matt. 4:18-22; Matt. 16:18; Matt. 28:19, 20; Mark 1:14-20; John 1:35-51; Eph. 3:21).
18. We believe that there are two pictorial ordinances in the Lord's churches: Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Scriptural baptism is the immersion of penitent believers in water, administered by the authority of a New Testament church in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Lord's Supper is a memorial ordinance, restricted to the members of the church observing the ordinance (Matt. 28:19, 20; Acts 8:12, 38; Rom. 6:4; 1 Cor. 5:11-13; 1 Cor. 11:1, 2, 17-20, 26).
19. We believe that there are two divinely appointed offices in a church, pastors and deacons, to be filled by men whose qualifications are set forth in Titus and 1 Timothy.
20. We believe that all associations, fellowships, and committees are, and properly should be, servants of, and under control of the churches (Matt. 20:25-28).
21. We believe in freedom of worship without interference from the government and affirm our belief in civil obedience, unless the laws and regulations of civil government run contrary to the Holy Scriptures (Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-15).



# HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT

by: David Robinson



## Living for Christ— Your Life as a Disciple

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# Salvation

**Scripture: Ephesians 2:8–10; Acts 16:29–32**

**Aim: By the end of the lesson I will understand and apply the plan of salvation.**

## Start Here



The lessons this quarter are about living as a disciple of Christ. We will study many of the basic and fundamental principles of applied Christianity.

As we study these lessons, compare the things taught in the Bible with your own ideas about church work. We have many notions about how things are and about how they ought to be, but whenever the ideas of men conflict with the teachings of God, we must discard our ideas and accept the teaching of God's Word.

The first lesson concerns the beginning or foundation of our experiences in Christ. We are going to examine what the Bible teaches about the regeneration of one's spirit. As we do, remember, that in this matter, there is no second place. We are either saved or we are not. The only way to go to Heaven when we die is by being saved while we are on the earth. God has given us time on the earth so that we can prepare for eternity. It is vital that every human being make his preparation through Jesus Christ.

## Take a Closer Look



The Scripture lesson involves two elements. First, there is a statement of principle in Ephesians 2:8–10. Then we will see a personal application of that principle in Acts 16:29–32. It is important to realize that whatever we believe about salvation must work. All insurance is good until you try to collect a claim. Any plan of salvation might do for life, but only the one God honors will do when we die. This is God's plan, and it will work. We need to have a plan of salvation that is available and

accessible. We might devise a plan that would be available only to a few; God's plan is there for all. We might come up with a plan that many could not put into practice. God has given a plan that anyone, even a dying thief, can employ. This is the wonder of what God has done for us through Jesus.

**How it works.** In Ephesians 2:8, 9 we read a clear, simple statement about God's plan of salvation. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast." In this passage there are six elements, three positive and three negative, that can help us understand how the spirit is regenerated.

**By grace.** First, we are saved by grace. Grace is getting things we do not deserve. It is closely related to mercy, which is not getting what we do deserve. We need to be saved because we are lost. We are lost because we all have a sin nature. This is why we die. As God said in James 1:15, "Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." Sin entered the world through Adam and death by sin has passed to us all. Because we are sinners, we die physically, and, unless we trust Christ, we will die spiritually as well. This is how things are. These are spiritual laws and realities like the law of gravity or the laws of electricity. We can argue with them, but we can't change them.

Death would reign in the spiritual world like it does in the physical world except for the grace of God. All living things die in the physical world. In the spiritual world, the grace of God has brought salvation to those who believe in Jesus.

**Through faith.** We have access to the grace of God through personal faith in Jesus Christ. We are not saved by merely believing. "You gotta believe" is a common saying, but simply believing will not save our souls. Personal faith must be directed to the Son of God. We must trust Jesus and rely solely on Him to save us. The grace of God is there for us, but we put ourselves under that grace when we trust Christ and accept Him as our personal Savior. Each person must do this as an individual. No one else can do it for us. We are alone with our sins and the Savior.

**Not of men.** The third element is that this faith and grace are not of men. This isn't the plan that men would devise or the plan that men did devise. Our plans always\* begin with men having a spark of goodness in them and then working to fan that spark into

a flame of good behavior that will count more than the sin we have committed. Men want to believe that they can be saved by what they do. God says that we have to be saved by what we believe. Many plans may be all right with men, but only one plan is approved by God. Always remember that judgment is not a jury trial. It may matter on the earth what men think about us, but, after we die, it will only matter what God thinks of us. A bad idea that everyone agrees on is still a bad idea, and there are many bad ideas about being saved.

**A gift from God.** Then we see that salvation is a gift from God. We do not earn a gift. A gift is not a form of payment. We are given a gift solely out of the love of the one doing the giving. In John 3:16 we read, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Notice that God loved and God gave. This had nothing to do with whether or not we were lovable. In fact, we were not. God loved us while we were sinners, and He gave His Son to die for our sins so that we could be saved. Jesus' shed blood became the sacrifice that paid the price for all our sins. This is the gift of God.

**Not of works.** Next, we see that works are specifically excluded. Can the Bible say it any plainer than to simply say that salvation is not of works? This is easy to understand. It is telling us that there is absolutely nothing that we can do to save ourselves. We could go the rest of our lives doing good and trying not to sin, but we would still be lost. We are not lost because we have done more bad things than good things. We are lost because we are sinners. It's not what we do; it's what we are. Jesus died to change us from what we are to what we can become through His saving grace. You can do good and you can be good, and you should, but salvation is still not of works.

**No boasting.** The reason is plain. If we could be saved by works, we would quickly be bragging about what we had done and complaining that others had not done as much. This is a part of our sin nature. The thief who was saved while Jesus was dying on the cross had no works at all to brag about. Yet, he is in Heaven by the grace of God and through personal faith in Christ. Paul could boast of many things done in the service of God; yet, he is in Heaven by the grace of God and through personal faith in Christ. Salvation is a great equalizer. In spite of the many things that make us different,



we can have a common experience in salvation, where our abilities and talents count for nothing. We all must come to the cross and be saved by the grace of God through personal faith in Jesus.



A principle comes to life when it is put into practice. We see this in Acts 16:29-32 when a man, a jailer, was at the point of suicide. The doors of his jail had burst open. He thought that the prisoners were gone and he would be killed for letting them escape. He was about to take his life when he heard Paul's voice coming from the jail. He immediately saw that his life was saved, and then he realized that he was lost. He fell down trembling and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Paul didn't have to think about the answer. He told the jailer, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." Paul was putting into practice what he would later write to the Ephesians. How was this man saved? Like Ephesians 2:8, 9 states, he was saved by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

The events of that night brought the jailer to the point of death, and he realized that he was not ready to die. His life had been spared, but his spiritual problem remained. He turned to the preacher in the jail and heard the wonderful news that he could be saved by his faith in Jesus Christ. This is a tremendous illustration, in the life of a real person, of salvation and how it is available to all.

## **Building Blocks**

Paul didn't tell this man to do anything. He told him to believe in Jesus. If we build our hope for eternity on what we do, and, even if we are able to do what we plan, we will fail. However, when we place our faith in Jesus Christ, we will be eternally successful.

Behind every decision there is a philosophy, a thought process that causes us to go one way or another. The great struggle is between the plans and ways of men and the plan of God. You can listen to the religions of the world and you will hear many plans and programs that are all supposed to lead us to Heaven. Most of these were designed

by men to accommodate mankind. The problem is not that we don't have a right to our opinions; it's that all these plans do not work. They didn't even work for those who thought them up. All over the world, you can see the tombs, and, in some cases, even the remains of spiritual leaders. Their plans did not save them from death. Just outside Jerusalem, you can see the tomb of Jesus and it's empty! Jesus' grave is empty! Think about that for a moment. Jesus lives! He is alive today because what He said is true. Jesus is who He said He was. He did everything that God's Word declares He did. This is why we can trust Him.

You will build your life and your hope for eternity on something. Make certain that you build on the sure and solid foundation of personal faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior.



## Springboard

You don't build a building from the roof down—you build from the foundation up. We all begin our lives at birth, and we must all begin our spiritual lives at spiritual birth. This is what Jesus told Nicodemus when He said, "Ye must be born again" (John 3:7). Spiritual birth, which takes place when we repent of our sins and place our faith in Jesus, lays in our hearts a spiritual foundation that we can build on for as long as our physical lives last.

There is no other foundation that can take the place of this one. No matter what we learn and no matter where we go, it will always be important to have Jesus living in our hearts. This new life begins when we are saved.

Let me be as clear as possible. I am not talking about being baptized, taking the Lord's Supper or being a church member right now. This is about your relationship to Jesus. If you have never placed faith in Jesus Christ, do it right now, wherever you are as you read this. Simply pray, "God be merciful to me, a sinner" (Luke 18:13). God will hear your prayer and save you by His grace through faith in Jesus.

# Security of the Believer

**Scripture:** John 5:24; 6:37–40; Romans 8:33–39

**Aim:** By the end of the lesson I will understand that believers are safe in Jesus.

## Start Here



Second only to the question, “How can I be saved?” is the question, “How can I know that I am saved?” The lesson today deals with the biblical teaching that those who believe in Jesus are secure in Him. Like the plan of salvation itself, this teaching goes contrary to human reasoning.

Human reasoning concludes that we should be able to do something to save ourselves. Works of some kind should play a part in salvation. According to human reasoning, we should be able to lose our salvation. One of these thoughts follows the other. If we are saved by works, then we can be lost when we fail to do the works. We shall see from the Bible that we are saved by grace, and salvation is a permanent transaction. Simply take a look at the Scriptures. You will find ample testimony in them about the nature of the life imparted to us when we believe in Jesus. And as we study, remember we don’t work to gain our salvation, and we don’t work to keep it. Both salvation and security are gifts from God through Jesus Christ.

## Take a Closer Look



**The nature of the new life.** To understand our security in Christ, we first look at the nature of the new life that Jesus gives. One of the clearest statements of this is in John 5:24, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my



word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.”

This verse states the process that brings us spiritual life, the promise of protection and the nature of our new life in Christ. The process is simple. As Paul would write, “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). Jesus said the same thing. We hear the Word of God; we believe the Word of God, and our souls are saved. Note that it is the spirit that is saved, not the physical body. The physical body will perish, but the spirit will live in glory with Christ. We are saved by grace through faith.

When we believe, we have or possess everlasting life. This seems too simple to confuse. If life is everlasting, when does it end? It doesn't! This is simply teaching that the part of us that Jesus saves is saved forever. If our physical bodies had everlasting life, we would never die. Our physical bodies don't have this kind of life; instead, we have an appointment with death. Our spirit has this promise if we hear and believe the Word. This is the simple promise of Jesus.

Then notice the protection. The spirit of a believer will not come into future condemnation. This means that we will not slip back into a state that finds us condemned by God. The spirit of man is sealed by the Holy Spirit and kept from ever being condemned again. To be sure a child of God can sin, and that sin can be horrible, but the sin does not condemn the spirit because the spirit is kept by the power of God. Our physical lives can be shortened by sin and our minds can become reprobate through sin, but the spirit is kept from condemnation. This is a simple but powerful promise. It applies to those who have heard and believed the Word of God.

Then we have an explanation of the nature of our new life in Christ. We are passed from death unto life. By the nature of Adam, the nature we are born with, we will die. We will die physically, and we will die spiritually. But, when we are born again from above, we are given a new nature, the nature of Christ, and, through this new nature, we will live. We have spiritual life immediately when we believe, and we will get a glorified body to go with our regenerated spirit in the resurrection. Understanding these two natures is a key to understanding our security. It's not the physical life or the mental

state that is secure—it is the spirit. This is the new life that we have. This is how we pass from a state of spiritual death to a state of spiritual life. This is what it means to be born again.

**The protecting power of God.** A part of the work of Jesus was to keep the things God had given Him. This is stated plainly in John 6:39, 40, “And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.”

Jesus declared in these verses that no one who has trusted in Him as Savior will ever again be lost. God’s will was that Jesus would lose nothing, but would raise up those who had trusted in Him at the resurrection, reuniting those regenerated spirits with glorified bodies. The promise is simple and profound. We understand the gospel; we believe in Christ; then we have everlasting life and the promise that we will be raised up at the last day.

Our salvation is a fact right now. We are saved when we believe in Christ, and we are as saved as we will ever be. We may sin and disgrace ourselves and our Father in Heaven, but we will always be His children. Birth establishes fact. One man is your physical father. Nothing can ever change that. You may or may not be a wonderful human being, but your father is still your father, and you are still his child. When we believe in Jesus, God becomes our Father, and we will always be related to Him, no matter what. We do not have to see to it that we stay saved; God takes care of that. We only have to see to it that we behave as grateful children should.

**The keeping power of God’s love.** The power behind security is the same power that brings salvation in the first place. God loved the world and sent His Son to die so that we can have everlasting life. God loves us enough to keep us against all things that could separate us from that love. An extensive list of the things that might separate us is given in Romans 8:38, 39, but this passage concludes that none of these things can keep God from loving us.

God loves us because of Jesus. When we believe in Jesus, we are lining ourselves up with Him. We are saying to God, “I’m with Jesus.” No matter where we go, no matter what we or others may do, “I’m

with Jesus.” There is no more secure place to be in the whole of God’s creation than to simply be able to say, “I’m with Jesus.” This puts us squarely in the center of God’s love and protecting power.



We can look at life from a position of strength or a position of weakness. If we are uncertain and unsure of our spiritual condition, we will always be looking from the position of weakness. How can we ever be prepared to live until we are prepared to die? Death is not an accident; it is an appointment. Death is waiting for all of us, perhaps in the not too distant future, but Jesus died to save us from fear and worry about death.

When we trust in Christ as our Savior, we become secure in our future. None of us know where we are going tomorrow or exactly what the future will hold, but those who have trusted Christ know that when life is over, they are going home. We may go into the valley of the shadow of death, and we may have to go through it, but we will come out on the other side, and we will be victorious, not because of who we are or what we have done but because of Jesus.

When you know this in your heart, you are looking at life from a perspective of strength. You then have the power to do whatever God asks and to go wherever He leads. If we are not afraid of death, what else is there to fear? Even Satan can’t frighten us because we know that he has no power over our souls. This makes salvation our greatest experience and security our greatest strength.

## **Building Blocks**

Not everyone who is secure knows that they are. There is a sense in which we can be saved but forget about our spiritual experiences. This is mentioned in 2 Peter 1:9, where we see that a man who never added to his spiritual life could eventually even forget that he had one. This is why we serve God. We do not serve God so that we can be saved. We serve God because we already are saved.

This gives us the perspective of free people, voluntarily doing what our Father asks because He loves us and we love Him, not the



perspective of hirelings working at what we don't like to get some reward. Sin has wages. Eternal life is a gift from God. See the difference? We work to get what we have earned and then we demand payment. The job might mean nothing—it is the payday that we long for. How much better it is to work because of love. We love what we do, and we love those we are doing it with and for. The pay has already been taken care of. The reward is not in what we will receive, but in getting the chance to serve God who loves us and gives us so much through Jesus Christ.

Only those who are saved and who know that they are saved will serve God from this viewpoint. And this service will last. This attitude will keep you going the rest of your life. You will never get tired of service born of love. Any other motive will eventually wear out.



We are saved by faith and we are secure by faith. You can't prove that Jesus saves, and you can't prove that a child of God is secure. We know both of these things because we trust in Christ and believe His Word. If a person chooses not to believe, he will stay lost. God will not save you against your will. God will send the Holy Spirit to encourage and lead you to faith in Jesus, but the decision is yours alone, and you must make it.

Neither will God just make you know that you are secure. As you have to believe in Jesus, you have to believe in the promises of security. There are many fleshly arguments to show that we can be saved, lost and then saved again, but look at the promises of the Bible. God says differently, and we have to believe what He says.

If we listen to the world, we will try to be saved by our works and we will never find Jesus. Works might satisfy the flesh, but they will never save the soul. We are accountable to God, not each other. In judgment we will stand before God, not a jury of our peers. When God saves us, He keeps us. We can depend on Him to save us and we can depend on Him to keep us saved. Trust in Jesus is never misplaced. You can count on Him to do exactly as He said.

# Saved To Serve

**Scripture: Acts 1:8; Ephesians 2:10; Philippians 2:3-9**

**Aim: By the end of the lesson I will understand that salvation is a beginning, not an end.**

## Start Here



When we accept Christ as our Savior, we begin an adventure that will end in Heaven with Jesus. The purpose of this adventure is that we can be servants of our Lord. To understand this, we must learn that God deals with our personal service to Him in different ways. Changes are common in our everyday lives, but we can fail to see that they apply to our spiritual lives as well.

There are certain events that happen all at once. At a single moment of time things change, and they are changed forever. Consider what happens when two people get married. They come before a preacher or a justice of the peace, say a few words, and their lives are changed permanently. They will never be as they were before they said those words and took those vows. There are many times like this in our lives when things change a great deal in a short time. On the other hand, there are situations where change comes in small increments over a long period of time. For instance, we grow up. We don't do it all at once or in one or two days, but over a period of years we definitely grow and change. Change can come gradually over a long period or suddenly over a short period.

Salvation is a change that comes quickly at an instant in time, but growth in grace is a change that comes over a long period of time and in a gradual manner. Once we are saved, we then begin to grow in the grace of our Lord, and we assume the role and responsibility of servants.

## Take a Closer Look



God saves us for a reason. Of course the greatest reason for salvation is for us to escape the

power and penalty of sin. No earthly reward could ever equal the reward of going to Heaven when we die, and eternal life is the gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord. We must realize, however, that only a moment of our lives is involved in being saved. Once we accept Jesus as our Savior, what do we do then? The Bible clearly outlines a path of service for those who are saved, and we should strive to walk in this pathway. Let me stress that serving the Lord will never regenerate us. Salvation is not the result of faithful service. Just the opposite. We serve because we are already saved. Baptism will not save us—service will not save us. Salvation comes when we repent of our sins and place our personal faith in Jesus as our Savior. Then and only then can we think about serving the Lord.

**Saved people should be servants.** God tells us in His Word that we are saved to serve. This is brought out plainly in Ephesians 2:10, “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” There are three truths presented in this verse.

First, we are the “workmanship” of God; He has made us. God has not made us to be ornamental or to sit around looking nice. God has made us to be functional. God is involved in life and living. God is the Creator, not only of the universe and the world, but also of each person here. We are not here by accident—we are here because God has put us here. It is God’s will that everyone be saved. In 2 Peter 3:9, we read that God does not want any one to perish. “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” God wants all men to be saved and God wants all men to serve. He made us for this purpose.

Then we see that God has created us “unto good works.” Two words, *good* and *works*, stand out in Ephesians 2:10. God wants us to work for Him as long as we are alive, and God wants the work we do to be good work. The works are not to save us but are the result of grateful hearts that are already saved. Finally, we see that this is a part of the eternal plan of God. God has ordained or purposed that things should be this way. We are saved so that we can serve the Lord and do the works God has for us while we live on the earth.

**What saved people are to do.** If we follow the leadership of the Lord, we will spend a great deal of our time in service. The



question might follow, “What are we supposed to do for God?” The answer is given in Acts 1:8, “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 Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” We are to act in the power and according to the leadership of the Holy Spirit. We have two ways that the Holy Spirit leads us. One is through His Word, the Bible, and the other is through the opportunities He gives by opening and closing doors for us in our lives.

Either way, it is never left up to us to be self-directed or to direct each other. We are all to follow the Holy Spirit in service. Then the general direction of service is given. We are to be witnesses. We are to witness at home, in our neighborhoods, throughout our local areas and even to the uttermost part of the earth. Wherever we are and in whatever we do, the overall goal of service is witnessing. Witnessing is simply telling others what has happened to you. This is why God’s plan is for us to first be saved. If one is not saved, he does not have anything to witness about. When we are saved, we witness so that others can hear the good news about Jesus and be saved.

We can witness in many ways. We witness through our life-styles as well as our words. However we witness, this is our overall, general direction of service to God. These words in Acts are some of the last words Jesus spoke to His church before He went back to Heaven, and this is what He personally asked it to do for Him. What a great example and order for us.

Salvation is for all people everywhere—so is service. There is no one who does not need to be saved, and there is no saved person who does not need to serve the Lord. God’s desire is for every saved person to faithfully serve Him.



If you are saved, you are saved to serve. It’s that simple, but how are you going to serve the Lord? Where do you begin and what do you do? The answers are given in the Bible, and it all begins with a mind-set. In Philippians 2:5 we read, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” What kind of mind was in Jesus? The mind of a servant. “But made himself of

no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men" (verse 7). Jesus was in truth a King, but He became a servant to men so that He could fulfill the will of His Father. We are challenged to do the same thing. When we do, we will serve from a position of great strength.

You might think a servant is weak, but those who serve the Lord have a great inner strength, like Jesus possessed. God's servants realize something about life that many do not know. They know that although physical life is temporary and will end soon, eternal life will not. In eternity it will be the things we have done for God that will bring us a great reward, and those who serve Him here are earning that reward in Heaven.

What a perspective! We are servants here on earth so that we can be highly exalted by our Father in Heaven. We lose nothing by serving God, and we gain everything. Could there be a better situation?

## **Building Blocks**

Being a servant involves two distinct and different things. Remember that serving and following the Lord is for those who are already the children of God through personal faith in Jesus. Once we are saved, we must adopt the mind of Christ. This means that we must look at the world as Jesus looked at the world. We must see people like Jesus saw them. Jesus saw them as sheep without a shepherd and as cities that had rejected the men God sent to them. In short, Jesus loved people. When we love people, we will find it easy to serve the Lord.

Then we must actively do the things God asks us to do in His Word. Jesus did not tell His disciples to go into the world and to do whatever they wanted or to do whatever came up. He specifically gave them a command to witness, to preach and to share the good news that Jesus loves the world and that all who believe in Him can be saved. Service has a direction and some definite limitations. Remember, God asks us to be servants, not supervisors.

A servant does what the master wants, not what the servant wishes. A servant listens to the master and tries his best to do the

master's will. This is what service is all about. Service is about getting the work done, not about splitting up the reward.

## Springboard



If Jesus Christ has saved you, He has saved you to serve. How can you best do this? By following in the steps of Jesus. Before Jesus began His public ministry, He went to John the Baptist and was baptized. Anyone who wants to serve the Lord should do the same. We should seek out a New Testament church and follow Jesus in baptism before we take another step in service to Him.

Once we are baptized, we should seek to serve the Lord in and through a scriptural New Testament church. We are not called to be loners, going out on our own and doing whatever we want to do. We are called to be a fellowship, working together to do more as a unit than we ever could as individuals.

Then we are to serve the Lord faithfully. We are to look on service as a lifetime commitment. We are not saved so that we can serve for a few days, a few years or a few months. We are saved so that we can serve until our lives end or until Jesus comes back for us.

# Baptism

**Scripture: Matthew 3:13–17; 28:18–20**

**Aim: By the end of the lesson I will discuss the meaning and relevance of baptism.**

## Start Here



When a person is saved, it represents the beginning of the Christian life. Jesus compared being saved to being born again. Like the physical birth is the beginning of our earthly life, being saved is the beginning of our spiritual or eternal life. Physically we grow in stature, but spiritual growth is not like physical growth. Physical growth is automatic, but spiritual growth is voluntary.

We are saved because we consciously cooperate with God. No one is saved against his will, and growth in grace requires the same conscious cooperation with the leadership of the Holy Spirit. When one is born into the kingdom of God, there are distinct steps that lead to spiritual maturity. One step is baptism.

Baptism is widely misunderstood. Two great errors are made concerning baptism. One is that baptism is a part of salvation or that we have to be baptized to be saved. This is not true according to the Scriptures. Jesus was the Son of God before He was baptized. Salvation is by the grace of God through personal faith in the atoning death and resurrected power of Jesus. People were saved by grace long before anyone was ever baptized, and baptism was never necessary for salvation. The other error about baptism is that it can be administered unconsciously—that infants can be baptized. This follows on the heels of the first error. There is no biblical suggestion or example that an infant was ever baptized.

If baptism doesn't save us, and if we have to be saved before we can be baptized, then what is baptism all about and why should we submit to it? The lesson today will answer these questions.



## Take a Closer Look



If baptism plays no part in salvation, and if we can go to Heaven without being baptized, then what is it for and what purpose does it accomplish? The text Scriptures give us a great deal of information in answer to these questions.

**Why be baptized?** The simple answer to this question is because Jesus was baptized. We read of the baptism of Jesus in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Each writer gives an account of this event. This shows how important baptism was to Jesus. In the baptism of Jesus, we see the great reason that all saved people should be baptized. Baptism began the public ministry of Christ. It was at this moment that Jesus began to minister to others and to perform the deeds that would lead to accomplishing His divine purpose—to die on the cross for our sins.

Baptism is a public declaration of one's faith in God and of his salvation. Before Jesus was baptized, He knew who He was and John the Baptist knew who He was, but the world did not know. When Jesus was baptized, God announced to everyone listening that this was His Son.

Even an event so life changing as being saved can be lost in the turmoil of our everyday lives. If we don't make a public declaration of our faith, we can soon let the happy moment slip away from us. We don't lose our salvation, but Psalm 51 states that we can lose the joy of our salvation. To keep this from happening, we need to follow closely wherever God leads. If we follow Jesus, we will be baptized. He was and we should be.

**The elements of baptism.** Matthew 3 documents what is needed for scriptural baptism. First, there is the proper authority. John the Baptist was given the authority to baptize by God Himself. There were other people in the life of Jesus, but none of them had the authority to baptize. Only John had this authority, and Jesus went to John to be baptized.

Jesus gave this authority to His churches. This is recorded in Matthew 28:18-20. Today only a New Testament church has the authority to baptize. This authority belongs to a church, and it can then designate an individual to actually carry out the ordinance. This is usually the pastor, but the authority belongs to a church, not to individuals.

Then we see that baptism must be done in the proper way. John baptized in the Jordan River. The word *baptize* literally means “to dip or immerse.” John needed deep water to baptize. Baptism represents the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, and it has to be done by immersion in water. Nothing short of this can paint the proper picture and show the world what has happened to the person being baptized. Although men sometimes refer to other things as baptism, according to the Bible only immersion in water can constitute true baptism.

Then we have to have the proper candidates. In Matthew 3:7, 8 we read of people coming to John for baptism. John sent them away, saying that they needed to “bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance.” If baptism could have saved these men, John should have baptized them. They were not saved and baptism would not save them, so they were refused baptism. If God has not saved you, baptism has no effect on you. It is only when one’s soul has been saved that he can show the world that he has died to sin, has been buried to sin and has risen to walk in newness of life.

For baptism to follow the biblical pattern, there must be the proper authority, the proper method and the proper candidate. All these were present at the baptism of Jesus.

**The result of baptism.** When Jesus came up from the waters of baptism, a voice from Heaven declared, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:17). The baptism of Jesus did not make Him the Son of God. Jesus has always been the Son of God (John 20:30, 31). Neither did His baptism make Jesus to be loved of His Father. Jesus has always been loved by His Father (John 3:35; 17:23, 24, 26). And certainly this could not be said to be the first time that Jesus pleased His Father (John 8:29; Col. 1:15-19). Yet, God used the baptism of Jesus to reveal His approval of Jesus’ baptism to the world,

Similarly, baptism does not make one a child of God. Nor does baptism mark the beginning of God’s love toward a person. God loves each person even though he is a sinner (Rom. 5:8). Peter stated that baptism is “the answer of a good conscience toward God” (1 Peter 3:21). This simply means that following one’s baptism, a person can serve God with a conscience that is clear, knowing he has followed in the steps of Jesus. Baptism is the first example given by Jesus, and, when one is baptized, God is pleased.

In addition to this statement, the Holy Spirit descended like a dove and lighted on Jesus. The leadership of the Holy Spirit is always

conditioned on our will to follow Him. God leads as long as we follow. When and if we stop following, the leadership stops.

If we want to be led by the Holy Spirit, we must take the next step. For all those who are children of God, the next step after salvation is baptism.



Following His baptism, Jesus began His public ministry. Jesus' baptism declared Him to be the Son of God, and He began to publicly live as the Savior, not as the carpenter's son. In Romans 6:4 we read, "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." This verse reveals that the inward changes that take place when we are saved are to be shown outwardly in our lives.

Baptism is a public declaration of your faith, and it's up to each person to make sure he reflects the declaration he has made. As salvation is not the end but a beginning, so baptism is also a beginning. We should begin to walk in "newness of life." We should realize how wonderful it is to serve the Lord, and we should measure our lives by the promises God has made to us. Baptism is a picture of death, burial and resurrection. As children of God we have the promise that after death, we will live again in glorified bodies. This promise should be the focus of our living, so that we are not tied to the trouble of this world but to the glory of the world to come. This is a matter of viewpoint and baptism should give us this perspective.

## **Building Blocks**

An artist can paint a picture of something that never was and never will be. Baptism is a picture, but it can be a picture of something that has never happened. This occurs when a lost person is baptized, or when the proper authority or the proper mode is not employed. There is a picture of baptism but not the reality.

For baptism to be real, the candidate must be saved. Baptism does not save. Before anyone is ever baptized, he must know Jesus Christ

as Savior. It is possible to overlook this in the heat of emotion, but, literally, nothing can ever replace our salvation experience.

It is also vital that those who are baptized understand what they are doing. Whether one candidate or a thousand is baptized, each one should realize what is happening to him. Baptism is a kind of spiritual monument. We can always come back to it, even in times of doubt, and remember and renew our relationship with God.

Jesus told His churches in the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Baptism is a part of the foundation of our faith. We should begin our lives of service after the experience of scriptural baptism.

## Springboard



Have you been scripturally baptized? Take the information presented from the Bible and use it to examine the things that happened to you. We test our experiences by the Word of God—we do not test the Word of God by our experiences. We may be satisfied with the things that have happened to us, but is God satisfied? The Bible can answer these questions for us. When we follow biblical examples, we can be certain that our actions please our Heavenly Father.

Is baptism important to you? For many people, baptism is something they did. They really do not understand the reality of baptism. We should examine the experience in the light of God's Word and see the picture that is being painted. We die to sin; we are buried and then, quickly, we are raised to walk in newness of life. This is a wonderful snapshot of the life of a Christian.



# The Lord's Supper

**Scripture: 1 Corinthians 11:23–34**

**Aim: By the end of the lesson I will understand the solemnity of the ordinance of the Lord's Supper.**

## Start Here



During His life on earth, Jesus did many unique things that He alone could do. Jesus never asked us to duplicate these distinct actions. We are not asked to walk on water or to heal blind people. But Jesus did ask us to imitate Him in some of the things we are able to do. Two specific examples are baptism and the Lord's Supper.

We have specific Scripture verses commanding and commissioning churches to go into the world and baptize those who are saved. We have specific scriptural examples in the book of Acts of churches observing the Lord's Supper. In the lesson today, we will see how Paul taught the church at Corinth to observe the Lord's Supper according to God's instructions.

Nothing Jesus asks of us is frivolous or unnecessary. The Bible is given to provide all the things we need spiritually. Everything God has asked of us has a purpose in our spiritual development and in determining the blessings we receive from Him. Though often overlooked, the Lord's Supper certainly falls into this category.

## Take a Closer Look



Most people don't realize it, but our observance of the Lord's Supper has its roots in an old religious observance. Ever since the people of Israel left Egypt, Jews have been observing the Passover. This feast commemorates the night the Destroyer passed over the houses with the blood on their

doorposts. This demonstration of God's power finally freed the Israelites from Egyptian bondage and set them on their way toward their homeland.

Jesus observed the Passover every year of His life, and, at His last observance of this feast, He instituted what we call the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is not a continuation of Israel's Passover. The Passover was looking back. The Lord's Supper is looking ahead. The Passover was a shadow of what was coming—Jesus is the reality. The Lord's Supper is to show the reality and effect of Jesus' death until He comes again.

**Where does this service come from?** Paul stated in verse 23 that he had taught the people of the church in Corinth what God had given him. Paul had received this instruction from the Lord, and he presented it to those who heard him. The Lord's Supper is not the invention of men or the decision of churches. This service was instituted by Christ during His lifetime to present a specific message and teaching. These verses present clear instructions with no question about the method and motive. Jesus asked us to do this, and He told us how to do it. Since this service comes directly from Christ, it is extremely important that we observe it.

The Lord's Supper, like baptism, does not save us. If you are not saved, you will see little significance in the Lord's Supper. This is a service for saved people, and it is a service that belongs within the fellowship of a local church. Like the Passover was observed by families in Israel, the Lord's Supper is observed by the spiritual family that is pictured in the membership of local churches. The Lord's Supper does not save, and it does not make people church members. It serves to call to mind what has already happened and what we can look forward to in the future.

**What does the service mean?** There are two elements involved in the Lord's Supper. The text refers to these as bread and the cup. As the Bible explains, these elements are representative or pictorial of other things.

The bread represents the physical body of Jesus that was broken for us. The cup represents the blood of Christ that was shed for us. The order of the service given in the text and in other Scriptures is also important. Jesus first took the bread. He offered a prayer of thanksgiving and gave the bread to His disciples, and they ate the

bread. He took the cup, again offered a prayer of thanksgiving, distributed the cup to the disciples, and they drank (Matt. 26:27).

The text gives us two things we are to remember when observing the Lord's Supper. First, we are to remember Christ when we observe this ordinance. We should remember that Jesus' body was broken for us and that His blood was shed for us. Jesus gave His all to save us; He gave the human part of Himself, His body, and He gave the divine part of His nature, His blood. His sacrifice was total, so that men could be saved.

Then we are to show the Lord's death in this ordinance. The Bible presents a simple principle in Hebrews 9:22, "And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission." For our sins to be forgiven, blood had to be shed. This could not be the blood of bulls and goats, it had to be the blood of the Lamb of God. Jesus provided that sacrifice for you. We show this to the world through the Lord's Supper.

The Lord's Supper is looking ahead. In Matthew 26:29 Jesus stated, "But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." This service will be repeated when Jesus comes again, testifying for the ages to come that salvation is through the blood of the spotless Lamb of God.

You can easily see why only those who are saved by the blood of Christ can testify to these things and properly present this picture.

**Spiritual preparation is needed.** Great importance is placed on the things that God instructed us to do for Him. Nothing is trivial to God. Because this is important to God, we are to make certain spiritual preparation before we observe the Lord's Supper. There is nothing special or magic about this preparation. In fact, it involves things every child of God should do regularly. First, we are to examine ourselves. If we are to show the broken body and shed blood of Christ, we must be certain that we are covered by that blood. Self-examination is one way to be sure. Are you saved? Are you a living testimony to the saving power of Jesus? We should be, and we should look inwardly and see these things before we partake of this ordinance.

How are we observing this ordinance? Are we doing it flippantly or irreverently? If we are, we are not giving proper understanding to what we are doing. The Lord's Supper is one place where we are to be serious and reverent. The broken body and shed blood of Jesus



are serious to God, and He demands that we show them our utmost respect.

These are matters of the heart as much as they are matters of action. We certainly should be serious and sincere in our actions concerning the Lord's Supper, but we should also be serious in our attitudes about it. We should understand what we are doing and why we are doing it. If we don't, we can compound our spiritual difficulties instead of helping them.



God has given us church ordinances to help us. Baptism and the Lord's Supper, when rightly done, will greatly aid our spiritual development. It is not wrong to say that we need both of these ordinances to develop as much as possible in the Lord's service.

These ordinances are beneficial to the child of God, but like anything that is of great benefit, there is also the possibility of harm.

If we do not judge or examine ourselves in these matters, God will do the judging for us. This is not some kind of punishment; it is an attempt to instruct and correct us. In fact, the verses of Scripture given in 1 Corinthians were instructions to help a church correct some of its wrong practices with regard to the Lord's Supper. The way the members were observing this ordinance did not present a picture of reverence and respect. God wanted them to change.

God does convict and challenge His children. He doesn't do this to punish us for what we do that is not according to His will, but He does it so that we can learn to do right and not be condemned with the evil world around us. God's chastening is always motivated by God's love, and we should receive it that way.

Our attitude toward this ordinance begins with our understanding of it and its meaning to each of us personally. The more we understand what the Lord's Supper means and why Jesus gave it, the more we will benefit spiritually when we observe it.

## **Building Blocks**

The Lord's Supper is not about eating a meal and being fed. The Bible makes this clear in verse 34 of the text. If we are hungry



physically, the Lord's Supper will not take care of that need. The Lord's Supper is about meeting the needs of the inner man, not the needs of the body.

As you need food every day to sustain your physical life, you need food for your spirit. Your spirit won't starve if you don't feed it; eternal life is, after all, eternal, but there will be a hunger in you that nothing else will satisfy. It's relatively easy to satisfy physical hunger. A hamburger, fries or a pizza, and all is taken care of. It's not as easy to satisfy a hungry spirit. The spirit is fed by the words that come from God, and a part of that feeding is understanding God's Word and hiding it in our hearts. This is as much a part of spiritual feeding as receiving the Word of God.

You can come to church, and you can, as a church member, observe the Lord's Supper, but you will only be fed spiritually as you understand what is happening to you and what this service really means. Spiritual nourishment takes place when the spirit of man comes in contact with the Word of God, and the Word of God becomes a living part of the spirit of man. Then we are nourished, and we begin to live not by bread alone, but by every word that comes from God.

## Springboard



It's amazing that, although everyone who is a member of a New Testament church has been baptized, few will regularly observe the Lord's Supper. Jesus did not place the importance of one ordinance above the other. Both are equally important for our spiritual development.

Baptism is a once only ordinance. Once we are scripturally baptized, we will never need to be baptized again. The Lord's Supper is a continuing need. Our observance of the Lord's Supper with our local church family shows that we have and desire an ongoing relationship with Jesus, and that we are looking forward to meeting the Lord in our future. What a wonderful picture for us to paint in our lives!

# The Origin of the Church

**Scripture: Matthew 16:18; 18:20**

**Aim: By the end of the lesson I will understand that Jesus personally began His church.**

## Start Here



One of the most important teachings in the New Testament concerns the Lord's churches. God has given three great institutions to men to regulate human society. The first was the family, given in the beginning in the Garden of Eden. Then God gave men governments, exemplified by the government of Israel and the Law given to Moses. Then Jesus, during His personal ministry on earth, instituted His church. Each of these great institutions helps to guide humanity so that we can lead peaceful, fulfilled lives.

Over the years Satan has attacked and continues to attack all three. No institution can provide the strength and foundation in life like the family. As long as human beings are on this earth, there will be a need for governments. Human governments need to be accountable to God and founded on the principles of God's Word. The separation of church and state does not mean that God should be taken out of government because God is and always will be intimately involved in the government of men.

We also need churches to provide for the spiritual opportunity and welfare of mankind. In the lesson today we will see where churches originated and learn how we can carry out the will of Christ through service in a New Testament church.

## Take a Closer Look



One of the most commonly believed mistakes about churches is that the New Testament church began on the day of Pentecost. Something

wonderful did happen on that day, but it was not the beginning of the church. Churches were in existence before then, as we shall see in the Scriptures.

**A definition.** The word *church* first appears in the Bible in the verses of the lesson text. In Greek, the language Jesus spoke, the word means “a called out assembly.” Today a church is a called out group of born-again, scripturally baptized believers who have covenanted together to carry out the commission of Christ. The only manifestation of a church is as a local, visible body. Like family and government, we often use the word in an institutional sense, but we realize that each of these institutions only exists as a local, visible body. There is simply no such thing as a universal, invisible church.

**The first selection.** Since a church is a called out body, we naturally look in the Bible for the first time Jesus actually selected or called out men to follow Him. John the Baptist prepared the material for the church Jesus would begin. John preached the gospel, and he baptized those who made a sincere profession of faith, but John did not start churches. Only Jesus could do this.

One of the first records we have of Jesus calling out men is in Matthew 4:18-22. In this passage Jesus called Peter, Andrew, James and John to leave their fishing business, to follow Him and become fishers of men. These men and others became the nucleus of the church that Jesus established. This is the first time in the Bible where we find all the elements present that are needed to begin a church. We have saved, scripturally baptized men. We have Jesus calling them out, and we find them following Jesus and entering into an agreement to be fishers of men. This event happened at the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus. From beginning to end, Jesus worked through His church, and He still does today.

**The first promises.** In the verses of the lesson text, we find the first use of the word *church*. Jesus used the word to refer to the work of the Lord and the part that Peter and others would have in this work. Peter was asked to identify Jesus. Jesus asked Peter who others said that Jesus was, then He asked Peter who he, Peter, thought Jesus was. Peter answered that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God. Peter had not learned this from other men. He had learned it from the Father in Heaven.

Jesus made a play on the words of Peter’s name in Matthew 4:17, 18. There are three names used there: Simon, Peter’s first name, Bar-jona, Peter’s last name and Peter, Peter’s nickname. Peter’s legal



name was Simon Bar-jona or Simon, son of Jonah. He was called Peter, which means "small rock." If Peter were alive today, his name might be Simon, "Small Rock," Jonasson. It was the nickname, Peter or small rock, which Jesus used in verse 18. Jesus contrasted Peter's name with the word rock which means "boulder or very large rock." Peter was a small rock, but Jesus was going to build, or literally dome up, His church on a large boulder. The large boulder was Jesus Himself. The church was built on Jesus, not on Peter.

Then the promise was given. The gates of hell will not prevail against the Lord's church. The church was promised perpetuity. This has happened simply because Jesus promised it. Today, there are churches preaching and practicing the same truth as the churches in the New Testament. We know this because Jesus said that it would be so. Truth has been persecuted, and many errors have been introduced, but there have always been churches that have remained faithful to the Word of God and have provided a witness of the truth of this promise of Jesus.

**Church activity during Jesus' ministry.** The greatest evidence that we have of the beginning of a church before Pentecost is in the biblical record of its activity during the ministry of Christ.

This church observed the ordinance of baptism (John 4:1, 2). The church evidently had members from which Jesus chose the apostles (Luke 6:13). The church observed the Lord's Supper (Matt. 26:26-30). The church was given rules for dealing with matters of discipline (Matt. 18:15-17). The church was given the Great Commission to do mission work (Matt. 28:18-20).

All of these Scriptures point to the simple conclusion that Jesus organized and established this first church during His personal ministry on earth.

Additional churches have been organized since Jesus' personal ministry. We read of many of them in the book of Acts. They were formed according to the biblical pattern and were taught to follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

We must also note that over the years, men have started organizations that call themselves churches. Men may view these organizations as churches, but they are not recognized as such by God. To be recognized by God, a church must meet the qualifications set forth in the Bible. This includes the belief and practice of biblical doctrine and principles.





At one time or another all of us have played make-believe. This is all right as a game, but at some point make-believe should come to an end and reality should take over. Sadly, many who should know better are playing make-believe when it comes to their church. Few church members know about the origin and the doctrines of their church. We seem more interested in a church's facilities and programs instead of origin and doctrine; yet, the physical will pass away, but the things of the spirit are eternal.

When you take a look at a church, really examine it. See where it comes from. Did some man start it? Does it have a heritage that goes all the way back to Jesus? Does this church preach and practice the doctrines of the New Testament?

There are churches that do because Jesus said that there would be, but not all established organizations that call themselves churches are like the one that Jesus established. God has given each of us a mind to use in making our decisions, and we should use all our powers of reason when it comes to the important decision of choosing a church where we worship Him.

In our church affiliation, as in the rest of our lives, the important thing is not to please ourselves, but to please God. We may be completely happy with all our choices, but is God happy with the things we have chosen?

## **Building Blocks**

It's impossible to make wise choices without good information. Often when people make the choices that will have the most effect on them, they do so in the dark. Why did you choose the church where you are a member? Have you examined its doctrinal statement? Have you asked about its history? Do you know any of the particular stands the church takes on various biblical teachings? These are questions you should ask yourself as you get older. Many would have a difficult time answering these questions, but all

churches are not alike, and all organizations that have the word *church* on its sign are not real churches.

There are organizations that are called cults. Cults seek to dominate those who are members of them, usually through the personality of one strong leader. Above all, a church will confess that Jesus only is Lord. We read in 1 John 4:2, 3, "Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world."

We must learn to "try the spirits," and test our feelings by the truth of God's Word (verse 1). We can be completely satisfied with things that are all wrong, but if we will follow the admonitions of the Bible, we will make wise choices, not only about our place in eternity but also about our place of service while we are on the earth.



What difference does church membership make? Do I even have to be a member of a church? If there is so much confusion about churches, why not just skip the whole thing? These are good questions, and the Bible has some positive answers.

Jesus thought it was important to be baptized. He went to John the Baptist and insisted that John baptize Him. Jesus was teaching us that baptism and church fellowship are important. The Bible plainly teaches that Jesus gave His commission and orders to His churches. His churches, not any other organizations on earth, are commissioned to carry out the orders of God. No individual has that authority. Then we see that the Bible plainly declares in Ephesians 3:21, "Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen." Christ is still getting glory through His churches and will do so throughout eternity. If we want to be a part of giving Christ this glory, we must be a part of a New Testament church.

# The Nature of the Church

**Scripture: Revelation 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14; 1 Corinthians 1:2**

**Aim: By the end of the lesson I will understand that the church is a local, visible body.**

## Start Here



In the world today, there are over two thousand different organizations that call themselves churches. Most of them claim to have the truth. This is confusing for anyone who wants to find a scriptural church. No doubt Satan brings about this confusion to keep people from easily identifying New Testament churches, but we should always remember that where sin abounds, grace much more abounds.

God will not allow His churches to disappear from the earth. There are true churches in the world today, and it is possible to identify a true church.

In the lesson today, we will see the things that make a church a biblically patterned church. It's important for us to begin by understanding that we can't go by the name of a church alone. Names come and go. Over the years God's people have had many different names, some given by their friends and some by their enemies. Identification is seldom done by name alone. When we identify someone or something, we look for characteristics that are not easily changed and that are readily observable. The same is true of churches. What a church believes and practices is far more important than the name on the sign when it comes to identifying that body as a New Testament church.

## Take a Closer Look



**Obedient to Christ.** Among the first identifying characteristics of a true, New Testament church is that the church will want to be obedient



to Jesus and will seek to follow the pattern given in the Bible. If you encounter a group whose total focus is to ignore the Scriptures and proceed in some other direction, you can be assured that this is not a New Testament church. Jesus said in John 10:27, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." Those who want to be led by the Spirit and taught by the Word can be, and those who deliberately ignore God's Word will not be.

In the New Testament we see a consistent pattern of churches trying to imitate the things Jesus taught as God revealed them through His Word. In one particular place this is taught directly concerning the Lord's Supper. In 1 Corinthians 11:23 we read, "For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you." The apostle Paul had been given instructions from God about this church ordinance, and he had given these instructions to the church in Corinth. The Corinthians had not done as Paul instructed them, and he was repeating these instructions in this passage. The important point is that God had specifically instructed this church, and it was to be obedient to those instructions.

A true church is never at liberty to make decisions that contradict the Word of God. True churches are independent, but they are never independent of Jesus. A true church will seek to find and follow the will of God and to obey the commandments that Jesus gave to His church during His personal ministry.

A church is supposed to be what Jesus wants, not what men want. It is more important for churches to follow the Lord than to please men. Your church may be everything you want it to be, but that is meaningless unless it is what Jesus wants it to be.

**Conforming to the New Testament pattern.** If a church is to conform to the New Testament pattern, it must be able to recognize and identify that pattern. The Bible presents some practices that are given specifically for churches to imitate. In other areas, principles are given from which we can infer practices. Either way, a true church will follow both the principles and practices as set forth in the Scriptures. The alternative is to follow the principles and practices invented by men. These may be pleasing to people, but they will not be pleasing to God. While we can't look at all of these biblical principles and practices, listed below are several that we can readily identify.

**Independent.** According to the Scriptures, each local church is an independent body. There is no universal, invisible church that



exercises authority over each local congregation. Neither can one church tell another what to do. Jesus recognized this when He spoke to His disciples in Matthew 18:18. God recognizes the authority of each church to make decisions, and God honors those decisions. Of course each church, like each individual, is bound to follow the Bible and the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

**Bible oriented.** A biblically patterned church will have the Bible as the centerpiece of its means and message. True churches are always Bible believing and Bible practicing churches. A true church will never set the ideas of men on an equal footing with the Word of God, but will in all things yield to the teaching of the Scriptures. As 2 Timothy 3:16 declares, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”

**Ordinance observing.** Jesus gave His churches two ordinances to observe. These are baptism, Matthew 28:18-20 and the Lord’s Supper, 1 Corinthians 11:23-25. These ordinances belong exclusively to New Testament churches, and no others are to be added. A true church will faithfully observe these—baptizing those who have repented of their sins and accepted Jesus and then regularly remembering Jesus through observance of the Lord’s Supper in the manner we are taught in the Bible.

**Mission minded.** A New Testament church will be interested in spreading the Word of God. In Acts 1:8, we are commanded to be witnesses. No church can claim to follow the pattern of the Bible and not be engaged in the spread of the gospel both at home and in the regions beyond. There are many ways churches can actually do mission work, and God has given us some latitude in choosing our method, but we do not have any biblical options when it comes to witnessing and mission work.

**Loving.** Jesus commanded His people to love each other as He has loved us. No church can follow the biblical pattern and be cold and indifferent. A true church is a loving church. (See John 13:34; 2 John 5.) If a church becomes selfish and self-centered, it is not following the biblical pattern.

**Expectant and optimistic.** The future is bright for every Christian. Heaven waits for us on the other side of death, and Jesus is coming back again to resurrect and receive His people. These precious promises should give true churches an uplifting and optimistic spirit. One of the signs of our character is how we handle trouble. Over the

centuries, the Lord's churches have responded to oppression with love and a bright spirit. This is still a mark of true Christianity.

This list is not complete, but this will give you a place to start in your own studies. Remember, each one of us is challenged by the Holy Spirit to make our own decisions about our church fellowship.



Many people select a church almost by accident. We join where our parents attend, or we go where our friends go. Maybe we go to a certain church because it's close to our home, or we like the physical appearance of the building. Maybe we attend there because the people are friendly. There are many different reasons for choosing a particular church to attend, but the most important reasons are because the church is a scriptural church and because the Lord, through the Holy Spirit, leads us there.

The church you attend might be exactly what you want, but it is far more important that it be what God wants. The issue isn't what pleases men, but what pleases God. What God wants from us is a conscious decision to cooperate with the Holy Spirit and follow the pattern of the Bible. We know from the promises of Jesus that there will be true churches in the world until He returns to the earth. God does lead His people, so it's up to us to follow His leadership and use our minds to examine each body that uses the name *church* to see if it follows the biblical pattern. No true church will ever shy away from such an examination. Just the opposite, a true church will welcome your questions and will be happy to share what it believes with everyone who will listen. Never be afraid to ask questions and to examine what your church believes and practices.

## **Building Blocks**

True churches can go wrong. The seven letters sent to the seven churches in Asia that are mentioned in the text verses show that this can happen. God inspired men to write letters or epistles to a specific church urging it to correct its errors.

Because of man's sinful nature, no church can ever be perfect until Jesus comes. God does deal with sinful men, but there is a limit to His patience. As the letters in Revelation suggest, God corrects us and then expects us to respond to His correcting influence. This is true for an individual and it is true for a church.

If we search the Scriptures and find a practice or doctrine being taught in our church that is contrary to the Bible, we should do everything we can to correct the error. We should do this individually, always making our beliefs conform to the teachings of God's Word, and we should do this corporately. God has given His people great liberty, but He has never given us the liberty or freedom to set His Word aside and go our own way.

There are tempting reasons to abandon the teachings of the Bible and adopt some new ideas, but we will never please our Heavenly Father when we do. Many teachings seem good to men and may be attractive to many, but if they contradict the Word of God, they will ultimately cause us to fail. We all need to be mindful of these false doctrines and refuse and reject them whenever they appear.



Every day we make choices. Many of these choices have small consequences, and many of them have great consequences. We choose what clothes to wear, and we choose what job we want or whom we will marry. These decisions can lead us to happy, productive lives, or they can ruin our lives. So it is with our choice of a church.

There is no better place to be than saved by the blood of Jesus, scripturally baptized and actively serving the Lord in and through a New Testament church. This is the best that life has to offer, but there are many people who are not saved. There are many saved people who have never followed the Lord in scriptural baptism, and there are many saved, baptized people who are not serving the Lord in a New Testament church.

Each of these actions begins with the truth—the truth about salvation, the truth about baptism and the truth about the church. We can learn the truth, and, as Jesus taught, the truth can make us free. (See John 8:32.)



# Church Government

**Scripture:** Luke 22:24–27; Acts 1:14–26

**Aim:** By the end of the lesson I will understand and discuss equality of church membership.

## Start Here



The lesson today should be a concern of everyone who is a member of a church or who attends a church. If you are in Sunday School, you are attending a church function, and the way the church is governed should be interesting to you. Many people never give a thought to such matters. We seem to think that these things just happen, but nothing could be further from the truth.

As we examine what the Bible says about how a church should be governed, we will see that many churches are not following the biblical pattern. This is because men always seem to think they can improve the instructions of God. In truth, we never can. The best we can do is to understand and accept the teachings of the Bible and apply them to each situation in our lives. This will produce a scriptural life-style for each individual and will in turn produce a scriptural form of government in the churches where those individuals attend.

Every organization needs some form of regulation. These regulations serve to produce peace and harmony in the organization and allow the organization to carry out its stated purpose. Church government should have these goals as well.

## Take a Closer Look



**A principle of government.** Behind every decision we might make, there is a principle. In Luke 22:24-27, Jesus states the principle of biblical church government. The occasion for this passage was strife or division among the apostles about who was counted the greatest.



Jesus was a strong leader, and He had provided them with guidance, but now He was going away, and they got into an argument about who was the greatest apostle.

Jesus used this occasion to establish the underlying principle of church government. This principle is different from the principles of the world. The world is governed by lordship, authority and power. The greatest person is the person who has the most power. Jesus taught that the apostles were not to be governed like this. Instead, they were to operate on the principle of service. The greatest among them would be the one who was the best servant. Instead of looking for ways to get our will imposed on the body, we are to look for ways to serve each other, and the greatest is the one who does the most work.

Do you see how radically this would affect any government? Instead of political advantage, we would look for chances to serve. Instead of trying to get our way, we would look for someone to help. This attitude was shown in the life of Christ. Jesus did not come so that men could minister to Him—He came so that He could minister to mankind. When we see someone being served, we naturally think that the man sitting at the table is better than the man serving him, but Jesus said that this is not so. Our mission in the world is to be servants of our Lord and of our fellowman, not to be the center of attention.

Attitude in any situation determines our actions in that situation. If we begin to think about church government with the mind of a servant, we will go in a different direction than when we look at it through the eyes of lordship, power and authority.

**Decisions between brothers.** The most basic kind of government is between individuals. What do we do when two of us disagree? How do we settle it? The Bible tells us in Matthew 18:15-17. In these verses we have the case of a brother trespassing or sinning against another brother. The nature of the trespass isn't stated, and we do not know whether it was justified or not. That isn't the point. The point is how to resolve the difficulty.

First, we are told to go to the brother and tell him that we have a problem. The object is not to destroy the relationship, but to save it, to gain "thy brother" (verse 15). We must be careful because many petty annoyances do not truly constitute trespasses. Let the Bible and the Holy Spirit guide you. Remember also the servant principle. You are going to your brother to serve the Lord and to serve him. You can't do this with a bitter, vindictive spirit.

If your brother will not listen to you, then take one or two witnesses to hear your appeal for peace. This is an Old Testament

principle that everything was to be established in the mouths of two or three witnesses. The idea was to avoid confusion. But what if your brother would not listen even after the witnesses were present? Then you should tell the matter to the church, and the church should reconcile the differences. If the brother would not listen to or heed the decision of the church, then he would be counted as a heathen or a publican. This means that he would lose his reputation and influence. His evil fruit would indicate an unrepentant heart, and he would be treated accordingly.

Keep in mind that the object is not to judge or reprimand either party. The object is to restore fellowship between brethren. A servant's heart will go a long way toward accomplishing this goal.

**Decisions for the whole congregation.** So far we have dealt with individuals, but there are times when a church must make a decision. Such an occasion occurred in Acts 1:14-26. The church in Jerusalem was faced with the problem of choosing a leader to replace Judas. Judas had hanged himself after he betrayed Jesus. He had a part in the ministry of the apostles. Now that he was dead, another leader was needed to take his place. Although there are many things taught here, the important lesson in these verses is the procedures used to make this decision.

First, notice that the church was in harmony and fellowship, "these all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication." Any decision is easier to make when we are in one accord and united in prayer. Then Peter, the leader or pastor of the church, brought the matter to the attention of the others. He told the story of Judas frankly and honestly. He did not attempt to sugarcoat Judas' sin or excuse him in any way. Problems should be faced frankly and openly. He then set forth the qualifications for election in verses 21 and 22. Not all men present were qualified for this position. Then the church nominated two men for the job (verse 23). The men nominated were Joseph Barsabas Justus and Matthias.

After the nominations were completed, the church prayed asking God to guide them in their decision. Prayer is always in order. Then the church voted, each person voted once or "gave forth their lots" (verse 26). and the vote was for Matthias. He was then counted or numbered with the eleven apostles.

Notice that they were choosing a servant. There is no indication that Joseph Barsabas Justus was offended or disappointed because he was not chosen. No one won the election and no one lost. The church, led by the Holy Spirit, made a choice. Joseph Barsabas Justus

could not serve in this position, but he certainly could serve the Lord in other ways. When God's people follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit, no one wins or loses. God simply has His way in our lives.



In these three examples, do you see how church government is to be different from worldly government? The world is often described as a “dog-eat-dog” society, but think about that for a moment. Even if you are the big dog, do you really want to eat the little dog? I don't think so.

The principles that Jesus taught will work, not only for a church, but for any organization that will implement them. First, there has to be the idea of service. In Philippians 2:5-7 we read, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.” Jesus had the mind and attitude of a servant. He did not have to be a servant; He chose to be one. If we imitate Jesus, we will also choose to be servants, first of God and then of others.

We will have a mechanism for resolving every difference we might have on a personal level. We can be reconciled to our brothers when we offend each other. It's not possible to live and work together without sometimes hurting each other's feelings. Having the attitude of Christ is the way to deal with such problems. Then we will have a means to make our decisions. The example in Acts is simply that, an example. We will not need to choose another to take the place of Judas, but we will need to make decisions that affect others. When we do, we have a pattern to follow.

In our personal lives and in our churches, we can imitate the things that are done in the world, or we can follow the pattern given in the Bible. If we want to do God's work in God's way, we will always follow the biblical examples.

## **Building Blocks**

Church government should be based on some important foundational truths. First, Jesus is the Head of His churches. No church is



ever at liberty to go against the will of the Lord or the Word of the Lord. We will never be called on to decide whether or not the Bible is true. It is true, and it is the Word of the Lord. We have no option but to follow what it teaches.

Then we must always respect the will of the majority. Every vote does not have to be unanimous. However, we should be careful about making important decisions by a small margin of votes. A church that is prayerfully following the leadership of the Holy Spirit and God's Word will seldom be seriously divided. But even if there is division, the majority should prevail. The majority is not always right, but order cannot be preserved any other way than to listen to the majority voice in all matters.

But we also must protect and respect the rights of the minority. Christians are bound together with more than earthly ties. We will see each other in Heaven, and we need to learn to get along right now. No decision should be made that literally runs over others just because they are in the minority. There are no levels of church membership. There are no associate members of churches, no junior members who have some privileges but do not enjoy others. We are either church members or we are not, and every member of a church should be treated with courtesy and respect.

## Springboard



Unfortunately, many young people do not consider themselves real members of the church where they belong. Because of this, they have little or no part in the decision-making process of the church they attend. This should not be so. Every scriptural church takes care of its own business. No organization of any kind has the right to tell a local church what to do. But with independence comes responsibility. We have a great liberty; the liberty to carry on our business without interference from outside, but this means that every one of us has a responsibility to take church business seriously.

How does your church make decisions? How would you resolve a conflict between yourself and another brother or sister in the Lord? How does your church choose leaders? Find out and then become a part of the process.

# Church Offices

**Scripture: 1 Timothy 3:1–13; Titus 1:5–9**

**Aim: By the end of the lesson I will discuss the duties of pastors and deacons.**

## Start Here



Every organism (living thing) needs organization. A church is compared in the Bible to a living body and for a body to function, there must be some organization. God has given His churches organization in the form of church offices. These offices could be summed up as temporary and permanent.

The temporary offices were those given in the early churches that passed away with the completion of the Bible. Among these was the office of apostle. Since one of the qualifications of an apostle was to have been a witness of the resurrection or to have seen the resurrected Christ, this office obviously passed away with the generation of people living in Jesus' day (Acts 1:22).

There were offices that were permanently placed in the Lord's churches. These are the subject of the lesson today. We sometimes refer to many different people as church officers. We might say that the Sunday School superintendent or the church clerk are church officers, and most people would understand what we mean. But strictly and biblically speaking, there are only two offices in a church. These are the office of bishop or pastor and deacon or servant. If we want to adhere to the Bible, we will only refer to these two positions as church offices.

## Take a Closer Look



The Bible not only sets forth bishops and deacons as church officers, it also clearly states the qualifications for holding one of these offices. In Philippians 1:1 we read, "Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the

bishops and deacons.” This and other passages help confirm that the two permanent offices in a New Testament church are the office of bishop and deacon.

The word translated *bishop* in the Bible is the Greek word *episkopos*, and it literally means “overseer, watchman or guardian.” From the way the word *bishop* is used in the Bible, we see that it is referring to what we today call the office of pastor. The word *pastor* comes from a term indicating “shepherd.” So, as the shepherd is the guardian or watchman of his flock, a pastor is the spiritual guardian or watchman for a church or congregation.

Jesus used this illustration to teach Peter about his duties in John 21:15-17, when He told Peter to “feed my sheep.” As a pastor or bishop, Peter was responsible for the spiritual care of those whom the Lord had entrusted to him. Note that they were not Peter’s sheep. They were Jesus’ sheep, and Peter was instructed only to feed them.

Today the word *bishop* has a different meaning from the one given in the Bible. We use the word to mean “an overseer of other pastors in a religious hierarchy,” but God never intended for this to be so. No church is superior to any other church, and no preacher is called to supervise and direct the work of another preacher.

**Qualifications for pastors.** The qualifications for a pastor are set forth in 1 Timothy 3:1-7. These are simple and easy to understand; yet, men often try to make them complicated.

First, a pastor has to be called to preach. The call to preach is a God-given desire burning in the heart of a man to preach God’s Word. True preachers do not choose their profession; God chooses them. The call to preach is not a choice among alternatives because for the God-called preacher there is no other choice.

A preacher or pastor then must have the approval or ordination of a local church to carry out the responsibilities of his ministry. Each church is solely responsible for the ordination of preachers. Each church can determine whether or not any individual meets the biblical qualifications and can then employ him as their pastor.

Read the list of qualifications in 1 Timothy 3 carefully. There are several qualifications and each of them is important, but two have been under the spotlight in recent times. These are dealt with in 1 Timothy 3:2, “A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach.” The questions have been raised—whether or not women can serve as pastors and what should be the marital status of a pastor.



The Bible is plain in these matters. If a pastor must be the husband of one wife, then women are excluded from serving in the office of pastor. This is not discriminating against women; it is admitting God's choice in this matter. Men and women are not interchangeable. Each has special talents and abilities. God wants us to use our abilities in the best way possible, and the best way is to follow the pattern given in the Bible. If we search the Scriptures, we will see that there are no women pastors mentioned in the Bible. The qualifications given exclude women from serving in this office.

The other issue is simply stated in this verse. A pastor does not have to be married, Paul was not married, but if the pastor is married, he is to be married to one wife and not married into a state of adultery. The literal translation would be "he must be a one woman man." This is easy to understand, but some would twist it around to include those who do not meet this simple qualification.

There are many other qualifications for a pastor, and each of them is of equal weight. These two have caught our attention recently, but each qualification should be met by anyone who wants to pastor a New Testament church.

**Qualifications for deacons.** The first deacons were chosen by the church in Jerusalem. The record of this is in Acts 6. The idea was that deacons or servants would free the preachers from physical duties so they could attend to spiritual things. This passage defines the work of a deacon, and in 1 Timothy 3:8-13 we see the qualifications of deacons.

Unlike the pastor, there is no divine call to be a deacon. Deacons are chosen by churches to serve in assistance to the pastor. Many of the qualifications of a deacon are the same as those for a pastor. Both offices are held to a high standard of conduct and personal morality. These men are examples to other believers, and only those who meet the biblical standards should be chosen for these offices.

There are even qualifications given for deacon's wives. This indicates the high regard that God has for the men who serve in these positions.

A man who does not meet these qualifications will have trouble performing the duties expected of him and given to him by a church. God knows the trials and difficulties of service in these special positions, and He expects a church to choose men to serve accordingly.

There is no better situation than a church where the pastor and deacons are serving in harmony with each other and with the other members of the congregation.



There are many traditions that have been handed down over the years. Traditions can be a good thing because in some ways they form a link with our past. Traditions can be dangerous when they take on the same force and authority as Scripture. Jesus warned in Mark 7:7, “Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.”

In the matter of church offices, what is traditional has often taken on the same importance as the Bible. True Baptists have always believed that the Bible is our all-sufficient guide for our faith and practice. Traditions are all right, but they should never be allowed to become equal to the Bible.

A church can select as many people as necessary to perform as many functions as might arise, but these people should not be designated as or referred to as church officers. The officers of a church, according to the Bible, are pastors and deacons. According to the needs of the day, we have people serving in other positions, such as music directors, pianists, organists, clerks, treasurers, ushers, teachers, janitors and maybe even computer specialists. This is not wrong. Each person is performing an important duty and is helping vitally with the work of the Lord. The simple point is that they are not church officers—they are church servants.

What we call or name a thing is important. If you call it garbage, I don't want to eat it, no matter how appetizing it may be. Words mean things. They mean things to us and they mean things to others. If we want the world to get a true picture of a scriptural church, we will be careful how we use words to describe what we do.

## **Building Blocks**

Pastors and deacons have different duties. The pastor is responsible for the spiritual well-being of the congregation he serves. It is the duty of the pastor to preach God's Word to the church, and it will set the tone for the service as the Holy Spirit interprets the message to each heart and mind. The pastor also is in a leadership role. It is his responsibility to have a vision for the church he serves,

to lead each member in new fields of service and to help each member see the importance of implementing every part of the Great Commission.

In 1 Corinthians 3:6 Paul said, "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase." Paul and Apollos had jobs to do, but the power of God was needed to make the work blossom. Pastors are not interchangeable. Each has specific talents, and the Lord uses these talents according to His will and the people's needs.

The duty of deacons is to make the spiritual work of the pastor easier. The pattern in Acts 6 is clear. The deacons were to take care of feeding the widows of the church so that the pastors would have time for study and prayer. In any church there are certain physical things that must be attended to, and this is where the deacons come in. This is not to say that these things are beneath a pastor, or that a pastor is too good to take care of the physical side of church needs. There are some things that only a pastor can do. Remember, God calls men to be pastors, and a church chooses deacons to serve so that the pastors can use their unique talents to the best advantage of the whole congregation.



The overall philosophy for church government is that it allows a church to efficiently carry out the will of God. We are not in the fellowship of a church so that we can do what we want; we are there so that we can do what Jesus wants us to do. To do God's will, we must have the heart and mind of a servant.

A pastor is not a ruler or boss. A deacon is not a ruler or boss. The pastor does not rule over the deacons; the deacons do not rule over the pastor and neither of them rules over the church. They are servants one of the other. This is the mind of Christ, and this is the mind that Christ wants to be in us.

Whenever we try to impose our will on someone else, we will fail in doing the will of our Father. Each and every member of a church should allow God to impose His will on them as individuals. When each of us is following the leadership of the Holy Spirit, we will walk in harmony and fellowship and will serve where God wants us to be.



# The First Christians

**Scripture: Acts 11**

**Aim: By the end of the lesson I will understand the results of witnessing.**

## Start Here



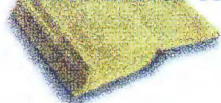
What difference does a name make? It can make a great difference. Names precede expectations. If you ask me to smell the flowers, I will expect a different experience than if you ask me to smell the garbage. Names may not change things, but they certainly have an impact and make an impression. The lesson today is about the name *Christian* and how it came to be applied to followers of Jesus.

Originally those who followed Jesus were called disciples. A disciple is a learner or follower. John the Baptist had disciples, the Pharisees had disciples, and those who followed Jesus were also called by this name. This wasn't a bad term. In fact, we should still be proud to say that we are followers of Jesus seeking to learn from Him.

But the name *disciple* would give way to a new name *Christian*. This name was given to the members of the church in Antioch in Syria, not to the members of the church in Jerusalem. The name was coined because of the character of those in the church in Antioch.

Names should accurately reflect the nature and character of the thing named, and, when we wear the name of Christ, we should always be careful to reflect His character and nature.

## Take a Closer Look



**The gospel spreads north.** When Jesus left the world, He gave the church in Jerusalem a job to do. Its members were told to be witnesses of Him in

Judea, Samaria and to the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:8). Unfortunately, they chose to stay in Jerusalem. Only after persecution and trouble arose did they go into the world as Jesus instructed. We may not always understand why Jesus gave us a specific instruction, but it is always best to obey Him.

God used persecution to spread His Word. The disciples in Jerusalem had been scattered abroad following the death of Stephen. They had been forced to do what Jesus had asked them to do voluntarily. Because most of those in the church in Jerusalem were Jews, they only preached to Jews in the cities where they went. It's natural to want to be around people who share your background and values, but God told them to preach the gospel to everyone. We must always remember that our obligations do not stop with our own families and at our own doorsteps.

Fortunately, some of the disciples who were Gentiles themselves came to the city of Antioch and preached the Word to the Greeks of that city, telling them about Jesus. Antioch was founded by the Greeks and was named after several Seleucid kings named Antiochus. The city was an important center of commerce for Syria in biblical times, and many people there needed to hear the gospel.

When a seed is planted in good, fertile ground, a crop grows quite naturally. So it was in Antioch. The Lord was with the preaching of His Word. God is always there when the Word is preached. We may plant and water, but God gives the increase. A great number of people believed the preaching of the men from Jerusalem and turned to the Lord. The men from Jerusalem preached the gospel, and a great number of Greeks turned from believing in false idols to real faith in Jesus Christ.

This spiritual revival led to the founding of a church in the city of Antioch. The witnesses needed assistance in helping these new disciples grow in grace and knowledge. When we first believe, the Bible speaks of us as “babes in Christ” (1 Cor. 3:1). Like a baby, new believers need a lot of tender care and careful training. Knowing this, the church at Jerusalem was prepared to send another man to help these people become a stable congregation.

Notice that the revival that led to the salvation of many souls took place in a short period of time, but the discipleship that followed took much longer. Salvation is a crisis; it happens at a moment in time when we believe in Jesus, but growth in grace is a process that will consume the rest of our lives.

**The church in Jerusalem sends Barnabas.** When the church in Jerusalem heard about the remarkable work in Antioch, they sent Barnabas to go and see what was happening and to help these people in their growth in grace. Barnabas had been in the church in Jerusalem for a long time and was a faithful disciple of Christ.

When Barnabas arrived in Antioch, he was glad to see the revival that had taken place. He lost no time in beginning his teaching ministry. He started with lessons on dedication to Christ. The Bible says in Acts 11:23, "Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord." His first exhortation or teaching was that these new believers should commit their hearts to the Lord.

Development in Christ begins with our hearts. Our hearts must be right with God, and our hearts must be dedicated to serving the Lord. The Greeks believed that the heart was the seat of decision making. Barnabas wanted these Greek believers to decide that they wanted to follow Jesus.

**Saul (Paul) comes to help.** Barnabas soon realized two important things. One was that the work was extremely significant. Something great was happening in Antioch. God was opening a door to the Gentiles, and the Gentile people were entering in multitudes. This work was too great for one man. Barnabas needed help, and he knew just the man. He left Antioch and went to Tarsus to search for Saul. Barnabas had met Saul shortly after Saul had been saved on the road to Damascus and baptized by the church in Damascus. Saul came to Jerusalem, but the brethren were afraid of him, and he returned to his home in Tarsus. God closed the door in Jerusalem to Saul, but now God was opening a door of opportunity in Antioch.

Saul came to Antioch with Barnabas, and for a whole year they met with the brethren and taught many people the principles of Christ. A school requires only teachers with knowledge and students with willing hearts. Both of these were present in Antioch. Many people learned valuable, life changing lessons about Jesus and His churches. By the end of the year, the disciples had gained a new name. They were called *Christians*.

Perhaps they were given the name because they attempted to imitate the character and deeds of Jesus. Perhaps the name came because they were constantly studying and preaching about Jesus. We do not know for certain, but use of the name continued. From



that day until now, those who are disciples of Christ have been called Christians. Today, as in days of old, it's a name that those who know Jesus as Savior should wear proudly. It is a testimony to our relationship with Jesus and to the changes that come into our lives because we know Jesus Christ as our living Lord.



What does it mean to you to be called a Christian? Are you proud of the name? Do you have a right to wear it? Names mean things. A rose by another name might smell as sweet, but if you named it wrong, no one would ever stop to smell it. Names bring about expectations. When we hear someone called sweetie or darling, we expect them to behave in a certain way. Likewise, when we hear someone referred to as a little devil, we expect poor behavior. The names we give people, especially what we call nicknames, are judgments we make about their character.

If an observer looked at your behavior, without knowing anything about your background, what name would he give you? Would that observer call you a Christian? If we want to be able to wear this label, we must walk in the way Jesus walked. We are not Christians because we say we are—we are Christians because others say we are.

The Bible clearly presents a picture of Christian behavior. Jesus taught us precisely how we should behave toward other believers and toward the world in general. Only when we follow the patterns of behavior given in the Bible can we truly earn this name.

A popular slogan today is What Would Jesus Do? If we want to be identified with Christ, we should always strive to behave like He did or like He would behave in situations that we may experience.

## **Building Blocks**

The building blocks of Christian character are expressed in the life and ministry of Barnabas. Notice what the Bible says about him. First, he was willing to go and be used by God. No one can truly be a Christian and be unwilling to go where God leads. The ultimate test of our devotion is our willingness to commit our physical

presence to a cause. Many will send their best wishes or even give their money, but when we really believe, we will send ourselves.

Barnabas was a good man. Literally nothing can replace morality. We can never advance beyond our need to behave. Barnabas had an internal moral compass, and he followed it. Every child of God has the presence of the Holy Spirit to lead him in the paths of righteousness and to turn him away from the path of error. Those who bear the name of Christ will use and follow this guidance. Goodness will be a part of their character.

Barnabas was also full of the Holy Ghost. This suggests that he lived as close to the Lord as he possibly could. Many seem determined to see how far away from God they can get. They stray to the end of the rope, always testing the boundaries. The real Christian will always seek to stay as close as possible to the Lord. Following the Lord will not be a burden to bear, it will be a pleasure to enjoy.

## Springboard



Good things can come out of bad situations. Perhaps the worst situation ever was when Jesus hung on the cross, and God turned His back on His only Son. But out of that dark moment came the salvation of anyone who will call on the name of the Lord (Rom. 10:13).

It was a bad situation when the church at Jerusalem rejected Saul because the members feared him and did not believe his testimony of his salvation (Acts 9:26). It was bad for the church in Jerusalem to be persecuted and scattered because of the stoning of Stephen. However, out of these two bad things God brought about many good things.

Out of the scattering of the Jerusalem church came the preaching in Antioch that led to the establishment of a church there. Out of this great church came the mission work that spread the gospel throughout the Roman empire. Out of the rejection of Saul by the Jerusalem church came his availability to Barnabas and his teaching ministry in Antioch. God is in control of every issue, and the end results will be that His will is accomplished. We can have a part in this biblical work by making ourselves available to Him and proudly wearing the name *Christian*.

# The First Mission Work

**Scripture: Acts 13**

**Aim: By the end of the lesson I will understand the biblical teaching of mission work.**

## Start Here



Many things we take for granted are in truth quite special. Mission work is one of those things. Churches do not do mission work because someone decided that this was a good idea. God instructed His churches to do mission work, and the Bible gives us a pattern to follow. If you read the Scriptures that relate to missions carefully, you will see that God did not give His churches an option. This is not a take it or leave it situation. We should use the resources God has placed at our command to accomplish mission work.

The church where you are worshipping this morning is probably in existence because a missionary was sent out to your community. There has been a succession of scriptural churches since Jesus started the first church during His personal ministry. This process will continue until Jesus comes back again, and we should understand what the Bible teaches about it.

As we look at these Scriptures, remember that there are many places of responsibility in missions. We will consider the missionaries themselves, missionary helpers and the sending church. Each has a job to do, and every job is important.

## Take a Closer Look



**The call of God.** Mission work properly begins with the call of God. There were many teachers in the church at Antioch. Saul and Barnabas had been there for over a year, but others were helping them. Every one of these men was doing his best to serve the Lord by teaching and interpreting prophecy. The important point is that God usually calls a busy man. If we have a desire to serve the Lord somewhere else, we need to get



busy right where we are. Look around you. If you see something that needs to be done, do it, and do it right now. Then perhaps God will call you into another field of service.

As these men ministered to the Lord, He chose Saul and Barnabas and called them to a separate work. This was not to suggest that their work would be superior to the work of others. God is no respecter of persons. In His divine wisdom, God uses men where they can best serve. God chooses and men respond. Barnabas and Saul gladly agreed to go where the Lord wanted them to go. So should we. We should always do what the Bible teaches. Then God will lead us through opening and closing doors of opportunity in our lives. God was opening a door to the Gentiles, and Barnabas and Saul were led to go through it. Often the call to special service is made to be a mysterious thing. This was simply a God-given desire put into the hearts of Saul, Barnabas and into the church at Antioch for this special work.

Remember, God can work on all sides of a situation. When God leads a man to go, He also leads a church to send him. God is also working in the hearts of those who will receive the man.

**The response of the church.** The church fasted and prayed about this matter. The members wanted to be certain that sending these men out was the will of God. We should always do whatever is needed to determine the will of God in any matter. We can always be assured that God will help us do His will. After prayer and fasting, the church members laid their hands on Barnabas and Saul and sent them on their way.

Laying hands on someone was a sign of public approval of decisions that had been made. The church at Antioch was saying publicly that it approved of the decision of Barnabas and Saul and would support them in it. We do not know the amount and nature of the physical support the church gave for the needs of these men. We do know that Paul taught in 1 Corinthians 9:14, "Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel." Undoubtedly, the church at Antioch helped in whatever way it could, but no details are given.

The important lesson is that Barnabas and Saul went out with the approval, love and support of the church where they worshiped. Every missionary is entitled to a loving, faithful, supportive, sponsoring church. Mission work is church work. According to God's Word, we cannot do it on our own. We need the prayers and support of all of God's people to do the demanding work of missions.

**The journey begins.** From Antioch, Barnabas and Saul went to Seleucia and then sailed to the island of Cyprus. On Cyprus they came to the city of Salamis. It would be difficult for us to imagine the difficulties of travel in the first century. Any trip was dangerous and costly. There was little communication and not many facilities for travelers. Barnabas and Saul didn't just make a reservation on an airplane and then check into a nice hotel when they arrived.

They had many people to help them in their travels. One of them was John Mark, who had traveled to Antioch with Barnabas and Saul. He also accompanied them on their missionary journey. God had not specifically said to separate John Mark. He was what we might consider a missionary helper. He had an interest in the work of God and wanted to help out in any way he could. There are many things that men and women, who are not missionaries themselves, can do, and any missionary will appreciate their labors. Whether the help is given at home or on the mission field, we should aid those God has called in any way we possibly can.

This first trip of Barnabas and Saul might not seem like much to us today. After all, it was just a few men traveling a few miles, but it set a pattern for centuries of mission endeavor. From that time until now, men have been sent out to faraway places to preach the gospel and establish churches. A church is the agency responsible for sending them, and the men are responsible to their sending church. This pattern worked well for Barnabas and Saul, and it still works for missionaries today.

**Problems, power and solutions.** Whenever we serve the Lord, we can expect opposition. God has never promised the saved a trouble free life, but He has promised to be with us throughout our troubles. When Barnabas and Saul came to Paphos, they encountered two men. One was Sergius Paulus, who was a prudent man and wanted to hear the preaching of Barnabas and Saul. The other was an evil sorcerer named Elymas. Elymas wanted to turn Sergius away from believing in Jesus. He withstood or opposed Barnabas and Saul. We do not know exactly what he did, but he put a stumbling block in the way of these missionaries.

Paul used his apostolic power and caused Elymas to be blind. Paul was trying to keep the work of the Lord from being perverted. This was a contest between Jesus and the devil, not between Paul and Elymas.

With Elymas out of the way, Sergius became a believer. Notice that the Bible says that he was "astonished at the doctrine of the

Lord” (Acts 13:12). It was not seeing the miracle that caused him to believe, it was what Barnabas and Saul preached about Jesus. The gospel “is the power of God unto salvation” (Rom. 1:16). The gospel was working in the heart of Sergius Paulus.



Many Christians give little thought to mission work. It becomes something pastors preach about, and someone else does. Mission work is vital to every church. It is a part of our reason for being here as churches. Every local church has a part in carrying out the commission of Jesus. Jesus did not give the Great Commission to an organization of churches. He gave it to each local, individual body, and each local, individual body or church has a distinct responsibility to carry out this commission.

This is not to suggest that it is wrong for churches to work together to do mission work. One church may not have the resources to support a missionary, other churches can join with this church and help with his support. This is what we call associated work. The important thing is that churches work together as equals. No one church is large enough or strong enough to do all the work of the Lord. Each church, no matter how limited in resources, can have a part in the work of the Lord.

You have a part in mission work. You may be called, like Saul and Barnabas, to be a missionary. If you are, listen to what God is saying to your heart and pledge to go where He wants you to go. You may be a missionary helper, like John Mark. If you have this ability, then use it to help those God has called to do mission work. You may stay at home, like the members of the church at Antioch, and pray and financially support the missionaries. Whatever your role, it is an important one, and you should do all you can to honor the Lord with your service.

## Building Blocks

Do you know any missionaries? What are the names of the missionaries your church supports? If a man wanted to be a missionary, how would he go about it? Where would he begin? What



authorization would he need? These are questions you should be able to answer.

If you don't know any missionaries, ask your teacher or pastor to give you several names and addresses. Write to these men and try to get an understanding of the work they are doing for the Lord. The churches of the American Baptist Association literally have men preaching all over the world.

Find out how your church does mission work. Does your church send out missionaries directly, or does it support the work of men sent by other churches? Make a prayer list of the missionaries supported by your church and ask God to help them.

Ask your pastor or teacher about the process of becoming a missionary. A missionary must have the recommendation or endorsement of a local church. How does this come about? Try to find out just how mission work works. I believe you will be fascinated by what you discover.



“If you got it, a truck brought it” is a slogan on a bumper sticker. This may be true, but a better slogan would be, “If you heard the gospel, it’s because a missionary preached it.” The mission work of Barnabas and Saul led to the preaching of the gospel in Asia, then in Europe, and on to England and from there to America. There is a definite link between the lesson text in Acts and the church where you are worshiping today. This is the power of mission work.

We are a link in this wonderful chain. When we spread the gospel through mission work, we guarantee that there will be a chain of scriptural churches until the second coming of Jesus Christ. We bring honor to Jesus as we follow the pattern He has given in His Word.

# Churches in All Ages

**Scripture: Matthew 16:18; 28:20; Jude 3**

**Aim: By the end of the lesson I will see how truth has been preserved and error introduced.**

## Start Here



Almost two thousand years ago, the disciples of Christ in the church at Antioch were given the name *Christian*. The religious term generally used today is *Christianity*. At that time, the Roman empire ruled the known world. The Romans were pagans who worshiped many gods. Although most of the gods were imaginary, there were many devout worshipers. The pagan religion was established by law and supported by the Roman government.

The Jewish people were no longer a distinct nation but were scattered throughout the world. Even though there was a Temple at Jerusalem, worship had drifted into traditions and formalism. Judaism no longer reflected the great truths of the Old Testament.

When Jesus came, His kingdom was not of this earth. He established a spiritual kingdom that would not exercise power in the realm of the physical but would seek to influence the spiritual part of life. Almost immediately after Jesus ascended back to Heaven, men began to change and pervert the things He had taught. They did this in two ways: one by simply ignoring His commands, the other by adding in the ideas of men. Many of the letters in the New Testament were written to a specific church about various doctrinal errors.

In the twenty centuries since that time, many errors and teachings of men have been introduced into Christianity. Nevertheless, it is still possible to identify a scriptural church and worship in the truth.

## Take a Closer Look



Scriptural churches have the truth because over the years God has preserved it. Jesus promised in Matthew 16:18, "And I say also unto thee, That

thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” There is no greater assurance than the promise of God in His Word. No matter what the devil might do, the truth will always be here. The gates of hell have not prevailed, and there are true churches in the world. There have always been true churches in every age since Jesus’ personal ministry on earth.

**Identifying a true church.** We cannot depend too much on names for church identification. Names are often given to Christians by people of the world and may not accurately reflect the nature of the churches. We can depend on the doctrines or beliefs of individual churches. When we examine a core set of New Testament doctrines, we find that people in all ages have believed and practiced biblical principles to the best of their ability. Some of the marks of a true church are

1. Christ organized His church during His personal ministry. He gave His disciples the authority to organize churches from churches as God’s Word spread.

2. There are only two officers in a true church, pastors and deacons.

3. There are only two ordinances in a true church, baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

4. Each church is an independent, self-governing body. No church has authority over another.

5. Only saved people are suitable candidates for baptism and church membership.

6. The Scriptures are an all-sufficient guide for our faith and practice.

7. Christ is the Head of the church, not any governmental authority.

8. Each individual believer has the liberty of conscience to study the Bible and to determine its meaning.

9. Churches are local in nature; there is no universal, invisible church.

10. Churches and governments should be separated; there should be no union of church and state.

This list is not all-inclusive, but it provides some important reference points for any study of church history. Jesus did not give a formal name to His church. Identification of a true church should be made by examining its doctrinal position, not by its name. This will give a much clearer idea of whether or not a church follows the pattern of the Scriptures.



Over the years many errors have been introduced into churches. Men have tried to either improve or destroy the principles of God's Word. The reasons vary, but the result is the same. Truth is truth and error is error. The compromise of God's Word always ends in failure. As we read in 2 Corinthians 6:14, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?" If true believers join with the unsaved, confusion will be the result. If we know the truth, we have an obligation to practice the truth.

**Origins of denominations.** There have been true churches in all ages, but other denominations have also come into existence. If any organization, identified as a church, has a beginning other than with Jesus and His disciples then that organization cannot be a true church. To be recognized by God as a true church, it must meet two tests. First, it must be doctrinally correct according to the Scriptures. Then it must be historically correct. A true church must be in the succession of other true churches that have followed the biblical pattern.

If some man or group of men decides to begin a church, it would not be valid. This has happened many times over the years. One of the most notable events was the Protestant Reformation. At that time, many men came out of the Catholic church and organized churches of their own. They protested against the doctrines of Catholicism and were given the name *Protestant*. Baptists have never been Protestants. There were true churches preaching and practicing the truth before, during and after the Protestant Reformation. These organizations were right to come out of false doctrine, but they were wrong to deny that there were true churches that they could have joined. This has led to a great deal of confusion in the Christian world.

The important thing to remember is that any denomination established by men cannot be a true, scriptural church.

**A great price paid.** Over the years many evil people have used force in an attempt to hinder converts. One of the first examples of this is found in Acts chapter 7. Stephen preached to the Jews that Jesus was not just another Jewish prophet, but that His system of worship was a replacement for Judaism. They hated Stephen's message so much that they stoned him to death. From that time on, literally thousands of men and women have been killed for their faith. Even today in some parts of the world, Christians are being persecuted and killed.

These men and women died because they believed. They would not casually set their faith aside, even to save their lives. In our own country, just over two hundred years ago, preachers were put into jail for preaching what the Bible plainly teaches.

We should know and always remember that freedom is not free. We have the truth, and we have the right to preach the truth, but this did not come without the great sacrifice of countless saints who put their principles of faith above personal comfort and safety.



When you study church history and the horrible things done to the believers who were persecuted, it is easy to hate and to be intolerant toward false doctrine. We should not tolerate false doctrine of men, but we must always be careful to

make a difference between what people believe and the people themselves. God hates sin, but He loves sinners. We can hate the false and evil doctrines that cause many people to refuse Christ as Savior, but we must always love the people involved.

Jesus died for the Pharisees, Sadducees, Romans and even for the men who nailed Him to the cross. He never once gave even the slightest hint that He approved of the things these men believed and practiced. Jesus spoke out forcefully against false doctrine on many occasions, but He loved the individuals while hating the system.

A good illustration is found in our attitude toward disease. We can hate tuberculosis, diphtheria, polio and typhoid fever. We will do everything possible to eliminate these horrible diseases, but that doesn't mean that we hate the people who have these diseases. In fact, just the opposite should be true. Instead of hating a man because he is ill, we should show compassion and try our best to see that he gets well. This should also be our attitude toward false doctrine. We should hate the wrong teaching, but we should love the people involved. They need to be exposed to the truth so they can believe and be made whole.

## Building Blocks

One of the best and most positive steps you can take regarding truth is to believe it for yourself. You are either a part of the problem

or a part of the solution. If you do not believe and practice the truth, you are a part of the problem. You may not know the truth. In that case, you should seriously search the Scriptures and recognize that they are testifying about Jesus. When you have found the truth, you must practice the truth. It does little good to know what's right and then refuse to do it. Hell is full of people who knew how to be saved, but still rejected Jesus.

If you know and practice the truth, then you become a part of an unbroken chain of Bible believers linking the personal ministry of Jesus to the future second coming of Jesus. When Christ comes again, His true churches will be an important part of His kingdom. We can know and practice the truth about scriptural churches so that we are ready for our Lord to appear, no matter when He comes.

Being faithful is a matter of believing right and doing right. Neither will substitute for the other. Real, living faith will always result in practice or some activity that is caused by our faith. Faith without works is dead, but faith that changes us is living. A living faith honors God and continues from generation to generation.



Truth is one generation thick. If we do not preach it and pass it along to others, it will die when we die. Jesus has promised that this will not happen and that Satan will not prevail. However, it can happen to an individual. The gates of hell will not prevail against the churches of Jesus Christ, but they can prevail against an individual believer. This does not mean that we

will lose our salvation, but we can lose our love for and appreciation of the truth of the Bible. We can get so backslidden that the worship of Christ through a scriptural church doesn't matter to us anymore.

If we backslide, we should ask God to restore our love for the truth. One of the best ways to accomplish this is to have a part in spreading the truth to others. When we become strong advocates of truth, we strengthen ourselves as well as those to whom we witness. See to it that what you know about Jesus doesn't perish when you do. Pass it on to others.



# A Christian's Future

**Scripture: John 14:1-10**

**Aim: By the end of the lesson I will discuss death and the second coming of Christ.**

## Start Here



Two great constants of life are change and the uncertainty that comes with it. Just when we get our lives arranged like we want them, things are turned upside down. The senior in high school turns into a college freshman in a few short weeks. The college graduate, proud of his accomplishment after years of study, gets a job only to find out that he is the low man on the totem pole at work. You get the picture.

Sometimes we react favorably to change. After all, change is not always bad, but sometimes our lives can be really upset by the changes that come into them. We need some steadying influence to prepare us and to help us deal with change when it comes. We can find this influence in our faith in Christ.

This does not mean that things will never change for a Christian or that all changes will be pleasant for those who are believers. What it does mean is that we have a great future in Christ. We can always look forward to the precious promises Jesus has given in His Word.

We can't avoid the changes in life and the uncertainties that come with them, but we can always look ahead to the things Jesus has promised. We can be assured by God's Word and the Holy Spirit witnessing in our hearts that those who believe in Christ will ultimately be with Him for eternity.

## Take a Closer Look



When Jesus spoke the words of the text, He and His disciples were on the verge of a tremendous change. Jesus was about to go to the cross and die for the sins of the world. The disciples were about

to go into the world and carry out the commission of preaching the gospel. The public ministry of Jesus was at an end, and things would never be the same for these men. One of the disciples would betray Jesus, and most of them would deny Him in the next few hours. The world was also changing. The crucifixion, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ would permanently change human society.

In this momentous time, there were troubled hearts. No doubt the disciples were wondering what would become of them, and what would they do without the physical presence of Jesus? How could they go on without Him? To answer these questions and to give us hope, Jesus responded with the message in the text.

**Let belief conquer doubt.** Doubt feeds on doubt. If we begin to doubt the things we believe, we can fall into deep depression. Jesus first told these men to take control of their hearts. Do not let your heart be troubled by the things that may bother your mind or perplex your body. An untroubled heart is always the result of true belief. These men believed in God, and they needed to believe in Christ as well.

This is not the kind of belief that simply admits the facts. There is a kind of faith that doesn't change us much. In James 2:19 we read, "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble." This is the kind of faith that doesn't offer us any hope. The kind of faith that Jesus urged will touch the inner man and change our lives. This kind of faith is linked to hope and love, and it always helps us deal with the things that trouble us. Whenever we face great doubt, we also need great faith—we can find it in Jesus.

**Let God's promise sustain.** We are not asked to have faith in faith. We are asked to have faith in the concrete promises Jesus made. Jesus promised that places in God's house are prepared and waiting for God's people. He strengthened this promise by saying, "If it were not so, I would have told you" (John 14:2).

God does not have a secret agenda. The Bible is the revelation of all that we can know about God. When we get to Heaven, we will not find that these things are no longer true or that there are great secrets that change everything that God has shared with us. Jesus told the truth and that truth will never change. We can trust it, and we can anchor the spirit that abides in us on it. As Jesus said in Matthew 24:35, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." Things may change, but the Word of God will not.

How do we stay sane in a crazy world? We need an anchor for our souls, and we can find it in the Word of God. When we place our faith in Jesus, we are not just learning how to deal with life; we are preparing for eternity. When we have prepared for life's greatest change—our own death, then we can deal with the smaller changes that come our way with confidence that God has something better waiting for us in eternity.

**Look for the second coming.** It's natural, whenever things are changing around us, to have certain hopes and expectations. Many people are expecting things that have little chance of happening. Some are looking for wealth or fame, but this kind of fortune seldom comes to most people. Perhaps on a more personal scale, there is something that might happen, and you are looking forward to it. Such hopes can indeed offer us relief in times of trouble and change, but they are always temporary. We might gain the whole world, but we will still die, and all the wealth and fame in the world cannot help us.

The child of God looks forward to another far more blessed event. This is the rapture of the saints. He said that His coming is as certain as His leaving. John 14:3 declares, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." Did Jesus go away? Did He die on the cross? Did He ascend into Heaven? If the answer to these questions is yes, then we have assurance that He will return.

But the assurance is not only that Jesus will come back. He will come back for us. He is coming so that those who trust in Him can be with Him. We can waste our hope on things that aren't likely to happen at all, or we can have a sure thing based on the promises of God. This is the sure thing. Jesus is coming again to receive to Himself those who are His. We can count on His promise coming true. Through personal faith in Jesus, we can be assured of being one of those for whom a place has been prepared in Heaven.

**Accept the promises.** When Jesus spoke these inspired words of encouragement, men questioned Him. Thomas did not know the way Jesus spoke of, and Philip wanted to see God and be satisfied. Jesus' response was that these men had to have faith for these promises to be real. Faith is the key that unlocks the door to the blessings of assurance. All the help in the world will not help you personally, unless you take it. When we trust Christ as our Savior and follow Him as our Lord, we are accepting the promises He gave



and demonstrating in our lives that we believe that these promises are real.



All of us face changes throughout our lives. We change schools; we change jobs. Sometimes the changes are beyond our control. Our parents can get divorced, lose their jobs or be transferred to another town where we have no friends. Some of the changes we face aren't fair. We don't want them, and we can't stop them. This was what was happening to the disciples of Jesus when the text was given.

The disciples were in Jerusalem to observe the Passover, and they would never be the same after the events of that week. Jesus would die, be buried and rise again. Peter, James and John would assume new roles of leadership in the church in Jerusalem. Thousands of people would come and join the church in Jerusalem. The whole world would be turned upside down, and, from that time on, the world would be touched by the life and ministry of Jesus. Today, the changes of that time are still being felt, even in the church where you are worshipping this morning.

But for these men and for us, change does not have to hold our hearts hostage. What do we do when things change and we don't want them to change? We trust God and look forward to the good things God has in store for all those who trust Him. The less we understand our daily lives, the more we should place our faith in the Word of God and look forward to the second coming of our Lord.

## **Building Blocks**

How do we get this confidence in our hearts? How do we learn to deal with the changes that are inevitable in our lives? We do it through prayer. Prayer is our access to the promises of God. Jesus taught us to ask God for whatever we need, especially our spiritual needs. If we need confidence that things will be all right, we can ask God for it. If we need help in maintaining our witness in a difficult situation, we can ask God to help us. Remember, God loves you and He has a wonderful future waiting for you. We can ask Him for the things that we need to help us live for Him.

Then we have to be willing to keep His commandments. We do not obey because we want a certain reward; we do it because we love Jesus. When we obey Jesus' commands, we have access to the comforting ministry of the Holy Spirit. This is a simple and profound concept. The Holy Spirit leads us to make positive decisions for Christ. When we do, there is a comfort that literally passes human understanding that comes into our souls. There is trouble and doubt in doing wrong, but there is comfort and security in doing right. The world may never understand you, but, in your heart, you know that you have followed the Lord and that knowledge will help you.

Prayer and obedience are definite, positive steps that you can take to prepare yourself for the changes that you will encounter in your life.



What does the future hold? No one but God knows for sure. We may be headed for good experiences or we may be headed for disaster. But no matter what the future holds, it holds no terror for the child of God. Once the apostle Paul was in prison in Rome, he was eventually executed there.

From prison, God inspired him to write the thoughtful words of Philippians 1:21, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

We have it in a few words. We either live or die. If we live, we should live to serve Christ and earn an eternal reward that cannot be compared to anything on earth. If we die, we will be received into Heaven to live eternally with Jesus and the saved of all the ages. There is no way for a child of God to lose.

This faith will give you a great attitude and that attitude will sustain you, no matter what changes may come your way.

# HIGH SCHOOL

STUDENT

SUNDAY SCHOOL  
SUMMER QUARTER, 2013  
JUNE, JULY, AUGUST



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