

CHAPTER 3

The true New Testament church!

In this chapter, we wish to present a picture of the true New Testament church as it is given to us in the scriptures, established by the Lord Jesus Christ and His apostles, after His crucifixion for our sins and His resurrection from the dead. Jesus had said to Peter, **“And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this [Gk., this the] rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it. I will give you [Gk., singular] the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you [sing.] shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you [sing.] shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven”** (Mt. 16:18-19 NAS). This scripture has been misinterpreted by the vast majority of the church for centuries because of our rebellion and carnality. The Roman Catholics have interpreted the church to mean an organization of man built upon Peter, built with the traditions of men invalidating the Word of God, and have built Babylon in all of its mass confusion. The Protestants, on the other hand, (knowing that the true church is certainly not the Roman Catholic denomination of man with all of its sordid history and persecution of the true saints of God) have rejected the truth that Jesus built His church upon Peter; and they have in large part not

only rejected Peter's words, but also the words of the other apostolic writers, especially Paul who was built upon Ananias who was built upon Peter and **"the eleven,"** and they have built other carnal organizations.

Very simply, Peter was chosen by the Lord to preach His Word first to establish the church; first to the Jews, on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), and first to the Gentiles when he preached to Cornelius and his household (Acts 10). The Jews knew that Peter had been used to establish the church with them, when on the day of Pentecost Peter had preached to the crowd gathered from so many parts of the known world and three thousand souls had been added to the church, the "called out" people of God. There is to be only one church, so Peter confirms that this interpretation included all of the non-Jews when he says to the apostles and elders of the Jerusalem church that he had been chosen by God to open the door of God's kingdom with the keys of the gospel message to the Gentiles, also. Peter said, **"Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us"** (Acts 15:7-8 NAS).

Many Christians are fearful of acknowledging that the church is built upon Peter because they see the church as a man-made organization, structured as a congregation or denomination, instead of the spiritual structure that God reveals to us in the Word. They confess that the church is built upon Christ only — but that is not what Christ said, or what the scriptures teach. Christ is the bed-rock foundation, of course, as the scripture says, **"For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ** (I Cor. 3:11 NAS); but, then upon that foundation is Peter and the other apostles, then the prophets, and then all of the other saints of God, as the scriptures also say, **"So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone"** (Eph. 2:19-20 NAS).

One might ask, "What is the real importance of this?" The answer is that it teaches us a matter of relationship — relationship with God and Christ and the Holy Spirit, and the proper relationship with one another and the leadership of His church. Many of those who believe that the church is the Roman Catholic Church built upon Peter have no relationship with the Father,

Christ, or the Holy Spirit; God is only part of a head theology. This was the case of the Jews who had a correct theology about God in many respects, but did not have a relationship with God. In fact, when they professed to be children of God through Abraham, Jesus denied it, and said, **“You are of your father the devil,”** because their works were of the devil (Jn. 8:44 NAS). One has only to look at their fruits, as Jesus said, to know them. These kind of Roman Catholics can not have a spiritual relationship with true Christians either; in fact, in many places in the world they are persecuting and killing them. Those who are within the Roman Catholic structure and are true Christians, and desire a right relationship with other Christians, are taught that this would only be possible by the others becoming Roman Catholic, and this is impossible for spiritual Christians to do. Now, the sad fact is that this situation is true of most others who are part of some Christian denomination or man-made structure of the church; they understand their “Church” to be the only correct one, and others ought to join them to be saved, or at least be really “good Christians.” Unless they see the true church is the body of Christ, and then understand how it is to be structured, they also fall victims to the same destructive, carnal theologies. And as a result their relationship with other Christians is adversely affected, and thus their relationship with God. Jesus said, **“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’”** (Mt. 22:37-39 NAS). Jesus also said if we were going to be known as disciples of His, that we are to **“have love for one another”** (Jn. 13:35 NAS). And if we are going to love one another as He loves us, we must first love God with all of our hearts, and that means we must be willing to know and obey His Word! (Jn. 14:21-24). If we are to have proper relationships with God and other Christians, we must understand proper apostolic church structure. Moreover, if we are to understand it, we must first be willing to practice it (Jn. 7:17). So, if our hearts are set on loving and thus obeying the Lord, let us now look at the proper structure of the true New Testament church.

The structure of the New Testament church is very simple! There is only one church, both in heaven and on earth. For those of us on the earth, since there is only one church, the only thing that is to separate Christians is distance. (We will not be talking about sin and its effect in this discussion.) Therefore, all of the Christians in one locality are to be united, they are one church. All

of the people that were **“of God”** were named with His name and identified simply by their location — the New Testament churches were identified individually by the city they lived **“in”** or **“at”** — such as the church **“in Jerusalem”** or **“at Jerusalem”** (NAS, Acts 11:22; 8:1), **“the church of God which is at Corinth”** (I Cor. 1:2), **“the seven churches that are in Asia”** (Rev. 1:4), one of which was **“the church in Ephesus”** (Rev. 2:1), and others. Sometimes the church was identified simply by the fact that they were the holy and faithful people in the Lord, such as when Paul wrote to these same people and did not use the word **“church”**, but wrote **“to the saints [holy ones] who are at Ephesus, and who are faithful in Christ Jesus”** (Eph. 1:1 NAS). Now, what about the governmental structure?

New Testament rule.

In this section we want to look at several scriptures to begin to see the beauty and simplicity of the governmental structure of the New Testament church.

First, Isaiah prophesied these familiar and wonderful words:

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.”
(Isa. 9:6-7 KJV)

Here we have it so very clearly, that the Lord Jesus Christ has the authority to rule over His church, and that this authority on earth is until the end of the age and for ever. Jesus said:

“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father

and [of] the Son and [of] the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

(Mt. 28:18-20 NAS)

Recognizing that the Lord Jesus has the authority in His church, how then does He delegate this authority, and to whom?

First, we see that He ordained apostles and gave authority to them, and they went everywhere under His authority — preaching, teaching, baptizing, and making disciples (Mk. 3:14-15; Mt. 28:18-20; Jn. 15:16). As the church grew, it was necessary to establish local rulers because the apostles would be traveling in order to establish the church properly in other places, and so we find elders (Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23).

Now the questions arise, “How were elders ordained? Whose authority were they under? What are the qualifications?” It is first stated that this was the ministry of the apostles. Paul, who was a teacher, and Barnabas, a prophet (both ministering in the church in Antioch), were set apart by the Holy Spirit as apostles (Acts 13:1-4; 14:4, 14; I Tim. 2:7). And this is how, we might add, that apostles are ordained today, as well as the other ministry gifts; they are ordained by Jesus, speaking by the Holy Spirit, often through an anointed servant. Paul wrote that after the resurrection and Jesus ascended on high **“He gave gifts to men. . . . And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors [shepherds] and teachers”** (Eph. 4:8, 11 NAS).

Again, the apostles were the ones responsible for ordaining elders. The first occurrence written of this was through Paul and Barnabas as they prayed and fasted. We read, **“And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed,”** and they then continued on their apostolic journey (Acts 14:23-24 KJV). Also, this responsibility is very plainly given to us in Paul’s letters to two younger apostles, Timothy and Titus. But, let us first establish their apostolic ministry because tradition often tells us that Timothy and Titus were pastors, or bishops, but this is not true. That teaching is from the Babylonish church, sometimes inserted as superscriptions before the Roman Catholic scriptures, or subscriptions after the King James Version, in Paul’s letters to them.

Paul’s salutation in his first letter to the Thessalonians reads:

“Paul and Silas and Timothy,” and then he identifies all three of them as being apostles when he states: **“Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ”** (I Thes. 1:1; 2:6 KJV). Other post-ascension apostles positively identified besides Paul, Barnabas, Silas, and Timothy, are Titus, Epaphroditus, James the Lord’s brother, and Apollos (II Cor. 8:23 lit. Gk.; Phil. 2:25 lit. Gk.; Gal. 1:19; I Cor. 4:6-9). And from the way these men traveled and ministered, we can come to understand their apostolic ministry. From the similar instructions to both Timothy and Titus, we can understand more clearly the apostolic ordination of elders and ministry.

Now, we want to see several things from the scriptures just given or referred to. First, the elders were ordained to serve the people of God in a local area, identified as a city or church. They were not ordained to serve a congregation separate from other Christians in their area. We were given the scripture where Paul and Barnabas ordained elders in every church (Acts 14:23), and in Paul’s letter to Titus, he instructed the younger apostle who was ministering on the island of Crete to **“set in order what remains, and appoint elders in every city as I directed you”** (Tit. 1:5 NAS). We can realize several things from these verses. One, it confirms the reality that the body of Christ in a church or in a city are synonymous, as God’s people are to be one, and not divided. Another thing is that the people were considered a church before they had elders and everything was in order. The church is simply the people of God, not a particular structure. Also, Titus was a junior apostle functioning under the authority of a senior apostle, Paul. And as an apostle, Titus was responsible for ordaining men as elders who met certain qualifications; and Titus was to function with his apostolic authority in exhorting and reproving them and the rest of the church, including older men and women, as needed (Tit. 1:13; 2:15). Paul wrote to Titus, **“These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you.”** This was similar to the word Paul gave to the young apostle, Timothy, when he wrote, **“These things command and teach. Let no man despise thy youth”** (I Tim. 4:11-12 KJV).

Another important practice that we learn from the scriptures that we have just given, and the teaching on **“one mind, and one accord,”** is that the apostles taught the elders that they were to look to the Lord Jesus in their midst as the Chief Shepherd and get their directions from Him. So when the apostles left, the elders

were to know how to function and to be functioning directly under the authority and person of the Lord Jesus, not the apostles from a distance; and of course this means that neither were they to be under the authority of what has been developed since that time — various man-made, independent, or denominational hierarchies.

We also need to see that after an apostle left an area, the local elders were commanded to maintain the proper apostolic doctrines that they had been taught, and that other apostles might come through the area who would also function with them in the one united church in their city. We read that the church in Corinth had been founded by Paul, and yet also received the apostolic ministries of both Apollos and Peter; but the church was admonished not to be divided into groups following just one of these apostles, nor for some to separate themselves and think they were only following Christ (I Cor. 1:9-15; 3:4-7; 4:15; 9:1-2). Paul wrote, **“Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree, and there be no divisions among you, but you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe’s people, that there are quarrels among you. Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, ‘I am of Paul,’ and ‘I of Apollos,’ and ‘I of Cephas,’ and ‘I of Christ’”** (I Cor. 1:10-12 NAS).

The traveling ministry of Apollos which becomes apostolic is interesting as it starts with him **“speaking and teaching”** with a limited understanding of the Christian faith at Ephesus where Priscilla and Aquila heard him and **“took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately”** (Acts 18:24 - 19:7 NAS). Apollos then goes over to Achaia and we read the first account of his helping the church in Corinth which Paul had established. It was after Apollos left that Paul writes to the Corinthians his first letter in which we find that Apollos has at some point been ordained as an apostle, and Paul uses Apollos and himself as examples in teaching the Corinthians (I Cor. 1:10-17; 3:1 - 4:14). Paul confirms specifically the apostolic ministry of Apollos when he writes, **“Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that in us you might learn not to exceed what is written, in order that no one of you might become arrogant in behalf of one against the other. . . . For, I think, God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death”** (I Cor. 4:6, 9 NAS).

Paul also gives us insight that Apollos is travelling directly under the Holy Spirit (as when Paul and Barnabas had been called

into their apostolic ministries, Acts 13:1-4; 14:4, 14), while Timothy, a young apostle, is travelling directly under Paul's authority when he writes, **"For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord"** (4:17), and then in concluding the letter writes, **"Now if Timothy comes, see that he is with you without cause to be afraid; for he is doing the Lord's work, as I also am. Let no one therefore despise him. But send him on his way in peace, so that he may come to me; for I expect him with the brethren. But concerning Apollos our brother, I encouraged him greatly to come to you with the brethren; and it was not at all his desire to come now, but he will come when he has opportunity"** (I Cor. 16:10-12 NAS).

Paul's love and concern for Apollos, however, is evidenced in the one other reference about Apollos in the scripture, when he instructs the young apostle, Titus, **"Diligently help Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way so that nothing is lacking for them"** (Tit. 3:13 NAS).

When the apostles were in a city where there was an established church, they were with the elders as co-elders (*συμπρεσβυτερος*, *sumpresbuteros*; *sum* means "with" and *presbuteros* means "presbyter," an older man; therefore *sumpresbuteros* is translated "fellow elder," I Pet. 5:1 NAS); and when the apostles left the city, **"they commended [παρεθεντο, *parethento*, committed, intrusted] them [the elders] to the Lord, on whom they believed"** (Acts 14:23 KJV).

Now that we have seen that the apostles ordained and instructed the elders, let us look at several scriptures that prove that the elders were indeed the shepherds (Latin: pastors), and also called bishops; that these were not separate offices in a hierarchy. Peter wrote, **"Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight [επισκοπουντες, *episkopountes* (this Greek word is not found here in many Greek texts, including Panin), it is the participial form of *episkopos*; *epi* meaning "over," *skopos* meaning "seer," therefore it means "functioning as overseers"; often translated bishops — this word being derived from the Medieval Latin, (e)biscopus; e.g. the Episcopal Church is ruled by bishops; the Presbyterian Church is ruled by *πρεσβυτεροι*, *presbuteroi*, presbyters, meaning elders; but in the New Testament church these were the same men, the elders were the bishops who shepherded the one flock in each city] **not****

under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (I Pet. 5:1-5 NAS).

When Paul called the elders of the church in Ephesus over to the island of Miletus he said to them, "**Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers** [*επισκοπους, episkopous, overseers, bishops*] **to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them [themselves]. Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. And now I commend [*παρατιθεμαι, paratithemai, commit, intrust*] you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified"** (Acts 20:28-32 NAS).

Notice again that the elders were to be the bishops and shepherds of the one flock, one church, in the city of Ephesus. The people had been taught "**publicly and from house to house,**" so there were many different places where they were meeting, but there was only one church in the city! (Acts 20:20). Paul's public meeting place was the school of Tyrannus, and he also had personally gone around the city from house to house (Acts 19:9).

One might wonder why there are three different words used to describe a leader of the local church, but this can be easily understood when we compare their functions to a man, the leader of the family. A married man is the elder of the family, the older man, and that is precisely what the Greek word for elder (*πρεσβυτερος, presbuteros*) means, literally, "older man"; and it is always in the masculine and never in the feminine when referring to an elder of the church. He is also the overseer of the family, and that is what the Greek word for bishop means (*επισκοπος, episkopos, epi* meaning "over," *skopos* meaning "seer"), the one responsible in taking the oversight, the supervisor, of the family. He is also the one responsible for providing, protecting, caring for, and feeding

the family; this makes him the shepherd of the family. [The Greek word ποιμην, *poimen*, is always translated shepherd in the New Testament except one time. That exception is when it refers to a ministry brought into our understanding from the Roman system, and therefore is from the Latin translation of the word for shepherd, “pastor,” being brought into our English with even the same spelling. It is given in a list of four other ministries, and therefore, if this is not known so as to be able to trace the word in scripture for proper understanding, it cannot be interpreted except by tradition (Eph. 4:11).] Continuing on with the different words describing the different functions of a man, we might add that a man is also the husband, but this is only toward his wife, not the children. Only Christ is spoken of as our husband corporately (II Cor. 11:2-3); and we, the church, are His bride (Isa. 54:5; Jer. 31:32; Rev. 19:7; 21:2, 9). An elder of the church is never the husband of more than one woman, for the scriptures say he must be “**the husband of one wife**” (I Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:6). Therefore, a man is only the head of his wife, never a church; only Christ is head of “a” or “the” church (Eph. 5:23).

To further confirm the fact that an elder is also a bishop and shepherd, we find the words “elder” and “bishop” used together in referring to the same position and describing the same functions when qualifications are given to Timothy and Titus (I Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9). Paul wrote, “**a bishop**” (I Tim. 3:2 KJV), and “**ordain elders . . . for a bishop**” (Tit. 1:7, 9 KJV).

Elders are worthy of double pay when working hard in studying and teaching the Word of God; for Paul wrote, “**Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour** [Gk. *τιμησ*, *times*, value, and referring to money in this context and elsewhere (I Tim. 5:3, 9, 16, 18; Mt. 15:4-9)], **especially they who labour in the word and doctrine**” (I Tim. 5:17 KJV).

And as overseers, elders are given the responsibility to rule, they are prepared for the function of being a bishop by first successfully overseeing their own family before overseeing the family of God. Paul wrote, “**A bishop then must be . . . one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)**” (I Tim. 3:2-5 KJV).

In conclusion of this point of elders being both overseers and shepherds, we can see this when there are only two major ministries of oversight in a church, a local city church, given in Paul’s greeting to the church in Philippi. He wrote, “**Paul, and**

Timotheus [Gk. for Timothy], **the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops [overseers] and deacons [servants]**" (Phil. 1:1 KJV). The bishops (overseers), which are the elders and pastors (shepherds), have the oversight of the church as a whole, which includes the spiritual food; the deacons, the word taken from the Greek word for servants (*διακονοι, diakonoi*), have the oversight of serving the physical food. Although the deacons (servants) may be effective preachers and ministers in the spiritual realm (such as Stephen, Acts 6:1 - 7:60), they are not ruling elders of the church. When we see positions in the church as callings and ministry gifts to serve the people of God, instead of offices with titles to be served, we shall better understand what has become traditionally confusing because of our Babylonish backgrounds and unscriptural translations.

New Testament meeting.

In the New Testament scriptures we find that the church, the Christians, met in many different places, but primarily in the homes of believers. Although there were public gatherings, most of the meeting and fellowship was done in the family homes of the family of God. It was here that the believers met regularly, most of them daily, for fellowship, prayer, ministering to one another, and breaking bread with one another. In larger meeting places where more could come together, if not all of the believers from a local community, there would be more of the same, but naturally the Holy Spirit (since He was available to direct all meetings as well as the believers themselves) would have each meeting's agenda appropriate for those present, and would direct according to the various ministry gifts present. There was not any standard ritual or agenda set by man or tradition, but each meeting was under the headship of our Lord Jesus Christ who was present and ministering by His Spirit. The activity of the Holy Spirit was manifested continually as the believers worshipped the Father in spirit and truth, and songs of praise and adoration to God were an important part of the meeting. After people came together, at the time when they started to focus on God and wait upon Him (to look together to Him in a meeting), it was only natural to enter His presence with praise and thanksgiving, and once they had entered in corporately, to continue to look to Him for direction from His

throne. It is only tradition and teaching, supported by pulpits and pews, that have most Christians today looking to man for direction and everything else. We have built structures to exalt man, spiritual thrones for our leaders and often actual ones, and wonder why there is so little response from His throne. We must humble ourselves and pray, turn from our wicked ways and seek His face, and He will restore us, and much more.

Let us now look at the scriptures which support these truths. In the same chapter where we find the first tremendous growth of the church (the chapter after we find the church praying and waiting on God to begin with), we find that God did it by pouring out His Spirit upon the disciples, and multitudes came to know the Lord. They were preached to with signs from heaven, in sin-convicting power, baptized in water, and received the Holy Spirit as there were three thousand souls added that day to the church. The very next verse gives us the answer as to what believers should then do. **“And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer[s]”** (Acts 2:42 NAS). The next verses confirm that the believers met together in their homes daily as the preachers also proclaimed the gospel publicly. And their commitment in Christian community was with such grace, and God moved through them in such power, that it has astounded the church ever since.

“And everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together, and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions, and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. And day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

(Acts 2:43-47 NAS)

And this grace was not just momentary, or incidental, for we read as it continued:

“And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak the word of God with boldness. And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own; but all things were common property to them. And with great power the apostles were giving witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales, and lay them at the apostles’ feet; and they would be distributed to each, as any had need.” (Acts 4:31-35 NAS)

This pattern of public proclamation together with home ministry continued in spite of severe persecution. Even though the apostles were beaten for it, we read that **“Every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ”** (Acts 5:42 NAS). We see this practice of the church meeting in homes (sharing in fellowship, meals, and prayers, as the apostles travelled from house to house teaching) confirmed in the account of Peter’s imprisonment after James was killed. We read that although there was only one church in Jerusalem, it met in many different homes. Although **“the church at Jerusalem”** is spoken of in the singular, and **“prayer for him was being made fervently by the [one] church to God,”** it was being accomplished by the thousands of people in the many private homes of the believers where they gathered together in small groups to avoid the persecution (Acts 11:22; 12:5, 12, 17). We read that after Peter was released by the angel of the Lord in answer to their prayers, **“he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark, where many were gathered together and were praying”** (Acts 12:12 NAS). And after he told them what had happened, **“he said, ‘Report these things to James and the brethren.’ And he departed and went to another place,”** confirming in this history of the original New Testament church the pattern of home meetings (Acts 12:17 NAS).

Paul followed this same pattern, though he was also persecuted for it. He tells the elders of Ephesus:

“You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house, solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.”

(Acts 20:18-21 NAS)

And this apostolic pattern was not because they did not have sufficient funds in Ephesus to build a Christian synagogue, because they destroyed occult books alone worth over fifty thousand days' wages (Acts 19:19; Mt. 20:2).

We see that Paul taught this pattern by both word and example, and throughout his letters we read that it was continued by those he discipled.

“The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house” (I Cor. 16:19 NAS). Written from Ephesus about A.D. 55-57.

“Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who for my life risked their own necks, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles; also greet the church that is in their house” (Rom. 16:3-5 NAS). Written in A.D. 58 after they had moved to Rome.

“Gaius, host to me and to the whole church, greets you” (Rom. 16:23 NAS). Written from Corinth where Gaius was able to accommodate the entire Christian community at times in his home.

“Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea and also Nympha and the church that is in her house” (Col. 4:15 NAS). Another scripture confirming that women may host the church in their own house (Acts 12:12).

“To Philemon our beloved brother and fellow

worker . . . and to the church in your house: Grace to you" (Phile. 1:1-3 NAS). Here the apostle again confirms the fundamental practice of leaders and those working in the gospel to regularly host the church in their own homes.

Now that we have seen so very clearly in the scriptures that the Christians met primarily in homes for fellowship, prayer, ministering to one another, and breaking bread with one another, let us consider briefly why.

Let us ask ourselves, how much fellowship takes place at most Sunday morning meetings? Not much, as it is hard to fellowship with the back of someone's neck, even if we've hugged it in a brief greeting. Services start and end on a schedule that does not facilitate for much real fellowship. An informal home setting does! And that is where we can really get to know one another — and ourselves, our visions, our hearts in serving the Lord.

Let us ask ourselves, how much prayer takes place on Sunday morning for the real needs of the congregation? Not much, as it takes personal sharing and different people praying to accomplish this, not just the leader. Again, the home is a wonderful place to share and pray about all that anyone might have upon their hearts. And prayer is to be the main practice of the church, not preaching and teaching. Jesus said, **"Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a robbers' den"** (Mk. 11:17 NAS; Isa. 56:7; Jer. 7:11; Mt. 21:13; Lk. 19:46). It was not to be a public building for preaching, as important as this is, but the church is the people, to be meeting as He directs! New Testament preaching took place more outside the meetings, in the public arena, than inside, as recorded in the scriptures. What we really call churches today are not churches, but privately owned corporate buildings, used for the (semi-private) proclamation of the Word of God (hopefully); but the real functions of the believers still take place in homes, though only to a very small degree because they are not only not being taught, but actually discouraged or prevented from meeting as the Lord teaches us in the scriptures and by His Spirit!

Next, let us ask ourselves, how much ministering to one another takes place on Sunday morning? Not much, as it is also done mostly by leaders, if at all. [And we might ask the question, "Who and what kind of leaders are there?" Leaders are usually

controlled by who owns the buildings. They are often trained and controlled by denominations as to what they can do and teach, and they come and go as denominational headquarters directs; or leaders are controlled by a small group of local people, sometimes but not always including the pastor himself, who has responsibility for the building; or if owned by the “pastor,” he controls the message and the ministry, and the people come and go.] But the home is such a wonderful place to minister to one another, in the privacy of a small gathering where certain needs can and will be made known, but will not be revealed in a large public gathering.

And let us ask ourselves, how much breaking of bread together is there on Sunday morning? Very, very little, if any! An occasional meal is served in a basement, but those are seldom, and usually not much time for fellowship is scheduled when they do occur.

Now, we have briefly reviewed three of the four major practices of the early church: **“And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer[s]”** (Acts 2:42 NAS), and ministry to one another. Now, let us ask ourselves, “How much of the apostles’ teaching is done today?” It might surprise you, but very little of the pertinent truths. This is evident in the neglect of the other three major practices of the early church, and the lack of current church practices lining up with the Word of God or with one another. The very fact that there are so many differences in doctrine proves that most of the church is wrong, or we would not hold to such different views and opinions as to the proper interpretation of scripture and the oneness of truth!

So you see beloved, we must repent, rethink and re-evaluate our meeting practices, and get back to the Word and ways of God if we are to be obedient and successful in the church!

Let us close this section on the practice of meeting in private homes by reminding ourselves of just the incidences of their use given to us in the book of Acts, the authentic history book of the true New Testament church. First, we find the apostles abiding in an upper room, waiting on the Lord there with over one hundred other disciples, praying for the coming of the Holy Spirit; and revelation was given by the Lord for the ordination of a new apostle to replace Judas who fell (Acts 1:13-26). Next, we find the initial great outpouring and manifestations of the Holy Spirit in the house where they were praying on the day of Pentecost, and the first

large evangelistic preaching initiated from that house (Acts 2:1-41). The new church met daily for fellowship, prayer, and sharing their lives, financial resources, and food with one another in their homes (Acts 2:42-47). Paul received his sight, was filled with the Holy Spirit, and was ordained to preach the gospel in the house where he had been praying and fasting for three days (Acts 9:8-20). The healing of paralyzed Aeneas which caused the whole cities of Lydda and Sharon to turn to the Lord happened in the house where he had been bedridden for eight years (Acts 9:32-35). The raising from the dead of Dorcas at Joppa took place in the upper room where she had been laid (Acts 9:36-42). Then the hospitality of Simon the tanner given to Peter who had been used of the Lord to perform this mighty miracle was in Simon's house by the sea there in Joppa (Acts 9:43; 10:6). Next, Cornelius the centurion was praying and fasting in his house in Caesarea at the 3 pm hour of prayer when the angel of the Lord appeared to him, and directed him to send to Joppa for Peter (Acts 10:3, 30-32). It was on the housetop of the tanner's house the next day while Peter was praying that he had the wonderful vision from God to initiate salvation to the Gentiles; and then the three men arrived from Cornelius and he gave them lodging in the house (Acts 10:9, 19-23). Soon it was in Cornelius' house that the first Gentiles were saved and received the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:22, 24-28, 44-47). Then Peter stayed and ate in Cornelius' house with those who had gathered there (Acts 10:48; 11:3).

Next, it was in the private homes of the church in Jerusalem, such as the house of Mary the mother of John, who was also called Mark, that they gathered in smaller groups to pray for Peter when he was imprisoned because of the persecution (Acts 12:12). Then it was in the house of Lydia at Philippi that Paul and his companions stayed after receiving the Macedonian call in a night vision to first go to Europe (Acts 16:15). It was there in Philippi after the earthquake at midnight that Paul led the jailer and his entire household to the Lord in the jailer's house (Acts 16:32-34). And it was in Lydia's house again that they met with the brethren and comforted them before leaving the city (Acts 16:40).

At Corinth Paul stayed in the home of Aquila and his wife Priscilla (Acts 18:1-3). It was there in Corinth that Paul went to the house of Titius Justus, whose house was next to the synagogue which Paul left after the Jews refused the gospel, and led many to the Lord (Acts 18:7-8). It was later in an upper room in Troas on a Sunday night that Paul ministered so long that a boy fell asleep on

a window sill after midnight and fell three stories to his death; but Paul brought him back to life, ate food with them, and continued talking with them until daybreak before departing (Acts 20:6-12). When Paul and his company arrived in Caesarea, they stayed with Philip the evangelist in his house for many days; and it was in this house that Agabus the prophet warned Paul by the Holy Spirit what would befall him in Jerusalem (Acts 21:8-11). When Paul and his companions arrived in Jerusalem, they lodged with Mnason of Cyprus (Acts 21:16). Then after the Jews rose up against Paul and he was taken into protective custody by the Romans, they were shipwrecked on the island of Malta on the way to Rome where Paul entered into the home where the father of the leading man of the island lie sick and Paul healed him there (Acts 28:8). Then many who had diseases came to where Paul had been lodged in such a friendly manner and were healed (Acts 28:9). The last reference of Paul using a home to minister in and from is found in the last two verses of this great book of New Testament history. It is a fitting summary statement of the use of homes where open discussion and dialogue can take place so effectively. It is thus written that after Paul was taken to Rome for trial, **“he stayed two full years in his own rented quarters, and was welcoming all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered”** (Acts 28:23, 30-31).

Dearly beloved, let us return to meeting in our homes!

New Testament membership.

In this section we wish to consider church membership. Is it important? Is it helpful or harmful? Does it help build the body of Christ, or does it help destroy it? Where is our church membership scripturally? Is it in a house fellowship, a local congregation, a denomination, or is it in the body of Christ only? These questions and others, we will consider.

First, let us pray from the scripture, and then quote all of the scriptures in the New Testament that pertain to this subject, and see what God has to say on the subject.

Paul prays in the Ephesian letter a prayer that we would do well to pray now for ourselves as we consider church membership. He prayed [and now we pray] that:

“The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you [us] a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him . . . the eyes of your [our] heart may be [being] enlightened, so that you [we] may know what is the hope of His calling.”
“And He put all things in subjection under His [Christ’s] feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him who fills all in all.” (Eph. 1:17-18, 22-23 NAS)

Paul then states that:

“There is [only] one body.” (Eph. 4:4)

To the saints at Colossae, he writes of Christ:

“In the heavens and on earth . . . He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything.” **“Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body (which is the church) in filling up that which is lacking in Christ’s afflictions.”** (Col. 1:16, 18, 24 NAS)

And since Paul likens the body of Christ to a human body so that we, as members, can better understand it, he writes to the Romans:

“For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.”
(Rom. 12:4-5 NAS)

Thus we see in Paul’s letters that he identifies the church as the body of Christ, and that there is only one body in the universe. He writes further to the Ephesians:

“By revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God’s grace which was given to me according to the working of His power.”

(Eph. 3:3-7 NAS)

“I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Therefore it says, ‘When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men.’ (Now this expression, ‘He ascended,’ what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.) And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors [shepherds] and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by

craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part [member], causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love."

(Eph. 4:1-16 NAS)

"Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth, each one of you, with his neighbor, for we are members of one another."

(Eph. 4:25 NAS)

Christ nourishes and cherishes the church
"because we are members of His body."

(Eph. 5:30 NAS)

From the above scriptures we can see that there is only one body, one true church, and that we must see ourselves as members of that one true church, which must not be divided by carnal means and methods, by false and selfish teachings which are from beneath, not from above. These truths are special revelation that is first given to holy apostles and prophets of God by the ministry of the Holy Spirit. We can see that all of the body of Christ is to be connected in very practical ways, by which each joining supplies food and spiritual necessities to other members of this one universal body; and that this fitting together is only accomplished by first, the ministry of present day apostles and prophets given until we all come to the spiritual, functional, and practical unity of the faith, as well as spiritually minded evangelists, shepherds, and teachers, and then other maturing members of the body (see also I Cor. 12: 27-29).

The believing Jews are fellow members with the Gentile believers; the church is not to be divided.

"For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

(Gal. 3:27-28 NAS)

Concerning communion, Paul writes:

“Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ? Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread.” “For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not judge the body rightly.”

(I Cor. 10:16-17; 11:29 NAS)

Consequently, we see that division between members in the universal body of Christ is sin, and brings judgment upon those responsible and practicing division! Many communion services are divisive in themselves when they exclude “outside” members of the body from participating, and thus the righteous weakness, sickness, and death from the hand of the Lord is evident (I Cor. 11:30).

To follow this serious note, Paul gives us a very detailed portion of scripture from which we can see that our membership is in the one body of Christ, and not in a small house fellowship, a larger “local congregation,” or even an entire city; and these scriptures give us reasons why we must practice this truth.

Let us understand that Paul is including all Christians everywhere when he writes:

“To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours.”

(I Cor. 1:2 NAS)

Now then, let us understand that the following scripture refers to the entire body of Christ, not a city, not a congregation, or anything less.

“Now concerning spiritual gifts [Gk. *πνευματικων, pneumatikon, spirituals*], brethren, I do not want you to be unaware. You know that when you were pagans, you were led astray to the dumb idols, however you were led. Therefore I make known to

you, that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, 'Jesus is accursed'; and no one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. And there are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.

For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body,' it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body,' it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. And if they were all one member, where would the body be? But now there are many members, but one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you'; or again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; and those members of the body, which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our

unseemly members come to have more abundant seemliness, whereas our seemly members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, that there should be no division in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues. All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they? All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they? But earnestly desire the greater gifts."

(I Cor. 12:1-31 NAS)

If we are to benefit from various ministries and gifts which the Lord has given to His body, we must recognize that they are given to the body as a whole, not to any one portion of it! They are given to build up the one true universal church, and must be seen in this light. Membership is in the body, not a congregation, whether it is five people, five hundred, five thousand, or five million. And not even a city, for we, as individual members of the body of Christ, travel here and there, and must be accepted and responsible where ever we are. On the street or in the office, at play or at work, in assembly or out, we are always in church because we are the church, and we are to be ready and willing to function wherever we are, and we must recognize that all Christians are members of the one body of Christ, and must be accepted everywhere as such! Sectarianism is a deadly sin! It grieves the Holy Spirit who is given to make us one! It grieves the Lord Jesus Christ who died to make us one, and who agonized in prayer before He did so that we might be one. It grieves our heavenly Father who provides all that we are, all that we have, and all the benefits of salvation, that all of his children do not love and accept one another. We must stop lording it over one another when He has made Jesus our Lord! Our God is the one who paid the price to

make us one, and we must repent of our divisions and learn how to function together in love if we are going to succeed in the remaining days of this age, and be rewarded in eternity. Jesus is Lord!

When we split the body of Christ up into congregations or denominations with our own membership, it divides the body of Christ. It is not scriptural, but traditional! It is not spiritual, but carnal.

We just read how all true Christians are all baptized into one body by one Spirit! And that the various ministries that Christ gives, and various manifestations of the Holy Spirit, are given to the body for the edification of all of the body in love. When one member is affected, all are affected, and we must see this whether we thoroughly understand it or not. God deals with us according to our hearts and attitudes, and they must be filled with love for Him and for all of His children. **“Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God; and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him”** (1 Jn. 5:1 NAS).

There is never an incidence in scripture where Christians are members of anything less than the entire body of Christ. All modern membership is sectarian, divisive, carnal, and under the judgment of almighty God, our Lord Jesus Christ, and His Holy Spirit! It is of Babylon, and fostered by spirits of pride, selfish ambition, rebellion, unbelief, and fear!

We must congregate as the Spirit leads us, recognizing that He is in our midst as Head, and any of His children present are our legal, full brothers and sisters in Christ. We are not stepbrothers or half brothers, unrecognized or unwanted, but full brothers of our heavenly Father. The problems from our spiritual sickness of carnal division are exacerbated, however, due to the fact that our mother, the church which is above, is misunderstood and therefore practiced so incorrectly as a carnal church congregation or denomination from the earth (Gal. 4:26). Therefore we are in spiritual slavery instead of freedom, to the degree that we do not understand and practice the truth (Gal.4:22 - 5:1).

Various carnal reasons are given to justify local church membership, but they are just that — carnal justification for our building according to the carnal ways of men, and not according to the spiritual will of God! It is building carnal temples according to tradition, the way others have done it, the way men are taught in carnal schools, and not according to the way in heaven. When Moses was told to build the tabernacle, he was commanded to build

it according to how he had seen it while up on the mountain of God. Today, true apostles will build and help others to build in the true way; but rebellion, pride, selfish ambition, unbelief, and the fear of man and the fear of losing members, respectability among our peers, cause men to build incorrectly and with so much **“wood, hay, [and] stubble.”**

Therefore, I believe it would be helpful to bring to our attention and emphasize that within three chapters, Moses was told four times to build **“the tabernacle”** and **“all its furniture”** according to the **“pattern”** and **“plan”** for each which he had been **“shown in the mountain”** (Ex. 25:9, 40; 26:30; 27:8 NAS). The purpose, God said, was for His people to **“construct a sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them”** (Ex. 25:8 NAS). This same truth is for us in building a sanctuary for God today, the church, that He might dwell and manifest Himself among us now (Eph. 2: 21-22). And the Lord Jesus Christ, our high priest of the New Covenant, is the chief **“minister in the [heavenly] sanctuary”** where we are now able and beckoned to come boldly before the throne of grace; and as such He repeats the warning Moses received from God **“when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, ‘See,’ He says, ‘that you make all things according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain’”** (Heb. 8:2, 5 NAS). Thus if we are to please God, and thereby experience all the benefits which are given to us in this **“better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises,”** we must go up on the mountain of God also, seeking His face by prayer and fasting, in total consecration and humble service to Him, to have revealed to us His pattern for His tabernacle, the church, and then build accordingly (Heb. 8:6 NAS). Building as most do, in a sectarian and man centered, led, and controlled way, according to the carnal traditions of men, does not accomplish the will of God, does not bring to His church all of the glorious and wonderful benefits and manifestations of His presence, and will not result in joyful eternal rewards but sorrowful eternal loss (I Cor. 3:8-18).

There are those who justify church membership for various reasons, but it would be well to acknowledge that whole groups and movements have been built upon a proper understanding of the truth, and do not have memberships. However, although a group does not have church membership, it may deteriorate into carnality and become just as sectarian in spirit, or even more so, than those who do! But, we must not make that an excuse for not following the Lord fully; we must determine to worship Him not

only in Spirit, but in truth as well (**for the Father seeketh such to worship Him**), not according to the vain traditions and carnality of men (Jn. 4:23-24 KJV; Mt. 15:3-9; Mk. 7:6-13).

The carnal mind wants local church membership so as to hold a particular group together, not realizing that it is causing the very opposite in the Lord's church. When we come to realize this, we will be confronted with the reality of who we are really working for — the Lord or ourselves, and thus for the spiritual benefit of God's people, or for the carnal benefit of ourselves and other carnal groups. We are to be held together by love and peace, which come through spiritual commitments; not carnal means which come from erroneous and carnal commitments (Col. 3:14; Eph. 4:3).

Some leaders might think that local membership is needed to determine who they are responsible for and to, but that leads to failure to be responsible for many outside our membership for whom we are responsible. We are responsible when gathered together for all who are in our midst as the Lord leads us, whether true Christians, or unbelievers, or those who are not Christians but profess to be. The Lord looks and judges us "as one" (Josh.7; I Cor. 5:6). All are considered by God and should be by us according to their profession of faith, not according to whether they have signed some earthly membership roll or not (I Cor. 5:11). All who profess to be brothers and sisters in Christ must live according to certain standards (I Cor. 5:9-13). When dealing with all those who profess to be Christians, it's according to His membership roll, not ours!

We must come to see and practice universal membership if we are to grow and mature into all that the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ have planned for us. We can tell our progress by discerning the presence and anointing of the Holy Spirit as He works throughout our assemblies and beyond, and how we relate to all other members of His body! If we limit church membership, we limit relationship with those outside that membership. How tragic!

In closing this section on church membership, let us summarize briefly. Church membership is not in a congregation, group, denomination, movement, or even a city, but it is in the one universal body of Christ which is in heaven and earth. Any practice contrary to this truth is carnal and divisive. It brings judgment from God, depending upon the nature, intention, and destructiveness to the body of Christ.

Let us now quote a few scriptures that reveal our carnality in the church, and our eternal loss because of it.

“God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree, and there be no divisions [Gk. *σχισματα*, *schismata*, schisms, dissensions, rendings] among you, but you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe’s people, that there are quarrels among you. Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, ‘I am of Paul [a man of power and demonstration of the Spirit; maybe “I’m a Pentecostal” or “I’m a Charismatic”],’ and ‘I of Apollos [a man of eloquence; gifted orators; maybe “I’m a Methodist,” or “I’m a Baptist”],’ and ‘I of Cephas [a man of boldness; maybe “I’m a Lutheran” or “I’m a fundamentalist”],’ and ‘I of Christ [“I belong to the Church of Christ,” or even “the church of Christ”, or “I’m a Catholic”].’ **Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?”**

(I Cor. 1:9-13 NAS)

Please note that our fellowship is in Jesus, not doctrine about Jesus. Therefore, we can have fellowship with all Christians, unless they are in gross sin! Also, the church in Corinth was not divided as we are today; they were still meeting together, but were carnal and factious (I Cor. 11:18-19). The church had not at this time received such false teaching as to completely divide the church as we have today. And if I missed including your group in the list above, please forgive me.

Thus when we remember that Paul was writing to all of the Christians in Corinth as well as to all other Christians everywhere (that means all of us), we can have a better understanding of what he meant when he went further and wrote:

“And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh [carnal], as to babes in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed,

even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly [carnal]. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? For when one says, 'I am of Paul,' and another, 'I am of Apollos,' are you not mere men? What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth. Now he who plants and he who waters are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.

According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it. But let each man be careful how he builds upon it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire.

Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God [the one true body of Christ, its unity or any of its members], God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are.

Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become foolish that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God. For it is written, 'He is the one who catches the wise in their craftiness'; and again, 'The Lord knows the reasonings of the wise, that they are useless.' So then let no one boast in men. For all things belong to you, whether Paul or Apollos

or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come; all things belong to you, and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God.”

(1 Cor. 3:1-23 NAS)

So we see how the Lord is going to judge us with rewards or loss depending upon the quality of our work, not quantity of activity, in building the body of Christ. And we are to benefit from all of the great Christian men of the past who have brought to the universal church, the body of Christ, the truths we have been given down through the centuries; they all belong to us.

Unfortunately, in our carnality, we have not understood properly the one true body of Christ — church structure, function, discipline, and membership, and our responsibilities to them — although we have held tightly to the head. Consequently, the Lord has had to move separately in different parts of His body, but He has not had a united body through which He can demonstrate to the world all that He desires. But, it is coming!

In some respects, the body of Christ has been like a disjointed or spastic body, but as God moves and pours out more of His Spirit, and we experience more of His innervating and uniting work, we are going to see the body of Christ arise as never before in the history of man; and God will demonstrate to the world His creation in Christ, and therefore reveal as never before His Son to a lost world and soon ending age.

Let us press on therefore to know the Lord and His body more fully, and therefore understand God’s warning to us all of:

“not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.”

(Col. 2:19 NAS)

Remembering always the admonition and truth that we have:

“laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him — a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman [Methodist, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Roman

Catholic, Baptist, Fundamentalist, Holiness or Pentecostal, Charismatic or Evangelical, independent or dependent], **but Christ is all, and in all.**

And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. And beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. And let the peace of Christ rule in your [our] hearts, to which indeed you [we] were called in one body; and be thankful.” (Col. 3:9-15 NAS)

Finally, since the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but spiritual, in battling to bring unity and harmony to the body of Christ and to defeat Satan’s work of destroying the body, when asked what we are a member of, let us answer with love and thankfulness, with understanding and appreciation, as Jesus did: **“It is written”**; and then with Paul and the saints in Rome to whom he wrote, and with all of the Christians down through the ages:

“Just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.”

(Rom. 12:4-5 NAS)

Amen, and Amen!

New Testament picture.

When we began this chapter on **“the church,”** our stated goal was **“to present a picture of the true New Testament church as it is given to us in the scriptures, established by the Lord Jesus Christ and His apostles, after His crucifixion for our sins and His resurrection from the dead.”**

We have endeavored to picture the church in words, and now we wish to picture the church in graphic illustration, both the true spiritual New Testament church and the carnal Babylonian

church. By these terms we mean: The spiritual church is the true New Testament church which is indwelt, empowered, structured, and led (mostly) by the Spirit of God (as she matures). The Babylonian church is composed of organizations of man, a mixture of true believers and those that are only professing to be believers, structured according to the traditions and interpretations of man, and led by a mixture of God's Spirit and "**the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience**" (Eph. 2:2 NAS). Energized by Satan using the spirits of Babylon and every other conceivable unclean spirit of lust and greed (Rev. 18:2; II Tim. 3:1-9; II Pet. 2:1-22; Jude vv. 4-19), the Babylonian church follows men and "**the tradition of the elders**" (Mt. 15:2; Mk. 7:5; see also Isa. 29:13; Col. 2:8) according to the varying degrees of Babylonish doctrines which they hold to.

There are a number of differences which we can note from the graphics, and there is more that is not shown.

First, the Babylonian Church is composed of many separate "Churches," each with its own independent government and structure of different kinds depending upon the tradition from which they come. Of course, many are supremely governed by a hierarchy outside the congregation, but all of them are governed and structured independently of other "Christians" in their city. This sectarianism is illustrated by the solid lines around each individual congregation. They all have different names put upon the people so that they recognize themselves as belonging to one particular congregation, not the whole, the true church of the Lord in the entire city and beyond. In the spiritual church, believers carry His precious name only.

As we look at the members, we see some that are saved, that are truly children of God, and some that are not saved; this is illustrated by true believers having an open, white circle; and the unbelievers are filled with black, indicating that their hearts have not been regenerated by the Spirit of God. The spiritual church is united, because the leadership sees itself as united under the headship of Jesus Christ, and the "elders of the city" are shepherding and overseeing the one true flock in the city together. These leaders are the "elders," "shepherds," and "bishops," and regularly meet together for prayer and fasting, fellowship, teaching and ministering to one another and to the Lord as the Holy Spirit leads, recognizing themselves in their individual giftings and together governing the one church in their locality under Christ

the Head in their midst. They have renounced the Babylonian doctrines and practices from their backgrounds in order to support the truth of God and the headship of Jesus Christ in every respect, both individually and corporately.

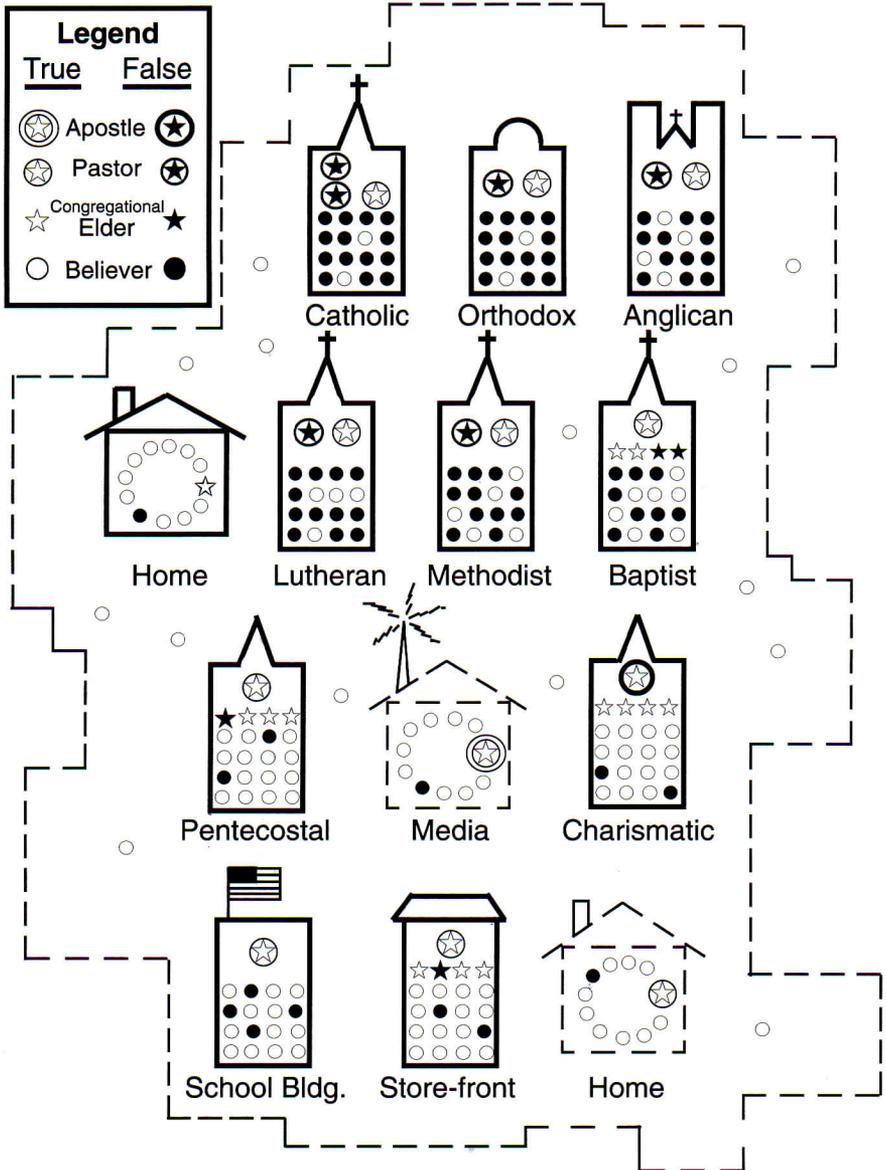
Notice from the graphics that what was once a “Pastor” and recognized as the “Head” of an independent congregation in the Babylonian system, is in the spiritual system a fellow elder of the city with other men of God, looking to Jesus as the “Head” and “Chief Shepherd” in their midst, getting direction, inspiration, and life from Him as He moves by His Spirit both directly and through his fellow elders, as well as other members of His body. The elders together rule the one church in their city in plurality, not independently but dependently, dependent upon the Lord and one another.

Men who were elders of congregations in the Babylonian Church under a Pastor may or may not be elders in the spiritual church. And of course, some were not even saved and true believers, and this is true of other “Church members” as well!

Membership in the Babylonian Church is congregational, with all the attendant requirements and commitments demanded, but in the spiritual church, membership is recognized and taught as in the body of Christ only, and all requirements and commitments are first to the Lord as given by His Word and Spirit. No unbeliever is recognized as a member, and no believer is recognized as a non-member! The solid lines around the congregations also emphasizes the sectarian carnality of the independent and divisive Babylonish Church memberships; whereas, in the spiritual church there is only membership in the total, one body of Christ, so there are no lines around the congregations in the city. In the Babylonian structure meetings such as one of the home groups or the media ministry have broken lines around them to signify that they have no sectarian membership but teach and practice body-wide church membership. However, this is not always the case with many home groups or media ministries. The city has no solid line either as we are not even members of a locality alone, but “**fellow members of the body,**” “**one body,**” and “**members of one another**” throughout the city and beyond.

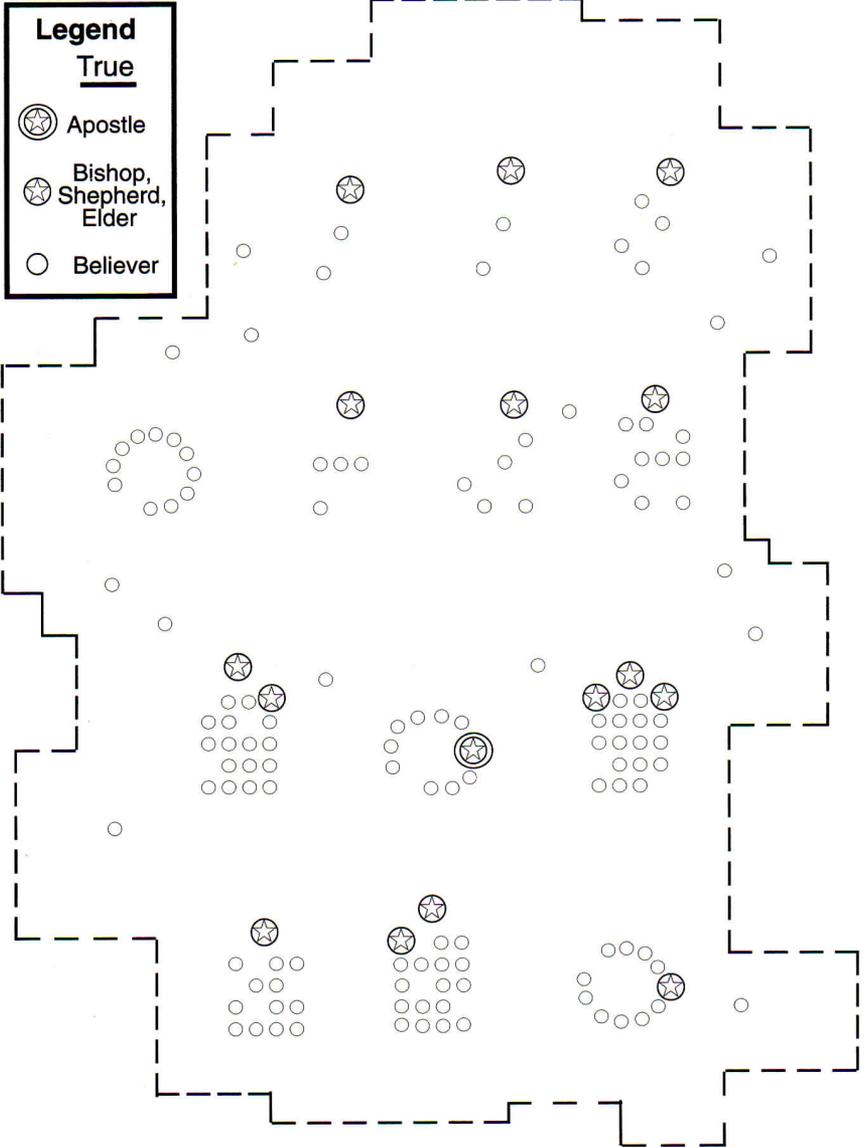
In the Babylonian Church, meetings are set according to tradition and the degree of life within and allowed by hierarchical leadership; but in the spiritual church, meetings are where ever, when ever, and however the Lord, the Head of the church, directs; and His life flows accordingly (Mt. 18:19-20).

The modern Babylonian Churches in any large Christianized city.



The one true church in the same city. And “the elders of the church [city].” Acts 20:17

Example: “The church which was in Jerusalem.” Acts 11:22
“The seven churches [cities] which are in Asia.” Rev. 1:11 KJV



During this time of such Babylonian sectarianism, notice there are believers outside the “Churches” who are members of His body. They often flow freely within the body, and consequently are called “church tramps,” “church hoppers,” “uncommitted,” or worse; and although some may have spiritual needs and deficiencies, many are just more spiritual than the castigating carnal leadership which needs to be ashamed of themselves and repent of their carnal Babylonish ways and words!

Notice also that although a man may be a true shepherd, he may think, or have been told or prophesied to, that he is an apostle because of his “success” as a Babylonish “pastor” — but he is not! He does not teach “**the apostles’ doctrine**,” does not have the apostles’ “**revelations**,” and the understanding of the “**mystery of Christ**” (Eph. 3:1-12), and is not backed up by the Lord in that authority because he is not called by the Lord into that ministry. (For example, consider the Charismatic Church graphic.) Men must repent for assuming any position, ministry, or authority which Christ has not given or be severely chastened, either in this life, the next, or both!

The true apostles with 20/20 vision will be teaching “**publicly and from house to house**” (Acts 20:20), and using writings as Paul and the first apostles in Jerusalem did, and also using the additional media of the present such as radio, television, tape recordings, and the internet. In any particular city, there may be no apostles, or there may be one or more depending upon the leading of the Lord at any given time.

The most significant differences in graphical summation that we must see and understand between the Babylonian Churches and the true church are the structures and government, and the sectarian membership and function versus the all inclusive non-sectarian membership and function within the total body of Christ. The placement of the members is the same in both graphics, in order to account for their participation in the Babylonian system versus a spiritual system, not to demonstrate seating arrangements or even participation throughout the city. This has been addressed in words elsewhere in this book. Obviously, when Christians are properly shepherded and have a spiritual view of the entire body of Christ, they will also be encouraged to flow freely and widely throughout the city and beyond in experiencing and building the entire body of Christ, and then we can also expect to experience powerful revival and evangelism!

There are many other truths that may not be observed from the graphic pictures, but can be understood from the previous word pictures, so let us take note of some.

The spiritual New Testament church

vs

The carnal Babylonian Church

In the spiritual church, all the people are Christians and members of the same church, the body of Christ; and they are under spiritual leadership. In the Babylonian church, the people are divided into separate congregations, each with its own sectarian membership, composed of mixtures of all non-Christians, varying degrees of both carnal Christians and non-Christians, or all carnal Christians. The leadership is the same mixture, and instead of recognizing the Lord Jesus as the head, it looks to a hierarchy or itself as the head. Only when local leaders meet together and recognize the truth of the headship of Christ over each and every meeting of Christians, as well as the total church, and learn to wait upon Him for the direction and anointing of the Holy Spirit for all the Christians in any given area, can they grow and understand what true spirituality is and what Christ's plans and purposes for the church are.

Consequently, Babylonish leaders also look to denominational doctrine or their own interpretation of scripture, rather than meeting together and waiting on the Lord for His truth to come forth, and particularly, the **"teaching of the apostles"** (Acts 2:42 lit.).

In the spiritual church, Christians meet whenever and wherever the Lord leads; this results in daily fellowship, edifying, helping, and loving one another, and reaching out to those to whom they are being led. In the carnal church, they follow carnal man and the patterns of the Babylonian heritage from which they descended — either of a denomination, or of men which they follow from books, experience, or fellowship; this results in only weekly [and weakly] "worship" services, but depending upon the spirituality of the leaders there may be one or two more "meetings."

In the spiritual church, Christians are taught to be concerned with building up the body of Christ; but in the Babylonian church,

the concern is with a particular congregation or movement, even at the expense of harming or destroying the proper functioning of the body of Christ, or its members. Or worse yet, the concern is building up a physical building at the expense of the spiritual and financial well being of the members themselves.

In the spiritual church, home meetings are foundational and essential; but in the Babylonian church they are either forbidden, or else erroneously controlled by man, customs, or doctrine, rather than by the Holy Spirit of God. Consequently, Christian homes are deteriorating, both spiritually and financially, while special buildings are built with idolatrous zeal and greed.

In the spiritual church, every member is important and able to function freely under the anointing of the Holy Spirit; whereas in the Babylonian church only selected people are permitted to function, and only as freely as heritage or headquarters permit. Because of this, small intimate meetings are forbidden or looked to as unimportant, and the size of the meetings is the standard of success. Large impersonal meetings are more comfortable for those not seeking wholeheartedly the kingdom of God (whether they be the leaders or those being led).

In the spiritual church, Christians seek for and receive all of the ministries, gifts, and manifestations of the Holy Spirit, and people function freely in their particular individual anointings; but in the Babylonian church the practice of these different anointings is in various mixtures, many being denied expression and only a very few being practiced, and certainly only those that will not challenge the beliefs or positions of the hierarchy of the Church.

In the spiritual church, members are equipped to carry on ministry outside the assembly (a place of spiritual training), and a worldwide vision of the body of Christ is held forth; but in the Babylonian church what is held in highest esteem is attendance in meetings, financial contributions to the local work, and volunteering for programs and activities.

In the spiritual church, members help one another; but in the Babylonian church, everyone in need is referred to the "pastor" or a specialist outside the Church (often someone not even saved), whether it's the people themselves (the house of God) or the furnishings of their physical house that need repair.

In the spiritual church, a good meeting is where the Lord has His way, and moves through whomever He chooses; but in the Babylonian church, it is a good sermon or teaching from the leader. The emphasis is more on the head than the heart, forgetting

the scripture, **“knowledge puffs up, but love builds up”** (I Cor. 8:1 lit.).

In the spiritual church, prayer is extremely important, both private and corporate; but in the Babylonian church, a simple “Pastoral” prayer is the most often heard publicly, and private prayer is also unbelievably small, both in quantity and quality.

In the spiritual church where God chooses, the qualifications for leadership are character and spirituality; but in the Babylonian church where man chooses, the qualifications are formal education and degrees in worldly ways. We must realize that to serve is more important than to know (Lu. 22:25-27; Gal. 5:13-14; I Cor. 13:1-3).

In the spiritual church the emphasis is to “go” — go and make disciples of all nations — quality first and then quantity; but in the Babylonian church the emphasis is to “come” — come and help us build the size of this congregation — quantity first, and quality is low priority, if at all.

In the spiritual church the goal of leaders is to serve others (the Lord’s vision; Mt. 20:25-28); but in the Babylonian church the goal is to gather others to serve the leader (his own vision; Rom. 16:17-18).

Consequently, in the spiritual church, members are disciplined, trained and qualified to serve from within the local work. But in the Babylonian church, members who wish to be trained, are stifled or exported to be trained to serve elsewhere; and professional clergy are imported to lead and control. In the spiritual church emerging ministry is encouraged and trained to come up along side, versus being suppressed and rejected, or at least held in lower esteem.

In the spiritual church, leaders are in plurality, responsible for shepherding one another, working cooperatively with one another. In the Babylonian church they are isolated, structured to working competitively with one another. Fired up, versus burned out! Edified, versus edifices!

In the spiritual church, leaders are recognized as being sheep as well as shepherds, and are therefore cared for along with the rest of the flock. In the Babylonian church the “clergy” are so singular and elevated above and separated from the “laity,” they are without proper care and more easily fall prey to many wiles of the “evil one.”

In summation, in the spiritual church the commitments are to the Lord primarily, and then to the work; but in the Babylonian church the commitments are primarily to carnal ambitions and

idolatrous practices before any commitment to the Lord. Humility, faith, truth, love, obedience, the kingdom of God, and the fear of the Lord are liberating virtues and goals prayed for in the spiritual church; as opposed to pride, unbelief, misbelief, rebellion, selfish ambition, and the fear of man that are bonds of slavery in every Babylonish carnal structure.

“Dear Father, please help us to be Your servants, filled with Your Spirit to do Your will and not our own — to pursue love and spiritual gifting that we might be better used to build your kingdom, and not our own. Help us to be like Jesus, that others might see Him and be drawn to Him, and not to ourselves. Dear God, please help us in Jesus’ name we pray. Amen, and Amen. Amen!”

This is the end of [The church](#), Chapter 3
For Chapter 4, visit www.JohnRothacker.org