

THE ESSENTIAL COMPONENT OF RELATIONSHIP IN THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

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James W. Garrett

The New Testament term, *koinonia*, usually translated, "fellowship," is the umbrella term which covers all relationships in the New Testament Church. Love, mutual accountability, church membership, spiritual authority, church discipline, benevolent activity, community; these and many other terms describe various facets of *koinonia* in the church. This paper will examine the New Testament Church expressions of *koinonia*. The goal of this study is to gain an understanding of proper relationships within the church, thus providing a standard whereby the manifestations of relationship in our contemporary local churches might be evaluated.

PART ONE: THE INDIVIDUAL BELIEVER'S RELATIONSHIP TO THE LOCAL CHURCH

The concept, so popular today, that one can be a Christian without a living relationship with a local church, is in stark contrast to the Christianity pictured in the New Testament. Except for those called to itinerant ministry, New Testament Christians were integrated into a local church. The New Testament presents this picture of First Century Christians through several displays.

DISPLAY #1: Romans 16:1-16

- *I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea; that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well.*
- *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.*
- *Greet Epaphroditus, my beloved, who is the first convert to Christ from Asia.*
- *Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you.*
- *Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners, who are outstanding among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.*
- *Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord.*
- *Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ,*
- *and Stachys my beloved.*
- *Greet Apelles, the approved in Christ.*
- *Greet those who are of the household of Aristobulus.*
- *Greet Herodion, my kinsman.*
- *Greet those of the household of Narcissus, who are in the Lord.*
- *Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa, workers in the Lord.*
- *Greet Persis the beloved, who has worked hard in the Lord.*
- *Greet Rufus, a choice man in the Lord, also his mother and mine.*

- *Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brethren with them.*
- *Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them.*
- *Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.*

This section begins with Paul's commendation of Phoebe, described as *a servant of the church at Cenchrea*. Even though Phoebe was visiting Rome and had contact with the Roman Church, her identity in Rome was as a member of the Cenchrean Church.

The next fourteen verses (3-16) are punctuated with the constant refrain, "greet...greet...greet." Paul urges the Roman Church to extend his greetings to twenty-six individuals and to five groups. The picture clearly is one of a church that had a sense of community. These people knew each other and were involved with one another.

Three house-churches are mentioned:

Vs 3-5 the house-church that met in the home of Prisca and Aquila

V 14 the house-church that included Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the brethren with them.

V 15 the house-church that included Philologus, Julia, Nereus, his sister, Olympas, and all the saints who are with them.

At the heart of the Christian faith is its meeting, the assembly of the faith community. The early Christians, like the Jews, met in open places¹ and in hired halls.² However, it seems that the most common meeting place was in the homes of believers.³ Churches located in homes are specifically mentioned six times in Scripture. In addition to the three instances before us, reference also is made to house-churches in I Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15; and Philemon 2. In such house-churches, intimacy, identity, and bonding would be the expected norm.

Two other groups of interest to our study are mentioned in Romans 16:10-11. Most English Versions contain some form of the following:

- *Greet those of the household of Aristobulus (V 10)*
- *Greet those of the household of Narcissus (v 11)*

This language has caused some confusion of understanding. The Greek text does not contain the words *household*.⁴ The Greek text literally says,

¹ Pliny, *Letters*, 17; Acts 16:13,16

² Acts 19:9

³ Acts 2:46; 12:12; etc. The earliest example of a church building to be discovered by archaeologists is a house in the city of Dura-Europos (located in modern Syria). The original house was remodeled to accommodate a house-church between 232 and 256, the year that Dura-Europos fell to the Sassanians. For an excellent and detailed article on the Dura-Europos house church, see: Graydon and Snyder, *Ante Pacem*, Mercer University Press, Macon, GA, 1985, pg 67-71.

⁴ οἰκεῖος, οἰκέτης, οἰκία, οἰκιακός, are the Greek terms that express various concepts of a household, all derivatives of οἶκος, meaning, "house"

- *Greet those out of the Aristobulus*
ἀσπάσασθε τοὺς ἐκ τῶν Ἀριστοβούλου
- *Greet those out of the Narcissus*
ἀσπάσασθε τοὺς ἐκ τῶν Ναρκίσσου

Why do most English Versions have the word, *household*? In order to make the phrase understandable to English readers, the committee that produced the King James Version added the word, *household*, in both of these phrases. Most English versions have followed the example of the KJV. This action has caused a mis-understanding of Paul's statement. A couple of considerations help us to identify those to whom Paul referred in these expressions.

First, note that neither Aristobulus nor Narcissus are addressed. If Paul had been referring to those who lived with Aristobulus and Narcissus, we would expect him to use the same language that he used with Prisca & Aquilla (verses 3-5) or that which he used with the two house-church groups addressed in verses 14 & 15. We would expect him to write something along the lines of,

- *Greet Aristobulus and those in his home*
- *Greet Narcissus and those in his home*

We then must ask, who were *those out of the Aristobulus* and *those out of the Narcissus*? Scholars of ancient Roman culture provide insight into a Roman custom that explains Paul's language.

The custom in Rome was for the slaves of a deceased prominent figure to be referred to thereafter, as "the (name of deceased master)," regardless of who owned them in the future. For example, the famous Roman historian Livy (BC 59 - AD 17), had among his slaves the *Maecenatiani* (slaves from the household of the deceased Maecenas), *Amyntiani* (slaves from the household of the deceased Amyntas), *Agrippiani* (slaves from the household of the deceased Agrippina), and *Germaniciniani* (slaves from the household of the deceased Germanicus).

The consensus of classical New Testament scholars, especially from Lightfoot onward, is that the language of verses 10 & 11 *tous ek ton aristoboulou* (τοὺς ἐκ τῶν Ἀριστοβούλου), "those out of the Aristobulus," possibly, (some would say, "probably") refers to the slaves of the Aristobulus who was the deceased grandson of Herod the Great.⁵ Aristobulus was a friend and political supporter of Emperor Claudius. Because of his nationality (a Jew), Aristobulus' household slaves presumably would have included Jews and other Palestinians. Upon his death, the normal thing would have been for his slaves to have been added to the slaves of the Imperial household. In that setting, these would have been called, "those out of the Aristobulus."⁶

⁵For a brief discussion, see, Sanday and Headlam, *The International Critical Commentary*, THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS, Charles Scribner and Sons, New York, 1896, pgs 425-426. See also Kenneth S. Wuest, *Romans in the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company) 1955, page 261

⁶Lard is a notable exception (Lard, Moses E., *Commentary on Romans*, Standard Publishing, Cincinnati, 1875, pg 457)

The same would be true of the *tous ek ton narkissou* (τοὺς ἐκ τῶν Ναρκίσσου), "those out of the Narcissus." This Narcissus probably was the wealthy and influential freedman who was the secretary to Emperor Claudius. It was at his orders that Claudius' wife, Messalina, was put to death. Two years after Nero succeeded Claudius, Agrippina, Nero's mother, fearing the threat of Narcissus political power, ordered the execution of Narcissus. After the execution, Nero would have confiscated Narcissus' slaves and added them to his household.

Interestingly, in between these two groups is mentioned Paul's kinsman, *Herodion*. Both by his name and the fact that he is Paul's kinsman, we know that Herodion was a Jew. Since he is mentioned in conjunction with *those out of the Aristobulus*, he probably was one of the Jewish/Christian slaves of Aristobulus that were transferred to the ownership of the Caesar.

The thing to observe in all of this is that even though brothers and sisters were slaves in the palace of Caesar, and probably not as free to circulate as were the rest of the members of the Roman Christian community, they were known and were considered to be a part of the community. They were *those in the Lord* (verse 11), those called out of the world into the local church.

DISPLAY #2: The Focus of the New Testament

The focus of the New Testament, from Acts onward, is the Church:

- Even though the first twelve chapters of Acts tell the story of Peter's leadership and the last sixteen tell the story of Paul's ministry, Acts is the story of the first thirty years of the church's existence.

Acts 2:41 *so then, those who had received his word were baptized; and there were added that day about three thousand souls.*

Acts 2:47 *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 4:4 *But many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.*

Acts 4:32 *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.*

Acts 5:14 *And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number;*

Acts 6:1-2a *Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. And the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said...*

Acts 8:3 *But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house...*

Acts 9:19b *Now for several days he was with the disciples who were at Damascus,*

Acts 9:31 *So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase.*

These are sufficient examples, but one could continue through Acts and find the same phrases and emphasis over and over again.

- Most of the second person pronouns in the epistles are plural, indicating that groups are addressed, rather than individuals. This understanding makes a large difference in how one views chapters such as I Corinthians 12-14. For example, the exhortation, *But earnestly desire the greater gifts*,⁷ is a second person plural exhortation⁸. Therefore, the exhortation is not that individual believers should desire the greater gifts, but that the church should desire that these greater gifts be present in their body. Such a difference in understanding removes ambition from the individual to a realm of a plea to God to supply the local church with those gifts that will enable it to be all that it can be.
- Romans, I & II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and I & II Thessalonians, were written to churches in defined geographical areas.
- I & II Timothy and Titus were written to Paul's delegates who were left in Ephesus and Crete, respectively, to complete the organization of local churches. These letters were instructions concerning the work of church planting.
- Hebrews, James, and I & II Peter were written to Jewish churches. Hebrews probably was written to the Church in Jerusalem. The epistles of James and Peter were written to those who had fled Jerusalem (James 1:1; I Peter 1:1-2; II Peter 3:1). That these were written to groups rather than individuals, not only is known by the salutation, but also is verified by the tenor of the instruction.
- The First Letter of John was written to instruct the Asian church that was plagued with Nicolaitanism and Gnosticism.
- Third John, written to John's friend, Gaius, contains strong words concerning an ambitious leader in the church and the need for the church to extend hospitality to itinerant ministries.
- Jude is written to the church to warn of evil men who are seducing the church into error. Jude calls them "spots in your feasts of love" (v12), implying that these people contaminate the holy love that should be present in the communal life of the church.
- The Revelation is written to seven churches in Asia (1:4, etc.).

⁷I Corinthians 12:31

⁸Second person plural imperatives can be used in a "distributive" sense (each one of you) or a "collective" sense (all of you together). There are times when it is difficult to determine which sense is meant by the author. Context is the determinative factor, but context sometimes allows for either understanding. It seems to me that *zeloute de ta charismata ta meizona* (ζηλοῦτε δὲ τὰ χαρίσματα τὰ μείζονα) *zeloute*, being the second person plural, present imperative, is collective in this verse. I believe this to be true because this is consistent with the point made in the verses immediately preceding. Verse 1 of Chapter 14, may lean toward a distributive interpretation, but the goal still would be for the collective good of the local church.

Thus, the only exceptions to the Church's being the focus of the Acts-Revelation portion of the New Testament are Philemon and II John. Many argue that II John is written to the church, under the figure of the "elect lady" (v1). Philemon, even though not written to the church or about the church, contains a greeting to the church that met in the house of Philemon (v2).

There is no evidence in the New Testament of any Christian's living an individualistic life, totally apart from the church, except for those who were condemned for schismatic activity.⁹

DISPLAY #3: Specific Passages

- Passages such as Ephesians 4:1-16 and Romans 12 imply that the reason for a believer's existence is to function organically in the Church. To this end, First Corinthians 12:7 informs us that the manifestations of the Spirit (commonly called "gifts of the Spirit") are given to each individual Christian, for "the common good," not for the personal benefit of the individual believer¹⁰. These and similar passages of Scripture are absurd if an independent and unattached life is acceptable for believers.
- "Greet one another with a holy kiss," an exhortation found in five of the epistles¹¹, could have been written only to a group.
- Hebrews 10:23-31 exhorts believers to be faithful to church gatherings and warns that failure to be consistent in such attendance puts one in jeopardy of moral failure, resulting in damnation.
- Hebrews 13:17 urges believers to be obedient to their leaders. This type of language has no meaning apart from a local church that is under the oversight of recognized leaders.
- Acts 20:28 contains Paul's commission to the Ephesian elders mandating their ministry of oversight and shepherding the Ephesian flock. Again, if believers were not committed to a local flock under recognized leaders, giving such a commission to the Ephesian elders would be an empty gesture.

DISPLAY #4: The Responsibility Churches felt for One Another

That local churches recognized one another and felt responsibility for one another illustrates the group mentality of the New Testament.

⁹ I John 2:19; Titus 3:10; Romans 16:17; Acts 20:30

¹⁰The Greek term, *sumphero*, communicates the idea of profit or advantage. In each passage, it must be determined by the context whether the advantage is a personal one or a community one. The term is used with both meanings in the New Testament. In I Corinthians 12:7, it clearly refers to benefitting the community of the saints, rather than the individual through which the manifestation comes.

¹¹Romans 16:16; I Corinthians 16:20; II Corinthians 13:12; First Thessalonians 5:26; I Peter 5:14 (kiss of love [*agape*])

- One manner in which this group to group responsibility was exercised was in commending various itinerant believers to one another:

We already have encountered Phoebe, in Romans 16:1-2. These verses record the Cenchronean Church's commendation of Phoebe to the Roman Church.

Acts 18:24, 27-28 informs us that the Ephesian church commended Apollos to the brethren in Achaia. Again, here is an example of the community of the saints in one place recognizing the community of saints elsewhere. No independent individualistic Christianity is displayed here. As a matter of fact, it seems that Apollos came to Ephesus as a bit of an independent with a distorted (at least incomplete) Gospel. After Priscilla and Aquilla correctly instructed Apollos in the way of God, he left Ephesus an independent no longer, but one who had a relationship with the Church.

- Another manner in which group to group responsibility was demonstrated was in benevolent care for one another:¹²

Acts 11:22-26 contains the record of the Jerusalem Church's sending Barnabas to Antioch to help in the establishment of the new church in that city. Again, one group caring about the health of another group.

Acts 11:27-30 is the first example of one group's sending money to another group. The Antioch Church sent money to the Jerusalem elders to assist Jerusalem Church in a time of famine.

One of Paul's main activities on his third missionary journey was the collection of a benevolent offering for Jerusalem. He gathered this fund from the Macedonian and Achaian churches. Each church was to select a delegate to accompany the funds to Jerusalem. Individuals who were members of churches in Macedonia and Achaia, brought their offerings to the Sunday service and gave to the "Jerusalem Fund," which was forwarded to the church leaders in Jerusalem. In some cases, Paul had to cajole¹³, but in other cases, he was overwhelmed by the generosity of his churches¹⁴ (First Corinthians 16:1-4; II Corinthians 8:1-9:15; Romans 15:25-31; Acts 20:4; 24:17).

In many of his letters, Paul extended greetings from one group of church leaders to those in the church to which the letter was addressed.

Again, in these cases, all aid and concern was for a group and was administered by a group. There is no hint of the individualism and entrepreneurial style that became prominent in the final decades of 20th Century Christianity.

¹²It could be argued that Peter and John's going to Samaria (Acts 8:5ff) is another example of one group's helping another group, i.e., the Jerusalem Church's sending two leaders to help the Samaritan Church. However, since the terms, "church," "disciples," or other such designations that would indicate a group are not used for the Samaritans, I do not feel that I can legitimately use Samaria as an example to build the case we are arguing here.

¹³2 Corinthians 9:3ff

¹⁴2 Corinthians 8:2-4

CONCLUSION

It is clear from these displays and others that we could cite, that the biblical assumption is that every believer, except those called to itinerant ministry, had a relationship with a local church. Wild geese, in normal circumstances, tend to be a part of a flock; it is the nature of the species. The same could be said of Christians.

As far as the record reveals, even most of those in itinerant ministries were in these ministries because of a "call" that was witnessed and affirmed by a local congregation. We do not find examples of valid itinerant ministries in the New Testament that began when a believer just decided that he was called to go forth and minister. Where there is sufficient detail in the account to inform us of the origin of a ministry, it always was in the context of a group.

Sometimes, but not always, itinerant ministries had a home-base church. Antioch was that church for Paul on his first two missionary journeys.¹⁵ On his third journey, Paul left Antioch and from that time onward had no home-base. By this time he was well known by all of the churches and had the respect of scores of churches throughout the Gentile world, many of which he had been instrumental in planting. His credibility had been established. By the pattern of Paul's third missionary journey, as well as other itinerant ministries mentioned in the New Testament, it is apparent that even when an itinerant ministry did not have a reporting relationship with a particular church, those in that ministry felt organically connected to each local church in particular and to the universal church in general.

¹⁵FIRST JOURNEY: Acts 13:1-3 is the record of Antioch's "releasing" (Greek-*apoluo*, "to release" or "to turn loose") of Barnabas and Saul, to go do what the Holy Spirit had called them to do. A "furlough" at Antioch of a little more than a year is recorded in Acts 14:26-28. SECOND JOURNEY: Acts 15:40-41 is the record of Antioch's commending Paul and Silas to the grace of God as the second journey is begun. Acts 18:22-23 records Paul's return to Antioch (53 A.D.), where he spent a few months before his extensive work in Ephesus. THIRD JOURNEY: Acts 18:23 states curtly, "And having spent some time there, he departed and passed successfully through Galatia..." After this departure (53 A.D.), Paul did not return to Antioch. He and his teams were itinerant ministries that spent long periods of time in some places and very brief stays in others. Note: Some confusion has been created by the phrase, "I must by all means keep this feast that cometh at Jerusalem," (v 21). This phrase is an interpolation that was not in the original text. This phrase has been omitted from all translations done in the last 100 years, except for those that have used the Textus Receptus (KJV and older English versions are based on the Textus Receptus).

PART TWO: MUTUAL DEPENDENCY

One of the characteristics of the believers displayed in the New Testament is a sense of inadequacy for the task set before them. The model that Paul set before us is one of dependency upon God. Describing himself, Paul said,

*I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me.*¹⁶

*And such confidence we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit;*¹⁷

*But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.*¹⁸

*For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.*¹⁹

One expression of dependency upon God is the reliance upon the endowments of the Holy Spirit that are resident in one's fellow believers. It seems as if God made every believer deficient in one or more areas. Thus, each of us is required to access the endowments of others in the areas of our weakness. Each Christian needs his fellows to fulfill his own service to Christ.

In I Corinthians 12:8-11, Paul listed examples of the spiritual manifestations that might be experienced by the Corinthian believers.²⁰ Yet, the core message of Chapter 12 is not the identification of such spiritual gifts, but the proposition stated in verse 7, *But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.* The rest of the chapter is an elaboration of this proposition. In order to emphasize the co-dependency that members of the church have in one another, Paul used the human body as analogy of the local church.

¹⁶Galatians 2:20

¹⁷2 Corinthians 3:4-6a

¹⁸I Corinthians 15:10

¹⁹Romans 12:3

²⁰ In addition to the list in I Corinthians 12, there is a shorter list in Romans 12:6-8 and still a briefer list in I Peter 4. In these lists, certain gifts are referred to by more than one name. By comparing these lists, there seem to be sixteen or seventeen gifts listed and manner in which the gifts are given would lead us to conclude that they do not intend to be exhaustive lists. Although these gifts may be found in a single individual, equipping him for a certain ministry, no one has them all.

- 12 *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.*
- 13 *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.*
- 14 *For the body is not one member, but many.*
- 15 *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.*
- 16 *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.*
- 17 *If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?*
- 18 *But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired.*
- 19 *And if they were all one member, where would the body be?*
- 20 *But now there are many members but one body.*
- 21 *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."*
- 22 *On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary.*

Unfortunately, many have focused on the list of Paul's examples of spiritual gifts listed in verses 8-11 (all of which the Corinthians were experiencing), and have missed – or in some instances, dismissed – the point that Paul sought to impress upon his readers.

Paul concluded this part of his argument by asking a series of rhetorical questions:

- 29 *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?*
- 30 *All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they?*

The Greek construction of these questions indicates that Paul expected a negative answer. In Koine Greek, a rhetorical question can begin with the negative *ou* (οὐ), which would mean that the questioner expected a positive answer, or with the negative *me* (μή), indicating that the questioner expected a negative answer²¹. Because Paul knew that the reply to each of his questions would be, "no," he began each of these rhetorical questions with *me*. Thus, he emphasized that no believer has it all and each believer needs what other believers have.

Consistent with Paul's exhortation, Peter wrote, *As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God,*²² echoing Paul's declaration, *But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.*²³

²¹Dana, H.E., and Mantey, Julius R., *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, (Toronto, Macmillan, 1927), p. 265

²²I Peter 4:10

Ephesians 4:16 is a key verse in understanding the mutual dependency among believers,

...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, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

Several things in this statement relate to our topic. First, the Church is spoken of as a body, *fitted and held together*; every member is important. Christ intends for us to be fitted into the body where we function together with others, causing *the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love*. It is not God's intention for believers in a given locality to be autonomous elements occupying adjacent space. Instead, believers are like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle whose protrusions and indentations fit together to form a beautiful picture of a completed church.

A second key thought is found in the word, *haphe* (ἅφή), which most modern versions render as *joint*.²⁴ Since Paul is using the body as a figure for explaining the local church, the term, *joint* is a legitimate translation. However, because of the nature and function of a joint in a physical body, most readers of the English New Testament will miss the implications of what Paul is saying here. The phrase rendered as *every joint supplies* is difficult to translate because ἅφή can have several related meanings. Another complicating factor is its function's being described as *supplying*. The term rendered *supply* is *epichoregia* (ἐπιχορηγία), which carries the sense of supplying something of substance.²⁵ In a physical body, joints do not supply, but they allow the skeletal frame to function. Arteries, nerves, and soft tissue supply. How could a joint supply? Help in understanding comes from an examination of how the term *haphe* was used in ancient Greek. Aristotle used it in the sense of *contact*.²⁶ It also was used in the sense of touch and sense (feeling something by touching it). It seems that by the use of these two terms, Paul was emphasizing that when a functioning member of the body touches another believer's life, at that point of contact, life and spiritual nourishment are exchanged. There is a mutual two-directional flow at the point of contact. Thus, as members of the local church spend time together, either in a worship service or in social contact, the Church is building itself up in love.

With this understanding of Ephesians 4:16, it becomes apparent that a believer who does not blend his life into the lives of his fellow believers will have an anemic spiritual life. Not only that, he will be depriving his fellow believers of the spiritual nourishment that they have a right to expect the Spirit to supply through him.

²³I Corinthians 12:7

²⁴The NIV renders the term as *ligament*, which is a very poor rendering. Another Greek term, *sundesmos* (σύνδεσμος see Colossians 2:19) refers to a ligament (that which binds together).

²⁵*Epichoregia* is found only twice in the New Testament, here and in Philippians 1:19, where it refers to the Holy Spirit's provision for Paul.

²⁶Aristotle, *De Gen, et Corr, I, 8, 24*. For an excellent discussion of the historic use of the term and the various meanings assigned to it, see Nicole, *The Greek Expositors New Testament Volume 3* (Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Company) 1976, pages 336-337

CONCLUSION

Each Christian lives a life of dependency upon Christ, and that dependency is met by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit supplies our lack in by four avenues:

- through His indwelling presence;
- through spiritual manifestations and spiritual gifts given to us;
- through the spiritual gifts and manifestations of the Spirit operating in the lives of our brothers and sisters with whom our lives have been linked;
- through the exchange of life, when believers spend time together.

It is important that we do not defraud one another, by isolating ourselves from the Body of Christ. To do so is to deprive the Body of Christ, in general, and our brothers and sisters in particular, of the spiritual resources that God desires to be supplied through us.

PART THREE: MUTUAL SUBMISSION

Ephesians 5:21 exhorts, *be subject to one another in the fear of Christ*

This verse is the final of four co-ordinate clauses:²⁷

Primary Clause: *And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit,* (V 18)

First co-ordinate clause: *19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,*

Second co-ordinate clause: *singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord;*

Third co-ordinate clause: *always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father;*

Fourth co-ordinate clause: *and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.*

These four co-ordinate clauses describe the behavior that grows out the exhortation to be filled with the Spirit (the primary clause).

The fourth co-ordinate, *be subject to one another in the fear of Christ*, is the only place in the New Testament that the expression, "in the fear of Christ," occurs. Reverence for the Lord, Himself, is the spirit in which mutual submission is to be fulfilled.

Thus, a "Spirit-filled" person has a submissive spirit.

²⁷Some, such as Calvin, take verse 21 as an independent clause, making the participle an imperative. However, for that to be true, *este* would have to be supplied and there is nothing to suggest this. For a discussion of this matter, see Salmond, S.D.F., "Epistle to the Ephesians," in *The Expositors Greek Testament*, (Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Printing Co., 1976) Vol. III, p.364

What does it mean to be mutually submitted to one another? Paul helps us to understand the concept by giving some examples:

- (1) husbands and wives 5:22-33
- (2) parents and children 6:1-4
- (3) slaves and masters 6:5-9

In each of these examples, one party in the relationship is in the cultural place of power and the other in the cultural place of subordination. In each example, Paul first addresses those in the place of subordination:

- *Wives, [be subject] to your own husbands, as to the Lord.*
- *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.*
- *Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as unto Christ.*

Paul urges these who are in the place of submission to be reverently submissive, rather than chaffing and having rebellious hearts.

Paul then speaks to those in the cultural place of power:

- *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her;*
- *And fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*
- *And masters, do the same things to them, and give up threatening, knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.*

Those in the place of power submit to those under them in two ways:

- (1) by lovingly and gently functioning in their roles of oversight; giving respect to their subordinates and viewing them as being their equals in the sight of God;
- (2) by providing for the needs of their subordinates.

This same paradigm is displayed in the scriptural passages that speak of the relationship between church leaders and those under their charge (the final section of this paper will give fuller attention to the relationship between the church and its leaders). For example, Hebrews 13:17 enjoins church members, *Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give account.*²⁸

Leaders, on the other hand, must remember how Jesus, the model shepherd, described the heart of the good shepherd, *the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.* (John 10:11) A good

²⁸ The term rendered, *submit*, is ὑπέικω (*hupeiko*). Interestingly, this is the term used for a wrestler who has lost a match – “I yield, you win.”

shepherd, surrenders his life in service to the needs of the flock, and in some cases that means death or danger.

Peter described the heart of the true shepherd when he wrote,

shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight 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. (1 Peter 5:2-3)

Note that the mutual submission in these cases is not mutual in respect to authority:

- The subordinate submits to authority.
- The person of authority submits by adopting an attitude of humility and respect toward those under his charge and gives his energy and resources toward the care of those under his charge.

Thus, Scripture is very clear concerning mutual submission between leaders and subordinates, but what about mutual submission between all Christians, without regard to authority or power position? Is Betty Brown, Sunday school teacher, in some way to submit to Jane Jones Sunday school teacher? If so, how?

Ephesians 5:21 is of plenary application. Mutual submission is a trait of all Spirit-filled believers, regardless of position or role in society or the church. Our Lord stated this in the starkest of terms,

*It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave;*²⁹

According to the picture displayed in these verses, believers are to view themselves as Christ's slaves who live for one another, rather than for themselves.

We now will explore some of the ways that Christians mutually submit to one another.

MUTUAL SUBMISSION MEANS RESTRICTING ONE'S PERSONAL FREEDOM BECAUSE OF A FELLOW BELIEVER'S WEAK CONSCIENCE

There are various reasons for, and manners in which, the believer will restrict his own freedom out of concern for his brother. The first that we will note is out of respect to a fellow believer's conscience.

One's conscience is developed and programmed by many factors. Therefore, conscience is an imperfect guide as to right or wrong. For example, one who has lived his whole life among cannibals, would not have a troubled conscience about killing and eating another human being, especially one who is a member of another tribe. One who from childhood had been taught that playing cards is wrong would be troubled if he participated in a card game.

²⁹ Matthew 20:26-27

Conscience is a lot like a warning signal at a railroad crossing. If there is a short in the circuitry on the rail, then the signal will flash when there is no train on the track, causing automobile traffic to stop, even though there is no danger. On the other hand, there can be a break in the circuitry, so that the signal does not flash when a train is rushing toward the intersection. As a result of the defective signal, automobiles will cross the rails, erroneously thinking that there is no danger. Then, there are some drivers who just tend to ignore the signal and rush on through the crossing. Some of these end up dead or injured. The wise and prudent thing to do when encountering a warning light at a railroad track, is to stop when the signal says to do so, even if the signal is wrong.

In the same way, some consciences have been developed in a manner that causes them to be troubled when no wrong is involved; some are placid when evil is being practiced; and some learn to ignore their consciences, which in time causes the conscience to lose any power of restraint.³⁰

Even though conscience is an imperfect measure of right and wrong, it is an inner facility that God created in man as a guide and protection. It is wrong and foolish to violate one's conscience, even if the conscience is troubling us over something that is innocent. That being true, no Christian should tempt someone to violate his own conscience, even if that person's conscience is misinformed. This is the subject of Romans 14.

Most interpret the one, "weak in faith," in Romans 14 as a brother who is narrow minded, perhaps a babe in Christ; he probably is bigoted and has no appreciation of the freedom that we have in Christ. The strong brother, in this understanding, is a mature Christian who has his feet on the ground and understands the beauty of Christian freedom. The problem with this view is that it makes the church subject to every opinionated "crank" who happens to wander in. This interpretation also violates Paul's clear declaration in Colossians 2:16-17,

Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day - things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance is Christ.

Let me present another view.

As background for our study of Romans 14, we first will examine I Corinthians 8 and 10. In these two chapters of I Corinthians, Paul discusses two questions:

- (1) Should Christians eat meat that has been sacrificed to idols;
- (2) Should Christians participate in the social meals that were held in the temples of idols?

³⁰ Paul described these in I Timothy 4:2, as having a "seared conscience."

I Corinthians 8

This chapter addresses the responsibility that one has for a brother who has a weak conscience. By, "weak conscience," Paul is referring to one whose conscience bothers him about something, but his conscience is not strong enough to keep him from doing it. So, he violates his conscience and by so doing "defiles" his conscience. Since he has chosen to do what he considers to be evil, he has chosen evil, thus committing a sin. The discussion which follows doesn't make a lot of sense unless we understand that the meat offered in the markets of Corinth came from the temples. These were sacrifices of meat that had been given to the idol. The meat in turn was sold in the meat market. So, almost any meat bought in the market had been dedicated to an idol. The choice for Corinthian Christians was, "Eat meat that had been sacrificed to an idol or be a vegetarian."

Here is how Paul's argument in I Corinthians 8 is constructed:

Vs 4-5

There is only one God. The idols represent gods who have no real existence. The many religions of the world have many gods and lords, but they are false gods and are not real.

V 6

For Christians, there is only one God, the Father, who made all things and we exist for him. There also is one Lord, Jesus Christ, who also was involved in the creation (Note that we exist "for" God the father, but we exist "through" Jesus Christ).

V 7

Unfortunately, not everyone is able fully to come to this understanding. Some, because of their background, view meat that has been dedicated to an idol as if there were some relationship with the idol god (which really does not exist). Even though their conscience bothers them when they eat this meat, their conscience is not strong enough to stop them. So they violate their conscience and defile it.

V 8

Eating or not eating various foods is irrelevant to our relationship with God.

V 9-10

Christians who have a true understanding of these matters, can eat meat sacrificed to idols without a troubled conscience. However, if weak-conscience believers whose conscience bothers them in this matter, see conscience-free Christians eating this meat, the weak-conscience believer will be encouraged to violate his conscience.

V 11

These weak-conscience believers who follow the example of conscience-free Christians, and go ahead and eat this meat with a troubled conscience, are ruined. This is tragic, because Christ died for the one who has been ruined by violating his conscience.

V 12-13

A conscience-free believer commits sin when he exercises his God-given liberty in a manner that results in the destruction of a conscience-troubled believer. Not only has he sinned against his brother, but he also has sinned against Christ.

V 14

This being true, Paul said that he would give up anything that would cause a brother with a weak conscience to stumble (violate his conscience).

I Corinthians 10:14-33

In these verses, Paul deals with the question of participating in idol feasts and how to conduct one's self when dining in the home of an unbeliever. Again, let's follow his argument:

Vs 14-22

These verses deal with the topic of fleeing from idolatry. Paul uses two analogies:

- (1) the Lord's Supper;
- (2) the eating of Old Testament sacrifices.

The cup of blessing was the third cup of the Passover feast (the cup consumed after the meal). This is the cup that Jesus took after supper (I Corinthians 11:25) and instituted the Lord's Supper. Jesus reinterpreted the meaning of this cup so that it pointed to the shedding of His blood on the cross. Jesus took a sheet of unleavened bread and broke it and distributed it, signifying that it represented His body. Thus, as Christians partake of the one loaf (Christians throughout the world partake of the unleavened bread symbol of the body of Christ), all are one in Christ.³¹

³¹The "Fellowship of the saints," is a concept that was held dear in the Church for centuries. Only in this century has this concept slipped from the consciousness of most church groups. The fellowship of the saints always has been centered about the Lord's Table. The sense of partaking of the Lord's Supper is a type of fellowship with those who throughout all of the ages partook of the loaf and cup, and fellowshiping with those who throughout the world would be partaking in that same 24 hour period, was precious to past generations. Unfortunately, we live in a self focused age that has little consciousness of the past nor any link with it. This partly is the result of American Christianity, in which new movements, radically different church paradigms, and the focus on the "immediate," functions as if life, truth, and the church all were created in the last half of the 20th Century.

In the same way, the Lord's Table has become a neglected option in most of the newer churches. In many, it never is observed. In others, it is something done in a back room in a small group, but never something that the whole church does together. For some, it is an occasional event, but not a real part of church-life. Instead, the Sunday gathering is focused on excitement, the charismatic personality of the "pastor" (incorrectly so labeled, because most are CEOs of a thriving corporation, rather than shepherds).

All testimony and evidence available to us indicates that the Apostolic and Post-Apostolic Church met primarily to partake of the Lord's Supper. It was the central aspect of the Sunday gathering. Thus, Paul's argument in I Corinthians 10 would be persuasive in his day. Today, it wouldn't carry much weight.

The priests of the Old Testament had a fellowship with the altar, through their eating of the sacrifices offered on the altar.³² Paul cites this as evidence that the Christian has fellowship with Christ when he partakes of his sacrifice, through the loaf and cup of the Lord's Supper.

Even though the worshippers of idols are deceived in thinking that they are worshipping a god, in reality they are worshipping demons masquerading as gods (Deut. 32:17). Christians cannot drink from the Lord's cup and the demon's cup. The conclusion of this argument is that such action will arouse the Lord to jealousy. Paul asks them if they are stronger than Christ, and thus able to survive a confrontation with Him. The conclusion is that it is wrong for Christians to participate in idol feasts, even though the food eaten is not contaminated in any way.

Vs 23-33

Paul uses their own argument to show the unchristian character in their argument. Thus, in verses 23-24, Paul points out that the true test of right and wrong, in spiritually neutral but disputed matters, is whether or not an action is spiritually beneficial to one's fellows.

In verses 25-26 Paul reiterates the spiritual neutrality of food, stating that everything in the world, including all food, belongs to God. He repeats Psalm 24:1, which is a traditional Jewish prayer before meals. The fact that something may have been offered in a temple before being sold in the market is overridden by the prayer of Psalm 24:1.

Verses 27-29 explain how to function in the midst of a religious pluralism. If a believer is invited to the home of an unbeliever, he should eat everything set before him, without having any qualms. However, if his host, out of courtesy to the Christian's religion, points out that the meat on the table had been sacrificed to an idol, assuming that Christians would not partake of such, then the believer should not partake. He does not refuse to partake because of his own conscience, but because of the host's conscience (his host's belief that it would be wrong for a Christian to partake of food that had been offered to an idol). Again, Paul emphasized the point that the scruples and needs of one's neighbor circumscribe the Christian's actions.

Verses 30-33 give the broad parameters within which Christians should operate in society.

- Vs 30-31** Believers are free to partake of all things with thanksgiving (I Timothy 4:1-5) and to God's glory.
- Vs 32** No one, inside or outside of the church, should be made to stumble by a believer's behaviour.
- Vs 33** Paul had set the example in this and he urged the Corinthians to follow his example (11:1).

What do we conclude about these passages, as far as our quest is concerned? In First Corinthians 10:14-22, Paul came to grips with the inherent right or wrong of the matter and made it clear that Christians should not participate in idol feasts. Thus, the weaker brother in I Corinthians 8 was doctrinally right (even though for the wrong reasons). In I Corinthians 10:25, the stronger brother is doctrinally right, concerning food bought in the market.

³²Leviticus 3:3; 7:15

Romans 14

With this background, we turn to Romans 14, defining the weaker brother as Paul so defined him in the passages in I Corinthians. "Weak in faith," refers to one who does not have the strength of his convictions to abstain from partaking of those things that trouble his conscience. A man who has the moral courage to die for what he believes, is a strong man (It is important to realize that there is a difference between a strong man and a man with a hardened heart).

Vs 2-3

We are to accept each other, even though we might disagree on matters of opinion. The vegetarian must recognize his kinship with the meat eater. The meat eater must recognize his kinship with the vegetarian.

V 4-12

God will not reject the meat eater because of the vegetarian's feelings. Nor will he reject the vegetarian because of the opinion of the meat eater. The important thing in all of this, whether partaking or abstaining, is that it is done with a heart that glorifies God. It is to God that we will give account, not to one another.

V 13

Christian love says to not judge one another in these secondary matters, but be more concerned about not tempting someone to violate his conscience.

V 14

Paul does not speak of moral cleanliness or the lack thereof. He speaks here of the ceremonial aspects of clean and unclean.

Anyone who views an act or an object as unclean, dirty, etc., to him it is unclean and he will be held accountable to God for violating his conscience and participating in evil (note verse 23).

V 15-21

Here again is the exhortation to consider the impact of our behaviour upon those about us. Our liberty, properly understood, can be destructive to others. If so, we should curb our liberty.

Vs 22-23

In matters that Scripture does not clearly label, "sin," each man should have his own understanding of what is good and what is evil.³³ If a man feels that something is acceptable and can eat, drink, or do, with a thankful heart, he is happy and God is blessed.

However, if a man feels that something is wrong and goes ahead and does it, even if his assessment is incorrect, he has sinned, because he has chosen to do that which he views as evil. Anyone who chooses evil, sins.

³³Of course, those things that are sin, without question, are spelled out in Scripture. Galatians 5:19-21 contains one catalogue of obvious sin. These obvious sins are not within the purview of this discussion.

CONCLUSION

There are many things that "religion" declares to be taboo, even though such labelling has no basis in the New Covenant. However, even if such an assessment is incorrect, those who accept the taboo as being correct must not violate the taboo. To do so is sin.

Those who know that the taboo is incorrect are free to ignore it, unless they are in a situation where those who accept the taboo would be drawn into a violation of their conscience. If one is in the presence of a believer who has a strong but misinformed conscience (one that is strong enough to be immune to temptation), the doctrinally correct believer's behaviour is not as circumscribed.

To cause a believer to violate his conscience is to cause him to sin, and the one who prompted the violation has sinned against his brother and against Christ.

Therefore, in the area of mutual submission, we submit to one another's weaknesses, by circumscribing our liberty when it becomes a danger to a fellow believer.

MUTUAL SUBMISSION MEANS RESTRICTING ONE'S PERSONAL FREEDOM BECAUSE OF A FELLOW BELIEVER'S WEAKNESS TOWARD SIN

Because so much has been written and preached on this particular aspect of restricting our freedom there is little reason to belabor the subject. So, we limit our comments here to but a statement and a slight elaboration of the principle.

When one is born again, he is cleansed from the guilt of sin and delivered from enslavement to sin.³⁴ However, sin is tenacious and as long as the Christian is in this life, he will be the object of temptation and will, from time to time, stumble, either in attitude or deed. This is clear in the First Letter of John, written to born again believers:

If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. My little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; (I John 1:8-2:1)

Individual believers are prone to some sins, but not to others. For example, picture a man who is in the check-out line at a super market. The clerk is called away from the cash register for a few moments and leaves the cash drawer open. The man who is left standing beside the register has to fight hard to resist reaching into the drawer and taking a few dollars, unnoticed. As he leaves the store, he walks by a porno movie theatre and is not even tempted to look at the

³⁴ This is the sense of Romans 6:6ff. The picture presented in this passage is of one who is a helpless slave to sin. At baptism, the old self is buried and a new self comes forth from the baptismal water. The new self no longer is a helpless slave, but one who has the power to choose. The baptized believer is exhorted to live with this attitude toward sin, and to make the right choices.

advertisements on display. Another man, in that same situation, may not be tempted one bit by the money, but upon leaving the store, he has to struggle to avoid yielding to the temptation of the porno theatre.

Both stealing and lust are sins. Both of these men were tempted to sin in their individual area of weakness. Both seemed to be immune to temptation in the other area.

A believer who enjoys a glass of wine with his evening meal, and never is tempted toward drunkenness, does not sin in drinking wine. However, if he has a brother who fights a weakness toward alcohol, the moderate brother should not serve wine at the evening meal if the alcohol-weak brother were his dinner guest. To do so, might cause the alcohol-weak brother to fall into sin.

Jesus said,

It is inevitable that stumbling blocks should come, but woe to him through whom they come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should cause one of these little ones to stumble. (Luke 17:1-2)

The Greek word for, "stumbling block," used here is, *skandalon*, which has as its literal reference the bait-stick on a trap. It refers to any act or habit that knowingly or unknowingly lures others into sin. In Matthew and Mark, this statement of Jesus is reported as being made toward children. In Luke, the statement is made in a different setting. This is the sort of statement that Jesus probably repeated from time to time as he spoke to different audiences. "Little ones," could refer to children, to those young in the faith, or as the NAS margin suggests, "humble ones."

I John 2:9-10 states,

The one who says he is in the light and yet hates his brother is in darkness until now. The one who loves his brother abides in the light and there is no cause for stumbling in him.

Indeed, one who loves his brother will not be a *skandalon* to his brother. Not only in matters of conscience, which we discussed in the previous section, but in areas of real temptation, we will not be occasions of stumbling to those whom we love. We will circumscribe our lives in such a way so that our strength will not be a snare to one for whom Christ died.

CONCLUSION

Individual Christians are tempted in different areas of weakness. When a believer is with another believer who has a weakness in a given area, the stronger believer will be sensitive to his brother's weakness. He will not participate in activities in a weaker brother's presence that would cause the weaker brother to fight temptation, or even fall into sin.

MUTUAL SUBMISSION IS MANIFESTED THROUGH LOVING AND HUMBLE SERVICE TO ONE ANOTHER

Galatians 5 contrasts a life lived under the Law and a life lived in freedom. In the first twelve verses of this chapter Paul emphasizes that the freedom which is ours in Christ ought not to be lightly despised. Then, in the last fourteen verses of the chapter, he points out that being delivered from the Law, Christians are free "to do the right thing." He defines what living in freedom looks like. A part of Paul's definition is making a distinction between living by the desires and impulses of the flesh, versus living under the control of and at the impulse of the Holy Spirit.

Paul describes the deeds of the flesh in verses 19-21:

*19 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are; immorality, impurity, sensuality,
20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissension,
factions,
21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarned you just
as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the
kingdom of God.*

Note that the list is not complete. Paul states that traits listed are examples of "things like these."

In the middle of this horrible list are, "enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissension, factions, and envying." These terms describe those who do not have a humble, loving spirit.

This list of deeds of the flesh (which are expressions of "self") are in sharp contrast to Paul's earlier exhortation,

*V 13 For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom
into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.*

Through love serve one another, is an important aspect of mutual submission. The proud cannot serve; the insensitive don't think about it; the self-centered expect to be served. So many people who otherwise are fine citizens in the Kingdom do not have a servant's heart. They are easy to identify, when we are with them for a while. They never open the door for someone else. They are discourteous. They can watch people carrying things without offering to help (assuming that they have the health to do so). They can attend a church dinner and never help clean up the tables, without being asked. Nor would they be found in the kitchen helping to wash the dishes. They don't mind asking others to do things. If they are "in ministry," they consider themselves too busy to spend time helping others with menial tasks. Often they are so goal-oriented that they, like the priest and Levite in the parable of the good Samaritan, rush along on the other side, rather than get side tracked in someone's need.³⁵

³⁵ Luke 10:30ff

Sometimes the best way to describe something is to describe what it is not. The above paragraph is an attempt to do that. Humble and loving servants of Jesus are humble and loving servants of the other servants. As noted earlier, to those who were concerned about greatness in the Kingdom, Our Lord said,

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve...³⁶

"Whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave," is strong language for independent Americans. However, such an attitude is God's measure of greatness in the Kingdom.

In Philippians 2:1-8, Paul penned one of the most beautiful descriptions of a humble and loving spirit,

- 1 If therefore there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion,*
- 2 make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.*
- 3 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself;*
- 4 do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interest of others.*
- 5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,*
- 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped,*
- 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, and being made in the likeness of men.*
- 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*

There is another side of the coin. Receiving the service of one's fellow believers also is an indication of a humble and loving spirit. Some always want to be givers. By doing so, they feel good about themselves. They cannot be receivers, either because of pride, or because of some sense of failure at not being able to take care of themselves. This is the same spirit that has trouble accepting God's grace. The flesh loves to remain important by earning points with heaven. However, the humble spirit that acknowledges the inability to achieve all things, do all things, and carry all things, is pleasing to God. Such a humble spirit is needed to receive service from one's brothers. However, if the one with a receiving a spirit also is one who rarely serves, his receiving spirit probably is not a loving, humble spirit, but possibly a spirit of entitlement.

³⁶Matthew 20:25-28

PART FOUR: MUTUAL RESPONSIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

In Part Three we noted the responsibility of believers to make certain that their freedom in Christ was not exercised in a manner that was destructive to other believers. We now will look at other ways in which mutual responsibility and accountability are expressed.

SECTION ONE: The Mutual Responsibility of Believers

A number of Scriptural passages concern themselves with the responsibility that believers have for one another. We will examine some of these.

The responsibility to exhort and encourage - Hebrews 10:23-27:

- 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful;*
24 and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds,
25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.
26 for if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,
27 but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment, and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries.

When The Epistle to the Hebrews was written, the Hebrew church had been in existence for several decades. The expected soon return of Jesus had not taken place. The fires of early passion for Christ and the New Covenant had been banked. The Hebrew church had entered the season described by contemporary church growth students as "the middle aged church." Some members of the Hebrew church were being drawn back into Judaism. The beauty of the Temple, the familiar and beautiful ceremonies, the sacrifices and the priesthood, as well as the family expressions of Judaism, these were their roots and they had begun to miss them. The Epistle to the Hebrews was written out of concern for those who were "falling away" back into Judaism and the Law.

This letter was written to remind the Hebrew Christians of the superior covenant that they had with Jesus Christ. The epistle declares that the ceremonies, the Temple, and all of the institutions associated with the Old Covenant were but temporary shadows and types of the new and final covenant given through Jesus. The expressions, "we have something better," and, "superior," are frequent terms in Hebrews.

The section before us speaks of the importance of faithful attendance at church meetings. The potential for falling away (Hebrews 6) and willful sin (Hebrews 10:26) was a growing reality in their fellowship. Consistent participation in church meetings, where believers encouraged and

exhorted one another was prescribed as a prophylactic against the threat of falling away (returning to Judaism) and willful sin.

One means of encouraging one another is our presence in the Sunday meeting. Besides the Holy Spirit, nothing adds more force to a Sunday meeting than a full house. In spite of the Holy Spirit, many Christians are discouraged when seats are empty or those who customarily are present are conspicuous by their absence. In some denominations and in some countries, "church attendance" is viewed as a duty and one's salvation depends on a stated minimal annual attendance. Such a works mentality is not the New Testament mentality. One's salvation may be in jeopardy because he rarely attends worship services, but it is not because he has not met the minimal requirement. It is because he is not giving and receiving the life that flows in the mutual encouragement that takes place in such meetings.

In addition to the desire to meet together and to glorify God in worship, there also should be a desire to participate in the high privilege of being an encouragement to our fellow believers. The attitude of believers toward worship and prayer meetings should be one of giving. Each one arrives at the service eager to give himself both to God and to his brothers and sisters. If all believers came to the meeting with the desire to give, everyone would experience the fullest benefit of the meeting. Each would give and each would receive. Thus, one way in which mutual responsibility for one another is exercised is by participating in church gatherings.

The responsibility to restore those who have fallen into sin - Galatians 6:1-3:

- 1 *Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted.*
- 2 *Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ.*
- 3 *For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.*

To begin with, we must determine the meaning of *caught in any trespass*, (*προλημφθῆ...ἐν τινι παραπτώματι* - *prolemfthe en tini paraptomati*). One view is that Paul was describing a situation in which a brother in Christ, walking along the path of life, is suddenly seized upon by the enemy and led into some act of sin. Thus, his guilt is somewhat diminished. Although the Greek term translated, "caught" ("overtaken," in the KJV) permits this view, the surrounding language tends toward another understanding. The, "overtaken in any trespass," (*prolemfthe en tini paraptomati*) can better be taken to refer to the place where the overtaking happened rather than to the means or the agent of it. Therefore, the idea is, "Brethren, even if a man be actually detected in the act of sin..."³⁷ The Greek further emphasizes the extreme nature of the event by using the expression, *ean kai*, meaning "even if." The picture is of a believer who is caught in the very act of sin, therefore, his guilt is apparent.

³⁷ For a discussion of the terms in this passage see: Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (Hendrickson Publishers) third printing 1995, page 215; Nicole, *The Expositors Greek New Testament*, Volume Three (Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmann Publishing) 1976, page 188.

There is a softening of the situation, however. The term translated, "trespass," is *paraptoma*, which has the idea of falling. The intimation is that the sinner is found in something that is not a deliberately planned sin, but something that he fell into. Even so, this does not mitigate his guilt.

It should be noted that the situation described in Galatians 6:1 is not like the one in I Corinthians 5. The Corinthian church member judged by Paul in I Corinthians 5 was practicing incest, quite openly. In that situation, Paul prescribed excommunication with a view to causing repentance and ultimate restoration. In the Galatians 6 situation, where one has fallen into sin, gentleness and a more immediate restoration is in view.

The point of all of this is that even if one is caught in the act of some sin, he is to be dealt with tenderly and in a spirit of meekness. This can be done only by those who are "spiritual." The spiritual man is led by the Holy Spirit in this very delicate work. The spiritual man is not even to judge, for even the spiritual are subject to temptation. So the instruction to restore through gentle action is followed by a warning to not consider one's self as being immune to temptation and moral failure.

One other thing is important to note. The term, "restore," is *katartidzo*. This word is used frequently in Scripture. It is a term that can refer either to the original framing of a mechanism or the replacement of something in a mechanism. Here, the erring brother is to be restored to his place in the body.

Two things stand out with reference to our mutual responsibility for one another.

- First, we are responsible for restoring the fallen. We cannot look the other way and be pleasing to God.
- Second, our actions must be done with gentleness. Criticism and faultfinding will be put aside.

We are to bear one another's burdens.

The responsibility for material care for one another - I John 3:17-18:

17 But whoever has the world's good, and behold his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?

18 Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.

James 2:14-17 expresses the same truth as a part of the discussion of faith and works,

14 What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him?

15 If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food,

16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?

17 Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.

Christians do bear a responsibility for the financial well being of one another. The Jerusalem Church, in the first days of Christianity modeled this beautifully.³⁸ Note the description of their communal living in the early chapters of Acts:

Acts 2:44-45

*44 And all those who had believed were together, and had all things in common;
45 and they began selling their property and possessions, and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need.*

Acts 4:32,33-37

32 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.

34 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,

35 and lay them at the apostles' feet; and they would be distributed to each, as any had need.

36 And Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means, "Son of Encouragement"),

37 and who owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

This does not mean that there is no responsibility for believers to try to work and provide for themselves and their families. Paul addresses this strongly in II Thessalonians 3:

10 For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone will not work, neither let him eat.

11 For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies.

12 Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread.

Paul wrote to Timothy that those who did not provide for their own households were worse than infidels (I Timothy 5:8).

The care of widows is a special concern of the church.

The controversy in the church that produced the first deacons had to do with the proper care of widows (Acts 6). After the church had a few years of history, Paul outlined requirements for widows who were to be supported by the Church. I Timothy 5 contains a rather detailed list:

³⁸The Jerusalem Church is the only church that practiced communal living. The Jerusalem Church followed this practice in the first few years of its existence because of the non-Palestinian converts who accepted Christ on the Day of Pentecost and then remained in Jerusalem. They did not have jobs nor houses in which to live. Therefore, an unusual situation existed which caused the Christians, in love for one another, to give up their personal property so that none would be lacking. This was completely voluntary, as is seen from Acts 5:3-4

- She has no family to care for her (vs 3-4, 8, 16)
- She gives herself to prayer, rather than to wanton pleasure (vs 5-6)
- She is over 60 years old (v 9)
- She has been the wife of one man (v 9)
- She has a reputation for good works (v 10)
- She has brought up children (v 10)
- She has shown hospitality to strangers (v 10)
- She has washed the saints feet (v 10)
- She has assisted those in distress (v 10)
- She has devoted herself to every good work (v 10)

The Scriptural principles are clear. Everyone should work and do all that he can to provide for himself and for his relatives. The Church is instructed to not support those who are not willing to work nor should the local church support those who have some means of support other than the church. However, if there are those, who, because of circumstances (perhaps even of their own making), are not able to support themselves, then their fellow believers have a responsibility to help them financially. One way to help financially might be to give some counsel about finances, while providing finances.

Another responsibility for one another is to be truthful in our conversations. We quote two passages that speak directly to this issue:

Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self With its evil practices.
(Colossians 3:9)

Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth, each one you, with his neighbor, for we are members of one another (Ephesians 4:25)

Jesus, describing those who hypocritically opposed him, said,

You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murder from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature; for he is a liar, and the father of lies. (John 8:44)

Therefore, even though there may be situations in which the flesh may incline one toward deception, Satan is behind it all. Christians should be scrupulous in accuracy in their speech. Exaggeration and deception have no place in a Christian's conversation.

Believers have a responsibility to speak accurate doctrine in conversation.

Paul addresses this in Ephesians 4:14-15

14 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;

15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspect into Him, who is the head, even Christ.

These verses have been used by Navigators and others to justify "speaking into one another's lives." However, such a use of verse 15 is a misuse of the verse. Clearly, Paul is speaking about doctrinal truth, since that is the subject of the paragraph. Christians should be careful about the doctrinal content of their speech. Quite often, believers are not even aware of the fact that their conversation has doctrinal content. They pick up phrases from TV preachers or some other source and these become a part of their conversation. Often, when someone has nothing to say, but feels that he or she is expected to say something, a trite phrase is spouted. Those around the speaker say, quietly or bombastically, "Amen." The phrase may not have correct doctrinal content, but no one thinks about it.

Two attitudes toward doctrinal accuracy are commonly seen in present day churches. One attitude is displayed in the camp of those who exist to expose heresy. These usually treat the offenders as enemies.

The other camp consists of most of the Charismatic Movement, which takes the view that we should not make an issue out of these matters because to do so is to divide the brethren. Such action is condemned as, "judging."

Scripture clearly takes the position that doctrine is important; that false doctrine is not to be ignored; that when addressing false doctrine, love must be the prevailing tone of the communication. For example, I John was written expressly to address Gnosticism, the false doctrine that prevailed in the Asian churches of his day.

There were three major heresies that infected the First Century Church. These were Judaism, Nicolaitanism, and Gnosticism.³⁹

³⁹ **Judaism** declared that in order to be a Christian, in order to be saved, one had to submit to the Law of Moses... in essence, to become a Jew. Paul spent his life contending that this was error. He emphasized that Christians are under a new covenant. Judaism found few advocates after the 70 AD fall of Jerusalem.

Nicolaitanism, which arose a bit later than Judaism, became quite strong and plagued the church for almost 100 years. Its adherents claimed to be followers of Nicolas, the proselyte, one of the seven deacons chosen in Act 6. The Nicolaitans told this story about their founder. He had a very beautiful wife. After the ascension of Jesus, the apostles were jealous, and so, Nicolas brought his wife forth and said that anyone who wanted to marry her could have her. He said that "we must abuse the flesh." He himself never had any woman other than his wife, his sons and daughters were honorable. However, his followers, taking the expression, "We must abuse the flesh," began to do just that. They became very immoral, committed fornication without restraint and were described by Clement, one of the early Church leaders, as being "as dissolute as he-goats."

What this group did was take Paul's teaching that we are not under law, and pushed it to the extreme, disowning all moral obligation as something that pertained to the flesh, which was inappropriate for the spiritual man. Through debauchery they sought to destroy their bodies. To them, this was not sin, because it was a means of attaining a higher place, when the body was spent of its lustful forces.

Nicolaitanism is condemned in two of the letters to the seven churches mentioned in Revelation (Revelation 2:6, 15). It still was being addressed in the church 1000 years later.

Gnosticism was the most dangerous enemy of the church during the first 150 years of its history. It was built on the premise that the spirit is good and that matter is evil. This being true, matter and spirit cannot have any enduring relationship. Therefore, salvation consists of escape from the realm of matter into the realm of the Spirit. There were numerous means of escape, the chief one being knowledge. In this special knowledge, called, "gnosis," known only by those who were initiated into the inner secrets of the

John the Apostle outlived all of the other Apostles. He settled in Asia Minor and wrote his Gospel and three epistles in the middle of the last third of the First Century. By this time, Christianity had become predominately a Gentile movement and John dealt with the heresies that came from the Greek culture, Nicolaitanism and Gnosticism.

The Gospel of John and The First Epistle of John were written to combat these heresies. As one reads through I John, with the understanding of why John wrote the treatise, it becomes a very polemical book. Galatians and I John are the most polemical books in the New Testament. Yet, I John is a book full of love. The book contains 105 verses, 35 of these (1/3) deal with love. John's way to combat heresy is by correct, positive teaching, and with a heart of love.

SECTION TWO: The Mutual Accountability Between Believers

Turning from one's responsibility for fellow believers, to the topic of one's accountability to fellow believers poses a bit of a problem. The problem is that it is difficult to find passages that speak directly to the topic. Accountability groups have become quite common in Christian culture. Great value has been seen in those groups where healthy relationships are fostered. Great harm has been seen in those groups where healthy relationships have not been fostered and where accountability structures have been abused.

Accountability settings become abusive, even cultic, when the members of the group lose their personal autonomy. It is important in any setting, that each individual continue to be responsible for himself. If through brainwashing or other means, an individual loses the ability to disagree with those about him, or to challenge what he is being told to do, then something is amiss. Each Christian must retain the ability and right to do what he is told to do or refuse to do what he is told to do, on the basis of what he believes to be the will of God.

group, man can rise above the earthbound chains of matter into heavenly apprehension of truth. Of course, since the body is matter, it cannot do good and so fornication, gluttony, and all other activities of the flesh are routine, but they do not touch the spirit of a man because the spirit is inherently good.

Many Greek Gnostics entered the church. Others, wanting to make Christianity acceptable to the intellectuals of the day, sought to conform Christian doctrine to Gnostic understandings. There were two main views of Christ held by different Gnostic groups in the First Century:

Docetic Gnostics - Jesus did not really appear in the flesh, but only seemed to do so. (*dokeo* "to seem"). He was a divinely orchestrated illusion. He was a "hologram"... "a virtual reality" being.

Cerinthian Gnostics - Jesus was the son of Joseph and Mary and was a human. The Christ-spirit inhabited the man, Jesus, at the time of his baptism, and left him before he went to the cross (this very heresy has been taught by some of the Word/Faith teachers in recent decades).

PART FIVE: FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION

In addition to the things said in the above sections relating to reconciliation, there is a personal responsibility that each believer bears for removing barriers between himself and other believers. We will examine the more prominent passages that deal with this topic.

Matthew 5:23-24

- 23 If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brothers has something against you,
24 leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.*

These verses are in a section dealing with the sin of anger toward a fellow believer. Jesus said that if one is in the very act of presenting his offering at the altar, and there flashes through his mind the realization that he has done something that has provoked anger in a brother, he should not proceed with presenting the offering, then afterwards rush to his brother and make peace. No, he is to suspend the offering, leaving it in the hands of the priest, so to speak, and rush forth to make peace. After that, he may return and go on with the ceremony.

This verse speaks of the supreme importance of reconciliation. To interrupt the ceremony of presenting an offering at the altar, with those in line behind waiting their turn, was a very extreme thing to suggest. Yet, Jesus said that this must be done. By presenting such a radical idea, Jesus emphasized that reconciliation with alienated brethren must be a priority for believers. Note that nothing is said about whether the anger is justified or not. The important thing, is to attempt reconciliation.

Matthew 18:15-18

- 15 And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.
16 But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed.
17 "And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer.
18 "Truly I say to you, whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*

We face a bit of a problem with this passage. The KJV, and the family of manuscripts used for that version, reads, "if your brother sins *against you*." More recent scholarship has felt that the manuscript evidence indicates that "against you" was not in the original text. How one decides on the manuscript integrity of *eis se* (against you) will determine how this passage is viewed. "Against you," clearly makes the sin something that has been done against a particular brother. The injunction in such case, would be for the offended brother to go to the offender and make things right.

On the other hand, if these two words were not in the original, then the sin could be something of a general nature, which every person in the Christian community might be obligated to deal with. Which ever view is taken, it is clear that some one has the responsibility to take the initiative.

In my opinion, the words of Jesus, with or without, *eis se*, were understood by the disciples as referring to a personal sin against an individual. I base my conclusion on Peter's response to Jesus words. Immediately after Jesus finished this discussion, Peter came up and asked Jesus,

*Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?"*⁴⁰

In this passage, the words are clear, *eis me*, "against me." Peter understood Jesus to be talking about a personal affront, not some general sin. It is with that understanding that we look to this text.

The pattern is clear. Every effort should be made to keep the exchange private. The offended brother should not present the problem "for prayer" in his prayer group. If he is offended, his communication should take place only with his brother and with God, in prayer. If offended, a brother should go immediately to the offending brother.⁴¹

If the offender is obdurate, then the offended brother is to take one or two witnesses with him. The witnesses may or may not have been witnesses of the offence. What they are witnesses of is the effort to achieve reconciliation. If the offender will not acknowledge his fault and ask forgiveness, then the matter is to be presented to the church.⁴² If the offender will not repent and ask forgiveness when told to do so by the church, then he is to be excommunicated. The terms, heathen and publican are descriptive of the type of boycott to be exercised. The heathen were not allowed in the temple, so this was a severe ban. Publicans were social pariahs, so this was a limited boycott. One could not avoid contact with the person in society, but there was to be no friendship extended.

Another passage with similar portent is I Corinthians 6. Paul had just given instructions for dealing with the brother who had been practicing flagrant sin, by having an open incestuous relationship with his step mother. He tells the church to act as a court and pronounce sentence.⁴³ With the thought of a courtroom in mind, Paul immediately turned to the topic of Christians' suing each other before the civil courts of Gentiles.

1 Does any one of you, when he has a case against his neighbor, dare to go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints?

⁴⁰Matthew 18:21

⁴¹The Greek in this instance is *elegxon*, which means to convict or convince the offender of his fault, without delay.

⁴²By the term, "church," Jesus either meant the group of believers already in existence (the disciples, possibly), or he is speaking prophetically of future local churches.

⁴³I Corinthians 5:12-13

- 2 *Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is judged by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts?*
- 3 *Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, matters of this life?*
- 4 *If then you have law courts dealing with matters of this life, do you appoint them as judges who are no account in the church?*
- 5 *I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not among you one wise man who will be able to decide between his brethren,*
- 6 *but brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers?*
- 7 *Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded?*
- 8 *On the contrary, you yourselves wrong and defraud, and that your brethren.*

The church is declared to be the place to settle disputes between believers, rather than in a court of law, administered by the government. Paul does not spell out what sort of a body is to constitute the church court. Possibly the Acts 15 pattern is assumed. In that instance, the church leadership came together and "heard the case" before the church. Any who wanted to do so were allowed to listen in, but the leadership functioned like a court of appeals. So, if there are matters of such nature that unbelievers normally would take to court, Christians should take these matters before the church.

These two passages (Matthew 18 and I Corinthians 6) present two scenarios in which offended people are given a paradigm for dealing with their hurts. I believe that there is a higher way. It is interesting that we have these two passages that give a pattern for dealing with offenses and disputes that picture some corrective act on the part of the offended believer. However, we have a whole catalogue of New Testament Scriptures that imply or state that it is better to forgive the offense and ignore it.

First, we turn to Paul's letter to the Philippian Church. In his various letters, Paul used terms that are very instructive concerning the Church. The term that the Holy Spirit chose to use for the Kingdom of Christ on earth, in this age, is *ekklesia* (ἐκκλησία). This word means, "The called out ones." It is a designation for citizenship in one of the Greek city-states. A Greek city state was called a *polis* (πόλις). In each *polis* there was a mixed society. There were slaves, freedmen, and non-citizens from other places. The citizens of the *polis* took very seriously their responsibility as citizens. Every citizen was a participant in the welfare of the city. The purest democracy ever to exist in a political entity probably was exemplified in the *polis*. When decisions for the *polis* had to be made a crier went through the streets calling the citizens to a town meeting. Only the citizens could attend the meeting. Thus, the gathering of the citizens was called the *ekklesia*, "The called out ones."

So, first we note that the church consists of that select group called out of society to form an entity apart from the rest of the world.

The second family of words that come into view here are those that spring from *polis*, relating to citizenship. The first word is found in Philippians 3:20,

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The term translated, "citizenship," is *politeuma* (πολίτευμα), which literally means, "commonwealth." The term denotes a colony of foreigners in an alien country. In a colony, the citizens do not follow the mores of the nation in which they live, but reflect the country whose colony they are. A good example would be the former English colonies in India, which continued to have afternoon tea, etc. The colony and the home nation share in one another's fortunes and misfortunes. This is the sense of "commonwealth." Thus, this term pictures the church as a colony of heaven in a foreign society, earth. The colony lives by the standards of and the mores of heaven.

A second word of this family of terms found in Philippians is in 1:27,

Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ; so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.

In this verse, the term translated, "conduct yourselves," is the term, *politeuesthe*⁴⁴ (πολιτεύσθε), which means "discharge your obligations as citizens."

Through these terms used to describe the Church and church members, we see a picture of an alternative society (the Church) which lives by a different standard, code, etc., than the world in which it exists. What is that code? Basically, it is the example of Jesus. Paul said, *Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ* (I Corinthians 11:1); *Therefore be imitators of God* (Ephesians 1:1); *You also became imitators of us and of the Lord* (I Thessalonians 1:6). Paul's desire was that those who came to Christ through him would look to the model of Jesus Christ for how to live. Paul sought to follow Christ and model the life style of Jesus Christ before them, since they had not seen Jesus for themselves.

One of the most striking statements concerning following the example of Jesus is in I Peter 2:21,

For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps

The word translated, "example," is *hupogrammos* (ὑπογραμμός). This term referred to the handwriting model that teachers presented to students who were learning to write. The Greek child would have a wax tablet. Affixed to the top of the page was a copper plate with Greek words written on it. The student was to copy the words over and over and over until he could reproduce the handwriting exactly as it was presented on the *hupogrammos*, the model or example before him.

⁴⁴*politeuomai* (politeu>omai) in its primary form

By the use of this term in I Peter 2:21, Peter is saying that we are to focus intently on the life of Christ. We are to be concerned about details and we are to reproduce exactly the model presented by Jesus.

Notice that Peter wrote this in the midst of a section describing how Christians are to conduct themselves in an alien society. The *ekklesia* who have their citizenship in the commonwealth of heaven are to conduct themselves according to the model of Jesus, not according to the pattern of the society in which they live, nor according to the tendencies of the flesh.

Peter gives a prescription for handling persecution and offenses, when we have been slandered, accused, or abused, when we have done no wrong. We are to do it the way that Jesus did it,

Who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously.

How did Jesus do it? He forgave it and ignored it, trusting Himself to the God who judges righteously. We are hard pressed to find any example of Jesus going to someone who had sinned against him or wronged him and trying to make things right. He did openly expose the hypocrites when they confronted him, but He continually modeled and taught forgiveness.

Back to Philippians. In Philippians 4:1-9, Paul gives summary details about living in this world. In verse 5, he wrote,

Let your forbearing spirit be known to all men.

Here is an exhortation to forgive and not even take notice of wrongs done against us. This is exactly what Paul wrote in I Corinthians 13:5c,

[Love]...is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered.

The expression, "take into account," is *logizetai* (λογίζεσθαι), which has the idea of "noticing," or, "meditating upon." It also is used to denote a "ledger of accounts." So, Paul states that if we love one another, we will not take notice of wrongs done against us. We will be longsuffering, forgiving, and ignoring of such affronts.

We could go on and on presenting passages that have this flavor..."forgive and ignore." Yet, there are only two passages, Matthew 18 and I Corinthians 6, that speak of a wounded believer's going to the offender to do something about it. One of these, I Corinthians 6, says that it is better to be defrauded than to do something about it (I Corinthians 6:7). This is just another expression of Jesus teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:38-48),

You have heard that it was said, "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him

who wants to borrow from you. You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

My own experience has been that when we take action to try to straighten things out, especially when we have been slandered or falsely accused, we muddy the water more than we clear things up. In case after case I have seen church leadership, especially, create more of a mess by trying to clarify things with those who have gossiped about them or sinned against them in some way.

How, then, should we respond to Matthew 18? It seems apparent that Matthew 18 and Galatians 6:1 are motivated by the same concern, the spiritual survival of the offending believer. The only reason that a spiritual believer would go to one who has sinned against him is because he is worried about the salvation of the offender. Usually, one who has committed an offense, deals with guilty feelings. He has trouble being open and thus, manifests behaviour that is harmful to the church. The motive that would drive us to seek out the offender and try to talk with him is because we are worried about his spiritual survival.

Again, out of past experience, I believe that prayer and the guidance of the Holy Spirit are essential in these matters. Our usual *modus operandi* should be to forgive, forget, and ignore the sin against us. This is the model of Jesus. However, out of concern for the erring believer, the Holy Spirit might say to us, "Go talk to him." In such a case, we go humbly, and prayerfully, not in the sense of an Elijah who is going to set things straight.

CONCLUSION

One can reach no other conclusion than this, "Relationships are of primary importance in the economy of God." Every follower of Jesus will do all that he can to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace; to be at peace with all men; to bear the burdens of his brothers and sisters; to live a forgiving life; to consider others more important than himself; to do all that he can to heal fractured relationships; to care about the spiritual survival of all believers; to seek to be a blessing to others in the Body of Christ. Every believer will realize that he is not what God wants him to be, apart from his place and function in the Church.

PART SIX: The Role of Relationship in The Exercise of Authority

An important aspect of New Testament relational church life is the recognition and exercise of authority. A place to begin an overview of this subject is an examination of the terms⁴⁵ that the New Testament uses to describe:

- The nature of biblical authority
- those who are in authority
- terms that describe the proper and improper exercise of authority
- the attitude of those who are subject to the authority of church leaders

Archon: Leadership described by the term, *archon* (ἄρχων) translated, "ruler," "commander," "chief," or "leader," is forbidden in Christ's Church. The root of this term is the verb, *archo* (ἄρχω), and has the idea of being the "first." It has the sense of being *primary*, one who is answerable to no one and who is "the" authority. The *archon* lords it over those whom he rules. Jesus clearly said that this style of church leadership has no place in His Kingdom,

*You know that the rulers (archon) of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave (doulos).*⁴⁶

In his instructions to the elders of the Jewish Diaspora, Peter reiterated Our Lord's standard for leaders,

*nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.*⁴⁷

Doulos: Elsewhere, we have written extensively on the biblical implications and application of *doulos* (δοῦλος), meaning, "slave",⁴⁸ so we forego an in-depth study of the term. Even so, it is important to realize that in the New Testament, this term is the second most frequently term to describe the relationship between Christ and those in His Church. Only the term, *disciple*,⁴⁹ is used more frequently, and that term occurs only in the Four Gospels and Acts. *Doulos*, on the other hand, is used in every New Testament book to describe those who are a part of Christ's Church. Paul frequently used the term to describe himself and other leaders in the Church.⁵⁰

⁴⁵The term, *kratos* (κράτος), meaning "strength," "dominion," "power," is used primarily as a trait assigned to God. It is used only remotely with any reference to humans and is not a term used to describe the authority of Church leaders. Therefore, it will not be included in our study (note: a compound form of this term is used for the portion of Satan's forces that direct evil spirits in the world; Ephesians 6:12).

⁴⁶Matthew 20:25-27

⁴⁷I Peter 5:3

⁴⁸James Garrett, *The Doulos Principle*, (Tulsa, Oklahoma, Doulos Press) 1999

⁴⁹*Mathetes* (μαθητής)

⁵⁰The *doulos* is not a hired servant, a free man who sells his time and skills. The *doulos* is his master's possession. This term occurs 125 times in the New Testament. It is the common term used to signify the

Biblical elders understand that they are not in charge; Christ who is the Head of the Church is in charge. In submission to Christ, whose Church they steward, elders implement the Master's will in the exercise of authority. When this *doulos* attitude is absent, when elders are implementing their own will, or their own wishes, or the wishes of the congregation, rather than humbly seeking the will of Christ, it is not a stretch to say that they have kidnapped the Bride of Christ. Through sound exegesis of Scripture, and prayerfully seeking and receiving guidance from the Holy Spirit, biblical elders steward the Bride of Christ, the Church, God's flock.

Exousia: A second term that must be considered is *exousia* (ἐξουσία). The root of this word is the state of being verb, *eimi* (Greek εἰμι), "I am." Thus, *exousia* indicates an authority that is resident in a being because of who he is. *Exousia* belongs to God alone and to those on whom He bestows *exousia* within defined spheres. No one has *exousia* without God's granting it. Some interesting examples of the use of *exousia*, expressing God's absolute authority are:

Luke 12:5 "But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who, after He has killed, has authority (*exousia*) to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him!"

Acts 1:7 He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority (*exousia*);

Romans 9:21 Or does not the potter have a right (Greek *exousia* i.e. "authority") over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use?

Jude 25 to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority (*exousia*), before all time and now and forever. Amen.

The *exousia* of God is displayed in nature. Gerhard Kittel notes that the frequent use of this term in the context of nature shows that nature is regarded as an ordered totality under the *exousia* of God.⁵¹ An interesting use of the term is found in the Revelation, in which God gives *exousia* to the destructive forces of nature.⁵²

After Jesus' resurrection, God the Father bestowed total *exousia* upon the Son. He declared to His disciples, "All *exousia* has been given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matthew 28:18).

Master/servant relationship between God and the believer. Paul reminded the Corinthians, "You are not your own; you were bought with a price." (I Corinthians 6:19c-20a). Peter, acknowledging the freedom that we have in Christ, urges the believers to "Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as *douloi* of God." (I Peter 2:16). The Revelation is written to the *douloi* of Jesus Christ through John, a *doulos* of Jesus Christ (Revelation 1:1). It should be noted that the term, *despotes* (Greek δεσπότης), "one who owns slaves," is used four times for Jesus (II Timothy 2:21; II Peter 2:1; Jude 4; Revelation 6:10) and once for God the Father (Acts 4:24). These two terms, *despotes* and *doulos* define clearly the absolute authority of God (the slave owner) on the one hand and absolute submission of the believer (the slave) on the other. Whatever one's role might be in the Kingdom, or whatever authority a believer might have, the *despotes/doulos* relationship between God and the Christian remains unchanged.

⁵¹Kittel, op. cit., Volume II pages 566-567

⁵²Revelation 14:18; 6:8; 9:3, 10,19; 16:9

This is reflected in the statement made in Colossians 1:19, concerning the fullness of God's being in Him; it is described in Hebrews 1:3, concerning His present role in the universe; and in I Corinthians 15:24-28, concerning His temporary rule until all enemies are put under his feet.

For reasons that we could discuss and debate for hours, God has granted a measure of *exousia* to Satan's sphere of dominion. When he tempted Jesus in the wilderness, Satan made the statement that the *exousia* and splendor of the kingdoms of the world had been given to him (Luke 4:5-6). Jesus did not debate the issue with Satan.⁵³

An interesting scene is recorded in Revelation 13, in which Satan, having the above referenced *exousia*, is seen as giving authority to the *beast*; the implication is that God sets a time limit on how long this *exousia* can be exercised (v2-7, esp. v5). This is in keeping with Jesus' statement to the Jewish authorities, "This is your hour - when darkness reigns." (Luke 22:53)

Civil authorities have *exousia* to the degree that God allows. Witness the exchange between Jesus and Pilate,

*"Do you refuse to speak to me," Pilate said; "Don't you realize that I have exousia either to free you or the exousia to crucify you?" Jesus answered, "You have no exousia over me that was not given to you from above."*⁵⁴

Paul wrote in Romans 13:1, *Everyone must submit himself to the governing exousia for there is no exousia except that which God has established. The exousia that exist have been established by God.* (See also I Peter 2:13-14, in which Peter uses the term, *dia* (διά) - "through" him [v14], indicating that through the king, God sends governors to exercise authority).

In the above verses we see a reflection of the Scriptural principal, *societal order is an expression of God's exousia*. The Christian is exhorted to respect the *exousia* functioning within that order.⁵⁵

By themselves, these Scriptures would cause us to conclude that a Christian should give absolute obedience to authorities without any thought of right or wrong. Some popular teachers have made absolute obedience one of their primary doctrines. Advocates of this view state that wives should be in submission to husbands, even if the husbands required them to commit ungodly acts; church members are taught that they must obey the leaders over them, even if such obedience required a violation of conscience. The same teaching has been put forth concerning civil authorities.

The rationale behind this teaching is that the authorities have been put in place by God. Therefore, obedience to such authority must be absolute, even if the authorities command those under them to commit an ungodly deed. If an ungodly deed is committed in obedience to an

⁵³Note related passages - Acts 26:18; Colossians 1:13; Ephesians 2:2; 6:12

⁵⁴John 19:10-11 KJV adapted

⁵⁵Ephesians 6:5-9; Colossians 3:18; I Peter 2:18; etc.

authority, the perpetrator is guiltless. The authority would be held accountable, not the obedient underling.

Apostolic example demonstrated in a number of episodes recorded in Acts, makes clear that this view is not the proper response to perverted *exousia*. The apostles disobeyed perverted authority, but did so with respect and without rebellion. What appeared to be an act of rebellion and disobedience, actually was an act of sober obedience to the primary *exousia*, God Himself.⁵⁶ Because the apostles modeled this behavior before authorities that were demanding that they disobey God, the principle emerges that whether in the home, the Church, or in society, individual believers are obligated to be obedient to God, even when that means that they will disobey someone or a group that occupies a position of God-ordained authority.

Dunamis: The term, *dunamis* (δύναμις), refers to the "power or strength that enables one to do something." Although *exousia* and *dunamis* sometimes overlap in usage, a careful examination of the texts will reveal that a particular emphasis is being made by the choice of the word used.

Consider this illustration that contrasts the two terms, *exousia* and *dunamis*. A policeman who is 5' 8" in height and weighing 150 pounds, has a warrant for the arrest of a 6' 6" criminal, weighing 250 pounds. The policeman has the badge, the uniform, and the warrant. He has *exousia*. The criminal, however, being bigger and stronger, has more *dunamis*. In this illustration, the one with the *exousia* does not have enough *dunamis* to carry out his duties. The one with the *dunamis* on the other hand, has no *exousia*. In the world, *exousia* and *dunamis* do not always occur in the same person or institution.⁵⁷

In the Kingdom of God, *exousia* and *dunamis* seem to be given as a unit. When God bestows spiritual authority (*exousia*), He bestows power (*dunamis*) to the degree that spiritual authority (*exousia*) is given.

To the twelve, Jesus gave *exousia* and *dunamis* to drive out demons and to heal diseases (Luke 9:1).

When the seventy returned from their ministry tour, Jesus told them that He had given them the *exousia* to trample down all of the *dunamis* of the enemy (Luke 10:19).

Our Lord promised *dunamis* to the eleven apostles, to whom he already had given *exousia* in the affairs of the kingdom, "Ye shall receive *dunamis* after the Holy Spirit is come upon you." (Acts 1:8)

Under normal circumstances, the *douloi* of Jesus have the *exousia* to use the name of Jesus with accompanying *dunamis*. A very interesting event is recorded in Acts 19:13-16, in which the sons of Sceva, not being *douloi* of Christ, attempted to use the name without *exousia*. They had no *dunamis* and were attacked by the demons which they sought to expel. This is in contrast to Paul,

⁵⁶see Acts 4:1-4, 10-22, 33; 5:12-32, 40-42

⁵⁷ *Dunamis*, as *coercive power*, frequently is abused. Unfortunately, church history is replete with episodes of such abuse. Also grievous is the not-infrequent abuse of *dunamis* in local church settings.

who described himself as a slave of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:1), and one who had the *exousia* from Christ (II Cor. 10:8; 13:10), and one through whom God worked *dunamis* (Acts 19:11).

Passages in the Gospel of John reveal that Jesus Himself ministered only at the direction of the Father, thus setting the example of effective servanthood, moving in the authority and with the power bestowed of God (John 8:26, 40; 12:49; 15:15; 5:19; etc.).

Proistemi: The New Testament term that describes the ruling style that is acceptable in God's Kingdom is communicated by the term, *proistemi* (προΐστημι)⁵⁸. The term literally means, "to stand before," "to place before," or "to set over."

It is unfortunate that the KJV tends to translate *proistemi* as, *rule*, a term that the newer translations have tended to avoid. The NAS renders *proistemi* with the term, *rule*, only one time.⁵⁹ The NIV totally avoids it. Note the following instances of *proistemi* in the New Testament and how these three popular various versions render the term:

	KJV	NAS	NIV
Romans 12:8	ruleth	leads	govern
1 Thess. 5:12	over	have charge	over
1 Timothy 3:4	ruleth	manages	manage
1 Timothy 3:5	rule	manage	manage
1 Timothy 3:12	ruling	managers	manage
1 Timothy 5:17	rule	rule	direct the affairs
Titus 3:8	maintain	engage in	devote themselves to doing
Titus 3:14	maintain	engage in	devote themselves to doing

Proistemi always is used with the genitive case of the person or thing that is being managed. The genitive case in Greek is used to indicate something about a relationship. For example, when the idea of ownership is to be communicated, the genitive is used. When the idea of separation from a relationship is to be communicated, the genitive is used. Thus, the genitive case comments on a relationship. This term and the pattern of its usage does not picture those in church leadership as detached overseers; they are not professionals doing a job. They belong to those whom they oversee. They have the same Lord, are controlled by the same Spirit, and have a common destiny.

Poimaino: Another term describing church leadership is *poimaino* (ποιμαίνω), to "tend a flock."⁶⁰ This is a verb, describing what elders do (The noun form of this term, *poimen* [ποιμήν] a *herdsman*, is used only once in Scripture to refer to church leadership - Ephesians 4:11).⁶¹ The

⁵⁸Romans 12:8; I Thessalonians 5:12; I Timothy 3:4, 5, 12; 5:17

⁵⁹ I Timothy 5:17

⁶⁰ The noun form of this term, *poimen* (Greek- ποιμήν), a *herdsman*, is used only once in Scripture to refer to church leadership - Ephesians 4:11 (usually translated, "pastor").

⁶¹ The tendency to render this Greek term in Ephesians 4:11 by the Latin term, "pastor," rather than translating it into clear contemporary English – "herdsman," or "shepherd" - the cultural office of the professional church leader is validated. Far better to rid ourselves, totally, of the term, "pastor," and

term, *poimaino*, is consistent with the *proistemi* concept, in that the shepherd does not drive the flock before him, but he is in front of the flock and it follows him. Frequently, the shepherd walks along, surrounded by his flock. The tender heart of the shepherd, emotionally involved with the flock, is an illustration of the proper style of Biblical church leadership.

As already noted, Peter urged elders to avoid shepherding as *overlords*, but to lead *by example* (I Peter 5:2-3). In this vein, Ezekiel 34:1-6 records God's indictment against the spiritual shepherds of Israel, who were motivated by self-interest rather than by concern for the welfare of the flock.

The combination of these two terms, *proistemi* and *poimaino* picture the good shepherd as one who exists as a servant to the needs and well-being of the flock. The beautiful Twenty-Third Psalm pictures the security of a flock under the care of such a shepherd.

Episkopos: The Greek term, *episkopos* (ἐπίσκοπος), "overseer," denotes one who has the responsibility of seeing that things done by others are done rightly. The term also denotes a "guardian."⁶² Contained within this term is more of a sense of authority than in the two terms just noted. Neither guarding nor superintending can be done without the exercise of authority. However, the shepherd/overseer/elder must realize that he has *exousia* and *dunamis* only at the discretion of God and that he, himself, is a *doulos* of Jesus Christ. He must remain aware of the fact that the flock is not his, but that it belongs to his Master and exists only for the Master's use.

Relational Authority and Ecclesiastical Authority

Two classes of leadership authority are modeled in the New Testament: relational and ecclesiastical.

Relational Authority

Paul clearly demonstrated that the preferred authority is one of influence and example, which is possible only if the leader has a deep relationship with those under his authority. Two clear examples of relational authority are recorded in Paul's letter to Philemon and his First Letter to the Thessalonians.

Paul's letter to Philemon is a showcase of relational authority. Paul stated that because of his apostolic authority he could order Philemon to receive Onesimus. However, he preferred to appeal to Philemon on the basis of their relationship.

Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to order you to do that which is proper, yet for love's sake, I rather appeal to you - since I am such a person as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus - I appeal to you for my child, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment, Onesimus, who formerly was useless to you, but now is useful both to you and to me...If then you regard me a partner, accept him as you would me... Having

translate the term by English words that do not come with the baggage attached to, "pastor."

⁶²I Peter 2:25

*confidence in your obedience, I write to you, since I know that you will do even more than what I say.*⁶³

The same sense is found in Paul's First Epistle to the Thessalonians,

*...even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority...we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children.*⁶⁴

When dealing with the multitude of problems in the Corinthian Church, Paul appealed to them as a father.

*I do not write these things to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children. For if you were to have countless tutors in Christ, yet you would not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. Therefore I exhort you, be imitators of me.*⁶⁵

Ecclesiastical Authority

The other class of authority that is exercised by church leaders is *ecclesiastical*. This is the least preferred, and yet, sometimes it is necessary. Paul exercised ecclesiastical authority when the Corinthians failed to deal with a case of incest (I Corinthians 5:1-5, 13).

It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife.² You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst.³ For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present.⁴ In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus,⁵ I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.... But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves.

The third stage of the Matthew 18:15-18 formula involves ecclesiastical authority.

Stage One: *"If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother"*

Stage Two: *But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed.'*

Stage Three: *"If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector."¹⁸ Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.*

These instructions conclude with a statement concerning binding and loosing. The Greek form used here is a periphrastic passive participle in the perfect tense. (Translating Greek participles

⁶³Philemon 8-11, 17, 21.

⁶⁴I Thessalonians 2:6-7

⁶⁵ 1 Corinthians 4:14-16

into English is difficult. Often a literal translation is impossible because of grammatical differences in the two languages.) The significance of this form of the participle is that it refers to something that already has been accomplished. The action of the perfect participle precedes that of the main verb and the action continues in force. Therefore, a nearly literal translation of v18 would be,

Whatsoever things ye bind on earth shall be what already has been bound in heaven, and whatsoever things ye loose on earth shall be what already has been loosed in heaven.

The point being made is that Our Lord already has decreed that a person who will not hear the Church in such a dispute is declared to be excommunicated by the court of heaven.

This is the pattern that must prevail in ecclesiastical authority. It is delegated authority. The Church, the apostle, the council of elders, or any other governmental representation of the Kingdom exercises authority as the representative of Christ. As representatives of Christ, church authorities must be certain that they are representing Christ and functioning according to His will. The proper model for ecclesiastical authority consists of fulfilling scriptural decrees, implemented under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

CONCLUSION TO THE DISCUSSION OF AUTHORITY

There are several instances in the New Testament urging Christians to submit to or to respect authority,⁶⁶ and sheep who will not heed the voice of their shepherds are a serious problem. On the other hand, there is not a single passage in the New Testament in which leaders are exhorted to assert their authority. A self-conscious (and probably insecure) leader who needs to make certain that he is given proper respect and always has a need to be recognized as being a leader, is a problem to himself, to the Church, and to God.

Those who exercise authority must always be aware of the fact that they themselves are under authority – they are *douloi*, slaves of their Master. As His slaves they are

- stewarding His Bride,
- caring for His flock,
- protecting His flock,
- under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, managing His Kingdom.

When church leaders stand before the Judge of All Mankind, they will have to give answer to the Master concerning how faithful they have been in their stewardship and in what spirit they have fulfilled their duties.

⁶⁶Hebrews 13:17; Ephesians 5:22-24, etc.