

THE "CHURCH" – WHAT IT REALLY IS AND WHAT IT IS REALLY SUPPOSED TO BE AND TO DO.

By: Bob Stewart

I received a letter from a dear friend a while back. Here is a portion of it,

“After going to the funeral a few days ago, I saw and heard the same old thing; The church-the church. I have been to all denomination funerals and the emphasis is always on themselves. This makes me sick.”

He wanted me to help him understand the nature and purpose of the church as Christ intended it to be.

Okay, let's study this together.

WHAT THE TRUE CHURCH ISN'T THE EARTHLY "CHURCH."

1. People coming together on a specified day to worship God.
2. The building where these people meet.
3. A group belonging to a named organization
Such as: The Catholic Church, The Baptist Church, The Presbyterian Church, The Community Church...etc.
4. Any organization calling itself a "church" that has human leadership and hosts meetings where doctrines, opinions, and theological presumptions are presented as truth when in fact they may not be.
5. Confirmed, baptized, and accepted members of a group, denomination or organization calling itself a "church."

None of these represent what the Scripture calls the "church."

WHAT THE TRUE CHURCH IS, A SPIRITUAL ENTITY, NOT PHYSICAL ONE

1. Defined in this study

THE TRUE CHURCH

What or who is the true church? Above left are some common ideas of what the definition of “church” might be. All of them are untrue from a Biblical standpoint as is the definition of a “Christian” – a person who simply belongs to a church. An old preacher once said, “Going to church no more makes you a Christian than going to a garage make you an automobile.”¹

PART I.

The church is a spiritual entity, not a physical one.

Though we are physical and live in a physical universe created by God for us, those of us who are in the true church are there by faith, not because of any physical attribute or activity such as being confirmed, baptized, being a member of an earthly church, attending services or giving money or any work whatsoever.

The true church is made up of people belonging to God through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus calls them an assembly of those who are His, as we will see in a moment. These people of faith in Him as their own Lord and Savior are also called, “the sheep of His pasture”; “citizens of the kingdom of God”; and “the household and family of God.” This last phrase is the most important of all.

Ephesians 2:19. “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household,”

What we see is that the true church is actually God's family where each child is born into it by a new spiritual birth described in the New Testament. We, for example, we see family terms in the Bible such as: “God the Father”; Jesus is called the “Son of God”; believers called “brothers and sisters”; and most poignant of all, we who are His by faith called God's children:

Galatians 3:26, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus."

John 1:12-13, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, *even* to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”

We know we are not physical brother and sisters because we have different earthly parents, but we are spiritual brothers because we all have one spiritual Father who is God. And, though we inhabit this physical world at the moment, we are actually a spiritual family who already have our citizenship and place reserved for us in heaven.

¹ Billy Sunday – c. 1930

Philippians 3:20, "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ;" [NASB, NLT, NEB, MKJV] It is also important to know that only those who are God's children will inherit the kingdom God has prepared for them.

Galatians 3:28-29, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise."

So, how did we get so confused?" Let's start off with the word "Church."

First, how did we come to have the English word "church" and come to understand this word as we do in this time?

A. The word "church" is Old English and describes a "place" of worship. The word "church" is NOT a Biblical term at all in terms of the Biblical definition of the original word thus translated. The translators take the Biblical Word "ekklesia" and translate it "church." But the word "church" in our language does not mean what the New Testament (or the Old) means by this word - at all. We will come back to that in a moment.

Checking the origin of the word "church" beginning at the most current use of the English word and going back in time, the Old English (from which we now have the word "church") stems from 16th century Old English, and that word was "cirice" or "circe" pronounced "Kerke." In Scotland, the Scottish word is "Kirk" for "church, even today. Going back a little more, this word actually came from the old Germanic and Saxon "kirkja." Again, now going back further to the 12th century Greek, the word "kyriake" (or kyriakon" meaning "Lord's house") was used from which we now go forward to today. Let's look at that Greek word.

"The Greek kyriakon (an adjective) meaning "of the Lord" was used of houses of Christian worship since about 300 A.D., especially in the Near East, though it was less common in this sense than "ekklesia" or "basilika."²

The word above "kuriakon" **is** a New Testament word. It means "belonging to the Lord." It is used only twice in the N.T. and here are the references.

1. I Corinthians 11:20, "Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper..." *Lord's* being this word in the Greek and meaning "belonging to the Lord."

And

2. Revelation 1:10, "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day..." The day "belonging to the Lord."

² Online Etymology Dictionary (Basilika in the N.T. means "belonging to the king or to royalty. We will ignore this.)

As you can see, neither reference has anything to do with what we would call a term for the "church." But, two hundred years later it became used for that which came to be called ("The Lord's House") and, as I noted above, the word was carried down through to our age as "kirk" and later in English "church" and then the meaning became totally changed. How? Well, it now describes a building in which worshippers meet or a specific denomination like the "Catholic Church" or the "Lutheran Church" or Methodist, Anglican, Presbyterian, Baptist "Church" and all the rest. The building and the denomination within it came to be called a "church." When we drive down the street we might say, "Oh, look at that lovely church." But that is not what Jesus came to build at all. More appropriate would be me looking at my fellow believers, and saying, "What a lovely church."

Also, if you list the great religions of the world, you will see in that list; Islam; Buddhism; Hinduism; and Christianity among others. Though "Christianity" is listed as a religion, Jesus did not come to start a new religion. Nor did He come to begin what is defined as a "church" in the list above. Why?

Included in the developing "earthly" church is an authority structure that enforces doctrine and power over those who belong to it. Of course, it wasn't long before men began to take the role of the head of the church and put Christ's actual headship on a shelf somewhere while they sit in His place...like the Pope or some priest or pastor. Then, of course, as this progressed and these authorities began to exert power and influence, all sorts of different ideas and doctrines emerged and so we have the conflicting mess, distortion and corruption we have today in what is called "Christianity."

As such, it also described the governing and procedural nature of each denomination. For example, the "presbyterian" church is an organization led by "elders" from the N.T. Greek word, "presbuteros" meaning "elder."

Now we have an "authority structure" in some "church" or other that enforces power over and the conduct of its constituents. Of course, men take the role of "head of some such church" and put Christ's actual headship on a shelf somewhere while they "sit" in His place.³ And then corruption occurring in men of power and all the rest set in. We now often have more of a "churchianity" than a "Christianity."

So, we can see what a mess we have made of things, including our translations, and understanding of what it all means. So, we have all sorts of people, who, by being a member of a church believe themselves to be saved. A physical involvement has been substituted for a spiritual reality. The apostle Paul is pretty clear who is "in" and who is "out." That's the real issue. I simply deny that just because a person is a member of a so-called church that he or she is saved. Years ago, in California, a preacher in a local church

³ Col 1:17-18; "He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything."

proclaimed that if you were not a member of his particular “church congregation” you could not be saved.

In a Baptist church I once pastored, half the congregation, the “old guard,” were determined to make people into Baptists while the other half prayed for people to come to Jesus in faith so they could be saved and have eternal life in His name. Which do you think is the more Biblical truth?

That is a very brief summary, but we all get the idea.

B. What is the Biblical word for "church" and what does it actually mean? The word (sadly) translated "church" is actually "ekklesia." This word is used 77 times in the N.T. when translated "church." However, it is also used in the book of Acts translated "assembly" four times, and in Hebrews, once. In these five times, not once was the assembly the "church."⁴ In the rest of the New Testament, the word is translated “church.” To me that is unfortunate because it removes the specific nature of the assembly and leaves us with a thinking of an institution, building or a denomination to which people belong.

Anyway, in Acts 19, the "assembly" was held in the great theatre at Ephesus where the "whole city" turned out to witness the clash of the silversmiths with the effects of Paul's preaching. In this "assembly" (“ekklesia” but not “church”) the citizens were yelling, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians." You can see the word "assembly" in Acts 19:30 through 19:41.

So even the word "ecclesia" by itself is inadequate to describe the "church" as it ought to be. In fact, the Old Testament, in I Kings 8:14 for example, a secular assembly is called an "ekkelesia" in the LXX.⁵ This is used more than 75 times in the LXX and always means an “assembly” of people. The same word is translated "church" many times in the N.T., while a religious assembly of the Jews is called a "synagogue."

"Ekklesia" does mean “called out” but doesn’t define “who” these “called out ones” specifically are in the word itself. So, people have defined it the way they want to. It should have been properly translated as such, but "alas." Thus, it became a generic. It is important to note in this teaching what this word meant and how it was to be defined by the “church” from the outset. The root word is also the basis for the term “elect” used by Jesus and others. It means “selected” or “called” and is used by the Calvinists and reformed churches to mean “predestined to salvation.” Another topic for another time. But Jesus meant in quite a different manner as we shall discover.

Well, this term is also misused by theologians, but bottom line there are those who are born into the family of God and become heirs and citizens of the kingdom of God and

⁴ Acts 7:38; 19:32; 19:39; 19:41; Hebrews 2:12.

⁵ The Septuagint

there are those who are not... though many think they are because they are part of a "church."

C. So, if the term "church", or the original Greek (ekklesia) in the N.T. doesn't describe what is actually what we are after, then what does?

First, as we consider this, Paul is pretty clear who is "in" and who is "out." That's the real issue. None of what we have discussed above has anything to do with that, and now I have stepped on the toes of every "church" centered person in the history of the world. The Jehovah's Witnesses, for example, believe that if you are not a member of that organization, you will not be saved. There are many such organizations who claim those kinds of things. In my saying this is neither Biblical nor true, I would have been (in more ancient times) either, 1. Burned at the stake, 2. Stretched out on a rack, 3. Had molten lead poured down my throat, 4. Or at the least excommunicated or exiled for telling the truth.

Anyway, another problem is going to occur when I say that Abraham and all saints of faith are also "in." Hebrews 11 has something to say about this as I recall. Paul also noted,

"The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, *saying*, "ALL THE NATIONS WILL BE BLESSED IN YOU." So, then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer."
Galatians 3:8-9

And Jesus poked those good who thought that just because they had a physical lineage to Abraham when He told of the two sons who went to work in th3ir father's vineyard, and asked,

"Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly I say to you that the tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the kingdom of God before you." Matthew 21:23-31.

John the Baptist paved the way for this understanding when he told them,

7: "But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You offspring of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8: "Therefore produce fruit consistent with repentance; 9: and do not assume that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham *as our* father'; for I tell you that God is able, from these stones, to raise up children for Abraham." Matthew 3:7-9

Second, now, let's continue for a moment to see what the truth really is. Many miss that Jesus came preaching "the Kingdom of God", not the "kingdom of the church." In Mark 1:14-15 we read, 'Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is

at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

And in John 3:3-5, "Jesus answered (Nicodemus) and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

So, entrance into God's kingdom is a spiritual matter based in faith, not a physical matter of joining a group. The assembly Jesus spoke of is clearly stated in the New Testament:

The "church" as "ekklesia" is translated in the English and what we have been told to think is not what He described it to be at all. And it is not just an assembly as the word "ekklesia" normally is defined.

But it is "His Assembly." Note: Matthew 16:18

"I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build **My church**; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it."

Setting aside the Catholic interpretation of this verse, we focus on: "My church"; "My assembly"; "My gathering"; not man's and certainly not the Catholic Church though they claim this verse for their authority. But Jesus called it, "My assembly!" Mine! Paul says it this way in I Timothy 3:15,

"...but in case I am delayed, *I write* so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the **church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.**"

God's assembly!

There is a denomination called "Assembly of God." That actually is a correct definition of the "church" as we wish to understand it. But anyone can name anything as they wish.

The phrase "the kingdom of God" does not appear in the Old Testament in that form. But it is spoken of in:

a. Obadiah 1:20-21,

20: "And the exiles of this host of the sons of Israel, Who are *among* the Canaanites as far as Zarephath, And the exiles of Jerusalem who are in Sepharad Will possess the cities of the Negev. 21: The deliverers will ascend Mount Zion To judge the mountain of Esau, And the kingdom will be the LORD'S."

"LORD" is "Yahweh." The main place where we find this is in Daniel, which Jesus was familiar with as He quotes Daniel here and there.

b. Daniel 2:44,

44: "In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and *that* kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever."

c. Daniel 4:2-3,

2: "It has seemed good to me to declare the signs and wonders which the Most High God has done for me. 3: "How great are His signs And how mighty are His wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom. And His dominion is from generation to generation."

d. Daniel 6:25-26,

25: "Then Darius the king wrote to all the peoples, nations and *men of every* language who were living in all the land: "May your peace abound! 26: "I make a decree that in all the dominion of my kingdom men are to fear and tremble before the God of Daniel; For He is the living God and enduring forever, And His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed, And His dominion *will be* forever."

e. Daniel 7:13-14,

13: "I kept looking in the night visions, And behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, And He came up to the Ancient of Days And was presented before Him. 14: "And to Him was given dominion, Glory and a kingdom, That all the peoples, nations and *men of every* language Might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion Which will not pass away; And His kingdom is one Which will not be destroyed."

And there are others; Psalm 145:13; Zechariah 14:9; Isaiah 9:6-7; Micah 4:7; etc. So, Jesus' announcement of the "Kingdom of God" was not unknown to the Jews and they did not object to the use of this term as they were indeed anticipating the coming of God's Messiah and God's rule through Him.

The issue is then, how does one get "in" to the kingdom of God? This is a much better way of using terms than using the word "church" which can be entered by going through a wooden or glass door, signing up, agreeing with some statement of faith or doctrine, being "confirmed" or "baptized" and whatever. Works. For way too many, this becomes the reason they think they are saved.

I visited my dying uncle with my son and wished to speak of Jesus and the way of salvation through faith. Before we even got into it, he, from his bed proclaimed, "I Don't need to hear about any of this, I am a member of the Methodist Church." John and Charles Wesley would roll over in their graves if they heard these words come from one of the members of the church that was founded and named after

their devotional practices.

Of course, the entrance is not by membership in a “church” or by works at all, as Paul so eloquently writes in Ephesians 2:1-10, (one of, if not the most favorite passages for this old man.) That is why Abraham and all the O.T. saints are “in” the kingdom of God despite the rantings of the dispensationalists. I always define my stand in Christ this way, “My feet are firmly planted in the kingdom of God by faith.” I never use the term church. This is a good time to differentiate the two terms. Nothing wrong with the term “church” as long as people know what we are talking about. Do they think of the building, members, those who attend, a denomination, or those in the kingdom of God through faith. His people, His assembly? Nothing else.

Finally, the “church”, His “assembly”, are also defined as His family. It is clear that unless one is a child of God through faith, he cannot be an heir of the kingdom.

John 1:2, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name...”

Galatians 3:26-29,

26: “For you are all sons *and daughters* of God through faith in Christ Jesus.
27: For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28: There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29: And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to promise.”

Galatians 4:4-7,

“4: But when the fullness of the time came, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, 5: so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons *and daughters*. 6: Because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying out, “Abba! Father!” 7: Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.”

Family is the ultimate issue as to whom as the heirs of the kingdom of God. In our last will and testament, my wife and I leave the remains of our estate to our family. No one else is named regardless of how much we love them. The same is true in both “Testaments” of the Bible.

So, the true church is made up of people belonging to God through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus calls them an assembly of those who are His. These people of faith in Him as

their own Lord and Savior are also called, “the sheep of His pasture”; “citizens of the kingdom of God”; and “the household and family of God.” This last phrase is the most important of all.

Ephesians 2:19. “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household,”

What we see is that the true church is actually God’s family where each child is born into it by a new spiritual birth described in the New Testament. We, for example, we see family terms in the Bible such as: “God the Father”; Jesus is called the “Son of God”; believers called “brothers and sisters”; and most poignant of all, we who are His by faith called God’s children:

We know we are not physical brother and sisters because we have different earthly parents, but we are spiritual brothers because we all have one spiritual Father who is God. And, though we inhabit this physical world at the moment, we are actually a spiritual family who already have our citizenship and place reserved for us in heaven as Paul notes,

"For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ;" [NASB, NLT, NEB, MKJV] It is also important to know that only those who are God’s children will inherit the kingdom God has prepared for them.”

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Galatians 3:28-29, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise."

The confusion since the Lord defined exactly what His “church” actually is to be is caused by manmade religious doctrines and teachings.

Well, that ought to settle it, I would think. The entrance into the household of God is by being born into it through faith in Jesus. No physical involvement or works involved. This is a spiritual event. The apostle Paul wrote,

“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.” Ephesians 2:8-9.

I always define my stand in Christ this way, “My feet are firmly planted in the kingdom of God by faith.” I never use the term "church" though there are those in organized churches who are his sheep, no doubt. But that is neither what makes them God’s children, a Christian, or among the saved.

In his novel, "The Cottage" one of author Michael Phillips characters says, "...for many years I refused to have anything to do with organized Christianity. But over the years, God softened my heart and turned me toward Him rather than any teaching *about* Him.

Thus, as I grew into manhood my spiritual quest has not involved the doctrine of any man or church, or any system of dogma, though I hope I have been receptive along the way to the quiet influences of honorable men who have pointed to truth. And with that has come a love for the church-the *true* church, God's people. Mine has been a quest to discover who God is and how He works in human hearts, free from the corruptions which man seems often to bring into it."⁶

PART II.

It's purpose

When the early "church" met together how they identified themselves and what they knew their purpose to be is quite different from what goes on in today's churches. In fact, what we do in church services may have little or no resemblance to what they did or knew their purpose to be. It depends, of course, on the denomination. In addition, what most churches spend time, energy and resources on today, would be largely rejected by those early disciples and believers as a misuse of the time, energy and resources. We will look at this in a moment.

One might think that their sole purpose was to worship God and His Son as a congregation. This they did, but worship wasn't an hour spent each week together. In actuality, worship was the essence of one's daily life and the director of how they lived their lives. Paul wrote in Romans 12:1-2 for example,

"Therefore, I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."

Having been in a number of churches over the years and pastor of three, I have finally come to the conclusion my friend spoke of at the beginning of this article. The modern "church" seems to have one thing on its mind. Itself. Its focus is on itself, its programs, its doctrine, its building program, the salaries of its staff, its own glory, popularity, how much more "Christian" it is compared to other churches, etc..

Of course, its numbers are the most important. How big it can grow. How important it can be in the eyes of men. It's wealth and status. And the list is too long to mention. Every time I went to a pastoral conference one after another pastor would come to me, introduce himself and ask two questions, "Where are you?" and, "How big is your

⁶ Michael Phillips, "The Cottage" (Book 2 of "Secrets of the Shetlands", Bethany House, 2016, pg. 170.

congregation?” I just shook my head and went on.

Of course, in the middle of all this is the church politics, getting the “right” people in charge, developing systems, policies, doctrinal and function disagreements, roles, egos, who is important in the church, and (as James condemned), favoring the wealthy, kissing up to the rich, looking for ways to finance something, campaigns to raise money for buildings, signage, property, and this list is too long to include.

My wife and I left a church because the emphasis, though it was often to lead the lost who were attending to Christ, was more often to raise money for a new freeway sign, or to pay the bills because of an ego centered expansion, and to make matters worse, bring people in so that their money could be used for all this self-glory. As a result, any worthwhile outreach to the lost or poor was actually cancelled because the enormous debt incurred from all the extraneous other needs. Missions were dropped. Announcements of the amount needed to pay the new enormous electric bill at the new facility were made instead of anything Jesus wished to have preached. So, what Jesus wants His people to be and do gets shelved as these other “important” self-perpetuating things take precedent.

In another church, there is a conflict over whether the prayer ministry is following the doctrines of the denomination. In a similar fashion there are questions about what is being preached, taught, said, gossiped about, and complained about. In another, whether the growth in the once failing congregation under the new pastor should be tolerated because the old guard might not be reelected to power due to the increased numbers of new and excited people.

In another church, people are asked to give money so that God will bless and enrich them. As if you can buy God’s blessings. Tetzl tried this in 16th century Germany. He went through towns claiming the “When a coin in the coffer rings, another soul from purgatory springs.” Again, the list of all these “church” problems must first require that what Jesus wants His assembly to be and to do be put on the back burner, buried under church bureaucratic demands and efforts to maintain and build the existing “ministry.” Not all churches are embroiled in these “goals” but unfortunately, most I have seen are.

It is estimated that of the multiplied billions people in the U.S. give to their “churches” the largest percentage goes to perpetuate the church facilities, staff and costs, the denominational programs and personnel, or services benefitting the congregants themselves. In other words, nearly all the money a person gives each year is to benefit him or herself. Imagine what could be done with a hundred billion dollars for those to whom Jesus made clear needed the help of His assembly.

Unfortunately, the church once the bastion of community help and assistance to the poor and needy, it has abdicated that role and left it to government while it spends the funds on itself. As I mentioned earlier, we now have “churchianity” rather than

“Christianity” in way more cases than not in my opinion.

One example of this is the early motto of Harvard University, “*Veritas Christo et Ecclesiae*, meaning "Truth for Christ and the Church" and was engraved on its seal. Harvard’s “Rules and Precepts,” adopted in 1646, stated, “Let every Student be plainly instructed, and earnestly pressed to consider well, the main end of his life and studies is, to know God and Jesus Christ which is eternal life (John 17:3) and therefore to lay Christ in the bottom, as the only foundation of all sound knowledge and learning.”

This first college in the new world was founded by churchmen. But here it is today. The motto and the seal were changed by the mid-18th century to now read “*veritas*” (truth), with - “for Christ and the Church” deleted.

So, actually doing the work Jesus wishes His church to do, organizations outside of the church do most of it; either missionary organizations the churches may or may not support, or even civic organizations and governmental organizations. However, in many countries where there are both churches and governmental organizations, no care is given to those in need at all. If it weren’t for foreign missionary efforts, nothing would get done to help those in need.

Well, what did the early church understand about what was supposed to be it’s identity and its purpose?

First, to set the important historical scene of the time, they were told and experienced that anyone who placed their faith in Jesus as the Messiah (Christ) would suffer persecution. This could mean losing one’s family link, one’s job, one’s inheritance, one’s friends, one’s community and well, everything including possibly their lives. Jesus had told His disciples, “But you will be betrayed even by parents, brothers *and sisters*, other relatives, and friends, and they will put *some* of you to death, and you will be hated by all people because of My name.” Luke 21:16-17

And,

“Blessed are you when the people hate you, and when they exclude you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man.” Luke 6:22⁷

We see in Acts 11:19, “So then those who were scattered because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone.”⁸

Because of the persecution, many early believers, especially Jews were left without

⁷ See the appendix for more references.

⁸ See: Acts 6:8-7:60 regarding Stephen and his murder.

family or resources. To assist in this, the church did several things.

- I. They provided food and help to these people, caring for one another and sharing their assets, labor, goods, time with each other and especially those in need.

Acts 2:44-45,

44: “And all the believers were together and had all things in common; 45: and they would sell their property and possessions and share them with all, to the extent that anyone had need.”

Acts 4:32-37,

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. 33: And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. 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 to the extent that any had need. 36: Now Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means Son of Encouragement), 37: owned a tract of land. So he sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet.”

In Acts, chapter six, the Jews native to Judea who were in the congregation of the believers had always had a prejudice against Jews from outside Judea, called “Hellenistic Jews” because they had come from territories once controlled by the Greek empire, before Rome came into power. But these people were suffering loss as well. So, under the direction of the apostles, seven men (all Hellenistic Jews) were chosen to make sure no one was left out of being served food. Because this persecution, principally from Jewish opponents and then from Roman officials and other Gentile opponents, the congregations met to encourage and strengthen each other in the faith and to stand firm regardless of the opposition.

Paul was implored to collect money on his journeys for those who were suffering want in Jerusalem.

Galatians 2:9-10, 9: “... and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, so that we *might go* to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised. 10: *They only asked* us to remember the poor—the very thing I also was eager to do.”

Acts 11:29, “And to the extent that any of the disciples had means, each of them

determined to send *a contribution* for the relief of the brothers *and sisters* living in Judea.

Romans 15:25-26, 25: "...but now, I am going to Jerusalem, serving the saints. 26: For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem."

Acts 24:17 "Now after several years I came to bring charitable gifts to my nation and to present offerings..."

I Corinthians 16:1, "Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you are to do as well."

Galatians 6:9-10, 9: "Let's not become discouraged in doing good, for in due time we will reap, if we do not become weary. 10: So then, while we have opportunity, let's do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith."

I John 3:16-18, 16: "We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers *and sisters*. 17: But whoever has worldly goods and sees his brother *or sister* in need, and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God remain in him? 18: Little children, let's not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth."

This was necessary within the Jerusalem congregation particularly who suffered the greatest. But they were not the only ones.

In direct reference to the poor and needy in general, there are so many passages in both testaments that only a sample can be offered here.

Deuteronomy 15:7, "If there is a poor person among you, one of your brothers, in any of your towns in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart, nor close your hand from your poor brother;"

Deuteronomy 15:11, "For the poor will not cease to exist in the land; therefore I am commanding you, saying, 'You shall fully open your hand to your brother, to your needy and poor in your land.'"

Deuteronomy 24:14, "You shall not exploit a hired worker *who is* poor and needy, whether *he is* one of your countrymen or one of your strangers who are in your land in your towns."

Proverbs 17:5, "One who mocks the poor taunts his Maker; One who rejoices at disaster will not go unpunished."

Proverbs 19:17, “One who is gracious to a poor person lends to the LORD, And He will repay him for his good deed.”

(This verse is much like Matthew 25:34-40 which follows and is a stunner):

34: “Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 35: ‘For I was hungry, and you gave Me *something* to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me *something* to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; 36: naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.’ 37: “Then the righteous will answer Him, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You *something* to drink? 38: ‘And when did we see You *as* a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? 39: ‘And when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ 40: “And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did *it* for one of the least of these brothers *or sisters* of Mine, you did *it* for Me.’”

Isaiah 3:15, “What do you mean by crushing My people And oppressing the face of the poor?” Declares the Lord GOD of armies.”

Isaiah 10:1-2, 1: “Woe to those who enact unjust statutes And to those who constantly record harmful decisions, 2: So as to deprive the needy of justice And rob the poor among My people of *their* rights, So that widows may be their spoil And that they may plunder the orphans.”

Isaiah 58:4-7, 4: “Behold, you fast for contention and strife, and to strike with a wicked fist. You do not fast like *you have done* today to make your voice heard on high! 5: “Is it a fast like this that I choose, a day for a person to humble himself? Is it for bowing one’s head like a reed And for spreading out sackcloth and ashes as a bed? Will you call this a fast, even an acceptable day to the LORD? 6: “Is this not the fast that I choose: To release the bonds of wickedness, To undo the ropes of the yoke, And to let the oppressed go free, And break every yoke? 7: “Is it not to break your bread with the hungry And bring the homeless poor into the house; When you see the naked, to cover him; And not to hide yourself from your own flesh?”

Ezekiel 22:29, “The people of the land have practiced extortion and committed robbery, and they have oppressed the poor and needy, and have oppressed the stranger without justice.”

Zechariah 7:9-10, “This is what the LORD of armies has said: ‘Dispense true justice and practice kindness and compassion each to his brother; 10: and do not oppress the widow or the orphan, the stranger or the poor; and do not devise evil in your hearts

against one another.”

Micah 6:6-8, “With what shall I come to the LORD *And* bow myself before the God on high? Shall I come to Him with burnt offerings, With yearling calves? 7: Does the LORD take pleasure in thousands of rams, In ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give *Him* my firstborn *for* my wrongdoings, The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? 8: He has told you, mortal one, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God?”

Luke 14:12-14, 12: “Now He also went on to say to the one who had invited Him, “Whenever you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor wealthy neighbors, otherwise they may also invite you *to a meal* in return, and *that* will be your repayment. 13: **“But whenever you give a banquet, invite people who are poor, who have disabilities, who are limping, *and* people who are blind; 14: and you will be blessed, since they do not have *the means* to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”**

James 1:27, “Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of *our* God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, *and* to keep oneself unstained by the world.”

(I could also list verses about the widows, orphans, the blind, lame and all the rest, but hopefully we get the idea.)

James 2:1-6, 1: “My brothers *and sisters*, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with *an attitude of* personal favoritism. 2: For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring *and is dressed* in bright clothes, and a poor man in dirty clothes also comes in, 3: and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the bright clothes, and say, “You sit here in a good *place*,” and you say to the poor man, “You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool,” 4: have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives? 5: Listen, my beloved brothers *and sisters*: did God not choose the poor of this world *to be* rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? 6: But you have dishonored the poor man. Is it not the rich who oppress you and personally drag you into court?”

Ephesians 4:28, “The one who steals must no longer steal; but rather he must labor, producing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have *something* to share with the one who has need.”

And how does God feel about our offerings?

Isaiah 1:13-17, 13: “Do not go on bringing your worthless offerings, Incense is an

abomination to Me. New moon and Sabbath, the proclamation of an assembly— I cannot endure wrongdoing and the festive assembly. 14: “I hate your new moon *festivals* and your appointed feasts, They have become a burden to Me; I am tired of bearing *them*. 15: “So when you spread out your hands *in prayer*, I will hide My eyes from you; Yes, even though you offer many prayers, I will not be listening. Your hands are covered with blood. 16: “Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Stop doing evil, 17: Learn to do good; Seek justice, Rebuke the oppressor, Obtain justice for the orphan, Plead for the widow’s case.”

These are but a few of the dozens, if not hundreds of passages like these. The tenants of the Lord in both testaments are in accord. Now, in our country or community there may not be the great need for this service, but there is in many places in the world. Thus, the local congregation ought to be helping people in need wherever the Lord leads.

II. Now, researching what the early "church" did when they got together one main purpose was simply to "encourage" one another in the faith. Persecution and false teachings were occurring.⁹ We read in many places counsel like the following:

Acts 11:23, “Then when he arrived and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and *began* to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain *true* to the Lord;”

Colossians 4:8, “*For* I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts;”

I Thessalonians 3:2, “...and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith...”

I Thessalonians 5:11, “Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.”

I Thessalonians 5:14, “We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone.”

Titus 2:4, “...so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children...”

Hebrews 3:13, “But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is *still* called ‘Today,’ so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of

⁹ Note: Revelation 2:1-3, 9-10, 13-15, 19-25; 3:9-10, will underscore the matter of persecution and false teachings. See also, Galatians 1:7; Ephesians 4:14; II Peter 2:1-3; I John 4:1; Matthew 24:24; Acts 20:29; I Timothy 4:1; II Timothy 3:13; II John 1:7; etc.

sin.”

Again, The reason for this mutual "encouragement" was due to the severe persecution of believers in the early church, especially from Orthodox Jewish sources.

Acts 8:1, "Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles."

Acts 11:19, "So then those who were scattered because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone."

Acts 13:50, "But the Jews incited the devout women of prominence and the leading men of the city, and instigated a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district."

I Peter 4:12-16, 12: "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; 13: but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. 14: If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. 15: Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; 16: but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name."

(Again), Acts 11:23, "Then when he arrived and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord;"

Acts 15:31, "When they had read it, they rejoiced because of its encouragement."

Romans 15:4, "For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."

Romans 15:5, "Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus..."

Philippians 2:1-2, "Therefore if 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, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose."

Colossians 4:11, "...and *also* Jesus who is called Justus; these are the only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are from the circumcision, and they have proved to be an encouragement to me."

Hebrews 6:18, "...so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us."

These should be enough passages to underscore the need for encouragement. These things are happening today also, as you know, wherever believers meet. So, we need to be an "encourager" and the people to each other as well. If "many will fall away from the faith" in the last days, we need to give sound reasons why they need to stand firm.

By the way, the word "encourage" in nearly every verse is the same word used of the Holy Spirit and is used over a hundred times in the N. T. and is also translated, "to comfort", "urge," "exhort," "implore", "admonish" and almost every time it has to do with persevering in the truth, faith and care for others.

III. The early church also sent out prepared and gifted apostles and people to do mission work, help, encourage, teach, preach, follow-up a previous ministry and so on.

Matthew 10:16,

16: "Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be as wary as serpents, and as innocent as doves."

Matthew 28:18-20,

18: "And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. 19: 'Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20: teaching them to follow all that I commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'"

Acts 13:1-3

3: "Now there were prophets and teachers at Antioch, in the church that was *there*: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. 2: While they were serving the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set Barnabas and Saul apart for Me for the work to which I have called them.' 3: "Then, when they had fasted, prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away."

Yes, Jesus said, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all nations.” But I must have missed where He said, “Go into all the world and build huge cathedrals at the expense of the needs of the poor.” “Oh, and demand that people, especially the poor are used to build these cathedrals, which by the way, are built to glorify Me.” Oh, and be sure my pastors travel in the finest carriages, live in the finest homes and eat the best food while the poor starve, die in hopelessness and are buried in some cheap field.” And so on. I just don’t recall Jesus issuing those orders. Seems like He said something about a “Good Samaritan.”¹⁰

The early “church” met in homes. When they outgrew their homes, they met in larger facilities that others owned and either let them use or rented to them. The first church buildings were not built until nearly 300 years later. Even then they were modest. Once Rome became the center of Western Christianity church buildings began to take on greater significance and grandeur. Often the architect and his achievements received more glory than did the Lord.

There is a movement toward home churches once again. Rather than spend funds on costly accoutrements for a building, these people gather funds to help the poor where needed and tell them about the gospel of God’s grace and love through Jesus.

Now, in reference to Hebrews 10:19-25 that reads,

19: "Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, 20: by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21: and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22: let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. 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."

A comment is warranted. Often verse 25 is quoted to admonish people to be sure and attend "church" or they will be in disobedience to God's will. However, there is no specific formula given for this "assembling together." And the word for "assembling together" is not "ekklesia" but "epi-soonah-go-geh" from which we get "synagogue." "Synagogue" means to gather or assemble together. In the early days, small groups met in homes. Their identity and purpose remain as described throughout this study as we see in this passage.

IV. The pastor-teachers also trained the people in the work of the ministry. Paul writes in Ephesians 4:11-16,

¹⁰ Luke 10:30-37 “GO AND DO LIKEWISE.”

11: “And He gave some *as* apostles, some *as* prophets, some *as* evangelists, some *as* pastors and teachers, 12: for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ; 13: until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. 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 people, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; 15: but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *that is*, Christ, 16: from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what 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.”

These men were often not paid by the people in their congregation. And though the “laborer is worthy of his hire, and “Do not muzzle the ox while he is threshing out the grain” most of the church leaders worked outside of the “church” to provide for their families. Paul did, as did Prisca and Aquila and others.

My personal opinion is that a pastor of a smaller church ought to do the same and his income, whether paid by the congregation or not should not be more than the median income of his membership.

V. Mostly, the "church" (Christian assembly - if you will) was to "love" each other and those in their community as we saw at the end of the Ephesians quote above. It was and is to be a place where Christians love and conduct themselves in a manner that glorifies Christ (and God) demonstrates godliness and holiness, beginning with its leadership. Since there are hundreds of verses preaching this, I have selected just a few. The word “agape” is often used that speaks of a self-sacrificing love for others. Then, they were to conduct themselves in a manner worthy of their faith. “Worthy” is (“axios”) meaning suitably, appropriately, in concert with.

John 13:34-35, 34: “I am giving you a new commandment, that you love one another; just as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35: By this all *people* will know that you are My disciples: if you have love for one another.”

Romans 12:9-13, 9: “Love *must be* free of hypocrisy. Detest what is evil; cling to what is good.10: *Be* devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor, 11: not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; 12: rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer 13: contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.”

I John 3:11, “For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we are to love one another;”

I Peter 4:8, “Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.”

II Peter 1:3-7, 3: “... for His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. 4: Through these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of *the* divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world on account of lust. 5: Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in *your* moral excellence, knowledge, 6: and in *your* knowledge, self-control, and in *your* self-control, perseverance, and in *your* perseverance, godliness, 7: and in *your* godliness, brotherly kindness, and in *your* brotherly kindness, love.”

Ephesians 4:1, “Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called...”¹¹

Philippians 1:27-28: 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 will hear about you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; 28: and in no way alarmed by *your* opponents—which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and this *too*, from God.”

Colossians 1:10, “... so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please *Him* in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;...”

I Thessalonians 2:12, “...so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.”

II Thessalonians 1:5 “*This is* a plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that you will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering.”

II Thessalonians 1:11, “To this end also we pray for you always, that our God will count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power,...”

¹¹ The entire Book of James is about his condemning “conduct unbecoming” among his readers. Though often criticized as a book of salvation by works, this is a gross misunderstanding, and in fact, there is not one word about this theological emphasis in the book. For more, see my commentary on James at www.bibleclassroom.org, under “Studies”, Book Studies/Commentaries.

All of I Timothy 6

The early church, when they met, did sing hymns (the Psalms), pray, hear reports from visitors as to what was happening where they journeyed from, heard teaching and collected money for the poor.

What they didn't do was spend most of their money on all the church functions for the church members, spend time telling why funds were needed to improve facilities, pay bills, and a bunch of ancillary costs, nor were there paid singers, orchestras, entertainers, evangelists, musical instruments, (unless brought by members), listen to doctrinal assumptions created and preached by men about prophecy and everything else that smacks of self-promotion.

Still, we have attended services where the building was modest, the singing inspirational, the message clear and interest in the welfare of the people there emphasized. But outreach to those most in need is often forgotten.

If a congregation has few poor in its community, or that other agencies are helping them, then it needs to look to places where there is little or no help, either here or abroad and help them.

We do need to be wise so that the people are not taken advantage of by unscrupulous individuals, con-artists, or "ministries" who simply beg for money to put into their own pockets.

We remember Jesus said, "The poor you will always have with you." And as we saw in Matthew 25:31-46, These are at the center of the purpose he has for His assembly.

APPENDIX

I. Persecution

Matthew 5:11, “Blessed are you when *people* insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.”

Matthew 23:34 “Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will flog in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city,…”

Luke 21:12-18, 12: “But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, turning you over to the synagogues and prisons, bringing you before kings and governors on account of My name. 13: “It will lead to an opportunity for your testimony.” 14: “So make up your minds not to prepare beforehand to defend yourselves; 15: for I will provide you eloquence and wisdom which none of your adversaries will be able to oppose or refute. 16: “But you will be betrayed even by parents, brothers *and sisters*, *other* relatives, and friends, and they will put *some* of you to death, 17: and you will be hated by all people because of My name. 18: “And *yet* not a hair of your head will perish. The Hatred of the World.”

Could this actually happen in the good ol’ USA??

John 15:18-21, 18: “If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before *it hated* you. 19: “If you were of the world, the world would love *you as* its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. 20: “Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you as well; if they followed My word, they will follow yours also. 21: “But all these things they will do to you on account of My name, because they do not know the One who sent Me.”

Acts 8:1, “Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.”

Acts 13:50, “But the Jews incited the devout women of prominence and the leading men of the city, and instigated a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district.”

I Peter 4:12-16, 12: "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; 13: but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. 14: If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. 15: Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; 16: but if *anyone* suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name."

II. The Harvard University example expanded.

Harvard University was founded in 1636 with the intention of establishing a school to train **Christian** ministers. In accordance with that vision, Harvard’s “Rules and Precepts,” adopted in 1646, stated (original spelling and Scriptural references retained):

2. Let every Student be plainly instructed, and earnestly pressed to consider well, the maine end of his life and studies is, to know **God** and **Jesus** Christ which is eternal life (**John 17:3**) and therefore to lay Christ in the bottome, as the only foundation of all sound knowledge and Learning. And seeing the Lord only giveth wisdom, Let every one seriously set himself by prayer in secret to seeke it of him (**Prov. 2:3**).

3. Every one shall so exercise himselfe in reading the Scriptures twice a day, that he shall be ready to give such an account of his proficiency therein, both in Theoreticall observations of Language and Logick, and in practical and spiritual truths, as his Tutor shall require, according to his ability; seeing the entrance of the word giveth light, it giveth understanding to the simple (**Psalms 119:130**).¹²

III. The roles of the congregation and leadership.

Jesus came to serve, not to be served. Matthew 20:25-28,

25: “But Jesus called them to Himself and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles domineer over them, and those in high position exercise authority over them. 26: “It is not this way among you, but whoever wants to become prominent among you shall be your servant, 27: and whoever desires to be first among you shall be your slave; 28: just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to

¹² From “Answers in Genesis” Fr. Georgia Purdom, Blog - Harvard

serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.”

He speaks of this type of heart often and is the way it ought to be among those who are His. This includes anyone in some leadership or authority role whether in the home, church, or neighborhood. In way too many churches, the pastor and staff seek to be served by the congregation rather than the other way around.

The pastor’s role is to be a shepherd to his flock even as Jesus is. That is what the word “pastor” means. It is “poimen” in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians (4:11) and used eighteen times in the New Testament and translated “shepherd” each time except in this passage. Therefore, his role is to instill within his congregation the desire to have the heart Jesus wishes us to have toward Him and others. And what is that?

The role of the congregation is to carry out the desires of the heart of the Lord as taught by the shepherd.

C.S. Lewis in his book “Mere Christianity” notes that it isn’t the congregation’s role to look to the pastor to do the work of the ministry, but that of the layman.¹³ The pastor has one responsibility the congregation another.

¹³ Book III, Chapter three, paragraph 2 – “Social Morality.”