



Full Stewardship

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another,
even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. (John 13:34)

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Have you ever considered the fact that God's worldview and people's worldview are different? (See Prov 16:25, 21:2; Isa 55:6-11) Popular opinion and religious traditions have influenced everyone except the omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent God.

Your reading this indicates that you may have reached a time in your life where you have a teachable spirit and are ready to take a fresh look at the worldview of God. If this is true, you will have fun learning to increase your intimacy and peace with God and others.

Most topics are multifaceted. Though effort has been made to be balanced, certainly not every facet is covered here. This is more of a springboard to stimulate your thinking and motivate you to study the Bible more thoroughly.

You may not agree with everything presented here, but chew on it and keep reading. We welcome your feedback at JesusForKing.com!

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The Truth About Relationships

We love, because He first loved us. (1 John 4:19)

For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that *while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*

Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies we were *reconciled* to God through the death of

His Son, *much more*, having been *reconciled*, *we shall be saved by His life.* And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the *reconciliation.* (Rom 5:6-11)

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. Now all these things are from God, who *reconciled* us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of *reconciliation*, namely, that God was in Christ *reconciling* the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of *reconciliation.* Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be *reconciled* to God. He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, *so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.* (2 Cor 5:17-21)

Sin destroys our relationships with God and others. (See Isa 59:1-2) If we are not reconciled, we will remain separated for all eternity in hell. Because of our guilt, this is what each one of us deserves. Jesus never sinned. (See Heb 4:15) He loves us so much that He was willing to trade our sin for His righteousness. Though innocent, He bore the punishment for our sins on the cross. (See 1 Pet 2:24) In exchange, we get forgiveness of sins and the gift of His Holy Spirit.

Reconciliation to God is the first step to repairing all of the other relationships in our life. The old things passed away; behold, new things have come. God reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. We get to learn exciting, dynamic, and positive new relationship skills that affect all of our stewardships. Jesus said...

Who then is the faithful and sensible steward, whom his master will put in charge of his servants, to give them their rations at the proper time? Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes. Truly I say to you that he will put him in charge of all his possessions.

But if that slave says in his heart, "My master will be a long time in coming," and begins to beat the slaves, both men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk; the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him in pieces, and assign him a place with the unbelievers.

And that slave who knew his master's will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, will receive many lashes, but the one who did not know it, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few.

From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more. (Luke 12:42-48)

All the Earth

Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them *rule* over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and *over all the earth*, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” (Gen 1:26)

The earth is the LORD’S, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it. (Ps 24:1)

God has given mankind stewardship over His creation and He has given instructions about how He wants us to manage what He has entrusted to us. Who then is the faithful and sensible steward who will carry out his Master’s will? We need to be determined and committed to ruling the world as long as it exists. God will be our judge.

The righteous rule themselves and their family, community, and church with a spirit of humility and service, creating high levels of trust. Do the wicked rule God’s way? No, they intimidate, manipulate, and force others to serve them and their selfish desires. If the righteous are not faithful stewards, the wicked will rule the world – their way!

Not everyone has been given the same responsibilities, but stewardship applies to every person to the degree that they have been given responsibilities. God has told us how He expects us to perform in every area of life. Have you considered the King’s wishes for your personal conduct, family life, finances, employee/employer relations, citizenship, or serving the body of Christ?

Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall. (1 Cor 10:12)

Not all stewardships will be addressed in detail in this study guide. You are exhorted to identify areas that need improvement and then study and apply God’s principles for transformation.

Seeing that 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. (2 Peter 1:3)

The exciting thing is that God’s ways work best - *when* we passionately apply them in our lives! The principles for successful living that are found in the Bible produce authentic relational warmth and meaningful fulfillment; and they equip us for effective evangelism. The greatest joy comes from being a tool that God uses in the process of saving someone’s eternal soul.

You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. *Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.* (Matt 5:13-16)

As faithful stewards we are to salt the earth, diligently bringing the flavor of Christ into every area of life. Whether it's the family, the workplace, or the country we live in, we are to enlighten our sphere of influence with "the whole message of this life." (Acts 5:20) To preach Jesus is to preach 'everything pertaining to life and godliness'.

Life and godliness are all about relationships. Regrettably, many people don't realize this until after they've already wasted their life pursuing things of no consequence. The most important concern for everyone on earth should be the condition of their relationship with God.

The amount of trust others have in you is one way to measure the health of your relationships. Do your children trust you? Does your spouse trust you? Do your neighbors trust you? Do your brothers and sisters in Christ trust you? Can God trust you?

In as much as it depends on you, the condition of your relationship with others is a reflection of your relationship with God. He has entrusted all of us with relationships and He tells us how to intentionally manage them fruitfully. Obedience has rewards and disobedience has consequences; in this life and in the life to come.

Feelings are an automatic result of relationships, so God doesn't tell us to have feelings. But He does tell us how to treat each other (and how not to). It is our responsibility to decide to walk by the Spirit (See Gal 5:16) and demonstrate each of the following characteristics (and others):

Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. (Gal 5:22-23)

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another. (John 13:34-35)

The love that God commands is not a feeling, it is a decision. Just as you can choose to rejoice always (See Phil 4:4) and energetically spread cheer to others, you can decide to love others and purposely demonstrate it to them every day in many personable and caring ways.

Though some are shallower than others, you have some sort of relationship with all of the people you interact with each day. Actively pursue peace with God and others. Deliberately demonstrate self-control and patience with people in public as well as your children. Be thoughtfully gentle and kind to people you work with as well as your spouse. Enthusiastically show faithfulness and goodness to all who depend on you.

You are exhorted to diligently study each of the characteristics listed above and receive a blessing by thoughtfully practicing them. As you study love, for example, think about how to apply it in each of your relationships. Then do the same thing with kindness, goodness, etc.

In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, "*It is more blessed to give than to receive.*" (Acts 20:35)

Do you look at relationships as a way to give or as a way to get? Blessed means happy. If you want to be happy, be a giver not a taker. Selfishness steals your happiness. Does the room brighten when you enter it or when you leave it? Relationships take deliberate effort, but the rewards are worth it. You have to consciously choose to love people in a way that will communicate to them that they are valuable to you.

Be subject to one another in the fear of Christ. (Eph 5:21)

That is, if you want to be happy. Subject yourself to the needs of those you serve. Whether it's with God, your boss, or your children, your relationships determine your everyday and eternal happiness. We're all in this together. Let's make whatever sacrifices are necessary to flourish!

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, and to give His life a ransom for many. (Matt 20:26-28)

Choose success over failure. You can enjoy loving relationships with God and others; or you can suffer the loneliness of hurt feelings and a scabbed-over heart. We have all tasted success and also contributed to relationship failures: happy and sweet or painful and divisive. Choose wisely.

God shows us how to fix broken relationships: it's conflict resolution, not conflict avoidance. We hurt our relationship with God; He had mercy and reached out to us by making a loving sacrifice.

This is My commandment, that you love one another, *just as I have loved you*. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. (John 15:12-13)

God wants to forgive you and enjoy eternal fellowship with you. He wants to give you a new start and patiently *help you* learn to thrive on the truth. He wants you to do the same for others.

For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions. (Matt 6:14-15)

Jesus was crucified to pay the price for our sin. He was punished so we could be healed. Once our sins are washed away, we get the refreshing, transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order *that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord*. (Acts 3:19)

Repent and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will *receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*. (Acts 2:38)

Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma. (Eph 4:30-5:2)

Relationship to Authority

Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men. (Tit 3:1-2)

Jesus said, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven *and* on earth.” (Matt 28:18)

He is the head over *all* rule and authority. (Col 2:10)

God is over all and His word authorizes the distinct responsibilities and authority of each form of government. The primary responsibility He has delegated to each form of government is the duty of protecting those entrusted to it. The governed are blessed with security unless they *or* the authorities rebel against God.

- ◆ Family government teaches the wisdom of God.
- ◆ Civil government teaches the justice of God.
- ◆ Church government teaches the love of God.

These are the primary relationships in life. It takes wisdom and genuine commitment to keep them all healthy and in balance. When they are strong we are protected from evil. When they are weak we become vulnerable to the schemes of the devil. Satan does everything he can to weaken them. We should do everything we can to strengthen them.

Like trees that reproduce abundantly when their seeds find the right conditions, godly self-government is produced abundantly when each form of government performs its God-given role. Those who learn godly self-government can then succeed in other God-given roles of government. You must rightly govern yourself before you can rightly govern others.

For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and *the government will rest on His shoulders*; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. *There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace*, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this. (Isa 9:6-7) 700 BC

All authority has been given to Jesus in heaven and on earth. If you want to experience peace, make Jesus the King of all your relationships. Establish and uphold them with His justice and righteousness. Choose to deny yourself and let Jesus reign over all of your roles in life.

Jesus reigns through His word, which authorizes the responsibility and authority of each form of government. If one form of government usurps the role of another, the injured government has a responsibility to defend its sovereignty in order to protect the rights of those it is accountable for.

Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore whoever resists authority has

opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. (Rom 13:1-2)

God expects us to be in subjection to the authorities He places over us. We are to obey our bosses, parents, husbands, the civil authorities and laws, and church leadership. Rebellion to the authorities is rebellion to God. It has consequences in this life and in the life to come.

Through a series of cause and effect relationships that God has established, you reap the rewards or consequences you deserve. Blessings or curses; which will you choose? (Read Deuteronomy 28)
Those who reject the authorities of God are progressively judged with increasing severity.

For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. (Rom 13:3-4)

The purpose of wrath is to deter evil behavior that destroys relationships. *The whole family, community, or congregation suffers when stewards pervert, neglect, or overstep their role.* They are to facilitate conflict resolution through reconciliation, which promotes peace. When the law is not properly enforced, it is difficult to lead a tranquil and quiet life and the price paid on the cross loses its value. Mercy is meaningless unless contrasted with wrath.

The Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. (Gal 3:24)

But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully, realizing the fact that *law is not made for a righteous person*, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers and immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching, *according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God*, with which I have been entrusted. (1 Tim 1:8-11)

Those who enforce the law are to do so lawfully, according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior. Ultimately, all will be judged by God, including the authorities who are to enforce the law. We have been entrusted with the responsibility of proclaiming this glorious gospel.

So that godless men would not rule nor be snares of the people. (Job 34:30)

In many cases you can choose your boss, your spouse, and your civil authorities. God's word teaches us how to make wise choices. We can influence existing rulers by appealing to them. The following true-to-life parable about the use of appeals in asking for justice from the authorities teaches us that we especially need to appeal to God, the One Who has all authority:

Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart, saying, "In a certain city there was a judge who did not fear God and did not respect man. There was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, 'Give me legal protection

from my opponent.’ For a while he was unwilling; but afterward he said to himself, ‘Even though I do not fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will give her legal protection, otherwise by continually coming she will wear me out.’ Hear what the unrighteous judge said; now, *will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night*, and will He delay long over them? I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly.” (Luke 18:1-8)

As Jesus’ parable about the diligent widow illustrates, persistence pays. The squeaky wheel gets the grease. No one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket and God didn’t create a resurrected army so they could hide in church buildings. He has entrusted us with everything pertaining to life and godliness. We need to be out in our communities leading the way in righteousness and justice. We can appeal, plea, and petition for God’s laws to be followed.

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, *equipped for every good work*. (2 Tim 3:16-17)

Jesus said ‘you’ll know them by their fruit’. Look around the world at those who oppose the truth (Muslims, communists, Hindus, humanists, socialists, sodomites, atheists, etc.), and examine the fruit of their leadership. God has given us exactly what we need to combat evil and inspire righteousness: the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And He has commanded us to preach to *every nation*.

When they had brought them, they stood them before the Council. The high priest questioned them, saying, “We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man's blood upon us.” But Peter and the apostles answered, “*We must obey God rather than men.*” (Acts 5:27-32)

If family, civil, or church authorities are trampling your God-given rights, you have a right to appeal to them, and as a last resort, to disobey them. On the other hand...

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God. Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king. (1 Peter 2:13-25)

There are very few Biblically justifiable reasons to remove oneself from under the authority placed over you, whether it is wives from husbands or citizens from civil servants. Before proceeding, one must pray for God’s wisdom and make every possible effort to remain in subjection while following a peaceful appeal process to seek recourse.

Certain cases may require the use of legal appeals, as Paul did when he was on trial (See Acts 25:11), or as the early American colonies did in every stage of the oppression they had experienced under the British crown. Read the Declaration of Independence again or for the first time (JesusForKing.com/DeclarationofIndependence.html). Read the list of grievances the American colonies had against Britain and see if you agree with their decision.

Righteousness, Self-Control, and the Judgment to Come (Acts 24:25)

In our personal and public affairs we progressively reap what we sow in our relationships, in the way we govern, and in our respect for those who govern us. Check it out in the New Testament: we are judged by the way we treat others, by the righteousness and self-control we practice in our relationships.

We love, because He first loved us. If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also. (1 John 4:19-21)

“Remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, reprove the ruthless, defend the orphan, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together,” Says the LORD, “Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool. If you consent and obey, you will eat the best of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword.” (Isa 1:16-20)

God has given mankind stewardship over the earth. In His word He tells us everything pertaining to life and godliness. He has given mankind specific instructions for managing what He has entrusted to us. Who then is the faithful and sensible steward who will carry out his Master’s will? Will the wicked rule the earth God’s way? The righteous need to be faithful stewards and rule the earth – God’s way!

Christians willingly and joyfully sacrifice everything, knowing that we are guaranteed a resurrection. (See Mat 16:24-27) We zealously impact society, strengthening our communities and world with truth and justice. We salt the earth, bringing the flavor of Christ into every area of life. We stay informed and involved in contemporary issues, utilizing resources like JesusForKing.com to maximize our effectiveness.

When Christians teach, preach, *and live* the whole message of this life, they are often labeled fanatics. So be it! If our cause isn’t worth being fanatical about and persecuted for, what is it worth? We have an example to follow that was left by innumerable fanatics. From Elijah to John the Baptist to Jesus and Paul, we see that God’s work is not done in a corner.

We need to co-operate with God, training His resurrected army to be effective in every area of life. We need to prepare godly leaders for the family, the community, and the church; and then keep encouraging them in obedience to God. We need to diligently influence everyone we can and stand up for righteousness at every opportunity. If not you, who?

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. (2 Cor 5:10)

The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. (2 Pet 3:9)

Self-Government

Rights & Responsibilities Based On the Ten Commandments

1-4. I am the LORD your God... You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself an idol... You shall not worship them or serve them... You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain... Remember the Sabbath day...

- ◆ The right to worship & serve God.
- ◆ The responsibility to worship & serve God.

5. Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you.

- ◆ The right to teach your children.
- ◆ The responsibility to care for your parents.

6. You shall not murder.

- ◆ The right to life.
- ◆ The responsibility to protect life.

7. You shall not commit adultery.

- ◆ The right to marry.
- ◆ The responsibility to be faithful.

8. You shall not steal.

- ◆ The right to private property.
- ◆ The responsibility to labor.

9. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

- ◆ The right to reputation and due process of law.
- ◆ The responsibility to tell the truth.

10. You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

- ◆ The right to prosper.
- ◆ The responsibility to be content.

The Christian is not under law.

(See Rom 6:14-15) In other words, we don't win our salvation by keeping a list of 'do's and don'ts' and religious ceremonies. Instead, we have been given the free gift of salvation for which a great price was paid. Therefore, "We love, because He first loved us." (1 John 4:19) His Spirit motivates us to love those He loves; those He died for.

Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. *For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.* (Rom 8:1-4)

In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets. (Matt 7:12)

If there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore *love is the fulfillment of the law.* (Rom 13:9-10)

Self-government starts with a proper understanding of rights and responsibilities. Human rights are a stewardship from God which comes with distinct responsibilities.

O My people! Their oppressors are children, and women rule over them. O My people! Those who guide you lead you astray and confuse the direction of your paths. The LORD arises to contend, and stands to judge the people. The LORD enters into judgment with the elders and princes of His people, “It is you who have devoured the vineyard; the plunder of the poor is in your houses. What do you mean by crushing My people and grinding the face of the poor?” Declares the Lord God of hosts. (Isa 3:12-15)

Crime is the violation of rights. A criminal is any individual or government that violates the rights of others. When a criminal tries to violate your rights they lose their rights because you have the right to defend yourself, your family, your community, and your church. Defense is one of the primary stewardships entrusted to each form of government.

Self-Control

He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city. (Prov 16:32)

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. (Matt 5:39-42)

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?* (1 Cor 6:8)

Just because you have the right to self-defense, doesn't mean that's always the best course of action. Let's look at both sides of the coin:

Do not resist an evil person.	☞	Whoever has no sword is to sell his coat and buy one. (Luke 22:35-38)
Give to him who asks of you.	☞	If anyone will not work, then he is not to eat, either. (2 Thess 3:10)
Why not rather be defrauded?	☞	But if you are able also to become free, rather do that. (1 Cor 7:21)

Common sense tells you that if resistance is futile, it's probably better not to resist. On the other hand, if you are able to defend yourself from a criminal, how many future victims might you be helping? But most importantly, if you respond with love when people treat you wickedly, you just might plant a seed of light in their heart that overcomes the darkness.

Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, *so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men*. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,” says the Lord. “BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY,

GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Rom 12:17-21)

In Romans chapter 13 we see that God uses government to “bring wrath on the one who practices evil.” The appropriate administration of authority brings justice, reconciliation, and peace. Have the self-control to let the proper authorities do their job.

Self-control is one of the first things to teach a child. It will aid them in every other learning discipline. Indeed, as they grow up it will aid them in every area of their life and every character trait they seek to practice.

If children need to learn self-control, how much more do adults need to practice it? How many relationships would have been saved if both parties exercised self-control? How many families could have been salvaged? How many wars could have been prevented?

If you address as *Father* the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth; knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your *futile way of life inherited from your forefathers*, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. (1 Peter 1:17-19)

Did you inherit a futile way of life from your forefathers? Regardless of your personal circumstances, it is up to you to start a new generation. The Father of light wants to adopt everyone into His royal family so that we will be imitators of Him and walk as children of light.

And working together with Him, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain -- for He says, “AT THE ACCEPTABLE TIME I LISTENED TO YOU, AND ON THE DAY OF SALVATION I HELPED YOU.” Behold, now is “THE ACCEPTABLE TIME,” behold, now is “THE DAY OF SALVATION” -- *giving no cause for offense in anything*, so that the ministry will not be discredited, but in everything commending ourselves as servants of God, *in much endurance*, in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses, in beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in hunger, *in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in genuine love, in the word of truth, in the power of God*; by the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left, by glory and dishonor, by evil report and good report; regarded as deceivers and yet true; as unknown yet well-known, as dying yet behold, we live; as punished yet not put to death, as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing all things. (2 Cor 6:1-10)

Regardless of external circumstances, you decide how you will respond to each situation. Others may react with sorrow, but you are always rejoicing. You can know for certain, because of the curse placed upon Adam and Eve, that you will experience pain in this life. There will be thorns where you didn't expect them. Knowing this ahead of time, you can decide now how you are going to respond. You can throw a fit like an untrained child; or you can grin and bear it.

For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you

endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it *you patiently endure it*, this finds favor with God. (1 Peter 2:19-20)

Even when suffering unjustly! Do you know anyone who has troubles? Do you ever run into problems? Did you know that God has told us exactly how to respond to difficulties? Not only does He tell us how we should respond, He also tells us why...

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (James 1:2-4)

Do all things without grumbling or disputing; so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world. (Phil 2:14-15)

You decide what kind of attitude you're going to have. Some things in life are certainly difficult and even painful. Develop mental toughness today! If you have a bad attitude it makes things even worse. If you have a good attitude it lightens the load.

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Phil 4:4-7)

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified. (1 Cor 9:24-27)

Personal Responsibility

For each one will bear his own load. (Gal 6:5)

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you, nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but *with labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you*; not because we do not have the right to this, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, *so that you would follow our example*. For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: *if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either*. For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread. But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary of doing good. (2 Thess 3:6-13)

Simple enough! Nonetheless, there have always been lazy people who have tried to avoid labor. *Labor is good for you.* It teaches confidence and independence. Almost all criminal activity would cease if people learned to labor. Hunger may be the father of motivation, and laziness the mother of invention, but welfare is the granddaddy of helplessness.

He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need. (Eph 4:28)

It's amazing how much work people will do to avoid work. They want a cushy job and they acquire all kinds of servants (human or electronic) to make life easier. Then they suffer disease because of their bad health, so they spend more money to join a health club to work their bodies.

Whatever you do, *do your work heartily*, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. *It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.* (Col 3:23-24)

We labor to provide for our personal needs; for the administration of family, civil, and church government; and to share with those in need. Understanding our responsibilities is important in laying aside any selfish ambitions which plunge men into ruin and destruction.

But godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by *contentment*. For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. (1 Tim 6:6-7)

If we have food and covering, *with these we shall be content*. But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. But flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness. (1 Tim 6:8-11)

It is foolish and irresponsible to strive after things that do not enhance your eternal reward.

Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is my portion. (Prov 30:8)

Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. (James 1:17)

God is the One Who provides us with all good things. We get ourselves into trouble if we quit being thankful and content and we begin to covet things we don't need. The result is often debt. This snare renders many ineffective who could otherwise be great servants in the kingdom.

The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower becomes the lender's slave. (Prov 22:7)

The wicked borrows and does not pay back, but the righteous is gracious and gives. (Ps 37:21)

Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. (Rom 13:8)

Flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, *with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.* (2 Tim 2:22)

Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, *making the most of your time*, because the days are evil. (Eph 5:15-16)

God expects us to be responsible with the money and the time He has entrusted us with. If you're not sure why, study *Spiritual Warfare*. Wartime conditions require wartime priorities. As you mature in Christ you'll want to make increasingly better use of God's resources.

The land of a rich man was very productive. And he began reasoning to himself, saying, "What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?" Then he said, "This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry." But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?" So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God. (Luke 12:16-21)

The wise steward designs his life so that he can be a blessing to others. He is thankful for the way God made him and he smiles at the future. He suffers without complaint and pursues rewards that he can share with others. He develops better relationship skills, better time management and financial stewardship skills, and he takes care of his health and vitality.

People who study these things report that those who set goals are about one hundred times more likely to be successful in any area of life than those who don't set goals. And among those who set goals, those who write their goals down and frequently review them are about one hundred times more likely to be successful than those who don't. Wouldn't now be a good time to increase your success? What do you hope to achieve for Jesus during your stay on earth?

Forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Phil 3:13-14)

Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God... not seeking my own profit but the profit of the many, so that they may be saved. (1 Cor 10:31-33)

So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God. (Rom 14:12)

Family Government

Teaches the Wisdom of God

Praise the LORD! How blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who greatly delights in His commandments. *His descendants will be mighty on earth; the generation of the upright will be blessed.* (Ps 112:1-2)

When God created Adam and Eve, He created the first family. The children came along later. Therefore, *husband and wife* is the primary relationship that all of society is built upon. They were told to be fruitful and multiply. Human survival depends on it.

Family is the ultimate, self-perpetuating and efficient unit when it follows the Biblical pattern. Godly individuals build godly families, which are the basis for godly communities and churches. God made husbands and wives with unique abilities. Each one finds the greatest fulfillment when they learn *and* set their mind on excelling in their God-given roles.

Husbands, *love your wives*, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her... So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church. (Eph 5:25-29)

Loving relationships are what's important! It's been said that a good marriage is the closest thing on earth to heaven, and a bad marriage is the closest thing on earth to hell. Husbands, lead with a spirit of humility, authenticity, and relational warmth. Be personable, caring, and passionate.

Lay down your life to protect your family. You are the first line of defense against danger. If it became known that the man in every family was prepared to use lethal force if necessary, criminals would largely be deterred from abusing the rights of others and preying on the weak.

We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. (1 John 3:16-18)

Man is not only the leader and protector of his family, he is also the provider. By the sweat of his face (See Gen 3:17-19) he is to provide the world's goods for those who depend on him.

But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. (1 Tim 5:8)

Honor widows who are widows indeed; but if any widow has *children or grandchildren*, they must first learn to practice piety in regard to their own family and to *make some return to their parents*; for this is acceptable in the sight of God. (1 Tim 5:3-4)

Your household may include a spouse, children, grandchildren, parents, and grandparents. When three or more generations pool their resources and pull together as a team, they become such a productive mechanism that they not only provide for their own, they also help widows, orphans, and others in need. Let us love in deed and truth and be a blessing to others.

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. (James 1:27)

When man fulfills his role, it enables woman to fulfill her role. When woman fulfills her role, it enables man to fulfill his role. As long as they each focus on personal excellence rather than controlling the other, together they can accomplish more than their separate efforts combined.

Most women would not like to have man's responsibilities, and most men would not like to have woman's responsibilities. This helps them appreciate each other more. There are some things that boys are best taught by men and girls are best taught by women.

Paul instructed Titus to: speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine. Older men are to be temperate, dignified, sensible, sound in faith, in love, in perseverance. (Titus 2:1-2)

Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, *so that the word of God will not be dishonored.* (Titus 2:3-5)

Likewise urge the young men to be sensible; in all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, with purity in doctrine, dignified, sound in speech which is beyond reproach, *so that the opponent will be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us.* (Titus 2:6-8)

If man's labor is hard, woman's is probably harder. From the labor of childbirth to the labor of running a home, a woman's work is never done. A healthy, fully balanced family would be impossible to achieve if woman was not fulfilling her critical role.

She nurtures and supports the family. Everyone goes to her for comfort and care. She makes others feel like they are a valuable and important part of the team. She is frugal and industrious, and she has an eye for detail. Read Proverbs 31:10-31. Following is just a glimpse:

An excellent wife, who can find? For her worth is far above jewels. The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. (Prov 31:10-11)

Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. (Phil 4:8)

Dwell on these things if you want to build a beautiful family. Focus on faults if you want to tear your family apart. Thank God for each other. Love each other enough to learn to communicate with each other through difficulties with a goal of understanding each other. Serve one another.

Be subject to one another in the fear of Christ. Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, because we are members of His body. **FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND SHALL BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH.** This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church. Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband. (Eph 5:21-33)

Husbands most need to feel respected. Wives most need to feel loved. Husbands, if you would like to ruin your marriage, try forcing your wife to respect you. Wives, if you would like to ruin your marriage, try manipulating your husband into loving you.

Husbands, if you would like a blissful marriage, try winning your wife's respect by showing her that you love her. Wives, if you would like a blissful marriage, try winning your husband's love by showing him that you respect him. Try outdoing each other! Like we discussed in chapter one, if you love others, you express it in a way that will make them feel loved.

Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; fornicators and adulterers God will judge. (Heb 13:5)

“Let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth. For I hate divorce,” says the LORD. (Mal 2:14-16)

He said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.” The disciples said to Him, “If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, *it is better not to marry.*” But He said to them, “Not all men can accept this statement, but only those to whom it has been given. For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother's womb; and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men; and there are also eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. *He who is able to accept this, let him accept it.*” (Matt 19:8-12)

Paul was able to accept this and he regarded it as a gift:

Yet I wish that all men were even as I myself am. However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that. But I say to the unmarried and to widows that it is good for them if they remain even as I. But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn with passion. But to the married I give instructions, not I, but the

Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband (but if she does leave, she must remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband), and that the husband should not divorce his wife. (1 Cor 7:7-11)

There are advantages and disadvantages to marriage. If you choose to marry, you should not divorce. Jesus, Paul, and others gained advantages by remaining single. Wartime conditions require wartime strategies. If you choose to remain single, you can later change your mind.

But if you marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. Yet such will have trouble in this life, and I am trying to spare you. (1 Cor 7:28)

One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, and his interests are divided. The woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband. *This I say for your own benefit; not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is appropriate and to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord.* (1 Cor 7:32-35)

In order for two to become one, they will have trouble in this life. Too often, once the deal is sealed, the wooing ends. But this is when the work of wooing your mate should really begin! Consider having a weekly date night, and take turns planning to woo your spouse.

Marital responsibilities also include the fruit of your union: *children* and *grandchildren*. Romance should be the last thing on your mind until you are prepared to be a partner worthy of someone's lifetime commitment. This should also cause you to cautiously choose the kind of character to spend your life with. Will they help you and your children get to heaven?

Behold, children are a gift of the LORD, the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them; they will not be ashamed when they speak with their enemies in the gate. (Ps 127:3-5)

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER (which is the first commandment with a promise), SO THAT IT MAY BE WELL WITH YOU, AND THAT YOU MAY LIVE LONG ON THE EARTH. *Fathers*, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. (Eph 6:1-4)

Fathers, you are the one God is going to hold accountable for your children. This should jerk you to attention and bring your responsibilities into the forefront of your brain. It should also motivate you to make sure you are prepared to take on such a responsibility before you do so.

We were *exhorting* and *encouraging* and *imploring* each one of you *as a father would his own children*. (1 Thess 2:11)

It is expected that fathers would exhort, encourage, and implore their own children. Mother, grandparents, and others may help. Additionally, you may hire a tutor. But you are the one God is going to hold accountable for the discipline and instruction of your children.

Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, *shall be on your heart*. You shall *teach them diligently* to your sons and shall *talk of them* when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. (Deut 6:4-7)

Make them known to your sons *and* your grandsons. (Deut 4:9)

The mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil. (Matt 12:34-35)

Parents and grandparents, the word of God needs to fill your heart, for the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. If the word of God is preeminent in your life, you will teach it diligently to your children and grandchildren. God's word will have preeminence in their life. Their heroes will be Ruth, David, Jesus, and other Bible greats; and *you*.

How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Your word. With all my heart I have sought You; do not let me wander from Your commandments. Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You. With my lips I have told of all the ordinances of Your mouth. (Ps 119:9-13)

The fear of the LORD is the *beginning of knowledge*; fools despise wisdom and instruction. Hear, my son, your *father's instruction* and do not forsake your *mother's teaching*. (Prov 1:7-8)

She opens her mouth in wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue. (Prov 31:26)

You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that *from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation* through faith which is in Christ Jesus. *All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable **for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness**; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.* (2 Tim 3:14-17)

Resulting in a *true knowledge* of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself, *in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.* (Col 2:2-3)

The Bible is the foundation for all learning. It contains everything pertaining to life and godliness. Teach it to your children and fill their life with it so that it may be well with them and they may live long on the earth. But most importantly, teach it to them so that they may enjoy eternal life.

Teach them about faith in Jesus Christ, God's principles of transformation, the realities of spiritual warfare, and successful stewardship. Also teach them basic life skills; health and safety; and make sure they learn some marketable skills. They will be prepared for leading a responsible life and you will ensure their salvation.

Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it. (Prov 22:6)

Try making a list of everything you need to know to live life and get to heaven, and then teach it to your children. Could you do it over a period of ten to twenty years? This is how it has been done for thousands of years, and there is more of an abundance of readily available resources now than ever before. It is really not as complicated as some would like to make it. But they have ulterior motives. They want to steal your child's heart.

It is a joyful and laborious adventure raising spiritual warriors. Chasten those little ones; and as they grow, discover the wonder of God's creation together. Develop a relationship strong enough to lead them in righteousness. And ultimately, enjoy a lifelong friendship and partnership.

As each family member develops a servant's heart and adds to the productivity of the team, the family becomes the ultimate, self-perpetuating and efficient unit. If your forefathers have strayed far from the word of God, you have your work cut out for you. Grin and bear it with God's help.

You can easily move in the right direction by spending time each day (even if it's just 15 minutes) reading the Bible together as a family and discussing how it applies to your life. Spending meaningful time together is critical to building good relationships, and eating at least one meal together each day is one practical way to do this.

We will not conceal them from their children, but tell to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and His strength and His wondrous works that He has done. For He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers that they should teach them to their children, that the generation to come might know, even the children yet to be born, that they may arise and tell them to their children, that they should put their confidence in God and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments. (Ps 78:4-7)

There is so much more that can and should be taught about the Biblical model for the family. The Bible, especially the book of Proverbs, is loaded with good advice. Seek counsel from Christian parents who have good fruit, and learn from the mistakes of others.

Restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse. (Mal 4:6)

Civil Government

Teaches the Justice of God

The God who made the world and all things in it, since *He is Lord of heaven and earth...* gives to all people life and breath and all things; and He made from one man *every nation* of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, *having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation*, that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us. (Acts 17:24-27)

For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens *and* on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities -- all things have been created through Him and for Him. (Col 1:16)

Jesus told Pilate, “You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above.” (John 19:11)

God has delegated to civil government the responsibility of protecting the rights of those who are under its authority. In the chapter on self-government, we discussed exactly what these rights are. If everyone just governed themselves perfectly, there would be no need for civil government. Unfortunately, this is not the case.

Therefore, civil government is necessary among men. Its stewardship is to bring wrath on the wicked so that the righteous may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity, free to carry out their stewardships unmolested. Failure has terrible consequences; especially when the righteous allow the wicked to infiltrate and pervert the justice system.

The king gives stability to the land by justice, but a man who takes bribes overthrows it. (Prov 29:4)

The exercise of justice is joy for the righteous, but is terror to the workers of iniquity. (Prov 21:15)

Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed quickly, therefore the hearts of the sons of men among them are given fully to do evil. (Ecc1 8:11)

Woe to those who enact evil statutes and to those who constantly record unjust decisions, so as to deprive the needy of justice and rob the poor of My people of their rights, so that widows may be their spoil and that they may plunder the orphans. Now what will you do in the day of punishment, and in the devastation which will come from afar? To whom will you flee for help? And where will you leave your wealth? (Isa 10:1-3)

God Judges Culture

But this people has a stubborn and rebellious heart; they have turned aside and departed. They do not say in their heart, “Let us now fear the LORD our God, Who gives rain in its season, both the autumn rain and the spring rain, Who keeps for us the appointed weeks of the harvest.” Your iniquities have turned these away, and *your sins have withheld good from you. For wicked men are found among My people*, they watch like fowlers lying in wait; they set a trap, they catch

men. Like a cage full of birds, so their houses are full of deceit; therefore they have become great and rich. They are fat, they are sleek, they also excel in deeds of wickedness; they do not plead the cause, the cause of the orphan, that they may prosper; and they do not defend the rights of the poor. *“Shall I not punish these people?” declares the LORD, “On a nation such as this shall I not avenge Myself?”* An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule on their own authority; and My people love it so! But what will you do at the end of it? (Jer 5:23-31)

Through a series of cause and effect relationships, God gives people what they deserve. The Bible and secular history both teach us this fact. “Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD.” (Psalms 33:12) Likewise, cursed is the nation who rejects the LORD. They are progressively judged with increasing severity and in due course get a ruthless government that perverts justice.

Thus says the LORD: At one moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to uproot, to pull down, or to destroy it; if that nation against which I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent concerning the calamity I planned to bring on it. Or at another moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to build up or to plant it; if it does evil in My sight by not obeying My voice, then I will think better of the good with which I had promised to bless it. So now then, speak to the men of Judah and against the inhabitants of Jerusalem saying, “Thus says the LORD, ‘Behold, I am fashioning calamity against you and devising a plan against you. Oh turn back, each of you from his evil way, and reform your ways and your deeds.’” (Jer 18:7-11)

Here are a few of the many examples of God’s judgment:

- ◆ God blotted out the violent pre-flood world. (Gen 6)
- ◆ God judged the immoral Sodomites. (Gen 19)
- ◆ God crushed the pagan empire of Egypt and set the Israelites free. (Gen 15:13, 14; Num 33:4)
- ◆ God destroyed the wicked Canaanites at the hand of the Israelites. (Deut 9:3-5; Num 33:51, 52)
- ◆ God delivered the idolatrous Israelites into the hand of their enemies. (2 Kings 17:5-23)
- ◆ God smashed the ruthless Assyrians and their capital city of Nineveh with foreign soldiers. (Nahum 1-3)
- ◆ God demolished the backsliding Judeans and sent them into slavery. (2 Kings 24:1-25:21)
- ◆ God destroyed the star worshipping Babylonians under the Medes and Persians. (Jer 50)
- ◆ God put an end to the ‘god-kings’ who forced the people to worship the government. (Daniel 2:44)

In addition to ‘acts of God’ or ‘natural disasters,’ the most common means by which God punishes people is civil government. Often it’s with brutal foreign armies who rape, pillage and plunder the land; who are led by men that lust for world power and engage in whatever wicked tactics are necessary to subject people to their absolute control: mass starvation, prison ‘work’ camps, torture, intimidation, harassment, humiliation, beatings, midnight raids, murder, etc.

Notice also that the most common reason for God judging a nation is false religion. “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge...” (Hosea 4:6) Mental laziness leads people to do whatever *feels* good, but it ultimately causes the obliteration of a society.

Repent, for the judgment of God is at hand! Open your eyes and see what is about to come upon you and your children if your culture rejects the God of the Bible. God has allowed Satan to raise seven world governments in times past. Before He humbled these evil empires, God used them to judge the earth on a grand scale, just as He had done with a worldwide flood in earlier times, and as He will do with fire at the end. God always gives each culture or society what it deserves.

Fourteen hundred years before Christ, God promised the nation of Israel: “*If you will diligently obey the LORD your God I will set you high above all the nations of the earth. All these blessings shall come upon you... The LORD will cause your enemies who rise up against you to be defeated before you... The LORD will make you abound in prosperity... and bless all the work of your hand...*” (Deut. 28:1-14)

He then goes on to promise in verses 15-68: “*But it shall come about, if you will not obey the LORD your God that all these curses shall come upon you... Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joy and a glad heart, for the abundance of all things; therefore you shall serve your enemies whom the LORD shall send against you, in hunger, in thirst, in nakedness, and in the lack of all things; and He will put an iron yoke on your neck until He has destroyed you. The LORD will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as the eagle swoops down, a nation whose language you shall not understand, a nation of fierce countenance who shall have no respect for the old, nor show favor to the young. Moreover, it shall eat the offspring of your herd and the produce of your ground until you are destroyed, who also leaves you no grain, new wine, or oil, nor the increase of your herd or the young of your flock until they have caused you to perish. And it shall besiege you in all your towns until your high and fortified walls in which you trusted come down throughout your land...*”

And so the LORD judges nations who reject Him. When immorality and violence is exalted by the media, allowed in the home, practiced in the streets, and tolerated by the civil authorities, the Judge of the universe will act. Ignorance is the problem! God’s truth is the only solution!

The law of the LORD is perfect. (Ps 19:7)

You are therefore to keep all My statutes and all My ordinances and do them, so that the land will not spew you out. (Lev 20:22)

We know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully, realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous person, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers and immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching, according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God. (1 Tim 1:8-11)

An encouraging example of what can happen in any country is what happened when God sent Jonah to Nineveh to proclaim God’s judgment against its wickedness. (Jon 1:2) “Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown,” Jonah cried. Word spread fast, “Let men call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands. Who knows, God may turn and relent, and withdraw His burning anger so that we shall not perish.” When

God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it. (See Jon 3)

Because Nineveh was Israel's enemy, Jonah hadn't wanted to go in the first place. It would have suited him just fine if God had destroyed Nineveh. Afterward he prayed to the LORD and said, "Please LORD, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore, in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and One who relents concerning calamity." (Jon 4:2) I'm sure Nineveh was grateful that God is more merciful than Jonah was.

Jesus said: The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment, and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. (Matt 12:41)

God will certainly judge nations that don't repent. But He would delight to bless them if they would turn from their wicked ways; that all the nations of the world might know that He is God.

"Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked," declares the Lord GOD, "rather than that he should turn from his ways and live?" (Ezek 18:23)

Throughout history God has sent His ambassadors to try and reconcile the world to Himself. The terms of reconciliation that God offers are: Repent, for the judgment of God is at hand! The Bible tells how God's messengers warn Jews and Gentiles, rulers and renegades, to turn from their wicked ways. These messengers destroy speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God. Some people listen and repent, but many others perish.

Look at the example of John the Baptist: With many other exhortations he preached the gospel to the people. But when Herod the tetrarch was *reprimanded by him* because of Herodias, his brother's wife, *and* because of **all** the wicked things which Herod had done, Herod also added this to them all: he locked John up in prison. (Luke 3:18-20)

For when Herod had John arrested, he bound him and put him in prison because of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip. For John had been saying to him, "It is not *lawful* for you to have her." Although *Herod wanted to put him to death, he feared the crowd*, because they regarded John as a prophet. But when Herod's birthday came, the daughter of Herodias danced before them and pleased Herod, so much that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked. Having been prompted by her mother, she said, "Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist." Although *he was grieved*, the king commanded it to be given because of his oaths, and because of his dinner guests. He sent and had John beheaded in the prison. And his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she brought it to her mother. (Matt 14:3-11)

Herod was the lawmaker. How could his actions have been unlawful? *God's law defines right and wrong for all people for all time*. Why was it that although Herod wanted to put John to death, the king was grieved when he commanded it? Because he feared the crowd. Even though he was a tyrant, he was a politician. All civil authorities rule because the people allow them to.

God condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes, having made them an *example* to cultures that would tolerate ungodliness thereafter. Check out this *example* God recorded for rulers who won't humble themselves before God:

On an appointed day Herod, having put on his royal apparel, took his seat on the rostrum and began delivering an address to them. The people kept crying out, "The voice of a god and not of a man!" And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and died. But the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied. (Acts 12:21-24)

Paul found himself on trial before many a ruler for preaching the gospel. In each case he made the most of the opportunity and he preached the gospel. (See Acts 24:10-25; 26:1-29) When is the best time to tell rulers that they need to obey God's law: when you have the freedom to do so, or when you have to be arrested and put on trial for preaching? Are they always going to listen? Not usually. Does this excuse you of your obligation to do so, even at the cost of your life? No.

The primary role of civil government is to protect the righteous from the unrighteous, God's word being the standard. When cultures invent their own standards and allow the unrighteous to rule over them, those cultures experience horrible consequences.

Biblical Equation

Pray, then, in this way: "...Give us this day our daily bread..." (Matt 6:9-13)

For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either. (2 Thess 3:10)

We are to ask God every day to provide food for us, but we are not to sit in our lazy chair and wait for manna to fall into our lap. God's equation is that we have to work in order to prosper, but He wants us to be mindful of the fact that we are always dependent upon Him.

First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. (1 Tim 2:1-2)

Were you called while a slave? Do not worry about it; but *if you are able also to become free, rather do that*. For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord's freedman; likewise he who was called while free, is Christ's slave. You were bought with a price; *do not become slaves of men*. (1 Cor 7:21-23)

We are to ask God every day to provide righteous rulers who will exercise justice so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life, but we are not to sit in our lazy chair and wait for the *blessing of freedom* to fall into our lap. Again, God's equation is that we have to work in order to prosper, but He wants us to be mindful of the fact that we are always dependent upon Him.

Pray like it depends on God, because it does, and work like it depends on you, because it does.

The hand of the diligent will rule, but the slack hand will be put to forced labor. (Prov 12:24)

When the righteous increase, the people rejoice, but when a wicked man rules, people groan. (Prov 29:2)

The righteous is concerned for the rights of the poor, the wicked does not understand such concern. (Prov 29:7)

The wicked don't care about people's rights. To them, might makes right; and, he who has the biggest guns gets whatever he wants. Since government has the biggest guns, many people with evil motives are attracted to power and the wicked things they can do with it. Because of this, the righteous need to be all the more diligent to rule their communities and countries God's way.

Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all the unfortunate. Open your mouth, judge righteously, and defend the rights of the afflicted and needy. (Prov 31:8-9)

If My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land. (2 Chron 7:14)

Let the name of God be blessed forever and ever, for wisdom and power belong to Him. It is He who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings; He gives wisdom to wise men and knowledge to men of understanding. (Dan 2:20-21)

You can become a great minister of God by studying the civil laws of Israel in the Bible and learning how to administer civil justice. God can establish you as a civil servant. He can give you enough wisdom to be able to decide civil cases dealing with matters of this life.

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? Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? If the world is judged by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts? Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more matters of this life? So if you have law courts dealing with matters of this life, do you appoint them as judges who are of no account in the church? 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, but brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers? (1 Cor 6:1-6)

Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. 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; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." (Matt 20:25-28)

For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; for it is a minister of God to you for good. *But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.* (Rom 13:3-4)

The preceding Scripture was written to the church in Rome, the capital city of Caesar's empire. The church in Rome was in a unique position to make known the manifold wisdom of God to the rulers and the authorities, especially the Christians who were of Caesar's household. (See Phil. 4:22) Did Caesar praise those who did what is good and bring wrath on those who practiced evil? In many cases it was just the opposite. Nonetheless, as Paul exhorted King Agrippa:

I would wish to God, that whether in a short or long time, not only you, but also all who hear me this day, might become such as I am, *except for these chains*. (Acts 26:29)

We are the salt of the earth; the light of the world. *The world is run by those who show up and speak up*. We can educate the civil government and ask them to pass righteous laws and repeal unrighteous ones. We can seek the opportunity to serve as ministers of justice. We can also listen to the advice of Jethro, Moses' father-in-law:

Furthermore, you shall select out of all the people *able men who fear God, men of truth, those who hate dishonest gain*; and you shall place these over them as leaders. (Ex 18:21)

Choose wise, discerning, and experienced men as civil leaders. (See Deut 1:12-17) Choose those who will administer the justice of God. Following are a few examples of Biblical justice (other Scripture and the context of the situation must be taken into account):

If a man takes the life of any human being, he shall surely be put to death. (Lev 24:17)

He shall make restitution in full for his wrong and add to it one-fifth of it, and *give it to him whom he has wronged*. (Num 5:7)

The judges shall investigate thoroughly, and if the witness is a false witness and he has accused his brother falsely, then you shall do to him just as he had intended to do to his brother. Thus *you shall purge the evil from among you*. The rest will hear and be afraid, and will never again do such an evil thing among you. Thus you shall not show pity. (Deut 19:16-21)

Taxes

For because of this you also pay taxes, for rulers are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing. Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor. (Rom 13:6-7)

We should pay taxes to government ministers, but how much does the civil government need to perform its limited role?

When the people of Israel rejected God from being king over them, they asked Samuel to appoint a king for them like all the nations. (See 1 Sam 8:1-18) Among other consequences, Samuel warned them that the king would "take a tenth of your seed and of your vineyards and give to his officers and to his servants... He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his servants." Ten percent was regarded as excessive.

During seven years of famine in Egypt, *the Egyptians sold themselves to Pharaoh*. Joseph said, “I have today bought you and your land for Pharaoh; now, here is seed for you, and you may sow the land. At the harvest you shall give a fifth to Pharaoh, and four-fifths shall be your own for seed of the field and for your food.” (Gen 47:23-24) Twenty percent was regarded as slavery.

People who reject God’s righteous standards go after leaders they can manipulate. Here’s their deal: you supply the food, entertainment, and other welfare subsidies, and we won’t rebel. We’ll keep voting for you. Nations who go this route destroy themselves, as happened to Rome. When people use the force of government to steal the wealth of their neighbor’s labor, taxes continually rise as more and more laborers quit producing to stand in line at the welfare trough.

It doesn’t take long for a nation that develops a system of welfare dependency to become bankrupt and enslaved. It subverts God’s standard: ‘if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat’. It cripples the productivity of the people and renders them helpless against oppression. It also allows aspiring tyrants to rob the public treasury to buy supporters.

As long as this world exists, there will be a struggle between good and evil. The battleground is the people of each nation: individuals, families, communities, and churches. Satan craftily manipulates the culture with the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life. (See 1 John 2:16) He enslaves people with the fear of death. (See Heb 2:14-15)

Deliver those who are being taken away to death, and those who are staggering to slaughter, oh hold them back. If you say, “See, we did not know this,” does He not consider it who weighs the hearts? And does He not know it who keeps your soul? And will He not render to man according to his work? (Prov 24:11-12)

Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin. (James 4:17)

The church is to disciple the nations, teaching them to observe all that Jesus commanded. We are not to be religious police or nitpicking busybodies, trying to run everybody’s life. We are to enlighten individuals so they can govern their own lives! We are not to raise people’s children for them with a bunch of socialist programs. We are to empower parents and grandparents to build strong families. We are not to take our own vengeance upon those who practice evil. We are to equip men to be wise civil rulers, administering Biblical justice.

You shall not distort justice; you shall not be partial, and you shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and perverts the words of the righteous. Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue, that you may live and possess the land which the LORD your God is giving you. (Deut 16:19-20)

Church Government

Teaches the Love of God

Let's use an illustration of an imaginary first century congregation. We'll pick up the story when they had seven members. Let me introduce you to them. Their names were *Mercy*, *Lead*, *Give*, *Exhort*, *Teach*, *Service*, and *Prophecy*. As their names indicate, they all had special gifts which they used to express their love for God and others.

God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. (1 Cor 12:18)

Mercy was compassionate, always looking to cheer everyone up. *Lead* was an example of good deeds and was diligent to organize everyone for this purpose. *Give* was a liberal sharer, having been blessed with financial skills. He reminded everyone that you have to be productive in order to have something to share. *Exhort* was always enthusiastic and had a way of getting others excited. *Teach* was really good at helping everyone understand things more clearly. *Service* paid attention to detail and always made sure the details were taken care of. *Prophecy* seemed to know all mysteries (See 1 Cor 13:2) and he judged everything spoken to make sure it was correct.

They loved serving one another and fulfilling Jesus' mission of seeking and saving the lost. (See Luke 19:9-10) They all went about preaching the word. (See Acts 8:4) *Preaching* means *evangelizing* which means telling others the good news.

When they assembled, each one had a psalm or a teaching. (See 1 Cor 14:26-40) The variety of specialized perspectives that were shared helped everyone appreciate each other more. It also helped new members quickly discover their gift and how to express their love for God and others. All things were done for edification so that all could learn and all could be exhorted.

This highly relational group of servant leaders created an empowering environment that was positive, friendly, and welcoming. They led with a spirit of humility and authenticity, developing high levels of trust. They were resolutely committed to helping others grow spiritually by getting them engaged with the body of Christ and involved in evangelism. So should we.

For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. *Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly:* if *prophecy*, according to the proportion of his faith; if *service*, in his serving; or he who *teaches*, in his teaching; or he who *exhorts*, in his exhortation; he who *gives*, with liberality; he who *leads*, with diligence; he who shows *mercy*, with cheerfulness. (Rom 12:4-8)

Mature Christians guide their disciples to maturity, which multiplies the number of mature Christians who can make more disciples. Just like children, disciples learn by observation, imitation, and participation. The level of maturity achieved depends on their involvement and commitment. Ultimately, it depends on their love for God and others.

Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. (Phil 3:17)

Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith. (Heb 13:7)

The process a disciple goes through to become a mature Christian is compared to the process a baby goes through to become a mature adult. Babies need milk before they can handle meat.

Faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ. (Rom 10:17)

The milk that disciples need starts with a proper foundation: faith that Jesus is *Lord* and *Christ*. Once they can handle it, solid food helps them really grow. After laying the foundation, disciples need to be taught many life-changing realities; everything pertaining to life and godliness.

Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babies, *long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation.* (1 Peter 2:1-2)

The Christian's way of life is radically different from the typical culture's way of life. Children of light bear the fruit of the light which consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth. They *learn* and *teach* God's principles of transformation; how to be effective spiritual soldiers; and how to serve their family, neighbors, and brothers and sisters in Christ.

So that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:9)

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. (Heb 5:12-14)

God expects Christians to mature. One of the ways He designed for you to do so is by teaching others. There are at least seven different styles, or gifts. Not all of them are up in front of a group. *But this is important:* your personal learning is taken to the highest level when you plan on teaching others. As you do so, the putting aside of the flesh and the putting on of the Spirit is necessary in order for you to become effective. The result is spiritual maturity.

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? (1 Cor 3:1-3)

The assembly of the the saints is for equipping each other, not for winning the lost. Men of flesh need milk to drink, which is best served in personal Bible studies where you can meet their

individual needs, or in special presentations geared for the lost. If 'inviting people to church' is the standard method of evangelism, milk is always the main course. Babies can't mature if they're only served milk, and neither can Christians.

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. *Go therefore and make disciples* of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matt 28:18-20)

Evangelism is the primary mission of the church. Properly fulfilling this mission is the difference between Christians maturing or stagnating. *Go* make disciples. As soon as you have an interested student, begin integrating them into the body of Christ. But continue teaching them to observe all that Jesus commanded, laying a solid foundation.

We are to help disciples grow up in all aspects into Christ. Growth happens when *saints* are equipped for works of service, to the building up of the body of Christ. (See Eph 4:12-16) In order to discover and practice their gifts, they need to be presented with opportunities to exercise them and they need to be challenged to continue growing so they don't become sluggish.

Let us *consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds*, 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. (Heb 10:24-25)

Wisdom is needed to discern between teaching facts and teaching love. We need to always remember that the *goal* of our instruction is not just knowledge (See 2 Pet 1:3-11), "*But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.*" (1 Tim 1:5)

Knowledge makes arrogant, but *love* edifies. (1 Cor 8:1)

Think about how to encourage and stimulate one another to love and good deeds. A small group is the ideal environment for giving each member an opportunity to serve and for integrating new disciples into the body. In the first century church, large congregations of several thousand met for public proclamation and in small groups from house to house.

Day by Day

And *every day, in the temple and from house to house*, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ. (Acts 5:42)

I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you *publicly and from house to house*, solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ... I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God. (Acts 20:20-27)

So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. They were *continually devoting* themselves to the *apostles' teaching* and to *fellowship*, to the *breaking of bread* and to *prayer*. Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and

many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common. They began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. *Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house*, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:41-47)

They were *continually* devoting themselves to study, prayer, fellowship, and the *breaking of bread*. If the breaking of bread here referred to common meals, it would be out of place in this context. During the Passover feast Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper. (See Mat 26:26-29) Jude called it a love feast. It was a meal together with other saints that included unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine as a memorial of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Where did the first century church eat this love feast? 'Breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart.' The same place they took their common meals together. Years later an immature church was told to drop the meal part of this memorial. (See 1 Cor 11:17-34) It is not implied that all churches were required to do this, but it does let us know that the meal part is optional.

Study, prayer, and fellowship went on throughout the week, but the first century church gathered for the *breaking of bread* on the first day of the week:

We sailed from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and came to them at Troas within five days; and there we stayed seven days. *On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread*, Paul began talking to them, intending to leave the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight. (Acts 20:6-7)

Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus so that he would not have to spend time in Asia; for *he was hurrying to be in Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost*. (Acts 20:16)

If Paul was in a hurry to get to Jerusalem by Pentecost, why would he wait seven days at Troas? Apparently he had a message he really wanted to deliver to them, which he did when they gathered everyone together to break bread on the first day of the week. He prolonged his message until midnight, intending to leave the next day.

Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing. But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another. We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone. See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people. (1 Thess 5:11-15)

Under normal circumstances, house-size groups are the ideal setting for disciples to learn by observation, imitation, and participation. Each member gets more opportunities to serve in small groups than would be possible in large assemblies.

The New Testament mentions meeting in public places and in houses, but doesn't say that the church (*ekklesia*; an assembly or congregation) as a body owned buildings. Imagine the millions of dollars that could be spent on evangelism rather than fattening the wallets of bankers who hold the mortgage on many expensive buildings that sit empty most of the week.

All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify. (1 Cor 10:23)

We're not trying to create laws where none exist in Scripture, so don't get the wrong idea. It's often a matter of *good, better, and best*. Each congregation has the freedom to decide what's best for each unique situation. Don't cripple the body of Christ with the traditions of men.

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. For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another. (Gal 5:13-15)

Although there are never any generational divisions of the congregation recorded in Scripture, it is evident that in some cases men and women met separately. (See 1 Cor 11:5-6) This makes sense because they each have special roles, and specific instructions about those roles are best given and received by the same sex. Men are exhorted to act like men. (See 1 Cor 16:13) Older women are exhorted to teach the younger women (See Tit 2:3-5) about things specific to their role.

Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension. Likewise, I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments, but rather by means of good works, as is proper for women making a claim to godliness. A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. [See also 1 Cor 14:34-38] For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. But women will be preserved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint. (1 Tim 2:8-15)

Leadership Development

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. (2 Tim 3:16-17)

The Scripture has everything needed to equip the saints to serve the church and to seek and save the lost. We started this chapter discussing seven gifts that illustrate different roles in the body and the process by which disciples mature into leaders. All of the leaders in the first century church were developed through subjection to the mission of the body.

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, and to give His life a ransom for many. (Matt 20:26-28)

Rather than hoarding responsibilities or trying to control everyone, Jesus wants us to lead by example and teach others to love and serve. By God's grace, we can build a thriving, maturing, united body of self-sacrificing soldiers who march at their Lord's command!

As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 4:10-11)

Have you noticed a need that is not being met; maybe something that is neglected by others? If so, you may have discovered your gift. Each one has been given a stewardship of serving one another. To become a leader you simply need to take the initiative of finding a need and filling it.

Jesus said: I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. (John 15:1-2)

It is sad to say that not everyone who starts will finish. Just like branches on a vine, not everyone bears fruit. Some never take initiative. Others are not given the opportunity or encouragement to develop their gift; or their enthusiasm was squelched by the response they got when they tried.

Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an *example* of those who believe. Until I come, give attention to the *public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching.* (1 Tim 4:12-13)

Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them, so that *your progress will be evident to all.* Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you. (1 Tim 4:15-16)

The sins of some men are quite *evident*, going before them to judgment; for others, their sins follow after. Likewise also, deeds that are good are quite *evident*, and those which are otherwise cannot be concealed. (1 Tim 5:24-25)

Jesus said you'll know them by their fruit. Those who take the initiative to serve become responsible for their areas of ministry. Their progress is evident to all. When you take responsibility for your stewardship, there is a subsequent authority and ongoing accountability to the saints and to God.

Now I urge you, brethren (you know the household of Stephanas, that they were the first fruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves for ministry to the saints), that you also be in subjection to such men and to everyone who helps in the work and labors. (1 Cor 16:15-16)

Servant/Deacon/Minister

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. So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to *serve* tables. Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven *men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom*, whom we may put in charge of this task. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, *a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit*, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. And these they brought before the apostles; and *after praying, they laid their hands on them.* (Acts 6:1-6)

The apostles of Jesus started the first century church and were the sole leadership up to this point. But many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand. (See Acts 4:4) By Acts chapter six, things had reached the point that they needed a second layer of leadership. So the congregation was directed to choose men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom. The men they chose were known by their fruit.

These seven men probably didn't serve tables for thousands of people every day at every meal without help, but they were 'put in charge of this task.' When you have this many people you simply have to have some who are in charge, otherwise chaos breaks out. Those who want to do great things become the servant of all, which is what these men did.

The Greek word used here for *serve* is *diakonein* (a form of the word *diakonos*). It means to be a servant, attendant, i.e. to wait upon. It is translated as serve, servant, deacon, or minister.

'After praying, they laid their hands on them.' When the church puts someone in charge of a specific task, it is made official with the laying on of hands. It's fantastic when everyone just takes the initiative to do whatever needs to be done. There are also benefits to officially appointing them to be in charge of a task. When everyone knows who's in charge it increases efficiency and any squabbles that arise can be quickly dealt with. It also creates accountability for those who have been appointed.

Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it. (Col 4:17)

Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. These men must also first be tested; then let them serve as *deacons* if they are beyond reproach. Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things. *Deacons* must be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households. For those who have served well as *deacons* obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus. (1 Tim 3:8-13)

The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly. (Acts 6:7)

At least two of the seven were instrumental in the continuing spread of the gospel. They served well as deacons and obtained for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith. The rest of Acts chapter six and all of chapter seven tell of the great things done by Stephen; and chapter eight tells of the successful work of Philip, who is later (See Acts 21:8) called an evangelist.

Evangelist/Preacher/Apostle

The harvest is plentiful, but the *workers* are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to *send out workers* into His harvest. (Matt 9:37-38)

Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, *the Holy Spirit said*, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul *for the work* to which I have called them.” Then, when *they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away*. (Acts 13:1-3)

Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you [See Eph 4:7-8, 11], which was bestowed on you *through prophetic utterance* with *the laying on of hands* by the presbytery. (1 Tim 4:14)

How do we know that the church is supposed to send out evangelists? As seen in the previous Scriptures, the Holy Spirit, through prophetic utterance, designed the pattern for preachers to be sent out by churches.

How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? *And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent?* Just as it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!” (Rom 10:14-15)

Do a study on it and you’ll see that evangelist, preacher, and apostle are used in Scripture to describe the same role. An apostle is a delegate, messenger, or one sent forth. Because Jesus sent out twelve witnesses of His resurrection, we typically reserve the term ‘apostle’ for His twelve; and call those sent out by congregations, ‘missionaries.’ This is not the case in Scripture (See Acts 14:4, 14), which never uses the term ‘missionary.’

Churches are to send out evangelists/preachers/apostles. This should be the goal of every congregation. When you check it out you’ll see once again that it was those who were known by their good fruit who were chosen to be sent. (See Acts 11:22-26; 16:1-2) You’ll also see that they were sent in teams, and some of the team members were helpers (See Acts 13:5) or apprentices.

In the church that was at Antioch, *prophets and teachers* fasted and prayed and laid their hands on Barnabas and Saul and sent them away. (See Acts 13:1-3) In Timothy’s case, it was the presbytery (elders) who performed the laying on of hands. (See 1 Tim 4:14)

So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus. When they reached Salamis, *they began to proclaim the word of God* in the synagogues of the Jews; and they also had John as their helper. (Acts 13:4-5)

On their first adventure, which lasted two or three years, they preached to many cities and made disciples at Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:14-52), Iconium (Acts 14:1-7), Lystra (Acts 14:8-19), and Derbe (Acts 14:20-21). They wouldn't have spent any more than about six months at any one location. The congregation of seven we introduced to you at the beginning of this chapter could have been one of the congregations that Paul's team started in a matter of months.

The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, *entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.* (2 Tim 2:2)

Faithful men are hard to find, but easy to identify: time will either expose you or promote you. After letting their new congregations practice serving each other and seeking and saving the lost by themselves for about six months or so they went back and appointed elders. Elders are mature Christian leaders who are able to guide their disciples to maturity.

After they had preached the gospel to [Derbe] and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." *When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.* (Acts 14:21-23)

They passed through Pisidia and came into Pamphylia. When they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia. *From there they sailed to Antioch, from which they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had accomplished.* When they had arrived and gathered the church together, *they began to report all things that God had done with them* and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. And they spent a long time with the disciples. (Acts 14:24-28)

In a matter of two or three years they had established several mature, self-sufficient congregations. Not that these congregations never had an evangelist come through again...

After some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord." ...Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus. But Paul chose Silas and left, being committed by the brethren to the grace of the Lord. And he was traveling through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches. Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. And a disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek, and he was well spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted this man to go with him. (Acts 15:36-16:3)

Churches established just a few years earlier were already sending out their first apostle, Timothy, to go preach with Paul and Silas. We pointed out earlier that this was done through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery, probably in connection with Paul's request. After strengthening the existing churches, these three adventured on to Macedonia to make more disciples.

Things don't always work as perfectly as they did at Lystra, but what an ideal to go after. Mature, self-sufficient congregations can raise their own leaders and send out preachers.

It appears that the longest Paul spent preaching at any one location was three years. (See Acts 20:31-35) He would typically go back and check up on things, or send one of his helpers to do so. Paul exhorted Timothy to do the work of an evangelist and fulfill his ministry (See 2 Tim 4:1-5), and he gave Titus similar instructions: For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you. (See Tit 1:5-9)

In addition to starting new churches, preachers visit existing churches to reprove, rebuke, and exhort; help them mature (See 1 Cor 4:17); strengthen them; set things in order; and appoint elders.

Again, there is accountability involved in bestowing responsibility on someone: Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses. Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning. I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of His chosen angels, to maintain these principles without bias, doing nothing in a spirit of partiality. Do not lay hands upon anyone too hastily and thereby share responsibility for the sins of others; keep yourself free from sin. (1 Tim 5:19-22)

Elder/Overseer/Shepherd

It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of *overseer*, it is a fine *work* he desires to do. An *overseer*, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, *able to teach*, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money. He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?), and not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. (1 Tim 3:1-7)

What a fantastic description of a mature Christian! These are qualities that every Christian should be taught to strive for and must be found in every elder. The overseer must be able to teach, exhort in sound doctrine, and to refute those who contradict. (See Tit 1:5-9)

Elder, overseer, and shepherd are interchangeable names describing the same stewardship. (See Acts 20:17-28; 1 Peter 2:25, 5:1-5) Another name for shepherd is pastor, which is one who shepherds the flock of God. Overseer is translated as bishop in some translations. So elder, shepherd, pastor, overseer, and bishop all describe one role.

Just as the meaning of servant/deacon/minister describes their role, and the meaning of evangelist/preacher/apostle describes their role, the meaning of elder/overseer/shepherd describes their role. Elder is an older, mature Christian who serves the saints and seeks and saves the lost, *leading by example*. Overseer is a superintendent, which involves inspection. A shepherd/pastor feeds, guides, and protects the flock.

Paul told the elders at Ephesus: Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you *overseers*, to *shepherd* the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock... speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. (Acts 20:28-30)

Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but *proving to be examples* to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for **GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.** (1 Peter 5:1-5)

Pay Your Leaders

The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches him. (Gal 6:6)

The Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel. (1 Cor 9:14)

Or do only Barnabas and I not have a right to refrain from working? Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat the fruit of it? Or who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock? I am not speaking these things according to human judgment, am I? Or does not the Law also say these things? For it is written in the Law of Moses, “You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing.” God is not concerned about oxen, is He? Or is He speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops. *If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you?* (1 Cor 9:6-11)

The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double *honor*, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing,” and “The laborer is worthy of his wages.” (1 Tim 5:17-18)

The word *honor* here means a value, i.e. money paid, or valuables. The same word is used here:

Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; *honor* to whom *honor*. Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. (Rom 13:7-8)

Those who take the initiative to serve the body and seek and save the lost obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus. They are qualified to get their living from the gospel.

They went out for the sake of the Name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. Therefore we ought to support such men, so that we may be fellow workers with the truth. (3 John 7-8)

Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come. When I arrive, whomever you may approve, I will send them with letters to carry your gift to Jerusalem. (1 Cor 16:1-3)

The saints at Jerusalem were in need (See 2 Cor 8-9) so a freewill offering was collected by other churches and sent to help. This is a precedent for any needs that a church might fulfill.

Conclusion

The cross comes before the crown. Those who truly love the church and the lost will do the work regardless of the price. True leaders take initiative to serve others, and their fruit is evident to all.

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you. (Heb 13:17)

Do you give your leaders joy? Do you deliberately add to the momentum of the mission?

So that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. (Eph 3:10)

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, *for the equipping of the saints for the work of service*, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. (Eph 4:11-13)

These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you. (Titus 2:15)

A nobleman went to a distant country to receive a kingdom for himself, and then return. And he called ten of his slaves, and gave them ten minas and said to them, “Do business with this until I come back.”

But his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, “We do not want this man to reign over us.”

When he returned, after receiving the kingdom, he ordered that these slaves, to whom he had given the money, be called to him so that he might know what business they had done. The first appeared, saying, “Master, your mina has made ten minas more.”

And he said to him, “Well done, good slave, because you have been faithful in a very little thing, you are to be in authority over ten cities.”

The second came, saying, “Your mina, master, has made five minas.”

And he said to him also, “And you are to be over five cities.”

Another came, saying, “Master, here is your mina, which I kept put away in a handkerchief; for I was afraid of you, because you are an exacting man; you take up what you did not lay down and reap what you did not sow.”

He said to him, “By your own words I will judge you, you worthless slave. Did you know that I am an exacting man, taking up what I did not lay down and reaping what I did not sow? Then why did you not put my money in the bank, and having come, I would have collected it with interest?”

Then he said to the bystanders, “Take the mina away from him and give it to the one who has the ten minas.”

And they said to him, “Master, he has ten minas already.”

“I tell you that to everyone who has, more shall be given, but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away. But these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slay them in my presence.” (Luke 19:12-27)



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Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead. (Acts 17:30-31)