

THE TRINITY

A great mystery is before us here, for, since there is only one God, only one Trinity (or "Triunity"), we have no adequate analogies, or comparisons, to aid us in understanding the Trinity of the Godhead (the divine Being that exists in a unity of three distinct, divine Persons). (13)

Difficult as it may be to comprehend the truth, it is a vital and urgent doctrine. Church history contains the tragic tales of groups that failed to do justice to the concept of the Trinity.

The daily Jewish family prayer, taken from Deuteronomy 6:4, emphasizes the great truth of the unity of God. "Hear, O Israel: The LORD Our God, the LORD is one." (14) Alongside this important truth is the concept of personality in God. Personality involves knowledge (or intelligence), feeling (or affection), and will. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit each show these characteristics in their own personal way. The Holy Spirit, for example, does things that show He is not a mere power or thing (see Acts 8:29; 11:12; 13:2,4; 16:6-7; Rom. 8:27; 15:30; 1 Cor. 2:11; 12:11).

Personality also demands fellowship. But before the creation of the universe, where was the possibility of fellowship? The answer lies in the complex arrangement within the Godhead. The unity of the Godhead does not preclude compound personalities. There are three distinct personalities, each wholly deity, yet so harmoniously interrelated that they are one essence. This is quite different from saying there are three Gods.

One helpful way to disclose the distinctions of persons within the Godhead is to observe the functions especially attributed to each. For example, God the Father is principally credited with the work of creation; God the Son is the principal agent in applying the work of redemption to humanity; God the Holy Spirit is the deposit, or first installment, guaranteeing our future inheritance. This threefold distinction is sketched in Ephesians 1. Yet one must not press this distinction too far, for there is also abundant biblical testimony to the cooperation of the Son and the Spirit in the work of creation: The Father created through

the Son (John 1:3); the Holy Spirit hovered gently over the earth in preparation for the six days of creation (Gen. 1:2). The Father sent the Son into the world to effect redemption (John 3:16), and the Son himself, in His ministry, went "in the power of the Spirit" (Luke 4:14). The Father and the Son also share in the Holy Spirit's ministry of sanctifying the believer. The Trinity is a harmonious fellowship within the Godhead. This fellowship is also a loving fellowship, for God is love. But His love is an outgoing love, not a self-centered love. This kind of love demands that before the creation there had to be more than one Person within the Being of God. An important term to bear in mind with respect to the doctrine of the Trinity is subordination. There is a kind of subordination in the order of relation of the persons, but not of their nature. The Son and the Spirit are said to "proceed" from the Father. This is a subordination in relationship, but not of essence. The Spirit is said to proceed from the Son and the Father. This is the orthodox statement of the western Church, adopted at the council of Nicea in A.D. 325 and embodied in the standard Christian creeds and doctrinal statements.

Two major kinds of heresies that diverged from the consensus of Church understanding of biblical teaching regarding the Trinity were Sabellianism and Arianism. About the middle of the third century A.D., Sabellius, in an attempt to avoid the possibility of teaching that there were three Gods, promoted the idea that there was but one God with one personality, but that He manifested himself in three different modes. First, there was God the Father, the Creator. Then God manifested himself as Son, the Redeemer. Now, He manifests himself as Spirit. God, for Sabellius, was just exhibiting three different "masks." A modern form of this heresy erupted in Pentecostal circles about 1915, assuming the epithet of "Jesus Only," or "Oneness."⁽¹⁵⁾ It is a species of Unitarianism that oversimplifies the Trinity,⁽¹⁶⁾ actually dragging God down to the human level. On the human level there is only one person to one being. It does not matter what part of a person (e.g., will, emotions) acts, he must say, "I did it." But on the divine level there are

the three Persons to the one Being. God has three "places" where He can say "I." And why not-surely we should expect God to be greater than we are!

Most of those who now follow this Jesus Only doctrine teach that people are not saved until they are baptized in the Holy Spirit and speak in tongues. This flows out of their confusion about divine persons, failing to distinguish the redemption wrought in Christ and the anointing and empowerment made available through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The other serious heresy that has periodically afflicted segments of the Church is Arianism. Arius, in A.D. 325, went to the other extreme, emphasizing so much the distinction among the persons in the Godhead that he in effect divided the Godhead into three distinct essences. The result was a subordination not only of relationship but of nature, for both the Son and the Holy Spirit. This led to the reduction of Jesus Christ, and the Spirit as well, to a position of less than full deity. Arius denied the eternal Sonship of Christ, considering Him to have come into existence at some point after the Father. Further, the Holy Spirit was said to have come into existence through the operation of the Father and the Son, making Him even less deity. There are many groups of people today who hold that neither the Son nor the Spirit is in the fullest sense deity. Such groups are in league with their spiritual ancestor Arius,(17)

Although there is no specific passage in the Bible that uses the term "trinity," there are numerous passages that allude to the Trinity. A vivid example is clearly given in the events of the baptism of Jesus at the Jordan River by John the Baptist: "As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, " "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased"" (Matt. 3:16-17). The Trinity is admittedly a mystery, a mystery too great for human comprehension. But as with so many truths hard for the unregenerate person to accept, the Spirit of Truth helps our weakness and human inability (1 Cor. 2:13-16). We worship the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and recognize their personalities in what we see in

the Bible. Therefore, we humbly acknowledge that they are One in fellowship, purpose, and substance.

[(13)Dr. Nathan Wood, former president of Gordon College and Gordon Divinity School, believed we could see the imprint of the Trinity in nature. He suggested, for example, that three-dimensional space shows it. If the dimensions of a room are taken as equal units, the length goes through the entire room, so do the width and the height, yet each is distinct. And to get the space you do not add $1 + 1 + 1$; you multiply $1 \times 1 \times 1$, which is still one. (Like all analogies, however, this one falls short, since dimensions are not personal.)

(14)"One" here is the Heb. '*echad*, which can represent a compound or complex unity. Although the Heb. has a word that means "one alone," "the only one," *yachid*, it is not used of God.

(15)They usually point to the fact that the word "name" in Matt. 28:19 is singular and they say that that "name" is Jesus. However, in Bible times the word "name" included both names and titles (see Luke 6:13, KJV) and was used in the singular when only one name was given for each person (as in Ruth 1:2 where the "name" is singular in the Heb. when referring to the two sons). It should be noted also that in Matt. 28:19 the command was literally to baptize them "into the name," which was their way of saying into the worship and service of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In Acts 2:38, however, a different form is used in the Gk. and means "upon the Name of Jesus," which was their way of saying "upon the authority of Jesus," an authority expressed in Matt. 28:19. Luke used that terminology to distinguish Christian baptism from the baptism of John the Baptist.

(16)Some of them use an illustration like this: Dr. William Jones is addressed by his title, Dr. Jones, in his office. On the golf course his friends call him by his personal name, William or Bill. At home his children call him Daddy or Father. The problem with this is that Bill Jones on the golf course does not go to the telephone and talk to father Jones at home or Dr. Jones in the office. Yet Jesus prayed to the Father, and the Father declared, "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased" (Luke 3:22).

(17)Some of the passages that refute such subordination are John 15:26; 16:13; 17:1,18,23. (See also 1 Cor. 12:4-6; Eph. 4:1-6; Heb. 10:7-17.)]

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Although unbelievers do not accept the classical arguments for the existence of God, in what sense can these arguments be helpful to believers?
2. When the Bible speaks of God's great name, the word "name" may be collective and include all that is revealed in the various names of God given in the Bible. What kind of God does the Old Testament reveal? What does the New Testament add to this?
3. How can God be both transcendent and immanent?
4. How can you relate the attributes of God to your experience of God?
5. What are the two important aspects of God's holiness and how do they relate to the holiness He wants to see in us?
6. What is the difference between holiness and righteousness?
7. Why is it important to recognize God as a Trinity of Persons in one Being rather than as three separate Gods?
8. What are some of the ways the Bible indicates that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are distinct Persons?
9. What are some of the ways the Bible shows that there is indeed a Trinity ("Triunity")?

ORDINANCES OF THE CHURCH

(a) Baptism in Water

The ordinance of baptism by immersion is commanded in the Scriptures. All who repent and believe on Christ as Savior and Lord are to be baptized. Thus they declare to the world that they have died with Christ and that they also have been raised

with Him to walk in newness of life (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:16; Acts 10:47-48; Rom. 6:4).

(b) Holy Communion

The Lord's Supper, consisting of the elements-bread and the fruit of the vine-is the symbol expressing our sharing the divine nature of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1:4); a memorial of His suffering and death (1 Cor. 11:26); and a prophecy of His second coming (1 Cor. 11:26); and is enjoined on all believers "till He come!"

Biblical Christianity is not ritualistic or sacramental. Sacramentalism is the belief that special grace is bestowed on participants who engage in certain prescribed rituals. It is usually held by sacramental churches that the grace is received whether or not the participant has any active faith-all one has to do is go through the form. Although obedience to two ordinances is prescribed in the New Testament, no special merit is attached to such obedience.⁽¹⁾ These two ceremonies, which the Lord instituted and commanded, are to be understood as occasions of memorial. There is no saving power in the mechanical performance of these acts; the blessing that one may receive is a matter of the heart.

WATER BAPTISM

Water baptism is a ceremony that symbolizes the beginning of the spiritual life. It is a public declaration of our identification with Jesus in His death and resurrection, for they made possible our new life in Him (see Rom. 6:1-4). Peter makes a comparison with Noah and his family going through the Flood in the ark:

In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him (1 Pet.

3:20-21).

The water of the Flood brought judgment on a world that was corrupt and full of violence (see Gen. 6:5,11). So the water of baptism symbolizes judgment that Jesus in His death took upon himself for all people of all times. The water of the Flood did not cleanse Noah. Rather, the fact he and his family came through the Flood and were saved from its judgment was a testimony to the faith they had before the Flood-faith that caused them to believe and obey God and build the ark. So the water of baptism does not cleanse us, but is a testimony to our faith in the risen Lord Jesus Christ, a faith we must have before we go into the water of baptism. Therefore, it is not the water itself that saves us, but what coming through the water represents: the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the resurrection that showed God had accepted Christ's sacrifice on our behalf and in our place. The New Testament clearly shows it is the blood of Jesus, not the water of baptism, that brings us cleansing and forgiveness: By His blood we are justified (Rom. 5:9), our consciences are cleansed (Heb. 9:14), we are redeemed (1 Pet. 1:19).

When Peter spoke of baptism "for the forgiveness of your sins" (Acts 2:38), he used the same Greek construction where John the Baptist said, "I baptize you in water for repentance" (Matt. 3:11). John's baptism did not produce repentance. In fact, he refused to baptize the Pharisees and Sadducees until they showed the fruit of repentance, that is, until they showed they had already repented (see Matt. 3:7-8). "For repentance" means "because of repentance" or "as a testimony of repentance." So also "for the forgiveness of sins" means "because of the forgiveness of sins" or "as a testimony to the fact that sins have been forgiven." Unless a person has first believed and been cleansed by the blood of Christ, water baptism means nothing. But for the one who is truly born again (cleansed by His blood and justified), baptism becomes not only a testimony but also the pledge that we will continue to live a new life in the power of the risen Christ.

Who then is eligible for water baptism? The New Testament

teaches that water baptism is for believers only. In line with Peter's illustration, Noah believed God before going through the Flood (see Heb. 11:7). Jesus commanded His disciples to make disciples and then to baptize them (see Matt. 28:19). In Mark 16:16, believing precedes baptism. When the deacon Philip went to Samaria, his preaching and miracles "brought great joy in that city" (Acts 8:8).

"When they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women" (Acts 8:12). Their baptism came after they believed. At the house of Cornelius, they not only believed, they were baptized in the Holy Spirit, spoke in tongues, and praised God before they were baptized in water. At Philippi, Paul told the jailer, "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved-you and your household" (Acts 16:31). Then all heard the word of the Lord, all were baptized, and the jailer "was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God-he and his whole family" (Acts 16:34). It is clear therefore that water baptism is intended to be a public ceremony in which open witness is made to the community that the believer has accepted Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

The foregoing leaves no grounds for infant baptism. Nevertheless, those who argue for infant baptism sometimes take baptism as a substitute for circumcision, which was done when Israelite boy babies were eight days old. However, when the New Testament deals with circumcision it does not say, "Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is water baptism." It says, "what counts is a new creation" (Gal. 6:15). We are a new creation when we are "in Christ," by faith (see 2 Cor. 5:17). Because the promise is "for you and your children" (Acts 2:39) and because Paul baptized the household of Stephanas (1 Cor. 1:16), some take this to point to infant baptism. But in those days, children were not considered full members of the household until the time of their "adoption." (2) Furthermore, Peter commanded the people to "repent and be baptized" (Acts 2:38). Infants are incapable of repentance, faith, and public testimony to salvation. In fact, they have no sins of which to repent. This means that

infants and children who die before the age of accountability are still saved through the redemption that is by Christ Jesus. "Jesus called the children to him and said, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these'" (Luke 18:16). Because of this, we believe the dedication of infants to God is not out of order. It is, however, primarily a challenge to the parents and to the local church to make provision for the spiritual training of the child so that upon reaching an age of responsibility the child will be prepared to accept Jesus as Savior and Lord.

Immersion is the mode that conveys the full significance of such passages as Romans 6:1-4, in which the going down into the water pictures death to sin and rising up out of the water, new life in Christ. Some denominations take Ezekiel 36:25, which speaks of God sprinkling clean water on Israel as a restored nation, as grounds for baptism by sprinkling. However, the Greek word *baptizō* clearly means "to dip under," "immerse." It was used in ancient non-Christian literature to mean "plunge," "sink into," "drench," "overwhelm." Furthermore, note the following: John the Baptist was baptizing at Aenon "because there was plenty of water" (John 3:23). When Jesus was baptized, He came "up out of the water" (see Mark 1:10). When Philip baptized the Ethiopian Eunuch, both of them went "down into and came "up out of" the water (see Acts 8:38-39). All these things point conclusively to immersion.(3) The baptismal formula is supplied in Matthew 28:19- "baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." " The word "name" in the Greek also means "title."(4) It is singular here because it is used distributively and there is only one "name" or title each.(5) "In the name" here is literally "into the name," a phrase that was commonly used in those days to mean "into the worship and service." In Acts 2:38, where we read of baptism "in the name of Jesus Christ," the expression is a little different. It is literally "upon the name of Jesus Christ." "Upon the name" was their way of saying "upon the authority." Peter, in effect, was appealing to the Great Commission, in which Jesus on His authority told the disciples

how to baptize (Matt. 28:19). In other words, those in the Book of Acts, on the authority of Jesus Christ, did baptize "into the name [the worship and service] of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Church history confirms that baptism continued to be done in the Triune Name.

THE LORD'S SUPPER

The Lord's Supper was instituted by the Lord Jesus Christ on the occasion of His last Passover meal with the disciples (often called the Last Supper), just hours before He died on the cross.(6) For us it takes the place of the Passover of the Old Testament, "for Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed" (1 Cor. 5:7). The Lord's Supper, which Jesus commanded to be repeated at frequent intervals until His Second Coming,(7) has several values in relation to the past, the present, and the future: It is commemorative, instructive, and inspirational; it promotes thanksgiving and fellowship; it proclaims the new covenant; and it carries a responsibility. First, it is commemorative: "Do this in *remembrance* of me" (Luke 22:19). It is a solemn occasion for pondering deeply the significance of the atoning death of Christ, the focal point of all history. It confronts us again with the cost of our redemption from sin and its penalty. It is also instructive, symbolizing by means of a sacred object lesson the incarnation of Christ (the physical elements of bread and wine(8)) and the Atonement (the consuming of the physical elements). When Jesus said, "This is my body" and "this cup is the new covenant in my blood," He meant that the bread and wine represented His body given in death and His blood poured out as a sacrifice on the cross(9) The Lord's Supper is also inspirational, since we are reminded that by faith we may enter into the benefits of His death and resurrection. By partaking on a regular basis, we are repeatedly identifying ourselves with Him in His death, reminded that He died and rose again so that we might have victory over sin and avoid every kind of evil (see 1 Thess. 5:22). The Lord's Supper calls for thanksgiving, which is *eucharistia* in the Greek (see 1 Cor. 10:16) and thus the source of the term "Eucharist," used by some churches. It is an opportunity to thank God for all the blessings that are

ours because Jesus died on the cross.(10) It is an opportunity for fellowship (Gk. *koinonia*)-first of all, with the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ (see 1 John 1:3), and, second, with other believers who share the faith (see Titus 1:4; Jude 3), the grace of God (see Phil. 1:7; Col. 1:6), and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (see Rom. 8:9,11). Jesus was the host at the Last Supper. As our risen Lord, He is present, for He promised, "Where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them" (Matt. 18:20).

Therefore, He is the unseen host at every celebration of the Lord's Supper.

The Lord's Supper recognizes and proclaims the new covenant (Gk. *hē kainē diathēkē*). By partaking of the Lord's Supper we declare our purpose to make Jesus Lord, do His will, take up our cross daily to follow Him, and fulfill His Great Commission. The Lord's Supper also looks forward to the future kingdom of God, where Jesus promised to "drink it [the fruit of the vine] anew" (Mark 14:25).

This probably refers to "the Marriage Supper of the Lamb" (cf. Matt. 8:11; 22:1-14; Luke 13:29; Rev. 19:7).

Finally, the Lord's Supper carries a responsibility. Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 11:27-34 that one must guard against participating "in an unworthy manner." What does it mean to participate in an unworthy manner? Surely it does not mean that one must be worthy as a person, since none of us is able to stand in this relationship to God apart from Christ. It refers, rather, to unworthiness of attitude and behavior. We are all sinners, but those who have been "made new in the attitude of your minds" and "put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness," and who are "all members of one body" (Eph. 4:23-25) are eligible for participation in the Lord's Table. Those who harbor sin, whether it be gross and carnal or subtle and personal, are in need first of cleansing (1 John 1:7,9).

Since the warning is so strong (see 1 Cor. 11:27,29-30), it is important that we examine ourselves before we eat of the bread and drink of the cup (1 Cor. 11:28). As we eat and drink, we must recognize "the body of the Lord."

The "body" we must recognize, or "discern" (KJV), is the

spiritual body of Christ, the assembly of believers. "Is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf" (1 Cor. 10:16-17). The context shows that the Corinthians were allowing divisions and quarrels among themselves. "One ... says, follow Paul'; another, 'I follow Apollos'; another, 'I follow Cephas'; still another, 'I follow Christ'" (1 Cor. 1:12). This party spirit had spilled over into the celebration of the Lord's Supper (which was originally celebrated in connection with a meal). So they showed no love for each other. and they did not recognize each other as members of the body of Christ. Consequently, they did not recognize the Body in each other. (See 1 Cor. 12:12-13.) Instead, they partook in a self-centered spirit that was indifferent to each other.

Notice, however, the Bible does not tell those who were taking the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner to stop taking it. Rather, we are to "examine" ourselves, "judge ourselves," and "wait for each other" (1 Cor. 11:28,31,33). That is, we are to wait until we can recognize the body of Christ in each other and partake of the Lord's Supper in unity of love and faith, honoring Christ and God's Word. Actually, it is worse for a Christian to refuse to take the Lord's Supper than it is to partake of it in an unworthy manner. By refusing to partake, a person is saying, "I refuse to repent and I refuse to believe that Christ's body and blood were the effective sacrifice I need for the cleansing of my sins. I don't believe what He did on the cross was good enough. I refuse to give thanks and I refuse to continue to accept the New Covenant. I also refuse to accept the brothers and sisters in the assembly as members of the Body of Christ."

Nor do we need to wait long. "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin" and "if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:7,9). The moment we confess, the blood covers. Because the Lord's Supper is a solemn time for remembering

the focal point of Christ's work on our behalf, it can become a time for great spiritual blessing, provided the participants come in the proper frame of mind and allow it to be an opportunity for worship and fellowship with the risen Christ and with each other.

[(1)As time went on, the Catholic Church added other sacraments. For a discussion of the seven traditional sacraments of the Roman church-the Eucharistic Sacrifice of Christ's Body and Blood, Baptism, Confirmation, Penance (now called Reconciliation), Anointing of the Sick (formerly called Extreme Unction), Holy Orders or Ordination, and Marriage-as currently held, see Arthur P. Flannery, ed. *The Documents of Vatican II*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1984).

(2)See chap. 5, note 5.

(3)Recently, archaeologists have found in the earliest church buildings (from the second century A.D.) baptismal tanks for immersion. In Jerusalem also there were several large pools where it would have been easy for the 120 to baptize the 3,000 who were converted on the Day of Pentecost.

(4)See Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, eds., *A Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, trans. Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), 576.

(5)The same distributive (rather than collective) use is seen in Ruth 1:2, where the "name" (singular in the Heb.) of the two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. If "name" had been in the plural, the Bible would have had to give more than one name for each of the sons.

(6)See Matt. 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:15-20; and 1 Cor. 11:23-26.

(7)Some churches observe the Lord's Supper every service, some once a week, but most assemblies observe it once a month. All Jesus said was "Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor. 11:26).

(8)There is good evidence that the wine, the juice of the vine, was

unfermented at the Lord's Supper. See "Wine in New Testament Times" in *The Full Life Study Bible* Donald C. Stamps, ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1990), 126.

(9) Roman Catholics teach transubstantiation, the belief that the bread and wine by a miracle become the actual body and blood of Jesus, keeping only the appearance of bread and wine-so they adore the bread and the wine. Lutherans and many Anglicans (Episcopalians) teach consubstantiation, the belief that Jesus is actually present in a substantial way with the bread and wine. However, "this is my body" and "in my blood" are metaphors. Jesus was present with the disciples when He said this of the bread and the wine. See also 1 Cor. 5:8, where Paul speaks of "the bread of sincerity and truth."

(10) See Matt. 26:27-28; Mark 14:23-24; Luke 22:19-20; and 1 Cor. 11:24-26.]

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Why do most Protestants accept only two ordinances instead of observing seven sacraments?
2. What does water baptism do and what does it not do?
3. What is the biblical evidence that water baptism is for believers only?
4. Why is it important that we be baptized by immersion?
5. In what sense does the Lord's Supper have a backward look, an upward look, and a forward look? Explain.
6. What attitudes does the Lord's Supper call for on our part?
7. What does it mean to partake in a worthy manner?

The Church and Its Mission

The Church is the Body of Christ, the habitation

of God through the Spirit, with divine appointments for the fulfillment of her Great Commission. Each believer, born of the Spirit, is an integral part of the General Assembly and Church of the Firstborn, which are written in heaven (Eph. 1:22-23; 2:22; Heb. 12:23).

Since God's purpose concerning man is to seek and to save that which is lost, to be worshiped by man, and to build a body of believers in the image of His Son, the priority reason-for-being of the Assemblies of God as part of the Church is:

- a. To be an agency of God for evangelizing the world (Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 1:8).
- b. To be a corporate body in which man may worship God (1 Cor. 12:13).
- c. To be a channel of God's purpose to build a body of saints being perfected in the image of His Son (1 Cor. 12:28; 14:12; Eph. 4:11-16).

The Assemblies of God exists expressly to give continuing emphasis to this reason-for-being in the New Testament apostolic pattern by teaching and encouraging believers to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. This experience:

- a. Enables them to evangelize in the power of the Spirit with accompanying supernatural signs (Mark 16:15-20; Acts 4:29-31; Heb. 2:3-4).
- b. Adds a necessary dimension to a worshipful relationship with God (1 Cor. 2:10-16; 12:14).
- c. Enables them to respond to the full working of the Holy Spirit in expression of fruit and gifts and ministries as in New Testament times for the edifying of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:28; 14:12; Gal. 5:22-26; Eph. 4:11-12; Col. 1:29).

WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

The word "church" translates the Greek word *ekklēsia*.⁽¹⁾ *Ekklēsia* was commonly used in the ancient Near East to describe an assembly of citizens, sometimes one meeting officially, sometimes one just rushing together as a mob (Acts 19:32,39,41). In the Septuagint (Gk.) version of the

Old Testament this Greek word was used of the assembly, or congregation, of Israel, particularly when the people were gathered before the Lord for religious occasions (e.g., Deut. 9:10; 18:16; 23:1,3). By New Testament times, however, the Jews preferred the term "synagogue" to designate both the building and the congregation meeting there.

Therefore, to distinguish themselves from the Jews and to declare themselves as the true people of God, both Jesus and the early Christians used the term *ekklésia*.⁽²⁾ It is the spiritual family of God, a fellowship created by the Holy Spirit, based upon the atoning work of Christ.

The word "church" is used variously today by many people. It is sometimes used to denote a physical structure, a building used by a local congregation. It is sometimes used of a denomination. However, there are only two valid biblical uses for the term "church" (assembly). There is the local church (assembly), by which is meant not the building, but the assembled saints who worship together in a given location. In a real sense, all the attributes of the whole church are expected to characterize that local assemblage; it is the body of Christ localized. Consequently, Paul could refer to the church (assembly) of God in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:2). At the same time, there is a broader use of that term as well: Based on the context, "church" may refer to all saints, throughout history as well as throughout the world. And only to the extent that they are composed of genuine believers may denominations be said to be a part of that grand, universal Church.

There are several highly descriptive figures of speech that the Bible writers have used to help us understand the mystery of the Church. Perhaps the most important is the term "body of Christ." Christ was visibly present on earth during the time of the Incarnation. When He was preparing to depart, He took special pains to train a group of disciples whom He had commissioned to found and be the Church, the assembly of citizens of heaven (Matt. 16:18-19; 18:17-20; Eph. 2:19; Phil. 3:20). After His resurrection, Jesus breathed on the disciples and others who were in the Upper Room, imparting a measure of the Holy Spirit to them. Their names were already written in heaven (Luke

10:20); they were already clean before God, having had a spiritual bath through Christ's Word (John 13:10; 15:3). The old covenant had been abolished at Calvary (Eph. 2:15); the death of Jesus put the new covenant into effect (Heb. 9:15-17). Consequently, they were already a new covenant body, and Jesus imparted to them the new covenant life through this impartation of the Holy Spirit-the same life all believers receive when they believe that God raised Jesus from the dead and are born again (Rom. 10:9-10).(3)

At the same time, Jesus commissioned them and gave them authority. Thus, from Christ's resurrection day they were in a new relationship with Him: They were already the Church, the *ekklēsia*. Jesus instituted not an organization, but an organism. At the time of the Ascension, Christ exhorted the disciples to stay in the city of Jerusalem until they would be clothed with power from on high (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4). On the Day of Pentecost the 120 assembled believers, who were praising God (Luke 24:53), individually received the promise of the Father, the baptism in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit came to energize the community of believers, to make the resurrected Christ available everywhere through Spirit-filled disciples.

To emphasize and visualize the living relationship of the believers with Christ, the Bible talks about Christ as the "head" of the Church and the Church as His "body" (1 Cor. 12:27; Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18). There are several reasons for this beautiful analogy of the Church as the body of Christ. The Church is the physical, visible manifestation of Christ in the world, doing His work, such as calling sinners to repentance, proclaiming the truth of God to the nations, and preparing for the ages to come. The Church also is like a body in that it is composed of a complex arrangement of diverse parts, each discrete, each receiving from the Head, each with its own gifts and ministry, yet all necessary for the work of God to proceed (Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 6:15; 10:16,17; 12:12-27; Eph. 4:15-16).

Another significant metaphor used to describe the Church is the "temple of God" and of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1; Eph. 2:11-22; 1 Pet. 2:4-10). "Temple" (Gk. *naos*) refers to the inner sanctuary, the most

holy place, where God manifested His glory in a special, localized way.(4) God is omnipresent, it is true, but in a special sense His dwelling is among His people (Exod. 25:8; 1 Kings 8:27). The word "temple" is used in 1 Corinthians 3:16 of the entire local assembly. Together each assembly is the temple, for God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit is in their midst. Then in 1 Corinthians 6:19, the body of the individual is also the temple of the Holy Spirit. Even in Old Testament times, though the glory(5) was manifest in the inner room-the Most Holy Place-God's presence was not limited to His manifestation of himself in the midst of His people. "For this is what the high and lofty One says-he who lives forever, whose name is holy: 'I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite'" (Isa. 57:15). In Ephesians 2:20-22 Paul enlarges the figure of the temple to include all believers of all times:

You are... built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Peter then combines the figures of the temple and the priesthood:

As you come to him, the living Stone(6)-rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him-you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ... You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light (1 Pet. 2:4-5,9).

We are not only the temple, we also offer spiritual ministry among ourselves as priests of God in this sanctuary.(7) Another

vivid figure used with respect to the Church is "the bride of Christ." This figure emphasizes union and communion of the saints with the Christ. It is used particularly with regard to the eagerness of the bride to be ready for the marriage, and therefore has a strong tone of hope for the future (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:25-27; Rev. 19:7; 21:2; 22:17). The figure of a wife is also used of the Church, for even though we look forward to a closer relationship with Christ when He comes to earth again, we have a close relationship now (cf. Eph. 5:25-32). The marriage relationship is thus used to illustrate Christ's love and care for the Church as well as the devotion and faithfulness of the Church to Christ.

Other terms and phrases used of the Church include "God's household, which is the Church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). It is the household, or family, of God (Eph. 2:19), and it supports and upholds the truth. It is God's "field" as well as God's "building," where He not only dwells, but from which He expects fruit (1 Cor. 3:9). It is an "army" equipped with "the full armor of God" so that it can stand against the devil's schemes, using the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, and protected by the shield of faith and the helmet of salvation (Eph. 6:10-17). It is a spiritual "fellowship," or partnership, working together with the Lord in the power of the Spirit and in love and care for one another and for the lost (2 Cor. 13:14; Phil. 2:1; 1 John 1:3). We are all "ministers," literally, "servants," doing God's work and building up one another through the gifts and ministries of the Spirit (Rom. 12:6; 1 Cor. 1:7; 12:4-11, 28-31; Eph. 4:11).

Within the Church also is a present manifestation of the "kingdom of God,"⁽⁸⁾ the term itself (Gk. *basileia*) referring to the authority, reign, or rule of a king, rather than to territory or subjects. Though human participation in the Kingdom is voluntary, God's kingdom is present, whether or not people recognize and accept it.

There is only one kingdom (rule, authority) of God, variously described in Scripture as the "kingdom of heaven," "kingdom of

God," kingdom of "the Son of Man" (Matt. 13:41), "my kingdom" (spoken by Jesus, Luke 22:30), "kingdom of Christ and of God" (Eph. 5:5), and "kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ" (Rev. 11:15),

From the various contexts of the word kingdom in the Gospels, the rule of God is seen as (1) a present realm or sphere into which people are entering now and (2) a future apocalyptic order into which the righteous will enter at the end of the age.

...

As Pentecostals we recognize the role of the Holy Spirit in the inauguration and ongoing ministry of the Kingdom.... The working of the Spirit in the ministry of Jesus proved the presence of the Kingdom.

Jesus described the rule of the Holy Spirit in the kingdom of God.... The power of the Kingdom, so manifest in the Cross, the Resurrection, and the Ascension, was passed on to all who would be filled with the Spirit. The age of the Spirit is the age of the Church, the community of the Spirit. Through the Church the Spirit continues the Kingdom ministry of Jesus himself....

The kingdom of God is not the Church. Yet there is an inseparable relationship between the two.....

The kingdom of God existed before the beginning of the Church and will continue after the work of the Church is complete. The Church is therefore part of the Kingdom but not all of it. In the present age the kingdom [rule, reign] of God is at work through the Church.(9)

MEMBERSHIP IN THE CHURCH

Through the atoning death of Jesus Christ all human walls of division have been broken down, and in Christ all who are genuine believers are made members of the body of Christ. He [Jesus] came and preached peace to you [Gentiles] who were far away and peace to those who were near [that is, the Jews]. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy

temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit (Eph. 2:17-21).

Clearly, as the Bible tells us, "It is by grace you have been saved, through faith-and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-not by works, so that no one can boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). Acts 16:31 expresses the simple truth: "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved-you and your household." It is the Lord who adds daily to the Church "those who are being saved" (Acts 2:47).

THE WORK OF THE CHURCH

The Church has a threefold objective. All of the functions of a local body of believers should relate in some significant way to one or more of these three cardinal objectives. If upon examination the local body discovers that its energies are being consumed by activities that do not fit these objectives, it would do well to reassess its priorities. There is a further introductory note which should be interjected here as well: It is God's intention to work through the Church between the first and second advents of Christ. This is the Church Age. An axiom worth pondering is that any activity that does not feed and nourish the Church, no matter how well-intentioned, is simply not God's way of doing things in this age. He has chosen the Church to be His agency for accomplishing His purposes in the world today. The first objective of the Church is world evangelization. Just as Jesus Christ came to seek and to save the lost, so the extension in this age of His body, the Church, is to His ascension He issued a solemn challenge to the disciples to evangelize the world, making disciples ("learners," "people eager to learn") from all nations, baptizing them "and teaching them to obey everything" He had commanded (Matt. 28:19-20).

A characteristic of the early Jerusalem Church was that it was growing. The Lord added to the Church daily those who were being saved (Acts 2:47). Even under persecution, the Early Church scattered the gospel message, "gossiping the gospel" wherever the members were dispersed (Acts 8:4). The Book of Acts has a theme of growth, both

spiritual and numerical, with more and more new centers established as believers in the power of the Spirit continued to spread the good news.(10)

The Early Church was also characterized by emphasis on the spoken Word. Paul recognized that "God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe" (1 Cor. 1:21), and so the work of extending the Great Commission is still to be achieved. The Pentecostal experience has been given to believers with the task of evangelism as its principal objective (Acts 1:8). The power of the Holy Spirit coming upon believers expresses itself not only in tongues as the initial physical, or outward, evidence, but in mighty acts of a supernatural sort, which confirm the verbal testimony of faithful witnesses (Mark 16:15-16; Heb. 2:4). Gifts of the Spirit, such as prophecy, also are means the Holy Spirit uses to convict and convince sinners (1 Cor. 14:24-25).

The second objective of the Church is to minister to God. As a great denominational catechism states, "Man's chief and highest end is to glorify God, and fully to enjoy him forever.(11) An oft-repeated phrase in Ephesians, particularly chapter 1, regarding the purpose of human beings in God's universe is that we should be "to the praise of his [God's] glory." Augustine, bishop of Hippo in North Africa from A.D. 396 to 430, declared that all human beings are restless until they find their rest in God. Human beings apart from a worshipful relationship to our Creator are disoriented and out of tune. We were created to worship. Now, it is true that worship has many avenues of expression. In a real sense, all of life can be a great hymn of praise to God. The mundane acts of life, including digging weeds, washing the car, and cleaning house, can become an instrument of worship and praise to God.(12) All of life should be of such expression of thanks and praise. However, God has provided the Church, the corporate body of believers, as a special instrument of worship.

One cannot read passages such as 1 Corinthians 11 to 14 without recognizing that the ministry of the Holy Spirit is especially significant in the worship of the Church. Given to the Body of assembled believers are diverse operations

of the Spirit, which both edify the worshipers and enrich the worship of God. God and believers are blessed wonderfully in the spiritual worship furnished by the manifest presence of the Holy Spirit. These varied manifestations of the Spirit are generally called gifts of the Spirit; but in the original text of 1 Corinthians 12:1, the word "gift" is not present, but simply the term "spirituals." This word "by itself might include other things directed by the Holy Spirit and expressed through Spirit-filled believers. But in this passage Paul is clearly limiting the word to mean the free gracious gifts or charismata."(13)

(All the early Christian writers took the word spirituals as spiritual gifts, therefore recognizing them to be supernatural gifts with the Holy Spirit as their immediate source. (15))((15)John Owen, The Holy Spirit (Grand Rapids: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 1971), 16.(14))

The implication is that God through the Holy Spirit distributes the various manifestations needful in the worshiping community as He chooses; the "gifts" are given to the Church as a whole. It is true that individuals in the congregation may develop a ministry featuring one or more of the gifts, but none are to be considered one's private property, for the Spirit dispenses His ministrations for the benefit of the Church "just as he determines" (1 Cor. 12:11; 14:12.32).

There are several lists of gifts of the Holy Spirit:

1 Corinthians 12:8-10,28; Ephesians 4:11; Romans 12:6-8. The first list, 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, is the fullest catalog of spiritual ministries bestowed by the Spirit in the worshiping body. This list is often called the nine gifts of the Spirit. These include three gifts of revelation (the word [or message] of wisdom, the word [or message] of knowledge, and the discerning of [or distinguishing between] spirits), three gifts of power (faith, miracles [miraculous powers], gifts of healings), and three gifts of utterance (tongues, interpretation of tongues, and prophecy).

These supernatural gifts are all concerned with the manifestation of God's character, ways, and eternal purposes.

Therefore, every word or message of wisdom that the Spirit gives "will reflect God's plans, purposes, and ways of accomplishing things." (15) It will give divine insight into the need or problem and into God's Word, for the practical resolution of that need. (16)

The word, or message, of knowledge is especially concerned with "the light [enlightening] of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6) and "the fragrance of the knowledge of him" (2 Cor. 2:14). It reveals applications of the gospel to Christian living and on occasion reveals other facts that only God knows. Donald Gee described it as "flashes of insight into truth" that penetrate beyond the operation of our unaided intellect. (17)

The gift of faith is not ordinary faith, nor is it saving faith. "The vibrant, active Christian is more likely to see this gift in action as he claims God's power for present needs. Fervent prayer, extraordinary joy, and unusual boldness accompany the gift of faith. It can include special ability to inspire faith in others, as Paul did on board the ship in the storm (Acts 27:25)." (18)

In the Greek of 1 Corinthians 12:9-10, there are three sets of plurals: gifts of healings, works of power, and distinguishings of spirits. Clearly, no one has the gift of healing. The plural may indicate a variety of forms of this gift. It may also indicate that a specific gift is given to the sick person for the particular sickness or disease, the one ministering the gift being the agent through whom the Holy Spirit works. Works of miraculous power are divine energizings in a broader category than healing. In the Book of Acts, such works encouraged the mission of the Church. Examples may include the judgment on Ananias and Sapphira and on Elymas, the deliverance of Peter from prison, and the preservation of Paul from snakebite.

Prophecy simply means "speaking for God" in a known language. It reveals the progress of the kingdom of God and puts the sinner under conviction by revealing the secrets of his or her heart (1 Cor. 14:24-25). It brings edification and encouragement to the assembled believers (Acts 15:32).

With "distinguishings between spirits" the plurals again

indicate a variety of expressions of the gift. We are not to believe every spirit but we must put them to the test (1 John 4:1). In the spiritual battle going on in this world, we need to distinguish who the enemy is. But also the human spirit can be an offender.

The gift of tongues includes kinds, or families, of languages. In the assembly, a message in tongues needs to be interpreted in order to bring edification. Even when the tongue is praise or prayer, there should be interpretation. Interpretation, however, is not necessarily strict translation; rather, it gives the meaning or essential content of what is given in tongues.(19) The spiritual, worshiping church is a powerful arsenal of supernatural power which God employs in His warfare against the hosts of darkness. In fact, "[w]hatever the need of the Church, the Spirit has some gift to meet it."(20) By combining the four lists given in Romans, Ephesians, and 1 Corinthians "in various ways, it is possible to come up with a total of 18 to 20 gifts."(21) They include "gifts for the establishment of the church and for bringing it to a maturity where all the members can receive their own gifts and contribute to the upbuilding of the local body.... Second. gifts of the edification of the local body through individual members.... Third, gifts for service and outreach."(22)

The latter group includes the following:

1. Gifts of administration (1 Cor. 12:28), a variety of expressions helping those in leadership.
2. Gifts of helps, or helpful deeds, inspiring us to help others or take someone's part in a difficult situation.
3. Gifts of ministry (service, deaconship), various types of spiritual and practical service, including the distribution of aid or help to the poor, inspiring generosity.
4. Gifts of ruling (directing, caring, giving aid), helping leaders care for souls and make the church concerned about helping others under the leadership God gives.
5. The gift of showing mercy (Rom. 12:8), inspiring gracious and compassionate care for the needy, the sick, the hungry, those with insufficient clothing, and prisoners. It is the last in the list of gifts in Romans 12, but not the least (see Matt. 25:31-46).

All these gifts are needed. The Holy Spirit distributes

them according to the need, but we must be willing to respond in faith and obedience. Then the local assembly will be built up both spiritually and in numbers. In fact, as the worshiping body responds in faith, all these spiritual ministries, or gifts, should be in operation in a truly apostolic-patterned church. This is the privilege of believers. It is more than a privilege, really, for increasingly as the clouds of darkness roll over the face of the earth, the Church must have all the spiritual resources available to it to withstand the encroachment of secularism, materialism, the occult, New Age philosophies, and other subtle devices of Satan designed to weaken its witness. Over most of the history of the Church there has been too much dependence on human resources. As long as the funds, equipment, men [and women], materials, and technical skill are available, projects are pushed with every expectation of success. Yet often they fail in spite of everything. On the other hand, some have started out with almost nothing but with a tremendous confidence in God and a dependence on the gifts and help of the Holy Spirit, and the impossible has been done. It is a great thing to learn to use the human resources available, while depending on the Spirit. The gifts of the Spirit are still God's primary means of building the Church both spiritually and in numbers. Nothing else can do it.(23)

There is a third objective of the New Testament Church: to build a body of saints (dedicated believers), nourishing them so that they become conformed to the image of Christ. Evangelism is the winning of new converts; worship is the Church directed toward God; nurture is the development of new converts into mature saints. God is mightily concerned that newborn babes grow in grace (on the basis of Eph. 4:11-16; cf. 1 Cor. 12:28; 14:12). Paul emphasized repeatedly the yearning God has for evidence of spiritual maturity in the lives of believers (1 Cor. 14:12; Eph. 4:11-13; Col. 1:28-29).

How may one know when one is growing into the image of Christ? How can the Church gauge its success in producing Christian maturity in its membership? Galatians 5:22-26 offers a beautiful set of virtues called the "fruit of the Spirit": love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness,

faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.(24) Those who exhibit such traits of character are said to be fulfilling the law or instruction of Christ. We do need to take an active part in this. Second Peter 1:5-11 tells us:

Make every effort to add to your faith (or exercise abundantly in your faith] goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins. Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The Church's task is not done until it assists its members in growing spiritually, so that the various gifts of the Spirit are matched by the display of the fruits of the Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 13).

The Church has a high calling, an upward calling. Paul said, "I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:14). Hebrews 3:1 reminds us that we "share in the heavenly calling." Ephesians 1:3 says, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight." The Bible is not referring to predestination of individuals. It is saying that the Church is a chosen body, predestined to be holy. All those who choose to believe become part of the Church and share in its destiny. In the Church "the Christian's position and blessings are spiritual, heavenly, and eternal."(25)

[(1)The word is derived from *ek*, "out of," and *kaleō*, "call." However, in the Bible it is used of any assembly. Usage, not derivation, determines

meaning. Bible usage shows it had lost the meaning of "called-out ones. "Assembly" is the best translation.

(2)See The New Testament Greek-English Dictionary, Delta-Epsilon, The Complete Biblical Library (Springfield, Mo.: The Complete Biblical Library, 1990), 336.

(3)Stanley M. Horton, What the Bible Says About the Holy Spirit (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1976), 128-133.

(4)The Gk. has another word, hieron, for the whole temple precinct with all its buildings and courts.

(5)Later, rabbis called this glory the shekinah, a term derived from the Heb. shakan, "dwell, stay."

(6)Notice that Christ is the One to whom we come. He, not Peter, is the "Rock" on which the Church is built (Matt. 16:18). Note also that in 1 Pet. 2:8 the word "stone" (Gk. lithos) is parallel to "rock" (Gk. petra), the word used in Matt. 16:18.

(7)Peter can mix these metaphors because in the Bible the church is always "people."

(8)It should be noted that where Mark and Luke have "the kingdom of God," Matthew, writing to the Jews, has in the same contexts "the kingdom of heaven." The terms are synonymous. Jews in New Testament times preferred to avoid the name of God for fear they might take it in vain.

(9)Where We Stand (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1990), 185-186, 187, 189, 190.

(10)Stanley M. Horton, The Book of Acts (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1981), 13.

(11)The Westminster Larger Catechism (Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1939), 162.

(12)Myer Pearlman, beloved teacher and writer, used to say, "If you

have to mop the floor, take the mop and say, 'I will not let you go until you bless me.'"

(13)Horton, What the Bible Says, 208. The word charismata is actually used in 1 Cor. 12:4,9,28,30-31; and 14:1.

(14)Ibid., 208-209.

(15)David Lim, Spiritual Gifts: A Fresh Look (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1991), 71.

(16)See Acts 6:1-7; 10:47; 15:13-21; 16:35-40, for example.

(17)Donald Gee, Spiritual Gifts in the Work of the Ministry Today (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1963), 29.

(18)Lim, Spiritual Gifts, 74-75.

(19)Horton, What the Bible Says, 277-279.

(20)Ibid., 209.

(21)Ibid., 210.

(22)Ibid., 263-264.

(23)Ibid., 282.

(24)See "The Acts of the Sinful Nature and the Fruit of the Spirit," in The Full Life Study Bible (Grand Rapids Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1990), 395.

(25)Ernest Swing Williams, Systematic Theology, vol. 3 (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1953), 107.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. How was the word "church" (ekklēsia) used in Bible times and how does that use compare with the way it is used today?

2. What is the evidence that the Church was already in existence before the Day of Pentecost?
3. Both Ephesians and Colossians called Christ the Head and the Church His Body. Is the Head or the Body given most emphasis in Ephesians? in Colossians?
4. What are the three ways the figure of the temple is used with respect to the Church?
5. Some today treat the bride of Christ as a special company of super believers within the Church. What does this kind of teaching lead to and what are the reasons for understanding the Bride to be the whole true Church?
6. What is the relation of the Church to the kingdom of God?
7. What are the conditions for membership in the Church given in the New Testament? How does that compare with conditions for membership in your own local assembly?
8. What priorities does the New Testament give for the work of the Church? What is your own local assembly doing to put these priorities into effect?
9. What is the primary purpose of the Holy Spirit in the ministry of His gifts in the local assembly?
10. When should we expect the Spirit to give His gifts?
11. Which gifts are most often neglected in your own local assembly today?
12. Which gifts are most needed in your own local assembly today?
13. Why is it important that we desire and seek the gifts of the Spirit?
14. How do we grow spiritually and how can we help others to grow spiritually?

THE MINISTRY

A divinely called and scripturally ordained ministry has been provided by our Lord for the threefold purpose of leading the Church in: (1) Evangelization of the world (Mark 16:15-20), (2) Worship of God (John 4:23-24), and (3) Building a body of saints being perfected in the image of His Son (Eph. 4:11,16).

CHURCH ORGANIZATION

The Church is more than an organization; it is a living organism. The head of the Church is Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:22-23), who nourishes the Church, giving it spiritual life. However, a living organism must have structure. Nothing is more highly organized in the natural world than the simplest living cell. In the Old Testament the tribes were organized for march as well as for encampment (see Num. 2 to 4). Similarly, the Church is also an orderly, structured arrangement of parts, an arrangement one discovers from examining the pattern of the Apostolic Church. The structure set forth in the New Testament was quite simple, the principle apparently being that only organization necessary for the ongoing life of the Church should be adopted. For example, they did not have deacons until they needed deacons.

A general principle in the development of the Church also seems to be that each local assembly was considered self-governing, without hierarchical connections beyond the local assembly. The exception to this principle is the special authority accorded the apostles, who did, as a matter of fact, exercise an authority over a number of churches. This, however, was because of their special relationship to Christ, and upon their death this apostolic authority ceased.⁽¹⁾ For example, Paul in his missionary journeys conducted elections for elders and received the respect due one with special authority.⁽²⁾

There were two basic types of offices in the Apostolic Church. One was itinerant and charismatic; the other was local and elected. The first involved ministries rather than

offices in the modern sense, and was itinerant because those who exercised this function traveled around, generally among a wide range of local assemblies. They were charismatic, given to the whole Church for the exercise of supernatural manifestations that would establish the churches and bring all the believers to the place where they could do the work of ministry (Eph. 4:8,11-14). The other type of office was local. Those who functioned in this category remained in one specific locality. They also were elected, chosen by the local congregation according to prescribed qualifications set forth by the apostles before the churches. (See Acts 6:3; 1 Tim. 3:1-13; Titus 1:6-9.) Itinerant and charismatic leaders were set apart and given ministry by divine direction. Paul introduces these ministries as Christ's gifts by quoting from Psalm 68:18, "When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men" (Eph. 4:8).(3) Ephesians 4:9-10 is a parenthesis that identifies Jesus as the one who ascended on high. Then Paul goes on to show that the gifts given to men are apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers. The primary group of apostles were the Twelve. They had a ministry in the initial establishing of the Church (Acts 1:20,25-26) and when Jesus sits on His glorious throne in the millennial kingdom, they "will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. 19:28). This marks the twelve apostles as a limited group. However, the New Testament indicates there were other apostles (Gk. *apostoloi*, "ambassadors, sent with a mission") who were also given as gifts to the Church. These included Paul and Barnabas (Acts 14:4,14) as well as Paul's relatives Andronicus and Junias (Rom. 16:7).(4) However, Paul speaks of those who were apostles before he was (Gal. 1:17). He also tells about how Jesus appeared to all the apostles, and "last of all" to him, "as to one abnormally born" (1 Cor. 15:7-8; cf. 9:1). "Thus it appears that the rest of those who are called apostles in the New Testament also belonged to a limited group of which Paul was the last."(5) The apostolic ministry had three distinct features. First, the apostles were commissioned by the risen Lord Jesus (Acts 1:2) and were first-hand witnesses to the teachings

and resurrection of Jesus.(6) Second, the apostles had the unique role of establishing the Church and producing Scripture. This role could not be duplicated after their death, since it was limited to those who had heard Jesus or were able to talk to those who had heard Jesus.(7) The third feature, however, is an apostolic ministry (not office) of signs and wonders applicable to all ages (2 Cor. 12:12). This ministry was involved in the planting of churches. That apostolic function is similar to the task of the pioneer missionary today (2 Cor. 10:16). Paul's journeys supply a vivid and practical pattern for our missionary enterprise. Prophets were those in the Apostolic Church who had a special ministry of inspired utterance. While the apostles and evangelists took the gospel to the unregenerate world, the prophets exercised an edifying ministry to the various churches. For example, "Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the brothers" (Acts 15:32). Their messages, however, were not to be taken as infallible, but were to be judged, or evaluated, by the other members of the local church (1 Cor. 14:29-33; 1 John 4:1).

The ministry of evangelist in a very real sense overlapped the ministries of apostles and pastors in the New Testament. The function of the evangelist was to be the first to bring the gospel to those who had not yet heard. In this pioneer sense the function of the evangelist seemed to overlap that of the apostle, who also served in new territory, at the edge of the already evangelized field. The pastor in the New Testament was also exhorted to "do the work of an evangelist" (2 Tim. 4:5). The term was also applied to a layman in the church, the deacon Philip, who exercised the ministry of evangelism and was called "Philip the evangelist" (Acts 21:8). His preaching of the good news was accompanied by miracles, healings, and deliverance from demons. Many in his audiences were saved, baptized in water, and filled with joy (Acts 8:6-8). "Pastors" could also be translated "shepherds" (Gk. poimenas). Jesus called himself the Good Shepherd who gathers the flock, cares for them, knows them, rescues them when they stray, and lays down His life for them (John

10:2-16). He remains the Chief Shepherd (Heb. 13:20; 1 Pet. 5:4). Pastors are undershepherds, having the ministry and responsibility of caring for and protecting God's flock as well as being worthy of their imitation (1 Pet. 5:2-3). Teachers were given a special ability to explain and interpret the truth of God's revelation (Matt. 28:19-20; Eph. 4:11; 2 John 10). Some were itinerant, going from church to church. However, Ephesians 4:11 seems to connect pastor and teacher as a twofold ministry. The shepherd needed to feed the flock. The very word "shepherd" in the Old Testament (Heb. ro'eh) is an active participle meaning, literally, "one who feeds."

First Timothy 3:1-13 gives instruction in the selection of local and elected officers. The first of these officers was the "elder" (Gk. presbuteros), a term indicating age and maturity. This term was also used by the Jews to designate the person who was known as the "ruler" of the synagogue (Mark 5:35-38). In the Greek-speaking world of the New Testament, the term "bishop" was used as the equivalent of "elder" (cf. Acts 20:17 and 20:28). "Bishop" (Gk. episkopos) literally means "overseer" or "superintendent." Acts 20:28 indicates that they were also expected to have the ministry of shepherd, or pastor. The duties of the office were similar to those of pastors as we think of them today. The elder, or bishop, was in a sense the president of the congregation and was initially elected out of the congregation and given the responsibility of seeing that preaching and teaching were done. The elder did not need to do all the teaching, but, as Paul wrote to Timothy, "The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor [including financial support], especially those whose work is preaching and teaching" (1 Tim. 5:17). The use of the plural, "elders," may indicate that each house church had an elder and that the elders in a city met together for the guidance of all the churches. In the history of the Church, the leader of the principal church in a city eventually took the title of bishop and left the title of elder (Gk. presbuteros) to his assistants and the pastors of the smaller churches in the city. Later the word "elder" (presbuteros) was corrupted into "priest." (8) Since

the Bible teaches the priesthood of all believers, we do not believe there should be a priest or shepherd standing between the believer and Christ so that the believer cannot go directly to Him. Jesus is the one and only Mediator between God and humankind. Our pastors serve as teachers, inspirers, and role models for the assembly. Ordination does not make them ministers, it simply recognizes the ministry God has already given them.(9)

The other group of elected officials in the Early Church were the "deacons" (Gk. diakonos), originally meaning "a

I waiter who kept the wine glasses full." It then came to mean a servant who had various duties. Among Christians, deacons were following the pattern of servanthood set by Jesus (Matt. 20:26-28; 23:11; John 12:26). The term was soon used generally for those in the ministry, but then came to be used for an established group of workers elected by the local congregation. These people served as helpers to the elders, principally in the material and mundane matters relating to the assembly, such as the care of tables for the sake of widows (Acts 6:1-4; Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. money

3:8-13). Church history shows too that they were busy caring for the poor, the sick, and the weak. It should be noted that women seem to have been accorded a role in this ministry, too, for women deacons are mentioned in Romans 16:1 and Philippians 4:3, as well as in 1 Timothy 3:8-11.(10) The deacons, although their ministry was sometimes of a more secular nature, needed to minister spiritually to those they served and were therefore expected to measure up to a high set of spiritual and moral qualifications.(11)

FUNCTIONS OF THE MINISTRY

The various ministers, whether apostles, prophets, evangelists, or pastor-teachers, are considered God's gifts to the Church (Eph. 4:11). The varied tasks of this group of God's servants may be summarized in the following ways.

First, the ministry in the Early Church was expected to lead the Church in world evangelization. The officials, whether itinerant or elected, were not expected to do an the evangelizing. Their task was to equip the believers in

the church at large for this and other ministries. Ephesians 4:12 pointedly declares this truth. When persecution struck the Jerusalem church the laypeople were scattered abroad, but they had been so well instructed-and inspired by the Holy Spirit-that everywhere they went they fulfilled the ministry of evangelism. There were evangelistic rallies, to be sure, but personal evangelism was the principal means of extending the Early Church. It was expected that converts would be made through the normal concourse of daily encounter, and then they would be brought into the assemblies. The ministers, in other words, were to lead the entire Church in the task of world outreach. Were the ministers alone assigned this task, the world would never be evangelized.

The leadership of the Church also bore a special responsibility in cultivating a climate of worship and leading people into ministry to the Lord (John 4:23-24; Acts 13:1-2). Discipline of the local assembly in matters pertaining to worship, particularly the matter of abuses of the manifestations of the Spirit, occupies 1 Corinthians 11 to 14. In that passage, however, the Bible calls for moderation, not a moderator. The congregation as a whole, as well as the individual members, was to exercise self-discipline.

References to spiritual leadership appear in many places in the New Testament record. Principles that governed worship seem to be edification of the assembly and freedom of expression without quenching the Spirit (1 Thess. 5:19). Of course, the strong assumption throughout the Epistles is that the assemblies were filled with members baptized in the Holy Spirit. Instruction in spiritual worship includes the beauty of spontaneous expressions of praise and song, suggesting that in the Early Church there was a delightful freedom and sense of expectancy (Eph. 5:18-20). However, lest one imagine that there was a total lack of order, consider such passages as 1 Timothy 4:13, which strongly suggests a regular pattern of Bible reading, the centrality of preaching, and an emphasis on right doctrine (teaching), all within a context of public worship.

A third facet of responsibility charged to the leadership of the New Testament Church was the task of building up

believers into mature saints. The stated reason for the various ministries in the Church being classified as "gifts" to the Church is specifically "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up" (Eph. 4:12). The word "prepare" (Gk. *katartismos*) is the word used for "equipping," "completely furnishing," "training with a view of bringing to a level of maturity or full fruition." In the next verse, Ephesians 4:13, the objective is spelled out: "Until we all reach unity in faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." In this verse the word "mature" (Gk. *teleion*) emphasizes the idea of "enabling one to fulfil an intended destiny." The sense of fulfilling God's will for one's life is strongly implied. This is also what being mature implies, for the meaning of that term points to the appropriate use of one's energies, the marshalling of all one's resources, for concentration on ultimate goals without the hindrance of scattered and diverted interests. The expression in this verse that describes the level of maturity the Christian is to achieve, "the whole measure of the fullness of Christ," emphasizes that our model, our pattern, of full obedience to the will of God is the life of Christ himself. Ephesians 4:14-15 gives to us the result of this maturation process, which the Church is expected to produce in the believers through the various ministries entrusted to it. In summary, one can describe the intended result as stability. The effective result of spiritual ministry in the household of God will be an assembly of saints whose feet are solidly planted, saints whose lives are not easily disturbed by the "waves, and ... wind of teaching" (Eph. 4:14). Into such a solid fellowship it is expected that new converts will be accepted and that those who have suffered the agonies of broken lives will see in this delightful union of believers an attractive quality of life (1 John 1:3-4).

THE CALL TO THE MINISTRY

Paul carefully points out an important truth concerning diversity of ministry (Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12:1-30). Within the wonderful unity in the body of Christ, brought about

by the work of the Holy Spirit, there is a rich diversity. Not all have the same function, the same gift, the same ministry, or the same office. As the human body needs a wide variety of organs in order to function properly, so the body of Christ requires a diversity of ministries so that the Church may effectively do the bidding of Christ in this world. Out of this great truth of "diversity in unity" shines the concept of God's concern for the individual. Regardless of function, gift, or office, regardless of how glamorous or hidden the task entrusted to one, in the sight of God all are important. Each believer will be rewarded according to individual faithfulness. This great biblical emphasis on the worth and integrity of the individual has tremendous implications for a proper understanding of people and society in the modern world-it militates against totalitarianism and collectivism, such as one finds in communistic societies.

How is it that God brings about the richness of the variety the Church needs? The answer lies in the call of God, sometimes called the doctrine of vocation. The field of toil, the lifework, is not a matter of personal choice for the believer. It is an obedient response to the calling of a sovereign God. God's summons to himself is not only for salvation, but also for service. In the Gospel record, Jesus is described as calling people with great frequency. His call was to discipleship, that is, to become learners, students. Following Jesus to learn from Him involved leaving the past and surrendering every aspect of one's life to the Master Teacher. It included not only deliverance from sin, but it carried with it a whole new program for living. "Come, follow me," " Jesus said, 'and I will make you fishers of men'" (Matt. 4:19). Coupled with salvation was the call to service. In a very real sense we are saved to serve. Salvation is more than an escape hatch from hell, it is the gateway to fullness of life and usefulness in the kingdom of God. In the largest sense all are called to service. All who know Jesus as Savior must continue to be disciples ("learners" who earnestly desire to learn to know and serve Him better). This large view is related to the concept known

as the priesthood of all believers (1 Pet. 2:5,9; Rev. 1:5-6). Because Christ made a new and living way into the Most Holy Place (in heaven), all believers have access to the throne of God (Heb. 10:18-22). This is a privilege of the believer's being in the family of God. The powerful implication of this great truth is that no human intermediary is needed to plead one's case with God, for Jesus Christ is the Great Mediator-the one and only Mediator-and He has opened the way for the individual to appear before the throne of grace. In this important sense, then, each believer is a priest of God, each believer is a minister of God.

This shatters the medieval idea that salvation was to be dispensed through a special few: the hierarchy of the Church. The sharp division that arose between clergy and laity during this long dark night of church history was broken down by the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century, when the New Testament doctrine of the priesthood of all believers was resurrected from the nearly forgotten apostolic past.(12)

However, let us not overlook a very important point here. Although the priesthood of believers gives everyone equal standing before God, not requiring an earthly sacramental system with its round of ritual and pageantry of priestcraft, nonetheless God does call individuals to particular functions in the Church for special service. Though there is no qualitative difference in the worth of the minister as distinct from the layperson, there is a difference in function. And although we should not wish in any way to minimize the calling of the laity-for that also is an important sphere in which a witness for God is made-the Bible does give special attention to the calling of those entrusted with spiritual oversight of the Church. Today, such ministers are usually ordained, which is the Church's recognition that God has given them a ministry and that they are faithfully serving in their calling.(13)

Paul was keenly aware that his apostleship was his own choosing. He was aware also that in the providence of God he had been entrusted with awesome responsibility. It was God's doing. God called Paul to be an apostle, making

him a "servant" (Gk. *doulos*, literally, "slave") of the Lord and of the Church, separating him to the special ministry of the Word of God (Rom. 1:1). Again, in writing to the Galatians, Paul underscored the fact that he did not assume this ministry himself, nor was it delegated to him by another person-it was God who put him in the ministry (Gal. 1:1).

Paul's emphasis on servant leadership is in line with the example and commands of Jesus. On one occasion Jesus called a little child and had him stand among the disciples and said, " "Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:2-4). Later, Jesus told them, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority [play the tyrant] over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave-just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:25-28; see also Luke 22:25-26). Those called to special ministry are not to seek to go to the top, nor are they to seek fame, worldly power, or special privilege. Instead, loving, faithful, humble service, giving themselves for the Lord and for others, will mark all they do. God will take care of their advancement, if it is His will.

That the proclamation of the gospel, its preaching and explanation, requires a special calling from God is evident from this account in the Book of Acts: The leadership in the church at Jerusalem found themselves encountering the ministry of the Word and prayer, was being neglected. numerous mundane duties, so that their primary calling, The appointment of deacons grew out of this awareness. Nothing was to hinder the ministry of the Word. "We... will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word'" (Acts 6:1-4)

A final word should be added here regarding the call to the ministry. Indeed, it is God who sets His call upon individuals in a special manner for the work of the ministry.

However, this does not preclude the aspiration of capable earnest young people to such a work. There is a divine-human cooperation evident here. "Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer [bishop, pastor], he desires a noble task" (1 Tim. 3:1).

Not all who desire-or even all who prepare for such a work-will be called by God. But it is commendable for keen, capable, energetic, moral, spiritual young people to present themselves before the Lord, making preparation for service and awaiting divine direction. In this age there is likely greater danger of young people shutting their ears to the call of God to the ministry than of finding themselves out of God's will in such full-time service. How important not to mistake the voice of God, not only for one's own personal well-being, not only for the world dying around us, but for the sake of God's glory!

[(1)Matthias was chosen to take the place of Judas because Judas lost his office, but when the apostle James was martyred, no one was chosen to take his place. He will be among the Twelve who will rule the twelve tribes of Israel in the Millennium (Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:30). The Bible gives no indication of any apostles, other than the apostle Paul, who were not commissioned by Jesus before His ascension.

(2)See Acts 14:23, where the word "appointed" is the Gk. *xeirotoneo*, which means, literally, "conducting an election by a show of hands."

(3)The picture is taken from the ancient custom of conquerors taking captives, making them slaves, and giving them as gifts to their friends. The ascended Jesus took people captive to himself and gave them as gifts to the Church. Notice how Paul calls himself a servant, literally, a "slave" (Gk. *doulos*), of Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:1; Phil. 1:1).

(4)Junias is a feminine name in the Gk.

(5)Stanley M. Horton, *What the Bible Says About the Holy Spirit* (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1976), 265.

(6)Notice how Paul defends his apostleship in 1 Cor. 15:8-10; 2 Cor.

12:12; Gal. 1:1,12,16; 2:8.

(7)See the qualifications laid down for the selection of a replacement for Judas (Acts 1:21-22).

(8)This is an unbiblical use of the word "priest" and draws attention away from the New Testament word (hiereus) used in Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6.

(9)See "The Assemblies of God View of Ordination," in Where We Stand (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel Publishing House, 1990), 87-99.

(10)In 1 Tim. 3:11 "their wives" is simply the Gk. gunaikas, "women"; therefore the verse itself is a parenthesis giving additional qualifications for women deacons. (See NASB margin.)

(11)See "Deacons and Trustees," in Where We Stand, 77-82.

(12)The modern "shepherding" movement has fallen into the same trap of setting up another priesthood between the believer and God.

(13)See "Assemblies of God View," in Where We Stand, 87-99.]

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Some churches consider themselves free in the sense of not having any formal organization. Why is organization important?
2. Why should the itinerant, charismatic offices be considered primarily as ministries?
3. What were the qualifications of the office of apostle in New Testament times and how does that differ from what might be called apostolic ministry today?
4. What is the primary ministry of prophets in the New Testament Church?
5. How are the ministries of evangelism, pastor, and teacher related?
6. What was the function of the elder-bishop in New Testament times and how does that compare with the function of the pastor in your own local assembly today?

7. What was the function of the deacon in New Testament times and how does that compare with the function of deacons in your own local assembly today?
8. What do you learn about the nature of worship services in the New Testament?
9. How can we help each other become mature, stable saints?
10. What is the essence of a call to full-time ministry?
11. In what sense are all believers to be ministers?
12. Is it wrong to desire a call to full-time ministry? Explain.