

Lesson

5

THE CHURCH ... Participation and Responsibilities

In this study, we are going to look at four specific areas of personal church involvement:

- ◆ Church Attendance
- ◆ Communion
- ◆ Praise and Worship
- ◆ Tithes & Offerings

Each of these subjects is a study in itself, and you can get some good reading and study material from any good Christian bookstore, your local church, or even online if you wish to go into more detail than is covered here. We will briefly touch on each subject, and as you open yourself up to the Holy Spirit, He will speak to you about your involvement in each area.

CHURCH ATTENDANCE

“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and 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 10:23-25)

God never intended us to be alone in our Christian walk. As born again believers, we are spiritually re-born to function as members of the Body of Christ (Rom 7:4). We are not called to independence, but to union (or inter-dependence) with others, as part of God’s divine plan of the salvation for all mankind. In the New Testament, this union often happened locally in homes or community halls where believers got together to worship God, and share their faith with each other and their friends (Acts 2:43-47).

As the early Church grew they formed themselves into larger, more organised groups, often naming themselves after the city or town where they gathered (eg The Roman, Galatian, or Ephesian churches). Both house churches and city churches are spoken of in Acts and in Paul’s Letters.

It should be noted that it was not often that 3,000 (and later 5,000) people came to know the Lord at one time as they did in Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost. As early believers travelled forth from Jerusalem their message of hope and salvation spread wherever they went. Apostles and evangelists would often find a small group of believers in a town (such as Ephesus in Acts 19:1-7), and spend time encouraging and teaching them God’s Word. They became linked by this network of God’s ministers to the Body of Christ universal, and became known as “local churches”.

The early church met on “the Lord’s day” each week, sharing communion and worshipping. By the second century this was almost universally on a Sunday and has largely remained so. Believers have always gathered together regularly with other believers to worship God. Some churches meet on a different day from Sunday, but it really doesn’t matter.

We need to be Involved in Church

Because of early church concerns over the Jewish “Sabbath”, Paul declared it was up to the individual or group to determine which day they preferred - *one day to be holy or every day to be holy* - God will bless us anyway if we are faithful and obedient (Rom 14:5). We just need to make sure we get together regularly with other believers to worship God.

We receive valuable teaching, and enjoy rich fellowship, when we meet together to worship the Lord. We are also commanded not to neglect this part of our spiritual walk, as some do (Heb 10:24,25), but to spur each other on to love and good deeds.

It is unhealthy, even unwise, to not meet regularly with other believers. We are made to function spiritually as members of the Body of Christ (Rom 7:4). We are not called to independence, but to inter-dependence with others as part of God’s strategy for the salvation of all mankind.

The word “church” comes from the Greek word “ecclesia”, which means a “people called out from” or an “assembly of people”. We are called to be in the world, but not of the world, and are commanded to renew our thinking when we become Christians.

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom 12:2)

As a Christian, it is essential that we become an active part of the Body of Christ, through the local church. Becoming an active member of a local church means meeting and making new friends; finding your place or role in the body; as well as becoming part of its ministry outreach; and learning how best to use your God-given gifts and talents.

Church is our spiritual family in Christ. This does not mean neglecting our natural family in any way. Indeed, people in true communion with Christ, and His Church, should be able to function better in every area of their lives, including their relationships at home, work or school.

God has placed *all things* under Jesus’ feet (Eph 1:18-23), and appointed Him to be the head over everything for the Church. The Bible calls the Church *‘the Bride of Christ’* (Rev 19:7-9). Marriage is a pattern of Jesus’ relationship to His Church (Eph 5:25-27) which He is preparing for that great day when we get to go to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

ATTENDING MEETINGS

It is important to attend church, not only because God commands it, but because it is good for us to come together regularly for teaching, fellowship, praise and worship, and in order to build a sense of community with other fellow believers.

Sunday Meetings

You are encouraged to attend Sunday services every week. It is vital that you do not neglect this important duty to your new faith. If possible, attending both Sunday and mid-week meetings is beneficial in many churches because they have different emphases.

While all meetings, whether Sunday services or mid-week Small Group meetings, last around the same time - about an hour and a half - they all have a different emphasis and purpose, tending to emphasise different aspects of need and expression, teaching and worship.

Sundays promote corporate worship, with lots of music and singing, communion, testimonies, announcements and preaching making up the bulk of the service. Sunday meetings are designed to make new or return visitors feel welcome, with planning going into making each and every service relevant, understandable, exciting, inspiring and challenging.

Ideally, Sunday services should be user-friendly, easy to understand and attractive to all visitors and new people, churched or unchurched as the case may be. The songs bright and uplifting, the message inspirational and challenging, and there may even be an altar call for prayer if need be after the meeting. Refreshments should also be offered after every meeting to give people time to talk and catch up with one another.

Small Group Meetings

Small group meetings are generally held in various locations where people are able to get together around a common theme, interest or activity in a more informal environment. Small group meetings focus on several priorities, depending on the reason for their existence in the first place. Some are prayer oriented, others cater for new believers such as this Foundations course. Other small groups cover Bible study and discussion as their main focus. Yet others may meet around topical subjects that include youth, junior youth, young adults, seniors, worship teams, women's and men's meetings and business networking breakfasts. Everything from spiritual meetings to social occasions with dinners, movies, fashion shows or anything imaginable really.

Every member of a vibrant and active local church is strongly encouraged to become involved in a small group that meets their particular needs and suits their particular interests - and there is usually something for everyone in an established church! Small groups especially help people to integrate into the life of the church and make new friendships.

PRAISE AND WORSHIP

As a charismatic, or Pentecostal church (for the purpose of this study, the words "*charismatic*" and "*Pentecostal*" are interchangeable), our style of worship is often different from what people have come to expect from a more traditional church. We are not ashamed of our exuberance. It is quite biblical to raise your hands in the air (Psalm 63:4), clap & shout (Psalm 47:1), dance (Psalm 149:3), sing (Psalm 30:4), and generally have a good time in God's presence (Psalm 132:9,16). We choose to use contemporary worship music and encourage a freedom of expression not usually found in more traditional churches. If we can get excited about such worldly pursuits as football or a rock concert, how much more should we get excited about coming into the presence of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the creator of heaven and earth!

God is moving mightily by His Holy Spirit in the world today, and the most obvious expression of this is our style of church music. People are attracted to modern, contemporary worship more so than traditional styles, and it is important to recognise this reality as we seek to attract new converts and see God's Word reach a new generation of people. Music is extraordinarily powerful as a medium, and we neglect at our peril. In truth, churches have always used contemporary music to attract followers and converts. We must be careful not to get bogged down in how things used to be when the world has moved on and no longer cares. Being relevant is foundational to reaching people with the power of the gospel message.

Church must be relevant, powerful, and infused with the presence of God! Praise and worship is a primary vehicle by which we enter into the realm of the Spirit, and few would argue that modern church music today is not exceptional at reaching today's generation.

The Difference Between “Praise” And “Worship”

Praise is our gateway into the presence of God. Psalm 43:1 encourages us to praise the Lord as a matter of *choice*. No matter what our situation, circumstances or problems (Eph 5:15-21); whether we feel like it or not, we are still required to offer the “fruit of our lips, which is the sacrifice of praise” (Heb 13:15,16). Praise is something we do as an act of our will.

Worship is more spiritual in nature. It is essentially a *response*, which comes from our desire to fellowship with the Spirit of the Lord as He moves in our midst (Rev 4:8-11). It is sometimes solemn and quiet, at other times boisterous and noisy, especially when we enter into spiritual warfare. The Lord moves in different ways for different reasons and we are called to be sensitive and responsive to him and not quench the moving of the Holy Spirit (1 Thess 5:16-22).

Sometimes we can be scared to let go of our inhibitions, but the benefits of experiencing the presence of God personally and intimately is worth any initial sacrifice or anticipated embarrassment. We can enter into amazing praise and worship by ourselves, in a group, or any time we assemble together as a body of believers in the local church.

Key to Miracles People often ask what is the key that will open the heavens and release God's hand to bless them? Try praise and worship and see for yourself. There are many different keys, such as binding strongholds of darkness (Matt 16:19), and forgiving those who have hurt you (Matt 18:21-35), speaking to the mountains (Mark 11:23-25) and others we need to study and learn as we grow and mature our faith. But entering into the Holy of Holies with the Lord through the avenue of praise and worship is one of the most simple and effective methods used in Scripture. Paul and Silas were singing hymns, and praising God, at midnight, after being severely beaten (Acts 16:22-30), when God set them free and opened the prison doors. David was a man who knew persecution and discouragement, but he left a legacy in Psalms for us to read, which clearly shows his dependence on praise and worship, no matter his circumstances.

COMMUNION

Communion is one of two ordinances (instructions) given to the church by the Lord Jesus Christ, which we are expected to obey. The other is water baptism.

In the story of the last supper (Luke 22:7-20), the bread represents the broken body of Jesus, whilst the wine symbolises his shed blood. Jesus said to “do this in remembrance of me” (1 Cor 11:23-26):

“For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, ‘This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ In the same way He took the cup also, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes” (1 Cor 11:23-26)

We are instructed to ensure we have a clean heart, and pure motives, when we come together around “the table of the Lord”. Paul said that not to do so can have serious consequences (1 Cor 11:27-32). Communion is a time of intimate fellowship and remembrance. If we partake of it in this manner, we will indeed remember all that Jesus Christ has done, and continues to do for us, and come before him in humility and thanksgiving.

When partaken with a humble and contrite heart the communion table can have significant value (1 Peter 5:6,7), and be a source of refreshment and healing, especially when this follows a time of quality worship.

The Passover Feast Becomes The Communion Feast

There is nothing “magical” about the bread or the wine. What we do at communion is honour the Lord Jesus Christ by remembering His death, burial and resurrection until He comes again. But we need to understand the significance of the symbolism used. Communion came to the church as a direct result of Jesus’ command, which He gave at “*The Last Supper*”.

It is significant that Jesus chose to institute this ordinance of the church at the time of the Passover feast. The Passover was instituted by God when the children of Israel were coming out of bondage to Egypt. You can read the story in Exodus 12:1-14. God said that Israel was to consider the first Passover to be the “beginning of months”, and the “first month of the year”. The angel of the Lord was going to come upon the Egyptians and slay the first-born of both man and beast, but He would “pass over” the Israelites, if they performed a certain ceremony involving the blood of a lamb being sprinkled over the doorposts and lintels of their homes. This was known as the Lord’s Passover (Exodus 12:11).

Shortly after this the Ten Commandments were given and the Law of Moses was instituted. The Passover continued until Jesus made the perfect sacrifice, and the temple veil was torn in two (Matthew 27:51). The institution of the Communion ordinance effectively replaces the need for the Passover ceremony, at least for non-Jewish Christians.

Communion heralds in a time when miracles of healing and deliverance (through the broken body of Jesus; 1 Peter 2:24) and forgiveness and cleansing (through the shed blood of Jesus; 1 John 1:7-9) are made available to all who believe and accept the work that was finished on the cross of Calvary, for every believer in Christ.

Our approach to Communion

We seek to make our Sunday meetings ritual-free and user-friendly in order for them to be understood by the unchurched visitor. We want to see people touched with the awesome and majestic presence of God. As such we want communion blessing for those who choose to partake.

Communion is a celebration, and should be received in this manner. Our view is that communion is more about relationship than ceremony. More about forgiveness and serving one another than something mystical. Some churches have communion weekly, some monthly and some less often. It doesn't really matter. In my view a meal together is closer to both the spirit and the practice of the Passover in the traditional sense than our pieces of cracker and thimbles of wine. However communion is served, and received, it is the spirit and attitude of those participating that is of most importance, not the actual choice of wine or grape juice, bread or crackers, or style of ceremony conducted.

TITHES AND OFFERINGS

One of the vital areas we must come to terms with early in our walk with the Lord is the financial area of material possessions. The objective of every born-again believer should be to manage their finances biblically, and the basic principle applying to all of this is that **God owns 100% of everything:**

***“For every beast of the forest is Mine, the cattle on a thousand hills.
I know every bird of the mountains, and everything that moves
in the field is Mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell you;
for the world is Mine, and all it contains” (Psalm 50:10-12)***

We are stewards, not owners. This refers to our own life, and everything in it (1 Cor 6:20; 7:23). Nowhere is our spiritual understanding made more obvious than in what we are prepared to return to God for the furtherance of his kingdom here on earth.

Salvation is meant to have a life-changing impact upon every area of our life. This includes our involvement with finances and material possessions. Though many consider discussion about Christianity and money at the same time to be incompatible with true faith, the Bible begs to differ, and contains a wealth of information and instruction concerning its use and abuse.

The Bible says a great deal about our financial priorities, stewardship and related responsibilities. Though the Bible contains many cautions against the love of money, greed and worldly dependence on material possession, nowhere does it indicate a blanket condemnation against its value and use. Many biblical principles can be found concerning the proper use and function of finances. It's all about being a kingdom focused believer, rather than a carnally (or worldly) focused one.

Establishing Correct Financial Priorities

One of these principles concerns the concept of tithing. Tithing is another word for giving and is a most important issue that can and does affect the life and prosperity of individual believers, as well as the local church.

- ◆ Hag 1:3-11 Consider your ways, says the Lord
- ◆ Prov 11:24-28 He who scatters, prospers
- ◆ 2 Cor 9:6-8 He who sows sparingly will reap sparingly
- ◆ Deut 28:1-14 Prosperity is promised conditionally (Deut 29:9)

The Principle Of Giving

- ◆ Luke 6:38 Give and it will be given unto you
- ◆ Gal 6:7-10 What a man sows he also reaps
- ◆ Lev 27:30-34 The tithe belongs to the Lord
- ◆ Mal 3:8-12 Will a man rob God?
- ◆ Matt 23:23 Do the latter, without neglecting the former

*The tithe is God's primary means of funding
and supporting the ministry of the Local Church*

Running a church (and its various ministries, missions and outreaches) costs money. Apart from the costs of maintaining a building and paying salaries, there are a host of other hidden costs that need to be met each week - mostly out of the weekly offering.

God chooses to use the local church as a means of providing the necessary funding to reach lost people and build a community of believers. The tithe is one way that financial provision is made to enable this to happen.

In Malachi 3:8-12, the last book of the Old Testament, we see that there are definite advantages to tithing, and definite disadvantages in failing to do so. Tithing is the only subject in Scripture in which God actually tells us - His children - to "prove" or "test" Him. He promises us a blessing we cannot contain if we are faithful and obedient.

"Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, 'How have we robbed Thee?' In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you! Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this," says the Lord of hosts, "if I will not open for you the windows of heaven, and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows. Then I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it may not destroy the fruits of the ground; nor will your vine in the field cast its grapes," says the Lord of hosts. "And all the nations will call you blessed, for you shall be a delightful land," says the Lord of hosts" (Mal 3:8-12)

What is the Tithe?

In simple terms, a tithe means a percentage (10%) of our "first-fruits", or increase (income). God has ordained that whatever we receive for our labour, or as income, should be tithed on. Although everything we earn actually comes from God, we get to keep most of it - 90% in fact. He asks for a mere 10% in return for all that He has given us, and promised to give us if we are faithful and obedient.

God calls the tithe “His portion” and it is to be brought into His church for the benefit of the ministry, and to further His kingdom. Man will testify that when we obey His simple command the 90% we keep, to spend or invest as we wish, has a habit of stretching much further 100% ever will.

It is important to understand that God loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor 9:6-8), and we are told that as we sow, so shall we also reap, for God will not be mocked (Gal 6:7-10). Tithing is one way by which we “sow to the Spirit”, and reap some generous rewards “in this life”.

Tithing is a requirement of both Old and the New Testaments. The Lord Jesus, while attacking the Pharisees for their hardness of heart, encouraged them to maintain the tithe as a part of our spiritual worship (Matt 23:23).

Testimonies of miraculous provision from those who have discovered this amazing principle and applied it to their lives are numerous, and evident in every church where this principle is practised. Excellent teaching is available from any Christian bookstore, or online from respected biblical teaching sources.

What is an Offering?

The main difference between **tithes** and **offerings** is the tithe is a foremost requirement of our Christian faith, and is meant to be brought into the local church you choose to commit yourself to as your spiritual home. Offerings are over and above your tithe, and are what we voluntarily choose to give to Christian organisations, or people, that we feel the Lord wants us to help financially, or sow into at various times. Do not confuse the two otherwise not only will the church be robbed of its provision, but the blessing and reward for your obedience will not be as it should be.

What are Alms?

Alms are commonly known as “gifts for the poor”, and are separate to both tithes and offering in Scripture.

Charitable giving can be termed “alms for the poor”, although it would probably not be very politically correct today to use such terminology.

*“Honour the Lord from your wealth, and from
the first of all your produce” (Prov 3:9)*

*“The reward of humility and the fear of the Lord are
riches, honour and life” (Prov 22:4)*

*“Do not weary yourself to gain wealth, cease from your
consideration of it. When you set your eyes on it, it is gone.*

*For wealth certainly makes itself wings, like an eagle
that flies toward the heavens” (Prov 23:4-5)*

*“Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken
together, running over, they will pour into your lap. For by your
standard of measure it will be measured to you in return” (Luke 6:38)*

*“Now this I say, he who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and he
who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully. Let each one do just as
he has purposed in his heart; not grudgingly or under compulsion; for
God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to
you, that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an
abundance for every good deed” (2 Cor 9:6-8)*