

"Beyond What Is Written"

A Study of Institutionalism

By
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Lesson One - Attitudes Towards God's Word

Introduction. (I Corinthians 4:1-6). In this passage Paul appeals to the Christians in ancient Corinth - "...not to think beyond what is written..." This ancient appeal expressed the importance of guarding their actions against over-stepping what God had authorized for His people. This appeal speaks to churches in our own age because today (just as in Paul's day) many brethren feel the temptation to think (and act) "beyond what is written."

1. In this series of studies we are going to be discussing some matters of grave importance concerning current practices and attitudes among modern Christians. As we do so we want to make it clear that we have no intention to sit in judgment of these brethren. In the text mentioned above Paul speaks of Himself and the Apostles as "stewards of the mysteries of God" (vs. 1). I Peter 4:10 speaks of Christians in general as "Stewards of the manifold grace of God." As stewards we have a responsibility to uphold God's word.
2. We do not approach this study with any "axe to grind." I have Loved ones involved with these things. I grew up during most of my school years in a congregation where these things were accepted. Our goal is simply to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15) and to do all that I can to glorify God and expand the borders of His kingdom.

I. Overview Of Church History. It has been said that one cannot "know where he is going without knowing where he has been" from the standpoint of religious history this is true. The issues and principles that modern believers struggle with have been involved in religious controversies throughout history and brings to mind another maxim - "Those who will not learn from the past are doomed to repeat its mistakes." With such dangers in mind let us begin with a brief consideration of church history.

- A. The Promise of *Apostasy*. The word *apostasy* (which comes from the Greek word meaning "turning away") describes what the Lord said would take place.
 1. II Timothy 4:3 - "...the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine..."
 2. I Timothy 4:1 - "...the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith..."
 3. Acts 20:30 - "...from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after themselves."
 4. Historically this has not always come from bold, dramatic rejections of truth, but simple steps beyond what God has authorized.
- B. The Birth of Roman Catholicism. Small departures attacked all elements of the faith. Four areas relate to our study: authority, organization, worship & purpose.
 1. Authority.
 - a. New Testament church. God's word (as given to the Apostles) was the standard.

Jesus Christ alone held the power to legislate.

- b. The Apostate church. Authority began to be assumed by men. Preachers, bishops, councils and even emperors would establish practices which were not authorized by God and blasphemously presume to speak for God.
2. Organization.
 - a. The New Testament church was made up of independent congregations led by a group of elders and deacons appointed from scriptural qualifications.
 - b. The Apostate church began by the second century to draw a distinction between bishops and elders. One bishop would lead a single congregation. This expanded to one man over a city, then a region, then the bishop of Rome presumed to exercise authority over all others and Roman Catholicism was born.
 3. Worship would diminish from a simple spiritual devotion to God into complex rituals born out of human tradition.
 4. Purpose would shift from a focus upon the spiritual side of man's nature to concern for the physical needs of man. The church would become a political entity controlling governments and huge revenues. It would build schools, monasteries and ornate cathedrals. The people would be deprived of spiritual knowledge and taxed and tantalized by carnal attractions.
 5. All of these moves into apostasy undoubtedly began from a sincere motive. The desire to be more "efficient," the desire to "grow," or perhaps even out of a desire for unity. Nevertheless the results of these small beginnings would snowball into spiritual chaos.
 6. The Roman catholic church would dominate the western world for centuries, crushing (out of a desire for unity) all efforts to hold to the simple purity of the New Testament church.
 - a. The New Testament church did not cease to exist - it did not and will not until the Lord returns. Yet sadly, it may have been (as in the days of ancient Israel) that those who followed the Lord in truth were the small, unpopular remnant who never had the limelight but held to the truth. Many of those whom history has labeled as "heretics" may simply have rejected Rome's authority.
- C. The "Great Schism." In the twelfth century this monstrous political machine suffered a major rift, known to history as the "Great Schism." Some of the churches (in the east) rejected the authority of Rome. In fact, these churches never had acknowledged Rome's authority over them. Some of these churches (called "Eastern Orthodox Churches") did not practice a number of Roman doctrines: 1. the doctrine of purgatory, 2. transubstantiation, 3. hereditary sin, 4. sprinkling for baptism & 5. instrumental music in worship.
- D. The Protestant Reformation. Some 400-500 years later the Roman catholic church would be shattered again in the west by what history knows as the Protestant Reformation.
1. Good Result: The word of God was returned to the people. Many people died trying to bring the Bible to people in their own language.
 2. Bad Result: There came even further division.. Out of the Reformation was born the Lutheran Church, Presbyterian Church, Baptist Church,

Anglican Church, Congregational Church, Episcopal Church and Methodist Church.

II. The Restoration Movement. In the midst of this religious chaos and turmoil many men and women began to realize some basic truths about the church and the nature of Scripture.

A. Fundamental truths about the church.

1. There is only one church.
 - a. In Matthew 16:18 Jesus said that he would build "His church," not "churches."
 - b. Paul in Ephesians 4:4,5 declared that there was "one body" and "one faith."
2. Division is sinful.
 - a. In John 17:21 Jesus prayed that those who would come to believe in Him "all may be one."
 - b. In I Corinthians 1:10 Paul commanded unity. They were to "Speak the same things" with "No divisions" but "perfectly joined together."
3. Scripture is all-sufficient. Thus it could guide the church.
 - a. II Timothy 3:13-17 teaches that Scripture is profitable for *teaching, correction* and *instruction* that one may be "thoroughly equipped for every good work."
 - b. In I Timothy 3:15 Paul said to Timothy - "...I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God the pillar and ground of the truth."
4. We must obey God rather than men. Divisions come from what Scripture doesn't say rather than what it does say.
 - a. In Matthew 15:9 Jesus rebuked the Pharisee for their vain worship: "...teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."
 - b. In Acts 5:29 Peter told the Jewish leaders, "We ought to obey God rather than men."
5. Having realized these truths it began to become apparent that there was a solution to all the chaos that had developed over the centuries. The solution was - *Unity through Restoration*.
 - a. The New Testament church was sound, pure and established by God. The record which God left within the New Testament offers man all that they need to worship God and be pleasing to Him. If contemporary believers would reject all human traditions, creeds and practices and follow and teach what the New Testament authorizes believers could be one!
 - b. This began a monumental effort to "Restore the ancient gospel" (i.e. what the New Testament taught). "Restore the ancient order" (i.e. what the N.T. church practiced). Believers from all groups were called out of their human denominations to the ancient church.
 - c. Mottoes developed which expressed the goals of this effort. One man said he would "speak where the Bible speaks and remain silent where the Bible remains silent." They committed themselves to use "Bible names for Bible things" and maintain "in matters of faith - unity, in matters of opinion - liberty, in all things - charity (or love)."
 - d. In the mid 1800's this effort began to explode throughout much of the United

States. According to historian David Edwin Harrel Jr. by 1860 this effort was the sixth largest religious group in the United States, and the largest group which did not look to Europe for its origins.

- e. To accomplish this "restoration" believers needed to understand some basics about the nature of scripture.

B. The nature Of Scripture.

1. It was given by God. II Peter 1:20,21 asserts that Scripture came about when "Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."
2. It is understandable. (Ephesians 3:4). In Ephesians 3:4 Paul had declared that what he had written- "...when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ."
3. It is sufficient. There is no need for councils, creeds, supernatural interpretation or human traditions.

C. How is Biblical Authority Determined? These truths were fundamental because if we were to be what the New Testament church was, one must determine what God has authorized the church to do.

1. There is Divine authority and manmade vain worship. (Matthew 21:23-27).
2. Since Scripture is the revelation of God in written words, to understand these words we have but to consider what the Bible: 1. Says, 2. Describes & 3. Implies (about the New Testament church).
3. Authority for the Lord's Supper:
 - a. Direct Command (I Corinthians 11:24,25).
 - b. Approved Example (Acts 20:7).
 - c. Necessary Inference (I Corinthians 11:20).
 - d. This shows that the New Testament church observed the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week, and that it was a regular element of their times of worship. As a result, there is authority for the church to observe the Lord's Supper each Lord's Day but not at any other time.
4. Through the study of Scripture and seeking to establish authority for what the church teaches and practices the effort succeeded in...
 - a. Restoring autonomous local congregations functioning independent of one another under the oversight of elders and deacons.
 - b. Restoring spiritual worship involving weekly observance of the Lord's Supper, and the free-will contribution, teaching , singing and prayer.
 - c. Restoring the truths of the gospel. Teaching the truth on baptism in the plan of salvation. Rejecting total depravity and limited atonement and clarifying doctrines of salvation and punishment.

III. Changing Attitudes Toward Scripture.

- A. The Birth of the Christian Church. The Christians who first bonded together to restore the "ancient order" and the "ancient gospel" before the nineteenth century was over gave way themselves to division. The results of this division led to the

denomination known as the “Christian Church” (or “Disciples of Christ”).

1. The issues that caused this split were the use of instrumental music in worship and an evangelistic effort called the “missionary society” (see Lesson Four).
 2. Behind this was the larger question of how Scripture is viewed.
 - a. The Christian Church now has women preachers, a national organization and a very tolerant attitude toward the denominational world.
- B. The Developing “Church of Christ” Denomination. The brethren that insisted on pure restoration continued to view themselves as simply churches which belonged to Christ. They maintained opposition to denominationalism and insisted upon Biblical authority for all doctrines and practices.
1. In the 1950’s, some brethren began to reject the goal of pure restoration. Practices were accepted for which there was no Scriptural authority (as we will see). Churches began to grow and become more appealing by adopting methods used by the denominations (rather than holding to the simplicity of Scripture). As it currently stands many “churches of Christ” have become much more tolerant of the denominational world and no longer claim to be “non-denominational.”
 2. The issues in this division related to congregational cooperation, church supported social activities and the support of human institutions.
 - a. In this division as well, behind this was the question of how scripture is viewed.
 - b. “Is scripture a sure pattern for the church and the individual or is it a springboard of general principles to which we can apply our own creativity?”
 3. To brethren in the early years this would not even be a question. The Bible was our pattern and guide. Now this view is believed to be out moded. Consider a few examples which illustrate this change in thinking:
 - a. One brother wrote an article entitled “The Sound Of Silence: The Limbo Of Legalism.” In this article he referred to the use of direct command, approved apostolic example and necessary inference as “the Legalist-lens method.” He wrote: “No matter matter what pious-sounding name its adherents may give it, the Legalist-lens Method of interpretation is clearly a human concoction.”
Is it a human concoction to seek to understand something written by what it says, describes or implies?
 - b. In a 1988 meeting in Nashville one brother stated that establishing authority by command, example and inference is... “An 18th century man-made rule” and claimed that he “rejected apostolic examples and necessary inferences as a means of establishing Biblical authority.”
Have we considered the consequences of such a belief? Why observe the Lord’s supper each Lord’s day? If example isn’t binding there is no reason to do that.
 - c. Another brother at the same meeting claimed that Christians should not accept anything from Acts-Revelation as authoritative or binding. This may not be the widespread view but it demonstrates a change.
 - d. One brother from St. Louis Missouri wrote an article entitled “Wine And Wine-skins” in which he commented on the Lord’s teachings in Matthew 9:17

saying... "The ever-new Wine of God's good news demands flexible, malleable and expanding structures. Whenever procedures or traditions become inflexible... it's time to make some changes."

On what basis can we make any objection to denominationalism? If the old procedures and traditions that are taught in scripture must be flexible and expanding how can we know that the religious world hasn't simply already changed what needed to be changed?

4. This is a different way of viewing things. It takes away any confidence we can have in the all-sufficiency of scripture and leaves us simply hoping that we can attract people because we are more appealing than other groups.
5. In the late nineteenth century David Lipscomb wrote - "Nothing indicates the wide departures from the landmarks of truth more clearly, that is taking place among those who started out to restore the ancient order, than the loose views put forth by some accredited teachers among them in reference to the authority of God. These show that the old standards have been set aside and new ones adopted." ("Strange Developments," *Gospel Advocate*, January 23, 1884, p. 49).
 - a. As it stands today, in the Northeast there are now churches with women preachers.
 - b. In Texas there are churches which no longer insist that immersion is the only acceptable method of baptism, use instrumental music in worship and believe that one church can act as the "mother church" to other congregations.

Conclusion. How should we view Scripture? I fear that many in the church have come to view the scriptures much differently than did the original pioneers of restoration. Many now feel that it is "legalistic" to try to understand exactly what the Bible says and apply it to our practice and teaching. In the rest of these lessons we are going to look at the specifics of these moves away from Scripture. In this first lesson we have tried to illustrate that any departure has at its heart one's view of scripture. Is scripture sufficient or not?

1. What does the Bible teach about itself?
 - a. It is the standard of judgment (John 12:46-48).
 - b. It reveals to us the mind of God (I Corinthians 2:9-13).
 - c. It must be properly discerned (II Timothy 2:14-16).
 - d. It contains all things needed (II Peter 1:2-4).
 - e. To go beyond it separates one from God (II John 8-11).

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Lesson Two - The Use of Church Contributions

Introduction. If our aim is to sweep away all things that are not authorized by Scripture and then do what is authorized we must be willing to test all things. In this study we will do this considering some issues concerning the church contribution.

I. Is a Church Contribution Scriptural?

A. Authority For A Church Contribution. Direct command (I Corinthians 16:2), approved example (Acts 11:29) and necessary inference (Philippians 4:15,16).

Let's consider some questions about these texts:

1. "Was this only a command to the Corinthian church?"
 - a. "As I have given orders to the churches of Galatia" (I Cor. 16:1).
 - b. Acts 11:29 & Philippians 4:15,16 concerned Antioch & Philippi which were two churches neither in Galatia nor near Corinth.
2. "Was this only to meet the needs in Jerusalem?"
 - a. I Corinthians 16:3 points out it was to go to Jerusalem.
 - b. The contribution in Acts 11:29 was to go to "the brethren dwelling in Judea" - which would include Jerusalem but not it alone. This occurred because a famine was prophesied.

B. Principles Concerning This Contribution.

1. "When was it to be offered?" - "On the first day of the week" (I Cor. 16:2).
2. "Why was it to be offered?"
 - a. *Directly* - For the church - "Collection for the saints" (I Corinthians 16:1) In the Greek this is literally "into (or unto) the saints."
 - b. *Indirectly* - To God - "An acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God" (Phil. 4:18).
3. "How was it to be made?" - "each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper" (I Corinthians 16:2)
4. Was this a tithe? - "Not grudgingly or of necessity" (II Corinthians 9:6,7).

II. How Was The Collection Used?

A. Relief for needy saints.

1. One of the first descriptions of the church in Jerusalem was this - "Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need." (Acts 2:44,45).
2. The Apostles distributed "to each as anyone had need" (Acts 4:35).
 - a. Does this teach communal living? This seems to refer to a peculiar time when the church was young in which those who were in Jerusalem and obeyed the gospel stayed for a time to learn about Jesus. Later on in the New Testament it is clear that Christians owned their own goods and worked for their necessities.

3. In Acts 11:27-30 aid was sent to the brethren in Judea because of a famine.
 4. Romans 15:25-27 reads - "But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. For it pleased those from Macedonia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem. It pleased them indeed and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things."
- B. The support of preaching.
1. In Philippians 4:10,15-18 we find that the church in Philippi gave to him even at a time when others churches did not.
 2. In I Corinthians 9:11-14 the clear inference is that there must have been some kind of contribution for them to have been able to "reap material things." Verse fourteen authorizes support of preachers. A preacher may support himself, but the church is authorized to support preaching.
- C. Support of qualified widows.
1. In Acts 6:1 the church extended daily aid to widows.
 2. In I Timothy 5:3-11,16 "Honor" refers to support (vs.3). While the church was authorized to support widows, the family was responsible first (4,8,16) only qualified widows were to be supported (9-10) and others were to be refused (11).
 - a. Is this heartless and cruel, that some were to be refused? No, it teaches personal family responsibility. The church is not a welfare bank. II Thessalonians 3:6-15 shows us that even needy saints who were not willing to work for their food should not continue to be supported.
- D. Support of elders (I Timothy 5:17-19). Verse 18 quotes Deuteronomy 25:4 which is the same quote used in I Corinthians 9:9 concerning support of preachers.
- E. Were there other needs of the church? If we can find in Scripture that the church is instructed to do something, it infers (by necessity) that the church is authorized to do what is necessary to accomplish it."
1. A place of assembly. The church is commanded to assemble (Hebrews 10:25) - If there is no place for them to assemble then the church must secure a place to assemble.
 2. Song books. The church is commanded to sing spiritual songs (Eph. 5:19). It is also commanded to do all things decently and in order (I Corinthians 14:40). The only way for us to all sing orderly is to all have access to the song.
 3. Preacher's house. The church is authorized to support preachers (I Cor. 9:14). The nature of that support is not specified. They could pay a preacher to buy a house himself. Rent a house for him. Or buy a house for the preacher as a part of his support.
 4. The key question is: What is the church instructed to do and what is the

church not instructed to do?

- a. How we carry out support for those things which are authorized may be an issue of personal judgment. The problem is that today we have a lot of brethren who seek to justify practices which the Bible has never authorized by appealing to questions of judgment about what he has authorized.

III. Examples Of Movements Away From Scripture. Let's look at three examples of moves away from scriptures: 1. Benevolence to non-Christians, 2. Support of human institutions, 3. Money-making enterprises. We will find that each of these involve practices for which there is no command, example or inference as far as the church is concerned.

A. Benevolence to non-Christians.

1. I Timothy 3:15 describes the church as "...The pillar and ground of the truth". It is its responsibility to "uphold" the spiritual truths of God's revealed word.
 - a. Many brethren have come to feel that it is part of the duty of the church to minister to the physical needs of the world.
 - b. The simple fact of the matter is that there is no command, example or necessary inference teaching the church to offer assistance to any one who is not a Christian.
 - c. Even so, many churches stock pantries and closets with food and clothes which are made available to anyone who might have need.
2. As individuals we should have a spirit of compassion for those in need. Godly minded Christians will help when they have opportunity (Matthew 25:31-46; Galatians 6:10).
 - a. However, whenever a group assumes a responsibility it changes the group's purpose and focus. The Bible doesn't authorize that role for the church.
3. This is illustrated in the very words that are used to describe the collection:
 - a. It is - "For the saints" (or lit. "unto the saints") - (I Corinthians 16:1).
 - b. Romans 15:26,27 speaks of the "contribution" from the Greek word *koinonia* (κοινωνία) translated other places "fellowship". In vs. 27 "partakers" is the verb form of this word. The giving of the collection for the saints is an act of fellowship. The Bible prohibits fellowship with unbelievers (II Corinthians 6:14,15).

B. Support Of Human Institutions.

1. An "institution" is something that has been instituted, started or set up. It may be a relationship. God has established at least three institutions that directly effect human relationships: the home, the church and civil government.
 - a. If we refer to a "human institution" then we are talking about something man has set up. Some human institutions are schools, a hospitals, a newspapers, clubs, or businesses. There are many worthwhile human institutions.
 - b. Just as it is true that the responsibilities which the church assumes change its purpose, the things which churches supports alter its purpose.
2. The church must never...
 - a. Abandon its God-given responsibilities, nor...

- b. Expand its responsibility beyond what God has authorized.
 - 3. The surrender of responsibility.
 - a. The church is to support the preaching of the gospel.
 - b. In the New Testament it did so by: Sending men to preach (Acts 11:22 & 13:1-3) or Sending support to the preacher (Philippians 4:14-18).
 - c. What if the church decides that the way they are going to fulfill this responsibility is to set up an independent organization, put a board of directors over it send money to this board who then decides what preacher they will send money to?
 - d. What has happened? The church has surrendered its responsibility to a separate organization set up by man
 - 4. The expansion of responsibility.
 - a. The church is to support qualified widows and needy saints but the family must support it's own first (I Timothy 5:16).
 - b. Needy saints that won't work are not to be supported (II Thessalonians 3:6-15).
 - c. What if the church decides to (again) set up an independent organization, select a board of directors over it to run it, build homes for the elderly or the orphans or substance abusers or schools, or hospitals and send money to the board of directors to support these activities.
 - d. What has happened? The church has not only abandoned some of its authorized responsibilities but it has expanded its work to things which are not authorized.
 - 5. Institutions supported by modern churches of Christ are summer camps, general & Biblical education schools, hospitals & clinics, cooperative magazines, benevolent homes (elderly & orphans), national broadcasts, day care programs & family counseling centers.
 - a. Where do you find all this in scripture? Scripture teaches no "board of directors". Scripture never describes organizations separate from the church, supported by the church.
 - b. If the church is authorized to do something it should just do it. If not it is presumptuous and an offense against God and His word to expand the work of the church to engage it such.
- C. Money-Making Enterprises.
- 1. The church is authorized to secure money by voluntary contributions (I Corinthians 16:2, II Corinthians 9:6,7).
 - 2. Though early Christians sold their goods to have money to contribute (Acts 2:45 & 4:34) this is never described as a church marketing enterprise.
 - a. In modern times churches have tried to raise money through: ticket sales (to meals and plays), seminar fees and rental properties.
 - b. All of these things move the church away from the simplicity of scripture toward denominationalism.

Conclusion. Let us end the lesson with just a few observations:

- 1. The goal of unity through restoration is only possible when we are willing to forsake every addition to God's word in place of those things which Scripture authorizes.
 - a. How can we appeal to the religious world to reject their big organizations, unScriptural practices if we ask them to then simply accept ours?

2. In complexity there is danger in cautious simplicity there is safety.
3. Caution doesn't mean inactivity (cf. Matthew 25:14-30 the Parable of the Talents).
4. Most of these things which brethren engage in they would not claim are necessities. They view them as "liberties."
 - a. When scripture doesn't authorize something we are not at liberty to do it.
 - b. Even if it were a liberty is it worth dividing the church for something which is simply a "liberty" but not a necessity?

Some might say - "It's only money - what difference does money make?" A number of years ago a Pentecostal religious leader known as Jim Baker ran an organization called PTL. Baker mismanaged and fraudulently used contributions he had solicited. As a result, he was convicted and served time in prison. I wonder if he thinks it makes a difference how you spend your money? The way a church spends its money reflects the churches purpose, goals and emphasis.

"Beyond What Is Written"

Lesson Three - The Surrender Of Individual Responsibilities

Introduction. (I Corinthians 4:1-6). In this passage Paul appealed to the Christians in ancient Corinth - "...not to think beyond what is written..." The Bible establishes boundaries for our actions. If we act within those bounds we can be confident of God's approval. Scripture shows examples of those who moved beyond God's word and were punished for it even when what they did was an act of worship...

1. Nadab & Abihu (Leviticus 10:1-7).
2. King Saul (I Samuel 13 & 15).

So far in this series we have looked at attitudes toward scripture and the proper use of the contribution. In this lesson we will focus on personal responsibility. This lesson is very important because it concerns how we view the church and how we view ourselves. It concerns what we allow Satan to accomplish in our lives. Satan may overcome us:

- By convincing us to do what is unlawful (or unauthorized). - (I John 3:4), or...
- By convincing us not to do what is lawful (or authorized). - (James 4:17).

We may often be guilty of this second type of sin because we have a tendency to surrender our personal individual responsibilities. We may surrender responsibilities because we have misconceptions about the nature and work of the church. We may have a...

I. The Corporate (or Impersonal) Concept Of The Church. The dictionary defines a "corporation" as - "A body of persons recognized by law as an individual person or entity having its own name and identity, and with rights, privileges and liabilities distinct from those of its members." (Funk & Wagnalls)

A. There are collective activities of the church.

1. Discipline. (Matthew 18:15-17).
2. Oversight. (Acts 20:28).
3. We must be careful not to take this conception of the church too far lest we come to have a rather impersonal concept of the Lord's church.
 - a. The church (or congregation) which belongs to God is a group of individuals who are in a personal relationship with God (I Corinthians 12:26).
 - b. If we come to see the Lord's church as something distinct from the individuals who make it up it may lead us to do a couple of things: 1. Assume that the church is fulfilling the tasks we have a responsibility to fulfill, or... 2. Surrender to the church tasks which we ought to be doing.
 - c. Let's look at how an impersonal concept of the church can lead us to do this.

B. The Home. The Bible teaches certain responsibilities that are to be met by the home (Ephesians 6:4; I Timothy 5:14; Titus 2:4,5; Proverbs 19:18; Luke 2:51,52). The emphasis is upon the role of the home in shaping children into what they ought to be. Often when we see problems we tend to think the only way to solve the problem is through some massive collective effort. That may be fine if: 1. We have scriptural authority, 2. We don't neglect our own duty in the

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process. Consider some examples of problems and their corporate and individual solutions.

1. The Problem: Christian children need to have close relationships with other Christian children in order to build healthy relationships in a controlled environment.
 - a. Corporate (Impersonal) Solution: The church buys a place where the children can meet and interact. Hires a “youth minister” to chaperone entertainment activities. The church sponsors “church skating parties”, “church bowling night” or scavenger hunts.
 - b. Personal Solution: Christian parents open their homes to children for “get togethers” and Bible studies. Parents become involved in their child’s activities and friends. Assume the God-given responsibility to raise your children.
2. The Problem: Christian children need to be taught the Bible.
 - a. Corporate (Impersonal) Solution: We say, “let the church teach my children the Bible, it is their responsibility!” And then we say - “If they are untrained it is the church’s fault!”
 - b. Personal Solution: Christian parents involve your children in home Bible study. Talk with them regularly about the Bible. Assume the God-given responsibility to teach your children (II Timothy 1:3-5, 3:14,15).
3. The Problem: It is difficult to teach children to pay attention in the assembly.
 - a. Corporate (Impersonal) Solution: We say the church should provide an attended nursery for young children. Conduct “children’s church” for older children.
 - b. Personal Solution: Christian Parents struggle to “Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it.” (Proverbs 22:6).
4. The Problem: There are many orphans, abandoned or abused children in the world who may be deprived of a chance to learn about Christ.
 - a. Corporate (Impersonal) Solution: Build a children’s home to take in such children. Support it through the church treasury. Hire house parents to care for the children.
 - b. Personal Solution: Christian parents adopt children yourselves. Provide them with a permanent home with a lasting influence (James 1:26,27). What if we can’t afford to adopt a child? Galatians 6:10 tells us - “Therefore as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.” God will not hold us accountable for things we could not do, but he will for those things we could do and choose not to. Why not personally help a family who has done this?

C. Good Works.

1. The problem: How can we help non-Christians in need?
 - a. Corporate (Impersonal) Solution: Build a “church pantry” where members can bring food or clothing for those who might approach us for help. Budget a certain amount for benevolence to non-Christians.
 - b. Personal Solution: Act as Christians should when they have the opportunity to help others. There is no Biblical example of collective benevolence to non-Christians.
2. The Problem: Visitors need to be warmly welcomed when they visit with

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- us.
- a. Corporate (Impersonal) Solution: Select a “greeting committee” to welcome visitors.
 - b. Personal solution: Christians display the hospitality and friendliness we should to welcome any who may visit with us. We will be judged as individuals (Matthew 25:31-40).
3. The Problem: Brethren don’t always give as they should.
- a. Corporate (Impersonal) Solution: Create a “pledge system.” Require members to pledge how much they intend to give.
 - b. Personal Solution: Encourage Christians to give “not grudgingly or of necessity” (II Cor. 9:6,7). Trust the power of God’s word to provoke the hearts of the faithful to do as they should.
4. The Problem: The gospel needs to be spread.
- a. Corporate (Impersonal) Solution: Get all the congregations in an area to go in together to put on some massive effort.
 - b. Personal Solution: Every Christian teaching every person as they have opportunity (Acts 8:3,4).
5. Not all collective activities are unsound, but we must limit them to what scripture authorizes. If we all simply chose to approach things as we think would be best all churches would be going in different directions. If, however, our collective activities are limited to only those things which are clearly authorized unity is possible.
- a. We must remember I Corinthians 1:10 - “Now I plead with you brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you , but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” This is only possible when we stay within the Word of God!

II. The Nature And Work Of The Church.

- A. What is the church?
1. An assembly of individuals... (I Corinthians 12:27; 11:18; Hebrews 12:23).
 - a. We are commanded to assemble (Hebrews 10:25).
 - b. We are to be members of “one another” (Romans 12:5).
 - c. We are commanded to use our individual gifts for the “profit of all” (Romans 12:6-8 & I Corinthians 12:7).
 2. ...in a saved relationship with God... (Acts 2:47).
 3. ...in fellowship with one another (I John 1:3).
- B. What is the work of the church? (Ephesians 1:22,23; 2:19-22; 4:11-16).
1. Evangelism (Ephesians 4:11-13; I Timothy 3:15).
 2. Edification (“Building Up”) of the Saints. (Ephesians 4:14-16).

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Conclusion. We must act upon opportunities. It isn't enough to rebuke those acting without authority and yet do nothing ourselves. The Pharisees, in their zeal to tithe even their spices, neglected "justice, mercy and faith." Jesus told them, "These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone" (Matthew 23:23,24). We must trust what God told Cain - "If you do well you will be accepted" (Genesis 4:7). When we do what New Testament Christians did, we too will be accepted.

"Beyond What Is Written"

Lesson Four - Methods Of Evangelism

Introduction. In I Corinthians 4:1-6 Paul appealed to the Christians in ancient Corinth - "...not to think beyond what is written..."

1. What leads to division? Usually disputes over what the what the Bible doesn't say rather than what it actually says (e.g. Baptism but not *sprinkling*; salvation by faith but not faith *alone*; singing in worship but not *playing instruments*, etc.).
2. In our first lesson together we spent some time talking about the history of the church. It began in simplicity and unity yet very quickly turned away to human ideas.
 - a. The bishop in the church in Rome attempted to exert His control over all the churches leading to the birth of Roman Catholicism.
 - b. From this would come the Protestant Reformation years latter which led to the creation of scores of other churches.
 - c. There had always been those who tried to follow the pure teachings of God's word.
 - d. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries in America (and to some extent Great Britain) there grew a call to return to Scripture to find unity through the restoring the practices and teachings of the New Testament church.
3. Among those who engaged in this effort the first turning away (or we might say "turning back") to the chaos of human organization and denominationalism came over two issues:
 - a. The use of instruments of music in worship and...
 - b. An innovation called the "missionary society."
4. In this lesson we will consider some modern moves involving evangelism which involve the same types of moves away from Biblical authority.

I. New Testament Evangelism. "Evangelism" simply means the spreading of the good news of the message of Christ. A man who does this on a regular basis is an "evangelist." The Bible teaches the importance of evangelism (Matthew 28:16-20).

- A. Who performed the work of evangelism?
 1. God. (I Corinthians 3:5-7; Philippians 2:13; Matthew 13:23; James 1:20; I Thessalonians 2:13).
 2. Any Christian. (Acts 18:26; II Timothy 1:5; I Peter 3:1; I Peter 3:15).
 3. The Christian Evangelist.
 - a. Individual effort (Acts 9:26-29).
 - b. Church effort (Acts 13:1-3; 14:26-28).
- B. How did the church promote the spread of the gospel?
 1. They upheld the word in their community. (Titus 1:8; Acts 19:1, 7-10; Revelation 2 & 3).
 2. Sending a preacher (Acts 13:1-3).
 3. Supporting a preacher (Philippians 4:15,16).

II. Modern Methods Employed.

A. The “Missionary Society”.

1. Among those striving to restore New Testament Christianity in the 1800’s there arose a desire among some within the ranks to develop a more centralized approach. Alexander Campbell wrote in February of 1849 - “There now is heard from East and from the West, from the North and from the South, one general, if not universal call for the most efficient organization of our churches. Experience, than which there is not a more efficient teacher, decides and promulgates that our present cooperative system is inefficient and inadequate to the cause we plead.”
2. This type of thinking led to “cooperation meetings.” These at first were district, then state, then “brotherhood wide” meetings. Out of these meetings developed the missionary society.
3. What was the “Missionary Society?”
 - a. An organization of delegates from various congregations for the purpose of organizing and sending men to preach (first county, then state, then national).
 - b. The organization had directors & delegates who became such by a congregation paying for their acceptance.
 - c. In addition to this congregations sent financial support to them to support preaching efforts.
4. Was this scriptural?
 - a. The Bible Pattern: 1. Sending a preacher (Acts 13:1-3); 2. supporting a preacher (Philippians 4:15,16).
 - b. In Philippians 4:18 support was sent directly from the church and the preacher reported to the church. In Scripture we see no delegates, directors or societies.

B. The Sponsoring Church.

1. Since one of the factors that led to division at the end of the last century and the birth of the Christian Church denomination was this centralized approach to evangelism for many years brethren opposed all such arrangements until the middle of the 20th Century.
2. In 1945 a preacher named Ulrich Beeson of Little Rock Arkansas wrote an article entitled “The Boys Are Coming Home”. He predicted that returning servicemen would - “expect larger and better built classrooms and auditoriums to which they can bring their friends without embarrassment.” He warned that “while old brother ‘Snickelfritz’ is up in the pulpit expounding on which churches of Christ cannot scripturally cooperate” He warned... “The modest business man and church leader on the back seat is slipping out of the old ramshackled meeting-house with the young people.”
3. In the 20th Century many brethren became involved in what is referred to as the “sponsoring-church” arrangement.
 - a. No separate organization but rather a local church which asserts prominence.
 - b. The church obligates itself to a massive work (beyond its own ability) and solicits funds from other congregations.

- c. Projects may be benevolent, educational or the support of preaching in another country.
 4. Is this scriptural?
 - a. The Bible Pattern: Relief in time of need (Acts 11:27-30). Evangelism was direct as seen above.
 - b. The sponsoring church is just the missionary society in disguise.
- C. Unorganized cooperation.
 1. Many churches opposed efforts at centralization. They maintained the independence of the local church while still trying to follow Biblical patterns.
 2. Is This Inefficient?
 3. Are These churches Opposed To Evangelism?
 4. Are These churches Opposed To Cooperation? David Lipscomb was asked about how work would get done when it was more than one church alone could do? How should the church act? He said - "Precisely as the family acts, when it finds itself unable to roll its own logs, raise its own house, harvest its own grain or pick its own cotton. Let it make known its weakness and wants to its nearest sister congregations or congregation. And let these congregations without human organization, say whether they will aid the one asking aid or not and send the aid to sustain the teacher, or feed the poor, as congregations without the intervention of any human organization. So soon then as the work is done each congregation is left perfectly free to pursue its own course without any entangling alliances, with burdensome and frail machinery or with its sister congregations."

III. Examples Of Church Cooperation.

- A. The American Missionary Society - Alexander Campbell (1849)
 1. Campbell's early position. Writing about the church in the 1st Century he said - "Their churches were not fractured into missionary societies, Bible societies, education societies; nor did they dream of organizing such in the world...they knew nothing of the hobbies of modern times. In their church capacity alone they moved. They neither transformed themselves into any other kind of association, nor did they fracture and sever themselves into divers societies...they dare not transfer to a missionary or Bible society, a cent or a prayer, lest in doing so they rob the church of its glory, and exalt the inventions of men above the wisdom of God."
 2. Later Alexander Campbell became the first president of the American Missionary Society, elected in 1849.
 3. One brother who objected to the society wrote - "We believe and teach that the Church of Christ is fully competent to most profitably employ all of our powers, physical, intellectual and spiritual; that she is the only divine missionary, Bible, Sunday School, temperance and cooperation society on earth. It is, has been, and we suppose always will be our honest conviction, that the true genuine service of God can be performed only in and through the church." (Tolbert Fanning)
 4. Those who supported such efforts developed into the Christian church, those opposed struggled to be simply churches that belonged to Christ.

- B. The Henderson Meeting - David Lipscomb (1910)
1. A call was advertised to “all loyal preachers, and teachers of the gospel of Christ and all elders.” Brethren assembled who lived as much as 200 miles apart.
 2. A preacher named J. W. Dunn was selected to preach in the destitute regions of West Tennessee.
 3. The impression left by the meeting was that the Henderson church was requesting support from other churches in order to assume “general oversight” of Dunn’s work.
 4. Brethren objected strenuously. David Lipscomb, editor of *Gospel Advocate*, wrote - “Now what was that but the organization of a society in the elders of this church? The church elders at Henderson constitute the board to collect and pay out the money and control the evangelist for the brethren of West Tennessee, and all the preachers are solicitors for the work”
 5. What happened in response to this was that the brethren at Henderson responded with assurances that they were not intending to assume “general oversight” but simply trying to encourage other churches to support him as well. Now churches do this all over the country.
- C. “Herald of Truth” - South Fifth & Highland Church (1950’s)
1. South Fifth & Highland church in Abilene Texas began one of the first “national” cooperative efforts.
 2. Support was solicited and accepted from all over the country for a nationwide program.
 3. The effort was one of the factors that led to another rift among brethren which continues to the present.
- D. “One Nation Under God” - Sycamore Church (1991). Sycamore church in Cookville Tennessee a few years ago conducted a similar nationwide approach called - “One Nation Under God”. The effort had five stages:
1. National adds in Reader’s Digest T.V. Guide.
 2. 102 million brochures were sent out to every home in America.
 3. A two hour program on 200 stations.
 4. A correspondence course
 5. Every church in America having a meeting on the same week. Support was requested from every church in America with only those who participated being given follow up leads.
- E. The Boston Movement - Kip McKean (1979-Present)
1. Formerly called the “Crossroads Movement” this effort began when Kip McKean left the Crossroads church in Gainesville Florida and began to work in Boston.
 2. In the years after that McKean built a huge organization with churches overseeing other churches and a system of accountability that has led

- many to call them a mind control cult.
3. They identified themselves with the title “The International Churches of Christ.” This all began from a move away from Biblical authority in an effort to win converts.

Conclusion. What difference does the method make?

1. It reflects a lack of confidence in the Lord’s plan for the church (Ephesians 3:8-12).
 - a. David Lipscomb wrote - “...For our faith is of that character, that we believe if God had proposed to convert the world through the agency of the church, although I may fail to see how He will do it, nevertheless, He is able to remove the difficulties and my duty is in simple, trusting faith to do what He has commanded me and leave the result with Him...”
2. It expands the authority of the local church (Acts 20:28).
 - a. David Lipscomb also wrote - “All meetings of churches or officers of churches to combine more power than a single church possess is wrong. God’s power is in all churches. He is with them to bless and strengthen their work when they are faithful to Him. A Christian, one or more, may visit a church with or without an invitation and seek to stir them up to a faithful discharge of other duties. But for one or more to direct what and how all the churches shall work, or to take charge of their men and money and use it, is to assume the authority God has given to each church.”
3. It calls on churches to assume obligations beyond their individual ability (Romans 12:6; Acts 11:29).
4. It is an effort to activate the universal church.
 - a. Universal Church (Hebrews 12:23).
 - b. Local Church (I Corinthians 1:2).
 - c. Christ is the only head of the church (Ephesians 5:23).

"Beyond What Is Written"

Lesson Five - The Social Gospel

Introduction. The title of this series is drawn from I Corinthians 4:1-6. Paul urged the Corinthians "...not to think beyond what is written..." If we consider the context of this statement we find:

1. There was division in the church (1:10-12).
2. Such division was carnal (3:1-4).
3. Paul declares that the apostles and teachers were mere men - God is supreme (3:5-7).
4. Paul shows that there is no need to seek carnal glory since it is spiritual glory that matters (3:18-23).

These texts indicate to us that division has at its root pride (i.e. being "puffed up"). Many churches in our own age have this problem. They often think (and act) "beyond what is written" and the church is divided as a result. In this lesson we bring to a close our study of some of the ways in which brethren have gone "beyond what is written" by looking at what is referred to as "the social gospel."

I. The Social Gospel. This term has two applications: 1. The historical movement known as the "Social Gospel," 2. The movement among churches of Christ to emphasize man's social needs.

A. The Social Gospel Movement.

1. In the early years of the 20th century there were some very hard conditions that faced Americans. Industry led many to move to the cities. Harsh working conditions existed in which child labor and long work weeks created oppressive conditions.
 - a. Some accepted a theory known as "Social Darwinism" (i.e. "survival of the fittest" applied to social conditions). This suggested that the strong and most fit prospered and conquered - the weak and unworthy deserved their fate.
2. In reaction to this thinking some preachers in the religious world as a whole began to preach what came to be called a "social gospel." The idea was that Christian principles could cure the world's problems.
 - a. Baptist preacher Walter Rauschenbusch suggested that Jesus' statements about the "kingdom of God" referred to a transformed society on earth brought about by social reform and political action.
 - b. The views of this movement were formalized in 1908 when the "Federal Council of the Churches of Christ In America" (a forerunner to the National Council of Churches) was formed. The movement succeeded in the abolition of child-labor, improved working conditions for women and a day off each week.
3. The Bible teaches a different emphasis.
 - a. God's kingdom is not of this world. (John 18:36).
 - b. It does not come "with observation" (Luke 17:20,21).
 - c. It is the spiritual domain of submissive souls. (Colossians 1:13).
 - d. This kingdom doesn't remove all hardship. (John 12:8; John 16:33).

B. The Social Gospel principle.

1. Even among those who rejected the political aspect of the social gospel movement many accepted some of its objectives.
2. Ways the social gospel principles have influenced religion:
 - a. Less “hardline Bible studies” more psychology, social reforms and political causes.
 - b. Soup kitchens for the urban poor.
 - c. Counseling centers, health-care centers or low income housing.
 - d. Use of physical needs as a tool to draw people to a spiritual message.
 - e. Medical mission teams going into foreign countries with doctors, medicine and free supplies. After the health care is provided, they would then speak to them about spiritual matters.
 - f. Church sponsored daycare for children of non-Christians (in the hope of influencing the parents).
 - g. Plays open to the public, portrayed as entertainment with the goal of spiritual persuasion.
 - h. Recreation facilities ranging from gymnasium equipment to kitchens and youth houses in the hopes of appealing to Christian and non-Christian youth.
3. Some rethren have accepted these principles now practice these activities.
 - a. This demands some very serious consideration in the light of God’s word.

II. Questions To Answer From Scripture.

A. How does the Christian faith address man’s social needs?

1. Man’s nature is both physical & spiritual. (Ecclesiastes 12:7; II Corinthians 4:18; Galatians 5:17; Romans 5:3,4).
2. A spiritual kingdom exists in a physical world. (John 17:6; 17:14-16; Romans 13:1; Ephesians 4:28; II Timothy 3:12; Ephesians 1:3; Matthew 5:16).

B. What should draw people to Christ?

1. How do we understand the Lord’s example of benevolence? Why did Jesus practice benevolence?
 - a. Compassion (Mark 8:1-3; John 6:1,2, 15; 51-54; Matthew 19:16-22).
 - b. To confirm personal belief. (John 4:46-48, 54).
2. The Social Gospel approach. Today we have churches using benevolence as a “carrot at the end of the stick” trying to draw people by it. After World War II brethren did this on a massive scale in Germany. Food and clothing were poured into Germany and the churches grew by leaps and bounds. When their economy recovered the churches were abandoned and the buildings sold.
 - a. This kind of thinking leads to twisted priorities. I know of churches where the ladies view it as part of their Christian duty to forsake the assembly so they can be back in the “church kitchen” preparing food for the dinner after services. The Lord’s Supper is brought back to them.

- b. N. B. Hardeman is quoted as having said - “The less religion a person has the more fried chicken it takes to keep him interested in church.” Whatever enticement we use to draw people is exactly what it is going to take to keep them.
 - 3. What drew early believers to Christ? (Acts 2:41; I Thessalonians 2:13,14; I Corinthians 9:19-23).
- C. What are we authorized to do as a church?
 - 1. Things the church did.
 - a. They Sang - (Ephesians 5:18-21, I Corinthians 14:26)
 - b. They Prayed - (Acts 2:42, I Corinthians 14:15)
 - c. They Studied God's Word - (Acts 20:7)
 - d. They Gave Of Their Means - (I Corinthians 16:1,2)
 - e. They Assembled - (Hebrews 10:25)
 - f. They Practiced Discipline - (Matthew 18:17)
 - 2. Did they eat as a church? (I Corinthians 11:20-22, 33,34).
 - a. The Lord’s supper is a memorial not for hunger.
 - b. Eating together is not a work of the church.
 - 3. What about the “Love Feasts” of Jude 12? - “In the pl., *agapai*, love feasts, public banquets of a frugal kind instituted by the early Christian church and connected with the celebration of the Lord's Supper. The provisions were contributed by the more wealthy individuals and were made common to all Christians, whether rich or poor, who chose to partake. Portions were also sent to the sick and absent members. These love feasts were intended as an exhibition of that mutual love which is required by the Christian faith, but **as they became subject to abuses, they were discontinued.**” (*The Complete Word Study Dictionary*, by Spiros Zodiatas, p. 66, 1992., emphasis mine)
 - 4. Doesn’t The Word “Fellowship” Referto Social Interaction?
 - a. “Fellowship” refers to joint-participation (I John 1:1-4).
 - b. The context determines in what they are jointly participating.
 - c. The New Testament focuses on joint-participation in the gospel (Philippians 1:5).

Conclusion. The Jewish Talmud taught that *Massorah* (i.e. tradition) was a “fence to the Torah (or Law)” (*Pirke Aboth*, III. 17). The problem that the Jews had was that they elevated the “Tradition of the Elders” (Matthew 15:2) over the word of God itself. As a result something that was intended to actually help people follow the word of God caused them to violate it (see Matthew 15:3-9).

Revelation 22:18,19 warns of adding to or taking away from the word of God. Romans 2:23 speaks of those “breaking” the law using a word that in the original language refers to “over-stepping” something. Romans 3:19 speaks of God's law “stopping” every mouth using a word in the original language that refers to “fencing-in” something. God's word establishes the boundaries for our words and our deeds. Let us trust God and His word and stay within the bounds of God’s revelation.