

Why Church? #2

What are the Valid Activities of the Church? (what do we do that makes church church?)

From the previous lesson:

1. *Regular meetings (by tradition on Sundays)*
2. *Recognized leadership (pastors, deacons, teachers, etc.)*
3. *Reading, preaching and teaching of the Word*

4. Discipleship training

Actually, this is an expansion of the previous point, showing the real purpose of teaching the Word, which is to develop strong believers who are united in Biblical beliefs and purpose.

1 Cor. 1:10 – “... that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.”

Ac. 2:42 – (right after Pentecost) “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine ...”

Ac. 18:11 – Paul “continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.”

The church is made up of people of varying physical and spiritual ages and maturity levels. Some are young children, others are elderly. Some have only been believers for a few days or months, others for decades. Some that have been Christians for many years are, sadly, not much further along spiritually than when they started. A major purpose of the church is to take new or immature Christians and train them in what it means to be a believer, and how to live this new life in holiness and victory. We want to simultaneously bring the new believers “up to speed”, and also to continually inspire older Christians to keep advancing in spiritual knowledge and experience. We do not want people to live on a perpetual plateau, but to be continually growing.

2 Cor. 3:18 – “But we all with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.”

Heb. 5:12 – 6:2 – “For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God ... Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; ...”

Types of training:

- **Doctrinal** – To teach what we believe, and why, from the Scriptures. New believers obviously know little spiritual truth, and much of what they think they know is wrong. This training must not be merely what the “church rules” are, but Biblical instruction. They must be taught, not just what to believe, but to see the Bible as the real authority for what we believe, to study it and internalize it.

1 Thess. 2:15 – “Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.” The word “traditions” is perhaps misleading, because we often use it to describe church or societal practices or beliefs that have little or no scriptural authority behind them. Rather, it means the real substance of what Paul had taught them personally and by his letters.

The books of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus are filled with admonitions to teach the word faithfully, to combat false teachings, to hold fast to right doctrine, and to commit the same to faithful men who would in turn pass it on to others. Being able to teach was listed as a qualification for men to be bishops (aka pastors or elders), and such men were not to be “novices”. Doctrine was to be a serious pursuit, and not to be neglected (1 Tim. 4:11-16). It would require study, not just light reading. 2 Tim. 2:15 – “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” Many people read the Bible, but not all of them rightly divide (interpret) it, and so come up with some wacky ideas.

How this training is done can vary widely. Some is obviously done in weekly sermons or Sunday school lessons or Bible studies. There can also be personal teaching that is less formal, and so is more amenable to question and answer. This could be a person in the church who takes a personal interest

in mentoring a new believer (*this should be men-to-men and women-to women, to avoid not only real mischief, but even the perception of hanky-panky*). Perhaps the most common form of such teaching is, or should be, parents teaching their children. Unfortunately, not all children have believing or spiritually-minded parents, which is why most churches have children's Sunday school, vacation Bible school, youth groups, etc. We could wish that more of such activities were scripturally-oriented, and not just church baby-sitting or fun activities.

In the days of the early church there was some form of instruction among the Jews whereby some men would become educated, and skilled in the law, but there were no "Christian seminaries" for the instruction and training of "pastor candidates". It appears that some of the likely candidates for leadership were identified due to their experience and faithful walk, and then personally instructed by Paul or other apostles. They would be ordained as elders, and would in turn lead and teach the flock that had been put under their charge.

Tit. 1:5 – "For this purpose left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee"

Tit. 1:9 – "Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers." (*a qualification for a bishop/pastor*)

2 Tim. 2:2 – "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also."

Being a spiritual leader is not a static position. Just because one has been ordained doesn't mean the learning stops. We have "continuing education" in the church as well as the world.

1 Tim. 4:14-16 – "Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery [*the other elders*]. Meditate upon these things, give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee."

Biblical instruction should include not only what we believe, but sometimes warnings about what we must not believe. We have a responsibility to combat false doctrine.

Ac. 20:29-30 – "For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them."

2 P. 2:1 – "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them ..."

Jude 3-4 – "... and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ."

- **Practical training**

How to read the Bible; prayer, marriage, money, vocation, avoiding temptation, etc.

- **Inspirational training**

To learn to worship, to live in joy and victory, to develop perseverance and longsuffering, etc.

- **Social training**

To learn to genuinely love the brethren and enjoy their company, for the mutual benefits of edification, encouragement, comfort, and even how to deal with contentious behavior and beliefs.

These last three kinds of training may be done in sermons, Bible studies, "small groups", through books or recordings, through personal interactions among church members, or pastoral "counseling".