



Welcome to Fellowship 101

*The Biblical Purpose of a Church
and How
Fellowship at Cross Creek
Does it!*

Fellowship Bible Church of Branson, Mo.

Updated 2017 from 2012 Version

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How Did I Get Here?

The goal of this first class is to level everyone's playing field so to speak. Everyone has a context or a set of beliefs, values and experiences you bring to this moment with respect to your relationship with the church. And everyone's background is usually very different. We simply ask you to briefly share your "church" background --your spiritual pilgrimage through, away from, and even back to the "church." What is your story? Don't be embarrassed to share? Below are some questions to help you.

- What church did you grow up in?
- Maybe your family didn't go to church.
- What denomination?
- As you got older where did you attend?
- What kind of church(es) was it?
- Where had you attended most recently before attending Fellowship?
- Maybe you have been out of "church " for a while and are just now making it back.
- Overall has your "church" experience been more "positive" or more "negative"?
- What brought you to Fellowship?
- What has drawn you back to church?

As you listen to each other's stories, appreciate the rich diversity of the class' background. Are there any common themes you are hearing as you listen to each person's story? How do they compare or contrast with yours? Can you imagine why God has crafted out your personal spiritual pilgrimage to bring you to this moment of your life?

Joe's Story

There's Got to Be More!

Part I

A Stairway to Heaven...

I had come home from college for the weekend. It was a Sunday morning, and, for what seemed like the millionth time, I found myself sitting in the church of my youth. Only this was not the older, square, flat-roofed, seemingly immense, tan-brick building that I had grown up in. No, due to the building's flat roof holding more rainwater than it was actually shedding, the church members had grown tired of watching the older sanctuary ceiling's many water stains grow larger and larger, flake paint and seemingly multiply. During a particularly dry message, these stains served a dual purpose. One was entertainment. Had any particular stain grown disproportionately larger from the last it was observed, and were there any new stains? And the other reason? Fear. What if a portion of the deteriorated ceiling plaster decided to give way and fall upon an unsuspecting or sleeping member?

But with the new church that particular diversion had been removed. The ceiling in the new church—an exquisitely beautiful varnished white pine ceiling. Outside observing its beauty and exceedingly high pitch, there were no more growing ceiling stains to divert one's attention during a particularly dry message.

The older, flat-roofed church had been replaced with a newer, sleeker and more modern church, one whose roof could not have been more different.

In what seemed like an over-kill reaction to the flatter, older and previously leaking roof, the roof on the new church was severely pitched, and I mean severely—a roofer's nightmare. The eaves of the new church's roof began just above a flat-roofed covered walkway that surrounded the church and ascended skyward. Standing guard right smack dab in the middle of that roof's high front gable was a large bell tower, which replaced the mechanical, but very-real sounding, bell of the older church.

The older building had faced the town's main thoroughfare at the time it was built, Cross Street. Standing beside the stately older church was her equally impressive sister, the red-brick Methodist church. The two churches were the largest in town, and with large stately oaks shading the passing sidewalk; the two sisters made for an impressive sight and dominated that city's path to the Court Square just two blocks away.

The older church rose out of the ground like a mighty fortress. A short parapet wall, along with cut-out crenels even stood guard all along the outer edges of her flat roofline, almost as if to say that if medieval guards were required to stand guard within those crenels and pour boiling oil over the church's invaders below, her occupants' safety was guaranteed.

The older church had also been built long before the days of handicap accessibility. There seemed like an eternity of steep steps leading up the two-front double-door entrances, one on either side of the building. A walk-thru balcony connected the two double door entrances.

The multi-pane glass and wooden double-doors opened to a small landing area guarded on the outside wall by a stairwell entrance that led downstairs underneath the sanctuary to a series of poorly-lit catacomb-like classrooms on either side of the wide hallway that eventually connected to the older building's fellowship hall and more classrooms.

From the entry landing, one ascended several more steep steps to the main sanctuary. Setting aside the fact that these steps had to be murder on the elderly, or perhaps caused them not to attend at all, it was as if ascending those steps gave the small town church a somewhat reverent or holy mystique. It was as if one was ascending holy steps to God's sacred temple, and with each new step, the worshiper was brought closer and closer to God himself.

If there had not been enough steps already, as one finally reached the top landing that led into the main sanctuary, there were still more to come if one so chose to ascend them—to the balcony itself. If one entered

through the right side's double doors, which was mostly normally the case, due to the fact that most had parked their cars on the right of the church, where a side street ran between the church and the elementary school's graveled playground, as opposed to the left side where the Methodist church stood, this stairwell's entrance to the balcony was just to the right. But the stairwell on the right side of the church had its mirror image on the left side, and these stairwells existed over the lower stairwells leading to the downstairs or basement classrooms.

The Balcony's Trouble...

The upper stairwells led to the balcony with its noisy wooden floors and closely tiered, older wooden pews. As is the case with most balconies, when you sat in the balcony you felt like you were sitting on top of person who was sitting in the row just in front of you. And while it was fun to be late, so that you might get a chance, perhaps, to sit up in the balcony, it was either in the balcony or just underneath the balcony that could get a kid in big trouble. For it was in the balcony or just underneath the balcony, in the very last row of the church, that a kid or bored teenager could find him or herself the farthest conceivable distance away from either the preacher, who was either seated on the main stage, or platform, or standing at the pulpit, or one's mom who was a member of the choir and seated in the choir loft behind a half wall just in back of the minister.

Singing in the choir was a sacred trust, but it put a mother quite a distance from her potentially disruptive and embarrassing children, if there were no dad there-- which was often the case--to stand guard over. It was not beyond a mother to remove herself from the choir loft to go and sit with a disruptive child.

Since there usually not enough people to open up the trouble-enticing upper balcony on Sunday nights, the older high school youth had to make do with the last row under the balcony--again, within the sanctuary itself, the position of farthest spiritual connection from whatever was going on within the service. It was every young elementary kid's dream to someday grow up enough to sit on the back row,

chew gum and pass notes with one's friends.

A Floor that Threw the Worshiper Forward...

It may sound strange to describe the main sanctuary this way, but it wasn't as big as it seemed high or tall. There were three sections of pews, a center section and two wings. There were no pads on the pews, but the wood seemed soft and worn. The pews had a gentle curve to them, thus almost, but not quite forming a semi-circle around the main stage and pulpit.

Like a theater, the floor sloped downward, from back to front. This seemed to have the added affect of urging a wayward sinner under conviction to getting out of his seat, walk forward and visit the minister when, after his sermon, he would extend an invitation to anyone from the congregation to come forward, as the invitation music was playing or the choir softly singing, and privately unburden to the waiting minister some important spiritual decision, such as becoming "saved," or if the worshiper had already made that decision, but had backslidden to "rededicate" his life to Christ. While the penitent sinner was making his or her way forward, the rest of us prayed and held tightly to the pew in front of us for fear that if any of us ever made it to the aisle before that invitation ended, that sloped floor somehow grew steeper with each passing verse of the hymn that we were singing.

Stained Glass Beauty...

The walls of the sanctuary were painted white over a kind of chalk-like stucco or plaster. The plaster had a rough, almost sharp texture to it. It seemed to flake off rather easily when it was brushed up against, thus making the walls always in need of patching and repainting.

On both sides of the sanctuary, within the outer walls, there were a series of three brightly-colored stain glass windows, dedicated to memory of former members, long-since departed, and I assume, forgotten. I can't remember exactly, but the scenes seem to depict Jesus with a baby lamb or small child or the woman who washed Jesus feet with her tears. On sunny Sundays, as the sun would crest over the

Methodist church to the east, the stain glass windows would light up brilliantly exposing their vast array of beautiful colors and images.

A Baptistery Fall...

On the floor, to the left side of the raised platform, sat a baby-grand piano, and just to the upper left of the piano behind the railed choir loft was the organ. Behind the choir loft was large wall with an opening just behind the choir. This opening had a partial glass front running across its front edge that prevented water from splashing onto the choir members whenever a new convert was baptized, or immersed, by the pastor into the water-filled baptistery.

I remember on the night of my baptism as a child, I slipped down the steps that led down into the baptistery. Thud, thud, splash, thud, splash, I went, as I slipped right down on my bottom and down each of the now water-soaked steps from the previous baptisms. I landed right up against the minister. Fortunately the curtains in front of the baptistery were closed so that no one could see who it was that had fallen. They could just hear it. Most assumed the pastor had fallen.

There Goes My Innocence!

Before my mother had joined the choir, and while the minister was droning on and on, I can still remember as a young child leaning on my mother's lap--which made for a great table to lay one of my father's prescription pads on--and with pencil in hand, keeping myself entertained for the duration of the message.

No doubt, I was cranking out great religious art, and besides, this had been our normal pattern for as long as I could remember, when suddenly my mom made a painful executive decision. She gently lifted the drawing pad and pencil from my hands, and to my utter shock, she placed the pad and pencil inside her purse. At first I was devastated and confused, but then I understood. This was the day that young Joe had to start learning to listen to the minister's message. It was time to grow up, and, at least, try to pay attention and understand what he was saying. Ouch!

In other words, it was time to learn how to mentally and intellectually absorb a somewhat Bible-based lecture, for that's what preaching was, a lecture filled with emotion and spiritual exhortation--at least that it what it seemed to me at the time.

Like Adam and Eve in the Garden discovering they were naked after having eaten the forbidden fruit, with one deft movement of my mother's two hands, my childhood spiritual innocence had suddenly disappeared within her purse.

Back to the Present...

It was now perhaps ten to twelve years later. I was a young college student, home from college, and once again, for what seemed like the millionth time, since I was a young child and my mother had taken away that pad and pencil so that I had had to learn to listen to a lectured message, I was listening to a lectured sermon.

After all this was our church tradition. This is what I knew. This WAS church. This was all I had EVER known. But then something CHANGED--something other than the new, modern building with a terrifyingly high-pitched roof and bell tower.

Like Mixing Oil and Water: Old Worship in a New Building!

The new church building had been built on the back of the old church property. In other words, the front of the new church had been flipped so that it faced in the exact opposite direction as the old church had faced. The old church had faced north on Cross Street, the main drag into town; the new church now faced south on First Street.

Building the new church on the back end of the old church property had made sense. It allowed the congregation to continue to worship in the old building while the new building was still under construction. But something was just not right.

The imposing box-shaped tan-brick fortress which had faced north onto the town's main thoroughfare, Cross Street, along with its many imposing steps leading up to its main sanctuary, its creaky wooden-floor balcony, its sloping-forward main floor that threw the unsuspecting worship forward, its

curved brown wooden pews, its beautiful stain glass windows, its dark, dungeon-like classroom basement, its friendly fellowship hall for hosting congregational meals, its fortress-like parapet roof-line, flat-top leaking roof and water-stained stucco ceiling had all been replaced with a more modern, varnished, beautiful, white-pine-ceiling, grayish-brown, brick, A-frame cathedral with an imposing bell tower and severely-sloping roof-line. And it was facing in the exact opposite direction, south towards an indiscriminate First Street.

Had the church changed too much? Was it facing the wrong direction? Was its non-leaking roof shedding more than just heaven's rains, but heaven's blessings as well?

Or did all this occur at just the wrong time for an impressionable young worshiper, one who was also making a transition, from an adult to a child? Was this all just about a kid becoming an adult and losing what had been worshipfully and spiritually familiar to him? A lost spiritual innocence personified in the tearing down of an old decaying building to be replaced by a new one?

Joe's Story

There's Got to Be More!

Part II

Cold and Lifeless...

Some, rightly or wrongly, remarked that the new edifice had been built as a monument to its builder, a long-time church member and bank president. The new facility had started out as good idea. The old facility needed replacing, but there was just something about the new church that left the former worship feeling cold and empty. The architecture was plain and modern, as opposed to the old church, which resembled something from the twenties, and rightly so, for that is when the building had been built.

On the newer building's outer edges, the roofline began near the ground, above a long columned portico-covered walkway. The two sides of the A-framed roof then rose majestically into the sky and met in the middle. There was a huge bell tower out front that had its twin behind the choir loft and baptistery inside the church.

On the inside of the newer building, the peeling stucco plaster white walls with brightly colored stain-glassed windows depicting scenes of Jesus with children, baby lambs and kneeling devoted women and been replaced by a dark, windowless hardwood ceiling that rose from the outer edges of the outer pews to the high A-frame center.

The carpet was blood red. To be honest, I can't remember the color of the carpet in the old church. Perhaps a worn out or faded red, almost a dull rose, I think? But more importantly, it was not noticeable. It obviously blended in. In the dark new cathedral, one felt if he made a move into the aisle, he was walking in blood. The sanctuary was vast, expansive and hardly ever filled. The dynamic spiritual and social life, which had been such a vibrant part of the older church had been drained. It was like we were all lost. We had built something we thought we would enjoy, something that the Lord himself would be proud of it and it was killing us, slowly

choking the spiritual life out of what had once been a vibrant congregation.

And so I sat there on this particular Sunday morning, singing the same old hymns that I had sung as a child, but now everything seemed strangely unfamiliar. At yet, despite having updated where we were worshiped, we had not changed how we worshiped. The same tired worship that had driven many a bored worshiper to look up and observe growing water stains on the ceiling was still the same old tired worship...just in a newer and less-friendlier facility. And like mixing oil and water, nothing was mixing, at least not for this lost young worshiper.

For as long as I can remember, it seemed that every Sunday morning and every Sunday night followed the same old tired ritual, with a few perhaps slight variations from time to time. There was the welcome, the deacon's long-winded prayer, three very old hymns, a special music or song, sung, or perhaps just played by the pianist or organist, during, or just after, the passing of the offering plate. Then the minister or pastor would stand up to read the scripture. After that, it was good night, Charlie. I called it Southern-Baptist Soul Sleep. As the minister would finish reading his selected scripture, he would launch into his lecture, sermon or diatribe. It was at this point, most of the congregation—not all, but most, would fall asleep. Like a mother's sweet lullaby puts her child to sleep, once the scripture ended and the minister launched out into whatever he wanted to talk about or lecture on, on cue, the church went to sleep. I suppose most ministers had just not been trained at holding people's attention. One man for thirty minutes? One man for seemingly one minute? Just could not hold their attention, and slowly, but surely, one after the other, eyes opened or close, it didn't make any difference, would find themselves asleep. Then, almost as if on cue, thirty minutes later, just as the minister would begin to wrap up his sermon or message and bring it to a close, the few who had been able to remain wake, would begin to stir, just a bit, perhaps closing their Bibles, rustling their bulletins or just moving ever so slightly. And it was this subtle movement perhaps that then triggered the rest of the light-sleeping congregation to begin to awaken. It was time to go home.

And what was the tip off to those that had remained awake through the lecture that the minister was wrapping up his message? Easy. Regardless of that morning's sermon's topic—loving your neighbor, serving God, being a good mother or father, honoring your parents, not lying or stealing, becoming a missionary etc.--the minister always had this unique way of segueing or transitioning from whatever his topic had been that morning to what we called the *invitation* (to respond to his message).

Walking the Aisle: The Invitation to Meet Jesus...

It was during the invitation, when the choir would begin to softly sing a familiar encouraging hymn, that the pastor would encourage those within the congregation to leave their seats, come forward and quietly express some deeply-felt or conscience-inspired response to the minister's message. While I suppose anyone could have shared anything that they would have wanted to share or confess, most responses usually took the form of a few standard and/or publicly-accepted or reinforced responses: a public affirmation of one's coming to faith--making a decision to trust or follow Christ as one's personal Savior, or if someone had already made that decision, but had never been baptized as a symbol of that decision in a Baptist church (which made it official, at least according to the Baptists) then one could go forward and let the pastor know: "I have been saved, but I have never been baptized" ...as a public symbol (within my church) of what was a private and personal decision—to trust Christ as one's savior.

But since most of the congregation had already made these two major decisions, salvation or baptism, many who would leave their seats and walk the aisle down to the pastor, would be making the decision to rededicate their lives to more closely following the Lord. Perhaps they had gotten off the beaten path, or not been attending church as regularly as they should have, or were not as fervent in their daily spiritual walk, i.e. not reading their Bible regularly, not praying as often as they should have, or not serving within the church in some capacity, or perhaps, not witnessing to their friends about Jesus, or maybe they had just lost their passion and had become spiritually bored? By walking the aisle and

confessing it to the pastor, they all seemed to feel better, liking getting something of their chests. They were ready to renew their walk in Christ...again...and again...and again.

For some this public act of rededication seemed to be just what the doctor ordered. It seemed that the penitent person's renewed dedication never wavered. He or she began to teach Sunday School, were at church every time the doors opened and just basically led a very dedicated or spiritually-devoted life. But for the rest of us, the vitality of our spiritual walks were kind of an up and down thing. So, about once every few years, it just kind of became the thing to do—rededicate one's life to Christ. It became time to walk the aisle, confess and start all over, until it was time to do it...again. For some the walk and profession became very frequent. So much so that it was very tempting to label them, or ask, "Is something wrong?" But no one to my knowledge ever really asked that question. And who was I to judge? Who was anyone to judge? But you just couldn't help yourself, and so I did. Looking back, I realize now that I was doing what I had always done as a child and have continued to do all my life—observe life and people and ask why? I guess I am just a curious of sorts.

Then as the invitation was being offered, and it became apparent that no one else was coming forward to speak to the pastor, the pastor would close the invitation and announce to the congregation whether anyone had become saved or wanted to be baptized. Those that had rededicated their lives to Christ or has asked the pastor for prayer for prayer had most usually returned to their seats, but if for some reason the person really needed his rededication announced to the church body, the pastor, functioning as a spiritual intermediary or protective attorney between his client and the congregation, would speak on the repentant sinner's behalf, informing a sympathetic congregation of the now rededicated believer's fresh desire to be more faithful to his or her Lord once again.

The Really Big Decision!

On a rare occasion, and perhaps of even greater significance than the invitation and

decision to accept Jesus Christ as one's personal Savior from hell, was the really big decision to give one's life to missions, or even greater, foreign missions service. This was the mother load of all decisions it seemed, to give one's life to God for the rest of your life. To deny yourself the worldly pleasures that the rest of us enjoyed, at the expense of spending the rest of one's life going from village to village telling natives or indigenous cultures in Africa or South America that Jesus loves them. This was the whole enchilada! This is what the church seemed to live for. The church had done something. The spiritual process had worked. From nursery to pew, all the programs, services, classes, choir specials, sermons, moving invitations, retreats, summer camps, Vacation Bible Schools, week-long revivals and guest missionary speakers had worked its magic. One of the church's own was going out there in the real world to serve God. Out there to spread Jesus' gospel.

Now there was a long road from walking the aisle to actually becoming a missionary or pastor. One had to finish school, go off to college as well as survive college and all its temptations. Then after college, it was off to seminary for several more years of special training. And then if one was accepted into the missionary program, there were additional years of culture and language training. Finally, after completion of all this study and training, one would be assigned some place in the world to serve as a missionary. For anyone, much less a younger person, to remain committed to such a long-term call or decision, was indeed a challenge. But despite the congregation's implicit understanding that the chances were slim to none that the person making this decision would make it that far, the congregation, acting like one, would nod in an approving affirmation as the pastor announced the well-intended member's decision or call to serve God.

My Life to God: I Made All the Big Four!

And in fact, in my youth, being as spiritually sensitive as I was, I had made all the big four decisions at one time or another, salvation and baptism as a nine-year old, baptism again as a college senior, rededication and the big banana, full-time missions. I was twelve years old, and on

three closely separate occasions or evenings, I walked the aisle, once for sensing God's call, the second time for being a medical missionary and the third time, specifically to a place called Biafra in Nigeria. Biafra was caught up in a civil war with Nigeria and children were starving and dying.

A Methodist Becomes a Baptist: My Father's Profound Spiritual Influence...

My father was one of the town's two main physicians. In addition, there were two older physicians, but for the most part they were each retired, perhaps seeing just a few patients a week. In addition, my mother was a nurse—that is how she met my dad. He was in medical school, and she had finished her nurses' training when they had gotten married. And while she worked for my dad, it was as his practice's office manager, and not as a nurse. So medicine is what I knew in my family. I saw the great respect it afforded my father. Most people felt he was a very smart man, as well as, a little different and agitated...at just how stupid people could be. When I was young, my father had not attended church very much. When he did begin to attend more and sing in the choir, it was the redbrick Methodist church, located on the other end of the block, facing the same direction as the older Baptist church had faced.

After my youngest brother was born, we three boys would drive the one block to the great big Baptist church (my mom having grown up Baptist) on the corner and park across the street in the Westside Elementary graveled playground, and my dad would attend the church on the other end of the block, closer to town and the main square, the Methodist church. Both would teach youth and both would sing in their respective choirs.

And then that all changed. My father was brought up before the state medical society for some bizarre behaviors. I suppose some thought he was on drugs. So he had to go to and obtain signed affidavits from every patient he had written a class I narcotic prescription for pain in the past so many years to, stating that they had indeed received the prescribed medication. There

were sixty in all. All signed, but one, who had died in the interim. Thus became a crack down on doctors not just scribbling off prescriptions in what seemed a quick, almost haphazardly, written scrawl that only the pharmacist could interpret.

My father ended up voluntarily surrendering his narcotic license for a period of six months. He also told the chairman of the board in a public hearing that in his heart he had every reason to hate him. This was the second time he had had to go before the medical board to defend himself. The first time involved a hospital patient that he had sent on over to Little Rock to be looked after rather than attempt to treat her himself. She was not his patient, but apparently he was on call that weekend. At some point in the process she had expired, and so the state medical board looked into the matter. An interesting footnote to all of this was that the other main doctor in our small community was on the board too. My dad had come to our small town to practice with him, but that relationship ended rather quickly, and so my dad rented space from one of the older retired doctors and began his own practice. Before my dad had come to town, there had been many that had been lobbying for another doctor. Now they feared they would lose their viable second option so they came to my dad's support, helping to raise funds for attorney's fees and making the trip to the hearings. He was exonerated, but it had wiped out our family's savings and perhaps caused my mother to miscarry. Now for the second time, my dad was standing before the board and his medical rival at the time. But instead of hating, he said, "Hate would only hurt me. Instead, I am going to kill you with kindness. I am choosing to love you as Jesus would." I guess this is what I mean that my dad was different and unpredictable. About the time you thought you had him figured out, he would think out of the box and throw you a curve ball. I am sure that the board thought he was nuts in his response. But the end result was that our family was together spiritually, worshiping under the same roof. Everyday before we kids went off to school, we would read a chapter of the Bible, quite often from a large-print Bible.

My dad had taught and lived some great moral examples. When humbled - turn to

God, no matter how smart or arrogant you think you are...because he was really, really smart. But perhaps, deep down, he was even wiser because in his family's pain, he turned to God for support and strength.

And so perhaps combining the spirits of both my heavenly and earthly fathers, I thought or presumed that this was God's call on my life to help the desperately needy in a medical capacity.

*Back to the Invitation... Again and Again:
Something's Not Working Here!*

Now while all these decision, and perhaps a few more were open and fair game for anyone from the congregation to make, it was not like a lot of people were rushing down the aisle to make or declare these decision. Most of the congregation had already been saved and baptized (some more than once even. Some felt that they had not done it for the right reasons the first time, perhaps they were a child at the time of their decision or perhaps they had not lead a very godly life after making their decision to follow Christ, so before they tried rededication they would accept Christ a second time and be re-baptized, thinking that perhaps they had really never been a Christian in the first place. If making the decision to accept Christ as their savior didn't work a second or third time even, then there was the fall back position of walking the aisle to rededicate one's life to Christ). Few ever committed their life to serving Christ on a full-time basis. So that really on left rededication, but if one did this too much, one might risk being labeled as troubled or emotional. So in reality, many a Sunday, a discouraged minister would stand up at the front of the church, awaiting some response to his message as the church and choir sang the invitation song, and I suppose, even a few faithful were praying, and no one would come forward. I can only imagine this weekly-programmed disappointment felt by many a pastor when no one would come forward. Finally, when the minister probably seemed as his breaking point and perhaps out of mercy, some faithful saint, who everyone knew had no business coming forward because they never missed a spiritual step to begin with, or it was assumed that did not because of their spiritual stature, might mercifully step forward, walk down the aisle and ask for

prayer, thus sparing the congregation the possibility that the church would lose another pastor due to the lack of spiritual response to his messages and/or ministry.

Two Years and a Cloud of Ministerial Dust...

And in fact, when I got to seminary, we were told that the average pastoral tenure for our seminary's graduate was two and a half years, and for the denomination I was from, but my seminary was not associate with, it was a whopping two years! Two years! Two years in nothing in a pastorate! Having now served at the same church for twenty-three years, and perhaps too long, I am not sure, two years is nothing. In fact, it was my goal just to last those first two years. Now, twenty-three years later, I feel almost as lost as ever.

This Church Pastoring Thing We Seek to Undertake is a Darn Near Impossible Task!

Pastoring is hard. It is not an exact science, or if it is, I feel sure we still must be in spiritually prehistoric times. The church is still so ignorant when it comes to shepherding sheep. People are complicated. Their families, lives, values, decision patterns and motivations are complicated, and pasturing them can feel like nailing Jello to a tree. I have often told our congregation that what we are doing is hard, especially in the seemingly affluent, as well as, morally eroding culture we live in today. In comparing it to what retailers are attempting to do, it would be like someone loving Wal-Mart so much that they want to come back to shop at Wal-Mart again and again, as well as, telling their friends that they need to shop at Wal-Mart too. And in fact, they love shopping at Wal-Mart so much that one day, they apply to work for Wal-Mart and refuse to accept pay. That is what volunteer organizations such as churches are up against. No wonder so many ministers feel like failure even after only two years on the job. What we are doing is not just hard, it is down right impossible! So for a kindly older believer to have mercy on a struggling young pastor and walk the aisle during his invitation in order to keep that young pastor motivated just one more week until a real decision is made, well, it's just a mercifully wise act.

The Obligatory Ministerial Handshake...

Finally, the minister would pray the benedictory prayer. The congregation would dismiss, perhaps visit with their neighbor or another friend for a moment, find their hat and coat and file out through the very same doors which an hour earlier they had made their grand entrance through. As they exited, the minister would be there to greet them and thank them for coming. There was the obligatory shaking of hands with the minister, as well as, lying to him, telling him that he had preached a good message, even if they had slept through most of it and even just a few minutes later couldn't tell you one thing he had just preached his heart out about. I mean what else do you say to they guy in that brief uncomfortable three seconds? And if the minister had any kind of savvy whatsoever and had paid any attention, he knew who he had caught sleeping, and were thus telling him only what they thought he wanted to hear—that he had done a good job.

Beaten Again! A Defeated Glance: Those Dratted Methodists!

After the obligatory handshake with the minister and a few more causal goodbyes to friends, most were destined for one of the two local restaurants, but already disappointed even before they had reached their cars. For even as one was making the obligatory ministerial handshake, with one quick glance down the street and to the right at the old church, one could see that Methodist's parking spaces which joined that the parking spaces Baptist's parking spaces, thus forming one tree-lined continuous block of parking in front of both churches, was almost empty, thus meaning for all intent and purposes, the Methodist had BEATEN the Baptist to the restaurants, meaning the Baptists would have to wait longer for their lunch orders or would be at the tail end of the buffet lines. In all actuality, it was a rare Sunday that the Baptists would ever beat the Methodist to the lunch tables. The Methodist were more interested in you being a good person and thus their minister's message was shorter. The Baptists were interested in saving your soul, thus the stakes to them were higher and their minister's message longer. Add to

that the invitation, and well, the Baptists never had a chance.

One Incredible Sunday Spread...

Knowing this, my mom, would put a roast in the oven before we left for church at 9:30, and most usually, we would go home an incredible Sunday dinner. I mean did we eat well. Pot roast, mashed potatoes and gravy, green beans, corn, dinner rolls, ice tea and lemon icebox pie. Often we would eat in the dining room next to the kitchen on my great grandmother's ornately decorated beveled-edged dining room table--which also doubled as a ping-pong table for my middle brother and me from time to time. One could murder his opponent with some incredible ricochet shots off those edges.

After dinner, since mom would destroy her kitchen in the process of making such an elaborate dinner, especially so soon after attending church, my brothers and I would look to the kitchen with an incredible incredulity. How could we, as eager young boys wanting to go outside, meet up with our friends and ride our bikes around town, ever possibly imagine to clean it up the massive devastation that had brought us such a delectable and satisfying feast because after all it was our responsibility to help clean up? But then our mother, sensing our despair and utter contempt for the chore at hand, would kindly and mercifully tell us that we could go on and play. Are you sure, Mom? Sure, go, run along and play. And out we would dash. My mother would clean up, rest a few hours, and then it was time for Sunday night church, which was just a more causal version of the Sunday morning. Not everyone came back for the Sunday night service. Heathens! But there was no option for my mom. We were going back! And about half the congregation did as well. And this was a routine we would repeat year in and year out. It was our duty, our obligation. This was what we thought church was or all about. This was the informal ritual we had learned.

There Has Got to Be More!

Now here I was, as a young college student, bored to death in the church that I had grown up in, but also in the new church building that I had helped to pay for, and not the old one that I had forged most all of

my earliest spiritual memories had been forged within. Like oil and water, the same old format wasn't mixing with this new cathedral-like monument to an affluent banker. It wasn't working spiritually, at least not for me. It didn't fit. Nothing fit. Finally, in my frustration and confusion, I leaned over to my mom and spoke these now landmark words, at least landmark with respect to my spiritual odyssey I was about to embark on, "There has got to be more than this!" More than just three hymns, a special, an offering, a boring message about salvation—something that ninety-nine percent of the congregation had already done, an invitation, prayer and then go home. Is this all that God had designed us for? Be saved, struggle and die, with little relevancy, power and insight to this life that we were now living? Dry, lifeless worship? The same old, same old, every Sunday morning, Sunday night and Wednesday night? THERE HAD TO BE MORE! THERE JUST HAD TO BE MORE!

Later, while attending several churches in college, I was to find out that there was more. Much more!

Footnote:

Apparently, a part of my struggle may have been the more rural nature of my going-to-church experience. As I was growing up, my small-town church, when in actuality was the largest church in the community, did provide me with very safe and secure religious upbringing. I have fond memories of spending summer mornings attending church-led vacation Bible schools, eating Nabisco Vanilla Wafers and drinking raspberry Kool-Aid during snack breaks, running across the street to play at the local elementary playground, learning about missionaries who had dedicated their lives to taking the story of Jesus' love to other cultures, hearing Bible stories and making crafts out of seashells and Popsicle Sticks.

I came to faith and was baptized in that church. I remember Wednesday night potlucks where the whole church came together to eat meals prepared by three large African-America women who knew how to cook—and I mean cook well. Even today, I can still have dreams from time to

time of the old church auditorium with its overhanging balcony. I can almost go row by row and tell you where everyone sat.

But as I grew up, what held my attention and was a safe place to consider God as a child began to lose its relevancy to me. The old church auditorium came down for a new one, and it was never the same for me. The building was fancy, but the message, the performance; the execution of worship didn't match.

Perhaps when we were in the old church, our expectations were lower. Perhaps it was just the changing times. It was the 1970s in the south, and everything was changing. Perhaps it was just me growing up. I was searching for something more, something better, and something more spiritually relevant.

As I moved off to college and began attending churches in more-educated college communities, there was a tendency towards a not only a more progressive and relevant worship service, but a better level of Bible teaching.

It is not that a more rural church can't compete with a larger more urban church setting, but with a greater talent pool of people to draw from, as well as, more giving dollars to pull from, larger, more urban churches can tend to afford to hire more talented, communicational-gifted ministers, as well as, being able to afford other things that smaller, more rural churches usually cannot afford.

I suppose the church is not immune from the laws of supply and demand as well. Larger, more affluent churches can hire better personnel, as well as, offer more ministry resources than smaller churches. Thus smaller churches, it would seem to me, have to be more creative, think smarter, as well as, emphasize their community nature if they are going to be able to compete as far as a higher quality of ministry with larger more affluent churches.

At the same time, larger churches have their built-in handicaps as well. After all the NT church in Acts, not only met in the temple courts, but in homes as well. And as the church expanded from Jerusalem, it was the home that offered the first meeting places.

And in smaller settings, I believe believers were better able to practice all the "One another" commands left behind by Jesus and his NT writers.

A New View of Church: Why does Fellowship seem a little different from other Churches?

Simple: the universal truth:
“Form Follows Function.”

What?! What does “Form Following Function” got to do with a church?

Everything. One doesn’t drink coffee out of a bathtub, or take a bath in a coffee cup. One doesn’t use a dustpan to sweep dust onto a broom. One doesn’t use a nail to pound a hammer into two pieces of wood to bind them together. One drinks coffee out of a coffee cup. One takes a bath in a bathtub. One uses a broom to sweep dust onto a dustpan. One uses a hammer to pound a nail into two blocks of wood to hold them together. Everything in life is designed, or takes on a particular shape or form, for a particular purpose.

While these examples may seem ridiculously obvious, ponder how even with respect to something as simple as footwear, “form still follows function.”

Who wants to run or play sports in high heels? Or trudge miles in the snow in your slippers? Or swim with fishing waders on? Or fight fires while wearing swimming fins (now that would be a funny sight)? No way!

Fins were designed for propelling a swimmer through the water; slippers to relax in; fishing waders to wade out where the fish are; high heels...well...I am not sure about high heels. Obviously there is something about height and fashion or attraction. Bottom line: each footwear form has its function.

And I could go on and on, pens, paper, chairs, beds, wheels, tires, cars, stoves, refrigerators, shirts, dresses, socks, hats, caps, t-shirts, blankets, sheets, washers, dryers, plates, forks, spoons, knives, coats, sweaters, pants, fingers, hands, eyes, toes, ears, the brain, bones, nerve cells, the heart, the kidney, highways, stoplights, light switches, doors, windows, televisions, computers, radios, mp3 players, phones, cell phones, lamps, pillows, suitcases, purses, wallets, dressers, closets, bathrooms, restrooms, living rooms, sinks, disposals, waste cans, pantries, garages, sidewalks, streets, baskets, hair berets, hair brushes, scissors, combs, lotions, shampoos, squeeze tubes, glass bottles, backpacks, park benches, buses, pick up trucks, Mac trucks, race cars, family vans, sports utility vehicles, jets, passenger jets, space shuttles, kitchen cabinets, garage door openers, door handles, picture frames, knobs, handles, locks, keys, chains, ropes, water, oxygen, air, grass, trees, livestock, flowers, pets, bees, birds, fish, bearings, pistons, rods, saws, screwdrivers, nail guns, fishing rods, hooks, fishing bait, various types of sport balls—footballs, soccer balls, basketballs, baseballs, tennis balls, golf balls--eye glasses, contacts, sun glasses, pacemakers, MRI diagnostic machines, IV’s, various types of scopes, drills, cans, plastic wrap, checkout counters, signs, tomatoes, potatoes, squash, milk, soft drinks, energy drinks, medicines, vaccines...do I need to go on?

All the above are simply forms that were designed or created with a specific function in mind. Everything in life has a purpose. The same is true of the church. The church is a form, just like a hammer, a nail, a broom, a coffee cup, bath tub are all forms, each with a very specific purpose in mind. Therefore since the church is a form like everything else, the question naturally arises: what is this form’s (the Church’s) purpose? In the mind of God, what was

the church designed to accomplish and why is this so important?

Why is this so important? Again, one can use the hammer as a nail to bind wood, or the bathtub to drink coffee out of, but neither was designed with these functions in mind. In other words, the bathtub makes a poor coffee cup and the hammer makes for a poor binder of wood. The tub is something stationary and is designed to hold something larger, preferably a human being and a liquid, and even more preferably water, and even more than just water, but hot water so that the person taking the bath can rinse her or himself off with the hot water, thereby cleansing the skin of its sweat, dirt and grime.

In other words, when it comes to the church, if one is not clear about its purpose, then it may end up doing what it wasn't created for, thus performing a poor job at whatever it is being asked to do, along with leaving its intended purpose undone.

Well then, someone could remark, "Isn't it obvious what a church's purpose is?"

Maybe. Maybe not. What do you think the church's purpose is?

One might answer to help people grow closer to God. And that's not a bad answer. It makes sense to me. I am not sure where this comes from, but it comes from somewhere—perhaps religious tradition, perhaps one's church upbringing from childhood, perhaps from some minister or evangelist, perhaps this is what has just been observed from having attended various churches, or watched a church service on television, perhaps it comes from the Bible?

But if this is the purpose, then several more questions evolve? 1) How is the church doing as a form to help people grow closer to God and 2) Why are there so many different types of

churches and denominations? Are there many ways to God? Or different strokes for different folks? 3) And how did all these churches know to be different? I mean how did they decide to look and function like they appear and perform? 4) Are there certain form, tools or truths that work better than others? A shower compared to a bathtub? A coffee cup with a lid to hold the heat in? A screw with threads over a slick compression nail? A vacuum cleaner or mop over a broom and dustpan? A nail gun over a hammer? A car over a horse and carriage? A jet over a car? Can churches improve at their purpose? Can churches get better? 5) Where does ritual, tradition and Scriptures come into play? 6) Can churches look different from culture to culture?

Other questions that also arise are: Do churches have to be boring? Does the music need to be old? Can a band replace a choir? Are sermons or lectures about being good or bad required? What role do the Scriptures play in the church? When should a church meet? On Sundays? On Sunday mornings? Can a church meet in a home? How often can a church meet? How big or small does a church need to be? Does size matter? Can a church be led by someone that does function in a professional capacity, such as priest or minister? Can a woman be a priest or minister? Who makes the decisions for the church? How does a church support itself?

As the questions begin to pile up, an astute observer might begin to re-ask her or himself, "Just what is a church and what is its purpose?" If I am going to belong, participate or become involved in this thing, or form called a church, and get everything out of it that I am supposed to get from it, maybe Joe (that's me) is right. Perhaps understanding just what a church is, starting from the beginning, and grasping just what it was designed for might be helpful because after all many

who have either grown up in church, left the church, become disenchanted with the church, come back to church, tried many various churches out, looking for the one that works for them, have all had various, and perhaps even, negative experiences with the church. Perhaps the clues to many a lost sojourner's unsuccessful attempts to fit within the modern church lie within the purpose of a church. Perhaps if I knew just exactly what the church's purpose is, then just perhaps I might find the church that works for me, or better yet, fearing that the perfect church might not exist out there, I might figure out how to connect to, fit in, serve or get my spiritual needs met in a less than perfect church.

With the universal law that "Form Follows Function" not only applying to everything else in the universe, and the church as well, perhaps that understanding of the church's purpose or function might just enlighten or heighten my church experience. As we go back to the beginning, we go back to the source, not only to define a church, but its purpose as well.

And just perhaps, as we attempt to answer these two questions, the answers to all our other questions might reveal themselves as well. And in fact, might not the exploration of these questions and answers have an even greater tangible impact in our lives? For if God did create the church for a specific purpose and the purpose the Scriptures will seem to espouse, then when it is done well, might not the church change us as well? Might not a biblically directed, well-purposed church just be

the godly vessel, tool or form that man has been searching for to have a meaningful and well-lived life—a life that honors and pleases our Creator and Redeemer.

Here goes...

A Healthy Rethinking of "Church"

One of the goals of this study is to help you rethink your understanding of the church in light of what the New Testament says about a church as opposed to what you may have experienced or observed from culture and tradition.

After this class or study, one should be able to take the biblical purpose and environment of a church anyplace in the world -- to join and help serve in a church, or even to help start new one or renew an old one.

This study intends to be timeless in its biblical content.

Chapter 1

The Biblical Purpose of a Church

Fellowship's philosophy of ministry
"Form Follows Function"

Chapter 1

The Purpose of the Church: Form and Function...

By now, having listened to others stories or journeys, as well as, your own, you are beginning to grasp a couple of things:

1) How, for better or worse, everyone's spiritual journey is unique to their own spiritual or religious experiences. One person may have grown up Roman Catholic, another Baptist or Lutheran. Some enjoyed their experience. Others struggled. Some may have had a very short, direct to God even from childhood; others have taken a much longer and circuitous route back to God. Some never left. Some are just now arriving. Some took a wrong turn, got lost and are just now finding their way back.

So thank God for your experience, good or bad. Learn from it, as well as others experiences, and for this moment set it aside, good or bad. Why? Because even if we could match Fellowship's ministry experience to your particular church upbringing, we would leave many others, whose experiences are different from your own, far behind. So just for the moment everyone is equal again. Everyone starts back at the beginning.

2) Your arrival at Fellowship at this particular time is no accident. It is a part of God's plan or purpose for your life. There is something you are supposed to learn or experience. And in fact, you are about to detach what you have learned about church from your past and reattach it to

Scripture first, before culture and your upbringing.

Fellowship's Philosophy of Ministry, or the system of principles that guide the way we do ministry here at Fellowship, is built on the premise that everything in creation has a purpose, and that this purpose or function determines that something's ultimate design or form, and that just as this universal truth applies to everything in life it also applies to God's design for the body of Christ, the church.

A coffee cup was designed to hold a few ounces of a hot liquid. It does not function very well as a human bathtub. It's too small. But while the coffee cup is too small for a human to bath in, note the similarity of both the coffee cup and the bathtub's purpose—both were designed to hold a hot liquid. And yet, though their purposes—holding hot liquids are similar, they are not the same purpose.

Can you imagine pouring your coffee into the bathtub and attempting to slurp it out? What a laugh! Or trying to take a bath in a cup of coffee? Both would be ridiculous! Though similar in function, each form was uniquely created for an even more specific purpose: one to bath in; one to drink from. So in other words, their very specific forms followed, as opposed to preceded, their very specific functions. It is a universal principle of life: *Forms Follow Function, and not vice versa!*

And while this simple, yet universal truth may sound obvious and simple, most of us fail to observe it in many of our everyday forms of living, and so much so, that we often find ourselves enduring or attempting to maintain

failing forms, including many churches, schools, businesses and cultural traditions. Why? Because we have forgotten or abandoned the function that gave rise to the original form in the first place, thus maintaining an outdated form becomes for many the fatiguing/ discouraging objective. In other words, form has become function—maintaining a dying church, a worn out building or an inefficient approach to business, life, marriage, parenting, work, eating, medicine, home-building, clothes-washing, cooking, keeping records, paying bills, traveling across country, hunting, fishing, farming, manufacturing, communicating, etc. Are you starting to get the picture?

What was the original purpose? What were we trying to do or accomplish when we first came up with the form? Is that form still getting the job done? Is there a better form to get the job done? What is more important, the function or the form that accomplishes the function? Because the function may never change, but the form that accomplishes that function most assuredly will change, be it a diaper, a camera, a drill, a car, computer, phone, television, mail, a hammer, a shoe, etc.

Thus as it is true in life, it should be in the church. While a church's function remains constant, it's forms will change from generation to generation, from culture to culture, and that is okay, as long as, its original purpose or function is still being fulfilled—and fulfilled in a meaningful and relevant manner.

For example, while great cathedrals, with their artistically painted ceilings, once had their practical value in a movement that sought to inspire within the individual worshiper his Creator's transcendent awe, beauty and majesty,

for the most part, these great cathedrals now lie empty, merely serving as tourist attractions and monuments to another era.

In their place, new worshiping forms have arisen. Ones which are financially more feasible to construct, more practical in nature—forms that emphasize both the worshiping and teaching nature of the church, and which inspire worshipers through new types of music, as well as, uniquely designed sound, lighting, staging and techniques. Add to this what television, and both large and small group events have contributed to the mix. In other words, Forms Follow Function.

So what was the church's original purpose? Let's take a closer look.

This class' next goal is to look at Eph. 4:11-16 and discern what the church's purpose is. For the answer to this crucial question we must examine Eph. 4:11-16 in context for within this passage are the biblical clues of the church's real purpose.

Paul's Letter to the Ephesians (the church at Ephesus)

You are about to travel back in time to a portion of an ancient biblical letter that a once former religiously legalistic law-abiding Jew and zealous persecutor of the early church, but who was literally captured by the glory of the resurrected Jesus Christ and who went on to become the church's greatest advocate, as well as, the founder and establisher of the church to which this letter is addressed, the great Apostle, Paul.

While not spoken directly of, many believe that some of the clues as to the

church's purpose seem to be contained within the pages of this letter.

First of all, Paul's letter to the Ephesian church is about *unity* - unity between believing Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews) within the same congregation. Eph. 2:14ff reads:

14 For he himself (Jesus) is our peace, who has made the two (Jew and Gentile) one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, (How?) 15 by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations.

His *purpose* was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

17 He came and preached peace to you (Gentiles) who were far away and peace to those who were near (Jews).

18 For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

19 *Consequently*, you (believing Gentiles) are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people (believing Jews) and members of God's household,

20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.

22 And in him you too are being built together *to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit*.

"A dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit." That is what the *church* is supposed to be. A place of unity, of genuine togetherness, but genuine togetherness that is built upon

the cornerstone of Christ Jesus—the Truth—his sin-atonement death and resurrection--and the foundation of his apostles and prophets—his Holy Words—his truth.

In Eph. 4 Paul again brings up this idea of **"Spirit-inspired unity."** Eph. 4:1-6 reads:

The What...

1 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to *live a life worthy* of the calling you have received.

The How...

2 Be *completely* humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. 3 *Make every effort* to keep the unity of the Spirit through *the bond of peace* (remember chapter 2, Jew and Gentile, one new man).

The Why...

4 There is one body and one Spirit-- just as you were called to one hope when you were called-- 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Then in v. 7 *in order to develop and maintain this Christ-like unity or togetherness* Paul writes just as he does in Rom. 12 and 1 Cor. 12.

7 But to each one of us grace (God's favor) has been given as Christ apportioned it (as a king bestows his favor upon his loyal subjects).

Then once again in v.11ff., Paul brings up *the foundation of Christ's body*, the apostles and prophets (which he discussed earlier in chapter 2), along with other gifted or *graced* individuals. Within this discussion of these gifted individuals helping the church to build

this special unity, Paul perhaps alludes to *the real purpose of a church*. Read Eph. 4:11-16 below and see if you can glean what *the real purpose of the church* seems to be about.

Eph. 4:11-16

11 It was he (CHRIST) who gave some to be apostles,
some to be prophets,
some to be evangelists, and
some to be pastors and teachers,

(Why? For what purpose?)

12 to prepare God's people for works of service,

(What kinds of acts of service? And Why?)

so that *the body of Christ may be built up*

(With what goal or result?)

13 until we all reach *unity in the faith* and *in the knowledge* of the Son of God and *become mature, attaining to the whole measure* of the fullness of Christ.

(The result, stated negatively...)

14 Then we will no longer be infants, *tossed* back and forth by the waves, and *blown* here and there by every wind of teaching and by the *cunning* and *craftiness* of men in their *deceitful scheming*.

(The result, stated positively...)

15 Instead, *speaking the truth in love*, we will *in all things grow up* into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.

16 From him the whole body, *joined* and held together by *every supporting ligament, grows* and *builds itself up* in love, *as each part* does its work.

Q. Even if you are not a biblical scholar, after having read the above passage and ponder it for a moment in its original context, just on the surface, if you had to describe the real purpose of this God-created and Spirit-inspired form, commonly called the body of Christ, or *the church*, what would you say?

The purpose of the *assembly, church, or body of Christ* it seems is *growth*—but not *growth* as the world often defines it--*numerical growth*, but a different type of *growth*—

a growth defined by what's inside a person; a growth that seeks to serve the other guy, or my fellow brother or sister within the body of Christ; growth that is not just about me, but about us; a growth that thinks outside itself; a growth that like our Lord, who was rich in God, gave himself up for others; a growth that grows and never stops growing; a growth seeks the full measure of Christ; a growth inspired by the Holy Spirit of God; a growth that seeks a real change in character--a change in the way a person thinks, feels and acts; a growth the world really has no understanding of; a growth like no other.

Bottom line the purpose of the church, and Fellowship's purpose as well, seems to be to create a biblical, spiritual environment, which encourages and results in Christ-like spiritual growth and maturity. It is both that simple and that complex. Because as human beings are complex, so are groups, or bodies of human beings, as well. But that is the task before us—the task given to us by the Holy Spirit--to create, develop and maintain upon this earth an environment for spiritual growth.

And while ultimately, no person can make another human being grow, but together we can strive within the best of our God-given, Spirit-inspired abilities and talents (our graces or gifts) to seek to create, and continue to recreate, this biblical environment that creates and nurtures healthy, biblical Christ-like spiritual growth, *as each member of the body is trained and equipped to do his/her purpose and function.*

In other words, your physical birth and spiritual rebirth are no accidents. According to what the Spirit inspired Paul to write many, many years ago, we were made to be a part of larger work, a larger body, a community of believers, whose spiritual whole is infinitely greater than the sum of our individual spiritual parts.

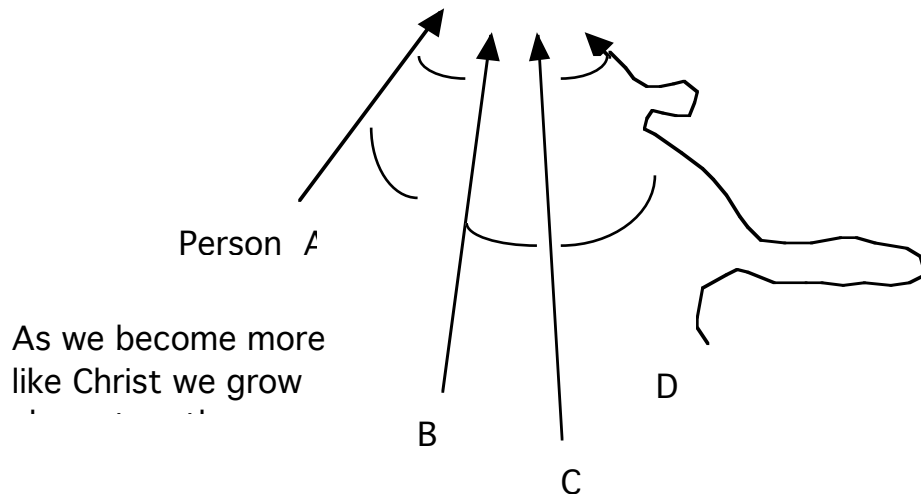
So, welcome to the party, friend or brother. Like us or not, love us or not, just like the individual cells and organs of the human body, an

individual's spiritual growth comes through the body's many countless interactions between its members, and the body's overall growth is a result of all the individual members' spiritual growth. You cannot divorce the two. Their Spirit-inspired births, journeys, growth, sufferings and ultimate maturities are all inseparably intertwined. This is the miracle and mystery of the Holy Spirit—*"a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit" —the body of Christ, the church.* All for one, and one for all.

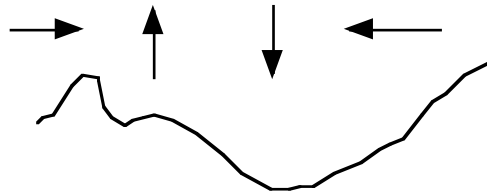
Bottom line, stated simply, Fellowship's Purpose:

*To Create an
Environment...
that Encourages
Christ-like
Spiritual Growth.*

Jesus Christ

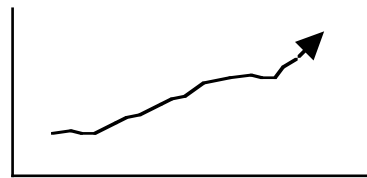


Change

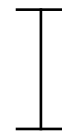


Growth

(Positive)



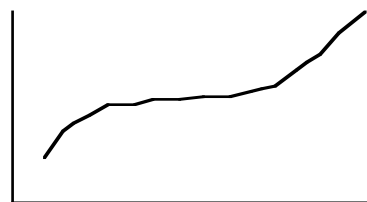
Time



Growth

Maturity

(Result Goal)



Time

Jesus Christ (Eph. 4)



Chapter 2

The Environment “The Ships”

*The Biblical Environment that Bests
Produces Spiritual Growth in the Church*

- *Worship*
- *Discipleship*
- *Fellowship/Stewardship*
 -Leadership, Eldership
- *Hardship*

Chapter 2

The Environment of a Church: Acts 2:42-47

The word “environ” means “to surround.” Environment has to do with the “sum total of something’s surroundings.” Just as it takes the proper environment to grow a child or a tomato, so there is a proper spiritual environment to grow a believer into Christ-like spiritual maturity.

So when we ask what is the proper biblical environment to produce spiritual growth, we are asking, “what are the biblical surroundings of the church?” In other words, just as a garden requires the right environment--such as the right amount of sunlight for photosynthesis to occur, or the right amount of water to transplant minerals and nutrients, or its soiled tilled or cultivated for weeds, or natural fertilizers for growth or natural insecticides or fungicides to protect the plant from insects and disease--in order to produce a bountiful harvest, so what spiritual elements should every church contain, if it is to produce healthy spiritual growth among its members?

To answer that question, there are several passages, which will enlighten us as to what these essential ingredients are. The first passage is found in Acts 2:42-47.

The Context

Christ has already ascended to heaven. (Acts 1). The Promised Spirit has poured himself out upon the apostles. In the languages of all the peoples present from all around the world for the Jewish Pentecost festival--which was held 50

days (thus the prefix *pente* or *five*) after the Jewish Passover, during which their Lord and God’s Son, Jesus, had suffered, died and been resurrected to atone for the sins of the world--they have miraculously shared their incredible story. Peter, now full of the Spirit, has preached a powerful message explaining the miracle that had just taken place, namely, that the Apostles were not drunk because it was too early in the day for this. Rather incredible ability to speak in other known languages was because they were filled with God’s Holy Spirit.

Peter then goes on to explain very articulately to the crowd how Jesus fulfilled the prophecies--that indeed he was the promised Son of David, or Israel’s promised savior, the Messiah or *Anointed One*. Peter goes on to say that even his death, which you, Israel, had a role in, had been foretold. In fact, you killed your King. But it was a part of God’s plan in order to redeem or spiritually buy you back from the penalty and destructive power of your sin. In other words, the Messiah had come to save the world spiritually first, before he returns to rescue it physically someday.”

In response to this the crowds asked, “What must we do to be saved?”

Peter responded, “Repent (or change the direction of your lives from faithlessness to faithfulness in Christ) and be baptized (or immersed as a public symbol, identifying yourself with Jesus Christ as your Lord and God, as well as, his death and resurrection) for the forgiveness of your sin.”

Miraculously, 3,000 did believe and repent that day.

But now what? We have 3,000 + new believers. What were they to do? How were they to celebrate their new faith? How were they to keep it alive? How were they to keep each other faithful?

Were they to go on with life as usual?
Was anything to be different? What
about the temple sacrifices and the Law?
Where these rituals still supposed to be
a part of their religious experience?

Acts 2:42-47 describes to us what
happens next.

The Passage: Acts 2:42ff

•Look closely at the text. V. 42 list four
things that they devoted themselves to.
Ask yourself do these seem to be the
essential environmental elements of a
church? Are they still important today?

Hint: vv. 43-47 almost seem to restate
and perhaps elaborate on v. 42's list.

Acts 2:42 They devoted themselves
to the apostles' teaching and
to the fellowship,
to the breaking of bread and
to prayer.

43 Everyone was filled with awe,
and many wonders and miraculous
signs were done by the **apostles**.

(Note: the apostle's miracles validate the
apostle's message or teaching.)

44 All the believers were **together**
and had **everything in common**.

45 Selling their possessions and goods,
they gave to anyone as he had need.

46 Every day they continued to meet
together in the temple courts.

(What do the previous three verses seem
to describe?)

They **broke bread** in their homes and
ate together with glad and sincere
hearts,

(What's third on the list?)

47 **praising God** and enjoying the favor
of all the people.

(Fourth and finally...)

And the Lord added to their number
daily those who were being saved.

Notes...

1) Note the connection between the
Apostles' teaching (v.42) and the
Apostles' miracles (v.43).

Quite often miracles serve to validate
the messenger or Apostle as being from
God. His message was therefore
authentic and was to be listened to,
trusted and obeyed. Very minimally,
miracles got the attention of the
observers so that they listened to the
messenger's message. Preaching about
Christ, Peter had just said, "Men of
Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth
was a man accredited by God to you by
miracles, wonders and signs, which God
did among you through him, as you
yourselves know." Acts 2:22.

2) Also note the use of the definite
article "the" before "fellowship." We
often use "fellowship" in a general way,
such as, "we had a nice time of
fellowship." Seldom do we use phrase:
"the fellowship." It's as if something
specific is meant by this term, such as:
"a special relationship between fellow
believers." And indeed there was! See
how strong the bond was in v. 44-45.
The biblical term "fellowship" is close to
our idea of "family" or a "legal
partnership." It is indeed, powerful--
not anything like the church quite often
uses the term today.

3) Finally, does the phrase "breaking
bread" refer to simply prayer before
meals, when the bread was broken and
distributed to each person at the table,
or does it refer to the Lord's Supper,

specifically? Some suggest that before every meal we are to be mindful of Christ's sacrifice? Also is this more of an act of worship or fellowship? or both? Why? See 1 Cor. 10:14-22 and 11:17-34.

Colossians 1:9-14

Another significant passage that sheds some light on the early church's spiritual environment is Col. 1:9-14. In this passage Paul tells the Colossian community of believers that he is praying that God will fill them with the knowledge of his will and that they may please God in every way. He then goes on to list four "-ing" words or participles (words that are hybrids of both nouns [naming words] and verbs [doing words]. They both describe and do.).

9 For this reason,

since the day we heard about you,

we (Paul) have not stopped praying for you (Colossae) and

asking God to fill you

with the knowledge of his will

through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

10 And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord

(Sound like Eph. 4:1ff?)

and may please him in every way:

(How? Watch for the "-ing" words.)

- *bearing* fruit in every good work,

- *growing* in the knowledge of God,

- 11 *being* strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that

you may have great endurance and patience,

- and joyfully 12 *giving* thanks to the Father,

who has qualified you

to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.

13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves,

14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Comparing the Two Passages...

- Now let's compare our two lists from Acts 2:42-47 and Col. 1:9-14.

- Apostles' teaching (Acts 2)

- growing in the knowledge of God (Col. 1)

- the fellowship (Acts 2)

- bearing fruit in every good work (Col. 1)

- prayer (Acts 2)

- giving thanks to the Father (Col. 1)

That leaves...

- the breaking of bread (Acts 2)

- being strengthened with all power to endure (Col. 1)

Notes...

1) Notice how three elements from each list seem to match up. While these may not be direct correlations, a pattern does seem to emerge. a) *Worship*: including prayer, praise, and thanksgiving; b) *Discipleship*: to cause someone to learn or teach someone about God and his truth; c) *Fellowship and Stewardship*: using my God-given gifts, resources and abilities to build up or care for my spiritual family or others that God might lead me to minister or serve.

2) The two that are left over from each list are: “the breaking of bread” and “being strengthened with all power to patiently endure.” With respect to “the breaking of bread,” again this seems to be both an act of worship and fellowship or “communion.” And as far as “as being strengthened to patiently endure,” we can not over emphasize its importance enough, especially in a day when all too often many seem easily discouraged and fall away from their commitments, be it: marriage and family, friendship, country, community, work, or the body of Christ. Without commitment, there is no endurance, no success and no reward.

The Four Ships

1) Fellowship Bible has established several essential elements of a healthy growing church or individual member. This by no mean implies there are not more crucial elements that go into making a healthy thriving environment for a church body. These four along with “patient endurance” just serve as the essential starting foundation. They are: *Worship, Discipleship, Fellowship and Stewardship*. Together they make up the *Four Ships* of Fellowship. As Columbus’ three ships safely carried him through rough ocean waters to a new world, we believe these four ships will carry, not only our Body to his New World, but each individual passenger on those

ships as well. At least those who decide not to jump ship! *Patient endurance!*

2) Following is a more detailed breakdown of what is included within each of these categories. Notice when one considers all the various facets of each essential, there is plenty of room for growth and maturity. On the other hand, please don’t miss the simplicity of each essential either. Anyone can start wherever they are and grow. The key is not to ignore any one category. Growth is a long-term project or process. One cannot entirely focus on *Worship* to the neglect of *Discipleship, Fellowship or Stewardship*. By the same token one cannot focus entirely on *Discipleship* without being sensitive to *Worship or Fellowship*. All are needed for balanced, healthy Christ-like growth.

Growth =

+ Worship
Praise, Petition,
Thanksgiving

+ Discipleship
Bible Overview,
Basics, Study,
Application

+ Fellowship / Stew
ardship

Relationships,
Commitment,
Love
Purpose, Gifts,
Talents,
Resources

+ Hardship

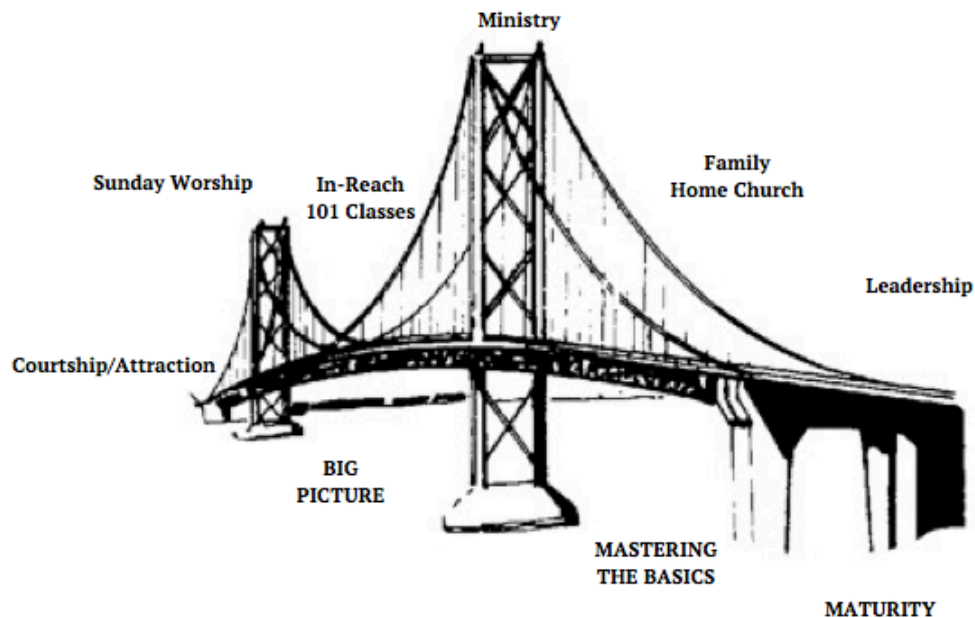
Patient
Endurance

Chapter 3

The Spiritual Growth Bridge

*How Fellowship Creates Its
Environment for Spiritual Growth*

Fellowship's Spiritual Growth Bridge



Chapter 3

The Spiritual Growth Bridge

Just as with everything in life, *form follows function* for the Body of Christ, the Church, as well.

- **The Body's Function** is to *Create a Biblical Environment for Christ-like Spiritual Growth and Maturity* (Eph. 4).
- **How?** The Biblical Environment for Spiritual Growth *is made up of several essential Ships* (Acts 2; Col. 1).
 - *the Worship of God*—a genuine, heartfelt acknowledgement that God is the standard of all value and worth, and therefore,
...*worthy to be adored* or worshiped,
...*prayerfully called and depended upon* in our time of need and
...*joyfully thanked* for his gracious, sovereign deliverance.
 - *Discipleship in his Truth*—the Scriptures...His inspired Word!
 - *Fellowship/Stewardship*—using and developing one's gifts and abilities to spiritually benefit others...
 - despite *the Hardships* of life—doing it again and again and again--Perseverance!

Form: *The Spiritual Growth Bridge*—the functioning Body of Christ (Eph. 4; Rom. 12; 1 Cor. 12; 1 Peter 4).

The Bridge to Spiritual Maturity

• *Christ-like Servant Leadership*

• *Home Church and Ministry Involvement*

• *Children and Youth Learning Center*

• *Fellowship 101*

• *Sunday Morning Fellowship*

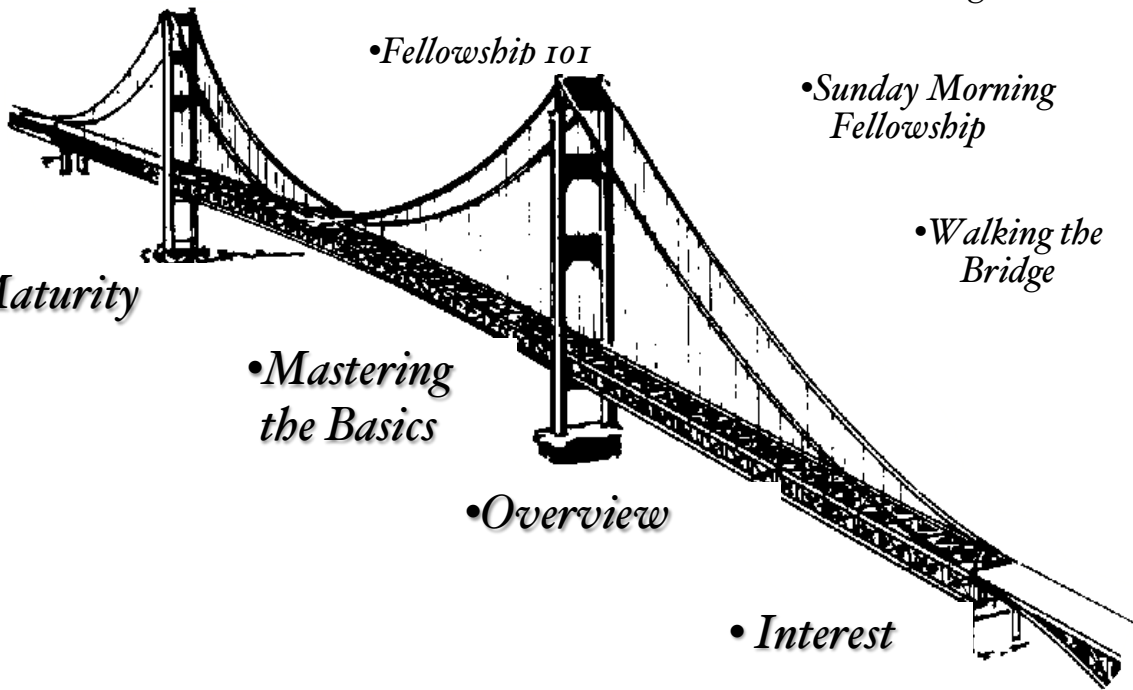
• *Walking the Bridge*

• *Maturity*

• *Mastering the Basics*

• *Overview*

• *Interest*



Chapter 4

Review

Chapter 4

Review

• *Form Follows Function* is true for the Church.

• What is a Church's function? A Church's function is **Growth**--Spiritual Growth--to become more like Christ--as individuals and as a Body.

• *What Environment* best encourages this growth?

• *The Four Ships*: Worship of God; Discipleship in His Truth; Fellowship with One Another; Stewardship of our Gifts and Abilities, all with "*patient endurance*."

• Without these elements you will not grow healthily!

• Every Church should be passionately committed to these "Ships" within its ministry forms.

• How does Fellowship attempt to accomplish its function utilizing these "Ships of Growth"?

• *The Spiritual Growth Bridge*.

• The Body functions as a Bridge, which allows interested seekers in God to walk over the difficult river of life to spiritual growth and maturity.

• It has two major supporting structures or towers:

1) the *Sunday Morning* gathering of the entire Body to worship God and be discipled in His word, as well as the commitment (fellowship) to serve (stewardship) each other; this also includes our children's and youth ministries.

2) *Weekly Home Churches*: these small groups of committed believers essentially seek to accomplish the same biblical goals. They just attempt to do it with more support, feedback, and accountability, just like the early New Testament House Churches.

• Between the two main supporting structures is the ministry of assimilating 3) (*In Reach*) those that attend Fellowship's Sunday Morning Worship into our Body. This includes becoming involved in the strengthening of the Bridge (Ministry) and being supported (Home Churches).

• Currently *Fellowship 101 and Home Church Classes* are designed to help people make the transition from attendance to involvement. Note: by no means does this limit other opportunities to become involved or discipled. It's just that when you are a *Quick Mart* trying to become an *AppleMarket*, you have to be committed to your basics first. As you grow, more specialization can take place.

• Ultimately as one grows and matures through his/her involvement in these ministry forms, one should mature into 4) (*Leadership/Mission*) of these ministry forms or within their community or world.

• Also it is Fellowship's desire to begin to reach out more into our community and cultivate interest in Jesus Christ, His Body, and genuine spiritual growth as our Bridge becomes more complete and can handle the spiritual transportation of more and more interested seekers 5) (*OutReach*). Maybe even you can help us to develop this part of the Bridge.

• And as always, the Bridge is continually maturing and changing to better accomplish its mandate *to mature believers into the servant image of Jesus Christ*

Chapter 5

Theological Foundations

Historical Protestant Orthodoxy

Chapter 5

Fellowship's

Doctrinal

Foundation is one of

Historic Protestant

Christianity.

1) We believe in the Trinity of God. One God. Three Persons: The Father, Son and Spirit.

2) We believe in His divinely inspired word.

3) We believe a person is made righteous and totally forgiven through God's grace, solely by faith in the Son's death and resurrection.

4) We believe a person personally grows and matures as one discovers in the Body of Christ the Spirit's life-changing truth and power.

Note: There are many more beliefs, values, and teachings that Fellowship holds dear. If we were to list them all, this section would grow immensely.

The final responsibility for the Body's core beliefs, values and interpretation of the Scripture lies with the Body's Elders. It is our hope that within the safe environment of this Eldership, the individual believer would come to develop a love, study, understanding, application of the Scriptures that transcends rote doctrinal beliefs or teachings. Our desire is that as a part of your growth in Christ, that by your own self-study and wrestling with the text,

you come to know why you believe what you believe. The above list only serves as a beginning foundation.

If you have any other questions or concerns, please contact one of the Body's Elders, or the Body's Senior Teaching Elder.

"Charismata"

Because of the emphasis of the more spectacular sign gifts within the Church today, the Elders of Fellowship Bible feel the need to explain our position on these gifts.

First of all, we believe no less and no more than the Scripture teaches. We allow the Scripture (primarily 1 Cor. 12-14) to regulate the gifts.

Second, we believe that all the Spirit's gifts or "graces" (charismata) are still available today, including the spiritual gift of language, tongues or "glossa."

Third, the reason we hold this view is because "the Perfect," Christ Jesus, has not yet returned (1 Cor. 13:10). We also lean towards a known language interpretation of the word "glossa," as it infers, and not just an "ecstatic utterance," as some practice.

Fourth, whether this is the case or not, it's use as Scripture (1 Cor. 14) indicates is to be highly regulated:

1) There must be an interpreter present (14:27-28).

2) Only two or three should speak, and only one at a time (14:27); not everyone at the same time, as is the custom of many churches.

For a clear understanding of this controversial gift's regulation, we suggest a slow and patient reading of this very clear passage.

3) If there is no interpreter present, the person should keep silent and speak to God and himself (14:28).

In summary, we believe that the gift or grace is 1) publicly possible, but 2) highly regulated and 3) privately accommodated.

Theological Foundations Further Explained...

*1) We Believe in the
Trinity: One God; Three
Persons: the Father, Son
and Spirit.*

One God...

*In both Old and New
Testaments...*

OT...Deut. 6:4 Hear, O
Israel: **The LORD our God, the
LORD is one.**

NT...James 2:19 You believe
that there is **one God**. Good!
Even the demons believe that --
and shudder.

Three Persons...

*The Father is God (many
passages)*

1Pet. 1:2 ...who have been
chosen according

to the foreknowledge of **God
the Father**,
through the sanctifying work of
the **Spirit**,
for obedience to **Jesus Christ**
and sprinkling by his blood...

*The Son is God (John 1, Titus
2)*

In the introduction to his
gospel, the apostle John
describes the Son as God in the
flesh, the revealed Word of
God who created the
Universe...

John 1:1...

In the beginning was **the Word**,
and **the Word** was with God,
and **the Word was God**.

2 He (the Word) was with God
in the beginning.

3 Through him all things were
made;

without him nothing was made
that has been made...

14 **The Word became flesh**
and made his dwelling among
us.

We have seen his glory,
the glory of **the One and Only**,
who came from the Father,
full of grace and truth...

18 ...No one has ever seen God,
but God the One and Only,
who is at the Father's side,
has made him known.

*Jesus refers to himself by
God's personal name:
Yahweh or "I Am"... "I
Exist"*

God reveals his name to Moses
at the burning bush...

Exod. 3:14 God said to Moses,

"I AM WHO I AM.

This is what you are to say to
the Israelites: `

I AM has sent me to you."

15 God also said to Moses,

"Say to the Israelites,

`The LORD, the God of your
fathers

--the God of Abraham,

he God of Isaac and

the God of Jacob

--has sent me to you.'

This is my name FOREVER,
the name by which I am to be
remembered
from GENERATION TO
GENERATION...

Almost fifteen centuries later,
Jesus tells us religious
opposition...

John 8:58 "I tell you the truth,"
Jesus answered,

**"before Abraham was born, I
AM!"**

Three decades later, in writing
to one of his young pastors,
Titus, the Apostle Paul writes...

Titus 2:13 while we wait for
the blessed hope

--the GLORIOUS appearing
of **our great God and Savior,**
Jesus Christ...

Note: In Greek grammar "**Our
great God**" and "**Savior, Jesus
Christ**" must refer to one and
the same person. Both personal
nouns, God and Savior, are
preceded by definite articles
(kind of like a "the" in English,
but not used here because it is
not pronounced) and are joined
by the Greek conjunction "kai"
("and" in English). This is
commonly referred to as
Granville Sharpe's Rule.

If Paul's intent was NOT to
refer to the same person, but
rather to two DIFFERENT
individuals (let's say for
example, God the Father and
God the Son, or God and Jesus),
then this would be the only
exception of the G.S. rule in
N.T. It is clear, Paul is referring
to Jesus as God.

The Spirit is God

Early in the history of the
church, Peter accuses Ananias
of having lied to the Holy Spirit
whom he later calls God. Acts
5...

By inference the Holy Spirit is
equal to God.

Acts 5:3 Then Peter said,
"Ananias, how is it that Satan
has so filled your heart
that **you have lied to the Holy Spirit**
and have kept for yourself
some of the money you
received for the land?

4 Didn't it belong to you before
it was sold?
And after it was sold, wasn't
the money at your disposal?
What made you think of doing
such a thing?
**You have not lied to men but
to God."**

*Father, Son and Spirit are
not the same person,*
as they are each mentioned together as
separate persons...

Matt 3, 28, 1 Cor. 3, 1 Peter 1...

At Jesus' Baptism
Matt. 3:16...

- the Son...

Matt. 3:16 As soon as **Jesus** was
baptized,
he went up out of the water.

- the Spirit...

At that moment heaven was
opened,
and he **saw the Spirit of God**
descending like a dove and
lighting on him.

- the Father...

17 And a voice from heaven
said,
"This is my Son, whom I love;
with him I am well pleased."

*After Jesus' Resurrection, when He
commissions and sends out His Apostles (or
"sent ones") with His heavenly authority
and message...Matt. 28:19*

Therefore go and make
disciples of all nations,
baptizing them

- **in the name of the Father**
- **and of the Son**
- **and of the Holy Spirit,**

*Paul mentions all Three together
as separate persons...2 Cor. 13:14*

May the grace of the **Lord Jesus Christ,**

and the love of **God,**

and the fellowship of the **Holy Spirit**

be with you all.

Eph. 4:3 Make every effort to
keep the unity of the Spirit

(How?) through the bond of
peace.

(Why? Because...)

4 There is one body and **one Spirit—**

just as you were called to one
hope

when you were called--

5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism;

6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Summary...

Therefore,
God is exists as a Trinity or Tri-Unity...

One Nature...

(God—the “Unity”)

with all the divine attributes limited to but one infinite being...all-knowing, all-present, all-powerful.

But Three Distinct Persons... (the “Tri-”--Father, Son and Spirit).

At the same time, the Son exists as One Person/Two Natures—

Note: It was absolutely necessary for mankind’s redemption for the Son to be both God and man (two natures) in one person (Jesus).

Man so he could die (because by definition, God, being infinite and all and all powerful, can not die).

and **God** so his death could spiritually atone for anything he wanted it to atone for (because he is God; if

he was only a man, then his death as a martyr could only serve as inspiration, but it certainly could do nothing theologically or divinely-speaking for Man himself)--in this case, the sins of the entire world.

2) We Believe in His Divinely Inspired Word.

Scripture is God-breathed (inspired)... 2 Tim 3:16; 2 Peter 1,3.

Paul wrote to Timothy...
2 Tim. 3:16... All Scripture is God-breathed

and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,

Jesus said during his Sermon on the Mount...Matt. 5:18... I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear,

not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen,

will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.

Peter wrote...
2 Pet. 1:21... For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man,

**but men spoke from God
as they were carried along by
the Holy Spirit.**

*Peter authenticates Paul's
writings
as Divinely-Inspired Scripture.*

2 Pet. 3:15 Bear in mind that
our Lord's patience means
salvation,
just as our dear brother **Paul**
also wrote you
with the **wisdom that God**
gave him.

16 He writes the same way **in**
all his letters,
speaking in them of these
matters.
His letters contain some things
that are hard to understand,

which ignorant and unstable
people distort,
as they do **the other Scriptures,**
to their own destruction.

Summary...

We believe the Scriptures
were **inspired by God**
without error
in their original manuscripts.

Note: We do not
have those exact
original
manuscripts, but
don't panic...

We do have
approximately 5,000
ancient complete or
partial portions of
the New Testament
dating from the late
2nd century A. D. or
about one hundred
years after the close
of the New
Testament;

No other work of
antiquity comes
close. Not even in
the same ball park.

Via the process
called "textual
criticism," the
comparing of all the
different
manuscripts
according to
different regions of
origin (Western-
Rome, Byzantine-
Antioch, north of
Jerusalem, and
Alexandrian-
Egypt), scholars are
able to reconstruct
the original
manuscripts with
amazing accuracy.

In other words, our
current versions of
the New Testament
are extremely
trustworthy.

Note: Our earliest
written and

complete version of the Hebrew Old Testament (MT) is from about a thousand years after Christ.

But with the discovery of the now famous Dead Sea Scrolls, which date to around the time of Christ (a thousand years before our earliest written manuscripts of the Old Testament), significant portions of the Old Testament have been validated exactly.

Even earlier than these two sources and about 250 years before Christ or B.C., seventy Jewish scholars undertook the task of translating the Hebrew OT into Greek. That version that we have today is called the Septuagint (LXX)—the Greek OT.

Our earliest manuscripts of the LXX date from the 4th century A.D.

*3) We Believe
through God's Grace...
His merciful favor...*

*a Person is
totally forgiven
for all his or her Sins
(wrongs)...*

*declared Righteous
before a holy and perfect
God*

*...and Saved (or delivered
from) God's just
judgment and eternal
wrath...*

*Solely by Faith (trust in;
not any MAN-MADE Work[s]...)
in the Son's (the God-
Man's) Death and
Resurrection.*

*In other words, man cannot and
does not earn his own salvation
before his holy, righteous, all-
knowing, all-powerful and all-
present Creator.*

It would be more impossible for a man to achieve a perfect righteousness before God than it would be for him, using his own power, to swim from the beaches of California to Hawaii. In fact, think of the impossibility of being completely and perfectly righteous before a completely and perfectly righteous God

like this. We could all line up on the shores of southern California and begin our swim. Some might make it ten yards before drowning, others a hundred yards; some might even make it several miles; a rare exception perhaps fifty or a hundred miles. But NO ONE—ABSOLUTELY NO ONE MAKES IT to Hawaii's shores! The distance is too great. We all drown. We all die sooner or later. No one is good or talented enough. This is the way it is with our righteousness. Paul writes in Romans 3, quoting a Psalm, "We are all sinners. We ALL fall short of God's (majestic) glory."

But what if there was a divine boat, bridge or plane that could take us from the shores of southern California to those of Hawaii—a boat of grace, a boat of forgiveness, a boat piloted by ONE who was perfect and whose sacrificial death atones for our sins and now makes us righteous before a holy God.

And all God asks is that we accept, receive, believe in or trust this gift, this grace, this mercy, this divine peace offering through faith, or believing in it. Sounds so simple, and yet most of the world continues to reject the divine olive branch handed down by heaven, choosing to follow our own path and be our own gods...in the end, to our own just destruction.

Salvation by Faith...

Eph 2, John 3, Rom 3, 10.

Paul writes...

Eph. 2:8 For it is by **grace** you have been **saved**, through **faith**

--and this not from yourselves, it is the **gift of God**—

-9 **not by works**,
so that no one can boast.

John, quoting Jesus, wrote...

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever **BELIEVES** in him shall not **perish** but have **ETERNAL LIFE**."

*Paul writes...*Rom. 3:19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the **whole world held accountable to God**.

20 Therefore **NO ONE will be declared righteous in his sight** by observing the law;

rather, through the law we become **CONSCIOUS (aware) of sin**.

21 But **NOW a righteousness from God, apart from law**, has been made known,

to which the Law and the Prophets testify.

22 This **righteousness from God** comes through **faith in Jesus Christ** to **all who believe**.

There is no difference,

23 for **all have sinned**

and **fall short** of the **glory of God**,

24 and are **justified** (declared righteous) **FREELY** by his **grace** (mercy)

through the **redemption** (the paying off of one's indebtedness)

that came by **Christ Jesus**.

25 God presented him as a **sacrifice of atonement**,

through **faith in his blood** (death).

He did this to demonstrate his justice,

because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished--

26 he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time,

so as to be **just** (the righteous Judge)

and the **one who justifies** those who have **faith in Jesus...**
(the Sacrifice...the Payment)

Paul goes on to write...Rom. 4:3

What does the Scripture say?
"Abraham **believed God**, and it was **credited** (accounted) to him

as **righteousness**."

22 This is why "it was **credited** to him as **righteousness**."

23 The words "it was **credited** to him" were written not for him alone,

24 but also **for us**, to whom God **will credit righteousness** --for us **who believe in him** who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.

25 He was delivered over to **death for our sins** and was **raised to life** for our **justification...**

5:1 ...Therefore, since we have been **justified** (declared righteous) **through faith**,

we have **peace** with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

2 through whom we have gained access by **faith into this grace** in which we now stand.

And we rejoice in the **hope** of the **glory of God** (that we shall see God in all his glory).

Continuing, Paul writes...

Rom. 10:9...That if you **confess**
with your **mouth**,
"Jesus is Lord,"

and **believe** in your **heart**

that God raised him from the
dead,
you will **be saved**.

10 For it is with your **heart** that
you **believe** and are **justified**,

and it is with your **mouth** that
you **confess** and are **saved**.

11 As the Scripture says,

**"Anyone who trusts in him
will never be put to shame."**

12 For there is no difference
between Jew and Gentile

--the same Lord is Lord of all
and richly blesses ALL who call
on him,

13 for, "Everyone
who **calls on the name** of the
Lord
will be saved."

Summary...

So in the end, God in his mercy,
has built the bridge—has
provided the boat—the sacrificial
death of his Son, the God-man, Jesus,
which both satisfies God's perfect justice
and holiness—he cannot tolerate evil or
sin...his righteous power would
automatically destroy it—while at the
same time, mercifully providing the
WAY back home. All that is required of

man: to trust; to believe; to humbly
accept the truth that while we can't, or
could never, be good enough to earn
our entrance into heaven, there is a
sacrifice that does provide the way. His
name is Jesus, and through faith in his
sin-atoning death and resurrection, I
have forgiveness, I have righteousness, I
am a child of God, I have an eternal
inheritance, I have the Spirit of God, I
have hope, I have power, I have truth, I
am not alone, and forever I will be with
God, not because of anything I did. I
couldn't, but because of what he did. I
was loved. I am loved. I will be loved
forever and ever. This is salvation. This
is hope.

*Now what's after Initial or
Beginning Faith in God or Christ?
What's next? What's after
positional salvation?*

*Practical Sanctification...the day
by day journey of becoming more
like our positional, theological or
heavenly identity in Christ.*

*4) We believe a person
personally grows and
spiritually matures as one
discovers within the body
of Christ the Spirit's life-
changing truth and power.*

*We are back to where this study
began: the purpose of the church—
spiritual growth or spiritual
maturity...and the practical,
ongoing and spiritual attempt to
create the biblical environment of
the "-ships" (worship, discipleship,
fellowship/stewardship despite the
hardships which encourages or*

fosters an Eph. 4 or Christ-like spiritual growth and maturity.

Sanctification simply means to become holy. The Greek word *hagios* means *saint* or *holy one*. To be *holy* means having been ritually cleansed or made pure and thus useful or acceptable to the gods, or in our case, the God. Believers or saints are made holy through the blood or sacrifice of the Son.

But the writer of Hebrews also writes...

Heb. 11:14 because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever...

those who are *being made holy*.

So while there is a positional or theological cleansing and thus a belonging to God for his use and purpose, there is also an ongoing process of spiritual sanctification or *being made holy* that takes place as well.

Through Christ we have the ticket—the Spirit—to the big dance, heaven or the ball game. This is salvation. Now through being sanctified, made practically useful, holy or clean, we are learning to play the game, moving from just being at the game to learning to play and enjoy the game—daily obedience to the Spirit's will. In contrast to salvation, which is instantaneous, sanctification, or becoming useful and holy to God, takes place for the rest of our lives. Through trial and error, confession, repentance, telling the truth, falling down and then getting back up again and again, understanding his Word and being held accountable to live it, using and developing our gifts and talents for the purpose we were created for, day by day, year by year, we become more like our Lord, more obedient, more trusting, more like Jesus and less like ourselves, more dependent upon the Spirit's leading and less dependent upon our fleshly or human instinct, more courageous, more sacrificial.

But note and this is very important: we do this because we want to be more like Christ, not because we want to earn God's love. We have his love. Rather sanctification is a natural response to or thanksgiving for having received God's grace, mercy, favor, salvation, forgiveness, blessing and love. In other words, we want to experientially come to know and enjoy what we have been given in Christ.

As Paul writes in Philippians 3:10...

I WANT to KNOW Christ...

and the **power** of his resurrection and the **fellowship** of sharing in his sufferings,

becoming like him in his death,

(and Why?)

11 and so, somehow, to attain to (live up to what I have in Christ through faith)

the **Resurrection** from the dead (eternal life).

Essentially what Paul seems to be saying here is--Thanks God, for loving me first, and because you have loved me first, I want to love you back. Therefore, there exists such an immeasurable debt of love, for which I will never be able to repay you enough.

1) We are Given the Spirit at New Birth...

Paul writes...

Eph. 1:11 In him we (Jews) were also **chosen**, having been **predestined** according to the plan of him (God)

who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will,

(Why were we chosen or predestined...)

12 in order that we (Jews), who were the first to hope in Christ,

might be for the **praise of his glory**.

13 And you (Gentiles; non-Jews) also were **included in Christ** when you heard the word of truth,

the gospel (good news) of your salvation.

Having believed, You (Gentiles) were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit,

14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance

until the redemption (the buying back; paying off the debts of) of those who are God's possession (the Jews)

--to the praise of his glory.

Again Paul writes...

1 Cor. 12:7...

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good....

13 For we were all baptized (immersed; dipped) **by one Spirit into ONE body**

--whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free

-and we were all **given the one Spirit** to drink.

2) Since we have been given the Spirit, we now are to learn to live by the Spirit as opposed to our Flesh or Sinful Nature (our natural desire to rebel or sin)...

Gal. 5:16 So I say, live by the Spirit,

and you will not gratify the desires of the **sinful nature**.

17 For the **sinful nature** desires what is contrary to the **Spirit**,

and the **Spirit** what is contrary to the **sinful nature**.

They are in conflict with each other,

so that you do not do what you want.

18 But if you are **led by the Spirit**, you are not under law.

19 The acts of the **sinful nature** are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery;

20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions

21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.

I warn you,
as I did before,
that those **who live like this**
will **NOT** inherit the kingdom of God.

22 But the **fruit of the Spirit**

is love, joy, peace, patience,
kindness, goodness,
faithfulness,

23 gentleness and self-control.

Against such things there is no
law.

24 Those who belong to Christ
Jesus
have (**through initial faith in
Christ**)

crucified

the sinful nature
with its passions and desires.

(Our sin nature was judged,
condemned and atoned for on
the Cross. Otherwise, we
would not be able to see the
face of God...

And yet, there is still the
fight...there is still a struggle
with our sinful nature. Paul
writes in Rom. 7, "I want to do
right, but I still do wrong.")

Paul continues...

25 **Since we live by the Spirit,**
let us **keep in step with the
Spirit.**

26 Let us not become conceited,
provoking and envying each
other...

(which is our natural everyday
tendency...)

*How do we keep in step with the
Spirit?*

Paul writes...

*Put on a New Self, as you Take off
an Old Self...*

Eph 4:17 So I tell you this,
and insist on it in the Lord,

**that you must no longer live
as the Gentiles do,**
in the futility of their thinking.

18 They are **darkened in their
understanding**
and **separated from the life of
God**

because of the **ignorance** that is
in them
due to the **hardening of their
hearts.**

19 Having **lost all sensitivity,**
they have given themselves
over to **sensuality**
so as to **indulge** in every kind
of **impurity,**

with a **continual lust** for more
(it is never enough).

20 You, however,
did not come to know Christ
that way.

21 Surely you heard of him
and were taught in him

in accordance with the truth
that is in Jesus.

22 You were taught,
with regard to your **former
way of life,**

to put off your **old self,**
which is being **corrupted**
by its deceitful desires;

23 **to be made new
in the attitude of your minds**
(your thinking);

24 and to put on the **new self,**
created to be like God

**in true righteousness and
holiness.**

*Where do we begin? By telling the
truth...*

25 Therefore each of you
must **put off falsehood**
and **speak truthfully** to his
neighbor,

(Why?)

for we are ALL members of one
body...

*Paul continues versus being
controlled by wine, be controlled or
filled by the Spirit via worship.*

5:17 ...Therefore do not be
foolish,

but understand what the Lord's
will is.

18 **Do not get drunk** on wine,
which leads to debauchery.

Instead, be filled with the
Spirit.

19 Speak to one another
with psalms, hymns and
spiritual songs.

**Sing and make music in your
heart** to the Lord,

20 always **giving thanks** to
God the Father for everything,
in the name of our Lord Jesus
Christ.

(And...

21 **Submit** to one another
out of reverence for Christ...

*Being Transformed vs. Being
Conformed*

Rom. 12:1 Therefore, I urge
you, brothers,
in view of God's mercy,

to **offer your bodies** (YOU;
yourself)

as **living sacrifices**
(as opposed to a dead sacrifice),

holy and pleasing to God

--this is your **spiritual act of
worship.**

2 Do not conform
any longer to the **pattern of**
this world,

but be **transformed**
by the **renewing of your mind**
(your thinking).

Then you will be able to test...

and approve **what God's will is**

--his good, pleasing and perfect
will.

*SUMMARY...After faith,
after salvation, after gaining our
inheritance in heaven as redeemed
children of God, there is growth,
there is learning, there is the
Spirit—being led by, inspired, walking
with, keeping in step with, being filled
with God's Spirit. There is the WALK,
the Christian Walk. There is the journey,
dying to myself and my instinctive self-
centeredness and living to God's Spirit,
caring and serving others and not just
myself, seeing the bigger, spiritual
picture, seeing life from God's
perspective. This is sanctification. This is
growth. This should be what takes place
in the body and family of Christ—
growing and maturing believers—God's
children.*

Ultimately, this requires a change in the
way we think--an exchange of old,
sweaty, dirty clothes—sinful, hurtful,
evil and wrong attitudes, beliefs and
behaviors--for new clean clothes—
righteous, good and beneficial attitudes,
values, beliefs and behaviors.

Spiritual growth is about
growing up, but growing up
with a news lens, a new pair of

spiritual eyes, our Creator's
eyes, as opposed to our human,
self-centered lens—the lens that
makes me my own god—the
center of my own spiritual
universe...the one that puts
myself and my corrupted needs
and wants ahead of others.

This is why we need God's
Spirit, his Word and the Body
of Christ to grow. The problem
arises when man does an end-run
around God's intended plan for our
spiritual development and deceptively
and insidiously (slowly) corrupts our
understanding of his Word and the
application of his Church.

Summary...

*1) God Exists...as Three
Persons...*

God exists; He exists as a Trinity or **Tri-
Unity**: Father, Son and Spirit. (James 1;
Jn. 1; Acts 5; Mt 28.)

2) He has Spoken in His Word...

God has revealed himself through his
Creation, his Son and His Inspired
Word (2 Tim. 3; 2 Peter 1).

*3) He tells us how through his Son
we can Spiritually Restore Our
Broken Relationship with Him in
Heaven Forever (Our Salvation)...*

God offers his fallen creatures
reconciliation via faith in His Son and
his Son's sacrificial death and
resurrection (John 3; Eph. 2; Rom. 10).

4) He then tell us how through his Spirit, Word and Church we can Practically Grow and Become More like His Son today (Our Sanctification, becoming more useful or godly)...

We grow and become more like His Son via His Spirit's Truth and Power (and truth is power). Gal. 5; Eph. 4-5; Col. 3; Rom. 8 and 12.)

Chapter 6

Gracious Giving

Biblical Principles of Giving
A Matter of the Heart

Chapter 6

Fellowship's Principles of Giving

Paul to the Early Church...

*"But just as you excel in everything
—in faith, in speech, in knowledge,
in complete earnestness and in your love for us—
see that you **also excel***

in this grace of giving." 2 Cor. 8:7

1. Worshipfully, First Fruits...

(like there is a Heaven, invest in the future...Luke 12:13-34; Prov. 3:9-10; Luke 16:1ff; Luke 21:1-4; Mal. 1:6ff; 3:6ff)

2. Consistently...(1 Cor. 16:1ff)

3. (As Abraham/Jacob) Shoot for a Tenth or More...(Gen. 14, 28)

4. Immediate Spiritual Family First...(1 Tim. 5:8; Gal. 6:9)

5. As the Macedonians, Sacrificially... (2 Cor. 8-9)

Chapter 7

Servant-Leaders

*How Does Fellowship Govern Itself?
Biblical Eldership and Deacons*

Chapter 7

Biblical Eldership

Fellowship Bible Church of
Branson, Mo.
Revised 1995

Introduction: *Is Eldership Really Biblical?*

For many, Biblical Elder Rule is a foreign form of church government. But it is very Biblical, and as so often is the case, it flies in the face of much church tradition.

Most often the selection of leadership in the Bible is a spiritual process of which God is in charge. This was true of the Patriarchs: Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Joshua; the Judges: Gideon, Deborah, and Samson; the Prophets: Samuel, Elisha, Daniel, and Jeremiah; the Kings: Saul, David, Solomon; the Apostles, including, Peter, James, and John, of which even Peter seemed to play even a more prominent role. There is also the selection of Judas' replacement by the casting of lots. As well as Paul's selection by God to be an Apostle. And finally, there are Paul's instructions and examples of appointing men of godly character to be elders.

One of the reasons this selection or appointing process makes some uncomfortable is the seeming lack of control or say so. When we vote we feel like we have some say, or at least someone can say, "you had your chance! You could have voted or gotten out and campaigned for the candidate of your choice." Often, even in this seemingly fair system, we are left dissatisfied or disillusioned. But we hold on to it, because we know there's always hope to vote the "bums" out of office come next election.

It seems God views leadership differently than we do. God doesn't seem as concerned with how it's done, but rather how does leadership function. The nation, body, or family is held accountable by its leadership. Very rarely do the people hold their leadership accountable. In other words, if there is good leadership, the people seek to serve God and are blessed. On the other hand, if there is bad leadership, the people do not follow God, and God allows them to suffer the consequences.

In other terms, the sheep follow the shepherd, and not vice versa. Spiritually, over the years this has proven true within the Church. The leadership sets the pace for the rest of the flock to follow. Most sheep are content to stay in familiar pastures as opposed to by faith stepping out of their comfort zone to be used by God to accomplish great things.

In the final analysis it comes down to obedience and trust. While no leadership is perfect, the only question that matters is: are these men of upright integrity seeking God and his will? If they are, we are to trust God and follow his leading through these men.

Hebrews 13:17

**Obey your leaders and
submit to their authority.**

**They keep watch over you
as men who must give an
account.**

**Obey them
so that their work will be a joy,
not a burden,
for that would be of no
advantage to you.**

What do Elders do?

•They Direct the Affairs of the Body.

•**1Tim. 5:17.** The **elders** who **direct the affairs of the church well** are worthy of double honor, especially those whose **work is preaching and teaching.**

•**Acts 11:29-30.** The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea. This they did sending their gift to the **elders** by Barnabus and Saul.

•**Acts 15:1-6.** Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved." 2 This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were **appointed**, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem **to see the apostles and elders about this question.** 3 The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the brothers very glad. 4 When they came to Jerusalem, they were **welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported** everything God had done through them. 5 Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses." 6 **The apostles and elders met to consider this question.**

•**Acts 15:22-23.** Then **the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided** to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, two men who were **leaders among the brothers.** 23 With them they sent the following letter:

The apostles and elders, your brothers,
To the Gentile believers in Antioch,
Syria and Cilicia: Greetings.

•**Acts 16:4.** As they traveled from town to town, they delivered **the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey.**

At Fellowship the Elders are responsible for establishing the Body's philosophy of ministry, or biblically, why the church does what it does. They are also responsible for major policy decision and long-term vision. The Body under leadership and coordination of the Ministry Staff is responsible for carrying out and developing the day to day ministry of the church. (Minutes of Board Meetings or Financial Reports are available on request.)

•They Teach the Word and Guard the Flock.

•**Acts 20:17, 28-32.** 17 From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the **elders** of the church . . . 28 **Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock** of which the Holy Spirit has made you **overseers.** Be **shepherds** of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. 29 I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. 30 Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. 31 So **be on your guard!** Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears. 32 "Now I commit you to God and to **the word of his grace**, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. Also see 1 Tim. 5:17.

•**Titus 1:9.** He must **hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught**, so that he can **encourage** others by sound doctrine and **refute** those who oppose it.

The Elders are responsible for establishing and guarding Fellowship's Evangelical Protestant Theological parameters and positions --in other words, Fellowship's theological teachings and boundaries.

Also important is the overall discipleship of the Body, especially with regard to the teaching, study, understanding, and application of the Scriptures.

• *They Equip and Empower the Body's Members to Grow and Serve.*

• **Eph. 4:11-16.** It was he who gave some to be **apostles**, some to be **prophets**, some to be **evangelists**, and some to be **pastors and teachers**, **12 to prepare God's people for works of service**, so that the body of Christ may be built up **13** until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. **14** Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. **15** Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. **16** From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Elders through the Staff and other Ministry Leaders are responsible that the Body's members are cared for, assisted, equipped, and held accountable to grow in ministry maturity and leadership.
Elders p. 37

• *They Recognize Spiritual Giftedness.*

• **1Tim. 4:11-16.** Command and teach these things. **12** Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity. **13** Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. **14 Do not neglect your gift**, which was given you through a prophetic message when **the body of elders laid their hands on you**. **15** Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. **16** Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

The Elders feel that this recognition not only validates the individual member as to the importance of his or her gift to the Body, but it also serves as an example and encouragement to others to discover and develop their own gifts.

• *They Pray for the Afflicted.*

• **James 5:13-16.** Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. **14** Is any one of you sick? He should call **the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord**. **15** And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. **16** Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

This is an area the Elders are still probing. Our desire is to do more in this capacity. It must also be understood that all prayer is subject to God's will and right to rule as creator and not ours. See Luke 22:42 and 1 John 5:14.

Another possible interpretation of James 5 could be that the sickness here is due to sin or anger and the resulting guilt or shame and its repression produces a

depression as opposed to the powerfully spiritual, emotional, and physical healing act of public confession.

Again according to most traditions the duty of visiting the sick usually is the responsibility of the pastor or priest. But again, while this may be comforting, it is not biblical. If someone is just sick or in the hospital, the first primary responsibility lies with the members of the Body to support this person, especially those gifted in mercy. How much more powerful of a witness, when the entire Body takes the responsibility for caring for each other. If the person desires the elders to come and lay hands and pray for them, this becomes a shared elder ministry. Again it is the Pastor/Teacher's job to equip the Body to minister, not to do the ministry for them.

What are the Qualifications of an Elder?

• *They are to be Spiritually Mature.*

Titus 1:6-9...

An **elder** must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient.

7 Since an **overseer** is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless -- not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain.

8 Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good,

who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined.

9 He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

1 Tim. 3:2-7...

Now the **overseer** must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, 3 not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.

4 He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. 5 (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?)

6 He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil.

7 He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.

• *They Aspire to Serve.*

• 1 Tim. 3:6. Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an **overseer**, he desires a noble task.

• **1 Peter 5:1-4.** To the **Elders** among you, I appeal as a fellow **elder**, a witness of Christ's suffering and one who will share in the glory to be revealed. Be **shepherds** of God's flock that is under your care, **serving as overseers --not because you must**, but because you are **willing**, as God wants you to be; not

greedy for money, but **eager to serve**; **not lording** it over those entrusted to you, but **being examples** to the flock. And when the **Chief Shepherd** appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

An Elder should exhibit three primary characteristics:

1) Spiritual and Emotional Maturity (as defined in above passages).

How many Elders are there?

- *More than One.*

- **Phil. 1:1.** Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, **To all the saints** in Christ Jesus at Philippi, **together with the overseers and deacons:**

Also see Acts 20:17, 1 Tim. 4:14 , and James 5:14 below. The Elders were a group or body of men.

How does one become an Elder?

- *They are Appointed.*

- **Acts 14:23.** Paul and Barnabas **appointed elders** for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.

- **Titus 1:5-9.** The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and **appoint elders** in every town, as I directed you.

While the Elders are the final accountability for this appointment at Fellowship, the Body is vitally involved in this process.

2) Commitment; especially of time; It's a demanding call.

3) Teamability: the ability to work within a team and not be a lone canon. The elders make decisions consensually. We must all agree or be of one mind. This doesn't mean there can not be honest disagreement, debate, prayer etc. But ultimately, the elders are a team, and they go together.

First, any member of the Body can recommend or nominate for the Elders' consideration any adult male member of Fellowship Bible Church to be an Elder. The Elders as needed then consider these nominations, based on criteria below. If the nominee is qualified and agreed upon by the Elders, then the nominee is interviewed by one of the Elders concerning his interest and the demanding responsibilities of the position.

If the nominee accepts the invitation, he first serves as an advisor to the Board of Elders. This attempts to protect both the Board and the nominee from "laying hands" upon an Elder too quickly, as the Scripture teaches. If the advisor does function well, ultimately the Board will recommend the advisor to be considered an Elder by the Body.

The Body will have several weeks to give input concerning the Elder candidate. Members will be held accountable for their opinion. This is not a popularity contest. The Elders are seeking the truth concerning the candidate's character and ability.

If after this process the Board feels the candidate is qualified to be an Elder, he is then appointed an Elder by the Biblical symbol of "laying upon of hands". This signifies the Elders' public recognition of this man's call.

Are Elders Compensated for their Ministry?

• **1Tim. 5:17-18.** The **elders** who direct the affairs of the church well are **worthy of double honor**, especially those whose **work is preaching and teaching**. 18 For the Scripture says, "Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain," and "**The worker deserves his wages**." Also see 1 Peter 5 above.

Only Elders who are called on by the Board of Elders to go beyond the call of duty and put in an inordinate amount of time in managing the ministry affairs of the Body, which prevents them from making a living, are eligible for "worthy" compensation.

Salaries are not determined by merit, but simply seek to objectively and fairly compensate the elder for the lack of income he is unable to make because of time and energy devoted to ministry. A national compensation survey is utilized to determine this standard. Currently, Fellowship attempts to reach a median compensation level for smaller churches in smaller communities in the Midwest. But quite often that level is not achieved.

Also no Elder is involved in the final decision of his compensation so as to avoid any conflict of interest. Also remember all the other elders must agree.

How is an Elder's Character to be Treated Once He is an Elder?

• *His Character Protected, but His is Sin Publicly Rebuked.*

• **1 Tim. 5:19-20.** Do not entertain an accusation against an **elder** unless it is brought by two or three witnesses. Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that others may take warning.

When one is in leadership it is easy to both be slandered and to abuse one's authority. Both are wrong.

Can a Woman serve as an Elder?

1Tim. 2:9 I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, 10 but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God. 11 A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. 12 I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. 13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve. 14 And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. 15 But women will be saved through childbearing --if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

• 1 Timothy 2:9-15 makes it clear that within the church a woman is not to teach or exercise authority over a man. It dishonors the divine head ship established in the Body of Christ by God: the Son is under the Father's authority; the Man under the Son's authority; the Woman under the Man's; the children under the parents'; the members of the body under the elders; citizen's under the king; slaves under their master's; etc.(Eph. 5; Col. 3; 1 Peter 2-3; 1 Cor. 11, 14). Also note that in the list of qualifications for an elder (above), no mention of women is made. This is not the case with the office of deacon (1 Tim. 3).

Obviously here is another biblical precedent that flies in the face of our culture. Because women do not serve as elders does not reflect on a lack of competence or worth. It is simply a matter of being true to God's original design.

It must also be noted that for any leadership not to consult those it has responsibility for is foolish and insensitive. Women are to be highly esteemed, valued, served and protected both in the home and in the Body of Christ (Eph. 5, Col. 3, 1 Peter 3), as

Christ loved the Church and gave himself to present her spotless and without blemish, holy and pleasing to God. If many women felt this sense of security and value, they would find respecting their husband's leadership the higher call.

Chapter 8

Home Churches

The Biblical Basis for Home Churches
Anchors of Accountability

Chapter 8

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Anchors of Accountability...

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Fellowship at Cross Creek
Pastor Joseph M. Cross

The Biblical Basis for Home /House Churches

Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Phil 2:4

“Quite often, within our modern society, mismanaged and misguided bible studies, small groups and cell groups are wrongly mistaken for one of the church’s most powerful, yet squandered weapons of accountability, the home church—a fellowship of fidelity; a community of courage; a laboratory of love; a place of purpose; a habitat for hospitality; a haven for the hurting; a shelter of safety; a sanctuary of honesty; a dwelling of the diligent; a curriculum for the curious; a library of learning and a lifetime of experience for the inquisitive, and an anchor of accountability for the drifting.” J. Cross

“If a person wants to travel to Denver, they can fly, drive or walk. A home church is like walking. It takes a lot longer, but the relationships you build along the way are priceless.” David Evans, former Worship Pastor at Fellowship

“A home church is like a spiritual family. Hopefully a more healthy functional family than what most of are accustomed to—the way that God intended the family to be.” Joseph M. Cross, Teaching Pastor at Fellowship

I. The True Meaning of Fellowship Demands a Special Form to Accomplish its True Function. That Form is the Home Church.

- Acts 2:42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to

the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. 44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. 46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Fellowship is not defined as a “warm time of visiting or sharing or coke and joke,” but rather a participation, sharing or partnership. See 2 Cor 8:23; Luke 5:10; Phm 17.

Just as two oxen in a yoke share a special relationship and calling that a third ox grazing on another hill does not share, so two believers in Christ share a position of responsibility in a special family.

- Goodness, kindness, peace, steadfastness, love, forbearance, faithfulness are proper expressions of our relationship in Christ. “‘Fellowship’ is not some subjective inner glow which we must kindle by blowing on its coals in our hearts; neither is it some cozy stove in the church which draws us toward it if there is fire in it, but drives us out if there is none. ‘Fellowship’ is one of the facts of the new life in Christ. God has made us brother and sisters in Christ, and therefore a bond unites us of which love is the only appropriate expression.” Stuart Currie, Austin Seminary Bulletin 1963

II. The Church Began in Homes. In Other Words, it is Biblical...

No doubt this was in part logistical. There were no church structures to meet in. Synagogues, yes, but not church buildings. Paul did meet with the believers in Ephesus at the Lecture Hall of Tyrannus, after he left the Jewish synagogue. But for the most part churches were meeting in homes—perhaps even large homes. But whether this was a matter of necessity or intent, they did meet in homes.

And it only makes sense. People are comfortable in their homes, and therefore more apt to open up, share and be real, all

requirements for the real give-and-take growth of spiritual maturity.

- Acts 2:46 They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.

- Acts 5:42 Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.

- Acts 8:3 But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.

- Acts 12:12 When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying.

- Acts 16:40 After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and encouraged them. Then they left.

- Acts 18:7 Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justus, a worshiper of God.

- Acts 20:20 You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house.

- Rom. 16:3-5 Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. 4 They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. 5 Greet also the church that meets at their house.

- 1Cor. 16:19 The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house.

- Col. 4:15 Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.

Phlm. 2 to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier and to the church that meets in your home:

- Hebr. 10:24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. 25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing,

but let us encourage one another --and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

III. All the New Testament's "One Another" Commands Make Better Sense in a Home Church.

Below is a functioning list of all the New Testament's one another commands. Remember they were mostly written to churches, which met in homes.

"The Functioning Body"

Adapted from

"Sharpening the Focus of the Church"

By Gene A. Getz

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- Be devoted to one another. Romans 12:10

- Give preference to one another. Romans 12:10

- Be of the same mind toward one another. Romans 12:16

- Let us not judge one another. Romans 14:13

- Pursue the things which make for peace for the building up of one another. Romans 15:5

- Accept one another. Romans 15:7

- Admonish one another. Romans 15:14

- Care for one another. I Corinthians 12:25

- Serve one another. Galatians 5:13

- Bear one another's burdens. Galatians 6:2

- Show forbearance to one another.

Ephesians 4:1 & 2

- Be kind to one another. Ephesians 4:32

- Speak to one another in psalms & hymns & spiritual songs. Ephesians 5:18-21

- Be subject to one another. Ephesians 5:18-21

- Do not lie to one another. Colossians 3:9

- Bear with one another. Colossians 3:9

- Forgive each other. Colossians 3:9

- Teach and admonish one another.

Colossians 3:16

- Increase and abound in love for one another. I Thessalonians 3:12

- Comfort one another. I Thessalonians 4:18

- Encourage one another. Hebrews 3:13

- Stimulate one another to love and good deeds. Hebrews 10:23-25

- Do not speak against one another. James 4:11

- Do not complain . . . against one another. James 5:9

- Confess your sins to one another. James 5:16

- Pray for one another. James 5:16

- Be hospitable to one another. I Peter 4:9

- Clothe yourselves in humility toward one another. I Peter 5:5

- Love one another. Romans 13:8, I Peter 1:22, I John 3:11, 23, 4:7,11-12, II John 5

When the local church is smaller or divided up into smaller groups (about the size of a group that can meet in a home), then the New Testament's "One Another" commands--to be devoted to, to be like-minded with, to accept, to admonish, to serve, to forbear, to forgive, to teach, to be subject to, to not lie to, to comfort, to pray for and to confess sins to one another--make better sense.

It is not that these commands cannot be done in a larger context; it is just that most people won't ordinarily practice them to any degree of effectiveness because they are not comfortable within the larger context or don't know very many people.

Weekly accountability suffers as well if you are not with the same group of people. I can keep on my sinning and no one knows any difference because I am always with a new or large group of people. There is really no one to hold me accountable. Am I changing and growing? Am I becoming a different person in Christ?

No one would fight a war this way (and Scripture tells us that ours is indeed a spiritual battle—Eph 6). Armies are divided into divisions, regiments, battalions, companies and platoons. And what is the size of a platoon? About the same size of a home church—a "church that meets in someone's home." And the reason why an army does this? Manageability and accountability? The Body of Christ is no different.

In this way, each spiritual "platoon" or "house church" can better care for and insure that the needs of its members or participants are being met. People don't fall through the cracks. The pastor doesn't have to attempt to meet all the congregation's needs because the flock is helping to meet "each other's" needs more effectively. If a need is greater than the "platoon" or "home church" can meet on its own (say providing meals to a cancer victim's family) then it goes to the "company" or "another platoon" for help--in this case, the larger church body or other home churches.

(Note: Israel also managed itself in a very similar fashion: nation, tribes, clans and families. See Joshua 7 to see how one particular family was found out for its

disobedience after the collapse of Jericho. These same units also functioned as fighting units as well. Moses also employed a similar system in leading the people at the suggestion of his father-in-law, Jethro...Ex 18. Jesus did the same in feeding the five thousand. He sat them in groups of hundreds and fifties...Mark 6:40).

Therefore because it makes more sense of all the "one another" commands and is biblical, our purpose statement with respect to home churches is...

IV. Home Church Purpose Statement (@1986 Fellowship at Cross Creek):

"to build a family of believers,
knitted together by their common faith,
who will learn and grow
in Christ-like character,
while developing
lasting, supportive relationships."

V. Our Home Church Philosophy...

Definition: A Biblical Support Group
The New Testament teaches that maturing spiritual faith is a journey not meant to be taken alone. Rather, it is to be made with the help of other supportive believers, in a loving environment. In the days of the early church, believers met in houses. There, they studied God's word, shared their common struggles and prayed together. Fellowship's Home Churches are patterned after this biblical example.

Shared and Open Leadership
There should be at least 2-3 committed families or individuals to begin a Home Church and bear the initial leadership responsibility. These leaders need to be willing to model open, honest sharing for the other group members, and encourage individual ownership in the Home Church's functions.

All aspects of the group are shared, discussed and evaluated by its members under the guidance of the group's appointed servant leader. These include commitment, planning, meeting times and location, Bible study, sharing, refreshments, meals, childcare and special events. The home church seeks to function as a healthy spiritual family.

A Trusting Environment
Building trust is absolutely essential for a Home Church's vitality and strength.

Greater trust leads to greater openness, and further trust. And it is in this environment of openness and trust where truth is discovered and growth is experienced. We believe there are four elements that work together to build greater group trust. They are:

- Open, honest communication;
- A respectful sensitivity of what is shared within the group;
- Getting to get to know each other better.;
- And resolving problems together.

Over time, these four things will produce a Home Church characterized by strength and stability.

A Balanced and Flexible Format
Ultimately each Home Church meeting rotates around this agenda:

- Informal fellowship
- Group discussion and decision-making
- Bible study, sharing and prayer

Special activities such as work or ministry projects, dinners, fun and games, family nights, play times are also scheduled throughout the year. It is Fellowship's hope that you will find the time spent in you Home Church, one of the most rewarding and beneficial experiences of your life!

VI. Practical Thoughts and Questions...
Further keys to a good home church...

1) Honesty. Without a doubt, next to loyalty, the number one requirement of a successful, healthy home church. Without it, the group will die. People will fade away, and you will never know the reason why. I am not saying that you have to be totally or brutally honest about every little thing where someone is constantly griping or complaining. But I am saying pseudo-community or pseudo-love will kill a group faster than anything.

Someone doesn't like the starting time or what the group is doing with the kids or how the study is running, or someone isn't opening up about some of their own struggles, and brother, they are out of here, and you may never know why.

Eph 4 exhorts us to "speak the truth in love," and to stop being dishonest with one another. I presume this means out of a loving motivation—what I discern to be in the other person's best spiritual good—and in a loving manner. Use wisdom. Use

discernment. At the same time, just remember, if you are not being honest and you are keeping your truth to yourself, you are putting the group at risk. If this is your spiritual family and you want it to be a healthy, functioning one, then you have got to risk "speaking up the truth in love."

Things may not necessarily change, but now you have ownership. This is my family, and I am risking honesty and vulnerability to keep it healthy and functioning. Instead of not having any warning lights or ignoring them completely, now I can stop the car and see what the problem is and call for help, if necessary.

2) Don't worry about numbers...especially on the low side; if a couple of families are all that can get together for that night, then go for it, if you desire to get together. Christ has promised via his Holy Spirit to be in the midst of only two or three when gathered in His name. Sometimes smaller is better.

3) On the other hand, do worry about the largeness of the group. Anything over seven families, and someone or some family will begin to fall through the cracks. Not every family will share every week. Maybe even only one or two, time permitting. So if one particularly family that is struggling doesn't share within a month or two, then they are particularly at risk.

4) Deal with the kid thing. Don't be afraid to deal with it. It will kill a group quickly. Our kids come to our home churches, at least the younger ones, and sometimes the older ones...high school. It gives them a chance to get together. We don't have anything structured for them--too much pressure.

But many do have a kid's coach, especially with the younger ones. Some groups put their kids down—the younger ones--so they can have more time and don't have to rush out the door (Often people don't open up until later). If you are worrying about getting the kids to bed, you're heart won't be in the group.

Over the years, our kids had very little problem of parents waking them up and taking them home. In fact, after a time, they began to like brothers and sisters (in a healthy way) or cousins. One of the great satisfactions our parents experienced would be seeing all our kids, stretched out or huddled up, lying on the floor asleep. It kind of brings back memories of when all

the cousins would spend the night together at grandma's house--something rarely experienced in our fast-paced and geographically diverse society.

Some parents may have difficulty putting their youngster(s) down. I believe this sometimes exposes who is really in charge in this family. On the other hand, sometimes kids have legitimate separation-anxiety fears. They are afraid if they fall asleep, momma or daddy will leave them behind. "But even if they did—which they won't," I explained to one little girl, "you would still be at Miss Nikki's house, and she would take you back to your momma's in the morning." This was the missing psychological key for this little girl to go to bed. She is now in 8th grade and still doesn't miss home church. In the end, one has to determine what is more important to you: long-term mutual spiritual support or a few weeks, maybe even months, of going through a bed-time power struggle.

Others just choose to let their kids stay up and leave between 10 and 11 pm. It is a tricky thing. Just make it work. Find a way. Be flexible. Your kid will survive. Keep tinkering as a group and as a family. Families are different and have different values. What you are trying to find out is can we compromise enough to build an ongoing extended-family spiritual support group. And in doing so, you are learning to practice what we preach: "Spiritual servanthood, selflessness, picking up the towel, dying to the flesh, taking up my cross, obedience to Christ, loving one another, and on and on."

Note: there may even be some problems between kids. Again this exposes families. So I ask the question: is this family about playing a pretty religious game or growing? People may be offended.

They may even leave. But there has to be boundaries and conflicts must be worked through. Deal with your child first. If that doesn't work, bring it to the attention of the other parent. If that doesn't work, bring it to the group. I know of no other way for things getting better. Otherwise, you will leave the group.

5) Don't be afraid of conflict. It is going to happen. After all the Scriptures challenge us to "admonish" each other. If we are truly seeking to change, and no one walks into this group, perfect, then at some point in

time pseudo-community or "shallow love" will crash.

This is where real growth or change begins. While it may be uncomfortable, it does not need to be fatal. Some will walk away and leave. Others will hang in there and grow, no different than a marriage or family.

Some of our moments of greatest growth occur as a result of a conflict or misunderstanding. Just like in a marriage, where our marriage vows and children keep us together, within the Body of Christ, our commitment to our Lord and to one another should keep us together.

Do we really want to change or are we just playing games? Families will have conflict, but learning to listen, honor and understand each other will only strengthen the bonds of the relationship.

It is an ironic thing, but usually, after the group or individuals involved in the conflict survive the conflict, the relationship is strengthened like ten-fold. "Now I am not afraid to share with you my real truth. I am ready to grow, to open up, to trust you and to be honest."

We have conflicts within our marriages and families and survive, why can't we have them within an extended spiritual family. After all people are not perfect. The whole point of coming into the Body of Christ is to change in the first place, so a disagreement exposes my need to change a bit. I thought that is what it is all about.

Besides, expecting there to never be any conflicts of problems is a little unrealistic. It also reminds me of the world's view of relationships. We are infatuated with getting to know another person, but when we begin to discover their idiosyncrasies, we are out of here. So we just constantly keep changing relationships versus really growing in Christ. Are we really growing or are we just constantly rearranging the furniture? Bottom line: don't be afraid of conflict. A mature loyalty will sustain the group of relationship until the problem can be resolved in a healthy manner.

6) Beware of a feeding frenzy, and not everyone try to fix the hurting person at the same time. It can get overwhelming. Learn the value of sensitive listening. I call it the "piranha affect." Someone shares their struggle and the piranhas feed. Everyone

tries to fix the person. Learn to use some self-restraint. Honor the person for opening up. Afford them some self-dignity in working through their own struggle. It doesn't mean that prayer or helpful hints or even question-asking isn't appropriate. Just be gentle and wise. Not everyone jump in. Don't give them your superficial answers just to make your own conscience feel better. This problem probably did not arise over night and will not go away over night. Working through the problem is a part of the growth process. But just to know I am not going through it alone provides a lot of comfort and hope.

7) Don't let someone dominate the group for weeks on end with the same problem. Again have some discipline. Don't turn it into a personal support group for that person. Maybe you ask them how they are doing 2-3 weeks in a row max. But give it a rest. Theirs is not the only problem in the world. Some will dominate. The group becomes their own surrogate counselor or mate. Don't enable their self-centeredness. Again allow them to work out some of this on their own. After all, this is about growth and maturity. And if we are always fixing them, then they will never grow up. Some don't want to fix the problem to begin with. They just love the comfort sharing their pain with others provides, like some kind of sick game. Have balance within the group. It is just like a family budget: overspend on your house or car payments and you will bust the budget. Only here, you will bust the group as it tires of hearing the same old struggle that never gets any better.

8) What about leadership? One of the older, original complaints or fears some used to express is what about a leader taking over a group for their own personal agenda and splitting them off from the church.

Choose your leaders wisely. Make sure they understand the philosophy of the home church. Meet regularly to keep the groups or leaders accountable. Early on, more frequent. Later on, as the system gets more established, less and less. But have accountability.

Also listen to your members if they say that something strange is going on. Don't rush in and fix too quick, unless it is a real crisis. You want the group to work through it themselves. But on the other hand, keep the situation monitored and don't be afraid to deal with it. Remember we are requires to

be tolerant and forbearing, but now without boundaries. The closer someone gets to those boundaries or over those boundaries, then we need to deal with the situation, face to face. We are called to protect the Body (Acts 20).

9) What about the groups becoming cliques? Both are dangers. With respect to the later concern, make all the leaders, the church and the individual home churches aware of this. The small group is not larger than the church. The platoon does not exist for its own sake, but to serve the company or a much larger fighting force. The same is true within the larger Body. While the temptation will be to do everything together, don't. Have other relationships. Cross-pollinate within the Body, particularly with respect to service. Bottom line, balance is the key once again. These groups may indeed become close-knit and discover more and more the real meaning of "biblical fellowship" as experienced in the early church, but at the same time, it should not be done to the exclusion to the larger Body of Christ. After all, we are all members of the Body, all brothers and sisters. Sense "over-cliquishness" and "spew it out of thy mouth" (Rev 3).

10) What about inviting guests or newcomers? It might irritate your friend who is interested in coming to your group this week, but have the courtesy to check with the group first. I have tended to notice this seems to be more important to the female members of the group. Perhaps it threatens their nest. Just like they have the physical and natural nest with respect to their real homes, they have spiritual "nests" as well. This may mean that the person has to wait another week before they attend. It may even sound cliquish to them. But to preserve the integrity of the group's well-earned intimacy, check first. We try to suggest that newcomers go through our membership class first. But this may not always be possible. The class may be a long ways off and you want to get the person connected sooner. Just remember this isn't a slam-dunk.

Christ surely didn't mind throwing up a few hurdles to cull out those that were not really interested in laying down their lives, and neither should we have to apologize either. He also chose 12 and 3 within that.

One might be surprised that everything does not have to be done now. Still, despite

having said all this, use discernment. Every case is different. And you will make mistakes. But life does go on.

Note: this does not apply to a one-time guest visiting with you or in your home. Indeed this may be a way to introduce them to a powerful new concept—the body of Christ supporting one another.

But if the person has the potential of coming more regularly or becoming a part of the group, just have the courtesy of running it by everyone else. Most will not object, but it does say to them that they have a say so and that the group has some stability

This is one of my pet peeves with much of modern-day Christianity, we are so consumed with bringing in new customers that we don't have the common sense to recognize that every new customer is not a customer. They may not want to play by the rules. Again, it's okay to have boundaries. It is not okay to be totally exclusive. There must be a balance.

11) What about Bible Study? We use a quick, simple inductive method that we have also been using with our kids on Sunday morning for years now and study one book at a time (this method is available upon request).

I personally detest topical studies. Too long, too many questions, too much homework, etc.

Whatever you do, less is more. Focus on just one passage or several verses. Don't try to skim the entire chapter. Shallow or superficial is boring and almost meaningless. Like it or not, we love it in our romance novels and our soap operas, as well as our sports. "Give me the details, the blow by blow account. What happened next?" We love texture. It captures our attention, when woven correctly.

Go deeper. Think deeper. Remember your goal is change here. The Scripture should be the Holy Spirit's tool of intervention within our lives to rub off our rough edges. We should be informed, encouraged or convicted somehow. We should get something out of the study. It should make a difference.

If you are going to use a topical study, go slower, or just pick a question or two. Let that be the focus of discussion. Then have

the courage or guts to challenge people to personally apply it. And just don't leave it at the principle level. Connect the principle to a specific problem that you or your family is going through. Be honest. Allow it to be a teaching tool to others as well.

When people become open and honest and start telling their drama, then you have a story worth listening to. Now you have people's attention. Now you have a plot, a story. How will it be resolved? Now we are involved. But better than all this, it came from having studied the Word. It is not unattached, but connected to a hunger of what God's truth is and how does it apply, even if our application is less than perfect. At least we are trying, and God's word comes first. Our problems are not unanchored buoys floating helplessly in the ocean, but anchored in the timeless of his truth. This is worship.

12) Getting started each night. Adults can be worse than their kids. Talk, talk, talk. And this is healthy. It is their way of reconnecting with what is going on in each other's lives.

If you just said let's get together to visit, then most may never do it. But if you say, let's get together for Bible study, most Christians will feel the need to get together. Ironically though, when they do get together, they will succumb to the desire to just chat and catch up, etc.

Don't be so demanding that they can't be real and let their hair down, but at the same time, the leader, preferably, has to take charge and say (several times) let's get started. Again, no different than a family. Sometime you just have to start, particularly if you are beginning with Bible study. Eventually, they will join in.

The same goes for rabbit trails. Use discernment. Sometimes they are helpful. Sometimes someone needs to bring the group back on task. Be wise. And it doesn't have to always be the leader of the group. Others can have ownership too. After all it is there family as well.

13) Ending each night. Ours has several endings. There are those that have to go at a certain time to get up the next morning or get kids to bed. There are others who want to check on each other, continue the application, pray, etc. Sometimes we are able to close in prayer and stay and visit

afterwards, even if this means the host going on to bed. "Lock up, when you leave." As you can see, this gets to be a really family-thing. (In larger cities where the group is new and you don't know everyone well enough, this would not be the case, but in time, as the group becomes more bonded and trusting of each other, don't be surprised if this is not the case. It may not be for everyone, again, but for some it is their mid-week treat.)

Again be somewhat flexible. I am not sure the early church was on a time schedule with respect to studying God's word or exploring its application and relevance within their lives. For many, this will become their weekly appointment for growth. For many, this will become their weekly highlight or entertainment. Instead of going to the movies or on a date, this is their date. After all people are entertaining, especially when they open up and become real.

Conflict is drama. Television has even discovered its values and exploits it via all the reality shows. Before, everything was scripted. Now people are discovering that real life is even more entertaining. I am not saying that this is the reason people should get together for home churches. I am just telling you that a small group is drama; Home churches are engaging, entertaining or attention capturing.

Bottom line: when people are enjoying themselves and being entertained, time will fly. Two hours can seem like nothing. I have seen groups—not every one—go two, three, four, five hours or more, and it be worth every minute to its participants because it was utterly entertaining, utterly engaging, utterly meaningful, enlightening, practical, useful, etc.

I have heard members walkout the door saying, "I will pray that you will make it through the day tomorrow." Some just catch up on sleep the next night. For the first time in their lives they have been empowered to create something that is more beneficial and loving that Hollywood could ever create on their TV screen.

So why should they not celebrate it via a few extra minutes or hours, if they so desire. Again this is not for everyone, but neither should those who want to invest more time in one another's lives be shut off from this

experience either. We are too much a rush-rush society to begin with.

Children will adapt; so will sleep cycles and families. Why not indulge ourselves in this one spiritual passion?

14) Food always helps. It makes people happier. And if they are happier, they are more willing to open up, share, be teachable, more everything. Some get together for meals. They figure out ways to make it work. The early church in Acts 2 ate together in each other's homes.

15) What about summers and holidays? Chill. It is lighter out and people want to be outside in the summer. If a few want to get together, then get together. It is always enjoyable to spend some time with some brothers and sisters in the Word, finding out how the battle is going or just getting to know each other better.

Our group is kind of hit and miss in the summer. I would not recommend taking the whole summer off. But expectations need to be lowered. Don't be afraid to miss on occasion. Life will go on. Especially during holidays, such as over the Christmas break.

Home churches go through seasons just like anything else. Sometimes we spend more time sharing, if we have been dealing with a crisis, such as a marital struggle. Other times, we hit Bible study for weeks. Sometimes you will miss a couple of weeks. It is not the end of the world. People will be back. Too many need what the home church has to offer.

16) Different groups will have different personalities. That's okay. They don't have to be cookie-cutter groups. Let them experiment, even fail and learn from their failure. Remember this is about maturing, and just as is true with our kids, if they are not given any opportunity to make decisions and think for themselves, then they won't grow up.

Bottom line...be honest; make it work for you via your honesty. Don't lie. You may not always be able to solve every problem. But have enough ownership that you want to make the group work for you. Then be faithful. If you are being honest and faithful, your home church will be successful.

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Miscellaneous

Exam

Covenant

Evaluation

Fellowship 101 Final Exam

(Open Book Open Bible)

1) In your own words, according to Eph. 4:11-16, what is the purpose of a church?

2) What are three key words Fellowship uses to describe the goal or purpose of a church?

ch _____, gr _____, and ma _____.

3) List from both Acts 2:42 and Col. 1:10-12, what are some essential environmental components of a healthy church?

Acts 2:42

Col. 1:10-12

5) List "five ships" in which Fellowship restates these essential components of a healthy church.

_____ship

_____ship

_____ship

_____ship

_____ship

6) What is Fellowship constructing in order to create this environment and accomplish our goal?

7) What are the two major supports?

8) True or False. We believe the Bible is the inspired inerrant (without error in the original manuscripts) word of God. (2 Tim. 3:16).

9) With respect to the Trinity, there is One _____ and three _____persons: the

_____, _____, and _____.

9) What delivers a person from God's judgment and yields them his eternal life? (Eph 2; Rom 10; John 3).

10) According to Proverbs 3:9, we should give from our _____ .
What does this mean to you?

10) True or False. If one wanted to know what the Bible teaches about giving, 2 Cor. 8-9 would be a great start.

11) According to Acts 20:17; 28ff _____, _____, and _____
_____ are all three synonymous terms for those who lead the church.

12) True or False. According to 1 Cor. 12 or Rom. 12, the Body is made up of many differently-gifted or graced spiritual members, all of which are important for the Body's healthy Spiritual functioning.

13) According to 1 Cor. 14 how should the gift of "language" or "tongues" be regulated?

1) There must be an _____ present.

2) If there is not one present, then the one with the gift of "language" must keep _____.

3) Only _____ or _____ should speak.

4) And in _____.

14) According to Eph. 4:15, 25 what is a sign of our maturity?
(Miss this one and you flunk the test!)

Fellowship at Cross Creek Church

Membership Covenant

Today I enter into covenant with Fellowship Bible Church, also known as Fellowship at Cross Creek. After having read through Fellowship's 101 Notebook, I agree to support, abide by, and be involved in:

1) **Fellowship's Biblical Ministry Purpose:** To Create a Biblical Environment which Encourages Genuine Spiritual Growth, as Reflected in the Loving, Obedient Servant Image of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

2) **Fellowship's Biblical Philosophy Environment**, including becoming actively involved in the building of that environment through:

- a) the **Worship of God**;
- b) the **Discipleship in His Truth**: the study and application of the Scriptures in our daily life; especially in our relationship to God and others;
- c) the **Fellowship**: the tenacious commitment we have to genuinely love each other in the body of Christ;
- d) the **Stewardship** of our gifts and abilities to build up other members of the Body, including our children and the Spiritual Growth Bridge by which this environment takes its form and accomplishes its stated function.

3) **Fellowship's Biblical Foundations, Biblical Philosophy of Giving, and Biblical Elder-Deacon led approach to church leadership, direction, service, and responsibility.**

4) **I also understand** that commitment or perseverance is a crucial element for growing a healthy church **and therefore, I resolve** to do my best to speak the truth in love (Eph. 4)--out of loving motivation and in a loving manner with my fellow brothers and sisters, following the appellate manner to conflict resolution as set down by our Lord in Matt: 18:15ff.

Name

Date

Fellowship 101 Evaluation

(A) Do you feel you know more about "FBC" than when you started the Class?
[1] None. [2] A little. [3] A lot.

(B) Do you feel more connected or a part of "FBC"?
[1] No. [2] Sum. [3] Yes .

(C) Did you like the Class, before Service or would you have preferred it:
[1] When? [2] Sunday night . [3] After Service.

(D) Did you like the Elders teaching the Class, or would you have preferred:
[1] Who? [2] Joe. [3] The Elders.

(E) Was the Class too:
[1] long? [2] short? [3] just right?

(F) On a scale of one to ten, ten meeting all your expectations / one meeting none, how would you rate the class?
[1] [2] [3] [4] [5] [6] [7] [8] [9] [10]

(G) What did you enjoy most about the Class?

(H) If one question about "FBC" could have been answered that was not, what would it be?

(I) What could be done to improve the Class?