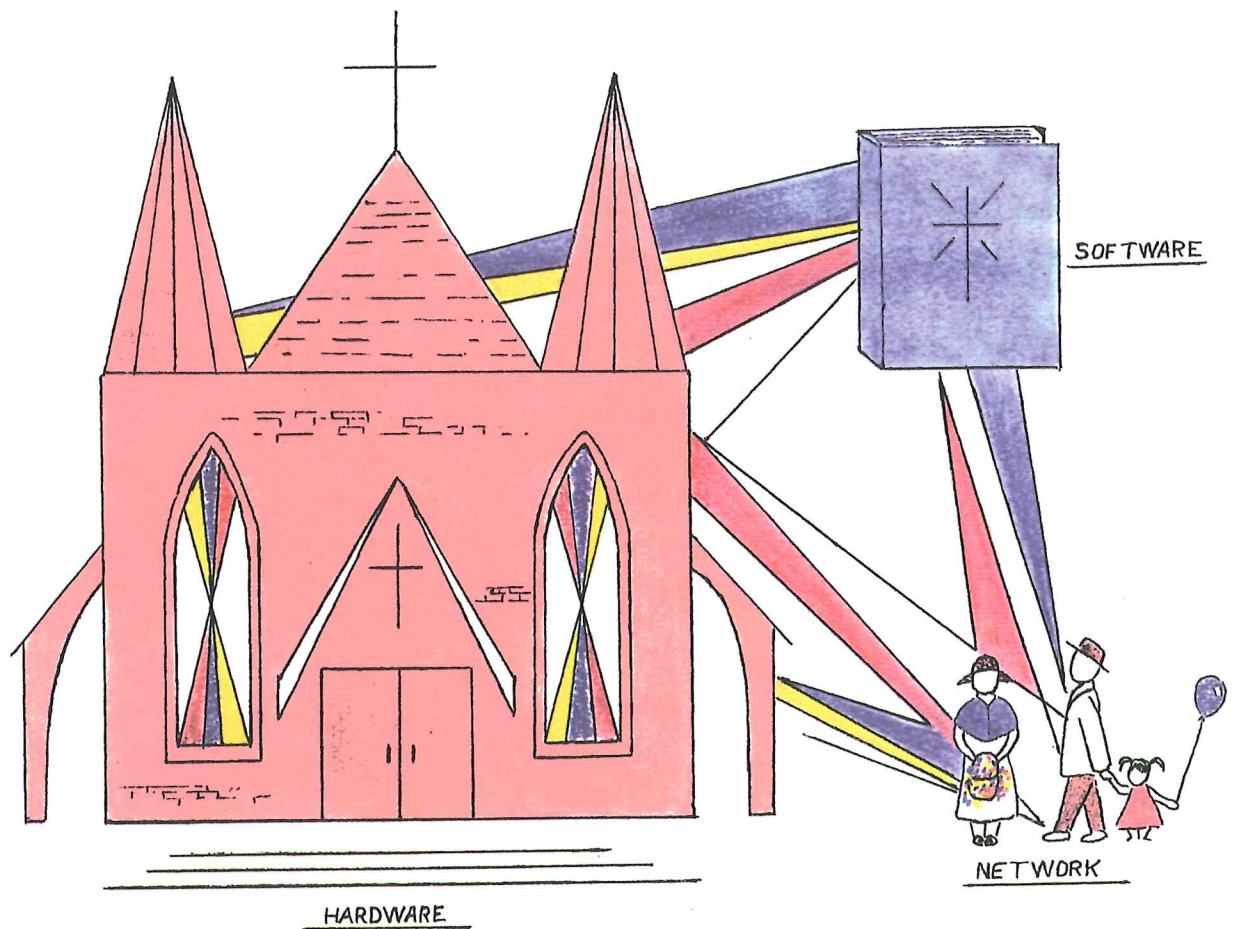


Chapter Thirteen



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The Christian Congregation

XIII. THE CHRISTIAN CONGREGATION

Introduction: When a new baby is born into the world, it is usually born into a family. So also when God brings a new Christian into spiritual life through the Gospel, He places the new Christian into a family. **This “family” is the Christian congregation.** Wherever the Apostles of Jesus went they founded “families” or **congregations** of Christians. These congregations were instructed in the faith and taught to love and help one another and to meet regularly for worship. Certain men with spiritual gifts were appointed to lead and guide the spiritual life of these congregations. **Every Christian congregation is the Church in miniature.** In the New Testament, congregations are called “churches,” and sometimes a congregation is spoken of as “the church” in a particular city or area.

It is clear from a study of the New Testament that God wills the founding and growth of Christian congregations and that those who have been brought to faith in Jesus should join such a congregation and render faithful service to it.

1. THE NATURE OF A CHRISTIAN CONGREGATION

A Christian congregation is a group of believers who share a common faith in Jesus Christ, and who are united in their loyalty to the teachings of Christ’s Apostles. **The congregation organizes its life and activities around the Word of God and the sacraments,** and members seek to build each other up in knowledge, faith, hope, and love. The congregation also appoints men with proper qualifications to serve it as their pastor, teacher, etc.

Notice the description of the congregation or the use of the term “church” in the following Bible passages.

Acts 4:32-35 All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need. (NRSV)

Acts 13:1 In the **church at Antioch** there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon...Lucius...Manaen...and Saul. (NIV)

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. (Congregations at Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe.) (NIV)

Acts 14:27 On arriving there, (at Antioch) **they gathered the church together** and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. (NIV)

2. THE LEADERSHIP OF A CHRISTIAN CONGREGATION

A. A Christian congregation really has only one master, AND THAT IS JESUS CHRIST. THE CONGREGATION OBEYS JESUS BY OBEYING HIS WORD. THE PASTOR (SHEPHERD) OF THE CONGREGATION AND ITS OTHER LEADERS HAVE NO AUTHORITY OVER THE CONGREGATION EXCEPT AS THEY PROCLAIM TO IT GOD'S WORD AND REQUIRE OBEDIENCE TO THAT WORD. IF THE PASTOR PROCLAIMS AND APPLIES GOD'S WORD FAITHFULLY, THEN HE IS CHRIST'S REPRESENTATIVE TO THAT CONGREGATION, AND ITS OBEDIENCE IS NOT MERELY OBEDIENCE TO THE PASTOR, BUT TO CHRIST HIMSELF.

Matt. 23:9-11 And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor are you to be called 'teacher,' **for you have one Teacher, the Christ.** The greatest among you will be your servant. (NIV)

Eph. 5:23b-24 ...**Christ is the head of the church,** His body, and is Himself its Savior. **As the church is subject to Christ,** so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands. (RSV)

I Cor. 4:6 Now, brothers, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, **"Do not go beyond what is written."** (NIV)

II Cor. 2:9 I wrote for this reason: to test you and **to know whether you are obedient in everything.** (NRSV)

Phil. 2:12 Therefore, my beloved, **just as you have always obeyed me,** not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence... (NRSV)

B. In the New Testament we read of various special offices in the church. THEY WERE: 1) APOSTLES, 2) EVANGELISTS, 3) PASTORS, 4) TEACHERS, 5) DEACONS, AND 6) DEACONESSES. ALL OF THESE OFFICES ARE STILL PRESENT TODAY IN THE CHURCH EXCEPT THAT OF AN Apostle. IN THE NEW TESTAMENT, THE TERMS "Bishop," "Pastor," "Elder," ARE ALL NAMES FOR THE SAME OFFICE WHICH CORRESPONDS TO OUR MODERN TERMS, "Minister," OR "Pastor." THE PRIMARY DUTIES OF THE PASTOR ARE TO LEAD, NOURISH, AND PROTECT THE CONGREGATION (THE "FLOCK") IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE WORD OF GOD. THE WORD "PASTOR" MEANS "SHEPHERD."

Eph. 4:11-12 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**, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up. (NIV)

Phil. 1:1 ...To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the **bishops** and **deacons.** (NRSV)

2. (Cont'd)

C. God has bestowed honor upon the pastoral ministry. HE HAS SET CERTAIN standards FOR IT, AND HE REQUIRES THAT THE CONGREGATION PROVIDE FOR THE material support OF ITS PASTOR(S) WHEN POSSIBLE.

1. The honor which God has bestowed on the ministry

I Cor. 4:1 Think of us in this way, as **servants of Christ** and **stewards of God's mysteries**. (NRSV)

I Th. 5:12-13 Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other. (NIV)

I Tim. 5:17 Let the elders **who rule well be considered worthy of double honor**, especially those who labor in **preaching and teaching**. (NRSV) (Apparently not all elders engaged in preaching and teaching.)

Heb. 13:17 Obey your leaders and submit to them, **for they are keeping watch over your souls and will give an account**. Let them do this with joy and not with sighing—for that would be harmful to you. (NRSV)

I Pet. 5:1-4 The **elders** who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow **elder** and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: **Shepherd** the flock of God which is among you, serving as **overseers**, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; **nor as being lords 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 does not fade away. (NKJV) (See Ch 13-4)

2. The qualifications and work of the ministry. The chief task of the pastoral ministry is to preach and teach the Word of God.

Acts 6:2-4 So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. **We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.**" (NIV)

Acts 20:28 Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you **overseers**, to **shepherd** the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son. (NRSV)

2.C.2. (Cont'd)

I Cor. 3:10-15 By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames. (NIV)

I Tim. 2:12 I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man... (NRSV)

I Tim. 3:1-7 The saying is sure: whoever aspires to the office of bishop (pastor) desires a noble task. Now a bishop must be above reproach, married only once, temperate, sensible, respectable, hospitable, an apt teacher, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, and not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way—for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how can he take care of God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may be puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace and the snare of the devil. (NRSV)

I Tim. 4:12-13,16 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. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching... Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers. (Paul to Timothy) (NIV)

Titus 1:5-9 My intention in leaving you behind in Crete was that you should deal with any outstanding matters, and in particular should **appoint elders in each town** in accordance with the principles I have laid down: Are they men of unimpeachable character? Is each the husband of one wife? Are their children believers, not open to any charge of dissipation or indiscipline? For as God's steward a **bishop** must be a man of unimpeachable character. He must not be overbearing or short-tempered or given to drink; no brawler, no money-grubber, but hospitable, right-minded, temperate, just, devout, and self-controlled. He must keep firm hold of the true doctrine, so that he may be well able both to appeal to his hearers with sound teaching and to refute those who raise objections. (REB)

(Notice how Paul uses the terms "elder" and "bishop" interchangeably.)

2.C.2. (Cont'd)

I Tim. 3:8-13 **Deacons** likewise must be serious, not double-tongued, not indulging in much wine, not greedy for money; they must hold fast to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let them first be tested; then, if they prove themselves blameless, let them serve as deacons. Women likewise must be serious, not slanderers, but temperate, faithful in all things. Let deacons be married only once, and let them manage their children and their households well; for those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and great boldness in the faith that is in Christ Jesus. (NRSV)

Note: Though women may serve in the church in various ways, they are not permitted to hold the office of the pastoral office, or to exercise authority over men.

See *I Corinthians 14:34-36*; *I Timothy 3:1-7*; (*I Timothy 2:12* - Ch 13-9)

See also: For further study of the office and work of the ministry, study *Ezekiel 34:1-16*; *Malachi 2:4-9*; *John 20:15-17*; *Acts 20:17-38*.

3. The material support of the ministry

I Cor. 9:7,11,13-14 Who at any time pays the expenses for doing military service? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not get any of its milk?...If we have sown spiritual good among you, is it too much if we reap your material benefits?...Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in what is sacrificed on the altar? In the same way, **the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.** (NRSV)

MY PASTOR

My pastor shapes his sermons
From A to final Z
In clear and forthright language,
And aims them straight at me.

And when he gets to preaching,
I look around to see
If there might be another
Deserving more than me.

But every soul looks saintly -
Their hearts to heaven turn
While I, in my conviction,
Can only sit and squirm.

You know, I often wonder
If I should miss a day,
Would he, without his target,
Have anything to say!

— Alton B. Lee



3. THE PRINCIPLES WHICH ARE TO BE OBSERVED IN A CHRISTIAN CONGREGATION. A CHRISTIAN CONGREGATION IS A FELLOWSHIP OF LOVE. THE LOVE WHICH CHRIST HAS REVEALED TO MANKIND IS TO BE EXPRESSED AND PRACTICED WITHIN THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY. EVERYTHING THAT IS DONE, OR LEFT UNDONE, WITHIN THE CHURCH SHOULD BE IN ACCORD WITH CHRIST'S GREAT COMMAND "THAT YOU LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS I HAVE LOVED YOU." NOTICE SOME OF THE GREAT **principles** WHICH SHOULD GOVERN THE LIFE OF A CONGREGATION.

Rom. 12:4-8, 10-16 For as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if **prophecy**, in proportion to our faith; if **service**, in our serving; he who **teaches**, in his teaching; he who **exhorts**, in his exhortation; he who **contributes**, in liberality; he who **gives aid**, with zeal; he who does **acts of mercy**, with cheerfulness...**love one another** with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Never flag in zeal, be aglow with the Spirit, serve the Lord... **Contribute** to the needs of the saints, practice hospitality... **Rejoice** with those who rejoice, **weep** with those who weep... **Live in harmony** with one another. (RSV)

3. (Cont'd)

Rom. 15:1-2 **We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak** and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, **to build him up.** (NIV)

I Cor. 14:12, 26b So with yourselves; since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, **strive to excel in building up the church... Let all things be done for edification.** (RSV)

Eph. 4:31-32 Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of malicious behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you. (NLT)

Phil. 2:2-4 Complete **my joy** by being of the **same mind**, having the **same love**, being in **full accord** and of one mind. **Do nothing from selfishness or conceit**, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. (RSV)

Col. 3:12-14 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. (NIV)

I Th. 5:11, 14 Therefore **encourage** one another and **build up each other**, as indeed you are doing... And we urge you, beloved, to **admonish** the idlers, encourage the faint hearted, help the weak, **be patient with all of them.** (NRSV)

Heb. 3:13 But **exhort one another** every day, as long as it is called "today," so that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. (NRSV)

Heb. 10:24-25 ...Let us consider how to **stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together**, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another... (RSV)

I Pet. 5:5b And all of you must **clothe yourselves with humility** in your dealings with one another, for "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." (NRSV)

4. THE DISCIPLINE OF A CHRISTIAN CONGREGATION

The Christian congregation is a **fellowship of forgiveness**. Those who seek forgiveness for their sins should find it within the forgiving love of the Christian congregation. On the other hand, those who willfully and publicly continue in sin should be put out of the fellowship of the congregation until such time as they repent of their sin and desire forgiveness. The individual congregation should be able with God's guidelines to keep its life pure and to **discipline its own membership**.

A. The individual Christian should forgive his erring brother. *WE SHOULD ALSO FEEL FREE TO CONFESS OUR SINS TO ANY FELLOW CHRISTIAN, OR TO A PASTOR OR PRIEST.*

Prov. 28:13 He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy. (RSV)

Jas. 5:16, 19-20 ...**Confess your sins to one another**, and pray for one another...My brothers and sisters, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and is brought back by another, **you should know that whoever brings back a sinner from wandering will save the sinner's soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.** (NRSV)

4. (Cont'd)

B. The congregation has the power, given it by Christ, to forgive the sins of those who repent; and it also has the power to not forgive those who commit public sins and who are unwilling to repent of them. This authority the congregation may delegate to its pastor WHEN IN THE PUBLIC WORSHIP SERVICE HE PRONOUNCES FORGIVENESS UPON THOSE WHO CONFESS THEIR SINS. (THE POWER OF THE KEYS)

Matt. 18:15-18 "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, **just between**
STEP ONE: **the two of you**. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.

STEP TWO: But if he will not listen, **take one or two others along**, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.'

STEP THREE: If he refuses to listen to them, **tell it to the church**; and if he refuses to
(excommunication) listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector." (NIV)

John 20:22-23 ...He (Jesus) breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. **If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.**" (NIV)

I Cor. 5:1-2 It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and of a kind that is not found even among pagans; for a man is living with his father's wife. And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this **be removed from among you.** (RSV)

I Cor. 5:9-13 In my letter I wrote that you must have nothing to do with those who are sexually immoral. I was not, of course, referring to people in general who are immoral or extortioners or swindlers or idolaters; to avoid them you would have to withdraw from society altogether. I meant that you must have nothing to do with any so-called Christian who leads an immoral life, or is extortionate, idolatrous, a slanderer, a drunkard, or a swindler; with anyone like that you should not even eat. What business of mine is it to judge outsiders? God is their judge. But within the fellowship, you are the judges: **'Root out the wrong-doer from your community.'** (REB)

II Cor. 2:6-8 This punishment by the majority is enough for such a person; so now instead you should forgive and console him, so that he may not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. So I urge you to reaffirm your love for him. (The man repented, and is received back into fellowship; not necessarily the same man as in *I Corinthians 5:2*.) (NRSV)

II Th. 3:6, 14-15 Now we command you, beloved, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to keep away from believers who are living in idleness and not according to the tradition that they received from us...Take note of those who do not obey what we say in this letter; **have nothing to do with them, so that they may be ashamed.** Do not regard them as enemies, **but warn them as believers.** (Shunning was a milder form of discipline.) (NRSV)

5. THE PURPOSE OF A CHRISTIAN CONGREGATION IS TO PROVIDE A FELLOWSHIP ON EARTH OF REDEEMED PEOPLE WHO DO GOD'S WILL UPON THE EARTH AS IT IS DONE IN HEAVEN.

The congregation exists for God's glory and for His service. The work of the church is similar to that which Christ performed on earth—help for man's physical need (**charity**), preaching the Gospel (**missions**), teaching mankind the Word of God (**Christian education**), and the **mutual upbuilding of each member** of the Christian community. (Refer back to section 3.)

- Col. 3:16-17*
(Worship) Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you **sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God**. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (NIV)
- Matt. 4:23*
(Three Tasks) And He (Jesus) went about all Galilee, **teaching** in their synagogues and **preaching the gospel** of the kingdom and **healing every disease and every infirmity** among the people. (RSV)
- II Cor. 4:13, 15*
(Witnessing & Worship) But just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture— “ I believed, and so I spoke”— we also believe, and so we speak...Yes, everything is for your sake, **so that grace**, as it extends to more and more people, **may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God**. (NRSV)
- Eph. 3:20-21*
(Worship) “Now to him who is able through the power which is at work among us to do immeasurably more than all we can ask or conceive, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus from generation to generation for evermore! Amen.” (REB)
- I Pet. 2:9*
(Witness) But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, **that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness** into his marvelous light. (RSV)
- I Pet. 3:15b, 16a* ...Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience. (NIV)
- I Pet. 4:10-11*
(Stewardship) “Each one should **use whatever gift he has received to serve others**, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone **speaks**, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone **serves**, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.” (NIV)
- (Worship)

6. THE WORK OF THE CHURCH AND ITS VARIOUS NEEDS SHOULD BE SUPPORTED BY THE MATERIAL GIFTS OF CHRISTIANS, AND ALSO BY THEIR OWN PERSONAL WORK AND SERVICE.

There are many ways in which each individual Christian can serve Christ and the Church—ways like working with the youth of the church; singing in the choir; teaching a Sunday School class; leading topics and devotions at meetings; serving on boards and committees; visiting the sick; witnessing to others on the job; distributing Christian literature; **giving one's time, talents, and money for the various tasks of the kingdom of God.**

Matt. 25:34-36 "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. **For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.**' " (NIV)

Luke 10:35 The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.' (Note **how he bought service for the man** when he could no longer serve him personally.) (NIV)

I Cor. 15:58 Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. **Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord**, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain. (NIV)

I Cor. 16:1-2 Now concerning the contribution for the saints...(1) **On the first day of every week**, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, (2) **as he may prosper...** (RSV)

II Cor. 9:6-9 The point is this: he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do (3) **as he has made up his mind**, not reluctantly or under compulsion, (4) **for God loves a cheerful giver.** (5) **And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance**, so that you may always have enough of everything and may provide in abundance for every good work. (RSV)

(The Christian is to give: 1. Systematically,
2. Proportionately,
3. Willingly,
4. Cheerfully, and
5. Confidently.)

Gal. 6:9-10 And let us not grow weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we do not lose heart. So then, as we have opportunity, **let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.** (RSV)

Definition of a Missionary

"A missionary is one whose ear has never become dulled to the throb of Christless feet on the road to eternity. A missionary is one whose heart is broken by the things that break the heart of God. He is one who believes heaven and hell to be what God says they are. He is one who hears the soundless sob of the multitudes, bewildered and bitter, and who cries in return, 'Lord, here am I, send me.'

"DO YOU FEEL THAT THE CHURCH, as you know it, does not live up to its mission? You may be right, but that is no reason to stay away from it. If you turn your back on the church, you turn your back on God's people in the world, and on God's primary work in the world.

"Do you break with your nation when you feel that is on the wrong track? Do you give up on your family when you think they are not what they ought to be?

"If you belong to Christ, then your place is among His people, worshipping and serving – even if they do not see their mission clearly; even if they are not all faithful servants of Christ."

– Adapted from W.A. Visser t'Hooft



The Church is Where Christians Are

What Can I Do to Strengthen My Church?

1. **Be a Sincere Believer.** Know Jesus as your Savior; trust in God's grace, purchased by Christ's death for you, not in yourself, for forgiveness and eternal life. Nothing so strengthens the Church as sincere believers who know they are saved by God's grace in Jesus Christ.
2. **Be a Committed Christian.** Put God's will and the advancement of Christ's Kingdom at the absolute center of your life. There is an old Indian saying that, "the perfume of holiness travels even against the wind."
3. **Deny Yourself.** Put the doing of God's will above personal plans, desires, and feelings. Always do the loving thing first and foremost. Take the hard jobs, be a servant of others. Discipline yourself in terms of your goals, your wants, the expenditure of your time, money and what occupies your interest. Then **give** generously of all you have as Christ did.
4. **Be Informed.** Know what's going on in the congregation. Tape the Sunday bulletin to the refrigerator door; ask, "What do YOU want me to do, Lord?" (Acts 22:10). Use your gifts to build up the Body of Christ in your congregation.
5. **Be Concerned.** Care about those who are sick, lonely, wandering away from the Lord and the Church; care about the person whose faith is weak, the "tired" Christian, the rebellious ones, the disgruntled, the shirkers, grumblers, critical, lazy—"be patient with them all." I Thess. 5:14.
6. **Pray.** Pray constantly for the whole Church, for your congregation, and specifically for individuals who are suffering, faltering, or who obviously need strengthening in some area of their life.
7. **Be Available.** - To God, as an instrument to achieve His righteous purposes in the Church and in the world. Volunteer your time, your abilities, your experience, your resources, whenever and wherever needed. I Pet. 4:10-11; Romans 6:13.
8. **Be a Good Bible Student.** Learn God's Word and will with the intention of putting it into practice, and with the hope that God will use your knowledge of His Word to win others, and to draw them closer to Him. Attend, teach, or participate in a Bible class. II Tim. 3:16-17.
9. **Be a Witness.** Pray daily that God would use you — through your example, your life, your words, your love, to share your hope in Christ with others, and, if possible, to win them to the Lord or draw them closer to Him.
10. **Be Friendly.** Bees are attracted to honey, not vinegar. Be a sweet, winsome, friendly, caring Christian. Get acquainted with people. Be concerned about them; be friendly to them even if they are not friendly toward you. If your church is "cold" be sure you're not one of the ice cubes in it.
11. **Be Faithful.** Pray for strength to complete every task; to act upon your good intentions; to be dependable and responsible in all you do; be persistent, be "steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." I Cor. 15:58.
12. **Be Humble.** Don't demand or expect too much of others; don't be quick to judge, criticize, blame or accuse others. Don't be quick to compare their efforts with yours. Do not hunger for praise and recognition, just remember God's great love and grace given to you in Christ, and be satisfied to work for Him, to have His approval. Have a tender heart and a humble mind. I Peter 3:8.
13. **Be Loving.** Since God is love, Christians who have God's love in their hearts and actions, are like little incarnations of God—little 'Christs' to their neighbors. This expression of the truth will draw non-Christians to the Church like honey draws bees to flowers.

The Decline and Demise of Christian Faith

When people become sporadic in their church attendance, in Bible study, worship, and in Christian service—or become inactive altogether, several things begin to happen:

1. Our understanding of the Christian faith becomes vague, and unclear; in its place, an element of fear starts gnawing on us, confusion, uncertainty and doubts increase.
2. Unconsciously, the attitudes, values, and ways of the world, gradually infiltrate our minds, and bit by bit they crowd out the word of God and the will of God from our hearts and minds.
3. Gradually, personal goals, ambitions and desires replace Christian goals and longings. Love for the world crowds out love for the Father. Inner peace and joy decreases.
4. Prayer becomes sporadic, mechanical, half-hearted, and there is little or no earnestness in our prayers. Our prayers, if they are said at all, are more like whining complaints and are simply requests for things that may or may not be in keeping with God's will for our lives.
5. Our love, whether for God, or for other people, becomes weaker, or non-existent. Instead, our energies and concerns all revolve around self-centered goals and self-gratification. Selfishness replaces love.
6. Our hope of heaven and eternal life becomes weaker and less important to us. We push thoughts of death, judgment, heaven and hell, to the remotest regions of our minds and we don't want to talk about them.
7. We cease to grow in character—our faith, our love, our hope, our patience, our wisdom, our faithfulness and gratitude—all of these diminish and atrophy. We are becoming more and more god-less, and our thought patterns and activities fall into a rut.
8. Jesus becomes less and less important to us; we begin to think it isn't really necessary to trust in Jesus for salvation. We begin to think that "it doesn't matter what you believe so long as you are sincere," and "all religions are going to the same place."
9. We no longer confess Christ; we secretly or openly reject some of His teachings, or at least ignore them. We never talk about Jesus to others or quote His words.
10. We become less and less willing to give of ourselves—our time, our energies, and especially our money, to help other people. We want God and others to serve us, but we don't want to serve God or others.
11. We become less and less concerned about the spiritual needs or salvation of others, and we make little or no effort to win them to faith in Jesus, or keep them in that faith.
12. We excuse and rationalize our increasing godlessness, with criticism of other Christians, doubts about the bible, and arguments against church membership and the Christian faith. Unbelief and godlessness have triumphed over Christian faith. We have died spiritually (Romans 8:12-13). Don't let this happen to you! (Revelation 3:15-20).

WORKSHEET FOR CHAPTER XIII

I. ON THE BASIS OF THIS LESSON, CAN YOU ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS?

1. Why is it not correct to say, "I can be just as good a Christian without belonging to a church"?
2. What part does the Word of God play in the life of a Christian congregation?
3. What are some of the special offices within the Church which the New Testament mentions? Which of these is no longer present in the Church?
4. How may women serve in the Church, and in what area are they restricted?
5. Mention some of the qualifications and duties of the Ministry.
6. Is the minister who holds down a secular job to pay his expense the ideal pattern for the Ministry of the Christian Church?
7. What are some of the principles which govern the life of a Christian congregation and which is the highest principle?
8. By what authority does the Pastor stand before the congregation and pronounce upon the congregation the forgiveness of sins?
9. What is the primary reason for the practice of Excommunication in the Church?
10. What is the proper work and purpose of the Church and of the individual Christian congregation?

II. CERTAIN CONGREGATIONS EXCEL IN THEIR CHRISTIAN FAITH, LOVE OR SERVICE. Others are sadly lacking in various ways. Look up the Bible references and write a few words on the blank space that describe the congregation. (Which congregation would you like to belong to?)

1. Jerusalem, Acts 2:42 _____

2. Antioch, Acts 11:26 _____

3. Philippi, Phil. 4:15-16 _____

4. Thessalonica, II Thess. 1:3 _____

5. Beroea, Acts 17:11 _____

6. Ephesus, Rev. 2:1 _____

7. Smyrna, Rev. 2:9-10 _____

8. Pergamum, Rev. 2:13 _____

9. Thyatira, Rev. 2:19 _____

10. Sardis, Rev. 3:1 _____

11. Philadelphia, Rev. 3:8 _____

12. Laodicea, Rev. 3:15-16 _____
