

*Acts 2:41 – 3,000 souls added to the church after Peter’s first sermon – someone counted! – continued counting 5,000 more in 4:4 – 5:14 – *“multitudes of men and women were constantly added to their number.”* – women counted! – knew who were among *“their number”*

*Acts 2:42 – they observed common activities of observing the apostles’ teaching, fellowship, breaking bread together, and prayer

*Acts 2:44 – they *“were together and had all things in common”* to the extent some sold their property to provide for the needs of others in the group

*Acts 4:32 – *“And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them.”*

*Acts 6:1 – knew who the Hellenistic widows were – normally would have been excluded because they were Greek oriented, because they were women, and because they were widows (God was punishing them) – the *“congregation”* was called upon to resolve the problem – v. 5 – the *“whole congregation”* approved

*Acts 8:1 – persecution *“against the church in Jerusalem”* – had to know who they were – people didn’t hide their association even under persecution – Saul went *“house to house”* to drag them out and put them in prison – how did he know which houses to raid?

*Acts 11:26 – Barnabas sent from *“the church at Jerusalem”* to Antioch to verify what was happening – went to Tarsus to get Paul and brought him to Antioch *“for an entire year they met with the church . . . and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch”* – church in Jerusalem and Antioch were both known entities

*Acts 12:1 – *“Now about that time Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church in order to mistreat them.”* – they had an awareness of who *“belonged”*

*Acts 12:12 – after Peter is arrested and released from jail by an angel, he immediately knows where to go to find people who were praying for him – v. 17 – told them to *“tell James”* – brother of Jesus who was head of the Jerusalem church by this time

*Acts 14:23 – Paul and Barnabas *“appointed elders for them in every church”* – Paul’s common practice was to evangelize, instruct the new believers, form a church and appoint elders to lead them – these were identifiable groups of believers – 16:5 – *“the churches”* were *“strengthened and were increasing in number daily”* on Paul’s return visits

*Acts 15:4 – the Council of Jerusalem – Paul and Barnabas *“received by the church and the apostles and elders”* – apostles were separate from leaders of the church – identifiable body with leadership and the authority to decide the weighty theological issue of including Gentiles into the new culture of the church – 15:22 – the *“whole church”* acted to send Paul and Barnabas to Antioch with the formal theological statement of the Council of Jerusalem – 15:30 – *“the congregation”* in Antioch received it and was greatly encouraged

*Acts 20 – in meeting with the elders of church of Ephesus – 20:28 – *“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you*

overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, nor sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.” – known church – known leadership – they had to know the flock to protect them from the wolves

Several things are apparent from these passages:

- *The early NT disciples quickly formed Identifiable bodies of believers in Jesus who shared everything together
- *God brought new disciples of both Jews and Gentiles to these churches through faithful preaching
- *They kept track of the numbers in their group
- *There was a mutual responsibility of worship and care for those in the group
- *They grew in spite of persecution
- *They eventually gained an identity as “Christians” who met as a “church”
- *Elders were instituted in these churches who were charged with teaching the flock and caring for them
- *These churches multiplied throughout Israel, Antioch, and into Asia Minor and Europe

3'. Modern a_____

The church is the most accurate and enduring manifestation of the new culture that unfolds in the book of Acts. As such, it deserves meaningful reflection. In his later writing to the church in Ephesus in Ephesians 5 Paul compared the church to marriage, with the love of the husband and wife seen as a picture of the love of Christ for the church. Both the church and marriage are presented as pictures of the gospel. The picture of the husband’s love and care for his wife is presented as a picture of Christ’s love for individuals in the church and the church as a whole. John uses the terminology of “bride” and “bridegroom” four times in Revelation 18 and 19 in reference to the church. How could anyone who loves the bridegroom not love His bride?

So the question remains – why would a true believer *not* want to formally identify with a local church? It’s possible they’ve been burned in the past by some kind of unpleasant experience in a church. Or it’s possible that their background has only been with a false church where they don’t even believe in the basics of the gospel.

There are a variety of reasons that people don’t identify with a local church – including a lack of biblical teaching and understanding – a maverick John Wayne “I can do it myself” mentality – bad experience in previous church – “false” liberal churches which exist in name only but deny basic biblical doctrine – the lure of the “attractional” concert driven “feel-good” megachurches

In America we are losing the principle of association with a local church – the “attractional” programming of the megachurch movement is destroying the biblical doctrine of the church:

- *Focus is in drawing huge crowds to multi-site venues – distorts gospel by removing sin and repentance from the message because that would “offend” their clientele

- *Latest fad – concert style worship – the experience is everything

- *Driven by professional tech orientation in communication, worship and promotion of multi-site venues

- *Massive appeal to popular culture

- *This makes it impossible to speak biblical truth to the crowd they are attempting to attract and emulate

But this doesn’t over-ride the biblical expectation and pattern of belonging to a local church – it’s hard to duplicate the experience of the NT church, but it seems clear that God created a new culture called “the church” during this time. Paul later called the church the “Bride of Christ,” alluding to the love and care that Christ has for the church. It is inconceivable that modern Christians would not identify with a local church through formal membership. Here are some reasons why.

T _____

At first glance some people would say that the Bible says nothing about membership in a local church. That is not entirely true. The Bible has much to say about Christians being “members” of the body of Christ. We believe this internal reality is best seen through external membership in the expression of God’s work in the local church. Biblical membership is much more than just “voting rights” at business meetings. It is the thrill of being a part of God’s great enterprise for making His presence known in this world. Membership is theologically guided by the following precepts.

- S _____ — We are all linked by our common salvation and are thus members of the same body in the family of God (1 Corinthians 12:12). The phrase “one another” used 107 times in the New Testament to describe our relationship to other people in the church. We are not just called to **be** together, Romans 12:5 says that we indeed **are** “members of one another,” linked by our common commitment to Jesus Christ. The admonitions to love, pray for, encourage, admonish, greet, serve, teach, accept, honor, and forgive one another are certainly signs that we are indeed “members of one another.” (Ephesians 4:25).
- A _____ — Being outside the membership of a church for a Christian is a unique American phenomenon, based more on the value of American rugged individualism than on the Word of God. When Jesus spoke of binding and loosing (Matthew 16:19; 18:18-20; John 20:23), He was giving authority on earth to a plurality of leaders in the church. Being outside the

protective umbrella of biblical leaders, and not being submissive to them is foreign to Scripture (Hebrews 13:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:12). In the same sense, elders are called to shepherd the flock of God, not individuals (Acts 20:28, 1 Peter 5:2).

- **C** _____ — Christians often say they are committed to the Lord, but don't realize they are to be just as committed to each other. In 2 Corinthians 8:5 Paul says the Macedonian Christians "*first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.*" (2 Corinthians 8:5), and Romans 12:10 tells us we are to "*Be devoted to one another in brotherly love.*" Church membership is merely a sign of our spiritual commitment to each other. We are to be known as much for belonging as believing.
- **D** _____ — Scripture does not present the picture of a Christian who stands outside watching and not contributing to the needs of the body. The Bible teaches that every Christian is **created** for ministry (Ephesians 2:10), **saved** for ministry (2 Timothy 1:9), **called** to ministry (1 Peter 2:9-10), **gifted** for ministry (1 Corinthians 12:7), **authorized** for ministry (Matthew 28:18-20), **equipped** to minister (Ephesians 4:11-12), **needed** for ministry (1 Corinthians 12:15), **expected** to minister (1 Peter 4:10), and will be **rewarded** for his/her ministry (Colossians 3:23-24). Membership is a tangible commitment to fulfilling this duty.
- **D** _____ — Strange as it may seem to a child, he needs the discipline of the parent. In like manner, each of us needs the discipline found only in the church. Outside the family circle, people tend to hide and follow selfish and often destructive pursuits. But, like our nuclear families, inside the security of the church family there is mutual accountability, the encouragement of fellow travelers, and even the loving discipline that comes through biblical rebuke and confrontation (Matthew 18:15-18). Without a tangible identification with the body there is much less chance of "iron sharpening iron" because there is no permission granted to do so.
- **P** _____ — While our individual purpose in life as Christians is to bring glory to God in all that we do (1 Corinthians 10:31), there is no scriptural basis for doing this apart from the church. Like the Pharisees and lawyers who rejected God's purpose for their lives in Luke 7:30, we too can reject God's purpose for our lives. And that purpose is always tied up in the expression and ministry of His body on this earth, the church. Ephesians 1 tells us that we have been "*...predestined according to His purpose...*" which was to put all things in subjection under His feet, and then to be given to the church (as a corporate whole, not individual parts) as the head over all things.
- **U** _____ — Probably nothing expresses our unity with the invisible church like membership in the visible church. We are told to preserve the bonds

of unity that are seen in our common allegiance to one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God (Ephesians 4:3-6). In Ephesians 5 Paul presents the picture of Christ being the body, a unified whole, not a collection of renegade individual parts. He also declares the church to be the bride of Christ, stressing our relational union with the groom.

R_____

In the modern era in which we live the increasing disintegration of the family has resulted in an increasing sense of detachment, where fractured relationships are more and more common. In addition, with the advent of modern travel, it is not uncommon for people to live many miles away from family and lifelong friends. In this context, the role of the church as a caring, healing community becomes increasingly important. As such, it is our desire that our church be a place of:

- **B**_____ — where each person is known, loved, and cared for. Studies have shown that if a person doesn't have at least three “friends” at church within one year, they will leave the church.
- **C**_____ — that allows each person to minister and be ministered to. We all have a desire to be needed and to respond to someone else’s needs. Without both, we are imbalanced, becoming either hardened or self-centered.
- **P**_____ — where the ultimate purpose of life is fleshed out in weekly involvements and fulfilling ministry. There is more to life than earning a paycheck and the church provides a place to be a part of something bigger than ourselves.

P_____

The practical side of church membership is that it not only makes you feel a part of something — you really are more intimately connected in ways that are not available to the casual attendee or non-member.

- **O**_____ — People tend to invest more in that which they own. Our desire is to see each member have a pride and sense of ownership that yields in the investment of all his resources for the glory of God. Being a member of a local church provides the member with a feeling of ownership that results in a commitment to the Lord and His work. Lack of ownership means that a person will have more of a tendency to merely attend services without a sense of belonging. And without the ownership and commitment of each member, the church becomes sort of a club with valued opinions and privileges only for the ones who have been around the longest.

- I _____ — The fact of the matter is that we can welcome you to become more involved with us, if you become a member. If you are a member, we know that you have made a commitment to Christ and that you share somewhat of the same spiritual paradigm. This allows us to welcome you to develop the full range of your gifts, to teach our children, to serve in our leadership, and to have a say in the business of the church.

B _____

Joining a local church:

- Allows us to experience God's presence through worship that addresses the deepest longing of our heart and the greatest goal of life.
- Allows us to experience God's people in a place where we can both be ministered to and minister to others.
- Allows us to experience God's peace by applying the principles of God's Word to resolve spiritual conflicts
- Allows us to experience God's purpose in being equipped to fulfill our God-given purpose in this world.
- Allows us to experience God's power through being part of His plan in redeeming the world through the Church.

Rosaria Champagne Butterfield gives an example of the new identity of a Christian in the context of a commitment to a local church:

Official Vows: Covenant of Church Membership

- *Do you believe the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and life?*
- *Do you believe in the one living and true God—the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as revealed in the scriptures?*
- *Do you repent of your sin; confess your guilt and helplessness as a sinner against God; profess Jesus Christ, Son of God, as your Savior and Lord; and dedicate yourself to His service: Do you promise that you will endeavor to forsake all sin, and to conform your life to His teaching and example?*
- *Do you promise to submit in the Lord to the teaching and government of this church as being based upon the scriptures and described in substance in the Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America? Do you recognize your responsibility to work with others in the church and do you promise to support and encourage them in their service to the Lord? In case you should need correction in doctrine or life, do you promise to respect the*

authority and discipline of the church?

- *To the end that you may grow in the Christian life, do you promise that you will diligently read the Bible, engage in private prayer, keep the Lord's Day, regularly attend the worship services, observe the appointed sacraments, and give to the Lord's work as He shall prosper you?*
- *Do you purpose to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness in all the relationships of life, faithfully to perform your whole duty as a true servant of Jesus Christ, and seek to win others to Him?*
- *Do you make this profession of faith and purpose in the presence of God, in humble reliance upon His grace, as you desire to give your account with joy at the Last Great Day?¹*

David Platt provides some context:

It is biblically, spiritually, and practically impossible to be a disciple of Christ (and much less *make* disciples of Christ) apart from total devotion to a family of Christians.

But so many people think it is possible—and they try to live like it's possible. It has even become a mark of spiritual maturity today for some professing Christians to *not* be active in a church. "I'm in love with Jesus," People will say, "but I just can't stand the church."

It's impossible to follow Jesus fully without loving his bride selflessly, and it's impossible to think that we can enjoy Christ apart from his body. Jesus goes so far as to identify the church with himself when he asks Saul on the road to Damascus, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" Saul hadn't persecuted Christ himself, but he had persecuted Christians, so in essence Jesus was saying, "When you mess with them, you mess with me."²

Summary to this point – creed and culture were the first two signs of the NT church – without foundational doctrine that stressed the provision of the cross of Christ there would have been no re-ordering of culture – but the teachings of Christianity drove the re-making of society – Mohler writes:

The permissive posture of the church in this century has allowed the most heinous heresies to grow unchecked-and heretics to be celebrated. Francis Schaeffer was among the most eloquent modern prophets who decried this

¹ Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert: An English Professor's Journey Into Christian Faith*, (Pittsburgh, PA: Crown & Covenant Publications, 2012), 38-40.

² David Platt, *Follow Me: A Call to Die. A Call to Live.*, (Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House, 2013), 150-151.

doctrinal cowardice. Schaeffer emphatically denied that a church could be a true Christian fellowship and allow false doctrine. As he stated, "One cannot explain the explosive dynamite, the dynamis, of the early church apart from the fact that they practiced two things simultaneously: orthodoxy of doctrine and orthodoxy of community in the midst of the visible church, a community which the world can see."³

III. C _____

The book of Acts serves as a model for two misunderstood institutions – the church and “missions” – these are actually synonymous:

- *The mission of the church is “missions”
- *“Missions” is the mission of the church

A. God’s p_____ plan

Progression – Mark Dever notes God’s progressive plan:

*OT – the theme of God’s salvific provision begins with the Abrahamic Covenant in Gen. 12 where God promises that all the nations of the world will be blessed through Abraham – how? – through the coming of the Jewish Messiah – this is initiated in the Gospels and implemented for the nations of the world in Acts

*Jesus’ ministry – Jesus is the seed of Abraham (Matt. 1:1) – the ministry of reconciliation for all nations was already underway in Jesus’ ministry through events like healing the daughter of the Roman centurion (Matt. 8:5-13), His discussion with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:7-38), His targeted casting a demon out of the daughter of a Canaanite woman (Matt. 15:22-28), and his reference to Gentiles in the OT (Luke 4:25-27)

*Pentecost – the coming of the HS in Acts 2 began the reversal of the curse of national and linguistic division seen in Gen. 11 – the first emphasis here is on the nations of the world

*Peter and Cornelius – this dramatic vision brought to Peter depicted the change from OT law to NT grace – three times Peter said, *“Surely not, Lord! . . . I have never eaten anything impure or unclean”* (Acts 10:14) – God responded each time – *“Do not call anything impure that God has made clean”* (Acts 10:15)

*Peter to Paul – Peter is the major character of the first part of the book – but from Acts 13-28 on the emphasis turns to the conversion, ministry, and the successive three mission trips of Paul where he broadened the gospel message to Gentile lands in the Roman Empire

*Paul and Barnabas – their turning to the Gentiles was a turning point in the book of Acts and a turning point in God’s dealing with the nations – Acts 13:46-47 – *“Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, ‘It was necessary that the word of God be*

³ Albert R. Mohler, Jr., “Church Discipline: The Missing Mark” in *The Compromised Church: The Present Evangelical Crisis* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1998), 183.

spoken to you first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. "For so the Lord has commanded us, 'I have placed You as a light for the Gentiles, That You may bring salvation to the end of the earth.' " – Paul understood what God was doing – his pattern continued to be preaching to the Jews but then quickly moving on the Gentiles when Jews rejected his message – Acts 18:6 – *"But when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles."* – part of the last message of Paul recorded in Acts 28:28 – *"Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will also listen."*

*Jerusalem to Rome – from the first witnesses of the resurrection at the end of the gospels, this new community grew enough to be known by the Roman governor Feilx (24:22) as well as the Jews in Rome – it is also significant that the movement was centered in Jerusalem at the beginning of Acts but in Rome at the end of Acts⁴

B. C _____

1. A _____ world

Remember the context of the Roman world – the Romans thought of Christianity as another Eastern religion – baptism resembled ceremonial cleansing rituals – the Lord's Table resembled the ritual meals of many of the mystery religions – Glenn Sunshine describes a number of cultural differences that made the growth of Christianity problematic

*Christians would not burn incense to the emperor – thus, they were guilty of treason

*The idea of using a cross as a symbol of their religion was repulsive – crucifixion was the most inhumane form of punishment Romans could conceive of – it was reserved for slaves, rebels, and the dregs of society

*Christians believed their eternal destiny depended on putting their trust in a Jew (a natural cultural enemy of Rome) from Judea (considered among the worst province in the Roman Empire)

*The claim of exclusivity by Christians clashed with the cosmopolitan, broad-minded outlook of the Romans who worshipped dozens of gods

*Christians behaved differently – they believed that all people are created in the image of God so they rejected gladiatorial games that viewed conquered slaves only as sources of entertainment

*The Christian sexual ethic was dramatically different – crude abortion, homosexuality, prostitution, and sexual infidelity were rampant – Christians taught the biblical ethic of family, sex in marriage, and heterosexuality

⁴ Mark Dever, *The Message of the New Testament: Promises Kept* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2005), 132-136.

*Romans regarded women as inferior – would often have many sons but kill all but one of their female babies – Aristotle said women were essentially the products of birth defects since there was not enough “heat” in the pregnancy which resulted in women coming out half-baked with their genitals inside out – as incomplete males they were genetically, physically, mentally, and spiritually inferior to men

*Christians taught that all men were equal spiritually before God – men and women, slaves and free, Jews and Gentiles, Romans and barbarians – all were created by God and welcome in the church⁵

Despite all of this – Christianity was born and flourished – shows us two things:

*Culture is not the determining factor in the advance of Christianity – the deck was stacked against the Christian message but the power of the gospel overwhelmed all cultural barriers

*The advance of the gospel is spiritual – not logical

2. M_____ context

But many today point out that we shouldn't do evangelism because of the waning influence of Christianity in the West – this intimidates and frightens many Christians – but Rebecca McLaughlin in *Confronting Christianity*⁶ points out that a review of pertinent summaries from *Pew Research Center* paints a different picture:

*In Western Europe and North America, the proportion of people identifying as religious has certainly shrunk. But at a global level, not only has religion failed to decline, but sociologists are now predicting an *increasing* religious world.⁷

*By 2060, the latest projections suggest, Christianity will still be the largest global belief system, having increased slightly, from 31 percent to 32 percent of the world's population.⁸

*Islam will have grown substantially, from 24 percent to 31 percent. Hinduism is set for marginal decline, from 15 percent to 14 percent, and Buddhism from 7 percent to 5 percent. Judaism will hold stable at 0.2 percent. And by 2060, the proportion of humanity identifying as atheists, agnostics, or “none” will have declined from 16 percent to 13 percent.⁹

⁵ Glenn S. Sunshine, *Why You Think the Way You Do: The Story of Western Worldviews from Rome to Home* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2009), 42-43.

⁶ Rebecca McLaughlin, *Confronting Christianity: 12 Hard Questions for the World's Largest Religion* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2019), 12.

⁷ “The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2015-2050,” Pew Research Center, April 2, 2015, accessed on March 27, 2020.

⁸ “Projected Change in Global Population, 2015-2060,” Pew Research Center, March 31, 2017, <http://www.pewforum.org>, accessed on March 27, 2020,]

⁹ “Size and Projected Growth of Major Religious Groups, 2015-2060,” Pew Research Center, April 3, 2017, <http://www.pewforum.org>, accessed on March 27, 2020.

*Why is this happening? Part of the answer lies in the link between theology and biology: Muslims, Christians, Hindus, and Jews outbreed the non-religious. Global fertility rates are as follows: Muslims (3.1), Christians 2.7), Hindus (2.4), Jews (2.3) unaffiliated 1.7), Buddhists (1.6).¹⁰

She continues, “Furthermore, while many Americans are becoming nonreligious, the traffic flows both ways.

*A recent study found that nearly 40 percent of Americans raised nonreligious become religious (typically Christian) as adults, while only 20 percent of those raised Protestant switch.¹¹

*If that trend continues, my secular friends are twice as likely to raise children who become Christians as I am to raise children who become non-religious.¹²

*And the kind of religious beliefs people hold today are not the kind that fit comfortably in the “Coexist” bumper sticker. In North America, partly thanks to immigrant believers, full-blooded Christianity is outcompeting theologically liberal faith.¹³

McLaughlin continues to poke holes in the theory of cultural advancement of the gospel by noting that China, the dominant Communist Country after the end of WWII has failed in their effort to craft a secularist society with no religion.¹⁴ She notes, “Conservative estimates from 2010 put China’s Christian population at over sixty-eight million, representing 5 percent of its vast population.¹⁵ But Christianity is spreading so fast that experts believe China could have more Christians than the US by 2030, and that it could be a majority Christian country by 2050.”¹⁶

Acts demonstrates that the truths of Christianity are foundational for all mankind – thus it is critical to see the Christian message propagated among all people – this occurs in a world that has developed our own culture – Tim Keller notes,

¹⁰ “Total Fertility Rate by Religion 2010-2015,” Pew Research Center, March 26:2015, <http://www.pewforum.org>, accessed on March 27, 2020.

¹¹ “One-in-Five U.S. Adults Were Raised in Interreligious Homes,” Pew Research Center, October 26, 2016, accessed on March 27, 2020.

¹² “Religious Switching and Inter marriage,” in *America’s Changing Religious Landscape*, Pew Research Center, May 12, 2015, <http://www.pewforum.org>, accessed on March 27, 2020.

¹³ The Changing Religious Composition of the U. S.,” in *America’s Changing Religious Landscape*, Pew Research Center, May 12, 2015, accessed on March 27, 2020.

¹⁴ McLaughlin, *Confronting Christianity*, 12.

¹⁵ Pew Research Center Global Religious Survey, 2010, cited by Eleanor Albert, “Christianity in China,” Council on Foreign Relations (website), March 9, 2018, <https://www.cfr.org>, accessed on March 27, 2020.

¹⁶ Antonia Blumberg, “China on Tract to Become World’s Largest Christian Country by 2025, Experts Say,” *Huffpost*, April 22, 2014, <http://huffingtonpost.com>, accessed on March 27, 2020.

five narratives function as self-evident truths, usually expressed in simple slogans that appear to need no justification once stated. “Keep your religious views private.” “I am free to do what I wish as long as I don’t hurt anyone else.” “What right do you have to tell anyone else what is right or wrong for them?” “You have to be yourself and not care what anyone else says.” “You don’t want to be on the wrong side of history.”¹⁷

C. Paul’s first “missionary” journey

1. His purpose

Remember “church” and “missions” are interchangeable here – one and the same:

- *Started with local, familiar people – synagogue in Salamis
- *Encountered persecution – Elymas the magician
- *13:16 – Paul always preached – explained flow of God’s working from familiar to the gospel
- *13:43 – great response but stirs up jealousy from Jews
- *13:50 – *“When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.”*

His travels looked like this – first missionary outreach has already broken out of Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria mentioned in Acts 1:8 – church of Antioch was in Asia Minor – Paul left from there:



¹⁷ Timothy Keller, *Preaching*, (New York, New York: Viking, 2015), 132-133.

*Same pattern in Iconium, Lystra – Paul preached, some believe, stoned and left for dead

*They planted churches – Acts 14:23 – *“When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.”* “Foreign” missions is synonymous with “home” missions. Anyone going “overseas” to do missions is tasked with the same thing as the church in the host country. After all, every country, with the exception of Israel, was once a “foreign” field.

*Went on to Pisidia, Perga, Pamphylia, Attallia – reversed field and went back to check on churches

2. His p_____

a. M_____ is for all people – Acts 2:1-13

Reaffirm – 16 people groups mentioned at the day of Pentecost – this was obviously God’s plan to kickstart this new era by launching the gospel into every known culture surrounding the central locus in Jerusalem – this begins the radical culture that sets Christianity apart from any other culture in the history of the world – most cultures have roots in ethnicity, language, location – but not Christianity

*Matt. 28:19-20 – *“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”*

*This will be accomplished at the end of the age – Rev. 5:9-10 – a new song in heaven will be sung – *“Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.”*

b. Missions is c_____ based

1'. The i_____ of the church

The church shows up in Acts 1-12:

*2:42 – basic practices

*5:11 – 1st mention of “church” in connection of benevolence

*8:1 – Paul persecutes “the church”

*9-11 – the church grows

*12:1 – Herod is aware of “the church”

2'. The g_____ of the church

But from Acts 13 on the emphasis is clearly on evangelizing and planting churches:

a'. The church s_____ missionaries

13:1-3 – 1st missionary journey – the church did the sending – “Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.”

b'. Accountable to s_____ church

14:26-27 – Paul reported back to his “sending” church on his ministry – “From there they sailed to Antioch, from which they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had accomplished. When they had arrived and gathered the church together, they began to report all things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.” – Acts 15:41 – Paul returns to “the churches” of 1st journey to strengthen them

c'. C_____ affirmed the process

Acts 15 – Jerusalem Council prompted by challenge on issue of salvation – v. 4 – Paul and Barnabas “were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them.” – v. 12 – transparent debate involved the congregation – “All the people kept silent, and they were listening to Barnabas and Paul as they were relating what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles.” – v. 22 – “Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas” – the leaders of the church in Jerusalem formally affirm the spread of the gospel to Gentiles – affirmed by the congregation

Observations:

- *Evangelism is always tied to the work of the church – it is never seen as an individual work separate from a body of believers

- *Planting churches is always the result of evangelism – new believers were always discipled and gathered into a local church

- *Paul’s missionary work was laser focused on planting churches

c. “Missions” is g_____ centered

13:5 – “When they reached Salamis, they began to proclaim the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews; and they also had John as their helper.” – **the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing**

Alert – the core definition of missions is the communication of the gospel – most would agree but modern “missions” often involves other efforts:

- *Education

- *Humanitarian efforts (“Compassion” ministries) – providing medical help – drilling water wells – supporting orphanages -

- *Business ventures

- *Missions is the natural extension of the work of the church – missions is not humanitarian aid, educational enterprise, or business venture – evangelism and discipleship is the work of the church – same with missions – presumes they have common language and the Bible in their language

- *Missions primarily flows from the leadership of the church – not mission agencies

- *Missionaries are “*set apart*” by the call of the HS – they were already ministering – not everyone goes – some want to make everyone a missionary – NT missionaries are foreign pastors – sent to evangelize, plant churches, train leaders

- *Missionaries are “*sent . . . away*” – v. 4 – “*when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.*” – they sent Paul and Barnabas – their very best

Must remember – Acts isn’t about merely telling the story of the birth of the church – must remember *how* and *why* it spread – it was because of the gospel – the church became the vessel that housed the message of the gospel and the gathering of those who embraced it – this was God’s doing – His idea – this wasn’t a “let’s start a new religion” campaign.

This is the whole message proclaimed in Acts – after the ascension of Jesus the disciples gather and receive the advent of the Holy Spirit – the result:

- *Acts 2 – first gospel message of the NT era – resulted in massive “recruitment” drive that launched a whole new world

- *Acts 4 – the new “normal” of gospel teaching permeated the new church

- *Acts 7 – the gospel led to the first martyr in Stephen

- *Acts 8-9 – the gospel-filled church experiences wide spread persecution but then God saves the ultimate messenger in Paul

- *Paul launches three successive missionary “journeys” – all centered around the spread of the gospel through aggressive evangelism and church planting – this is the message of the book of Acts!

But this “movement” was like no other – it was centered on the ultimate problem of man’s sinful nature and the ultimate solution in the person and work of Jesus Christ – this ultimate truth is what secures eternal life in heaven – there is no other way

But we often forget this – Curtis White reminds us:

We would prefer to be left alone, warmed by our beliefs-that-make-no-sense, whether they are the quotidian [every day] platitudes of ordinary Americans, the magical thinking of evangelicals, the mystical thinking of New Age Gnostics, the teary-eyed patriotism of social conservatives, or the perfervid loyalty of the rich to their free-market Mammon. We are thus the congregation of the Church of the Infinitely Fractured, splendidly alone together. And apparently that's how we like it. Our pluralism of belief says both to ourselves and to others, "Keep your distance." And yet isn't this all strangely familiar? Aren't these all the false gods that Isaiah and Jeremiah confronted, the cults of the "hot air gods"? The gods that couldn't scare birds from a cucumber patch? Belief of every kind and cult, self-indulgence and self-aggrandizement of every degree, all flourish. And yet God is abandoned.¹⁸

Even the church has seemed to forget the necessity of proclaiming the gospel – Kevin DeYoung, speaking on “The Church” at the NEXT conference on May 29, 2010 sponsored by Sovereign Grace Ministries:

There was much talk of reaching culture, impacting culture, shaping culture—and then it hit me. No one was talking about reaching the people who were making that culture. There was talk of justice and art, but not redemption. In some quarters it is as if we are focusing on the means to the end, only to forget the end. I have noticed this with many new churches planted to “reach the world” and “connect with culture.” After sitting through countless such services, the pattern seems the same: enormous effort to connect culturally, great explanations of the practical wisdom and ethic of the Bible, but seldom is given the invitation to actually cross the line of faith in Christ.¹⁹

d. New Leadership structure

Huge issue – leadership structure changed in new Christian culture – OT leadership centered around prophets, priests, and kings – when the nation of Israel sinned and was taken captive by Assyria, all of these forms of leadership became subservient to ensuing nations who ruled Israel – Assyria, Babylon, Medo/Persian Empire, Greece, Rome –

¹⁸ Curtis White, "Hot Air Gods," *Harper's*, December 2007, 14 quoted in Michael Horton, *Christless Christianity: The Alternative Gospel of the American Church*, Michael Horton (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2008), 162.

¹⁹ Trevin Wax, *Counterfeit Gospels: Rediscovering the Good News in a World of False Hope*, (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2011), 183.

during Jesus' time there was no King on the throne of Israel, the priesthood was corrupt, and there had been no prophetic voice in over 400 years

As the church was formed, leadership was given to pastors and teachers (elders) – the continuity of this demanded a new leadership structure – 14:23 – *“When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.”* – forms of polity vary today:

*Congregational – all authority rests with final authority of congregation – but there is no evidence of voting in NT

*Presbyterian – authority rests with a “session” or group of leaders over local church leaders – never any hierarchy of leadership over local elders in NT

*Episcopal – authority rests higher up with Pope or international leaders – nothing like this is seen in Scripture

Biblical standard – new leaders (men only) were appointed by existing leadership (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5) – qualified by 1 Tim. 3 and Titus 1 are appointed to position of elder by existing elders – accusations against elders must be brought by at least two witnesses (1 Tim. 5:19) who are subject to discipline like anyone else (1 Tim. 1:20)

D. The NT _____ of the church

1. The basic b_____ block of the NT

The church is the basic building block of the NT – God created the church as His primary means of revealing Himself to the world through the propagation of the gospel:

*Jesus Christ founded the church – Matt. 16:18 – *“I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.”*

*21 of the 27 books of the NT were written to specific individual churches or groups of churches

*Paul subjected himself to the rule of the church as his ministry to the Gentiles grew and caused controversy (Acts 15)

*Rom. 16:4 – Paul thanks *“all the churches of the Gentiles”* in his closing

*1 Cor. 7:17 – Paul’s instructions on marriage is given to *“all the churches”*

*1 Cor. 14:31 – Paul gives instructions on preaching and worship to *“all the churches”*

*1 Cor. 16:1 – the *“churches in Galatia”* are tied to the church of Corinth in their giving

*2 Cor. 8-9 – all the churches from Asia Minor to Jerusalem were tied together by their love and commitment to each other, even in times of poverty

*2 Cor. 11:28 – Paul did not see himself as a Lone Ranger evangelist – he ministered with a variety of colleagues including Luke, Barnabas, John Mark, Silas, Timothy, Epaphroditus, and Silvanus – he intimately felt the *“daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches”*

*The church is the revelation of the mystery of God revealed – Eph. 3:8-10 – *“To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.”*

*Eph. 4:11-12 – progression of leadership from OT to NT – *“And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.”*

- 1) apostles = personal tie with Jesus – received His teaching
- 2) prophets = given new revelation regarding Christian doctrine and practice
- 3) evangelists = missionaries who proclaimed this new message everywhere it was not known and formed new believers into churches
- 4) pastors/teachers = continued role with church to build it to maturity

*Eph. 5:23-27 – Jesus’ relation to the church – He is *“head of the church”* and the church is *“church is subject to Christ”* – His love for the church – *“Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her”* – His purpose for the church – *“so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.”*

*The church takes on the suffering of Christ *“on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions.”* (Col. 1:24)

*1 Tim. 3:15 – the pastoral epistles of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus were given *“so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.”*

*Rev. 2-3 – in the last book of the NT John records specific reports and instructions for future vitality for the churches of the NT era from Jesus Himself

*The church will be presented as the bride of Christ at the marriage supper of the lamb (Rev. 19:7), so that *“He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.”*

2. The c_____ of the church

The characteristics of the NT church are clear – they are marked by:

1) Biblical pastors and teachers (elders) – Acts 20:28 – *“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”* – Eph. 4:11-13 – *“And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and*

some as pastors and teachers” – excludes denominational leaders, TV pastors, traveling evangelists, seminary professors, psychologists, media icons

2) Biblical pattern of ministry – Eph. 4:12-13 – pastors are given “. . . *for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.*” – they are to “*shepherd the flock of God*” (1 Peter 5:2), keeping “*watch over their souls as those who will give an account*” (Heb. 13:17) – the job of the pastor is not to “get the unchurched into church”, “love our community”, “win the lost”, or “fulfill our cultural mandate” – it is to equip the church for ministry

3) Biblical preaching centered on the text of Scripture – 2 Tim. 4:2 – “*I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.*” – 1 Tim. 4:13 – “*Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching.*” – excludes topical, event orientated, political speeches, “felt need” sermons, “how to” self-help messages

4) Biblical worship by Christians – Heb. 10:23-25 – “*Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.*” – excludes popular music to “attract the unchurched” – worship is for Christians

5) Biblical mission – Acts 1:8 – “*but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.*” – excludes parachurch ministries, educational institutions, “reaching the unchurched”, humanitarian outreaches, “loving our communities”, “missional” ministries

6) Biblical ordinances – baptism and the Lord’s Table – Matt. 28:19, 20 – “*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*” – 1 Cor. 11:23-26 – “*For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you . . . For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes.*” – excludes infant baptism – believers only are baptized and participate in the Lord’s table

7) Biblical discipline for church members – Matt. 18:17 – a non-repentant Christian is to be confronted privately, then with two – then “*If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.*” – 1 Cor. 5:11-13 – “*But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves.” – this is a mandate for a pure church*

Any group that doesn't have these characteristics is not the church – nor does the Bible give any kind of paradigm or instruction for any kind of group to “come alongside” the church to partially emulate these functions.

3. The p_____

The 20th century saw the advent of various groups that catered to the entrepreneurial whims of business leaders and the rising psychological community – many times these leaders are not trained theologically, they are not accountable to any church leaders, and they assume pastoral roles over the flock – Michael Lindsey observes:

The parachurch sector has become the fulcrum of evangelical influence in American society. More than any other group, business executives have been the principal agents of change—as donors, directors, and leaders. Within this sector of the movement, business leaders have found an arena that both matches their ambitious agenda and allows them to contribute in a way that suits their strengths. Over time, this match between institutional needs and what these business leaders can offer has generated significant loyalties. And this sector has become a key portal through which non-evangelical elites have encountered the evangelical world, as evangelical executives introduce their secular peers to initiatives sponsored by the organizations they direct. Over the last thirty years, there has been a flowering of parachurch groups targeted toward business leaders, and I find that the nation's most influential evangelical business leaders—the highest-ranked corporate executives—favor these groups for their own spiritual journeys. This has generated more positive sentiment toward American evangelicalism among pockets of the nation's elite, giving much-needed legitimacy to the wider movement.²⁰

The modern phenomenon of parachurch organizations cover the evangelical landscape today – mostly spawned in the last 100 years

- *Evangelism is given over to traveling itinerant evangelists
- *Discipleship is promoted by groups emulating various reproduction models
- *Counseling and spiritual care has been turned over to psychologists
- *Leadership reflects the entrepreneurial model of Harvard Business School
- *Humanitarian needs are best met through quasi-mission agencies with world-wide reach
- *Missions is handed over to denominational and “professional” mission boards
- *Worship is modeled after professional Christian musicians

²⁰ D. Michael Lindsay, *Faith in the Halls of Power: How Evangelicals Joined the American Elite* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007), 201.

- *Christian education is entrusted to Christian institutions from pre-school through grad school
- *The result? – everything the church is called to do, someone else can do better.

These can have some positive effects::

- *Helps smaller churches do things they couldn't do by themselves
- *Makes a stronger force than many smaller ones
- *Meets needs without church bureaucracy
- *Takes advantage of specific training for leaders
- *Led by people with cross cultural experience

But the current plethora of parachurch organizations don't meet the NT standard of ministry – the downside is that this takes over the ministry of the church:

- *There is nothing in Scripture that references any kind of auxiliary ministry organization that “comes alongside” the church for the purpose of ministry
- *The leadership of parachurch ministries does not answer to the church
- *Parachurch organizations are not financially accountable to the church
- *Parachurch organizations draw away financial and human resources from the church and change the mission of the church from evangelism and church-planting to humanitarian, educational, and secondary issues
- *Parachurch ministries don't fulfill the functions of the church

Michael Horton correctly notes,

By providing support systems, parachurch agencies can help churches to stay focused on execution, but they transgress their limits when they assume the role that Christ entrusted to his church. They are not authorized to make disciples. They have no commission to proclaim the Word, to administer baptism or the Lord's Supper, to determine faith and practice, or to exercise spiritual discipline. Whatever they do must be in service to this ministry of the church rather than as a substitute parent.²¹

²¹ Michael Horton, *The Gospel Commission: Recovering God's Strategy for Making Disciples*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2011), 209.