

16 people groups mentioned at the day of Pentecost – 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.”*

2. The church is the new I _____ for Christians

The church can never be divided by ethnicity, language, economics, geography, nationality, or sex – Gal. 3:28 – *“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”* – the traditional boundaries of religion, sex, language, economics, culture, and ethnicity disappear at the cross of Christ

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*

3. The c_____ of Christian culture

a. It is s_____

Everything that happens in Acts must be seen as the supernatural plan of God moving the events of society along:

*The coming of Christ – Gal. 4:4 – *“But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law,”*

*His plan for His disciples – Acts 1:7-8 – *“He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; 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.”*

*The provision of the Holy Spirit – Acts 2:1-4

*The death and resurrection of Jesus changed history – Acts 2:23-24 – *“this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. 24 But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.”*

*Man's part – Acts 2:42 – *“They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”* – God's part – Acts 2:47 – *“praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.”*

*The unlikely conversion of Paul – from the “foremost” of all sinners (1 Tim. 1:15) to the most profound writer of NT literature

*Removal of OT restrictions – Acts 10 – God removes the dietary restrictions of the OT – 10:28 – *“And he said to them, “You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean.”* – effective change from OT to NT – God was letting Peter know that man's relationship to the law changed at the cross – 10:34-35 – *“Opening his mouth, Peter said: “I most certainly understand now that God is*

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.

not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him."

*Expansion to the Gentiles – Acts 11 – the apostles and Christians “took issue” with Peter when they heard of Cornelius’ salvation – Peter explained – 11:18 – *“When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, “Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life.””*

*Formal expansion of the church – 1st missionary journey – Acts 13:1 – *“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.”* – cf. 11:26 – 1st place in Acts where the new community in Antioch is called the “church” – *“Simeon who was called Niger”* – “black” – referred to color of his skin and descent (Niger is African country bordered by Libya, Nigeria, and Algeria) – *“Lucius of Cyrene”* – modern Libya in northern Africa (probably also black) – *“Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch”* – foster brother of Herod Antipas – *“and Paul”* – converted Jewish Pharisee – quite a mix! – this group formed the first “missionary committee” – v. 2 – *“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.”*

*The partial hardening of Israel – Rom. 11:25-26 – *“For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; 26 and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written,”*

*The formal inclusion of Gentiles in the church – Acts 13:46-48 – *“Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, “It was necessary that the word of God be 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.’” 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.”*

*The theological framework of the church – Acts 15:1 – problem framed – *“Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.”* – v. 10 – Peter relays his experience and asserts the NT truth of grace – *“Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? “But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are.”* – v. 19 – James agrees – 1st theological treatise of NT drafted in 15:23-29 and delivered to church of Antioch

Christianity does not fit into a pluralistic, “whatever works for you” system. Christianity is not one of the many religions you can choose from to get to heaven. It is not just one of many books on the shelf. George Marsden quoted Walter Lippman in pointing out the problem with this type of religious pluralism:

One of the effects of pluralism was that morality had come to be thought of as an essentially subjective and private matter. “It became the rule that ideas and principles are private—with only subjective relevance and significance,” he wrote. Lippmann saw that same trend in philosophy. Referring to Jean-Paul Sartre’s existentialism, Lippmann declared that “if what is good, what is right, what is true, is only what the individual ‘chooses’ to ‘invent,’ then we are outside the traditions of civility.” With no objective point of moral reference, with no philosopher to teach people that there was any order or meaning beyond the subjective self, there was nothing with which to counter the madness of the masses or to preempt their madness by educating them in the traditions of civility.²

b. We are “c_____” into this culture

The summation of God’s call to salvation – from NCC Teaching Statement:

We teach that God chose the elect for salvation before the foundation of the world (Matthew 25:34; Ephesians 1:4; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Timothy 1:9). This is the act of the Father giving repentant sinners “*out of the world*” to Jesus, resulting in belief, obedience, and eternal salvation (John 17:6-10). This is absolutely necessary, given the condition of man explained previously. Election is often paired with foreknowledge (Jeremiah 1:5; Romans 8:29), indicating God’s predetermined intimate knowledge of those He would save, not His knowledge of those who would respond to Him in the future (Matthew 7:23; Acts 2:23; Romans 8:29). This would make man the initiator of his own salvation and God responding to the faith of man. Instead, Scripture teaches that salvation is not the result of man’s will, but an act of God’s sovereign will alone (John 1:13; Romans 9:11-13; 2 Timothy 1:9). Only God can draw man to salvation, and His call to the elect is certain and effective (John 6:37, 39, 44, 65; Ephesians 2:5-6). God’s call becomes effective when man hears the gospel (Romans 10:14), and God lifts the veil of spiritual blindness (2 Corinthians 4:4), opens the heart of the sinner (Acts 16:14), gives the gift of faith (Acts 15:9; Galatians 3:22; Ephesians 2:8-9; Philippians 1:29), and leads the sinner to repent through His kindness (Romans 2:4). God does not elect anyone for damnation (Romans 9:22; James 1:13; 2 Peter 3:9), nor does election negate man’s responsibility to respond to God. Every unsaved person will someday stand before God and be judged (Hebrews 9:27; Revelation 20:12), not by whether or not he rejected the gospel, but because he suppressed the truth that God gave him (Romans 1:18-20, 26-32; 2:14-16), he loved the darkness of his unbelief and evil deeds (John 3:19), he hardened his heart (Hebrews 4:7), he chose to obey unrighteousness, wrath and

² George M. Marsden, *The Twilight of the American Enlightenment*, (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2014), 47.

indignation (Romans 2:8), and thus deserves God's judgment because of his sin (Romans 6:23, Galatians 6:7-8). Man is saved by God's grace and damned by his own works. Ultimately, this is a mystery to him because he cannot understand how God seemingly ordains everything according to His will, which includes the ordaining of the voluntary choices of moral creatures.³

c. The m_____ of our calling is varied

Notice the methodology and makeup of the church:

*Pentecost – God uses OT rituals to draw 16 people groups to Jerusalem at the time of His crucifixion and resurrection – Acts 2:5 – *“devout men from every nation under heaven.”* – God empowered the cowardly disciples gathered in the upper room to go out into the potentially hostile crowd and preach – Acts 2:6-7 – *“And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and were bewildered (confounded, confused) because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language. They were amazed (“astonishment, terror, trance”⁴) and astonished (“object of wonder, wonder, marvel, miracle;”⁵), saying, “Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans?”*

*Preaching – Peter's cowardice is turned to courage – preaches to same people who killed Jesus

*Through the faithful witness of the community of believers – Acts 2:47

*Through street preaching – Acts 3 – lame man healed – Peter preaches 2nd sermon – 4:3 – Peter and John jailed – v. 4 – *“But many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand.”* – 4:13 – amazing because they were *“untrained and uneducated men”*

*Acts 5 – Communal sharing – *“signs and wonders”* – death of Ananias and Sapphira – 5:13-14 – *“But none of the rest dared to associate with them; however, the people held them in high esteem. And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number”*

*5:28 – strict orders not to preach – v. 29 – *“We must obey God rather than man.”* – v. 41 – flogged but kept on preaching

*Jews and Greeks – 6:1 – *“the disciples were increasing in number”* – cultural conflict arose between Jews and Greek widows – Greek men put in charge – v. 7 – *“The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.”*

*Acts 7 – Stephen, 1 of the 7 deacons in chp. 6 begins to preach – explains God's story from Abraham to children of Israel in captivity to Moses to David to the prophets –

³ NorthCreek Church Teaching Statement, created 12/17/2010.

⁴ W. Mundle, “Ecstasy, Astonishment, Distraction, Horror, Madness,” ed. Lothar Coenen, Erich Beyreuther, and Hans Bietenhard, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 527.

⁵ W. Mundle, “Miracle, Wonder, Sign,” ed. Lothar Coenen, Erich Beyreuther, and Hans Bietenhard, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 621.

v. 51 – *“You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did.”* – became 1st martyr

*Samaritans – Acts 8:4 – Philip preaches in Samaria – hated “half-breeds” – the new culture is extended to include them

*Ethiopian – Acts 8:27 – Philip instructed to go a desert road from Gaza – encountered Ethiopian eunuch (literal – couldn’t enter Temple) – saved and baptized!

*Acts 9 – Paul’s encounter on road to Damascus – vision of Jesus – Paul saved – v. 29 – began *“talking and arguing with Hellenistic Jews”* who wanted to kill him – Paul taken to Caesarea then home to Tarsus – v. 31 – *“So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase.”*

*Italian cop – Acts 10 – vision of sheet to Peter – no more dietary laws – same vision to Cornelius, an Italian centurion – family received same vision – Peter comes – whole family comes to faith

*Acts 11 – Jews in Jerusalem take issue with Peter – he patiently explains God’s dealing with Cornelius – v. 18 – *“When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, “Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life.”*

*Acts 11:19 – some scattered from persecution of Stephen went to Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch to preach to Greeks north of Tyre in modern Turkey – v. 21 – *“And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord.”*

*Acts 11:26 – the new culture gains a name – v. 26 – *“and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.”*

*Acts 12 – James beheaded by Herod – Peter jailed then released by angel – Herod dies – v. 24 – *“ But the word of the Lord continued to grow and to be multiplied.”*

*Acts 13 – missionary journeys of Paul begin

What can we learn from this:

*You don’t become a Christian by birth, inheritance, buying it, or political persuasion

*Calling is God’s business – not ours – many think it rests on them – it doesn’t

*God calls us to salvation – not economic, psychological, or political reform

*Calling is not corporate – He doesn’t call a group of people – His calling is individual

d. Christianity is c_____cultural

Christianity is different – crosses ethnic boundaries that would not have crossed by any other means

*Eph. 2:11-16 – God is bringing together the *“circumcision”* and the *“uncircumcision”* – ie – Jews who live by the Law and Gentiles who have no use for Jewish law – neither group likes the other – they are different ethnically, socially, politically, economically – one group rules the other – both assume their positions of

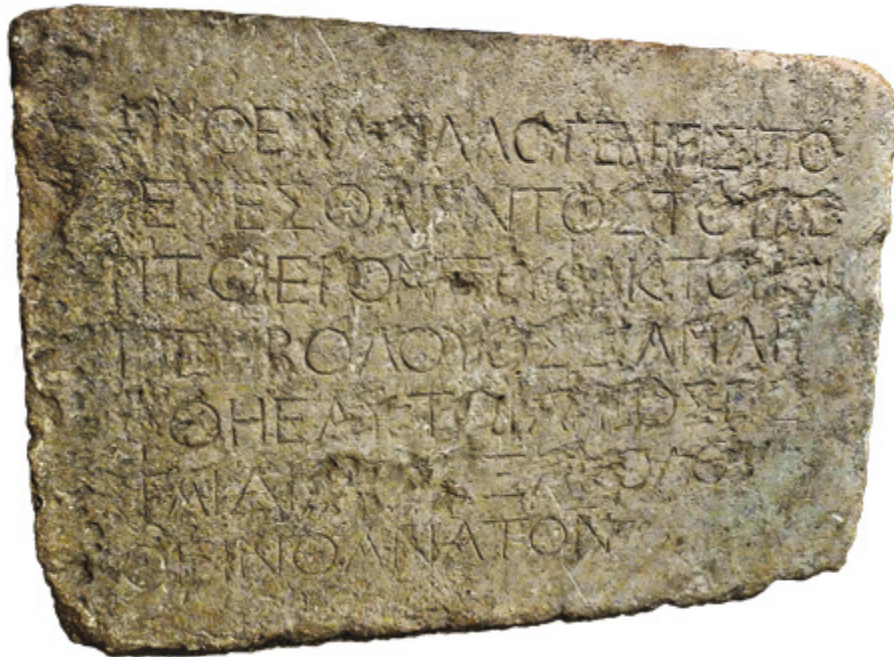
superiority over the other – there is no reason or means for these two groups to become one

*v. 12 – the problem for Gentiles wasn't that they weren't Jews – it was that they didn't know the God of the Jews – thus, they were alienated from God in 5 ways – 1) they were *“separate from Christ”* – had no awareness of the promised Savior and deliverer in whom *“all the families of the earth shall be blessed”* (Gen. 12:3) – 2) they were *“excluded from the commonwealth of Israel”* – they possessed none of the blessings promised to the people of Israel as God's chosen people – 3) they were *“strangers to the covenants of promise”* – they had no idea of the promised eternal destiny promised for God's people or how to possess it – 4) they had *“no hope”* because they had no relationship with the one true God – 5) they were *“without God in the world”* – turn out the lights, the party's over! – btw – Gentiles didn't perceive God because they didn't want Him! – Rom. 1:17-26

*v. 13 – *“But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ”*. – Jesus death on the cross provided the path to God for all who were alienated and couldn't get there on their own

*v. 14 – *“For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall”* – referred to a wall in the Temple that partitioned off the *Court of Gentiles* that physically separated Gentiles and Jews – symbolic of the many social, spiritual, and ceremonial barriers that separated them – Josephus wrote that no Gentile would ever think of entering the Temple courts of the Jews – there were numerous signs in Greek and Latin that warned Gentiles against going beyond the Court of the Gentiles – all would have been familiar with a posted inscription that said, *“No Gentile may enter within the railing around the sanctuary and within the enclosure. Whoever should be caught will render himself liable to the death penalty which will inevitably follow.”*⁶

⁶ Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 17, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 767.



According to Josephus a 5 foot 2 inch stone fence, called the *soreg*, surrounded the Court of the Gentiles and served as the main barriers that barred Gentiles and the ceremonially unclean from entering the inner courts of the Temple. The above stone was placed at the entrance of the Court to serve as a posted threat to any unauthorized entry.⁷

This physical barrier had a long history. Hendriksen expands on this division,

What the apostle was actually speaking of was something far more serious and dreadful, namely, *inveterate hostility* between the two groups. Humanly speaking, the wall of hatred and contempt that divided Jew and Gentile had been strengthened by centuries of mutual disparagement and mudslinging. A few more years and the pent-up hostility of generations would burst into an open flame, and one of the most cruel and bitter wars would be fought. It would result in the destruction of Jerusalem, A.D. 70. To the Jews the Gentiles were “dogs.” Many other vituperative expressions were used. Non-Jews were considered “unclean,” people with whom one must have almost none but unavoidable dealings. By many prominent Jews and rabbis even *proselytes* were despised. Close association with Gentiles meant “defilement” (John 18:28). To be sure, the temple had its “court of the Gentiles,” but even this space was at times filled with Jewish merchants and money-changers, with oxen, sheep, and doves, instead of being reserved for holy purposes. The result was that it failed to contribute its share in making the temple “a house of prayer” (Luke 19:46) “for

⁷ Randall Price, *Rose Guide to the Temple* (Torrance, CA: Rose Publishing, 2012).

all peoples" (Isa. 56:7). And, of course, the Gentiles treated the Jews similarly. By them the Jews were considered "enemies of the human race," a people "filled with a hostile disposition toward everybody." We can well imagine with what gesture of disdain and in what tone of contempt Pilate must have said, "I, surely, am not *a Jew*, am I?" (John 18:35). Across the centuries we can still hear the owners of the Philippian slave-girl denounce the Jewish trouble-makers (Paul and Silas!) in these words of contempt, "These men, *being Jews*, do exceedingly trouble our city" (Acts 16:20). Cf. Acts 18:2.⁸

*v. 15-16 – but Christ destroyed these barriers – "*by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.*" – through His death Jesus abolished the demands of these laws because He perfectly kept them – His sacrifice fulfilled the demands of the ceremonial feasts, laws, and rituals that kept Jews and Gentiles separate – Jesus didn't abolish the law (Matt. 5:17; Rom. 2:15) but the *demands* of the law – perfection – holiness – justice – perfect love – all met at the cross – thus, He created "*one new man*" – *kainos* – "new" in the sense that it did not exist before – the church!

*v. 17 – "*And He came and preached peace to you who were far away (Gentiles), and peace to those who were near (Jews)*"

*v. 19-20 – "*So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.*" – the church!

There is no explanation for this outside of a changed heart – Col. 3:10-11 – "*and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him— a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.*"

This is not the spirit of sectarianism which divides – Ravi Zacharias writes about the sinful sectarianism of religion:

At the center of the old city Jerusalem stands the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, reputedly on the sight of the original Calvary and the original Garden of the Resurrection. It stands, but only because ugly steel scaffolding permanently supports the walls inside and out. This church is one of the dirtiest, most depressing buildings in all Christendom. It should be torn down and rebuilt. This

⁸ William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of Ephesians*, vol. 7, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 133–134.

is not possible, however, because the Church of The Holy Sepulcher belongs jointly to the Abyssinians, Armenians, Copts, Greeks, Syrians and Roman Catholics, and their priests will hardly speak to one another, let alone cooperate in a joint enterprise of rebuilding. Each communion preserves its own separate chapel, and conducts its own ceremonies; and to make the situation ludicrous, the keys of the church have been entrusted to a family of Muslims who in order to answer the call of Allah five times daily, have turned the entrance into a Muslim Mosque. Nowhere in all the world can you find a more tragic symbol of the mutilation of Christ's body than the Church of The Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem.⁹

e. Christianity is c_____cultural

Christians today seem to think that we should convince the culture that you can be cool and be a part of the worldly culture – but the NT church wasn't like that – biblical Christianity is not only cross-cultural – it is counter-culture – ie – it brings diverse groups together which forms a new spiritual entity that now confronts the dominant culture of the world.

1'. R_____leaders

First sign of problem for the new church – Acts 4 – after Peter's 2nd sermon when he again called on the Jews to repent and turn to Christ (3:11-26), Acts 4:1 – *“the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to them being greatly disturbed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead.”* – they weren't concerned about the spiritual condition of the people – they were angry that someone dared to question their authority and teaching – Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection – they would rather argue a theological point than listen to the truth! – followed by their arrest, trial, defense, consultation, and finally acquittal

Ultimately, this kind of theological confrontation occurred throughout the book:

*5:17 – *“the high priest rose up, along with all his associates (that is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with jealousy.”* – common thread of all who seek power and prestige – the disciples were jailed, beaten, ordered not to teach – v. 29 – *“We must obey God rather than men.”* – v. 33 – *“But when they heard this, they were cut to the quick and intended to kill them.”*

*8:1-3 – *“Saul was in hearty agreement with putting him to death. And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered through the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles . . . But Saul began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison.”*

⁹ Ravi Zacharias, *Deliver Us From Evil: Restoring the Soul in a Disintegrating Culture* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1997), 50.

*13:45 – *“But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began contradicting the things spoken by Paul, and were blaspheming.”*

*18:12 – *“But while Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him before the judgment seat,”* – Gallio turned the tables on them and they beat their own leader Sosthenes

*23:12-13 – *“When it was day, the Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul. There were more than forty who formed this plot.”*

2'. C _____ icons

Acts 7:9– Stephen confronted by *“But some men from what was called the Synagogue of the Freedmen, including both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and some from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and argued with Stephen.”* – “Freedmen” referred to descendants of Jewish prisoners of war captured by Pompey in 63 BC – eventually released and formed colony on the Tiber River in Rome and some moved to Jerusalem – *“Cyrenians and Alexandrians”* indicates they were Hellenistic Jews from northern Africa – *“Cilician and Asia”* indicates Hellenistic Jews from Asia Minor – different cultures but all saw themselves as protectors of broader Jewish culture –

v. 10 – *“they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking”* – found some false witnesses to accuse him – v. 12 – *“stirred up the people, the elders and the scribes . . . dragged him away and brought him before the Council.”* – Acts 7 – Stephen’s beautiful defense – v. 54 – *“they were cut to the quick, and they began gnashing their teeth at him”* – stoned him

James Montgomery Boice notes,

To bring back truth, on a practical level, the church must encourage Christians to be not merely consumers of culture but *makers* of culture. The church needs to cultivate Christian artists, musicians, novelists, filmmakers, journalists, attorneys, teachers, scientists, business executives, and the like, teaching its laypeople the sense in which every secular vocation--including, above all, the callings of husband, wife, and parent--is a sphere of Christian ministry, a way of serving God and neighbor that is grounded in God's truth. Christian laypeople must be encouraged to be leaders in their fields, rather than eager-to-please followers, working from the assumptions of their biblical worldview, not the vapid clichés of pop culture.¹⁰

¹⁰ James Montgomery Boice, Benjamin E. Sasse, *Here We Stand! A Call From Confessing Evangelicals For a Modern Reformation* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2004), 95.

3'. G_____ authority

In Romans 13 Paul lays out instruction for us to obey the governing authorities – v. 1-2 – *“Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.”*

But there are times when Christians must disobey governmental authority when we are asked to do something against God’s laws and will:

*Acts 4-5 – disciples were told repeatedly to stop preaching – 5:28-29 – *“saying, “We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.” But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men.”*

*This might even end up in being martyred for the cause of Christ – Acts 12:1-3 – *“Now about that time Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church in order to mistreat them. And he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword. When he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. Now it was during the days of Unleavened Bread.”*

*Acts 7:54-60 – same thing happened with Stephen – at least two martyrs among the leaders of the church in the first few years of existence

Christians cannot depend on the government to protect our rights – or our lives – even if our case is logical and legal! Lutzer notes,

Whether it’s Nazism, Marxism, or Secularism, the state is always in conflict with religious freedom. And the more power the state has, the more laws it will pass to diminish the role of the church. What makes this so difficult is that these changes are made under the rubric of freedom and “what is best for everyone.” Thus the true nature of a totalitarian state is always hidden and always couched in the language of morality, progress, and liberty. As in George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*, slavery is defined as freedom, and suppression is defined as “the quest for equality and fairness.”¹¹

4'. The I_____ system

The last chapters of Acts reveal Paul’s continued appeal to the legal system of Rome:

*Acts 24:1 – *“After five days the high priest Ananias came down with some elders, with an attorney named Tertullus, and they brought charges to the governor against Paul.”* – the lawyer brought false charges – v. 27 – *“But after two years had*

¹¹ Erwin W. Lutzer, *When A Nation Forgets God*, (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2010), 11-12.

passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, and wishing to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul imprisoned."

*Paul defended himself against the false charges before Felix, the governor of Judea – says he will send him to Caesar at his request

*25:13 – regional King Agrippa arrives – wants to hear Paul along with Festus – 26:24 – *"While Paul was saying this in his defense, Festus said in a loud voice, 'Paul, you are out of your mind! Your great learning is driving you mad.'" Paul replied, "I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of sober truth. For the king knows about these matters, and I speak to him also with confidence, since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice; for this has not been done in a corner."*

*Their response – v. 31 – *"this man is not doing anything worthy of death or imprisonment."*

Paul made a strong, legal defense with the truth – this shows:

*We need to be prepared to defend ourselves legally – Acts 16:37 – when Paul and Silas were released from jail in Philippi they appealed to their Roman citizenship and demanded proper treatment in their release

*The gospel is logical but God must change the heart

*We will not always win the legal battle

5'. False b_____ in the church

Seen in several types of situations:

*False generosity – Acts 5 – Ananias and Sapphira killed for copying the generosity of believers in the church – Peter calls them out – the result – 11 – but *"great fear came over the whole church (first place "church" is used in Acts)"* – v. 12 – apostles were doing *"many signs and wonders . . . and they were all with one accord in Solomon's Portico. But none of the rest dared to associate with them; however, the people held them in high esteem."*

*False belief – Acts 8:9-21 – after hearing Philip preach in Samaria, Simon the magician *"himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip"* – but he wasn't saved – 8:18 – Simon thought he could obtain spiritual power by buying it – practice of *simony* – the purchase of an ecclesiastical office for money – the other side of people like this is the practice of charging people for spiritual services – ie – Catholic Church charges for baptisms, last rites, marriage – 8:20 – *"But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! "You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God."*

*False teaching – Acts 20:29-30 – Paul's admonition to the elders of Ephesus – *"I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them."* – there is as much destruction that comes from inside the church as from outside the church!

Newest fad in Christianity – “Prophets” and “Apostles” movement – seen in Bill Johnson (Bethel Church), Mike Bickle (International House of Prayer), Cindy Jacobs (Generals International), Chuck Pierce (Glory of Zion International), and Che Ahn (HRock Church):

*These are self-proclaimed “apostles” – first was Peter Wagner who called himself “super apostle” (before he died in 2016) – promise of direct access to God through signs and wonders

*They’ve gone beyond health and wealth movement – believe God has put them on earth to basically transform the world – they are top of the mountain exercising power over the global church to bring in the kingdom of God

*Not building churches – building following through conferences, media products, and concerts

*Believe in the “7 Mountains” Theology – God is placing His servants in key positions in the “mountains” of business, government, media, arts and entertainment, education, the family, and religion – they will bring about the Kingdom of God on earth – in America – before Jesus returns¹²

*Includes bizarre “ministries” – Todd Bentley, Canadian evangelist who rose to fame in 2008 with the infamous Lakeland Florida revival – questioned why God wasn’t moving in one healing event – “And the Holy Spirit spoke to me, the gift of faith came on me. He said ‘Kick her in the face – with your biker boot!’ I inched closer and I went like this. BAM! And just as my book made contact with her nose she fell under the power of God.”¹³

*Also seen in *Hillsong Church* based in Australia – music generated “worship” has spread across the world selling over 16 million “worship” albums – article in the *New York Times* on October 26, 2017 describes their packed services in New York, “the room is dim, the smoke machines are going and music from the large house band swells like Coldplay with a heavy dose of resurrection.”¹⁴ An earlier article in the *New York Times* noted, “For young Christians in cities where Hillsong has churches, it has become a magnet, combining the production values of a rock concert, the energy of a nightclub and the community of a megachurch.”¹⁵

6’. The appeal of f_____

Acts 14:8 – lame man healed – v. 11 – crowd was amazed – “*the gods have become like men and have come down to us. And they began calling Barnabas, Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker.*” – but Paul would have none of it! – v. 15 –

¹² Bob Smietana, “‘Prophets’ and ‘Apostles’ Leading the Quiet Revolution in American Religion,” *In Christianity Today*, August 3:2017.

¹³ “Todd Bentley Kicking “People in the Face Revival” – www.youtube.com/watch?v=kiT=qta5WqWwyW4, accessed on January 3, 2014.

¹⁴ Elizabeth A. Harris, “Tattoos, Bieber, Black Lives Matter, and Jesus,” *New York Times*, October 26, 2017.

¹⁵ Michael Paulson, “Megachurch With a Beat Lures a Young Flock,” *New York Times*, September 9, 2014.

“and saying, “Men, why are you doing these things? We are also men of the same nature as you, and preach the gospel to you that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them.” – result? – v. 19 – *“But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead.”* – crowds can be fickle – we are not to look to them for approval

7'. I _____ leaders

Acts 17 – Paul in Athens – speaks on the Areopagus – v. 18 – he “conversed” with the Epicureans and Stoics – Epicureans believed there was no life after death – therefore enjoy every pleasure you can on earth and avoid all suffering and grief by pursuing satisfaction and happiness – Stoics believed the gods controlled all of life and we achieve happiness by accepting our lot in life – Paul preached the identity of their “unknown God” – v. 32 – *“Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some began to sneer, but others said, “We shall hear you again concerning this.”*

We cannot look to academic intellectuals for ultimate truth. They will inevitably fail, even those that are founded on the premise of propagating biblical truth. Harvard University is an example. It was founded in 1636 for the sole purpose of establishing a school to train Christian ministers. Their “Rules and Precepts,” adopted in 1646, stated their vision in the following manner (with original spelling and Scripture references retained) in rules 2 and 3:

“2. Let every Student be plainly instructed, and earnestly pressed to consider well, the maine end of his life and studies is, to know God and Jesus Christ which is eternal life (John 17:3) and therefore to lay Christ in the bottome, as the only foundation of all sound knowledge and Learning. And seeing the Lord only giveth wisdom, Let every one seriously set himself by prayer in secret to seeke it of him (Prov. 2:3).

3. Every one shall so exercise himselfe in reading the Scriptures twice a day, that he shall be ready to give such an account of his proficiency therein, both in Theoreticall observations of Language and Logick, and in practical and spiritual truths, as his Tutor shall require, according to his ability; seeing the entrance of the word giveth light, it giveth understanding to the simple (Psalm 119:130).”¹⁶

The motto for the school was “Veritas Christo et Ecclesiae,” which means “Truth for Christ and the Church.” The phrase was embedded on a shield and can be found on many buildings, including the Widener library, the Memorial Church, and various dorms on campus. The top two books on the shield are face up while the bottom book faces down. This symbolizes the limits of reason and the need for God’s revelation. Today the

¹⁶ “Shield and ‘Veritas History,” Harvard GSAS Christian Community, <http://www.hcs.harvard.edu/~gsascf/shield-and-veritas-history>, accessed on 3/1/20.

school has been completely secularized and the shield now only contains the word “Veritas” with three open books.¹⁷



8'. F_____ interests

Acts 19 – at Ephesus Paul confronted the worship of Diana, the goddess of fertility – worshipped by the spread of silver images – the spread of the gospel impacted the financial trade of the city – v. 24-26 – *“For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, was bringing no little business to the craftsmen; these he gathered together with the workmen of similar trades, and said, “Men, you know that our prosperity depends upon this business. “You see and hear that not only in Ephesus, but in almost all of Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away a considerable number of people, saying that gods made with hands are no gods at all.” – 24,000 swarmed to the amphitheater shouting, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians.” – Paul forced to leave town for his safety!*

9'. The e_____ culture

Acts 21 – after returning to Jerusalem Paul was spotted in the temple – wrongfully accused him of bringing a Gentile (Trophimus) into the Temple – v. 29-30 – *“Then all the city was provoked, and the people rushed together, and taking hold of Paul they dragged him out of the temple, and immediately the doors were shut. While they were seeking to kill him, a report came up to the commander of the Roman cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion.”*

Christians have always been in the minority – this eventually led the authorities to take hold of Paul for his protection – asked to make his defense before the Jews – chp. 23 – caused dissension among the Pharisees and Sadducees when Paul told them he was a Pharisee – 23:10 – *“And as a great dissension was developing, the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them and ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force, and bring him into the barracks.” – Matt. 7:13-14 –*

¹⁷ Ibid

“Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.”

Paul summarizes his conflicts and persecutions in 2 Cor. 11:23-29 – *“Are they servants of Christ?—I speak as if insane—I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches. Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern?”*

Michael Horton notes,

The early Christians suffered persecution—even martyrdom—for their witness to Christ. On one hand, they didn’t withdraw into monasteries but fulfilled their callings in the world alongside non-Christians. On the other hand, they didn’t have a social agenda for transforming the Roman Empire. And yet, transformed by the gospel, they became salt and light in their communities, and this brought common grace blessing to the wider culture.

For at least a century and a half, American Protestants have evidenced a marked preference for “deeds over creeds,” and yet, since Finney’s announcement that the church is a society of moral reformers, the church seems less genuinely evangelized and Western culture is dominated by secularist impulses.¹⁸

f. Christianity is r_____

We have already seen the practice of the early church in Acts:

**Acts 2:42-47 – “They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” – v. 44 – “And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from*

¹⁸ Michael Horton, *The Gospel Commission: Recovering God’s Strategy for Making Disciples*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2011), 231.

house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart”

*Acts 6 – astounding new relational community – Hellenistic deacons chosen to alleviate concerns of neglected Hellenistic widows – previously not even accepted among orthodox Jews – now they complained and the response was to choose people from their own group to help them

*4:32 – continue development of relational ties – *“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.”* – v. 34 – *“not a needy person among them”* – sold property – laid assets at the feet of the apostles

The pattern of human relationships is prevalent in the NT – the list of “one anothers” is pervasive – it is not merely a list of nice things to do – they are key to personal growth as well as the corporate growth of the body of Christ

- * wash one another's feet (John 13:14)
- * love one another (John 13:34)
- * be devoted to one another in brotherly love (Romans 12:10)
- * give preference to one another in honor (Romans 12:10)
- * be of the same mind toward one another (Romans 12:16, Romans 15:5)
- * stop judging one another (Romans 14:13)* pursue the building up of one another (Romans 14:19)
- * accept one another (Romans 15:7)* admonish one another (Romans 15:14)
- * greet one another (Romans 16:16)* wait for one another (I Corinthians 11:33)
- * care for one another (I Corinthians 12:25)* serve one another through love (Galatians 5:13)
- * bear one another through love (Galatians 6:2)
- * show forbearance to one another (Ephesians 4:2)
- * be kind to one another (Ephesians 4:2)* forgive each other (Ephesians 4:32)
- * speak to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Ephesians 5:19)
- * be subject to one another (Ephesians 5:21)
- * regard one another as more important (Philippians 2:3)
- * not lie to one another (Colossians 3:9)* teach one another (Colossians 3:16)
- * comfort one another (I Thessalonians 4:18)* encourage one another (I Thessalonians 4:18)
- * be at peace with one another (I Thessalonians 5:13)
- * pursue good to one another (I Thessalonians 5:15)
- * considering one another (Hebrews 10:24)
- * not speak against one another (James 4:11)
- * 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 yourself with humility toward one another (I Peter 5:5)

g. Christianity is housed in the c_____

First time *church* is used – Acts 5:11 – “*And great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things.*” – after that *church* is used 16 times in Acts to describe this new community – every place it is used it signifies the group of people who embraced the Jewish Messiah as their Savior and Lord – this brought identification as well as certain persecution

1'. O_____

Two significant observations:

**Church* = “called out ones” – originally used to designate as a synonym for “group” – but the unique nature of the calling out of true believers began to describe the unique nature that believers were called out of the world to serve God

*As Acts progressed, *church* began to distinguish the true people of God from the Jews – Rom. 9:4-5 – Paul lists the advantages given to Jews – “*who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.*” – but he also points out in v. 6 that “*they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel; nor are they all children because they are Abraham’s descendants*” – points out that God’s promises came to Israel through Isaac, not Ishmael – in the same manner the true spiritual descendants of Abraham are all who follow Christ in faith

Very quickly the gospel reached Gentiles. This became a major refocus of the developing culture of the NT. It reached crisis proportions with The Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 where the leaders of the church went on record by stating that the gospel is for all people. The church can never be divided by ethnicity, language, economics, geography, nationality, or sex – Gal. 3:28 – “*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*” – the traditional boundaries of religion, sex, language, economics, culture, and ethnicity disappear at the cross of Christ –

It has become the norm for many “Christians” to ignore church membership – American individualism is prized over corporate responsibility – others say church membership is not found in Scripture

2'. The r_____ in Acts

It is clear throughout Acts that Christians had a clear sense of belonging to a specific group of believers. The doctrine of the *invisible* church holds that all who are true believers are members of the unseen universal church which will be united in heaven some day. But the pattern of the *visible* church is also clear in Acts:

*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?¹⁹*

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."²⁰

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

¹⁹ 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.

²⁰ 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 dunamis, 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."²¹

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*

²¹ 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 Acts²²

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

²² 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 church²³

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*²⁴ 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.²⁵

*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.²⁶

*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.²⁷

²³ 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.

²⁴ Rebecca McLaughlin, *Confronting Christianity: 12 Hard Questions for the World's Largest Religion* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2019), 12.

²⁵ “The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2015-2050,” Pew Research Center, April 2, 2015, accessed on March 27, 2020.

²⁶ “Projected Change in Global Population, 2015-2060,” Pew Research Center, March 31, 2017, <http://www.pewforum.org>, accessed on March 27, 2020.]

²⁷ “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).²⁸

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.²⁹

*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.³⁰

*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.³¹

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.³² She notes, “Conservative estimates from 2010 put China’s Christian population at over sixty-eight million, representing 5 percent of its vast population.³³ 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.”³⁴

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,

²⁸ “Total Fertility Rate by Religion 2010-2015,” Pew Research Center, March 26:2015, <http://www.pewforum.org>, accessed on March 27, 2020.

²⁹ “One-in-Five U.S. Adults Were Raised in Interreligious Homes,” Pew Research Center, October 26, 2016, accessed on March 27, 2020.

³⁰ “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.

³¹ 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.

³² McLaughlin, *Confronting Christianity*, 12.

³³ 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.

³⁴ 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.”³⁵

C. Paul’s first “missionary” journey

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:



³⁵ 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.

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

D. “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 and culture 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 – the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ through aggressive evangelism and church planting *is the message of the book of Acts!*

There is no other way – 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.³⁶

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.³⁷

³⁶ 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.

³⁷ Trevin Wax, *Counterfeit Gospels: Rediscovering the Good News in a World of False Hope*, (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2011), 183.

E. Christianity is for a _____ people – Acts 2:1-13

Reaffirm – 16 people groups mentioned at the day of Pentecost:

*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.”*

F. It is c_____ based

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

*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.”*

*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

*Acts 15 – the leaders of the church in Jerusalem formally affirm the spread of the gospel to Gentiles – affirmed by the congregation

*Acts 20:17-28 – Paul sets the standard and calling of elders of Ephesian church

*2nd and 3rd journeys Paul made were expressly to evangelize and plant churches

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 disciplined and gathered into a local church

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