

SO, NOW WHAT DO I DO? Lesson 6: Finding Fellowship¹

Some people who begin to wake up to God's grace toward them have long ago stopped attending church, so they will resist the idea of "going back there". They want fellowship but fear returning to what they once rejected (and what might have done them great harm).

Others who wake to grace are already actively involved in a local fellowship with multiple family members and friends in attendance. They are starting to realize that their pastor is teaching a mixed message, but they can't imagine leaving their "home" church. They are wondering how to walk in this revelation of grace while still attending a church that is teaching "another" gospel. How could they ever leave family and friends?

Lamentably, there are many awakening believers who are attending a church which not only teaches a mixed message, but which fosters a very hostile and abusive cult-like environment. They want to leave but know that they will be shunned even by very close friends and family.

More and more we are seeing that pastors of churches are becoming aware of the gospel of God's grace. Just how does a pastor handle this revelation after years of preaching mixed messages?

Others, longing for fellowship and friendship with other believers who have awakened to grace, have visited dozens of churches, even attending some of them for extended periods of time, but just can't find a place to call "home". What they find are sermons with "fix me" formulas and many churches participating in bizarre and irrational behaviors. They've been accused of "church hopping" and "pew warming" and of trying to find "the perfect church". Deep in their hearts what they really hope to find is a "normal" church, but aren't really sure what that would look like so they are more focused on what they DON'T WANT. They get up, get dressed and venture out almost every Sunday morning hoping that this week will be different; but even after years of looking, they just can't find a place. They've been chided by friends and family to "just find a church and attend". Rumors have been spread that their commitment to Christ is waning. People are "praying for them", too. They've endured commentaries from even the closest of friends: "Once you find a perfect church, it won't be perfect anymore because YOU will be there!" Instead of being encouraged by their friends, they are often accused of being too "picky" or "critical". Comments like these have NOT HELPED them find a place of fellowship.

There is no "one size fits all" answer to "So, now what do I do about church²?" We don't pretend to know the exact answer for you, but in this lesson, we hope to share information that will enable to you to do what GOD is leading YOU to do by setting you free from what is traditionally taught and practiced. God will call some of you to stay where you are, at least for the time being. He will call others to leave right away. Pastors, who will logically begin to preach what they are hearing from God will either be embraced by the people of the church or asked to leave by the board. The information in this lesson is meant to set you free to seek and find fellowship.

¹ For a more detailed description of "fellowship" read "What is Fellowship?" on page 10.

² For a closer look at "church" see "What Is Church?" on page 11.

I. **To Stay or Not to Stay? That is the Question!**

Many times when we awaken to God's grace, we begin to realize that the messages coming from the pulpit at the church we attend contain mixture. Now, what? Do we stay or go? While some say, "Stay!" just as many others will say, "Run!" However, we think that what you do will depend on your individual situation AND how God leads you.

A. No matter what will be your eventual decision, begin to feed yourself with the pure message of the gospel via the many resources available and fellowship in some way with believers who are also awakening to grace³.

1. Keep in mind, not everything labeled "grace" is grace.

There are many ministries with "grace" in the title which are actually anti-grace. Some of these seem to be deliberately using the word "grace" to attract believers.

2. Reread the New Testament allowing God to teach you.

3. Seek out the many resources teaching the gospel of grace.

There are many online resources such as Facebook groups, websites dedicated to teaching the gospel of the grace of God, books, and DVDs/CDs. We list some of these at the end of this lesson.

B. If you are attending a church you love where family and friends abound, consider ministering there for as long as you are allowed so that you can share this good news with those you likely deeply love. All believers want the truth, and many of them will be happy for you about the awakening that you are experiencing, want to learn more, and have their own awakening.

1. Many pastors are open to hearing from those who attend their churches and will want to know what God is showing you. So, share what you are learning. If you don't feel confident yet expressing what you are learning, give a book or DVD or online link that can explain it better.

a. Avoid accusations and share from a heart of love. You might be a little upset that your pastor has taught a mixed message, but consider that God loves him/her and wants him/her to know these glorious truths. It will be easier for him/her to receive from you if you come in love and humility.

2. Keep the lines of communication open and full of grace. (It is entirely upside down to share the grace of God without God's grace.)

a. Consider how you might have received this information even a year ago.

b. Be patient and pray for those with whom you share.

c. Trust the truth of the gospel to reveal itself, especially to believers who have the Spirit of God dwelling in them.

Romans 1:16

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes.

d. Live the love you are learning. It speaks louder than words.

³ No pastor should have the attitude that you may only consider him as your source. You are free to listen to others.

C. If You Decide to Go

If you have tried to share, but the message is being rejected, and somehow it is being made clear to you that the message (or you) are no longer welcome, don't be overwhelmed with heartache. Just "pack up your bags" and go. God will open other doors for you to share His grace.

Matthew 10:14

And whoever will not receive you nor hear your words, when you depart from that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet.

Acts 13:44-46

*On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God. ⁴⁵ But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul. ⁴⁶ Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; **but since you reject it**, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles.*

1. Realize that you have a right to fellowship where you want and with whom.
2. Reject the idea of any "curse" someone might insinuate or pronounce upon your departure.
3. Don't fear that you will fall away while you are looking for a new place to gather with believers. He will keep you.
4. Don't allow anger and resentments to be part of your thinking. Sometimes when you leave a fellowship, people do and say some pretty awful things after you've gone. Forgive each time you hear of anything.
5. Begin to seek out a new gathering. Following are some helpful guidelines.

II. Finding Fellowship

Encountering a place to fellowship where the true gospel is being proclaimed is not easy, but it is easier than it used to be. You might be delighted to find that there is a church in your area that is waking up to grace and will welcome you. It also might be that there is nothing in your area. If this is the case, consider joining with churches that will work with you as a satellite church. This would vary from asking you to join them live for their services to providing you with solid teaching and encouragement as you grow in grace⁴.

A. Forget about the format.

1. Location, Location, Location!

While we are told to not forsake assembling together, the format of this gathering is not prescribed. The early church clearly gathered in homes, so this is a valid way to "go to church". They also met in larger venues such as the temple (Acts 5:42) and the School of Tyrannus (Acts 19:9). In other words, don't worry about the location or size of the gathering. It doesn't matter. Where ever believers gather in His name, He is there.

⁴ If you are interested in beginning a fellowship in your home, contact us through <http://www.graceandfaithministries.org>. We provide DVD teachings and encouragement.

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Matthew 18:19

“Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven.²⁰ For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”

Acts 2:46

So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart

2. Time Management

God is concerned that we DO gather together, not about when or where. So, if a good grace fellowship meets on a day other than Sunday, feel free to consider that “church”.

3. Letting Go of Traditional Concepts of “Church”

Many grace gatherings are small in number. Most won’t have all the comforts and organization of a “full-service church”.

- a. **If there are no children or youth ministry consider ministering to you own children. Take them on outings yourself. Invite other families with children to join you. Get to know each other. You might find that having more time to enjoy life together fosters deeper fellowship. Invite your children to participate with the adults when the group gathers.**
- b. **Don’t be concerned about “worship” being what you are “used to”. Singing together can be just as meaningful a cappella as it is with a full worship band.**

4. Who’s in Charge Here?

This is a difficult point because many who have been devastated by “church” associate that harm as coming from a “leader”. The mere thought of a defined overseer in a gathering can be repulsive to many. However, we cannot deny the fact that overseers were appointed over each gathering⁵.

a. Appointed by Whom?

This is also a difficult question to answer. Of course, we know the Holy Spirit is the one who calls and appoints, but it is apparent the elders in the early church had a part in this process.

Acts 14:23

So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

- b. **Overseers are called to serve and provide correct teaching. Applying this truth will solve the abuses that often arise in “church”.**

Matthew 20:24-28

“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them.²⁶ Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant.²⁷ And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

⁵ For a more detailed look at the scriptural evidence of appointed overseers see “What About “Spiritual Authority” on page 12.

- c. **Overseers do not take the place of Jesus. Jesus is the head of the church.**
Matthew 16:18
I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.
Ephesians 2:22-23
And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, ²³ which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.
- d. **We all participate in the body of Christ. We are each encouraged to do what God has called us to do individually as members of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12).**

III. The Importance of Sound Biblical Teaching in Finding Fellowship

*While some continue to believe that meeting in a church building on Sunday is the only acceptable way to “go to church”, others seem to be on a campaign to convince believers that the **ONLY** way to gather together is in a home (and that the traditional church structure is intrinsically **EVIL**). Allow us to dispel both myths.*

It’s the message NOT the method that concerns God.

**Bad and good teachings can be found in BOTH large churches and home groups.
The format doesn’t guarantee correct teaching.**

A. Sound Biblical Doctrine

When looking for a place to fellowship, discover what the beliefs are of that group. You don’t want to get connected to a group and then later find out you have joined a cult! You should be able to locate these beliefs on that group’s website or if they don’t have a website, on a handout. If they don’t have information available, this may be a red flag OR simply an oversight on the group’s part. Don’t be shy to ask. Here are our core beliefs in our ministry. You might use them as a guideline in seeking fellowship.

1. What does the group believe about God, the Trinity, and Jesus?

There is one God, eternally preexistent as God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit; that is to say, we believe in the Trinity of God. This God is love and deeply loves mankind whom He has created. He demonstrates His love for all by giving His Son to die for us that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life (Rom. 5:8; John 3:16).

2. What does the group believe about Scripture?

Each original word of Scripture in both the Old and New Testaments was given by inspiration of God and is relevant to believers today and must be interpreted in context, its original significance, and in light of the New Covenant (2 Peter 1:19-21; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 3:15-16).

3. What does the Bible believe about Jesus and His finished work?

Jesus was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, was crucified, died, and bodily rose from the dead in order to eternally redeem those who would believe in Him and confess Him as their Lord. He is the only mediator between man and God. The work of the cross of Christ was God’s complete work upon which no improvement can be made by man

(Romans 10:9-10; Hebrews 9:12; 1 Timothy 2:5; John 19:30; Colossians 2:9-10; Hebrews 10:14; Galatians 3:3).

4. **What does the group believe about the believer's freedom from the law?**
The commandments of the New Covenant are that we believe in the name of God's Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another. Believing in His Son and loving one another, are our highest expressions of love for God (1 John 3:23; Matthew 25:40; John 14:21; John 21:15).
5. **What are their beliefs about initial, continual, and ultimate salvation?**
We are saved by grace through faith alone, initially (at salvation), continually (in this life), and eventually (at His return). While believers are created for good works, they are not saved by them (Ephesians 2:8-10; Titus 3:4-6).
6. **What are the beliefs about how we are made holy and righteous? What are their beliefs about forgiveness of sins?**
Our behavior is a fruit of our imputed right-standing with God. Since we are freed from sin and made holy, blameless, and righteous by faith, we are able to live a holy life. When we fall short, the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin (Romans 5:17; Romans 6:1-14; Galatians 5:22; Colossians 1:21-23; Romans 6:22; 1 John 2:1; 1 John 1:7).
7. **What is their concept of our closeness/access to God?**
At the moment of salvation Jesus Christ lives inside of believers by faith and we are seated in heavenly places with Christ Jesus. All believers have immediate access to the throne of grace through the blood of Christ and are full sons of God by faith in Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:27; Ephesians 2:6; Hebrews 4:14-16; Galatians 3:26).
8. **Does the group have a negative bent against the working of the Holy Spirit in the church today or do they over-emphasize it?**
All of the gifts and ministry gifts in operation in the Early Church are available to believers today and are manifested by grace through faith alone. We do not allow disorderly behavior during our services (Acts 2:38-39; Galatians 3:2-5; Romans 11:29).
9. **End times theology can sometimes be a red flag. While it is fair to agree to disagree on this topic, some will not accept you unless you agree with them.**
We believe in the immanent return of Jesus Christ; the Rapture of the Church (1 Thessalonians 4 13-18; 1 Corinthians 15:51-55).

B. NO MIXTURE!!!

Mixture comes in all shapes and sizes. In other words, a large traditional gathering as well as a home church could both be teaching a mixed "gospel". Don't be fooled by format.

1. **NO MIXTURE: Teaching a mixed message is not a minor offense. Paul called it teaching "another" gospel, and pronounced a curse on anyone teaching it.**

Galatians 1:6-9

I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel,⁷ which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.⁸ But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.⁹ As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.

2. **NO MIXTURE: Adding law (requirements) to our right-standing with God is to set aside the grace of God and nullify what Jesus accomplished on the cross.**
 - a. Many times a fellowship will agree with the beliefs above, but in actual teaching and practice they add a lot of “ifs”, “ands” and “buts”. In other words, they add requirements beyond faith in order to have right-standing with God and enjoy His many blessings. If you are looking for a place to fellowship and you discover this is the case, we suggest you move on.

Galatians 2:20-21

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.²¹ I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.”

3. **NO MIXTURE: Believers are no longer under any law. We are justified by grace through faith.**

Galatians 3:23-25

But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed.²⁴ Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.²⁵ But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.²⁶ For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

4. **NO MIXTURE: Thinking that we can be justified by our own efforts (our flesh) is foolishness.**

Galatians 3:1-4

O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified?² This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?³ Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?⁴ Have you suffered so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain?

5. **NO MIXTURE: Believers in Jesus Christ are guided by the New Covenant only and not by a combination of the New plus the Old.**

Galatians 4:21-31

Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law?²² For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman.²³ But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise,²⁴ which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar—²⁵ for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children—²⁶ but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all.²⁷ For it is written:

“Rejoice, O barren,

You who do not bear!

Break forth and shout,

You who are not in labor!

For the desolate has many more children

Than she who has a husband.”

²⁸ Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise. ²⁹ But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit,

*even so it is now.*³⁰ Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? “Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.”³¹ So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman⁶ but of the free.

6. **NO MIXTURE:** Receiving a mixed “gospel” causes us to be estranged from Christ and to fall from grace.

Galatians 5:4

You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.

7. **NO MIXTURE:** Many who are teaching a mixed “gospel” today are unaware of doing so. They are simply teaching what they were taught. Their motives are likely honorable and sincere. However, keep this in mind it doesn’t matter what the motives are of someone feeding you poison, it will still make you sick.
8. **NO MIXTURE:** Some teachers are in the process of awakening to grace. It might take some time for them to get rid of mixture, just like the rest of us.
9. **NO MIXTURE:** There are also people today who are purposely trying to undermine the gospel of grace They lace the word “grace” into their sermons for the purpose of deception.
 - a. Listen carefully. Sometimes you can identify a false teacher simply by comparing his/her teachings with scripture.
 - b. Listen carefully to your spirit. Sometimes you can’t quite figure out what is wrong. However, if you sense that something is, pay attention to that voice. It might be God guiding you. Don’t assume that you are being “critical or judgmental”. It is NOT wrong to “judge” when it comes to discerning if someone is or is not from God and it is correct to “judge” what you hear.

IV. Awakening Pastors

1 Timothy 4:16

Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.

Imagine the horror of parents who discover that the food or medicine they have been giving their child, thinking that they were helping or nourishing their child, turned out to be hurting them. This is the reality that faces pastors today, who have taught perhaps for years to possibly thousands of people “another” gospel. Most of them never meant to do this. They only taught what they had been taught never realizing that their own teachings were laced with poison. Now, they wake up to the truth; the truth that they themselves were estranged and that they have led multiple people into the same state. Now, what do they do? They don’t need to find a church...they are pastoring the church. Here are our recommendations.

- A. **Begin to feed yourself with solid teachings on “the” pure gospel of God’s grace (Acts 20:24).** There are grace ministries which offer free materials to pastors.

⁶ Referring to the law given at Mount Sinai

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- B. Be willing to put EVERYTHING on the chopping block as you reevaluate your beliefs.
- C. Get involved with an online grace ministers' group such as a blog or Facebook group.
- D. At some point when you feel God is leading you, share your testimony with the people. Apologize for not knowing and teaching the pure gospel.
 - 1. If you've been teaching for many years, attempt to communicate how your beliefs have changed with former members. This might be costly, but it also may liberate hundreds of believers.
- E. Hopefully, the people and the church Board will embrace this message, if they don't, keep in mind that God is not limited in your life and ministry by the actions of others. If your ministry is terminated, God is perfectly capable of opening another, one in which you will not be inhibited.
- F. Be prepared for persecution. It will come. You may sadly discover that preaching the true gospel will cost you your job, your credentials, and sadly even cause divisions among friends and family. None of that ultimately matters. What matters is preaching the purest gospel you know how and avoiding at every cost preaching "another".
Mark 10:28-30
Then Peter began to say to Him, "See, we have left all and followed You."
²⁹ So Jesus answered and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, ³⁰ who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time—houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions—and in the age to come, eternal life.
- G. We are all called to be "ministers of the gospel", and if we are ministers of the "gospel" certainly it is GOOD NEWS that we communicate. Allow God to completely renovate your teaching from law-based to good news-based.

*Grace is NOT a bandage we put on our theology.
It is NOT a mere topic to be discussed among a long list of others
and then forgotten.*

*God's grace IS the Good News that we preach.
It is EVERYTHING that Jesus accomplished
through His life, death, and resurrection.*

*So, it is of utmost importance that wherever we gather together
that the fellowship be based on this one true gospel,
the gospel of God's grace.*

(Acts 20:24)

ADDITIONAL STUDY

What is “Fellowship”?

If you have ever been in a church where you felt loved and where you could love others, a place where people actually know each other and are involved in each other’s lives, you don’t need a definition for “fellowship”. We knew this fellowship the first years we believed as we got to know other new believers, grew up together sharing our lives, and helped each other along however we were able. However, as people came under law, this fellowship is diminished. Personal relationships were not seen as truly spiritual pursuits. Our lives became crowded by trying to complete a growing list of Christian obligations and attending meeting after meeting leaving us little time to pursue friendship. Relationships in most churches today are based on hellos and good-byes on Sunday morning or structured times together at a home Bible study. The idea of knowing the pastor or anyone else in leadership or even friendship among leadership is nearly unknown. If you’ve awakened to grace remembering a time when you knew the joys of true fellowship with other believers or if you have never known these joys it is likely that you are looking and longing for fellowship.

- A. On the night Jesus was portrayed, he gave a command to His disciples to “love one another as I have loved you” telling them that the greatest of expression of friendship is to lay one’s life down for his friend.** He told them that they were His friends if they did as He commanded (which was to love one another). This command was much more than just having a feeling of affection in our hearts, but a call to demonstrate our love for each other by serving each other. Jesus told them by this one characteristic people would know that we are His disciples in that we have love for one another.
- B. Sadly today, many churches feel more like a war zone where people squabble over the new carpet color, vie for leadership positions, backbite each other, where board members work toward undermining leadership and where leadership uses manipulation in order to control people. What a far cry these “churches” are from what Jesus asked us to be! They claim to love God, but fail to love each other.**

1 John 4:20-21

If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? ²¹ And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.

- C. Most believers have heard the word “koinonia” from which we get our word fellowship but many have lost its true meaning.**

1. “Koinonia” means partnership, participation, social intercourse (exchange of thoughts or feelings), (pecuniary⁷) benefaction⁸; communication, communion, distribution, fellowship. Koinonia comes from the word “koinonos” which means: a sharer, that is, associate: companion, fellowship, partaker, partner.

2. Our fellowship is with each other and with God.

1 Corinthians 1:9

*God is faithful, by whom you were called into the **fellowship** of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*

1 John 1:3

*That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have **fellowship** with us; and truly our **fellowship** is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.*

3. Our fellowship is in the gospel.

Philippians 1:3

*I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, ⁴ always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, ⁵ for your **fellowship** in the **gospel** from the first day until now.*

4. The believers were in close fellowship with the apostles.

Acts 2:42

*And they continued steadfastly in the **apostles’** doctrine and **fellowship** (koinonia) in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.*

Galatians 6:6

*Let him who is taught the word **share**⁹ (koinoneo) in all good things with him who teaches.*

⁷ Pecuniary has to do with money.

⁸ Benefaction is good done to another.

⁹ *The word **communicate** means “to share, to be a partner in a thing with a person,” here “to hold fellowship with another person.” That in which the person holds fellowship with another is designated by the context. The one who is taught should hold fellowship with his teachers in all good things. What the good things are is defined by the context. In verses 1-4, Paul exhorts the Spirit-filled saints in the Galatian churches to take upon themselves the responsibility of restoring to the right method of living a Christian life, those who had put themselves under law. -Wuest*

- a. **Jesus never intended for there to be two classes of Christians, those who are called into ministry and those who are not.** He never meant for one believer to consider himself/herself one step lower or higher than the other.

John 13:12-17

So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? ¹³You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. ¹⁴If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you.

What is "Church"?

- A. **Jesus' church consists of believers in Jesus Christ.**

Acts 2:47

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

- B. **The church is the body of Christ and Jesus is the head of the church.**

Colossians 1:18

And He is the head of the body, the church, Who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.

Colossians 1:24

I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church.

- C. **The church provides mutual love and care within the body of Christ.**

John 15:12

This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

John 21:16

He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My sheep."

Galatians 6:10

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

- D. **The church provides sound teaching which builds the body of Christ.**

1 Corinthians 3:5-11

Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? 6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. 7 So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. 8 Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. 9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building. 10 According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. 11 For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

- E. **The Early Church: ONE Church Consisting of ALL Believers**

1. **The early believers did not have the concept of church as we do today. There was only ONE church in their minds and all those who believed in Jesus were part of it.**

2. **Each place where believers gathered was the church. When we read about "churches" (in the plural), it is referring to the multiple gatherings of believers.**

Acts 16:5

So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily.

- b. **Most of the gatherings took place in homes.**

Acts 2:46-47

So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.

Now, the Judaizers had precipitated a situation in the Galatian churches in which those who followed their teaching broke fellowship with the true teachers of the Word. Paul is exhorting these to resume their fellowship with their former teachers and share with them in the blessing of grace which their teachers were enjoying. The exhortation is that the disciple should make common cause with the teacher in everything that is morally good and which promotes salvation. This breach that had interposed itself between some of the Galatians and their teachers who had taught them grace (Paul included), could not but interfere with their moral and spiritual life. The Galatians' growth in grace was largely dependent upon their attending the means of grace afforded by the presence and ministry of the teachers in their midst who had taught them grace. Furthermore, the work of the churches was hindered by this disruption. The disciple is not to leave the sphere of the morally good as Paul taught it, to the teacher alone, and go off to the Judaizers. He is to work in common with his teachers and so promote the spiritual life of the churches. -Wuest

- c. The church also gathered in larger locations (likely to be able to accommodate and train more people).

Acts 19:8-10

And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God. 9 But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus¹⁰. 10 And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.

3. So connected were the churches that believers in one location often sent support to believers in need in another location.

2 Corinthians 8:13-15

For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened; 14 but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack—that there may be equality. 15 As it is written, “He who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack.”

F. Today’s “Church”

1. Today, the church is seen as consisting of different factions based on differences in beliefs.
 - a. Most of those outside of the church think of “church” as an institution.
2. Increasingly, believers are beginning to see the church as those who gather together with common faith in Jesus Christ. They are beginning to see themselves connected to each other beyond their particular denominations or lack thereof.

What about “Spiritual Authority”?

Many “grace” teachers today falsely conclude that the believers met in homes with no particular leader and that we don’t need pastors or teachers in the body of Christ. This simply is not true. However, what happened in those gatherings was a far cry from that observed in “churches” today.

A. The church of Jesus Christ is not a theocracy¹¹.

A theocracy is a form of civil government. If your pastor claims that his church is a theocracy, he likely believes he is the divinely appointed spiritual authority and that you aren’t. He is the ultimate rule. What he teaches and does cannot be challenged by anyone. To do so would be to “touch God’s anointed”.

1. A more subtle form of spiritual domination is stating that the pastor of a church has been trained and since the laity has not been trained, it is irrational for others to opine as to what is taught or what transpires within a local assembly because they are obviously not experts as is he.
2. Sadly, many schools teach pastors to maintain a “professional distance” from the laity (non-pastors).

B. Each church gathering had appointed elders-overseers.

Acts 14:23

So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

1. The overseers were to shepherd the church.

Acts 20:28

Therefore take heed to yourselves and to 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.

2. The overseers (shepherds) were to build up and serve the people, not to be lords over them.

1 Peter 5:1-4

The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: 2 Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; 3 nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; 4 and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.

C. God gives special ministries to build up the church.

Ephesians 4:11-15

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, 13 till we all come to the unity of

¹⁰ <http://www.israeljerusalem.com/school-of-tyrannus.htm>

¹¹ The definition of the word “theocracy” is enough proof that individual churches do not fall under the concept of theocracies. From Merriam-Webster Dictionary: government of a state by immediate divine guidance or by officials who are regarded as divinely guided.

the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; 14 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, 15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

- D. Paul asks the church to be submissive to the overseers in matters pertaining to the church and to hold them in high esteem because of their labor.**

Hebrews 13:17

Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

1 Thessalonians 5:13-14

And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, 13 and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves.

1 Corinthians 16:15-18

I urge you, brethren—you know the household of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves to the ministry of the saints— 16 that you also submit to such, and to everyone who works and labors with us. 17 I am glad about the coming of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, for what was lacking on your part they supplied. 18 For they refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore acknowledge such men.

- E. It is entirely scriptural for those who work in the gospel to be sustained financially. However, it was not required. Some chose to support themselves.**

1 Corinthians 9:3-18

My defense to those who examine me is this: 4 Do we have no right to eat and drink? 5 Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas? 6 Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working? 7 Who ever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Or who tends a flock and does not drink of the milk of the flock? 8 Do I say these things as a mere man? Or does not the law say the same also? 9 For it is written in the law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain." Is it oxen God is concerned about? 10 Or does He say it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written, that he who plows should plow in hope, and he who threshes in hope should be partaker of his hope. 11 If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things? 12 If others are partakers of this right over you, are we not even more? Nevertheless we have not used this right, but endure all things lest we hinder the gospel of Christ. Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings of the altar? 14 Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel. 15 But I have used none of these things, nor have I written these things that it should be done so to me; for it would be better for me to die than that anyone should make my boasting void... 18 What is my reward then? That when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel.

- F. How are overseers appointed today?**

Today we have a bit of a "situation". In the early church, there was ONE church, not multiple denominations. Now, with multiple denominations and independent gatherings, how do we know who is appointed and just who is doing the appointing? Here are some guidelines we think might be helpful.

1. If you are working within a denomination, the means of appointing overseers is likely predetermined. If God is calling you to work within a particular denomination, you will need to complete their requirements. Depending on the denomination, there will be specific requirements to complete (usually study and experience) before one can serve as an overseer. The elders within that organization (usually organized to protect doctrinal purity) then appoint the overseers in particular locations or approve the ministry someone feels called to fulfill (missionaries, teaching ministries, evangelists, etc.) Whatever your opinions are about these requirements, keep in mind that they are usually established to prepare someone for the work of the ministry. If you don't like the requirements, you have other options either outside of the denomination or service within a local church in some other capacity that doesn't require you to go to Bible School, for example.
 - a. Local churches also appoint elders within that particular body to serve the people.
 - b. If you are not part of an organized denomination, this doesn't prevent you from doing what God is calling you to do. Perhaps you have begun a group in your home. If this is the case, it will likely become apparent whom God has chosen to oversee the group. If God has put it on your heart to have a gathering in your home, He has likely put it on your heart to oversee the gathering, but this is not always the case. So, how are you "appointed"? It can be as simple as the acknowledgement of those gathering with you. Then as the group grows, new overseers will become apparent and can be appointed.
 - c. The Bible gives clear guidelines about who may serve as an overseer (pastor, shepherd) (1 Tim. 3:1-13).

- d. Give up the idea of finding a “full service” church. Be willing to see “church” differently. Many grace fellowships are too small to minister to every age group. Others prefer not to divide the ages but gather together as families encouraging parents to teach their children and children to care for their aging parents.
- G. Romans 13 clearly teaches us to obey civil laws and authorities.
If you plan on having a non-traditional fellowship, don't ignore laws about location and non-profit status. Generally speaking, those laws are set up to protect people from physical harm and fraud. Be considerate of your neighbors. If the law doesn't allow you to have a gathering in your home, consider other options.
 - 1. Local churches are sometimes willing to rent you space on a day they aren't using their facilities.
 - 2. Hotels often have conference rooms for reasonable rates.
 - 3. Public schools and other public facilities also rent to church gatherings.
 - 4. Consider gathering in multiple homes weekly and monthly or quarterly in a larger facility.