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The Church What is the church? When did it begin? Why are there so many denominations? Why does this group worship in a Bible church? The word church is a Greek word--ekklesia. The Universal Church--an Organism Definition: The universal church is that organism of professing believers making up the body of Christ through baptism by the Holy Spirit, which was formed first on the day of Pentecost, is distinct from the nation of Israel, and is not limited to local congregational or denominational affiliation. What did Jesus say about the church? Christ spoke of the church as future. When Christ spoke these words the church was still future, so it did not exist when He was here on earth. Who is the foundation upon which the church is built? Who or what is the rock that Christ referred to? Peter himself says that Christ is the Rock 1 Peter 2: When was the church born? The church was born at Pentecost, about ten days after Jesus ascended back to heaven. The Holy Spirit came down to place every believer into the body of Christ and to indwell every believer personally and permanently. Pentecost was to the Holy Spirit as Christmas was to Jesus. He came to relate to all believers in different ways. Paul speaks of the church as a mystery. This mystery is that Jews and Gentiles are joined together to form a new entity through the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The only qualification for membership is faith in the risen Savior. The church is a totally new thing made up of believing Jews and Gentiles. It is clear then, that every believer since Pentecost, living and dead, is a member of the body of Christ, the universal church. The Local Church--an Organization Definition: The local church is an assembly of professing believers who observe ordinances, are organized under a certain governmental structure, and who impact their community for Christ through the public worship of God, the edification of the members, and evangelization of the lost. There is a distinction between members in the universal church and the local church. The universal church consists only of believers, but the local church can have members who say they are believers and really are not. That can be through ignorance or deception. Some people may say that they believe, but they are pretenders, hypocrites. In our church, we do our best to ask each person who wishes to join to give their personal testimony about when they trusted Christ as Savior. But we can still be fooled. Only God knows the heart! Why so many different Christian denominations? Most denominations started out agreeing on the basic doctrines of the faith, but they disagreed on other things--mode of baptism, whether salvation can be lost, physical healing, charismatic gifts, church government, styles of worship. I believe that the variety we have meets the needs of different people. Some like ritual and liturgy, some like strong Bible teaching, some like casual services, some like a lot of emotion, some like very little. Church Government There are three basic forms of church government. Authority over the church resides in the bishop. Authority over the church resides in a group of representatives to whom authority has been granted by the congregation, elders. Presbyterian, Reformed and some Bible churches. This stresses the role of the individual Christian, making the congregation the final authority in matters. Every member has a vote. Baptist and Evangelical Free, Bible and independent churches. Our church is a combination of these last two. We are Elder governed and Staff run, and the congregation votes on the Pastor, Associate Pastor, Elders, and the budgets. Elders Spiritual leadership is the responsibility of the elders. Their qualifications are found in 1 Timothy 3: Deacons Deacons do the practical work of leadership under the spiritual authority of the elders. They take care of those in the congregation in need. Women can be deacons. Romans 16; 1 Timothy 3: Ordinances of the Local Church Ordinance: Both of these ordinances commemorate the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Baptism Read Matthew Immerse is the primary meaning of the Greek word baptizo. Immersion best pictures the significance of baptism, which is death to the old life and resurrection to the new. This church practices immersion, but arguing and dividing about mode of baptism is non-productive. Every believer should be baptized as soon as he or she knows that Christ commanded it. Baptism is obedience to your Lord. The unleavened bread represents the perfect life of our Lord which qualified Him to be an acceptable sacrifice for sin. It represents His body which bore our sin on the cross. The wine represents his blood shed for the

remission of our sins. It reminds us that Jesus Christ is coming again and we are to observe it till He comes. It should also remind us of our oneness with each other in the body of Christ and of the fellowship which share as fellow members of that body 1 Corinthians Can any believer partake regardless of denominational membership? Restrictions based on denominational affiliation go against the call for unity in the universal church. Communion at Lausanne Warning! We are to observe soul-searching and confession of sins before partaking. Otherwise, we may be disciplined--such as by sickness, or even death. The purpose for the Local Church 1. Worship and show its love for the Lord Revelation 2: Minister to its own members so that they encourage each other to love and good works Hebrews Be the agency for carrying out the Great Commission. The gospel should be preached in the services so that unbelievers can respond. Should care for its own who are in need, e. Do good in the world Galatians 6: To produce mature, stable, holy Christians Colossians 1: This may mean discipline in the area of morals and maintenance of purity in doctrine 1 Corinthians 5, 2 Timothy 2: Illustrations of Universal Church Christ is the Shepherd and we are the sheep John 10 --care and security. Christ is the vine and we are the branches John 15 --fruitfulness and strength. Christ is the cornerstone and we are the stones in the building Ephesians 2: Christ is the High Priest and we are a kingdom of priests 1 Peter 2 --we offer ourselves, our substance and our service. Christ is the Head and we are members of His body 1 Corinthians 12 --as Head, He directs; as members we serve each other through the exercise of the spiritual gifts he has given us. Christ is the Bridegroom and we are His bride Ephesians 5: Christ is the Heir and we are joint-heirs Hebrews 1: Christ is the firstfruits and we are the harvest 1 Corinthians Christ is the Master and we are His servants Colossians 4: The master takes care of the servant. How do we apply these facts? We should each be sure that we are members in the universal church, no matter what church we worship in. Membership in the universal church is secured by trusting the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior. There is great assurance in knowing that you are a member of the universal church, the body of Christ. This assurance should motivate you to identify with a local church where you can grow and you can serve. Joining means that you identify yourself with the people here. They are your family. You support and help those in need. You fellowship, you serve. New membership classes are held at least four times a year. They are held on two consecutive Sunday mornings.

Chapter 2 : Church Of Christ Sermons and Lessons

One of our aims as a community is to build our beliefs and practices on the example of the first century church which we see being established as we read through the Book of Acts.

Print Sermon The purpose of this website is to provide free sermon manuscripts and sermon videos to pastors and missionaries throughout the world, especially the Third World, where there are few if any theological seminaries or Bible schools. These sermon manuscripts and videos now go out to about 100 countries every year at www. Hundreds of others watch the videos on YouTube, but they soon leave YouTube and come to our website. YouTube feeds people to our website. The sermon manuscripts are given in 40 languages to about 100 countries each month. The sermon manuscripts are not copyrighted, so preachers can use them without our permission. Please click here to learn how you can make a monthly donation to help us in this great work of spreading the Gospel to the whole world, including the Muslim and Hindu nations. Whenever you write to Dr. Hymers always tell him what country you live in, or he cannot answer you. Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre were the two philosophers who popularized existentialism. Sproul, Lifeviews, Fleming H. Yes, I think so. You can be at a rave, or in a crowded mall, and still feel lonely. One teenager told our pastor, Dr. And most young people are literally tormented by feelings of loneliness today. What is the cure? The cure is to know Jesus Christ personally and to be part of the family of God in the local church. Come home to church! Come home to Jesus Christ, the Son of God! We are answering the aching, lonely, isolated meaninglessness of the modern world when we say that! Tell it far and wide! But there are some who want one without the other. They want the friendship of the local church without conversion to Jesus Christ. They must go together. Ultimately the fellowship will be broken. Here is a modern translation of I John 2: Let us think about this text more deeply. First, what they did. The early churches were a place of deep friendship in the coldness and heartlessness of the Roman world. But they soon found out that the Christian life was not always easy. Some of them left when they found that out. Demas, Crescens and Titus left when trouble came. Does that happen today? People come to church for a while. They enjoy the friendships they make in the church. It all seems fun. But then something else comes up. I heard about one person who went to Las Vegas on Sunday morning. That person liked coming to church, but Las Vegas sounded like even more fun! Second, why they did it. Commenting on I John 2: Vernon McGee said, The way you can tell a true child of God is that eventually a man will show his true colors and leave the assembly of God if he is not a child of God. He will withdraw from the Christians, the body of believers, and he will go back into the world. There are many who make professions of being Christians, but they are not really Christians. I will give without comment the words of Albert Barnes, in his classical commentary on the Bible, For if they had been of us. If they had been sincere and true Christians. They would no doubt have continued with us. If they had been true Christians they would never have departed from the church. The statement is so made also as to teach that if any do fall away from the church, the fact is full proof that they never had any religion, for if they had had they would have remained steadfast in the church. Albert Barnes, Notes on the New Testament, Baker Book House, reprint of the edition, note on I John 2: Third, how to remedy it. They were not joined to Christ. McGee said of this verse, John makes a very solemn and serious statement here, and he makes this statement to us today. The Lord Jesus said to a very religious man, Nicodemus, that he must be born again. You must be joined to Christ. This happens when you are truly born again. The remedy for apostasy is the new birth! This happens when you acknowledge your sins and come to Christ. When you come to Him, He will receive you and wash your sins away with His Blood. When you come to Christ, and are joined to Him, you receive the new birth. Your sins are canceled out, and you become a child of God. Only when you are born again do you truly become a living member of the local church. Existentialism is canceled out when you come to Christ and are born again. When we have passed from death to life by conversion, we will love the brethren in the local church! If you value the friendships you have made in this church, make sure you experience conversion. It is essential that you be converted. If these sermons bless you send an e-mail to Dr. Hymers and tell him, but always include what country you are writing from.

DOWNLOAD PDF BASIC BIBLE SERMONS ON THE CHURCH

You can write to Dr. Hymers in any language, but write in English if you can. If you want to write to Dr. Hymers by postal mail, his address is P. Box , Los Angeles, CA You may telephone him at

Chapter 3 : Basic Truth Church - Sermons

Free Access to Sermons on Basic, Church Sermons, Illustrations on Basic, and PowerPoints for Preaching on Basic. Independent Bible (2) Independent/Bible (

These are teachings that everybody claiming to be a Christian ought to know. As I began, I had no idea, as my methodical mind began developing the series, how extensive it would ultimately end up being. By the time I finished, I had preached forty sermons, and I quickly followed that up with five more on grace that served to complement the initial series. The general response to the "Basic Bible Teachings" series virtually blew me away. As already noted, I thought I was covering material of which all of us should already have a basic understanding. To a great extent I thought I was reviewing, re-emphasizing and reaffirming the foundational doctrines of Christianity. Requests for recordings of the individual lessons, and later of the entire series, were staggering. We distributed, literally, thousands of copies of the lessons. At the end of the series we made all forty sermons, in audio and typed outline form and twenty power point presentations available on one Mp3 format CD. We gave away stacks of those. It became apparent that the series struck a cord that evidently had a great need of being struck. Our own members scooped up many of the copies for themselves, but many of them were passing them on to friends and family members all across the country. Visitors who happened to come our way during the series would frequently ask for copies of individual lessons for themselves, often for the whole series. One point to glean from the reaction was that these basic principles need to be taught on a regular basis. Most churches have gotten away from teaching much Bible. As a result there is a dearth of in-depth Bible knowledge among people claiming to be followers of Christ. But, people want to learn! I intend to go over each sermon, improve it if I can and, hopefully, present it in a more effective manner. I plan to build power point presentations for all lessons for which I did not build them the first time around, and I intend to re-do the power points that I did build. I ask for your prayers as I work on and present these important lessons. Please pray that I will do an effective job in preparing and presenting them. Please pray that they can help us individually and as a congregation and that they can also help many others who are not members here at Sunny Slope. Please pray that God will be glorified greatly through these lessons. I thank you in advance for your prayers and encouragement. Think and pray about how you can use these lessons to benefit yourself and others

Church of Christ Sermon Outlines. Powerful sermon outlines to use in your ministry or to help you study. Get topical, textual or expository outlines.

Christian Doctrines 9 1. We Should Study the Bible. God gave us the Bible to read and study. It is a textbook to study, not a picture-book to browse through. There is a big difference between simply reading a book and seriously studying it. One is leisure, the other is work. God wants us to study our Bibles, not use them for pressing flowers. To study the Bible is to research it to discover its meaning. Eisegesis is twisting the Scriptures to suit our preconceived notions 2 Pet. It Takes Faith to Study the Bible. When we study the Bible, we should set aside wrong presuppositions and preconceived ideas. We need to be teachable. We should pray before and during Bible study, and rely on the Holy Spirit in us to teach us what He says in the Bible. Faith comes to us by the Word of God Rom. Without faith, we can understand the Bible only in a natural way, not a supernatural way. Studying the Bible profits us nothing unless it is mixed with faith Heb. It Takes Work to Study the Bible. Search and you will find. Dig deep and you will find new treasures of gold hidden in this field. Alas, some Christians have not even read the entire Bible yet. Others try to read it through every year. It takes work, but the Holy Spirit enables us to understand cf. A lacksadaisical attitude betrays low respect for the Bible and little faith in God. But serious Bible study is work which brings rest. The Bible is Understandable. Though the Bible was originally written in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek, it is still understandable through reliable translations not to mention the scholarly study of the original languages. We may profit from preachers and teachers who explain the Bible to us Acts 8: The Bible is for everyone. Though some parts are harder to understand than others 2 Pet. Even a cursory study of the Bible will yield great results. We study the historical setting of Scripture human author, original readers, date, geography, manners and customs, archeology, etc , as well as the normal meaning of the language its lexical meaning, grammar, syntax, context, etc. We Should Study All of the Bible. We should study all of it, not just our favorite parts. Use a concordance and cross references to compare Scripture with Scripture. It has great variety. All Scripture is inspired and deserves our study. Just as God used many human authors, so he used their backgrounds and a variety of literary styles. In these, we find prayer and praise to God, and wisdom in dealing with life. Then other books are mainly laws Exodus-Deuteronomy, parts of others. Some laws are straight-forward commands or prohibitions, while others are case laws. Then other books are mainly prophecy, recording direct messages from God, including accurate predictions of the future. Lastly, there are the epistles of Paul and others. All these styles form a wonderful harmony. The Bible Centers on Christ. One important principle of Bible study is knowing and noticing that Christ is the center of Scripture. The Old Testament is filled with prophecies, types and symbols of the coming Messiah Gen. Jesus fulfilled these prophecies. Some are explained in the New Testament see Luke And sandwiched between the Old Testament predictions of the future and the New Testament explanations of the past, we find the four Gospels which describe the person and work of Christ in a special way. The Bible Teaches Us Salvation. Since it is a book about Christ, the Bible is therefore a book about how we may be saved from our sins through Him. It makes us wise unto salvation 2 Tim. Some parts of the Bible more directly discuss salvation, such as the four Gospels, Acts and Romans. But all parts of Scripture fit into this comprehensive entity. Thus, the Bible was given to us that we may know how to be saved and how to have the assurance of salvation John We can also use it to tell other people the Gospel of salvation. The Bible is Spiritual Food. The Bible is frequently compared to food. We ought to thirst for it like a baby thirsts for milk I Pet. The basic message of the Bible is like milk; the additional details are like meat Heb. The Bible is the means that God uses to nourish His children. It gave us the new birth and sustains our new life. We grow spiritually anemic when we ignore it. So, we need to regularly read and study it, and meditate on it like a cow chews the cud. The more we do, the stronger we will grow spiritually. The Bible Has Many Uses. We study the Bible to learn about God. When we study it, we always need to find what God wants us to do in light of that passage. It teaches us how to live for God and helps us resist Satan and temptation, worship God in the way acceptable to Him, and witness in the world. It encourages us through its

many promises, aids us in prayer, points out our sins and assures us of forgiveness, strengthens our faith, answers the basic questions we have for guidance, and so much more. So let us diligently read it, study it, believe it and obey it cf.

The Tip of our Tongue Reveals the Depths of our Hearts. Authored By Dale Stinson. View. Who is Wise?

He is working out his plan for me. God still loves me. The Holy Spirit indwells me. Jesus is alive today. He will return someday. He and his wife have been through a series of incredibly difficult experiences over the past two or three years. Tell them those three words: It saves you from despair when hard times come. It literally saves your life. The nature of the Christian faith. Gresham Machen wrote a groundbreaking book called Christianity and Liberalism. A leader in the conservative movement within the Presbyterian Church, Machen wrote the book to demonstrate the fundamental difference between biblical Christianity and liberal Christianity. Looking back on the controversy his book provoked, he wrote this assessment: The issue in the Church of the present day is not between two varieties of the same religion, but, at bottom, between two essentially different types of thought and life. There is much interlocking of the branches, but the two tendencies, Modernism and supernaturalism, or otherwise designated non-doctrinal religion and historic Christianity, spring from different roots. That last phrase deserves special notice: We mean a true personal relationship with the Christ revealed in the Bible. Counteract the current emphasis on feelings and experience as the final arbiter of truth. Last weekend nearly 20, young people came to Urbana 03, the triennial missions conference sponsored by InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. John Stott had been scheduled to speak but had a small stroke a week earlier so his message was read in his absence. In it he discusses three great contemporary challenges to the Christian message: The relativist denies the existence of absolute moral standards. What is right for you is wrong for me, what is wrong for me is right for you. Thus neither abortion nor homosexuality are truly wrong in the eyes of the moral relativist. Stott points out that relativism permeates our culture and is seeping into the church. Then he offers a bit of doggerel that illustrates the meaning of relativism: It all depends on where you are, It all depends on who you are, It all depends on what you feel, It all depends on how you feel. If tastes just happen to agree Then you have morality. But where there are conflicting trends, It all depends, it all depends. The present world conflict. I am not speaking of the war on terror, but of the growing worldwide clash between Islam and Christianity. The war on terror is a battle of guns and bombs; the clash between Islam and Christianity is a battle of ideas, a clash of worldviews. And the greatest question is this: Who is Jesus Christ? If so, then we must bow down and worship him. If he is only a prophet, then we may honor him but we must not worship him. Between those two points of view, there is no middle ground. The principle of authority. If you think about it, Christians believe something very profound and fundamentally very radical. In an age of moral and spiritual anarchy, we believe there is a God in heaven that has spoken to the human race. God has spoken and he has not stuttered. He spoke and made himself clear in his Word, the Bible. We believe in authority. In an era that prizes individual freedom, Christians believe in a supreme being who dictates our words and deeds. To modern ears, the concept sounds outrageously autocratic. From when to die to when to give birth, from whom to have sex with, to how to spend their money, the chatteratis believe they should enjoy unlimited freedom. But for the Christian, freedom is not an end in itself. Unfettered individualism can mean greed and selfishness, the evasion of personal responsibility, the destruction of the family. Christians believe that from an all-powerful authority stems a clear system of judgment which teaches that there is a right and a wrong. He challenged Eve with this question: The church must once again declare the truth of God with boldness. Our task is to proclaim the truth of God even to those who reject it because it is the truth that sets men free. He mentioned that everything Word of Life does comes from a simple, three-word motto: We must Know the truth. We must Grow in the truth. We must Show the truth to others. The order is crucial. You must know it before you can grow in it. And you must grow in it before you show it to others. Know it, grow it on the inside, show it on the outside. But knowing coming first. We must know what God has said, take time to grow it into our lives, and then we will be prepared to show it to others. We owe it to the world, to ourselves, and to our God. We must not let the world squeeze us into its mold. Then we are ready to show the world who Jesus is. Only one question is left. Many of you grew up in churches where the creed was recited every Sunday. But have you ever taken time to study it carefully? You

know how it begins: It all begins here. It is very possible to talk about Jesus and not be a Christian. It is very possible to be a church member and know all the right answers and still be lost because you have never made the decision to trust Jesus Christ—and him alone—for your salvation. Make sure you are trusting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Too many parents think that sports and hobbies will protect their children as long as a little Sunday religion is thrown in for good measure. That might have worked 50 years ago. Our kids are in a battle every day. The best thing we can do is to make sure our homes reflect genuine spiritual reality. That means grounding our children daily in the Word of God. **Be Bold About Your Faith.** Never be ashamed of Jesus. You can change your world if you will be bold and winsome in the way you present Christ. Stand up for Jesus—and do it with a smile, not a frown. Pray that you will know so you can grow so you can show the world who Jesus is. The moral and spiritual confusion of these days offers an incredible opportunity to the church of Jesus Christ. After all, a starving dog will eat whatever you put in front of him. Something has to fill the void within. And that means we have a great opportunity. We have an obligation that goes beyond these four walls and beyond our own family. God has made us debtors to the whole world. We all made it. What about that man who came to your door? What about your sister, your daddy, your boss, your pals at work? Did you even try to tell them about me? It may well be that we are the final generation before the return of Christ. That would explain why Satan has made such an energetic effort to spread his lies. Last week Billy Graham said in his syndicated column that there is a battle going on between God and Satan. But where sin abounded, grace super-abounded. The very fact that we live in such spiritual darkness means that when the light shines, it really shines. Let us instead be encouraged by the opportunities of this hour.

Chapter 6 : Single Topical Sermons (Executable Outlines)

A series of sermons that were presented to the Northside church. A series that presents Bible "basics" and the fundamentals on which the church was established.

A disturbing trend seen too often in many churches is the apparent apathy of many Christians a. They may attend services, but it appears that they are only "going through the motions" b. Their singing, their praying, their Bible Study, their zeal, seems listless c. I suspect the problem is one akin to an athlete or a sport team which is "in a slump" a. Such a person or team "goes through the motions", but they are not performing up to their true potential b. The solution in sports: Work on "the fundamentals" 3. The same is true with Christians; when we find ourselves "in a slump" We need to stress the fundamentals - cf. We need to get "Back To The Basics! A Scriptural definition of faith is found in He The NIV is helpful: I like to think of faith as "confident trust" B. Faith in God is essential to pleasing Him - He Faith in Jesus is essential to finding forgiveness and eternal life - Jn 8: Without faith, the only alternative is doubt accompanied with fear - cf. The Word of God is designed to produce faith - cf. Through diligent reading of the Bible, we can "energize" our faith! It will also help you to It is NOT wishful thinking, or an insecure "I hope so" 3. A common definition of hope is "desire plus expectation" B. Hope is necessary to persevere - Ro 8: Hope is necessary for our motivation to become pure - 1Jn 3: Hope is necessary to increase opportunities to evangelize - 1Pe 3: The Word of God was written to produce hope - Ro This encourages us to expect Him to deliver on His promises for the future 2. Peter encourages us to "rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" - 1Pe 1: Where do read of the "grace" that is to come when Christ is revealed? In the Scriptures, of course! Nothing "fortifies" our hope better than those wonderful passages that reveal the eternal destiny of the saints! Getting "Back To The Basics" will also include an effort to Paul gives the best definition of love - 1Co A simple definition that is easy to remember: Expressing love gives us "assurance" of our salvation - cf. Expressing love assures us that God will answer our prayers - 1Jn 3: Expressing love reassures us that we abide in God, and He in us - 1Jn 4: Like the Thessalonians, we can be taught by God how to love - cf. Jesus taught us how to love by His sacrificial life - 1Jn 3: God taught us how to love by giving His Son as a propitiation for sins - 1Jn 4: CHARA joy , then, is the response we have to undeserved favor 2. I like to think of joy as the "delightful response" to the grace we receive from God B. Joy is an essential element of what constitutes the Kingdom of God - Ro Joy lightens the burden of trials in this life - 1Pe 1: It is often the loss of this virtue that is most evident in the lives of many Christians! Both Jesus and His apostles gave us words whereby our joy might be full - Jn Once again we see the value of daily Bible study b. Just as the Bible can Answered prayer certainly excites the Christian, and increases joy! It is used to describe such harmony between God and man d. A lack of peace often contributes to the "spiritual doldrums" that afflict many Christians B. Another crucial element constituting the Kingdom of God - Ro Peace with brethren contributes to receiving peace from peace from God - 2Co And having peace with God has a positive effect in our peace with our enemies - Pr Peace with God begins with justification found only in Christ - Ro 5: It continues in response to fervent prayer - cf. Just as prayer can "enhance" our joy b. So can prayer help us to "enjoy" our peace that surpasses all understanding! Faith, hope, love, joy, peace: Why are they often in short supply in the lives of many Christians? Because they neglect two fundamental tools God provides for them b. The Word of God and prayer! Brethren, whenever you find yourself in a spiritual "slump", let these two avenues of communication with God be the key to: Restoring the basic elements of the abundant life found only in Christ is not a mystery: Receive the implanted Word of God! Continue earnestly in prayer!

Chapter 7 : Basic Bible Teachings - Sunny Slope Church of Christ

3) *Great sermons illustrate the point - The moral of any story usually leaves the most significant impression on the listener. The same is true for sermon illustrations. Beginning or ending your sermon with a story can help the point stick with your church.*

BibleStudy 0 Comment Acts of the Apostles , believers , church , God , Jesus , spiritual Print This Page One of our aims as a community is to build our beliefs and practices on the example of the first century church which we see being established as we read through the Book of Acts. With all this evidence and divine assistance you would expect the first century ecclesia to be strong in faith, full of enthusiasm, a perfect knowledge of doctrine, perfect behaviour, extremely loving and an example of blissful harmony. We can go back further in our thoughts though to when the disciples were called. This is really the beginning of the foundation of the church, the first group of followers of Christ. But if we had been asked to pick out 12 men to help us in our mission I expect the end result would have been very different. Peter forsook Christ and denied him at a time when the other disciples needed him to be strong of character, and we can say that they had all failed their calling, but we would of course be wrong to think that. The disciples were not chosen on the basis of what they could do, but rather on the grounds of what they could become. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners. The 12 he chose to accompany him during his ministry were a diverse group, full of imperfections and could be thought of as poor building materials by some for his church, but that diversity and imperfection was nothing compared to what Paul was going to encounter on his extensive journeys to build the church of Christ. Think of all the many men and women that Paul and the other apostles met and collected into the early church. There were men and women from all races, all colours, religions. Rich men with large areas of land and numerous possessions, poor men with little more than the coat on their backs. Tentmakers, sellers of purple, doctors. The rich Philemon and his servant Onesimus along with many, many others. And what a lesson they teach us. This was the body of Christ which is the church. They had all become one in Jesus through baptism and belief in his saving sacrifice. They were all one body as Paul told us in Romans For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. There was of course one fixed point in the early church and that was the head, the head which is Christ and the body seeks to be controlled and animated by the head, motivated and directed by Christ. The body of the church will never be perfect until we are made like unto his own glorious body and only then will we ever achieve unity of mind and body, and we are not there yet. The church is really very different from the body of saintly individuals that we perhaps sometimes think that the church should be composed of. When we are called into the church it is not the end, it is only the beginning of the process. The people are the raw materials for building up the church but they must first be cut and shaped. Paul speaks to the Ephesians like he is conducting a Christian training camp. And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. But there are some differences in attitude between the first century and today that we should take lessons from that. Remember that in the first century there was no New Testament, it was still in the process of being written and collected together under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. There were some letters beginning to be distributed by the likes of Paul, but the circulation was quite narrow. There were no concordances, there were no shelves of commentaries, and not many would have had even one book of the Old Testament in their private possession. When we think of our ecclesias today we perhaps think of sitting round, engaging in a deep study and discussing the finer points to exhaustion. In the first century, that kind of study was virtually impossible, but what they could do and did do was to meditate on the practical living side of things, the pastoral care, the love for one another, the helping each other out whenever they could. Through this they grew in spirit, in truth and in love. They did have some extra challenges to overcome though. We

have nothing like the diversity to contend with, at least in this country. We are largely composed of people with a Christian background of some sort, and you can imagine the difficulty Paul had in bringing together intensely nationalistic Jews and the Gentiles who were thought of as dogs. Can you imagine trying to unify them into a close family relationship? Perhaps this is something to remember when we have differences of opinion. Largely though, we have a very similar situation to the first century, with a wide range of callings, talents, personalities, and we have all the different races, religions, accents, jobs, education, salaries, and none of them matter. In Acts 10 when it is revealed to Peter that the Gentiles were to be included. So Peter opened his mouth and said: These are the things that are important and we must remember what is important and what is not. In John we are told this of Jesus He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. Fitting that into the symbol of the body that Paul uses we then contribute using our faith and belief to be doers of good works, to be carers, presidents, doorkeepers, organists, preachers, teachers, writers, missionary workers, and other servants to the body of Christ of every kind. Some of the work can only be done by a few perhaps, but everyone can contribute love, faith and zeal to varying extents. But what we all contribute in abundant quantities is weakness, and the big challenge to each and every one of us is to overcome it. Each one of us is unique just like everyone else in the world. We each have our own personalities, and we are of course more than just our speech and our opinions. We have all kinds of peculiarities, likes and dislikes. There are those who have a responsible mind and think carefully before they speak about what the impact of what they say might be. There are the more impulsive who speak first and think later about the possible consequences. Quite often that comes with old age, but it comes on some people quite young too! Then there are the freethinkers who stir things up a bit, like to grasp at every new idea as it comes along, causing people to think. They are essential to a living church and should never be criticised, it keeps us on our toes. Each person has his or her place and every personality or trait will find somewhere to fit into the body of Christ. There are people so uncritical they will like everything, there are the hypercritical who are incapable of liking anything. If the exhortation was good, it was too long, if it was just the right length, it rambled too much. What they say about there is no pleasing some people there is some truth in it. But our diversity is actually a benefit to us because it means there is something for everyone at least some of the time. The body of Christ is selected from the whole spectrum of society, not based on their talent, how clever they are, how much money they can contribute, and from an organisational point of view it sounds like it would be a complete shambles, but the members of the church are selected by the teaching of the Word of God, because of their potential reaction to that message. Then whatever abilities exist are built into the church and all the weakness of sin that we bring with us we try to help each other overcome and eradicate. This is the whole task of building up a church. We of course have many diversities of sins, and each temptation can be quite different to us. There is no point priding ourselves on not doing sins A, B, C and D because in reality they had never been a great temptation to us anyway, when we are committing sins E, F, G and H continuously, just picking out the bits that come easily to us. But take comfort from the fact that it was always so. There were always people like Diotrophes, who love to have the preeminence. I have written something to the church, but Diotrophes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us. And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church. There are the agnostics who thought they already had all the answers, which the apostles found difficult to overcome. Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Let us remember the words of Paul in Romans 14 and in particular v13, though the whole chapter is very relevant. Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother. Let us seek out the good in each other, encourage and uplift for while there is good in the worst of us there is much bad in the best of us. Let us try and build each other up for there is never much

building up achieved by constantly knocking down what we think to be faulty. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. We should be extremely grateful that he will not lose patience with us either no matter how many times we show our failings. Let our concentration be where it should be, on helping each other in a positive way, recognising our common weakness and realising that the path of Christ should lie before us, striving to follow it together in unity as one body, helping each other along that road, and building the church of Christ together. So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

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