

Building up the Body of Christ

These 13 articles appeared in the Orangeburg Church Bulletin and are suitable for bulletins or one quarter of Bible study.

1. *Building up the Church in Love*

The New Testament portrays the church in several ways. For example, it is called the body and the church in the same sentence in Eph. 1:23, “. . .He . . . gave him to be head over all things to the church which is his body . . .” The church is variously called the house of God (1 Tim. 3:15), an elect race, a royal priesthood, and a holy nation (I Pet. 2:9). Whatever the church is called, the designation is synonymous for that group of penitent, baptized believers of whom it was said in Acts 2:47: “And the Lord added to the church daily such as were saved.” Paul added to this idea, “For in one spirit were we all baptized into one body” (1 Cor. 12:13). Therefore, each word used for the church carries a meaning about the church that is instructive as to the church’s purpose, nature, scope, or character. For example, the word church speaks of the called out body; the word kingdom speaks of it in relation to Christ the King; house of God, to God our Father and Christ our elder brother.

It is the word, *body*, that describes the functioning of the members of the church in relation to one another and in relation to Christ the head of the body. This member to member and member to head relationship is described in detail in two passages: 1 Cor. 12:12-31 and in Eph. 4:15-16.

I Cor. 12 applies the idea of the human head and body metaphorically and in great detail to Christ and the church. The passage teaches us by this analogy several important lessons:

- V.12: There is one body and one Christ.
- V.13: The only way into the body is baptism.
- V.14: It takes all the members not one.
- V.18. God has set the members in the body as it pleases him.
- V.21: One member cannot say to the other, “I have no need of you.”
- V.22: Abundant honor is bestowed on all the members of the body.
- V.25: There is no division in the body.
- V.25: The members should have the same care for one another.
- V.26: If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it.
- V.26 If one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.
- V.27 You are the body of Christ, and severally members thereof.

As members of the church of Christ we are each one integrated into a unified whole, where we each work and worship for the head—Christ—as he directs us. The church is at the same time unified and productive.

Eph 4:15:16 applies the same head and body analogy to the church but emphasizes those characteristics that give a body its strength:

- V.15 Speaking the truth in love, [the members] may grow up in all things to him, who is the head, even Christ.
- V.16 From Christ, all the body is fitly framed and knit together.
- V.16 Every joint supplies, according to the working of due measure of each several part.
- V.16 This makes the increase of the body unto building up of itself in love.

The church in this case is like the human body. The eyes, the joints, the muscles, the bones, the nervous system – all of these and more must work together to do even the smallest of task. There is no room for faction or division in the body. Therefore, the church members must all work together in love to accomplish the great tasks that Christ – the head – has left for us to do. The watchwords of our great labor in the Lord are love, unity, and peace. The end of it all is “the building up of itself in love” (Eph.4:16).

Each member of the Lord’s church in Orangeburg can become a strong force for the Lord by focusing on these passages. We can all be unified with the other members, unite by speaking the truth in love, and take direction from Christ our head in all matters that “pertain to life and Godliness, through the knowledge of him that called us by his own glory and virtue” (II Peter 1:3).

2. Congregational Discipline: To Love Is To Discipline

The New Testament is very clear: local churches are to discipline erring members. To fail to do so would place the congregation in violation of the direct teaching of God’s word. However, beyond the sin of this violation, the congregation that ignores the erring member shows a lack of love for that member. Of the Lord’s love of us, we are told in Heb 12:4-11:

4 You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; 5 and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons,

"MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD,
NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM;

6 FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES,
AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES."

7 It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? 8 But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 9 Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? 10 For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. 11 All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. NASU

This scripture describes the foundation of good discipline. This passage includes the discipline of God to his children and the discipline of earthly fathers to their children. The insights here apply equally to the church members who are disciplining unfaithful and erring members:

1. We should never regard the discipline of the Lord lightly.
2. We should not faint (pull back when we are reproved). How often it is that a disciplined child sulks and pouts when disciplined, even when the child is wrong.
3. God deals with us as sons; true and good fathers discipline their children.
4. If God did not discipline us, we would be as illegitimate children for whom He did not care.
5. Children respect earthly fathers who discipline them; therefore, we should accept the discipline of God, our heavenly Father, and live.
6. God disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness.
7. Discipline seems sorrowful at first, but afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

As the congregation takes action in order to discipline the divisive, disorderly, or immoral member, we should expect that this member might regard it lightly, discounting and discrediting our efforts. The member might, as a spoiled child, pout and blame others for the circumstances, choosing to ignore the sin that has entangled this member. On the other hand, the member might regard it lightly and respond to the church in a ridiculing and haughty manner. All of this is an effort to discredit the congregation's exercise of discipline. The congregation must remain strong and know that it is a loving church when it disciplines, and unloving when it does not. The loving Lord, the loving earthly father, and the loving congregation have this in common: when they love, they discipline.

Most often the erring member knows and accepts this. On many occasions the erring members are waiting for the church to take action and help them stop their erring ways. One member who had engaged in sexual immorality, and eventually left his wife and two young adopted children, said to the elders of his home congregation: "What took you so long?" Another man in another congregation who had developed sinful relationships with other men and left his family, said, when the elders called him in for a conference: "I thought I would have had a letter by now." Both these members understood their error and understood what the congregation should be doing to discipline them.

To love is to discipline. We must make every effort to snatch the erring member from the devil. "Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." 1 Peter 5:8.

3. Congregational Discipline: When and How?

The issue of church discipline raises the question of when and how. The elders are to initiate church discipline. In Acts 20, the apostle Paul called the elders at Ephesus to meet him at Miletus. In Acts 20:28-31, he told the elders: "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, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be on the alert . . ." Peter also admonished the elders of the congregations in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia in 1 Peter 5:1-2: "Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder . . . shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God." To tend and protect the flock, the elders must be on guard—like

shepherds—initiating action when savage wolves threaten individual members or the congregation.

The members are responsible to support and follow the lead of the elders in this most serious matter. In Heb 13:17, we are told, “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.” The apostle Paul adds to this: “The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.” 1 Tim 5:17. Paul also wrote in 1 Thess 5:12-13: “But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work.” For discipline to be effective in restoring the erring, the elders must lead and the members must follow, united in one, solid as a rock, and firm in the truth.

Threats to the members and to the congregation usually come from four directions: division, false doctrine, immorality, and unruly and undisciplined lives. Consider these.

Division. Of division Paul instructed us in Rom. 1:17 “Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them.” The NIV version says “watch those” and the KJ version says “mark those.” Paul describes the dissentious and divisive person in unflattering words in verse 18: “For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.” In Galatians 5, when discussing the works of the flesh, Paul identifies eight sins of division in verses 20 and 21 as deeds of the flesh: enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying. If these sins are not dealt with, they will destroy the church and the members. Swift and firm action is called for.

False doctrine. False doctrine and teaching are the instruments of the Destroyer—the devil. He comes in with his ministers who are disguised. “For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds. 2 Cor 11:13-15. These false teachers are wolves (Acts 20 above). They are described in the worst of terms in 2 Peter 2:1-3: “There will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; and in their greed they will exploit you with false words . . . their destruction is not asleep.” Elders are charged to take the lead in confronting false teachers. Paul included this ability when he gave the qualifications of elders in Titus 1:9-22: “Holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance

with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict. 10 For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers . . . 11 who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach for the sake of sordid gain . . . For this reason reprove them severely so that they may be sound in the faith.”

Immorality. Unlike divisive acts and false teaching, immorality targets an individual member or a small group of members. The most notable case is the man in 1 Cor 5 who had sexually immoral relations with his father's wife. Paul chastised the congregation for being arrogant by ignoring what was going on and by not removing such a one from their midst. Paul makes it very clear that it is the responsibility of the church to act in 1 Cor 5:5-7: "5 I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. 6 Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough?" What was first the sin of one person will run like leaven throughout the congregation in arrogance, boasting, and indifference until the members of the congregation become abettors or accessories to the sin. Paul's rebuke culminates in 1 Cor 5:11-13 by telling them what action to take and against whom to take it, defining abuses that we must still consider today:

11 But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler -- not even to eat with such a one. 12 For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? 13 But those who are outside, God judges. REMOVE THE WICKED MAN FROM AMONG YOURSELVES.

Paul includes so-called brothers who are immoral and covetous people, idolaters, revilers, drunkards and swindlers. The actions that we are to take include not associating with them, not even eating with them, and removing the wicked from among ourselves.

Undisciplined lives. Finally, there are those who walk unruly and disorderly lives. Paul writes in 2 Thess 3:6: "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who leads an unruly [disorderly KJV] life and not according to the tradition which you received from us." The meaning of leading an unruly life is defined in 3:11: "For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies." By extension, undisciplined lives must include those who have fallen away from the faith (Heb 6:6), who go on sinning willfully (Heb 10:26), and who are again entangled in the defilements of the world and are overcome (2 Pet 2:20).

Forsaking the assembly. Forsaking the assembly—a primary problem area today—is a willful sin in Heb 10:25-26: "Not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near. 26 For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins." The nature of these sins is clear, and Paul's call for action is equally clear in 2 Thess 3:14: "If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that person and do not associate with him, so that he will be put to shame." Therefore, we are to keep away from every brother, 2 Thess 3:6 above; take special note of that person; do not associate with him, so that he will be put to shame.

Finally, when we find division, false doctrine, immorality, and unruly and undisciplined lives within the congregation, we must act or we too will be sinning and in danger of the judgment. The love of God, the Father, and Jesus Christ, our Lord, demands it; the love of the erring members requires it; and the love of our souls' salvation depends on it.

4. Congregational Discipline: What Is the Role of the Members

Congregational discipline frightens many members. How shall they apply what seem to be rigid requirements to sons and daughters, husbands and wives, fellow-workers, civic and social club members, teller at the bank, or the clerk at store? The elders should do the more confrontational work of bringing the member's sin to their attention, refuting their false teaching, bringing their error to the congregation and asking the congregation to assert discipline. However, the congregation must do the every day work of applying the discipline:

- Keep their eye on them (mark them KJV). Rom. 16:17
- Do not associate with them. 1 Cor 5:11; 2 Thess 3:13.
- In the case of immorality, do not even eat with such a one. 1 Cor 5:11.
- Remove the wicked from among yourselves. 1 Cor 5:13
- Keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life. 2 Thess 3:6
- Take special note of that person. 2 Thess 3:13.

When first confronted with these actions, human nature takes over. Just as Heb 12:11 says: "All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful." It is only by staying with it that we can see that "afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. (verse 11)" Or we may over-react by saying that we cannot follow through with family, co-workers, or old-time friends. Of course, we can follow through with these folks, if as we exercise the above actions, we have the proper spirit. The Bible not only tells us what to do but how to do it:

- Restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Gal 6:1
- Bear one another's burdens. Gal 6:2
- Do not regard him as an enemy. 2 Thess 3:15
- Admonish him as a brother. 2 Thess 3:15

As we come and go in family, work, and social life, we must always gently admonish those under the discipline of God's word. We must be willing to bear their burdens. We must love them, but not their sin. On the other hand, they must know from us exactly where they stand according to God's word. A good application of these scriptures would be never to meet with one of these members in a social, family, or workplace setting without admonishing them to deny their sin and come back to the Lord. In this way they will not ever think that they are OK with us and receive strength from us to continue in their sin.

When one sets out to destroy the church through division and false teaching, the elders must take the lead, refuting and destroying their arguments and their evil spirit. The course of action is given in Titus 1:9-13:

- Refute those who contradict [sound doctrine]. 1:9.
- They must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach for the sake of sordid gain. 1:11
- Reprove them severely so that they may be sound in the faith. 1:13

In this situation with false teachers and destroyers of the congregation, the members must support the elders according to Heb 13:17: "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you." When the church is confronted with

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division and false teachers, the elders and members must stand as one. For the Lord has said: "And any city or house divided against itself will not stand." Matt 12:25.

We should always love the ones that we discipline and discipline with a spirit of gentleness.

5. Entrance into the Eternal Kingdom (2 Peter 1:5-11)

2 Peter 1:5-11 is a spiritual and moral recipe. Following the recipe saves us from hell and gives us heaven. This is the starting place: "Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence." 2 Peter 1:5. The directions are clear and easy to follow, so add them with diligence:

1. In your faith. Faith is like flour to a cake, for without it there can be no Christian to begin with: "And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him." Heb 11:6.
2. Supply moral excellence. The willingness to be good morally is necessary. We must avoid temptation as in Matthew 26:41: "Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." Sometimes, we must give up things: "Do not be deceived: bad company corrupts good morals." 1 Cor. 15:33.
3. In your moral excellence, knowledge. Knowledge is the seeking to know. In the case of Christian growth, it is the knowledge of God's will. ". . . that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." Col. 2:2-3. This ingredient -knowledge—is absolutely necessary. Eph. 5:17 is clear: "So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is."
4. In your knowledge, self-control. Self-control is man's responsibility in relation to what he learns from God's will. Some things we must do; some we must not do. Rom 12:1-2 tells us: ". . . present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."
5. In your self-control, perseverance. 1 Cor. 15:58 tells us: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord."
6. In your perseverance, godliness. Originally, godliness was God like ness. In verse 4 we are promised that we actually "become partakers of the divine nature."
7. In your godliness, brotherly kindness. "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God." 1 John 4:7
8. In your brotherly kindness, love. In Col 3:14 we are instructed on this last ingredient: "Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity."

These ingredients—diligently added—bring us to the state described in 2 Peter 1:8-11: "For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins. Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never

stumble; 11 for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.”

6. Is Our Giving In Vain?

One of the distinguishing features of the Church of Christ is the manner in which it was instructed to raise the money it needs for the work of the Lord. In 1 Cor. 15:58 we are charged to always abound in the work of the Lord: “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.” In the very next verses, Paul tells us how we are to support this work: “1 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. 2 On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come.” 1 Cor. 16:1-2. So it is that the Church of Christ does not use other means to raise money to support the work of the Lord. There are no raffles, auctions, or suppers. Nor is there tithing, pledging, or coercing. But each Christian puts aside on the first day of the week as he has prospered.

How much is included in the phrase, “ as he has prospered?” There is no direct answer given in the Bible. Even human wisdom tells us that it depends on the circumstances of the person giving. We are told of a widow who gave all that she had in Mark 12:42-44: 42:

A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which amount to a cent. 43 Calling His disciples to Him, He said to them, "Truly I say to you, this poor widow put in more than all the contributors to the treasury; 44 for they all put in out of their surplus, but she, out of her poverty, put in all she owned, all she had to live on."

The idea of people giving out of poverty is reinforced by the benevolence of the Macedonian brethren. In 2 Cor 8:1-5, Paul praised them for giving even though their poverty was deep:

. . . we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, 2 that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. 3 For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, 4 begging us with much urging for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, 5 and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God.

What attitudes should dominate our giving? The Bible is clear. Our reward will be measured by our gift: “Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.” 2 Cor 9:6. However it is not up to us to judge the hearts of others. To the contrary, we are all responsible in our own hearts for our actions. And so “ Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart:” 2 Cor 9:7. We are further told that it must not be “grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

Our giving and labor in the Lord are not in vain.

7. Running the Christian Race

The Bible uses many metaphors to help us understand what our Christian responsibility is and how to succeed in the very end. We are fighting the good fight in 1 Tim. 6:12: “Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. We are soldiers of the Lord in 2 Tim. 2:3-4:

“Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. 4 No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier.” However, the metaphor in Heb. 12:1-3 aptly portrays us as running a race:

1 Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

The lessons are clear!

Get rid of the sin that easily entangles us. Sin will trip us up and make us stumble and even fall. Notice that it “easily entangles us.” We are not to be surprised when sin does this, but we must lay it aside if we are to continue toward the goal line. The sin is all along the course that we are running. Jesus admonished: “Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

Let us run with endurance the race set before us. The Christian race is not a sprint—fast out of the blocks and over quickly. It is a long race that continues our entire lives. Endurance, not speed, is the secret. No sudden burst of righteous energy will see us through. The race calls for continuous effort sustained over a lifetime. Rev. 2:10 admonishes us: “Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.”

Fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith. The apostle Paul held this goal in sight in Phil 3:14: “I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” Because of this focus on Christ Jesus he could declare victory at the end of his life: “I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.” 2 Tim. 4:7-8.

So that you will not grow weary and lose heart. If we stay focused on Christ and on his hardship, and if we finish the race, we will receive the crown of life which the Lord will award us.

Run with endurance the race that is set before us!

8. Summer Tips for Maintaining the Work of the Lord

Summer is a fun time in the hearts of most Americans. Travel, vacationing, going home, camping—all of these increase in amount and fervor during the summer months. It is easy to lose focus on our spiritual and religious obligations. Perhaps most of us can even recite I Cor. 15:58: “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.”

With a careful reading, even the skeptic would know that words like steadfast, immovable, always, and abounding leave no room for taking a vacation from the Lord’s work. With the summer upon us, perhaps a few suggestions or tips for maintaining our spiritual service in summertime are in order.

1. Maintain our contribution to the Lord’s work over the summer months. The apostle Paul tells of our obligation: “On the first day of every week each one of you is to put

aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come." The work in Orangeburg depends on a predictable contribution for each of the members. Churches that we visit are not expecting a contribution. The tip is this: Let us be sure to contribute as we have prospered for each Lord's Day even if we have to give before we leave or after we come back.

2. Attend the services of the church on the first day of the week even though we are traveling. The command is clear: In Heb 10: 25 we are told: "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching." It is so easy while on the road to skip church. However, the practice of attending while traveling or vacationing in a far away place is a richly rewarding experience. We meet new Christian brothers and sisters. We understand the bond of love, peace, and unity that binds the Lord's church together. And most importantly, we fulfill our Christian service to attend on the first day of the week. The tip? Whether at home or away this summer, attend the Lord's Day worship.
3. Do not let Sunday activities interfere with our attending the evening service. Daylight savings time makes the summer conducive to long Sunday activities. An extended round at the golf course, just another hour in the boat at the lake, or a long summer's drive in the country can mean that we will miss the evening service. The temptation is great and besides, it's summertime. Let us remember the words of Jesus in Matt 26:41: "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak." The tip is that we resist the temptation to let the worldly affairs – especially entertainment and recreation – interfere with our attending the evening worship this summer.
4. Do not let visitors from out of town keep us from attending the services of the church. In the summer we will usually have lots of visitors from out of town – mostly family or old friends. What a great opportunity we have. Instead of staying home with our visitors, which in the least will set a bad example for them, why not invite them to come with us to the worship services of the Lord. We will benefit by being at worship, and they will benefit by having an opportunity to hear and learn the truth. The tip for the summer is that when we have visitors let us bring them to worship with us.

Following these summer tips for maintaining the work of the Lord will keep us in service all summer. Remember the teaching: ". . . knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord." Let each of us put the Lord first this summer in work, in play, and in worship.

9. The Great Struggle

The Christian life is the divine struggle between good and evil. Paul wrote in Eph 6:11-12: "11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places."

The "schemes of the devil" aim at destroying us spiritually through an all out attack on our human weakness. John told us about these weaknesses in 1 John 2:15-16: "15 Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world."

These lusts lead us to sin: "12 Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. 13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. 14 But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. 15 Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death."

Paul describes this struggle against our own lusts in great detail in Gal 5:16-21 as a war between the spirit and the flesh: "16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. 17 For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. 19 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, 21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."

Paul taught Timothy to fight this good fight: "This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son. . . that . . . you fight the good fight. 19 keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith." 1 Timothy 1:18-19. By fighting this good fight, Timothy could lay hold on eternal life: "12 Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses." 1 Tim 6:12.

Paul also found victory by fighting the good fight: "7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; 8 in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing." 2 Tim 4:7-8.

We can win the fight against the evil one. We are only to take up the full armor of God and resist and stand firm! (Eph 6:13-18). "13 Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. 14 Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; 16 in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

We have VICTORY in Jesus! "But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor.15:57;" "For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world -- our faith (1 John 5:4);" "These will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him are the called and chosen and faithful." (Rev 17:14).

10. The Unity of the Faith

The unity of the faith is a centerpiece concept in the New Testament. Christ, our Lord, prayed for it just before his crucifixion: "...That they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me." John 17:21. The apostle Paul wrote vividly about it in Eph 4:13: "... until we all attain to the

unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.”

The Bible condemns the opposite of unity – division – in Gal. 5: 19-21 where we find that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God:

Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, and envying are sins of division. Notice that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

The teaching is clear. Our job is to work toward unity and keep division away from this congregation. However, when confronted with divisive deeds or doctrine, the New Testament instructs us to take decisive and clear action. Rom 16:17 tells us to “keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them.” While we all are duty-bound in this regard, the elders – shepherds of the flock – have a special obligation to defend and protect the church. Paul admonishes elders in Tit. 1:9-11:

...holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict. For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach for the sake of sordid gain.

We must work to attain the unity of the faith, to protect that unity once we attain it, and to refute those who contradict the sound doctrine that undergirds it. The elders, as shepherds of the flock, must take the lead in so achieving. To this end we ask your help and prayers.

Let us pray that at the end of our time, this congregation still will be a faithful, unified, and true church of the Lord.

11. What Are We Wearing?

Human beings are clothes conscious. Designers know this and are always changing fashions. Neckties are skinny and then wide; skirts are long, then short; denim is in, then out. One set of clothing never changes – the clothing that Christians wear.

Jesus warned the church at Laodicea: “I advise you to buy from Me . . . white garments so that . . . the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed.” He used the same clothing metaphor to favorably describe some of the members at Sardis:

But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. Rev. 3:4-5.

The metaphor of clothing to describe the Christian life and character appears in 1 Peter 3:3-4. Peter describes Christian women using this clothing metaphor:

Your adornment must not be merely external -- braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God.

Jesus represents the proper relationship between the spiritual and physical concerns of life by our desire and concern for clothing among other material concerns:

Do not worry then, saying, "What will we eat?" or "What will we drink?" or "What will we wear for clothing?" For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Matt. 6:31-33.

If we really want to make a splendid show of clothing, we should dress up in the armor of God as described in Eph 6:13-17:

Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH, and HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, and having shod YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take THE HELMET OF SALVATION, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Today, let's ask the question: How are we dressed? May we as a congregation of the Lord's people purchase white garments. Our name will not be in Vogue or People magazine but in the Book of Life. Jesus will confess our name before the Father and His angels.

12. When Jesus Comes, Will He Find Us Watching?

We have all sung this old, familiar song over and over:

When Jesus comes to reward his servants,
Whether it be noon or night,
Faithful to him will he find us watching,
With our lamps all trimmed and bright.

The song is one of readiness and preparation. It is taken from the idea and meaning of the Parable of Ten Virgins:

"Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom.

2 "Five of them were foolish, and five were prudent.

3 "For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them,

4 but the prudent took oil in flasks along with their lamps.

5 "Now while the bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and began to sleep.

6 "But at midnight there was a shout, "Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him."

7 "Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps.

8 "The foolish said to the prudent, "Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.'

9 "But the prudent answered, "No, there will not be enough for us and you too; go instead to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.'

10 "And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut.

11 "Later the other virgins also came, saying, "Lord, lord, open up for us.'

12 "But he answered, "Truly I say to you, I do not know you.'

13 "Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour.

NASU Matt 25:1-13

Ready for the Lord to Come. Both the parable and the song teach the lesson of readiness. In addition to asking, "Are we ready?" we should also apply certain readiness scriptures to ourselves.

Watch and pray. When the disciples were in the garden while Jesus was praying, they fell asleep. They had been told, "Remain here and keep watch with me." After the first time, Jesus warned them: "Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." Matt 26:41

Be on the Alert. Peter warns us with urgency to watch out for the devil, who is seeking to devour us: "Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." 1 Peter 5:8. We must not only watch out for the dangers of an evil world and beguiling tempter, but we must also repent when we are overcome.

All People Everywhere Should Repent. As Paul preached to those of Athens, even ignorance is no excuse. Ignorance can only lose ones soul:

30 "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent,

31 because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead." Acts 17:30-31.

As the chorus of the song says: "O can we say we are ready. . . / Ready for the soul's bight home."

13. Why Should I Attend the Services of the Church

William Wordsworth – one of the great romantic poets of the 19th century – said:

The world is too much with us; late and soon,

Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:

Little we see in Nature that is ours;

We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon.

In the 21st century we are still getting and spending in the most materialistic world ever. In our effort to get material things—homes, clothes, cars, and entertainments—we often forget Jesus' admonition. He said:

31 "Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?'"

32 "For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things."

33 "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." Matt 6:31-33

In the middle of all our getting and spending, we often put our spiritual service on the back burner—letting everything else come first. We hustle here and there; meet all our appointments for recreation, entertainment, and work. And we often neglect the most important meetings of our life—those at church with our fellow Christians and our Lord Jesus Christ.

The writer of Hebrews has given us a direct command: "not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near." Heb 10:25

Actually, the command is two-fold: not forsaking the assembly and encouraging one another. If we forsake the assembly, we miss out on those aspects of life that see us through trouble, strife, and heartache. We also miss out on those things that refine and define our spiritual existence:

- We miss examining ourselves as we take the Lord's Supper. I Cor 11:28
- We miss teaching and being taught as we sing and make melody in our hearts. Col 3:16 and Eph 5:19
- We miss being taught the word of God. II Tim 3:14-16

The list could go on and on. Think also on the effect not attending has on our children. We are saddened when we see the lives of our young people fly fleeting by with parents who are not bringing them to the services and Bible study: "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." Eph 6:4

Yes, we parents do have a responsibility to our children. But we all have a responsibility before our Lord. May we not let getting and spending get in the way of our spiritual service. The Lord has promised that where two or more are gathered together there He will be. Come; bring your children to be with Him.