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MEMBERSHIP

IN

PRINCIPLE

- *WHAT WE BELIEVE*
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- *CHURCH DISCIPLINE*

In a day when “toleration” is the philosophy of our society and “ecumenism” is the trend in the church, doctrine is often considered divisive. Yet never has doctrine been more important. Unity is nothing more than apparent and superficial if it is not based on agreement concerning the truth. The church is a body of people who are set apart “in the truth,” and that truth is the word of God (John 17.17). In fact, the church is described as “the pillar and support of the truth” (1 Timothy 3.15).

If there is anything worth fighting for today, it is the truth. When Jude made the effort to write to his recipients “about our common salvation,” he “felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints” (Jude 1.3). He speaks here of the body of common doctrine passed down to “the saints,” i.e., those who have been set apart by God as constituting His church. Why was Jude so concerned that his readers “contend earnestly for the faith?” He explains, “For certain persons have crept in unnoticed . . .” (v. 4). False teachers had already infiltrated the church and the purity and the longevity of the church’s doctrine was at stake.

So important was the correct understanding of this doctrine that Paul instructed Timothy, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2.15). To the one who would deviate from the truth handed down to the saints, Paul twice said, “He is to be accursed” (Galatians 1.8-9).

Believers, then, must cling to an accurate understanding of God’s Word, because nothing short of this will sustain the life and vitality of the church. That which God has been pleased to use to effect real spiritual transformation and growth has always been His Word. It cuts down to the deepest level of the inner man (Hebrews 4.12) where it effectively works in those who believe (1 Thessalonians 2.13) so that by it they may “grow in respect to salvation” (1 Peter 2.2) and be “equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3.17).

Here at Applegate Community Church, we believe that theology/doctrine/the truth is the very bedrock foundation upon which we must build our lives (Matthew 7.24). It is our worldview; it is the air we breath; it is life itself— “you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (John 8.32).

- We believe the Bible is God’s written revelation to man. It is verbally inspired in every word, and absolutely inerrant in the original documents. We affirm the infallibility, sufficiency, and authority of Scripture.
- We believe that there is but one living and true God, an infinite, all-knowing Spirit, perfect in all His attributes, one in essence, eternally existing in three Persons—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—each equally deserving worship and obedience.
- We believe in the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, in His Virgin birth, in His sinless life, in His miracles, in His vicarious and atoning death through his shed blood, in His bodily

¹ Much of the material that follows is patterned after or partially taken from the membership manual of Grace Community Church of Sun Valley, California.

resurrection, in His ascension to the right hand of the Father, and His personal return in power and glory.

- We believe that the salvation of man, who is sinful and lost, is instantaneous and accomplished solely by the power of the Holy Spirit through the instrumentality of the Word of God when the repentant sinner—enabled by the Holy Spirit—responds in faith. This salvation is wholly of God by grace on the basis of the redeeming work of Jesus Christ, the merit of His shed blood, and not on the basis of human merit or works. All the redeemed are kept by God’s power and are thus secure in Christ forever.
- We believe in the Spirit-filled life. As the supernatural and sovereign Agent in regeneration, the Holy Spirit baptizes all believers into the Body of Christ at the moment of salvation. The Holy Spirit also indwells, sanctifies, instructs, empowers them for service, and seals them unto the day of redemption.
- We believe in the bodily resurrection of both the saved and the unsaved; the saved unto the resurrection of life and the unsaved unto the resurrection of damnation.
- We believe that all who put their faith in Jesus Christ are immediately placed by the Holy Spirit into one united spiritual Body, the church, of which Christ is the head. The purpose of the church is to glorify God by building its members up in the faith, by instruction of the word, by fellowship, by keeping the ordinances, and by advancing and communicating the gospel to the entire world.

Applegate Community Church’s complete statement of faith can be found in *What We Teach: The Doctrinal Statement of Applegate Community Church*.

It has been said, “He who aims at nothing will hit it every time.” Without a goal or driving purpose life becomes a meaningless absorption of time. This is why a philosophy of ministry is so important. It establishes a set of unchanging principles that are to guide the church in carrying out its God given purposes.

What is a Philosophy of Ministry?

In a general sense, a philosophy of ministry is a set of *unalterable principles* that determines how you will function in your ministry. Simply stated, your philosophy of ministry defines *why* you do what you do. More specifically, it is a set of *non-negotiable, biblical principles* that guides all the choices and decisions in your ministry.

Your philosophy of ministry should be drawn from a careful investigation of both the *explicit* teaching of Scripture and any *implicit* methodologies which can be gleaned from seeing how ministry occurred in the early church. When you are able to define your philosophy of ministry in this crucial way, you will not only know *why* you do what you do, but *how* to actually do it.

What Are the Benefits of a Philosophy of Ministry?

1) A philosophy of ministry develops a unity of direction.

Once your philosophy of ministry has been firmly established, it filters down through the rest of the flock to form a consistent approach to ministry. It also works to encourage consistent communication of your purpose and overall direction. It keeps the congregation on the same page. Keep in mind that this does not happen overnight.

2) It forces you to determine your month-to-month and year-to-year goals with an overall biblical understanding of ministry firmly in your mind.

3) It delineates our biblical priorities for pastoral ministry.

How is a Philosophy of Ministry Developed?

A philosophy of ministry is developed first by coming to understand what the Bible teaches concerning the purposes of the church, and then by learning from Scripture how those purposes are to be achieved. The methodology for achieving those purposes must be driven by a set of *non-negotiable, biblical principles* that guides all the choices and decisions in the ministries of a church.

One stated biblical purpose of the church is to “make disciples of all the nations” (Matt 28.19). That is clearly a Scriptural mission for the church, but “How,” someone might ask, “should that mission be accomplished?” This is where a local church must be guided by a certain set of principles, and it is where it becomes evident whether those principles are biblical. One church, for example, might seek to win converts by hiring a team of “show girls” from Las Vegas to perform in order to attract a crowd to their assembly. Another church may labor to be productive in equipping its people for the work of ministry (Eph 4.12) so that they might be

effective evangelists in their everyday circles of influence. One methodology is biblical; the other is not. The philosophy of ministry, then, must start with a set of transcendent biblical principles that guide a local church down to where the proverbial rubber meets the road.

The need for that set of principles, though, is accentuated when the local church comes to understand its greater purpose.

THE PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH

There are numerous specific tasks to which Scripture calls the church, but most of the biblical mandate for the church can be subsumed under a threefold purpose: 1) exalt the Lord; 2) equip the saints; 3) evangelize the lost.

A. Exalting the Lord

Every single created thing in the entire universe exists for the glory of God (1 Chron 29:11). He is the beginning and the end, not merely in sequence but in preeminence; His glory is the idea and the goal of everything that is (Rev 11:17). The church, then, certainly exists for the glory of God (Eph 1:12). The preeminent goal of the church is to worship the triune God through all of eternity (Rev 5:11-14). Every other function of the church must come under this ultimate priority.

The church is by nature a worshipping community, and worship is a way of life. It is an attitude of the heart that is so filled with wonder and thankfulness at the person and work of God that it is abandoned to praise and adoration. It is an offering up of one's whole life as a living sacrifice to God (Rom 12:1) in view of the manifold mercies of God in salvation (Eph 1:3-14; 1 Pet 2:9-10). Genuine worship can only occur in the redeemed person who is empowered by the Holy Spirit and can only be expressed through the medium of truth (John 4:24; 1 Cor 12:3).

B. Equipping the Saints

This second purpose of the church again has God's glory as its end. As believers are built up to maturity in Christ and equipped for the work of ministry, they continue to increase in their capacity to glorify God (2 Cor 3:18; Eph 4:11-13). When the local church assembles, its first priority is to exalt the Lord, and one way of doing that is through edifying His people. Hence, the corporate gatherings of the church are primarily geared not to the unbeliever, but to the believer. This is the assembling of the saints to worship God and edify one another. There is a brotherly love (Rom 12:10) and a common goal (Christ-likeness) that is only shared among the people of God. When the church gathers then, it may be said that all things should be done for edification (1 Cor 14:26)—the promotion of one another's growth in Christian wisdom, piety, happiness, and holiness.

C. Evangelizing the Lost

A third purpose of the church is to bring additional souls into its fellowship. This too is for the glory of God. The primary aim of evangelism is not to get people off the road that leads to hell, nor is it to add extra names to the membership roll of a church. The psalmist cried, "Let the peoples praise You, O God; Let all the peoples praise You" (Psa 67:3). He saw the greater

goal in the conversion of the nations—worship. Likewise, Paul saw the Gentiles who had been converted through his ministry as an offering to God (Rom 15:16). The motivating factor in evangelism is an earnest desire to see more souls added to the number of those who worship God. Hence, the Son is worshipped because He purchased “for God” men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation to be a kingdom of priests “to our God” (Rev 5:9-10). This understanding will guard evangelistic approaches from being man-centered rather than God-centered.

From its very inception the church was called to be a witnessing community: “You shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:8; cf. Matt 28: 19-20). Every believer is exhorted to be involved in evangelism (Mark 5:19; Luke 10:2; Rom 1:16) by his walk (Matt 5:16; Eph 5:8; Phil 2:15; 1 Pet 2:11-12; 3:1-2; 4:1-2) and by his words (Acts 17:2-3; Rom 10:17; Col 4:5-6; 1 Pet 3:15). No one can come to saving faith in Christ apart from hearing the Gospel (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Rom 1:16; 10:14, 17; 1 Cor 1:20-25; Jas 1:18; 1 Pet 1:23). So as faithful ambassadors for Christ (2 Cor 5:20), Christians are to minister the Gospel as a call to repentance (2 Cor 5:20) and reconciliation (2 Cor 5:19). This evangelism is both a local and a worldwide endeavor (Acts 1:8).

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES FOR ACCOMPLISHING THE PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH

When one begins to ask how the given purposes of the church might be accomplished, he must carefully look to the Scriptures for the right guiding principles. Otherwise he is in danger of descending to purely market-driven, seeker-driven, or pragmatic approaches to ministry. The methods for accomplishing the purposes of the church must start with God Himself.

A. A High View of God

- 1) God is holy, righteous, and just (and other perfections).
- 2) We must seek to express His communicable attributes (e.g., we then must be holy [practical sanctification]).

Note: A failure to have a high view of God leads to . . .

A toleration of sin

A focus on man, evidenced in teaching and programs

Result: The church reflects a man-centered ministry that attempts to please peers rather than glorify God.

A commitment to a high view of God leads us to view His Word as the perfect compass for our lives...

B. A Sufficient View of Scripture

The Bible is the very word of God (2 Tim 3.16) and is therefore without error and completely trustworthy in all that it asserts. In a world of no absolutes, God’s Word stands as absolute truth to be known and applied in every area of life. Scripture is the

very foundation upon which the church is built and comprises not only the content of the message that the church proclaims but also the methods by which the church operates. Every decision and aspect of ministry must be submitted to the scrutiny of relevant biblical data. A ministry void of the teachings of Scripture will also be void of the blessings of God.

- 1) Inspiration—verbal, plenary inspiration is the doctrine that all of Scripture in all of its parts is equally inspired, or “breathed out” by God (2 Tim 3.16; 2 Pet 1.20-21).
- 2) Inerrancy—it contains no errors. God conveyed truth to divinely chosen individuals. And what they wrote did not stray from the original formulation of truth as it existed in the mind of God (Psalm 19).
- 3) Authority—simply stated: What it says I must do (Psalm 119)!

The ramifications of the authority of Scripture upon a ministry are manifold. For example, the church is never to stray outside of the boundaries given in the Word of God. Every aspect of ministry (whether a sermon, Bible study, program or activity) must be motivated by an understanding of the authority of Scripture and must bring that Scripture to bear upon the lives of believers. Furthermore, since the Bible is completely authoritative for belief and practice, the church need not derive its methods from the culture of the day nor conform its message to that which is acceptable in the eyes of the world. Rather, ministry must be dictated by the principles taught in Scripture itself.

- 4) Sufficiency—2 Pet 1.3-4; Psa 19; 2 Tim 3 17; Heb 4.12

The Scriptures are not only authoritative over every aspect of life and ministry; they are also sufficient for the same. Second Timothy 3.16-17 states, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.” The implications of this verse are astounding, for it asserts that the Word of God is sufficient for all areas of ministry, including preaching, teaching, and counseling believers unto godliness. Therefore, the primary focus of every sermon, Bible study, or counseling opportunity must be the teaching of Scripture. Any time the church gathers, the emphasis must be on the proclamation of God’s Word and the exhortation to obey it (1 Tim 4.13).

A ministry that believes in the sufficiency of Scripture will do everything possible to bring the Word to bear on the lives of the congregation. The sufficiency of Scripture demands that individuals as well as ministries be devoted to and trusting of the Word of God. In other words, a proper view of Scripture demands our obedience and our belief. It demands our affections, our faith, and our understanding.

- 5) Relevancy—It is totally relevant for every situation (Psa 19; 2 Tim 3.17; Psa 119.105; Isa 40.8)

It may not give us an explicit answer to every specific problem, but it will always give us the principles by which we can, through obedience, glorify God.

Note: A failure to recognize the inspiration, inerrancy, authority, sufficiency, and relevancy of the Word leads to:

- Pursuit of comfort, rather than obedience.
- Personal experience as your authority rather than the authority of God's Word.
- Contemporary thinking as your guide for living rather than the principles of divine truth.

Result: The church produces people who pursue their own desires based upon an ungodly standard

A high view of God and a sufficient view of Scripture is the basis of a biblical view of mankind.

C. An Accurate View of Mankind

- 1) Mankind is totally depraved (or radically corrupt).
- On his own he cannot do good (Rom 3.10-18; 14.23; Heb 11.6).
 - On his own he is unable to understand or accept the things of God (1 Cor 1.18; 2.14).
 - His heart is deceitfully wicked (Jer 17.9-10).
 - His goal in life is selfishness and only evil continually (Gen 6.5; Eccl 9.3).

That man is depraved means not that he always acts as wickedly as possible, but rather that wickedness so permeates his entire being (intellect, emotion and will) that he is enslaved to it and is therefore inherently unable to respond to the gospel in faith and repentance. This reality has profound implications for the ministry of the church, particularly in the area of evangelism. Because the unbeliever is spiritually dead (Eph 2.1; Col 2.13), no amount of eloquence on the part of the evangelist is able to grant him life. Because he is spiritually blind, no amount of human logic or reason is able to open his eyes to the truth. And because he is spiritually enslaved to sin, no amount of evangelistic persuasion is able to free him from his unbelief. In light of these truths, the evangelist must depend not on his own rhetorical ability to convince the sinner to come to Christ, for this ability is simply not sufficient. He must look instead to the One whose power supercedes his own in drawing sinners to faith in the Savior. Simply stated, the evangelist's hope as he seeks the conversion of the lost is found in the sovereignty of God.

- 2) Man was created to glorify God, but because of sin, he seeks to glorify himself (Rom 3.23).

Note: A sinner is alienated from God, and as a result, he will seek fulfillment from the world's evil system (1 John 2.15-17). The implications are disturbing:

- Christ will not be seen as the only solution to man's needs.
- Substitutes will be provided that promise fulfillment and a better view of self.
- Felt needs rather than real needs will be addressed.

Result: The church produces people who make choices to solve their life problems based on what they believe will practically meet their perceived needs.

CONCLUSION

Now these principles could be multiplied, and they need to be sought out and followed whenever the church asks *how* a given ministry is to achieve its goals. If the overarching purposes of the church are to exalt the Lord, equip the Lord's people, and evangelize the lost, then the *means* (or methods) by which those purposes are accomplished must be driven by biblical principles.

In choosing music for a worship service, for example, the selection of style and content should be driven way more by a high view of God than by an effort to please a particular element of the congregation. If a certain music style is chosen because it is considered more likely to attract non-believers (i.e. they like it because it sounds just like their favorite music) or because it will appease the older and more influential members of the congregation (i.e. they think a church is not a church without an organ), the wrong factors have influenced the decision. Instead of asking, "What do people want or like?" it should be asked, "What will please God?"

In seeking to fulfill its purpose to equip the saints, the church needs to be driven by a sufficient view of Scripture. This means that when its members are given, for example, to "anxiety" this issue is called what Scripture calls it (sin—Phil 4.6) and dealt with accordingly (rather than sending its ailing members to a psychologist or psychiatrist, who will invariably misdiagnose and mistreat the issue on account of theories that operate on fundamentally anti-biblical presuppositions). The church has a word from the God who created the universe. He has spoken clearly on the issues that face mankind.

In summary, then, and in conclusion, we in the church should always be asking *why* we are doing what we are doing and *why* we are doing it *the way* we are doing it. When both of these questions are honestly answered by truth that is accurately derived from God's Word, then the church is being driven along by a philosophy of ministry that reflects the very will of God. This is what we aim to do here at Applegate Community Church.

In a day when “going to church” for many people is scarcely different from going to a baseball game—a spectator sport—what is church membership? Does the Bible actually instruct us to become a member of a local church? What are the benefits of church membership? What are the responsibilities of church membership?

What is Church Membership?

Church membership is a commitment to unite with a specific spiritual body of believers in Jesus Christ who have joined together in a particular geographic location for several divinely appointed purposes.

These purposes included:

- Worshipping God in the corporate gathering (Acts 2.47; 1 Cor 14.25)
- Receiving instruction from God’s Word (1 Tim 4.13; 2 Tim 4.2)
- The equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry (Eph 4.7-12)
- Serving and edifying one another through the proper use of spiritual gifts (Rom 12.3-8; 1 Cor 12.4-31; 1 Pet 4.10-11)
- Participating in the ordinances of Baptism and Communion (Luke 22.19; Acts 2.38-42)
- Proclaiming the gospel to unbelievers (Matt 28.18-20)

What is the Biblical Basis for Church Membership?

While the Bible does not contain a single direct statement commanding believers to become a member of a local church, such membership seems to be assumed at several levels: 1) the existence of church government; 2) the exercise of church discipline; 3) the example of the early church; 4) the exhortation to mutual edification.

The Existence of Church Government

The repeated pattern throughout the New Testament is that each local assembly of believers is to be overseen by a plurality of elders. The specific duties given to these elders presuppose a clearly defined group of church members who are under their care.

Among other things, these godly men are responsible to:

- Shepherd God’s people (Acts 20.28; 1 Pet 5.2)
- Labor diligently among them (1 Thess 5.12)
- Have charge over them (1 Thess 5.12; 1 Tim 5.17)
- Keep watch over their souls (Heb 13.17)

Scripture teaches that the elders will give an account to God for the individuals allotted to their charge (Heb 13.17; 1 Pet 5.3). These responsibilities require that there be a distinguishable, mutually understood membership in the local church, for how can the elders shepherd the people

and give an account to God for their spiritual well-being if the elders don't even know who they are?

- Elders must be able to define the members allotted to their care, for the purpose of providing proper oversight.
- The elders of a given local church are not responsible for the spiritual well-being of every individual who visits the church or who attends sporadically. Rather, they are primarily responsible to shepherd those who have submitted themselves to the care and the authority of the elders, and this is done through church membership.
- Scripture also teaches that believers are to submit to their elders. Hebrews 13.17 says, "Obey your leaders and submit to them."

The one who refuses to join a local church and entrust himself to the care and authority of the elders has no leaders. For him, obedience to Hebrews 13.17 is impossible. To put it simply, this verse implies that every believer knows to whom he must submit, which, in turn, assumes a clearly defined church membership.

The Exercise of Church Discipline:

In Matthew 18.15-17, Jesus prescribes a four-step process that is designed with the intent of restoring a believer who has fallen into sin. This process is known as church discipline.

- First, a person who has sinned is to be confronted in private by a Christian brother (v. 15).
- If the person refuses to repent at this point, the brother who first confronted him is to take one or two other believers with him and call him to repentance a second time (v. 16).
- If the sinning person still refuses to repent, they are then to tell it to the church (v.17).
- If there is still no repentance after this, the sinning person is to be put out of the church (v. 17; cf. 1 Cor 5.1-13).

This process of church discipline as outlined here and elsewhere (1 Cor 5.1-13; 1 Tim 5.20; Titus 3.10-11) assumes that the elders know who their members are, a recognizable membership.

- For example, the elders of Applegate Community Church do not have the responsibility or the authority to discipline members of other local congregations.
- The common confusion about church membership makes it necessary for our elders to discipline official members *and* those who regularly attend but are not members. However, the Bible's teaching on church discipline seems to presuppose church membership.

The Example of the Early Church:

- In the early church, coming to Christ meant coming to the church. There was no line of demarcation between Christ's followers and the church, because every believer was part of the church.

- The idea of experiencing salvation without belonging to the church is absent from the New Testament.
- When people repented and trusted Christ, they were baptized and added to the church (Acts 2.41, 47; 5.14; 16.5).
- Beyond simply holding a private commitment to Christ, this involved joining together with the other believers in that local assembly and devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer (Acts 2.42).
- The letters of the New Testament were largely written to local churches, and when they were written to individuals (e.g. Timothy, Titus, Philemon), those individuals were in key roles of leadership within those churches.
- The existence of the New Testament letters demonstrates an assumption that believers would be gathered in local assemblies, not just left every man for himself.
- There also seems to be evidence that just as there was a list of widows eligible for financial support (1 Tim 5.9), there was also a list of members that grew as people were saved (Acts 2.41, 47; 5.14; 16.5).
- The New Testament also indicates that when a believer would leave a church in a particular city because of a change of location to another city, the former church would write a letter of commendation to the church in the city of his relocation (Acts 18.27; Rom 16.1; Col 4.10; cf. 2 Cor 3.1-2).

Some of the language that appears in the book of Acts fits only with some kind of recognizable church membership. Consider the following phrases:

- “the whole congregation” (6.5)
- “the church in Jerusalem” (8.1)
- “the disciples” in Jerusalem (9.26)
- “elders . . . in every church” (14.23)
- “the whole church” (15.22)
- “the elders of the church” in Ephesus (20.17)
- See also 1 Cor 5.4; 14.23; Heb 10.25

The Exhortation to Mutual Edification:

The New Testament teaches that the church is the body of Christ (Eph 1.23; 4.15-16), and that every member of the body is called to a life given to Christian service. Scripture exhorts all believers to build each other up by practicing the “one another’s” of the New Testament (e.g., Heb 3.13; 10.24-25) and by using their spiritual gifts (Rom 12.6-8; 1 Cor 12.4-7; 1 Pet 4.10-11).

This kind of mutual edification can really only take place in the context of the local church, so exhortations of this kind assume that believers have committed themselves to other believers in a specific, local assembly. Church membership is the formal way to make this commitment.

What are the Benefits of Church Membership?

Among the many obvious benefits to being a member of a local church are these:

- Loving accountability
- The provision of an appropriate setting for believers to discover and use their spiritual gifts through serving and edifying other members.
- The opportunity to pursue and serve in positions of leadership in the body, such as elder, deacon, or teacher.
- Eligibility for the many privileges reserved for church members.
- Fellowship and friendships the likes of which cannot be found anywhere else.

What Are the Responsibilities of Church Membership?

Living out the commitment that one makes as a member of Applegate Community Church includes several responsibilities: exemplifying a godly lifestyle in the community, exercising your spiritual gifts for the benefit of others, contributing financially to the work of the ministry, giving admonishment in love and receiving the same with humility, and faithfully participating in corporate worship.

Some of the most basic responsibilities of membership here at Applegate Community Church come to fruition when we meet together on the Lord's Day. These are clearly set forth in Hebrews chapter ten.

The Responsibility of Being Present:

“Not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some. . .” --Hebrews 10.25

- Being present is imperative.
- Consistent attendance is the most fundamental responsibility, because without it the other duties of membership cannot often be fulfilled. If a person has a love for God, a love for the things of God, and a love for the people of God, the corporate gathering will be the high point of his week.
- That the author said, “Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds,” just before saying, “not forsaking our own assembling together,” shows the vital connection between the two. It is only *by means of* assembling together that we will be able to carry out the exhortation to “stimulate one another to love and good deeds.” This cannot happen outside of consistent attendance.

A look at the churches in Acts indicates that they sought to meet even more than once a week:

- They met daily (2.46)
- Served daily (6.1)
- Won souls daily (2.47)
- Searched the Scriptures daily (17.11)
- Increased in number daily (16.5)

This is why at Applegate Community Church, you can find a Bible study group or ministry team meeting virtually every day of the week. We are serious about providing members with both the opportunity to serve in the exercise of their spiritual gifts and the occasion to be built up in their faith through the ministry of others.

- Fellowship is essential. When we are together, it is the sharing of our common life, the building of friendships, the bearing of burdens, mutual care, and mutual prayer that reflect the life of the church.

The Responsibility of Being Prepared:

“Let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith. . .” --Hebrews 10.22

Preparation is an essential element to so many areas of our lives. Why should we think it unnecessary for the corporate gathering of the church for worship? A casual, “come as you are,” kind of attitude is foreign to the pages of Scripture (Ecc 5.1-2). Preparation is necessary and as the old adage goes, “Sunday morning begins on Saturday night.” When we show up, we are to draw near “with a sincere heart.”

- The worshiper’s heart is to be characterized as genuine or sincere.
- The heart is “the center and source of the whole inner life, with its thinking, feeling, and volition.”²
- “If the adjective (*alethines*) is understood in the same sense as in 8.2 it refers to what is real as opposed to what is only apparent. There can be no pretense or a devotion which is not true. The expression would seem to refer to the genuineness of the worshiper’s approach to God.”³
- God is not interested in shallow or hypocritical worship (Isa 29.11), nor does He here require the completion of a list of deeds before He is to be approached, but He does “desire truth in the innermost being” (Psa 51.6), and it is only in this state of mind, therefore, that one should draw near to Him.

The Responsibility of Participating:

“And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds. . .” --Hebrews 10.24

Involvement is an indispensable element in church membership. Far from mere attendance, this is an exhortation to *active* participation that has the benefit of others as its primary concern.

- Combined with love, the term “stimulate” surely has a positive connotation, but it still carries the strong sense of stirring up or provoking.
- This is exactly what the author has in mind. This earnest and intentional provoking of love and good deeds among the Christian assembly is what is needed if they are to hold without wavering to their confession.
- This is the kind of mutual edification that goes way beyond the mere exchange of trivialities and superficial conversations that can so characterize Christian gatherings. It

² Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. revised and edited by F. W. Danker (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 508.

³ Donald Guthrie, *Hebrews*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 213.

is an “in your face” kind of provoking, not to stir up a fight or to incite division, but to spur one another on to that virtuous life that ought to characterize one whose conscience has been cleansed by the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ.

The Responsibility of Persevering:

“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. . . and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.” –Hebrews 10.23-25

- The author of Hebrews gives an exhortation to individuals and to the church as a whole to persevere in the Christian life of worship in the assembly.
- The Scriptures teach that believers are to persevere both individually and corporately.
- They are to use their words and deeds to encourage and comfort others in the body to persevere with them as they wait for the Lord’s return. And this stimulation, exhortation, and encouragement are to take place in the assembly of the redeemed.

Conclusion

- No member of Applegate Community Church will live a perfect life, but his/her life should be characterized as being lived *for* the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Church membership is not an achievement to be added to your resume. It is a commitment to love the body of Christ in various practical ways, and to worship Him in spirit and truth, as He has commanded us (John 4.24).
- The goal of Applegate Community Church membership is for each member to fulfill the ministry for which God has prepared him/her (Eph 2.10) for the building up of the body of Christ (Eph 4.12) to the glory of God (Eph 1.12).

The concept of leadership within the church is often a matter of confusion among members and attendees in many of today's churches. When there is ignorance of what the Bible teaches concerning church leadership, the form of government adopted by a given church will typically reflect the culture in which it exists. Here in America, a country dominated by democratic principles of government as well as free enterprise and capitalism, local churches can easily adopt a style of government that looks more like the U.S. Congress or like a corporate leadership board than it does the biblical model.

So what instruction does the Bible give concerning church government? What kind of leadership do we see modeled in Scripture? What are the qualifications for church leaders? What are the primary duties of those leaders?

What is the Office of Elder?

After an examination of the biblical evidence, it becomes clear that the elder is the focal point of church leadership. An elder is one of a plurality of men who are qualified according to biblical standards to shepherd and oversee a local assembly of believers. The word translated "elder" is used almost twenty times in Acts and the epistles to refer to this unique group of leaders who have the responsibility of overseeing the people of God.

"Elder" (*presbuteros*) is not the only word that is used in Scripture to refer to this office. "Overseer" (translated "bishop" in older versions—*episkopos*) and "pastor" (*poimen*) are words that refer to the same office. The qualifications for an elder (*presbuteros*) in Titus 1.6-9 are clearly parallel to those of an overseer in 1 Timothy 3.1-7. In fact, both terms are used by Paul in Titus 1 to refer to the same man (*presbuteros* in v. 5 and *episkopos* in v. 7). All three terms are used interchangeably in Acts 20. Verse 17 says that Paul "sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders [*presbuteros*] of the church." As he instructed these elders he said, "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers [*episkopous*], to shepherd [*poimainein*] the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (v. 28).

Evidently Peter had the same understanding as Paul, because he uses the three terms interchangeably as well. He says, "Therefore, I exhort the elders [*presbuteros*] among you, as your fellow elder [*sumpresbuteros*] and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd [*poimanein*] the flock of God among you, exercising oversight [*episkopountes*] not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God" (1 Peter 5.1-2).

These three terms, then, emphasize different aspects of the responsibilities that are assigned to the same office.

Which Elder(s) Should Lead the Church?

Scripture seems to consistently show local churches as being led by a plurality of biblically qualified elders. Rule by majority opinion or by a single pastor is not the model presented in the Bible.

James wrote, “Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for **the elders of the church** . . .” (James 5.14). Paul told Titus, “For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and **appoint elders in every city.**” In Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, Paul and Barnabas “appointed **elders for them in every church**” (Acts 14.23). When Paul wrote to Timothy, who was serving the church at Ephesus, he spoke of “**the elders** who rule well” (1 Timothy 5.17) in that church. The plurality of elders at Ephesus is verified by the account in Acts where “Paul sent to Ephesus and called to him **the elders of the church**” (Acts 20.17). The book of Acts also speaks of the “elders” in the church at Jerusalem (Acts 11.30; 15.2, 4; 21.18).

Repeated reference is made to a plurality of elders ruling in the local churches. In fact, out of the 63 occurrences of the word *presbuteros* in the New Testament, it only appears in the singular four times. Two of those occurrences come from the apostle John when he refers to himself as an elder (2 John 1; 3 John 1). The third comes from Peter when he likewise refers to himself as an elder (1 Peter 5.1), and the fourth from Paul when he addresses the situation of “an accusation against an elder” (1 Timothy 5.19). Nowhere in the New Testament does there seem to be reference to a one-pastor congregation. There is the possibility that each elder in a particular city had a specific group in which he had oversight (cf. Acts 20.17). But the church functioned as one body, and decisions were made by a collective process and in view of the whole, not the individual parts.

At other points, a plurality of elders is referenced with words other than *presbuteros*. As Paul greets the Philippians, he speaks of “the overseers [plural of *episkopos*] and deacons” (Phil 1.1). He told the elders of Ephesus, “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers [plural of *episkopos*]” (Acts 20.28). The readers of Hebrews were instructed to submit to the “leaders” who kept watch over their souls (Hebrews 13.17). The Thessalonians were told, “Appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction” (1 Thess 5.12)—a clear reference to the plurality of leaders in the Thessalonian church.

Now this form of church leadership is in contrast to the type of government that is seen in many churches today. Some churches basically have rule by the congregation. Every major decision is essentially made by a vote of the congregation. This is politically correct in a nation that has democracy as its form of government, but it doesn’t do justice to the biblical model. Rule by a plurality of *biblically qualified* elders ensures that decisions are made by the spiritually mature of the congregation. Other churches adopt the “senior pastor” government approach in which the full time pastor is seen as *the* leader. But the combined counsel and wisdom of a plurality of elders helps assure that decisions are not self-willed or self-serving to a single individual (cf. Proverbs 11.14). If there is division among the elders in making decisions, all the elders should study, pray, and seek the will of God together until consensus is achieved. In this way, the unity and harmony that the Lord desires for the church will begin with those individuals He has appointed to shepherd His flock.

What Are the Qualifications of an Elder?

If the church is to be ruled not by democracy, but by a select group of men, then it is vital that those men are examined by the highest of standards. The Scripture is very clear about the qualifications for an elder and it is no mistake that those qualifications focus predominantly on his character. According to 1 Timothy 3.2-7 and Titus 1.6-8, an elder must be above reproach,

the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, gentle, uncontentious, free from the love of money, not fond of sordid gain, a good manager of his household, one who has his children under control with dignity, not a new convert, one who has a good reputation outside the church, self-controlled, sensible, able to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict, above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, loving what is good, just, and devout.

The single, overarching qualification of which the rest are supportive is that he is to be "above reproach." That is, he must be a leader who cannot be laid hold of or arrested as it were, because he has a sustained reputation for blamelessness. An elder is to be above reproach in his marital life, his social life, his business life, and his spiritual life. In this way, he is to be a model of godliness so he can legitimately call the congregation to follow his example (Phil 3.17).

It is also important to observe that the office of elder is limited to men. Paul told Timothy, "A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet" (1 Timothy 2.11-12). Women are to be under the authority of the elders in the church and are not to teach men or hold positions of authority over them.

What Are the Functions of an Elder?

Far from the appointment to a prestigious position for power-hungry men, the office of elder is reserved for those who like Christ are ready to humbly serve the people of God. They are not to be "lording it over" those allotted to their charge, but "proving to be examples to the flock" (1 Peter 5.3). They are really under-shepherds to Christ, the "Chief Shepherd" (1 Peter 5.4). Paul says, "If any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do." And "work" it will be, for his duties include determining church policy (Acts 15.22), overseeing the church (Acts 20.28); ordaining others (1 Timothy 4.4); ruling, teaching, preaching (1 Timothy 5.17; 1 Thess 5.12; 1 Tim 3.2); exhorting and refuting (Titus 1.9); and acting as a shepherd, setting an example for all (1 Peter 5.1-3).

It is critical to note that these responsibilities have to do primarily with *spiritual* oversight. In a very real sense, like the apostles the elders of a church should devote themselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word (Acts 6.4). If they are too encumbered by other concerns, they will likely fail in seeking to fulfill their responsibilities.

Office of Deacons and Deaconesses

The qualifications for church leadership are clearly mandated by Scripture and are the standard for all who serve in leadership capacities in the church. Rather than randomly fill open slots with any available body, it is crucial that churches evaluate the lives of candidates according to the biblical standards set forth in Scripture. What follows is a brief explanation of God's requirements for those who would serve His church in the roles of deacon and deaconess.

While the Bible teaches that *all* believers are to be characterized by a life of grateful service, some have been specially and uniquely gifted by the Spirit of God to serve in the church (cf. Rom 12:7). Only in 1 Timothy 3 is there a specific discussion of the office of deacon (vv. 8-10, 12).

Those who serve in the capacity of deacons are to be equally qualified with elders in terms of character and spiritual life. The main difference between the qualifications of these two positions is that elders are to be able to teach. Elders oversee the work of those who serve the Lord, and they are assisted

in their ministry endeavors by deacons. Note also the specific qualifications given for deaconesses in 1 Timothy 3:11 in addition to those for the deacon outlined here. Notice as well that there is no inherent hierarchy between the office of deacon and elder. Deacons faithfully tend to the serving ministries of the church in order to free up the elders for the ministry of the Word and prayer (Acts 6:2, 4). Yet again, those serving in such a capacity must be biblically qualified. Those in a position of visibility must lead a life consistent with that visibility.

Deacons

“Deacon” was a very common word in the world of the first century. A deacon was just about any kind of servant who performed work. In most instances it referred to individuals low on the social ladder; for example, the kid who cleared the dishes off your table at a restaurant was a “deacon.” Sometimes, though, it referred to people who carried great and sober responsibilities. The word could be used of civil rulers (Rom 13:4) and even Jesus Christ (Rom. 15:8). It was also used of both true and false apostles in the same book (2 Cor 3:6 and 11:15).

The word probably comes from the Greek word “to pursue,” which makes sense since true deacons in the church are those people who are pursuing service to Christ with energy and love. Thus, a true deacon in the church is an individual who actively pursues service to Christ in the church.

Only a few references in the New Testament actually refer to the position or “office” of deacon (Phil 1:1; Rom 16:1). Also 1 Timothy 3:8 and 3:10 refer to the qualification of deacons, which lines up alongside the office. The office of a deacon comes from God and is defined by Him in the Bible. When all the qualifications are examined, it becomes apparent that God has in mind someone who is a tested and proven servant, mature in Christian conduct and able to serve effectively under spiritual leadership. Individuals who are not qualified should not serve as deacons in the church.

He must be a man of dignity. The Greek term translated “dignity” means “worthy of respect, stately, dignified.” It denotes a seriousness of mind and character. The original word denoted internal excellence and praiseworthiness, particularly manifested in submissiveness. This submission is intelligent, well ordered, and demonstrates a gracious spirit toward elders as described in the passage. The context of 1 Timothy speaks of reverential submission to governmental authorities (2:2) and also to well-ordered and godly submission in the children of elders (3:4). A deacon must be worthy of respect and serious minded, not treating serious things lightly.

He must not be double-tongued. He is always consistent and righteous in what he says. He is not to be one who says one thing to one person and something else to another. Because he is a “God-pleaser” and not a “man-pleaser,” he will not tell different stories, depending on whom he is with, nor will he engage in flattery, guile, or subversion. Instead, he will communicate truthfully and accurately. He knows how to bridle his tongue and is not a gossip.

He must not be addicted to much wine. The intent of this verse is much broader than alcohol and includes his priorities, pleasures, and freedom. The word “addicted” speaks to a strong adherence to something. It means that though he knows it to be wrong, he is still attached to it (think of nicotine addiction). In the first century wine was diluted and drunkenness could only occur by drinking large amounts of wine for a prolonged amount of time. It would take great extents of time to indulge in it. So

the issue of undisciplined pleasure arises from this qualification. He is to be characterized by clear thinking and self-control.

He must not be fond of dishonest gain. His goals in life are not to be monetary. Gain is not inherently wrong but it is disqualifying if integrity is sacrificed for it. First Timothy 6:9 says that a pervasive desire for financial gain corrupts a man.

He must be doctrinally sound. First Timothy 3:9 says that he must hold “to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.” “The faith” refers to the whole of Christian truth. A “clear conscience” is the result of obeying the truth. He must hold to the faith and apply the truth in his life. An individual who does not pursue being taught by godly teachers in the church would not be one who holds to the truth.

He must be active in spiritual service. Verse 10 says, “Let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons.” The verb translated “be tested” speaks of an ongoing test, not a single test of a probationary period. The test is an ongoing general assessment by the church of the candidate’s service to Christ. Before being affirmed as a deacon, he must currently be faithfully serving the Lord.

He must be morally pure. His life is to be “beyond reproach” (v. 10). Like an elder, a deacon must be morally pure, having an irreproachable character. Verse 12 echoes the standard of moral purity: “Let deacons be husbands of only one wife.” This is a translation of Greek words which literally mean a “one-woman man,” the same words for elders in 1 Timothy 3:2. While this qualification does not mean he has to be married, if he is married his wife comes first and he loves her supremely (Eph 5:25-33). In other words, he is not a womanizer, nor is he ensnared by sexual sin such as pornography or harboring lustful thoughts. A deacon must be totally consecrated and devoted to his wife.

He must lead a godly family. Verse 12 also says that he must be a good manager of his children and household. The proving ground for leadership is how a man manages his children and home. “Managing” is from the verb “to stand out in front” and refers to leadership. A qualified deacon is not a passive spectator in the home but firmly and graciously leads his family and household in the ways of God. The way that a man cares for his children and home is an excellent indicator of his ability to care for God’s church.

Deaconesses

The single office of deacon includes both males and females. The qualifications for “deaconess,” the female deacon, are found in 1 Timothy 3:10-11. Since the office of a deacon does not possess the responsibility to lead the flock, there is no concern of female deacons possessing authority and thereby possibly violating a passage such as 1 Timothy 2:11-12. Although the office is often limited within churches to men only, the fact that 1 Timothy 3:11 in the original Greek does not begin with a conjunction (“and”), possessive pronoun (“their”), or definite article, there is no syntactical reason to call the women described in v. 11 the wives of deacons. Female deacons are just as legitimate in the church as male deacons.

She must not be a slanderer. Just as a deacon must not be “double-tongued” (v. 8), so the deaconess must not be known by any as a slanderer. The Greek word for slander in this verse is “*diabolos*,” the same word used for “devil” in 1 Timothy 3:6-7. A slanderer is given

to finding fault with the demeanor and conduct of others as well as spreading innuendos and criticisms in the church.

As such, the woman who finds fault and runs down the reputation of others is doing the work of Satan. A woman who slanders other people in the church creates division, while a woman who slanders leadership sows distrust and discord. Paul uses this word again in Titus 2:3 in reference to what older women must be taught not to do in the church. This is also the pattern of those in the church (male or female) who wish to create their own following (2 Tim 3:3). Paul instructs that people should turn away from such divisive men as they will creep into households and prey on women who are spiritually weak.

She must be sober-minded. Sober-mindedness in the Scriptures is a description of a person who is not easily carried away into foolishness by unbiblical ways of thinking. Rather than jumping on every latest bandwagon of fad and fashion, the sober-minded Christian weighs all thinking and wisdom against the council of the Word. It is the Word of God that is the anchor for sober-mindedness. How can a Christian weigh various options and ideas in service of Christ if they have not first labored to conform their thinking to the Scriptures? A sober-minded deaconess will always seek opportunities to come under the teaching of the Word in order to further train her mind to think God's thoughts after Him.

She must be faithful. Someone who is faithful in all things demonstrates reliability and trustworthiness in *every* area of life and in diligent ministry in the church. "Faithful" is not referring to believing in the gospel (since that is already explicitly required in verse 9) but is faithful in significant duties and responsibilities that actually advance the ministry. A faithful person can be trusted by spiritual leadership to carry out her service and ministry without close oversight. Someone possessing the character trait of "faithful in all things" would not have a reputation for "dropping the ball," but instead would demonstrate consistency in fulfilling her ministries. An example of faithfulness could be always showing up to one's scheduled nursery serving opportunity fifteen minutes before the Sunday school hour begins. A faithful person pursues ministry as a steward whose charge is to be "found faithful" (1 Cor 4:1).

May the Lord continue to raise up qualified deacons and deaconesses in Applegate Community Church who love the Word of God and love serving His people. In this way, our deacons will "gain a good standing" before the members of Applegate Community Church and "also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus" (1 Tim 3:13).

Though these biblical qualifications must be met specifically by those in office, they are equally to be sought and implemented into the lives of all who claim to be servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. These spiritual qualities are not a higher standard or requirement for church leaders but are simply a higher accountability by virtue of holding a visible position in which these qualities are to be modeled. Every Christian should strive to have these qualifications consistently on display in his life and service to Christ and the church, whether he is a recognized, office-holding believer or simply a servant to the body of Christ.

What is the Purpose of Church Discipline?

Church discipline is a practice that is foreign to numerous churches today. Many a person has thought, “If we do that, we’re going to scare everyone out of our church.” Others view church discipline as far too personal and imposing. In this day of rugged individualism it is seen as a violation of an individual’s personal rights that goes way beyond the jurisdiction of a church. Yet, the Bible clearly gives a mandate for church discipline (Matt 18.15-22; Acts 5.1-11; 1 Cor 5.1-13; 2 Thess 3.6-15; 1 Tim 1.19-20; Titus 1.10-16).

Perhaps the reason for which so many churches fear the implementation of church discipline is that they don’t understand its purpose. When Jesus first instituted it He said, “If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother” (Matt 18.15). The point is to win your brother. In other words, if you see a fellow Christian in sin, you are to confront him about that sin with the objective of turning him back in the right direction. The purpose is always *restoration*, restoring a Christian brother or sister back to the way of life that is best for him or her and most honoring to God. When this happens, the larger benefit extends to the whole church. The church is to be the holy Bride of Jesus Christ (Eph 5.25-26), and church discipline then plays a vital role in the purity of the church. When sin in the church is tolerated, Christ is dishonored, but when it is dealt with according to the process of church discipline, the best interest of the individual is in mind (restoration—Gal 6.1) and the purity of the church is maintained.

The goal of church discipline, then, is not to throw people out of the church or to feed the self-righteous pride of those who administer the discipline. It is not to embarrass people or to exercise authority and power in some unbiblical manner. The purpose is to restore a sinning believer to holiness and bring him back into a pure relationship within the assembly.

What is the Process of Church Discipline?

The process of church discipline is fourfold: 1) confront your brother in private; 2) bring one or two more to do the same; 3) tell it to the church; 4) treat him as an outsider.

Step One (Matt 18.15). Jesus said, “If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.” This is *private* confrontation in a spirit of gentleness and humility (Gal 6.1). If the person repents, the goal is achieved and the matter is immediately dropped.

Step Two (Matt 18.16). Jesus continued, “But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witness every fact may be confirmed.” This is best for the person being confronted and for the one who first privately confronted him. It allows for one or two more persons to confirm whether or not the sinning brother repented after the first confrontation. If it was simply a matter of confusion between the sinning brother and the one who first confronted him, these additional witnesses can clear the air. Yet if it is clear that there was no repentance, confrontation from one or two more people should be an added rebuke sufficient to bring about a change of heart that the initial rebuke did not cause. If

such a change of heart does occur, the sinning brother is forgiven and restored to fellowship, and the matter is dropped.

Step Three (Matt 18.17a). Jesus added, “If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church.” The matter has become quite serious by this point, and so also has the action that is mandated by Jesus. If the sinning individual still refuses to repent, this rebellion is to become a matter of public knowledge in the assembly. Practically, it would be wise for those who were initially involved in the confrontation to tell the elders, who would then oversee its communication to the church.

How long should the witnesses continue to call the person to repentance before telling the church? The elders at Applegate Community Church will avoid carrying out the third or fourth steps of church discipline until they are certain that the erring believer has truly sinned, or is continuing to sin, and that he has refused to repent when appropriately confronted. If unable to make contact with the sinning individual (and even if contact is made), the elders will routinely send a letter (registered mail) warning the individual that the third (or fourth) step of discipline will be taken if they have not received word of repentance by a specific date. When that date has passed, the person’s sin and refusal to repent are made known publicly (probably during a communion service).

At this point, each individual in the church will be encouraged to aggressively pursue the sinning person and plead with him/her to repent before the fourth step becomes necessary. This crucial and powerful procedure often draws the sinner to repentance and obedience. If this takes place, the sinning believer is forgiven and restored.

Step Four (Matt 18.17b). Jesus concluded, “And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.” The term “Gentile” was often used for those non-Jewish people who were devoted to pagan beliefs and hence excluded from the covenant, worship, and social life of the Jews. A “tax-gatherer,” however, was often a Jew who had chosen to become a traitor to his own people (via extortion with Roman authority). In using these terms, Jesus did not mean to suggest that the unrepentant sinner should be treated badly, but that he should be treated as an outsider. The church is to treat him as one who is outside the fellowship and therefore not able to associate and participate in the blessings and benefits of the Christian assembly.

When a man in the Corinthian church refused to repent of an incestuous relationship with his father’s wife, the apostle Paul commanded that the man be removed from the fellowship (1 Cor 5.13). The Corinthian believers were forbidden even to share a meal with him (v. 11), because that would be equated with a hospitable and cordial relationship. The one who is unrepentant is to be totally separated from the fellowship of the church and treated like an outcast, not a brother.

As far as the welfare of the church is concerned, the purpose of putting the brother out is to protect the purity of the fellowship (1 Cor 5.6), to warn the assembly of the seriousness of sin (1 Tim 5.20), and to give a testimony of righteousness to a watching world. But as far as the welfare of the brother himself is concerned, the purpose of this treatment is not to punish but to awaken, and it must therefore be done in humble love and never in a spirit of self-righteous superiority (2 Thess 3.15).

When a church has done everything it can to bring a sinning member back to the right path but is unsuccessful, that individual is to be left to his sin and his shame. If he is truly a

Christian, God will not cast him away, but He may allow him to sink still deeper before he becomes desperate enough to turn from his sin. The command not to have fellowship or even social contact with the unrepentant brother does not exclude all contact. When there is an opportunity to admonish him and try to call him back, the opportunity should be taken. In fact, this kind of contact should be sought for the purpose of admonishment and restoration.

MEMBERSHIP

IN

PRACTICE

- *CHURCH HISTORY*
- THE “ONE ANOTHER’S”
- DISCOVERY AND USE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTING
- *CHURCH MINISTRIES*

In August 2016, Applegate Community Church will celebrate 70 years of God's faithfulness in ministry. In the early years of the last century, the spiritual needs of the settlers in the Applegate Valley were mostly served through Bible classes held by the American Sunday School Union (now known as the American Missionary Fellowship). Sunday School classes were held at the Applegate School in 1932, as well as the Thompson Creek and Missouri Flat schools.

In 1944, John and Neva McEndree invited the Rev. and Mrs. Earl Book for revival meetings, which were held in the old Applegate Grange Hall, located directly across from the present Applegate Store. The need of a church facility was a common desire of all the people. Therefore, the people prayed seeking God's will and guidance. As God directed, a parcel of land was purchased on the hillside where the present church facility stands. In 1945, with money and building material available, construction began as the men put up the first church building, which included a sanctuary, 2 classrooms, and an attached 2-bedroom parsonage also used for classrooms.

By August 4, 1946, seventeen people were listed on the church membership rolls. Later that month (Aug. 23), a meeting was called at the "Applegate Assembly of God" Church by the pastor, Earl Book, for the purpose of setting the church in order. Book served as pastor until January 1950, followed by Harold Casper who served until June 1951.

In August 1951, Thornton Gapen became the pastor. By 1954, the church had grown and it became apparent that a larger facility was needed. At that time a building fund was started, architectural plans were completed and an estimated cost of \$75,000 was all to be raised on a pay-as-you-go basis. In April 1963, our church purchased 6 adjacent acres from the John Nielson family for \$1300. In May 1963, a building committee was appointed; in 1964, the "Country Store" and Barbeque were set up as a means of raising money; and in 1965, the actual construction began. In the meantime, at a special church business meeting, March 13, 1964, the church family agreed that it change its ministry *from* the Assembly of God Church *to* a non-denominational community church. All agreed and the name of the church was changed to the **Applegate Community Church**. Pastor Gapen began devoting all his time to building the church and laid all the blocks in the building. In June of 1968, without windows or doors, the wedding of Susan Head was held, initiating services in the new facility. As the church continued to grow and additional classroom space was needed, Pastor Gapen approached John Horner, a property owner adjacent to the church, about obtaining adjoining property for expansion of the church's facilities. Mr. Horner donated the land to the church. Construction of the Christian Education wing was begun in 1977 and completed by 1981. Thornton Gapen served over 30 years until the Lord directed him to resign his pastorate in order to serve as a Hospital Chaplain.

On January 11, 1981, the church held a welcoming service for Pastor and Mrs. Ken Schubert and family. Under Pastor Schubert's leadership, the church began a longtime relationship with the rural home missions' ministry, **Village Missions**. With this new partnership in place the church continued to reach out to the community resulting in numerical, spiritual, and ministry growth. Along with the growth came the need for additional space to accommodate larger ministries and ministry events such as Dinners, Teas, Youth and Children's work.

In July, 1998, following 18 years of a very fruitful ministry, Pastor Schubert and his wife, Barbara announced their retirement.

By August 1998, along with the leadership of Village Missions, Applegate Community Church called Pastor and Mrs. Kurt Krowel and family to lead the church through this time of transition and into the Gospel ministry of the new millennium. Pastor Kurt, his wife Linda and family arrived in Applegate in October of 1998.

Applegate Community Church is an **independent, non-denominational and evangelical church**. That's a mouthful but it means that we are not tied to any given denomination. As of December 2002, the church ended its eighteen-year affiliation with Village Missions and continued under the leadership of Pastor Krowel until in September of 2007 he and his wife, Linda, retired from service at Applegate Community Church.

Without formal ties to Village Missions, and with ample notice from Pastor Krowel, the church was free to seek a pastor of its choosing. After several months of prayerfully examining various candidates, the pastoral search committee and the elder board believed that the Lord was directing them to call Brian Johnson to serve as pastor.

Sensing the same direction from the Lord, Pastor Johnson and his family accepted the call and began to serve Applegate Community Church in November of 2007. At that time Brian and Kelly had two daughters, Katy and Alli, with Emma and Clara arriving shortly thereafter, completing their family. With love and compassion, Brian and Kelly faithfully led our church in gaining a deeper knowledge and understanding of God's word. Kelly was our AWANA Commander and guided our children's Sunday School and Children's Church programs. They stayed with us and were a loving part of our family until July of 2016. Following a tragic auto accident that took Brian's father's life, Brian believed he needed to go home to Bend to help his mom and family run the family business and farm.

Prior to Brian's departure, our church again began a search for a new pastor, seeking a man trained and experienced in teaching the truth of God's Holy Word. Following an 8 month search our church invited Pastor Parker Reardon and his family to travel almost 3000 miles across the country to come join our family here at Applegate Community Church. The Reardon family, including Parker and his wife Cindy, and their 7 wonderful kids, joined us in early October 2016. They initially squeezed into the parsonage and immediately began showing us the power of God's love. PRAISE THE LORD

Together with the elder board, Pastor Parker earnestly desires Applegate Community Church to be a place where God is glorified because His word is taught, lived, and loved.

One of the greatest joys of being part of a church family is to be used of God to minister to others. God’s Word contains numerous “one another” commands that outline specific ways we can do that. As a member of Applegate Community Church, consider how you can fulfill the following scriptural mandates in the lives of those around you.

PREFER ONE ANOTHER**Romans 12:10**

Outdo one another in honor

ADMONISH ONE ANOTHER**Romans 15:14**

Correct each other in maturity

BE DEVOTED TO ONE ANOTHER**Romans 12:10**

Devote yourself to brotherly love

SUE NOT ONE ANOTHER**1 Corinthians 6:7**

Do not have law suits with others

**BE OF THE SAME MIND TO
ONE ANOTHER****Romans 12:16**

Have a modest opinion of self

DEPRIVE NOT ONE ANOTHER**1 Corinthians 7:5**

Do not withhold marital intimacy

DO NOT JUDGE ONE ANOTHER**Romans 14:13**

Each will give an account to God

CARE FOR ONE ANOTHER**1 Corinthians 12:25**

Avoid division by caring

BUILD UP ONE ANOTHER**Romans 14:19**

Pursue peace and build up others

DO NO ENVY ONE ANOTHER**Galatians 5:26**

Do not envy but be content

ACCEPT ONE ANOTHER

Romans 15:7

Accept like Christ accepted us

BE TRUTHFUL TO ONE

ANOTHER

Ephesians 4:25

Speak truthfully to each other

BE KIND TO ONE ANOTHER

Ephesians 4:25

Be pleasant and tenderhearted

ENCOURAGE/BUILD UP ONE ANOTHER

1 Thess. 5:11

Encourage others in the faith

SUBMIT TO ONE ANOTHER

Ephesians 5:21

Subject yourself to those over you

BE AT PEACE WITH EACH

OTHER

1 Thess. 5:13

Live in peace/harmony with others

REGARD ONE ANOTHER

Philippians 2:3

Consider others more important

SEEK GOOD FOR ONE ANOTHER

1 Thess. 5:15

Seek after what is good for all men

DO NOT LIE TO ONE ANOTHER

Colossians 3:9

Put away lying to each other

PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER

1 Timothy 2:1

Pray for brethren and all men

BEAR WITH ONE ANOTHER

Colossians 3:13

Be patient and forgive others

STIMULATE ONE ANOTHER

Hebrews 10:24

Consider how to stir up good deeds

TEACH ONE ANOTHER

Colossians 3:16

Teach and admonish with Scripture

DO NOT SLANDER ONE ANOTHER

James 4:11

Do not speak against your brother

ABOUND IN LOVE

1 Thess. 3:12

Increase your love for each other

BE HOSPITABLE TO ONE

ANOTHER

1 Peter 4:9

Be generous without complaint

COMFORT ONE ANOTHER

1 Thessalonians 4:18

Comfort others with Christ's return

SERVE ONE ANOTHER

1 Peter 4:10

Use your giftedness to serve others

FELLOWSHIP WITH ONE

ANOTHER

1 John 1:7

Relate to others in humility

BE HUMBLE TO ONE ANOTHER

1 Peter 5:5

Fellowship with both God and man

GREET ONE ANOTHER

1 Peter 5:14

Greet each other showing you care

SHOW TOLERANCE FOR ONE ANOTHER

Ephesians 4:2

Endure wrongs suffered, in love

CONFESS SINS TO ONE ANOTHER

James 5:16

Be a tool of sanctification

DON'T REPAY WITH EVIL

1 Thessalonians 5:9

Respond with Gospel love

DON'T COMPLAIN AGAINST

James 5:9

BEAR ONE ANOTHER'S BURDENS

Galatians 6:2

DON'T BITE AND DEVOUR

Galatians 5:15

DON'T BOAST IN CHALLENGING

Galatians 5:26

WAIT FOR ONE ANOTHER

AT LORD'S TABLE

1 Corinthians 11:33

Partake together

SPEAK IN PSALMS, HYMNS,

SPIRITUAL SONGS

Ephesians 5:19

Join in song together

DISCOVERY AND USE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTING

Applegate Community Church

How to Discover Your Spiritual Gift(s)

Discovering one's spiritual gift(s) entails following nine rather distinct steps. Knowing the biblical possibilities of the gifts is one thing; identifying what one's own spiritual abilities are is another. This is a discovery that relatively few Christians seem to have made. A theory regarding the gifts is of little practical value unless that theory becomes practical in individual lives. The following process, if followed carefully, should lead a Christian to an understanding of what his or her gift or gifts are.

I. The first step in the process of learning what one's gift(s) is involves reaching the assurance that every Christian has a gift. Each context where spiritual gifts receive specific mention in the New Testament strongly emphasizes this fact (cf. 1 Cor. 12:7, 11; Rom. 12:3; Eph 4:7; 1 Peter 4:10). In every one of those verses, the Greek word *hekastos* ("each") occurs. The word individualizes each member with his specific gift. First Corinthians 12:11, in addition to *hekastos*, uses *idios* ("its own"), which makes the expression more emphatically individualistic. The operation of spiritual gifts is not merely for certain parts of the body; it is for the whole body, every single individual member. To the extent that even one member does not function in his or her proper role, that member cripples the whole body. Every part needs to be equipped and be in operation if the body is to have its full effectiveness.

II. The second step toward the discovery of one's spiritual gift(s) is an awareness of the possibilities and the purposes of the gifts....Speaking as twentieth-century Christians, we can conclude that eight gifts are currently operative in promoting continual growth in the body of Christ. They include the speaking gifts...and the auxiliary gifts...The speaking gifts are evangelism, teaching, pastor-teaching, and exhorting. The auxiliary gifts are helps or ministry, giving, showing mercy, and governing or administration. The speaking gifts strengthen the body of Christ both numerically and qualitatively. Evangelism adds new members to the body of Christ, and pastor-teaching, teaching, and exhorting help the already existing members to walk in service to the rest of the members. The auxiliary gifts in various ways make the speaking gifts

more effective, and without them the speaking gifts could have little impact on the growth of the body.

God specifically designed the remaining ten gifts for the infant church, the body of Christ, in the days of its beginning, each one with specific purposes...

III. The third step toward discovery is the step of prayer for enlightenment regarding one's gift(s). Though not explicitly named in connection with learning about gifts, prayer sustains an unquestionable connection with zeal for spiritual gifts for which Paul commends the Corinthians. First Corinthians 14:1 commands a zeal for spiritual gifts, even though that zeal is secondary to the pursuit of love in the same verse. The zeal is still there and indicates a degree of intensity in one's quest for spiritual gifts. This, without a doubt, involves prayer toward that end. First Corinthians 14:12 presents the zeal of the Corinthians for spiritual gifts in a favorable light. Their zeal seems to have been misdirected as to its purpose, but that same zeal with a corrected purpose is desirable. Prayer is involved wherever Christian zeal is involved. It must be.

IV. The fourth step leading to the discovery of spiritual gifts is a consideration of one's natural abilities, circumstances, and resources. Such a consideration is not determinative in the final analysis because gifts do not always fall into line with a person's natural background. However, it seems that most of the time, the Spirit chooses to match one's spiritual gifts to one's natural situation.

A conspicuous example of the association of a spiritual gift with a natural circumstance is the gift of apostleship. No one could receive such a gift without being an eyewitness of the ministry and resurrection of Christ. Hence the bestowment of the gift presupposed a certain series of personal experiences in the past. An example of the association of one's spiritual gifts with one's natural resources is in the gift of giving. While not an absolute necessity, it presupposes that a person has a significant amount of substance to give. Surely Christians can have very limited means and still makes very wise investments of what they have in the Lord's work, so they may still possess the gift of giving. But the most conspicuous examples of those with the gift of giving seem to be the ones who have been well endowed with material things. In regard to natural abilities, a person with significant difficulty in communicating by speech would hardly

receive the spiritual gift of teaching. That is not absolutely true in every case, however, since a person can teach by other means, such as writing. But most often, the gift of teaching will presuppose a substantial natural ability to communicate orally.

V. The fifth step in this sequence is probably the most difficult of all, yet in a sense it is the most crucial. Experimentation is essential if someone wants to discover his or her gift(s).

Believers must try their hand at every possible gift before they can know with certainty whether they have the gift or not. When we speak of experimentation, we are not speaking of one brief attempt to function in a given area during period of four to six months at least. The discoverer must delve into each of the eight areas of possible giftedness.

The suggestion may seem rather bold and even ill-advised. Someone may ask, “What if I try my hand in a particular area and turn out not to be gifted in that area? Have I not presumed upon the Lord? Have I not plunged into an area of expertise I have no business entering?” The answer is flatly, “No, you have not.” Every one of the eight gifts represents a general Christian responsibility, a ministry where every Christian is responsible to God to be active, whether he or she has that gift or not. If you turn out not to be gifted in a given way, you have not sinned, you have simply obeyed God in trying to have a positive effect on the growth of the body of Christ through carrying out duties every Christian should be performing. It is no sin to witness to a lost person and seek to win him to Christ if you do not have the gift of evangelism. You have simply obeyed the Great Commission given to every Christian. You have not sinned by trying to comfort a bereaved brother or sister in Christ without having the gift of mercy. That is a service you should perform anyway, whether you have the gift or not. The same is true throughout the list of eight operative gifts. Each gift is a duty every child of God needs to carry out even without that specific specialized ability. In the process of trying out the gifts one by one, you will not only discover your gift, but you will fulfill the will of God for your life as a Christian.

Getting people to experiment is very difficult. It is hard to experiment; it takes courage. Dozens of objections to undertaking this part of the process will arise, yet it must be done. It is crucial. No amount of spiritual-gift surveys can replace this. Experimentation is the proving ground where actual discovery comes. The acknowledged difficulty will disappear if a person possesses

the zeal spoken of in 1 Corinthians 14:1, 12. If your desire to know your gift(s) is strong enough, you will go out on a limb, take that hardest of steps, and try to function in each of the eight ways.

VI. The sixth step in the process of discovering these special abilities is the stage of self-

evaluation. When a person experiments in one or more of the eight areas, he or she will sense an inner satisfaction not found in the others, a satisfaction consisting of knowing the special worthwhileness of the activity in which he or she has just engaged.

First Corinthians 14:4 observes that a person who speaks in a tongue edifies himself or herself. The self-edifying spoken of in the verse is not a wholesome thing. It is an action contrary to the principle of love in 1 Corinthians 13:5, that love does not seek the things of itself. It is edification for selfish purposes that is not commendable nor is it to be condoned. Edification of oneself is not a high Christian idea. We know from 1 Corinthians 8:10 that negative edification can even be a factor in tearing down the body of Christ.

Yet, 1 Corinthians 14:4 does highlight another characteristic of spiritual gifts. When you use your gift for the right purpose, that of building up other members of the body of Christ, as a by-product you, yourself, will experience a degree of edification. Edification of yourself is not your goal in what you do, but you will experience it as a secondary affect of service to others.

Though that is not his purpose, the teacher himself experiences growth in the faith. He experiences a subjective awareness that in building up others, his own edification has resulted. This is the satisfaction for which one should be alert in the step of self-evaluation.

VII. The seventh step toward the discovery of one's own spiritual gift(s) is to seek out the reaction of others who are mature and respected Christians. The ultimate test of our

ministry for Christ is its impact upon other people. In 1 Corinthians 14:19, Paul points out his preference for having a positive impact on the lives of others. Though the quantity of his ten thousand words in a tongue far exceeds his five words with understanding the five words with understanding far exceeds the ten thousand words in importance. Why? Because other people receive benefit by way of Christian growth. The importance of seeking the opinion of others is consequently quite apparent.

First Corinthians 14:29 is a further illustration of the value of soliciting the reaction of others. For a prophet's utterance to have been accepted as valid, fellow prophets had to judge it. If their

opinion was negative, the church disregarded the speech. The words had not been a true prophecy.

We need responses of other people. At the point of self-evaluation (step 6) we have some help, but our conclusions may be so subjective that we have evaluated wrongly. One thing or another may be present in our lives to create a blind spot. Double-checking our own opinions is vital; hence we need the confirmations of respected, mature Christians. After engaging in an act of service, seek out these Christians and ask them questions such as: What degree of benefit to others did you detect? What degree of benefit to you was there in my service? Evaluation must be part of the learning process in researching your own spiritual gifts.

VIII. The eighth step in this sequence must be the allowance that a person may discover more than one gift, even a combination of gifts. That is one feature that keeps two members of the body of Christ from being identical with each other. Paul had the gift of apostleship (1 Cor. 9:1); he also had the gift of tongues (1Cor. 14:18). Probably the apostles had all the gifts. Such plentiful bestowment will not characterize our lives, but most Christians will discover more than a single gift, more than a single special ability to perform in the service of the other members of the body of Christ.

Lines of distinction between gifts that are found in combination are next to impossible to draw. The gifts are usually overlapping in nature. For example, the gift of showing mercy and gift of pastor-teaching may have many characteristics in common. Compassion and sensitivity to the needs of others must be present in both cases. One should not be too concerned whether at any given moment one is exercising the gift of pastor-teaching or the gift of showing mercy. That person should simply be conscious in a general way of the presence of both gifts. What is true of these two gifts by way of overlapping is true of other combinations of the eight gifts under discussion.

IX. The ninth step is recognition of degrees of giftedness. Among those with the gift of teaching, for example, there will be a range of ability. Some will be better than others. Because one is not as effective a teacher as some bright person who is highly endowed with communicative skills, that person should not conclude necessarily that he or she does not possess

the gift. The person may have effectiveness, though it is not nearly as profound as that of another.

At the same time, however, remember that there is a great gap between those who are in the range of giftedness and those who fall far from that range. The latter group may function as they should in teaching regarding matters that are the responsibility of all Christians, but those without the gift of teaching cannot in reality attain the range of ability that characterizes those with the gift. The same is true of all the gifts in regard to whether persons possess gifts to a greater or lesser degree.

The presence of the range of abilities is another factor that makes for variety in the body of Christ. No two members are the same; no two have identical degrees of ability. The variation in degrees of giftedness combined with the variation in combinations of gifts (see step 8) is ample provision for the absolute distinctiveness of every individual member of the body of Christ.

Discovery of one's spiritual gift or gifts is only the beginning of the process, not the end. There are five practical lessons or principals of Christian living derived from Scripture that one must apply to use gifts to their utmost effectiveness.

1. The first principle is the lesson of development. In 1 Timothy 4:33, Paul tells Timothy to give himself to reading, to exhortation, and to teaching. The last two of these, exhortation and teaching, were areas in which Timothy was apparently gifted. In verse 14, Paul tells Timothy not to neglect the gift of God that is in him. The gift spoken of in the singular is apparently a combination of all the gifts possessed by Timothy, including exhortation, teaching, and whatever gifts were his. Paul's direction to him is that he not neglect them but that he pay close attention to them with a view to sharpening and developing them into greater and greater effectiveness.

In 2 Timothy 1:6, Paul tells his younger associate to kindle afresh, or build a fire under, the gift that he has. He was to study ways that the gift could become more effective. He was to practice and practice and practice until the gift developed into a very smooth technique. Over the passage

of time, the gift would increase in effectiveness, its value and contribution toward the growth of the body of Christ becoming greater and greater.

A theological seminary and a Christian or Bible college cannot dispense spiritual gifts to its students. Only God dispenses the gifts. First Corinthians 12:11 clarifies that the sovereign will of God the Holy Spirit determines who in the body of Christ will have which gifts. Training institutions and theological institutions have the responsibility of helping students discover-if they do not know them already-and develop their gifts. Generally those who God calls to study in such a place know their gifts or else they are open to discovering them as soon as possible. In the school environment, they can sharpen those gifts through study, through practice, and through exchange with faculty and other students. They also have internship opportunities in which to try out the gifts and find ways of making them more effective. Institutional training can help the development of the gifts, but cannot give them.

Even after training, servants of God must continue developing their gifts. They must constantly seek improvement, always looking for ways to enhance their gifts and make them more profitable for people whom they serve. Ongoing development is of prime importance in the use of our spiritual gifts.

2. The second guideline for using spiritual gifts to the best advantage is to assure that they are in harmony with the fruit of the Spirit. According to Galatians 5:22, the fruit of the Spirit is love. The supreme importance of love is the reason for the inclusion of 1 Corinthians 13, the love chapter, between two chapters dealing with spiritual gifts. The Corinthian readers missed that most basic point. They received Paul's strong rebuke for erring regarding such a basic standard. They had devoted their exercise of gift largely to personal pleasure derived by the users themselves. Paul impressed upon them this shortcoming in an indirect and gentle way in 1 Corinthians 12:31b-13:13. He described the quality of Christian love in general terminology, as it was the most applicable to the Corinthians' need. Then in 1 Corinthians 14, he applied the implementation of love more specifically in reference to the gifts of prophecy and tongues.

In 1 Corinthians 13 it is justifiable to label love as the fruit of the Spirit for reasons that may not be so apparent. The listing of the qualities of love in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 shows an amazing correspondence to the fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22-23. The list begins with love, and all the following fruits really describe and define what love is. In Galatians love is defined by *joy*; 1 Corinthians 13 says love *rejoices* with the truth. In Galatians love has *patience* or *longsuffering*; 1 Corinthians 13 describes love as patient or longsuffering. Galatians includes *kindness* in the list headed by love; 1 Corinthians describes it by the adjective *kind*. Galatians says that love is *self-control*; 1 Corinthians 13 say that love *does not act unbecomingly*. The rest of the two listings match each other in a similar way. All the qualities are what Galatians 5:22-23 calls the fruit of the Spirit.

That same love is an indispensable element in the functioning of spiritual gifts. In 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, the Holy Spirit through Paul talks about the preeminence of love. In verse 1, he speaks of one who possesses the ultimate degree of linguistic ability through the gift of tongues, an ideal but not an actual case for anyone. He says that even if one had such a rich gift, it would amount only to a sounding gong or a clanging cymbal if not accompanied by love. In verse 2, he speaks of the maximum of the gifts of prophecy and knowledge, possibly including the gift of wisdom as referenced in understanding all mysteries. In the same verse, he refers to the ultimate measure of the gift of faith. Such bountiful endowments as these are useless if not exercised in conjunction with love. In verse 3, he refers to the gift of helps or showing mercy, or perhaps even the gift of giving. He speaks of giving all his possessions, which Paul incidentally, never did; he kept enough to support his own ministerial efforts. He adds the possibility of even selling himself into slavery so as to have additional means to help the needy. But all of this giftedness avails nothing and produces no profit for the rest of the body of Christ, unless a motivation of love lies behind its implementation. That love, in turn, is attainable only through a person's being controlled by the Holy Spirit. The believer walking in harmony with the Holy Spirit loves; one out of harmony with the Holy Spirit cannot love. The fruit of the Spirit is essential in the fruitful use of spiritual gifts.

The major problem in Corinth was the absence of love. The Christian congregation there had rich measures for outstanding spiritual gifts (cf. 1 Cor. 1:7), but they were using their gifts for the

wrong purposes. People were insisting on their right to show off their gifts whenever they chose because of the selfish satisfaction they derived from it (cf. 1 Cor. 14:4). A constructive harnessing of gift potential in submission to the needs of other people was absent.

That love teaches us to subserve our own interest in order to cater to the interests of others is the essence of what Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 13:4, 5 and 7. Those qualities bring out the submissiveness of love. Patience or longsuffering does not fly off the handle quickly at the shortcomings of others or ill treatment by other people. Love is kind; the basic force of the word for kindness is usefulness. Love does what is useful on behalf of other people. Love is free from jealousy. It is glad for, rather than envious of, the success and prosperity of other people. Love does not vaunt or promote itself; it does not insist on a place in the limelight. It does not have to be the center of attention. The reason for its freedom from such tendencies is that love is not puffed up or arrogant; it does not create the settled assurance of being number one in importance or ability. The verse adds that love does not behave itself unbecomingly. The Corinthians had demonstrated very bad manners, even at the time of their “love feast” (1 Cor. 11:20-22). Love does not seek the things of itself, no matter how positive those qualities may be. It does not even seek its own edification (cf. 1 Cor. 10:23-24, 33). The profit that is the purpose of spiritual gift (1 Cor. 12:7) is not the profit of the gift’s possessor, but the profit of other members of the body for whose benefit the gift functions. Love is exclusively outgoing and other directed. Love is not provoked to anger in response to the faults of others. It takes it on the chin and does not fight back. It is able to keep a cool head and not lose its temper. Remaining free from anger does not violate the principle of Ephesians 4:26, which allows wrath in a limited sense of being angry at the things that anger God. The provocation that love shuns in 1 Corinthians 13 is a provocation for selfish reasons because another violates a person’s personal rights. A further description of love in the list shows that love does not keep a permanent record of the evil or wrong that it experiences. It does not keep a long-term record with a view to future revenge.

The submissive qualities of love continue in verse 7. Love “bears all things,” in other words, it puts up with personality differences that would normally irritate. Personality clashes do not occur in relationships among loving Christians. Love “believes all things.” It is not suspicious.

It takes people at their word and accepts at face value their statements and promises. To be sure, often people do not fulfill their word and they broke promises. When this happens, love “hopes all things.” It looks to a future time when that other person will solve the spiritual problem that has made him or her unreliable and will become a truthful person who is trustworthy. Lastly, love “endures all things.” It holds up under suffering inflicted by enemies of the cross. Persecution comes and creates hardship, but hardship and suffering do not obstruct love. It goes on loving in spite of all negatives, just as Stephen, when his oppressors were afflicting him, prayed for their forgiveness. That response evidenced love.

The Corinthians were in desperate need of such qualities. Rather than submitting to the best interests of others they were using every opportunity to take advantage of others. Also needed among them, however, was another side of love, love’s strictness, or which verse 6 speaks. They needed to recognize that love has its boundaries. When an action bypasses the righteousness of God, love does not rejoice; it grieves. No matter how humanly worthy a purpose may seem to be, if it violates God’s righteous standards, it is not Christian love. Neither does love set itself against the truth of God; rather it rejoices only in fellowship with the truth. Doctrinal error, such as a wrong view of the resurrection that Paul corrected in 1 Corinthians 15, cannot join hands with Christian love. Strict confines set by God’s truth are boundaries beyond which love does not operate.

All the qualities described above, both those pertaining to submission and those pertaining to strictness, are relevant to the proper use of spiritual gifts. Those qualities are necessary to exercise to their maximum benefit. Real benefit will come, however, only if they keep themselves under the control of the Holy Spirit in demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit.

3. A third guideline to be followed in the use of one’s spiritual gifts requires that the gift be regulated in the light of stronger Christian duties. This involves a consideration of the effects of its use upon others. A set of circumstances may arise where harm will come rather than good in the use of your gift. Sometimes you must refrain from using your gift even when you feel you are more gifted than another whose gift is functioning in the church, or even when you feel that could bring more benefit to the body of Christ than the one who is currently under appointment

to fill the given role. You may detect a jealous spirit on the part of another or others in the assembly. Your use of your gift under those circumstances would only aggravate and enhance that jealousy. Granted such jealousy is wrong and needs to be corrected, yet for the time being it is better to wait to use your gift until the spiritual atmosphere has cleared.

The congregation may have a duly appointed or elected official to perform a given task that another gifted person knows he or she could perform far more effectively. It is that person's place to recognize God's sovereign oversight of that appointment and to respect the position and authority of the one who rightly discharges that responsibility.

First Corinthians 14:30 furnishes an instance of this. In the middle of prophetic utterance, a prophet found himself interrupted by another who had received a revelation from God. His duty was to stop speaking and yield the floor to the new prophet. That was the right and orderly way to proceed. In such a way, prophets were able to prophesy constructively and not simultaneously for the benefit of the whole congregation (1 Cor. 14:31). An orderly procedure accords with the will of God, who is not a God of confusion but of peace and order (1 Cor. 14:33).

Those stronger Christian responsibilities that limit the exercise of spiritual gifts mean that a person will not exercise his or her gift constantly. In fact, considerable periods of time between usages may occur. This is an important consideration in the light of love and taking into account what is of benefit to others in the body of Christ.

4. The fourth principle to be observed in the use of spiritual gifts is avoiding pride. Here is another specific application of love in connection with spiritual gifts. It is quite evident in other parts of 1 Corinthians that the Corinthian Christians were a proud people (cf. 1 Cor. 4:18). Such arrogance is contrary to love (1 Cor. 13:4). They were also puffed up about their possession of some of the more sensational spiritual gifts. It is quite easy and natural to become proud when one has special abilities that are flashy and attract attention. People with such gifts easily begin believing compliments that people give them about how outstanding they are. Self-centeredness is natural in those situations. God says that this ought not to be.

First Corinthians 12:21 uses the illustration of the human body where the eye, with its marvelous capabilities, could become self-centered and tell the hand that it is not necessary. The verse also poses the case of the head doing the same with the foot. In picture form that is an indication of pride. It is a highly gifted one looking down on those with lesser gifts and telling them they are not necessary. That is ignorance, which has absolutely no place in the exercise of spiritual gifts.

5. The fifth guideline in the use of spiritual gifts is to remember that each member of the body of Christ is needed. It is true with the body of Christ as it is true with the human body. If any individual member of the human body fails to function, it cripples the human body. The body cannot operate at its maximum efficiency and effectiveness without that member. So it is in the body of Christ. Every single member is absolutely necessary for the smooth operation of the spiritual body. Every gift, no matter how apparently insignificant, is vital to the effective functioning of the body of Christ. Paul points out in 1 Corinthians 12:15-16 that no member of the body can look at itself and say, “I am not needed”. Variety is necessary; all functions must be operative (1 Cor. 12:17). An individual contribution may appear to be quite small, but its absence initiates a chain reaction of hindrances and far-reaching losses in the growth of the body. Never in this life will a time come when we can sit back and assume that the church no longer needs our gifts. We must continue contributing our part, even though it may seem very small in comparison to the contribution of others.

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There are differing views concerning the number of gifts operating today. For our church’s perspective, see pages 297-307 in *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary on 1 Corinthians* by John MacArthur.

Understanding Spiritual Gifts, by Robert L. Thomas

Charismatic Chaos, by John MacArthur

The Body Dynamic, by John MacArthur

The MacArthur New Testament Commentary on 1 Corinthians, by John MacArthur

Here at Applegate Community Church, we have a number of different ministries that are geared toward the building up of God's people to Christian maturity and toward the outreach of our Christian witness into the local and international world. Because some of these will vary by time and location, it is best to contact the church office to get specific details (541) 846-6100.

SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASSES

- Our church offers a variety of Sunday school classes for children and adults. These times of fellowship are designed primarily for the equipping of believers through the study of Scripture in an interactive manner that is not possible during the main service. In our children's Sunday school classes, it is our desire to be systematic in laying a biblical foundation for our young people. This provides a great service to aid parents in training their children in the things of God, and it provides an opportunity for others to serve as teachers of children.

JUNIOR CHURCH

- While it is wonderful to see parents training their children to sit through the main service so that they might worship together as a family, we also recognize that there may be visitors and others who have not and are not so training their children. For them, we aim to provide a Bible lesson and program that is targeted specifically to their children's age group.

NURSERY

- This is an opportunity to serve as well as to be served. Those who willingly give of their time to help in the nursery are serving the rest of the body by allowing young mothers and fathers to attend Sunday school and church so as to be edified without distraction.

MUSIC MINISTRIES

- The primary opportunity to serve through music comes weekly on the Lord's Day. Occasional special events also benefit from our music ministry. This is a vital part of our weekly effort to direct praise to God as we assemble.

WOMEN'S MINISTRIES

- Women meet weekly at the church for Bible study.
- Women's outreach looks beyond the boundaries of our church through various mediums of outreach.
- Conferences and special events are planned annually.

MEN'S MINISTRIES

- The Men's Breakfast on Saturday mornings has been a staple of Men's Ministries for decades. It is a refreshing time of food and fellowship followed by prayer and focused Bible study.
- Various special events are scheduled for building fellowship and for promoting edification among the men.

AWANA

- Our church serves as the "hub" for the AWANA program among the community churches in the Applegate Valley. Because our facility is best equipped for this outreach, many church and non-church children flock to our program, and the need for committed volunteers is always pressing. This is an excellent opportunity to bring the Scripture to young people.

GRANTS PASS MISSION

- There are many ways to get involved in this mission. ACC's involvement has typically been that of providing chapel services and Bible studies for the residents at the men's facility. It is an excellent opportunity to reach out with the love of Christ and the truth of the gospel to those who are often at rock bottom.

MEDFORD MISSION

- This is an outreach ministry in which on the first Monday of each month (typically), some members of our church will go to the Medford Gospel Rescue Mission to provide a chapel service and to minister individually to the men who are part of that program. As with the Grants Pass Mission, this is another excellent ministry opportunity.

SUPPORTED MISSIONARIES

- Our church currently supports five missionary families who are serving respectively in Papua New Guinea, Mexico, Spain, Israel and Lebanon. These and other missionaries sometimes come to our church and bless us with reports of their ministries while reminding us of our need to be part of the missionary endeavor of the universal church.