

Form and Freedom: A New Testament Local Church Is . . .

Thesis:

In Ephesians 3:8–10, Paul states his two-fold job description:

- to preach to the Gentiles
- to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery (no distinction between Jews and Gentiles)

Note: *administration* (oikonomos) comes from two words:

- *oikos* which means “house”
 - *nomos* which means “law”
- oikonomos* is therefore house law, management of a household, administration

In the Pastoral Epistles, for example, Paul gave instructions for proper living within the household of God (a local church family) as part of this responsibility. It was Paul's job, in addition to evangelism, to give us these “household management instructions.” Listen to Paul's stated purpose for writing 1 Timothy: “I write so that you may know *how one ought to conduct himself* in a household of God” (1 Tim. 3:14–15). We need to pay close attention to these instructions; God has not left us without guidelines.

Description and Purpose(s) of a New Testament Local Church:

A New Testament local church is a group of baptized believers in Jesus Christ . . . (1 Cor. 1:2)

. . . that meets regularly in one geographic locale (1 Cor. 1:2; 11:18; Acts 20:7; Heb. 10:24–25)

. . . under the supervision of elders, assisted by deacons (1 Tim. 3; Titus 1:5–9)

. . . with the special aid of the equipping gifts (Eph. 4:11–13; 1 Tim. 4:1–16)

. . . that gathers together (as a large group, in small groups, or informally) for the purpose of building up one another in Christ (teaching, prayer, singing, exercise of spiritual gifts, practicing the “one anothers,” Lord's supper, etc.) (1 Cor. 12–14; Acts 2:42; Rom. 12:3–21; Heb. 10:24–25)

. . . resulting in (ultimate purposes)

. . . individual and corporate maturing into the image of Christ (Eph. 4:11–13; Col. 1:28–29)

. . . an attractive witness of Christ to the local community and a base for penetrating communities and nations beyond (Acts 2:42–47; 13:1–4)

. . . praise and thanksgiving ascribed to the persons of the Godhead (Eph. 3:8–10; 2 Cor. 4:12–15)

Setting In Order the Household of God (The Household Texts)

The Concept of the Household of God in the Pauline Epistles:

The Household (Haustafeln) Texts:

- 1 and 2 Timothy
- Titus
- Ephesians 5:22–6:9
- Colossians 3:18–4:1

The Core Concept:

The passages that seem to most closely express Paul's overall intent in writing the pastorals seem to be 1 Timothy 3:14–16 and Titus 1:5:

“I am writing these things to you hoping to come to you before long; but in case I am delayed, I write so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.” (1 Tim. 3:14–15)

“For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains, and appoint elders in every city.” (Titus 1:5)

Reasoning:

1. The phrase “these things” has no clear limitation placed on it, and since he adds “hoping to come to you” and “in case I am delayed,” Paul appears to add weight to the idea that he is placing all that he is writing Timothy in this letter under this purpose. The charge he refers to in 1:3, he starts to address specifically in 2:1 and continues in 2 Timothy.
2. The word *house* in the pastorals consistently means “household” in the sense of a social entity rather than *house* in the sense of a physical structure. This is a subject that is continually addressed in each epistle; thus, it seems likely that he is referring to community life not public worship in a building.
3. In Titus, Paul issues a similar charge to Titus and addresses similar community life and structure issues as those in 1 Timothy.
4. When 1 Timothy 3:14–15 is put together with Titus 1:5, it appears that the letters all generally served the purpose of encouraging Timothy and Titus to fully establish the community life of the churches under their care, according to the instructions given in these letters.
5. The placement of these letters within the context of all of Paul's letters serves to complete his task of establishing churches, which was an aspect of his stewardship from God (Eph. 3:1–13).

Implications:

1. The proper functioning of the community life of the church is of vital importance. The church is the pillar and support of the truth. Truth cannot be properly guarded and made visible if we do not pay attention to these truths. They are vital to a local church becoming established and effective in the progress of the gospel.
2. The ordering of community life is not simply a matter of personal preference. For a community to function as a harmonious unit, it must have order. Each individual must understand his or her part in

that order. We cannot expect to have order and harmony in our individual lives, our family life, and the life of our church if we ignore these principles.

3. These three letters climax the letters of Paul and complete his teaching on the life of the church, leaving us with all the essential norms and guides necessary to see churches in the twenty-first century become fully established. No church can call itself an established church—a New Testament church—if it fails to order its community life according to these truths.
4. It is important to clearly understand and stand firm in the New Testament guidelines as we attempt to order local churches for their participation in the progress of the gospel today. This becomes especially important since we live in a culture, and era of church history, when, in most cases, local churches regard church polity as a matter of preference. We must also guard against judgmental attitudes, pride, and “one-upmanship” while challenging churches to take these truths seriously—keeping the tension between a focus on being accurate and a focus on the mission set before us.
5. In becoming established as a church, “setting in order what remains” must be a priority for leaders, if we expect to be an effective witness in the community and a base for penetrating communities and nations beyond. Central to any world-evangelization goal must be the establishing of churches around the world. It was central to Paul's expansion strategy.
6. The stakes are high. Many men around Paul deserted him and their faith. Many of the churches faltered. These truths contain a crucial message for the church of the twenty-first century that is serious about participating effectively on the front lines of the progress of the gospel. These universal truths must be adhered to and carefully worked out in all cultures and in all times.

Roles and Responsibilities According to the Household Texts

Within the Household of God:

Ministers of the Gospel:

1. Pay close attention to their own lives and teaching, disciplining themselves for the purpose of godliness, that their progress may be evident to all. Work hard as farmers, be disciplined as athletes, and be as unentangled in civilian life as soldiers (1 Tim. 4:1–16; 2 Tim. 2:3–6).
2. Preach the Word, in season and out; reprove, rebuke and exhort, with great patience and instruction, as well as guard against doctrines of demons and refute those who contradict (2 Tim. 4:1–4; 2:22–26; 1 Timothy 4:1–16).
3. Be devoted to establishing churches, setting in order what remains, as well as teaching and preaching the truths of how a church (a household of God) ought to conduct itself, with the view of keeping the church(es) on course (Titus 1:5; 2:15; 1 Tim. 3:14–16; 6:2d; 1 Thess. 2:1–3:10).
4. Give priority time to training leaders—elders and faithful young “Timothys” to whom they can pass on the deposit. Be vitally involved in recognizing and appointing leaders as well as initiating necessary confrontation of elders who are sinning (Acts 20:17–38; esp. v. 31–32; 2 Tim. 2:2; 1 Tim. 3:1–7; 5:17–25; Titus 1:2–9).
5. Be available to minister in other parts of the world as God opens doors and confirms direction through the leaders He has placed over them. This should primarily mean taking the gospel to new areas and establishing new churches or further establish existing churches (Acts 13:1–14:26; 15:36–16:5; Phil. 1:3–7; 2:19–24; 1 Thess. 1:1–3:13; 1 Tim. 3:14–16; Titus 1:5).

Elders:

1. Manage the church to which they have been entrusted, shepherding and caring for the believers, being careful not to lord it over them but rather seeking to be an example in family and community life and in character (1 Tim. 3:1–7; 5:17; Titus 1:5–9; Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:1–4).
2. Be skillful handlers of the Word and use it to protect the church by refuting in sound doctrine as well as refuting those who contradict (1 Tim. 3:2; 5:17; Titus 1:9).
3. Be vitally involved in the development, recognizing, and commending of young “ministers of the gospel,” as their lives are tested and gifts evident, as well as appointing new elders and deacons (1 Tim. 3:4–5; 4:14; 5:22; Titus 1:5; Acts 6:1–6; 13:1–4; 20:28–32).

Deacons:

1. Serve the church, being faithful to carry out responsibilities entrusted to them by the elders, recognizing that at times they will be given special tasks of meeting community-wide needs and finding solutions to problems, which demands faithfulness and not being double-tongued (1 Tim. 3:8–13; Acts 6:1–6).
2. Be clear in their understanding of the faith, living consistently with the truths—especially in ordering their lives and families in accordance with God's plan for this age (1 Tim. 2:9).

Women Who Assist Elders and Deacons:

1. Serve the church, being faithful to carry out the responsibilities entrusted to them, being careful to be accountable to the elders and deacons (1 Tim. 3:11).
2. Be careful to remain exemplary in character and avoid allowing difficult situations, in which they find themselves, to lead to gossip (1 Tim. 3:11).

Older Men:

1. Set an example of faithfulness and perseverance within the church (Titus 2:2).
2. Continue on in the faith and remain sound in it, growing in the Word, and modeling the living of a life that is ordered under its principles so the community might be strengthened as it relates as an extended family (1 Tim. 5:1; Titus 2:2).

Older Women:

1. Set an example of respectful behavior in the life of the community, evidently both toward the leaders in the church as well as for younger women toward their husbands and family responsibilities (Titus 2:3–5).
2. Continue to be devoted to good works, using their homes for meeting needs in the church and in the world (1 Tim. 2:9–10; 5:9–10).
3. Anything they teach must have a soundness to it that is marked by good works and is built around assisting the younger women to properly orient themselves to godly living within their homes and within the household of God (Titus 2:3–5; 1 Tim. 2:9–10).

Younger Women:

1. Be devoted to their husbands and children and to laboring hard to make their homes a powerful witness to the beauty of the Word of God (Titus 2:3–5).
2. Be known for good deeds by using their homes as a base for meeting needs in the believing community and in the community at large, as well as assisting those in distress (1 Tim. 5:9–10; 1 Tim. 2:9–10).

Younger men:

1. Seek to show themselves as examples of good deeds, watching their speech so as not to get caught in youthful lusts, which is so often tied together with speech (Titus 2:6–8; 2 Tim. 2:22–26).
2. Labor to become established and sound in their faith (Titus 2:6–8).

Widows:

1. Younger widows should seek to remarry and invest in the types of responsibilities listed above for younger women (1 Tim. 5:11–16).
2. Older widows should seek to devote themselves fully to the needs of the household of faith, even to the extent of being supported if they are in need and their children cannot support them (1 Tim. 5:3–10).

Within Individual Households:

Husbands and Fathers:

1. Assume responsibility for the management, provision, and care of their households, leading their households to function effectively and harmoniously within the household of God (1 Tim. 3:4–5; 5:4,9; Eph. 5:15–6:10).
2. Love their wives as Christ loves the church, honoring and cherishing them, that they might mature into the image of Christ, without spot or wrinkle (Eph. 5:22–33; Col. 3:19).
3. Bring up their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord, being careful not to be too harsh or over corrective, causing them to become exasperated and lose heart (Eph. 6:1–4; Col. 3:21).

Wives and Mothers:

1. Assist their husbands by being devoted to them and the children, working hard to make their homes, under their husbands' leadership, a powerful witness to the beauty of the Word of God (Titus 2:3–5).
2. Place themselves under the headship of their husbands, putting on gentle, non-challenging spirits, which is precious in the sight of God (Eph. 5:22–33; Col. 3:18; 1 Pet. 3:1–6).
3. Assist their husbands in bringing up the children, loving them, and caring for them (Eph. 6:1–4; Titus 2:3–5; 1 Thess. 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15; 1 Tim. 5:9–10,14).

Children:

1. Obey their parents, keeping their lives under the direction and control of their parents as they grow, as well as staying on the life course that their parents taught them from the Scriptures and set them on (Eph. 6:1–2; Col. 3:20; 2 Tim. 1:5; 3:14–15).
2. Honor their parents, even to the extent of making some return to them as they are older, including completely providing for their widowed mothers if needed (Eph. 6:1–2; 1 Tim. 5:1–16).

Additional Guidelines for the Household of God

Leaders

Guidelines:

1. Paul entrusted the general oversight and shepherding of a local church to a group of men called elders. These men are to manage the household of God with the same care that they manage their own households (Acts 20:17–28, cf. 14:23; Titus 1:5–9; 1 Tim. 3:1–7).
 - They are to have mature character.
 - They are to be able to teach and guard the believers as well as refute those who contradicted the Word.
 - They need to desire to do the work, even to the extent of ordering their lives in such a way as to prepare for the responsibility.
 - They are to be good managers of their own households.
 - They are to be mature in the faith, not new believers.

2. A special group of men, called deacons, were designated by Paul to serve the church, evidently with the view of assisting the elders in carrying out their shepherding responsibilities (1 Tim. 3:8–13; Phil. 1:1; Acts 6:1–7).
 - They are to have mature character.
 - They are to have mature wives.
 - They are to be good managers of their homes.
 - They are to have tested experience.

3. Another type of leader, based on spiritual gift, was given to the churches as well. These men are to equip the whole church for the work of ministry (Eph. 4:10–11; 1 Tim. 4:6–16; 5:17–25; Titus 1:5; 2:1,15).
 - Their ministry responsibilities are based on their spiritual gift(s) rather than a position of official authority, and they should carry out those responsibilities under the oversight of the local elders.
 - Though they are under the authority of the local elders, they are to play a role in both the recognition and public correction of elders.
 - Their job description centers around three areas:
 - (a) establishing the believers and the local church
 - (b) doing the work of an evangelist
 - (c) training the next generation of leaders, as Paul had trained them.
 - Those who are recognized as being truly gifted as equippers experience some sort of official recognition by the elders of the local church through the laying on of hands.

Implications for the Churches of the Twenty-First Century:

1. Each local church should be autonomous, as in a family, in the sense that it is governed by a team of men called elders. They should not be under the authority of one man nor should several churches be under the authority of some sort of hierarchy. Neither should the people be left to govern themselves.
2. Whenever possible, deacons should be appointed to assist the elders in their work of managing the household of God.
3. Although the way in which elders are appointed seems to be varied, the existing leadership must have the responsibility of making the final selection(s) of new elders.
4. The authority of the elders should be restricted to the affairs of the local believing community and is not to be extended to the personal-life choices of a family and/or an individual member of the body.

5. The biblical terms (or titles) for leadership should be conformed to when possible, since specific qualifications are assigned to certain terms. If we change the terms, we must be very careful to explain which term and/or title conforms to which biblical term and/or title.
6. We should avoid any titles that lend to the perception of a clergy and laity distinction, which in itself violates the priesthood of the believer. However, we need not necessarily avoid official recognition of leaders nor full-time financial support.
7. Whatever organizational structure is created to assist the establishing ministry of the equippers (often called pastors or ministers today) it should be carried out under the oversight and authority of the elders and be viewed as a responsibility delegated by the elders.

Men and Women:

Guidelines:

1. Paul instructed the churches of the order in creation concerning men and women, which God wants honored in His church. Men are to assume the responsibility for the leadership of the believing community, not women (1 Cor. 11:3,7-12; 1 Tim. 2:8-14).
2. This created order has an audience larger than men and women themselves; it involved the rulers and authorities in heavenly places. Evidently, submission to God's order reveals to the universe the manifold wisdom of God (1 Cor. 11:10; Eph. 3:8-10).
3. Specifically, men are to assume the oversight of the community of believers and women are to avoid exercising authority over men and teaching men (1 Tim. 2:11-12).
4. The primary sphere of women's ministry is to be their own household. Their reputation is to be based on how well they minister to their husband and children, along with how well they use their homes for ministry (1 Tim. 2:9-10; 5:9-10,14-15; Titus 2:3-5; cf. Prov. 31:10-31).
5. Older women are to encourage younger women to become skillful in loving their husbands and children and using their homes as a base for ministry. The command to instruct the younger women is not a general command for older women to assume a "preaching and teaching" role over other women (Titus 2:3-5).
6. When they assemble together, the women are to assume a non-challenging stance by receiving instruction submissively. If the women question what is being taught, they are to discuss it at home with their husbands. They should not challenge the teaching publicly. And, whenever they pray or prophesy publicly, they are to have their heads covered. All the churches followed this practice (1 Cor. 11:1-16; 14:34-36; 1 Tim. 2:8-12).

Implications for the Churches of the Twenty-First Century:

1. We must be very careful not to allow our culture to redefine God's design for men's and women's roles in the church. Instead, culture should drive us to better understand the universals behind the directives and communicate them with clarity.
2. Even though not always apparent to us, the directives God has laid down for the church are a reflection of His wisdom to all who observe. Therefore, we must be careful not to distort any of them from their original intent, including the set of guidelines on women that at first glance appear to be out of step with both our culture and reality.
3. Though the working out of these guidelines is difficult, we should not always assume that the most liberal or the most conservative interpretation is the best way to interpret.

4. We should assume that more is involved in the issue of the distinction between men and women than just an arbitrary command to obey "because God said so." All His creation is set in order by wisdom (Prov. 8) so we should expect that further study of the directives will reveal their beauty.
5. Contemporary "women's ministries" need to be carefully examined in light of the above guidelines to make sure that they are in harmony with the spirit of God's "house order" for His church.
6. A career orientation for a woman needs to be examined in light of the spirit of the above guidelines to make sure that such work does not distract from the priority of her own household, the health of which is vital to God's household.
7. However we interpret the head-covering section, culturally or universally valid, and however we interpret the silence of women at the church in Corinth, it is clear that God intends the leadership by men in the assembly meeting to be evident to all attending.

Handling Conflict:

Guidelines:

1. Paul understood conflict to be commonplace in the church. He did not avoid conflict when it was necessary. He was open about the personal toll conflict took on his own life and built a theology of triumph founded on a realistic perspective of conflict in the ministry (Galatians 2:1-14; 2 Cor. 1:3-11; 2:12-7:7; esp. 2:12-14 and 7:5-7).
2. Paul was particularly straightforward and confronting with leaders when they were not "walking straightly in the truth of the gospel" (Galatians 2:11-14; Acts 15:1-6; Galatians 3:1).
3. Paul expected the churches to handle their own conflicts and to avoid letting problems between believers find their way into the world's law courts. If, as believers, they were going to judge angels in the future, surely they must be able to judge their own conflicts now (1 Cor. 6:1-11).
4. The churches were to judge those in the body persisting in sin after confronted, by first rebuking in the presence of all and then by putting them out of the church if they didn't repent. But it was not their job to judge those outside the church; rather, it was God's job (1 Cor. 5:1-13; 2 Thess. 3:6-15; 1 Tim. 5:19-22; cf. Matt. 18:15-18).
5. Spiritual leaders were to avoid conflict if possible, staying out of "trivial theological arguments." They were to be characterized by gentleness in correcting those trapped in unsound doctrine. However, those leading others astray from sound doctrine were to be dealt with firmly and directly (2 Tim. 2:14-26; Titus 1:9-16; 3:9-11).
6. Every individual in the household was responsible to do his or her part in preserving the unity of the Spirit. Several guidelines were set forth in order to preserve this unity.
 - Let no root of bitterness develop over conflict, instead pursue peace with each other (Heb. 12:14-15).
 - Admonish the unruly, but learn to tell the difference between the unruly and those in need of special help (1 Thess. 5:14).
 - Each one was to be convinced in his or her own mind concerning living out freedoms in Christ and accept one another in the process (Rom. 14:1-15:7).
 - Learn to set aside personality differences, making allowances for one another's imperfections (Phil. 4:2-5).
 - Examine your own work, not someone else's. If someone is trapped in sin, gently help them out, but even then, be careful to look to yourself, lest you too be tempted (Gal. 5:12-6:5).

Implications for Churches of the Twenty-First Century:

1. We must avoid the success-oriented church-growth philosophy of the day. It will cause us to develop a distorted and unrealistic view of triumph and, at times, unbiblical expectations. We should expect problems, setbacks, and conflicts in building Christ's church. This is all part of growth. We are in a spiritual war, not a U.S. suburb.
2. We must not use the exhortation to live in harmony as an excuse to avoid necessary confrontation. When the gospel is being distorted, we must deal with the error, even at the risk of great dissension. It should be noted that guarding the truth is fundamentally a leadership responsibility.
3. At the same time, we must make allowances for each other's conscience as we learn to live under the freedom of the gospel. Those whose consciences are weaker should be accepted, as well as those who live with greater freedom.
4. A local church must establish procedures for dealing with conflicts needing mediation, so as to avoid the situation where believers are turning to nonbelievers to solve their problems. Procedures must be set forth, as well, for dealing with those who are unruly, including excommunication from the group, yet always with the ultimate hope of restoration. Decisions within these structures must be adhered to by the entire believing community (local church). Problems affecting the whole community must not be left ignored.
5. As individual community members, we must do our part to build unity in the community, pursuing peace with each member, and at all costs avoiding a root of bitterness, which can defile many.

Assembly Meetings and Worship:

Guidelines:

1. Paul encouraged each believer to come together with a correct focus. They were to avoid self-serving attitudes and come prepared to minister to others. One of the primary reasons for gathering together is to encourage each other to remain committed Christians (1 Cor. 11:17–22; 14:26; Heb. 10:23–25).
2. The gatherings were quite flexible and their meeting places varied. They met in homes (a sort of compound) as well as other available buildings (e.g., a school facility). They met for varying lengths of time as well. Very few guidelines are given concerning the meeting place and format (Acts 20:7–12; Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Acts 19:8–10; 1 Cor. 14:26–33).
3. Opportunity was provided for each man, at least, to participate in the public ministry time, when the whole church was gathered. This public ministry, though, had as its central purpose the edification of the whole body. It was not a casual sharing, nor was it focused on personal needs. Again, note the flexibility (1 Cor. 14:26–33; Acts 20:7–12).
4. It appears they assembled on the first day of every week, toward evening, to break bread. This was a sort of sacred time in which only the true believers participated. The center of their focus was on the reality of being a covenant community, set apart to serve Christ. They were to regularly remind themselves that they were Christ's community (1 Cor. 11:17–34; Acts 20:7).
5. Great pains were to be taken in the instruction of the Word. It was to play an important role in assembly meetings. Careful exposition of the Word was key to the church being preserved from the philosophies of the world (Acts 11:19–26; 1 Tim. 4:6–16).
6. Men were to take the lead in the assembly meetings. They were to preside over the assembly meetings, as well as teach and pray. This was the norm for all the churches (1 Tim. 2:1–15; 1 Cor. 14:26–34).

Implications for the Churches of the Twenty-First Century:

1. We must rid ourselves of society's attitude of "attending church" as we do a football game or a concert. Our primary concern should not be what we "got out of it" but rather, Was I faithful in doing my part to build up the body?
2. The focus of our open public ministry time should not be on ourselves and our own needs but rather on inciting one another to love and good deeds. We must avoid letting this important ministry time be reduced to a mere "sharing experience." It is clear that each man ought to come prepared to participate in the open ministry time.
3. We are not given instructions on time, frequency, style, order of events, and on many other details of our meeting times together. Therefore we need to be very careful not to let our forms become sacred. We need to vary them to best meet the needs of all involved, just as our own family gatherings change as our family changes.
4. A significant part of gathering together should be devoted to reinforcing the reality that we are a covenant people. Therefore, the Lord's Supper should be a vital part of our life as a church. The practice, however, of adding a token "cup and wafer" at the end of the "service" does not do justice to the directives of Paul.
5. We must all take seriously the importance of the Word in our meeting times. It is to be taught carefully as well as discussed thoroughly. We need forms that will allow both to take place. Prayer should be a key element as well.
6. Despite the tensions created within our society, we need to respect God's household order. Each family is to be represented by the husband in the public meetings, especially in open discussion of what has been taught.

Giving and Financial Matters:

Guidelines:

1. Paul encouraged everyone in the churches to make giving a personal matter. Each was to decide in his or her own heart what to give. They were not to give grudgingly or under compulsion (2 Cor. 9:6-8).
2. At the same time, Paul put challenges before the churches, encouraged commitments to be made, and exhorted them to hold to their commitments (1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8-9).
3. Paul encouraged these voluntary gifts to be collected at one time and given as one gift from the church. Evidently this was the pattern because he received a gift more than once from the Philippians in this manner. Individuals gave to a collective need administered by church leadership (Acts 11:27-30; 1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8:1-24).
4. Paul expected the churches to support those making their living by the gospel. Even though he himself did not exercise his right for support, he saw it as an important norm to support ministers of the gospel. His case was somewhat special in the sense that his ministry was always in question as an itinerant evangelist and church planter (1 Cor. 9:1-18).
5. Even though virtually no guidelines were given to govern giving at the local church level, it is apparent that the finances were to be administered by the elders of the church. Several types of needs were to be met by the local church: support of ministers of the gospel as well as some elders, support of godly widows in need, special needs of other churches, as well as outsiders (Acts 11:29-30; 6:1-6; 1 Tim. 3:3,5; 5:1-16,17-18; Gal. 6:6-10).

6. At the same time, no one should be allowed to sponge off of the generosity of the church. Anyone not willing to work should not eat. If an individual continues to live a lazy, undisciplined life, the church is to break fellowship with the person (2 Thess. 3:6–15).

Implications for Churches of the Twenty-First Century:

1. We must establish giving procedures that avoid pressure tactics and guilt manipulation. Each believer must be encouraged to decide on his or her own what to give. It also appears that the tithe, a law in the Old Testament, has been replaced in the New Testament by a principle—give from the heart whatever you decide.
2. Yet, at the same time, leaders must not be afraid to set needs before the church, call for a commitment to meet those needs, as well as exhort the believers to fulfill their commitments. In fact, getting a response should not be like pulling teeth, but rather a church should be characterized by seeking needs to give towards.
3. However we collect gifts, it appears that needs should be responded to collectively, so that the image is that of the believing community meeting measurable needs.
4. Provided that their calling and gifts are confirmed by the elders, we need to take a hard look at those who feel that they are directed by the Lord to proclaim the gospel, and see that they are freed for ministry. This is one of the keys to legitimate church growth. Provision also should be made for elders who rule well. Often this cannot be accomplished because a significant amount of a church's resources is being given to support individuals in para-church organizations that are not church based.
5. The final authority on the use of funds should be in the hands of the elders. Many churches today, in our democratic country, claim to be under the leadership and authority of an elder board, and yet, all major financial decisions are in the hands of the congregation.
6. While we should go out of our way to care for legitimate needs as they occur in the life of the church, in other churches, and in society, the church must never be responsible for promoting laziness or undisciplined lifestyles. The church was not designed to be a free ride for those unwilling to work.

Widows and Special Needs:

Guidelines:

1. Paul understood the immediate family to be a family within a larger family (the church). The relationships within the church were to be patterned after the relationship within families (1 Tim. 5:1–2).
2. The church was to assist members who were in distress, using the strong base of their own households, with wives who were available servants to minister during special times (Rom. 12:13; 1 Tim. 5:9–10; Titus 3:12–14).
3. Paul also encouraged churches in one area to assist churches and other men in other areas during times of special need. Yet, clear priority was to be given to the household of faith—other churches and the needs within those local households (Rom. 15:26; 1 Cor. 16:1–5; 2 Cor. 8–9; Gal. 6:9–10).
4. God has a special place in his heart for distressed widows and orphans and poor men, as well, and so should we (James 1:27; 2:1–13).
5. Special instructions were given concerning widows. They were to be cared for first by their own families (their sons and daughters and grandchildren) if they had any. Otherwise, the church was to care for them (1 Tim. 5:1–5).
6. A widow who had lived a model Christian life was to be honored by being supported by her family so she did not have to work in her old age. If she did not have family to support her, then the church should take on that

responsibility. Yet, she should not be supported before she was 60 years old (1 Tim. 5:1-16). Key elements of a model life include:

- faithful to her husband
- a reputation for good works
- faithfully brought up her children
- used her home to minister to unbelievers
- used her home to minister to believers
- assisted those in distress
- devoted herself to every good work

Implications for Churches of the Twenty-First Century:

1. In a society that insures against all tragedies and sets up institutions for caring for those with special needs, it is vital that we think clearly about widows, orphans, and those in distress and with special needs. It is an area in which we have the opportunity for our light to brightly shine before the world.
2. To make an impact in caring for special needs, we must have strong homes and wives free to devote themselves to every good work. With so many frazzled working mothers, neglected children, broken homes, and institutionalized elderly, the ministry opportunities before a caring local household of God, anchored by strong ministering families, is almost limitless.
3. In the United States, we are unique among the believing communities of the world because we possess an unusual wealth. This should create within us a special burden for the less-fortunate churches of the Two-Thirds World and Eastern Europe.
4. One of our goals as a local household of God should be that we have a special place in our heart for widows, orphans, and poor men. And yet, is it not often the rich who gain our special attention and recognition in our success-oriented mind-set?
5. We must be prepared to care for our own, especially widows. As believing sons and daughters, even as grandchildren, we should be preparing ahead of time to care for our parents, especially our mothers. As a church, we need a plan for caring for the widows in need, as well as completely supporting those over 60 who have lived a model life.

Community Life and Ministry:

Guidelines—Ephesians 4:1–16

1. At the foundation of any description of the philosophy of ministry is unity of the Spirit, which every member must be committed to preserving (4:1–6). The “unity of the Spirit” is:
 - one body
 - one Spirit
 - one hope of your calling
 - one Lord
 - one faith
 - one baptism
 - one God and Father of all
2. Preserving this unity will demand that each member of the body demonstrates a wealth of character (4:2). The character necessary to preserving the unity of the Spirit is:
 - humility
 - gentleness
 - patience
 - forbearance
3. Another aspect of this unity calls for each member of the body taking responsibility for the work of building the body of Christ, according to his or her measure of grace (4:7,16).
4. Some gifts are given for equipping believers to carry out their ministry of building up the body of Christ (4:11–12). The equipping gifts mentioned are:
 - apostles (laid foundation, Eph. 2:20)
 - prophets (laid foundation, Eph. 2:20)
 - evangelists
 - pastors and teachers
5. Since evangelists are given to equip the saints for the work of service, we can assume that part of the work of building the body of Christ, for which each is responsible, involves evangelism (4:11–12).
6. The result of the proper working of each individual part will be local churches unified and mature in their faith and ministry (established), to such a degree that they look and act like one mature man—Jesus Christ (4:13,15).
7. In this fashion, each body of Christ is to mature in Christ, who is fitting the *whole* body (universal body and building, Eph. 2:11–3:10) together as each individual part does its part (4:14–16).

Implications for the Churches of the Twenty-First Century:

1. Unity is far more than “agreeing to get along” or “agreeing to disagree.” We are to be committed to one body of truth, one objective (building Christ's church) and one God. This unity must be maintained in a context of love and humility. We should never be satisfied with anything less than a faith that is lived as consistently as possible with the body of truth given us by the apostles and prophets.
2. Whatever strategies are designed for “the work of service,” they must be soundly built upon the truth that the “work of service” is to be done by the saints, not by some select clergy or professional class. We must avoid the error of thinking that the “clergy” are the ones *really* qualified for ministry.
3. In an age when a professional class exists (clergy and laity distinctions are almost universally made in the Western church), we must be careful to avoid its trappings, bringing our expectations of pastors, evangelists, and teachers in line with their stated purpose, which is equipping the believers for the “work of service,” not as men paid to *do* the “work of service” for the church.
4. As local churches, we should be cognizant that we also are part of the building of one universal church. We should be prepared to do our part in building the universal church as we have opportunity, whether that is in our own local sphere or in some other part of the world.

Guidelines (1 Cor. 12:1-31):

1. Unity is at the foundation of the ministry. That is seen in the fact that we were all baptized into one body of which we are all members and have a part, with one Spirit, Lord, and God directing the gifts, services, and activities (12:4-6,12-13).
2. The distribution of the Spirit can be summarized into a variety of gifts, services, and activities that utilize each individual member (12:4-6). The life of the body is:
 - varieties of gifts.
 - varieties of ministries (acts of service, ways of serving).
 - varieties of effects (forms of work, activities, way of working).
3. The Spirit is sovereign in regard to the distribution of gifts, services, and activities to members of the body, with no indication of such prerequisites as education, social status, occupation, etc. (12:11).
4. This kind of mutual interdependence is designed to bring about a certain balance in the body, because the whole body does not center around one part, and the contribution of each member is deemed significant, with special attention being given to weaker members (12:14-25).
5. At the same time, some manifestations of the Spirit at work in the church are to be desired before others, because they are more foundational to the building up and establishing of the whole body. This is set in opposition to the Corinthians' immature thinking that ecstatic experiences (miracles and other dramatic manifestations) were the most important and to be sought by all (12:1-3,28-31; 14:1-4,20-25).

Implications for the Churches of the Twenty-First Century:

1. We must resist the temptation to encumber the ministry of the church with carefully orchestrated plans and deadlines and major instead on identifying ways in which the Spirit is seeking to manifest Himself in the lives of the members of Christ's body locally and throughout the world.
2. We should expect the gifts, services, and activities within the life of the body to be as varied as the number of members and welcome this diversity as a sign of divine activity rather than be threatened by change and different ideas and methods. Operating with this kind of philosophy will go a long way toward defusing conflict over differences, as well as competition between members.
3. We must train ourselves to look beyond first appearances in one another, and avoid categorizing each other's possible contributions to the building up of the body according to education, IQ, social status, and vocation. Instead, we must learn to identify and cultivate the various ways the Spirit is manifesting Himself in each member.
4. We should give special attention to cultivating the "manifestations of the Spirit" in the least-likely-to-contribute member, that they might enjoy the mutual care of the body as well.
5. We can expect to maintain better balance in a church through an encouragement of diversity in ministry, not conformity of activity. Leaders must develop a management style that cultivates the ministries of each member and preserves the freedom for the Spirit to work in varied ways.
6. Within the philosophy of diversity and mutuality described above, we must not forget the foundational importance of certain equipping gifts, and be zealous to see that these are developed and functioning in a primary role in the life of the body.

Guidelines (Rom. 12:3–16):

1. At the foundation of proper functioning within the body is balanced, sound judgment concerning ourselves—knowing our God-given capabilities as well as limitations (12:3). Three key words are used here:
 - to think (phronein)
 - to think more highly (uperphronein = to think over, above, beyond)
 - to have sound judgment (sophronein = to be sensible, reasonable, to keep proper measure, not going beyond the set boundaries)²
2. Key to developing this balance is understanding that God has given us a *measure* of grace (a special ability to carry out a vital function in the body) in certain proportions, and that our limits are made up by the rest of the body (12:3–5). Two key words are used here:
 - measure (meridzo = deal out, assign, apportion)
 - proportion (analogia = right relationship, proportion, in agreement)
3. Once we possess “sound judgment” we are free to pursue our special “measure of grace” with our entire hearts, which explains the qualifiers Paul adds to each measure of grace in this passage (12:6–8). The following are representative “measures of grace,” from the Phillips translation.
 - prophecy (preach to the limit of our vision)
 - service (let us concentrate on our service)
 - teaching (let us give all we have to our teaching)
 - exhortation (let us set ourselves to it)
 - giving (give freely)
 - leading (work with enthusiasm)
 - showing mercy (help others cheerfully)
4. This core insight, into the nature of ministry in Christ’s body, must be kept in balance with the reality that we are also to be “general practitioners.” We must demonstrate a daily commitment to each other, which measures up to the reality of being of the same body and the same family (12:9–16). The following are example “commitments” to one another:
 - Be devoted to each other as to family.
 - Give preference to each other with honor.
 - Be diligent in serving each other.
 - Stick with each other through difficulties.
 - Contribute to each other’s needs.
 - Show hospitality to each other.
 - Seek to enrich the lives of those who seem to make a career out of making your life miserable.
 - Share in each other’s joys.
 - Share in each other’s sorrows.
 - Take real interest in the ordinary members of the family.

Implications for the Churches of the Twenty-First Century:

1. We must never allow the ministry to become a one-man show. When this happens, it violates *all* the fundamental principles that are to govern the life-balance of the body of Christ.
2. The intention of this passage is to encourage us to focus on what function(s) we do best in the body of Christ, not to give us an exhaustive fixed list of gifts. This list is an example of the types of God-given abilities we might find ourselves possessing, with the view of encouraging us to pursue them with all our hearts. Thus, as we seek to minister in the body, with the encouragement of others, we would expect to

² Cite *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* by Fritz Reinecker and Cleon Rogers, copyright 1976, 1980 by the Zondervan Corporation, Grand Rapids, Michigan, page 376.

become aware of our function in the body. As this becomes clearer we should devote more and more effort to doing it well.

3. We must be sensible about the limitations of our own capacities as well as the extent of our God-given abilities. In doing so, we must learn to listen to those who minister closely with us, and let them help us interpret that balance in our lives, looking to them to supply what we lack, building a mutuality in ministry.
4. As we understand and learn to live by these perspectives, it will strip away petty comparisons and jealousies and empower us to serve each other in the spirit of the fellowship described in Romans 12:9–16.
5. In the pursuit of doing our special God-given abilities well, we must keep in mind our general commitments to one another as well, avoiding at all costs the temptation to shirk our responsibilities to each other under the guise of “that’s not my job” or “that’s not my gift.”

Relationship with the World:

Guidelines:

1. Paul exhorted the churches to live lives of relational harmony and order, so that through their families and their community life, they might actually beautify the gospel to the unbelieving, judgmental world (Titus 2:1–15).
2. They were to be heavily engaged in good deeds toward unbelievers and to do so with a certain attitude and outlook. They were to be considerate, gentle, and uncontentious, remembering that unbelievers’ worldly pursuits are no different than ours once were (Titus 3:1–8).
3. Out of the context of a godly, harmonious, believing community and believers with lifestyles of good deeds, they were to make the most of every opportunity to give account for the hope that was in them, with humble attitudes (Col. 4:2–6; 1 Pet. 3:8–17).
4. Paul set himself up as a model of freedom. He encouraged each believer to be as free and flexible as possible around nonbelievers—becoming all things to all men that he might win some (1 Cor. 9:19–23).
5. Paul exhorted the believing communities to pray for their governmental leaders and for all who were in authority, so that as churches they might lead tranquil and quiet lives rather than live under governmental harassment. When unjustly treated, they were to pray, rather than to respond with wrath and dissension (1 Tim. 2:1–8; Rom. 13:1–7; 1 Pet. 2:11–25).

Implications for Churches of the Twenty-First Century:

1. In a society in which both family life and community life are breaking down, we have an outstanding opportunity to model the beautiful effects of the gospel in our own households as well as in the household of God. It is imperative that we live according to sound doctrine and not the trends of society, in regards to both our family life and the life of our local church.
2. Being heavily involved in doing good deeds toward unbelievers is foundational to creating opportunities to give an account for the faith within us. We probably need more service-oriented involvement in the lives of unbelievers than we need more evangelistic programs to reach them.
3. In a culture in which true believers are known for judging nonbelievers and trying to legislate their morality (often with wrath and dissension), as well as confusing Christ’s goals for the church with building a Christian nation, it is especially important that we get back to the habit of winning nonbelievers through our considerate, humble attitudes and through a lifestyle of doing good deeds for them.

4. In a culture in which true believers are often known for what they do and don't do rather than for their love, we need to rediscover what it means to "be all things to all men" that we may win some, risking judgment on our lifestyle by the legalistic, evangelical establishment. (Studies have shown that it takes about two years for the average new believer to lose all his non-believing friends!)
5. At a time when many are disgruntled, with jaded expectations of our leaders in government, we need to watch our attitudes very closely, making sure that we possess attitudes of respect, praying for them, that we might lead our lives, as a believing community, without harassment.

Establishing a Local Church

Lay careful foundations:

1. Carefully instruct the entire group until there is a basic grasp of who they are as a believing community and how they fit into the plans and purposes of God (Acts 11:19–26).
2. Begin investing time in a few faithful men, that they might provide the key leadership for the church in the future (Acts 16:1–5; 2 Tim. 2:2).

Appoint mature leaders:

1. Appoint a team of elders from among those you are training, who measure up to the qualifications given to Timothy and Titus (Acts 14:23; 20:17–38; Titus 1:5–9).
2. Set in order what remains in the proper ordering of the household of God. We must pay careful attention to how God instructed us to conduct ourselves in the household of God, if we expect to enjoy maximum effectiveness in the future (1 Tim. 3:14–15; Titus 1:5).

Build a “one-minded vision” for participating in the progress of the gospel:

1. Allow some leaders who demonstrate a special giftedness in teaching, to devote themselves to diligent study of the Word resulting in confident instruction from the Word in a sound, balanced manner, accompanied by exhortation and even rebuke when necessary (1 Tim. 4:6–16; 2 Tim. 4:1–4; Titus 2:1,15; 3:1–2).
2. Establish a ministry-management strategy shepherded by a team of mature elders, who willingly assume responsibility for the general oversight of the body. The elders must preserve both the individual ministry of each believer-priest as well as provide wise direction to the whole church in ministering in a one-minded fashion. They must be willing to deal with sin, conflict, and unsound doctrine, which has the capacity to destroy unity in the body, which is vital to the “one mind striving together for the progress of the gospel” (1 Tim. 3:4–5; Titus 1:5–16).
3. Establish a “meeting together” strategy that incorporates all of the critical elements both commanded and modeled in the epistles for the healthy growth of the body into one mature man—Jesus Christ (Eph. 4:11–16; 1 Cor. 11–14).
4. Establish a ministry-management strategy that allows for an orderly, corporate response to the sending of people and money to other geographical locales, for the building of Christ's church (2 Cor. 8–9; Phil. 1:3–11, 27–30; 4:10–20).

Implications for Churches of the Twenty-First Century:

1. Churches must redefine the pastoral job description to allow more time for serious leadership training to take place.
2. We must pay close attention to the “house order” in our churches, especially in technological societies when our churches often look more like well run businesses and organizations than families.
3. We must abandon both extremes of one-pastor domination and congregational rule and return to a carefully trained, mature leadership team of men in each church.

4. We must renovate our “traditional worship service” meeting structures, which have become a sort of universally accepted formal legalism, replacing those forms with culturally relevant structures that incorporate all the critical elements both commanded and modeled in Acts and the Epistles.
5. We must take seriously the goal of “one-minded” striving together as a community for the progress of the gospel. This is a tall order in the evangelical milieu that exists today, which is dominated by the training of the individual rather than the community and by mobilizing the individual rather than the whole community.
6. We must break out of the “\$10-per-month to 200 missionaries” model and learn how to build missionary outreach that patterns itself more closely after that of the early church, which often sent, as a whole church, both people and money for the sake of the furtherance of the gospel.