

A Sure Foundation

The beliefs that we build our lives on

How does Church Work?

MONTH 6

WEEK 4

READ:

1 Corinthians 11-16

Nowhere is God's grace as abundantly displayed as within the body of His church. We will be presented before God blameless and pure, but that certainly won't be because of our own merit, or because we got things so right. The glory of the church must depend entirely on its head - Christ Jesus our Lord. That means to me that the most important criteria for the functioning of the church is that it actually allows Christ, the risen and living Christ, to be the head of His body. That cannot be lost among our well meaning attempts to "do" church right. A New Testament church is not about the order of worship, the eloquence of the sermon, or using the right translation. It's not about replicating the surroundings of the first century church, or doing everything precisely as they did. A New Testament church is about the Christ that we live and die and live again for. Is He at the center of this body of believers? He, and He alone, qualifies the church as authentic.

Paul's instructions to the Corinthians about how to "do church" seem a bit confusing to us today because the structure of our church service is quite a bit different than the gatherings of believers in the time of the New Testament. We tend to read this passage through the lens of what we have experienced of church rather than seeing it with fresh eyes, as if we have never before encountered a church. Today there is an order of worship that is held by most congregations as sacred. There is an observed propriety that has more to do with tradition than with words of Scripture. As Paul addresses difficulties and misunderstandings in the young Corinthian church, we do get some clues about how things worked, and what Paul considered acceptable, and unacceptable. But though the activities of the body, and the problematic issues of the body might be quite different, hopefully what my church and your church and the Corinthian church and the Ephesian church all have in common is Christ as its head, and the clothing of His grace. Out of reverence for Christ, we submit to one another and soak Him in - together.

"Submit to
one another
out of
reverence
for Christ."

Eph.5:21

LOSING OUR HEAD

Even in a valiant effort to be the kind of church that Christ would want to be the head of, we still find ourselves struggling to agree on just what exactly that is. But I don't think it is where we disagree that we are in the greatest danger, but in where we are so sure we are right. Pride in our "correctness" can prove very costly.

The desire to search Scripture to determine and follow God's intent for His church is a very good one. I'm pleased to be among believers that make that a priority. But in the process of doing everything properly, we lose sight of who the real head of the church is, our Lord Jesus Christ who alone is able to clothe His church in righteousness. Without His grace, our rightness is only an illusion. The notion that we can avoid denominationalism is appealing, but is not a social reality. (Hughes 2) Our smugness blinds us to the truth. We claim to base our theology on no man, yet our church history contains names of those whose reforms we follow, just like everyone else. We are not above the cultural influences that have affected other times and denominations. Just like all Christians, we need to submit our programs and practices to the headship of Christ, and be thankful for God's grace where we get it wrong! Repentance and change continue to be necessary even among the best of us.

"So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!" 1 Cor. 10:12

THE HIDING CHURCH?

What do you think Christ's intentions are for His church? _____

In His book, Organic Church, Neil Cole says that the church today is "trying to avoid the threat that we were always meant to thwart" seen as "an impotent and frightened group that hides from the world and the reality that faces us." (Cole 5)

Do you see the church today as more defensive or offensive? _____

Do we have reason to be fearful? _____



ORIGINS

Some of the things that we do in church have been done so long that we just assume they must be sacred in origin and authentic New Testament stuff. That is not always so! Can you describe how these now common practices came about?

the altar call _____

the church bulletin _____

Sunday school _____

a passive, non-speaking congregation _____

the pulpit _____

"To look at something as though we had never seen it before requires great courage." Henri Matisse

"The very scary thing about religion, to me, is that people actually believe God is who they think He is."

Donald Miller, p.20 of *Searching for God Knows What*

Hmmm... What do you think?

WANT TO READ WHAT I READ?

LOSING OUR HEAD p. 2

Hughes, Richard T.. Reviving the Ancient Faith. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996.

THE HIDING CHURCH p. 2

Cole, Neil. Organic Church. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005.

WHERE DID IT COME FROM p. 4

Viola, Frank, and George Barna. Pagan Christianity?: Exploring the Roots of Our Christian Practices. 2nd. Tyndale House Publishers, 2008.

THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH

What example was Paul talking about in 1 Cor. 10:31-33? _____

If women were to be silent at church, then when was Paul talking about them praying or prophesying in 11:3-16? _____

Why don't we cover our heads? _____

What problem were they having with the Lord's Supper? _____

What is an unworthy manner in which to eat the bread and drink the cup? _____

What is the purpose of spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12)? _____

Who determines who gets which gift according to 12:11? _____

How do we determine giftedness in the church today? _____

What are some ways that we might be quenching the Spirit's work, and therefore harming the body? _____

What is the most excellent way? _____

Why is faith without love nothing (1 Cor. 13)? _____

Which spiritual gift are we to desire most (1 Cor. 14)? _____

What does prophecy do for people (14:3)? _____

Prophecy does not just mean a foretold future event, it also means an inspired word from God. (Meyers) Who can be a prophet? _____

In 14:26, Paul says that when they come together, **everyone** has a hymn, or word of instruction, a revelation, or a tongue, or an interpretation – all done for the strengthening of the church. How is that different than how we do things today? _____

How do you think that has affected the church? _____

How many does 14:31 say can prophesy? _____

What is to happen if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down (14:30)? _____



**ANSWERS
TO THIS
WEEK'S
PUZZLE**

ANSWERS TO LAST WEEK'S PUZZLE:

	Shinto		Christianity
	Hinduism		Islam
	Judaism		Sikhism
	Wicca		Taoism
	Jain		Baha'i



For questions or comments, contact me at:

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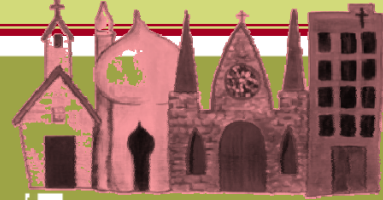
For more studies, visit me at:

<http://www.thelightedjourney.com>



PUZZLE PAGE

The Corinthian Church – Cor. 11-16

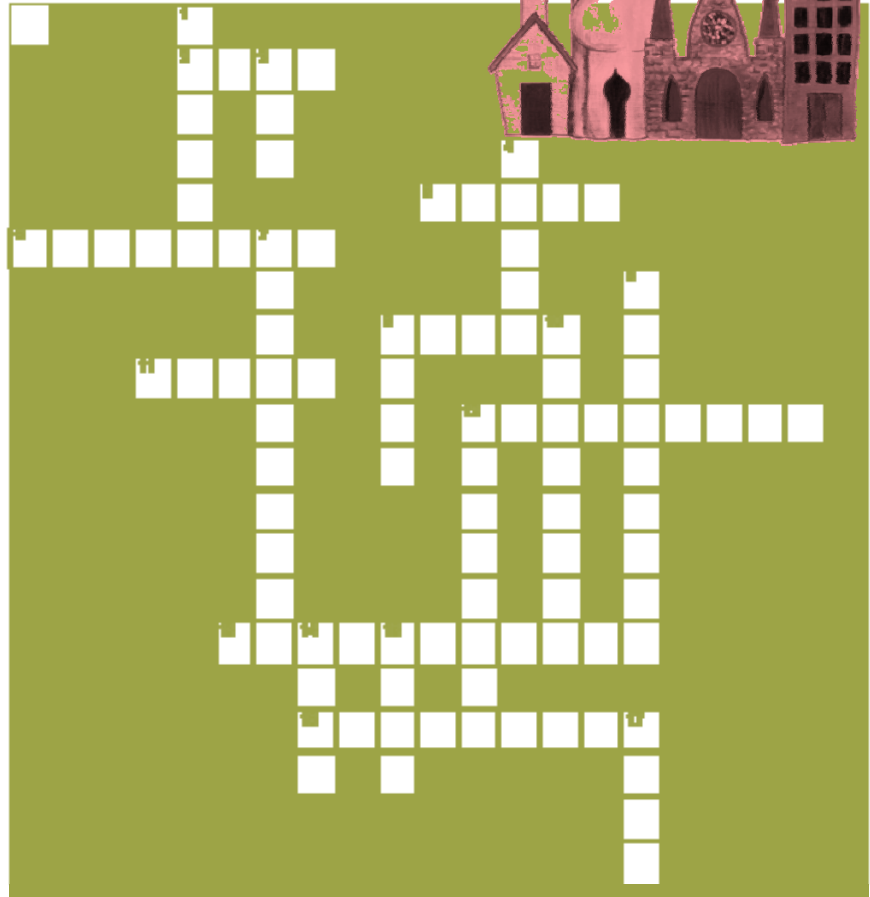


Across

- 2 to be covered by the woman who prays or prophesies 11:5 (4)
- 5 nothing without love 13:2 (5)
- 6 especially desire this gift 14:1 (8)
- 9 a church met at Priscilla and Aquilla's 16:19 (5)
- 11 how to give ourselves to the work of the Lord 15:58 (5)
- 12 useless if Christ did not rise 15:14 (9)
- 13 tongues are a sign for these 14:22 (11)
- 16 the Corinthians had trouble with this in their church 11:18 (9)

Down

- 1 edified by prophecy 14:4 (6)
- 3 the number who can prophesy in turn 14:31 (3)
- 4 given as the Spirit determines 12:4-11 (5)
- 7 taken for God's people in Jerusalem 16:1-4 (10)
- 8 Paul praised the Corinthians for holding to these 11:2 (9)
- 9 the Corinthian meetings did more of this than good 11:17 (4)
- 10 has a hymn, word of instruction, or a revelation 14:26 (8)
- 12 two or three of these should speak 14:29 (8)
- 14 made of many parts 12:12 (4)
- 15 patient, kind and hopeful 13:4-7 (4)
- 17 what the first speaker should do when a revelation comes to another 14:30 (4)



WHERE DID IT COME FROM?

We accept many, many things as customs of our “church service” even though they are not instructed by Scripture. Is there anything wrong with that? _____
Is there anything right with that? _____

The practice of the **altar call** was begun by Methodists in the eighteenth century. The **church bulletin** came about with the invention of stencil duplicating in 1884, allowing the printing of the order of worship, which has followed a pretty similar format in churches since Luther’s day. **Sunday school** was founded in Britain in 1780 to give poor children a chance at a basic education. The idea of a **passive, non-speaking congregation** arose along with the concept of clergy who basically became the functional head of the church. The **pulpit** (ambo), used by Jews and Greeks to deliver monologues, came into use in the church as early as 250 AD. (Viola and Barna)