The New “Normal”

1. **Mastering God’s Word is a Function of Time and Desire, but it is not optional for the Faithful!**
2. I Peter 2:1-12, we should desire the pure milk of the Word, but we are meant for much more than that. How did the Jews reject Jesus as a stumblingblock?

**3**

1. Hebrews 5:12-14, we are expected to grow past the milk stage promptly. Skill in the Word; we will soon answer to God Almighty concerning it.
2. 2 Timothy 2:15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth. NKJV
3. I Corinthians 3:1-2, it’s easy to forsake our studies, but it’s part of spiritual growth.
4. What’s the difference between the New Testament Church and denominations?

**7**

* No binding where God did not bind.
* No loosing where God did not loose.
* I Corinthians 4:6, we’re forbidden to think beyond what is written.
* I Peter 4:11, we’re to speak as the very oracles of God.

**3**

* Matthew 16:19 – could it possibly mean the apostles make it up as they go? It could only mean that the apostles made the Word known as it was made known (by inspiration) to them. Biblical consistency gives us no alternative.
* Colossians 3:17, we need Divine authority for our actions.

1. Even elders do not have authority to make up their own rules.

**9**

* Hebrews 13:17, we’re to obey them and they rule over the congregation.
* I Peter 5:1-3, they are not free to do as they please. Read the context for more!

1. **Extra Material from previous sermon “Tradition”**
2. Jesus on the Traditions of Men:
3. Matthew 15:1-20, the problem was not traditions, but the treating of traditions as being superior to, more important than, or supplanting God’s inspired Word.
4. Please compare the more detailed parallel account in Mark 7:1-23.
5. Would we ever think we should bind brethren with traditions of men?
6. What Traditions?
7. Consider the Pre-Pandemic Congregations:
   1. Where did their schedule come from? “The elders (men) decided that this was best.” Then how did 99% of the congregations across the United States come up with a cookie-cutter schedule?

* It is purely a work of the tradition of men.
* We’ve never had such an opportunity for a “reset” in our lifetimes!
* Establishing a new “normal” is tremendous responsibility that may never come again and should not be taken lightly or be treated with a knee-jerk reaction of swerving into the pre-dug ruts of habit.
* Many times since the schedule changed the offer has been made for Bible classes in homes, at the building, or even at other locations. Time, topic and class size were completely up to anyone accepting the offer.
* Is it wrong (sinful) to choose to do other things and miss a Wednesday night or a second Sunday assembly?
* Hebrews 10:24 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching. NKJV
  + An active choice. There’s an assembly, but they choose to be elsewhere. Some do this over & again, but once is too much!
* Why would we bind where God has not bound?
* The Passover had a second opportunity for those that could not participate (by Law), but I can’t find a single example in the New Testament pattern where the church met MORE THAN ONCE on the Lord’s Day.

1. Descriptions used for the New Testament Church…in the New Testament?

General Assembly / Church of the Firstborn, Hebrews 12:23 The Way, Acts 9:2; 19:9

Church of God, Acts 20:28; I Corinthians 1:2 Church of the Living God, I Timothy 3:15

churches of Christ, Romans 16:16 God’s Building / God’s Husbandry, I Corinthians 3:9

Body of Christ, I Corinthians 12:27; Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:12, Colossians 1:24

The Habitation of God, Ephesians 2:22 Heavenly Jerusalem, Hebrews 12:22

Flock of God, I Peter 5:2 God’s Heritage, I Peter 5:3

Golden Candlestick, Revelation 1:20 Holy City, Revelation 21:2

Bride of Christ, Revelation 21:9 Household of God, Ephesians 2:19

House of God, Hebrews 10:21; I Timothy 3:15 House of Christ, Hebrews 3:6

Israel of God, Galatians 6:16 Lamb’s Wife, Revelation 19:7; 21:9

Mount Zion, Hebrews 12:22 New Jerusalem, Revelation 21:2

Pillar and Ground of the Truth, I Timothy 3:15 Spiritual House, I Peter 2:5

Temple of God, I Corinthians 3:16-17 Temple of the Living God, 2 Corinthians 6:16

Vineyard, Matthew 21:41

* The point is not that the description of the congregation should be altered, but note the level of cookie-cutter conformity. Is this a compliance with the Word of God, or a compliance with the traditions of man?

1. How do we Grow as Christians?

* If we only rely on the church to provide our growth, we are failing.
* The New Testament pattern shows us that while the church met daily when the situation warranted it, they only met once per week on a consistent basis.
* Tradition can easily supplant the pattern in importance in our minds.
* Acts 17:11 …they received the Word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. NKJV
* This was daily Bible study by the Bereans.
* It was studying at home – they were not Christians yet.
* If we are not arming ourselves and building up our abilities on our own time, we’re missing the point. We’re commanded to!
* 2 Timothy 2:15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth. NKJV
* If people refuse to know their Bible, will more assemblies remedy that? I hand out study material with my sermon, almost every Lord’s Day. Classes have been offered to be held in homes, at the building and elsewhere.
  + Proverb 4:23 Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life. NKJV
  + Personal classes in a small group are usually more likely to get people to engage and interact than a larger setting.
  + When passive anonymity is allowed, and people are not held accountable for a working knowledge of the material, growth is only through self-motivation. Circular reasoning?
* Those not accountable to the Gospel (children, etc):
  + To put the responsibility of educating children in the Scriptures upon the church is tradition at best, but it is not at all the Word of God.
  + What New Testament Scripture authorizes the church to teach people who are not accountable to God? I can’t find it.
  + Ephesians 6:4 And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord. NKJV

1. Worship Service Arrangement:

* Order of the service:
  + - I was asked to lead singing as a new member. Any special order? No, just make sure you include all five acts of worship!
  + I always believed the Lord’s Supper should be AFTER the invitation, because we are commanded to partake as a congregation (I Cor 11:18), in one place (I Cor 11:20), waiting for one another (I Cor 11:33), on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7).
  + After the service a woman verbally accosted me because I had ‘condemned us all to Hell’ by ‘having the Lord’s Supper on the wrong side of the sermon.’
  + In spite of such clear Scripture, such practice has been chastised in this congregation, in spite of a clear explanation being offered.
  + Remember that when the New Testament church “came together to break bread,” (Acts 20:7) this did NOT mean it was the most important part of the worship services. Are any of the other four acts of worship expendable? How could one part be MORE important if they’re ALL REQUIRED? The Lord’s Supper is the ONLY act of worship we are commanded to assemble as a congregation, in one place, on the Lord’s Day to engage in. The other acts of worship can be done individually as well as collectively.
* Time frames:
* When we’re together, where’s our focus?
* The explanation of the need for more services is that people are not exposed to enough congregational time, but dictates are put upon the limited time we assemble.
* Sermons can be a waste of time, or they can be a helpful and encouraging study of God’s Word, regardless of their length.
* Movies can last 1.5 to 2 hours and few complain about their length, yet a service is traditionally limited to less.
* Our priority and commitment make a massive difference in our perspective.
* Attendance and participation:
* If it were a school function, an extracurricular activity, or even time with friends, consider the effort that would be made.
* If we have guests, we’ll show them what’s more important in our lives.
* It’s not about what I get out of an assembly, as much as giving me an opportunity to be an encouragement, if in no other way than being there and showing how important it is to me.
* When we have schedule conflicts, we will again show our priorities.
* Please prayerfully consider Matthew 6:24-34 and Luke 14:25-35.

1. So, then?
2. Traditions not wrong unless supplant, encroach upon, or compete w/ God’s Word.
3. As we have an opportunity to consider and order our new “normal” it must be done so prayerfully and with wisdom.
4. Traditions of men can be quite harmful:

* Galatians 1:13-14, Paul had once sought to destroy the church because he followed the traditions of his fathers.
* Colossians 2:8, cheated out of our salvation by the traditions of men.
* I Peter 1:17-21, the tradition of the fathers was aimless conduct, but Jesus (the Word) is manifest and available for us all.

1. **How it’s “always been done” vs. the New Testament Example:**

Men’s Business Meetings – Congregational Meetings (A)

Men’s Business Decisions – Congregational Decisions (A)

Mid-Week Services – One Sunday Service (B)

Encourage Avoiding Assemblies – Command Attendance (C)

Collection – Approved (D)

1. Only Men or the Whole Congregation?

**11**

1. Acts 6:1-5, our one New Testament example of congregational decisions being made when there is no eldership.
2. Matthew 7:21-23, many will say to Me in that Day, ‘Lord, Lord…’

* Abuse of a system does not mean the system is the error.
* An idea is not responsible for those that claim to believe in it.
* Were the crusades a “Christian” war, or was that a hollow claim?
* If people abused “Christianity”, do we ditch the whole concept?
* Many of recorded history’s most horrendous acts were to “God’s glory.”
* Being sincere doesn’t make one right.

1. Obviously women need to know and maintain their place, but part of their place is being a member of the congregation as a disciple.
2. I Corinthians 14:15-16, 23 - We have uninformed members even among those represented by a man who’s in the men’s meetings!
3. Mid-Week Services?
4. What’s the point?

**14**

1. The point is not study of God’s Word – this is to be done.

2 Timothy 2:15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth. NKJV

1. 2. The point is not getting together – this is to be done.

Romans 12:10 Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; NKJV

1. 3. The point is “church function” as opposed to individual actions.

I Timothy 5:9 Do not let a widow under sixty years old be taken into the number, and not unless she has been the wife of one man…16 If any believing man or woman has widows, let them relieve them, and do not let the church be burdened, that it may relieve those who are really widows. NKJV

1. Galatians 6:10, we do good to all, all the more to faithful brethren.
2. New Testament Pattern (Frequency):
3. The New Testament church met once on Sunday, Acts 20:7.
4. While there were extenuating circumstances to meet more often at times, they were extenuating circumstances, and were certainly not “normal.”
5. The problem and a solution:
6. Are those choosing to not attend a second Sunday or mid-week service wrong? Is it sin?
7. Hebrews 10:24 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching. NKJV
8. I’ve had preachers emphatically demand that these are “assembling” of the saints, so they’re just as binding as any Sunday service.
9. Is this binding where God has not bound? Isn’t THIS sinful?
10. Nothing wrong with home Bible studies, home singings, or even socializing. No binding, no pressure, just awesome opportunity!
11. Complications with the status quo.

**17**

1. Some people have greater burden than others to make the extra assemblies.
2. It can make for some tough choices for some people.
3. If it’s tough to assemble on the Lord’s Day, or to be baptized for the forgiveness of sins, of to observe the Lord’s Supper, those things are required by the New Testament pattern, so they have to be dealt with.
4. Who are we to impose more upon anyone?
5. When as assembly is posted on the front of the building, it is a church activity. Many believe it is sinful to choose to be elsewhere for posted assemblies.
6. Personally, it bothers my conscience to be a part of extra assemblies, yet it bothers my conscience to stay home. How do you fix that?
7. How did we revert back to this? Was it need or just tradition?

* Recall that while we were limiting to one Sunday assembly per week, offers were made many times over for studies at your convenience of time, place, topic and audience.
* There were very few takers.
* Attendance at Wednesday assemblies is much smaller than on Sunday.

1. Pros and cons:
2. If we have a get-together at a member’s home, I would not announce it in the assembly because it has nothing to do with the work of the church, but do we consider it sin to miss?

**19**

1. Home Bible studies can be combined with socializing as they are not a work of the church, but of individuals.
2. There should be nothing wrong with announcing or posting Bible studies in the assemblies, as this is something the church is to promote.
3. While everyone should want to participate, nobody is condemned for being absent and matters of conscience are much more limited.
4. Attendance: Should we Avoid it or Not?
5. Being driven by Fear or Faith:

**20**

1. “If you’re not well, thank you for not being here!”
2. The “mainstream” news media and many politicians want us to live in fear. Don’t buy into that; it’s too expensive!
3. In Texas – no attendance of families unless every person is masked. Visitors? Infants? Emphysema?
4. Personal responsibility is required of us all.
5. If I stayed home every time I had a sniffle or just didn’t feel well, I’d be gone the majority of the time.
6. I’d rather encourage all of my brethren to be here rather than encourage them to NOT make the assemblies, Proverb 12:25.
7. What leads to edification?
8. We don’t have to shake hands or hug, and those who may be sick can certainly take reasonable precautions, but if I isolate myself and one person that has contact with me has come from any public place, I could just as well be “contaminated” or infected.
9. Romans 15:1 We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. 2 Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification. 3 For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me." NKJV
10. Matthew 11:28-30, we have a burden to carry and a toke to bear, but it’s okay.
11. Luke 1:36-37, nothing is impossible with God. He’s still in control today!
12. Galatians 6:2, bearing one another’s burdens is part of our job description.

**23**

1. Hebrews 3:7-16, would they chide us to “be reasonable” & go w/ solid numbers?
2. Proverb 3:5-12, we must not lean on our own understanding if we want success.
3. The Collection
4. I Corinthians 16:1-2, this could not have been a command to us, though it was a command to them. It was soon to be something they were commanded to be over and done with. They were forbidden to have this collection when Paul arrived there! “that there be no collections when I come.”
5. This is an approved example of how the New Testament can raise funds. The context shows us some of why we give, it shows us the when and who, but it is an approved example, not a direct command.

**26**

1. When the church has need and we are able, we should give. That’s part of being a member, Acts 9:28 So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out. NKJV
2. Should we pass the plate again?
3. It has been expressed to several of us that a fellow Christian says he is offended in conscience because this is not part of the worship service. He has said he will not return until it is changed. Others are troubled.
4. We don’t want to be a stumblingblock and there’s certainly nothing wrong with re-establishing the collection by passing the plate as we had done previously.
5. There are other options available if this bothers anyone else’s conscience or sensibilities, but it needs to be rectified.
6. **Avoiding the Drifting Ruts on the Trail:**
7. Trends?
8. We site problems with brethren using instrumental music, church “socials” or entertainment, church support of human institutions and the such because they have no Scriptural authority. They loose where God has not loosed.

**28**

1. We site problems with brethren when they are one-cuppers and the such because they are making rules where God did not. They bind where God did not bind.
2. If we bind or loose where God did not, are we accurately handling (rightly dividing) the Word, 2 Timothy 2:15?
3. But the Ruts of Generations Past!
4. Matthew 12:34-37, brood of vipers? Drifting ruts from generations!

**30**

1. Matthew 23:29-33, the fathers they were so proud of.
2. Luke 6:23-26, so did their fathers – not necessarily a good thing!
3. Luke 11:47-51, their blood will be required of this generation. WHY?
4. Survey says…
5. “Greg, I asked umpteen preachers about this and they all said something different than you, and they all agreed with each other.”

**33**

1. I Kings 22:5 Also Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, "Please inquire for the Word of the Lord today." 6 Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, about four hundred men, and said to them, "Shall I go against Ramoth Gilead to fight, or shall I refrain?" So they said, "Go up, for the Lord will deliver it into the hand of the king." 7 And Jehoshaphat said, "Is there not still a prophet of the Lord here, that we may inquire of Him?" 8 So the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "There is still one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah, by whom we may inquire of the Lord; but I hate him, because he does not prophesy good concerning me, but evil." And Jehoshaphat said, "Let not the king say such things!" NKJV

With the world seeming to unravel at the seams, do you want to make all the more sure we are adhering to the pattern God gave us to follow, or to the ruts cut ahead of us by the previous generation(s)?

**Judgment Day** is coming fast and there are no second attempts at success.

**34**

**Judgment Day** is not a day of decision, but a day of announcement. We either **decide here and now** to follow the Lord without exception or compromise, or else **we judge ourselves** unworthy of Everlasting life:

Acts 13:46 Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. NKJV

**WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?**

Hear The Gospel (John 5:24; Romans 10:17)

Believe the Word of God (John 3:16-18; John 8:24)

Repent Of Your Sins (Luke 13:1-5; Acts 2:38)

Confess Jesus as Christ (Matthew 10:32; Romans 10:10)

Be Baptized (Acts 22:16; Galatians 3:27)

Remain Faithful for Life (John 8:31; Rev. 2:10)

**FOR THE ERRING CHILD OF GOD:**

Repent (Acts 8:22), Confess (I John 1:9), Pray (Acts 8:22)

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