

Choosing a Local Assembly

Carl H. Stevens Jr. is pastor of Greater Grace World Outreach located in Baltimore, Maryland. Pastor Stevens is also chancellor of Maryland Bible College & Seminary and host of the international Christian radio program "The Grace Hour." This booklet, a Grace Publications classic, was created from a message preached by Pastor Stevens.

Pastor Stevens can be seen weekly on cable television stations throughout the United States. Call us for information regarding programming in your area.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the King James Version. Italics for emphasis are ours.

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INTRODUCTION

This message was preached in our local assembly in the fall of 1984. Our church is a non-denominational Christian ministry that honors all local churches through the operation of grace and by the practice of unconditional love. We are committed to teaching the objective Word of God through the study of categorical doctrine and the continual filling of the Holy Spirit.

This booklet presents scriptural guidelines in choosing a local church—a study of scriptures pertaining to this practical topic. Our prayer is that the Holy Spirit will lead you into “all truth” and that the contents of this booklet will prepare you for your choice of a local assembly. The Word of God promises, “I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye” (Psalm 32:8).

In all of our decisions, God Almighty is Sovereign. Daniel 4:35 reinforces that God is Master of His Master Plan: “And all the inhabitants of

the earth are reputed as nothing: and He doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?"

As you make your choice to become part of a local assembly, prepare yourself in prayer and with the Word of God—in total submission to God's sovereignty.

Chapter One

WHAT THE CHURCH BELIEVES

One of the questions we most often hear from believers is, “What are some of the factors I should consider when choosing a local church?” The decision to attend a particular church is just as important as choosing a partner to marry! Both decisions are relevant in their value for our destiny.

Four Initial Considerations

How does a person choose a local assembly? First, the Word of God must be the standard for decision-making. The decision must not be made by weighing convenience and comfortability.

Second, you should not choose a local church because of what it can give you. The Laodicean church can offer you many luxuries—cushioned pews, lavish decor. There is nothing wrong with any of these things, but if there are no godly convictions in the message, it lacks the most vital

thing: the presence of God. The pulpit may communicate ear-tickling messages or capture you by its natural eloquence and comfortable surroundings. But without God's presence, it may as well be a lecture hall.

Third, you should not choose a local church because your best friend goes there. In other words, personality appreciation should not be the reason for choosing a local church.

Fourth, you should not choose a local church because of tradition—because your family has attended that church for years. Have you ever heard someone say, "My granddaddy went there and we have been going there ever since." That church may be great, but that is not the standard by which we should choose a local assembly.

It is vitally important to test everything we believe by the Word of God. The Bible says that man must live by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4). The Word of God reveals the mind of Christ, and it teaches us how to choose a local church.

God has given us a free volition. We can choose a church based upon the Bible's viewpoint, or we can make our decision from natural viewpoint, motivated by sentimentality, com-

promise, and fleshly support. Let's study more deeply what God has to say on the subject.

The Right Emphasis: Christ and His Word

Carefully consider some crucial questions that must be answered before we can choose a local assembly. First of all, does this church stay true to all the cardinal doctrines of the faith? Does the church believe in the historical creed of the faith passed down by the apostles, given to us through our forefathers? Do they accept the inherent, infallible teaching of the Word of God? Do they believe that all Scripture is given as God-breathed?

The Bible says, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Does the church believe that no prophecy of Scripture is to be privately interpreted? "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy [Spirit]" (2 Peter 1:21). Use discernment; be certain that the church does not add or subtract from Scripture:

“...If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book” (Revelation 22:18b-19).

Beware if the pastor insists on privately interpreting the Bible. Find out exactly where the church stands in its presentation of the nature and character of God’s essence.

We believe in the gifts of the Spirit for the edification of the Body of Christ and the individual believer today. But we do not believe in their overemphasis. Christ and the objective Word of God should be our emphasis.

*Once it was the blessing, Now it is the Lord;
Once it was the feeling, Now it is His Word;
Once His gift I wanted, Now the Giver own;
Once I sought for healing, Now Himself alone.**

The Principle of Ignorance: No Excuses

Ignorance cannot be used as an excuse when we face God. A church member is responsible for all that God has allowed him to hear. If he

does not make a choice toward categorical doctrine, he will never escape responsibility by claiming that he is ignorant.

When you say, "I didn't know that," the Lord is going to say, "You could have known it!" "Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant..." (1 Corinthians 10:1). Also, in Job chapter 35 they were ignorant and did not understand the light. Still, ignorance is no excuse for born-again believers, because we have all been given the same Holy Spirit who convicts of truth. Thousands of people are going to lose their reward at the Bema Seat because they haven't chosen the right local church. Many people think it does not matter, but the objective truth from Scripture is very clear.

Many Christian singers are more involved with entertaining than imparting the word of life to the audience. Who wants to be entertained when souls are going to hell? Christians should love the Finished Work, and the Word of God. A worship service should center on teaching the Word.

The Whole Counsel of God

The local church you join should have categorical doctrine, but it should also believe dog-

matically that Christ has finished the work of redemption—*forever!* (John 19:30). The work of salvation is by grace alone: grace plus nothing! (Romans 11:6). We receive grace for salvation, in Ephesians 2:8-9. We receive grace for growing, in 2 Peter 3:18: “But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.” This includes repentance, in 1 John 1:9.

A ministry that doesn't understand the nature of God and His grace cannot express unconditional love to its members. When a church adds works to grace, the people inevitably become involved in other systems that are not divine. Infiltration of legalism, taboos, status symbols, and religious works will characterize that ministry.

A ministry that takes grace as a license to sin and does not hold true to the whole counsel of God's Word is a ministry filled with lasciviousness. A ministry that does not stay true to the tenets of grace is guilty of antinomianism and lasciviousness. “They profess that they know God; but in works they deny Him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate” (Titus 1:16).

“For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condem-

nation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ" (Jude 4).

Eternal Security

The next consideration is whether or not the pastor-teacher and the congregation study and apply the whole counsel of God. Learn to detect false teaching by applying the Word of God to every aspect of life within the church. The most fundamental belief in Christianity is the unlimited atonement. Christ finished the work that was necessary for salvation on the Cross. Still, many churches deny the principle of eternal security, and by doing so directly attack the nature of God.

Make it a point to find out if the church believes in eternal security. If it does not, it cannot reveal God's character, limiting your capacity to think and live with God. If the pastor does not reveal the truth about who God is, then he will not reveal the truth about what Christ has done. If you don't know the truth about who God is and what He has done, how will you be able to function in God?

Anyone who does not believe in eternal security will inevitably put other people under

bondage with legalism. Those who listen to pastors who deny the Finished Work of Christ do not know the true nature of God. Consequently, they are not able to experience what they have not been taught. Many Christians do not know how important this issue is. Very little has been written on this topic because many pastors do not teach the truth concerning the principle of eternal security.

Do not become familiar with this issue through mental slothfulness. Millions and millions are defecting from God's perfect plan because they have committed themselves to the wrong local assembly and they have become discouraged. All churches, including ours, must be evaluated from a scriptural viewpoint.

A Worldwide Vision for the Lost

Next, consider the global vision of the ministry to preach the Gospel. "Where there is no vision, the people perish..." (Proverbs 29:18). Does the pastor-teacher motivate his congregation to take an active part in God's vision for that particular church? (Note the following verses: Acts 1:8, Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-16, Luke 24:46-47, John 20:21.) Do they really have a vision to reach the lost and those who are in need

of healing? (Luke 19:10, Matthew 14:14). Do church members practice meekness—forgiving one another as Christ has forgiven us? (Colossians 3:12-13). Do they have a vision in word only or in the power of practical application? “For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power” (1 Corinthians 4:20).

Does that local ministry seek God’s kingdom first (Matthew 6:33)? Are they after *people* or are they after God *for* people?

There are many wonderful local assemblies where the pastor-teacher and the members live by every Word of God, winning souls, building up the brethren, always seeking to edify others. Pray, as King David did in Psalm 25:5: “Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day.”

** Taken from A.B. Simpson’s poem, “Himself”; used by permission of Christian Publications, Inc., Harrisburg, PA 17101*

Chapter Two

CHURCH GOVERNMENT

Another area to consider when choosing a local assembly is the structure of the church government. From the pastor-teacher to the newest members of the church, we all need to understand the principle of delegated authority. Portions in the Body of Christ need to be utilized, mobilized and organized. Elders should be given delegated authority to minister in certain situations. This is wise leadership. Yet, this authority is to be delegated from one pastor-teacher.

One pastor-teacher is to be responsible to Jesus Christ for any particular assembly. (Ephesians 4:11-16, Titus 1:5, 7). The pastor-teacher is to be the chief administrator as well as the communicator of Bible doctrine—the head of the table of organization.

The Bible is filled with examples of the principle of one pastor-teacher. Apollos was the pastor-teacher in Corinth, (Acts 19:1, 1 Corinthians

3:6). At different times, Timothy and Titus were pastor-teachers in Corinth (1 Corinthians 4:17, 2 Corinthians 12:18). In Philippi, Epaphroditus was the only pastor-teacher (Philippians 2:25). In Ephesus, John was the only pastor-teacher. He succeeded the great man of God, Paul, who taught there for three years.

These men definitely needed and humbly received the help of many portions in the Body of Christ. Nevertheless, they were each responsible for the spiritual progress of their assembly under the headship of Jesus Christ, the one and only Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4). The seven churches of Revelation chapters 2 and 3 had one "*angelos*" or messenger each. Therefore, in light of the Word of God and church history, and in order to function according to Scripture, a church must have one pastor-teacher.

In addition to the pastor-teacher, the right church government is made up of deacons who function according to 1 Timothy 3, Titus 2 and Acts 6. The principle of delegated authority, beginning with Christ as the head of the Church, is one of the most important biblical premises to consider when joining a local church, and can be more thoroughly understood with additional study.

The Pastor-Teacher

Many born-again pastors do not know the true nature of God. Consequently, it is very difficult for the congregation to know God in His divine essence. Unless the pastor-teacher has an intimate heart relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, he will be incapable of leading his congregation to the Cross. Unless he is willing to lose his life, he will not find it. Unless he is anointed by God to preach the Word, he cannot impart God's life to others. It is impossible for a pastor to derive his life from Jesus Christ unless he is in communion with Christ through the Holy Spirit.

In many churches around the world, the Word is preached in the guise of intellectual knowledge and earthly wisdom. Is it any wonder why individual lives don't change? Yet, a remnant of believers are genuinely on fire for God. Their lives testify by the abundance of fruit they produce. Spirit-filled pastor-teachers who lay down their lives for their "sheep" produce disciples who go into all the world to preach the Gospel!

Another important consideration is this: Does the pastor demonstrate personal fervency

toward the study of the Word of God? A love for the Word will be seen in his precision as he rightly divides Scripture in the messages. Furthermore, he will encourage every believer to study the Word for himself. (See the following verses: 2 Timothy 2:15, Colossians 1:10, Philippians 1:9-11 & 19-21, Ephesians 3:16-19.)

Does he preach the whole counsel of God? The pastor may be a good fellow, educated in seminary, but not prepared to communicate doctrine. Paul said, "For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). Does he preach the Word in love, in season and out of season? (2 Timothy 4:2). Does he reprove, rebuke, exhort with all divine, delegated, legitimate authority? Does he communicate doctrine with authority? Does he let his yea be yea and nay be nay? (Matthew 5:37). Or, is he fearful of the congregation's reaction? Does his message lose its sting because he is not willing to declare the whole counsel of God?

Our capacity for details of life will not go beyond the measure of doctrine that is imparted to us categorically. Categorical doctrine is truth from the Bible on related individual subjects that can be put together in the same doctrinal category, such as the doctrine of forgiveness. This

enables believers to think with God in accurate light, as set forth in the Word of God. (Study the following verses: 2 Peter 1:4, Psalm 119:133, Psalm 37:24, 2 Corinthians 10:4-5). How will we ever reach maturity if we are not given mature instructions?

“But the Comforter, which is the Holy [Spirit], whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26).

The Holy Spirit only reveals what you have received from Christ. He brings into remembrance what Jesus has taught us.

We cannot live beyond the content of what we think; we cannot think beyond the content of what we have received; and we cannot receive if we are never in a position to hear the Word of God. (Romans 10:17).

Godly Convictions

The local church should have a balanced intercessory prayer emphasis based upon consistent commitment from the people in the church. A 24-hour prayer chain could be established to fulfill the prayer commission of Ephesians 6:18, “Praying always with all prayer and supplica-

tion in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints." We are instructed in the Word of God to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17), "with one accord" (Acts 1:14a) for "men ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18:1).

The prayer emphasis in a local church will determine the degree of its spirituality. Praying does not make us spiritual but it reflects our commitment to derive our life from God. Individual members should be encouraged to develop a solid devotional life, as well as corporate prayer. Husbands are responsible for the spiritual leadership in the home; therefore they are held responsible before God to establish a devotional life for their wives and family.

Finally, does the church tolerate slander, maligning or gossip? Does either the pastor or church members tolerate evil speaking? If they do and you know about it, you are committing spiritual adultery if you go there (Matthew 7:1-2, Romans 2:1-2, James 4:11-12, Romans 14:4, and Romans 14:10-13).

We are all sinners, but we must learn to repent and recover when we fail. We must practice true repentance as set forth in 1 John 1:9 and Proverbs 29:3: "If we confess our sins, He is

faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). "Whoso loveth wisdom rejoiceth his father: but he that keepeth company with harlots spendeth his substance." (Proverbs 29:3). We don't cover our sin; we confess to God and find mercy.

In God's eyes, His church is perfect, but with imperfect members. We all fall short in certain areas. But God wants us to beware of the *continual practice* of sin, rather than an occasional transgression. If we fail, do we quickly turn to the right point of reference, the infallible Word of God, and confess our failures to God? People in a local assembly ought to know each other after Christ, not after the flesh (2 Corinthians 5:16).

Every local church needs to grow in wisdom, but it is better to start out with the Finished Work message and keep on that road. That is how we should handle the imperfections: Teach people the Finished Work! If any single area in the ministry is not covered with the truth, it will result in wrong trends that develop in people's lives. These may not appear to be negative trends at first, but in time they will be!

Dealing with Sin

Do they practice divine order in church discipline? When members of the congregation practice sin, does the person who knows about it go alone to the person who sinned? (Matthew 18:16). Do they practice accepting an accusation only when there are at least two witnesses?

"One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established" (Deuteronomy 19:15).

Do they deal with sin Biblically? What happens if the person who sinned repents and forsakes his sin? (Matthew 18:21,22; Ephesians 4:32; and Colossians 3:13). Has the pastor taught the congregation to forgive and forget unconditionally? Divine forgiveness always forgets. Do they love one another or do they make a practice of repeating the matter to others? "He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends" (Proverbs 17:9). Are they born for adversity when it comes in? "A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity" (Proverbs 17:17). The Scripture is very clear on this point.

I thank God for those who love this teaching of grace orientation, the Finished Work, the two great commandments to love God and to love one another (Matthew 22:37-40), and the great commission to go into all the world preaching the gospel, teaching, and baptizing—making disciples in every nation (Matthew 28:19-20).

Chapter Three

THE REVELATION OF THE BODY OF CHRIST

Another important question relevant to choosing a local church is this: Does the local church teach and practice corporate body truth? 1 Corinthians 12:12-13 teaches this principle: "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free: and have been all made to drink into one Spirit."

Believers must understand the positional truth of the Body so that they will be in union with our head, Jesus Christ. (Note the following scriptures: Ephesians 5:30, 1 Corinthians 6:17, Ephesians 1:22-23.) Jesus Christ is the head and we are His body—"the fulness of him that filleth all in all" (Ephesians 1:23*b*). In other words, does

the church teach that when we are saved, we are placed into union with Christ as His body through the Holy Spirit? (See Titus 3:5). We are all made to drink from one spirit.

In practical application, the corporate body of Christ receives from the pastor-teacher (Ephesians 4:11) to accomplish the three-fold purpose of Ephesians 4:12, which results in Ephesians 4:13. Verse 11 says, "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers." Verse 12 says, "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:" And verse 13 concludes, "Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

Negative volition toward God results in Ephesians 4:17-19: "This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind. Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart. Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness."

Positive volition toward what the pastor-teacher teaches from the Word of God results in Ephesians 4:14, "That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive."

Believers who use positive volition toward the pastor-teacher's ministry will experience the benefits spoken of in Ephesians 4:15-16 as well as Ephesians 4:32:

"But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love."

"And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

Do the believers in the church lay down their lives to bare one another's burden fulfilling the law of love? (Galatians 6:2, 1 John 3:14). When they meet, do they edify one another? Does their speech minister grace?: "Let no cor-

rupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers" (Ephesians 4:29).

Does the church follow the instruction of Romans 12:19-21?: "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."

Built into a Spiritual House

Concerning the principle of edification, do the church members build up one another into a spiritual house? "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5).

Have the believers been built up by categorical doctrine in their soul? "That he would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in

love, May be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God" (Ephesians 3:16-19).

An Attitude of Love

Consider the attitude of love amongst church members. Does the church produce an atmosphere where people know that God loves them in adversity, tribulation, persecution, as well as when they sin? Does the church teach the Word of God in a loving atmosphere so that everyone experiences that God loves each individual with the same kind of love?

God loves every individual with unlimited divine capacity. His love never changes, for God *is* love! (1 John 4:8). (Note the following verses: Romans 5:6-8, Jeremiah 31:3, Ezekiel 16:8, Zephaniah 3:17, John 13:1.) The church has a powerful commission to love the brethren! If a man sins, and he is treated with the same love that he experienced before he sinned to restore him, he will know that he is in the right church. I am referring to the general attitude of the pastor of the ministry, rather than the members who follow

his example.

Do the church members love each other with unconditional love? "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another" (John 13:34). (See also: John 15:9, John 15:12, 1 John 3:14). Do the members reveal that they belong to God's royal family and love one another with God's unconditional love or are they petty, indifferent, judgmental, resentful and reactionary? While they do practice the love of God, does the ministry also take a stand against sin, and unrighteousness? Do they live by the conviction that Christians are ministers of grace and love? Does the ministry teach that faith is the only way to please God? Do members respond to the promises of grace?

"But without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6).

(See also Romans 1:17, 2 Corinthians 5:7). Even as salvation is by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8), so we must go from faith to faith as we grow (Romans 1:17). We know that faith is the act of believing God's Word which leads to receiving unmerited favor from God.

The Family

Every one of us who call ourselves Christians will have to give an answer to God at the Bema Seat, because we are personally responsible for our walk with God. Did we lead our families by the Holy Spirit's guidance, the divine guidance spoken of in Romans 8:14-15?:

"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father."

Did we allow the Word of Christ to dwell in us richly? (Colossians 3:16). Did we live by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God? (Matthew 4:4). Did we allow God to lead us where the shepherd feeds the flock and causes them to rest at noon? (Song of Solomon 1:7).

The institution of the family is sacred in God's sight. Decisions made by both a husband and his wife must be based upon the objective Word of God in every situation. Children should be brought up "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). The pastor-teacher is responsible to invest in both the husband and the wife so that each member of the family, in-

cluding the children, will grow in their capacity to serve God and be filled with the Word. Developing the right spiritual balance in the family is vital.

Proverbs 11:1 says, "A false balance is abomination to the Lord: but a just weight is His delight." Seek the proper balance. First, develop your own prayer life, then invest what you receive from the Lord in your family. Serve in the local church wholeheartedly in whatever God calls you to do. Build with gold, silver, and precious stones that will remain forever rather than wood, hay, and stubble that will be burned to ashes (1 Corinthians 3:9-17).

If a woman is saved and her husband is not, she should heed these instructions: "Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives" (1 Peter 3:1).

Brand-New Options

When you are in the right church with the right pastor-teacher and the right body of believers, you will begin to develop a capacity in your conscience. This is the principle: Our conscience can make either right decisions or wrong

decisions—that is up to us. If we make wrong decisions, Satan steals our capacity for right decisions. When we make right decisions, we have brand-new options.

For example, when you learn the doctrine of eternal security, you have a new option in knowing that you are saved forever, according to 1 John 5:13. Then, when you begin to understand the doctrine of rebound, you discover the option not to continue in sin that grace may abound (Romans 6:2, 15-16).

Because we do have an old sin nature, and we have sinned, we can now confess sin and name it, and have our conscience cleansed, even though the sin is not on the record against us. And even if it has to be seven times a day (in some cases) before victory finally establishes the conscience (Proverbs 24:16), we can rebound and really mean it!

The more of the Word of God you have, the more options you will have. That is why it is so important to be in the right local assembly with the right pastor-teacher, hearing the right words to make right decisions in an evil and corrupt world. The right pastor-teacher will invest in you, pray for you, and study diligently to teach you.

A Word in Closing

The last point we would like to emphasize concerns the congregation's relationship with the pastor-teacher. "Remember them which have rule over you who have spoken unto you the Word of God, whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation" (Hebrews 13:7).

We must always put God first in our lives. Obey the *whole* counsel of God. Do not listen to those who teach contrary to the objective Word of God.

The congregation should never adulate the pastor-teacher, nor put him ahead of the Lord. At the same time, they should realize that he has been gifted by the Lord to help further that church in its spiritual growth. The Word of God that he preaches needs to be received and applied as the Word of God.

These points on how to choose a local church have been given so that you will be able to make a mature and informed decision before God. Just as the wrong choice for a partner produces an unhappy marriage, the wrong choice for a church may produce a limited or an unhappy Christian life.

There is, however, a far greater reason for

choosing the right church. You and I are responsible to God for our decisions. Ask God to lead you to the place where He feeds His flock (Song of Solomon 1:7).

"For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the Word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe" (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

CONCLUSION

How many churches would fit the scriptural definition of a right local church? How many churches would be outside the realm of a possible choice when we consider obeying God's Word as our sole premise for our choice? You will find that most decisions for church attendance are made based upon comfort and convenience. "My friend goes there." "My wife feels good in that church." "My boy..."—all of these examples are the wrong reasons for choosing a church. In summary, if the church you go to does not point to the Cross daily because of godly convictions, it is the wrong church.

The Holy Spirit will lead you into *all* truth, and He will guide you into the right decision regarding a "church home." Thank Him today for leading you to the right local church where you can serve Him fervently with an undivided heart.