

The **Bible** Unpacked

This series of studies is based on the
Intermediate Edition of The Bible Unpacked.

There are seven editions of *The Bible Unpacked*.
These aim to address the needs of
NON-CHRISTIANS through to MATURE CHRISTIANS,
from TEENAGERS to ADULTS.

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Intermediate Study Series

A compilation of the Bible's teaching
for believers growing in the faith

paul mallison

The Bible Unpacked™

Intermediate Study Series

A compilation of the Bible's teaching
for believers growing in the faith

Part F. Church Life

Composed by Paul Mallison

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An Appeal on Behalf of Persecuted Christians

Over 200 million Christians in at least 60 countries are denied basic human rights solely because of their faith. (Source: World Evangelical Alliance) Every year many Christians are killed because of their faith.

Through prayer, encouragement and practical assistance we can assist and fellowship with persecuted Christians in their suffering. You can play a vital part in this through contacting one of the organizations listed below. Most produce regular news/prayer letters.

Barnabas Fund – www.barnabasfund.org

It provides material and spiritual support in response to needs identified by local Christian leaders.

Christian Faith and Freedom – www.cffreedom.org

It advocates on behalf of and aids persecuted Christians.

Christian Solidarity International – www.csi-int.org

CSI works to defend religious liberty and help persecuted Christians.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide – www.csw.org.uk

It advocates for freedom of religion and justice for persecuted believers.

Compass Direct – www.compassdirect.org

This is a Christian news service providing news, reports, interviews and analyses of situations facing persecuted Christians.

Open Doors – sb.od.org; www.opendoors.org.au

It provides Bibles and other Christian materials, to prepare believers for persecution and equip them to maintain a witness to the Gospel.

Religious Liberty Commission – www.worldevangelicals.org/commissions/rlc/; www.ea.org.au/ea-family/Religious-Liberty.aspx

RLC defends and aids persecuted Christians. See also www.idop.org Receive weekly updates by sending a blank email to join-rlpb@hub.xc.org.

The Bible League – www.bibleleague.org/persecuted; www.bibleleague.com

It supplies Bibles to persecuted Christians and also provides training.


Voice of the Martyrs – www.persecution.com; www.persecution.com.au


VOM provides Bibles, literature, radio broadcasts and other assistance to help persecuted Christians spread the gospel. They also send material aid.


Then the King will answer, ‘I tell you the truth, anything you did for even the least of my people here, you also did for me.’ Matthew 25:40 NCV

Overview of *The Bible Unpacked*


There are seven editions of *The Bible Unpacked*, as shown below. Each edition is an abbreviated version of the next longest edition. As such they have similar structures. Four of the editions have studies based on them, with the same text along with questions. For more details and free downloads of all the material, go to www.thebibleunpacked.net.

 **Two-Minute Edition:** Key Bible teachings for people “on the run”
For giving to non-Christians.


 **Pocket Edition:** Key Bible teachings for seekers of truth
Largely for giving to inquiring non-Christians or young new Christians.

 **Concise Edition:** A look at the Bible’s teaching for new and young believers. For either new or young Christians. Suitable to give to non-Christian friends. Has study series based on it.




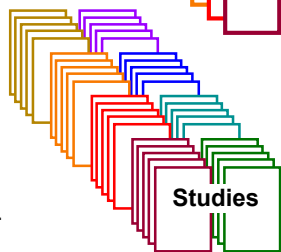
 **Foundations Edition:** A compilation of the Bible’s teaching for believers consolidating their faith. For newer Christians. Study series is ideal for studies with newer believers.




 **Intermediate Edition:** A compilation of the Bible’s teaching for believers growing in the faith. For developing a sound understanding of the faith. Studies are excellent for Bible study groups.



 **Comprehensive Edition:** A compilation of the Bible’s teaching for believers established in the faith. For a comprehensive knowledge of the faith. Useful as a study or a devotional tool - and preparing talks. Studies are ideal for studying topics in detail.



 **In-Depth Edition:** A compilation of the Bible’s teaching for teachers and students of the Bible. For Christians keen to gain a deep understanding of their faith. Useful for speakers preparing talks, study groups leaders, Bible students and Bible colleges. It is also in an electronic version, which is a PDF file.

Electronic
Version

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A Quick Word

This series of studies aims to present a compilation of the Bible's teachings in a clear and readable order. There are eight booklets in the series, based on the eight parts of the book *The Bible Unpacked - Intermediate Edition*. Each booklet has five chapters, with two sections each. These ten sections can be used for ten or more studies.

See *Topics in This Series* towards the end of this booklet for a full listing of all the topics. Note that studying booklets alternatively from the two major sections (*What to Know* and *What to Do*) would add variety.

The material contains Bible verses. Before the verses are headings, which reflect what the verses say – in particular the parts of the verses in *italics*. The verses are sometimes followed by a comment.

The verses often have a brief introduction. Usually these state who is speaking and often who they are speaking to. Apart from God and Jesus Christ, the main speakers are:

- Moses – who led the Israelites out of Egypt and taught them God's laws;
- David – Israel's greatest king who wrote many of the psalms, most of which are essentially prayers;
- Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and other prophets – who spoke to the people of Israel on God's behalf; and
- Paul, Peter, John and other leaders of the early church – who spoke to various groups and wrote letters to believers.

Much care has been taken in order to correctly interpret the verses. Nevertheless, if you encounter a verse that is used to teach something that is contrary to or goes beyond your understanding, assess its use by doing such things as: reading the passage it is from; and considering how its teaching fits in with Scripture as a whole (e.g. interpret OT teaching in the light of NT teaching).

For more information on *The Bible Unpacked* and free downloads, go to the website: www.thebibleunpacked.net

Paul Mallison

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- II. God's Pre-Eminence

2. God's Character

- I. Holy Characteristics
- II. Loving Characteristics

3. Jesus Christ

- I. General
- II. Jesus Christ and God

4. The Holy Spirit

- I. General
- II. God, Christ and the Holy Spirit as One

5. Angels, Satan and Demons

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Part B. God and the World: Basics

6. God's Creation

- I. General
- II. God's Creation of People

7. God's Sovereignty

- I. God's Supreme Authority
- II. God's Control over the World

8. God's Word

- I. General
- II. Key Old Testament Covenants

9. The Problem of Sin

- I. General
- II. The Law's Provision for Israel's Sin

10. God's Judgment

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Part C. God and the World: Jesus Christ

11. God's Promised Messiah

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12. Jesus Christ's Mission

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14. The New Order

- I. Jesus Christ and the Law's Diminished Role
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15. 'The Last Things'

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17. Keys to God's Interaction with His People

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18. God's Transformation of His People

- I. General
- II. Spiritual Attributes

19. God's Care of His People

- I. God's Saving of His People
- II. God's Preservation of His People

20. God's Plans for His People

- I. General
- II. God's Plans for Israel

Suggestions for Study Groups

Preliminary matters:

- Beforehand the leader should: check the context of any verses they are not familiar with; and review the questions. If need be, they should compose questions more applicable to the group.
- Each person should have a Bible, for things such as checking a verse's context. It would also be helpful to have Bible commentaries on hand.
- Pray before beginning the study. Ask God for help in understanding the meaning of the verses and to affect your lives through them. Also pray together at the end.

Doing the study:

- Ideally, read the material and answer the questions prior to the meeting. Then share answers and discuss any issues arising from the material in the meeting.
- Alternatively, read the material and answer the questions in the meeting – reading either aloud as a group or individually (prior to sharing answers). If reading as a group, **try having one person read the headings, another read the verses and another read the comments.** Additionally, a fourth person could read the Bible references.
- Answers need not be limited to only what is mentioned in the material.
- The group should feel free to diverge from the study if related issues arise.

General or concluding questions:

If time permits, conclude with one or more of the following questions:

- What is something that you either: **did not know** before; gained **greater insight** into; or **needed reminding** of?
- What verse would be helpful to memorize and bear in mind during the next week?
- In taking the verses seriously, is there anything you should change in:
 - (a) how you relate to God or to other people; or
 - (b) any other area of your life (e.g. attitudes, values or behavior)?
 If so, are there any specific steps you could take to do this?

Why is the Bible critical for Christian teaching?

What is one aspect of the way good preachers teach that you find helpful, as a listener?

Choose a common characteristic of false teaching and – if you can – give an example of how it can be seen in false teaching in the church today.

How can we recognize false teachers and false teaching?

If you were aware of false teaching in your church or fellowship, what action could you take?

False teachers typically deny Jesus Christ

Who, then, is the liar? It is those who say that Jesus is not the Messiah. Such people are the Enemies of Christ—they reject both the Father and the Son. 1 JOHN 2:22 GNT

False teachers (in view here) typically deny or dilute key aspects of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

False Teachers (II): Guarding against Them

Watch out for false teachers and their teaching – so as not to be deceived

Watch out for false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are voracious wolves. MATTHEW 7:15

Let nobody deceive you with empty words, for because of these things God’s wrath comes on the sons of disobedience. EPHESIANS 5:6

Test teachers by comparing their teaching with the Scriptures

The people of Berea were more open-minded than the people of Thessalonica. They were very willing to receive God’s message, and *every day they carefully examined the Scriptures to see if what Paul said was true.* ACTS 17:11 GW

False teachers can be recognized by their “fruit”

You will recognize them by their fruit. Grapes are not gathered from thorns or figs from thistles, are they? ¹⁷In the same way, *every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit.* ¹⁸A good tree is not able to bear bad fruit, nor a bad tree to bear good fruit.

MATTHEW 7:16–18

As used here, “fruit” is that which one’s inner being or character produces – basically one’s words and actions. In a secondary sense, the effect of one’s words and actions – particularly on other people – is also one’s produce or “fruit”.

26. Being One Body

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I. General

The New Testament deals extensively with how we should relate to other Christians and with issues vital for the life of the church. Amongst the most prominent themes are the need for unity and love. Fellowship is another important concept that we need to grasp, with it being involved in a number of aspects of church life.

The Church as One Body

Church members form one body – the body of Christ

[PAUL, TO THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH:] *A person's body is only one thing, but it has many parts. Though there are many parts to a body, all those parts make only one body. Christ is like that also. ...*²⁷*Together you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of that body.* 1 CORINTHIANS 12:12, 27 NCV™

The term “the body of Christ” figuratively depicts the spiritual union of Jesus Christ with his people. Moreover, it points to the unity Christ’s people have together in their relationship with him. While the worldwide church is the whole “body of Christ”, each local church is a form of “the body of Christ”. And in each case the many members together make one body.

Being one body, church members meet together

[PAUL:] Also, greet for me *the church that meets at their house.* ROMANS 16:5A NCV™

[THE WRITER, TO BELIEVERS:] *Let us not give up the habit of meeting together,* as some are doing. Instead, let us encourage one another all the more, since you see that the Day of the Lord is coming nearer. HEBREWS 10:25 GNT

Church members function together as one church body

The men who were sent by the church went through Phoenicia and Samaria, telling how the Gentiles had turned to God. This news made the Lord’s followers very happy.⁴When the men arrived in Jerusalem, *they were welcomed by the church,* including the apostles and the leaders. ACTS 15:3–4A CEV

How to Teach

Explain God’s word and truths

They [Levites] read from the book of God’s law, explaining it and imparting insight. Thus the people gained understanding from what was read. NEHEMIAH 8:8

From morning until evening *he [Paul] continued to explain the kingdom of God to them,* trying to convince them about Jesus from the law of Moses and the Prophets. ACTS 28:23B ISV

The manner in which to teach

[PAUL, TO THE CHURCH LEADER TITUS:] *Be sincere and serious in your teaching.*⁸*Use sound words that cannot be criticized,* so that your enemies may be put to shame by not having anything bad to say about us. TITUS 2:7B–8 GNT

[PAUL, TO TIMOTHY:] *Be very patient when you teach.* 2 TIMOTHY 4:2B GW

False Teachers (I): Their Teaching

False teachers speak lies and delusions of their own, while claiming God’s authority

[JEREMIAH:] Then the LORD said to me, “*Those [false] prophets are prophesying lies while claiming my authority!* I did not send them. I did not commission them. I did not speak to them. *They are prophesying to these people false visions, worthless predictions, and the delusions of their own mind.* JEREMIAH 14:14

They say what their listeners like to hear – appealing and pleasant things

[JEREMIAH, WARNING HIS PEOPLE ABOUT FALSE PROPHETS:] *They are filling you with false hopes.* They are reporting visions of their own imaginations, not something the LORD has given them to say.¹⁷*They continually say to those who reject what the LORD has said, ‘Things will go well for you!’ They say to all those who follow the stubborn inclinations of their own hearts, ‘Nothing bad will happen to you!’* JEREMIAH 23:16B–17

II. Teaching in the Church

Teaching is one of the main roles of most church leaders. Good teaching is based on God's word, and should be delivered in accordance with the directions and sound examples found in Scripture. On the topic of teaching, one must also be aware of the characteristics of "false" teachers who are so often present in the church, so as to recognize them and deal with them.

What to Teach: God's Word

Teach and preach God's word

*Every scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,*¹⁷ that the person dedicated to God may be capable and equipped for every good work. 2 TIMOTHY 3:16–17

[PAUL, TO TIMOTHY:] *Preach the word!* 2 TIMOTHY 4:2A NKJV

As such, teach God's commands and ways . . .

[JETHRO, TO MOSES:] *You should teach them God's commands and explain to them how they should live and what they should do.* EXODUS 18:20 GNT

. . . and teach the truths of the faith

[PAUL, TO TIMOTHY:] *By pointing out such things to the brothers and sisters, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, having nourished yourself on the words of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed.* 1 TIMOTHY 4:6

In v. 6a Paul exhorts Timothy to instruct the believers in the things that he had been writing about. These things were composed of or in line with the "words" or truths of the faith and the good teaching that Timothy himself had followed (v. 6b).

Moreover, read God's word in church worship

[PAUL, TO TIMOTHY:] Until I get there, *concentrate on reading Scripture in worship*, giving encouraging messages, and teaching people. 1 TIMOTHY 4:13 GW

This passage includes segments which illustrate churches functioning as one body – i.e. as a unit or cohesive community. The concept represented by the term "church" involves believers meeting together and functioning as a community or one spiritual body. As such, they worship God together and cohesively further the cause of their head, Jesus Christ. Furthermore, they live in relationship with each other, in which they minister to each other.

Be in Unison

Be united as one

The group of those who believed were of one heart and mind, and no one said that any of his possessions was his own, but everything was held in common. ACTS 4:32

[PAUL, TO THE CHURCH IN CORINTH:] I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, *to agree together, to end your divisions, and to be united by the same mind and purpose.*

1 CORINTHIANS 1:10

In the last clause, Paul urges his readers to be united by having the same Christ-centered thinking and objective/s.

Be at peace with each other

[PAUL, TO THE CHURCH IN ROME:] Therefore, *let's keep on pursuing those things that bring peace* and that lead to building one another up.

ROMANS 14:19 ISV

Submit to one another

[PAUL, TO THE CHURCH IN EPHESUS:] *Submit yourselves to one another because of your reverence for Christ.* EPHESIANS 5:21 GNT

Avoid foolish arguments and quarreling

[PAUL, TO TIMOTHY:] *Stay away from foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they grow into quarrels.*²⁴ *And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel* but must be kind to everyone, a good teacher, and patient. 2 TIMOTHY 2:23–24 NCV™

Be in Fellowship

The concept of “fellowship” involves sharing and participating in a partnership concerning a mutual interest or purpose, which for believers is their common faith and life in Christ. This is shown in the Greek word translated as “fellowship” (“koinonia”) which emphasizes participation. Believers participate in Christ and church activities, and in each other’s lives.

Have fellowship together – and with God and Jesus Christ

[JOHN, TO BELIEVERS:] What we have seen and heard we announce to you too, so *that you may have fellowship with us (and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ)*. 1 JOHN 1:3

This shows that the fellowship believers have together is not only based on their mutual relationship in Jesus Christ, but is also a fellowship with God, Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Participate together in church activities

They [the disciples] gathered frequently to pray as a group, together with the women and with Mary the mother of Jesus and with his brothers. ACTS 1:14 GNT

[PAUL, TO THE CHURCH IN CORINTH:] I urge you ¹⁶also to submit to people like this, and to *everyone who cooperates in the work and labors hard*. 1 CORINTHIANS 16:15B–16

Church members should participate together in God’s work, cooperating with each other.

Share together in the sufferings that come because of Christ

[PAUL, TO TIMOTHY:] So *never be ashamed to tell others about our Lord* or be ashamed of me, his prisoner. *Instead, by God’s power, join me in suffering for the sake of the Good News.* 2 TIMOTHY 1:8 GW

Share in each other’s joy and troubles

Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. ROMANS 12:15

Fellow believers may well be primarily in view here.

What part does God take in the choosing of church leaders? How can churches take this into account when choosing leaders?

State two or three key ways in which a leader should be an example for others to follow.

What aspect of care do you yourself value the most in a church leader?

What things should a church leader do to strengthen members in the faith?

What do you do in fulfilling your responsibilities as a church member towards your leader/s? Is there anything else you could do?

Strengthen members in the faith

[PAUL, TO CHURCH MEMBERS:] We are speaking in Christ before God, and *everything we do, dear friends, is to build you up.* 2 CORINTHIANS 12:19B

Work hard at helping church members

[PAUL, SPEAKING TO COLOSSIAN CHURCH MEMBERS ABOUT EPAPHRAS:] For I can testify that *he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and Hierapolis.* COLOSSIANS 4:13

Confront church members over sin

[GOD, TO EZEKIEL:] Son of man, *confront Jerusalem with her abominable practices ...* EZEKIEL 16:2

Church Members' Duties to Leaders

Love your leaders

[PAUL, TO THE CORINTHIAN BELIEVERS:] You are so rich in all you have: in faith, speech, and knowledge, in your eagerness to help and in *your love for us.* 2 CORINTHIANS 8:7A GNT

Obey your leaders

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you. HEBREWS 13:17 ESV

Give your leaders material support

Now *the one who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with the one who teaches it.* GALATIANS 6:6

Love Each Other

(→ 31. Love, in Part G)

Love each other as Christ loved us, even laying down his life

[JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] My commandment is this – to *love one another just as I have loved you.* ¹³*No one has greater love than this – that one lays down his life for his friends.* JOHN 15:12–13

Jesus disciples were to love each other as he had loved them, a love which he would show to be unsurpassed by laying down his life for them.

Loving other Christians is indicative of being of Christ and God

[JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] “I give you a new commandment – to love one another. *Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.* ³⁵*Everyone will know by this that you are my disciples – if you have love for one another.*” JOHN 13:34–35

[JOHN, TO BELIEVERS:] Beloved, *let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.* ... ¹²*No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.* ... ¹⁶*God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.* 1 JOHN 4:7, 12, 16B ESV

Love is the essence of God's nature – “God is love” (v. 16; cf. v. 8). Everyone who loves exhibits God's nature, demonstrating that they have been “born of God” (v. 7b). In addition, loving one another shows that we know God (v. 7), and that we live in God and he lives in us (vv. 12, 16b).

Love is expressed with actions

[JOHN, TO BELIEVERS:] *Suppose someone has enough to live and sees a brother or sister in need, but does not help. Then God's love is not living in that person.* ¹⁸*My children, we should love people not only with words and talk, but by our actions and true caring.*

1 JOHN 3:17–18 NCV™

Why is it important to meet together with other Christians?

What is meant by: “Submit to one another” (Eph 5:21)? What are some common situations in which we ought to do this?

What is involved in having fellowship with other believers?

What do you (or could you) share in with people in your church?

Why does loving other Christians indicate that we are people of God?

Managing the Church

As a leader, provide good leadership

Elders who *provide effective leadership* must be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard in speaking and teaching. 1 TIMOTHY 5:17

Be gentle and sparing in the use of authority

[PAUL, TO CHURCH MEMBERS:] Instead, *we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother tenderly caring for her own children.*

1 THESSALONIANS 2:7B ISV

[PAUL, TO CHURCH MEMBERS:] For this reason, *although in the Messiah I have complete freedom to order you to do what is proper,* ⁹*I prefer to make my appeal on the basis of love.* PHILEMON 1:8–9A ISV

Be an example for others to follow

[PAUL, TO CHURCH MEMBERS:] For you know yourselves how *you must imitate us, because we did not behave without discipline among you,* ⁸*and we did not eat anyone’s food without paying. Instead, in toil and drudgery we worked night and day in order not to burden any of you.* ⁹*It was not because we do not have that right, but to give ourselves as an example for you to imitate.* 2 THESSALONIANS 3:7–9

Caring for Church Members

Be a shepherd taking care of God’s flock

[PAUL, TO LEADERS:] *Watch out for yourselves and for all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son.* ACTS 20:28

Pray for church members

[PAUL, TO CHURCH MEMBERS:] *We have not stopped praying for you since the first day we heard about you. In fact, we always pray that God will show you everything he wants you to do and that you may have all the wisdom and understanding that his Spirit gives.*

COLOSSIANS 1:9 CEV

I. General

Good leadership is one of the most important prerequisites for a healthy church. For a church to function effectively it is critical that leaders know and do what is required of them. It is also important for church members to know what they should expect of leaders – and how they can support their leaders.

Note that a number of verses in this chapter speak of Paul and other NT leaders in their work overseeing a number of churches, or of leaders of the nation of Israel. Such verses are generally readily applicable to leaders of local churches today, and to their relationship with church members.

Required Characteristics

Godliness

For the overseer must be blameless as one entrusted with God's work, not arrogant, not prone to anger, not a drunkard, not violent, not greedy for gain. ⁸Instead he must be hospitable, devoted to what is good, sensible, upright, devout, and self-controlled. TITUS 1:7–8

Wisdom

[MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *Select wise and practical men, those known among your tribes, whom I may appoint as your leaders.* DEUTERONOMY 1:13

Strength and courage

[GOD, TO JOSHUA:] *Be strong and courageous, because you'll be leading this people to inherit the land that I promised to give their ancestors.* JOSHUA 1:6 ISV

Deep love for church members

[PAUL, TO CHURCH MEMBERS:] *Because of our love for you we were ready to share with you not only the Good News from God but even our own lives. You were so dear to us!* 1 THESSALONIANS 2:8 GNT

II. Caring for the Body

The care that church members ought to show each other should be one of the defining characteristics of every church, evidencing Christian love. This care should include both spiritual and practical care, with the former largely involving prayer and encouragement.

Pray for Each Other (I): General

Pray constantly for each other

Never stop praying, especially for others. Always pray by the power of the Spirit. *Stay alert and keep praying for God's people.*

EPHESIANS 6:18 CEV

Particularly pray for those facing persecution . . .

[PAUL:] Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, ¹⁹for I know that *this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers* and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. PHILIPPIANS 1:18B–19

Paul speaks of the Philippians' prayers for him while he was imprisoned because of his work for God's kingdom (cf. v. 17).

. . . and pray for those spreading the gospel

[PAUL:] Finally, our brothers and sisters, *pray for us, that the Lord's message may continue to spread rapidly and be received with honor,* just as it was among you. 2 THESSALONIANS 3:1 GNT

Pray for Each Other (II): What to Ask

Ask that other believers will live as God wants

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *We pray to God that you will not do anything wrong.* 2 CORINTHIANS 13:7A NCV™

Pray for their spiritual growth and perfection

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *And I pray this, that your love may abound even more and more in knowledge and every kind of insight ¹⁰so that you can decide what is best, and thus be sincere and blameless for the*

day of Christ, ¹¹filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God. PHILIPPIANS 1:9–11

Ask God to help and take care of them

[SOLOMON, TO GOD:] *May you be attentive to your servant's and your people Israel's requests for help and may you respond to all their prayers to you.* 1 KINGS 8:52

[DAVID, TO GOD:] *Protect those who love you; because of you they are truly happy.* PSALMS 5:11B GNT

Encourage Each Other

Encourage each other

Instead, *let us encourage one another all the more, since you see that the Day of the Lord is coming nearer.* HEBREWS 10:25B GNT

Encourage and strengthen each other by what you say

He [Hezekiah] encouraged them, saying, ⁷“Be strong and brave! Don't be afraid and don't panic because of the king of Assyria and this huge army that is with him! We have with us one who is stronger than those who are with him. ⁸He has with him mere human strength, but the LORD our God is with us to help us and fight our battles!” The army was encouraged by the words of King Hezekiah of Judah. 2 CHRONICLES 32:6B–8

When you talk, do not say harmful things, but say what people need—words that will help others become stronger. Then what you say will do good to those who listen to you. EPHESIANS 4:29 NCV™

Encourage others to remain true to the Lord

When he [Barnabas] arrived, he rejoiced to see what the grace of God had done, and with a hearty determination *he continuously encouraged them all to remain faithful to the Lord.* ACTS 11:23 ISV

Encourage and strengthen each other by what you do

[PAUL, TO THE BELIEVERS IN COLOSSE:] *I want you to know what a struggle I am going through for you, for God's people at Laodicea,*

30. Church Leadership

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What does “confessing” Jesus Christ involve?

Why is it important to confess Jesus Christ?

What are the advantages or benefits of keeping the Sabbath holy?

How could you use fasting in your life as a believer?

What is the significance of laying hands on people?

and for all of those followers who have never met me. ²I do it to encourage them. Then as their hearts are joined together in love, they will be wonderfully blessed with complete understanding. And they will truly know Christ. COLOSSIANS 2:1–2 CEV

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] We are speaking in Christ before God, and *everything we do, dear friends, is to build you up.* 2 CORINTHIANS 12:19B

Help Each Other

Be concerned for and compassionate towards each other

[PAUL, SPEAKING OF THE CHURCH BODY:] Instead, God has blended together the body, giving greater honor to the lesser member, ²⁵so that there may be no division in the body, but the members may *have mutual concern for one another.* 1 CORINTHIANS 12:24B–25

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Therefore, as God’s chosen ones, holy and loved, *clothe yourselves with compassion,* kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. COLOSSIANS 3:12 ISV

Consequently, help each other

Carry one another’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. GALATIANS 6:2

God is always fair. He will remember *how you helped his people in the past and how you are still helping them.* You belong to God, and he won’t forget the love you have shown his people. HEBREWS 6:10 CEV

Share what you have with those in need

Share what you have with God’s people who are in need. Be hospitable. ROMANS 12:13 GW

All who believed were together and *held everything in common,* ⁴⁵*and they began selling their property and possessions and distributing the proceeds to everyone, as anyone had need.* ACTS 2:44–45

What is involved in praying “earnestly”?

What steps could you take to pray more consistently for members of your church?

Can you think of a time when another Christian encouraged you? How did this affect you?

What could you do this week to encourage a particular Christian in need of it?

Are you aware of anyone in your church that needs practical support? How could you assist them?

Fasting

Fasting can be done regularly, with worship and prayer

She [Anna] had lived as a widow since then for eighty–four years. She never left the temple, *worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day*. LUKE 2:37

Fasting implies and promotes earnestness in worship and prayer. When fasting, the ache and craving of hunger brings an earnestness and intensity to our worship and prayers. Fasting also promotes clarity of thought. Furthermore, our hunger serves as a reminder to worship and/or pray throughout the fasting period.

Fasting can be done on particular occasions, in petitioning God

[EZRA:] *So we fasted and asked our God for a safe journey, and he answered our prayer*. EZRA 8:23 GW

The Laying on of Hands

In conveying the gift of the Holy Spirit

Then Peter and John placed their hands on the Samaritans, and they received the Holy Spirit. ACTS 8:17

Note that the laying on of hands to convey the gift of the Holy Spirit is generally done in conjunction with the recipients coming to faith – rather than at a time chosen by those performing the act. Also, it is not essential for a person to have hands laid on them for them to receive the Holy Spirit.

In conveying blessing

After he [Jesus] took the children in his arms, *he placed his hands on them and blessed them*. MARK 10:16

In commissioning for ministry

While they were serving the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, *“Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”* ³*Then, after they had fasted and prayed and placed their hands on them, they sent them off*. ACTS 13:2–3

Keeping the Sabbath Holy

Observe the Sabbath as holy by resting on it

[GOD, TO THE ISRAELITES:] “*Observe the Sabbath and keep it holy.* ⁹*You have six days in which to do your work,* ¹⁰*but the seventh day is a day of rest dedicated to me. On that day no one is to work—neither you, your children, your slaves, your animals, nor the foreigners who live in your country.* ¹¹*In six days I, the LORD, made the earth, the sky, the sea, and everything in them, but on the seventh day I rested. That is why I, the LORD, blessed the Sabbath and made it holy.* EXODUS 20:8–11 GNT

Israel was to observe the Sabbath as a sign of being God’s people, identifying themselves with him by resting on the seventh day as he did. The necessity for Christians to observe the Sabbath has been the subject of debate.

Observing the Sabbath enables people to be refreshed

For six days you are to do your work, but on the seventh day you must cease, in order that your ox and your donkey may rest and that your female servant’s son and any hired help may refresh themselves.

EXODUS 23:12

It is permissible to do good and necessary things on the Sabbath

A man was there who had a withered hand. And they asked Jesus, “*Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?*” so that they could accuse him. ¹¹*He said to them, “Would not any one of you, if he had one sheep that fell into a pit on the Sabbath, take hold of it and lift it out?”* ¹²*How much more valuable is a person than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.”* ¹³*Then he said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out and it was restored, as healthy as the other.* MATTHEW 12:10–13

Verses alleged to mean that we do not need to keep the Sabbath

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] Therefore *do not let anyone judge you with respect to food or drink, or in the matter of a feast, new moon, or Sabbath days* – ¹⁷*these are only the shadow of the things to come, but the reality is Christ!* COLOSSIANS 2:16–17

27. Worshiping God

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I. General

(⇒ 25. *Exalting God*, in Part E; 28. *Serving God*, p. 21)

Worshiping God is one of the most important and fundamental duties of believers. It involves honoring him by acknowledging his worthiness, including his divine characteristics and wondrous deeds. This is done through such things as praise and thanksgiving, offered with adoration and reverence.

It is also done through offering our resources and even ourselves to God. The former is born out in the second half of this chapter. The latter is done largely through serving God. As such the following chapter on serving God is also pertinent to worshiping him.

Worship God

Worship God alone

Again, the devil took him [Jesus] to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their grandeur. ⁹*And he said to him, “I will give you all these things if you throw yourself to the ground and worship me.”* ¹⁰*Then Jesus said to him, “Go away, Satan! For it is written: ‘You are to worship the Lord your God and serve only him.’”* MATTHEW 4:8–10

[NEBUCHADNEZZAR, SPEAKING OF SHADRACH, MESHACH, AND ABEDNEGO:] *They were willing to die rather than serve or worship any god other than their own.* DANIEL 3:28B NCV™

Worship God for his glory and sovereignty

Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength! ⁸*Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts!* ⁹*Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness; tremble before him, all the earth!* ¹⁰*Say among the nations, “The LORD reigns!”* PSALMS 96:7–10A ESV

Worship God for his great deeds . . .

All the nations, whom you created, *will come and worship you, O LORD. They will honor your name.* ¹⁰*For you are great and do amazing things. You alone are God.* PSALMS 86:9–10

II. Other Significant Practices

It is important for each Christian to understand all significant church practices. The practice of confessing Jesus Christ is one such practice that we need to understand – and be prepared to do. The weekly Sabbath is to some extent ignored by a lot of Christians, many seeing it as not relevant in the new covenant – but many evangelical theologians would “beg to differ”. Reasons both for and against observing it are included in this section. Fasting, when undertaken with a godly focus, is a significant practice that is a very valuable supplement to such things as prayer and worship. The laying on of hands is a further common practice, and so we should also be familiar with its significance and use in the Bible.

Confession of Jesus Christ

Confessing Jesus Christ is an expression of allegiance to him, as Lord, and involves stating what one believes about him. It is often done formally at one’s baptism and corporately in church with the recital of creeds or “confessions”. In addition, many Christians will experience times in which they should acknowledge Jesus Christ and their faith in him before unbelievers – often at the cost or risk of being persecuted.

Confess Jesus Christ, before others

Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, partners in a heavenly calling, take note of *Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess, . . .* HEBREWS 3:1

[JESUS:] I tell you, whoever *acknowledges me before men*, the Son of Man will also acknowledge before God’s angels. LUKE 12:8

Things to confess about Jesus Christ

For the Jewish leaders had already agreed that anyone who *confessed Jesus to be the Christ* would be put out of the synagogue. JOHN 9:22B

And everyone will *confess that Jesus Christ is Lord* and bring glory to God the Father. PHILIPPIANS 2:11 NCV™

If anyone *confesses that Jesus is the Son of God*, God resides in him and he in God. 1 JOHN 4:15

What is meant by being baptized in (or into) the name of Jesus Christ?

Does a person need to be baptized to be a Christian?

Explain the significance or meaning of the Lord's Supper?

Should you do anything differently when you take part in the Lord's Supper (either before or during it)?

Is there any practice amongst Christians and churches today that you think is – like circumcision – needless, or even detrimental?

. . . Worship God for his creation of everything

He [an angel] declared in a loud voice: "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has arrived, and *worship the one who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water!*"

REVELATION 14:7

Worship God because of his care of his people

They bowed down and worshiped the Lord because they knew that he had seen their suffering and was going to help them. EXODUS 4:31B CEV

Note that in conjunction with worshiping God because of his care of us, we should worship him for his power to do so and his goodness in doing so.

Worshipping before God

Worship God in spirit

But a time is coming – and now is here – when the *true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth*, for the Father seeks such people to be his worshipers. ²⁴*God is spirit, and the people who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.* JOHN 4:23–24

To worship "in spirit" is primarily an inward activity, rather than being centered on the performing of rituals (which were prominent in OT worship). It involves one's spirit – and thus one's mind and will. To begin with, the heart and/or conscience of the worshiper must be right before God. Then one must be honest and open in approaching God (cf. John 4:23–24 ↑), and fully focused on God; obviously this needs to be done willingly. Not least, the worshiper must worship by the Holy Spirit (cf. Philippians 3:3). This involves being conscious of the Spirit, relying on the Spirit's enablement to commune with God and being open to the Spirit's promptings.

Worship God in reverence and awe

Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus *let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe,* ²⁹*for our God is a consuming fire.* HEBREWS 12:28–29 ESV

The description of God as a “consuming fire” points to his power and preparedness to ferily devour or destroy that which is opposed to him and incompatible with his holiness.

Worship God with praise

Then the man knelt down and *worshipped the LORD*. ²⁷*He said, “Praise the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has faithfully kept his promise to my master.* GENESIS 24:26–27A GNT

Worshipping Together

Join with fellow believers in worshipping God

Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people replied “Amen! Amen!” as they lifted their hands. *Then they bowed down and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.* NEHEMIAH 8:6

[A CALL TO FELLOW ISRAELITES:] *Come! Let’s bow down and worship! Let’s kneel before the LORD, our creator!* PSALMS 95:6

Offer praise and thanksgiving together

They [Israelites] praised the LORD and gave thanks as they took turns singing: “The LORD is good! His faithful love for Israel will last forever.” Everyone started shouting and praising the LORD because work on the foundation of the temple had begun. EZRA 3:11 CEV

Pray together

They [the apostles] gathered frequently to pray as a group, together with the women and with Mary the mother of Jesus and with his brothers. ACTS 1:14 GNT

Circumcision does not bring salvation

Now some men came down from Judea [to the church at Antioch] and *began to teach the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.”* ²When Paul and Barnabas had a major argument and debate with them, the church appointed Paul and Barnabas and some others from among them to go up to meet with the apostles and elders in Jerusalem about this point of disagreement. ... [PETER:] ¹¹*On the contrary, we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they are.”* ACTS 15:1–2, 11

In v. 11 the apostle Peter sides emphatically with Paul and Barnabas (v. 2), indicating that circumcision and adherence to the OT law (which circumcision symbolizes) do not bring salvation.

Circumcision is of no consequence for believers

For *in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision carries any weight* – the only thing that matters is faith working through love. GALATIANS 5:6

Rather, it is our hearts that should be circumcised

Therefore, *circumcise your heart and stop being stubborn.* DEUTERONOMY 10:16 ISV

Circumcision of the heart involves changing to become responsive to God. It involves “cutting off” the rigidity of sin from a person’s heart.

supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, every time you drink it, in remembrance of me.” 1 CORINTHIANS 11:23–25

“This cup is the new covenant in my blood” (v. 25), speaks of Jesus Christ’s blood, shed in his death, introducing the new relationship – or covenant – between God and his people. In part at least this was achieved by his death bringing forgiveness for the sins of God’s people. The shedding of his blood inaugurated the new covenant and ratified or sealed it (cf. AMP, GNT, NCV, NLT) – just as the sprinkling of “the blood of the covenant” by Moses ceremonially confirmed the old covenant (cf. Exodus 24:5–8).

Participating in the Lord’s Supper also symbolizes participating in the blood and body of Jesus Christ

[PAUL, TO THE CORINTHIAN BELIEVERS:] *The cup of blessing that we bless is a sign of our sharing in the blood of the Messiah, isn’t it? The bread that we break is a sign of our sharing in the body of the Messiah, isn’t it? ¹⁷Because there is one loaf, we who are many are one body, because all of us partake of the one loaf.* 1 CORINTHIANS 10:16–17 ISV

The two rhetorical questions in v. 16 appear to imply that drinking from the cup and eating of the bread – in addition to remembering Jesus Christ and his death – symbolize one’s participation in what Christ’s death accomplished, i.e. forgiveness and thus salvation. However, in view of v. 17, the second rhetorical question may well additionally or alternatively mean that eating from the one loaf of bread symbolizes one being part of and participating in Christ’s body, the church.

Circumcision: Its Needlessness

Circumcision of males is the cutting off of the foreskin. Jewish males undergo circumcision in keeping with both God’s covenant with Abraham (their ancestor), and God’s covenant and law for Israel, i.e. the Mosaic Law.

In regard to God’s covenant and law for Israel, being circumcised signifies one’s adherence to the law – on which the covenant was based – as the way to righteousness. This is in contrast to and at odds with the way of faith in Jesus Christ, which God introduced in conjunction with the new covenant.

What aspects of your church’s worship times do you enjoy most? Is there any change that you would like to suggest?

Why should we worship God? (Do not limit your answer to just what is mentioned in the verses.)

What does it mean to worship God “in spirit and truth” (John 4:23–24)?

How do we worship God “with reverence and awe” (Heb 12:28)?

What do you do to worship God? Is there anything else that you should do?

II. Offerings

Making offerings to God of money and/or goods is an integral part of worshiping God. Moreover, the Bible gives a number of good reasons to give offerings to God. It also gives guidelines on what to give and how to give to God. Additionally, the Bible emphasizes the need for our lives to please God in order for our offerings to be acceptable to him.

Reasons to Give to God

Offerings are an important part of worshiping God

They will worship with sacrifices and food offerings. They will make vows to the LORD and carry them out. ISAIAH 19:21B GW

Offerings acknowledge God’s provision for us

[MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] You must count seven weeks; you must begin to count them *from the time you begin to harvest the standing grain.* ¹⁰*Then you are to celebrate the Festival of Weeks before the LORD your God with the voluntary offering that you will bring, in proportion to how he has blessed you.* DEUTERONOMY 16:9–10

The people were to bring an offering of an amount that was in proportion to the size of the harvest that God had blessed them with. Today believers likewise offer a portion of what they have earned from their work.

Offerings express thanksgiving to God for his deliverance

[DAVID:] O God, I have taken vows before you; therefore *I will offer thanksgiving sacrifices to you.* ¹³*For you have delivered me from death and my feet from stumbling, so that I may walk before God in the light of the living!* PSALMS 56:12–13 ISV

Offerings support the service of God

The Israelites brought a freewill offering to the LORD, every man and woman whose heart was willing to bring materials for all the work that the LORD through Moses had commanded them to do. EXODUS 35:29

After indicating that baptism signifies the spiritual union of the believer with Christ (v. 3), Paul draws parallels between baptism and other aspects of this spiritual union. Paul appears to parallel one’s immersion in water at baptism, with being immersed in death with Christ in his death (vv. 3–4a, 5a). As such, baptism portrays the death of our old self which was enslaved to sin (cf. vv. 6–7), and so a death to sin (v. 2b). Subsequently baptism symbolizes one being raised up in union with Christ to live a new spiritual life (vv. 4b, 5b).

Baptism signifies belief

But when they believed Philip as he was proclaiming the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they began to be baptized, both men and women. ACTS 8:12

Baptism is a declaration and confirmation of belief.

Baptism signifies the washing away of sins

[ANANIAS, TO SAUL:] And now what are you waiting for? Get up, *be baptized, and have your sins washed away*, calling on his name. ACTS 22:16

This should not be interpreted to mean that baptism in itself brings the forgiveness of sin. Rather, the external washing in water is symbolic of one’s spiritual cleansing.

The Lord’s Supper

The Lord’s Supper is regularly practiced in churches. It primarily symbolizes and commemorates Jesus Christ’s death for us. The breaking of the bread symbolizes the breaking of his body, and the pouring out of the wine symbolizes the pouring out of his blood.

Observe the Lord’s Supper – in remembrance of Jesus Christ and his death

[PAUL, TO THE CORINTHIAN BELIEVERS:] For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you, that *the Lord Jesus on the night in which he was betrayed took bread,* ²⁴*and after he had given thanks he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”* ²⁵*In the same way, he also took the cup after*

I. Symbolic Rites

Baptism and the Lord's Supper are considered by many churches to be the Christian rites or sacraments. "Sacrament" comes from a Latin term meaning "military oath". The sacraments are often spoken of as being an outward sign with an inner significance. They are practiced by churches in worship ceremonies. Circumcision was also a rite practiced by God's people, under the first covenant, but has no such relevance under the second covenant.

Baptism

The Greek translated as "baptism" denotes washing in water. Opinions differ as to whether baptism need necessarily involve full immersion in water, as opposed to simply pouring or sprinkling water on the person being baptized.

God's people are baptized in the "name" of Jesus Christ

On hearing this, *they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.*
ACTS 19:5 ESV

Being baptized in or into the "name" of Jesus Christ, is in part a declaration of our identification and relationship with Jesus Christ, and our commitment or allegiance to him. This explanation reflects both the meaning of the Latin from which "sacrament" comes – military oath (as commented above) – and the concept of being united with Christ (discussed in the following subsection).

Baptism into Jesus Christ signifies being united with him – with the corresponding implications

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] How can we who died as far as sin is concerned go on living in it? ³Or don't you know that *all of us who were baptized into union with the Messiah Jesus were baptized into his death?* ⁴*Therefore, through baptism we were buried with him into his death so that, just as the Messiah was raised from the dead by the Father's glory, we too may live an entirely new life.* ⁵*For if we have become united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his.* ROMANS 6:2B–5 ISV

What to Give to God

Give the "firstfruits" to God

As soon as the command was spread abroad, the people of Israel *gave in abundance the firstfruits of grain, wine, oil, honey, and of all the produce of the field.* 2 CHRONICLES 31:5 ESV

The OT speaks of giving to God the first portion of what we produce, often referred to as the "firstfruits". Today many believers emulate this by giving to God a portion of their wage on first receiving it. By this God's provision and goodness is acknowledged in a way that honors him (cf. Proverbs 3:9) – putting him first, rather than simply offering him the leftovers that we can spare. Note also that offering the firstfruits to God was a statement, made in faith, that the rest of the harvest would take place – a principle also applicable today.

Give the best to God . . .

[A DIRECTIVE TO THE ISRAELITES:] *You must bring the best of the firstfruits of your land to the Holy Tent of the LORD your God.*
EXODUS 23:19A NCV™

. . . Do not give what is inferior to God

[DIRECTIVES TO THE ISRAELITES:] *You shall not offer anything that has a blemish, for it will not be acceptable for you.* LEVITICUS 22:201 ESV

Give all that you can

[PAUL, SPEAKING OF THE MACEDONIAN CHURCHES:] They have been tested by great troubles, and *they are very poor. But they gave much because of their great joy.* ³*I can tell you that they gave as much as they were able and even more than they could afford.* 2 CORINTHIANS 8:2–3A NCV™

And a poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, worth less than a penny. ⁴³He called his disciples and said to them, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the offering box than all the others. ⁴⁴For they all gave out of their wealth. But *she, out of her poverty, put in what she had to live on, everything she had.*" MARK 12:42–44

How to Give to God

Give willingly

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *Each one of you should give just as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, because God loves a cheerful giver.* 2 CORINTHIANS 9:7

Give generously

[PAUL, TO THE CORINTHIAN BELIEVERS:] Therefore I thought it necessary to urge these brothers to go to you in advance and to arrange ahead of time *the generous contribution* you had promised, so this may be ready as *a generous gift and not as something you feel forced to do.* ⁶My point is this: *The person who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the person who sows generously will also reap generously.* 2 CORINTHIANS 9:5–6

Give regularly

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *On the first day of the week, each of you should set aside some income* and save it to the extent that God has blessed you, so that a collection will not have to be made when I come. 1 CORINTHIANS 16:2

This verse is quite probably speaking of money being brought to Christian gatherings held on the first day of every week.

Righteousness and Making Offerings

We must live righteously to acceptably worship God

[GOD:] *You, Israel, turn justice into poison and throw righteousness on the ground. ...* ²¹*I hate your festivals; I despise them. I'm not pleased with your religious assemblies. ...* ²³*Spare me the sound of your songs. I won't listen to the music of your harps.* AMOS 5:7, 21, 23 GW

Then they'll bring an offering in righteousness to the LORD. ⁴*Then the offering to the LORD by Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable as it was in the past, even as in former years.* MALACHI 3:3B–4 ISV

For any form of worship to be acceptable to God, including making offerings, we must live righteously, doing what is right.

29. Significant Practices

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How can we ensure our work will produce “the kind of fruit that will last” (John 15:16)?

In what ways should the following factors influence us in doing God’s work: without Jesus we “can accomplish nothing” (John 15:5); and it is God who makes the fruit of our work “sprout and grow” (1Cor 3:6–7)?

What are the advantages of working with other believers in serving God?

Which gift of the Holy Spirit do you think you have? If you are not sure, how could you find out?

What work do you do for God? What other work could you do for God?

Our offerings are not acceptable if our lives do not please God

[GOD, SPEAKING OF HIS UNFAITHFUL PEOPLE:] For *they have paid no attention to what I have said, and they have rejected my law.* ²⁰*I take no delight when they offer up to me frankincense that comes from Sheba or sweet-smelling cane imported from a faraway land. I cannot accept the burnt offerings they bring me.* JEREMIAH 6:19B–20A

We should in fact offer ourselves to God, in service to him

[PAUL:] I appeal to you: *offer yourselves as a living sacrifice to God, dedicated to his service and pleasing to him.* ROMANS 12:1B GNT

Also offer other spiritual sacrifices to God

So *offer spiritual sacrifices that God accepts* through Jesus Christ.
1 PETER 2:5B GW

Through him then *let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God*, that is, the fruit of our lips, acknowledging his name.
HEBREWS 13:15

Why is it important to give to God?

Do you agree that we should give the “firstfruits” to God? If so, why do you think it is important to do so?

How is Mark 12:41–44 applicable to us?

Is there any change you should make in how or what you give to God?

To what extent is your life a “living sacrifice” (Rom 12:1)?

Spiritual Gifts

God equips his people to serve him, notably by giving them spiritual gifts.

God gives each of his people a spiritual gift, through the Spirit

To each person the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the benefit of all. ⁸For one person is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, and another the message of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰to another performance of miracles, to another prophecy, and to another discernment of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. 1 CORINTHIANS 12:7–10

Broadly speaking, “the message of wisdom” and “the message of knowledge” (v. 8) quite possibly are respectively “the ability to give wise advice” (NLT) or insight and “the gift of special knowledge” (NLT) – with probably the application and conveying of spiritual truths being particularly in view.

The term “faith” (v. 9) does not refer to saving faith, but to exceptional faith or trust in God. The gift of “prophecy” (v. 10) is the communication of a revelation from God, such as a foretelling of a future event or a revelation of God’s will regarding a certain matter.

The gift of “discernment of spirits” (v. 10) appears to be the ability to distinguish whether something, such as a prophecy or teaching, is prompted by the Holy Spirit or a demonic spirit. The gift of “tongues” (v. 10) is the ability to speak in an unlearned language. (Note that further gifts are mentioned in the following subsection.)

Use your spiritual gift to build up the church

It was he [Christ] who gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, ¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, that is, to build up the body of Christ, ¹³until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God – a mature person, attaining to the measure of Christ’s full stature. EPHESIANS 4:11–13

As parts of the body of Christ, believers are to use the gifts they have been given (v. 11) in ministry (v. 12a) so that Christ’s body may be built up and become mature (vv. 12b–13).

The Manner in Which to Serve God

Serve God in holiness and righteousness

[ZECHARIAH, THE PRIEST:] This oath [of God] grants ⁷⁴that we, being rescued from the hand of our enemies, may *serve him without fear*, ⁷⁵*in holiness and righteousness* before him for as long as we live.

LUKE 1:73B–75

Serve God wholeheartedly

[MOSES:] And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to *serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul*, ... DEUTERONOMY 10:12 ESV

Be strong and courageous

The LORD gave this command to Joshua, son of Nun: “*Be strong and courageous, because you will bring the Israelites into the land that I swore to give them, and I will be with you.*” DEUTERONOMY 31:23 GW

Working with Other Believers

Serve each other

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *Serve each other with love.* GALATIANS 5:13 NCV™

Do God’s work together

[PAUL, TO SYZYGUS:] And, my true partner, *I ask you to help them. These women have worked together with me and with Clement and with the others in spreading the good news.* PHILIPPIANS 4:3A CEV

Encourage each other in doing God’s work

We must also consider how to encourage each other to show love and to do good things. HEBREWS 10:24 GW

He [King Josiah] appointed the priests to fulfill their duties and *encouraged them to carry out their service in the LORD’s temple.*

2 CHRONICLES 35:2

28. Serving God

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I. Preliminary Instructions and Insights

All of God's people are his servants – and so need to be prepared to serve him. This requires devotion to God and to his work.

As well as instructing us to serve God, the Bible provides plenty of encouragement to persevere in doing so. The Bible also gives insights into being guided by God, something which is very much applicable to serving God as well as to other areas of our lives.

Be Prepared to Serve God

Be prepared and ready to do God's work

So *prepare your minds for service* and have self-control. 1 PETER 1:13A NCV™

[GOD:] But you, Jeremiah, *get yourself ready!* Go and tell these people everything I instruct you to say. JEREMIAH 1:17A

Being prepared for God's work requires godly living

[PAUL, SPEAKING OF CHURCH LEADERS:] For *the overseer must be blameless as one entrusted with God's work, not arrogant, not prone to anger, not a drunkard, not violent, not greedy for gain.* ⁸*Instead he must be hospitable, devoted to what is good, sensible, upright, devout, and self-controlled.* TITUS 1:7–8

Be Devoted to God's Work

Serve only God

Samuel said to all the people of Israel, “If you are really turning to the LORD with all your hearts, remove from among you the foreign gods and the images of Ashtoreth. *Give your hearts to the LORD and serve only him.* Then he will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines.” ⁴So the Israelites removed the Baals and images of Ashtoreth. *They served only the LORD.* 1 SAMUEL 7:3–4

Be devoted to God's work

Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your work in the Lord is never wasted. 1 CORINTHIANS 15:58B NCV™

[PAUL:] I planted the seeds, Apollos watered them, *but God made them sprout and grow.* ⁷*What matters isn't those who planted or watered, but God who made the plants grow.* 1 CORINTHIANS 3:6–7 CEV

God's servants cannot themselves produce any true and lasting spiritual results or growth from the work that they do – only God can.

So, pray to God for help in the work – and ask others to pray

[THE EARLY BELIEVERS, PRAYING:] Lord, listen to their threats! *We are your servants. So make us brave enough to speak your message.* ³⁰*Show your mighty power, as we heal people and work miracles and wonders in the name of your holy Servant Jesus.* ³¹*After they had prayed, the meeting place shook. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and bravely spoke God's message.* ACTS 4:29–31 CEV

[PAUL, TO THE EPHESIAN BELIEVERS:] *Pray for me also, that I may be given the message when I begin to speak – that I may confidently make known the mystery of the gospel,* ²⁰*for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may be able to speak boldly as I ought to speak.* EPHESIANS 6:19–20

Do God's work with his help

[PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] *Whoever speaks, let it be with God's words. Whoever serves, do so with the strength that God supplies,* so that in everything God will be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen. 1 PETER 4:11

The first statement is probably indicating that we should rely on God's help in what we say in ministering to others – as is paralleled in the second statement regarding serving with God's strength.

Serve God through the Holy Spirit

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that *we serve in the new way of the Spirit* and not in the old way of the written code. ROMANS 7:6 ESV

God's people serve and obey him now by following the directing of the Holy Spirit, with the Spirit's empowerment, rather than by focusing on “obeying the letter of the law” (NLT).

II. Doing God’s Work

In instructing us in how to do God’s work, serving him, the Bible urges us to do our best but emphasizes God’s role and the need to rely on him. The Bible also teaches us about: the manner in which we should serve God; serving God in a church context; and God’s extraordinary spiritual gifts to his people for serving him.

Do God’s Work – the Best You Can

Do the work assigned to you

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] God has made us what we are, and in our union with Christ Jesus *he has created us for a life of good deeds, which he has already prepared for us to do.* EPHESIANS 2:10 GNT

Paul appears to be speaking of God preparing particular work for each believer to do (cf. AMP). As such, believers need to look to God to guide them and enable them to do the work – and willingly do it.

Work hard at God’s work

[PAUL, TO THE ROMAN BELIEVERS:] Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa, who have *worked hard for the Lord.* Greet dear Persis, who has *worked very hard for the Lord.* ROMANS 16:12 GW

Do quality work which bears “fruit” – “fruit” that will last

[JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] You did not choose me. *I chose you and sent you out to produce fruit, the kind of fruit that will last.* JOHN 15:16A CEV

Here “fruit” likely refers to spiritual outcomes of quality work for God.

Do the Work through God

Apart from God and Jesus Christ, we can accomplish nothing

[JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] Remain in me, and I will remain in you. *Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it remains in the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me.* ⁵“*I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me – and I in him – bears much fruit, because apart from me you can accomplish nothing.* JOHN 15:4–5

Dedicate your life to living for God and Jesus Christ

[PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] So then, my brothers and sisters, because of God’s great mercy to us I appeal to you: *offer yourselves as a living sacrifice to God, dedicated to his service and pleasing to him.*

ROMANS 12:1 GNT

Then he [Jesus] said to them all, “If anyone wants to become my follower, *he must deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me.*

LUKE 9:23

We must deny ourselves – give up living for ourselves and what we want – and live for Christ instead, daily shouldering the accompanying difficulties.

Reasons to Serve God

God is our God, who has done great things for us

[MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] Revere *the LORD your God, serve him,* be loyal to him and take oaths only in his name. ²¹He is the one you should praise; *he is your God, the one who has done these great and awesome things for you that you have seen.* DEUTERONOMY 10:20–21

Your work for God will be productive

[JESUS, EXPLAINING A PARABLE:] But the ones on the good soil are the people who hear the word but also hold on to it with good and honest hearts, *producing a crop through endurance.* LUKE 8:15 ISV

As with “fruit” elsewhere in this chapter, “crop” may well be referring to – or at least may be applied to – the productivity of one’s work for the kingdom (the theme of this subsection). Alternatively the spiritual growth of the individual believer may be in view.

You will be rewarded for your work

But as for you, be strong and don’t get discouraged, for *your work will be rewarded.* 2 CHRONICLES 15:7

Whoever does not produce “fruit” will be cut off from Christ

[JESUS, SPEAKING OF GOD:] *He cuts off every branch of mine that does not produce fruit.* JOHN 15:2A NCV™

Being Guided by God

The topic of being guided by God is very pertinent to serving God – such as in ascertaining his will in regard to how we should serve him. It is also of course important in other aspects of our lives. For it is vital in living righteously generally and in navigating through troubled times, as reflected in some of the following verses. God’s guidance also becomes an issue when we need to make a significant choice or decision.

God’s guidance may come through such sources as: the Holy Spirit’s promptings; inner conviction or assurance (itself largely of the Holy Spirit); Scripture; circumstances; or advice from others. But God does not always guide his people by making them aware of his will. They may not even be aware of being guided by God, only recognizing his guidance in retrospect. The Bible actually says little about how one should find out God’s guidance. But it does speak of how living a godly life and prayer are critical for being open to it – as is indicated in the following subsections.

To be guided by God, live a godly life

[DIRECTIVES TO ISRAEL:] *You must remove the burdensome yoke from among you and stop pointing fingers and speaking sinfully.* ¹⁰*You must actively help the hungry and feed the oppressed. Then your light will dispel the darkness, and your darkness will be transformed into noonday.* ¹¹*The LORD will continually lead you;* he will feed you even in parched regions. ISAIAH 58:9B–11A

Pray, asking God to guide you

[DAVID, TO GOD:] For you are my rock and my fortress; *for the sake of your name guide me and lead me.* PSALMS 31:3 ISV

Why should we serve God? And how are we better off for doing so?

What should we do to prepare ourselves to serve God?

How devoted are you to serving God? What changes could you make to be more devoted?

What do you understand Jesus to mean when he says that God “cuts off every branch of mine that does not produce fruit” (John 15:2)?

What should one do in seeking to be guided by God?
