

A
BIBLICAL
THEOLOGY
OF
MATERIAL
POSSESSIONS

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by

GENE A. GETZ

FOREWORD BY
JOSEPH M. STOWELL

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A Biblical Theology of Material Possessions
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To a group of eleven Christian men who serve as leaders
at Fellowship Bible Church North in Plano, Texas,

Eddie Burford

Jack Cole

Mike Cornwall

Bill Fackler

Jim Harris

Earl Lindgren

Don Logue

Steve Meyer

Richard Pascuzzi

Stan Potocki

Jim Wilson

men who are godly models of how Christians should view and use
their material possessions and whose input was invaluable in
both interpreting and applying scriptural truth in this book.

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Foreword

Since, as someone has well said, you can tell more about a person's spiritual life by reading through his checkbook ledger than by almost any other means, it is paramount that we Christians instruct each other in regard to the biblical management of our resources. From that standpoint at least, this study is long overdue.

As I read through *A Biblical Theology of Material Possessions*, I was struck immediately by the balance and the direct-rootedness in the biblical data of this study. Dr. Getz avoids all the traps of recent forays into this topic. He neither bashes the blessed nor burdens the bereft. There is no hint of the extremes we often hear about: that voluntary simplicity of life is what God demands of all of us or that abundant prosperity is a direct sign of God's blessing and of our personal faith.

When a pastor I often shied away from teaching principles of stewardship for several reasons. First, in no way did I want to give the impression to those who were seekers that all the church was interested in was their money. Nor did I wish to seem manipulative in seeking financial income for the plans and programs we had drawn up for the ministry of the church. It seemed a very touchy thing to talk to people about their money. Perhaps my feeling was that messages of this sort would create a great amount of discomfort in many people's hearts, and, after all, shouldn't the gospel bring peace and comfort instead?

While I struggled with some of these feelings, I knew deep down that I was called to preach the whole counsel of God. So at times I would awkwardly enter this arena, often creating a serious sense of imbalance. I remember one wealthy deacon who came to me after a message on money. He said that he didn't think it was right for me to make him "feel guilty" that God had blessed him with an abundant supply of goods. This man had been faithful to and generous toward God's work, and I knew right away that something had been wrong with the way I presented the material.

I remember preaching on another occasion a rather hard-hitting sermon on biblical stewardship. At the end of my message, I essentially apologized for having to preach on money. I said something like, "I know this is a hard topic, and I wish we didn't have to talk about it, but, nevertheless, it is important." A dear friend of mine, whose life was characterized by consistent commitment to the biblical principles of stewardship, approached me afterwards. He began by saying that he thought it had been a good sermon. Then he reproved me, saying, "Don't ever apologize for preaching God's truth about money!"

I don't think I would have suffered such examples of ministerial awkwardness if I had had Gene Getz's well thought through and carefully organized treatment of the biblical material. No one's ministry, and certainly no one's life and perspectives, will be the same after honestly interacting with the truth in this book.

The strength of this volume is that Dr. Getz has been careful to cite only *biblical* truth about money, material possessions, and giving. This truth is framed in clear principles, leaving the reader to apply these principles in each given situation. Thankfully the author has refused to give the impression that in every life situation and in every culture these principles will be applied uniformly. He has emphasized the priority of giving to the local church and yet outlined a good list of guidelines for those who give additional resources to parachurch ministries.

The value of this book is that it calls us nonnegotiable to obedience in terms of our possessions. It shows us what is right and qualifies our excuses and rationalizations in terms of our ultimate accountability to God.

You'll be surprised, as I was, at how much Christ, the apostles, and Scripture in general has to say about money. God obviously knows that one of the major struggles in life is the task of sorting out, prioritizing, and resisting the pressures that personal gain engenders in our existence.

One thing becomes clear, however: God is interested first and foremost in our *hearts*. The biblical management of our money and possessions is actually a reflection of our love for God, His cause, the gospel, and each other. Once our hearts are right, the management of our treasures will reflect our love for God and others.

Time and time again, the exposition of these relevant passages demonstrate the truth that it's not so much *what you have* but, rather, *what has you* that makes all the difference. You can tell a lot about the heart of a person by looking at the allocation of his treasures. As Christ said, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Luke 12:34).

JOSEPH M. STOWELL
PRESIDENT, MOODY BIBLE INSTITUTE

Preface

Researching and writing on what the Bible says about material possessions has brought back many singular memories of the cultural events that played a part in my research and writing of a previous book on the biblical theology of the church. In the late 60s and early 70s, I was catapulted into a fresh study of the New Testament Scriptures to determine what God says about the Body of Christ. Challenged by the anti-institutional trends and forces in society generally, I explored the Word of God with my students at Dallas Theological Seminary.

Eventually, I wrote a book entitled *Sharpening the Focus of the Church*. For several years I interacted with seminarians and with Christian leaders already in full-time ministry. From what I learned I outlined a number of scriptural supracultural principles for creating forms and structures for the church in any particular society in the world and at any moment in history. Looking through the “lens of Scripture,” the “lens of history,” and the “lens of culture,” I attempted to formulate principles that are normative and enduring.

MOVING FROM PRINCIPLIZING TO CHURCH PLANTING

Little did I realize that this effort would eventually lead me out of the seminary classroom as a professor to become a church-planting pastor. Several of my students at Dallas Theological Seminary challenged me to test these principles in a real-life situation. This was followed by an invitation from several families in Dallas to launch a new church. They were keenly interested in utilizing the principles outlined in *Sharpening the Focus of the Church* to develop new forms and structures that were based upon scriptural foundations but that were also culturally relevant. Consequently, we launched the first Fellowship Bible Church in the fall of 1972, determined not to do things differently just to be different but committed not to do things the same way just because they have always been done that way.

Since that time, I have been personally involved in launching new churches. After twenty years of teaching (thirteen years at Moody Bible Institute and seven years at Dallas Theological Seminary), I gave up my full-time professor role in 1973. Needless to say, the next twenty years have become a great learning experience.

UNIQUE SIMILARITIES BUT SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES

Several unique similarities, but also some significant differences, existed between researching and writing *A Biblical Theology of Material Possessions* and *Sharpening the Focus of the Church*. Both projects were precipitated by circumstances in the larger cultural setting. But rather than the anti-institutionalism trends in the late 60s and early 70s that launched my study of the New Testament church, the materialistic trends of the 80s have created the setting for this study on what the Bible says about material possessions.

Ironically, many young people who were part of the earlier movement, with its criticism of what they called the “plastic culture,” have now created one of their own—a superficial society permeated with self-preoccupation and self-advancement. Often designated as “baby boomers”—people born during the ten-to-twelve-year period following World War II—they have probably become the most materialistically oriented group of people in the two hundred years of American history. For instance, researchers have discovered that baby boomers give almost nothing to any form of charity.¹

Needless to say, this mentality has also become a part of the Christian community. Some estimate that evangelical Christians give an average of only 2 percent of their income to further the kingdom of God.² Since this statistic includes approximately 15 percent of those in the evangelical community who give at least 10 percent or more of their income, it is easy to conclude that Christian “baby boomers” differ very little from their secular counterparts. They too give next to nothing.

The second similarity is that researching and writing *A Biblical Theology of Material Possessions* has been a group process. But there is a singular difference. The first book grew out of the seminary classroom. Though the initial results of that process were shared again and again with pastors and Christian leaders before they were refined and put into permanent book form (including the extensive revision in 1984), the bulk of the research and work was forged out of an academic setting—and then tested and applied in various church planting situations.

A Biblical Theology of Material Possessions, however, has grown directly out of the local church setting itself. Rather than a group of seminarians, those involved in this process were primarily lay elders/pastors and leaders who serve with me at Fellowship Bible Church North in Plano, Texas. For a number of months we researched and studied in-depth what the

Scriptures have to say about material possessions. Such study resulted in this present volume.

AN ECONOMIC CRISIS AND CULTURAL SPILLOVER

Although various economic crises have plagued our country over the last several years, no recession has had more wide-ranging effects than what has happened in the Southwestern part of the United States. Texas particularly has been hard hit by the oil crisis, which in turn devastated the real estate market. And once the real estate market began to crater, an unusual domino effect took place that has impacted the banking industry. Failures, particularly among savings and loan institutions in Texas, have made world news.

Pastoring a church in the Dallas Metroplex brought me face-to-face with the results of this economic recession and the way it impacted Christians in their patterns of giving. Frankly, I had not given much attention to this area of Christian living in my pastoral experience, primarily because we had not faced any serious budget deficits—until the recession hit.

What was a hidden reality suddenly became quite visible. Because economic times had been very good over the years, many Christians had been giving—primarily when the need arose—out of what was “left over,” rather than out of what was set aside regularly as “firstfruits.” To be more specific, the majority of Christians attending our church (and other churches) were not regular, systematic, and proportional givers. God’s work was not a budget item—and, generally speaking, had never been. Consequently, when they felt the economic crunch, they had very little left over—virtually no excess to give. It took everything they were earning to handle their indebtedness—on their homes and their cars—and, in many instances, on a number of items that were considered investments in the pure enjoyment in life.

The effect on the financial needs of churches all over Texas was felt immediately. Even though some churches were growing numerically, giving was declining. Had Christians been giving God their firstfruits all along and making these monies a part of their personal budgets the ministry would not have been the first place to feel the financial crunch. But now it took most, if not all, of their income to make their payments on their debts to the world system and to maintain the life-style they were used to. Their indebtedness to God was the first to go by the wayside. This is not surprising since God’s work was not a priority item.

But this economic dynamic was a blessing in disguise. It brought into sharp focus a spiritual problem in our own congregation and in churches in most areas of the Western world. Most Christians are not putting God first in the financial area of their lives. Materialism has taken its toll and impacted believers. The world has pressed us into its mold, and the majority of evan-

gelical believers in our society are not walking in the will of God in relationship to their material possessions (Rom. 12:1-2).

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE PROCESS

Sensing my own personal concern about the way this cultural crisis was impacting believers in our own church, a good friend approached me one day and offered to do what he could to help me and our other church leaders address this need. When I shared the results of this conversation with my fellow elders, they agreed we should take action.

AN "ACTS 6 GROUP"

They asked my friend and six others to form a special task force to study this issue. We identified these men as our "Acts 6 Group," based upon the example of the seven men in Jerusalem who were appointed by the apostles to resolve the economic problems in the church at that time. These men took this assignment very seriously. They met weekly for several months, devoting a lot of time to prayer as they began to seek the will of God. This process resulted in a number of recommendations to the elders. However, one proposal that relates directly to this book was that I—as senior pastor—bring a series of messages to the total congregation concerning what the Bible says about material possessions. Impressed with this suggestion, the elders charged me with this responsibility.

AN EXPANDED TASK FORCE

I responded to this challenge by asking my fellow elders, as well as the members of the Acts 6 Group, to join me in a detailed study of the Word of God to gather basic information that would enable me to prepare this series of messages. They all agreed, and we began the study.

Initially, few of us realized the gigantic task we had tackled. We met weekly in my home on Wednesday evenings for a number of months, looking carefully at *every* reference in the Bible to material possessions. Beginning in the book of Acts, we moved to the gospels and then to the epistles. From there we turned to Genesis and ended our study with the book of Malachi. To our surprise, we found more detailed information on the subject of material possessions than nearly any other subject in the Bible—outside of what Scripture says about God Himself.

OBSERVING AND INTERPRETING

Reading ahead, I compiled every biblical reference to material possessions I could find. Using a computer program that contained the whole Bible, we printed these biblical texts on separate sheets, leaving space to make specific observations. During those Wednesday evening studies, each

man in the group took his turn reporting what he had observed from his own personal study, resulting in some dynamic interaction and discussion.

We attempted to interpret what these biblical events and teachings meant in their historical and cultural context. We also read selected extra-biblical literature, including the early church Fathers, attempting to discover how Christians over the years have interpreted and applied what they believed were the basic principles in these passages.

SYNTHESIZING AND PRINCIPLIZING

Once we had completed the observation and interpretation phase, we began the process of principlizing—discovering the supracultural teachings in these biblical accounts. At this point, I took the major responsibility of synthesizing a vast amount of biblical data, following the historical flow of events as they unfolded during the New Testament era. (This process is explained in detail in the Introduction.) I brought this synthesized material to the group each week for discussion, evaluation, and refinement.

Our next step was to present the material to our total leadership team—well over one hundred lay leaders, many of whom pastor small groups we call minichurches. Then I prepared the material in sermonic form and brought a series of messages to the total congregation.

The final step was to carefully rework the manuscript material after delivering a series of messages. The end result of this total process is *A Biblical Theology of Material Possessions*. The series of messages presented to the congregation took on an entirely different form and structure than the format in this book. It is one thing to formulate a biblical theology of material possessions for an in-depth study in manuscript form. It is yet another thing to develop and organize the material to teach these concepts to the church at large on a weekly basis. Both approaches call for distinctive patterns and methodology (see graphic on p. 18).

This book outlines passages of Scripture as they appear chronologically in various units of thought in the New Testament. These specific passages are then interpreted in their historical and cultural context. From these observations, a number of supracultural principles are outlined that grow directly out of Scripture.

The outlines used in preaching and teaching this biblical information are quite different. Rather, various supracultural principles were stated as biblical propositions. Following each proposition, selected biblical material was used to support and verify the supracultural nature of each principle.

PRACTICAL RESULTS

At the time of this writing, many people at Fellowship Bible Church North have begun to respond in a wonderful way to the Word of God. Pre-

“BOOK FORM” COMPARED WITH “SERMONIC FORM”

BOOK FORM

or Classroom Discussions

Biblical Exposition

(Observations & Interpretation)



Supracultural Principles

SERMONIC FORM

or Pulpit Presentations

Biblical Propositions

(Supracultural Principles)



Biblical Passages to Support Propositions (Principles)

dictably, many are still struggling to make changes. Understandably, it takes time to break old patterns and restructure one's economic life. And as in every church, some have chosen, at least outwardly, to ignore the principles of Scripture. We are convinced, however, that God is at work in their hearts, and eventually His Word will not return void.

Only time and especially eternity will tell the whole story. But for now, those of us in leadership in our church are very encouraged with the response to the principles that are outlined in this volume. Hopefully they will help you, not only to conform your own life to the will of God in this matter, but to help others do so as well.

One final thought: statements that are formulated by any biblical interpreter and presented as scriptural principles and propositional truths, and that are supposedly accurate reflections of the meaning of scriptural writings, whether in narrative or command form, are certainly subject to human error. These principles and propositions should be carefully evaluated in light of the actual scriptural record and subjected to proper exegetical scrutiny. As a student of Scripture, I humbly present the principles in this volume, hopefully as an accurate reflection of biblical truth, but certainly subject to further evaluation by scriptural exegetes who may be more exact and thorough than I.

NOTES

1. *The Yankelovich Monitor Report*, 1987.
2. Unfortunately, research demonstrates that, out of the total number of Christians in America, though many give at least 10 percent, this number probably represents only about 10-15 percent. On average, the remaining 85-90 percent give much less than 10 percent. E. Calvin Beisner, "How Much for How Many?" *Discipleship Journal* 49:20, states that "average churchgoers' giving today is only about 1.8 to 2.2 percent of income (depending on whose estimates and assumptions you accept)."

Acknowledgments

I would like to express special appreciation to my wife, Elaine, who graciously hosted the special research team that met weekly in our home to assist me with this study. Her consistent encouragement was a primary source of motivation to persevere in this project. Most important, Elaine has been a model to me in the use of our material possessions. Over the years she has taught me to be a regular and systematic giver. Though we are still working on the “proportional” aspect of giving (a lifetime goal), our objective has always been to give at least 10 percent of our gross income to God’s work. Because of Elaine’s careful planning and frugal approach to home and money management, we have often been able to exceed a tithe. Her unselfish and generous spirit has deeply impacted my life and ministry.

A special word of acknowledgment is also due Iva Morelli, my executive assistant. Her expert skills on the computer facilitated both the research and writing phases of this book. Her personal dedication to this task, involving many hours of time and effort beyond the call of duty, was a constant source of encouragement.

I am grateful to the total staff at Fellowship Bible Church North and the Center for Church Renewal. These committed men and women provided me with inner strength, often taking on extra responsibilities to free up my time for manuscript preparation. I would also like to express appreciation to the whole church body at FBCN, with special acknowledgment to our lay leadership team, which ministers to people in our small groups. Their positive response to the principles outlined in this book greatly motivated me to prepare this material for publication.

Finally, I am indebted to the leadership at Moody Bible Institute for their keen interest in this project. Special thanks is due President Joseph Stowell for writing the Foreword and to former Senior Vice President of Media Don Johnson, who contacted me about this material. It has been a delight to work with Greg Thornton, general manager and executive editor of Moody Press. His enthusiasm has been a constant source of motivation.

Introduction: Gaining Perspective

In his penetrating historical analysis of faith and wealth during the centuries immediately following the New Testament era, Justo Gonzalez draws some rather startling conclusions. He notes that these issues were never separated in the minds of the church Fathers. Yet he concludes that current theologians and church historians give very little attention to economic issues as they relate to the Christian faith.

Gonzalez questions why this is true. "One obvious answer," he says, "is that matters such as the origin, nature, and use of wealth are not considered theological issues, and therefore when historians of doctrine have read these texts in the past they have not been looking for such matters."¹ This leads Gonzalez to ask, "Why have such matters not been considered properly theological issues, when it is clear that the ancient writers themselves considered them of great theological significance?" There is, he continues, "the inescapable conclusion that they [faith and wealth] have not been considered theological issues because the church at large has avoided them."²

Whatever one's theological persuasion, Gonzalez poses questions that cannot be circumvented by Bible-believing Christians who are serious about knowing and doing the will of God. The facts are that the church Fathers were concerned about these issues because they were considered important by Jesus Christ and those who followed Him. How believers are to view and use their material possessions is a pervasive theme throughout the Word of God.

To understand our Christian faith and how it relates to material possessions will require more than merely studying the history of theology. Rather, we must focus initially on *biblical* theology. According to George Ladd biblical theology "is that discipline which sets forth the message of the books of the Bible in their historical setting."³ Charles Ryrie defines it as "that branch of theological science which deals systematically with the his-

torically conditioned process of the self-revelation of God as deposited in the Bible."⁴

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY IN THIS VOLUME

Regarding a study on material possessions, we need to amend these definitions as follows: *A Biblical Theology of Material Possessions* is a progressive study of what the Bible teaches regarding how New Testament Christians viewed and used their material possessions so as to determine principles that are supracultural and normative. This particular study follows the "historically conditioned process of the self-revelation of God," beginning with the founding of the church as recorded by Luke (the book of Acts) and tracing the unfolding of God's revelation as it is recorded in the rest of the New Testament. "Biblical theology," as Paul Enns asserts, "traces that *progress of revelation*, noting the revelation concerning Himself that God has given in a *particular era* or through a *particular writer*."⁵

Christians tend to forget that what is now a complete volume—what we call the Holy Bible—was not written in one brief period of time. Rather, the truth of Scripture "was unfolded in a *long series of successive acts* and through the minds and hands of many men of varying backgrounds."⁶ This study, then, follows the unfolding of God's work in history.⁷

Luke's historical record in the book of Acts is used as the basic structure for this biblical research. Simultaneously we will study the literature that was written as a result of the church planting efforts of the apostles and other New Testament Christians. This interrelated process will help us understand more clearly how the specific references to material possessions in the rest of the New Testament relate to the events described by Luke in the epistle-like narrative addressed to his friend Theophilus (Acts 1:1-2).⁸

In doing biblical theology, we must, as Ladd reminds us, "expect progression" in God's revelation. Though "the various stages of the prophetic interpretation of redemptive history are equally inspired and authoritative . . . they embody differing degrees of apprehension [comprehension] of the meanings involved."⁹ These degrees of understanding are particularly obvious when it comes to what God says about material possessions.

God's will unfolded as the church expanded throughout the New Testament world. The Holy Spirit (through various authors of Scripture) clarified and built on basic truths as one event followed another. What initially appears as a foundational and basic concept is often refined and expanded as New Testament history progresses. Furthermore, these developments appear directly related to geographical, cultural, ethnic, economic, and political factors involved over a period of time. Relative to the way Christians should view and use their material possessions, these factors created new challenges and necessitated clarification and correctives as the church grew and expanded throughout the Roman Empire.

What happened in the New Testament era did not take place in isolation from God's revelation in the Old Testament. As in any history, there is progression and continuity. It is important to study this continuity to understand all aspects of Bible doctrine, but it is particularly important to understand this connection as we attempt to formulate a body of truth regarding how a Christian should view and use material possessions. The Old Testament has a great deal to say about how God's people dealt with possessions under the Old Testament covenant (the law of Moses especially). Consequently, we will look at the unfolding of God's revelation regarding material possessions in the Old Testament and evaluate and integrate that revelation with the unfolding of God's revelation in the New Testament.

SUPRACULTURAL PRINCIPLES

As we progress through this study and complete each part, we will delineate biblical principles that emerge from each unit of study. Since one of our major goals is to determine from Scripture a *body of principles* to guide twentieth-century Christians in the use of their material possessions, it is important, first of all, to define what is meant by a *principle*.

DEFINITIONS

Webster defines a *principle* as "a comprehensive and fundamental law, doctrine, or assumption" or as "a rule or code of conduct." Applied to principles based upon supracultural truth, this becomes a helpful definition—particularly since the term "principle" is used in this study. We are looking for basic "laws" or "doctrines" or "assumptions" that reveal God's will for Christians regarding how they should view and use their material possessions. In that sense, these principles become a "code of conduct" to guide Christians in their living. If rightly stated, these principles are applicable to believers who live in every culture of the world and at any moment in history.¹⁰

DIFFERENTIATIONS

Principles per se do not include the *way* in which a principle is applied in any given cultural situation. Principles relate to activities (functions) and directives (teachings), not to forms, patterns, and methodology. Though it is impossible to engage in *functions* (the application of principles) without some kind of formal methodology and structure, it is possible to state a principle that describes a function without describing the *form* that principle takes when it is applied.

This is what makes a biblical principle truly supracultural. If it is, indeed, a correctly worded biblical principle, it can be applied anywhere in the world, no matter what the cultural conditions. Furthermore, it is applica-

ble at any moment in history—in the first century as well as in the twentieth century, anytime in-between, and in the future.¹¹

APPLICATIONS

Understanding the supracultural nature of these principles is important in helping Christians apply them. For example, being able to apply these principles does not depend on the existence of certain economic structures in a particular society. Furthermore, being able to apply them is not dependent on one's economic status in that society, either as an individual Christian or as a group of Christians. In fact, being able to apply these principles is not dependent upon *any* cultural factors. Though it may be more difficult to apply them because of certain cultural restrictions and pressures, their *supracultural* nature makes it possible for these principles to work in some form or fashion.

In some social environments in the world, of course, practicing certain biblical principles may be so threatening that it leads to persecution. In rare instances, this persecution has caused some Christians to pay the ultimate price in order to obey God—death through martyrdom. Stephen's death illustrates this in graphic fashion (Acts 7:54-60).

Fortunately, Christians are not severely persecuted in most cultures of the world—particularly in terms of how they use their material possessions. In fact, when these principles are applied properly, it usually does not alienate non-Christians or make them angry; rather, it contributes to peaceful relationships with unbelieving governmental authorities, employers, and employees. For example, when Christians pay their taxes regularly, it demonstrates that they are good citizens and loyal to the government, which in turn usually helps make it possible for believers to live "peaceful and quiet lives" (1 Tim. 2:2).

INTERPRETATIONS

How do we determine a biblical principle from the study of God's unfolding revelation? First, we must look carefully at the totality of Scripture. Biblical principles can be determined only in the context of God's complete written revelation. To attempt to principlize without the total context of Scripture can lead to statements that are only partially true or even untrue and inaccurate.

Second, we must look at all the *actions* and *functions* of God's people as they are described in Scripture and interpret these events in the light of what was happening in the culture of the time. It is especially important to look at what transpired during New Testament days, for it is in this historical context that the New Testament describes our New Covenant relationships with God and one another.

Narrowing our sphere of existence still further, we are all citizens of the kingdom of God, if we know Jesus Christ personally as Lord and Savior. But more specifically, we are members of Christ's Body, the church. Therefore, it is vitally important that we interpret Scripture and develop principles in the light of an adequate *ecclesiology*—an accurate perspective on what the Bible teaches about the church.

Third, we must look at all the *teachings* and *directives* of Scripture (e.g., the teachings of Jesus Christ and the teachings of the apostles). We must interpret these exhortations through careful grammatical and contextual analysis, attempting to understand what these teachings mean in their original historical and cultural context. To ignore this important principle of hermeneutics (the science of biblical interpretation) can lead to serious error.

One teaching that has become a serious problem in today's culture is the doctrine of prosperity theology. This so-called "principle," which teaches that God will multiply Christians' earthly possessions if they tithe (give 10 percent of their income) regularly, has become popular for several reasons. For one thing, certain Bible teachers have taken scriptural statements out of context. They have made biblical teachings and illustrations say things that the authors did not intend. Some Bible teachers fail to recognize (or admit) that this doctrine tends to produce results only in capitalistic societies where it is possible to better oneself financially due to the free enterprise system.

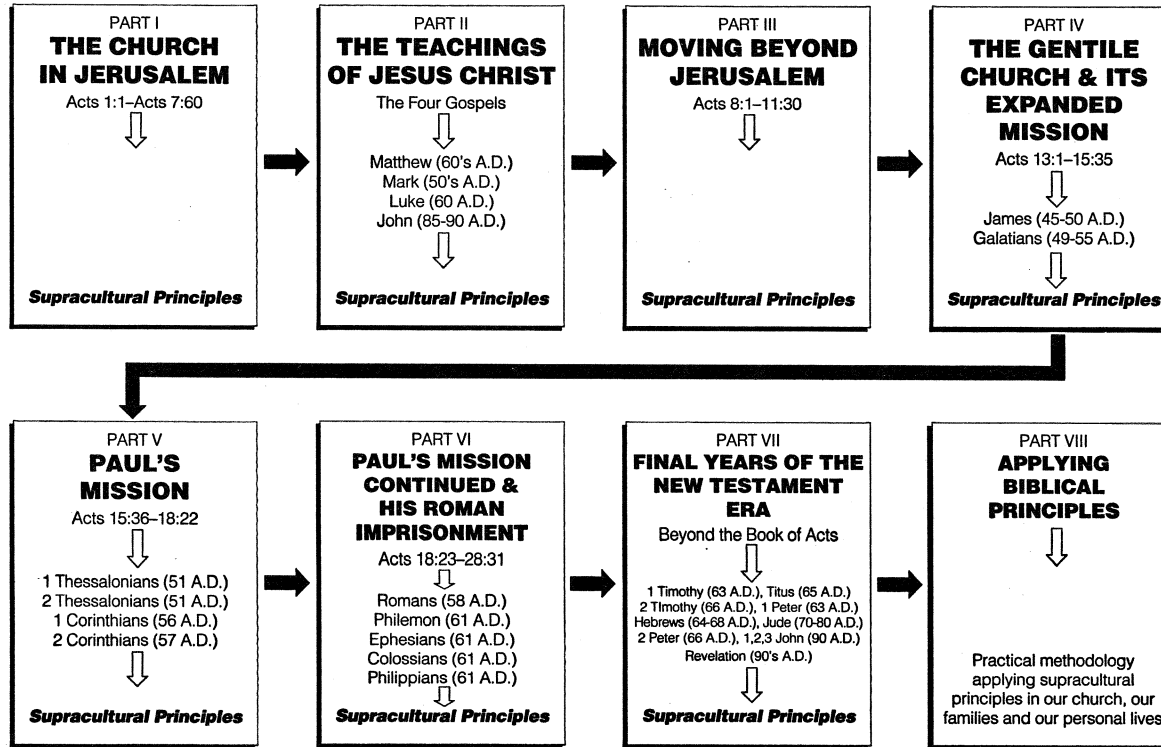
Unfortunately, some media evangelists and Bible teachers as well as other high-powered preachers are very much aware that this false doctrine is a successful way to generate money. Consequently, some use it as a manipulative means to carry on dishonest and fraudulent activities. And they do this in the name of Jesus Christ. Unbiblical teaching like this shows why this biblical study is so necessary.¹²

Fourth, in order to determine supracultural principles from Scripture, we must observe the extent to which New Testament "activities" and "teachings" are repeated, verified, expanded, and reinforced throughout the whole counsel of God, including *both* the Old and New Testaments. This process helps avoid taking Scripture out of context to support our own "personal agendas." Looking carefully at God's truth as it is unfolded *throughout Scripture* will help us understand *God's* agenda, not ours.

THE STRUCTURE FOR THIS STUDY

This study begins with the founding of the church in the book of Acts. As God's revelational history unfolds in Luke's historical account, the remainder of the books and letters in the New Testament are studied and evaluated in chronological order. Following each series of events and major teachings, *principles* are stated that are defined as *supracultural*. It is at this

A Historical and Chronological Structure for Determining God's Will Regarding Material Possessions



juncture, particularly, that Old Testament insights and teachings are utilized to explain and reinforce these supracultural principles. This structure is visualized on page 26.

NOTES

1. Justo L. Gonzalez, *Faith and Wealth: A History of Early Christian Ideas on the Origin, Significance, and Use of Money* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), p. 230.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 230-31.
3. George Elton Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), p. 25.
4. Charles C. Ryrie, *Biblical Theology of the New Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 1959), p. 12.
5. Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago: Moody, 1989), p. 20.
6. Ryrie, *Biblical Theology*, p. 13.
7. Enns, *Handbook of Theology*, p. 20, writes, "Biblical theology pays attention to the important historical circumstances in which the biblical doctrines were given. What can be learned from the Old Testament era of revelation? What were the circumstances in the writing of Matthew or John? What were the circumstances of the addressees of the letter to the Hebrews? These are important questions that help resolve the doctrinal emphasis of a particular period or of a specific writer."
8. At the outset of this study, I would like to pay tribute to the late Dr. Merrill Tenney, who served for many years as dean of the Wheaton College Graduate School and professor of New Testament literature. It was my privilege to study under Dr. Tenney. More than any other professor, both in his classroom teaching and through his writings, he introduced me to the process of understanding the New Testament in its historical, cultural, and chronological context. His classic volume, *New Testament Survey* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), has been of immeasurable help in providing a unique research model and design for structuring and pursuing this study on how Christians in the New Testament era viewed and used their material possessions.
9. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, pp. 32-33.
10. Enns, *Handbook of Theology*, p. 21, explains the importance of exegesis to biblical theology:
 Biblical theology has a direct relationship to exegesis ("to explain; to interpret"), inasmuch as biblical theology is the result of exegesis. Exegesis lies at the foundation of biblical theology. Exegesis calls for an analysis of the biblical text according to the literal-grammatical-historical methodology. (1) The passage under consideration should be studied according to the normal meaning of language. How is the word or statement normally understood? (2) The passage should be studied according to the rules of grammar; exegesis demands an examination of the nouns, verbs, prepositions, etc., for a proper understanding of the passage. (3) The passage should be studied in its historical context. What were the political, social, and particularly the cultural circumstances surrounding it? Biblical theology does not end with exegesis, but it must begin there. The theologian must be hermeneutically exacting in analyzing the text to properly understand what Matthew, Paul, or John wrote.

11. Henry A. Virkler, *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), especially chap. 8, "Applying the Biblical Message: A Proposal for the Transcultural Problem," pp. 211-31; also see Roy B. Zuck, "Applications in Biblical Hermeneutics and Exposition," in *Walvoord: A Tribute*, ed. by Donald K. Campbell (Chicago: Moody, 1982).
12. See Michael Horton, ed., *The Agony of Deceit: What Some TV Preachers Are Really Teaching* (Chicago: Moody, 1990); Bruce Barron, *The Health and Wealth Gospel: A Fresh Look at Healing, Prosperity & Positive Confession* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1987).

Part 1
THE CHURCH IN JERUSALEM

Part 1 describes the activities and functions of the church in Jerusalem during the first five years. It covers the time from its inception on the Day of Pentecost to when it was scattered after Stephen's trial and martyrdom. The totality of the events described by Luke form a singular segment in the history of the church, and, viewed together, they give us an illuminating profile of how the New Testament believers in Jerusalem viewed their material possessions. It is significant that approximately *half* of these events focus on the way the first Christians used their material possessions to further the work of God's kingdom.

1. Setting the Stage
2. Identifying with the Jewish Community
3. The Church in Action
4. Supracultural Principles

1

Setting the Stage

Following Christ's ascension, the apostles "returned to Jerusalem" as they had been told (Acts 1:12). They joined more than one hundred other followers of Christ in the upper room, where they had been staying. Then they waited for the Holy Spirit to come as Jesus Christ said He would. In the meantime, "they all joined together constantly in prayer" (Acts 1:14).

This small band of disciples could only respond to what they knew and understood. One major fact was clear—particularly in the minds of the eleven apostles: *Jesus had been resurrected*. Jesus "showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs *that he was alive*" (Acts 1:3a). Even Thomas, the most skeptical of the apostles, had stopped doubting and now believed (John 20:24-29).

At some point during those days of waiting, Peter remembered two statements from the Psalms that he now understood as applying directly to Judas Iscariot (Acts 1:20). These two prophecies predicted *his betrayal* (Ps. 69:25) and *his replacement* (Ps. 109:8). Peter knew that they must choose another man to join them—a man who had been with the other eleven apostles from the time John came baptizing. "One of these," Peter shared with the whole group, "must become a witness with us of his resurrection" (Acts 1:21-22). Consequently, Matthias "was added to the eleven apostles" (Acts 1:26).

THE SETTING IN JERUSALEM: ACTS 2:1

Three times a year, faithful Jews participated in three special events in the holy city. Jeremias observes that "on three occasions during these months the number of visitors increased by leaps and bounds to a prodigious height, at the three great festivals when pilgrims came from all over the world: Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles (Deut. 16:1-16). The annual peak was reached at Passover."¹

The special celebration that was in progress when Jesus ascended was the Feast of Pentecost. More precisely, scholars tell us that this special festival began on the same day Jesus rose from the grave and culminated fifty days later on the Day of Pentecost. This was the day the Holy Spirit descended on the 120 believers gathered in the upper room (2:1-4).

If these calculations are correct, this means that ten days transpired between the time Jesus ascended and the Holy Spirit came. This calculation is based upon Luke's observation that Christ "appeared to them over a period of forty days" (1:3). Since the Feast of Pentecost lasted fifty days and culminated on the Day of Pentecost, we can assume that the disciples waited ten days for the Holy Spirit to come. It was during this ten-day period that the 120 gathered in the upper room and joined together in prayer. It was also during this period that Peter took the lead in replacing Judas Iscariot with Matthias.

At the time the Holy Spirit descended on this small band of believers, thousands of faithful pilgrims from all over the Roman Empire were present in Jerusalem. Luke identified them as "*God-fearing Jews* from every nation under heaven" (2:5, italics added*). Many had no doubt come earlier to also participate in the Passover celebration, which means that they were there during the time of the crucifixion. Most of those present at Passover probably stayed for the Feast of Pentecost. Jeremias estimates that the permanent inhabitants of Jerusalem totaled about 55,000 and that there were approximately 125,000 visitors, the "God-fearing Jews" Luke refers to in Acts 2:5.²

THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT: ACTS 2:2-39

The coming of the Holy Spirit was a total surprise, not only to the inhabitants of Jerusalem but to all of the visitors who had come from all over the New Testament world. The only ones who were actually looking for this event composed the little band gathered in the upper room. And even they did not know specifically what was going to happen.

Evidently, the sound that seemed to be "like the blowing of a violent wind" (2:2) could be heard throughout Jerusalem: when the people in Jerusalem heard this sound, they "came together in bewilderment" (2:6b). When they gathered at the location in Jerusalem where the 120 had been staying, they were "utterly amazed" in that they heard the apostles speaking in their own languages. "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans?" they asked (2:7).

Luke provides us with a descriptive list of the language groups represented. There were "Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt

*In future Scripture quotations, all italics have been added for the sake of emphasis and will not be noted.

and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs" (2:9-11). All of these visitors heard the apostles speaking the Word of God in their own languages.

This phenomenon was so unusual that some of the onlookers accused the apostles of being drunk. Peter responded by quoting from the prophet Joel, who prophesied that this event would take place (2:17-21). He explained that Jesus of Nazareth whom they had crucified was now the resurrected Christ. He was indeed the promised Messiah that David had referred to in Psalm 16:8-11 (Acts 2:25-28).

Christ had been raised from the dead and had also been "exalted to the right hand of God" and "had received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit." Consequently, Peter concluded, Jesus Christ Himself was the one who had "poured out" what they could now "see and hear" (2:33). Peter culminated his initial message with a firm conclusion: "Therefore," he said, "let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (2:36).

A NEW ERA FOR GOD'S PEOPLE: ACTS 2:40-41

We are not told how many people were actually gathered together when Peter preached this message. However, we are told that three thousand responded to his invitation to "repent and be baptized" (2:38). Though we do not know how many genuine believers this three thousand represents, many of these individuals were probably heads of households. This means that the actual number of believers far exceeded the initial number referred to in Acts 2:41.

Though most Bible teachers pinpoint this event as the beginning of the church, those who believed and were baptized that day did not fully understand the concept of the church. This was true of the apostles as well. However, this was definitely the moment in history when God began a new era in His relationship with His people the Jews. The sacrificial system, established at Mt. Sinai many years before, had pointed to the cross where the Lamb of God would be slain for the sins of the world. The Jews who had responded to Peter's message were now looking back to the cross and the resurrection, and with their faith were acknowledging that Christ had become the once-for-all Passover Lamb who would never be sacrificed again.

NOTES

1. Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, trans. F. H. and C. H. Kay (London: SCM, 1969), p. 58.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

2

Identifying with the Jewish Community

Imagine the setting! Thousands of Jews had come from all over the Roman Empire—and beyond. Most were “faithful” and “God-fearing” Jews. Otherwise, they would not have come to offer sacrifices at the Temple, to pay their Temple tax, and to use their “second tithe” to participate in this great festival (Deut. 14:22-27). Together with the residents of Jerusalem and those who had come from the outlying districts of Jerusalem, they were expressing their Jewish faith.

While there, the unexpected happened. Many had witnessed the crucifixion of a man who claimed to be the Messiah. Later, many heard reports that those who had followed Him before His death stole His body during the night. Matthew recorded that this story “was widely circulated” among the Jews. His account helps us understand the mentality of the majority of the Jews (Matt. 28:11-15).

PERSONALIZING THE DAY OF PENTECOST: A POSSIBLE SCENARIO (ACTS 2)

What would you have done if you had been a God-fearing Grecian Jew—a father of a large family—let us say from Rome? All of you had come to worship God in the Temple in Jerusalem. You had traveled by ship to Caesarea and from there by foot to Jerusalem. While there, you witnessed the crucifixion. In fact, you got caught up in the mob psychology that permeated the atmosphere. Though you did not fully understand why you were doing it, you even joined the crowd and shouted, “Crucify him! Crucify him!” You were convinced that this Jesus of Nazareth was guilty of blasphemy. After all, some of your best friends who were members of the Sanhedrin told you they heard Jesus claim to have existed before Abraham was born (John 8:58).

YOUR ENLIGHTENMENT

Now you realize that Jesus *was* the Messiah. The rumors you had heard about a “supposed resurrection” were true! You heard the sound like a mighty rushing wind that swept through Jerusalem. Once again, you followed the crowd, this time to a location where you heard twelve men from Galilee speaking in various languages—languages they had never learned. In fact, you recognized most of them as uneducated men. And one of them spoke your Latin dialect, “declaring the wonders of God” (2:11).

Then you heard Peter speak. You found out that he was a former fisherman who had left his boats and nets nearly three and a half years ago to follow Christ. You were utterly amazed when he stood and quoted a lengthy section from the prophet Joel, explaining that the disciples were speaking by the influence and power of the Holy Spirit (2:17-18). He further explained that the man you had helped crucify was indeed the Messiah.

You then heard the same man quote from a psalm written by David. You had heard this psalm read many times before—and it always puzzled you. Who was David speaking about (2:25-28)? That day you heard Peter explain the meaning of this psalm. David could not have been speaking of himself because he died and was buried. “His tomb,” Peter stated, “is here to this day” (2:29).

Peter explained that David was a prophet. He knew God’s promise that He would place one of David’s descendants on his throne. He explained that David was looking ahead and, through the power of the Holy Spirit, had predicted the resurrection of Christ. Furthermore, David had predicted that this Christ would ascend to heaven. Peter reminded you—and the crowd—that

David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said,
 “The Lord said to my Lord:
 “Sit at my right hand
 until I make your enemies
 a footstool for your feet.””

(2:34; cf. Psalm 110:1)

YOUR CONVERSION

At that moment you were overwhelmed with conviction—“cut to the heart.” With a number of other listeners, you cried out, “Brothers, what shall we do?” (2:37).

“Repent and be baptized . . . in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins,” Peter responded. Peter promised that you would then “receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” just as they had (2:38).

After you heard this message, you rushed back to where you were staying—one of the inns of Jerusalem where your family was eagerly await-

ing a report of this unusual disturbance. You immediately shared what you had seen and heard. Because your wife and your sons and daughters (and their spouses) respected you as their spiritual leader, your total family, including your servants, eagerly responded to the truth.

Together, all of you elbowed your way back through the crowds where the apostles were already baptizing thousands of people. You and your extended family joyfully joined in this experience to demonstrate to your fellow Jews that you were now acknowledging Christ as the true Messiah. With this act of public confession, you let everyone know that you had joined the ranks of those who were disciples of Christ.

YOUR CRITICAL DECISION

Since this was the final day of the festival of Pentecost you had a critical decision to make. The fifty-day celebration had come to a close. The money and food (your second tithe) you had saved for the trip was nearly depleted with just enough resources to travel back to your home in Rome.

You soon found out that thousands of other Grecian Jews, including numerous widows, were facing the same decision. Should you return home or stay in Jerusalem? You were aware, of course, that the Old Testament prophets predicted that the Messiah would indeed occupy the throne of David and reign as king in Jerusalem. It would be a perfect kingdom. As you retired that night, you shared with your family the words of Isaiah:

Behold, I will create
new heavens and a new earth.
The former things will not be remembered,
nor will they come to mind.
But be glad and rejoice forever
in what I will create,
for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight
and its people a joy.
I will rejoice over Jerusalem
and take delight in my people;
the sound of weeping and of crying
will be heard no more.

(Isa. 65:17-19)

YOUR REFLECTIONS

You could hardly sleep that night thinking about Isaiah's words. You thought about the Roman emperor, Tiberius, whose throne was just a few miles from your home in Rome. He was a godless man. Though he had made some good decisions and had established some helpful policies in the Roman Empire, he was an arrogant leader. The experience just two years ago (A.D. 31) when Aelius Sejanus, the captain of the praetorian guard,

had tried to seize his throne had left Tiberius extremely paranoid and even more cruel than he had been before.

You also thought of Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee and Perea. Though a Jew by religion, he was an insensitive and immoral leader. You heard about what he had allowed to happen to John the Baptist—how he had him beheaded to placate his wife Herodias, who was intensely angry at John for accusing both of them of having an adulterous relationship (Matt. 14:1-12).

You saw him nearly two months ago when he arrived in Jerusalem for the Passover celebration. As usual, he had entered this holy city with pomp and circumstance—actually pride and arrogance. You had also heard about the way he treated Jesus when Pilate sent Him to his quarters for a hearing—how he and his soldiers had “ridiculed and mocked him, dressing him in an elegant robe” (Luke 23:11).

And then, of course, there was Pontius Pilate, who was appointed by the Roman emperor as procurator of Judea. You had seen him in action the day Christ was sentenced to death. In some respects, you felt sorry for him because he wrestled with the decision, knowing full well that Christ was innocent of the charges brought against Him.

But you could not, as you reflected on the day’s events, forget what Pilate had done several years before when he took office in Jerusalem. He had insisted that his troops carry into the Holy City banners bearing the image of the Roman emperor. The news of the violent reaction among your Jewish brethren had traveled all the way to Rome in a matter of days and had reached the ears of Tiberius. Pilate had yielded only when he saw that his actions would lead to bloodshed.

But Pilate’s move still made political hay in Rome. He had ingratiated himself with the emperor but, at the same time, demonstrated wisdom by changing his actions so as to placate the Jews. You had always been thankful that most of the Roman emperors did not wish to interfere with the religious views and practices of the people in various provinces in the Empire. Nevertheless, you were well aware of the pressures your fellow Jews felt, particularly in Jerusalem.

As all of these events churned and then congealed in your thoughts, the reality of what may be happening kept your mind racing most of the night. You finally drifted off to sleep reflecting on Peter’s sermon earlier that day when he quoted the prophet Joel. Your mind jumped ahead to the next section of the prophecy:

In those days and at that time,
when I restore the fortunes of *Judah* and *Jerusalem*,
I will gather all nations
and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat.

There I will enter into judgment against them
concerning my inheritance, my people Israel,
for they scattered my people among the nations
and divided up my land. . . .

Then you will know that I, the Lord your God,
dwell in Zion, my holy hill.

Jerusalem will be holy;
never again will foreigners invade her.

(Joel 3:1-2, 17)

Did not Zechariah prophesy the same future for Jerusalem? "On that day," Zechariah wrote, "living water will flow out from *Jerusalem*. . . . The Lord will be king over the whole earth. On that day *there will be one Lord, and his name the only name*" (Zech. 14:8-9).

At that moment, your mind was in a state of limbo—half conscious and half unconscious. But you never forgot the visual picture imprinted on your heart, for in your dreams you saw Herod—and Pilate—and yes, even the Roman emperor Tiberius, all bowing low and kneeling before Jesus Christ who was sitting on the throne in Jerusalem. And beyond, you saw people coming from all parts of the world to pay homage to the King of kings, the one and final and great King of the Jews.

THE SCENE IN PERSPECTIVE

Though this is an imaginary scenario, it fits what was happening in Jerusalem. It reconstructs what may have been the thinking of many God-fearing Jews who came from all over the New Testament world to worship God. Those who were relatively wealthy had been in Jerusalem for at least two months. They had witnessed the crucifixion and now had been confronted with their sin of rejecting the Messiah. Others had come for a shorter period of time. Though their knowledge of everything that had transpired was more limited, they were able to very quickly get an update. The Jewish residents in Jerusalem would have filled them in on the details, for many of them had actually heard Jesus teach and had seen Him work miracles. They would have felt the impact of their sin more forcefully since they had witnessed and participated in His life as well as His death.

Evidently, most of the Grecian Jews who responded to Peter's message decided to stay in Jerusalem so as not to miss the next chapter in this exciting story. After all, the last words the apostles received directly from the Lord came via the two men dressed in white. These heavenly messengers had appeared to the twelve apostles as they "were looking intently up into the sky" as Christ was disappearing from sight. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? The same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

THEIR VIEW OF THE FUTURE

There is no historical evidence that the Holy Spirit expanded, at this time, on this eschatological perspective in the minds and hearts of the apostles. In fact, some of the specific details regarding the return of Christ to earth following His ascension have never been revealed—even to this day. The totality of Scripture testifies to this reality.

The apostles, then, did not have a total perspective on what was to transpire in the days to come, even though Jesus Christ had given them some very specific information about their responsibility. When they asked Him if He was “going to restore the kingdom to Israel” at this time, Jesus responded by saying, “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. *But* you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:6-8).

With this explanation and directive, Jesus Christ made clear that He would not return to restore the kingdom to Israel until these men had at least *begun* the process of being witnesses of Christ’s death and resurrection to the “ends of the earth.” The apostles did not fully understand what this meant nor did they give much attention to it initially. But in God’s sovereign plan, the Holy Spirit began to unfold the future in broad brush strokes, enabling Peter to interpret the prophecies of Joel and David but without a specific understanding of that great era of which he was now a part—the age of the church. Peter did not even understand at this moment in his life that Gentiles would be “a part of the kingdom.” This insight did not come until at least five years later when he was confronted with the task of witnessing to a Gentile named Cornelius. At that time he confessed, “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right” (Acts 10:34-35).

SOME QUESTIONS

Why did God choose to reveal His message in this way? Why did He not make it all clear immediately? When it comes to God’s plans for future events, Scripture reveals that He has purposely kept these theological realities somewhat nebulous. For example, on one occasion, several of Christ’s disciples tested Him about the future. “What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” they queried. Though Jesus related some specific signs that would take place before He returned, He stated, “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father” (Matt. 24:36). If the Son of God Himself, who was God in the flesh, did not know the specifics relative to the future, who are we to question God’s decision to keep these realities veiled in mystery?

Another important factor helps us understand God's unfolding revelation. The children of Israel have always played a very significant role in God's redemptive plan and continue to do so until this very day. They *are* His chosen people—chosen not to show favoritism, but to reveal Himself to the whole world. Through His divine wisdom, He chose to make this a lengthy process. And as Gentiles, we are “wild olive shoots” that “have been grafted” among the “original olive shoots” in the “cultivated olive tree”—which Paul made clear is Israel (Rom. 11:17-24). God chose to unveil these truths a step at a time, which is what we see happening in the opening chapters of the book of Acts.

As we observe this process unfolding, we will see some important supracultural principles that span the transitional nature of Jewish-Christian history. I am speaking of those principles that relate to how we, as Christians, are to view and use our material possessions. These principles are clear in the opening chapters of Acts, even though those who practiced them did not understand what we now understand from the perspective of Christian history. And though the forms and structures of the early church changed dramatically, particularly as the gospel spread out and beyond Jerusalem, the principles remain the same. In fact, they are foundational principles that create a framework for additional principles, which will emerge as we see God's revelation unfold.

3

The Church in Action: Acts 2:42–6:7

When the church was born in Jerusalem, it appears that the majority of those Jews who had come from distant places and who responded to the gospel decided to stay and wait for Christ to return and to restore the earthly kingdom to Israel. In view of what they knew from the Old Testament, and in view of the Holy Spirit's lack of specificity at this moment in history, we cannot blame them. Because God, in His sovereign plan, had not fully revealed the future, they were not yet ready to leave. As God intended, the church would grow quantitatively and qualitatively and become a dynamic force that would in God's own time be scattered to the ends of the then known world.

THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE BELIEVERS (ACTS 2:42-47)

These new Jewish believers immediately "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching" (2:42). Though we cannot prove what the apostles actually taught, we know that the Holy Spirit reminded them of everything Jesus had taught them (John 14:26). We can also speculate, on the basis of the believers' attitudes and actions, that the Holy Spirit must have reminded the apostles of some of the truths Christ had taught about material possessions.

This was necessary because of what was happening in Jerusalem. Thousands of families decided to stay. Many had already used up their surplus of money and food. Those who were staying in public inns would need to pay their rent, and everyone needed food daily. To solve this problem, the believers decided to "have everything in common." This included both those who lived in Jerusalem and those who lived in other parts of the Roman Empire. But the residents of Jerusalem had to take the initial steps in solving the problem. This they did—willingly and unselfishly.

"Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need" (2:45). Those who owned homes in Jerusalem opened their doors to those from other places in the world, and "they broke bread in their homes

and ate together with glad and sincere hearts." Through this great demonstration of love and unselfishness, these new believers were "enjoying the favor of all the people." More and more Jews recognized that Jesus Christ was the true Messiah, and "the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved" (2:47).

Two primary factors were used by the Holy Spirit to cause the growth of the church in Jerusalem. First, the love and unity expressed by these believers, especially as it was reflected in the way they shared their material possessions, had a profound impact on the unbelieving community. The unconverted people saw them not only *talking* about love, but *demonstrating* love (2:46-47). The second factor God used in a mighty way to bring growth to the church was the divine power released by the Holy Spirit. This involved the signs and wonders and miracles that were evident in a special way through the ministry of the apostles (2:43).

PETER HEALS THE CRIPPLED BEGGAR (ACTS 3:1-10)

Following the experience at Pentecost, the first miracle recorded by Luke involved Peter and John as they were going up to the Temple to pray. It was about three o'clock in the afternoon. As they were approaching the Temple gate called Beautiful, they encountered a man who had been crippled from birth. He was being carried by some of his friends to a place inside the Temple courts where he was allowed to beg. It is doubtful he knew who Peter and John were, so he went about his daily routine and "asked them for money." Luke recorded that "Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, 'Look at us!'"

Because of Peter's command, the man evidently assumed that they were going to give him money. So he gave them his full attention. Peter's response is significant. He said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk" (3:6).

Predictably, this miracle had a tremendous impact on the Jewish community. Many people had seen this man over a lengthy period of time sitting at the Temple gate begging for money and food. When they saw him "walking and jumping and praising God . . . they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him" (3:8, 10).

This miraculous healing gave Peter and John an opportunity to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. But the religious leaders were "greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead" (4:2). Their message also affected the Sadducees, particularly since they did not believe in resurrection. Consequently, Peter and John were seized and put in jail. However, the results of this miracle and the message that was proclaimed already had a profound impact on the people: "many who heard the message believed, and the number of men grew to about five thousand" (4:4).