

Evaluating Current Trends

Keys to Discerning Authentic Ministries and Doctrinal Trends

Student Manual

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Lesson 1

The Need for Discernment

The purpose of this course is to equip the believer to be able to distinguish the good from the bad, the wheat from the tares, the profitable from the unprofitable and the true from the counterfeit. The Bible speaks of deception and the need to be watchful especially as we near the Second Coming of Christ. As we approach that day we must be able to discern or judge between true and false ministries and from sound and not-so-sound doctrine. We must be able to discern between ministries and doctrines that build what God is building and those ministries and doctrines that work against what God is building (Ezek. 44:23; Mal.3:16-18).

In order to be able to do this we need to:

- Observe the warnings of God’s word,
- Accept the fact that we are all vulnerable to deception,
- Apply the tests that God gives to us in His word,
- Maintain a teachable heart and
- Lean strongly on the Holy Spirit to assist us.

I. What does the word “discernment” mean?

There are several definitions of discernment that help us with our understanding.

A. The English word “to discern” means the following:

The following definitions gleanings are from Answers.com

1. To perceive with the eyes or intellect; to detect.
2. To recognize or comprehend mentally.
3. To perceive or recognize as being different or distinct; to distinguish.
4. To perceive differences.
5. To perceive and fix the identity of, especially with difficulty.
6. To perceive, especially barely or fleetingly.
7. To perceive with a special effort of the senses or the mind.
8. To recognize as being different.

Synonyms include: perceive, observe, notice, note, recognize, tell apart and distinguish

Antonyms include: disregard, neglect and overlook

B. The English word “discernment” means the following:

The following definitions gleanings are from Answers.com

1. The act or process of exhibiting keen insight and good judgment.
2. Keeness of insight and judgment.
3. Skill in perceiving, discriminating, or judging.

Synonyms include: acumen, astuteness, clear-sightedness, discrimination, eye, keenness, nose, perceptiveness and shrewdness

Antonyms include: gullibility, denseness, ignorance, ineptness, obtuseness and stupidity

C. The Greek words that are most often translated “discern” or discernment” include:

1. *Diakrisis* which means a distinguishing, discerning, judging (Heb. 5:14)
2. *Dokimazo* which means to test, examine, prove, scrutinise (to see whether a thing is genuine or not), as metals (Luke 12:56)

See: I John 4:1 and I Thessalonians 5:21

II. Why is discernment so important in our day?

A. The devil is subtle and uses deception as his _____ (Gen. 3:1; II Cor. 11:3).

To deceive is to cause to stray, to lead astray, lead aside from the right way through craft or _____.

1. The Bible warns us against the “_____ of the devil” (Eph. 6:11).

The Greek word used here for “wiles” refers to cunning arts, deceit, craft and trickery.

2. The Bible warns us that the devil is seeking whom he may _____ (I Pet. 5:8-9).
3. The Bible warns us of the _____ of the devil (I Tim. 3:7; II Tim. 2:26).

A snare is an instrument for hunting. It is a trap that is set for something or someone that is hidden from obvious view. When a snare seizes its prey it is usually unexpected, sudden and _____.

4. The Bible warns us that at times the devil will use _____ to trick or deceive believers (Eph. 4:14).

B. God wants His people to be as _____ (Mt. 10:16).

Sometimes the wolves are not just the unsaved who bring persecution to the church. Sometimes the wolves actually arise from within the church and damage the work of God (Acts 20:29-30).

- C. The last days will be especially characterized by a prevalence of _____.
1. Jesus indicated that the end times would be times of _____ deception (Mt. 24:4, 24; Mark 13:5; Luke 21:8).
 - a. There will be many false and deceptive _____ (Mt. 24:5; Mark 13:6, 21-23).
 - b. There will be many deceptive _____ (Mt. 24:24; Mark 13:22; II Th. 2:9).
 - c. There will be many false and deceptive _____ (I Tim. 4:1).
 2. Other New Testament writers confirm that the end times will be times of great deception.
 - a. The end time context will sift out those who have a love for _____ and those who do not (II Th. 2:8-12).
 - b. The end time context will be characterized by some being deluded and _____ from the faith (I Tim. 4:1).
 - c. The end time context will see church goes open to deception through _____ and covetousness (II Tim. 3:1-9, 13).
 - d. The end time context will see people itching for the _____ and the unusual (II Tim. 4:3-4).
 - e. The end time context will witness the devil unleashing his _____ on the church (Rev. 12:9; 13:14).

III. What are the three main areas that must be discerned?

In this course we want to focus on discerning three things that must be discerned.

- A. _____
- B. _____ or Teachings
- C. Our Own _____ (Ps. 139:23-24).

Lesson 2

The Fact of False Ministries

I. What will be the context of the church in the end times?

A. On the positive side the Eternal Purpose of God will come to _____ (Is. 60:1-5).

This means...

1. The church will be glorious and _____ (Mt. 16:18; Eph 5:27; Is. 60:13).
2. There will be days of great _____ (Mt. 13:39; Rev. 14:14-16).
3. There will be a great _____ of the Spirit of God (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:17-18).
4. The spirit and power of _____ will be on the church bringing restoration to relationships (Mal. 4:5-6).
5. The gospel will be going forth into the _____ (Mt. 24:14).
6. The kingdom of God will come to _____ (Jam. 5:7-8; Rev. 22:11, LB).

B. On the negative side Satan will work overtime to see that purpose _____ (II Tim. 3:1-5, See Appendix 1).

1. The love of many will grow _____ (Mt. 24:12).
2. There will be a great _____ (II Th. 2:3).
3. Many will give heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of _____ (I Tim. 4:1).
4. Many false christs or anointed ones will arise _____ many (II Tim. 3:13; Mt. 24:24).
5. Deception will be _____ (Mt. 24:24).
6. Wickedness will come to _____ (Rom. 1:18-32; Rev. 22:11, LB).

II. What is a false ministry?

The word false literally means _____ the truth or fact.

False: Contrary to the truth or fact; deceptive; counterfeit; artificial; not real or genuine.

III. What does the Bible say about the reality of false ministries?

The Bible teaches that...

A. False ministries are always _____ the true.

1. Jesus indicated that the wheat and tares are sown together and grow _____ (Mt. 13:24-30; 36-43).
2. False ministries were found in both the Old and the New Testament time.
 - a. They had them in Old Testament times (Deut. 18:20-22).
 - b. They had them in New Testament times (Rev. 2:2).
3. Jesus indicated that they would be _____ at the time of the harvest (Mt. 13:30).

B. False ministries fall into two categories.

1. Those from _____ the Church (Acts 13:6; 20:29; Gal. 2:4).

This includes representative from false religions, fortune tellers, mediums, mystics and other such people (Lev. 19:31; 20:6, 27; Deut. 18:11-13). It is important to note that all those who are false prophets even from outside of the church claim to be functioning _____.

To the mature believer these ministries are usually fairly easy to discern. Although often when they are accompanied by signs and wonders, even mature Christians can _____ (Acts 8:9-11).

2. Those from _____ the Church (Mt. 7:15; Acts 20:30; I John 2:19).

C. False ministries are of various types in the New Testament.

1. False _____ (II Cor. 11:13; Rev. 2:2).

A false apostle _____ a true apostle and may look to some degree like a true apostle but in reality the false apostle is a person who is not as much interested in serving and laying down his or her life for others, but has a completely different agenda.

2. False _____ (Mt. 7:15; 24:11, 24; Mark 13:22; Acts 13:6; II Pet. 2: 1; I John 4:1).

A false prophet may claim to be a true prophet and may look to some degree like a true prophet. The false prophet may even have prophecies that _____ but inwardly their heart is not right before the Lord. False prophets are inclined to tell you what you want to hear rather than what you need to hear so that they can be popular among the people (Jer. 5:31; 23:21; 29:8-9).

4. False _____ or Hirelings (Jer. 23:1-5; Ezek. 34:1-10; John 10:11-13).

A false shepherd may claim to be the man or woman of God, but in reality they _____ and their own preservation than they do about the flock of God. They function in the way that they do to gain something for themselves so that when the fire gets hot they do what is in their own best interest instead of what is good for the flock.

4. False _____ (I Pet. 2:1; I Tim. 6:3-5).

False teachers may look and sound very much like true teachers. The primary difference between them is the content of their teaching and the spirit with which they function. This doesn't mean that everything a false teacher teaches represents error. Quite the contrary, most of what a false teacher teaches is _____. This is what can make it so difficult to discern.

5. False Brethren or _____ (Gal. 2:4-5).

6. False Christs or _____ (Mt. 24:5, 24; Mark 13:22).

Jesus indicated that there would be false "anointed ones" which suggests there is a false or counterfeit anointing. This is why it is so important not to make a judgment about a ministry based on _____ that you may have had in a meeting when they were speaking. God gives us other criteria for _____ ministries.

- D. False ministries will be _____ in the end times (Mt. 24:24-25; Mark 13:22; I Tim. 4:1; II Tim. 3:13)

- E. False ministries will culminate in the manifestation of the "lawless one" and the false prophet who will have all power and manifest _____ and wonders (II Th. 2:1-12; I John 2:18; Rev. 13; 16:13-14; 19:20; 20:10).

Appendix 1, Lesson 2, The Context of the Last Days, II Timothy 3:1-5

Biblical Description	Synonyms	Antonyms
Lovers of their own selves	Fond of themselves, selfish, utterly self-centered	Selfless, considerate, others orientated
Covetous	Lovers of money, greedy, envious, motivated by money, grasping	Generous, liberal, self-sacrificing
Boasters	Full of big words, blow one's own horn, talk big, show off	Modest, accurate, grasping reality
Proud	Arrogant, conceited, insolent swagger, self-important, inflated, condescending, cocky, intolerant	Humble, lowly, submissive, unassuming, meek not weak
Blasphemers	Railers, irreverent, profane, sacrilegious, cursing/swearing	Reverent, benevolent, pious
Disobedient to parents	Rebellious to authority, disrespectful, obstinate, unmanageable, stubborn, defiant	Obedient, compliant, well behaved, manageable, submissive,
Unthankful	Thankless, inappreciative, critical	Appreciative, grateful, praising
Unholy	Worldly, wicked, corrupt, immoral, unsanctified, indecent, shameless	Spiritual, godly, moral, honest, virtuous, devout, righteous
Without natural affection	Unloving, hardhearted, callous, without familial love, insensitive	Caring, sympathetic, kind, warm-hearted
Trucebreakers	Irreconcilable, uncommitted, unforgiving	Conciliatory, loyal, committed, forgiving
False Accusers	Slanders, malicious gossips, scandal-mongers, liars	Truthful, discreet, accurate, reliable, authentic, faithful
Incontinent	Lacking restraint or self-control, intemperate, given to excess, given to anger	Temperate, controlled, moderate, balanced, coolheaded, easygoing
Fierce	Savage, brutal, uncivilized, barbaric, cruel, sadistic, ruthless	Merciful, gentle, calm, peaceful, civilized, tender, compassionate
Despisers of those that are good	Hateful, hostile to what is good, intolerant of those who practice good, enemies of decency	Promoters of good, lovers of good and those who practice that which is good.
Traitors	Betrayers, treacherous, faithless, devious, two-faced	Loyal, dependable, trustworthy, reliable, safe
Heady	Headstrong, reckless, defiant, adventurers, impulsive, rash, headlong with passion, hot-headed, bent on having one's own way, presumptuous	Manageable, cautious, cooperative, team player, principled, controlled
High-minded	Puffed up, lifted up in mind, swollen with self importance	Humble, treating others with respect, valuing the contribution of others
Lovers of pleasure	Feeling driven, love sensual and vain amusements, lives for the moment	Principle driven, driven by a passion to achieve destiny, able to see big picture
Having a form of godliness	Want to be perceived to be good, maintaining a religious facade, hypocritical, counterfeit, make-believe piety	True, proven, demonstrated, tested, tried, confirmed, real, substantial
Denying the power of God	Stranger's to God's power, having no personal experience with God, resisting its influence in their lives	Their relationship to God is a living, vibrant part of all that they do. They live putting God in His rightful place.

Lesson 3

The Food and Fuel of False Ministries

I. What is the FOOD of False Ministries?

Food can be defined as “that which is eaten, diet or _____.”

A. The food of false ministries is sheep or _____.

1. False ministries prey on the lambs or _____ (Amos 6:4; Eph. 4:14; I Tim. 3:6).

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Ephesians 4:14, NIV

2. False ministries prey on the _____, immature and ungrounded (II Pet. 2:14; 3:16).

But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. 2 And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. 3 By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber...13 They are spots and blemishes, carousing in their own deceptions while they feast with you, 14 having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls. They have a heart trained in covetous practices, and are accursed children. 15 They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness... II Peter 2:1-3, 13b-15

3. False ministries prey on the _____ and the needy (II Tim. 3:6-7).

These are the kind of people who smooth-talk themselves into the homes of unstable and needy women and take advantage of them; women who, depressed by their sinfulness, take up with every new religious fad that calls itself “truth.” – Msg

4. False ministries prey on the _____ and vulnerable (Jer. 6:13-15).

“From the least to the greatest, they trick others to get what does not belong to them. Yes, even my prophets and priests are like that! They offer superficial treatments for my people’s mortal wound. They give assurances of peace when all is war. Are they ashamed when they do these disgusting things? No, not at all--

they don't even blush! Therefore, they will lie among the slaughtered. They will be humbled beneath my punishing anger," says the LORD. –NLT

5. False ministries prey on those who do not have a sincere love for _____
_____ (II Th. 2:9-12).

The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, 10 and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. 11 And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, 12 that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

- B. False ministries exploit the nature and the defenselessness of _____ (Gal. 1:6-7).

I am shocked that you are turning away so soon from God, who in his love and mercy called you to share the eternal life he gives through Christ. You are already following a different way that pretends to be the Good News but is not the Good News at all. You are being fooled by those who twist and change the truth concerning Christ.

–NLT

1. Sheep are prone to _____ (Is 53:6a).
2. Sheep have an appetite for the _____ (Acts 8:18-10; 14:8-20).
3. Sheep have a thirst for that which is _____ (II Tim. 4:3-4).

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.

Contrast the Berean believers in Acts 17:11 and the Athenians in Acts 17:21.

Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men. Acts 17:10-12

And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new doctrine is of which you speak? For you are bringing some strange things to our ears. Therefore we want to know what these things mean." For all

the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing. Acts 17:19-21

4. Sheep love private, mysterious or _____ interpretation, revelation or experience (Mt. 24:26-27; II Pet. 1:20; 2:1).

Then if anyone says to you, "Look, here is the Christ!" or "There!" do not believe it. 24 For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. 25 See, I have told you beforehand. 26 Therefore if they say to you, "Look, He is in the desert!" do not go out; or "Look, He is in the inner rooms!" do not believe it. Matthew 24:23-26

5. Sheep love to hear what they _____ (Jer. 5:31; Gal. 4:6; John 8:40).

The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule by their own power; and My people love to have it so. But what will you do in the end? Jeremiah 5:31

Albert Barnes suggests that this could be read, "the priests govern according to their false prophecies, guidance, and directions." And the people love it because their words do not really challenge them to change.

Paul indicated that the time will come when people will not endure _____ (II Tim. 4:3a).

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine...

This word for "sound" literally means "that which is _____ or that which is good for you."

II. What is the FUEL of false ministries?

Fuel: Whatever feeds or sustains any expenditure, outlay, passion or excitement.

A. False ministries are fueled by _____. This includes people who are:

1. Discontent
2. Downcast
3. Discouraged
4. Desperate

B. False ministries are fueled by wrong _____ and motivation.

1. They care about _____ more than they do the sheep (Rom. 16:18; John 10:13; Phil. 3:19; Ezek. 34:2-3, 8).

Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame--who set their mind on earthly things. Philippians 3:17-19

2. They have selfish _____ (Phil. 1:16).

Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from goodwill: The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains... Philippians 1:15-16

3. They have a spirit of _____ (I Tim. 6:5-10; Tit. 1:11; II Peter 2:3).

Anyone who teaches anything different is both conceited and ignorant. Such a person has an unhealthy desire to quibble over the meaning of words. This stirs up arguments ending in jealousy, fighting, slander, and evil suspicions. 5 These people always cause trouble. Their minds are corrupt, and they don't tell the truth. To them religion is just a way to get rich. 6 Yet true religion with contentment is great wealth. 7 After all, we didn't bring anything with us when we came into the world, and we certainly cannot carry anything with us when we die. 8 So if we have enough food and clothing, let us be content. 9 But people who long to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many foolish and harmful desires that plunge them into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is at the root of all kinds of evil. And some people, craving money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows.

I Timothy 6:4-10, NLT

Many will follow their evil teaching and shameful immorality. And because of them, Christ and his true way will be slandered. In their greed they will make up clever lies to get hold of your money. But God condemned them long ago, and their destruction is on the way. II Peter 2:2-3, NLT

4. They desire a _____ (Acts 20:29-30).

For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.

There are some people that are not motivated by money, fame or worldly pleasures but who are extremely motivated with the potential to have a following even if only a very few people follow them. Often they create a unique and very rigorous message to create a band of radical disciples who will follow them anywhere...even to death.

Lesson 4

The Face and the Fruit of False Ministries

I. What is the FACE of false ministries?

Face: The _____ of anything; a front; the side or edge that is presented to view.

A. On the outside false ministries seem to have a _____.

1. They speak smooth, persuasive and flattering words or _____ (Rom. 16:18; Col. 2 4).

The word used for “deceive” in the Colossian passage is a word that means to mislead by _____ or argument. False ministries depend on average Christians not knowing their Bibles well and not being grounded in theology so that they can mislead them.

2. They speak of _____ and safety (Ezek. 13:10, 16).

My hand will be against the prophets who envision futility and who divine lies; they shall not be in the assembly of My people, nor be written in the record of the house of Israel, nor shall they enter into the land of Israel. Then you shall know that I am the Lord GOD. Because, indeed, because they have seduced My people, saying, “Peace!” when there is no peace... Ezekiel 13:9-10a

3. They appear as _____ and ministers of righteousness (II Cor. 11:13- 15).

For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.

4. They _____ to be somebody (Mt. 24:5; John 5:43).

For many will come in my name, claiming, “I am the Christ,” and will deceive many. Matthew 24:5

5. They _____ heal people with a message of peace (Jer. 6:13-15).

“From the least to the greatest, they trick others to get what does not belong to them. Yes, even my prophets and priests are like that! They offer superficial treatments for my people’s mortal wound. They give assurances of peace when all is war. Are they ashamed when they do these disgusting things? No, not at all--

they don't even blush! Therefore, they will lie among the slaughtered. They will be humbled beneath my punishing anger," says the LORD. –NLT

B. On the _____ or in the background things are not so appealing.

1. They draw disciples to themselves rather than leading them to _____ leadership (Acts 20:30).
2. They speak misleading things and _____ of the Gospel (Gal 1:7; Acts 20:30).

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel--which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. Galatians 1:6-7, NIV

This passage speaks of those who “pervert” the Gospel. To pervert is to twist, _____ and change the meaning.

3. They practice _____ by teaching fabricated or forged words (II Pet. 2:3a).

By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words...

There are three words that fill out the meaning here.

- a. *Covetousness* is a word that means a greedy desire to _____.
- b. *Exploit* is a word that means to use a person or things _____.
- c. *Deceptive* is a word that is used only here in the Bible and literally means molded out of _____ or clay.

It can refer to carefully molded and crafted words used to manipulate people to attain what their covetousness desires.

4. They have spiritual _____, believing and leading people to believe that they have secret revelation that only comes through them (I Tim. 6:3-5).
5. They speak evil of things that they do not fully _____ (I Tim. 6:3-5; II Pet. 2:12, 17; Jude 10).

Peter says that these false ministries are like “wells without _____” (II Pet. 2:17).

6. They are obsessed with disputes and arguments over _____ (I Tim. 6:4).

7. They see godliness as a means of _____ (I Tim. 6:5).
8. They preach a message of peace with no mention of _____ (Jer. 6:13-15).
9. They teach that their message brings liberty while they themselves are slaves of _____ (II Pet. 2:18-19).

For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage.

II. What is the FRUIT of false ministries?

Fruit: The consequence or result of any action; any outcome, effect or result; after effect; _____; the product or production (Mt. 7:15-20).

A. The following fruit comes to the people who eat from the tree of false ministry.

1. False ministries do not lead people to true _____ (Jer. 23:14, 21-22).

And among the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen something horrible: They commit adultery and live a lie. They strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that no one turns from his wickedness. They are all like Sodom to me; the people of Jerusalem are like Gomorrah. Jeremiah 23:14, NIV

I did not send these prophets, yet they have run with their message; I did not speak to them, yet they have prophesied. But if they had stood in my council, they would have proclaimed my words to my people and would have turned them from their evil ways and from their evil deeds. Jeremiah 23:21-22

2. False ministries strengthen the hands of evil doers (Jer. 23:14).
3. False ministries cause people to _____ and err (Jer. 23:13, 32; Mic. 3:5).

“Behold, I am against those who prophesy false dreams,” says the LORD, “and tell them, and cause My people to err by their lies and by their recklessness. Yet I did not send them or command them; therefore they shall not profit this people at all,” says the LORD. Jeremiah 23:32

This is what the LORD says to you false prophets: “You are leading my people astray! You promise peace for those who give you food, but you declare war on anyone who refuses to pay you.” Micah 3:5

4. False ministries make people _____ (Jer. 23:16-17).

Thus says the LORD of hosts: “Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you. They make you worthless; they speak a vision of their own heart, not from the mouth of the LORD. They continually say to those who despise Me, ‘The LORD has said, ‘You shall have peace’; and to everyone who walks according to the dictates of his own heart, they say, ‘No evil shall come upon you.’”

The word for “worthless” here can mean that they “fill you with _____.”

Gill says, “They filled their heads with vain and empty things, and their hearts with vain hopes, which deceived them.”

5. False ministries cause people to _____ God and His word (Jer. 23:22, 27).

Let these false prophets tell their dreams, but let my true messengers faithfully proclaim my every word. There is a difference between chaff and wheat! 29 Does not my word burn like fire?” asks the LORD. “Is it not like a mighty hammer that smashes rock to pieces?” 30 “Therefore,” says the LORD, “I stand against these prophets who get their messages from each other--31 these smooth-tongued prophets who say, ‘This prophecy is from the LORD!’ 32 Their imaginary dreams are flagrant lies that lead my people into sin. I did not send or appoint them, and they have no message at all for my people,” says the LORD.

Jeremiah 23:28-32, NLT

They want people to be dependent on them rather than teaching them to receive directly from God through a _____ with Him.

B. Their fruit in the local church is also bad.

1. False ministries cause _____ and strife (Rom. 16:17).

Notice that the divisions and offenses referred to in this passage have to do with the doctrine or _____ of the local church.

And now I make one more appeal, my dear brothers and sisters. Watch out for people who cause divisions and upset people’s faith by teaching things that are contrary to what you have been taught. –NLT

2. False ministries are a source of constant _____ (I Tim. 6:3-5, NIV).

If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.

Notice the negative fruit referred to in this passage...

- Controversies
- Quarrels (about meaningless things)
- Envy
- Strife
- Malicious Talk
- Evil Suspicions
- Constant Friction

3. False ministries _____ souls (Acts 15:24).

Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, "You must be circumcised and keep the law" --to whom we gave no such commandment...

There are two words in this passage that describe the fruit of false ministries in the local church.

a. False ministries trouble people.

The word "trouble" in this passage means to cause inner commotion, to _____ of mind and to make restless through anxiety or fear.

b. False ministries unsettle people.

The word "unsettle" in this passage means to subvert, undermine and to _____.

False teachers unsettle people by undermining the leadership of the local church and calling into question many of the solid foundations of Christian doctrine so that people are no longer sure of what they believe.

4. False ministries do not _____ the people of God (Jer. 23:32, NIV).

"Indeed, I am against those who prophesy false dreams," declares the LORD. "They tell them and lead my people astray with their reckless lies, yet I did not

send or appoint them. They do not benefit these people in the least,” declares the LORD .

III. What is the FATE of false ministries?

Fate: The destiny; the lot; predetermined outcome.

A. God has a very negative view of false ministry.

1. He sees false ministers as _____ (Jer. 5:30-31; 23:14).

An astonishing and horrible thing has been committed in the land: The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule by their own power; and My people love to have it so. Jeremiah 5:30-31

*An appalling and horrible thing... --Amp
A horrible and shocking thing... --NLT*

2. He sees false ministers as spots and _____ (II Pet. 2:13b-14; Jude 12-13).

They are spots and blemishes, carousing in their own deceptions while they feast with you, having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls. They have a heart trained in covetous practices, and are accursed children. II Peter 2:13b-14

The word that is used for “blemish” here can also be translated “_____.”

When these people join you in fellowship meals celebrating the love of the Lord, they are like dangerous reefs that can shipwreck you. They are shameless in the way they care only about themselves. They are like clouds blowing over dry land without giving rain, promising much but producing nothing. They are like trees without fruit at harvesttime. They are not only dead but doubly dead, for they have been pulled out by the roots. They are like wild waves of the sea, churning up the dirty foam of their shameful deeds. They are wandering stars, heading for everlasting gloom and darkness. Jude 12-13

Jude refers to these false ministries as...

- Dangerous reefs that can cause shipwreck
- Shameless
- Clouds without rain
- Trees without fruit at harvest time
- Dead and doubly dead

- Wild waves churning up dirty foam
- Wandering stars headed for destruction

B. God will judge them (Jer. 14:14-15; 23:15; II Cor. 11:15; II Pet. 2:17).

So it shouldn't surprise us when his servants masquerade as servants of God. But they're not getting by with anything. They'll pay for it in the end.

II Corinthians 11:15, Msg

1. He will take His people _____ their hands (Ezek. 34:10).

This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I now consider these shepherds my enemies, and I will hold them responsible for what has happened to my flock. I will take away their right to feed the flock, along with their right to feed themselves. I will rescue my flock from their mouths; the sheep will no longer be their prey. –NLT

2. He will remove their prophetic _____ (Mic. 3:5-7).

This is what the LORD says to you false prophets: "You are leading my people astray! You promise peace for those who give you food, but you declare war on anyone who refuses to pay you. 6 Now the night will close around you, cutting off all your visions. Darkness will cover you, making it impossible for you to predict the future. The sun will set for you prophets, and your day will come to an end. 7 Then you seers will cover your faces in shame, and you diviners will be disgraced. And you will admit that your messages were not from God."

3. He will no longer _____ to their cry (Mic. 3:7, NIV).

The seers will be ashamed and the diviners disgraced. They will all cover their faces because there is no answer from God.

4. He will bring swift _____ upon them (II Pet. 2:1, 3).

But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them--bringing swift destruction on themselves. I Peter 2:1

Lesson 5 Keeping Yourself Pure

I. What can a leader do to keep him or herself pure?

A. Leaders must examine their _____ (Ps. 139:23-24; John 14:30).

As leaders we must know our own hearts. We must be willing to be honest with ourselves and be willing to analyze the reasons why we are in the ministry and the things that truly motivate us.

Some questions leaders can ask themselves to assist in this self-examination process include the following:

1. What are my heart attitudes?
2. What are my motivations?
3. Is there anything in me that Satan can use for his ends?
4. Why am I in the ministry?

Am I in leadership ministry...

- a. To make a name for myself?
 - b. To be great in man's eyes?
 - c. To have a following?
 - d. To please or impress men?
 - e. To be in the limelight?
 - f. To have position and power over the lives of people?
5. Do I want to sit and be served or am I here to serve?
 6. Am I in the ministry to fulfill certain needs in me?
 - a. A need for acceptance?
 - b. A need for attention?
 - c. A need for a sense of self-worth, value or significance?
 7. Am I in the ministry for personal financial gain?
 - a. Am I a hireling?
 - b. Can I be bought?
 - c. Do I treat rich people differently than poor people?
 - d. Do I make merchandise of the people of God?
 - e. Do I see people as a means to meet my personal desires and goals?

8. Am I in the ministry for what I can get out of it personally?
 - a. Paul spoke of those who preached from strife, envy and personal _____ (Phil. 1:15-16).
 - b. Paul spoke of those who served their own belly or their own _____ (Rom. 16:18, NLT).
 - c. Paul spoke of those who served to _____ (Gal. 1:10, NLT).

B. Leaders must maintain and continually cultivate the heart of _____.

1. All ministers are first and foremost servants!
 - a. Servants of God (II Cor. 3:6; I Th. 3:2).
 - b. Servants of Christ (Rom. 1:1; I Cor. 4:1).
 - c. Servants of the Gospel (Col. 1:23).
 - d. Servants of the New Covenant (II Cor. 3:6).
 - e. Servants of the people of God (I Cor. 3:5; 9:19).
2. There are a number of things that will cause us to lose a servant's heart.

It is easy to lose a servant's heart. It is easy...

- a. When people murmur and complain when you have given yourself sacrificially _____.
- b. When you begin to believe that you have _____, you have sacrificed enough and now you owe it to yourself.
- c. When you are hurt by those who you are trying _____.
- d. When you focus on the material _____ who are serving their own interests...and seem to be getting away with it.
- e. When you start listening to the humanistic lie that the best thing you can do for others is to do what is _____.

C. Leaders must _____ in every aspect of their life and ministry.

This means...

1. Loving it!
2. Preaching it!
3. Teaching it!

4. Meditating on it!
5. Searching it!
6. Practicing it!
7. Being a lover of truth!

D. Leaders must never get tired of _____ of Christianity.

We must trust the basics. This includes focusing on...

1. The ABC's of Christianity.
2. Basic Doctrine (Repentance, Faith, God, Man, Sin, Redemption, Etc.)
3. Building strong marriages and families.
4. Practicing basic New Testament Christianity (Acts 2:42-47).

E. Leaders must maintain a _____ relationship with the Lord (Rev. 2:4-5; John 7:16-17).

II. What can a leader do to protect those under his or her care?

A. Be willing to _____ ministries.

This means that...

1. We cannot be intimidated by the signs and wonders that we see.
2. We must be a little skeptical of the new and exotic (Pro. 15:15).
3. We must be a fruit inspector (Mt. 7:16).
4. We must carefully screen ministries from within and from without.

B. Be willing to test _____.

C. Be willing to judge _____ (See Appendix 1).

Appendix 1, Lesson 5, Judging Prophecy

Judging Prophecy

By Bill Scheidler

Prophecy is a precious gift of the Spirit that has been given to the church for the blessing of God's people. When it is functioning as God designed, it has a tremendous ability to bless, strengthen, encourage, motivate, inspire, lift, envision and challenge.

But, at the same time, prophecy that is abused or given in an unbiblical way can do serious damage, bring confusion and unrest, and misguide or mislead believing people who are sincerely looking for direction, divine counsel and a "word from God" for their life.

For this reason, Paul indicates in I Corinthians 14:29 that prophecy is to be judged. This is not real easy for us because we do understand that prophecy is a gift of the Spirit and because of the manner in which it is given. When a person gives a prophecy, it is usually given in the first person as if God is speaking (and indeed He is).

For this reason, it is easy for us to feel that if we judge this prophecy, we are in some way judging the Spirit of God. No one wants to put him or herself in such a position. And yet, God makes it clear that prophecy is not to be viewed as infallible. This means that it is not to be taken on the same level as the written word of God.

Prophecy comes through people who are fallible and can be affected by many different things that could have a bearing on a prophecy when given. For this reason godly people need to be discriminating as they listen to prophetic words and make a decision as to whether or not the prophecy is indeed from God in part or in full.

A. The Need for Judgment

1. Christ was the only infallible ministry.
2. There will be false ministries.
3. Even valid ministries who have a good heart can "miss it."

God's people are at times so interested in "getting a word from God" that they exert pressure on prophetic ministries "to produce". This pressure can cause prophets to go "beyond the gift" to ensure that everyone gets a word.

B. Tests for the Prophetic

When testing prophecy there are several factors that should play into our judgment in the matter:

1. Test #1 – The Written Word of God (II Timothy 3:16).

If the prophetic word is not in harmony with the Scripture it is to be rejected (Is. 8:19-20). Failure to do this can cause people to run the risk of placing prophecy on the same level as the Word of God. This will cause instability and will open the person up to being seriously misled.

2. Test #2 – The Spirit or the Manner in which the Word is given.

While God has used the manner and mannerisms of prophets in unusual ways at times, the general rule is that prophecy will minister edification, exhortation and comfort (I Cor. 14:3) and lead to peace (I Cor. 14:33).

3. Test #3 – The Conduct and Personal Life of the Prophet.

God can certainly overrule the nature of the person prophesying and cause a true word to come forth from any vessel. However, God's usual method of working is to speak through vessels who have set themselves aside in holiness and dedication to the Lord.

When a prophet has a lifestyle that is ungodly, it brings the words that they speak into question (Jer. 23:15-16; II Pet. 2:2). The gifts of the Spirit must be motivated and impelled by the fruit of the Spirit.

4. Test #4 – The Inner Witness of the Holy Spirit.

Since every true believer is inhabited by the Spirit of God and there is only one Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God within the believer should attest to the Spirit of God in the prophet (I Cor. 2:11-14).

The inner peace of the Holy Spirit in this sense is a guiding force to help us discern whether or not this is a true word for us. God is not the author of confusion. If there is a lot of confusion in a person's spirit after the prophecy is given, the prophecy should be "put on the shelf" until peace returns (I Cor. 14:33).

5. Test #5 – The Confirmation of other Witnesses (II Corinthians 13:1).

If a word is to be established, it should be confirmed "in the mouth of two or three witnesses". Even Jesus was willing to have his words examined in this way (John 5:31-47). These "witnesses" could include several things. One witness could be other prophetic ministries. Another witness could be pastors and other church leaders. Another witness could be parents and those that God has put over our lives. Even circumstances and other events in our lives that are almost like "divine coincidences" can bear witness to the authenticity of a prophetic word.

6. Test #6 – The Edification by the Word Given.

If a prophetic utterance is from the Lord, it should build up, admonish and encourage the people of God (I Cor. 14:3). If it does not accomplish this, it must be rejected. If the word is

confusing, condemning, discouraging and brings a heaviness to an otherwise peaceful, uplifting setting, it is probably not from the Lord.

7. Test #7 – The Fulfillment of the Word Given.

If the prophetic word that is given is predictive in nature and it does not come to pass, the prophecy is not a true prophecy. Prophets whose words did not come to pass were not to be feared (Deut. 18:20-22).

8. Test #8 – The Exaltation of Jesus.

If prophecy is to be proper in all of its aspects, it must ultimately exalt the Lord and bring glory to Him and Him alone (I Pet. 4:1). The result of prophecy is that people should see Jesus and be drawn to Him (I Cor. 14:25-25). Indeed John proclaims in the Book of Revelation that the “testimony of Jesus” is the spirit of prophecy (Rev. 19:10), or as one translation says, “For the essence of prophecy is to give a clear witness for Jesus.” (NLT).

In the Old Testament even if the prophets words were true and came to pass, but the net result was that people were turned away from the Lord by their ministry, that prophet was to be considered false (Deut. 13:1-5).

C. Who Judges the Prophetic?

There are various levels of judgment that should be operating in relation to prophecy. Each level of judgment should minimize the need for deeper levels of judgment.

1. Judgment Level #1 – The One Giving the Prophecy (I Corinthians 14:32).

The Bible clearly teaches that the “spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets”. The Bible clearly teaches that we are responsible for what we say and do. Other translations of this same passage help us to understand more fully what is being said in this passage.

“Remember that a person who has a message from God has the power to stop himself and wait his turn” (Living Bible).

“And the gift of prophecy does not take from the prophets the control of their own spirits” (Conybeare).

In other words, people have total control of themselves when they give a prophetic utterance.

Paul said that if we would judge ourselves we would not be judged (I Cor. 11:31). While Paul was not speaking specifically about prophecy, self-analysis is clearly the first level of judgment that must take place in respect to any prophecy. This self-judgment should take place **before** the person who receives what they believe to be a word from God gives the prophecy.

The individual needs to render judgment on the content of his or her own word when measured against the word of God. Before they prophesy, they need to ask themselves some important questions.

- a. Is this word consistent with what the Bible says? Does it contradict the Scripture or violate any biblical principles?
- b. Will this word bring edification, exhortation or comfort?
- c. For whom is this word to be given? Is this a personal word for me or is it for the entire church?
- d. Am I a committed member of this church with a demonstrated love for and loyalty to the individual members of this congregation?
- e. Why do I want to give this word at this time? Is it in my heart to strengthen the church and its leadership?
- f. What is my personal attitude toward the congregation at this time? The pastor? The leadership?
- g. Is there any bitterness or lack of forgiveness in my spirit that might taint the word that is to be given?
- h. Is this word consistent with what God has been saying to the Church in this season? In this service?
- i. What seems to be the best time, place and context for this word to be given? Public setting? Private setting?
- j. What is the tone in which this word should be spoken?
- k. What is the manner in which the word is to be given? Orally to the pastor? Orally to the congregation? In writing to the pastor? Prophesied, exhorted or prayed?
- l. Is this the type of word that the pastor should be aware of **before** it is given to the congregation?
- m. Am I overstepping my authority in this congregation to give a word of this nature?
- n. Will this word put the pastor and leadership on the spot in front of the congregation? Am I painting myself or anyone else in a corner with this word?
- o. Am I using prophecy to bring a rebuke that I feel is needed, to speak my mind concerning the program or the vision of the church, or to get a major concern that I have off of my chest?
- p. Am I willing to allow this word of mine to be judged by others without feeling like everyone must agree with my personal analysis of it?
- q. Am I willing not to give this word if the leadership of the church feels that it is inappropriate?
- r. If this is a personal word for an individual, am I willing to request the presence of an appropriate person to listen to and judge this word?

- s. If my prophetic utterance proves to be inaccurate or does not come to pass, am I willing to take personal responsibility for it without blaming others for the result? Would I be willing to make a public statement acknowledging my error?

All of these questions will help the prophet minimize mistakes in the area of prophecy. But if this is to truly take place, a heartfelt desire for the serious evaluation of prophecy must be in the spirit of everyone who seeks to prophesy.

2. Judgment Level #2 – Other Prophetic Ministries.

The New Testament seems to have prophets working together in tandem with either apostolic ministries or other prophetic ministries (Acts 13:1; 15:32). Paul indicates that in the context of prophetic ministry, the prophets should serve as a check and a balance to each other. “Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge” (I Cor. 14:29).

3. Judgment Level #3 – The Leadership of the Church.

Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the leadership of the local church to render a judgment concerning any given prophecy. The Senior Pastor and the elders of the church have a God-given responsibility to feed, care for and protect the flock of God which is under their charge.

Paul makes this responsibility clear when he addresses the Ephesian elders in his meeting with them in Miletus (Acts 20:28-31). The elders were instructed to be overseers and watchmen, guarding against anything that would hurt or damage the people of God.

The Bible also instructs members of the congregation to submit to the elders of the church (I Pet. 5:5; Heb. 13:17). The reason for this submission to the elders is that ultimately God holds elders accountable for what takes place in the congregation under their charge. We make the task of the elders easier when we recognize their authority and receive whatever correction they may want to give us with a good spirit.

D. The Need for and Value of the Prophetic

With so much being said about judging prophecy, it makes one wonder whether or not we should just “scrap” the idea of having prophetic ministry. Maybe it would just be easier to eliminate it altogether.

God forbid that we should ever think this way! We could say the same thing about raising children, building a home, cultivating friendships and even getting married. Just because something carries with it some challenges, it is no reason to do away with it. The problems associated with prophecy should never cause us to get to a place where we “despise prophecies” (I Th. 5:20).

The fact is that the blessing of the prophetic ministry so far out weighs any negative aspects of prophecy that eliminating this great gift from the church cannot even be considered. Churches that have no prophetic vision are missing a wonderful element of the whole Christian experience. Rather than seeking to eliminate the prophetic because of a few potential problems, we must seek how to harness this ministry for the ultimate purpose of strengthening the church of Jesus Christ.

E. Pastoring the Prophetic Ministry

If the experience of the church in the area of prophecy is to be a positive one, the Senior Pastor and the leadership team of the church must take an active role in leading and guiding the prophetic. Here are some guidelines that the leadership can follow into this important area.

- 1. Teach people about prophecy.** Don't just wait for wrong behavior in this area to manifest itself and then try to correct it. This kind of training can promote a negative image for prophetic ministry. Teach the positive side of the ministry. Teach the people *before* there are problems so that they have truth to draw upon as they seek to operate in this ministry. Provide a positive environment for the emerging prophets to be disciplined. Samuel did this in his "schools of the prophets" and he raised up a whole new order of ministry in Old Testament times.
- 2. Teach people how to judge prophecy.** Put the tools in their hands that they need to have to evaluate their own prophecies and the prophecies of others. They will need this because at times they will be at other meetings or in other settings where prophecy is being given. They may have others who want to prophesy over them when you or someone from your leadership team is not present. If you have instructed them, they will have what they need to make their own judgments.
- 3. Prophecy yourself.** People need models as they grow and develop in the things of the Lord. Teaching is important, but it must be accompanied by modeling. Pastors should stir up their own gift in this area and encourage all of their leadership team to do the same. This will give the people a positive example to follow.
- 4. Don't allow strangers to prophesy (as a general rule).** There are many roving would-be prophets who are not committed to any one body of believers and who are not accountable to anyone for the words that they give. It should be clear in your assembly that there is no place for this kind of prophetic ministry. If someone that you do not know anything about comes to your assembly with a word, have them write it out and give it to you so you can pray over it with the other leaders, but do not have them speak it publicly. If your people are well trained, they will not listen to them anyway (John 10:4-5). There may be exceptions to this, but they should be rare.

5. **Provide a way for prophecy to be judged *before* it is given.** It is so much easier on everyone if prophecy is judged before it is given. Perhaps a microphone could be set up for this purpose and a member of the leadership team could assist people at the site. In this way the content of the prophecy could be shared with a church leader, and the leader could decide whether or not it should be given. A microphone can be very helpful so that people can hear more accurately what is being said and for the purpose of getting the prophecy on tape.
6. **Honor prophecy when it is given.** Once you have laid a good foundation for prophecy in your church, you should not only encourage it but you should honor it. We honor prophecy by giving it a place in our corporate gatherings and by taking it seriously when it is given. We also honor it when we make references to it in a service or when we integrate it into the life stream of the church in an immediate or ongoing way.
7. **Give people alternative outlets for prophecy.** Not everyone will be able to prophesy in a given service or public gathering. Leaders can encourage people come to them privately with what they feel the Lord is saying to them. People can also be encouraged to write down their prophetic insights and give them to a leader in the church. The leadership can discuss words of this nature and appropriate action can be taken when needed.
8. **Caution your people about prophetic abuses.** Prophetic zealots who will want to give them a personal word will approach many of your people. Encourage your people to seek appropriate witnesses for such words before they make any life adjustments on the basis of them. The wisdom acquired through many negative experiences needs to be exercised here so that people do not make rash decisions.
9. **Don't be afraid to judge prophecy.** While no one enjoys this aspect of pastoral ministry, we must be willing to make judgments at times especially where we feel that the church might be hurt if we do not make a judgment. Sometimes the action that we take may be done privately with the person who has prophesied "out of order". Other times, especially when some kind of response has been dictated by the prophecy, the issue may have to be handled publicly. The basic rule is to administer correction in the most gracious way possible while still getting the point across.

F. Conclusions

Prophecy is a great gift to the Church. We are instructed to not despise prophecies (I Th. 5:20). In fact, we are to earnestly desire to prophesy (I Cor. 14:1). When we prophesy within the framework provided to us by the Word of God, prophecy edifies or builds up the church (I Cor. 14:4). If the church is going to be what God has called it to be, it will not get there without prophets and prophecy being fully released.

Lesson 6 Defining “Current Trends”

I. What are “current trends”?

A. Definition of the word “trend”

1. The word “trend” means “an inclination in a particular direction, a general direction or a bent toward something.”
2. Some of the synonyms in our culture for this word include the following:
 - Fashion
 - Drift
 - Direction
 - Tendency
 - Leaning
 - Inclination
 - Propensity
 - Proclivity
 - Impulse
3. Trends can be applied to almost any area of life (II Cor. 4:18, NIV).
 - a. The world of nature is changing.
 - b. The world of science is changing.
 - c. The world of technology is changing.
 - d. The world of fashion changes constantly.
 - e. The world of politics is changing.
4. Trends also affect the church.

Change happens for at least five reasons in the life of the church.

- a. Change happens because of natural growth and maturity.
- b. Change happens because of a progressive walk with the Lord.
- c. Change happens because of improvements.
- d. Change happens because the church must adapt to a changing world.
- e. Change happens because God is always pushing the church forward.

B. The word “current” is a relative term that means “recent, prevailing or

1. We will be focusing on trends of the 20th and the 21st Centuries.
2. We will be looking at trends as they pertain to the _____.

II. Why are trends evident in the church today?

- A. Some trends reflect an _____ that God is highlighting in a certain season.
- B. Some trends represent the _____ of a truth that has been lost to the church.
- C. Some trends are aimed at _____ the Church with a fresh breath of air from the Spirit of God.
- D. Some trends are the result of _____ to meet the unique demands of a generation or culture.

III. What are some of the trend categories in the church world?

- A. Some of the trends that we will reference are _____ in nature.

These doctrinal trends might include such things as:

- Faith
- Prosperity
- Deliverance/Demonology
- Spiritual Warfare
- Dominion Theology
- Grace
- Etc.

- B. Some of the trends that we will reference deal with _____.

These structural trends might include such things as:

- Discipleship/Shepherding
- Church Government
- Apostles and Prophets
- Church Groupings
- The Cell Church
- Etc.

- C. Some of the trends that we will reference deal with church _____.

These methodological trends might include such things as:

- Church Growth Movement
- Church Marketing
- Seeker-Sensitive
- User Friendly
- Felt Needs
- Simple Church
- Etc.

IV. What are the challenges of examining current trends?

Examining and evaluating current trends can be a challenge because of the tension produced by the pressures of the church staying _____. This expresses itself in several ways.

- Leaders must balance the tension between biblical _____ or principle and method, style, _____ or experience.
- Leaders must balance the pressure to be culturally _____, yet at the same time maintaining a _____ and promoting a biblical experience.
- Leaders must balance the desire to be open and _____ to what the Spirit might be saying without being careless and gullible to the point of believing _____ and being blown about by every wind of doctrine.
- Leaders must balance the ability to be _____, adjustable and innovative without compromising the _____, universal and eternal.
- Leaders must balance challenge of being discerning, _____ and wise without overreacting and becoming _____, closed and judgmental.
- Leaders must balance ability to incorporate the truth contained in a current trend without losing _____ relative to the other truths of the Scripture.

V. What premises about “change” serve as the basis for our study of current trends?

A. Premise 1

We are living in a world of change and, therefore, we must have an ability to adapt to that change if we are going to touch the present generation for God.

A.W. Tozer (1897-1963) said, “The immutability of God appears in its most perfect beauty when viewed against the mutability of man. In God no change is possible; in

man change is impossible to escape. Neither the man is fixed nor his world, and he and it are in constant change.”

Alfred Whitehead commented on the church in a 1927 journal, *Science and the Modern World* saying, “Religion will not regain its old power until it can face change in the same spirit as does science. Its principles may be eternal, but the expression of those principles require continual development.”

Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865) stated, “The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise to the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew and act anew.”

This premise has two parts.

1. We are living in the _____.
2. The church must have the ability to _____ that change.

B. Premise 2

The church has always been characterized by change that is related to the context or environment in which it finds itself.

1. If the context of the church is persecution, tolerance or freedom, the church _____ its forms.
2. If the context of the church is Eastern, Western or Third World, the church _____ its forms to become all things to all men.
3. If the context of the church is the 1st Century or the 21st Century, the church has the power to be relevant, prophetic and to meet the needs of the world in which _____.

Lesson 7 The Challenge of Relevancy

I. What are some of the trends in our world that will have a bearing on the church?

- A. Changing definitions of the _____
- B. Changing definition of male and female _____
- C. Changing in fields of science and _____
- D. Changing technological _____
- E. Changing in _____ structures
- F. Changing in centers of influence and _____
- G. Changing in government _____

The church needs to be aware of what is going on around it so that it can adapt to present the Gospel to the world of today (I Chr. 12:32a).

II. What does the word “relevant” mean?

The word “relevant” means “fitting or suiting given requirements.” Some of the synonyms for this word include: applicable or pertinent.

“Since the church has been commissioned by Christ to extend His Kingdom throughout the earth, we are continually in need of evaluating our progress. Part of this evaluation has to focus on the world we are trying to reach. Do we understand where people are? Are we aware of the forces shaping their lives? Are we hindering our mission by being out of date? Are we preaching to kinds of people that do not exist anymore? Are we aiming our influence at a society that has moved out of our sights? Or, have we in our attempts to be relevant, compromised some of the very distinctives we should be confronting the world with?” –Ken Malmin

III. What are some examples of the more recent attempts to make the church relevant?

- A. There is the “_____” movement.

This movement seeks to make church services more “relevant” or at least more palatable and entertaining to people who are used to receiving information through multi-media. It attempts to rid itself of religious language and terminology for the sake of those who are not familiar with Christianity.

Some of the characteristics of such churches would include the following:

1. More subdued worship
2. Virtual elimination of anything that might offend (e.g. tongues, prophecy, dancing, etc.)
3. Shorter services and preaching
4. Adults-only services
5. Contemporary music (perhaps even some secular)
6. Modern instruments
7. Fast moving presentations
8. Minimize anything confrontational (Altar calls, lifting hands, standing too much, etc.).
9. Allowing visitors space without embarrassment

B. There is the “ _____ ” movement.

This movement seeks to analyze where people are at and what their needs are and then structure its programs and ministries with those particular needs in mind. This is sometimes referred to as the “ _____ ” approach.

Some of the characteristic of such churches would include the following:

1. Victim and abuse support groups
2. Focus on inner healing
3. Non-confrontation messages
4. Many homogeneous groupings

C. There is the “ _____ ” movement.

The term “movement” may not be the best word for this but it does represent a growing segment of the church. This movement employs modern technology and marketing strategies to grow the church. They utilize concepts that have proven effective in the business world and apply them to the various ministries and programs of the church.

Some of the characteristic of such churches would include the following:

1. Telemarketing strategies
2. Multi-media blitzes
3. User-friendly concepts
4. Target audiences
5. Multiple sites and simulcasting
6. Advertising (flyer campaigns, billboards, etc.)

IV. What is the primary tension that is created in this issue of relevancy?

- A. On the positive side, relevancy means that the church must be _____ its forms and programs to face the demands of the culture in which it finds itself.
1. This means utilizing modern technologies to fulfill the great commission.
 2. This means taking advantage of management techniques which are in essence an extension of the biblical principle of stewardship to become more efficient in what we do with the resources that we have.
 3. This means addressing the issues that are truly facing the people to whom we minister to help them become ambassadors in their day to their generation.
 4. This means being willing to evaluate our styles and methods of doing things to be sure that we are not offensive to the very people that we are trying to reach (Rom. 14:1; 15:1-2; I Cor. 9:22).
- B. On the negative side, relevancy must never be exalted _____ and can never lead us to _____ the eternal principles of God's Word to which all men must adapt themselves.
1. This means that while modern technologies should be utilized, they must not be abused and become _____ for personal pastoral ministry.
 2. This means that while we employ managerial methods that will help us to be better stewards of our resources, we must not reduce the church to the level of a human _____ without reliance on the supernatural.
 3. This means that while the church and its leaders must be in touch with the needs of the people and concerned about meeting those needs, they must not forget their central need for a personal relationship with God and the purpose for which all healing is to take place, and that is to become a disciplined army of God, advancing with the sword of the Spirit to reclaim territory lost to the devil.
 4. This means that while the church should not be living in the Dark Ages in its "look" and approach to society, lines must be drawn when the Bible clearly addresses issues of morality, _____ from worldliness, and our position in this world as strangers and pilgrims.

Lesson 8-9 The Challenge of Balance

I. How important is balance when it comes to the success of the church?

A. Balance is important in every area of life.

There are many areas of life where balance is important.

1. We need balance in our _____.
2. We need balance in our _____.
3. We need balance in our _____.
4. We need balance in our _____.

B. Balance is especially important in the life of the _____.

1. We need balance in our church life.

- Congregational ministry/Personal ministry
- Corporate activity/Individual activity
- Inreach/Outreach
- Preaching/Teaching
- Worship/Word
- Freedom/Order

2. We need balance regarding _____.

- Divine Sovereignty/Human Responsibility
- Law/Grace
- Faith/Works
- Gifts of the Spirit/Fruit of the Spirit
- Extreme Authority/Anarchy

3. We need balance regarding church _____.

Some common emphases include the following:

- Evangelism
- Healing/Deliverance
- Faith/Prosperity
- Water Baptism (Baptists)
- Baptism of the Holy Spirit (Pentecostals)

- Prayer
- Missions
- Holiness
- Prophecy/Dreams/Visions
- Love/Forgiveness/Acceptance
- Praise and Worship
- Spiritual Warfare
- Dominion
- Family
- Community

II. What are some of the challenges of balance when it comes to the area of relevancy?

These challenges can be summarize in seven areas.

A. INFLUENCE

Where does faith cease to influence _____ and the culture begin to influence the church and its faith (John 17:6-19)?

Os Guinness in his book, *Dining with the Devil*, states, “Compared to the past, faith today influences culture less. Compared to the past culture today influences faith more” (pg. 16).

While the church often lags behind culture, the church is to be a prophetic voice to the culture. We are to be “the head and not the tail” (Deut. 28:44). We are to change the world; the world is not supposed to change us (Acts 17:6).

B. BECOMING ALL THINGS

Where does “becoming all things” to culture end and the church’s responsibility to provoke people to “become all things” _____ begin (Eph. 4:15; II Cor. 12:19)?

It is right for us to be satisfied with leading people to less than the full expression of Christ in them? Is it right for us to try too hard to make them comfortable when they have many sin issues to deal with that are keeping them from fulfilling their destiny? What kind of Christians are we satisfied with in a day when the church is challenged to touch the world?

Os Guinness states that this modern focus “simultaneously makes evangelism easier—more people at more times in their life are more open to the Gospel—yet makes discipleship harder, because practicing the lordship of Christ runs counter to the fragmentation and specialization of modern life” (pg. 18).

C. NATURAL ABILITIES

Where does utilizing our natural abilities and strengths begin to supplant or become an acceptable substitute for _____ and revival (I Cor. 2:1-5)?

Os Guinness states that this modern focus “undercuts true dependence on God’s sovereign awakening by fostering the notion that we can effect revival by human means” (pg. 20).

The danger here is that we can become so clever in all of our techniques that we almost eliminate our need for God. Once we take our need for God and dependency on God out of the mix, “God experiences” soon give way to _____. When this happens, we lose the power to transmit our faith to the next generation. Our faith has become a formula instead of an experience with God (Gal. 6:14).

D. COMFORTABLE EXPERIENCE

Where does our attempt to make people comfortable leave off and our need to challenge our people to become living sacrifices and spend themselves and their resources on Christ and His kingdom begin (Rom. 12:1-2; Mt. 16:24-6; Luke 9:57-62)?

Os Guinness states that “far from leading to an exodus, modern church growth often uses the ideology and tools of Egypt to make the people more comfortable in captivity” (pg. 21).

Where exactly does “the cross” come in (Gal. 2:20; 5:11, 24; I Cor. 1:23-24)?

E. METHODOLOGY/THEOLOGY

Where do techniques, style and methodology _____ or minimize truth and theology (I Tim. 3:15)?

If we are not careful the result of this approach can be a “methodology” only occasionally in search of a “theology.”

F. NUMERICAL GROWTH

Where does a desire for numerical growth compromise the necessity for _____ growth as well?

If we focus too much on spiritual growth alone we can become exclusive, inward and almost cultish.

If, however, if we only focus on numerical growth we can come to the place where we have a lot of spiritual babies but no one that is coming to maturity (I Cor. 3:1-3; Acts 9:31; 2:37-40).

G. HISTORICAL CONNECTION

Where does our desire for cultural relevancy end and our _____ those who have died in the faith begin (Prov. 22:28; 23:10; Jude 3)?

While we must have a voice to the present, we cannot totally extract or divorce ourselves from the church of the past. We must be careful that we do not forsake the “_____” that are to be part of our modern heritage (Pro. 22:28; 23:10).

If we cannot link ourselves back to the New Testament believers we will culturalize all of our theology in the name of relevancy and end up with no connection to “the faith once delivered” (Jude 3). Jude seems to think that this is something for which we must “_____.”

When you read Paul’s letters you get the distinct feeling that when he speaks of “_____” he has in mind a body of truth that forms the basis of “our faith” (II Cor. 13:5a).

Notice also the following:

...obedience to the faith... Romans 1:5
...he that is weak in the faith... Romans 14:1
...stand fast in the faith... I Corinthians 16:13
...he now preaches the faith... Galatians 1:23
...till we all come to the unity of the faith... Ephesians 4:13
...if you indeed continue in the faith... Colossians 1:23
...rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith... Colossians 2:7
...holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience... I Timothy 3:9
...great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus... I Timothy 3:13
...some will depart from the faith... I Timothy 4:1
...some have strayed from the faith... I Timothy 6:10
...rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith... Titus 1:13

O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge--by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith. I Timothy 6:20-21

Paul said that there were certain traditions that he had established that he wanted practiced in all of the churches (I Cor. 4:17; 11:2).

III. What are some keys to maintaining balance?

If balance can be achieved in all of the above areas, if Christians “were to use the best fruits of the managerial revolution constructively and critically, accompanied by a parallel reformation of truth and theology, the potential for the gospel would be incalculable” (Guinness, pg. 24).

Dick Iverson in his book *Maintaining Balance when Winds of Doctrine Blow* offers several keys (pages 57-88). Among his suggestions are these that I will highlight only five.

A. Stick to _____ to support your vision (II Cor. 13:1).

“The first principle to remember is that if a teaching is worth devoting your life to, and especially worth affecting the Christian community at large, then it is going to be stated repeatedly in the Bible!” (Iverson, pg. 59).

B. Major on the _____ found in God’s Word.

“A church reduces its chances of going off on a tangent if it majors on what the Bible majors on and it minors on what the Bible minors on. We emphasize what God emphasizes! I am not suggesting that we are to ignore the minors, simply that we should not put a major emphasis on them” (Iverson, pp. 59-60).

C. Confer with _____ (Pro. 11:14; 12:15; 15:22).

“Pastors need to relate to other pastors that they know and trust so that they can discuss and exchange ideas and trends that are stirring Christendom. Pursuing these kind of relationships take time but they will ultimately help to safeguard the local pastor from possible imbalance” (Iverson, pg. 69).

D. Study it _____ (II Tim. 2:15).

“We in leadership who are commissioned to care for the flock of God must have the ability to see through all this glitter and emotional hype. We must not be gullible. We have to examine just exactly what is being said, and what the end result of this teaching is going to be” (Iverson, pg. 72).

E. Let others _____.

“To maintain a well-balanced church, be patient. When there is something going through the country, wait, be patient and let other churches try it first! Sometimes pastors may be a little reluctant to do this because they do not want to appear to be ‘behind the times’ in any way. Because of this it is easy for an insecure pastor to jump at everything that comes and as a result he becomes a spiritual ‘guinea pig’ that will test this new emphasis. For the sake of your people and long term stability of

your church, however, it is better to adopt a simple ‘wait and see’ attitude. That seems to be simple enough. But it may save you a lot of needless stress and many problems. Watch what is happening in the churches that are attempting to practice this truth and see how well they are doing. See if the implementation of that doctrine really works.” (Iverson, pp. 77-78).

F. Develop clearly defined _____.

An important process in the life of a leadership team is to develop biblical statements of your core values. Core values are truths that you will die for and cannot _____ . If you do not have any absolute lines that you will never cross it will be difficult to evaluate various trends that affect the church world.

For those who have never taken our *Vision and Values* course, I recommend it here. It takes you through the process of discovering, developing and articulating your vision and core values.

Lesson 10-11

The Challenge of Discerning the Winds

...that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ... Ephesians 4:15-16

I. What are some important observations about winds?

- A. A wind is caused by an _____ distribution of heat in the atmosphere.
- B. The direction from which a current comes determines its _____.
- C. When two currents of air of different directions meet, a _____ motion sometimes results.

II. What are some positive purposes for winds?

- A. Winds bring the clouds which bring the _____ (I Kgs. 18:44). Rains are essential for germinating the harvest and ripening the harvest.
- B. Winds were an _____ to the farmer in winnowing the grain (Ps. 1:4; 35:5; Is. 17:13; 41:16). In this way they helped the farmer to separate the wheat from the chaff.
- C. Winds were _____ for ancient sea travel (Acts 28:13; Jam. 3:4).

III. What are the four types of wind referenced in the Bible (Rev. 7:1)?

A. The West Wind

This wind is a cool wind that brings _____ and showers (Luke 12:54). It is the most common kind of wind and the most desired.

B. The South Wind

This wind is _____. It brings good weather unless it lasts too long and brings scorching heat (Luke 12:55-56). This wind was also quite frequent.

C. The North Wind

This wind is a strong, continuous wind that _____ rains. It is a disagreeable wind that often causes headaches and fever (Pro. 25:23).

D. The East Wind

This wind is a scorching wind from the desert that is hot, gusty and _____ and dust.

It occurs most frequently in May and October. It causes high temperature quickly; it causes vegetation to wither; and it is often very destructive. In Jeremiah this is called “the wind of the wilderness” (Jer. 13:24; See also Jer. 4:1; Hos. 13:15).

1. In the dream of Pharaoh that was interpreted by Joseph the land of Egypt would be “_____” by these east winds (Gen. 41:6).
2. In was this wind that destroyed the _____ of Job and all of his children (Job 1:19, NLT).
3. In the realm of navigation on the sea, these winds were the most _____ (Ps. 48:7; Acts 27:14).

All of these winds can be brought on by _____ for the fulfillment of His purpose (Ps. 78:26).

IV. How are winds spoken of symbolically in the Bible?

A. The _____ moves as the wind.

1. The Spirit moves in a spiritual or non-visible realm (John 3:8, I Cor. 2:14).
2. The Spirit moves and operates at the Lord’s command (Gal. 4:6; I Pet. 1:12).
3. The Spirit purges and cleanses the earth (Job. 37:21).
4. The Spirit moves as He wills (John 3:8; I Cor. 12:11).
5. The Spirit guides and impels the church (Acts 9:31; 13:4).

B. Doctrinal _____ are seen as winds (Eph. 4:14-15).

1. In balance these winds of doctrine can be refreshing and they are _____ for movement in the church.
2. In extreme, however, they can be destructive and _____ to the local church and the people that are in the church (Jam.1:6).

V. What are the positive and the potential negative effects of winds?

There are three main types of _____ described in the Bible—wind, water and rain. All of these can be positive or negative forces depending upon intensity, source and _____.

	POSITIVE FLOWS	NATURAL / SPIRITUAL RESULTS	NEGATIVE FLOWS	NATURAL / SPIRITUAL RESULTS
W I N D	Winds Breezes Zephyr	Refreshing, Cooling Gentle moving Delicate touching	Gale Cyclone Tornado Blast	Violent Destructive Devastating Upheaval
W A T E R	Currents Rivers Streams Flow	Advancement Progression Movement Continuity	Whirlpool Eddy Flood Tsunami	Introversion Dizziness Loss of Direction Drowning
R A I N	Rain Showers	Enlivening Growth Harvest	Storm Hurricane Deluge	Commotion Turbulence Loss of harvest

A. There are common characteristics of positive flows.

- In control
- Channeled
- Blessing
- Benefit
- Desirable

B. There are common characteristics of negative flows.

- Out of control
- No guidelines
- Cursing
- Destruction
- Unpleasant

VI. What is God’s relationship to the winds?

A. God is _____ of the winds (Rev. 7:1).

- B. Jesus is _____ the elements, stilling the storm (Mt. 8:26; Mark 4:37; Luke 8:23) and walking on the waves (Mt. 14:24, 32; Mark 6:48-51).

VII. How do positive and negative winds serve to test us?

- A. Winds can serve as a test to approve that which is _____ (I Cor. 11:19).
- B. Winds can serve as a test to see if we truly _____ the truth (II Th. 2:9-12).
- C. Winds can serve as a test to help us exercise and develop our spiritual _____ (Heb. 5:14).

VIII. What are some probable signals that turbulent winds may be coming?

There are some warning signs that should be in the back of the mind of every mature believer. As believers we are instructed to watch or be watchful (Acts 20:31; Rom. 16:17; Phil. 3:2; I Th. 5:6; I Pet. 5:8; II Pet. 3:16-17).

1. Watch out for the word “_____” especially when associated with “revelation” (Eccl. 1:9-10).

God’s revelation to man is _____ in the Word of God. The Spirit of God may bring new understanding or illumination concerning the revealed Word of God, but this new understanding cannot violate the proper, biblical principles of interpretation (See: *Interpreting the Scripture* course). It must represent the word “rightly divided” (II Tim. 2:15).

2. Watch out for anything that requires “_____ interpretation” (II Pet. 1:20, II Cor. 11:1-4).

The Gospel and the way to salvation is basically _____ as opposed to complex. God has designed His plan for man in such a way that it is readily open to all (II Cor. 4:3).

3. Watch out for those who major on the _____ (II Cor. 13:1).

Every major, essential truth is taught clearly and repeatedly in the Bible. It is important never to build a doctrine on one verse alone or on an unclear passage.

4. Watch out for extremes or truth out of _____ (Mt. 7:13-14).

Jesus spoke of the narrow way that leads to life. Often times the narrow way or the right path is the narrow line or the balance between two extremes.

- The concept of _____ must be balanced by the concept of _____ (Jam. 2:18).
 - The concept of the _____ of God must be balanced by the concept of the _____ of God (Rom. 11:22).
 - The concept of _____ of God must be balanced by the concept of holiness and _____ of God (Ps. 85:10).
 - The concept of prosperity and _____ must be balanced by the concept of persecution and _____ (II Tim. 3:12).
5. Watch out for anything that promises “_____ maturity” (Phil. 1:6; 3:12-16).

Maturity by its very definition implies a constant and a _____. Sanctification is a process that began when we were born again in Christ Jesus and it will continue right up to the return of the Lord (Phil. 1:6).

6. Watch out not to judge a truth primarily on the basis of external _____ that may follow (II Th. 2:9).

The miraculous signs that someone may perform do not verify or authenticate what the person is saying.

7. Watch out for teachings that elevate emotional _____ above the principles of God’s Word (II Pet. 1:16-21).

At times people can exalt visions, dreams, personal prophetic words and displays of the miraculous above the simple word of God. As Christians we must trust the Word of God about our own subjective experiences or we will get off balance.

8. Watch out for spiritual language used to justify _____ desires (I Th. 2:4-5; I Tim. 6:3-10; Jam. 4:1-4).

If there is a way to reason around the cross and a way to clothe our self-centeredness in spiritual sounding phrases then we can keep our carnal nature and make it our religion.

9. Watch out for teaching that promotes health, wealth, success and happiness with no mention of cost, pain, persecution, and even personal _____ (Phil. 3:7-11; II Tim. 1:8; 3:12; 4:5; Heb. 11:32-39).

The Bible teaches that the way to live is to die. The way to exaltation is humility. It teaches that all who live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution and that we must all through much tribulation enter the kingdom of God.

10. Watch out for teachings that will not work in _____ as easily as they do in the most prosperous and least persecuted of cultures (I Cor. 7:17c; Tit. 1:5).

God's truth cuts across all generations and all cultures. God's word is eternal. If we are properly interpreting the word of God, there is no place on earth where these principles will not work.

11. Watch out for doctrines that sidestep confession, repentance, restitution and forsaking sin and release you from personal _____ for your deeds (Acts 26:19-20).

Confession, repentance, restitution and forsaking sin are still the foundation of the Christian's walk with the Lord. There are many today who are offering love, acceptance and forgiveness without the basis for truth established. True recovery can never take place without dealing with _____ in a biblical manner.

12. Watch out for doctrines that diminish the power of the _____ and the work of repentance in your life (I Cor. 2:2; Gal. 1:6-10).

Many would espouse the idea that the Bible is an old book that does not take into account many of the current scientific research regarding man's behavior patterns. They imply that the application of the Word of God alone to people's lives is insufficient to meet the needs of modern man. The truth is only the Bible has the ultimate answer to man's emotional and psychological needs.

13. Watch out for doctrines that are not willing to be _____ or tested (I Th. 5:21; I John 4:1; Acts 17:11).

God's people need to be wary when they find spiritual leaders who react when their teaching is challenged or when they are asked for scriptures to substantiate what they are teaching.

14. Watch out for doctrines that lead to spiritual _____ or exclusivity (Mt. 24:26-27).

There are teachers today who would divide the Body of Christ into select groupings or companies. All of this teaching is divisive and produces schisms in the church. Paul tells us very clearly that there is but "one body" (Eph. 4:4).

15. Watch out for teachings that promote individuals and a _____ on individuals above Christ (John 3:26-32).

16. Watch out when the _____ does not confirm the message (Mt. 7:15-20).

Believe it or not there are many who espouse a particular truth who live their lives in serious sin.

IX. How can we be sure that we do not fall prey to negative winds or doctrine?

- A. Cultivate your personal _____ with the Lord (Eph. 1:15-23).
- B. Become a lover of the _____ (II Th. 2:9-12).
- C. Practice a daily _____ to God's voice (John 7:17).

Lesson 12

Present Day Trends

I. What are some significant church trends over the last few decades?

A. The Charismatic Movement

During the Charismatic Movement that dominated the 1960's and early 70's there was a strong emphasis on the assimilation of many of the previously illuminated truths into many of the historic denominations. The Baptism of the Spirit, speaking with other tongues, and renewed worship forms were incorporated into many denominational groups. In addition many new "independent" churches were built on the principles of church government that were an emphasis of the 1948 visitation.

B. The Discipleship Movement

While this movement caused a lot of confusion, it also brought a focus on the importance of spiritual authority, the need for believers to go on to maturity and the development of strong Christian character. Its failure had to do primarily with methodology and the application of the truth. The word "shepherding" became a negative word and equated to "controlling" and abusive leadership. The fact that those leading this movement did not have a clear understanding of the importance of the local church also contributed to the problems that would ensue.

C. The Dominion Movement

This movement like so many others came with problems. The Dominion Movement was flawed in terms of its biblical hermeneutic. Many who preached this doctrine did so out of scripture passages that were taken out of context. It also went to such an extreme that it almost left one to believe that God's plan of evangelism had more to do with the "ballot box" than preaching of the Gospel.

What it did bring in more of a positive way was an understanding that the Church of Jesus Christ is not going to be defeated. In fact, the church is to be the head and not the tail. The church need not be intimidated by the world. The church has a mission to touch every aspect of society and be salt and light to the world. It emphasized that Christianity is not just something that is practiced on Sunday morning, but we are to take the principles of the Kingdom into every sphere of life including the marketplace. It emphasized that every believer extends the kingdom by bringing believers to Christ and promoting God's agenda in the earth (Gen. 1:26-28).

D. The Faith and Prosperity Movement

Like so many of the movements before, certain proponents of this movement tended to go to an extreme which led many to conclude that they were making merchandise of the Gospel.

The truth is that God does want us to be people of faith. He wants us to step out at the word of the Lord and walk on water when Jesus beckons us. He does want to prosper his people. However, divine prosperity is not just about money. It is not about making us wealthy so that we can fulfill selfish desires. It is about fulfilling destiny and walking under the canopy of God's blessing. It is about having strong families, good friendships, whole bodies, sound minds and freedom from bondage. It is about accomplishing the mission.

II. What were some positive things that came out of these movements?

A. Covenant Relationship

The emphasis here was on the fact that in the Body of Christ we are our brother's keeper and that we should endeavor to establish relationships that focus on accountability one to another.

B. Family Life

The emphasis here was on principles of raising godly families to establish foundations for many generations. Many ministries arose with a focus on family, marriage and child rearing. Along with this many local churches put a stronger emphasis on Youth Ministry.

C. Spiritual Authority and Government

The emphasis here was that the local church is a place of spiritual authority and that we cannot be fully covered spiritually unless we are properly connected and in right relationship to the authority that God has placed in our lives.

D. Christian Character

The emphasis here was on the fact that we need more than the gifts of the Spirit if we are to fulfill the mission of Christ. We need the character of Christ. Christ-likeness is still the goal of the individual believer.

E. Cell Group Ministry

The emphasis here was on the two-fold approach to building the saints in the New Testament Church. There was the corporate gathering for the purpose of celebration and mission fulfillment and there was the smaller gathering for the purpose of evangelism and body ministry.

F. Apostles and Prophets

The emphasis here was on a releasing of these ministries in a way that truly builds the church. The functioning of these ministries in a biblical way is essential for the church to come to full completion.

G. Men's Movement

The emphasis here was on restoring men to their first responsibility of being the priest in their homes. Groups like the Promise Keepers were used to help men not to see themselves primarily as providers but also as protectors, spiritual leaders and shapers of arrows for the Lord (Ps. 127:3-5).

H. Dominion and the Kingdom of God

The emphasis here was on the "greater commission" given to Adam to subdue the earth. This involves the church getting involved in the issues of life on earth. This involves the church being a prophetic voice in all areas of society including politics, science, business, the arts and education.

I. City Reaching

The emphasis here was on believing for entire cities to be reached for the Lord. The model here is the city of Samaria that turned to the Lord under the ministry of Philip (Acts 8:4-8).

J. Pastor's Unity, Pastor's Conferences, Pastor's Prayer, City-wide Prayer

The emphasis here was on seeing the Body of Christ come together beginning with the spiritual leaders. During this season there has been a rise of pastors' and church leaders' conferences, pastors' prayer gatherings and city wide prayer. Most of these expressions cross denominational lines as God is bringing His people together.

III. What are some "now" words and concepts that God seems to be emphasizing?

A. Prayer, Intercession, Spiritual Warfare

Prayer, of course, is something that is a part of every season of visitation. Revival usually begins when people separate themselves in prayer and fasting. We are presently in a season where many prayer movements are being birthed. They reflect a spiritual hunger in the people for God to move to a deeper more powerful level in God.

B. Evangelism, Harvest and Church Growth

As we get closer to the harvest at the end of the age, we can expect a greater emphasis on evangelism. The church growth movements of the last few years are reflective of

this. Many books and plans of evangelism have been promoted in the last few years including God's Master Plan of Evangelism, Evangelism Explosion, Lifestyle Evangelism, Servant Evangelism, Spirit-Filled Evangelism, Etc. Along with that many missionary movements have seized the concept of finishing the commission and reaching the remaining unreached people groups of the world.

C. Church Planting

A significant voice in the world today is coming in the area of church planting. Many have realized that the harvest will only be retained as local churches are established to disciple, equip and release those who have come to the Lord. There seems to be a strong emphasis on church planting being the object of all missionary endeavors.

D. Signs and Wonders

Many who have seen the magnitude of the task at hand and the increasing population of the earth are contending for a greater release of the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit in the Church of today. Many are expecting the spirit and the power of Elijah to be upon the church in the last days. They see this as part of the supernatural equipment that man needs to be able to finish the commission that has been placed on the Church by God Himself.

While signs and wonders have been a part of every major movement in the last century, it is needed today in a greater and more general way. It is needed to fall upon the entire church not just a few individual superstars.

IV. What are some questions that I can ask when seeking to evaluate a trend?

The following are the type of questions that should be asked about any trend that arises in the church world:

1. Is this trend based on a clear biblical foundation?
2. What are the key verses substantiating this trend or doctrine?
3. Is the biblical interpretation of these verses based on solid hermeneutical footing?
4. Are there any scriptural principles or precepts that seem to be contrary to this trend?
5. Is this trend something that was taught by Jesus and the Apostles, practiced in the Book of Acts and explained in the Epistles?
6. Is there any historical evidence that something similar to this has taken place in the past? If so, what was the ultimate result? If not, why not?

7. Do those who preach this truth have a lifestyle that is consistent with the character of Jesus?
 - In love
 - In humility
 - In servant-like spirit
 - In the absence of greed
 - In the fruit of the Spirit
8. Do those who preach this truth point you toward or draw you away from your local church leadership?
9. Will this teaching work in any culture in the world?
10. What is the fruit in the lives of people who experience this truth?
11. What is the long-term benefit of this truth to the local church?