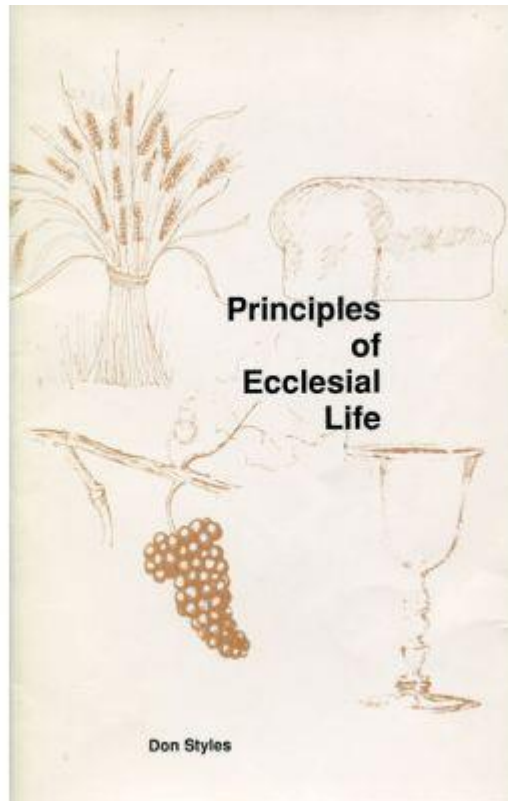


Principles of Ecclesial Life



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1. Fundamental Points

The ecclesia Is God's idea

The ecclesial community is not man's idea; it is not a Christadelphian idea; it is God's idea.

Baptism is more than the individual being baptized into fellowship with the Father and the Son; it is inclusion into a community of believers established by God; we are all baptized into one body.

God's deliberate choice

God's design is a deliberate choice on His part. There are many alternatives to the concept of one community of believers.

The individual believer could continue in his former associations.

He would not come to meeting but would spend his time with family, neighbors and the religious group to which he originally belonged. Even today, some think this would be a more effective way of spreading the Truth.

But this is not God's design.

Believers could be divided into different groups following their favorite teachers.

The ecclesia in Corinth was in danger of being rent apart on just such a basis (1 Cor. 1:12-13). The Jews were used to such a system in their loyalty to various rabbis.

Within Christadelphia, some would prefer to have ecclesias separated along lines of expository emphasis: all favoring pioneer writings in one meeting, all leaning to a young - earth view in another, etc.

But the followers of Christ are not to organize themselves in such a way.

Disciples of Christ could be divided into groups along ethnic, social and economic lines.

In New Testament times, this would have meant separate ecclesias for Jews, Gentiles, slaves and slave-owners. Such a structure would have made life much easier for most brethren and sisters. Jewish and Gentile believers frequently irritated one another because of their different dietary practices and attitudes to Jewish holidays. Left to themselves, they would, no doubt, have preferred to maintain one ecclesia for Jews and another for Gentiles, but this was not God's design. Slaves and slave-owners moved in wholly different circles in daily life. Why put them together in ecclesias where all are equal? In our own day, it is inevitable that in the ecclesia we have to get along with some people we find difficult. We have no choice as to whom is baptized. If a person believes the Truth and commits himself to living it, we can not refuse him. He may come from a background or socio-economic level that is radically different from our own. We may find dealing with him uncomfortable and would prefer that ecclesias were divided along lines of people with similar heritage and occupation. But that is not God's way.

We may find that some people have traits which irritate us.

We would, no doubt, prefer to organize an ecclesia where everybody in it had a personality we found agreeable to ourselves. Ecclesial life would be much easier if God's design were different. But it is not.

Believers are to put aside worldly differences and are to be bound into one fellowship by their baptism into the one body. From a human point of view, this will cause problems. But it is God's design.

One ecclesial body of all true believers

God set Christ "at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and **every** name that is named ... and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth **all in all** ... there is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling ... we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones" (Eph. 1:20-23; 4:4; 5:30).

All true believers of all ages are united in the one ecclesia in Christ. Only in the kingdom will the reality of this association be fully manifested. In any one generation, distance dampens the relationship between members of the body in different geographic areas. As much as possible, however, the Apostle sought to make the concept of the one body a reality by inter-ecclesial introductions, associations and welfare projects. The technological advances of our own day have many negative aspects but one great positive effect is to facilitate drawing the worldwide body of Christ closer together. Our opportunity to benefit from and to minister to other members of the body is thus enhanced.

Local ecclesias by geographic area

"And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem." "They returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch ... and when they had ordained them elders in every church..." "Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus ... unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. Likewise greet the church that is in their house" (Act. 8:1; 14:23; Rom. 16:3-5).

The word "church" (ecclesia) is clearly used in two ways: one referring to the total body of believers spanning all places and all generations, the other alluding to a specific group of believers who came together in one meeting place. The size of the local community was evidently determined by geographic distance and available facilities.

2. Ecclesias are for Growth

"And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the **perfecting** of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: **till we all come** in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, **unto a perfect man**, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ; that we henceforth **be no more children**, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;

but speaking the truth in love may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto **the edifying of itself** in love” (Eph. 4:11-16).

These verses are very impressive in underscoring the fact that ecclesial life is mandatory to growth. Even when the spirit gifts were given, nobody had all the abilities needed for the growth God wanted. Every believer, even those having the greatest of gifts, was only partially equipped. They all required what others had to offer and the community as a whole needed what they as an individual could provide. God deliberately arranged His gifts so that the necessity of ecclesial association would stand out for all to see.

The objective of growth through ecclesial association is made clear in the emphasized phrases in the above quotation.

v.12 “*perfecting*” – Greek is *katartismos*, “a restoring, restoration: a making perfect, educating” (Liddell-Scott Greek Lexicon). The basic idea is to improve the quality of something; here the word has particular reference to improving ecclesial understanding of the word of God.

vs.12,16 “*edifying*” – Greek is *oikodonee*, “the act of building: a building, edifice. 2. metaphorically edification, improvement, instruction” (L-S). As a building grows from the initial foundation to its full size, so the body of Christ is to grow in size and in quality.

v. 13 “*unto a perfect man*” – Greek for “perfect” is *teleios*, “complete, perfect, entire ... of animals, full-grown; a full-grown man...” (L-S). The figure of a child growing into a man is prominent in vs. 14 and 15; we are “to be no more children” but are to “grow up” into mature disciples in Christ. Note how the figure of speech is based on the human growth process of many individual body parts maturing, sometimes at different rates, but eventually resulting in a single mature person.

Growth In knowledge

In these verses, one phrase after another underscores the need for growth in knowledge.

V. 13 “... the unity of **the faith**, and of the **knowledge** of the Son of God...”

v.14 “... carried about with every **wind of doctrine** ...”

v. 15 “speaking **the truth** ...”

Everybody was dependent upon others for growth in knowledge. Most needed to learn from those who were particularly blessed in this regard – those who were apostles, prophets, teachers. If those with such gifts absented themselves from the ecclesia, others would not be able to grow in knowledge as God intended. Even those who were prophets needed to learn from those who were teachers, and teachers from those who were prophets. God so designed the situation that ecclesial association was a requisite to growth for each believer.

Today we are blessed with the completed New Testament and we may feel the principles that were true for ecclesial life in the first century are not true today. But the sweeping language of Ephesians 4 surely persuades us God's principles have not changed.

We may think we can not learn anything from somebody else or we may think we can learn everything necessary from one person. Such is not the case. The interchange of exposition and discussion of various points that is an integral part of ecclesial life contributes to the growth in knowledge of even those who know the most about scripture. The responses and questions of some babes in Christ often help clarify points for everybody.

We need to be wise in this regard. A hasty stifling of a question that may be new to us can shut off an area of consideration that would eventually add to the growth of our own knowledge and that of the ecclesia.

We may wish that all wisdom could be garnered from one teacher. We may find it disturbing to associate with those who approach things differently from ourselves. But one of the reasons for ecclesial life is growth in knowledge and this comes about by the various parts of the body contributing as they are able.

Growth In numbers

Part of the "work of the ministry" and the "**Fulness** of Christ" (vs. 12, 13) relates to the quantity of people who are converted to the Truth. While quality is more important than quantity, it remains true that "blindness in part is happened to Israel, **until the fulness of the Gentiles** be come in" (Rom. 11:25).

Rarely has someone learned the Truth without several ecclesial members contributing to their instruction and conversion. Once baptized, the ecclesia supplies the new member (or should do) with continued instruction, family-type fellowship, social activities and sometimes financial assistance.

Without such support, many who turn to the Truth would not be able to hold fast to the end. We are social creatures and we need the fellowship of like-minded believers. In many cases, the Truth separates people from their natural families. The ecclesia must step in and fill this gap. The fact of an ecclesial community thus contributes to the growth in numbers of those who are in Christ.

Growth in character

We are to speak the truth in love; the body is to increase unto the edifying of itself in love.

There is to be more than growth in knowledge and in numbers within ecclesial life. Our characters must increase and develop and our personality traits often must be modified.

The ecclesia, with all its component parts, is supplied that we, individually and collectively, might come "unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (vs. 11-13). Love and persistence, forgiveness, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, wisdom, judgment, holiness, justice, integrity are all to improve for we are to "grow up into him in **all things**, which is the head, even Christ" (v. 15).

This is a vital area of growth, for the saints of all ages are to be joint rulers of the world with Christ.

3. Ecclesias are to Prepare Believers for Ruling the Kingdom with Christ

The faithful will be joint rulers of the kingdom

Matt. 25:34 – “Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom **prepared for you** from the foundation of the world.”

Rev. 2:26-27 – “And he that overcometh and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: **even as I received of my Father.**”

Rev. 3:21 – “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit **with me in my throne**, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.”

The descriptions of the rulership of Christ thus apply to those who are joint rulers of the kingdom.

Isa. 11:34 – “...he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: but with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked.”

Isa. 30:20 – “... thine eyes shall see thy teachers: and thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.”

Isa. 32:1 – “Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment.”

Integrity, compassion, justice, opposition to sin, etc. will characterize Jesus Christ, the king, and all the saints who are ruling as joint heirs of the kingdom.

Right spiritual attributes must be developed now

We may think that at the judgment seat, the accepted will have these attributes injected into them. But at the judgment seat:

- the mortal will be made immortal,
- the corruptible will be made incorruptible, but
- the cruel will not be made compassionate,
- extortioners will not be made generous,
- haters of good will not be made lovers of righteousness,
- liars will not be made honest,
- the filthy minded will not be made pure of heart.

The great spiritual development into the new man in Christ must occur now before a physical change will occur at the judgment seat.

Consider Matt. 5:3-11:

Who is it that receives the kingdom of heaven, inherits the earth, is comforted, filled, obtains mercy, sees God and is called the children of God? It is the one who is already merciful, pure in heart, a peacemaker, meek, a despiser of sin and a lover of righteousness. Now, in this time of probation, the believer must develop into a likeness of the character of his head, even the Lord Jesus.

Spiritual development requires experience

Prayer and the word of God help greatly to develop a likeness of the divine character. But, like our physical and mental abilities, our spiritual abilities will not develop without exercise. This means circumstances must occur in our lives which require the application of integrity, forgiveness, longsuffering, etc.

For example, in order to practice forgiveness, we need situations where people have sinned against us that we might exercise forgiveness. The same is true of other virtues:

- patience requires irritating circumstances,
- longsuffering requires long-term problems,
- integrity requires promises that are difficult to keep,
- prudence requires opportunities to be indiscreet,
- compassion requires exposure to the problems of others

Married life, family life, everyday life in business and school, illness and financial circumstances all provide opportunities for exercising godly attributes. But some characteristics needed by the rulers of the world to come are most readily developed in the circumstances of ecclesial life.

Ecclesial life provides necessary experience

Saving others – a great objective, as rulers of the kingdom, will be to help mortals be saved.

A dominant concern we should now develop is that those in the ecclesial family be saved. Do we really care about that? Do we seriously consider the impact our words and example have on the spiritual welfare of others? Would we just as soon some people would leave the ecclesia and stop bothering us?

Sometimes we do not have a natural attraction to others in the ecclesia. Their personalities may irritate us but we have to develop the patience, perseverance and goodness to work for their eternal welfare. These qualities will be critical in the kingdom as we work with mortals who may have very difficult personalities.

Being empathetic – one of the great qualities of a godly ruler is to be able to see things from the other person's point of view. Christ does that now with us (Heb. 4:15-16).

In ecclesial life, we are associated with people from such varied backgrounds that often we have trouble understanding their attitudes and reactions. To deal with them in brotherly love, we must develop an empathy for their situations. This attribute will be essential for the saints guiding mortals into godliness.

Applying principles to cases – God does not work from a rulebook. He is the God of spirit and truth. Those who rule in His name must be like Him.

In many cases of ecclesial life, we must apply principles to cases that come before us. We might prefer a rulebook telling us exactly how to handle all ecclesial matters but we have not been given one. Wisdom and judgment are required and are developed as we prayerfully consider the matter in light of divine principles.

Persistence – God worked with Israel for centuries; Christ and the angels work with us all of our lives; rulers of the kingdom will work with the same mortals for hundreds of years.

In our current circumstances, we leave school and may change jobs but we are not to leave the ecclesia or our marital obligations. In both circumstances, we have the opportunity to develop persistence. Some negate the opportunity given in ecclesial life by moving from one ecclesia to another to avoid people they find awkward. Such action is a mistake for one of the advantages of ecclesial life is that we have an ideal situation to develop the persistence we will need in the kingdom.

It is clear that the ecclesial system is not designed to maximize administrative efficiency. That is not its objective. It is further clear that some of the most difficult aspects of ecclesial life are the best for our spiritual development. This is not accidental. One of the reasons for ecclesias is to enhance the growth of spiritual attributes that are required for those who will rule the world in righteousness with our Lord Jesus Christ.

4. Many in One, One in Many - The Message of the Figures

While a variety of figures of speech are used for the ecclesia, a common message runs through them all – many individuals are to be joined into one unit.

The human body

In the body, there are many easily distinguishable parts having a variety of abilities and functions but they are united into one working whole.

“Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others” (Rom. 12:4-5 NIV).

“For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ” (1 Cor. 12:12). The point is stressed that there are many unique parts but only one body.

“For the body is not one member, but many ... But now are they many members, yet but one body” (1 Cor. 12:14,20).

God's design of the human body has been carefully conceived so that no members should be neglected and that each member should sympathize with and care for the other members.

"That there should be **no schism** in the body; but that the members should have the **same care** one for another. And whether one member suffer, all **the** members suffer with it; or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it" (vs. 25-26).

There is no mistaking the intent of this analogy. We are to apply the points to ecclesial life. No matter what is our ethnic origin, cultural background or economic status, we are all united into one body.

"For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free ... Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular" (1 Cor. 12:13,27).

A temple made of stones

"And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord" (Eph. 2:20-21).

The parts are separately identifiable and have different functions – corner stone, foundation stones, etc. – but they form one unified structure. There are many parts but one whole. While this is clearly a characteristic of a temple made of stone, it is not true of all structures. A tent, for instance, would not suitably represent the ecclesia as the canvas appears as one piece rather than many separate, distinguishable pieces.

But what of the tabernacle, was not this a tent that represented the ecclesia?

Yes, it was. In order to do so, however, the tabernacle was constructed in a most unusual manner. The sections of the covering curtains were not sewn together but were coupled with loops and taches (a device, like a buckle, for fastening two parts together). They thus retained their individual identity while combining to form one tabernacle.

"Couple the curtains together with the taches: and it shall be one tabernacle ... and couple the tent together that it may be one" (Ex. 26:6,11).

In like manner, the structure itself was formed of many separate boards tied into one unit by the middle bar that reached from end to end (Ex. 26:18). Thus, rather than contravening the principle being considered, the peculiar construction of the tabernacle in the wilderness actually reinforces the importance of the ecclesia being a community of many parts united into one whole.

A family

We are so accustomed to calling one another brother and sister, we easily forget that this is really figurative language. The natural family is a figure for the association to which we have been called in Christ. And in this association, we, though many, are spoken of as all belonging to the same family. The Lord emphasizes the point that there are not several divine

families, there is only one. Christ died that “he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad” (John 11:52). And, again, the apostle prays “unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named” (Eph. 3:14-15).

The Father, the Son, the angels and the saints are all spoken of as being included in the **one family name**. The point again is clear: many separate individuals united into one.

A flock of sheep

“I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep and am known of mine ... and other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also **I must** bring and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be **one fold, and one shepherd**” (John 10:14,16).

The believers are likened to a flock of sheep. Once again it is stressed that, while several flocks might be more convenient, there “must” be only one flock gathered under one shepherd.

The use of sheep to represent believers, rather than goats or cattle, is significant. Of all herding animals, sheep tend to pack together and move together in a tightly knit unit.

The Bread and the Wine

The memorial emblems speak of the unity shared among the various members of the ecclesia.

“The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread” 1 Cor. 10:16-17).

Bread is made of many grains being eventually formed into one loaf. Wine comes from the juice of many grapes being crushed and distilled into its liquid form. In both cases, the end product is a result of many distinct parts being formed into one whole, like the ecclesia.

This similarity would not hold true if the memorial consisted, for example, of milk and a roast of meat. The roast would be from one animal and the milk could come from only one cow. With bread and wine, however, the perceptive believer is again reminded of the principle that many are to be united into one.

5. Dividing the Body is Sin

The sin of dichostasia

The Greek word *dichostasia* (“divisions, seditions”) is used only three times in the New Testament. A consideration of the passages where it occurs stresses the importance of conforming to God’s design of the unity of the body.

“Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord

Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple” (Rom. 16:17-18).

Those who fragment the ecclesial community:

- Disobey the teaching of the gospel.
- Are to be avoided.
- Do not serve Christ.
- Are mastered by the flesh (“their own belly”) not by the Lord.

“For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and **divisions**, are ye not carnal and walk as men?” (1 Cor. 3:3)

Note the repetition of the word “carnal” in vs. 1-4. Actions which cause divisions are not spiritual, they are carnal. True, the guilty parties may be actively involved in ecclesial affairs and may be enthusiastic about a given aspect of scripture. But if they are divisive in their effects, they are acting according to the flesh and not the spirit.

Note as well that those causing divisions are condemned for defacing the temple of God (vs. 9,17).

“Now the works of the flesh are ... seditions ... they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God” (Gal. 5:20).

Significantly, of the 17 works of the flesh listed in these verses, 8 of them relate to attitudes that prevail when ecclesial turmoil exists. They are: (definitions from Liddell-Scott Greek Lexicon)

“hatred”	<i>echthra</i>	“hatred, enmity.”
“variance”	<i>eris</i>	“strife, quarrel, debate, rivalry, contention, discord, jealousy.”
“emulations”	<i>zelos</i>	“any strong passion, especially jealousy: zeal or emulous desire for a thing (such as the respect of others).”
“wrath”	<i>thumos</i>	“wrath, anger.”
“strife”	<i>eritheia,</i>	“intriguing, party-spirit, faction.”
“seditions”	<i>dichostasia,</i>	“a standing apart, quarrel, dispute: dissension.”
“heresies”	<i>hairesis,</i>	“a taking for oneself, a choice, a sect or school of philosophy.”
“envyings”	<i>phthonos,</i>	“ill-will, envy, jealousy at the good fortune of another.”

Actions causing dichostasia

- Teaching false doctrine. This must be opposed or eventually the body of believers will no longer exist for, by definition, they are only the ecclesia if they believe the truth. With some upholding wrong teaching and some opposing it, the unity of the body is shattered.
- Upholding wrong conduct as being right. This is done both through wrong teaching and through unrepentant indulgence in sin.
- Treating other members of the body as if they were not. Such behavior is diametrically opposed to the very concept of one body in Christ.

- Treating others as members of the body when they are not. The demarcation of the body of Christ is thereby blurred until it is no longer distinguishable.
- Seeking a personal following which is loyal to oneself rather than the community as a whole. This frequently entails demeaning others or promoting deviant teaching.
- Teaching in a confusing or misleading manner that arouses suspicions of false doctrine.
- Isolating oneself into family groups.

6. Unity is Vital to God

The dire reaction to those who would disrupt the unify of the body indicates that something basic is at issue.

Unity Is basic to divine thinking, Eph. 4:4-6

<i>One body</i>	not separate ecclesias for Jew, Gentile, bond, free.
<i>One spirit</i>	not many opposing supernatural forces at work as the heathens imagined, but one power working in one way to one end.
<i>One hope</i>	not the notion that some groups have whereby they believe some will receive immortality, and others found faithful will be given a lesser position.
<i>One Lord</i>	over all; not a system of divided authority.
<i>One faith</i>	one set of promises which God will fulfill and upon which all are to rely.
<i>One baptism</i>	into one set of standards based on one set of principles.
<i>One Deity</i>	who designs all, regulates all and brings all who would be saved into His one name.

God's name speaks of many united in one

“And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you. And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt **thou** say unto the children of Israel, The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations” (Ex. 3:14-15).

While Yahweh is the name of God, the full memorial title is “the LORD God of your fathers.” The significance of this title is seen from the following:

LORD – “I will be”, as the Hebrew is the first person, future form of the verb “to be.”

God – “mighty ones” from the Hebrew *elohim* which is a plural word.

Of your fathers – those who are spiritual sons and daughters of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Herein is the purpose of God with mankind declared for He will take the spiritual seed of Abraham and, making them mighty spirit beings unite them into His name for ever. He will be mighty ones of Abraham. Many will be united in one and the one will be manifested in many.

This is His purpose and this is the basic method of divine operation. This very concept is employed now in the unity of the ecclesial body as many are united into one.

Immortal hosts working as one

Psa. 96:12-13 reads: "... then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice before the LORD: for he cometh, to judge the earth: he shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth."

Who will judge the world with righteousness? God Himself, personally? The verse seems to say so clearly enough. But consider Acts 17:31:

"he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained ..."

God will rule the world through the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus in Psalm 96, the name Yahweh includes the Lord Jesus as well as Deity himself.

Zech. 14:18 reads: "And if the family of Egypt go not up, and come not, that have no rain; there shall be the plague, wherewith the LORD will smite the heathen that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles."

Who will run the world during the kingdom age occasionally administering punishment upon various nations, God Himself personally? Consider Rev. 2:26-27: "And he that overcometh ... to him will I give power over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron ... even as I received of my Father." Rulership of the world will co-shared by Christ with the immortalized saints who will share his throne of power. Thus in Zech. 14, the name Yahweh includes the host of the saints as well as Christ and the Deity.

There are not lords many and gods many, there is a host of holy ones included in the one Yahweh name and working as one in Him. This is the same principle as the unity of the body of believers today. Again, many in one is seen as basic to divine thinking.

When, therefore, we disrupt the unity of the body of Christ we are offending in a very sensitive area of God's purpose. That is why those who cause division are spoken of in such harsh terms.

7. Every Member Important

You are an important brother or sister! The other person is an important brother or sister! Each is vital to the maturation of the community to its intended potential.

"... even Christ from whom the whole body fitly **joined together and compacted by that which every** joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of **every** part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love" (Eph. 4:15,16).

This is an essential principle of ecclesial life and is conveyed several times in different ways by scripture.

The broad distribution of spirit gifts

At Pentecost

The indications are that the Holy Spirit filled all 120 of the ecclesia.

“... the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty ... And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place ... And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit ... this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh ...” (Acts 1:15; 2:1,3-4,16-17).

While Peter. and John were the chief spokesmen for the ecclesia, the broad distribution of spirit-gifts negated any idea of an elite hierarchy for: “your sons and your *daughters* shall prophesy, and your *young men* shall see visions, and your old *men* shall dream dreams: and on my *servants* and on my *handmaidens* I will pour out in those days of my Spirit ...” (Acts 2:17-18).

To gentile converts

As the gospel spread to the Gentiles, apparently every ecclesial member was given some aspect of the Holy Spirit gifts.

“And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, **you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit**, which is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance ...” (Eph. 1:13-14 NIV). “But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ ... [he] gave gifts unto men ... and he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets ... according to the effectual working in the measure of every part ...” (Eph. 4:7-11,16).

The effect of such a policy would be threefold:

1. all members would feel included as important individuals within the ecclesia;
2. every member would want all of the others to participate so benefit could be realized from the gifts possessed by others;
3. the ecclesia would only function to its optimum potential when all members fully participated.

1 Cor. 12:6-11 confirms the spirit gifts were dispersed widely and a careful reading of the verses further indicates that, in the first ecclesias, every member was given some spirit gift.

... it is the same God which worketh all in all ... But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal...dividing to **every man** severally as he will.”

The individual received a gift of the spirit to “profit withal” (v.7). Each person would thus be under pressure to participate fully in the ecclesia that the whole group might be benefited thereby. If he did not, then the ecclesia would lose his input of teaching, administration, healing, tongues or whatever his gift might be.

In today's ecclesia

The same is true today. While we do not have a gift of the Holy Spirit, we each have unique contributions we can make to ecclesial life. If we are not fully involved, we deprive the ecclesia of that benefit others can derive from us. What can we do for the ecclesia?

- Attend meetings, listen attentively, participate with joy in singing, prepare carefully for any participation.
- Willingly take part in providing refreshments and in maintaining the meeting place.
- Thoughtfully communicate with others by conversation, phone and letter edifying others by our faith, joy and peace.
- Show hospitality, care for the sick, share our possessions, talents, homes and resources with those who are in need.
- Instruct our children and those of others.
- Spread the word of truth to friends and in ecclesial efforts. Use special abilities in writing, art or clear thinking for exposition and communication of the word of God.
- In a kindly manner, benefit others by our experience and wisdom.

The lesson of the human body, 1 Cor. 12:14-27

No matter how unique he may feel, every believer is part of a community of believers;

“For the body is not one, member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?...” (vs. 14-16).

A variety of individual contributions are essential to the proper operation of the whole.

“If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing?...” (vs. 17-20).

No person can say other believers are unnecessary to him; every member is important;

“the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee ...” (vs. 21-23).

Every believer should have the same care for all members alike:

“but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honor to that part which lacked: that there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another” (vs. 24-25).

One believer's problem should be a concern to the entire ecclesia;

“And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it ...” (v.26).

As the lessons apply to individuals within ecclesias, so they can apply to ecclesias within the brotherhood. For example, a small ecclesia that feels inconsequential compared to those which are large and well-known, can be a valuable training ground for young brethren. And they can be an example to others if they diligently send their young people to ecclesial functions in larger ecclesial centers.

The lesson of the stones, 1 Kgs. 5:17; 7:9-11

The great stones used to build Solomon's temple and associated buildings represent believers in the ecclesia.

"And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building **fitly framed** together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded ..." (Eph. 2:20-22).

The ecclesia is likened to a temple in the process of being built. In the figure, the corner stone speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ, the foundation stones represent the apostles and prophets and the other stones the rest of us. That much is plain. What may not be so evident is the allusion to the stones in Solomon's temple complex contained in the phrase "fitly framed together."

Fitly framed together

The Greek word is *sunarmologeō* used only here and 4:16 ("fitly joined together") and means, "to frame accurately together" (L-S). The word alludes to 1 Kings 6:7:

"And the house, when it was in building, was built of stone made ready before it was brought thither: so that there was neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the house, while it was in building. "

Some of the stones weighed thousands of pounds. God's instructions forbade making any final adjustments to the stone once it was moved on to the temple site. Certainly, no one wanted to haul these stones into place and be forced to haul them out again because they did not fit properly. Great care would thus be taken with each stone so that it would fit perfectly when put into its final spot in the project.

God's instructions applied whether the stone was a highly visible one or whether it was to be covered over with wood never to be seen again once it was in place (1 Kgs. 6:18). Great care would be expended to make every stone right, every stone was important to the master designer.

The message to us is clear – we are represented by those stones; great care is being taken with us to mold us that we might be fitly framed parts of the dwelling place of God. We may not be prominent, highly-visible stones, but we are important to the great builder.

Costly stones

The stones were fitly framed and they were described as being "costly."

"And the king commanded, and they brought great stones, costly stones, and hewed stones, to lay the foundation of the house ... All these **were of costly** stones, according to the measures of hewed stones, sawed with saws, within and without ... and the foundation was of **costly** stones, even great stones, stones of ten cubits, and stones of eight cubits" (1 Kgs. 5:17; 7:9-10).

A person reading 1 Kgs. 5:17 could think three different categories of stones were in mind – very large (“great”) stones, precious jewels (“costly stones”) and stones that required cutting (“hewed stones”). Upon reading 1 Kgs. 7:9-10, however, we see that all three descriptions apply to the same stones. They were very large (up to 12’ by 15’), they were hewed with stone-cutting saws and were spoken of as costly.

“Costly” – Hebrew is *yaqar*, “precious, rare” (Young’s); describes God’s love for the upright in Psa. 45:9 – “Kings’ daughters were among thy *honorable women*,” and for the Messiah in Isa. 28:16 – “Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone ...” cf. 1 Pet. 2:6.

The contour of Jerusalem required that many of these “costly” stones be used to provide a level platform for the erection of Solomon’s complex of buildings (see illustration and note 1 Kgs. 7:8-9). Most of those stones may, seem unimportant to us but to God they were “costly, precious.” In like manner, we may feel we are an obscure member of the ecclesial building; we may think our work is unimportant but to God we are “costly precious.”

Note, too, the great effort in carefully preparing these costly stones for their appointed place. The sawing and shaping may have been a time-consuming, laborious and sometimes painful process (cf. Heb. 12:11) but it was done with great care by the builders for each of the stones was precious to the great builder.

Lessons from the second temple, Haggai 1 and 2

Realistic encouragement, 2:3-4

The returned exiles had recommenced work on the temple when God’s word came through Haggai:

“Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now: is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?” (Hag. 2:3)

Was this a discouraging remark? Not if we know the divine perspective. Whether or not a project is glorious to man is wholly irrelevant to God. While this temple project was not magnificent, God accepted it. He realized their limitations; the message was, “Don’t be discouraged but “work.”

“Yet now be strong ... saith the LORD, and work: for I am with you saith the LORD of hosts” (Hag. 2:4).

God realizes our limitations in talent and resources; He knows our physical difficulties and natural responsibilities. What He wants is for us to **put our** hearts into His service, to hands to the work and He will be pleased, in fact, He will be glorified by such conduct.

The work that glorifies God

“Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD” (Hag. 1:8).

There was nothing glamorous about the task at hand: cut the wood, shape it, haul it and do it with your own hands. Here was not a call to prominence but to simple hard work. Yet look at what would be accomplished. The great God would take pleasure in their willing diligence and would be glorified by it. (The “it” in 1:8 was not the temple, which would be four years in building, but the labor of working thereon.)

We need to remember that the Lord Almighty is not glorified by the splendor of a great cathedral or the chords of a majestic organ; He is glorified by the humble work done in respect of His will. That would be hard to remember when struggling up the mountain under a load of wood, but here is conduct in which God delights.

All involved in the work, 1:12,14; 2:2,4

Of 38 verses in the entire prophecy of Haggai, 4 of them stress the same important point: Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest and all the remnant of the people obeyed the voice of the Lord and did work in the house of the LORD of hosts, their God. Not just the leaders were involved, not just the people did the laborious chores, but all gave themselves to the work. Through the prophet, God made it clear that His delight would come from everyone personally doing arduous routine labor on a project that was not magnificent.

Every member of that community was important. Every work done according to His will glorifies Him.

Today there are various humble tasks we do that give God pleasure:

The brother cleaning the hall may not have the talent for platform duties but can glorify God none the less in his ready labor.

The young couple prevented from doing mission work by family care and physical infirmity can give God pleasure by *ministering in* their local ecclesia.

God realizes the limitations of sickly members and takes pleasure in what they can do.

He sees the countless hours spent at preaching work which seem to yield no fruit and is glorified by the effort.

We may be limited by talent, resources and ability and our contribution may be small but God’s view is not man’s view. He is the one who put this treasure in earthen vessels. He is the one who has called not many mighty, not many noble, not many brilliant people. But every one He has called is, important to Him and the work done according to His will gives Him pleasure.

Every member a joint ruler

Everyone found faithful will share in ruling the world with Christ.

The promise is not limited to apostles, prophets and elders.

It is not restricted to brethren or to sisters with many children.

Every believer who overcomes and keeps Christ's works unto the end will share his throne. Therefore:

- Every believer needs to develop divine attributes of character now.
- Every believer needs to be able to apply principles to specific situations.
- Every member is important!

8. Solving an Ecclesial Problem - A Case Study from Acts 6:1-8

Acts 6:1 Trouble over ecclesial welfare

"the number of the disciples was multiplied" – Cf. 2:41, 3,000 added; 2:47, "the Lord added to the church daily;" 4:4, "many ... believed ... the number of the men was about five thousand;" 5:14, "And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women."

"the Grecians against the Hebrews" "Grecians" refers to "Grecian Jews" (NIV) who were born outside of Palestine and spoke Greek. The "Hebrews" were "Hebraic Jews" (NIV) who were born in Palestine and spoke Aramaic. While all were believers in Christ, differences would be apparent in many aspects of daily life such as customs in dress and choices of food.

Many Grecian Jews who believed would have resettled in Jerusalem to be with the ecclesia there.

"the daily ministration" – As part of the communal life of the Jerusalem ecclesia (2:44-45; 4:35), widows were evidently served daily in a group setting (cf. v.2).

Acts 6:2-4, A solution proposed

"The twelve called..." – The apostles and the believers had Holy Spirit gifts so why not solve the problem with a divinely inspired edict? As is evident throughout the New Testament, the gift of the Holy Spirit confirmed the **word of** the gospel as truth (Mk. 16:20; Hb. 2:4) but did not provide miraculous solutions to ecclesial or personal problems (Acts 15:6-7; 1 Cor. 12:7-9; Gal. 2:11-14).

"the multitude of the disciples" – A business meeting was convened. All were believers and all were to have a part in solving the problem.

"It is not reason" – "It would not be right" (NIV). Christ had assigned the apostles the particular task of gospel extension throughout the world (Acts 1:8). They should concentrate on that assignment

"leave the word of God and serve tables" – "Leave the word" is meant in a relative sense for Stephen was active in many areas of the Truth including gospel proclamation (Acts 6:8-15). However, the apostles wanted to be free of administrative duties in order to be "continually" involved in prayer and biblical instruction (v.4).

The pastoral work of serving tables was not unimportant as is evident by the, quality of disciple needed for the task (v.3), but it was not the activity upon which the apostles should concentrate.

“Wherefore, brethren ...” – The solution proposed follows the precedent of Deut. 1:9-14. Overburdened ecclesial leadership shared responsibility with godly men selected by the believers.

“look out from among you” – cf. Deut. 1:13. The apostles could have made the appointments themselves but they were more likely to secure the cooperation of the community if the believers chose their own committee.

Like Israel, the ecclesia was free to use the method of their choice in selecting the seven brethren. They could have done so by nomination and secret ballot, a show of hands, appointing a selection committee, etc. Ecclesias today have a similar flexibility in using whichever method they prefer in selecting their serving brethren.

“...men of honest report...” – Cf. Deut. 1:13. Ideally every brother should meet the qualifications. Realistically, however, there is a wide range of spiritual development among ecclesial members and this must be wisely considered when ecclesial appointments are made (cf. 1 Tim. 3:2-12).

“the Holy Spirit” – *“Holy”* is omitted in the Greek and by versions such as the RV, RSV, NIV, etc. Its inclusion by the KJV is, no doubt, because of the phrasing of v. 5 and no significance should be attached to its omission in v.3

“whom we may appoint” – As the ecclesial elders, the apostles would review the ecclesial selections to ensure they were appropriate (cf. Deut. 1:13).

Acts 6:5-6, The solution Implemented

Seven Grecian Jews – All seven brethren on the committee had Greek names indicating they were Grecian Jews. They would be more sensitive to the existing discrimination but their spiritual quality would be a safeguard against their implementing a policy of reverse discrimination. Their selection by the body of believers indicates the community recognized the problem and was making every effort to correct it in love.

“the apostles ... laid their hands on them” – thereby indicating they approved the choices made by the ecclesia.

Acts 6:7-8, The solution enhanced ecclesial growth

“the word of God increased” – This does not refer to additional divine revelations but to the increase in the influence of the Truth and the added numbers who adhered to it, cf. 12:24; 19:20.

“the number of the disciples multiplied” – appropriate solutions to ecclesial problems enhance the growth and vigor of the ecclesia.

Stephen – While handling additional administrative responsibilities, Stephen was still deeply involved in other areas of ecclesial life. He was not a one-dimensional disciple.

9. Five Practical Suggestions for solving Ecclesial Problems

1. Don't panic - Problems are inevitable

Problems are inevitable in ecclesial life due to factors beyond our control.

God has ordained that the ecclesia should be **one body**. Grecian Jews and Hebrew Jews may have lived more happily if they had separate, ecclesias for people of different cultural backgrounds. But doing so would have been in opposition to the concept of one body in Christ. Given the mix of backgrounds and personalities represented in any ecclesia, tensions and misunderstandings are likely to occur from this one factor alone.

The ecclesia is to be **“in” the world** as a living witness to the light of the gospel. Being thus in the world, the ecclesia is highly susceptible to the impact of the problems of contemporary society. The ethnic bias of Palestinian verses Grecian Jews was a problem amongst Jews throughout the world. In spite of the binding influence of fellowship in Christ, this social problem affected the ecclesia. Our situation is similar; we will be affected by the problems in the surrounding society. Lower morals, looser family structure, greater incidence of divorce, and increased tolerance for deviate relationships will result in a greater incidence of such problems in our ecclesias. We may want to isolate ourselves by establishing remote agricultural commune. That is not an acceptable solution, however, for while we must not be lovers of the world, God has ordained that we must live in it.

Human nature, with its carnal impulses, is not changed by baptism. The neglect of Grecian widows was inconsiderate, unkind and petty but it was a manifestation of the flesh. Human nature was still a constant plague to the disciples in the first century and it is to us today. The ecclesia at Jerusalem had witnessed an earlier, dramatic incident proving the point. Ananias and Sapphira gave into the lust of the flesh and the pride of life in holding back part of the price of land they sold while pretending they had generously given the total amount to the ecclesial fund. Their sudden death was a pointed reminder to all that, until this corruptible is made incorruptible, ecclesial problems will occur because of our human nature.

Big problems even in first century

The magnitude of ecclesial problems will sometimes surprise and shock us but don't panic, big problems occurred even with the apostles present.

Upon careful consideration, there was nothing small about the ecclesial problem in Acts 6. All involved had been baptized into Christ in whom all were to be distinguished by their love for one another even as the Lord loved them. Yet they were practicing worldly unkindness. All were Jews who had been raised on the Old Testament which stressed that widows are vulnerable and among the first to be hurt when the flesh rules (Ex. 22:22; Is. 1:17). Yet widows were the ones being hurt. All involved had been adopted into the family of God in whom cultural differences are to become inconsequential. Yet it was their cultural background that was a major factor in the problem. They had all been called in hope of ruling the world in God's name (1 Cor. 6:2). Yet they could not fairly administer the daily meal. A

serious situation existed in the ecclesia at Jerusalem; a shocking one and the apostles were present.

If they had serious problems that close to the ascension of Christ and with all of the apostles in their ecclesia, how much more likely are we to have serious problems today? The frequency of wrong conduct will be much less in ecclesial life than in the world, but any of the works of the flesh can occur in the ecclesia. Don't panic when they do.

Problems can help spiritual development

Don't panic when ecclesial problems occur because problems can have a beneficial effect.

We may be deeply hurt when a loved one is falsely accused by another believer. That is bad, but it is good in that we have an opportunity to exercise forgiveness. We will never develop the attribute of forgiveness unless we have occasion to exercise it.

We may be annoyed by continual frustrations caused by a difficult personality in the meeting. But in learning to deal with different personalities, we are being prepared to shepherd the inhabitants of the kingdom who will be under our care.

Prolonged and in-depth Bible study may be required to counteract subtle error from within the body. But the result can be a useful sharpening of our own understanding of the

2. Follow Bible precedents

An answer in Deut. 1:9-15

The leaders of the Jerusalem ecclesia were overburdened because of ecclesial growth. What should they do? Continue trying to manage everything themselves fearing to share responsibility with others? Pray that the problems would go away? Hire outside experts to handle special areas of difficulty?

What they did was look to the scriptures. A similar situation had arisen with Moses and the good solution applied at that time was used as a guideline by the apostles. An overburdened ecclesial leader shared responsibilities with other people of God (Deut. 1:9-16).

How were the, new serving brethren to be selected? Again the biblical precedent was followed: they were chosen by the congregation (Dt. 1:13; Acts 6:3).

What method should the congregation use for the selection process? No method was specified. They could do as they chose in this regard (Dt. 1:13; Acts 6:3).

Would the apostles have any final say in the acceptability of the brethren selected? Yes, they would follow Moses' example and review those who had been chosen (Dt. 1:15; Acts 6:3).

Other examples of following Bible precedents

The Jerusalem conference was settled by reference to Amos 9:11-12 (Acts. 15:15-19).

First century ecclesial welfare was patterned after the gathering of manna in the wilderness (2 Cor. 8:13-15 citing Ex. 16:18).

When Israel first entered the land, Achan and his family were dramatically killed for a sin of deception motivated by greed. At the beginning of the ecclesial era, similar dramatic action was taken by the apostles against Ananias and Sapphira who committed the same type of sin as Achan (Josh. 7:20-26; Acts 5:1-11).

Christadelphians already do this

We already do this in the major areas of ecclesial life. The Christadelphian structure is based on following the guidelines of scripture, not the wisdom of men. We stress anonymous donations because of Matt. 6:24. We have no ecclesiastical power structure because of Matt. 23:8-12. Ecclesias are organized as autonomous units linked to one another by our common belief in the gospel after the pattern of the ecclesias of New Testament times.

When specific problems arise, we should continue the pattern of following the precedents of scripture in working out a solution.

However, we can't do this unless we know the Bible well. The guidelines and principles are all there but they are not presented in textbook fashion neatly indexed to the specific situations we face. We will only see the applicability of a given precedent if we are thoroughly familiar with the circumstances of various scriptural incidents and well acquainted with divine principles.

The purpose of scripture is to equip the person of God for right conduct (2 Tim. 3:17). We don't need the gifts of the Holy Spirit in this regard. In fact, even when the spirit gifts were extant, the available scriptures provided the guidelines for solving problems. In having the completed Bible, we actually have an advantage in this regard over ecclesias of the first century. However, we must use our advantage, and we can only use it if we know our Bibles.

3. Apply spiritual commonsense.

"Look ye out from among you" – If those administering the delicate welfare matter were chosen by the community as a whole, the ecclesia would more likely cooperate with the decisions of those selected. If the apostles, who were all Hebrew Jews, had appointed the committee, many of the brethren might have resented the situation. Remember, human nature does not disappear when we are baptized.

Seven Grecian Jews selected – Every one of those chosen by the ecclesial community has a Greek name indicating they were Grecian Jews. This is most remarkable and indicates that, given the opportunity, the brethren and sisters were sensitive to the problem and anxious to have it rectified in the spirit of Christ. No doubt, if the apostles had made such a selection themselves, many of the Hebrew brethren would have considered they were overreacting and would have complained the appointees would practice reverse discrimination. But given the opportunity to make the selection themselves, the nominees were accepted and the ecclesia prospered.

"Whom they set before the apostles" – An ecclesia can sometimes act unwisely and it only makes common sense for the elders to review ecclesial selections.

The entire process showed wise judgment. The potential reaction of human nature was anticipated and a safeguard was provided against rash decisions.

Spiritual commonsense today

In our own situation, spiritual commonsense needs to be exercised in ecclesial matters.

Some examples:

- To make someone recording brother who has recently moved to the ecclesia is not sound judgment; he does not know the strengths and weaknesses of members well enough to react properly for their eternal good.
- For strong brethren to divide over a weak brother's odd ideas or sinful action does not make sense. Often in such cases the one causing the trouble drifts from the Truth leaving the others still divided where for years they had worked together in harmony.
- To make quick decisions on items newly introduced at a business meeting often results in bad decisions. Let matters be thought through so that their possible affects can be considered.
- Making rules to solve a passing problem is not sound judgment. Rely on biblical principles and precedents rather than on "quick-fixes" which are often neither scriptural nor appropriate.

Ask of God

Commonsense is a modern synonym for wisdom. If we lack wisdom, let us ask it of God "that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him" (Jam. 1:5).

4. Establish right ecclesial structure

"The number of the disciples multiplied" – Ecclesias do not stand still. The Jerusalem ecclesia had grown so large that the apostles could no longer cope with their responsibilities; help was needed.

With our own ecclesias, having no arranging board may work fine when there are only 11 brethren and sisters. However, if the ecclesia grows to 50, deciding every matter by impromptu business meetings becomes unwieldy and contributes to problems. Ecclesial structure needs to be adjusted as ecclesias grow.

Match jobs and people

It was not appropriate that the apostles should spend time on administrative matters. By virtue of their personal experiences with Christ, they were uniquely qualified for gospel proclamation and exposition of the word.

Every person is not equally suited to every ecclesial task. In fact, considerable trouble is sometimes caused when a brother or sister is given a responsibility for which they are unsuited.

- A brother may be an excellent speaker but may be unsuited to handle the complaints frequently presented to a recording brother.
- A sister may be an excellent Sunday school teacher but unable to work well with others on a catering committee.
- A brother may work well with young people but be sufficiently disorganized so that he is unable to keep up ecclesial records as finance brother.

Some ecclesias are too small to allow much choice. But, where selection is possible, those who serve should do so in areas where they are best suited by virtue of ability, background and personality.

5. Keep spiritual priorities uppermost

“It is not reason ...” – There was nothing wrong with serving -tables, but the most important aspect of ecclesial life is the eternal salvation of its members. The apostles were able to contribute in the area of preaching, exposition and spiritual counsel better than anyone else in the Jerusalem ecclesia. They felt obliged, therefore, to devote their efforts to those areas.

Sometimes we cannot do everything we are able and willing. to do in ecclesial life. A choice has to be made of which activities to pursue and which ones to drop. If that situation arises, let us keep spiritual priorities uppermost and concentrate on those areas where we best contribute to the eternal wellbeing of others.

“men full of the spirit and wisdom” – While the committee was to perform an administrative function, the most important consideration was that they do so in harmony with the will of God. The primary consideration in selecting brethren for the task was not to be their background in social work, or catering service or their organizational abilities. These factors may have been noted, but they were not to be the most important consideration.

Qualifications of elders

The same ranking of priorities is evident in the qualifications for ecclesial elders set forth in 1 Tim. 3:2-12. In that list, there is no mention of organizational ability, appearance, economic status, personal charisma or success in business. As noted earlier, considerations of secular background may sometimes be useful but they are always to be secondary to spiritual qualifications.

The objective of ecclesial life is not a smooth-running organization, but the long-term development of human beings suitable for receiving immortality.

Some examples:

- A finance brother may be excellent with the books but wholly lacking in compassion for those who get in financial trouble through their own ineptitude. Compassion is more important than fiscal impeccability.
- A recording brother maybe early to meetings and efficient in notifying people of duties but be quickly provoked by brethren who are tardy because of family problems. Sympathy is more important than efficiency.

- A Sunday school teacher may provide excellent lessons with beautiful graphics but be intolerant of dull children who perform poorly on homework and tests. Patience is more important than performance.