

A New Church Building?

A Spiritual Reason. for not building

Every congregation faces this decision at least once in its lifetime. It is usually the biggest financial decision a congregation makes. Considering the very high cost of building plus the interest paid on the loan, this decision is very serious indeed. If the church limits, restricts or minimizes its spiritual outreach, while emphasizing the physical comfort, beauty and size of a new building then this decision has spiritual implications and consequences for the whole church in general, but specifically for the spiritual leaders/elders.

God expects us, as individuals as well as the church, to take care of our own physical needs:

2 Thessalonians 3:6-10,

6 ¶ In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. 7 For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, 8 nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. 9 We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow. 10 For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat."

1 Timothy 5:8-10, and James 1:27 add support to this conclusion.

Meeting one's physical needs is acceptable, beneficial and even commanded by God. But, as always, any teaching can be abused. For example, although air conditioning in any church building is recommended in the 21st century in the America, it might be considered an extravagant waste in the near east or some other third world countries where few of the population have such comfort. I believe this principle of **limiting the grandeur of a church building to the minimum of what is respected (not necessarily admired), by the local neighborhood** is applicable to most details of any church building. Each case must be decided on its own merits. Since this paper is basically for Americans in the 21st century, we will be assuming that a church building of some kind is expedient, with its degree of comfort decided by the social norms of the time and place, in harmony with Christian standards and balanced by the scriptural priorities in God's word. This conclusion, of course, leaves all kinds of room for abuse. Since God gave us no specific instructions on the particulars of a church building we must depend on the good judgment of spiritually mature Christians, especially the elders in each church, who will through sincere prayer and love for the truth seek God's guidance in this most serious matter.

Our main concern in this article is how much money to spend for our church building verses the spiritual needs of our church, our community and the lost souls of the world.

Specific examples will be used to illustrate the obvious principle that the spiritual needs of the lost must always take precedence over the physical comforts of the saved. Every aspect of these examples may not apply to your particular situation, but I hope the stated principle will be established so that it will be used to make practical decisions that will, in every situation, be pleasing to God.

We sometimes make very important decisions without giving enough thought to the fact that we will someday be asked, by God, to explain/justify every decision we make, Matthew 12:36, Romans 14:9-12, and

2 Corinthians 5:10

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due to him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

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The decision of how much of our resources to spend on a building has great spiritual ramifications for every Christian, for every church, and especially for the spiritual leaders/elders who are responsible for making and implementing the decision, as they will give an account to God for each soul in their church, Hebrews 13:17.

Our part in saving souls

One of the best known scriptures in the Bible is the great commission, Matthew 28:18-20:

18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Although Jesus was speaking only to the apostles, these instructions apply equally to each of us today. After the apostles had taught "all nations" and baptised them, what were the apostles to teach these new converts? Verse 20 tells us plainly "teaching them (these new converts) to obey everything I have commanded you." This, of course, includes verse 19 which says "go make disciples of all nations." The new converts were also to obey verse 20. Thus every Christian must go, teach and baptize and tell their converts to obey everything that Jesus told the apostles. Therefore every Christian has a direct command from Jesus to "make disciples."

It is interesting to note that although a comfortable church building is a reasonable deduction from scripture it is nowhere mentioned directly. Compare this to the direct command from Jesus in the great commission plus hundreds of verses telling us about the importance of one soul, ex. Mark 8:36, plus all the instructions about teaching the Gospel and we can deduce the relative importance of spiritual matters verses our place of worship.

One example of sharing the complete and pure Gospel

Only one program will be discussed in this paper, but **everything** mentioned here could be applied to Eastern European Missions (E.E.M.) and probably to **several other** missionary efforts as well. We will only be talking about Bibles for China because of our intimate knowledge of the details of its purpose, operation and results.

Since 1997 the Bibles for China program has been collecting money to purchase Bibles, printed in China, to be given to those millions of Chinese people who are eager to have one. One *necessary* thing to remember is:

The ONLY thing more valuable than a soul is 2 souls.

Through Dec. 2011, after 14 years, the Bibles for China program had spent over \$1,200,000.00 which is about \$86,000.00 per year. During this time it delivered over 542,000 Bibles/N.T.s which implies a average cost per Bible of about \$2.20 (now the cost is closer to \$5.00 each). To evaluate this program we must remember what the Lord said in Isaiah 55:8-11:

8 "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. 9 "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. 10 As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, 11 so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

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God promises that His word, the Gospel, will achieve the purpose for which I sent it. What is the purpose of His word ? Romans 1:16:

16 ¶ I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

Romans 16:25-26:

25 ¶ Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, 26 but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him—

His word is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. The Gospel has also been revealed by the command of God "**so that all nations might believe and obey Him!**" God's word was intended to save souls. It will!! We have but to preach it and The Gospel will do the rest! If we give someone a Bible, we are preaching the word and His word will save the lost. The Bible says it! God will see to it!

When men today preach orally we are but communicating an interpretation of part of the word, possibly with some human error, as no man is perfect. When we write a book or a paper, like this one, we are also but communicating an interpretation of part of the word, with the same possibility of human error. **When we give a Bible we are preaching the complete and pure Gospel** with absolutely no error! God promises the results will be saved souls, Isaiah 55:10-11.

As 540,000 Bibles were delivered in China, *could* God get these Bibles into the hands of those who will read it and obey it? Will He really fulfill His promise in Isaiah 55? Is the Philippian jailer, Lydia and the Ethiopian eunuch examples of God getting the Gospel into receptive hands? Is God able to fulfill His promise in Isaiah 55?

Matthew 19:26 *Jesus ... said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."*

God is definitely **able**, but does God *want* to deliver His Word into the hands of those who will obey it?

2 Peter 3:9,

9 ¶ The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

John 20:30-31, and 1 John 5:13 all prove God's desire that all should be saved.

And the best known scripture in all the Bible, John 3:16. God wanted the whole world to be saved so badly that He offered His beloved son to be sacrificed; suffer and die so that all might be saved.

If God is **able** to get His Word into the hands of receptive people and if God *wants* all men to be saved and if God *promised* His Gospel will accomplish the purpose for which He sent it, **Isaiah 55:10-11**, then I ask:

Would it be reasonable to think that God did in fact get, at least, 10% of these Bibles delivered in China into receptive hands?

- 10% of 542,000 Bibles delivered implies **54,200 new souls** saved over 14 years,
- **If so, that would be 3871 souls saved each year. Consistently for 14 years!!**

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-- But, that is based on an assumption of God guiding only 10% of the Bibles into receptive hands!

What if by God's infinite power and His infinite Love He decided to guide 20% of these Bibles into the hands of eager souls who would read and obey?? That would mean 7742 souls saved EACH year for 14 years!

Now compare this to about 2.5 million dollars used for a new building where the seating capacity is 500 versus 300 in the old building. Assume each of the 200 new seats will be filled with new Christians (very unrealistic as many would be filled by Christians moving into the community or coming from other congregations). Please don't get the impression that a new building was required to convert these 200 souls. By going to two services the available seating would be doubled saving the church enough money so that resources could be spent in local preaching and benevolence **AND** in the foreign field as demonstrated by Bibles for China. As the cost of printing Bibles is now up to about \$5 each, the above mentioned 2.5 million dollars would produce 500,000 Bibles for distribution. Using the 10% guideline to estimate the number of saved souls, yields 50,000 new Christians.

Which result would God be more pleased with:

200 saved locally plus a new building **OR**
200 saved locally plus 50,000 saved in foreign fields?

We have lived through other church building projects in our lifetime and agree that many things must be considered. Sometimes in the hustle and bustle of planning we put our emphasis on physical desires rather than spiritual growth. A quick look at the church budget will determine where our emphasis is. It was Jesus who said "for where your treasure is there your heart will be also," Matthew 6:21. Jesus said it, ...it is true!

Summary

In America today it is certainly expedient to have a heated, air-conditioned church building. The Bible also teaches that we should take care of ourselves physically. With no further details regarding a church building there is much room for extremism on both sides of the discussion concerning how to spend God's money. I hope we have given enough evidence to convince all parties that spiritual needs must take precedence over physical desires.

Could Mordecai be speaking to every Christian who faces this question when He said in Esther 4:13-14:

"Do not think that because you are in the *church* you alone of all *people* will escape. 14 For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the *lost* will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to *this church* for such a time as this?" (PLEASE FORGIVE THE WORD CHANGES INDICATED BY ITALICS)

There are programs currently available (E.E.M. and Bibles for China, plus others) for preaching the ***complete and pure*** Gospel. The results of these programs are guaranteed by God, Isaiah 55:8-11. Ignoring these opportunities will be very difficult to explain to God when He asks us about it, 2 Corinthians 5:10. We simply must consider the spiritual as more important than the physical, Matthew 6:19-21."

**In all cases, the results of following God's plan are
worth any discomfort caused by the process.**

There is yet another question to consider: Is building our new building supported by scripture?

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Earlier this year while talking to a friend, I was questioning the wisdom of building a new building which would be larger, more attractive and possibly more comfortable than the existing one. As the discussion progressed and different opinions were expressed he finally said "well, do you think it is a sin to build a new place of worship?" I was taken aback because I had never thought of this action of the church that strictly. I confessed my inability to answer the question because, sin is a violation of the law, 1 John 3:4 *"Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness,"* and I couldn't think of a law it would violate. In my experience it seemed anytime a new building is built, there will be someone who objects, but I had never thought of it as **sin!** In an effort to answer the question I began to study, pray and fast asking for wisdom to understand God's will in this matter. After a few weeks I sent him a list of pertinent scriptures to consider. Later, having received no reply I sent a specific request for help in understanding these scriptures because I was surprised and disquieted with the conclusion I had reached while studying them. Since I again received no reply, I send my detail analysis of each scripture and how they implied, in our specific case, it would be a sin to build another building, asking again for help in understanding any error found in my use of scripture or logic. Receiving no reply I am now asking for your help in understanding these scriptures. This question has far reaching implications, for if my conclusions are correct many congregations must reevaluate their decision to build.

Since every time this subject is discussed the detail situation will be somewhat different, let us state the current conditions for the analysis in this paper. The conclusions reached here **do not** apply to **all** new building projects, but these questions must be asked and each scripture considered for every expenditure of the Lord's money.

Current Conditions:

- 1) Our existing church building is certainly considered safe by our local building inspector and, acceptable, reasonably attractive and comfortable by the local community as evidenced by the recent significant increase in attendance.
- 2) A current average attendance per Sunday, the sum of two services, of about 56% of the seating capacity.
- 3) The recent increase in attendance increased the contribution considerably, now regularly exceeding the budget.
- 4) A new building on the same property would cost about \$2.5 million and reduce parking by 15 spaces (10.5%).

What shall be done with this additional contribution which exceeds the current budget? Some want to build a new, larger, more attractive and possibly more comfortable auditorium. There are some who think it should be spent on: sharing the Gospel and benevolent works. Many things must be considered before such a great financial decision is made because there can be serious spiritual implications from this decision. Actions speak louder than words. What do our actions say regarding our commitment to sharing the Gospel with the lost if we spend **all** of the new over-the-budget money, literally millions over 16 years, on a bigger, more attractive building and **none** of this new money on our spiritual ministries? Are our actions saying "It is more important to build another building than it is to share the Gospel with the lost?"

Bible Teachings concerning a building

Does the Bible actually discuss this subject? Yes it does, but only indirectly.

First, 2 Timothy 3:16-17 "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be **thoroughly equipped** for **every** good work." (NIV)

or

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"complete, furnished completely unto every good work." (ASV),

"adequate, equipped for every good work." (NASB),

"thoroughly furnished unto all good works." (KJV)

"complete, equipped for every good work" (ESV)

If the scriptures do not support it, it is not a good work. Of course I am only talking about religious "work" or activity. For example, there is no scripture authorizing horse back riding but it could be called a good work by some in certain circumstances. But any action proposed as a service to God must be supported by His Word by a) direct teaching, b) approved example, c) necessary inference or d) reasonable deduction. (Yes I know how easily *reasonable deduction* can be abused, but unless it is allowed for justification of some religious action, we could not even own a church building at all, because, to my knowledge, there is no scripture that directly teaches us to own/build one, nor any scripturally approved example of a local congregation having one, nor any scriptures that necessitates one, as "meeting together" can be achieved using private houses or rented facility.)

Any scripture(s) from which we can reasonably deduce a building is satisfied by our existing building described under the "Current Conditions" section on the previous page.

Please help me to find a scripture (I am seriously asking for your help here. c2baird@charter.net, 615-261-9324) from which I can reasonably deduce adding a new building at a cost of about 2.5 million dollars, when there are so many lost souls *eagerly* seeking the gospel and many others with great benevolent needs.

Second, Please read the whole chapter of Romans 14 to get the complete context for the following verses:

2 One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. ...

14 As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean. ...**23** But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and (Greek: "because") ***everything that does not come from faith is sin.***

Everything we do religiously must be based on faith or it is sin. But this faith regardless of how strong it is does not, in and of itself, make the action right. Many good people have a strong faith that playing instrumental music in the worship service is acceptable to God, many other people have a strong faith that converting people by force and/or deception is acceptable, but these actions are sin because they are not supported/taught by scripture.

Logically speaking we would say a strong faith is necessary but not sufficient. Applying this to a proposed new building would imply: If it is built, the builders must have faith that God wants it. This strong faith, however, must first be based on scripture to be acceptable to God, Romans 10:17 ***"Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ."*** A righteous faith must always be based on the word of God! For without this scriptural support any **religious** action is not from faith, and if not from faith it is **sin**. Please help me to find any scriptural support for a new building when one already exists (as described by "Current Conditions" on the previous page).

Third, There are so many scriptures that tell us or imply that we must share the Gospel. I hope using only one here will suffice, Matthew 28:19 *"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* **Therefore this is a good work!** Also looking at James 1:27 *"Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world."* **This is also a good work.** There are many good works for Christians, but all of them are implied by approved example, taught directly,

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reasonably deduced or necessarily implied from the scriptures. If, with the **new** money above the current budget, a choice is made **not** to feed the poor nor share the Gospel with the lost which are scripturally identified as good works, but instead use the Lord's money to build another church building which has no scriptural support, we will one day have to explain that decision to the Lord in light of James 4:17 *"Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins."* If it (building a new building without scriptural support) prohibits a church from doing the good that is scripturally commanded, i.e. teaching the lost or caring for the orphans and widows, then this *in*activity is sin.

I must also add that many scriptures mention "coming together" to worship and one which commands us to do so, Hebrews 10:25. This provides enough evidence from which we can reasonably deduce the need for **a** church building. I have yet to find a scripture that implies the need for a second building when one exists which is safe, large enough, and acceptable to, and respected by, our local community. There is no deduced-from-scripture need for a 2.5 million dollar larger and more attractive building. There is, however, a great need for greater benevolent help and Bible teaching locally, **and** there are many efforts within the Church with years of successful experience sharing the pure and complete Gospel with the lost, ex. E.E.M., the Guyana Mission, Bibles for China, etc. To spend God's money on a larger, more beautiful, and possibly more comfortable building while many people go hungry and millions of lost souls are dying facing an eternity in Hell, is inexcusable (and sinful), and we shall give an accounting for this decision, 2 Corinthians 5:10 *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad."*

If these conclusions are correct we must also consider Matthew 18:6, *"But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. 7 ¶ "Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come!"*

Summary

Is building a new additional church building taught/supported/IMPLIED by scripture?

Any scripture which implies the need for **a** building is satisfied by a safe, comfortable, large enough, acceptable-by-peers existing building.

- 1) If the scriptures don't teach/support/imply any specific religious action (for ex.: building a new building), then that specific action is not a good work, 2 Timothy 3:16-17
- 2) If the scriptures don't teach/support/imply any specific religious action (for ex.: building a new building), then that specific action is not from faith, and therefore it is sin, Romans 10:17, 14:23.
- 3) In the New Testament the number one *good* work is to spread/teach the Gospel to the lost. When we have an opportunity to do that and choose not to do it, we sin. James 4:17.

A Sunday school teacher once said "We have but to look at a person's checkbook to see where his treasure is." Looking at our church budget will show us where our church's treasure is! "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also," Mt 6:21.

In all cases, the results of following God's plan are worth any discomfort caused by the process.

We have one more very practical situation to discuss; Available Parking.

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Available Parking

In this country today it is very difficult to achieve regular church attendance, especially by visitors. This is even more difficult if parking is not convenient. All the following calculations are based on the average number of people per car, calculated as follows: These are counts from four actual services:

?? p.m. service. 109 cars, 239 people = 2.19 people per car.
Sept. 7, p.m. service. 104 cars, 264 people = 2.53 people per car.
Sept. 17, Wednesday 89 cars, 218 people = 2.44 people per car.
Sept. 21, second service 65 cars, 169 people = 2.60 people per car.

If we use the largest figure of 2.6 (instead of the average of 2.44) as the number of people per car and after the new building we will have 127 available parking spaces,

Minus 5 reserved for handicapped, required for a 500 seat auditorium,
Minus 5?, at least, convenient spaces reserved for visitors,
Minus 5?, at least, reserved for elderly.
= 112 "non-reserved" spaces.

Using this number of available spaces = 112
multiplied by the number of people per car $\frac{2.6}{}$
291 people will fill all the on-property non-reserved parking.

But if all elderly and handicapped spaces were full, and only reserving five spaces for visitors,

The number of available spaces (127-5) = 122
multiplied by the number of people per car $\frac{2.6}{}$
317 people will fill all the available on-property parking

Using 350 as a current average attendance implies **33** people or (33 / 2.6) **12** cars must park off-property. This implies a convenient passenger drop-off must be provided for those who park off-property **and** Every new car (person or family) added to our church implies another one of our families must start parking off-property. If our attendance every reaches 500 then **183** people (or 187/2.6 = **72** cars) must park off property and walk to worship.

As we use off-property parking we must trust that:

- a) No one in Spring Hill would object strenuously enough to bring a law suit, or notify the ACLU, for violating the separation of church and state. i.e. a church using "state" property for church parking.
- b) The school will never refuse our use of their parking lot. If they ever did refuse our parking on their property we would be limited to a maximum attendance of 317 for any one service.

Another alternative: We begin using our new building with two worship services. This would imply the maximum attendance at any service would be 317 because there is available parking for only 127 cars.

Our current building has a maximum seating capacity for any one service of 300, and parking for 142 cars.

**In all cases, the results of following God's plan are
worth any discomfort caused by the process.**

The only objections received regarding this paper are discussed on the following pages.

A New Church Building? **Some objections to consider:**

As of October 15, 2014 I have heard only three objections to this paper:

- 1) Regarding Isaiah 55:8-11 a) "The 10% figure you used for the number of saved souls is unsure and skewed." This comment was made with no supporting evidence. b) "It is more important to build another church building in Spring Hill now, than it is to take the Gospel to the lost!"
- 2) "This information is divisive!" This comment was made with no supporting evidence.
- 3) And the most commonly held position on this matter;
Since building or owning a building is not mentioned specifically in scripture, building is a matter of opinion. Therefore we must obey the elders in this regard, Hebrews 13:17.

"Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you."

Thoughts to consider regarding objection 1a.

If we remain alive and Christ does not return, we will make the decision regarding a new church building:

- A) by ignoring Isaiah 55:8-11 as having no effect on our decision,
- B) based on our faith that God **will not** fulfill His promise at least 10% of the time,
- C) based on our faith that God **WILL** fulfill His promise at least 10% of the time.

Which option will display greater faith in God's promises, greater obedience to God's commands and accomplish more good for His cause?

Thoughts to consider regarding objection 1b. I hope no response to this comment is necessary!

Thoughts to consider regarding objection 2.

If scripturally based truth shared in love causes division, then that division in the kind Jesus promised to cause in Luke 12:51-53,

51 Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. 52 From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three. 53 They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."

or the kind of division Paul recognized in 1 Corinthians 11:18-19.

18 In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. 19 No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval.

In both cases the results of following God's plan are worth any discomfort caused by the process.

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Some objections to consider:

Thoughts to consider regarding objection 3.

We will consider this objection as part of a broader subject of how and when to follow all God's commands when He tells us to obey/submit to man, i.e. a) citizens obey the government, b) Wives obey your husbands, c) children obey your parents, and d) congregation obey the elders. Please see Appendix A for a complete list of scriptures telling us to obey/submit to various groups of men.

In every aspect of our lives we must always follow God! If there is ever a conflict between what God says in His word and the advice/instruction/laws/commands of any man, we always follow God! This obvious guideline must be remembered as we study when to be obedient of the government, husbands, parents or elders.

Another question to consider is how to solve any conflict between these separate categories of masters to which we must be obedient? If the government tells you to vote and your husband tells you not to vote, or if a young couple wants to have children and the parents tell them "not a good idea," or the elders tell you to come to worship and the government says "No," etc., etc., etc. Although difficult, is it always possible to resolve these conflicts. But there are very few general rules that apply to all such cases. Each case must be resolved based on it's own individual circumstances with an open mind, Bible study, much Prayer and even sometimes fasting! But God **WILL** assist you in this quest! Because qualified elders are mature Christians their advice should always be more dependable and less often in error, but in every case of conflict the previous paragraph must be always be followed. Let us now look at the individual masters the Lord has given us.

a) Obey our government

Please read the complete context of Romans 13:1-7, verse one reads:

Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.

Most people realize that if our government orders us to (for example) lie, cheat or steal we should not do it because God's commands override man's instructions, even the government's, Acts 5:29. We don't apply Romans 13:1 to any government rule or regulation which conflicts with any of God's Laws. In other words this verse has exceptions. Of course these exceptions must be specified in other verses of the God's Word, not based on the whim of man's opinions. This is a perfect example of a very important rule of Bible Study: We must read all the verses that deal with a particular subject before reaching a conclusion on that subject. Should our salvation be based solely on Ephesians 2:5b or must we also consider Acts 2:38?

The Holy Spirit guided Paul as he told us to submit to government authorities, knowing that any exceptions to this general rule were specified by other scriptures. Is there a danger that sometimes we may want to take this verse literally, without any exceptions, simply to save us the trouble and stress of deciding what the exceptions are and when and how to apply them?

b) Wives obey your husbands

As always, please read the complete context of Ephesians 5:22-33, verse 24 reads:

Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

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Some objections to consider:

Again, most people realize that if any husband tells his wife to (for example) lie, cheat or steal she should not do it because God's commands override man's instructions, even her husband's, Acts 5:29. We don't apply Ephesians 5:24 to any husband's suggestion or instructions which conflicts with any of God's Laws. In other words this verse has exceptions. Of course these exceptions must be specified in other verses of the God's Word, not based on the whim of anyone's opinions. This is a perfect example of a very important rule of Bible Study: We must read all the verses that deal with a particular subject before reaching a conclusion on that subject. Should our expectation of answered prayer be based solely on John 14:13-14 or must we also consider James 1:6-7, 4:4?

The Holy Spirit guided Paul as he told wives to submit to their husbands, knowing that any exceptions to this general rule were specified by other scriptures. Is there a danger that sometimes we may want to take this verse literally, without any exceptions, simply to save us the trouble and stress of deciding what the exceptions are and when and how to apply them?

Please forgive the obvious duplication of the above evidence. Although I will not repeat it for the next two categories, all that is said in the previous two paragraphs would certainly also apply to the third and fourth examples which follows.

c) children obey parents

Ephesians 6:1 "**Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.**" Are there any exceptions to this command? Based on the previous two examples we would probably say "yes." What, then, are the exceptions and when does the Bible specify these? The first exception is noted in the verse, "in the Lord." This simply confirms our conviction that no child is told by God to submit to their parents in a quest to sin. Another obvious consideration is the age of the child, the younger he is the more obedience and the less questioning of his parents. Growing up is the normal and desirable, and even commanded human process. As the child grows older and especially when he marries he is "to leave his father and mother and be united to his wife," Matthew 19:5. This separation has a tremendous effect on the child's obedience to his parents.

We have learned that anytime God tells man to obey/submit to another human there are always conditions/limitations. The obvious ones are the ones already mentioned, i.e. any sin. We are never to follow the directions of any man to commit sin. Remember the context of these three examples as we discuss the next one.

d) Congregations are to submit to their elders

The third objection to the conclusions reached in this paper implies that any action not specifically mentioned in scriptures is a matter of opinion, therefore we must obey the elders regarding such action. If this reasoning is valid then consider these additional examples:

- 1) Since instrumental music is not mentioned specifically, using it is a matter of opinion.
Therefore we must obey the elders in this regard, Hebrews 13:17
- 2) Since we are not told the method of travel while doing mission work, it is a matter of opinion.
Therefore we must obey the elders in this regard. We could travel first class air, cruise ship or private jet!
- 3) Since investing church funds is not mentioned specifically, doing so is a matter of opinion.
Therefore, the elders could invest church funds in the stock market or any private business.
- 4) Buying lottery tickets with church funds is not mentioned in the scriptures, doing so is a matter of opinion.
Therefore elders could buy lottery tickets with church money!

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Some objections to consider:

5) Giving church funds to a political campaign is not mentioned in the Bible, doing so is a matter of opinion.

Therefore the eldership could contribute church money to any political candidate they favored.

Do these examples give us reason to consider whether God cares how His money is spent by the church (elders)? Do we have any teaching in His Word regarding the limits to the flexibility of how His money is dispersed? Is every opinion of the elders valid?

Do men, even elders, ever have an *invalid* opinion? Since all men today are **uninspired**, we must answer the question "Yes," sometimes even elders have invalid opinions. If this is so then we must accept or reject an elder's opinion based on the evidence. Only the opinion which has the best supporting evidence must be adopted. But once we start questioning the decisions of the elders, at what point does it stop? This is a valid and good question, but it is valid in both directions. "At what level does it stop" in allowing them to make decisions without questioning them? Can they decide anything, regardless of the results or implications? We obviously all agree that if the elders agree that instrumental music can be used in the worship service we must **not** submit to that decision. What, then, is the basis for deciding when to submit and when not to?

It seems the only reasonable answer is: Each case must be decided on its own merits. Yes, we all agree elders are just men who sometimes make mistakes. All mistakes should **not** be handled the same way. If an elder says something unkind in anger, he has but to apologize and it's forgotten. If he does it consistently, over a period of years, at some point he must resign, having lost the qualification to be self-controlled (1 Timothy 3:2) and not be quick-tempered (Titus 1:7). If the eldership spends money on some project that later proves to be unwise, they have but to apologize and it's forgotten. If it happens over and over again, and more and more money is involved with each incidence, is there a point when the congregation must "influence" the Eldership to change their minds?

If the eldership decides to pay a preacher \$75,000.00 per year and you disagree and express that to the elders and if they do not change their minds, then forget it, it's over. If they agree to pay him \$150,000 you may object more strenuously and talk to other before giving up. But if they decide to pay him \$300,000.00, maybe a different reaction might be warranted. It may be time for the congregation to "influence" the eldership to change their minds. In matters of opinion, some opinions are valid and other are not valid even if held by the eldership. Each case decided on its own merits, based on the evidence, Bible teaching, much prayer and even fasting!

Should all financial decisions of the church be given the same scrutiny, no matter the amount of money involved? If it is thought that the elders need no more evidence to spend \$100.00 than to spend \$2.5 million dollars, then we need to read again Luke 14:28-30 about counting the cost of any project.

Must even the elders follow the Christian guidelines of honesty, transparency, counting the cost, using the Lord's money for the Lord's work (determined by the scriptures), temperance, not a lover a money, etc. Who decides if and when an eldership violates any of these scriptural guidelines? Since the elders also are servants and brothers they, too, when they sin should accept correction when "you who are spiritual should restore such a one," Galatians 6:1. All Christians have the right and scriptural requirement to "influence" even the elders when they err in matters of judgment. How much influence and how bad an error in judgment justifies this influence depends on each individual case. In Acts 20:28-31 when elders fall from the truth, who is to point that out to them?? If other elders fail to do it are we, non-elders, exempt from any responsibility in this case?

Although it would be very difficult to find, if we could find a missionary (to China, for instance) who wanted to, and an eldership who would support him in his desire, how should we react to the missionary traveling first class air to the west coast, first class cruise ship to Hawaii, another first class cruise ship to Hong Kong then first class

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Some objections to consider:

air to a city in China and return the same way? What if this was his "normal" and frequently used mode of travel? After all, a missionary deserves a special vacation and he would be fresher and *ready-to-go* upon arrival, no need to recover from jet lag, etc. Would this mode-of-travel opinion be valid or invalid? Would God be pleased or displeased with this opinion of how to use His money? How would God react to the congregation who by their silence implied approval of this decision? Would Esther 4:14 apply to this situation?

Is it reasonable to conclude that even an opinion, to be valid, must be based on evidence? And, yes, better evidence than supports an alternative opinion? This implies that some opinions are **invalid**, even if it comes from mature Christians for there are no infallible men today. But since mature Christians and qualified elders love the truth *and* their church they should be **anxious**, not defensive, to have their opinions vetted. They should be **happy**, not offended, to hear the evidence that supports a differing opinion., because this is the only way to learn, grow, build confidence in their decision making abilities and to be most effective in the Lord's work, while deterring any idea that they may be "Lording it over the flock."

Jesus said "to him who would borrow, turn him not away." But if we don't use some discretion on how much to keep for ourselves then we can't take care of our families and we are worse than an infidel, 1 Timothy 5:8. But how much do we keep. In answering this question the sum total makes a big difference. If we talk about \$10.00, then no matter, give it to him who would borrow. However if the borrower asks for \$100,000.00 then God may want us to say "no" to the borrower so that we can care for our families. If the elders want to spend \$100.00 on a new rug, no big deal. Not worth verbalizing any possible disagreement. If they want to spend \$2,500,000.00 on a second building when the first one is only half used, then I want all the details and reasons why it is needed. They should be eager and anxious to share that evidence as justification for their decision in an effort to be transparent and discredit any possible accusation of being too concerned about physical comforts. The amount of money involved makes a big difference in how the matter is handled. Not all financial mistakes are sin. Likewise, not all financial mistakes are free from sin. Each case to be decided on its own merits.

Is there a danger that sometimes we may want to take Hebrews 13:17 literally, without any exceptions, simply to save us the trouble and stress of deciding what the exceptions are and when and how to apply them? Also, If anything goes wrong with any actions after the elders decided, we automatically have someone else to blame for the error or mistake, that is, "it's not my responsibility, the elders did it!"

Please seriously consider the matter of building a second, bigger, more attractive and probably more comfortable church building now in Spring Hill when the existing one is only half used and is acceptable as safe, comfortable, sufficiently attractive and respected by the local community, as evidenced by the recent growth in attendance.

Any comments and/or criticisms based on scriptures and given in love are eagerly sought, as I, too, love the truth and the church and will change my thinking when the evidence warrants. c2baird@charter.netCliff

In all cases, the results of following God's plan are worth any discomfort caused by the process.

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Some objections to consider:

Appendix A

All scriptures using *obey* and *submit*

- Matthew 23:3 So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach.
- Luke 2:51 Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart.
- Acts 4:19 But Peter and John replied, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God.
- Acts 5:29 Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than men!
- Romans 6:16 Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey— whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?
- Romans 13:1 Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.
- Romans 13:5 Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience.
- 1 Corinthians 16:16 to submit to such as these and to everyone who joins in the work, and labors at it.
- Ephesians 5:21 Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.
- Ephesians 5:22 Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord.
- Ephesians 5:24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.
- Ephesians 6:1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.
- Ephesians 6:5 Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ.
- Ephesians 6:6 Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart.
- Colossians 3:18 Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.
- Colossians 3:20 Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.
- Colossians 3:22 Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord.
- 1 Timothy 3:4 He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect.
- Titus 3:1 Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good,
- Hebrews 13:17 Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.
- 1 Peter 2:13 Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority,
- 1 Peter 2:18 Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh.