

Lesson 11
THE NEW WAY OF LIFE OF THE CHURCH

INTRODUCTION:

- 1) The resurrected Jesus delivered an authoritative way of life to be followed by his disciples, instructing that those who had been baptized be taught to observe all things that had been commanded (Matt. 28:20).
- 2) It has been said that there are two sides to being a Christian – believing and behaving.
 - a) Early lessons have centered on believing.
 - b) This lesson centers on behaving.
- 3) The salvation in Christ and membership in his church find expression in a new way of life.
 - a) The new way of life has a theological basis that gives a distinctive character as to why Christians live as they do.
 - b) This way of life is expressed in and supported by the mutual fellowship of believers, a fellowship that allows liberty in most matters, but a fellowship that must be withdrawn when conduct deliberately violates that fellowship.

BODY:

- 1) **MORALITY AND COMMUNITY.**
 - a) The concepts of the church discussed in earlier lessons have implications about behavior.
 - i) A covenant people is bound by the stipulations of the covenant.
 - ii) The people of the kingdom live under the rule of God.
 - iii) The body of Christ acts under the direction of the head.
 - iv) The temple of the Holy Spirit is holy in word and deed.
 - v) The family of God responds to the Father's love.
 - b) The resultant behavior in its turn creates the sense of community.
 - i) Living by the covenant confirms covenant loyalty.
 - ii) Submitting to the King makes visible the kingdom.
 - iii) Acting as a body develops solidarity.
 - iv) Exhibiting family characteristics bonds the family together.
 - c) Becoming a Christian was not merely an act of individual conversion (however personal it may have been), it was becoming a part of the Christian community.
 - i) The convert entered a primary reference group (the church) different from what had been the person's primary social group in the past: whether of family, city, club, philosophical school, or religious association.
 - ii) When converts were told that those who do certain things will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5), they were being told something about the community they were joining.
 - iii) Thus, the topic of the new way of life in Christ is significant for an understanding of the New Testament doctrine of the church.
 - iv) Christian morality is intimately wrapped up with the Christian community.
- 2) **THE NATURE OF CHRISTIAN ETHICS.**

- a) The Christian life flows from salvation in Christ and incorporation into him.
 - i) An identifying mark of God's people is how they live (John 13:35).
 - (1) The point is not so much that conduct proves discipleship as it is that conduct is a witness to Christ.
 - (2) The truth claims of Christianity are seriously damaged when Christians do not live as Christians.
 - (3) Ultimately, truth must be judged on other grounds, but an important indication of whether something is true is what results from its practice (Matt. 7:20).
 - (4) The failure of Christians to live up to their teachings is a serious matter but does not invalidate the faith that they profess.
 - b) Theological foundations for ethics in the New Testament.
 - i) Many moral people who are not Christians will act in the same way in a given situation that Christian teaching enjoins.
 - (1) Even when the conduct is the same, a Christian acts for different reasons.
 - (2) A Christian does not choose a course of conduct because it will gain the approval of others, contribute to success, bring an earthly reward, because it accords with moral teachings or ethical principles arrived at on natural presuppositions.
 - (a) Ben Franklin said "Honesty is the best policy."
 - (b) The Christian is not honest because of policy considerations but because it is God's teaching for his life.
 - ii) All the motivations for the moral teaching given by New Testament writers are religious and are rooted in fundamental Christian doctrine.
 - (1) Theology.
 - (a) Christian conduct is rooted in the will of God for which Christ set the pattern (cf. Matt. 26:39; John 6:38; Heb. 10:5-7, 9).
 - (b) Ethics for the Christian is related to the kind of person that God is (Eph. 4:24; 5:1).
 - (i) It is natural for children to imitate the examples of their parents.
 - (ii) Even so the children of God are expected to take on God's characteristics (Matt. 5:48).
 - (c) The operative principle for the Christian is the will of God (1 Thess. 4:3; 1 Pet. 4:2; Rom. 12:1-2).
 - (2) Christology.
 - (a) Christians are also called to imitate the life of Christ (Eph. 5:2; 1 Cor. 11:1).
 - (b) A new life is received through being joined to Christ (Rom. 6:1-23).
 - (c) That experience involves a death to sin, so the practice of sin is inconsistent with the new condition.
 - (d) A person who is in Christ will live Christ's kind of life.
 - (3) Pneumatology.
 - (a) Since the Holy Spirit is given to the baptized believer as the mark of the new life, the Christian lives life with reference to the Spirit (Eph. 4:30).

- (b) The indwelling of the Spirit is the basis of Paul's argument against sexual immorality in 1 Cor. 6:13-20.
- (4) Soteriology.
 - (a) The experience of salvation in Christ is often made the basis of ethical injunctions.
 - (i) The experience of salvation governs the way one treats others (Eph. 4:32).
 - (ii) Having been raised with Christ (Rom. 6:1-7), the Christian seeks those things that are above, including the new life (Col. 3:1-12).
 - (iii) Death and resurrection, and removing and putting on clothes, are baptismal imagery applied to the moral consequences of conversion.
 - (b) The believer renounces the old way of life and accepts the new way of life in Christ because of being redeemed (1 Pet. 1:18-19).
- (5) Eschatology.
 - (a) The Christian lives a certain way because of the end time 2 Pet. 3:11-12).
 - (b) The characteristics of this "end time" kind of life are brought out in 1 Thess. 4:13-5:11.
 - (i) These Christians were troubled by uncertainties about the Lord's second coming.
 - (ii) Paul maintains the end time tension between imminence and indefiniteness by affirming the uncertainty of the date and the certainty of its occurrence.
 - (iii) In the interim there is a definite kind of conduct that pertains to the end time (1 Thess. 5:2-9).
 - (c) This end time perspective calls attention to the transience of life and puts emphasis on those things of enduring value.
- (6) Ecclesiology.
 - (a) The church provides both a standard and a structure for the new life in Christ.
 - (i) The ethical section in Ephesians begins with an appeal to possess qualities (humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, and unity) based on there being one body (Eph. 4:1-4).
 - (ii) The end of Eph. 4 enjoins qualities that may be common enough in the world, but are joined with distinctive Christian motivation related to the church.
 - 1. We speak truth to one another because we are members one of another.
 - (iii) We are to work so that we might have to give to those in need.
 - (b) The concern for the church does not mean that the Christian has no concern for the world.
 - (i) However, our lives are not conducted with an eye to the world.

- (ii) Christians will be concerned about the reputation of the church in the world (1 Tim. 3:7; Col. 4:5) and should not tolerate a lower standard than the world (1 Cor. 5:1).
 - (iii) What the world thinks does not control Christian conduct.
 - c) The primacy of love.
 - i) Jesus is the standard for what it means to love one another (John 15:12).
 - ii) Even as Jesus taught his followers to love their enemies (Mt. 5:43-44), so he died for the salvation of his enemies (Rom. 5:6-10).
 - iii) His command to love enemies is followed by an appeal to be children of God who set the example of sending sunshine and rain on the righteous and unrighteous (Mt. 5:45).
- 3) FELLOWSHIP.
 - a) The support provided with other Christians is necessary in order to live the new life in Christ.
 - i) The church is a continuation of that fellowship of the first disciples gathered around their Lord.
 - ii) Being in Christ produces a fellowship with Christ that in turn forms a fellowship among those who share the same faith in him.
 - b) Theological foundations of fellowship.
 - i) Christian fellowship is a fellowship with the Father (1 John 1:3; 2 Pet. 1:4)
 - ii) Christian fellowship is distinctively a fellowship with Christ, because the Father extends his fellowship through his Son (1 Cor. 1:9).
 - iii) Christian fellowship is also with the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 13:13; Phil 2:1).
 - iv) Christian fellowship is based on and comes about through the gospel message (1 John 1:3).
 - v) Fellowship is based on a shared or common faith (Rom. 10:17).
 - (1) This is the counterpart to the gospel.
 - (2) The message declared must be received in faith.
 - c) Expressions of fellowship.
 - i) Participation in the Lord's Supper, which is appropriately called "communion."
 - (1) In 1 Cor. 11 Paul considers the manner in which the Lord's Supper is observed as an important expression of unity.
 - (2) The Lord's Supper thus reflects both the divine and human dimensions of fellowship.
 - ii) The contribution of material possessions for the needs of others (2 Cor. 8-9; Rom. 15:26; 12:13; Heb. 13:16).
 - iii) Cooperation in the advancement of the gospel (1 Cor. 9:23; Rom. 11:17; 2 Cor. 8:23; Philem 17).
 - iv) The sufferings of Christ created the Christian fellowship, and having fellowship with him often found expression in sharing in suffering (Phil. 3:10f.; 4:14; 2 Cor. 1:7).
 - v) All that has been said is caught up in the sharing of a common life together (Acts 2:42).
 - d) Only things done after one becomes a Christian can break the existing fellowship established by reason of being in the Lord.

4) DISCIPLINE.

a) Positive Discipline.

i) Discipline often carries negative connotations because it is associated with punishment, but it also applies in a broader sense to the ordering and scheduling of religious acts in meaningful ways as well as to efforts to remove evil from the community.

- (1) In the positive sense of ordered activities to achieve a desired goal, discipline is recognized as essential to attaining anything worthwhile.
- (2) The disciplined Christian life should be viewed in this larger context.

ii) Personal Spiritual Disciplines.

- (1) Personal spiritual disciplines remain the same as they have been through the centuries.
- (2) Regular, orderly participation in the activities of prayer, studying the Bible, reading devotional literature, meditation, and undertaking good works on behalf of others is absolutely essential for developing the Christian lifestyle.
- (3) Discipline means setting aside a fixed time on a daily basis to cultivate these activities.

b) Negative Discipline – Withdrawal of Fellowship.

i) When positive discipline fails in the life of someone, others steps must be taken, both for the good of the person involved and for the sake of the integrity of congregational life.

ii) Corrective discipline follows the example and precedent of Jesus during his earthly ministry in admonishing, correcting, and rebuking people for their improper attitudes and behavior.

- (1) Admonition occurs frequently, as in Luke 13:1-5.
- (2) His correction of wrong teaching leading to wrong conduct may be seen in Mark 7:1-23.
- (3) A stern rebuke is found in the strong denunciation of the scribes and Pharisees is found in Matt. 23, yet concluding with the compassionate lament of verses 37-39.
- (4) Christ expects his people to take firm stands against sin and to maintain discipline within their ranks.
- (5) Even as God puts redeemed persons in the community, so he sets the standards of remaining in the community.
- (6) God, however, entrusts to the community the implementation of his standards.
- (7) The community must be conscious of its responsibility as the instrument of God in maintaining the boundaries of the community.
- (8) Corrective church discipline aims at bringing the conduct of a congregation's members into line with the teachings of Jesus and his apostles.

iii) The Practice – What is Disfellowship?

(1) The fullest description of the practice is found in 1 Cor. 5:9-13.

- (a) To withdraw fellowship means not to associate with the person.

- (b) Participation in any activity that would give the appearance of approval of the person's unacceptable conduct would be a violation of the teaching.
- (2) Other passages fill out the picture (2 Thess. 3:6, 14; Titus 3:10; 2 John 10-11).
- (3) The picture that emerges from these passages is for the church to have no social or religious association with the person.
 - (a) That is why it is important for the discipline to be the act of the whole church (1 Cor. 5:4).
 - (b) The disfellowshipped person is cut off from any association that would seem to give endorsement or encouragement to the practices for which fellowship was withdrawn.
- iv) The Persons – Who Are to Be Disfellowshipped?
 - (1) The immoral (1 Cor. 5:10-11).
 - (2) Teachers and followers of false doctrine (2 John 9-10).
 - (3) The disorderly (2 Thess. 3:6, 14).
 - (4) Those who cause division (Titus 3:10).
 - (5) Those who leave the fellowship.
 - (a) The false teachers dealt with in 1 and 2 John had already left the Christian community (1 John 2:19; cf. 2 John 7).
 - (b) In these cases the faithful simply acknowledge that fellowship no longer exists.
- v) The Process or Procedure – How is Disfellowshipping to Be Done?
 - (1) The whole church is to be involved (1 Cor. 5:4-5).
 - (2) The person disfellowshipped is handed over to Satan (cf. 1 Tim. 1:20), or transferred from the realm of holiness represented by the church to the realm of the Evil One, whom the person has chosen to obey.
 - (3) The “destruction of the flesh” and “his spirit may be saved” are probably to be understood according to Paul’s usual contrast of flesh and spirit, according to which flesh refers to the sinful nature, the life lived according to human desires, and spirit refers to the spiritual nature, life lived according to the Spirit of God (cf. Gal. 5:16-25).
 - (4) Titus 3:10 indicates something of the preliminary steps before this final action of withdrawal of fellowship is taken.
- vi) The Purpose – Why Is Disfellowshipping Undertaken?
 - (1) So that they may be ashamed (2 Thess. 3:14).
 - (2) To accomplish a redemptive purpose (Gal. 6:1).
 - (3) Although the person’s own salvation is the overriding concern, there are other values from taking this action.
 - (a) There is a need to maintain the purity of the church (1 Cor. 5:6-7).
 - (b) There is need to preserve the reputation of the church among outsiders (Col. 4:5).
 - (c) The action will maintain respect for the Lord among church members and others (Acts 5:11).

- (4) In accomplishing these purposes it is well to remember that the one from whom fellowship has been withdrawn is not to be treated as an enemy but entreated as a brother (2 Thess. 3:15).
 - (5) Even after fellowship has been withdrawn the door is to be left open for his repentance, reconciliation, and return.
 - c) Pardon for Erring Christians.
 - i) Forgiveness is available for the Christian who falls into sin.
 - (1) 2 Cor. 2:5-11 is a notable case.
 - (2) Just as there are certain things to be done to obtain the initial forgiveness of sin, there are commands to be obeyed by baptized believers in order for them to obtain forgiveness of postbaptismal sins.
 - ii) The “Second Law of Pardon.”
 - (1) Repentance.
 - (a) Such was Peter’s command to Simon the Magician who had believed and been baptized (Acts 8:13), but then wanted the power of conferring the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:18-19), doubtless to advance his own reputation and influence.
 - (b) Repentance is the way of reclaiming the benefits of the blood of Christ initially received in baptism.
 - (2) Confession.
 - (a) Confession of sin is implicit in repentance and prayer.
 - (b) If repentance is the inward turning away from sin, confession is the outward expression in word and deed (James 5:16).
 - (c) Confession requires that one be honest with himself.
 - (d) Honest confession accomplishes inner cleansing.
 - (e) Acknowledgment of sin is essential to receiving forgiveness.
 - (3) Prayer.
 - (a) Prayer is mentioned in both passages already cited where repentance and confession are commanded.
 - (b) The passages include not only the person praying for forgiveness, but others praying for the person who has sinned.
 - (c) Intercessory prayer for forgiveness is in order in most circumstances (but see 1 John 5:16).
 - d) Discipline and Evangelism.
 - i) Where there are standards, membership means something; therefore, discipline can be an aspect of evangelistic outreach.
 - ii) Discipline is also a way of offering the gospel and forgiveness to those who depart from the Christian life.
- 5) Christian Liberty.
- a) Freedom From.
 - i) The New Testament speaks most often of freedom from sin (Rom. 6:18, 22).
 - (1) All sin enslaves, and the good news is that Christ sets people free from sin and its consequences (Rom. 8:2, 21).
 - (2) The most important consequence of sin from which the Christian is set free is the power of death; death is no longer terminal (Rom. 6:23).

- ii) The Christian furthermore enjoys a freedom from law as a means of justification and salvation.
 - (1) Instead the Christian is under law to Christ (1 Cor. 9:21).
 - (2) The Christian is not free from all law, but free from law as a means of salvation.
 - iii) The Christian is free from indifferent things, that is, things neither right nor wrong in themselves, but things that hinder the achievement of a greater good.
 - (1) 2 Pet. 2:19 speaks of those who promise freedom but are themselves slaves of corruption.
 - (2) The statement that people are slaves to whatever masters them is applicable to more things than sin and immorality.
 - (a) It applies to laws and rules, even good ones.
 - (b) It applies to habits and things harmless in themselves.
 - (c) Notice Paul's use of "free" in 1 Cor. 9:1-5, 12, and 19; he surrendered his rights in order to be more effective as a missionary.
 - (d) Here is the most mature expression of freedom – by one's own freedom to give up freedom.
 - (e) Paul demonstrated that freedom is not the most important concern for the Christian; he instructed the Corinthians (1 Cor. 8:9) to limit their freedom by a charitable concern for others.
- b) Freedom For.
- i) On the positive side, freedom in Christ is a freedom to serve God.
 - (1) Liberty is not to be a pretext or license for evil; it is to enable one to serve God (1 Pet. 2:16).
 - (2) Liberation from compulsion to sin opens up the hitherto impossible possibility of becoming righteous (Rom. 6:18).
 - ii) The Christian's freedom is also a freedom to serve others in love.
 - (1) Gal. 5:13 states that freedom is not an opportunity to sin, but an opportunity to serve others.
 - (2) Martin Luther stated it as a paradox: "A Christian is a perfectly free Lord of all, subject to none; a Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all."
- c) Misunderstandings of Freedom.
- i) Some call bondage "freedom."
 - (1) The Communists used to do this when they captured a country.
 - (2) They called it "liberating" a people.
 - ii) Some want freedom for themselves, but not for others.
 - (1) My freedom is limited by your freedom, and vice versa.
 - (2) My freedom to swing my arms stops at the end of your nose.
 - iii) Some confuse freedom with license.
 - (1) Doing whatever I want to do without a sense of responsibility is not freedom.
 - (2) This attitude leads to the slavery of selfishness.
 - (3) This attitude toward freedom is also illusory.

- (4) As Eric Hoffer said, “When people are free to do as they please, they usually imitate each other.”
- iv) Columnist Sidney Harris offers this insight: “Most people mistakenly believe that to be ‘free’ is to be able to do what you want to do; when, in truth, to be free is to be able to do what is best for yourself – and learning what is best for yourself is the only way to get rid of the slavery of self-indulgence.”
- v) Elton Trueblood seconds that statement: “Freedom does not mean that everyone can do as he likes, but that he can become what he should.”
- d) The Place of Rules in the Christian Life.
- i) Divine law must be distinguished from human law and tradition (Matt. 15:2-3; Mark 7:8-9).
- ii) Human laws should never be made absolute.
- (1) They are, however, inevitable in human societies in consequence of the need to do things in an orderly fashion.
- (2) Human laws and traditions arise, in part, from interpreting the divine law and implementing its performance.
- (3) They are to be respected even as they are kept in their secondary place.
- (4) Laws are necessary and a society cannot function without them.
- (a) Nevertheless, laws have limitations.
- (b) Law cannot change the heart, impart power to keep its requirements, or bring peace of mind.
- e) The exercise of Christian Liberty.
- i) Actions and Morality.
- (1) A given act within the realm of Christian liberty is nonmoral (Rom. 14:14-17; Matt. 15:1-20; Titus 1:15).
- (2) The heart and the attitude of the person doing it and the circumstances under which it is done determine whether the act is moral or immoral.
- (3) Some examples will illustrate the point.
- (a) One may take another person’s life in an accident with no criminal neglect or other blameworthy factor.
- (b) Narcotics may be taken for medical purposes.
- ii) Principles limiting the exercise of liberty.
- (1) The desire for food is healthy and normal, but too much or the wrong kinds of food may become harmful to the body.
- (2) The need to acquire possessions for oneself or one’s family may become the sin of greed or covetousness.
- (3) The instinct for self preservation may lead to behavior that is fraudulent, deceptive, or unfair to others.
- (4) One should not abuse freedom by losing control of one’s actions.
- (5) On the other hand, the fact that something could possibly lead to sin is not necessarily a reason for not doing it.
- (a) Games can be used for gambling, that is no reason not to observe or participate.
- (b) Excelling in an endeavor can lead to pride, but that is no excuse for mediocrity.
- (6) Christian liberty may be limited out of higher concerns.

- (a) Paul sets forth in several passages that charitable regard for others as a principle guiding the exercise of Christian liberty (Rom. 14:16, 20-22; 1 Cor. 6:12; 10:23; 1 Cor. 8:13).
 - (b) However, charitable interest in others does not mean that they can bind their opinions on their fellow believers.
 - (i) Passages like 1 Cor. 8:13 and 10:32 are sometimes taken to mean that a Christian should not do anything that offends another, and then that is further taken by people as a means of imposing their opinions on others by insisting that others should not do what is objected to.
 - (ii) Paul actually says in the former passage that he will not do what will cause the brother to “offend,” that is, fall into sin, not what “offends” him.
 - (iii) A different word is used in the latter passage to say that the believer avoids giving a bad example; at any rate, it is the believer’s charitable regard for others, not a scruple imposed by another, that is under consideration.
 - (iv) If Christians were bound by the scruples of everyone, there would be very little in the way of entertainment or anything else left that they could do.
 - (v) Charitable concessions can be made without surrender of freedom, but principles cannot be applied with legalism.
- 6) Unity.
- a) An important aspect of the church’s witness to the larger society is displaying the unity that is essential to the church and is God’s goal for humanity.
 - b) The images used for the church uniformly denote its oneness.
 - i) Body of Christ – he has but one (Eph. 4:4).
 - ii) Bride of Christ – he has but one (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:22-23; Rev. 21:9; cf. 1 Cor. 7:2).
 - iii) Temple – God authorized one temple, that at Jerusalem (Deut. 12:5, 14; Eph. 2:21).
 - iv) Sheep – one flock and one shepherd (John 10:16).
 - v) Nation – one people and one priesthood (1 Peter 2:9, based on Exod. 19:5-6, Israel chosen out of all the peoples of the earth).
 - c) The unity of God is set forth as a figure of the unity of the church (John 17:21).
 - d) Contemporary observations.
 - i) Unity may be contrasted with two concepts that stand on either side of it: uniformity and union.
 - (1) Uniformity means that everything or everyone alike.
 - (a) Members of a band or team were uniforms; they all look alike.
 - (b) Some think of Christian unity in these terms; everyone must act, look, think, and sound alike.
 - (c) There is a certain core of faith in which all must be one, but not in matters of opinion.

- (2) On the other hand, many hope for a loose sense of union in which people or groups come together in their diversity for limited objectives and a limited degree of unity.
 - (a) Members of a union maintain their individuality, but unite for economic purposes.
 - (b) The American colonies came together to create a federal government in order to achieve certain political purposes, but the idea was to maintain a great deal of autonomy for the participating states.
 - (c) The term “union” describes many organizational expressions of the modern ecumenical movement.
 - (d) Such organizations as the World Council and National Council may provide a framework in which the participating bodies may grow closer together, but the most that is achieved is a loose federation of churches.
- ii) Unity may share some aspects of union (a coming together for a common purpose) and uniformity (certain things held or observed identically), but its essential quality is elsewhere.
 - (1) Unity requires solidarity and loyalty.
 - (2) Even where there are differences, there is a commitment to remain together.
 - (3) There is a sense of being one people who share a loyalty to the same principles and to one another.

CONCLUSION:

- 1) Matthew 5:16.
- 2) Phil. 2:14-16.