



## LETTERS TO THE CHURCH

### 3. The Order

*"It is imperative that we differentiate between what we want and what God commands."*

**Read the parables in Luke 12 and Matthew 25.** Are we giving God what He asked for? What do those parables teach us about the importance of us being serious about God's commands?

Is God looking for SOMETHING or OBEDIENCE?

**Read Mark 7:1-13.** Notice that the Pharisees were forcing people to wash their hands before they ate. But God never told people they needed to do this. Make some observations about Jesus' response to the Pharisees. Why was He upset? What words did He repeat? What seems to be the focus in His strong rebuke of the Pharisees?

It is obvious that washing your hands before you eat isn't a BAD thing. It's actually a good idea. The problem was that it became a higher priority to people than what God actually asked for. Complete one of the exercises mentioned in the book. Below you will find space to make two lists. In the COMMANDS (not optional) section, start listing our scriptural commands God has given us as a new covenant of believers. Be sure that these are actual commands, not merely things we see happen in the Bible or feel are good ideas. Then in the TRADITIONS (optional) column, write out things that tend to be frequently expected in churches today but aren't actually commanded. An example could be "dressing up," since there is nothing in Scripture that commands us to do it but often it is expected in the church.

Think through things like “having a really good church service” or “sermons” or “youth group” or “Children’s Church.” If something isn’t mentioned, it doesn’t mean it is a bad thing; it just means it is optional. The goal is not to figure out every single difficult issue and debate it, but rather come up with two lists relatively quickly.

<b>COMMANDS</b> (Not Optional)	<b>TRADITIONS</b> (Optional)

Between the two lists, think about what you tend to give more time, money and energy toward personally as a church. **Do we get more upset if we aren’t taking things on the COMMAND side seriously or if we aren’t taking things on the TRADITION side seriously?**

**Read 1 Corinthians 1:13-17 and 2:1-5.** 2 Corinthians 10-11 says that this church wanted an eloquent preacher (or super apostle) to look up to and elevate. But Paul refused to let them make it about him. He chose not to baptize many of them or to preach with eloquence so that their "faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God" (2 Cor. 2:5). He wanted to spend on the power of the gospel rather than his own effort.

**Are we content in the Church today with seeing people who don't really love Jesus walk away from the Church? Or do we try to keep them?**

**If a certain decision in the Church will help us get more people to come, does that mean it is definitely something we should do? Why or why not? At what point would it become a bad thing?**

Imagine you saw Muslims from a local mosque using raffles, butting on big concerts, investing in fancy facilities, and using other gimmicks to draw people in to join their religion. What would you think about that? What would it say about the appeal of their god? What would you assume about the motivations of the followers of that religion? Now imagine that Mosque again, but change it to a Christian church. **Have we ever been guilty of using a show to draw people to God in stead of letting God show Himself to the people?**

In India, people will walk for miles just to come and pray with the church because they love prayer and fellowship and Jesus. **What do you think it says about a church if people won't come just for prayer, reading the Scripture together, and loving one another? What does it say about us if we need really good bands, lively preachers, great programs and elaborate facilities to attend a church?**

**How should we respond if we do need all these other things?**

# The Acts 2 Church

**Read Acts 2:42-47.** The early Church DEVOTED themselves to:

1. *The Apostles' Teaching*
2. *Fellowship*
3. *The Breaking of Bread*
4. *Prayer*

**DEVOTED** is a really important word in that sentence. Sometimes we have been guilty of being devoted to sermons, Christian books, podcasts more than the Apostles' teaching. There is nothing that can replace reading the Word of God.

Read Hebrews 4:12. What does it say about the Word of God?

When we read Scripture, it acts on us in a way no other words can.

Sometimes we have also been guilty of being more devoted to programs than to one another. We may be faithful to attend things, but few people in our church would call us FAITHFUL to them personally.

There was also something about the early Church's commitment to the Lord's Supper and prayer that we often fall short of.

**DEFINE THE WORD "DEVOTED."** It's important to think about this word as we evaluate our own heart to see whether it is true of us.

When you look at yourself and your church, would you say you are DEVOTED to the apostles' teaching? To fellowship? To the breaking of bread? To prayer?

**FOR NEXT WEEK:** Read Chapter 4: "The Gang"  
"Letters to the Church"