**"CHALLENGES CONFRONTING THE CHURCH"**

**Introduction**

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1. The church in the first century often experienced grave challenges...

a. Persecution - [**Ac 8:1-3**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Ac%208.1-3)**;** [**9:1-2**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Ac%209.1-2)

**(Acts 8:1-3),** *“Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. 2 And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.*

*3 As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison.”*

**(Acts 9:1-2),** *“Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest 2 and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.”*

b. False teachers - [**Ac 15:1-2**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Ac%2015.1-2)**;** [**2Pe 2:1-3**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/2Pe%202.1-3)

**(Acts 15:1-2),** *“And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." 2 Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question.”*

**(2 Peter 2:1-3),** *“But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. 2 And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. 3 By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber.”*

c. Apostasy - [**Ac 20:29-31**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Ac%2020.29-31)**;** [**1Ti 4:1-3**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/1Ti%204.1-3)**;** [**Jude 3**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Jude%203)

**(Acts 20:29-31),** *“For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. 31 Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.”*

**(1 Timothy 4:1-3),** *“Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, 2 speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, 3 forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.”*

2. Today we see similar challenges confronting the church...

a. False teachers leading many astray

b. Churches apostatizing, resulting in new religious organizations

c. More than 38,000 denominations now existing!

3. In this series of lessons, I would like for us to examine some challenges we face today...

a. Not every challenge, for there are many

b. Some common ones faced by many churches

4. First, define what we mean by “church”

**Point of the next section, For us to recognize where the danger is to be found.**

**UNIVERSAL: A. COMPOSED OF ALL CHRISTIANS... (**Made up all the saved, both living and dead - cf. [**He 12:22-24**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/He%2012.22-24)**)**

**(Hebrews 12:22-24),** *“But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, 23 to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, 24 to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.”*

**LOCAL: A. COMPOSED OF CHRISTIANS IN ONE PLACE... (**examples -[**1Co 1:2**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/1Co%201.2)**;** [**1Th 1:1**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/1Th%201.1)**)**

**(1 Corinthians 1:2), *“To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours”***

**(1 Thessalonians 1:1),** *“Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”*

**Universal: B. THERE IS JUST ONE... (**There is only "one body"; therefore, only one church! - [**Ep 4:4**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Ep%204.4)**)**

**(Ephesians 4:4),** *“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling”*

**Local: B. THERE ARE MANY CHURCHES... (**examples – **Ro 16:16; Ga 1:2)**

**(Romans 16:16),** *“Greet one another with a holy kiss. The churches of Christ greet you.”*

**(Galatians 1:2),** *“…To the churches of Galatia:”*

**Universal: C. BEGAN ON THE DAY OF PENTECOST...** ([**Ac 2:1-47**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Ac%202.1-47)**;** the "beginning - cf. [**Ac 11:15**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Ac%2011.15)**)**

**(Acts 11:15),** *“And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning.”*

**Local: C. BEGINS WHEREVER PEOPLE JOIN TOGETHER... (**cf. forming of Antioch church - **Ac 11:19-26)**

**(Acts 11:24b-26),** *“And a great many people were added to the Lord. 25 Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. 26 And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.”*

**Universal: D. ENTER ONLY BY BEING ADDED BY THE LORD... (Ac 2:41,47**. One cannot “join” by their own volition**)**

**(Acts 2:41,47),** *“Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.”* **(47),** *“praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.”*

**Local: D. ENTER BY JOINING OURSELVES... (**Paul as example - **Ac 9:26-28)**

**(Acts 9:26-28),** *“And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple. 27 But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. 28 So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out.”*

**Universal: E. THE LORD KEEPS THE BOOKS OF MEMBERSHIP... (**He knows those who are His - [**He 12:23**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/He%2012.23)**;** [**2Ti 2:19**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/2Ti%202.19)**)**

**(Hebrews 12:23),** *“to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect”*

**(2 Timothy 2:19),** *“Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal:"The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity."*

**Local: E. ENROLLED BY HUMAN JUDGMENT... (**and, sometimes mistakes are made – **3Jn 5-9; 1Co5:1-13)**

**(3 John 5-9),** *“Beloved, you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers, 6 who have borne witness of your love before the church. If you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well, 7 because they went forth for His name's sake, taking nothing from the Gentiles. 8 We therefore ought to receive such, that we may become fellow workers for the truth. 9 I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us.”*

**(1 Corinthians 5:2),** *“And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you.”*

**Universal: F. CONSISTS OF ALL THE SAVED...** (a church holy and without blemish - cf. [**Ep 5:25-27**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Ep%205.25-27)**)**

**(Ephesians 5:25-27),** *“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, 26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, 27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.”*

**Local: F. CONSISTS OF BOTH SAVED AND LOST... (**A local church may include some apostates - cf. [**Re 3:1-4**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Re%203.1-4)**)**

**(Revelation 3:1-4),** *“And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, ‘These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: 'I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. 2 Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God.* 3 *Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you.* 4 *You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.’”*

**Universal: G. MUST BE IN THIS CHURCH TO BE SAVED… (**the Lord is the Savior of the body - [**Ep 5:23**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Ep%205.23)**)**

**(Ephesians 5:23),** *“For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.”*

**Local: G. DO NOT HAVE TO BE A MEMBER TO BE SAVED... (**Should be temporary – **Ac 8:39; 9:26)**

**(Acts 8:39),** *“Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing.”*

**(Acts 9:26***), “And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple.”*

**Universal: H. HAS NO EARTHLY ORGANIZATION... (**organization is spiritual in nature - [**Ep 2:19-22**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Ep%202.19-22)**;** [**1Pe 2:5**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/1Pe%202.5)**)**

**(Ephesians 2:19-22),** *“Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.”*

**(1 Peter 3:5),** *“you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”*

**Local: H. HAS EARTHLY ORGANIZATION... (**Bishops & Deacons -[**Php 1:1**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Php%201.1)**;** [**Ac 14:23**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Ac%2014.23)**;** [**20:17**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Ac%2020.17)**,**[**28**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Ac%2020.28)**)**

**(Philippians 1:1),** *“Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons”*

**(Acts 14:23),** *“So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.”*

**(Acts 20:17,28),** *“From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church.”* **(28),** *“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”*

**Universal: I. CANNOT BE DIVIDED... (**For there is no earthly organization to divide!)

**Local: I. CAN BE DIVIDED... (**cf. Corinth – **1Co 1:10-13; 3:3,4)**

**(1 Corinthians 1:10-13),** *“Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. 11 For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. 12 Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ." 13 Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?”*

**(1 Corinthians 3:3-4),** *“for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? 4 For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not carnal?”*

**Universal: J. DEATH DOESN’T AFFECT MEMBERSHIP...** (made up of the saved, both living and dead - [**He 12:22-23**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/He%2012.22-23)**)**

**(Hebrews 12:22-23),** *“But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, 23 to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect”*

**Local: J. DEATH DOES AFFECT MEMBERSHIP... (**When Stephen died, no longer a member at Jer. - [**Ac 8:1-2**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Ac%208.1-2)**)**

**(Acts 8:1-2),** *“Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. 2 And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.”*

**Universal: K. DOES NOT HAVE ONE OFFICIAL NAME...** (Various terms are used - [**1Co 10:32**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/1Co%2010.32)**;** [**Ep 1:22-23**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Ep%201.22-23)**;** [**Col 1:13**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Col%201.13)**)**

**(1 Corinthians 10:32),** *“church of God”,* **(Ephesians 1:22-23),** *“the church, 23 which is His body”* **(Colossians 1:13),** *“the kingdom of the Son of His love”*

**Local: K. MAY USE DIFFERENT SCRIPTURAL NAMES... (**relationship-[**1Co 1:2**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/1Co%201.2)**;** [**Ro 16:16**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Ro%2016.16)**;** location - [**1Th 1:1**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/1Th%201.1)**)**

**(1 Corinthians 1:2),** *“the church of God which is at Corinth”;* **(Romans 16:16),** *“the churches of Christ”;* **(1 Thessalonians 1:1),** *“the church of the Thessalonians”*

[Such are some of the defining characteristics of the church universal. In contrast, consider...]

**CONCLUSION**

Most challenges confronting the church today do not affect the church universal per se. Most challenges confronting the church today involve how local churches respond to them.

The church of Christ universal is in good hands (those of Jesus Himself). Whether we remain in His church universal is greatly determined by how we face challenges that affect us as members of local

churches of Christ!

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