**Note:** The following material will take us through December in our Wednesday evening class. Each outline is intended for a single class, so if we do not finish, you will have to study the remaining material on your own. **The lessons are adapted from a series by Mark Copeland.**

**"CHALLENGES CONFRONTING THE CHURCH"**

**Introduction**

**INTRODUCTION**

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)

 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)

 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)

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”

**THE CHURCH 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)**)**

**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)**)**

**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)**)**

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

**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)**)**

**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)**)**

**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)**)**

**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)**)**

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

**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)**)**

**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)**)**

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

**THE CHURCH 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)**)**

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

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

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

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

**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)**)**

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

**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)**)**

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

**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)**)**

**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)**)**

**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!

*(for presentation on December 7, 2016) 1*

**"CHALLENGES CONFRONTING THE CHURCH"**

**Denominationalism**

**INTRODUCTION**

1. A great challenge confronting the church is **denominationalism**...

 a. More than 38,000 different denominations!

 b. Hinders the spread of the gospel - **Jn 17:21**

2. Denominationalism confronted the church early

 a. Protestant reformation (ca. 1517 AD) **BUT…**

 b. Gnosticism, traced to the second century AD

[What is denominationalism? Why is it wrong?]

**I. DEFINING TERMS**

**A. WHAT IS A DENOMINATION...?**

 1. "A large group of religious congregations united under a common faith and name and organized under a single administrative and legal hierarchy." - **The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language**

2. Examples: **The Roman Catholic Church** is a denomination made up of those churches that submit to the pope in Rome; **The Eastern Orthodox Church** is a denomination made up of those churches that submit to the patriarch of Constantinople; **The Anglican Church of England** is a denomination made up of those churches that submit to the archbishop of Canterbury; **The Lutheran Church (Missouri Synod)** is made up of those churches that submit to the synod in Missouri

**B. WHAT IS DENOMINATIONALISM...?**

 1. T**he American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language**: a. "The tendency to separate into religious denominations"; b. "Advocacy of separation into religious denominations"; c. "Strict adherence to a denomination; sectarianism"

 2. For this study, see definition, b.

 3. Some consider it a blessing!

 4. “Join the church of your choice”

 5. NOT the Bible perspective

**II. WHY DENOMINATIONALISM IS WRONG**

 **A. IT IS UN-SCRIPTURAL...**  In the New Testament... a. Local congregations were independent, autonomous; b. Church organization was limited to within the local congregation; c. With elders (also known as pastors, bishops, overseers, presbyters) appointed to oversee only the congregation of which they were members - cf. [**Ac 20:17**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Ac%2020.17)**,**[**28**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Ac%2020.28)**;** [**1Pe 5:1-2**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/1Pe%205.1-2)**.** The only authority above the local church in the NT was Christ and His apostles. Synods, individuals, conferences, etc., usurp authority!

**B. IT IS ANTI-SCRIPTURAL...**

(**[Jn 17:20-23](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Jn%2017.20-23%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank);** [**1Co 1:10-13**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/1Co%201.10-13)**;** [**1Co 3:3-4**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/1Co%203.3-4)**;** [**Ep 2:14-16**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Ep%202.14-16)**)**

**C. IT IS HARMFUL TO THE CAUSE OF CHRIST...**

("that the world may believe" - [**Jn 17:21**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Jn%2017.21)**)**

**D. OTHERS WHO VIEWED DENOMINATIONALISM AS WRONG...**

 1. **Martin Luther**, a leader of the Reformation:

 "I ask that men make no reference to my name, and call themselves not Lutherans, but Christians. What is Luther? …No, no, my dear friends; let us abolish all party names, and call ourselves Christians after Him Whose doctrine we have." - **Hugh Thomason Kerr, A Compend of Luther’s Theology (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1943, p. 135)**

2. **Charles Spurgeon**, famous Baptist preacher:

 "I look forward with pleasure to the day when there will not be a Baptist living! I hope that the Baptist name will soon perish, but let Christ’s name last forever." – **Spurgeon Memorial Library, Vol. I., p. 168**

 **-- Note well: these individuals were bemoaning the use of denominational titles, not organizational ties per se.**

**CONCLUSION**

If local churches are to successfully confront the challenge of denominationalism, they must...

 a. Remain independent, congregations

 b. Refuse organizational associations w/ churches

 c. Refrain from using denominational names

Churches that succeed in avoiding denomination-alism are more likely to be...

 a. Nothing more than local churches of Christ

 b. Christians who simply seek to follow Jesus

 c. The answer to the prayer of our Lord for unity

cf. [**Jn 17:20-21**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Jn%2017.20-21)

*(for presentation on December 14, 2016) 2*

**"CHALLENGES CONFRONTING THE CHURCH"**

**Secularism**

**INTRODUCTION**

Last week, studied denominationalism. That challenge contributes toward changing the church into something very different than Jesus intended. Churches that are carnal, fleshly, more of the world than of God.

A similar challenge confronting churches is the trend toward **secularism**.

**I. DEFINING SECULAR AND SECULARISM**

**A. SECULAR...**

1. Worldly rather than spiritual - **American Heritage Dictionary**

 2. Of or relating to worldly things as distinguished from things relating to church and religion; not sacred or religious; temporal; worldly - **YourDictionary.com**

**B. SECULARISM...**

 1. Indifference to or rejection or exclusion of religion and religious considerations - **Merriam-Webster**

2. Worldly spirit, views, or the like; esp., a system of doctrines and practices that disregards or rejects any form of religious faith and worship - **YourDictionary.com**

[One would think that by definition churches would be religious, spiritual, sacred, in nature. Yet many have noted that in too many churches, there are...]

**II. MANIFESTATIONS OF SECULARISM**

**A. THE CHURCH AS A BUSINESS INSTUTITION...**

 1. In the Bible, the church is a spiritual institution *(a. The body of Christ, the kingdom of God -* [***1Co 12:27***](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/1Co%2012.27)***;*** [***Col 1:13***](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Col%201.13)***;*** *b. The bride of Christ, the temple of the Holy Spirit -* [***2Co 11:2***](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/2Co%2011.2)***;*** [***1Co 3:16***](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/1Co%203.16)***;*** *c. With elders served as shepherds, feeding and guiding the flock of God -* [***Ac 20:28***](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Ac%2020.28)***;*** *d. Deacons met physical needs, but so others could focus on spiritual needs -* [***Ac 6:1-7***](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Ac%206.1-7)***;*** *Preachers were devoted to the Word, serving as evangelists -* [***1Ti 4:16***](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/1Ti%204.16)***;*** [***2Ti 4:5***](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/2Ti%204.5)***)***

 2. Today, many churches function more like a business *(a. Elders are more like board members, directors, corporate managers; b. Preachers have become staff managers, counselors, figure heads; c.* *Members divided into committees, departments, with chairpersons, superintendents; d. Evangelism has turned into marketing, public relations)*

**B. THE CHURCH AS A SOCIAL INSTITUTION...**

 1. Today, many churches have become social clubs *(a. Building gymnasiums, eating ("fellowship") halls; b. Offering mental counseling, babysitting services; c. Providing entertainment for children and even adults)*

 2. Whereas in the Bible the church focused on the spiritual *(a. They assembled to worship, edify one another -* [***Ac 20:7***](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Ac%2020.7)***;*** [***He 10:24-25***](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/He%2010.24-25)***;*** *b. Trends leading to make the focus social or secular were addressed -* [***1Co 11:17-34***](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/1Co%2011.17-34)***;*** *c. The assembly was their "fellowship hall", the Lord’s Supper their "fellowship dinner"; d. Families were expected to take care of their social needs, lest the church become burdened and unable to fulfill its primary duties -* [***1Ti 5:16***](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/1Ti%205.16)***)***

**III. AVOIDING SECULARISM**

**A. DISTINGUISH BETWEEN SACRED/SECULAR...**

 1. Let the church fulfill its role as a spiritual institution, focused on: *(a. Teaching the Word of God, praising God; b. Providing opportunities to fulfill spiritual duties [e.g., Lord’s Supper, assembling]; c. Equipping the saints for ministry, much of which will occur outside the church)*

 2. Let family and society fulfill their roles *(a. Parents and friends providing entertainment, physical needs; b. Professionals providing medical and counseling needs; c. Individuals joining together in charitable organizations to serve others).*

**B. ADOPT BIBLICAL GUIDELINES...**

 1. The church focus on spiritual - [**1Co 11:34**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/1Co%2011.34)

2. Be careful not to take on unnecessary burdens

[**1Ti 5:16**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/1Ti%205.16)

 4. Follow NT pattern for organization- [**Php 1:1**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Php%201.1)

**CONCLUSION**

The Lord’s church is a wonderful institution; but God has other institutions as well (family, government, etc.) The Lord’s church is uniquely designed and qualified to fulfill its limited role (One that is spiritual and sacred. One that can easily be neglected or burdened. That is the danger of secularism!

*(for presentation on December 21, 2016) 3*

**"CHALLENGES CONFRONTING THE CHURCH"**

**Traditionalism**

**INTRODUCTION**

Another challenge that has a long history is **traditionalism**... Jesus often conflicted with traditions in His day. Traditions have often been a major factor in causing division among churches.

**I. THE MEANING OF TRADITION**

**A. TRADITION...** The Greek word is **paradosis**, which means "giving over" or "handing down". It refers to teaching that is handed down either by word (orally) or in writing

**B. AS UNDERSTOOD BY THE JEWS...**

 1. It applied to the oral teachings of the elders (distinguished elders from Moses on down)

 2. These traditions were often divided into three classes... *(a. Oral laws supposedly given by Moses in addition to the written laws; b. Decisions of various judges which became precedents in judicial matters; c. Interpretations of highly respected rabbis held in reverence along with the OT scriptures* ***-- Article on "Tradition", ISBE)***

3. Prior to his conversion, Paul was a staunch supporter of Jewish tradition - [**Ga 1:13-14**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Ga%201.13-14)

**C. AS UNDERSTOOD BY CATHOLICS...**

 1. Their views appear to parallel that of the Jews

 2. What they consider "Tradition" is what they believe to be the teachings: *(a. Of Jesus or His apostles, persevered orally rather than through writing; b. Of various church councils which have left various decrees; c. Of various church leaders (such as the pope) considered to be inspired with later revelations from God).*

3. One is expected to take their word for it that these "traditions" were truly from God and have been faithfully transmitted

**D. AS FOUND IN THE SCRIPTURES...**

 1. It is found thirteen (13) times in the N.T., never in the OT. *(a. Three times referring to "apostolic teaching" -* [***1Co 11:2***](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/1Co%2011.2)***;*** [***2Th 2:15***](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/2Th%202.15)***;*** [***3:6***](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/2Th%203.6)***;*** *b. Ten times referring to "the tradition of the elders" or "the*

*traditions of men" in a dangerous way -* [***Mk 7:3-13***](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Mk%207.3-13)***;*** [***Mt 15:2-6***](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Mt%2015.2-6)***;*** [***Col 2:8***](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Col%202.8)***;*** [***1Pe 1:18***](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/1Pe%201.18)***;*** [***Ga 1:14***](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Ga%201.14)***)***

2. Jesus did not feel bound to abide by "the traditions of the elders." *(a. Some traditions He had no problem with keeping,* [***Jn 2:1-2***](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Jn%202.1-2)***,*** [***Jn 10:22-23***](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Jn%2010.22-23)***;*** *b.* *He just as easily had no problem with violating other traditions,* [***Mk 2:23-28***](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Mk%202.23-28)***;*** [***Mk 7:1-5***](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Mk%207.1-5)***0.***

 3. Jesus evidently did not subscribe to the view of "traditions" handed down orally *(a. He never appealed to the traditions of the elders; b. He either appealed to the authority of the written Word [the Law of Moses], or to His own authority as the Son of God).*

 4. **Note well:** We have seen that not all "traditions" are wrong, but some are, and they can be dangerous and destructive.

**II. THE DANGER OF TRADITIONS OF MEN**

**A. THEY CAN LEAD TO HYPOCRITICAL WORSHIP...** (Traditions of men tend toward ritual [without the heart/hypocritical] worship! - [**Mk 7:6**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Mk%207.6)**)**

**B. THEY CAN LEAD TO VAIN WORSHIP...** (When traditions of men have same level as the commands of God, it leads to vain worship - [**Mk 7:7**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Mk%207.7)**)**

**C. THEY CAN MAKE THE WORD OF GOD VOID... (**[**Mk 7:10-12**](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Mk%207.10-12), rendering the God’s command of no effect)

**III. TRADITIONALISM: A SUMMARY**

**A. TRADITIONS...**

 1. T**raditions of God**, handed down by Christ and His apostles through the Written Word, are necessary for our salvation!

 2. **Traditions of men**, handed down by uninspired men, are dangerous and sinful, when they*: (a. Lead to hypocritical worship; b. Lead to vain worship; c. Make the Word of God void).*

 3. Traditions of men can be harmless, but they become sinful if they: *(a. Are taught as doctrines [i.e., equivalent to the Word of God] -* [***Mk 7:7***](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Mk%207.7)***;*** *b. Make the commandments of God of no effect [by their observance] -* [***Mk 7:9***](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Mk%207.9)***,***[***13***](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Mk%207.13)***).***

**B. TRADITIONALISM...**

 1. Defined: the systematic emphasis on the value of tradition - **Wikipedia**

2. Can also be manifested in churches of Christ *(a. Doing things a certain way, just because that is how it has always been done; b. Binding practices without scriptural basis, because we’ve always done it that way).*

**CONCLUSION**

Ask, is it from God or men? **(Mt 21:25).**

*(for presentation December 28, 2016)*