**Lesson 4**

***How Can the Church as a Community Seek and Find***

***God's Direction In Difficult Matters?***

We have been discussing how, when practical decisions must be made, we can walk with Jesus humbly seeking God's direction so that we are transformed into those who offer to God lives that know what is good, pleasing to Him, and perfect--rather than becoming those who are conformed to the desires of the world. [Romans 12:1-4]

Today we will look at three passages in the book of Acts where believers were faced with decisions to be made, somewhat difficult ones and ones which could influence the well-being of the church. In each case they succeeded through prayer and dependence on the guidance of God's Spirit.

Acts 1:15-26: Who will replace Judas as an apostle?

Acts 6:16: How can a conflict over distribution of aid to widows be solved and the women be helped?

Acts 14:26 – 15:35: How can believers who are in conflict over relations between Jews and Gentiles in the church come to live together in peace while being sure to follow God's will in these matters?

Eight key elements are seen across the Scriptures above as to how a Godly search for guidance took place:

1. *The process was directed by people accepted as leaders.*
2. *Prayer for God's help was an important part of the process.*
3. *The Scriptures were seen not as a source where an exact answer to every question could be found, but as the place where God's intentions could be known.*
4. *The process was not hurried.*
5. *The voices of those with contrary opinions were listened to during the process.*
6. *The experiences of believers known to be serving in the church were given attention.*
7. *The process resulted in a decision, rather than an ongoing discussion that leads nowhere.*
8. *God's blessing and the proof of His guidance are seen in the outcomes of such decisions.*

**Notice this saying:** Seek *JOY*: put JESUS first, OTHERS second, then YOU. So, when we must make decisions we ask:

1. What pleases the Lord?

Sometimes we know the answer with certainty: We must not worship idols. There are direct statements in Scripture that settle many questions.

Some times we must figure things out based on what we do know for sure: Paul's discussion of whether we should eat meat offered to idols is an example. The answers to such questions may be very important even though they may be matters that need careful consideration to be solved. 1 Corinthians 8

Another example is whether a Christian should get married. We do know from Scripture that we should not refuse the marriage state as appropriate for Christians. Paul claimed the right to have a wife, but his not doing so was probably an example of Jesus' teaching that some men are eunuchs for the Lord's sake. 1 Corinthians 7

Again Scripture does not offer advice about how to handle every case of abuse by another. But several teachings, including the Parable of the Prodigal Son, show that we must head in the Lord's direction.

Many decisions a church must make [for example, how much to spend on various matters: carpet vs. missions] will show whether we intend to please the Lord.

2. What pleases others?

Paul taught that we should not eat meat if it causes another to stumble. [He did not say, "If it causes another to grumble." Some will grumble no matter what we do.] 1 Corinthians 8:13

More than that, if it is possible we should live at peace with everyone. Romans 14:19: "So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding." A decision in matters where we do not have clear Scriptural direction could still lead to great disruption of a congregation.

Sometimes pleasing the Lord means displeasing others. Paul rebuked Peter because he would not eat with non-Jews. We cannot invite everyone in the church to our house for dinner. But what we do in this regard must show that we want to please the Lord. Peter failed in this regard. Galatians 2:11

3. What pleases ourselves?

Paul essentially said that Christians may get married if they really want to do so.

In a similar way, the church should consider what its members want.