

## How Do We Create a Structure for the Local Church?

### Teaching Goals

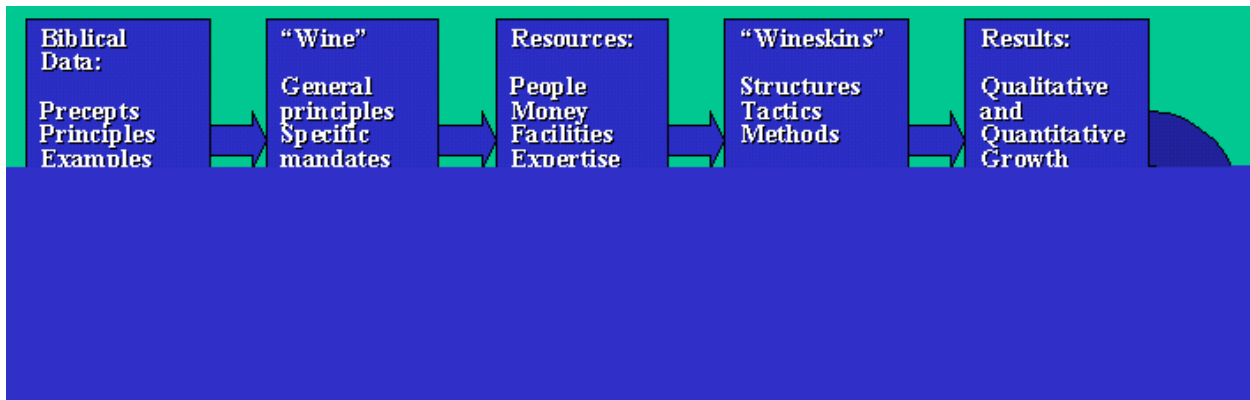
In this section, we hope to gain the following understanding.

- Students will understand how the church can create and adapt structures and strategies to do its work, without violating the intent of Scripture.
- Students should have a feel for the fact that it is alright to change structures, and that many different types of structures are effective.
- Students should understand what the process of Ministry Networking entails. They will be ready to participate in the Network Seminar.
- Students should understand the differences and similarities between the old and the new structures employed at Xenos.
- Students should understand what a task-oriented Ministry Team is.
- Students should understand what a grounding group is.
- Students should understand the philosophy involved in Ministry Networking and Fellowship groups.
- How do we create a structure for the local church?

Every local church has certain goals, and a strategy for accomplishing those goals. It also has structures and methods by which it carries out this strategy. How should we determine these things? Since we want to base such decisions on the Bible, it is vital that we approach the biblical data with sound interpretive principles. Unless we do this, we will build the church in ways that are ineffective, or perhaps even at cross-purposes with Christ.

No wonder Paul says that we should "be careful how (we) build!" (1 Cor. 3:10) The following chart illustrates what we believe is a good methodology for accomplishing this goal.

Flowchart showing how to manage wine and wineskins



### Explaining the boxes

" **Biblical Data**" consists of the material from Scripture which describes the essential nature and mission of the church. As argued earlier, this material includes material that is universally applicable (such as ethical principles), Jesus' specific teaching about the church, Acts, the epistles and Rev. 1-3. One of the primary considerations must be whether the scripture is describing precepts, principles, or examples. Each of these provide a different level of authority, application, and/or flexibility to today's church.

"**Precepts**" refer to specify commands addressed to the church. These precepts define aspects of the church's mission and are applicable to all Christians in all ages. The Great Commission (Mt. 28:19) and the exercise of church discipline (Mt. 18:15-17) would be examples of such precepts

"**Principles**" refer to descriptive doctrinal statements about the nature of the church which have universal relevance. For example, the analogy of the local church as a physical body (Rom. 12:4,5) describes certain features of church life (e.g. mutually interdependent involvement) which have important implications for church structure.

"**Examples**" are just that--examples of ways that the New Testament church gave expression to scriptural precepts and principles. Since cultures and church resources change, scriptural examples are not binding. However, in view of the tremendous fruit borne by the New Testament church, it is wise to carefully consider one's reasons before deciding not to include them. House churches are an "example" which seems to have virtually universal relevance since home groups greatly facilitate koinonia. The Jerusalem church's communal property seems to be an "example" which was not the norm even in New Testament times.

"**Wine**" refers to what God is trying to do at this time. Jesus referred to this "wine" in his parable of the wine and the wineskins in Lk. 5:36-38. Although our understanding of the biblical data describing God's program may grow and deepen over time, it is a body of truth that is unchanging and therefore serves as an anchor for our work in building the church.

"**Field**" refers to that segment of our culture which God has called us to reach for Christ. "Resources" refers to such things as people, spiritual gifts, money, facilities, reputation, knowledge and expertise which the local church presently possesses. Both of these features are in a state of constant flux.

"**Skins**" refers to the present tactics of the church--especially the structures and methods employed to carry out that strategy. On the one hand, "skins" are very important because they have the ability to enhance or inhibit the expression of the "wine." On the other hand, "skins" are subordinate to the "wine" and derive their value from how well they serve the "wine." They have no intrinsic value and should be cast aside once it becomes apparent that they are no longer serving this purpose.

"**Results**" refers to the extent to which the church is accomplishing its mission. Both quantitative (more people coming to Christ) and qualitative (Christians becoming more mature spiritually) growth are important results.

"**Periodic Re-evaluation**" refers to the necessity of reflection and change in church tactics, structure and methods. As we evaluate the results of our work, and as we evaluate the ways in which our field and resources have changed, these factors will periodically necessitate the innovation of new "skins."

## **The Need for Change**

Thus, while the essential nature and mission of the church should remain constant, its outward appearance should be constantly changing. But human nature naturally resists change. There are many reasons for this fact, but it is a feature which tends to gradually render the local church ineffective. Since

we naturally tend to become attached to the "skins," we often preserve them long after they have ceased to serve their purpose.

Because this process is very gradual, those involved often do not even realize that it is happening. But when this occurs, the local church ceases to be a dynamic movement and instead becomes a stagnant institution. Church history makes it clear that unfortunately this is the norm rather than the exception.

One of the crucial responsibilities of the leaders of the local church is to fight against this tendency. Leaders must lead the church into change as often and as extensively as is needed if they are to be faithful to the living Head of the church, Jesus Christ.