***A Unique Body of Believers

Colossians 1:1-2

COL-013***

Our topic is "The Salutation," number 13 in Colossians 1:1-2.

The apostle Paul, by divine appointment, became an apostle of the new body of believers formed by God on the day of Pentecost. The Bible calls this the church. The church era was in God's plan from eternity past, but it had been kept a secret until the final rejection of Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah savior of Israel. On the day of Pentecost, the new body of saints began. It was made up of believers from Jews and Gentiles, those who had trusted in Christ as Savior. The church age, in which we live, operates on the grace principle of God, which reveals to us church age doctrine for daily guidance, and then provides the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit to obey that doctrine and to enable us to do right.

The church, we have found, is intimately related to the Lord Jesus Christ as His bride and as His body, and it constitutes the royal family of God. Of all the groups of saints that have ever lived from Adam on down, the supreme group is the one that to which you and I belong, the church age. We are the most privileged. The Christians are the highest of all the believers of all-time, and will be so in all of eternity.

At the future Rapture of the church, the catching way of the church from the earth, all saints in this special family of God are transferred to Heaven and the church is then completed. Following the church dispensation God will resume his final seven-year plan of dealing with the nation of Israel and following that bring in a thousand-year earthly kingdom of Jesus Christ. Israel and the church are therefore, you see, totally different programs. They're totally different in their objectives. They are a separate work of God, and they have their own way of life, their own programs and their own destiny.

**The Church is a Unique Body of Believers**

And that is the point of calling your attention to the fact that Paul speaks to Christians in Colossians, and he describes them as being in Christ, which means that they're in a special, unique group of believers, the church. And the church is not Israel and Israel is not the church. There is no such thing as a Christian Israel. There is no such thing as a mixing between these two.

The reason I stress that is because this was a great error of the Reformation. The Reformers got a lot of things straight, but they never straightened this out. And most churches today think that they have replaced the Jewish people. That is a serious, serious mistake. And while somebody, as every now and then somebody asks about a point of doctrine, and says to me, "Well, what difference does it make?" And it's a very contemptuous remark to make and I always have try to be gentle when somebody says that to me because no part of the Word of God is insignificant. No part of the Word of God is an extraneous thing that God stumbled into putting in the Bible and really didn't need to stick in there and we don't really have to pay any attention to it. We have to pay attention to everything that is in the Word of God. And that's the very problem with churches today and Christians today, is that they're denied the full access to the full counsel of the Word of God. The apostle Paul was very proud of the fact that he, at the end of his life, could look back as a minister of God, and said he delivered to you the full counsel of the Word of God.

I never said that there weren't some things that were hard to understand in the Bible, hard to coordinate and relate on the human level of understanding. But I never suggested to you: "What difference does it make?" It's not important." Everything is important in the Word of God. How significant a certain truth is in the Word of God depends upon your point in time, but it is all part of the delivery of the mind of God to us.

So this concept of Israel and the church being somehow a mixture will cause you to distort the rest of the Bible. You will not understand what is your place in the privileged royal family of God under Christianity. You will not understand what Christianity is all about. And when it says that God is going to wipe away tears of all the believers, I'm telling you this is going to be in Heaven at the Judgment Seat of Christ. People who go to all these lovely churches that are carrying on with their programs, who spend their time in Bible classes where people share their mutual ignorance upon a piece of Scripture because the pastor isn't up there explaining it to the people so that they have a basis of learning the Word of God, those are the people who are very smug and happy now who are not going to stand in the crises when this country finds itself under the real gun of the power of the highest authorities directed against Christians. And if you have not caught onto that yet, then you're out of touch with reality. People don't care about the Word of God.

While I was gone, I was in West Yellowstone, Montana, across the line from Wyoming. And in speaking to a man who was there with a friend on a matter, when we were through, I pulled out one of our evangelism brochures and said, "I'm a minister from Texas, and this little booklet I wrote – you might find it valuable to read." He looked at it, and said "Ah." And he pushed his hand back and said, "No." And he walked away. I said, "Well, maybe your friend might like to read it, that sat in the truck." He said, "No, he's a Mormon. He wouldn't want it."

That tells me that both those men are unsaved and someday they're going to stand before God and they're going to remember this unknown preacher who stood on the parking lot of the IMAX theater next to their truck in West Yellowstone, Montana and who offered them the key to salvation, and they gave it the back of their hand. Well, they're not off the hook yet. I have his card. He's a repairman and he's going to get a letter from me, and the brochure is going to be in there. I'm going to give him one more shot to make it so that when he stands up there and finds the judgment that he's entered, he's not going to be able to say there was a preacher who didn't inform me. This is a ministry which is based upon informing people and nothing is insignificant or unimportant in the Word of God. It is all to give us the full picture of the truth of God.

If we don't know how to communicate all that God has said, if we don't know the basics of what He has said, then when the world system hits us, and you better wake up Christians, they hate you. They hate you with a vengeance. They have no compunctions about striking a work of God. They hate you because they hate Jesus Christ. They are Satan's people, and while many Christians and many churches are not Satan's people, they aid and abet that crowd by the very kinds of lives they live and the kind of ministry they'll tolerate, what they will tolerate in a local church from their preacher. They sit there starving like a bunch of stupid ninnies because they don't understand what it is costing them for all eternity.

I'll guarantee you that there is no believer who's ever gone out of this life into the Lord's presence from this congregation, who looks back and said, I was never told, I didn't know. I was never informed. Then they look back and said, I stood there, and I blew it off stupidly and that's going to cost me now, but at least they will have had a chance.

**Blessings of the church Age**

1. **Unity With Other Believers**

We who are part of the universal invisible body of Christ, the church are the most supremely privileged and blessed of all believers over the previous pre-church centuries. We are blessed in a variety of ways, which is never true of other saints. For example, every Christian is in Christ and united as family to all other believers. The people who are the closest to you are those who are sitting in this room and born-again believers. Nobody on earth is closer to you than those who are believers.

1. **Permanently indwelt by Jesus Christ**

Every Christian is permanently indwelt by Jesus Christ for fellowship. He is always there as your friend. He walks with you constantly and you should act as one who is in the presence of that friend. Every Christian is permanently indwelt by God, the Holy Spirit for power in God's service. You're never called upon to serve God without being given the capacity to do it and the means to do it. But I'll tell you, when God has given you the capacity and when God has given you the means and the need is out there and the burden is placed upon your heart, you would be wise to respond. Some of you aren't going to be around here much longer. Life is moving on and now is the day to get with it in the capacities that you have or the Lord's going to be wiping a few tears from your eyes as you stand before His judgment seat, remembering what might have been. Every Christian is permanently indwelt by the Holy Spirit for guidance and for power to do this service to which He calls you.

1. **The Priesthood**

Every Christian is a priest of God representing himself alone before God. Every Christian is an ambassador of Jesus Christ to Satan's world with a gospel of grace. Every Christian possesses a completed Bible with Old and New Testaments for doctrine. Every Christian is called and enabled to live a supernatural life of godliness. That's one of the most wonderful things about the Christian life. The Jew could not live a life of godliness. He went up, he went down. He struggled. He tried. He did the best he could, but he was always a failure. It's inconceivable to think that we who have a sin nature, yet can get on a track where day after day after day, we live with a minimum of sin and a minimum of ungodliness, and when we do step out of line, we quickly correct. That is a fantastic thing. The average Christian has never been taught the outer and inner circle principle of eternal and temporal fellowship, so he doesn't know how to walk with God.

The unique and distinct relationship of the church age believer to Jesus Christ is illustrated by a varieties of analogies in the Bible. For example, Christ is portrayed as the shepherd and the Christians are his sheep. Christ is the vine, and the Christians are the branches from Him. Christ is the chief cornerstone, and the Christians are the stone which are built as a temple upon Him. Christ is the high priest and Christians are believer priests. Christ is the head of the church and Christians are His body. Christ is the head of a new creation and Christians are the new species of that creation. Christ is the bride groom and Christians are His bride. Now each of these analogies is filled with enormous spiritual insight and enlightenment and it is not our purpose to pursue these today. You can go up to the tape room and you can find these detailed expositions of these relationships that will thrill your soul and will lift you to new heights of glory, all these comparisons of our relationship, which is ours and ours alone as Christians in this age.

The Christian serves God by means of his divinely provided spiritual gifts and abilities and that's another subject all in itself. You'll have to get the tapes to explain spiritual gifts. So, to be in Christ means to be part of the church of Jesus Christ. It does not mean to be part of a defunct Israel. So, this morning we'll pull it all together.

**The Church Universal**

Here is the doctrine of the church Universal summary.

1. **Called Out**

The meaning of the word church is "that which is called out."

1. **A Mystery**

Up to the time of the Lord's ministry on earth, the church was a complete mystery, which means it was a secret. The Greek word mystery is something known to those on the inside (that is to God), but not to those on the outside (people in general).

The term mystery in the New Testament has referenced to the truth about the church age, which was completely hidden in Old Testament Scriptures. The Old Testament never talked about this age of the church. It left room for it. It left time gaps in the Old Testament Scriptures, but it never explained it. God had incorporated the church universal into His plan in eternity past, but He never revealed it until New Testament times. Ephesians 1:4.

**The Ascension**

The structure of the church could not begin until after the Lord Jesus Christ had died, risen, and ascended up into Heaven to be seated at the right hand of God. Before the church could begin, Christ had to purchase the church with His precious blood. Ephesians 5:25-27, 1 Peter 1:18-19. Also Christ had to rise from the dead to give the church resurrection life. Colossians 3:1-3. Christ had to ascend to be head over all things to the church, Ephesians 1:20-23.

**Pentecost**

After this was done, then the Holy Spirit could descend on Pentecost to form the church. The crucifixion, the death, the resurrection, the ascension of Christ all took place during the age of Israel. There was no church before the day of Pentecost. All of these things were preparatory during the age of Israel. The church itself then began on the day of Pentecost with the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

On that day up in that upper room, the group of believers who were gathered there were fused together into a new body called the royal family of God and the church age began. The tribulation and the millennium are not part of the church age. It is always sad when you find Christians who think that they're going to go through the terrible times of the tribulation, you're not. What you will go through is the rapture. The tribulation will be only for the judgment upon Israel and the world system, and the millennium will be a place where you'll be ruling.

Some of you who have been faithful to the Lord and faithful to your mission and faithful to your calling and faithful with your resources, you'll be given a throne and you'll be ruling in the millennium over an entity of that kingdom. Some of you will never get a throne. Your lives will not have merited that kind of responsibility and you'll probably be very surprised because you'll think you have it coming. You'll think that you will be one that God certainly would select for a throne. But He will make the decision and your part in the millennium will be as that in that administrative capacity.

The church age was predicted in the New Testament by Jesus Christ in Matthew 16:18 and in John 14:20 with the phrase "in that day". The doctrine of the church age is not found in the Old Testament Scriptures and is not found anywhere in the gospels and is only alluded to in Matthews 16:18 and in John chapters 13 through 17. Otherwise, there is no reference to the church in the Old Testament or in the gospels.

So, until the time of the Lord's ministry on Earth, Point Number Two, the church was a complete mystery. The doctrine of this mystery is found in Ephesians 3:3-6. And it is referred to in verse 3 as the revelation of the mystery, Verse 4: the knowledge of the mystery, Verse 5: the definition of the mystery, Verse 6: the content of the mystery. This word mystery constantly referring to this special work of God, the church. The Old Testament left gaps and the church was inserted in those gaps. This is the Doctrine of Intercalation. The church was simply inserted in a part of Israel's program when Israel's program was put on hold.

1. **The Church Began on Pentecost**

The next point in this summary: the church began on the day of Pentecost, John 14:20. The Holy Spirit takes a believer today at the point of salvation and baptizes him immediately into union with Christ. This baptism happens only in the church age. The baptism of the Holy Spirit first occurred on the day of Pentecost. It doesn't mention that in Acts chapter two, but in Acts 11:15-16 we're told that that's what happened. It happened on that day.

1. **The Dispensation of Grace**

The church age is called the dispensation of the grace of God (Ephesians 3:2). This means that a maximum amount of grace is available in the church age to every person in Christ, the maximum amount of grace. Paul says, "I am what I am by the grace of God."

I have to remember to stay in front of this microphone. Our lapel mics were stolen, so we're having to record today from the microphone. So, if you see me move off point, tell me to get back here!

"I am what I am by the grace of God." That grace is without limit. People wonder how some Christians can take things in stride. It's because of the grace of God. It's because they know the overwhelming capacities that God gives. Nothing can bring you down. When that grace is fully operating, you are the king of the mountain. It is the dispensation of the grace of God.

An example of church age grace is the Jews, who in spite of their rejection of Jesus Christ, yet when the church age began, the Jews there were first in line. The apostles were told, "Give the gospel first to the Jews. Don't talk to Gentiles, first to the Jews, they're first in line. These rebels; these hard necks; and, these who are contemptible toward their Messiah savior – they're first in line." Now that's grace, and that is characteristic of this age. After the Jews, the Gentiles came. For seven long years after the day of Pentecost, there was no Gentile in the church. Seven long years, only Jews got the gospel. Only Jews were brought into the body of Christ. Only Jews became the royal family of God. These who had so rebelled against this very savior. Finally, with the experience of Peter and Cornelius, the first Gentile comes in and with that the Gentiles took over. The Jews had had their day.

1. **Jews and Gentiles**

The next point on the church Universal is that this church which is invisible in the true church, is made up of both Jews and Gentiles who accept the Lord Jesus Christ as savior regardless of what your denominational affiliation may be, Galatians 3:26-28. From the moment of regeneration, a person ceases to be a Jew or Gentile when he becomes a Christian in the eyes of God. You can only be one of those three. So, it's not quite right to speak about Christian Jews or Christian Gentiles. You are either Jew or Gentile or a Christian. Galatians 3:26-28, Colossians 3:11. At the point of salvation, the Holy Spirit baptizes all believers immediately into the body of Christ, whether they be Jews or Gentiles, 1 Corinthians 12:13.

1. **The Body of Christ**

The church is called the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12). Christ is designated as the head of the body. The church is His body. Colossians 1:18, Ephesians 1:22-23. Now that is a pretty close relationship. A head and a body obviously are intimately related and it is obvious that the head controls and directs the body. The church has many members just as a human body does, but Christ is the head. Romans 12:4-5.

1. **The Lord's Redeemed**

The church is the Lord's redeemed, called from the old creation (that place in Adam), into the new creation (in Christ), 1 Corinthians 15:22, 2 Corinthians 5:17. It could never be said of the Old Testament Jew that he was in Christ. He was always struggling around there in the place of death in Adam.

1. **Growing but Incomplete**

The church is likened to a growing but not yet completed structure, Ephesians 2:21-22, 1 Corinthians 3:9. The church is constantly growing, constantly being added to and when the last Christian has been added to it, the Rapture will take place.

1. **When Completed**

When the last member has been added to the body of Christ, or the structure of the church, the Lord will remove His church from the earth, John 14:3, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17 and Ephesians 5:27.

1. **Jesus Christ**

The founder of the church is Jesus Christ, who is its chief cornerstone, Ephesians 2:20. The historical foundation of the church was the temporary spiritual gifts of apostles and Prophets. This was possessed by the early church leaders. Ephesians 2:20. And the church was temporarily founded on that. The Lord Himself is building His church upon that early foundation (Matthew 16:18, Acts 2:4, and Acts 2:47).

1. **The Bride of Christ**

The church, when in Heaven, is called the bride of Christ, Revelation 19:6-8.

1. **A Living Organism**

The Holy Spirit holds the church together as a living organism. He is its power. You see, there's the two kinds of churches you must be aware of. There is the true universal, invisible church as an organism, that's a living body. There is the organizational local church, which is something else and we'll be looking at that shortly. It is the Holy Spirit who is the life power of the organism of the church.

1. **Areas in Common**

There are areas that believers have in common during the church age, all Christians are in union with Christ, indwelt by Jesus Christ, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, Priests of God, an Ambassador for Christ. Every Christian has certain things in common. He has a living human spirit. He has a soul with a mind will and emotions. He has the completed Bible. He has at least one spiritual gift. He has the privilege of prayer and worship. He has the means for spirituality through confession of sins, and he has the grace System of Perception for learning doctrine. All Christians have that in common, but not all Christians are permitted to exercise those things because their preachers deny it to them.

Furthermore, every Christian is, one, commanded to live a supernatural way of life, 1 Peter 1:14-16. To do that requires a filling of the Holy Spirit as the basis for spiritual growth. You are filled with the spirit when you confess your known sins. This also requires a spiritual maturity structure in the soul through the use of the grace System of Perception, the system by which you learn doctrine.

You are responsible for representing Jesus Christ accurately. Every Christian is responsible for that, Acts 1:8. That is a very serious common responsibility that we have. Nothing is more terrible than people who misrepresent what God believes, what God teaches, what God thinks. It is a terrible, terrible thing to misinform people about the Word of God. So don't open your mouth to speak with confidence because it's your opinion when you are not qualified in your knowledge of the Word of God, to have brought it all together to know that you are conveying that which is true. Your opinions mean nothing.

1. **Differences in Believers**

There are areas of differences between believers during the church age. First, we have different sin natures. Each Christian has an old sin nature which differs from the next believer in its expressions. The patterns of interests, the lusts, the nature of weaknesses and strengths differ from person to person. You find that you get along best on the human level with people who have compatible sin natures. All that comes from the sin nature, however, is unacceptable to God. Only two things come from the sin nature, human good and sins. Both of those are evil.

There are differences of spirituality. A Christian is either in a spiritual status or in a carnal status at any given moment. The apostle Paul says he is in the inner circle, he is spiritual. He is in the outer circle, he is not spiritual, and he gets back in with 1 John 1:9 confession. While he is in fellowship, while he is in a position of spirituality, that's when he does God's work.

Then there is a matter of spiritual maturity. There are three stages of spiritual maturity, the baby stage, the teenager, and the adult stage we are told in 1 John 2:12-13. What stage you are at depends upon how much knowledge you have of the Word of God. You build your own spiritual IQ. Your natural IQ does not affect your spiritual status.

There are differences between Christians and their physical and personality characteristics. Believers do not all appeal to one another. Can you think of some sweet, real nice believer that you don't care too much for? I know scads of them. I hate to see them coming. Great burden and I don't have any intimidation about it. I don't say to myself, "Gee, there's Mr. Freakout. I really got to take him to El Chico's. He'd have an upset stomach and I would too." There are some Christians that are so different physically or in personality that they don't appeal to you. We have all been made by the Lord with a purpose and that's how we're supposed to be. We are what we are in righteousness by our temperament and our characteristics and how we function because God has a purpose for us to fulfill with that temperament and with that structure. So don't get irritated with somebody else's appearance or someone else's personality and don't be intimidated to think that you have to change.

There are also differences of spiritual gifts. Every Christian has at least one spiritual ability for serving God. Spiritual gifts will determine the nature of your ministry and the nature of the authority that you bear. The Holy Spirit sovereignly decides on what spiritual gifts are to be distributed at the point of salvation.

That in general is a summary of the doctrine of the church invisible.

**The Church as an Organization**

But we also notice in Colossians 1:2, the apostle Paul speaks to the saints and faithful brethren who are at Colossae, Christians who are in a geographical location. These people are in Asia Minor in a city called Colossae. This refers to the city in which they lived who received this letter from Paul. Some Christians were in Christ as a church invisible and the same Christians were in the city of Colossae as the church visible.

There is a basic use of the word "church," and this is important for you to understand in a local sense now. We're talking about the church as an organization, and it is used in a variety of ways in the Word of God. It means the same thing as with the church universal. It means those who are called out. The word church is generally used in the New Testament in the local sense. If you were to add up the use of the word church, you find that most of the time it is referring to the church in its local organizational structure. But what is true of the local church depends on what is true of the church universal. You have to understand what is true the body of Christ. Then you will know how to operate on the local church level.

This word "church" is used sometimes of an individual congregation. For example, Romans 16:5, Paul says, "Also greet the church that is in their house. Greet Epaenetus, my beloved, who is the first convert to Christ from Asia." He's speaking about Prisca and Aquila and he says, "Greet the church that is in their house." There is a single congregation of believers and is called "the church." Notice 1 Corinthians 16:19, another example. "The churches of Asia greet you; Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house." Now, please notice where they met, in their house. Think of your own house. For 300 years, this is all the church buildings that Christians knew. There were no temples. There were no cathedrals. There were no magnificent buildings. For the first 300 years of Christianity, they met in houses.

**Elders**

This is very important so that you understand the role of the multiplicity of elders. You did not have more than one elder in each church. Each church only had one elder, but each city had many house churches and many elders who were pastors individually of those churches. There's no place in the New Testament that you have clear declaration that one church had more than one elder. They met in houses and each house church had a leader who is the pastor-teacher elder. Notice Colossians 4:15. Colossians says, "Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea and also Nympha and the church that is in her house." Here is a Christian woman who gave her house to have a church in and her house had a group of believers who gathered, and her house had a male elder who led the congregation. You may also look one more place at Philemon 1:2, "and to Apphia our sister, and to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house."

So meeting in homes was the practice of Christians until about 300 AD. Church buildings came into being only after Christianity was accepted by the Roman Empire as the state religion. The first thing they did was threw out all of the pagans out of their temples and out of the structures in which the pagans were meeting. And suddenly they had these big buildings that became the structures where Christians began to meet. And then they began to have church structures where a sizable number of people could gather.

**Uses of the Word "Church"**

So the first way this word "church" is used in its geographic sense is of an individual congregation. It is also used of a body of regenerated people worldwide. It speaks of regenerated people as a church in a worldwide sense. This is illustrated in 1 Corinthians 12:28, "And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues." 1 Corinthians 12:28, God has appointed these in the church. Now this is referring to all believers all over the whole world. They all had these particular spiritual gifts which God appointed to them. So here the church is used of believers as a whole in the singular, the church.

Third, the word "church" is used in the plural as churches where it is viewing a group of churches in a certain territory as a whole, many individual local churches in a single territory were viewed as a unit. This is illustrated by Galatians 1:2, "and all the brethren who are with me to the churches of Galatia." Paul is speaking to the churches, individual congregations, individual organizations, but he is treating them as if they were one church in all of Galatia. Well, there wasn't just one church in all Galatia. There were churches in Galatia because they met in lots of houses. This letter was written to the Galatian churches as a united whole. Many local churches in many different geographic locations were viewed collectively as one body.

This is also the case in Acts 9:31, "So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace being built up." The church, there wasn't just one church in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria. There were many individual local churches. But here he speaks of them as if there was only one church, "the church," many congregations spoken of, in a united whole. One more example, Act 16:4-5. "Now while they were passing through the cities, they were delivering the decrees which had been decided upon by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem, for them to observe. So the churches were being strengthened in the faith, and were increasing in numbers daily." Here they gave instruction to the church how they should act in relationship to the Jews and there were many individual churches, but they're treated as a whole.

We also have the word "church" used of many churches in a specific geographic area. There were too many Christians in major centers to be able to meet in one house. So, in Corinth in 1 Corinthians 1:2, we have this reference again to the church as a whole, as if there were only one church. But it's speaking of the territory of the city of Corinth. 1 Corinthians 1:2, "and to the church of God, which is at Corinth to those who have been sanctified." Now compare that to 1 Corinthians 14:34; it says, "Let the women keep silent in the churches; for they're not permitted to speak, but let them subject themselves, just as the Law also says." So here at the beginning of the book, Paul says, “I'm writing to the church of God, which is at Corinth.” Then in the instruction here in 1 Corinthians 14:34, concerning women preachers, he says, "Let the women be silent in the churches" indicating that in the city of Corinth there were many, many churches.

The same was true in Jerusalem. It speaks of the church in Jerusalem, but there were lots of church organizations, Acts 1:8. Same in Antioch, Act 13:1. Same in Thessalonica, 1 Thessalonians 1:1. So it helps to understand that the word church is used in the local sense in a variety of ways. It is used of course for the church universal and invisible as the body of Christ. This is made up of only regenerated people. It is used for the visible expression of the body of Christ in a specific geographic area or territory regenerated people. It is used for a specific local church congregation with an organization and a definitive purpose. But not all people are regenerated in that. The church Universal, everybody's born again. The church that exists in Asia as a whole, the local churches, that refers to regenerated people. But when you get down to a local congregation, you have some who are mere professors and not genuinely born again.

All believers are positionally in Christ and in their experience, they obey the will of God as it is revealed in the Word of God. God therefore establishes the local church organization to teach Christians in a certain locality the revealed Scriptures. Never belittle or hold in contempt the local church organization. The local church is where it is all made or broken for Christians. Now you arrogant types can go out and think you can carry on, on your own, that you can buy books and you can listen to the TV and radio in our modern era. But you are growing shallower and shallower. It is in the local church organization, the shepherding structure that God has provided, and the grace system of perception – that He has inserted, that is how you will make progress in the spiritual life. And if you are not in such an organization, you're going to be a bumpkin all your life. And the worst thing is you're going to be so stupid you don't even know you're a bumpkin.

**The Function of the Local Church**

Believers who gather in public meetings to hear the principles of Bible doctrine explained, who then respond with positive volition; they learn, they store in their human spirits, they will mature in the knowledge of doctrine, and they will effectively practice the Christian life. They will effectively serve Jesus Christ in the circle of their contexts. They will make an impact. And when they get to Heaven, they would hear Jesus Christ say, "Sam, I'm very pleased with what you did with your money. I'm very pleased with what you did with those spiritual gifts I gave you. I'm very pleased with what you did with the life I gave you. In your case, Sam, you know I gave you 70 years. You had that coming. Then I kicked in another 10 for you, and you used the 10 extra just as well as you did the others. I'm very pleased, Sam, that you did that. You did not run around living a stupid frenetic life. You kept your focus on your eternity and you realized, Sam, that I gave you a job and I gave you good possessions and good earning just so you could serve me. I didn't give it to you for any other purpose. And you didn't spend your money and your life, the fruits of your labor in a trivial way. You always spent it with a focus on eternity. You have proved to be a trustworthy man. Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of thy rewards. That's your throne over there. Sit down on it and get the feel of it." The local church therefore is God's provision during this church age to enable believers everywhere to carry on His work.

This is what Paul tried to tell us in Ephesians 4:11-14, what the local church is all about. Now let me read this and you think about local churches that you have been acquainted with and you tell me how close this conforms to what we see often on the local organization level. Ephesians 4:11: "He gave some apostles and some prophets." Those are two spiritual gifts which were given until the Bible, the New Testament Bible, was completed. They no longer exist. There are no apostles and there are no prophets today.

"And he gave some Evangelists," people who have a special ability to preach the gospel, to go out to pioneer territories and establish churches and bring people to Christ. That's a special gift. An evangelist should never be pastor of a church. Lots of evangelists are and lots of churches very foolishly think, "Oh that's great. He gets up, he preaches the same message every Sunday. He lies in bed at night, and he revises the order, and he revises the illustrations and the jokes, and he comes up with a new version of the same story." And when he finishes, you say, “You know, I heard that last Sunday. In fact, I've been hearing that for a month. In fact, it's been years that I've been hearing this same sermon, ‘How to go to Heaven.’" And he very cleverly re-edits it and people are so excited, especially when he has them coming down the aisle where they can see the results, they love it. An evangelist does not belong in the local church ministry.

Sometimes, as Paul said, “Timothy, the pastor, does the work of the evangelist. He explains the gospel. Most of the time he's explaining doctrine. He's the next category in some pastor-teachers.” It's a combination job in Greek, you cannot be a pastor if you don't have the ability to teach. You can teach reading, writing, and arithmetic, but that doesn't mean you can teach spiritual things. A pastor-teacher gift is a special gift that God gives certain men but never gives it to women. That's why we don't have women preachers. But we do have that gift in the hands of those selected by God. It is their business to feed the church of God on the local congregational level and they have the capacity to do it. And it comes out a lot different than when you read it in the book, or you hear it on TV.

(continuing in Ephesians 4:12) "for the equipping of the saints [that is, to train the believers for a military service, they are trained with the doctrine of Scripture to serve] for the work of service [They're trained in order to do divine good work, to be able to use their spiritual gifts.], to the building up of the body of Christ [to winning people to the Lord in salvation and to strengthening believers, young people, and old people in their spiritual lives.]" And it's all hinged on that one previous pastor-teacher.

And in the Greek language, the "for, for, for" that you have here is in a sequence that's a chain reaction. The first for is for the equipping of the saints and that for is the preposition "pros," which means "face to face." You bring people face to face with God with doctrine. Now when they go positive to it, they have made a step toward capacity to do the next for (Preposition) eis the work of service. There the Greek preposition changes to "eis," which means "unto the purpose of serving." But if you don't do the first for (pros), if the preacher isn't there equipping them with doctrine, they're not going to serve anything.

They can play church there and have a good time. They're going to have a church that has a class for the singles, a class for the doubles, a class for the triples, and even a class that's big enough for the quadruples, the class for the married, the class for the unmarried, a class for the long to be married, the class for those who are sorry to be married. They have all these categories of people, and everybody says, isn't this a wonderful church, boy we're really meeting people's needs. No, you're not. You ding-dong, they all need the same thing.

They all should be in the same class and what they need is to be equipped with the Word of God, doctrine. And that's why you should be here every Sunday and you should start making a new church year's resolution to be here. This place is a gold mine of information. Why do you deny yourself with trivialities by not filling these seats and excusing yourself? You're not going to be here much longer. It's all going to be over. And what you have done with this time is going to be largely dependent upon how much you sat here and had the fires of God stirred up in your soul. We will equip the saints. We'll give them military training.

They will then be prepared for combat duty with the work of their spiritual gifts and the result will be the building up. There's another "eis" then. "To" - the result then will be the building up of the body of Christ. Now I guarantee you any church that sits there week after week preaching the gospel to people, is not equipping the saints for spiritual combat. Most of those Christians couldn't even give you the gospel in a clean-cut way that a person could be saved. Most of them would say, “I'll take you to church and let you listen to my preacher. I know he's going to preach about the gospel next Sunday."

In Ephesians 4:13, here's the purpose: "Until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature [spiritual] man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. "As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, and by craftiness in deceitful scheming; "but speaking of the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects to Him, who is the head, even Christ, "from whom the whole body, being fitted together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love."

Love is the cement that holds us together here at Berean church. And when we have responded to the instruction of the Word of God, we become a winning team in Christ. And we receive the hatred of other churches who are not well taught because they think we think we're the only ones that have the truth. All we think is that we know we have the truth because we are not tossed to and fro by every wave of doctrine.

Now you have had that experience where you've been able to explain a word of truth because you've been so well taught you know what it is. And somebody with their human viewpoint thinking said, "~Oh, I don't think that's the way it is." Your family members get mad at you when you try to tell them what the Word of God has to say. “Who do you think you are? You are some arrogant character. What makes you think that you know better? Have you gone to preacher school?" You bet – every Sunday. That's exactly what we're in here.

And by the way, think of all the money you save by not having to go to counselors. You don't have to go to marriage counselors. You don't have to go to mother-in-law counselors. You don't have to go to any kind of counselors because we do it every Sunday here, every Sunday. And you should feel guilty! You'd pay $50 dollars an hour for a good counselor. You should feel guilty walking out this door without dropping $50 in that offering box per person for the counseling you've received.

When you had the Word of God and you know doctrine, you nobody's fool you see. You are not tossed around by every wave and carried about by every wind of doctrine. That is exhausting.

Those of you who are scuba divers, you know how exhausting it is to go into an ocean that the waves are crashing on the beach and the water is rough and finally, you get out there and you turn around backwards, you got your flippers on, and you walk in backwards and finally you get deep enough where you can fall in and get down under. Once you're under it is all smooth and easy cause all the turmoil is above you and you're out of it. You're in the stability of doctrine once you get under that surface.

Now you don't have to be a yo-yo, you don't have to be a ding-a-ling. You are a member of the royal family, so act like it and live up to your capacity. But it is the local church you see that is the key to it all. But if the guy in the pulpit is not doing his job, then you have just cause when you stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ, to think about him with some great regrets and to be somewhat resentful over what you were denied.

Our local church also began on day Pentecost. The totality of the church was in that upper room. The church invisible and visible was exactly the same at that point. Both were filled only with genuine believers. So, when Paul was persecuting that early church, he really was persecuting Christ. Jesus could really say, "You're hitting My Christians. They're My body. We're one and the same. When you hit the Christians, you hit Me." That's still true today. Anytime people of Satan's world system hit us either individually or as an organization, we are the body of Christ and they have taken on a terrible burden. When they have struck against us, they have struck against the creator of all the universe. And while it makes you mad when they hit you, you should pity them for the consequences that they will pay for all eternity for that act. You don't sock it to Jesus Christ and get away with it.

The visible local church aspect today is different. It contains both those who are true believers and those who are mere false professors. Acts 20:28-29 point that out, as well as 1 John 2:18-19, and Jude 3-4. All these indicate that there are the true and the false, the good fish and the bad.

God has made us part of a magnificent new thing, the church, the universal body of Christ with its local church expression. And we are the people in that local church expression who are the witnesses to this world today. We make it all work. And without your efforts, without your contributions, without your support, there is no local church ministry. So don't look to me like I'm the guy who's going to make a local church ministry and don't look to these people that knocked themselves out here on our campus day-by-day that they're making the local church ministry. We are a body. Which part of you do you not need? I had a fingernail pulled off once. Doesn't that make you feel good just to think of that? I found something else about fingernails. They're not only good for scratching, but under the fingernail there's an enormous number of sensitive nerve ends. I found that no matter how much of a body you have, and some of us have a lot of body, when that fingernail was gone, that was the only part I hit. Didn't hit my head, didn't hit my toe, didn't hit my nose, but that little stupid fingernail that was gone, that's a point I'd always hit. And it was an electric shock every time. Very uncomfortable. And so I have great respect for fingernails, and you should have great respect for everybody in this congregation. Some of them are nothing but fingernails. But boy do we miss them when they're not here.

**Benediction**

Dear God, our Father, we thank You for the fact that we are alive and well in Christ. We pray Thy blessing upon this Thy word and that Thou will help us to realize that we are a unique species, a new breed, we who are members of Christ, we who are part of the church. And as a local expression in that body, we are the Lord's working arm. Help us, we pray to rise with new zeal and new enthusiasm and new confidence to our calling as Berean Memorial church. We have a message. We know what we're talking about because we know the Scriptures. Give us courage, give us graciousness of participation, and help us to keep our eyes on our own examination day before Thy judgment seat. We pray in Jesus' name, amen.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1995

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