***The Objectives of the Local Church

Colossians 1:1-2

COL-014***

Our topic is "The Salutation," number 14 in Colossians 1:1-2.

**The Church**

The local church is the visible organizational expression of the church universal – that church which is the living organism, the body of Christ. The apostle Paul wrote the book of Colossians to believers who were part of the universal church in Christ, and to the local church in the city of Colossae. The word "church" in the New Testament is used in several ways relative to the local church. First, it is used in the singular of a specific individual congregation which exists at some point on earth. Romans 16:5 is an example. Secondly, it is used in the singular of all believers worldwide viewed as a whole on earth (1 Corinthians 12:28). Then it is used also in the singular for many individual church organizations in a certain geographic area. And they are viewed as if they were all one church instead of a bunch of individual churches. Acts 9:31 uses it in that way. And finally, the word "church," relative to the local ministry, is used in the plural ("churches") for many individual churches in a geographic area, which also are viewed collectively as if they were one church (Galatians 1:2).

I stress that to you, in part, so that you are aware that sometimes, when the apostle speaks about the church in Corinth, he is not speaking of one single organization. And when he is speaking about the elders of the church in Ephesus, he is not speaking about many elders in one single church. It was not possible, with the hundreds and hundreds of Christians, who had no church buildings, but only met in people's homes, and little groups, to have had large congregations. Each of them had one elder. He was the single spiritual leader. And when Paul said, "I want to speak to the elders of Ephesus," at the seashores, which was on his way to Jerusalem, which was going to trigger that four years of imprisonment, he wasn't speaking about one local church. He was speaking about many churches which reviewed as a whole.

So, the local church does exist on the earth. We respect this. This is extremely important. There are some denominational groups which do not believe that there is such a thing as a universal church, an invisible body of Christ. They believe that the word "church" only applies to the local church on earth. Now, it is true that most of the times that the word "church" is used in the New Testament, it does refer to the local body. But the local body is simply a reflection of what Jesus said in Matthew 16:18: "I will build My church," which was the invisible body of Christ. Now, the local church is a group of people who are united for worship; for prayer; for instruction; for ordinances (recognizing the ordinances); for procedures of various kinds; for discipline; and, for testimony.

This is summarized for us in Acts 2:42: "And they (the Christians) were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to the breaking of bread, and to prayer." There you have the fundamental purposes of a local church. It's for people to get together to be taught doctrine. The word "teaching" is the apostle's doctrine. They are to have spiritual fellowship with one another: to reinforce; to encourage; and, to assist. The breaking of bread refers here primarily to observing the Lord's Supper, but also to times of social meals. And then they are called to prayer – gathering together to pray as a group.

Many denominational distinctions today are actually a contradiction of the church universal. And for that reason, they are into traditions which are unfounded in the New Testament. What's true of the local church has to always be compatible with the universal church. You cannot be interjecting something into local church life which is incompatible with the church as a whole, in terms of the body of Christ.

As an organization, the local church has members. That is to decide who can vote in terms of the church business. And it has officers to conduct the church's business. It has facilities in which to conduct that business. And it has a ministry. That ministry is not the same for every church. It changes from locality to locality. The local church is a team of believers that has gathered to do the Lord's work. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself is absent from the earth, and Ephesians 1:20 tells us that He's now seated at the right hand of God in heaven. Therefore, He is no longer here to do His work, and that is our job. Every believer now is in a position where he represents Jesus Christ on this earth. In 2 Corinthians 5:1-20, this is enunciated for us: "Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us, we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."

We have two primary jobs as Christians. We have the job of priesthood. Everybody is his own priest. We have the job of ambassadorship. We are the representatives of God to our society, and it is our job to represent Christ in this way.

Every believer, furthermore, is part of the body of Christ. He is in union with Christ. 1 Corinthians 12:13 says, "By one Holy Spirit we have all been baptized into one body." This is the church universal. So, we have the local aspect as ambassadors to our society, and we have the universal aspect. We are part of the body of Christ.

**Spiritual Gifts**

Now, because Christians are in union with Christ, the Holy Spirit has sovereignly bestowed upon each Christian at least one spiritual gift. This is something that you should always be very conscious of (1 Corinthians 12:11). When you were born again, you received a spiritual gift to serve God: "But one and the same Spirit works all these things." He has been describing various spiritual gifts: "Distributing to each one individually just as He wills." And what that verse tells us is that there are not only skills spiritually for serving God, but that God the Holy Spirit decides which one you have. There are nine of them in operation today. We will not go into those now, but one of these, at least, is your gift. And you have a capacity to serve God with this gift. So, it's incumbent upon you to find out what that gift is.

I also want to stress to you that one of those gifts is the gift of ministry. The gift of ministry is a general service ability that God gives. And some of you have a superb capacity for serving; for ministering to other believers; for ministering to the local congregation; and, for ministering within the circle of our ministries. And I personally think that all of you have certain natural gifts. You have certain natural abilities. You're good at certain things. And while that is not a spiritual gift, when you take that ability, and you dedicate it to God, He takes it under the gift of ministering, and enables you to use it in that way.

Music is not a spiritual gift. When you hear some people perform, you know that that's true. But somebody with that skill, who uses it in subjection to the will of God, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the gift of ministry overcomes and overshadows that ability of music, and that person stands up and performs a work of God. And when that work is finished, the computers in heaven click another segment of eternal reward to be given. The gift of ministering is a wonderful gift. And all that you are in, and all that you're able to do comes under that category of serving God.

The different parts of ministering make us all part of one body. And the body, as 1 Corinthians 12 points out, has many parts. This is analogous to spiritual gifts in the body of Christ. We have many working parts that fit together. The spiritual gifts determine one's service and responsibility in the body in its local expression. And if we have some Christian among us who falls by the wayside, that doesn't mean that somebody else is going to be there to do your job. When we come to this time of the year, where we're working intensely on property preparations, on this magnificent campus that God has given us, our minds go back to people that we, in the past, were able to count on, who would be there to perform a certain task. And when they're not there, we miss them. Part of the body of Christ has been fractured off, and we are all the losers for it.

So, you must never sell yourself short – that what you do is insignificant or not important. It doesn't matter whether anybody knows about it. It doesn't matter whether anybody is constantly commending you for what you're doing. It doesn't even matter if I know about it, though most of the time I do. The thing that matters is that God knows about it, and that this is your great gift and your great honor for serving God. When you don't do it, the body of Christ is hurt. You are not a nothing in Berean Church.

Of course, all spiritual gifts depend upon the filling of the Holy Spirit for operation. They are never productive unless you are filled with the Spirit: known sins are confessed; and, you're walking under the guidance of the Spirit of God.

Your spiritual gift is always operational. It doesn't phase in and out. It isn't like the charismatics, who like to claim the gift of healing, and then defend themselves that sometimes they're not able to do it. If you had the gift of healing, you were able to do it every time. The only time you wouldn't be able to use that gift is if you were using it improperly, out of the will of the Spirit of God. But your gift is there to use. But you must be in the Spirit of God's guidance. The filling of the Holy Spirit, for that reason, is more important than the spiritual gift itself.

**Love**

Just read through 1 Corinthians 13. It uses the word "love," which, as you know, is the primary characteristic of Christian character. When the Holy Spirit lists the fruit of the spirit, the number one thing which represents everything that follows, is love. And when 1 Corinthians 13 uses the word "love," it means to be filled with the Spirit. That means that you are on track with God's feelings and emotions. So, it says, "If I have not love (it means if I have not fulfilling of the Spirit, then" thus and thus and so is worthless. So, this is important in fulfilling our mission.

For maximum divine production from spiritual gifts, Christians need not only the filling of the spirit, but they also need the guidance of doctrine. And for that reason, they need to be taught the Word of God, and here comes the local church. Whatever else you may have as sources of instruction, the number one source provided for you by God is this room and this church organization. Ultimately, if this is not productive, you will not get very far.

It is to the advantage of every believer to have a spiritual gift. It is the basis of your rewards in heaven. You cannot choose this gift, as we have read. The Spirit gives it to us by His choice.

It is also to the advantage of the body of Christ to have all of the spiritual gifts that are permanent in operation today. It is always sad if a local church does not have administrators, for example. It's terrible if you don't have the gift of administration. That is a gift that is so crucial to the conduct of the local church. You need leaders – people who can take charge in a segment and do the job, and who are motivated by the power of God to use that gift, so that we don't have to stay after people to do their jobs and to lead their segment. It is to the advantage of the body for us to have all of the spiritual gifts. And it is wonderful to look out across a congregation like Berean. It's not big, but every gift is there. Not a one of them is missing. Somebody in this group possesses a gift (or gifts), such that every one of these gifts is represented in this body.

One of the great factors of a local church is the consistence of believers in fellowship of service through the area of their spiritual gifts. Divine good production in the Christian life, from service, depends upon knowing how to stay in temporal fellowship. Your gift is useless unless you are in a position of fellowship of the Spirit of God, with your sins confessed. All Christians, of course, have the same position in Christ. In that respect, every one of you is a chief. But in time on earth, Christians have different positions with their spiritual gifts. Some of you are chiefs. Some of you are sub-chiefs. And most of you are Indians in the operation. Some of you are leaders at the highest echelons. Some of you are leaders at a lower level. And most of us are followers. And when that structure is respected, and everybody functions upon it, the work that God can accomplish is amazing.

The distinction of different gifts does not make one gift inferior to another. Charismatics always think that speaking in babel is the greatest gift of all, and they all want to talk in languages, and none of them ever do. But one gift is not more important than another gift. Each gift determines the role that you will play.

Much that takes place in the local church today is disoriented, because Christians do not understand this principle of spiritual gifts; the principle of knowing doctrine; the principle of temporal fellowship; and, not the least of which, is the principle of the difference between Israel and the church. Much that goes on as Christian service today is useless gobbledygook – meaningless. It makes people feel good, but it is still treading on Old Testament ground. When you walk into a church, and you see an altar up front, that should tell you a great deal. This is not a place that understands the New Testament grace era. You're looking at a group of people who still think that they have to make sacrifices. Although they're bloodless, they still need an altar to approach God. No, you don't need an altar anymore, because the one sacrifice of Christ has been made. If you walk into a church, and the whole services ritual, there's one word for a ritualistic service: boring. It's enormously boring. I don't see how people continue going to church year-after-year, knowing that the preacher is going to say something, and they're going to respond, and they're going to go back and forth. But those people are not there to come to know God through the Word of God. They're there to put in their time to get their merit.

Some churches observe holy days for special worship days. And these holy days, though not found in the New Testament, are something brought over from the Old Testament. You have to have holy days. The priests wear robes (vestments). Well, we won't fault you if you want to wear a gown in the pulpit as you lead, but it is a little hangover from the Old Testament.

I was thinking the other day that if I ever get a very large congregation, I'm going to do like the pastors of the Moody Memorial Church in Chicago always did, in that huge congregation. They wore a Prince Albert coat every morning. On Sunday morning, they wore a formal Prince Albert coat with the long tails in the back. So, when you sat down the chair, you reached back, and you flipped them up, and sat down, I thought, "Now that's class!" Sometimes I sit up here, and I do that. I just pretend. But I thought, "That's class." And it's a kind of a gown. It's a kind of a uniform. And we won't fault you for that. But the vestments don't mean a thing.

We have people who look upon spiritual leadership as priests today. Churches look upon their pastors if he were a priest. And when they want to go to God, they go to him. That is wrong. You are the priest. If you want to go to God, then go there directly. You already have access to Him.

There's the idea of a plurality of elders in the local assembly to form a committee to dominate the sheep. The sheep are viewed as something stupid. Ordinary sheep are, but sheep who are Christians, filled with the spirit of God, and taught by doctrine, are not stupid. They know the story, and they know the drill.

Then there are methods of doing God's work of various kinds: under pressures; under demands; and, under force, in the Old Testament legalistic system, such as tithing. And people are very proud that their church does a tithing system. And they should be embarrassed by that. They should be terribly embarrassed that, here in the age of grace, they're still groveling around in a system like tithing, as if that were going to make Christians more generous.

**The Kingdom of Heaven**

So, the local church is a very important institution, reflecting the body of Christ, the church invisible. There are some things that characterize the nature of the church in this age. For one thing, the Lord pointed out to us the course of the present local church age. We have that summarized for us in a group of parables in Matthew 13. We won't look at those in detail, but the Lord calls those "the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven." The kingdom of Heaven refers to the era when heaven is ruling upon this earth. It's a term particularly associated with kingdom rule. But now the kingdom of heaven, the rule of Christ upon this earth, is in a stage, as you know now, between two mountain peaks: the First and Second comings of Christ. And what is going on now is the church age. Now the church age is part of the kingdom of heaven's influence and rule on this earth, but it is in what Jesus calls "a mystery" form – the secret of the church. It is in a secret form. Therefore, it is not in a normative state.

The church age is an aspect of God's rule on this earth, though it was unforeseen in the Old Testament. And there are certain things that, therefore, were not revealed before about the church age. It has certain characteristics. From these parables, we learn that the church congregations will be mixed with true and false believers: true believers; and, false professors. So, we have the parable of the wheat and the terrors. We have a dragnet that comes in and brings good and bad fish. All of Matthew 13 is a symbolic presentation of what is going to be characteristic of the church age.

We also have the fact that there's a time of monstrous ecclesiastical growth, in organization. We have that in the parable of the mustard seed. It is a little seed, and it grows into an enormous tree. And the birds of the heaven, which symbolize agents of Satan in Scripture, lodge in it. And certainly, the ecclesiastical organization of the church has grown enormous.

Then we have revealed that there will be a movement toward apostasy – falling away from the true Word of God. This is in the parable of the woman who hides a little bit of yeast in a loaf of bread, and pretty soon the whole loaf is contaminated by this yeast. And that is what is happening, and has happened in Christendom, particularly since the 1920s, when great denominations, once true to the Word of God, have now become apostate in their beliefs. And now, instead of being sources of enlightening, are sources of great darkness.

Then we also have indicated in one of the parables that during this age of the church, Israel is like a treasure hidden by God in society, worldwide. And we have the parable of the hidden treasure. That refers to Israel, which is very valuable to God, but which is now not in His favor, but is ultimately the apple of His eye. And the nation is hidden as a treasure to be uncovered in due time at the Second Coming.

Then we're told that the church itself is bought and built by Jesus Christ, and there the church is described in the parable of the pearl of great price. The church is that great pearl.

Now, all of this is a reflection of what is true of this age, and that is certainly our case. What we have in the New Testament is gradual information about the local church. The New Testament was written over an extended period of time, from Pentecost to Patmos. And this means that a brand-new thing had to begin with a brand-new organization. So, they started it with a very simple church structure. Gradually, as time went by, and more revelation came, the organization of the church became more sophisticated. The divine plan for the local church evolved by stages as it was progressively revealed in the New Testament books. That progression began with the early Pauline epistles: Galatians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and Romans. They give us the first basic insights of what a local church should be like. Then as time went by, Paul wrote later the pastoral epistles: 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. And that gave us a lot more information. Then came the general epistles: 1 and 2 Peter, Hebrews, and Jude. And again, the concept of what a local church should be like; how it should be structured; and, what its job is became even clearer. And finally, with the Johannine writings: 1, 2 and 3 John, and Revelation, the picture became quite complete.

The stages of the revelation about the local church organization and the New Testament church – we have little detail of, at first, in Paul's first writings. But by the time we get to his prison epistles and later, we have the full organizational structure in mind. That is illustrated in Philippians 1:1, where Paul says, "Paul and Timothy, bond servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers (that's another word for bishop, or pastor-teacher – they're all the same people) and the deacons." So, here the structures has come now where you have two main offices in the local church. You have pastors and you have deacons. These pastors are called also elders. Paul first uses the word "elder" in his prison epistles. But in Paul's later pastoral epistles, he gives a lot of instruction about the local church organization with its elder-bishop-pastor, and the deacons.

**Church Officers**

This pattern indicates that Paul, in his last epistles, was really stressing the type of local church officers and organization which were to replace the era of the apostles and the apostolic envoys. Initially the apostles ran things. They were like the pastor-teachers. They were the elders, and they were called "elders," as per the Jewish pattern. They ran everything, or their envoys ran things, like Titus and Timothy and Luke. They were designated to go and perform missions. Now, the apostles are going to die off. They will never be replaced. There will never be any more apostles after John dies. That was a temporary gift. And the apostles have finished writing the New Testament. And now the time has come to shift gears to the normal organization of the local church with its pastor-teacher-elder, and the deacons.

The general epistles, which were written after Paul have detailed references to the local church organization. It indicates that it is divine provision for equipping the saints for service after the apostles die off. In the Old Testament, Israel was responsible for disseminating the Word of God and for evangelism. Today that's the job of the local church. The universal church is unrelated to time or place, while the local church is related to the activities of believers on earth in time.

**The Main Objective of the Local Church**

That, therefore, raises a question: what is the main objective of the local church? Now here we come to the rub. Here we come to where the local church drifts off into outer orbits, very often, and into outer uselessness, because they miss the focus of their purpose. What in the world should we be gathering for? What in the world should we be contributing our money to this organization for? What in the world should we be knocking ourselves out in ministry for? Doing what? It has to have a divine purpose; and, it has to have a divine guidance. So, what is God's plan and purpose for the church-age?

1. **The Christianization of the World?**

One: is it the Christianization of the world? 2 Peter 3:9: "The Lord is not slow about His promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance." Some take this verse and say, "If God doesn't want anyone to perish, His purpose is to Christianize the whole world." Well, probably 250 years ago, 25% of the world would consider themselves Christian. Today it's probably nearer 2%, of all the people in the world. In any case, it is less than it has been in generations and times (decades) past. So, we're not doing very good progress if the purpose of the church is to Christianize the world. That is obviously not the plan of God.

1. **The Evangelization of the World?**

How about merely the evangelization of the world? We do have basis for that objective. For example, Matthew 28:19-20: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you, and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Is it the purpose of the church to evangelize the world?

There are constant movements. We have para-church organizations that are in existence who are constantly creating some new rally, and some new objectives. And they are led by men who operate on that. They operate by creating great movements; great rallies; and, great events that hold everybody's attention, and they focus on it. And they bring people from all groups together in that. And when they finish with that, they go to another one. One of these organizations put into a high motion worldwide operation, that by 1985 all of the world would be evangelized. Well, it didn't happen.

From 32 to 64 A.D., this was the time of Emperor Nero. There was a great spread of the gospel in the ancient known world, and the great establishment of many churches. From 64 to 313 A.D., the church was underground, until the Roman Emperor Constantine forced its acceptance as the religion of the Roman Empire. Then from 313 to 476 AD, the church, as a religion, spread through the Roman Empire. It was no longer Christianity. It became a religion. True Christianity was gradually perverted by Babylonianism, the religion of Nimrod, and eventuated in its finest form as the Roman Catholic Church today, the most paganistic religious exercise and organization on the face of the earth today. This was very subtle – thinking that it has something to do with God when it has nothing to do with God at all. From 476, then, to the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century, there was very little evangelization. The modern mission movement only began within the last 150 years. What we think is commonplace in modern missions, you must remember, was not thought of before. Groups and churches were not evangelizing the world. This was gradual, as people went back to studying the Bible – that they became burdened for the fact that they're not getting the Word out to people of all the cultures of the world.

There are current movements that think that the ministry of the church is to evangelize the world. Well, do we want to evangelize the world? Yes, we do. Do we want to evangelize people? Yes, we do. Do we want to bring a Christianized society together? Yes, we do. Will we be able to do that? No, that cannot be our mission.

1. **To Build up the Church**

How about this one? Is our mission is to build up the church, the body of Christ? This is, in Scripture, the declared plan of Jesus Christ (Matthew 16:18). Jesus was crossing the line out of Israel. He was now formally rejected now by the Jewish people and their leaders. He was standing in Caesarea-Philippi on gentile territory, Jesus says, in Matthews 16:18, "And I also say to you that you are Peter (a little pebble), and upon this rock (the great rock of your confession that I am the Christ, the Son of the living God), I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it."

**The Great Commission**

Then we read, in Matthew 28:18-20, the Great Commission. There's something that you should know about the Great Commission. Please turn back to it: Matthew 28:18-20. While Jesus said that He was going to build His church, which gives us our first indication of what our mission is, here's a further clarification of how that is to be done: "And Jesus came up and spoke to them saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth." He is the conquering Christ. Then he said, in Matthew 28:19, "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."

There is no direct command "to go" in this verse. Missionaries sometimes use this verse, but they misuse it. This verse is not a command to go out and tell the gospel, because the Greek grammar tells us something else. This is in a grammatical construction. The Greek calls it the aorist active participle. This is a Greek grammatical construction which tells us that this is not the main action of the sentence, and you can't tell that reading the English verse. But when we read the Greek Bible, and we see this grammatical structure, we say, "Aha, that's not the main action. That's not the main verb." What is?

It's in the next verse: "Teaching them." Teaching is the main verb of this sentence, and verses 19-20 are one sentence. So, "teach" is the main verb, and it happens to be a command. It is what we are told to do. The Greek word is "matheteuo" M A T H E T E U O (math-ayt-yoo'-o). It's an aorist active imperative, and it tells us what we are to do.

So, the way to translate this is: "As you go, make disciples." What is that telling us? Your purpose, believers, is: as you go about through pagan unsaved society, you teach them the Word of God. You're a teacher of doctrine. This means "As you move through society." The emphasis is not: "Go out there." The emphasis is: when you are out there in that sinful society, which surround you all the time, teach them the principles of the Word of God, starting with salvation, and going on to rewards. Teach them doctrine, or make it accessible to them.

I was in an office recently. The secretary was there. She knew me, and I didn't know her. When she met me, she was thrilled. Well, that didn't surprise me [jokingly]. She said, "Oh, is that who you are?" And she says, "I've just wanted to talk to you for so long." And then she went off into asking me questions about the Bible. And these were things that concerned her. She says, "I have unsaved relatives. Some are very close to me. How am I going to feel when I'm in heaven, and they're in hell? How can I be happy?" That is a good question. And I had to tell her a little bit about the fact that our own transformation in the image of Christ will give us God's perspective and point of view upon those who end up in the lake of fire by their own choice, and that, while we take no pleasure in that, as God wishes that all of you were saved, and He takes no pleasure (the Bible says) in anybody being lost, yet the justice of God brings us discomfort. We know that the fair thing has been done, and the inevitable thing takes place. And on that side, I told her, "I think we'll understand it more."

Well, as she talked on one thing after another, I told her, "If you would like, we have a tape ministry, and I can give you catalog, and it will take up many of these questions that you're asking. She says, "You can?" And I said, "Yes." Now, you don't often get an eager beaver like that. So, I zapped on home, and got her a brochure for evangelism, and the tape catalog, and showed her where the basics were, and the advanced study in Philippians. And I said, "If you go through that, you're going to be head and shoulders above anybody you know, probably, when it comes to knowing God and walking with God."

So, this is the example. I just happened to go into this place on other business. But as I went, God brought this person who was reaching out, and the thing I was to give them was not an invitation to attend be church, but to give them the Word of God. And that's the beauty of the tape ministry and with the catalog. You can do it. She said, "But I need more than two tapes. My mother and I will devour these." That's just a figure of speech – that means that they're going to listen to them: "We're going to devour these." And I said, "Well, if you come by a Berean Church service, the tape room is always open. You go up there and get several more." I sneak that in. But I said, "As soon as you get your tapes, just send the next request in, and they'll send it to you.

Well, that's what this verse is talking about As you're going through life, that's what you're doing already. We're not telling you to go. You are already in that service. And I stress this to you so that you don't think that there are missionaries here, and that you are not part of them. You are a missionary.

Years ago, we used to have a big sign across the front that said, "Every unsaved heart, a mission field; every believer, a missionary." Well said! And people used to look up at that, and all throughout the service they were reminded: every unsafe heart, a mission field; every believer, a missionary. And this is what is a mission of the local church: "As you go, make disciples." This commission tells us what we are to be doing as we go through life: the instruction of people in the Word of God.

However, evangelism is only part of this commission. This commission starts with the gospel. But people must be given it if they're going to function as believers, and not become spiritual casualties. They must become what Paul called the full counsel of the Word of God – the full impact of church truth in the grace age.

Making disciples begins with the grace message of salvation. It requires the growth of doctrine so that you can reach the objective that is put forth for each one of us. 2 Timothy 2:2 is your final objective: "And the things which you have heard from me, in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."

So, this is God's plan for this age, and for ourselves, and for our children. The divine objective of this age is the functioning of the local church to reach the world with the gospel. And this plan, executed through the local church ministry, incorporates all the various agencies that we have: our Christian school; our youth clubs; and, whatever we do – reinforcing our top priority, which is the home. And that objective cannot be reached unless Christians are prepared to do the work. No preacher is ever going to reach the world with the Word of God, let alone the gospel. Only through Christians who, as they go, they perform that service, will this be accomplished.

So, our lot in life is not the betterment of man's condition now – social reforms. This is the goal of liberalism, neo-orthodoxy, and neo-evangelicalism. The social gospel is the idea that comes from evolution: "Man can improve his lot on his own. Things get better." That is the fallacy. All of society will never be saved. So, there will be no general Christian solution to social ills possible. Anytime the Christians try to band together and say "We're going to get voting power," they will find that the opposition rises up against them and overwhelms them. Society is only going to be improved through the regeneration of individuals, which is a byproduct of Christians performing the mission of the church age – building up the church, so that believers can do the work of the ministry.

1. **Feed the Flock**

So, here it is. The local church is ultimately this, primarily. It's a feeding and training station. Please notice that John 21:15 tells us it's a feeding station: "So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?' He said to Him, 'Yes Lord, you know that I love you.' And He said to him, 'Tend (or feed) My lambs."

Then there's 1 Peter 5:1-2, "Therefore, I exhort the elders (the pastor-teachers) among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a particular also of the glory that is to be revealed. Shepherds, feed the flock of God among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God, and not for the sordid gain, but with eagerness."

What is the mission of the local church? It is to feed people upon the Word of God. Secondly, it is a training station. We've looked before at Ephesians 4:11-16: "And he gave some as apostles; some as prophets; some as evangelists; and, some as pastor-teachers, for the equipping of the saints (giving them combat gear); for the work of the service (so that they can serve in the angelic warfare); and, to build up the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man spiritually, 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, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects unto Him who is the Head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part (your spiritual gift) causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love."

There's your classic statement of what is the mission of the church. The mission is to prepared Christians to know how to walk with God, and not become spiritual casualties – little, whiny, sniveling, self-oriented people with eyes on themselves, who, when they hit a hard point, and a strife, and a crisis condition in their lives, that they're so preoccupied with themselves that they lose their orientation to what they've been called to do.

Jesus said, "I never promised you a bed of roses." That would make a good song title [jokingly]. And that's a scriptural position. Whatever comes, we take it in stride. The Spirit of God is our strength. He will never let us down. And Christ lives within us.

This is the divine purpose of the local church: to prepare people for the work of the ministry. And if you find a church like that, you ought to knock yourself out supporting it. You should never be disloyal to it, because that kind of an attitude is to be disloyal to Christ. That kind of church is worth preserving. You should put everything you have; everything you are; and, everything you possess at the disposal of that ministry. When it's doing the work of orienting people to the mind of God, nothing is greater, and no calling is higher. And if they're not doing that for you, then you are going to be shortchanged at the judgment's seat of Christ. You should thank God that, whatever your condition is when you stand before Him, it'll never be because you were not told.

God our Father, we thank You for this instruction which we received today from the Word of God.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1995

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