***A Summary of the Doctrine of the Church, No. 2

Colossians 1:15-20

COL-145***

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Our subject is "Hymn in Honor of Christ," segment number 35 in Colossians 1:15-20.

I have observed, as I'm sure you have, that when people do not like the plain meaning of the words of Scripture (what Scripture is saying), they reinterpret the Bible. Words are given symbolic meaning, and a theology is built upon human reason which is compatible with the human viewpoint of the sin nature. Because unsaved people have no fear of God, they have no hesitancy to choose to speak for Him in spiritual matters. The result is that, instead of the mind of a holy God on matters of life and death, from the objective source of Scripture, man is left with the mind of sinful men from the subjective source of personal feelings and experiences. This is a condition that has existed from the very first, and one which the Lord, on various occasions, tried to warn us about: people will think they're smarter than God. But, in fact, Jesus says that they're blind to spiritual realities, and we should never be deceived by them.

In Matthew 15:10-14, we read, "And after He (Jesus) called the multitude to Him, He said to them, 'Hear and understand. Not what enters into the mouth defiles a man, but what proceeds out of the mouth – this defiles the man.'" The background of this Scriptures is that the Pharisees, who were carrying on with their variety of religious activities of one kind and another (ceremonial activities – their very legalistic ways), they thought that this was setting them up into a relationship with God. And Jesus was saying to them, "All of this carefulness that you don't eat unclean food, and you don't do this, and you don't do that, does not justify you, and does not make you godly. And what, in fact, happens that defiles a man is what comes from within him. It's what the sin nature is permitted to spew up.

Verse 12" "Then the disciples came and said to Him, 'Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this statement?' But He answered and said, 'Every plant which My Heavenly Father did not plant, shall be rooted up. Let them alone. They are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit.'" Now, that's not hard to understand. It's' very simple. And that's the truth. And yet, what do people do today? They rush to the blind religious leaders. They rush to all these blind popular religious leaders, and all these blind popular pulpits. Whereas, they should be saying, "Wait a minute, this is not expository explanation of the Bible that I'm getting here. This is the mind of man. This is not the mind of God. Therefore you are a blind leader. I'm already blind. How can you lead me?"

In Luke 6:39-40, the Lord added this: "And He (Jesus) also spoke a parable to them: 'A blind man cannot guide a blind man, can he? Will they not both fall into a pit? A pupil is not above his teacher, but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher." And that's what I've been trying to alert you to – that God will hold you responsible for the teacher you listen to, because I guarantee you that you'll become like that teacher. That teacher's instruction will become your mind. And if that teacher's instruction is human viewpoint, that's what you'll have. You'll have the mind of Satan. And that's why God will hold you responsible for putting money in the offering box and the offering plate to support what that teacher is doing, because that teacher has corrupted you, if he has not explained the Scripture. And you should not financially support it. You should not even support it with your attendance.

Now, obviously where the Word of God is proclaimed and the seats are empty, somebody's telling God, "I don't support your propagating of the Word of God. That's why I'm not in here filling that seat. I could be there. I'm not kept from being there." And the same point is being made for that which is godly work as can be made by ungodly work.

Today, people create their own myths about what God believes. It's on television. Anytime Bill Moyer comes on with his "Genesis" and other programs, you have a wild Mr. Toad's ride into goony land, religious thinking. And yet, here's a graduate of a seminary – a prominent man. And people cannot listen enough. And their mind is corrupted away from the Word of God, and from loyalty to the Lord Jesus.

Throughout history, men have recorded their own sacred Scriptures based on their own human reason in order to justify the beliefs that they want to have, and which they're claiming are the beliefs of God. This is done to have freedom to exercise the evil of human good, and of sins from the sin nature.

**Mormonism**

I watched a recent television special which portrayed the history; the organization; and, the beliefs of the Mormon Church. Because I am so well-acquainted with Mormon beliefs in history, I was keenly aware of how the program had been sanitized. They made a cult of Satan look even like it was Christian. The program presented Joseph Smith as a martyr for Mormon beliefs. It made a big point of that. He was slain by a hateful mob, while he was in jail, awaiting trial for his teachings.

However, what the program failed to point out was that Joseph Smith was in jail because he had ordered his followers to destroy the newspaper plant in Nauvoo, Illinois. They took the presses; broke them into pieces; threw the stuff out into the street; and, destroyed the editor's capacity to put out a newspaper. And the program failed to point out that the reason for this was that the editor had printed an article exposing Joseph Smith's practice of adultery under the guise of sacred plural marriages. Smith claimed to have a revelation from God that stated that any man who did not have several wives would not enter the highest heaven. He would not be exalted into the celestial heaven. And polygamy was established as a command from God.

He had a little problem propagating this idea at first. He kept it secret. He practiced it on the sly, but he kept it secret. His wife, Emma, he felt, would not be too keen on the idea. But the revelation that he had, specifically, I noticed when I read it, told Emma that she should accept this from God. The program never said that. That's why he was in jail for destroying the press: for trying to silence what was being done, and that the result was that the mob was so enraged by this arrogant act of muscle being exercised toward the people that they went to the jail. Things got out of hand. Joseph Smith managed to shoot three of them with his pistol before he was killed, and his final words were the Masonic cry for help: "Oh Lord, is there no help for the widow's son?" That's a code word in Mormonism. If you shout that, any Mormon around you will come running to help you, and that was his last call: "Oh Lord, is there no help for the widow's son?" And he died, and left behind him a cult that has grown to unbelievable proportions, because he created a new body of Scripture.

Joseph Smith's personal history of involvement in the occult, and his various cons which angered his non-Mormon victims, were never discussed in the program. The doctrine of personal godhead for every Mormon was glossed over. That's what all Mormons live for – the day that they're going to become gods. They did point out the Mormon pagan doctrine of their belief that God is a deified human being, and that: "As He now is, they will become." The creation of sacred Scriptures by Joseph Smith were treated as revelations on the par with the Old and New Testament. They never pointed out however, that over 4,000 times, the Book of Mormon, in later additions, has had to be corrected for obvious errors of various kinds. The Bible has never had to be corrected.

Also, they never did point out that Joseph Smith had been exposed as a total deceiver in his claim to be able to translate all languages, because when an Egyptian papyrus came into his hand, he claimed to translate it, and discovered that it was the Book of Abraham, a sacred book now of the Mormon Church. And nobody could challenge him at that time in hieroglyphics. Nobody could read it. The key to that came later with the finding of the Rosetta Stone. But here is Joseph Smith claiming to translate this as a sacred Scripture from God.

Well, unfortunately he didn't destroy the papyrus that he translated from. It ended up in the Metropolitan Museum in New York. And they discovered it there – actually, I think it was a Mormon researcher. And in the columns were the notations of Joseph Smith's own handwriting. They knew this was it. When they gave it to the prominent Egyptologist of the Mormon Church, Dr. D.J. Nelson, he was horrified. He said, this is not what is in the book of the book of Abraham. This is a ceremony for the Egyptian dead to carry them across to the underworld. It's a pagan document. And when the church refused to admit that they had been deceived, and that their prophet had not told them the truth (which is the first sign that he's not a prophet of God), Dr. Nelson said, “That's it. My family and I resign from the Mormon Church.”

When some of us visited the Mormon temple here in Dallas before it was dedicated, and closed to the public, I asked our guide, "Is the book of Abraham still part of your sacred Scriptures?" He said, "Oh yes. Yes, it is." And I said, "Does it not bother you that it has been demonstrated now by the discovery of the document from the papyrus from which Joseph Smith translated this, that what he said was in the papyrus hieroglyphics is not what it really said. He got a little red and indignant, and said, "No, it doesn't bother me at all." Now, that's faith folks. That's faith like you wouldn't believe it: "I don't care what the facts are, don't confuse me." And none of that was pointed out on the program.

The social welfare works of the Mormon Church, which are extensive, were lauded as good works. And the idea was that this confirms their relationship to Christianity and Jesus Christ, because, naturally, the people who put on the program didn't know the difference between human good and divine good works.

There was no clear distinction made between the Mormon doctrine of salvation based on one's worthiness, and salvation by the grace of God, apart from one's worthiness, based on the worthiness of Jesus Christ and His payment of death on the cross for the sins of mankind. Instead, they pointed out that Mormons are baptized for the dead because you can't go to heaven if you don't have water baptism. And they did not point out that, in the temples that they build, they carry on the Masonic ceremonies that Joseph Smith took over from the Masons, and that these Masonic ceremonies are the way you get up to the highest heavens.

In short, Mormonism is the product of no expository preaching. It is the result of no expository preaching of God's inerrant Bible in order to convey the people the mind of God. There is no true doctrine of the church in Mormonism, as separate from Israel. As a matter of fact, Mormons consider themselves the new Israel, and they refer everyone else as gentiles. There is no concept in Mormonism of the grace of God, which distinguishes the lifestyle of Christians under grace from that of Israel under Law. Mormons are very devoted to proving themselves worthy to go to heaven. That is what they live for. That is why Mormons are so moral. That is why the FBI looks for Mormons to bring into the service. That is why the CIA looks for Mormon men and women to bring into the service, because they can count on their morality, because if they're not moral, they're not going to make it to heaven. There was no understanding in Mormonism of the Holy Spirit as the one who guides the believer in into God's will, and then carries out that will for him.

The TV program dignified a religion which has been created by Satan, followed now by 15 million people, and which, of all things, uses the Lord Jesus Christ as its focus point. But then Jesus said, "This is the way it's going to happen." Matthew 7:21-23: "The Lord said, 'Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord' (and the Mormons use that word all the time) will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven.'" And the will of His Father is to accept Jesus Christ as personal Savior: "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name, cast out demons, and in your name performed many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you. Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'"

That is exactly what is happening. That program portrayed it so effectively. How can people be so deceived? No explanatory preaching of the Bible. People who do not have a pastor-teacher explaining Scripture to them by a proper technique of interpretation cannot heed the Lord's warning in Matthew 7:15-20. And every one of us is obligated to obey this warning: "Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves." They look good on the outside. And nobody looks as good as a Mormon on the outside. Matthew 7:16: "You'll know them by their fruits."

Now, in this context, what is being taught here of their fruits is not their lifestyle, but their doctrines – what they teach. That's why Matthew 7:13-14 say that the doctrine of heaven is through a narrow gate, and that the gate is small that leads to eternal life, and the way is narrow. And there are only a few who are ever going to find it, because that is Jesus Christ. He is the gate. He is the narrow road.

Matthew 7:16-19 says, "You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles, are they? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you'll know them by their fruits." You'll know them by what they teach. And then, in the verse that we just read (Matthew 7:21), Jesus says, "Many of those people I will not even accept. I will completely reject them, though they claim to have been serving me.

Satan, therefore, constantly creates antagonism, rejection, ridicule, and misrepresentation of churches which deliver an expository preaching ministry, verse-by-verse, through a book of the Bible. That's why we are under attack, and we'll be under more intense attack. And you should not be swayed from your firm dedication that out there, in all this religious world, where the majority is, there's something better. There's nothing better than expository, explanatory preaching of the Word of God, because that's the way you get to think the way God thinks.

**The Doctrine of the Church**

We have been bringing all of our study of the doctrine of the church together in a summary. We have pointed out three points thus far.

1. **"Ekklesia"**

The Greek word "ekklesia" for "church" means a call out assembly of people from the mass of Jews and gentiles.

1. **A Mystery (A Secret)**

Two, the church was a mystery "musterion" (moos-tay'-ree-on), or "secret" of God, unrevealed in Old Testament Scriptures.

1. **The Gospels**

The doctrine of the church is not found in the New Testament gospels except a reference in Matthew 16:18, where Jesus says, "I will build My church," and in John 13–17.

We're going to continue with the summary. But I do want to point out to you that what you are going to hear is a rarity of knowledge among Christians. Most people who are Christians will have hardly the foggiest notion of what it means to be a member of the church, the body of Christ. So listen carefully.

1. **After Christ's Ascension**

The church age could not begin until after the Lord Jesus Christ had been crucified; had been resurrected; and, had ascended into heaven to be seated at the right hand of the Father in a glorified body. The Lord Jesus Christ had to purchase the church with His own blood (Ephesians 5:25-27, 1 Peter 1:18-19). Christ had to then rise from the dead to give the church resurrection life (Colossians 3:1-2). If He was not raised, then we would not be raised.

Then, Christ also had to ascend to heaven to be head over all things to the church (Ephesians 1:20-23). So, there could not have been a church in the Old Testament until these three basic things were done:

* 1. **Paid for Sin**

That He had paid for the sins of the world with his blood.

* 1. **Death and Resurrection**

That He had been buried and been raised back to life.

* 1. **Ascension**

That He had ascended to heaven to be seated at the right hand of God the Father, and to be supreme over all things.

The crucifixion, the death, the resurrection, and the ascension of Jesus Christ all took place during the age of Israel. The tribulation and the millennium, which are part of the age of Israel, are not part of the church age. They follow the church age. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit could not descend from heaven to replace Jesus Christ here on this earth to begin the church until Christ was back in heaven. In John 16:7, the Lord said, "But I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away. For if I do not go away, the Helper shall not come to you. But if (first-condition 'if' in the Greek) I go, I will send Him to you." The Helper to come was the Holy Spirit.

1. **Pentecost**

The church age began on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). On that day, the Holy Spirit, for the first time, baptized a group of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ into one body, and they coalesce into a body to form the church. The fact of the baptism of the Holy Spirit taking place on the day of Pentecost is confirmed to us by a subsequent Scripture.

Please notice that Acts chapter 2 doesn't say that they were baptized by the Holy Spirit. Acts 2:1-4: "And when the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues, as of fire, distributing themselves, and they rested on each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues or languages as the Spirit was giving them utterance."

Now go over to Acts 11. It is on this occasion that, seven years after Pentecost and the church began, God now moves to bring gentiles in. Up to now, it has been all Jewish. Seven years later, Peter is sent to proclaim, in the house of Cornelius, the gospel of the grace of God. In Acts 11:15-16, Peter says, "And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as He did upon us at the beginning. And I remember the Word of the Lord – how He used to say, 'John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'"

Aha! In Acts 11:15, Peter says, "He came upon us at the beginning." What God did upon the believers at Pentecost, Acts 11:16 says, was to baptize them with the Holy Spirit, quoting Acts 1:5. So, from this Scripture, Peter says, I knew that these people were in the church, because they experienced the same thing that we had experienced on the day of Pentecost that brought us together into the church; namely, the baptizing of the Holy Spirit. And if they were baptized by the Holy Spirit, they had to be part of the church. Gentiles were indeed not unclean, but they were part of the same body.

Now today, the Holy Spirit baptizes a new believer into the church automatically at the point of his salvation. He is automatically brought into union with Christ. That's what it means to be saved – to be joined into union with Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 12:13 points that out: "For as by one Spirit, we were all baptized into one body, whether the Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, we are all made to drink of one Spirit:" "Made to drink of one Spirit" means that we're all filled with the Holy Spirit. We're baptized (indwelt) by the Holy Spirit.

Now, if you listen to Pat Robertson on the 700 club, he, representing the charismatic movement, will be telling you to seek the baptism of the Holy Spirit. That is what they refer to by "the something more." So far, people like you have become born-again Christians, but they say that there is something more – to be baptized by the Holy Spirit so that now you will have power in your life. But that, of course, is a total deception. That is not the Word of God. That is one of those human inventions, because it is clear from the Word of God that baptism of the Holy Spirit, as Paul points out in 1 Corinthians 12:13, is what places us into the body of Christ, which means that we are believers; we are Christians; and, we are going to heaven. If you're not in the body of Christ, you're not part of the church. If you're not part of the church, you're not going to heaven. That's why everyone else, of all the religions of the world, because they're not in the church (the invisible universal body of Christ), that's why they're not going to heaven. That's why Jews are not going to heaven. Muslims are not going to heaven. All of the religions of the world, like Mormonism or Catholicism, that build around Jesus Christ, but have a works system of salvation – they have not been baptized by the Holy Spirit; they are not in the body of Christ; and, they are not going to heaven. The baptism of the Holy Spirit never took place before the church age, because there was no church in the Old Testament era.

1. **The Stewardship of God's Grace**

The church age is called the stewardship of God's grace. In Ephesians 3:2, Paul says, "If indeed you heard of the stewardship of God's grace, which was given to me for you." Here he is talking about why he knows so much about church doctrine. And he says, "I was brought into an understanding of the stewardship of God's grace." Now the King James Bible, you may remember, translates this by the word "dispensation," which is a proper translation. And that's where we get the word "dispensation" and the principles of dispensation. What is a dispensation? It's a lifestyle. Adam and Eve had a dispensation. They were the first one. They had a lifestyle: "Eat everything you want in this garden, but not of that one tree." That's it. That was their lifestyle. That was what God required of them. That's how they were to live.

The Jews lived under a variety of laws – very specific rules they had to keep. That was their lifestyle. But Christians live under a totally different lifestyle, and that is summed up in the word "grace." So, that's what he is talking about – the stewardship of God's grace, or the "dispensation" of the grace of God. This is an era where maximum grace is available from God to every believer. An example of the unlimited grace of God of this age was the fact that the Jews, for the first seven years, were the only ones who were permitted into the church, in spite of their national rejection of Jesus Christ as the Messiah. Now, that's being graced out. God's grace upon this nation brought them in first.

1. **The Rapture**

The church age ends at the rapture of the church in to heaven (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17). At that time in the future (very near, I think), the Lord Jesus Christ returns from heaven, and He will meet all church believers from Pentecost to that time, dead and alive, in the air. The dead will be raised to meet Him. The living will be caught up with Him.

The church is then taken into heaven. In John 14:2-3, Jesus talks about going to prepare a place for us there. The church-age believers in heaven stand, then, when they arrive in heaven, before the Judgment Seat of Christ, to be rewarded for their divine good works on earth in God's service. 2 Corinthians 5:10 says, "You will all stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ." For what? Well, because, up here on the board, you were born this date, and with it came these spiritual gifts. You were given these spiritual gifts to perform this mission in life for God. You weren't here for anything else. Now, if you had a good life, and if you had enjoyed God's creation, and you enjoyed many things in life, that was all peripheral blessing – graced-out gravy. But the reason for your life was to fulfill your mission. And that's why 2 Corinthians 5:10 says, "You will stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ." And I guarantee you that any Christian who does not regularly attend church services where there's expository instruction of the Word of God is going to have a great disappointment before that Judgment Seat. I don't care how religious they are. I don't care how smart they think they are in Scripture. They're in big trouble. You cannot grow spiritually without the ministry of the local church instruction. And if you decide to blow your life by standing under the instruction of some character who does not understand his job from the pulpit, and who's not equipped to do it, then you're going to have to suffer the consequences. You will pay the price. Now, you'll get a lot of jollies out of a church operation like that, but those jollies are not going to be going to heaven with you.

The other classic passage of course is 1 Corinthians 3:11-15, which point out that our works, under the judgment of God, will either stand, like gold, silver, and precious gems would; or, they'll be burned up like hay, wood, and stubble. And we will accordingly, by our works, receive rewards or loss of reward. It is no small thing to fail to fulfill your life's mission. It is no small thing not to give yourself a chance to fulfill the mission. And in God's name, don't listen to other people. And don't watch, and listen, and get caught up with other movements. Look to the Word of God. Be occupied with Christ. Be focused on the Word. Most of what is out there is wrong. Never forget Noah. Of all the thousands and thousands and thousands of people in the heat of enormous religious activity before the flood, at the Tower of Babel, only nine people were right. And all the rest of them were wrong. Eight of them composed Noah's family. One of them Methuselah, the oldest man that ever lived (969 years). He got a little careless at the end of his life on his vitamins and his exercise, so they cut him off a little bit. Otherwise he'd have made it through a whole millennium. But take a lesson from Methuselah. He got hot on the potato chips and the French fries, and that sort of thing. But in any case, he had a pretty good span in spite of it. But he was the only other one. And one week before the rain started, he dies.

So, eight people are ready to go on board the ark. Can you be right; and, the whole world of the religious community around you, your dearest friends, and your family members, be wrong. You betcha. And if you want to fritter away your life, then give up the principle of expository preaching verse-by-verse through a book of the Bible. And I guarantee that you'll stand at the Judgment Seat of Christ. And boy, will you regret it?

1. **Jews and Gentiles Who Accept Christ as Savior**

The church is made up of both Jews and Gentiles who accept Christ as Savior, regardless of your denominational affiliation. The church universal (the invisible body of Christ) is made up of people from all denominations who are trusting in Him (Galatians 3:26-28). From the point of regeneration, a person ceases to be a Jew or a gentile in God's reckoning. At the point of salvation, all become Christians in the body of Christ, the church.

Colossians 3:11: "A renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, and free, but Christ is all and in all." Being a Jew or a gentile ceases once you enter the body of Christ through the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

1. **Seven Biblical Illustrations**

This is an extensive point. In order to convey the special relationship of church age believers to the Lord Jesus Christ, seven figures are presented in Scripture to convey that relationship.

* 1. **The Shepherd and the Sheep**

First of all, Christ is viewed as the Shepherd, and Christians are His sheep (John 10:1-18). The Lord Jesus Christ cares for every individual believer as the shepherd cares for his sheep. He leads; He feeds; and, He protects them. Jesus Christ will never abandon His sheep since He is the true Shepherd of God. Now you should just about be ready to yell "Hallelujah" because of that. He never abandons His sheep. Sheep tend to do very foolish things. They tend to be downright stupid. And one of the stupidities that they do is that they wander off from their best care; their best food; and, their best sustenance. And then the Bible says that that is a wandering sheep who has lost his way. And in comes the Holy Spirit, through Jesus Christ, the Great Shepherd, reaching out, trying to find that sheep. He'll have 99 back here that are in the fold, that are all having their head screwed on straight, and they're staying with the shepherd – for safety; for food; and, for nourishment. But the one that wandered off, He will go for them. But the problem is that if that sheep keeps running away, and if that sheep will not turn back and respond, that sheep will self-destruct.

* 1. **The Vine and the Branches**

Christ is presented as a vine. The Christians are the branches on Him (John 15:1-17). The eternal life of Jesus Christ flows through the Christian. The blessings of this eternal relationship are to be maintained by temporal fellowship with the Father (your known sins confessed). The life of Christ is in you. Don't shut it off with sin. This figure portrays the basis of the church-age believer's fruitfulness in God's service. Jesus says, "I am the vine. You're but the branch in Me. If you are not in Me, you cannot bear anything. The only reason the branch bears anything fruitful is because it's attached to the vine.

* 1. **The Chief Cornerstone and the Living Blocks**

Christ is the Chief Cornerstone, and Christians are the living blocks built on Him (Ephesians 2:19-22, 1 Peter 2:5, 1 Corinthians 3:9). The church believers constitute the temple of the Holy Spirit. We are now at this point in a magnificent cathedral here in the Berean gym. And God the Holy Spirit is indwelling this temple because He is here present in every one of you believers. And as long as you are here, this room possesses the qualities of the temple of God. We Christians have been built as a holy temple on our Chief Cornerstone, Jesus Christ. And we constitute the temple of the Holy Spirit, corporately and individually. Jesus Christ builds His church temple (Matthew 16:18). This figure portrays the interdependence also of church believers. No one of the interdependence of church believers is independent of one another. All are dependent upon the cornerstone Jesus Christ. None of you are unimportant. None of you are unnecessary. And when you, as a sheep of God, or here in this figure, when you as a living block, decide to put yourself out of the wall, what do you think is going to happen to the rest of us? In this local church ministry we are dependent on you. We are structured on you. We are leaning on you.

So, don't get all hot and bothered, and start vibrating when we make a big point of the fact that when you're not here, it's bad business. We're doing it because of our own selfishness (because of our own self-interest at least). When you're not here, it is bad business for us. And when it's bad business for us, it's bad business for the work of God, because that's what we are engaged in here in the Berean ministry. So, this figure not only is a demonstration of how there is a living temple of God made up of believers, but how these believers could not form this temple except by being built on one another.

* 1. **The Head and the Body**

Another figure is Christ is the Head, and Christians are his body (Ephesians 4:11-16, 1 Corinthians 12:12). The church, we have pointed out, is a living organism, compared to the human body. The church, as the body of Christ, is made up many parts which perform various functions (Romans 12:4-5). If you have a particular spiritual gift (performing a particular function), and you're not here doing it, that doesn't mean that we got somebody else to replace you. That just means we get along without you. If you get a broken bone, and you have a leg that won't work, that doesn't mean that you get along without it. You limp, and you try to get some other structures: a cane; or, a crutch to lean on, to make it. But I guarantee that you're not in a foot-race anymore. You're not at high speed. You're not at full power. And when you, as a believer, are not here in this body, then part of the body does not function. And we're all incapacitated.

The church, of course, is a self-developing body through Christian service. And that's what the pastor-teacher prepares the people to do: to go out; to do the work of evangelism; and, to bring the folks in to be taught, and to be prepared for their own service. Christians are given specific spiritual gifts by the Holy Spirit at the point of salvation for service in the body of Christ. This is taught in 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 and Romans 12:2-8. The spiritual gifts are sovereignly bestowed by the Holy Spirit. They are sovereignly bestowed. You don't ask for them. He gives them to you. And then as your life goes on, He makes it clear what you're able to do – the gifts that are still operational. Some were supernatural gifts that were needed to confirm that Christianity had replaced Judaism. Those gifts no longer exist.

Certain gifts were necessary to communicate New Testament doctrine until the New Testament was written. Those gifts of tongues and communication no longer exist: the prophet; and, so on. The apostle gift – those longer exist. These do: the evangelists; the pastor-teacher; exhortation; ministry; administration; giving; showing mercy; teaching; and, faith. There are nine operational gifts.

* 1. **The High Priest and His Priests**

Another figure is Christ as the high priest and Christians are His priests (1 Peter 2:5-9, Revelation 1:6). That 1 Peter passage is where we are called a "royal priesthood," and that is why we speak of ourselves as the royal family of God. Every believer in the church age is a priest: men and women alike; and, young people and older people alike. Within the family unit, your father is your priest until you reach an age of maturity, which in the Old Testament was 20 years. Each church-age priest represents only himself before God.

The Roman Catholics are fraud. The Buddhists are a fraud. Everybody else that has a priestly system, like Mormonism, are frauds. The only priesthood of the New Testament church age is you, the individual believer. Christian priests offer spiritual sacrifices in contrast to the material sacrifices of the Old Testament. There is a sacrifice of one's body and of yourself (Romans 12:1). There is a sacrifice of one's lips in praise to God (Hebrews 13:15). There is the sacrifice of one's substance – your material possessions (Philippians 4:18). There is the sacrifice of one's divine good works (Hebrews 13:16). And the Bible is very clear that this is what the Christian life is all about: making these sacrifices to God: your body and self; your praise; your money; and, your divine good works.

The Christian priest also leads himself in the worship of God. And the way he does that is through positive volition to Bible doctrine. What you have been doing all morning here is worshiping God through the hearing of the Word of God. The Christian priest has direct, full access to God's throne of grace in prayer (Hebrews 10:19-22, Hebrews 4:16). God is waiting for prayer. I'm getting a deeper and deeper appreciation for moving through the realm of prayer, and the great cathedral of prayer. You'll find yourself a whole lot more appreciative and, indeed, conscious of God if the praying goes on, as the Scripture says, "without ceasing" – all day long: a little spurt here; a little spurt there; this issue; and, that issue. This is constant standing. And you're not praying for God to ram through what you hope for; to ram through what your ambitions are; and, to ram through what your vision is, but to go and say, "What now? Here is the thing that is on my heart. Here is the ministry. Here is the need. What now, Father. How do I go? How do I do it? What do I do? Do You want me to knock this off, or do You want me to hit the road running for You in this respect. Prayer is what orients you to that. The throne of grace – what a phrase!

God is sitting up there, tapping His foot on the throne of grace, just waiting for us to come up and ask. And that's why He says, "If don't ask, I can't give. If you don't ask, I can't do."

* 1. **A New Creation**

Christ is also the head of a new creation. Christians are members of that creation (2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 6:15, Colossians 3:1-4, Ephesians 4:20-24). The church has been removed from the old creation in Adam into the new creation in Christ. Adam is the place of eternal death in the lake of fire, while Christ is the place of eternal life in heaven. In heaven, the church-age believer will be released from his sin nature, to be a new creature just like Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ is the first fruit of this new creation of believers, raised in glorified bodies. The new creation in Christ is commemorated by a new day of worship, namely Sunday.

* 1. **The Bridegroom and His Bride**

Then there's one more: Christ is the Bridegroom, and the church is His bride (Ephesians 5:25-30, 2 Corinthians 11:2, Revelation 19:7-8). The church is intimately related to the Lord Jesus Christ as His espoused virgin bride. After the church is removed to heaven, the marriage to Christ will take place. The incomprehensible intimacy, and the love between Christ and His church bride will exist forever, as she reflects His glory. Colossians 3:4 says that the church will always, as Christ's bride, reflect his glory, which is what a bride is supposed to do for her husband. The church bride will reign with King Jesus in the millennium, during which the marriage supper of the Lamb will be celebrated for the whole 1,000 years. Christ is now preparing, in heaven, a special dwelling place for His bride, the church, called the new Jerusalem. The farther we go along in the study of the doctrine of the church, bringing it all together from all parts of the Bible, the more impressive it becomes, and the more awesome to realize that only those of us who live between Pentecost and the rapture are going to be part of this group of humanity in eternity. What a graced out honor. Tonight, we will continue with the rest of the doctrine of the church.

God, our Father, we thank You for this time together.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1995

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