***Elements of the Local Church

Colossians 1:24-29

COL-191***

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We are studying "The Mystery of the Church," segment number 8 in Colossians 1:25-29.

**The Dispensations**

One of the things that the Bible reveals to us is God's plan for human history from the Garden of Eden into eternity itself. It's all there, clearly laid out. This plan is broken up into seven distinct ages, or another translation of the biblical Word is “dispensations.” A dispensation is a way of life. God has led the human race through seven significant, distinct ways of life – ways of His dealing with them in order to demonstrate that man, on his own, can never come to God, and can never achieve personal righteousness that qualifies him for heaven. In each era of time, God deals with the human race in a very distinct way. Each is a decisively (a divinely) ordained way of life to test man's attempts, which always end in failure to achieve qualification for heaven.

This dispensational arrangement is readily seen in the dispensation of Israel under the Mosaic Law, in contrast to the present dispensation of the church under the grace of God. Anybody with half a brain knows that, on the day of Pentecost, something changed. And the whole Mosaic system was no longer in force. The whole way of life under that system was now put aside (abrogated). And suddenly, everything was different. God was running things in His household in a different way.

The concept of the dispensations is going to come up very shortly in our study here of the book of Colossians. In Colossians 1:24 (that we're now looking at), in verse 25-27, the apostle Paul says, concerning his afflictions, in behalf of His body of Christ, the church, he says, "Of this church, I was made a minister according to the stewardship." There is the word, if you're sitting there with an authorized King James Version of the Bible, you'll see that the Greek word is translated as "dispensation." That's one of the ways to translate it. It's also translated as "stewardship," and it's also translated as "economy." Paul is referring to this new dispensation that replaced the old system of Israel: "Of this church, I was made a minister according to the dispensation from God bestowed on me for your benefit, that I might fully carry out the preaching of the Word of God." It was Paul to whom God revealed all the fundamentals above all the other disciples of that which is pertinent to the church age, and the principle of life by grace instead of by law.

Verse 26: "And that is the mystery." Was Israel a mystery? No. Was a way of life of Israel a mystery? No. But in the Old Testament, the church was a mystery. That means a secret – never revealed, until Pentecost: "That is the mystery which has been hidden, from the ages past, and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God will to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery (this secret – the secret of the church among the gentiles – made up mostly of gentiles), which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." No Jew could ever make the statement: "God in you, the hope of glory," because God never entered the physical structure of a Jew: "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

Now, in every dispensation, the plan of salvation is by the grace of God, through believing in Jesus Christ, the Messiah Savior, who paid the penalty of death for the sin of mankind. People who are anti-dispensational (which most of Christendom is) like to make this false accusation – that dispensationalists teach that, in different periods of time, God had a different plan of salvation. They love to say that, in the dispensation of the Jews, dispensationalists say that you were saved by works. Well, that's a caricature. It's a false thing. And don't fall for it. It has always been by the grace of God.

Now, you tell me, in Romans 4, how was Abraham saved? Very clearly, it says, "God revealed Himself to this man in Ur of the Chaldees, and Abraham believe God that He would save him, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." Abraham received absolute righteousness as a gift from God. And that whole passage goes on to prove that point.

Now, the divine dispensational arrangement of human history is largely rejected (as I have indicated) by Christendom, especially by denominations which have been descended from the Reformers. Their leaders never saw the plan of human history recorded in the Bible, because they missed understanding most of the prophetic Scriptures. This is especially true in their failure to note the distinction in God's plan of history between Israel and the church as separate, distinct eras of God's working. The result is a mixture of lifestyles, nowhere found in Scripture. And you have a . . . hybrid that is a lifestyle – a way of life that is useless.

**Do go Mix the Church with Israel**

Those who mix these dispensations do so selectively. You will notice they select what parts of the Mosaic Law they want to incorporate into their church way of life. They do not take over the animal sacrifices. They do not take over going to church on Saturday, the Sabbath. They don't go through a worship rest day, the Sabbath day. They do not reject legalism. They live under the rules. They love altars. They love holy days. They love priestly rituals. And, boy, do they love tithing! None of this is found in the New Testament Scriptures, as applicable to the church. It comes directly out of a previous dispensation. If you are not a dispensationalist, then you don't understand God's plan of history, and the progression from one era to the other. And you cannot mix one era into another.

What was the first dispensation? We've called it innocence. It was in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve lived under a way of life. What was their way of life? Have a ball: "Everything in this garden is perfect. It's for you. Enjoy it. All you have to do is take care of it; prune the garden; and, work on it. But don't eat of that tree right there in the middle. Stay away from it – the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The day you eat of it, you will die.

Now, how many of you walking around today, worried about eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? You go to the grocery store. You call the manager of Minyard's, and you say, "Does any of this fruit come from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? If it is, I can't eat it." Of course not. That isn't your way of life. Clearly, something has changed since the first era – the first segment of human history. I'm going to press that. I just want you to know that there's an awful lot of nonsense out there that people who are anti-dispositional are really very much dispensational. They very much are dividing the eras of time.

**Sundays**

The significant day of the church is Sunday. And I like to go by one of the big churches here in town, and see what the preacher is going to preach on next Sunday. This week, I drove by, and it said that the topic is: "How to Keep Sunday." And what should be the Scripture for that? Exodus 20:8-12. Now, here's the Old Testament. Here's the Mosaic Law code. Here's the church never spoken of in the Old Testament. And here is this sermon, and these hundreds of people gathered this morning, and they listened to how to keep Sunday out of the Mosaic code. Do you see the problem? Exodus 20:8-12: "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy?"

Point number one: The Sabbath day is Saturday. Keeping it holy means that it's set apart to a special purpose of God for the people of Israel. The special for Israel was the Sabbath day. The special day of the church is the Lord's Day: "Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day – it is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it, you shall not do any work: nor you; nor your son; nor your daughter; nor your male or female servant; nor your cattle; nor your sojourner who stays with you. For in six days, the Lord made the heavens and the earth, and the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy."

Incidentally, you will see that we are to rest on the Sabbath day for a period of time that God rested from His creation. So, those of you who think that the days of creation are vast eras of time, like some Christians do (theistic evolution), so that evolution could take place, you're going to have to stay away from work a lot longer than you people are doing. You're knocking off for 24 hours, and you're supposed to be there (at least take a break) for a million years. Now, either do it the Bible, or admit that you're not doing it. Do you see the nonsense? OK.

So, on Saturday, what do you do? You don't work. Sabbath means "rest," or inactivity: "For six days, God worked, and then He rested. And you don't do anything on that particular day.

Now, those who mix Law with grace, do so very selectively. And then, what happens next? You have to give up literal interpretation of Scripture, because you can't make the church fit into the program of Israel (the lifestyle of Israel), and let the words say what they mean. You cannot make the church the fulfillment of the promises to Israel (the Abrahamic Covenant) without twisting the words. Suddenly, you give up literal interpretation. Those who claim that it ain't necessarily, so that the Bible teaches a series of dispensations to reveal the absolute spiritual failure of man without doctrine, and God's grace doing, are wrong.

The church is also both a universal, and an organism, and a local church organization. It is an organism that is a life structure, and it is an organization. The divine mission of the local church is teaching Bible doctrine through expository preaching, through a book of the Bible. We showed you that this morning in Acts 42. And did I get grief this morning? Yeah, I got grief on what you heard. Acts 2:42 indicates that they gathered for the apostles' doctrine. That's what they gathered in church for: to be taught doctrine. Then they gathered for a secondary thing called fellowship, and the text there indicates that what fellowship means is the Lord's Supper (breaking of bread), and prayer meeting.

So, suddenly, what is the local church? The preacher stands up to perform the duty of expository preaching. He doesn't hop around, giving inspiration and challenge, from Scripture to Scripture. The big church, whose sign I check every week, is doing just that. I know exactly what's happening in there. He's finding some inspiration and challenge in Scripture, and that's what he talks on.

Somebody asked me what I meant by the word "Christianettes." He asked me, "What are you talking about? Like the "rockettes" in New York, where those girls can kick?" And I said, "No, what I had in mind was "preacherettes" preaching "sermonettes" to "Christianettes." However, when the charismatics hear about that, they'll get "Christianettes." They'll do a little chorus line up there, because they're not in there for inspiration. They're for entertainment. However, as I thought about that, I thought that that is not a bad idea. Get people in here one way or another. But as I looked over our potential "Christianettes" (ladies), I concluded that most of them would hurt themselves, so, I just abandoned the idea. We're not going to have any kicking girls here.

OK. The church is an organism of life. It is a local organization. So, its job is very clear. It is to feed the flock. That is their right, and that is his duty. And any church that doesn't do that is not true blue. Whatever it is, it's not true blue to the Scriptures.

Now, this instruction is done primarily in the local church services when the believers gather on Sunday for worship. Any other day that the assembly may gather – that is not worship day. That is Bible study day. You may meet any time of the week. But do not say, "Our church meets on Saturday night." No, it doesn't. Your Bible class meets on Saturday night. If it's church, it meets on Sunday. That is the special day.

While we are free to create auxiliary agencies for teaching the Bible as a local organization, these classes can never replace the formal gatherings of the saints on Sunday. There is something distinct and special that most of us recognize about these formal gatherings, when we gather together, and the flock is fed the Word of God through the pastor-teacher-elder give. And it's a monologue. It's not like a Bible class. It's a distinctly different thing, and it's a distinctly different impact.

People who don't have access to a place like Berean church are longing for a place like this, where many in our own area would hold us in contempt. A family called me recently and said, "We're thinking of moving to Irving." I always have to warn people when they say that to me, because it's happened before – that this church is full of sin natures, and you must be prepared that people aren't going to be different here. Hopefully, they'll be better because of their knowledge of the Word. And you better be sure that you're breaking ties to come for the right thing: the Word of God.

**Local Church Leaders**

The local church gathers for its fellowship time of the Lord's Supper time, and for a meeting, and it has local church leaders. These leaders are made up, first of all, of the spiritual guide, which is the pastor-teacher-elder. I won't go into details on that, but those are the same terms. They apply to the same person. You can call him a pastor, but he has to be a pastor-teacher, and you can call him an elder. Another one is an overseer. The financial and material caretakers of the local church are the deacons. That's it. Those are the two officers you have. That's the structure. The question, however, is: who's in charge? It is the congregation that is in charge. It is the final voice of authority on the policies by which that church conducts its business on the local level. The local church leaders operate under their authority and their guidance. When authority has been granted to the pastor-teacher-elder, he acts accordingly. He's their executive head, and he is to carry out their wishes. The deacons conduct themselves according to the policies of the congregation, under the supervision of that pastor-teacher. The congregation is the final authority.

The pastor-teacher-elder is expected to comport himself with a high degree of integrity, and to keep his focus upon being a servant of the flock. He's not to Lord it over people, but neither is he a doormat for people to walk over, or to pressure, to do what they might think is a good thing to do, that he has not led before God to confirm. He has to have freedom in the pulpit. And the people that I told you about this morning, who cut out, make the serious mistake that if they hear something that they don't think they agree with (they think ain't necessarily so), put it on the back burner in your mind. Think about it a while. Pursue it. You just might find that you're wrong, and a great favor has been done to you. And that often does happen.

**Elders**

It is true that some churches do have a board of spiritual leaders to assist the pastor-teacher elder. And often, these are called "elders." I have no problem with that, because what happens is that they have a board of elders. They appoint somebody who is called "the teaching elder." So, you're back to the same thing. To distinguish him from the other elders, you have one person who is the church's executive head, whom they hold responsible for the conduct of their ministry. I don't care what you want to call the men that are upon a board to assist him in his spiritual work, he is still the head of the ministry, and he is still the elder.

The reason this confusion exists is that when you read the New Testament, you read about the elders of the city of Ephesus. The elders of city of Ephesus come down and meet Paul on the beach. He's ready to shove off toward Jerusalem. He's going to board the boat. And he gives them a final talk. He'll never see them again. They kneel on the beach, and they pray together. Was there one church in the city of Ephesus? Of course not. There were hundreds and hundreds of believers. Where did they meet? They met in houses – a few at a time. There was no church building until after the year 250 A.D.

So, these were house-churches all along, just like there are in China now. That's the only way those people survive. Every one of those house churches in China has a pastor-teacher-elder who's in charge of taking care of that flock before God. Like Peter says, "When I get to heaven, God help me if I have not been faithful to my duty of caring for my flock, and not feeding them on chaff and entertainment and programs, but feeding them upon the living and active Word of God."

To the pastor-teacher elder who's faithful to that duty, there's a great incentive. It's not a happy job necessarily, but at the end, it's a very great incentive. Paul looked forward to it. He said, "I've fulfilled my calling. I fought the good fight of faith. I'm ready to go to meet the Lord." One of the reasons for it was that Paul had qualified, undoubtedly, for one of the four crowns which is exclusive to pastor-teacher-elders – the Crown of glory. They only, Peter says, will receive that." That's a badge of honor for those who have demonstrated in their ministry to have merited that. How does he demonstrate that? It's the Word, and the Word, and the Word. It is not as cutesy-pooh story stories; not how funny he can be; not his executive abilities; not how much money he can raise; nor, how many people he can bring in.

Several years ago, we had a church in the Metroplex area. It was a church that was run by a board. And they had a splendid teacher of the Word of God. But they wanted a big campus. They had a great big portrait on the wall (a diagram) of their future plans of this building and that building. And while he was cranking out the Word of God, and people were growing in the Lord, it wasn't of attracting (that kind of a mob) that would pay for that kind of a dream. So, the board got together, and before a morning service, they called him inside, and said, "This is your last sermon. Adios, muchacho." These are the brutalities of a board power. That's why communism always works by committees, because the committee is powerful, where an individual will have a hard time being that powerful. This poor man came to the end in a very horribly, shocking way, so that this church could go on (although it still hasn't happened) to become a real big country club operation. But you can call your board whatever you want. Yeah, I find no problem with that. But you should understand that somebody becomes the coach who calls the plays on the team, and that's, by God's ordination, the pastor-teacher-elder.

The problem arises, as it does in these churches with multiple elders, that they are viewed as having apostolic authority. Here's this committee. They're viewed as having apostolic authority. Therefore, they have the authority to conduct the local church ministry apart from the vote of the congregation. The congregation, in this case, as I just referred to, rose up in indignation: "Wait a minute. We love this man. We want this man." And the elder board said, "No, please. We're trying to help you. Just be patient." One man said, "We are concerned for you. We want to care for you as our flock. And we believe that this is the right thing for us to do." But the congregation is treated as what?" Sheep. And sheep are supposed to be what? Dumb. And when you have a board committee of elders with apostolic-like authority, they view the people as dumb sheep. But people who are filled with the Holy Spirit, and who are taught doctrine are not dumb sheep. The longer they're at it, the more discerning they become. And that poor congregation had more discerning people than had these pontifical leaders that they had appointed themselves.

So, I do find a great problem for a church to have a multiplicity of elders who run the program of the local church on their authority. Usually, when they have that kind of a system, the congregation doesn't meet once a year and say, "Now this elder is leaving the group. We want you to appoint another one." No, the elders get together and say, "Sam, you're leaving. We'll ask John to come on the board this time." And they are self-appointing. That's about as crazy as it can get. Certainly, I can guarantee you that there isn't one biblical verse that guarantees that's kind of an arrangement. The pastor-teachers (the elders) of Ephesus were not in one church. They were all over the city. And that is an assumption to say: "They're all in one church."

**The Pastor-Teacher-Elder-Overseer**

What's the job? I can't stress this enough. You young people need to know this, because you're going to be appealed to by a lot of your friends to join them in their hoopla church operation. But that's nothing. That will work against you. That will injure you in the long run. What is the pastor-teacher supposed to do? First, Timothy 3:2: "An overseer." There's the other word. It's the same thing: "An elder then must be above reproach; the husband of one wife; temperate; prudent; respectable; hospitable; and, (this is it:) able to teach.

Some years ago, there was a seminary professor who didn't like the concept of a pastor-teacher-elder leading the congregation. He had 25 elders in his operation, and he was explaining this Scripture in a book he had written. And he said, "This is a wrong translation: 'able to teach." The Greek word means 'teachable.' The pastor-teacher-elder has to be (not only a teacher), but he has to be teachable." And I said, "Wow, why didn't I notice that before?" So, I got the Greek Testament out, and I looked up this word, and there was something odd. I pulled out the lexicon, and looked up the word that was here in the text, and sure enough, it said that he had to have the ability to teach (able to teach). Then I dropped down and I saw another word, with one letter different. And that word meant "teachable." I don't know whether this guy didn't know that, or whether he was playing tricks. The word in the Greek is "ability to teach." But he took another word with just one Greek letter different, that says that he has to be teachable. He said, "There are no authoritative guides in the congregation, but there are only all these elders teaming up together to run a committee.

2 Timothy 4:2. What is the pastor-teacher-elder supposed to do? "Preach the Word. Be ready in season and out of season. Reprove, rebuke, and exhort with great patience and instruction." And then there is the one that is so well-known. I'll read it again. Ephesians 4:11-12 sums it all up: "And He, the Lord Jesus Christ, after He gave some apostles; some prophets; some evangelists; and, some pastor-teachers." These are all communicator gifts. We have no more apostles, and no more prophets. We still have the gift evangelists, and we have the gift of pastor-teacher.

Verse 12 tells us what the pastor-teacher is to do after the evangelist hands him a convert: "For the equipping of the saints." "The equipping of the saints" in military terminology. He is to equip them for the battle in the angelic warfare, which is doctrinal understanding: "For the work of the service," in order that he can perform genuine Christian service: "To the building up of the body of Christ, so that the believers can be built up spiritually. And the body of Christ will grow."

You can see, that if the pastor-teacher elder doesn't do this, the whole church is out of sync with the will of God. I'll tell you something else, in case you've forgotten. "For the equipping of the saints" – that is the first requirement. Then the other two: "for the work of the service to the building" (the "for" and the "to") are exactly the same Greek word – the preposition "eis." And they are hinged upon the first word. And the first word "for" is the Greek preposition "pros." It means face-to-face: face-to-face equipping the saints. What do you think that means? It means what we're doing right now. And if he fails to do that first one, it's impossible for people to serve God and to earn treasures in heaven. It's impossible for the body of Christ to mature, and for people to be added.

You can see how sobering this is when the pastor-teacher elder doesn't do his job. When he failed to perform his duty in expository preaching, that local church congregation degenerates into religion; emotionalism; and, worldly ways, and becomes a country club of "Hail fellows, well met." People get inspiration instead of illumination.

**Grace**

This is the basic guiding principle of the local church ministry. The church is the product of the grace of God alone. What is grace? It's the unearned blessing of God. It is what God, in His love, is so free now to give to us because of what Christ has done to turn that grace/love loose upon us, because Christ has removed the barrier between ourselves and God. He has reconciled us to him. The church is to show forth the glories of the grace of God.

Ephesians 2:6-7: "And raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." When Christ was raised from the dead, we were raised from the dead: "And we were placed in the heavenly spheres already now, in order that in the ages to come, He might show the surpassing riches of His grace and kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. That's where you are now, Christian. You are seated in the heavenly places positionally. You will have that in reality at the point of the rapture.

So, why are these Christians living like dogs in the world system, and living under Satan's way of life, when they're walking in heaven positionally now? Is that a travesty or what? It is the death of the Lord Jesus that removed all the limitations that sin had imposed on the expression of God's love. 1 John 2:2 says: "Christ is the propitiation for our sins, and not only for us who are believers, but for all the sins of all the people who are unbelievers as well." Salvation comes as a gift. Therefore, it removes all requirements of human effort to be saved. That is the way you get into the church: by a grace gift of God. Ephesians 2:8-9 declare that: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not as a result of works, that no one should boast." It all comes because of the kindness of God. And I'll not get into the doctrine of election tonight. But you know that pretty well – that you wouldn't even consider being saved.

Paul, in Romans 1 says, "There is none that does righteousness. No, not one. There is none that seeks after God." There is not one. All of a sudden, something along the line burst upon your mind and you said, "God, I'm headed for the lake of fire. I'm going to accept Your Son. I'm going to believe Your promise to save me, if I'll depend upon Him for it." Suddenly, you were put at peace, and your destiny was changed to heaven. And you did nothing. You just believed God.

**Eternal Security**

Now, just to be sure that everybody understands that there isn't anything that you can do to be saved, I'll say this. Incidentally, these people (these churches) that are anti-dispensational, and mix Israel with the church, almost inevitably, do not believe in the eternal security of the believer. Inevitably, they believe you can be lost again, because you're saved by your good works (by your behaving yourself). You're kept saved that way.

In Galatians 3:22, God says, "But the Scripture has shut up all men under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe." God has said, "You are condemned because you were in Adam. He was your federal head. That judgment takes you into hell. You are condemned because you're born with a sin nature, and you are guilty of personal sins. That takes you into hell." And just to be sure that it's all solidly buttoned down, God said, "I'm going to give you a third whammy. I hereby, Judge of the universe, declare you, because of these things, to be under sin." You are doomed – a judgment of God. Now, if God says, "You are doomed and with no way out, unless I give you the way out," that pretty well makes clear that there's no such thing as salvation by any human effort.

That is God's method, as it applies to dealing in grace in the local church operation. In contrast to the Old Testament way of life, the Old Testament says, "Do good and I'll bless you." But the New Testament says, "Do good because I've already blessed you with all blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. One is the law. The other is the grace.

**Bible Doctrine**

I cannot comprehend why anybody would want to live under the Law system, when God says, "It has done its work, and shown us how evil we are. And God has given us the solution under grace. Grace in salvation, in the church life, therefore, is now the rule. Grace, therefore, is the guiding principle in all of our local church operations. How do we teach the Word of God? We teach it on the basis of standing in the fullness of blessing and privileges that come to us through a local church which is functioning under God's plan of teaching the Word. And how do we teach the Word? We teach the Word by respecting your privacy as your personal priesthood requires, so that you sit here, and you are instructed. I don't know what you're thinking; I don't know what your attitude is; I don't know if you're saying, "Well, that ain't necessarily so." I don't know whether you're going to be negative or positive, or what. It doesn't matter. My duty is to give you the information. Then if you take it with mental reservations, and this is what the Word of God teaches, you've immediately broken your fellowship with God, and you're on the road to reversionism. If you're going to be negative toward the teaching of the Word of God, don't even come. But that's what you're going to hear in this place. So, grace requires that we respect your privacy.

**Finances**

How do we secure finances for the Lord's work? It has to be not tithing. That's Old Testament. It has to be as God leads you through the Holy Spirit. It has to be free will. It has to be absolutely private. It has to be understood to be a spiritual sacrifice. Therefore, we make it as private and personal by putting offering boxes at the door, and we don't pass a plate on your nose.

**Salvation**

How do we give an invitation to salvation? We make it clear that being saved is a matter of believing in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Savior who has covered your sins. We do not tell you to pray to be saved. We do not ask you to walk and aisle to be saved. We do not ask you to invite Jesus into your life. We do not ask you to give your life to Jesus or any of the other confusing expressions that are required. And we do not ask you to make a commitment to behave yourself. Salvation is an appropriation of a gift that God is offering. It is not commitment to a proper way of life, which of course should follow. You should not live in a carnal situation if you call yourself a Christian. So, don't be going to church with your Bible under your arm; smiling and greeting the folks; and, then live under the devil system of morality. Salvation does require a lifestyle.

**Receive Members**

How do we receive members in the local church? They have to be saved people. And we don't know that if they walk down the aisle, and fill out a card for us, and tell us that they're saved. We have to sit down with our spiritual leaders who assist the pastor, and they ask the person, "Why do you think you're going to heaven? They're satisfied that their trust is in Christ, and they're recommended for membership.

**Priesthood**

How do we treat the priesthood of the believers – the right of living under the Lord in privacy? Well, we butt out of their business? Keep yourself private. Don't let these nosy folks, that like to root into your personal business, call you up on the phone with a jingly, happy little voice, say, "Oh, how is this going?" Right away, turn on your smoke button. Just blow the smoke right through the receiver. Get them all confused.

I made a lady real mad one time because I blew so much smoke at her. She went running around, telling the wrong story, and she wanted to know why I had done that to her. Because it was fun! She didn't think it was.

**Visitors**

How do we treat visitors in the service? We don't use any gimmicks. We don't embarrass them. Now, if it was a very large congregation here, it would be very tempting to say, "Raise your hand. How many of you are first-timers?" And so on. We don't do that. We respect your personal privacy.

How do we view the leadership in the local church? We respect them as appointed by God. You don't tell your kids that what the pastor-teacher says from the pulpit ain't necessarily so. You might regret that, because, if he's on track with the Word of God, you better at least consider it. He probably knows more about the world's way of life. Nothing is so sad as to have some parent say, "Boy, was I ever wrong about that, once he's got a kid in trouble, and he realizes that he himself set the kid on the wrong road by what he was tolerating, even though we were saying, "Don't tolerate it." If something is condemned from the Word of God, it's not the preacher's opinion. If you don't like his application in the social context: the way people act; the way they dress; and, so on, you just have to decide yourself whether that's right or wrong. But usually it's right.

**The Sin Nature**

How do we deal with the sin nature failures of other members in the congregation? Well, there are no heroes in the Christian life. We live and let live. We help people to repent, which means that they change their mind. We encourage them to confess to God. In heaven's name, we don't want them confessing publicly. Only some ignorant blasphemer who doesn't know the Word of God stands up and makes public confessions. If you are a person who understands doctrine, you will read 1 John 1:9, and you will understand that that's only talking about talking to God, not to people. If you confess to God, you forget, and you move on in His service. You never insult Him by saying, "Boy, I've got this problem in my life. I got this grief right now. God is punishing me because of what I did." No, unless the sin has produced some other element that cannot be removed, he gives you the grace to live with that. When you confess, the sin is forgotten. He puts it behind His back, and it's as far removed as the East is from the West. That's the magnificence of the grace way of life.

**Paul**

The Pauline doctrine of the church is second in importance only to the doctrine of salvation by grace. Salvation was the first thing that was made very clear, that Paul proclaimed. The second thing was: "It's a grace way of life." You have to be grace-oriented. Salvation by grace, provides the supernatural materials out of which the true church is formed. Paul's gospel (or of "the good news") includes these two distinct features: salvation by grace; and, then a lifestyle in the church age, which is no longer the Mosaic Law, but the dispensation of grace – the dispensation of the grace of God. Both of these doctrines came to Paul by direct revelation from God, and they are detailed in his epistles.

Galatians 1:11-12 and Ephesians 3:1-6 said, "I didn't go to the other apostles and say, "You teach me." Instead, said God to me: "Paul, I want you to come out here. I want you to go out to the Arabian Desert; set yourself a place to live; get yourself stocked up on supplies; and, then every day, the Lord Jesus Christ is going to come, and you're going to be instructed in this brand new thing that I'm doing: bringing from Jews and gentiles a new body of believers who are going to be related to My Son, the Lord Jesus, in a very close and special way, like a husband and wife. They are going to be magnificent people in eternity. They will have privileges here on earth that are beyond your fondest dreams. And He will care for you like no one ever else cared for you. Your toughest moment, when Satan belts you, that grace is going to snap you back and carry you through. So, listen carefully, Paul. These are the doctrines of the church age." And that's all.

The other apostles learned some. They had a great knowledge of it too, but not like Paul. They all recognize that Paul was the leader in the understanding of the church age. In the Bible, there are various figures to try to illustrate to us the unique relationship that you and I have to the person of Jesus Christ. None of these was ever true of Israel. It's a different lifestyle. It's a different dispensation. These things never were true of Israel, and they never could be.

**The Church, and Christians**

The church is described as Christ is the shepherd, and we Christians are His sheep. That's not true of Israel. Christ is viewed as a vine, and we Christians are branches in Him. His life is our life. Christ is the chief cornerstone, and we Christians are stones built upon Him as the temple for God. Christ is our High Priest, and Christians are believer priests. Christ is the Head of the church, and we Christians are His body. Christ is the origin of the new creation, and Christians are the new species of that creation. We're a new creation. We're a grace product. Christ is the bridegroom (and this is a precious one), and we Christians are His bride.

The Christian serves God by means of his divinely appointed gifts (spiritual gifts) and abilities. And through these, he is able to store treasures in heaven. When the Bible speaks about being in Christ, that means that you're part of the church body. 1 Corinthians 12:13 tells us that you are saved in this way (placed into that body) by the baptism of the Holy Spirit. What can you expect from religious groups that are not devoted to expository preaching? Charismatics completely miss the magnificence of being baptized in the Holy Spirit. They're always inviting people up to get the baptism. They're always running around, looking for the baptism. If you didn't have the baptism of the Holy Spirit, Scripture says, "You're none of Him. You're none of Christ." That's the only way you get into Him. That's the only way you're saved.

**Sundays**

One thing more before we close. We alluded previously to the special day of the week, which is identified with the Christian; that is, Sunday is the church's day. It is the day of worship in remembrance of Christ's Resurrection (Acts 20:7). And, of course, the people who are asking me questions about this aren't here tonight. Acts 20:7: "On the first day of the week (Sunday), when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to depart the next day. And he prolonged his message until midnight;" and, so on. They were gathered for what? For doctrinal instruction, on what day? On Sunday. That was very early. It's a pattern in the New Testament church.

1 Corinthians 16:2: "On the first day of every week (Sunday), let each one of you put aside and save as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come." When do you bring your offerings? Sunday. That's the day set apart. That's the church's day. You don't do it on Saturday. That's a Jewish day for his offerings and for his tithes.

John 20:26: "After eight days, again, His disciples were inside;" that is, Sunday again: the eighth day: "And Thomas with them. Jesus came, with the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, 'Peace be with you.'" Here, the disciples, even this early, before they all were sure of the resurrection of the Lord, had already switched gears from the Sabbath Saturday to Sunday gathering.

We'll look at one more, in Acts 2:1: "When the day of Pentecost had come, they were together in one place." That day – Pentecost was a Sunday. That was the Sunday upon which the church was born.

So, Sunday is a very special day indeed for the church, because it's the commemoration of the resurrection day of the Lord Jesus Christ. However, Sunday is not a holy day like the Sabbath of the Mosaic Law. In Romans 14:5-6: "One man regards one day above another. Another regards every day alike. Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes a day, observes it for the Lord; and, he who eats, does it for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and, He who is not for the Lord, and he does not eat, and he gives thanks to God. In other words, if you want to observe some other day, you may. Every day is holy with the Christians. But the tradition of the New Testament church is that Sunday is our special day, but it is not a holy day. It's no different than any other day. Therefore, you don't come and start acting holy on Sunday, and then live like the devil for the rest of the time. Sunday is in fact identified as the Lord's Day.

In Revelation 1:10: John was on the island of Patmos, and he says, "I was in the spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, like the sound of a trumpet." He was there on Sunday in worship by himself – this poor exile, at the hand of the Roman emperor. God comes to him on a Sunday, and gives him the book of the Revelation. John calls it the Lord's Day.

So, we do not have the Sabbath day, nor do we have the Christian Sabbath day." We have the Lord's Day. The church body meets for official worship on Sunday. Other meetings during the week are not the official church meetings. If your group meets on Saturday night, or Saturday morning, then you're having a Bible class – you're not having a meeting of the church. It is popular now to set church services as early as possible on Sunday, or to meet on Saturday night, in order to leave Sunday free for recreation. So, the day, in American society, has been horribly degraded. It's now a day of business. You can go to the mall, and everything is there, just like it is every other day of the week. And that's wrong, because there is a merit to the Exodus 20 passage on observing the Sabbath day as a holy day, in terms of being a day of rest. You do need one day in seven. That is a biblical principle apart from the Mosaic code. And that is quite true.

One very popular business is called Chick-Fil-A. I don't know whether we have it in this part of the country or not, but the owner of Chick-Fil-A is a Christian, and he will not open his business on Sunday. He's the biggest fast food operator in the country: Chick-Fil-A. Every Sunday, they're closed tight. Does God bless this man, or not? He says, "Everybody (my employees) – we all need a day of rest. Sunday is our day. There's no such thing, of course, when you try to squeeze the dispensation of the Law into the dispensation of the church. Then you have to call Sunday the Christian Sabbath. That's nonsense. It's the Lord's Day. It's not a day of inactivity. It's a time of activity. It's a time for worship; for Bible study; for fellowship; for meeting with the saints; for meeting with your family; for relaxation; fixing whatever your wife needs to have fixed around the house; and, for washing your car. It's a day of freedom. Grace means liberty. Yeah, it's a day for going out to the game. But I hope you're not going to be using the Lord's Day as a substitute for the things you should be doing, and being with the people of God for the worship of God, in the place that they gather on the Lord's Day. That is first priority. I hope you don't exhaust yourself on Sunday so that you don't have a time to be able to recoup your strength.

I close with this admonition to you – that it is a violation, clearly stated in the Word of God, if you skip attending those official functions when the church gathers in worship: Sunday morning; Sunday night; or, whenever it is, it's a violation of the commandment of God, unless you have been providentially hindered from being there.

Hebrews 10:23-25: "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope, without wavering for He who promised (Christ) is faithful. And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds." How are we going to get each other to do the thing that is loving, and to perform the good deeds? Well, I guarantee you, it starts right here in this room: "Not forsaking your own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more, as you see the day drawing near" (the day of the rapture drawing near). You cannot encourage if you are an empty chair. But if you are here, with the people of God, you can encourage them, to stimulate them to love and to good works, because you have been fueled spiritually with the Word of God. This is the magnificence of the church age, the dispensation of the grace of God.

Father, we thank You so much for this day, and for what we have learned. And we pray that we shall store this now with positive volition in our human spirits, that it may come up – many things that we have touched upon, at the appropriate time for our guidance. Please bless us as we take the English and Spanish brochures, and distribute them through the community through which we move. We ask You to honor the offerings tonight. And we do continue to pray for the money to be able to get that editing machine in the very near future.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1995

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